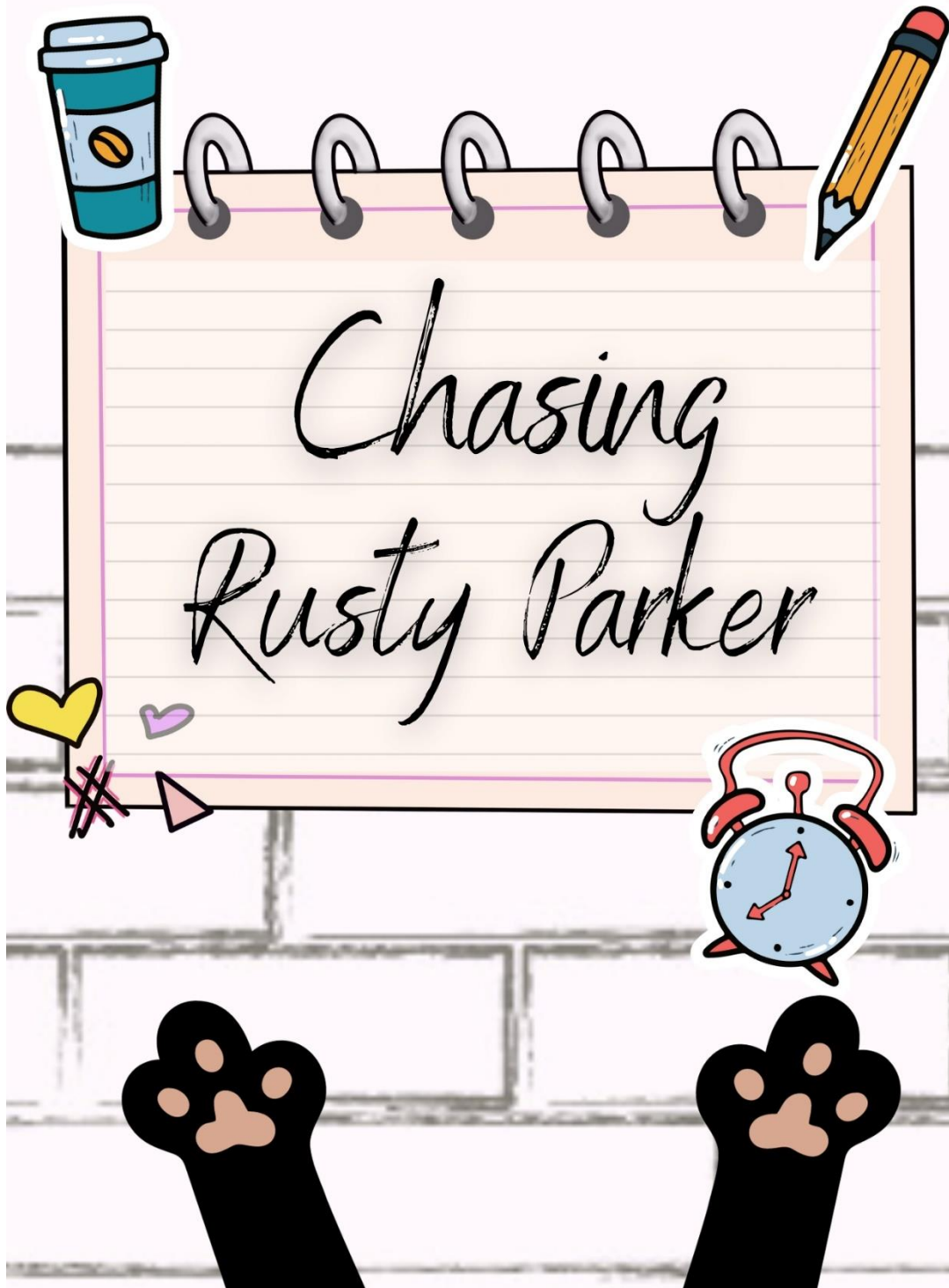


Laura S. Fox



Chasing Rusty Parker

by

Laura S. Fox

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M/M Fiction

Intended for Mature Audiences Only

This book contains graphic depictions of sexual intercourse between men, and it is not meant for readers who are less than 18 years of age.

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Chapter One

It Must Be the Gay

Up. Down. Right. Left. Repeat. Rusty swung his head around, but the landscape didn't change. Yup, it was the first day of the last year of his life, as he knew it. After that, it was all a blank, so you could say that it had to be a different life, one he had no idea what it was going to be like. So, senior year was like the last year of his life as Rusty Parker, the king of Sunny Hill.

"Would you stop that? You're making me dizzy," Dex complained.

To piss Dex off a little more, Rusty began swinging his head faster and then stopped abruptly. "Better?"

Dex shrugged and shook his head. Kane, as usual, rushed to his bestie's help. "How about you go get us some sodas from the counter?"

"Am I your errand boy?" Rusty declaimed out loud, making heads turn. A few laughs here and there, and the usual. The interested looks from all the freshies and the others alike. So, business as usual.

He smirked and got to his feet.

And, after just a couple of steps, he promptly smacked into someone, who seemed to be not that well acquainted with his own feet because he landed on his ass. Rusty looked, slightly horrified, at how the guy's glasses slid on the polished cafeteria floor like a curling weight.

Quick thinking was one of the main perks of the king of Sunny Hill. Without hesitating, Rusty threw himself on the glasses, protecting them with his body, and preventing any walkers from crushing them under their feet. Without changing his position, he turned his head toward the dude sprawled on the floor. He looked slightly dizzy and confused, but what truly registered with Rusty were a cute as a button upturned nose and a pair of the most hazel eyes in all hazel eyes history. He smiled. "Are you all right?"

The hazel eyes finally landed on him. "My glasses," the guy stuttered.

"Safe," Rusty replied. "They're right here."

More confusion rolled from the hazel eyes. "Um, could you please give them back?"

Rusty rolled to one side, gracefully uncovering his protected charge. Then, he slid them cautiously over the floor until he bumped the other's hand with them. A sigh of relief left the guy's lips, and Rusty found himself staring. Too caught up by the upturned nose and hazel eyes, he had missed that perfect Cupid's bow arch.

The dude quickly put on his glasses, with the cautiousness and hurry characteristic to people whose proper navigation in the outside world depended greatly on such accessories. Then, the guy finally looked at him.

Rusty expected a 'thank you', but the hazel eyes just turned bigger, or maybe it was the glasses. Their owner pushed himself backwards on his ass, eventually bumped into someone, jumped to his feet and ran away.

"What the fuck?" Rusty asked himself out loud.

"Do you need a hand down there, or is the floor your most recent best friend?" Dex called for him.

Hadn't anyone noticed that weird thing with the boy with glasses? Rusty turned toward Dex and Kane, but they seemed to be engrossed in something on their phones. Probably the class schedule for the semester. Nerds.

Disappointed that his valiant act had gone unnoticed - not by the freshman year and/or most girls around - Rusty dragged himself to his feet and sauntered toward the counter. He searched for the boy with his eyes, but he had already been swallowed by the crowd.



Matty put his palms over his ears and kept his head down while rushing toward the table in the corner where Zoey was already seated. He plopped himself down across from her and breathed heavily like he had just run a marathon.

"What's with you?" she asked, scutinizing him with keen eyes.

Zoey was petite, but she packed a punch. Everyone who didn't know them thought they were a cute couple. Probably they thought so the same way they thought of a pair of hamsters being cute. Just like him, Zoey wore glasses, and had what people called a harmless pretty face. In his case, the harmless comment was right on point. In hers, not so much.

Matty leaned over the table, causing his best friend to do the same. "Zoey, you won't believe it!" Overly conscious of his voice being too loud, he dropped it to a whisper. "I crashed into Rusty Parker."

Zoey didn't look impressed. Her brown eyes inspected him, like he was a bit of a lunatic. "Matty, you've been crushing on," she emphasized each word, "Rusty Parker since freshman year."

Matty waved desperately. "Any louder and this will end up in Xpress. Ah, wait, maybe I shouldn't bother shushing you. Xpress doesn't even know I exist." He deflated considerably. "Just like Rusty Parker has no idea I exist."

Zoey pushed her glasses up on her nose. “Are you going to tell me what happened or should I hit you with the list first?”

Matty knew all about the list. After confessing, complaining, and wallowing in semi despair, Zoey had forced the list on him at the end of sophomore year. It served as a wakeup pill or whatever. “Hit me with the list first,” he admitted morosely and sank back into his chair, arms over his chest.

Zoey cleared her throat with importance and leafed through an imaginary document in front of her. “Rusty Parker is a shallow, good for nothing, popularity chaser,” she said in a sing-song voice and waited for Matty’s reaction.

Matty bit his bottom lip. “He’s not,” he protested right away. “I can tell that he’s not shallow,” he continued. “His popularity is due to the fact that he has natural charm. And I can see in his eyes that he’s very smart. Who would think of a butt slapping contest and manage to win it?”

Zoey grimaced and shifted in her chair. “Don’t remind me of that. I could only take like five with that paddle. And then I couldn’t sit for a week.”

Matty nodded in understanding. “That’s why I gave you that new pillow.”

“Shut up,” Zoey mumbled. “You were such a scaredy cat you didn’t even come with me to that party. Now, just for the sake of argument, why would such a completely moronic contest would make Rusty Parker smart?”

“You know. Because he thinks of all kinds of things no one else thinks about.” Zoey was on his side. She didn’t want to corner him, but he was the one asking for it.

“Yeah. Like having a luau party. In December. Even Judy Dartwood said she froze her tits off. And she has some melons.” Zoey gestured surreptitiously to make a point. “You know, there’s a lot of protective fat there.” Part admiration, part envy commingled in her voice.

“Zoey, I’m not talking to you about melons,” Matty said in resignation, knowing that it wasn’t entirely up to him if they did or did not.

“Melons are a perfectly healthy fruit,” Zoey commented. “So, we concur that Rusty Parker is super smart, right?”

Matty nodded. He was feeling a bit better already. “Next.”

“All right,” Zoey agreed. “Rusty Parker is a complete meathead,” she recited from the invisible list.

“That’s not true,” Matty protested again. “That’s not where the meat of Rusty Parker is.”

Zoey grinned and her eyes glinted with mischief. She pedantically lifted her long hair and wrapped it into a bun on the crown of her head. Then, she pushed a pencil through it to keep it in place. "Am I rocking the sexy librarian look yet?" That was random. That was Zoey.

Matty looked at her and made a suffering face. "Wrong dude to ask, Zoey. But, if it helps, I think you might be able to scare off some crows if you choose your location well."

She threw a French fry at him. "Shut up, virgin."

Matty grinned. Since they were considered hamster-weight, it was okay for all of their matches to consist of hits below the belt. They could hardly hurt each other. "Really," he said with a sigh, "even if Rusty Parker plays basketball, that doesn't mean he's a meathead."

"As you say, my friend," Zoey said with a shrug.

"Hey, you're supposed to be the devil's advocate here," Matty reminded her.

"Right, right. Let's continue. Rusty Parker is a total womanizer."

Matty deflated considerably. Yeah, he could extol on Rusty's amazing looks and intellect - which the guy used mainly for throwing some of the hottest parties on campus - all he wanted, but he couldn't deny that. "You really had to go there," he said, but without any real reproach.

Zoey offered him a sympathetic smile. "Come on, Matty, you know what to do."

"Zoey, I'm not putting on a cat boy suit. Xpress is talking shit."

Zoey groaned in frustration. "Could you at least try? Maybe, just maybe, this one time, Xpress is not talking shit. If he's into cat boys, and you dress up as a cat boy, that's your best chance."

"Of making a fool of myself? And where would I even wear such a costume? While attending Mrs. Lane's class on human resource management?"

Zoey took a long sip from her soda. "That's some really forward thinking there, Matty. I like it."

"Oh, come on," Matty groaned and rolled his eyes. "Not even in a cat boy suit would Rusty Parker ever acknowledge I exist."

Zoey narrowed her eyes. "He totally would. Come on, you have the perfect body for wearing a cat suit. Wait, didn't you just say that you crashed into Rusty? How did that go?"

Suddenly, Matty felt less in the mood to share, mainly because he knew what Zoey would say.

"Come on, was all this build up for nothing?" Zoey insisted.

"All right," Matty admitted reluctantly. "I bumped into him by mistake, I landed on my ass, and he gave me back my glasses."

“Did you introduce yourself?” Zoey asked, this time with wide excited eyes.

Matty sank low in his chair. “I ran away.”

Zoey didn’t say anything but let her hands speak for her. Her small fists cut through the air, mimicking a strangling motion, then they shook up and down, only to spread into open palms as if she had just dropped Matty into a heap of self-loathing. “That’s it,” she said. Matty shrank in his chair at the determined look in her eyes. “This year, you’re going to get Rusty Parker to know who you are. You’ll wear a cat boy suit, a bear boy suit, a pelican boy suit, I don’t care. You’re going to do it.”

“Um, says you?” Matty asked cautiously.

“Come on, Matty, do you really want your college years to end on a ‘what if’ note? And what are you afraid of, anyway?”

Matty knew very well what he was afraid of. But could Zoey understand him? Once he learned for a fact that Rusty Parker would never be interested in knowing good ol’ plain Matthew Han, was there anything else left? Sure, he was cute, Zoey said that much, he took care of his body, lifting weights and whatnot, but his genes could only do so much. He had a feeling that even if he were ever into guys, Rusty Parker would like some muscle god or someone like that.

Zoey snapped her fingers in front of him to bring him back to reality. “Matty, no one says you have to do it all in one step.”

“What steps are we even talking about when it comes to cat boys? Should I start communicating through meows of varying intensities?”

“No, but you could start getting out of your nerdy clothes more, and into cooler ones. You really have a nice body.”

“Yeah, if you’re into Korean boy bands,” Matty mumbled.

“Which I totally am,” Zoey said. “Do you have any idea how much I envy you? It’s because of your grand-grandfather that you have perfect skin. Don’t make me want to kill you in your sleep so that I can peel off your skin and dress myself in it.”

“Wow, that turned into Silence of the Lambs fast,” Matty commented.

“Silence of the what?”

He wouldn’t go on a tangent now and talk about old movies. “Never mind. Come on, Zoey, it’s my curse. I’m just pretty enough for girls to like me. It would be so much easier if I didn’t like guys, right?”

Zoey leaned back into her chair and crossed her arms. “Matthew Han, you’re not saying what I think you’re saying. Grow some guts, or some balls, or whatever. Get a cat boy suit. Try it on, study in it, until, you know, it feels like a second skin.”

“It sounds to me more like a recipe for a descent into madness,” Matty said and buried his face in his palms. “But I suppose you’re right. This year is now or never. Who knows if I’ll ever get to see Rusty again once we finish school?” The answer was pretty obvious. “All right,” he said, trying to sound as determined as possible.

“For real?” Zoey clapped her hands in glee. “Look, you’ll have to dish out some real cash. You’ll also need a wig, okay? None of that cheap stuff, not when it comes to something as important as this.”

“Great.” Matty let out a sigh. “I suppose I can continue to tutor, at least for some time.”

“Do that. It will be money well spent.”

“Make sure my folks never hear about it. They’ll blow a gasket.”

“Does it say ‘traitor’ above my head?” Zoey pointed to an invisible point up in the air.

“I’m counting on it, okay? They told me ‘no tutoring’ this year. They want to make sure I graduate with a good GPA.”

“They shouldn’t worry,” Zoey said. “You’re like only second to Jonathan Hamilton in this place.”

“Yeah, don’t remind me,” Matty murmured. “Why does that guy have it all? Looks, intellect, and a boyfriend like Maddox frigging Kingsley? I can’t even hate him. He’s too nice.”

Zoey shrugged. “Yeah, together, they’re any fujoshi’s wet dream.”

Yeah, Zoey was right. Jonathan and Maddox made an amazing couple, but how would he look side by side with Rusty Parker? No, he couldn’t even picture it. He was in a very public place and couldn’t afford letting his heart beat faster. Zoey might threaten him with mouth to mouth resuscitation.

“Put up those ads for tutoring. And let’s go shopping. I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer, and I know about your hefty cash stash you put away for such occasions.”

“That money is not for such occasions,” Matty argued, but then he sighed. “Where are we going to shop for a cat boy suit? Hopefully, in another city. Or country. I would never live it down if anyone else, except you, finds out about my unlikely hobby.”

“Online, obviously. And I told you, no cheap stuff. So our best bet is to have something custom made. You know, it needs to look great on you.”

Matty put his head on the table. “Will that make a difference?”

“Of course.” Zoey ruffled his hair. “Rusty Parker is a perfectionist. You must make a good impression on him.”

“How do you know he’s a perfectionist?” Matty asked, always hungry for hearing other people talking in admiring terms about his crush.

Zoey gave him an all-knowing look. “How many people would take thirty-seven swats with a paddle after turning his underwear into a self-inflicted wedgie?”

“What? Wait, you’re talking about that ass-slapping party? You didn’t give me the details!”

“I didn’t want to give you more wet dreams than you already have. Yeah, Rusty pulled at his boxers until his butt cheeks were as good as naked, then bent over and took it on his bare ass.”

“And who gave him the spanking?”

“He wouldn’t have anyone else but Dex, of course, just to make sure that he had the dude with the heaviest hand give him the spanking.. You know, so that no one would say he cheated or something.”

What if Rusty was crushing on Dex? He was a muscle god, and everything Matty wasn’t. But they were both straight guys...

Zoey chatted away, unaware of the new mental torture Matty was giving himself. “Even Dex got tired around twenty-five, though. Kane took over, and he really made Rusty cry. It looked like Dex was going easy on him.”

“Rusty cried?” Matty couldn’t believe it.

“It was a sight,” Zoey assured him. “He was also laughing his ass off, so you didn’t know whether to feel terrified or laugh your ass off, too. But overall, it was very sexy. Rusty has a very sexy ass. Wanna know more?”

Matty shook his head energetically. “You could have taken a picture.”

“It didn’t cross my mind,” Zoey said airily.

Matty didn’t press further. For all he knew, Zoey might just have a picture of Rusty’s reddened ass on her phone, stashed away. But, as long as he didn’t ask for it directly, he was safe.



Rusty threw himself on the bed. It was still early in the afternoon, but he felt like taking a nap. He closed his eyes and willed himself to chase away the dream that had recurred so often lately.

Maybe he was to blame, because he never let go of something if it irked him or made him curious.

The fact that he was willing to revisit it although he knew it wasn't doing him any good said a lot about his penchant for self-flagellation. Yeah, those were the kind of words he liked to look up in online dictionaries. Since he enjoyed a bit of pain in his sandwich, he didn't see a lot of harm in self-flagellation, which was a bit like going in a roundabout, or fucking yourself in the ass with your own dick. If he could do that, he'd totally go for it.

Maybe that would cure him of this dream constantly torturing him. Every time, it was the same. The door to Maddox's room would be open, and he would first sneak a peek. He would see Jonathan and Maddox sleeping on their sides, facing each other, doing that thing that Rusty couldn't define or understand. Maybe Maddox would rest one hand possessively on Jonathan's hip. And Jonathan would smile in his sleep, as if he knew his boyfriend was feeling him up.

If he were a sane person, he'd close the door and go about his own business. If. Oh, what a big if. But dream Rusty couldn't be too different from real Rusty, or else he'd be somebody else. So, in the dream, he would sneak into the room and walk close to the bed, so close that he could see their big peepes, busy seeing each other eye to eye. Then, he would slowly climb into the bed, pushing himself slowly between them, making sure to gently maneuver their peepes so that they stopped smooching each other while the owners were asleep. Sure, he'd be tempted to play a little Ken and Barbie or, better said, Ken and Ken with them, but this wasn't about dicks and what people usually did with them.

So, the next thing he would do, he would stay there, between them, feeling their breathing, steady and content. He wouldn't even look at them; no, he would close his eyes and try to feel whatever it was that they were feeling for each other.

And he'd fail every time. Sure thing, the sex thing would be easy to imagine. Sometimes, he would imagine being Jonathan and having Maddox call him 'babe' and make doe-eyes at him; or he would imagine being Maddox and having Jonathan kiss him hard and firm. That would make his dick hard every time.

But it wasn't the sex, though. No, sex had no secrets for Rusty Parker. That other thing, though, the one they called 'love' and all that. Nah, that one he couldn't get. At all.

He'd dream the same dream anyway.

Rusty didn't realize when he fell asleep, but he could tell he was dreaming. It was the same thing – he had trained his mind well to dream of whatever he wanted – so he knew the drill. He walked up the stairs, stood in the door for a few moments, and then walked into the room.

Only that, this time, his dream just wanted to play a prank on him. When he snuck into the bed, between Jonathan and Maddox, he realized something was different. He turned his head to look

at Jonathan. What the hell? Was he wearing his glasses in bed, now? But no, those weren't Jonathan's glasses. Actually, that wasn't Jonathan at all.

There was no point in freaking out. Rusty calmly turned his head toward Maddox. Then, he looked up. That wasn't Maddox, either. No, left and right, he was flanked by the boy in glasses from earlier today, and a cat boy. Okay, this dream was getting sexual, after all.

But why a threesome with the boy in glasses and the cat boy? He knew where the cat boy was coming from, but the other dude? This was one weird-ass dream.

All right, he got this. He turned toward the cat boy. "Hey," he whispered, "can I touch your tail?"

There was no answer. Quite disappointed by that, Rusty turned toward the boy in glasses. He looked really pretty with his eyes closed like that. Why was he wearing glasses in bed? Whatever, weird-ass dream. "Sorry for asking, but why are you here?" he asked.

The boy shifted in his sleep and, as he did that, he threw one arm over Rusty's belly.

"Are you going for the Mighty Thor?" Rusty asked. Finally, the dream would make some sense.

The boy did nothing. Rusty continued to examine him. Too bad his imagination didn't have much beyond cute nose, eyes, lips, and glasses. He didn't remember much else, at least not in his sleeping form. Deciding that he was the one who was supposed to do something after all, Rusty took the boy's hand and pushed it downward. "Do you mind if I do that?" he asked courteously.

The boy moved again and this time he slapped Rusty by accident. Not hard, but enough to count as a surprise.

"Now that was a bit kinky," Rusty commented.

The dream boy seemed to have a life of his own, and without opening his eyes, he moved and placed his soft lips on Rusty's mouth. He tasted nice. Rusty smiled and decided that he could allow himself to be molested in his dream. The stranger had a nice, lithe body that pressed to him hard. Rusty could feel the Mighty Thor getting ready for action.

"It must be the gay," Rusty commented, not stopping to wonder why he was getting hard over a dude kissing him all of a sudden. A dude who wasn't either dream Jonathan or dream Maddox, obviously.

"Hey, hey!"

Rusty squirmed, annoyed by the intrusion of another voice into his dream. It couldn't be the boy in glasses, nor the cat boy. "Go away!" he said sharply.

Whoever it was, he was bent on messing up his sex dream and didn't stop. Rusty opened his eyes abruptly. Maddox was shaking him and grinned when their eyes met.

“What the fuck, dude?”

“Really, dude? I’m saving you!” Maddox replied.

Rusty blinked and rubbed his eyes. “Saving me from what?”

“You were thrashing in your sleep and crying out ‘it must be the gay’,” Maddox explained. His smirk was starting to get a bit annoying.

Rusty pulled a blanket over himself and put on an offended face. “Why did you have to barge into my room like this?”

And stop my dream just when it was getting good.

Maddox laughed and pulled at the blanket. “Seriously, dude? You’re in my room. My bed.”

Rusty looked around. Yeah, something was very wrong. This room was too neat. Just as primly, he threw off the blanket and got to his feet.

He didn’t miss the look of amused and very much fake horror in Maddox’s eyes.

“Why do you have a stiffy, Rusty?” Maddox pointed down between them.

“I don’t have to explain shit,” Rusty declared and walked toward the door as stiffly as his stiffy. He could practically feel his dick swinging to and fro. Then, he remembered that he could do something. He turned, grabbed the blanket and threw it over himself like a cloak. Whatever, as long as he could get out of the room without losing any more face, he’d save his dignity.

“Could it be the gay?” Maddox called out after him.

Rusty flipped the bird at Maddox without a backward look. “Screw you, Maddie.”

He even closed the door without giving Maddox a full-frontal of his stiffy again. Phew, now that had been close or something. Close to what, he had no idea. But what the hell, was he walking in his sleep now?

Or maybe he had just walked into Maddox’s room without thinking twice. Whatever. That could have happened, only that it needed not to happen again. Not because Maddox would ever get mad at him for something like that, but because it would be freaking humiliating to shout in his sleep ‘it must be the gay’ again and be heard by his best friend.

Maddox would just get the wrong idea.

Nah, he wouldn’t. He was a cool guy.



Eventually, he had managed to find his own room, only that sleep was elusive now he had just had a weird gay dream. He had seen that boy in glasses for like, what? Half a minute? So why was he walking into his dream like there were no better places for him to be?

Rusty looked around his room. Damn, he was getting bored already. Maybe he could convince those nerds downstairs to do something fun already. Everyone was behaving like the end of the world was near. It was just senior year, end of college, yada-yada.

Wait, Maddox had just entered the picture, and Jonathan must have come with him, too. The least Rusty could do was to continue his research on whatever those two shared. They had gotten engaged at the end of summer break, and that party had been uber lit. Rusty was sure he would remember it forever, despite being the tamest thing he'd ever attended in his life.

So, being engaged meant that they would also get married, and in the world of the living, normal beings, and all that, it was the most serious shit ever. Not even Kane had fast-tracked like that with Louise.

Therefore, the questions still remained. Sure, Jonathan Hamilton was sexiness incarnate despite fighting it with every fiber of his aristocratic self. Of course, Maddox was the man, cool and handsome, and everything, but why, oh, why, couldn't they live without each other? What was that all about?

Not that he was jealous or anything. Not in that sense of the word. No, Rusty just couldn't understand it, even if he had heard – and even provoked – Jonathan into saying the words out loud. He could get liking someone. Yeah, that was fine. Rusty himself liked his friends enough, maybe even to the point of giving them all a hand if they found themselves in casts with both arms broken or something.

Hmm, more research was needed. With a little bit of luck, he would find Jonathan all over Maddox when he went downstairs. But first, he needed to check for Dex and Kane. Already, without him provoking them in any way, they had started piling on him, telling him that this year was no joke, and he should study, and all those things that could make him want to kill himself from boredom, Deadpool-style – like in the sense that he couldn't really die, just take a break from their incessant droning.

Making sure to tiptoe to the top of the stairs so that he could examine the troops from a superior vantage point, he walked over to the rail. Clearly enough, the large living room was populated, and voices could be heard.

“I don't mind tutoring Rusty.”

That was Jonathan. Wow, Dex and Kane had moved like really fast.

“Babe,” Maddox intervened, “Rusty would have you wrapped around his little finger in no time.”

“It’s worth a try,” Jonathan insisted. “You are all saying that you’ve tried in the past. We are not giving up on him, are we?”

“That’s true,” Dex admitted.

Now that gave Rusty a bit of a sense of triumph. What did Kane have to say about it, though?

“He’s pigheaded and annoying.” Kane would never disappoint him. Rusty felt a grin threatening to go around his head. “If he doesn’t want to do something, he just doesn’t do it.”

“There must be a way,” Jonathan said. “At least for a few of his classes where he might be struggling.”

It was a bit touching that Jonathan didn’t want to give up.

“Should we find a cat boy and ask him to tutor Rusty?” That was still Jonathan.

Rusty thought that he liked the guy more and more. Just in a bro way. What happened in dreams stayed in dreams. There should be a saying for that.

“That’s a difficult call, don’t you think?” Dex asked, always the unbeliever. “I doubt cosplayers are necessarily excellent tutors. And that any of them who are attend Sunny Hill. The probability of finding someone like that is pretty dismal.”

“Maybe we could convince the tutor to dress as a cat boy?” Jonathan offered.

“Rusty would smell foul play right away,” Kane said, sounding pretty much convinced.

He totally would. Yeah, Kane knew him well. But he was starting to take a little pity on the guys’ predicament. He understood they wanted to do him a boatload of good or something, but he just didn’t like studying boring stuff.

Hmm, he needed to think of a solution before they started banging their heads against the walls. So, he nonchalantly began walking down the stairs, making everyone turn their heads to stare at him.

“Yeah, before anyone asks, I heard you,” he said.

“Look, Rusty--” Jonathan began.

Rusty put one hand up. “All right, all right, you’re good people. I get it. I’m just not the kind that can be tutored.”

He expected some denial, but Dex, Maddox, and Kane all looked at him like they totally agreed with him.

“What if,” Jonathan continued, not knowing Rusty as well as the rest, or just being stubborn, “we find someone who can tutor you?”

Rusty considered the question. “Like a contest? A contest for all the tutors on campus?”

Jonathan smiled. Ha, let him believe that he had something there. “I’ll personally offer to triple the fee if anyone gets past the first lesson with you. What do you say?”

“I’m in,” Rusty said brightly. The prospect of driving a few people mad who dared to go up against him sounded pretty swell. It would only be one session with the bravest on campus. It would be fun. “Wait, what if no one manages to do that? What do I get?”

“Nothing,” Jonathan said naturally. “Isn’t it the fact that you want to win enough motivation?”

“True,” Rusty admitted. “Still, Hamilton, you could have thrown me a bone, you know.”

“I’ll make sure to make some treats for you shaped like that,” Jonathan promised.

Rusty shuddered for a moment. He didn’t even have to close his eyes to imagine cool and collected Jonathan enticing him with dog treats while Rusty knelt at his feet. Jeesh, this fucking imagination could be a nightmare at times.

“Did you just think of something dirty involving my boyfriend?” Maddox asked.

Rusty bristled. “Totally not,” he denied. Maddox squinted and stared at him. “No, I didn’t,” he insisted. “Bring on your best. I have some tutors to put in their places.” He cracked his knuckles for show. They had no idea what they were going to be putting those people through.

Chapter Two

Dee Untuturable

A, B, C... is anyone brave enough to try teaching Rusty Parker the alphabet? Why the alphabet? You may ask. It's quite simple. So far, no one has managed to make the king of Sunny Hill repeat a simple little 'a' after him or her.

A new legend is born, guys and gals. We know already that Rusty Parker goes through personalities and quirks faster than, you guessed, you can say A, B, C... But this new skin he's dressing up in is totally worthy of pursuing in its aim for greatness.

From now on, we will call Rusty Parker by his – currently – true name:

DEE UNTUTORABLE

We didn't come up with the idea. We just read what's on the t-shirt. Welcome to Sunny Hill, Mr. New Superhero!

Can someone get Rusty Parker out of that t-shirt? Supposedly, we should wait and see... but we're not holding our breath.



“Dee Untuturable? For real, Rusty?” Maddox groaned and showed him the phone.

Rusty shrugged and put his hands above his head, proud of making the t-shirt stretch over his chest. He had written the imagined name with a black marker on a white tee, so it wouldn't survive a wash, but he had a hunch that he wouldn't need it that long to win the game. So far, he had managed to send several boys and girls running, all with very well-known tutoring experience. This was more fun than he had expected. Of course, it maybe worked because he was so intimidating for those people who spent all their waking hours with their noses buried in a book or textbook.

Hmm, it wasn't that much of a challenge. But he enjoyed seeing Maddox trying to work out a solution. He had a feeling that he could get the best of people through sheer stubbornness. Maddox was super smart; he would soon realize that Rusty was worthy of the nickname he had recently chosen for himself.

Maddox made a face as he focused on the letters on his t-shirt.

“What? I didn't misspell anything, did I,” Rusty said and didn't forget to glare properly.

“You can’t exactly misspell a word that doesn’t exist. And I know that you’re smart, and that pisses me off.”

Rusty shrugged and followed Maddox with his eyes. In all honesty, he hoped Maddox and Jonathan and the others would somehow win against him. It would give him a bit of a sense of purpose, probably. Maybe. Perhaps. He knew a lot of synonyms. Xpress was wrong about what happened with the tutors. Rusty simply proved to them that he knew more than they did; not about studies, which were freaking boring, but about everything else. That kind of thing crushed their spirits, for sure. He didn’t do it because he was unkind.

He was doing it because he truly believed himself to be Dee Untutorable.

“I could hold you down while Jonathan feeds you every textbook available,” Maddox said all of a sudden.

“If you hold me down, I hope you’ll do kinkier stuff to me than forcing me to eat paper. You know, it’s overrated.” At Maddox’s confused look, he added, “I tried it.”

“Without a doubt. Come on, Rusty, give me one good reason why you don’t want to study this year.”

If he had a good reason, he would give it to Maddox. No, not that kind of giving ‘it’ because since the dream with that weird ass threesome, which involved him packed and stacked between that cute boy with glasses and a cat boy, he no longer dreamed of his bestie like that. Even Jonathan could move his sexy bod around in nothing but a towel, and he was no longer impressed. Maybe he was cured of whatever that was.

So, he decided in favor of being honest. “I have no idea. I just don’t like it.”

“We don’t like it that much, either--” Maddox began to argue.

“No, you actually do. All right, maybe not the long hours of going through all that boring stuff, but you like what you’re going to do with it. I just don’t see it.”

“Please, don’t tell me you just want to drop out of college. Do you have a backup plan?”

Rusty shook his head. “No. And my dad paid for the whole thing.”

“And you don’t want to disappoint him,” Maddox completed with whatever he thought Rusty wasn’t saying.

Another shrug was the only possible reaction. “Not really. I just don’t want him to think I fooled him into paying for it or something. Don’t worry that much, bro. I’ll graduate even if I have to crawl.”

Maddox seemed discomfited by his reaction. “Then we should call off the tutoring thing? I thought it would stimulate you somehow.”

“Not yet. I kind of enjoy the new title.” He pointed at his t-shirt. “Plus, I don’t want to wash this tee just yet. When you see me doing laundry, you can call it off.”

“That may be tomorrow or never.”

“No, no, no, it will happen. I don’t intend to turn into Dee Unwashable.”

“Good to hear. But, Rusty, if you need any help with your studies, just tell me or Jonathan. Or Dex or Kane.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll leave this place as the king,” Rusty assured him. “Gosh, you’ve gotten so serious since you got hitched to your boyfriend. Oops, I mean, fiancé. That’s a funny word. It makes me think of a girl in a tutu with a tiara on her head, stuffing marshmallows in her mouth with both hands.”

Maddox dropped his eyelids and stared at him. “Well, that tells me you’re completely sane and you know what you’re doing. Great.”

Well, that was that. Maddox knew very well just how much to push with him. And it was still heartwarming and marshmallowy to know that he cared.



“You’ve seen this, right?”

Matty couldn’t dodge, as Zoey was bent on stuffing the phone under his nose and even rubbing it against his face only so that he couldn’t hide from it. “I’ve seen it,” he admitted with a groan. Good thing his roommate was mostly gone all the time, and Zoey could barge in there without shocking the living daylight out of the poor dude. It was as if he lived more with her there, than with his actual roommate.

“So, you’re a tutor. You have like a perfect record tutoring. And Rusty Parker is looking for a tutor! This whole thing is like a freaking godsend!”

“Zoey, please stop shouting,” Matty complained only so that he could stall for time. “It’s not like we are in the same classes.”

“The ones that count do overlap, and I know for a fact that you took them only so that you could ogle him like a poor puppy would ogle a bone hidden behind a fence. Also, your method is infallible. I just know!”

“What are you wearing?” Matty made another attempt to escape.

Zoey had a pink jacket and pajama bottoms on. The fluffy slippers were no surprise. They were her favorites. “I had to come in a heartbeat to box your ears. I was so sure you didn’t go to let him try you on for size.”

Matty felt his cheeks coloring slightly. Zoey hadn’t meant anything by that, but the idea of Rusty Parker trying him on for anything was just wrong to have in his head that early in the morning. His usual morning wood was already sacrificed on Rusty’s invisible altar. His overly active imagination could already make the entire Sunny Hill blush – if they only knew what he was thinking about their king. The last thing he needed was more incentive. “Zoey, really, better people than me have failed. I’m not going to win against him if he doesn’t want to learn anything from anyone.”

“Of course, you need to do your bestest,” Zoey said matter-of-factly. “This is a golden opportunity. If you win, Jonathan Hamilton promised he would personally triple the fee. And if you don’t, there’s still the usual. So, what are you waiting for? You need to pay back the money you will use for your cat boy suit. It’s your plan B, after all.”

“I thought it was plan A,” Matty said brightly. Fat chance for Zoey to forget about their big plan for the year. He had already looked online for some talented people who made custom suits. They were expensive, but their work was gorgeous. Of course, he needed every penny.

“We combine them. Now, let’s play like those lawyers with their clients in movies. I’m Rusty Parker, and you’re the tutor. Come on, convince me that I have to study.”

Matty threw her a look of consternation. “We have class in like half an hour.”

“That’s long enough to whip you into shape. Come on, give me your best shot.”

Matty considered for a moment. There was no way he could send Zoey packing, and he never missed class. So, he pushed his glasses up on his nose and gave his best friend the coldest glare he could muster. “If you don’t study--”

He watched in satisfaction as Zoey’s eyes grew wide while he continued talking. His confidence soared as her expression told him that he wasn’t half-bad when it came to tutoring.

Yeah, because just like he needed a custom made cat boy suit, he always tailored his lessons to fit the student. And that was why he almost never went wrong.



“I’ll show you my tits,” the girl said as she threw him a lewd look over the table.

Rusty looked at her chest. Yeah, he was totally curious. Big tits on a smart girl? He was in.

“Do we have a deal?” the girl pressed.

“Hmm, let’s just see the goods first.”

She rolled her eyes and stood up. “No way I’m going to fall for that kind of cheap trick. What do you choose? Tits and study? Or nothing?”

Hmm, ah, damn it, he was so fucking tempted. She wore a cool sweater that made those things bounce up and down, with the power to hypnotize people. But his pride was at stake. “Nah, I’ll pass,” he said and bit on his tongue to punish himself for it.

She huffed and brushed by him with a strong hip on her way out. “You’re a fucking pig, Rusty Parker.”

“Hey, for the record,” he called out after her, “they look pretty amazing in that sweater! I just don’t want to lose!”

She didn’t catch all of it, as she stormed out of the room. He shrugged. Well, that kind of concluded the tutoring contest. Good thing Jonathan had such deep pockets. No one left without being paid at least once. It wasn’t his fault they were so unconvincing.

He stood from the chair to go to the door and rub his victory in the face of everyone in the house, but at that very moment, the door opened and almost hit him in the face. Right there stood the boy with glasses from before, with a killer look in his hazel eyes. He had a wooden ruler in his hand and promptly smacked his shoulder. “Sit,” he ordered.

Rusty grinned. “Are you trying to be a tutor, little guy?”

He wasn’t that little, actually, but compared to Rusty, a lot of people looked short. He had to be at least five foot nine, which, for his lithe build, was totally fine.

The next smack with the wooden ruler took him by surprise. It hurt a little. “I said ‘sit’,” the boy insisted.

Was it really the same guy? That one had run away scared after a look at him. This dude had to be his evil twin. Well, it was worth exploring, Rusty decided. With a shrug, he returned to his chair and sat down. “Are you new around here?”

The newcomer threw him a withering look. “I’ve been around here,” he emphasized each word, “for as long as you’ve been.”

“Funny thing, I didn’t notice you around.”

“Of course.”

Was this guy a tiny bit annoying or what? The implied words had to do with something related to how he knew Rusty, while Rusty was completely ignorant about him. It wasn’t self-deprecation. No, it wasn’t. This dude was full of himself.

But his upturned nose was still cute as a button, and his big hazel eyes should have belonged to an angel if they had been blue. Maybe that was why he was a little demon, instead. Rusty continued to inspect him closely. Okay, so maybe, just maybe, before the last year, he hadn't even noticed dudes a lot, and that explained the overlook. This guy's skin was absolutely fucking flawless. Rusty felt an itch in his fingers to reach out and touch it. Was that what they meant by porcelain skin? This dude had to see a lot of action since he looked like half of the most beautiful stars in Asian boy bands. Only his big eyes didn't look Asian. His soft brown hair was slightly wavy and hung down to his shoulders. This guy had to see a lot of action from girls.

"How many girlfriends did you have last year?" he asked out of professional courtesy. If there was any competition on campus, he had to know about it. That would explain why some chicks still told him 'no'. They had this doll of a dude to gush over.

For a moment, it looked like the angry and cool façade would slip. "None of your business," came the icy reply.

"Fuck," Rusty groaned, "that many? Hey, did you land Nancy what's her name, you know, the one with those nice pear-shaped titties?"

The hazel eyes turned frosty. "No. Stop dallying. Let me introduce myself. My name is Matthew Han, and I'm here to tutor you."

"Han, huh? That explains it," Rusty said out loud.

"Explains what?"

"You know, the whole nerdy BTS look," Rusty pointed out. "I bet you beat girls away with a stick. Or are you ambidextrous and use two sticks? Man, that would come in so handy. You know, you could do really cool stuff." He made a move as if he was handling two sticks as weapons.

"My dating life doesn't concern you. I'm well aware of every trick students try to pull to get out of tutoring."

"Really? Do you tutor a lot?"

"Yes. My experience recommends me."

Rusty leaned back in his chair. "You're a demon, aren't you? Are you going to beat me up with that ruler? Smack my bottom with your big book of knowledge?"

"If the need arises," the answer came promptly.

Rusty felt his eyebrows jumping up in surprise. The boy stared at him through his glasses without blinking. All right, so he was cute, but he was also uber-nerdy. Maybe Rusty had

happened to strike a nerve with all those comments on fucking around with girls. That horizontal pattern did the guy no service. He hadn't noticed anything else below belt level, but he would do that, as soon as their tutoring session was over.

"The clock is ticking, and not in your favor," Matthew reminded him. "If I keep you here for one hour and you are able to memorize at least one thing I tell you, then I win and I'll tutor you throughout the semester."

Was that a challenge or what? Rusty leaned back in his chair, placed his linked hands on top of his head and stared at Matthew Han through his eyelashes. "Challenge accepted," he said. "But braver men and women have failed already. I thought you should know."

"Braver than me?"

How could warm hazel eyes look so chilling? Rusty knew he was intrigued. Just not enough to lose. So, he smirked. "In the cafeteria, the first day. That was you. You dropped your glasses."

Matthew seemed unfazed. "Your point?" He adjusted his glasses and stared at Rusty.

"You screamed and ran away. Admit it." Rusty leaned over the table and grinned. "You're afraid of me."

"I did that because I remembered that I left the oven on." The reply was delivered in a deadpan manner.

"Yeah, right."

Matthew measured his wooden ruler slowly, caressing it. Rusty found himself fascinated. "What's the deal with the ruler? Are you into corporal punishment? That your take on tutoring?"

"Can you take it from me with your hands tied behind your back?" Matthew the tutor asked, ignoring his question.

Rusty smirked. This was getting good, and he was having fun. He showed Matthew his hands and put them behind his back. He waited patiently while Matthew produced a hair tie from his pocket and secured his hands together. Secured was one way of saying it. Rusty was sure he could snap it without even trying.

He waited for the other to sit and wave the thing in front of him again. Then, he lunged and grabbed the ruler with his teeth, snatching it away from Matthew. He was about to mumble his victory, when Matthew suddenly grabbed Rusty's phone from the table. Rusty let the ruler drop. "Give that back!"

"Not until you learn one thing from me and repeat it in front of your friends."

"Do you think I can't take it from you?"

“Do you use face recognition?”

Rusty couldn't believe the nerve of the guy. He released his hands, but it was too late. Matthew, who appeared quite nimble for all that he wore glasses and was nerdy, had retreated to the other corner of the room and was now deep into his phone. Without wasting a moment, Rusty rushed toward him, but Matthew was ahead and soon, they were chasing each other around the table.

“Do you really need your Tinder profile? It's so yesterday, you know?” Matthew commented.

“You wouldn't dare,” Rusty warned him. He moved to one side suddenly. Matthew couldn't be that fast.

He wasn't, but he did make the phone disappear into the front of his pants. Rusty stopped dead in his tracks. “Dude, are you rubbing your dick against my phone?”

“I'm wearing underwear,” came the immediate protest.

“What color?”

“None of your business. You'll have your phone back if you promise to be a good boy.”

Rusty pondered. Well, he wasn't completely against manhandling Matthew to get his phone back, even if it meant bending the guy over and stuffing both hands in his pants. He could totally do that.

Or he could do some laundry today. He put his hands up and reveled in the expression of satisfaction on that cute face. “You totally got me. What are you going to teach me?”

“Ethics and Consumer Behavior,” Matthew said promptly.

“Meh, I'm not into ethics. And I'm a consumer. I already know a lot about that. And how to behave.”

“I doubt that.” Matthew moved his hips as if he was playing with a hula-hoop. “Who knows what my dick is doing to your phone right now?”

The ugly t-shirt hiked up enough to let a sliver of firm belly show.

“You have abs!” Rusty exclaimed.

Matthew dropped his arms in alarm, covering the perfectly shaped lower abs in the process. “Everybody has the same muscle groups,” he protested.

Hmm, now that was a reason to lick his chops. Rusty could smell blood in the water. Why was Matthew Han hiding his abs under those ugly clothes? And his cute face behind those glasses?

Truth be told, he had a nerdy appeal because of them, so if the plan was to make him less attractive, it wasn't working.

"Nah, nah, nah," Rusty said. "You," he pointed at Matthew, who stared at him like the proverbial deer that must have gotten tired of getting caught in headlights and shamed because of it, "have awesome abs. Let me see them."

Matthew crossed his arms around his lower belly in a protective gesture. "No."

"I'll do your bidding. Pinky promise."

Matthew seemed to consider. "Will you allow me to tutor you? For the whole semester?"

"Aren't you getting ahead of yourself? Abs for learning whatever you want to teach me this time around."

Matthew pouted, and Rusty found himself staring. It wasn't some coquettish gesture on the guy's part. Nah, Rusty doubted his tutor realized the cute faces he was making. He was just calculating with that big brain of his. He had to have a big brain, or else he wouldn't be able to keep Rusty's attention for longer than all the other tutors had combined.

"Fine." Matthew pulled his shirt up, revealing perfect washboard abs. He wasn't overly muscled, since he was so slender, but the definition of those muscles was great. Rusty moved, eager to touch them.

Matthew moved out of the way with the same ease as before.

"You're no fun," Rusty complained.

Matthew shrugged, as if he couldn't even be bothered. Maybe the guy was so straight that he couldn't even bear for some dude to touch his abs. Very well. That meant that he had a weakness, and Rusty would exploit it at length. He would take his time, seeing how this tutor fiend thought he'd be able to put a leash on Rusty Parker, just like that.

"All right. A deal is a deal. Can I have my phone back?"

Matthew nodded and pulled the phone out of his pants. However, he didn't give it back, as requested. He searched his bag for something and took out what looked like a cleaning kit.

"Really, dude?" Rusty laughed. "I didn't really mean it about your dick. Unless it got a stiffy seeing my Tinder profile."

"In your dreams," Matthew replied and set himself hard at work to clean the screen.

Yeah, he was so damn cool. He had to be uber straight. Rusty knew for sure that most dudes got a bit flustered in his presence, even if they weren't gay, just because of his expansive personality

and the way he moved his body. The same was not happening with Matthew Han. A tough nut to crack.

Just what he needed this year to escape pure boredom with everyone getting the studying bug. Rusty intended to do some serious studying, too. Only the topic he intended to study was Matthew Han.

“Ready for the first lesson?” Matthew asked while pushing the phone toward him with two fingers.

Rusty couldn’t remember his phone screen ever being so clean. He looked at his new tutor, pondering for a bit. Damn, Matthew was surely making bank with that cool attitude. Chicks often went for that kind. Unless this dude was only into studying. And keeping his abs in tip-top shape.



Rusty stared at Matthew with unhidden satisfaction. When he put his mind to it, he could learn anything. He could tell his tutor was impressed.

“I will say this,” Matthew said while closing his textbook. “I don’t believe you need my tutoring. You seem to catch new concepts fast on your own, and you have a good memory. You also have—”

As much as Rusty enjoyed compliments, he needed to stop his new favorite victim before he made a run for it. “I have great need for someone to keep me accountable. And it has to be someone obnoxious like you.” Matthew was pedantic, a stickler for details, and a slave driver. But Rusty never lavished people with compliments like that.

He could swear that he saw Matthew’s bottom lip quiver for a moment. “Do you think I’m obnoxious?” Nah, his tone was just as bossy as it had been throughout their tutoring session.

“Kind of,” Rusty said lightly. “Just what I need. You know, to keep me in line.”

“Very well. Once a week, then, and do your homework.” Matthew stood up and hiked his bag over his shoulder.

“Wait. Let me pay,” Rusty said.

“I thought Jonathan--”

“No way I’m letting him pay for my lessons,” Rusty said promptly. He had made plenty with his summer gig, so there was no issue with that. Plus, Matthew deserved the payment, down to the last dime. “Triple, right?”

“Yes. But that was Jonathan’s promise.”

A damn stickler to details. What would it take to mess up a guy like that? Rusty wondered. A worthy pursuit, indeed.



“So?” Maddox asked.

Rusty grinned as he took in all his friends, who had stayed in their rooms throughout his tutoring adventure. Now, they were all downstairs, looking at him, then at Matthew, then back at him. Jonathan was the first to act. He offered Matthew his hand. “I suppose that congratulations are in order. Please let me know how you want to be paid.”

Matthew shook Jonathan’s hand. “Rusty has paid me already.”

“He did?” Dex asked. “You must be one hell of a tutor.”

“It wouldn’t have been a problem, Rusty,” Jonathan insisted. “I suggested it.”

“No way,” Rusty said and threw one arm over Matthew’s shoulders, making him stagger under his weight. “He’s my tutor.”

Kane laughed. “Look at Rusty, all possessive.”

“Hey, hey,” Rusty warned, “Don’t embarrass my tutor.” He liked the sound of that in his mouth. “He already has to worry about half the chicks in this place.”

“What?” Matthew asked.

“What?” Maddox did the same, almost simultaneously.

“Yeah,” Rusty said with confidence. “This dude, right here, is a total lady killer. Now I know why some chicks don’t dig me at all. They have it bad for this guy’s abs.”

Kane examined him with narrowing eyes. “Are you trying to scare him off, Rusty? Matthew, please, don’t let this clown get to you.”

“I’m not scaring him,” Rusty protested and turned his head to look at his tutor. “I’m telling it like it is.”

Matthew was keeping his head turned, so Rusty couldn’t see his eyes. Damn, was he so uncomfortable with some guy touching him, even if only casually? Maybe he had a thing against germs and stuff. That explained having a cleaning kit at the ready, in his bag. Rusty was pretty certain his germs were of the friendliest kind, but he wasn’t into forcing himself on people. So, he pulled away, and just then, it might have been his imagination, but Matthew brushed his arm against his back, as if he was about to wrap it around Rusty’s waist. It all lasted less than two seconds, so he couldn’t exactly tell what the guy’s intention had been.

“I should go,” Matthew said. “Good luck on your studies, guys. And Rusty, work hard.” His voice was clipped and strange.

Rusty didn’t make any attempt to keep him. He just watched Matthew as the rest of the guys were complimenting him for a job well done. Where was the cool façade? Who was this shy hamster and where had he come from?

“Wait,” he said and took off his t-shirt. He threw it at Matthew who caught it deftly. If the guy was against germs, he’d drop it like it burned him. “Take that trophy with you. I don’t need it anymore.”

Matthew was holding onto his t-shirt with a shocked look on his face. “Trophy?”

Rusty shrugged and hooked his thumbs into his jeans. “A tutoring trophy. You can tell anyone you defeated Dee Untutorable. And prove it.”

Maddox put a hand on Rusty’s shoulder. “Stop trying to scare him. Just admit that he won against you. Matthew, I’ll take that. Rusty needs to do his laundry anyway.”

“No, no, that’s fine, I like tutoring trophies,” Matthew said and stuffed the t-shirt into his bag hurriedly. Rusty observed everything with keen eyes. So, his germs were not on the blacklist. He must have worn that for at least three days. “I’ll go now. Bye,” he said quickly and walked out, leaving Rusty with a huge grin on his face.

“Hey, wasn’t that a little bit weird?” Of course, Kane had to question everything.

“What was weird?” Rusty asked, flexing his muscles in what he hoped looked like a display of aggression. The good kind, between friends.

“That he took your t-shirt,” Kane pointed out.

Dex slapped his bestie on the back. “Let’s not look a gift horse in the mouth. I don’t expect Rusty’s preferred tutor to be the epitome of what people call normal. I like the guy, and he got Rusty to study already. Even gave him homework. I’m not asking for more.”

“He can probably sell that for a bit of money,” Jonathan suggested. “Anyone with a mind for business would think that. And I believe Matthew has what it takes. Is there a market for Rusty paraphernalia here, on campus?”

“I have no idea,” Maddox replied. “But you have a point, babe,” he added and used the occasion to steal a kiss from Jonathan, as he did all the time.

Rusty felt deflated. He hoped Matthew didn’t sell the t-shirt. He hoped Matthew kept it.



Matty maintained a steady normal pace as he moved through the campus, entered his dorm, and then walked into his room. Then, and only then, he threw himself on the bed and shouted into a pillow. It was such a good thing that his roommate wasn't there. Anyone seeing him flailing all his members and muffling his shouts like that would have thought he was insane.

Which, he most probably was. His phone rang on cue. He didn't even have to check to see who it was. "Zoey, I did it," he said in a heartbeat.

"O.M.F.G!" Zoey shouted loud enough to pierce his eardrum. "How did it go? What happened? How did he look? How did he smell?"

"Wow, you're making me dizzy. Zoey, my knees are shaking. It worked. I was so cool and collected, I swear."

"I knew you'd pull it off if you put your mind to it. Kudos, my friend."

"But--"

"No, no, no, there are no 'buts' you want to tell me about."

"I don't know if I can keep it up," Matthew complained. "I almost slipped. What the hell am I saying? I did slip. I took his t-shirt, Zoey. That's weird, right? I'm weird. And I almost hugged him by accident. My arm, I swear, it just moved like it had a mind of its own!"

"Slow down and explain. Are you already at a stage where you're undressing Rusty Parker? I don't know you anymore! But I love it!"

"No, no, it wasn't like that," Matty hurried to correct her. "He took off the t-shirt himself and gave it to me. Like a trophy."

"O.M.G., is it THE t-shirt?"

"Yes, THE t-shirt," Matty replied and drawled the words, just like her. "I should wash it and give it back."

"No way," Zoey contradicted him. "That's a piece of history, Matty. You don't mess with history."

"But what should I do with it?"

"Conserve it. You know. Put it in a Ziploc bag. After you smell it and rub your entire body up and down with it."

"For real, Zoey, don't ever let other people hear you talk like that. You might end up in prison," Matty said. "I'll conserve it, as you say. I won't do the other part, though. That would be weird and creepy."

“Yeah, yeah, weird and creepy, but you’d do it. Come on, at least give it a little sniff.”

“Bye, Zoey.”

“Hey, can we hang out later?”

“Yeah, but give me a couple of hours to put my mind in order.”

“So, he’s even sexier, one on one, right?”

Matty couldn’t put in words all that he felt about spending almost two hours across from Rusty, just the two of them in the same room. “I guess you can say that,” he said quietly.

Chapter Three

The Gift of Knowledge

His research so far had led him nowhere. All the girls he had asked about Matthew Han had given him a blank stare. Some did remember about a dude with whom they shared some classes, but they couldn't give him anything meaty to work with. His supposition that Matthew was a lady killer had been completely off the mark, and that wasn't like him. Did most people lack eyes these days? The dude was a looker; yeah, a nerd and a bit on the obnoxious side, but he had seen plenty of chicks going for a lot worse. Rusty couldn't help thinking of those nice lips and what they could do, stretch in a thin line of disapproval, pout in thought, and even... wait, did the guy even smile? All right, so maybe that was the problem. Matthew Han had no idea how to smile, and that chased all the chicks away. Somehow, those chicks who were into the sulking type had yet to meet him. Maybe he even had trouble landing dates and whatnot. Good thing he had Rusty in his corner. A little bit of help didn't hurt anyone.

Lost in thought as he was while walking through the quad, his hands in his pockets, it took him some time to realize that someone was calling his name. "Hey, Ray," he said when he saw Jonathan's roomie and bestie. Hanna, his girlfriend, was with him, and they were holding hands like two lovebirds, which they totally were. "Hey, Hanna. What are you two up to? Some engagement party or something?"

"Not today," Ray said frankly. Hanna grinned and pushed into his shoulder. They were cute in a nerdy way.

Then it dawned on him. "Do you two happen to know Matthew Han?"

"Your tutor?" Ray asked. "Yeah, but not very well. I heard that he uses a wooden ruler. What's the deal about that?"

"Yeah, did he use it on your bottom or something?" Hanna asked, with a smirk that announced she was up to no good.

Rusty sighed from the depths of his soul. "Unfortunately, no. Way to get a guy's hopes high."

Ray and Hanna laughed. "Well, he must still be one hell of a guy if he managed to convince you to study," Ray pointed out.

Rusty made a gesture with his arms and pointed his fists against each other. "It's a battle of wills. I need some dirt on him."

"Dirt?" Hanna asked. "I doubt you'll find anything like that. One of my friends shared a lot of classes with him, and by what she said of him, he's all about studying."

“Does he have like a girlfriend or something?” Rusty continued to fish for info.

Hanna seemed to ponder while her eyes darted up. “Yes, I think he’s always with a girl. Yeah, it must be his girlfriend.”

For some reason, Rusty felt a bit deflated. If Matthew played the field, scoring with chicks who were into his nerdy looks, he would dig it. But a girlfriend? Like a longtime girlfriend? That sounded so boring. And annoying.

“Has he been with her long?” he asked.

Hanna shrugged. “I don’t really know. But they seem to be a good fit.”

“A good fit, like how?” Rusty questioned.

“You know, they both wear glasses and look like the studious type. And they’re practically joined at the hip.”

“It’s that girl with the long curly hair, right?” Ray asked. Hanna nodded. “Yeah, now I remember that I’ve seen them together. They always seem to have some secret to share. And they laugh together. I guess that’s practically the recipe for a solid relationship,” Ray added in an academic tone. “But wait, why do you want to know about Matthew’s girlfriend, Rusty?”

Rusty shrugged. “No reason. I mean, as I said, I wanted to learn if you guys knew some unsavory things about him. So that I could use them to defeat him.”

“Unsavory? Defeat him?” Hanna repeated. “I pity the guy. What did he do to you?”

“He’s trying to make me study.”

“But I thought you accepted that he won, and in the most gracious manner, even,” Ray reminded him. He had to know all that from Jonathan.

“That was only a battle. The war is long,” Rusty declared and pointed at an invisible point of interest, somewhere in the distance, making Ray and Hanna turned their heads and then stare at each other in confusion. “Do you happen to know what his girlfriend is called?”

Hanna had to search her database again. “I think it’s... oh, yes. Her name is Zoey.”

“Hmm, is she cute?”

Hanna gasped. “Rusty Parker, are you planning on stealing your tutor’s girlfriend?”

“Nah, I won’t play that dirty,” Rusty replied with emphasis. “And it would be too easy. All the chicks dig me anyway. It wouldn’t be fair.”

Hanna shook her head and rolled her eyes. Ray grinned. “I don’t think you’d be able to steal Zoey from Matthew, Rusty.”

Rusty stared at Jonathan’s bestie, his eyes narrow slits. “Are you trying to get me into trouble, Ray? You know I can’t say ‘no’ to a challenge.”

“Nah, although I bet there would be some people who’d love to see the mighty king of Sunny Hill getting rejected once in a blue moon,” Ray pointed out.

Rusty crossed his arms. “Well, I do get rejected on occasion. It’s nothing new. But don’t let Xpress know. I need to stay the king.”

“Don’t worry. Our lips are sealed,” Ray promised.

He waved the duo goodbye and continued his routine of getting lost in thought with Matthew Han on his mind. When others called to him again, he ignored them on purpose.

So, Matthew had a girlfriend. A girl named Zoey, with long curly hair, nerdy like him. They laughed and shared secrets. Yeah, it sounded so, so boring.

And so annoying.



“Have you talked to Rusty?” Zoey questioned him while sitting on the bed opposite from Matty’s, a big container of ice cream in her lap, armed with an equally big spoon. “You know, ever since your tutoring session?”

“You know I haven’t,” Matty replied and tried to get back to his book. In fact, he had tried to stay out of Rusty’s way since his heart could only handle just so much. Only thinking of finding himself alone with the guy in close quarters made his stomach do backflips, his mind melt into a puddle... and the rest of him wasn’t doing that well, either.

“That means that tomorrow you’re going to see him again, right?” Zoey pointedly ignored his efforts to ignore her. “Are you prepared?”

“I’m trying to be.” Matty took the book and showed it to her and then slammed it down on the bed. “I have to know the lessons in advance and know them well if I want to maintain my reputation as a tutor.”

“I’m not talking about lessons, you nerd, duh.” Zoey dug deep into the ice cream and came up victoriously with a huge dollop which she examined with satisfaction before stuffing it whole into her mouth. “I’m talking about your plan to seduce him.”

Matty sighed and buried his head in the book, resting his forehead against the cool pages and closing his eyes. "I'm without hope, Zoey," he mumbled. "He's a straight dude who's killing it with girls, and I'm just the guy crushing on him for lack of anything better to do."

"Nah, you're just talking out of your ass," Zoey contradicted him and gestured with the spoon. "You're the guy with a crush on him, who has finally gotten the chance to seduce him."

"Nobody uses words like 'seduce' anymore, Zoey."

"I can use others. All right, so you're the guy who crushes on him and now can think up a way to whisper to his snake."

"Whisper to his snake?" Matty turned his head to stare at his friend.

"Play his magic flute?" Zoey made another attempt. "Get him horned up?"

Matty knew better than to contradict her. So, he turned back to confessing his sins to the book in front of him and closed his eyes again. "I don't have what it takes," he said, trying to sound more matter-of-fact than complaining. "He likes girls, and I should have gotten it through my head that, whatever, nothing would ever happen."

"And yet," Zoey said in a motherly, patient tone, "you haven't given up on your crush for the last three years. There must be a reason for that."

"Yeah, only that I can't explain it. It was crush at first sight, Zoey. Are there still people in the world to which stuff like this happens? Or am I the only one?"

"Don't get so full of yourself," Zoey scolded him. "People are crushing on people all the time. They might not hold that torch for three whole frigging years like you, but--"

"Thanks for the support," Matty interrupted her quickly.

"Either way, you're you. And you're crushing on Rusty Parker. Now, tell me, how are you really getting ready for tutoring Rusty again? The day after tomorrow is Saturday, which means--"

"That he'll go to some party and hook up," Matty said fast.

"And that's your chance to foil his plans to do that," Zoey continued as if that was the most logical thing to think and say.

"By doing what? Giving him more homework? And it's petty of me to even think of such a thing," Matty pointed out.

"Nah, nah, nah, you have him in your clutches now--"

Matty let out a snort. “Yeah, right. If I have him in my clutches, he’s nothing but sand, slipping through.”

“Listen to me, Matty.” Zoey startled him by clapping her hands all of a sudden. “Stop it with this defeatist attitude. This isn’t you. I think you’re crushing on Rusty and haven’t given up because, somehow, all secretly and stuff, you know that you can turn him.”

Now Zoey was the one totally talking out of her ass, but that was her way of giving him a pep talk, and he appreciated it.

“I’m not going to do anything to stop him from partying like usual,” he said. “But I will try to get to know him better, because I also want to know why I haven’t given up on this stupid crush for all these years. I might discover that he’s nothing but a vacuous annoying character and be done with him.”

Zoey was scraping the walls of the ice cream container furiously now. “You’re such a cerebral creature, Matty, I swear. Only you would rationalize a thing as huge as your crush in terms like that.”

“My brain is my biggest ally,” Matty said. “Having a crush for three years is, sort of like, an error, you know?”

“No, I don’t know. You’re more than your brain, you big head.” Zoey hopped from the bed and gave Matty a sticky kiss on the forehead. “You’re also--”

Matty squeezed his eyes tightly shut. “Please, don’t finish that sentence.”

Zoey laughed. “All right. I won’t. But only because I know you. Thanks for the ice cream. Did you want some, too?”

“No, it’s all right.” He couldn’t think of ice cream when he had to tutor Rusty tomorrow. His stomach was all tied up in knots.



Rusty was tapping the desk in a playful rhythm while observing his tutor across the table. Matthew was all buttoned up and had a gloomy expression on his face, which had to have a reasonable explanation. No one was usually that gloomy in his company unless someone had died or something equally horrific.

“Trouble with your girlfriend?”

“What?” Matthew stammered for a moment and quickly adjusted his glasses by pushing them up on his nose. Rusty had an inkling that it was a thing that had a calming effect Matthew did when

he was nervous. He was willing to go the extra mile to establish what was what. “Have you finished?”

Rusty pushed the paper toward Matthew. “Don’t try to change the subject. I can help if you have girl trouble.”

Matthew grabbed the paper and began examining it, his eyes moving fast across it. “The only subject here is Ethics, Mr. Parker. And I don’t have girl trouble, for your information.”

“No shit,” Rusty said in his usual laidback manner and stretched with a yawn. Matthew stared at him for a moment, and then his eyes returned to the task at hand. What was with that look? It was halfway ‘I want to strangle you’, and the rest of the road ‘why the hell do you exist?’. Matthew Han didn’t like him, and that sucked. Of course, Rusty had every intention to ruin his cool façade and intellectual propriety, but that didn’t mean that Matthew shouldn’t like him.

“Language,” Matthew said from the tip of his tongue. “We’re studying Ethics, after all.”

“I don’t think cuss words have anything to do with morals. I mean, like you could swear like a sailor on a bad day before discovering America, or something, and that still wouldn’t make you as bad as corpos peddling shit to consumers while exploiting six-year-olds in third world countries,” Rusty said promptly.

Matthew gave him a longer, more thoughtful look this time. “You’re right.”

Rusty waited for two heartbeats. “That is all?”

“I suppose you don’t want a medal for spewing truisms now,” Matthew replied.

“I was talking about your girlfriend.” Rusty observed the stony façade going through small, underground earthquakes. So, there was something there; Zoey was giving poor Matthew a hard time. Oh, no. What a pity.

Matthew sighed. “There is no girlfriend. This is good,” he said and gave Rusty the paper back.

“Why is there no girlfriend?” Rusty pressed on.

“I’m here to tutor you, not to complain about my love life.”

“I’m totally fine with you complaining about your love life. It would make things a little less dull.”

“I see you’re doing fine. Soon enough, you’ll put me out of my job.”

“Not so fast. I can, too,” Rusty said with aplomb, “give you the gift of knowledge.”

“What exactly are we talking about? What gift of knowledge?”

Good, by the avid look in Matthew's eyes, the guy was interested. Rusty grinned and linked his hands over the paper in front of him. "About chicks."

Matthew had the nerve to roll his eyes. It made him even more obnoxious in a cute way. Rusty felt his fingers itching to ruffle his feathers and see if the kitty had some claws, too. Bad choice of a comparison. Straight-laced Matthew Han wouldn't be caught dead in a cat boy suit, without a doubt.

"Who's Zoey, then?" Rusty decided to show his hand, seeing how his opponent had no intention of saying anything.

Matthew's widened eyes spelled surprise. "How do you know about Zoey?"

"What? Is she like some secret? Don't tell me she's your stepsister, and you've done some unpardonable--"

"Oh, gawd, stop right there," Matthew moaned. "Zoey's my best friend. Not my girlfriend, not my stepsister, or anything else."

"I see," Rusty said with satisfaction. "Wait, does she know?"

"Know what?" Matthew appeared quite disoriented.

"That she's just your friend."

"Trust me, she does." Those words felt dry like sandpaper.

Hmm, was there some juicy story there or none at all? It made Rusty wonder. "All right, all right, so does that mean that you suck in the girl department?"

Matthew's flawless skin reddened, making the heights of his cheeks look good enough to lick. Rusty shook his head. All right, so the guy was pretty and all, but that wasn't sufficient for any proper gay feelings. It didn't make his dick tingle; not a lot. Maybe just a mere twitch.

"Ah, you totally suck!" Rusty said with satisfaction. "I knew I had something to teach you back."

Matthew was shaking his head, like he needed to wake up from some weird dream. The redness diminished, and it looked like that hard mask was about to fall back in place any moment now. Nah, nah, nah, not when he had just made a breach in those defenses.

"Look, the problem with you is that you're not aware of your assets," Rusty explained in a didactic manner.

"My assets?"

All right, Matthew was practically stuttering at this point. That was when Rusty knew he must have struck gold. “Yeah, like your abs. You need to show them.”

“Show them where? How?” Matthew asked.

“Good thing you have the teacher of all teachers in the same room as you are right now.” Rusty grabbed the glass of water on the table and threw its contents straight at Matthew’s chest, making him gasp in shock and outrage.

“Rusty, what the fuck?!”

“Language, my dude,” Rusty said with satisfaction.

“Am I supposed to stay here, with this cold, wet t-shirt on?” Matthew asked and stood to his feet. He pulled at the hem, trying to air the wet spots.

That was the moment Rusty had been waiting for. He also got up and walked over to Matthew. “Lesson number one. Pretend to be helpless and a bit dumb. Let’s say that some chick just walked into you and poured all her green disgusting smoothie on you.”

Matthew stopped his attempts to dry his t-shirt and stared at him, wide-eyed and mouth a bit slack. Rusty felt a sudden impulse to push Matthew’s chin up to make him close his mouth and then pull it down to see how he looked with it opened wider. “Why does it have to be a green disgusting smoothie?”

“Chicks who are into health stuff are always ready for a new project. You could be theirs.” Rusty flicked a finger over the tip of Matthew’s nose.

“Ouch!” Matthew protested and grabbed his nose.

“Geesh, stop being such a baby. So, this chick just made a mess out of your t-shirt. What do you do?”

“Um, apologize for walking into her?”

“Yeah, right. She walked into you.”

“Am I supposed to wait for such an opportunity?”

“No, you create it.”

“So, I did walk into her,” Matthew concluded.

“Goals justify means, or something,” Rusty countered. “Don’t apologize. What do you do?”

“I..., um, say that it’s fine? In case she feels guilty about it?” Matthew continued down the same road of guys never getting laid.

Rusty pursed his lips and stared at Matthew for two long moments, until the other squirmed under that intent gaze. Then, he quickly grabbed the hem of Matthew's t-shirt and pulled it up, hard and fast. Matthew squealed but, finally, he was naked from the waist up, and those perfect abs showed. Rusty let his assessing eyes wander briefly; pecs were nice and defined, too, and the shoulders weren't bad. The dude was working out. "This is what you do. You take off your t-shirt and pretend to be completely lost about what to do about it."

"Like any girl with a head on her shoulders would think anything else but that I'm a douchebag for undressing in front of her," Matthew said, without forgetting to glare. He crossed his arms over his chest, as if he could hide the goods.

Rusty took pride in being patient where it mattered, but Matthew Han looked like he needed a bit of a hands-on approach. So, he took him by one shoulder. "You take your t-shirt," he said and handed the thing back to its owner until Matthew felt forced to accept it, "and you start wiping your abs." He made a rubbing gesture, just to be clearer.

Matthew just stood there, the t-shirt limp in his hand. "Does this really work for you?"

Rusty shrugged. "Totally. Congrats, my man. You just showed the girl the goods. You have her drooling, I'm telling you."

Matthew shook his head. "Or I'll have her shouting 'creep' and summoning campus security."

"With abs like these?" Rusty's itchy fingers needed a bit of release, so he touched Matthew's belly with only one and only briefly. A sucked-in breath was the immediate reaction. "Why are you acting like a total virgin? We're just role-playing here. Hey, are you really imagining I'm a chick?"

Matthew held the t-shirt close to his chest. "That's none of your business!"

"Oh, no, don't tell me," Rusty said slowly. Was he about to strike gold or what?

"I'm not a virgin!" Matthew shouted. "I've had sex. Lots of it."

"Yeah, yeah, you sound really convincing. I bet you don't even know how to kiss."

Matthew sputtered with indignation. "I'll have you know that I'm an extremely good kisser."

"Words are only words," Rusty chanted in falsetto. "Come on, show me. How do you hold your mouth when you kiss? What do you do with your tongue? Do you even have one?"

"What do you mean how do I hold my mouth? What kind of question is that?" Matthew continued, more and more absorbed in his own obnoxious righteousness.

"Ha, you don't even know how to kiss. No wonder chicks around here don't even know you exist." Rusty crossed his arms, pleased with his findings.

“Do you want to know how I hold my mouth? What I do with my tongue?” The cute hamster was no more. Yeah, that was a kitty and he had claws, too.

Rusty grinned and basked in satisfaction. “Yeah, I totally want to know.”

Matthew threw him a deadly look. Then, he opened his mouth slightly and licked his lips. Rusty looked on in disbelief. No way was this virgin boy going to rain on his parade. Matthew darted his tongue out, and his eyelids dropped. Now that looked nice. Rusty could feel that nifty tongue wrapping around somewhere inside him, giving a perfect spot of him small, craze-inducing licks.

“You look like a fish,” Rusty said with rancor. “Are you frozen, too?”

That earned him another flash of the lethal kind from the hazel eyes. Yet, it didn’t prepare him for what followed. Matthew threw his t-shirt on the floor and then grabbed Rusty by the front of his shirt.

And then, he put those soft inviting lips on his and snuck his tongue into his mouth, taking him totally by surprise.

Rusty took a step back and his ass hit the table, but Matthew followed, turning those flicks of the tongue into something very much real, exploring deeper and deeper.

That moment, there was a short knock on the door, and someone entered. “Guys, I thought you’d need some refreshments--”

Matthew pulled away and turned his back. Rusty turned the other way, to witness Jonathan standing in the door with a tray in his hands, and a completely shocked expression in his eyes. “I’m so sorry, I should have waited for you to tell me to come in,” Jonathan said quickly and looked away. “I didn’t see anything,” he added and made a one-eighty, disappearing behind the door, taking the tray with him.

Rusty swallowed. He was thirsty, in all honesty. Too bad Jonathan had taken off so quickly. He could have used some freshly squeezed juice.

“We’re done for today,” Matthew’s voice brought him back to reality.

The guy was already dressed, the wet spots still visible on the front of his prim t-shirt. The bag was safely on his shoulder and he was quick to make a beeline for the door.

Rusty knew he was supposed to say something to keep Matthew there. Only that, a first for him, his mind was a pristine blank canvas. No, not quite so pristine. The shape of a kiss could be seen on closer inspection.



Matty maintained an indifferent face while walking down the stairs and through the open space shared by Rusty and his friends. Jonathan was there, along with his boyfriend, and Matty felt that if the ground opened under his feet it would be too little to save him from embarrassment. He made an awkward wave with his hand in their direction, hoping against hope that Jonathan wouldn't tease him.

"Too bad you're allergic, Matthew," Maddox said while gesturing with a tall glass filled with orange juice.

"Yes," Jonathan added quickly, "I should have asked first. If there is something else you prefer to drink when you're here, just let us know."

To Matty's ears, Jonathan sounded a bit nervous. There was no way Maddox couldn't tell his boyfriend was hiding something. Nonetheless, he was thankful that Jonathan had been tactful enough not to tell on him.

He apologized meekly and slunk out the door like a thief. Once outside, he drew in a big gulp of air. What on earth was he thinking lately?

Rusty would never want to have him over tutoring. Ever again.



What the hell had just happened? Rusty wasn't in the business of 'cannot compute', but this was one such situation. So, for a good few moments, he had been completely in control, teasing Matthew and getting closer to his goal of punishing the obnoxious prick for being a 'know-it-all'.

And then? Then it happened that Matthew had taught him a lesson in an area that Rusty didn't believe that there was anything left for him to learn.

He had taught him that a boy's lips could be pretty sweet, too.

Who would have thought that? Rusty patted his lips and considered the situation.

Matthew had nice lips. Rusty liked nice lips.

Matthew knew how to kiss. Rusty liked being kissed.

Matthew had kissed Rusty.

What did that make them?

"Pretty damn gay," he concluded with a shrug.

Just the situation, though. Not either of them or anything. Because Rusty had all the chicks he wanted, and Matthew wanted all the chicks if he had no girlfriend and was willing to go that far just to prove that he could kiss.

And damn, the dude could kiss. Rusty closed his eyes for a moment. It was easy to go gay for that kind of kiss. His dick twitched at the recollection of the earlier challenge. Yeah, yeah, dudes could go in and out of gay, and he was the living example. Like dipping your littlest toe in a pool of gay and then taking it out.



Can there be some other greater embarrassment than what I just fucking did? Matty took in breaths and released them, pondering over a proper punishment for his transgressions. If Rusty learned he was crushing on him, he would laugh forever.

Yeah, like who crushed on a guy who could go to bed with every girl who happened into his path, and also did that?

Probably a moron. One who didn't know where and when to stop so that he would save himself some embarrassment. Matty checked his phone. Oh, he had a package.

Well, he considered philosophically. There was always room for more embarrassment.

His cat suit had just been delivered.

Chapter Four

I Almost Touched a Pussycat Tail

“Tension. Knife. Knife. Tension.” Rusty gestured to compartmentalize, using both hands held at a straight angle.

Maddox looked at him over the table. One of the awesome perks of having Jonathan over most of the time was that they got to eat pretty good food. They had to share him with Ray, or otherwise, there would be a war on campus. Rusty could live with that. He took the knife he had used to butcher his piece of steak and gestured into the air like a duelist.

“What are you on about now?” Maddox eventually asked.

Jonathan gave him a pointed look. Unlike the rest of them, he held his eating utensils in what looked like an effortless elegant manner. However, he knew what Rusty meant by tension. He was clutching his fork and knife just a lil’ bit too tightly.

“Didn’t Jonathan tell you?” Rusty said innocently, ready to stir up some trouble.

“Tell me what?” Maddox asked and looked at his Jonathan, half smiling.

That guy was so damn smitten.

Jonathan groaned, patted his lips with a paper napkin and threw it on the table. “Don’t tell me you wanted me to tell on you, Rusty.”

“What? What did he do?” Maddox asked, his interest piqued.

“I don’t know exactly, and from where I stood, it looked like he was the one having things done to him,” Jonathan enunciated every word carefully. He sighed and turned toward Maddox. “Matthew is not allergic to orange juice. I just walked in on them, and Matthew was all over Rusty, naked from the waist up.” He returned to his food, like he had just delivered the weather report.

Maddox grinned. “Oh, shoot. What did you do, Rusty, to warrant such punishment? Wait, is Matthew gay? I thought he had a girlfriend. Not that I judge if he swings both ways.” He put his hand up in self-defense.

“That is not his girlfriend,” Rusty said with importance.

“Who is she?” Jonathan naturally asked.

Rusty smirked and glared through his eyelashes. “Zoey,” he said pointedly, “is just his best friend.”

“Aren’t you a bit too interested in your tutor? Since I know you, it’s not a good sign. Hell, how did you get Matthew to undress?” Maddox sounded more and more alarmed.

“Chill, amigo,” Rusty said in a baritone voice, “I’m not going to ditch studying and stuff. But I plan on bringing Matthew Han to his knees.” Satisfied to have voiced his decision out loud, he grabbed the ketchup bottle and made a little mountain on the small piece of steak still on his plate. Hmm, it looked like a turd now. He pushed the plate away.

“That didn’t sound dirty at all,” Maddox said in a terse voice. “What did the poor guy do to you?”

“Nah, nah, nah, you don’t understand me. It’s for his own good,” Rusty started. “You see, Matthew’s a total stuck up. He can’t even bend from the waist because of that big a stick he has up his ass. Oh, man, you should see him. He’s like all ice while stuffing all that shit in my brain. It sucks.”

“I have no idea what you mean, and Matthew is just doing his job. Just don’t chase him away,” Maddox warned.

“I don’t plan to,” Rusty said brightly. “You see, I’m going to help him get, you know, looser, so that he can finally land a date. That dude should kill it on the hookup scene, I’m telling you. Instead, he’s just busy sticking that stick further up his ass.”

“That’s a lot of innuendo, even coming from you,” Jonathan pointed out. “Maybe Matthew doesn’t want to hook up.”

“Whatever,” Rusty said waving his head to and fro at a fast pace and rolling his eyes. “The least he could do is get a girlfriend. I’ll help him.”

“Whether he wants one or not,” Maddox muttered under his breath.

Jonathan seemed to have some unanswered questions. Rusty turned dutifully and pointed the fork at him this time. “Speak now, or forever hold your peace.”

“Famous last words,” Maddox chimed in, uninvited.

“Silence in court,” Rusty called, still keeping the fork pointed at Jonathan. “Ask away, Johnny boy.”

“From where I stood,” Jonathan began slowly, measuring his words, “it looked like Matthew was actually the one doing, let’s say, the molesting.”

“Ha! The person who could molest me hasn’t been born yet. It was totally consensual,” Rusty replied calmly. Well, Matthew did spring it on him, but that didn’t mean that it hadn’t been all too pleasurable. Rusty felt the signs of an impending stiffy just thinking of it.

“Are you going gay for your tutor?” Maddox asked.

Rusty threw the fork on the plate and began waving his arms. “Dudes can kiss other dudes without going gay.”

Maddox made a face like he had just landed on Mars or something. “Were you two kissing? Babe, they were kissing?” he insisted, turning toward his fiancé.

Jonathan nodded.

“Huzza!” Rusty exclaimed. “Stop blowing things out of proportions. I was just testing his ability to kiss.”

“And?” Jonathan asked. “Where does he stand?”

“Better not let him handle any CPR, unless it’s a life or death situation,” Rusty delivered what he wanted to be his last line for the evening.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Maddox asked.

Ah, these children. They knew nothing. Rusty was already on his feet, but a demonstration was better than a thousand explanations. He picked his empty glass from the table and stuck his tongue in it as far as he could. He waved it around while Maddox and Jonathan both stared at him nonplussed.

“Yeah,” he said and put the glass back on the table. “He’s that kind of kisser. The tongue-feeder type.”

Jonathan snickered. Maddox was biting his lip not to laugh.

“What? It’s a real term,” Rusty protested.

Maddox grinned and threw him a sideways glance. “You like this dude, Rusty.”

Yeah. Maybe.

“I hate his guts,” Rusty declared and turned on his feet. “Keep this a secret from Dex and Kane or --”

“Keep what a secret from us?” The two bros from different moms walked in at that very moment.

“Rusty got fed some tongue by his tutor,” Maddox ratted him out promptly.

“Oh, shoot. We need to find another tutor?” Kane asked.

“No, Kane,” Maddox countered. “Hear my words. Rusty was the one on the receiving end.”

Kane's face lit up like a fucking street lamp. "For real? Matthew should get a medal."

"I vote yes," Dex hurried to agree.

"Guys, guys," Jonathan called for attention, "I think Matthew would be embarrassed if we mentioned that."

Rusty snorted. "Like hell. You don't know that demon."



Damn, it felt good to be the king. Rusty stretched and placed his arms around two girls who giggled instantly as soon as he touched them. They were new and very much willing to be introduced to the lord of the realm. Still, as the true king, Rusty needed to postpone his personal pleasure until later and see that everyone was having fun. Therefore, he let himself be kissed on the cheeks by the two new cheerleaders for one-man-team Rusty and moved on. He checked the drinks, the music, the guy pretending to be the DJ... eh, they could do better in that department, and maybe later, he'd take over. Some people didn't know good music if it hit them in the face.

"Man, you gotta try this." A dude from Kane's team pushed a plastic cup into his hand. "Top notch. You won't know what hit you."

Rusty looked into the cup with doubt. He was all for experimenting, and he had tried some crazy shit in his life, so he knew exactly what he didn't want to try again. Like the guy could read his mind, he added, "It's just booze, dude. My captain would kill me if I slipped you something, what the heck?"

Yeah, Kane would totally have the dude's ass if anything weird happened. So, Rusty shrugged and drank all the content in one gulp. It was kind of bitter and gross. Rusty turned toward the dude. "Did you piss in it? Just give it to me straight."

The guy made a face like he'd never heard a joke in his life. "No, dude, what the fuck?"

Rusty patted him on the shoulder. "Then we're good."

Ugh, but that thing had been strong. It went right to his head. It was most probably something completely unimaginative, like a combination of the strongest liquors college kids could get their hands on. He sat on the nearest sofa, deciding to take a break and admire his kingdom. Then he noticed a curly mass of hair sitting on top of a head. And the head was attached to no other than the keeper of Matthew Han's dirty secrets, Zoey. Since he had learned about her, he had been curious. Yeah, so she and Matthew were the kind of people who flew under his radar, usually, but.

He didn't finish his thought and propelled himself to his feet. There was a chance a certain stuck-up tutor was around, with Zoey in the house. Without wasting a moment, he made a beeline for

her. She was bracing the wall and examining the room with avid eyes. Rusty observed her line of sight closely.

When her mouth went slack into a heartfelt sigh like a heroine in a historical romance book, he was by her side. “Hi.”

He was so abrupt and loud to cover the music, that Zoey had to catch her glasses, threatening to slide off her nose. She gave him a rabbit-like look, but then cleared her throat and regained her composure. “Your Majesty,” she said.

Oh, look, a smartass. No wonder Matthew kept her company. Birds of a feather, he would bet.

To raise the stakes, he planted one hand on the wall over her head and leaned in. “I didn’t catch your name.”

Zoey grinned at him, looked at his arm above her, then back at him. “Bark up another tree, dude. I’m not into royalty.”

Ouch. Was that a slap in the face? A cold shower? A kick right in the eggos? “Everyone’s into royalty,” Rusty said with emphasis.

“Come on, cut to the chase. You don’t even know who I am. So you either placed a weird bet with someone, or you’re drunker than you think.”

Her frankness left him speechless. For like a second. “But I do know who you are,” he drawled and paused for effect, “Zoey.”

Her eyes grew wide, just like Matthew’s, so big and shiny behind the glasses. “Did Matty tell you something weird about me?”

“Matty?” Rusty asked, forgetting to keep the charm turned on.

Zoey rolled her eyes. “Your tutor. Wait, did he introduce himself to you under a different name?”

Rusty blinked. This chick was nuts. And he was nuts for talking to her. Not quite. “You mean, Matthew,” he said. “Does he like Matty better?”

“Why don’t you ask him yourself?” Zoey said and grinned.

Good. Straight to the matter at hand. “Where is he?”

Zoey’s smirk turned mischievous. “Why do you want to know?”

“He’s my tutor, and I have questions,” Rusty delivered in a deadpan voice.

“On Saturday night? At a party?” Zoey gestured around.

“My thirst for knowledge never sleeps. Take me to him. Minion.” He wanted to get on her nerves a little. Chicks were usually more tactful, not like this mini-beast.

Zoey made a face. “But I just got here. I’m not taking you halfway across the campus only so you can wake up Matty.”

“What? He’s sleeping?” Rusty didn’t know whether this Zoey chick was pulling his leg or not.

“I kid you not. How do you think he keeps his skin like that? With sacrifices, obviously.”

“I can’t let this happen. That old man will turn eighty and be full of regrets before he knows it. Where is his room?”

“You’re actually a bit older than him, and your signs--” Zoey stopped and closed her mouth tightly. “I’ll tell you where his room is, but don’t tell him you heard it from me,” she added quickly. “Be warned. The little prince turns into a demon at night.”

“You mean he’s not one all the time?” Rusty asked and smiled broadly.

Zoey matched his grin with hers. “Don’t let appearances fool you. If you like cookies, he’s it.”

Rusty licked his lips. He was much in the mood for some cookies, actually.



Matty took a deep breath. Some college kids were at parties at that hour. Others were asleep. Some others surely played video games.

And he was the only one doing the most abnormal thing in the history of college kids everywhere. However, according to extensive research on the matter, in order to get into character, so to speak, he needed to push his boundaries, test his limits, and walk outside... dressed as a cat boy.

He kept to the shadows, avoiding the groups of rowdy young men and women hopping from party to party. It was beyond strange to be out in the open, wearing that tight latex suit that glued itself to his body like a second skin, fully equipped with a mask and cat ears. At least people who saw him by accident would think there was a costume party somewhere, or that they were a bit too drunk.

Also, it was a college campus. Maybe dudes dressed as cat boys weren’t the norm, but they wouldn’t be as frowned upon, either.

He shook his shoulders trying to relax. Did people wear this kind of thing in a non-ironic way? And if yes, how did they do it? Matty felt extremely foolish. Good thing no one paid him any mind since he was careful to move behind the leafy hedge, being sure not to make any noises.

How long did it count as significant exposure for a first try? Not even Zoey knew about his crazy plans. After arguing with him for an entire hour to convince him to attend the same party Rusty was going to, she had decided that he was hopeless. She would have such a laugh right now if she saw him. He just didn't have the guts to face Rusty, not after that bold kiss... that he was still thinking of every waking moment. Before Jonathan had come knocking, he could swear Rusty was starting to react... but that was probably his wishful thinking and nothing else. What he needed was to put some distance between that moment and the next time he faced Rusty Parker. And experiment with the cat boy suit, obviously.

Hmm, he was starting to feel a little better. Actually, the costume was pretty well made, and it granted him excellent freedom of movement. Maybe he couldn't do an entire parkour run dressed like this, but it didn't mean that he was hindered in any way while performing quite taxing physical tasks.

Matty pondered the wall in front of him. Well, since he was supposed to get inside the mind of a feline, maybe he could try that. It was no feat for him to catch the edge with his hands and then pull himself up. Once on the ledge, he crouched for balance and looked around. What did you know? It felt quite liberating and fun.

The back wall went around a part of the campus, so, if he wanted, he could walk slowly and remain out of sight. Emboldened by that decision, he stood straight and put his hands on his hips.

It was kind of fun to pretend to be a cat boy.



Hmm, what was a good way to make Matthew, no, Matty, come out of his shell? Rusty was pretty sure the guy would both hate him and be grateful for it later if he followed the proper advice on dating and hooking up. Rusty knew himself as the expert and he was in a generous mood tonight. After all, he had to get back at Matty for that kiss.

The tip of his tongue tingled at the memory. Now that had been a kiss. What business did Matty have keeping such expertise to himself? There had to be a flaw, a faulty connection between Matty's tongue and his brain if he didn't see what he could do and how much he could score. He'd probably be an oral sex guru, too, if he tried. With that kinky tongue, everything was possible.

Shock therapy it had to be, Rusty decided. Now, where was that dorm again? He looked around, a bit confused. Whenever he thought too long and hard about Matty's tongue and what the dude could do with it, he tended to forget where he was going.

Establishing that he had walked in the wrong direction, Rusty made a sharp turn to the right and then remained glued to the spot, his mouth gone slack. There, on top of the wall that surrounded the east side of the campus, tall in the moonlight...

Stood a cat boy. Rusty's perfect unicorn. The cat boy was sniffing the air, most probably in search of prey, and his latex suit showed his lithe, yet strong body. Rusty looked around, waved quickly at a couple of people and then jumped over the green hedge, making sure not to make a sound. If he knew one thing about cats, it was that they were skittish. Also, it always served to approach them by placing yourself below them if it was possible so that they felt safe.

That wasn't a problem, seeing how the cat boy was up on the wall. The costume looked good on him, like it was made to order, which could only mean that the dude was dedicated to the cause. For some time, Rusty stood there and admired him. Now that was a good body for rocking a cat boy suit.

Rusty got as close as he believed it was safe. "Here, kitty, kitty," he called in a gentle voice.

That startled the cat boy enough to make him lose his balance. Rusty shrugged and threw open his arms, ready to catch him if need be. But the cat boy wavered and swung his body a couple of times back and forth, only to find his footing and regain his bearings. Perfect feline moves.

Then, he grabbed his tail, wrapping it around his arm, and started running along the wall.

"Hey," Rusty called for him and began running, too. "Hey, come back. I have treats!"

The cat boy didn't seem in any mood to listen. Rusty stopped and hiked himself up onto the wall. He staggered for a moment. Damn that strange drink. At one point, the wall stopped and then he'd have the cat boy properly cornered. He'd probably hiss and try to scratch, but those were nothing compared to Rusty's desire to pet him.

At the mention of treats, the cat boy only started to run faster. Now, what kind of cat didn't like treats? Well, one couldn't catch a feline with the same means intended for a canine. A dog boy would have been in Rusty's lap by now. "All right, I lied and you know it! I don't have any treats."

He was balancing himself on the wall, but it wasn't easy to catch up with the quick cat boy who seemed to fly along the top of the wall, that fast he moved. At one point, he risked a look to one side, and he was about to fall. He couldn't have that. Maybe he shouldn't have drunk that weird booze Kane's teammate had handed to him.

"Stop chasing me!" the cat boy whined at him.

He had a strange, pitchy voice, and for a moment, Rusty felt tempted to stop. His ideal cat boy needed a voice like silk and velvet combined. Eh, he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth, or a cat boy in the way he talked. Maybe he could be trained.

The wall ended, as Rusty predicted, and the cat boy stopped. "Gotcha!" He rushed to grab the cat boy from behind, but right then, the dude made a leap of faith, landing, quite effortlessly, in a nearby tree. Rusty braced himself to avoid falling and jumped to the ground. From the tree, the

cat boy was staring at him, or at least, that was what he guessed from his body language in the dark.

“I want us to be friends,” Rusty explained. “Get down and I will pet you.”

“Go away,” the cat boy replied in the same annoying pitchy voice. “I hate being petted.”

“All right, I’ll do as you say. Can I at least touch your tail?”

The cat boy huffed and found his way up to another branch. From there, he gained momentum and jumped onto the low roof of one of the buildings, but it was too high for Rusty. Ah, damn, he was losing him. “Hey,” he called again.

But the cat boy was already gone from view, much nimbler than Rusty.

The disappointments he had to live with in life. Rusty pondered for a moment. Well, if the cat boy was that adept at finding shortcuts to evade him, it could only mean one thing.

The cat boy had to be a student here at Sunny Hill.

Now, what was he about to do before having all his attention hijacked by the cat boy? Ah, right, he was on his way to pester Matty to wake up and get his ass to the party. Funny how the mind worked. Since yesterday, this little chase had been the only reprieve from thinking about the annoying and obnoxious, the tongue-feeder kisser Matthew Han. It only took a cat boy in flesh and blood.



Matty closed the door behind him and pressed his back against it. No one had seen him walking inside, and he had had the inspiration of leaving some unsuspecting clothes in a bush behind the dorm so that he could change and walk back inside the building without making people think that he was out of his mind.

He folded the cat boy suit and turned it into a bundle, which he threw into the bottom of his closet. The hell had he been thinking? So early into his mission, and he had been about to blow his cover.

He was sweaty all over and his heart wouldn’t stop beating fast. Rusty had almost caught him. What the hell was he doing there instead of rocking some party? Good thing Matty was so good at climbing. But that had been a close call, and one he hadn’t been ready for. He focused on his breathing and ran his hands through his hair. Damn, he had forgotten about the ears, but good thing that he hadn’t put on the wig, as well. He began untangling the cat ear band from his hair when a loud knock on the door made him freeze. What on earth? Was there some sort of emergency?

For a moment, he didn't move. If someone from his floor was trying to prank him, they would go away soon if he just ignored the knocking.

The someone in question insisted, the knocking more and more persistent.

"Who is it?" Matty asked sharply. "Zoey, if it's you--"

"I'm your student, bearing questions," someone whose voice he knew well now replied from behind the door.

He hadn't frozen in place before; no, this was the moment for him to freeze in place. That was Rusty. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, Rusty Parker, the king of Sunny Hill and of Matty's most private dreams, was threatening to knock the door down. Just after he had just chased Matty up on a wall, like ten minutes ago.

"Can't they wait?" Matty asked, his heart beating fast again. "You can just message me with whatever you don't understand."

"I can't wait," Rusty insisted and knocked again, with increased ferocity.

"Would you cut that out? People might be sleeping at this hour on this floor."

"Nope, you're the only one. Nerd."

It was so strange to talk to Rusty through the door. "If I answer your questions, will you go away?"

"Let me in, and we'll see."

Matty pondered. Well, the cat suit was safe at the bottom of the closet. He put his hand on the handle and pushed the other through his hair. He stopped as he felt the cat ear band. Fuck. Rusty pushed against the door. Matty pulled off the band, ripping some hairs out of his head, and threw it under the bed with dexterity he had no idea he possessed.

Rusty was inside that very moment. Matty stared at him. *Act normal, act normal, act normal.*

Rusty sniffed the air. Then he looked at Matty. Then he looked around the room. "Were you jerking off?"

"What?" Matty asked, nonplussed, and watched Rusty walk into his dorm room, stopping by his bed.

A book, opened in the middle, was resting face down on the coverlet. Rusty picked it and began leafing through it. Matty continued to watch, like at an accident of some sort from which he couldn't look away.

Rusty made a face and looked at him as if he was growing horns out of his head. Matty put his hands to his hair, alarmed. Phew, he really had gotten rid of the cat ears in the nick of time. That would have been a disaster.

“Dude, are you beating your meat to alien wizard zombies?”

Matty groaned and grabbed the book from Rusty’s hand. “I wasn’t,” he said.

“Then why the fuck are you so sweaty and breathing like you’ve just run a marathon?”

Matty pressed the book to his chest like a small shield. Could it be that Rusty already knew that he had been the cat boy from earlier? Was he here to make fun of him? That would be bad. He wouldn’t survive. So, he sighed. “Yeah, you got me, I was masturbating to tales of the ancient kingdom of Lo’ar. It was just getting good, with the half-zombies assaulting the palace of queen Kamara.” If he went down, at least he would go down swinging.

Rusty examined him with what seemed like genuine interest. Then, he shrugged. “Eh, whatever floats your boat, man. But, for the record, you’re one sick fuck. In a good way.”

Matty sighed in relief. Rusty would be teasing him already over the cat boy incident if he knew anything. “What are your questions?”

“What questions?” Rusty asked while continuing to inspect Matty’s small room. “You don’t have a cellmate?”

“Cellmate?”

“Yeah, I’m sure there are prison cells bigger than your room,” Rusty pointed out.

“My roommate has other arrangements, most of the time.”

“Like what?”

Rusty’s curiosity made no sense. Could it be that he was playing with Matty, wanting to make him sweat first? “I have no idea. He’s seeing an older woman or something,” Matty said as he came up with something ludicrous only so that he could throw Rusty off his scent. Silently, he addressed his apologies to John, his roommate. The guy had a sister and the sister had a boyfriend with a small apartment for rent. He didn’t charge John anything, and John could study in peace there all he wanted.

“A milf,” Rusty concluded. “Now that’s a player,” he said, pointing a finger at Matty. “Unlike someone else who’s living here.”

Matty scoffed. “Rusty, you woke me up because you wanted to ask me something. Come on, say what it is, and beat it.”

Rusty gasped and pressed a hand to his chest. “So damn cold. You know, not even chicks who are heavily into the brooding type would fall for that. And I didn’t wake you up. You were choking the chicken while reading about an army of zombie wankers doing the unspeakable to the queen’s four-poster bed. I bet they’re jerking off all over her iron and leather throne. She’s some kind of dominatrix, isn’t she? And they’re all into punishment. Tell me I’m right.”

“Whatever,” Matty said in what he hoped sounded like a vexed enough voice.

Rusty plopped himself down on Matty’s bed, bouncing a few times, as if he wanted to check the spring resistance. That wasn’t exactly how Matty had pictured having Rusty in his bed, but beggars couldn’t be choosers.

“There’s a party somewhere, and you’re here,” Matty pointed out. “Please, tell me there’s a good reason why you’re not there instead.”

Rusty yawned and stretched. “Dude, your bed is so soft. It’s like a chick’s.” He began to feel the pillow case. “Silk?”

Matty narrowed his eyes. “What did you have to drink tonight? Or... oh, fuck, what are you on?”

Rusty decided that the pillow case was much to his liking because he grabbed it and rubbed his face against it. Then, with a sly grin, he stared at Matty. “I’m not high, four-eyes.” He threw the pillow back to its place, but instead of getting up, he just stretched out on the bed and kicked off his sneakers. “I’m tired, though. And a bit drunk.”

“Do you really want me to believe such a thing?” Matty crossed his arms. “Rusty Parker always leaves the party last. Any party.”

“A guy gave me something weird to drink. And I had to chase down a cat. I almost touched his tail.”

Matty tensed. Any moment now, Rusty would jump to his feet, point a finger at him, and laugh. He waited, but nothing happened.

Then, Rusty looked at him, only one eye open. “How about you read to me about those zombie wankers?”

“Are you sure? Do you mind if I jerk off while I’m doing that?”

Rusty moved closer to the wall and patted the place by his side. “Not really. I’m actually quite curious about your pecker. Is it a reason for you to have an inferiority complex?”

“Is this your nice way of asking me if I have a small dick?”

“Yeah,” Rusty admitted without one shadow of remorse.

“For the record, it’s completely normal,” Matty said.

“Define normal.”

“What do you mean? Normal like in average.”

“You’re a guy jerking off to alien zombie porn. Normal might have a completely different meaning for you.”

Matty groaned. “I wasn’t jerking off. The reason I was sweaty and all is because the damn book gave me a nightmare and I woke up like that.”

Rusty threw him a sympathetic, yet very clearly fake, look. “I believe you, man. Now, come and read to me from your kinky book. I’m just going to rest for like five minutes. No, don’t sit over there. This is your bed.”

“Which you took over without asking.”

Rusty grinned and his eyes narrowed. “Can I please sleep in your bed, Matty?”

“Okay,” Matty said with a sigh. “Hey, when did I say you could call me Matty?”

“That’s what your friends call you, right?”

“Are we friends?”

“We are if you read me some cool BDSM bedtime story and let me sleep for like half an hour. It’s hard work chasing cats.”

So, Rusty didn’t use the term cat boy, and Matty wasn’t about to bring it up. He plopped himself down next to Rusty, trying hard not to touch him, a difficult thing to achieve in his very narrow bed.

Rusty pulled him closer and rested his head against Matty’s flank.

“This is uncomfortable, you know,” Matty complained and squirmed.

“Do you have a problem with people touching you? Okay, I’m moving my hand, but I still want to rest my head on your belly. Consider it exposure therapy.”

Matty was damn sure he had had enough of that for one night, but Rusty had already put his head on top of his belly. He held the book tightly. From where he sat, he could so easily imagine Rusty going down on him.

“I knew you were getting a hard-on for those zombie wizards,” Rusty commented. “Dude, I don’t think your dick is normal.”

Matty cursed his decision to change out of his cat boy suit into sweatpants. Sure thing, Rusty had a front row seat to his growing hard-on that had to be quite visible through the soft fabric. The zombie wizards weren't to blame for that, but he wouldn't make the mistake of contradicting Rusty.

“Wait, what do you mean it's not normal?”

Rusty tipped his head back until they could look at each other. The conceited ass grinned. “It's more than average. I think it's pretty big.”

“If you're using my belly as a pillow just so that you could stare at my boner, be my guest,” Matty said, picking up the glove.

“I would, but I'm too sleepy. Just wake me up in half an hour. Then, I'll let you jerk off to your weird-ass stories.”

“You're really serious about this,” Matty commented.

“As serious as I am about everything. Read.”

Matty had a mind to protest, but he was already in heavenly hell, or hellish heaven. He had Rusty Parker in his bed, his blond tousled head inches away from his dick. It was one strange situation, but maybe that was the only thing he'd have to jerk off to on the many lonely nights from here on out.

So, he started reading.



Rusty woke up with his head as heavy as a wooden log. He blinked as he looked around. Damn, those new cheerleaders were heavy into grit fantasy. He touched the poster on the wall and forced himself up on his butt. That booze he had drunk was strange all right. He had dreamed of chasing cat boys on the campus walls for like hours. And then, of his tutor reading him BDSM bedtime stories.

Wait. His memories were coming back to him. He turned to his right and stared at the strangest bed partner he'd had in a long time.

Matty was sleeping soundly, his glasses still on, his mouth slack, and his sweatshirt hiked up enough to reveal his awesome abs. And a book was resting on his chest, rising and falling with each of his breaths.

Right. Rusty remembered now. He carefully took Matty's glasses, folded them and put them on the nightstand. Then, he took the book and closed it with satisfaction. Let the kinky demon figure out where he left off.

He moved quietly and landed safely on the floor. This had been a weird night. And he was still curious about one thing. Carefully, he leaned over Matty's sleeping form and, using his pinky, he lifted the waistband of the guy's sweatpants. A little peek wouldn't hurt anyone. Hmm. Yeah. That dick looked bigger than average, even limp. It was also cute. Matty had another point in his favor. Chicks always dug cute things, especially if they were big.

Just as carefully, Rusty slipped his finger away. Well, now was a good moment to make an exit, and leave Matty to his alien zombie porn. What was that book about, anyway? He couldn't remember. Next time he saw Kane's mate, the one who had given him that weird drink, he was going to have a serious talk with him.

But now, he needed to slip out of the room without making a sound. It would have been pretty weird for two straight dudes to wake up in the same bed. Rusty was doing everyone involved a service by saving Matty and himself the embarrassment.

Actually, he was never embarrassed. Rusty walked out and closed the door behind him, all the while making no noise whatsoever.

And then, he promptly slapped his crotch by accident with the back of his hand while trying to fix his t-shirt.

"What are you on about now?" he asked his dick that was shamelessly pitching a tent. "I need to do some waiting for this morning wood to go down."

Chapter Five

Where Did Rusty Parker Sleep Last Night?

Last night was dark and full of secrets, boys and girls. Our king, Rusty Parker, after seducing and abandoning a fair number of equally fair maidens, abandoned the hippest party on campus and disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. We're pretty sure it wasn't the earth doing the swallowing to our king last night, but that still begs the question...

Rusty Parker, where did you sleep last night?



“I’m not in the habit of reading Xpress, but now I’m curious since a bunch of random people keep pestering me.” Dex put his phone on the table and linked his hands on top of his head. “Who did you do it with last night, Rusty?”

Such questions came with the territory when you were a celebrity. Rusty sighed and continued to create a house from his French fries. Satisfied with the result, he reached for the ketchup bottle. If he painted the walls red, it would be a horror movie.

However, his hand met nothing but air. Kane had grabbed it and was now staring at him with interest.

Rusty just opened and closed his fingers a few times. “Give.”

“We’re curious, Rusty.”

“You should teach your mates not to give me weird booze,” Rusty told Kane.

Kane shrugged. “You can say ‘no’ on occasion, Rusty. Now, spit it out. What new girl grabbed you and dragged you to her lair? If this information doesn’t surface in the next twenty-four hours, we’ll have to turn off our phones.”

Rusty leaned back in his chair and looked at Dex, and then at Kane. These guys were serious. And Kane was going to eat all the ketchup given the way he was squeezing the bottle over his fries.

“I chased a cat boy.”

Dex and Kane stared at him with interest. “A cat boy?” Dex asked. “You’re sure it wasn’t your imagination you were chasing? There are no cat boys around here, and I don’t think there’s any cosplay convention taking place anywhere near.”

“It was a cat boy,” Rusty insisted.

“All right.” Kane always played the diplomat. “Let’s say that there was a cat boy. Did you catch him?”

“No. He jumped into a tree. I couldn’t follow.”

Kane and Dex traded one of their famous shared glances.

“No,” Rusty said pointedly, “it wasn’t just a cat. It was a sexy dude, dressed in a black latex suit, with tail and ears and all.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t a flying squirrel?” Kane insisted, like the annoying prick he was. “Mistakes are easy to make, especially at night.”

“Did you chase this cat boy all night? And where?”

Rusty paused. Usually, he would just say everything. But he didn’t want these assholes of friends of his to think that he suddenly had a thing for his tutor. Not everyone turned gay at the sight of a sexy tail, the way it had happened to Maddox, as soon as he had laid his eyes on Jonathan. That wasn’t like him. Plus, it wouldn’t have been that much of an issue, but Matty was straight and wanted to hook up or get a girlfriend or something. Spreading rumors that he was getting into the gay with the king could hurt his chances of scoring.

Determined that it was all for a good cause, he kept his mouth shut.

And Kane and Dex exchanged another look.

“He was real,” he said and stuffed his mouth with the east wall of the French fry house. He didn’t need any ketchup. “And yeah, I chased him all night. It was exhausting. But fun.”

“He is keeping things from us,” Kane said slowly.

Dex tooted his agreement.

“I’m not,” Rusty said aggressively. Well, he sounded like he was keeping things from them. Damn, there was no way to fool these wannabe parents. “You know what? I am. But it’s my right.”

“Were you at least here on campus?”

“Yes. I didn’t leave.”

“Are you for real about the cat boy?” Kane asked.

“Yes.”

“He’s telling the truth,” Dex concluded. “Did you do it with him?”

Rusty groaned. “No. For your information, I’m not-fucked. So, unless one of you is offering me a hand, lay off.”

“Wow, he’s serious,” Dex said with satisfaction. “Rusty didn’t get his dick wet last night.”

“Yeah, yeah, call Xpress,” Rusty said and scoffed. He grabbed the glass of water from the table and marched toward the stairs. He didn’t want to offer any other explanation.

“What are you doing with that?” Kane asked, always aware of everything everyone did and wanting to know why.

Rusty raised the glass while walking up the stairs. “I need it to get my dick wet.”



“So.” Zoey grinned and bumped into his shoulder.

Matty pretended to be absorbed by something on his phone.

“So,” Zoey insisted.

Matty growled under his breath. “In the animal kingdom, this should be a signal to butt off, Zoey.”

“Thanks for the translation. Now, tell me everything.”

“Everything in the history of humankind?”

“I’ll settle for what happened last night between you and Rusty.”

“Nothing happened. I mean, why would you even assume that something happened? I wasn’t at the party--” Matty began to babble.

“I was the one who told him where to look for you, so save it,” Zoey interrupted him promptly.

“Traitor,” Matty muttered.

“I’ll settle for fairy godmother, Cinderel.”

“Why did you tell him where my room is?” Matty groaned and finally abandoned his phone.

“And why are you always in my room? No wonder you aren’t getting laid. You only hang out with the one dude who’s not interested.”

Zoey's eyes sparkled. "Do you mean everyone else is interested? Aww, that's such a nice thing for you to say. Forget about why I'm not getting laid. Let's talk about how you're working on that."

"On you not getting laid?" Matty said airily.

Zoey slapped his shoulder. "Spit it. Now. Last night, unbeknownst to the vast Sunny Hill student body, Rusty Parker abandoned a party in search of his tutor. No one but me knows this. Not even Xpress."

"I know. Rusty knows. Stop pretending to be special," Matty teased his best friend.

Zoey grinned. "Which means that he found you. What did you two do all night?" She gasped and covered her mouth with both hands. "Don't tell me that you did it!"

"Seriously?" Matty gave her a disappointed look. "Is that how well you know me?"

"Well, according to how well I know you, this would be a very boring story. Such as you sent Rusty on his way instead of dragging him into your lair and doing unspeakable things to him."

"Yeah, like tucking him in bed and reading him a bedtime story," Matty said matter-of-factly.

Zoey searched his face for signs that he was pulling her leg, and then searched again. Then, she punched him in the shoulder hard enough to hurt. "Get out of here! Is that what happened? For real?"

"I kid you not." Matty sighed and looked out the window, recalling the events of the night before in all too vivid colors. "He came in here, asked me why I was sweaty, supposed I was jerking off, then supposed I was jerking off to A Kingdom To Plunder, then decided to take a nap, and then made me read to him until we both fell asleep." At the end of that tirade, Matty took a deep breath. "And that's the whole boring truth. I woke up alone, before you get any other strange ideas in your head."

Zoey was conspicuously silent. Matty had to look at her eventually and witness her slack jaw and wide eyes. "How long are you going to keep that face?" he asked.

Zoey's face metamorphosed into a large grin. "My romantically inadequate friend, it's a lot better than I expected. But why were you sweaty? Were you jerking off to A Kingdom To Plunder?"

"Not you too, Zoey. No, I was sweaty because earlier Rusty chased me down--" He clamped his mouth shut.

"He chased you down?!"

He covered his ears. "Louder, Zoey. They didn't hear you on the top floor."

“Why did he chase you? What happened? O. M. G., this is so good, and why, oh why, don’t I have any popcorn with me?”

Well, it was all right to admit to everything, no matter how weird or humiliating, in front of friends. “I tried on the cat suit, and Rusty almost caught me. I was outside, running on the walls.” He gestured with his hand as if it was the most common occurrence for him to put on costumes, go outside, and do parkour on the campus walls.

“You didn’t tell me the suit came. Where is it?” Zoey didn’t wait for an answer and began to search the room.

Matty didn’t stop her, but didn’t help her, either. She eventually came back with the bundled suit and even found the cat ear band under the bed. She held them and stared at him in shocked pleasure. “Put them on. I have to see you.”

“This suit almost got me into trouble,” Matty argued. “It’s a stupid idea. No, it’s insane.”

“Why?” Zoey asked with a stricken face. “Oh, don’t tell me he’s into some other cosplay. This kind of thing is expensive.”

“No,” Matty said quietly. “That might just be one thing Xpress got right. He wanted to touch my tail. So I ran.”

“Yeah, the most logical thing to do,” Zoey said with irony. “But, wait,” she added, “that’s not a bad thing. Yeap, you did the right thing, Matty. Rusty gets bored easily. You need to keep his interest high. So, not giving in too easily is the way.” She nodded, satisfied with her conclusion. “Wait, he doesn’t know you’re the cat boy, right?”

“No. It was a really close call. Why do you think the cat ears were under the bed?”

Zoey pursed her lips and munched them for a while. “This is amazing, totally awesome. Long foreplays are the best, especially with a guy who gets handed every piece of tail in the land on a silver platter, the moment he snaps his fingers.”

“Are you telling me to play hard to get?” Matty asked.

Zoey plopped herself down on the bed, the latex costume still in her arms. “Yeah, totally. You need to lure him, seduce him, make him yours, until he cannot live without you!”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. So, Rusty’s interest in cat boys is real. That’s a fact,” he admitted. “But what if there are other cat boys that decide to, you know, not play hard to get?”

“Yeah, the world is full of cat boys, especially here at Sunny Hill. I tripped over one in the library, and I had fur in my coffee at the coffee shop on the corner,” Zoey commented while pretending to sip from an invisible cup with one hand. “Well, I’m not going to go against your

wishes. You might as well put on the cat suit, happen into Rusty's path once more, and let him touch you everywhere."

"I wouldn't do that," Matty protested. "The embarrassment would kill me on the spot."

"So hard to get it is," Zoey said with satisfaction. "Rusty's going to go nuts. That's how you catch a guy like him. During your tutoring sessions, you can still treat him like he's only your tutored pupil, although, now that I think about it, you two crossed a line by sleeping together." She scrunched up her face in thought.

"Trust me, that wasn't crossing the line since nothing happened last night." Matty sighed. "I didn't tell you what happened on Friday."

"What happened on Friday?" Zoey's eyes grew wide again. "You know what? I'll turn around and you can change into your cat boy suit while you tell me all about it."

This was the price of having a confidante, right? "Well, there is no easy way to say this. I kissed him. Hey, don't turn now!"

Zoey fidgeted in her place, but obeyed. "What the hell, Matty? And you didn't say a thing? Tell me everything that happened, and not in the history of humankind."

"He challenged me because he gets bored so easily, just as you noticed. When he provoked me by saying that I don't know how to kiss, well, I showed him."

Zoey bounced up and down, giggling. "O. M. G., this is so good. How did he react?"

"I didn't have time to process everything. Jonathan came into the room. He saw everything."

"Ah, damn, I wouldn't have pegged Jonathan Hamilton for a cockblocker."

"He apologized. He just wanted to treat us to some juice and didn't expect to find me half naked, stuffing my tongue down Rusty's throat," Matty explained.

"You were half naked?" This time, Zoey truly turned.

Good thing he was already zipping up. The cat suit was so glued to his body that it didn't allow for anything but the skimpiest underwear to be worn underneath. Since he didn't have such a thing, he was all naked underneath. "It was a very strange and complicated situation. You know, he didn't bring up the kiss last night. That means that he wants both of us to forget that it happened. And it was just a dare, anyway," Matty continued and looked down.

"Matty, you look damn fine in this suit," Zoey commented. "Give me a full three-sixty. Put on the cat ears, and stop assuming things. Where's the wig?"

"That's the one thing I didn't unpack," Matty said.

“It doesn’t matter. I like what I see. Now crouch.”

Matty shrugged and obeyed.

“Good, good,” Zoey continued her appraisal. “Now, lift one paw like you want to scratch. Give me a meow.”

“Oh, fuck off, Zoey.” Matty got to his feet.

The reprimand flew over Zoey’s head like an invisible annoying bug. His friend was all a grin, ear to ear, and she seemed very pleased with how he looked. That made him feel good, to have someone else’s opinion on the matter. Still, he shouldn’t get ahead of himself. Catching Rusty Parker, as Zoey put it, was no easy feat. And maybe, the fact that somewhere inside, he maybe was a scaredy cat, helped. So far, it had worked to get him to take certain steps with Rusty...

Argh, what was he thinking? Rusty hadn’t mentioned the kiss, and why would he? He got kisses from so many people, well, mostly girls, presumably, and again, Matty’s kiss must have been annoying, or worse, nothing special. Something forgettable.

“Hey, Matty, hey,” Zoey called for him.

“You don’t have to yell,” he scolded her.

“I do. You were so lost in your own head that you didn’t hear me. What were you thinking about?”

He could call the whole thing off. He could pack the costume, put it at the bottom of the closet, and pretend that nothing ever happened. And then, continue his tutoring with Rusty for a bit, so that he wouldn’t seem suspicious and then tell the guy that he needed to focus on his own studies and couldn’t afford the wasted time.

“Zoey,” he said slowly, “am I nuts for wanting Rusty Parker, of all people?”

Zoey shook her head and offered one of her motherly looks. “No. We want who we want, I guess. And you, my friend,” she said, perking up, “have the golden opportunity to see how far you can get with your crush. Not many people have this kind of luck, you know? Also, you make your own luck. Look at you, wearing a cat boy suit, and kissing Rusty. Told you, I’m awfully proud of you,” she added in a fake strange accent.

Matty sat on the bed and took Zoey by the shoulders. “I’m not the sentimental kind, but damn, sometimes you make me want to kiss you, Zoey.”

“Eww.” She pushed him away playfully. “Go kiss Rusty. I bet he wants an encore.”

“He didn’t mention it, you know? What does that mean? Oh, fuck, I sound like one of those ditzzy heroines in all the romance novels, right?”

“You sound like you,” Zoey said and patted his shoulder. “I’m not just saying that, although I’m mooching off your notes on a regular basis, and you know that I get perks for hanging out with you.”

“Yeah, you’re a total user,” Matty said with a snort. “But enough about my silly cat boy adventures. How was the party?”

“Eh, you know,” Zoey said and shrugged.

“No, I don’t. That’s why I’m asking,” Matty insisted. Whenever he got close to the topic of who Zoey was crushing on at the moment, he either got evasive replies or something outrageous. Now, Zoey was evasive. That was code for ‘serious’.

“I drank some weird stuff. I fell asleep on a sofa. I didn’t molest anyone.”

“Kudos for your restraint,” Matty said, knowing it wouldn’t do any good to apply too much pressure. He would just poke her gently now and then, until she spilled the beans. Despite her apparently reckless exterior, underneath it all, Zoey was one of the most complex human beings he had had the chance to know.

“Eh, I try,” she said brightly. “Let’s go for a cup of coffee. Wait, don’t you want to change first?”

Matty looked down at his body and shook his head. He was getting a bit too comfortable playing the cat boy.



How many weeks since he had gotten laid last? He didn’t even know. That was a premiere for Rusty’s sex life since its inception. Well, maybe not quite that long, but ever since he had established himself as the king of Sunny Hill, he had had more than his fair share of sexual endeavors and this dry season wasn’t like him, especially since it wasn’t exactly self-imposed.

Rusty found himself bored out of his eyeballs. The occasional perky tushy wiggling about no longer had the same appeal. Girls resting their boobs against his arm while trying to get his attention had no success in dragging him out of his funk.

“Cat boys are ruining me,” he declared, although he was alone in his room, doing a kind of thing he supposed to be meditating, if meditating about his lack of sex counted.

Well, he always had his hand. But he had seen most of the cat boy porn the world had to offer, and he was all in for something new. Hmm, he needed to find that cat boy, because that was where the problems started. Now that he knew such a fine specimen was somewhere in the vicinity, he didn’t want to use only his hand and the porn videos available.

Plus, the cat boy he had chased down the wall on Saturday night was superior to all the porn stuff in existence. First of all, he hadn't been sexed up. Not that Rusty didn't appreciate collared cat boys who stuffed their asses with more than just butt plugs and dildos, but that wasn't what he had in mind.

No, his desire to pet a cat boy was a lot more intellectual than that. Speaking of intellect, he could use all this boring time to get on someone's nerves. He grabbed his phone.

Free?

He waited. And waited. Geez, he had read the message, why the hell wasn't he replying?

Free for what?

Rusty grinned. He could see those pouty lips in his head if he closed his eyes for like a second.

Dunno. Tutoring?

It's not Friday yet.

So? I have a need for knowledge.

Take your need somewhere else.

Come tutor me or I'll tell everyone the kind of weird stuff you're jerking off to.

Are you daring to challenge me? I'm sure you have a lot more skeletons in your closet than me.

What do you have in your closet?

Normal clothes. Nothing else. Bye, Rusty.

Wait. Do you want to hang out?

Another pause followed. It could be that Matty was ignoring him now, buried deep in his textbooks.

Hang out where?

My room.

That doesn't sound too exciting.

Trust me, you don't know what you're talking about.

He was very much in the mood to ruffle Matty some more. After falling asleep in his room, Rusty had meditated about Matty a lot, too. Like about that kiss, as well, although it wasn't like

him to obsess over the little things. But he could ask Matty why he kept all that kissing to himself when he could make girls happy all over campus. Sure enough, those girls who wanted a tonsil examination with a tongue, but still.

Just joking, he typed. I just need your tutoring skills, nothing else.

Rusty closed one eye and used the other one to zero in on the tent he was pitching. He should just rub one out and leave Matty alone. Poor guy only wanted to study.

He took his cock out. He didn't even need any porn. He'd just imagine catching the cat boy, caressing his back, playing with his tail and making him twerk for him. It should be enough to jizz after so much no-action time.

I'm coming.

Rusty checked the phone and grinned. He pushed his cock back in his pants. That would have to wait until after chasing off his boredom by playing a bit of cat and mouse with Matthew Han.



“Why are you moping around the house like you’ve just been left at the altar?” Maddox asked, lifting his eyes from his text book only so that he could check on him. Kane and Dex were at the library, and Jonathan wasn’t around, either.

Rusty would have preferred to have the house to himself while having Matty over, but Maddox had taken over the living room and was deep in his studying.

“Who’s moping?” he asked. “I’m as bright as ever.”

Maddox gave him a short once-over. “Rumor has it that you’re mourning some lost love.”

Rusty snorted. “Is that what Xpress is saying about me lately? Geesh, slow news day, I guess.”

Maddox grinned and leaned back into the sofa. “Come on. You can tell me if you have trouble in love.”

“Because you’re the expert, right? By the way, the only problem I have right now is that I’m not in the mood to get laid.”

Maddox snickered. “Don’t tell me you finally overused your dick. Maybe it’s time for a break, Rusty.”

“Yeah, yeah, I thought so, too,” Rusty replied, ignoring the jab. “That’s why, today, I’m studying.”

That wiped that annoying grin off Maddie's face. "Studying?" The grin was replaced by an incredulous stare. "You? Is it the end of the world? Do we need to find shelter?"

Rusty smiled, sure of himself. There was already someone knocking on the door. "Laugh all you want. My tutor is here." With that, he walked away, making sure to do it as pompously as possible.

He opened the door and he felt his entire face lifting up at the sight. Matty wasn't wearing his ugly stripes. He had on a tight fitting black t-shirt that showed off his pretty nice shape.



At Zoey's insistence, Matty had gone for a t-shirt he had always considered much too tight to be comfortable and skinny jeans. After Rusty's insistence he come over, he had called her to ask for her opinion, and the consensus had been that he could play hard to get while showing off how sexy he was. Those were Zoey's words. He himself believed he was more awkward than usual, because it wasn't night, and he couldn't pretend to be a cat boy roaming the premises like a stray feline.

"Come in, come in," Rusty urged him while grinning broadly.

Matty bit his bottom lip unconsciously while taking in his host. Rusty wore loose sweatpants that were hanging low on his hips, and because the tank top he wore wasn't that long, Matty could make out the shape of a sexy hip cleavage on the side facing him, and a hint of a happy trail that led to that danger zone he needed to stay away from.

"Hi, Matthew." Maddox's voice pulled him out of his dirty thoughts.

He shook his head. "Hi, Maddox. I'm here to teach Rusty." He said the words quickly before Maddox had a mind to wonder or even ask him what the hell he was doing there long before Friday.

"That's good to hear," Maddox said. "Finally, someone who manages to put Rusty in his place and make him study. You're the man." He pointed at him and winked good-naturedly.

Matty just nodded, not knowing what to say. Before the silence became awkward, Maddox's phone rang.

"Yeah, babe. I'm on my way. Can barely wait. Love you."

Maddox quickly gathered up his textbooks and got to his feet. He pushed the phone back into his pocket and offered Matty and Rusty a huge smile. Matty knew what that was. Maddox was head over heels in love with Jonathan, therefore he didn't mind offering those generous smiles to everyone around. "Well, play nice, kids," Maddox said and headed over to the door, quick on his

feet. “Rusty, be good. Matthew, I’m counting on you to deal with this mule.” He patted Matty on the shoulder on his way out.

“Yeah, you can count on me,” Matty stuttered, but Maddox was already out the door and probably couldn’t hear him anymore.

“Matty,” Rusty drawled, “why were you staring at Maddox like a puppy?”

“What?” Matty immediately put on his tough guy mask. “I wasn’t.”

“Are you afraid of being all alone with me in this big house?” Rusty gestured around like he was a lord ushering a guest into his vast estate.

Oh, shoot. For a moment there, he thought that Rusty had assumed he had a crush on Maddox or something like that. He pulled at the hem of his t-shirt and puffed out his chest. “As if.”

Rusty surprised him by giving him a smirk. “Love the t-shirt. Cool nips, too.” He gave him an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

Matty stared down at himself. Damn Zoey and her ideas. The t-shirt was so thin and tight that he looked as good as naked. He should have worn his usual clothes.

“Let’s go,” Rusty ordered and gestured for him to walk up the stairs.

“After you,” Matty said, trying to sound as unaffected as possible. Now, he would have to sit through an entire tutoring session while being overly conscious that his nipples were showing through his t-shirt. He could feel them getting hard, too, which could either be a consequence of ogling Rusty’s hip cleavage a bit too much, or of how the fabric rubbed against them.

For the next hour or so, he would be in hell.



Rusty observed Matty slowly and carefully. “No, please, I insist,” he said. “You first.”

“Aren’t you the host?”

“You know the way upstairs, don’t you? You’ve been here before. Come on, we don’t have all day.”

Matty groaned and started up the stairs. Rusty didn’t care about etiquette and whatnot. He was just curious about seeing Matty’s tight pants and how they stretched over his behind that was usually covered by baggy pants that didn’t show anything. The guy needed to understand the importance of a sexy ass on a guy. It was a signal to girls that he had enough power in his gluteus maximum to sustain a deep hard satisfying fuck.

Rusty smiled appreciatively as Matty walked in front of him. Not only had he put on a tight t-shirt today, but he also wore skinny jeans that offered an excellent view of a tight butt. He had no idea if Matty included any particular butt exercises in his workout routine, but those were some fine man buttocks. Rusty wasn't petty. He could appreciate the competition when it was staring him in the face like that.

Wait, why was Matty dressed like that? Could it be that he was getting ready for a date, finally getting the idea that he needed to show off the goods if he wanted chicks to dig him? But why had he accepted the invitation to come over, then?

Hmm, Rusty pondered. Was Matty eager for approval from the king?



“Come on, pay attention already,” Matty said in frustration. He was one step away from smacking Rusty over the head with the textbook. “You are just wasting both our times here.”

“I’m bored,” Rusty complained and slammed his head against the table with a groan. He turned his head and stared at Matty with an innocent look in his eyes. “Don’t you ever get bored?”

“I do. And I live with it, because I’m a grownup, not a kid,” Matty pointed out.

“Being a grownup sucks,” Rusty concluded and closed his eyes.

“Well, tough luck. It’s not a choice.”

“You’re no fun,” Rusty murmured and continued to keep his eyes closed.

Matty linked his hands together. Was this Rusty’s very convoluted way of firing him as his tutor? It was well-known that no one could hold the guy’s attention for more than a very limited time, so it wouldn’t be that much of a shock, right?

“You’re making my job hard here,” Matty said, deciding to be the grownup, after all.

Rusty peeked at him, opening one eye. “How hard?”

Matty sighed. He took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “If you don’t want us to do this anymore, just say so.”

“And miss the chance of teaching you how to have fun?” Rusty asked, coming completely out of left field. “Look, I see you’re making progress.” Suddenly, the bored kid was no more. Rusty straightened up and stared at him. “Wow, you’re not bad at all without your glasses.”

Matty could swear his cheeks were turning pink. He reached for the glasses, but Rusty had already grabbed them. “Rusty, come on. I don’t see very well without them.”

“But you’re not blind, right?”

“No,” Matty admitted. Even without glasses, he could see how sexy Rusty was, his broad shoulders showing from the tank top, his generous mouth stretched into a knowing grin, and his mischievous green eyes announcing that their owner was up to no good.

“Then, for what remains of this tutoring session, they will sit over here.” Rusty placed the glasses on top of the closet and came back to the table. “Now, tell me,” he said, suddenly assuming the role of professor, “what made you dress up like this today?”

Matty stared at Rusty. Was he really asking that? Oh, fuck, what was he supposed to say?

“You thought of my advice, right?” Rusty continued.

“Your advice?” Matty asked slowly, while using the reprieve to gather his wits about him.

“To show off the goods, man!” Rusty exclaimed. “Come to the mirror. I’ll tell you what you did good and what wrong.”

“Are you a fashion expert now?” Matty glared and crossed his arms.

“When it comes to impressing chicks, I am. You’re almost there.”

It wasn’t very surprising that Rusty had a full-size mirror in a corner of his room. The dumbbell rack on the side told him that the guy was checking his proper form while training his muscles. And Matty wanted to be a fly on the wall so that he could watch Rusty doing that. A very excited fly, for sure.

He moved reluctantly. Rusty would pester him, anyway, and he wanted to be pestered.

Rusty pushed him in front of the mirror and came to stand behind him. Matty had to bite his lips. He didn’t look that bad next to Rusty. Or maybe that was just his wishful imagination. Rusty was clearly taller and he only had to move his chin up a bit to rest it on top of Matty’s head. His superior muscular shape framed Matty’s smaller one so well that they looked like they were parts made to fit each other.

“The first problem, as I see it,” Rusty began, “is your attitude. Stop hunching.” He put his hands on Matty’s shoulders and rubbed them a little. “Come on, relax a bit.”

It was hard not to. It was also hard not to do other things, and Matty closed his eyes for a moment.

“Good. Now, you have nice arms. You should show them.” Rusty began rolling the small sleeves up and turned Matty left and right so that he could see the effect. “You know, it’s not the size of your guns, but what you can do with them.”

“What exactly am I supposed to do with them?” Matty asked.

“Quiet in class,” Rusty ordered. “Now, it’s good that you went for tighter pants, but in all honesty, my dude, they show your ass off a bit too much.”

“Is that a problem?” Matty quipped. “Aren’t you the one always saying I should show off the goods?”

“Yeah. But, you know, it’s like you don’t want to draw certain people’s attention with this.” Rusty turned him around unapologetically and smacked his ass briefly.

Matty remained turned and stared at him. “What people?” he asked, holding his breath.

Rusty looked down at him. “Dudes. Dudes who are into other dudes. You show off ass. Instead of lady boners, you’ll make dicks hard.”

“Oh,” Matty managed and gulped. He was so close to Rusty he couldn’t not smell him. And he was directly facing his Adam’s apple, which he suddenly was very much in the mood to lick. “Whose dick?” he asked in a small voice without taking his eyes off Rusty’s throat. It was safer to keep his eyes there. Sort of.

“Does it matter?” Rusty asked and snorted. “Wait... wait, wait, wait... dude!”

“Yeah?” Matty asked, his voice barely a whisper.

“No girlfriend... best friend is a girl... oh, fuck, how didn’t I see it? Are you into dudes?”

Chapter Six

Straight Vs. Stray (Cat)

Was that what people meant when they said something about watching an accident in slow motion without being able to look away? Matty's problem wasn't that, though. No, his problem was that he was the accident in progress. He was gaping like a fish; he was sweating and blushing while keeping his eyes furiously glued to Rusty's Adam's apple.

Rusty surprised him by putting both hands on his shoulders and making a move as if he was trying to push Matty down. What was that about? Oh, gawd, was this the moment when Rusty would ask him to suck his cock in exchange for silence, like in one of his strange fantasies?

He staggered and kept upright, although his knees were getting weaker. Rusty patted him forcefully on the shoulders and his arms dropped.

Then, he suddenly leaned forward, forcing Matty to take a step back, almost running into the mirror. Rusty was grinning and staring at him. "Got you, right?"

Oh, oh, this wasn't the moment for him to lose his head. So, he crossed his arms, set his chin high and stared Rusty in the face, still not aiming for the eyes and just looking a little lower, at those beautiful lips stretched in a huge grin. "So?"

"Oh, you're a dude with attitude," Rusty commented. "You're not denying it."

"I have no reason to. You just went ahead and assumed whatever," Matty said, while willing his heart to slow down. Looking at Rusty's mouth didn't help his nerves much. "You didn't ask."

"I stand corrected." To show that he meant it, Rusty straightened up and moved away.

Now, Matty could breathe. And it was probably where everything he had hoped to achieve with Rusty ended because this was a game changer. However, he didn't intend to hide his orientation, and if Rusty losing complete interest of any kind in him was a consequence, so be it.

It was also an easy way out, he admitted to himself. Just standing close to Rusty was enough to make him dizzy. Any more of that sweet torture, and he wouldn't be held accountable for what his hands wanted to do.

Rusty began to pace the room slowly. Matty just followed him with his eyes. He should say something, end the awkwardness, and find his way out.

Then Rusty stopped abruptly. "Do you have a boyfriend?"

“No,” Matty replied and rubbed his elbows in a defensive gesture. Any moment now, Rusty would know that he was crushing on him and it was the only reason why he had gotten into this tutoring thing and –

“How good are you at hooking up?” Rusty asked his next question.

Matty stared. There was no sign on Rusty’s face that he was making fun of him. “Um, I don’t know,” he started. What was the correct answer?

“You’re not hooking up either,” Rusty concluded. He clapped his hands suddenly. “That’s great!”

“It is?” Matty asked carefully.

Rusty pushed an invisible pair of glasses up on his nose. “Yes. Because I can still teach you everything.” He opened his arms wide, as if he was inviting Matty to embrace him.

Matty didn’t move from his place. “I have no idea what you mean by that,” he said cautiously.

Rusty threw him an understanding, yet patronizing look. “Nothing’s changed, Matty boy. I am still on a mission to help you loosen up. No, before you’re getting your panties in a twist, not that kind of loosening up. Although, for the record, I wouldn’t mind. Would you want me to open you up?”

Matty gulped and gaped and couldn’t close his mouth.

“I understand, I understand.” Rusty waved and smirked. “My forward personality is too much for you. That’s why I promise to be gentle.”

“Rusty, I --” Matty started. Whatever was happening, it was the slow motion thing again. And this time, Rusty was a willing participant in the accident.

“On a scale from one to ten, how inexperienced are you?” Rusty continued.

“That’s... none of your business!” Matty exclaimed.

“Hmm.” Rusty pursed his lips and crossed his arms. “You’re a kinky kisser, for sure, so there’s no way you’re a virgin, and yet.” He rubbed his chin and turned, for no apparent reason. Then, he marched toward the closet, rummaged through it and came out with a fluffy toy that looked anthropomorphic enough to be considered a furry. He waved it in front of Matty.

“Why do you have such a thing?” Matty asked and pointed at the fluffy object.

“A chick gave it to me. It was a gift. I never throw gifts away.” The closet doors opened with a low-key wail, and Matty watched as a multitude of things poured from inside. A lot of it was

sexy female lingerie, and he noticed a whip, a paddle, and many other fluffy toys among other things.

Rusty looked over his shoulder and then shrugged. "I should do some spring cleaning."

"It's the end of September," Matty pointed out.

"Yeah," Rusty admitted but added nothing else. "Now," he said as he waved the toy, "show me how far you went with guys. Did you touch here?" He pointed at the toy's chest.

Matty looked closely. Did the toy have nipples? What kind of a toy was it? "I'm not answering your stupid questions," he decided.

That seemed to leave Rusty a bit discomfited. "Are you a virgin?"

Matty clamped his mouth shut and threw Rusty as angry a look as he could muster.

"How come you kiss like that?" Rusty continued.

"Like what?" Matty mumbled. His cheeks had to be crimson red by now.

"You know, like you want to force a poor guy into deepthroating without announcing yourself first. By the way, not cool."

"Sorry," Matty said and winced. He had gone overboard with that kiss. He shouldn't have been so thirsty to begin with.

"Ah, I didn't mind," Rusty assured him. "But it looks like I have to teach you the proper etiquette."

Matty just nodded, feeling dazed. Rusty hadn't minded being kissed by him. "How?" he whispered.

Rusty smiled. No, he smirked. That wasn't a good sign, was it?



He hadn't felt such a thrill in a long time. And he was suddenly happy. Finally, his boredom was at an end, and teaching Matty everything he needed to know about how to get out of his shell and turn into a gay butterfly was the solution to everything.

Plus, it was so satisfying to see the ice-cool ass going through so many different shades of red that Rusty couldn't keep count.

"Well," he said and walked over to Matty after throwing the useless toy over his shoulder. "Look, this is what we're going to do about it." In one smooth motion, he took off his tank top.

Matty was staring at him, biting his bottom lip. That was a good sign. It also made Rusty want to bite on the same lip, too. It was so plump and sexy. Gay dudes would love it.

But first, Matty needed to stop being such a nerd.

“Feel free to use me.” Rusty put his hands over his head and flexed his muscles in what he knew was a totally sexy move.

“W-what?” Matty stuttered.

Rusty smirked. He so totally had the guy where he wanted him. Oh, how the tables turned when the sexy nerd didn’t have a textbook in his hand and a sharp unforgiving glint in his eyes. “Yeah, you heard me. Explore my body.”

“Rusty.” Matty rubbed his forehead and took his eyes off him. Hmm, not a good sign. “Why would I do that?”

“Because,” Rusty enunciated carefully, academic-style, “you must be curious about the male body.”

“I’m a guy,” Matty threw at him. “I know the male body well enough.”

“Yours,” Rusty pointed out swiftly. “For the record, if you’re gay, you need to be curious about other dudes’ bods. Not just the peckers.” He made a vague gesture around his crotch.

“For real?” Matty said breezily, his eyes wide and questioning in the most innocent manner possible. Damn, that was one fine actor. “I had no idea.”

“Sarcasm will get you nowhere, gay boy.” Action was mandatory, given the circumstances. Rusty walked over to Matty, grabbed his reluctant hand and began rubbing it against his chest. “See? Different from yours, right?” Matty’s hand was a bit damp, but not unpleasant. Rusty ignored the small shiver of delight coursing through him at the touch.

“Yeah,” came a whisper.

“I know,” Rusty said and snapped his fingers. He let Matty’s hand drop and moved to the bed. He threw himself on it, hands above his head. “I’ll close my eyes. Imagine you’re a kinky doc and just hypnotized your patient, who’s a dumb but very sexy jock.”

Matty groaned. “Where do you come up with these ideas?”

“I’m at your mercy, doc. Do your kinky worst.” Rusty bit his lips trying not to laugh. Matty was too much of a goody-two-shoes to do anything dirty to him.

“Are you laughing at me? Don’t complain then,” Matty said aggressively.

Hmm, me likey, Rusty thought. “I wouldn’t dare laugh at you. Come on, let me see your kinky dirty nerdy side.”

“You asked for it. What’s your safe word?”

“I’m shaking already. No safe word needed. You don’t have the guts,” Rusty continued to rile up Matty. With this guy, direct challenge worked best.

“All right. Your call.” Damn, Matty could sound pretty damn smug when he wanted. That was the part of him that Rusty wanted to subdue and make crumble.

He was taken by surprise by the sensation of warmth and wetness on his skin. Well, well, well. Matty had a side. Rusty wasn’t sure if it was kinky enough, but he was licking along his right hip bone. Rusty shivered. *Dat tongue, man, dat tongue.* It was shy, yet curious and daring.

Matty’s touch was featherlike but homing in on Rusty’s pecs. At the same time, he took his time licking across Rusty’s lower belly and reaching the other hip. That was a guy with a very clear kink in mind. Rusty held his muscles tight to give Matty plenty to work with. Deft fingers brushed against his nipples and he hissed in pleasure.

“Aren’t you supposed to be under hypnosis or something?” Matty teased him. “I didn’t order you to talk.”

“Shut up and do your thing. By the way, you’re doing great.”

Matty pinched his right nipple lightly. Rusty grunted for show. He liked those little dares.

He understood the order to shut up. The most challenging part was to continue to keep his eyes closed while Matty did whatever he did. He was dying to watch him stick out that rosy tongue and lick him all over.

But roleplay was meant to be done well by respecting the script. As torturous as it was, he needed to play the hypnotized.

Matty moved his tongue again, dipping it in the main valley between the abs. Normally, Rusty would have appreciated his bed partner going lower not upward at this point, but it was Matty’s show. Rusty even preferred to take pleasure in getting a boner that he knew would remain unfulfilled unless he chose to use his hand. Later.

Now, he could hear Matty sniffing him delicately, burying that cute nose into his chest hair here and there. Then, Matty moved to his armpit and suddenly sank his teeth in the tender flesh between the arm and torso.

It didn’t hurt. But it surely made Rusty’s boner pop. He opened his eyes, grabbed Matty by the shoulders and rolled him on the bed. His mouth covered moist lips, good enough to eat, and he

put his tongue deep inside Matty's mouth, earning a soft desperate keen in return. Rusty wanted to feel that tongue on his, he wanted Matty to force him to deepthroat it again. The memory of the kiss was back in full force, and Rusty hiked his boner against Matty's thigh.

Matty struggled but pushed him away. He stared at Rusty, breathing hard and with a wild look in his eyes. "Safe word," he said.

"Oh, wow," Rusty said but pulled slightly away to give Matty space. "I thought I was the one who would need it. Why?"

"I can't tell," Matty said, in a quick clipped manner.

Rusty moved further away and stared between them. "Dude, you have a boner!"

Matty, flustered enough to put a coven of nuns to shame, jumped from the bed. "You have a boner, too!"

"Yeah." Rusty was quite proud of it. It was a mighty good boner. "I don't mind if you jerk off here."

Matty stared at him, completely horrified. Right. Virgin boy needed to be taken easy. "Does it ever cross your mind that you're a bit too..." Matty struggled for a bit to find the right word, "open to these things for a straight guy?"

Rusty shrugged. "So? I have full confidence in my sexuality or something. Nothing troubles me when it comes to sex. Does it trouble you?"

"Plenty," Matty shot back. He put his hands in his hair and looked desperate for a moment. "I have to go."

"Okay, I won't keep you," Rusty said but he felt miffed by that abrupt decision. "For the record, how do you rate my tutoring skills?"

Matty grabbed his shoulder bag from the chair. "Goodbye, Rusty."

"See you on Friday?"

"Sure, of course, yes." Matty ran toward the door.

"A little bit of blue balls never killed anyone," Rusty shouted after him. "Not that I know of." Damn, that boy was really in a hurry to take care of business.

Matty's hurried steps on the stairs were the only reply. Rusty stretched on the bed and pulled out his hard cock. As he replayed the very satisfying tutoring session in his head, his eyes fell on the glasses he had taken from his tutor and placed on top of the closet. Could he...?

Hmm, better not. But it was a good fantasy to imagine coming on Matty's face. With the glasses on. It wasn't gay if it was just a fantasy.

But, maybe, just maybe, kissing his tutor and enjoying it way too much did make him a little gay. Eh, whatever got him off.

It was one of the happiest boners in his life of late, and it was worth playing with for a while. Rusty kept his eyes closed as the memory of a sweet boy tongue in his mouth flooded his brain with pleasure. The force of his release almost knocked him over.

"Wow." He stared down at his chest in awe. He had made a really nice and good mess.

Obnoxious tutors in tight jeans with an attitude made good jerk off material. Go figure. There was always something new to learn.



Oh, no, oh, no, why had he played along? That wasn't hard to get! Matty burst into his room, closed the door, crashed against it and pulled out his cock. It took him about two point three seconds to unload.

He dropped to the floor. His breathing was so uneven and harsh that he hoped no one on the other side of the door could hear him. They would probably think something bad was happening to him. Like he was sick or having a heart attack. Only that he was just sickly in love with the wrong guy.

His t-shirt was ruined. He took it off and dropped it on the floor by his side. What kind of madness pushed him to do all those things to Rusty? Sure, the guy kept challenging him and it looked like he didn't mind being licked all over by a gay dude, but that didn't mean that Matty was supposed to lose his head like that.

He covered his face and groaned. Rusty was probably having so much fun at his expense right now. It was easy for him to wave the goods in the face of poor ol' thirsty Matty and even let himself be groped and licked. He was very confident in his sexuality, right?

Only that, Matty thought as he kept on covering his face in shame, Rusty had kissed him. Yeah, he had pushed him on his back, got on top of him, and kissed him like he meant it. Plus, his cock had been hard as a rock. Matty touched his thigh, as if there could be some phantom imprint of Rusty's penis still there.

No, no, no, for Rusty, such things weren't probably in any shape or form to provide a cause for doubt and other issues. No, he was the guy who got handsy with his best friends and no one batted an eye. He could go around the campus, pinching the nipples of all the guys happening in his path, and that was just Rusty.

And Matty was just Matty. More and more foolishly in crush with him, because imagining things and doing them for real were so very different. Now, he didn't need to use his brain to conjure how Rusty's large sexy mouth felt on his. He knew it; and there were absolutely no fricking chances that he would ever forget it.

Or how his hands had held his shoulders, pressing him down. It made him weak in the knees just thinking of it. How would it feel to have sex with him for real?

Matty shook his head and jumped to his feet. No, he wasn't thinking that. There was no way he mistook all this for something else. It would be just stupid. However, the plan of seeing how far he could go with Rusty had high chances of exploding spectacularly in his own face. It wouldn't be only his own jizz, as well. He took the stained t-shirt to the bathroom and gave himself a longsuffering look in the mirror.

Ah, fuck. He didn't have his glasses.

His phone chimed at that exact moment.

You forgot your glasses. I'll drop by to bring them to you.

K.

Yes, single letter abbreviations were the best way to hide what he was feeling. That 'K' made him sound cool and unaffected.

Make sure I don't catch you jerking off to zombie porn again.

As if.

Wow, he got this. If he had to communicate to Rusty via short text messages, he was saved.

I have better suggestions.

Don't wanna hear them.

Not a choice, Matty boy. Be ready for me.

Matty decided against typing anything else. There was no intelligent, one-word comeback to something like that. Ready for Rusty? That was impossible. Surely, Rusty was just teasing him after seeing how easy it was to make Matty get a boner for him.

Thing was, he needed to be quick because Rusty Parker would be upon him with who knew how many weird challenges. He stashed away the stained t-shirt and slapped his cheeks hard while staring one last time at himself in the mirror. Well, it would take Rusty at least ten minutes to reach the dorm, so he had time to change into something more fitting for the cool and collected person he was supposed to be and chill his racing heartbeat.

Damn, he probably needed to become a yoga expert in the next ten minutes to make that happen.



He opted out of the book he had been reading the night of the cat boy incident and spread some textbooks on the bed, careful to pretend that nothing had happened and that he was as cool as a cucumber.

The playful knock on the door still made him start with a small gasp. He really, really needed to get hold of himself. He opened the door, making sure to school his face into something neutral and non-inviting for further teasing.

“Your glasses, professor,” Rusty said and grinned, while holding his glasses. He wore a different tank top and smelled like he had just showered.

Matty opened his palm. “Thanks.”

But Rusty pulled back his hand and let Matty’s glasses drop inside his pocket. “Aren’t you going to invite me in? I need to check on your proclivities regarding certain priapic zombies.”

He could resist, say something like he needed to study, but Matty knew that he would only invite new forms of torture into his life that way. His heart and other parts of his body had had enough of that for the day. So, he stepped to the side and gestured with his chin for Rusty to enter.

Ah, why did he have to smell so good? Matty stopped breathing mid-way as Rusty threw him a strange look. His voice came out wheezing. “Come inside already.”

“Hmm,” Rusty said and walked in with his usual swagger that only served to further prove his confidence in how he moved his body and the effect that had on the people around him.

Matty stared after him, letting his eyes linger lower. The sweatpants Rusty wore were the baggy type, but the way they hung so low on those sexy hips helped Matty remember everything from earlier a bit too much. There was plenty of junk in Rusty’s trunk, for sure. Maybe, next time, Rusty would let him play –

No, no, he needed to stop with his wide-eyed fantasies. Any moment now, Rusty would start laughing at him for being too easy.

Rusty took out Matty’s glasses and put them on the nightstand. Then, he plopped down on the bed and examined the textbooks spread around. “Are you one of those multipotentialites?” he asked. “Or just good at multi-tasking?”

He hadn’t expect Rusty to be curious about the textbooks. “It keeps me from getting bored. You know, learning multiple things at the same time.”

“I feel you, man,” Rusty said and then stared at him.

It took Matty all his willpower not to fidget in place.

“I was thinking of a trade, my dude,” Rusty began.

“What trade?”

Rusty leaned back and put his linked hands on top of his head. Why did he have to look so good in that bed, even surrounded by textbooks? Matty wondered and licked his lips.

“You’re free to say ‘no’,” Rusty continued.

Matty was pretty sure he couldn’t say ‘no’ to Rusty in this life or the next. “All right.” He crossed his arms and looked at his guest, trying hard not to let any of his true feelings show.

“You’re obviously a guy who hasn’t seen any proper action in forever.”

“Gee, thanks. Way to boost a man’s confidence,” Matty shot back.

Rusty smirked. “You know, that glare, how you’re looking at me right now, I have no idea about what makes some dudes tick and all that, but if I were gay, it’d make me want to bend you over and give it to you.”

Matty let out a suffering sigh. “Then, I guess I’m in luck, because you’re as straight as they come, right?”

Rusty shrugged. “I’m open-minded. And I like sex. I want other people to enjoy it too, you know?”

“By how often you hook up, there’s no shortage of candidates to your philosophy, right? By that, I mean girls,” Matty added quickly.

Rusty offered him another broad smile. “I could teach you. I want to help you stop being so shy. I mean, you do want to have sex with dudes, right? You’re pretty thirsty, in my humble opinion.”

“I doubt there’s a humble bone in your whole body.”

“True. But here I am, with a proposition. Rusty Parker, that’s me,” he said pointing at his chest, “is willing to lend his body to science.”

“What science is that?”

“The science of getting Matty Han to enjoy being the thirsty gay boy he is,” Rusty replied brightly. “Come on, it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. Unless you want to catch a boyfriend or hook up with a sexy gay dude by playing the shy virgin... wait, do you?”

“No,” Matty replied. In all honesty, he had no answer to that question. He only wanted to catch Rusty Parker. The method was still unclear.

“See?” Rusty pointed out, making a large gesture with his right arm, his palm open. “This is what we’re going to do. I’ll help you explore and become confident of your sexuality, just like I am. Then, I will release you into the wild, and you’ll be able to have anyone you want.”

“Anyone?” Matty said slowly.

Rusty nodded with conviction.

“Anyone-anyone?” Matty asked again. *Even you?*

“I always succeed in everything I put my mind to,” Rusty replied. “Just one thing.”

“Yes,” Matty replied, waiting for the other shoe to drop. *Now’s the moment when he’s going to tell me that he’s off-limits.*

“Don’t use what I’m teaching you on Maddox or Jonathan. They’re my bros. It wouldn’t be cool.”

Matty nodded eagerly. “Of course.”

Rusty gave him a long look, his eyes narrowed as if he was trying to gauge if Matty was being honest. “I’ll hold you accountable. I saw the way you looked at my man Maddox. Sure, at the moment, I didn’t know what it was, but now I see it. Are you thirsty for my bff, Matty?”

“No.” Matty didn’t know if it was possible to shake his head more than that without having it unscrew from his neck and make it fly across the room.

“Okay. Then we’re cool. Shake on it?” Rusty offered his hand, making very little effort to push himself off the bed.

Matty was, therefore, forced to walk to him and shake hands. He had no idea why he was doing that or what followed.

“Good,” Rusty said, still shaking his hand. “For a moment there, I thought you’d say ‘no’. You know, like your ethics-oriented mind was telling you that you shouldn’t play with me to avoid falling for your student.”

Rusty was totally pulling his leg. And he was wrong. When it came to falling, it was too late. Matty was all too willing to trample everything that he knew about ethics only so that he could get his hands on Rusty again.

That was how thirsty he was. Rusty had no idea.

“Good.” Rusty pushed himself to his feet. “I’ll turn you into the most desirable gay candy in the land.” He patted Matty’s shoulders roughly. “That’s a promise, bro.”

“Yeah, okay,” Matty said, stuttering a bit. “I’d like that.”

“That was a nice, polite reply.” Rusty smirked as he stared him up and down. “We’ll work on that, too.”

“What, do you assume that gay guys don’t like nice polite guys?” Matty asked, wanting to be clever enough to say something that would make Rusty stay a little bit longer.

Rusty gave him a thoughtful once-over. “Do you consider yourself a top or a bottom?”

Matty shrugged. “I don’t know exactly. Maybe both?”

Rusty nodded. “Well, it’s all about discovering yourself, right? Something tells me that you’re the domineering kind. So, you might like to play both roles, and I can totally see you as a power bottom, and even as a dom cracking his whip.”

“A dom? I think your imagination is taking you a bit too far,” Matty said. His palms were starting to sweat. It was no mystery that Rusty enjoyed a little bit of pain on the menu. Just imagining himself as the guy cracking his whip to make Rusty obey was enough to give him a new series of wet dreams.

“Nah, nah, the first rule, Matty boy, is not to knock it until you try it. Have you ever tried dressing up in leather? Latex, maybe?”

Matty froze for a moment, overly conscious of the cat boy suit at the bottom of his closet. “No, no, not my style,” he protested. “I like, you know, airy clothes.” He pointed at his striped shirt.

Rusty made a face. “Don’t worry, I’ll drag you out of your cocoon and turn you into the most awesome gay butterfly at Sunny Hill. You can’t change your mind. You shook on it.”

“No leather for me, though. Or latex,” Matty said quickly.

“All right, all right.” Rusty held his palms up. “I’m only guiding you, not pressuring you or anything. Then, see you on Friday.”

“I’m supposed to tutor you on Friday.”

“I’ll let you do that, as long as you let me tutor you back.”

“I didn’t know that was a condition.”

“It is, now,” Rusty concluded for the both of them. “Now, I gotta go. There’s a new doe in the land, looking for a hunter. Or so I heard.”

Matty nodded, not knowing what he could add to that. He dropped on the bed and caught his head in his hands. Had he just struck a deal with the devil? If he had, it was all his fault and no one else's.

Right now, Rusty was going to chase some skirt as he always did, while Matty just sat here, in his room, thinking of how bad he was still crushing on him without even knowing why.

His phone interrupted his thoughts.

“Local reports say that Rusty Parker is just leaving your dorm.”

“For real? What reports?” Matty asked, alarmed.

“Relax. I'm on my way to you, and I just saw him,” Zoey said. “Is it just me, or do you sound really down?”

“Just come up, and I'll tell you all about it.”



“So, you see, I am very bad, like really incredibly bad, at playing hard to get,” Matty finished his explanation.

Zoey had gotten a shortened, embellished, and kinks-left-out version of what had happened, not for the sake of her innocent ears, but for that of his self-esteem. “Well, that's true,” she agreed, “but let's not forget about the ace up your sleeve.”

“What's that?” As he saw things, Rusty would torture him Friday after Friday, with glimpses of how it would feel to be together even if only in a wrapped up way, until he got bored and tired of him.

“Matty might play easy to get, but your cat boy persona doesn't have to.”

“I guess so. But what are the chances I'll stumble upon Rusty again while in my cat boy suit?”

“Search for him,” Zoey suggested. “Come on.”

“What, right now? You're pushing me, in case you're not aware.”

“Yes. Stop dallying.”

“Zoey, I think that right now, Rusty is hooking up with some new girl he noticed. I don't know if--”

“What did I tell you? Stop it with the defeatist attitude. And stop getting out of his way of getting laid. As a cat boy, you're free to cockblock him.”

“I am?” Matty asked cautiously.

“Yeah. Put on that suit and go chase him down. That’s your purpose in life right now.”

Matty rolled his eyes, but Zoey had a point. “Wait, I can’t just go in and out of my room dressed as a cat boy.”

“Okay. I’ll play watch for you this time. But you need to find a way to do it.”

Hiding clothes nearby was one choice, although risky. Matty pondered for a bit until Zoey began elbowing him again. “All right, I’ll do it.”

Zoey patted his head. “See? That’s the attitude.”



After the earlier jerk-off session, and clearing the air with Matty, Rusty felt like himself again. That meant that he could start hooking up after his short stint in the realm of the abstinent. To be honest, it did serve well and made for good blow-ups to keep from sex a little, but now, he was all for pleasure.

Also, as much as he liked fooling around with Matty, there was a bit too much gay in his sandwich lately. He was a ladies’ man, to put it nicely, and he hadn’t been that for the last several days.

Rumor had it that a certain freshman already had the hots for him and had accepted a challenge from her circle of girlfriends to bring him to his knees. That was a good, solid attitude. Rusty could barely wait to do some pressure tests.

And to take plump lips, wide eyes, and a certain tongue out of his mind. What was he now? Gay like Maddox?

“Hey, hey,” he called for a girl who looked like she was new around there by how she studied her surroundings and was noting something on her pad. “Do you know where I can find Wilhelmina, um, Willie?” He had no idea what the girl’s last name was.

The girl looked at him and blinked a few times. “I know a Wilhelmina, but I don’t think that’s her last name.”

“I don’t know, either,” Rusty said with a big smile and put his hands in his pockets. “But there can’t be more than one Wilhelmina in freshman year, right?”

“I only know one,” the girl replied stubbornly.

“Well, tell me where I can find her,” Rusty said with a shrug.

He listened to the girl's directions and thanked her, hoping that his dazzling smile was enough to make her lose some of the sourness in her face. Evening was setting, and he wanted to be back to the house early enough to enjoy Jonathan's cooking. Those two were really bent on not living together during senior year, but Jonathan was spending more time at their house than in his own room. Probably Ray was half-disappointed about it, but also half-grateful because that meant he could have his girlfriend over more often than not.

He was heading over to the dorm indicated by the girl, when someone called his name. He turned to see a blonde girl with hair down to her waist, walking toward him. Oh, right, that was his target.

"I heard you've been asking about me," she said and smiled while wrapping a strand of hair around her forefinger. She was casting sideway glances at him and chewing on her gum.

She looked like she didn't have a lot going on for her in the upstairs department, but everything below the forehead looked in perfect order. Especially that rack, which Rusty eyed with expert consideration.

"Yeah," he started.

His eyes slid past her, to the wall behind. Chasing that cat boy on Saturday night had been so much fun. Unexpected fun.

"And?" the girl asked and looked over her shoulder, curious to see what was competing with her for Rusty's attention. "Is there something you want to ask me?"

Yeah, he would like to ask her how she got a name like that, and charm her with sweet talk. Then, if she was game, he would go to her room and they'd play the horizontal cha-cha for like an hour or so...

Predictable. He knew how things would go with that girl without thinking twice.

"What are you looking at?" she eventually asked, unnerved by his silence, without a doubt. "Wow, what the hell is that?"

Rusty blinked. At first, he thought it was his imagination conjuring up the cat boy, again up on the wall, but no, the chick in front of him could see him, too. The cat boy was gracefully walking on the narrow ledge, his skinny tail swinging to and fro. He stopped, and while it was difficult to figure out his expression from where Rusty was, he seemed to be pondering over his next move.

Hmm, better not to scare him and just observe him.

"O. M. G.," Wilhelmina commented, "is it one of those losers who don't have a life and play dress-up?"

Rusty turned his head toward her so fast it made a cracking noise. He worked a sudden kink in his neck and stared her down. She mistook his change in attitude for something else and batted her eyelashes while chewing harder on her gum.

“You’re not the Wilhelmina I was looking for,” he said.

She looked at him nonplussed and blinked hard and fast a few times. “There’s no other Wilhelmina around here.”

“I’m sure there is,” Rusty said and ruffled her hair, which she had probably painstakingly styled for hours. “Sorry, my bad. Allow me to take my leave, miss.”

She brought her hands to her hair and rushed after him. “Are you sure?” she asked. “I’ve been asking about you.”

“Ask again next week,” Rusty told her without a second thought.

“Really? Next week, I might be asking about someone else,” she warned him with obvious rancor.

He waved. “My loss, then,” he said airily, his full attention on the cat boy on the wall now.

While he had conversed with Wilhelmina, the cat boy had decided to sit on a ledge and let his feet dangle over the wall, as if he was debating whether or not to jump down on this side.

Wilhelmina turned on her heel and left in a huff. Rusty only heard her walking away. He had no eyes for her anymore. What he had eyes for was a stray cat who needed some domesticating.

Chapter Seven

Sunny Hill Wildlife

Matty could hardly believe his luck if that was what he should call Rusty walking straight toward him. After Zoey had done some quick research on Rusty's whereabouts by checking the local gossip page that, sometimes, offered the latest rumors live, he had been armed with a general idea where the new girl might be waiting to get the king of the campus into her clutches.

He had gone there, thankful for being able to take the same wall route as before, but without having high hopes.

And yet, fate or the laws of the universe were on his side, so lo and behold, Rusty was right there, befriending the new girl. Matty had remained stuck on the wall, not knowing what exactly cockblocking implied as a general practice, until Rusty had decided to wave the girl goodbye and head over to him.

His heart beat faster, but he had the presence of mind to hike himself to his feet and keep his tail away from Rusty's wandering hands. By how the guy was moving forward, his hands raised and his fingers moving, he was very much in the mood to either drag Matty down from the wall by his tail, scratch his back, tickle him, or all of the above.

"What's your name, kitten?" Rusty purred as he got closer.

Name, name, oh, fuck, he hadn't thought about it. "My name is," he started and then he realized that he was supposed to speak in a different voice. He cleared his throat and began again in a shrilly voice. "My name is..." so, his coat was pretty slick, being latex and all, and, um, his eyes fell on a small tree nearby with some sort of decorative fruit on it, "Slicky Coolplums."

Rusty blinked a few times and leaned on the wall with one hand while staring at him with a huge smile. "So, are your balls always cold because you have no actual fur, or are you chill as balls?"

Ah, damn, what a stupid name to choose. No going back now. Fuck. "My balls are always cool because I fear nothing," he declared and sidestepped as Rusty tried to reach for the tip of his tail that was hanging low, feigning a casual move.

"Hmm, that's cool," Rusty replied. "Pun intended. Who owns you, kitty?"

Matty threw Rusty a withering look from above. "Take that back." Could he try to hiss? Better not risk it without knowing firsthand what he sounded like. This was supposed to be seduction of some sort. "I'm a stray and proud of it."

"Very well. I'm glad to hear that," Rusty said in a very strange polite manner. "Then I shall be the one to domesticate you."

Matty snorted. "I am not to be domesticated."

"What are you to be?" Rusty continued in the same deferential way.

They were two actors playing in a very bad play.

So, the plan had been to cockblock Rusty, but right now, Matty had no idea how to continue this very strange interaction. Ah, he was supposed to play hard to get. "I do whatever I want," he said and began marching along the wall.

Rusty pushed himself away from the wall and began to walk by his side. At least, he wasn't getting on the wall to chase him like before. That was a good thing.

"Do you take classes here, at Sunny Hill?" Rusty asked.

"What nonsense," Matty quipped. "I am a cat. Cats don't go to school."

"Wow, you're pretty amazing. Totally into your cat persona," Rusty praised him.

"Thank you," Matty said primly.

He knew where to go to put some sort of barrier between him and his dutiful follower. He jumped from the wall behind the wire fence going round the vegetable garden where the biology students were conducting their various experiments on improving crops. The ground was soft under his feet, and he stopped for a moment to check where Rusty was.

Safely enough on the other side of the fence. Rusty hooked his fingers into the wire and stared at him. "I could swear you had a different hairstyle and hair color last time."

Yeah, because this time, he had gone full cat boy. Zoey had even forced him to wear the contacts he had ordered. It was, indeed, an expensive hobby, but it served well to know that his eyes were safely hidden from Rusty's inquisitive stares. One great thing about these contacts is that they had been made to help his eyesight, so he wasn't in any danger of ending up making a fool of himself by falling off a wall. That, and, of course, all the balance exercises he had performed since high school.

"You have poor eyesight," he accused and winced inside. He wasn't one to talk.

"Nah, I think you're just getting into it. You're pretty shy."

"I beg your pardon?" Matty said in the best grating voice he could muster.

"Yeah. You need to do better."

Matty turned on his heel. "I do not take advice from a human."

And that had been a mistake because somehow, his tail brushed by the fence and Rusty's deft fingers caught it.

"Take your hands off me," Matty growled at him. "Leave my tail alone."

But Rusty already had one hand pushed through what looked like a hole in the fence and was now holding onto his tail with all his might. Matty was well aware that if he tried to pull, and Rusty pulled in the opposite direction, the tail might tear, or worse, tear the material where it was sewn into the rest, and most likely expose Matty's naked ass underneath. He really needed to consider some skimpy underwear. That way, he wouldn't have to clean the costume so thoroughly after each use.

"I'm going to scratch you," he warned. The claws the costume came with were pretty sharp, which had been a surprise to him when trying to gauge their quality.

"I don't mind. Scratch me all you want."

Matty wavered. What was he supposed to do?

"All I want is to pet you," Rusty explained. "Come closer."

"Don't touch my hair," Matty warned, pointing at his wig. Being exposed so early in the game would be bad.

"No worries," Rusty said brightly.

He didn't like it, but those were the risks he was taking as a cat boy. He moved close to the fence. And gasped promptly when Rusty's other hand grabbed his ass.

How on earth did he manage to put his hands through the fence so easily? Matty grabbed Rusty's wrist, but it was so strong, and his wandering hand was kneading Matty's ass while its owner didn't care to conceal his delight.

"You perv," Matty accused. Yeah, right, like he wasn't there, while it was still light outside, dressed in a latex suit that left absolutely nothing to the imagination. Such a hard case of the pot calling the kettle black.

"Come on, only a little," Rusty begged. "You have an awesome ass. Do you do house calls?"

Matty gasped in outrage. Actually, Rusty's hand on his ass felt rather nice. At least, his tail was left alone, but that was only because Rusty had different plans.

"Nice plums," Rusty said in a low, seductive voice, as his fingers reached through the fence and touched Matty with only the tips.

Matty pushed himself away and escaped. He stood a few feet back and took in Rusty, who had an obvious look of satisfaction on his face. “House calls,” he said and scoffed. “You cannot bribe me.”

“Don’t blame a man for trying. I could leave a bowl of milk outside. Or do you prefer something stronger?”

“Stronger than your milk?” Oops, the weird things coming out of his mouth.

“Point taken,” Rusty said and his eyes flashed with mischief. “Are you challenging me to fill an entire bowl? That might take some time.”

Matty crossed his arms and turned his head to one side, while setting his chin high. “Your human perversions do not interest me.”

“That’s all right,” Rusty said. “I’m sure we can find common ground. Walk you home?”

“You grabbed my ass, and now you’re asking this?”

“It’s the least I can do since you won’t let me buy you... I mean, make you dinner.”

Matty shrugged. “I am not so silly as to lead you to my hiding place.”

“Good point. When will I see you again?”

Matty was already putting distance between them, and it looked like Rusty didn’t feel like scaling the wire fence and coming after him. The chances were that he would get caught if they were to go for a race in the open vegetable field. Was this enough to cockblock Rusty for the entire evening? Should he dally some more? But he was supposed to play hard to get, and except for the ass-grabbing incident, things had gone rather well so far.

“Only if you play nice,” he shouted back.

“I’m the nicest dude in the land,” Rusty assured him.

“I know who you are, Mr. King. The moment I turn my back, you’ll be in someone’s panties.”

“Not tonight. All this talk about milk made me hungry. But if you want me to play nice, you’ll have to give me something in return.”

“Like what? More petting?”

“Yeah, why not? And maybe meeting without a fence between us.”

“We’ll see,” Matty replied and waved.

“Goodbye, Slick Coolplums,” Rusty shouted after him.

Matty hunched his head into his shoulders from the cringe. Great. He was stuck with that stupid nickname now.



What do you know of local wildlife, boys and girls of Sunny Hill? Just like you, we thought that unless you count the somewhat reprobate behavior of the football team after a win, there was none of it.

We bring you great news, dear audience. We do have wildlife here, on campus! So far, only one specimen has been spotted, but who's to say that there are not more.

We are talking about a cat boy. Yes, a cat boy, complete with ears, tail, and claws. How sharp those are, we cannot say. But we are willing to pay grandly for any reports on spotting him and any additional information. How? Let's say that we'll forgive you for all those times you ended up puking your guts out after a party, or all the promises you made not to fall for the same wrong guy or girl again. Take advantage of our generous offer. It's for a limited time only.



“Oh, wow, Rusty wasn’t talking out of his ass,” Kane commented. “We have a cat boy on campus.”

“When do I ever talk out of my ass?” Rusty asked with emphasis. “I told you the cat boy was real.”

“Did you summon him with the power of your mind?” Dex intervened in the conversation.

They were enjoying leftovers from dinner the night before, and they were still better than anything else Rusty would normally have eaten. Jonathan could always become a chef if the chemistry thing didn’t pan out.

“I wouldn’t be surprised.” Maddox was holding Jonathan close and nuzzling his neck while they were both leaning against the countertop.

Rusty observed them with a sour look on his face.

“Is there a chance,” Kane began again, “that you actually put on a cat boy suit and pranced all over the campus at night?”

Rusty gave his housemate a look he hoped appeared insufferable enough. “No, Kane the Bane of all sexy fantasies. What would be the point of that?”

Kane shrugged. "I don't know. So that you can fulfill your crazy-ass fantasy and touch yourself all over."

"For your information, I like it better when someone else does the touching."

"Something you are said not to have indulged in lately," Dex reminded him.

Rusty took in his friend who was grinning at him like he knew some awesome joke and didn't care to share. "You're all a bit too curious about my sex life."

"It's not our fault you are practically having it out in the open. We couldn't dodge being kept up to date with your latest conquests even if we wanted to," Dex pointed out.

Maddox and Jonathan were sharing some private joke, because they were giggling and kissing.

"You two, move away from each other," Rusty told them. "You're giving me a boner."

Jonathan straightened up and tried to move away, but Maddox pulled him back. "Don't worry about this ass. Watching paint dry gives Rusty a boner."

"True," Rusty admitted. Still, the two lovebirds were totally getting on his nerves. Not in a very bad way, but still. They indulged in too much touching of each other, while – Dex was right about one thing – he was getting derailed by a certain cat boy and also, by his tutor who used safe words all randomly.

"So," Kane brought him back from his musings, "Xpress doesn't seem to know much about this cat boy. Did you get your hands on him?"

"Yes, a bit," Rusty replied and admired his non-existent manicure for a moment. That just helped him remember how sharp those claws had looked. They were probably sharp enough to hurt nice and good. Hmm.

"Enlighten us," Kane said in a fatherly tone. "What did you do with him?"

"Scared him away, without a doubt," Dex quipped.

"Yeah, right." Rusty snorted and turned in his chair, away from his nosy friends. He wanted to focus on remembering the very pleasant sensation of having that shapely buttock filling his hand so well. Too bad he hadn't been able to examine the plums at length.

"It's not like you to keep it to yourself," Maddox pointed out. "Spill the beans already."

Jonathan cupped his boyfriend's cheek to turn his attention back to him. "Guys, let's leave Rusty some room to breathe. If he's not comfortable with telling us all the details, we're not supposed to corner him."

“Thank you, dear sir,” Rusty said and saluted. “Well, I know more than Xpress. I know his name.”

“Really? What’s he called?” Maddox asked.

Rusty smiled triumphantly and turned back around in his chair to take in everyone. “Slick Coolplums,” he announced.

A moment of silence followed, and then all the assholes in the room burst into laughter. Even Jonathan giggled discreetly and tried to hide it behind his hand.

“What? It’s an awesome name for a cat boy,” he protested. “He’s very slick, and I also tested his plums a little. They’re perfectly cool.”

“You touched his balls?” Kane was holding his belly with one hand.

Rusty wiggled his index and middle fingers. “Just a bit. There was a wire fence between us.”

“Your sex life just got incredibly interesting,” Dex commented.

“My sex life,” Rusty pronounced with emphasis on each word, “is always incredible.”

“Maybe,” Dex said with a shrug. “But not that interesting. This is all very new.”

“And a little bit--” Jonathan added and then stopped, his face scrunched up in thought.

“Gay?” Rusty supplied.

“Hetero-challenged, maybe?” Jonathan offered and winced.

Rusty waved. “Don’t try your hand at what you’re not good at, Johnny boy. Stick to the kitchen. New words are not your thing.”

“Did you just send my man to the kitchen?” Maddox gasped in feigned outrage.

“Say everything you want, Maddie, but your man belongs to the kitchen, and the kitchen belongs to him.”

To his surprise, Kane and Dex added agreements of their own, chiefly concerning the food quality. Good thing it was senior year, and Jonathan was bound to practice most of his cooking skills at their house. It would be hard to go back to normal food afterwards.

Afterwards was a time far away, and Rusty didn’t want to think about it anyway.

