

SHARING DESSERT

SEA KISSED BONUS EPILOGUE

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SHARING DESSERT

Holden

“Does it hurt?” I asked Ari, glancing down at his face, half-covered by a scarf that warded off the late March cold. We were down in Washington, D.C., visiting his sister, and even though we were a lot farther south than Maine, it was still chilly.

“What?” Ari asked as we walked. “The scarf? I mean, it’s a little itchy, but it’s not too bad. And I did promise Hadley I’d wear it.”

He’d made the mistake of telling Hadley he liked her latest crocheted creation—a voluminous, sparkly magenta scarf the size of an afghan—so she’d knit him one in navy blue.

“Not the scarf,” I said.

“Then what?” He looked up at me, confused, as we came to a stop at an intersection, waiting for the light to turn green.

I looked around. There wasn't anyone close enough to overhear us, but I lowered my voice anyway.

"The... you know."

Ari's face broke into a grin. "You can't even say it? You bought it for me and you can't even say the word!"

"That's not true. I can say it. I'm just being discreet. We're in public, after all." I waved a hand around, gesturing at the street scene, and he rolled his eyes. "Anyway, it's two words."

"I'm well aware that it's two words. I just want to hear you say them."

"And I'm just trying to look out for your welfare and this is how you repay me? Psychological torture?"

Ari laughed. "Hey, I have to get my kicks somehow."

"Pretty sure you got your kicks less than 20 minutes ago, in the back of the car."

"I did indeed. And you did too." He wiggled his eyebrows. "And to answer your question, no, it doesn't hurt. That's kind of the whole point of butt plugs. They're supposed to feel good."

I couldn't help looking over my shoulder again, just to reassure myself the intersection was still empty. The light turned green.

"Besides," Ari continued as we started walking. "You're the one who put it in me. Did I *look* like I was in pain when you did that?"

My mind flashed back to the car, parked in a secluded lot in Rock Creek Park. The two of us in the backseat, Ari's legs up

over my shoulders. The moonlight dappling his skin as I thrust into him. The tiny gasp he made as he came, and the “Please, Daddy,” on his lips as he begged for me to come inside him. The truly raunchy moan that escaped him as I’d plugged him up afterwards, keeping my load from dripping back out.

I cleared my throat and tried not to get hard again. If the night went as planned, there’d be plenty of opportunities for that later, but we were going to a fancy restaurant first, and I didn’t really need an erection throughout dinner.

“Well, no,” I said, taking his hand as we turned to the right. The restaurant beckoned, halfway down the block. “But it’s one thing for it to feel good while you’re lying on your back and we’ve used a ton of lube and you’re still... relaxed... after sex.”

I was *not* going to use the word ‘*gaping*.’ The point was to keep myself from getting turned on, not make it even harder.

“It’s another thing entirely to have a plug inside you while we walk halfway across the city because we couldn’t find parking any closer. I don’t know if they’re designed for that. I just want to make sure you’re not in pain.”

“I promise I’m not.” Ari smiled up at me coyly. “In fact, I’m quite the opposite. It feels fucking amazing, having something in my ass as I walk. Not as good as your cock, obviously. But feeling my hole sucking it inside? Knowing I’m staying stretched out for you, and keeping your load warm? Knowing you could push me into that alley right there, rip the plug out, and shove your cock in me without even asking permission, and that I’d still be loose enough to take you without a struggle? Trust me. It feels good.”

“Jesus Christ,” I whispered. So much for not being hard during dinner. Another couple was walking towards us along the sidewalk and I held my breath until they passed. “Don’t get me wrong, that’s—that’s very good to hear. But maybe don’t say it in public?”

Ari grinned. “I thought the point of tonight was to cross things off the fucket list. Including public sex.”

He had a point. What had started out as a joke—Ari not being sure he could remember all the sexual experiences he’d had, and therefore needing to experience everything possible, for science—had somehow evolved into a sexual bucket list—a fucket list, if you will. And he’d decided that this weekend trip was the perfect opportunity to check some items off.

But still...

“Public sex, sure.” That’s what the car sex was. Maybe not *public* public, given how deserted the parking lot had been, but as close as I wanted to risk. “But publicly describing fantasies that make it sound like I should get arrested?”

“You worry too much.” Ari patted my arm, then pulled open the door to the restaurant. “Come on. I’m starving and I can’t wait to put more things in my mouth.”



Ari

Nourriture, I decided, was way too stuffy a restaurant for my tastes. Leah had recommended it—apparently it was one of the best restaurants in the city—but even if I hadn’t been

desperate to move on to the next phase of the evening, I still would have found it a bit pretentious. As it was, we'd only been inside for thirty seconds and I was ready to go get falafel from the carry-out place around the corner from Leah's apartment instead.

I hadn't been lying to Holden. Having the plug inside me felt utterly delicious. That added bit of pressure and fullness made me feel safe and slutty at the same time, somehow. I'd only come half an hour ago and I was already hard again. I didn't want to sit through a fancy French meal with white tablecloths and candlelight and a wine list forty pages long. I wanted to get fucked.

Again.

That was the goal, after all. After public sex—well, semi-public, but it would do for now—the next item on the fucket list was finding a guy for a threesome. Someone to fuck my ass as Holden fucked my throat. Or vice versa. I wasn't picky.

We were supposed to go out to a club after dinner, to try to make that happen, and I couldn't help wondering what would happen if we just skipped dinner and went there now. Probably lead to a bunch of awkward standing around. It was only 10 pm, which was late, in dinner-terms, but still early for a club.

"What's wrong?" Holden asked. He must have caught the wistful expression on my face.

"Nothing," I said, well aware of how whiny I sounded. "I was just wishing we could skip this part somehow. Move on to the exciting stuff."

He laughed. "You have a one-track mind."

“Funny, usually you like that about me.”

“I still like that about you,” he said, leaning in and bringing his lips to my ear. “I just also don’t want you to pass out later tonight, in the middle of getting railed by a stranger. Is that too much to ask? It might kind of ruin the fun, you know?”

“Or increase it.”

Holden snorted softly. “Eat your dinner like a good boy, and I’ll make it worth your while.”

I looked up at him speculatively. “Bribery, huh? I eat my vegetables in exchange for dessert?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of you *being* dessert. But yeah, something like that.”

“Welcome to Nourriture. How can I help you?”

Holden and I turned at the same time to look at the new speaker, who’d just joined us at the front of the restaurant. It was a guy. A cute guy. Older than me but younger than Holden, I thought. Tall and thin, with black hair and warm brown eyes and a sensitive face.

Maybe the evening was looking up.

“Hi there,” Holden said, putting on his *‘just folks’* voice that he used when he didn’t want people to recognize him. “We have a reservation, for two, at 10?”

He didn’t mention his last name, but the guy with black hair just nodded and glanced at a book lying open on the host’s stand by the door. “Of course,” he said smoothly. “Right this way.”