“And you don’t mind it?” Kane started a new line of questioning.

“Mind what?” Rusty asked.

“This obsession with touching cat boys’ plums,” Kane replied promptly.

“Cat boys are a totally different thing,” Rusty argued. “It’s their personality I’m interested in the most. You know, what makes them purr, what makes them scratch, all that.”

“And kissing your tutor... oh, sorry, letting yourself be kissed by your tutor,” Kane continued, “that belongs to what category?”

“The category of ‘none of your damn business,’” Rusty replied with a plastic smile. Well, that was a bit worrying, maybe, if he had the time to think about it, which he didn’t. “Actually, it’s charity work. Don’t tell anyone, but I’m helping Matty turn into the most awesome gay butterfly you ignoramuses have ever seen.”

“Why?” Dex asked in obvious confusion. “Why would you want to turn Matthew Han gay?”

“He’s already gay, you must have enough wax to make a dozen candles in your ears. I’m making him an awesome gay.”

“Butterfly,” Jonathan added for precision’s sake.

“What he said,” Rusty said and pointed at Jonathan. “Otherwise, he’s going to finish college with his bum untouched.”

“So, you’re touching his bum for this reason only?” Kane asked.

Rusty rolled his eyes. “Talking to you is like running in circles. I repay his tutoring lessons with helping him discover his inner gay superpowers of having any dude he wants. By the way, Maddie and cook extraordinaire, I saved you two. He’s not going to steal either of you. We shook on it.”

“We weren’t included in this little deal of yours?” Kane asked and pointed at him and Dex.

“No,” Rusty said with satisfaction. “Kane, you’re safe, since you’re a lifer and all. But if Matty wants Dex, it’s going to be fun watching you get jealous.”

Dex grunted. Kane sighed.

“What if the student ends up outplaying the teacher?” Jonathan intervened.

“Not gonna happen,” Rusty replied. “He’s three years behind me. I’ll allow him to be the king of gay hookups, but, you know, that’s niche. I don’t fear him getting more famous than I am.”

Jonathan frowned and tried to find the right words. “That’s not exactly what I meant.”

Rusty smacked his hands on the table. “I don’t know about you, boys, but I have places to go and people to see. All that. Thanks for the food, Jonathan. Chef’s kiss.” To make it clear, he brought three fingers to his mouth and smooched them loudly.

Also, he needed to make a board. One for setting powerful traps meant for cat boys. A cat boy.



What did he know so far about the cat boy? Rusty examined the white board in front of him and gestured artistically with the black marker right above the pristine surface. Once he had put his mind to making the board, gathering the supplies needed had been easy. Sure, he had to keep everything under wraps until he reached a conclusion, and when anyone else was in the room, he would just turn the board to face the wall.

First of all, he knew the cat boy’s name. Sure, it was only his name as a feline, and said nothing about the Sunny Hill student hidden underneath, yet it was an invaluable piece of information. Rusty wrote it down dutifully. What else did he know? Well, the cat boy was, indeed, a male. Those balls felt real, and overall, he looked male.

Next. His height. Rusty had had the time to gauge it while they had measured one another with the wire fence between them. Five foot nine or ten? That was a good enough estimate. He wrote it down, as well.

Real hair color. The wig was a stark pink color, which helped with identifying the cat boy from afar, but what lay underneath was a different thing. It had been dark enough the first time he had chased the cat boy down, but he could tell his hair color wasn’t too light, nor too dark.

Ass. Rusty nodded. A little plump, a little perky. Just right. Although he could have worn special padding underneath. That wouldn’t be too unusual.

Voice had to go to downsides. Rusty dragged a long line to separate the section. Yeah, that voice was good enough to scratch ears.

Personality. A bit timid, but brave and getting into his cat persona with definite enthusiasm. That was a plus. Not much to say about his face, as the mask rode down over his cheeks. The contacts were pretty awesome, though. Golden cat eyes. Top notch. Those had to be expensive.

Another thing had to be mentioned. Despite a bit of hissing, the cat boy hadn’t seemed easily shaken by Rusty’s risky propositions. Actually, it was as if he knew how much to allow and when to pull away to keep things interesting.

A knock on the door made him flip the board in an instant. “Come in,” he called out loudly.

Dex walked in but looked around warily as if he expected strange things or creatures to jump at him from every corner.

“Yeah?” Rusty asked, using as much insolence as he could muster. That should give Dex an idea about what to do next, which was walking out the same way he had walked in.

“A certain team misses a certain power forward at practice,” Dex cut straight to the chase.

“So...” Rusty could feel the tips of his fingers tingling. He wanted to ignore Dex and get back to his cat boy board. It was such a case of hidden identity, a mystery waiting to be solved. But in due time. Rusty had nothing against a game of cat and mouse, and he didn’t intend to be the mouse. It was more like cat versus cat. Or was he a dog, because he was so horny all the time? Not when he was thinking –

“Rusty!” Dex boomed at him to get his attention.

Rusty grimaced to express his displeasure in a non-violent way. “You don’t have to yell, you know.”

“You said ‘so’ and left me hanging for two minutes without saying a word.”

He had? All was possible. “Right. What I mean is, I don’t need the practice. I’m naturally gifted. Even the coach said so.”

“He only said it once, according to gospel. And he regretted it instantly. Why don’t you go to practice, Rusty? What secret project are you on?”

“Why do you care?”

“Don’t you at least need to train your voice or something? With that coach?” Dex had only a vague understanding of why Rusty needed a vocal coach. His first reaction had been something like ‘Rusty already knows how to sing, the way I see it.’ Rusty loved him all the more for being so pure and precious.

“Stop looking around, all suspicious like that. I didn’t hide the vocal coach under the bed,” he pointed out.

“You are hiding something.” Dex crossed his arms and watched him with half-hooded eyes. “Come on, spit it out. I’ll tell you if it’s a good idea or not.”

Rusty snorted, and, just like that, a sneeze came out. Dex watched him without hiding his amusement. Rusty managed to stop after the fourth sneeze or so.

“Some people might be talking about you. I bet it’s the coach. And the entire team,” Dex said.

With some difficulty, Rusty found a tissue and blew his nose loudly. “It’s said ‘bless you’, T-Dex. Where are your manners?”

“The same place you’re coming from,” Dex replied promptly. “If you’re not getting into that voice thing, at least go to practice. You’re going to cry later when you lose your crown.”

“I’m not going to cry,” Rusty protested. He would, a little. A little snuffle. But yeah, Dex was right, as annoying as he was. The crown came with responsibilities, one of them being an athlete, because what chick didn’t want to bag a king and a champion?

What were cat boys into? Or, at least, Slick Coolplums? Hmm, Rusty needed a strategy in place until they met again.

“I’m already studying. Isn’t that enough?” he complained and opened his arms wide, as if too much was being asked of him.

“I’m telling you all this for your own good. I’m not going to force you or anything.” Dex put his hands up in surrender.

“Like you could force me,” Rusty said with a shrug.

That was enough of a challenge. The next moment, Dex was all over him, catching him in a deadly headlock, holding him tightly and making it impossible to fight back. Rusty knew better than to be subdued like that, so after his initial surprise, he let himself go slack and Dex eased his hold. That was enough to turn the tables and have Dex in the same position he had been in earlier.

“Okay, okay, you win,” Dex admitted, although Rusty had an inkling that he was being allowed that win.

Nonetheless, he let go of Dex. He didn’t have time to fool around with friends, when he had to design a trap to catch a cat boy. “I’ll go to practice,” Rusty said. “Just so that you get off my sexy ass.” He slapped his own bottom and brought two fingers to his mouth to blow on them.

Dex rolled his eyes. “One day, some dude might think you’re serious.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Rusty asked.

“He might think you want your cherry popped,” Dex joked. “And he might catch you in a tight corner.”

Rusty grinned. “You said tight.”

“Derail the conversation all you want. It’s going to happen to you. We’re all going to have a laugh while you struggle to fend off some determined gay boy who thinks you’re into it for real.”

Rusty flexed his guns. “He’ll have to be one hell of a dude. I’m not that easy to bend over. I just wiped the floor with you like seconds ago. He’ll have to be bigger than you.”

Dex didn't take it to heart but smirked instead. "It's not all about size, Rusty. His strongest asset might be his power of persuasion. That, coupled with your natural curiosity might turn you into a --"

Rusty put his hand up. "Don't say the word. Thanks for the warning. Bye, Dex. The door is over there. For the record, for the next half hour or so, you're not welcome. I'm going to jerk off to the nastiest porn on the planet."

"What's that?" Dex asked, always the curious.

"Pollination in plants," Rusty said right away.

Dex shivered and grimaced. "Nasty indeed. Okay, I go. It's mission accomplished, anyway. You'll go to practice."

"Yeah, because you can't bear the thought of not having the king as your close and dear friend. I'm doing it for you."

"Whatever floats your boat," Dex said with a shrug. "See ya, Rusty. Make sure to play safe around thirsty gay boys." He even dared to give him a wink on his way out.

Thirsty gay boys. Right, he had a project, beside the cat boy. So, he had Matty to turn into the coolest, most desirable gay bachelor at Sunny Hill, a cat boy to trap, textbooks to study, basketball to practice... No wonder he wasn't getting laid! He had no free time.

No problem. He was happy for now. The getting laid part came naturally to him, anyway.



"When are you going to stop me?" Matty eventually asked.

"Stop you?" Zoey grinned at him and then wrapped an arm around his. "But this is all so very entertaining."

"I think I've been talking about Rusty for at least half an hour straight, and you didn't say a word."

"I'm an avid listener when it comes to the adventures of," Zoey paused for effect and looked at him from underneath her eyelashes, "Slick Coolplums."

She said the secret cat boy name in a whisper, but Matty still felt compelled to shush her. He looked around at the other students strolling through the quad. They seemed indifferent to whatever he and Zoey were sharing right now. If only they knew he had managed to catch the attention of no one other than their uncrowned king, they wouldn't be so indifferent. Matty shivered. He wasn't the kind to like attention; the fact that Rusty basked in it all the time amazed

him. And, of course, made him think about the rule saying that opposites attract, and blah, blah, blah.

“That’s a crazy good name, no matter what you think.”

“You’re just laughing at me and I know it,” Matty warned her.

“No, no, it proves that you’re bringing your best whenever you meet--”

“Don’t say his name, someone might hear us.”

Zoey nodded. “Xpress caught a whiff that a cat boy is prancing about. However, they haven’t seemed to be able to put two and two together.”

“What do you mean?”

“That Slick Coolplums is our dear king’s latest obsession,” Zoey pointed out.

“I wouldn’t go as far as to call it that.” Matty would have liked very much to call it that.

“Really? Then how do you explain that he’s not hooking up? He left that chick staring at the moon while he went chasing after you. And, according to everyone, he hasn’t chased after anyone else lately. You got his attention, my friend.”

“He might be busy with other things,” Matty argued.

“Yeah, probably the homework you gave him last time. I must say, you’re playing the champ like a champ.”

“Who’s the champ?” someone asked from their left, making both of them jump.

Matty felt all color draining from his face, as his eyes met the smiling face of no other than Ray Franklin, who was Jonathan Hamilton’s roommate, and part of Rusty’s closest circle, as far as he knew.

“We were talking about board games,” Zoey chirped to save the day.

Ray nodded. “I was thinking that. Sorry I barged into your conversation and didn’t even introduce myself.”

“We know who you are,” Zoey said quickly.

Ray smiled and offered his hand. “Even so, it’s only polite.”

Matty shook Ray’s hand, hoping that the throbbing of his heart couldn’t be felt down to his pinky. How much had Ray overheard? He seemed like a nice guy, but still, anything concerning Rusty counted as juicy gossip.

“I’m Matthew--”

“I also know who you are,” Ray said and grinned while holding his hand. “You’re really giving Rusty a run for his money, aren’t you? I’m already in awe of your tutoring skills. Hey, do you and Zoey--”

“You also know who I am?” Zoey asked and pressed her hands to her chest.

Ray offered her his hand, too. “Yes. I’m sorry if I’m being too straightforward, but what do you say about a little tournament? You can pick the game. Hanna and I – Hanna is--”

“Your girlfriend, yes,” Zoey said quickly.

“We’re both big into board games. And since I overheard you saying something about a champion, I thought that maybe you wouldn’t mind a little bit of friendly sparring.”

“We’d love that,” Zoey exclaimed. She nudged Matty in the ribs. “Wouldn’t we?”

“Yes, totally,” Matty replied automatically.

“All right,” Ray said and pulled out his phone. “Just to let you know, Hanna and I, we’re pretty good.”

“Bring the heat, pal,” Zoey said enthusiastically.

Matty looked after Ray for a bit, as he said goodbye, and then turned toward Zoey. “I am so going to kill you, Zoey. Why on earth did we accept?”

“Because Ray is one of the ‘in’ people, Matty. Making friends with the ‘in’ people is very important.”

“And very dangerous. He almost overheard us talking about Rusty, Slicky Coolplums, and whatnot.”

“Chillax,” Zoey said and grabbed his arm harder. “Let’s speak in a different language from now on.”

“What language?”

Zoey pondered for a moment, then gestured as if she wanted to lick her loose fist. “Meow?”

“One day, Zoey, one day,” Matty promised.

Chapter Eight

Mr. Parker

Matty had a hard time focusing on the game, and Zoey was already throwing daggers at him with her eyes, but it wasn't every day that he sat at the same table, playing board games with some of the 'in' people, as she had so aptly put it. Ray and Hanna weren't in the wrong, in any way. They were friendly, cool, and Zoey was smitten with them. Only Matty was sitting there like he had a stick up his ass – that was something Rusty would love hearing about, for sure – and couldn't focus on either the conversation or the game. At any moment, he expected Ray to read too much into something he said, or just infer from various pieces of information he was collecting—

His mind was going in circles. Sure, all his thoughts revolved around Rusty, and that made everything else difficult to the extent that right now, Zoey had to push him to let him know that it was his turn.

“We could call it a day if you're tired,” Ray suggested.

They were having their little sparring session, as Ray had called it, in the dorm suite that their host shared with Jonathan Hamilton. However, since Jonathan spent most of his time with his boyfriend, Matty hadn't been that surprised to see he wasn't there, even if the evening was setting in fast. It had to be nice to have a boyfriend and sleep at his place on any occasion that presented itself.

“Matty is just an airhead,” Zoey offered. “And he's studying too much.”

“Yeah, your grades are impressive,” Hanna intervened in the conversation. “By the way, how is Rusty's tutoring going?”

Matty froze. So Hanna was going to conduct the interrogation. He had no idea what exactly he feared from Ray and Hanna, but playing at double life and wearing a cat boy suit made him a little nervous in polite company, as things stood. “It's going well,” he replied in a deadpan voice. “Rusty is very intelligent,” he added quickly.

“No one doubts that,” Ray said. “But discipline is not his forte.”

“And he gets bored easily,” Hanna added. “So, unbeknownst to most people on campus, you're quite the celebrity in the making, Matty. Sorry for using the pretext of wanting to play games with you, guys, but the truth is that we're curious. And we also want to get to know you better. You must be a really fun person.”

“You lied to us?” Zoey said in a theatrical fashion.

“Guilty as charged,” Hanna admitted. “But you two are quite redoubtable opponents. We’d love to play with you again. And we’re happy to have met you, Zoey. You’re really cute.”

“Oh, nonsense, you’re cute,” Zoey replied.

“I’m actually not fun at all,” Matty decided to nip all of the gossip in the bud. Not that Ray and Hanna would go around spreading rumors since they had to be good people, seeing they were friends with Jonathan and the entire group at Rusty’s house. But if they smelled something odd, it meant that others would be able to do the same. Ah, why was his mind so complicated sometimes?

“Don’t listen to him,” Zoey said in a motherly voice. To show that she meant to protect him, even against himself, she grabbed him and smothered him for a second. “He’s fun. Of course, that’s if you like board games, reading fantasy, studying--”

“You’re really making a case for me, aren’t you?” Matty said. “I’m simply a good tutor, not that I’m bragging. And I customize my tutoring sessions to fit the student.”

Ray and Hanna craned their necks to listen to him closely. “How do you customize your tutoring when it comes to Rusty?” Ray asked. “JJ says he didn’t expect anyone from this world to be able to make Rusty learn anything unless he allowed it to happen.”

It was clear as day that Ray was in total awe of his BFF, and part of his curiosity came from there. Matty wondered briefly if Jonathan had told Ray how he had stumbled upon him and Rusty kissing. By how innocently both Ray and Hanna were looking at him, it seemed unlikely.

“You make a really cute couple,” Hanna chirped away. “And we just want to tell you that if Rusty ever acts as if he would like to come between you two, he’s just playing. Don’t pay him any mind, Zoey, even if he pulls out all the stops to try and make you forget about your boyfriend.”

That surprised both Matty and Zoey. They first stared at their hosts, then at each other, then back at Ray and Hanna.

And they burst out laughing at the same time. Zoey was holding her belly and wiping tears from her eyes. Their hosts, most naturally, didn’t understand and looked at them in confusion.

“We’re not together,” Zoey finally managed while waving between her and Matty.

“Oh,” Ray said and blinked. “But you do look like you’re a couple.”

“I keep telling her that’s the reason she doesn’t get a boyfriend,” Matty said. “We’re like Siamese twins, but that’s about it. Also, I’m gay.” It wasn’t like him to say it so directly, so right away he fell silent.

Hanna smiled at him. “That’s so cool. It makes total sense now.”

“It does?” Matty asked. He had no idea what Hanna meant by that.

“Yes. Since you’re not a girl, Rusty cannot wrap you around his little finger and mess with your head. As for guys, he’d just get them to drink with him or do who knows what crazy things men do to prove their masculinity--” Hanna stopped and looked at her boyfriend. “Of course, present company excluded.”

“I would totally drink and do crazy things with Rusty,” Ray replied good-naturedly. “But JJ keeps protecting me from him, I’m sure. He never says it, but I’m sure he does it.”

Hanna beamed at him and gave him a quick kiss. “Because you’re precious and you need protection.”

“All right, my valiant knightess,” Ray replied and looked at Hanna, his eyes full of love.

“Wait, guys, what makes sense?” Zoey reminded the loving couple that they still had guests.

“Yes, right,” Hanna said. “Well, Matty is obviously not impressed by Rusty’s fooleries and he’s in no danger to be the target of the uncrowned king’s obviously efficient seduction techniques.”

“See?” Zoey said and looked at him. “There are still people who use the word ‘seduction’ in a completely non-ironic way.”

Matty felt like he had something in his throat. A ball of fur, maybe?

Hanna linked hands with Zoey over the table. “You guys, that’s great news. I mean, you took a weight off our chests. I was talking to Ray, and we were thinking Rusty might try to seduce Zoey, and Matthew might get angry at him, without realizing that he didn’t mean to do any harm and--”

“Rusty’s a good guy,” Matty said, somewhat brusquely.

Hanna and Ray turned their heads toward him at the same time. “That’s what we know, but we doubt that everyone thinks the same,” Ray explained. “It was another reason we wanted to meet you. To tell you exactly that.”

Matty nodded. “Okay. Although, just for the record, if Zoey had been my girlfriend and Rusty tried anything, I would have challenged him to a duel or something. I wouldn’t have allowed him to tarnish my honor.” He smacked his chest with his fist to make a point.

Hanna grinned at him. “Then how about you use some of that combative attitude on the next round?”

Matty felt relieved. Ray and Hanna just wanted to make sure that he didn't end up judging Rusty badly by accident. "You don't have to ask me twice. From the top?"

Ray seemed happy to restart the game. "Sure thing. We can barely wait to kick your asses. No offence."

"None taken," Matty replied with a smile.



"Finally, you remembered that you are part of this team." The coach patted him on the back hard enough for him to feel it.

"I never forgot," Rusty said lightly.

"Just get out there," the coach said and gestured with his chin. "Let's see if that's the only thing you didn't forget."

Rusty shrugged. So, maybe it would take him like a minute or so to get back into the flow, but it wasn't like he could forget how to play. His mates welcomed him with open arms. Yeah, everywhere he went, he was the king. It came with the territory that he always had friends.

"We have a game to win, boys," the coach reminded them and blew his whistle.

"What game?" he asked the guy closest to him.

"Pacific Grove's coming to town," his mate explained. "And we need to kick some ass."

"Yeah," the coach agreed, catching their conversation. "So, until then, no partying, no stupidity, no broken ankles while shooting the breeze, got it?"

The coach was half-joking, but he had to say it because of that one time, when Rusty had missed practice and arrived at the next one with a bandaged ankle, claiming that he had injured it while, exactly that, shooting the breeze. The man had to love him if he remembered small things like that.



He was in a good mood. Nothing worked better than practice to get his mind in order. Sure thing, the coach expected them to keep their head in the game and forget about hooking up and whatnot, although the man was too old-fashioned to use such words, but that didn't mean he would forgo making plans for the weekend.

He dropped onto the bench and was about to tie his laces when his phone rang. "Fuck," he muttered under his breath. One idea was to ignore it, but that wouldn't work for long.

“Yeah?” he answered, not forgetting to show his irritation.

“What were you doing?” His dad was just as little invested in using greetings as he was.

“Just finished practice,” Rusty replied and smacked the door to his locker loud enough to be heard through the phone.

A grunt was the next reply. A man of few words. Maybe that was why he acted more; whatever he wanted, he did everything to get it. Driven, people said. Obsessed, more likely, Rusty thought.

“When’s your next game?”

Rusty moved the phone from one ear to another, to win some time on his side. “Next week.” There was no point in lying. His dad would just go online and check.

“I’ll be there.”

And that was it. That was the heartwarming conversation between father and son that took place now and then. If he collected all the words they had exchanged in his lifetime, they would probably fill a very slim book.

He threw the phone inside his knapsack and closed his eyes for a moment. His father, the mighty, the one and only Roy Parker, was going to come down from his throne to attend his son’s game, as if college basketball was somehow important to him.

It was. Roy Parker searched for any proof that Rusty was growing up to be a man just like him like a trained hunting dog. And there could be no other way.

That meant he needed to win that shit, and he needed to put his all into it, just so he would be left the fuck alone until next time.



Matty pushed his glasses up his nose for the umpteenth time. Something was wrong with Rusty, and he couldn’t put his finger on what that could be. He was slouching in his chair, offering strictly correct answers to everything Matty threw at him, and it looked like he had studied properly. All in all, he had no idea what to make out of his student’s sudden change in attitude. There was a possibility Rusty had already forgotten about their little deal, or worse, that he wasn’t interested in it anymore.

That was a good reason to feel foolish and inadequate. Matty looked at the textbook open in front of his eyes and tried hard not to feel desperate. “I think that’s all for today,” he said as he closed it.

“Okay.”

Matty stood to his feet. It was better to grab the bull by the horns. “Look, Rusty, about that other thing, I know you didn’t mean it. There’s no point in being weird about it.” He played with the shoulder strap of his bag, just to show that he didn’t feel miserable about being forgotten and discarded so easily.

The green eyes, always so full of mischief, rested on him and seemed strangely empty. Matty fidgeted under a gaze that could mean anything, including Rusty hating him for not getting laid lately because of him and his cat boy suit, even if he didn’t know Matty and that silly cat boy were the same—

“What are you doing this weekend?”

“Um, I don’t know,” Matty replied, taken by surprise. “Nothing in particular. I mean, I’m pretty flexible.”

Rusty nodded, his eyes never leaving Matty. “I’m not allowed to go to parties,” he said.

“Because of the game,” Matty said and nodded. Was this Rusty’s way of becoming uber-focused because he had a game coming? He didn’t know, but he hoped that was the cause of all this awkwardness.

“Yeah.” Rusty grimaced.

Well, the prospect of not having fun this Saturday night as usual could be enough reason for the king of the campus to feel so blue. Matty didn’t know if he was just fooling himself into believing that.

“Is there something wrong?” Matty ventured.

“Like what?” Rusty asked him, somewhat aggressive and unpleasant.

Matty felt the need to backpedal and stop the conversation there, but it irked him that Rusty seemed so cold. He liked to think that it wasn’t because of him it was happening. “I don’t know. Are you worried about your performance at the game?”

Rusty smirked and put his hands on top of his head, while examining Matty with keen eyes. He seemed more like himself than he had looked for the last hour. But Matty didn’t think it was the right moment yet to feel relieved.

“Worried? Nah, not really. Just pissed at little.”

“All right.” Matty relaxed a bit. “Why?”

Rusty shrugged. “I can’t get laid.”

Matty snorted. “For real? What’s stopping you?”

“The game,” Rusty replied. “Somehow, the coach thinks that if I keep my jizz in my balls, it’ll miraculously make me a better player.”

“I somehow doubt that Coach Anderson would say such a thing out loud,” Matty pointed out.

“That doesn’t mean that he’s not thinking it,” Rusty said matter-of-factly.

“Well, you’re like the absolute rebel,” Matty continued. “You can always do what you want.”

“True,” Rusty admitted. “But I don’t feel like it.”

“Why?” Matty asked.

Rusty examined him again. This time, Matty no longer felt cold under that green gaze, but hot for some reason. It had to be his imagination. Rusty was pissed because he couldn’t get laid, and that involved a partner that was most likely female. So, he was simply just wide-eyed dreaming that Rusty looked at him like he was his next meal after fasting for three days.

“I have practice this afternoon,” Rusty said. “Tomorrow evening, be here.”

“What for?” Matty asked.

Rusty frowned. “Did you forget that I’m supposed to tutor you back? You’re bad at sex, Matty. Don’t tell me that already went out of your mind.”

Matty gawked at Rusty, nonplussed, for several seconds.

“What?” Rusty asked. “Are you chicken?”

Matty had basically just pointed at their deal and how he didn’t want to keep Rusty to a bargain he didn’t feel comfortable with. And now, Rusty was talking like he hadn’t heard a word. “Rusty, what did I say when I got up from the table, like five minutes ago?”

Rusty pondered. “I don’t know. Something about homework. Why? Are you testing my short-term memory?”

“In a way,” Matty said dryly. So, Rusty hadn’t even heard him, his mind too wrapped up in the upcoming game and his role in it. “Wait, are you just assuming that I can come here tomorrow night? That I don’t have other things to do?”

“You just said you’re flexible,” Rusty explained and grinned broadly. “I’ll be your doctor and see just how flexible you are.”

Matty gulped, short flashes of images involving him bent in various impossible ways, with Rusty’s hands all over him, crossing his mind.

“And you said ‘night’!” Rusty suddenly exclaimed and jumped from his seat. “That means, oh, that means,” he continued in an excited tone while pacing around the room, “that we’re going to have a slumber party!”

Matty had no idea how Rusty could go from zero to sixty like that, but he wasn’t about splitting hairs these days. “A slumber party with a doctor?” he asked, just to check.

Rusty stopped and pretended to check an invisible stethoscope, blowing air over it and polishing it on his shirt. “Doctor Rusty, at your service,” he said with a huge smile that lit up the whole room.

Matty smiled, too. He couldn’t help it. However, as Rusty looked at him again, his smile began to fade, not because he felt less happy, but the opposite. The way those green eyes were searching his face, finally settling on his lips, the way he saw it, made his heart beat wildly.

“See you tomorrow,” he said quickly, as if he was afraid Rusty would change his mind.

To his surprise, Rusty followed him to the door, and quite closely. He was about to open the door when Rusty put a palm above his head and forced it closed. “What?” he stammered.

Rusty pondered for a moment, and Matty felt his knees going soft. Rusty could ask him anything at this point, and he would say ‘yes’. The way Rusty towered over him was enough to make a hive of butterflies go nuts in his stomach. He was slowly oozing down onto the floor, in the most literal sense of the word, because his knees were bending of their own accord.

“Funny,” Rusty interrupted his meltdown. “I thought you were a bit taller.”

Again, much to his surprise, Matty felt Rusty kissing the top of his head briefly.

“You’re small,” Rusty said and laughed.

“Yeah, and you’re tall,” Matty replied, for lack of anything bright to say.

“My bad,” Rusty admitted and made room for Matty to escape.

That was an opportunity he couldn’t refuse, so he scurried away. What was that little kiss all about? As if he could fall for Rusty any harder than he had already fallen. It looked like he could. Go figure.



What a thought, to suspect goody-two-shoes Matty – Matty the virgin, Matty the one with a stick up his butt, and not the fun type, Matty the safe word user – of playing cat boy in his spare time. Rusty shook his head. Maybe he could convince Matty to wear a cat boy suit for his entertainment, if nothing came out of his interactions with Slick Coolplums. His face would be

totally red. He'd be a shy cat. Rusty grinned just imagining that. Well, the cat boy chase was one thing. Teaching Matty how to be happy and gay was another.

And he had practice now. It was a good way to forget about next week. That and, of course, fooling around with Matty was a good distraction, too.

He threw himself on the bed. He should be out the door in five minutes or so, but that was enough time to dream a little about Matty's lips. That guy had lips to die for, it was a simple fact. Rusty had to ensure that they had plenty of objects that could serve as a substitute for the real thing, just to test how Matty looked with his lips wrapped around—

Five minutes was enough, he thought and searched for his dick in his pants. A knock on the door made him groan. Not only the coach, but other obnoxious people were trying to keep him from emptying his balls.

"Who's there? Go away," he growled.

The impromptu guest took that as an invitation to come in. Rusty kept his hand inside his pants obstinately. Maddox grinned when he saw him. "Ethics get you hard, Rusty?"

With a roll of the eyes and a scoff, Rusty abandoned his neglected dick. "You have no idea."

"I'm hearing that you're pretty serious about the game."

"Yeah, what makes you say that?" Rusty got to his feet and began preparing his backpack for practice.

"There's a huge article on Xpress about Rusty Parker abstaining from sex because of the upcoming game. I'm your friend, so I'm not supposed to learn about such things from the papers."

Maddox was joking, but he was sniffing around. Rusty knew very well what that was about. "Dad called," he said and pretended to be absorbed in the contents of his backpack.

"He's coming to see the game?"

Rusty nodded and began walking toward the door. Maddox stop him with a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. "Don't let him get to you."

"I don't plan to," Rusty replied. "But you know that's not how it works."

He showed his real self to the people in that house on occasion, but to Maddox the most. They were brothers from different mothers, like Dex and Kane were.

Maddox wrapped his arms around him and hiked him off the floor, making Rusty snicker. "Feeling better?" his friend asked while putting him down.

“Your hugs always make me feel better,” Rusty replied promptly. “But make sure your fiancé doesn’t see us. He might get jealous.”

Maddox laughed and hugged him again. “Jonathan would never get jealous. He’d hug you, too.”

“Ah, well, you two should be more aware of this straight boy’s sensibilities,” Rusty advised, feeling his good mood returning. “I’m sure you’re rubbing some gay into me or something.”

“Aww, do we give you a boner?” Maddox asked, faking concern while grinning ear to ear.

“You’re giving my lil’ heart a boner. If you ever want to become three instead of two, adopt me.”

“Rusty, that would never work. We’d end up fighting about how to raise you well.”

“I know. I’m un-raisable,” he pointed out.

“You were also untutorable, but here you are,” Maddox said.

“Right. Look, you guys are going to party and stuff tomorrow night, right?”

“I’ll be out of town with Jonathan. Dex and Kane, as far as I know, were saying something about getting properly drunk.”

“Not here though, right?” Rusty asked.

“No, but why are you asking so many questions? Do you plan on throwing a party here? I think your coach is going to box your ears if he hears about it.”

“No, no, I’m just having Matty over for some tutoring.”

“Oh, gawd, Rusty, give the guy a break. Do you want to learn everything in the first weeks of the semester?”

“I’m tutoring him,” Rusty said. “We need the house to ourselves.”

“I’m still unclear what this tutoring is about.” Maddox looked at him with hooded eyes. “What exactly do you plan on teaching him?”

“We might,” Rusty offered, raising one finger, “run around the house dressed as fairies. You know, to unleash the gay overlord Matty has trapped inside him. And we don’t need an audience.”

“Strange strategy, but whatever you say. As long as you don’t make Matty uncomfortable.”

“No chance of that.”

“Good,” Maddox agreed. “Although I do fear that you might make Matty crazy before turning him into that gay god or whatever you say you want to turn him into.”

“Don’t underestimate the guy.”

“I won’t. You two seem to get along like a charm. That’s awesome, Rusty. I’m happy when you make other friends.”

“I always make other friends,” Rusty said pointedly.

“Not the real kind. Which one is Matty?”

Maddox had a point. Rusty thought it over for a bit. “He’s the real deal, you know, really caring that I learn and stuff. So, this is about me giving back, okay? Stop worrying.”

“I’m not worrying. I just don’t want any fairy dust up my crack after you’re done with your tutoring.”

“Ha, do you plan on dragging your crack over unusual surfaces in this house?” Rusty asked.

Maddox took a moment to reply. “Unusual surfaces? I’m starting to get scared.”

Rusty patted him on the back. “I’m going to practice. So, when are you leaving with your better half?”

“Tomorrow morning. Why?”

“So that I know Jonathan is still cooking tonight.”

“I see, you only care about that,” Maddox said and faked a sour face.

“No, Ace, I’m going to miss the two of you,” Rusty said and grinned.

“Ace? Where did you hear that?” Maddox asked and this time frowned.

“The walls are thin in this house. You must be doing some crazy things to your fiancé if he keeps moaning, ‘yes Ace, right there, deeper, more, please’ and all that.”

Maddox looked confused. Rusty loved to put one over on his bestie. That hadn’t been how he had learned about that nickname. He had just overheard Jonathan saying it in a tender whisper and kissing Maddox’s cheek while trying to get him to stop pouting for some reason.

“I’m off to practice,” he said quickly. He didn’t intend to give Maddox time to think and see through his charade. Plus, he felt much better now, knowing that he would have the entire house to himself and Matty so that they could go as crazy as they wanted.



“Will you be okay?” Zoey didn’t really sound that worried, but it was par for the course with how she usually pretended to be his mom.

“I’m just going to spend the night at Rusty’s. Of course, I’ll be fine,” Matty said, feigning confidence to the best of his abilities.

“Remember who you are,” Zoey continued. “I wish I was by your side in person to give you this pep talk, but you’ll have to settle for my voice.”

Matty sighed, tempted to end the convo, because of the many jitters in his stomach that Zoey was just making worse with her so-called pep talk. “Who am I? Slicky Coolplums?”

“Be aware not to let your two personalities collide or show at the same time. It would be bad.”

“I don’t think I’m in much danger. After all, playing the cat boy requires quite the effort. Being Matthew Han comes a lot more naturally to me,” Matty explained in a light tone.

“Yes, but you don’t know what might make you start mewling,” Zoey pointed out. “Just keep it in mind.”

“Mewling, right,” Matty said and shook his head, even though Zoey wasn’t present there in flesh and blood to understand just how unlikely he thought that was to happen.

“I’ll keep my fingers crossed for you all night,” Zoey promised. “Even if I get a cramp.”

“Just don’t. Why do I share so many details of my life with you again?”

“Because maybe, just maybe, in a different life, we shared a womb. My divination magic says so.”

“I thought divination was about reading the future, not the past,” Matty considered it reasonable to remind Zoey.

“When you’re mystical like me, everything is a whole,” Zoey replied. “And Matty, don’t be too easy, okay? Rusty has had it easy all his life when it comes to making whoopee.”

“Making whoopee? Did you just make that up?” Matty inquired.

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m a factual person. Go ask the internet if you don’t believe me.”

“I’ll take your word for it. But I’m not making any promises about not being easy. He only needs to look at me and I’m—You know what, I’ll be fine, okay? Bye, Zoey,” Matty said quickly. If he thought too much about his visit to Rusty and what it entailed, he could easily convince himself not to go at all.

“Bye, Matty. Don’t worry. You always have Slicky Coolplums to fall back on if you fail.”

“Sure, the greatest strategy in history. Bye for real, Zoey. If I don’t stop talking to you on the phone, I might miss going to this... whatever it is altogether.”

“Don’t even think about it. What are you still doing talking to me? Bye,” Zoey said quickly.

Matty breathed out and took one last look in the mirror. In the end, he had decided that it was better to go as his usual self, without any tight clothes ready to reveal parts that weren’t supposed to be revealed so easily. Yeah, he didn’t want to seem easy, he decided as he adjusted his glasses on his nose. Still, maybe he had time for another shower. He had only taken three. Warm water calmed his nerves.



Rusty opened the door before he had the chance to knock. He was shirtless. That was the first thing Matty noticed. The second was that Rusty held something like a magic wand in his hand, the kind kids used at parties to pretend being wizards and witches and whatnot.

“What is that?” Matty asked.

Rusty looked at the wand in his hand like he was seeing it for the first time in his life. He shrugged and threw it away over his shoulder. “I had to convince my hard-headed pals that I was real about tutoring you.”

“They know?” Matty’s eyes grew wide.

“What? It’s a secret that you’re gay and want to get laid?” Rusty asked. His question was genuine, and his eyes were just as big as Matty’s. He looked one moment away from panicking.

Matty sighed. He didn’t exactly have the right to judge. After all, Zoey knew everything about his crazy adventures as a cat boy, and so many other things. If he ever became famous for some obscure reason, Zoey would make bank on selling all his dirty secrets to tabloids. “Not really, no,” he admitted. “But don’t they think something weird about me?”

“Weird? No. Actually, they’re a bit in awe.”

“Really? Why?”

Rusty smiled and pulled him inside. “You succeeded and continue to do so where many others failed before. Of course, they have no idea I’m letting you.”

Matty bristled a little at that. “Do you mean, the tutoring? I’ll have you know, Mr. Parker, that I have yet to fail as a tutor.”

Rusty’s face turned sour for a moment. “Don’t call me Mr. Parker. That’s my dad.”

“Okay,” Matty said quickly. Was that a touchy subject? Of course, Rusty’s parents were divorced. He looked around, hoping to find something to grab onto and eliminate the awkwardness that threatened to appear between them again. “So,” he said brightly, “how are we going to do this?” To appear a lot more nonchalant than he felt, he made a move to get rid of his shoulder bag but somehow ended up punching Rusty in the stomach, since they were standing too close to each other.

Rusty grunted and grabbed Matty’s bag. “Follow me,” he said like the master of a mansion and gestured for his guest to fall in step with him.

This time, Matty got the opportunity to watch Rusty climb the stairs in front of him. And Zoey kept saying that he shouldn’t be easy. Well, that was one tough promise to keep. Rusty’s sweatpants seemed thinner than usual, and Matty had serious doubts that the guy had any underwear on.

He moved a bit too fast and crashed into Rusty’s backside.

“I can see that you have the proper attitude,” Rusty commented, while Matty extricated himself from hugging Rusty’s ass with his face.

“Why did you stop so abruptly?” Matty asked.

“We’re on the landing,” Rusty said and added no other explanation.

Matty could tell his cheeks were on fire. He would be easy; everything else wouldn’t.

Chapter Nine

Doctor Rusty, At Your Service

The way Matty had just planted his cute face on his ass reminded Rusty of an old song, something about dancing cheek to cheek. He couldn't exactly recall the rest of the lyrics, but it didn't matter. Tonight, he would teach Matty all kinds of things and dancing cheek to cheek, in a completely different interpretation, of course, might be part of the syllabus.

But first, he needed to shake things up. So, as soon as they were inside his room, he put Matty's bag on a chair and then pushed down his sweatpants and gestured for Matty to follow his example. "Undress."

The cute face was a wall of wonder, and Matty's eyes had gone straight to the Mighty Thor. Rusty grinned and removed his pants completely, along with his socks, his toes very adept at doing everything concerning undressing. He knew for a fact that he could undress someone completely using only his toes. "Well, what are you waiting for? By the way, this is a crash course."

"Um, okay," Matty said quickly. He wasn't as awkward as usual as he began to take off his clothes.

Rusty examined him with interest. Yeah, totally, Matty had a nice body, harmonious and lean but with well-defined muscles, even if they weren't big. His guest stopped once he was completely naked save for his glasses and put his hands in front of himself.

"Hey, no cheating," Rusty warned. "What do you have to hide?"

Matty moved his hands behind his back, and now he had something of a submissive look about him as he bent his head and then moved it from side to side to look to Rusty for approval.

"Let's get rid of the glasses," he suggested and didn't let Matty do it himself, because Rusty liked him like that, with his hands at his back and looking vulnerable. He looked like a tasty marshmallow and Rusty wanted a bite.

They were close as Rusty took off Matty's glasses. "You smell nice," Rusty commented and sniffed Matty delicately along his right ear.

"I showered. A lot," Matty confessed.

Rusty could feel warmth coming from Matty's face like from the inside of an oven. Vulnerable, cute, embarrassed. Well, it wasn't every day that Rusty stumbled upon such a gem.

He could tell his cock was getting hard, but right now, he was supposed to be a professional, a tutor, a teacher of sex. Making the pupil uncomfortable with sudden erections wasn't supposed to happen. Therefore, he moved away while his mind went hard at work.

"We must test your reflexes first," he suggested. "Touch my ass."

Matty stared at him confused. "What kind of reflexes are we testing?"

"You know how doctors use that little hammer to test something in your legs?" Rusty asked.

"Uh-ha," Matty said in a strange, squeaky voice.

Rusty had his hand on Matty's wrist. "Your heart is beating a little fast. Why?"

"You're the doctor, you should tell me," Matty replied.

Rusty grinned. Who needed a party when he could play doctor with Matty? So, firm in his decision that he needed to play the doc, he placed Matty's hand on his ass and then looked down. "Your reflexes leave something to be desired."

"What, why?" Matty asked, visibly alarmed.

"No worries, it's nothing serious. What should happen goes like this." To make a point, Rusty put his hand on Matty's ass. His cock immediately sprang up. "See?" he pointed down.

Matty looked. "You're getting hard," he whispered. "You're hard! Because of me?"

"Yeah. The question is, why aren't you?" Rusty said. "Can I touch your cock? More tests are required."



Well, he had thought he needed to fight with all his strength not to get hard so that he didn't seem easy, but it looked like what he was doing was wrong. Feeling Rusty's firmly muscled ass in his hand had almost killed him on the spot, and only by calling upon himself the power of all the saddest memories in his life, which weren't that many, he had managed to keep his own dick down and on its best behavior.

"Rusty," he said alarmed, "can we take it slowly?"

"I thought this was slowly," Rusty said, a bit disconcerted. He moved his hand away before touching Matty's cock, and he looked disappointed. "All right, we'll take it slowly. Show me how flexible you are."

"Um, okay," Matty said slowly. "What do you need me to do?"

Rusty threw himself on the bed, hands behind his head, and looked at Matty with half-lidded eyes. “Show me how much you can bend. Can you touch your toes?”

All this silliness was welcome. Matty needed to get hold of himself and try to steer any thoughts inside his brain away from wanting to jump Rusty and ravish his sexy body. What exactly this ravishing would be, he didn't know, as things were hazy, but he could picture himself licking the king of Sunny Hill all over until his tongue was sore.

“Like this?” He bent from the waist and touched his toes effortlessly.

“No,” came the frustrated sigh. “Turn around.”

Matty bit his lower lip and turned. This was a sure way to expose his ass to Rusty, but he had said ‘yes’ to all that foolishness to begin with, so he couldn't complain. He turned and did the same thing, overly conscious of how his ass must look. Did it look okay? He hoped that it did. Was his asshole twitching or was it just his imagination?

“Move your legs farther apart,” Rusty commanded from his seat of power. “Lean forward more.”

Matty was now staring at his so-called teacher through his legs, everything upside down. Quite fitting. Nothing was normal about the interactions they shared.

“I think you might be an exhibitionist,” Rusty said.

“Why?” Matty continued to look at him through his legs.

“Because your nut sack got all wrinkly and I can see your stiffy.”

“Maybe I'm a little cold,” Matty mumbled.

“You're so unknowledgeable, I'm cringing. You don't get hard when you're cold, Matty. Your prick actually gets smaller. And there's nothing going on like that from what I see. Just look at it.”

Matty did. Yes, indeed, being exposed to Rusty in that weird fashion was giving him a hard-on.

“Try touching the tip of your cock with your tongue.”

“What? No way!”

“Touch it or I will make you,” Rusty threatened.

“You're bluffing,” Matty argued. “And I can't, anyway,” he added and made a show of sticking out his tongue and trying to touch his cock. He should close his eyes to save himself the embarrassment, but it had been his firm decision not to chicken out, no matter what.

“Hmm, I really thought you’d be able to self-suck,” Rusty said with some regret in his voice. “It’s all right, the good doctor has a bowl full of lollipops only for you.”

Matty straightened up as he was starting to feel light-headed, and he doubted that it was because of all the blood going to his head. When he turned, Rusty was on his feet again and waving a lollipop in front of him.

No, it wasn’t a lollipop. It was something shaped like a penis, about two fingers thick, and complete with a pair of round balls. “What is that?” he asked.

Rusty stared at the lollipop in confusion. “It’s a lollipop. You haven’t seen one before? Come on, lick it.” He began poking at Matty with his strange weapon.

“Where did you even get such a thing?”

“I tried getting Jonathan to make some special candy for me, but in the end, I had to order it online.”

“From some prank store?” Matty asked, still eyeing the lollipop warily and dodging Rusty’s attempts to stuff it into his mouth by moving his head around.

“It was a real store,” Rusty argued.

“It might have something disgusting in it,” Matty protested. “It’s a prank gift, I’m sure. It probably tastes like snot or something--”

His protests died on his lips when Rusty simply stuffed the lollipop in his own mouth and began sucking on it. Rusty removed it with a pop. “It’s strawberry. That’s the pink top. The rest is vanilla. Try it.”

Matty felt helpless as Rusty guided the lollipop to his mouth. The thing moved between his lips, and it was, indeed, sweet.

“Okay,” Rusty breathed out. “Show me.” The last words were whispered like a plea.

Matty stuck out his tongue and locked eyes with Rusty. He felt the lollipop being pushed into his mouth and he wrapped his tongue around it. A soft muffled moan escaped his lips.



As he had expected, Matty looked just perfect with a dick in his mouth. He had just the right kind of lips for it, and that look of soft abandonment in his pretty eyes would make any gay dude lose a load in an instant. “Dude,” he said, “the way you lick that thing, you get me in the mood for dick, too.”

Matty pulled back. “Really? We can share, you know.”

Rusty grinned and waved the lollipop. “You’re kinky. You make me want dick, you perv.”

Matty smiled, too. “What’s wrong with dick?”

Yes, yes, the awkwardness was slowly fading and that little demon was showing his true colors. “Nothing. If you’re into it.” Rusty stuffed the candy dick in his mouth and gestured for Matty to follow him to the bed.

They sat in a crouched position, face to face. Rusty had a clear view of Matty’s cock that now was all hard and proud. “The way I see it, you need to become comfortable around naked dudes.”

Matty leaned back and rested his palms on the bed. “I’m pretty comfortable around you.” His erection was resting on his lower abs, and it looked comfortable, indeed.

“Yes. That means that my plan is working like a charm.”

“What does doctor Rusty want me to do next?”

Rusty could swear Matty was low-key pulling his leg, now that his cock was hard and he felt much more at ease, even while being naked and showing that nice body shamelessly. That was a good student in his book, but Rusty was a bit dissatisfied. How much could he push Matty? How far?

So, armed with the candy, he touched the tip of Matty’s cock. The vulnerable, yet curious look, was back in the hazel eyes. Very cute. Rusty grinned. “Have you ever tasted it?”

“Sure,” Matty replied without asking what. He didn’t play the fool, but he was fighting to sound sure of himself. “What guy hasn’t?”

“You’d be surprised,” Rusty offered. “Are we talking quantities?”

“Quantities? What do you mean?”

“I don’t know, like a spoonful?”

Matty was obviously trying to understand what the catch was. “No, not really. Just a little taste now and then. That’s all.”

“Okay. But you know you’ll have to swallow, right?” Rusty asked matter-of-factly.

“Swallow,” Matty repeated after him and gulped visibly.

Eh, there were still ways to rattle that cage. But Matty was quick-witted and adaptable. Rusty liked that.

“Which means that you also need to find out what others’ taste like,” Rusty said promptly.

“Rusty, I’m not going to taste your--” Matty stopped and pouted without saying the dirty word.

“How did you know I’d suggest that? Anyways, you know what they say. Don’t get high on your own supply. Or you’ll become a raging narcissist. Do you want to become a raging narcissist, Matty?”

“Do you always use old movie quotes to fit whatever you want to say?”

“Irrelevant.”

Matty straightened up and moved closer. Rusty could smell strawberry on his breath. “If I taste yours, will you taste mine? Or don’t you mind becoming a raging narcissist? Oh, wait, you are one already.”

Rusty leaned closer. Matty didn’t back away. So, he kissed him quickly just for the shock value and got up from the bed. “Just one more thing, since we’re at the doctor’s office. You’re a complete virgin, and all’s well, but I’m a notorious fuck boy, so here it is.”

He handed Matty the results of his tests, which he took regularly, despite of how loose and wild everyone thought him to be. He had thought about that in advance since it had become clear in his mind that he didn’t mind going deep and wide, and in all directions, with Matty.

Matty looked at the papers confused. “I don’t have my glasses.”

Rusty grabbed them from the table and handed them to Matty. “Now, any other protests regarding our little taste test?”

Matty shook his head energetically and handed Rusty the papers back. “Wait, first we need to come, right?”

“We could watch some gay porn. I don’t mind,” Rusty offered, waiting for Matty’s next move.

“I wouldn’t subject you to that,” Matty said and grinned. “Plus, I thought that, as a doctor, you’d do everything for your patient.”



Clearly, he was out of his mind. He was talking like he knew how to do that, and he didn’t, and Rusty wasn’t stopping him. And how the hell had they jumped to cum-tasting, just like that? It was the weirdest slumber party he had ever been to in his entire life. Did he look okay, as he tried to pretend being seductive and all-knowing? Probably not. He was weird and awkward. So far, Rusty had done all those things to shock him, without a doubt, but how far were they going to go?

“Well, it is true that I’m your educator for the night,” Rusty admitted. “Does that mean that you will suck my cock?”

Matty swallowed hard. All right, it was the hand he had dealt himself, and there was no way out. “Yes.” That was a little squeal, not a confident agreement. Any moment now, Rusty would see through his act and laugh at him.

“Wow,” Rusty said, and he sounded like he honestly hadn’t expected that. “If you keep at it like that, soon I won’t have anything to teach you.”

“What should I do?” Matty gave up on looking at Rusty and took hold of the delicious cock in front of him. He hadn’t seen that many in real life, but Rusty’s seemed the most amazing he had ever seen. It made his mouth dry just to look at it, the pink head, the rest of it ribbed everywhere, and especially the small bead of precum pooling inside the slit.

Rusty was silent, unnerving him to no end. Matty eased his hold. Was he maybe too rough? Too demanding? He hadn’t even asked Rusty if he was okay with it. After all, what right did he have to ask a straight guy to do all these things with him? It was Rusty’s game, his crash course as he named it, and he should be the one setting the boundaries.

Slowly, as if he was about to defuse a bomb, he removed his hand, but Rusty caught his wrist. He lifted his head and his eyes met Rusty’s, now hooded and full of questions. Or he was just imagining things.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Rusty’s voice was a little hoarse. “Put your hand back on my cock.”

Matty obeyed without tearing his eyes away from Rusty. “I don’t think this counts as slowly anymore.”

“What are you worrying about?” The question was direct, simple, and genuine.

“You don’t do this with guys, right? I mean, it’s probably going to be hard for you to... you know.”

“Hard for me to...” Rusty waved with the lollipop he still had in his other hand.

“To keep it hard while I blow you because I’m a dude,” Matty recited quickly and took a deep breath.

“Well, that’s a thought,” Rusty commented and seemed to ponder over something.



Matty was completely off the mark. That wasn't the problem; the complete opposite was the problem. It had to be his lack of sexual activity lately, but Matty's firm grip on his cock had made his horniness shoot up like five hundred percent. If they kept it up like this, if Matty only moved a few times, Rusty would end up blowing a load that would tarnish his reputation for years and years to come. Therefore, since Matty was offering him a way out...

He wasn't going to take it. People sometimes called him stubborn, but when he got something in his mind, he did it all the way. That was his way. And offering Matty a crash course on boy on boy action had to include everything.

Well, maybe not in one session. Rusty stuffed the lollipop into his cheek and stared at Matty, considering his next move.

Much to his surprise, Matty's lips quirked into a grin.

"What's so funny, virgin boy?" Rusty asked him, slurring the words, as the candy was melting in his mouth.

"You look like a hamster preparing for winter."

"There's no such thing." Rusty took the lollipop out and gave it to Matty, who looked at it quite puzzled.

"What should I do with it?"

"Because you laughed at your teacher, I'd suggest you shove it up your butt, but sugary things never make good lube."

Matty's grin faded. His eyes were getting foggy. Was virgin boy getting hard over having a lollipop stuffed up his ass? He was a lot kinkier than Rusty had pegged him for. "Just put it on the table somewhere," he said with a small wave of the hand.

That gave him the chance to admire Matty in motion, climbing out of the bed and displaying his cute perky butt while walking across the room. Those baggy clothes he usually wore didn't do him justice at all. The guy needed to show his ass more. A lot more. Rusty licked his lips. He felt his teeth tingling and wanted to sink them into one of those round mounds to check it for firmness and ripeness.

Matty returned and sat on the bed again. His eyes were glued to the Mighty Thor, which meant that he was a man with a mission. All right, Rusty knew exactly what to do.

"Grab my cock like you did before." Rusty adjusted his position, tucking his legs under him and bringing his cock higher. The little break had served to make it cool down a little.

Matty dutifully obeyed. He had nice hands, Rusty noticed, a bit bony, but manly. One look at them and you would think that the guy knew what to do with his hands. “Let’s see, what do you know about blowjobs?”

Matty looked up at him, with those innocent cute eyes. “They must feel good.”

“Yeah, they do. Now, you’re the one about to give me head, so we need to put down some rules.”

Matty nodded like a good student, eager to learn.

Rusty continued. “I’ve never been the one to give one, but I know what feels good. Put your tongue on the head.”

Matty stuck out his tongue and planted it directly under the head. Rusty could swear his dick had forgotten who its master was. The boy in front of him was too adorable like that, and the Mighty Thor wanted more of him.

“Come here, let’s kiss a little,” Rusty suggested. His cock needed to fucking chill.

Matty removed his tongue reluctantly. “Why?”

“Because I need to keep my erection and kissing helps,” Rusty lied. He lied about very few things in life, but now his reputation was at stake. Not that he wouldn’t love to see Matty’s cute face all covered in his spunk, but if he did that too soon, he’d have to hide in the mountains and live a life of solitude, without internet and other fun things. So, all in all, it was for a good cause: keeping Rusty Parker away from a hermit’s life.

Matty’s lips tasted fucking great. Rusty rubbed his mouth against them, postponing the moment when their tongues would meet just for a little bit. He held Matty by the back of the head, pressing him firmly into their shared kiss. Matty didn’t seem to mind at all and held onto Rusty with one arm wrapped around his neck, his other hand unwilling to let go of the Mighty Thor.

“All right, you can go down on me again,” Rusty suggested.

Kissing didn’t exactly help. Small breaks in-between, more likely would. Matty didn’t wait for directions this time and wrapped his sweet mouth around the head. The little flicks of the tongue were to die for, and Rusty had to hum a mazurka to distract himself.

“Is the way I do it really boring ?” Matty asked.

“No, but let’s kiss a little more,” Rusty said.

“It’s quite melodic, the way you hum, though,” Matty said before their lips touched again.

Wasn't Matty supposed to have his mind full of cock at the moment? What was he doing, noticing all these little things?

Their kiss took longer, and Matty, conscious of what he was doing or not, began to move his hand on Rusty's cock, soon turning everything into slow delicious torture. Desperate times called for desperate measures. Rusty pulled Matty closer, in an attempt to make him let go of the cock in his hand, but somehow that only made matters worse because Matty fell on top of him, and their cocks touched and rubbed against each other, while Rusty's hand dropped directly on that nicely shaped ass.

Matty keened into the kiss, and Rusty experienced everything like a horrified bystander as his cock began to shoot only from that friction alone, something that he didn't recall ever happening to him, not even as a teenager discovering his body a bit too thoroughly...

Yet, it all felt so good, perfect even, as Matty pressed him down for lack of alternatives and the firm flesh of his cock pulsed and struggled like a trapped animal between them, and... was he coming, too? At least he had the excuse of being of virgin.

What was his excuse?

He groaned, closed his eyes, and let his head drop to the bed, which made Matty's mouth slide across his chin and then his throat, making him shiver from head to toes.

They remained like that for some time, both trying to control their breathing, both failing.

"We are so not going to talk about this," Rusty said.

Matty, as soft and pliant around him as he had been, turned stiff and moved away. His chest and belly were a mess. Rusty stared down at his body to see that he looked just the same. He gathered some on his finger and showed it to Matty. "We made a cocktail. Still counts, right? Wait, isn't cocktail a funny word? It's made from cock and tail... Why are you standing there, looking so shell-shocked?"

Matty's eyes were wide and troubled as he gawked at Rusty, who had his finger almost in his mouth. "We were tasting cum, right?" he pointed out, unclear about why Matty seemed so out of the loop, after being so kinky and fun only earlier.

Matty nodded. "Um, yeah."

Rusty's eyes narrowed. "Don't tell me you've never come in your life."

"What? Of course, I have!" Matty protested right away.

"Then what are you waiting for? Quick, before it gets cold," Rusty said. "Have a taste, or I'll declare this tutoring session a big fail."

Matty surprised him – for how many times already? – and climbed on the bed; the next moment, his tongue was on Rusty’s chest, tasting the cocktail directly from his skin.

Rusty shrugged. “Well, that works, too. Just don’t eat too much all at once. You might get ill.” He was babbling, blathering, palavering, or whatever, because Matty’s tongue was hot, wet, and naughty on his right pec, thoroughly licking their mixed jizz.

The words died on his lips, and he lay there, completely dazed, just watching Matty’s head move and feeling that kinky tongue all over.

“Wow, greedy,” he barely managed. “How is it?”

Matty raised his head, and his lips were glistening, appetizingly pink and good enough to eat. “It’s good,” he whispered. “Do you mind if I have a little more?”

Rusty’s cock twitched at that. “Wait, you need to leave some for me.” He pushed Matty away a few inches so that he could plant his mouth directly on the guy’s cleavage and suck a few drops from there. No way would a virgin outplay him like that.

Why was it so tasty? Was virgin cum better as a general rule or something? Matty was moaning softly, a bit panicky, while Rusty licked his chest.

All right, he so needed to stop, because he had no idea where all of this was going. Matty was way too pliant in his arms, and also too damn kinky, and Rusty felt like he was about to step where he had never stepped before, and stuff like that needed some serious preparation beforehand.

He let go of Matty and dropped to the bed again. “Just for the record, Matty, that was some crazy fun. But no word to anyone, okay?”

Matty nodded. “Of course, it stays between us. I suppose that what we did was pretty gay, and no one should know--”

Rusty pushed himself up on his elbows to stare at Matty. “It’s not about the gay thing.”

“It’s not?” Matty searched his face, probably for signs that he was lying or something. “What is it about, then? The cum-tasting thing?”

Rusty rolled his eyes. “You’re not from this world, are you? I’m talking about shooting in under ten seconds, dude.”

No student of his would leave the premises without understanding everything properly.

“I did it just as fast,” Matty argued.

“Yeah, but you’re the cherry boy. It comes with the territory,” Rusty pointed out. “It just doesn’t happen to me.”

“I think it was a lot longer than ten seconds,” Matty continued.

“From what point onward do we count? Since you stepped inside the room? Because, if it’s that, it’s a pretty good run.”

“Don’t cheat so much. Let’s say... since I sat on the bed with you.”

“Since I touched your ass,” Rusty haggled.

Matty groaned and plopped himself down on the bed, at Rusty’s feet. “Did you start a timer or something?”

“Hmm, not really.”

Matty sighed, but it sounded more like relief than anything else. As he sat there, his skin a bit damp, traces of jizz on his chest and abs, his head tilted back, his face all a smile, and his eyes half closed, Rusty had a sudden sensation that Matthew Han looked like he belonged there, in his room. Like they had been friends for a century or so, and he could say the stupidest things, and Matty wouldn’t laugh at him, but with him.

Maybe Maddox was right. He was making new friends.

“How would you rate my tutoring skills now?” Rusty asked, again donning his teacher’s coat.

Matty laughed lazily and turned his head to look at him. “Your cum tastes great, doctor Rusty.”

“Yours is not bad either. Or maybe, because they mixed into a cocktail, it was better?” Rusty asked, rubbing his chin in philosophical thought.

Matty snickered and dropped his head to one shoulder, eyeing him all knowingly.

“You’re a kinky virgin,” Rusty said and laughed, too.

“That’s not fair,” Matty protested but his lips were still stretched into a grin. “I’m only taking after my master.”

Rusty wiggled his eyebrows. “Master?”

Matty gasped and looked away, but he was laughing his ass off, the little demon. “Slip of the tongue, nothing else!”

“Yeah, yeah, sure. Should we try some BDSM next time?”

“No way. I’m squeamish when it comes to pain. I’m a total coward,” Matty declared, without turning his head to face his – possible – master.

“You’re not a coward,” Rusty argued. “And the first rule of doctor-slash-teacher Rusty is not to knock it until you try it. Come on, I thought you’d run out the door at the faintest mention of cum-tasting, and you practically licked me clean. You know what? That makes me kind of hungry. Let’s raid the kitchen.”



Matty was sure he would wake up from this very vivid dream at any moment now. The taste still lingering on his tongue said it wasn’t a dream, but he had no idea what was happening just yet. Was sex with Rusty always so carefree, so natural? No wonder half the campus wanted to end up in his bed, or have a repeat performance if that had already happened. Zoey was right. He had the privilege of going a lot further with his crush than he had ever dreamed of.

Remembering that he was crushing on Rusty made his heart squeeze for a moment.

“Hey, did you hear me?” Rusty asked and moved closer.

“I heard you. Maybe I should go, now that we concluded our lesson,” Matty struggled to get the words out, “and you might need your sleep.”

“Ah, no way,” Rusty said and began pulling at his arm to make him get up. “As your master, I command you to make me a sandwich.”

“You didn’t say anything about that,” Matty replied. “I thought it was all about sex with you, not making sandwiches.”

“We’re going to make sandwiches while naked, so it counts as at least sexy,” Rusty said promptly.

“We?” Matty stared at him through his curly eyelashes.

“We what?”

“We’re going to make sandwiches? You’re not going to force me to serve you?”

“It was just a slip of the tongue,” Rusty said brightly. “Come on, Matty, let’s go. And don’t be so fussy. You wouldn’t want to let me make sandwiches. I might cut myself. The knife might fall and end up stuck in my foot. Then the coach would take me off the team. After that, my wound would get infected and I would end up dying--”

Matty stopped him with a groan. “Oh, gawd, what kind of master are you? A whiny master? I’ll do it, don’t worry. But do you have everything you need in your fridge? I hope you won’t suggest going grocery shopping in the buff.”

“Not yet. And anyway, when that happens, we’ll grab some windbreakers, fedora hats, and sunglasses first. You know, to look the part.”

“What about shoes? We’ll go barefooted?” Matty duly asked.

“I’m a fan of crocs. Preferably pink.”

“Hmm, it might take away from the flasher immersion experience,” Matty offered.

“Not if you’re with me.”

Matty had to work hard to pretend he didn’t hear those simple words. He would give all his earthly possessions to be with Rusty, but even that wasn’t enough.

“I need some tissues and to clean myself up a little,” he said.

Rusty nodded thoughtfully and forced him up off the bed. Then he pushed him toward the door, touching his ass like it was the most natural thing in the world. Matty was starting to worry that kitchen accidents might involve certain hardened members and lack of blood in the head.

Rusty wrapped an arm around his shoulders as they walked out of the room. And, quickly, like before, he kissed Matty’s temple.

“Why do you keep kissing me like that?” Matty allowed the question to flow out of his mouth without thinking.

“Because you’re pretty,” Rusty said with a shrug. “And you’re just the kissing type.”

That made sense. Everything with Rusty made sense, from cum-tasting to making sandwiches wearing absolutely nothing.

Chapter Ten

Sorry Not Sorry

Why did it feel so exciting instead of embarrassing to stand naked by the kitchen counter and enjoy a simple sandwich? Matty couldn't help stealing glances at Rusty's cock that, as asleep as it was, still looked good enough to eat. His little inspections served a purpose, which was to collect as much information about the man and master of his dreams, such as how the hair down there was coarser and scratched lightly when Matty rubbed his cheek against it, or how that mighty V of muscles felt under his fingers, or—

"I am glad to see that you're making progress," Rusty commented while munching on his sandwich.

"What?" Matty was sure as hell he looked guilty.

"You're finally looking at me like a gay boy should."

You have no idea.

"How is that?"

"You know, like you're interested in more than just the Mighty Thor."

"The Mighty Thor? Is that what you call it?" Matty was happy to file that piece of information away.

"Yours doesn't have a name?" Rusty asked.

"No. I don't think I know anyone who names his penis."

"You obviously don't know a lot of people. And don't say penis. It's boring. Say 'cock'," Rusty challenged him with a smirk. "Come on, do it. You're way too shy. Sex between dudes is supposed to be more straightforward, you know? Like simple and direct."

Obviously, Rusty was quite good at that, even though he had a lot more experience fooling around with girls and not guys.

Since he kept silent while brooding over Rusty's many former lovers of the female persuasion, his host decided to explain it all for him. "You have too many hang-ups, Matty boy. It's a cock, not a penis, when we're not studying biology in high school. Wait, do you have a good relationship with your cock?"

"What exactly do you mean by that? I jerk off," Matty replied.

Rusty wiped his hands on a paper towel, having finished his sandwich and moved closer. "You will need to show your appreciation more. After all, it's your best friend, always there for you."

Matty munched on his lower lip. "Since it's attached to my body, I don't see how it's a choice for my... cock to get away from me."

"Have you ever measured it?" Rusty asked promptly.

Yes.

"Well--"

Rusty began to fondle him directly, making the words die on his lips. His entire being was focused on how that big rough hand felt on him. Obviously, its owner was quite adept at handling sensitive flesh, because Matty sensed it growing to full length and girth within seconds. He steadied himself by grabbing Rusty's shoulders. A look down was enough to make a gasp escape his lips. His cock was the happiest it had ever been, leaking already, while Rusty manipulated it with ease.

"What's your favorite position when you jerk off?" Rusty asked in a husky tone.

"Um, sitting on a chair or something?" Matty replied, unsure of the proper answer.

"So, you're jerking off at your computer, watching porn?" The interrogation continued, as did Rusty's hand.

"Sometimes," Matty whispered.

"Sometimes? Don't tell me you stare blankly at the wall while doing the deed."

"No, it's not like that. I just use my imagination."

"Hmm, interesting. What do you imagine? I hope it's not something boring, like holding hands with some dude."

Matty groaned and tipped his head back. That seemed to be an invitation for Rusty to move closer, change the way he stroked Matty's cock, and torture his charge even more.

His lips were close to Matty's ear, caressing it. "Come on, Matty, what do you jerk off to?"

"Priapic zombies?" Matty tried a new way out.

"I call bull on that." Rusty's voice was deep and husky, blowing hot air over Matty's skin.

"It's normal stuff," Matty said softly. It killed him how much he wanted to turn his head and kiss Rusty again. "Like doing it."

“Hmm,” Rusty purred into his ear. “Do you take it up the ass in these fantasies, Matty? Or are you top dog and make some sexy dude call out to whatever deity he’s fancying?”

“You think I’d be able to do that?” Matty asked, avoiding a reply, afraid that the truth might just fly out of his mouth like a savage bird.

“I can’t see why not. But first, I need to teach you how to be more in touch with the little friend you carry between your legs.”

“That’s one weird way of putting it.” Rusty had moved away already, and that made Matty just a smidge more articulate in expressing his ideas. “And is it little?”

Rusty stared at his cock shamelessly. “Nope. As I told you. With that kind of gun in your possession, you should be killing it on the hookup scene. Seriously, I’m not even gay, and my mouth waters when I look at your cock. I almost want to drop to my knees and suck it.”

Matty bit hard on his bottom lip as Rusty turned to lead the way back to the bedroom. That ‘almost’ thing did the killing, and the target was him. They were so close, and yet the little space that remained between them made all the difference.

It didn’t matter. He was doing a lot more with Rusty than he had ever thought would happen for real.



He hadn’t lied. To the point of becoming unsettling, he had gotten in the business of eyeing Matty’s cock from all possible angles, and that impulse to take it in his mouth and taste it fully was as real as they come. Supposedly, he had to be the selfless party in this endeavor, and it was getting a tad too difficult to keep that in mind. Since he had never had a cock in his mouth, if toys and candy didn’t count, the idea itself was a bit startling.

Therefore, while still turning the idea on all sides in his head, he grabbed Matty and pushed him toward the bed. “On all fours,” he ordered.

“Okay, master,” Matty muttered.

“Are you pouting?” Rusty asked. “Why?”

Matty assumed the position without being told twice and looked at him over his shoulder, as Rusty placed himself behind him. “I am totally not pouting.”

“You are. I could see that pout from space. Wait, do you want to be the master? We could play it either way, I don’t mind.”

“Maybe later,” Matty suggested and hid his face by turning his head.

“Give me one of your hands. The one you jerk off with.”

Matty hesitated.

“What? Do you jerk off with both hands?”

“I like variety, what can I say?”

“Awesome. Do you ever use a glove?”

“No, but it’s a good idea.”

Now, that was a thing to like about Matty. He was open to everything. Since the guy could use both his hands, Rusty just went for the left and brought it to Matty’s cock. “Hold it and start jerking off.”

“Just like that?”

“Yeah. Now, let’s see what you like the most.”

“Is there a reason why I have to be in this position?”

There was. Rusty wanted to stare at Matty’s ass from behind while he jerked off, too. During that time, Matty should be too busy browsing through the porn Rusty had selected for him to notice that he was being used as a visual stimulant for a handjob.

“You need to free your body of all inhibitions,” Rusty replied promptly. “Doing things differently once in a while can work wonders for your brain.”

“Thank you for your concern, then, doctor Rusty,” Matty replied.

What a smartass. Rusty looked at Matty’s round ass. Boy, he kind of wanted a piece of that. The guy had such nice skin, and he had a perky butt on him. Most probably, he would like to bottom at least half the time. Satisfied with that average, Rusty grabbed his phone and searched for the list he had put together for Matty. Just for the record, he must have seen enough gay porn to last him a lifetime, but whatever. New things to learn popped up everywhere.

He put the phone in front of Matty and hit play. “Whenever there’s something that really gets your groove on, just tell me. It’s important for research.”

“We’re really approaching this in an academic style. I must say I’m impressed,” Matty commented.

“I never do things by half.” Rusty smacked Matty’s ass playfully.

“Ouch!”

“Really? I barely touched you. Do you want me to kiss it to make it better?”

“Totally,” came the brazen reply.

Rusty didn’t mind and kissed the exact spot where his palm had landed. That made Matty release a soft moan. Boy, the dude could charm the pants off a super-straight dude with that kind of thing. He grabbed his own cock and stared directly at Matty’s round ass. Could they try a little butt plug? Maybe another time. Preferably, they would get one with a tail attached. A cat tail.

Hmm, worlds were colliding, but Rusty didn’t really mind. Maybe he could get Matty and the cat boy to make out in front of him. That would be the best kind of cat boy porn. He would tell them what to do, how to grope each other and kiss, and maybe have the cat boy fuck Matty in his gorgeous ass while his own tail was swinging around.

Matty seemed to be hard at work judging by the way his arm moved and his balls bounced to the rhythm. That meant that he could stare to his heart’s content, and no one would be the wiser.



He hadn’t meant to do it, but somehow, he had got out of the list of gay porn Rusty had curated for him. No, he had totally meant to do it. He felt guilty as hell, but he couldn’t stop himself. Rusty was to blame, inviting him into the privacy of his phone like that. His heart was beating out of his chest and, using his fingers fast, Matty went to the photo folder in his search for some real goodies.

“I can’t hear anything,” Rusty said. “Did you put it on mute?”

“Yeah. Noises are distracting sometimes,” Matty replied quickly.

Oh, fuck, he had just struck gold. Was this the usual nude set Rusty was sending to girls? No wonder they fell like flies. Rusty’s cute smirk was to die for, and of course, there was also that cock, hard and perfectly framed and in focus...

“Dude.”

Rusty’s voice right by his ear startled him so much that he fell on his side like a whale washed ashore. He was just as helpless as one.

“Why?” Rusty asked, looking confusedly at the phone.

Matty swallowed hard. That was a legitimate question. “I think I just—I mean... I’m sorry,” he mumbled quickly.

Rusty looked at him from above, puzzled. “Stop saying sorry all the time. Why would you jerk off to my pics instead of using the real me to get off? Oh, fuck, are you one of those dudes that are only into 2D husbandos?”

Matty closed his eyes. Rusty was amazingly intelligent, but his mind could run so many threads at the same time it was no wonder it sometimes returned some sort of scrambled output. “Yeah,” he said still keeping his eyes closed.

“Whatever floats your boat, my dude. You only need to tell me. Do you want me to send all these pics to your phone? I have a lot more.”

Matty opened one eye and stared at Rusty for signs that his leg was being pulled. Nope, no sign of that. “Yes, please,” he squeaked.

Rusty grinned at him. “See? It’s not so hard, is it?”

Matty grinned, too. Rusty was just too precious. “But it is,” he said and grabbed his cock, pointing it upward.

“Would you rather we jerk off together?”

“I’d like that, yeah. You can watch straight porn.”

“Hmm, nah, not in the mood for that. Let’s jerk each other off.” Rusty climbed on top of him, catching Matty’s legs between his thighs. “Come on, your hand on my cock, my hand on yours. What do you say?”

“Perfect,” Matty said and grabbed both cocks, forcing them to align.

“Dude,” Rusty said with a grin.

This time, Matty seemed to have forgotten to apologize judging by the confident smirk on his face. “Sorry...” – ah, damn, was it that hard to learn? – “not sorry.”



Pushy wasn’t a word to describe him, usually, but with Rusty around he felt bold and daring. He was holding both their cocks between his hands, and while there were differences to consider, his own light-skinned and thinner, Rusty’s darker and veiny, they fit together perfectly. “Is it good like this?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” Rusty confirmed, his eyes a little dazed. “Just go a little slower.”

“Okay,” Matty agreed and moved his hands at a more moderate pace. “Would you like to kiss?” he ventured to ask. “To keep your erection and all that?”

“I don’t think there’s any need for that,” Rusty said matter-of-factly.

Matty suppressed his disappointment. What was with him and all this thirst? There was no end to it, obviously.

“I need to guide you,” Rusty said. “For instance, you can be a little rougher, squeeze a little harder.”

Matty nodded in agreement as Rusty put his hands over his. Now, they were working together.

“Can you feel the difference?”

He didn’t know what to say, because he was trapped between the sensation of stroking his cock while rubbing it against Rusty’s, and the feeling of warm hands cupping his in a gentle yet firm touch.

“I can,” he whispered. He began to squirm as the sensation grew in intensity, while Rusty increased the pace. “Oh, gawd, oh, fuck, Rusty,” he breathed out while their eyes locked.

He was supposed to close them, not look at his sex tutor or whatever Rusty assumed his role to be, but he just couldn’t help staring. Rusty’s eyes were so beautiful, a bit dazed and hooded, filled with pleasure. His cock started shooting, fat long ropes that ended up as high as his chin.

“You came first, nerd,” Rusty said victoriously.

Matty didn’t have it in him to protest anymore. His hands stopped rubbing, but Rusty held them in place, allowing only his satisfied cock to escape. Yeah, Rusty was basically using his hands to jerk off, and Matty didn’t mind it. He stared at the target of all his horniness and affection, his eyes half-closed, while breathing hard. “Can I help?” he asked, his eyes glued helplessly to Rusty’s intense green gaze. “Should I do anything?”

“Say something kinky,” Rusty challenged him and continued to stroke his cock faster and faster. Matty felt like a toy, as his hands swung up and down, guided as they were by the other boy.

Something kinky? What would be kinky enough for someone as experienced as Rusty? He bit on his bottom lip. “Come all over me, Rusty, please.” The harsh inhalation of breath from his partner convinced him to become bolder. “Yes, fuck, bathe me in your cum, spray it all over my face, and in my mouth--”

Rusty was one to take things at face value because he moved forward, dragging Matty’s hands with him. The reason Matty’s kinky speech was cut short was simple; Rusty was already coming, and Matty closed his eyes in the nick of time and felt the warm drops all over his face and on his lips from which he greedily captured them with his tongue.

“Fuck, that is sexy,” Rusty groaned his own delight from above.

Matty wanted to rub Rusty's jizz all over his skin and have all the fun he could have with it. Rusty finally let go of his hands, and Matty continued to keep his eyes closed, eager to maintain the illusion for a little while longer. The short playful kiss on his nose lasted but a second. The next, Rusty dropped to the bed by his side, while letting out a long groan of satisfaction. "You are so going to drive a bunch of gay boys crazy."

Matty's illusion shattered. "You sure?"

"Yeah. I mean, look how much you made me come. You're fucking sexy, and I mean it. I know what I'm talking about."

"Really? Do sexy guys often land in your bed for lessons in sex?" Matty teased, burying his disappointment deep. How many times did he need to tell himself to face the truth? Apparently, countless times.

"You're the first," Rusty replied with a chuckle. "So, how did you like the lesson? But first, let me get you a tissue to wipe your face."

"No need for now. It's better than face cream," Matty said quickly and began rubbing Rusty's cum into his skin.

"I gotta give it to you, man. For a virgin, you're pretty kinky. Now, rate my lesson, please."

"On a scale from one to ten?" Matty asked.

"Yeah, let's use that."

"A hundred."

"You're just saying that," Rusty drawled and bumped his shoulder playfully. "But thanks. You're a good teacher, too."

"Glad to be of help." Matty wondered if this was the right time for him to remember that he needed to get dressed and leave.

"How about we try some butt plugs next time?" Rusty suggested.

"For you or for me?" Matty turned and supported himself on one elbow to look at Rusty.

Rusty's grin broadened. "Are you curious about my butt, Matty boy?"

"Why wouldn't I be? It's a very nice ass."

Rusty made a face like he had just licked a slice of lemon. "Nice? That is all you have to say about my glorious behind?"

"Glorious behind, really?" Matty teased.

“Don’t tell me you’ve seen better.” Rusty climbed out of the bed, turned his back to Matty and pulled his ass cheeks apart. “Now, go ahead, critique some more.”

“Um,” Matty managed and gulped. “You’re right.” The sight of that tight, puckered hole was enough to leave him breathless. The idea that he actually had a precise picture of how the thing looked to store in his mind for future pleasures left him speechless.

Rusty turned with a huff. He crossed his arms and looked down at Matty. “You don’t like my asshole,” he decided and pouted.

Matty rolled his eyes. “For fuck’s sake, Rusty. Your asshole just left me without words.”

Rusty smiled, a lot more satisfied with that reaction. “Good. So, just to be clear, you’d like to put your cock in an ass, right?”

“This is still about deciding whether I’m going to be a top or a bottom?”

“Or both,” Rusty reminded him.

“Well, the asshole test we just did,” Matty said cautiously, “is pretty conclusive. I’d like to fuck, too. But I also want to get fucked. Pleased, sensei?”

“Thoroughly pleased,” Rusty confirmed. “You’re going to sleep here, right?”

Matty considered for a moment. “If it’s not too much trouble.”

Rusty groaned. “Listen to him. He just stared at my asshole and now he’s back to being annoyingly polite.”

“Rusty, have you ever had a guy sleeping with you in the same bed?” Matty asked.

Rusty didn’t reply right away. “Yeah, I did,” he eventually said, but the words were shot out like bullets from the barrel of a gun. “But it wasn’t like this.”

Rusty’s clipped manner could only make him wonder. “Was it the same guy all those times?”

“Yeah,” Rusty confirmed. “No more questions. Let’s get to sleep. Goodnight.”

To show that he was serious about it, Rusty turned off the light and hopped in bed by Matty’s side, pulling a blanket over them both.

“Are we going to sleep naked?” Matty asked tentatively.

“I said goodnight,” came Rusty’s reply.

Well, he wouldn’t ask anything else, then. How was he going to sleep, inches away from Rusty, both of them naked? Matty yawned. Maybe he could think of sheep.

One...



Matty's soft snoring was pretty cute and not that loud, so it wasn't the thing keeping him awake. Rusty linked his hands on top of the blanket and stared at the ceiling, although there wasn't that much to see in the dark. Not that he was interested in counting cracks in the ceiling anyway.

Why had those memories rushed to his mind? They were messy and came from a place that wasn't that happy. That, along with the annoying thought that his dad would attend his next game, made it impossible for him to fall asleep.

The night had been fun so far. Why ruin it with things like that? Too bad he didn't have an off switch when it came to those shitty times. He and his mom had moved after his dad left for good, about two years after. His mom's shrink, or whatever that guy was, had suggested that she should move elsewhere, to get rid of all the little things triggering her melancholies. For her, the change hadn't proven that helpful. But for him, it had, and that was the thing he should be focusing on.

At first, it hadn't been that easy. The last thing he had thought he needed was to be uprooted from the only place he had known as home to go to some small suburb where everyone knew everyone and he was a stranger.

That lasted for about two weeks, because then he had met Maddox. It was still summer break, right before starting school, and Maddox had started talking to him out of the blue, while Rusty was struggling with shooting hoops at the local sports center that was open to everyone, even those with no money.

Until Maddox, Rusty hadn't imagined that people could strike up conversations so naturally, not even if they were kids. Here came this dude, shorter than him, but full of energy, who had somehow pulled him in, talking about everything, from school and teachers, to girls and TV shows.

His mom never managed to get rid of her melancholies, despite the change of location. She continued to spend many hours of the day just staring at nothing and ignoring him, surely not on purpose, something that soon, he discovered, suited him just fine. The evenings were the hardest, because she often forgot about dinner, and Rusty hadn't yet found the right budget for administering his pocket money in such a way that he had enough for both snacks and small childish delights to last him throughout the entire day.

So, when Maddox asked him if he wanted to come over for dinner and then reading comics under a blanket with a flashlight when they were supposed to be asleep, he had had just one answer to give. Did his mom mind if he slept over? No, she was totally cool. Did he need to call her? Yes. So he pretended to be on the phone and beg a little, just to make it more credible.

Maddox's mom had looked at him with her keen eyes and later, filled up his plate with seconds without even asking him if he wanted more.

Had he been sad during those times? A little. When his mom told him they would move away, he had felt a sort of desperation. What if his dad decided that it was too long a ride to come see him, now that they moved away? She wasn't thinking about such things, was she? She wasn't on speaking terms with his dad, but Rusty was, on the rare occasions he visited. He was busy, caught up in his new job and new family, but he still made time now and then to come and see Rusty. And she wanted to take that away from him.

For that, he had hated her for a while. Although he never dwelled on such thoughts for long. She had her own problems, and he needed to be understanding. Being all that was hard on most days, but not so much after he met Maddox. Sleeping over had to happen at long enough intervals so that Maddox's mom didn't start suspecting that he was a freeloader at their house. Good thing Maddox was the youngest of the seven siblings, and most of them were either in college or had their own homes. Except for Al, who was just two years older, the house got busy only during some days. And Al was uber cool, so artsy and wearing the wackiest clothes Rusty had ever seen, even though he came from a big city. She covered for their sleeping late by knocking on the wall to let them know Flo was running her rounds of checking on the kids.

He had no reason to think of those times as sad times. A little muddy, yes, but they were mostly happy.

He turned his head to look at Matty's back, his eyes now adjusted to the dark and the outside lights bright enough for him to make out shapes. The guy was soundly asleep, without a care in the world. Yeah, this sleeping together was completely different because he had never done such crazy things with Maddox when sleeping over at his house. Fun yes, but not this type of fun.

The blanket had slid down, showing the dip of Matty's waist, right above that awesome ass. He was one fine-looking dude. And he seemed very much in touch with his sexuality, by how free and wild he had behaved around Rusty, albeit shy and reluctant on occasion. So, that begged the question. Why still a virgin? Why no boyfriend?

One reason Rusty could think of was that Matty was being incredibly pretentious when it came to guys. Maybe he wanted the equivalent of a fairytale prince or something like that. Hmm, he would need to have a conversation with him about that. What was his type? Did Matty have a type or was he still working on it?

The second reason had everything to do with how bookish the guy was. He always had his nose in a textbook, or those weird fantasies he was reading. Of course, that led to a very sexless life, and while Rusty liked reading, real life had many things to offer, one of them being booty.

He stole another look at Matty's backside. Yeah, they should try playing with that booty the next chance they got. With an ass like that, it would be a total bummer if Matty ended up deciding only to use his gluteus maximus for being on top and smashing some booty himself.

That also meant that Rusty needed to brush up on his knowledge of anal sex. It should keep him occupied for a decent amount of time and stop him from thinking ugly thoughts.

Everyone knew him as the happy dude who never gave a shit. The truth was he did, sometimes a bit too much, to the point of becoming bothered by it. It was better to cover all that with a thick blanket of dead leaves or something equally poetic.

Would people think that this happy self of his was a fraud if they knew what lurked right under the surface? Or would they just think he was playacting if he ever showed a miniscule amount of the pain that cornered him at times? It was even hard for him to tell the difference. It was much easier to present the world with the image they were accustomed to.

And that world included his dad, too. To some extent.



Matty woke up slowly, not wanting to let go of his dream. It was a pretty funny dream, in which he and Rusty were having a picnic, and Rusty was playing with the food, sticking his cock between two slices of bread and calling it a meat sandwich. Matty was about to take a bite when something from the real world made the dream disintegrate and he had no chance but to give up and let go.

“Hey, dude,” Rusty’s voice cut through the fog.

Matty opened his eyes. “Is it morning already?”

“It’s been like for hours.” Rusty stared at him, amused, with a large grin on his face.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“I barely got up myself. You were pulling at my dick, claiming it was your meat sandwich.”

“I totally didn’t.” Matty looked down and his hand was, indeed, on Rusty’s cock. He pulled his hand away.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Rusty protested. “It was getting good.”

“Then why did you wake me up?”

“Legit question. You were mumbling about wanting to take a bite, and I didn’t want to risk it. Fair enough?”

Matty nodded. "Fair. I should get going."

"Do you have to?" There was something hopeful in the way Rusty asked that.

"I've already taken all your night. Don't tell me you want to study on Sunday."

"Life's not only about studying, Matty boy."

"Maybe you want to spend your Sunday with your friends," Matty suggested.

"Maddox and Jonathan won't come back until tonight. Kane and Dex are probably nursing a hangover the size of two continents. When they're like that, their intelligence drops to two, and the only way to communicate with them is by grunting and pointing. If I were hungover, too, I'd understand them, but right now, they're like a foreign civilization which I don't want to disturb."

"Should we hang out, then? I should buy you breakfast."

"It's usually dinner and sex, Matty, but I'll take it."

"Later in the afternoon I have to meet up with Zoey." She was probably firing messages at his phone right now, but he didn't want to check. "But I'm free until then."

"Sounds like a plan. Zoey, who's not your girlfriend, right?"

"Yeah." Matty was unclear why Rusty needed extra clarification for that particular detail.

"You're mine until you meet her, then."

Just the way Rusty threw such casual words around was enough to make his heart jolt and bounce with joy. He needed to act cool enough so that Rusty didn't suspect a thing. "Okay."

"Super-duper," Rusty declared and climbed out of the bed, sliding over Matty and touching him with his cock in the process.

Matty grunted and closed his eyes. His thirst for Rusty would never end.

Chapter Eleven

Do You Ever Dream of Cat Boys?

Matty played with the straw by pushing it to hit the bottom of his glass and watching it being pushed back by the laws of physics.

“It looks to me like you’re developing a little bit of an obsession,” Rusty said, stopping his mind from wandering.

“What obsession?”

Rusty grinned. “It’s a bit loose, but I think it’s about penetration.” He pointed at Matty’s glass. “We’ll get to that in our lessons.”

Talking about penetration over breakfast at a fast-food place near campus seemed an unlikely way to begin the day, but there they were, and Matty couldn’t say that he was surprised. With Rusty, everything was new, fun, exciting, and by laws of nature yet to be discovered, naturally surprising.

“So,” Rusty continued without waiting for a reaction from him, and taking a large bite out of his hamburger, “what’s your type?”

“My type?” Matty dallied. He needed to tread carefully. If Rusty began guessing that Matty was crushing on him, all bets would be off, for sure. That would make things awkward between them. Therefore, he needed to play it cool but without appearing like a pathological liar. “I’m flexible, I think.”

“Hmm.” Rusty examined him with his intense green eyes.

Matty licked his lips and looked away, and then sipped at his soda, pretending that everything was normal. Yeah, right. He had spent the night in the guy’s bed. The temptation to shout his victory from the top of his lungs was high, but the logical part of his brain took over. “What’s the ‘hmm’ for?”

“You’re flexible, and yet, not one guy has ever been good enough for you. Are you like one of those chicks with a list?” Rusty asked.

Yes, if the list said, tall, blond, kinky, and his name was Rusty Parker. Of course, Matty needed at least a couple of pages to list everything he liked about Rusty, but in a nutshell, that was it. “What kind of list?” he dallied again.

“You know, no older than twenty-seven, playing the piano like Liszt, seven feet tall, in possession of a chauffeur and an army of help, battle scars from his stint in a third world country

where he saved a bunch of kids from hunger while learning another – the seventh – foreign language... do you need me to continue?"

"I don't have a list like that," Matty said.

Rusty continued to examine him with narrowed eyes.

"What? I don't," Matty insisted.

"You're not getting away," Rusty warned him. "We'll do a short quiz. But you'll have to answer without thinking. If you take too long, I'll discard the answer."

"What if I say 'no'?"

"We'll be here all day," Rusty threatened.

"Fine." Matty sighed. "Go ahead."

"Hair color?" Rusty began immediately.

"Blond." Matty wanted to bite his tongue.

"Eye color?"

"Green." Fuck, he needed to think ahead if he wanted to fool Rusty. If he asked about height, he'd say average.

"Top or bottom?" Rusty wasn't playing by the rules.

"Both."

"Excellent answer. Momma's boy or the apple of daddy's eye?"

"Just eye candy is enough."

"Smartass," Rusty said under his breath. "Do you ever dream of cat boys?"

"What?" That was a question he hadn't expected.

"I'll take that as a 'no'," Rusty said and seemed slightly disappointed.

"I like cats," Matty offered, although he felt like the moment was lost.

"How would you feel," Rusty said slowly, his eyes on Matty as if he wanted to hypnotize him, "about wearing a cat's tail?"

Matty swallowed hard. "How would I do that?"

“You know.” Rusty leaned back in his seat. “Sex shops carry this stuff. Fluffy tails attached to butt plugs. I think they’d look good on you.”

“I don’t know,” Matty murmured and searched for help in his soda glass once more.

“It’s all right. How would you feel about making out with a cat boy?”

“You mean, someone who cosplays?” Matty asked cautiously.

“Yeah. Some pretty guy, not some alley cat,” Rusty assured him.

Matty had a distinct feeling that he knew what kind of cat he liked best, as he looked into Rusty’s mischievous green eyes. “I think I’d take the alley cat any day,” he said in a heartbeat.

That earned him a surprised, yet pleased look from Rusty. “You don’t mind getting down and dirty, do you, Matty?”

With you, any moment of the day or night.

“Why haven’t you hooked up with anyone?” Rusty continued his string of questions.

“I like the boyfriend type of thing better,” Matty replied promptly.

Rusty grinned, as if he was pleased by that answer. “So, why no boyfriend?”

Matty frowned, trying to form a reply that didn’t say *Because I’ve been crushing on you since freshman year*. “I guess the right person hasn’t come along or something.”

“A-ha,” Rusty said and pointed his paper napkin at Matty. “You do have a list. That’s why no guy is good enough. There’s no such thing as the perfect guy, I’m telling you. If you meet someone who seems perfect, something must be wrong with him. Something you can’t tell at first.”

“Like what?”

“Like, his feet smell bad,” Rusty replied immediately. “Or he doubles at night as a stripper and can’t get it up, unless you stuff his skimpy underwear with one-dollar bills.”

“Kind of a cheap stripper, but okay,” Matty admitted the argument. “Wait, did you meet guys like that?”

“I’ve never looked for a guy,” Rusty said with a shrug. “But if I had, I bet I would’ve found some strippers.”

“Loving your confidence,” Matty said tersely. “Why cat boys?” he decided to ask a question of his own.

Rusty pursed his lips for a moment, but then he smiled. “Do you read Xpress?”

“Sometimes. When it’s about Rusty Parker being into cat boys.” That was a bit of a lie. Zoey was the one busy keeping him updated on everything the gossip rag had to say about Rusty.

“Well,” Rusty began while stretching and putting his hands behind his head, “how much time do you have?”

Matty grinned. Rusty always liked a challenge, so he rose to the occasion. “Until I finish these fries.” To show that he meant business, he grabbed one and dipped it in ketchup.

“Well, for starters, they don’t mind showing everything,” Rusty said.

Matty grabbed two fries and stuffed them in his mouth.

“I mean, you’ve seen how tight those costumes are? They need the perfect body for that kind of thing. And, it’s like they’re basically sex on legs, I mean paws, but because they need to behave like cats, they have to pretend that they don’t want it.”

“Want what?” Matty stuffed his face with more fries.

Rusty leaned over the table. “They’re dudes,” he whispered, “and they want to be petted on the butt.”

“Just like gay guys,” Matty pointed out.

“Nah, nah, you’re missing the point. Boy, you have an appetite. Slow down.”

“Right.” Matty didn’t know whether to grab all the fries and gobble them down, or to endure hearing all about cat boys and why Rusty liked them. The chances were that he wasn’t any of that, at all.

“What they want is hidden,” Rusty continued to explain. “But it’s also on display.”

“Very confusing.” Matty eyed the last two fries. “How’s that attractive?”

Rusty grinned again. “You can make them admit it. You can grab them by the tail, smother them in your arms,” he illustrated his point by hugging himself, “and then, at one point, they sigh, and they realize that they cannot escape. And that they actually like it a lot. And then, they look at you, like, ‘don’t stop petting me or I’ll scratch your face’. Do you get it now?”

“Wouldn’t be easier to get a cat?” Matty suggested, down to the last fry now.

Rusty waved. “Nope. I want a life-size one. I want to pet him and smother him and pull at his tail to annoy him. It just makes things interesting. You can finish that now.”

Matty took the fried slice of potato and looked at it. “Nah. I want to hear more about cat boys.”

Rusty surprised him by snatching the fry from his fingers with his mouth. Then, he leaned back and chewed, pleased with himself.

“Are you going to come to the game next Saturday?” Rusty asked, changing tack.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Matty said. “Hey, you know there’s a live one around here, right? A cat boy?”

Rusty seemed pensive, while Matty waited with bated breath. “So they say,” he eventually replied.

Matty didn’t know what to make of that. Why wasn’t Rusty bragging about meeting the cat boy? And that would have been his chance to learn what Rusty really thought of Slicky Coolplums. Although, again, maybe not. Rusty didn’t let on more than he wanted to.

Right now, he wasn’t being honest, and Matty felt disappointed for some reason.

“Done?” Rusty asked. “Thanks for the food, man. And don’t forget about the game.”

“We’re going to see each other before then. You can remind me again,” Matty joked.

Rusty shook his head. “We’ll have to skip our Friday thing.”

“Yeah, of course. The game is more important.”

“It’s not that,” Rusty said, but then looked away as if he regretted saying too much. “See you then, Matty. Don’t let me down,” he added in a playful tone.

Matty just nodded. Why did it feel like Rusty had cracked open a window, only to slam the door in his face? Maybe it was just his imagination. He was overthinking each and every one of Rusty’s actions and words. And that wasn’t healthy.



The annoying part of having his dad attend the game on Saturday wasn’t his mere presence, although that was on the list, too. It was everything that came with it, his dad’s insistence, his own resistance to whatever the man wanted for him, but without telling it to his face.

Everything was a barter between them. Do you want that new shiny toy, son? Shoot that ball. Do you want me to visit more often? Shoot that ball and be a man. Do you want me to tell you that I love you? Nah, the thought didn’t even cross his dad’s mind, ever. Rusty doubted Roy Parker really loved anyone, in the sense that he had seen other people doing it. Everything was a strategy with him. He had married Rusty’s mom young, and he had considered that a mistake for a long time. Rusty didn’t dare to go as far as to ask if he was included in that mistake, because he feared that he knew the answer. Going for validation of that guess wasn’t at the top of his list.

His dad had a new family because the woman lived where he worked now, and he needed someone to take care of the house. Someone to have other kids with, because perpetuating his genes had to be somewhere on a list. Rusty had two younger half-siblings he rarely saw, a nine-year-old boy and a seven-year-old girl. He didn't need to be that good at math to know when the boy must have been conceived. A little before his mom and dad had divorced. That said a lot about Roy Parker and his penchant for solid planning. Since it was so important for him to come home after work to a warm home-cooked meal and a woman who didn't have any other purpose in life but to serve him, he had made sure to replace Rusty's mom with someone who fit the bill a lot better.

Words muttered under his breath had said a lot about what Roy Parker thought about his first wife. That hadn't been a well-planned choice. Sharon was a fragile soul – his words when he was nice – too inclined toward self-inspection to be practical. Therefore, they were a bad match and had been so from the start.

Rusty shook his head. He was letting his dad get to him without even being present, and that sucked. Even late in his teenage years he had hoped that his dad would come back and admit to having made a mistake. And that he would also assume responsibility for Rusty's mom's melancholies instead of leaving his son to deal with them.

He had dealt with them, in his own way. His mom loved his voice. Sometimes it worked to get her out of her funks, but not always. It was a thankless job, not because she didn't appreciate his singing, but because she always told him not to disappoint his dad. The unspoken words: the way she had done.

That was it. He needed to get into game week mindset. That meant, regretfully, abandoning any thoughts of fooling around with Matty and Slicky Coolplums, the two very bright highlights of his life at the moment. They represented everything his dad hated or, at least, what Rusty was doing with them: superfluous, strange, and - what was another nice word his dad often used? – indecent.

When he had told him over the phone during the summer that he couldn't come visit because he was working as a stagehand alongside Maddox and Jonathan, that conversation had been a weird one. His dad didn't know who Jonathan was. So Rusty had just said the words 'Maddox's boyfriend, soon to be fiancé', just to get a rise out of him. *Always thought that boy was a queer one.* That had been directed at Maddox. No, his dad hadn't always thought that. On the contrary, he had kept on using Maddox as an example of what it meant to be a man, along with Dex and Kane, because he expected Rusty to develop what he called a healthy competitive spirit, directed against his closest friends.

At least his dad had refrained from telling him to ditch Maddox as a friend. At least he understood Rusty was no longer a boy he could impress with one hard, cold stare or a hurtful word.

Senior year would end, eventually. After that, Rusty was free of his deal with his dad. Roy Parker had asked his son to finish damn college, and that was what he would do. There were no outstanding contracts to consider afterward.

Rusty closed his eyes as he threw himself on the bed. It was a lot more pleasant to think of Matty and his pretty lips. Or about Slicky Coolplums and his tail. Ah, damn, he had to restructure some of his fantasies. While his cock still twitched at the thought of having the two play with each other, just earlier, he had had a revelation: he felt rather possessive of both. Who was to say that he wouldn't get jealous if he had both of them in the same bed?

Wait, the answer was simple. It had been revealed by that weird dream from after just having met Matty in the cafeteria, right? He could be the meat in that sexy tutor and cat boy sandwich. Both of them would go for the Mighty Thor, while Rusty could just chill and enjoy the treatment.

What if they got jealous? He didn't expect it from Matty since he was an uber-cool guy who was only interested in studying; threesomes had to be brought up as a topic to examine during their lessons. However, the cat boy was a different matter. He might just get very jealous of Matty, regardless of having no reason to do that.

Ah, damn, he needed to think things through. Maybe that could be his prize after the game on Saturday, to have those two together, with him between them. It might not happen right away, because he needed to catch the cat boy first, but it was a cool idea to toy with. Would Matty be able to tame the little beast? Rusty liked to think that his sexy tutor had it in him.

But first, he needed to focus on the game and the game only, and boy, that was boring.

He sighed and got up. Ah, but he knew how to make it more interesting. Quickly, he fired out a message to the guys on the team. If they played just for fun at least once, they'd endure game week a lot better.



“So, you remembered,” Zoey said the moment he answered his phone.

“Remembered what?”

“That you have a bestie, obviously,” Zoey pointed out. “Who’s just dying to find out all the details. Spit it out. Did you two do it?”

“Zoey, you know it’s not like that. And it would be way too gay of him to jump to that, don’t you think? He just gave me some, you know, instructions on how to handle guys and such.” Matty was sure he was blushing, even though he was completely alone.

“Ah, I see how it is,” Zoey said, sounding as sly as a fox that wanted to be caught.

“How is it?” Matty asked, against his better judgement.

“You can’t talk about it, which only means one thing.”

“Which is? Are you going to make me extract each word from you?”

“It’s a little punishment for not telling me everything, but I get it, Matty. It must have been really intense. You two must have crossed lines that have never been crossed before--”

“Dream on,” Matty interrupted her.

“It was good, Matty, am I right or am I right?”

“Okay, you’re right.” Matty sighed and dropped on the bed. “It was good. Or even more than good. I can’t describe it.”

“I totally get you, my friend. Now, are you ready for us to go watch some basketball practice?”

“What basketball practice? It’s Sunday.”

“And yet, the guys are practicing with some friendly sparring or something.”

“What guys? Do you mean, our guys?”

“Word has it that Rusty convoked an emergency meeting to think up their strategy.”

Matty didn’t say a word for a moment. Rusty hadn’t mentioned that. Not that he had to, since he was free to do what he wanted, but it just felt like, between friends, it should have come up. Maybe they weren’t friends. How had he even gotten that idea?

“How do you know about it?”

“It’s all over Xpress. All the chicks on campus are there, ready to show their tits to the king.”

“Good for them,” Matty said dryly. “And him.”

“What’s with the sour tone, buddy?” Zoey asked.

“I’m not sour,” Matty protested.

“You know that’s what you’re going against. Tits.”

“You really like that word, don’t you, Zoey? For the record, I’m completely flat in that area, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

“Not entirely flat,” Zoey insisted. “You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Thanks for the pep talk, but what do you want me to do? Go there and flash my naked chest? People are going to think I’m mental.”

“Well, I’m sure Rusty would appreciate it.”

“Weren’t we supposed to hang out and do stuff that is not Rusty-related?”

“What could be more fun than watching a bunch of sexy dudes sweating it out while passing a ball between them?”

“So, this is more for you than me,” Matty concluded.

“As long as you’re coming, it sounds good to me. Let’s go.”

“Rusty is going to think it strange that I’m following him everywhere, don’t you think?”

“Everyone is going to be there. We’ll get lost in the crowd.”

Matty had to admit that he felt tempted. The more time he spent with Rusty, the more he wanted to be around him. Not that it was healthy, but otherwise, he lived a pretty healthy life, so he was allowed one vice. “Okay. But we’re not going to make ourselves noticed or anything like that.”

“Okay. I get it. I concur with your strategy. You need to seem uninterested.”

That boat had sailed a long time ago, but there was no reasoning with Zoey. “Yeah, totally,” he agreed.



Half an hour later, he was hiding in the last row, a baseball cap on his head, and wearing too many clothes. He felt guilty for acting like a stalker, but he couldn’t help it. Rusty probably needed a break from all that gay stuff they were doing together. Seeing how electrified the audience was, especially the female part, the king of Sunny Hill would get all the attention he needed from the fairer sex, which he had notoriously neglected lately.

So many times before, he had been in the same situation, watching Rusty on the court, so fast, so precise, like a machine made to score. This informal practice was looser, he could tell. Rusty and the others were clearly having fun, and that made their play all the more entertaining. One guy from the team hugged Rusty tightly and patted his butt briefly after another perfect shot.

“It looks to me like you have to worry about the guys as much as about the gals,” Zoey whispered.

“That’s just camaraderie, Zoey,” Matty protested.

He would have liked this portion of Rusty without jealousy as a side dish, but he had to admit that his crush was as handsy with his teammates as they were with him.

“And how is that different from what you two did all night?”

“It wasn’t all night.”

“You’re wearing shades like a rock star after a night spent on cocaine and pussy.”

“Why are we friends, again?” Matty whispered.

“Because someone needs to be the crazy and indecent to your straight-laced and too decent.”

“Straight-laced, right. Like a noodle, maybe.”

“Joke away. You know that’s who you are. Oh, look, he scored again!” Zoey jumped to her feet and applauded frenetically.

It wasn’t the big game, but everyone behaved like it was. Matty totally got it. It was happening because of Rusty, his presence on the court made everything so much better and fun. The girls, as expected, were gushing over him. Fortunately, none of them hurried to show her naked chest, much to his relief.

However, once the so-called practice was over, they rushed in droves to get Rusty’s attention. That was his cue to make a quiet exit. It wasn’t his business if Rusty got laid before the big game, after all. What they had done the night before didn’t count as that, of course.



Rusty liked the attention, as always, but during the practice he had become restless. Was it because he was already anticipating his dad’s presence in the stands? No, it wasn’t that. And since when was he looking for someone’s approval, in particular?

It had to be because of Matty and all that tutoring. Rusty grimaced. If he wanted the guy’s approval that much, he should have told him about the mock practice. Only that he hadn’t actually told anyone, except the guys, so everyone present had just come of their own accord.

A short girl struggled to get him down to her level to smooch his cheek and he obeyed. As he lowered his head, he noticed a pink jacket in the crowd that was leaving last. That was Zoey, Matty’s bestie; Rusty knew that because she was a big fan of the brightest pink he had ever seen, and she was hard to ignore, now that he knew who she was.

He disentangled himself from the girls’ arms and hurried after the pink jacket. Matty had to be around, too, and Rusty found himself wanting to ask him what he had thought about the little

show they had just put on. Well, it hadn't been for that, but for the strategy he wanted to discuss with his teammates, but one thing had led to another and he didn't mind it.

He caught the back of the pink jacket, stopping the girl in her tracks. Zoey turned with a nasty expression on her face. Short people tended to be hamster-angry most of the time; probably they suffered a lot because of their height. However, her expression changed when she saw him. "Your Majesty," she said with a broad grin, "those were some moves."

"Thanks, minion," he replied. "Is Matty with you?"

She stared at him nonplussed and only then Rusty noticed that she was moving her eyes to the side, like she wanted to point something out to him without words. Rusty examined the guy standing with his back to them like he wanted to hide from someone. He sensed his eyes narrowing of their own accord as he took in the guy. That was Matty, without a doubt, although it looked like he put on his entire wardrobe only for the sake of looking twice his usual size.

He let his hand land heavily on the guy's shoulder and turned him. Matty jumped and leaned backward so fast that Rusty barely had time to catch him. "Wow, did you get into a fight or something? When did you have the time?"

"I'll leave you guys to it," Zoey said hurriedly.

Matty's lips moved like he wanted to say something, but in the end just pursed in displeasure as they usually did when Rusty was trying to get out of studying with skillful dedication. That didn't work with his tutor, and that made Rusty appreciate him even more. Not many people could brag that they could make him do things of any kind.

"Why would you think that?" Matty turned his head to follow his bestie with his eyes, or at least Rusty could surmise that since the oversized sunglasses were hiding half his face.

Rusty grabbed the shades and removed them to stare at Matty, expecting a black eye. He squinted and examined that cute face from up close.

Naturally, Matty tried to pull back, but Rusty just followed his every move like a homing missile.

"Where's the black eye? Are you using concealer?"

Matty rolled his eyes. "I just have sensitive eyes."

"Right. By the way, where are your prescription glasses?"

"In my dorm room. I also wear contacts, on occasion," Matty explained.

Contacts. Like Slick Coolplums, but for a different reason. Rusty grabbed Matty's hand, forcing him to follow.

“Where are we going?”

“I just need someone to wash my back,” Rusty said matter-of-factly.

“I see no shortage of girls wanting to help,” Matty replied and gestured at the girls, who were still trying to get Rusty’s attention by waving and calling for him from all sides.

Rusty navigated through the throngs of admirers like the skillful navigator he was. “Sorry, sorry,” he repeated with a smile. “I gotta focus on the game. See you guys later.”

Matty was huffing and puffing behind him, probably wanting to protest against being made to obey, when it was everything Rusty wanted to live for like for about half an hour, only to annoy the living daylight out of his tutor. That was only part of the truth. All that validation he had been searching for during the game, Matty could give right away and put his mind at ease.

While he had been busy chasing Zoey, and consequently Matty through the crowd, his teammates had already finished showering, and the last of them were getting dressed to leave right then.

Well, there was still a guy in the buff when he dragged Matty to the locker room, and it took him a moment to realize that he was subjecting Matty to what had to be one of the gay boy’s fantasies coming to life right then. So, he pushed Matty behind him and held him there, obscuring the view of that dude’s family jewels until he put his pants on.

“What’s going on?” Matty asked, trying to get around him.

Just as he played with the ball, Rusty dodged Matty’s attempts and held him there without much difficulty.

“Good practice, man.” Rusty’s teammate high-fived him on his way out. “What are you hiding there? Some girl, you dog?”

“I’m not a girl,” Matty protested before Rusty had time to reply.

“Just my friend, Matty.”

He couldn’t say ‘my backwasher’ because he had a feeling his friend-slash-tutor would try to murder him a little for it.

Finally, they were alone, and that was what mattered. Matty pulled at his jacket zipper and dropped down on a bench, still huffing and puffing a little.

“Why the hell did you overdress like this?” Rusty asked.

“I was cold,” came the deadpan reply. “What was that all about just earlier?” Matty continued undressing, first taking off his jacket, then a couple of sweaters and a shirt, to finally remain in just a t-shirt.

“You’re deflecting. Wait, were you trying to disguise yourself or something? Because it didn’t work,” Rusty warned him.

“Why would I do that?”

“So that you can come incognito to my mock practice and judge my skills without me knowing,” Rusty said.

“Yeah, right. What do I know about basketball?”

Rusty pondered. “You’re kind of weird, Matthew.”

“Oh, Matthew is it now?” Matty played along and grinned. “The real question is: why am I here?”

Rusty opened his arms wide. “Well, that’s easy. Have you ever had locker room fantasies and the like?”

Matty nodded thoughtfully. “Yeah. I suppose.”

Rusty moved slowly and stopped in front of the other. Matty looked up and their eyes met. “What are the fantasies about?”

Matty smiled. “Do you really want to know?”

That was the cool thing between them. Rusty didn’t have to explain too much for Matty to catch what he meant. So, he crossed his arms and leaned slightly, to tower over his tutor and make him tip his head back further. “I want more than that. I want you to show me.”

That small glint of mischief in the hazel eyes told him what he needed to know. Still, he grunted in surprise as Matty grabbed and pulled down his shorts and underwear in one fell swoop.

“Is that all?” he challenged.

Matty’s smile broadened and Rusty shivered as smooth fingers rested on his hips, and the next sensation was a warm mouth on the head of his cock, taking him inside.

“It’s a real wonder you haven’t hooked up so far,” Rusty said, exhaling while Matty moved his hands over his crotch, teasing him everywhere, until one hand was solidly wrapped around the base of his cock, and the other was cupping his balls.

“Is this okay?” Matty asked in a whisper. His lips were already wet and parted, and he looked beautiful and guilty.

“I’ll stop you if you ever go too far,” Rusty assured. “That has never happened with anyone, just so you know.” His own voice was low and raspy, and it had to be the high of enjoying practice with the guys mixed with that naked look in Matty’s eyes. “Now, go on. You’re doing more than fine.”

Matty nodded eagerly, and this time, he was a lot more decisive as he took Rusty’s cock in his mouth and began to caress it gently with his tongue.

There was no way this guy wouldn’t end up blowing gay boys’ minds like frigging confetti. He closed his eyes tightly, trying to focus on nothing else but the sensation without letting his mind wander. Not that it wandered far; it just went to Matty, and how nice he looked, sitting there, his mouth full, his eyelashes dropped so prettily and a bit wet, probably because of his sensitive eyes or something.

He was supposed to let Matty do his thing, while he thought of girls. That was probably what Matty thought was happening right now. He expected it. But Rusty, for the first time in forever when it came to sex, discovered that he couldn’t deliver what was expected of him.

It was way too enjoyable to separate the person doing it from the act itself. Matty was moaning softly while he took him in as far as he could, showing his lack of experience. Even that was pleasant, causing Rusty to let out a few sounds of his own. “Easy,” he begged.

They had fooled around some the night before, so he wasn’t supposed to shoot so fast again. When everyone knew him for his staying power, he turned out to be a complete failure when it came to Matty, and that was weird as fuck.

Matty decreased his grip but thought it a good idea to tease the head with little licks. Rusty groaned in exasperation, as well as mind-blowing pleasure. “You naughty jerk,” he berated Matty through his teeth, “you deserve what’s coming.”

His partner in locker room fantasies didn’t seem to take it to heart and just moved his head a little faster, until Rusty had to steady himself by holding Matty by the shoulders. One more flick of the tongue and he was gone, his jizz shooting so fast out of him that he barely felt it for a second or so.

Matty let out muffled moans while he continued to drink Rusty dry. Which took a while, and made Rusty shiver in pleasure, as all those sensations spread through his entire body, while Matty took his time to clean him well.

He didn’t protest when Matty released him from his mouth and then hugged his waist and pressed his warm cheek against his spent cock. He even caressed Matty’s hair. “That was really

good,” he said. He had dragged his tutor here to hear some praise about the way he played ball, and in turn, he found himself being the guy to offer those praises back, which was kind of new to him.

Anyone he had hooked up with said he was a nice dude, but he had a feeling what was happening here was beyond being nice. And he had a damn hard time defining what it was.

Chapter Twelve

Making the Right Choice

Well, things weren't supposed to turn so emotional, but Matty couldn't stop himself after blowing Rusty exactly like in one of his fantasies. All that stuff about first times had to be real, because he was living it himself, right now. As he squeezed his eyes tightly shut, he struggled to focus on each aspect in particular, the way Rusty's skin smelled, how solid his body felt in Matty's arms, and that lingering taste on his tongue, to crown it all. Yet, his struggles proved fruitless, as his mind was shattered from experiencing a kind of pleasure he hadn't encountered before. His own cock was straining his jeans and the fabric strength alone kept it contained, but he knew just as well to ignore it, because it wasn't about that.

Was this really the right moment to realize he was no longer just crushing on Rusty Parker, but that he was deeply, seriously in love with him? It might have all started as a little bit of a joke, but the joke was now on him.

And back to more pressing matters, how long was Rusty going to let him hang onto him like that, without a smidge of wanting him to let go? It had already started getting weird a couple of minutes ago, but Matty couldn't bring himself to act like a normal person and unwrap his arms from around Rusty.

What made it quite impossible to let go was how Rusty kept running his fingers through his hair, making him shudder in too much pleasure. It was like all that was understandable, explainable. Reluctantly, Matty removed his arms from around his crush of the last three years and moved away.

"Did it match your locker room fantasy or was it just meh?"

The question brought him back to real life and all that was truly Rusty. He buried his face in his hands to hide his laughter.

"Are you laughing at me, Matty boy? I'm going to punish you with my schlong." The threat was followed by prompt action. The half limp member slapped him playfully over the side of his head.

"Eww, Rusty, you're gross," Matty protested and moved away, only to be followed and promptly smacked again.

"Oh, yeah? It wasn't gross when you were gobbling it down like it was your favorite type of sausage."

"I don't have a favorite type of sausage. Cut it out."

“You do now.”

“Aren’t you full of yourself?”

Matty escaped the sloppy attacks and turned the tables, dragging Rusty down and making him stumble and end up sprawled on top of him on the long bench. That might not have been the wisest move because now, the naughty green eyes could easily inspect him from up close, and, without a doubt, his face had to be red with embarrassment.

“You sucked your first dick,” Rusty teased him with a grin.

Way to go, ruining a perfect, magical moment. No, that wasn’t right, actually. Matty had always crushed on Rusty Parker because of how out of the ordinary he was. That line was all him, and Matty intended to cherish it forever, like a good memory.

“Hey, I had my mouth on your dick last night,” he reminded his partner in crime and locker room fantasies.

“That doesn’t really count. You just licked a bit of ice cream then.”

“And I thought we were doing a cum taste test. Go figure.”

They snickered like school boys. How the hell could they be so in synch, a straight guy with dozens of female admirers and a still somewhat virgin gay boy?

“How does it feel?”

“You mean, a dick in my mouth? Your dick?”

“I didn’t mean mine, in particular, but okay, since you mentioned it.”

Matty took a moment to come up with something worthy of the legendary kinkster. His mind was, however, blank. Rusty was still lying on top of him, making it tough to concentrate.

“You know,” Rusty started, “people say that you never forget your first.”

“The first dick you sucked, you mean?”

“Smartass,” Rusty praised him. He pushed himself up, and Matty straightened.

Now that Rusty’s heavy body no longer kept him down, he felt weightless, just short of floating away.

“What did you think about the game?”

The change of tack was welcome. “I’m no basketball aficionado, but you looked great out there. You’re so going to win on Saturday.”

Surprisingly enough, his praise didn't have the expected effect. Rusty grimaced slightly. "Way to put more pressure on the man."

"Really? Would you rather have me telling you that you suck or something?" Matty observed the other carefully. What was he missing?

The frown lines, so not at home on Rusty's face, smoothed out and made room for a playful grin. "No, you suck."

"You ass," Matty protested. "Just so you know, it takes real courage to suck a dick. What do you do? Run to and fro, passing a ball? That so doesn't compare."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?" The lopsided smirk told Matty that he might not have the necessary mental equipment to answer that and be sure that he was telling the truth.

"Totally," he offered with the utmost confidence.

"Hmm," Rusty purred and stared at him with half-lidded eyes. "You pack a punch for a small guy, don't you?"

"Psh, I'm not that small, what are you saying?"

"Nah, you're not. I've seen it." Rusty smiled ear to ear now.

"You're so dick-obsessed for a straight dude."

"You kept on flaunting it, right in my face."

"Seriously? You pushed me to it."

"Because you're in grave danger of dying a virgin, and my mission is to prevent that."

"Your mission, really?" Matty was enjoying their banter, all the more because Rusty was undressing and gesturing for him to follow him to the showers.

"Yeah," came the confirmation. "I'm like a superhero. But I'm not fighting crime. I'm fighting the plight of virginity."

"Oh, my, what a worthy cause. Have you had many virgins, then?"

Rusty stepped under the shower and groaned in pleasure as the warm water hit his back. Matty had a mind to ask if that back washing offer was still on the table, but he was in the business of not pushing his luck, or so he kept telling himself.

"Now that I think about it, no. Girls tend to come to me because they're past that and know what they want." Rusty turned to wink at him and began washing his hair.

Matty crossed his arms and admired the view, hoping that his ogling wasn't too much.

"You'd be my first," Rusty added.

Funny thing, his voice no longer sounded playful. It had become suddenly deep and low, and Matty couldn't help the strange sensation traveling over him from head to toes. He shook his head to shake it away. "I am so not giving you my V-card," he said, to play it cool.

"Why?" Rusty looked puzzled while soaping his chest.

"What do you mean, why? It's supposed to be with someone special and all that."

"I'm totally special." That came with the signature smirk. Matty fell in love another inch. One more thing to keep to himself.

"You know what I mean. Hey, didn't you need me to wash your back?" At times, it was better to deflect.

"I can do that." Rusty made a demonstration at how far he could bend his arm for the operation. "And you're dressed. It would be hard to explain if we were to march across campus with you sopping wet."

"Now, I know you're special. How considerate of you." That came out as dry as sandpaper.

"And what's that guy supposed to be like? Drive a Lexus? Have an Ivy League degree under his belt, which he keeps next to his dick?"

"Ugh, stop it. I told you, I don't have a list." Matty observed all the details carefully, while Rusty continued to wash himself and was now turning his back for a final rinse.

That was a great ass. Matty hoped his body wasn't leaning forward of its own accord. He barely had any self-restraint around this guy as things were. But what an ass, though.

"I'll let you grope it."

Rusty was looking at him over his shoulder and winked at him, when Matty lifted his eyes. "I wasn't staring."

"You totally were. And I can see that tent you're pitching."

"It's hardly the right time to go camping. It'll go away," Matty promised.

Rusty turned off the water and stepped out of the shower. And then, he promptly grabbed the front of Matty's jeans.

"Hey!"

“Hey there,” Rusty teased him and smiled.

That had been the only protest he managed. The next thing, Rusty had both hands inside his jeans, playing with his cock and balls. Matty closed his eyes to rein in the sensation that was threatening to be too much, but that left him wide open because right away, he felt Rusty moving closer and firm lips taking his mouth, with the clear intention of conquering it.

His defenses were just for show, and he quickly handed over the keys to the city, opening his mouth and letting Rusty kiss him. As firm as the first attack had been, what followed could only be described as a leisurely walk. Rusty was taking his time, tasting him slowly, moving his tongue in small, provocative circles and pulling back to tease his bottom lip, only to dive back in again.

Matty had no idea what made his mind swirl more, the kiss, or how Rusty was dealing with his hard cock. He steadied himself by resting his hands on the other’s biceps.

What was the record for the longest kiss in history? Matty liked to believe that he and Rusty could sign up for the competition. He kissed back, while Rusty’s hand moved up and down at a steady pace.

Then, suddenly, his partner decided to turn him, plastering his back against his chest. Matty’s breath grew labored as he looked down. He could see that strong hand pumping him good. Rusty was now licking the side of his neck and one ear. “Let me see how you shoot for me.”

It was done and done, almost.

“Fuck, that looks nice,” Rusty continued to tease his ear with both his voice and tongue.

Matty moaned helplessly.

“Just for the record,” Rusty whispered making his skin turn to goosebumps everywhere, “for your first time, you sucked a mean dick, Matty.”

It was weird praise, but Matty was willing to take it. Heck, he was willing to take everything Rusty wanted to give him.

“Oh, man, look at it go,” Rusty said with admiration while Matty’s cock began to shoot.

His entire body was trembling, and he could not help it. It took him a moment or so to realize that he was making all kinds of shameless sounds. Rusty released him gently and kissed the crown of his head. Matty staggered for a moment as he got his balance back. He could tell Rusty was toweling off, whistling a happy tune.

He pushed his spent cock back in his jeans and pondered whether to make a run for it or just stay. With Rusty, he knew that the latter would more likely seem normal.

“Ready?” Rusty asked and threw one arm over Matty’s shoulders. “Ha, you look properly fucked. If that’s what a handjob does to you, I wonder.”

“You wonder what?”

Rusty nuzzled his cheek. “How you look when you are actually properly fucked.”

That sounded like a promise. Matty didn’t quite dare to hope. Wait, how did they even get to that point?



At first, the point was supposed to be to tease Matty and see how he looked with his cage rattled, because that was such fun to watch. Rusty could blame it on not having had his dick sucked for a while for saying all those things. He could, but he wouldn’t. After all, sex was sex. A hole was a hole.

Matty’s hole, though. He had seen it, from quite up close. It was pink and pretty. Quite a shame to penetrate such a cute little thing.

Rusty kept in a snort. He had finally let Matty off the hook and was now heading toward the house, his mind full of fuck, but not in the wrong way. Supposedly, as the teacher, he should consider teasing Matty with butt plugs and whatnot. Somewhere, along the way, his own dick had popped up like a weed, asking to be considered a worthy candidate.

Bah, he was thinking about it too much. Matty had been firm about not wanting to hand him his V-card. V-card, really. Rusty shook his head. Although, it was true that he didn’t have one of those in his trophy case of achievements.

On his way back to the house, a bunch of girls shouted and waved to him, and he waved back. One of these days, he would have to get properly laid because thinking of stealing Matty’s V-card was a bit too much, even for him, renowned for his sexual adventures.

Yeah, with all the regret that it came with, he would have to let Matty keep his precious V-card and hand it over to some special guy. What had Matty said that one time, during the quiz? Rusty narrowed his eyes. His mind had been trying to find ways to get Matty to consider fooling around with a cat boy, so he hadn’t really paid attention to what the guy had been saying. What was his favorite eye color? Blue? Probably. A lot of people liked blue eyes.

Rusty shrugged. It didn’t matter anyway. Those had been just control questions, to lull the questioned into dropping the guard and reply truthfully.

And Matty had admitted to liking alley cats. Now, that was something to consider. The nerdy preppy boy liked guys from the wrong side of the tracks, it seemed. Well, at least that was

Rusty's interpretation for now. More questioning was needed for Matty to disclose what made the perfect guy for him.

As a generous, conscientious teacher of sex, he would also help Matty find that dude. But who would be perfect for someone as cute as that?

Great. Now, he would have to start checking dudes out. He pushed the door open, only to find Maddox and Jonathan making out on the sofa. Hmm, they would make perfect subjects for a bit of quizzing.

In all truth, they must have been making out until the sound of the door opening, because they were now pretending to be engrossed in some textbook spread on the small table in front of them. That only meant that they were getting hot and heavy, or otherwise Maddox wouldn't have pulled away from his boyfriend like that.

Even better, they were perfectly ripe for some questioning.

"Hi, Rusty," Jonathan said.

"Hi, my dudes," Rusty said and did his secret handshake with Maddox. "How was the first time you two did it in the butt?"

Jonathan snickered and looked away. Maddox groaned and let his head fall back to pray at the ceiling. Rusty pushed away the table and sat on top of it, legs crossed and examined them closely.

"Isn't it a bit early in the day to talk anal sex?" Maddox asked instead of replying like a good boy.

"You two are early. You were supposed to come back tonight. It's still light outside," Rusty pointed out. "Come on, don't be shy. It's just Uncle Rusty asking."

"Uncle Rusty? The other day you wanted us to adopt you," Maddox reminded him.

"That ship sailed. Now call me uncle."

"I totally won't," Maddox warned him.

"What are you curious about, Rusty?" Jonathan intervened.

"Was it like, really painful?" Of course, Jonathan must have been the first to take it, so he was the one to ask.

Jonathan frowned slightly, while he seemed to think about something. "Not so much, if you're patient and there's enough preparation involved. But you must know these things."

He did because he fucked plenty in the butt. The thing was, the ones on the receiving end had been only girls, and now he needed to offer Matty some good advice. Maybe not everything he already knew applied, and there were hidden gay things he had to be aware of.

“Yeah, I know very well you’re a butt-fucker,” Maddox said with conviction. “Wait, Rusty, my man, do you want to take it in the butt?”

“Ha-ha, Maddie, let’s be serious,” Rusty countered. “There’s no way—I mean, I’ve already tried some things. But this isn’t about me,” he added quickly.

Yeah, he had tried a couple of times. He had even put a girl up to exploring his butt, and, to be honest, it had made him a little bit hot all over and ready to lose his head. That was never the plan. When it came to sex, Rusty Parker was on top of things and in control.

What about Matty? A little voice whispered in his ear. With that preppie cute guy, everything became a tumble, like the blowjob from earlier. Rusty had wondered how long Matty would allow him to hold him like that after the deed. Apparently, the answer had been: as long as needed.

That was just a side effect of not getting laid, for sure. Rusty Parker had gotten enough head in this life already to last him about three more, and it had been Matty’s first bj, so—

“Rusty, are you still with us?” Maddox was waving a hand in front of him. “Who is this about?”

“Hmm, you know what? We can have this conversation later, over dinner.”

“I’m not going to talk to you about anal sex over dinner,” Maddox said sternly. “Come on, spit it out. What’s with the curiosity?”

“You,” Rusty turned toward Jonathan, “having been a virgin and all when Maddox put it in, did you feel like crying afterward or something?”

Jonathan stared at him nonplussed for a moment, then he smiled. “No, nobody cried.”

“Good. So, I don’t have to worry about sentimentalisms and stuff.”

“You intend to…” Maddox seemed to be catching on. “Hang on. Rusty, my man, there are limits.”

“What are you talking about?” Rusty need to dash up the stairs, lock himself in his room, and strategize for the future.

“Even if you fool around with Matthew, trying to turn him into a gay overlord and whatnot, that’s not a good idea.” Maddox was holding him prisoner with nothing but his eyes.

Rusty felt like he was glued in place. He tried to play it casually. “Don’t make so much out of sex, Maddie. And Matty’s totally cool. We could play hide-the-salami.”

Maddox pursed his lips and looked at him like he was disappointed. Rusty didn’t like that look.

“I’m with Maddox, Rusty,” Jonathan said. “As much as I’ve never believed I’d ever say these words, please don’t play hide-the-salami with Matthew. He might misunderstand.”

“What could he misunderstand if we talk about it beforehand?”

“You shouldn’t worry about Matty crying on you,” Jonathan said. “It’s the matter of attachment that should worry you.”

Ah well, Jonathan was right. Rusty hadn’t had any intention of turning this into a serious conversation, but there they were. “Good point, Hamilton,” he said and pushed himself up.

“And don’t you forget that,” Maddox warned him.

Rusty waved. Yeah, yeah, annoying but they were totally right. Except for one thing. He didn’t worry much about Matty’s attachment to him, since the guy knew what was what.

He worried about his own.



Whenever he didn’t know what to do, Rusty fell back on things that were the hardest to consider. So, while thinking of the righteousness of Jonathan’s recommendation to avoid possible attachments by playing too close to the fire, he took out the card Francine had gifted him from its secret hiding place and began playing with it. As usual, he started by dragging his finger over each letter, reconstructing it through invisible lines. Maybe after college? After the need to play basketball as part of the deal? Rusty had a feeling that he would have enjoyed playing more if his dad hadn’t wanted him to be a jock in the first place.

He held the card close to his chest and closed his palm over it. What was that thing they said, about visualizing things if you wanted them really bad? As much as he kept his eyes closed and tried to do that, he just couldn’t see it. That was a different world, as much as Francine Hamilton had pestered him that he had a knack for it, a natural talent. Maybe she hadn’t said it in those particular words, but that’s why he liked Jonathan’s awesome mom. She was stern but fair. And she wouldn’t have given him that chance to study with a real vocal coach if she didn’t think he had it in him.

All his friends were impressed with his singing, but Rusty knew very well that he was lacking in many areas. Francine had been the one to see right through his charade. In particular, without anyone else listening in, she had told him that he should drop the clown act, give up on artifice and things that made it look like he was treating singing as a joke.

She was right, of course. But that didn't mean that it worked on him. His clown act, as she called it, was the result of much trial and error and it had turned him into a success. He was the king of Sunny Hill, the beast on the basketball court, the guy who could hook up three times a day if he wanted.

That was his shield, and he didn't expect anyone to understand, let alone Francine. For her, things were clear and straightforward. He needed to work to polish his voice and then try his hand at turning it into more than just a funny pastime.

For him, things weren't that clear. No, things like that could make him vulnerable, open to critique. People worked for decades to have a distinct voice; what business did he have to climb up there and pretend that he knew what he was doing? They'd only laugh at him, because, well, he had to keep telling himself, he hadn't practiced his voice as much as shooting hoops, and it showed.

He turned to one side. Dreams were elusive things, weren't they? It was the same as when he had looked into Matty's eyes, and he had thought he had seen some naked truth for a moment. What that truth was about, he couldn't say.

Ah, damn it, Maddie and Johnny boy were right. Matty might really get the wrong idea if they played so fast and loose with their dicks. But Matty wasn't some girl; wait, no girl actually cared about turning him into some loving boyfriend, what was he even thinking? No, girls came to him because they wanted to have nothing but fun with no strings attached. Also, because they wanted to feel adventurous and have a blast, since Rusty was known to be so inventive in bed. That kind of summed up all he was doing with those girls.

The thought of it seemed, without reason, not as palatable as it had used to be.

The problem was one and only: he was thinking too much. Until Saturday, he'd only think about the upcoming game and nothing else. If he focused enough, he'd get rid of all those annoying thoughts that didn't lead anywhere.

A knock on the door interrupted his convoluted train of thought. "Yeah?" He made quick work of returning the card to its hidden spot.

He wasn't that surprised to see Maddox walking in.

"Did you change your mind about talking about anal sex at length with me?" he joked.

Maddox grinned and climbed on the bed, crossing his legs and putting his chin in his palm. There had been many times when he had envied Maddox for his looks; it was so easy for him with girls. Correction, it had been; nowadays, he was a one guy's man, up till eternity or all those words people used to profess undying love. Yeah, there was that. He and Jonathan both were so

fucking brave, getting into it without thinking twice, and without worrying that it might go sideways one day.

“Nah, but I’m here to check on you.”

“Why? Are you worried? I thought you were worried about Matty’s ass.”

Maddox shook his head and let out a mirthful sigh. “Actually, I am... well, not worried about you, but it feels like we haven’t talked in a while.”

“You’re busy with Jonathan,” Rusty pointed out.

“Yeah. I guess we might get a bit on other people’s nerves.”

“Nah, it’s nothing like that. You’re cute. And you give people boners.”

Maddox rolled his eyes. “What’s the deal with Matthew Han?”

“We were talking about you and Johnny boy. Don’t change the subject.”

“No, we were actually talking about you.”

Rusty groaned for show and covered his eyes. “All right, I’ve told you already that I won’t play hide-the-salami with the guy.”

“After a second look, I have to wonder. Do you want to do that with Matthew Han? Not for giggles?”

Rusty propped himself on his elbows and stared at his bestie. “I assure you, there are no giggles involved. More like moans and you know.” He wiggled his eyebrows.

Maddox just grinned. Boy, they knew each other so well. “Come on, Rusty, spit it out. Do you like this dude? A lil’ bit more than you should? I know how fogged up your mind can get when you’re horny.”

Rusty stared at his bestie in kind. “And how do you know that? Have you been paying attention while I was horny?”

Maddox’s eyes grew wide at the implication. “Shut up, kinkster. You know what I mean. And what about Slicky Coolplums?” He was biting his lips in an attempt not to laugh out loud.

“Ha-ha, laugh more,” Rusty said, without hiding how miffed he was. “Matty and Slicky Coolplums are two different dudes. They should never meet each other.”

“Why?” Maddox asked.

“Because they might get jealous over me.”

“That sounds like a perfect explanation. Just to make things perfectly clear, are you two-timing your tutor with the cat boy, or the other way around?”

“Neither way,” Rusty declared with aplomb, “because neither of them wants to put out.”

“Ah, then I feel relieved,” Maddox concluded. “Are you sure, though? You’re not in any danger of seducing Matty by accident? Or playing with that cat tail a bit too much?”

“No danger,” Rusty replied. “Matty told me clearly that he intends to hold on to his V-card until that guy with an Ivy League degree for a shlong appears--”

“What guy?”

Rusty waved. “That’s between Matty and I.”

“Oh, you two are sharing secrets. Interesting.”

“What’s so interesting? It’s not like you and your better half don’t have those.”

“We’re as good as married. What’s your relationship with Matty?”

Hmm, that was a tricky question. Or a trick question? “A very interesting relationship,” he said, willing to send Maddox out the door, along with his questions.

“I can see that. Just play safe, and don’t break gay boys’ hearts in the process.”

“Like there’s any chance of that. Matty is a totally cool dude. You should see how he puts me in my place when I fail to study.”

“I’d pay to see that.”

“No chance of that. Me and Matty, we’re very private about our private lessons.”

“And what’s so private about Ethics?”

“It’s not the topic. It’s the teaching method. Matty doesn’t want anyone to steal it from him, even had me sign an NDA, I kid you not.”

“I don’t know if I should be scared or interested. It looks like you finally met your equal.”

“Psh, that’s so not how it is,” Rusty said promptly.

“Is he your boss then?” Maddox teased him.

“Stop grinning like you know stuff,” Rusty warned him. “And you know I have no equal. I’m the king.”

“Yeah, right. Aren’t you a little bit too used to ruling alone?”

Rusty rubbed his chin and stared at his bestie with half-lidded eyes. “I think there’s a joke in there, somewhere, but I don’t get it.”

Maddox finally got off his bed and patted Rusty on the shoulder. “I trust you to make the right decisions, son.”

“You know you can trust me,” Rusty retorted. “Wait, didn’t I tell you to call me uncle?”

“You wish.” Maddox snorted and began walking toward the door. “Game week, right?”

“Yeah,” Rusty confirmed.

“Then I’ll make sure Jonathan puts you on a diet.”

“That’s no fun. I’m going to tell mom.”

“Gotcha, son.” Maddox winked at him on his way out.

Rusty stretched on the bed and considered the situation one more time. Maddox and Jonathan were right. He had to respect Matty’s wish to give his V-card to that Ivy League douchebag with a Lexus.

Chapter Thirteen

I've Been Friendzoned and I'm Okay with It

Could he lay like that and daydream about Rusty helping him out of his pesky virginity? No matter how many times he turned and turned the idea on all sides, his brain reached only one conclusion: he so, so wanted to that to happen. Seeing how his brain was the most rational part of him, there was no need to ask either his heart or his dick.

"I'm so fucked," Matty groaned and grabbed a pillow to smack himself in the face with.

Since it was game week, he didn't expect to have any kind of interaction with Rusty, and had only seen him from afar for the last couple of days. Granted, each time Rusty had waved at him like a madman and shouted his greetings, but they had stayed clear of each other, otherwise.

How did that saying go, that distance made the heart grow fonder? Fonder was a mild, unassuming term. In Matty's case, it was absolutely raging wild.

The phone ringing pulled him out of his daytime dreaming.

"Rusty?" Matty asked tentatively.

"No, I'm some dude who stole the phone from Rusty, and now I'm holding it for ransom," Rusty announced in a cavernous voice.

"Isn't it game week?"

"What's with the tone? Outside of tutoring, you're my pal."

"I didn't mean to sound like I was reproaching you or anything."

"No need to get defensive, Matty boy. I'm only pulling your leg, is all."

"Are you sure there's nothing else you'd rather pull?" Matty retorted, happy to hear Rusty, and only now realizing that it was better to remind himself that he had actually been dreaming of the guy until only moments ago.

"Your nose," Rusty said matter-of-factly. "It's kind of small."

"Is it weird?"

"Nah. It's cute."

"Thanks, then. Why did you call me?" Matty decided to steer the conversation away from stuff that would only give him more dreams than he could handle.

“What, unhappy to hear me?” Rusty drawled.

“It’s game week,” Matty pointed out again. “I thought you needed all of your head in the game or something.”

“Hmm, it sounds to me like you want to get rid of me. Are you trying to study?”

“I finished studying for the day.”

“Good boy,” Rusty whispered, making it dirtier than the mere words would imply.

Matty groaned. “Am I at the receiving end of some crazy experiment?”

“No. I’m just bored. Give me an idea of what to do.”

“Play with your dick.”

“Already done it twice today.”

“Hmm. And I thought,” Matty cleared his throat, “that the Mighty Thor would keep you plenty entertained.”

“Yeah, but you spoiled me for my own handjobs. It’s a lot more fun when there’s someone else in the room.”

“Watching?” Matty asked, hoping that his attempts to catch the ball weren’t half-bad.

“I’m all for action, baby,” Rusty drawled.

“Eww, don’t call me ‘baby’. I bet that’s what you call all the girls.”

“True, true,” Rusty admitted. “You’re a dude. But you don’t get to tell me what I want to call you. I know. I’ll call you ‘baby dude’.”

“Baby dude.” Matty took a moment to collect himself. “I haven’t heard a stupider thing in my entire life.”

“That’s an accomplishment. I’ll write it down.”

“Why? Do you think you’ll forget a stupid term like that?”

“It’s not the name I’ll write. I’m making a small collection. It’s called Matthew Han – all the times his cage got rattled by something I said.”

“That’s a pretty long title. Why would you even create such a thing?”

“Because.”

Clearly, Rusty didn't want to share the reason why he was collecting memories of their interactions. Matty didn't insist. For many, Rusty appeared easygoing and fun, but he could be stubborn as a mule. Matty had learned that the hard way during their tutoring sessions.

"How's practice going?" Any reason he could think up to keep Rusty on the phone for as long as he could manage was good enough.

"It's going." There was something clipped and strange in that statement.

"Anything wrong?"

"Why would there be?"

"Because you sound a little pissed, and that's a side of you I haven't seen much."

"I'm never pissed. I'm all sunshine and rainbows."

"Try as you might, you cannot fool me. Are you forgetting that I'm your tutor?" There wasn't a card he wouldn't play to get something more out of Rusty, something real.

"That you are. By the way, how did you manage to land the job? I can't remember."

"I hit you with a ruler and dragged my balls all over your Tinder profile. Does that ring a bell?" Matty rested one hand on his lower belly and played with the string of his sweatpants.

"Ah, right. You were a kinky bastard. In a preppy way. By the way, have you been touching yourself lately while thinking of that blowjob you gave me?"

"Just when I thought we were having a decent conversation."

"You just mentioned your dick."

"I mentioned my balls."

"Details."

Matty would bet Rusty was sporting his signature smirk as they spoke. It made him feel warm and a bit dizzy that the king of Sunny Hill was on the phone with him of all people at that very moment. It also made him think that they were at least friends.

"How about you read to me from that book until I fall asleep?" Rusty suggested.

"Isn't it a bit early for you to be going to bed?" Matty asked. Even for him, who wasn't partying every single day until late at night as Rusty's reputation went, it wasn't the time for that yet.

"Maddie and Johnny boy are pestering me to get to sleep earlier. To show them, I shut myself in my room before dinner. Yeah, that'll teach them," Rusty explained with satisfaction.

“Maddie and Johnny?” Matty knew who those had to be, but he liked to hear the smallest things about Rusty straight from the horse’s mouth.

“They’re my parents. At least, they behave like they are. I think I ought to show them that I’m literally going through my rebellious phase right now.”

“Does Maddox like being called Maddie?”

“Nope. He gives me all these looks, you know, like killer vibes, but he got used to it. As for Hamilton, he’s like the mom; he just goes with everything and forgives me everything.”

“That sounds kind of nice.”

“Not always. They try to baby me on occasion. Is that why you’re envious? Because no one is babying you?”

“I didn’t say anything like that.”

“I can baby you.” Rusty paused for effect. “Baby dude.”

Matty groaned. “Cut it out with that stupid... whatever it is.”

“Come on, tell me a story so that I can fall asleep.”

“You’re really bent on it. Fine. But you’ll cry that you’re bored in less than five minutes, I bet.”

“Nah, I don’t think so. Go ahead,” Rusty egged him on.

Matty sighed for show but opened the book. “Should I start from the beginning?”

“Yeah. I really want to know what makes those zombies so appealing to you.”

“Okay. We’ll have a quiz after, though. Just consider yourself warned.”



Rusty lay on his back, hands behind his head, his phone by his side. He couldn’t stop smiling while Matty’s pleasant, slightly throaty voice, filled the room. It was such a nice distraction after having to keep his mind trained on nothing but serious stuff all day long. At first, when calling Matty, he had toyed with the idea of suggesting phone sex, but given up eventually. The chances were that if he started, he would have wanted more. A lot more. Maddox and Jonathan were watching him, though, and as much as he would have liked to avoid them by going out the window, he was aware of the risk of injury. The coach would have his head, and his dad, well, his dad would let him know just how disappointed he was in him. With that guy, he was always in the negative. The only thing left for him to do was to try and stay afloat, along the zero line.

Matty really had no idea how much this was helping. He probably thought that he was just indulging Rusty and his crazy demands, which, in itself, was pretty awesome. It wasn't like he wanted to go to sleep so fast, but he needed to fill the hours with anything other than letting his thoughts gravitate toward the same thing, over and over.

And, since Maddox and Jonathan had warned him about playing with Matty in a sexual way, he at least had to try and keep his word. Normally, stuff like that wouldn't even be considered a problem. Rusty didn't do attachments easily, and especially with the people he fucked. That was why things had been so chill between him and Maddox when it came to what girls they chased.

Now, Maddox had Jonathan, and Rusty, well, he was free to do whatever he wanted.

But, he reminded himself, that didn't include taking Matty's precious V-card. Ah, fuck. He was getting horny, because he couldn't think of that, without remembering what Matty's unpenetrated hole looked like. That was enough to make his cock spring up in his sweatpants. Well, he had put aside the idea of phone sex, but that didn't mean that he couldn't rub one out while thinking of the naughty stuff he had already done with Matty, without Maddox's and Jonathan's knowing.

He would just have to be very quiet about it. Matty would so think he was having it hard for zombies. And he'd have a laugh, for sure.

"They had started their attack at night," Matty read, "while I did not know what they were doing or where they had come from, there was nothing else to do but defend the place. I sent two of my own men with orders to follow them and see if they could learn anything about their purpose while I remained in charge..."

Rusty hummed in approval and began feeling the shape of the Mighty Thor through his sweatpants.

"Are you really into this?" Matty asked.

"More than you would think." Oops, now that had been a little slip of the tongue. And why on earth would he keep from fooling around with Matty, since the guy was game? Now that he knew he wasn't supposed to do that, he wanted it even more. Damn, and he thought he only liked to jump in bed with girls. He had to add a dude to that list, and the name of that dude was Matthew Han.

Eh, his dick liked what he liked, and he had never been in the business of contradicting it. Rusty had great respect for his dick.

A knock on the door pulled him out of his thoughts.

"Sorry, Matty, someone's at the door. Yeah, come in," Rusty said loudly.

Jonathan peeked in and offered him a big smile, albeit a little strained. “Maddox asked me to come and get you for dinner.”

Rusty examined Jonathan carefully and put his hands over his crotch. Oh, Jonathan must have thought he was hard, and he was. Maybe he was just wondering why. Well, that was a good question, and not only for Jonathan. “Okay, okay, you drive a tough bargain. I’m coming. Sorry, Matty, the zombies will have to wait until next time.”

“No problem,” Matty replied cheerfully. “Enjoy your dinner. And your friends, too.”

“Do you want me to enjoy my friends over dinner?”

Matty groaned. “Only you would twist it like that.”

“Yeah, that’s me. Bye for now, baby dude.”

“Bye, tiny asshole,” Matty replied with a huff after a short hesitation.

Rusty laughed and jumped off the bed after ending the convo. Jonathan was staring at him, nonplussed. “What?” he asked. He looked down at his own crotch to see if he was still pitching.

“Why does Matty call you that?”

“He thinks he’s funny. Spoiler alert. He’s not,” Rusty offered with a smirk. He hooked one arm over Jonathan’s shoulders and guided him out of the room. “What’s for dinner?”

“Something you’ll like,” Jonathan said promptly. “Just before, I thought you were listening to an audiobook, not talking to Matthew over the phone.”

“He’s very dutiful. He was reading to me so that I could go to sleep.”

“It didn’t seem to work that well,” Jonathan said under his breath.

“I totally heard that,” Rusty protested.



The noise was deafening. Pacific Grove had brought quite the cheerleading squad with them from home, so it was twice the fun. Rusty liked to believe that he performed best under pressure, but not when the name of that pressure was Roy Parker. Even without looking, he was aware of those lips set in a grim line, the permanent frown, and whatever judgmental shit lurked under that broad forehead. Everyone who knew them both said they looked alike, but Rusty had the satisfaction of having grown taller than his dad. Also, he knew for a fact that he had inherited plenty from his mom, too, and it was probably her natural beauty that had been passed down to him and made him such a success with chicks.

As a child, he had always felt proud when people said he looked like his father. Things had changed a lot. His dad had just had to leave them and do whatever he wanted.

The whistle stopped him and forced him to return the ball.

“Parker!” the coach shouted at him. “Pay attention!”

Yeah, it was fucking hard to play as he should while that man was there. He hustled back in defense. The guy from Pacific Grove he had just taken the ball from pushed against him. Rusty pushed back, making the referee blow his whistle again.

The coach ran up on the sideline. “Parker, is this how you take charge? Should I send you back to kindergarten for the basics?”

Yeah, he should have fallen back, but instead had stood there, ready for the guy to crash into him.



“What do you think is going on with him?” Zoey asked, as startled as the rest of the audience at what seemed like amateurish mistakes on Rusty’s part.

Matty had no idea. He had already munched halfway through his lower lip while trying to figure out what was wrong with Rusty. If he thought about it, during some games in the past, Rusty had tended to make a mess out of things despite his otherwise excellent performance overall. Back then, he had wondered about the same stuff, only now he had a feeling that he was supposed to know.

“He’s clearly demotivated,” Zoey continued to comment, sounding as disappointed as everyone else seemed.

“He is just having a bad day,” Matty hurried to defend him.

“It’s totally weird. We should do something to motivate him,” Zoey said. Along with the rest of Sunny Hill, she began to cheer and shout Rusty’s name.

However, the blond head remained hanging in defeat, even as the crowd went wild.

“Zoey, I have to go,” Matty said brusquely.

“What? Now? Come on, Rusty is depending on you.”

“I have no idea if that’s the truth, but I need to do something. You, just make sure to keep an eye on your phone. I’ll be as fast as I can.”

“What are you planning? Hey, Matty.”

He ignored her as he pushed his way through the people in the stands so that he could get out of there as fast as he could. There was still plenty of time in the game left, but that didn't mean that he could afford to waste any of it.



Rusty looked up at the stands with clouded eyes. Fuck, every time, it had to happen like that. All his muscles were locked in place from undischarged anger, and he couldn't focus, either.

Even through the fog in his mind, he heard the change in the noises the audience was making. People were gesturing and pointing at the scoreboard. Rusty looked, too, while the referee called for the game to stop, and campus security was pushing its way through the crowd.

Rusty felt his entire face splitting into one huge smile. There, on top of the scoreboard, sitting with his legs hanging over, holding on for balance with his hands between his legs, was no other than Slicky Coolplums. He waved at him and the cat boy turned his head, his chin up, looking pretty pissed.

The security guys were shouting at the cat boy to get down, but it looked like they didn't dare to escalate the thing. Slicky Coolplums lifted himself to his feet and stared down, crossing his arms.

“Get down from there, kid!”

Rusty hugged the ball while watching the show. Were they going to catch him? Maybe he would have to break out of jail, and Rusty would help him.

Another wave passed over the audience, and now, it looked like everyone was checking their phones. From the sidelines, Maddox called out, and Rusty hurried over to him. Maddox showed him his phone.



My, my, what an interesting development has landed in our lap. We just found out the name of the stray cat boy, who has been roaming our campus at night. We're proud to be the first to announce it to you all.

Slicky Coolplums, as this is the name he goes by, however, has more than one cat trick up his sleeve. Apparently, he has the hots for no one other than our king, who, at the moment, is facing hard times on the court. We were informed that there's a message Slicky Coolplums wants us to shout out. The message is...

If you win the game, I'll let you touch my tail, king of Sunny Hill!



Rusty didn't read the rest of what Xpress wanted to say about his performance or lack thereof. He patted Maddox on the shoulder and rushed back onto the court. From the scoreboard, Slick Coolplums dove into the stands, jumped to his feet, and, helped by all the students around, found his way out while the security guys chased after him.

Yeah, good luck catching that tail. Rusty smiled and smiled. The tension from before was gone from his muscles, turning into nothing but smooth adrenaline. The audience erupted as he shot the ball straight through the hoop.



"That was insane," Zoey shouted at him and hugged him so tightly he could barely breathe.

He was sweaty, freaked out after getting chased by security, and had barely gotten back in time to see Sunny Hill win gloriously against Pacific Grove. Hopefully, Rusty hadn't searched for him in the stands, because it would be hard to explain why he had missed most of the big game. He'd find something to say if that happened. Right now, he was a bit too exhausted to care. Zoey continued to shake him and praise him for being completely reckless, and he didn't care about that either, although he wouldn't have minded a bit of rest.

"It worked, it freaking worked! Matty, you're a complete genius. I knew it was a genius move for you to find your inner feline."

"Zoey, this feline is absolutely broken after pulling that stunt earlier. Thanks for getting that rumor spread so fast."

"I only had to talk to a girl from freshman year about the cat boy, and she told all her friends. I have no idea how it got in Xpress so fast, but it did. Now, I think it's high time for you to present the champion with his hard-earned reward."

"I am so not going back and changing into that suit again. I'll honor that promise later."

"But you will," Zoey insisted.

"I wouldn't disappoint the champion. By the way, did you see him? I bet he's celebrating with the team and all."

Zoey shook her head. "According to intel, he's in the parking lot, seeing someone off."

"Okay, I'll go there. The least I can do is congratulate him on the game."



"The problem with you is that you're inconsistent."

Those were the first words he heard from his dad the moment they saw each other. His dad was already holding his keys, ready to get into his car and out of there, back to his new family.

“And?” Rusty asked aggressively. “I won.”

His dad pursed his lips and shook his head. There were more white hairs on his head now, but he didn’t seem any less mean than usual. “You won by pure luck.”

“What pure luck?”

“That kid on the opposing team got injured.”

“So? It’s not like that was my fault.” He hated so much how defensive his voice turned each time he had an argument with Roy Parker.

“Your fault was playing like a brick for half a game. It doesn’t matter. It’s not like you’re going to make something out of basketball, anyway. You missed that chance, son.”

“I’ve played for you,” Rusty said thickly, each word weighing a ton in his mouth.

His dad seemed surprised and looked at him. “Then you didn’t do that good a job, if your only purpose was to impress me.”

“There’s no pleasing you, is there?” Rusty continued.

“You’re a piece of work, boy, aren’t you? I told you over and over. If you’re good, you will have all doors open in front of you. But you treated all this like some sort of joke, as you do with everything.”

His dad seemed to be in quite the talkative mood. True enough, Rusty didn’t want to provoke him on the grounds of not wanting another to be put on the receiving end of a few hurtful words and disappointed frowns.

“It shouldn’t come as a big surprise. This whole school of yours is one big joke,” his dad continued. “Like that weirdo interrupting the game. I suppose I should be content no one ran naked across the floor.”

Rusty bit his lip. Now wasn’t a good time to be laughing.

“Something funny? Finish your damn school, and then you can do whatever you want.”

“Yeah, sure.”

No one was able to sour the mood like his dad. And, Rusty realized at that very moment, he had always been like that, even when he had been at home, supposedly playing the roles of father and husband.

He watched as his dad climbed behind the wheel without another word. He continued to watch while the car moved away, until its lights became dim and hard to see. Without his knowing it, his hands had curled into fists. Suddenly, he felt tired, wanting nothing but a damn shower and to hit the bed. Anything but to think of this crappy evening.

“Good game, Rusty.”

He turned his head and some of his tiredness disappeared when he saw Matty walking toward him. Could it be that Matty had heard that convo? At least, parts of it? Maybe he pitied him for having such a lousy dad.

“Yeah, it was pretty good,” he said, not wanting to ask Matty anything about it. If they both didn’t say a thing, it could be as if it never happened.

“You, playing modest? Really? You were awesome.” Matty smiled from ear to ear and wrapped one arm around Rusty’s. “How about you come with me and I can read you more of *A Kingdom to Plunder*?”

“Are you telling me that I could be celebrating with the entire cheerleading team right now, and you want me to come with you to your tiny cell aka dorm room so that you can read to me about zombies with hard schlongs?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you.”

“That seems about right, then.”



Matty wasn’t going to comment on what he had seen and heard. Things were a lot clearer now. For a moment, the idea to interrupt them had crossed his mind, to do something even crazier than dressing up as a cat boy and having security chase him down. Something like waving his GPA score in front of Rusty’s dad so that the man would know that people were really studying at Sunny Hill, and that it was as good as any other school, and then say that basketball wasn’t everything—

He had stopped himself in time. It was a matter of respecting boundaries, and he was relieved that Rusty hadn’t asked him about how long he had been standing there, listening in on that strained conversation with his dad.

“Boy, I so need to take a shower,” he said, seeing how Rusty was silent, although he let himself be carried away as Matty dragged him along by one arm. “It’s hard work to scream and shout throughout an entire game.”

“Were you there the whole time?” Rusty asked.

“Yeah, I didn’t miss a second,” Matty lied through his teeth.

“I saw your friend’s uber pink jacket, but it was hard to see you in that crowd. So, you liked it?”

“I barely have any voice left,” Matty assured him. “You were a freaking star out there.”

“Not through the entire game,” Rusty said.

“Don’t you know what they say? It happens to the best of us.”

“Come on, Matty, tell me you didn’t feel the need to boo for at least like a minute or so.”

“No way. I’ll always cheer you on.”

“Regardless of how bad I do?”

“Regardless,” Matty replied. “Hey, how about we shower together? My bathroom is really tiny, but I think we can manage.”

“Is this your way of compensating for the cheerleading team?”

“Hey, I’m trying. And you haven’t yet seen my back soaping technique. I belong in a spa as a regular attraction.”

Rusty observed him through his eyelashes. “Now, you’re just bragging.”

“Hey, I guess you’ll have to see it with your own eyes. I mean, feel it on your own back.”

“Yeah, why not?”



In a way, Matty hadn’t been talking out of his ass. Rusty groaned as he felt the firm hands moving across his back and making him feel like knot after knot of tight muscles was getting unraveled like a ball of yarn. Funny. He was thinking of Slicky Coolplums while being soaped thoroughly and massaged by Matty. It was a little bit like cheating, but it wasn’t.

Ah, damn, he really needed to consider Matty as just a friend, and not even the buttfucking type of friend. Damn Maddox and Jonathan, and their unified idea that he shouldn’t be an asshole by playing too close to the fire with Matty.

For the umpteenth time, he had to say it to himself. They were right, obviously, even if they didn’t have a clue that Rusty might like having Matty’s hands on him like that a bit too much.

Still, that didn’t mean that his dick had any idea what being a moral upstanding person meant. The Mighty Thor had been twitching like crazy every time Matty had breathed on his neck by accident, each time his fingers had moved a bit too close to his ass for a non-sexual massage.

“Thanks a lot, Matty boy,” he said, trying to sound nonchalant and his usual self. “I think I can take it from here.”

“Sure.” Matty was obviously fighting to hide the disappointment in his voice. “I’ll wait for you to finish, and then it’ll be my turn.”

“Yeah, thanks. Just make sure not to fall asleep without reading some of that zombie stuff to me. You lured me here with that promise alone.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Rusty waited until Matty closed the door to grab hold of his now fully hard cock. “I’m fucking supposed to be a nice dude and stop jumping Matty’s bones, you fucker,” he admonished his longtime friend.

The Mighty Thor could be an asshole. He sprung happily in his hand while Rusty closed his eyes. He needed to think of some girls and stuff. Yet, each image he conjured in his head somehow metamorphosed into the only person he wasn’t supposed to fantasize about. A pair of juicy tits invariably turned into Matty’s smooth chest, a tiny waist into the guy’s hard abs, and he didn’t even dare to think about butts. If he went there, he was bound to become a goner in less than sixty seconds.

“You will pay for this.” Rusty pumped his cock a couple of more times and then slapped it one time. “You will go to sleep, blue balls and all. That will teach you.”



Matty showered in record time, wanting so much to understand why Rusty had assumed that completely non-combat attitude toward him, although they had practically stood naked in the shower together. He had expected at least a bit of teasing if not something physical, yet nothing of the kind had happened.

It was all right. After all, Rusty had just gone through a tough time, first through that miserable first half of the game, and then that conversation with his dad. Matty couldn’t even imagine how it would feel to be in open conflict like that with his parents. They were demanding and wanted him to excel in his studies, but they never looked down on him or made him feel bad about himself, as he had seen tonight while witnessing Rusty and his father from the shadows.

He groaned and pressed the palms of his hands against his closed eyes. He was being an asshole. No one in their right mind would think of sex under circumstances like that. As much of a free spirit as Rusty was, there was no way that kind of rejection wouldn’t get to him. Right now, more than anything, the guy needed a friend, not a horny dude who could barely wait to get into his pants.

When he got out of the bathroom, the sight that greeted him made his resolve shake a smidge. Rusty had only a pair of sweatpants on – he must have had them in his backpack, and he was lying on Matty’s bed, hands behind his head, contemplating the ceiling. When Matty walked in, his eyes turned to him and he smiled, not like his usual flirtatious or teasing smile, but the genuine kind.

Rusty moved away from the edge of the bed, closer to the wall. “Come on, hop in. I can really barely wait to hear more of what happens in that crazy fantasy.”

Matty smiled, too, as he grabbed the book and climbed on the bed. As a friend, he would ignore Rusty’s naked chest, and the warmth of his body, and the pleasant smell of his skin. He fluffed his pillow and arranged it so that he could lean against the wall in a sitting position. Rusty rested his head in Matty’s lap immediately, wrapping one arm around his left leg.

It was pure temptation, so he reached for the blond head and began caressing it gently. Rusty immediately made a purring sound, and Matty snickered. “You’re like one big cat. By the way, that thing with the cat boy, right? Wow.” He waited with bated breath.

“Yeah,” Rusty agreed quietly. “He pulled me out of my funk. Just what I needed at that moment.”

“How could he know you were having a hard time?” Matty asked. Damn, he really loved to play close to the fire.

“He’s a student here, at Sunny Hill. There’s no other explanation.”

“Do you want to touch his tail?”

“It’s a pretty fluffy tail.”

Silence followed, and Matty considered if all this probing was a good idea on his part.

“I don’t know how he knew what to do, but it’s like he really knows me,” Rusty continued.

“He sounds like a friend,” Matty commented, his heart in his throat.

“I don’t want to be friends with him,” Rusty retorted. “I want to pull his tail and fondle his butt, because he’s a total cockteaser. Plus, I have plenty of friends already.”

“Like Maddox and Jonathan,” Matty pointed out.

“And you. You’re an awesome friend, Matty.”

“The kind whose butt you want to fondle?” he risked.

“Yeah, about that. I shouldn’t do that to a friend.”

Matty pursed his lips and blinked hard. What the hell was going on?

“Now, go on, start reading. My eyes are already closing.”

“Okay,” Matty said softly.

He had just been friendzoned. Just like that. Although his eyes were getting moist and he no longer could see the letters clearly, he continued to read. It was fine. It was totally fine. Rusty needed a friend, and he, Matty, was okay with that.

Chapter Fourteen

It's All Nothing but a... Fairytail

This time, when he woke up, Rusty knew exactly where he was, unlike previously when he had found himself in the same situation. Not precisely the same situation. Matty had his back turned to him and pushed, without knowing, his perky butt against Rusty's crotch that immediately manifested itself like it was really, really happy with it. The Mighty Thor hadn't forgotten the punishment from the evening before, so he was getting hard with a vengeance. Rusty grunted as Matty pushed against him even more and mumbled something in his sleep. What had that been right there?

"Damn cats," Matty murmured in his sleep.

Ah, it looked like Matty wasn't that much of a cat person if he felt the need to curse the feline breed as a whole in his sleep. Despite that bit about alley cats, the guy could have allergies or something.

Rusty grunted as his cock rubbed itself happily through the thin fabric of his sweatpants right against Matty's perky ass. It was firm, yet juicy, even covered, and it took him all the willpower he had, plus a plethora of cursing and pleading that went through his head at the speed of light, to hold back.

Why did Jonathan and Maddox have to be so right? If Matty were a girl, things would be so easy. Rusty didn't get attached to girls. He liked them, he enjoyed doing the horizontal cha-cha with them, talked to them about everything and nothing, but there was this invisible line he never crossed with them. The chances of any girl getting under his skin were zero.

Not that guys were any different. Except for his very close friends, he never let anyone get too close for comfort.

And that put Matty in a very strange category, all by himself, because, while he hadn't yet got under Rusty's skin, he was very close to doing that. Just like his butt, so innocent and ignorant of the beast lurking a breath away, aka the Mighty Thor.

That meant that he needed to repeat to himself, over and over, that Matty did belong to a category, which was that of friends. Yes, they had established that. Only his very springy friend between his legs hadn't gotten the memo. Rusty moved one hand carefully so that he could make a barrier of sorts between Matty's lovely behind and his own uncouth partner in crime.

Because of the narrow bed, there was no room for him to maneuver. He could climb over Matty and get out of bed, but what if Matty woke up? Rusty would be caught right on top of him and that would be hard to explain after all that friend talk from last night. Not that he couldn't be fast,

but he had a feeling that he would feel too tempted to get a look at Matty's sleepy eyes first thing in the morning, and maybe kiss that cute as a button nose.

Matty jerked abruptly and let out a low growl that sounded like an angry meowl, making Rusty shout in surprise. That finally woke Matty, who stared at Rusty completely dumbfounded.

"What?" a very confused Matty asked.

"Don't 'what' me," Rusty retorted. "You mewled in your sleep so loudly I almost pissed my pants."

Matty covered his mouth with both hands and stared at Rusty in disbelief.

"Just for the record, have you ever been traumatized by cats? As a kid and stuff like that?"

Matty shook his head, without releasing his own mouth, as if in fear of saying something wrong.

"That must have been one weird dream you had, then. You started cussing at cats, and then you mewled yourself. It was like you were engaged in a fight with a cat and had to beat him with his own weapons."

"I don't remember what I was dreaming about," Matty said quickly. "Yeah, well, maybe, I'm not that big a fan of cats. Now that you mention it, one scratched me pretty badly while I was still in diapers, according to my mom. It must be some late onset PTSD."

Rusty nodded. Matty was making fun of him, so he needed to play along. Yet, there had to be a bit of truth behind it. "Slicky Coolplums jumping on the scoreboard might have triggered your memories," he said.

"You think?" Matty smirked and pushed himself up and out of bed.

Rusty followed him with his eyes as Matty walked toward the bathroom. Yeah, that was one nice butt. Matty left the door open, while brushing his teeth.

"You know," Matty said from the bathroom, "that guy's pretty nutso. Good thing the security guys didn't catch him."

Ah, Rusty realized. Matty was trying to fish for info. He wanted to know what Rusty thought of the cat boy. He had been so right about jealousies and whatnot.

"Do you want to touch his tail?" Matty continued as he walked back into the bedroom. "I have a spare toothbrush if you want to use it."

Rusty nodded and changed places with Matty after a short choreography in the middle of the room. "He was just talking. I don't think he wants me to touch him too much. He's very prickly."

“Even so, he promised,” Matty reminded him.

“We’ll see about that,” Rusty said and began washing his face. He stared at himself in the mirror until he managed to get rid of those horny eyes. Matty was a friend and he didn’t need to see his horny eyes first thing in the morning. Fuck, he was caught in a dilemma.

Matty sat cross-legged on the bed when Rusty came back. He seemed like he had something on his mind, and it wasn’t a cat boy with a fluffy tail. “I have to ask you,” he said directly. “Are we still on with the tutoring and all? You know, the sex stuff? Or is this where we stop?”

Rusty took in Matty’s big eyes, hidden behind his glasses. “We don’t stop,” he said. Yeah, Maddie and Johnny would say that was a bad idea, but he had promised that he would teach his tutor everything about sex. “We just need to rethink it a little.”

“Okay,” Matty said and worried his bottom lip while his eyes darted sideways.

“You’re mad at me for stealing your first blowjob experience and stuff?” Rusty asked.

Matty stared at him, looking precious and confused. “You didn’t steal anything. It’s just that I want to know where we stand so that, you know, we don’t end up in some awkward situation.”

Rusty put his hands on his hips. “I see. You’re so cool and rational, Matty. I mean, that’s a great thing because it works for you and all. I mean, you wouldn’t be caught dead in a cat boy suit, climbing the scoreboard, right?” He shook his head and laughed, mostly at himself. He was getting worried for nothing. He had been right the first time. Matty was uber cool and understood their strange relationship. Now, if only Rusty could manage to make the Mighty Thor behave. Then they would be totally good.

“That’s why you like him,” Matty said in a wistful voice.

“Yeah, but I like you, too,” Rusty explained. “As a friend,” he hurried to add. Geez, he needed to guard his mouth and everything that came out of it.

“Do you like him better?” Matty asked. “Better than me?”

Rusty snorted. There was no way he could compare them. “He’s a cat boy. But let’s not compare apples and oranges. I like the--” he struggled to find the right words.

“The cocktails we make together?” Matty offered.

Rusty groaned. “Look, Matty, we can’t be buttfucking friends. I mean, duh. You clearly told me not even to think of attempting to take your V-card or else.”

“I don’t remember sounding so aggressive.”

“You should be. You need to save it for that special dude. I know very well that I can be very convincing, and then you’ll hate my guts. I’m trying to be nice here, get it?” He was cringing so hard inside. Nice was the word used when he pushed people away. Matty had gotten a taste and wanted more, without realizing the risk of attachment and all that. Rusty couldn’t lose face and admit that he was the one scared of all that. Better to just play it cool.

“Nice.” Matty nodded thoughtfully. “Come on, Rusty, be real. Are you scared I’m going to get clingy with you and all that?”

Rusty winced. “Ah, well, yeah, I guess.” It wasn’t like him to lie so blatantly, but he couldn’t get Matty involved in the messy tangle that was his mind on a regular basis.

Matty snorted and rolled his eyes. “Like that would happen. You’re so totally not my type.”

“What?” Rusty asked, now alarmed by Matty’s sudden confession.

His host was already busy tidying up the bed, a sign that he didn’t think their conversation that much of a priority. “You’re my type as a friend and as a sex tutor,” Matty explained while punching a pillow in the face with all his might. “But not as a boyfriend or anything like that.”

“Good to know,” Rusty murmured. “Yeah, you’re totally right. I’m nobody’s boyfriend material. I’m practically a manwhore.”

“And now that the game week is over, you’re free to fool around again,” Matty pointed out. “So, you won’t be bored anymore, or need me to read to you about zombie wizards.”

Rusty walked behind Matty and put both hands on his shoulders. “That’s so totally not true. I don’t remember sleeping as well as I did last night. So, I reserve the right to end up in your bed so that you can read me bedtime stories again. Do we have a deal?” For some obscure reason, securing that understanding with Matty was important.

“Okay, fine,” Matty agreed but sounded annoyed.

Rusty wrapped one arm around Matty’s chest and held him close. “You’re mad at me. Why are you mad at me?”

“I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No, I’m not.”

“I’m going to tickle you until you spill the beans.”

“Don’t you dare. I’ll tickle you back, and I’ll have you know I’m a master tickler.”

“You don’t say.” Rusty moved fast and sank his fingers into Matty’s flanks, but the other was faster and ready to fight.

They circled each other in the small space between the two beds, each waiting for the other to make a wrong move. Rusty, impatient as he always was, launched the first attack, but Matty dodged him and jumped, and then moved past him, ending up behind him.

He growled as Matty began to tickle him while pushing him so hard that he met the bed face first. Who knew that nerd could be such a wild beast? Now, Matty was on top of him, holding him down and tickling his sides, making him thrash and laugh.

“I surrender, I surrender,” Rusty shouted and turned, slipping to the floor, with Matty in his lap.

Why did he have such pretty eyes? Why did he have to look at him like that?

Matty stopped all his thinking by kissing him hard on the lips, only one time, and then getting up. “Come on, king of Sunny Hill,” he mocked playfully, “there’s a world of chicks and cat tails out there. It’s time for you to leave the premises and get back to your usual entertainments.”

“I don’t mind the entertainment here, either,” Rusty said. “Ah, it’s Saturday. There are like a gazillion parties going on. We will have to put all that training I gave you to good use.”

“What do you mean?” Matty asked.

“You know, find a guy for you.”

“Ah, okay. But I’m not really in the mood to party.”

“How are you going to find that special dude if you lock yourself in your room every night? Do you think he’ll fly to your window and profess his undying love or something?”

“But that’s exactly how I picture it all,” Matty said with a heartfelt sigh. “Don’t crush my dreams.”

Rusty went to the window and opened it wide. He looked down. “The guy could climb, but it’s kind of dangerous. You don’t want your second date to involve you helping him feed through a straw in a hospital room, right?”

Matty pulled him away from the window, just as Rusty thought he saw something strange peeking from a nearby tree. What was it? Something a little pink? He shrugged.

“I will come tonight and drag you to the most awesome party on campus. You will so totally get hitched.”

“I don’t think so, but okay, since you’re my teacher of sex.”

“Good, Matty boy, that’s the right attitude.”



Matty plopped down on the bed and sighed, while hiding his face in his palms. Whatever was happening, it had been totally expected. Rusty no longer wanted to do the naughty with him, because, obviously, he had gotten bored already and wanted to go back to his usual string of hookups and whatnot. As expected as it had been, it was still so hard to ignore how bad it felt.

Zoey’s phone call came right on time. “Hey, sleepy head, how was your night? You dragged Rusty to your lair, didn’t you?”

“I did, but, well, what can I tell you, Zoey? I think it’s fair to say my little sexual adventures with Rusty are over.”

“What? Why?” Zoey asked, sounding a lot more alarmed than Matty felt.

“He must have gotten bored. He practically told me that we cannot be buttfucking friends.”

“Well, I suppose there are some steps to be taken before getting there,” Zoey said, “like, for instance, you must first blow him--”

Matty grunted.

“What?” Zoey caught on right away. “You did?!”

Matty had to hold the phone a bit farther from his ear. “I can’t believe I’m talking to you about my sex life. Yes, I did, apparently I sucked, and not in the good way, and now, it’s over. The end.”

Zoey remained silent for a bit and then said quietly, “Matty, it’s all right. You can say that it sucks and it feels bad.”

Matty sniffled and then recollected himself. “It does feel bad. But it’s not like I didn’t know it wouldn’t last, right?”

“Do you still want him?” Zoey said, the determination in her voice announcing to him that she was bent on great things.

“I do, but it’s not like I can force him, right?”

“You have the secret weapon, Matty.”

“A wooden ruler?”

“No, you wuss. You have Slicky Coolplums!”

Matty grimaced. “Yeah. Rusty likes that guy better. Can you believe it? I beat myself with myself. I don’t think there’s anyone else in history to have done that as flawlessly as me.”

“I’d say, ‘don’t beat yourself up’, but.” Zoey snickered but stopped right away. “Sorry, Matty, you have the most fantastic sex and love life I’ve ever heard about. Anyway, put on your cat suit and go wiggle your tail. Keep Rusty busy. Don’t let him go hook up with chicks again. Postpone that as long as you can.”

“You know, that’s practically postponing the inevitable.”

“Yet, you’re considering it. You still want to do it,” Zoey said each word slowly and carefully.

“Are you trying to hypnotize me through the phone?”

“Yeah, totally. Is it working?”