It was impossible to tell from his voice if he realized who Holden was, and his face was a mask of neutral pleasantness. Though his face probably would have been pleasant to look at even if he'd been scowling. He just had a nice one.

The restaurant took up the bottom floor of an old row house in the Dupont Circle neighborhood of DC, and the guy led us on a circuitous path to a small table tucked away in an alcove in the back of the third room that we walked through. There was a fireplace to the right, a small fire burning cheerily in it, and the walls were lined with bookshelves and old paintings in gilded frames.

It felt very cozy, and I wondered if it was just chance we'd been given this table, or if the restaurant had assumed Holden would want as private a dining experience as possible. I supposed it was DC—there were probably tons of senators who'd eaten meals with their mistresses, or conducted business with shady lobbyists, right at this spot.

"My name's Nolan," the guy with black hair said as we sat down, "and I'll be taking care of you this evening. I'm actually the manager here, but one of our servers had a family emergency and had to leave early, so I'm pitching in. I apologize in advance if I'm a little out of practice with this. But on the bright side, if you have any complaints, you can address them directly to the me, right?"

He gave us a self-deprecating smile, the first crack in his facade of bland politeness, and it transformed his face from cute to gorgeous. I glanced at Holden and saw that he was just as taken as I was, smiling and looking a little stunned.

This dinner was looking up.

“Anyway, I’ll leave you two with the menus and come back in a minute to take your drink order,” Nolan said, passing the leather-bound menus in our direction and then leaving with a smile.

I turned to Holden the second he was out of earshot.

“He’s cute.”

“He is cute,” Holden agreed, opening his menu.

“Like, very cute.”

“No argument from me,” he said, scanning the first page.

“Like, I would definitely let him fuck me in the ass cute,” I said, putting my hand on Holden’s menu and lowering it so he had to look at me.

Holden laughed lightly. “And I would definitely enjoy watching that. But I’m not sure *he* would enjoy participating. Or even knowing we were imagining it.”

“He might.”

“I doubt it.”

“We won’t know unless we ask.”

Holden set his menu down on the table and gave me a long look. “Babe, I’m not saying the dude isn’t good-looking. And technically—*technically*—it’s possible that he likes guys and might be amenable to that suggestion. But I think the likelihood of that—of the universe just happening to give us a waiter who just happens to like dudes and just happens to want to have a threesome with two guys he’s barely met—is highly unlikely. Let’s just have a nice dinner and not sexually harass our waiter, huh?”

“It’s not sexual harassment if you ask politely.”

“You clearly haven’t watched enough workplace training videos on the subject.”

“Fine, then we won’t *ask*. We’ll just... feel the situation out.”

“What does that mean?” Holden asked.

I smiled. “You’ll see.”



Nolan

The universe was definitely fucking with me.

I’d worked at Nourriture for *so long* and had never had a couple as hot as the one I’d just seated. We had plenty of politicians, and sometimes even some regular celebrities, but absolutely none of them had been as boner-inducing as Holden Amundsen and his boyfriend.

And of course they had to show up—not just show up, but be assigned to me—on a night when everything was going wrong. Not only had Marion gone home early, Emil and Johnny had had a vicious breakup fight in front of our entire dining room around 8 pm and were now both sulking, and there had been a literal fire in the kitchen forty-five minutes ago.

I’d had to redistribute responsibilities, soothe the terrified kitchen staff, and comp seven different people’s meals. Thank God I was leaving this job in a couple weeks—this place was a nightmare of stress on a good day, and today was definitely not a good day. I was exhausted and grumpy and

sweaty and probably smelled, so of course tonight was the night we got our hottest patrons ever, and I was the one who had to serve them.

At least we'd be closing soon. Our kitchen shut down in an hour and half our servers had already gone home. I took a long drink of water at the bar and headed back to Holden's table. I might look like a mess, but I still had to at least pretend to be professional.

"Can I get you anything to drink to start out with?" I asked them, doing my best to focus on my responsibilities and not drool over the two men.

Holden Amundsen was as hot in real life as he'd been on TV years ago, back when he'd gone by Eric Amundsen and been ostensibly straight. Maybe hotter. It might have been age, or it might just have been knowing he was gay, but I would have let the guy do anything he wanted to me, if he'd asked.

Not that he ever would—not with his adorable twink of a boyfriend at his side. He'd been in the news a few months back—the boyfriend, I mean—but I couldn't remember his name. What I *did* remember were those delicate features, that impish grin, and those startling green eyes that had looked out from every magazine cover for a week.

The two men were so different, but equally gorgeous, so of course, I had to talk to them on a night when I looked—and probably smelled—like I'd been mucking out a horse stable.

"Mmm, do you have any recommendations?" the boyfriend asked, snuggling up to Holden on the horseshoe-shaped banquette that surrounded their table.

As I recited our list of house cocktails, I struggled to keep my eyes from falling out of my head. The boyfriend wasn't content to just snuggle up to Holden—no, he had to go and take his hand and stroke it across Holden's chest, then down his stomach, and then drop it to his groin, rubbing him there.

I stammered something about our wine list, not entirely sure the syllables I was uttering actually formed words. Holden, thank God, seemed as flustered as I was.

"Ari," he groaned, shifting in his seat.

The groan sounded half embarrassed, half turned-on. Fair enough—that was how I felt, too. Holden flicked his eyes up to meet mine, then looked away, clearly uncomfortable. But he didn't move out of his boyfriend's reach.

Ari. Right. That was the boyfriend's name. That sounded familiar.

"Do you have a favorite?" Ari asked, smiling up at me, completely unashamed. "What do you like to put in your mouth?"

I choked. There was absolutely no need to phrase the question that way. But Ari just smiled innocently—stroking Holden's crotch all the while. I had to keep my eyes from lingering down there, trying to estimate Holden's length from the shadow in his pants.

"We have a really nice Barolo," I said, because it was the first thing I could think of.

"That sounds good," Holden said, sounding strangled. He nodded vigorously, still not making eye-contact. "We'll go with that."

"I'll be right back," I said, then beat a hasty retreat from the table.

It only got worse over the rest of the evening. When I brought the wine bottle back to them, Ari licked his lips and said, "I can't wait to taste what you're offering."

When they ordered salads, he justified his choice by saying, "That one has walnuts, right? I just love nuts."

When their entrees arrived, Ari took one look at his filet mignon and said, "God, I don't know if I'll be able to eat all that. I'm already stuffed. Then again, there's nothing I love more than *being* stuffed, so I'll give it a go."

I was in awe of him, to be honest. I wasn't aware it was possible to turn every food-related conversation into an innuendo-laden minefield. And how he managed to keep a straight face while saying all of that was beyond me. I actually got the feeling he was testing me, trying to get me to beg him to stop, or throw my hands up in embarrassment.

Well, fuck that.

I wasn't going to let him win. I wasn't going to be embarrassed by a handsy twink with a potty-mouth. Besides, I hadn't hooked up with anyone in ages, and it wasn't fair for this little brat to tease me with no consequences.

The restaurant was practically empty by now. There was only one other table still occupied, and they'd just asked for their check. The kitchen had already shut down, so the only dessert options were ones that were pre-made. I'd cashed out our bartender, confident I could handle any remaining drink orders Ari and Holden might have.

I poured myself a quick shot of vodka, tossed it back, and headed back to their table.



Holden

“What are you doing?” I hissed at Ari after Nolan walked away with our empty dinner plates.

He’d explained that they’d already sent the busboys home, since it was so late. I’d taken that as a subtle signal that he’d like me and Ari to leave too, and sooner rather than later. I’d been about to say as much to Ari when I’d turned and found him starting to slide under the table.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” he said with a sly smile.

“Uh, trying to get us arrested? Or at the very least, thrown out of here. I thought the public-sex portion of the evening was over.”

“Well it sure is with that attitude,” Ari said archly. “Relax. I’ve been hitting on Nolan all dinner and he hasn’t objected.”

“That doesn’t mean he likes it. And that definitely doesn’t mean that he wants you to suck me off under the table.”

“No. But *you* want that.”

I swallowed. I couldn’t deny the idea had some appeal. But still.

“Correction—my dick wants that. The rest of me thinks that’s a very stupid idea.”

“And have you not been paying any attention to our lovely server’s dick throughout this evening? The way he’s been rock hard every time he talks to us?” Ari laughed. “Did you not see the way he looked when I said I loved getting stuffed? He’s probably jerking off in the bathroom as we speak.”

To tell the truth, I had looked once or twice, but I’d glanced away immediately each time. Nolan was hot, there was no doubt about that. But I still felt a little gross about ogling him quite so openly.

“So unless you want to join him there,” Ari continued, “why don’t you let *me* take care of you.”

In a flash, he was under the table. And Christ, it’s not like I could deny that I was hard, or that the idea of getting a covert blow-job didn’t turn me on. It was a little awkward, but Ari managed to get me unzipped and seconds later, I felt his mouth close around the head of my cock, warm and wet. Not being able to see what he was doing, but feeling exposed nonetheless, only made it hotter.

So of course, that’s when Nolan showed up again, proffering two dessert menus.

But there was something different about him, this time. Gone was the vaguely embarrassed, definitely stunned look he’d worn all evening. It had been replaced by something much more amused—and knowing.

“Are you two interested in dessert?” he asked.

I opened my mouth to reply, but Ari sank down around my cock before I could say anything, and all that came out was a

helpless moan. Fuck, that felt good—but did he have to do that right when I'd been about to speak?

I wanted to die of embarrassment, and it only got worse when Nolan's eyes went to my waist, now covered by the tablecloth, which was clearly moving slightly. But instead of calling us out, or dragging Ari out from under the table by his feet, Nolan just smiled.

“We have a trio of mini-eclairs on the menu. All organic ingredients. Deliciously cream-filled. Your boyfriend might like those. And a lovely pecan tart. He did say he liked nuts, right? There's also our homemade vanilla gelato—so good you want to bury your face in it, even if you do end up covered in cream.”

I tried to respond again, and again, all I could manage was a strangled whine—partly because Nolan's words made it absolutely clear he knew what was going on, and partly because Ari's tongue was sliding around the head of my cock now, teasing me cruelly. In the silence that followed, he started slurping up and down my length, making no effort to conceal the noise. Hell, he was being louder than he usually was when we were alone.

“Well, I'll give you a minute to think it over,” Nolan said, setting the two menus on the table. “Just let me know once you've come... to a decision, that is.”

With a teasing smile, he walked away.



Ari

Oh, it was *so* on.

I pulled off Holden's dick—a shame, really, because there were few things I loved more than his cock in my mouth—but this was for the greater good. I crawled out from under the table and stood up, brushing my knees off unnecessarily. The floors in this restaurant were spotless.

“What—where are you—” Holden gestured helplessly at his cock, now peeking above the table cloth, glistening with spit and precum. “You’re just gonna leave me here like this?”

“With any luck, it won’t be for long.” I winked, then went in search of Nolan.

I found him in the hallway that led back to the kitchen. He was checking something off on a clipboard that hung on the wall, and turned with a startled noise when I tapped him on the shoulder.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said when he saw me. I was gratified that he sounded a touch breathless. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

I took a step closer to him. “There could be. If you want.”

Nolan’s eyes darted over my shoulder, and I got the sense he was double-checking to make sure no one was close enough to overhear. “Well, we do aim to please here at Nourriture.”

“Funny.” I laughed lightly. “Because what I was going to propose was more about me pleasing you.”

Nolan’s nostrils flared, but he didn’t back away, even after I placed a finger on his chest and trailed it down to his waist. He *was* hard—I could see it. I ached to touch him and get a

sense of just how big he was, but I reminded myself that good things came to those who waited.

"I'll cut to the chase," I said, batting my eyelashes as I looked up at him. He wasn't as tall as Holden, but he still had a few inches on me. "Holden and I have a bucket list. A fucket list, we call it. Because it's mostly about sex. Well, entirely about sex, actually."

"I see."

"And we were planning on going out after dinner to see if we could find someone who wanted to join us tonight. In bed," I added, just in case the first part hadn't been clear enough.

"Okay." Nolan swallowed, but he still hadn't moved away, or told me to back off, or anything. I thought he might even look a little intrigued.

"And the thing is, you're crazy hot. We both think so. So we were wondering if maybe we could skip the whole going-out-after-dinner-to-find-somebody-and-bringing-them-back-to-our-hotel part. If you'd be interested."

Nolan pressed his lips together. "Just to be clear, are you asking me what I think you're asking me?"

"If you think I'm asking you to have a threesome, then yes. I'm asking if you want to have sex with us. Specifically if you'd like to fuck me, because I would really, really like that. But if you're a bottom, that's cool too, I'm sure Holden would be more than happy to—"

"And by skipping the going-to-your-hotel part, you're suggesting—"

"Having sex here. Yes."

“In the hallway?”

“Well, I was thinking more by our table. Since it’s so secluded. But I mean, it’s your restaurant, so you make the rules.”

Nolan looked at me for a long moment and then whispered, “Fuck.”

“Is that a good ‘fuck’ or a bad ‘fuck?’”

He shook his head and laughed. “It’s an ‘*I could definitely get fired for this, but I’m quitting in two weeks so I don’t think I care*’ fuck.”

“Oh.” I laughed. “I can work with that.”

“This is...” Nolan shook his head again, still laughing to himself. “This is probably a bad idea. But fuck it, right?”

“That is indeed the point of the list.”

“I need to close a couple more things out,” he said. “Go back to your table, I’ll meet you there in a few minutes.”

“Can do.” I grinned, then finally let my hand dip down and stroke the bulge I’d seen in his pants all evening. Very satisfying. I licked my lips. “Don’t be long.”



Nolan

Jesus Christ.