Matty weighed his options. “I had no idea I had it this bad for this guy, Zoey,” he said softly.

“You’ve crushed on him for three years. I don’t understand what you’re saying. Of course you do. The thing is, you don’t get to quit until it’s over. It’s like the law or something. Come on, hop into that cat boy suit.”

“Right now? I’m already risking becoming some kind of persona non grata on campus after the craziness from yesterday. And since I scaled to my window when I got back to avoid being seen, a bit of hair from my wig ended up in the tree just outside. Rusty almost saw it. Now, I have to make sure I wipe any traces of me away well, or I’ll be in big trouble.”

“Hmm, what do you think his reaction would be if you told him you were Slick Coolplums?”

“I have a feeling that he might not take it well. I’m basically fooling him. Also, the worst that could happen would be for him to lose all interest in me. In all versions of me.”

“You’re the most cautious dude I’ve ever met. But, okay, you have a point. Play with his head until he cannot escape and has to admit that he has the hots for you. Then, he’s going to ask you to marry him.”

“Geez, Zoey, you have no equal when it comes to dreaming up stuff. What kind of fairytale land do you live in? Not that I judge. I envy you.”

“Maybe you should dream a little, too. Go be Slick Coolplums. Rusty will surely appreciate it. And make it more interesting.”

“Like how?”

“I don’t know. You are a very creative guy, only you don’t admit it.”

“And how did you reach that conclusion?”

“Hey, you ended up blowing Rusty, the straight king of Sunny Hill. Check up your sleeve for new tricks. And be yourself,” Zoey said cheerfully.

Matty sighed from the depths of his heart. “I’m basically putting on a suit and pretending to be a cat boy.”

“That’s as good as a part of you now. That show at the game was top notch. Come on, Matty, you can do it.”

“Okay, okay, if only so that you stop pestering me,” Matty joked. “Seriously, Zoey, though... thank you. You’re a great friend.”

“I know, right?” Zoey laughed. “Who else is going to push you into playing cat boy other than your bestie? Bye, Matty. And keep me posted.”

“Will do.”

Matty lay on his bed for a while. Make it interesting, Zoey said, in her never-ending optimism. He was nuts for wanting Rusty still, but he had come this far. Plus, it was a shame not to put on that costume again. He kind of felt good in it. Also, as Slick Coolplums, he could be shameless.

He straightened up. Of course. “Zoey?” he asked quickly, as soon as his friend picked up. “Do you still have that weird gift your roommate gave you freshman year? The one that was supposed to help you loosen up?”

“I totally do,” Zoey replied. “I keep it in my special box. Never used it. Do you want it?”

“I’ve never wanted anything else more in my whole life,” he joked.



Bad idea, bad idea, bad idea, Matty repeated to himself while walking up and down along the top of the wall, trying to get used to the weird sensation in his ass. His tail wiggled from side to side, startling him now and then as the small butt plug was dragged in all directions, adding friction where there was supposed to be none. Zoey had declared herself completely unhappy with the size, saying that bigger was better for what he had in mind, and yet, it felt like a torture device only because it was giving him all kinds of sensations.

Given the latex suit, he was also starting to sweat, but heck, everything was game when wanting to make things interesting, right?

Now, he was supposed to find Rusty somehow or hope for the gossip grapevine to function well enough so that news of the local cat boy being spotted reached the right ears. A few students noticed him and waved at him. Great. Now, he was becoming a local celebrity.

All's fair in love and war, or something like that. Not so fair for his ass. He felt so full from so little it was uncanny. Maybe he was destined to be a top, after all. He tried to be philosophical about it.

He sat on the wall, his feet hanging over.

“Out of the way, out of the way,” someone called loudly.

Hmm, he so needed to play his coolest card ever. He got back on his feet and crossed his arms while Rusty rushed toward him. He must have come in a real hurry, because when he got to the wall he rested one hand against it and was breathing hard while staring at Matty in his cat boy suit.

“You’re here,” Rusty finally managed. “In broad daylight.”

“I don’t sleep all day,” Matty replied in his high-pitched impersonation of what he thought to be a cat boy voice. Probably it had nothing to do with reality. “Well, you kept your end of the bargain. I’m here to deliver.” He wrapped his tail around one arm. “Ready to get your reward?”

“So ready,” Rusty assured him and raised one hand.

“Not here,” Matty said quickly, looking around. People were even taking pictures. “Somewhere we can be alone. I have a reputation to uphold.”

“Sure thing.” Rusty lifted himself up on the wall. “I know a way to get rid of everyone.”



He had been in such a sour mood after having to clear the air with Matty about being nothing but friends, and not the buttfucking kind, that all day until now he had moped around the house, getting on everyone’s nerves. So, Matty was okay with it, and he was okay with it, but nothing made it okay.

Good thing the cat boy had decided to make an appearance. It looked like Slicky Coolplums had a knack for showing up whenever he was going through a tough time, just like the day before. The cat boy was fair game, after all, and Rusty planned on taking out on him all his frustration at being unable or allowed to touch Matty anywhere with his cock.

Through skillful navigation, they had ended up in one of Rusty’s secret spots for making out, in one of the old buildings that had once served as a gym. Normally, it was locked, but Rusty knew

a way in, so he guided the cat boy gently, with his hand placed on the small of his back, right above the swinging tail that enticed him so much.

Now, that he had the cat boy where he wanted him, he could experiment with a little bit of delayed gratification.

They were in the middle of what had used to be an indoor basketball court, so it was very apropos, but it had to work for them. Rusty made a show of jumping and grabbing the hoop, swinging from it a couple of times before landing back on the ground again.

Slicky held his arms crossed and stared at him with his golden eyes. “We must set some ground rules.”

“Sure,” Rusty said and grinned. He liked looking at the cat boy from all angles. One of his fantasies included a photoshoot involving various stages of undress and teasing, but this was hardly the place. He had a feeling he would have other opportunities lined up after today.

“Regardless of what we do, you must never try to take off my wig or do anything else to find out who I am.”

“You’re Slicky Coolplums,” Rusty said with a shrug. “That goes without saying. I have other means to find out who you are.”

“You do?” The cat boy angled his head and stared hard at him.

“I’m not going to show you my hand, though,” Rusty replied. “Now, are you going to let me pet you or what?”

“Okay.” Slicky turned slowly and bent slightly from the waist. Then, he began wiggling his tail. “I’ll endure it since I promised.”

Rusty chuckled and grabbed the fluffy tail, gently at first. He moved his hand up and down, wrapping the thing around his arm, while his eyes remained fixed on the prize.

Slicky gasped when he pulled a little harder. “Not so roughly, please.”

“Don’t tell me it hurts.” Rusty moved his hand lower, to the root of the tail. His fingers felt something through the latex, something like a hard edge. “What is this?”

“Nothing,” the cat boy protested.

Rusty continued his investigation. His knowledge on the topic could only lead to one conclusion. “You have a butt plug in your ass?” He pulled on it a bit, making Slicky gasp again. “O. M. F. G., you do!”

“It’s for controlling my tail, nothing else,” Slicky said quickly. “I didn’t tell you to touch there.”

Rusty moved quickly and wrapped one arm around Slicky's slim waist. "You're a kinky cat boy," he whispered in his ear.

Slicky trembled in his arms. Rusty rested his crotch against a shapely buttock and rubbed against it. He hadn't jerked off since a couple of days ago. And now, he had a cat boy in his arms, one who had thought it wise to put a butt plug up his ass when meeting the king of Sunny Hill.

"You wanted me to find out, didn't you?" Rusty slowly purred into Slicky's ear. "To find out what a naughty boy you are."

"As if," the cat boy protested. "Stop that."

Rusty used his crotch as leverage to push into the butt plug. It wasn't ideal, but he bet the other could feel it. Then, his hand wandered down and moved over Slicky's obvious erection. "All that running away, when you want to be touched."

"I don't," the cat boy keened softly.

"Part of the deal or not, I have to rub one out, because you're way too sexy," Rusty announced and freed the Mighty Thor so that he could finally get a guiltless release.

For a moment, he wondered if Matty would pop to mind even now, but it was hard to ignore having that lean perfect body in his arms. That was good. He was allowed to have some fun, for fuck's sake.

He moved his cock against the latex clad buttocks. "Do you like getting fucked in the butt?" he asked.

"No," came the offended reply. "Why would you even ask that? You're a lady killer, or so I heard."

"Lady killer." Rusty snorted. "Well, it's okay, since I'm not supposed to fuck guys in the butt, either."

"Then why are you doing this kind of naughty thing?" Slicky asked and squirmed as Rusty continued to torture his cock through his costume.

"Because I like your sexy ass too much. Can you feel my cock? Rubbing against your butt?" With each word, he felt himself getting nearer and nearer to the point of no return.

"It would be hard not to. Wait, I hope you're not planning to--"

"Too late," Rusty whispered and sprayed all over the latex costume.

He laughed as Slicky pushed him away and then stared him down with miffed eyes. “You didn’t!” He brought one hand back and returned it full of Rusty’s cum. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

“It’s nutritious. You could lick it,” Rusty suggested and squeezed the Mighty Thor a couple more times for the last drops.

Another killer look from Slicky convinced him that he had hit the jackpot with this guy. “Maybe you should lick it.”

He was holding his palm open, and since his hands were covered in latex gloves, too, it was obvious how big a load Rusty had blown.

“Why did you even have so much?” Slicky continued to complain.

Rusty shrugged. “There’s a good explanation for that.”

“Like what?”

“I had to spend an entire night with the owner of a sexy butt without doing anything.”

“Really? What held you back? I’m sure the girl would have liked to get a fucking from you.”

“It was no girl. Just my sexy friend, and I can’t jump his bones or there will be consequences.”

“What consequences?”

Rusty removed his t-shirt and began wiping Slicky’s palm. Then, he turned him and wiped the rest from his back and butt. “I’m supposed to be a moral upstanding person,” he explained. “Which I don’t have to be with you.”

Slicky gasped in outrage as Rusty lifted him from the ground and smothered him in his arms. “Put me down, or I’ll scratch you. This is your last warning.”

Rusty obeyed and then turned Slicky so they were facing each other. “You’re hard because I fondled your butt and came all over it,” he said with a grin.

“And? What do you want to do about it?”

Rusty considered. Well, the cat boy was kind of a perv, and he liked that, and Maddox and Jonathan didn’t have anything to say in this situation, because whatever they said about Matty didn’t extend to Slicky Coolplums. So, with a small shrug, decided that no one was supposed to beat him at the kink game, he knelt in front of the other and put his tongue directly on top of the latex clad erection.

Slicky moaned instantly. Rusty smirked in satisfaction and opened his mouth so that he could squeeze the cat boy's cock with his lips. His efforts didn't appear to be in vain at all, because Slicky was gasping and moaning, despite trying hard to hold back the noises he was making.

Rusty moved one hand behind to press against the butt plug by holding the tail. That seemed to do it, along with his tongue teasing the cat boy through his suit. Slicky grabbed Rusty's hair hard and let out the cutest moan of release he had ever heard in the last year or so. Too bad he couldn't taste the juice, too. He would like to compare it with Matty's, though that wasn't supposed to happen.

He shook his head and got to his feet. "Well? Mad at me, still?"

Slicky crossed his arms and huffed, although his breathing was uneven. "You're a kinky bastard, Mr. King. I'll keep this offense in mind."

"I bet. So, when will I see you again? Can I undress you next time? You can keep the wig on."

"No. It was only this time. Because you had to win the game."

"Yeah, yeah, fool yourself more. You wanted me to play with you. I'm telling you, this fairytale between us, it's not over."

"Fairytale?" Slicky asked, frowning under the mask.

"No, no," Rusty hurried to correct him. "Fairytail, 'cause you have a tail."

"Hmm, what a cheap low hanging fruit. I'll leave first."

"Yeah, okay. Swing that tail for me some more on your way out."

Rusty watched the cat boy jump on a stack of boxes and then going out the window. Wow, now that had been something. And, finally, his balls were empty and he could do right by Matty and find him a guy tonight, without the Mighty Thor getting in the way and asking for that V-card like it was his birthright or something.



Matty felt as if he were flying over every obstacle in his path. His heart was in his throat, his mind was dizzy, and he had a cat boy suit to clean thoroughly.

Rusty wanted him, still. Yeah, he even wanted Matty, not only Slicky Coolplums. But how to convince him that he would still be a moral upstanding person or whatever, even if they were fooling around together?

Chapter Fifteen

Tonight's Not about Bubbles

“You seem to be in a good mood,” Maddox noted out loud as Rusty whistled while adjusting the cuffs on his shirt. After admiring Jonathan for his dress code, the guy had gifted him some really cool shirts, and now he could present himself at the party dressed as a teacher should. “And why are you suddenly getting dressed to the nines? Aren't we going out to party?”

Maddie and Johnny would be present and they would totally see that he could be a perfect gentleman with Matty. “Yes, and this is also the night when I'm going to push Matty in the right direction. That of finding himself a dude,” he explained. “Can Jonathan lend me some of that badass cologne of his?”

“I have no idea which one you consider badass.” Maddox crossed his arms and stared at him from the bathroom door. “If I didn't know any better, I'd think you're getting ready for a date. But, I gotta say, you do clean up nicely.”

“I totally do,” Rusty said and undid another button. Yeah, no need to make it entirely formal. He was the casual type of teacher, not the moldy kind.

“Wow, Rusty,” Jonathan interjected and wrapped one arm around Maddox's shoulders. “You look great. What's the occasion?”

“He's introducing Matty to the world of hookups, apparently,” Maddox explained. “By the way, the streets have been buzzing about you going somewhere with the local cat boy and coming back from that secret place with a very satisfied look on your face. Do you have something to confess?”

Rusty offered his friends a dazzling smile. “It was ah-mazing.”

Jonathan grinned at him. “I shouldn't ask, but I cannot help myself. What did you two do?”

Rusty slapped his face a few times and winked at himself in the mirror. “You know, a bit of this, a bit of that. I touched his tail. He looked at me in outrage. I spanked my monkey. He got mad. Only cat boy fans would understand.”

“What we're understanding,” Maddox intervened, “is that you enjoy a lot of fooling around with dudes lately. Is it still the gay?”

Rusty sighed and shook his head. How could they even understand? “It is something. But hey, Matty and I, we're totally cool. You two parents have nothing to worry about.”

Jonathan and Maddox traded a look. They acted so much like Kane and Dex these days.

“What? I’m doing the moral thing and all that. I’m not making any attempts on his V-card. Some other dude is going to do that.”

The face reflected in the mirror didn’t seem to like the sound of that much, because it pursed its lips as if he had just tasted a lemon.

“Hmm, so tonight’s the night you’re going to find Matty a guy to hook up with?” Maddox asked.

Rusty waved an irritated hand at his own reflection and gave up on looking in the mirror. “Yeah. Any comments from you two?”

“No, none,” Maddox said and shrugged. “I just wonder what guy is going to be good enough for Matty.”

“And why do you say that?”

“I remember you saying something about some guy with an Ivy League degree and a big schlong. I’m not sure we have that kind around here,” Maddox replied promptly.

“We could negotiate on that Ivy League thing.”

“What about the big schlong?” Maddox asked.

“That’s non-negotiable. What is it, Johnny boy?” Rusty asked, seeing how Jonathan was fighting himself not to laugh. “Don’t tell me you gay boys don’t measure your dicks.”

“That’s practically standard procedure for entering the gay boys club,” Jonathan joked. “What’s your excuse?”

“As the owner of the biggest schlong on campus, I’m allowed to,” Rusty offered the wackiest explanation that came to mind.

“The biggest--” Maddox huffed. “Well, let’s hope it matches your ego. Now, are you ready, or do you need more time with the mirror?”

“Nope, I’m ready.” Nothing would ruin his night. He had had Slick Coolplums take a load on his latex suit, he had cleared the air with Matty, his balls were empty, and now he could find a dude for his cute sexy tutor.

Damn, his teeth kind of hurt, he thought, as he rubbed his jaw.



“Anyone who doesn’t know you would think that you’re getting ready for a funeral,” Zoey commented while measuring him up and down with her keen eyes that read right through him on a regular basis.

“Yeah, the funeral of my dreams of getting Rusty while being dressed like this,” Matty gestured at his usual plain clothes, “and being my usual self.”

Zoey waved. “You’re getting too hung up on all the wrong things, my friend. You have him by the balls as Slick Coolplums. By the way, how--”

“Not telling.”

“You’re no fun.” Zoey pouted and crossed her arms.

Matty narrowed his eyes as he took her in. “What kind of outfit is that?”

Zoey wore a pair of the baggiest pants she must have been able to find for sale, and a shirt that looked like a balloon. They were both of a pink so bright that Matty thought people at the party would have to wear sunglasses in the presence of his dazzling companion.

“One that says--” she began and then pressed her index finger against her lips and looked to the ceiling for help.

“Look at me, I’m a walking neon sign?” Matty offered since his bestie seemed at a loss for ideas. That couldn’t have been the case when she had walked into the store and tried those clothes on.

“I need to catch someone’s attention,” she said quickly.

“Hmm. Who is that someone?”

Zoey waved. Apparently, she wasn’t ready to tell. Still, Matty thought that all that dallying couldn’t be good for her. Without saying anything, he walked toward her and suddenly pinched her cheek.

“Ouch,” she batted his hand away, “you’re taking off all my glitter.”

Matty looked at his hand. Indeed, his fingers were covered with it. Zoey’s makeup was screaming for attention just as much as the rest of her. “Let me understand. Are you trying to hook up with a clown?”

Zoey scowled and gave him a murderous look. “That’s easy for you to say. You have this,” she poked him in the stomach making him grunt, “and you can make the king of Sunny Hill fall for your ass. Whatever magic skill you have is, I want some of it, too.”

“Now you’re talking out of your ass. I have nothing.” Matty threw his arms up in surrender. “I mean, he does think I have a sexy butt--”

“He does?” Zoey’s glitter heavy eyes grew wide. “Why am I the last one to find out?”

“You’re the only one to find out, so let’s leave it at that. That’s what he confessed to me when I was dressed up as a cat boy. But, Zoey, what if I have to dress up as a cat boy all my life to get him to notice me?”

“Let’s not make this into a teenage drama movie. First of all, we’re young adults, no longer teenagers. Second of all, what you do with Rusty is clearly as R-rated as fuck. That means that you are free to make your own choices.”

“I somehow doubt that anyone with a working brain can actually follow your logic on a day to day basis, Zoey. What do you even mean by making my own choices?”

Zoey made an effort with her balloon-clad arms to grasp him by the shoulders. It was like being comforted by an overinflated pixie. “It means that whatever you think you’re sad about tonight is not true. What do you think is going to happen tonight?”

“Rusty’s going to push me into some guy’s arms.”

“So? What’s the problem?”

Matty gestured as if he needed to explain a complicated math problem. “That is the opposite of the direction of his arms.”

“Then how about you play along? For a bit? Maybe you’ll make him jealous.”

“I doubt that’s going to happen. He has a horde of adoring fans at his feet. The moment he pushes me away, all I can count on is Slick Coolplums.”

“Who practically counts as a royal flush in this game of poker you’re playing with the dude,” Zoey noted very matter-of-factly. “The best thing that could happen is for Rusty to fall for your cat boy persona. And then, when you take the wig off, you can say something like: Surprise, motherfucker!” The last words were delivered in a booming voice.

Matty slapped his forehead. “I’d never say something so rude to Rusty in my life.”

“I know.” Zoey took him by the arm as if he was an invalid and needed help crossing the street. “You’re this nice guy, who needs to leave some of that niceness at home so that he can nail the sexy bastard who is the king of Sunny Hill.”

“He’s not a bastard,” Matty protested again.

“I say it with love, affection, and tenderness,” Zoey assured him. “Tonight, play dirty, Matty. Does Rusty want you to hook up? Play your hand. Go for some dude, dance lasciviously with him, grinding your cocks together, until the two of you need to be pulled apart by the police or an entire team of firefighters armed with big hefty hoses--” Her voice grew so heated that he felt rightfully embarrassed.

“Zoey, stop. This fantasy of yours is getting out of hand.”

“Hey, it’s a good one. Anyway, you get it. Don’t play the shy virgin. Show Rusty that you learned plenty from your lessons together.” She did the air quotes to prove her point.

“And he’ll be all too happy to get rid of me, finally.”

“Or realize that he’s not ready to let you go just yet. What do you say?”

“Hindsight is always 20/20, right?” Matty said with a sigh. “There’s no way I can think about this clearly while I’m so deep in it.”

“And deep is where you should be,” Zoey concluded. “Look at the bright side. What if you find a guy you really click with? What if you make a friend? A boyfriend?”

“That’s a stretch. And it wouldn’t be fair to that person, right? I mean, I shouldn’t mislead other guys while I’m still crushing on Rusty like crazy.”

“A little dance and a little flirting don’t count as that. Chicks do it all the time, while, you know, evaluating whether this dude or the next is the right one for them. You’re overthinking things. I’m overthinking things, and it’s all because of you,” Zoey accused. “You know what? Let’s just have fun. If you don’t want to hook up at all, not even to make Rusty jealous, be honest about it. And maybe Rusty’s going to understand a little bit about what’s going on, without your having to spell it out for him.”

Matty exhaled noisily. “Okay, pink master. You’re right about that. We should have a little fun while we’re still young. Now, could you please let go of my arm? I feel like I’m eighty and need help.”

Zoey just squeezed his arm harder. “No. You do need help.”

No chance of countering that. Rolling his eyes, Matty let himself be guided out of the room.



Rusty scanned the room again and checked his phone. Matty was late. What the hell was he thinking? No way was Rusty getting stood up by his student.

“Why are you checking the door every other second?” Maddox asked and threw a lazy arm over his shoulders.

“Matty is trying to wiggle out of our deal.” Rusty pouted for show and crossed his arms.

“There are barely ten people here. It’s very early, and we’re only here because you dragged us out of the house like there was a fire.”

“Hmph,” Rusty offered in as non-committal way as he could manage.

Maddox’s smile hinted at nothing good. “It looks to me like the only fire is the one under your ass,” his bestie whispered in his ear and gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

Rusty made a face and rubbed the place where Maddox had kissed him. “Stop embarrassing me in front of the other kids, mom.”

“Stop hugging the door with your eyes. He’s going to be here.”

“You think so?”

“He wouldn’t miss it since it was you asking him to be present. By the way, what’s the game plan?”

Rusty munched on his lower lip with a vengeance. “I’m going to find a dude for my baby dude.”

“Baby dude? You gave Matty an endearing nickname?”

“Stop it with those eyes,” Rusty warned his bestie. Maddox was laughing at him with his entire face. If he hadn’t planned to be such a gentleman tonight, Maddox would have already heard about what he could do with that shit-eating grin.

“What do you mean ‘those eyes’?” Maddox teased. “I’m not doing anything.”

“You totally are, and you know very well that you are. Anyway, yeah, Matty’s my baby dude, ‘cause I say so, but don’t dare pass that on or we’re going to have a problem.”

“Hmm, I’m already shaking. Okay, I won’t tell anyone, except Jonathan. Is that okay with you?”

“Jonathan is going to think--”

“I’m not judging,” Jonathan intervened from behind, making Rusty roll his eyes in pure, unadulterated suffering. “By the way, here’s your baby dude.”

Rusty forgot all about the things he wanted to say to Maddie and Johnny, things that were designed to give them sleepless nights on account of the expectation of having certain pranks played on them, because, indeed, Matty walked through the door at that exact moment.

He wore regular cut jeans and a white tee and normally Rusty would have scolded him for dressing too plainly, only that seeing Matty’s non-assuming attire gave him an odd satisfaction. The cute nerd hadn’t bothered to style his hair, either, and he wore his glasses.

Leaving Maddox and Jonathan to their own little happy bubble, Rusty moved toward his target. He blinked at a pink balloon sauntering at Matty’s left, and it took him a couple of moments to realize that was Zoey encased in that strange outfit.

“Hey, dudes,” he said and wrapped one arm around Matty’s shoulders, pulling him in for a hug. “You don’t get a hug,” he said to Zoey. “I don’t want to make you pop.”

Zoey, as per usual, dared to roll her eyes at him. “In your dreams. With all due respect, Your Majesty.”

“Yeah, yeah. Cool outfit, though. But I have to disappoint you. There’s no costume party tonight.”

As he talked to Zoey, he unconsciously continued to pull Matty toward him. The other’s warm, mint-scented breath on his cheek made him realize that they were too close.

He let go an inch with great reluctance. “Why did you let her go out of the house like that?”

Matty’s eyes were very close, very big, and very shiny. It was probably the effect of the glasses. “I wouldn’t dream of telling Zoey anything about her fashion sense. I value my life. Plus, it looks like it worked.”

“What?” Rusty was aware of his lips being only a couple of inches away from Matty’s mouth. No, it was probably less.

“Zoey’s so flashy that you didn’t bother to scold me about not dressing up for the occasion,” Matty explained.

“Nah, you’re good. The idea is that you should be so good at the game now that it doesn’t matter what you’re wearing. Hey, where did the pink balloon go?”

Zoey had mysteriously disappeared, but Rusty couldn’t say that he was disappointed. He needed some moments alone with his student so that they could iron out all the little imperfections in Matty’s game before launching him into the world of gay delights awaiting him.

“She must be floating around,” Matty replied. “So, what’s the first move, master?”

Rusty leaned forward, his lips touching Matty’s ear briefly. “Careful with that tone. I’m prone to misunderstandings, people say.”

“Oh, really? Okay, teach. Teach me.”

Rusty let go of Matty abruptly. Curiously enough, he could sense a bubble forming around the two of them while they were sharing that private space. Tonight wasn’t about bubbles. It was about finding Matty a dude to hook up with, or at least do some of the old teasing and denial.

That was a funny thing to think about. Matty wasn’t the teasing and denial kind. Slick Coolplums on the other hand—

All right, it was a good moment for him to stop. Someone laughed at his right, drawing his attention. A couple of girls were staring at him with naughty glints in their eyes. One of them winked. “Meow,” she drawled.

“You’re doing it wrong,” he immediately admonished her.

“You should know,” she replied and laughed. She turned on her heel, followed by her girlfriend, who gave him another amused look before scurrying after like a little loyal acolyte.

“What was that all about?” Rusty asked out loud.

Matty, rightfully considering that he was the one being asked, hurried to reply. “Don’t you know? Xpress invented a bunch of stuff about you getting it on with the cat boy.”

“I haven’t read Xpress today.”

“Well, I doubt they ever publish an ounce of truth,” Matty continued, “and they really went the extra mile with the fake news this time around.”

Rusty pulled out his phone.



Hey, hey, boys and girls of Sunny Hill! Do you know what it takes to get into our good king’s graces these days? Yes, you guessed it, since we’ve already covered some of Rusty Parker’s obsession with cat boys.

You need a tail, cat ears, some claws, and the right body to rock a black latex suit. Well, you ladies are out of luck because, obviously, to get it right, you also need a chest so flat no one would mistake you for a female.

We’ve been wondering... why cat boys? Is that one of Rusty Parker’s ways of telling the world he actually has gay feelings buried deep inside his hard and cold womanizing heart?

Let us guide you through what happened earlier today, when the local cat boy made an appearance... Our dear king whisked him away from prying eyes, but we have prying eyes everywhere.

So, we can tell you on good authority... Rusty Parker succumbed to the basest of desires! There must have been a convenient hole in that latex suit, because his wandering hands found their way inside. Oh, and what ecstasy followed! We bet our king now rocks a nice pair of symmetric scratch patterns on his back.

Even more, there was no protection involved! Do you know what that means, Sunny Hill?

Ah, we cannot stop our hammering hearts at the revelations we're about to share. Have we already tricked you into believing that Rusty Parker got flipped like a switch? No, no, no, that's not what's happening...

The cat boy, the now famous Slick Coolplums, is actually a girl! Yes, you heard us. Should we expect a consistent feline litter after today's transgressions? And we thought our king was a stickler for safe sex! It looks like passion trampled all!



“What a bunch of bullshit,” Rusty wondered aloud.

“I thought so, too,” Matty offered eagerly.

Rusty pulled his eyes from Xpress’s bullshit to look at his gay friend. “Why?” he asked.

“What do you mean, why?” Matty blinked a few times. “That’s definitely a guy,” he said somewhat defensively. “I mean, the cat boy.”

Rusty nodded. “Don’t you think I could have done it with him today, though?”

Matty blushed and averted his eyes. “You could do whatever you want,” he replied, his voice close to abrasive.

Rusty kissed Matty shortly on the forehead. “You don’t have to be jealous of Slick Coolplums.”

“I know, I know. We’re only friends.”

Something about the way Matty said that, grumbling like an old man, convinced Rusty all the more that tonight was the night to let the chick fly out of the coop.

“I’ve put together a list,” he announced. “There are some awesome gay boys to choose from, all single.”

“Very interesting. And are they all going to attend this party?” Matty inquired, a lot more formal than necessary, while pushing the glasses up on his nose.

“I took care to personally invite them.”

“Didn’t they think it odd?”

“No. It was on the grounds of having the once in a lifetime opportunity of meeting the man of their dreams.”

“Did you really use those words?”

Rusty pulled out his phone again and showed Matty the message, at which the other only groaned in resignation.

“You do realize that now I’ll have to live up to some outstanding expectations.”

“And? I know for a fact that you can meet them and go beyond.”

Matty rubbed his cheeks and reached for his eyes under the glasses with the tips of his fingers. “Thank you for the vote of confidence, teach. Now, I need to get mentally prepared to disappoint some gay boys. Are you going to tell me their names? Or how are we going to go about this?”

Rusty patted Matty’s shoulders hard, for encouragement. “The first contender just walked in. Andy something. Go get him, tiger.”



Matty stared at the nerdy boy, who seemed to be wishing to be anywhere else but there, while he took one step after another. For a moment, he had felt tempted to tell Rusty that he knew for a fact that Xpress was talking out of their asses because he had been present at that meeting with the cat boy. Rusty’s suspicions had proven short-lived, so there was nothing for him to worry about.

Still, to think that Xpress thought the cat boy to be a cat girl. Where the hell did they get that idea? Matty had only skimmed through the gossip at a glance since Zoey had insisted, but now those insinuations were starting to get to him. So, according to Xpress, Rusty couldn’t be gay, not even a little. And he might have fathered some illegitimate children, just like that.

Well, he could spend a lot of time and think about how Xpress was eating shit for all their daily meals, but he had a bigger problem on his hands. He stopped in front of Andy something, and the boy stopped his fidgeting, throwing him a confused look.

Matty smiled and waved. “Hi, Andy. It looks like you’re here because of me.”

Andy pulled out his phone. “Rusty Parker sent me a message. I thought it was a prank.”

Matty winced a little inside. “Well, he is kind of a prankster. The truth is he hopes that I could find a partner at this party, and that’s why he sent the message. To you.”

And others, but Matty wasn’t sure he was supposed to divulge that.

Andy let out a long sigh of relief and offered Matty his hand. “I’m relieved. I was worried he might push me into the arms of a male stripper, just for the lulz.”

Matty shook the offered hand. “I’m Matty. Rusty wouldn’t be so cruel, though.”

Andy grinned and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “I think I hoped he would be, though. I’ve never been in the arms of a male stripper.”

They both laughed. “That makes two of us, because I’ve never been in that kind of situation, either.”



Rusty followed Matty with hawk-like eyes from afar. It looked like he and Andy were starting out on the right foot, because they were laughing like they were having the best time in the world.

The same could not be said about him, though. The cat jokes were growing a bit old already. The girls wanted to know if he knew the name of the chick he might have happened to impregnate in the throes of desire. The boys wolf-whistled and called him a hound dog or something along those lines. All that noise for nothing, and it was only serving to piss him off. Especially now, when he needed all his concentration to keep track of how Matty was doing.

Hmm, but they weren’t touching and were only conversing like friends. Had Matty learned nothing, after all that hard work? Maybe Andy wasn’t his type. His forehead a frown, Rusty fired a quick message off to his student.

Make a move if you like him. Else, get back to base.

He observed Matty as he checked his phone. It was now or never, and Rusty held his breath for a moment. Matty waved Andy goodbye and sauntered back to him.

What a relief. Rusty frowned at that simple realization. Well, he did have five or six guys lined up for Matty. Maybe not all of them would attend the party. Maybe some weren’t interested in meeting the man of their dreams.

“So?” Rusty asked, worrying his bottom lip.

“He was expecting a male stripper. It looks like I struck out.” Matty smiled apologetically and shrugged his shoulders.

“A male stripper?” Rusty threw Andy a curious look, and the shy nerdy guy waved at him with a confused smile. “We could turn you into that. Get on that table and began undressing slowly.”

Matty pinched the bridge of his nose. “I am so not going to do that. I still have half a brain, I think.”

“After three years and a couple of months or so in college? Nah, you only think that. What’s wrong with being a male stripper? You have those cool abs. Ah, don’t tell me. He’s not your style.”

“No Ivy League degree,” Matty counted on his fingers, “no Lexus, no big schlong. Sorry, no match.”

“Are you sure about the big schlong? These studious types tend to hide some oversized sausages in their baggy pants.”

“So, who’s next?” Matty asked. “I’m just getting the hang of things.”

Rusty searched the room for the next target. When he found him, he grinned. The goth boy yawned demonstratively to show what he thought of the choice of music and picked invisible lint from his black t-shirt.



After the guy with the very narrow taste in music came a guy who confessed timidly to Matty that he wasn’t actually gay, just not adept at meeting girls. That brought the number of attempts to three, and he was starting to think that Rusty’s criteria for choosing possible partners for him might have suffered some serious alterations from what he had imagined.

“No luck so far,” he explained to his teacher.

Rusty’s brow furrowed. Matty really hated to disappoint him, but there was no way he’d play that game only for the sake of that.

“A-ha,” Rusty said victoriously, “what about him?”

Matty turned to look in the direction of where Rusty was pointing, and he blinked. The guy who had just walked in sported a sleeveless shirt that showed off his intricate sleeve tattoos. He looked dark and dangerous. Somehow, Matty doubted that guy was a student at Sunny Hill.

“You said something about alley cats, right?” Rusty whispered in his ear. “Go try your luck now, Mr. Fancy Pants.”

Matty would have argued about that nickname, but his attention was captured by the new guest more than he cared to admit. When he walked toward the guy, he felt a little like the proverbial moth flying frantically toward the flame.

Blue eyes, deep like sin, settled on him, making the words die in his throat. The guy chuckled and leaned against the wall. He crossed his arms, showing off his tattoos. Matty could hardly hear a word, as the guy’s lips moved.

Only when the aforementioned lips stopped moving, Matty realized that he was supposed to answer. “What?” he stammered. “I’m sorry, I didn’t get what you just said.”

The stranger laughed again, making a cute dimple appear in his right cheek. “I said,” he drawled seductively, “you must be Matty.”

Had Rusty mentioned his name to the other guys? Matty didn’t remember. “And you are?” He stretched out his hand.

The guy pulled him close suddenly and wrapped him in his arms. Then, he blew hot air over Matty’s ear. “Tonight, I’m going to be your alley cat.”



Rusty watched with increased annoyance as Jamie played Matty like a pro. He had been the one with the idea of calling a veritable heartbreaker and put him in Matty’s path, but now, he was starting to regret his decision.

By all reckoning, Matty should have been prepared for such a challenge. But, instead, he looked like he was smitten beyond belief, leaning toward Jamie, laughing at his jokes – very lame jokes, Rusty knew them all – and brushing that sexy body of his against the other.

That wasn’t how a gay overlord should react to a cookie-cutter bad boy. Rusty pursed his lips and clenched his fists.

Jamie, who had been more than happy to hear that he’d have a cute college boy to hook up with tonight, made his next move with the nonchalance of a player, which he was, obviously. He was whispering into Matty’s ear, probably inviting him outside, for a little bit of heavy petting.

And Matty, forgetting all about his training, seemed eager to agree to everything.

Absolutely no way.



All right, so this guy was so different from all the others that Matty couldn’t believe it. He was so striking in appearance that Matty had forgotten how to speak for a minute or so. But, now they were at ease, laughing together, and sharing what brought them to that party.

“Did Rusty send you the same message he sent the others?”

The guy, whose name was still a mystery, was playing the seducer by the book. Matty thought it funny to play along. Now, Zoey’s plan to go with it and see Rusty’s reaction to his being taken with some dude made some sense.

Plus, Matty was actually paying attention because this alley cat was a true player.

“What message?” Rough hands massaged the back of Matty’s neck.

“To meet the man of your dreams and all that.”

Another chuckle followed. “That you, pretty boy? That’s on the mark. How about going outside for a moment? It’s getting hot in here.”

“For the record, was that a pun, or are you really hot?”

“What do you think?”

Okay, this guy was a player, Rusty was a womanizer, and Matty was a virgin. What to do?

Chapter Sixteen

Am I Supposed to Get Brain Damage?

They were out, in the slightly chill late night air, and Matty rubbed his arms to get the goosebumps off his skin. Sure thing, the chilly air didn't warrant that reaction by itself, and that had everything to do with the sexy guy walking by his side.

And holding him by the shoulders casually, yet firmly and in a possessive way that did something a bit funny to Matty's throat, which was getting drier by the moment. "Where are we going?" he asked and coughed for a moment to stop himself from squealing at the thought of being alone with that alley cat.

Oh, the guy was a tomcat all right. He moved with grace and was very much aware of his sex appeal. On one hand, Matty found it a bit funny. There was no way he looked like he belonged with that specimen of sex on legs. Which brought forward a proper re-evaluation. Did he look all right by Rusty's side?

Hmm, he hoped he did, but that was just him hoping. "You're a regular mystery, aren't you?" he continued, seeing how his companion remained silent and seemed obsessed with caressing the side of Matty's neck where his fingers touched while humming pleasantly under his breath and pleased with himself.

So, on the other hand, this situation was a bit unnerving. Matty doubted that all the lessons he had gone through with Rusty could have prepared him for what would follow. Not that he had a clear idea about that.

He grunted in surprise when the guy simply slammed him against the closest wall he could find and put his hungry lips on him. Matty let out a muffled 'ouch', since the back of his head had come forcefully in contact with the hard surface.

He stopped the guy by pressing hard enough against his shoulders to shift him. "Wait, I don't even know your name."

"It's Jamie," the other replied and smiled.

The light outside was bright enough for Matty to see that cat-like grin. "Um, Jamie. Nice to meet you." He made a clumsy attempt to push his hand up so that they could shake on their belated acquaintance.

Jamie laughed and moved away enough to make room for that to happen. He threw Matty a lazy look. "Am I moving too fast for you, college boy?"

Matty snorted. "The way you said that, just now, it sounded like that's the most important thing about me. Being a college boy."

Jamie laughed. "Well, you guys do have a reputation."

"What kind of reputation?" Matty was genuinely curious.

Jamie wrapped one arm around him and aligned their bodies. "That you're very open-minded." He moved one slow finger along Matty's nose and then brushed it against his lips just enough to make it a tease.

In all honesty, if he hadn't been so caught up in his fantasy of landing the king of Sunny Hill, Matty would have gone for a little bit of open-minded experimentation with Jamie. Sure thing, it was basically Rusty pushing him into this guy's arms, and his plan of making the guy jealous was obviously falling through. It was hard to figure out his next step, so Matty thought of doing the next best thing for his own sanity.

He began talking and asking questions. "Have you been with many college boys?"

"None as cute as you," Jamie assured him without toning down the seducer act. He moved in for another kiss, but Matty was ready this time. He dodged swiftly and kissed Jamie on the cheek fast as a way of apologizing.

"You're a bit of a tease," Jamie accused him, but he seemed more amused than pissed off with the situation. "What's the deal? I'm not your type?"

Matty let his eyes wander over Jamie's handsome face, the thick eyebrows, the straight nose with just the slightest deviation due to some fist fight probably, and the sexy lips curled in that award-winning smile. "If there's a gay dude who says that, hand on heart, show him to me. If he's not blind, I doubt all his senses. And his dick."

Jamie laughed and grabbed Matty's crotch playfully. "Yours is driving a tough bargain, my friend."

He wasn't hard, that was true, and that was only because his mind was so damned busy scrutinizing the possibility of dodging this guy's advances and making Rusty jealous at the same time.

"Not his best day," Matty admitted.

At that, Jamie pulled back and stared at him, his eyes filled with confusion. "Don't tell me I have to cure you of not having a sex drive," he said. "It's all right. I just need to know what I'm working with. I can take you slowly."

Talking about misunderstandings. Matty was about to start an attempt at explaining, but Jamie knelt in front of him and pushed his chest with one arm so fast that his head met the wall again.

“What are you doing?” he asked and sucked in a breath as Jamie worked his fly and began stroking his cock through the thin fabric of his underwear.

Okay, so crushing on the king of Sunny Hill aside, Matty believed himself to be just a simple man. The feeling of that hot mouth on him, and the beautiful sight of having that handsome man at his feet, were enough to send a little twitch through his nether parts.

“Ah, it looks like it’s working just fine,” Jamie said with satisfaction. “How would you feel about me blowing you for starters, college boy? You can return the favor later.”

Well, now that’s what things moving too fast had to mean. Matty searched his mind frantically for an excuse, while his cock seemed all too happy to ignore any rational recommendation and advice.



After a few minutes of intense deliberation with himself and watching the duo from afar, Rusty believed himself quite entitled to intervene. That hard shove against the wall had Jamie’s signature all over it, according to the rave reviews the man got from the dudes he nailed, but it looked like Matty wasn’t all that comfortable about being manhandled like that. Some conversation of sorts had followed, and Rusty had hoped Matty would tell Jamie off, a first in the guy’s life, for sure.

Nope, Matty was now pinned to the wall, and Jamie was all intent on going down on him. Rusty pursed his lips. No way, he couldn’t let that happen. Matty wasn’t that easy. Their lessons together didn’t count. He was supposed to play hard to get, shove the guy on his ass, and leave with his head high.

How come he hadn’t taught that lesson to Matty? They were supposed to have gone through everything together. Well, it wasn’t the student’s mistake, but the teacher’s.

And Rusty had every intention of correcting the situation, promptly and without delay. Therefore, his teacher title allowed him to do what he did next.

“Hey, no sex on campus grounds or something,” he yelled out loud.

Jamie got up to his feet and turned to give him a piece of his mind. “Rusty, what the fuck?”

Rusty walked over to his dubious acquaintance and patted him on the back. “Thanks a bunch, man, but Matty here just failed the test.” He eyed Matty’s crotch an instant and was satisfied to see that the white briefs still covered that pretty, bouncy thing Rusty was already acquainted with.

“What test?” both Jamie and Matty asked at the same time.

“The resistance to players test,” Rusty said promptly. “I didn’t tell you about it, because it would have influenced the final result. Obviously, Matty needs more training.”

Jamie ran a hand through his hair. Damn, the fucker knew how he looked. Even now, that pissed off act was a good act. “Rusty, dude, are you cockblocking me for real? Me and Matty here, we were just getting to know each other.”

“You were just getting ready to suck his cock,” Rusty offered matter-of-factly.

“My point exactly,” Jamie said and threw his arms out. “That’s how guys get to know each other.”

“By tasting each other’s cum?” Rusty inquired. From the corner of his eye, he noticed how Matty had buttoned his fly back up and was now observing his convo with Jamie with what looked like great interest.

“The most straightforward way for the gay,” Jamie joked. “Now,” he said and took Matty by the shoulders, “do you see what you did? You scared the virgin boy.”

“I’m not scared,” Matty replied. “And, what the hell? Why would you tell him I was a virgin, Rusty?”

“It’s not like I slut-shamed you,” Rusty protested.

“Just virgin-shamed me,” Matty accused.

Strangely enough, Rusty couldn’t tell whether Matty was really pissed or just pulling his leg. His face was in shadow, so not easy to examine for signs.

“How are we going to play this?” Jamie intervened. “Are you going to let us get properly acquainted, or are you going to be a douche about it?”

“I’ll take the douche part,” Rusty said with conviction and pulled Matty to him.

That earned him a surprised look from both of the guys.

Jamie stared for a moment, looked like he was about to stand his ground, but then stepped down with a crooked smile. “I see how it is,” he said. “Well, you owe me some gas money. Douche,” he threw over his shoulder. “See you another time, Matty.” Jamie offered his best smile this time. “When your jailer’s not around.”

Matty put a hand up to wave at the guy, but Rusty caught it and pushed it down. “Don’t. Didn’t I teach you anything?” he asked, once Jamie was out of earshot.

“What the hell, Rusty?”

Wow, quiet, calm Matty was a bit pissed.

“What do you mean? I saved you from getting your dick sucked by some playboy.”

“For real? A playboy you invited to the party. By the way, don’t forget that you owe the guy some gas money.”

Ah, fuck. Matty was sooooo making fun of him. Well, Rusty believed himself to have a right to act like the injured party, then.

“When,” he began in a teacher slash parent’s voice, “did I tell you that you should be easy?”

Matty pursed his lips in thought and rolled his eyes as if he was trying to remember, and then he delivered his line. “Practically all of the time.”

“That’s not true,” Rusty protested, rightfully indignant.

“Yes, it is. All your teaching was about going for it.”

“Not for just any guy’s dick, though. Where on that asshole do you see written that he goes to some Ivy League school?”

“It didn’t appear to be tattooed on him, but I had every intention to check his entire body for that particular tidbit,” Matty replied promptly.

“Ah, really? And he doesn’t drive a Lexus. Just some stupid muscle car.” Even if they were doing this to have a little laugh, Rusty felt like his blood was getting hotter and rushing quickly to his head.

“Maybe I like muscle cars a lot better. Fuck the environment,” Matty said in too serious a tone to be taken seriously.

Okay, the little prick was kind of asking for it. Rusty caught him by the front of his t-shirt and pushed him into the wall. “Do you also like to be shoved up against a wall like this?”

Matty groaned and rubbed the back of his head. “Am I supposed to get brain damage tonight or something?” he grumbled. “You know what, Rusty? Maybe I do.” He grabbed Rusty by his very nice shirt and pushed back. “And I’d also like to have my dick sucked for a change. By some sexy dude, ‘cause that’s basically what you prepared me for.” He pushed his index finger into Rusty’s chest for emphasis.

“Is this your way of telling me you’re pissed because I didn’t return the favor?”

“What do you even mean by that?” Matty pushed himself into Rusty’s face to make his point.

“I mean that you’re pissed at me because I didn’t suck your dick back.”



Okay, okay, so this had to be the strangest conversation ever, and Matty felt like he was treading dangerous waters. Technically, Rusty had given him some oral satisfaction while Matty had been dressed in his cat boy suit, but only the simple mention of the guy’s beautiful mouth on his naked dick made his knees buckle a smidge.

However, he had gotten this far. Rusty had just cockblocked him, and it had to be for a damn good reason, even if neither of them was willing to say the truth out loud.

Or so it seemed.

“Well, since that’s the case, how about I suck your dick right now?” Rusty offered in a heated voice. “Will that teach you not to let any bad boy touch it with his mouth?”

“I had no idea I was supposed to resist,” Matty began. “Wait, what? Do you really mean it? Do you want to suck my cock?” There went all the hoping. Stupid hoping. Rusty was probably just pulling his leg.

Rusty grabbed his hand. “This party sucks, anyway. Let’s go to your place, and I’ll teach you what kind of guy you should allow to get that near to your cock.”

Matty already knew the answer to that one, but he wasn’t about to tell Rusty. He had to be dreaming that he was being dragged across the campus to his dorm, that his hand was in Rusty’s and it felt so good, and that he really could expect his wildest fantasies to come true for a change.

“Why do you say the party sucks? Should I have hooked up with the goth kid instead?”

Rusty let out an outraged scoff. “Neither of them was good enough for you. I should have seen that.”

“Because of no Ivy League degree? At least, I think Jamie’s dick must have been pretty big.”

That appeared to be the wrong thing to say. Rusty turned to give him a withering look. “And how do you know that? Did he show it to you?”

“No. But he plastered himself all over me. I’m pretty sure that wasn’t some rocket in his pocket,” Matty joked.

Rusty didn’t find it funny. His grip on Matty’s hand doubled and he began to walk so fast that Matty had to run to keep up. “Come on, Rusty, who pissed you off?”

“You did by failing your test,” came the reply. “You’ll get a blowjob you’ll never forget. That’ll teach you.”

Matty was pretty sure everything Rusty said was true. The only problem was that he had no idea what kind of teaching he was supposed to take away from it.



So, Matty didn't think him capable of giving head or something. He must have thought himself freaking lucky to have a bad boy like Jamie, with tattoos and his annoying muscle car, to go down on him. And he even had the nerve to think that Rusty must have cockblocked him just for the lulz, although he hadn't said anything like that.

He let Matty open the door, but the following instant, he was on him, pushing him to the bed and ending up between his legs and all over him. "Teach, I believe this is quite the compromising position," Matty dared to tease him.

"Shut up," Rusty mumbled against Matty's lips, dizzy already with the anticipation of tasting them again. "You didn't even notice how nicely I dressed up, only for you."

Matty sniffed him delicately. "You don't seem to be drunk--"

"I'm not high, asshole," Rusty corrected him before he had the chance to say anything. "I mean it."

Matty surprised him with a gentle pat on the head. "Doctor Rusty, you look dashing tonight. Or is it Professor? I never know with you."

"I like keeping you on your toes. Now, where were we?" Rusty turned his head so that Matty wouldn't catch him smiling. That compliment sounded genuine, regardless of how it had been delivered.

He made his way down Matty's body, with the intention of getting to work right away. However, his earlier bravado seemed to have diminished quite a lot. Rusty couldn't say why it had angered him so much to see Jamie about to blow Matty. That had been what he wanted all along, to give Matty a taste of free sex with a sexy guy.

Only that it hadn't worked that way. No, the moment he had seen the two, chatting friendlily, and then getting to the hot and heavy stuff, some irrational feeling had taken over, telling him that he was about to be robbed of something that was meant for him and him alone.

The problem was, he hadn't expected to be faced with the mechanics of putting his plan in motion, with nothing in-between to help the play-pretend, something like a latex suit. He was face to face with Matty's crotch, and he was in a dilemma.

With one deep breath, he decided to grab the bull by the horns and dragged Matty's pants down along with his underwear. The thing bounced so fast it hit him in the nose. "Ouch," he complained.

“Not my fault,” came the mumbled protest from above.

“You can’t really say that,” Rusty shot back. With all the courage he was capable of, he took hold of Matty’s cock, pretty and hard and leaking precum, and stared at it with hard eyes. “Were you really going for that bad boy? Were you?” He shook it a little. That made Matty snicker. “You shut up.”

Matty pushed himself up on his elbows and their eyes met. “If you didn’t want Jamie to get it on with me, why did you call him?”

It was a very good question. A very good question, indeed. And like all good questions, it belonged in the special drawer that Rusty kept only for them.

“Aren’t you going to tell me?” Matty pressed.

He was annoying. He was an annoying little shit and he knew it. Rusty decided that there was only one way of getting out of the situation. Before the dive, he closed his eyes and opened his mouth wide.

And then, the unfamiliar sensation of having his mouth filled with a hard living pulsing thing spread through him like wildfire. He had watched girls going down on him so many times. They seemed to like it a great deal. He had watched porn, and oral sex was like foreplay for almost everything, even the kinky stuff.

He hadn’t done it himself, though. With one sure move, he pulled Matty’s cock out of his mouth and clicked his tongue a few times. When he looked up, he only saw an arm thrown over Matty’s face, and what was left visible of his face had an unmistakable crimson color. “Don’t tell me you hate it now. You can’t possibly hate it,” he protested, hoping that really wasn’t the case.

Matty didn’t uncover his face. “Rusty, if you don’t want me to start thinking up ways to strangle you, please, just continue.”

Oh, so it was good. Well, now that gave him a little bit of confidence, didn’t it? Rusty set himself up for the job and moved his mouth back on the hard cock in front of him. It was satisfying to move his hand up and down and feel it get so rock hard, even more than it had been the second before.

To make things even better, Matty moaned softly, barely audible, as he clearly tried to keep his voice down. Rusty wanted to tell him that it was all right, and that it would give him a mighty good boost of confidence if Matty just gave him a moment by moment review in as many glowing words as possible, but, in a way, this was good, too. He felt a bit of unfamiliar shyness preventing him from asking, so he decided that it was better to deliver on his promise, after all.



It was as real as it could possibly get. Rusty was there, kneeling between his legs, and he was taking his cock in his mouth. Matty wanted to pull out his phone and record everything so that he could prove to himself that he wasn't dreaming, but it would have been a dick move, and that was the last thing he wanted Rusty to think of him.

For fear of not ruining the moment, he didn't dare move and kept his face covered, as he was burning with embarrassment and too much excitement. Since it was probably the only time in his life he'd have the king of Sunny Hill giving him a blowjob, the idea was to make it count and last for as long as was humanly possible.

In a way, though, it was a lot more difficult to ignore what was going on with his eyes closed. He felt everything with a clarity that his endorphin-soaked mind shouldn't have been able to register, from how Rusty's warm breath blew over his skin to how a tentative tongue was tasting him slowly. If he didn't know any better, he'd think that the unabashed king of Sunny Hill was approaching that blowjob with care and a bit of constraint.

That last thought hit him where it hurt. He removed his arm from his face and looked at Rusty. "Rusty," he whispered, ignoring the heaviness starting to weigh on his heart, "if it's just a dare, if you don't feel like it--"

Rusty stared at him for two moments, Matty's dick still in his mouth, and looking damn good for it, and then pulled it out to speak. "I totally feel like it. It's just that I've never done it. Don't be so quick to judge, jeez."

Matty blinked. Rusty blinked. They blinked together at the same time. "Do you like it?" Matty dared to ask first. "At least a little bit?"

Rusty shrugged. "Eh, I don't know." Then, he burst into laughter. "Just kidding. It's quite good. I don't know what the big fuss is about it all."

"What do you mean? Don't you like having your dick sucked?" Matty shot back, feeling a bit peeved by that reaction.

"Yeah, I totally do, especially when it's by someone as pretty as you. But I was expecting it to be more hard-hitting, you know? The moment I put my mouth on a guy's dick."

Had Rusty thought about it before? He was open-minded and did everything that crossed his mind, so why had he refrained from that particular temptation? Matty didn't know how to wrap his mind around that. "Sorry if it's so underwhelming," he said.

Rusty held Matty's cock and patted his cheek with it like it could help him think. "It's not like that at all. Now, shut up and enjoy it. As your teacher, I should have gotten to this point already. Consider this sort of a making up for lost time."

Matty couldn't argue against that.

“And feel free to tell me when it feels bad and when it feels good. And when it feels amazing. Or just four and a half stars.”

“Oh, gawd, Rusty,” Matty moaned and put a firm hand on the blond head, “just suck my cock already.”



Well, it was surely nice for a change to have someone tell him what to do. And Matty had a nice authoritarian voice when he got the hang of it. Rusty went back to the blowjob with a lot more confidence and enthusiasm. This was getting better and better, he realized, as he now understood what his little flicks of the tongue did to the owner of the cock he was blowing.

Matty no longer kept his voice down. Besides his cute soft moaning, the occasional sharp intake of breath made him think that he was practically getting a raving review on the spot. Jamie with all his conquests could go fuck himself and settle for second place, ‘cause another champion was in town.

That was basically the pep talk he was giving himself while going hard at it. The way Matty’s cock curved up a bit made it a challenge to take it too deep from that position, so Rusty got himself a bit higher and used his hand to help him milk the thing for all it was worth.

“How is it, Matty?” he asked in a heated voice and watched the other, who seemed lost to the world if the expression of pure bliss on his face was any indication.

“Rusty, it’s beyond five stars,” Matty immediately delivered, “and you’re amazing, too.”

“Okay, now order me around a little bit more.”

“What?” Matty asked, not quite understanding the question, by the looks of it.

“Yeah, be the boss. Tell me how to suck your cock.”

Instead of doing that, Matty surprised him by grabbing hold of the hair at the back of his head and pushing him down.

“This works, too,” Rusty agreed, feeling free to go for it without any guilt attached.

Matty had a firm hand for a guy who liked to keep his nose in books all day long. Rusty really, really appreciated the thought. It gave him something more to think than about how hard that cock was in his mouth, and how much he enjoyed it. A lot more than he would have thought possible, that was sure.

Because of Matty's taking charge, now the curved cock hit at certain angles that made Rusty choke a little. He raised one hand in surrender. "Just a little bit," he demanded, without needing to be too explicit.

"Sorry," Matty whispered, "but just get back to work because I'm really close."

So much honesty made Matty a pretty interesting boy, Rusty decided, and that was one thing he really liked whenever he had met that particular trait in people. It was hard to be honest, and he knew it to be true.

He focused on the blowjob again, stopping his mind from wandering. It made it all the more real, how full he felt, and how much pleasure he could take from making Matty moan and squirm like that.

"Are you going to swallow?" Matty asked breathlessly. "Please, just tell me now--"

Rusty didn't answer that. Instead, since actions spoke a lot louder than words, he just went as deep as he could and applied the pressure needed to squeeze Matty's cock harder. Yes, he had never done it himself before, but he had had it done to himself so many times, and that knowledge had rubbed off on him plenty.

A wave of delicious spunk hit his mouth, and he struggled to keep it in while still moving his lips up and down. Soon, his entire mouth was full, and Matty was whispering all kinds of dirty niceties, like how good he was with his mouth, and how much he enjoyed giving it to him and making him swallow like that.

Rusty removed his mouth eventually and took in the moist cock falling to rest like a tired warrior on Matty's belly. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "Now that is what I call a blowjob," he said with satisfaction. "What do you say? What's your final rating--"

A hard pull and firm lips seeking his made him stop talking. Without a moment's notice, Matty was all over him, kissing him, forcing his mouth open, and hugging him with both arms and legs.

"Hey, if you're in the mood for cum that badly, I have some hard candy waiting for you," Rusty joked, although he liked that wave of effusion. It said a lot more than all the verbal praise he was expecting for a job well done.

"Just don't say a word," Matty said and kissed him again.

Rusty no longer protested, and let Matty climb on top of him and kiss him at length. Did Matty the virgin boy know just how dirty and sexy that was? He was probably aware, because he was giving him a thorough dental checkup.

Not that it wasn't good. Rusty was well aware of how his best friend was twitching desperately and begging to be released from the confines of his nicest pants.

Yet, it felt somehow like a thing that was beyond sex. Rusty really didn't know what to think of that. Matty was kissing him not like he was just grateful for getting his dick sucked. He was doing it like his life depended on it or something, and that gave Rusty a sudden rush of an unknown feeling never experienced before.

A part of him wanted to stop Matty. Another wished nothing else but to let him continue. Whatever it was, it was worth exploring, Rusty decided. Learning new things could never hurt, right?

Matty let go of his mouth and breathed one time, deeply. "That was the best blowjob of my life, Rusty."

Rusty laughed, comforted by getting back on familiar ground again. "It was the only blowjob of your life, Matty."

"I'm sure my opinion won't change for the next eighty years or so."

"Wow, planning to live for one hundred years?"

"Why not? I exercise, I eat healthy. And since I met you, it looks like I have quite the satisfying sex life."

Matty was joking. That was comforting, too. Rusty wrapped one arm around him to hold him close. He sighed in satisfaction as Matty groped the front of his pants. "How about my turn?"

"Don't let me stop you," Rusty joked and hissed as Matty went a little hard on the Mighty Thor.

"By the way, after this thing, what kind of friends are we? I mean, was it only one time or--"

"Nope. We're going to do it again. Let's be cocksucking friends," Rusty offered.

"Cocksucking friends? All right. I think I like that."

How could he not? Rusty put his arms behind his head and smiled, while Matty went down on him.

Chapter Seventeen

Sixty-Nice

“You know what?” Matty said, lifting his head, just when he was about to go down on the Mighty Thor and prove his worth and that of Rusty’s lessons in uninhibited sex.

“What?” Rusty quirked an eyebrow in his best sexy pirate impersonation.

“I want to undress you. Like completely.” Without being told ‘yes’, Matty raised both hands and began unbuttoning Rusty’s dress shirt with eager fingers.

“I put a lot of thought into dressing up tonight,” Rusty took care to remind his very forward pupil.

Matty stopped for a moment. “Why?”

Oh, well, that was a good question. “I like looking my best,” Rusty said with a shrug. “Jonathan gave this shirt to me as a gift. And I stalked him around the house until he agreed to lend me some of his cologne, too.”

Matty gave him a delicate sniff. “I like you better au naturel,” he said.

“Well, I didn’t dress up for you,” Rusty replied, a tiny bit miffed with that statement.

“Who did you dress up for?” Matty rested his elbows on Rusty’s thighs and looked up at him, although it did feel a little like he was doing the opposite, with that attitude.

“Okay, I did dress up for you,” Rusty said just to escape that sassy glare.

“You did?” From sassy to astonished at the drop of a dime. Those cute eyes were so pretty, beautiful even, and Rusty must have had a bad case of remembering the proper order of adjectives, or he would have come up with a longer list.

“In the sense that I intended to look every bit like your teacher, given the occasion,” Rusty hurried to add. Clearing up misunderstandings was his forte. Not.

“The occasion of me failing the test of resisting players?” Matty inquired slowly.

“You’re making my dick die on you with all this interrogation,” Rusty shot back.

Matty gave him a pretty self-assured smile. “I don’t fear that. The Mighty Thor has quite a reputation,” he teased, sticking his tongue out for a moment, and looking pretty damn scrumptious like that.

Rusty allowed him to unbutton his shirt and let out an exhalation when Matty reached under his undershirt and teased the naked skin. Then, Matty got to his feet and put the dress shirt neatly on the back of a chair, the only one in the room.

To speed things up, because he didn't quite understand why his excitement was soaring with each of Matty's simple gestures, Rusty took it upon himself to get rid of the undershirt. However, he didn't have to continue with the pants, because Matty was back to work, and his nimble fingers were unbuckling, unbuttoning and all that.

Rusty was on his feet now, so he could take in Matty on his knees, the kind of sight he liked a great deal if anyone was asking. There was surety in the way Matty moved, his strong, slender hands doing everything without hesitation. It appeared that nothing was beneath him because before taking Rusty out of his dress pants, he began untying his shoelaces and removing his footwear.

"You really mean to see me all naked?"

A beaming smile was his answer. And then, as soon as Rusty was in his birthday suit and nothing else, Matty had his cheek planted alongside the Mighty Thor, and his tongue reached underneath, playful and on a mission.

An idea struck Rusty. "How about we sixty-nine?"

Matty looked up again. "So, it wasn't just the one time?"

"You mean, me sucking you off? No, I told you. We're cocksucking friends now."

"Right, right, I keep forgetting." Matty got to his feet.

Rusty reached for his large t-shirt. "And it's only fair to get you out of your clothes, too. Although you look pretty good a bit ruffled."

Matty laughed. "Thanks for the compliment." He ran his hands through his hair to make some adjustments, but Rusty made it all bad again by ruffling it and destroying Matty's efforts.

It didn't appear to faze the guy in the least. Rusty watched as Matty got rid of all his clothes and then moved closer. Something of the closeness hit Rusty as familiar, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was because Matty gave him a sweet gentle kiss, and there was nothing else for him to do but wrap his arms around him and move toward the bed.

They fell on it and aligned their bodies, teasing each other with short kisses. How come it was more than just sex when he was with Matty? He had to be the only one thinking that way. After all, they were teacher and student, and such relationships were, supposedly, frowned upon.

So meek were all his rationalizations when it came to all the newness that had moved in with Matty, like a guest he couldn't remember inviting. It didn't matter; it felt good, and all his life, Rusty had cared about the stuff that felt good.

Matty angled his head, and their kiss deepened. Rusty found it most convenient to put his hands around the other's waist, and one of them reached lower, resting on the curve of that delicious ass.

"Rusty Parker, you're the best kisser in the world," Matty moaned during a short break.

"You haven't tried too many dudes, though," Rusty reminded him.

"I don't have to. When you find the best, you just know, right?"

The praise tickled him in all the right places. "I suppose. But how can you be sure?"

Matty chuckled, and licked Rusty's lips slowly. "Just like that. It's magic, and I don't have to explain shit."

That sounded just right. To be the best for someone, that had to mean something.

"But I bet you hear that all the time," Matty added as he moved closer for another kiss.

"A lot less often than you might think," Rusty murmured and took Matty up on the offer as the pretty lips opened and the playful tongue moved forward.

His lips were tingling when they drew away from each other. That was a good moment to take a close look at the guy in front of him. What made him so special? Never before had he thought... No, that wasn't right, and he knew it. A little bit of honesty and introspection always hurt. He had wanted it, low key, in the back of his mind, for a while now.

It was easier to play, to be easy. "How about that sixty-nine?" he proposed, all too willing to get back on familiar ground.

Matty seemed fairly reluctant to let go of him but obeyed nonetheless. "Who's going to be on top?"

"You, obviously, because you're smaller. I don't want to crush you. And it's the same as I've always done with--" he stopped abruptly.

"With girls," Matty supplied the thing he didn't want to say out loud. "It's okay, I know who's in my bed." He rolled his pretty eyes for good measure. "And I don't mind."

"Why would you mind?" Rusty braved. "You have all this," he gestured at his naked body, "all to yourself."

Matty threw him a critical look that made him squirm a little. Was he not up to par or something? There was still that matter to settle about Matty's type. Too bad he hadn't paid attention that one time. It was a shame really, and now they were stuck in a joke about Ivy League degrees and expensive cars. The big schlongs were okay. They were present on the battleground. Rusty looked at Matty's cute one for confirmation. Yeap, it was up, proud, and ready for the skirmish. "You know what?" he asked. "Let's do it differently. Let's do a... sixty-nice."

"Sixty-nice? What's that?" Matty's eyes lit up with interest.

"Each of us," Rusty launched his challenge slowly so that his pupil would understand, "will have to do everything that crosses his mind to make things more interesting."

Matty cocked his head to one side. "More interesting? Not nicer?"

"Terms like that can be subjective. I'll pat you on the butt when I like what you do, since my mouth's going to be busy. You tap me on the thigh. Do we have a deal?"

Matty grinned and gave him two thumbs up, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

Rusty frowned and considered his pupil's usual sassiness. "No biting sensitive parts, okay?"

"I'm a dude, too. I wouldn't do anything to you that'd hurt me," came the prompt reply.

"Okay, good. Let's go, people. I want my dick sucked before morning comes, if possible."



Matty knew he had to have been smiled upon by fate, or something like that. Rusty was still an enigma, of course, and just blaming it all on nothing but the guy's peculiar personality and propensity for all things sexual didn't work. For some reason, of all the people in the world, Rusty had chosen him to be cocksucking friends.

And now, the challenge of his life was upon him. Rusty was very adept at manipulating him until he lay on top, face to face with the Mighty Thor again. He could distinctively feel Rusty's hands on his butt cheeks, playing with them. Naughty fingers probed him everywhere, but Matty had to agree that it was going to be a sixty-nice after all, because he couldn't dream of anything nicer than this.

Rusty started by daringly swallowing one ball, then the other. Matty grunted. So, that was how they were going to play this. Therefore, he grabbed hold of the hard cock in front of him and swallowed half of it. He dragged it out of his mouth slowly, but applying a lot of pressure all the way. When he pulled the lollipop out with a short smacking sound, his reward was Rusty's very explicit moan of appreciation.

“I have another idea,” Rusty said. “Since I need some sort of steering mechanism, I’m going to use your asshole.”

“Steering. In layman’s terms, what does it mean?” Matty continued to rub Rusty’s cock up and down.

Rusty pushed a wet finger inside Matty’s ass. “If I go to and fro,” he explained through example, “it means that you can continue. If I hook my finger like this,” he again made it clear through actions and drawing a sharp inhalation from Matty, “it means that you can do it harder and faster.”

“Keep going like that with your steering, and I’ll give you a facial you won’t soon forget.”

Rusty laughed and slapped his butt with delight. “I’m not scared,” he announced.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” Matty said cheerfully. “Now, let’s make it nicer.”

Rusty didn’t comment anymore once Matty began devouring his cock with an unrivalled appetite. He went hard to work himself, pushing Matty’s cock inside his mouth and making a great job out of it.

Matty was slightly aware of the sounds they were making in his small dorm room. Could anyone guess from the population of several thousand students going to Sunny Hill that he now had Rusty under him and they were sucking each other’s dicks? Except for Zoey, and even she wouldn’t imagine that he was moving that fast – that they were moving that fast – hopefully no one would.

The thought alone made him feel giddy, like he had the biggest secret he could possibly have, and the nicest of them all. Even if it was just a thing of the now, it would go down in history as it should. He had done the sixty-nine with the king of Sunny Hill.

Split between the sensation of having his cock engulfed to the hilt by moist tight heat and taking delight in attacking Rusty’s Mighty Thor from all possible angles, he was slowly becoming a mess. He was drooling over the object of his affection, and that wasn’t just some turn of phrase. The slurping sounds he was making dripped in his ear like dirty little secrets. The only thing rivaling with them was the beating of his heart, which he could hear but only if he focused really hard. He just knew that it was hammering in his chest while he was living one of his fantasies, a fantasy which he’d had no idea he nurtured until now.

Rusty had seemed to struggle a bit at first but it looked like he was going at it with a vengeance now, and there was no inch left of Matty’s cock outside that generous playful mouth. They were having fun, indeed. If fun was the right word to describe so much sensation and an overwhelmed heart.

He was taken by surprise as Rusty's firm hand pushed him to swallow the cock he was sucking to its root. It could only mean one thing, along with the fact that the 'steering' finger had now stilled in his ass.

Matty could tell his eyes were rolling in his head as his his toes were curling against the coverlet while Rusty came and came in waves inside his mouth. The fact that he was coming, too, was just a second-hand emotion, as he discovered that giving could be more thrilling than receiving. Or that they were almost fairly equal.

Rusty was gentle as he brought him down from his high and gently guided him onto his side. Then, the same gentle firmness was used to make him turn and align himself with the gorgeous guy in his bed.

"That was, indeed, an awesome sixty-nice," Rusty declared.

Matty laughed. "I completely agree."

"Kiss?" Rusty asked in an unhurried voice.

"Sure," Matty obliged.

They weren't as hungry anymore, so the kiss reflected that. They brushed their lips slowly against each other's mouths and sighed contentedly with each nip and lick. It felt like such a perfect moment to declare his love that Matty hesitated. No, he'd just spoil it. Rusty counted on him not to be clingy and all that. An ill-timed 'I love you' would just make a big mess out of things.

"I'd like to sleep here if it's not too much to ask," Rusty said primly, back to his playful side.

"I'd love to have you over, doctor, I mean teach, I mean..."

"Shut up." Rusty laughed against his lips and kissed him again to make his point.



Matty watched with languid satisfaction while Rusty made a show of putting his clothes back on from the night before. They still looked great on him, but it was the gleam in the wicked green eyes that told a different story about how Rusty Parker had spent the last several hours. That meant, of course, before sleeping all wrapped up in Matty, and the other way around.

He only pulled on a pair of sweatpants and enjoyed the appreciative stare Rusty gave his naked chest for a few moments too many. "People are going to wonder again where you slept last night."

Rusty shrugged. "I can invent an older lover off campus. You know, like that mature chick that's banging your roommate's brains out right now."

Matty opened his mouth to say that he had lied about John that one time, but he didn't have the chance. Like in those movies when the inevitable simply happens, and nothing can stop it, the sound of the lock being turned by a key took them both unawares.

He barely had the presence of mind to grab a t-shirt and open the window wide. Rusty just watched him curiously and then turned his head to witness Matty's roommate walking in.

John stopped as soon as he was in the room and took in its present occupants. He pushed his eyeglasses up on his nose, scrunched up his face, and stared at Rusty, and then looked around, as if he had just discovered that he had ended up in the wrong room.

Matty noticed the red eyes right away. The guy's allergies were probably acting up again, and overall he didn't look very good. John shared the same love for baggy clothes as Matty, and he was even more studious, although with somewhat less commendable results. The reason why he had chosen to stay away from dorm life was that he believed even someone as into studying as Matty would somehow encroach on his time and make him fail his exams.

The three of them exchanged looks for moments that seemed to stretch into forever. It was a classic Mexican standoff.

Rusty broke the illusion. "What's up, man? Is the jaded husband back home?"

John blinked very hard a couple of times and turned to Matty. "Did you rent out my bed, Matthew?" And then, turning toward Rusty, he asked the most incredible question of them all. "Who are you?" He moved closer to inspect Rusty through his thick glasses.

Matty jumped into action. "No renting. See?" He gestured at the neatly made bed that had remained in the same state since the beginning of the year.

John forgot about Rusty and moved toward the bed. He dropped his backpack on it and then pulled out a book. "I need to study," he said in all seriousness.

Rusty was making a face that looked like he had just swallowed a dozen lemons or so. Matty could sense another disaster in the making and grabbed Rusty so he could push him out the door. "Not another word from you or I'll beat your ass with a wooden ruler until you cry 'mommy'," he said, whispering his threats rapidly like cannon fire.

"But he doesn't--" Rusty started.

"I can trade that wooden ruler for a whip," Matty insisted.

Rusty was out the door now. His eyes glinted and crinkled at the corners. "Promise?"

“Yes.” Matty slammed the door promptly in his face. Damn, that had been close.

“Since when are you bringing men here, Matthew?” John inquired, his nose stuffed in the book. He hadn’t even taken off his shoes, he was that absorbed in his studies.

“That wasn’t a man,” Matty protested.

“I may be as blind as a bat, but that was a man,” John shot back. “Very rude. I bet he’s not even a student here at Sunny Hill. Your parents would be very disappointed if they knew.”

“Let’s not jump to conclusions here,” Matty said in an appeasing voice. He had forgotten that his roommate seemed to be the insufferable kind. He was willing to give anyone the benefit of the doubt, but in this case, his first impression appeared to be the correct one. On the first day of their senior year, when he had installed himself in this room, his parents had come, as usual, to help him. John had witnessed the usual pep talk Matty got from his folks about studying hard and making them proud. His mom’s ‘not a good time for boyfriends’ must have reached John’s ears, hence his reaction at the present moment.

“I don’t care anyway,” John said with a pinch of envy. “I would be more concerned about my grades if I were you, and not with this kind of extracurricular activity. And close that window already. Can’t you see I’m tearing up?”

Matty shrugged and closed the window. He didn’t exactly care what John thought of him bringing ‘men’ to his dorm room, but he didn’t want some random gossip to escape into the wild and mess up the fragile understanding he had with Rusty. They had barely arrived at being cocksucking friends, and Matty wouldn’t jeopardize such a thing for the world. As miffed as Rusty had to be about not being recognized, they had to be satisfied with it.



What an astonishing roommate Matty had! Rusty mused over his failing popularity while walking out of the dorm and into the Sunday morning sun. Usually, after a night spent partying he was a lethargic mess and didn’t want to do more than walk a few steps to the nearest bed, preferably his own.

That wasn’t the case this morning. He felt fresh like a daisy. For half the night, he had slept in Matty’s arms, their sleepy cocks touching each other, and making him feel low key still horny, but too satisfied to care. That had to be working wonders for his complexion, for sure, because he felt the skin of his face was really tight.

Like that, he walked into the house he shared with his friends, and was promptly surprised by four heads turning to meet him. “What?” he asked at the questioning looks.

Maddox was the first to grab the bull by the horns. “Where are you coming from at this hour?”

“Geez, Maddie. I was expecting that kind of thing from Kane.” His other friend nodded in agreement.

“Rusty,” Dex growled playfully at him, “are we even your pals anymore? From where are you coming with that ear-to-ear grin?”

“Psh, I’m not allowed to smile or something?” Rusty protested.

“She must be one hell of a chick,” Dex commented. “You’re sneaking around, you care way too much about what to wear, and you come home looking fucked and pleased like never before.”

“I’m always fucked and pleased,” Rusty shot his line and tried to walk toward the stairs. There was no way he could wipe that grin off his face, and he didn’t even want to try, anyway.

A small grunt from Jonathan drew his attention. “Do you have something to say too?” he asked.

Maddox’s fiancé gave him an odd mysterious look. “If I ever have something to say to you regarding the way you look right now, I’ll say it to you in private.”

Ah, Johnny boy was subtler than the rest. They all smelled blood in the water, but it wasn’t like Rusty wanted to confess how awesome it was to have a sixty-nine with his tutor. That was the best sex he had had in a long time if he thought about it, nothing like the usual routine. “That’s quite bold of you, Mr. Hamilton.”

Jonathan replied with nothing but a sly smile. Could it be that he knew something? Was his gaydar starting to ping at Rusty’s newfound pleasure in playing dick games with Matty? Hmm, now that was an adversary he had to keep his eyes on.

“Can I go to sleep now?” he asked out loud, for all ears in the room to hear him.

“You don’t look that sleepy,” Kane stated, always the observant one.

Rusty’s system began booting up. “That’s because I did sleep,” he said triumphantly. “As you can see, I didn’t spend a night of debauchery in the arms of some creature of the dark, but I did only wholesome stuff. Like sleeping.” And sucking Matty’s cock and having his sucked. Nah, that wasn’t a detail he was willing to share.

Kane shook his head with that motherly expression of his that made him so annoying. “All these secrets you’ve been keeping lately, Rusty, they will come back and bite you in the ass one day.”

“Is that a promise? I like a bite on the ass just as much as the next fellow.”

That earned him another knowing glance from Dex, an amused one from Maddox, and a very sharp and annoying one from Mr. Hamilton.

“You’re the only one who thinks that’s funny.” Kane sighed, but he was smiling, too.

“You say so, and yet you’re grinning like a cat,” Rusty pointed out.

“That’s because you look good, which means that you’re finally serious about someone for the first time in your life,” Kane continued. “And if you slept in this chick’s bed, that’s a good sign, too. The only problem is that we can’t figure out who she might be. Any hints?”

“I feel magnanimous today,” Rusty said and opened his arms wide. “You don’t know her. She’s not a student. She’s older, and she lives off campus.” Yeah, he could bank on Matty’s roommate’s proclivities for this one.

“Did you pick her from one of those ads about ‘mature ladies in your area looking for sex’?” Maddox asked.

“What kind of porn do you let him watch, Jonathan?” Rusty put his hands on his hips and turned toward Maddie’s better half.

Jonathan laughed and still continued to observe him with those unnerving eyes. “He’s free to watch whatever porn he likes. I trust him for his good taste.”

Hmm, hmm, a little bit self-assured, a line like that, coming from Jonathan, but Rusty liked to see that confident part of the guy. The year before, Jonathan had been a plethora of insecurities packed in an aristocratic sense of worlds ending and stuff like that. Now, he was happily engaged to Maddox, and they had awesome sex, by the way they looked each time they walked out of Maddox’s room after a little bit of time alone, regardless of the hour on the clock.

To prove there was nothing his fiancé had to worry about in regards to his internet search history, Maddox leaned in for a kiss, and Jonathan gave it to him while wrapping an arm around his shoulders in a possessive gesture, his eyes never leaving Rusty, as if he was trying to gauge any reaction he might have at seeing them kiss.

Now was a good moment to make fun of the situation and show them that he was his usual self, but he found himself engrossed in watching how their lips touched, how Maddox’s eyelids drooped in pleasure, and how Jonathan’s mouth quirked at the corners in such a smug way that Rusty kind of wanted to smack him but also made him want to smile that way, too, sure of another’s complete and undying affection.

He shook his head. Jonathan was provoking him, without a doubt. To what end, Rusty had a feeling that he would find out soon enough.



There were definitely voices outside his room, so Rusty tiptoed to the door and put his ear close to the wooden surface. He couldn’t make out all the words, but he was pretty certain that Maddox and Jonathan were on the other side of the door, trying to work up the courage to

interrogate him. He could open it brusquely and catch them in the act, but he was also very curious as to where this was going.

Therefore, he waited for whatever debate those two had going on to die down. Finally, there was a knock, so Rusty moved surreptitiously away and dropped on the bed, hoping to pose as a dying knight in such an artsy fashion that neither Maddie, nor his fiancé, would dare to go against him. “It’s open,” he announced, anticipating the battle of wits that was about to occur with great pleasure.

Jonathan walked inside, and Rusty couldn’t say he was surprised. Maddox was smitten and wrapped around Jonathan’s little finger, feeling quite comfortable in that position even though he was wound up like a clock.

“Is this the private time you were talking about?” he started with an opening line that would prove his bravery in the face of battle.

Jonathan didn’t seem fazed in the least by his aggressive stance. He leaned against the wall, opposite Rusty and crossed his arms. His entire posture was relaxed, which meant that he came in peace, not to judge or anything.

Like he would fall for a strategy like that. It was only meant to get him to lower his guard.

“You like Matthew Han,” Jonathan stated, giving him such a clear, unabashed look that Rusty fought himself to not look away, afraid of facing that kind of full-frontal honesty.

“Of course. He’s my tutor and a capital fellow,” Rusty proclaimed, hoping that his attempt at talking like a period drama character would throw Jonathan off his scent.

“He’s more than that,” Jonathan said pointedly. “Oh, don’t look so cross,” he joked, playing into Rusty’s chosen verbal cosplay for the moment. “You like this capital fellow more than you care to admit.”

“True,” Rusty admitted. “Now that we have established that I don’t care to admit much--”

“Oh, Rusty,” Jonathan said and laughed, adjusting his position and shaking his head. “Can we just leave all of the joking aside? For a moment?”

Rusty felt slightly deflated. He always enjoyed a comedy act. But Jonathan was making the rules, it seemed. “Do they know? The others? Maddox?”

“I suppose they all have their hunches, but I’m the only one who knows for a fact. Because I saw you dragging Matty along, holding his hand like you couldn’t leave him for a moment.”

“Did you also hear what I said to him?” Rusty asked. “And how come you saw all this?”

“I went out for a moment for a bit of fresh air. No, I didn’t hear what you told him, but your body language was enough for me to understand.”

“Okay,” Rusty admitted. “But do I get that confidentiality thing? If I tell you a couple of things, not all?”

Jonathan smiled. “You’re among friends here, Rusty. And you helped me during some moments when I didn’t know exactly what to do with myself. Consider this returning the favor.”

Rusty put his hands behind his head. He felt suddenly giddy, a little tickle in the middle of his chest. He could trust Jonathan, of course. “Do you know just how awesome he is?” he began.

“I’d like to hear all about it,” Jonathan assured him.

Chapter Eighteen

Tension

For a moment or so, Rusty had no idea how to start. It was a lot easier to joke and take things lightly, but Hamilton was staring at him with such keen eyes that he felt tempted to blame it all on him. To avoid that honesty-seeking gaze, he lay on his back, hands behind his head, and took a look at the ceiling.

“Are you going to start or do you need me to ask you a series of well-aimed questions?” Jonathan asked with a low chuckle.

That kind of sound made Rusty feel ticklish all over. Usually, he would have blamed Johnny boy for that, too, because, come on, who had the right to be so sexy and untouchable at the same time? But, for a change, he knew Jonathan’s laugh wasn’t tickling his inner kinky demons like usual. It had more to do with the sensory overload experienced the night before in Matty’s arms, the two of them wrapped around each other, sucking each other’s dicks. That thought alone made him grunt, while a little familiar twitch made its way into his pants.

“Was that a ‘yes’? A ‘no’? Was it English?” Jonathan continued.

Rusty risked a killer glare at his guest. Yeah, he was having a laugh, all right. “Ask your questions and be gone, demon.”

Jonathan shook his head in mirth. “What do you like about Matty? Just say three things off the top of your head.”

“Looks, smarts, and sass.”

“Wow. I thought you’d struggle a lot more. Okay. Care to elaborate?”

“I’m not going to make your job easier. Since Maddie put you up to this--”

“He didn’t. I had to fight him to convince him that it would do you good to confess for a change. He was definitely sure you’d clam up.”

“I don’t clam up,” Rusty retorted. “I’m a fully open book.”

“Then let’s get over the introduction and get into the action.”

“How do you know about the action?” Rusty asked, feeling a tiny bit suspicious of Jonathan’s deductive skills.

“What?”

“What?” he mirrored.

Jonathan rolled his eyes. “All this might work on Maddox, because you’ve known each other for a long time, but consider that I’m currently like a dog with a bone, and I’m not going to let it go.”

Rusty grinned. “You said bone.”

“Indeed. So, since you want me to ask you more in-depth questions, were any bones of the kind you seem to enjoy laughing so much about involved?”

“Now that’s a little too forward coming from you, Jonathan.”

“I apologize, but you do look extremely satisfied this morning.”

“Are you studying my horny face when I’m not looking, like Maddox?”

Jonathan appeared to ponder his reply. “Rusty,” he said slowly, “you look happy.”

Rusty tsked and looked away. “I’m uber happy every waking moment.”

“It must be exhausting,” Jonathan pointed out.

Two words. Too clever.

“It’s fun,” he retorted.

“Yes, I must agree, but now you’re no longer as tense as you usually are. You’re always so full of this energy, and don’t get me wrong, it’s part of your charm, but sometimes I wonder if it doesn’t tire you out.”

“Yes, it does. But that’s why I sleep. Sometimes,” Rusty offered. This conversation was taking a dangerous turn. It was better to get it to veer it back to Matty. “We were talking about something else, though.”

“Matthew Han. Matty. The one with smarts, looks, and sass.” Jonathan smiled, to show that he understood what all that was about. “Were you with him all night?”

“Yes, dad,” Rusty replied.

“Did you kiss him?”

Okay, okay, so Hamilton was a heavy hitter, after all. This time, he replied in a small voice, “Yeah.”

“Was it good?” Jonathan continued, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper.

“Yeah.” If they continued like this, they would soon have to communicate through sounds only dogs could hear.

“The best you’ve ever had?”

“Now, you’re pushing it.” Rusty straightened up and looked Jonathan in the eye. “But yeah, it felt that way for sure. Do you think you gave me the gay?”

Jonathan gave him a half-amused, half-reproachful look. “Blame it all on me if you want, Rusty, but what is going on between you and Matty, it’s pretty important.”

“We’re having fun.”

“Things can be serious and fun at the same time.”

“No, they can’t... okay, you have a point. And before you ask, it is kind of serious and fun with Matty, but that’s because he’s a tutor, and he’s always so serious, and that’s why.”

“Okay, that’s good. Have you two gone further than kissing?”

“Are you trying to perv on me, Johnny boy? You and Maddox already bored like a couple married for fifty years?”

“Very funny,” Jonathan said and grinned. His eyes lost focus for a moment. Nope, no sign of boredom there. The guy was thinking of the pervy things he must have done with his fiancé last night.

“Okay, since you asked, yes. We’re talking third base.” Jonathan seemed unresponsive for a bit. “You do know what third base is, right?”

“I do, it’s just that I’m a bit in shock. All right, let’s keep with the euphemisms, just so that we don’t find ourselves a little bit out of our depth,” Jonathan said and tugged the collar of his dress shirt for a moment.

“Speak for yourself,” Rusty said with a snort, feeling on top of the situation once more. “Just for the record, you’re not going to blab about this to Dex and Kane. I don’t include Maddox here, since you two are joined at the hip, and you also seem to share the same brain.”

“I’m glad. It’s impossible to keep something a secret from Maddox. I mean, almost impossible. I would try, for you.”

“Your concern is appreciated. Now, can I gush about Matty for a second?”

“There’s nothing I’d like to hear more. Go ahead, please,” Jonathan encouraged him.

“I lied. It’s going to take more than a second.”

“Just start already,” Jonathan snapped, but his grin said everything about how much he wanted to hear Rusty gushing over Matty.

Pleased with that result, he lay on his back again. “At first, I thought he was a bit insufferable, but you know, like in a cute, harmless way. My mistake was playing along, letting him win, and before I knew it, he got the upper hand. You know, I wanted to give him lessons about sex, and you have no idea, Johnny boy, but he’s a bigger perv than me.”

“That’s quite the high praise, coming from you,” Jonathan commented.

“Well, it’s true. I mean, I say, suck on this finger, and he sucks the whole hand.”

“Really?” Jonathan’s stricken face confirmed that his euphemisms were a bit off the mark.

“Just a figure of speech,” Rusty hurried to correct the misunderstanding. “Anyway, the thing is that each time I try to shock him, he’s all for it, and I need to raise the bar, you know?”

“Except for the sex element, into which I’m not going to get too deep,” Jonathan said, “what else do you like about Matty? You two seem very close.”

“Yeah, ‘cause he’s uber smart. Usually, with any teacher, professor, tutor, whatever, I have my ways to make them run, tails between their legs, but Matty’s really stubborn. He hits me with that wooden ruler on occasion, you know?”

“Something tells me you like that part.”

“Well, he could do better, and that thing doesn’t really hurt. But I’ll teach him all about that in due time. There’s no escaping from me, I’m telling you.”

“It does look like you’re very interested in having Matty in your clutches for some time. But tell me, how does he really feel about all this?”

Rusty pointed at his temple. “He has a huge brain. He must be one of those people that are heavy into research. Case in point, we study sex. Together. So, there’s no such thing as silly attachments and all that.”

“All right. As long as the two of you are on the same page, I guess there’s no point in insisting. What about the friendship that’s clearly developing between the two of you?”

“He’s a great guy.” Rusty stopped for a moment as his mind wandered to the night of the match when Matty had saved him from dark thoughts concerning his dad, like he just knew. “He reads this very stupid book with zombie wizards, and he knows it’s like the best antidote for my insomnia. He reads it to me out loud until I fall asleep, and he will do it at any hour, regardless. I can count on him. Plus, he’s really witty, and he knows how to play me sometimes and although I let him, it’s refreshing, you know?”

“I bet. I must say, Rusty, you’ve been quite forthcoming. Not what I expected.”

“I was born to prove people wrong.”

Jonathan laughed. “Okay, then I should tell you to continue to have fun with Matty.”

“Really, can I, mom?” Rusty made a pleading face and linked his hands together, after straightening himself up once more.

“I thought I was the dad,” Jonathan replied smoothly.

“Eh, you’re the kinder one. Maddox would have given me a wedgie by now to extract information.”

Jonathan’s eyes lit up. “Are you serious? Has Maddox ever treated you that way?”

“Maybe I’m exaggerating. Maybe we once gave each other wedgies.”

“You didn’t,” Jonathan whispered, his eyes wide.

“Or I might just be pulling your leg. You’ll never know,” Rusty said with a smirk.

“I’ll ask Maddox.”

“Feel free to do that. But he’s not going to admit it, because he lost. And he was begging like a wuss to be let go of.”

“You’re so full of it, Rusty, I swear.” Jonathan threw his arms out in defeat.

“Hey, I had to pay you back a little for ambushing me about Matty. And don’t worry, it’s not like anyone’s going to fall for anyone or stuff like that. Just in case you were worried about it.”

Jonathan didn’t appear completely convinced, but in the end, he smiled. “I try not to be. After all, you’re both grownups, and I should let you spread your wings.”

“Consider them spread.” Rusty opened his arms wide to make his point.

He purred as Jonathan patted him on the head on his way out. Well, it felt good to get that off his chest a little. After all, it wasn’t like they didn’t suspect it anyway. Which also meant that he could have Matty over more often, without fearing that it might look weird.



“You’re literally, but literally, glowing,” was Zoey’s first remark the moment she set foot in his room.

Matty made a sign at her to zip it. Zoey didn't need any more explanations, as she noticed John right away, spread out on his bed, noise-cancelling headphones over his ears, trying some new method of learning that required him to make a proper corpse impersonation during which no other soul was supposed to breathe in his presence.

The 'corpse' opened his eyes, much to Matty's chagrin. "You're not only bringing men to your dorm room, but also women?" John questioned.

In the battle of Zoey versus noise-cancelling headphones, the winner was incontestable.

"Men, what men? Did you have strippers here overnight?" Zoey asked, bubbling with excitement.

That brought a look of disgust to John's face. The guy looked at Zoey like she was a bug from a distant galaxy. He tried to look disdainful but that didn't quite cover the fear he was obviously experiencing.

"Not men, but only one, and he's a friend." He warned Zoey not to say a thing with nothing but a look, and miracles be praised, she didn't. "And this is Zoey, not women."

"I am a woman," Zoey cared to establish right away. "But I'm not here for some debauchery or a menagerie a trois."

"It's ménage a trois," John hurried to correct her.

"Nope," she replied, completely unfazed by his righteousness. "It's how I said it."

John blinked, trying to figure out what she meant. Matty was ready to go anyway, so he grabbed her by the elbow and they both walked out, after a short and perfunctory goodbye to his roommate.

"So, the D-bag is back," Zoey commented as soon as they were out of the dorm. "When did that happen?"

"This morning, and he almost caught us in the act."

"You mean, you and Rusty?" Zoey asked. "What act? Was it sexual, at least?"

"Yes," Matty said hurriedly. "But John has bad eyesight and he always has his head in his books, so he didn't recognize Rusty."

Zoey gasped in outrage. "No, he didn't," she exclaimed. "I bet our beloved king corrected him immediately."

"No, I was faster. I don't want John to know. You realize that he could be a loose cannon with that kind of information in his hand."

“That’s true,” Zoey admitted, “but you know that it could work to your advantage. With his reputation ruined, Rusty would have no other choice but to marry you.”

“I don’t know exactly what century you’re from, or what planet for that matter, but it doesn’t work like that, Zoey. I’m afraid Rusty would hate me if that happened.”

Zoey seemed to ponder over what to tell him next. Then, her face was split by a huge smile and she took his arm. “You know what, Matty? I have this feeling that you two are going to be completely fine. So, just take things as they go. And don’t worry about your roommate. He wouldn’t deign to gossip if you tortured him. He’s that much of a snob.”

“I hardly know the guy. He low-key threatened me of informing my parents that I’m fooling around with men in my quarters.”

Zoey rolled her eyes in exasperation. “What’s the going rate for snuffing an annoying roommate?”

“What rate?”

“How many years in the slammer?”

“I think it would still be first-degree murder, even if the guy’s annoying,” Matty offered with all the solicitude he was capable of, so early and after all the recent events.

“That’s too bad. Yeah, you’re totally right. Good thing he’s a snob. As for your parents, if he ever contacts them on Facebook or something, just tell them he’s a lunatic. What person under twenty-five uses Facebook?”

“Such a strong argument. I bow before it, my friend,” Matty joked. “I won’t worry too much about him. I also hope that he’s gone soon, but I don’t know if that’s going to happen. It looks like his relatives need that apartment or the money from renting it, after all. Which means that I’ll be stuck with him.”

“Hmm,” Zoey said under her breath. “Which means that debaucheries like last night won’t happen any time soon. At least, not in your quarters, as you call them, you medieval fantasy fanboy.”

“Yeah. And I don’t know how I’m going to plan a repeat performance of last night. Should we rent a motel room or something? It would be pretty weird and shady.”

“Why can’t you go to him? His buddies are a lot cooler than your John. I mean, Maddox and Jonathan are so in love that they can’t even be bothered by the existence of other people from what I’ve seen of them and their highly questionable behavior. Kane has that girlfriend he plans to marry, so he knows how it is to want someone so much that you must sentence them for life. And Dexter Solomon--” She stopped abruptly and bit her bottom lip in thought.

“What about Dex?” Matty pressed her. Did Zoey know something about the football player that could throw a spanner into his – as yet unshared – plans to worm his way into Rusty’s room and fool around there?

“Nothing,” Zoey said quickly. “Hey, did you hear about Connor Williams?”

The name was familiar. Actually, you didn’t have to be an avid reader of Xpress to know who the guy was. “The guy into eco stuff?” Matty asked.

“Uh-huh,” Zoey managed and pursed her lips in disapproval. “He was Jonathan Hamilton’s initial love interest last year.”

Matty searched his brain for that piece of info. Apparently, you had to read Xpress after all to be up-to-date on everything. He did remember about the scandal from less than a year before when certain people had tried to blackmail Jonathan into something, he didn’t exactly recall what. “Ah, his posse got mad that Jonathan chose Maddox. Well, now I remember.”

Zoey gave him a sympathetic pat on the back. “I’m glad you’re from this planet, after all. Although, I can’t blame you. You just have kind of a selective way of retaining only the things concerning Rusty.”

“Not even those. I have you for that.” He reciprocated the sympathetic pat, only because he knew it would annoy her.

She pushed him away playfully. “Right. You had no actual idea that Rusty was into cat boys. I had to drill that into you, only so that you’d take a step in the right direction. And see where you are now? Kiss the pinky.” She waved her hand in front of him.

He grabbed it unceremoniously and then bit on the offensive pinky in question. Maybe they didn’t have very strong boundaries when it came to their friendship, but that was just one of the things that made it special.

Zoey nursed her pinky with a wounded look on her face. “You ungrateful brat,” she uttered from the tip of her lips. “I’ll get you for that.”

“Wait, where are we even going? And what were you saying about Connor Williams?”

“The two are connected, trust me. There’s a kind of a meeting going on, and we’re going to infiltrate it.”

“A meeting? With Connor Williams as the main speaker or something? Zoey, I’m really not that in the mood for listening to rehashed news about how the planet’s dying.”

“No, no, no, you don’t understand. He lost that love for all things green. Since he realized that taking over the world through means of righteous outrage over the whales and what not was quite the tall order, he settled for something closer to home. Something smaller.”

“Like what?”

“Like Sunny Hill,” Zoey replied promptly.

“Does he want us all to wipe our asses with leaves or something?”

Zoey giggled. “No, although that’s an idea I’m not fond of,” she added. “No, Connor is quickly becoming the voice of high morals, right here, on the campus grounds. He believes that we’re all spending too much time fornicating – I wish – and that we bow to false gods like a useless bunch of cultists.”

Matty frowned. “Is he turning into a religious nut? Good luck with that. He must be living in the wrong century.”

“No, religion has nothing to do with it, but I gotta give it to the guy, he knows how to dress up his discourse to make sure that it appeals to the masses.”

“What does he want?” Matty felt slightly wary, although Zoey seemed to believe that it was all just an occasion for having a laugh.

“He wants us to behave like proper grownups, with high morals. Yes, I say that, because those are the words he seemed to be enamored with. That means, among other things, zero tolerance for drinking on campus, hooking up, obviously, and even parties. In his vision, we should study and reach a higher plane of existence.”

“It all sounds like a bunch of mumbo-jumbo to me. I doubt he’ll gain too many followers.”

“You think? I heard he’s drawing a crowd.”

“Does he still wear his hair like Jesus?” Matty asked. That was one detail he knew about the guy.

“Nope. That would be a lil’ too on the nose, even for a fame-hungry whore like him,” Zoey said matter-of-factly. “Uh, you kept on interrupting me, and I haven’t gotten to the point. Rusty’s reign is in danger, my good man. Connor’s gotten it into his head that there’s a symbol he must attack in order for his ideas to prevail.”

“And he’s attacking Rusty? How? Calling him a fornicator and stuff like that?”

“No. I told you. He’s subtler, the bastard. And all that fornication and stuff, that’s the language I picked to make it clear to you what he’s up to.”

“Okay. Color me intrigued. Where’s that meeting?”

“Just follow me. Wipe that smile off your face, though, and put on your most pious one.” She stopped for good measure, and then added, “Fornicator.”

Matty rolled his eyes but followed her. This story about Connor Williams sounded pretty weird, and Zoey was right that they needed to get a front row seat to the guy’s preaching session.

Did Rusty even know he was being turned into an effigy to be burned at the stake? Somehow, Matty doubted it.



He thumbed the card nervously, flicking the same dog-eared corner over and over with his forefinger.

The voice on the other end was warm and likeable. “Hello?”

“Mrs. May,” Rusty said quickly, not allowing himself the time to lose all courage, “hello. I know it’s Sunday, but I wanted to find out if you’re free this week. To see me. I’m Rusty Parker. You most certainly don’t know who I am, but--”

“Ah, Rusty, of course,” Mrs. May replied. “Francine told me about you. I have been expecting you. For more than half a year, I think.”

Rusty fidgeted. It was hard to keep up his usual act when people put him on the spot like that. Especially when they meant well, something he knew about Mrs. May without having met her once.

“I was busy,” he muttered, hoping that he didn’t have to apologize for half an hour to make up for all that time.

“With basketball. Yes,” Mrs. May continued.

Rusty couldn’t place an age for her. The mellifluous quality of her voice made her sound young, but the way she dominated him with nothing but good words spelled experience. She could be thirty, she could as well be fifty. “I’m sorry,” he blurted out. Well, he did deserve a little bit of chastising, after all.

“It’s all right,” she assured him. “If you’re free now, how about paying me a visit? I’ve waited for so long to meet you.”

That had to be Francine’s influence, if Mrs. May was willing to sacrifice her Sunday only to hear him sing.

“Sure. Of course. I mean, thank you.”

“It’s about an hour drive, I think,” Mrs. May said. “You live on campus, if I remember correctly. Is this an inconvenience?”

“No worries. I’ll find a car in no time,” he assured her.

Francine had thought of everything when handing him that gift the previous Christmas. He couldn’t easily invoke that he couldn’t go to see the vocal coach she had chosen for him, because her studio wasn’t that far away from Sunny Hill.

After telling her goodbye, he jumped to his feet. Today, he felt like a million dollars. He could do this. But first, he needed to ask Maddox to lend him the car.



“Where’s the fire?” Maddox asked. He was lounging on the couch in the living room thumbing through some study materials without too much zest. Jonathan had to be studying by himself if Maddox was on his own. They sometimes parted ways when they needed to focus on their studies. But it looked like that was going pretty tough on his man, Maddox.

“I decided to go see that vocal coach,” he said quickly, after a short look around for eavesdroppers.

“Today? Sunday?” Maddox asked.

“Don’t be stingy with that pretty car,” Rusty warned him. “I know Jonathan gave it to you, but I think I liked that old one better. The one you’d lend to me without the twenty questions.”

“I didn’t say ‘no’, you little shit,” Maddox said with a grin. “It’s just that I don’t think you’ll find her at her studio today.”

“She invited me over,” Rusty said with importance. “We talked on the phone.”

That made Maddox’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. “Well, if that’s how it is, how about I drive you?”

Rusty narrowed his eyes. “Don’t you trust me with your swanky ride?”

“I’m just bored up to my eyeballs. You can drive, if you want. But I want out of the house. Jonathan is a bit more studious than me, and that shows.”

Rusty nodded thoughtfully. “And I bet you can’t keep your hands to yourself while he tries to be all serious and stuff.”

Maddox observed him carefully and grinned. “You’re paying a lot of attention to the things we do. Why?”

“Stop beating around the bush. I know that, by now, Jonathan must have brought you up to speed on Matty and I.”

“It was about damn time you fessed up,” Maddox said and dangled the car keys for him to see. “Do you want to drive, after all?”

“Nah,” Rusty waved, “since I’m on my way to become a diva, I guess I might as well get used to being chauffeured around.”

“Chauffeured.” Maddox shook his head. “I’m afraid there’ll be nothing new for you to discover there. You act like a diva all the time, anyway.”

“Do not,” Rusty protested. “What about me says diva?” He pointed at himself.

Maddox gave him a critical onceover. “I guess if you were one, you’d dress better.”

Rusty shrugged. “I actually asked for Jonathan’s advice on what to wear.” He had his nice sweater on, and a pair of dress pants. Sort of formal casual or whatever that was called.

Maddox grunted. “Damn. Don’t tell him I said anything then.”

“Bribe me.”

“I’m already taking you to see the vocal coach.”

“Not enough. Buy me ice cream. See? I can be a diva if I want.” He stuck his tongue out at Maddox, just to prove his point.

“No diva would want ice cream. But I’ll buy you one, on the way back. We wouldn’t want to ruin your voice before we get there, right?”

Maddox had meant it as a joke, but Rusty felt some not so familiar jitters that came to him only when he allowed them to. He shook them off; now wasn’t a good time. Not that it ever was for things like that.



Rusty groaned as he checked the caller ID.

“What is it?” Maddox asked. “Who’s calling? Cat boy extraordinaire, or tutor extraordinaire?”

“Neither,” Rusty replied. “My dad.”

“Let it ring,” Maddox suggested in a tone that brooked no contradiction.

“I can’t. He’ll just call and call.”

“Put it on mute.”

Rusty shook his head, pursed his lips and put the phone to his ear. “Yeah.”

“What are you doing?” The same greeting as always.

“I’m studying,” he said brightly.

“That would be something. Try again, son.”

“What do you want?” Rusty changed tack, not wanting to disclose the slightest whiff of what he was truly doing.

“Since you seem to have forgotten, next Saturday, we’re inviting you over.”

“Why? It’s not Thanksgiving or Christmas, as far as I know.”

“As if you cared about spending such special occasions with your family.”

Rusty took a deep breath. “My family,” he said in a deadpan voice. “That’s a good one.”

His dad remained silent at the other end. “It’s your brother’s birthday. For some reason I don’t understand, he looks up to you. Don’t miss it.”

And just like that, the line went dead. Rusty threw his phone on the dashboard.

“What was that about?” Maddox asked.

“His son’s birthday,” Rusty replied.

“Are you going?”

“I don’t know.” Rusty looked out the window at the scenery slipping by before his eyes had a chance to focus on the shape of a tree or a house in the distance.

Maddox patted his knee. “Whatever you choose, I’m with you. Although I think, and it’s just a thought, don’t bite my head off for it, that Gabriel would be over the moon if you went.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Rusty shifted in his seat.

It would be petty to be jealous of a ten-year-old. How many birthdays had Roy Parker missed during those years when he only had one son?



“We’re here.” Maddox pulled the car into the driveway and into the space that seemed dedicated to visitors. “Is it just me, or does it look like she’s teaching at home?”

The coquet little house tucked between two similar ones stood apart from the suburban cookie cutter design due to the colorful flower beds lining the walls, still fresh and beautiful even as the weather was getting colder.

“I didn’t realize, but yeah,” Rusty confirmed.

“I’ll drive around for a bit, check out the neighborhood,” Maddox said. “When you’re done, text.”

Rusty stood in front of the polished wooden door for a while. With one deep breath, he knocked, and the door opened.

“Rusty,” the woman in the door said with warmth in her voice. “You’re every bit like Francine described you,” she added before he even managed to get a word out.

She looked around forty, a petite blond with wavy hair and kind eyes smiling at him from behind cat glasses encased in light pink frames.

“Come on in.”

“Are you sure I didn’t come at a bad time?” Rusty asked, feeling every drop of courage from before abandoning him.

“Totally sure,” she assured him. She wore a knitted grey dress that showed off a graceful body. “My husband and kids are playing some crazy shooting video game in the basement, and let’s just say, that’s not exactly up my alley. Let’s hear you,” she added as she opened the door to what had to be her studio.



Maddox seemed surprised to hear from him. “What? Done already?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m done,” Rusty said in a strained voice.

“Why so fast? What happened?”

Rusty took one shaky breath. “Well, pretty much,” he murmured, “she wrecked me with kindness.”

Chapter Nineteen

Pride, Prejudice and Other Demons

“So, are you going to tell me how it went?” Maddox eyed him carefully from time to time, as he still needed to keep his eyes on the road, which was a blessing in disguise.

Rusty placed the card carefully on the dashboard and leaned back. Even the interior of the car was luxurious and it made him low-key envious that he didn’t have a boyfriend like Jonathan. Not because he was loaded, but because it was more than a nice gesture to receive a thoughtful gift like this. He had overheard Jonathan explaining to Kane how he had done some serious research on what a young man in finance should drive.

People never thought that much about him. Sure, Maddox was his bestie, and Jonathan showed his good intentions all the time, but Rusty believed that when dealing with most people it was better if their interest remained superficial. Anyone trying to get to know him better than his persona – carefully crafted, if anyone was asking – made him feel like he needed to draw the bridge and let them swim around in the moat until they got bored. They should be thankful that he hadn’t thought of adding sharks as entertainment.

“She praised me and put me down at the same time,” he explained in a low voice, as he looked out the car window, at the passing scenery. Too bad, he wouldn’t be seeing the same places again.

“Okay, I can see why someone would do that to you. No offense,” Maddox added, when Rusty looked at him with reproachful eyes. “Come on, man, you know what I mean. But let’s hear it. Don’t keep it bottled up inside. You know you never deal well with bottling up and the like.”

Rusty sighed and closed his eyes. “She gave me some tests, asked me to sing different songs, just to gauge my range and stuff like that. And she thinks I have a wonderful voice, I kid you not, and that I can go from tenor to baritone with proper work and interest, because I’m that versatile.”

“Tell me you didn’t burst out laughing at that word.”

“Is that how well you know me?” Rusty opened one eye to give Maddie his signature angry-pirate-who-lost-an-eye-fighting-a-whale look.

“Yes,” Maddox replied, completely unfazed.

“I, like, chuckled. For a second, no more.”

“Did she give you the evil eye for playing the fool?”

“No. She smiled. And that was worse, in a way.”

“How come?”

Too bad the drive back to the campus took exactly as long as when they’d driven to see Mrs. May. “Well, you do know me,” Rusty admitted. “So, when people are mean to me, I know how to handle them. I take all that meanness and wrap it around their necks like a scarf.”

“How nice of you.”

“Nope. It’s like I wrap them in their mean scarves when it’s more than one hundred degrees or so outside.”

“Okay, so she wasn’t mean. What was she? What did she tell you?”

“She started explaining how to control my breathing and stuff like that. Technical stuff, and she guided me through it.”

“It sounds to me like you aced it. I know that if you put your mind to anything, you’ll do it and surpass it.”

Rusty took another deep breath. “Not this time. I swear, Maddie, Mrs. May must have spoken to your beloved Johnny because she told me something he also mentioned.”

“What’s that?”

“Tension,” Rusty muttered under his breath and looked out the car window again, feeling sullen all of a sudden.

“What do you mean, tension? Those guys singing opera always look so stiff that I can only imagine what a feat it must be to get through it all. And they also manage to make all those faces at the same time. It must be hard.”

“Well, yeah, but making all those faces is not hard for me. Letting go of the tension is. I don’t even know what she’s talking about. Or Jonathan. She said something to me like, ‘Rusty, you must sing with joy, not all this fierceness’ and, trust me, I can’t.”

Maddox remained silent for some time. “Maybe,” he said cautiously, as if he was choosing each word carefully, “you could let go a little and, you know, show yourself. How you really are.”

“Don’t side with the enemy, Maddie,” Rusty warned. “That tension, or whatever she says it is, is--” He stopped. Not even with Maddox could he be that honest. That tension was keeping him glued together. That wasn’t something anyone else but he himself could understand. And not even he thought that he understood it all. He just depended on it, and it made him low-key annoyed when people saw it. First, Jonathan, and then, Mrs. Day. Was he starting to crack and unravel in places or something? No one was supposed to see it.

“Take the card back.” They were at a stop, so Maddox reached for the thing and slapped it on Rusty’s chest. “You’re not getting out of this. You’re going to see Mrs. May again.”

“I don’t think so,” Rusty said stubbornly. He took the card from Maddox and ripped it in two.

Maddox gave him a startled look. Then, he wrenched the two halves from his hand and pushed them into his pocket. “I think I’ll keep this for you. Until you stop acting like a mule.”

“Good luck with that.” Rusty snorted and turned his back to Maddox.

At least, his bestie knew when to shut up. Yeah, he was pissed. She had seen right through him and advised him to come back when he realized what was more important than keeping up an act that wasn’t him. Francine must have talked to her, warned her somehow.

And that made him a bit angry. Even though he knew both of them were right.



Matty and Zoey snuck through the rows of attendees in search of some empty seats, and it looked like their only choice was to sit in the front, barely one foot or so away from the speaker. At first, Matty didn’t even recognize Connor Williams. The guy must have gone to one of those TV shows, specializing in makeovers, because he didn’t look one ounce like he used to. Gone were the billowy flowery shirts and the hippie hair, the colorful bracelets, even the fake benevolent gaze he had used to bestow upon lesser mortals.

For starters, he wore a suit and held his body in a rigid posture, his hands resting on his claimed pulpit while only his eyes moved, inspecting the crowd that still had a hard time settling down, like seals on an iceberg. His hair was cut short and fashioned à la military reject, and the pretended well-meant look had been replaced by a harsh glint speaking of a lack of forgiveness.

“That’s quite the transformation,” Matty whispered to Zoey.

“I told you. He’s gone one-eighty. Actually, I think he’s spinning off of his axis. But let’s hear him first.”

Matty couldn’t agree more. Something astonishing was in the works, and they basically had front row seats to it. To say that he was curious would be a major understatement.

Finally, it looked like the easily inconvenienced seals had found their places and after Connor coughed loudly a couple of times to get the attention of the interested attendees, a silence fell over the room.

“Fellow students,” Connor began and consulted the papers in front of him briefly with an important frown, “I am glad to see you here in such large numbers. That gives me hope for the future of Sunny Hill.” A pause for effect followed, as another look at the papers that had to

contain the secret to eternal life by how carefully he thumbed them from time to time. “Did you know that we are the 348th college in the country? 348,” he pronounced slowly. “That’s our place.”

“I bet you five bucks he pulled that number out of his ass,” Zoey whispered.

“No point in betting. I agree,” Matty whispered back.

Their muttering didn’t go unnoticed. Connor’s steely gaze rested on them for a brief moment, and his lips pursed in disappointment. Matty wasn’t sure whether it was because of the nerve of them to talk in class or Zoey’s bright pink jacket deemed so insufferable.

“Do you know that we used to be a lot higher?”

“How much higher?” Zoey asked loudly.

Matty tried to shush her, but it was too late.

Connor stared with fresh disdain at Zoey. “We used to be the 127th.” Annoyed with the interruption, he thumbed his papers again. “What does that tell you, students of Sunny Hill? Are we failing the first test of our lives as adults?”

A few murmurs confirmed the frightening perspective laid out so carefully in front of them. Matty stole a few looks around. He hadn’t expected so many people to come and listen to Connor. However, compared to the total number of students living on campus, it wasn’t an important percentage. Still, the way the people there stared at Connor like he was about to announce the Second Coming or to tell them that he was himself, that gave him the willies a bit.

“Our education is going downhill,” Connor continued and smacked his closed fist on the lectern, making the poor wooden structure tremble in fear of domestic violence for a bit. “We treat college like it’s a four-year summer camp, from which we emerge not one bit wiser than when we entered, with fresh innocent faces, waiting to be enlightened.” At the last word, he raised one hand to the ceiling, and all the pairs of eyes in attendance followed his gesture, expecting some kind of miracle or punishment to fall upon them next.

“I don’t remember that part,” Zoey muttered under her breath. “I’m afraid I’ve never been an innocent face.”

“I can vouch for that,” Matty agreed, while his eyes remained on Connor. He had to give it to the guy. Something of how he moved and talked was on par with the behavior and slimy magnetism of a snake oil salesman. And the ignorant crowd waited, brains wide open for a little washing.

“Have we found that enlightenment?” Connor continued. After each question, he took his time to examine the faces of those in attendance, as if he expected answers.

Zoey made a gesture to raise her hand, but Matty caught her. "Let's play the invisible spectators' part for now," he advised. His bestie put her hand down, but not without a pout to let him know that she was disappointed.

"What we have found is how to live a life without meaning," Connor offered the answer in their stead. "A life spent partying, drinking, experimenting with illegal substances. A life wasted by investing our time in meaningless sexual encounters."

"Here we go," Zoey murmured, her hands stuffed into the pockets of her jacket, which made her look like a pink balloon.

A few more murmurs of approval emerged from the audience.

"This isn't what I want to take with me when I leave college," Connor enunciated with self-importance. He leaned on the lectern with one elbow and gave another sweeping gaze to the crowd in front of him. "I want to leave this place happy with myself, and with my fellow students."

"What should we do?" someone suddenly wailed from a middle row.

Matty tried to see who the speaker was, but he had turned too late.

"Don't tell me," Zoey muttered again. "Here comes the PowerPoint presentation."

"There's no way--" Matty started.

The whiteboard behind Connor lit up. Matty craned his neck and saw someone behind the projector, a short girl with hair like a nest. She operated the machine like a little witch bent over her potion cauldron. It looked like the speaker for the masses had help.

Displayed in front of them was an aerial view of the campus. Connor turned toward it and gave the sight a look of proper respect and admiration. "This place of learning," he boomed, "deserves all of our attention, understanding, and love."

A few people in the audience began clapping, but the sounds died down, as Connor put one hand up in modesty, as if he wasn't worthy of any such display of appreciation just yet.

"We won't hide our love for learning," he continued in a sweeter tone. Then, he raised his voice again. "We won't hide in the shadows, huddled together under the umbrella of some secret society like our ancestors."

"What ancestors?" Zoey wondered quietly. "This college is like twenty years old or something."

Matty patted her knee in sympathy.

“No, we don’t have to hide,” Connor continued and waved his right arm with aplomb, seeking allies with his eyes everywhere in the room. Finally, someone seemed to take the cue and jumped to their feet. “Yeah!”

A few others followed, and it looked like that spark was enough. Matty looked around, feeling second-hand embarrassment at the display of sudden emotion at Connor’s speech.

“We will dedicate ourselves to the high ideals of learning. We will aim higher! We will be better! We will be the best!”

The agitation in the room increased gradually, like an undercurrent turning into a wave.

“We will be a force for good,” Connor continued. He made a short gesture meant for the witch with the projector. “We will be,” he raised his voice again while the image changed behind him, “the Sunny Hill Implacable Team!”

More people jumped to their feet to applaud. Matty and Zoey exchanged a nonplussed look.

“Is he for real?” Matty asked with a frown.

Zoey just let her jaw drop, shook her head, and then put her jaw back on with one hand.

Connor gestured for the audience to calm down, with a smarmy smile. He looked pleased. “Behold our crest,” he said, pointing at the projected image again.

The shield design showed an open manuscript and above it some sort of bird, a cross between a raven and a vulture, was perched, its claws digging deep into the pages. The initials were separated, S and H on top, and the other two below.

“Second Hand Information Technology,” Zoey whispered at him. “So Happy It’s Tuesday. Sorry Hoe It’s Tea--”

“Yeah,” Matty barely managed.

Connor interrupted their little conversation, booming again from his pulpit, this time with more excitement and his hands grabbing the edges whether for balance or to keep himself from soaring toward the ceiling.

“We won’t hide, no! But we will do even more! We will help our fellow students, who have been left prey to all these--”

“Is he going to call them vices? Temptations?” Zoey wondered in a subdued voice.

“—temptations,” Connor continued.

“Bingo,” Zoey congratulated herself.

“—with no one to pick up their cause and turn it into a credo, and we will show them that there is more to college life than mindless drinking and partying and hooking up!” Connor shouted, his eyes burning in his head.

“There’s more, more,” someone chanted from the agitated audience.

Matty shook his head. Some people. How could they not see how false Connor was? And how come that awful acronym didn’t stop them from shouting like zealots?

Connor made another gesture to make the crowd calm down. Apparently, he had more to say. “Sunny Hill has become a place where students end up valuing excess in the deplorable activities I mentioned before, and those who excel in them.”

“Here it comes,” Zoey said. “Matty, pay attention.”

He was all ears.

“Someone like Rusty Parker,” Connor thundered, “who’s one step from flunking all his exams, an unreliable team player on the basketball court, who indulges in partying as a way of life, is called a king!”

The audience fell completely silent.

Connor seemed to sense that his dominance over the captive audience was slipping. He shouted louder. “A king! How can that even be a thing? We don’t celebrate worthless aristocracy in this country! We make ourselves with our two hands! In a way, yes, Rusty Parker can be called a king. He’s as profligate as one! A reprobate!”

“Oh, my, what big words,” Zoey whispered and leaned toward Matty.

“We shouldn’t go through college subjected to a constant popularity contest,” Connor continued, his eyes shifting across the audience.

“Yeah!” someone confirmed.

Matty was starting to think that each time, the supporter was the same person.

“Rusty Parker is no better than you and I,” Connor said. “I’d even dare to say that he’s below most of us. We’re better than him. We want more from us, not partying our lives away!” He made another sweeping arc with his right arm.

“No shit,” Zoey said with a shake of the head.

“You can do something to make this false reign disappear,” Connor continued.

“What can we even do?” someone cried out, as if Rusty was some kind of despot, keeping them in chains.

“It’s simple,” Connor said with a magnanimous smile. “From today onward, we will ignore Rusty Parker. He no longer exists.” Another expansive sweep of the arm. “He has no power over us. And we will teach others what to do about it, too. They should ignore him. They should stop looking up to someone as undeserving as him. We’re better! We’re the best Sunny Hill can offer!”

Clapping followed. Matty shook his head in disbelief. He grabbed Zoey’s arm to drag her away. “I’ve had enough. You?”

“Totally,” Zoey agreed. “We should totally tell Rusty about this.”

Matty exchanged a short look with Connor on his way out. It was strange to think that the man at the pulpit would deign to spare a stare at a simple member of the audience, but maybe he could still blame it on Zoey’s pink jacket.

During that brief moment, Connor’s mask slipped, and Matty saw the ugliness below, the calculated strategy, the ambition and the greed. He wasn’t the first to look away. Connor displayed an affable smile as he took in his loving audience.



“What have the two of you been up to?” Kane questioned them the moment they stepped through the door.

Rusty rushed toward the stairs. “Maddie, you better not say a word, or I’ll be mad at you until Christmas!”

“Now that makes me curious,” Kane said and crossed his arms, while looking at Rusty as he passed by him at full speed. “It’s clearly not enough to stop Rusty from wanting Christmas presents.”

“He’ll talk when he’s ready,” Maddox said with a weary sigh.

Seriously, these days he was turning kind of annoying. It had to be Jonathan’s influence, Rusty thought and pursed his lips. “I’m not home for anyone until I say otherwise,” he announced. “So you, nosy housemates, better keep your nose out of it and let me be. Not one of you come knocking, or I’ll wrestle you to the floor until you cry for your mommy.”

“Jonathan’s cooking tonight,” Maddox announced. “Are you sure you’re strong enough to resist?”

“I said, I’m not home for anyone,” Rusty added petulantly.

A sudden energetic knock on the door made them all turn toward it. Maddox went to get it. A pretty disheveled Matty was there, breathing hard as if he had been running. “Is Rusty home? I need to tell him something, and I don’t want to do it over the phone.”

“He’s not--” Maddox started.

Rusty groaned. “I’m right here, and he can probably see my shoes or something. Come on in, Matty.”

Matty looked confusedly at Maddox and Kane as he entered. Maddox offered him an apologetic shrug. Kane just rolled his eyes and threw his arms out like he couldn’t be bothered anymore.

That was exactly what he needed. A distraction. And Matty was the best kind of distraction because he reminded Rusty why he had felt like a million dollars that morning and brave enough to call Mrs. May, regardless of the disappointment experienced after. *You can’t be truly great if you don’t let go of what’s holding you back.* Those had been her exact words. *Maybe I don’t want to be truly great.* That had been what he had said to her. *Maybe I should wait for you for another half a year.* Now that had been a great suggestion on her part. Go back, think if that is what you want, all that jazz.

No, he couldn’t do that. But he could chase that formidable sensation experienced the night before in Matty’s arms. Yes, that he could do. Chase after the pleasure and the happiness that came with it.



Matty had noticed the strange tension between the housemates the moment he had set foot in the room, but he had more pressing matters than to ask Rusty what that was all about. Rusty needed to know that he had an enemy on campus, and even if he brushed it off, Matty thought it pretty important. Connor would surely spread ugly things about Rusty, and he would try to attack his character, even though he didn’t know him at all.

That was unjust, and Matty couldn’t stand it. He hurried after Rusty into his room, and he was just about to start explaining, when he was grabbed by his shoulders and pulled into a fierce, demanding kiss. Rusty wasn’t wasting time, and his hands were now lower, searching for something. Matty gasped as Rusty planted both hands on his ass and began kneading it in earnest.

It was mind-blowing, so much so that Matty forgot for a moment that he was there to deliver important news. He tried to pull away, but Rusty went at it relentlessly, now kissing his neck, biting it teasingly, and pushing his jacket and the hooded sweatshirt underneath upward, with the intention to undress him.

Matty took advantage of the break given by Rusty having to throw those clothes on the back of a chair to adjust his skewed glasses and make another attempt. “Rusty, there are some things you need to know--”

Rusty was looking at his naked chest as if he needed to strategize how to devour it. “Can’t it wait?” The voice was rough; it didn’t leave room for a ‘no’.

“I guess it can,” Matty agreed and didn’t protest as Rusty pulled him in for another hungry kiss, which he answered with all the desire starting to burn inside him, too.



Matty looked just as delicious as the night before, and right now, there was a whole world of difference between him and everyone else, because unlike those others, he understood him and didn’t want him to change to fit a mold. No one understood just how much that mattered to Rusty. They threw the word ‘change’ around like it was nothing, and people could just get up from their beds in the morning and tell themselves that they could be different, just like that.

Maybe it was one-sided. The chances were Matty had no clue Rusty saw him as his only true friend at the moment and, if he knew, he’d be confused.

There was no time to explain. He pushed Matty on the bed and got him out of his pants and underwear. Yeah, he looked good enough to eat. “Your glasses,” he said.

Matty nodded and took them off, blinking and looking at him with narrowed eyes. Even like that, he was cute as hell. Rusty felt warmth inside again. The shy unsure smile that welcomed his probably all-knowing grin was enough to set him off. With one deep breath, he dove in, and took Matty’s cock in his mouth.

A sharp inhalation, and soon, firm hands were in his hair, guiding him. A good fuck in the mouth was basically what he needed right now. It was better than getting fucked over by people with the best intentions in mind.

Damn, it felt great to suck on a hard cock like that. How come it had never crossed his mind before? Actually, it had, but he wasn’t going to dwell on particulars at the moment. The thing was, before, he had thought of it like from a sex-related point of view, without the cock in question needing to be attached to a person in particular.

Not exactly true. Again, no particulars allowed to be involved. He had better things to do, like trying to take Matty as far as he could. To his surprise, it was too much, and he had to pull back and cough a little.

“Sorry,” Matty said in a pleading voice and pushed himself up on his elbows.

Rusty pushed him back with one hand. “Not your fault. I just need some deep-throating training.”

And what better time to start than right now? He was good with the mechanics of sex, he liked to think. While Matty didn't have a small pecker, his wasn't that unmanageable. Rusty focused on the task at hand, and his mind began feeling at ease again. Yes, this was firm ground, not whatever shaky goals he could dream for himself.

Matty was warm and solid under his hands, and his moans were the cutest. If anyone dared to eavesdrop... let them do it. Rusty had the right to enjoy himself a little.

Now, onto the task of making it last for a bit. He placed himself comfortably between Matty's knees and began licking the tasty lollipop on all sides.

“Rusty, you just--” Matty complained, one arm thrown over his face.

He didn't finish. It took Rusty a bit to realize what that meant. Obviously, he needed some more practice to gauge each of those moments, and how Matty announced his impending release. For that oversight, he missed most of it. What got into his mouth was not enough, so he proceeded to chase it over Matty's smooth stomach, drop by drop.



Rusty looked like a satisfied tomcat when he finally released Matty from his hold. Well, without one shadow of a doubt, being cocksucking friends was not only for real, but highly rewarding.

He watched as Rusty fell by his side on the bed and stared at him with shiny eyes. “Was it better than before? Am I getting better?”

“You're the best, and you know it,” Matty moaned his reply and covered his face again.

His hands were removed and Rusty kissed him on the cheek. It felt like real affection, not just two friends playing at giving each other blowjobs. “That's because I'm the only one to have ever sucked your cock,” came the follow-up.

As much as he loved to indulge in the afterglow, Matty knew that he needed to get to the order of business. But first, his eyes lingered on Rusty's nether parts. As if the guy knew why he was checking him out, he turned on his belly and placed his chin on top of his linked hands. There was a questioning look in the pretty green eyes, but Matty didn't understand the question. “Don't you want me to--” he started.

“Not right now.” Rusty rubbed himself against the bed for a moment. “I'm experimenting with delayed gratification.”

“Oh, really? How much delay are we talking about?”

Rusty laughed and pushed himself up only so that he could give Matty a deep dirty kiss. “You’re playing the smartass. I guess you need a bit of cum in your life.”

“Always,” Matty replied brightly.

They stopped for a moment and looked at each other. Moments like those were just making his heart beat faster. He licked his dry lips for a moment and forgot everything he wanted to say.

Rusty came to the rescue. “What was it that you wanted to tell me?”

“Right.” Matty searched for his glasses and put them on.

Rusty laughed. “It looks serious. I better cover you with the blanket.”

Well, it was a bit funny to start talking about serious stuff while naked and sexually satisfied. Rusty pulled the blanket over him, and covered Matty up to his neck. Then, he admired his handiwork. “I think I like putting you to bed,” he declared.

Matty extracted his arms and put them on top so that he could help himself while explaining about Connor and his weird plans. He obviously needed his hands to add to the dramatic nature of the situation. “Rusty, you won’t believe it, but you have an enemy,” he began.

Rusty gave him a silly grin. “Just one? People hate me just because I’m pretty.”

Matty rolled his eyes. “How do I say this? Connor Williams is trying to turn you into persona non grata.”

“What’s that? Some kind of sexual kink?”

“I know you’re joking, and I know you know what it means.”

“Okay, I do. So what’s Connor been up to?” Rusty asked. He didn’t seem bothered in the least, and Matty felt like his rushing there had been, well, too rushed.

“He’s assembling this sort of organization. They’re against parties, hooking up, you know, all that jazz.”

Rusty nodded. “The things I’m famous for.”

Matty continued. “And he got it into his head that people must be convinced to ignore you and pretend you don’t even exist.”

Rusty’s eyes grew wide. Then, all of a sudden, he burst into laughter. “What, for real? That’s stupid.”

“Yes, I know,” Matty said impatiently, “but he’s gaining a following.”

Rusty stretched and yawned. "I don't really care."

"You don't? But he's basically staging a revolution to dethrone you," Matty insisted.

Another shrug followed. Rusty adjusted his position and threw one arm around Matty's shoulders. "Let nutsos be nutsos. I have more important things to do."

"Like what?"

Rusty laughed and kissed his cheek. "Just to make it clear, you're sleeping here tonight."

"Um, I wasn't planning--"

"It doesn't matter. You still have to make me come, and I don't like sleeping alone."

"Do you always have someone over then?" Matty asked.

Rusty seemed to ponder his next answer. "No, this is a recent development. It's your fault. I need someone to suck me off and read me to sleep."

"In what order?" Matty asked. "And I don't have any book with me."

Rusty waved. "The order doesn't matter. And you can read to me about Ethics any time. It will surely make me fall asleep the fastest. But, there are still many hours until then."

Matty didn't question what Rusty planned on doing until then, because his mouth was covered by those demanding lips again.

Chapter Twenty

If It Fits, It Sits

There was this strange thing he hadn't realized before, how Rusty always seemed to be moving, regardless of what he did, he never left a moment empty, and that striking thought overcame, for a moment, the pleasure he was experiencing as his lips were taken, chewed gently and then licked, making him shiver and groan in overstimulation.

Being with Rusty was like getting on board a rollercoaster. Not one dull moment, but Matty could swear there was something under all that, an undercurrent that could sweep them both off their feet without the possibility of grabbing onto a life-saving branch bent wearily over troubled waters.

Connor was talking about excess, but he had probably never had anything of what he wanted in large enough amounts to understand why it could be sublime and worth chasing. That was also what he was experiencing in Rusty's strong arms. Everything, from the scent of his skin to the look in the hooded green eyes that promised everything, made him feel dizzy.

"Do you always kiss like this?" he felt compelled to ask.

"Like what?" Rusty hovered close, eager for another kiss.

"Like it's the end of the world," Matty explained as he moved his head to meet Rusty's lips again.

"Sometimes it is," came the reply.

Each word of that sounded genuine. Matty couldn't ask for details because Rusty shut him up and explored his mouth slowly, interrupting all rational thought processes.

It was time for him to take a bit of initiative or he risked losing himself completely. He searched lower until his hands found purchase in Rusty's jeans zipper. They both groaned as Matty felt Rusty's erection. He let his fingers linger over the fabric of the underwear, enjoying the feel of that hard candy through it.

"Enough's enough," Rusty declared. "Show me, Matty."

"What?"

"How good you are," the soon to be dethroned king of Sunny Hill said with an all-knowing grin.

Matty smirked, too. Rusty liked to talk big, so it was refreshing to know that he could put him in his place with his oral sex skills. He pushed his bed partner on his back and proceeded to slide

slowly over that magnificent body, his eyes never leaving the green ones filled with playful mischief.

He made a show of opening his mouth wide and then planting it over Rusty's hard cock, still hidden inside the underwear. The head peeked over the elastic band, so Matty took advantage of the opportunity to tease it with his tongue and lick the precum from the tiny eye.

"How do you like my--" Rusty started, his voice soon growing breathless.

"Mighty Thor?" Matty asked with a smug smile.

"I was going to say my bald-headed yoghurt slinger," Rusty said in a deadpan tone.

Ah, someone was trying to suppress his excitement by introducing comedy into the menu, but this time, Matty decided that he wouldn't have it. He put his tongue into the slit again. "I can assure you, it's not yoghurt."

"Maybe you haven't tasted it enough," Rusty threw at him.

"Maybe I need to correct that," Matty said brightly.

"Then, go on. Release the kraken," Rusty joked.

Matty made a face. "You wish you had more than one dick."

Rusty laughed. "True. Then we could make tentacle porn. You'd be the innocent maiden. I'd make sure to check all your orifices with my tentacles."

"Perv."

"Aren't you the pot calling the kettle black?"

Matty sighed. "I guess. But, you know, forgive me for being educated by you in the pleasures of the flesh."

"Yeah, yeah, put that flesh in your mouth already. That should shut you up."

A kinky thought crossed his mind. "How about you make me shut up?" Rusty had mostly preferred to let Matty explore him, and in all honesty, he liked it a little rougher on occasion.

"Do you want me to fuck your mouth?" Rusty asked in a heated voice.

Matty shrugged to cover just how excited he felt at the suggestion. He pushed himself up. "How about I sit here?" He sat on the floor, his head resting comfortably against the bed. He closed his eyes for a moment.

"You have very specific fantasies, don't you?"

“Yeah,” Matty admitted. “Ever since I watched my first teabagging video, I wanted that.”

“Teabagging? Wait, that’s not from porn, that’s--”

“Yeah,” Matty said brightly. “A guy gets his inspiration from various places. Problem?”

Rusty laughed out loud and moved to stand in front of him, his cock already pulled out. “I see that you were on your road to hell long before we met.”

“Yeah, I’m full of surprises,” Matty said dryly.

Rusty shrugged. “Well, since we’re talking kettles and tea, I guess I need to get out of these.” He pushed his jeans and underwear down and stepped out of them. Then, he pushed them away with one foot impatiently.

Matty took a firm hold of Rusty’s balls as soon as the guy was on top of him and began licking them. The sharp inhalation that followed assured him he was on the right track. He took one in his mouth, then the other, as it didn’t look like he could fit both of them inside his mouth at the same time.

“You’re good at this,” Rusty grunted from above. “Damn, promise me, Matty, that you’ve never taken another dude’s nuts in your mouth.”

“Never,” Matty replied between slurps. He couldn’t help getting hard while playing like that with the guy he was in love with. Rusty would probably never know just how much Matty wanted him, but if that was all he got... no, he’d never be truly satisfied, but it was still better than having nothing.

“Oh, fuck, I’m so going to give it to you,” Rusty promised and moved to push his cock into Matty’s willing mouth.

That was pretty much what he wanted. Matty took advantage of the position they were in to slide one hand along Rusty’s crack and search for that tight entrance with his fingers. Another thing Rusty had no idea about was how much Matty had been fantasizing lately about exploring such an enticing backside. He liked everything about Rusty’s ass, how muscled it was, how firm under his touch, how strong the heat coming off that tiny opening was.

Tortured by a particular question, he tapped Rusty’s thigh. Rusty understood right away and pulled back. “Too much for you, kinky boy? And I haven’t even started.”

Matty ignored the teasing. “Has anyone touched your ass?”

Rusty grinned and looked down at him. “Why so curious? Ah, I can tell you have some wandering fingers.”

“Can I put a finger in your ass?”

“You can put two,” came the valiant reply.

“How about three?”

“Now you’re pushing it.”

“Just what I plan,” Matty said promptly.

They both burst into laughter at the same time. “Go crazy,” Rusty whispered. “I don’t mind a little surprise now and then.”

“You sure?” Matty made a show of putting two fingers in his mouth and sucking on them with as lewd sounds as he could manage.

From above, Rusty watched him with unfocused eyes. “As long as you don’t plan to put your whole fist in, I think I’ll live through it,” he said, his voice dropping low, filled with promises.

Matty licked his lips quickly. “Okay.” That came out as barely a whisper. They could joke and laugh all they wanted, but the truth was that they were both hot for each other.

It helped to have a bit of confirmation. The Mighty Thor was already leaking precum, making him drool over the promise of all those delights involving Rusty’s little friend. Of course, he’d have a fit over having the Mighty Thor called little, but Matty didn’t care. He planned on teasing Rusty and playing with him until he understood what he did to others by simply being himself.

He cupped Rusty’s buttocks gently and pulled him closer. Rusty manipulated his cock so that it was now aligned with Matty’s mouth, and they locked eyes for a moment. Then, the hard cock passed through Matty’s lips, triggering all those wonderful sensations and flooding his brain with endorphins.

He moaned around the hard shaft, lost in the sensation of having his mouth full. Without meaning to, since this was supposed to be Rusty pretending to get rough on him, he began pulling the other toward him.

“Slow down,” Rusty begged. “Oh, fuck, you swallowed more than half. Now you’re making me feel jealous.”

He had no reason to feel jealous; Matty was sure of it. He used his tongue and bobbed his head slightly to apply extra friction and pressure. Rusty’s hitched breathing let him know that he wasn’t doing a half bad job.

Good on his promise, he advanced slowly toward the main point of interest. His fingers scooted closer and closer to Rusty’s crack and began teasing so that he would be allowed entrance. Matty enjoyed the heat under the tip of a forefinger before pushing slightly in. Above him, Rusty was unleashing a symphony of moans, grunts, and soft curses.

Another thought crossed Matty's mind. He pushed Rusty slightly back. "I want to eat your ass."

Rusty closed his eyes. "That should be my line," he groaned. "I'm too close, Matty. Stop talking dirty already if you don't want me to spill all over your cute face."

Matty didn't have time to explain that he actually meant what he had said, because Rusty pushed his cock into his mouth again, making him take a little more than he could manage. He quickly recovered from the surprise attack and began using his tongue in the hope that it would push his partner over the edge, as Rusty's urgent grunts of pleasure announced anyway.

His mouth filled with delicious spunk, and he let out sounds of his own as he struggled to eat everything as it came.

"You're so fucking good," Rusty praised him while voicing his orgasm, "you're the best at sucking cock."



Had he ever paid so much attention to how someone went down on him? It felt like all the cocksucking he had gotten over the years faded like pencil sketches in an old textbook. What he was getting now instead was a harmony of colors of the brightest kind, and he only had to look down to see Matty licking his cock slowly, his eyes hooded and dreamy, staring up at him, searching for approval.

Rusty patted his head. "Fuck, you really got me going with that ass-eating thing."

"I meant it," Matty said. "And I barely got the chance to finger you."

Rusty tipped his head back and groaned. "Fuck, you're an expert at talking dirty. And I could totally feel your finger, trust me."

Matty threw him an annoyed look. "You so totally wiggled your way out of getting some ass action."

Well, that was true, and Matty was getting a bit close to stuff that Rusty still shied away from, despite being totally comfortable with all things sexual. Sure thing, he had put his own fingers in and some girls played around that area, but it wasn't the same. That made him think that it had more to do with who was doing the fingering than the act itself.

Whatever it was, it could put him in a vulnerable position, and he had had enough of that to deal with today. Now, he was all for having fun. "Come here." He helped Matty to his feet and pulled him into a hug. "I'm your teacher," he said. "I'm going to be the one to eat your ass," he promised.

It was supposed to be a joke, but his mouth went instantly dry at the vivid image that popped into his head, Matty on his belly, only his ass raised, all red in the face, pulling at his glorious ass cheeks and exposing his cute little hole. Oh, fuck, damn; now, for real, he wanted to eat Matty's ass, to see what it was like, and how undone he could make the other come.

"You're no fun." Matty pushed him away playfully.

"Really?" Rusty pulled him back, making their bodies clash and Matty lose his balance. Good thing he was there to catch him. "I'm all fun, and I assure you that when I eat your ass, you'll totally see what I mean."

Matty shook his head and moved it to the sides while Rusty tried to kiss him. "Weren't you the one who thought I didn't like his ass? Let me prove to you how much I like it," Matty insisted.

"You're quickly becoming ass-obsessed, you perv," Rusty accused him.

"It's your fault. You dangle the goods in front of me."

This wasn't a fight Rusty intended to lose at the moment. He released Matty from his arms and took advantage when the other turned to sink his fingers into his flanks and start tickling him. Matty howled and laughed as he fell to his knees and over the bed.

A knock on the door stopped both of them.

"Come in," Rusty shouted without thinking.

Jonathan was the one to stick his head through. "I'm making dinner--"

All three of them fell completely silent. Only then Rusty realized that he was naked and all over Matty, who was also naked.

Jonathan reacted first and pulled back, closing the door. "Just come down in about half an hour," he shouted from the other side.

"Oh, fuck," Rusty whispered. "I guess the cat is totally out of the bag."

Matty was conspicuously silent.

Rusty poked him tentatively. "Did you die of shame?"

To his dismay, Matty began shaking with laughter. "O. M. G., Jonathan's face was priceless!"

"Well, I guess it's not every day that he walks in on some dudes who look like they're just about to become buttfucking friends," Rusty said matter-of-factly.

"Are we going to be that, though?" Matty wondered. That sounded like he doubted such a thing was going to happen very much.

At that very moment, Rusty noticed how comfortably his cock lay against Matty's balls. The Mighty Thor twitched in acknowledgment. "Why not?" he said casually.

Matty turned so fast, his neck made a strange sound. He quickly brought one hand up and began rubbing his nape. "Are we going to... I mean... Um, Rusty..."

"Why not? Are you worried that it's not going to fit or something?"

Matty turned to face him and now lay with his back against the bed. Rusty found it the most natural to sit in his lap, given their new position.

"That's sort of a big step," Matty mumbled and his eyes darted sideways.

Yeah, sure it was. But Rusty felt like he couldn't take 'no' for an answer. "What's big is my cock. What's small is your asshole. But we will make it work, I promise. There's nothing I want more."

Matty chewed on his bottom lip. Finally, his pretty eyes met Rusty's stare. "That's my V-card we're talking about, though."

Rusty rested his arms on Matty's shoulders, putting some weight behind them and making the other grunt. "Yeah, I know, but, let's face it, you're way too pretentious when it comes to dudes, and that means that you're at risk at finishing college with your cherry still intact. Is that really what you want?"

"Are we seriously rationalizing why I should lose my virginity to you?" Matty asked, again sounding like he didn't actually want to wait for an answer.

Rusty rested his forehead against Matty's. "Would it be so bad? I mean, you might end up waiting for a very long time for that guy with--"

"Yeah, Lexus, big schlong, Ivy League, all that jazz," Matty finished his argument with a roll of his eyes.

"I do have a big schlong," Rusty pointed out.

"Good enough for me," Matty said simply.

"As for the rest--" Rusty continued, bent on convincing Matty. "Wait, did you just say 'yes'?"

"As much as that might surprise you, I'm not interested in those things that you mentioned when it comes to guys."

Rusty threw Matty a suspicious look. "Not even the big schlong?"

"As long as it's attached to the right person, the length doesn't matter," Matty explained.

Rusty made a sour face. “You don’t even want me for my big--”

“Oh, gawd, Rusty,” Matty moaned. “Do you want me to spell it for you? I do want to become your buttfucking friend.”

It was obvious Matty struggled to keep a straight face while continuing their conversation, munching on his lower lip and grimacing from time to time.

“Super-duper,” Rusty declared and made a move to stand.

“On one condition,” Matty said.

“Shoot.”

“You’ll let me play with your ass. This isn’t going to be a one-sided buttfucking friendship.”

“Do you plan to fuck me in the ass?” Rusty asked, his eyebrows shooting up so fast they pulled half the skin on his face along.

Matty let out a suffering sigh. “Did I say that? I just asked you to let me play with your ass. I’m going to use only my fingers,” he flicked his index and middle fingers in a gesture that caused funny things to happen in Rusty’s belly, “and my tongue. Do we have a deal or not?”

“And I get to fuck you,” Rusty took care to make clear. “In the ass.”

Matty’s face was so neutral, it could act as a mediator between warring countries. “Yes.”

“With my cock,” Rusty insisted.

“I hope you weren’t planning to fuck me with the wooden leg of an old pirate.” The neutral façade still resisted. How did he manage it? Rusty was beyond astonished. That was one mighty opponent he was going against.

“I have no such thing in my arsenal of sex toys,” Rusty hurried to assure him. “Deal?” he asked anxiously and pushed his open hand into Matty’s chest.

Moving awkwardly, Matty managed to shake on it. Their eyes met. Wow, now that was a worthy adversary. Rusty could barely wait for them to put their plans in action.



His heart was beating wildly to compensate for his efforts at keeping calm and steady while negotiating with Rusty the details of starting their buttfucking friendship. Matty had no idea he had it in him, but ever since he had met Rusty, that appeared to be par for the course. To catch an elusive target such as the king of Sunny Hill, he needed to bring out the big guns.

Therefore, it was excruciating to keep the same cool and collected demeanor when his heart was doing a crazy victory dance in his chest.

Caught up as he had been in getting Rusty to agree to the next level of their intimacy while accepting certain compromises, he hadn't quite realized what it meant. And now, everything came crushing down, but in a fun way.

He would lose his virginity to Rusty Parker.

He would be allowed to explore Rusty Parker's gorgeous ass. Hopefully, he would make him come undone so hard he'd want something bigger to penetrate him. Hopefully, that something would be Matty's cock.

Hell, what was he thinking? Matty caught his face in his palms, only to realize that his face was burning. Rusty had left him alone for a moment as he had gone to ask Jonathan about something, and now he was by himself.

He stood to his feet and looked around. Where was it going to happen? Right here, in Rusty's room? It had to be here, because Matty's room was out of the question, now that obnoxious roommate of his was present.

To test something vital to the said plan, Matty began checking the bedsprings. How much action that thing must have seen. Well, he wouldn't let anything bring him down from his high spirits. At least, Rusty hadn't fooled around with a guy in that bed.

Next, what position would they use? Matty first lay on his back on the bed and looked at the ceiling. Missionary? It would be nice, but he might combust if he looked at Rusty while getting fucked. Staring at the ceiling was hardly an option; Rusty might worry that he was getting bored or something.

There were alternatives. Matty moved on all his fours. He would have to keep his ass up, for the perfect angle. He grabbed a pillow and stuffed it under his belly. Would this be good enough? Rusty was so tall, he would have to part his legs for his cock to end up on the same level with Matty's ass. To make things perfect, some simulations were needed.

He pulled out his phone and began drawing stick figures on the screen. He had always been reasonably good at math, so figuring out the perfect angle—

“What are you doing there?”

He had been so caught up in his calculations that he had missed Rusty coming back. He didn't have time to hide because Rusty grabbed his phone and studied his drawing with keen eyes.

“I think,” Rusty said slowly, “that you should stick to your major, Matty. This lewd artwork leaves a lot to be desired.” Then, he looked at him.

Rusty's eyes filled with interest as he took in Matty's position. Then, he looked at the phone again.

Matty felt his face heating up. "That's not what it looks like." He had no idea why he wanted to hide. Maybe he looked way too eager, and Rusty would think he was a bit too much to handle.

"I have no idea what you mean by that, but how you lie there right now makes me think that if I move behind you," Rusty did just that, "and I grab you like this," he planted his hands on Matty's hips, "I could give you the perfect dicking." To finish his demonstration, he moved his hips forward and slammed into Matty's thankfully clothed butt.

A playful slap on the ass followed and Rusty moved away. Then, he suddenly leaned forward and whispered in Matty's ear. "I think your calculations are correct. And don't worry, your ass is perfect for my cock."

There was nothing left for him to do but bury his burning face into another pillow. Rusty laughed and ruffled his hair. "I so knew you were bluffing by keeping that straight face and talking dirty to me. I'll make sure it's going to be perfect, what do you say?"

Matty just nodded, without removing his face from the pillow. Rusty continued to caress his head and back. "Let's go down to dinner. Jonathan outdid himself. He made some crazy steak and some mad sauce."

"Is that safe to eat then?" Matty finally recovered and thought his face was not so red anymore so that he could face Rusty and his cocky teasing.

"Totally. Come, upsy-daisy." Rusty pulled him to his feet.

"What about Jonathan? He practically saw us in a very compromising position."

Rusty shrugged. "I suppose he's going to stare at us a bit. Although he had a good upbringing, as they say. He might not do that. I can't say the same about the others."

Matty remained a bit nonplussed and gawked at Rusty. "They all know we..." He couldn't find the right words.

"Not exactly. But I'm not going to hide from my bros. Do you want to hide from my bros?"

"No, I don't see why," Matty said slowly. "But wait, aren't they going to find it weird? That you're straight and you want to--"

"Fuck you in the ass? Don't worry. I won't bring it up. They won't either because apparently anal sex is not exactly a good conversation topic to discuss over dinner. That's what people say, at least." Rusty nodded and raised an eyebrow while closing the other eye, as if Matty had to understand what he was trying to say with that.

“I suppose so. But I’m not exactly talking about that. I mean, you and me, we’re dudes.” Matty gestured between them to make a point.

Rusty gave him an appreciative once-over. “Yeah, you’re one fine dude, if you ask me.”

“Yeah, you too,” Matty couldn’t help saying. Then, he shook his head. He couldn’t allow Rusty to derail him like that, not when it was so important to get things right. “Rusty,” he said, drawing a breath to get him through what he was about to say. “You’re the straight king of Sunny Hill. I’m your tutor, and I’m gay. What are your friends going to think?”

Rusty shrugged. “They won’t think you seduced me and gave me the gay, if that’s what you’re worried about. By the way, Jonathan gave me the gay, and I’m sticking with it.”

“Jonathan,” Matty repeated slowly, “gave you the gay. How?”

Rusty pondered for a moment, but as much as Matty was waiting with bated breath, what followed was disappointing. “I’ll tell you another time. Now, let’s get down to dinner.” He stopped for a moment, then he turned toward Matty, who was already following him. “One more thing. You can’t back away from it.”

“Did I say anything? Why do you worry so much?” Matty asked.

Rusty looked at him with shiny eyes and a dreamy cartoon character look on his face. “Because I’m a poor sensitive soul and I need reassurance at every step.”

Matty groaned and pushed Rusty toward the door. “I’ll give you some reassurance you won’t forget.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Rusty pointed out but dug his heels into the carpet to stop Matty from pushing him forward.

Matty didn’t have to ask what that was all about because Rusty took him by the shoulders and gave him his most amazing smile.



Dinner had been a pretty normal affair, and no one had questioned why Matty was joining them. They were all pretty chill, and Rusty thought it was just like his friends not to think it weird that he had a dude over instead of a dudette. Not that he usually invited girls over to dinner. Technically, Jonathan had asked them to join the rest, so—

Maddox put a heavy hand on his shoulder and sat by his side. Oh, damn, here came the lecture or whatever. Matty was taking a shower upstairs, and Rusty, while he much wanted to join him, had decided that he might just push the guy too much to be considered cool.

Therefore, he was alone with his roommates. All of them. Even Dex stood like a pole in the middle of the living room and stared him down like he wanted to extract vital information.

“So, you and Matty,” Maddox said. “By the way, they asked me to conduct this intervention.” He pointed at Kane and Dex.

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Rusty crossed his arms and smiled cheekily at Kane, knowing how much his attitude usually got on the guy’s nerves when it came to doing the right things, like studying and the like.

Kane grinned back and winked at him. What was that wink about? Rusty moved his eyes to Dex, who also smirked like he knew shit.

Jonathan, at least, looked like he was siding with him, because his eyes were warm, just like his smile. Ah, so they were all going to make fun of him, except for Johnny boy.

“All right, boys,” he said cheerfully, “what do you want to know? Want me to give you the spiel about the bees and the bees?”

At least, that seemed to rattle Kane’s cage for a change. The guy made a shocked face. “Have the two of you already gotten there?”

“There where?” Rusty asked, offering solicitude and openness with the charm of a middle-school teacher.

“Stinging each other,” Kane said in a deadpan voice.

Rusty waved. “Not yet. I hope you assholes don’t plan to ruin it for me, though.”

“We don’t even know how we could do that,” Dex intervened. “What’s the deal with you two?”

“We’re friends,” Rusty pointed out. “Really close friends, if you catch my drift.” He batted his eyelashes, making them all roll their eyes. Save for Jonathan, of course, who knew a great deal more.

“How close are we talking about?” Dex questioned.

“Are you asking about the distance between my dick and Matty’s sexy butt?” Rusty inquired politely.

“Seriously, dude?” Dex looked exasperated already.

“Eh, you know how it is. If it fits, it sits,” Rusty said with a shrug.

That earned him a collective chuckle. Rusty bowed slightly in front of his audience.

“Matty looks like a good guy,” Kane said. “Don’t do anything to hurt his feelings.”

“I’m going to use lube, what the hell?” Rusty thought it appropriate to show how scandalized such an accusation made him be. “Why are you all so interested in my sex life again?”

Dex came closer and squeezed his shoulder to make him pay attention. “We’re interested in your feelings, asshole. Feelings.” His mate repeated that word slowly as if he was in first grade or something.

“Yeah, yeah, feelings,” he agreed since Dex could get pretty mean and physical when he wanted to convince Rusty of his point of view. He had to admit that it was a good tactic. It usually made him yield. “We’re cool. We’re friends. We’re experimenting.” He enunciated the last word while wiggling his eyebrows. “Stop looking at me like that. I’m not going to go down the Maddox way,” he pointed at his bestie, who grunted to express his annoyance.

“Are you sure?” Kane asked and stared him down.

“Totally. You won’t hear me about boyfriends, engagements, and whatnot from me. Matty and I are just friends. And we’re going to stay that way. By the way, what got into you to think about stuff like that?”

Kane gave him a lopsided grin. “Let’s say you two were anything but discreet.”

“Did we make that much noise?”

“You kissed him when he left his last tutoring session here.”

He did? He didn’t remember that. Hell, he was losing it a bit.

“And you were making noise,” Kane added promptly.

“Hmm, I see. Well, I’ll let you live more exciting lives vicariously through me,” Rusty offered.

“Generous of you. Not really. Just don’t do anything to upset Matty, okay?”

Yeah, it was totally okay. Matty would never get upset with him.



Eavesdropping wasn’t the polite thing to do, Matty thought as he moved quietly on the landing to go to Rusty’s room. So, they were friends. They would always be friends. That didn’t hurt.

Much.

Chapter Twenty-One

I Want to Put My Mark on You

Rusty tip-toed into his own bedroom, not to make sure that he didn't wake Matty up, but because he wanted to surprise his soon-to-be buttfucking friend in some crazy position like earlier. The sight of Matty lying on his belly, with his ass up, was forever etched on the wrinkled surface of his brain that got fired up like Christmas lights the moment he thought of stuff like that.

He grabbed his cock through his sweatpants. Soon, they'd get there, both he and Mighty Thor, and then maybe they'd feel a lot more satisfied than they had felt lately.

Indeed, Matty lay on the bed, but he was on his back and looking at the ceiling, an activity that didn't appear to be very conducive for buttfucking activities. Rusty moved closer and then Matty's pretty eyes settled on him. He climbed on the bed without losing eye contact and pondered over what that stare meant.

"Are you mad at me or something?"

Matty wasn't even naked, something that told him that maybe they would have to postpone their buttfucking friendship debut. Hopefully, it wouldn't be indefinitely.

"No, but I need to come clean," Matty said and propped himself up on his elbows to look at him.

Rusty lay on one side and gestured with his chin for the other to continue.

"I just eavesdropped on your conversation with your friends," Matty confessed.

Rusty groaned. "Don't worry about them. They mean well. I mean, wait, stop, it's me who did something wrong, right? I tend to do that."

Matty welcomed that last bit with a surprised expression on his pretty face. "What? No, Rusty, I have to apologize. Although, yeah, maybe, the fact that your friends know what we're about to do--"

Ah, so there was hope. "We're still on, right?" he asked.

Matty nodded, but he didn't appear that enthusiastic. Well, that was bad. Rusty could feel his entire body temperature dropping.

He lay on his back and did the same as Matty had earlier, staring at the ceiling, knowing it wouldn't judge him for the world. "So, I did bad by telling them."

Matty scooted closer and put a hand on Rusty's chest. "We shook on it, remember? Don't tell me you're going back on that."

Rusty searched Matty's face for clues to understand what this was all about, but he came up empty. "I don't want to. But I don't want us to do it if you don't feel like it. I just wish you'd tell me what pissed you off. Besides my telling my friends that we're about to do it, which I get it, it's pretty much inconsiderate of me... Wait, why are you laughing?"

Matty was chuckling, mostly to himself by the way he angled his head, and that sound went straight into the pit of Rusty's stomach, something not so giggly or bubbly like the usual, but deeper, more masculine. It both irked him and made him hot all over. It wasn't easy to explain. If he were to compare it to something, he recalled the way Jonathan laughed in Maddox's ear when trying to provoke his boyfriend to react in a certain way. That certain way was, usually, Maddox turning to face his better half and kiss him within an inch of death by asphyxiation, regardless of how many people were present.

Was Matty playing him like that? He was one hell of a player, then. Rusty found it difficult to stay in place, not move at all, as he waited for that sexy chuckle to die down.

Matty moved even closer and crowded him by placing his arms, bent from the elbows, on top of Rusty's chest, and his chin on top of them. From there, he stared at him, digging into Rusty with his chin in his chest so that their eyes would meet.

"What kind of thing is this between us?" Matty asked.

It felt like the most natural thing in the world then was to run one hand through Matty's silky hair. The pretty eyes closed slowly as a small purr of satisfaction followed the caress. In a way, Matty was like a cat, reacting well to being petted. "Honestly, dude," Rusty replied, "I'd say it's pretty awesome."

Matty laughed and the sound reverberated from his chest into Rusty's, causing another tickly and giddy sensation to blossom there. "Because it's about sex?"

Rusty considered his reply carefully. "Man, you're having me talk when my dick wants me to get into action already. Fine, I'll do what you want me to. Yeah, because it's about sexy fun times, but there's also something else." He tried to swallow the last word, but it was too late.

Matty put his head to one side and stared at him, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. He looked so pretty like that. "Well?" he drawled. "Like what?"

"Like because we're friends," Rusty said quickly.

"And?" Matty continued and blinked slowly.

"You're the first friend I've had I want to fuck in the butt." Muddy, unclear desires from before didn't matter at all.

"Wow, so I'm special?" Matty asked and smiled broadly.

“As special as you want to be,” Rusty replied. At this point, he knew that his actions had to count more than his words. Therefore, he moved his hand from Matty’s head to his perky sexy ass.

Matty’s eyes grew wide. However, he didn’t seem to mind because he let his eyelashes drop again in silent invitation.

“I know,” Rusty said promptly. “I need to make this special for you.”

“You do?” Matty seemed taken aback as Rusty pushed him away and got to his feet.



He had tried to get any unpleasant feelings out of the way before Rusty came into the room, but he hadn’t been particularly successful. Therefore, he had been forced by circumstances to admit to eavesdropping earlier. Rusty hadn’t gotten mad, but he must have gotten some strange ideas in his head because he was now rummaging through his closet, the same one from which that worrying number of sex toys and other things had escaped during one of their first tutoring sessions.

Was Rusty thinking about taking his virginity with a dildo or something like that? Matty prepared mentally for the argument that would follow. A dildo wouldn’t count. He could do the same by himself, with no one as company. He really, really regretted not showing how much he actually wanted Rusty and him to become buttfucking friends.

“Found it!” Rusty announced victoriously and showed Matty something that looked like the statue of a man with a happy expression on his face and a very big belly. “It’s a candle,” he added and placed it on the nightstand, looking very pleased with himself.

“What do we need a candle for?” Matty wished he could use his glasses, but he really didn’t want to deal with any other obstacles that would prevent him from having proper sex with Rusty.

“For atmosphere,” Rusty replied. “Too bad I don’t have rose petals.” With determination, he walked over to the window.

When he turned, Matty saw that he had one hand filled with dead leaves. With a theatrical gesture, he threw them up into the air and Matty watched as they fell to the floor. Then, Rusty returned to his closet and rummaged inside it some more.

Just when Matty was about to intervene to stop the madness, Rusty emerged from the depths of his furniture holding what looked like an impressive bottle of lube. Well, that was needed. He had nothing to say against that.

Rusty ambled toward the bed, with a naughty glint in his eyes. “Undress, Matty, and you’ll see how special I can make it for you.”

“Between the happy fat man,” Matty said and turned slightly to rub the candle on its huge belly, “and the dead leaves, I should say that my hopes and expectations are getting pretty high.”

“Great,” Rusty said cheerfully. “Come on, get out of those clothes. I prefer you naked, anyway.”

“You do?” Matty asked, then he remembered that he needed to be a bit more assertive in his dealings with Rusty so that he didn’t end up penetrated by anything other than the Mighty Thor. “Sure,” he added with confidence and pulled his t-shirt over his head.

Rusty surprised him by jumping on the bed and pouring from that bottle all over his chest.

“Ouch, that’s cold,” Matty protested. “And do I really have to get drenched in lube for this to work?”

“It’s not lube,” Rusty said with a roll of the eyes. “It’s body oil. I was keeping it for a special occasion.”

“Really? What special occasion?”

“This,” Rusty said triumphantly and pushed Matty on his back.

It was a real wonder how he managed to keep the bottle steady in one hand and undress Matty with the other.

Soon, Matty was all naked and exposed. Rusty let his eyes travel appreciatively over all the bared skin, making Matty feel pretty self-conscious about himself.

“We’re going to make a mess out of your sheets,” Matty warned him, as Rusty continued to massage more of the oil into the skin on his belly, while humming and smiling.

“I’ll just do the laundry tomorrow or something. And we’re going to make a mess out of them, anyway,” Rusty let him know with another self-assured grin.

Right. Matty inhaled deeply. With Rusty being Rusty, it was easy to lose focus. He tried to stave off the butterflies in his stomach that were going wild at that promise.

Rusty reached his crotch and began to massage Matty’s cock and balls slowly and intently. It only lasted for half a minute, because he then ordered, “Back to me.”

Matty turned on his belly, the swarm of butterflies now going nuts. Rusty proceeded the spread more of the body oil on his back. It had a pleasant, flowery scent that was probably meant to relax the person it was being applied to. It had no power whatsoever on Matty’s jittery nerves. Rusty’s skilled hands moved across his back, lower and lower, until they stopped right above his buttocks.

“I won’t put oil there,” Rusty declared in a stern voice, “because I want to lick it.”

Matty didn't have the time to ask what 'it' was, because Rusty pushed his butt cheeks apart and soon there was a tongue moving slowly across his crack and stopping at his asshole. "Oh, fuck," he whispered.

"We'll get there, don't worry," Rusty assured him. And then, added in a sugary voice, "my baby dude."

Matty wished he still had the power to roll his eyes and pretend Rusty's jokes still reached him one way or another, but the same earnest tongue was back at the job at hand, pushing and flicking over all the sensitive spots. Sensations flared like fireworks from that point in his body and seemed to take over everything else. Rusty snuck one hand under his belly and hiked him up, probably to ensure a better angle.

With each lick, he seemed to become a bit fiercer. Matty whispered obscenities as Rusty moved his lips over the taint and teased his balls, too.

"Oh, fuck, Matty, too bad you can't eat your own ass," Rusty commented, "because this is fucking it."

He would have liked to remind his bed partner that their little understanding included reciprocity on that front, but the words were lost to him. At this point, the only sounds coming out of his mouth were short grunts, long moans, and unintelligible noises of various intensities and lengths in-between.

Finally, Rusty took mercy and unhandled him. It only lasted for a bit, because Matty felt himself being turned again. Rusty dragged him over his lap and his Mighty Thor now rested along Matty's crack, ready for action.

Matty's heart beat wildly. So it was going to happen after all, and there was no need for him to expect Rusty to make another trip to his closet and take who knew what else out of there.

"I bet you thought I'd take you on all fours or something boring like that," Rusty said.

Matty shook his head like he had water in his ears. All fours, boring. Those words had no place in the same sentence, unless there was a 'not' somewhere between them.

"Or that I'd pretend to be romantic and give you my dick in the missionary position," Rusty continued.

Apparently, dead leaves and fat man candles didn't count. Matty was speechless, mostly because his mind was still reeling from that rimming from earlier.

"No," Rusty said playfully, "I'm all for empowering you, Matty, so that's why you're going to sit on my dick."

Matty had little idea as to how he was going to do that, not because the mechanics weren't clear, but because his knees had been rendered mush by Rusty's previous ministrations involving his body.

Rusty grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him into a hot, demanding kiss. At the same time, he was now pouring something else along Matty's ass crack. When he had managed to grab some lube, Matty couldn't recall.

Capable fingers were now teasing his asshole into opening slowly, while Rusty kissed him hard, penetrating his mouth with his tongue as if he wanted to show him what would happen with his ass soon, too.

Matty moaned into the kiss, as he sensed Rusty coating his cock with lube while rubbing it gently in his anal cleft. It would happen, but only if he managed to control his legs. As if he could tell what was going on, Rusty helped him by hiking his butt up, now sneaking both hands under it. "Do you think you can do it, Matty?" he whispered raggedly. "Can you put it in by yourself?"

If it cost him one arm and one leg he could, Matty thought and brought one hand back to grab hold of Rusty's cock. A short inhalation from the other assured him that he wasn't the only one with some pretty urgent needs. With all the courage he could muster, he aligned the blunt head with his hole and began pushing down slowly.

"Easy, I got you," Rusty whispered while hugging him.

Encouragements worked wonders. Matty was all for positive reinforcement, especially when it involved his impaling himself on Rusty's cock. Of course, his butt was still tight as fuck, and patience and nice words from Rusty could only do so much.

He breathed out, stopping for a moment. He felt the area with his fingers, but it looked like not even the head was in. "Rusty," he whispered in distress, "I think my ass doesn't want to cooperate."

"Let me put in some more lube," Rusty said, and his nimble fingers were back at work.

Matty sighed in relief as Rusty took it upon himself to pull his cock away. Soon, he was slowly coaxing the tight ring of muscles into giving in. The sensations were all pleasurable, and Matty focused on them as Rusty continued to encourage him. "It's normal that you're this tight," came the warm whisper in his ear. "You're still a virgin."

"Hopefully, not for long," Matty said, expressing his surprise at having an ass that didn't understand that it was part of the deal of getting Rusty Parker.

Rusty chuckled. "I'll make sure of that."



The squeeze on the head of his cock was fantastic. Rusty didn't remember having ever fucked anything this tight. It was even tighter than his own hand, as sometimes, the Mighty Thor liked it really hard and rough. But it wasn't only the crushing grip that made his cock harder; Matty was right about saying that the cock he'd like would have to be attached to the right person. Now, Rusty thought the same about assholes, and this particular asshole was attached to an awesome person.

Still, it looked like it was distressing Matty that he couldn't relax his ass muscles properly for the Mighty Thor to perform his triumphal march through those gates. "Hey," he said gently, "Matty, look at me." The pretty eyes were blurry and unfocused as they settled on him. "It's going to be fine. I mean, a lot of people in the world are having anal sex right now. If they can do it, so can you."

Matty smiled and giggled. "I guess. How about we try a bit more?"

"Sure." Rusty rested his hands on Matty's hips to guide him.

His bedfellow adjusted his position and began pushing himself down. Rusty had to close his eyes and count slowly from ten to one. He could feel his cock pulsing inside the taut heat. The lube helped and he could feel Matty slip down, even if at an excruciating pace.

It seemed that things were getting a bit easier. He searched for Matty's mouth with his lips, to give him something to do and distract him from the discomfort he had to be feeling. Matty attacked his mouth and gave him plenty of tongue, which Rusty accepted greedily.

Fuck, they were fucking doing it, and it was like nothing he had felt while fucking before. Matty was hard and unyielding but it only made it all the more delicious because he wanted it and his hips moved until Rusty felt the perky ass resting on his thighs.

"Wow," he whispered.

Matty breathed out, "Yeah, you can say that again. Is it all in?"

Rusty checked with his fingers. "Yeah, now we should go for the next stage."

"What? Are you telling me there's more?"

Rusty laughed and flicked Matty's nose. "For a proper dicking, smarty-pants, my cock needs to go back and forth in your ass at least a few times."

"All right, it doesn't sound that challenging," Matty replied. "Just give me a moment. I had no idea I would feel... so full."

“Yeah, you’re full of me,” Rusty said and grinned.

Matty looked like he was about to come back with some clever retort, but then he settled for another kiss. He began to move up and down, only a very little at first, but it was enough for Rusty to feel like his cock was in absolutely fucking heaven. If that was what being buttfucking friends with Matty felt like, he was all for going at it again and soon. He’d have to establish a schedule or something, and ask Matty when it was convenient...

His mind rarely went completely silent or blank while having sex, but Matty hiked his butt up, almost to the point that Rusty’s cock was about to break free from that sweet torture, and then slammed himself back down.

Rusty groaned. “Oh, fuck,” he whispered.

“Too much?” Matty asked. “I thought this was all about that.”

“Not too much. Do it again. And do it faster, if your sweet ass can handle it,” Rusty said.

Matty closed his eyes and exhaled. “I’ll do my best.”

He was too damn pretty when he was all determined like that. Rusty smooched him again, and held one arm around his waist, enjoying how Matty moved his ass.



At one point, it had gone from unbearable sensations to something a lot more pleasurable. Matty could still feel that he was fighting an uphill battle with his ass, but he was doing a lot better. Rusty kissed his lips and face and neck and had one finger resting along his crack as if to check that his cock was going all in.

Miracles had to be real because there was no other way that this coupling between them was happening. It felt good to be in charge, and Rusty had read him well, allowing him to give himself all the dicking he wanted, because now he felt a lot more courageous and he was going at it with all the tenacity he had inside him.

“Yes, like this, fuck me, Matty.” Rusty’s lips caressed his ear.

That choice of words was a bit strange, seeing who was doing the penetration, but he understood it well. After all, he was the guy on top and he was controlling how much pleasure he gave the Mighty Thor who might have been pretty used to being the one in charge.

That realization filled him with a new rush of pleasure. Rusty’s cock filled him to the brim, and it triggered so many sensations that were soon topped by those caused by the friction and especially the brushing over a certain point inside his ass. He understood it all; he had read about it. But books couldn’t describe the complexity of what he was feeling. At the same time, he felt

like bursting out of his skin and drawing himself inward to a single point, that one that caused him so much pleasure.

At the same time, his cock was stiff as a rock and got barely any action from rubbing against Rusty's washboard abs. Funnily enough, he didn't mind. On the contrary, he enjoyed that feeling of teetering right on the edge of an abyss that promised nothing but mind-blowing pleasure. If it were up to him and his legs weren't starting to show signs of exhaustion, he would go at it forever.

Rusty sensed that his legs could no longer hold him and placed him gently on his back. "I'm sorry, Matty," he mumbled, "I wanted you to do it all the way, but I just can't take it anymore."

That made two of them, at this point. Matty grabbed his own cock and began to rub it quickly, all the while keeping eye contact with Rusty, who was holding his hips and pushing himself forward, making the bed shake.

It was everything, Matty thought, everything he had fantasized about and even more. Rusty was moving in and out of him, with ample moves, while still keeping him close, and that single-minded spot inside him intensified its reactions with each of them.

"Oh, fuck, Matty, can you come for me?" Rusty pleaded with him. "Please, come for me. I want to see you come."

Gone was the usual playfulness from Rusty's voice. He sounded like he was standing on the same edge as Matty, and the understanding that they were in that together, that they were sharing this thing happening between them was enough to make him arch his back, hold his cock tightly and make it spurt all over him.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," Rusty chanted and increased the movement of his hips.

Matty felt it all. The way his secret bud of pleasure was hit over and over, and how Rusty's cock felt like steel inside him, hot steel wrapped in velvet, so hard, and yet so smooth and scorching. Although his eyes were full of tears from his thrilling orgasm, he could see Rusty well, the way he looked, his head tipped back, his throat taut and exposed, his chest sweaty, the most beautiful man he had ever seen in his life.

"Inside," Rusty murmured incoherently, "can I?"

"Please... fill me up," Matty grunted, as the way Rusty's cock was brushing over the sensitive spot inside him pushed him higher despite his not having anywhere to go after a climax like that.

He could tell Rusty was coming inside him by how the hard cock pulsed. He was dying to feel the hot cum flowing out of him, a solid proof of what had just happened between him and Rusty, because otherwise, everything felt like a dream, one come true.



“Wow,” Rusty whispered as he pulled out. He brushed his fingers against Matty’s opening, while holding his legs up. “I came like a fucking hose.”

Matty laughed. “Let me see, too.”

Rusty released his legs and watched as Matty felt his crack, his fingers coming up wet with fresh jizz. “Your first time getting spread, your first time getting bred,” he joked.

Matty stared at him in amused shock and then burst into laughter. “Oh, yeah?” He challenged him with his pretty eyes. “At least there’s no chance for you to get me pregnant like rumor has it that you did with that cat boy or girl, or whatever...” The laughter died, and he looked away, hiding his face, seemingly embarrassed.

“It’s definitely a cat boy,” Rusty said. “But you don’t have to worry. If anything like that happened, I would totally assume responsibility.”

That seemed to trigger a bout of alertness in Matty. He pushed himself up and looked him in the eye. “For real? Have you had a lot of unprotected sex, then?”

“Not as much as I want,” Rusty assured him. “But seeing how we’re buttfucking friends now, I hope you’re going to put out frequently. On a schedule.”

Matty laughed again.

“I mean it,” Rusty insisted. “I mean, come on, you have to admit it. This is fucking great. Unless your butt hurts or something.” Damn, he should have been smoother than this, not just hurrying to be demanding like an asshole.

Matty lay on his back and smiled contentedly. “It doesn’t hurt now. But I guess I’m going to feel it later. How about we have another round of negotiations at a later date?”

“You are so pulling my leg right now, aren’t you, Matty?” Rusty laughed, too, and smacked Matty’s thighs playfully.

“We fucked. I guess it comes with the territory. Unless you want me to pull something else?” Matty winked at him like an all-knowing bastard.

Well, to be totally honest, Rusty had to admit that he and his cock alike hadn’t felt so good in ages, and regardless of how he had seemed to have forgotten all about getting laid since the beginning of the semester, it seemed like a pretty big deal.

“You’ll pull a lot of things, don’t worry about it,” he assured Matty and lay by his side. Sure, they could joke and they could laugh, but they couldn’t dance around the subject. “How was it?”

Matty turned his clear eyes to him. “It was amazing, Rusty. And, just so you know, I do appreciate your wanting me to be in charge and all.”

Rusty loved lying like that, so close to Matty’s body heat. That was the sort of comfort he could easily get accustomed to. Sure thing, now that Matty was getting a bit more practiced in the art of the horizontal cha-cha, at one point, he’d start pursuing some guy. Or maybe, guys would flock to him now that he was even sexier, having gotten fucked and all.

Yeah, one look at Matty and how gorgeous his face looked in the aftermath assured him that he would have to beat guys away with a stick from now on. It was selfish of him, but he couldn’t help it. He had never had anyone like this to call his own, just like he had never had a cat, because of his mom’s allergies. While growing up, a pet would have been nice to push away the loneliness, but the answer had always been ‘no’.

“Hey,” Matty called gently, “where did you go?” At the same time, he brushed some sweaty hair out of Rusty’s eyes.

“Thinking stupid shit,” Rusty said brightly. “That’s what I do like 99.9% of the time, so it shouldn’t surprise you.”

Matty caressed his face gently. “Thank you for an awesome first time, Mr. Parker.”

“Hey, I told you--” Rusty stopped.

“Ah, sorry, right, right,” Matty hurried to say and was about to move his hand away.

Rusty caught it and put it back on his cheek, holding it there. “Actually, if it comes from you, I don’t mind.”

“Really?” Matty asked, looking like he was genuinely trying to make sure that was the case.

Rusty nodded solemnly. “At one point in my life, I guess people will be going to call me that, whether I like it or not. I mean, professors also call me that, but they don’t matter because they don’t know me that well.”

“So,” Matty asked playfully, “am I going to be the first you’re okay with calling you that?”

“Totally. You gave me your first time in the butt, and I’m trading you this. What do you say?”

Matty laughed. It looked like he was having a good time, and Rusty felt all warm and pleasant inside at that sound. “All right, Mr. Parker, I’ll hold you to it.”

“Hey, it’s actually quite little seeing how I practically molded the inside of your ass to match my dick,” Rusty offered.

Matty looked at him with only one eye open. Oh, no, he was planning something, Rusty could tell. And then, suddenly, Matty lunged for him and planted his lips on the side of his neck, making sucking sounds.

Rusty didn't push him away. Actually, it felt quite nice. If Matty decided to turn into a vampire, Rusty would be a willing victim, as long as he got all those super-duper orgasms promised by getting freaky with that kind of creature of the night.

Matty pulled back and admired his work. "Yeah, that is so going to turn into a hickey," he said with satisfaction.

Rusty rubbed the side of his neck. "What was that for?"

Matty shrugged. "I wanted to put my mark on you." Then, with that all-knowing smile of his, he turned his back.

Wrong move, Rusty thought and grinned. He hugged Matty from behind and put his cock right between the enticing mounds of flesh teasing him so much. "Well, I can live with it," he said with fake resignation, "as long as you give me more of your sexy ass."

Matty put one arm over Rusty's and linked their fingers together. "It sounds like a plan. Now or later?"

"Totally now," Rusty replied, feeling the mighty Thor getting longer and harder by simply rubbing against Matty's round ass cheeks.

Chapter Twenty-Two

While Still His

They were both lying on one side, and Matty found it exquisitely pleasurable like this, because it allowed Rusty to align his entire body with him so that they were the closest they could be. Rusty was moving slowly in and out of him, all the while caressing his neck and exposed shoulder with his lips. While the first time had happened fast and in a sort of blur of mixed emotions and the pressure of experiencing everything, all at once, now they were as near to making love as they could be.

As friends. Rusty had seemed a bit puzzled, too, regarding the nature of their relationship, but Matty was willing to take that over being straightforward nothing else but simple buddies. All jokes aside about being buttfucking pals and whatnot, what they shared right now was beyond simple pleasure.

Rusty's kisses were soft and intimate while he moved one hand to caress Matty's arm down to the fingers. They interlocked their hands and rested them on top of Matty's hip while Rusty continued to fuck him slowly. It was so nice to feel that they were taking their time, that they could have this and enjoy it for as long as they could last.

At a certain level, Matty had always believe that his crush was nothing more than that. That if he ever got close to know the real Rusty Parker, he would end up disappointed, the picture constructed in his head having nothing in common with the stark truth of a person in flesh and blood, with his own flaws and demerits to which anyone alive was entitled.

Whatever he was experiencing right now had nothing in common with that sort of anticipated outcome. On the contrary, it was more than he had ever wanted or dreamed about. Rusty was holding him so gently, as if he were afraid Matty would disappear if he let go.

Maybe that was just the romantic part of him going slowly and completely crazy in the most delicious way possible. Rusty probably always had sex like this. He wasn't the king of Sunny Hill for nothing. He knew how to make love, and that was what made him so popular with the girls.

Matty knew for a fact that Rusty didn't look at him and see a woman, though. It seemed that he enjoyed that Matty had a cock; he liked to stroke it, even put it in his mouth, and that meant that there were no misunderstandings in that area whatsoever.

Even now, it happened again. Rusty let go of his hand to reach for his cock and began moving it over the hard thing with purpose. Matty moaned and tipped his head back, while he struggled to move his hips to get more of that pleasant sensation. Rusty's grip was too gentle, and Matty needed more.

At the same time, the pressure inside his ass was growing, too. Rusty seemed to understand his every moan and plea, so he increased the pressure, turning it into something fiercer and unyielding. His lips pressed hard on the side of Matty's neck and he began moving his hips in short thrusts that hit the right spot, over and over.

Fuck, Matty thought. When he didn't have Rusty anymore, he'd be in big trouble finding a suitable partner. From sex to banter, no one would compare to what he had right now. No point in dwelling on it, though. He lost himself in the dirty whispers Rusty poured into his ear, while his own body gave in.

Even after, Rusty continued to move slowly in and out of him. Matty could tell his partner had climaxed for a second time, as well, which meant that they were both on equal footing when it came to pleasure. At least, he hoped so, because he felt so deliciously spent that he couldn't imagine himself capable of anything else but sleeping at this point.

Rusty snickered in his ear and rained kisses over it until he became so ticklish that he had to react. "Rusty!" he complained, when a sneaky tongue lapped at his ear from its lobe and across the edge.

"What?" came the drawled reaction. "I'm in the mood for ear."

"So? Order some takeout or something," Matty suggested.

"Nah. It never tastes as good as homemade meals."

"Because of Jonathan." Well, he wanted to pretend a great deal that he wasn't jealous, but he wasn't entirely sure that he was capable of that. Rusty hadn't cared to elaborate in regards to how Jonathan Hamilton had given him the gay, whatever that was supposed to mean. Could it be that Rusty had a bit of a crush on his best friend's fiancé? Not that Matty didn't understand why. Jonathan was handsome, sexy in an unattainable sort of way, which had to challenge Rusty, who was always up for any provocation. And also an accomplished home cook, as Matty had had the chance to sample that very evening.

That was quite the high bar if he thought about it. He had no particular inclinations toward such activities and even if he wanted to start learning, his dorm room was not fit for culinary endeavors.

Yes, Jonathan Hamilton was the kind of guy to become the target for a straight guy's crush. Case in point, Maddox Kingsley had been known to be as much a lady's man as Rusty. Of course, that had been before his later to become fiancé had set foot on the grounds of the Sunny Hill campus.

"Why do you bring Johnny boy into this?" Rusty asked, stopping his train of thought. He smacked Matty's ass playfully and climbed out of the bed.

Matty took a moment to admire the guy he had just had sex with. He had crushed on Rusty before having the slightest chance to see him in all his naked glory. Clearly, he was doomed because there was no way another dude would compare to that. “He gave you the gay,” he pointed out eventually, while Rusty was using a towel and wiping the sweat off his head and the back of his neck.

He turned toward Matty, his hair spiky and pointing in all directions. He looked very much like a sexy porcupine. “The what?”

Matty rolled his eyes. “It was you who said it. Care to tell me what happened between you two?”

Rusty grimaced like he had been ordered to lick a lemon.

“What? Is it something bad?” Matty asked, somewhat alarmed now. “Something Maddox doesn’t know about?”

Rusty waved. “He knows. Well, I was a major ass one time and had to apologize. To punish me properly, Jonathan flaunted the goods for like a second.”

“The goods?” Matty asked slowly.

Rusty made a demonstration by grabbing his cock by its root and swinging it in a circular motion quickly. “Sometimes I wonder how gay you are.”

“Ha-ha, funny,” Matty said dryly.

“Wait, what kind of goods did you think I was talking about?” Rusty narrowed his eyes.

Matty shrugged. “Like the ass or something.”

“The ass?” Rusty gawked at him like there was no way he had just said that. “The ass?” he repeated a little louder. “Did you just imagine Jonathan frigging Hamilton wiggling his ass at me?”

“What’s so hard to imagine?” Matty protested. “I bet a lot of guys would like to wiggle their asses at you. Especially the gay ones.”

Rusty rubbed his chin and raised an eyebrow. Something of how he was staring foreboded nothing good. “Have you ever wanted to wiggle your ass at me, Matty?”

His mouth went instantly dry. He turned his head away. “All the time,” he replied, offering a vague answer instead of a clear admission of how he had been crushing on the guy in front of him from the moment he had seen him.

Rusty laughed and plopped himself on the bed. No, not on the bed, but on top of Matty, crushing him. Good thing he had turned already or Rusty would have been able to tell that he was hiding

something. He could feel hot breath on his cheek and heard Rusty chuckling in his ear, but pretended not to notice.

“Matty,” Rusty drawled, “are you jealous of Jonathan?”

“Why would I be jealous of—oh, fuck you, Rusty,” Matty blurted out and hid his face even more.

Rusty laughed out loud, seemingly very satisfied with himself. He didn’t appear to give a damn that he was really crushing Matty. “You’re so like a cat,” the whisper poured some little truth right into his ear. “You don’t straight up say what you want.”

“Cats don’t talk, Rusty,” Matty retorted, using his most tutor-like voice, not with only a little difficulty.

“You know what I mean,” Rusty continued just the same and proceeded to lick his ear with no sign of caring for his self-preservation.

“Stop it,” Matty growled.

“Nope. I’m going to hold you under me like this until you admit to being jealous of Jonathan because he showed me his dick.”

“Never,” Matty declared.

“I see. So you want to go to war with me, huh?”

Matty gasped in outrage as Rusty positioned himself for penetration, by what he could feel happening behind him. He tried to push himself up, but Rusty pushed him back down with one firm hand between his shoulder blades.

“Since you’re so stubborn, we’re going to do it like this,” Rusty explained. “You’re going to make a lot of fuss, and I’m going to give it to you until you mewl like a cat in heat.”

“Eww, Rusty,” Matty protested again. “Have you ever heard a cat in heat? I’d take fingernails on a blackboard instead.”

Rusty just laughed. “Then I’ll settle for the next best thing.”

“Which is what?” Matty asked while Rusty easily slid inside him due to all the lubrication already available. He moaned and had to slap one hand over his mouth as to not give his insolent bed partner any more satisfaction.

“I won’t let you get away until you shout, from the top of your lungs, that you’re jealous and want me only for you.”

“Can I say it really quickly right now?”

“No way you’re getting out of this. And can’t you tell? I’m already so hard in your ass that it would be inhumane treatment to pull out.”

“Inhumane to you or to me?” Matty asked.

“Both, hopefully,” Rusty offered and began moving his hips.



Wow, Matty was pretty awesome. That was the third time they were going at it tonight, and it was a lot more than what he had expected with his cute tutor being a virgin and all. Nonetheless, it looked like the dude could take it, and he even continued to have a mouth on him, even with his ass so full of cock.

It made him shiver in pleasure hearing the sounds of their bodies coming together. Matty offered just the right amount of resistance to play into Rusty’s suggestion of acting like he didn’t quite want it while secretly wanting it. He even held his head turn to one side but with his chin high, to show that he disagreed with the treatment his unbelievably sexy ass was getting.

“Still resisting?” Rusty grunted as a myriad of delightful sensations spread from where he was connected with Matty to the rest of his body.

“Still,” Matty assured him and shot a dirty glance at him over his shoulder.

“Good thing your ass is squeezing me so hard. It looks like someone can only be honest with the lower part of his body.”

“My foot is actually itching to become friends with your ass,” Matty replied, “so your theory doesn’t exactly stand on two feet.”

“I don’t need two feet,” Rusty said brightly while putting his all behind it, “to give it to you.”

“I hope you’re not going to make some lame joke about having a third leg,” Matty said, but his breath was coming in short pants, a distinctive sign that he actually liked it.

“I was going to, but now you ruined it.” Rusty pulled Matty close to his chest, forcing him to arch his back so that they continued to fuck.

All that dry spell he had been going through since the start of the college year was a distant memory. He was now holding someone in his arms, someone he knew, not some ephemeral presence in his life, but a person who no longer had the shine of novelty which always drew him in, but something a lot more important.

Matty knew him, he played into his games without needing any explanations, as if they had been born to be so close, a little more than friends, a lot more than just pals. It tickled him in all the right places that Matty was jealous of Jonathan, even if he had no reason to be. Yeah, he was getting owned, and it was a damned pleasant feeling.

“You’re my one and only buttfucking friend,” he promised while ramming in with increased speed now.

“I know,” came the arrogant reply.

Rusty felt himself trembling with a different kind of desire. He knew about sex, almost everything, he liked to think, but this sudden and increased urge that he would want nothing less than to wrap himself inside Matty and feel safe that very moment was completely new. He couldn’t remember anything similar to have happened to him before, all throughout his life.

“Say it,” he said breathlessly, “say that I’m yours, too.”

Matty was gasping for breath just the same. “You’re my only buttfucking friend,” he replied, mistaking Rusty’s demand for something else.

Sometimes, you had to take what was available in front of you, Rusty thought as he sensed himself getting too near to still be able to keep his sanity and prolong their sexual act. “Here’s the proof,” he said, grunting and holding Matty close.

There was no witty comeback. Matty just moaned prettily and pushed his butt back, meeting him thrust for thrust. Rusty didn’t hold back; hopefully, everyone else in the house was deep in sleep and was not listening to him right now letting out those animal-like sounds.

Usually, when he had sex, it was a well-staged performance. Sure, he liked it. Yeah, he fucking loved it, the prelude, all the teasing, what happened in the middle, and of course, the finish. But he was on top of it, controlling everything, down to the smallest sound he made.

With Matty here, moaning and quivering under him while gripping his hands hard, all that carefully planned production had been long forgotten. He was free, he was enjoying himself with no limits to restrain him, and all those new sensations were going to his head, making him heady, forcing him to soar to new heights.

When they collapsed, they did it together. And then, the laughter came, just as free and unbound, straight from Matty’s chest.

“What’s so funny?” Rusty asked, pretending to be pissed that his glorious performance was a cause of amusement.

Matty turned his face, as much as he could do so while still being crushed and held against the bed. “You couldn’t make me say it.”

“Yeah, ‘cause, you know, it kind of slipped my mind since your asshole was squeezing my dick so hard,” Rusty explained. “I felt lightheaded. Obviously, my brain was no longer getting enough oxygen.”

Matty snickered again. “Do you happen to breathe with your dick?”

“I cannot live without it, so you could say that,” Rusty replied promptly. He hugged Matty tightly and rested his head against the other’s. “This was a great fuck, Matty. Glad you chose me.”

“Like I had a choice,” came the smartass reply.

“Good. It’s better that you don’t have choices.”

Silence followed, falling over them like a warm blanket.

“Do you think they heard us?” Matty asked.

“The other guys, you mean? Eh, they’ve heard worse, I guess. And don’t worry, you don’t have to do some walk of shame in the morning. The people here are not like that.”

He could tell that Matty still had other questions but decided to be patient and let the other decide. To his surprise, Matty remained silent for quite a bit. He was about to initiate a new conversational thread, when his wait was brought to a halt.

“Do you like the cat boy more than me?”

They had been over this, had they not? But Rusty didn’t know if he could tell Matty what exactly pulled him toward Slicky Coolplums, without making things appear as some sort of a joke. Slicky had been there for him when he needed a distraction the most, during the basketball game. And then, Matty had come and dragged him to his room to read to him from that stupid book, which helped him forget about the bitterness left behind by his dad’s attitude. They were complementing each other, and Rusty hoped Matty wouldn’t ask him to give up on pursuing the cat boy, because, somehow, he needed them both in his life.

“No, not more,” he eventually replied.

“Less?” came the expected follow-up.

“No, not less either.” Honesty was the best way forward, or so they said.

“What, really? You like us both the same?”

Rusty made room for Matty to turn, but he didn’t move away. He kept him trapped between his arms and looked at his cute face, taking in every line, from the well-defined lips to the shape at

the nose to the glimmer in his eyes. “Yeah,” he admitted. “You two are like the best stuff to have happened in my life lately.”

Oh, fuck, he hadn’t meant to be that honest. He was the king of Sunny Hill, or, in other words, the king of fun and no-strings-attached sex and shallow feelings.

Yet, with Matty, he sensed that he could be honest to a degree. “What are you doing next Saturday?”

“I don’t have anything planned in particular,” Matty replied. He appeared a bit relieved by the change in topic. Maybe he wasn’t that crazy to talk about the cat boy, either, while they were in bed together naked.

“How would you feel about coming with me to a birthday party?”

“Here, on campus? Whose birthday is it?”

“No, not here. It’s going to be a bit of a drive. Maddox is going to lend us his car, I’m sure.” He hadn’t asked yet, but he supposed that his bestie wouldn’t say ‘no’. And then, he added, after a short sigh, “It’s my brother’s birthday.”

Matty’s eyes grew wide. “I had no idea you had a brother.”

“Half-brother. He’s going to turn ten. What do you say? I could play the clown. You could... it doesn’t matter. You just come with me. There’s going to be cake. I think.”

“Sure. I’d love to come with you.”

“Really? It might be boring.”

“Rusty, I said ‘yes’,” Matty said gently. “And it doesn’t matter if it’s boring. They’re kids. I suppose that the party won’t go raging for the entire night. What does your brother like? I must bring a gift.”

That was a tough one. He hadn’t bothered to get to know his siblings, so he couldn’t exactly tell what Gabriel was into. He wouldn’t be caught dead calling his dad to ask, either. If the man knew what his other son liked, it would be like a stake driven through his chest. If he didn’t, Rusty would pity his baby brother, and that wasn’t an option, either.

He pushed himself up. “Dunno,” he said with a shrug. “The same things all boys his age like.”

“I’ll google it, then,” Matty said brightly, as if it wasn’t weird that Rusty had no idea what his baby brother preferred. “I bet he likes superhero stuff. All boys like that stuff.”

Rusty turned toward Matty abruptly. “Matty, you’re a genius.”

“Because I know how to google things?”

“You haven’t googled anything yet and still came up with an awesome idea. We’ll dress up to make Gabriel a surprise. We’ll go as superheroes.”

This time, Matty reached for his phone on the nightstand. “What superheroes? Do you have something specific in mind? Like Superman and Lois Lane? No way I’m going to be Lois.”

Rusty laughed. “Okay, you’re right. Not Lois ‘cause I want to see you in a tighter outfit.”

Matty looked at him wide-eyed. Was he going to protest against that? But he had a lot to show off.

“Hmm, let’s see. I guess I’ll be Hawkeye, because I just like the suit and him being a circus performer and all, plus, it’s pretty random and I like that. As for you…” Rusty pondered while taking in Matty, stretched as he lay on his bed. “I know,” he said, snapping his fingers. “You’ll be Nightwing.”

“Nightwing,” Matty said slowly. “Why?”

“Because you’d just look good in that outfit,” Rusty replied, confident of his choice.

“Okay,” Matty agreed, albeit reluctantly. “But what if we’re not on your brother’s list of favorites? We don’t want to disappoint him, right?”

Disappointment was a dress code in the Parker family. Why not go for it? The kid wouldn’t be disappointed, but Rusty could barely wait to see his father’s face when he’d come through the door dressed like that. It all worked out perfectly so that he wouldn’t go there looking like he would rather be somewhere else or punch somebody in the face.

“I don’t think he’ll care. We’ll just be two super cool dudes dressed as superheroes. You said it yourself. Kids dig this stuff. I’ll take care of everything, don’t worry. As for the gift, we’ll buy a little of everything. I mean, I will, of course. He’s my brother.”

“No, I can’t let you buy everything. Let me pitch in. And I want to go shopping for toys with you.”

Rusty gave Matty a naughty look. “I really thought it would be completely different when you’d say that.”

As expected, Matty rolled his eyes. “I believe you have a closet stuffed with those.” Then, he turned and grabbed the fat guy candle from the nightstand. “We didn’t light it up.”

“We could do that another time.”

Matty turned the ugly thing in his hands. “Can I have it?”

“Sure.” Rusty shrugged and plopped down on the bed. “I don’t have its original packaging, though.” He pointed vaguely toward the closet. “It could be in there, somewhere.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll take it as it is.” As if he was afraid that Rusty would take it away from him, he pushed himself up and searched for his hoodie and stuffed the thing in one of the pockets.

Rusty watched him for a bit. Matty had such a great body. Too bad he hid it under those nerdy clothes all the time. But maybe it was for the best because Rusty really didn’t need other dudes ogling Matty while he was still his. That thing with Jamie – he had dodged a bullet there.

“You’re staring,” Matty pointed out and passed by him, close enough so they could sniff each other.

Which was exactly what Rusty did, leaning near and then grabbing Matty in his arms. “I fucked you,” he said with a grin.

Matty tsked. “Always the smartass, aren’t you? By the way, you’re behind on our deal. I haven’t done one thing to your asshole.”

“We’ll get to that in due time. It’s not like you’re in a rush to find a boyfriend, right? You know how important is to study during your senior year.”

“Studying and getting freaky with you. Those two things are at the top of my list,” Matty said.

“Good,” Rusty concluded. “That’s smart thinking on your part. But then, I expect nothing less from you.”

That was a given, then. He pulled Matty into his arms and kissed him on the forehead, to seal the deal.



Waking up with someone wrapped around him was a bit new. Usually, his bed partners preferred to leave before midnight, like fairytale creatures. Or maybe that was good for keeping up with appearances, the kind he’d rather keep up, just because. He looked at Matty, or better said, at the crown of his head, as they lay together, his cute tutor partly on top of him, one arm thrown in abandon over Rusty’s abdomen.

He could totally dig Jonathan and Maddox right now. They were waking up most mornings like this. How come some people know, without a shadow of a doubt that they were good for each other? That there would never be anyone else?

He had a great friend in Matty. Well, since last night, a buttfucking friend, too, and it seemed so cool and uncomplicated to just have someone like that in his life. It made him feel like there were no longer missing pieces, no matter how hard he looked at himself.

And they would so rock by dressing up for his brother's birthday party. They'd look awesome and all. Was there any fanfiction written for Hawkeye and Nightwing? It would be a crossover, and those weren't as popular as the fics that involved characters from the same universe, but still, it was worth checking.

Happy with that realization, he moved one hand slowly so as not to wake up Matty and took his phone. Using that one free hand, he started examining the results returned to him by the search engines. What the hell? There was very little to find, and the one he did read, the guys were just cuddling in bed and saying 'I love you' to each other.

He pursed his lips. Well, it didn't matter. It looked like Rule 34 didn't apply to everything—everything as the credo on top said.

“What are you doing?” Matty asked and lifted his head.

Rusty pushed him down, preventing him from sneaking even a peek at the still open page with the fanfic with the reciprocal I love you's. Matty would probably think that he was going bonkers.

Matty pushed himself up, eventually, and Rusty hid the evidence by closing the browser on his phone.

“I guess I should be going,” Matty said and began fishing for his clothes.

“Why so soon?” Rusty asked.

Matty looked strangely at him. “I didn't even plan to stay the night.” He rubbed the back of his head and laughed, looking cute and embarrassed. “Which was damn awesome, by the way. Still, I need to do some things,” he added vaguely.

“Sure, sure,” Rusty hurried to reply. “You gotta do what you gotta do. We're still on for the birthday party, right?”

“Totally. By the way, what's your brother's name?”

“Gabriel.”

“And we're still on for shopping together for the gift, right?”

“Totally.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

They looked at each other for another moment, and then, they moved at the same time and met in the middle. Rusty brushed the hair off of Matty's forehead and then kissed it. Matty hugged him briefly.



He ran to his dorm, his heart full. He had had sex the entire night with Rusty Parker. Had it been real? It must have been. He felt his forehead as if he could still feel Rusty's kiss there. It had been so chaste and nice after all the crazy stuff they had done throughout the night.

And they would even go to Rusty's brother's birthday together. Just how cool was that?



Well, well, it seems like there's a new sheriff in town... and his name is Connor Williams. We could go down a dark path and say that it appears that our planet is doomed if her staunchest defender has stepped down from his role, but there appears to be a silver lining to Mr. Williams's abdication.

Everywhere you look, there's no shortage of worlds that need saving, and our accomplished fellow student has identified another cause worthy of his pursuing. And who needs more saving than you, our dear guys and gals of Sunny Hill? Ever since you put one foot after the other, even hand after foot, and the other way around, until you got on all fours... on these not so holy grounds, you've been partying, drinking, hooking up... Yes, yes, we're looking at you.

Not that we're pointing fingers. No, far from us. After all, your wrongdoings and blunders are our raison d'être... We wouldn't kill the cash cow. Just joking. We're not making any money, and we can assure you that our killer instincts are only similar to a bloodhound sniffing prey... We never deal the finishing blow.

What will be your next move, Rusty Parker? Our pertinacious Mr. Williams is after your crown, armed with all the doggedness of a grand inquisitor.

For now, we'll sit back and enjoy the show. We hope it will be at least mildly interesting. Play with your foe for a bit, Rusty Parker. Don't finish him with one punch. There's nothing more disappointing than a K.O. in the first ten seconds.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The First Confrontation

“So, last night,” Kane was the first to start when he went down for breakfast.

Breakfast was one way of naming what he was going to get, mainly because Jonathan, bless his heart, had thought of him and put aside some leftovers. Rusty plopped down on a chair and brought the plate closer. Scrambled eggs were good even cold; Jonathan had left a note, recommending that he heat them up a little, but he couldn't be bothered with that.

He pointed his fork at his housemate. “What do you want to say? Come on, hurry up, I have things to see, people to do.”

“Ah,” Kane said and raised an eyebrow. “I thought you did Matthew Han all night long.”

“Curious?” Rusty asked. “You see, Kane, that story with the bees and the flowers, well, sometimes the bees are by themselves, and they start eyeing their bros, like, you know, damn, look at the fine booty on that bro.”

“Are we talking about worker bees or drones here?” Kane, always the smartass, asked.

“Did you just call me a drone?”

Kane rolled his eyes. “But the place is full of flowers,” he gestured around. “Why this particular... bee?”

Rusty shrugged. “I'm going to tell Louise if you don't stop with this line of questioning.”

“I bet she'd be just as interested in your sudden change from being a flower hopper to one bee's man.”

“It's not anything like that,” Rusty hurried to deny. “I'm still the same flower hopper. It's just that it's a lot more convenient to have a buttfucking friend right now.”

“Buttfucking friend,” Kane repeated slowly. “And why is it convenient now of all times?”

Well, that was a hard question. However, Rusty was famous for being perfectly capable of thinking on his feet, so he grabbed his phone and pushed it across the table toward Kane. His friend took it and stared at the screen. “Why are you even reading Xpress?”

“Because,” Rusty said with a shrug. “It's cheap entertainment. Free, as it's pointed out in the text. As you can tell, this new sheriff they're talking about is after my ass, and not in any fun way. Obviously, I have to lay low, or I might get burned at the stake. Or, you know, become part of some Mexican standoff.” To get his point across, he began to hum a random western theme.

Kane looked at him and narrowed his eyes. “Since when are you afraid of Connor Williams? And what’s this story all about?”

Rusty waved. When Matty had tried to explain it to him, he had just brushed it off. Even now, he was none the wiser. “He’s in charge of some vigilante group or whatever. They’re called the Funbusters.”

“Really? The Funbusters?” Kane threw him a doubtful look.

“Not very inspired, right?”

Kane gave him back his phone and began fiddling with his. “What the fuck?” he said out loud. When Rusty waved impatiently with his fork, he continued, “You have to see it to believe it.”

It was Rusty’s turn to stare at Kane’s phone screen. “Well,” he said, adopting a philosophical stance on the matter, “if you put ‘the’ in front, it’s clear what they believe themselves to be. But whatever, I’m not in the mood to fight. I don’t give a fuck about this new T-man--”

“T-man?” Kane asked.

“Yeah, from--”

“I get it,” Kane said quickly and shook his head. “But why don’t you want to put this clown in his place?”

“Because, obviously, that’s what Xpress wants. And I don’t care about doing what other people want me to do. Especially if they’re strangers. If Connor Williams wants to become the king, whatever.”

“He’s more likely to become the leader of a so-called revolution,” Kane said.

“And, as we learn from history, revolutionary leaders have a tendency to put their weathered buttocks on the same seat they pushed the other guy down from.”

Kane seemed to consider his words for a moment. “I guess you’re right. So, you’re not bothered by this in the least?”

“Why would I be? Unlike Connor Williams, I don’t hate my life enough to want to change it.” He got up and took the plate to the sink where he washed it, dried it and put it back in its place. “What?” he asked, when Kane continued to stare at him. “It’s the deal I have with Jonathan. He leaves me food, I do the dishes.”

“It’s good to know you can be house-trained, after all. Anyway, as long as this new wannabe doesn’t bother you, I won’t care, either. But are you really sure it’s because of Connor Williams that you’re willing to fool around with your tutor instead of some random girls?”

“No, obviously not. But the point is, Matty’s not random. I know him. We have fun. Case closed.”

He didn’t, really didn’t, want to go into details, mostly because they were fuzzy and flying randomly inside his head, and he couldn’t be bothered to make them clearer.



Mock practice it was since on Sundays that was his favorite physical activity. Sure, he would have liked to keep Matty in for the entire day, but the guy had an ass to care for, and Rusty was damn certain that he was supposed to respect that or else he’d be considered a major douche.

“Have you heard about Connor Williams, man?” One of his teammates approached him as he was putting his sneakers on.

“I heard something,” he admitted.

“So? What’s going to be your move? You need to put that douchebag in his place.”

Rusty shrugged and jumped to his feet. “No one’s going to buy the cookies he’s selling, so don’t worry, my man. I can tell that he’s using vinegar instead of sugar.”

His mate looked at him nonplussed, probably trying to figure out the joke.

“Oh, shit,” Rusty realized his mistake. “You can catch some flies with vinegar, too. They’re these little creatures,” he began to explain, “and they’re called, wait for it, drosophila melanogaster.” The other guy began shifting uncomfortably and scratching his head. Rusty patted him on the back. “I’ll let Connor make a fool of himself. He has no power here.”

“But he runs the Sunny Hill Implacable Team,” his mate argued.

“My point exactly,” Rusty said with satisfaction and walked out of the locker room. For real, why was everyone getting their panties in a twist over this Connor dude?



Matty had slept far into the afternoon, probably an effect of getting naughty with Rusty throughout the night before and only his roommate making noise managed to pull him from his slumber. He groaned and grabbed his glasses.

“It appears that you’ve been getting all kinds of bad habits since the beginning of the year,” John said reproachfully, as if he was Matty’s mom or something.

“Sorry, what?” Matty asked, hoping that his sarcasm was well-aimed.

John didn't appear to get it. "I mean, I know that you didn't sleep here last night, and now you're still sleeping, although it's two in the afternoon."

Well, that wasn't like him, but it wasn't every day, or better said, night, that he was losing his virginity to the king of Sunny Hill. He couldn't help smiling at the thought. Yeah, that had been an incredible night, and Rusty had been equally incredible.

"You spent your night in sin," John suddenly said as if he had just discovered that Santa wasn't real.

"In sin? Seriously, who talks like that?" Matty said with a snort. "And would you get off my back already? You're not my real mom." Again, he was trying to make a joke.

Which hadn't landed, obviously, because John moved near and put a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. "I'm trying to help you, Matthew."

"Help me escape the depths of hell?" Matty pushed his glasses up on his nose and gave John an inquisitive look.

"Hell isn't real," John said with a snort.

"According to that line of reasoning, sin isn't real, either," Matty said.

John seemed to consider. "Yes, that's an archaic word, I admit. But criminal activity isn't."

"What criminal activity?" Matty asked. This conversation was getting weirder and weirder by the moment.

John began talking very slowly. "Did you consume illegal substances last night?" He also seemed to stare into Matty's eyes, while being uncomfortably close.

Matty pulled away. "I didn't even drink alcohol." Sarcasm and jokes were wasted on this guy. "What are you going to ask me next? If I had sex out of wedlock? Is that a criminal activity, too?"

John straightened up and moved away, as if Matty was suddenly threatening him with a lit torch. "Did you... do that then?" he stuttered.

Matty rolled his eyes. "With all due respect, John, even being roommates and all, I don't know you well enough to answer that question. By the way, what's with your sudden interest in me? I thought you were here to study."

That appeared to send John into a frenzy of sorts, because right away, he started gesticulating and talking animatedly. "A wonderful thing happened. You see, there's this new organization on campus that wants to help us all become the best we can be. You can't say 'no' to self-improvement, Matthew. As I recall, you're a good student. Don't tell me you've forgotten about

your studies to live a life of debauchery.” He stopped and gave Matty a long hard stare. “What do your parents think?”

Matty groaned. He was all for dealing amiably even with people he couldn’t stand, but John was starting to get on his nerves. All he was in the mood for today was to lie in bed, read, and dream about Rusty. Definitely, he didn’t care about meandering around inside his roommate’s crazy head.

“My parents are more than satisfied with my grades and academic activities,” he assured John.

“What about the other stuff?” John gestured with his chin in a vague direction.

“The debauchery, you mean?” Matty asked brightly. “They know all about it. I send them regular updates on my extracurricular activities, as well.”

That brought a disgusted look to John’s face.

“Come on, man,” Matty grunted, “can’t you tell I’m joking? And don’t worry about me. I can take care of myself. Thank you for your concern.”

“You should become part of the Implacable Team, too.”

Oh, great. That was what John was talking about. Had he been there yesterday? Matty hadn’t seen him, but the place had been packed, anyway, making it hard to identify one single person in the sea of faces. “Sorry, I’m too busy studying,” Matty said and grabbed a textbook from his nightstand, hoping that would make his roommate shut up.

Finally, it seemed to be the necessary magic trick, because John returned to his bed and grabbed a heavy tome as well and buried his nose in it.

Matty stared at him for a few moments. Hopefully, Rusty wouldn’t want to see Slick Coolplums again, because there was no way he’d be able to change into his suit in this room with John watching over his morality like a hawk. Turning into a cat boy wasn’t, maybe, even a thing in John’s book just yet, but it would be, and Matty had an inkling that it would be considered a mortal sin, as well. Or even some kind of criminal activity.



Rusty was walking back from his mock practice when he heard murmurs rising all around him. He had no idea what was happening, but it wasn’t the usual fangirling over his person. Since Xpress had launched the rumor that he had impregnated the cat boy, the girls had taken a step back, which suited him just fine. Everyone suspected that he was keeping the cat boy, cat girl, whatever, away from prying eyes, and that he was getting ready to become a doting father. That was the kind of mad shit Xpress kept writing, at least.

He raised his head, lost as he had been in thoughts of how to put together the perfect bag of gifts for Gabriel. Right in front of him, almost at the point of crashing into each other, stood Connor Williams. Well, that was the conclusion he reached after searching the guy's face for a while, because he hadn't recognized him at first, in that moldy suit and new haircut that made him look like he wanted to apply for a schoolmaster position in a Dickensian novel.

"What's up, T-man?" Rusty said with a huge grin and grabbed the dude by his shoulders.

Connor tried to shake off his touch, but Rusty pretended that he didn't get it and forced him to walk side by side. "Rusty Parker," he hissed, "we're not pals. Please unhand me at once."

Rusty let go of him so brusquely it made him lose his balance. However, Connor knew a thing or two about keeping his wits about him, because he quickly recovered and straightened his suit.

To make things more interesting, Rusty whistled appreciatively. "Are you going on a date, my good dude? 'Cause I heard chicks dig older dudes. Oh, sorry, my bad. It applies to dudes, too."

Connor stared at him as if he were some lunatic. "You must have heard about us by now. Your jokes fall on deaf ears. I can understand that you hate me now--"

Rusty opened his arms wide. "Why would I hate you, man? You do you. Although, I thought gay dudes tended to have pretty decent fashion sense. Sorry, sorry, my bad again," he added and put his hands up. "That's a stereotype. There must be some gay dudes who have an indecent fashion sense, too. Now, if you'll ex-squeeze me," he drawled, "I gotta go. See ya! And good luck."

Connor tried to open his mouth to come up with some scathing retort, but he must have noticed that Rusty was already too far away for him to deliver his line without shouting, so he reconsidered.

Rusty shrugged. Was anyone taking this douche seriously? Whatever. As he had told Kane, he couldn't care less.



"Did you tell Rusty?" Zoey's voice came through the phone speaker the moment he picked it up.

"Hi to you, too," Matty said but a smile was already tugging at the corners of his mouth. Damn, John was still lying in bed, across from him, deep in his studying. He had his headphones on, but Matty didn't want to risk anything by telling Zoey all about his crazy night with Rusty.

"He even had a confrontation with Connor while they were both walking through the quad," Zoey shot back rapidly. "And yeah, hi."

"A confrontation? When? Today?"

John shifted in his place, making Matty believe that it was unlikely he was actually listening to something in those headphones.

“You know what, Zoey? I wanted to go out anyway. Let’s get together if you have nothing else lined up.”

“The douche is over there, isn’t he?” Zoey asked. Matty could picture her nodding thoughtfully and probably cooking up some prank he wouldn’t want to play on his roommate.

“Yeah,” he said quickly.

“Okay, then, meet me outside of my dorm in ten.”

“You’re sure that’s enough to put on all the glitter you need?”

“There’s no point to glitter,” Zoey said with a long sigh. “He’s not around today anyway.”

“Who?” Matty asked quickly, happy to grab the opportunity.

“In ten, no more,” Zoey replied just as fast and cut the convo.

Hmm, he would have to extract little bits of truth out of his bestie. All in due time. Now, what was this about a confrontation between Rusty and Connor? Things were getting unnecessarily interesting around here.



The weather was still good enough for them to find a place on one of the benches around the quad. Zoey pointed right in front of them. “That is where it happened,” she explained.

“Are you sure that’s the exact spot?” Matty asked.

“Totally.” She nodded energetically. “Connor was like, Rusty Parker, you will pay for all the fun you’ve ever had in your life. And Rusty was like, no I won’t.”

“Really? I somehow expected Rusty to be more verbose than that.”

“Well, I’m giving you the abridged version. Rusty low-key insulted Connor by calling him T-man, and I think the nickname’s going to stick, you know. Pun totally intended.”

Matty pondered for a moment. “I can see that, yeah. What did Connor want Rusty for, anyway?”

“I’m not entirely sure. But that boy’s totally itching for a fight. And he’s so going to get it.” Zoey seemed very much amused at the prospect.

“Well, it’s not like they’re going to get into some fisticuffs,” Matty offered his point of view. “I doubt they’d be able to pull that kind of stuff in the middle of the campus.”

“No, like duh,” Zoey said with a roll of the eyes, “but maybe an underground battle could be arranged.”

“Only you’d think of such extreme measures.”

“That’s because I’d high-key enjoy seeing Connor’s arrogant mug getting smashed.” To make a point, she drove one little fist into her open palm.

Matty shivered. “You scare me sometimes, Zoey. Stop listening to those true crime podcasts. I fear for your sanity. Just for the record, if you ever turn to the dark side, we’ve never known each other.”

“Traitor,” Zoey said and pouted. “Anyway, the thing is, Xpress totally expects Rusty to ruin Connor.”

The choice of words made Matty swallow hard. If there were one person in the whole world who deserved to be ruined by Rusty, it was him. Well, in an ideal world of his choosing, of course.

Finally, Zoey caught on. “What’s with you? You look like you were up all night. That’s not good for your skin, Matty. What’s Rusty going to think if he sees you with dark circles?” She poked him in the cheek.

“Well, I guess he won’t notice or at least won’t say a word since he’s the reason I was up all night,” he said in a low voice, while stealing glances around.

Zoey leaned in closer. “He is? Fess up, right now.”

Matty munched on his lower lip hard. “He... I... you know.”

“No, I don’t. Not if you don’t tell me,” Zoey pressed him.

“We did it,” Matty blurt it out quickly. “Only his friends know. I mean, suspect, or they know for a fact. Like you, now.”

“Wow. Then I’m part of a really select circle.” Zoey sighed. “I’ve never been part of a circle. Not even a circle-jerk.”

Matty shook his head. Well, it was hard to still be embarrassed when Zoey was talking about circle-jerks like they weren’t a big deal.

Then, she turned and punched him in the shoulder suddenly. “Good for you, Matty!”

“Ouch. I was wondering when you were going to catch on.”

“So,” Zoey said slowly, and then, abruptly, “how was it?”

Matty sighed. “Like a dream come true.”

Zoey joined him with a reverent sigh of her own. “Has he already told you that he loves you?”

“Hey, we’re not even close to that. I mean, I doubt we’ll ever be.”

A tsk of disappointment let him know that his bestie disagreed. “Don’t be such a pessimist, Matty. At least, you plan on telling him how you really feel about him, right?”

He nodded. “I will, but not now.”

“When?” Zoey pressed.

“Hey, I’ve crushed about him for three long years. Forgive me for not wanting the fairytale to end right away. Because once I let that bird out of the cage, it’s game over.” He took a moment. He had thought about it, of course, even before getting to know him, how he would confess. At times, something low key like leaving a letter on Rusty’s doorstep, something he wouldn’t sign, seemed like the right choice. On the other hand, it wasn’t like him to be so extra, so he had thought of something a lot easier and yet harder at the same time to achieve, such as going directly to Rusty and telling him right up front that he had been his crush for all his years in college. “I’ll tell him when I know that we won’t be seeing each other again. You know, at the end of the academic year.”

Zoey nodded. “I see that you’re in it for the long run and congratulate you for it. But what if he calls things off before that? What will you do?”

Matty shrugged. “I’ll just stick to the plan. The last day on campus, I’ll walk up to him and tell him. And then, of course, I’ll run away. I’m shopping for the best running shoes as we speak. Before you ask, I still haven’t settled on the ideal pair.”

“Hmm,” came the noncommittal reply from Zoey. “Don’t tell me you’re also training for it. Rusty can easily catch you. He’s the athlete of the two of you, after all.”

That was good reason to snort with superiority. “He couldn’t catch Slicky, though, so sorry to burst your bubble. He won’t be able to catch me.”

“No bubble burst, don’t worry. Ah, damn, how are you going to turn into Slicky from now on? The douchebag is here to stay, isn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Matty said and pursed his lips. “Unless I manage some magical girl trick so I can change only by performing a pirouette in mid-air, that’s pretty much busted. Slicky has already mysteriously disappeared from the college grounds, the way I see it.”

“No way, nah-uh,” Zoey said. “That’s going to rip Rusty’s poor little heart in two. I have an idea. Do you want to hear it?”

“Do I have a choice? Yeah, I totally want to hear it, and stop giving me that withering stare,” Matty hurried to reply. She always meant well, but it was fun to tease her.

“Bundle up the suit and smuggle it to my room. In case of force majeure, we will use my bathroom for your magical girl routine. Sorry, for your cat boy transformation.”

“And what will your roommate think?”

“Let me worry about her. I have at least five different scenarios lined up, in case I need to send her all over campus so that I have a bit of well-deserved solitude for putting my plans into action.”

“Wow, you really are turning into a villain,” Matty said and snickered.

Zoey pinched his cheek. “Unlike you, I’m not a traitor. If I ever turn to the dark side, I won’t forget about you. You’ll always be my friend, especially when the police are going to hunt me down and I’ll need a place to lay low.”

“It looks like whether I like it or not, I’ll have to act as an accessory to your criminal activity. Ah, that reminds me. John, my roommate, is absolutely over the moon with Connor’s initiative.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Zoey shook her head. “You know what we can do to him?”

“To Connor?”

“I’ll think about that, too. But no, I meant your roommate.”

“I have a feeling that I don’t want to hear whatever is going to come next.”

Zoey grinned. “We could tie him up and hang all his textbooks from the ceiling just far enough away so that he cannot read a word. Or we could attach them to an improvised merry-go-round that will move around his head. He’ll go nuts.”

“I am so not engaging in any kind of criminal activity with you. And that’s cruel, you know?”

“I do,” Zoey confirmed brightly. “But don’t worry. My plans usually don’t bear fruit, they’re just ideas in my head. A girl has to busy her mind with something.”

Matty examined his friend carefully. “Who is he?”

“What do you mean?” Zoey pretended to be suddenly interested in absolutely nothing, because the quad was as good as deserted at that hour.

“You’re crushing on someone, and you’re not telling me. And I know it’s a ‘he’ because that somehow slipped from your tongue today, when we were on the phone.”

“It’s going to pass,” Zoey said with a long, heartfelt sigh. “I mean,” she gestured, pointing with her palm a few inches over the ground, “I’m down here, and he’s,” she stopped for a moment and then pointed at a tall tree across from them, somewhere up near its crown, “up there.”

“And is that stopping you? Get a ladder,” Matty pointed out.

“If only it were that simple. And I’m using metaphors, Matty, metaphors.”

“I know what metaphors are. I just had no idea they’d be enough to stop you,” he insisted. “So, when are you going to tell me who this guy is?”

“When you confess to Rusty. How about that?” Zoey stared at him and smiled.

He could read a lot of stuff in that smile. Most people thought Zoey to be this wacky character and settled for that, but he knew there was more to her. She was highly intelligent and one of her most often used skills was to hide uncomfortable feelings under a thick blanket of humor. Without even thinking, he pulled her into a tight hug. As expected, she protested and tapped his shoulders with her little fists, but he didn’t let go, because he knew very well that she really needed that hug, despite her objections.

He let go of her only when the protests stopped. “I’ll hold you to it,” he promised.

“Deal,” she said and rolled her eyes. “But, seriously, dude, you should stop with the hugging ‘cause I ain’t your Rusty.”

He punched her playfully in the shoulder. “Sometimes, Zoey, I think you act like one of those guys who are just too tough to show their feelings.”

“And?” she challenged him. “What’s wrong with that?”

“Should I read you the entire list or--”

She punched him in the shoulder this time, too, but harder. Matty rubbed the place she had hit him and shook his head.

Then, Zoey looked away and put her both hands under her knees, letting her feet dangle above the ground. Maybe it all came from her being so short. People expected her to be fragile and helpless, and she was bent on proving that she was just the opposite. “You’re an awesome dude, Matty,” she said. “And the best friend I’ll ever have.”

“Same here, my dudette,” Matty said jokingly, knowing that he needed to lighten the mood. “Should we get something to eat? My treat.”

“Why is it your treat?”

“Because, obviously, I need to celebrate losing my virginity to the king of Sunny Hill.”

“Hmm, that means we need to have some cake.”

“I wouldn’t even dare to think not to have cake on a random day.”

“It’s not random,” Zoey reminded him. “It’s about celebrating your getting banged by the biggest crush of your life to date.”

“Good point. Let’s go.” He offered her his hand, and she smacked hers over his palm in agreement.



“Maddie, I have a huge favor to ask you,” Rusty began the moment he walked into the house and saw his bestie and his better half sitting on the sofa and making doe eyes at each other.

“Since you started by calling me Maddie, you can kiss that favor goodbye,” Maddox replied with a snort.

“It’s for a good cause,” Rusty pointed out and plopped down on the sofa, getting between them on purpose. He put his hands on their knees to show that he was willing to treat them equally.

Maddox laughed and pushed his hand away. Jonathan chuckled, his usual sexy chuckle that made Rusty feel goose bumps rising on his skin everywhere. He, however, made no move to make him remove his hand. Therefore, it was only natural to cuddle against him and turn his butt to mad Maddie. “See, mom loves me more.”

“Ah, you’re playing that card, I see,” Maddox commented. “I thought you’d start offering sexual favors in exchange for whatever you want to ask me.”

“No way. I’d sexually assault you into acceptance.”

“How is that supposed to work?” Maddox asked.

“I’d stop only when you said ‘yes’.”

It was Jonathan’s turn to laugh out loud. “And what if we didn’t want you to stop?” he teased, his voice dropping low.

Rusty pulled away and then stood to his feet. He wagged a finger at Jonathan. “You’re getting too good at this game, Hamilton. I’m supposed to win. All the time.”

“I’m learning from the best,” Jonathan served him back. “Now, what did you want to ask Maddox?” He pulled his boyfriend close and gave him a quick kiss. “Since you’re in my good graces,” he added, “I’m sure I can convince him for your sake.”

Yeah, mom was totally on his side. He took a deep breath. “I need your car next Saturday if it’s possible,” he said in one go.

Maddox’s face lit up. “You’re going,” he said with a big smile.

“Where?” Jonathan asked.

“His baby brother’s birthday,” Maddox explained. “He’s turning ten.”

“That’s great,” Jonathan said. “You should lend him the car.”

“Totally. Yeah, you can have the car,” Maddox said and turned toward him. “Have you thought about a present, too?”

Rusty puffed out his chest. “We’re going to dress up as superheroes. And we’re going to get a little of everything a ten-year-old boy could possibly want. Matty and I,” he explained when two pairs of eyes set on him questioningly.

Maddox let out a sound of relief. “Awesome. For a moment, I worried that you’d have me and Jonathan play dress up with you.”

He knew what Maddox meant by that. If he ever needed an ally to confront his dad, Maddox would be game. But he was grateful for having convinced Matty because he wasn’t as aware of his family drama as his best friend was. That meant that he would be able to take things lightly, as a result.

“Matty is a great guy,” Jonathan said. “Wait, you did ask him, right?”

“Yeah, he’s down with it. And it was his idea to google for perfect gifts for boys, and it was also his idea that we can’t go wrong with the superhero stuff. Now, thanks a bunch, Maddie, and I’ll be up in my room, shopping for gifts. Ah, and I’m going to call Matty. Just let him in when he arrives.”

“At this point, you might want to have a key made for him,” Maddox pointed out.

“Would that be all right with you all?” Rusty gestured vaguely, to show that he was including Dex and Kane in that, too.

“I don’t see why not. I suppose he’s going to spend a lot of time around here.”

Rusty raised his hand and Maddox high-fived him, grinning madly. Yeah, they thought they were joking, or that he needed some push, but he could see himself comfortable enough to have Matty become that much of a regular that he really needed a key.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Problem with Cosplaying

Rusty browsed through the many items on display, but each time he was about to press the ‘add to cart’ button, he couldn’t bring himself to do it since there was immediately something else catching his eye. That had been the case yesterday, too, and if he postponed too much, there was a possibility he would end up having all that stuff he wanted to buy for Gabriel delivered to him post factum.

That wouldn’t do, and he had just the best solution for his temporary gift-hunting disability. He grabbed the phone and started smiling even before Matty picked up.

“Hello,” he drawled.

“Rusty, what’s up?” Matty sounded genuinely happy to hear him. During the week, they didn’t see each other much, since they were supposedly both busy studying. He wasn’t, but Matty applied himself, and he had to respect that. “Did you find something for your brother? Don’t forget that I want to contribute.”

“That’s exactly why I’m calling. Let’s go shopping.”

“In the real world, you mean? I thought you wanted to shop online.”

“Nah, that’s like a normie thing,” Rusty justified without thinking twice.

“Normie? Ah, I understand,” Matty replied, and Rusty could tell that the other was smiling even though he couldn’t see his face. “Then let’s go touch grass together.”

Rusty laughed. “Yeah, let’s do that. Are you free today?”

“Sure thing. I’m free right now.”

That was Matty, always ready and available for him. How hadn’t he thought of it until now, how convenient and cool it would be to have a friend that filled all the gaps? No square peg trying to fit through a round hole there. He had to laugh at himself for that. There was nothing square about the Mighty Thor.



“So, what do you think about this?”

“A hoverboard? Aren’t those like last year or something?” Matty asked.

“Hmm,” Rusty mumbled and put the package back on the shelf.

He had insisted that he would pay for everything, but Matty was just as equally insisting that they would split the final bill in half. Still, that made him feel like they were now involved in some responsible shopping, and those two words had no meaning and purpose being next to each other when it came to him.

“What about this?” Matty suggested.

Rusty could feel his eyes lighting up at the sight of that flashy mini-drone. He grabbed it from Matty’s hands and placed it carefully in the cart.

“This also looks interesting,” Matty added as he grabbed another thing. “It’s like some capture the flag game, but he can play it with his friends in the dark.”

Rusty had no idea if Roy was letting his ten-year-old son play with his friends in the backyard and stay up so late, but it was a good idea anyway. Maybe their shared old man was getting softer with age. For Rusty, the only words Roy had ever had were ‘study’ and ‘play basketball’. He was doing one better than the other, but still, he wasn’t good enough.

He shrugged and took the over-the-door compact basket hoop and threw it in. The chances were the kid would love it, and maybe he’d grow up to be a better player than his older brother.

“Laser guns, obviously, right?” Matty continued animatedly.

This was fun, Rusty realized. He could see himself pushing a cart behind Matty while the guy bought half the store, and not only once in a lifetime.

“Rusty?” a familiar voice called for him from behind. “Rusty Parker?”

He turned quickly and faced the owner of the voice. “August?” he asked and blinked as he took her in.

She hadn’t changed much since they had seen last of each other. The same long jet black hair, the same keen scrutinizing eyes, the same leather jacket that made her look like a badass, and that half smile that had used to make him feel so funny on the inside.

She opened her arms wide. “Aren’t you going to give me a hug?”

He moved toward her somewhat reluctantly, and August noticed right away. However, before she got a chance to drop her arms, he swept her into his and forced them both into a pirouette, making her laugh out loud. He only put her down when she smacked his shoulders with her fists, begging him to stop.

“How have you been doing?” *Are you still married to that asshole?*

“Better,” she replied. “Each day is new.”

That didn't answer his unspoken question. He then realized that Matty was only a few feet away. He ran a hand through his hair. "I was shopping for a gift for Gabriel with my friend Matty. Matty, this is August, an old friend."

She didn't seem upset with how he introduced her and offered her hand, her arm extended over the full cart. "Nice to meet you, Matty. I bet the others ran from home just to avoid this, and you were the only victim available."

"No, actually, I was Rusty's first choice," Matty replied. "Nice to meet you, August."

If Matty had been a girl, Rusty would have thought that reply a bit catty, but his very special friend was actually telling the truth, and there was nothing disingenuous in his words.

"Same here," August replied. "Are you a new addition to the Amazing Four?"

"Yes," Rusty said, at the same time as Matty said 'no'. They exchanged a surprised look.

August laughed, breaking the awkward moment.

"Wait," Rusty turned toward her, "how do you even know about the Amazing Four?"

"I intend to take some classes at your college. I know, better late than never and all that. Nothing fancy, I'm not going to go for a PhD or anything crazy." She laughed again, but this time, the laugh was turned inward.

"How come I didn't know that?" Rusty asked.

August leaned slightly toward him and gave him one of those signature looks, the kind that reached inside his heart and grabbed it by the balls. "Maybe because you changed your number." She only allowed a moment for that to sink in, and then added quickly, "So, I happened to start reading your campus publication, what's it called...?"

"Xpress," Matty supplied when Rusty didn't say a word.

She was supposed to remain in the past, wasn't she? And yet, he couldn't help feel happy to see her. At one point in time, she had known him better than anyone else. Even himself.

August threw a cursory look over the contents of the already full shopping cart. "I'll leave you guys to it, then. See you around, Rusty."

He was still stuck in place, looking after her as she disappeared through the aisles.

"She seems nice. Is she from the same town as you and Maddox?"

"No," he replied curtly.

No, she wasn't, but she knew everything about his friends, at least everything he had told her.

Matty was still looking at him, waiting for something more than just that, but Rusty grabbed the first board game that happened to be there and placed it on top of the other things. “This is the last,” he announced.



“I believe we went a little overboard,” Matty commented while he inspected the contents of the large bag for a moment while they were in the backseat of the Uber meant to take them back to the campus.

They had been shopping for gifts for half a day, but Matty could really say, hand on heart, that it had all been time well spent. Now and then, Rusty would remember something his dad had mentioned about Gabriel, or even Gabriel during what seemed to have been only short and far between interactions. It only meant that Rusty truly paid attention, even if he seemed so keen to stay clear of his dad’s other family, at least by how dismissive he tried to sound when mentioning it.

Matty’s heart went out to him. He couldn’t relate, since his parents were not only married to each other, but also each other’s best friends. Although he didn’t know everything going on between them and probably they had their fair share of quarrels here and there, Matty couldn’t imagine a world in which they’d be separated.

“Yeah, but it’s fine,” Rusty said, his head turned, apparently lost in the scenery flying by.

It wasn’t hard to tell that Rusty’s mood change must have happened after meeting that young woman at the store. She was definitely someone Rusty had mixed feelings about, if the way their interaction had gone was any indication. Matty had noticed right away the shared intimacy, that glint in their eyes as they recognized each other. But they hadn’t stayed in touch, so something must have happened.

Was she one of Rusty’s old flames? The king of Sunny Hill was famous for not doing relationships, so that seemed unlikely. But that could very well be an act. What bothered Matty more, although he was trying not to read too much into things, was how she seemed to know Rusty, really know him. Not only because she was obviously aware of who Gabriel and Rusty’s closest friends were, but because of how she had stared at him, with a fond look in her eyes, filled with tenderness and a bit of mockery as if she was a moment away from telling Rusty to drop the act.

She was definitely older than them, maybe not by much, but enough. She had to be twenty-seven or maybe twenty-five, but that difference was enough to make Matty wonder how she had come to know Rusty so well.

“August’s very pretty,” he found himself saying.

A noncommittal grunt from Rusty had to be a sign that it would be better if he dropped it. Too bad he didn't feel like it. "How did you two get to know each other?"

"What do you want to know, Matty?" Rusty asked and finally looked at him.

Matty didn't cower under that hard stare. Supposedly, they were friends, and friends told each other stuff. "Is she an old friend? And how come you guys haven't stayed in touch?"

Rusty was resting his elbow on the door and covering part of his mouth. He stopped looking at Matty. "We fucked once. And we haven't stayed in touch because if I were to do that with everyone I ever hooked up with, I wouldn't have a life."

That was one strange answer. Matty had no idea what to make of it. August must have made Rusty angry with her somehow. He turned to look out the window on his side, too.

Then, a warm hand was on the back of his neck and Rusty pulled him close, at the risk of smashing the full bag of gifts between us. "For the record, you don't count."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Matty asked while Rusty rubbed the crown of his head with a closed fist, so playfully and a contrast with his sour mood from earlier.

"You're not like the rest I mean. I'll always keep in touch with you. So stop pouting."

Matty didn't really have any words left after something like that. Rusty looked ahead for a moment. "Hey, man, don't look for a moment, okay?"

It took Matty a moment to realize Rusty was talking to the driver. The guy just shrugged. "I only have eyes for the road, man. Don't mind me."

And then Rusty kissed him. Not just a peck on the lips, but a full-fledged kiss that left him breathless and reeling with happy dizziness until the car reached their destination.



Matty examined the costume with worried eyes. How come he hadn't thought of it until now? The tight latex was the same color as his cat boy costume, so if he were to dress in it... Damn, he really needed to see if that was true. He had to check himself in the mirror, so, despite having John as his continuous unwanted audience, he proceeded to dress up slowly, under the blanket, in fear of hurting his roommate's sensibilities if he were to prance around in nothing but a pair of tight underwear while trying on a superhero outfit.

"What are you doing?" John asked and moved his eyes slowly from his textbook.

None of your business was the first thing Matty wanted to say, but he had decided that dealing with his obnoxious roommate wouldn't turn him into an annoying asshole, too. "I'm going to this birthday party," he said. "This is a superhero costume," he added.

"I know what it is," John replied, like somehow Matty had just accused him of not knowing the full periodic table by heart.

Matty huffed, finally managing to get the lower part of his body into the jumpsuit. He pushed away the blanket, hoping that the sight of his bare chest wouldn't be too offensive for the douchebag lying in the bed across from his.

He checked the back while putting the rest on. Well, it was different from his cat boy costume, but maybe not different enough. He showed plenty of ass, and his worries didn't seem unfounded at all. With Rusty's powers of observation, the fact that his latex-clad ass would look very much the same as a certain cat boy's could be enough to ruin everything.

A sigh escaped his lips while he adjusted the costume on his shoulders. Only then, he noticed that John was staring at him, jaw slack. "What?" he asked. "It's a kid's birthday. He likes superheroes."

John frowned and got up abruptly. Matty stepped back when John moved closer and began pulling at one of his sleeves.

"What are you doing?" Matty asked, scandalized by how forward his roommate tended to be with him, despite their being almost as good as strangers.

"You must get out of this costume," John said decisively. "It shows off your body."

"John, stop it, dude," Matty protested and removed his arm from the other's grip. "What's wrong with you? And all superheroes show their bodies. It's how it is."

John crossed his arms and pursed his lips. "You are not going to show yours."

"Excuse me? What's wrong with my body?"

John pressed his glasses up his nose and looked Matty up and down. "You look like you're as good as naked," he said with disgust. "A piece of meat."

Matty began rubbing his forehead. Oh, how he longed for the peace he used to have with John away. But that was in the past. "Well, I promise you won't see me again in it," he said brightly, feigning calm, when he felt nothing remotely close.

"You can be sure of that," John said and pursed his lips some more.

Matty shook his head and headed to the bathroom. He should have known it would be a bad idea to change there, but it wasn't like he had many options. Then, he stopped abruptly and turned

toward John. “Is The Implacable Team against wearing superhero costumes, too?” he asked, pretending to be genuinely interested.

John barely spared him a glance. “It’s demeaning. Like that female student dressing up as a cat girl and flaunting her body. Look where that got her.”

“What cat girl?” Matty asked, now even more than willing to hear what was going through his roommate’s head, out of pure repulsed fascination and no other reason.

“The one who got pregnant. She obviously had to drop out. What’s waiting for her in the future?”

“What, I wonder,” Matty said under his breath. “Wait, do you know who she is?”

“Some junior,” John said, waving. “And the man who let himself be enticed by her lewd body, he won’t end up well, either.”

So much insight, Matty thought, feeling like his head would start hurting at any given moment now. “Well, you don’t have to worry that someone might get me pregnant,” he said.

“No, but men will only want you for your body if you go down this path,” John said in the same preaching tone.

Oh-so-good intentions wrapped in toilet paper. Matty shook his head. “There’s nothing wrong with sexual desire,” he said.

John gave him a surprised look and then buried his nose in his textbook. Matty decided that this wasn’t a fight worth fighting. It wasn’t his business at all what his roommate was getting up to.



“And you see, Zoey,” he explained while his bestie was finding a place in her closet for the cat boy costume, “I might get myself in trouble if Rusty gets the chance to stare at my ass while I’m dressed like that.”

“Well,” Zoey said as she closed the closet door with a satisfied smile, “you only have to face him all the time.”

“Really, that’s your solution?” Matty rolled his eyes.

“You could wear a cape,” Zoey suggested.

“Nightwing doesn’t wear a cape. Actually, that’s a pretty big thing for him, not wearing a cape and all that.”

“For real? I don’t keep up with superheroes’ pet peeves these days,” Zoey said.

“I don’t, either, but I had to get informed because I think Rusty would care if I didn’t get properly into character.”

“Nothing but the best for your Rusty.” Zoey giggled and plopped down on the bed by his side. “You should have a plan B, Matty. How about you dress as someone else?”

“He’ll be disappointed.”

“It means that you need to choose which one’s the lesser evil.”

Zoey had a point. There was still time until Saturday, and he needed to find a solution until then. “You’re right,” he admitted. “I’ll think about it. By the way, my roommate really hates how I look dressed up as a superhero.”

“I bet he hates fun, glitter, and having a life, too,” Zoey replied with a snort. “Anyway, it’s not his business.”

“He gives me the willies a bit, you know,” Matty continued. “He told me I looked like a piece of meat, and offered me the cautionary tale of the cat girl who got pregnant.”

Zoey shook her head. “He’s talking a lot of smack, this roommate of yours. He might give you the willies, but I bet you’re giving him a hard willie.”

“Yeah, right. I doubt he has one, to start with.”

“Nah, you’re wrong, Matty, my man. It looks to me like he wants nothing more than to go through great pains and tribulations to save you from the fate of the pregnant cat girl.”

Matty shrugged. “Well, I’m not going to become his little ‘playing the savior’ project. And I’m not usually the type to complain, but he’s getting up in my business a lot more than he should. I’m not sure what to do about him.”

“You could plant your foot in his ass. Who knows? He might discover something about himself. Just be prepared to deal with Mr. Douchey’s face in the throes of ecstasy.”

“I can barely deal with you presenting such an unlikely scenario. But, seriously, my parents haven’t taught me how to deal with people who are this rude.”

“That’s because they’re too polite and passed it on to you. Fight fire with fire, Matty, is what I’m saying. And if you find yourself in some moral quandary about how to push back without hurting Mr. Douchey’s feelings, you can always count on me. I’ll put him in his place.”

“I’ll hold you to it, Zoey. By the way, what’s The Implacable Team’s plan these days?”

“They’re suspiciously silent. It looks to me like they’re in their recruitment period, just spreading the word and all that. But leave it to me. I’m going to find out when they’re going to move

against our dear king. I know! We could be the kingsguard, Matty. See, I'm already finding solutions. And you could wear a white cape."

"I'll keep that in mind," Matty said. "Or, if Rusty notices my ass too much, I'm just going to deny everything. I'm not very keen on disappointing him, given the big occasion and all that."

Zoey nodded like a wise old man and caressed an invisible beard. "I see. When truth comes biting you on the ass, just opt for playing the smartass. It might help you."

That advice was as good as any. Matty stored it away for future reference.



Rusty leafed through the pages of the textbook without really reading the words. August coming to Sunny Hill was a thing. He didn't know if he could define it as being a big thing or not, but it was a thing. Just seeing her face was enough to pull him back to those times when happiness equaled that strange frisson of hiding and evading.

"Hey." Maddox's voice interrupted his train of thought.

"What?" He stared at his bestie over the table.

"Are you studying, or do you simply enjoy torturing me by flipping those pages back and forth?"

"You wanted me to sit down here with you and make an attempt at studying," Rusty accused him openly.

Maddox leaned back in his chair and observed him. "Problems in paradise?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Rusty bristled and tried to read the first sentence on the page. Nah, it made no sense. It didn't explain to him why he felt so messed up by seeing August again, after so much time had passed.

"Are you and Matty fighting?" Maddox asked, with a small, all-knowing smile.

"Matty and I are best friends. You know how we never fight?" He pointed between Maddox and him.

"What are you talking about? I always fight you when I'm trying to get you to study."

"Besides that. And Matty knows what to do about that. He has that wooden ruler."

Maddox grinned. "I see. Don't tell me you're sulking because he hasn't used it on your ass lately."

“Now that you’re mentioning it, yeah, he hasn’t,” Rusty said, happy to steer the conversation toward any other topic than the real one, which he had no idea how to approach anyway.

“So, it’s not Matty. Why are you fighting with the textbook?” Maddox pointed at the thing in front of him.

Rusty pushed himself away from the table and stretched, while wincing and making faces. Maddox didn’t know about August. No one else did. Matty knew now, only he didn’t know much. Still, it had been such a long time ago, and if he wanted to convince himself that it was all in the past, he had to treat that thing like it didn’t matter.

“I slept with a married chick,” he said.

Maddox’s eyes grew wide. “The fuck, dude? And I thought you were kind of exclusive with Matty these days.”

Rusty waved impatiently. “Not now. Like five years ago.”

Maddox blinked slowly while he did the math. “For real? When we were still in high school? You dog.”

“Yeah, yeah, you know me. I couldn’t keep it in my pants for like five seconds back then.”

“Not that much has changed since that time,” Maddox said as if he were spouting some philosophical truth that couldn’t be denied.

“Yeah, but that’s not the point.”

“You’ve never said anything about it. Was it like a one-time-thing? The kind that made you feel all slimy and full of regret in the morning?”

Maddox was pulling his leg, but he was also fishing for info. Rusty decided that it was as good a moment as any to fess up. “Nah, it went on for a while. I thought I was in love with her.”

“Where was I when all of this was happening?”

“During that summer when I went away to work at that resort,” Rusty said. “That was a lie.”

“I thought you were embellishing your stint at The Royal Sinkhole, or whatever name you invented for that place. But I didn’t want to hurt your feelings. What did you do that summer, Rusty?”

“It all started on a night, outside a bar, where I went to drink with a fake ID.”

“Come on, asshole, tone it down,” Maddox said and smirked.

Rusty had to give it to his bestie. He could smell bullshit from a mile away. “Okay, okay, I’ll try sticking to the truth.”

“Try harder,” Maddox suggested.

“The thing is, I was in front of this store that sold booze. And, of course, I wanted a beer, but it wasn’t like I had money for one anyway.”

“Besides the fact that you were underage and couldn’t even buy any if you had money.”

“That too,” Rusty conceded. “Anyway, here comes this chick, walking out of the store, swinging a six-pack in her right hand and a motorcycle helmet in the other.”

“Motorcycle helmet? Is this part of your imagining things that weren’t there or--”

“Totally true. And she sees me eyeing her like a thirsty little punk, and she just asks me ‘want one?’ and of course, I said ‘hell yeah’ ‘cause you don’t say ‘no’ to chicks in leather offering you free beer.”

“Did you let her pop your cherry for a beer?” Maddox asked, shaking his head.

“I wasn’t a virgin anymore by that time,” Rusty reminded him. “But it wasn’t like that. We drank the whole pack together, sitting on the pavement at the back of the store, shooting the breeze, telling each other our life’s story.”

“Did she then get on her bike after drinking a few?” Maddox asked.

“Let’s say that August’s not crazy about playing safe as a general rule,” Rusty said. “And I still think she let me drink most of it, and she only had like one. Thing is, she asked me for my number, and I gave it to her. Next time, we met at a bar, where she sort of vouched for me. She got all the goods for vodka and tequila shots, not a beer. Really, Maddie, only you’d think I’m that easy.”

“You slept with her while being dead drunk?”

“I think I sobered up at one point. Anyway, I spent that summer with her.”

“Where was her husband?”

“Away. The type who goes and works his ass off for months on end.” *And then comes home and beats the crap out of his wife.*

Maddie didn’t have to know everything.

“Wow. So you basically lived with her all the time? Day in, day out?”

“Yeah. At that time, it was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“What happened?”

Rusty shrugged. “Summer ended. I had to go back to school. Her husband came back. You know, the shitty hands we’re dealt.”

He got up and walked over to the fridge. “Want a beer, Maddie?”

“Why not? Your story is making me want one. Now, spill it.”

“What exactly? I’m not going to spill perfectly good beer,” Rusty said.

Maddox leaned over the table to look at him. “Why are you thinking of her – August, right? – now of all times?”

“She’s here,” Rusty said. “She’s going to take some courses, she says.”

“I see. And? Did you feel some flame rekindling in your cold little heart?” Maddox teased him, still needling him for information.

“Nah,” Rusty denied.

What he felt wasn’t that. He could play it simple and say it was the opposite, because of how they had parted ways that time, and how angry he had been at her. How many times hadn’t she tried to get in touch with him? A lot, until he just changed his number. He had promised himself that he would never see her again, but it looked like it wasn’t up to him, and good ol’ fate had different plans. She reminded him so much of those times when he had thought himself capable of being someone else, someone better, as if he were trying a costume on for size.

“It’s just weird, seeing her after so many years, is all,” he added, as Maddox still pinned him down with an inquisitive stare.

He grabbed his textbook and this time began reading for real. It felt good talking about it, even if he didn’t get into the nitty-gritty of what that summer had meant for him. It looked like Maddox didn’t care about insisting either. And that was good.



Rusty had told him that they would have to leave before noon, so Matty enjoyed the late morning sleep. He woke up at the sound of something that appeared to be... some kind of ripping?

Startled enough, he got up and looked around. When his eyes fell on his roommate, who was getting busy with a pair of scissors, he felt his hackles rising.

Right there, in John’s lap, was his Nightwing costume. And it was getting ripped to shreds with the angry precision of a dog left home alone for too long.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” he bellowed so loudly that John dropped his scissors and his glasses slid down his nose.

Matty jumped from the bed and grabbed the poor thing from John’s hands. It was utterly destroyed. There were holes everywhere, and one leg was holding on for dear life by just a thread. The outrage was so overwhelming that he felt like he was choking.

“You can’t dress up like this and go out,” John said, but his voice didn’t sound sure and stern like before.

Matty blinked hard a few times. His first impulse was to grab John’s textbooks and throw them out the window as payback, but he couldn’t do that. However, he dropped the destroyed costume to the floor and walked over to his roommate, forcing him to climb on the bed and pull back in fear.

He ignored all that and grabbed John by the front of his shirt, bringing their faces close. “Now listen here, you little shit, if you ever dare to pull another stunt like this, I’ll cut the bottom out of all your pants and underwear and I’ll make you walk all over the campus so that everyone can stare at your bare ass. Do you fucking hear me?” He shook the guy a few times to make himself understood.

John gulped and stared, incapable of saying a word.

“Do you?” Matty shook him again.

John managed to nod.

Matty pushed him back. Damn. Plan B it had to be. He turned toward his roommate brusquely, making him jump and squeal.

And stare at him with moist eyes and parted lips, as if he had just seen a demon ready to devour him. But not necessarily as if that was a bad thing.

Matty shook his head. Zoey was getting to him with her weird assumptions. John was, simply, just a huge scumbag.

Chapter Twenty-Five

How Many Kids Does Rusty Parker Have?

Guys and gals of Sunny Hill, did you know that while you were getting ready for your end of the week smash or pass, your beloved king was doing nothing of the kind? Or the usual, we dare to add.

The regular royal haunts miss Rusty Parker these days. And there's an explanation for it. Because the king of Sunny Hill spends his now-a-days being a doting father. We have an enigma to solve, and anyone who knows the answer is eagerly invited to step up and grab the mike. Here's the case at hand.

Sexually-accomplished Mr. Parker was spotted shopping for toys at one of the local stores. Yes, you heard us. And they weren't the crib toy type, either! No, obviously, the selection picked from thousands of products was very much intended for a much older kid than one who'd still need his or her pacifier.

Color us shocked. Does this mean that our king has sowed his wild oats more than once, while inconveniently forgetting about the basic use of a French letter? My, my, the quest to identify the heir apparent announces itself as a complicated issue. We'll be on it, and that's a promise.



Rusty munched on his lower lip, not knowing whether to laugh or get pissed at Xpress' latest account of his so-called family life. If he needed any proof that those idiots were talking out of their asses, it was right in front of him. Let them gossip all they wanted; it wasn't like anyone could make them shut their pieholes, so the best thing to do was to ignore them. Plus, all that shit kept him relevant in the weirdest of ways. What other student could brag about being a father of at least two kids? This also justified why he wasn't hooking up like he used to, another thing that Xpress had lunged at like a stray dog at a bone.

And that meant, very conveniently, that no one was looking into the budding bromance developing between him and Matty. Sure thing, there was not much romance in that bromance, but he liked that word and had always wanted to try it for himself. Too bad Maddox, during the times when he had still thought himself straight and had been Jonathan-less, had never played into the enticing traps he had laid out. He had had more success with Dex, who was as straight as they came and didn't give a shit about gossip since he knew he only had to stare at anyone yapping their mouths and make them shit their pants.

Hmm, could that mean that Maddox just didn't find him attractive as a dude? That would be a bummer, and he would have to ask. Because Maddox was now gay, and Matty was also gay, and if he, Rusty, didn't have something essential that gay dudes liked, he was in big trouble.

He put his phone back into his pocket and leaned against the car. He had a lot more pressing matters to mull over, such as impressing a ten-year-old so much that some of all that impressioning would seep into the powers that be, with the result of Roy Parker giving his eldest a break for a change.

Matty hurried out of the dorm, but he wasn't wearing his superhero costume just yet, something that Rusty was willing to overlook since the guy could change once they reached their destination.

However, he thought as his eyes narrowed of their own accord, Matty did look like he was wearing a costume of sorts. His hair was brushed neatly, parted on one side, and those weren't his usual glasses. Also, he wore a very nerdy costume that somehow made him look very sexy in, well, a very nerdy way. The initial irritation was replaced quickly by something a lot more irresistible.

Matty was hot, while wearing the nerdiest clothes in existence, but in a fashionable way. What he also wore was a guilty apologetic expression on his cute face, and Rusty forgot why that was there.

"Rusty, I'm so, so sorry," Matty hurried to say. "Apparently, I'm sharing a room with a complete idiot. He tore through my Nightwing costume as if it had killed his dear mother. And this is all I could come up with in such short notice."

Rusty grinned and pulled Matty close, resisting the impulse to kiss him then and there with much difficulty, in broad daylight, with Xpress and its minions lurking about, or ruffle the hair that he had so neatly and probably painstakingly arranged in Superman's alter ego's fashion. "Don't tell me you woke up like this," he joked.

By how Matty shivered and looked away, he wasn't the only one having a small embarrassing moment by pitching a tent at inappropriate times. Since he was wearing his superhero costume, that would be hard to hide, pun intended. Matty, the way he looked in his costume of choice, had better means of concealment, and yet, Rusty was dying to check.

He shook his head. This particular Clark Kent wannabe was so going to be ravished later. "Wait," the info Matty had just delivered caught up with him, "that roommate of yours destroyed your Nightwing costume?"

"What I said," Matty confirmed. "Let's go and forget about idiots. And don't worry," he said, his hand already on the car door, "I gave him a shaking he won't soon forget."

Rusty grinned. Matty on a warpath? He would have to place a special request for that to happen when he had time to admire the guy at leisure and observe him from all angles.



He felt relieved. Rusty hadn't looked disappointed in his last-minute change of costume, but now, his handsome face had acquired a somber look as the car rolled smoothly on the interstate.

"Tell me about your siblings," he said, wanting to break the silence.

Rusty shrugged and his frown deepened. Maybe that choice of topic wasn't that inspired, after all. "They're kids. Like light years away from everything I know."

"But I think you're a lot like a kid," Matty joked.

That earned him the usual signature smirk that flashed for a moment on Rusty's lips. "I suppose I can fake it for one lousy afternoon."

What was with that self-deprecating tone? Was it really that? Or Rusty was only attending his brother's birthday party out of obligation? No one bought a bag of toys to rival Santa's just out of obligation.

"I bet your brother's going to be over the moon when he sees you. Did you let them know we're on our way?"

"Nah. Mr. Parker expects me to play nice as long as he pays for my education. A lot of good that is doing me," Rusty added under his breath.

"Have you thought about what you'd like to do after we finish college?" Matty maneuvered the conversation slightly away from the touchy topic of family.

"Not really. I'm not the kind to get stuck in some corporate job, running up and down ladders while kissing ass. Not that there's anything wrong with that," Rusty said. "Just in case you want to become a little mouse in the rat race."

"A little mouse?" Matty smirked and crossed his arms, giving Rusty a confident look. "You're underestimating me."

"Yeah." Rusty laughed, and while it wasn't his full laughter that could be heard from the other end of the campus, he was getting warmer. That was enough for a win, in Matty's book. "I guess I shouldn't. What are you going to become, professionally wise, Mr. Han?"

"I'll work my way from the ground up. I'm not the kind to be that much into marketing, but product design might be my thing," Matty explained. He suspected that Rusty wasn't that interested in his post-college plans, but it was only polite to offer a reply.

Rusty gave him an encouraging smile. “You’re a bit of a brainiac. Are you going to use your powers for good?”

Matty pointed at his disguise. “Doesn’t my costume tell you that already?”

“Good point.”

The conversation stalled again. Matty wanted to ask a million questions, but he didn’t want to blunder into any touchy topics once more.

“Are you worried that I might become a bum on the streets?” Rusty asked suddenly.

“It hadn’t crossed my mind.”

“You don’t have to worry. If nothing comes through, I’ll just become a busker.”

“I see. You could be an actor,” Matty said. “It’s clear that you can slip into any costume you want with ease.”

Rusty quirked an eyebrow and then groaned for show. “Stop talking dirty, Matty boy. The only costume I want to slip in right now is yours, and it’s really not the time, nor the place.”

That was enough to give Matty pause. For the remainder of their trip, he chose silence, and it no longer bothered him. The thought that Rusty wanted him, even while dressed in a nerdy suit, was enough to keep him company.



He had been there several times, and each of those times, his only thought had been to get out as fast as he could. This house looked so well-maintained compared to the unkempt sorry state of affairs of his mom’s property. Sure, if he put his mind to it, he could whip the place into shape, but after trying that twice or thrice, when he had still been a kid, he had given up. His mom just didn’t care.

It was time to get this over with. He climbed out of the car and waited for Matty to do the same, before going to grab the big bag of toys from the trunk.

“Rusty, Rusty, Rusty, Rusty,” someone shouted and rolled out the front door like a force of nature.

He turned and received his baby brother’s blunt force right in the ribs. The little one didn’t know how hard his melon was. He quickly grabbed Gabriel and threw him up in the air once. That was the kind of thing the boy used to like.

When he was five. Or seven? However, he didn’t appear to protest too much as Rusty made him straddle his shoulders. Matty hurried to grab the toy bag and followed quickly.

“I am not Rusty,” he announced in a thunderous voice, “I am Hawkeye!”

“You’re totally Rusty,” Gabriel said promptly, showing that he didn’t intend to be fooled by the cosplay thing. “But who’s he?”

“Don’t you know? Kids these days,” Rusty let out a sigh. “That’s Clark Kent.”

“No, he’s not,” Gabriel contradicted him again while swinging his legs from overwhelming excitement without realizing that he was kicking his brother in the ribs again, but from another angle.

“Yeah, you’re right. This is Matty, my friend,” he explained. How fast they grew up, right?

“No,” Gabriel protested once more, even more vivaciously, “he’s Superman!”

That was probably a ten-year-old’s logic. And it meant that Matty was rocking his cosplay as he should without even trying. No wonder he was such an accomplished student.

They were at the door, and his dad was blocking the entrance. His face was unreadable as his eyes set on Rusty. “You’re here. Good. Get inside.”

“Dad, Rusty brought Superman with him!” Gabriel shouted.

When had been the last time he had seen Roy Parker smile like that? Rusty was tempted to say ‘never’, but it wasn’t true. His dad opened his arms wide and took Gabriel from his brother’s shoulders to get him down. “I hope Superman’s going to like the cake,” he said.

“Hello, Mr. Parker,” Matty said politely.

“This is Matthew – Matty, my friend,” Rusty explained while Roy held Gabriel with one hand and extended his other. “He has like the second-best GPA score in the whole school.” He had no idea why he was saying things like that. As if he wanted to impress his dad with another guy’s accomplishments.

“Who’s first?” Roy inquired, in his usual fashion, while shaking Matty’s hand.

“Maddox’s fiancé,” Rusty said promptly. He had mentioned that before.

Roy’s lips pursed for a moment, but then it looked like he forgot to be pissed about the ‘homosexual boy’ as Maddox had been reduced to ever since Rusty had told his dad about his friend’s choice in a better half.

“Come inside, boys. Anna will love to see you two, all dressed up like this.”

Curiously, there wasn’t a hint of disdain in those words. Rusty looked around for his little sister. Unlike Gabriel, Anna was a lot more composed, and even at eight years of age she liked to be

considered a little lady. Apparently, from what Roy had said about her, she was a prodigy, reaching for the higher shelves of the bookcase already. Reading books she probably not entirely understood, had to be having an impact on her recent development.

She wore a pretty dress, but not the usual frills kids her age seemed to become victims of at the whim of their parents. Her hair was combed neatly, but all the pretense of being a little lady was gone as soon as she saw him. Her eyes grew wide and her mouth turned into an amazed and genuine 'o'. "You're a superhero!" she exclaimed. She probably couldn't name which one he tried to pass as, but she knew what he was aiming at.

He opened his arms and she rushed to him. Gabriel showed his admiration and love by kicking him in the ribs. Anna was a different breed; she kissed him on the cheek and held him by the neck, wrapping her skinny arms tightly around it, probably aware that she was a bit too high from the ground.

"Rusty, come, come," Gabriel said impatiently and began dragging him by his free hand, as he had gotten down from his dad's arms somehow. "Let's meet everyone!"



Matty lingered a bit back, as he enjoyed watching Rusty with his siblings, who were obviously mad about him, superhero costume or not. Then, he noticed that Mr. Parker was looking at him. He offered the bag of toys. "This is Gabriel's present," he said.

The man nodded shortly. Matty realized he was being weighed and measured but had no idea to what end.

"What is a smart kid like you doing with my Rusty?"

The voice was gruff, the choice of words strange, but Matty thought he could read something more into it. Maybe it was better if he kept things simple. Somehow, he doubted that telling Mr. Parker something along the lines of he and Rusty being special friends would sit well with the man. Plus, that wasn't the kind of thing one told parents.

They were hiding, he realized at that very moment. Not that he didn't know it, but it made him a tad sad to realize that their relationship was too complicated to be exposed to sunlight too much.

"Rusty's awesome," Matty offered. "We get along great." He paused, not knowing what else to add. "I'm tutoring him," he added quickly.

That seemed to please the older Mr. Parker. "I see. That means that I can entertain hopes he'll graduate, right?" The question sounded lighter than the previous interrogation, but Matty didn't want to make the mistake of believing that Rusty's dad was capable of joking about serious stuff.

"He will, sir," he said with conviction and using his most tutor-like voice.

Mr. Parker patted him on the back and took the bag from him. “It looks like there’s more than just one present in there.”

“We might have overdone it a bit.”

“It’s all right. Kids deserved to be spoiled on their birthdays.”

Matty felt Mr. Parker’s hand on his shoulder, heavy and warm, and he wondered when the last time was Rusty had been spoiled on his birthday by his father.



Rusty looked around, completely satisfied. All the kids were tired by now and had been carried off one by one by their parents. He had almost run out of ideas. What a crowd. Not a tough one, but actually the kind who asked for encore after encore. But in the end, he was the last man standing.

Even Gabriel’s head lolled on his mom’s shoulder and only power of will still kept his eyes open and set on Rusty. There was so much admiration in them that he had no idea what to do with it.

If anyone asked if he wanted kids, he’d say what any other college student would say. A big fat no. But there were rewards in having some mini-selves around, so much in awe of you. He had to admit that.

“I’ll take you to bed,” Gabriel’s mom said firmly.

Gabriel looked like he wanted to protest, but Roy made a small gesture, and the kid got the message. “Say goodbye to your brother and his friend.”

Gabriel mumbled, his eyes dropping, “That’s not his friend, that’s Superman.”

The adults laughed a bit. Rusty let his brother hug him for a while. That bag of toys had sealed the deal. He was, officially, even if on this day only, the best big bro in the universe. He also had to thank Matty for all the help. Mr. Clark Kent had been throughout his number one fan, igniting the audience during each number Rusty had come up with. That counted as loyalty.

“Thank you for coming, Rusty,” Gabriel’s mom said as she took Gabriel’s hand.

“No problem,” he said and almost believed it.

He was alone with Roy and Matty now. Why did it look like a Mexican standoff? He was getting kind of used to this stuff lately.

“Matthew here tells me he’s tutoring you,” Roy said.

“Yeah. He’s a good teacher.”

“Good, that’s good. I should let you boys hit the road then.”

Another short conversation, in the unmistakable Roy Parker brand of short conversations. Damn, it wasn’t like he was expecting thanks, but still. He got to his feet. He was beat after entertaining a bunch of kids for hours. If Matty hadn’t been there, maybe he would have been in the mood to fight a little just for the sake of it, but he could drop it for once.

For any onlooker, there was no reason for him to fight with his dad. But that was only because strangers didn’t know what lurked under the surface. He and his dad, they didn’t even have to make an effort to find something to disagree about.

“Is there anything you want to tell me, son?”

The question took him by surprise. Matty had excused himself to use the bathroom before they got into the car and on their way back home, so he was alone with dear ol’ dad.

“Nope. I’m good,” he said.

“What’s this story about you having a kid?”

That was the last thing he’d expected his dad to bring up. “What?” he asked, too dumbfounded to even understand what Roy was asking.

“I was curious about what kind of hiring opportunities your college offers after graduating, and there’s this site where they report everything you do in that campus of yours.”

“Do you read Xpress? I thought you weren’t into gossip rags.”

“It’s not called Xpress. And it doesn’t seem to be a gossip rag. It’s something,” Roy seemed to make an effort to remember, “about their calling themselves a college team? I think. But it appears to be respectable, the opposite of a gossip rag.”

Rusty smacked his forehead. “Fuck my life,” he moaned, “for real?”

“Language, son,” Roy said sternly. “When were you going to tell me you fathered a child?”

“I haven’t fathered any child,” Rusty said.

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been surer of anything more.”

Roy examined his face. “Do you always use protection?”

“It’s a bit too late for the two of us to have this conversation. Yeah, dad, I always use protection.”

That seemed to convince the man. Half-convince him, at least. But then, he had to wag the finger at him, of course. “If you ever do such a thing, do right by the girl.”

“Thanks for the advice,” Rusty said, pouring as much vinegar as he could over those words.

“Don’t play the smartass. It makes you a dumbass.”

Rusty bit his lower lip to stop the comeback that was creeping up his throat, ready to shoot. Better not cause a big scene, when everything had worked out so great. “Stop reading whatever S.H.I.T. thinks it has to say about me.”

“I told you to watch that language,” Roy warned.

“That’s not on me, it’s on them. That’s what they’re called. The Sunny Hill Implacable Team. I bet it’s their little publication you’ve been reading.”

His dad stared at him nonplussed. Then, he took out his phone and frowned as he convinced himself of what Rusty was telling him. Then, he shook his head, disgusted. “You kids today. You go to any length to, what’s that word, troll?”

“Yeah, you got that right,” Rusty said. “But these aren’t trolls. They’re not living under a bridge. They try fucking with me in broad daylight.”

His dad sighed but didn’t get another chance to correct his language again. Matty was back, and they could hit the road.

So, S.H.I.T. really thought themselves to be ‘the shit’. And their idiocies were more dangerous compared to Xpress, because, apparently, parents thought they looked respectable.

And now they even had their own little online media outlet. Go figure.



Matty listened closely to Rusty ranting about Connor and his new following, while the evening was setting in fast. “I can’t believe they just took some piece of gossip from Xpress and talked about it at large,” he said, as he browsed through the new campus publication on his phone.

“Yeah, I thought they were just some fuckers with no lives, but it looks like that only motivates them to go after other people’s lives,” Rusty said with rancor. “The last thing I needed was to have my dad scold me for irresponsibly making him into a granddad.”

Matty didn’t comment on how much Rusty looked like he cared about what his dad thought. From his point of view, it was also interesting that Mr. Parker took such close interest in his eldest son.

“Read,” Rusty demanded. “I want to hear what those fuckers have to say about me.”

“Is that a good idea? They’re just idiots,” Matty said, trying to downplay Rusty’s reason to be angry at Connor’s little organization.

“No. I was just doing something good and--” Rusty stopped abruptly. “Please, Matty, read.”

“Only if you promise that we won’t end up in a ditch,” Matty replied while keeping his phone close to his chest.

“Maddox would have my ass if I return this baby with as little as a scratch on it. Spoiler alert. I don’t want Maddox to have my ass.”

Joking was a good way to diffuse the tension. “Who do you want to have your ass, then?”

Rusty snorted. “Isn’t it obvious? You, of course. Just read. I have a thirst in me to be righteously pissed.”

Matty stared at the handsome profile. What had Rusty meant by that? He shook his head to pull himself out of whatever fantasies his mind was capable of conjuring based on those three words alone.

He cleared his throat and began. The title was enough to make him roll his eyes.



About Collective Responsibility And How Individuals Can Contribute To The Greater Good

For too long, campus life has equated with pursuing a type of living that has nothing in common with academic endeavors. We strongly believe in collective responsibility, which is why we bring forth one of the most troubling developments faced by one of our students. Rusty Parker, celebrated as he continues to be some sort of poster boy for our college, is said to have recently behaved in a manner we can only describe as beyond reprehensible.

Getting into sordid details is not our modus operandi. There are others who take care of that, much to our chagrin. But the truth remains: Rusty Parker and one female student that shall remain unnamed will be parents, not because they made a responsible decision, but because they played too close to the fire.

Who is guilty for the new life that will be brought into the world by young people who are not even capable of looking after themselves? First of all, the would-be parents, you will feel tempted to say.

But we’re not here to play righteous and point fingers. No, far from it. We’ve started our organization and our publication to elevate and help the student

population here at Sunny Hill. What happens within the borders of our campus is our collective responsibility.

It is our role, our duty, to help those of us who make mistakes. So, using this particular case as an example, this is our call to arms. Let's help Rusty Parker. Let's make him understand why becoming a father, while being so obviously unprepared, will have an impact on the new life that will soon be brought into this world, and not a positive one. How you decide to do that is up to you.

We're a community, Sunny Hill. We can be better. And we will. We trust in ourselves.



“Fuck me sideways,” Rusty groaned.

Matty pondered and looked over the text again. No wonder John thought it was perfectly okay for him to grab other people’s things and destroy them. The idiot thought he was helping, and it was Connor Williams who was putting ideas of that nature in his head and not only.

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to prepare for all the help you’re going to get.”

“This Implacable Team is starting to get on my nerves.” Rusty munched on his lower lip, and he looked pissed, but he wasn’t tearing his eyes off the road, which was a good thing.

“Don’t let it ruin your day,” Matty suggested. “Gabriel loves you to bits, and I bet all his friends are going to say that his birthday party was the best they’ve ever gone to. For at least three days,” he added with a smile.

“Yeah,” Rusty admitted.

“Your brother admires you. Do you visit them often?”

“Once in a blue moon or so. Less if I can help it.” Rusty shrugged, but Matty could tell that his very special friend wasn’t completely comfortable with that particular choice of his. “It makes you wonder why the hell he holds me in such high esteem, right?”

“No, it doesn’t,” Matty contradicted him. “You make an impression everywhere you go. And I guess that Gabriel is at that age when having a brother in college makes him the coolest kid on the block.”

“Maybe,” Rusty agreed half-heartedly.

There was a lot lurking under the surface. Matty could tell, but he couldn’t say that he understood everything. “And your sister grabbed your arm and didn’t let go for hours. She’s a

stubborn one. I've never seen so many young kids getting the boot while trying to get close to someone. She's fierce, I have to say. I wish I had siblings."

Rusty turned his head slightly to give him a half-crooked smile. "I'd say that it's not all that it's cracked up to be, but I'd sound like an asshole. They're great kids. It's not their fault their dad is an asshole."

Matty hesitated. He wanted to learn more about Roy Parker, but he wasn't sure that he wouldn't sour the mood even further.

"You should have heard his reaction when I told him that Maddox's totally gay now." Rusty smirked. It looked like he liked getting on his dad's nerves as often as he could.

"Is he a homophobe?" Matty asked and frowned.

Rusty shook his head. "Not in the way that he'd burn people at the stake or something. But you know, it's like he thinks it's such a disappointing thing for a parent to discover that their kid is gay. He even said that to me. He said that Maddox's parents must be so disappointed right now. Flash news. They're not."

"Did you tell him that?"

"Of course. He didn't have a comeback to that. Not really. He just said something about the Kingsleys having plenty of children to give them grandchildren anyway."

"He does sound a bit like an asshole," Matty admitted.

"Just a bit?" Rusty snorted. "If a guy doesn't excel at something, it's like he's worthless in his eyes."

"Is that why you're the king of Sunny Hill?"

"What?"

Matty looked away. The question had come to him unbidden, like it was a logical conclusion that Rusty was trying to impress his dad in his own way.

"How about we get something to eat? There's a place halfway home. I'm buying, obviously," Rusty said quickly as if he wanted to change the subject.

"Can you still eat after all that?" Matty asked.

"No. But I just want us to enjoy a little break from driving before heading home."

"Why?"

Rusty grinned and winked at him. “I was today years old,” he said in a silly robotic voice, “when I found out that I have a deep need to ravish a Clark Kent cosplayer.”

Matty stared for a moment. Then he blinked. “For real?”

The look Rusty gave him left no room for guessing.

“Should we find a comic con in the area then?” Matty teased.

Rusty laughed, tipping his head back briefly and looking his usual carefree self. “No need for that. I have the cosplay winner riding shotgun with me.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

It's Because of You

It appeared that it wasn't the diner Rusty was interested in, but rather the dark forest rising behind it, which provided plenty of cover at that hour. Matty didn't protest in the slightest as he was pushed with his back against a tree, and a hot mouth was on him, demanding and seductive at the same time.

Rusty Parker could be many things, indeed. But what he was, without the shadow of a doubt, didn't have anything to do with possibilities. King of Sunny Hill or not, he was the guy who had Matty's heart. That became more and more painfully clear as their relationship continued. It was as if they were navigating through muddy waters on a stormy night during moments like these, when their bodies got so close and offered a lot more honesty than their mouths could.

Not that Rusty wasn't honest, Matty thought. He alone was the guy with a hidden agenda. Even more mind-boggling was that he couldn't bring himself to feel guilty or sorry for it. The entire ruse he had worked on, playing the role of Slick Coolplums included, had brought him here, flush against the hard bark of a tall tree, the only silent witness to whatever it was that they were doing.

Rusty had promised a ravishing. Matty could tell that his glasses stood crooked on his nose now, but his hands had been pinned above his head so he couldn't straighten them up or take them off. And stopping what was happening because of a pair of crooked glasses seemed terribly unnecessary at this point.

He fought to keep his voice down when Rusty released his mouth and moved to torturing his neck, making a meal out of each inch of his skin. How could he even think to live without this? Rusty was sucking his neck playfully, only to lick the tortured skin next. There would be a lot of hickeys the next day, but, since it was clearly a way to mark ownership, Matty couldn't give a damn.

"Fuck," Rusty muttered and pressed their foreheads together for a while. "Should I stop before we go too far?"

Was it truly an option? To stop? Matty didn't believe it so, but, at the same time, as the more practical part of his mind kicked into gear, he realized that they were hardly in the best place to go as crazy as they wanted. Case in point, Rusty couldn't ravish him as Matty wished to be ravished, and that wasn't an alternative to opt for.

Half-ravishing just wouldn't do.

“Your room?” Matty asked, while other thoughts floated to the surface, their roots like seaweed. “And maybe I can raise some of my own to your... intentions?”

Rusty laughed, low in his chest, making a sound that both tickled and excited Matty’s hearing, while reverberating through him like a low-key earthquake. “What do you mean by that?”

“You’ll see,” Matty replied after a short moment of hesitation. He didn’t want to let his intentions be known until he had brought Rusty where he wanted him, preferably close to the point of no return, when saying ‘no’ wouldn’t be possible, simply because the usual defenses would be dropped.

Rusty couldn’t know what kind of things he was thinking about. He had a dirty mind, for sure. As long as they took it as a joke, he could push forward and hope that the kinky part of Rusty, the one that wanted to experiment with everything and grab life with both hands to enjoy it to the fullest, would be onboard with everything he wanted to do.

Ravishing a superhero was on today’s list, indeed, and Rusty didn’t have to suspect that it was actually his ass on the line, so to speak. Matty could only wish that Rusty wouldn’t find the tiniest fault with his plan.



There had to be something on Matty’s mind since he had preferred to stop their little make out session in the woods, but Rusty was in favor of being patient for once. On their way back, he had focused on driving, impatient to get back to his room, where Matty had promised... that was unclear, what he had promised. But he could feel his excitement growing, and it wasn’t only related to what was happening between his legs.

No, it carried a little more weight and went a little deeper than his usual interactions with other human beings when getting close to playing the horizontal cha-cha.

The rest of the guys were already asleep when they got home, so the only thing they had to do to avoid getting noticed was to tiptoe upstairs. Matty took the lead, being the first to walk into the room and throw himself on the bed.

Oh, fuck, Rusty thought, and his best friend since forever twitched at the sight. Matty was sprawled on the bed, looking like an aloof model, a wistful look on his face, his clothes fashionably crumpled, glasses askew. “You better come through with that plan of yours or whatever it is,” he said, pointing at him, “or I won’t be held responsible for what’s going to happen if you keep looking at me like that.”

Matty grinned and fixed his glasses, looking more like his usual self. That didn’t work to make the beating of Rusty’s heart slow down; on the contrary, it just reminded him why he liked this

dude so much. It was that composure, the way Matty carried himself, like he was sure of things, not just someone carried to and fro by every wind and undercurrent.

So unlike himself. It had to be the contrast between them that made Matty so attractive in his eyes. It just had to, because, otherwise, Rusty didn't have an exact or logical explanation for why, of all people, he was playing buttfucking friends with him.

That gave him an idea. The proverbial light bulb flickered. "You helped me a great deal today, Matty. So, it's only fair that you make a wish." Matty opened his mouth, but Rusty hushed him. "Close your eyes first."

Matty obeyed, but his lips quirked into an amused expression. "Am I in some story with fairies?"

"Only if you consider this strapping six five footer," Rusty pointed at himself, although Matty couldn't see him, "capable of pulling off a fairy act."

"I believe you can pull off anything you want."

That was high praise. Rusty caught it, gave it a little mental kiss, and put it into the box of wonderful things, truly wonderful things, people had ever said to him. "Then, wait for me."

He disappeared into the hallway, with just one destination in mind. Was anyone going to wonder when they found his Hawkeye costume hanging in the bathroom? Eh, he couldn't be bothered with housekeeping when he had something completely different in mind.



Letting Rusty be in charge wasn't exactly aligned with his plans, the ones that had taken root in his brain the moment the guy had mentioned that he'd be the only one to have his ass, but Matty found himself in the impossibility of refusing whatever was offered. Not even knowing what Rusty had in mind, he believed that he could steer the night in the direction he wanted. After all, what was a man without confidence?

It was better not to go there. This was all new. What if Rusty didn't want... Matty covered his eyes. Confidence, confidence, confidence. Good things come for those who wait, but those who take action can have the upper hand. Ugh, he sucked at mental prepping, didn't he?

He had no time to reflect on his inadequacies for too long, because Rusty was back. Propping himself back on his elbows, he had to let his jaw hang low.

Because Rusty was completely naked, wearing a smile on his handsome face and nothing else.

"Did you just prance around the hallway like that?" he asked, without thinking twice.

“Jealous?” Rusty grinned. “And it’s not like these dudes haven’t seen worse. Also, don’t you remember how Jonathan walked in on us while we were all buck naked?”

“Yeah, but this is different. You were alone.”

Did he sound jealous? All right, he sounded so, so jealous. He could hear it in his voice.

Rusty’s smile broadened. He walked toward the bed and climbed on it. Then, he straddled Matty and began fiddling with his tie. “What the hell is wrong with this thing?”

It was hard to focus with the king of Sunny Hill riding him like that, his skin smelling of spicy bodywash, damp hair in his eyes, and that heart-snatching smile lighting up his face. It took him a couple of seconds to realize why Rusty was fighting a losing battle with his tie.

“It’s actually sewed to the shirt,” he explained.

Rusty nodded as if he had just been offered a piece of vital information and proceeded to get Matty out of his suit jacket and then his shirt, all the while very careful not to disturb the glasses. They had gotten to the point where they didn’t need words to communicate their thoughts to one another.

Now, he was down to his pants, underwear, socks and glasses. And Rusty was still in charge. When was a good moment to intervene and speak up about what he wanted? His train of thought was interrupted by nimble fingers moving slowly across his chest, teasing his nipples, and then going lower, making him shiver and suck in a breath. “I thought the word ‘ravishing’ would involve somewhat more brutal action,” he squeaked.

Great, even his voice was a traitor now. How could he act like a man with confidence when he sounded like someone on a helium diet? Things, he had to admit, didn’t look very good right now.

Rusty laughed, ignoring his distress. Then, he set his green beautiful eyes on him. “Sometime today, I said something. And you took that something like it was some kind of chew toy and now you’re munching on it furiously.”

“I’m not a dog,” Matty moaned and threw one arm over his eyes. So, he had been found out, and it hadn’t even been that hard.

“No, you’re not,” Rusty agreed. “But, you have to tell me, Mr. Kent, what exactly is your big brain getting busy with?”

Matty blushed even though his face was obscured from the other’s scrutinizing eyes. “You tell me,” he mumbled.

Rusty played with his nipples, as if he intended to tweak them until all was right in the world. “See, this is the thing. I was caught up in other stuff, but that doesn’t mean that I didn’t feel a disturbance in the Force. So, you have to tell me. What do you want, Matty?”

An honest question demanded an honest answer. He took one deep breath. “I,” his voice became steadier and firmer, “want to be the one to--” a small gulp followed, “—to fuck you.”

Silence followed, so deep, so stunned, that Matty didn’t have the guts to remove his arm from his eyes and take a good look at the disaster he had just caused.

In the end, he didn’t need to. Rusty grabbed hold of his hand and forced his arm down. Then, his face unreadable, but his eyes burning, he said, “Then how about you say it to my face?”



So, it had to be about that thing he had said about allowing Matty to be the single person to have his ass. At the time, the words had just flown out of his mouth, completely natural. But, of course, there was truth in wine, and also in the time when you were pissed and stressed, which could only mean that he hadn’t said it simply by accident.

Sure, it was a good way to tease Matty to high heaven. It served as a little spice in their already spicy relationship, but he was the kind to reach for the hot sauce, regardless. Now, with great anticipation, he let the ball drop in Matty’s court, waiting, unlike other times in his life, for the other’s move.

He wasn’t disappointed. Matty pushed himself up on his elbows and looked him fiercely in the eyes. “Rusty Parker, you said that I’m the only one to have your ass. Prove that it is true.”

Rusty smirked. “Not so fast, Matty boy. Are you going to let me do all the work? I mean, I know I’m already on top of you, and it would be easy to take out your cock to use as a dildo, but is this really how you want it to go?”

Matty narrowed his eyes and examined him. Fuck, they were both good. Rusty didn’t have to look to know that the Mighty Thor was ready for action, and by the way Matty’s little friend was twitching right under his balls, they were clearly both horny.

“I see,” Matty said, and his usual coolness returned. “You want me to work for it, don’t you?”

Rusty shrugged and continued to play with Matty’s nipples, ignoring the small grunts coming from the other. “It’s all about satisfaction, right?”

Matty surprised him by grabbing one of his wrists. “Then choose your weapon, Mr. Parker.”

Wow, that was the part of his redoubtable tutor he enjoyed so much, the hard unyielding nature of a guy raised to be polite and well-behaved.

Rusty waved, holding his free hand up. “No weapons, just our bodies. What do you say?”

He barely had time to finish, because Matty made a sudden move, and, using the strength from his lower body, toppled him. At the same time, since he was holding on to that wrist, he managed to manipulate Rusty onto his back, with him on top.

“You had the element of surprise on your side,” he protested. “Two out of three?”

To his surprise, Matty got to his feet and waited for him to do the same. He definitely looked sexy in his tweed pants and bare-footed, since his shoes were the only other thing Rusty had managed to take off of him.

Always up for a challenge. Rusty got to his feet and threw Matty’s chest a cursory glance. He yelped when Matty rammed suddenly into him and pushed him back on the bed. “Hey,” he protested again. “That’s not fair.”

Matty laughed and straddled him. “I won. Now, are you going to submit willingly,” he asked while leaning lower and stealing a kiss from Rusty’s mouth that was hanging agape, “or do I have to tie you up?”

Those last words had the effect of an electroshock – the pleasant kind if there was any such thing – to Rusty’s boggled mind. How come Matty was so quick? How hadn’t he seen it coming? And, above all else, why was he so horny for getting tied up, all of a sudden?

“It’s because of you,” he blurted out, earning a startled look from Matty.

“How does that answer my question?”

That was right. “Tie me up, you savage beast,” Rusty offered quickly. He even struggled to free his arms so that he could present his wrists close together to the man in charge.

Matty snorted. “You wish. I’m sure your closet contains many things I can use. If you’re not chicken, lie on the bed. On your belly.”

Rusty clucked a couple of times for show until he met Matty’s reproachful glare. “Okay, okay. On my belly, right. And what should I say? Woof?”

Matty patted his head before getting up in one graceful move. “Good boy.”

Rusty smiled. “Good luck finding something. I’ll give you no pointers, simply because I have none. But don’t take too long. You’ll find me snoring.”

Like hell he’d fall asleep, while knowing that Matty, straightlaced, cool as a cucumber Matty, was looking for some rope to tie him up with and...

Oh, fuck. Things were getting real, weren’t they?



Matty was grateful for being able to hide himself in Rusty's huge closet, filled with all kinds of sex toys, because his confidence was running thin already and needed a recharge. His hands were trembling slightly in excitement. One look at Rusty's glorious and bare behind, while the guy had obediently stretched out on the bed, was enough to make him lose his mind, his cool, and everything else he had ever possessed.

He needed to find something so he would not let Rusty down, as he had acted on impulse. What if there was nothing in there that he could use? That would be bad. He'd have to improvise. Ah, damn, too bad he hadn't chosen a real tie for his costume, right? It would have been a bit on the nose to use it, but, hell, desperate times called for desperate measures.

He waved aside various fluffy toys and stole a dubious glance at a few nipple clamps and a cock ring, but those weren't what he needed at the moment. Damn. Rusty had wished him good luck at finding something, and he had meant it. There was not one piece of lousy rope, not even a pair of pink cuffs, in there.

He would have to think on his feet. As he stood up, he rested his hands on his hips and looked down. Right. That would have to do.

As he removed his belt, he stole another look at Rusty's naked body. With his luck, the guy was already asleep and all that tour de force had been for nothing.

To see if the owner of the body he intended to ravish was still present, he caught his belt, folded it and then yanked the ends apart a couple of times, making it snap. That had the intended result, because Rusty turned his head and gave him a perplexed look. "Matty," he murmured, "are you going to turn my ass red to make me submit?"

Matty rolled his eyes. "It's for tying you up. As promised."

Rusty turned his head away and rested it on his crooked elbows. "Lame."

Yeah, even as he was saying that his voice betrayed him. Matty had learned a thing or two about the king of Sunny Hill since the beginning of their strange relationship. He hopped on the bed and straddled Rusty, trying not to anticipate how it would feel to get his cock between those firm mounds of flesh beneath him.



Matty didn't mollycoddle him as he grabbed one of his arms and then the other, forcing them together behind his back. He didn't protest, however, as the belt was skillfully wrapped around his wrists. That loss of control, so imminent, made his mouth go dry. Nonetheless, his cock seemed to appreciate the thought very much.

“Is it too tight?” Matty asked, his voice all tender.

“What kind of master are you?” Rusty scolded him, only for the sake of hiding the tremor of anticipation running through him, unbridled like a colt. “Ouch.” Matty had just slapped his ass.

And it felt good.

However, Matty appeared to hesitate. Were they just playing? Did he really want to...? Rusty sighed. “Don’t tell me your dick died on you at the sight of my tight ass?”

Matty caressed his crack, making him buck his hips upward, to let a teasing finger sneak along its length. “Far from it. Only that, fuck, how do I say this?”

“Say whatever you want, but don’t leave me tied up because we’re going to have a problem eventually. You don’t want me to wet the bed, right?”

Matty laughed softly. “Rusty, I want to fuck you. But, you know, we fool around a lot, and I’m not sure, and do you really--”

“The answer is ‘yes’,” Rusty said firmly. “Now, stop beating around the bush, because you’re breaking the immersion and that makes my dick limp.”

That appeared to convince Matty. Rusty turned his head as far as he could to watch his sexy tutor getting rid of his pants and underwear, making that cute cock pop. “You can take advantage of my subdued position to feed me that,” he pointed out.

Matty watched him with burning eyes and seemed to ignore the playfulness in his voice. He climbed on the bed and pushed Rusty’s legs apart so he could get between them. Another slap, harder this time, followed. “Who’s the dude in charge here?”

Okay, so they were still playing. Half-playing.

“That would be you, my baby dude,” Rusty offered.

Matty rewarded him with a long wet kiss between his shoulder blades. “Good answer. Now, any last wish before I get to business?”

Rusty felt a deep raw need to hear Matty say it. “Say that you want to fuck my ass, Matty.”

Another kiss, and whispered words falling like warm rain over his ear. “I want to fuck you so much it hurts, Rusty.”

That sounded good, that sounded very good. “I should warn you, though. There’s been some fooling around down there. Like the neck of a glass bottle. Also, fingers. Plenty of fingers. From girls with a more adventurous streak, I’d say--” His words trailed off into a moan, because, without his knowing, Matty had moved lower and his tongue was now in his ass.

“What about this?” came the obvious question.

“I got tongue,” Rusty said, a lot more seriously this time, “but not like this. Do it again, or I might try to break free.”

Matty chuckled, that same sound that made Rusty feel weak in the knees. In all his life, he had only heard Jonathan laughing like that, but Matty was even better. He seemed so harmless to the outside world, and yet, man, what a man.

He wiggled as much as his tied hands allowed, and Matty helped him by stuffing a pillow under him and bringing his ass higher. Oh, fuck, that was divine, Rusty thought, as his mind began to move in lazy circles.



At any moment, he was bound to wake up, right? It simply wasn't possible to have the famous Rusty Parker, lying in that supine position under him, offering his ass for free licking, and later, penetrating.

Yet, he was right there, and lapping gently at Rusty's tight hole was his doing. There was no one else with them, there. They were alone, and they were doing this. It appeared that Rusty was enjoying it a lot, too, because he was pushing his ass up and murmuring some very heartfelt four-letter words as Matty went deeper and deeper.

He hadn't joked about hurting to have Rusty. It wasn't only physical. It was the kind of thing that you longed for all your life, and when it was within reach, you suddenly became so voracious for it that you could barely control yourself.

Saliva couldn't be enough. Even though he wanted to stay there a little longer, carefully licking every inch of skin exposed, and especially the one with the high temperature between the firm buttocks, he would have to find lube. Hopefully, Rusty had some around.

Just how unprepared was he? Matty cursed himself inwardly and, in frustration, bit a little too hard on Rusty's right butt cheek.

A natural yelp followed. “Sorry, sorry,” he hurried to say.

“Ugh, Matty, stop breaking the immersion and just play the master.”

Matty slapped Rusty's ass again. It was a bit funny just how much he enjoyed doing that. Yeah, he even thought that he wouldn't mind taking off an entire afternoon and have Rusty over his lap, writhing in pleased pain while he smacked his ass at leisure.

He shook his head. Rusty's naughtiness was getting to him, and now, he even fancied himself some sort of dom.

“Then, my dear slave, I mean, sub?”

“Fuck me, Matty, you’re such a goody two shoes.”

“I want to fuck you. I just need lube,” Matty finally said.

“In the drawer,” Rusty explained. “No, the other. Whose amazing idea was it to tie my hands?”

“Both of ours, I guess,” Matty replied with a shrug.

“Right. Did you get it? Now ride my ass.”

There was bravado in there. There surely was. Matty had reasons to invoke the gods of confidence on his side again. After all, he only had to compete with the neck of a bottle and some girls’ fingers, right?

He used all his self-control while lubing Rusty’s ass copiously and doing the same with his cock.

“Are you going to take all day?” Rusty’s voice brought him back from his musings.

“Rusty, I promise you, for all this, when you least expect it, I will bend you over my knee, and I’m going to give you a spanking you won’t soon forget. Do we have a deal?”

The cheerful reply was all he wanted and more. “Totally, my baby dude.”



At any point, he could say he didn’t want to play, and Matty would understand. And normally, had it been any other dude, some weird survival instinct would have kicked in, making him turn it all into a joke and saving his ass.

That time, when that girl had moved her fingers deep inside him, making him feel like he was about to lose control and go nuts with pleasure, he had stopped it. She had looked at him like she couldn’t believe him when he said that it was uncomfortable and he didn’t like it, but she had accepted it nonetheless.

Now, with Matty poised at his backdoor, ready to make him feel that same mind-blowing sensation he’d experienced at that time, probably multiplied tenfold, he found himself not only incapable of saying ‘no’, but also unwilling to.

He could pin it all on not wanting to disappoint Matty after getting the guy all worked up. But that wouldn’t be true. And, at least in the tiny space that made up his inner self, Rusty didn’t want to be a liar.

Was he truly ready for it, though? He didn't have the time to think it over because Matty, finally emboldened by his repeated complaints, pushed something blunt, hard and big against his ass, making him swallow both his words and his thoughts.

"Oh, fuck."

"Oh, fuck, indeed," Matty whispered behind him. "I had no idea it would feel so tight."

"What? Did you think my ass was as loose as the rest of me?"

"Rusty, please, stop joking," Matty joked. "I have no idea what to do. I want to go deeper, but I'm afraid--"

"Stop being afraid. Fear is only in your mind—ah, fuck me sideways!"

Had Matty just gone ahead and put all that hard cock inside him in one go?

"Sorry, sorry, but I believe I got the head in," Matty replied in a hitched breath.

"The head? Only the head? Are you fucking kidding me?"

"I'm afraid not, and please don't tell me fear is only in my mind. Rusty, am I hurting you?"

He took one deep breath. What was he now, a big ass wuss? On the other hand, if he had had a big ass, maybe—

Right, he needed to stop thinking and start focusing on the important aspect of making his ass relax. Now, Matty had taken the Mighty Thor like a champ, which made it obvious who the better man of the two of them was. Since when was he satisfied with being only second place?

"Hey, it's only an ass. It's going to get bigger, right?" he offered in the most philosophical manner he could muster.

"I must be doing something wrong—Rusty, what are you doing?"

It had to be like jumping in cold water. Rusty pushed himself back with as much strength as his limited mobility allowed. "How much in, now?"

"More than half," Matty whispered, mesmerized by the sound of his voice.

"See? You're welcome," Rusty said. "Now, do your job. Or do you want me to tease you till the end of time about how I had to fuck myself in your dick because you couldn't handle the job?"

It still hurt, but as he breathed in and out, he could tell that his ass muscles were letting themselves be convinced little by little to allow Matty's cute cock to get inside.

He started when Matty caressed his back.

“Just for the record, Rusty, this feels awesome, and I’m glad it was you.”

Well, now, that was encouraging and made all the pain worth it. Plus, Matty only had to move about an inch or so and something about how he did it hit the spot.

Rusty moaned in pleasure and relaxed to get more of it. Matty’s hands were on his ass, pulling his cheeks apart, probably eager to admire his handiwork, but they were doing so lovingly, with care, something that made him melt on the inside, never to be put back together the same way he had been.

Another slow, careful thrust, and he was on the way to the moon. Another, and he was close to Mars. More of that, and he might end up flying right into the sun. Obviously, Matty had no idea he was some kind of wizard playing with him and the planetary system.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The Good Ol' To and Fro

The only thing that prevented Matty from moving faster was fear alone, and he wasn't about to talk about it out loud, since if Rusty did as little as say a word, not even a kinky one, he was in severe danger of blowing up.

How many times had he imagined a moment like this? Sure, his fantasies tended to be foggy from one point onward, and that lack of definition and detail was showing its shortcomings now. He was buried, balls deep, in Rusty's amazing ass, and he was afraid, no, completely terrified, of moving again.

"I do enjoy the pressure and how full you make me feel, but, seriously, Matty, do I need to remind you that fucking involves friction and a to and fro movement--"

"Rusty, please," Matty grunted. "Oh, fuck, what are you doing? Are you squeezing my cock with your ass?"

"It's worth a try. I haven't used my asshole like this before. It's quite, hmm, how should I put it? Interesting."

"Interesting." Matty inhaled sharply. "Okay, I'll move."

He did and the pressure eased slightly, letting him breathe.

"Are you going to be a fast shooter?" Rusty questioned. "Then I'll know that I'm better than you."

"Ah, screw you," Matty moaned. "You really like pushing all my buttons, don't you?"

"The real question here, Matty boy, is this: do you even push, bro?"

Matty took one deep breath. Rusty's joking served a good purpose, because now, he was no longer about to shoot at the slightest provocation. "I'm sure that's not how that goes, but here's some push for your tush," he joked, too, with every intention to show that he didn't feel as affected as he truly was.

"Give me that push," Rusty challenged him.

Matty grabbed hold of Rusty's hips to leverage himself and then slammed in, pulling the other toward him.

"Oh, fuck," Rusty breathed out. "Why is your cock so big, again?"

“So that I can fuck you better.”

They both snickered at the same time. That was how their relationship existed and thrived, through jabs and good humor. And it looked like it had brought them to this very particular point, where, as unimaginable as things might have seemed at the beginning of the academic year, Matty was actually giving the king of Sunny Hill a real dicking.

He made a move to take Rusty out of his restraints.

“Leave that be,” came the imperative order. “It’s all right if you just use my ass. This time around.”

Matty caressed the small of Rusty’s back and pressed on. It felt really good; he only wished Rusty didn’t play the selfless party at the moment so that he knew that everything was reciprocal.



Even without hearing a peep out of Matty, Rusty could tell that his baby dude seemed to be disappointed in being ordered to leave the belt in place. He couldn’t just outright admit that feeling Matty’s cock against certain parts inside his ass were already doing such crazy things to him that he wanted to enjoy them for as long as he could.

Call it a masochistic streak or not, Rusty liked being able to prolong his pleasure and, if given the chance to touch his cock, he’d come to it way too fast. Now, as things stood, Matty was moving against his ass, finally riding it like he was supposed to, and all the friction that made things unbearable was also igniting a fire in him that burned bright and fast.

Since the time he had discovered that masturbating could be an adventurous affair by adding all kinds of things to the mix, he had managed to prolong and postpone his climax for as long as he wanted.

With Matty now, he teetered on the edge of losing control, and it was so pleasurable that it brought tears to his eyes. Damn, his bed partner was a bit clumsy, but he was so considerate while still knowing what he wanted that the entire combination was nothing but pure dynamite.

Rusty challenged the loss of control he had feared for so long by trying to keep his wits about him, whether by counting backward from one hundred, or trying to remember the last Ethics lecture he had been present at... No, that was a dangerous topic. Matty was tutoring him in Ethics. Also, if he counted backward, he only found himself counting Matty’s every push and pull.

Whatever he did, even facing down and away from the guy ravishing his ass presently, his thoughts and sensations were pulling him back to Matty. He groaned and hid his face in the

crook of his elbow, as that fickle tickle in his ass grew to the proportions of a bomb about to explode. “Fuck me,” he whispered, mostly to himself.

“I’m working on it,” Matty’s reply came.

Rusty didn’t manage to tell him that particular ‘fuck me’ had been rhetorical because his entire body shook and he felt his balls pulling tight.

“Rusty, I can’t...” Matty let out breathlessly, “fuck, your ass does some crazy... ah, I hate you...”

Rusty fucked the pillow. Matty fucked him. It made some freaking sense, because he dropped, breathing hard and covering his eyes while he could feel his special friend shooting inside him, filling him up.

Matty moved slowly away. “I came inside you, sorry,” he said softly, but his breath was ragged and the sweet smell of his sweat filled the room.

Rusty took a deep breath. “No worries, I filled your ass, too, remember?”

“Yeah, but you didn’t neglect my needs,” Matty reminded him. “We both came.”

“Just like we did now.”

“What?”

“Yeah. Come on, untie me. I need to check the damage.”

Matty hurried to take off the belt. “What damage?”

Rusty pushed himself up and showed his partner the pillow. “This one’s toast. Unless you want to sleep on a cummy pillow.”

Matty stared nonplussed at the proof of Rusty’s shameful discharge ahead of time and then shook his head.

Rusty shrugged and dropped the pillow to the floor. Then, the following moment, he was all over Matty, kissing him, and rubbing their sweaty bodies together.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Matty said quickly while pushing him slightly away to look into his eyes. “Did you really come with your hands tied behind your back?”

“Kinky, I know,” Rusty said.

“I don’t know about that. But it’s awesome,” Matty replied, his eyes all shiny. “Rusty,” he said, “you’re awesome.”

“I actually came too fast. Since it was your first time fucking a dude, it was supposed to last.”

“I came too fast,” Matty disagreed and pointed at himself.

“I hope you don’t want us to call ourselves the fastest shooters in the West. People might get what we’re hinting at. Then, we might be all over Xpress with Wanted written under our names.”

“Wanted for what?” Matty asked and snorted.

“Cheap entertainment,” Rusty replied promptly. “We’d get invited to parties where we could make the audience laugh by jumping on a little stage and popping like champagne corks.”

Matty snickered and hid his face against Rusty’s chest. “I bet they won’t laugh when we end up turning those parties into bukkake parties.”

“You’re not allowed to come on some random people’s faces, though. Okay, we’ll keep it to ourselves, this little thing, about fast shooting and all.”

“Can I come on your face?”

Rusty laughed. “You’re so naughty, Matty. You make me want to ride you into the sunset.”

“How about you ride me right now?”

“Fast shooter, fast reloader, then?”

“Totally,” Matty confirmed. “In case I have to make it clear, whatever’s poking you in the butt right about now, that ain’t my gun.”

Rusty laughed and pushed Matty down, holding him pinned by his shoulders, flattening him against the bed. “What do you say? Can we make the last round go for longer?”

“We won’t know unless we try. Let’s go,” Matty said and bit his bottom lip.

It was easier now, since his ass was lubed properly with jizz and Matty’s cock stood proud like a mast. Rusty forgot to laugh as he impaled himself on that hard thing and felt the now familiar tickle deep inside him.

Matty wrapped his arms around him and held him close, and then pressed his ass down firmly, making him fill himself with cock.

All right, that was fine, too, although Rusty was eager to be the one in charge, even if he was still the dude getting a dicking. Their bodies came together like they were meant for one another, and it was one of the best sensations ever. Rusty realized, at that very moment, that he didn’t want it to end, whatever this thing was. Now that he had discovered what it truly felt like to lose control

while a myriad of sensations pulled him apart without breaking him, he wanted to experience the same thing over and over again.

The best part of it? Matty didn't mind being used for his experiments. That was a big plus. Too many times, Rusty had found himself in the company of bed partners who weren't keen on trying new things, whether for lack of imagination or simple wariness of the unknown. Of course, when they were too far ahead, like that chick who had wanted to probe his ass as far as he could go, he found himself the one to be the chicken.

Finally, the planets must have aligned, because with Matty, things were just about right. There was honesty in how they were handling each other, and that kind of thing was hard to find. He pushed himself down, moving his hips, while getting help from firm hands keeping him in place. If he wanted, he could break free at any moment, but it felt safe to have someone holding him like that, like he couldn't really escape that easily.

And Matty was getting good at giving it to him, because he clearly knew how to move his hips and give him more of that dick. Rusty felt invaded by so many things at the same time that he didn't know when to stop and savor one because the next was rushing over him. Now, it was his ass doing all the feeling, but then, his sensations climbed upward, and there came the need to have Matty as deep as he could go, like he would be capable, all of a sudden, of swallowing the other completely and making him part of his own body.

It was more than just physical, too. It tickled Rusty all the right ways, how Matty stared at him with his big shiny eyes, his lips parted and waiting to be kissed. Making a cage with his arms on either side of Matty's head, he indulged his prisoner's silent plea. They kissed like it was the last thing they could do before the world ended, just as Matty had wondered before. Yeah, it was liberating. Not easy to explain, no. But liberating, like no other feeling he had ever experienced.

He made their bodies clash and move toward one another like two meteorites finding themselves on a collision course. No surprise there, it ended with a bang, and Rusty was proud to report that this time, their coming together had taken longer.

He dropped to one side with a groan. When he turned his head to look at Matty, he was surprised to see the other carefully dipping his fingers in the jizz Rusty had left on his belly and then bringing them to his mouth.

Matty noticed he was staring one moment later. He pulled the fingers out of his mouth, looking guilty. "What?"

"Nothing," Rusty said with a shrug. "But, man, you're kinky."

Matty laughed and then, catching him unawares, he smeared some of it on his face.

"Dude," Rusty protested.

“What? It’s yours. And I want to lick it from your face.” Like a little, annoying dog, Matty drew a long tongue over his cheek. “What do you say now? I made you clean.”

“You’re still the biggest perv that ever walked the earth.”

“Gee, thanks, and I thought you wouldn’t relinquish that title for the world.”

“Anything for you, my baby dude,” Rusty joked and pulled Matty closer.

He enjoyed the weight of Matty’s head on his chest. The other began to purr softly as he ran his hands through the silky smooth hair. A long inhalation and it was all it took for him to realize.

He was happy. Not the kind of nervous excitement that usually made him search for new things and taste them all at once. No, this was a type of chill happiness, and it made all his bones melt, and his body dip the bed a little heavier. The sensation was too pleasant to fight; he drifted off, while his mind sent new roots, like tender tendrils, spreading out of him.



This wasn’t his room, but it was familiar. Right, he had slept over at Rusty’s and... Matty opened his eyes wide. Something important had happened during the previous night. Yes, something very important. He had given the king of Sunny Hill a real dicking, one with his dick involved. Matty touched himself in inappropriate ways and felt his cock growing. That hadn’t been a dream. Nope, not at all.

He turned and savored the sight of a very naked Rusty, sleeping on his belly, with a hint of a smile on his handsome face. His eyes moved along the muscular back, rushed down the dip before climbing up the perfect ass he had fucked last night.

“The hell you’re grinning at?” A voice, rough from sleep, interrupted his shameless ogling.

Matty didn’t care to stop smiling. He stared at Rusty, who had only opened one eye to look at him crookedly. “I fucked you,” he said and could feel his face stretching into the biggest grin that had ever been grinned in the history of grins.

“You did?” Rusty pushed himself up on his elbows and smirked. “I didn’t feel a thing. Did you take advantage of me while I was asleep?”

“Advantage, right.” Matty snorted and reached for Rusty’s ass to give it a naughty squeeze.

The way the green mischievous eyes blinked lazily let him know that the good feels from the night were very likely to continue into the morning, and maybe even beyond that.

Rusty’s phone buzzed, interrupting the moment.

“It’s Jonathan, asking about brunch.” He laughed. “I think we scared Hamilton good. That guy is never going to set foot in this room ever again,” Rusty added and shook his head.

“Ah, I guess that’s my cue to take a hike,” Matty said.

“Nope. Jonathan is asking how many people he should put down for brunch, which means that he suspects you’re here, hence his decision not to come knocking. And I just told him to put me down with a plus one. What do you say?”

“Plus one,” Matty repeated without thinking.

Rusty pinched his cheek and snickered. “You look fucked.”

“Oh, yeah? So do you.”

“Come on, let’s make ourselves presentable. We’re having brunch at the castle. Just fucked hair won’t sit well with Hamilton.”

“The castle?”

“It’s a recurring joke. Because Jonathan really likes to make meals an experience from time to time, we say that we’re having – introduce whatever meal of the day Hamilton’s making and making it special – at the castle. Dex even brushes his hair for the occasion.”

“Dex has like a super short haircut, though,” Matty pointed out.

“My point exactly.”

“I don’t have any nice clothes. Is it okay to attend brunch at the castle as Clark Kent?”

“I don’t see why not. I could lend you some clothes, but I don’t want you to look like the poor youngest brother of this big family. You know.” Rusty began moving his arms as if he was wearing sleeves that were too long for him.

Matty smiled. He was rewarded instantly with a mirrored reaction. Brunch at the castle as Clark Kent it was, then.



Rusty hadn’t exaggerated, was Matty’s first thought when he took in the white tablecloth dressing the table, the matching plates and the beautiful, real glass, glasses, symmetrically placed to compliment everything else. Even the lighting, filtered through the tall windows, created the illusion that the otherwise normal-looking kitchen belonged to a completely different place.

Matty felt his mouth watering instantly at the sight of the casseroles placed along the midline of the table, all elegant containers that shouldn't have been there, ready to serve some college kids that survived on pizza and takeout more often than not.

"Hey, you guys were really fast," Jonathan said brightly and turned to face them, while taking off his apron. "Everyone else, I believe, is still getting up."

"What are we having? What are we having?" Rusty asked like an impatient child.

Jonathan pointed at each of the dishes on the table. "I thought of keeping it simple today. We have kedgeree, well not exactly the classic recipe, but my take on it, honey buns with sausage filling, some potato hash, green salad, and, for dessert, lemon pancakes. And plenty of raspberry punch, of course."

Rusty took seat at the table and patted the place next to him for Matty to join him. "Matty, I'm telling you, this kind of stuff is what they have in heaven, and Johnny boy here is like an angel or something."

Jonathan laughed and threw a kitchen towel at him. "If I were an angel, I would be here to punish you because you don't study enough."

Rusty grinned ear to ear and moved an arm to take Matty by the shoulders. "You'd have no reason to punish me."

"Because Matty is tutoring you?" Jonathan asked and offered Matty a bright smile, as well.

"No, because he's in charge of my punishment, and he's a little devil. It's why I can't sit right this morning." Rusty made a show of shifting on his chair while groaning theatrically.

Jonathan's smile wavered for a moment, but then turned into something well-knowing and pleased. "Well, if that's the case, we can safely say that justice has been served."

"Come on," Rusty moaned, "I'm not that bad."

Jonathan's lips quirked in a larger smile than before. "I suppose Matty made sure of that."

Under their gracious host and cook's keen examination, Matty began feeling a little hot under the collar. He pulled at the fake tie, forgetting that it was sewn in.

"So, how was your baby brother's birthday party?" Jonathan asked, changing the subject.

"Ah, you know, kid stuff," Rusty said with a shrug.

Something was telling Matty that Rusty was making a mistake by selling himself short, so he started to go into the details. "It was totally rad. Rusty was the soul of the party. He played at least thirty-seven different characters. I don't even know that many beloved kids' characters

from movies and cartoons. Now I feel richer in my life experience because I witnessed everything firsthand.”

He stopped abruptly and blushed. Why was he launching himself into some kind of tirade over a thing like that? For starters, he wanted to praise Rusty so hard that the guy would drown in it. But it was a bit embarrassing to gush like that in front of Jonathan. There was a chance Rusty might not like it.

“That’s our Rusty,” Jonathan said and laughed, sweeping the slightly awkward moment away with grace. “That means you two had fun.”

“Yes,” Matty confirmed and stole a glance at Rusty.

The guy was beaming at him, resting his cheek against his palm, staring with eyes so shiny that Matty felt blinded for a moment.

“Babe, why didn’t you wake me up to help?” Maddox interrupted the magical moment by coming in.

“You looked too pretty to wake up,” Jonathan replied and accepted Maddox’s kiss on the lips.

Matty looked at them. They acted like they were a happy married couple. *#relationshipgoals*, he thought and barely kept himself from sighing.

“Hey, Matty,” Maddox said after having received his mandatory smooching from his guy. “How’s it going?”

“Fine, I guess,” Matty replied, a bit unsure of what that question meant. Maddox was treating him as if he was a regular at the brunch table.

“What do you mean, fine?” Rusty protested right away. “And you guess?”

Before Matty had time to offer a proper reply, Rusty grabbed him and smooched him loudly in front of his friends.

When Rusty was finally done with him, Matty barely had the guts to look up. He expected Maddox and Jonathan to be staring at them in complete shock, but much to his surprise, the two were busy dealing with a delicious stack of pancakes and paid them no mind.

“See?” Rusty said. “Everything you feel like having at this table, you can. No point in drooling over anything without getting satisfaction.”

Matty had a distinct sensation that Rusty wasn’t talking about food.



Something was a bit off, Rusty thought, as he took in his friends, one after another, while everyone got busy with Jonathan's delicious food. No one stared at him, or laughed behind cupped hands. Actually, that wasn't those mofo's usual MO. There was no teasing, either. No direct questions. Nothing.

Everyone behaved as if Matty wasn't even there. Well, that wasn't exactly so. They acknowledged him, asked him questions, but none of those were 'Are you sleeping with Rusty?', 'Are you two hooking up now?', or 'What exactly are you two to each other?'.

Absolutely nothing. That was mighty weird, and, while he usually didn't look a gift horse in the mouth, mainly because it wouldn't be nice toward said horse to shame it for getting old, right now his curiosity was off the charts.

"Are you going to eat that?" Dex gestured at his plate.

Rusty put both arms around his dish. "I totally am."

Dex shrugged. "You look like you don't have that much of an appetite. And it would be a shame to let any of what Jonathan cooked go to waste."

"I'm just eating daintily," Rusty explained. He couldn't outright say that he was too busy examining the suspects to eat as fast as usual.

"Yeah, you're a dainty little thing," Dex teased him, saying 'thang' while drawling the word.

Now, that was more like it, because, obviously Dex was laughing at him, and an enemy known was an enemy he could beat. "Just you wait," he promised and began shoveling food in his mouth at the speed of light while locking eyes with his foe.

"Does this have alcohol in it?" Matty asked after he sipped from his glass.

"Just champagne," Jonathan replied.

"Oh," Matty said. "It's really tasty. I've never had champagne for breakfast before. I mean, brunch."

"Neither had anyone of us," Kane offered right away. "I mean, before Jonathan got here. We're lucky Maddox's just this pretty," he joked.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Maddox bristled, but he was grinning and his eyes were twinkling.

"Come on, man," Dex joined in, "it's not like we don't know you used all your charms to get Mr. Chef Extraordinaire here."

Rusty was happy at not being on the receiving end of all that banter. And that allowed him to steal glances at Matty without seeming weird to his friends. His tutor was one pretty boy, for sure, but that wasn't it. No, Rusty liked to believe that he saw, noticed things that others couldn't. Like the way the thin skin right under the eyes darkened slightly when the long curly lashes dropped lazily, but only for a moment, creating a contrast with Matty's otherwise flawless complexion. Like the slight ripple caused by a pebble dropped into a pond while making a wish. Or should it be a coin, for the wish to come true? He searched his brain while munching on his lower lip.

It took him a bit to realize that everyone was silent. Like in a scary movie, he slowly turned his head and, through the sheer magic of his movement, the guys began talking between them, pretending that they hadn't been staring until a moment ago.

Weird. Yeah, something was off, but he wasn't going to put Matty in some embarrassing position – that only worked when they were alone – with all those people watching. But damn, he needed to have a word with those assholes he called his friends.

And, of course, ask for their opinion on how great Matty was. He was sure their options were: great, awesome, off the charts, beyond all the known galaxies.



“Thank you for your outstanding support, Mr. Superman.”

Matty grinned and leaned in for a goodbye kiss, but then he reconsidered. Rusty narrowed his eyes and threw a look over his shoulder. Everyone was pretending to be busy with something, but he wasn't fooled. They were dying to grill him; he knew it.

“We superheroes stick together, right?” Matty joked.

“Yeah, at least these two guys.” Rusty gestured between the two of them. “But seriously, that could have been a major disaster and turned out awesome because you were there.”

“You give me too much credit. I was only your sidekick. Your family loves you, Rusty.”

“They're not—yeah, well, I guess. They're kids. What do they know?”

“I think your dad does, too.”

Rusty forced a smile and patted Matty's head. “Good thing you have a pretty head. It must compensate for what's inside.”

Matty laughed and pushed his arm away playfully. “I'll let it slide this time, Mr. Parker. Mainly, because I think that sweet thing Jonathan gives an innocent name such as punch must have gone to my head.”

“Yeah, I guess I should’ve warned you. I didn’t know Jonathan was throwing one of those.”

“No worries. See you around, then?”

Rusty wrapped one arm around Matty’s shoulders and kissed him on the cheek. “All the time.”

He waited, looking after Matty, while calculating his next move. Once his Superman was out of sight, he closed the door, making sure the noise was loud enough to get everyone’s attention. Four pairs of eyes were on him like wolves the next second.

“Well, my dear assholicus unfriendicus, what the actual hell?” he asked.

Maddox snickered. “What do you mean by that, Rusty? Use plain English, please.”

“You want to tease and torture me over Matty, don’t you? Come on, go ahead. I can take you all.” He opened his arms wide.

Maddox shrugged. “No one’s going to do anything like that.”

Rusty waited for a few moments. He made another round of his friends, eyeing them carefully. Dex was smirking. Kane seemed suspiciously neutral. And Jonathan was making himself busy with the dishes, barely sparing a smile in his direction.

“Wait, what’s the big idea?”

Maddox sighed. “Jonathan thinks we should all leave you alone and have faith in you.”

“That’s a bit too general,” Rusty argued.

“Take it and be satisfied for a change,” Maddox said. “We’re not allowed to tease you. We’re not allowed to ask you questions. We just need to get off your back.”

“Johnny boy, care to say more?” Rusty asked. “These asses are getting ready for a big hit, aren’t they? They’re going to jump me when I least expect it, tickle me until I spill, right?”

Jonathan shook his head slowly and his fond smile brightened even more. “No. You’re a big boy now, Rusty,” he joked. “And I personally like Matty a lot.”

“We all do,” Maddox added.

Rusty turned to take a better look at Kane and Dex. “How come you two are not presiding over the committee of happy banter at my expense?”

“We can’t,” Dex said and he seemed deadly serious. “As much as we’d love to, Jonathan used the carrot and stick on us already.”

“And we’re not going to break our promise,” Kane added.

“What carrot and stick?”

“The carrot was this brunch. The stick was not having this brunch. Or others.”

Rusty snorted. “You guys are so cheap. Sorry, no offense, Johnny boy. In the kitchen, you have no equal.”

Dex stared at him. “Your Matty’s a pretty amazing dude. Let’s say we were easy to convince.”

“Okay.” Rusty scratched his head, still not believing his luck.

Only it wasn’t luck. It was Jonathan Hamilton, who, somehow, had a level of sensibility that helped him understand others like no one else. He’d thank the guy later, when they were alone.



Matty still felt like floating on his way to his dorm when his phone started ringing. “Zoey,” he said cheerfully. “How’s it hanging?”

“Wow, someone’s in a good mood. How was your Superman stint?”

“Awesome. And boy, I have news.” He giggled.

“Are you tipsy, Matty? You sound tipsy.”

“I had champagne for breakfast. Don’t ask.”

“How could I not? Spill everything.”

“Well, I slept with... him last night,” Matty dropped his voice and stole a few anxious looks around, “you know who.”

“Good, good. Then I hope your bum is ready for what I’m about to drop on you.”

“It wasn’t my bum on the line,” Matty whispered.

“What?” Zoey’s shout almost busted his eardrum. “What are you telling me, man?”

“Exactly what I’m telling you.” Matty cupped his hand over the phone. “I topped, Zoey.” He giggled again.

“Well, good for you,” Zoey said, still shouting and sounding incredibly excited.

“Wait, what bomb are you talking about?” Matty remembered her early warning.

“Oh, fuck. Just check Xpress. I’m afraid your cat boy suit is going to remain in storage for a long time.”

Matty stared at the screen, his eyes not quite transmitting the information to his raspberry punch infused brain at first.



Is it really a secret society if anyone knows about it? Sunny Hill's one and only Implacable Team is on the move, guys and gals! They're looking to beat us at our own game. Of course, we have nothing in common with these do-gooders, but a challenge's a challenge, and we don't mind picking up the glove.

We've just found out about the big Team's newest project. They're looking to unveil the identity of the cat boy...oops, cat girl, so that she can be made an example of. Something about morality, yada, yada, yada.

Let them dream. We're going to be the first to do it and we're going to make an example out of her... for you to follow, of course. Ambition is what we're made of. So, people of Sunny Hill, it's open season for cat boys! Or cat girls. Whatever.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Day Owl, Night Owl

He didn't usually wake up in a good mood, mostly because he liked sleeping in and all lectures had the bad habit of requiring students to wake up in the morning when only early birds were supposed to be hard at work, catching that poor worm over and over. Sure, everyone else would tell him otherwise, that waking up in the morning was good, but Rusty really didn't think he'd be anything else but a night owl. Wasn't night owl kind of redundant? Was there such a thing as a day owl?

Apparently, if it existed, its name had to be Rusty Parker, because it was way early on a Monday, and he felt rested, amazing, and ready to take over the world. The world of Sunny Hill, of course.

He took his time getting ready for classes, making sure to look his best. While he was the most enthusiastic adept of the 'I-don't-care-what-I-wear' fashion style, today it wasn't one of those days.

When he walked downstairs, he looked almost preppy. Not entirely, because he would never live it down, but he wore the nice sweater Jonathan had gifted him the Christmas before and a pair of dress pants, the casual type, but still. Footwear was a concession. He felt good in sneakers, and while they were new, they still looked exactly like what they were.

Jonathan gave him a surprised look when he saw him coming down the stairs. Maddox was all over his fiancé, presumably helping him with the coffee, and the domesticity of the sight in front of him made Rusty grin ear to ear.

"Someone's really early," Jonathan commented.

"There's a world to conquer out there," Rusty declared like a general in front of his troops. "No time to waste."

"Are you leaving already?" Maddox questioned him. "There's still about an hour or so until classes start."

"It's too nice a day to spend even a moment indoors more than needed," Rusty offered, reciting each word as if he was performing on a stage.

Maddox threw a confused look at Jonathan. It appeared, however, that Hamilton was not that surprised with Rusty's good mood. So, he took Maddox by the shoulders and leaned over, surely to whisper something in his ear. Realization dawned on Maddox's face, and now they were both staring at him like they knew something he didn't.

“I’m just in the mood for a bit of practice,” he said and walked out with a shrug. He didn’t tell them what kind of practice. Parents or not, they weren’t supposed to know everything-everything.

Once outside, he took one deep breath, enjoying the fresh air for a moment, and took in the sight of the campus stretching in front of him. That was his domain, and he was the king.



There were few students already up at that hour, but nonetheless, Rusty greeted everyone in his usual fashion. What he got in return were a few blank stares, a slight sign of recognition from a guy that was quickly smothered by one of his female friends who caught his arm and pulled it down, and a few odd and all-knowing looks.

Rusty shrugged. Morning people were obviously a weird bunch. He’d get used to them, presumably, since he felt too good not to get up in the morning from now on. He took the stairs to the Arts building two by two, checking that no one was staring in his direction. His peers’ lack of interest in him was nice for a change, because it meant that he could go in and out of any place without having to fight a crowd.

Once he reached the room he was interested in, he took a moment. It had been a while since he had practiced in that manner. What he was vocalizing during his morning showers didn’t truly count.

He turned the knob, but the door didn’t open. What the hell? That place wasn’t usually under lock and key. He looked around, feeling rightfully deflated. One of the janitors was cleaning the floors and he waved at the man. “Good morning, my good man. Do you happen to have a key?” he asked.

The man just shook his head and returned to his task at hand. Rusty let out a long exhalation. All right, so his plans for this morning had just been thwarted. Someone must have thought that the music room had important treasures to hide, and thus, the locked door.

Rusty took the stairs down, two by two, but something was off, and the spring in his step was waning. And to think he had even skipped breakfast to get here fast, just to try his voice a little. No dice, it seemed.



It wasn’t until late in the afternoon that Rusty began to understand that something fishy was going on. Leaving aside that he felt a bit too hot in his nice sweater and that the energy boost from earlier seemed to have evaporated into thin air, he had begun to have a slightly ominous feeling. Certain crowds no longer seemed to hold him in the usual high esteem. Sure thing, his

buddies were as chummy as ever, and the people who knew him beyond hello talked to him, but the overall sentiment was that something was changing.

At first, he had brushed it off, too caught up in what should be called experiencing the college life to the fullest, even by paying attention to lectures. But, just like the locked door to the music room, there was an oppressive atmosphere hanging over the beautiful late fall day, and he couldn't put his finger on it, nor shake it off.

"Maddie," he asked with half a mouth, while pretending to look over the people gathered there with his usual confidence, "I think there's a mutiny in the works or something."

They were attending their last class together, so at least he had someone to ask whether he was starting to imagine things or something.

"Hmm," Maddox offered in his most non-committal style, absorbed as he was by the contents of the textbook in front of him.

"I swear," Rusty commented, "ever since the Hamiltons allowed you to pursue their heir's hand, you've become even more of a nerd than you were before."

Maddox looked at him and blinked. "What's that?"

Rusty rolled his eyes. "Come on, Maddie, they don't even have a moat."

His bestie snickered and was about to return to his textbook diving when Rusty caught his arm hard.

Maddox sighed and closed the book. "What is it, boy? What is it?" he asked, grinning at him.

"Look around."

"I'm looking. What am I supposed to see?"

Rusty leaned over and whispered, "I think there's a coup in the works."

"A coup?"

"Yeah. They're after my crown, I'm telling you."

Maddox bit his bottom lip and then couldn't keep it in. "Rusty, for real. What's that supposed to mean? Ah, is it about the Implacable Team and their discourse on morality?"

"I guess," Rusty replied. "I mean, I thought that they would be as inefficient as a cat in the seafood aisle."

Maddox stared at him. "Something's wrong with that phrase."

“The cat is supposed to guard the fishy things,” Rusty explained and waved impatiently. “The thing is, I’m afraid to say, but I think that S.H.I.T is starting to get to people.”

Maddox appeared to be completely unimpressed by his revelations. “And? Do you care or something?”

Rusty gasped and placed a very offended hand on his chest. “Of course I care. I mean, what’s a king without his subjects?”

Maddox shook his head. “I thought you were over that. And look at things this way. I still love you, man.” To make a point, his bestie took him by the shoulders and looked at him, with a big grin on his face.

Great, his best bro was making fun of his predicament. “Yeah, yeah, like I believe you. You already put a ring on it, and that finger isn’t mine. If I die an old maid, it’s your fault.”

“Get Matty to save you from spinsterhood then,” Maddox said very matter-of-factly.

Rusty searched his brain for a good comeback and had nothing. The professor saved him by walking in, and his convo with Maddie got cut short. How was Matty supposed to save him? He would have to ask Maddox later provided that he didn’t forget.

Was the Implacable Team really going to make things hard for him? Rusty stared out the window, tuning out the professor’s monotone monologue. Maybe he wasn’t a day owl after all; he was a night owl by definition, redundant or not.



Matty waited patiently for Rusty to come closer. The famous king of Sunny Hill was strolling through the quad, seemingly lost in thought. One of the things Matty wanted to find out – and he needed superior abilities to do it – was to discover just how affected Rusty would be if he were never to see the cat boy again.

Zoey had assured him over and over that her roommate had no idea she was hiding the costume in her closet, but he worried that his bestie might get entangled in the strangest way with the entire cat boy/girl drama thing. In most universes, A led to B, and B to C, and if Xpress or the Implacable Team caught whiff of what lay hidden inside Zoey’s closet, it would be bad. Maybe he should think about moving it or even returning it. Could he ask for a refund? Given what kind of things had happened while he’d been dressed in that cat boy suit, the honest answer was probably ‘no’. And another thing, he couldn’t go down that road before learning if Rusty would be really affected by the sudden disappearance of Slicky Coolplums.

Now, he must have been the one lost in thought because Rusty bumped into him, and, for a moment, they stared at each other, both looking rightfully startled. That lasted no more than that,

and the following second, Rusty threw an arm over Matty's shoulders, trying to see if he could hold him. Matty dug his heels in and smiled at his special friend. "How's the king of Sunny Hill today?"

"Smelling something rotten, and we're not talking about the state of Denmark. We're talking about the state of affairs here, at Sunny Hill."

Matty nodded thoughtfully and began walking side by side with Rusty, who didn't choose to let go of his shoulders. It was a very pleasant feeling, so he didn't make any remark. If anyone stared and jumped to the wrong conclusion, that was on them.

"So, you heard about the cat boy thing," he said, grateful for the opening he got to bring up the topic that most interested him at the moment.

"What?" Rusty asked. "What cat boy thing?"

"Xpress and the Implacable Team both are currently engaged, or so they say, in a race for unmasking the cat boy. You know, that guy who climbed on the scoreboard at your game that time."

Somehow, he couldn't bring himself to play into Xpress's stupidity over how the cat boy was a cat girl carrying Rusty's unborn children.

Rusty grunted, not giving Matty much to work with. Could it be that the king of Sunny Hill, the most kinkster of them all, was over cat boys? That might be a relief, but Matty didn't dare to hope just yet. As much as he would have liked to get rid of the competition, it wasn't his choice to make. Or was it?

His train of thought was brought to a halt by Rusty. "They're going after Slicky Coolplums, too. I see. That guy's not a coward, though. He's chill as balls. He told me so."

Matty wanted to offer some slight corrections to that but bit his tongue before he started unraveling his trickery by accident. "Do you think they're going to catch him? I mean, he could just go into hiding."

Rusty's expression was so serious that it was hard to believe that they were talking completely non-ironically about a cat boy, his weird moniker, and the fact that there were two different shady organizations after the guy's slick pair of balls. Not to mention, the said cat boy was actually taking part in their present conversation.

"If he goes into hiding, he's not the dude I thought him to be."

Ah, now that was a relevant piece of information. "Then it means that it's not the last we've heard of him," Matty replied, a new conviction taking shape in his mind. "Now, what is it about something smelling rotten?"

“It’s about Connor and his acolytes,” Rusty said promptly. “People kept warning me about the Implacable Team, but I’ve never expected them to cause real damage. Especially with a name like that.”

“Yes. It makes you wonder. I believe that my roommate got lured into their craziness already.”

“That roommate who destroyed your Nightwing costume?”

“That’s the guy.” Matty had felt relieved that John had given him plenty of space once he got back to his room, and they weren’t on speaking terms anymore. It made for a very tense atmosphere in their shared quarters, but happy as he had been after topping Rusty, he hadn’t exactly taken the time to defuse the situation. It served that guy right to learn that he couldn’t get away with weird things like that.

“He’s one of them?”

“By how he kept on pushing Connor’s not so secret agenda on me, I’d say so. Anyway, he’s not an issue. He keeps walking on egg shells around me. I guess I scared him enough to last him at least a couple of weeks. Things are pretty weird right now.”

Rusty laughed and brought their heads together. He even rubbed his against Matty’s temple, in an unexpected sign of affection. Matty felt like turning his head and kissing Rusty in full daylight, for everyone to see.

However, Rusty was already turning something on all sides in his head and wasn’t looking at him anymore. That was good, supposedly; because if he looked, he would be able to read everything in Matty’s eyes.

“My reign is reaching its end, I think,” Rusty said with a sigh.

“What does that mean?” Matty asked.

“Well, I suppose it was bound to happen, sooner or later. Which means that it’s high time for a new victor to emerge.”

Rusty was talking like an actor on a stage, and while he enjoyed the performance, Matty wasn’t entirely sure he understood what he meant by those words. As things stood, the Implacable Team was, indeed, against Rusty as the informal king of Sunny Hill, and it looked like they were getting something out of it, too.

Was it a bad thing? Or was it good? Like the thing with the cat boy, it all appeared to be the half-full, half-empty glass type of situation.

But Slicky Coolplums would not back down. Why was Rusty doing it, though? Matty took a long look at him. “Are you going to step out of the way of the new royalty, just like that?”

Rusty laughed and rubbed his head against Matty's again, but offered no answer. Instead, he proposed something completely out of left field. "How about we hit your dorm room?"

"Sure," Matty said, although there was nothing he was less sure of at the moment.

He had basically just told Rusty that he and his roommate were engaged in a very weird status quo. And they were headed his way.



To know your enemies, you must observe them in the wild, Rusty thought as he pushed Matty toward his dorm. Of course, he could always go head to head with Connor and make the guy regret the day he'd decided that saving the planet was just not worth it anymore. But that wouldn't help him understand why the guy had managed to gather minions around him in such a brief period of time.

Maddox didn't see it and couldn't be made to care but, for Rusty, something that could get out of control like that didn't sit well with him. Who knew what those Implacable Team supporters would do next?

They were many, and he was one. But that didn't mean that he would simply accept defeat and get out of the way. No, it meant that he needed to put his mind to work and organize the biggest prank in the history of Sunny Hill. He was already playing with ideas in his head, but he also needed to gather intel.

Which led him to accompanying Matty to his dorm, where one of Connor's snakelets lay, dormant or not so much, according to his baby dude. If that guy had the guts to ruin what must have been a perfect Nightwing costume just because he believed in whatever gospel Connor was preaching, a bit of evaluation was in order.

"As I told you, John is behaving really weirdly since our little altercation," Matty warned him for one last time before they stepped into the room.

The guy in question gave them a short look when they entered, but then quickly returned to the book he was reading. He had his nose buried in it, but Rusty could tell that John was all ears by how tense he was.

"John, my man," Rusty said loudly, startling the guy.

"Do I know you?" John asked from the tip of his lips.

"I sleep over at Matty's sometimes. I was here before, remember?" Rusty continued, ignoring Matty who was pulling at his sleeve.

John pushed his glasses up on his nose and stared more closely, craning his neck, but unwilling to give up on the security offered by his bed. Rusty helped him by walking toward him until he made him tip his head back.

Rusty put his hands on his hips. “Matty tells me that you’re with Connor.”

John, in the most suspicious manner, looked away and his cheeks burned red. “I’m not with him. I’m under him. I mean, I’m with the Implacable Team!”

Because John shouted the last few words, Rusty straightened up and leaned back, just to show how impressed he was. “Well then, you must know what Connor plans to do about raising the morality levels around here.”

John appeared not to know what to do with this surprise attack. “He intends,” he began, pushing his glasses up his nose again, “to make sure that the students here live fulfilling lives that prepare them for the real life that awaits after college.”

“Hmm.” Rusty rubbed his chin and threw John a very honest and interested look. “And how exactly does he plan to do that?”

“By instilling true values into them.”

“Instilling, huh?” Rusty noticed Matty from the corner of one eye. His baby dude seemed slightly amused by the entire exchange and was trying to hide it. “With what?”

“We believe,” John continued after a brief moment of hesitation, “in the power of the good word.”

“All words, no action, then?” Rusty asked.

John pursed his lips. “There will be action, too. There already is. Everywhere we go, we, those with the Implacable Team, spread the word. And we stop people from making mistakes.”

“I see. How, exactly?”

John puffed out his chest and sat on the edge of the bed, ready to launch into a veritable tirade. “We know that our actions might not be to everyone’s liking, but it’s like good medicine. It may be bitter, but it’s working and it’s good for you. We will raid parties and get rid of all the alcohol. We will stop people from mindlessly hooking up. And, most of all, we will make sure that Rusty Parker is no longer the king of Sunny Hill!” Just as he said that, John paused and took a better look at him. He gasped in surprise. “You... you’re him!”

Rusty began laughing. Matty was already biting his pillow, hiding his face in it, his entire body shaking, and that would easily hijack his interest normally, but now there were important things at stake, which meant that everything else, no matter how enticing, had to wait.

That seemed to send John into some sort of frenzy. The guy grabbed his books, trembling from head to toe and tried to sneak around Rusty, although there was no need for that since Rusty had already moved out of the way and was looking at him like he was studying an alien life form.

“Where are you going? We were in the middle of a conversation here,” Rusty complained.

“I need to study in the library!” John shouted. “There’s no one... weird down there!”

Rusty looked at Matty. “We’re weird,” he said and sighed contentedly like that was an outstanding achievement.

“Totally,” Matty agreed, still laughing his ass off while John rushed out the door. “For real, Rusty, though, why do you have to torture the guy? I’m supposed to do that.”

“You’re too soft on him,” Rusty explained. “That explains why he’s so easy to impress.”



Seeing Rusty in action was the kind of thing that brought Matty to his knees, figuratively speaking. John had been on the brink of wetting his pants when he realized that he was actually talking to the enemy of the state. All the time, Rusty had kept himself in check without letting on anything, and it was that kind of power the guy had that made Matty like him and not only because he was crushing on him and had always been.

He couldn’t see Rusty bullying anyone, and indeed, the contested king of Sunny Hill didn’t have to use any of his obvious strength to make an impression. John deserved it because he was actually doing it to himself. After all, Matty had needed to take drastic measures and shake him down only to make him understand that it wasn’t right to destroy other people’s property. The same thing Rusty could achieve with just being in the same room.

“You know, I’m afraid the way you’re presenting your ass right now makes me much in the mood for the kind of debauchery the Implacable Team condemns so openly.”

Rusty’s words made him throw a look over his shoulder to check his own ass. He was interrupted by receiving the full weight of his special buddy right on top of him. He grunted for show and Rusty kissed his cheek while humping his ass.

“Whatever you’re doing, it might be a bit too prudish to cause public outrage,” Matty played into Rusty’s shenanigans.

“I’m dry humping you,” Rusty pointed out.

“That’s the problem. We have too many clothes on.” Matty managed to turn and Rusty trapped him underneath. “Although, I suppose we should behave. John could be back any minute.”

“I think I scared him enough,” Rusty insisted and leaned in for another kiss.

Matty indulged it - because how could he not? – but quickly got back his bearings. “If he sees us in this compromising position, he’s going to tootle his horn all over the place.”

Rusty grinned. “If by tootling his horn, you mean that he’s going to rub one off, then I guess you’re right.”

“I don’t think John really has a tool like that,” Matty offered.

“He’s just one,” Rusty countered. “Nah, Matty boy, you’re reading it wrong. Your roommate might have things to hide.”

“Maybe. Like the fact that he actually browses his phone for cat memes when he’s supposed to be studying. I caught him once. He keeps the phone strapped to his textbook so that no one can see it.”

“I don’t care about that. What I mean is that John might want to suck Connor’s cock.”

Matty stared at his bed partner long and hard. “How exactly did you reach that conclusion? I mean, the guy is really into ass-licking--”

Rusty guffawed. “Yeah, that too. However, if your John were that kind of fun ass licker, everything would be fine. No, the problem is that he wants his cake and to eat it, too.”

“Indulge me in your theories, Mr. King.”

“He got red in the face when I asked him about Connor. That’s exhibit A. He mumbled something about being under the guy. I mean, come on, Matty, that’s really on the nose. Secondly, he wants to impress his leader, and that means he needs to be a stalwart supporter of the morality policies Connor wants to implement. Do you see where the problem is?”

“I don’t think John’s gay,” Matty argued. “The idea that he needs to impress Connor Williams I agree with. But I’m afraid he’s the kind of person that can’t hear anyone talking about sex without breaking into a cold sweat.”

“I think he wants to do it.”

“And do it with Connor, of all people? Talk about weird taste,” Matty said.

“Actually, if they both dropped the act, they’d be pretty all right for a pair of dudes wanting to get freaky.”

“I don’t intend to contradict you because I like you, but I must say that only you’d see things that are sex-related in everything.”

Rusty shrugged. “Hey, I’m telling it how it is. And right now, I have to tell you, Matty, your naughty friend downstairs keeps poking me in the eye.”

“Thank you for the compliment, but your eyes are up here, and my dick is not that long.”

“I was talking about my one-eyed snake,” Rusty explained and glared for good measure.

“Of course you are,” Matty delivered deadpan.

Rusty brushed his nose against his a few times. “You know what I was thinking?”

“What?” Matty could feel his own breath deepening as Rusty continued to tease him gently.

“That you should have a key.”

“A key?” Matty didn’t exactly dare to think beyond the simple words he was hearing, words that carried a lot more weight than he wanted to risk imagining.

“Yeah, a key to the house. You know, where I live,” Rusty explained. He propped himself on one elbow and continued to stare at him from one side.

“Oh, I see.”

“Do you want it?”

“Do horses eat hay?”

“Is that a ‘yes’?”

“Yes.”

“Yes-yes or--”

“Rusty,” Matty said and caught the other’s cheek in his palm. “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever asked of me.”

“Cool.” Rusty’s eyes lit up. “I mean, seeing what a douche your roommate is, I don’t see why you shouldn’t have an alternative.”

“Is it only because you care for my wellbeing?” Matty teased as he continued to stroke Rusty’s cheek.

“Not only. I also care for the wellbeing of someone else.”

“You?”

“I wanted to say the Mighty Thor.”

Matty laughed and shook his head. “You know, I was expecting you to say that. So, this weary traveler will have to pay for board and lodging with his own body?”

“It sounds just like one of the fantasies I was thinking about. Do you happen to have one of those feathery hats they used to wear in the fourteenth century?”

“I’m afraid my wardrobe is not as extensive as that.”

“It doesn’t matter. If you feel it in your heart, you’ll be it in no time.”

“I’m really afraid to ask about the ‘it’, though.”

“I’ll guide you through it,” Rusty said and took Matty’s hand. With a smirk, he placed a small kiss on it.

“Wow, Mr. Parker, are you suddenly in the mood for some romantic repertoire or are my eyes playing tricks on me?” Matty asked.

Rusty grinned and then manipulated his hand until Matty’s middle finger was in his mouth. That was enough to make Matty tremble from head to toe, more than all the jokes they could make about one-eyed snakes and Mighty Thors. Without any trace of shame, Rusty proceeded to suck that finger deeper into his mouth, while his eyelashes dropped in the most seductive manner Matty had ever witnessed in his life.

That was the guy for whom he had put on a cat boy suit and pranced around the campus at night and during the day. Words were lost to him, but he knew that he needed more of what Rusty had to offer for as long as he could get it, free of charge.

The payment would probably come later, he thought, as Rusty finally abandoned Matty’s middle finger in favor of his lips. It looked like dry humping could be fun, too.

“Let’s make it wet,” Rusty suggested and he was soon the one in charge, taking both their cocks out of the confines of their pants and rubbing them together. He did quick work with his fingers, wetting them copiously by wrapping his tongue around them, and Matty never missed one beat, his eyes fixed on Rusty, feeling completely helpless.

It was also Rusty who pushed Matty’s shirt upward, leaving his abdomen bare. “I hope you don’t mind if I go a little Jackson Pollock on your belly.”

“Go crazy, don’t worry. It will be a short-lived work of art, though, I’m afraid.” Matty struggled not to feel it all at the same time, as Rusty’s hand was moving slowly and the entire length of the Mighty Thor was pressing down on his smaller cock.

“It’s not like I’d allow anyone else to look at you after the deed,” Rusty replied and shut him up with a deep kiss. “So don’t you worry about that.”

Matty took deep breaths, lungfuls of Rusty's scent, as he became dizzy from too much want. Rusty was nothing but efficient. He must have thought about the same thing for the entire day, just like him. That was the only explanation he was willing to accept, he thought, as Rusty pressed his lips hard on his and made them both explode, as promised.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Strange Conversations

Lingering in Matty's bed felt deliciously luxurious, even by his standards. John hadn't returned from his library stint, and the poor fellow probably even planned to sleep there, only to avoid the biggest imagined enemy in his life to date. That meant he could stay just a little bit longer, only his mind was already working in overdrive and he needed to start organizing himself.

S.H.I.T. wanted to go crazy with imposing new morality standards on the student population of Sunny Hill, under Connor's villainous leadership. That guy really had some serious issues, but Rusty didn't intend to unpack any of it. It was probably something years of therapy wouldn't be able to solve but, again, not his problem.

What bothered him, above all was how Connor and his posse – one a lot larger than he had employed in his service during junior years – kept on designing new and elaborate strategies to annoy the hell out of him. At first, he had decided not to give that A-hole a piece of his mind, but now it was on. Slicky must have gone into hiding already because of that T-head, which meant that his chances of meeting him again were growing slim.

Not that Matty wasn't keeping him plenty occupied. He felt tender all over and in a good way as he took a look at the crown of Matty's head resting against his chest. His baby dude was soundly asleep and Rusty didn't have the heart to wake him only because he wanted an encore.

Back to scheming. Also, going after his crown was getting real, according to the freakish experiences he had lived through today. He wouldn't give a damn... only that it wasn't some newcomer ready to take his place through charisma, wits, and other stuff that would make a dude – or a dudette – cool enough to force his early abdication, but an organization with a churlish attitude, and an even worse acronym. That he couldn't just let pass.

Hmm, that, indeed, required finesse on his part. He definitely didn't intend to look like a sore loser, and going head on with Connor, when his power was growing, would place him in a position that might not be easy to sustain.

No, he would just show everyone that he could charm his way back onto the throne without breaking a sweat. And, when everyone wondered who had been brave enough to challenge and replace Rusty as the king, he would tear off his mask and laugh his ass off.

Now, that was starting to give him ideas. That morning, he had felt on top of the world, ready for any challenge, and with a newfound love for music filling his lungs. He knew exactly what he had to do to throw his glove at himself, pick it up, and emerge victorious.

His excitement must have manifested itself a bit too energetically because Matty stirred. Rusty brushed one hand over his bed partner's face. "Hey," he whispered, "are you in the mood for a sleepy blowjob?"

"Okay," Matty mumbled and rolled on his belly to land between Rusty's legs.

That was his baby dude, always up for any request, but Rusty had something else in mind. "No, no, no," he said, and pushed Matty back so that he could be the one to slide down the other's body.

"You want to suck me off?" Matty asked, his voice still drowsy with sleep.

"That's my intention. You can go back to sleep if you want," Rusty said cheerfully while dragging Matty's pants down to have easy access to all the goods.

"Go back to sleep? Quite the tall order," Matty said but his head was tilting to one side and the cute smile on his face said that he didn't mind that sleepy blowjob at all.

Rusty placed one hand right under Matty's ball sac and began kissing it slowly, taking one ball and then the other in his mouth.

"Rusty," Matty whispered and inhaled audibly. "Why are you so good at this?"

"Are you trying to say that you suspect me of having done this with other dudes?"

"No, it was a rhetorical question. In other words, you're killing me."

"Play sleepy and let me take care of you."

No other words were needed, and Matty assumed the position right away. Rusty let one of his hands brush against the taut lower abs while he got back to his ball sucking technique, which he intended to perfect while using Matty as the only subject for his training.

It took him a while to let go of the balls, which had gotten satisfactorily heavy after being lavished with so much attention and finally focus on the more important part of Matty's anatomy. He licked his way round and round, sensing every tremble in the slender body under his fingers, until he reached the head. Once there, there was no point in dallying.

So, he wrapped his lips around the engorged head and began licking it. Matty's breathing grew ragged as Rusty continued his torturous descent on the full length. This time, he decided to go less deep but concentrate on using his tongue more. It appeared that his loyal subject was reacting well to all that tongue work.

He let go of it from time to time, only to swallow the precum Matty was freely giving. That kind of thing was definitely addictive. He could lick and lick at it like it was a lollipop. No wonder so

many girls liked giving head. Also there had to be a bunch of guys who liked it, too, and now, he was on the same side of the fence as they were.

“Damn, Matty, eating your dick is definitely it,” he commented as he took the hard candy in his mouth again.

“Do you think you could finish your meal?” Matty asked in a hoarse whisper. “You’re driving me totally crazy.”

Rusty smiled, with Matty’s cock still in his mouth. He even laughed, and the reverb of the sounds he made moved through Matty, or so it seemed, because the body he was holding hostage shivered more. Good, that meant it was high time for the last act. He increased the rhythm to which his lips moved and helped himself with one hand. Matty’s hands rested on his head and pushed him down one time, hard. That appeared to be his cue to swallow, because what was happening barely registered with him and he felt his mouth getting filled.

He smacked his lips and gave Matty’s cock one last playful lick before moving away, but he barely had the time to do so. He fell on his back, pushed forcefully with just one hand, and Matty was all over him, going straight for the Mighty Thor.

There was no time left even to make a sound, because Matty already had his mouth full and, when he looked up with his pretty eyes still droopy from sleep, he looked scrumptiously hungry for the cock he was gobbling down that very moment.

Rusty laughed and caressed Matty’s smooth hair, running his fingers through the silky strands, and pushing them away from his forehead. “A little peckish, are we?” he teased.

Matty nodded without letting go of his candy and proceeded to swallow him down as far as he could go. Now that was what Rusty called a fast learner. Matty was good at it, just as he was good at many other things, and now he appeared perfectly capable of giving the Mighty Thor a run for his money. What he enjoyed the most, however, was how his cock, not so negligible in size, could disappear in Matty’s mouth like some sort of magic trick. Those sweet lips he knew so well stretched around, and he could tell when he was hitting the back of Matty’s throat. That was his cue that he needed to control the crazy moves the Mighty Thor wanted to make by twitching too hard, but Matty helped him by pressing down on his thighs and controlling the depth to which he was going as well as the angle.

Now, all Rusty could see was Matty’s head moving to the rhythm, no hands involved. Fuck, that was mind blowing. He grunted as he tried to keep it in for a little while longer, but Matty was getting too good at this, and it seemed that he seriously wanted to put Rusty to shame through his performance.

“Oh, fuck, yeah,” he whispered, “get yourself some of that, Matty.”

He knew that his bed partner had no qualms about swallowing it, and that was fine by him. Totally fine, he thought, as he tensed and began shooting into the generous mouth, seemingly forever.

He dropped back, breathing hard, and then felt Matty's mouth on his, making him taste himself. Yeah, they were good at that. Sharing was the name of the game, after all. He took Matty's head in his hands and kissed him, making their tongues brush against each other repeatedly, until they were both out of breath.

He then held Matty only inches away so that they could look at each other. "I am so having that key made for you."

"Because you need me to dress like a fourteenth century traveler with not even two coins to rub together?" Matty asked and snickered.

Rusty kissed him loudly. "I'm happy to see that you have an excellent memory. But it's mainly because you're rooming with annoyance personified and my goal in life is to save you from that."

"I see. All right, then. I can hardly wait. I can't promise that I will spend every night over, though. It would look like I'm running away from a problem."

"One in two nights, then?"

"One in three," Matty replied promptly. "I still have to study, and I'm afraid that the only studying I'll do while sharing such close quarters with you is going to be studying your body through and through."

"Studying my body should be a discipline in the curriculum."

"No way. I don't intend to share you with anyone."

Matty stared at him for a moment after that as if he had just said something wrong. He was even about to add something, so Rusty decided to interrupt him. "Good. We have a deal, then. And if this creep you call your roommate ever gives you trouble, let me know. I'll rush right over here."