I wasn’t sure what I’d been expecting from Ari and Holden. Maybe a little flirting. An invitation to join them for a drink later, at most. Definitely not an outright proposition.

I obviously should have known better than to say yes. I *did* know better.

But I was saying yes anyway.

Because fuck it. It had been so long since I'd been with anyone. And I was leaving this job soon anyway. And the restaurant was empty. And I'd spent so, so much of my life being careful. Responsible. Sensible. Always doing the right thing.

Just once, I wanted to do something very, very wrong.

I did a final sweep of the restaurant, making sure everyone had left, and locked the doors. Then I headed to the bar. I took another shot of vodka, and then a third, for good luck.

I felt tipsy almost immediately—I wasn't a big drinker. But this was nice, the way my head felt kinda floaty and my heart felt buoyant. Maybe I should have been drinking on the job all along.

I set the vodka bottle back on the shelf and made my way back to Ari and Holden's table, heart beating a mile a minute. I wondered if they felt nervous like I did. Wondered what to say when I got there. How exactly did one break the ice in a threesome?

Then I rounded the final corner and saw that the ice had already been shattered.

They'd pushed the table back and Ari was kneeling on the floor in front of Holden, licking a long stripe up his cock. Holden was leaning back, eyes closed, one hand on Ari's head. Fuck, that was hot.

I almost felt bad interrupting—I'd have been happy to just watch this for the rest of the night. But then Holden opened an eye, saw me, and smiled.

"Hey," he said, his voice rumbly and deep.

"Hey." I didn't sound nearly as suave as he did.

"Didn't mean to start without you," Holden said. He gestured down at Ari. "This one's just a little..."

Ari pulled off, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and grinned.

"Impatient," he said. "I'm impatient." He wiggled his eyebrows and gestured to the banquette. "So glad you finally decided to join us. Won't you take a seat?"

Feeling a bit like I was arriving unfashionably late to an orgy, I came forward and sat on the banquette, leaving a few feet of space between me and Holden. I rubbed my hands on the legs of my pants nervously.

"I should probably say that I've never done anything like this before," I said as Ari pushed himself up. "Are there like, ground rules? Or limits you want to set, or—"

I cut off as Ari climbed into my lap, straddled me, and began to unknot my tie.

"The only limits are the ones you want," Ari said, leaning in and brushing a kiss across my mouth. "Like I said—you make the rules."

He ground his ass down onto my lap, rubbing back and forth across my cock as it strained against the fabric of my pants. I glanced over at Holden, who smiled indulgently and stroked his own cock with a careless hand. When I looked

back at Ari, he pressed his lips to mine, stealing my breath with a deep kiss.

The kid knew what he was doing, that was for sure. His tongue tangled with mine. His lips were so fucking soft and demanding, and all the while, his fingers were busy, first pulling off my tie, then unbuttoning my shirt.

Thank God Nourriture didn't have CCTV.

But if I were getting naked, Ari should be too, I decided. I tugged on the bottom of his sweater, then pulled it off over his head, revealing a slim frame that glowed in the dim light of the restaurant.

"Fuck yeah," Holden growled, looking on. "Take it all off."

Ari pulled away from my neck, which he'd been busy decorating with hickeys. "Join us," he said.

"With pleasure." Holden slid closer and smiled at me. "You can be rougher with him, you know. He likes it."

Suiting action to words, Holden tugged Ari in his direction until Ari was lying down on his back between us on the banquette. Then he yanked Ari's pants and briefs down, exposing his cock, which was as hard as mine, though quite a bit smaller. It was leaking precum and Ari whined as Holden twirled a finger around the tip.

"You like that?" Holden said.

"Yes, Daddy," Ari gasped.

"Show me how much you like it," Holden said. "Show *Nolan* how much."

Ari shifted onto his side and began tugging at my zipper, and once I felt his hand ghost over my cock through my clothes, I couldn't get my pants off fast enough. They landed halfway across the room as I kicked them off, but I barely had a chance to register that before Ari brought his mouth to my cock and started enthusiastically bobbing up and down on it.

When was the last time I'd gotten a blow job? I couldn't even remember. Ari was acting like my cock was water in the Sahara, though, taking as much of it into his mouth as he could before pulling off and slurping it down again. He was so hot and wet and I ached with pleasure as I watched him.

Then Holden put a hand on my cheek and pulled me in for a kiss, and all I could do was feel—Ari's mouth, Holden's lips, and my body melting in between them.

This was officially the best bad decision I'd ever made. It should have been awkward, our three bodies in various states of undress, crammed into a curving restaurant booth, but it worked.

Ari shifted in my lap and I broke away from kissing Holden to see him turning onto his stomach. Holden smacked his ass, leaving a red palm print across one cheek. And then I saw it.

The plug.

Ari had a butt plug in his ass, the visible end a sparkling blue jewel, nestled in between his cheeks.

"Fuck, that's hot," I breathed.

Holden followed my gaze and smiled. He hooked one finger under the edge of the jewel and gave it a little tug,

prompting a moan from Ari.

“I fucked him right before we came here tonight,” Holden said, his voice thick with desire. “Then plugged him up to keep him nice and loose for whoever uses him next.”

I couldn't keep my fingers from reaching for the plug, and Holden took his hand away, making room. He gave me an encouraging smile.

“Go ahead. Play with it. Play with *him*. He likes it.”

So I did, twisting the plug first one way, then the other, as Ari sucked my cock and Holden watched with lust-shot eyes. Then I gripped it gently and pulled, gratified by the way Ari shimmied in response. I did it again, pulling a little further this time, so the silver plug began to slide out, slick with lube, stretching his hole wide before I pushed it back in.

The third time, I pulled it all the way out. A little trickle of cum came out with it, first clinging to the tapered end of the plug, then catching on the outer ring of Ari's hole as I slid the plug out completely. He gaped open, begging to be filled.

“You want to put another load in there?” Holden asked. “You want to fuck my boyfriend's hole while I watch? Use my cum as lube as you breed him?”

My cock throbbed at those words.

“I—I mean—shouldn't we—aren't you worried about—”

“Ari, baby. Are you worried about Nolan using a condom?” Holden asked sweetly, slipping a finger inside Ari's hole before it could close completely.

Ari pulled off my cock and looked up at me. “If you want to use one, that’s totally cool. We brought some. But...” he trailed off as his cheeks turned red. “If it were up to me, I’d rather you take me bareback. I like it better that way.”

“You’re sure?” I asked, breathless.

“Fuck yes.”

I turned to Holden. “And you’re sure? I mean, you two are together. I don’t want to—”

“Nolan, there is nothing I’d like more than to watch you fuck him, use him, and come inside him.” Holden slid his finger deeper into Ari’s hole, then pulled it out. A little dollop of cum glistened on the tip of his finger, and he brought it to his mouth and licked it clean. “What do you say?”