"Don't tell me you plan on giving him a good beating," Matty said and snickered.

"No, but I will stare menacingly." To prove his point, Rusty stared at Matty cross-eyed.

"Stop it!" Matty pulled at one of his ears. "You might end up stuck like that."

"Will you love me less if I'm cross-eyed?"

"Never, but let's not risk your wellbeing. After all, that's the other reason you're giving me that key, right?"

“Right. Okay, Matty, I’ll leave you to study while I’m seeing about my plans.”

“Your plans?”

“My plans not to study,” Rusty explained right away. He didn’t intend to make anyone privy to his incipient strategy to take down Connor’s revolution for now.

“I see. See you around, then?”

“Once every three nights, that means that you’ll sleep over at least once before Saturday.” Rusty counted on his fingers.

“Is something important happening on Saturday?”

“I might have something to do off campus,” Rusty said hurriedly. He kissed Matty’s head briefly when he noticed the little questioning look in his eyes. What he planned to do required secrecy and master planning. Therefore, he would keep his mouth shut about it for the moment.



Had he imagined Rusty’s evasiveness on the topic of his plans for that Saturday? Matty rubbed his face a few times and shook his head. Clearly, he needed to remind himself that Rusty didn’t belong to him in such a way that required him to tell him all of his plans all of the time.

And there had been that little slip-up with the word ‘love’ getting thrown about casually. Of course, Rusty would be the kind to use it exactly in the most casual way possible, making it impossible for anyone to dish it out at him without considering it some kind of joke.

That was a matter that troubled Matty to some degree, too. He had crushed on Rusty for as long as he had been a college student. And he was definitely in love with him, in that way that his parents would tell him could easily be mistaken for infatuation.

He rebelled against the idea immediately. He had thought about it before, and all he was feeling inside pointed to his loving Rusty with all his heart. Beyond the playfulness, dressing up as a cat boy, fooling around, using their bodies to show how much they liked each other, there was something stronger than everything else.

That feeling he was experiencing no longer appeared as fluid and blithe as he had imagined it over the years. No, it was now reaching the solidified essence of a piece of amber pressed by millennia and harder rocks.

He shook his head. Maybe Rusty would laugh at him, hearing his thoughts, which was why he would hold back until much later. He hadn’t been joking when he told Zoey that he would only tell Rusty what he felt for him on the last day of college. That gave him enough room to run

afterward. Also, he expected to have zero regrets if he did it that way. No losses, that was the bottom line he was aiming for.

Now, if he thought about it, it was a great thing that Rusty had plans that Saturday. Since Slicky Coolplums had lived in the shadows lately, and by that, he simply meant that the chosen resting place in between performances for that feline alter ego of his was Zoey's closet, it was high time for him to make an appearance. Sure, Rusty wouldn't get the chance to see him, but it all was working out just as it should. Later, he'd learn that Slicky Coolplums had been up and about, and while he might regret missing him, he'd be content to know that his favorite cat boy – that was how Matty described himself in his own head – hadn't run and hidden from the likes of Connor and his shitty team of followers.

Yes, that would work out great, he decided and grabbed his phone. “Zoey, do you think I could use that thing you keep for me this Saturday?”

“Of course. My roommate has a new crush and she'll be out partying. Ready for one of those kinky transformations? I can barely wait seeing it happen under my very eyes.”

“Oh, gosh, Zoey. There's nothing kinky about my transformation.”

“Really? You're as good as naked and you have a tail. If it helps, that image is enough to give me a little lady boner.”

“I'll ignore that because you're like a sister to me.”

“Right.”

“Wait, I didn't ask if you have any plans. Will you put on that glitter and go chasing that unnamed guy?”

“I can do both. I'm a free agent,” Zoey said right away.

“And you still don't want to tell me who he is. I see, I'm that much of a friend to you.”

“Stop busting my balls, man,” Zoey complained. “It's really complicated.”

“I see. You have balls but you don't know how to use them.”

“They are little lady balls,” Zoey added and then laughed.

Matty followed along with her, because there was nothing better to do. “Okay, then, it's settled. This Saturday, you go glitter, I go--”

The door opening behind him made him stop.

“Yeah, yeah, I get it,” Zoey said. “What about that weird creature in your room? Is it still nesting there?”

“Yes,” Matty confirmed.

John stopped in the middle of the room for a moment, gave him a reproachful look and then dropped onto his bed, one hand resting on his chest, looking like a dying hero in a painting from the Romantic era.

“I’ll get back to you with details. Bye for now, love you to death,” he told Zoey and turned all his attention on his troublesome roommate. “Hey, man, you good?”

John turned his eyes languidly toward him. “No. I cannot study.”

“I won’t be around here much, and you know I’m as silent as a cat, I mean, mouse.”

“Silence is not the issue.”

Matty waited. He was starting to regret showing any interest in John’s wellbeing, but for him, being nice was an instinct, not a habit. “What is?” he asked with a soft sigh.

John straightened up. “Don’t you ever feel like all this is too much?” He stared at Matty with avid eyes.

“Studying? I think so. I mean, that’s the aim of college. To push you and make you prove yourself.” Matty wasn’t completely sure he was saying whatever John was expecting to hear.

“No, I mean all the other things.”

“Like what?” Matty thought again that maybe having this conversation with John wasn’t that good an idea.

“People are wasting their lives away,” John said slowly. “Like that student you’re having over.”

“Do you mean Rusty?”

“Yes, him.” John pursed his lips as if he had just tasted a lemon. “He doesn’t care about anything. Doesn’t it scare you?”

“Scare me? Let me check. Hmm, nope,” Matty said with determination and stared John in the eye to challenge him to say otherwise.

It looked like the oblivious fool had no skill in observing his conversational partners, because he continued. “How can it not? What’s beyond college for him? Does he ever even think about it?”

“What’s in it for you what Rusty thinks or doesn’t think about? It’s his future.”

John shook his head and pursed his lips more. “How can you not care?”

Now that was a question that took Matty by surprise. He cared about Rusty, of course, but it wasn't his business to lecture him on what to do with his life. “I do, but it's not my place to make decisions for him or even bother him with what I think is right or not. It's called respect, John. Have you heard about it?”

“I call it indifference.”

Matty sighed without hiding it this time. “Let's agree to disagree. And you still haven't answered my question. What do you care what Rusty does?”

“I care about everyone.”

Oh, damn, that Connor was channeling through John as they spoke, right there. Was that what people who pretended they were possessed in the Middle Ages felt like? “I'm sorry to disappoint you, but that's highly impractical. There's only so much caring someone can do.”

“And are you doing your part, Matty? In regards to... your friend? He is your friend, I suppose. He's a womanizer so he can't be... is he?” John craned his neck and looked at Matty with troubled eyes.

“Is he what?” Matty snapped. “I'm tutoring him, John. You see, I care. I do my part. What Rusty does with what he learns, that's his business.”

“I worried for a moment that he might lead you on the path to... to...” John seemed to have lost his words.

“Please don't say ‘sin’ or ‘temptation’. They're so overused.”

“I didn't mean it that way. But I'm glad that he cannot. You're not a girl.”

“Thank heavens,” Matty joked. “He cannot get me pregnant.”

“Exactly,” John said, missing the whole point. “Matty, don't you want to do more for him, though?”

“Like what? Telling him what to do, as if I knew any better?”

John gave him a disconcerted look. “But you do know better.”

“For myself.”

That didn't seem to have the desired effect of making John drop the conversation altogether. On the contrary, the guy only appeared to be more and more irritated and in the mood to insist even more. “If you care about him as a human being, you'd do better than that.”

“Oh, great.” Why was he even talking to his roommate? He was a looney who ripped apart Nightwing costumes. Rusty was right that he was soft. “Tell me, John, is this what Connor has been teaching you?”

“Yes,” John replied and puffed out his chest. “Can you say, hand on heart, that you don’t believe that we should do more for others?”

Matty groaned and closed his eyes for a moment. Nonetheless, if he could say something clever enough to pierce through that cloud of indoctrination, maybe he could be the one to save John from wasting his last year in college playing the cultist. Not that he was supposed to care, but, at this point, he felt like his intellect was being challenged.

“Yes, we could all do more for others. But are we going to force old ladies to cross the street now?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, slap me with a ruler and call me baby,” Matty muttered under his breath. “My guy, are you even listening to me? You can’t force other people to do better for themselves. That’s just wrong. And do we even know what’s better for them?”

“I disagree,” John said and crossed his arms. “Just because something seems fun, it doesn’t mean that it’s right. And that’s what happens with liquor and having sex and all.”

“Why did you come to college?” Matty asked.

“To study.”

“Of course, that goes without saying, but do I really have to spell it out for you? We’re young. Yes, we should learn how to be responsible for ourselves, but we should also be allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. Nobody says that we should go around getting high, drinking ourselves out of our minds and getting pregnant or getting others pregnant or worse. Fun can be had responsibly.”

“That is not what your friend is doing.” The word ‘friend’ sounded like some kind of venereal disease coming from John’s mouth.

Matty felt his irritation growing. “I assure you my friend,” and he said the word like it was a precious stone, “is very responsible.”

“He got a girl pregnant!”

“He got no one pregnant!”

“How do you know?”

“Because that cat boy is... a boy!” Matty exclaimed, running out of options.

John stared at him curiously. “No, he’s not. It’s a cat girl. I mean,” he added, a bit flustered, “someone who dresses as a cat. And is female!”

“And how do you know? Did you touch her or something? Fess up, John. Something tells me this holier than thou attitude is too large a coat for you.”

“I didn’t touch her, but Connor knows.”

“And how exactly does he know?”

John stopped his tirade and stared at Matty, as if he didn’t know what to add to that. Eventually, his lips moved again. “Connor doesn’t lie.”

“Connor took that from some speculations Xpress ran and, well, he ran away with it. When Xpress was wondering why Rusty was buying toys, he was actually shopping for a birthday present for his brother. And I know, because I was there. Also, if Rusty ever got someone pregnant, I’d be the first to learn about it.” That was a stretch, and there were clearly things Rusty preferred to keep to himself, but he was trying to make a point.

John finally seemed to relent a bit. “So, it’s not true? About the cat girl?”

“No, it’s not.”

“And do you know for sure that it is a cat boy?”

“Rusty knows for sure and told me,” Matty said quickly.

“But he likes girls.”

“And cat boys. Deal with it,” Matty added, even faster this time.

John pulled at one of his ears hard and squinted. *Ah, well, try to figure out Rusty Parker now if you can*, Matty thought and shook his head.

“Still, Connor wants us to unmask the cat... boy,” John said. “It’s wrong to pretend to be an animal. It’s not healthy.”

“No one actually pretends to be an animal. It’s that fun part I’m trying to tell you about, and you just don’t get it,” Matty insisted. “It’s like a play on a stage. Do you think actors go around thinking they’re Superman or a mobster or an alien all the time? Read my lips, dude. It’s fun. Don’t overthink it.”

John seemed vaguely convinced. “Still,” he began again.

Matty was already fed up. “You know, for someone who talks a lot about doing the right thing, you really haven’t done anything about the costume you ruined. A costume I rented and had to pay back in full.”

That finally got through the little monster. John looked down and linked his hands together. “I don’t have that kind of money.”

Matty threw his hands up. “A simple apology would have been nice.”

“I’m so--”

“Don’t waste your breath. Unless you mean it and you take back all that other crap you said.”

John seemed to consider. “I shouldn’t have done that. I got carried away.”

“Well, at least you admit it was wrong to destroy someone’s property.”

Matty waited but nothing else came out of his roommate’s mouth. John looked like he had just been given a difficult problem to solve, and his mind couldn’t compute. It was very possible that he had been talking to a wall all this time, but at least, he had gotten a few things off his chest. Such as the fact that Rusty wasn’t some irresponsible douche that went around getting girls pregnant because he had the sexual education of a chimpanzee. How much of that John had understood was something he had absolutely no control over.

And he intended to do nothing else about it.



Rusty didn’t ask Maddox to drive him this time. No, the time for getting others to push him toward what he wanted had to come to an end sooner or later. All this crisis with Connor was refreshing if he thought about it, and it also gave him something he had felt lacking lately from his repertoire. That thing was called motivation, and now all that remained was to explain what his convoluted brain wanted.

She was the one to open the door, just like before. Her face lit up when she saw him. “Rusty Parker. I know a stranger when I see one.”

“Mrs. May, I’m ready,” he said with conviction.

She smiled at him from behind her cat glasses. “Count me in, then. Let’s see what you have to tell me this time. And sing, of course.”



She listened to him closely and nodded a few times, which was encouraging. When he finished, she touched the frames of her glasses briefly, took them off, and looked at him. “I’ve sent people out the door for less. No, let me finish before you explain to me how all your ships are sinking and you start making me feel sorry for you.”

How did she know all that? Probably it was something that made good teachers great. Rusty decided to keep his mouth shut.

“However, because I’m beyond impressed with your talent, I believe that you have the right to put your plans in motion, no matter how treacherous they might be.”

“What’s treacherous about wanting an audience? Isn’t that something everyone who’s a performer does?”

“Yes, but it shows your age, because I’m not sure you will understand what I’m about to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“Your love for music comes from the heart, and the audience you truly want is not what you’re seeking right now. I can see those little wheels turning in your brain, and I’m glad that you trust me with your plans, but what you’re about to do comes from a place of cold calculation.”

“Ouch. That’s the first time anyone has told me I’m cold,” Rusty said and looked down for a moment.

“I understand your frustration and, although I have yet to get to know you well, you’re the type of person who’d rather pull a prank than go to war with someone. How am I doing so far? Am I reading you right?”

“Yeah, totally,” Rusty agreed.

“You will fool everyone. That’s your intention.”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“If you pull it off, I’ll be the first to commend you. It will be clever and entertaining, at the same time. But think of your ideal audience, Rusty. Who do you truly want to impress? What kind of person are they?”

Rusty opened his mouth to say something, but then decided otherwise. That man would never be satisfied. However, Mrs. May was waiting, so he cleared his throat and shifted in his chair. “I haven’t given it much thought, I guess.”

She shook her head. “You don’t want to tell me, and that’s fine. You’ll be able to do so eventually. Now, since you’re that willing to learn and become great, how about we start?”

There was nothing he wanted more. And he was dying to sing again.

Chapter Thirty

Secondary Characters Have a Life Too

“And you wouldn’t believe it, Zoey, he was going on and on about all that crap that Connor put in his brain. And others’ brains, I’m sure. Can you tell me what makes some people get into this kind of thing? I just can’t figure it out by myself,” Matty finished his complaint with a deep sigh.

Zoey patted him on the shoulder. He was buying to celebrate the fact that Rusty was making a key for him, and who else was there to do that with than his bestie? “Look, Matty, my bro, my friend,” Zoey began, “there are people in this life that are nothing but followers. Now, the problem is who they end up following. Too bad that it’s usually evil leaders that get to these people. You know, like religious fanatics. I mean, there are plenty of people who believe in a greater being or more without being looney about it. However, that small percentage that gets so easily influenced does exist. That’s life. Sorry your creepy roommate is that kind of person.”

“You say that it’s only a small percentage, but I hear that the Implacable Team is continuing to recruit new members. And do you recall how many people were there, when he made the first public appearance, as the ultimate leader of S.H.I.T?”

Zoey pursed her lips. “Well, you’re right about that. I would’ve never imagined that anyone would find that eco-bs-loving bozo a charming guy, but it looks like he speaks to the minds of some. It has to be because a part of those people find Connor trendy or something. In other words, it’s a fad.”

“One that can and might lead to dangerous consequences, don’t you think? I mean, today it’s only a Nightwing costume that gets it. What’s it going to be tomorrow?”

“I have to admit,” Zoey relented, “that a thing like that can be quite troubling. I mean, sharp objects were involved.”

“The thing is I pity John for falling under Connor’s influence. Does that guy even understand what his incensing speeches do to people?” Matty shook his head.

Zoey seemed to ponder over something in her mind, because her pursed lips moved from left to right, and then up and down, repeating the whole cycle a few times. Then, her eyes lit up, and she snapped her fingers. “I know exactly what we should do! I mean, what I should do.”

“You? Why? Is your roommate going nuts with S.H.I.T., too?”

“Nope, but you know, what I was telling you, about John and others beings followers and all that? Well, I should practice what I preach. I’m not a follower, but I don’t want to be a spectator, either.”

“Why do I get the feeling that I won’t like where this is going?” Matty asked and took a cautious sip from his juice, his eyes never leaving Zoey.

“You’re going to love it!” Zoey waved as if she was completely not sure that would be the case.

“Great. I’ll hate it, even,” Matty concluded. “I know you’re hardheaded and there’s no way in hell I’m going to convince you otherwise, but still I should try--”

Zoey wagged a finger at him. “Nah-ah, Matty. You told John you’re not going to pester Rusty about what to do with his life. So, practice what you preach, too, when your bestie is concerned.”

“Great way to serve that back at me.” Matty grinned and gave Zoey two thumbs up. “Now, let me in on your evil plans. I’m sure something good is bound to come out of them because they’re yours.”

Zoey made a great impersonation of a sniffing poor soul and patted her eyes to dry invisible tears. “You’re making me so emotional.”

“You should be an actor. People who don’t know you are in severe danger of falling for this act.”

“Exactly,” Zoey said with satisfaction. “That’s what I’m counting on. Ready to hear my plan?”

“I believe I was born ready for this kind of thing. Shoot.” Matty examined his friend’s face for signs of hesitation and saw none. That meant that Zoey was truly serious about whatever it was.

Zoey leaned over the table and protected their conspiratorial space with both her hands. Then, she whispered, “I’m going to infiltrate the Implacable Team.”

“What?” Matty asked too loudly, and Zoey shushed him impatiently. “Why?” he added, but in a more subdued tone.

“Because that’s the surest way to expose them,” Zoey explained. “Duh,” she said as an addition when she noticed that he was staring at her, completely nonplussed.

“I don’t know what their deal is, and I hope they’re not dangerous, only annoying, but I don’t think it’s that good an idea, Zoey.”

“Psh, come on, don’t be like that, Matty. What could they do to me, even if they discover, at some point, that I’m not one of them? We don’t live in the Middle Ages, thankfully. They won’t tie me up with stones around my neck, and then try to see if I sink or if I float.”

“I suppose not,” Matty conceded. “I don’t see college students going as far as that. However, they’re not a cool bunch. Why would you do that, Zoey? Please tell me that it’s not because they’re going after Rusty’s crown or something silly like that. I’ll never forgive myself as your best friend.”

“You’re way too serious for twenty-one years of age, Matty. And don’t you worry your pretty head,” she said and reached over the table to pinch his cheek, knowing all too well that he didn’t like it. “No, I’m not doing this for Rusty. That would make this whole thing a selfless act, and, between you and me, let’s say I’m a cold-hearted asshole.”

Matty snorted and rolled his eyes. “When? When you’re sleeping?”

Zoey made a small annoyed sound in the back of her throat without opening her mouth. “I’m telling you, I am.”

“Okay, if you say so. I’m not going to deny you the pleasure of calling yourself what you’re not.”

“It would take all day to tell you all the crazy stuff that goes through my brain on a regular basis, but I like you, and I don’t want to see you broken. No, I’m going to infiltrate the Implacable Team and expose them for the morons they are because I need to be noticed.”

“Wasn’t that what the glitter was for?” Matty asked. “Just checking.”

Zoey rolled her eyes. “And? Has it worked so far?”

“You tell me,” Matty said slowly, hoping that Zoey would blurt out the name of her crush.

“No, it hasn’t,” Zoey replied. “Trust me, I’ve been thinking of a thing so grand that it couldn’t be ignored, no matter how--” She stopped abruptly. “The thing is, this can make me noticeable in the highest degree.”

“I see. So you’re chasing fame,” Matty agreed and showed his approval by nodding his head like a sage. “What’s that got to do with your crush, though? Is he into chicks who love infiltrating organizations so that she can later play the part of a whistleblower? If that’s the case, he must be a guy with very peculiar tastes.”

“Matty, Matty, Matty,” Zoey said, shaking her head, while her eyes glinted with shrewdness and humor. “That’s not the endgame, that’s the strategy. When I finally get noticed by him, I can put a hand on my hip, swaying gently and looking him in the eye, and then saying: ‘babe, do you come here often?’”

Matty bit his bottom lip to stop from laughing, but it was a losing battle. “All this convoluted plan just to use a lame pick-up line?”

“Hey,” Zoey said, putting one hand up and pretending to be offended, “I’m still working out the kinks. Let me think of another pick-up line since you’re so picky.” She narrowed her eyes in thought. “How about this? Winter is coming, and soon so will you?”

“I think you’re a bit much for me today,” Matty said and shook his head, smiling. “All right, I suppose that it’s fine to endanger yourself to some degree for the sake of getting noticed. Hey, who am I to judge, right? I’m playing you know who,” he added and made imaginary pointy ears with his index fingers.

“See?” Zoey said with a big grin on her face. “You’re an inspiration to me.”

“Okay, I get it. Just don’t mention that in court,” Matty said and smiled, too.



“Why are you pacing the floor with the look of a scheming evil character on your face?” Maddox asked, without tearing his eyes away from his textbook while lying lazily on the sofa in the living room.

“Finally, you noticed,” Rusty said. “Wait, how do you know what look I have on my face if you’re not even looking at me?”

It was just the two of them in the whole house, which offered the perfect opportunity for Rusty to broach the topic that interested him without going into too many details. He counted on Maddie to be the weakest link, because Kane would grill him like some freaking secret service agent, while Dex might tackle and tickle him into submission. Therefore, communicating to Maddox only the deets he intended with the hope that the info would be passed on to those other two was the way to go.

“Because I have laser vision and can see you through this textbook,” Maddox said and laughed. He finally closed the book and looked at him. “You just have a certain rhythm to your step when you’re scheming, that’s all.”

“How well you know me,” Rusty said and shook his head in mirth. “Look, Maddie, what’s your opinion of secondary characters?”

“That sounds a little bit random. But, since this is you, and I learned a long time ago not to question your logic, here’s my answer. They can be pretty interesting and offer support for the story and the main characters.”

“Exactly,” Rusty said with satisfaction. “So, you wouldn’t be terribly upset if there were another version of me prancing around, doing stuff, while keeping his real identity a secret from the rest of the world?”

At this, Maddox stared at him, blinking a few times and trying to figure him out, a task he quickly abandoned, most probably because he knew he would never be capable of such a feat. “Do you intend to multiply? How? And why?”

Rusty waved impatiently. “That’s not important. The thing is that I need your silence once certain strange things start happening around here.”

“Strange things. This is getting more interesting by the moment. Care to share what’s going on in that big head of yours?”

“Not really. It will ruin the surprise, and I want you all to be as surprised as the rest when it happens.”

“Because?” Maddox insisted.

“Only Kane would ask such a thing,” Rusty accused. At Maddox’s gesture of surrender, he quickly continued, “You know, so that no one suspects you.”

“Suspect me of what?”

“Not only you, but Kane and Dex, too.”

“For the record, Rusty, you’re making even less sense than usual.”

“That’s intentional.”

“Good to know. I was beginning to think I was talking to your clone already. Is this what this is about? Are you going to enroll in a secret experiment and make us all dizzy by having two of you around?”

“That sounds like a cool scenario, but no. Let’s say it’s something a lot more down to earth, so to speak.”

“Since it involves you, I don’t see how that could be possible,” Maddox said and stared at him intently. “Come on, Rusty, fess up. What are you planning to do?”

“I can’t tell you. Sorry, but I have to be tight-lipped about it.”

“I see. The fewer people know... that kind of thing,” Maddox concluded for himself.

“Yeah, that’s exactly that. All you need to know is that I’ll be taking down the Implacable Team and that I’m going to make it fun,” Rusty said, pleased with how willing Maddie was to go along with his nonsense. That was his best bro. It almost brought a tear to his eye. “I told Matty he’s going to get a key,” he added, changing tack.

“Great. I like that you’re progressing quite nicely down that road,” Maddox commented with a sly smile.

“What’s that supposed to mean? I’m just practical. Matty is going to be over more often than not. Plus, his roommate is a creep. So, you know, it’s for his protection.”

“That sounds good to me. You know, Matty’s been a great influence on you lately.”

“Hold that thought. We’ll see what you think about this on Saturday,” Rusty said, nodding all-knowingly.

“What’s going to happen on Saturday?” Maddox asked, narrowing his eyes in suspicion once more.

“That’s for me to do, and for you to find out... at the right moment, along with everyone else. Ah, let Kane and Dex know that I’m planning something without telling them what I’m planning.”

“Rusty, I really don’t know what you’re planning, so that part isn’t hard. You know they’re going to come after you to squeeze the truth out of you.”

“That’s why I’m counting on you to prevent them from doing so. I know you have what it takes to make them stay away. C’mon, Maddie, it’s all I’m asking,” Rusty said and linked his hands together while making puppy eyes.

Maddox shook his head. “The things you make me do. Okay, they’ll know something, but they won’t know everything, since that’s what you know and you don’t want to share because you sometimes like to act like a bit of a prick.” Seeing how Rusty continued to nod and stare at him, he added with a long-suffering sigh, “And they won’t torture you with questions or otherwise. Good enough?”

“Totally.” There was nothing more he could ask for. Now, the next order of business was to produce all the necessary accessories for making his new persona come to life.



On Wednesday night, Matty made good on his promise to sleep over, so now, they were together in bed, each of them seeing about their own stuff without bothering the other. Rusty was pretty sure that there was no better roommate in the whole campus. And the best looking, too, he thought as he took in the beautiful curve of Matty’s ass, so enticing and so little protected by the thin layer of a pair of sweatpants. While pretending to be deep into the book he was reading, he reached out and touched Matty’s scrumptious behind, kneading it with one hand.

“Rusty?” Matty asked, without peeling his eyes away from his own book.

“Hmm?” Rusty offered while continuing his assault.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing, just chilling.”

“You’re rubbing my butt.”

“Yeah, I am. Ah, right. I should’ve asked. Matty, is it all right if I rub your butt?”

“Sure it is. What I want to know is if all this butt-rubbing is leading somewhere or not.”

“Not,” Rusty replied. “I thought about what you told me, about studying and stuff, and I want to show you that I can be a good roommate and let you do your thing. You know, by not jumping your bones, even if you’re right here.”

“Now that’s a very gentleman-y thought,” Matty said. “I do have a lot to study this week, it’s true.”

“Good. Then you can go back to it, while I do my thing.”

“Your thing being your rubbing my butt?”

“Yeah. Hey, I want to be a gentleman when I’m around you, but you can’t ask me to be a saint, too. I can promise you, though; I intend to limit myself to butt-rubbing.”

Matty tipped his head to one side, throwing Rusty a lopsided grin. “Okay. I can live with that. Don’t hold it against me, though, when I’m going to get into another type of rubbing with you.”

They both laughed, as Matty reached for Rusty’s groin and began to fondle him through his pants. Rusty leaned in for a kiss and wrapped one hand around Matty’s head, helping himself to that kiss to his heart’s content. It took them very little to progress from there, and soon, the textbooks were forgotten, and Rusty was on top of Matty, pinning him down to the bed and kissing him like crazy. “I won’t go the whole way tonight since I have to let you go back to your studies, so here’s what I’m going to do.”

Matty didn’t protest as Rusty made him turn and pushed down his sweatpants and underwear. He slipped his cock through Matty’s thighs, enjoying the rubbing against the other’s balls.

“Will this be enough?” Matty asked in a strained voice. “Not that I’m complaining. You’re teasing my balls plenty.”

“It’s called fooling around for a reason,” Rusty replied. “It’s not like I know exactly what I’m doing, but it’s pleasant and I want to feel you everywhere.”

Matty was on all fours now, keeping his thighs close together, so Rusty could enjoy the to and fro movement. He liked that he had the unhindered look of Matty’s round butt, so another idea came to him. “Sorry, but I’m going to use you a little. And objectify you a lot.”

“Wow, that sounds promising,” Matty breathed out.

Rusty pulled back and then slipped the Mighty Thor between Matty's ass cheeks, bringing them together with his hands, while pushing his bed partner flat against the bed. There was a need for some lubrication, so he reached for the lube without moving away.

"I see what you mean," Matty commented. "I didn't know between the butt cheeks was an option."

"That's because I don't want to fuck you senseless in the middle of the week," Rusty offered.

"How considerate of you. All right, I'll take it. So, I just have to lie down here. Can I continue to study?"

"Why not? If you're up to it. Actually, do it. I think I'm getting into the being ignored kink."

"Is there a kink with such a name?"

"If there's not, there should be," Rusty retorted. "Feel free to continue your studying. I'll just be here, doing my business."

Damn, Matty's butt was everything. It was plump and firm at the same time, and it squeezed him so good. He could very well tell that studying wasn't exactly everything on Matty's mind because he was using his muscles to compress the cock bothering him in the most delicious ways possible.

Rusty didn't comment on it. If they were to play like that, it was completely cool with him. He tried to keep as silent as he could, for the sake of the scenario they were enacting, but it was hard to do so while watching the Mighty Thor going between the two perfect mounds again and again. Matty arched his spine just right, creating the perfect opportunity with the small of his back. Rusty mumbled incoherently and forced himself to go slowly so that all his cum poured into the valley thus created.

He groaned at the self-inflicted torture while the sight of the small puddle of white gleamed in front of his eyes. He pushed himself back on the balls of his feet and dipped his fingers into his own release.

Matty looked over his shoulder and laughed. "How was it, Mr. Kink?"

"Awesome," Rusty said with a smile. "Let me wipe you down."

"No. Just play around with it." Matty pushed himself up on all fours again.

A small trickle began running down right between the perfect ass cheeks, and Rusty didn't miss the opportunity presenting itself. He began moving the cum collected on Matty's back down to the crack and started using it to slowly scissor the tiny asshole in the middle.

Matty moaned and pushed his ass back, showing how much he was enjoying the treatment. “More,” he urged Rusty.

So, the studious one didn’t mind a bit of fingering. Too bad the Mighty Thor was spent, although he did twitch in sympathy as Rusty’s fingers worked the hole slowly. With the other hand, he grabbed Matty’s cock and began to stroke it to the rhythm of his fingering.

Matty was making the cutest sounds while being worked like that. Rusty caught himself in time; he was drooling. To put his mouth to good use, he began to kiss and lick Matty’s ass cheeks, biting from time to time because that was how hungry his baby dude was making him.

“Rusty, your sheets,” Matty moaned, as his balls were starting to wrinkle. Rusty was feeling them from time to time, so he knew.

“Fuck the sheets,” Rusty said matter-of-factly, and that was all the permission Matty needed because he began spurting while voicing away his climax.

Rusty placed one last kiss to Matty’s ass and let him plop down on the bed. Hopefully, doing him like that was gentleman-y enough. He wouldn’t want his baby dude to be left unsatisfied neither in the pleasures of his body, nor his studying, while he was spending his time under the same roof as him.

He took Matty in his arms and turned him. Then, he peppered his face with kisses. “Was it good?” he asked.

“No need to ask. I’m spent,” Matty admitted. “I guess it’s time to sleep anyway, right?”

It wasn’t his usual bedtime, but he was willing to make concessions for Matty. Plus, he felt completely satisfied, so there was no need for him to do anything else. Also, it was in the dark that the greatest plans came alive, right?



Rusty examined the window to his bedroom from outside and closed one eye. For his plan to work flawlessly, he needed to make sure that he didn’t end up taking that theatrical slang wish for luck too literally from his first attempt at showing Sunny Hill what a true king looked like. Hmm, that meant that he needed to think this through and bring a ladder, one that would be highly inconspicuous while he left it propped against the wall. Or maybe he could opt for a folding model?

He was so deep in thought that he missed someone approaching. Only when the feet coming near made the dead leaves sigh as they crunched through them, he turned his head. “Johnny boy,” he said joyously and took Jonathan’s hand to shake it while guiding the guy away. No one needed to know many details about his cunning plan, even if it was mom asking.

Of course, it went without saying that anything he told Maddox, he implicitly told Jonathan, so the stealthy approach wasn't that much of a surprise. Jonathan laughed while Rusty pushed him so they would go around the house. "To what do I owe the pleasure of being pushed around by you?" he asked.

Rusty hooked one arm over the guy's shoulders and fell into a less conspicuous stride. "Let's say you were about to see something you weren't supposed to. And if you had seen it, I would've had to kill you."

"And bury me in the backyard? Not that there's much to it, actually. Do we call it a backyard?" Jonathan asked.

"Not important," Rusty said with aplomb. "Now, how much did Maddox tell you? Wait, don't tell me, 'cause I already know. He told you everything."

"Presumably. I doubt he left anything out, mainly because he looked just as confused as the rest of us when he finished."

"I see. So he didn't drag you to a dark corner to tell you that I'm using him as my shield against the others' questions."

"It was already evident from the way he told us all. Now, Rusty, while you might suspect that I'm trying to extract some vital information out of you, that's not what I'm here for. I made the copy of the key you asked me to help you with while I was in town the other day."

"Oh, right. Thanks a lot, Johnny boy. You're the real McCoy, whatever that has to do with an oil-drip cup."

"Oil-drip cup?" Jonathan asked, looking very much amused, as he should.

"I like reading random stuff on the internet when I'm bored," Rusty explained.

"I can't say I'm surprised. Do you want the key?" Jonathan reached into his pocket without waiting for a confirmation.

Rusty took it from him as if it were a powerful artifact and bowed. "This will end up in good hands."

"I'm sure of it. Now, since you don't want to let anyone in on your plans, I suppose that I can entice you with dinner."

"It's not yet time for dinner, though," Rusty pointed out.

"That's true. But Maddox is deep in his studies this week, and I need a kitchen helper. Are you in?"

“Do I get to taste all the sauces until my tummy hurts?”

“All right. It looks like I’ll have to keep an eye on you. Now I’m not so sure I need a kitchen helper anymore. You sound like a lot of work,” Jonathan joked.

“Which I totally am,” Rusty agreed. “Don’t worry. I’ll be good. Just pass me the occasional snack, and consider me indentured for the next hour.”

Jonathan patted him on the back and gestured for him to walk into the house first. Phew, that had been a close one. No one should suspect anything.



Getting to know the enemy’s lair was one thing he needed to check off his list, which was why he found himself in front of the room that rumor said served as Connor’s Implacable Team’s quarters. It was late at night, and there was no one walking the quiet halls. The street lights from outside threw moving shadows over the door, as a few cars passed by. First, Rusty tried the door knob, and he was oddly satisfied to find it locked. Getting in wasn’t what he needed at the moment. Maybe at a later time. For now, he could get to work without being bothered, only that he needed to act quickly, and he truly believed in that saying about not hurrying a genius in action or something like that.

He tasted the food coloring from the little tube he had brought and smacked his lips. Those nosy assholes were in for a sweet surprise. He poured enough in his palm so that he could work with it and began painting the door. Then, he took the small donut holes and began gluing them to the door, along with as many small candies as he could manage.

He was half an hour in his vandalistic quest when he thought he heard someone walking up the stairs. He took one step back, threw a quick look at his artwork – which could have suffered through at least a couple more iterations – and then rushed out of sight.

Whoever that was, they seemed to be interested in the same destination as he had been only moments earlier. So, he would meet the first critic of his art. He couldn’t stay still, so he peeked from around the corner, hoping that the darker shadow there concealed him well enough.

A small giggle drew his attention even more, so he craned his neck to see better. The intruder had to be a girl and a very short one. She stood in front of the door for some time, then raised her hand to grab a donut hole, most probably, and stuck it into her mouth. The next thing she did was try the door knob, but, unlike him, she didn’t seem content with finding it closed. She leaned over and she seemed to be working the lock. Caught up as he was in spying on her, his left foot twisted slightly, and his sneaker squeaked on the polished floor. The girl, dressed in loose black clothes that made it hard to tell more about her, froze and turned her head, making Rusty dash away from view.

The hurried steps down the stairs assured him that the would-be burglar was running away from him and not toward him. Well, it looked like his latest career choice might not be that good for his blood pressure, but the good news was that he was young and he could handle it.

Nonetheless, he needed to be a lot more careful than this. Lesson learned. Still, he wouldn't let go of his strategy to rub the Implacable Team's nose into it first, and then beat them by hiding in plain sight. Ah, the pleasure this plan would bring. He could only sigh in reverence at the perfection of it.



It wasn't me! That's Rusty Parker's defense at being accused by the Implacable Team that he vandalized the entrance to their inner sanctum – cough, cough – by decorating it, cake pop style. The damage, we learned from one of the people in charge of cleaning, was minimal, and the art could even be consumed, that is if you like your sweet delights straight from a door.

However, Connor Williams wasn't amused to find a giant red R encrusted in candies and donut holes when he went down there this morning, ready to scheme... we mean, ready to plan on how to raise the morality levels of Sunny Hill to the stars. He says that it could only have been Rusty Parker, the one who feels threatened by the policies of his organization. He considers it a cheap revenge, but we dare to say that all that must have cost a pretty penny. Is revenge a dish better served sweet?

Rusty's roommates stand with him. We overheard Maddox Kingsley telling his better half: 'Rusty would never do something so on the nose.' At which, Jonathan Hamilton replied: 'By no means. I heard the result was a horrifying mess. Rusty has better taste in art than that.'



“I can hear the nasal tone through the screen,” Jonathan commented and laughed. “Do they really think I talk like that?”

“That's not important,” Kane interrupted them, as they were lunching together and had fun reading the latest Xpress after Connor's bemoaning had already made rounds through the campus from the break of dawn until now. “What's important is this. How on earth did you pull this off, Rusty? I can swear you slept through the night like a baby. I would have heard you running up and down the stairs.”

Rusty stuffed his mouth with another spoonful of Jonathan's fantastic quiche. “It wasn't me,” he said with a shrug.

Chapter Thirty-One

A Night to Remember

Zoey walked into the room as soon as Matty yelled for her to come in from the other side of the door, but it took him a few moments to recognize his bestie in her new attire. The pink jacket she loved so much was gone, and so was any trace of glitter. If anything, the lack of any makeup made Zoey look younger with her eyes made huge by the glasses and her hair brushed back and tied into a braided ponytail. Knowing the usual troubles she had with making her hair behave, Matty wondered what could have happened to warrant what must have been a torture involving hours of punishing brushing of that leonine mane.

The clothes were just as much of a shock. Matty could have overlooked the lack of pink, but why was Zoey wearing a long black dress? The only thing going for it was the way it cinched at the waist, showing the wearer's slim figure. Otherwise, it looked like something that forced the person in it to take small painstaking steps just to move about. Zoey wore thick socks wrapped over a pair of black army boots that made her feet look enormous compared to the rest of her. That was, however, the only thing of that entire outfit that revealed to Matty that his usually fun-loving bestie was somewhere underneath all that stern clothing.

Zoey obviously took delight in his shocked expression because she made a pirouette toward the middle of the room, allowing him to observe her from all angles. "Well," she asked, "am I cultist chic already?"

So, it was a change of style. "With flying colors," he confirmed. "The only question is: why?"

Zoey puckered her lips with an expression of glee on her small face. "This is my undercover cover."

"Wow," Matty said unenthusiastically. "Don't you think it's missing something?"

"Like what?" Zoey asked, without hiding her confusion.

"I don't know. Some pink maybe? Or any other color, if I think about it. You look like you're getting ready to attend some wacky funeral."

Zoey grinned, seemingly satisfied with his fashion critique. "I suppose you could say that. It's going to be the Implacable Team's funeral once I'm done with them."

"Oh," Matty said, as the meaning of all that finally caught up with him. "This is your undercover cover, indeed. I'd say, girl," he continued with a snicker, "that you're going to need a stick to beat off all those doom-loving cultists once you set foot in there. But are you sure that this horrible dress is enough to make them bite? That mischievous glint in your eye might give you away."

“That’s why I’m here, to test drive it,” Zoey explained. “On your roommate,” she added at his questioning look.

“As you can see, he’s not here,” Matty pointed out.

Zoey waved. “I saw him outside, talking to another Implacable. That’s what they call themselves. I’d say that I did earn a couple of lewd looks while walking past. It worked wonders for my self-esteem.”

“Really? Did they see you?” Matty stared, unsure of what was going on in Zoey’s head. “I mean, I bet it’s hard to see anyone from the heights of moral purity they bask themselves on.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Zoey admitted. “I was totally pulling your leg. And it’s good that they didn’t notice me. I mean, I have to be at least half invisible for this to work.”

She barely finished speaking when the door opened brusquely, letting in the d-creature they were just discussing. John examined them quickly, pushing his glasses up his nose and flaring his nostrils for a moment as if he could smell foul play.

“Hey, John,” Zoey began without delay. “I’m here to ask you something.”

John eyed her suspiciously. Matty wasn’t entirely sure his roommate recognized Zoey. After all, he had barely recognized her sans glitter.

“Hello to you, too,” John uttered without one trace of friendliness. “Ask away.”

“I was wondering if I could join your order,” Zoey said with aplomb.

Matty worried for a moment. But Zoey was a terribly good actor, innocent and hopeful, her hands linked in front of her chest as if she was waiting with bated breath for John’s approval.

“You will have to pass a test,” John said testily.

“Of course,” Zoey supplied dutifully. “I didn’t imagine that you would take in just anyone walking in from the street. Do you think you could put in a good word for me?” She tipped her head to one side and looked at him while biting her bottom lip nervously.

Matty was sitting on his bed, but he felt the need to give Zoey a standing ovation. She was playing John just the right way, getting into the coat of the lost sheep as if it had always belonged to her.

“If Matty forgives me,” John suddenly blurted out, taking both of them by surprise.

Zoey’s mask almost slipped as she turned her head to ask him without words what that was about. Matty hurried to the rescue. “If this is about the superhero outfit, it’s water under the bridge, man.”

John's face lit up as if he had been promised endless afterlife. "Then I'll take your friend to Connor right now." Showing again that he had no proper notion of personal boundaries, he grabbed Zoey's hand. "You should come with us, Matty," he added, while dragging Zoey along, making her stumble in her tight dress. "We should all be Implacable," he declared in a pompous tone.

Matty made a move to follow, already worried about the possessiveness John showed for Zoey, but a curt look from his bestie assured him that his help wouldn't be seen with good eyes. "Ah, thanks, man, maybe another time. I have a ton of studying to do."

The magic word made John waver. "I have to study too," he said in a forlorn voice.

"I'm sure you two will make it quick," Matty said.

Behind John, Zoey made an exasperated gesture mimicking a forehead slap. The joke, however, was lost on John. "Okay," he said. "I'll be right back."

Zoey waved at Matty and winked. Then, her smile turned into a startled look when John pulled her away with all his force.



Everything had to be perfect down to the minutest detail. Rusty examined his accoutrements with the most critical eye he could muster. He grabbed the black mask and put it over his eyes while looking in the mirror. That thing was worth every penny. It covered his forehead, slipping comfortably over the nose and obscuring his left cheek while allowing unhindered vision. There were at least a few things that could give him away, but he counted on the simple fact that people didn't look further than what they were used to seeing on a regular basis. For them, Rusty Parker, the now contested king of Sunny Hill, was a jock, a meathead, a fuck boy, whose performance at any karaoke attempt was just a reason for hilarity and nothing else. Plus, presumably, he was living the consequences of his profligate life, which meant that he was caught up in soon-to-be-a-father plans.

Sure, most students with a head still on their shoulders wouldn't be fooled so easily, but they weren't interested in seeing the truth to begin with. That was another little aspect of human behavior he was counting on. Mrs. May had questioned him about it and nodded in agreement as he explained his reasoning. That small smile that had curled her lips also assured him that she thought him pretty clever to come up with such ideas, and also brave enough to enact them.

He smiled as he replayed his plans through his head. The mask in the mirror remained immobile while only half his mouth seemed to be caught in that satisfied grin.



“What are your plans for this Saturday?” Rusty questioned Matty as soon as their tutoring session was over. To make sure Matty continued to like him all the same, he even forced himself to study for those sessions. The hardest part wasn’t that, though. It was keeping himself from jumping the guy’s bones, especially since Matty looked really sexy while playing the role of the stern professor. However, since Rusty could also make him smile when he got the answers right, all was good in the world.

“Since you won’t be here,” Matty replied, somewhat pointedly, “I suppose I will spend my time indoors, studying and such.”

“Aww, sorry to ruin your Saturday,” Rusty joked while brushing off the implied question. He hadn’t told Matty anything, and he didn’t want to lie, either. It wasn’t earning him any points with his baby dude, but his secrecy had a role to play, just as he had justified it when talking to Maddox. That was the part of him he didn’t want exposed. Only with a mask firmly wrapped around his head, he truly had the guts to let it shine. Mrs. May had had something to comment about that, but she was a kind soul. He had even managed to get her to promise that Francine Hamilton wouldn’t hear one word about his convoluted plans, although Jonathan’s mom probably had better things to do than be concerned about his secret and unusual project.

“We’ve spent quite a bit of time together this week,” Matty said and then averted his eyes. “I’m not complaining.”

Rusty didn’t know what was going on in Matty’s head and didn’t want to pry, either. After all, he had plenty of secrets himself, and it would be hypocritical to comment on others’ propensity for the same thing. “Okay, then,” he said and felt as if he should say more but, unlike most times, he had no idea what that would be.



Matty took a deep breath once outside Rusty’s room. There was something going on with Rusty, and the guy didn’t want to share. Right now he, Matty, also seemed to be suffering from a case of a foot in his mouth because, to any normal person’s ears, what he had just said earlier must have sounded like the words of a miffed boyfriend. Since Rusty didn’t do girlfriends, there was no way he’d do boyfriends.

Although, what could be keeping Rusty away from campus this Saturday? Matty’s thoughts went to the young woman they had met while shopping for birthday presents for Gabriel. At the time, he had decided not to make too much of that encounter. However, that didn’t mean that a little worm with green eyes wasn’t trying to gnaw its way through his heart as if it were an apple. Strangely enough, he had seen girls trying to get Rusty’s attention before, and it had never bothered him.

Mainly because Rusty's responses had been nothing but superficial and disinterested. That wasn't the case with August, right? Well, that made things a lot less funny than Matty was trying to make them. There was no reason for him to act like a jealous boyfriend; there was no reason for him to act up at all, regardless of what August was to Rusty, and Rusty to her.

Yet, why did he feel like a jilted partner now that he knew Rusty had plans off campus, and secret plans on top of that? He shook his head, wishing he could laugh at himself. What was he even thinking? Maybe those plans weren't secret at all. Maybe Maddox and Rusty's other friends knew where he was going, and there was a good reason why Rusty didn't want to talk about them to just anyone.

Even that thought was a bit depressing. After all, it only meant that Matty wasn't part of Rusty's inner circle, and that hurt. At least he could expect to be considered a friend, even if he wasn't Rusty's boyfriend in any shape or form.

Lost as he was in his own head, he missed colliding with Jonathan at the foot of the stairs by a hair's breadth. Jonathan laughed and caught him as he was about to end up twisting his ankle in an effort to keep from crashing into the other.

"Hello, Matty," Jonathan said in his pleasant voice. "Is Rusty doing okay in his studies?"

Matty had heard Rusty joking about Jonathan being the 'mom' on more than one occasion. "Yeah, he's doing great, actually."

Jonathan smiled broadly and Matty felt his heart growing bigger for some reason. "I'm happy he found you," he said.

Matty considered those words carefully and then blurted out without thinking twice. "Do you happen to know where he's going this Saturday? I forgot to ask him," he added quickly, feeling instantly guilty over the lie.

Jonathan seemed a bit surprised at the question. Matty cursed inwardly. Was he being stupid or what? Rusty was upstairs. They had phones. There were a gazillion opportunities for him to ask his question. However, what Jonathan said took him by surprise. "He didn't tell any of us he'd be away this weekend."

Not odd. Not odd at all, Matty told himself. Rusty was a free man; he could go wherever he wanted, with whomever he wanted, and there was no law that he had to tell his friends – or Matty – anything about his plans.

"Ah, I must have misunderstood him," he said quickly and made a beeline for the door. "Have a great weekend, Jonathan," he added brightly as he walked out.

He was behaving like an idiot, he decided as soon as he was outside. Plus, wasn't he the pot calling the kettle black now? He intended to take Slick Coolplums out for a run this weekend.



“Matty, you wouldn’t believe it,” Zoey began without any preamble. “This Saturday is going to be huge.”

“All right, all right, slow down. What do you mean?” Matty asked while moving his phone from one ear to the other.

“I’m all in, you know, deep in you know what, and this Saturday, we’re going on a rampage against party people.”

“We? Are you already part of them? I had no idea a brainwash would suit you,” Matty joked.

“Geesh, stop it. I’m blending in,” Zoey whispered.

“Why are you whispering? Is your roommate there? Where are you?” he asked, feeling his suspicion growing.

“Didn’t I just tell you? I’m deep in--”

“Okay, okay, now I’m sure you’re starting to crack. Get off the phone, and stop putting yourself in unnecessary danger. You can tell me all about it when we see each other. After all, I’m going to come over this Saturday for you know what.” Great, now they were talking like a pair of conspirators.

“Right, right. I’m going to leave the key in the usual place. I won’t be there, since now I’m part of the... you know, it.”

“Tell me in two words or less what kind of crazy you’ll get up to this Saturday.”

“You just said it. Crazy. Shoot, I can’t talk anymore. But it’s going to be a night to remember. Bye for now, Matty. I’m going to call you later, when I can, with details.”

Matty stared at his phone for a moment and then put it away with a sigh. Everyone was dealing in secrets nowadays. Rusty, Zoey, and him. Yeah, no point in judging others, for sure.



Why would I ever give up on being a night owl? Rusty thought as he took one deep breath before hiking himself up on the wall. He had everything well planned out. Since everyone was out partying, the campus would be his stage. From the top of the wall he could see far left and right, and the lawns were getting busier with people in the mood for drinking and partying. With midterms looming on the horizon, it was obvious most students were trying to make the best of the time they had left.

And this was his playground, Rusty thought with a smile. He was about to choose the first party to crash when the sound of a loud procession coming from the far left stopped him. What the hell was going on? He crouched on the wall and then took a seat, letting his legs dangle over, while crossing his arms and waiting for the unusual cortege to come near.

“What do we want? Order! When do we want it? Now!” The chanting was loud enough now to make out the words.

Rusty couldn't believe the golden opportunity being delivered right into his lap. “I'll be damned,” he murmured, as he took in the group marching by, armed with what looked like torches and slogans. They had to be Connor's formidable shitheads by the look of it. First of all, they were a homogenous mass, and Rusty had to hand it to them that they appeared to be really disciplined. They were marching, hitting the pavement hard with their boots, and they stopped in front of one of the houses where a party seemed to be in full swing already.

Full of curiosity, he waited. The procession continued marching in place, and finally, the noise they were causing made more and more heads turn, until the music pouring out of the house in question stopped.

Someone, who appeared to be at the front of the clamoring cortege, took a few steps forward, breaking ranks, but, as Rusty quickly realized, all for a good cause. His vantage point perched on the wall afforded him a good view of the conflict brewing at his feet. This was going to be good, he thought and couldn't help a grin.

Also, it looked like he wasn't the only one going for a masked act tonight. The leader of the procession, all dressed in black and wearing a hoodie supposedly meant to make him look badass for the role, went straight toward a pair of well-built guys who were struggling with a beer keg, seemingly unaware that they were walking through a minefield. The masked personage grabbed the keg so suddenly that the two students didn't understand what was going on at first. Surprised with his unexpected success, the guy hesitated for a moment, but then, he threw one arm up, a call to arms of sorts. “Seize all the alcohol!”

His followers took the order to heart, and they lunged over the lawn, pushing people out of their way. The two jocks in charge of the keg finally caught up with what was going on and tried to get their property back. However, in the confusion caused by the surprise attack, the keg had fallen as the first victim and was now on its side, foaming at the mouth and giving up its last breath. Rusty said a few words in its memory quietly to himself, with all the piety he could muster.

The party people were too stunned by the attack of the masked mob, so bottles were littering the lawn soon enough, their contents spilled directly on the grass. *That can't be good for the environment*, Rusty thought and shook his head.

Delighted with their first success, the procession of black hoodies rushed toward the next lawn but, this time, the party goers were better prepared. Some of the masked guys and gals got pushed back and their leader gestured for them to fall back and regroup.

Disgruntled shouts could be heard everywhere, especially coming from those who had no booze left thanks to the impromptu intervention, and sides were getting formed. Just as he was thinking that things were getting out of hand and campus security had to take action, a shout came from the far left. "It's the cat boy!"

What? For real? *This night is just getting better and better*, Rusty thought, his face muscles already cramping from all the fun he was having. His gaze followed the outstretched arms and took in Slicky Coolplums hanging from the lowest branch of a tree, seemingly intent on mocking the crowd. The righteous destruction of booze appeared to have been abandoned in favor of a worthier cause.

The masked guys turned their whole attention to Slicky, who, now aware of having drawn their focus, grabbed a higher branch of the tree and hiked himself up, while swinging his tail with his usual elegance.

"Take him down!" someone bellowed, and the crowd surrounded the tree and began to shake it, although their efforts were hilarious given how thick the trunk was. However, since they were smacking their fists against the bark, some shaking was starting to show and, for a moment, Rusty worried that Slicky was on the point of losing his balance.

No, no, that was just an act with the intention of mocking the crowd below. Other students were watching the show, and they seemed mesmerized by it. The spilled booze was forgotten, as something a lot more interesting appeared to be happening in front of their very eyes.

"Do you think I'm a girl?" Slicky shouted in his usual shrilly voice. "Check this!" He was holding himself with one arm and with the other, he made a lewd gesture, moving it down his lean abdomen and stopping right above his sex. Then, he pushed his hips forward, making the mob below gasp in outrage.

"Get him down! Unmask him!" Cries of anger emerged from everywhere.

Uh-uh, weren't they the hypocrites now?

Slicky laughed and swung his hips, making sure to draw attention to that particular part of his anatomy. However, caught up as he was in the act he was putting on, he missed one of his masked enemies climbing on a lower branch and trying to grab his foot. He jumped out of the way just in time and then climbed higher. Spurred on by being made fun of, the Implacables, because there was no way they were anyone else, began to attack the tree.

Rusty pushed himself off the wall. Now, this situation called for an intervention. Carefully, his eyes on the prize, aka the cat boy, he slunk around, making sure that no one noticed him, and used another tree to climb up and then jump onto the roof of a nearby building. In the meantime, Slicky was starting to have a hard time fending off his attackers, so Rusty cleared his throat for a moment to achieve the tonality he was going for, and then began. “Give me thy hand, sweet creature of the night,” he sang, going for a lower register, the one Mrs. May had told him to practice and explore.

Everyone stopped at the sound of his loud voice, as if a magical wand had snatched away their ability to speak, yell, and grunt. Slicky turned his head, and Rusty opened his arms wide. It was not only for Slicky’s sake, but also because that way, the cape on his shoulders would billow in the night breeze, showing its shockingly red interior.

“Who the fuck is that?” someone from below cried out.

Rusty gestured for Slicky to jump into his arms. The cat boy looked down at his attackers getting nearer on the lower branches, hesitated in pure feline fashion, but then, pressured by the incoming mob, he threw himself forward. Rusty quickly wrapped one arm around his waist and used the cape to protect him from the eyes of those unworthy onlookers. Briefly, he placed his lips on Slicky’s moist mouth and made them both turn in a waltz-like pirouette. “And now, I’ll make you disappear,” he continued in the same baritone register. “Go,” he whispered to Slicky and obscured his running away by turning his back and throwing his arms wide like a magician executing his prestige.

He didn’t look to see if the cat boy was making himself scarce. Behind his cape, he was, indeed, invisible.



Who was that? Matty wondered, throwing one last look over his shoulder at the tall figure in the moonlight, standing there with his arms extended while mocking the crowd at his feet and singing... some sort of opera? He rushed away, his heart beating wildly. When Zoey had told him where the Implacables were going to hit, he had thought it was a great idea to go and crash their party-crashing plans and end up being featured on the cover of Xpress for Rusty’s amusement when he got back from his weekend.

However, he had underestimated, and grossly at that, just how determined Connor’s team was. That had been a really close call, with the mob climbing the tree and trying to get him. In hindsight, he could have chosen to jump on the roof of the building anyway to save himself but being helped out had come as a big surprise.

He stopped at the edge of the roof, looking back one more time. Whoever that had been, he had an amazing voice, nothing like anyone else Matty had ever heard or listened to in his entire life. When the enigmatic stranger had kissed him, he had experienced a wave of familiarity, but...

Matty shook his head. He missed Rusty, even if it had barely been thirty hours or so since they had seen each other last. And now he was imagining that the dark handsome stranger, in his heavy luxurious cape with his black hair swept back and wearing the costume of an opera star, was the guy he was in love with. It couldn't be, right? The general consensus was that Rusty couldn't sing for shit, that was something he had heard someone saying at one point – but who was it then? – and, also, he was away for the weekend.

A small shiver coursed through him as his heartbeat settled to a steadier rhythm. In the distance, the stranger stood tall, and sounds of awe from the audience could be heard from time to time, followed by clapping.

It looked like someone was stealing the headlines from Connor. Matty couldn't keep in a snicker. Well, Rusty would have a grand time hearing about all the astonishing things that had happened tonight... but he wouldn't hear them from him. After all, he, Matty, was supposed to be deep in study or even asleep at that hour.

He touched his lips for a moment, where the stranger had kissed him. He had only felt the other's lips partially, as the mask he was wearing covered almost his entire face save for half his mouth and part of his right cheek. There was also quite a strong smell of some haircare product that had invaded his nose during their short encounter. He was pretty sure Zoey was using something similar, so he would have to ask her about it later.

What could she be doing by now? He had noticed someone short and energetic in the mob chasing him, and it had to be her. What gave her away was how she had continuously grabbed people to drag them down from the tree while yelling the hardest and pretending to be crazed about being the one who wanted to catch the cat boy. No one had seemed to notice, but, still, Matty shivered again.

Damn, they were getting into some dangerous game, weren't they? All of them?



Rusty was beyond pleased. The finale of his aria was met with applause and demands for encores. The only ones ruining the mood had been the Implacables, but even their energy eventually ran out, and, at first, they had waited by the foot of the tree, only to make themselves disappear little by little.

Yes, he thought, that was more like it. He wrapped his cape around himself. "Have fun, my lieblings," he boomed. "And remember the name Rybalt, belonging to the one who saved your night. Farewell for now. You'll hear from me again."

With that promise, he turned on his heel and made his grand exit. Too bad the cat boy was no longer there. A part of him had wished for Slicky to be waiting for him in the distance.

Alas, one couldn't have everything.



Oh, dears, did you hear a divine voice last night, cutting through the din of parties and bottles getting smashed by the Implacable Team – yes, yes, we know who it was, masks or not – in an effort to reestablish the cursed days of prohibition? A war is underway, guys and gals of Sunny Hill, a war of one against an army. And boy, we love us an underdog.

We do. And his name is Rybalt. If you noticed that R splashed all over the door to the room where the Implacable Team is holding its daily fastidious planning of how to ruin your youth, hopes and dreams (of fucking up) then you know who your masked hero is. Yes, we know, we messed up at the time, wrongly suspecting our local hero Rusty Parker of being the author of the aforementioned prank.

We're not too proud to stand corrected. Now, on to the burning questions that won't let our poor souls rest. Is Rybalt a student here? But since when do we house such endowed singers in our midst?

Stay tuned. The true identity of our new masked hero will be revealed here. At the right moment, as you know is our way by now.

Chapter Thirty-Two

I Used to Know You

Last night had been electric. Rusty couldn't sit still. He had gotten up before everyone else, aware that he would soon have to fend off a wave of questions from his besties, and went out for a run. The campus was still quiet at that hour, while a thin breeze, cutting a bit through his clothes, had just begun, an early morning announcement that the weather would soon change for the worse. He sat on a bench and took out his phone, hoping that the hour wasn't outrageous for the call he was dying to make. "Mrs. May," he whispered in a heartbeat after the short exchange of greetings, "I did it. I'll send you the video that's just started circulating online. It was taken by someone on their phone, but I think it's pretty good."

"You are moving fast. I like it," she commended him. "Give me a little. I will tell you what I think right away."

He waited, wavering between excitement and worry. The people listening to him last night had applauded him, but that wasn't enough. He needed to hear an educated opinion, and he was just lucky that Mrs. May didn't like sleeping in on Sundays. When the phone rang back, his thumb was already hovering over the screen.

"First of all, congratulations, Rusty, on your first outing as a singer," Mrs. May said brightly. "I am quite impressed with how well you held your own across the range. A lot of singers have trouble with this kind of control. But you sounded like yourself as you went low, as well as when you went high. However, there is still some work we need to do on really low notes. Also, there was a bit of a hesitation in the beginning. I suppose I can attribute it to first public appearance jitters. Wasn't that it?" she added in a pleasant voice.

Rusty felt all giddy inside. Of course, he had work to do on the lower notes, and he knew it. As for that hesitation, Mrs. May was right, and he wasn't about to contradict her because he didn't do stuff like that in front of an authority in the field like she was. There was no point in bragging or pretending it wasn't so. "Yeah. And you were correct to tell me to move more into those lower ranges. I mean, that's one way to keep myself from sounding like a cartoon character."

Mrs. May laughed. "Along with your voice, you must also cultivate your persona as a singer, Rusty. There's a certain dignity that comes with this profession. For now, I won't scold you too much. And I believe that before even being a singer, you are an entertainer. That is not something I'm willing to stifle in your development. You really know how to make a crowd fall in love with you, and that's no small thing."

"Thank you, Mrs. May," he said, while the patch of warmth in his chest spread until it filled him completely.

“Don’t forget about our next session. I’m waiting with bated breath to teach you more, Mr. Rybalt,” she said in a playful tone.

“I still have eight or seven sessions left. Afterward--” he started, wanting to find out what her usual rates were and expecting them to be quite high.

“I already let Francine know,” Mrs. May interrupted him. “You don’t have to worry about anything of the kind. However, she told me that she expects nothing but excellence at the end of our time together.”

“Geez, man, talk about pressure,” Rusty mumbled. “I should talk to her and tell her that I can handle my own stuff.”

“I wouldn’t dare if I were you,” Mrs. May said, and she was only half-joking by the sound of her voice. “How about we both work hard and surprise her?”

“I don’t think she’s that easy to surprise. She’s listened to the best, like live and all that,” Rusty said, suddenly feeling little compared to the rest of the universe, or at least the part of it that mattered.

“All the more reason to put your all into it. I’ll do my part,” she assured him.

“Then I’m all in, too,” he said solemnly. Francine was a tough cookie, but, man, that woman could almost make him want to cry. There was so much trust in how she behaved toward him that he had no idea what to make of it. If only the stuff could be bottled and stashed away for later use; he’d make it last a lifetime.

“That’s good to know, Rusty. Or do you prefer Rybalt more?” she joked.

“Not when you’re teaching me. I can be myself then.” He stopped in time. These women were making him spill more than he intended to. “Bye, Mrs. May. Thank you for everything.”

“Oh, I intend to put you through hell to get your voice in top shape. You might not feel so thankful after that. Bye, Rusty. I can barely wait.”

He felt full and content as he put the phone back into his pocket. Life finally made sense.



There were so many pieces he wanted to practice, he thought, as he began making a selection on his phone, while on his way to eat breakfast. He felt too energetic to get back to the house, and all his friends were still sleeping. Plus, this way, he could also enjoy brunch with them later.

He grunted when he was suddenly attacked from behind just as he got close to the fast food place. Someone crashed into him and put their hands over his eyes. “So, Rybalt,” a cavernous voice began, “any last wishes before breakfast?”

For a moment, he froze, but then he realized that there was only one person in the whole world who could see through his charade so easily. He thrust one arm quickly behind him and caught his attacker. Then, turning quickly on his heels he faced his opponent. August burst into laughter, most probably because of the expression on his face.

“How could you tell?” he asked directly.

She tilted her head to one side, giving him that legendary look of hers, the one that made you feel like there was no one else in the entire world. Today, it only filled him with fondness, but there had been a time when it used to do a lot more to him than just that. “I used to know you, remember?”

Yeah, there was no doubt about that. “Are you reading Xpress all the time now? Don’t you have any hobbies?” he teased her.

August’s smile grew larger. She wrapped one arm around his. “How about I buy you breakfast? We have tons to catch up on, right?”

They did. That was another thing he couldn’t deny. “Nah. I’m going to buy you breakfast,” he said. “Finally, I have some pocket money,” he joked.

“Sure, I won’t argue. How are things with your dad?”

He shrugged. “He’s himself. It’s not like I have any hope he’s going to change now. Although, he seems like a better dad to my brother and sister than he’s been to me.”

“And how does that make you feel?” she asked as they entered the fast-food restaurant.

“Are you majoring in psychology or something? Stop picking my brain,” he complained, but that was the way they talked, provoking each other, giving each other stuff to think about.

“Actually, I’m more into trade these days,” she said.

They sat across from each other at one of the tables. To gain some time, Rusty pretended to be busy with the menu, although that place barely had a handful of options to choose from, and he usually picked the same thing. He wanted to ask her so many questions, and yet, his tongue seemed tied. Maybe he was afraid of opening some Pandora’s box and then shutting it before he managed to get out. Maybe he needed to stop picking apart his own brain.

That summer had seemed magical at the time, outside the boundaries of time in a way. It had only lasted while it lasted, and yet, that mixed bag he had carried along all this time hadn’t

grown old and moldy enough to stash away for good. August had known he could sing. Besides the people at his old school before moving, no one else had known at the time. He had tried showing off his skills to his dad, just to prove that he had something special, and he had been promptly shut down. In front of August, he had done it at first just to show off, too. Only she hadn't shut him down; on the contrary, she'd told him that one day he'd become a star. She had meant it. She meant everything she said, which was why, after that summer, when she told him that she would never leave her husband, he'd gotten so mad that he never returned her calls.

Only it looked like something had changed. He went to place their order and waited for it, his back turned to where she was sitting, trying to make sense of the nest of thoughts inside his head. Had she woken up and realized that it was no way to live, hoping that scumbag would finally see the light and change his ways? They had that much in common, probably. They both hoped and hoped and believed in a change that was bound to never come.

She took a sip from her soda and smacked her lips in delight, the same way she'd used to while they were gobbling down junk food, but only after arranging it prettily on plastic plates just to make each meal feel festive somehow.

"So," he asked, pretending to be busy with his burger, "how's it hanging, August?"

"It's not like you to beat around the bush. Go ahead, ask what you want to know."

"Fine," he said and leaned back in his chair, eyeing her carefully. "Did you leave him?"

August frowned slightly and took another long sip from her drink. "You can say that."

"What is that supposed to mean?" He couldn't believe that, after all these years, there were still traces of pain inside him. It was only this much he could do not to yell at her.

"We're separated," August explained. "Not yet divorced."

"So, did you finally have enough of it?" he asked, hating how aggressive, how fucking entitled he sounded as if he still had the right to ask her anything. Not that he'd ever had that; August had made that perfectly clear.

August sighed and her eyes drifted out the window. "Sometimes, feelings turn bad, I guess. Like pudding."

"Joke more," he said under his breath. Fuck, this wasn't him, and yet, he couldn't help himself. He wanted to blame her, but he had learned it long ago that each and every person was responsible for what they felt.

She looked at him and smiled. There was something bittersweet in that smile, making her look older than her twenty-five. "That's something no one can take away from me. When I stop

joking, feel free to turn me over to the big guy,” she said, making a vague gesture toward the ceiling. “That’s when I’ll know it’s over for good.”

Rusty shook his head. His anger moved out of him, draining some of the energy of that morning away, too. But it didn’t feel entirely bad. Just different. “I’m glad for you,” he said, and it was the first completely honest thing he had said since meeting her this morning.

She offered him a warm smile. “So,” she said, “what’s the deal with this Rybalt persona?”

Rusty threw a quick look around and made a gesture for her to keep it down. “Just some secret project of mine.”

“I see.” She nodded, as her smile turned mischievous. “Who dared to piss on your turf?”

Rusty rolled his eyes. Yeah, she totally knew him. “Just some scumbags who think themselves smart or some shit.”

“Just to be clear, why do you need this sexy ghost?” she asked and began stuffing her face with fries.

She had never been the kind to eat daintily or make a fuss about greasy foods like other chicks. She was real, and he had always liked that about her.

“No one knows I can sing. Almost no one. My guys do, and they even had to learn about it because of some crappy things I did last year,” he said hastily.

To his relief, she didn’t ask what things. He had almost ruined Maddox’s chances with Jonathan because he wanted to keep everything hidden about his secret passion.

“I see,” she said and sucked on her forefinger with gusto. “Don’t worry; your secret is safe with me. I still don’t know why you don’t want to be yourself and just show the world the middle finger while doing the things you want to do.”

“Hey, I’m not asking you why you can’t leave your husband. Anymore,” he added and looked away.

“Good point,” August admitted. “But that was the good thing between us, right? No pressure.”

Yeah, it had been like that. No pressure until he had wanted more. And no, not because he wanted her to himself, like a selfish prick, because at seventeen, he had absolutely nothing to offer, but for her sake. He had wanted her to be happy, and she had chosen not to understand a simple thing like that.

“I guess,” he said with a shrug. “What are your plans now, as a free woman?”

August leaned back into her seat and stretched her arms. “First of all, finish my education. Then, get a diploma, start getting on the hamster wheel and all that. I suppose that even people like me need to grow up.”

He had nothing to add to something like that. Supposedly, everyone needed to grow up, and that was a fact. Only that he couldn't see himself doing that. Maybe later, when the level of disappointment would be high enough to warrant that. For now, there was no reason to change anything. He was completely fine where he was.

“How's your boy Matty doing?” August asked suddenly, taking him by surprise.

“Why? What have you heard?” Had he missed some juicy piece of gossip that pointed out his special friendship with Matty?

August burst into laughter. “You should see your face. What? Is he your secret lover or something?” He didn't have to do or say anything. It had to be written all over his face, but only she could read that cryptogram. Her eyes grew wide, and she grinned madly. “Wow, Rusty. I've always thought it would be that pretty bestie of yours.”

“Hmm,” he mumbled and now, he was the one busying himself with his drink. For fuck's sake. Well, he had told August a bunch of crazy things that summer, even about that one time when he and Maddox had measured their dicks and even touched a little, but it was quite the jump from that to—

He didn't know exactly to what. Only that August, with her shrewdness, was low-key pissing him off now. She had been there for like two weeks or something, and she already knew all his secrets.

August grinned and looked like that wasn't a bone she was willing to let go of. She leaned over the table, her eyes glinting. “Come on, Rusty, out with everything. Your little campus gossip rag talks about you like you haven't missed one girl from freshman to senior year, and yet there's this mad cute guy who acts all possessive the moment I do as little as talk to you.”

Rusty snorted. “Yeah, possessive.” When had that happened? What had August seen? Did she have different eyesight than the rest of the entire world?

August snickered. “Yeah. I could tell. Nah, I'm pulling your leg, actually. All right, so maybe he didn't give away much, and you didn't either, when I met the two of you, but you just confirmed my hunch. You wouldn't take just anyone to your brother's birthday. And since he wasn't one of your well-known besties, I just wondered how he's special. I believe I got my answer.” She leaned back again, with a satisfied look on her face.

“How in the world--” Rusty started and then shut up, frustrated with her keen insight. “How do you even do that?”

August shrugged. “I’m just good at putting two and two together, I guess. I mean, back then,” she said, without saying the words both of them had to be thinking – *when we were together* – “you were talking about your bestie Maddox an awful lot of the time.”

“Yeah, ‘cause he was my number one bro. He still is,” Rusty argued.

“I know. There’s nothing wrong with having a bro whose ass you’re checking from time to time,” August said.

“When did I ever tell you something like that?”

“Hmm, it must be true what they say about guys having short-term memory after,” she explained while making a vague lewd gesture that suggested exactly what he thought she meant. “You told me that Maddox must have gotten that ass by fucking a lot. You know, a lot of action from the hip.” Her lips quirked into another roguish smile.

“Fuck me,” Rusty groaned and looked around, although there weren’t many people there yet, and the place was too far off campus anyway for many students to have breakfast there and be able to eavesdrop on their conversation. “Did I really? Fuck, I can’t remember.”

“Well, then it’s my curse that I do,” August said and grinned, looking pretty satisfied with herself. “So, Matty.”

“You’re not going to let it drop, are you?” Rusty asked, feeling a bit pissed at August’s powers of deduction. “Fucking cockless Sherlock Holmes.”

She just laughed, throwing her head back, wild and free as usual. That was another thing he had loved about her at the time. Thought to love. Rusty wasn’t that sure he understood all the fuss about that word. It got thrown about a lot; no wonder it got bruised easily. “Let me get this straight,” he said, straightening in his chair. “Or not so straight,” he added after a short moment of deliberation. “Did you think I was gay while we were fucking?”

August shook her head, still amused enough to piss him off a little more. “No, what the hell? Just a little bi-curious. Wait, do you fancy yourself gay now?”

Rusty snorted. “I don’t fancy myself anything. I like what I like.”

August wiggled her eyebrows. “And, in this case, the ass on that delicious BTS look-alike dude.”

“I know, right? That’s how cute he is,” he confirmed. Then, realizing that he still needed to be pissed at August for unmasking him way too easily, he frowned. “Still, you’re pissing me off,” he declared.

That only made her shake with laughter a little more. Great, now she was even wiping tears from her eyes.

“Wow, you’ve fallen for a dude, eventually,” August said matter-of-factly.

“Psh, I don’t fall for anyone,” Rusty replied, puffing out his chest, a sort of knee-jerk reaction to being accused of impossible things.

August’s laughter died down. She wasn’t even smiling. “It’s just sex, then? Damn, and I thought no one could even hold a candle to your bestie’s ass.” She was hiding behind a joke, but her eyes held no humor in them. If anything, she was pinning him down with a hard stare.

“No, it’s not just sex,” he hurried to convince her, because that was a convenient truth he could live with. “We’re like best buds, too. He has a good head on his shoulders. And he’s tutoring me. Matty’s like... you can’t know ‘cause you’re a chick, and you chicks don’t have friendships like that.”

August sighed, smiling, this time with mirth, and put one elbow on the table, rubbing her forehead with one hand. “Then why don’t you enlighten me a little more. You know how much I like learning all kinds of things about guys. And, it feels like I need to remind you that, on more than one occasion, you told me that you felt like you were with one of your besties when you were with me. You even accused me of being sort of a dude, but one with a pussy.”

A couple went past them that very moment and they both turned their heads in surprise at the last word leaving her mouth.

August waved and smiled pleasantly at them. “I have a kitty at home, she’s this big,” she explained, “and she’s really furry. Yeah, she leaves hair everywhere.”

Rusty pretended he needed to tie his shoelaces. August was killing him, as usual. He only emerged from under the table once the couple had moved away. “Damn, girl,” he laughed, “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you’re embarrassing me. I’m the one who does that to others, just for the record. Anyway, about what you said, I wasn’t accusing you. I was complimenting you.”

August rolled her eyes. “Yeah, yeah, I suppose it was the manly part of me you liked in the end.”

“That’s not true. I liked all your parts,” Rusty protested.

They stopped for a moment, looking at each other fondly. “We had fun,” August concluded for the both of them. “Now, let me just understand this. Is Matty a secret, too?”

“Kind of,” Rusty said hesitantly.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Kind of shouldn’t be in Rusty Parker’s vocabulary.”

“Well, the guys know, but not anyone else.”

August's eyebrows shot up and not in surprise, but more like in an incredulous dissatisfaction. "Is he okay with that? Wait, is he exploring his bi-curious tendencies, just as you're doing?"

"That's not what I'm doing," Rusty shot back. What exactly was he doing? Now, that was a good question. "He's not bi-curious. He's very unapologetically gay."

"Well, at least one of you knows his own deal," August commented and shrugged her shoulders. "You still haven't answered. Is it really fine with him to fool around with you on the downlow?"

"Yeah, totally. He's only in this to get practice. One day, he wants to get a real boyfriend."

"Why, you're a fake one?" August sent the ball back into his court with her usual precision.

"I'm not fake, how can you even..." Rusty scoffed and pursed his lips. "Look, it's like this. Matty wants to get good at gay sex, so he's using me to do that. We talked about it."

"He uses a seemingly straight guy to learn about gay sex," August said slowly, as if she wasn't sure those words meant their literal sense. "Wait, do you play the passive role while he does the, you know, good ol' to and fro?"

Rusty groaned. "I'm so not going to answer that."

"But why?" August fake-complained. "Really, it doesn't seem like a good strategy at all, to go to a guy with no experience whatsoever for that kind of practice."

"I've had lots of sex since I was fifteen," Rusty argued.

"Sex with girls," August pointed out. "I don't think it's the same."

"Well, Matty's more than pleased with what he's learning from me," Rusty said.

"Of course, because he has not had that much practice under his belt, so to speak, therefore, he has no basis for comparison."

August was so freaking infuriating with her logic. "Say what you want, but we know it's good," he said, not knowing what else he could say to convince her.

To his relief, she began laughing again. "I'm just pulling your leg. I know very well what a fast learner you are, as well as how dedicated you are to everything involving sex. However, forgive me if I'm still a little puzzled. He doesn't mind at all that he's your dirty little secret?"

"First of all, he's not a dirty little secret. He's only a partial secret. And there's nothing little about him."

August raised her soda. "Good for you, then. You obviously have a weakness for big dicks."

"Oh, screw you, you witch," Rusty threw at her, biting his lips not to laugh.

She smiled and then wiped her hands. “Speaking of which,” she said pointedly, “I believe I need to get on my broom already. Do you want to come along and see where I live? It’s not far from here, and it was a really good deal, seeing how close it is to the campus.”

Rusty hesitated, but only for a moment. He’d see Matty later tonight, and his bros wouldn’t care if he was missing in action some more. Also, it gave him more time to prepare for all their questions, something he didn’t want to face just now. “Why not?” he said and got up from his chair.



Matty lay on his belly, textbooks open in front of him, trying to keep his mind busy after the events of last night. Xpress had already reported on the appearance of a new hero on campus, but left out the cat boy, which miffed him a little bit. After all, he had hoped Rusty would see news of Slicky and be content with that. For reasons he didn’t fully comprehend about himself, he didn’t want his cat boy persona to be considered a coward by Rusty. Now it seemed that all that dangerous enterprise had been for nothing. Xpress had grabbed the bigger bone and was now chewing on it.

He touched his lips for a moment. Not that the mysterious stranger, with his magnetic personality, wasn’t bound to steal the show. The kiss, albeit short, had been so cocksure that Matty didn’t know if it warranted a slap or to just melt into it. It was too late for such debates, and, at the moment, he had been too surprised for either. Maybe he leaned a bit into the melting option.

Matty shook his head energetically. He had Rusty in his life, so he wasn’t supposed to kiss other boys. Only that this was a genuine case of his being kissed by other boys; did that absolve him of any feeling of guilt?

It wasn’t about the kiss, though. It was about how – what the hell could the right word be? – seduced he had felt in that moment. Was he really that easy? He wanted to slap himself silly or just laugh. Along came a dark, handsome stranger and all his passion for Rusty went flying out the window. He really, really needed to have his head checked. Self-checked.

His internal debate was brought to a halt by someone coming in. Although he knew that it could only be his obnoxious roommate, he looked over his shoulder only to notice, much to his surprise, that John wasn’t alone. He and Zoey walked into the room, single file, both with mournful expressions on their faces, dragging their feet. Then, as if they were coordinated by a magical wand, they stopped in the middle of the room, turned and then fell exhausted on John’s bed, leaving a decent arm’s length between them. If it hadn’t been for that, Matty would have started to worry that his roommate and his bestie were getting into some nefarious union together. Wait, actually, they were doing that.

“Who died?” he asked after the pair sighed in the same freakish unison.

“Decency,” John said and shook his head, as his eyes filled with sorrow.

Matty pressed his eyeglasses against his face to take a good look at Zoey. She seemed just as devastated, only her pursed lips were making counterclockwise circles which meant – much to his relief – that his bestie was still in there and he didn’t have to run an ad-hoc intervention to save her soul.

“Come on, John,” he teased, “that can’t be true.”

“Do you know what happened last night, Matty?” John asked with a long-suffering exhalation. “No, how could you? You were here, studying, then asleep, like the last vestige of a dying world of decency.”

Matty had a hard time stomaching that image of himself. If only John knew. He’d probably try to smother him with a pillow while in the world of dreams. Better not take any chances, he decided, hoping that he wasn’t the kind to talk in his sleep and thus give himself away. Zoey had turned her head away from them, and her shoulders were shaking.

John, sensing what he believed to be distress, took Zoey by the shoulders to comfort her. “We will have other chances. This isn’t over.”

“Guys, come on, it’s beautiful outside. Both of you, stop being so gloomy,” Matty advised in a cheerful voice. “However, I need to ask. Were the two of you up all night?”

“We slept together,” John said solemnly.

“You what?” Matty tried to catch Zoey’s eyes, but his bestie had her head buried in John’s chest.

“Some of us who felt too defeated after last night,” John explained. “We went to our nest and slept there, with our heads on the table.”

Nest? Really? One meant for nursing velociraptors, probably, Matty thought. “Zoey, let’s take you out to get some food. I guess they’re still serving breakfast someplace. If not, we’ll grab lunch. John, you need some proper sleep and study time,” he addressed his roommate, to prevent any demand from him to come along.

His phone buzzed with a new notification. He threw one look at it and saw that Xpress had just posted some new piece of gossip. Maybe they were finally acknowledging his presence at the scene of last night’s events. He’d read it later. Now, he had a bestie to save.

A bestie, who was now checking her phone. He watched helplessly while Zoey’s face metamorphosed into an expression of shock and then into a frown. Then, she looked at him with

what looked like some sort of compassion, the corners of her mouth dropping. The following moment, she began to type a message on her phone, moving her eyes away from him.

Matty felt his stomach starting to twist into knots. The second buzz was a message from her. He took the phone.

CHECK XPRESS!!!

All caps. That couldn't be good.



Well, well, well, did we just identify Rusty Parker's main squeeze of the moment? He was suspiciously AWOL from campus this whole weekend, which, of course, made us wonder...

Now, the mystery is solved. Rusty was spotted off campus, in the company of a young Joan Jett, according to the tip we got. Who's Joan Jett? Yes, we had to google that, too. Our anonymous tipster must have lived his youth in a completely different era. Whatever, we must give credit where credit is due, because now we know what to look for. And it was all at an hour that points to a single logical conclusion: the happy duo must have spent the night together.

Who's the mysterious rock star look-alike Rusty's seeing at the moment? Is Rusty into older women now? Sunny Hill ingénue does – oops, we almost misplaced a letter there, good thing we caught ourselves at the last moment – it looks like you have nothing on this hot lynx. As you can see, we have our terminology in place. If you intend to rise up to expectations, upgrade yourselves from does to wildcats, and then maybe you'll stand a chance.

Chapter Thirty-Three

I'm Making My Own Rules, I'm Choosing My Own Muse

“Is it my imagination, or have you gotten better since I last heard you sing?” August asked while handing him a cup of coffee.

Rusty had been busy checking out her place while she got busy with the coffee and, so far, he had come to the conclusion that his old acquaintance was still perfectly capable of turning any space into her own. The studio was small and cozy; there were flowers in a small vase on the table, and on the wall were a few posters featuring rock'n'roll stars that must have been brought over from her old place. There was also the familiar guitar in the corner, and he remembered how he had tried his hand at plucking the strings, but never getting too far. As opposed to him, August was more than adequate at making the stringed instrument behave under her fingers. Regardless of how much he had insisted that she should pursue that hobby in a more organized fashion, she had always said ‘no’. He was one to talk. He was hiding a lot more than she was.

“Yeah,” he eventually replied, tearing his eyes away from the vestiges of their shared memories. “I’m actually studying with a vocal coach. Her name is Meryl May, and she’s amazing.”

“For real? That’s so cool.” She sat by his side on the sofa, folding one leg under the other and resting her head against her palm, elbow resting a mere inch away from his shoulder. “What caused the change of heart? I thought your dad had said ‘no’, and that was that.”

Rusty shrugged. “Do you really want to listen to my life story?”

“Why not? Unless you have somewhere else you need to be.” She angled her head and looked at him, the shadow of a smile quirking her lips.

“Not really.” He was supposed to be away all weekend, so it wouldn’t hurt to hang out with August for most of the day. Also, there was the matter of postponing the inevitable, which involved getting questioned at length by Maddox and the others.

“How did it come about? You getting the vocal coach?”

“Maddox, unlike me,” he said pointedly, “is gay now. He has a boyfriend, sorry, fiancé, and it was because of that guy’s mom that I was forced to take lessons.”

August laughed. “It sounds like the kind of story you’d go through. And? Any regrets?”

“Nah, I told you, she’s awesome. I mean, she’s hard on me and everything, but I like to learn from her. She’s really good at what she does.”

“I wasn’t talking about the vocal coach.” August’s eyes shadowed slightly.

Rusty pursed his lips for a moment. Wasn't she full of questions now? "If you're talking about Maddox and his fiancé, which I think you're hinting at, no. What regrets? I wasn't crushing on my bestie, if that's what your pervy mind keeps telling you."

"I believe you," August said honestly. "But forgive me if I feel the need to needle you a little more. It must have come as a big surprise that your bestie, as you call him, who got an awesome ass because of fucking girls a lot, turned out to be hot for a boy."

"Well, first of all, it's not just any boy. Do you know Jonathan?"

"I have to admit that I wasn't particularly curious about him. I just got here, remember? I just read in that little gossip rag about them. Well, I was actually reading about you, and they were mentioned, Maddox and his better half."

"If you knew Jonathan, you'd understand. That guy is, I don't know, perfect or something." Rusty shrugged, growing more and more uncomfortable with this line of questioning. It wasn't because he was nurturing some unrequited love for Maddox – that had never been so – and the simple fact that, because of August now, he was thinking more and more in terms of that elusive word, was a clear sign that he was losing control of the narrative, so to speak.

"Ah, I see. Perfect. So not like you."

"August, what the hell do you want me to tell you? I've never crushed on Maddox. He's my bestie. My bro. And even though we measured our dicks once, that didn't mean anything."

August let out a noncommittal grunt, probably only to irk him more. "What are you chasing nowadays, Rusty Parker? It's not your bestie, I get it. That's all for the better, by the way. Just as you say that you're seeing him as your bro, he must see the same when he looks at you."

"Chasing? Why should I be chasing after someone?" he asked, feeling that familiar irritation growing, when August was trying to do that whole mumbo-jumbo soul-searching crap.

"I didn't mention a person. You're the most restless guy I've ever met. You never sit still, because there's something better you haven't found yet."

"Well, if you're so keen to know," he said, "I'm actually chasing a cat boy." Dragging August away from dangerous topics that he didn't care to talk about, by using half a truth, was one way to go. "There's one at Sunny Hill. He has a tail and claws and everything. He's very sexy, too."

"Ah, I see. Where does that leave Matty? Or is it good that you don't have to chase him?"

"Matty's in it for fun, as I told you." The way he was insisting made it all sound fake to his own ears. Yeah, Matty hadn't run away from him, always game, always ready for trying out things, and it had been such a breath of fresh air, that he didn't need to endlessly hunt something down, which was exciting, but also too exhausting.

“I think you should ask him, just to check,” August suggested. “It really baffles me how you don’t realize how easy it might be for people to fall for you.”

Rusty rolled his eyes. “That’s so chick talk. I take that back. You’re not like a dude. You’re exactly like a chick. You see love intrigues and romance and all that crap that makes your kind get droopy eyes and all everywhere you look. It’s not the same for dudes.”

“Wow, defensive much?” August teased him. “Now, you’ve made me curious. How do you juggle the cat boy and your special friend? Do they know about each other?”

“They do,” Rusty replied, feeling that he was back on solid ground. “Matty’s cool with it. Slicky, I mean the cat boy, he doesn’t know all but knows something.”

“You have the craziest love life.”

“It’s not love, it’s sex,” Rusty argued. “Well, maybe it’s sex with feels, especially where it concerns Matty, because he’s an awesome friend, and I like him in his clothes, as well as out of them. And I like Slicky, too,” he hurried to add. “Although I’ve done next to nothing with him. I can accept that he’s just teasing me. It’s all right.”

August let out a long, drawn-out theatrical sigh. “Man, that sounds so complicated. But I supposed you’ve always been a bit aloof like that.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean? And aloof? Come on, I’m not like that. I always pay attention to whoever’s in my bed. Or I in theirs.”

“Yes, as far as sex goes. Take off that blindfold, Rusty. You might not like it when reality comes biting you in the ass.”

Where had he heard that one before? People. He shrugged. “I have no clue what you’re talking about. That’s what happened with us? I was aloof and didn’t care enough or something?”

There was something in the way her face rearranged itself as she said the next words that left him without a real comeback. “No, you were just a kid. That’s all.” August stopped for a moment, fiddling with her cup. “And I guess, in retrospect, I should’ve known better.”

“Great. You have regrets now,” he said sullenly. “For the record, I don’t.”

August punched him in the shoulder. “Stop being so serious. We had fun. I told you. And I won’t ever regret meeting you, because, let’s admit it, Rusty, you’re sort of unique.”

“Sort of?” he quirked an eyebrow, a bit relieved that the tension seemed to be flowing out of their conversation.

“Totally unique,” August corrected herself. “I can see you eyeing the guitar. Would you like to play?”

“Nah, I haven’t touched one since then,” he said. “But I’d like to hear you play, though.”

“Only if you sing with me,” August offered.

That was good, solid ground. That was one place where Rusty was convinced he wouldn’t be accused of aloofness or anything similar. And he had always loved to sing when she was playing her guitar.



“Zoey,” Matty said. Then, louder, “Zoey!”

“What?”

“You’ve been rubbing my arm for like the last half an hour. I’m afraid I’m starting to get a rash or something.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Zoey said and pulled away her hands. “Oh, damn, Matty, what are you going to do?”

He took her small hands in his and held them. Zoey, in her own way, was just trying to comfort him, and he understood as much. “It’s not the end of the world. August, because I’m sure she’s the mysterious woman, is one of Rusty’s old friends.”

“You mean, you know her?” Zoey caught herself in time and toned down her voice so that other people didn’t start eavesdropping on their conversation.

After enduring a hefty lunch and Zoey’s compassionate staring, Matty knew he had to convince his bestie – and himself – that Rusty being seen with a woman meant absolutely nothing. “I met her once, when I was shopping for Rusty’s brother’s birthday present. They seemed really fond of each other, although they haven’t seen each other in a long time.”

“Did they fuck?”

Sometimes, Zoey’s frankness was difficult to see as a positive character trait. “Yes,” he said, trying to sound as casual as possible.

Zoey groaned and hung on his arm again, bent on offering some more of her comforting. “I can’t believe that floozy,” she moaned. “She’s trying to break your home, Matty.”

“It happened a long time ago. Now, they’re only friends,” he continued the same thin line of reasoning. “And what home, really? You know that’s not how things are between Rusty and I. I can’t act like a jealous boyfriend out of the blue.”

“But you are a jealous boyfriend,” she insisted. “Come on, Matty, you know that’s how you feel. Don’t hide behind this cool, level-headed persona.”

“What if that’s exactly who I am?” Matty shot back.

Zoey sighed. “You wish. I wish you really were, but we both know it’s not how things are. Right now, you’re bottling things inside, and frankly, if I were you, I’d throw some dangerous objects in Rusty’s direction the first moment I saw him.”

“Xpress is usually talking out of their asses,” Matty pointed out. “And, in the end, what’s the whole scandal all about? Rusty being seen with a woman, a woman who I know is his friend. It’s really absurd to get your panties in a twist over speculations thrown about by a bunch of nitwits imagining themselves keyboard warriors. Also, really, Zoey, getting all jealous and turning into some sort of accuser would only work against me.” He stopped for a moment, a little breathless after his tirade.

Zoey appeared to ponder. “You’re so smart, Matty. So much smarter than me. Of course, Rusty wouldn’t take well to being on the receiving end of dangerous objects and accusations. And you know what?” she said and stared at him as if she had just realized something really important. “I think that’s why Rusty likes you so much. Because you’re so frank and not judgmental at all. However,” she added, “you need to discover if he spent the night with her.”

“I’m not going to ask him. It’s his business. If he volunteers the information, that’s fine. Otherwise, I’m not going to grill him like the freaking FBI.”

Zoey grabbed one of her knees with both hands and appeared appeased for a bit. Then, she suddenly turned toward him once more. “Should Rusty go back to chicks and forget about dicks, I think you should have someone to fall back to.”

“What? Are you suggesting I become a two-timer?” Matty asked. He fiddled with his straw for a bit.

“He’d be first to have done it,” Zoey protested and played with her napkin, bent on turning it into a piece of art with little to no success. “You wouldn’t be in the wrong. Also, there’s nothing wrong with a bit of flirting. I’m not saying you should go dick-hopping all over the campus. Just have someone, you know, you’d enjoy to do a little bit of making sheep’s eyes at.”

“Sheep’s eyes?” Matty shook his head and released a deep sigh.

“Liking Rusty doesn’t make you blind to all the pretty boys around, I hope.”

Blind, no. Matty hated how his mind moved on its own accord to the mysterious dark stranger with a knack for singing opera in the middle of the night, in front of half the campus. That kiss was still on his mind, whether he liked it or not.

“Matty?” Zoey waved her hand in front of him. “Are you still there? Who are you thinking of?”

“No one,” he replied hastily.

“Then why are you blushing? O. M. G., there is someone else besides Rusty!” Zoey swung her body back and forth, gripped by excitement. “Who is it?”

“No one!” Matty repeated. “All right, so maybe something did happen last night.”

“When we were all chasing you, trying to unmask you?” Zoey asked. “Tell me you’re not thinking about some weird sado-masochistic play with one of the Implacables. I’d never live it down. I might begin to question the validity of our friendship for life.”

“No. And they were all masked and dressed in black. However, for your peace of mind, there would only be one of the Implacables I’d ever get into a questionable relationship with.”

“Who?!” Zoey shouted, and Matty had to shush her.

“That’s you, dummy,” Matty said with a sigh. “By the way, I noticed the help. Thanks a bunch. Although you’re pretty crazy for doing this, and I need to tell you that.”

“Talk about the cat boy calling the fake cultist black,” Zoey retorted.

“Point taken,” Matty admitted.

A short silence followed. “Well?” Zoey asked. “What happened last night?”

Matty hesitated and then whispered, “That guy, you know, the singer... he kissed me.”

“Wow,” Zoey said slowly and began smiling. “Was it good?”

“Pretty good.”

“Oh gawd, I’m swooning. Catch me ‘cause I’m about to fall. That guy is totally dreamy. Wait, was it better than when Rusty kissed you?”

“I didn’t think of making any comparisons. And it also happened pretty fast. He used his cape to shield us from view, but he did kiss me. Only for a moment, though,” he added.

“If he managed to get your knees to buckle and caused a storm of butterflies in your stomach, he’s a dreamy kisser, too.”

“I didn’t say any of that. Gosh, you really like embellishing things, don’t you?”

“You don’t have to tell me. The look on your face says it all. You enjoyed getting kissed by that guy,” Zoey said triumphantly. “Then, that’s great. You’re a masked hero. He’s a masked hero. I’d say it’s a match made in heaven.”

“I’m not going to do anything,” Matty pointed out. “I mean, Rusty is, most likely, innocent of all those weird insinuations in Xpress, and here I am, planning to cheat on him. Zoey, I’m blaming you. Stop dragging me to the dark side.”

Zoey giggled, pleased as she seemed to be of being accused of that. “But it wouldn’t be you being a flirt and all. It would be Slick,” she said and laughed out loud.

Matty rubbed his forehead. All this banter with his bestie had both the effect of curing his headaches and then giving him new ones.



It had been a fine day, all things considered, Rusty decided as he was walking back to the house. He pulled out his phone, hoping for another distraction that would make his day even better. Matty answered on the second ring.

“Hi,” he said, “how’s it hanging, my dawg?”

“Eww, Rusty, I’m not a dog,” Matty said playfully.

“Right. That reminds me that I still want to see you with a cat tail.”

“That is so not going to happen.”

“We’ll see about that. What are you doing? Are you busy?”

“No. I was actually waiting for your call to see if you wanted to hang out.”

“Totally. My place? How long is it going to take you?”

“You sound like you’re in a hurry or something. I can be out the door in ten.”

That immediate response was one of the many things Rusty liked about Matty. “Okay, okay, you don’t have to hurry that much. I mean, like don’t forget your panties kind of hurry. Actually, forget your panties. You won’t stay dressed for long, once you set foot in here.”

“I don’t wear panties,” Matty argued. “Just boxers and stuff.”

“Hmm,” Rusty purred, “that’s so not sexy, Matty. I need to see you in some cute thong or something.”

A grunt was the next answer. “Well, I suppose you’ll have to settle for seeing me in the buff.”

“I can live with that,” Rusty said with a sigh. “Now, hurry, ‘cause time’s a wasting.”

“Roger that.”

Rusty was still smiling as he put his phone back into his pocket and walked into the house. And, surprise surprise, everyone was there as if they had been waiting for him. “Hello,” he drawled and smiled, ear to ear, now ready for the confrontation.

Kane was leaning against the wall, his arms crossed. However, he was grinning, a sign that the guy actually appreciated his little play at costumes and entertainment. “I’ll be damned, Rusty. You had like everyone fooled. And who’s that chick?”

“What chick?” Rusty asked, apprehensive all of a sudden. He turned to take in Maddox and Jonathan, half-turned in their seats.

Dex came up to his side and let his heavy hand fall on Rusty’s shoulder. “Are you cheating on Matty, Rusty? Be careful what you say,” he wagged a finger at him, “because I might feel tempted to hurt you.”

“I’m not cheating on Matty, what the hell?” Rusty shook his head, as if there was water in his ears.

“Then, who’s she?” Dex asked.

Rusty took in his friends, one at a time, until he reached Maddox. His bestie was smiling, too, but in a way that bore a question mark with it. “Ask Maddie,” he pointed at him. “He already knows. But how the hell--”

“Xpress, as usual,” Jonathan supplied the answer and sighed. “Wait, I thought that gossip wasn’t true. And why should Maddox know?”

“Because Rusty told me about an old friend that had just come to Sunny Hill to continue her studies. I suppose that’s her,” Maddox offered promptly.

Rusty could appreciate Maddox’s consideration in not telling the others outright what he knew about August. Apparently, some weird shit had gotten reported in Xpress. Fuck, he needed to see what it was. Had Matty seen it? What was he thinking right now? What the hell was going on?

“Maddie, you can fill them all in on August,” he said hurriedly. “I need to shower. When Matty comes, let him in.”

“As if we’d leave him at the door, waiting like a dog,” Kane said with a snort.

“Sorry, let me rephrase that. Let him in, and tell him to come to my room directly. You are all forbidden to talk to him. Only I talk to him.”

“Weird, possessive... hmm, what are these signs of?” Kane wondered.

“I don’t know, and I don’t care,” Rusty said quickly. “Gosh, I can’t believe this shit with August has made the front page just as I’m launching my career.” The last words he said under his breath.

“Ah, by the way, your singing was,” Dex said and kissed his fingers.

Rusty already felt irritated about Xpress and its shit. “Yeah, yeah,” he said and waved quickly as he rushed up the stairs. He needed to do damage control with Matty. Half-way, he realized. Matty hadn’t sounded angry or upset or anything. Either he hadn’t read Xpress or he didn’t care.

Still, that was one area that Rusty didn’t want to leave in the grey. Matty had to know that nothing had happened between him and August.



It wasn’t the easiest task to keep any pesky thoughts moving randomly through his head away. He knocked and waited until Maddox came the door. “Hi, Maddox,” he said and smiled.

He was welcomed with a matching smile. And with being grabbed by the shoulder and guided toward the foot of the stairs to the first floor. “Sorry, Matty, Rusty sternly instructed us not to talk to you before he did, which means that I’m basically breaking our promise by opening my mouth right now. You know where his room is.”

“Yeah, sure,” Matty said, a bit surprised. He hurried up the stairs without looking back.

When he entered Rusty’s room after knocking, he ended up face to face with its rightful owner. Actually, he almost crashed into the other, but he was soon engulfed in a warm embrace, while the door closed behind him, as if by magic.

It took him just one moment to realize that Rusty was completely naked and smelling of soap. Also, his skin was a little damp, something that did funny things to his knees. He would’ve liked to push Rusty back only to look at him, but that wasn’t possible because he was being held so tightly.

Talking didn’t seem to be the first thing on Rusty’s mind, despite what Maddox had said just earlier, because a strong hand was at the back of his neck, angling his head for a kiss, which Matty welcomed avidly. Rusty’s lips on his were warm and demanding, and they didn’t have to insist much to get what they wanted. The following moment, Matty had his arms wrapped around Rusty’s strong back, and he was melting into the kiss faster than ice cream left in the sun.

There couldn’t be many people in the world who could kiss the way Rusty kissed, with so much abandonment and keen desire. Matty wouldn’t believe otherwise if it cost him years of his life. He kissed back, and he could tell that he was being moved toward the bed, although he couldn’t really say if his feet were still touching the ground or not. When they finally landed on the bed, Rusty released his mouth.

“Hey,” Matty said, breathing hard already.

“Hey,” Rusty said with a naughty grin.

Then, much to his surprise, he moved away, giving him more space than he needed.

“Has anyone talked to you?” Rusty asked, as he lay on one side, and only had a hand on Matty’s belly as a means of remaining connected, physically-wise.

“No,” Matty lied. “Maddox just pointed at the stairs, then at me, then at the stairs again. I have no idea what that vow of silence is all about.”

Rusty seemed to be satisfied with that piece of information. “Good. I told them not to talk to you before I did.”

“Why?” Matty pushed himself up on his elbows to get a good look at Rusty. “Did something happen?”

Rusty rolled away and grabbed his phone. Then, he showed the screen to him. “Have you read this piece of shit?”

Matty pondered for a moment. There was no point in lying. After all, there were already so many hidden things to juggle while in Rusty’s arms, and he really didn’t need one more. “You met August, I suppose,” he said. Wow, he deserved an award for how steady his voice sounded. “By the way they described her, I could only guess it was her.”

“Yeah.” Rusty searched his face for a moment. He seemed slightly dissatisfied.

“I have no idea what they’re making such a huge deal out of it, because I don’t see what the problem is,” Matty babbled.

“You’re not jealous,” Rusty said, apparently bent on ignoring Matty’s comments.

“Jealous? Why would I be?” Matty asked.

“Right,” Rusty agreed. “Because there’s no reason.”

“Wait, did you think that I’d throw some hissy fit over you meeting your old friend?” Matty asked cautiously.

“A little, maybe. But, obviously, that was in my head,” Rusty said quickly. Then, he brought one arm around Matty’s shoulders and pulled him close. “That’s my baby dude.”

“Rusty, is it just my imagination, or are you a bit disappointed that I’m not throwing a hissy fit?” Matty asked. Since they were talking about it, why not get it all out in the open?

“Not disappointed. A bit surprised. Obviously, I don’t know you that well,” Rusty said. “I mean, if I’d been going steady with some chick, I bet she would’ve had my head by now.” He rubbed himself against Matty as if he was trying to make enough room for himself to be as close as possible.

Matty wondered about those words. Rusty was right about one thing. They both didn't know each other that well. This was an opportunity to ask him if he had spent the night with August, but he worried that a simple question like that would ruin what he had built so far. So, he embraced Rusty back, relishing his proximity.

Finally, Rusty brushed his lips against Matty's ear. "Thank you for the trust."

A wave of relief washed through him. He had made the right choice, after all. And he did trust Rusty, no matter what pesky thoughts were trying to worm their way out of him. Yes, calm and level-headed, that was him. And that was, also, as it seemed, the very thing that Rusty liked about him.

Rusty threw one leg over his and began kissing him again. It felt a bit unnerving that he was still dressed while getting attacked like that. Once more, Rusty stopped and looked him in the eye. "I met August while I was grabbing breakfast. We talked and then I visited her place. That was it. That's the truth."

"Okay, you don't have to justify yourself," Matty said quickly.

"I think I do," Rusty replied with a small frown. "August thinks—never mind. I just want to be straight with you."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of that," Matty joked. What had August told Rusty? And about what? "I mean, the way you're humping my leg right now has nothing straight about it."

Rusty laughed and removed himself from Matty's arms. He was now on his feet, giving Matty a full frontal view of his male nudity. He pointed at him. "You hold that thought, because I plan on doing a lot more than just hump your leg tonight. And we'll see how straight you'll find it after that."

With those words, he turned on his heel, making a beeline for the door. Startled by the sudden move, Matty felt it necessary to intervene. "Rusty, where are you going?"

"I have to lift the vow of silence," Rusty explained. "Those guys love me so much that they are capable of ignoring you forever."

"I see. But don't you think you should put something on first?"

Only then did Rusty seem to realize that he was practically naked. Even the Mighty Thor was a bit indecent, as he had gotten bigger due to certain friction activities. Matty was certain he would never get over that nickname. Still, it had started to grow on him. Great, now he was thinking in puns. It had to be because of Rusty's proximity.

"Yeah, you're right." Rusty went to his closet, opened the two doors wide and then slammed them shut, as if he was trying to keep in some monster. He quickly grabbed a pair of sweatpants

from a chair. “Good enough?” he asked, on his way out, while turning slightly for Matty to appreciate the state of things.

Maybe, at times, Matty could find it inside himself to be jealous. Because the sight of Rusty’s naked torso was enough to make him believe that he didn’t want that many other people to see it. However, for obvious reasons, he had to keep himself in check. “Yeah,” he said.

Rusty walked closer and ruffled his hair. Then, he leaned over for a kiss and rubbed their mouths together for a while, until they both became breathless again. “Be right back.”



He rushed downstairs, eager to go back as soon as possible. “Guys,” he said quickly, “Matty’s not jealous because he’s a total baby dude, so you can talk to him about whatever.”

“Sure,” Kane said with a shrug. “Wait, does he know you’re Rybalt?”

Rusty shushed his friend and looked up, as if to check if Matty was on the landing eavesdropping. “No, he doesn’t. I’ll tell him at some point.”

“Why aren’t you telling him that? It’s a cool act you’re pulling,” Dex pointed out while having a beer.

“Yeah, but... I don’t know. It’s something I’ll save for later.” Rusty didn’t want to examine what was keeping him from telling Matty about his secret identity and he wasn’t in the mood to unpack that right now.

“Don’t you think he should know? I thought you considered him a close friend,” Jonathan said, turning toward him, Maddox’s hand on his shoulder in what looked like an act of claiming possession.

“He’s more than that,” Rusty said.

“Really? Like what?” Maddox asked from behind Jonathan.

“He’s my...” Rusty pondered for a moment, and then he understood it all at once. “He’s my muse.”

“What? That’s so lol,” Dex commented.

“Why?” Rusty bristled. “Because he’s a dude?”

“No, because--” Dex began but he stopped abruptly.

Rusty turned toward Jonathan but saw nothing. Whatever had prevented Dex from yapping his mouth must have come from that side, but both Maddox and his fiancé seemed interested in their textbooks more than anything.

“Because you just say random stuff most of the time,” Kane hurried to the rescue.

Rusty put his chin up. “It’s nothing random. You’re just jelly I make my own rules.”

“And choose your own muse, apparently,” Kane said under his breath, wiggling his eyebrows, as if he knew shit.

“Yeah, that too,” Rusty said pointedly. “So, talk to Matty, but not about Rybalt, okay? Also, we shall not be disturbed for the foreseeable future. Good night! I said, good night!”

He walked away stiffly, ignoring the muffled laughter that followed him all the way up the stairs. Ha, they knew nothing. And Matty was his muse, in a way. Probably because being with him, sexy times and all, was so awesome that it made him feel as if he could fly if he wanted.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Sorry, We're Cheaters

The sight of a perfect Matty sprawled over his bedsheets while leafing through a textbook, his cheek pushed upward by a closed fist that also made the corner of his mouth curl in a half smile, was the kind of thing Rusty wished he could be more prepared for.

“What?” Matty asked, turning toward him and dropping his fist, making the half-smile disappear.

“What-what?” Rusty asked, a little belligerently and slightly unnerved by having been caught staring.

Matty grinned. “Are you thinking of naughty things? Because I think I can tell when you’re thinking of naughty things.”

“You’re in my bed, ass up. You’re wearing too many clothes, but that’s okay, ‘cause I know what you look like naked, and the shape of that ass is clearly visible.”

“Was that your answer to my question?”

“In there, somewhere,” Rusty said and put one knee on the bed, while Matty turned slowly on one side, never letting him out of sight. There had been thoughts as he had stared at his baby dude in his bed, looking so casual and so himself, and they hadn’t been the naughty kind. He wouldn’t dwell on them at the moment, since he preferred solid ground. When it came to sex matters, he’d rather not be a pirate, but very much a landlubber. No, that wasn’t right. He was adventurous, right? But what if Matty was getting bored with the same-old, same-old?

His musings were brought to a halt by a slight nudge that made him lose his balance for a moment. Without hesitation, he threw himself on Matty, ready to fight, his secret weapon being curled fingers, optimal for delivering the tickling of his adversary’s life.

“I surrender, I surrender,” Matty shouted through hiccups of laughter.

They were in quite a nice position, Rusty on top rubbing himself against Matty, although there were two layers of fabric between them. With one hand, he pushed his sweatpants lower so that he could now rest the Mighty Thor against that still-clothed perfect ass.

“Rusty,” Matty warned and looked over his shoulder, “don’t you think I should undress?”

“That’s what I keep telling you ever since you set foot in my room. Don’t you know the rules yet?” Rusty bent over his ‘victim’ and bit Matty’s ear, careful to chomp on it only hard enough to make the other shudder and gasp softly. “You’re in my bed, you should be naked.”

“Oh, yeah? What about that thong? You know, the thong in cheek?” Matty joked.

Rusty straightened up and smacked Matty's butt cheeks through his pants. "You think you're funny, right?"

"Totally. I'm a very funny guy."

"Let's see if you can still laugh once I put you in your place." Rusty pulled Matty's pants lower until they were right under the beautifully shaped buttocks, making that ass pop even more. He rested the Mighty Thor between them and began to play around, grabbing the perky cheeks and pulling them apart. "As they say," he joked, "ready or not, here I come."

"Wow, you're horny," Matty said, but his voice had turned deeper, softer, filled with meaning.

"I haven't seen you since Friday. The Mighty Thor was starting to fear that he might never see action again."

"Wow, in just two days?" Matty asked, feigning surprise.

"What can I say? This guy has short memory issues. To him, it is like ages have passed."

He took his time pouring lube over Matty's crack and getting the enticing hole primed and ready for his cock. Matty appeared to have forgotten about joking and fooling around and was now waiting, his breath peppered by cute soft moans. He was so pliant under his hands, so exposed, and Rusty loved every second of it. When he put the head of his cock against Matty's hole, ready to delve in, he felt like he could stay like that forever, on the precipice of an undefined desire that made him want all and still postpone the inevitable so that it didn't come to pass and become the past already.

He shook his head. All that talk with August must have gotten into his head. He was thinking like a chick now, seeking signs in everything, including how Matty's hole opened up to him, so warm, so tight, and yet so hungry.

"You have a hungry little hole," he said. The words didn't come out as much of a joke as he had hoped for. "So beautiful and tight."

"You're damn right it's hungry," Matty said and brought back a hand to pull at one of his butt cheeks. "I have no idea why you're taking so long. I can tell the Mighty Thor is ready for the ride."

Rusty laughed and draped his entire body over Matty. "You do realize," he whispered right into a cute ear laid bare to his eyes and lips, "that I'm going to fuck you into the mattress, right?"

"I wish," Matty challenged him. "It looks to me like your precious friend has got a terrible case of shyness overload."

"That's not true," Rusty retorted and finally pushed.

He groaned without artifice. It did feel that good.



Matty could tell something had changed in Rusty's attitude, but he couldn't tell what it was. Also, it was sort of unnerving, because Rusty, without even realizing it, was teasing him beyond what was possible for him to withstand at the present moment. Since he was being held down, there was little he could do to hurry things up, so he just lay there on his belly at Rusty's mercy.

He bit back a moan as Rusty pushed inside him, making him feel too full. Yet, the familiarity of having that hard gorgeous cock inside him made up for that almost unbearable sensation. Rusty was all over him, fucking him in short, deep thrusts, not letting go, and showering his neck and exposed ear with kisses.

"Fuck, this is so good," Rusty whispered huskily, "it's so good fucking you, Matty. Do you have any idea just how perfect the squeeze of your ass is on my cock?"

"You seem in the mood for talking dirty, it seems," Matty uttered with some difficulty. He said each word with a punch at the end, to the rhythm of Rusty's thrusts. Under any other circumstances, he would have found that a bit hilarious, but, as things were, he couldn't see himself starting to laugh. Yeah, sex with Rusty was no laughing matter for sure.

"Then you should match me, word for word," Rusty challenged him.

"I don't know," Matty grunted back. "You're the king, after all."

"Not anymore," Rusty said and bucked his hips again. "I mean, I'm only the king of this castle, and there's only one loyal subject I need."

"That would be me, right," Matty said heatedly. "Always at your service."

"Yeah, ready to service my cock," Rusty replied with a bawdy joke. "You can't say no, and I can use you as I see fit. All the freaking time. Oh, yeah, that's the life of a royal."

"If this royal saw fit to make the best out of the movement of his hips, that would be swell," Matty suggested. What they were doing at the moment wasn't enough to make him go crazy completely. He needed more, a lot more.

Rusty finally appeared to understand his predicament and changed the angle of his thrusts while helping him up onto all fours. Then, he trapped both his arms, linking them through his and then using only his hips to pound into him, more amply this time around.

"Yes," Matty whispered as Rusty bottomed out inside him, making him feel like dying the most pleasurable death, if there was such a thing.

Then, Rusty pulled back, giving him enough room to breathe, but only for a fraction of a second. The next, he slammed back in, and Matty could swear that it was true what people said about feeling launched straight to heaven through the means of simple friction.

“Oh, fuck, Matty, you’re so fucking hot,” Rusty praised him and pulled him close, forcing him into an almost upright position.

Almost, because he still was able to buck his ass backward to meet Rusty’s fucking. They were now acting like two battering rams, pulling apart only to smack back against each other with increasingly higher and higher desire to rush toward the end.

“Fuck, I hope it’s all right, because I need to come--” Rusty’s words turned into an unintelligible mess.

Matty squeezed his ass, to milk Rusty dry, and it really did feel like that because Rusty remained there for what seemed like moments of eternal bliss. He didn’t have time to react because Rusty, as soon as he withdrew, turned him around, pushed him on his back and took his cock in his mouth.

Normally, Matty would ask the other to slow down so that he could prolong his enjoyment, not only the feeling of expert lips moving up and down his cock, but also the sight of that blond head from above. Just knowing that Rusty, the famous king of Sunny Hill, was going down on him, gave him power. But above all else, he loved the feeling that this amazing guy was his in ways that he didn’t belong to anyone else.

No, this wasn’t a good time for postponing. Yeah, they had only been apart for two days, but it did seem too long in retrospect. Matty’s pent up desire rushed through him and exploded. Rusty seemed to appreciate it, making sounds of delight as Matty practically served him a new warm meal straight from the source.

And the blond head emerged from Matty’s crotch looking glorious and satisfied, just a few pearly white droplets at the corner of his mouth. Matty laughed and brushed his hand over them only to push his finger into his mouth.

Rusty smirked, pleased with himself, and leaned over, making their mouths meet again. They kissed for what seemed like a long time.



His friends were trying to push him to move faster than he wanted. But he had a thing for preparation, and it was justified. As much as he might have seemed to everyone around as someone who cared absolutely nothing for keeping things tidy, there was a part inside himself eager for control. Therefore, he couldn’t just rush into it.

Matty was resting his head on his shoulder, so it was easy to caress his hair. “I’ve heard that the weekend here was pretty wild.”

“I don’t know more than what I’ve read online,” Matty offered. “Apparently, Connor’s guys tried to crush a party, but they got crushed instead.” He giggled. “I can only imagine what Connor is thinking right now. Or doing. He’s probably foaming at the mouth.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Rusty pondered over his next question. “And there was that guy who broke into some singing and stuff. What do you think of him?”

“I don’t know. It all seems very dramatic from what Xpress reported. I mean, masks and all that. Kind of over the top, don’t you think?” Matty was talking fast, like he didn’t want to dwell on that topic for too long.

Now that was quite disappointing, Rusty thought. Matty didn’t seem to care a smidge about his masked persona, because he appeared too dramatic and over the top. That was why he never rushed into things. He knew it.



Why on earth was he sounding so defensive right now? It wasn’t like Rusty could know or guess that Rybalt, the masked hero and singer, had kissed him. Matty felt so guilty, especially after having had Rusty going down on him like that. Gawd, he was turning into a horrible person, a two-timer in his mind – and wasn’t that just as bad as doing things for real? And hell, he had done... something, by letting himself be kissed.

It was all for the better if Rusty didn’t think that Matty liked that Rybalt character for a moment. After all, what was there to like? Except that the guy was absolutely gorgeous, had an amazing voice, and was also sexy and mysterious? Fuck, fuck, fuck, Matty thought. It was better if he threw Rusty off that scent. There was no way in hell he would admit that he liked that guy even a smidge. Damn Zoey and her crazy ideas! If he were caught in the same situation again, he’d push the guy away and not allow the kiss.

“I mean,” he added quickly, taking Rusty’s silence for something else, “he must be a total coward, wearing a disguise and all.”

“What do you mean?” Rusty stopped caressing his head. “Slicky wears a costume, too.”

Oops, damn. Of course, Rusty liked the cat boy. “Yeah, but I mean, that’s like a... a... I don’t know, something completely different,” he blurted out, not knowing what to say.

“Matty, Matty, admit it,” Rusty said in a sly voice. “You don’t like the cat boy because you’re jealous of him.”

“Why would I be jealous of that guy?” Matty sputtered, annoyed with having created a trap for himself without meaning to. “Wait, are you doing the same things with him that you do with me?”

“No, why would you even...? Oh, damn, you are jealous.”

Matty pushed himself away from Rusty. The conversation had gone off the rails, and he saw no rescue in sight. “Stop it already. You can have your cat boy, whatever.”

To his annoyance, Rusty laughed. “You sound so jealous right now, Matty. And no, I haven’t gone down on him, you little crazy jelly freak.”

Of course, it wasn’t like he didn’t know exactly what Rusty had done or not done to Slick Coolplums. Damn, the situation was so tricky and it would have even been hilarious if it hadn’t been for all the concealed truths.

“I’m not jelly,” he said, his back turned to Rusty.

Rusty embraced him from behind. “Actually, I think that’s pretty cute. And Slick’s a cockteaser, anyway.”

“While I’m not,” Matty blurted out.

Rusty forced him to turn and looked into his eyes. “No, you’re not,” he said gently and brushed the hair away from his forehead. “You’re pretty awesome, you know?”

Matty groaned. One moment of paying attention to someone else and he had made a total fool of himself in front of Rusty. He covered his face. “Sorry about the outburst, for real. I mean, it’s not like--”

Rusty pulled his hands away and kissed him. “It’s fine. You didn’t cross an invisible line or whatever. I don’t have those.” Matty had no idea what to say to that. Rusty, however, seemed more in control. “We’re totally cool.”



How cool they were was a matter up for debate. On the one hand, Rusty felt elated at the mere thought that Matty was jealous of Slick; it proved that he really cared, even if they were nothing but buttfucking friends. Sure, they were more than that, since they weren’t just fucking and they liked each other well enough, but that wasn’t the point.

On the other hand, Matty’s cute jealousy put him into a very difficult position. He still wanted to catch that elusive cat boy, take him out of his costume and play with him until he made him melt completely. What was he supposed to do? Make promises he wouldn’t keep? Sure, he wouldn’t

do the same things with Slicky that he did with Matty, but wasn't even the fact that he was trying to rationalize that a sign that he was acting like a potential cheater?

Ah, damn it. Things were supposed to be simple, right? The only thing that crossed his mind at the moment was to continue to kiss Matty slowly, without even making it sexual, because it was simply more than that, what was happening between them. Who said they needed labels? Why was everyone so keen on busting his balls lately?

Matty keened as he munched on his bottom lip a bit too vigorously.

"Sorry, sorry," he said quickly.

"It's okay," Matty said, just as quickly. "And I have nothing against the fact that you like Slicky. Nothing at all."

Rusty pondered that while munching on his own bottom lip this time. That kind of hurt if done for too long. He really needed to be more mindful. "How open would you be to a threesome?"

Matty burst into laughter. "No way! I mean, come on, Rusty, that's so kinky!"

"Yeah, right. I've seen you trying to eat your own cock."

"You were making me try to do it! Anyway, just for the record, do you want me and some other guy from the street--"

"No," Rusty said promptly. "Just you and Slicky."

That appeared to make Matty stop his protests for a bit. Then, he said quietly, "If you manage to convince him, sure, I'm game."

"What?" Rusty couldn't believe his ears. "For real?"

"Yeah, for real." Matty seemed not to have one smidge of hesitation in him as he said that.

"Consider it done," Rusty said, feeling quite pleased with that development.

"Full of yourself much?" Matty teased him. "Just for the record, do you think you'd be cured of your cat boy obsession if we did that?"

"Nah. He might become a fixture. I'm telling you, Matty, if I had you and Slicky both in my bed and in my life, I wouldn't want anything else. Anything."

"That's quite something. All right, let's see if you have what it takes to make Slicky come to heel and bring him here."

"Sure. Let's shake on it."

Yeah, not one trace of hesitation remained as Matty grabbed his hand and squeezed it. Damn, life was good, Rusty thought as he pulled his baby dude into another crazy kiss.



He had to be absolutely mental. He liked playing with fire, obviously. The lecture dragged on, and he didn't have one clue why he was allowing his mind to wander to the crazy conversation with Rusty from last night when he was supposed to be studying. So, the guy liked being teased, and only Slicky could do that properly.

One, very easy, course of action was to put Slicky in storage forever but, in all honesty, Matty enjoyed being a cat boy at night, time permitting. It gave him a taste of adventure, just like that kiss from Rybalt. He was so doomed. He shook his head and turned all his attention to the professor giving her lecture.

He needed to pull himself together and stop thinking about crazy things. Studying came first, and he'd better remember that. Playing cat boy and Rusty in the meantime had to come second, with all the regret he felt at that.



"Rusty, I think there's something you should see," Jonathan said as they almost bumped into each other on the landing.

Rusty peered over Jonathan's shoulder as the other pointed at something on his phone.

He is doing a wonderful job so far. You shouldn't tell him I said so. That boy already believes he's entitled to all the praise in the world. And he is, but he shouldn't know it. It would only go to his head.

The rest of the message held things of little importance, just the usual between a loving but stern mom and her son. He scratched his head and pulled at his ear. "That was from Francine, right? She was talking about me. I mean, obviously, duh. Wait, why did you show that to me? She practically said that you shouldn't let me know what she said."

Jonathan laughed, all good-naturedly. "Yes, she did. But I believe in positive reinforcement, unlike her. Maddox and I have already decided that we're going to raise our kids in a completely different way than my family did. I've always wished she'd praise me more. Consider it a bit of payback."

Rusty grinned and grabbed Jonathan by the back of his neck, squeezing. "Kids, huh?"

"Was that all you got from what I said?" Jonathan rolled his eyes, but he was smiling wildly.

“Yeah, because that’s the most shocking thing. Francine liking me? Meh, I knew it already,” he said, hiding just how much pleasure that praise actually gave him. “But wait, how does she—ah, it was Mrs. May, right? I thought she wanted to turn me into this beautiful butterfly with wings of steel or something before throwing me in front of Francine for a performance.”

“Don’t put it beyond my mom to do her own research. Also, I told her about how awesome you are as a singer. I couldn’t keep it from her, not when she’s so bent on you having to become a world class singer.”

“Uh, man, thanks for the extra pressure.”

“Rusty, you’re strong,” Jonathan said and turned to squeeze his shoulder. “You can take pressure, and I know it.”

“Yeah. Then tell me, how do I get out of a promise of a threesome?” Rusty had struggled with that all day. He had been so brave when he told Matty that he wanted a three-way with him and the cat boy, but the more he thought about it, the more complications that kind of thing was bound to create. Sure, as far as sex went, it would be totally explosive. But Matty, in his own cute way, had shown that he could be jealous. And Slicky was... well, he was sexy and all, but he was more like a fantasy.

It hadn’t felt that way when Rusty had kissed him while dressed as Rybalt. He had felt very real, and despite having done no other naughty things since that time when Rusty had blown a load on his slick costume, there hadn’t been much going on between them.

“Rusty,” Jonathan said, pulling him back to the real world, “what threesome are you talking about?”

Rusty smiled and patted Jonathan hard on the back. “Parents with kids shouldn’t hear about kinky stuff like that.”

“Come on, you can’t mean it,” Jonathan said and laughed. “And kids will appear somewhere in the far future. And when they do, we’ll warn them that Uncle Rusty is a bit strange.”

Rusty made a face as if he had just licked a lemon. “You and Maddie are both crazy. I can’t see myself married with children.”

“You’re still young. That might change. Or not. It’s all up to you, remember that.”

“Thank you for the wisdom pill. Anyways, good talk, Johnny boy. Thank Francine from me. No, better not. She must remain oblivious of my knowing of her praises. Still, jokes aside, my man, thank you both, you and your mom. You really turned me around.”

He hadn't expected Jonathan to catch his shoulder before he could disappear into his room. "You're not off the hook yet. Tell me about that threesome. In a few words, if talking at length about it is not possible."

"It's just a fantasy," Rusty said quickly. "Matty and the cat boy making out in my bed. Me, getting to be the most delicious filling of that sandwich. You know, mid things. Nothing special."

"Right," Jonathan commented. "So, you still like that cat boy? Even though you and Matty are so serious about each other now?"

"Yeah," Rusty declared with emphasis. "There's nothing wrong with having hobbies."

"I don't know," Jonathan said, a smile still curling his lips. "It might be if that hobby implies you like cheating on your baby dude."

"Urgh, it's not cheating," Rusty protested. "I mean, they know about each other. And Matty said yes to the threesome, just so you know. And, basically, if he were to make out with the cat boy, he'd be a cheater, too. Only that we will all be in the same room, so it doesn't count. Of course you can't understand. You want kids, for fuck's sake." At the end of his tirade, Jonathan was already bending over, laughing. Rusty groaned like an annoyed diva. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Yeah. Without a doubt. Then I'll leave you be. Just don't be disappointed if the fantasy doesn't turn out to be as good once it becomes reality."

"Psh, you don't know cat boys, Johnny boy. And you don't know Matty. Once I have them both under me, I'm going to implode or something. Or explode. Invest in a good vacuum cleaner. Don't bury me. I couldn't stand it. Just use an old Greek vase or something for my remains. I'm sure you have something like that at the castle. And tell Mr. Simmons that's actually me, not some ordinary dust that needs dusting."

"We will all treat your remains with the utmost respect," Jonathan assured him, still shaking with laughter. "You have my word. However, I feel like I need to ask you something before you combust and leave us all weeping after you."

"Yeah, sure, go ahead." Rusty examined Jonathan carefully. This time, the laughter had almost gone, so what followed had to be a serious question.

"You asked Matty what he thinks of a threesome, and he said yes. Have you also asked the cat boy about it? He might not be so keen to share. You know how cats are."

"Damn, Johnny boy, you're a genius!" Rusty shouted in disbelief. How come he hadn't thought of that? There was a way out without losing face. If Slicky said no, and he would say no, then he was off the hook, and he didn't need to bother his head with all the dilemma about him cheating on Matty, Matty cheating on him, Slicky cheating on him...

Jonathan was still stunned as Rusty smooched his cheek for a moment and disappeared, laughing like a madman, into his own bedroom.



“I am so blaming you, Zoey,” Matty started.

“Hopefully, not for the dying of our planet,” Zoey replied promptly and patted beside her for him to join her on her bed.

“No, that, apparently, is because of others,” Matty said tersely. “You, little lady, are getting me into a world of trouble.”

“Okay, grandpa, what did I do wrong this time?” Zoey teased him and put her arm around his shoulders as soon as he had seated himself next to her side.

“You put all those crazy thoughts into my head about having an alternative to Rusty, and guess what? Now I feel like a cheater. Also, I said yes to a threesome.”

“Wow, wow, wow, slow down,” Zoey warned him. “What threesome? Who’s the third wheel? That floozy?”

“Oh, gawd, Zoey, August’s so not a floozy. No, a threesome involving Rusty, the cat boy, and I.”

Zoey was still holding him by the shoulders. She pulled back a little, gave him a long incredulous look, and then burst into laughter.

“What?” Matty whined. “What now, really?”

“Only you’d end up in this kind of situation, but it’s actually pretty awesome. That’s never going to happen, so you don’t have to worry while pretending to be all up for it. It must give that kink doctor a boner the size of the Eiffel Tower.”

“Yeah, I guess, but it’s also lying. And he brought up Rybalt, so I went overboard and told him that guy’s a coward for wearing a mask and all that, and that prompted Rusty to talk about Slicky and take that guy’s side, and, and—ugh, Zoey, it was only because I didn’t want Rusty to hear what I really think of the masked singer!”

“Wow,” Zoey whispered and looked at him from up close. “You’re coming apart!” She began laughing again.

“Thank you, asshole,” Matty said with a scowl. “There was no reason for me to feel guilty in any way about Rybalt. I mean, there was,” he contradicted himself the very next moment. “Only that Rusty didn’t know about it, and he’ll never know. He just thinks that I have something against Slicky Coolplums and that I’m jealous.”

Zoey rubbed her forehead, still throwing glances at him and barely keeping from breaking out into laughter again. “Only you’d feel like you cheated on a guy after only a little peck. Wait, sorry, I take that back. It was a mind blowing kiss, right? Eh, in that case, I think you’ll have to spend a lot of time on your knees, making amends.”

“On my knees? Praying for forgiveness?” Matty asked, not quite believing his ears.

“Well, if you want to call it that. What I meant was--” Zoey began making puppets with her hands to illustrate her words.

When she started bending her middle finger, Matty caught her hand and put it down. “You have a dirty, dirty mind, young lady.”

“Yeah, grandpa, I know,” Zoey said with a long sigh. “Too bad it’s not appreciated. It’s my number one skill.”

“Think of developing better ones. This one might leave you going hungry,” Matty joked.

“Maybe not if I spend enough time on my knees,” Zoey replied promptly.

Matty rolled his eyes. “That’s so like you to say something like that. Anyway, thanks for making me feel like a cheater. Now, I can’t stop thinking about wanting a threesome with Rusty and Rybalt!” Wow, that really did come out a bit unexpectedly. Yeah, that was something on his mind and no amount of lecture had been able to squash it.

“Uber kinky,” Zoey approved. “Rusty wants a threesome, you want a threesome... I’d say you two, my dudes, have quite a lot in common. No wonder you ended up together.”

“But we’re not really together, and wanting threesomes with strangers is not cool, Zoey,” Matty continued his lamentations. “I need to get that Rybalt dude out of my head and focus on Rusty. I feel like I might be going slightly mad.”

“Yeah, cool song.” Zoey nodded in approval. “Now listen here, Matty, since you say I got you into this mental mess or whatever you want to call it. Dress as Slicky, go hunt down Rybalt. Do the crazy with him and get him out of your system. See? All guilt-free.”

“Only in your head, obviously.”

“No, it’s not. And after that, I promise I’ll kneel with you and say, to the powers that be or whatever: sorry, we’re cheaters.”

“I’m not doing any kind of kneeling with you,” Matty said and shook his head. “You’re crazy.”

“But you love me,” Zoey added and nudged him in the ribs.

He took her by the shoulders and held her close. “Yeah, heaven knows why.”

Chapter Thirty-Five

A Game of Cat and Mask

Banning alcohol on campus grounds? That's tight! And wrong, of course, but, supposedly, we should tread lightly, or else we might end up canceled. This time, we'd say, The Implacable Team has just gone too far! How are the students of Sunny Hill going to lose their innocence now? How can they get rid of inhibitions and prove, once more, the truthfulness of that old adage – in vino veritas? We don't know what's in beer, if truth's in wine, but let's leave such academic debate for another time.

Connor Williams, through means we know close to nothing about, has the ear of our Dean of Students, hence the new – tight! – policy on the consumption of alcohol at campus parties. We said 'close to nothing', so, Connor, watch out! We'll dig and dig and find out how you managed to convince our dear – usually so kind and understanding in regard to students' mishaps and alcohol-imbibed endeavors - Mr. Preston that such an idea would be good for the overall wellbeing of the student populace.



“For real?” Maddox asked, putting his phone on the table and looking at him.

Rusty shrugged. “Unlike His Douchiness Connor, I don't have Preston's ear. I have no idea.”

“I think it's a stretch and Xpress, like usual, is jumping the shark here,” Kane said. “I mean, it's not like the college regulations regarding student life ever said that we can drink our asses off.”

“Yeah, 'cause we're responsible kids,” Rusty argued. “I mean, it's not like anything bad has ever happened.”

“So far,” Dex intervened in the conversation from his corner.

“Are you the devil's advocate or something?” Rusty questioned. “I mean, whatever, it's not like I care. I prefer to get drunk on life.”

Maddox and Jonathan snickered and elbowed each other, as if they knew some joke he wasn't privy to.

“What?” he asked and gave them the evil eye.

Dex ignored his interest in the two lovebirds and continued his argument. "I'm not the devil's advocate, but I'm sure that Connor, if he really has Preston's ear, must have told him that alcohol at parties might have some bad consequences, and that was enough to scare him into listening."

"Listening, yes, but not this," Kane said. "I mean, I'll have to see it to believe it. Most probably, it's going to be some reinforcement of the rules and regulations already in place, such as for underage drinking and all that."

"Well," Dex said, after he consulted his phone, "it looks like it's more than that, because the powers that be are already advertising a few more jobs for campus safety officers. What does that tell you?"

"That we're going to be safer?" Rusty offered sagely.

"Safer from ourselves?" Dex asked. "Look, I'm only saying. This might be just the beginning. If Connor has enough power to get campus policies modified and measures are taken to enforce them, measures that involve spending more money on security, that says a lot. Next thing you know, he might ban parties altogether."

"We're seniors, we should focus on graduating," Kane said. "I mean, it might not affect us, personally, that much. Maddox and Jonathan have each other. Just look at them." Rusty looked, just as Dex did, only to see that those two were getting lost in the singular world of each other as usual. "You and I," he pointed at Dex, "we like our occasional beer, and we're studying most of the time. And Rusty here, well, he said it. He gets drunk on cat boys and baby dudes."

"I didn't say that," Rusty protested. "I said life."

Kane smirked. "So, cat boys and baby dudes aren't life?"

Rusty scoffed, annoyed by his friend's logic. "Yeah. Still, there's just one of them. One cat boy. One baby dude. That's all. I have limits."

"Surprisingly, yes," Dex said under his breath. "Anyway, back to this new campus drama, Kane, even if it doesn't affect us, shouldn't we be a bit wary of this little dictator in the making that Connor is turning into? Preston, let's admit it, he's a soft guy, easy to influence. Connor might just be practicing the efficacy of his methods of persuasion. Who knows who his next target might be?"

"Wait," Maddox intervened suddenly, "can we really be sure that Connor is behind all this? That might be only Xpress's speculations, as far as we know."

"It sounds like something he'd do. Plus, only last weekend, he tried to crush a party and destroyed a lot of bottles and even a beer keg, according to witnesses," Dex said. "You know, if it quacks like a duck and walks like a duck, it's a duck."

“Too bad it’s not Donald Duck,” Rusty concluded with a joke. “Leave it to me, boyos. Does Connor want to banish fun from Sunny Hill? Well, I’m here, and I’m a freaking superhero.”

“Rybalt, don’t you think it’s a bit too ambitious to take on that crazy bunch of assholes?” Dex asked with a sly grin.

Rusty put his fists on his hips and pushed his shoulders up, in as much of a superhero impersonation as he could muster. “Don’t worry about me. You, boys, see to your studies and your beer stash. I will give Sunny Hill reasons to believe that Connor’s dark reign is not here to stay.”

“Okay, man, cheers to you.” Dex raised his beer. “Wait, you don’t suppose they’re going to start checking on our personal supplies?”

“That would be a stretch,” Kane started again.

Rusty didn’t wait to hear more as the argument renewed between the two besties and turned on his heel. Well, the fact that Connor was acting like such a major douche could work to his advantage. The shittier his opponent was, the cooler he’d be, right? Yeah, Connor was fucking stupid, making so many enemies among the students of Sunny Hill. Eh, it wasn’t his business, anyway, how Connor chose to meet his social demise.



Rusty observed with satisfaction the reactions of those who stopped in front of the big poster he had made and plastered all over the bulletin board, right on top of an announcement put there by S.H.I.T. for one of their obnoxious meetings intended to lecture the guys and gals of Sunny Hill on how to give up a life of debauchery and choose to kiss His Douchiness’s ring instead.

Maybe he was no artist, and the pic was pretty grainy, since it was just a screenshot from the little video of his first public performance that had circulated online, but he had done a good job with the font and, of course, the message.

Forget about withdrawal! Get high on Rybalt! Each Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night at ten, on the roof of a random building on campus! Magic, music, entertainment!

What he was doing could probably qualify as disruptive, but if anyone with half a brain thought Connor and his shitheads had a right to do what they were doing, he was very much entitled to the same rights. And, of course, it was important for him to test his audience and see what resonated with them. The world was yet to become his oyster, but the little world of Sunny Hill could very much serve as his lab to experiment in.

“Can you believe it? That guy is going to sing again,” one girl giggled into another’s ear. “He’s so sexy!”

“We’re so totally go to watch and hear him again,” the other agreed. “Maybe we can get a selfie!”

No selfies, ladies, Rusty mused to himself. He had no intention of letting anyone get close enough to reveal his identity before it was the right time for that. Connor would so eat his heart out, but there was still a reputation to build before that happened. There was no point in hurrying toward the conclusion. The journey was fun.

There was also a second reason, an intimate one, for why he had offered such clear details on when and where he could be spotted. Jonathan had made a very valid point regarding Slicky’s willingness for a threesome, and if the cat boy was as little as a smidge interested in Rybalt, he’d come. Sure, Rybalt was not Rusty Parker, the – former? – king of Sunny Hill, but that didn’t matter. He only had to ask a simple question. And maybe fondle certain body parts of said cat boy.



Well, supposedly, that was his chance to get to meet Rybalt again and, while in his cat boy suit, make it pretty clear that he had no intention of letting himself be kissed again. He would clear the air, maybe say something along the lines that he had an owner or something like that, and that he wouldn’t stand being petted – and kissed! – by a stranger, no matter how mysterious and sexy. Was it enough to clear his guilty conscience? Maybe not entirely, and maybe Zoey, in her crazy way, had a point in telling him that Slicky was free of any contract, but his conscience didn’t work that way.

Also, it was a bit funny that he could cockblock Rusty’s threesome initiative from the get-go. Hell, he should have been quite satisfied that the only other guy Rusty was willing to go to bed with was also him. Matty shook his head and sighed. He needed to see what day was okay for him to visit Zoey’s quarters with the precise intention of his magical transformation, since her having a roommate was a bit of a problem for their shady plans.

Damn, John was annoying by being such a fly in the soup. Nowadays, except for his S.H.I.T. activities and mandatory courses, he was spending most of his time indoors, pretending to study or forcing himself to. Matty wished he didn’t care that much, but his roommate’s long-suffering sighs were driving him crazy.

Because of him, he couldn’t slip in and out his cat boy persona as often as he wanted, or with as much liberty.

“What do you do for fun, John?” he asked, without raising his eyes from his textbook.

“Fun is overrated,” his roommate replied in the same fashion.

“Don’t you ever think that you might end up regretting not having had fun when you had the chance?” Matty continued.

“No, never,” John said back passionately.

“Okay,” Matty replied.

They continued to read from their textbooks for a while, only the sound of the pages being turned filling the space between them.

“And I am having fun,” John said. “By studying and attending group activities.”

“That’s right,” Matty said breezily. “Is it true? Did Connor tell Mr. Preston that policies on alcohol on campus should be tighter?”

“Yes. Mr. Preston took some convincing, though. He thinks, just like you, that students should have fun instead of studying.”

“I doubt that’s the case with Mr. Preston. As for me, I’ve never said that. You should have both in your life. For balance, you know? But, whatever floats your boat, I guess.”

“Matthew,” John said pointedly, “do you have fun with that guy?”

It was funny how John couldn’t even bring himself to say Rusty’s name as if it were some kind of a curse trigger.

“Yeah, we do. We’re friends,” Matty replied. He was about to add something, but John must have climbed out of his bed and walked over to his silently, because his shadow fell over him, startling him. “What?” he asked, raising his eyes.

John looked at him intently. “He’s a womanizer. What kind of fun do you have with him?”

“The usual fun,” Matty said promptly. And, whatever little devil was sitting on his shoulder at that very moment, he added, “You know, making the beast with two backs, enjoying horizontal refreshments, airing the sheets, tossing salads at each other, that kind of thing.”

John blinked and stared at him through his thick glasses. Completely unfazed by the staring, he stared back.

“I haven’t heard of any of those games,” John said slowly. “So, you’re making the bed together and you’re cleaning, that’s it? And that thing about the salads, are you two cooking together?”

“Yes, you could say that,” Matty said with aplomb. “I can assure you, everything we do is absolutely delicious.”

“Delicious? Can I have some?”

“No,” Matty replied promptly and returned to his textbook. “Why are you so curious anyway?”

“Because someone like you should be with us, not with the likes of that guy.”

“I believe I’m perfectly capable of choosing my friends, thank you,” Matty said, pouring a bit of acid on that salad.

“We could do all those things with you,” John insisted.

Matty hid his face behind his textbook. “It wouldn’t work. They’re all two-person games and I’m only enjoying them with Rusty and no one else.”

“That sounds very narrow-minded,” John said. “But to each their own, I suppose,” he added, sounding quite miffed at being refused so bluntly. “You should open up more and toward other people, Matty.”

“I don’t think so,” Matty said and breathed noisily through his mouth, to signal that the conversation was over.

Well, the problem was that he, indeed, was a bit too open toward other people, and by that, he only meant the mysterious singer Rybalt. Yeah, he needed to stop that opening from happening, and the sooner, the better.



His Thursday night performance had really drawn a crowd, and he was more than satisfied with the response. He never sang for the same length of time, as he was wary of idiots who would try to ruin his show, and especially of the mood of those who witnessed his singing. It looked like the students of Sunny Hill didn’t mind listening to more complex pieces, and he didn’t have to opt for operatic renditions of known pop songs to reel them in. All in all, life was good.

And it would have been even better if he could only get his hands on a certain elusive cat boy, and obtain from him the refusal of a threesome. Sure, that didn’t eliminate the desire for a two-way, a little bit of fondling, and a little bit of naughtiness. However, despite his overt advertising so far, there had been no sign of Slicky. Well, it was still only his second performance, so it served no one to be so impatient.

He took his mandatory bow and waved at the audience. It looked like he was being left alone, both by the powers that be and Connor’s shitheads, so all was well on that front. With the same elegance as always, he flaunted his cape and wrapped himself in it, in a pretense of a magic trick to make himself disappear. He was just really good at dropping to the floor, while holding the cape with one hand so that those below would be easily fooled into believing that he was disappearing. So far, the magic trick had worked like a charm.

Once he was far enough from prying eyes, he got to his feet and began walking normally. He would start eliminating elements of his disguise while away from anyone else, so that, even if caught, it would appear as if he was just a normal student, a bit overdressed, roaming the campus at night for no apparent reason. Sure thing, he needed to work on his alibi more, but, until now, there had been no risky situations to warrant him to worry or hurry in that respect.

He was about to take his mask off when he noticed someone standing on the edge of the building's roof, at a fair distance from him. The distance wasn't an obstacle in recognizing who it was. Rusty grinned and pressed his mask against his face as he began treading lightly, like a cat – how apropos! – toward his target.

Slicky turned his head when he was only two feet away. "I can hear you, you know," he said in the same screechy voice.

"No, you can't," Rusty replied, making his voice deep. "How are you tonight, my darling?" He offered his hand for Slicky to take so that he could help him off the edge, but the cat boy huffed and jumped down by his side.

They were so close they could sense each other well. Slicky smelled nice, Rusty thought and turned as the cat boy was moving around him, as if he was trying to see him from all angles. The cat boy wouldn't reach for his mask, for sure, because the war they were waging was one of mutual assured destruction.

"You kissed me," Slicky accused.

"So? Don't tell me you disliked it," Rusty said and grinned. The cat boy wanted him dizzy, because he had to turn and turn to keep visual contact.

"I'm here to tell you never to do it again," Slicky continued, ignoring his words.

"Or else?" Rusty slid one hand around Slicky's slim waist and pulled him close.

Slicky pressed both hands against him, but he didn't appear very keen on rejecting him. So, it was just a little game of cat and mouse. "Or else, my owner wouldn't like it."

"Your owner? I thought you were a stray cat," Rusty said, bringing Slicky as close as he could manage. There was something terribly familiar in how the weight of that body felt in his arms. Stimulated by that scent, he moved his nose alongside Slicky's jaw. Yes, definitely familiar. Probably since that time they had fooled around a bit? It was possible, but Rusty felt unsatisfied with that explanation.

"Things change," Slicky squealed. "Let me go."

"Not so fast. If you have an owner, why are you looking for me?"

“I told you,” Slicky whined, “just to tell you never to kiss me again.”

“Oh, is that right? What are you going to do if I kiss you again, anyway?”

“I can scratch you,” Slicky warned.

“I’m not afraid,” Rusty assured him.



Getting so close had been, without a doubt, a terrible mistake. Matty was searching his brain for a solution to get away from Rybalt, but the grip on his body was so tight that he didn’t have a lot of leeway to escape. His nose brushed unintentionally against Rybalt’s throat, and something cut through the mess of thoughts in his mind like a red thread. Why did he feel as if he had been in this kind of situation with this guy before? That wasn’t possible, Rybalt had only appeared on campus last week... but wait, he could be a student at Sunny Hill...

Lost as he was in those convoluted scenarios, he missed how Rybalt angled his head and put his lips on his again. Matty let out a small surprised squeal, but it was too late. Rybalt leaned him back as if they were playing a romantic scene in an old movie, without letting go of his lips. Startled as he was, Matty wrapped his arms around the stranger’s strong shoulders, unwittingly deepening their kiss.

The red thread turned into a rope. What the hell... he knew the taste of those lips, that tongue in his mouth, the way it flicked first to the left, then to the right...

He pushed back suddenly and with so much force that Rybalt almost dropped him. Luckily for Matty, the mysterious singer caught him again and cradled his head as it was about to crash against the hard roof.

“Damn,” Rybalt whispered, and now Matty, still in shock, thought he could recognize those inflections, too.

He rolled to one side quickly and jumped to his feet. From behind his mask, Rybalt stared at him in what seemed like surprise. “No more kisses,” he said quickly. “That’s all I wanted to tell you.”

“Wait,” Rybalt shouted after him, “how about a threesome with a cute guy?”

Matty was already running away and felt his head burrowing into his shoulders. “No way!” he shouted back.

Oh gawd. He knew the true identity of the mysterious singer. He hadn’t even needed that threesome reference.



Rusty rolled himself on his back, the cape thick enough to provide cushioning for him to lie like that, looking at the night sky. That kiss had been amazing, the soft lips opening slowly, welcoming him to taste their sweetness.

And that moment, he had realized what had been under his nose all this time. “That’s so cool,” he whispered under his breath.

He knew who Slicky Coolplums was. Finally. Now, the true questions began. How to play properly with a cat? How to snare him to the point that he’d be turned into a house pet? And of course, how to make him give himself away for real?



Zoey helped Matty out of his costume, and they were on the clock. Her roommate had come back early, and now they were both stuck in the small bathroom. Zoey’s roommate probably imagined they were having sex in there, judging by the grunts and whispers that could probably be heard through the door. When they finally emerged, Matty back in his usual clothes and Zoey pretending that the bundled costume was laundry, the girl was staring at them with suspicious eyes. Still, whatever she thought she kept to herself for the moment. Later, she’d probably question Zoey, but there was nothing Matty could do about that. “Hi,” he said and waved.

“Hi.” She smiled knowingly.

“I gotta run, Zoey,” he said quickly, all too aware of how disheveled he looked. He had some serious stuff to sleep on. He hadn’t even told Zoey, because he didn’t want her roommate to overhear them.

“Okay,” Zoey said just as quickly. “Let me see you to the door.”

That operation actually involved both of them stepping out of the room and closing the door behind them.

“Your roommate must think we’re together,” Matty said apologetically.

Zoey waved. “Don’t worry.”

“Really? I should have said something,” Matty said anxiously. “You told me she tends to be a big mouth.”

“I’ll tell her you were helping me with the plumbing.”

“It’s almost midnight. And I don’t think the word ‘plumbing’ really helps, given the circumstances.”

“I’ll figure something out. Now go,” Zoey urged him. “We don’t want anyone else to think you’re slipping out of my dorm room at night for nefarious reasons.”

“I think that ship sailed centuries ago, but okay. Take care. And thanks, Zoey.”

“Hey,” she called in a whisper when he was halfway toward the stairs. “Did he kiss you again?”

“Yes,” he whispered back.

“Cool. That’s twice already.”

He waved quickly. “Good night, Zoey.” Oh, she had no idea. That didn’t bring the total number to two. Actually, he had no idea what the real number was because he hadn’t counted. What an oversight on his part, truly.



Hmm, what could he do to give Matty the idea that he knew without really telling him? He was, after all, a cat, as things seemed, and that meant that he wouldn’t be too happy with having been caught. No, with felines, one had to proceed cautiously. Plus, this game was fun, Rusty decided as he caressed the cat tail he had gotten from the sex shop via express delivery. Well, Matty, when not in cat boy shape, was pretty open to all kinds of sexual adventures. Oh, he would so torture him, Rusty thought with a big grin.

Still, that would come a little bit later. For now, he would pretend to be completely innocent. Damn, Matty was a sly one. Of course he had been keen to say ‘yes’ to the threesome, while saying ‘no’ at the same time, once he had donned that slick costume. What could have made him play the cat boy to begin with? Matty had been a student at Sunny Hill for as long as he had been, and until their senior year he hadn’t roamed the campus dressed in that fine getup.

No wonder he was hard for both of them. They were actually the same guy. Also, the awesome bit of news was this: he wasn’t a two-timing bastard and a cheater! Yeah, he had his baby dude and his cat boy in the same package. Go figure. Hmm, he so wanted to see Matty give himself away and then tease him to no end.

But such things required finesse and good timing. Rusty was all for delayed gratification, especially since he was delaying none of it. The thought alone made him laugh. He had basically fucked the cat boy... how many times? He hadn’t counted. He threw the cat tail over his shoulder and then wrapped it around his neck without thinking twice. Whistling a happy tune, he stepped out of his bedroom.

Only to end up almost smacking into Maddox, who was going to his room with Jonathan.

“Ha!” he shouted at them and pointed both forefingers in their direction. “That thing, I have it.”

Maddox exchanged confused looks with his better half. Jonathan shrugged. “Don’t look at me. You’ve known him longer.”

“Rusty, what’s that you’re wearing? Are you really turning into a diva? Or don’t you think it’s too early in the day for wearing a mink coat?”

Rusty stared at the tip of the cat tail he was holding and made it twitch to and fro, while smiling. “This isn’t a mink coat,” he explained with emphasis. “It’s a cat tail.”

“And why are you wearing a cat tail?” Maddox asked, with saint-like patience.

“Because it’s not only that. It’s a prop. No, it’s part of a costume. It comes with this.” To illustrate his words better, he pointed the other end, the one with the butt plug, at his friends.

Jonathan chuckled. Maddie groaned for show. “You are not going out like that.”

“Yes, mom,” Rusty said and opened the door to throw the cat tail on the bed. “I mean, dad.” He had absent-mindedly brought that out of the room with him. “And I have tutoring with Matty, anyway.”

With Matty. Yeah. He grinned just thinking about how his cat boy would react to the sight of that casually thrown on the bed cat tail.

“Let’s go,” Maddox advised Jonathan. “Rusty’s thinking about some really crazy stuff, I bet. I pity his baby dude.”

“Don’t,” Rusty advised. “Envy him. Well, if you’re into endless teasing and a bit of denied orgasm.”

Maddox squinted while giving him a long look. “What kind of tutoring does Matty do? Ah, clearly, you’ve corrupted the poor guy. I stick to my initial reaction. I pity him.”

Rusty shrugged. “Do whatever. Matty likes it.”

“We’re sure he does,” Jonathan said with a smile. “He wouldn’t be here Friday after Friday.”

“And Saturday. And Sunday. Sometimes, during the week, too,” Maddox added. “Do you think Rusty’s finally doing something good? Besides the singing?”

“Hey, I’m right here,” Rusty warned them. “And I’m always doing something good. Because I’m that good,” he added while opening his arms wide.

“You need tutoring in modesty,” Maddox warned him, wagging a finger playfully.

“Nah, I have absolutely no need for that,” Rusty said with a cocksure smile.



How was he going to behave in Rusty's presence, now that he knew? Dex had told him that Rusty was upstairs, so the clock was ticking. He needed to play it cool, or, otherwise he would give himself away. Rusty obviously had secrets of his own... but did that really make his deception right? He doubted it. Also, Rusty was hot for the cat boy, still.

First, he needed to find out why Rusty was hiding behind a mask. Although all campus knew that his karaoke skills were just a reason for a laugh, Rusty actually sang like a virtuoso while dressed like a dark sexy character who could as well have just been descending from the stage of an opera.

Why the secrecy? Rusty should have been proud of it. That, of course, solved the riddle of not knowing where Rusty had been that weekend; he had been busy putting on a mask and singing for an audience. His close friends seemed just as unaware of Rusty's plans back then as he had been. What could he learn from that? Only that Rusty wanted to keep his identity as a singer a secret until he chose – if he chose – to unveil it.

Matty had to admit that he was confused, and that wasn't a usual state for him. What he could do was wait for Rusty to tell him about Rybalt. Or, he could make allusions to the fact that he liked opera... which, actually, he hadn't watched or listened to such performances so far. It was a good moment to start so that he could understand Rusty better. Wasn't he the one who had been crushing on the same guy since freshman year? Now, he had the opportunity to prove to himself that it was more than just a crush. After all, he believed so already.

He was at the top of the stairs. Well, he had to show Rusty that he was a friend whom he could trust with his biggest secrets. In the meantime, he was also relieved. He wasn't a cheater, not even in thought. He had just felt attracted to the same guy, only dressed differently. Also, as naughty as that thought was, Slicky could actually fool around with Rybalt at night, after the singer's performances were over. Gosh, he was turning into a groupie. He so needed to pull himself together.

Rusty opened the door, robbing him of the possibility of postponing their seeing each other again after last night if only by mere moments. "Come on in, Matty. I'm dying to learn," he said with a sly grin.

Matty no longer wondered at Rusty's quirks. He stepped into the room, and the first thing he saw was a cat tail, the kind with a butt plug at one end. "What's that?" he asked, his throat dry.

"That's for the after party," Rusty said and closed the door. Then, he grabbed Matty by the shoulders. "Just ignore it for now, Matty," he whispered. "First, you need to teach me stuff."

Chapter Thirty-Six

Will You Tell Me If I Go Too Far?

It was definitely a hurdle to focus on the topics he was supposed to be teaching Rusty while there was something like that burning his retina from the corner of one eye. Was that a sign that Rusty knew about his secret identity? If that were the case, why wasn't he mentioning it out loud? The chances were Rusty was looking forward to teasing him over it, with the intention of making him give himself away. But if he did that, was that the most satisfying end for Slicky Coolplums?

Of course, there was an equal chance that Rusty, tired of waiting for that threesome, had put into action the sexy threat he had issued some time ago. He wanted him with a cat tail up his butt so that he could indulge in his fantasies. Yes, that was just as credible a possibility. At the same time, it was difficult to tell which one of those variants was the truth, as Rusty, sitting across from him, seemed very much into paying attention to the information being taught to him, with no sign on his face that he was up to no good.

Matty willed the beating of his heart to go down. It was all fun with Rusty, and even if he had realized who Slicky Coolplums truly was, it looked like he wasn't mad about it. That was the best conclusion to reach for the time being, and he liked it very much. So, maybe, just maybe, Rusty didn't mind a little bit of playing and beating around the bush in regard to the true identity of the cat boy. He took some liberty in watching Rusty across the table and decided that he would play it cool until the unavoidable unmasking. He so hoped he wasn't wrong.

"Okay, I'm quite puzzled," he eventually said as he closed the textbook in front of him. "You really applied yourself today. What gives?" He hoped his poker face was completely unreadable.

Rusty appeared not to think anything about his poker face, either, which meant that it was working. However, there was no point in celebrating victory; after all, with Rusty, everything was a fun war of attrition, right?

"I wanted to be a good boy so that you won't say 'no' to that." Rusty gestured vaguely over his shoulder, but they both knew what he was talking about.

Matty felt his cheeks getting warm, as his eyes moved to the offending object that lay on Rusty's bed, as if it was waiting to be used. "Okay," he said, his throat getting dry, and all the courage he had mustered for himself just earlier completely gone. "You know I'm not that hard to convince."

"You're not that hard yet," Rusty said with a devilish grin.

Matty rolled his eyes, using that as an excuse to look away. Did Rusty know? Or was he still completely in the dark? He also had to focus on the other important part, which was to find out

why Rusty was hiding his amazing singing abilities behind a mask. In his case, he knew why he was donning a cat boy suit at night; it had all been part of a strategy to get the king of Sunny Hill to himself, one way or another. It didn't matter that Slicky had grown into being his own thing, and now Matty didn't have it in him to abandon him, especially since Rusty enjoyed his time with the cat boy so much.

“So, what do you say?” Rusty asked and leaned over the table, pushing the textbook slightly away so that he could get as close as possible.

Matty decided to give himself a pat on the back later for the – presumably – cool face he offered as he looked into Rusty's eyes. “Yeah, why not? But why now?” he asked, feigning complete innocence.

Rusty smiled. “I asked Slicky about that threesome, you know? The one you said ‘yes’ to.”

“And?” Matty asked, swallowing the big lump in his throat with plenty of difficulty.

“Can you believe it? He said ‘no’,” Rusty replied. “I'm counting on you being more open-minded than him.”



Rusty felt a particular kind of elation as he watched Matty. His sexy tutor was, apparently, in no mood to reveal himself as Slicky, and that was fine by him. It went to show that all his presumptions about Matty's double persona had been right on point. Playing with a cat was, therefore, in store for him, and it was starting right now. Of course, at the end of it all, once he had Matty completely cornered and had him surrender in both his shapes, it would be so amazing that he should fear some kind of explosion or implosion might occur inside himself.

“Let's see you with it on,” he added. “Since you're not that hard to convince and all.”

For a second, Matty appeared to reconsider, but, in the end, he nodded and stood. Rusty took his hand and dragged him toward the bed with a big smile on his face. Oh, damn, Matty's cheeks were so red now, they made him want to lick that pretty face all over. He sat on the edge of the bed and brought Matty between his legs. He snuck his hands under Matty's hoodie and caressed his lower abs slowly.

“I should undress, right?” Matty whispered.

“Only the bottom part,” Rusty said promptly and began fiddling with Matty's jeans slowly.

Even if Matty's usual fashion involved wearing baggy jeans, it was a satisfaction to notice the resistance that perky behind showed when pants were being pushed over it. Rusty took a moment to grab Matty's ass and fill his hands with those round butt cheeks before proceeding forward and helping his tutor slash baby dude slash cat boy out of his jeans and underwear. That

reminded him that he had also threatened Matty with a cute thong. Later. Now, he wanted his sexy partner to put on a little show for him and lash his tail like a pissed off cat.

Matty allowed Rusty to turn him once he was out of every article of clothing covering his lower body, and even bent over of his own accord. That gave Rusty an unimpeded view of that bubble butt, and even more, of that pink entrance that would soon swallow the butt plug that would keep the cat tail in place.

He took his time, dragging a finger between the pink hole and the heavy ball sac slowly. “You know, I should ask,” he said slowly. “If you have anything against this kind of stuff, this is the moment to speak up. Later, you might like it too much to object and I don’t want you to leave here with this tail still attached.”

Matty’s body shook with laughter. “Do you really think I’d walk out of your bedroom, swinging my tail without realizing it?”

His tail. Of course. The cat boy didn’t mind having a tail. Ah, Rusty thought with satisfaction, and Matty had done this kind of thing before, securing his fluffy appendage in place with a butt plug like the little pervert that he was. Yeah, the cat boy had been his all along, and now, he was also at his mercy. “Hey, we might get into a bit of alternative lifestyle, and you might enjoy it a little too much,” he warned.

Matty let out a long sigh and then laughed. “I’d say there’s no danger of that. And you will tell me if I happen to prance out of here with the tail still inside my butt, right?”

“Yeah. This sight,” he said and took a small playful bite out of each of the butt cheeks in front of him, “is for my eyes only.”

“That’s a relief. So, if Slicky doesn’t want that threesome, you’re okay with it?”

“Yeah. There’s no one else I’d share you with,” Rusty hurried to say. It looked like Matty needed some reassurance to put his jealous streak to sleep. He wanted to laugh but couldn’t give himself away. Matty was really a cunning one, so quick to approve of the threesome only because he knew that would lead to absolutely nothing because it was up to him alone and not even possible to begin with.

In due time, he’d have Matty wear a complete cat boy suit. He would have such a big laugh while torturing him slowly. For now, however, he had some plans in mind, and he was really dying to see how Matty would look with that tail stuck in his naked butt.

He reached for some lube and the tail and began preparing the tight hole slowly. Damn, it felt good to experience that tight grip around his fingers. For a moment, he had to squeeze the Mighty Thor and get him to behave until he got his fill of watching Matty in a cat tail. The short gasps assured him that his baby dude was enjoying the slow penetration of his ass. Rusty slowly

pushed the butt plug in until the enticing hole swallowed it whole. He let his hand roam over the fluffy tail and then snuck it in front to caress Matty's cock and balls for a moment. "Now," he said, "let me see how you look."

Matty took a couple of steps forward and wiggled his ass playfully. "Do you really want me to keep my hoodie on?"

"Yeah, it gives me the best view of both worlds," Rusty assured him. Yes, for real, he had half the cat boy and half of Matty before his very eyes. Who said he couldn't have that threesome still? All he needed was to be creative.

Matty turned and a hint of the tail could be seen between his legs as he moved. His cute cock was hard as a rock and bobbing slightly left and right. Rusty beckoned to him and his directions were dutifully followed. A certain type of hunger had started to accumulate in the pit of his stomach. He stopped Matty right in front of him and grabbed his hips with both hands. Then, he began to lick the engorged head slowly. A soft moan confirmed that he was doing just what he was expected to.

Rusty cupped the round butt cheeks again, squeezing and kneading them while he filled his mouth with the delicious lollipop in front of him. It was so easy to go lower and lower, swallowing the whole thing, due to the practice he had gotten ever since he had started fooling around with his tutor. Matty was caressing his head, his hands running through his hair, making his entire skin go into goose bump mode, while the taste on his tongue, so pleasant and exciting, was warming him up for what was to come.

He moved his fingers around the tight ring of muscles, squeezing the base of the butt plug so nicely. It looked like Matty was very sensitive there, as his harsh breathing indicated. Rusty used his tongue to lick the underside of the hard candy in his mouth, using all the tricks he had learned along the way. At the same time, he pushed at the base of the butt plug, knowing that it was probably not enough to stimulate Matty's bud of pleasure, but enjoying the idea that the other sensed the sweet torture he was being subjected to.

"Rusty, I think--" Matty barely managed and began shooting in his mouth, rope after rope of tasty cream that seemed not to end for quite a while.

Rusty took great pleasure in eating Matty's release. It was slightly different from his, and he was pretty sure he'd be able to recognize it from others... not that he intended to sample other wares, so to speak. He rested his head against Matty's belly, still holding the tip of his cock in his mouth.

"Thank you," Matty whispered. "Rusty, you're so good. I'd wear any kind of tail for you."

Well, that was great to hear, especially since Rusty had plans that involved metamorphosing Matty into the cat boy under his very eyes. He needed to shop for the exact costume, the same

wig, and the same contacts, but the investment would be worth it. Of course, he would tell Matty that it was because he wanted to live out his fantasy of being with Slicky, and watch for any signs of defeat or jealousy. Could Matty become jealous of himself? That was one thing Rusty very much intended to test to see how it would go. In all truth, it sounded like crazy fun.

He placed a small kiss on the head of Matty's cock that was starting to go down and then pushed him slightly away. "Okay. Do a three-sixty for me. Awesome. Now, you can take off your hoodie, but keep the tail."

Matty obeyed without any sign of resistance. Now, he looked delicious, with that tail stuffed in his butt, and wearing nothing else.

Rusty made room for Matty to climb on the bed. "On all fours and walk around on the bed for a bit."

Matty's breathing was still uneven after what must have been a glorious release only earlier, but he did as told nonetheless. He looked over his shoulder while wagging his tail slowly. "Do you want me to mewl, too?"

"Let's not go crazy. I don't want the others to hear you." Rusty discovered, that very moment, that he wanted to keep the secret of Slicky Coolplums's identity to himself for a while longer. It was something he would share only with Matty until he got the okay to reveal who the cat boy really was.



The more Rusty encouraged him, the more daring he was getting. Matty really felt like he owned that tail, and it was pleasant to feel the little nudge against the most sensitive parts of his ass as he moved his hips to entice his 'owner' with all that wagging and swinging. The naked desire in Rusty's eyes was enough confirmation that his efforts were highly appreciated. Not to mention, he had a real desire now to be used. Therefore, he leaned forward, holding his ass as high as he could. Maybe he was acting more like a dog now, but that didn't seem to matter to Rusty in the least.

"Matty, you're so sexy," Rusty whispered. "Fuck, you're making me so hard."

"Do you want me to suck you off?" he offered, while still moving his hips.

"Yeah," Rusty confirmed.

He turned and sank his head between Rusty's thighs, although there was a layer of fabric between him and the object of his desires. He played around, grabbing Rusty's cock through the sweatpants with his lips and blowing hot air on it. He felt a hand running through his hair and

then moving down his spine up to his butt. It looked like Rusty was fascinated by how well that cat tail worked for him. Matty enjoyed the attention to the extreme.

“Wait, let me get the Mighty Thor out,” Rusty said jokingly.

Matty gripped harder, making Rusty gasp in pleasure. Oh, he was so getting good at this. Obviously, they liked each other enough for a little bit of teasing. And since the cat tail was used as an instrument for exactly that, no rule said that he couldn't enjoy doing a little bit of teasing himself.

He allowed Rusty to get out of his sweatpants, but once he was back on the bed, Matty took matters into his own hands, pushing him on his back and hiking his thighs slightly upward so that he could have complete access to what he wanted. Rusty grabbed hold of his hair as he began to lick the heavy balls with lustful abandon. His crush was so tasty everywhere. Matty especially enjoyed taking one ball, and then the other, into his mouth, and caressing them with his tongue at length, especially since it looked like their owner enjoyed the treatment so much.

Assuming that he was on the right path, he moved his head lower and began licking the taint. A short grunt that qualified as an encouraging curse of sorts followed, giving him even more courage. He leveraged himself so that he could reach even lower and began rimming Rusty in earnest. At the same time, he used his fingers to get inside the sexy ass more, while his other hand got busy rubbing the impressive length of the Mighty Thor.

He could get completely lost in this, pleasuring Rusty until the guy ended up completely pliant in his hands and at his mercy. However, he was doing everything by ear, and it was great that his efforts were recognized for what they were meant to be and encouraged by moans and soft orders to insist on one part or another.

He now had two fingers lodged deep inside Rusty's ass and he could get to the main course. He took the cock in front of him as deep as he could and began bobbing his head up and down.

“Oh, gawd, Matty, you're such a naughty cat,” Rusty praised him. “You really like licking me all over, don't you?”

It wasn't polite to talk with a full mouth, so Matty just continued to swallow Rusty's cock. At this point, he had no intention of stopping, not even for some hot conversation. He moved his fingers to make Rusty feel his intentions, and right away, he heard new moans and grunts. There was a warm hand on the back of his neck, guiding him, and making him take it all in. That was all the encouragement he needed. Although swallowing a tool like Rusty's was no easy feat, he was trying to make the best of the situation and earn the praise raining down on his head from above.

“Do you want some milk, naughty cat?” Rusty teased him.

He had come only earlier, and now he was hard again because of all these praises and sexy talk.

“Here it comes, only for you,” Rusty warned him in a low whisper and then began voicing his release.

There was so much, he had to hurry and gobble it all down. Since the study week had left them with little time to get naughty with each other, they both seemed to be quite pent up. He didn't mind it, but he regretted that he couldn't swallow every drop, and the problem of overflowing juices manifested. When he finally let go of Rusty's cock, he could tell his mouth was wet all over and that his chin was also covered in cum.

Rusty looked at him with hazy eyes. “Wow,” he whispered. “I gotta give it to you, Matty. You're great at sucking cock, but you're even double that with a cat tail in your ass. Come here, messy cat.”

Matty climbed over Rusty's body to reach him and snickered as what he couldn't eat earlier was slowly pushed into his mouth by deft fingers.

“So, how do you like my milk?” Rusty asked and grinned once he was done feeding Matty all the escaped jizz.

“I've had it before,” Matty said with a small huff, only because he knew that such teasing was right up Rusty's alley. “It's not like I don't know it already.”

Rusty laughed and caressed his hair. “Yeah, but it's the first time you're having it as a cat.”

Matty reached back and caressed the fluffy tail slowly. “Is this thing really getting you going more than usual?”

“If you're wearing it, yes,” Rusty confirmed what he was hoping to hear.

“Awesome. Can I take it out now?”

“Not just yet. Except for my hand, I've had no action all week. So, let me exploit you a little more. What do you say?”

“I'm down with it,” Matty confirmed, feeling elated at knowing that Rusty only wanted to get naughty with him and no one else.



Matty sucked cock like no one else he had ever experienced in his life, Rusty decided after the earlier session. And it looked like having a butt plug in his ass with a cat tail attached made him even hotter than usual. Since he liked it all to the extreme, Rusty wanted to take advantage of the situation and see what else he could do with Matty at his mercy like that. He had taken to

wearing the cat tail with quite the confidence, and that was a good sign. Rusty would work toward making him feel confident enough to agree to other cat boy games. For now, this was enough, because any more of them and there was a chance that he would explode and burn out completely.

He gently turned Matty on his back and began to kiss him slowly, on the mouth, the same mouth that had drunk him dry minutes ago, and then move downward, along the arch of his neck, his chest, his cute nipples, and nicely shaped abs.

“I’m going to fool around while using you,” he announced.

Matty agreed through a barely there moan. No need for any other confirmation, it seemed. Rusty knew that he was setting himself up for torture by not letting Matty out of his cat tail, but there was still plenty of fun to be had even like that. He aligned the Mighty Thor with Matty’s cute cock and began moving slowly. Then he reached lower, moving past Matty’s balls, teasing them, and even further until he was rubbing the head of his cock against the tight ring.

A longer moan assured him that he wasn’t the only one being tortured by his stubbornness. “Do you want something in your ass, Matty?” Rusty teased him. “Something harder, longer?”

“Yes, what the hell?” Matty murmured and turned his face to rub his cheek against the pillow as he hiked his legs higher and used his hands to pull his ass cheeks apart.

Rusty leaned back on his knees to watch the show his naughty cat boy was putting on for him. It looked like Matty knew he was one to truly appreciate a good performance, because he began pushing the butt plug out one moment, but only a little, then sucking it back in with his ass the next. Now that was the kind of thing he could see himself watching for some time, while stroking his cock slowly, not to bring himself to completion, but to ensure that he could control his own instincts. If he were to do what the Mighty Thor wanted at this point, he would just pull the tail out of Matty’s ass so that he could fill him up with some proper meat.

But, for now, they were in an accord of teasing each other until they couldn’t take it anymore. Rusty felt Matty’s sexy opening with a couple of fingers. “Hmm,” he purred, “it looks to me like you need to show a little more determination if you want my cock.”

“Oh, really?” Matty teased back without one moment of hesitation. “Maybe I like my tail too much. Maybe I don’t need anything else.”

A little denial, how nice. That was quite the game they were playing, and neither of them seemed in the mood to bring it to a close. Rusty used his cock again to rub around the bulging opening. It was starting to reach the realm of sweet torture indeed. The Mighty Thor was twitching and leaking precum, and he seemed very much in the mood for those games to be over already so that he could burrow himself into Matty’s enticing, sexy ass.

“You’re talking big, cat boy,” Rusty said with a grin.

Matty gave him a short look but then quickly closed his eyes. He pulled at his ass cheeks more, and this time pushed the butt plug out completely. That was all the cue he needed. Rusty was right there and pushed inside, the entrance made a little more pliant by the sex toy and the fooling around they had engaged in. He slid right in, the slight resistance only there enough to make the conquest feel even more delicious.

He couldn’t pull back, wouldn’t, not only because his desire was going through the roof, but because Matty’s legs were now firmly wrapped around him to hold him close and prevent any opportunity to escape. They were moving as one, Matty raising his hips off the bed to meet him half-way while he thrust inside over and over. “Fuck, you’re so hot,” he praised his unusual bed partner.

It was as if there had never been anyone else there, and seeing how long his list of former hookups was, that said a lot. Rusty took Matty’s mouth and indulged in it, forcing it open only so that he could get inside it as deep as he could, just the same as his cock was doing with the other end of that sexy body under him.

Was it possible to lose yourself in someone else like that? Sex made it possible. Maybe that was why he liked sex so much. All bets were off; all pretenses were out the window. And now, they were simply there, two naked bodies, coming together, and soon that became the truth. Rusty let go of Matty’s mouth only so that he could groan and shout how good it was to fill his bed partner’s hot ass with his cum. And he could tell, even if it was somewhere at the edge of his consciousness, that Matty was doing the same, spilling all over between them, and sealing the deal, so to speak.