There was a lot I could have said. About safety, and responsibility, and common sense. But tonight, I decided, none of those things applied. So in the end, I didn’t say anything at all. I just smiled.



Holden

The change that had come over Nolan over the course of the evening was nothing short of revelatory. He’d started as our server, very proper, very prim, and here he was, getting sucked off by Ari and looking at me like he wanted to lick Ari’s cum right out of my mouth.

He groaned in pleasure as Ari took him all the way down, and I smiled. It was fucking hot, the way Ari was so

desperate to please him, and the way Nolan was so undone. But it was also clear that I needed to take charge, or Nolan might come in the next minute before any of us got what we wanted.

I took the plug from Nolan's hands and set it on the banquette next to me, then leaned in and kissed him deeply. His tongue caressed mine like he was searching for any droplets of cum that might still linger.

"Let's get him into position," I said when I pulled away. I stroked Ari's back tenderly. "Come on, baby."

I stood up and guided Ari over to the table, which we'd pushed a few feet away, and had him lie down on his back.

"There you go," I said as he lifted his legs up. Nolan brought himself in between them and took hold of Ari's right leg. I steadied his left.

"Good boy," I told him, rubbing his stomach and then stroking his dick a few times in praise. "Now tell Nolan how badly you want it."

"Please," Ari gasped, picking his head up to look at Nolan. "Put it in me."

"Should we get more lube?" Nolan asked. "Or—"

"Just fuck me," Ari begged. "I need it."

I was going to have to be careful not to come too soon myself. It was way too hot, hearing Ari talk that way. Nolan bit his lip, then nodded, and brought the head of his cock to Ari's hole, which was just winking at us now, almost all the way closed again.

Ari's little body twisted, then writhed, then finally stilled as Nolan pushed his cock into him. Nolan closed his eyes as he sank all the way to the hilt, burying himself in Ari's ass.

"You're so tight," he moaned, which was impressive, given the fact that Ari had already been fucked once tonight, and had been wearing a plug for the last hour and a half.

Ari whined and closed his eyes too, adjusting to the stretch of having someone inside him again. Nolan's dick wasn't as big as mine, but it was certainly more to accommodate than his plug.

"You're doing so good," I said, stroking his stomach. Ari opened his eyes and looked up at me, grateful. "You look so beautiful, taking that big dick. Such a good little boy."

Nolan began to move, and Ari moaned with each thrust, begging Nolan for more. He really was such a slut, and it was obscenely sexy to see him get railed by another man, to watch Nolan use him, pumping right into the load I'd left inside him.

Ari touched my arm and I looked down, worried for a moment that this might all be too much for him. Maybe we did need more lube, or maybe we—

"I want to suck your cock," Ari said. "I want you to throat fuck me."

My eyes went wide. Even all these months later, I still tried to be gentle when it came to Ari's neck. But he seemed to be taking an exposure therapy approach and the requests to throat fuck him had been getting more frequent of late. So far, I'd turned him down. But tonight... tonight I didn't think I had the strength to.

I had to trust Ari to know his limits and to tell me what he needed. So I nodded, and walked around to the other end of the table where his head lay on the white cloth.

I brought my cock to his lips, still red and wet from when they'd been sucking Nolan's cock. I was gentle at first, wanting to be sure Ari really wanted this, so I didn't push very far. But after he'd bathed my cock with his tongue, getting it absolutely dripping wet, he whispered, "More," and I obliged.

I slid my cock in deeper, all the way to the back of his mouth and then into his throat. I went so far that I could see the outlines of my dick in his neck. I thrust three times, feeling Ari gag around me, then pulled out so he could breathe.

Ari reached down and grabbed his dick, stroking himself. "Again," he commanded, opening up.

He was wanton—sprawled out on a table, his thin frame taking a cock from either end—and he loved it, stroking himself faster and faster.

It was gorgeous, and if I wasn't careful, I was going to come soon. But as I watched Nolan thrust into him, listened to Ari's moans and gurgles around my cock, I knew there was one more thing I wanted tonight.

I pulled out and looked down at Ari.

"Baby, do you think you could take both of us?"



Ari

I blinked at Holden, looking at him upside down. Nolan's thrusts inside my ass stilled and I frowned in confusion.

"I thought I *was* taking both of you," I said, wiping my mouth with my arm.

Holden smiled and bit his lip, and suddenly, I understood what he meant.

I'd never been double-penetrated before, but I'd always thought it sounded hot, and my porn-viewing history backed that up. I wasn't entirely sure I'd be able to take both of them—Holden was big enough on his own—but goddamn was I willing to try.

"Yes, please," I said, heat rushing to my cheeks.

We had to rearrange to make it work, and ended up over at the banquette again. Nolan leaned against the back of the booth, stroking his not-inconsiderably-sized cock with his fist. It was still wet from where it had been buried inside me, and I had to stop myself from leaning over to taste it.

Instead, I handed him the bottle of lube that had been in my pants pocket and watched in anticipation as he drizzled it onto his cockhead and slicked it down his shaft.

"Ready?" Holden asked.

I nodded. "Fuck yes."

I lined myself up over Nolan's cock and sank down onto it. It felt so good going in. I didn't think I'd ever get tired of the feeling of a cock enter me. It slid in easily this time, now that he'd fucked me open and loose, but I knew it would feel tight again once Holden pushed in, too.

I clenched my muscles around Nolan's cock a few times, just because I could, and smiled in satisfaction as he moaned behind me. I was facing away from him, leaning back on his chest, which left me with a perfect view of Holden as he slicked his own cock and fingers with lube.

He started by running his index finger around the edge of my hole, then slipping it inside. When I nodded, he added a second, and then a third, thrusting them in and out while Nolan stayed still.

"How's that?" Holden asked. "Okay?"

"Fuck no," I said. "Not okay." His eyebrows rose in concern and I grinned. "Not nearly enough. I need more."

"Brat," Holden said.

I laughed. "Yeah. But you like it. Now give me what I like."

Holden rolled his eyes, then bent down to kiss me. He slid his fingers out and brought the tip of his cock to my hole, next to Nolan's shaft. He caught my gaze, a silent question in his eyes. I nodded, and he pushed in.

Fuck. The stretch was incredible, and a warm tingling spread through my entire body. It radiated out from my ass through my core and out to my toes and fingertips and even scalp. It was so intense—not painful, but it took my breath away.

I looked up at Holden. I'd never felt more connected to him. Holden, ever the gentleman, smiled down at me.

"Okay?" he asked again. Then he reached out and traced a tear away from the corner of my eye, which was how I realized I was crying.

Not in pain, but from the completeness, and the warmth, and how I almost felt like I was transcending the barriers of my own body, merging with Holden and Nolan.

“So good,” I gasped. “So fucking good.”

“You’re so perfect,” Holden whispered. “So gorgeous with two cocks inside you. You’ve never been more beautiful.”

Then he began to move, thrusting into me, and another wave of tingles rushed across my body. Fucking hell. The pressure and movement combined to make it impossible to think at all. All I could do was exist and breathe and float on the flood of ecstasy sweeping me away.