They embraced long after the last waves of their release had moved through them, less and less intense, until everything was very still, but not in a state of tension, just the opposite. Their bodies felt like melted butter, still coming together like a living statue created by the hand of a skillful sculptor.



Matty could hardly find the words to describe what had just happened. Was Rusty aware of how complete their sex session had just been? Or was he the only one thinking like that? He didn’t have the courage to ask. The chances were he would end up ruining the moment, and that was something he didn’t want to destroy.

Rusty finally raised his head and looked him in the eye, although Matty wouldn’t have minded spending an eternity like that. “Matty, you’re so damn good,” he praised him. “You’re the best guy I’ve ever had in my bed.”

Matty laughed. “According to gospel, I’m the only guy that’s ever been in your bed.”

Rusty rolled his eyes and huffed. "I call girls 'guys', too."

"Really? Don't they mind?"

"Nah. I call them that in my mind. Okay, so let me rephrase that. You're the best ever. Period."

"Wow. I feel quite a bit overwhelmed by such an admission, Mr. Parker. After all, you've had many lovers before me."

"They weren't lovers," Rusty argued. "But I could call you that."

"Lover? Hmm," Matty barely managed, as he tried to make light of it. Rusty probably didn't mean it the way he hoped he meant it.

"Yes. And you know, it makes sense. Because you're special. And it's like how they say in books, someone taking a lover, because it was more than just the sex, you know?"

"I do," Matty said, although he couldn't exactly follow Rusty's reasoning. He didn't dare ask for more explanations since he didn't want to be disappointed.

"I mean, those guys were quite practical," Rusty continued. "Because they wanted more than just getting freaky. They wanted a companion, too, someone to share stuff with, which they couldn't share with anyone else."

Matty thought he was just getting a glimpse of an opportunity. "And what's the stuff you're sharing with me and you haven't with others?"

"This," Rusty said. "You put on a cat tail just because I said so. That's huge, Matty."

"Okay," Matty said, still unsure of where Rusty was trying to get with all that.

Rusty seemed taken over by a bout of excitement. He bounced off the bed and then back over him, grinning and staring at him. "I want to see how far you're willing to go."

Matty considered his next words carefully. "Do you mean how far I'm willing to get pushed by you?"

Rusty shook his head. "Pushed by me? You're one guy with plenty of initiative if you ask me."

What could that possibly mean? "So, if I take things into my own hands, so to speak, you wouldn't mind?" he asked cautiously.

"Yeah, like that," Rusty confirmed. "You clearly have a kinky mind of your own, and I'm crazy about it. I mean, right now, damn, that was some really hot stuff, Matty. Good thing you're wearing those nerdy clothes, I'm telling you. 'Cause I wouldn't want random people to think they have a shot at you."

Matty couldn't help smiling. Maybe he was on the right track with Rusty, teasing him with his cat boy persona, on the one hand, while delivering as far as that fantasy was concerned, on the other hand. That really made him feel like he had a chance in the long run, too.

Nonetheless, it was important to ask, since it had been Rusty who brought up the matter of 'not only the sex' part of their apparent arrangement. "Will you tell me if I go too far?"

Rusty appeared to understand that Matty was asking a serious question. "I don't see how you can do that."

"It's important," Matty insisted. "Will you?"

"Sure. I definitely will. Although, Matty, I have to say this. With you, I feel like we could go... hmm... let me think..."

"Where no one has gone before? And boldly at that?" Matty chose to joke.

Rusty's face lit up. "I'd say naughtily, but I don't mind the way you put it, either."

That was a relief. He could hope and strategize for the future then.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

What Talk of Peace?

There was something hammering against his eardrums and, at first, he thought he had to be dreaming still. No, it wasn't some dream involving a lot of noise; the ruckus was coming from outside, and although his window faced the back of the house, there seemed to be some sort of pandemonium happening not too far away. Rusty groaned and opened his eyes. He was so not a morning person, and especially after indulging in so much action with his baby dude last night. He was in no mood to wake up on Saturday morning that early.

Matty stirred by his side, scrunching up his cute nose, annoyed as he seemed to be for the same reason Rusty had woken up. "What's going on?" he growled sleepily. "What's with all the noise?"

"I have no idea, but I'll go open the window and check." Rusty tip-toed around, although there was little chance Matty could go back to sleep now.

He opened the window wide, and the sound of some sort of cadenced shouts reached them. At first, he couldn't make out any proper words, but then he understood. He turned toward Matty, who was up on his butt, his hair sticking out in all directions. He was staring at him with a dumbfounded look on his face. "Is that what I think it is?"

No more parties, no more booze,

Let's have higher life values!

"Va-luze?" Matty said slowly and stared at Rusty. "O. M. G. Those are Connor's Implacables, aren't they?"

"I suppose so. But why the hell are they chanting like this first thing on a Saturday morning?" Rusty had no idea about the hour, but he could only assume that normal people were still enjoying a little bit of extra sleep.

"Let's check Xpress," Matty decided. "I mean, they're bullshitters by definition, but they might know something about this new development."

The noise outside was only getting louder. Rusty shrugged and left the window open but moved to sit on the bed by Matty's side and look over his shoulder at the screen. Absentmindedly, he placed a small kiss on his bed partner's naked shoulder. Matty started for a moment and looked at him, and only then Rusty realized the domesticity of the gesture. Was he being tamed or something? By a cat boy? Then it had to be true what they said about cats being the actual masters and not the other way around. Still, he was about to look guiltily away when Matty

hurried and smooched him on the cheek. That also lasted for just a moment, because Matty turned his attention back to the screen.



What's going on, Sunny Hill? How can you take this lying down? Ugh, and all these years we squandered for your fulfillment as a naughty species, aka college students. Connor Williams doesn't have only Mr. Preston's ear. We now suspect that he has his whole head! Or worse, that he replaced the aforementioned head, because we don't otherwise understand how it was possible for our dear Dean of Students to give in so easily to such demands.

Did we mention it yet? Your college life, the one you've been dreaming of since you sent out your first application and waited with bated breath to be accepted within the halls of learning and debauchery of such an institution, yes, that college life, is officially OVER.



“Wow, all caps. Xpress means business,” Matty said, interrupting his reading of the latest piece of news for a bit of commentary.

“When did it all happen?” Rusty asked and nudged Matty gently to read further.



Connor Williams, you are so, so vile. We cannot help but wonder what lurks behind this veneer of respectability you're trying to project. We are so sure there are plenty of skeletons in your closet, and we don't mean the closet you came out of. No, no, no, we mean the one you have stashed in a musty cellar somewhere, the kind you don't want anyone to ever see.

Maybe the students of Sunny Hill have yet to understand that you are treating them no better than sheep. But we're awake. We know that you're a threat. And we will take you down.

How, you might ask? Here's a hint. We only need one champion to stand up to you and deny you the power you seek to seize through such underhanded tactics. And then, we'll support him or her through thick and thin.

In other words, dear Connor: challenge accepted.



“That sounds like a job for a superhero,” Matty said and threw Rusty a lopsided grin.

Hmm, how much was Matty suspecting? Well, there was the matter of the refused threesome that must have given him away as Rybalt, but why be the first to deny himself the pleasure of this new game?

“Get real, Matty,” he said with pretentious superiority. “Superheroes aren’t real. Also, and I know you might start to cry, but Santa isn’t real, either.”

“Oh, no,” Matty said and closed his eyes in theatrical pain. “That can’t be true! I won’t accept it! I hate you!”

“Okay, okay, I lied, don’t hate me,” Rusty said in a plaintive voice and rubbed his head against Matty’s shoulder.

Matty wrapped one arm around him and kissed him on the head. Since when were the roles reversed? It didn’t matter. Rusty actually enjoyed being the one pampered, for a change.

“It looks like Connor has managed to convince the Dean of Students to put a ban on booze at parties, with no exceptions, and there’s even a curfew now. All parties need to end before midnight, and you must also submit a special request that should include the number of party guests and other stuff,” Matty said as he skimmed through the campus news feed quickly. “Damn, Xpress is not wrong. This thing is big, and Connor might have just made a few enemies. I mean, I’m the kind who prefers a different type of party, but for most people, I guess, it’s going to get pretty dull.”

“What kind of party do you prefer, Matty?” Rusty questioned.

“This kind,” Matty said promptly. “A party of two.”

“Sounds good to me,” Rusty approved. “So, this curfew, what does it mean, besides the party-related stuff?”

“Basically, there should be no more roaming at night,” Matty said with a sigh. “Unless you have an emergency or other similar reason, and that’s also something that needs to be documented and shown to security on campus--”

“Okay, this is starting to get nuts. Connor just went from douche to evil mastermind in the span of a few weeks.”

“I agree with you. I mean, he’s obviously up for ruining things for everyone on campus, and I don’t see why, save for his acolytes, anyone would go along with him.”

“I believe that Xpress put it quite well for a change. At this point, people seem to be taking everything lying down,” Rusty said and nodded thoughtfully. “I mean, if no one stands against Connor and his weird ideas, who knows how far he’s willing to go?”

Matty shuddered for show. “I fear even thinking about it. It was already a bit scary to see how easily he managed to brainwash a not so easy to ignore number of students, but this? He basically has the Dean of Students in his pocket, or so Xpress makes it sound. And, above all else, why are his people the ones protesting in the street right now? I mean, they’re the ones behind the change. What more do they want?”

Rusty pondered over the issue for a moment. “They want validation.”

“Are you sure?” Matty wondered out loud. It didn’t appear that the question was aimed at him.

“They’re bullies,” Rusty continued his line of reasoning. “They’ve won battle after battle, and that without any opposition. Now they want to go even beyond that. Yeah, they want to bully everyone into being on their side because that’s what happens with all tyrants. They’re never happy with power. They want absolute power.”

“That’s pretty insightful, Rusty. I’m afraid you’re right.”

Rusty took in Matty’s expression. “Hey, let’s not make it so serious. It’s only college, right? Although Connor might grow up to be a nasty dictator of sorts, for now, I don’t think he can do much.”

“Well, I hope that’s the case. But, frankly, by what I hear happening outside, that should be a wakeup call for everyone that Connor is going too far. You’re right that he’s basically in a race with no opponent. That makes it sound all the more like he’s looking for one.”

“Exactly,” Rusty said and grinned, as an idea began to form in his head. “He’s itching for a fight for real, only no one has given him that satisfaction.”

“Are you going to be the one to do that? No one more fitting than the king of Sunny Hill, right?”

“What king? Ever since this shit with Connor started, and I really mean the pun this time around, not many see me as that anymore. Not that I care about it, anyway,” Rusty said with a shrug.

Matty gave him a slanted look, seemingly deep in thought about something. “You know you’ll always be the king for me.”

For a moment, they stared at each other without saying a word, then burst into laughter at the same time. “You almost got me right there,” Rusty said and shook his head. “Anyway, I’m not much of a king these days, so it would be nice to see someone else stepping up. I wonder who that guy will be.”

“Or gal,” Matty reminded him. “I mean, it could be anyone at this point. Connor and his people are protesting against an empty chair, which means that it’s a free for all.”

“This time, I’m just going to be a spectator,” Rusty said and crossed his arms. “I mean, why should I play into Xpress’s game or Connor’s? I’m not that easy.”

Of course, it wouldn’t be him taking on the challenge, but Rybalt, and that meant, as far as most people knew, someone else. Yeah, it really helped to have a secondary character he could slip in and out of without any problem. He stared for a few moments at Matty, trying to read his mind but came up empty. It looked like Matty wasn’t particularly bothered by who would pick up the thrown glove. Unless he was the one reading minds right now.

A loud knock on the door made them both turn their heads. Rusty threw a cursory glance at Matty to see if he was decent enough for visitors and then sauntered to get the door. He wasn’t very surprised to see Maddox and Jonathan there.

“Have you guys heard what’s going on outside?” Maddox asked.

Rusty opened the door wide and gestured for them to come in. It looked like neither his bestie, nor his better half seemed surprised to see Matty still in his bed. After all, they knew almost everything about what was going on.

“Yeah, it was pretty difficult to sleep through all that,” Rusty pointed out. “And we so wanted to sleep in.”

Maddox walked over to the window to listen some more, but the sounds were now fading into the distance. On his way there, he nodded at Matty and got a slight wave as reply. “What are you going to do about this, Rusty?”

“Why does everyone think I should do anything?” Rusty asked with a shrug.

“Because you’re the king, or did you abandon your throne without our knowledge?” Maddox asked and crossed his arms.

“It’s more like my people forsook me,” Rusty replied and stared pedantically at his fingernails while quirking an eyebrow.

“You also have that other--” Jonathan stopped mid-sentence and stole a glance at Matty, who appeared to be completely oblivious to what was being talked about. That was one poker face he wanted to borrow on his way to the casino.

“You’re the only guy who actually cares,” Maddox said quickly and saved his fiancé from spilling the beans. “If you don’t, who, then?”

Rusty sat on a chair and shifted his weight back and forth for a bit. “Eh, aren’t we supposed to have one foot out in the real world already? We’re seniors.”

“Yeah, and there’s also such a thing as a legacy. You don’t care about that?” Maddox insisted with a sly smile.

Ah, that only meant that they were really suspecting him of already being on the job, as the king of Sunny Hill or Rybalt. They were here to test the waters. Too bad Rusty wasn’t good at sharing his plans. “I don’t have to jump at any opportunity to prove myself. After all, I’m busy,” Rusty said and shrugged.

“Busy with what?” Maddox asked with a sly smile.

“Studying,” Rusty said brightly and pointed at Matty. “Just ask him.”

“Rusty has been applying himself something fierce,” Matty explained right away. “He is busy.”

Now that was a partner if he’d ever seen one. He winked at Matty, who smiled back.

“Hey, we tried, right?” Jonathan said in a tone so fake that it wouldn’t sell a ticket if his life depended on it. That also meant that he and Maddox had been sent there by the others to test him. Rusty suspected Kane, who was always too curious for his own good. It didn’t matter; they would all find out about his awesome plans once they were put into motion.

“What was that all about?” Matty asked, always the astute one, once Jonathan and Maddox were out of the room.

“My besties always suspect me of wanting to get in on the action whenever there’s any,” Rusty said lightly. “And they always have a ton of advice they want to dish out to me, which I don’t really need. The best way for me to make them shut up is to pretend I’m actually not interested at all.”

“You do act like you’re not interested at all,” Matty said slowly and watched him with his eyes at half-mast.

“I might be, or I might not,” Rusty replied, opting for a mysterious tone. “I mean, I’m not the only star of campus lately. There’s also--”

“Rybalt,” Matty completed his phrase with a sly smile.

“Yeah, that guy,” Rusty admitted. “We also have a cat boy, right? What do you think? Would he be up for shaking up Connor’s new reign?”

Matty shrugged. “I have no idea. But maybe just one person is not enough.”

“Two are better,” Rusty agreed and leaned over Matty, making him lean back.

“Or three,” Matty challenged him and blinked slowly, just like a cat.

“Or four. But let’s not count to one hundred, okay?”

There was no reply because what followed was a kiss. And Matty seemed no longer in the mood to argue beyond that magic number four.



There was no time to lose. Matty was gone, busy doing other things, and that gave Rusty the window of opportunity he was looking for. It was dangerous to do it all without careful planning, and also like that, in broad daylight, but the newsfeed kept going and going. Eventually, Connor’s shitheads with their leader included had decided to make a pit stop at the quad, where speeches of doubtful quality were being made for an audience that was starting to gather.

Okay, so, since he didn’t have the benefit of low light conditions to hide his true identity, he needed to be extra careful. He put on the wig and made sure that the mask was properly in place before donning his cape. The fact that Connor was basically gathering up the whole population of Sunny Hill to listen to the decrees of his reign of terror worked to his advantage. No one would see him jumping from building to building and be able to guess where he was coming from.



Was Zoey with the bunch of crapheads? Matty suspected she was in the middle of it all and that meant that while he had told Rusty that he had some important matters to tend to... he had basically not lied. He could only hope that Zoey was careful not to give herself away in front of that frenzied crowd by saying something blunt and truthful, as was her usual MO.

That brought him to the quad, which was the direction everyone was headed in. Even if they disagreed with Connor, the entire population on campus seemed interested in hearing him out. At least, that seemed to be the case, he gathered from what he could hear other students saying among themselves. Now, where was campus security, he wondered? Things like debates on campus grounds didn’t have a reason to turn violent, per se, but it definitely seemed like Connor was looking for a reason to get into a real fight.

He stopped at a fair distance since it appeared that Connor’s team had come well prepared. Connor stood high on a box or something like that from which he could observe the crowd at his leisure. The musty suit was gone; instead, Connor looked like a politician on tour, his sleeves rolled up, his hair slightly messy, but fashionably so, while still in dress pants and a dress shirt. He also had a mike into which he was shouting his calls to action, which helped the people in the back hear him.

“I’m glad to see you here in such great numbers,” the politician in the making bleated into his microphone. “I’m glad to see that the true college life spirit isn’t dead.” Connor’s acolytes applauded energetically to make up for the lack of reaction by most spectators. That only encouraged their leader to continue. “As you may have heard by now, we earned a well-deserved victory after taking matters into our own hands and bringing them forward to the powers that be.”

Oh, no, he was such an underdog, Matty thought wryly.

“The academic environment has gone through unfathomable changes over the years, turning institutions such as ours, meant to educate and enlighten, into nothing but a year-long summer camp and something even worse than that.” Connor cut through the air with his arm to make a point. “I won’t insist on rehearsing the bad things. I’m here,” he paused for effect, “we’re here,” he resumed while gesturing to the people around him, “to focus on the positive. And we want to help you,” he pointed at no one in particular, but very decisively nonetheless, “to do the same.”

“Why on earth did you get Mr. Preston to ban parties?” someone shouted from the non-Connor crowd.

Connor shifted his weight from one foot to another. From the distance he was from the speaker, Matty couldn’t see and read his face. But something told him that yeah, Rusty was pretty much right, and the asshole was itching for a fight. He must have waited for that question, for any reaction, no matter how small, from the many students gathered there.

“Where are you getting your information from? Xpress?” Connor asked and laughed. His crowd followed on cue. “We didn’t ban parties.” Hmm, ‘we’, not the Dean of Students, Matty noted. “We,” Connor insisted, “allow parties, as long as they’re well planned events that will not lead to any unpleasant or even worse consequences. We care about you.” He gestured widely with his arm again, to show his magnanimity.

“Like hell,” someone from the crowd protested. “You shouldn’t have taken away the booze, man! We’ll riot!”

“You’ll riot for booze?” Connor expressed his disbelief. “What have we come to? There’s no other aim, no purpose in this life, but... booze?!” Well, if a career in politics wasn’t in the cards for him, Connor could always try his hand at acting. In horror movies. “You won’t riot to save the environment, or the starving children of the world, but you’ll riot for booze?!”

Yeah, what was booze compared to kids dying of starvation? Matty shook his head. Connor knew exactly what he was doing. He did very well with such opponents who, compared to him, seemed nothing but a bunch of petulant spoiled brats who only cared about their next fix, their next entertainment, and nothing else.

Silence followed. Some of the brighter students were probably busy thinking up arguments to contradict Connor, but the leader of crapheads had the element of surprise on his side. He must have polished that speech for quite a while before this Saturday morning.

“It’s not like we can do something about all that,” the heckler insisted after a while, but doubt was creeping into his voice, weakening his message.

“So you think,” Connor said and nothing spelled his triumph better than his puffed out chest. “We know because we were the same,” he added with an extra layer of piety illustrated by his hands tightening on the mike. He was now playing the empathy card. “We thought that we couldn’t do anything, either.”

More silence from the crowd. Matty couldn’t believe it, but it wasn’t like he was getting out there and telling Connor a couple of things to his face, either, right? Then, he understood. Connor was playing them and forcing them to accept his point of view. Determined to be at least a voice of reason in that sea of lunacy that was threatening to turn its waves into a tsunami, he began pushing his way through the crowd to get to the front and speak.

He was barely there and ready to open his mouth to speak when Connor flinched and brought one hand to his head. He looked around and it looked like something had hit him. All those present began searching with their eyes for whatever the source of that attack was.

“Hey, look over there,” a girl shouted. “It’s him!”

Matty couldn’t keep in a smile as he saw the tall figure balancing his weight on the edge of a nearby roof. Rusty wouldn’t stay away; of course he wouldn’t. And he looked even more dashing in broad daylight in his cape and overall disguise.

“Rybalt!” a few more cried out.

“What’s he doing here?” some whispered.

“I think he’s crashing this party,” another student offered his point of view.

Rybalt reached into his breast pocket and took something out. Then, he moved his arm back and threw that small object at Connor’s head. Matty was close enough to see what it was when the thing dropped to the floor. It was candy. Not exactly the first thought that came to mind, that, because the candy had an unbecoming brown color, but it made total sense. It looked like Rybalt wanted to fight the king of crapheads with his own weapons, so to speak.

“Hey, you hooligan, stop what you’re doing right now!” Connor shouted.

Instead of offering a reply, Rybalt reached for more ammunition and this time rained a series of projectiles over the heads of those around Connor. One boy grabbed one piece that hadn’t yet touched the ground and tried to put it into his mouth. Unfortunately for him, his leader noticed

and slapped his hand, making the candy drop. With a forlorn look, the guy followed the dropped candy with his eyes and only after a moment realized that his leader was still staring at him and pedaled back to being an exemplary craphead.

“Get down from there,” Connor continued, addressing the intruder now. “Let’s see how brave you are when you have to face me man to man!”

“You mean, man to octopus?” Rybalt asked and laughed, putting his hands on his hips. “Sorry, man, I’m not into tentacles.”

“I don’t even know what you mean by that! You make absolutely no sense,” Connor stated and held his chin high, still clutching the mike with all his strength.

Rybalt laughed and aimed another projectile at Connor’s head. The other had only two options: to duck and look ridiculous, or to take it like a man and look ridiculous. Being the proud idiot that he was, he endured a candy hitting smack in the middle of his forehead. That made a few laugh. Apparently, it only took a little bit of showing how naked the emperor was for the audience to realize that they weren’t supposed to feel like they were under assault.

“You!” Connor hissed. “You vampire!”

Matty shook his head in mirth. That guy really needed to brush up on his vocabulary because that wasn’t anywhere near an insult. If anything, Rybalt looked every bit like a sexy vampire, someone meant to seduce and turn everyone’s heads, and that was the complete opposite of the image Connor was projecting at the moment. Or at any other moment, Matty considered. Finally, the leader of that organization had found an opponent, but maybe it wasn’t the kind of opponent he expected.

Rybalt laughed loudly, while everyone looked up, hands shielding their eyes to see him better. It appeared that everything Connor did played right into his plans, because he took a few steps on the ledge, executing a little elegant dance while at it, and making the audience gasp in surprise and terror. Then, he broke into a song that sounded very much like an aria no one had ever heard before.

You call me a creature of the night

But you don’t rise from sunlight, either

These people, they deserve a knight;

In turn, you’re nothing but a mouth-breather

It was quite possible that Rybalt had come up with that little song on the spot, and Matty, knowing the guy pretty well, wasn’t surprised. The other students present, however, thought nothing of it and were just enjoying it. The insult caught right away, and the earlier chants

performed by the crapheads now faded into obscurity as the other side of the barricade began to chant.

Mouth-breather! Mouth-breather!

Connor was livid, clutching at his mike and throwing nervous looks around. One of his acolytes moved to his side and began whispering something in his ear. Matty observed as the expression on Connor's face turned to one of perverse glee. The S.H.I.T leader nodded briefly at whatever his subordinate suggested, and the other guy took out his phone.

Of course, they'd pull a black card seeing how they were losing the crowd. Matty shook his head in disgust. Someone had to warn Rybalt that the assholes were, most probably, calling security to complain that their little brainwashing party was getting crashed by someone with more moral fiber in his little toe than in all of them combined.

Except for one person. Matty searched for Zoey in that mass of uniformed bastards – today, they were all dressed in light colors, to reflect the color palette their leader had opted for, white shirts, light cream pants – and didn't manage to spot her.

On the roof, Rybalt continued to give his performance, probably oblivious to the further underhanded tactics of the assholes below. Matty had to applaud the new star of Sunny Hill for not stooping to Connor's level and allowing himself to be dragged into an endless debate. Instead, he offered the students an alternative, the real joy of being young and free.

It looked like, from his vantage point, Rybalt could easily spot any movement and the arrival of a couple of campus security guards immediately prompted him to act. "This party appears to be over, my lieblings," he said and took a bow, while most of the students applauded. "I will see you, as scheduled. Stay true, don't step in shit."

And, with that, Rybalt executed his signature move of draping his cape over one arm and making himself disappear like a real magician. Matty felt proud. Now that was a good way to fight the haters. And those around were probably, in pretty large number, the same people who no longer thought that Rusty was still the king of Sunny Hill. How wrong they were. How surprised would they be to learn the truth?

The security people pushed their way through the crowd to Connor, and the guy covered the microphone while he talked to them. They seemed dumbfounded at having been called there, and it appeared that at least one of them was chastising the leader of crapheads about it. Connor had his most suave face on and was even acting, as it appeared from where Matty stood, like a veritable victim.

He shook his head and began walking away. Now, where was Zoey? He took out his phone to message her. She was probably laughing her ass off right now, but only internally. While he was no superhero like Rybalt, he could at least save his bestie and get her to go to lunch with him.



“I wasn’t there,” Zoey moaned and pressed her head into the table.

“Were you sleeping late?” Matty asked and patted her gently on the hair.

“Well, yeah, but that’s not the point. They simply didn’t tell me.”

“How come? Haven’t you passed the brainwashed test? I’m afraid that must be it.”

Zoey gave him an annoyed look from below, with just one eye. She would definitely make a fine pirate. “It’s weird. Your roommate wasn’t there, either, by the way.”

“For real? Now that is weird, indeed. I’m pretty sure John would never miss the opportunity to lick Connor’s ass for the world. Is he sick or something?”

“I don’t know. But you should. He’s your roommate,” Zoey pointed out. “Didn’t you see him this morning?”

“I didn’t sleep in my bed, let’s put it that way,” Matty said with a smile.

Zoey grinned. “Right. I forgot that you’re going steady with Rusty now. By the way, what does he think of all this crazy stuff?”

Matty hesitated. Even if Zoey was his bestie, Rusty had his reasons for keeping his alter-ego a secret. “He says he doesn’t care and doesn’t want to get involved.”

Zoey didn’t appear to notice his hesitation. “Well, then it’s good that there’s this Rybalt dude flinging candy at Connor and his shitheads. We still need a hero, right?”

Matty nodded, without adding a word. Rusty definitely wanted the cat boy to join Rybalt in his illicit life of fighting Connor and his team. That meant he needed to do some planning.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Operation: Rescue

His roommate was the picture of inconsolable rage when he walked into his dorm room. During the time spent in John's company – through no fault of his own – he had come to learn a few of the different faces the guy he was sharing such close quarters with wore, and this one was new. For a moment, Matty thought of ignoring his parents' advice to offer comfort whenever he could and skip this one. But John looked at him while his hands were still clutched on his textbook so hard that his knuckles had turned white, while his eyes looked large and shiny behind his glasses. His face was spattered by red blotches, which could mean a number of things, and that made it simply impossible to ignore him.

“Zoey told me that neither you nor she were called to take part in this morning's rally.” It was better to grab the bull by the horns and then patiently convince the unfortunate beast that being part of a cult specializing in brainwashing and party-pooing was not a big deal, after all, and that he was all the better without it.

“Yes, that is true,” John said in a strained voice. “Connor says that he forgot,” he added, as the tension in his voice rose, “but he's lying. I know he's lying.” The last few words had been forcefully pushed through clenched teeth. Wow. Talk about barely contained anger.

Matty sat on his bed and examined John slowly. Damn, he looked like a bottle of champagne ready to pop, minus the fun part and the midnight countdown. Seeing how John had no idea how to get his rage out so that he didn't burst a vein or something, Matty continued carefully. “And how is that making you feel?”

John closed his eyes, clutched his hands even tighter on the textbook and then threw it away suddenly. He pushed his closed fists against his eyes – or just tried to do so since his glasses were in the way – and then started bawling. He did it so abruptly and loudly that Matty jumped from his place.

He hurried to his roommate's side and put a cautious arm around him. “There, there,” he said slowly, “it's not the end of the world.”

John turned and hugged him tightly, pressing his head against his chest. Matty had to brace himself not to fall off the edge of the bed. There was something more to all that hurt, and it was in his nature to see what he could do to ease the other's pain. “John,” he asked quietly, “do you happen to have feelings for Connor?”

The way the bawling intensified told him that he had hit the nail on the head. Not that he could entirely understand how someone could fall for that weasel, but it wasn't his place to judge such things. Therefore, he continued to pat John on the back and let him cry out his pain and outrage

at being rejected like this by his leader. “You know,” he said, “maybe it’s all for the best.” If it had been anyone else involved in that little drama, he would have mentioned that perhaps there was no use blowing things out of proportion and that people were allowed to forget about this or that on occasion. But, as things stood, he thought it better not to give John any hope that the leader of the Implacables was anything other than a conniving lying bastard.

Lost as he was in those thoughts, he missed how John stopped his crying and was now staring at him intently. It was too late when John attacked him, trying to plaster his lips all over his. He reacted, but that only made it worse for his balance, and soon they were both on the floor. Matty immediately put one hand against John’s chest and pushed him away. As guilty as he felt at seeing how hurt John looked back at him, he said in a heartbeat, without thinking twice. “I can’t. I’m committed to Rusty Parker.”

John stared at him in disbelief for a moment and then pushed himself up, his face closing and darkening. “I understand that you don’t like me, Matty, but you don’t have to lie, too.”

“I’m not--” Damn, maybe he should keep his mouth shut more often than not.

“That guy,” John interrupted him, “is a womanizer who gets girls pregnant all over the place.”

“That’s not--”

John pointed an accusing finger at him. “Unless you turned that guy and made him gay, Matty, you’re just plain lying.”

Matty bit his tongue. Maybe he had turned Rusty, after all. But letting the cat out of the bag just like that wasn’t okay at all. Damn, he should have thought before talking. John didn’t believe him, so that was all for the better, but he really needed to watch that tongue.

“Forget about it. About all this,” John said hurriedly, gesturing vaguely at Matty, as he lay there, sprawled on the floor.

“Consider it forgotten,” Matty said quickly.

John nodded and disappeared into the bathroom, where he spent around ten minutes. When he came back, his face was such a mask Matty felt his cheeks hurting just by looking at him. “Look, John, it’s actually better that you’re no longer with those guys.”

His roommate threw him a withering look. The failed attempt at a romantic overture must have tipped the guy’s fragile balance in the wrong direction. Matty felt a bit too weary to continue, but he did nonetheless. “Zoey wasn’t invited to participate, either.”

John sat on his bed and looked down, hands clasped and held between his knees. “Yeah, but she was new,” he whispered. “Almost as good as an outsider. I think it’s because I brought her in that she had to suffer this injustice.”

Matty waited for John to continue. That line of thinking had to lead somewhere if only he was willing to be patient.

“No, Connor has something against me, something he’s not saying.” John took out his phone and checked it for a moment. “I’m waiting for him to call.”

“Why? Did he tell you that he has a better explanation than that?” Matty questioned.

There was something resolute in John’s stare when he raised his head. “I will convince him that he’s making a mistake if he pushes me away.”

Now that sounded a bit ominous, and Matty didn’t know exactly what to say. “John,” he said slowly. “What are you thinking of?”

John shrugged and his eyes became unfocused for a moment. To Matty, it looked like his aloof roommate was scheming. What about, that was a mystery he wasn’t sure he wanted revealed.

“I’ve been with Connor from the beginning,” John eventually began talking again. “He wouldn’t have this big of a following if it weren’t for me. You know, I went from door to door to spread the word. For him. And now, he’s pushing me away.”

There was clearly a matter of hidden knowledge, but Matty didn’t know John well enough to press him for the truth. Still, he felt like he needed to prove that he could be a friend, or at least someone his roommate could count on for the time being, while he was still so raw and vulnerable after being rejected twice. “It would be good to remind him of all that, but, for your sake, I’d say that you should be ready to walk away. If he doesn’t see it, your support, that is, then he’s not worthy of it.”

“You should start your own campus group, Matty. You have a way with words,” John said with unhidden admiration.

“It’s not something I’m interested in.”

“Too bad.” He checked his phone again. “I knew it. Connor is calling a meeting for this afternoon. I’ll tell him a few things then.”

“It looks to me like he still wants you to be in the thick of things with him.”

John shook his head slowly and then lifted his chin up in forced importance. “With all due respect, Matty, you don’t know anything about politics. I’ll go armed, so to speak,” he added under his breath as he looked away.

Matty wasn’t sure he wanted to know more. After all, John was a grownup like everyone else on campus, and he was responsible for his own choices, especially since he didn’t want to share them.

“About earlier,” John started. “I didn’t mean to... you know.”

“No worries. It was but a moment. Don’t sweat it.”

John nodded solemnly. “And I’m sorry that Zoey got in the mix-up because of me.”

“I’ll tell her that.” Matty suspected that more than her association with John, other things must have hurt his bestie’s standing with that crazy crowd.

“No, I will.” John fiddled with his phone. “She’s going to be at the meeting this afternoon, too.”



Matty lay in bed and held the phone in his hand, frowning at his unread messages to Zoey. How long was that meeting going to last? John wasn’t back, either, but he didn’t exactly keep tabs on his roommate. One thing he could do was text the guy and ask him about seeing Zoey, but while he and John had exchanged numbers during the first day of senior year, they had never spoken on the phone or even messaged one another.

Well, it wasn’t that important seeing how he only wanted to hang out and not much else. Could he just ask Rusty if he was in the mood for a bit of that? But he had told him that he’d be busy with Zoey all day, and that meant that Rusty could have made other plans. Could those plans involve playing Rybalt around the campus again? Matty closed his eyes so that he could easily fantasize about Rusty’s alter-ego. He was so sexy; if he hadn’t already been in love with Rusty, he would have fallen for that guy, for sure. And what about that amazing talent? Why was Rusty hiding something like that? Matty couldn’t figure it out and thought it best to let Rusty tell him all about it when he wanted to reveal himself and his motives. Hell, he was playing at prancing around dressed as a cat boy, and he hadn’t told anything about that to Rusty either. In other words, their telling and not telling were in perfect balance.

His musings were interrupted by an incoming message. Finally, Zoey had escaped that boring meeting.

He straightened up in alarm as he read the message. It wasn’t from Zoey.

S.O.S. they got us



Rusty had no trouble shooting the breeze with Maddox and Jonathan, the only problem being that those two were so into each other that he felt like a third wheel. Just looking at them reminded him of Matty and how cute he was, and especially how well they got along, too. Only that Matty had told him that he and Zoey would hang out this afternoon, which meant that they

wouldn't see each other until tonight. How long was it until tonight anyway? He checked his phone and sighed.

"What was that sigh for, Rusty?" Maddox teased him, his arm wrapped comfortably around Jonathan, who was deep in a book. They were both reading it, actually. That reminded Rusty that Matty hadn't read to him from that kinky book in a while. He'd remind him and then fall asleep to stories of horny zombies.

"It's long until tonight," he answered Maddox's question. "That's when I get to see Matty."

The mention of that name made Jonathan forget about his book. He stared at him with a knowing smile. "Why don't you ask him to come earlier if you miss him?"

Rusty put his tongue between his teeth and frowned. Why did Jonathan think he was missing Matty? True, he was missing Matty, but that wasn't the point. Of course, he made it sound like that by sighing and staring in envy at his bestie and his better half. "Because he's busy doing stuff that doesn't involve me," he offered promptly.

"So find something to do," Maddox suggested.

"I am doing something."

"Like what?"

"Sitting here and staring at you two."

"And you're not getting bored?"

"Hey, I never skip the intro on any porn videos. So, I'm waiting for that moment when one of you is going to get a glass of water and then pretends to slip and spill it all over the other so that the undressing can begin."

Naturally, Jonathan and Maddox began laughing at the same time. That was good. He had gotten them to drop the book. He was about to rope them into some inane conversation to kill time, when his phone began ringing. "It's Matty," he said triumphantly and showed the screen to his two friends as if they wouldn't believe him otherwise. "Hi, Matty, what's up?" As he listened, his mood changed. "Come here and we'll take care of it."

Jonathan and Maddox stared at him curiously. "What's going on?" Maddox asked.

"Something completely whack. Matty's on his way. He just got a message from his roommate that he and Zoey are being held hostage or something like that."

"Hostage? By who?"

Dex and Kane walked in that very moment, while Rusty was still explaining the situation.

“Those shitheads are going too far,” Kane said and shook his head with a sour expression on his face. “Let’s do something about it. Dex?”

“I was getting a little bored with all this studying, now that you mention it. Let’s do some party crashing, boys.”



“Both their phones are dead now,” Matty explained as he cast curious looks at the entire group. “I tried and tried, but they’re obviously turned off.”

Rusty was quite proud of his friends. They were all up in arms, so to speak, and they were marching toward Connor’s lair with determined looks on their faces. He would have suggested some war paint for their faces, but there was no time to lose.

“No matter how we look at this,” Dex commented, “it’s beyond freakish. What else did the message say, Matty?”

“That was all. Just those few words. But I know from John when I talked to him earlier, Connor didn’t invite Zoey and him to join this morning’s rally but asked them to be part of this meeting. I suppose it took place at their lair.”

“My good dudes,” Rusty said, “let’s synchronize our watches. What are the parameters of Operation Rescue? Do we knock or just barge in?”

“We’ll knock,” Jonathan said. “Connor has some serious explaining to do. You don’t grab people’s phones and then hold them against their will. I have a mind to see Mr. Preston at this point. I wonder if he truly condones such behavior.”

“Way to go, Johnny boy,” Rusty said. “And if Preston gives you the finger, let him know that Francine might want to have a word with him, and he really doesn’t want that.”

“I’m not going to use my mother as a shield,” Jonathan argued but his lips quirked in a smile.

“All the better. Your mom is a weapon of mass destruction, not a shield.”

“Before we get to that point, Connor needs some shaking up,” Dex intervened. “I mean, I heard about that poor keg, man. Spilled all over the lawn. Such crimes shouldn’t go unpunished.”

“We’re actually going there to save Matty’s friend and roommate,” Jonathan reminded him.

“Okay. Although, just so you know, I don’t know either of them,” Dex said.

They were still exchanging ideas between them as they climbed the stairs and stepped in front of the same door Rusty had so carefully decorated with candies not too long ago. Jonathan was the

one to knock, while the others waited patiently. He leaned closer and listened. “They’re inside. I hear voices.”

Rusty was just as startled as Matty to hear a girl’s voice, high pitched and troubled, coming from inside. “Help! They’re keeping us here against our will!” Some muffled sounds followed and a thumping noise like something falling to the floor came next.

Jonathan raised his hand and knocked energetically. “Connor,” he shouted. “Open this door immediately!”

“Jonathan, get out of the way,” Dex said. “Everyone, give me some space. I have a beer keg to avenge.”

They barely had time to do so because Dex dropped a heavy kick right above the knob. The wood splintered and the door gave a little.

“Wow, like in the movies,” Kane commented.

Dex was about to drop another kick to the door when it opened wide in front of them. Connor was staring at them from the other side. “Are you people mad? What the hell--”

Time was a wasting in certain people’s universe because Dex took the guy by the front of his shirt and pushed him inside. “Where are the hostages, you freak?”

Wow, never come between that guy and his beer, Rusty thought as they all pushed their way inside. There were about a dozen shithheads in the room, and Rusty noticed right away that John and Zoey were being held down by a couple of guys each. “Drop them or I’ll drop you,” he warned, and it was enough to walk menacingly a couple of steps before the assholes immediately let go of their victims and scurried away to safety.

John remained standing there, looking spooked and disoriented, while Zoey did the opposite. She barreled forward, and Rusty opened his arms to catch her, but she brushed past him and smashed into Dex, who was still holding Connor by the front of his shirt. “You came to save me! My hero!”

She pushed Connor away and wrapped her arms around Dex, who was looking down at her, rightfully confused. However, since she kept on staring upward at him with a look of adoration in her eyes, he hiked her up in his arms. Zoey promptly wrapped her arms around his neck and looked straight at him. “Winter is coming,” she whispered. “But I forget how the rest goes.”



‘Tis the season for a little bit of purging? More importantly, Connor, is your favorite color red? Like blood-red? Hmm, and we thought for a moment we were

looking at a true leader for the masses. Nope, we just lied. We've never thought of you that way.

For anyone who hasn't been in on the gossip this afternoon, The Amazing Four... wait, that's not right. The Amazing Dexter Solomon broke into a secret meeting of the Implacables and saved a little damsel in distress. Her name's not important. What's important is that she was being put on trial like a veritable witch when our football star smashed against the door with such commendable valiance that the poor wood didn't hold.

Connor, we feel the need to tell you. Witch hunting has been out of fashion for centuries. What gives, man? What gives?



“My name’s not important? Gosh, I hate Xpress,” Zoey moaned theatrically.

“Be thankful that they left you out of it. You don’t really want to get that much attention. Unless, of course,” he smiled slyly, “it’s a certain star of our football team that you’re interested in getting attention from.”

Zoey rolled her eyes theatrically. “I so totally botched that one. I mean, I’ve rehearsed that moment so many times in my head. And then, when I finally got to it, I ruined it.”

“Is this about your pickup line? Frankly, I don’t think that it matters. Look at the bright side. Now Dex knows who you are.”

Zoey groaned and covered her face with both hands. “I’ve made such a fool of myself. Things like this only sound good when you’re just imagining them. In reality, they’re totally cringe.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself.” Matty patted her on the back. “No one paid attention to what you barely whispered to Dex. On the other hand, why didn’t you tell me he was your secret crush? I could have gotten Rusty to put in a good word for you.”

Zoey rested her head on her linked hands. “Because I thought it was pretty silly to have a crush on a guy who’s basically thrice my size. Although, I thought it would be pretty badass to get him to notice me, and I got it into my head to make it happen. But it was all just a fantasy, anyway, not like I really thought it through,” she added quickly.

Matty doubted that was the whole truth. “Okay, but now you’ve been in his arms, so you must know if you’re really attracted to him or not,” he stated the obvious. “Which is it?”

“I might like him,” Zoey said so quietly that he had to almost touch his head to hers to hear her. “But, whatever, he didn’t get the pickup line because I botched it, so there’s that. No harm done, and there won’t be any winter coming.”

“Zoey,” Matty said slowly, “don’t tell me you’re afraid.”

“Afraid? Who’s afraid? I’m not afraid,” Zoey said quickly. “Well, except this time. Connor was super freakish and in a bad way.”

She was changing the subject, and Matty decided to let her off the hook for the moment, since he really wanted to understand what had been going on when they had barged in on that secret meeting of the Implacables.

“What was that all about anyway?” Since Zoey had declared herself pretty shaken, he had brought her to his room. John had made himself invisible during the whole thing, and that was good since Matty wanted to have a heartfelt conversation with his bestie and learn all about that crazy afternoon. After the rescue mission, the two sides had exchanged threats - Connor that he’d bring campus security if they didn’t leave, Jonathan that Mr. Preston was going to hear about the whole thing, aka the truth. Rusty hadn’t minded about his leaving with Zoey to take care of her. And, of course, someone must have tipped off Xpress with the speed of light, so probably the whole campus knew about the incident.

“Let me tell you everything,” Zoey began. “So, it looks like my roommate saw the cat boy suit and thought it funny to tell some douchebag friend of hers.”

“What? Oh, fuck, Zoey,” Matty murmured. “I shouldn’t have put you on the spot like that. So, did they put you on trial for being a cat girl?”

“They didn’t think it was me. They’re stupid, but not that stupid. There’s almost one foot difference in height between us.”

“Well, I’m expecting people to be stupid and crazy on a daily basis now. So, what did they accuse you of?”

Zoey straightened up and stretched as she smiled. Matty was pretty sure that, despite the scare, a part of her enjoyed the thrill of it all. “First, they started as if it was a regular meeting, but then, Connor asked me and John to come forth - I kid you not, those were his words - and recite the oath.”

“The oath? S.H.I.T. has an oath? Never mind. I shouldn’t be surprised. Okay, so he was testing your loyalty to the cause.”

“Just setting the stage. And then, he began circling us like a hyena, sneering and talking about betrayal in our midst. Again, his words. In the meantime, I was trying to use my phone, which kept buzzing with messages from you. So, Connor stopped in front of me and began yelling like a freak. He grabbed my phone, and then he stared at John and told him that he must give him his phone, too. He did but then leaned toward me and whispered quickly that he had messaged you. So, I was expecting the cavalry. Not all of it, but I’m glad,” she said and grinned.

“Those people are completely nuts,” Matty stated. “I mean, I had a little bad feeling in the pit of my stomach when you decided to infiltrate them, but now, they’ve gone too far. I didn’t think they’d be capable of taking you and John hostage, forbid you from using your phones, and all that. By the way, how did John get mixed up in this? I understand why Connor would yell at you for having some connection with the cat boy... that was what you were on so-called trial for, right?”

“Yep,” Zoey confirmed. “John, I think he just got caught in the crossfire. Evidently, Connor thought that John knew everything and was a willing participant in my little ruse.” She used the air quotes to make a point.

“What happened next? Did they question you about the cat boy’s identity?” At this point, Matty wasn’t so sure it mattered since the chances were high that Rusty had already guessed the truth. He didn’t exactly care about other people’s opinions. However, as a matter of preferences, he wished to reach that point with Rusty on his own terms, not Connor’s or Xpress’s.

“They tried to, but I told them that they could burn me at the stake and I still wouldn’t say a word.”

“Wow, so dramatic. You didn’t even deny that you were in cahoots with the cat boy the whole time, did you?”

“How could I? I’d never deny my friendship to you, regardless of the presence of furry tails and claws.”

Matty grinned at Zoey. “That’s my girl. Now, please, stay away from those creeps. Since the beginning this infiltration thing had the potential to become dangerous from the get-go, and now that potential came to fruition. What on earth did they want to do with you?” He shuddered just remembering how John and Zoey had been held by their arms by those crapheads.

Zoey shrugged. “I doubt they would have kept us there indefinitely, but they wanted to make an example out of us, like shaming us for betrayal and stuff. You know, I feel bad for John. He was so shocked that he was put in the same boat as me. Still, he was quick to think on his feet like that.”

“Honestly, I think it would do him good to break free from those assholes. He is already too easy to influence, and their influence is just plain bad. I hope that Connor and his little reign of terror is getting its ignominious end after this little stunt.”

“Yeah. My infiltration would really pay off then. Since my pickup line left me when I needed it the most.”

“Don’t worry so much about that. I’ll prod Rusty to see what Dex thinks about the whole thing.”

Zoey's eyes went wide with terror, unlike when she was still being held hostage by Connor's morons. "Don't, just don't, Matty! I'll die of shame."

"Why?" he asked, completely dumbfounded by her reaction. "Don't you want to know what he thinks about you?"

"He thinks I'm a weirdo who likes to talk about the upcoming winter," Zoey moaned. "I'll never recover from a thing like that. It's like the blunder of the century."

"Come on. You can't mean that. There must be at least a few other blunders committed already that surpass yours. Plus, we're barely into the third decade of the century," Matty joked.

"Don't rope Rusty in, please," Zoey insisted. When she got stubborn like that, there was no way to convince her otherwise. "I prefer to nurse my shame in the shadows."

"You better not do that," Matty warned.

He would have to find a way to help Zoey without her knowing. There was no way Dex hadn't been at least a bit impressed by someone as daring as she was.



"That was weird as fuck," Rusty declared as soon as they were back at the house. He would have liked to have Matty there, as well as his bestie, to question them a little more about Connor's nasty plans. But Zoey had proven to be quite shaken by the experience, so Matty was on comfort duty now.

"You can say that again," Kane added. "I mean, Preston really needs to hear about it."

"Connor said he'd inform him that Dex broke the door to his little nest of vipers," Rusty reminded everyone. He had had a mind to grab Connor even harder than Dex had earlier and shake him into a human being, although the chance of that were slim.

"And? He was right to do it," Kane hurried to his best friend's defense. "I mean, they were holding Zoey and that other guy hostages. Dex, don't worry, we're with you, mate."

Dex, however, seemed to be a bit out of the conversation and acted surprised when all heads turned toward him. "Yeah, yeah," he said hurriedly, shaking his head from some daydreaming that he must have been doing until that point, "I mean, it was for a good cause, and I'm going to tell Preston all about it."

Rusty hadn't missed how Zoey had climbed into Dex's arms like a tiny monkey and whispered that quote to him like it was code or something. "Hey, do you happen to know Matty's bestie, Dex?" he asked.

“I’ve never seen that girl in my life. I mean, before today.”

Dex wasn’t the kind to lie. Zoey had been a student at Sunny Hill as long as everyone else. But it wasn’t that big a surprise that they didn’t know everyone on campus. He hadn’t been aware of Matty’s existence until the beginning of senior year, so that made sense. However, there was some story there, one in the making most probably, and Rusty was dying to know more about it.

“She definitely acted like she knew you,” he pointed out.

“Yeah,” Dex agreed. “Totally weird. And she said something about ‘winter is coming’. Poor girl, she was probably in shock.”

Shock didn’t appear the right word to describe Zoey, although Rusty couldn’t say that he knew her well. That left room for other interpretations, of course.

“I will talk to Mr. Preston,” Jonathan announced. “You are all Dex’s closest friends, and while I am close to you, as well, he’ll have a harder time accusing me of taking sides.”

“Because you’re a Hamilton,” Rusty said with a knowing grin.

Jonathan offered him the same sly smirk in return. “Yes. It looks like Connor has some leverage when it comes to Mr. Preston. If that’s the battlefield, we should go in prepared. Fair enough?”

Rusty nodded. And if Jonathan failed to impress upon their Dean of Students that Connor was the douchebag of the century, he was willing to beg Francine to intervene for Dex’s sake.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Matthew Han Is Totally Gay, Okay?

With the cat boy suit location compromised, Matty had no idea how he would be able to slip in and out of Slicky's furry coat, and that was when an unexpected opportunity fell in his lap. John came into their dorm room late in the evening, and he appeared lost in thought as he stepped inside.

"Hey, man, are you all right?" Matty asked, trying to read John's face for clues. "That was some really freaky stuff, wasn't it?"

John looked at him like he was seeing him for the first time in his life or a ghost. There were some questions in there, but Matty had no universal translators of glares at hand, which only meant that the guy really needed to speak out loud to make him understand what that was all about. "Matty," he said very slowly, "how does your friend know that cat impersonator?"

"Rusty? I don't know--"

"No, not Rusty Parker." Damn, there was so much contempt in how John dropped that name from the tip of his lips as if he couldn't be bothered to open his mouth to say it.

But, of course, John didn't mean Rusty, and Matty believed that he was getting too messed up in his head for his own good. "You mean Zoey," he said in a deadpan voice. "What's this all about, really?"

John began to gather his textbooks and other things on the bed. "She isn't worthy of being an Implacable," he eventually started. "She fooled me into believing that her intentions were of the purest kind, but she was only interested in making us all look bad."

Matty didn't quite like where this was going, and there was also the matter of John looking like he was packing his bags. "Going somewhere?" he asked, determined to forget all about the cat boy suit and Zoey incident for a moment, although he was dying to know what John was thinking. Did he think that Matty was the cat boy? Had he reached that conclusion on his own? Or maybe—

"I'm moving out again. I can't focus here. There's too much... drama."

"I see," Matty agreed as his heart leapt for joy. Could it be that he would finally be alone? That would really make things a lot easier, with the cat boy, too, but first, he needed to know if his alter-ego had been compromised. "Where are you moving? Back to your relative's apartment?"

"No," John replied shortly and offered no other information. Hmm, he was suspiciously tight-lipped about it all. What could that mean?

“Care to tell me at least what that whole thing was about?” Matty decided that it was better to learn directly from John if the Implacables, and maybe the whole world, suspected him of being the cat boy. “You texted me,” he reminded his ungrateful roommate. “By the way, that was one strange text if I’m thinking about it,” he added. “Did you have a reason to worry about Connor getting you for something?”

“No.” The answer was too quick and forced to be the truth. Matty could tell a lie from a truth, at least in John’s case. “That was all about how your friend Zoey harbors a questionable character.”

“And who that might be?”

“The cat girl, obviously,” John replied.

Matty had to catch his right hand with the other so that he didn’t face-palmed himself on the spot. “The cat girl?” he asked slowly, not quite believing his luck. Not even Xpress could think of the cat boy as a girl at this point. The Implacables were suffering from chronic brain farts or something.

“Yeah. I mean, there were some rumors about that thing,” again, with contempt, John’s lips pursed, “being a boy, but it’s a girl, obviously.”

“What’s so obvious about it?” Matty asked, too flabbergasted about the whole thing not to pressure his roommate into saying more.

“Zoey kept talking about a cat boy, but I bet that she hides that girl because she’s a girl, too. And they,” John said in a tone that brooked no contradiction, “have a code of their own.”

“They... do you mean, girls in general?” Funny thing, that code hadn’t worked that well, or Zoey’s roommate would have kept her mouth shut.

“Yes. That’s why I don’t get them,” John explained. “They’re like a coven of witches, I’m telling you, Matty. Good thing you don’t like them, because they’re the root of all troubles.”

Wrapping his head around something as weird as that was too much for his logical brain, so Matty decided to abandon it for the moment, only so that he could continue this particularly weird conversation. “So, it’s a cat girl, after all.”

“Yes. The same one who got your other friend in her clutches. She must have enticed him with her exceptionally lean body. And you say that you’re committed to him. He cannot be, if just any cat girl can take advantage of him like that.”

The image of Rusty being taken advantage of by a slim girl dressed in a cat suit was too much for him. He couldn’t keep in a small snicker, and John caught on right away. “You’re laughing, but if you think for a moment that your special friendship is anything else but your friend’s cry for help--”

“Wait, wait, wait.” Matty put his hands up and pressed his lips together to keep himself from laughing. “What cry for help? Rusty’s not some victim. And he didn’t get any girl pregnant, let alone a cat girl.”

John sighed and shook his head as if he couldn’t believe that Matty could be just so gullible. “I’m sure that he turned to you because he doesn’t know where his life is going. And you are too kind, and now you think that he might like you.”

Matty wiped his brow although he wasn’t sweating. “Where are you going, John? Do you want to transfer from Sunny Hill, too?”

“No, not at all. If anything, I’m coming out of this stronger than before,” John said brightly. Then, he munched on his lower lip as if he wanted to continue.

“How so?” Matty asked.

John hesitated and then blurted out. “Connor saw the truth. I’m his right hand now.”

Matty stared at his roommate, not quite believing his ears. “Connor took your phone and accused you of... whatever he accused you of. Are you sure you want to hang out with him again? He seems fickle to me. And how come you got back into his good graces so fast?”

John’s lips stretched into a large, self-assured, smile. “I have my means, Matty, don’t you worry. Frankly, the only thing that makes me regret that I’m leaving the dorm is that I’m leaving you here alone. People like Rusty Parker will take advantage of you because you’re too nice to them.”

Matty was pretty certain he was taking advantage of Rusty at length, and that didn’t bother anyone, certainly not him. “Don’t worry. So, you’re not telling me where you’re going?”

“It’s a nice place,” John said and smiled again. “You can always call me or text me if you need anything.”

Matty somehow doubted he’d need John of all people, but it was only polite to reply in kind. “Of course. And if you ever need help in a hostage situation like today, I’ll gladly help.”

John puffed out his chest. “That won’t happen to me.” Again, his smile turned mysterious and cocksure. “Make sure to study hard, Matty. And get rid of that guy. He’s bad news.”

Matty was pretty sure he knew a lot more about Rusty than his roommate, but there was no point in letting him know that. Now, to be perfectly honest, he was damn happy that he was getting the room back and all to himself. And the cat boy suit could return to the bottom of his closet without any trouble.



Do you know what's odd, Sunny Hill? Just yesterday, we were reporting the biggest thing that happened over the weekend, and now, there's another interesting bit that we gleaned from what bystanders to the incident told us via anonymous tips.

How did we fail to notice it? Are our wits no longer sharp? Where have we been looking lately? It doesn't matter; these questions may and will remain unanswered.

Now, before you start claiming that it's a slow news day since it's Sunday, hear us out. Do you know who Matthew Han is? Well, besides the fact that he looks like a K-pop idol impersonator on his bestest of best days, he is a very accomplished student, and... Rusty Parker's personal tutor!

And, at yesterday's incident, they were both present! What should we get from all this? Why were Matthew Han and Rusty Parker at the same scene at the same time? We don't know – yet – the answer, but we do find the whole thing mighty queer. Also, there are reports saying that a durable friendship has formed since the beginning of senior year between these two protagonists.

We're serving you one last bit and then we'll let you start your own rumors until we come back with something more palpable to feed the mill. Did you know, guys and gals of Sunny Hill? Matthew Han is totally gay!

On another order of business, we'll come back tomorrow with act two from the Connor the Implacable vs. Dexter the Amazing drama, as the Dean of Students is bound to hear from them both. Who's going to win? Place your bets, ladies and gents! (Hint – Dexter Solomon has all his friends in his corner, but Connor Williams has an army behind him).



“What are they going on about now?” Rusty mumbled under his breath. After that crazy Saturday, he had let Matty off the hook and spent the night alone, but now he was heading over to his dorm to see if he wanted to hang out. He hadn't texted or called simply because he wanted to see Matty a little in case he was busy and they'd have to spend another day apart.

He eyed the latest Xpress gossip with one eye, while pondering over what they were alluding to, in their usually silly fashion. He knocked on Matty's door, hoping that his baby dude was still in and not somewhere with Zoey. In the future, he might have to negotiate the schedule a little bit with that girl so that they had Matty in equal portions.

“Rusty!” Matty welcomed him, somewhat startled.

“Yeah, I know,” Rusty grinned, “I’m such a psycho. It’s like I don’t have a phone or something. Wait, is this like a bad time?”

“No, not at all.” For some weird reason, Matty looked behind the door for a second and then opened it wide. “Come in.”

Rusty peered behind the door and saw nothing except the closed doors to Matty’s closet. With a shrug, he stepped inside. He had just probably spooked Matty by dropping in instead of texting first like a normal person. “Have you seen this?” he asked and pointed at his phone.

“No.” Matty took the phone from his hand and skimmed through Xpress’s article with the speed of light. Then, he snorted. “What do they want with this? It’s not like I’m keeping it a secret or anything. That I’m gay, I mean. It must really be a slow news day for them.”

Rusty patted Matty on the head. “You’re so wholesome, I want to have you with rye bread.”

“I’m not sure what you mean, but you can have me any way you want.”

Rusty shuddered as if tickled at that very nonchalant admission and took Matty in his arms to kiss him deeply. “Wait,” he said as he broke the kiss, “is your weird roommate anywhere in the vicinity? I bet he’d want to rub one off while staring at us, but I don’t want him as our audience.”

Matty laughed. “Well, unlike Xpress, I do have some actual news. John moved out yesterday.”

“For real? That’s great. I mean, the guy’s a bit of a creep. So, did he quit the Implacables with a bang or what?”

Matty grimaced at that. “No. I thought he would, too, but it looks like he actually got promoted. He told me that Connor made him into his right-hand man. What do you think of all that?”

Rusty rubbed his chin in thought. “To quote Xpress, I find it mighty queer.”

“What?” Matty’s eyes grew wide. “Do you think that John and Connor hooked up or something?”

Rusty made a face as if he had licked a lemon to get his point across. “I’m trying not to picture that in detail because it would kill my boner.”

“What boner?” Matty, always the innocent, asked.

“This one,” Rusty said promptly and grabbed Matty’s hand to place it on his crotch.

Matty, also always the guy ready to act, wrapped his hand around the Mighty Thor and gave a good squeeze. “Hmm, I don’t know, it doesn’t look like that much of a boner to me.”

“That’s because we kissed for like ten seconds. So, it’s like only ten percent up. Give me more and it will be at full mast in no time.”

Matty laughed and wrapped his arms around him. This time, he was the one to kiss Rusty, and he wasn’t doing half a bad job. The Mighty Thor took less time than expected to get to one hundred percent, but he wasn’t the kind to rush, not at this point, simply because it was too pleasant to give up. He smacked his lips in satisfaction once Matty decided to let him breathe. “You know, you got really good at kissing lately.”

“Having a good teacher helps. Tell me, does this Xpress stuff bother you? They practically say that there must be something mighty queer,” Matty’s lips curled upward naughtily, “between us.”

Rusty pondered for a moment. “You know what? I don’t care.”

“You don’t?” Matty’s eyebrows shot up. “I mean, it’s going to be a pretty big deal if they start saying--”

“Why would it be that big a deal? I mean, everyone knows I do what I want. Also, maybe they’d get off my back with all that crazy shit about my getting chicks pregnant and all.”

“That’s not the point, Rusty.” Matty’s furrowed eyebrows could be a sign of frustration. “I mean, what are you known best for?”

“Hmm, do I have to pick only one thing? That’s tough. Okay, okay, don’t tell me and let me think. Ah, it must be my perfect shooting mechanics.”

Matty stared at him and blinked in confusion. “Shooting...? Rusty! Don’t tell me you really did score! I mean, not like that, like in having--”

Rusty made a perfectly surprised face. “What are you thinking, you perv? I’m talking about basketball.”

Matty groaned and covered his eyes. “Really, sometimes with you, I don’t even know.” Again, his eyes darted to the closet doors, and Rusty had to use all his willpower not to follow the same direction with his. So, there was something in there, and he was already wondering what that could be. Something that Matty very much intended to keep a secret from him. Now his head was getting chock full of ideas, and his curiosity was soaring.

“I’m here to take you out,” he said brightly. “Unless you have plans with that cute little monkey.”

“Is that a new code-word for Zoey?”

“It is,” Rusty confirmed. “The way she climbed up Dex the other day, she’s totally it. By the way, what’s all that business about winter?”

Matty winced. “I can’t say a thing. I promised Zoey. And I don’t have plans, so we could hang out. Wait, aren’t you worried about Xpress? They just dropped the bomb that we’re strangely close, and now we’re going out in public?”

Rusty grinned. Yeah, his head was big and working. “You know what? I’m not giving a damn. Let them talk all they want. Unless you want me to be your dirty little secret, although you know there’s nothing little about me, and I take regular showers.”

“All that remains of all that is the secret,” Matty said with a cute smirk. “Okay, if you don’t mind that gossipy little rag, then I’m all in. What should we do?”

“You know, walk around, hold hands, make doe eyes at each other, stuff like that.”

Matty took it in stride. “Okay, I see that you want to give Xpress something to rummage through. Wait, is it a strategy to keep their attention away from that deal with Mr. Preston? Connor seemed bent on reporting Dex for breaking the door.”

“Jonathan’s on it. He wants to act as Dex’s representative. I don’t think that douchebag stands a chance. I’m not worried about that, and I simply want to go out with you.”

Something of a rebellious streak was growing inside him at Xpress’s allusions regarding the nature of his relationship with Matty. But, in the end, did he really want to hide? If Matty was game, he had nothing against it, either.



What was happening was beyond his comprehension. Rusty was holding him by the shoulders, and no, not like a bro, but in a way that left little room to guess the nature of the things they were doing behind closed doors. And, while it was Sunday, and not many students were walking about the quad, the few that did appeared to be having trouble looking any other way but theirs. After all, it looked like Rusty had spoken the truth about pretending to be in some sort of romantic relationship. No, no, no, that was just his brain working overtime. There was no way Rusty was thinking anything beyond that he wanted to give Xpress something to chew and choke on. Nonetheless, he wasn’t that comfortable with that joke, now that they were out in public. As much as Rusty enjoyed shocking the living daylights out of everyone on a regular basis, that didn’t mean that he could stop thinking about all the ways in which that could go the wrong way. Or maybe he was just trying to rationalize this stuff that was happening – pretty exciting stuff if he could allow himself to let go of his worries.

“Rusty,” Matty whispered, “people are staring.” He was holding his arms stiffly by his sides, still confused about what his very special friend, as John had christened Rusty, had in mind with this open display of affection.

“Let them stare. I’m curious to see what Xpress is going to write tomorrow. Come on, don’t go back on your word. You told me you wouldn’t mind.”

“I had no idea what I was signing up for,” Matty protested meekly. “I mean, I thought it would be just the two of us, hanging out like bros or something.”

“Bros.” Rusty snickered, which didn’t make him any cuter, given the circumstances. “Well, tough luck, baby dude, because I don’t remember a time I thought of you as my bro.”

Matty pinched the bridge of his nose. Rusty was simply incorrigible. Right now, he was probably thinking of some crazy ways to make Xpress lose it, and he didn’t factor in how that would look in everyone’s eyes, gossip rags involved or not. Still, he couldn’t exactly focus on proper replies and whatnot, while Rusty was not only holding him by the shoulders, but he was also slowly caressing his cheek with one thumb, a gesture that anyone could interpret as being far beyond what two guys would get into unless there was another kind of interaction involved. “Okay, I’ll play along since you’re so bent on making Xpress lose their shit over your being seen with me, a totally gay dude, like this.”

He barely had time to get those words out when someone interrupted them.

“Why the fuck am I not surprised?”

At first, Matty didn’t recognize the owner of the voice, seeing how he had only seen the guy once, and not in the light of day. However, that bad boy vibe was hard to forget.

“Jamie, my good dude,” Rusty exclaimed and offered his hand, pulling Matty forward in the process and almost pushing him into Jamie so that he could greet his acquaintance.

Jamie smirked and took the offered hand while his eyes bored into Matty’s. “So, this fucker was after you, huh?”

“Don’t fall for Rusty’s act, too,” Matty replied while Rusty’s hold on him increased. “He’s just fooling around.”

“Really?” Jamie moved his eyes to Rusty. “It doesn’t look like that to me at all.”

“And it’s not,” Rusty declared. “Matty here is in denial.”

“Oh, come on,” Matty began. He didn’t get to say more than that, because Rusty kissed him fully on the lips.

Jamie, as their audience, clapped and laughed. “Well, at least I know this cutie pie isn’t wasting his college life away studying and all.”

“And what exactly brings you here?” Rusty asked, completely nonchalant after having kissed him like that.

Matty was dumbstruck. His eyes had been open the whole time, and now he could only stare at Rusty. That had been the last thing he had expected, and now there were no words left in him. Not only couldn't he talk, but his mind was blank, too. Besides Jamie, others must have seen that, and he didn't dare look any other way than at Rusty, who continued to talk to the other guy as if nothing – let alone something the size and intensity of an earthquake – had happened.

He must have looked like the perfect picture of a frozen fish, because both guys stopped their conversation and stared at him, Jamie with an all-knowing smirk on his face, and Rusty as if he didn't have any right to act surprised. “Hey, Matty,” he said, “are you sick or something? Does your tummy hurt?”

He even dared to put a hand on Matty's abdomen as if to check for signs of a stomachache like he was a doctor or something. He caught Rusty's hand and didn't say a thing, but the trembling in his upper body must have been visible, because that look of carefree recklessness finally left the mischievous green eyes to be replaced by worry. “Jamie, my dude, it was nice to see you, but I have somewhere to be,” he said hurriedly and fist-bumped the other's fist.

Then, before Matty had any time to react, he folded himself around him like a blanket and hurried him back to the dorm as if a hailstorm had started and they needed to reach safety before something bad happened to them. He didn't have it in him to protest and let himself be pushed toward the building where his room was without another word. It looked like Rusty didn't think it a good idea to talk, and that was good because Matty had no idea what he could say that wouldn't sound like an accusation or a reproach. And he didn't want to commit to either, because this wasn't a good moment to lose his head.



Rusty threw enough murderous looks around to ensure that no one dared stop them on their way back to the dorm. Matty's earlier hesitation was now starting to make more and more sense, and he regretted being so callous about it all when he should have thought it through better. While Matty appeared to be on board all the time with everything he came up with, that didn't give him the right to put his friend on the spot like that, without thinking twice.

He let Matty sit on the bed, and he sat on the other, now that he knew that that douche roommate was no longer there. He watched as Matty clasped his hands together and looked to one side, as if he was having a tough time finding his words. “You're angry,” he said slowly. “But you're too nice to say it to my face. So I'm going to help you out.”

“How?” Matty asked and worked his jaw a little.

“By admitting that I'm a complete idiot.”

“You're not--”

“Nope, you’re not going to defend me when you should be kicking my ass. I’m an asshole. I thought it would be funny to have everyone stare at us and wonder what the hell is going on. And you didn’t think I’d do something stupid like that--”

“Like kissing me in front of everyone?” Matty asked quietly, while the tension showed no sign of leaving his body.

“Yeah, like that,” Rusty admitted and put his hands up in surrender. “I mean, you’re not like me at all. You care what people think.”

“That’s not--”

“Let me finish.”

Matty pursed his lips, but it appeared that he was allowing Rusty to continue.

So he did. “You’ll want a boyfriend at some point, and you don’t want that guy to think that he has to compete with me or something. In your eyes. Like, you know?”

He had moved his eyes away as he said those words, hoping that he hadn’t messed up his friendship with Matty beyond recognition. Therefore, the pillow smacking him right in the face took him completely by surprise. “Hey,” he protested, but it was no use.

Matty was all over him, grabbing the pillow and smacking him repeatedly, with quite the viciousness.

“I see that today you chose violence,” Rusty said in cavernous voice and grabbed the pillow out of Matty’s hands.

The horrified look in the pretty eyes didn’t deter him from throwing the pillow across the room and then catching Matty under him. There was still some of that anger left in the way those cute features continued to tense, but he didn’t mind it. “Come on, if you don’t want me to say it, how about you do it? Why are you mad at me? Put it into words that a sixth grader would understand.”

Matty pursed his lips and breathed audibly through his mouth. “You got it all wrong, Rusty Parker.”

“Then straighten me out. You’re the only one who can do it.”

Silence followed, and Rusty thought of insisting, but Matty removed his hands from the pin Rusty was holding them in and kissed him hard and deep on the lips.



Fuck, he was a complete coward. That would have been the perfect opportunity to tell Rusty what he truly felt, and he had chickened out, hiding himself behind a kiss. Now, he really needed to come up with a solution to that because there was no way Rusty wouldn't press him until he got something out of him. Not the truth, for obvious reasons, but something. And now, while he was melting into the kiss he was sharing with the other, he needed to think of a solution, and one that would pass the bar because there was no way a witty guy like Rusty wouldn't see through his web of lies.

Therefore, he opted for half a truth. "I don't want a boyfriend," he said as he removed his lips reluctantly from the generous mouth that made him go nuts on the regular with all the things it knew how to do.

"You don't?"

Matty closed his eyes. "Why would I want a boyfriend when I have you? You just startled me, is all."

"But you were mad at me. I mean, I did surprise you, I get it, but you were also mad," Rusty pointed out, unwilling to let it go. "And, just so you know, you can have me as long as you want. I mean, until you get a proper boyfriend and all that."

"I'm not sure 'proper' is a good word to describe my future boyfriend," Matty said and felt his chest getting lighter. Rusty had no idea he was that ideal future boyfriend and didn't have to know. That simple admission, that they would go on for as long as he didn't get a boyfriend sounded both a terrible and an amazing idea at the same time. Rusty had no idea what he was getting himself into, and Matty didn't care to enlighten him at all.

"You don't want a proper dude?" Rusty continued to babble on. "Don't tell me you want someone like Jamie."

"No, of that I'm sure."

"Have you decided then? What kind of guy you'd like?"

"He's a work in progress," Matty said brightly and moved his head to kiss Rusty again.

But Rusty moved out of the way. "You're keeping things from me, Matty."

"Tough luck. It's not like you tell me everything, right?"

That was both a challenge and an offer. But Rusty hesitated, and the moment was gone. Apparently, the right time for confessions wasn't today.

But maybe, it would come one day. And there was always that self-imposed deadline of the last day of college.

Chapter Forty

Oh So Dreadful Catch-22

“Do you know what Jamie told me while you were busy being mad at me?”

They were lying on Matty’s bed, and Rusty was holding him by the shoulders, his hand hanging over and playing from time to time with strands of his hair. While Matty had expected to go straight to sex, it looked like Rusty was more in the mood to talk. Since he had been about to spill the beans, and the perfect timing appeared to have been blown out of the water, he needed to be extra careful what would come out of his mouth from now on.

“Was it important? What he said?” Matty asked.

“Yeah. He told me this. Once you go cute and gay, you never go away.”

“Shut up, you’re making me blush,” Matty joked.

“He does have a point, you know?” Rusty continued.

Matty was pretty damn certain his ears had started to grow to the size of burdock leaves, he wanted to hear what followed that much. “What do you mean?” he asked, his voice little.

“I’ve never had a friend like you. And I mean, I thought I made my fair share of friends for life. So, can we be friends forever?”

The words were said playfully, but Matty felt tempted to take them at face value. Sure, his future plans – the most outrageous and unbelievable plans – had changed, and he wanted to add ‘boy’ in front of the word ‘friend’ when it came to Rusty. He could be plenty sneaky, he liked to think, and turning Rusty that badly would take guts and careful planning; however, when it came to his crush, he felt sort of like Napoleon taking over Europe. Hopefully, this current decision wouldn’t lead to his own Battle of Borodino. He shook his head. Now wasn’t the time to get lost in the historical details of famous battles.

“Do you want us to do the pinky swear and all that?” he joked to hide the little – quite pleasant – frisson dancing over him at Rusty’s words.

Rusty scoffed. “I mean it. I don’t usually think about whatever’s going to happen after college, but when I do,” he stopped briefly to kiss Matty’s head, “I totally want to believe that we’ll continue to see each other.”

Matty turned to look Rusty in the eyes. Was he really serious? Pushing him was a way to go. So, he put one hand on Rusty’s forehead. “Funny, you don’t have a fever.”

“Come on, you prick,” Rusty complained. “I’m laying it all in front of you right now. And I’ve never been more lucid.”

“Okay.” Matty rolled over Rusty, until he was on top, their bodies aligned. “Let’s be friends forever. Like only kids in cartoons would say.”

Rusty laughed, finally pleased with Matty’s reply. He brushed his hands over Matty’s shoulders and went lower. At the same time, he spread his legs enough to allow him to find the perfect spot between them. “You know what I’m thinking?”

“I believe your other head started to think because he’s already poking me. Do you want me to say ‘hi’ to the Mighty Thor? He’s obviously all for coming out and playing.”

Rusty leaned back a little and put his hands behind his head. “You know what? I think that to celebrate the fact that you’re again alone in your room you deserve a gift. Do me, Matty.”

“Do you?” Matty grinned. “So, you want me to do the work?”

“Why not? I’m tired anyway.”

“Why exactly is that?”

“I didn’t sleep well last night.”

“How so? Don’t tell me your friends partied like crazy. They all seem to be taking their studying seriously. Or was it the silence that bothered you?”

Rusty laughed and dropped his eyelashes. At that moment, Matty realized that no matter what happened in the future, he would never be able to hold it against Rusty. He was in love with him, and he would pursue him to the end of the world if need be, but if it weren’t meant to be, he’d understand. And keep that promise of a lifetime friendship if they ended up being just that.

“I slept badly because I was forced to sleep alone. And do you know who’s responsible for that? You are.” Rusty quirked an eyebrow, pretending to give him the evil eye.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Matty replied.

“As you should. Now, are you going to start undressing me, or are you just going to bask in my beauty?”

“Don’t tempt me. I could keep you on the edge for hours,” Matty boasted, although he had absolutely no intention to make either of them suffer.

“You talk big. Come on, let me see you in action,” Rusty challenged him.

Matty smiled and decided that, now that they had the room all to themselves, they could very well indulge in prolonged lovemaking without a worry in the world. Therefore, he started by sneaking his hands under Rusty's t-shirt, enjoying every inch of skin under his fingertips.

"That tickles," Rusty complained.

"No, it doesn't. You just want to get to it, admit it." Matty suddenly had a mind to tease his bed partner until he begged. There had to be some payback for what had happened earlier in the quad. Xpress had to have caught whiff of everything by now, and tomorrow, they would have to face the entire campus. But, for now, they had all the time in the world.

Therefore, teasing was in the cards. Matty moved his hands slowly, deliberately, until he cupped Rusty's pecs. Using his thumbs, he began teasing the hardening nipples, while watching the handsome face in front of him for the usual signs of arousal. They were all there. Rusty parted his lips and bit on the bottom one while his eyelashes fluttered. Matty thought of kissing him, because he looked so good like that, aroused and at his mercy, but, at the same time, he was discovering new delights in taking things slowly.

He hiked up the t-shirt, taking his handsome partner out of it, but when Rusty reached over for a kiss, he pushed him back and straddled him properly so that he could remain in control. "I want to look at you," he announced as he marveled in the sight of that perfectly shaped torso. His fingers lingered on the hard abs, as Rusty flexed for show.

"Don't you want to take a picture?"

"Later. Stop interrupting, you're ruining the vibe," Matty joked.

"Forgive me, forgive me," Rusty said and put his hands up in surrender.

That gave him the best opportunity to catch Rusty's wrists and pin them over his head. From there, it was easy to be the guy on the attack. With his moves limited, Rusty could only try to push his head forward, to be denied a kiss here and there. The short huff of frustration was music to Matty's ears. "Give me more of you," he whispered and brushed his lips against the opening mouth, ready for him to go in. He tongued its shape slowly, making the gorgeous guy in his bed pant with want.

"Matty, are you cheating on me?" Rusty asked.

"What?" Matty stared, startled by that accusation.

"I don't remember teaching you to be such a cockteaser," Rusty explained. "Also, in case I wasn't clear, no cheating allowed. You want a third wheel to this bicycle, you need to come clean and ask for a threesome."

Matty guffawed. “Isn’t that rich coming from you? I mean, you kept pestering me with that cat boy all the time.”

“Hmm, I guess you’re right. Therefore, now you have to tell me who you’d pick for a threesome. So that we’re even, you know?”

Was that a trap? He sighed. “I’m fine with the cat boy. Since you’re so keen on him.”

“No, no, no, that is my choice, not yours. Tell me who you’d want in the same bed along with me.”

Matty pondered for a bit longer. Could he risk it? Could he say it and see if there was a spark of recognition and mischief in the green eyes he loved so much? “I don’t know,” he said with a shrug and trying to play it cool. “It’s like we know everyone around here, and it wouldn’t be fair to pull them into our fantasy.”

“You mean, we know all the hottest guys on campus, right?” Rusty said with a lopsided grin. “Then, how about someone we don’t know well?”

All right, okay, two could really play that game. “But who?” Matty played the innocent. “And yes, you happen to be friends with the hottest dudes at Sunny Hill. I mean there’s Maddox, and Jonathan, and I wouldn’t overlook your other besties, Dex and Kane--”

Rusty placed one hand over his mouth, shutting him up. “Those dudes are out of the question.”

That negation was both playful and not. Matty decided to take the game to the next level. He pushed Rusty’s hand away. “Then, how about the mysterious singer?”

Rusty narrowed his eyes. “I thought you didn’t like the guy.”

Matty shrugged with the utmost nonchalance. Damn, he deserved the Oscar for best actor. “He’s good looking. And sexy. I’d say he’s all right for a little romp in the hay.”

He yelped as Rusty grabbed him and kissed him with all the tongue he had. That was so cute. And if there were any doubts in his mind who Rybalt was, they were fading into mist-like dreams.



Ha! That was the only confirmation he needed. He was so happy that Matty happened to be just like him. The same need appeared to be embedded deep within their core. Jamie was right about one thing; Rusty had absolutely no intention of going back. And there was also the matter of being unable to. Matty would have to choose that boyfriend of his with the utmost care, because Rusty had absolutely no intention of letting him go with just any guy from the street. No, no, no, that guy would have to be perfect down to his little toe, or else no dice. Was that how fathers felt

about their daughters and didn't let them marry just any guy to the point of risking to turn them into spinsters? He had absolutely no paternal feelings toward Matty, but he did start to think that maybe the guy was at a major risk of ending up without a boyfriend if it were up to Rusty.

That was a problem to turn over in his head at a later date. That was the thing with the heavy stuff; you could just postpone it again and again, until you simply forgot or it wasn't a problem anymore. It had worked for most things so far; not that Rusty wanted to add Matty to that pile, but he just couldn't deal with it right now.

The number one reason for that was simple. Currently, Matty was determined to turn the tables back on him and was attacking his ear with darts of the tongue that couldn't be ignored. Somewhat reluctantly – but a promise was a promise – he gave up and allowed his lover boy to push him on his back and get on top.

One thing he couldn't overlook, though, and that was that they were way too overdressed. He took it upon himself to push down Matty's jeans so that he could fill his hands with that delicious rump. That was more like it. Matty could go and protest if he felt slighted regarding his role as the guy on top, but that wasn't Rusty's business. When in bed with such a sexy dude, one could only act on instinct.

Matty proved right away that he couldn't care less about roles or whatever Rusty thought that he was doing by taking matters into his own hands, so to speak. He did the same to him, and soon their freed cocks were rubbing against each other. Matty kissed him at length and then asked, in his usually cute manner, "Is it really all right if I top you this time?"

"Don't ask, just take," Rusty advised directly. If he weren't taken and soon, he would start having a little bit of a hissy fit.

"Yeah, let me do just that." Matty pressed Rusty into the bed and helped him out of all his clothes. He did the same with his jeans, and finally, they were able to rub against each other with no layer of fabric between them.

Why was this so good? Rusty didn't have a proper answer. He liked everything that felt good, so there was that. But, unlike before, he wasn't compartmentalizing, and he didn't put the person giving him the good sensations apart from those feelings. His baby dude was just that good.

Matty knew how to find his way around and between his legs, and like this, facing each other, was the absolute best. Rusty liked watching Matty's face going through all those expressions, from a bit of wonder to surety to then pleasure, and ultimately, to the exquisite picture of his climax. He was telling Matty to take pictures to last him longer, but he was the one willing to immortalize all of those faces so that he could have them with him forever.

Matty moved slowly inside him at first. "Fuck, Rusty," he moaned. "You're so tight."

“I can’t help it,” he teased. “You haven’t given me much action lately. If there’s anyone who should complain, it’s me.”

“Why? Does it hurt?”

“No. The lack of your cock in me, though--”

“Rusty, stop joking, or I might go in too fast,” Matty pleaded with him. It looked like it took him quite the effort not to go at it as quickly as he wanted.

Rusty believed that he could take it. Therefore, he decided that it would be a good idea to provoke his sexy attacker. “Seriously, it’s only a little prick I’m feeling or someth—of fuck, Matty!”

“Your right to complain has just been suspended,” Matty informed him. “And now, you will feel the little prick, I hope.”

“I take it back.” Rusty grinned despite the sensation of having been filled to the brim and began kissing Matty. “You’re sexy when you’re tough like this.”

“Then let me show you I know how to be in charge.” Matty wrapped one arm behind the back of Rusty’s head and pushed even further in. “Let me hear you say my name.”

So Rusty did that. He would call Matty over and over while getting impaled like that. Damn, his baby dude was really growing. And he was an awesome top.



Okay, maybe making decisions while having your dick all wrapped up in the velvety heat of your crush’s body wasn’t ideal, but any time was good. He would do everything he could to turn Rusty into his boyfriend because he feared that he would never feel as good with anyone else in the whole world.

They moved in synch, and while Rusty praised him for being so good as a top, he was also kissing him back and dominating him with his deft tongue. Matty liked to think that he was the kind of student to apply himself outside of the classes he took, and that included those taken with Rusty on matters of lust and pleasure. Of course, having the right motivation was essential, and, in this case, rocking this awesome guy’s world was it. Yeah, it was a challenge, but he was up to it.

“How do you like it like this?” he asked and changed his angle, while moving his hips in a rhythm.

“You really want me to think that you got yourself a tutor on the side,” Rusty joked. “You’re going to make me shoot like this.”

“I’m counting on it. As for your suspicions, put them to rest.” Matty took another deep breath and pushed more. He groaned at the exquisite sensations caused by Rusty milking him and knowing exactly what he was doing. “I’m just good at studying and I’m always for perusing extra material on the side.”

“Like porn?”

“No. Like paying attention to what makes you moan like this.” To make a point, Matty put his all behind his next move. Rusty rewarded him by throwing his head back and exposing his throat. That was what he had in mind. He made a meal out of eating the side of Rusty’s neck and listening to him gasp, grunt, and pant.

They were both doing that if he were completely honest. That meant that postponing it was not in the cards. Matty smothered his words of praise and affection by biting on Rusty’s neck and sucking at the taut flesh while he came inside that tight heat holding his cock prisoner.

What a top he was, he thought wryly as he moved away. He’d have to blow Rusty once he got his breathing to some kind of normalcy. “I’m sorry,” he said as he threw one arm over his eyes. “I thought I could go like that for longer.”

“Nothing to be sorry about. You’re a master at triggering my no-hands approach.”

Matty pushed himself up on his elbows and looked at Rusty’s belly that was properly messed with droplets of cum.

“Yeah, it was quite the ride,” Rusty commented and dipped his fingers into his own cum to taste it. “Want some?”

“All of it,” Matty confirmed and slammed his head on Rusty’s abdomen so that he could enjoy all that for as long as he wanted.



It was so damn dangerous, and he risked a lot by tiptoeing around the room while Matty was deep in sleep. Still, he couldn’t help himself. If there were anything else but what he was looking for in that closet, he’d make a one-eighty and forget all about it. If it were something like a human skeleton in there, he’d still say not one word.

He opened the doors carefully while keeping his eyes on Matty. Then, he had to turn his head so that he could look. At first, there appeared to be nothing of interest, just hoodies and sundry, so he crouched and began pushing away shoe boxes, until he caught a glimpse. Looking again at Matty, he put his whole right arm inside and began to feel for anything that could be hidden behind those boxes. His hand touched something furry. He smiled. He had felt the same

sensation before. However, he wanted to be sure, so he pulled at the furry thing until he uncovered a full tail.

Matty turned in his sleep and Rusty froze. If he got caught, what would he do? Maybe he'd offer his body as payment for his transgression, but he had done that already, which left him with nothing to give. Damn, that was complicated stuff. Better not to be caught, then.

He searched blindly for more, his finger touching latex next. That had to be the cat boy suit, and what Matty had been hiding when he had come in earlier. Good. That was very good. There was a secret in Matty's closet and it wasn't being a gay dude. Xpress had no idea. Those shitheads either. And they would remain in the dark forever if he could help it. This felt good, too, to have secrets with Matty that no one else knew or shared.

Satisfied with his research, although a visual check would have sealed the deal, he closed the closet doors and returned to the bed. Everything was going according to plan. He was in no rush to unmask the cat boy now that he knew exactly who that was. It looked like Matty loved to play the same game, so all was cool.

Plus, he had practically admitted to liking Rybalt, too. Things were going really smoothly.



They were having snacks in bed, while checking their phones for the latest gossip, but it looked like Xpress was slow on the uptake today. Matty noticed right away how Rusty's face changed when his phone began ringing. "Who's that?"

"My dad," Rusty said, working his jaw. "And I have a feeling he's going to give me a hard time about something."

"Does he check on you? All the time?"

"It's his special perk. He can't breathe if he's not disappointed in me around the clock. I have to talk to him. I'll go outside for a few minutes."

"You can take it here. I'll just put on headphones."

"No, that's fine. I'll be right back."

He couldn't insist. Rusty's relationship with his dad was clearly not the greatest, despite the efforts Rusty put into it by what Matty could tell after Gabriel's birthday party. He was about to say that he could go for a little walk to allow Rusty to talk to his dad inside the room, since he was the guest, when his phone pinged with a message from Zoey.

How's it hanging, stranger?

“Talk to your friend,” Rusty recommended. “And I’m telling you. This won’t take long.”



It wasn’t like he hadn’t been expecting that phone call. The coach must have called Roy, or Roy must have called the coach, and a very specific exchange of notes must have taken place between those two. In all truth, Rusty hadn’t found as much passion in himself as usual to keep up with basketball practice, now that he had Rybalt and his vocal coaching to occupy him. Time wasn’t exactly a problem, but he no longer found it in his heart to lie to himself. And what did it matter, anyway?

He had a feeling that his dad was going to give him a very exact answer to that question. So, he swiped to the right and put the phone by his ear. “Hi, dad,” he started, trying to sound cheerful. Apparently, it wasn’t so hard because Matty had put him in such a good mood that his sky didn’t get cloudy easily.

“Rusty.” His name was said with the same reproachful quality as ever. “Your coach tells me--”

“—that I haven’t been to practice for a couple of weeks,” he added promptly. Why bother to postpone the conflict? He had better things to do.

“Why?” Roy asked after a second that must have meant that Rusty had managed to take his dad by surprise by his sudden admission.

“Because I’m not going anywhere with this basketball thing. You said it yourself. It’s too late. And I’m not serious enough.”

“I don’t understand how you can be so flippant about it. It’s not only about basketball. It’s about being serious about something. About commitment.”

Rusty bit the inside of his mouth for a moment. He had a couple of things to tell his dad about commitment, such as leaving him alone with his fragile mom, when it wasn’t his job to take care of a parent at such a young age.

Roy mistook his silence for some kind of regret. “It’s not too late to get back in the saddle. The coach praises you. He says you’re really talented. Go back to practice.”

“I have better things to do,” Rusty said suddenly. He felt so tempted to say it to his dad’s face, that he was getting coached in a different way, and that was his true passion, but, at the same time, he knew that would be in vain. No, his dad would learn about it when he was going to sing on a stage for people who saw him for what he truly was, for his true passion.

“Such as what? Don’t tell me you study,” Roy said with unhidden contempt.

“Why tell you if you don’t believe me anyway?” he said, feeling his good mood turning sour, and his irritation growing.

“Why should I believe you if you’re lying?” his dad countered.

Rusty munched on his lower lip to stop himself from saying things he’d regret later. “I’m pursuing a different interest at the moment. You’ll know about it when the time is right.”

“Is that a new way for you to deflect? To shirk your responsibilities?”

“No,” Rusty replied in as cool a voice as he could muster. “But if you only showed me a bit of trust, if you were only satisfied with me for a moment--”

“If that’s what you want to do, do it,” his dad interrupted him. “Prove yourself.”

“Right. And then would you tell me if I did good or bad?”

“There’s no point in playing the victim here, son. You’re a grownup. You’re responsible for your choices.”

“And your responsibility to me extends to the end of this academic year, right?”

Roy remained silent for two beats. “Pursue whatever it is you want to pursue. Let me know when you’re done and ready to chase some other dream. You won’t get far like this in life. And I’m telling it to you because I care about you, and I don’t want to watch you crash and burn.”

“Like mom?” The temptation was too strong not to give in.

His dad let out a sigh. “Don’t say things like that. I’ve never said you were like her.”

But that didn’t stop him from thinking it, right? Rusty decided to let it go. There was no point to that kind of exchange. “I’ll prove myself, as you say. You’ll see.”

“I look forward to it. And before you get mad at me again for caring about you, I must tell you that I don’t mean it in an ironic way. Do your best, son.”

The end of that conversation left him in an unusual state. Was that some kind of blessing in disguise from his dad? Was he really free to chase his dreams? He leaned against the wall by Matty’s door, trying to process what had just happened.



As soon as Rusty was out the door, Matty used the opportunity to call Zoey. He really needed someone to confide in right now, after making the decision to pursue Rusty for as long as needed.

“Hey, cute little monkey,” he joked as soon as Zoey picked up.

“Are you trying to be funny? I can grow nails if needed.”

“It’s the nickname Rusty chose for you,” Matty explained.

“Then I’ll take it,” Zoey said solemnly, as if she’d just been given some medal by the president.

“How are things on your front? Don’t ask about mine, and I mean it,” she warned.

“Well, Rusty’s here, I mean, he’s taking a phone call outside my room. He kissed me in front of people in the quad today,” he whispered.

“Wow. I mean, Matty, just wow. Did he propose already? When’s the wedding? Can I be your bridesmaid? Wait, there won’t be any bridesmaid? What’s the equivalent called? Groom-groom?”

“I think it’s bridesman, but there are no brides, either... Forget it, let me talk quickly, since Rusty might come back in a jiffy.”

“Then shoot. Gosh, I so love your love life. It’s like in the movies.”

“I’ll let that slide. I made a decision, Zoey. Rusty says he won’t let me go until I find a boyfriend. But I want him as my boyfriend. Do you see where I’m going with this?”

“Not very clearly. Are you saying that you’re going to just stay with Rusty without getting a boyfriend, while hoping he’ll become that boyfriend?”

“Something like that. I’m still planning.”

“How long are you going to keep this up, Matty?” Zoey asked. “I mean, it’s cool and all, but it might take a while.”

“Until we’re both old and grey. And then, I’ll say. Huh, Rusty, the joke’s on you. You’ve been my boyfriend the whole time,” Matty said cheerfully. Of course, Zoey was right, and he needed to work out a lot of kinks for the plan to become all smooth and proper for the ride.

“Geez. You’re not going to make an honest man out of him, then?” Zoey asked and tsked in playful disapproval.

“Don’t you think it would be tricky to get him in front of a minister without telling him what’s going on? I mean, if you want to pitch in with ideas, go ahead,” Matty said.

“The only idea that comes to my mind is to smack him hard over the head with something and drag him to the wedding completely unconscious. So, for now, I agree. But how are you going to explain the kids? Don’t even get me started with cats, dogs, shared mortgage—“

“Damn, Zoey, you’re putting me in a spot, aren’t you?” Matty groaned and moved the phone from one ear to the other.

“It’s your catch-22, not mine. So, think, Matty, think,” Zoey said.

“I’m trying,” Matty replied. He was, only he needed more time and some fresh ideas to get it all figured out.

“Use your other head,” Zoey recommended.

“Really, Zoey?”

“Yeah, really. The one on your shoulders isn’t brave enough.”

He had to laugh at that. “Thanks for the advice, partner. I knew I could count on you.”

“Always,” Zoey assured him cheerfully. “So, you’re spending your whole Sunday indoors like newlyweds who can’t get their hands off of each other?”

“Something like that.”

“Hey, how come Xpress hasn’t reported on your very public kiss?”

“Beats me,” Matty replied. “I thought they’d be all over it, but it looks like they either don’t know or don’t care.” Rusty walked into the room that very moment with a pensive expression on his face. “I gotta go, Zoey, talk to you later. Bye. Yeah, kisses.” He put the phone down and looked at Rusty, feeling a bit uneasy. “Is everything fine? With your family?”

Rusty shrugged. “Dad never talks about them unless it’s important. He just wanted to chew my ear for skipping basketball practice. I told him off. He took it better than expected. Which is major weird.”

Matty had known Rusty long enough to know that he wasn’t telling the whole truth and was even trying to downplay the importance of that call. “Maybe he just thinks that basketball is not that important.”

“It will be a cold day in hell when he thinks that. But, anyway, it looks like he’s done getting on my case for a while, which is good. Now, where were we?”

In the process of becoming real boyfriends. But Matty decided to keep that tidbit for himself.

Chapter Forty-One

Status Quo

When Monday came around, Rusty felt as rested as if he had spent the entire weekend at a spa or something like that. He smiled as he recalled all the fun he'd had with his baby dude, and most spa treatments surely didn't rival the stuff they had pulled – and pushed – on each other. Yeah, life was pretty great. Adding that his dad no longer truly cared about his pursuing basketball – since that ship had sailed, according to the same guy – everything was pretty neat.

He whistled on his way home. Despite not being a morning person, he had woken up early so he had enough time to change into different clothes for classes. Also, the little walk from Matty's dorm to the house he was sharing with his besties – declared by his baby dude the hottest guys on campus – just served to put a little spring in his step.

Jonathan was downstairs, studying something on his phone, and there were already breakfast items on the table. That guy was wasted for his major; he needed to become a chef in his own right and turn into the most famous cooking dude in the universe.

“Hi, Johnny boy,” he said out loud, just in case that serious expression on Jonathan's face was because Maddox was somehow hidden under the table, giving him a blowjob. Although he had spent so much time fooling around with Matty, that naughty picture in his head was enough to make him wince and walk stiffly, hoping that the Mighty Thor would get the memo. Hot dudes indeed. None hotter than his baby dude, however.

Jonathan turned his head and smiled. “Hi, Rusty.”

“How come you're already up?” Rusty picked a scone from the plate and sank his teeth into it. Hmm, something wasn't quite right. “Did you change the recipe?” he asked. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't Hamilton's on-brand superior cooking.

Jonathan laughed at that. “I didn't bake them. I bought them yesterday from a pastry shop. Could you tell, though?”

“Don't act so surprised. You're using magic dust in your cooking, I'm sure. So, what's up?” He had to live with the disappointment of not eating Jonathan's awesome scones, but some regular stuff for a change.

“Mr. Preston summoned us, I mean Connor and I, first thing this morning. So, I was just going over my defense statement one last time.”

“Wow, it sounds pretty serious. How come Dex is not already up?”

“I advised against his coming. I really don’t want him and Connor to come to blows in the Dean of Students’ office.”

“Connor’s a sore loser and a douchebag. He’d try to provoke Dex only to show that our bestie’s a meathead, ready to fight for a bit of beer. I mean, yeah, he did it for beer, but still,” Rusty added right away.

“Mr. Preston will have to hear both sides of the story,” Jonathan said. “And I believe Dex appreciates not having to wake up so early even if it’s Monday.”

If only he could be a fly on the wall to hear what that douchebag Connor had to say as means of explaining why he took two students hostage for his evil scheming plans. The proverbial light bulb popped in his mind. “Hey, you shouldn’t go face the wolves alone. I’m coming with you.”

Jonathan seemed a bit surprised. “Don’t you have classes later?”

“Don’t you?” Rusty shot back. “Come on, mom, don’t tell me you’re ashamed of me and can’t take me out in public. I’m sure Connor’s not going to go alone. He’ll surely pack some heat, and you need to be ready, Johnny boy.”

“You’ve proven yourself countless times, Rusty,” Jonathan admitted. “And you might be right. Connor is not the kind to give up so easily, and now the stakes are high. If Mr. Preston believes him against us, Dex might get in hot water. But if Mr. Preston believes us--”

“His little crusade might come undone, and he’d have to send everyone home. And then, poor he will have to find another strategy to satisfy his world domination ambitions.”

Jonathan laughed but offered Rusty his hand. “Welcome aboard, partner. Let’s see what Mr. Preston has to say about the Implacables, now that there are witnesses to their wrongdoings.”



Mr. Preston’s office wasn’t the kind of place you wanted to visit as a student at Sunny Hill as a general rule, although Rusty had seen its interior several times over the years. On their way there, he had explained to Jonathan why he was such an asset for the defense team, as someone who had confronted the Dean of Students before. Confronted was, of course, a vile word to use, since Mr. Preston was a kind man in his late fifties with a weakness for sob stories. He always wanted to help the students in his care, and it must have been because of his natural leniency that Connor had gotten under his skin so easily. When Rusty had ended up in Mr. Preston’s office due to now and then shenanigans, the Dean of Students had always listened carefully to his promises that he wouldn’t do it again, hadn’t known better, yada, yada, yada.

As the modest person that he was, Mr. Preston didn’t have a large office. His space was packed with small gifts from students, as well as duplicates of awards and accolades won by the alumni

over the years in their careers, and those were quite a few despite the school being so new. The Dean of Students took great pride in these accomplishments of former students and used them as positive reinforcement for the lost sheep visiting his office.

All things considered, Mr. Preston's office wasn't a bad place to visit, but the idea of being associated with some sort of misconduct requiring a duty call to the Dean of Students was enough to scare people off. Not Rusty, though. Also, as he informed Jonathan on their way there, Mr. Preston made a mean English breakfast tea.

"There are like only three other chairs in the room, so we need to get there first," Rusty explained while rushing Jonathan toward the administrative building.

"Why is that important?" Jonathan asked.

"Because the guys left standing are going to look like the intruders. You know, the bad guys."

"We aren't the bad guys."

"Exactly. Also, I'm telling this to you from the start, I'm going to let you do all the talking. Today, I'm only the support character."

"That's very generous of you, Rusty. Okay, I will do that. But I may need you from time to time to confirm my recounting of the events."

"Will do, will do," Rusty said, rightfully feeling full of importance in his newly assigned role. Jonathan was a magnanimous boss, seeing how they were rushing now because he had wasted precious time changing into more conservative clothes, apt for a meeting of that magnitude with Mr. Preston and the leader of shitheads.

As the assistant to the guy in charge, he hurried to hold the doors for Jonathan and follow him swiftly as they climbed the stairs. There was no way they weren't first. Not even the earliest of birds were that early.

And yet, as they were invited to come in after Jonathan knocked briefly on the door, Rusty experienced a feeling of disconcert of the sight of His Douchiness Connor seated across from Mr. Preston, while Matty's roommate sat right behind him. Wasn't he supposed to be one of the victims? Damn, he didn't like that at all.

"Mr. Hamilton, we were expecting you," Mr. Preston said in his usually jolly fashion, rising from his chair to gesture toward the remaining empty chair in the room. He caressed his salt and pepper moustache and blinked at Rusty through his thick glasses. "We weren't expecting you, Mr. Parker, so I apologize that we will have you stand throughout this little discussion. Long time, no see, right?"

Rusty smiled and shrugged. "I've been a good boy lately."

“Yes, yes,” Mr. Preston said, moving his barrel-like body around with ease and fiddling with his tea kettle. “Would you boys like some tea?”

“Yes, please,” Jonathan said smoothly, without sparing a glance for Connor, which was quite commendable seeing how the S.H.I.T. leader was already shooting daggers at his soon-to-be opponent.

Rusty stared at John, trying to get a read on Matty’s strange roommate, but the guy kept his back straight, his shoulders level, and his eyes on his boss, without even acknowledging his presence or Jonathan’s. He was a statue. As if he weren’t weird enough as he was.

“Hmm,” Jonathan murmured appreciatively. “This is very good tea, Mr. Preston.”

“Oh, thank you, Jonathan.” As was his usual manner, the Dean of Students had already forgotten about formalities. Also, having his tea-making skills praised was his weak spot, and Jonathan had picked that up as Rusty had explained things to him on their way there. “Now, boys, what is this nonsense about broken doors and hostages and whatnot?”

“They,” Connor started pointedly, “are blowing things out of proportion. And they,” he enthused even more, “broke into an official meeting of our organization--”

“Because you were holding two students there against their will,” Jonathan interrupted Connor, but again without sparing him a glance. He was looking at Mr. Preston, still holding his cup of tea with aristocratic grace.

“Who, exactly, were we holding there against their will?” Connor asked, puffing out his chest, his whole body turned toward Jonathan as if he was trying to pounce on him and rip his throat out like a wild dog. “One of these so-called hostages is here with me today.” He gestured to his acolyte and John leaned forward a smidge, like a dog just waiting for an order from his master to jump in and bite.

Rusty pursed his lips. To counter John, they should have brought Zoey. So, that was the kind of play they were putting on. Damn those assholes. And John was, suddenly, no longer a hostage, but an enemy. The message the guy had sent Matty would have come in handy now.

“I believe that we are not in a court of law,” Jonathan said, without losing his bearings for a moment, “and that there’s no need for putting witnesses on the stand. Of course,” he added, and only then moved his head to look at Connor, “if we ever get to that, proper legal representation will be assured for the party I speak for today.”

Rusty would have loved to applaud Maddox’s better half. Connor lowered his gaze a smidge, a sign that he understood the veiled threat and didn’t have the guts to counterattack.

“Boys, boys,” Mr. Preston called for peace right away. “Why can’t we all get along? I am sure that it was all a big misunderstanding. A door can be repaired, right?”

Yeah, as he thought. For the sake of peace, Mr. Preston would just love to see them kiss and make up.

“They should pay for it,” Connor said, looking at the Dean of Students, in an effort to avoid staring at Jonathan. He already leaned slightly to one side, as if he were afraid of sitting too close to his adversary.

Like a cowardly dog. Rusty shook his head. Mr. Preston must have noticed that because he latched on to him right away. “What’s your take on all this, Rusty?”

“He’s not a neutral bystander,” Connor squeaked. “He was there, leading them--”

“May I speak freely, Mr. Preston?” Rusty asked, feeling bold at being recognized as a party worth listening to by the Dean of Students. Cutting off Connor felt good.

“Go ahead, my boy.” Mr. Preston leaned back in his chair and began playing with one of the buttons of his vest, a sign that he was trying to appear most invested in settling this squabble but also eager to be done with it.

“The way I see it,” Rusty explained, “we got a cry for help – and we have the material proof of that, too. We hurried to the place, and since Connor didn’t seem to care to answer the door, we assumed the worst. We had to force our way in, afraid as we were for the wellbeing of our fellow students.”

“That is not--” Connor intervened.

“Not now, please, Mr. Williams,” the Dean of Students said, putting up one hand. “In this office, people speak in turn, not one over the other.”

That was encouraging. No first-name basis for Connor at the moment. That meant that Mr. Preston really wanted to hear them out.

“Had any harm come to the two students by the time you got there?” Mr. Preston asked.

Rusty hesitated. “Not physical. They just got a little spooked, since Connor and his... friends had taken their phones.”

Mr. Preston nodded thoughtfully. “I see. Well, in that case, this is what I propose. You will repair the door, Mr. Williams. And I don’t want to hear of such petty conflicts anymore. And Jonathan, I believe that it’s good to have a student organization caring for the lives of everyone on campus, as enthusiastic as they might get. This is a minor trifle. Let’s forget about it.”

Rusty was just as dumbfounded by that quick resolution as the others present. Jonathan even turned in his chair and exchanged a glance with him.

“Is that all?” Connor squealed again.

Mr. Preston put both of his soft white hands up. “Why make it into something bigger than it is? It is just a door. And no one was harmed.”

“Mr. Preston, may I add something?” Jonathan asked cautiously.

“Of course, Jonathan. But please bear in mind that other students are in need of guidance and wasting our entire day on this would not do.”

“Certainly, I will be mindful of that,” Jonathan agreed. “However, it is not so easy to overlook Connor’s organization’s behavior toward the students of Sunny Hill.”

Mr. Preston gestured again, as if he were starting to feel bothered by the whole thing. “You are still young. You play pranks on each other. We have a local opera singer and a boy dressed as a personage from a popular musical running around. Do I need to say more?”

Damn. It looked like Mr. Preston was quite in touch with the life on campus. Maybe he was even reading Xpress. Although Matty as a cat boy wasn’t exactly like a personage from the popular musical Mr. Preston was talking about. That seemed hilarious, but Rusty couldn’t quite bring himself to laugh.

“Shake hands, make up. Come on,” Mr. Preston urged them and rose from his chair.

Jonathan and Connor followed suit, both aware that the meeting was over. As affable as ever, Jonathan offered his hand first.

“Very good,” Mr. Preston exclaimed and smacked his hands together, pleased with the outcome and the only one in the room to be so. “Now, make sure I don’t see you in my office again. Unless you want to enjoy a cup of tea with me, of course.”

After the door to the Dean of Students’ office closed, Rusty fell in step with Jonathan, his eyes on the two scumbags walking rapidly in front of them. Connor turned on his heel without breaking his stride. He pointed a finger at them menacingly. “This isn’t over, Hamilton.”

“I have no idea what that’s supposed to mean,” Jonathan replied, as smooth as he had been in Mr. Preston’s office.

“It means that I won’t give up on raising the morals of this community of students to the highest-”

“Oh, fuck off, Williams, Preston can’t hear you anymore,” Rusty intervened. “And we’re not buying your brand of bullshit.”

Connor turned his attention to him, but just then he stumbled over something and his acolyte promptly hurried to break his fall and catch him in his arms. “I’m watching you all,” he threatened after he straightened himself up and shook off John’s, apparently unwanted, attention.

He hurried down the stairs with his partner in crime on his heels without another word.

“These dudes are so out of whack,” Rusty declared.

Jonathan stopped for a moment and stared at their enemies’ retreating backs. “Indeed. I’m sorry to say, but despite his kind bedside manner, Mr. Preston doesn’t seem to understand that Connor crossed a line last Saturday.”

“That’s Preston for you,” Rusty said with a shrug. “For him, all students are little angels. They never mean to do any wrong.”

Jonathan grinned and nudged him playfully in the ribs. “So, how come the Dean of Students knows you so well?”

“I’m a tea lover,” Rusty said with emphasis. “And that’s the only explanation I’m going to give you.”



We are sorry to say this, but all is quiet on the Western front. If that reference went over your heads, don't worry. We will spell it out for you, because this is what we do when nothing worthy of our interest is going on.

The great confrontation we were expecting with bated breath... proved fruitless. The Dean of Students loves the campus status quo, and we're yet to decide if that's a good or a bad thing.

Ah, and Rusty Parker proved that he's the king for obvious reasons. He beat us at our own game by showing off on the quad with his tutor hanging on his arm, just to prove us wrong.

Ugh, we hate slow days... Give us some sugar, Sunny Hill! We're dying here!



“So,” Maddox began as soon as he put his phone down, not before bringing everyone up to speed by reading Xpress. “Preston chose peace over violence.”

“He’s ridiculously tolerant,” Kane commented with a grunt.

“I don’t mind it that badly,” Dex said and shrugged. “I mean, my dads never heard from school before, and it would be something to start giving them grief just as I’m about to finish my studies.”

“Don’t tell me you were really worried,” Kane retorted. “I mean, they would believe you over anyone else in the world.”

“It’s true that I got a little carried away,” Dex admitted. “By the way, Jonathan, thanks a lot, man. I wasn’t crazy about seeing that douchebag beer-hating asshole again from up close.”

“Don’t mention it,” Jonathan said and waved. “While all seems good, I don’t particularly like that Mr. Preston thinks that Connor and his proselytes are little angels. If it were anyone else, I’d be happy with this result, but, between us here, Connor has a screw loose.”

“Yeah,” Rusty interjected, “and there’s no one willing to screw it back in for him.”

Maddox guffawed. “Are you trying to say that he needs to get laid? Frankly, I think the guy is just a certified asshole, and no amount of sex can save him.”

“What’s the deal with you proving Xpress wrong, Rusty?” Kane asked. “What do they mean by that?”

“Ah, they’ve been trying to say that I’m turning to the gay side, so I kissed Matty in the quad in the middle of the day,” Rusty explained. “By the way, I got smacked in the face with a pillow for it.”

Kane blinked and stared at him in confusion. “How did a pillow get there? And did you do it to prove them wrong?”

“No, to prove them right,” Rusty said brightly. “I mean, I just wanted to show them that I don’t give a damn about what the hell they’re writing about me. What they think they understand about it all is their freaking business.”

“That’s the most convoluted logic I’ve ever heard, but it’s so on brand for you, Rusty,” Kane said with a sly grin. He traded a glance with Dex, while Maddox did the same with his fiancé. Hmm, they were all behaving like a flock of old biddies. Rusty didn’t have time for that kind of party.

“Let’s focus on the real issue here,” Jonathan proposed. “Connor is going to try some other stupid strategies in hope of having the entire campus under his thumb.”

“You think so, babe?” Maddox asked. “I tend to think that Preston is not wrong. After all, he didn’t let Connor have his way and didn’t blow things out of proportion either way.”

Jonathan sighed. “Normally, I’d agree. Mr. Preston wants us to get along, not get into petty squabbles as he calls them. And there should be no room for such things during our senior year. However, it looks to me like Connor is taking this truce as just an opportunity to rally the troops once more.”

“Did you guys ask Preston if he really thinks beer is that bad?” Dex looked hopeful as he moved his eyes from Jonathan to him.

“No, we didn’t bring it up,” Jonathan confessed. “I suppose that it remains to be seen what Connor’s next move is going to be.”

“And I suppose that someone needs to go against his little reign of terror,” Rusty added.

“Is that someone going to be you or Rybalt?” Maddox teased him.

Rusty found it all too natural to grab his bestie by the shoulders and look into his eyes. “Both of us.”

“Hmm, and is there an alliance with a certain cat boy also in the works?” His bestie threw him a loaded look.

Right, no one knew the true identity of their local feline impersonator. That made him feel quite special. “We’ll see,” he said, loving how acting all mysterious seemed both to amuse and unnerve his audience.

“How come Matty is so accepting of your fascination with the cat boy?” Kane questioned while staring at him through his dropped eyelashes.

“He’s just that kind of swell guy,” Rusty replied.

“Even after all this time?” Kane continued, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

Especially after all this time. To think that Matty had played him like that. What else could one expect from a cat? Rusty was beyond pleased, because it took guts and smarts to pull off something like that. Only his baby dude would be able to fool a fox like him. Hmm, maybe he was a tomcat, too, not a fox. Although, he felt like going on a little hunt and sniff a certain cat boy to see if he was in heat. That still wasn’t right because cats didn’t exactly sniff each other’s butts. That was more like a dog thing. Damn, they weren’t going for an interspecies thing now, were they?



Matty couldn’t help smiling the moment he saw who was calling. “Rusty,” he began, maybe a bit too enthusiastically, but who could blame him? They had just spent an amazing weekend together, and he planned on turning the famous and infamous king of Sunny Hill into his honest man. Well, maybe he was getting ahead of himself a little. Nonetheless. The guy in question was calling him so soon after they had spent the night together, which was a great sign. Matty would have liked Rusty to wake him up before leaving, have a little fun before classes, but there was no need to get greedy now.

“Good morning,” Rusty said cheerfully.

“How early did you wake up? You were gone when I opened my eyes this morning.”

“Sorry for not being there to give you your morning kiss.”

Matty couldn't help getting excited when Rusty said random stuff like that. Like, who were they fooling now? What were they? He shook his head and pressed one hand on his chest just to get his breathing in check. Rusty had him swooning with only a few words, and he was already dizzy with all the possibilities opening up in the future. “I'm sorry, too, but let's not dwell on it. How are you?”

“I'm awesome and you know it,” Rusty joked. “Funny thing. I just came back from an interesting meeting with the Dean of Students.”

“Is this about the incident?” Matty could picture himself doing the air quotes without doing them.

“Yeah. I went with Jonathan as a support character.”

Matty could hardly imagine Rusty settling for that role, but he was all ears. “How did it go?”

“Weird as fuck. Your roommate was there.”

“John? Why the hell was he there? Tell me he didn't play the victim. He told me he was back in Connor's good graces before leaving the dorm.”

“Indeed he is,” Rusty said as if he had just been forced to suck on a lemon. “He didn't say a thing, but he was clearly offering all his support to his shitty leader.”

“Well, I can't say that I'm completely surprised. After all, John prefers to dedicate his entire life to such leaders and causes. Were they really awful?”

“Connor wanted Dex to pay for the door. Or all of us. But Preston wouldn't have it.”

“That's good, right? I mean, he didn't side with them.”

“Yeah, but he didn't side with us, either. Preston's the kind of guy who likes having peace on campus. Xpress commented on it, even complained. Not even they like it.”

Matty laughed. “So Xpress got on it quickly. Sometimes I wonder how that happens.”

“I don't, at least in this case. After we left the building, so to speak, everyone we met asked us how it went. So, it was no secret. How come you didn't read it today?”

“I was busy... studying,” Matty eventually replied. At first, he had felt tempted to say that he had been busy being happy and couldn’t care less about what kind of bullshit Xpress was processing today.

That appeared to deflate Rusty for some reason. “Ah, so you didn’t see it.”

“Is there something important to read?”

“Just like you, they didn’t think I was serious. See you later?”

That was a bit abrupt, so Matty pondered for a moment before giving his answer. “Yeah, sure. Drop by?”

“Yeah. I’ll swing by a bit later.”

A bit disconcerted with that conversation, Matty was quick to open the Xpress page. “He beat us at our own game,” he began murmuring under his breath, “by showing off on the quad with his tutor hanging on his arm, just to prove us wrong...”

Hmm, so Xpress thought nothing of Rusty’s PDA. According to Rusty’s history, that of a guy always intent on shocking others, that was par for the course. But why was the king of Sunny Hill disappointed in that interpretation? Matty was quite certain he would have to do some digging.

He was still busy mulling over the recent developments, when his phone began ringing. A frown wrinkled his brow when he saw who the caller was. “Are you being taken hostage again?” he asked without any form of greeting.

“Matthew Han? This is Connor Williams.”

Matthew felt a headache coming on. “Have you taken John hostage again?” he asked pointedly.

“No,” came the affronted reply. “I never have.”

“That’s debatable,” Matty conceded, only because he was damn curious what Connor wanted from him. “Where is he now, and why are you using his phone?”

“He is standing right beside me,” Connor replied in a cool voice.

Matty felt like the characters in movies involving hostage situations as he asked his next question. “I need proof of life. Put him on.”

It took a moment for John’s voice to come through. “Hi, Matty.” He sounded weirdly happy. “I’m here with Connor and, boy, he has something to ask you about. I’m sure you’ll do the right thing.”

Matty was sure of the complete opposite. “Are you okay, man? Is he holding you against your will? At gun point?”

John’s voice soured. “Not at all. I’m Connor’s most loyal ally and confidante.”

Matty sighed. “You make your bed, you lie in it, I guess. Whatever your boss is selling, I’m not buying.”

“But you haven’t heard him yet,” John insisted.

He could hang up and be done with all the ridiculousness. However, he was curious and didn’t believe the old adage about cats and their general curiosity. “Fine, put him on.”

Connor began right away. “You are friends with Rusty Parker.”

“Yes.”

“So you must know about his peculiar situation.”

“What situation is that?” Matty felt his lips still tingling from all the kissing he’d done with Rusty over the weekend.

“You must know about the girl,” Connor continued. “The one he got pregnant?”

“The cat girl?” Matty continued, imitating Connor’s sing-song tone.

“Yes.”

Matty stopped for a moment. Connor was a weasel, but was he stupid? He didn’t think so. “I’m afraid I don’t know her,” he said pointedly. And then, as the honest soul he was – when convenient, but well, circumstances-circumstances – he added, “I doubt she exists.”

“Hmm, I see. Are you really sure?”

“I’m pretty sure there is no cat girl at Sunny Hill,” Matty said cheerfully.

“Oh, how disappointing.”

Matty could swear Connor was sneering at the other end of their weird conversation. “Why?”

“Why what?” Connor’s voice became increasingly suave.

“Why would the nonexistence of the cat girl be disappointing?” Matty asked, speaking each word slowly enough for both Connor and John – who had to be listening in – to understand.

“Because it leads to only one conclusion,” Connor said.

“A very disappointing one,” John piped in.

“Which is?” He needed to lead these two mutts to water, but could he make them drink?

“That it can only be a cat boy in that suit. I mean, that it must be a man,” Connor corrected himself. “A young man who attends Sunny Hill.”

“And lives on campus,” John added again, from the background.

His roommate sounded really excited for some reason, and excited in a mean way. Matty began to think that taking this call hadn’t been that wise.

“Thank you for your input on this, Matthew,” Connor offered in the slimiest and most solicitous manner. “It truly helped me understand everything.”

“Which is?” Matty asked with a frown.

“That the youths of Sunny Hill need me more than ever,” Connor replied. “Goodbye. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Like he had just offered information on things he wasn’t supposed to, completely unwittingly. What the hell had just happened?

Chapter Forty-Two

What Makes a King?

Was it a good idea to tell Rusty about the strange call from Connor? If he did, he'd have to disclose all the matters discussed... which was basically just one, and it could mean that they were getting dangerously close to the issue of the cat boy, which they both used for teasing each other, as far as he knew. However, in this very interesting game of two, he also had his trump card, so maybe he could just steer the conversation toward the now famous Rybalt, to see if Rusty cared to offer some insight into his stage persona. After all, he was in this up to his eyeballs and wanted to learn everything he could about his partner in crime, if he could call Rusty that.

He was still staring at his phone, lost in thought, when Rusty's energetic knock pulled him out of his reverie. He got the door, a frown on his face. He didn't want to keep things hidden from Rusty. Well, there was the secret identity game they were playing, but they were both aware of it, so that didn't count.

"Did something happen?" Rusty asked directly, as soon as he was inside. "You look like you've swallowed a rat."

How apropos. "No, I just took a call from one," Matty explained. "Connor called, using John's phone."

"What did he want? Don't tell me," Rusty said with a groan while he plopped himself down on Matty's bed. "John's a hostage again. That dude's going to develop Stockholm syndrome or something."

"That ship must have sailed in his case, I'm afraid. He didn't get kidnapped again, and he seemed quite a willing participant."

"Hmm," Rusty let out. "So, what did you talk to him about?"

No, he wouldn't lie, and his decision was made. "About the cat boy. It looks like they finally reached the conclusion that it's not a girl in that suit, but, to quote Connor, a young man. A young man who attends Sunny Hill. And lives on campus. The additions were willingly made by John, who apparently acts as a second voice for the leader of douchebags."

He waited patiently for Rusty's reaction. A snort followed right away. "That guy totally wants to lick Connor's balls. I'm not so sure about Connor wanting them licked, though."

"What makes you say that?" Matty wasn't usually curious about what other people were getting up to, but, in this case, he had to make an exception, for the sole reason that Connor and John were hovering dangerously close to the cat boy's real identity. Also, he was quite happy that

Rusty seemed to glide over it, without giving any hint at wanting to bring their little game to an end.

“Well, based on their interactions this morning, Connor seems to hate his partner’s guts.”

“For real? I thought they were on the best of terms. Why would they scheme together?”

“Good question. But my eyes don’t lie.” Rusty crossed his eyes for a moment, making Matty laugh. “Connor looked like he could barely stand that John was there. Isn’t that weird, given their track record? And John should stay clear of that asshole, who held him hostage and took his phone. Ah, what am I saying? That might be his kink.”

Matty was already laughing so hard that Rusty had to pat him on the back and then pull him down to sit on his knees. “John might be hot for Connor, and I agree this time around. Why else would he endure that guy treating him like that?”

“My point exactly. Hey, want to hang around at the house? You can bring that little monkey, too. Something tells me Dex will be happy to see her.”

Matty couldn’t believe the awesome opportunity being delivered to him on a silver platter. Rusty was generous like that, anyway, and if some of that could be extended so easily to Zoey, too, he liked him all the more. “Let me just check on her.”

He fired off a quick message to Zoey and, within seconds, a reply came. “Hmm, how odd,” he murmured under his breath. “Zoey says she’s busy.”

“Another time, then?”

“Yeah, just wait a moment.” He began typing again.

It’s an invitation to the castle, Zoey!!! Are you sure you’re that busy?

A few moments later, another ping announced a new message. *I know what comes after winter.*

Realization dawned on him, so he felt his lips stretching into an ear to ear grin. No invitation to any castle in the world could beat that.

“So?” Rusty asked, evidently curious.

“She’s busy indeed.”

“Too bad. Dex’s going to be disappointed.”

Or maybe not, Matty thought while he wrapped his arms around Rusty’s neck and gave him a kiss. If Connor wanted to out him as the cat boy, he’d deal with it once they crossed that bridge. For now, like Zoey, he was too busy being happy.



This was one meeting he would have liked to skip, but it was better to do it now than later or never. The coach had always been nice to him, in his own hard and bellowing way, so the least he could do was to let him know of his formal abdication from the team.

“Look who decided to pay us a visit,” the coach remarked when all his teammates’ eyes fixed on him as he entered the locker room where he had come regularly – as regularly as his hectic way of being allowed – for the last three and a half years. “Parker, where the hell have you been? Do we need to send out a posse, just for you?”

“Sorry, coach, just busy.”

“Don’t just stand there. Practice starts in ten.”

Rusty drew one deep breath under the questioning gaze of his aging basketball coach. “I won’t be attending practice.”

The man tsked. “You might have a sack of talent, Parker, but the more you miss practice, the less helpful you’ll be for your team out there.”

“I can’t be on the team anymore,” Rusty said in one breath.

The coach reacted as if he couldn’t believe his ears. “What do you mean, you can’t be on the team anymore?” he bellowed in his usual fashion.

He might have escaped a verbal thrashing from his dad, but the coach might not let him off the hook that easily. “I have other things I need to focus on. I’m really sorry, coach, and guys,” he added, throwing a look around at faces filled with consternation.

“What other things?” The coach dismissed the guys with a flick of the wrist. “Out, out, start the practice without me. I have a boy here who needs to get it through his thick skull that he’s making a mistake.”

It looked like the coach wanted to talk to him alone, and he understood that. However, he didn’t miss the annoyed and surprised looks a few of the guys on the team sent his way as they walked out of the locker room.

The coach took him by the shoulders and talked kindly, the complete opposite of his earlier tone. “Is it true, about you getting a girl pregnant, Rusty?”

That story again. “No, coach, it’s just that I need to focus on the things I’m going to do after college. And, let’s face it, I’ve mistreated basketball enough to know that I’m not going to be a star on the court.”

“That’s too bad, Rusty,” his coach said and sighed. “I can’t say that I don’t want to pull your ears because you have something special that you can give to this sport. But, to tell you the truth, I was expecting you to come and tell me that you wanted to give up. How did your dad take it?”

Yeah, his dad and the coach talked to each other on occasion, so that question was no big surprise. “He’s not happy about it. But it’s my choice.”

The coach patted him on the back. “Then I wish you good luck, whatever you choose to do. In case anyone asks, I really gave you a dressing down. I don’t want the boys to think I’ve gone soft or something.”

Rusty laughed. “I’ll do that. And thank you, coach. You’re a really great guy.”

The man just waved it off like he didn’t want to hear it again. “Off you go now. Since you’re of no use to me anymore.”

That had gone well. Rusty was satisfied with the outcome, and his heart was easier. Becoming more Rybalt with each passing day and visiting Mrs. May for coaching were now two of his life’s beacons.

And getting chummier and chummier with Matty. That, too. Because they were that good for each other.



What makes a king, Sunny Hill? Truth be told, we find ourselves not-ruled and not-guided by the one who is supposed to be in charge. The Implacable Team is taking up arms. Alcohol still remains a touchy topic with the administration. And what does our leader do?

He’s giving up on basketball! Yes, you heard us. He’s not charming girls in his spare time... or ever. And he doesn’t give a rat’s ass about ruling over you, guys and gals of Sunny Hill.

Is Rusty Parker no longer our king? Who’s going to stand against Connor’s army and bring back fun as we know it? We would have liked to have gotten that memo if that’s the case.



He was all in the business of bringing back fun, but Xpress didn’t have to know about it. Actually, the less that gossip rag looked in his direction, the better. He very much intended to leave the limelight to Rybalt and charm everyone out of their socks. Actually, the fact that Xpress was so willing to dethrone him worked in his favor more than those silly columnists

would ever know. Any new celebrity needed a news outlet to document their salad-eating habits and latest shenanigans, and Xpress might as well serve a noble purpose for a change.



And, we didn't want to mention it last time, but he even lost face to the leader of the Implacables. The meeting at the Dean of Students' office had Rusty Parker leave with his tail between his legs, while Connor held his head high. What is this? What kind of world are we even living in?



Now, they were just being scumbags, Rusty decided. He hadn't lost anything to Connor, face or not. Was that their way of trying to rile him up? There was no need for that. He already had his strategy in place, and Rybalt was going to play them all like an instrument, one of his own choosing. A flute, maybe? That only meant he needed to brush up on his German pronunciation.

Well, Sunny Hill would find out that fun could mean many things. And did Connor want to lift the morals of the student population to the highest heights? He had nothing on him, and Rusty would prove it.



It was quite late when Matty heard his phone ring. He smiled as he saw Zoey's name on the screen and picked up right away. Since he needed to focus on his studies, too, he was alone in his room, while Rusty was probably busy with cultivating his Rybalt persona. Since the meeting at the 'castle' had left them with little alone time, he hadn't yet had the chance to discover why Rusty liked to keep his singing abilities a secret from the world.

However, one thing had confirmed his suspicions regarding his bestie's activities that afternoon had been Dex's absence from the house. No one appeared to wonder where he was, and he kept Zoey's secret if that was what it was.

"Hello, stranger," he drawled as soon as he heard Zoey's cheerful voice. "What's the deal with winter?"

"Oh, don't start with me. No, actually, please do start with me. Dex came... and I remembered my pickup line!"

"For real! You're the woman, girl," Matty teased her. "What did he say? How did he react? Tell me everything."

"Everything-everything? I warn you, this might get pretty X-rated and fast."

“Okay, maybe you can leave some parts out,” Matty agreed. “Give me at least the tl;dr version.”

“I delivered the line. We made out. Matty, he’s so big,” Zoey explained excitedly, “when he kisses me it’s like he’s about to swallow my whole head!”

“Frankly, that sounds a bit scary, Zoey, but who am I to judge? So, have you started naming the kids?”

“Not so fast,” Zoey said in a sly tone. “This guy’s not easy to tie down. For now, we’re – how should I put this? – kissing buddies.”

“Really? You promised R-rated stuff, and this is what you deliver?” Matty teased his bestie again. “Is that what you’ve done for hours?”

“Not only that. We talked, too. He was really pissed because of Connor’s war on beer. I told him I could set up a mini bar at my place just for him. He liked the idea. Then he kissed me again and told me something about hobbies getting realigned. I have no idea what he meant. I was too busy checking my head, making sure it hadn’t been swallowed.”

“A reasonable concern, given the circumstances.”

“What’s new on your front? Gosh, my skin is all goosebumps, still, but don’t get into too raunchy details about you and Rusty. I might not be able to handle it right now, I am that close to combusting.”

“I have great trust in you that you can weather all trials and tribulations coming your way,” Matty joked. “Actually, a weird thing happened to me.” He proceeded to recount the story of the phone call he had received from Connor earlier that day.

“That sounds pretty ominous,” Zoey agreed. “Do you think they’ve guessed you’re the guy behind the suit? Wait, that isn’t right... you’re not behind the suit, you’re inside it. Okay, I got this. Did they guess you’re the guy behind the mask?”

“I can’t be sure, but, without a doubt, they are suspecting something. I told Rusty about the convo, too, and he didn’t seem rattled in the least.”

“Well, that’s good, because he doesn’t know you’re the cat boy, and, unless you plan a big unmasking, you should first let your bestie know so that she can bring a piñata and throw a real party.”

Matty pondered for a moment. Rusty knew, but would their game be affected by other people knowing?

Zoey ignored his silence and continued. “By the way, what about you and Rybalt? Are you living a risky double-life for real?”

“I don’t know about that,” Matty replied, feeling honest for a change.

“Ah, he’s dreamy, though,” Zoey said with a deep sigh. “Not as dreamy as Dex, obviously. By the way, don’t tell Rusty anything. I have no idea where we stand for now, so I don’t want other people to end up feeling disappointed when nothing comes of it.”

“Hey, it’s not like you to be a pessimist. I’m sure he likes you. By the way, how did he find your room? That’s where you two met, right?”

“He asked around. And he came to check on me. Then, I remembered my line and said it in a heartbeat. Then, he laughed and patted my head. I still think he wanted to kiss me on the forehead, but I made a move like a medaled gymnast and he ended up catching me and kissing me on the lips. The rest is history.”

“That’s some nice history,” Matty commended his friend. “Okay, I’ll keep it a secret. But it’s a great sign that he was so interested in you that he asked around to find you.” And yet, Dex hadn’t asked him about Zoey’s whereabouts, although, by now, he had to know that he and she were BFFs.

“Do you want me to spread my antennas and see what the Implacables are up to?”

“Zoey, I believe you’ve risked your skin enough. But you know what? I’m not going to cower in the shadows. If they think it’s that easy to catch a cat boy, they better think again. Like all cats, I like playing with my food... I can’t believe I’m saying such insane things. Also, I really don’t want to put my mouth on either of those despicable dudes.”

Zoey laughed. “Yeah, keep that mouth of yours for Rybalt. I’m sure he’s dying to feel your tongue down his throat again. Check on those amazing vocal cords, Matty. I’m sure they’re pure gold, but you’d be in the privileged position to check them out.”

“Hey, he kissed me,” Matty protested, not very convincingly. Later, when everything was out in the open, he’d make amends to his bestie. For now, he and Rybalt were caught up in a game of cat and... opera singer.



“What is this?” People were murmuring among themselves while checking some new posters on the campus’s announcement board.

Matty couldn’t imagine what could get the students of Sunny Hill so excited first thing in the morning, so he made his way through those crowding in front of the board. He stopped and bit hard on his bottom lip not to laugh when he saw the content of the posters. That was a message for him if he’d ever seen one.

A muse, a muse, my kingdom for a muse! Pointy ears and fluffy tails are a must. Only cat boys need apply. Taking interviews Wednesday evening, ten sharp, the roof of the science building. Getting there without a scratch is part of the stuff that'll get you hired.

So, Rusty wanted him out in the open, just as much as he wanted himself. He looked closely, and then he noticed that the fresh posters had been glued over something underneath.

“Make way, make way,” someone called in a stern voice, and Matty couldn’t say he was that surprised when he saw Connor, followed closely by John, who appeared to be glued to his leader like a shadow.

Connor gave him a brief curious look and then proceeded to tear down Rusty’s posters, all the while grunting and mumbling to himself. Matty knew he was pushing his luck, but he hovered close, very interested in what the leader of the Implacables had in mind besides trying to stop people from getting more and more enamored with the new celebrity on campus.

“Hand them to me,” Connor said shortly, and only then Matty noticed that his former roommate had a few coiled sheets of paper under his arm.

Connor began gluing his own announcements over the shreds of Rusty’s call for a cat boy as his muse. It didn’t matter; the cat boy in question now knew that he had been summoned. As for Connor and John, if they really suspected him of being Slicky Coolplums, how come they were only focused on their little errand? They should have known that he had seen Rybalt’s ad, so any measure they intended to take wouldn’t serve them in any way.

That was until his eyes fell on the fresh announcement plastered in five different copies over the announcement board, taking up all the real estate available.

We are calling for a ban on questionable characters! We are calling for a real age of high morals, Sunny Hill! Anyone with information on the true identities of the vandal pretending to be able to sing and the cat impersonator that have been wreaking havoc on our campus grounds for too long is kindly demanded to send it to us. We will take care of the unmasking and bring back order!

Kindly, my ass, Matty thought and leaned against the frame of the announcement board, crossing his arms and pinning Connor down with his eyes. If this guy thought he was going to intimidate him so easily, he had to think again. He stared until the S.H.I.T. leader turned around to look at him. “What’s up, guys?” he asked and smiled.

For a moment, it seemed like Connor would lose some of his righteous indignation and perfect composure, but he wasn’t a leader of crapheads for nothing. His smile was so fake someone needed to take it to the recycling bin. “Oh, Matthew, how nice to see you.”

“Really? We don’t even know each other, so why would you think that?”

“Why wouldn’t I? You are one of the better people here. You study, you’re proper, you have high morals--”

“Just like you, you mean?” Matty asked calmly, keeping his claws carefully sheathed behind an equally plastic smile.

“Like us.” Connor even dared to touch his shoulder and lean forward as if they were sharing some secrets mere mortals couldn’t be put at risk to partake. “It’s a real shame John hasn’t managed to convince you to join our ranks.”

There was only so much he could do not to shake off Connor’s slimy touch. Not that his hands were clammy or that he portrayed the image of someone unkempt, but his morality was so dubious Matty didn’t want to have anything to do with him.

Luckily for him, Connor withdrew his hand so that he could stare with reproachful eyes at his acolyte. John looked down, but only for a moment. The next, he set his chin high and looked Connor in the eye. Matty had to say that his former roommate appeared quite brazen to the unknowing bystander, but he had seen enough to realize that there was a certain dynamic between the two worshippers of ‘high morals’ that must have developed recently.

“Matty will come to realize the errors of his ways on his own, I’m sure,” John said from the tip of his lips, as if he could barely be troubled to say such things.

“There are no errors in my ways,” Matty said promptly. “All this concern for me is touching, guys, but I have no need for it.” Then, he gestured with his chin at the freshly posted announcement. “What do you really want to achieve with this?”

“Isn’t it clear from the ink wasted?” Connor asked and, this time, he glared as if he was just beginning to realize that Matty was firmly against him. “The Dean of Students is too soft on the morals of the students of Sunny Hill. Someone with a firmer hand must do something.”

“And that someone is you. Go figure.”

“Yes. I don’t understand why a straightlaced individual such as yourself would fail to see that we are right.”

“Graduation is only months away. Do you really want to spend the last of your college days doing this?” Matty inquired calmly.

“Don’t you believe in leaving a legacy, Matthew? This will be mine. And it will be a testimonial for my future endeavors in the world.” Connor looked ahead and slightly to the side, as if he could truly envision an incredibly bountiful future for himself, based on his accomplishments during his time spent at Sunny Hill.

“Looking to go into politics?” Matty asked, reaching the only logical conclusion he could from it all.

“It is how one changes the world,” Connor confirmed and looked at him again. “And I have every intention of doing that. It is my life’s goal. What’s yours?”

Not being a scumbag. Enjoying life. Loving Rusty Parker. “Not pissing off people by taking away their beer,” he said promptly instead.

Connor made a long face, just to show how disappointed he was in Matty’s choice of words. “Is beer that important? Our youths consume way too much alcohol as it is. And that is a habit that can grow to become a real problem in later years. If we can save one person from alcoholism and related problems through our actions, I’ll still call it a win.”

“It’s each person’s choice what they do with their liver,” Matty replied. “And I believe that a lot of people know what moderation is.”

Connor sighed deeply. “You’re such a libertarian, Matty. You almost make me think you’re a contrarian, too.”

“I’m not in the business of labeling myself,” Matty replied. “I can only tell you one thing. I believe in common sense.”

“Yes, of course,” Connor said, feigning affront as if he believed Matty to have just accused him of having none of that. While that was true, Matty’s intention hadn’t been to accuse the craphead of all crapheads of anything of the kind.

“So, see you on Wednesday?” Matty cut the conversation short with a well-aimed challenge. He gestured toward the announcement board, although Rusty’s ad was no longer visible. “Since you’re so keen on catching Rybalt and the cat boy.”

Connor’s lips twitched for a moment. “We’ll see about that,” he replied, imagining himself all mysterious by doing so. “Goodbye, Matthew. Something tells me that you will soon become one of ours. Just so you know, there won’t be any hard feelings related to the past when that happens.”

“Why should there be?” Matty asked with a broad smile.

“I’m just putting it out there for your consideration,” Connor replied. His smile was self-assured as he walked away with John in tow. John, who threw a look over his shoulder at him. His eyes were unreadable. Matty had no idea what to make of that and didn’t care to, either.

His only current interest, besides the usual, was to find some time for proper stretching before the big interview. After all, he was more than certain that Rusty was going to be a tough interviewer, and he had to prepare properly for the task.



Had Matty seen the ad? He hoped so, but, in hindsight, he should have tried a method that was sure to succeed, and not leave everything to chance like this. Just in case Matty didn't make an appearance at the established place and hour, he would have to reconsider his strategy of contacting the cat boy. Too bad fooling around like that in costumes was so much fun. It was the only thing keeping him from blurting out the truth and getting to hang out with Matty as they saw fit, costumes or not.

Maybe that wasn't the only thing. What would Matty think – really think – of his singing? At first, he had told him that he didn't think much of Rybalt. It wasn't like him to experience so much doubt, but there they were, and doubt was par for the course. Matty was definitely bold and sure of his cat persona, and that was a plus. But what if it was all nothing but a fantasy? One that would end once college was over, and they had to face the real world, as older people often put it?

He didn't want to think about such things. His MO with them was to sweep them under the rug. That imaginary rug was probably now sitting about one foot off the ground, but it didn't matter as long as others had no idea of its existence. It had worked so far, right?

How was he going to be sure Matty would be there, dressed as the cat boy as if taken from one of his hottest fantasies with slender young dudes dressed in latex? Rusty shook his head. There was no point in dwelling on things that were bound to make him horny. Unless, of course, he could call Matty over for a quickie.

Without one moment's hesitation, he grabbed the phone. "Hey," he drawled, as Matty picked up on the second ring. "Do you have time?"

"Ugh, unfortunately, not really."

That was a bummer, but Rusty had always said that he would be respectful of Matty's study time. "What are you busy with?"

"Stretching," came the prompt reply.

Now that was something he hadn't expected. "Interesting. I thought you were pretty limber already. I recall certain sex positions we've tried that even weathered contortionists might find themselves hard pressed to pull off."

Matty snickered, a sound that had come to tickle his ear in the most pleasant of ways. "Well, that should tell you that keeping myself in shape is paramount, or otherwise we might end up as a bunch of knots when together."

That was surely not as bad as it sounded. Rusty could see himself all wrapped around Matty and Matty wrapped around him. “Well, if that’s the case, I’d say carry on.”

“Wait, why did you call?”

“I was wondering if you were available for a quickie,” Rusty admitted in his usual forthright fashion when it came to sex.

“How quick are we talking about?”

“Hand to hand combat,” Rusty explained. “I’m already horny.”

“You could watch porn,” Matty suggested.

“I’ve hardly watched that since we’ve gotten together.” Now that was one huge confession for him. Why watch porn when he had the sexiest dude in his bed? Not even cat boy porn mattered anymore. He had the real deal. That reminded him. “What are you going to do on Wednesday evening?”

“I’ve heard there’s going to be a Rybalt event. I wouldn’t miss it,” Matty replied promptly.

Ah, so his message had been received. That was great to know. The only matter left unsolved was his horny dick. “Can I come watch you stretch, my limber friend?”

“Sure. Since you’ve admitted that I ruined you for watching porn, it’s my duty to help you get off.”

That was everything he needed. Also, he had a little gift for Matty. He could barely wait to see how his baby dude was going to look dressed in it.

Chapter Forty-Three

Bats Eat Cats... Like Not Really!

Matty thought himself pretty clever about letting Rusty know that he would attend the scheduled interview, but he wasn't exactly prepared for the gift being pushed into his arms as soon as he opened the door. "What's this?" he asked, as he carefully unfolded the black thing.

It was a top with sleeves, skin-tight, by all appearances, and made of latex. And nothing else.

"Just something for you to wear while you perform your stretches," Rusty said with a smirk. "I can barely wait to see how it looks on you. Too bad I didn't bring the tail, too." He made a sour face like he couldn't believe himself capable of such an oversight.

So, it had to be all part of the strategy of turning him slowly into a cat boy, and Rusty was all for a slow version of opposite striptease. At the end of their game, Matty would end up in the situation where it would be impossible to deny that he was Slick Coolplums if they kept at it like this. Funny thing, he didn't care about losing the game. As it's said, being part of it is the only thing that counts.

Therefore, although his breath hitched for a moment, he took off his t-shirt and put on the black top. It really looked as if it had been made for him, which meant that Rusty knew his size. That went to show how observant his crush was, and it tickled his vanity.

Rusty gave him a critical once-over and then began giving orders. "Those shorts won't do, although it's nice that I can see the shape of your dick through them. Take them off."

"Did you bring a pair of pants to match the top?" Matty asked.

"No. You will have to work out wearing only that," Rusty said with a satisfied grin.

"I'm stretching, not working out," Matty cared to make clear.

"Whatever floats your boat, man. Come on, give me some sugar."

Rusty looked so good, already stretched out on his bed, one hand suggestively placed on his crotch, while staring at him with burning eyes. People saw him as this carefree guy, who never gave a damn about anything, but Matty knew him to be intense, too. Right now, he was that and more. He only had eyes for him, and it wasn't so strange to feel the pressure of performing up to expectations.

With sure moves, to show that he wasn't intimidated in the least, he pushed down his shorts. Watching those beautiful eyes moving lazily all over him, stopping at the sight of his cock, already starting to grow under that intense stare, was totally doing it for him. Throughout his life,

he had used to think of himself as quite shy, not always ready to take off his clothes in front of someone else, but it appeared that the notorious king of Sunny Hill had cured him of any traces of that. He was more than willing now to put himself on display and enjoy the unhidden admiration in Rusty's deep green eyes.

"You do your thing, Matty. Don't mind me," Rusty said in an urgent voice and bit his bottom lip suggestively.

He planned on minding him, but not in any way that would make either of them uncomfortable. Turning slowly, he didn't forget to throw a knowing smirk over his shoulder. That had the desired effect, as Rusty wiggled his eyebrows and laughed. "Look what you're doing to the Mighty Thor," he said and his cock sprang out, looking delicious and ready for battle.

"My stretching routine might take a bit," Matty warned.

"I don't mind it. I assure you – watching you is the best use of my time."

"But I thought you wanted it to be a quickie," Matty said in the most innocent manner possible.

"Quick, slow, short, long, it doesn't matter as long as I get to watch you in that awesome getup of yours."

"Which you got for me," Matty reminded him.

Rusty just hummed in appreciation. With a shrug, Matty began his routine. He had the Wednesday interview in the bag, but why risk pulling a muscle?



Now that was a guy who knew how to play. In his life to date, or at least the one he had led until knowing Matty, his games with his bed partners had been satisfactory, but superficial for the most part. None of the girls who ended up in his bed had been too keen on looking beneath the surface; and when they did, Rusty was quick to put distance between him and them. It was the only way he functioned.

The same could not be said about what was happening at the moment. Matty played into his kinks with a smile on his face. A cute, yet all-knowing smile. Yeah, that was the best partner for him.

He watched as Matty set himself to work for real. Wow, he really meant it about that stretching, and it was a good occasion to admire all those lean muscles, especially since his host offered him an incredible view from behind. Rusty squeezed his cock at the base hard to stop himself from shooting prematurely. Regardless of what he had said before, he was under no obligation to make it quick.

The sight of that perky bottom really did it for him. Guys shouldn't have asses like that, but he couldn't say that he held it against Matty. It was, after all, an advantage he very much enjoyed. And now, like the cheeky cockteaser he was, Matty was flexing his butt cheeks in a very alluring fashion. "Stop it or I'll come over there and start licking that thing."

"That thing? I had no idea you shied away from dirty words," Matty teased him.

"I'm going to put my tongue in your ass if you don't stop," Rusty replied promptly.

"Is that supposed to be a threat? Try harder."

Rusty flaunted the Mighty Thor. "Any harder than this and it might become a life form of its own."

Matty laughed and bent over while shaking his ass. That was it; he couldn't take it anymore. In the blink of an eye, he was on his feet, and the next second, he was kneeling behind Matty, grabbing his ass cheeks. He buried his face in that ass and licked playfully, at first. Help came right away, and soon, the thing he so much wanted to lick was exposing itself more, as its owner took it upon himself to part the two mounds of perfect flesh and offer it completely.

No brainer there. He made a meal out of it, while Matty rewarded him in an entire harmony of soft moans and surprised gasps, peppered here and there with kinky encouragements. When he got back on his feet, he was quite pleased with himself and the state in which he had brought his partner. Matty turned and grabbed him by the shoulders, only to hike himself up into his arms.

"Weren't you busy stretching?"

"I'll do it while we go at it," Matty said with a shrug.

That worked for him, too. He put Matty on the bed and climbed on top of him. It took them a little to get into position, but they were there, ready for action. He locked eyes with Matty as he began penetrating him slowly. Fuck, that was so good. However, he needed not to forget that he was supposed to help with the stretching.

Matty grunted and then giggled as Rusty spread his legs as far as humanly possible. No wonder this dude had chosen to play the cat boy. That was some really good performance if anyone asked him. Not that he would share the details of his current session with anyone. Having secrets of this kind was major fun.

"Let's see how flexible you are," he said in a teacher-like voice.

Matty snickered. "Where have I heard that before?"

“Smartass.” Rusty pushed Matty’s legs so that now they were brushing his ears. That was quite the sight. Plus, it allowed for really deep penetration, which he very much enjoyed. “I might fuck you into the mattress today, Matty.”

“Oh yeah?” came the breathless question. “Then go for it already.”

And that he did. Nothing was hard with Matty, except their cocks. He watched the pair on his cat boy bouncing in front of his eyes. Too bad he was not that flexible; he couldn’t fuck and lick those balls at the same time. That would have been something. The angle, however, allowed him to watch Matty rubbing his cock while closing his eyes and letting out small huffs of pleasure.

“Here it comes,” he announced in a strained voice and pulled out only so that he could make a mess out of his baby dude.

The latex top was a total winner. Rusty watched with satisfaction how his jizz flew out of his cock and landed everywhere. Matty added his, as well, and soon the latex top was a beautiful mess. He groaned theatrically as he collapsed on top of Matty, only to be rewarded with a lot of giggles. Damn, it felt good to just lie there, and not only because of the sex.

When they came unstuck after a bit, the first thing he noticed was the clear look in Matty’s eyes. Those were eyes trying to tell him something. He was about to press and needle, but that very moment, Matty looked lower and then exclaimed, “O. M. F. G.! Your shirt is a mess!”

He had rubbed himself against the messy top while embracing Matty, which, of course, caused that little disaster.

“How are you going to get back to your place?”

“Do you think you can put me up for the night? I am willing to pay with my body.”

“Then I think you’ve already paid for the week,” Matty joked.

“For real? And I thought you’d take advantage and use me like a tyrant only to have your way with me.” He pouted for show, and Matty shut him up with a kiss.

And then, he ruffled his hair and made him purr like a cat. “Still, should I go to your house and get you a change of clothes? What are you going to wear tomorrow in classes?”

“Sounds like a good idea.” Rusty pressed his lips together to stop himself from smiling. That afforded him a great opportunity to rummage more through Matty’s closet for signs of that awesome outfit.

Matty gave him a quick kiss and got to his feet.

“Don’t go out like that,” Rusty said with a pointed glare.

Laughter followed, naturally. “I’ll take a shower and change into decent clothes, don’t worry.”

“And wipe that smile off your face,” Rusty called out to him as Matty moved away. Then, after just a short moment of deliberation, he added, “Actually, don’t. It suits you.”



Matty felt like a burglar as he entered the house, although he had the key Rusty had given him, and everyone there knew about it. However, because the house was empty, the illicit plan he had come up with on his way there seemed all the more like the proverbial forbidden fruit. Slowly, careful of each noise he was making, he stalked up the staircase to the second floor. It really did look like no one was home.

Officially, he was there only to get a change of clothes for Rusty, but that wasn’t all. Unwittingly, his partner had provided him with the perfect opportunity to inspect at length the contents of Rusty’s closet. That beautiful cape had to be in there, somewhere. Also, from what he remembered, Rusty wasn’t the most organized person in the world, so it might not take long to find the thing and get the final proof that the guy he was in love with loved dressing up at night – and sometimes during the day – and give the entire campus a show like they’d never seen in their lives.

As he put his hands on the door handles of the closet, he took a deep breath. There was a chance that a landslide of sex toys and whatnot would topple him over the moment he opened those doors, so he needed to exercise extra caution.

Relief washed over him as nothing like that happened. Actually, Rusty’s closet was no longer the mess he remembered from those first tutoring lessons. The gifts, the sex toys, and the infinite number of seemingly useless things weren’t there anymore. First he grabbed a pair of jeans and a shirt to stuff into his bag. As soon as he was done with that, he took another deep breath.

Rybalt always looked impeccable, which meant that those clothes had to be kept in perfect shape in-between performances. After a bit of fiddling around and pushing clothing hangers about, he reached the end and then he saw the garment bag that was last on the rail. He took it out and placed it on the bed, and then pulled the zipper down. At first, he couldn’t keep in a grin of satisfaction.

“Yes!”

Not like he’d had any doubts about it, but now he had the confirmation. The fabric of the cape felt so luxurious under his fingers. Rusty must have spent a lot on it, but it was worth every penny. Under the cape lay the suit, and a pair of black gloves peeked from the vest pocket. He was about to inspect the suit next when he heard noises on the other side of the door. His hands moved fast as he pulled the zipper up; he quickly stashed the Rybalt costume back where it

belonged and closed the closet doors just as someone knocked on the door. “Rusty, are you home?”

Matty looked around for any signs of his reprehensible activities and saw none. He rushed to get the door, hoping that his face wouldn’t betray him. Maddox was there and looked pleasantly surprised to see him. “Hey, Matty. Where’s Rusty?”

“He’s at my place. I just came to grab a change of clothes for him.”

“Okay. Is he going to sleep over?”

“Yeah.”

Maddox gave him a slow look and blinked a few times, making Matty squirm under that questioning gaze. “Why didn’t he come himself?”

“Er, um,” Matty began to stutter, “he was a bit... tired.” That didn’t make it sound any better than other options, such as ‘incapacitated’ or ‘his t-shirt has cum stains’.

Maddox caught on right away and grinned. “Ah, I see. Is he playing nice with you, Matty?”

So nice. It took him a moment to realize that he must have been grinning, too, and forgot to reply. “We’re good friends, yeah,” he said quickly.

“Friends,” Maddox repeated slowly. “Okay.”

“I should be going,” Matty said, a bit unnerved by the way Maddox was looking at him like he was about to say something but didn’t think it a good idea or something like that. He couldn’t exactly tell what was on other people’s minds.

“Hey, Matty,” Maddox called out to him when he was about to walk down the stairs. “Just to let you know, Rusty’s worth it.”

He nodded and swallowed. Maddox didn’t look at him like that because he wanted to tease him or reproach him about something. That was a look that expressed a friend’s care for his bestie. “Yeah. He is. He totally is.”

Maddox gave him a broad smile as he waved goodbye. In a way, it felt like a blessing from Rusty’s best friend. And, until that moment, Matty hadn’t even realized how much he wanted that kind of thing.



Rybalt took in a deep breath. At night, the air was different, as artists had often wrote music and lyrics about it.

It was true, down to the last chord dying down as the stage curtain fell. While growing up, he had had no one to share such ideas with. His mom was too out of it all the time, now that he thought about it, for as long as he could remember; his dad was a practical man – he couldn't be bothered with aspects that went beyond the comprehension of the way things worked in the real world.

Real world. He snorted at that. There wasn't anything more real than what music and songs and art in general revealed to the unaware eye, or ear, or soul. If anything, such people who created things out of thin air, using nothing but the power of their imagination to make them come alive, knew of a world that bubbled and lived way under the surface, and they must feel responsible to bring it up for everyone else to see and hear and feel.

He caressed his naked hand with the gloved one and smiled. So, after all, he wasn't the only one with a propensity for snooping around. He had searched for the misplaced glove for a while, but when he found it, the dust bunnies under his bed had already done their loving work. It was too late to wash and dry it, and it also offered him the perfect chance to give his accomplice a hint that he knew about certain trespassing activities.

Although he expected Matty to be there at ten on the dot, he had come earlier only so he could take his time and slip into his Rybalt persona while taking in the kingdom lying at his feet. A few scattered students were already there, some snapping pics of him with their phones, waving at him, and calling out. He waved graciously and offered prompt replies about the evening's scheduled entertainment. First, he needed his muse, however.

"Well, well, well," a voice with a nasty hiss to it interrupted his basking in the attention of his – sparse for now – audience. "If it isn't the wannabe vampire Rybalt."

Rusty turned on his heel and eyed the intruder. He munched on his lips trying not to laugh. Not that Connor looked bad in his black suit and cape, as well as bat mask, but it was funny to consider that the guy thought he could take him on.

"Oh, I feel quite offended by your mischaracterization of my person," he replied in a haughty, aristocratic tone he had cultivated lately so that he could adapt to certain roles with ease. Mrs. May had warmly recommended him nurturing his inclination toward the art of acting as a useful skill to have in his future career. "I am," he added while making a convoluted, exaggerated bow, "the prince of cats. Also, the protector of all things raunchy and kinky and fun. You wouldn't know about them." He took a moment to examine his opponent as if he needed that to make up his mind about what he was about to say next. "You look like you've never enjoyed a moment of that in your life. Am I right, Flappy?"

"Flappy?" Connor oozed indignation through all his batty pores. "Well, let me tell you something, prince of alley cats. Bats eat cats!"

And, as soon as he said that, he lunged toward Rusty.



To reach the science building, Matty had to walk along the wall until he got to the arts building, climb the high tree by it and then, from there, go straight to his destination. He was about to grab the ledge and hike himself up, when someone seized him suddenly from behind, making him lose his balance. His adrenaline kicked in before any rational thought as he stumbled and rolled on the ground with his attacker still clinging on to him. As soon as they stopped, he got on top of the other person and pinned him down.

He stared in shock at a masked character, dressed in a suit that seemed quite familiar. There was no guessing required, as the black and blue colors revealed under the light coming from the street lights were enough to identify that thing for what it was. The surprise was too much for him, and it made him lose focus for a moment.

The next thing he knew, the tables were turned and he was on his back, with the mysterious attacker on top of him.

“I got you!”

What the hell? Was that John? And was he wearing the Nightwing costume he had destroyed when Matty intended to join Rusty for his brother’s birthday party, both dressed as superheroes? No, that couldn’t be, first, because the costume had been destroyed, and second, because he had personally returned its earthly remains to the rental shop and paid for the damages.

That could only mean that John had rented or bought a similar outfit. What a copycat. And not only that, he was an annoying copycat because, celebrating too soon, he reached for Matty’s mask, trying to snatch it off his head. That move, however, only made his balance more precarious, something that Matty took quick advantage of.

John cried out as the tables turned once more, and now he was the one pinned to the ground. Matty held both of his attacker’s wrists tightly. He used his squealy annoying Slick voice. “Who are you and what do you want?”

“Let go of me,” John whined. “I’m your punisher...” His voice cracked and tumbled into a real moan of distress, although Matty wasn’t hurting him, just merely incapacitating him for any attack.

“Do you think it’s so easy to catch a cat?” Matty hissed at him and now he did increase the pressure on the guy’s wrists to make a point. Funny how his disguise had allowed him to go undetected for so long, and he had been able to see John under his Nightwing costume from the start. Getting into this cosplay thing was an art in itself, Matty considered for a moment. Not every guy in a mask could pass as the character he was trying to impersonate. And John didn’t even have a wig.

He would have clucked his tongue at that, just to show his superiority in dressing up, but it was neither the time, nor the place, for such things. Rybalt was waiting for him, and he didn't want to make a bad impression by being late for his interview.

"I am going to let you go, but you must promise that you won't follow me," he said.

John nodded and sniffled, so Matty pushed him away as he released him. Then, trusting that his former roommate had learned his lesson, he turned on his heel and rushed to the wall, determined to get to the science building on time.

However, it appeared that his goodwill had been misplaced because, behind him, a roar arose and soon he was being grabbed again from behind. "Bats eat cats! Bats eat cats!"

In hindsight, he should have expected a low blow like that from John. A pure knee jerk reaction, he drew back his elbow hard and heard a gasp of pain, while the grip on his body loosened. He turned just in time to witness John falling to the ground like a rag doll.

Cold sweat materialized on his back in an instant. He quickly knelt by John's side to check on him. "John," he shouted in his normal voice, "hey, man, don't play, wake the fuck up!"

His shaking had the desired effect, eventually, because John opened his eyes and blinked at him, seemingly dizzy. "Bats eat cats," he said softly.

"Are you okay?" Matty asked, still very much worried.

John rubbed his face. "You caught me right in the chin. That hurt, Matty."

"Oh, damn," Matty whispered softly. "Come on, let me help you up. Seriously, you're such a lightweight. Don't mind me. I'm sorry. Can you stand?"

John leaned against him and it appeared that he could stand on his own feet without too much help. Still, Matty didn't want to take any chance. "We should have someone look at you."

"No, no need," John said and shook his head.

"No way. I'm not having you on my conscience."

"I'm fine, Matty." He did appear so. He even took a few steps and seemed capable of walking straight. Then, suddenly, he stopped and grabbed Matty's mask. "Ha! I got you!"

"Seriously, dude?" Matty didn't even bother to take his mask back. John held it like some sort of prize. He could keep it since that was a small price to pay for socking the poor guy in the face like that. "How are you really feeling?"

"Fine. Awesome!" John exclaimed and held Matty's mask high in the air, as a trophy. "I need to let Connor know--"

“Did Connor put you up to this?” Matty shook his head in annoyance and grabbed John’s arm.

“Hey, where are you taking me?” John complained, still holding Matty’s mask to his chest as if someone were about to take it away from him.

“My dorm room,” Matty said with determination. His interview was compromised, but he didn’t want to take any chances with John. He had never seen anyone in his life crumple to the ground like that. The guy said he was all right, but Matty was no doctor. He’d call an emergency service and ask for advice. Then, first thing in the morning, he’d take John to the health service office on campus.

“But I need to get to Connor!” John protested.

“I elbowed you in the face and you fell like a doll. No way I’m letting you roam the streets or worse, get behind a wheel. You’ll listen to me, do you understand?”

“Oh, Matty,” John said in a suddenly reverent tone, “you care!”

“I’m the cause of your injury, so I must.”

“It’s more than that,” John declared. “You care about me.”

Matty didn’t contradict him, especially since John stopped digging his heels in and followed him of his own accord. Good. That was all he wanted.



“Tonight, I’m going to unmask you, pest!” Connor roared.

“Well, I have to say, catch me first!” Rusty replied as he dodged out of the way.

This was entertaining if he thought about it. However, it annoyed him because it threw a wrench into his interview of the sexiest cat boy alive. He needed to solve this Connor problem and fast so that he could see about getting back to the evening’s program.

Connor wasn’t in that bad shape since he managed to keep up with him while chasing him around. He had to give it to the guy. He was tenacious, but that was par for the course, seeing how he had managed to rally so many people under that shitty acronym and his high-morals waving flag.

Still, this wasn’t a game he intended to lose. He enjoyed jumping around and letting Connor waste his energy. Apparently, the guy had plenty of it. Maybe being a little batty, no allusion to how he was dressed, offered an untapped source of stamina.

“When are you going to give up?” Rusty laughed while moving out of the way at the last moment.

That gave him an idea. Using the respite offered by his tireless opponent, he took off his cape and began waving it in front of Connor. “Hey, Connor, cows go moo.”

Oops, he hadn’t meant to use the guy’s actual name, or his own normal voice.

Behind his stupid mask, Connor’s face seemed to transform. Even in the low light conditions, that was obvious. “Rusty Parker! How come I’m not surprised?”

“Oh, you’re also delusional,” Rusty commented in his Rybalt voice, but it looked like the cat was out of the bag with this one. Well, too bad. But Connor was just one guy, and Rusty believed that he would be able to spin the tale the way he wanted, still.

“No, I’m not! I heard you, loud and clear!” Connor rushed ahead, his head low, his pointy ears like impotent horns, much to Rusty’s satisfaction. He flipped the cape with the grace of a toreador and watched as his attacker stumbled and barely got his bearings back at the last moment.

“Well, we can do this all night, but, as you may well know, I have an important appointment lined up.”

“Oh, really?” Connor laughed, annoying Rusty for a moment. “I don’t think your furry friend will make it, Rusty Parker.”

Now that made him feel a bit uneasy. “You don’t say. And how do you know that?”

“You’re not the only one with a sidekick,” Connor replied. He straightened up. “You know what? My job here is done. I know who you are, and tomorrow, everyone will know. Tootles, Parker, say ‘hi’ to public shame.”

Rusty would have followed after Connor, but he had his interview with Slicky to consider. Those words about the sidekick and Matty not coming had rubbed him the wrong way. There was only one way to find out what was what, without calling off the game only for the sake’s of Connor’s stupid crusade.

He pulled out his phone that had been put on silent for his show and fired a quick message off to Matty. If he didn’t reply, it meant that he was on his way; that suit could hardly conceal a phone, and Matty would need to leave his in his dorm room.

A small twitch in his upper lip betrayed his uneasiness when his phone pinged with a return message.

Just getting ready for bed. See you tomorrow?

What the fuck? Rusty stared at the phone. Matty was the cat boy, without a doubt. And Matty, Slicky, whatever, just stood him up. What the hell had Connor's sidekick done to his baby dude? No way would Matty flip him off like that unless there was a good reason.

One option was to call off the game and ask Matty for details. But were Connor and his stupid acolyte worth that? Well, the interview would have to wait, no matter how much he disliked it.



Matty sighed as he set his phone aside. Rusty must have realized he wasn't coming. And he was probably disappointed, as there was no follow-up message to his question. He'd have to make it up to Rusty for that. For now, he turned his entire attention to John.

"You are so going to spill everything about what you and your leader are getting up to these days," he warned.

John fidgeted in his place. "But I might have a concussion! Because you hit me!"

"It doesn't look like it, as that emergency nurse told us on the phone. Also, I'm supervising you for the night, which means that you're not getting away. Yeah, I got you, not the other way around. So talk."

"Or else?" John put his chin up defiantly. "Are you going to hit me again?"

"It sounds quite tempting." The look on John's face was priceless. "I'm joking. But only about hitting you again. I'm very serious about finding out what you and Connor are scheming."

John seemed to consider for a moment, but then, he looked at Matty with unfocused eyes. Yeah, it looked like he hadn't taken his glasses with him on this little adventure of his. So, he was as blind as a bat. Ironic. "Okay," John admitted with a self-encouraging sigh. "I'll tell you everything."

Chapter Forty-Four

The Sorest Spot

Matty brought John a glass of water and waited patiently while his unexpected guest took it with a guilty expression on his face. Extracting uncomfortable truths out of his former roommate wasn't high on his wishlist, but that was the situation they were in, so that was that.

"Where do I start?" John declared and shook his head as if he couldn't believe he was doing this.

"Start by telling me how you could go back to Connor after he treated you like that."

John took a pendantic sip and then stared at Matty, surprisingly confident all of a sudden. "I know things about Connor. Things he doesn't want anyone to know."

"So you are blackmailing him into being friends with you?" Now that was something worth noting. Whatever it was that John held over Connor, it had to be important; the leader of the Implacables hadn't struck Matty as the forgiving type.

John made a long face. "I wouldn't call it blackmail."

"I would." Matty sat on the other bed, convinced now that John wouldn't take off if he wasn't guarded from up close. "Why do you even want to be friends with Connor? He's pretty shady."

John waved. "Oh, we're not friends. But he cannot shake me off now. I believe in him, and he's going to see it one day."

It was Matty's turn to shake his head. "I don't think that is going to happen, John. Connor's the type of guy who only cares about being number one."

"So's the case with your special friend. Rusty Parker." John threw the name at him with the same disgust as before.

Matty pursed his lips. That wasn't true. He was about to argue, when John began talking again.

"At least you have Rybalt as another option. He might be gay." An all-knowing nod followed.

Ah, well. No point in ruining the desire for self-delusion running so strong in this one. "Okay, we're digressing here. We were talking about you and Connor."

"Right." John took another sip. "The things is, Connor needs to get this Rybalt out of the way, so he thought of beating him at his own game."

"Is he going to try his hand at singing opera?"

John's brow wrinkled like a sheet. "No, tonight, he was going to unmask Rybalt. And I, you."

“Are you sure about that?” Matty had had to abandon his cat claws but made a show of turning his hand into a very close impersonation of them while giving John a withering look.

His guest made himself little. “Are you going to beat me up if I do?”

Matty huffed. “Seriously, I’m starting to worry about you. Do you have a kink for getting floored in one kick? Because I think I already apologized for it plenty. Okay, let me talk to you like we’re both human beings.”

John nodded eagerly. “Not cat and superhero.”

Not what he meant. Matty continued after letting out a sigh. “I can’t stop you from telling the world I’m Slick Coolplums. But I’d appreciate it a lot if you didn’t.”

John waited for a bit. “Is that all? Aren’t you going to frighten me? Blackmail me?”

“If you’re going to add ‘hit me’ to that, I’m kicking you out and you can supervise yourself for the night while sleeping in the hallway.”

John took the threat at face value. “Okay. I won’t tell anyone it was you.”

Matty would have liked to press the matter more, but he needed to hit the iron while it was still hot. “So, back to your silly little plans with Connor. What would this unmasking do? What does your leader hope to achieve with it?”

“Come on, Matty, you’re smart. Once Connor unmask this so-called hero, people will see that he’s nothing but a clown. And they’ll get back to what’s important, like studying, and leading pure lives.”

“Pure lives? John, my dude, are you even hearing yourself?” Matty leaned forward. “Come on, spit it all out. That can’t be everything.”

John’s eyes darted sideways as if he was trying to find a way out. So, Matty thought, that had to be it; Connor had some evil plan up his sleeve, and John was trying to protect that ugly child.

“Well, you know how Rybalt is disturbing the peace,” John said slowly.

“The peace. What peace? World peace?”

“No.” John scowled. “The peace on campus. And we need to stand united to have a chance.”

“A chance against what? The zombie apocalypse? All right, all right, I’m listening.”

John pursed his lips and appeared to debate with himself whether it was a good idea to share everything he knew with Matty or not. Before needing a bit of encouragement on that front, he began speaking. “Once he has Rybalt’s real identity, Connor can go to the dean with it. Also, to

the authorities.” The last word came out very softly, as if not even the person speaking it was sure about how valid that would be.

“Authorities? Really? Like reporting him to the police? On what grounds?”

“Connor intends to collect evidence that what Rybalt does is breaking the law.”

“He’s not breaking any law,” Matty said through his teeth.

John gave him an odd look and then smiled. “You like Rybalt, Matty. More than you do your special friend Rusty Parker.”

“I assure you. I like them both exactly the same. Come on, spit it all out. What kind of law breaking is Connor thinking about?”

“Vandalism, for starters.” John leaned forward and whispered. “And he’s thinking of luring him into doing more than that. Connor believes that he could make the guy hit him, because he looks like someone with a short temper.”

“Bad idea,” Matty said promptly. “Wait. I hit you. Are you going to report me to the police?”

“Of course not,” John replied and had the nerve to look wounded.

“Good to know. And what if he cannot convince Rybalt to give him a fat lip? What then?”

John shrugged. “That part, with the actual police, even he admits is a stretch. But Connor thinks that he can turn Rybalt into persona non grata with the dean and everyone else on campus. Because, let’s face it, Matty, at this point, Rybalt is fooling everyone. And people don’t like being fooled. That’s the plan.” As if he had just gotten a big weight off his chest, John sighed deeply and then leaned back, his hands crossed over his belly. He looked like a man happy to have gotten over the biggest trial in his life. Now, it was out of his hands.

And transferred to Matty. “Seriously, John, what’s up with Connor? What dirt do you have on him?”

John averted his eyes. “That’s something I can’t tell you. You could hurt Connor with it. Even if you promise you won’t... I just can’t risk it.”

“Why are you on his side, again?” Matty tried to catch John’s eyes but it was futile. “John, really.”

“I... I just think he needs me.”

“It doesn’t look like that to me. You could do better.”

John scoffed. “Easy for you to say while you rock that body in your cat boy suit.”

Matty frowned. "I do work for this body, and you know that. It's not simply a gift from the heavens above."

"You say that, but you're beautiful and you don't care." John crossed his arms and pouted.

"Connor is a scumbag. Stop deflecting and making it about me. Ditch the asshole, John. He's going to drag you down. For the life of me, I can't imagine what you see in him."

"He means well," John said, but the seeds of doubt were already taking root in his mind, if the traces of hesitation in his voice revealed anything.

"He only means well for himself. He likes being adored. Don't you find it odd that he has no actual friends?"

"He had friends, but then... you know what happened last year," John said pointedly.

"Yeah. His so-called friends tried to publicly shame Jonathan. I do remember very well."

"Are you on first-name basis with Jonathan Hamilton?" John gave him a look full of envy and longing.

"Yeah, because I'm friends with Jonathan. He's an awesome person, you know? He didn't deserve that crap from Connor's friends."

"Sure, but people like Jonathan have everything, and it's not fair."

"Or maybe you just don't know everything. He's had his fair share of problems. All last year, he had to work to support himself in college. And his GPA was still the best in the entire school."

John didn't seem too moved by Jonathan's trials and tribulations. Matty could tell when he was dealing with people who had their minds made up about something. Also, it wasn't his goal here to turn his former roommate's mind around about everything. It could very well be a losing battle. What he needed was to make sure that John understood that Connor was a major creep and staying by his side wouldn't bode well for him in the future. Another thing was more selfish, since he didn't want to be outed as the cat boy on other people's terms. Not when he was having so much fun fooling around with Rusty-slash-Rybalt.

As if he could read his thoughts, John started talking again. "I won't tell a soul that you're Slick Coolplums."

"Connor is going to ask you what happened since he put you up to it."

John shrugged. "I'm going to lie."

"He suspects me anyway, right?" Matty gave John a long look.

“Yeah.” John shifted uncomfortably in his place. “But he agreed that we would need to be sure before talking out loud about it. I’ll just send him a message that I got sick to my stomach and rushed to my former dorm room, where I found you sleeping. That should absolve you of any suspicion.”

“I’m not so sure about that, but okay.”

John stretched out on his former bed. “Can I sleep here tonight, Matty? I don’t feel like going back to Connor just yet.”

“Okay. It’s your room, too, until the end of the year, anyway.”

John turned on his side to face the wall. “Do you really think I could do better than Connor, Matty? He’s pretty handsome.”

“Handsome doesn’t mean squat with a rotten personality like his. You could find someone kinder.”

“Okay.” John sniffled for good measure. “What did you think of my Nightwing costume?”

“Pretty neat,” Matty said. He wasn’t going to nitpick about that of all things.

“Okay. Thanks for letting me sleep here. And the other stuff.”

“Don’t sweat it. Sleep tight. But if you feel anything weird, just wake me up. I hit you pretty hard.”

“Actually, I think it’s good that you did. We had a chance to talk.”

“Yeah.” How much good that did, they’d have to wait and see.



O. M. G., Connor dear, it looks like you’ve lost the plot completely! Accusing Rusty Parker of being Rybalt, our new beloved leader... Come on, we all know that our former royal figure could not sing if his life depended on it. That only goes to show that you’d pick on anything just to get ahead. And what do you even expect to obtain with such accusations? Even if it were true... which obviously it is not, it wouldn’t endear you to the masses.

The prince of cats won last night’s battle, boys and girls of Sunny Hill! And yes, if you haven’t got it by now, we do have a new king, and his name is Rybalt!

As for Connor Williams, let’s put this in words you can understand... Boo, boo, boo!



That wasn't surprising at all. Rusty wished he could have been a fly on the wall when Connor had dished his heart out to Xpress, probably via direct message on their site, about the real identity of the prince of cats. He even loved it that now Xpress called him that as well, due to his main rival's detractions.

That guy must have been so mad. Rusty couldn't stop grinning just imagining it. The only thing that had thrown a wrench into his plans to take over Sunny Hill was not having his muse by his side. It didn't matter; they'd have other chances.

He felt his face turning into a grimace when he checked his phone. His mom had called again. She seemed to be in one of her usual down spells, when she needed to talk to him. This was the third time she had called, and it was starting to wear him out. She wasn't saying much, actually, just letting long silences stretch between them, and she remembered something she wanted to talk about only when he tried to bring the conversation to a conclusion.