It was slippery and warm and the sounds of skin on skin were unmistakable. It felt filthy, and a little bit divine.

Holden’s hand still rested on my cheek, and I reached for it, brought it to my lips, and kissed his knuckles. Behind me, Nolan began to moan a steady stream of “*fuck yeahs*” and “*oh, gods*,” and Holden smiled down at me like I was some kind of angel.

Stroking my cock with my other hand, I was getting close to coming myself when Nolan groaned, “Oh fuck, I’m gonna come. I’m gonna—fuck, should I pull out?”

“No, no,” I said, shaking my head frantically. “Come inside me. Give it to me.”

Maybe it was knowing that a relative stranger was going to come inside me, with Holden’s permission, with Holden *watching*, that pushed me to the edge. Maybe it was knowing how depraved I must sound, how desperate to be used. Or maybe it was the way Holden growled, “You like that, don’t you? Taking his load. My little cumslut.”

But one way or another, I did come, just as he said that, shooting into my hand. He was right. I *was* a cumslut, and I was his, and I was floating now, my entire body tingling when Holden asked, “Where do you want it, baby? In your mouth or your ass?”

“My ass,” I begged. “Please, Daddy, come in my ass.”

I swear to God, I was flying.

I don’t know how long we lay there, tangled together, our three bodies heaving with the aftershocks of pleasure, before Nolan’s cock finally slid out of my ass. That seemed to trigger something in Holden, because he shifted, and I could feel him start to pull out, too.

“Wait,” I said, grabbing his wrist. I was so stretched out now, my hole aching so sweetly, that I wasn’t sure I’d ever close back up again. I certainly didn’t think I could keep their cum inside me without help. “My plug. Put it in. So I don’t—don’t lose it.”

Holden found it on the banquette and smiled. “You want to keep those loads in you till morning?”

Did I ever.

I whined as Holden pulled out, then sighed in pleasure as he pushed the plug into me. My hole closed around it gratefully. It felt right, being plugged. I could get used to this.

Holden stroked my cheek. “I’m so proud of you, you know that?”

I grinned, exhausted but happy. “I feel like I deserve a blue ribbon or something.”

Nolan laughed behind me. “I’m not sure we have any ribbons, but I might be able to scrounge up some leftover eclairs from the kitchen. If you’re not feeling cream-filled enough.”

“What do you think?” I asked, looking up at Holden.

“I think that sounds like an excellent idea,” he said with a laugh. He leaned in and kissed my forehead. “And I’m beginning to understand why people like to share dessert.”

ALSO BY SPENCER SPEARS

Thanks for reading!

If you enjoyed this story and are wondering just who Nolan is, you might enjoy my Murphy Brothers series.

Check the series out below, or *flip to the next page to read the first chapter of Wild Heart now.*

Wild Heart

Free Spirit

Savage Grace

WILD HEART - FIRST CHAPTER

Read the first chapter of *Wild Heart*, Book 1 in my Murphy Brothers series...



Chapter 1 Mal

I have what you might call a boyfriend-picking problem.

In that I'm terrible at it, and pretty much only pick guys who should not, under any circumstances, be anybody's boyfriend.

Really. It's uncanny. Bees communicate through dance, bats use fucking sonar to get around, dolphins can be taught to do calculus and honestly, none of that is as impressive as my ability to consistently, unerringly, pick the absolute worst possible guys to date.

You could blindfold me, plug my ears, stick eucalyptus-soaked cotton balls up my nostrils to prevent me from inhaling any pheromones, and set me loose in a room full of two-hundred and fifty perfectly acceptable men, and I guarantee you I'd find my way, zombie-like in my determination, to the two-hundred fifty-first, who would be a terrible choice.

It's not just boyfriends, actually. No, my talent is far too impressive to be confined to such a limited scope. It applies to any guy I've ever slept with. Any guy I've ever so much as looked twice at. If I'm attracted to him at all, there's something wrong with him. And I don't just mean *'never tips his baristas'* or *'farts in an elevator and doesn't apologize'* wrong. I mean like, actually wrong.

And I never fucking see it coming.

Every time, I tell myself that this guy is different. This guy sees the real me. Likes the real me. Respects, admires, *loves* the real me—not just my body, and not just my low self-esteem that makes me fall for unsuitable men with an alacrity usually reserved for younger sisters in Jane Austen novels.

Every time, I tell myself that I've learned from the past, that I've grown, that I'm different now, and this thing, this time, this guy is for real.

It never is.

Case in point, Stephen, the current boyfriend. Well, ex-boyfriend.

Because let's be clear, I broke up with him—twice. I ended things, politely, and told him in no uncertain terms that we

were done. I left the fucking state. But evidently, that wasn't enough to get my message across. I sure know how to pick 'em.

If I'd had any sense—wishful thinking, apparently—I would have known something was off about Stephen the first night I met him, when he came into the kitchen at Nourriture, the restaurant where I'd been working as a sous-chef, and said he wanted to meet me. What I'd taken for confidence, and a flattering interest in me, my friend Nolan, the manager at Nourriture, had called arrogance, and *'next level creepiness.'*

Guess which one of us turned out to be right?

If I could go back and take past-Mal by the scruff of the neck and shake him, I would—except I know it wouldn't do any good. Past-Mal wouldn't have listened. He never did. And honestly, who was to say that present-Mal or future-Mal was going to be any better at making responsible decisions?

The best thing I could do for myself was to stop dating anyone. Stop sleeping with anyone. Remove myself from the dating-and-fucking pool entirely. At 27 years old, I had a decade's worth of experience telling me that I was never going to get any better at picking guys who didn't turn out to be assholes.

It was time to call it quits.

And if I made it through tonight, I would.

“Mal, get the fuck out here right now, you ungrateful slut!”

I stared at the door of my motel room, heart in my throat. How the hell had Stephen found me?

“Jesus Christ, is that him?” Nolan asked, his shocked voice coming through the phone.

I took a shaky breath, then another, as Stephen continued to pound on the door. Fuck, this was bad. Bad enough that my psycho ex had tracked me across state lines after I’d ended things, but if he kept up like this, he was going to wake up the whole motel. I didn’t need a bunch of irate travelers yelling at me in their pajamas on top of the shit Stephen was screaming at me now.

“I don’t know how he found me,” I said, my voice wavering.

I wished it sounded stronger, wished I could pretend to Nolan, if not to myself, that I wasn’t completely fucking terrified. But who was I kidding? I’ve never been strong. That’s the whole problem.

“I know you’re in there, Mal,” Stephen shouted again. “You’re pathetic, but I’m not going to let you get away with hiding from me. Now stop running from your problems and come out here and talk.”

I shuddered. I’d left Washington, D.C. desperate to get away from Stephen. After my first attempt at breaking up with him had only led to more disaster, I’d known I had to leave town if I were ever going to truly get away from him. But he’d been watching me like a hawk since then, effectively keeping me prisoner in his apartment.