"Hi, mom," he said, picking up the phone.

"Rusty, when are you coming home?" She sounded agitated, not exactly her usual self.

"Not too soon. I mean, I'm not planning to. I'm busy with school and all that."

"Don't give me that. You've never cared much for school. That was your dad's idea, that you should go to college."

Rusty considered his next words carefully. When she talked to him, she always tried to guilt him into something, and the main villain in that story had to be his dad, one way or another. While he held his own grudges about how Roy had chosen to leave them behind and build a different life and family for himself, he was mad enough at his mom for not even trying to make things work in his dad's absence. He hated the guilt trip she always tricked him into; and he didn't plan on hurling that guilt back. It was the least he could do.

She had been the abandoned one, and that had been a card she'd played for a long time now. It was part of their interactions as natural as needing water. "Why did you call me, mom?"

"When are you coming home?" The way she ignored his previous answers to the same question was also one thing she did. Until he gave her what she wanted, she would continue in that vein.

He didn't have time for getting into a battle of wills with her right now. "When do you want me to come home?"

"It's not a matter of what I want."

So untrue. He staved off his growing irritation. “Okay. I’ll come this weekend. Is that all right with you?”

“Yes. But I must warn you, Rusty. I’m not in my best shape. That doctor keeps changing my medication.”

In hope of finding a combination that would truly work for her, without a doubt. After so many years, and being an adult now, Rusty suspected his mom of not wanting to feel better. The therapists she’d seen throughout her life had tried all sorts of things to make her life more bearable. While it had to be true that his mom’s chronic condition couldn’t be cured, a part of him just couldn’t let her side with her forever and unconditionally. He also had a hunch that she did all that because the costs came out of her ex-husband’s pocket. She was punishing his dad, but why did she have to punish him now, making him feel guilty about not going home as often as she wanted? He was just there, while Roy hadn’t been.

An entire weekend with his mom. He wasn’t sure he wanted to face her alone. “Can I bring a friend?”

“Yes, of course you can.” She seemed happy with the suggestion. A third person might act as a buffer between them and stop any attempt at a guilt trip. Also, his mom loved visitors. When it was just him visiting, she soured quickly, but if a stranger was there, it took her longer to find other people’s presence unbearable.

That was what he was counting on. “That’s great, mom. We’ll be there.” He waited for a moment before asking. “You do get out, right? You don’t spend all your days at home?”

“Yes, I do. Although people are so busy these days. Mrs. Kingsley comes over once every few days, as you know she does. I’m not a hermit.”

That was another thing that irked him, his mom’s refusal to get close to anyone. Maddox’s mom was a real saint to put up with his mom’s moods, but, after all this time, she still called her Mrs. Kingsley, not Florence or, god forbid, Flo.

“Do you want me to bring you anything?”

“No, you don’t have to. I can bake something. Does your friend have any allergies?”

Rusty was pretty sure his mom wouldn’t bake anything if it killed her. “Yeah, some,” he lied. “We’ll bring all the food we need, just to be safe,” he said.

As expected, his mom seemed relieved. “Of course. You can never be too careful.”

After the conversation ended, Rusty felt his good mood failing to return. He hadn’t seen his mom in a while, and maybe that was where the guilt he felt came from. Well, he’d do his duty as a good son, the weekend to come. That should settle that matter for a while.

One other thing he had learned while watching his mom wallowing in her misery as if she were addicted to it was that getting in a good mood was doable if you put in the work. Smile even when you didn't feel like it, laugh just to push everything negative out of the way, find pleasure in the silliest things. He was an expert in the field.

Nowadays, it was a lot easier. All he had to do was call.



Matty felt relieved when he saw the caller ID. Rusty had been incommunicado after the interview fiasco, and he was trying to bide his time before calling himself. There would be veiled questions, without a doubt, but unless Rusty wanted to call it quits on their game, they wouldn't be asked directly.

“Hey,” he said as soon as he heard the familiar voice at the other end.

“Do you like ice cream, Matty?”

“Who doesn't?”

“Some people. People who aren't my friends, obviously,” he said cheerfully. “Let's go, then. My treat.”

“Is it far?”

“Maddox let me have the car. So we're set.”

“Sure. Doesn't he mind lending it to you?”

Rusty laughed, the sound of that so pleasant to his ear. “Maddie's my brother from a different mother. We share everything.”

“Hopefully, not boyfriends.” Matty bit his bottom lip. Fuck, he needed to control himself.

“Nope. That's a pretty thick line,” Rusty agreed. “Don't get me wrong, that Hamilton is smoking hot, but he's not my type.”

“Really?” Matty turned on his belly and swung his feet in the air, feeling as excited as a schoolgirl getting a much-awaited phone call from her crush. Which, in a way, pretty much summed up his situation.

“Nope,” Rusty confirmed.

“Yours are cat boys,” Matty teased.

“Yeah, but maybe not so much these days.” Rusty fell silent, as if he had just caught himself before saying too much.

“Well, I suppose all kinks fade away sooner or later.”

“Yeah, probably. For some people. Not in my case.”

“Are you jealous he’s fooling around with the sexy singer Rybalt?”

“Not much fooling around between them lately, apparently.”

“Really? What a shame,” Matty chirped happily.

“Let’s leave others out of this. I want to eat ice cream with you.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Indeed it did. Matty held the phone to his chest and smiled long after his conversation with Rusty was over. He hadn’t had the nerve to prod Rusty for his type these days, so to speak, but, in his book, he’d been doing well enough for himself. How many people in the world could say that they had taken a chance with their crushes like he was doing?

Surely, it was more than a crush now. But everything felt just as exciting as it had in the beginning.



“You’ve been staring at my ice cream for the last couple of minutes. Do you want some?”

Rusty accepted the spoon and steadied Matty’s hand to enjoy the tasty offering. Wanting to have a sample of what his date was having wasn’t the reason why he’d been spacing out for the last few minutes. He looked at Matty, who was smiling at him. He really loved how Matty looked at him. That was a guy who knew nothing of his flaws. Of course, that made things so enjoyable and easy between them. The question that had been on his lips faded away.

“You really like mine, don’t you? We can switch.” Matty made a move to push his tall ice cream dish to him, but Rusty stopped him.

He moved closer and wrapped one arm around him. “Do you know what would make it taste better?”

“I have a hunch,” Matty said and turned to look over his shoulder, “but I believe that we are in a way too public space for it.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Although I really want to taste it off…” he began while tipping Matty’s chin and dropping his eyes at the tantalizing lips parting slightly.

“…your dick.”

Those two words were barely mumbled, but Rusty caught them right away. “What?”

Matty's eyes grew wide with alarm. "Sorry, sorry, I just spoke my mind by mistake."

"No mistake there," Rusty said and laughed. "Gawd, Matty, you're so damn kinky, you know that? Just to be clear, do you actually want me to taste it off your dick?"

"No." Matty turned away and snickered. "I was thinking about what I wanted to do to you."

"For the record, I was totally vanilla. I wanted to say 'your lips'."

"For real?" Matty blinked lazily. "That's too romantic for you."

"No way is it too romantic," Rusty protested. "This is an ice cream date, so it's normal for me to say romantic things."

Matty patted him gently on the cheek. "You really say the craziest things sometimes."

"Ice cream isn't crazy."

"A romantic Rusty Parker might be a bit, though."

"Ah," Rusty groaned theatrically, "you really only want me for my body, is that it? Hence your 'mistake'," he air-quoted.

"You got me. Hey, do you have plans for this weekend?"

Rusty straightened up in his place. "I have to go see my mom."

"Oh. Everything fine? You don't look very happy about it."

"Easy to tell, right? Well, it's the kind of thing that's an obligation."

Matty put a hand on his. "Do you want me to come with you?"

No, he didn't want that. He didn't want Matty to see that house left to crumble in on itself, or his mom, who could run hot and cold at the drop of a hat. Just looking at him convinced him of the thing that mattered now more than others; Matty was his happy place now, the guy who knew nothing about all that part of his family drama, and Rusty realized that he wanted to keep it that way. His mom wasn't his dad. She was his sorest spot. "No. It's okay. It's going to be uber boring."

Matty appeared quite disappointed. "I can do boring. I study all day."

"I'm sure you're qualified." He didn't add anything and returned to his ice cream. "You really have to taste this." He pushed the spoon in Matty's face, forcing him to take it only so that he wouldn't speak any more.

Matty smiled. All was brushed over, then. All good.



“Look what the cat dragged out,” August welcomed him and, unlike her words, her arms were wide open. “I was starting to think that you forgot I was living around here. Although, I do understand. You’re a big star now. No time for old acquaintances, right?”

“Yeah, busy as a bee, that’s what I am,” Rusty said with a forced smile.

August read him right away. “Why the long face? Has anything happened? Don’t tell me Matty gave you the boot.”

Rusty glared. “Why would you even say that? Matty and I are just awesome.”

“I see. Come on in.” August made room for him to step into her tiny space. “For the record, I don’t mind being your confidante, okay?”

She sat on the sofa by his side, turned toward him with a knowing look in her eyes. “If it isn’t Matty, what’s going on? The stardom getting to you already? Feeling purposeless? A fraud?”

She knew exactly what to say to make him laugh. “I’m never purposeless,” he said while slapping her knee, “what the hell? Nah, it’s just that I have to visit my mom this weekend, and it feels like such a drag.”

“Your mom. She can be a lot from what you’ve told me. So, why don’t you take Matty with you? He could keep you distracted.”

Rusty grimaced. “I don’t know. He offered, but I don’t want him to meet her.”

August inspected him with keen eyes. “You know, Rusty, this might come as a great shock to you, but people don’t have to like your parents to like you. Didn’t you take him to your brother’s birthday? You had no trouble with him meeting daddy from hell.”

“Come on, August. He’s a breeze compared to her. At least he tries to act like a regular person. Well, as regular as a douchey dad can be, but still. With mom, I don’t even know. I mean, I know it’s not her fault, and that it’s a condition, but sometimes I feel like she’s not even trying.”

August’s face changed as he spoke. “Well, I guess I know what you mean. It was never easy meeting my friends after... you know. Having to hide my bruises and everything. Pretending everything was fine. I guess we can’t change people.”

Rusty felt slightly relieved. If there was one person in the world who understood shame in that deep, raw way he did where his mom was concerned, it had to be August. He didn’t do heartfelt conversations with other guys, unless he really had to. And he just preferred to be the one listening, anyway. That had to be it.

“So,” he began, “what do I have to do to convince you to come with me and serve as my human shield?”

August sighed. “I still think you should take Matty. Don’t you want him to know you? Warts and all, as they say.”

“Fuck no.” He intended to let that out in a joking tone, but it ended up sounding exactly like he felt on the inside. “Well, if you don’t want to come with me--”

“I’ll come with you. I know how hard it can be to face people you love but don’t like.”

Rusty pursed his lips. “I don’t even know why you’re doing this for me. It’s not like I helped you when you needed it.”

August surprised him by caressing his head in a motherly manner, which was quite apropos seeing what he was asking of her. “You helped me more than you can imagine. Your words back then, even if they hurt me, they stayed with me. I mean, I was just hooking up with you and didn’t expect to have a few horrible truths thrown back at me. But there you were, this guy younger than me, trying to get me to see things for what they were.” She shifted in her place for a moment. “When you’re caught up in a bad relationship, but you still love the person, it’s easy to find justifications for everything. You know, to think that you might be the problem.”

“I have no idea what to say to that.” There was a reason why he avoided heart-to-heart conversations like this. Dealing with the truth was never easy.

“I’m coming with you. And I’m going to be your shield.”

“I was joking about that. She’s going to be happy to have visitors, so I’m betting on her forgetting to be mad at me for simply existing for at least the time we’re there. Also, no need to invest too much in physical defense. She weighs like a hundred and twenty, sopping wet.” He was trying to laugh it off, to steer the conversation away from hurtful truths.

August’s hand was now on his shoulder. “Not all abuse is physical, Rusty. Sometimes, a word spoken the wrong way, if it’s repeated often enough, if it aims to hurt, well, it’s going to reach its goal.”

“Yeah,” he said and took a deep breath, “yeah.”

“How are things with Matty?” August changed the subject, much to his relief.

“Great, just swell. We went to get ice cream the other day.”

“You took him out on a date. How nice. I’m happy to see that you’re growing up, Rusty.”

“It was an ice cream date.” Making those important clarifications was mandatory.

“Yes, a date, like I said.”

“Why are you insisting on this? It’s not like I said it wasn’t a date.” August could be a little annoying, needling like an old lady trying to get everything out of everybody for lack of anything better to do.

“I’m letting you discover it all by yourself. It’s going to be so funny when you finally see it. I just hope Matty’s in for the long haul with you because, Rusty, for real, you’re a ton of work. Fun and cool and exciting, but a ton of work.”

“He totally is. He agreed to remain friends after college.”

August snorted and got up to get herself a cup of coffee. She leaned against the counter and raised the cup as a salute. “Your Matty is a saint. That’s good. It means that he’ll teach you how to worship him properly.”

“That’s so kinky, August. I do worship his ass, though.”

“Yeah,” August said with an all-knowing grin, while placing her cup back on the counter, “totally what I meant.”

Chapter Forty-Five

The Lies We Tell

Rusty stole glances at his mom, who grimaced slightly with each bite she took. A lot of convincing had been employed just to make her sit at the table with them. When they arrived, he and August had found his mom in a worse state than he'd expected, and that irritated him. She had been the one to call him over, even encouraged him to bring a friend, and now she was like this. As much as he tried to tell himself that she wasn't responsible for her mood swings, and maybe those pills made her worse not better, just as she had told him, he couldn't control the rancor he sensed developing, hard as a rock inside him and growing at a frightening speed.

"You have a lovely house, Ms. Wilder," August tried her best to make conversation.

Yeah, lovely. The lawn was dryland, and it looked like his mom had chosen that precise moment of the year to do some cleaning, because there were old things thrown out in the back yard all over the place. At least she had taken some time to clean the living room and the kitchen. He should have been grateful for small mercies. And August, of course, tried to play the role of the pleasant guest, as much as she was able to do that under the circumstances.

"It's a pain to keep a house like this," Rusty's mom complained right away. "And this boy of mine has forgotten he has a home. He only comes to see me if I call and call to tell him to drop by once in a blue moon."

Definitely in a bad mood, Rusty mused and looked down at his plate. The quiche Jonathan had battled with him to take along seemed tasteless. Good thing he hadn't given in to the idea of bringing Matty home. His mom was on the warpath.

"College can be very demanding," August said, "especially since it's senior year. Rusty needs to focus on his studies."

"He should focus on family from time to time," his mom continued in the same vein. "And I know he doesn't care about studying and college. He's just doing it for his father. As if that will ever convince that wayward man to give a damn about his family."

August gave him a sympathetic look across the table. Yeah, she had been the better choice, after all. If Matty were here, what would he think of a scene like this? Matthew Han looked like someone who came from a family that would never make their son feel like this when bringing friends over. No, probably he came from a family with strong values and a great love for their only son. A universe away from how he had grown up. He crushed the napkin in his hand and then threw it on the table. "I'm done," he said and pushed the plate away. "I'll show August around town. We'll be back in a couple of hours." That was the minimum required to deal with the anger growing inside him like a nasty beast.

“But you two just got here,” his mom protested. The look in her eyes was regretful, but Rusty had learned a long time ago not to fall for that kind of act. If he gave in, she took, and took, without thinking twice.

“I’ll take care of the dishes, Ms. Wilder,” August offered and quickly got up. Probably, she couldn’t stand spending time in that awful woman’s company a moment longer.

“This town has nothing for you young people to see,” his mom mumbled but mostly to herself. “Just make sure to come back before dark. I go to sleep early. That’s what the doctor says I should do. He doesn’t care that I suffer from insomnia. So, no loud noises, all right?”

“Duly noted,” Rusty said and grabbed his own plate. He’d have to apologize to Jonathan for treating his quiche like that. It looked like even the best food in the world tasted like cardboard when served with a side of family drama.



“Well, do you regret coming along already?” he asked August, as soon as they were outside and could breathe freely. Even the air in that house felt oppressive. No wonder he had spent all his days either outside or at Maddox’s house since they’d moved here.

“No. I’m glad,” August replied.

“For real?” He put his hands in his pockets and began walking fast. “Don’t tell me this kind of thing makes your day or something.”

“No, but it was more than enough to convince me that you needed someone by your side on this trip back home.” August took his arm and wrapped hers around it. “Has she always been like this?”

Rusty took a deep breath. “I’m so pissed at her right now, which makes me want to say ‘yes’, but it’s not true. When I was little, she was different. She liked to laugh a lot. Actually, she was sort of extreme, I mean like really hardcore. We would play together until I couldn’t sit straight because my eyes were closing by themselves. Then, my dad came home and scolded us. Really, it was like she was the same age as me.”

“It sounds like she used to be fun. So, was it the divorce that, you know, messed her up?”

Rusty shrugged. “That sounds like a reasonable explanation, right? I mean, she always blamed my dad for everything, even the slightest of her mood swings. And she made me believe that, too.” He took a moment to think about it.

August nudged him lightly. “You’re not so sure anymore, right?”

“No.”

“Maybe you should ask your dad, too.”

He scoffed. “Yeah, like he’d tell me anything. I tried a few times, you know? I tried to understand why he left us.”

“And what did he tell you?”

“He gave me the spiel. He and mom hadn’t seen eye to eye in a long time, and discovered that they were very different people. It sounds like a bunch of bull to me. He must be guilty for it if he doesn’t want to say. And that kind of confirms what she’s kept telling me all the time, doesn’t it?”

August nodded thoughtfully. “You’ve had it rough, my friend.”

“Rusty Parker, when did you get here?”

The sudden exclamation made them both stop right in the middle of the street. Rusty’s face lit up as he saw Maddox’s mom right there, a bag full of groceries in her arms, just closing the trunk of her car, eyes smiling just as much as her mouth. At her age, she was still the prettiest girl in the whole neighborhood. Without looking standoffish, she had a way of carrying herself and dressing that always made her seem put together and on top of everything. With seven kids at home, plus Rusty, she had to be, or otherwise her soul would have ended up being theirs alone.

“Mrs. K, let me take those for you,” he said gallantly as he grabbed the bag. “This is my friend August,” he added.

“So happy to meet you, August,” Florence said and opened her arms.

August just threw him a small alarmed look but she returned the hug. As they pulled away, she realized. “You must be Maddox’s mom!”

“The one and only. Have you kids had anything to eat? I just got back from a farmer’s market miles away from here, but everything was a steal. If you come around in about three hours, I’ll have dinner ready.”

“Oh, we wouldn’t want to impose--” August started.

Florence turned toward Rusty. “Doesn’t she know you’re my eighth child? I can’t believe you haven’t told your friend about me, Rusty.” Her tone was playful, none of that guilt-trip his mom was an expert at dishing out like it was her prerogative. “And how is Matthew? Did you bring him along, as well? We all want to meet him.”

Rusty groaned. “Does Maddie ever keep anything from you?”

“Hopefully, only the things that don’t concern me,” Florence replied cheerfully. Then, as if she could read his mind, she added, “And it does concern me when it’s you getting involved with a pretty boy with smarts that only rival our Jonathan’s.”

Just how much was Maddox sharing with his mom? He was so going to kill his bestie once he got back to Sunny Hill. But it warmed his heart to hear Florence talk like that. “I didn’t bring him this time,” he admitted, and it was the first time since he got here that he regretted doing just that. Maybe he should have brought both Matty and August so that they could meet the famous mother Kingsley.

“Okay, we’ll come over,” Rusty said and snickered as Flo embraced him tightly, risking crushing all those organic veggies between them. “Let me just take these inside for you.”

August waited until they were both outside again. “Wow, Maddox’s mom is awesome, Rusty. And she’s seriously crazy about you.”

“She’s crazy about everybody.” That wasn’t exactly true, but Florence did more than her fair share of work when caring for all kinds of people. Such as his mom. Rusty felt his anger coming back and pushed it down.

“Aren’t we going to be out too late if we have dinner at her house?” August asked. “Your mom seemed quite annoyed with us.”

“Yeah, when isn’t she annoyed with something or someone?” He breathed in and out once and loudly. “We’re going to be careful not to wake her up.” He doubted she would even be asleep. There was always the possibility that she was itching for a fight, something he had dodged for quite a while. Despite Florence casting her little ray of sunshine over his visit there, the reality of his family burned darker.

That wasn’t something he ever wanted to let Matty see.



It was sort of strange to spend Saturday without seeing Rusty at all and, since he hadn’t texted, Matty had decided against being the first to do so. It was very clear that Rusty disliked visiting his mom profoundly and blamed it on boredom, but he was quite sure that there had to be something more to that dislike. Families could be complicated but, in all honesty, he didn’t know much about such things. His family was a rock, a steady reality that he was a bit afraid that he must have taken for granted on more than one occasion. His parents were best friends and had always been, and that must have helped them become the happy family they were. They could be strict, too, but that came with the territory. He had to smile at all those Asian dad memes. It wasn’t his dad always drilling into him that he had to learn and succeed all the time, but his mom of Irish and German descent. That also served as a recurring joke between him and his dad.

He hadn't spoken to them in a while. Great, now he felt a little guilty about it, too. He took out his phone without thinking twice as he sat on the bench in the quad that had been marked by him and Zoey as theirs. These days she was busy with cornering Dex from all sides, as she described it, which was why he was alone now.

His mom picked up on the second ring. "Matty," she exclaimed right away, "how are you? Is school fine?"

Of course, that would be her first question, so he rolled his eyes but did it with affection. "School's totally fine."

"Just fine?" she teased him.

"Absolutely great! Amazing! All these books make me want to get a tattoo with the most complicated math formula in existence."

His mom gasped for show. "Don't you dare get a tattoo, young man."

"Come on, mom, a small one," he begged.

She laughed. "How are things, Toots?"

"They're great. I'm studying just as hard as if you were blowing cold air down my neck."

"Cold air? I thought you once drew me as a dragon," his mom joked, although that one was true. "Besides studying. Have you met anyone? A cute boy, perhaps?"

With his parents being so strict and all, he had feared that coming out to them while still in high school would make them think differently of him, but his fears had proven completely unfounded. His dad had just nodded and hugged him, while asking him if anyone at school was giving him a hard time, while his mom had started a long list of all the positive traits her son's future partner should have. Rusty wouldn't make it through half of that list, Matty thought, and his heart grew small. But that was his mom's list; on his list, Rusty was not only at the top, his was the only name on it.

"A cute boy who studies hard, knows seven languages, plays the violin and is already a neurosurgeon at twenty-one? I think I saw one just the other day. He was saving the whales while teaching unfortunate children math at the same time."

His mom laughed wholeheartedly. "Say what you want, Matty, but it's important to have standards. I mean, look at you. You're a catch. You're smart, accomplished, ambitious, handsome. What more could anyone want in a partner?"

At least, his mom's list where it concerned him was shorter and more realistic. Matty didn't care to point out the stark difference between the two. "How are you and dad?"

“We’re great. But for a couple of oldies like us, days tend to be the same. You’re the one who should have news. And don’t think I didn’t notice how you dodged my question.”

He wanted to protest. Would it be so bad to let his mom know about Rusty, at least a little bit? He didn’t have to tell the whole truth. “Well, I sort of met someone,” he said quickly before he had a chance to change his mind. “He’s a student here, at Sunny Hill.”

“Well, well, well,” his mom said slyly, “your tone of voice tells me there are things about this boy you don’t want your mom to know. I understand, Matty, don’t you think I don’t. But I would very much like to remind you that both your dad and I were young once.”

“Oh, what a shock,” Matty said gamely. “I would’ve never imagined it if you hadn’t told me just now.”

“So, who is this young man? What’s his name?”

Matty licked his lips nervously. “Rusty. Rusty Parker. He’s a star of the basketball team.” *Used to be.*

His mom’s silence didn’t make him feel any less anxious. “He’s a jock,” she said matter-of-factly. “Not exactly what I imagined my future son-in-law would be.”

“Mom!” Matty protested. “He doesn’t even know he’s my boyfriend.” Now that just came out wrong. “I mean, we are just getting to know each other, and I like him very much.”

“I had no idea jocks would be…” she seemed to struggle to find the right words.

“Gay?” Matty supplied the word she was looking for right away.

“They tend to be macho types, yes,” his mom continued, unfazed, as if she hadn’t been hesitating just a moment ago. “And the kind who cares only about sports. How did you and he get to know each other? Is he new at the school?”

It was a very good thing that he hadn’t told his mom anything about his crush on Rusty over the years. This conversation was difficult enough as it was. “No, but we just haven’t crossed paths until this year.” At least, that was true. The source of his anxiety regarding this talk with his mom was complex. Was he afraid to disappoint her with his choice? What a joke. Of course, he was. All his life he had only aimed to make her proud of him. However, this matter of the heart, so to speak, was a lot more complicated than the good grades and academic achievements he had brought home over the years. It was, first of all, completely different. And then, there was the thing about his relationship with Rusty, of not having a definition, one clear-cut and obvious, as to what it was.

“You’re awfully silent, Matty. What is it about this young man, - Rusty, right? - that you don’t like?”

“I like everything about him,” Matty replied. And he did. He had crushed on him for so long, but once he had gotten to know him, he had fallen in love for real. His heart felt suddenly so full that he couldn’t keep in a sigh.

His mom laughed. “So, he must be dreamy if he makes you sigh like that.”

“Well, he is,” Matty said. “He’s very handsome.”

“And what else?” his mom continued to prod him.

“He’s very bright and talented.”

“Talented in regards to how he manages to throw a ball through a hoop?”

“Come on, mom, you taught me not to be judgmental.”

“Sorry, sorry, just trying to get a feel for his character here,” his mom replied quickly. “Don’t blame me for being curious. You’ve never mentioned a boy before.”

“He has more, like, hidden talents,” he continued.

“Hidden? Why does he need to hide them?”

“It’s complicated,” Matty said quickly. The more this conversation progressed, the more he realized that it had been a mistake to start it. Rusty wasn’t at all like the man his mom pictured while building her long list of attributes for her future son-in-law.

“You’re not getting too involved in someone else’s drama, are you, Matty?”

Of course, she would ask that. She was very protective, and he got it, and she wanted him to have a life that was all smooth sailing, but things weren’t always like that. Even now, whatever drama Rusty had to deal with while visiting his mom, he had wanted to be a part of it. Too bad Rusty hadn’t accepted his offer to come along. How could he really explain Rusty and everything that made him so amazing in his eyes, when the other person hadn’t met him?

“I’m not,” he said. “He’s worth it, though, and it’s not drama. It’s just that he’s on a path to discover who he truly is.” He hoped that was the case. But Rusty didn’t do things by half. If he wore a mask and a cape to roam the campus at night and sing arias from popular operas, it was because that had to be something he believed in. It was, however, only guesswork on his part; one of these days, he’d have to ask Rusty. He needed to put on his big boy pants and learn what truly made the guy he was in love with tick.

“All right. But you sound like you’re not convinced, Matty. And what’s your relationship with him? You said that you’re not yet boyfriends.”

“Yeah.” He didn’t even recognize his voice in that whisper. Was his affection that poorly woven that the lightest breeze was enough to make it come undone? The sudden scrutiny, to which he was subjecting himself of his own accord, made him see things in a different light. He had been a coward, he realized, and got a little mad at himself.

“But you want him to be that for you, don’t you?” his mom asked, oblivious to all the conflicting emotions he was experiencing at the moment. “Then you know what to do. You go at it with everything that has made you a success in life so far. I know you have it in you.”

“Really? I have your blessing?” He couldn’t believe his ears. This was his mom, the mom with the list, the mom whom he had drawn as a dragon when he was little and overwhelmed by her desire for him to succeed in his studies, and the mom who would never, never allow anyone to hurt him.

Matty had a hunch that even if hurting was involved, he’d be down with it, as long as it was Rusty doing the hurting.

“As long as you don’t neglect your studies. It’s senior year, Matty. You must give it your all. Speaking of which, how is that Jonathan Hamilton doing? Is he showing any signs of slowing down?”

“Unfortunately not, mom,” Matty said, relieved to steer the conversation away from Rusty for the time being. “He’s truly gifted.”

“So are you,” his mom shot back. “I wonder if it’s because he comes from a wealthy family that he’s seen with different eyes by the faculty.”

“It’s not like that,” he explained. “Jonathan is really hardworking and intelligent. And he explicitly forbid his parents to make donations to the school so that no one thinks he’s buying his way through.” His mom didn’t have to know all the details about how Jonathan had supported himself through half of junior year.

“And how do you know that? Have you talked to him?”

“We’re friends, actually.”

“Really? That is one important piece of news, Matty. Now, no matter how friendly you two are, make sure that you steal his methods of getting such impressive grades on his exams.”

“I’m not turning to a life of crime for your sake, mom,” Matty joked. “Jonathan is simply a scholar at heart.” Also, an impressive cook. “I’m a practical person. I study to achieve something beyond my studies.” That was the kind of thing his mom liked to hear, and he didn’t want to keep her hanging.

“Well, keep me posted on how things work out with your crush,” his mom said cheerfully.

“Crush? It’s not a crush,” Matty argued.

“It sounds like it is to me.”

Minutes after his conversation with his mom ended, Matty was still turning her words over in his mind and examining them from all sides. It was only natural that Rusty didn’t think he was serious; he had never said anything to that effect. What was the worst that could happen? For starters, Rusty might never want to have anything to do with him ever again. But if that were the case, wasn’t he only postponing the inevitable? They had been tutor and pupil, fuck buddies, friends, and what else was necessary before they ended up having that talk?

It wasn’t like he felt insanely brave, and that was what he needed to be if he wanted Rusty’s heart for real. His mom had talked about Rusty being only a crush to him, because he still acted as if they were at the beginning of their relationship.

How was he going to have the guts to tell him how he felt? Truly felt?

“Hey, college boy.”

Matty shook his head and stared up at Jamie. They were so close he could tell that if he moved his feet only a smidge he’d end up stepping on the other’s toes. That also forced him to tip his head back to look at the intruder on his thoughts.

Jamie grinned, his tattooed arms crossed over his chest, the entire bad boy thing really working for him, and, for a moment, Matty forgot that he was supposed to say something.

Jamie leaned forward, bringing their faces close and making Matty lean back even further. “Cat got your tongue, pretty thing?”

Just as he was about to reply, Matty lost his balance and was about to fall on his back in the most comical way possible when Jamie caught him and helped steady him. “I’ve been told I make guys fall head over heels with me, but I never took it literally.”

“Thanks,” Matty said dryly, “you can release me now.”

“And risk letting you fall? No, that won’t happen.” Jamie laughed and pulled Matty forward and then up to stand face to face. “What I really want to know is why that owner of yours is letting you roam free.”

It was difficult to keep a serious train of thought with Jamie crowding his space like that. Matty liked to believe that he wasn’t that big a sucker for a pretty face, but it looked like he wasn’t as impervious to manly charms as he thought himself to be. “What owner?” He sidestepped and managed to put some distance between himself and the other.

Jamie followed him casually, his strut as confident as the rest of him. “Consider it friendly curiosity, but how on earth did you tame that beast, Matty?”

“I’m glad to see you know my name,” Matty continued. And then, completely sure of himself and even proud, “I have no idea who you’re talking about.”

Jamie laughed and seemed to not take the hint that Matty didn’t want company. “I see. You’re playing hard to get. And that would be really exciting if Rusty were into dudes to begin with. So, you see my dilemma? How did you made him fall for your sexy ass?”

“The last time I saw him, he was doing just fine, still walking on his own two feet. No sign of falling,” Matty hurried to assure him.

“Not by what I saw,” Jamie replied.

Matty was torn. On the one hand, he wanted to learn more about Rusty from Jamie. On the other, he was pretty sure that it wasn’t healthy for him to spend too much time in that bad boy’s company. “Where are you going?”

“Right now? Wherever you are, sweetie.”

Matty rolled his eyes. “I’m going to study in my room. Are you sure you still want to follow me?”

“Why not? I could rub your feet while you read your boring books. I could suck on your toes, too. I bet they’re just as pretty as the rest of you.”

“Oh gawd,” Matty groaned, “you’re one of those guys into feet. That’s like the most boring kink in existence.” He had no strong opinion about it, actually, but he wanted, no, he needed to show Jamie that he wasn’t interested.

“I’m just pulling your leg.” Jamie laughed. “See what I did there? Foot, leg.”

“You’re a total riot, what can I say. Now, what do I have to do to get rid of you?”

“Finally, a reasonable question. All I want is for you to join me for a cup of joe and chill.”

“I don’t drink coffee.”

“I do. You can have anything you like.” Jamie took him casually by the shoulders, and Matty didn’t shake him off. It looked like playing along would bring him benefits, since now he was really curious what the guy’s play was. Something told him that all that flirting was a smokescreen. “Me included,” a whisper brushed by his ear.

Okay, so maybe the guy was laying it on a bit too thick. But Matty was still curious.



“Okay, what is it that you want to know?” Matty asked.

Jamie stared at him intently. “What’s the deal with you and Rusty?”

“What’s it to you?” Matty asked in the same manner and sipped his soda, his eyes never leaving the handsome guy sitting across from him.

“You see, as much as it might surprise you, that mofo is my friend. So, it hurts me that he didn’t let me know he got himself a boyfriend.”

“Come on, dude, there’s only so much eye rolling I can do in one day without straining something.” Matty felt embarrassed as he remembered how Jamie had witnessed their public kiss that time. He had been mad at Rusty and didn’t recall much of how Jamie had actually reacted. Now, he was trying to smooth things over by playing it cool.

“You guys are fucking,” Jamie said matter-of-factly.

“So?” Matty held his chin high, praying inwardly that no one was actually close enough to their table to hear what they were talking about.

Jamie threw him an incredulous look. “That’s all you have to say? That mofo changes the girls he’s banging faster than socks.”

“He’s not a big fan of socks, it seems,” Matty replied.

Jamie’s face froze in a gasp and then he grinned again. “I’ll be damned.” He shook his head. “Not a big fan of socks, indeed. He’s into ass. Your ass.” He pointed at Matty with a satisfied look in his eyes.

“Well, it’s none of your business, right?”

Jamie sighed. “I’ve known Rusty for a while. He’s tough, but, you know, I’ve never seen him being real about someone.”

“What are you trying to tell me here?” Matty asked and took another cautious sip of his beverage. “That I should... what?”

“Convince him to be real about you,” Jamie said with a shrug. “He needs that kind of thing.”

“I had no idea you were close enough friends that you cared,” Matty pointed out.

Jamie opened his arms, making sure to flex those guns in the process. “Call me a hopeless romantic at heart. I see the two of you, and I get interested.”

“I am so not buying one word you’re saying.”

Jamie laughed but he didn’t seem to be hiding anything behind that laughter. “Do what you must, Matty. Just to be clear. If Rusty gives you the boot, don’t hide in a corner, crying your heart out. Come to me. I’m good at comforting people.” He pointed both hands at his chest. “Some people might even call me an expert.”

“I don’t doubt it for a moment,” Matty said. “Still, why the interest in what Rusty does?”

Jamie leaned over the table. “I owe the guy. And he never asked for anything in return until that night when he wanted me to show you a good time. That was a shocker. Especially since he changed the deal so I was left high and dry.”

“You didn’t seem that keen on him that time. You got pretty pissed.”

Jamie hunched his shoulders and let them drop. “Eh, you were so pretty and I got worked up.”

“Why are you here?” Matty asked. It wasn’t the first time Jamie had been on campus. “I mean here, at Sunny Hill, on a Saturday.”

“Why not? Hunting grounds,” Jamie replied. “And also on a little mission.”

“To tell me... what? That you want to offer your comforting services?”

“That, and to let you know that Rusty is worth the trouble, the mofo.”

Matty blinked. Jamie wasn’t the first person to tell him that. He sipped from his drink again. The odds were going up. He needed to make his move soon.

Chapter Forty-Six

The Falling

“You know,” August said as they walked back to his house after having dinner with Maddox’s parents and a few of his siblings, “I had no idea you’ve kept so much from me. Your childhood was a hoot.”

“Ah, well, some things I’d like to forget myself,” Rusty replied. “The problem is Maddox’s mom will never let me do that. She’s like an encyclopedia of all the stupid stuff her kids have ever done in their lives. My honest suspicion is that she wants to use that against us whenever we get too cocky. Keeps us in check and all.”

“She does treat you like you’re one of her own.” August nudged him in the shoulder gently. “You made me think back then that you only had it rough in your life.”

Rusty laughed it off. “Maybe I wanted you, this badass older chick, to have pity on me.”

“Yeah, totally a winning strategy. That makes me glad, though, because it means that you still grew up happy.”

That was true. Even with all the misery seeping into every corner of the house he was living in with his mom, he had had his fair share of happiness, and it was due to the Kingsley family, especially the mom. And Maddox, of course. “Maybe that’s the reason I’m not totally fucked up now.” He’d meant it as a joke, but August wrapped her arm around his and squeezed it in sympathy.

“It’s pretty late. Let’s make sure that we don’t wake your mom up.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. He hoped she was asleep already so that he would be spared another unjust conversation that would only allow her to make him into the bad guy again.

The house was quiet, which was a good sign, but Rusty had learned that believing in good signs was not that much of a strategy when it came to his mom. For all he knew, she could be waiting in the darkness, to show him how miserable she was while he was out, having fun. They had been drifting apart, year after year, ever since high school started, and Rusty had begun to feel stronger, with the help of his friends, someone who didn’t need his mom to put food on the table or get him nice things or have a good word for him. At least, the part about things had been covered by Roy. Whenever he came to visit, he’d make sure that Rusty got an entire new closet full of clothes, a phone, the latest gimmick, or some shiny new toy. At the time, Rusty had accepted everything with increasing anger, hoping that his dad would notice that he couldn’t buy his son’s approval just by getting him stuff. After all, those visits were few and far between.

His dad had also given him his college tuition. The way he'd done it, like Rusty had to make something out of it, not just receive it, had once more filled him with resentment. But all his friends were going, and he wanted to go, too, as a deep fear of being left behind had started to grow inside him. For that, at least, he had Roy to thank.

They walked in and made their way through the dark house without turning on the lights, August holding on to his arm and following him up the stairs. Once they got there, he opened the door to the guestroom only to find it, to his horror, turned into a storage room full of old crates and packages that had to date back to the previous century.

“Oh,” August said. “She must have thought we were going to sleep in the same bed.”

“Yeah,” Rusty admitted. “No problem. I’ll give you my bedroom, and I’ll take the sofa downstairs.”

“I could sleep on the sofa,” August offered. “I’m smaller.”

Rusty pursed his lips. He hadn't told his mom anything about him and August being together, but it looked like she just assumed that. As caught up as he had been in what a drag this visit was, he hadn't taken a moment to realize that she would think they were a couple. If Matty had been with him instead of August, such a thing wouldn't have bothered him at all. Although his mom, on many occasions, had blamed him for his womanizing, never forgetting to add that he must be taking after his dad. That was untrue. Roy might have started his relationship with his new wife when things were shaky but not yet destroyed at home – this home – but Rusty didn't believe he was the kind to chase skirts. His dad was way too sour and rigid to pursue anything remotely adventurous in his life. That had been all himself, his own thing, regardless of what his mom had to say about it.

“No, you're my guest, even if my mom didn't stop to think that we might need the guestroom. And trust me, I've landed on that sofa many a time,” he joked. “You know, when I was too wrecked to walk up the stairs.”

“Okay, since it's an old friend of yours, I won't come between the two of you,” August joked as she pulled him out of the dusty room.

Rusty nodded and took another look around. His mom and this habit of amassing piles of useless things were starting to worry him. But how was he going to begin a proper conversation with her, when everything he said was bound to strike a nerve?



He couldn't sleep, not because he had outgrown that sofa without even realizing it, but because his head was full of thoughts. One thing he had to do was to see about that doctor his mom was seeing now. Without having one iota of an idea about what the doctor could share with him, he

was responsible for her and needed to make sure that she got the help she needed. In the past, all his offers of playing an active part in her treatment had been met with hostility. His mom had made sure he understood he was in no position to do anything. Useless. Just like his dad. But things like turning parts of the house into a huge storage unit and destroying the backyard had to be symptoms of something more than the usual. These things worried him more than a little.

The creak of the stairs made him turn his head. His mom was there, peering down at him.

“Can’t sleep, mom?” he asked.

“What are you doing on the sofa? Where’s August?” she began without answering his question.

“She’s sleeping in my bedroom. What’s with you being up so late?”

“Did you two have a fight?” His mom’s voice became increasingly louder.

“No, why would you even think that?” Rusty got up and turned on the light. The fight, that horrible conversation, was coming whether he liked it or not. “We’re not together.”

His mom took one step after another, so deliberately that Rusty couldn’t help notice. “You should go back to bed,” he said, trying to sound as placating as possible.

“You don’t get to tell me what to do. And those damn pills, they don’t help me sleep at all.”

He moved slowly, ready to steady her in case she lost her balance, but without making her feel wary of his actions. If there was one thing that got on his mom’s nerves, it had to be the help others were offering her. She was so ready to suspect them of wanting something in return. As if she had anything to give, he thought as a dark snake coiled in his gut.

He let out a small sigh of relief once she was on level ground. “Do you want me to talk to your doctor, see if there’s something she can do to make you feel better?”

The small grunt coming from his mom convinced him that he was barking up the wrong tree. Nonetheless, he didn’t want to give up. When his dad upped and left, he had remained the one in charge. No matter how reluctant he had been to realize that he was responsible for his mom, it was his duty to look after her. Especially now that she was starting to seem so out of it.

“Don’t you think I’ve talked to her already?” His mom crossed her arms and began walking slowly around the room. She was unhappy, and someone had to pay for it. “I’m not a child, you know?”

“I know,” Rusty said in defeat and dropped back down on the sofa. If he hadn’t been able to sleep so far, his mom would surely wear him down enough to make him regret the lost hours of shuteye. “What’s up? What’s happening? Why is there so much junk everywhere?”

“Oh, he cares now.” His mom shook her head and looked out the window, although there was nothing that could be seen out there.

“Don’t say things like that,” Rusty reproached her. “Whatever it is, just tell me about it. I want to help you.”

“You could help by not being like your dad.”

Right. The shitstorm was coming. “And what do you mean by that?”

His mom turned on her heel to shoot an accusing look at him. “What’s with this girl? Why do you say you and she aren’t together? Don’t you see you’re hurting her?”

“August is not my girlfriend, mom. She’s just a friend.”

“Ha! Only gay men have female friends. You don’t fool me. You’re just leading her on, the same way your dad did with me.”

Rusty felt a muscle twitching in his jaw and tried to ignore it. He so didn’t want to fight. And what was that weird thing she’d said, about only gay guys having female friends? “Trust me, mom. August is just a friend,” he repeated, hoping that his message would get through to her.

“You slept with her,” his mom continued.

“Yeah, I did, but it was a long time ago,” Rusty said, feeling a new type of tiredness seeping into his bones. “Now we’re friends.” He got up again. A weird annoying energy was making all his muscles tremble. He needed to get it out somehow.

“You will never settle down. You will probably find some woman willing to put up with your philandering, but that isn’t settling down.”

“If this is, again, about you and dad, I really don’t want to hear it. Go back to sleep, mom. If you don’t need my help, if you’re so sure of that, I guess there’s nothing left for me to tell you. Or do for you.”

His mom’s laughter was humorless and dark. It sent a shiver down his spine, and he tried to chase it off. “You give up so easily. You are your father’s son.”

“Yeah, I am. Unless you were the one who had an affair and had me with someone else, he’s my dad, and I’m his son.” He meant it only as a way of pointing out the obvious and showing her that he wasn’t going to take offense over something like that.

However, it seemed like the wrong thing to have said. “You won’t speak to me like that under my own roof!”

“Mom, really, stop shouting. You’re going to wake August up.”

“So what? She should wake up and see you for who you really are so she won’t make the same mistakes as I did. Believing a man, his sweet words, sacrificing my whole life for him--”

“Oh, mom, just spare me already.”

They were both taken by surprise at his outburst. His mom, because she had never heard him talk back so openly, not on the topic of his dad – that was the topic that no one in that house touched, save for her. And he was surprised as well, because he hadn’t realized that the cup was full.

“How dare you?” his mom hissed at him. “He left you here. He left me alone to take care of you, and this is your gratitude?”

Rusty closed his eyes for a moment. He needed to stop this, he needed to make it so that it didn’t get out of hand.

“It must be his doing. What does he tell you? That I was to blame, right?”

“No.” If he only used one-word replies, he could still save the situation.

“I know he does. You’re siding with him,” she said, her voice more sour by the moment. “Men,” she spat as if that word was poison.

That was it. He was done with her complaining and accusing. “Stop comparing me to him,” Rusty said through his teeth. “I stayed here when he left.”

She got herself in his face. Her eyes were wild. She seemed so small and frail now, a shadow of the woman she used to be. “You stayed only for as long as you didn’t have a choice. Even as a child, you ran to your friend’s house. Ready to act like a good kid in front of strangers. Always a woman better than me outside the house.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Rusty felt his throat squeezing itself tight. “The fact that Maddox’s mom had a plate of food for me when you didn’t care to--”

The slap broke the string of words rushing out of his mouth. It stung, but that wasn’t the most hurtful thing about it. Rusty took one step back and then another. Hopefully, he could put as much distance as possible between them. “I have no idea why you wanted me here this weekend. Don’t worry. You’ll see a lot less of me from now on.”

For a moment, the threat seemed to reach her. But she was too proud a woman to accept that she had gone too far. “Fine. What good are you to me, anyway?” She set her chin up and began walking up the stairs. She stopped mid-way. “You know what? Why don’t you leave right now? Go already!”

“You want me to go? All right, fine, I’ll go.” He began dressing up with brusque movements. Then he grabbed his jacket and headed for the door. “Just make sure you don’t make August feel bad tomorrow morning when she wakes up.”

“Rusty!”

The voice was suddenly full of anguish. But he couldn’t care. Everything, all she had for him, was hurt. And he didn’t want to be part of it anymore.

He grabbed the door handle, ravenous to breathe air that wasn’t here, in this house.

“Rusty, come back!”

He pulled the door wide open. And took a step out, not one more.

The thud and crash, along with a cry, made his blood freeze in his veins. He turned, his entire body rigid, unwilling to listen to him. His eyes grew wide, and his feet moved by themselves.

“What happened?”

August’s urgent question reached him through the flood of blood in his ears. He ran to his mom, knelt by her side. “Mom, mom!” His voice seemed just as far away, coming from the water ceiling closing over his head.

“Oh, god, I’m calling 911!”



The ambulance lights were hard to see. He remained in the middle of the road, watching them fade. August reached for him, wrapped her hand around his gently. “Come, Rusty, let’s go. I’m driving.”

He just nodded and blinked. His chest was so tight he couldn’t breathe.

“They say she’s breathing even though she’s still unconscious,” August continued. “That’s a good sign.” She guided him slowly toward the car. “Maddox’s mom is going to be there, too. But I think... you should call your dad.”

He nodded again. Everything and everyone around him had moved in slow motion for the past... how long had it been? Half an hour? More? Less?

August had to put him in the seat and then climbed behind the wheel. “Rusty,” she called, this time more firmly. “It wasn’t your fault.”

He closed his fists, pressing them against his knees and looked down.

“I heard the two of you fighting. I was even there for a bit. She was so mean--”

“Don’t. August, don’t.”

“All right, I won’t. But it was an accident. She took a wrong step. And there’s also the matter of all the medication she’s been taking.”

“Just don’t say another word, August.”

The warmth of her hand covering his fist made his skin crawl. Not because of her or her good intentions, but because of him. And his lack of them.



“Have you called your dad?”

He couldn’t brush off Maddox’s mom like he could August. “Not yet.”

They were sitting in the waiting area, he, August, and Florence. He refused the cup of coffee he had been offered. He was as wide awake as he could be. People in hospital scrubs came and went around them, but so far there had been no news.

“He needs to know,” Florence pointed out in her usually gentle yet firm manner. “There may be extra costs involved, depending on her evaluation.”

He nodded like an automaton. That was the one thing he could do, agree with what others kept telling him. “I’ll call him in the morning,” he said in a dry raspy voice. “No need to wake him up in the middle of the night.”

Wasn’t his mom his responsibility? Especially now that he had let his anger get the better of him and that had pushed her over the edge? August kept saying that it had been nothing but an accident, but was that the truth? That wrong step, that medication-fogged mind... he didn’t dare think beyond them. The simplest thing he should have done... was not getting mad at her.

He had been pretty happy lately. He was singing. He had Matty. And, somewhere, in the middle of all of that, he had forgotten about her and how unhappy she was. For her sake, he shouldn’t have behaved like that. Weren’t they bound by the same misery? How could he forget about that so easily?

Florence touched his shoulder. “Don’t you go and get mad at yourself, Rusty.”

“That’s an impossible thing to ask, Mrs. K,” he mumbled. “We got into a fight. I should have just let her win. Because, if I had done that, now she’d be at home in bed.” And not here, in the hospital, still unconscious while the doctors were trying to get her to wake up.

Florence sighed. “Your mom’s not the easiest person to live with. You, of all people, should know that. And if you start blaming yourself for this, I’m going to be mad at you. I really mean it.”

He knew she meant it. Of course, he did. But not even Florence’s words could reach him in the place where he was now. Between wanting to curl into himself and squeezing until it hurt all over and letting go, preferably by breaking something, a door, a chair, a punch through a damn wall, he stayed like that, caught in between.

“How is she, doc?” August’s voice let him know that someone in charge had walked in.

“I’m afraid that she’s in a coma for the moment. We will keep her under supervision, so I advise that you go home and get some sleep. If there’s any news, you’ll be contacted.”

Coma. The word opened a pit in his stomach. “How long is she going to be like this?” he asked but without looking up at the doctor.

“We cannot know. We will have to run tests and see how her brain was affected by the fall. She could wake up tomorrow. But I cannot tell you anything for sure. Not at the moment.”

Rusty nodded, his ears ringing. She had been fine by herself, right? All this time, living alone, and when he visited after so much time had passed, this happened. Florence could tell him not to blame himself for as long as she wanted. He couldn’t see himself getting out of this, not so easily.

“Come on,” August said and took his hand. “You need to sleep a little, Rusty.”

He followed her and Florence out of the hospital. He doubted he’d be able to close his eyes, let alone sleep.



Matty checked his phone again and sighed. He knew that Rusty would be back today from his visit to his mom, but it dumbfounded him that there was no message from him, not even a small playful one.

Well, he wasn’t supposed to just sit around and wait for that to happen. No one said that he couldn’t send a message if he wanted to get in touch. And Rusty could reply whenever he felt like it. Who knew? Maybe he needed a distraction.

Hey, what’s up? I was wondering. Can I drop by tonight?

He checked the message a few times to make sure that he didn’t sound too desperate. Was it casual enough? Butterflies began battling like crazy in his belly as he played in his mind how he would tell Rusty the truth. The whole of it. They had been dancing around each other long

enough... if such feelings were mutual, Rusty should know by now, right? Also, there were all those little proofs of how much Rusty cared about him. He couldn't dismiss them, right?

He sent the message without looking at it again.

There was still plenty of time until the year ended, his deadline for confessing his true feelings. But he didn't want to waste any more time. A part of him kept telling himself that he'd end up just pushing Rusty away, but was that the realistic and most likely outcome? Matty knew himself to be a practical person, a realist – well, he was allowed to have a crush for so much time as the exception that confirmed the rule, right? – which meant that all his calculations were correct. Maybe Rusty would need a bit of time to process a confession from his baby dude, but he'd see it for what it was.

Right?

Ugh, he wanted to see clearly, to use his head like always, but was that even possible when he only thought of what it would feel like to have Rusty stare at him with eyes full of affection and say the words back?

He had it bad. He rubbed his eyes, ran his hands through his hair, pulled at it for good measure, and checked his phone. Unread. Well, it was still early in the day, and maybe Rusty didn't check his phone every five minutes like a maniac. Like him.

He needed to be patient. The choice was made, and he would say the words he meant. What followed after... he would just have to wait and see.

If only it weren't so nerve-wracking to wait.



Several hours later, his message was still unread. That wasn't like Rusty, right? Matty liked to think that he had known the rebellious king of Sunny Hill long enough to know a few things about his habits of reading his messages. It was too late for him to be still sleeping in. What could he be doing?

Ah, but of course, there had to be a good explanation for it. Rusty must have forgotten his phone in his room. That would explain everything. Matty wanted to face-palm himself. It was only because he was staging his confession in his mind that he was getting so uselessly riled up over the tiniest thing. And no one said that he had to confess today. He could do it on any other day... until the last day of senior year.

No, no, if he continued to postpone things like he had been, he would never get them done. Wasn't that the only remedy for procrastination or something like that? Get to work. Do the thing. Confess already.

Matty was walking through the quad, his eyes on the pavement in front of him, while he battled himself for acting like a rational human being.

“Hey, Matty,” someone interrupted his train of thought, something he needed to be thankful for because he was spinning in circles so fast he was bound to get dizzy.

He raised his eyes to see Maddox and Jonathan. Their somber faces made his stomach drop. “Hi guys, um, why the long faces?” he asked and smiled tentatively, trying to push away any irrational thoughts.

“Have you talked to Rusty yet?” Maddox asked, his face all a deep frown. “He’s not answering our calls.”

“No. Why? I mean, I did send him a message... Wait, maybe he just left his phone in his room. Have you checked?” He smiled, trying to evade the unpleasant sensation growing in his chest.

Maddox threw him an odd look. Jonathan intervened. “Matty doesn’t know, obviously.”

“What?” Damn you, heart, slow down. “What don’t I know?”

Jonathan was the one to reply. “Rusty’s mom had an accident last night. Maddox’s mom called this morning to tell us, but we haven’t heard from Rusty yet. And his phone isn’t in his room. He has it with him. We thought that maybe he had talked to you, since you’re the closest to him.”

The closest to him. Such words would have sounded so good under other circumstances. “An accident? What kind of accident?”

Maddox ran a hand over his face. “She fell down the stairs. My mom says that she’s in a coma now.”

“That’s awful.” Matty pressed a hand against his chest. He hated the feeling of relief that washed through him. Rusty was all right. He just wasn’t answering his phone. “But if the accident took place last night, that means Rusty couldn’t have gotten very much sleep. He’s probably resting right now.”

Jonathan offered him a kind smile. “You could be right, of course.”

Maddox, however, didn’t seem convinced. “I’m going to talk to my mom again, see if she went by his place.”

Matty waited while Maddox placed the call.

“Hi, mom. Have you gone by Rusty’s today? You have. All right. Well, he’s not answering his phone, although we’ve all tried. What? Try her? But I don’t have her number. Yeah, pass it on.”

Her. Probably a female relative living in the same... house? He shook his head, to avoid letting it be assaulted by strange thoughts.

Maddox finished his conversation with his mom. "She says to try August, because she's with him."

"What?" Matty hated the way the word came out of his mouth. He hated it but he couldn't take it back now.

"August is with Rusty?" Jonathan expressed his surprise in a more articulate manner.

Maddox shrugged. "She must have tagged along. Which is a good thing, I guess, since that means Rusty's not by himself."

He wasn't by himself. He was with August, whom he had preferred to take with him on his trip back home. Matty shook his head to stop the swarm of nasty thoughts. Now wasn't the time to get stupidly jealous. Rusty had to be an emotional mess because of his mom's accident, and he was acting like a selfish idiot.

"Let's try her," Maddox said and put his phone to his ear.

Matty waited, although he couldn't help feeling like an intruder now, an outsider who just happened to be around while an unfortunate family event happened to someone he knew.

"Hey, August, it's Maddox. My mom gave me your number, I hope that's okay. What's going on with Rusty? We've all been trying to call him since we heard." Maddox's frown only deepened. "Yeah, he can be as stubborn as a mule. You're not telling me anything new, trust me." He sighed. "Yeah, okay. So you guys are coming back tonight? Or is he going to stay there for a while? Ah, okay. No, of course there's no issue. Bye and thanks for everything. Yeah, I know. We're counting on you then."

"Well?" Jonathan asked.

Maddox closed his eyes and ran a hand over his face. "What can I tell you? He's a mess, of course. August has yet to convince him to have something to eat."

"When are they coming back?" Good thing Jonathan was there to ask all the questions lodged in Matty's throat.

"The day after tomorrow. My mom is going to take care of him, along with August. You know, the only thing he opened his mouth for was to make August ask me if it's okay to get the car back after a couple of more days. Sometimes, I can't believe that guy." Maddox shook his head, and he looked so sad that Matty wished he knew what to do to comfort him.

Again, Jonathan was there to do all the right things. He took his boyfriend by the shoulders. “He’s Rusty. He’s stubborn. But he’s going to come back, and we’re going to convince the hell out of him that he’s not alone in this.”

“Right, of course. Matty, would you like to have August’s number?” Maddox asked. “Maybe through combining your powers you can get Rusty to talk.”

He shook his head. “No, I guess he wants to be left alone at the moment. But can I ask you something? Could you let me know when he’s back? I’d rather comfort him in person than over the phone.”

“Of course,” Maddox assured him with a friendly smile. “It’s too bad that he’s there and we’re here. There’s little we can do right now. But we’re going to assemble the forces once he’s back.” He put a warm hand on Matty’s shoulder. “You’ll hear from us the moment he steps foot in the house. He’ll want to see you, for sure.”

Matty nodded. He would have liked to believe those words, but that worm moving in and out of his heart like it was going through a rotten apple had other things in mind.

Chapter Forty-Seven

That Guy

The door to his bedroom opened. It had to be August again, coming to check on him. For another hour, he could pretend he was still asleep. As much as he insisted on remaining on the sofa downstairs, August had insisted back that he needed to rest and being here inside his old room gave him at least a semblance of safety.

The bed dipped by his side and a hand landed on his shoulder. It wasn't August, so he forced himself to shake off the fragmented slumber he had battled with for the last several hours since coming back home from the hospital.

"Dad," he said and hid his face in the crook of his elbow.

His parent's rough and warm hand moved to the back of his neck and squeezed gently. "I came as soon as I could. I dropped by the hospital first. Your neighbor, Mrs. Kingsley, told me where to go."

In the end, it had been Florence who called his dad, as his stubbornness about contacting Roy had only increased over the painful hours of waiting.

"Any change?" he asked without removing his head from the illusory shelter of his arms.

"No, not yet. But I've talked to the doctors treating her. It seems she must have been taking medication by the handful. She will need proper supervision. Even after she wakes up from her coma. She's a danger to herself, and she needs to be institutionalized."

"That will cost a lot. That means I--"

"That means I will take care of everything," Roy interrupted him. "Rusty, there's no job you can get that would enable you to cover such expenses."

Of course, he wasn't even good enough to care for his mom. He knew that. But that didn't mean it diminished the revolt he felt growing inside him.

"You see about your school, your friends," his dad continued. "This isn't for you to bear, do you understand?"

Roy began caressing his head. Rusty wanted to howl and cry at the same time. Was a family drama of such proportions really necessary for his dad to show him a bit of understanding?

"I fought with her," he said, speaking with his face hidden from view. "I should have just... let her have the last word and all. It was the least I could do. And are you sure your present wife is

okay with you paying for the care of your ex-wife?" His words were so bitter he couldn't hold them in.

Roy sighed and shifted his position. The presence of his dad made him feel oddly calm, as if he hadn't endured such a storm of emotions until he had walked into the room.

"You never call her by her name."

"Why should I?" Rusty hated that he was being unfair toward a stranger – which Roy's current wife had always remained to him – but he felt better talking.

"Of course."

"That's all you have to say? Aren't you going to put me in my place?"

"Under these conditions? No, Rusty. Anger is not going to help you, either."

"Anger? Do you think I'm angry?" The way he raised his voice only made it obvious that he was overwhelmed by blind fury. "I shouldn't have talked to her like that, I shouldn't have let her think that I'm just like you, I--"

"Rusty." His dad didn't say his name louder than usual, but there was a firmness in it that made him stop. "Don't feel guilty."

He straightened up and looked at his dad. "I was responsible for her, wasn't I? How can you tell me not to feel guilty?"

"Just listen to me for a moment." Roy met his eyes, and it was maybe the first time Rusty realized that his dad was growing old. His hair was thinning, and there were more wrinkles on his face than ever before. That simple understanding landed like a rock in his stomach. He felt like crying again, but tears had never been the right choice when dealing with Roy Parker. No matter the circumstances.

"You're not responsible for your mother," his dad continued. "The only one who should pay for it all, and I'm certainly not exclusively talking about money here, is me."

"Are you saying that you should have never left her?" *And me?*

Roy shook his head. "When we're young, we think we know everything. Your mom and I, we kept on refusing to see that we weren't good for each other. We were so different. That's why we didn't work out."

"You two must have had something in common," Rusty shot back.

“Yes, of course. There was attraction. But that’s not enough to build a home and a life, my son. Don’t make the same mistake I did. Don’t ruin someone else’s life just because you think she’s perfect for you.”

“A little too late to dole out life advice, don’t you think?”

“Be mad at me if you want, Rusty. You have a right to be.”

“Seriously?” Rusty felt his outrage from earlier being replaced by confusion.

“Yes. The only reason you feel like this right now, why you think you’re responsible for your mom is because I put you in charge.”

Rusty searched his mind. Had his dad ever said words like ‘take care of your mom’ or other things like that? But maybe he hadn’t needed to say them; Rusty had thought them all anyway.

“I left you with her because I couldn’t stand leaving her all alone.”

“What?” Rusty blinked a few times, ignoring the wetness of his eyelashes. “What do you mean by that?”

Roy sighed and ran one hand over his face. “I treated her emotional instability merely as a sign of an artistic personality. But then the truth hit me in the face. She was sick, and that meant I could never be happy with her.”

“So you ran away,” Rusty said and the accusatory words fell between them like a rock into a deep pond.

“I loved your mom, Rusty,” Roy said instead of offering a proper reply. “And because I didn’t want her to continue to face the world alone, I decided to leave you with her.”

“Wait, what are you saying? You could have taken me with you?” Rusty couldn’t believe his ears.

Roy offered him a look that combined pity with embarrassment. “Her condition didn’t prevent her from continuing to be a mom to you, but it was all a grey area, according to the lawyers at least. If I had fought to get full custody, the chances were I could have obtained it.”

“And you just chose to... you didn’t choose me,” Rusty whispered. His ears were ringing and he rolled onto his back so that he could look away from his parent. “Just because you didn’t want to leave her alone? Is that the lie you tell yourself?”

“Rusty,” his dad said in a reproachful yet ineffective tone.

“No, I get it,” Rusty said as he continued to stare stubbornly at the ceiling. “I was a burden you didn’t care about.”

“Are you saying that you would have preferred to leave your mom behind, too?”

The words hit home. This was exactly the same thing his mom had said, right? He was blaming his dad for running away, but he was his father’s son, as all his actions showed.

“You could’ve, at least, dropped by more often than once every several months,” he said through his teeth. “But you were busy being happy, weren’t you?”

“I guess I deserve your anger.”

“You do. And don’t expect me to be grateful that you’re paying for mom’s care.”

“I don’t. I only told you about it so that you don’t take a bigger burden on your shoulders than you can carry. That is all.”

Rusty moved his arm away when his dad tried to touch him. “Why didn’t you come more often, dad?”

“You’re not a child anymore. Do you really want us to rehash old history?”

“I do. So tell me why you chose to forget all about me. You felt guilty, didn’t you? Each time you visited here.”

“Yes, I did,” Roy said, his voice louder and filled with exasperation. “When you finally grow up, you’ll realize that life is not easy, and we don’t always make the right choices.”

“Make that never.”

Roy slammed his knees and got to his feet. “Your mom would have continued to be unhappy even if I had stayed, Rusty. But maybe she would have blamed me more than she did you. That’s my debt to you.”

A debt that money wouldn’t cover, ever, Rusty wanted to throw that in his dad’s face. And this was what he was doing now, by coming in and paying for the medical expenses, like usual. Nothing had changed and, as Roy walked out of the room with a soft goodbye, he came to the frightening realization that the empty space he had always thought his dad could fill was going to remain void.



“What did you and your dad talk about?” August began needling him as they were driving back to Sunny Hill.

“Basically, about what an asshole he’s been to me my whole life,” Rusty replied.

“Oh, wow, heavy stuff.”

He couldn't blame August for trying to lighten the mood, but he was sick of everything, himself in particular. His dad had said a lot of things, but he had left out the obvious. That he had preferred to have a whole new family instead of bringing with him the kid that would remind him of his ex-wife, emotionally unstable and who only wanted to make him unhappy. He didn't need to hear the words spoken aloud. The truth was stark and obvious.

Maybe he should be happy that his dad hadn't forgotten him altogether. Right. Was partial abandonment any better than total abandonment? At least, with the latter, you'd know where you stood, right? But the morsels of attention thrown his way, that whole pretense that he still cared, had only continued to give him hope that would never come to anything.

"You're so silent," August said. "This isn't like you."

"Well," he said and gripped the wheel harder, "maybe this is the real me."

"Come on. Would you like some cheese with that whine?"

"Screw you, August. My mom's in the hospital, still unconscious. My dad just told me that he chose to be free and get a new family, kids included, instead of fighting to get full custody of me. So, yeah, I'm very comfortable in this pity party of one, thank you very much."

"And none of the shit you've just told me has anything to do with you." August turned toward him, as much as the seatbelt allowed her. "Hey, they're fucking grownups, pardon my French. I know you're in no mood to hear some hard little truths, but here they are. Your mom shouldn't have taken so many pills and neglected you all her life because a man walked out on her. And your dad should have been at least ten percent less of a coward and worked at least a little harder for you. The problem isn't you. It's them." With that, she straightened back up in her seat, pulling at the lapels of her leather jacket, her lips pursed in a grim line.

She could run her mouth all she wanted. But that didn't change the facts. His mom was lying in a coma because he couldn't keep his mouth shut. All her yelling that he was his father's son? Yeah, it had the ring of truth in it. But, then again, he was also hers, and what did that mean?

He knew exactly why his dad hadn't wanted to take him along when he left. He was too much like his mom, yes, artistic, but also reckless, irresponsible, immature, and all that. By the time they had started fighting before the divorce, Rusty had been old enough to understand all of those words.

And they all described him oh-so-perfectly.



He had barely made it one step into the house when Maddox pulled him into a hard hug. For a moment, he let his bestie do his thing and then patted him on the back to make him let go. He looked around at everyone there. His pity party didn't need guests.

"Come on, guys," he said in a casual tone, "don't be like this. She's going to be fine. The doctors say so."

Jonathan walked closer and hugged him, too, which was a big thing because Hamilton wasn't usually a touchy-feely guy.

"All right, all right," he continued. "Who's next?"

Kane hugged him so hard that a few joints popped. "We're with you, buddy."

"I know, I know." Getting out of that tight grip wasn't easy, but he managed. The knot of coiled snakes in his gut was starting to get restless at all of the displays of affection from his friends.

Dex grabbed him by the back of the neck and looked him in the eyes. "Rusty," he said, "did you lose your phone or something?"

Of course. His phone had blown up with calls and messages, and he had ignored them all, unfit to deal with responding to everyone. Even now, being surrounded by so many people made him feel like the sooner he could get away, the better.

"Nope. It's right here," he replied and showed them by pulling his phone out of his pocket.

Dex smiled and slapped him lightly upside the head. "Good. Do you need a crash course on how to use one of these new and wonderful devices?"

Rusty couldn't fight a grin. Dex was one intelligent mofo. He knew too much affection made him feel icky. "Maybe later. You guys, don't mind if I go crash in my room, right? I'm beat."

"No, of course not." That was Jonathan, always the caring one. "I'm going to bring you some chocolate chip cookies later. We didn't know when you'd arrive, so I postponed getting started on them."

Who needed parents when he had such a great group of friends to lean on? That was one lame joke. He was bone-tired but something more than that. He wanted to be alone, which was new for him, because as long as he'd known himself he had preferred to be surrounded by people, especially so he didn't have to deal with that frightening feeling of isolation.



Matty almost knocked the phone on the floor in his haste to grab it when it began ringing. Waiting for Rusty's return had made him particularly anxious, and it was only because of his good reflexes that his phone didn't hit the floor, face first.

"Yes?"

"Hey, Matty," Maddox's voice came through. "Rusty just arrived. He went to crash in his bed, but feel free to drop by as soon as you want. When he wakes up, I bet he's going to be happy to see you. Also, Jonathan's making chocolate chip cookies. I hope this offer is enough to bribe you to come here and cheer Rusty up."

"How is he?" Matty asked, his heart in his throat.

"As you might expect. But the good news is that the doctors say that his mom is going to be fine. We haven't talked to him a lot because he wasn't in the mood to chat. We know most of the details from my mom, anyway."

"Okay, I'll come by," Matty said. "And thank you, Maddox."

"No sweat. I told you we'd call as soon as he got here. See you soon, right?"

"Yes, of course."

Matty took a deep breath after the conversation ended and then ran his fingers through his hair. Rusty needed him now more than ever. How silly he had been to agonize so much over his confession when there were so many bigger things in play.

That confession could wait. Now, Rusty needed a friend, and Matty intended to be that friend, even if there were all the others already at the house, supporting him. He was the closest to Rusty, right? Jonathan had said so and he'd known Rusty for some time.



He waited awkwardly, his bag still on his shoulder, debating whether he should spend some time with the guys downstairs or just go up to see Rusty. Maddox was the one who saved him from that dilemma. "You can go up and try to see if our sleeping beauty is awake, Matty. Since he can be a beast when he wakes up on the wrong side of the bed, none of us is brave enough to risk his skin. Consider yourself our human sacrifice."

Matty felt a bit better when Maddox smiled reassuringly. "Okay, I'll do that."

"Remind him that Jonathan has decided to make cookies in the middle of the week only for him."

Everything seemed all right at the house. That meant that Rusty felt a bit better, Matty concluded. Since he had tried his phone number several times since learning from Maddox and Jonathan about what had happened with his mom, the silence that met all his attempts had served only to convince him that Rusty wasn't ready to talk.

That must have changed if all his old friends were in such a good mood. Matty climbed the stairs, feeling energized and in the best comforting mood he could be. No one had to tell him that.

Once on the landing, he waited for a moment before walking toward Rusty's bedroom. To think that he had become so familiar with this place that it felt as if he was walking through his own home. It all had to do with the guy behind the door in front of which he now stood.

He knocked lightly. If Rusty was still asleep, Matty would like to let him rest a bit more. However, the raspy 'come in' convinced him that wasn't the case.

The first thing he noticed when he walked in was how bloodshot Rusty's eyes were. He looked like someone who'd been crying, and that was understandable, only it was a shock to see the carefree king of Sunny Hill in a state like that. Rusty was sitting on the edge of the still made bed, which meant that he hadn't slept at all yet.

"Hi Rusty. I heard about your mom." Matty made a move toward the bed, wondering if it were all right to offer a hug. Something about the way Rusty held his body, rigid and unyielding, made him think that he might have to wrench one out of him.

"Yeah." A wan smile and tired eyes welcomed him. "Sorry I didn't answer the phone. All those boys downstairs are making a big deal over it."

Matty hesitated for just one more moment, and then he finally took it upon himself to sit on the bed by Rusty's side. They were very close, but they weren't touching. That was something that had to be corrected.

Matty put a hand on Rusty's shoulder. "I'm so sorry about everything. And I get why you didn't answer your phone. This whole thing must have been difficult for you."

Something in Rusty's eyes hardened. "Not as difficult as for my mom, I can tell you that."

This was more than pain. Matty didn't know what it was. "It was an accident, right?"

"Yeah, an accident." Rusty looked away, breaking eye contact. "So, did the guys send you to check on me? You can go back down and tell them that I'm not hungry yet."

"I'd rather stay here with you," Matty said bravely.

"Why?"

The question took him by surprise. There was something very odd about their whole interaction but he couldn't put his finger on what. "Because I'm your friend, and I want to be here for you."

"Yeah, okay. But I have to warn you, I'm not the most pleasant company right now."

"And I don't expect you to be." Matty put one arm around Rusty's shoulders.

To his surprise, Rusty shook off his touch and got to his feet. Matty took in the turned back, the hunched shoulders.

"Look, Matty, I'm sorry, but I don't feel like sunshine and rainbows right now."

"That's understandable. And I'm not here for that," Matty hurried to say.

Rusty's clenched fists betrayed a different state of emotion than what Matty had expected to see. It made his chest hurt, and he wanted to hear all about it, so that he could know what to do to make it go away or at least less of a burden.

"Well, that's too bad," Rusty murmured.

"What's going on? Why are you mad?" Matty asked. Rusty was mad. He was sure of it.

"Besides the obvious?" Rusty asked louder, and snorted, a sound that seemed an expression of self-deprecation. "You see, Matty, I'm basically a piece of shit whose last words to his mom while she was still conscious were enough to make her so upset that she fell down the stairs and ended up in a coma. Do you need me to tell you more?"

Rusty turned his head but didn't look at him, only offering his profile, his lips set, his eyebrows drawn into a tight frown, his entire face, usually all a smile, now a genuine mask of pain.

Matty jumped to his feet. He grabbed Rusty by the arms and shook him. "That is not true, Rusty! I know you're upset about what happened to her, but don't say things like that about yourself."

The green eyes seemed blank as they rested on him. "Why? They are the truth, Matty."

He shook his head vehemently. "No, no, that's not true. You're wonderful, you're this great person, you're--"

"The king of Sunny Hill? The best party planner on campus? The star of the basketball team? The guy who can joke about anything and anyone?"

Matty didn't like the way Rusty was saying those words, as if he was listing bad things about himself. "You're much more than that. I'm not talking about those things."

"But I am, and I want you to listen to all of this, because it's the truth. I'm just a superficial asshole--"

“You’re not!”

The force of his words seemed to take Rusty aback. His eyes seemed to clear for a moment. “Why do you say that? Can’t you see who I am? Why do you keep telling me these things? Because you want to comfort me? Make me feel better?”

“No, Rusty.”

“Then why?”

“Because I love you, dammit!”

The stunned silence that followed made them both hold their breath. Matty knew it cost him everything to keep staring into Rusty’s eyes. There were no more masks between them now.

“Okay, Matty, you can see yourself out,” Rusty said suddenly and moved away. “I’m not in the mood for jokes. I know you want to make me feel better, but stuff like this isn’t funny.”

“I’m not joking.” Matty felt like every word was a wrong step but he didn’t want to deny it anymore. “I’m in love with you, and I have been for a long time.”

Rusty walked to the door and opened it wide. Then, he gestured at it with his chin, without saying another word.

Matty shook his head, feeling pain and anger blending inside him like an explosive. Rusty was just hurt and upset because of his mom, he told himself as he moved slowly toward the door.

A strong arm barred the way at the last moment. “For real, Matty?” Rusty whispered. “I thought you were smart.”

“What’s that even supposed to mean?” Matty felt his bottom lip quivering and didn’t want to let Rusty see that.

“I can take a joke, even a lie... but you’re serious, aren’t you?”

He didn’t reply and looked away this time.

“Do you remember when you said I should tell you if you ever went too far?” The words were thrown at him like shotgun bullets. “This is too far, Matty.”

“Okay,” he murmured. “It was the wrong time and... We’ll talk later.”

“Better not,” Rusty said. “For your sake, our little arrangement is off. Fine by you?”

Matty struggled to look up. “Yeah, of course. When have I ever told you ‘no’?”

With wooden hands, he searched in his bag. He handed the key to Rusty and then walked out, without throwing one look back.



“What’s going on? Are you leaving so soon?” Maddox asked as soon as he was downstairs.

Matty could hardly breathe and needed to get out of there and fast. This had always been a possibility, right? And he had rushed in, without even thinking, and caused only hurt for both of them.

“Yeah, there’s somewhere I need to be, and it’s important, and I just realized it,” he spoke quickly, his eyes darting sideways.

“Oh, okay. Nice seeing you. Will you come back later? We’ll save some cookies for you.”

Matty shook his head. “I don’t think so. You guys enjoy your dinner. Bye.”

He could tell all of Rusty’s buddies were staring at him with questions in their eyes. But he had no answers, only the raw pain and fury at himself for having messed up such an important thing. He had just blurted everything out without thinking.

And that wasn’t like him. Lesson for the future, always use your head. His heart was no good at making good decisions.



Rusty stared at the key in his palm, feeling nauseous. That look in Matty’s eyes was bound to haunt him. Fuck, that was bad. He shouldn’t have acted like that, throwing him out as if he didn’t care at all. But Matty needed to know that it was a mistake to think himself in love with him. He was in love with that sunshine and rainbows guy, not the real him.

He’d see it, in due time. Because Rusty didn’t believe he could play that game anymore. It was exhausting just to think about it. All his life, chasing after something that wasn’t there, imagining himself being someone else, someone fun, who people would like without thinking twice. The illusion had stayed safely out of reach, taunting him with the knowledge that he wasn’t the Rusty Parker everyone knew and thought they liked. The way he saw it, that was the problem. When they liked him, they didn’t like the real him; they just liked the image he had so carefully crafted over time.

That kind of thing never worked in the long run. All it took was a real cut to get through, like what had just happened between him and his mom, and the whole thing came unraveled.

Yeah, Matty would be better off without him. If he’d known the real him, he wouldn’t have imagined himself in love with that guy.

And that fucking hurt, because if Matty had said that to that guy, that would have made him pretty freaking happy.



Rusty sauntered downstairs, trying to mimic as carefree an attitude as he could, under the circumstances.

“Finally, we thought you fell asleep again.” Maddox grabbed him and placed him in his chair.

They were all there, ready to dig in. However, as ravenous as Dex and Kane usually were, they didn’t seem keen on starting to shovel food into their mouths. No, everyone was just staring at him.

“Yeah, what?” he asked, a bit roughly.

“Matty left in a hurry. What happened?” Maddox asked him directly.

Rusty shrugged. “I told him the truth. He deserved it.”

“What truth?”

He really didn’t want to have this conversation. He moved and grabbed a cookie from the bowl Jonathan had placed on the side. “You know what? I’m not really hungry. But you go ahead. Excellent stuff, Johnny boy,” he tried to laugh it off as he took a bite out of the chocolate chip masterpiece.

“Rusty,” Maddox said, and the reproach in that single word was visible from Mars.

They’d leave him alone. Not for long, but maybe long enough to make some order out of the mess in his head and come up with some answers that made sense and would maybe lessen the hurt he felt inside right now.

Chapter Forty-Eight

Nothing but a Crush

Was that the most difficult part of being heartbroken? Matty couldn't wrap his head around the information written in the textbook in front of his eyes, as all his thoughts continued to crawl back to Rusty, no matter how stubbornly he tried to rein them in. Only several days ago, he had felt so happy and full of hope, and now he was going through the exact opposite. No wonder he had never been in love until now. It sucked, and it went against everything he stood for: logic, reason, comfortable expectations. He almost regretted having gotten that cat boy suit.

Studying was impossible. It was all he had right now, emotional drama and upheaval aside, but he couldn't use his logic and reason to get back into it and do the things that were convenient and not bound to give him any heartaches. Absent-mindedly, he traced invisible lines over the formulas he had yet to learn by heart. Why weren't people as simple as that?

He got to his feet and walked over to his closet. The cat boy suit was still there, of course. He would probably have to get rid of it. Or maybe he was just jumping to conclusions, right? He and Rusty had been friends for months; they might just meet again and have a little fun at Matty's ill-timed confession, some weeks or months in the future.

With a deep sigh, he shook his head. No, he couldn't see himself doing anything of the kind. As long as Rusty Parker had been nothing but a crush, he had been a safe choice. Matty had moved through college life with a deep focus on his studies and moderate fun. And then, he had gotten to know the real Rusty Parker, and he had fallen in love for real.

The real Rusty Parker? That simple question gave him pause. What words had Rusty used? Sunshine and rainbows? Yes, he had mostly known just that part of him, with very few exceptions. Matty felt his anger rising inside him again. He had wanted to know Rusty completely, to learn him by heart, but when had the other let him?

He closed the closet door so fast and hard that it shook on its hinges. Great, now he was developing anger issues, and he just couldn't make sense of any of it. There was just one person who could make it make sense.

Without thinking twice, he grabbed his phone. On the fourth ring, he knew he had to give up but couldn't stop himself and just let it continue until the system disconnected the call. That was his answer, right?

They weren't even friends.

Just as he was about to throw the phone on the bed and wallow a bit more in his own despair, a cheerful ring announced that he was being called back.

Zoey's voice did nothing for his disappointment. "Am I demoted from bestie position? We didn't talk yesterday at all, or today either."

"Sorry, Zoey," Matty said and sighed so noisily that the next thing he knew, Zoey was onto him.

"That sigh, what's that sigh all about?" she asked quickly.

His first impulse was to tell her that nothing was wrong, and he was just busy studying, but one, Zoey wasn't that easy to fool, and two, lying to her didn't make him any wiser or better than Rusty, who didn't want to let anyone in on his pain.

"Do you want me to give you the tl;dr version?"

"Just so that I can take my next breath. If you don't realize it, I'm holding this one. Then, you can give me the long version."

"Rusty broke up with me. Wait, that's not--"

"He did what?!" Zoey's shout forced him to remove the phone from his ear for a moment.

"I'm to blame," Matty said quickly. The last thing he wanted was to have Zoey jump to the wrong conclusions. "I was supposed to offer him comfort and understanding... and, well, I just blurted out the truth. He didn't take it well. Actually, at first, he thought I was just joking, and then, when I insisted – because how could I not? – he just kicked me out. Ah, and I gave him back the key he had made for me."

"Damn," Zoey whispered. By the shuffling sounds he could hear on the other end, he could only surmise that she was trying to find a place to sit down. "What a moron."

"Yeah, I know, you don't have to tell me," Matty said with a bit of pique. "I've been kicking myself mentally--"

"Not you. Him," Zoey said.

"I love you, Zoey, I really do, but I can't agree with you. He's in a dark place now, and the last thing he needed from me was to tell him... those stupid words." His voice cracked a little and he took a moment to stop himself from crying like an idiot over his own mistakes.

"Yeah, I know that his life got tough quickly, and I don't blame him," Zoey said. "But, I don't know, Matty. If I were in his place and someone professed their love to me, I think I'd be happy or at least comforted in a way. Even if I didn't return the guy's feelings. Wait, Matty... that's it!"

Being friends with Zoey came with hearing impairment, but Matty still wouldn't trade his bestie for the world.

“Yeah, I mean, can’t you see it?” she continued in her usual boisterous way. “It’s because he does that he behaved like that!”

“Hmm, you’re making less sense than usual because I have no idea what you mean. Has Dex swallowed half your brain with all that kissing practice you two have been having?”

“Sorry, sorry, I’m connecting the dots way too fast for a mere mortal such as yourself,” Zoey said. “What I mean is that you shocked Rusty so hard with your confession because he, too, is in love with you!”

Matty groaned and rubbed his eyes. Zoey was good. She could make him smile under the direst circumstances, and that meant a lot. “I don’t follow your logic, bestie.”

“That’s because it’s a different logic from yours,” came the honest and prompt reply. “If Rusty’d had no feelings, or only lukewarm feelings toward you, he would have just said something like ‘thank you, Matty, but I don’t feel the same’. Now, tell me, did he say anything like that? Hmm, hmm?”

“No, he didn’t, but let’s just say that it was the kind of situation where actions spoke louder than words. I don’t think he even wants us to be friends anymore.” Damn, his voice cracked again. This wouldn’t do. He wasn’t the kind to cry so easily, right?

“I’m coming over there right now,” Zoey declared. “And no, before you ask, you can’t wiggle your way out of it.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“Even so, I knew you were going to. Because, despite your flower boy look, Matty, you’re like the toughest person I know. And I’m not letting you be the kind who hides in the dark to lick his wounds.”

“How did you know that would be my favorite activity for the foreseeable future?”

“I just did. And don’t worry. While Dex might only be my kissing partner at the moment and nothing else, I am willing to beg him to kick Rusty’s ass for breaking your precious little heart like this.”

“Oh, gawd, Zoey, please don’t involve other people. Things are bad enough--”

“Yeah, and that’s why friends should help,” Zoey interrupted him. “Okay, I’m not going to ask Dex to do that because, frankly, he scares me a little because he’s so big, and if he takes my words at face value and really kicks Rusty’s ass, who knows what might happen?”

“Just come already,” Matty said and felt like smiling again. He could use a little bit of pick-me-up conversation with Zoey. She had the skills to make him feel better.

Maybe she could help him figure out what to do next, how to talk to Rusty. He wouldn't take those words back, not in a million years, but maybe he could find a way back to being friends.

And stop feeling so down. That almost never happened to him. It was new, and it was bad.



“Why are you two here?”

Maddox and Jonathan traded a brief glance. “We live here, remember?”

The two lovebirds were up and about at seven in the morning and blocking the way so that he couldn't leave his room as inconspicuously as he had wanted to.

“Well, good for you, now can you please get out of the way? I'm in a bit of a hurry, and you're standing between my bladder and the bathroom.”

His attempt didn't faze Maddox at all. “Good. Since you have a reason not to make this conversation longer than necessary, let's cut to the chase. What happened between you and Matty?”

“Isn't it a bit too early in the day for gossip? Why do you care?” That had come out harsher than he intended. But words were words, and once they left your tongue, you couldn't pull them back in your mouth.

Maddox shook his head. “Rusty, this isn't like you. He looked so devastated when he left here two days ago.”

“He'll get over it,” Rusty replied and tried to push his bestie out of the way. “Maddie, for real. Why do you want to know so badly?”

“Matty cares about you. What could you say to him to make him feel so...” Maddox looked at his better half for help.

“Unwanted,” Jonathan supplied and fixed his eyes on Rusty hard.

Damn, that was one stare you didn't want to be on the receiving end of. It reached inside him and made him feel things he didn't want to feel. He didn't need them to tell him what Matty had looked like. He had looked like someone whose rug had been pulled from under him. Like someone who had lost something important. And Rusty had been the cause of that.

“Trust me, it hurt me more than it hurt him,” he said brusquely. Maybe a little bit of honesty would get him off the hook for now.

“And how do you know that?” Maddox got into his face. “We've seen him around. He looks so down, which means that, whatever happened between the two of you--”

“Should stay between the two of us,” Rusty said and pushed Maddox slightly.

He clenched his fists when Maddox didn’t budge.

Jonathan seemed to sense what was going on and got between them. His hand was warm and placating as it landed on his shoulder. “What Maddox is trying to say is that we’re here for you. And I know,” he said, raising his voice a little and giving his fiancé a warning look, “that he knows you like no one else does, but we want you to know that we’re not trying to make you feel bad here.”

“Unless it serves the purpose of making you see the truth,” Maddox added, looking at him from two feet away.

Rusty realized with bitterness that he wouldn’t mind it a lot if he happened to come to blows with his bestie, just for the sake of letting out some of the mountain of anger he had stashed inside. He had been working on building it up for the last several days, so he had a good amount of it. Still, it wouldn’t serve anyone to lash out at Maddox, who wanted only what was best for him.

It was one thing to know that, and another thing to act like it.

“If I don’t come back tonight, don’t call the police,” he said in a harsh tone. “It only means that I have found another bed to sleep in. Like I usually do.”

He was well aware of the perplexed looks on the faces of his friends as he brushed by them and hurried down the stairs. He needed to be anywhere else but inside claustrophobic spaces like this, where people wished to help him so much, when he wanted just the opposite.



Zoey hugged him tightly the moment she saw him. Matty had to unglue her from him in the end, although it did feel good to have someone care like that. They sat on the edge of the bed and only held hands for a while, because that was the kind of friend Zoey was to him, the kind who knew when to shout until making your ears bleed and when to be quiet like right now.

“How are you going to get him back?”

Her question took him by surprise. “He made his point, Zoey. I don’t think there’s coming back from it.” He wished things were different, but he had never seen Rusty like that. Every word they had exchanged seemed like such a final sentence between them.

“No, you’ve worked so damn hard for him,” Zoey contradicted him. “I mean, I understand if you suddenly stop caring about him, but I know you well enough that I don’t think that’s the case, Matty.”

“Just before the thing with his mom happened, I talked to my mom on the phone, and she really got me thinking. Especially now,” he confessed. “I mean, what if all this time I have fooled myself into thinking that I’m in love with Rusty?”

He wanted to hear Zoey confirm it, but all he saw in her eyes was compassion. She didn’t hurry to eagerly tell him that it had to be that, only infatuation and nothing more.

“I’ve known you all these years, Matty, and you’ve been so steadfast in your crush on Rusty that it can’t be just that. Okay, so if college had been over, and you hadn’t done a thing to get close to him, I would have told you to let it go. But that didn’t happen. You’re the most serious crusher in the history of all crushes, Matty. You put in the effort to get close to him, to know him. If there was nothing there, you’d know by now. So, let me ask you. What do you feel right now?”

Matty ran his hands over his face and rubbed his eyes. “I can’t... I mean, it’s like my mind refuses to accept it. I can’t even study, and you know me.”

Zoey nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, you can study through a hurricane. Which only means that this is bigger than any weather condition. Even climate change,” she added a joke for good measure. “Which brings me back to my opening question. How do you plan to get him back?”

“Ugh, I don’t even have the courage to talk to him again. I mean, I’ve called, but he doesn’t answer, so I guess that’s that. He’s telling me to leave him alone.”

Zoey shook her head repeatedly. “I still can’t understand how he could do this to you. It all must be because of the shock caused by what happened to his mom. Although, for the life of me, I can’t see the link between the two.”

“That only means I should leave him alone for a while, right?”

“No, not at all. You need to shake him up, Matty. Even if he continues to say the same crap, you don’t have to take it lying down. I mean, if you give up so easily, doesn’t that make it look like you didn’t mean it in the first place?”

“That’s quite the logic, Zoey. You know, I didn’t mean to say it. To confess. I went to his place just to comfort him over what happened with his mom. And then, he said some bad things about himself, and the words just flew out of my mouth. Just like that. I couldn’t control them. Isn’t that scary?”

“Yeah, it is. Well, maybe not as scary as having your face devoured by a giant in a kiss. Sorry, my bad, I shouldn’t joke or compare the two.”

“It’s okay, I can use making a little light of the situation as it is. I can’t hold anything against him. I have really bad timing,” Matty continued.

“Look, you would have said those words anyway, sooner or later. Now, you can just plan for stage two.”

Zoey, always the optimist. But it was one of those things that made her such a great friend.

“Then I think that I need to go talk to him again. At least, as a friend. And if he brushes everything off like it didn’t happen--”

“That won’t happen. I saw the way he kept staring at you. It baffles me beyond reason that he reacted the way he did. You need to get to the bottom of this, Matty. I’m rooting for you.”

Matty nodded, feeling a bit better already. The timing had been bad, and maybe Rusty hadn’t meant all those things. There was one way to find out, right?



“What’s with you here?” August asked him the moment he stepped inside. “You’re supposed to be in class, right?”

“Oh, spare me the spiel, grandma,” Rusty said morosely and moved past her so that he could crash on her sofa.

She closed the door without saying another word. However, he was pretty damn sure that the lecture would come nonetheless.

“Any changes?” she asked as she sat by his side and turn toward him.

“No, she’s still the same. It’s just that the guys at the house are giving me pain because I broke up with Matty.”

The moment he said it, he realized his mistake. He swallowed hard and ground his teeth.

“And why did you do that?” August asked.

“We fell out as friends,” he hurried to say.

August groaned and then flicked him on the ear. “Your power of denial is outstanding, Rusty, but that doesn’t make what you just said any less of a fine example of one of the most moronic things you could ever say.”

“The fuck is that supposed to mean?” he asked, but his usual ploy, the strength with which he made people think whatever he wanted, was faltering.

“It means that you should just stop lying to yourself. You’ve been with this guy for how long?”

Months. They felt like forever. In a good way. The best of ways. But his dad was right. Fooling someone into believing you were someone else, that you two could work out when it wasn't possible, that was wrong. And not in a million years did he want to do wrong by Matty. Not Matty. Anyone else, maybe he could have lied a little to them. But not to Matty.

"He confessed his feelings to me, you know?" he said, thinking that, of all people, if there were someone who would get it, it had to be August.

"Get out of here!" August slapped him on the shoulder so hard that it hurt.

He rubbed the abused spot and glared at her.

August's expression changed from surprise to being pissed off. "And you broke up with him? Why on earth would you do that?"

"I thought you'd understand." There was only so angry he could be at himself. What did the world want from him, anyway?

August caught his arm and dragged him down before he had the chance to get away. "Hey," she said, softly this time, "it's okay. Talk to me."

Okay, at least she wasn't challenging him to a boxing match like Maddox had. He sat his ass back down.

"Me and Matty, we've had like a ton of fun. But that's all we did," Rusty began. "And it's not like I don't like him..." He stopped for a moment, waiting for August to contradict him. When that didn't come, he continued. "He's amazing. I should have known better than to get so crazy involved with someone like him."

"So, you're protecting him, huh?" August asked and gave him a sideways look.

"Yeah. It's for his own good. I mean, he doesn't even know who I really am."

"Not his fault," August pointed out.

"Okay, true, I admit it. And I take full responsibility. Do you think that if I offer him the opportunity to punch me in the face, he'll take it?"

August shook her head. "Okay, I have like a thousand thoughts in my mind right now while you talk bullshit but I'm here to listen because I'm your friend. So, go ahead, and I'll try my best not to interrupt you."

Rusty felt like caving into himself altogether under her inquisitive stare. But there wasn't much for him to do now except for dealing with the aftermath. His life would be so different from now on. If he ever wanted to be someone who didn't make the same mistakes his parents had done, he needed to start working hard on that.

The toughest part about it? He had no idea where to start.

“He said he loved me,” he let out with a sigh. “If I were a scumbag, I’d take it and run with it. Matty deserves better, don’t you agree?” As promised, August remained silent. So there was no other option but to continue. “And he’s not even in love with me. He’s just infatuated with the king of Sunny Hill, who does it all for show.”

“And you’re sure as hell that’s the case,” August concluded and pursed her lips.

“Yeah, I’m sure.” He crossed his arms and looked stubbornly forward. “I know he’s upset now, but I’m saving him a lot more pain in the future.”

August pressed her index finger against her lips and seemed to ponder something. “Are you reenacting your parents’ relationship right now, Rusty? With Matty as an unwilling participant?”

“No, I’m preventing it from happening again. I know, my dad is... what he is, but he has a point. He and mom just barreled forward, even had a child, although they knew they weren’t good together.”

“And that’s you and Matty, happening again. For the sake of the argument, who’s who?”

Rusty gave her an exasperated glare. “It doesn’t matter. For the sake of whatever, I’m both my father’s and my mother’s son. And Matty... well, he’s perfect and he deserves a perfect guy.”

“Aren’t you missing something here? Something essential?”

“There’s nothing that matters more than not causing Matty a boatload of hurt in the future for choosing wrong. That’s all.”

“And you? How do you feel about it?”

Cut in half. Destroyed from one end to the other, all the interior space he could call his own turned upside down. But maybe that was the kind of pain it took to do the right thing.

So he shrugged. “I’ve been better, sure. It’s not like I break up with people all the time. This is... kind of a first. It’s nasty. It sucks a bag of dicks.” He was talking faster and faster now. “What more do you want me to say? Matty’s better off. And I’m sure it was nothing but a crush on his part. After all, from freshman year I’ve been all over the place, playing my freaking part. He must have gotten a wrong idea of who I am. Which only means that this thing between us was doomed to fail from the start.”

“Wow,” August said dryly. “Do you usually play all the main roles in the dramas in your head? All this stuff you’ve said, and now’s the moment when I stop being silent because I just discovered that it doesn’t suit me, all this stuff is made up by you and you alone. I don’t see Matty anywhere in what you’ve just said. It’s only what you think.”

“Yeah, well, it’s a no-brainer,” Rusty argued. “All we’ve ever done together was fool around. All he’s known about me was what I chose to show him.”

“And I bet he’s eager to know all the rest of you and do more than fool around. The guy went with you to your brother’s birthday. I’ve seen you two. You’re joined at the hip. And I saw you happy, Rusty, and please, please, don’t tell me you just faked it, because I know it’s not true. During all this time you two spent together, it’s impossible that you kept a mask on all the time. No one’s that great an actor. Once the curtain falls, people go home.”

“Funny you talking about masks,” Rusty said through his teeth.

“Right. You’re Rybalt, too. And you’ve been your truest self while donning that cape.”

“No, you’re wrong. That has to go, too.”

“Ah, you’ve finally decided to go pro. That’s good,” August said.

Rusty shook his head harder. “No, I’m done with that. With singing. It was nothing but playacting.”

“What?!” August grabbed his shoulder and shook him. “You can’t be serious. So, your parents aren’t going to win mom and dad of the year, but what the hell has gotten into you?”

He was eerily calm as he turned to face her. “Don’t you see? What’s the point in pretending to feel everything when you’re nothing but callous and don’t give a damn on the inside? I don’t want to be another fake artist, to be one more of the same crowd.”

August slapped her forehead and groaned. “Rusty, Rusty, Rusty Parker! Would you just stop? Do you think that getting rid of all the passion in your life will make your mom better? Let me break it to you. No, it’s not going to happen. The only person you’re hurting here is yourself.”

“Are you done? I wanted to crash here all day, but it looks like you’re just as annoying as the rest.”

“You’re going to crash here because I’m not letting you leave and make some stupid mistake,” August said and got up. “But you will have to do your own thinking, because it looks like I’m not getting through to you.”

He didn’t have the energy to get up and make mistakes as she was predicting. So, her ultimatum suited him just fine. He’d do all the thinking he needed to make things better, but in his own way.



Zoey's comfort had helped some, especially with his decision to try and speak to Rusty again. Since his phone remained stubbornly silent, there was another way he could approach the matter at hand. He was used to finding solutions all the time, right? Even if he didn't have all the unknown facts at hand, it didn't mean that it wasn't worth a try to discover a way out of this mess.

Maddox was the one who answered the door, and the look of pity in his eyes told him that the rest of the house was at least a bit aware of what was going on. Had Rusty confided in his friends? If so, what had he told them?

"Hi Matty. Come in," he said and made room for him to step inside.

"I don't want to be a bother. Is Rusty in?"

"No, he's not."

"Then I guess I should try again later tonight."

Jonathan appeared in the door. "You might end up making the trip for nothing."

"How do you know?" Maddox asked.

Jonathan grimaced and frowned. "He just texted me. He's not coming home tonight."

"Ah, fuck," Maddox murmured under his breath. "This is all part of his finding another bed to sleep in, right?"

The question hadn't been aimed at him, but Matty felt like it didn't have to be. It was so easy to read between the lines. Rusty Parker could sleep anywhere he wanted. Doors opened for him, and not only doors. He hated himself for thinking that, for putting a label on someone he had come to consider so close to him.

"Did he say where he is right now?" he asked, mustering all the courage he could.

Jonathan hesitated.

"I'm a big boy, I can take it," Matty added with a forced smile.

"He says he's with August, but that doesn't mean that they're together," Jonathan said hurriedly, while his eyes darted to Maddox, as if he were looking for help.

Matty nodded and took a step back to leave. "Thank you, Jonathan. And Maddox."

"August is just his friend," Maddox said.

He was already leaving. And that was all the information he needed. Friends or more than that, Rusty had found a harbor for all his sorrows. And it wasn't him. And it hurt.

And he could do absolutely nothing about it.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Thank You for the Heartache

“Rusty.”

Someone was calling his name. It was incredibly annoying. He turned on his other side, but a punch in the shoulder convinced him that he wouldn't get away even if he growled and pretended to be ready to bite.

“What?”

“It's almost noon. Get up. And don't get all depressed on me,” August scolded him.

He ran one hand over his face. He needed a shave. Shower. Get out of the house. And face the world. Huzzah.

For the last three days – if he still knew how to count – he had holed up at August's, ignoring phone calls, texts, and even visitors at the door. Loyal to his cause, his host had graciously sent all his friends on their way, but it looked like even her patience had an end. Naturally.

The only problem was that he had no idea how to continue, how to get up and out there, go on living his life. As usual was out of the question. August had kept up with his mom's evolution. Nothing new on that front. That phase of suspended hopes and tragedies ate at him slowly, with the obsessive persistence of a wood-devouring critter. It didn't matter how tough he thought himself to be; it only took enough holes bored into him to make him paper-thin.

August sat gingerly by his side.

“Sorry for doing this, but you can't go on like this,” she said in a gentle, yet firm voice. “I understand pain, I've been there long enough. You need a bit of air.” She patted his knee. “Come on. Hit the shower while I fix you something to eat. And don't say a word.”

“Not even thank you?”

“Okay, I'll take that. But I'd rather you be quiet and think properly about what to do next.”

He felt tempted to ask if Matty had dropped by, but then, he quickly recovered. There was no need to stick pins in such a sore wound. Matty was better off. Matty was better off. He only had to repeat that to himself as many times as possible, and it would become reality.

Half an hour later, he was closer to a human being than he had been over the last interminable days. He accepted the offered lunch and ate without feeling the taste or texture of the food. August could have served him cardboard dipped in tap water, or a complete gourmet meal, and it would have all tasted the same to him.

Still, he was aware that he needed the nourishment. And being depressed wasn't helping anyone. August was right about that. Even the jacket he put on seemed strange and unfamiliar.

"Are you coming?" he asked her.

August nodded and grabbed her jacket.

"Unless you have something better to do."

"Better than assisting your baby steps as the new Rusty Parker? No. By the way, I don't approve of whatever you think you're doing, but that's beyond the point. Let's go."

She hadn't asked him where they were going, and he had no destination in mind. However, because of him, she hadn't gone out a lot, either, and she probably needed a bit of air. Just like he did, although he had no notion of such needs.

Until they stepped out in the balmy air of the late fall afternoon. It was the kind of weather that made him feel good even if he felt bad, as it carried the same nostalgias as he did.

"We're going to see your friends," August announced, without giving him an option.

That meant that they would have to walk across the campus, and, at first, Rusty had an almost visceral impulse of self-preservation. August, however, held his elbow tightly, with the obvious intention of not letting him run back into the house.



Heartache, it seemed, was something any human being could get used to. That was what Matty thought as he walked out of the science building. At first, he had deemed the whole thing unbearable, but it had only been a few days – albeit it felt like a lot longer – and the pain and emotional exhaustion had become a part of him. He would call them old friends, only they were new.

These days had given him the opportunity to think a lot. Maddox and Jonathan had called every day, not to needle him with useless questions such as how he was feeling, but to maintain a connection with him. They didn't talk about Rusty unless he asked, and they appeared more concerned with his wellbeing. He was thankful for their friendship.

Kane had called, too, and offered him, in unlimited terms, his support. Dex had been there, too, interjecting from time to time, and offering a different type of support. He was responsible, as he seemed to feel, with the ass-kicking department, so Zoey hadn't been far off in her assumptions that it might be a little scary to have that mountain of a young man punish Rusty for whatever he needed to be punished for.

Matty had accepted everything wearily, while hoping they weren't disappointed in his replies. He wished he had more to give, but besides gratitude, there was a vast emptiness inside him.

He was getting used to it. A dim hope continued to flicker inside him, even though the days seemed bleak, despite the pleasant weather. One day, Rusty would have to talk to him, when all the wounds were scabbed over, and then he would tell him why. His ill-timed confession had cut short all explanations, and Matty couldn't let go of them. Rusty would learn, no matter what he thought, why Matty loved him. Sunshine and rainbows didn't begin to cover it.

First, he heard the murmurs, running through the crowd of students going in and out of campus buildings like a sudden restless wave. Then, he saw the reason for it.

Nothing should have shocked him, but he remained frozen in place nonetheless. Rusty was walking through the quad, but it wasn't with his confident strut, his usual posture as the king of Sunny Hill. He held August by the shoulders and listened attentively to something she was saying. Even from that distance, Matty could swear he could see all of the lines in Rusty's face, all of the shadows and planes, every inch of skin.

People walked by him, some brushing past closely, sometimes throwing him a strange, annoyed look or a surprised one, but he didn't move at all. And Rusty, as if he could tell he was being watched so intently, raised his eyes and met his over the shifting crowd.

Matty didn't even dare to blink. Rusty didn't, either. But his body moved and Matty watched as the guy he loved turned to the woman by his side to embrace her and hold her tightly, his eyes never leaving his.

He was so tense he was afraid to make even one move. He ignored August's question – what was going on? – and kept staring at Matty, at the way he stood there, arms by his sides, unmoving, unquestioning, just staring back.

And then, he noticed the smile, calm and kind that lit up the face he knew so well, the face he had held close so many times. That was Matty the way he wanted to remember him. Forgiving, understanding. And sad. That part was temporary. Matty would forget and move on. If there was only one thing he wanted to shout over the quad and all those indifferent heads and minds, it had to be this: move on.

“Hey,” August said in a concerned voice, “are you okay?”

He had to break eye contact and turn back to reality. August stared at him, and she must have seen something in his eyes because she turned away and then quickly back to him.

“Rusty,” she said through her teeth, “I don't like being used. Never do that again.”

“Okay,” he breathed out.

“Won’t you go talk--”

“No. I’ve already granted you one wish.”

August sighed but added nothing. He knew very well why she was doing that. She thought this was a phase and he’d get over it. But Rusty couldn’t see himself doing that; this new world for him didn’t seem to offer much, but he had made his choice.



He had expected it to hurt. But he hadn’t expected it to hurt so badly, like there was nothing left for him but hurt all over. The only point he hung onto was the smile he gave Rusty before walking away. And from that single point, a soothing sensation spread. August had to be able to make Rusty very happy if she could help him through such trying times. That was the truth, and it had been placed right in front of his eyes for him to see.

Love wasn’t supposed to be egotistical, he realized. He had to wish Rusty happiness, and if that didn’t include him, that was just something he had to live with. Rusty had August. Jonathan and Maddox both could say as often as they wanted that she was only a friend to Rusty, but Matty had seen the truth just now, in the way Rusty had held her, and not for the world to see. For him to see.

He rushed toward the dorm. Supposedly, he still had classes to attend but he couldn’t remember what they were and why he had to go.

When Zoey caught him on the stairs, he was already running.

“Matty, have you heard?”

He shook his head no but admitted, “Yes. He’s with her now.” So few words, yet they held everything he needed to know.

“I’m so pissed,” Zoey continued and grabbed his arm.

“Don’t you have classes?” he asked her.

“Don’t you?” she answered with a question. “This is too big. I want to cry so much.”

She even sniffled. Matty let out a small laugh at first but, in all honesty, he felt like crying, too. Good thing they were close to his room now.

Zoey grabbed his hand and held it. “You should go to him and slap him,” she proposed.

“Why?” Matty asked and as he uttered the one word it came out pained.

“Because he’s such an asshole,” Zoey complained. “How could he do this to you?”

“He’s happy with her. There’s nothing I can do.”

“Don’t you want to slap him? Strangle him? Kill him a little?”

“Maybe. A little. But it’s no use. He’s obviously made his choice, and he wanted me to see it.”

“I know!” Zoey shouted and jumped to her feet. There was just too much energy in that small body, and it had to find an outlet somewhere. “You will have to do the same.”

“Should I hug August in the middle of the quad?”

“Don’t hide behind jokes,” Zoey said and stamped her foot. “I hate her guts. I don’t know what her deal is, but she makes me so mad.”

“None of this is her fault. Rusty chose her,” Matty said, trying to sound convincing and failing.

“I don’t care! She’s to blame because she exists. That’s enough for me,” Zoey stated, waving one hand through the air.

“Well, I’m glad she exists because Rusty had someone to turn to when he needed it.”

“Damn you, Matty.” Zoey shook her head in negation. “You’re not giving up, are you?”

“I don’t even know what you mean by that. I can’t stop loving him if that’s what you’re asking. But I can stop trying to talk to him. Talking to him is something that might be possible in the future, but not right now. I’m only human.”

“That’s good enough for me. You need to make him jealous.”

Matty rolled his eyes, trying to make light of Zoey’s suggestion.

“No, don’t give me that look,” his friend continued. “It is not a matter of choice. You just have to do it. Give me your phone. I’m going to send you on three different Grindr dates in a jiffy.”

“Gawd, Zoey, the last thing I want right now is hook up,” Matty replied and slipped his phone under his mattress in a swift motion and then sat on the bed to ensure that his bestie wouldn’t get him in unusual trouble just because she cared so much about him.

“There’s no way you can let him get away with this.”

“This, as you call it, is what he chose. I can’t go against that.”

Zoey shook her head, her lips pursed. She paced the room and seemed to be deep in thought. Matty decided not to interrupt her. He had no energy left anyway. What he wanted right now was to hide under the covers and sleep until he forgot everything.

“Something’s wrong,” Zoey muttered under her breath. At this point, she seemed more likely to be talking to herself than to him. “There’s no way I’m wrong about this. You can’t tell me you didn’t feel it, Matty.”

“Feel what?”

“That he loves you. It’s impossible for anyone to get so close to you and not love you.”

“Not for him, obviously.”

“Stop putting yourself down. There has to be something.” She continued pacing the floor, this time with her hands behind her back, like a general anxious to get his strategy right before leading the attack of his troops.

“I appreciate this, Zoey, I do--”

His phone ringing interrupted them. Cautiously, Matty rummaged for it under the mattress.

“Is it Rusty? Who is it?” Zoey asked, throwing the questions at him in rapid fire.

“No, it’s someone else,” Matty said and frowned as he saw the name on the screen. “I’d better not--”

Zoey grabbed it from him with the dexterity of a monkey. Rusty had been right to give her that nickname. She was already in the bathroom, the door locked. He pounded on it.

“Zoey, come on, this isn’t funny.”

“Who’s Jamie?” Zoey asked, while his phone kept ringing.

“No one.”

“That’s it, I’m answering it.”

Matty groaned and pressed his forehead against the bathroom door while listening to Zoey’s voice on the other side.

“Why, of course, he’d be so happy to get together with you,” Zoey drawled. “Yeah, well, you see, the moment he saw you were calling, he got so excited that he had to jump in the shower. Yeah, without answering the phone, because that’s how flustered he got. Of course, I’ll tell him. He’ll be there.”

Matty crossed his arms and waited for Zoey to come out of the bathroom. As if she hadn’t done the unspeakable, she handed the phone back to him.

“You have a date,” she said brightly.

“I’m not going. Jamie’s a player.”

“All for the better. That’s exactly what you need right now.”

“Zoey, that guy might want to hook up!”

“So? By the way, your date is in two hours. Make sure to wash all that sadness off your face. Or maybe not. Something tells me that this dude might be big time into you if you style yourself as a tragic figure.”

“He’s never called me before,” Matty said. “Obviously, he wants to talk to me about Rusty, and that’s not what I want.”

“Why would he want to talk to you about Rusty?”

“Because they’re friends.”

Zoey stared at him for a moment and then snapped her fingers. “That’s even better. You can ask him what the hell got into Rusty. Grill the hell out of him.”

“Zoey, it’s a bad idea. I might not survive this so-called date,” Matty warned.

But she was grinning happily. “Oh, he’s so going to wreck you. And you know it. Oh, gawd, this is so good. It’s exactly what you need.”

“Zoey! Really! I’m not the kind to jump from--”

“I know.” She grabbed him by the arms and looked him in the eyes. “But if you go out there, and Rusty hears about it, I bet he’s going to eat his heart out. He’s not the only one who can pull that sort of act.”

Going on a date with Jamie was the last thing Matty needed or wanted to do. Zoey would just have to understand that.

“It’s either this or I’m staying cooped up in here all day with you so that we can both cry our eyeballs out. Come on, Matty, you don’t have to hook up with this guy. And I know you’re not the kind to do so, and that you’re stronger than this. If you still love Rusty so much, what are you even afraid of?”

That was one valid question. It wasn’t as if he would let himself be pressured into hooking up just out of politeness. To see himself with anyone other than Rusty was ludicrous to begin with. So he laughed.

Zoey hugged him briefly. “I knew you’d make the right choice.”

“But I didn’t say that I’d go.”

“You don’t have to. I know you will. Also, I’m going to sit here and force you to get ready for your date. So, you see, you can’t ditch Jamie. By the way, is he sexy?”

“Very.”

“Perfect. Take that, Rusty Parker,” Zoey said, clenching her tiny fist.



“Oh, look what the cat dragged in,” Kane remarked first as soon as he set foot in the house and let August in after him.

“That’s not a very nice name to call August,” he said, making an attempt at joking. “She’s more like a cougar.”

“Do you want to die?” August threatened him. “I’m not that old. I did my part, guys. I brought him here. Do you think you can take him off my hands for a while?”

“Yeah, not a problem. Thank you for bringing the stray back,” Kane said promptly. “Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“No, I’m off. I have a thousand things to take care of.”

She hadn’t said anything about having things to do, but it was true that she had been around to look after him, so she must have neglected her own life for him. He turned to her to offer his thanks, but she waved him off with a pointed look in her eyes as she said goodbye and walked out.

Great. Now, he would have to endure the ordeal by himself. He looked at Kane, and his friend simply looked back at him before walking to the foot of the stairs to yell: “Rusty’s back!”

He plopped down on the sofa, bracing himself for the lecture that would soon start. He didn’t expect a friendly squeeze on his shoulder.

“So, how have you been?”

“Through hell, mostly,” he admitted.

Kane was the most likely of them all to start with the lecturing, so that was a great sign. He was about to add something when he got attacked from behind and forced to the floor. Dex held him down and rubbed his head hard.

“Finally, home?”

“Yeah. Although I might need the hospital now. You must have broken at least one of my ribs.”

“Shut up, whiner. You’re fine.”

That he was, especially now with the warm welcome and all.

“Rusty!” Maddox exclaimed from the top of the stairs and hurried down to pick him up off the floor.

This time, he didn’t feel like the hug was unwarranted, so he hugged his bestie back.

“Where’s Johnny boy?” he asked. “Don’t tell me he’s too busy studying.”

“No, he’s here, too. We have a ton of things to tell you.”

“Can the lecture wait for a couple of more days?”

“We don’t want to lecture you.” Maddox made them both sit on the sofa. “We’re just glad you’re back.”

“Wow, so no lecturing?”

“No. But you’ve been out of the loop, and you need to get right back in.”

“Yeah, sure.”

That was normal, right? Banter and chill all around. He felt better already.

“So, what’s been going on in the realm in my absence?” he joked.

“Jonathan’s going to tell you,” Maddox said and gestured with his chin at his future better-half, who was coming down the stairs. “Connor’s been going so crazy with no one to stand in his way.”

He got up to hug Jonathan on his own, giving the others a reason to jeer and hoot.

“So, what’s up with Connor?” he asked, as soon as all the effusive hugs and welcomes were out of the way.

“Not many good things, obviously,” Jonathan said. “He has started a crusade against the Dean of Students.”

“What for?” Rusty asked with a frown. “After all, Preston gave him free rein to do whatever he wanted with that crappy organization.”

“Well, apparently, that’s no longer good enough for him. He wants the guy’s head,” Maddox explained. “I have no idea if or what kind of pull he has with the administration, but he’s going at it like a crazy dog. He might make Preston resign, only by making the poor man think that all the students hate him.”

Rusty sensed his mind starting to work, but then he remembered his choice and only smiled.

“So what are you guys going to do about it?”

That appeared to make them all stop for a moment. Then, Jonathan began to talk.

“I personally assured the dean of our support. He might have been a laissez-faire kind of dean to us, but I’m quite certain that we don’t want him replaced with whoever Connor considers fit for the job.”

“It’s not like he can do that, anyway. Unless that pull, as you call it, is pretty strong,” Rusty said.

“It’s all politics and perspective,” Kane explained. “And you know how easily influenced some of the students can be. A large number of them don’t care, and that’s a problem, too. Because we can end up with the vocal minority led by Connor turning the campus into whatever crazy vision he has for it.”

“Yeah, but we’re seniors. We shouldn’t care so much,” Rusty argued.

Dex stared at him as if he was growing another head. “It’s all a matter of principles, Rusty. Don’t say you’re okay with this shit Connor is trying to pull. The people need a champion.” He punched him playfully in the shoulder. “And they have one. When are you going to take back what’s yours? You’ve let Connor do his worst for a bit, but that has to stop.”

Rusty opened his arms in a gesture of surrender. “I’m going to tell Preston in person that I’m with him. But I’m not going to do anything else. I mean, between you and me, this whole king of Sunny Hill thing is a bit childish.”

“What about Rybalt?” Jonathan asked.

Rusty shrugged. “He’s as good as dead and buried. Unless someone else feels like donning a cape and trying his hand at singing--”

“Are you giving up on being Rybalt?” Maddox interrupted.

“I know you must all feel sort of disappointed, but I got a wakeup call, Maddie.” He said the nickname not as playful mockery, but as the endearment it truly was. “I no longer have time for fooling around.”

“So, are you going to study now?” Kane asked.

They were all looking at him intently.

“The least I can do is finish college properly. Don’t expect me to surpass our dear Jonathan here, but I’m going to pull my own weight.”

“What about singing?” Dex asked. “You’re going to take it up seriously after college, right?”

He shook his head and didn’t dare look at anyone in particular. “No. It was all really silly if we think about it, right? I mean, all this cloak and dagger stuff. Life is not a play.”

“Damn,” Dex said and stared at him with surprise. “When did you decide to grow up?”

“When mom took a tumble because of me,” he replied. “A little tumble that put her in a coma. Is that enough of an answer for you, Dexter?”

Dex looked away. They all seemed stunned by the revelations of this new person that looked like their friend and moved like their friend, but no longer spoke like him.

“Look, guys,” he said, “it’s not like these things didn’t have to come to an end eventually. We’ve fooled around long enough. Real life is waiting for us. And of us all, I’ve fooled around the most. It was going to happen anyway.”

Dex shook his head as if he couldn’t understand a thing he was saying. Kane sighed and crossed his arms in reproach. But Maddox held his shoulder and didn’t seem to judge him.

“Well, if any of you has anything else to say, please don’t hold back.” He stared, in turn, at each of his friends. “You, Jonathan?” he asked, eventually, since the frown on that aristocratic face seemed to say that there was something to share and it was important.

Jonathan smiled and began walking away. “I have a phone call to make. And we all have to study, anyway. Welcome back, Rusty.”

Yes, they had to study. It was boring, but it was a must. A grownup person didn’t go around, doing whatever they wanted all the time. Sometimes, they needed to buckle down and do what was right.



Matty wasn’t particularly surprised by the arm thrown over his shoulders and for his personal space to be invaded like that.

“For the record, Jamie, I’m here only because Zoey’s crazy.”

“Zoey,” Jamie said with a grin. “That cheeky girl on the phone. Do you swing both ways, Matty?”

“No.”

“So, just a little thing you don’t have in common with Rusty.”

When Jamie called, Matty had forgotten they had exchanged phone numbers. And now, he wasn't so sure he wanted to be there and talk about Rusty. Damn, he was turning into such a coward. He needed to get a grip already. And he wanted to talk about Rusty. Not to curse at him, like Zoey seemed to prefer, but to try understand him, if such a thing were possible to begin with.

"Yeah, I guess so. What would you like to do? Where to?"

"Let's take a walk." Jamie had no trouble holding him. If Rusty weren't in the picture, Matty could see no reason to not give in and have a little fun with the attractive bad boy by his side.

Nothing was truly stopping him apart from his feelings. Zoey had gone as far as to talk to him about rebound sex, but Matty didn't feel like that would be the right solution for him. With Rusty's rejection, it felt as if all the desire had been washed out of him. There was nothing left.

"So, Rusty went and did it, right?"

"Aren't you abnormally in touch with what's going on at Sunny Hill, Jamie? I bet you only called because you heard... wait. Did it end up in Xpress?"

"That crappy gossip rag? I have no idea. But I heard enough people talking about Rusty Parker's long awaited return. The king got himself a queen. Am I wrong?"

"I don't think you are," Matty said, although he felt his chest caving in from the pressure.

"Where does that leave you, Matty?"

"Exactly where I am."

"Where's that?"

The entire conversation seemed so strange. Matty had expected Jamie to try to get into his pants, or at least allude to that.

"Whatever impression you might have about what went on between Rusty and I, it's wrong," he said. "I mean, it was just a thing between us. Like fuck buddies, to speak your language. August's more than that to him."

"Rusty has been fuck buddies for a moment or two with a whole lot of girls, but never with a dude," Jamie said.

"That's just a detail. And it's irrelevant."

"Really? How weird. All those months of you two fucking like rabbits, you know that's weird, too, right?"

“It’s not weird. It was a pleasurable way to pass the time.” It was getting more and more difficult to get the words out in Jamie’s presence. The guy was looking for a truth, and Matty had no idea if he had that truth to give him.

“If that was all it was, how come you’re so down?”

“That’s my problem. And weren’t you the one who said something about offering comfort to those in need? Not so keen on your saintly duties, are you?” Matty said and shook his head. At least, if Jamie did that, if he jumped at the opportunity, then he would have a reason to call off the date and go back to his dorm to lick his wounds the way he wanted.

“Oh, I’m here to offer you all the comfort you need.” Jamie stopped and turned him so that they were facing each other. “You know, you’re really pretty.”

“Thanks.”

“I didn’t mean it as a compliment. It’s a fact.”

“I see. This is how you’re trying to seduce me.”

“Maybe.” That sexy dimpled smile must have won over many hearts. “How am I doing so far?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to try harder than that.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jamie wrapped one hand around the back of his neck and moved closer.

Matty met his gaze without flinching. And he didn’t close his eyes, either, when Jamie moved in for a kiss.



What’s the definition of a worthy cause, Sunny Hill? We’ll tell you something about such grand ideas. A worthy cause requires a worthy opponent, and therefore, we see neither. If you’ve paid attention to what has been happening lately on our beloved campus grounds, you know what we’re talking about.

Are there truly no more heroes left in the world? The throne is vacant. No masked singers wake up the night to make it come alive. And Connor Williams and his Implacables are winning without an opponent.

We’re bitter. We’re through. Give us a hero, Sunny Hill, or we might just have to pull the plug. You don’t want that, do you?

Do you?

Chapter Fifty

Boys like You Don't End up with the King

Matty waited patiently until Jamie let go. Their eyes met again, and he was only half-surprised by the openly appreciative smile Jamie gave him.

"I see. Wow," Jamie said.

"You'll have to spell it out for me," Matty said.

"You're in love with him."

"Because I didn't respond to your kiss?"

Jamie laughed. He appeared so confident, so easy to like. "I could make you, you know."

"I have no doubt."

"Good. It would break my little heartbreaking heart if you said otherwise. Now that sex isn't in the cards, how about we just hang out?"

"I have nothing against it," Matty agreed. "I have one question, though. Why didn't you insist, just now? I'm sure you've broken others' resolve before."

"Yeah, but when it was worth it. Call me a lawful criminal or something like that. I only steal what's readily on offer. Or, you know, on the fence, ready to fall in my lap."

"I'd call that comfortable and maybe lazy."

"Pretty boy," Jamie drawled, "don't test me. Ah, maybe you're lucky it's Rusty we're talking about."

"Because you care about him? Don't let that stop you. He made his choice," Matty pointed out.

"Let me make a little confession. It might look like it, but you forget that I've seen you with him."

"And?" Matty made an effort to square his shoulders. He had no reason to walk through the world, looking forlorn and defeated. Only Rusty had the right to see him like that, and even for him, he had mustered that smile, with all the costs attached.

"And I'm pretty damn sure that if he gets the slightest idea that I got freaky with you, he's going to have my head."

“Damn, you’re good,” Matty said and forced himself to smile. “You know exactly what to say to make me feel ready to fall in your lap, as you say.”

“I deserve that,” Jamie replied. “But this time, it’s not a game. I’m telling you the truth. He’s possessive of you. Very possessive.”

“He’s got a girlfriend,” Matty immediately supplied the obvious.

“Nah, I don’t buy that. Rusty has never showed that kind of possessiveness toward anyone or anything. He’s the kind to let go. All the freaking time. Such a free spirit, right? Damn right annoying.”

“He let me go. And I understand.”

“Maybe you should stop.”

“Understanding?”

“Yeah.”

Matty pondered those words. He had no idea what to make of them. Jamie was, apparently, an endless supply of surprises.

“Is this the moment when you start telling me I should think with my heart or something stupid like that?”

“No, you’re too cool for that.” Jamie kissed his cheek noisily. “You freaking brainiac. Of course, he’d go for someone like you. Before you ask what I mean by that. Someone who’s his complete opposite. You complete him,” he whispered right into his ear.

This time, Matty laughed out loud. He hadn’t done that for days, and the sound of his own laughter lifted a weight from his shoulders.

“Here is what we’re going to do,” Jamie said. “I’m going to give you all that comfort, but without the sex. What do you say?”

“Why not? Actually, thank you, Jamie. It feels good, so whatever magic you have that you use on people, it’s working.”

“Great. I wouldn’t ask for anything else.”



The first time, it had been sort of a shock. He should have expected it. Maybe not so soon, and the fact that it hurt him right annoyed the hell out of him. Matty was hanging out with Jamie, and

if Rusty knew anything about what that kind of hanging out meant, it could only lead to one thing and one thing only.

He had no right to feel so hurt. Or jealous. It only went to show that he needed to be stronger than he was. He tried to fool himself into believing that it was only his ego demanding its rights, or that he thought Matty deserved better than a playboy. But it was neither, and he couldn't convince himself of the lies, regardless of how much he tried.

Matty didn't appear to notice the way his eyes lingered on him and his newfound friend. He always appeared to be caught up in whatever Jamie was telling him, sometimes even laughing, the sound of his pleasure carried to the onlooker... and for what?

He should have been happy, so damn happy. Matty had moved on. Just as he had expected it to happen. Yet, he was the one on the lookout for the new duo everywhere he went. More than once his steps changed direction as soon as he overheard that they had been spotted. They were even a bit of a celebrity pair. Jamie was sexy, Matty was sexy. Of course, they would make people look at them everywhere they went.

Some people seemed to remember vaguely that Matty had used to be his tutor. That was gone, too, of course. How easily people forgot. It frightened him and made him turn away and go back home where he would spend his days in bed, forcing himself to study, per the promise he had made in front of his friends. At least, there was no Matty there to worry about. Or, better said, there was the only place where he could go to leave the world outside, a world in which Matty was no longer his.

He had deleted all the texts from Matty that had been sent during those horrible days. The news from the hospital remained reserved. Anything could happen. But one thing was certain, his mother would eventually be moved to a place where they could take care of her. Also, his dad would pay for it all.

His phone pinged and he grabbed it quickly. He stared stupidly at the screen. It wasn't a text from Matty, although why he had been waiting for one had no reasonable explanation. It was just Maddox, who didn't want to move his ass up the stairs and talk to him.

Come downstairs.

Why?

We have a surprise for you.

Unless the surprise was Matty beautifully wrapped in nothing but a bow... Fuck, what the hell was he thinking? Why wasn't he letting go already? Why didn't the universe understand that he had made the right choice?

I hate surprises.

No, you don't. Now, Rusty.

Well, he couldn't study anyway. He was probably hard in the head and hadn't realized it until now. With a shrug and a look around the room that had been his safe shelter for the last few days, he decided that he needed to make an effort to get out of his cocoon of self-imposed misery. It might also give him a break from thinking about Matty. That would be good.

He couldn't help thinking about him. He was still doing that and only once he was halfway down the stairs did he raise his eyes and see the surprise.

"No," he said.

Francine was staring at him from below. She was dressed to impress, in a light cream two-piece suit, her hair pulled back into a conservative chignon, her pearls in place as usual.

"Don't you dare run, young man," she said from the tip of her lips and adjusted her bag on her forearm while maintaining the same menacing gaze on him.

"Hamilton," Rusty began, his eyes darting around the room, searching for traitors, "I'm so going to--"

"Now," Francine interrupted him.

"I need to change into something nicer," he argued. "I wasn't expecting royalty."

"No, as you are." Francine didn't spare him another glance as she turned on her heel. "Let's not keep Simmons waiting. He's very anxious for a drive."

Rusty looked down at himself, at the sweatpants and the simple t-shirt he had on. He shrugged. Supposedly, he could receive a lecture while being dressed like a bum. It might even serve to support his cause. He walked down and only added sneakers to his offensive attire. Glancing about the room, he saw that there were still no traitors around.



Simmons greeted him effusively, and he did look more than a little anxious, like a kid on his first fieldtrip. Maybe Francine needed to get the poor guy out of the house more.

He was in the backseat, keeping a safe distance from the tiger.

"You could have lectured me at the house," he began. "I guess you spoke to Mrs. May."

Francine was resting her elbow on the door on her side of the car and looking out the window. She didn't seem to have heard him.

“Where are we going?” he asked after a while. Wherever their destination was, it was pretty far. And Francine wasn’t dragging him to Mrs. May’s home studio, either. It felt a little bit like being kidnapped, only more frightening.

He had no idea what she was thinking and didn’t have the guts to ask, either. She was so incredibly vicious in her silence. And the way she couldn’t be bothered to spare him a glance should have been a clear sign that she had already given up on him.

The only problem was that they were still moving toward some unknown destination.

“You know, you might be rich and all, but if you plan to kill me and get rid of the body, you might not get away with it,” he joked.

Yeah, fallen on deaf ears. How frightened did he have to be?

Finally, the car stopped. At first, Rusty thought they were in the middle of nowhere, but then he noticed a vehicle approaching, sending a plume of dust into the air behind it.

“Out,” Francine ordered and he obeyed.

The truck, because it was a truck approaching them, stopped, and a man in his fifties with a hardhat on got out.

“Mrs. Hamilton, what an incredible surprise,” he offered courteously.

Francine greeted the man with a lot more warmth than Rusty had received from her on their way here.

“Mr. Harris, please take this young man,” she said with a benevolent smile. “Work him to the bone. I will pick him up at shift change. Is that all right?”

Mr. Harris examined Rusty from head to toe and seemed pleased. He asked Francine no more questions.

“Come on, lad. We’re in full swing, and there’s plenty to do.”

All right, so it was a damn good joke and all, but what the hell? Rusty turned to watch Francine get into the car. He guessed rather than saw the way she waved at Simmons, most probably telling him to start driving.



Hours later, he was bone-tired. It must have been one of the construction sites run by the Hamiltons. Rusty hadn’t understood a lot of what the foreman told him while pointing him at the safety gear and tools he needed. He’d only understood that there was a lot of rock that needed

breaking in spots where the machines couldn't reach. And he had gone at it with a vengeance, his muscles taking over his thoughts and freeing them for a while.

All he needed right now was a bed to crash on. What was the lesson, anyway? He was sure as hell it was a lesson, only that he had no idea what it was. Ah, Francine was trying to show him where he might end up if he gave up on music. There was nothing wrong with that kind of work. It was honest, and it felt good, although it made him hurt all over.

But that was probably too simple, right?

The car stopped several feet away. Mr. Harris patted him on the back and wished him luck, telling him again how much he appreciated the work Rusty had done today.

He took another look at himself. The coveralls had kept his clothes from getting too dirty, but his arms looked like a statue's and his hair was a mess, sweaty and glued to his forehead. It would be a shame to leave unsightly smudges all over Francine's car.

The car horn startled him. Now that was his cue.



“You know what I don't understand?”

“What?” Matty asked and couldn't suppress a yawn. Jamie was in charge of his free hours to keep him from thinking about Rusty, and Zoey took over the second shift. That only left him with the night. It was precious little, but he didn't plan on giving up anyway. Of course, his two friends didn't know about his stubborn decision.

“Rybalt has been a no-show for a damn long time now.”

Not so long. Matty knew how to count. Still, he needed to remind himself that while he was in Zoey's presence, he wasn't allowed to mope about Rusty.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Zoey stared at him with shrewd eyes. “So, how about you put on that cat suit and try to lure him out of his den?”

“That would be no use.” Her surprised stare made him realize that she didn't know Rusty was Rybalt. “Stop trying to push me into the arms of other men. Jamie's enough as it is.”

“Yeah, only that he's not doing what's I expected of him. Come on, Matty. You liked Rybalt, didn't you? I mean, the guy kissed you and all.”

He kept his mouth shut. He was getting so tired, he just had to close his eyes.

“Who is Rybalt, Matty?”

Zoey was so close it startled him.

“I have no idea.”

The problem was she was too close.

“Damn,” she said once she noticed his guilty look. “Damn, Matty. Are you trying to say--”

“I wasn’t saying anything.”

“But of course.” She straightened up. “It all makes sense now, especially his disappearance and all of the other coincidences... Matty, give it to me straight.”

“Yeah, okay, Rusty’s Rybalt,” he exclaimed and threw his arms up in surrender. What was the point of keeping it a secret from his bestie? His loyalty to Rusty stretched just so far. This was harmless. Or was it?

“For real?” Zoey’s eyes grew so wide she looked like a cartoon character. “For real?!” This time louder, of course.

“What do you mean for real? Wasn’t that what you were trying to tell me?” He felt too irritated for Zoey’s good. Being emotionally wrought all the time was patience consuming.

“No.” She shook her head, looking just as bewildered. “I thought you must have slipped tongue to Rybalt one too many times, and Rusty somehow found out, and there must have been a battle between rivals for you--”

“Only you would think of an entire melodramatic play,” Matty retorted. “Seriously? You thought I cheated on Rusty?”

“It would have made you human,” Zoey replied with a shrug. “But you’re a monster in love if I ever saw one. Don’t give me that look. A cute monster.” She slapped her own face and gasped, as if she just remembered she was supposed to be surprised. “Rusty’s Rybalt?”

“Yes. I’ve known for some time,” Matty admitted. “Feel free to hate me for not telling you.”

“I’m not going to do that. You’re above getting mad at because you’re suffering way too much already. But... I really don’t get it. Rusty can’t sing. I mean, we’ve all heard him doing that karaoke thing, right? How does one go from that to... you know, freaking opera?”

“I think he could always sing like that,” Matty said. “I always wanted to find out why he preferred to keep it hidden from everyone. I missed my chance, it seems.”

“You can still ask him,” Zoey said quietly. “Although, he hasn’t sung a thing in a long time. What if he gave up on that, too?”

Zoey’s all too innocent question made him snap his head upward so fast he startled her. He felt something inside him starting to crumble slowly. It wasn’t a sudden disaster, but only the shore crumbling after days and days of rain. “Damn it, Zoey,” he whispered softly.

“What? What did I say?” she asked, alarmed and a bit scared.

“It’s not your fault, don’t worry. It’s been right under my eyes all this time. Even Xpress hasn’t shut up about it. I have no idea what Rusty’s doing, but this makes me think... he must have given up on music, too. Yeah, just like you said.”

“It must be temporary.”

“It could be, but I don’t know. Right now, I just need to tell you. You and Jamie both are doing a fine job of keeping me busy so that I don’t obsess over him, but this puts everything in a new light. Zoey, I’m afraid that if Rusty gave up on what seemed to be his passion – because I don’t think anyone can sing like that without loving it to the core – what chance do I have?”

Zoey moved slowly and took his hands. “Don’t say things like that.”

“Well, I must be brave, right? I have to admit it. I can hope all I want that he might see things differently someday, but we’re not kids. That thing with his mom must have given him a whole new perspective on things, on life, I don’t know. All I know is that I’m not part of it.”

“Are you saying that you want to move on?”

“Don’t act so surprised. You and Jamie have both pushed me in that direction for some time now.”

“Yeah, while hoping Rusty would get so mad with jealousy that he’d do something about it.”

“It doesn’t look like that’s going to happen.” Matty took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “I need to stop this. Somehow. Not that I know how. I don’t expect to stop being in love with him on a whim, but I can at least stop hoping.”

“Ah, damn, this hurts,” Zoey whispered and hung her head in defeat. “I really thought he’d come running back to you once he realized he can’t live without you.”

“That kind of stuff only happens in books,” Matty said, feeling weary to the bone and in need of crawling under a blanket and having a good cry. He couldn’t do that in front of Zoey, though, because he couldn’t do something like that to her.

“I know what to do!” Zoey exclaimed. “You need a way to bury your love, Matty.”

“I don’t want to bury--”

“No, listen to me. You need a symbolic gesture, something that will draw a line so you can at least consider moving on.”

“I’ve told you about it. Doesn’t that count?”

Zoey squeezed his hands in hers. “Can you sell the cat boy suit?”

“No, I’ve been naked underneath it way too many times. It would be a foul thing to do. And I wouldn’t sell it, anyway.”

“Do you want to keep it?”

He shook his head. He didn’t want that, either.

Zoey straightened up, a veritable image of solemnity. “Then there’s only one thing to be done. We must bury Slicky Coolplums.”



Now that was one driveway he knew. He turned to Francine before she could order him to get out.

“I could say no.”

“Will you?”

“No.”

“Then what are we talking for? Out.”

He followed her like a beaten dog into the house. After all, everyone he had hurt lately had the right to yell at him. The way he saw it, Francine was saving him time and gas money.

Mrs. May didn’t appear surprised to see them at that hour at all, which could only mean that their visit had been scheduled prior to their arrival. Strangely enough, Francine hadn’t made one phone call or sent any texts, as far as he could remember from their silent trip by car.

Simmons appeared to be the only party oblivious to everything, taking all that was happening in stride. He was invited to join the rest of the family watching a movie while Rusty was flanked in front by Mrs. May and Francine at the rear on their way to the studio.

So, they wanted the whole thing. He’d do it because it was asked of him.

“Make him sing, please,” Francine told Mrs. May as she took her place on a chair in the room, at a fair distance from him.

“What do you really hope to achieve with this? I don’t want to sing anymore.” He felt his presence so incongruous in that room, and not only because he was dirty and tired. “What was the point in having me break rocks all day?”

Mrs. May turned a questioning look toward Francine. Jonathan’s mom seemed completely unfazed by his question.

“I made you touch the ground. How did it feel?”

Not bad. Probably good. He wouldn’t admit it, though.

“Well, now Meryl and I will make you touch the sky, as well.”

“Fine,” he said and accepted the sheet from the vocal coach. Mrs. May had been silent save for a few necessary words exchanged at the door. “You will see that I no longer want it.”

“I won’t believe it until I see it with my own eyes. Go on.”

Under Mrs. May’s guidance, he began. He didn’t plan on disappointing them, he didn’t sing out of tune on purpose. Actually, the technique remained there, where it had been so carefully ingrained in him after all, but there was flatness in the way he sang that was impossible to go unnoticed.

“I’m afraid he’s not ready,” Mrs. May said quietly, addressing Francine.

“He’s not trying, you mean. Give him another one.”

So this was the kind of torture she intended for him. And he felt so tired.

“Think of what is making you sad, Rusty,” Francine said, her keen eyes set on him.

So many things. His mom, most of all. But the words coming out of his mouth, every note, climbed only as high as it needed to fall back to the same cursed level of mediocrity.

“This isn’t working,” he said, speaking for them, voicing what they had to be thinking.

Another glance passed between the two women. And then, Mrs. May said, “Sadness was never your tune, Rusty. Think of what makes you happy.”

That was a tough one, a very tough one, indeed.

“Think of her,” Mrs. May added gently.

He tried thinking of his mom, a life wasted in the name of something he couldn’t call love. But that wasn’t what his vocal coach meant, right?

“Him,” he heard Francine say.

He looked up. Mrs. May smiled in acquiescence at Francine's suggestion.

"Think of him, Rusty."

They talked about him without knowing who he was, but he did, and he was the one to sing. He hesitated as he stared at the new sheet that had been handed to him. He knew this one by heart.

So, he closed his eyes and began singing, the playfulness was doubled by seriousness because he knew that he meant everything beyond every word, even if the language wasn't the one he had been born into. He knew what the author of the piece had intended to do with it, and it was such a revelation of his life before. But now, for him, it marked a rite of passage, a movement toward something new. Suddenly, without even knowing it, only feeling it, he began meaning every word.

Minutes later, as he let the final note fall from his lips, he opened his eyes.

"I hate you both," he whispered.

Francine smiled. "Encore," she said, looking damned pleased with herself.

He sniffled and pressed his face against his forearm, the smell of earth from the construction site flooding his nostrils.

"Encore," Mrs. May agreed and nodded, encouraging him with her eyes.

"Stop breaking me, you witches," he said, choking on the words.

"Sing, Rusty. You know you can't not do so."

Yes, of course. He couldn't not. Just like he couldn't not think of Matty. Of how he truly, deeply loved him.



"We are, at least, a bit insane," Matty confessed as they struggled with a plastic shovel Zoey had discovered at the back of her closet, a remnant of a birthday gift that was supposed to go to one of her very young nieces. It was all they had and beggars couldn't be choosers.

"Well, being symbolic and stuff takes courage and brawn," she said as she handed him the shovel back. "Obviously, in this situation, I'm the one with the courage, you're the muscle."

"Yeah. You know, people in movies make it look so easy, digging a hole. It's not. Just how deep should we make it?"

"Well, we don't want the first rain to bring it back to the surface. It might lead to uncomfortable questions. The police might get involved," she said in an intimate, scary whisper.

“Only you can make me feel like a criminal.” Matty continued the arduous task and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. The plastic tool only made it more difficult.

“But you like it,” Zoey shot back cheerfully. She held the phone’s flashlight up so that he could see what he was doing.

The weather was starting to grow chilly. An owl hooted nearby, giving him the willies.

“Why on earth I let you talk me into such stuff baffles me.”

“Wait, what was that?”

“What?”

Zoey said nothing, and they both stood still, not moving a muscle. “I don’t know, for a moment, I felt as if we were being watched. I’m afraid I have to urge you to hurry up and bury your love for Rusty faster.”

“Thanks, partner. All this craziness really gives the moment the right tone, methinks.” He tried to laugh it off, but it didn’t work too well.

Zoey grabbed the bundle made of the cat boy suit and handed it to him.

“Wait, before you put Slicky into the ground, how about saying a few solemn words?”

Matty stood by the edge of the very small hole he had managed to dig and looked down as Zoey put the latex suit inside.

“I have no idea what I should say. You try.”

Zoey seemed prepared, unlike him.

“Here lies Slicky Coolplums,” she said in a grave voice, “whose only sin upon this earth was to fall in love with the king of Sunny Hill. His silly antics came from the heart, and we would be hard-pressed to hold them against him, seeing how we’d all love to be capable of the same stuff if we were only as limber as he. May his latex coat and furry tail find peace and good company among the well-meaning worms aerating this patch of soil.”

“All right,” he said with a sigh. He loaded as much dirt as he could onto the little shovel and threw it over the cat boy’s earthly remains. He had no idea if Zoey’s plan was working, and he didn’t feel any lighter than before, but he was tired enough to not give a damn anymore.



“Can you let me out here? I’d like to walk for a bit,” he told Francine as soon as the campus lights came into focus.

“Of course. Remember today, Rusty. That is the real you.”

He just nodded. He wanted to thank her, but he found his words too small to express it all. His mind had been hijacked by many other wondrous thoughts. They must have been to blame for it. Of course, they were all about Matty and no one and nothing else.

It didn't matter that he had worked all day breaking rocks and that he had exhausted his soul while singing in front of Mrs. May and Francine. He needed to walk, to feel the air on his face and see the campus at night, the same way he had seen it so many times.

And think of Matty. Only of him.



Just who do you think you are, Matthew Han?! Hear our collective gasp as we write these words. We accuse. We know everything.

You dressed up as a cat boy and cheated your way into the arms and – how presumptuous of you! – soul of our king! Now everything makes sense. Everything that has happened over the past weeks, our king's abdication, your vulgar exposure of all your hookups, the pain you caused!

In a more journalistic manner, we want to inform everyone that we have solved one more of the mysteries of Sunny Hill. Matthew Han, believing himself smart and good-looking, took it upon himself to seduce our one and only king, Rusty Parker. To some degree he appears to have succeeded, or else why would a ladies' man like our leader feel so betrayed by a nobody who hooks up all the time with other nameless nobodies? But alas, all is solved. Rusty Parker shall soon forget.

Now, back to our outrage. How dare you, Matthew Han, how dare you think you had a chance? Don't you know? Boys like you don't end up with the king!

Chapter Fifty-One

Through the Mud, on Our Way to the Stars

His heart felt like an inflated balloon inside his chest, which must be the case or otherwise, he had no explanation for why each step he took lifted him off the ground to the point that he mostly felt like he was floating. So, until now, he had known unknown love – and that had to cover every moment since... when had he really fallen for Matty? Rusty stopped for a moment to ponder over it. Had it been when they went out for ice cream? No, definitely a lot, lot sooner than that. All the crazy sex they'd had? Okay, so that played like a major role in it because Rusty loved every inch of Matty's body, as well as every drop of his kinky self. But that wasn't it, either. How far back could he go with the memories? Gabriel's birthday party... that had been a milestone, for sure. Wow, could it be that he had fallen in love when he got smacked with that ruler?

He was in the middle of the road, at night, and he was laughing. Good thing there was no one around or they might think he had gone completely bonkers. There wasn't a moment in time when he'd fallen for Matty. There couldn't be, because that kind of thing hadn't happened to him like in the movies and books. He hadn't watched Matty slinking his way past an aquarium wearing angel wings and smiling innocently at him, nor had he caught a glimpse of Matty bathing in a lake with most of his clothes on for the sake of historical accuracy, only to give Rusty butterflies at the sight of his nipples poking at the delicate fabric of his shirt. No, no, no, none of that swooning, eyelash-batting, heart-skipping-beats nonsense. Although, he might have experienced all of those things while being with Matty. He just hadn't thought about them much at the time, nor about what they meant.

One last deep breath, and he would come back to the real world, with friends who worried about him, and Matty who loved him and now needed to be shown how much he was loved back. That is if Matty still loved him. There was no time to waste. So many things to do and he had to get right on top of them all.

It was almost midnight, which meant that he needed to be very quiet and not wake up the whole house. So, he made sure to turn the key in the lock really slowly, only to...

Find himself face to face with Jonathan, who looked like someone who must have staked out the door for the last half hour or so. That meant, of course, startled.

Rusty grinned as he took in his friends, one by one. They were waiting for him, of course. Most probably all those beloved traitors had already learned that he was coming. So, he did the thing that came naturally, as his lips hadn't stopped tingling from the moment he had left Mrs. May's studio.

“Rusty, you’re home,” Jonathan said and that was the only thing he managed to squeeze in.

Rusty grabbed him and dipped him as if they were engaged in an elaborate dance of tango. He made Jonathan drop as close to the floor as possible while holding him, and then smooched him loudly on the lips.

“Hey, that’s my fiancé,” came Maddox’s surprised cry.

Rusty broke the kiss and looked at Jonathan. “Sorry, Johnny boy, safe landing.” He let him drop, still enjoying the flustered look in the amber eyes, and turned toward Maddie with a vengeance.

Maddox stared back, not knowing what to do or say for a moment. His mistake. Rusty grabbed him by the cheeks and kissed him, too, with a loud lip-smacking noise, until his bestie punched him in the chest.

And then, he turned, just as viciously, toward the other two. Dex, always the one to think quickly, was pushing Kane to run. That only made him laugh like a cartoon villain, throwing his head back.

“Run if you can. You’re making it worse, you know? For this, I’m going to slip you some tongue, Dexter!”

Ah, it felt good to chase his friends around the house. They had nothing on him. When he put his mind to it, he was the best of the best.

“Kane, Dex, avenge us!” Maddox cried out from behind him.

Yeah, like that was going to happen.



Rusty smacked his lips in satisfaction as he took in his disheveled friends gathered around the table. Dex was still sticking his tongue into his water bottle, as if that would help him wash the memory away. Kane was throwing him dagger looks from the other side, while Maddox was pouting and looking cute while doing so. The only one who couldn’t keep from smiling was Jonathan. Of course, he had to hide it from his fiancé. Ah, he’d always known Johnny boy was the open-minded one.

“So, you fiend,” Kane said, as dry as sandpaper, “how did it go?”

“Awesome, fantastic,” Rusty replied and grinned, while leaning back and placing his hands behind his head so that he could take in all his friends’ reactions. “Your mom’s the real deal, Johnny boy.”

“I know,” Jonathan said and gave him a self-assured smile. “There was no point in us going head to head with you when we had the ultimate secret weapon on our side. So, it worked.”

“Yeah,” Rusty admitted, balancing his chair on its back legs and enjoying himself like a schoolkid. “But you’ll have to pay the price. I’m going to steal her from you and have her walk me down the aisle.”

“Walk you down the aisle?” Kane asked, his eyes as big as saucers. “Who are you getting married to? When?”

“Matty, obviously,” Rusty replied, hiking his shoulders up for a second. “Yeah, I know, first I need to win him back.”

“When are you going to start?” Maddox asked, throwing him an unusually shrewd look.

“Chill, dude, I need to prepare first. Stop looking at me like you want to kick me in my lovely behind and send me to him right now.”

“I have a wish to kick you in your smart ass and let you sleep on the doormat, actually,” Maddox replied.

“Come on, my dudes, stop being so sour over a little smooching. You’ve done a lot worse in your lives, with your tongues especially.”

Dex gave him a dirty look. “We’re all pretty damn sure that we haven’t done anything as remotely kinky as you’ve done in your life. With tongue or not.”

Rusty stuck out his tongue and winked at Dex. His friend promptly stuck his tongue back into his water bottle, while Kane laid a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

Jonathan yawned, covering his mouth discreetly or not so discreetly since he obviously wanted to signal everyone that it was time to go to bed. If it were up to him, Rusty would keep everyone up all night, but he should be considerate of his friends’ wellbeing. After all, they had been up until that hour only so they could check on him. Tongue-slipping notwithstanding, they seemed to be willing to forgive him everything. Maybe they wouldn’t be so quick to forget, though, Rusty pondered while taking in all the pairs of eyes staring at him.

“Well, it’s good that you’re back completely,” Maddox said in lieu of a conclusion while putting a possessive arm around Jonathan’s shoulders. “But consider yourself warned, Rusty. Keep your hands to yourself.”

Rusty put his hands up to show his complete lack of guile. “Jonathan can vouch that my hands didn’t touch anywhere improper. Also, don’t get your panties in a twist, my dear boyo. These hands are only going to get busy with Matty and no one else.”

“You better do that,” Maddox warned him again, pointing a finger at him.

“See, Dex?” Kane said in a placating voice. “Rusty promises he won’t manhandle you again.”

Dex looked up at his bestie with innocent eyes. “For real?”

Then, of course, both of them burst into laughter.

“Yeah, I knew it would take a lot more than that to break you, assholes,” Rusty said and pursed his lips.

Kane stared at Dex. Dex stared at Kane. Damn, they were already planning their revenge. He’d have to sleep with one eye open. Who knew what would cross their devious minds?



“Damn,” Matty muttered under his breath as he read the latest Xpress gossip that – lo and behold – featured him and a series of impossible hookups. According to the campus tabloid, he’d been involved in a threesome with twins, he was a stripper in his spare time, and sold his bathwater on questionable websites. In-between all those activities, it was a wonder he still had time to study and be a normal college kid.

The worst part of it was how random people stopped him on his way back to his dorm, to ask him if any – or all – of that was true. He had gotten so many lewd looks from guys that he felt the need to take a shower. And maybe sell the used water afterward. Ah, damn, what a mess. He had new empathy for the plight of everyone who had ever been smeared by Xpress. Those guys really knew how to turn things on their head so badly that there was no possible way to go against them.

Zoey grabbed his elbow and stopped him in his rush to get to his dorm.

“Are you sure you want to be seen with me?” he joked. “Apparently, I’m the most shocking thing since Will Smith slapped Chris Rock on stage at the Oscars.”

“Are you kidding me? You’re famous. Don’t forget where you came from, Matty,” Zoey joked back and fell in line with him. “You know, there is one thing I don’t understand. How the heck did they unearth Slicky Coolplums so fast?”

“They must have put two and two together,” Matty said with a shrug. “In their case, it ends up totaling one thousand, but I suppose that’s what happened.”

“No, you don’t get me, Matty. Slicky is gone. I checked.”

“What?” Matty asked and turned to look at his bestie, who looked just as dumbfounded as he was. “Do you mean the cat boy suit is no longer where we buried it?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I mean.” Zoey moved closer and held him by the front of his shirt, while stealing nervous glances around. “Someone must have followed us that night, Matty,” she whispered. “There’s no way anything else could have happened. It was impossible for anyone to just stumble on Slicky’s grave.”

“Someone from Xpress?” Matty asked in the same manner.

He made the mistake of looking at a group of guys walking past. One of them waved at him and winked. The others hooted and began pushing the guy, as if they wanted to encourage him to do more, but it looked like his courage could only get him that far.

“I need to go and lock myself in my room,” Matty said brusquely. “Gawd, what does Rusty think of me now?”

“Really? That’s your number one worry?” Zoey punched him in the shoulder, looking like an angry chipmunk. “Did we bury Slicky for nothing?”

“Not for nothing. I’m a porn star now,” Matty said and sighed. “How many days will it take for me to keep hidden from view until people forget about my bathwater business?”

“Ugh, I hate Xpress. They made you into a star, while at my moment of glory, they made me into the nameless girl that needed rescuing. Remember that?”

“Yeah. But you wouldn’t want to be in their crosshairs, Zoey. I promise you. All this fame is not everything it’s cracked up to be.”

“Easy for you to say, Mr. Famous. Okay, you’re free to go hide, but don’t you dare mope about Rusty all day, as I know you’re wont to do.”

“Now, why would I mope about him?” Matty said brightly.

Zoey’s eyes narrowed. “Because these,” she said, pushing a finger under his right eye, “don’t happen to people who happily tumble into threesomes and shake their booties for fun and dough.”

“Don’t forget about selling bathwater. It’s my bread and butter,” he joked.

Zoey rolled her eyes. “Okay, you’re off the hook. I see that you can laugh it off. That’s good. But don’t ignore my advice on not moping.” She wagged a finger at him.

“I promise,” Matty said while keeping his fingers crossed behind him.

Yeah, it was a bummer that he had to lie, but he had learned one important lesson ever since he and Rusty had had their falling out. There was no surefire way to hurry heartache. It took its time and that time was long. He sighed and rushed toward his dorm after a hasty goodbye to Zoey.



Rusty was bursting with energy. For the last few days, he had rehearsed all of the seven ways he had come up with so far to apologize to Matty, completely ignoring classes. However, he needed to go down to eat, as Jonathan had courteously warned him that he needed sustenance, while Maddox's comment that he looked like warmed over shit had touched his sensitive heart. When he told Matty how sorry he was for being an asshole, he needed to look his best. Also, he needed to work hard if Matty was going to take him back, because all that hooking up with Jamie had very possibly left a long-lasting impression on his baby dude. It took him all his willpower not to call that asshole and tell him 'hands off'. Could he take Jamie in a one-on-one wrestling match? Or would they have to throw punches at each other? Damn, now he needed to train on top of everything else.

He dropped to the floor to start doing pushups, but his phone pinged. Maddox was hungry and warned him that they wouldn't wait for him. Okay, so he needed protein to build some more muscle. How long did it take for that to happen? He was about to google it when Maddox sent another text, more menacing in nature. Rusty hurried down, putting his preparations on hold for a while.

When he arrived downstairs, his friends were engaged in a serious conversation.

"For real?" Maddox asked. "But it's kind of late, right?"

Jonathan shook his head. "I can't say I blame him. With the crusade going against him... he must have taken it to heart."

Ah, they were probably talking about Dean Preston. That was another thing he needed to set in order, but even a king had to have priorities.

"I heard that he's already submitted his transfer papers. It's a shame that he's not going to graduate with the rest of us," Kane said, looking upset.

"What are you guys talking about?" Rusty asked as he grabbed a chair and a fork, ready to enjoy Jonathan's cooking with his usual gusto.

Dex sighed. "Matty."

"What? What do you mean, Matty? Is he going to transfer?" Rusty asked, fork suspended half-way to his mouth.

"Yes," Jonathan said and offered him a helpless look. "Xpress dogpiled on him these last few days in the most horrible way."

"Because of that, he's been cooped up in his dorm room every day," Maddox added. "And he hasn't taken any of our phone calls."

Yeah, Rusty had skimmed through all that crap and smiled, thinking that Matty was probably having a laugh, too. However, according to his friends, Matty was really taking all that crap to heart. That wasn't like him... but Rusty treating him so unfairly must have broken him.

His appetite was gone. He dropped his fork and pushed himself away from the table. His plan needed some serious ironing out still, but he was also seriously running out of time. It had to happen, and it had to happen tonight.

“Sorry, guys, I’m not hungry,” he said quickly. “I have a thousand things to do.”

No one tried to stop him. Good, because he didn't have time to argue about the importance of three healthy meals a day.



“Rusty Parker!” someone shouted at him as he was coming back from his errands, his backpack full of everything he needed.

He stopped and turned to see John, Matty’s former – or was he current? – roommate, walking toward him purposefully, with murder written all over his face.

“Yeah? Come on, man, whatever it is, shoot,” Rusty said quickly.

“Do you have any idea what you’ve done?” John crossed his arms and, in his outrage, swung his body so much that his shoulder bag, that looked like it had been stuffed with all the books needed for four years of college, almost dropped to the ground. Its owner caught it right in the nick of time.

“I’m on borrowed time here, so enlighten me.” Rusty opened his arms wide. His backpack didn't swing about him out of control.

John pursed his lips, then put his bag down and began rummaging through it. He stood erect and pushed a bundle into Rusty’s chest.

“This. This is your doing.”

Rusty threw an unsure look at John and then studied the bundle in his arms. Damn, was that...

“Where did you find this?”

“Funny you should ask. The same place Matty buried his love for you. You asshole.”

“Wow, okay. I mean, for real, how did you get this?”

John hiked his bag back onto his shoulder. “None of your business. It wasn't easy. That's all you need to know.”

Rusty caught the guy by one shoulder as he made a move to walk away.

“Wait, wait, wait.”

“You can’t force me to tell you anything,” John said defensively.

“Okay. Since you’re in such a doing-good mood, what’s the deal with your leader and Preston?”

John stared at him with delight. “What are you going to do about it, failed king?”

“Ah, damn, you’re really trying to rile me up, aren’t you?”

John shrugged. His face lit up with glee. “Word on the street is that you’re not going to do anything because you’re finished. It’s because of you Matty’s such a mess now. It serves you right. Everyone’s turning their back on you.”

“Blabber much, you still won’t make any sense,” Rusty said and let go of John’s shoulder. “But about Matty... I’m going to make things right. That’s why you gave me this, correct?” He balanced the muddied Slicky costume in his other hand. The thing was in a horrible state and smelled of freshly dug soil. Too bad he couldn’t see how he would be able to clean it and dry it by tonight. It didn’t matter. His plan, as imperfect as it was, was in motion. It just had to work.

John gave him another look, full of meaning only he could understand. “They’re talking nonsense, Xpress. You’ve never been worthy of Matty.”

Rusty sighed. “Well, I can’t exactly contradict you about that. Still, people can work on themselves to become better. Worthier.”

“Good luck with that. Matty has moved on already. Although his taste in men is still horrendous. Something else you should be blamed for.”

“Okay, okay, I take full responsibility.” Tonight, his heart would be handed to Matty never to be asked to be returned. “Although, you should tell your boss I will come for him. Preston’s not going to leave Sunny Hill while I’m still king.”

He said those last words as he was already walking. John stared after him and their eyes met for a moment. The little asshole looked pretty triumphant, like he knew shit.



“What is it now, Rusty?” August asked, sounding like she had just been woken up from a nap.

“There’s no time to sleep. I’m coming to you, and I must warn you. I’m armed and dangerous.”

“No way,” August commented, still sleepily, but in her usual ironic tone. “What’s your weapon of choice, outlaw?”

“A little mandolin,” Rusty replied honestly. “You have today to learn my piece by heart.”

“I see. You’re looking forward to getting strangled. No problem. It can be arranged. I’m just reading a book on hiding bodies.”

Rusty laughed wholeheartedly. “Excellent. That means you’ll help me.”

“Of course. Come already so that I can start. And then you can tell me all about your plan. Just checking, though. Is it about Matty?”

“Totally about him. And by the way, August,” he said quietly, “you were definitely right.”

“Yeah, I usually am. See, I’m merciful. I’m not forcing you to spell it out.”

“There’s no need for you to do so. I’m suddenly wise enough to admit it. I’m in love with him. I don’t know how it happened, but this strange feeling has to be love. There’s no other explanation. I mean, I feel a little sick and happy at the same time.”

“It sounds like it, then. Okay, let’s rehearse. I have a feeling I know how professing your love will happen.”

“Yeah, like that. You know me.”

“Yeah.”

Rusty stared for a moment at his phone, and then he made another decision. No more hiding behind masks tonight. He no longer cared what the world thought about him.



Matty could swear his dreams had just turned really weird. There was singing, and it was pretty loud. Also, he could hear something plinking against his window at what seemed like regular intervals. Wait, this wasn’t a dream he realized and threw off the blanket covering him.

Definitely, it was singing, and it sounded like... Rybalt?! He started when he heard the same plinking sound against his window. Someone was throwing pebbles, it seemed. Without even thinking, and half-believing he was still trapped in a dream, he walked over to the window and opened it wide.

To be met with the sight of Rusty perched on one of branches of the tree close to the dorm building, the same one Matty had climbed to get inside his room before, while trying to sneak about as Slick Coolplums.

Rusty stopped for a moment and then he appeared to start singing from the beginning, holding one arm toward him in supplication. He looked like a dramatic personage, moaning his love, although Matty had no idea what the words meant. He grabbed his glasses and stared out the

window. All around the campus, lights were beginning to come on. From below, the sound of a stringed instrument being plucked at just the right moments accompanied the vocal performance.

If this were a dream, it was his kind of dream, he thought. But the chilly evening air caressed his face, and he could tell that the astonished sounds coming from the other open windows were real. And they weren't all friendly.

"Rusty," he whispered, "get your ass inside! And where's your mask?"

Rusty completely ignored him and continued his aria, still holding his arm out to him. Matty rolled his eyes, but the music touched him. He leaned over the windowsill and locked eyes with Rusty – as much as was possible in the dim glow cast by the streetlamps scattered around campus. By now, some people were probably calling security. Mid-terms were fast approaching and many students wanted to focus on their studies.

However, right now, he couldn't and wouldn't stop him for the world. Rusty was singing his heart out in Italian as far as Matty could tell, and it had to be all for him.

The last foreign words died away on Rusty's lips, and his arm dropped. With it, so did Matty's heart. Was this some farewell song he couldn't understand? He noticed Rusty looking down and then reaching into his pocket. The sound of a coin being flipped ensued, and Matty looked down, leaning dangerously out of the window, to glimpse a shadow catch the offered coin and slyly move away with what looked like an instrument in their arms.

"Are you still inviting me in?" Rusty's ragged whisper pulled him back to reality.

Matty looked around and the noises coming from all sides caused him to spring into action. "Quick," he urged and Rusty jumped with precise grace from the tree branch, grabbing hold of the ledge of Matty's window. He made room for him and dragged him inside.

Hopefully, campus security was still far away. Matty closed the window quickly and pulled the curtains shut. And then, he turned to face his fate.

Rusty was there, in flesh and blood. It was no dream. He could tell that at least. And he had no idea what to say.

"What was that song about?" he asked, feeling out of his element. Rusty had dropped his Rybalt mask, and he had done it for him.

"Delicious things," Rusty replied and smiled at him. "I'll tell you all about it."

It hurt Matty to see that smile. He didn't even know where to start. For so many days, he had hoped to see Rusty smiling at him like that, and now that he had what he wanted, he had no idea what to do with it.

“Rusty, what do you want?” he asked numbly. He had grown fearful, it seemed. That wasn’t like him.

Rusty took another step forward and stopped in front of him. Then, he pulled something out of his backpack and handed it to him.

It was his Slick costume. It was streaked with mud, yet, it still felt familiar under his fingers. He really didn’t want to cry. This was all beyond surreal, and he had done his best to keep it together throughout the last days, hadn’t he?

“Rusty, what do you want?” he repeated the same question.

Rusty’s eyes were soft. So were his mouth and his smile.

“I want you to keep your promise.”

“What promise? I don’t remember any promise.”

“Okay, you’re right about that. I want you to keep... your word? You said you loved me. If that’s gone, though, I get it.”

“No, it’s not gone,” Matty said very quietly. He looked away, afraid to stare at Rusty for too long. It hurt him in places he didn’t know he could hurt to be having this conversation. And he still didn’t know what his night visitor wanted from him.

“Say what?” Rusty’s voice was raspy and so very close.

Matty bit his bottom lip. “You’re such a bastard, Rusty Parker. Do you really want me to humiliate myself again?”

Rusty’s touch was gentle on his cheek, feather-like. “Xpress is eating crap by the spoonful. Only you can end up with the king.”

Matty looked up. “What’s that supposed to--”

He didn’t have time to finish his question. Rusty pressed his lips against his, coaxing him into a kiss. After so much time going without such things, he was afraid to breathe, scared that the magic of them would break and leave him out in the cold like before.

Then Rusty spoke. “I’ve tried my whole life to please the world, to make them like me. But you know what? I’ve never had to try with you. That should have given me a hint.”

“Because I love you?” Matty dared to look at Rusty, their eyes meeting. From up close, he felt he was hopeless. Maybe heartbreak lasted forever, because he couldn’t see himself loving anyone else, and that was stupid, because he was the guy with logic and numbers by his side, and such

things weren't possible. He only needed to continue staring into Rusty's eyes to know that he was feeding himself lies. There was no turning back from this.

"No," Rusty said gently and pushed Matty's hair back from his forehead in a gesture that seemed both careful and absent-minded, like something you did with people you'd known and cared about for a long time. "It's because I love you. And I don't have to pretend with you. Ever."

"What?"

"I love you," Rusty said again. "You have every right in the world to tell me to fuck off, but you might have a problem getting out of your room because I'm going to sleep in front of your door from now on. Don't think this is just an empty threat. Also, I will follow you around like a dog. I'll make sure to scare off all your hookups--"

"Don't tell me you've bought into whatever idiotic things Xpress has been vomiting on virtual pages these last few days."

"No. I know for a fact they were lying because I've looked all over the Internet for your bathwater. It's not on sale anywhere."

"You're joking."

"I wish I was."

"Damn, Rusty, you're just so extra."

"Well, I guess you've known that for a while. Don't expect me to be the kind who keeps this thing under wraps now. That is, of course, if I still have a chance."

Matty remained quiet for a bit. He knew Rusty was staring at him, could feel his hot breath on his hair and forehead.

"You know, I really never imagined what you confessing your love would look like."

"Disappointed?"

Matty felt his chest getting lighter as he looked up. "No, not at all. Actually, it surpasses all my expectations. But you'll have to tell me what that song is about."

Rusty smiled. "Mainly about sex. About me, how I used to be. Only that, this time, unlike the character singing it, I mean it. You need to think beforehand, though, Matty. Because you need to be sure that you want to save this Don Giovanni from his fate."

"I have only a vague idea about Don Giovanni and its sad ending. I guess I need to start listening to more opera from now on. What happens to him?"

“Well, he was a womanizer, so he ends up burning in hell.”

“Ouch. We can’t let the same thing happen to you, then.”

“I’m glad you think so. I’m at your mercy.”

“Okay. I’m going to take care of you, keep you out of hell and all that,” Matty said and sighed, not in pain, but in relief.

“Really? Are you taking me back? Just like that?”

“Don’t tell me you want me to make it hard for you. I’m not the kind to play games.”

“Damn,” Rusty whispered, “that Jamie must really suck in bed.”

Chapter Fifty-Two

Only My Future Husband

Matty opened his mouth to contradict Rusty about Jamie, but then he grinned and gave the other a sly look.

“Actually, he doesn’t suck at all.”

“What? Are you trying to tell me that he didn’t get on his knees for you? I am so going to challenge him to a duel.”

“Because you think he hasn’t sucked my cock yet?” Matty asked, doing his best to act all serious. And failing, of course. It didn’t matter, because Rusty was buying it and a little bit of tormenting was a good way to get even.

“That should go without saying,” Rusty said with emphasis. “Also, because he stepped on my turf.”

“Should I remind you that you were the one to neglect your lawn?” Matty played into the joke right away. “You shouldn’t be so mad that someone else equipped with a lawnmower stepped in.”

Rusty’s eyes grew as large as saucers. “Don’t tell me he took it upon himself to take care of your bush. That I have to see.”

Matty guffawed as Rusty began to pull at his pants. “Rusty!” From an excess of enthusiasm, both landed on the floor.

They stopped in the middle of their rough-and-tumble. Rusty was the first to open his mouth.

“I have so many things to tell you, Matty.”

“So do I. I had awful timing, right?”

Rusty didn’t reply but helped him to his feet and then sat on the bed, pulling him into his arms.

“It wasn’t your fault. It was all mine. I messed up. Although I should ask... what the hell do you see in me?”

Matty caressed Rusty’s cheek and looked him in the eye. “You’re everything I’m not, and I guess that it’s true that opposites attract. I’ve always been a goody-two-shoes. My crush on you has been my guilty pleasure since freshman year.”

“Since--” Rusty gawped like a fish and then suddenly attacked Matty’s flanks with his fingers, triggering a bout of giggles. “Are you trying to tell me that I could have had you since then? We’ve wasted three years of awesome sex!”

“Well, something tells me that neither of us would have been ready for... this,” Matty replied and gestured between them.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Rusty admitted. He was busy caressing Matty everywhere, as if he were checking to make sure that the guy he was holding was real.

Matty could tell genuine emotions were bubbling below the surface. “You really surprised me with this confession. What happened that made you change your mind about me?”

“I didn’t have to change anything. I only had to see it. I guess I’m lucky that there are people who care so much about me that they’re willing to apply some tough love.”

“Who did? Your friends?”

“They conspired, but it was Jonathan’s mom, actually, and my vocal coach... By the way, Matty, when did you realize I was Rybalt? You weren’t surprised tonight to hear me sing like this. I mean, I had my suspicions that you knew--”

“It wasn’t me who realized it. It was Slick,” Matty explained. “And it happened during that second kiss. I know exactly the way you kiss, Rusty.”

“Oh, damn, does that mean that I’m predictable and boring? Clearly, I need to take my tongue to the gym and learn some new routines.”

Matty laughed and pressed one palm over Rusty’s mouth. “Shut up. The way you just said that sounds like a porn plot. You’re not going to any gym. And you’re not boring, and you’re not predictable. Actually, you’re what I need,” he added, more quietly this time. He was the one to run his fingers through Rusty’s hair now, slowly, with infinite care. “I’m a very straitlaced kind of person, you know? And if you’re worried about predictable and boring, those are practically my middle names.”

“I beg to differ,” Rusty said, lifting a finger to help his argument. “Matty, you’re a freaking cat boy!”

“Ah, well, that only happened because of you. Zoey kept bugging me that Xpress was sure you’re into cat boys. She pushed me into this craziness.”

“For real? Remind me to buy her a cake. But that means... you turned into a cat boy for me?”

“Are you disappointed? Unfortunately, it wasn’t some inner motivation that made me put on that silly suit.”

“Disappointed? Hell, it’s so much better! You did it for me, do you even know how much that means to me? Not many people have done things for me in my life. I didn’t want to ask anyone for anything, either, so I’ve always pretended that I’m cool with everything. As for the girls who chose me, they only did it for the rep.”

“What about August?” Matty asked. He had to. Now that Rusty was here, they had to talk through everything. Even if it took them all night. Or many days and nights.

“I went all the wrong ways in my life and walked all the wrong paths. But I don’t regret her. No, I’m not in love with her, but she became my friend during a tough time in my life. She and I, we weren’t meant to be anything other than friends, but we did sleep together. However, the things I always remember from those times were all the things we talked about. She understands a lot more about me than I do. Like, for instance, she was pretty damn sure I was in love with you before I realized it.”

“Was she the one playing that instrument tonight?”

“Yes. She had to practice all day long for it. She threatened to strangle me and hide my body. But she came tonight, although I have a slight suspicion that she only did it for coin,” Rusty said, changing his tone to that of a medieval fair character.

Matty laughed, feeling relieved. “I thought you were with her. And because you took her with you to visit your mom--”

“I know. You offered and I told you no. I was ashamed. I didn’t want you to see the kind of house I’ve lived in for most of my life, the kind of parent I’ve lived with. I thought I was ashamed of her, but mostly I believe now that I was ashamed of myself. I didn’t want you to see me at my most vulnerable low.”

“I love all your parts, highs and lows included.”

Rusty looked at him and kissed one of his hands. “And I should have been brave enough to take you along, and let you decide for yourself. In a stupid way that can only be mine, I thought I would lose you if you saw my life as it was.”

“Why did you push me away?” Matty asked.

“You really scared me with that one,” Rusty admitted. “I was so afraid that you only loved the sunshine and rainbow guy, that my first impulse was to think that letting you in would only lead to hurting you.”

“Hurting me how?”

“By tricking you into having me as I am, with all the bad things. I was so sure you would walk into this blindly, and it was my responsibility to stop you before it was too late.”

“Rusty, you are indeed, a bit silly,” Matty said. “What exactly did I do to make you think I’m that easy to put off by things such as a difficult family life?”

“Now that you’re asking me, I don’t know. You’re a pretty tough guy, actually. It just didn’t seem fair to you. Are you really sure you want to get involved with me? Before you walked into my life armed with that ruler, my life was pretty much a mess. I just ran with it, because it was easy. Do you know that it’s because of you I took up singing seriously?”

“You’re just saying that,” Matty teased, although his cheeks were now growing hot with pleasure. “Do you mean it?”

“Yeah. We got together, even though we were playing a game and I guess that’s the only reason I didn’t end up running away screaming like the coward I am, and when I realized I was so happy that I didn’t know what to do with everything I was feeling inside, I finally got gutsy enough to follow my dream.”

“Really? Because of me?”

“Yeah, because of you,” Rusty confirmed. “Even if I didn’t realize it at the time, you gave me purpose.”

“Me and Slicky Coolplums,” Matty reminded him.

“Right. All my life I’ve chased after so many things, but this year was the best of my life. And yes,” Rusty said in a quiet voice, “even after what happened with my mom.” He looked away for a moment and Matty let him. “I suppose that over the years it became an instinct to chase others’ approval, admiration, acceptance. It never came from the people I wanted those things from.”