I know that sounds absurd—I’m 27 years old, and in theory, all I had to do was just walk out the door. But the past year had been... not great.

I'd thought I was too smart to fall for someone as manipulative as Stephen. Too smart to give someone else control of my life. As it turns out, I wasn't. And by the time I'd realized how fucked up things were, I had no job, no money, and practically no friends left. Stephen had even taken my set of keys to the apartment, so I couldn't leave the building without him. Not if I wanted to come back.

"Call 911," Nolan said. "Call them and tell them there's a psychopath trying to break into your motel room."

"911?" I cringed at the thought. Calling 911 meant explaining how I'd gotten into this situation. How I'd let myself get so dependent, how I'd been stupid enough to let it go so far. "You're only supposed to call them for emergencies. I don't want to waste their time."

The fact of the matter was, Stephen's words made my gut roil because they were true. I was pathetic, and I'd made a complete mess of my life. Sure, Stephen was the cause of the problem, but I was the one who'd let him do this to me. It was my fault.

Yesterday, he'd finally decided he trusted me enough to leave me alone in the apartment as he took a meeting for work downtown. I knew I only had a few hours, and that I needed to make the most of them. I'd grabbed my phone, wallet, and a small duffel bag with some clothes and run to Union Station. The first bus leaving the city was bound for Savannah, Georgia and I'd gotten on it without looking back.

I'd gotten a room at a shitty roadside motel on the outskirts of the city. It was all I could afford. I shouldn't have bothered, really—it's not like I'd been able to sleep at all last

night, or even breathe normally. It wasn't until this afternoon that it finally sank in that I was free. I'd called Nolan to let him know where I'd ended up.

And then Stephen had found me.

"Mal, your possessive, rage-filled, and frankly terrifying ex-boyfriend has now refused—twice—to accept that you wanted to break up with him. He's chased you across state lines, God knows how. And now he's standing outside your motel room yelling obscenities at you? He's threatening you. This is an emergency, and it's exactly what 911 is here for."

"He hasn't actually threatened me, technically," I said, though I knew I was just searching for the flimsiest of excuses for my gut-level certainty that getting the cops involved would only make me more humiliated. "Not physically, anyway."

"Mal, I'm giving you 'til the count of ten, and if you don't open this door, you're going to regret it," Stephen bellowed. "I've been gentle so far. You know you don't want me to get angry."

Shit, there was no way my neighbors in the rooms next door hadn't heard that.

"You were saying?" Nolan said, clearly having heard Stephen himself. "Besides, what do you call that time he broke your fingers. Or the time he made you—"

"Okay, okay, I get it," I interrupted. I didn't like to think about those incidents.

Stephen had always been possessive, and demanding, even from the beginning. I hadn't liked those qualities, exactly, but I'd looked past them because it was so damn unlikely

that someone like him would want me. Stephen worked for a huge international consulting firm, made crazy amounts of money, was well-read, well-spoken, charming, and hot as hell.

Maybe he was a little intense sometimes, I'd figured, but no one was perfect, right? He told me he loved me after only a month of dating. No one had ever said they loved me before. So I'd told myself that maybe this was just what love was like.

"One." Stephen's voice came through the door as clearly as if he were in the room with me. "Two. Three."

I should have known Stephen wouldn't give up easily. He never did, when he wanted something. He said that was what made him so good at his job. I'd just never thought I'd be the thing he decided he had to have.

"I'll call you back," I told Nolan, taking a step towards the door.

"What? No. Mal, what are you doing?" Nolan said, agitated. "Do not go outside. Do not go talk to him. You can't—"

A crash interrupted both of us, and the windows of my motel room shook. I'd drawn the curtains shut as soon as I'd checked in, but I was positive that if I opened them now, I'd see that the glass had been cracked.

"If I stay in here, it's only going to get worse."

I swallowed hard. I had no idea how to get out of this, but I knew I had to stop it, somehow.

“It’s going to be a hell of a lot worse if you let him lay hands on you again,” Nolan countered. “Please, Mal, I am begging you, don’t go out there. Don’t—”

There was an even louder noise this time, more of a boom than a crash, and the flimsy wood of the motel door buckled inwards.

“I’ll call you back,” I said, hoping like hell I’d be able to follow through on that promise.

I clicked to end the call, then stepped up to the door, praying that it didn’t fly off its hinges as I stood there.

“Stephen?” I asked, trying to get my voice to stop shaking. “Are you there? I’m coming out.”

The noises stopped and I opened the door. It stuck a little, like the damage it had suffered had warped the latch. When I finally got it open, I stepped out into the humid night and saw Stephen holding a baseball bat in his right hand, peering down at the other end of the bat as he bounced it against his left palm.

It was so odd. The guy looked like a demigod, all tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed grace. Broad shoulders filled out a suit I knew had cost thousands of dollars, a suit that covered a physique he spent hours in the gym maintaining, every day. And he was standing there with a baseball bat. I didn’t even know he’d owned one. In all the time I’d spent with him, I’d never seen him watch a game.

The whole scene was incongruous, to be honest. Stephen insisted on luxury, always. He refused to go to clubs without VIP rooms, restaurants that didn’t take months to get into, establishments that didn’t have valet. I’d never seen him in a

place as run-down as this motel, with its broken vending machines, flickering street lamps, and trash-filled parking lot. The warm summer air smelled like diesel fuel and day-old pizza—not a pleasant combination.

As I closed the beat-up door behind me, a woman several doors down stuck her head out of her room. Checking to see if someone was getting murdered, maybe. I wasn't sure if what she saw convinced her everything was okay, or convinced her it was simply better not to get involved, but she pulled her head back in and closed her door immediately.

Maybe I'd overestimated my fellow travelers' sense of civic duty. Or maybe violent shouting and baseball bats were regular features at places like this.

Stephen looked up from the bat and smiled. His eyes were cold.

"Come to your senses at last. I knew you couldn't stay away. You need me too much."

I took a deep breath. I knew I was shaking, but dammit, I was going to try to sound firm.

"I don't need you. And I am staying away. I don't want to be with you anymore. I broke up with you."

"That's what you said the last time." Stephen's smile grew tighter. "But you still came crawling back."

"Only because you begged me, and promised to change. But you didn't. You pushed me down a set of stairs and then you locked me in your apartment."

“To keep you safe. Especially as you recovered. And to keep you from making more mistakes.” Stephen’s tone grew warmer, but there was a rancid undercurrent to it. It was warm the way rotting trash is warm. “You’re too gullible, Mal. Too weak. You trust your friends, when all they want to do is use you, and then drag you down. You trust anyone who gives you a second glance, and then you let them convince you to cheat on me and you—”

“I never fucking cheated on you,” I shot back, and I was angry enough that my voice stopped shaking. “Never. I don’t know how you got that in your head, but I never did. And Nolan was just trying to help me. *Help* me. Not control me, like you.”