“Your parents,” Matty said.

“Yes. But this year, that all changed. I began chasing my dream. I chased a cat boy. It happened gradually, and it happened because of you. Do you know that I can’t tell the precise moment when I fell in love with you? You took me over, just like that, and I had no idea.”

“In my defense, I had three years to prepare. And once I started chasing you for real,” Matty said with a smile, “it all came pretty much naturally.”

Rusty laughed. It was a good sound. “So, from being the guy chasing all sorts of things all over the place, I became the chased. Go figure.”

“As you see, it was an elaborate and cunning plan.”

“Worthy of a cat boy. By the way, Matty, I need to make so many amends. Slicky might have enticed me with his sexy tail, but it is you I’m in love with. You must have been so pissed over my obsession with the cat boy.”

“Yeah,” Matty said with amused irony, “it’s tough being jealous over your alter ego. By the way, what would you say if I told you I like Rybalt more?”

Rusty stared at him with one eye closed as if he were trying to figure out something important. “Then I suppose I will have to wear my wig, mask and cape all the time. Especially in bed.”

Matty laughed. And then, he realized. “Rusty, you outed yourself tonight!”

“Yeah, Xpress can kiss my ass. I’m in love with you, and tomorrow they will all know it.”

“I was talking about your singing!”

“Ah, that. It doesn’t matter. I don’t plan on hiding anymore. The next performance I give, it won’t be as Rybalt, but as myself.”

“But Rybalt is pretty sexy, Rusty,” Matty teased. “All that mystery... and let’s call it even. I got a pretty nice hardon for Rybalt, as you did for Slicky.”

“Does that mean that you don’t have anything against dressing up and roleplaying?” Rusty asked.

“After so much chasing, I say we need a bit of a reprieve. Unfortunately, Slicky’s costume is beyond any hope.”

They both stared at the mound of latex on the floor. It did look deplorable.

“Rusty, how did you get the costume?” Matty asked.

“That guy John, you know, your former roommate, gave it to me. Along with a lecture on how I don’t deserve you, and I’m also to blame for twisting your taste in men.”

“John? And how the hell did he get it?”

“He didn’t say. Only that it hadn’t been easy. He is one mysterious dude, that one.”

“Zoey did say that she felt someone was watching us as we buried Slicky.”

“Zoey was with you? I shouldn’t be so surprised. That little monkey has her fingers stuck in many pies.”

Matty let out a long satisfying sigh. “Are we really doing this, Rusty? Tomorrow, we might not be able to leave the room. Who knows what Xpress is going to say?”

“Do you really care? And wait, are you letting me sleep here tonight?”

“Where else do you think you’re going to sleep?”



As he said those last words, Matty wrapped one arm around Rusty's neck, squeezing with all his strength. That was just one of the many things he liked so much about his baby dude. He was strong, and he didn't mind using it to his advantage.

"Are you laying your claim?" he asked.

"Definitely. But remember this, Rusty," Matty warned him. "You might think yourself smart, but you're walking into a trap, and it's only because I'm such a nice guy that I'm willing to let you know."

"Let me know what?" It wasn't easy to think when Matty was so close, his enticing mouth only inches away from the promise of a kiss.

"That once you're mine, you're mine. I never do things by half. I've been after you since freshman year, and while I didn't do a thing for three years, I went all in once I put my mind to it. Also, my mom and dad know me as a perfect student who would never do a thing to embarrass them. If this cat boy thing reaches their ears, I need to have a good explanation for it. Like doing it with a clear plan to get the boyfriend I want."

"Okay, totally fair." Rusty craned his neck, hoping that he could get close enough to touch Matty's lips with his. However, his baby dude was not so easy to push around, so he needed to have patience.

"Also, you will not skip your tutoring sessions anymore. I've invested my time and talent as a tutor to get all that information into your head. I will not tolerate disappointment on that front."

"I will study like a dog," Rusty promised. "Anything else? Do you want me to get a buzz cut? Drop and give you twenty?"

Matty snickered and rubbed his nose slowly against his. "You think yourself smart, Rusty Parker, but you are going to be on such a short leash, you can't even begin to imagine."

"Anything you say. Can I move in here?"

"That goes without saying."

"What about PDA? Allowed or punishable by spanking?"

"I was only mad at you that time because you did it so flippantly."

"Then I will only do it seriously," Rusty replied.

"Maybe we just keep those things for the bedroom," Matty said after a moment of debating with himself. "Yes, that would be for the better. I'm already a porn star."

“Yes, but you are my little porn star. And I’m the only one entitled to your bathwater.”

“That is one of the stupidest things--”

Rusty took advantage of Matty loosening his hold for a moment and rolled him on his back on the bed. From above, he looked at Matty’s face for what stretched to an excessive extent.

“What?” Matty asked and swallowed visibly.

“You’re just so beautiful,” Rusty admitted. “And smart. Remind me again why you love me.”

Matty smiled, sure as he seemed of the answer. “I’m the guy with both feet on the ground all the time. But with you, I can fly.”

“And be a cat boy.”

Matty burst into laughter. “Okay, that too. Now, are you going to make doe eyes at me all night long, or are you going to show your love for me in a more customary manner?”

“If by customary, you mean hugs and kisses--”

“No, I mean this,” Matty said and pulled Rusty close for a deep kiss.

He didn’t mind being taken in hand. No, he didn’t mind it at all. So, when Matty turned the tables on him and rolled him underneath, he didn’t protest. Especially since Matty pressed himself against him and began kissing him so hard there were telltale signs that his lips would be numb for the whole day tomorrow.

Their clothes followed the abandoned Slick costume to the floor. Clearly, they wouldn’t be a family worried about household chores as long as they were in bed like this. They would definitely be a combination of straitlaced and fun; if Matty thought that was some sort of drawback, he was wrong. Rusty needed Matty in his life because that thing he said about the way opposites attract rang so true. Matty said Rusty helped him fly, but Rusty needed Matty because his feet had to touch the ground sometimes and it was a good feeling to experience.

Matty was vicious in how he was handling him. Rusty grunted as he felt one nipple getting twisted a little too hard. Well, he deserved it all, so now he needed to show that he was willing to go the distance, regardless of how much nipple-pinching was involved. The sounds he was making, however, betrayed his pleasure-pain responses.

“Is this too rough on you?” Matty teased him.

“Are you kidding me? Do it more, it makes my dick hard.”

Matty shut him up by planting his mouth on the side of his neck and sucking noisily.

“You’re marking me,” Rusty exclaimed as realization dawned on him. “That is so scandalous, Matty.”

“Hey, I’m the guy who sells bathwater for a living. Scandal is my middle name.”

“What happened to predictable and boring? Also, I thought you wanted to protect the family name,” Rusty cried out as Matty subjected him to further neck-sucking.

“And what name is that? Parker?” Matty teased him.

Rusty smiled at the thought of what he still had stashed in his backpack for later use. “I think Rusty Han could be an awesome name,” he said without thinking twice.

Matty stopped for a moment and then he caught Rusty’s arms and pushed them over his head to keep them pinned to the bed. “I don’t think you’re realizing it, but you just unleashed a very possessive streak in me.”

“I’m counting on it,” Rusty agreed.

He shouldn’t have been so quick to agree because, swiftly, he found himself turned on his belly, with his ass exposed to a very possessive future husband. It was very possible that Matty didn’t realize what had just transpired between them, but he was willing to wait until morning to do the other thing he had come here to do.

Matty was really going all in tonight. A part of it must have been how pissed he still felt over Rusty’s behavior toward him until now. But some of it had to be need, or at least there was hope that it was that, as well.

“Be gentle with me,” Rusty joked. “Without you to nail me, my ass has become the most neglected part of me.”

“I will make sure to change that,” Matty said promptly and pushed his head down while making him lift his butt higher.

Rusty smiled. He needed that kind of authority in his life. No wonder he was chasing every new scent all over the place, since he had no owner. Now, he had one of those, it seemed, and Matty surely didn’t shy away from the role.

He grunted as Matty began probing him with his fingers. “Should I bite the pillow?” he asked.

“Like I’d ever do anything to deliberately hurt you,” came the immediate reply. “I do understand that you might feel a little bit in need of punishment, but this isn’t included. However, expect me to do my thing and make you pay a little for what you put me through with your silly ideas.”

“I’m all for paying with my ass,” Rusty said brightly.

Matty laughed, and it was a glorious sound. He was both careful and impatient while preparing him and Rusty waited without saying a word. It really did feel different after not doing it in the ass for some time. Matty was choking him with his cock on the other end. Hmm, maybe he would ask his baby dude later if he wanted to teach his mouth a lesson, too. Particularly since Jamie hadn't bothered to apply the required amount of worshipping Matty deserved when it came to his cute cock. Did that mean that they'd only done anal? He would have to ask and very carefully. Also, as much as it pained him, he needed to keep his jealousy in check. Good thing Jamie hadn't made a lasting impression on Matty. It meant that he would be easy to forget, too.

A long drawn-out gasp of pleasure announced to him that his ass had to be full of cock. Not that he wasn't feeling it. It was really as they said, full to the brim and all that. If only Matty decided to move already. The sensation of wanting more while being too much at the same time was getting tough to bear.

He snickered as Matty grabbed his hair to hold him steady.

"Aren't you the big man now?" he teased.

"Oh, you have no idea," Matty replied in kind.



It felt like a dream come true, to have Rusty there with him, so ready to submit to his every whim. He hadn't lied one bit about being a straitlaced kind of person, after all. Everything he wanted was to make sure that Rusty was his now, over and over. Surely enough, he might not be able to feel his legs or other parts of his body afterward, but he couldn't let himself be bothered by details at this point.

His cock was being squeezed deliciously. Rusty had been upfront about his ass getting no action – not that Matty had worried about that – so it was a good idea to be considerate. That was one thing the girls who had had Rusty before couldn't beat him at; even if there must have been some wandering fingers and curiosities getting satisfied one way or the other, Rusty had never gotten fucked by another man.

With that assurance in mind, Matty began to move his hips. His penetration efforts were, naturally, met with some resistance, and Rusty's grunts, gasps and moans let him know that he could continue as they were. This was his victory, after all. Tomorrow would be explosive, as far as all the living souls on campus who cared about gossip were concerned, but that was beyond anything he cared about.

He began riding Rusty, a feeling of happiness growing inside him, hand in hand with how he remembered how it was done. Riding a bike had nothing on riding the ass belonging to the guy he loved. Someone had to work on that saying and come up with another, X-rated, version. It

was all familiar and pleasant and good, and he sensed that it wouldn't take him much to show Rusty just how much he missed him.

"Sorry," he whispered, as he recalled some of his manners, and clasped Rusty's right hip with one hand while the other was busy pulling his lover's head back.

"Oh, fuck," Rusty breathed out.

That was all it took them. Matty withdrew with certain regret from his boyfriend's tight ass – yeah, he could now use words like that, and fell on his back. Only to be soon invaded from above by a Rusty much in the mood to kiss him until he couldn't breathe anymore. When one of his legs was hiked up to offer easier access, he knew what was coming next.

The fingers at his ass were feverish, wanting, but careful nonetheless.

"Can I?" Rusty asked breathlessly.

"Sure you can. You're my boyfriend now."

"Not for long."

Was Rusty in the mood for jokes now? Matty forgot those words the next second as he was kissed again and the familiar sensation of getting penetrated moved through him. Unlike usually, when Rusty tended to make an elaborate play to impress, this performance was on the messy side. Not that he cared; this way, it was more truthful, more how he imagined things as they should be between them.

Too bad he had just come. Yet, there was pleasure in knowing that he was giving back, and he returned Rusty's kisses again and again. The moment his lips were freed, he went back for more, and he got what he wanted.

"I'm so going to fill your ass," Rusty announced to him.

"Do it," Matty ordered shortly.

He wrapped his arms around Rusty's shoulders and held him close. Even if they were coming down from their high, neither was willing to let go, so they embraced like that for what had to be a pretty long time.

Rusty kissed him, long and satiated. "Fuck me like that forever, Matty."

"Okay, consider it done. Although I think you just gave me a serious workout. We might both have trouble sitting tomorrow."

"Well, who says we have to sit?"

Matty caressed Rusty's sweaty hair. "Right. Also, I guess the pain in my ass is going to remind me that I didn't just dream this whole thing."

"You didn't. I'm going to sleep wrapped around you if you don't mind."

"Okay, I wouldn't have it any other way."



Rusty sensed the moment Matty moved and growled. As promised, he had slept tangled around his baby dude, and the chances were at least one of them was waking up with a stiff neck and numb limbs. Still, that didn't mean that there would be regrets about any of it.

"You don't have to leave, you know?" he began with the thorniest part he had to address now that he knew he had Matty's love. "I mean, don't go."

"Rusty," Matty said sleepily, "I just need the bathroom. And I don't think I can feel my left arm at all."

"You know what I'm talking about."

"You're very serious for first thing in the morning. No, I don't."

"Come on, I deserve it, but you can still change your mind, right?"

"About pissing?" Matty asked and tried to wiggle away.

Rusty let go reluctantly. "No, I mean, the transfer papers."

Matty was already on his feet, working a kink out of his neck. However, as soon as he heard that, he stopped and blinked as he looked at Rusty.

"What transfer papers?"

"You know, your transfer from Sunny Hill--" Matty's confused stare let him know that he had been played. "Those sons of... No, Francine is going to eat my heart in tartar sauce if I say anything like that," he began talking to himself. "The ass... no, no, there's only one ass for me and that belongs to Matty. Those absolutely crazy dudes."

Matty's laugh pulled him out of his debate about what kind of insults he had to come up with for his friends.

"So, you're not leaving, right?" Rusty struggled to his feet and then crawled to his backpack. Maybe having terrible bed hair and waking up half-numb after holding on tightly to Matty all night long didn't count as perfect timing, but he was beginning to think that poor timing could be their schtick.

He smiled as he felt the small box and hid it behind his back. Then, he turned and knelt ceremoniously in front of Matty. “There’s something I want to give you, Matty,” he started.

Matty craned his neck as he tried to see what he was hiding. “Ah, you forgot the cat ears, right? You know I can’t put those on my head after they spent so much time buried.”

“No, it’s something else,” Rusty said and revealed the secret. Who cared that it was such a cliché? So many people had offered their love like this through the years and sports events. It had to work for him, too. “Will you marry me, Matty?”

The expression on that cute face he loved so much was priceless. First, Matty did a double take, then he took a step back and then he covered his mouth with both hands.

“What the heck? Am I on reality TV?”

Of all the things Matty could say, Rusty hadn’t imagined those to be the words coming out of his mouth. “No, this is the real real, Matty. I know you must think I’m completely crazy right now, but please, marry my sorry ass.”

“But... but...” Matty began hyperventilating, “we’re still in college, Rusty!”

“Yeah, it’s an obstacle, I agree, but we’ll finish soon.”

“What are my parents going to say?” Matty slapped both his cheeks so hard Rusty winced.

“Well, if they are against it, you can always tell them I’m royalty. According to history, it works every time.”

Matty rubbed his forehead and threw wild looks in turn at first Rusty and then the open ring box. “I can’t...” he began, shaking his head.

Rusty felt a pang in his chest. Maybe Matty wasn’t even the marrying kind.

“Still,” he said, “please, take it. This ring is only for you, and this is the first and last time I’m behaving like such a sap.”

“It can’t be the last time,” Matty said promptly.

“How so?” Rusty asked, his arm still outstretched.

“I suppose you will have to say a bunch of sappy things in front of the minister. You know, the person that marries people?” Matty seemed confused. “I haven’t been to many weddings in my life.”

Rusty felt all his good mood returning. He jumped to his feet, forgetting his routine and pulled the ring out of its box. Then he took Matty's hand and put the ring on his finger. It was just an engagement ring, after all, but it fit perfectly.

"So," he asked playfully, "what's your answer?"

Matty was alternating between admiring his ring – a silver band with a small yellow stone in the middle – and staring back at him. "The only one possible – yes."

"Yes?" Rusty asked. "Is it really yes?"

Matty began laughing, but in the way that people used when not believing their eyes. "Yes, it's totally yes. But be ready to pray for me. My parents are so going to kill me."

"Use me as your shield. I'm ready to die for you," Rusty said solemnly.

"Let's not be tragic. I plan to live a long time now that you... damn, did you really just propose to me? Pinch me. Here," Matty said and offered him an arm.

Rusty did him one better and pinched Matty's butt, making him yelp.

"Here's my first proposition as soon to be married guys. You must come up with a long list of punishments to get even with me. I'll make breakfast every day. No, all the meals. I'll do the laundry – the folding, too."

Matty grinned and wiggled his eyebrows. "Say you'll be the one to carry the babies and we have a deal."

Rusty grinned back so hard his face hurt, but in a good way. "Only my future husband would say something crazy like that."

Chapter Fifty-Three

Making Plans

Rusty rubbed with violence at the stained costume and then stared at it critically. Matty walked over to embrace him from behind. “Come on, I told you I should just get another one. This one’s as good as gone.”

“No, no, no, even if you get another to dress up in, I have to have this one as a souvenir,” Rusty insisted. “You seduced me wearing this.”

“Some people hold onto their wedding gowns and the like,” Matty commented and pushed his chin into Rusty’s shoulder.

“We’ll keep everything,” Rusty declared while scrubbing away at a particular spot again and again. “Do you think this is the right way to go about washing this kind of material?”

“I have no idea. Wasn’t that the kind of thing we should have checked before you started washing?”

“I guess so.”

Matty laughed and wrapped his arms tightly around his boyfriend. No, not boyfriend, fiancé. Was that the correct term? Yes, it definitely was. He had a ring on his finger to prove it. Like they said in books and movies, it was like a dream come true. Even more than that, like complete happiness. Still, there were so many things they needed to talk about and put in order.

“Rusty, how’s your mom?” he asked, hating that he was probably spoiling the mood but not wanting to brush over the hard times Rusty was having with his family and what had happened lately.

“She’s being moved to another facility. My dad told me he would pay for all the expenses.” Rusty stopped his washing and stared at his hands covered with suds. Apparently, the small sink and whatever counted as cleaning supplies had failed Slicky’s costume already. Matty reached for the faucet and took it upon himself to take Rusty’s hands in his and rinse them.

“You’re not blaming yourself, I hope,” he said as he took the other’s hand and pulled him back into the room.

“That’s one very hard thing to do,” Rusty admitted. He looked at his hands and sighed. “I suppose we’ve always had this dysfunctional way of dealing with things in my family. That’s one thing I don’t want in my future. Do you think you can help me, Matty?”

Matty moved to kneel in front of him and held his hands. “We’ll be married... How am I even going to get used to this? Anyway, I’d say that it comes with the territory. Can you tell me what you’re worried about? No, I think it’s even more. What are you afraid of? Like when you couldn’t take the confession of my feelings for you.”

Rusty looked up and his eyes had a naked quality to them, as if Matty only had to look to let himself see deep inside the other’s soul. “I don’t want to turn out like them, twisted and unhappy. I mean, like my mom. My dad saved himself. I want to blame him for it. He told me that he didn’t fight for having full custody because he didn’t want to leave my mom all alone. Does that sound like a lie to you?”

“A lie? I don’t know,” Matty admitted in all honesty. “How do you feel about it? What do you think?”

Rusty laughed softly and blinked while his chest rose and fell a couple of times. “You’re not making this easy for me, are you?”

“You wouldn’t want that anyway. As well as I’ve come to know you, I think you’re the kind to fight your own battles. I’m the support character. But let me tell you this: I will help you choose what battles are worth fighting.”

“Then what do you think about this whole mess with my family? For so many years, I’ve hoped that my father would come back. Even when it became so clear that he had no reason to come back because he was already happy and had no need for mom and me, that hope, I guess, still continued to live on.”

“No one can blame you for that,” Matty said gently. “I can’t even begin to imagine how I would feel if mom or dad ever decided to leave me behind. That’s not something you can get over just like that.” He squeezed Rusty’s hands. “I can promise you this. It won’t happen to us. I told you. You’re on a short leash. You may feel as tempted as you want to stray, but you have a master, and I’ll remind you of it as often as possible.” He was using a light tone because he knew that Rusty needed it, with everything happening in his life to date.

“That’s very reassuring, actually. I might tend to suffocate you, you know? I mean, I’m going to be in your hair all the time. You won’t be able to chase me away. I will stick to you like glue.”

“Fine by me. But you’ll have to live by several rules. No more of this running scared.”

“Running scared? Really?” Rusty snorted, but his eyes shone with happiness. “Are you going to set me straight?”

“Not straight, no. But I will take care of you. Damn, your voice, Rusty, I mean, I’m no expert, but you sound like a star.”

“Not yet. Mrs. May believes that I still have a long way to go. I have to apply myself.”

“You will succeed, I’m sure. So, are you going to be an opera singer?”

“That’s the plan. I might have to work for a long time to become that, and that means that I will have to get a job that has nothing to do with it for a while. I’m sure your parents won’t be that thrilled to learn that you’re marrying an artist. Probably a starving artist,” Rusty said and laughed.

“Starving? Not on my watch. And don’t worry about my parents so much. We can always tell them you’re royalty, right? Which reminds me, what are we going to do, king of Sunny Hill? The moment we leave this room, I’m afraid all hell will break loose.”

“I will announce our engagement,” Rusty said. “Very publicly, so that there are no doubts about the news being as real as they come. Xpress won’t be able to spin it and twist it.”

“I beg to differ, but I don’t care anyway. You know, there’s an entire world out there, ready to gawk at us. I’m still getting used to the celebrity status. Truth be told, it’s sort of annoying. I’ve got so many indecent proposals these days that I’m starting to wonder if I might be missing my vocation by following a career based on my studies.”

“Don’t even think about it,” Rusty said so sternly it sounded comical. “I’ll chase them all away with a stick. What about Jamie, Matty? How are we going to get rid of him?”

“Are you asking me?”

“Only because I’m trying not to sound like a possessive jerk. If it were up to me, I’d walk over to him and punch him in the nose. And tell him that he’s not allowed within six feet of you.”

“That wouldn’t be very nice,” Matty said and nodded.

“I knew you’d say that, so I won’t do it. That doesn’t mean I don’t want to. I totally do. Especially since I thought he was my friend, the asshole. Yeah, yeah, I know what you’re going to say, that it was me who let you go. And that’s true. It doesn’t hurt less.”

“Let me get this right,” Matty began. “You’re pissed at him for making a move, but not at me for letting him do it?”

“I can’t be mad at you. I practically pushed you into his arms. I have no right to say anything. So, I won’t punch him in the nose, and I won’t say anything to him if you don’t want me to. Still, Matty,” Rusty said, sucking in a breath, “you need to break up with him.”

“Hmm, and I thought you were the adventurous type when it came to relationships. I remember quite distinctly how you kept asking me about whether I’d be against or for a threesome.”

“A threesome with the other you,” Rusty pointed out.

“You didn’t know that at the time,” Matty shot back at him and then grinned. It was quite fun to have Rusty squirm a little over his past transgressions. However, he didn’t want that to lead to hard feelings between Rusty and Jamie. “So, no threesome? You, me, Jamie?”

Rusty made a face as if he had just licked a lemon. “The asshole’s a looker, true, but I’m not into sucking his cock or bending over for him.”

Matty laughed. “You can only see yourself as the bottom when it comes to Jamie? Do you know him that well?”

Rusty pondered for a bit. “Not really. But he strikes me as an incorrigible top.”

“What if I told you that’s not true?” Matty leaned over and let his voice drop to a whisper, while biting his bottom lip and giving Rusty an all-knowing look.

Rusty’s eyes grew wide. “What? Did you top that alpha dog?”

“I think they’re called alpha... wolves?” Matty teased.

“No way that mutt’s a wolf. He’s a dog, that’s what he is. How was his ass?”

Matty giggled, having way too much fun with this to be healthy. “Not telling.”

“Come on,” Rusty begged. “Was he better than me at bottoming? What kind of moves did he use? Did he choose to stay on top and ride your cock? I can be better. I only need to practice.”

Matty laughed out loud and didn’t stop until Rusty began to eye him, as he appeared to grow more and more suspicious.

“What aren’t you telling me, Matty?”

“You should see your face. You’re so cute when you’re jealous. Ah, just your luck that I’m in such a generous mood today seeing how you offered yourself so nicely to be put on a leash.”

“Hmm, it feels like you’re saying... what are you saying?” Rusty asked, a smile beginning to curl his lips upward.

It was the kind of sight Matty wanted to stare at forever. “Nothing happened between Jamie and me. We just hung out together.”

“What? Are you pulling my leg? Are you protecting that mongrel dog?”

Matty laughed and shook his head. “No, not at all. It’s the truth, Rusty. Let’s just say you’re a tough act to follow.”

“Good. Because there’s not going to be anyone else after me in your life.”

“Excellent. Just what I wanted to hear.”

Rusty pulled him into a kiss, and they indulged in it. Matty couldn't help himself and his hands found their way under Rusty's shirt.

“So naughty,” Rusty said in a raspy sigh. “Are we really ditching classes altogether today?”

Matty pulled away. “It's tempting, but--” He pointed a finger at Rusty, inviting him to continue.

“Now we're the straitlaced dudes,” Rusty added. “Okay. We've already missed the first hour, you know?”

“We'll just say that we had a very short after-engagement party and that detained us.”

“Detained us?” Rusty guffawed. “That's just like something Jonathan would say. By the way, I am so going to exact my revenge. Once Francine and Mrs. May made me understand how much I was in love with you and music, I went back home and jumped their bones. Yeah, I smooched them all. Afterward, Dex acted as if his tongue got hairy or something.”

“You did what?” Matty asked, feigning shock. “You mean, I'm not allowed to fool around with Jamie, but you kiss all your friends. With the same lips and tongue you're kissing me?”

Rusty did a perfect impersonation of embarrassment. “It seemed like such a great idea at the time. You should have seen their faces, though. But I'm not going to kiss them anymore.”

“Good. That's settled. Now, are you ready to face the world? Xpress gossip? The Implacables?”

“For that kind of stuff, I was born ready,” Rusty replied with enthusiasm.

As long as he was so sure, Matty couldn't argue. They would just figure out things as they came.



What? What? WHAT?! Guys and gals of Sunny Hill, it's over! It's officially over! Our reputation has taken a major hit. Rusty Parker is Rybalt, Matthew Han is Slick Coolplums, and... they're engaged?!

It is the curse of the times to believe yourself invincible, is it not? Such was our case, but now... Now, we don't have words to put on virtual paper for you to read and have a little laugh.

Rusty Parker, Matthew Han, you two scoundrels, have played us magnificently. Good thing you're graduating soon, or else, we'd feel tempted to throw in the towel. And now that we got that out of the way, anyone with information about how long this illicit affair - we can call it that since only recently our king put on a ring on it - has been going on? Such coordination and tactics cannot have been

achieved overnight. We obviously contributed to making Matthew Han into a consort worthy of royal interest.

Our bad. The cat's out of the bag. Yes, cheap pun, we know. The thing is there's no way to stuff it back in.

It will take us until tomorrow to recover from the shock. Unless... It is all a ruse and Rusty Parker is pranking us - and all of you - big time. What do you think? Has our local womanizer really laid his weapons down? For a guy?

We're just as astonished. But alas, students of Sunny Hill, even the greats have their bad days on occasion. So, nothing gained, nothing lost.

(We reserve the right to be reserved about how genuine this relationship truly is until we see the wedding photos.)



Maddox slammed into him the moment he set foot inside their shared house. He was squeezing him so hard it was hard to breathe. Rusty resisted for like half a minute, and then, he had to beg for mercy.

“Engaged? For real? And we had to learn about it by reading Xpress?”

It didn't look like the rest of the guys were around, but Maddox was speaking for all of them, it seemed.

“Sorry, but you all pulled a fast one on me by scaring me and making me believe that Matty was getting a transfer. I'd say it's only fair,” he said with a large grin. Of course, that wasn't it, but to dispel all possible rumors he had told everyone he had met on his way to classes - while holding Matty's hand tightly in his - that he had gotten himself a future husband and anyone who didn't buy it could go suck it. Not in those words, of course. Sucking was a thing to do with a former boyfriend, current fiancé.

“We had to push you into action,” Maddox said and began pushing him toward the sofa to make him sit down. “You were taking too much time. So unlike you.”

“Where is Jonathan? What about Dex and Kane?”

“They got it into their heads that they have to get you two an engagement gift. They left me here to keep you in the dark.”

“I'm not in the dark at all. You basically just told me all about it.”

“Only what I know,” Maddox said with a grin. “So, it’s for real. You weren’t joking about wanting my mother-in-law to walk you down the aisle.”

“No, I’ve never been so dead serious in my entire life. And I hope you and Johnny boy don’t get mad at me if I’m stealing Francine for this. I wouldn’t have anyone else... Except your mom, but she’s going to be busy with you, I bet.”

Maddox squeezed the back of his neck. “Damn, I have so wanted to strangle you over the last few days. But all’s well when it ends well, right? I mean, he took you back. We all worried that he might give you the boot.”

“That’s because you don’t know him the way I do.” Rusty smiled to himself and then turned to face his friend. “Actually, I was pretty scared he wouldn’t take me back. But that’s Matty. Loyal to a fault. I’m a lucky mofo, ain’t I?”

“You totally are. But we would have made a case for you if you had failed to convince him. But seriously, was that other part real, too? About the stuff Xpress said?”

“He hasn’t sold one drop of bathwater,” Rusty said in a deadpan voice.

“Come on, you know what I mean? Is he the cat boy? For real?”

“Yeah. He actually did it for me.”

Maddox took a moment to digest the information. “Wow. I mean, he looks so... You know, not exactly like the type of dude who’d put on a latex suit and roam the campus. Is that the real story? He turned into a cat boy to catch you?”

“I’m no mouse, but consider me caught,” Rusty agreed.

“Well, I’m glad, because you guys have your work cut out for you.”

“What do you mean?”

Maddox moved only so that he could pull out his phone. “According to the latest news, Connor is over the moon that he finally got vindicated for pointing out that you’re Rybalt when no one cared to listen. He’s on a high horse and now he’s threatening that he’s going to take this – how did he call it? - masquerade to the powers that be.” He kept scrolling through his phone, so Rusty peeked over his shoulder.

“Are you reading their shitty publication?”

“Someone has to keep an eye on Connor. He’s bent on sending Preston home in tears, and now his vendetta is personal. And I thought he was an asshole when Jonathan gave him the boot because he just couldn’t keep his hands off me.”

They traded a knowing grin.

“Screw Connor for a moment, Maddie. We’re getting freaking married.”

“Don’t you look happy?” Maddox grinned at him. Then, his smile faded some. “Are you going to tell your dad?”

Rusty took a deep breath. “Yeah. I’m not going to keep a thing this big from him. But I need to prepare for his being an asshole about it.”

“Are you going to tell him about the singing, too?”

“Yeah, that, too. I bet he’s going to think that he really wasted his money sending me to college. That’s why I’m going to put aside money each month and pay him back. Once I have a job, obviously.”

“Do you think he’s going to accept it?”

“The money? I guess so. I mean, I don’t want to remain indebted to him.”

“It won’t be easy. And if he tells you to keep your money? In exchange for feeling it’s his right to show his disapproval?”

“Double it with disappointment, and you have the whole picture. Don’t worry so much about me, Maddie,” he said and patted his friend’s knee, “I feel liberated now that I know what I really want from life. And his approval is no longer among those things.”

Maddox nodded, his face serious. Rusty felt the need to lighten the mood.

“Come on, you’re going to be able to tell everyone you meet that your bestie is a megastar.”

“Megastar? For real? Are you planning on acting in the movies, too?”

“I could, but two passions are enough for any man. Matty and opera. I don’t need anything else or anyone else for that matter. Although, I do have a confession to make. I’m really scared about meeting the in-laws. I mean, look at Matty. He can kick my ass at every moment and even threatened me that he won’t take my lack of interest in studying lightly. His parents must be really stern.”

“Something tells me that you’re going to be fine,” Maddox said with a smile.

“You only say that because you like me. Ah, I know. I’ll get Francine to whip me into shape. I’m sure she’s full of ideas. I might get a cowlick.”

Maddox laughed and leaned back, stretching his legs. “You really caught a good one, Rusty. Don’t ever let him go.”

There were many things he could say, including how he hadn't been the one chasing after Matty in the end, and that he'd had no idea he'd been caught before it was too late to realize it. But all those things seemed of little importance.

"Was it the same for you when you fell for Johnny boy?" he asked. "I mean, you were quicker to get what was happening to you, right?"

"It was sort of weird, at first, but since he was so incredulous about my really liking him that it only made me more stubborn."

"I thought you were just exploring your bi side, some side you didn't know existed." Rusty had attempted it as a joke, but it came out more serious than intended.

"While you played it off as if getting naughty with your tutor was completely natural," Maddox pointed out. "I suppose that, between the two of us, I was the one who walked into it with my eyes open."

"What do you mean?" Rusty asked. There was something vague, like a memory, nudging him, but he couldn't tell what it was.

Maddox's hand on the back of his neck was warm and pleasant. Throughout this conversation, his friend hadn't let go of him, and Rusty chewed on the realization. There had always been a certain degree of intimacy between him and Maddox, different from what he had with the others.

"Do you recall that night? When we got really drunk for the first time in our lives? Before leaving for college?"

"Yeah," Rusty said and swallowed for a moment. "I challenged you to see whose dick was bigger. Just to establish the pecking order."

"Not just that, though, right, Rusty?" Maddox said and sounded serious. "I guess that was our bi side rearing its head right then."

"It's so damn brave of you that you can talk about it," Rusty said with a smidgeon of pique.

"Well, we never did, so maybe we're finally old enough to bring it up and clear the air. I thought about it when I started having the hots for Jonathan. Only briefly, but... Whatever, maybe only I found it weird getting so hard over having a dude touching my dick."

"No, it wasn't only you. Maddie, I have to tell you since you were so keen to bring it up. For a moment there, I wanted to kiss you."

"What? For real?"

Rusty nodded. “But you moved your head so fast, snapping it up after staring at our dicks and mumbling something about how yours was thicker, anyway, that you hit me in the chin so hard you almost knocked me out cold.”

“Ah, don’t tell me,” Maddox said, trying to make his voice sound light, “the magic was gone.”

“Yeah, it was. But I’m glad it happened. Because you’re my bro, and I love your ass, but not like I’m hot for Matty. That’s special.”

“Phew, that’s a relief, then. I wouldn’t want to be your unrequited crush.”

“Not a chance of that. For the sake of an intellectual exercise, though, if I had kissed you, what would you have done?”

“Probably socked you in the face. Because of the shock. I don’t think I was ready for that kind of thing before Jonathan.”

“That’s what Matty and I talked about, too,” Rusty said, feeling a weight lifting off his shoulders. “How we wouldn’t have worked out if we had met during freshman year. I had a head full of empty ambitions then.”

“Well, we’ve had fun, one way or another. But it’s awesome and special to have someone like that, isn’t it?”

“You don’t have to tell me twice. How about we wrap up this talk, though? I feel old already.”

“Really?” Maddox teased. “And I thought you might feel tempted to kiss me again.”

Rusty made a show of shivering at the thought. “When I kissed all of you a few nights ago, that was the last time, Maddie. Live with it. I promised Matty he’s going to be the only one I’ll ever kiss, all the rest of my life.”

“It sounds like a good commitment. Great, then. Make sure to let Dex know, though. He might live in fear otherwise.”

“And what would be the fun in that?”

They laughed at the same time.

“So, when are you planning on having the happy event?” Maddox asked.

“As soon as it’s possible,” Rusty said. “I need to face the dragon first. Apparently, Matty’s mom goes by that name.”



Matty's face broke into a big smile as soon as he spotted Jamie in the crowd of faces. He got a grin back and then Jamie was by his side, grabbing his hand and staring at the ring.

"I can't believe that guy. He really went on one knee and all that?"

"As hard to imagine as that might be, yes," Matty confirmed. "I have to apologize to you."

"What for?"

"Just for the sake of teasing Rusty, I let him believe that we got freaky. I did try to clear the air finally, but something tells me that he might still be a little jealous of you."

Jamie laughed, looking as carefree as ever. "Let him bring it on. I don't mind a little bit of sparring. And it would all be worth it since it's Rusty Parker we're talking about. Not many things can rattle that guy."

He barely finished that phrase when something, or better said, someone, crashed into him from one side and transported him, willy-nilly, several feet away. Matty watched as Rusty put himself between him and Jamie, his arms stretched wide. "That is my fiancé, if you didn't get the memo. Hands off, punk."

"Punk?" Jamie laughed and began fighting Rusty to reach Matty. "In case you haven't realized it yet, butthead, it was only because of me that your fiancé's chastity was kept safe in good hands."

"No really? Good hands? These hands?" Rusty grabbed Jamie's arms and hoisted them up into the air, making the other look like a puppet on strings.

Over Rusty's shoulder, Jamie winked at Matty. Around them, people had started to stop and stare, so some measures had to be taken. Matty hurried to grab his boyfriend and pulled him away from Jamie.

"You promised," he chided him lovingly. "And nothing happened between me and Jamie."

"Hey, not so loud," Jamie protested and stole glances around. "I have a reputation to uphold."

"Sorry, sorry," Matty agreed. "Rusty, let go of Jamie. He did nothing wrong."

"It's hard to believe, but I trust you," Rusty said and released Jamie reluctantly.

Jamie made a show of smoothing invisible wrinkles away on his tight t-shirt, just an occasion for him to flex his muscles and put himself on display a little. The appreciative glances thrown his way were enough to confirm that whatever he was doing was working.

"Matty here is a tough cookie," Jamie said and grinned, while he ruffled Rusty's hair only to make him bristle and throw him murderous looks. "He made it very clear from the start that he's one guy's man. Just so you know, fucker, you were on borrowed time." He wagged a finger at

Rusty to make his point clear. “I mean, there was only so much time I was willing to let Matty wallow in despair over losing your sorry ass.”

“I didn’t know that,” Matty said.

Jamie measured him up and down with his eyes, blinking slowly like a lazy cat. “Well, since it became public knowledge that you like prancing around in a latex suit that shows your ass, I’d say that you have a kinky side, Mr. Goody-two-shoes. And that means that for the sake of this asshole, I missed my chance with you.” He grabbed Rusty by the shoulders and bumped him gently in the chin. “Don’t ever make this guy cry again, hear me?”

“When have I cried?” Matty protested.

“When I wasn’t looking, I’m sure.”

That was one point he couldn’t argue. But now Rusty was searching his face and he felt the need for a little white lie. “I’m not the kind to cry, you know that.”

Rusty was, however, all over him now, hugging him and kissing the crown of his head. Jamie applauded and laughed. “Matty, you’re one hell of a guy. You caught the legendary Don Giovanni.” They both turned to stare at Jamie. “Yeah, I’ve heard what aria you performed for your beloved here. If you’re asking me, so very on the nose. But as long as you have surrendered, I think all’s well. Right?”

Matty held Rusty close while watching Jamie. “Thank you for being such a friend. To both of us. And rest assured. I’ll never let him go.”

“Okay, okay, enough of this romantic stuff,” Jamie said and put his hands up. “I’d rather not be seen with the two of you, as that might also hurt my reputation.”

“You didn’t think about that when you hung out with me until yesterday,” Matty said and laughed.

“Yeah, but yesterday you were about as good as a porn star. Today--”

“Today, he’s mine. And forever,” Rusty said in an irritated voice.

“He’s just playing,” Matty explained.

Jamie grinned and threw them a mock salute while backing away and then turning on his heel.

“I can’t believe it. He really didn’t touch you,” Rusty said and embraced him more fervently. “Everything’s perfect.”

“HA!”

The sudden exclamation made them both turn their heads. Connor was there, pointing at them with an outstretched arm. “You two should be ashamed of yourselves!”

Matty rolled his eyes. Rusty looked at Connor for a moment, and then at Matty. “It does look like we have our work cut out for us.”

Chapter Fifty-Four

Only the Right Things

Now was the time for him to shine again. Rusty walked up to Connor, while keeping one arm hanging lazily over Matty's shoulders. His fiancé was not only obviously ready to have his back, but he could also pull his weight, too. Connor blinked a few times while observing him with murder written all over his face. Clearly, the guy had no idea what to expect, and that put Rusty at an advantage, one that he intended to make full use of.

"Well, chief," he said brightly and grinned, "how about you bring it on?"

"What do you mean?" Connor asked and stared at him in disbelief. "Calling me chief won't earn you any points."

"Since you offered yourself up to police things around here, I thought it was a good title for you."

Connor crossed his arms and observed him carefully. He seemed unable to figure out what this was all about.

Rusty hurried, quite gallantly, to his aid. "How about a final confrontation? You and your Implacables on one side, my fiancé and I," – he just couldn't say that word enough – "on the other?" He would think about the actual plan later. For now, as the returned king of Sunny Hill, he needed to begin by putting this scumbag in his place, where he deserved to be.

Connor snorted and showed his teeth in a derisive smile. "You're only two. Are you sure you're up for a challenge of such magnitude?"

Rusty shrugged. "So? We're men enough to take you head on. You and your little army."

"I'll have you know," Connor said in a haughty tone and crossed his arms over his chest, "that my army is not little at all."

"Only the guys who know the truth being opposite of what they're bragging about do this thing you just did," Rusty replied and showed his teeth, too.

It took Connor a couple of moments to understand the insult, but Matty was shaking with laughter. That only caused the leader of S.H.I.T. to turn his full attention on him. "And you, Matthew? I thought you were much better than this."

"I really don't understand what you're talking about," Matty said, offering a big innocent smile that made Rusty want to force him into a pirouette ending with both in a compromising position

that allowed them to kiss passionately. There was a time and a place for everything. Later, when they were alone.

“I am talking,” Connor said pointedly, unaware and untouched by the undercurrent of happiness moving through the people right in front of his eyes, “about putting on that silly costume and prancing around the campus at night. When do you even have time to study?”

“Yeah, I’ve been asking myself the same thing,” Matty replied and bit on his bottom lip since he was trying hard not to laugh. “But, apparently, I’m such a capable person that I’ve managed to juggle everything without any trouble.”

“Do your parents even know?” A glint of malice flared in Connor’s eyes for a moment.

Matty, however, didn’t lose his composure for a single moment. “Yes, they ask me about my adventures as a cat boy all the time. They are highly invested in all my interests and hobbies.”

“You’re bluffing,” Connor narrowed his eyes and lifted his chin as if to provoke Matty to launch into a debate with him.

There was no way his smart fiancé would take such cheap bait, Rusty thought as he pulled Matty a bit closer and kissed his temple.

“What do you have against Preston, Connor?” he asked as he turned his attention to the intruder and moved the conversation where he needed it to be. “I mean, the guy could have brought the hammer down hard on you that time when you took Zoey and John hostage. But he was lenient and let you go, scot-free.”

“He had nothing to condemn us for. Our behavior has always been above board, and to say that we took those two students hostage is an exaggeration. People like Preston let people like you taint the life of the campus, and the noble aspirations of the students within it.”

“Oh, damn,” Rusty moaned. “When are you going to come down from the pulpit, man? Be careful. The higher you climb, the harder you fall. You know that, right?”

Connor puffed out his chest. Rusty regretted not having a pin on him to make the prick deflate with a disappointing whine and not with a bang. Well, if a bang was what he wanted, he would get it. For that, some careful planning was needed but, now that his life was in order, Rusty was ready to grab the bull by the horns and put all things to rights.

“Let’s do this, Connor,” he said. “Let’s see who the campus and its people want. Us or your organization.”

“A popularity contest?” Connor seemed to perk up his ears like a hunting dog.

Rusty didn't smile, although he could smell triumph from a mile away. "Don't bastardize your noble fight by calling it that. We'll call for a vote at the end of it all."

"A vote? Yes, of course," Connor said, suddenly courteous. "I will prepare a speech that will bury you, Parker." Not so courteous, after all. He walked closer and pressed one index finger against Rusty's chest.

Rusty stood his ground and was about to tell Connor a couple of things about boundaries when he saw the guy's hand being pushed away. By his side, Matty was eyeing Connor with well simulated anger. He looked cute, especially since he was frowning and fighting a smile at the same time.

"Hands off my fiancé," Matty growled. "I'm the only guy allowed to touch him."

"Oh, babe," Rusty purred for show and tightened his grip on Matty's shoulder. They moved their faces close and rubbed their noses together.

"This," Connor squealed and pointed at them, his arm shaking with indignation, "this is the problem!"

Rusty grinned as he looked at the scumbag again. "What? That you're not getting any while everyone else does? Damn, keep that jealousy in check, dude, will you?"

"I'm not jealous," Connor protested and blinked a few times under the burden of realization. He had to know he was a prick, but he wouldn't admit it for the world, without a doubt.

"Whatever," Rusty said and shrugged. "So, are we on? Showdown?"

"Yes, of course," Connor said. "But I won't shake on it. You don't deserve to be treated like a gentleman."

Rusty shrugged and looked at Matty like he couldn't understand an iota of what Connor was babbling about. Matty offered a similar shrug in response.

"Okay, we'll settle this once and for all," Rusty concluded. "And once you realize that no one at Sunny Hill wants you, you'll have to admit your defeat as graciously as your little mean heart allows."

"While ignoring your not-so-subtle insults, yes, I agree."

"Another thing," Rusty added. "You'll drop your vendetta against Preston."

"Why would I?" Connor's eyes turned to slits. "He's bad for the campus."

“Only because he didn’t kick your ass out when he could have, but his approach is one of peace and understanding, unlike yours. So, I think the students are better off with someone like him than someone you’d agree with. Unless, of course, you know you’re going to lose.”

“I will not lose,” Connor said with emphasis. “Just watch me, Parker. But we’ve only talked about what you want in the impossible scenario where you emerge out of this victorious. How about we talk of what I want?”

“Shoot,” Rusty said. Matty had one arm wrapped around his waist and was holding him close. All his life, he had strived to ensure that he didn’t need anyone to stand on his own two feet, and now it felt so good to have such awesome support by his side.

“You’ll give up Rybalt. And you’ll give up that silly costume,” Connor said and he looked at Matty.

“Sure,” Rusty agreed. “Is that all?”

Connor gave them a shrewd fake smile. “No, not all. Matthew here will have to go on a date with me.”

To say that suggestion had the effect of a brick dropped on his head would have been too little as far as metaphors went. Rusty blinked a couple of times, unsure of what the asshole in front of him was saying.

“What the fuck?” That was the only reasonable thing to ask at this point in their conversation.

“Yes,” Connor insisted, not for one moment dropping the act. “Your precious fiancé will have to go on a date with me. I am sure I can convince Matthew of the error of his ways once he’s no longer under your bad influence.”

Rusty pursed his lips, feeling anger flaring. He had thought Connor, despite being a major scumbag, was on the same wavelength as far as their sparring was concerned. But this was too much. “Forget it, no way--”

“Okay,” Matty said suddenly. “Since you see me as such a damsel in distress that needs some good ol’ saving.”

“But, Matty,” Rusty whispered at him, “there’s no way I’m betting on you. This fucking asshole won’t make me do a stupid thing like this.”

Matty smiled and caressed his face. “We’re going to win, Rusty. And, by the way, don’t tell me you see me as someone who cannot fend for himself.”

“No, that’s not--”

“Hush.” Matty kissed him briefly. “Let him show his true colors.”

“You know, I’m still standing right here,” Connor said loudly.

“Yeah, and we don’t care that much,” Matty said in Rusty’s stead. “But we all want something out of this, it’s true. What I want may be an impossible thing, but I’m going to say it anyway. Connor, what I want is for you to see that you cannot think for other people. What you just said confirms it. You think everyone else is helpless and needs to be told what to believe and what to do. Maybe some people are like that, and they do need help, but not from you. What I’m asking is that once we win, no more Implacables. You call it quits, you send everyone home. Your little horror show is over.”

Connor recoiled as if he just got punched in the chest. “That’s cruel, don’t you think, Matthew? I mean, these students that I’m leading, they--”

“It’s what I ask. No one’s forcing you into this. You can walk away,” Matty continued, and he grew larger than life in Rusty’s eyes. “And you asked us to give up on Rybalt and Slicky. Don’t you think it’s fair?”

“No, I don’t think it’s fair. For whose sake are you playing around in costumes? Not for the sake of the students of Sunny Hill,” Connor said, raising his voice, and most likely already practicing his speech to conquer the hearts and minds of those present. A small crowd had gathered around them, watching and listening to them with their eyes wide and their jaws slack. Rusty knew the attendance at the confrontation he was planning between them and Connor’s squad in the ring would beat world records for any kind of debate.

“I beg to differ,” Matty replied. He gave Rusty a small look and a smile. He looked grateful. “We show them a vision of how life as a college student could be, one of the many. If people want to spend their time studying, that’s great. It’s what they want. And if they want to have a little fun, that’s great, too. Just for the record, Connor, I have nothing against your wanting to bring together people of the same mind as you. But I do have something against your wanting to impose that mind on everyone. That’s what I’m going to fight against when we cross swords.”

“Is it going to be a sword fight?” Connor asked, aghast.

Matty rolled his eyes. “Just a figure of speech. You do you. And may the best people win. Agreed?”

Rusty wanted to applaud Matty and give him a standing ovation when his fiancé offered Connor his hand. The asshole had no choice but to take it and shake it.

They both watched him walk away.

“Wow, Matty,” Rusty said, dropping his voice, as he didn’t want the audience to hear everything he had to share with his loved one. “You really put the guy in his place.”

“Someone has to,” Matty said and then embraced him tightly. “See you later? I have some things to do. Calling my mom is on the top of the list.”

“Do you need support for that?”

“I’m prepping the ground. Trust me, I’m doing it for your sake.”

“Thank you, Matty. I have to admit that I need all the help I can get. I haven’t faced a dragon yet.”

“You’ll be fine,” Matty assured him. “What about you?”

“I’m going to follow your example. I’m going to call my dad,” Rusty said and let out a long sigh. “I don’t expect much from him, but I’m doing it for myself.”

“Okay, now I feel like I should ask you? Do you need me as your support character?”

“Not this time, but I appreciate the thought.” Rusty pushed Matty’s hair away from his eyes and kissed his forehead. “It’s high time I put on my big boy pants. And I’ll be fine. I know I will because now I have you.”



That had been such a touching thing to say, Matty thought as he watched Rusty heading toward the house he was sharing with his friends. It was with a light heart he could now look at the guy he loved walking away, because he knew they were together now and forever. That hadn’t been the outcome he had envisioned for one moment throughout the years of pining for Rusty; at most, he had imagined a few spicy encounters that would only live in his imagination. And now, here was the reality of the beautiful ring on his finger that told him that what was happening to him surpassed everything he had dreamed of.

And that led him to the trial at hand. While Rusty had low expectations from his dad, Matty had to admit that he didn’t know exactly what his mom, and consequently his dad, would say about his sudden engagement. They had spent years teaching him how to be this no-nonsense, always rational kind of guy, and now he would come to them with news that went against that sort of upbringing.

No matter what happened, it had to be done, and Rusty was right. After they let their parents learn the news, they’d go from there.

All that determination, however, did nothing for his sweaty hands as he pulled out his phone on the way to his dorm room.

“Mom?” he asked tentatively as soon as she picked up.

“The one and only,” his mom replied cheerfully. And then, as she quickly gauged his mood, “Is something wrong, Toots?”

“No, nothing’s wrong.” Matty took a deep breath. “Actually, it’s perfect. And awesome.” How was he supposed to give his mom the news without bubbling over with excitement? “I... I’m engaged, mom.” The silence at the other end worried him. “Mom, are you still there?”

“Engaged? Last time you called, you didn’t even have a boyfriend. And it’s hasn’t been very long.”

“Yes, I know.” He sucked in another breath for courage. “He’s the one, mom,” he confessed. “He just is.”

“Is he the boy with the basketball and secret talents? Do you even know what those are?” his mom questioned.

“Yes, I know. He’s going to be an opera singer.”

Another stunned silence. “Isn’t it quite a leap from basketball to opera?”

“It may be for others, but not for him. He really knows how to jump,” Matty joked.

“And did you just propose to him?” his mom continued the interview.

“He proposed to me, actually.”

“But it’s all so fast! You’ve known each other for how long?”

“You told me to go in with everything I have, remember?” Matty said.

“That’s true, but engagement? It’s all so very serious,” his mom insisted.

“I’m going to send you a short video. To see and hear him.” It was from the night when Rybalt had saved him from the angry Implacable mob, and that video had been on everyone’s phones ever since. “And then, we can continue to talk about it.”

His mom said nothing, and Matty waited until she called back after watching the video, his heart in his throat a bit. Not much, but it was there, somewhere in his chest, climbing up.

“Matty, your boyfriend is incredibly talented,” his mom said right away. “And so very handsome. I didn’t know you would go for that type, though. Is he dyeing his hair?”

“No, that’s a wig there,” Matty explained. “I’m in love with him, mom,” he admitted. “And I did tell him so first. And although we went through a rough patch after I did, he came back with a ring.”

“So dramatic. But that is definitely his flair,” his mom said. “What a voice, though. I haven’t listened to this sort of music very much, but he looks and sounds like someone who should be up there, on the big stages of the world.”

“I think so, too.”

“Such a man,” his mom continued, “he must be very popular. And popular people have many temptations laid in front of them. Are you sure you can handle the competition, Matty?”

“Tell me you didn’t just ask me that,” Matty moaned. “You’ve taught me to be the best, haven’t you? And this is also part of that,” he continued, surer and surer of himself. “I aimed for the best, and now he’s mine.” He used that sort of language because he knew his mom would understand. Ambition, as a positive trait, ran in the family.

His mom laughed softly. “You really do sound like me, Toots. And you’re so like me.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re saying that you chased this boy?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying.”

“And you didn’t give up until he became yours?”

“Yes, exactly,” Matty said impatiently. There was something his mom wanted to say, but she was taking her sweet time.

“Well, don’t let your dad know I told you this but, in our day, I had to face quite the competition when it came to the girls who wanted him as their boyfriend.”

“But I thought you’ve been together since... forever?”

Another soft laugh. “I made him think that. I bet he’s forgotten all the girls he knew before me. But I won’t disclose my strategy, because I have a feeling you had your own from the start.”

“Yes, never give up, right?” Matty said and laughed, too. “So, you’re okay with my being engaged? Didn’t I shock you out of your socks?”

“A bit, yes. However, since passionate pursuing runs in the family, I’d be a hypocrite to hold it against you. Also, I know very well that you’re old enough to make your own decisions, without my looking over your shoulder all the time. Still, your dad and I want to meet this young man. Rusty, right?”

“You remember,” Matty said with delight.

“Of course. You’re my only son. If I forgot the name of the boy you told me you liked for the first time in your life, what kind of mom would I be? So, when will we be able to meet him?”

“Maybe at Christmas? Will that be all right?”

“I see. You want to squeeze him in among all our relatives so that I don’t have time to grill him properly.”

“That was my plan all along, and now you unveiled it. I’m not good enough at this.”

“How about you come for a weekend? The week after the next? I can barely wait to meet my future son-in-law. And to hear him sing live. Will he do that for us, or is he shy when he’s not in front of a large audience?”

“He’s not shy at all,” Matty assured her. “Okay, I’ll tell him. Still, mom,” he said while chewing his bottom lip, “don’t be too hard on him, okay? I really want to keep him.”

“Sure thing, Toots. Anything and everything for you.”

Well, that certainly went well. Matty felt relieved and happy. And he barely got off the phone when the thing started ringing in his hand. He grinned as he saw who the caller was.

“Zoey,” he said happily.

His bestie’s voice was ragged and a whisper. “I come down with the flu for the first time in ten years, and you get engaged? When were you going to tell me?”

“The flu? Damn. Where are you? I should have called you,” he said, feeling guilty.

“No problem. I’m in the med ward. They’re keeping me on fluids. Treating me like a princess. One in a hospital gown.”

“Oh, Zoey, I’m so sorry. I should have been there for you.”

“And got the flu instead of engaged? You’re forgiven,” Zoey rasped out. “I slept through the day and only just heard the news from Dex. Damn, Matty. Did you plan this?”

“Rusty proposed.” Everybody thought – well, at least his mom and Zoey – that he had been the one to pop the question. Maybe they saw him as more forward than he thought himself to be.

“Even better. Ah, damn, it’s so hard not to be able to get excited.”

“Can I come see you?”

“No. I shouldn’t go out in the world until my fever is done for. But save me some cake.”

“What cake?”

“You don’t know? Rusty’s friends got him – and you – a huge cake. Dex told me.”

“And isn’t he saving you some cake?”

“Yes, but why not milk two cows if I can?”

“That sounds like you,” Matty agreed. “I’ll save half of it for you.”

“And now, you want to fatten me up.” Zoey laughed and then coughed. “I can’t talk long. I need my beauty sleep.”

“Get well. When should I call you again?”

“I’ll call you, don’t worry. And awesome job, Matty. You got the boy.”

He had surely gone and done it. Matty was still smiling minutes after getting off the phone with Zoey.



The sight of the horrendous pink thing looking like it was about to spill over the edges of the table made him stop dead in his tracks.

“My dudes,” he called out, alarmed, “the cake fairy paid us a visit!”

His friends suddenly emerged from all corners. “Congratulations!”

And if it weren’t clear, Jonathan added. “On your engagement. We thought of getting a bit of revenge on you for making us learn from Xpress that you got engaged.”

“Really? By getting me a huge cake? Why is it so pink?”

“Because it is the color your heart must be right now.”

“But I’m a boy,” Rusty whined in a high-pitched voice. And then, as a conclusion, in a normal voice, “I wear blue socks. Do you want me to show you?”

“When you wear socks, they’re never from the same pair,” Maddox reminded him. “So, it’s hard to tell what you are, right?”

Rusty grinned ear to ear. “Totally true. Although Matty threatened that we will have to be disciplined from now on. So, just so you guys know, I’m engaged. That’s what I am.”

Dex patted him on the shoulder, making sure that he felt it. “Yeah, thanks for letting us know. Now, we’re all waiting to see what’s in that cake.”

“It looks crazy. But I hope you don’t mind if we wait for Matty for split it open. I wouldn’t want to do it without him.”

Kane laughed. “Far from us to even think that you’d do anything without your fiancé. Damn, Rusty, you went all in, didn’t you?”

“I sure did,” Rusty said proudly. He stood straight, and he felt so happy he needed to walk carefully or else he would burst. “I need to call my dad, but then, I’ll call Matty over, and this cake is going to be the hill we’re all going to die on.”

Dex intervened with a serious look on his face. “I need to save a slice for Zoey. She’s got the flu.”

Rusty moved his eyes from Dex to the enormous cake and then back to his friend. “Yeah, okay, it’s going to be tough to restrain ourselves, but I think we’ll manage.”

“Good,” Dex said. “I had to let you all know.”

Kane, Maddox, and Jonathan had such composed faces it made him laugh. “Really, no one’s making fun of Dex, though?”

“No,” Kane said brightly. “Also, he threatened us he would eat the whole cake if we opened our mouths about it.”

“Okay, hold that thought. I just need to do this.”

Maddox moved by his side and gave him a short hug. “Are you going to tell him?”

“Yeah, I have to. Before I lose my courage,” he joked. “Nah, I’m never going to lose my courage again. I’ll let him know, listen to half of his lecture, and then I’ll be right back. Sounds good?”

All the thumbs up from his friends convinced him that yes, it was.



He waited patiently until his dad picked up.

“She’s going to be moved the day after tomorrow,” his dad informed him after exchanging perfunctory greetings. “There’s no need for you to come. After all, you must be busy with school.”

“I will be there, anyway,” Rusty said. “Thank you for taking care of her,” he added. “But that is not why I called you.”

“What is it?” There was a sort of tiredness in his dad’s voice he hadn’t heard before.

Rusty felt some of his courage dissolving. However, he steeled himself for it. What kind of man would he be for Matty if he didn't have the guts to confront his dad over this?

"I got engaged," he said curtly.

"Engaged? Is this a good time? And you're still in college," his dad reminded him. "Who is she?"

"I'm engaged to Matty."

"Who?" His dad asked as if he could no longer hear correctly. "Is that a girl's name now?"

"You know Matty, dad. He came with me to Gabriel's birthday party."

Stunned silence followed.

"Anyway, I thought I should let you know," he said since there was no response from the other end of the line.

"You mean Matthew," his dad said, as if awakened from a slumber. "That boy in glasses. The one who studies well."

"Yes, him. Matthew Han."

"Why are you doing this, Rusty? Joke and prank your way through life?"

Rusty set his jaw hard. But, after all, wasn't this partially his fault, too? He had let others know him as nothing more than a clown, someone who entertained without showing a sign of anything deeper than the surface?

"I wouldn't joke about something like this. Not now, not ever. Matty is the one I choose."

"Wait, Rusty, make me understand. God knows parents don't like to hear this about their kids, but I've heard enough about you being a womanizer. There was even that strange talk about your getting a girl pregnant."

"I didn't get anyone pregnant. I'm not joking. I'm engaged to Matty. Once school's over, we're going to get married."

"Don't expect me to attend that mock wedding," his dad said, his voice still betraying that he didn't believe what he was hearing.

"Actually, I don't. I mean, I don't expect you to come to the wedding."

His dad sighed. "When did this big awakening of yours happen? About liking a boy? It must be one of those college experimentation things."

“No, it’s not. He’s the one for me. There will never be someone else.”

“Are you doing drugs, Rusty?”

This conversation was hardly going anywhere.

“No, dad. I know you find it difficult to believe, but it’s the truth. I just didn’t want to postpone telling you about it since it just happened.”

“You’ll get over it. I don’t understand. How do you go from being a ladies’ man to... wanting to marry... a boy?”

“It looks like it just happened. I’m in love with a boy, yes. And since I’m calling you to tell you about my life, here’s another one. I started taking lessons. From a vocal coach.”

“What for?”

Rusty sighed and sat on the bed. “I liked basketball, dad. But I didn’t love it. There’s something else I love.”

“Besides a boy.”

“Yes, besides a boy. I want to become an opera singer. And I will.”

His dad snorted. “Good luck with that. Things like that don’t put food on the table.”

“I guess I will have to see about that when the time comes. Mrs. May believes I have it in me.”

“Who’s she? The vocal coach, I assume.”

“Yes.”

“Of course she’d say something like that. She wants your money. She has every reason to let you think you’re some Pavarotti.”

“Someone else paid for the lessons,” Rusty countered, fighting hard to ignore the rejection in his dad’s voice. He should have been used to it by now.

“Who? Matthew?”

“No, Jonathan’s mom, Francine.”

“A woman. An older one if I understand correctly. Offering you favors. Rusty, what are you doing with your life?”

“Only the right things, dad, only the right things. And, just to let you know, it’s ludicrous what you’re implying.”

“It’s hard not to assume, given--”

“Given that I’m your son? Philandering runs in the family? Is that what you’re saying?”

“No, son. Given your history with women, I wanted to say.”

“You know, dad,” Rusty said slowly, “that would be something I’d expect from a stranger. But I suppose we’ve never been close, after all.” The sudden emotion choked him.

“We’ll talk about this madness when we see each other the day after tomorrow,” his dad warned him.

“I told you everything I needed to tell you. But I will listen to you, nonetheless. And I will do as I have decided,” Rusty said back. “Goodbye, dad.”

“Son,” Roy said suddenly, but then he stopped. “Goodbye.”

Chapter Fifty-Five

Love Maker

“I’ve heard of death by chocolate, but could we call this death by pink frosting?” Rusty asked, as they all lay on their sides, in various states of fullness. “By the way, can we give all the rest to Zoey?”

The sweet pink monstrosity leaned to one side as its base had been attacked first from too much good will and hunger. Half of it was still standing, but it showed a tendency to rival the Tower of Pisa, only with fewer chances of survival.

“She told me to save her a slice,” Dex said while massaging his belly. “This all sounded like such a good idea at first. And I thought there was going to be a cake fight like at the end of junior year.”

“We grew up since junior year,” Rusty said solemnly.

His friends burst into laughter. “Yes, it’s exactly because we’re grownups now that we thought of buying a huge cake to celebrate the official end of your celibacy,” Kane countered. “Anyway, this was our way to tell you, Rusty. Well done! And Matty, take care of our kinkster here. He might go overboard from time to time. Forgive him.”

“Hey, you don’t have to worry about Matty,” Rusty protested. “He’s a kinkster himself.”

His fiancé squeezed his hand. “It’s true and I admit it.”

Maddox laughed. “It takes one to catch one, right?” He shook his head. “We’re so not yet over the fact that you were the cat boy.”

Rusty eyed Matty from the corner of his eye and smiled as his darling showed not one single sign of embarrassment.

“I have to admit that it was Zoey’s idea to get myself a cat boy suit,” Matty said. “But I can now say, hand on heart, that it felt good having nine lives and all. It worked like a charm for me.”

“And you really fooled Rusty here, making him chase you in both human and cat shapes,” Jonathan pointed out. “That was some really 3D chess, Matty. But it only goes to show what kind of guy would get our legendary Rusty. And we’re glad you two worked out your differences in the end.”

Rusty had to snort at that. “What differences? I was an idiot. Matty here only tried to make me see things the real way.” Matty cuddled against his side and when he turned his head, Rusty found himself staring into his fiancé’s pretty eyes. They were in an agreement. Nothing more to

add. "I will leave the rest of the cake in your care," he said without looking away from Matty. "Make sure Zoey gets some because I have other things to do."

"What things?" Dex asked, only to be quickly shushed by the others. "Ah, those things. Yeah. Okay, play nice, boys."

"We always do," Rusty hurried to assure his friend, not only because he believed Dex needed some reassurance, but also because he wanted to get everything out of the way so that he could be alone with Matty once more.



"Did you hate me?" Rusty asked once they were alone in his room upstairs. "When I rejected you?"

"Are you asking me because I'm here? It's the first time after that time, right?" Matty didn't appear taken aback at all by Rusty's questions and was now busy trying the bed springs.

"What are you doing?" Rusty asked, a bit confused about Matty's sudden preoccupation with the furniture.

"I'm trying to decide which bed is better. Yours or mine," came the prompt reply. "What?" Matty asked and stared at him.

Rusty sighed and enjoyed the simple act of breathing freely for two seconds. "You know, before you, it wasn't my jam to feel so insecure."

Matty's quirky smile let him know that there was no need to act. Not with him. Not now, nor ever. "You just hid it better before me. Am I right or am I right?"

Rusty walked over to the bed. It was such a relief to have someone else steer the ship once in a while. Especially when it was someone as competent as Matty. "I suppose you're right. No, I'm sure you're right. I want you to know, though. I've never been happier."

Matty knelt on the bed and straightened up enough to reach Rusty and wrap his arms around his neck. "My mom told me that I should be aware of competition."

"Come on, it's not like I'm such a catch," Rusty said and let out a short snort. "I mean, it's obvious to anyone with two eyes and a bit of brain that you're taking pity on me."

"Well, this kind of self-deprecation might have worked for you before, but now you're in a relationship with me. You're a Han now, Rusty. Well, I'm a Parker, too, but you know what I mean."

Rusty shook his head. “I don’t want to do that thing where we end up having multiple names. I don’t want you to become a Parker, but I’m sure as hell that I want to be a Han.”

Matty’s eyes grew wide. “You meant it that time, then? Rusty Han? Awesome stage name and not only?”

“Yes. I mean, I have no idea how these things work, but it is possible to get your name, right?”

Matty nodded thoughtfully. “I suppose so. Are you sure, Rusty?”

He shrugged. “There’s not a lot keeping me tied to that name. I mean, for the longest time, I wanted him to be proud of me. Happy for me. But that ship sailed the moment he left me behind and chose a different life. I will always consider him my dad and I won’t stop caring, but it’s you I choose, and I’ll let him know that.”

“We haven’t had time to talk about it. How did your conversation with him go?”

“As you might expect,” Rusty offered. “He thinks I’m doing this for the shock value and suspects me of being on drugs. The usual interaction for my family. You know, if anyone asked me before, I would have so told them that I’m not the kind to marry, like ever, but now I like the idea more and more. I’ll get a new family.”

“And I’m so glad to get you,” Matty confessed.

Rusty felt his face changing from happy to sad as he recalled that he would see his mom being moved soon. “He told me he’s going to take my mom to another facility. For what it’s worth, the fact that he stepped up with this helped me a lot. That’s why there is a part of me that might always long for what we could have been, as dad and son. That means that I will face him again and soon.”

“I’m coming with you,” Matty said in a tone that brooked no contradiction. “Did you tell him it’s me you’re marrying?”

“Yeah. He had some trouble remembering who you were, but in the end, he recalled you being the boy in glasses who studies well.”

“Those are two of my traits,” Matty said. “Well, he might not be crazy about my becoming his son-in-law, but it’s not like it’s his choice to make.”

“No, not at all. I’m glad you’re coming with me, Matty. I want you every day, everywhere with me.”

“Good choice,” Matty said and smiled, looking pleased. “Now, how about we try this bed again because my memories about its capabilities are fuzzy. What do you say?”

“I thought you’d never bring it up.”

Matty gave him a sly grin and then suddenly pulled him over. They fell on the bed together, and Rusty struggled to adjust his position while Matty did some struggling of his own to accommodate him between his legs.

“Last question,” he said solemnly. “You realize that you’re swearing yourself to a life of monogamy.”

“That was not a question, but the answer is yes, anyway.”

“Smartass. What I meant is this. Any regrets about not having tasted the freedoms and pleasures of trying out multiple dicks before settling for mine?”

Matty’s lips quirked and pursed in the most comical way. “I believe I can say, without any hesitation whatsoever, that you are such a handful, Rusty, that I don’t see how multiple dicks could compare to you.”

“Hey, I wasn’t calling myself a dick, I was talking about my dick. I mean, and others’ dicks.”

The naughty laughter made him want to take a tasty chunk out of his future husband. He made an attempt, but Matty was prepared. He swiftly dodged his tingling teeth and put one arm up to hold him at bay.

“But I thought you called yours the Mighty Thor,” Matty said, shaking with laughter. “When did you demote the poor guy to being considered nothing but a dick like any other?”

“I wasn’t doing that,” Rusty protested, but then, he had to admit his defeat. “Okay, maybe it’s you that humbled the poor guy, as you call him.”

“Nah, that was just a way of saying. I’m very happy to continue to call him that behind closed doors. Also, I feel like I’m in quite the mood for getting reacquainted with him again.”

Matty was not only a man of his word, but also a man of action. He quickly made Rusty fall on one side and climbed on top. His eyes were shiny as he leaned over and kissed Rusty sweetly.

“I have no regrets whatsoever about not trying other guys before you. I’m afraid your future husband is a bit too focused. When I saw you at the start of freshman year, when you weren’t yet a celebrity, and you didn’t even know I existed, one look at you was enough. I thought to myself: that’s the guy I want to be with. I have no idea if he’s straight or gay or bi or anything else. I’ve never had a crush on a guy before because every face I liked till now comes back as a complete blank, but now I know. I want this guy. And later, after I learned who you were, I told myself again: I want Rusty Parker, and no one else will do.”

“For real?” Rusty had the presence of mind to look shocked enough. “No wonder I didn’t stand a chance from the moment we met. You were prepared to take me.”

Matty laughed. “You’re so gullible, I can’t believe it. I mean, a part of what I just told you is true. I don’t think I was that clear in my feelings. But the more I saw and learned about you, the more my crush got real.”

“I feel ashamed now of all the things you must have heard about me over the years. For real, were you never deterred in your conviction that I was the guy for you, only hearing about the many girls I got with?”

“A crush is not that easy to explain, Rusty.” Matty rolled over and put his hands behind his head. “It puzzled me for the longest time. You were so safe as a fantasy. I didn’t even imagine I would get to know you, even as simple acquaintances.”

“That’s why you were so scared that day in the cafeteria?”

“It was quite a shock to see you up close. But it was like fate, wasn’t it? After three years of almost no interaction--”

“Almost? Did we interact before our fateful meet cute?”

“Twice. Once you brushed by me in the quad and said ‘sorry’. And another time, you asked me to change seats before a human resource management class so that you could sit behind your friends. And throw small balls of paper at them the whole the time.”

“And I never noticed you,” Rusty said with a defeated sigh.

“Don’t worry. On each of those occasions, I didn’t know how fast to make myself invisible. I was that shy around you. But when I crashed into you and you gave me back my glasses, there was no escape from it. Well, there was, and I did make a fool of myself by running away. Then Zoey proceeded to put it into my head that I need to make you realize that I existed. By getting a cat boy suit.”

“And then, you came to compete against those other tutors. And you seemed so changed from the freaked out version of you in the cafeteria,” Rusty recalled. “Boy, did you put me in my place that day. I liked you so much and from the start. I mean, from the start when I was aware of your presence. You made everything feel so much more fun.”

“I’m sure,” Matty commented dryly. “Since I was tutoring you in such a fun manner.”

“Hey, the topic may be as dry as the Sahara Desert, but the tutor is--”

“Wet?”

They burst into laughter at the same time.

“Let’s check,” Rusty proposed and he was, once more, the guy on top. And the next moment, his mouth was all over Matty’s, kissing it at length and tasting every inch.



Too bad his mouth was busy already because Matty recalled too late that he actually wanted to tell Rusty that he had never been happier, either. There were so many differences in the way their pasts before they met had gone, his a straight unwavering line, Rusty's a quirky fun mess, but now those two lines were tangled together, and they would remain so forever.

He loved the eagerness with which his future husband kissed him. They had time to enjoy each other now, despite having so many things on their plate. They would go see Rusty's mom moved, and they would have to confront Connor. His parents wanted to meet Rusty, and that would have to happen soon since he didn't want to disappoint his mom after promising her. They had to finish college and find work and get married. What should be the order of things?

"Hey," Rusty called gently, "are you bored already with my kissing technique?"

Matty brushed the messy blond hair out of Rusty's eyes. "No. My mind just went to trying to organize our life together. I realized that we have so many things to do. I guess that's what happens when you get engaged. You suddenly become very busy."

"We'll figure it all out, don't worry. I mean, you in particular, since it looks to me like you're the guy with a lot of interest in organizing stuff. I'm going to be in the backseat and ask you innocently from time to time: Husband, what do you think we should do next?"

"Ah, damn, Rusty, I should have realized that you had a cunning plan all along. So, you don't mind being dominated a little?"

"Do you really have to ask such a question? Now, order me around and threaten me with your ruler. Tell me to suck your cock."

"If you're telling me what I should order you to do, that's not exactly domination."

"I'm open to suggestions then," Rusty said with a dazzling smile.

"Okay, suck my cock," Matty said. "Hopefully, that will shut your big mouth," he added and winked at Rusty, who was already going down on him.

The immediate reply was a playful growl while Rusty set himself to lowering Matty's zipper by only using his teeth. It was a difficult task, but Matty didn't even think about asking for things to get done faster. He enjoyed every moment with his Rusty. Yes, after all this time, he could say that there was nothing else he wanted. All the other things would still be there tomorrow, another day of having Rusty as his. Right now, however, he could enjoy everything his lover had to offer.

Finally, his zipper was down and Rusty was blowing hot air over his underwear. "In our house, you will have to walk around naked."

“All of the time? It might get chilly.” Matty let out a sigh as Rusty mouthed his cock through his underwear with his lips, applying just enough pressure to make his intentions known and Matty’s desire soar.

“That will make your nipples hard and perky. I’ll take it,” Rusty replied.

“But it might make our cocks turn into shrinking willies,” Matty argued.

“When that happens, we’ll get under a blanket. And once we’re warm enough, we’ll do the nasty.”

“There’s nothing nasty about what you’re doing to me,” Matty said, surprising even himself with the gentle tone he used.

Rusty looked up, his eyes large and grateful. And then, he gave up on playing around and pulled Matty’s jeans and underwear down, releasing the confined cock from its little prison.

Matty groaned as Rusty’s hot mouth was on him. Maybe he was imagining stuff a little, but this, what they were doing right now, felt like something more than it ever had before when they were just fooling around, playing their own game. They hadn’t lost anything; they were gaining something more. Although it took time to adjust to the idea, Matty realized that he could barely wait to be married to Rusty and see how much richer their life together would become.

For now, though, they had this, the pleasure of being together, skin next to skin. Rusty placed a heated cheek on Matty’s thigh, while taking a break from sucking. He was stroking gently, all his attention trained on the object of his desire.

“You look really good down there,” Matty whispered.

Another look full of gratitude followed. “I like being here. A lot. There’s no other place I’d rather be.”

“Seriously? Don’t you want to fuck me?”

“Sure thing I do. But, Matty,” Rusty faked outrage, “the kind of language you use. It’s beyond the pale.”

“Right,” Matty snorted. “I’m sure you wrote the dictionary of dirty words.”

“Of course. Do you see anyone else being better at this than me?”

“No. However, I’d like to see you doing more than just talk.”

“I’m on it, sweetheart,” Rusty said theatrically. And then, after taking a deep breath like someone getting ready to make a dive, he engulfed the entire length of Matty’s cock in his mouth.

Matty knew he'd never get tired of that. Rusty was a generous lover. Right now, he was just going lower and lower, full of good intentions and naughty ideas. His mouth was slippery and knowledgeable as it moved, wrapping around the hard candy it was attacking from all angles.

"Love maker," he whispered without thinking.

"What did you say?" Rusty asked, taking a break from putting his crazy blowjob technique to work.

"You know how to make love," Matty said. "I'm not talking only about sex." He caressed the blond head with gentle moves. "You know how to give, Rusty. That's why I love you."

"I love you, too," Rusty replied.

The words were exchanged so easily between them, like a wave washing back and forth on a beach.

"Now, let me get to work," Rusty said and grinned. "I must have told you before, but it's not called a job for nothing. I need to use my whole head... to give you head."

"Then do it," Matty whispered and closed his eyes.

It felt so good to have his fiancé devour him like this. Want other men? Not in a million years. Matty knew he was lucky. He might have taken his time, but he had gotten the man he wanted, and the world could very well fade into the background.

Rusty was putting his mind to it now with determination. He lay on his belly between Matty's legs and played with the cock in his mouth, from time to time opening his eyes so that he could meet the other's gaze.

That was more than enough for Matty. Maybe staying power wouldn't be part of their routine, but that was fine. They would just do it numerous times to compensate for it.

"Rusty," he whispered urgently, "I--"

He didn't finish the sentence and didn't have to. Rusty was drinking everything from him, and his lips and tongue made it all so mind-blowing that Matty worried for a moment that he might black out from too much pleasure.

There was no need for that, either. He was fine and Rusty was all over him, looking like a tomcat that had just licked the milk bowl clean. Matty laughed and tasted his lips. "Hmm, good job," he praised his fiancé.

"I thought so myself," Rusty replied, seemingly very proud of himself. "And now I will fuck you."

“It’s good that you thought of informing me,” Matty joked and didn’t protest as he was made to turn on all fours and observe the other’s moves over his shoulder. “Don’t go easy on me.”

Rusty had the nerve to look a bit puzzled. “Matty, you should say, go easy on me.”

“No, there’s no misunderstanding. I want you to fuck me like you mean it.” He made sure to add a naughty smile at the proposition.

“And they say I’m the kinkster in this family,” Rusty said, shaking his head.

“Well, I am bound and determined to prove you wrong if you ever make the mistake of thinking that. Seeing how you wronged me a little in the past, I’d say that the best way to redeem yourself is by properly licking my ass and sticking it in me.”

“You make it all sound so romantic,” Rusty hastened to agree. “I am so going to put it in,” he said in a droll voice.

Matty giggled. They knew each other well. They knew each other so very well. He had heard of people who fit so well together that they didn’t need anyone else. That was obviously the case with his parents, so he was proud to say that he was the same.

Rusty was, once more tonight, hard at work. His tongue was exquisitely naughty as it pushed inside, tasting Matty from all angles. He was, indeed, thorough in his work.



Matty’s pink hole glistened, and Rusty did feel tempted to follow his lover’s offer of taking him hard and fast. Throughout the earlier blowjob, his cock had gotten hard enough to break rocks, but he didn’t want to think of nothing but his own pleasure. Matty had called him a love maker and a giver, and as much as he wanted to really give it to his guy, he knew very well that he had to be considerate of the other’s needs.

Which were voiced in easy to understand terms.

“You’re so going to turn my ass white if you continue like this,” Matty complained. “Is the Mighty Thor really okay with this long foreplay of yours? I thought I knew the guy, and he’s always ready for action.”

Rusty got to his knees and used his hard cock to slap Matty playfully over one round buttock. “He is, but I don’t want to go at it like an animal.”

“Even if I order you to?” Matty asked.

Rusty made a show of biting his fist. “You really know how to put a guy between a rock and a hard place.”

Matty did wrong to bounce his ass suggestively. “That’s not where I want to put you. I’d rather have you between leftie and righty here.” One buttock went up, the other down, and then the other way around.

Rusty considered himself properly hypnotized. “You’re driving a hard bargain. Well, let’s see what you’re going to say now.”

Despite his words, he didn’t go right in. He smeared Matty’s ass carefully with lube and held his cock by the root to control it as if he had an antsy stallion at his mercy and not his longtime friend. Clearly enough, the Mighty Thor wanted nothing else but to bury himself straight into Matty’s hot, tight hole, which meant that Rusty needed to use his other head to make sure that no one would end up in pain, even if briefly.

Matty let out a delicious sigh of surrender and pleasure when the head of Rusty’s cock pushed through the ring of muscles. Delight was equal on both sides, and Rusty took a moment to let out a groan of his own pleasure, as well.

“Damn, your ass is so eating me, Matty,” he whispered.

“That’s his favorite treat. Didn’t you know?” his lover teased him.

“I’ll hold you to that because I’m so going to feed you dick on a regular basis.”

“If you’re only going to give me a lick and a small bit like this, I’m afraid I’m going to be going hungry.”

Rusty moaned as Matty pushed back and impaled himself on the cock penetrating him. To show his appreciation, Rusty smacked one of the lewd buttocks enticing him too much.

“Oh, yes, that too,” Matty agreed. “Spank me a little more.”

He indulged him a couple more times, but he had other pressing matters to attend to than watch that lovely butt turning the prettiest shade of pink. With a vengeance, he grabbed Matty’s hips and bottomed out in his ass. They both groaned in new pleasure at the same time.

“That’s it,” Matty whispered, “that’s it, Rusty. Come on, ride me like I’m yours.”

“Mine,” Rusty growled into Matty’s ear while leaning over him. “You’re really mine.”

They no longer needed words after that. Matty’s ass clamped around him, making him go nuts. That was only him, though. The Mighty Thor knew his job very well and he was now in his element, so to speak. This was the kind of sex he wanted to have all his life. This was the life he wanted, sex and banter and happy times with Matty.

He wrapped his arms around his fiancé's slender body, enjoying how solid it felt. Words of praise and love fell from his lips, over and over. And Matty replied in turn, urging him to mark him with his fingers and kisses and cock.

That was Matty for him. The best combination of sugar and spice.



Matty purred as Rusty caressed his back slowly. From time to time, wandering fingers reached his back door.

“Are you checking how much of you is still inside me?”

“It's good to make sure everything is in order, don't you think?”

“Of course. I can see that my training is paying off.”

“Ah, so you were the one conditioning me all this time. I shouldn't be surprised. I was starting to think I wasn't exactly myself lately.”

“Really?” Matty pushed himself up on one elbow so that he could stare at Rusty.

His question was greeted by a quick kiss. “It's true what they say, everything they say. You make me better, Matty.”

“And you're making me responsible. Shouldn't we go to sleep?”

“I love watching you like this, naked in my bed.”

“My eyes are closing, though.”

“You can go to sleep. I want to touch you some more.”

Matty agreed with a sleepy smile and lay on his belly again. Rusty's hand still moved slowly over his back as he drifted off.



A new life was truly waiting in front of him. It was nuts, no matter how he looked at it. But it was happening, to him of all people. Rusty placed a lingering kiss on Matty's shoulder and rested his head there as the thoughts of everything that would happen to them in the future, all the happy things, as he moved slowly into dreams.

Chapter Fifty-Six

The Ones We Leave Behind

Silence stretched between them, but it was the kind of companionable silence that wouldn't make either of them uncomfortable. Rusty kept his eyes on the road, but there was melancholy in there, something Matty respected and felt like aching for, as well. They would meet Roy at the new facility and then they would visit Rusty's mom as she was already there.

"I'm thinking about selling that house," Rusty said suddenly.

Matty pondered over the strange sentence. Was Rusty thinking that his mom wouldn't come out of her coma, ever? It didn't sound like him. There had to be something else.

"Once she's awake, of course. I didn't like her there, and she didn't like it much, either. I think that in a different place, she might feel better."

"You will no longer be neighbors with Maddox's family," Matty reminded him.

"Yes, I know," Rusty said, letting out a breath. "But the chick needs to fly the coop someday, right?" He turned slightly to offer him a smile, and Matty took it at face value.

"I believe we're here," Matty said as Rusty turned down a winding road, per the GPS instructions. "I think it's a good place. Quiet."

"My dad chose it." Rusty didn't add anything, but it was clear that he was thinking that he did trust his old man with this sort of things.

Matty took Rusty's hand without thinking as he noticed Roy Parker waiting in front of the white building. What sort of confrontation could he expect? No matter what anyone said to reassure him, he was a tad nervous about this meeting. He didn't imagine Roy to be the kind to start a scandal in a place meant for patients who needed the quiet more than anything else, but since he knew so little about the man, the scenarios he kept playing in his head tended to become muddled and complicated.

He had said nothing about it to Rusty, as he didn't want to add more stress on top of what had to be a trying experience for his fiancé. One thing was sure; he wasn't expecting Roy to receive him with open arms.

However, once they approached and Rusty greeted his dad, Matty was surprised to see the man stretching out his hand.

"Hello, Matthew."

"Hello, Mr. Parker."

A nod followed. It could mean anything. Maybe not absolute acceptance, but it wasn't rejection, either. So far, so good, Matty thought and kept back while Roy told them that he would lead the way so that they could see Rusty's mom.

"Her situation is unchanged, but anything can happen, any day, according to the doctors," Roy said, his voice tired and sounding as if it came from somewhere far away. "I will leave the two of you with her. Let's meet up outside once you're done here."

Matty wasn't surprised to see Rusty's mom lying on the hospital bed. He had expected that much. But what did surprise him was the striking resemblance he could see between mother and son. It was easy to tell that in her youth, she must have been a real beauty. Maybe that was why he had seen so little of Rusty in Roy. His boyfriend took after his mother, looks wise.

Rusty walked over to the bed and sat on a chair beside it. He took one inert, thin hand in his and caressed it with the other.

"I'm not sure if you can hear me, mom, but some people think that patients in a coma can still be aware of what's happening around them. For the sake of what I'm about to tell you, I hope that's true. I'm sorry that we fought so bitterly the last time. I should have let you win, although I've never known what that meant."

Matty felt his heart squeezing in his chest as he heard Rusty's grave voice. How many people could say they truly knew the king of Sunny Hill when they had never heard him speak like that? This was something meant only for him to see, at this very moment. So, he walked closer, too, stopping only inches away from the foot of the bed.

"Hello, Ms. Wilder," he said.

Rusty turned his head and smiled gratefully. His eyes said that he knew that he and Matty were in this together, now and always.

"Mom, this is Matty. I know you might scoff at me for using clichés, but he's the best thing that has ever happened to me. We're going to get married, and there's nothing more I wish than for you to wake up so that you can attend the wedding."

Matty moved round the bed and put one hand on Rusty's shoulder. "You two look so alike. You're handsome like your mom."

"Don't worry, Matty. Feel free to call us beautiful. We're not the kind to mind."

Matty sat by Rusty's side, pulling up another chair. "That's interesting to know. What else can you tell me about the two of you?"

Rusty's face turned into a tender smile, and, as his lips began to move, memories of the good kind began spilling out, like a torrent that couldn't be stopped. Matty listened, not because he

had nothing to add, but because seeing Rusty like this made him all the more real with each word he said. Real in a way that he would be only for him and him only.

Maybe he was selfish like that, but he was grateful that despite the others' offering to come along, he had been the one Rusty had chosen. They were closer than friends and boyfriends. They were family, and that really moved his heart.

“And you might even like this,” Rusty continued as the flow of beautiful recollections turned into a quiet moving river, “but now I’m taking singing seriously. I should have told you about it the last time I was home, but I don’t think now is too late. I’m going to be a star. Mrs. May says so when she wants to motivate me. I’m still a bit of a slacker, but I’m working on it. You’ll hear me sing one day.”

Matty searched Rusty’s face. “How about you sing to her now?” he suggested. “Or is it against the rules? This place is really quiet.”

“That’s a great idea, Matty,” Rusty said excitedly. “I’ll sing sotto voce. There’s this one song she loves so much.”

Rusty leaned over and began singing in a breathless whisper, while Matty watched him in amazement. It became clear at that very moment he would never tire of watching and listening to Rusty sing. Mrs. May was right; he was on the path to become a star. There was so much joy on his face as the harmonies poured out of him, even in that quiet voice. He loved music.

And he loved Matty. There was no doubt that Matty loved him back. He leaned back into his chair and listened to the beautiful music. He’d definitely convince Rusty to sing in front of his parents, too. It would be the easiest way to make them fall in love with him, and Matty didn’t mind things being easy from time to time.



Rusty closed the door behind them with infinite care. He felt clean like he had not felt in ages. A part of him had expected anger, mostly at himself, once he got to see his mom in that state. But he had a feeling that things would get better now, maybe an irrational hope that the only way was up, and his mom would not lie in a coma forever.

He was at peace with everything now, and he had Matty to thank for it. As their fingers entangled and they walked down the silent corridor, that was one solid truth he knew. He was no longer alone, and there was someone who had his back.

His dad was waiting for them outside, his eyes looking off into the distance as if he was deep in thought.

“Dad,” he said gently. “Thank you. It looks like she’s being taken good care of. It’s a good place for her.”

A small nod was the only indication that his gratitude was acknowledged. That was typical of Roy Parker, so Rusty wasn’t surprised. From now on, he was determined that doing his part would be enough. And his part involved letting his dad know that he appreciated what he was doing for his mom, even though she and Roy had separated a long time ago.

“Let’s walk for a bit,” Roy suggested.

They left through the main gate that separated the building from the grounds and, for a while, they walked in silence, side by side. Rusty was waiting. Whatever his dad had to dish out to him about Matty, he was prepared to face it with maturity.

“Matthew,” Roy began, “is it true what Rusty is telling me?”

“About what, sir?” Matty replied politely.

It was obvious what Roy was hinting at, but that didn’t mean that Matty would make it easy for him, nor that he would act as if he was embarrassed about the whole thing. That made Rusty so proud of the one he’d chosen to be with for the rest of his life.

“Rusty tells me that you and he are going to get married,” Roy said after a short pause, during which he must have been expecting Rusty and Matty to become nervous about their announcement. Nothing worked like that anymore.

“Yes, it is true.”

“What do your parents have to say about this?”

“They can barely wait to meet Rusty,” Matty replied promptly.

Roy appeared to ponder that bit of information as if there were something beyond the immediate and clear meaning of those words for him to examine. Rusty kept silent. He wouldn’t give his dad any reason to accuse him of being immature ever again. Since it had been his choice to talk only to Matty, he would get some uncomfortable truths and answers from another source than his son. Rusty felt that he was completely okay with that.

“Do they know who he is?”

“I’m afraid you will have to be more specific than that,” Matty replied, perfectly capable of holding his own in this little confrontation. When Roy said nothing, he continued, “They do know that he is a student at Sunny Hill, just as I am. They also know that he has a wonderful voice as I sent them a video of one of Rusty’s performances. And they know that he’s a great person.”

“And how do they know that? Since they have never met him?”

“Because I told them. And they trust me.”

Roy let out a deep sigh. Rusty steeled for what was to follow. His dad hadn't ever minced words when it came to pointing out his first son's flaws. Unlike before, Rusty promised himself that he wouldn't let those touch him.

Therefore, he was taken aback by Roy's words. “All right, then.”

The silence that stretched between them after that was getting stranger by the moment.

“What? Is that all?” Rusty asked out loud. “I thought you were going to ask us both if we're on drugs.”

Roy shook his head. “No, I will not say anything of the kind. But since you're so keen on hearing my opinion again, here it is. I cannot condone this. I believe that both of you are making a mistake, but you're grownups. Even if I said anything, it would be like barking up the wrong tree. Even a parent's obligations have limits.”

Rusty forced down the wave of anger rising in him. As always, the things left unsaid were the ones that hurt the most.

Roy stopped and turned toward them. He put a hand on Rusty's shoulder. “I wish you well. Matthew, you seem like a good person. Take care of him. And yourself.”

They watched Roy as he walked back, while they remained standing in the middle of the path.

“Mr. Parker,” Matty called out to the man's retreating back, “we will send you a wedding invitation as soon as we know the date!”

Roy didn't turn. He just waved, in that way of his that said ‘don't bother’. Rusty had a mind to explain that to Matty, but it looked like his fiancé had a different take on the whole thing.

Matty turned toward him and smiled. “He'll then know for sure that we're not on drugs.”

Rusty pursed his lips, as laughing under the circumstances seemed out of place. Still, the laughter bubbling in his chest got the better of him. Good thing they were quite far from the main building and the personnel wouldn't hear someone laughing like a madman so close to their facility.

“Matty, you're so awesome I don't know where to start.”

“I'll take that. Tell me more about my awesomeness. By the way, you do realize what just happened, right?”

“Um, my dad being my dad? I mean, it might seem like a novelty to you, but I’m pretty used to his special brand of putting people down.”

“Well, allow me to enlighten you. Do you know how the bride is walked down the aisle by her father and then transferred into the groom’s waiting arms?”

“Yeah, where are you getting with this?”

Matty gestured with both arms, as if he were part of an aircraft carrier crew on the job. “We walked down the aisle together. Okay, so that bit is off because I was supposed to wait at the end of the thing. But he did transfer you to me and told me to take care of you. That’s what happened.”

“So, we’re already married?” Rusty joked. “I thought a wedding came with a lot more headache than this. It happened so fast. How am I supposed to remember this emotional moment in my life thirty years from now? And transfer? Really, Matty? Like I’m property or something?”

“But you are,” Matty argued right away. “You’re mine. You belong to me. I’ll say it as many times as it takes.”

“As it takes to what?”

“To realize.” Matty stopped and grabbed Rusty’s hands. He brought them to his chest. “Jokes aside, thank you for bringing me today. I’m happy I met your mom. And your dad gave us his blessing, in his own unusual way.”

“You just think that because you’re the strangest optimist I’ve met in my life. He’s going to throw that invitation in the trashcan.”

Matty shrugged like such things were of no consequence for him. “It doesn’t matter. We will send it anyway. That’s our part.”

Rusty stared at his fiancé in pure astonishment. “That is exactly the kind of thing I’ve been thinking, Matty. That the only thing I have to do is my part. And now, you just said the same thing. Does that make us soulmates?”

“Without a doubt,” Matty replied and pulled him along so that they could walk back.

Rusty took one deep breath. “Is it really all right? To let him leave like this?”

“His choice,” Matty said promptly. “Don’t you think so?”

“I do. I so totally do. Some people we just leave behind.” His mind drifted to memories from childhood, the happy times. His decision was made, and the simple fact that there was no turning back gave him a joy like no other he had ever experienced. With newfound courage, he continued. “Not with the intention of forgetting about them forever, but their place is simply in

the past, with the good and the bad. And then, there are others that we will only leave behind in body, because they are always with us in our hearts. We can come back to visit them, and it's always with joy and pleasure. Like we will surely visit the Kingsleys even if I won't have a home close to them anymore. Do I sound too philosophical right now?" He had no idea if his ramblings made much sense, but the ideas were crowding his head, wanting to get out, all at the same time.

Matty made their clasped hands swing between them, as their steps became light. "Not at all. You're just as I imagined you were, Rusty Parker. You have layers."

Rusty grinned and wiggled his eyebrows. "Like an onion?"

"That's a cool Shrek joke. So, I feel compelled to say. Not like an onion, but like a parfait." Matty wiggled his eyebrows, too.

"So, I'm sweet."

"Of course, you are. I've tasted you often enough to know."

"Now, that was pretty dirty, Matty."

"Do you really mean that? Wow, to receive such a compliment from the king of kinksters. I feel honored."

"As you should. And you shouldn't think that I'd just allow anyone to tutor me, right?"

Matty laughed, the carefree sound touching Rusty in the deep recesses of his heart. "Come on, let's go. Something tells me your dad may come around one day."

"Hopefully that day will happen while he's still alive," Rusty said with a shrug. "But, you know what? It no longer matters like it used to. I mean, not that it wouldn't make me happy if he were satisfied with my choices for once in a lifetime. But I can live without his approval. What the hell am I even saying? I am so completely, utterly happy, no matter what he says or does, that I'm afraid I might end up flying."

"No way. You're not flying away from me." Matty pulled at his hand energetically to make a point.

"Aww, don't tell me you've seriously gotten into your ball and chain role."

"Ball and chain? I like that. Yeah, that's totally me."

"Great, because I mean it from the bottom of my heart. Keep me with you, Matty." Rusty stopped only so that he could hug his guy. Matty was his, and that possession thing went both ways. That meant they would only choose to be happy, no matter what happened.



The first person to greet them at the house upon their return was, unsurprisingly, Zoey, who was much better now and quite busy tasting whatever Jonathan was cooking.

“That cake was,” she said and offered a thumbs-up, “but this is chef’s kiss,” she added as she pointed at the different dish samples on the table.

“I have discovered,” Jonathan said as he pushed another small dish toward Zoey, “that your bestie, Matty, is the perfect guinea pig.”

“Yeah, totally,” Zoey said as she dug into the food and tasted it carefully. “Yeah, this is perfect.”

“Great, I’m glad to see that you guys are making such an awesome cook-tester team,” Matty said, “but what’s with all this food?”

Zoey stopped, her fork in mid-air. “Jonathan is thinking of buttering up the audience for your big showdown with Connor.”

“So, is it going to be like a party with punch and pie?” Matty asked, feeling a bit out of the loop. Rusty was busy joining Zoey in testing Jonathan’s creations, and they were now engaged in a battle of forks, while pushing each other. It was obvious to anyone looking on that Rusty wasn’t using all his strength, but that didn’t keep Zoey from giving her all to come out on top.

Jonathan smiled and offered him a small cake in a pretty ruffled paper. Rusty and Zoey both stared at him with hunger in their eyes. Matty grinned at them and bit down on the sweet confection only to let out a sound of delight. “Jonathan, this is incredible. What’s the latest on Connor? You guys seem to know a lot more than we do.”

“As you might expect, Connor is on the move, energizing his fan base. They have already started spreading this announcement all over campus.” Jonathan turned and picked up a sheet of paper from the counter to hand it to Matty.

“*Implacables, unite!*” Matty read out loud. “*End Preston’s rule of terror!*” He stopped for a moment. “Terror? Show me one person who has ever been terrorized by our dear Dean of Students, and I’ll eat my hat and everybody else’s, too.”

“He can be pretty insistent with that tea,” Rusty said and snickered. “I bet that the Implacables are not tea-lovers. Not one of them. They’re tea-haters. Read on, Matty.”

“*Uphold real values! Fight for justice! Join us to bring down the false king of Sunny Hill...* I’m literally dying, which is of course, an inane thing to say, but this guy is totally nuts, so I can’t have a normal reaction to any of this. Don’t tell me he’s already established what the confrontation will be all about.”

“I’m afraid so,” Jonathan explained. “He wants to gather a crowd and have a debate.”

“Well, we’re not scared,” Rusty said with a shrug. “It only means that we’ll have to prepare, too. By the way, do you know what that asshole asked for? Not that he’s going to win, I’m not going to let him, but he’s one crazy scumbag.”

Matty waved, trying to stop him, but Rusty continued.

“He wants a date with Matty.”

Jonathan and Zoey were both surprised to hear that.

“Does he have the hots for you?” Zoey asked, throwing Matty a sympathetic look. “Oh,” she exclaimed, “that must be why he’s keeping poor John around him. He wanted the deets on you, partner.” She shook her head to show her disbelief at what some people got up to.

“It’s nothing like that,” Matty hurried to explain. “He thinks he can convince me--”

“Brainwash you,” Rusty said pointedly. “He thinks Matty is cockwhipped because of me.”

“He didn’t say it like that,” Matty clarified for the sake of their shocked audience. How could Jonathan and Zoey still be taken aback by all this with friends like him and Rusty was beyond understanding. “He is just so delusional and he believes he’s so right that everyone else should give up on having their own thoughts and just bow to his superior intellect. I have no idea why he’s so bent on me, though.”

“He’s envious, obviously,” Zoey said. “You’re engaged to Rusty, which means that he no longer has a chance.”

“Zoey, the guy has zero romantic interest in me. Actually, I think he’s not interested in that way in anyone. He just loves himself too much, and there’s no room for another person in his mean little heart.”

“I can see that,” Jonathan agreed. “I mean, last year, when I tried to get to know him, he struck me as pretty self-absorbed.”

“I still can’t get over the fact that you let that guy slip you the tongue, Johnny boy,” Rusty said. “All the while Maddox was drooling all over his pillow and whining about not having you.”

A prompt smack upside the head made Rusty drop the morsel on his fork.

“Who was drooling and whining, bozo?” Maddox growled at his bestie and then sauntered over to his boyfriend to kiss him and accept a small sweet offering in the shape of a cake similar to the one Matty was still only half-way through.

“Don’t worry, Rusty,” Jonathan said. “Connor never got that far with me.”

“Really? Not what I heard,” Rusty replied.

Matty watched the exchange between the best friends, trying his best not to laugh.

“Rusty, Maddox and everyone else are already on board. We have your back.”

“I also need to energize my fanbase,” Rusty replied. “Connor’s not the sheriff in this town, and he never will be.”

“No need for underhanded tactics, though,” Jonathan warned him.

“You’re cooking... I don’t even know what these are called. And you’re talking about underhanded tactics? You plan on getting everyone sweet on us for this thing with Connor,” Rusty pointed out.

“They are called madeleines and a bit of sweetness never killed anyone.”

“Keep telling yourself that, Johnny boy. But I’m sure this is a Hamilton thing. I bet your mom would approve. She’s all sneaky like that, too, but direct at the same time.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Jonathan replied. “What are your plans, Rusty? How are you going to take down Connor?”

“Using what I’m best at,” Rusty said with aplomb, pulling out imaginary suspenders with both hands. “I’ll show Sunny Hill their true king. Also, my royal consort will play an important role. By the way, Matty, I think the new cat boy suit is already upstairs.”

“What? When did it arrive?”

“Details don’t matter,” Rusty said a bit evasively, which made Matty narrow his eyes. “I think you need to try it on. How about now? Hamilton here is going to kill us with kindness and madeleines if we’re not careful.”

That was a cue. That and Rusty’s big knowing grin.



Of course, he planned on telling Matty the truth, but not in front of everyone. He was well aware that his fiancé was right behind him, so he made a little show of stopping only so that he could push his butt back a little and shake it.

A rewarding slap followed promptly. “Weren’t you in a hurry for me to try on the cat boy suit?”

“Yeah, but I’m insecure. I need a daily tushie slap or I might start to think that you don’t like me anymore.”

“That’s never going to happen, but thank you for letting me know. I’m going to slap your butt daily until I turn it red.”

“Good. That’s what I wanted to hear.”

“You might not be able to sit. It will hurt.”

“Stop teasing me already,” Rusty joked. He sprinted ahead and opened his bedroom door.

Matty threw him a pointed look before going inside. And then, he sat on the bed and watched as Rusty pulled various pieces of clothing from his carefully curated collection.

“I think I recall this crop top,” Matty said. “Wait, did you have another cat boy suit all along, Rusty?”

“Not exactly. But I wanted to ease you into your cat boy persona, before I discovered that you were actually very well acquainted with this sort of kinky activity.”

“The pants are all right, but this top is going to leave my midriff a little bare, isn’t it?”

“I’m counting on that,” Rusty said promptly. “You need an upgrade, cat boy. It’s war, and you have to up the ante. You know, become sexier.”

“For Connor?” Matty teased.

Rusty let his face fall for a moment. “You know, there are two types of people in this world. The ones that get so jealous that they don’t want anyone else to look at the one they love, and the ones that don’t mind showing that person off for the world to see. I belong to the latter category.”

“I see. Maybe I should try facing the Implacable crowd in the nude then. Well, I’d wear the cat boy tail, don’t worry, and the wig with the ears.”

“Let’s not go that far,” Rusty suggested promptly. “There is only this much showing off I am willing to accept.”

“Tyrant,” Matty accused but with the hint of a smile. When Rusty jumped on him to tickle him, he gave up easily and began giggling. “Okay, okay, you’re the boss. Since Connor has a bone to pick with you, you must establish how we’re going to go about it.”

“Before that, however, I think there’s something else we need to prepare for. I mean, I have to prepare for, because you’ve known your folks all your life.”

“Oh, right. They’ll love you. You only need to be yourself.”

“What if being myself is not enough?” Rusty asked, and this time, his question didn’t sound like a joke.

Matty picked up on it right away. “Rusty, I’m the guy marrying you, not them. To put your heart at ease, in the wildly impossible off-chance that they don’t like you, I’m ready to elope. All we need is our love and our alter-ego suits. Slicky and Rybalt will take the world by storm.”

“Correct,” Rusty said with enthusiasm and smooched Matty loudly. “That means that Connor is no match for us.”

“Don’t tell me you ever doubted it.”

Rusty grinned ear to ear. “Never. As long as I have my Slicky, nothing and no one can stand in my way. That said, I will have to prepare my number.”

“And what will I do? Shake my tail to the beat? I don’t think that would work too well, and let’s keep the twerking for the bedroom.”

His fiancé. Always thinking of every angle. “Don’t worry about a thing. You’re the support character in their eyes, but you’re the main protagonist in every story of mine.”

“Wow, that was such a sweet thing to say, Rusty. That still means I will have to come up with a number for myself, as well.”

“As you wish. Now put on your cat boy suit because I so need to see you in it.”

Chapter Fifty-Seven

A Different Kind of Family

Rusty closed the door quietly, throwing one last look at Matty, who was way into the world of dreams by all signs. It was late in the evening already, which meant that his baby dude slash cat boy wouldn't have to go back to his dorm room. Things worked out well this way and much to his advantage. Not that he had any doubts about Matty telling him 'yes' to everything now. That thought alone filled him with giddiness.

This wouldn't do. He had a tough task ahead of himself, so he smacked one cheek then the other in the hope that he would manage to wipe that grin of his face. It was no use. That meant that he would have to call Francine while he was still smiling like an idiot. An idiot in love, so maybe not that much of an idiot, although he would only use that word to describe the version of himself before his first 'I love you' escaped his lips with Matty as the sole recipient.

He tiptoed downstairs because he didn't need an audience for the conversation he wanted to have with Francine. His besties were in their rooms, busy with studying and other things before going to bed. In the case of Maddox and Jonathan, they were probably in bed already doing the naughty, but Rusty didn't want to think too much about that. More like he didn't want to think along those lines because the Mighty Thor might nudge him in the direction of his sleeping fiancé with all sorts of naughty intentions on his mind.

Back to the task at hand. He sat gingerly on the sofa. People surely couldn't guess by looking at the guy, but Matthew Han was a beast in bed. Not that he was complaining, but it did make sitting a bit of a challenge.

Rusty took another deep breath. Hopefully, she wasn't asleep yet. He just needed to talk to her for a bit. During a very hard time in his life, she had been there in ways that his own parents hadn't. Whether she liked it or not, she was part of this whole thing. It was now high time for her to assume responsibility till the end.

Francine picked up on the second ring. "Rusty," she said in her usual aristocratic tone which might have come across as standoffish to most people. But this was her affectionate voice. The lucky ones never got to hear the frosty version. "I hope you learned your lesson."

"Of course. You're a good teacher. The best," Rusty confirmed. "Sorry to bother you so late. I have no idea if Jonathan told you anything, since it looks like he has a thing for telling you stuff that's not necessarily about him--"

"Out with it," Francine commanded in a tone that brooked no contradiction. "You must be more courageous to get what you want, Rusty."

“Oh, well, I was hoping to complain a little about Johnny boy and butter you up for what I’m about to tell you, but it looks like I’m keeping you from your beauty sleep,” he said quickly. “I’m going to be meeting my future in-laws. I need every bit of help I can get.”

“What do you have in mind?”

Well, he hadn’t thought about it in that much detail. “Give me a cowlick?” he said and winced at his own choice.

“Really? A cowlick? How about a kick in the seat of your pants?”

Rusty gasped for show. “Mrs. Hamilton, your language is beyond the pale.”

Francine chuckled softly. “Be yourself, Rusty. Don’t worry about details so much. Since their son loves you, whether they do or don’t is not that important. Maddox had the guts to come knocking down our door.”

“I was there, remember?” Rusty said with phony pique. “I was brave, too.”

“While someone else’s nuts were in the fire. Sure, you were brave.”

Rusty snickered. “You said ‘nuts’.”

“Come on, Rusty, tell me why you really called. And yes, I’m moments away from starting my beauty sleep.”

Rusty took one deep breath and wiped his palms on his pants. “Walk me down the aisle, Francine. I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer. You got me into this mess called love, not that I wasn’t there already, and--” He stopped to catch his breath. “Say ‘yes’, please.”

“Did you sound this tortured while proposing to Matthew? No wonder he felt compelled to help you out of your misery. I’m joking, Rusty. Of course, my answer is ‘yes’. But are you sure? Your father--”

“Let’s say he’s not exactly sold on the idea. I don’t think he’ll attend the wedding, even. And my heart is set on you, anyway.”

Silence reigned at the other end.

“Hey,” he called out, “Francine, are you still there?”

He heard her clearing her throat. “Yes. I needed a moment.”

“To... cry?”

“What nonsense. The only way you’ll ever make me cry is by singing out of tune.”

Rusty grinned as he smelled blood in the water. “I made you cry.”

“Something got in my eye,” she said suavely. And then, she laughed. “Keep making me proud, Rusty. And it will be my honor to walk this other son of mine down the aisle.”

How long was his heart going to last if things kept going like this?

“Now who’s crying?” Francine teased him from the other end. “I will have to check with Jonathan first, however. I wouldn’t want him to think that his mom is putting her other kids before him.”

“Sure, of course,” Rusty mumbled, still overcome with emotion. “I should have asked him if he’d be okay with it. Damn, I always make such a joke out of everything that it’s hard for people to take me seriously, right?”

“I believe that people who know you are very much aware of how you truly are. And Jonathan’s father is already bent on being the one to hand our son over to the Kingsleys. I doubt that we would encounter any resistance on that front. Now tell me, because Jonathan told me to ask you if I really wanted to know, did you sing your heart out to win him back?”

“Oh, yes, you bet I did. I woke up the whole campus with my singing. Now my cover is busted, though. But I don’t care. I have everything I need in my life right now.”

“Good night, Rusty,” Francine said with a low chuckle. “Feel free to call me anytime, but remember. I want results and I have standards.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, don’t you worry. And I’ll make sure to make you proud.”

The eddies of warmth rippling through his entire body took some time to fade, long after his call to Jonathan’s mom ended. So, Francine told him to be himself and it was a good way to build self-confidence, but he wasn’t entirely convinced. At the very least, he needed new clothes.



Matty just couldn’t keep his mouth shut any longer. The collar of Rusty’s shirt was so scrubbed and starched that it dug into the poor guy’s neck. Rusty had brushed his usually messy hair into such an austere style that anyone getting a single look at him could tell he was uncomfortable. Because Rusty had decided to allow him one night of sleeping alone in his dorm room under the pretext that they had to be well-rested before making the road trip to see Matty’s parents, he had had no chance to tell his fiancé anything about his choice in clothes.

“Rusty,” he demanded once they were at a fair distance from Sunny Hill. “Stop being so stiff, for heaven’s sake. My parents are totally cool, I’m telling you.”

A noncommittal grunt was all he got instead of a clear reply.

“I mean,” Matty continued his assault, “look at me. I’m wearing my normal clothes.”

“Well, that’s because you don’t have to impress them. I do.”

“Hey,” Matty said, gently this time, “I’d rather you be yourself. They will love you as you are.”

“And if they don’t?” Rusty let out a short huff. He craned his neck and grimaced. He was obviously so uncomfortable and miserable that Matty wanted to undress him to his underwear on the spot only so that he would stop sighing like that.

“Well, if they don’t, we can always elope,” Matty said promptly. “I’ve been a good kid all my life. I have plenty of karma points to spend.”

“You say that now, but wait until my shine wears off. Then you’ll see the error of your ways.”

“You don’t scare me, and it’s too late anyway.” Matty waved the hand with the ring on it for Rusty to notice. Then, he made up his mind. “Pull over.”

“We’re in the middle of nowhere,” Rusty pointed out.

“Which is exactly why I want you to pull over. Come on. I’m supposed to be your lord and master, or was that only last week?”

“Okay,” Rusty agreed but not without showing his displeasure. He waited until there was a fork and pulled into the small side road, away from any prying eyes. “Now, what?” he asked and turned toward Matty, his eyes anxious and expectant.

“Now this,” Matty replied and grabbed Rusty by the front of his scrubbed shirt. He placed his lips on the soft mouth that immediately responded to his attack by opening slightly.

That was enough for him to launch into a full-scale war against the stiff clothes and the annoyingly proper hairstyle. He ran his fingers through Rusty’s hair, making a mess in the process, but distracting his nervous lover from it by kissing him deeply. Next, the shirt had to get it, so he kept his lips on Rusty’s, putting his all into his ruse. Damn, those tiny pesky buttons...

The sound of something ripping made them both stop.

“Matty!” Rusty let out an appalled cry. “My shirt.”

“Oh, shoot,” Matty tried to summon some regret he didn’t feel. “I guess you’ll have to wear something else now.”

“I don’t have something else,” Rusty began fretting, “it’s not like I packed more than what was necessary for this trip!”

“We’ll stop at some store on the way. And no, you won’t get a second horrible shirt to replace this one. I’ll choose.”

“But--” Rusty started and stopped just as abruptly when Matty put one hand up. “I wanted to look my best for your parents.”

Matty snorted and rolled his eyes. “This isn’t your best. It’s your worst. Really, Rusty, I want my parents to meet you, not some preppy version of yourself that, by the way, doesn’t even exist. What can I do to put your mind at ease?”

Rusty let out a deep sigh and checked the state of his shirt. “It must be all in my head and everything, but I keep having weird dreams. You know, the kind where you find yourself naked in front of the teacher and you didn’t even do your homework.”

“I find it hard to believe you’ve never found yourself in that sort of situation in real life.” Another look at his very miserable fiancé convinced him that this was no time for jokes, not at the moment. “You know what? The fact that you’re willing to put yourself through so much for the sake of meeting my folks... it’s really touching. So, how about,” he said and caressed Rusty’s chest through the ripped shirt, “I give you a blowjob to take the edge off?”

Rusty sucked in a breath and moaned. “You’re so chill I want to strangle you a bit, Matty.”

“You don’t want a blowjob?” Matty dangled the tasty tidbit in front of his usually horny as hell better half.

Rusty groaned and tipped his head back. “I do want a blowjob. From you, and only from you.”

“That goes without saying,” Matty said casually as if they were talking about mundane things. Well, if by mundane people meant everyday things, blowjobs would count among them. Only this morning, waking up alone had left him with quite the wood in his shorts. Within days, he had gotten so used to waking up to Rusty’s lips wrapped firmly around his cock that the change hadn’t been welcome at all.

“What if someone sees us?” Rusty asked, stealing looks over his shoulder as if he was expecting an entire army of upstanding citizens to emerge out of thin air and lecture them on the importance of public decency.

“Where is my future husband and what have you done with him?” Matty asked, feigning shock. “Never in my life would I have imagined I would become the guy in charge of the naughty stuff.”

Rusty gave him a lopsided grin. “Nah, I’m not going to relinquish that role for anything in the world. Which means that I’m going to be the one who gives you a blowjob.”

“But I offered first,” Matty countered and placed a bold hand on Rusty’s crotch. “How am I going to help you take the edge off if I’m the one getting a blowjob?”

“Well, maybe we can work something out. I mean, a car is not really the place for a sixty-nine, but maybe if we bend until we become a pretzel--”

A knock on the car window on Rusty’s side made them both jump.

A nice old lady was smiling at them, and Rusty quickly lowered the window. “Are you boys lost? It happens all the time. People take the wrong turn here instead of continuing up the highway. You’re lucky I went out to search for Poppy. Poppy’s my little dog. I live right there,” she pointed somewhere farther back.

“I’m sorry, I had no idea we were on private property,” Rusty said quickly.

The old lady waved. “This part is not, but Poppy and his friends might not like it if you continue down this road. You see, Poppy is a guard dog.”

Matty was busy hiding his face in his t-shirt. Rusty had a harder time trying to keep a straight face with his shirt hanging open in the front. However, he seemed to be holding his own quite well, and soon, he was waving the old lady goodbye and making a turn to return the car – and themselves – back onto the highway.

He was still shaking with laughter when he heard Rusty laughing as well. It was a good sound.

“Can you imagine that nice old lady catching us in a pretzel position?” Rusty was still grinning as he tried to pretend he was serious about it all. “You’re bound to get us in trouble, young man.”

“Young man... Like you’re eighty or something. Grandpa Rusty,” Matty teased.

Rusty breathed out gustily. “Well, there’ll be a time for that, but let’s not skip steps. Also, just for the record, Grandpa Rusty is going to be the coolest grandpa that has ever lived. Prove me wrong.”

Matty could tell his eyes were growing so big they threatened to pop out of their sockets. “Wow, you’re really thinking ahead,” he said after a while. “On the upside,” he added quickly and grinned at Rusty, “you’re no longer nervous, right?”

“Yeah, your little attempt to commit indecent exposure worked wonders,” Rusty agreed. “But you still owe me a shirt. And what’s wrong with preppy Rusty? Is he too much for you? Can’t you take the heat, Matty?”

“Right. You know that’s not true. It just pained me to watch you struggle so hard when you have no reason to fret. Like none at all. Mom and dad have been properly prepared for your making an appearance by yours truly. Do you doubt my powers of persuasion?”

“I shouldn’t.” Rusty kept his eyes on the road, but his lips were still twitching. “Let’s just say that I’m still not over the fact that I’m getting the better end of the deal out of this. You’re a steal, Matty, let’s face it.”

“Forget about your folks for a second, Rusty,” Matty advised. “It’s you I’m marrying. And you’re free to think of yourself as not being that much of a catch, but sure as hell, you’re my catch. And I don’t practice that humane catch and release thing.”

“Your parents will want to know who my parents are. I’m not going to lie.”

The conversation had turned serious, but Matty was all right with that. “I wouldn’t want you to lie. But my mom and dad taught me not to judge people without getting to know them first. They’re the kind that practice what they preach. You might be surprised, but I’m sure they won’t ask about your parents at all.”



If this was the house where Matty had grown up, Rusty didn’t wonder for a moment that his future husband had turned out the way he had. It was a wonderful two-bedroom unit tucked away behind a garden full of rose bushes, and the place looked like it had been given a lot of love. The front door opened before they had a chance to knock, and Rusty’s eyes fell on a petite woman in her late forties with an amazing head of red hair. That was a bit of a surprise, but he didn’t have a chance to wonder at it because their host quickly took them both by their arms. Her grip was surprisingly strong, given her pint size. From behind a pair of glasses, another version of Matty’s eyes observed him with unhidden joy.

“You boys are early! You should have called at least half an hour in advance and given us a chance to get ready.”

“Mom, you were born ready for the apocalypse,” Matty replied, hugging her tightly.

“And this is the famous Rusty,” she said, turning her full attention on him.

For a moment, he hesitated, not knowing if it was all right to hug her, too, given how they had only met two moments ago, but she took the decision out of his hands by hugging him herself.

“Come in, come in, Kevin is just applying exact science to roasting a chicken. So, don’t make any sudden movements. We might end up with either an undercooked or overcooked meal, depending on the unfortunate second we choose to disturb the uncrowned chef of the neighborhood.” And then, completely out of the blue, she shouted, “Kevin! The boys are here!”

He turned toward Matty, to check if his mom was joking or not. His fiancé winked at him and then leaned closer. “A couple of weirdos, I’m telling you. With all the affection in the world, of course.”

Someone poked his head out from around the corner, where the open kitchen was located, as Rusty noticed. Matty's dad was almost a dead ringer for his son – a thirty years older version, the only differences being his hair being darker, and his eyes, too. Once his entire body emerged, he looked like a college professor, save for the apron he wore on which the words Kiss the Chef were written in bold lettering.

“Emma, I was in the middle of a scientific experiment. I almost got it right.”

“Almost?” Matty's mom hurried toward the oven.

Kevin flashed a big smile at them, while his wife inspected the contents of the oven with a critical eye. “I lied. I turned off the heat two minutes ago.”

At that, Emma turned on her heel to throw her husband a withering glare. “You should have said so.”

“And miss my chance to offer you yet another occasion to glare at my imperfect cooking technique? By the way, in this family, she's the perfectionist. In other words, the low hanging fruit when it comes to teasing. Welcome to the Hans, Rusty. I hope we haven't scared you off already.”

Kevin's handshake was firm and warm.

“I'm happy to be here,” he replied, and he truly meant it.

“Taken,” Kevin read the second word imprinted on the front of Rusty's t-shirt with a checkmark by its side, that element of his attire having been carefully chosen by Matty from a gas station store on their way there. “I believe I know where that's coming from.” He grinned broadly. “I'm sure Matty was the one who picked this one out for you.”

“It wasn't my first choice,” Rusty admitted. “But we encountered a little wardrobe malfunction on the way here.”

“Don't we all?” Kevin said and waved, using both hands. “Let's get seated before Emma starts suspecting that I'm usurping her position in the household in the most nefarious of ways.”



Rusty had always gotten along with people. It came naturally to him, to lie, to pretend, to fake a good disposition all the time so they were pleased with him and left him alone. The people he didn't have to do that with were few, but he loved them all to pieces. On their way here, he had worried that he might have to rely on his old charm so he didn't make a bad impression on Matty's parents.

Just as Matty had told him, his worries had been all in vain. The conversation flowed naturally between them, and the food was amazing. Kevin's special brand of scientific approach to chicken roasting was spot on. He doubted he had ever tasted anything as tender, that is, of course, if he pretended for a moment that he had never had any food cooked by Jonathan. That was all right. He shouldn't compare apples to oranges, and Jonathan wasn't a fan of roast chicken anyway.

Emma and Kevin both asked him directly about how he felt about giving up basketball for opera. They weren't the kind to make idle conversation, but Rusty liked them very much for that.

"Singing was something I've been wanting to do for a long time. Ever since I can remember," he added.

"Why the basketball detour?" Kevin inquired.

"My dad liked me playing basketball," Rusty explained. "I was good at it, too. I'm sorry, that came out wrong--"

"We know how things stand from Matty. You were good, indeed. That is an amazing thing in itself. Most people tend to be good at only one thing. Well, some aren't even good at one."

Emma intervened. "We replayed that performance of yours Matty sent us hundreds of times already." Her eyes turned shrewd. "I'm afraid you're already a celebrity as far as this family is concerned. Everyone received it and had to watch it, down to the last cousin and aunt. And I checked to make sure they had. Now, I've been meaning to ask. Do you think you could sing for us?"

That was the easiest thing he could do and yet, when he got up, he felt a short flash of nervousness.

"You won't even know we're here," Matty's mom promised, as if she could guess what was on his mind.

"Let's take our drinks to the backyard. It's a beautiful evening," Kevin suggested. "And maybe Rusty would feel better performing for the mother-in-law from hell somewhere it's easy to make a run from."

"Dad," Matty complained. "Stop scaring Rusty."

"He should be prepared," his dad continued to joke. He couldn't help smiling, but there was something there.

Of course, Kevin had said it already. Matty's mom was a perfectionist. That meant that he needed to give the performance of a lifetime. After all, the quest for obtaining Matty's hand in

marriage included convincing the dragon mom her son would be in good hands once he left their home.

Starting from there, it became easy. It was all down to what was worth fighting for. At least, that was what people kept saying. One thing was certain, though: this time around, Rusty knew exactly what he was fighting for.



Matty didn't mind being squeezed between his mom and dad, since that was one of their many ways to tell him they loved him. His eyes were on Rusty, however, and the way he widened his stance in the same way he had now noticed some opera singers do before starting to sing.

Rusty closed his eyes for a moment and his voice boomed suddenly, making both Matty's parents jump in their seats only to laugh at themselves right after.

He was a performance in himself, more than just a star. He opened his arms as if to welcome the whole audience, an imaginary audience of thousands, perhaps, while he controlled his voice with the precision of a heartbeat. Matty couldn't help but feel enthralled beyond words with the way Rusty performed. It wasn't only his voice that made it so. It was his entire being, expressing the joy of singing, of sharing such a gift with the world.

When the last notes died down, he began clapping at the same time as his mom and dad did. And then, there was applause coming from both their left and right, from their neighbors' backyards.

"Mom?" he whispered.

She smiled all-knowingly. "Let's just say that I might have let them know that if they were in luck, they might have a chance to listen to my future son-in-law's amazing voice."

Rusty shouldn't have doubted himself for a moment. His future in-laws were already proud of him. Now, he was graciously accepting the applause and words of praise being thrown his way, bowing like a true star of the stage, one who knew how to display modesty, as well as confidence in his art.

As demands for more came pouring in, just as courteously, he accepted them.

And that was how Rusty Parker, soon to become Rusty Han, kept the entire neighborhood where the Hans lived awake and happy until a little after midnight.



"Your parents are uber awesome," Rusty said with stars in his eyes the moment they were alone in Matty's old bedroom. "I mean, I totally dig them."

“And they dig you big time. By the way, my mom’s usual MO is over the top. As you might well expect, she has already recorded your entire show. And she’s going to make every last member of our extended family watch and listen to it. According to the last census, at least a couple of them are no longer hearing and seeing very well, being into their nineties and all.”

“She’s one hell of a supporter to have in your corner, I gotta say,” Rusty continued. “And they were cool with us sleeping together here, in your room.”

“Hey, we’re engaged. Of course, they’d be fine with it. So, how do you like my family?”

“Do you even have to ask? They’re the real deal. I hope they like me, too.”

“That goes without saying. Although, I must say, you’re setting quite the high bar, Rusty. My mom might start pestering me again about not beating Jonathan’s GPA.”

“That’s not the same thing.” Rusty scrunched up his nose. “Studying is hard. Singing isn’t.”

“For you, it isn’t, obviously. You really shine, have I told you that? You’ll definitely be a star.”

“I hope I’m already one in your book, my darling fiancé.” Rusty grabbed him and made him spin into a complicated pirouette with him.

Matty flashed a big grin at him. “Do you even have to ask?”

Chapter Fifty-Eight

Teasing His Cat Boy

“Your grin tells me you’re so thinking of something dirty,” Rusty said as he played with Matty’s hair while his fiancé was smiling back at him with an all-knowing look.

It was bedtime, way past it, actually, but it looked like neither of them could sleep. After the earlier performance given in the Hans’ backyard, Rusty felt energized, ready to take over the world, and clearly, not at all in the mood for the needed and mandatory shut-eye.

And he wasn’t alone. Matty was obviously in the same boat, and while he loved that comfortable peace between them, with him lying on his back and his baby dude on his belly by his side, they both had to find a way to tire themselves out before dawn caught them still like that, lost in each other’s eyes.

“And if I am?” Matty purred his eventual answer he had left hanging for a few good solid moments.

“Care to share?” Rusty let the pads of his fingers move slowly along Matty’s jawline, taking in each of his lover’s features as if he wanted them forever etched in his memory. The best part was that he didn’t need to do that because Matty would always be with him. Forever. A word that had so often sent shivers down his spine. He, who loved change above all else, was going to settle down. Go figure.

“Well, without your knowing, I did pack a couple of things, and I even stole some from your room. I suppose you didn’t even notice.”

Rusty frowned slightly, in thought rather than displeasure at his fiancé’s shenanigans. “Did you steal my underwear?” he asked with a broad smile. “For a little sniff before spanking your monkey?”

“Why would I do that when I have the whole man for me to sniff?” Matty asked and, to prove his point, he stuck his nose directly under Rusty’s arm, inhaling deeply for show. “Well, it does make me hard,” he admitted. “But good and dirty self-love is not what I have in mind.”

“What do you have in mind?”

Matty winked at him and hiked himself off the bed. “You’ll see.”

Rusty followed him with his eyes as Matty fiddled with his travel bag. He had been so caught up in looking his best for the future in-laws that he hadn’t paid much attention to Matty’s luggage. Now that he thought about it, it did look like there was more in there than the needed clothes and sundries for a weekend spent away.

The mystery didn't last long. With steady moves, Matty extracted from his bag the elements of his cat boy suit, making Rusty's face stretch into a smile. What he wasn't expecting, though, was to see his cape and mask emerge from Matty's secret stash next.

"You didn't," he whispered as his eyes went as big as saucers.

"I totally did. You know, it crossed my mind," Matty said as he arranged the clothing on the bed with the attentive care of a seamstress. "While we have done all sorts of crazy things, Slicky and Rybalt have barely had their moments together. And that so doesn't sound fair, does it?"

"I completely agree," Rusty replied and put his hands behind his back while he took in Matty's moving about. "And Rybalt, in your opinion, is only a cape and mask?"

"A lot more," Matty said and grinned while his eyes twinkled. The desk lamp that must have served the bedroom's owner as a guide and friend during many evenings of studying lit up the room enough to make every detail plain. "First of all, I think he's also all cock. And balls."

Rusty inhaled sharply as Matty pressed one hand against the inside of his thigh, right where his shorts ended. "Are you going to seduce me, Matty?"

"You have no idea. Let's play. I hope Rybalt is going to give Slicky a run for his money."

"Whatever you think that means, you're not even close." While he enjoying his submissive role now and then when Matty was in charge, this time he wanted to offer a different sort of performance and, above all, an outstanding one. He moved quickly and grabbed Matty's arm, making him lose his balance. He brushed his lips against a delicate and delicious-looking ear. "Get into your cat boy suit. Slicky needs some loving."

Matty didn't protest in the slightest. His eyes, so big and pretty even without the glasses, were set on him as he carefully donned the latex pants that glued themselves to his hips like a second skin, the short tank top that left his midriff bare, and then the wig and cat ears.

"You look the part. Damn, how come I didn't realize who you were until I kissed you?" Rusty wondered at his own shortcomings.

Matty snickered and moved closer, standing by the bed with a naughty smile on his lips. "Now it's your turn."

"You know," Rusty said as he pushed himself up, "this seems a bit unfair. You're practically covered from head to toes, while I only have a mask and a cape. I assume you want me naked underneath them."

"You assume correctly. Now, listen to me closely." Matty stopped in front of him and didn't break their eye to eye connection as Rusty lowered his shorts. "For years, you've been my fantasy and I jerked off to you countless times. Forgive me if, when we're alone in the bedroom

– any bedroom – I think of you as sex incarnate. Hence, you must wear nothing underneath your cape and mask.”

“Suits me just fine.” Rusty felt his usual confidence taking over. His skin got hotter under Matty’s hungry gaze as he slid the mask over his face and then threw the cape over his shoulders.

“And I hope I don’t have to tell you that it’s mandatory that you remain in character all the time.”

“You don’t know me well enough if you believe I need to be told that,” Rusty said with a snort.

“Well, then,” Matty said with a sweet smile that announced nothing good. Or too good. There was a promise there.

He gasped as Matty touched his chest. Those claws, as fake as they were, pricked a little.

“I believe I’ll soon be singing in a high-pitch register if you keep this up,” Rusty joked.

He almost wanted to turn the joke into something serious because next thing he knew, Matty grabbed him by the balls in the most unceremonious manner. Those little claws grazed the sensitive skin around them.

“Is this what you imagined when you fantasized about your cat boys?” Matty asked.

“I was thinking more of forcing them down and playing with their tails.” Rusty grabbed Matty’s ass and rested his hand right by the fluffy thing coming from his lover’s nicely shaped behind.

“I’m not so easy to overcome and tease, Rybalt,” Matty whispered.

“Then that shall be my challenge,” Rusty said, as his voice dropped to a husky musical whisper.

“Oh, fuck, your voice is so sexy,” Matty said and shivered while Rusty palmed his ample buttocks.

“You’re so easy, kitty,” Rusty purred and kept in a groan of delight as Matty’s hand began moving up and down his lengthening hard-on. “I thought you’d put up more of a fight.”

“Far be it from me to disappoint you.” With ineffable grace, Matty moved away, leaving his cock twitching in the absence of stimulation.

Matty sat on the bed, resting his weight on his palms placed slightly behind him and parting his legs. Rusty drank him in.

“How do you catch a cat boy?” Matty challenged him.

Rusty grabbed his cock. “By enticing him with treats?”

Matty smiled. "I'm afraid you will have to do a little more than that."

"Hmm," Rusty moved slowly to stand in front of his fiancé, "that sounds like a job for Rybalt."

He noticed the slight surprise on Matty's face as he knelt in front of him with a flourish. No protest followed as he took one of Matty's hands and kissed the latex covering it. "Oh, beautiful being, would you be so kind as to let me suck your cock?"

Matty's lips twitched in amusement. That was a sign that he was allowed to continue. He moved one hand to touch the bare skin between the top and the pants. Slowly, he was coaxing a little purr out of his cat boy. He pressed his advantage and caused Matty to fall backward, while he slid his way up the slender body at his mercy.

"My sexy cat boy," he purred into Matty's ear as he used one hand to explore the covered parts, as well.

He felt the tight chest, searching for the shape of the pert nipples through the latex. They were hardening under his focused attention, which made him chuckle.

"You're so full of yourself," Matty protested meekly.

"You shouldn't use that phrase on me," Rusty advised breezily, "you know I can't resist the temptation of adding to it."

"And tell me that I, too, will be full of you soon?"

"Exactly," Rusty said with satisfaction.

Matty escaped his embrace brusquely, but only to give him the satisfaction of catching him from behind.

"Your enticing butt makes me want to spank it, but I know that's something no cat would agree to. Therefore, I'm using the tender loving approach."

"You call that loving?" Matty protested as Rusty held him down and snuck one hand between his legs to feel the balls underneath the tautly stretched material. Still, he bucked his hips back to allow Rusty the pleasure of exploring his nether parts at length.

"No, this is what I call loving." Rusty pressed his face against Matty's ass so suddenly that he made his baby dude fall forward.

That was all for the better. He now had the cat boy where he wanted him to be, his ass up in the air, the clear shape of his balls visible through the latex suit. Rusty proceeded right away to lick them through the smooth fabric, something that immediately cause Matty to draw in a sharp breath.

“Rusty,” his baby dude moaned longingly.

“Who’s Rusty?” He slapped a covered buttock with enough force to let his fake displeasure be known. “I am Rybalt, your king and entertainer for the night.”

“Yes, you are,” Matty confirmed and pushed his ass back higher.

“Call me Your Majesty.”

“You wish.”

Rusty caught the balls between his lips and pressed on them as if he wanted to eat them.

“Your Majesty, I want to sit on your face,” came the prompt reaction.

“That sounds more like it. Do it.”

Rusty made sure to arrange his cape properly as he lay on his back. Matty moved to press his crotch against his mouth and then slid over him so that he could grab the hard cock presenting itself below.

Matty’s mouth was warm and maddening as it engulfed him whole.

“This is hardly reciprocal,” he complained.

“You still haven’t realized you’re not the one in charge?” Matty asked. “Now Slicky’s going to suck Your Majesty’s cock because Slicky does what Slicky wants. Clear enough?”

“I believe so.”

Matty sighed as he couldn’t believe what he was hearing and got back to work. Rusty now regretted that the suit Matty was wearing was so form-fitting. He could do nothing but tease his partner through the fabric with no chance of getting further than that. At the same time, Matty appeared to take great pleasure in sucking him off, which only served to make him envious.

“Rybalt, Your Majesty,” Matty said in a breathless voice, “I would very much like to have your cum now.”

“A cat boy asking for a meal so politely,” Rusty drawled, finally finding the chance to get his revenge. “I’m afraid I will have to say ‘no’.”

“What?” Matty turned to stare at him over his shoulder. His lips were moist and inviting. It was easy to tell what he had been doing until only moments earlier.

Rusty grabbed him and rolled him over onto his back. “Naughty cat boys who tease their masters need to be taught a lesson.”

“I don’t want lessons.” Matty struggled and grinned as Rusty tightened his hold, only to pretend to be furious the next second. “I want your cum.”

“You sure know how to drive a hot bargain,” Rusty teased him back and licked Matty’s lips briefly. “But I want you in nothing but your tank top.”

“You could have just said that,” Matty said and rolled his eyes.



Playing with Rusty like this was the real deal. He had never imagined himself as adventurous in bed – before getting to know the king of Sunny Hill in the most intimate manner – and even his fantasies had tended to be the conventional kind. From virgin to kinkster within several months. That was Rusty Parker’s influence on him, and he didn’t mind it in the least.

“First of all,” Rusty continued, “I will give you a taste of your own milk.” He proceeded to undress Matty, leaving him, as promised in his tank top, as the pants flew across the room.

Rusty’s moves were firm as he grabbed Matty from underneath and dragged him closer so that he could enjoy his meal. That hot tongue on his now-naked balls was enough to make him speak in tongues. It only came to him in hindsight that they were supposed to be reasonably quiet. Rusty wasn’t the problem; he was because he couldn’t keep his voice down very well, not with that crazy tongue moving in circles and teasing each of his balls in turn.

“Oh, fuck, I changed my mind, now suck my cock.”

“Oh, really?”

Matty groaned. “You are so trying to play me, Master Rybalt. I must warn you. I won’t have it.”

“And how exactly do you plan to stop me?”

Matty buried both hands in Rusty’s tousled hair. “I might have an idea or two. They might involve leaving you bald, and I don’t think that’s a look I want on you right now. How about you play nice, and I’ll play nice to you?”

“It does sound tempting, but...” Rusty let those words hang and went down on Matty hard.

So hard that Matty felt the head of his cock smacking against the back of Rusty’s throat. His lover was, without a doubt, the enthusiastic kind, and nothing would convince him to dial down the fire in his actions.

“I’m getting a deepthroat from Rybalt,” he whispered. “I think I know how he makes his voice sound so throaty and sexy when he wants.”

Rusty didn't stop to reply. He was now hard at work and, with all the teasing, Matty couldn't hold back any longer. There was heat and pressure and too much pleasure. So much so that his mind went blank as his cum erupted from what felt like somewhere deep inside him.

He groaned in delight as Rusty's mouth released him slowly and was taking big mouthfuls of air when his lips surrendered to a new attack. His lover's taste, mingled with his own cum, only made him moan harder into the kiss. It was so good and dirty, just how he liked it.

"Damn," he said, licking his lips, "I so blew a load, didn't I?"

Rusty grinned and nodded happily. "You sure did, my dear cat boy. Now, feel free to serve your king. I'm all yours."

They both had gone beyond teasing at this point, so Matty quickly obeyed without a fuss. The sight of Rusty in his bed, his bed from home, sprawled on the luxurious cape, his legs parted, his face all a smile, his lips so full and inviting, all combined were enough to make him lose his mind a little.

No one would hold it against Slick Coolplums when, despite being a cat boy and all, he sometimes did what he was told. He dragged his tongue along the inside of each muscular thigh, as he inched closer to his prize. The Mighty Thor was weeping in waiting and Matty very much liked his old friend like that. He took him in gingerly and tried him on for size using only one hand. His mouth got busy tonguing the heavy balls underneath.

"You look so good like this," Rusty praised him. "Who's a good boy?"

Matty gasped in outrage and glared up at him. "You didn't just say that."

A smirk from his handsome fiancé let him know that the scoundrel knew exactly what he was doing.

"This calls for a genuine putting in place. Buckle up," Matty recommended and pressed his tongue against the leaking tip.

"Oh, I'm so very scared," Rusty taunted him with unhidden glee.

"You should be because I'm going to make you beg like you've never begged for anything in your life."

"Wow, my expectations are soaring."

They should indeed, Matty thought as he grabbed the Mighty Thor as if he were some lollipop and began licking the head in earnest. He knew his way around that gorgeous thing so every twitch and grunt from its owner were only confirmations of what he knew.

If he put his mind to it, he could drive Rusty crazy with desire for him. Now that was power, he mused for a mere moment. How many could say that they had ever had the upper hand when in bed with the king of Sunny Hill? According to everything he knew, Rusty called the shots and never surrendered.

Except when he did, like he was doing at that very moment. Matty felt the hard cock pulsing in his hand but he didn't move anything else but his tongue.

"I might come, even like this," Rusty warned him.

"No, you won't, and thank you for telling me that," Matty said. He increased the pressure of his squeezing and continued to torture the Mighty Thor with well-aimed licks. As a strategist, he was all but reckless. It served him well that he had just had his cock sucked earlier and that left him with a clear head, but it was hardly an advantage. He pressed his body down and rubbed it against the sheets. That would help him chill for a while.

"I love the way your bubble butt is signaling me that it's ready for some dicking," Rusty said. "Are you fucking the mattress, Slick boy?"

If Rusty thought he'd throw him off his game like that, he should think again.

"Beg," he said and blinked up at him slowly.

"I'm not some pigeon. You won't hypnotize me with your cute eyes," Rusty objected to this new change of strategy.

"Are you sure? You look pretty much like a sucker to me, Your Majesty. My dick knows it."

"Oh, right, I see. You're playing tough. You know I'm stronger. And the Mighty Thor is so ready to go."

Matty hummed around Rusty's cock, ignoring him. He didn't intend to go on forever like this, and he had some plans, but it didn't hurt to keep his lover on the edge for a bit. Teasing someone you loved felt so rewarding once in a while.

"I beg you," Rusty whimpered. "Are you happy now? I beg you. My toes are curling so badly I'll need special footwear when I'm out of here."

"You are? You're begging me?"

Letting his guard down was a mistake. Rusty was quick to push him off and then trap him underneath his hard body. The Mighty Thor brushed against Matty's crack, letting him know that play time was over.

"I do have what you need," Matty said in a breathless whisper. "Also in my bag, in that little side pocket."

Rusty wasted no more time. His fingers were wet and ready and they worked slowly at Matty's ass, opening him up.

"You know how to make a guy lose it, Matty," Rusty growled, but his fingers continued their patient exploration.

"How about you assert your dominance then, Your Majesty? Teach me a good lesson with your cock," Matty challenged him.

Rusty groaned in despair. "You're so lucky I love your ass so badly that I don't want to damage it because, otherwise, you might get the Mighty Thor before you're ready for him."

"I'm counting on you loving my ass," Matty admitted honestly. "Come on, impale me on your sword, my knight."

"I love the way you play the game," Rusty said and began to rain small kisses on Matty's cheek, angling his head so that their lips would come together. "And I love how you're so good for me. I love you, Matthew Han."

"Who's Matthew Han?" Matty teased playfully.

"Right, my bad. I love you, Slick Coolplums. You're the perfect cat boy for me. And now, what do you say?"

"I accept your offer to become my human slave, Your Majesty."

Rusty laughed, and Matty joined in, only to have his voice stolen from him the moment the Mighty Thor finally found his way and was buried halfway inside his ass. He trembled and accepted everything as Rusty pressed him down and grabbed his hip firmly.

"You have no idea how amazing your ass looks from above. And with that tank top... fuck, Matty, Slick, whatever name you want to go by... you're the best fuck ever."

Rusty's dirty talk only made him tremble with desire even more. He grabbed his cock that was now weeping for attention, too, and rubbed it fast. They always went at this the right way. They fit together, just like the Mighty Thor enjoyed being wrapped in the tight heat of Matty's ass.

"And you're perfect," he whispered back.

Rusty wrapped his entire body around his and gave it to him hard. They would so sleep in tomorrow, but that was fine. They deserved it, and the awesome part of it all was that they would be doing this sort of things over and over again, until they were satisfied.

Something told Matty they would never be satisfied completely. That was the sort of dissatisfaction he could live with.

But, for now, as Rusty filled him up and his own cock gave up on resisting the inevitable climax, they would be very much satiated until next time. Because that was how things happened when in love and with marriage on the horizon.



Rusty was on the phone when Matty woke up in the morning. He listened in as he rested his head against Rusty's knee and enjoyed having his head caressed.

"That was Maddox," Rusty announced as soon as his conversation was over. "It looks like Connor just chose the time, place, and weapons."

"Really? Tell me. Don't leave anything out."

"He's already spreading the word that the confrontation will take place next Saturday. He will have his Implacables with him and will, of course, be giving a big speech. He also calls for an open vote, whatever that might mean in his book, at the end of the event. He has mentioned that he expects opposition in the form and shape of undesirables like Slicky Coolplums and Rybalt."

"Wait, he isn't even calling us by our names?"

Rusty gave him a crooked smile. "What do you mean, Slicky? You don't go by that name? I remember quite distinctly how adamant you were last night about holding onto our," he made the air-quote sign, "real names."

"Well, I have nothing against it if that's the game Connor wants to play," Matty hurried to agree. "We will have to dry clean our costumes, though, since we got pretty wild last night, don't you think?"

"Will do," Rusty said with a firm nod. "But we will also have to prepare our speech."

"We're not going to give a speech," Matty replied, "we're going to give a performance, Master Rybalt."

He got out of bed and rubbed his nose playfully against Rusty. When morning breath was involved, they used that as a replacement for the first kisses of the day.

"A performance. Of course," Rusty said in his theatrical voice. "Because that's what the world expects of us, and we're not in the business of disappointing people."

Matty grinned and gave his partner two heartfelt thumbs-up. Connor had no idea what was coming.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Who's the Toppest Dog, After All?

“Ouch.”

“Stay still.”

“I can't. You're trying to pull all the hair off my head,” Rusty complained while August struggled to make a small ponytail of his real hair because – she said – the wig would stay better on his head if none of his natural hairs went astray. It was, he thought, a ruse and she only wanted to see him in tears.

“Such a cry baby. How does Matty put up with you again?”

“Shut up, or I pull you off the bridesmaids' list.”

August gasped for show. “You wouldn't do that. It's always been my dream to stare at someone else getting married with stars in my eyes. And congratulate myself that it isn't me playing the lottery.”

Rusty sobered up some. “Don't tell me he ruined you for happiness.”

August fussed around him, applying all sorts of hair products only she knew the purpose of. “For happiness, no. For marriage, maybe. I don't know. I guess we'll see. And I can always be auntie August, who comes visiting to spoil other people's babies rotten.”

“Okay, auntie. Hey, what's in that?” He pointed nervously at a big bottle with something the color of wet cement in it.

“You need a mud mask,” August argued.

“I've been just fine without all this stuff.”

His friend huffed in disbelief. “You don't say. I suppose you don't realize this yet, Rusty, but on your way to stardom, you will have to face armies of makeup artists bent on doing their job. And they won't have a soft spot for you like I do.”

“I haven't thought of that,” Rusty admitted. “Okay, mud me up. I hope my luscious visage will shine so brightly that Connor will instantly see the light.”

“Don't tell me you're going for a quick victory. The entire campus is abuzz with this confrontation of yours. The king of douchebags is probably at a spa right now, getting a mani-pedi and who knows what else.”

“You know, when you put it like that, I can’t allow that dude to get the upper hand only because he thought of undergoing more beautification treatments.”

“They’re called beauty treatments, actually.”

“Whatevs, my dear,” Rusty proclaimed and lounged back in his chair like a spoiled diva.

“Straighten up right now,” August said and poked him in the ribs. “And Matty’s probably getting his own makeover right now, too.”



“So, should I go with this,” Matty asked as he lifted one tank top up and then the other, “or this?”

Zoey was swinging her legs and didn’t seem that eager to help him out.

“Hey,” Matty said louder to draw her attention. “On the phone, you said, and I quote, ‘I’m coming over to help you kill it’ but now I’m starting to have doubts about what exactly you planned on killing. Probably that quart of ice cream you’ve been polishing off for the last half hour.”

Zoey gave him a guilty look and then sighed from the bottom of her ice cream filled heart. “Today, Dex asked me about my plans after graduation. We might be evolving from kissing partners.”

“To touching partners? You two did touch each other, right?” Matty asked.

“Of course,” Zoey hurried to say. “What do you think we are? Nuns? Monks? Nunks?”

Matty dropped his arms. “But you haven’t done the deed yet, right?”

Zoey nodded and looked away quickly. “It’s overwhelming how gentle he can be, given his size. It feels like it’s not real at times.”

“That’s great,” Matty said and plopped on the bed by Zoey’s side. “And you want to be with him. You’ve wanted it for some time.”

“Yes, but now the future sort of scares me a little,” Zoey admitted. “I mean, we’ve done a lot of things for fun while in college, but who knows what real life’s going to be like?”

“I guess we’ll have to see how it goes when we get there. Come on, out with it, tell me what’s eating you.”

Zoey buried her nose in the ice cream bucket and mumbled something.

“I don’t think I caught that. Say again?”

Zoey mumbled again and her head dipped lower.

Matty grabbed the bucket from her and held it up. “I’m going to hold this hostage until you say it--”

“I’m a virgin, okay?”

Matty looked at Zoey, not really understanding what the big deal was. Eventually, he found his voice. “So what?”

“So what?! I made him believe that I’m this mysterious seductive creature of the night--”

“No, you didn’t, Zoey.”

She deflated. “No, I didn’t. He must have guessed it. That’s why we’re not moving forward. He behaves sometimes like I’m going to break. Unless I’m reading all this wrong and he’s having the time of his life with dozens of chicks on the side, while I’m... I don’t even know what I am to him.”

“You’re the chick he asked about future plans. That should give you the answer to that. Also, between football, studying, and you, do you really think he has time for dozens of chicks? Every time I see him at the house, he’s got his nose in a book and Kane is the only one keeping him company.”

“He might, though,” she argued. “If he’s not sleeping. Gosh, Matty, I’m one of those now, aren’t I?”

“What those are you talking about?”

“People in suffering.”

“Suffering?”

“I mean, in love,” she added and then threw her arms around his neck and pressed her head into his chest. “It’s so weird because I’ve never been before.”

“Well, if that helps, before Rusty, I hadn’t been in love either. So, you see, we’re in this together.”

“Damn, we’re both helpless then.”

Matty patted her on the back. “It will be fine, I promise. He clearly cares about you. And if you want to take your kissing partnership to the next level, just tell him. I very much believe that he’s going to be over the moon if you do. Come on, Zoey, who’s the bravest in the land?”

“I am,” she said bravely and then looked up. “The one that leaves your midriff bare is the right choice.”

“Thank you,” he said courteously, not in the least surprised by the sudden change of topic. That was his bestie. “But showing skin, wouldn’t that give those guys new fodder? They’re bent on presenting us as the number one reason why the world is going to end in fire and brimstone.”

“And? If they already think so, it doesn’t matter if you go in even a more risqué outfit than the one you already have. Also, can you tell me what your plans are? You’ve been so secretive about them.”

“Rusty is in charge of the show. I want you to be as surprised as everyone else will be. Especially since it’s going to be a lot of fun.”

“Okay, okay, so it’s pretty much like not giving any spoilers away. I can live with that. Now let me help you be at your best.”

“You already helped me with the final choice. What’s left to do?”

Zoey smiled slyly. “Oh, you have no idea. You must be dazzlingly beautiful so that Connor eats his heart out when he sees you. I’ve brought all the beauty products I managed to appropriate from the chicks on my floor. Before you ask, they were happy to contribute to the cause.” To make a point, she grabbed her bag and opened it, letting Matty stare at a wide range of bottles and cans with various contents.

“Zoey, you do know that I’m going to wear a mask and a wig. Not that much to see of me, except well, what’s out in the open, given how skintight my costume is.”

“Beauty is in the soul, Matty. And I’m going to help you feel it.”

“Admit it, you just want a doll to play with.”

“Yes. One that comes in human size. Hopefully, it doesn’t scratch.”

“Not this human,” Matty said and smiled. “I’m yours, then. And you can tell me how you plan to seduce your big guy.”

“Do I have to?” Zoey made one last-ditch effort to escape.

“Yes. I need to be paid for what you’re about to inflict on me.”

“Fair,” Zoey admitted and grabbed her bag again.



Connor was in a smart suit that looked like it must have cost a pretty penny, which was a surprise given his propensity for mainly wearing stuff that smelled of mold from miles away. Without a doubt, it was a big occasion for him, and he wanted to dress the part. He was strutting along the improvised stage from one side to the other, holding a microphone tightly in his hand while blaring words at an audience that looked quite bored and apathetic.

“How long are we going to wait?” Matty whispered while waiting right behind Rusty, in their hiding place, which was the roof of a nearby building.

“Let him tire himself out for a bit. Look at him, so full of energy. Wasted on this crap instead of self-love.”

“Are you suggesting that he should masturbate more often?”

“I would,” Rusty admitted, “but I don’t believe he takes kindly to that sort of thing. To tell you the truth, Matty, I’m starting to suspect Connor of being a dickless wonder. It’s a legendary creature, almost on the same level as a unicorn.”

Matty snickered and pressed himself against Rusty. “Are we only going to taunt him from the balcony, or are we going to face him on his level, too?” The reason why he hadn’t been able to tell Zoey about the plan was that he didn’t know it, either, not in great detail.

“Yes, and the boys have helped me with a little project. I’m going to descend upon him like a true vigilante. Like a beast. And, of course, I’ll have my beauty with me.” Rusty turned toward him and pursed his lips, waiting for a kiss.

“I can’t kiss you right now. Zoey used at least five different lip glosses, all in nude shades, whatever those are, on me, and all her work meant to present the world my plump lips will go to waste.”

“And I thought you were a rule breaker,” Rusty protested and pouted, but soon he was smiling again. “Okay, since our dudes and gals have worked so hard for this moment to be perfect, I’m not going to be the one to ruin it with my extremely high libido.”

“Not a modest one, are you?” Matty teased his lover.

“Of course not. The day I become modest, make sure to lock me up in a dungeon on a diet of bread, water, and you.”

“Where would I find a dungeon?”

“We’re going to build one,” Rusty said brightly. “Especially for such extreme occasions.”

Matty couldn’t agree more. “Let’s listen a bit to what he has to say. O.M.G., is he really bringing up Preston again? The poor guy doesn’t deserve this.”

On the stage below them, Connor was continuing his irate speech. The lack of enthusiasm from the crowd only made him bellow into the microphone harder and harder.

“I think it’s time to intervene,” Matty added and turned to see Rusty looking at him bug-eyed all of a sudden. “What is it?”

“Matty, I think I have stage fright.”

“Rusty,” Matty moaned, half-believing his fiancé by how shell-shocked he managed to look for a moment.

The next second, Rusty’s mouth turned into a large grin. “Okay, I’m over it.”

“Player,” Matty muttered under his breath and shook his head, although he couldn’t conceal the smile tugging at the corners of his lips, either.

He looked over the edge and then noticed the rope. “Are we really, really sure about this?”

“Yes,” Rusty replied. “Come on, give your swashbuckling hero a kiss for luck and let’s get going.”



The crowd was going mad around them as they reached the stage on which Connor had been king until only recently. Rusty had a mind not to release Matty at all from the hug and kiss, because it felt good to be one person’s hero after all, so he needed to remind himself that Connor was still a jerk and needed some serious putting in place for the sake of everyone around them. Plus, the guys’ hard work to make their entrance as spectacular as it had been needed to be rewarded properly.

“See what I’m talking about?” Connor squealed into the microphone, pointing at Rusty and Matty, his arm shaking with righteous indignation. “They’re making a mockery of student life! Just like Dean Preston!”

“Mr. S.H.I.T., please allow me,” Rusty said courteously while allowing Matty to step away from him in what must have been a well-rehearsed pirouette. “I believe it’s now my turn.” He grabbed the microphone from Connor and, on cue, his friends hit him with the first orchestral notes of his weapon of choice. It was time for Sunny Hill to recognize their one and only true factotum .

The audience began screaming in delight as he played with the aria, making it his own. And, like a genuine barber of quality, he began circling Connor, cutting the air around him with his fingers turned into imaginary scissors. The guy seemed a bit out of his element, but Rusty was a little too busy with his own performance to spare an ounce of pity for the out of water fish. Connor tried to step away from him, but Rusty, bent on his job, followed and managed to brush his hand against the guy’s hair, ruffling it a bit.

“He touched me! He’s assaulting me!” Connor shouted, but because he no longer had the microphone, only Rusty and Matty, who were on stage with him, could hear him. He seemed to realize his mistake and began jumping around Rusty, who held the microphone up and tilted his head back. Actually, Connor’s antics were helping him create the effect of his voice coming from different corners of the stage, for the most genuine effect that complemented the control he was applying to the melody and words of the aria.

In the meantime, Matty was performing a special dance, for the sake of the audience, pretending to stalk either a mouse or a red light. Flowers began to rain over them, and Rusty noticed, out of the corner of one eye, how August, Zoey, and Hanna were busy with that part of the act. Improvisation, nice.

Connor was going mad and a bit red in the face, so Rusty delivered the last lines of his aria and held the arm with the microphone away from his body as he bowed in front of the audience. He couldn’t say he was surprised when Connor snatched the thing out of his hand to re-launch his attack.

“You see, you see?” he squealed in a high-pitched voice. “Stop applauding them, can’t you see?”

The students of Sunny Hill seemed to want an encore, but Rusty believed in fairness. He pointed graciously at his opponent. “It’s his turn,” he said, although not many people could hear him.

Matty came to rest against his shoulder and catch his breath. Of course, at this point, they didn’t even have to do much; just standing there seemed to be enough to make the crowd go crazy. Now that was a success, and he could live with it. And, of course, allow Connor to shriek his way through his speech.

Not that anyone paid him any attention at this point. Which, of course, begged the question: where was Connor’s famous army? He wrapped one arm around Matty’s waist and then, together, they moved closer to Connor.

The infamous leader of the Implacables, however, seemed to take their peaceful action as an act of violence and began sprinting away, holding the microphone close as if it were a precious artifact and bad people were trying to take it away from him.

“I only want to ask you a question,” Rusty insisted. His Don Giovanni piece wouldn’t work as well if there wasn’t a backdrop made out of Connor’s men. Who would have thought? He was a stickler for detail. Also, since Connor insisted so much in showing ‘his true colors’, Rusty believed that a reversal in exposing the other would work just as fine.

Connor was about to fall off the stage in his struggle to get away from his so-called enemies, so Rusty had to let go of Matty to catch the asshole before he broke an arm or something. The collective gasp of disbelief from the crowd made him understand that it had been the wrong move on his part.

Still holding Connor to prevent him from falling, he turned his head.

“Rybalt!” Matty called out in his Slick voice.

And there it was. Connor’s army. All dressed in black and grabbing Slick Coolplums with unclear intentions. Rusty had to give it to his partner. Matty didn’t lose his composure, despite so many strangers putting their hands on him.

“I’m coming, my love,” he declaimed and pulled Connor up to ensure the guy’s safety.

They had the entire Sunny Hill watching, so he could bet that it was all an act on the others’ side, too. Matty struggled against his assailants, hissing and threatening to scratch with his claws. All this improvisation only served to make them shine as the stars of the event, Rusty believed, and began walking toward the group, swinging one arm as if he was brandishing an invisible sword.

He grunted when he was attacked from behind. Connor was on his back, squeezing him in what could have been interpreted as a bear hug. However, knowing the guy behind the bear hug, Rusty doubted it.

“Rusty!” Matty called out to him, this time in his normal voice, and alarmed.

Someone had pulled the wig off Matty’s head and it seemed like Connor’s shitheads weren’t playing anymore. Rusty pushed back against Connor, trying to shake him off.

“Dude, what the hell? Not cool,” he said through his teeth.

“Who’s the top dog now, Parker? Huh?” Connor breathed in his face.

“Eww, do you need a mint or something?”

“I brushed my teeth this morning!”

Rusty took advantage of the element of surprise and pushed Connor away. He hurried toward Matty, who was being dragged away by the shitheads. Were those guys for real?

Before he could open his mouth to shout for help, Maddox, Jonathan, Dex, Kane, and even Jonathan’s lanky roommate, Ray, were climbing onto the stage, rushing Connor’s army. Behind him, the leader of shitheads laughed like a mad man. He had the microphone and he seemed unafraid to use it.

“The problematic elements are now being removed from the premises,” he announced with delight. “Then, we can continue our meeting. In the name of a brighter future, Sunny Hill!” He even threw a punch in the air, Rusty noticed as he stole a look at him, still not believing that the asshole would fight so dirty.

Someone grunted and Rusty turned his full attention on the other side. Dex was holding his jaw and Kane was by his side. It looked like one shithead had thrown the first punch. Damn, this was going bad fast. Rusty hurried to hold his friend back, as Dex could turn into a beast if provoked beyond what he deemed acceptable.

“I got him,” Kane shouted at him, and Rusty moved past and grabbed Matty’s outstretched arm before he was completely engulfed by the madding crowd. He pulled, hoping that the shitheads would get the message, but he found himself being pulled forward, with a tight circle closing in around them.

“Not on my watch,” someone yelled in a girl’s voice. That was Zoey, perched high on Dex’s shoulders and ready to fight.

“Kids, kids, please,” another voice began pleading in what had to be a second microphone.

Everyone stopped whatever they were doing as if by magic. Dean Preston was now on stage, looking flustered and rubbing one button of his vest nervously.

“You are the one to blame for tolerating such elements on campus,” Connor’s shrill voice drowned out the dean’s calling for calm.

The poor man seemed chastised by such words. “Will you kids stop?” he pleaded again. “I do not want to have to call security.”

“We’ll stop,” Connor continue, “but you resign! Right here, right now!”

The dean stopped and looked at Connor in disbelief. At least, that was Rusty surmised, since he was still being held back by those assholes and couldn’t see everything.

“If that is what it takes to stop this... this war--” the dean began.

“No way!” Rusty shouted. He pushed those restraining him while ignoring a few grunts and grabbed Matty. Taken by surprise, the shitheads released them. “Mr. Preston, you don’t have to resign for this asshole’s sake,” he said.

The dean turned toward him with an apologetic look on his face. “Maybe it’s time I retire, Rusty. It looks like I’ve failed in looking after you all.”

“No, you chose to believe that we’re grownups and we can be responsible for our own actions. So yeah, maybe you were a little lax here and there, but frankly, we all love you for it,” Rusty declared. Then, he turned toward the crowd. “Isn’t that true, Sunny Hill? Dean Preston has always believed in us, not partying harder than we can, or getting up to more shenanigans than we can handle. He thinks we’re all good kids.”

Sounds of agreement began emerging from the crowd, making Rusty smile.

“Also, Mr. Preston, you make a killer cup of tea.”

The dean gave him a look of gratitude, but it looked like Connor was far from finished.

“Do not let yourself seduced by this rascal,” he shouted. “If we don’t have order, if we don’t have law--”

A screeching sound like someone was adjusting the audio channels coming out the speakers interrupted their verbal sparring. A flash of light and they all turned toward the big screen which must have been set up there for Connor’s later presentation.

Who really is Connor Williams?

The voice coming through had to be modulated because it didn’t sound entirely human.

The silence that followed spoke volumes. All eyes were now trained on the presentation screen, on which pics of a black pickup truck rolled out; the vehicle looked aggressive enough to jump off and run the audience down.

Thirteen miles per gallon? Hmm, that is how Connor Williams’s love for the environment looks in numbers, dear guys and gals of Sunny Hill. But it’s a hybrid, so it’s all ‘kay.

The silence was now replaced by whispers. Connor, of all people, seemed perturbed. He forgot to yell into the microphone and ran to his army. “Who’s out there?” he yelled. “Who’s running the projector?”

In the meantime, the presentation continued to roll on unperturbed.

Our dear leader of high morals seems to have certain tastes when it comes to titillating his superior intellect.

This time, the whispers turned into gasps of disbelief. The pic on the big screen showed a disheveled Connor looking mesmerized by a long female leg wearing an impossibly high heel. Rusty didn’t want to start throwing ideas around but that pretty much looked like a strip club to him.

“They’re photoshopped,” Connor began yelling into the microphone, as he seemed to remember he still had it. “Everything is photoshopped!” No one on his team seemed to have a clue who truly was in charge of the presentation rolling on the big screen.

And now, la pièce de résistance, my dearests. Connor might appear – and appeal – to you as the maverick, the outsider, but when it comes to romantic involvements, he doesn’t mind covering all his bases.

The next pics had been taken from afar, so the identity of the other people in them, besides Connor, was obscured. In one of them, Connor was embracing a girl in front of a movie theater, while in the next, he was busy fumbling in the semi-dark outside a club with a good looking guy.

Don't get me wrong, Sunny Hill, the modulated voice continued. Being bi is totally cool. Being a two-timer, though... Neither the pretty gal, nor the handsome lad in these pictures know of the other's existence. How's that for your high morals, Connor Williams?

A few of Connor's army finally sprang into action and hurried in the direction the unknown presentation seemed to be coming from, probably bent on taking down the person handling the projector.

And this is where we leave you, Sunny Hill. The choice is yours. We're only bringing you the truth. Yours always true blue, Xpress, out.

Rusty exchanged a surprised look with Matty. "Pinch me, Matty, I must be dreaming, because I think Xpress just did a good thing for once in their existence."

Matty only took his hand. And then, he lifted Rusty's arm high. "Do we have a winner, Sunny Hill?" he yelled in his Slicky voice.

The crowd erupted into cheers. Connor straightened up and hurried toward the edge of the stage, gesticulating, but the deed was done. All he got from the audience were boos.

"Go home, Implacables!"

Rusty let out a sigh of relief and hugged Matty. Under the crowd's pressure, Connor's people were dispersing. All in a day's work, and he had Xpress to thank. Who would have thought? Connor was still trying to gain some attention from the students of Sunny Hill, like a temporary king holding on to his fake crown.

Rusty took a bow and then took Matty to approach Dean Preston together. The dean was wiping his forehead with a pristine white handkerchief, probably still wondering what in the world had just happened.

"How about a group photo, Mr. Preston?"

He stood by the dean's right and Matty flanked him from the left, while all their friends and random students crowded behind them.

"Oh, great, now who's going to take the picture?" someone asked when they realized there was no one left to be in charge of a phone camera.

Rusty smiled. "Don't you worry, guys. Something tells me we're going to see ourselves in Xpress by tonight."

Epilog

“Is it okay to say that I can’t believe it?”

Maddox patted him on the back on his way to pack the last few things. “Yep, Rusty, it’s totally fine. You’re going to get hitched to a swell guy.”

“Not that part, that I can believe,” Rusty replied and waved impatiently. “I mean this. College is over. We’re grownups or something.”

“Or something,” Maddox agreed as he used duct tape to secure one last cardboard box in place. It was full of books, and it had to weigh at least a ton.

Rusty offered to pitch in and grabbed the box from one side. “It’s like we’ve lived an entire life during these four years.”

“Yeah, I think it does feel like that. We went in as boys and came out as men,” Maddox said with a grin and a wink.

“Let’s not go overboard,” Rusty scolded his bestie. “It’s not like we’ve been to war.”

“I guess, for our generation, it does count as that. Plus, there was that thing with Connor. That was almost a full-fledged war. Talk about abdicating in disgrace.”

“Well, I guess that Xpress really did do a number on that guy,” Rusty admitted. “After that exposé, not even his staunchest supporters wanted anything to do with him.”

“That’s true,” Maddox said. “Although, I can’t help but wonder. How did Xpress get their hands on all those photos? Some were quite closeup shots. Connor must have never noticed, but it seems pretty weird.”

“There’s always the possibility that the photos were doctored, just as Connor screamed from the top of his lungs. I mean, if that’s the truth, I no longer feel all that good about winning.”

Maddox grunted as they moved the box down the stairs to take it to the car. “I’m actually glad someone pulled the rug out from under that douchebag. And looking back, I think it did him good, too.”

“Yeah, he’s a lot more humble now. No more Mr. Leader, it seems. Although you can tell he’s suffering that he no longer has cohorts praising his name.”

“Just for the record, Rusty, there’s no point in pitying the guy. He got what was coming to him. And whether the pictures were fakes or not, it looks like he was really an asshole two-timer. The

girl in those pics threw a real fit, since she somehow heard about it. The guy seemed more laidback about the whole thing. He was never that crazy about Connor in the first place.”

Rusty narrowed his eyes. “Did you read all this in Xpress? ‘Cause that’s not exactly a reliable source of information.”

“No, that’s what I heard by listening to the latest gossip on campus. It looks like you haven’t paid attention lately.”

“Well, I’ve been busy,” Rusty said, and that was the whole truth. Between spending most of his time in Matty’s room, going to classes, and taking singing lessons, he’d had very little time to pay attention to such small details.

“And too happy to care about Connor’s whereabouts,” Maddox added for good measure. “So,” he said as he closed the trunk with a satisfied look on his face. “We’re really going to do this, right?”

“Of course,” Rusty said and could tell that the smile on his face was pulling at his muscles until it strained them. “It’s going to be weddings at the castle. I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Rusty, it’s going to be your wedding, too. I hope you’re not going to get cold feet and then miss it.”

Rusty didn’t have time to reply because Matty rammed into him from behind, quickly wrapping his arms around him.

“He has his ball and chain, Maddox, don’t worry,” Matty said cheerfully. “After everything he’s put me through, I’m going to drag him to the altar... is there going to be an altar? Not exactly, since it’s not a church where we’re getting married.”

“I could ask Francine to have one built, especially for us,” Rusty said promptly.

“Don’t you dare,” Jonathan warned him, coming out of the house, as well. “You’re lucky I don’t get jealous, because it definitely feels like my mother has a favorite child and it’s not me.”

“Don’t get jealous, Johnny boy, just be unreasonable and spoiled like me. That will work wonders, for sure. Or consider me your evil twin.”

“Evil?” Jonathan asked.

“Twin?” Maddox asked at the same time as his fiancé, soon-to-be husband. “You look nothing like Jonathan, Rusty.”

“That’s because we’re not identical twins,” Rusty replied promptly. “Also, be thankful for that. You’re in no danger of wandering into the wrong room and getting the wrong spouse pregnant.”

Maddox rolled his eyes. “You wish you’d had that kind of pull. Matty, make sure our resident kinkster doesn’t wander off.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice,” Matty said. “This one’s mine.”

Rusty leaned back into Matty’s embrace. “And we’re going to make it official.”

“See?” Matty looked over Rusty’s shoulder at Maddox. “He’s totally taken. But seriously, Jonathan, thank you so much for what your family is doing for us. My mom is over the moon already.”

“Yeah, and it’s crazy to have so many weddings taking place at the same time. Hopefully, no one gets left out,” Rusty said.

Francine had been thrilled to be in charge of organizing all their scheduled weddings at the same time at their estate. Besides Maddox and Jonathan, and Rusty and Matty, she had insisted that ‘all the children’ needed to celebrate all in one place at one time, provided that they didn’t have other plans. Therefore, Ray and Hanna, Kane and Louise, and not so surprisingly, Dex and Zoey, were all included.

“Hey,” he realized only that moment, “we’re like five weddings and no funeral.”

All of the available pairs of eyes turned to look at him, blinking and not understanding. He waved quickly.

“It’s an old movie, but it doesn’t matter. We have the lucky number with us.”

They no longer paid him any mind as they hurried to take their places inside the car. Maddox was driving, and Jonathan was riding with him in front. That left the backseat for Matty and him, which meant that he felt compelled to make at least a few jokes about it.

“Do you really care about the upholstery inside your vehicle, Maddie?” Rusty asked as he caressed the leather seat.

“Do you plan on doing something nasty?” the driver asked while kicking the engine into gear.

“You put me back here with Matty. You know I’m not the kind to keep my hands to myself.”

“Matty, make sure Rusty behaves,” Maddox called out to the voice of reason in their relationship.

“Will do,” Matty said brightly. “He’ll be an exemplary passenger, I promise.”

“We’re all counting on you.”

Rusty looked out the window on his side as they started rolling. To think that he was leaving this campus behind after having it for so long as the only place he had called home in his mind without telling everyone.

Matty squeezed his hand to get his attention. "Is everything fine?"

"Yeah," Rusty said in a quiet voice. "Just a tad melancholic, which you know is not exactly my jam."

If Maddox and Jonathan were listening in, they didn't show it, caught up in a conversation of their own.

"We have the rest of our lives in front of us," Matty said.

Rusty moved his eyes away from the window and back to his better half. "And I'm excited for it," he admitted. "Because it's going to be one life I'll spend with you."

Matty smiled happily and cuddled against his side, as Rusty took him by the shoulders. "Don't worry. We'll come back from time to time if only to remind people that Sunny Hill was once a kingdom."

Rusty laughed. "There will be other kings, I guess."

"Hmm, I'm sure that if we read Xpress, we'll be up to date with the next coronation. Unless," Matty said and frowned a smidge in thought. "Unless Xpress just graduated, as we did. What do you think?"

"That's one possibility. I guess we'll know if the thing gets discontinued, now that our generation is free to go out in the world and make a name for ourselves."

"That might not be enough. There could be copycats," Matty suggested.

"Yeah, that's true. Well, I guess we'll never know for sure, right?"



So, dear guys and gals, every love story must end with the famous words 'and they lived happily ever after'... And then you know that all is right in the world. This story is no exception to the famous rule of romance, and yet.

You're probably still wondering who I am. Am I an insider or an outsider? A professor with too much time on his or her hands, bored and bent on throwing a spanner in the works just for the fun of teaching young people that life's not always fair? Or am I a student here at Sunny Hill, fascinated by living vicariously

through other people's ups and downs? Am I lurking in the shadows, or am I walking out in the open, with everyone else?

My work is a labor of love, I promise, regardless of what you might think of me. So, at times, I have been silly, I have been mean, I have been witty, I have even been surprising.

As far as famous last words go, I have a confession to make. In my doings, I have been driven in equal parts by my own selfish motives, as well as a desire to do good. I am well aware that you might feel pretty cross with me for uttering such an audacity. But it takes a nudge from the wrong direction sometimes, and even a bit of negativity to get the right thing done.

So long, I fare thee well, and maybe, who knows? We'll meet again ☺

Yours truly,

Sunny Hill Xpress.

P.S. Did I forget something? Oh, yes.

And they lived happily ever after.

THE END