“Maybe you need to be controlled,” Stephen spit back. “Keep you from being a little slut with anyone who gives you attention.”

“I don’t need anything from you.”

“Then why are you out here talking to me?”

“Because you were trying to break your way into my room with a baseball bat, why do you think?”

“I think you’re in denial.” Stephen’s voice was flat and hard. “About what you really want.”

I looked at him helplessly.

“I broke up with you the first time because I wanted to get away from you. I broke up with you the second time and left the fucking city because I wanted to get away from you. I took a bus across multiple state lines, over five hundred miles to get away from you. I don’t know how much clearer I can get about what I want.”

“And yet you brought your cell phone.” Stephen cocked his head to the side. “Knowing how easy that would make you to track. You’re telling me you really didn’t want me to follow?”

“Fuck no,” I exploded. “You tracked my cell phone? How did you even—I don’t even think that’s legal.”

“It is when I pay for the damn thing.”

A cold knot formed in my stomach. Right after I’d moved in, Stephen had pressured me to let him buy me a new phone and join his plan. He’d said it made him sad to see the shitty old phone I was using, and framed joining his plan as something that just made economic sense.

Had he foreseen a situation like this? How long had he been spying on me, using my phone to track where I went? I already knew his thinking was messed up when it came to his belief that I was cheating on him, but this was way beyond the shallow waters of ‘messed up.’ This dove straight into the deep end of paranoia.

“If you think that I’m going to let something as trivial as you running away to Georgia stop me from getting what I want, you have seriously underestimated me.”

The night air, already dark, seemed to blacken around Stephen, and I knew with a sick certainty that he was speaking the simple truth. He was never going to stop until he had me under his thumb again. Not as long as there was any way he could find me. And once he got me back, I didn’t think I’d get a third chance to leave.

I needed to disappear.

“I think you knew that,” Stephen continued quietly. “Just like I think that, deep down, you know how much you want me.”

“I—I’m not—I’m just—” I stammered as I looked up into those wintry blue eyes that burned with a cold fury.

Stephen was never going to let me go, if it were up to him. But if I went back with him this time—no. I *couldn't* go back to him this time. It was as simple as that.

But I couldn't say that. My mind raced, heart thumping in my chest, as I tried to stall, tried to find a way out of this. Fuck, why hadn't I listened to Nolan? Why did I have to open the door? If I hadn't, maybe I could have found another way out. Grabbed my bag and—

My eyes went wide. The bathroom window. My room was on the bottom floor, and the screen on the bathroom window was broken. If I could just get back into the room, I could get my stuff and crawl out to the other side of the motel. Go... somewhere. Anywhere. As long as it wasn't here.

It wasn't like I'd unpacked. All I needed was thirty seconds. A minute, max, and I could do it. I *had* to do it. But I had to find some way to get Stephen to let me go back inside, out of his sight.

I licked my lips and tried to smile, make it look like I was softening towards him. I was pretty sure I just looked like I was going to be sick, but it would have to do.

“I just wanted to—”

“Break up with me. I know.” Stephen arched an eyebrow, then took a step towards me. Unable to help myself, I

stepped back. “But let me tell you something about how this works, Malachi, since you don’t seem to understand.”

He began tapping the baseball bat in his hand as he took a second step, then a third, and I backed up slowly against the mangled door.

“You don’t get to break up with me. I tell you when we’re over. And I’m telling you, we are not over. You belong to me. And you’re coming home with me, tonight.”

“No, that’s not—I didn’t mean that I wanted to—” I shook my head like I was worried Stephen wouldn’t understand me. Since I didn’t even know what I was trying to say, exactly, I hoped it was working. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry?” Stephen took a final step, closing the space between us, and he let the bat fall away from his left hand. “You bet your ass you’re sorry. I’m going to show you how sorry you really are.”

The next thing I knew, his hand was at my neck. He squeezed, and suddenly it was difficult to talk. And breathe.

“What are you going to do to me?” I gasped. I didn’t have to work to sound scared. I was.

“What am I going to do to you?” Stephen laughed a short, ugly laugh. “Well, let’s see. For starters, I’m going to punish you for leaving. And you’re not going to like that. But you have to learn, Mal. You have to learn. You’re nothing more than a cheap whore, but I’ve invested too much time and money into trying to make something of you to throw you out just yet. Though maybe that’s exactly what I’ll use you for. Maybe I’ll start using you like the piece of trash you are. Let my friends use you, too.”

His hand squeezed tighter and breathing got distinctly more difficult. My heart was racing now. I didn't want to be scared by what Stephen said, but I couldn't lie—I was. More pressingly, though, I was scared that I was about to pass out, or possibly die, and that seemed like the kind of thing I should deal with first.

“Please,” I said. Or tried to say. I couldn't do more than make a harsh croaking sound. I mouthed the word again, begging Stephen with my eyes to let me go. “Please.”

“I want you to nod,” Stephen said slowly, “if you understand that you are mine. That I can do whatever I want with you, and that there's nothing you can do to stop me. And that you're coming home. Now.”

I nodded frantically. My vision was starting to go funny, sparkly at first, then black around the edges. Fuck, I was nodding for all I was worth, why wouldn't Stephen let me go? I couldn't breathe.

After an eternity, Stephen removed his hand from my neck.

I sucked in a huge breath of air and immediately wished I hadn't. My throat hurt. Even the simple act of inhaling made it feel like it was on fire. My chest heaved, and I desperately wanted to rub at my neck, but Stephen was still only inches away from me, and I knew he hated it when I showed any sign of weakness.

“There,” Stephen said, his voice freakishly mild. “That wasn't so hard, was it?” He brought his hand to my shoulder and rubbed it gently. “I've missed you, Mal. And I know you've missed me. I've never claimed to be perfect, but I love you, and I'll do whatever I need to prove that to you. Got it?”

“Yeah,” I said faintly. “Got it.”

Stephen smiled a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“What do you say?” he prompted.

I stared at him, confused.

“What do you say?” he repeated. “I told you I loved you. What do you say in return?”

“Oh.” I sighed in relief. I didn’t want to say it, but at least I understood. And at that point, all I wanted to do was keep him from hurting me again. And I still had to figure out a way out of this. “I—I love you too.”

If the lie hurt, it was nothing compared to the pain in my throat or the fear gripping my heart.

“Good.” Stephen beamed like a teacher, proud of his star pupil. “Now go get your things. I want you in the car in two minutes. I drove a long way to pick you up, and I have a big day tomorrow.”

I blinked in surprise. Was he handing me the excuse I needed? It seemed too easy, but I wasn’t going to stop and question. I was going to take the opportunity and run with it. Literally.

“Okay.” I hoped my face didn’t betray me. If I looked scared, well, I had a feeling Stephen liked seeing me look nervous. And he’d done plenty tonight to terrify me. “I’ll be right back.”

I turned, my body still trembling, and fumbled with the doorknob. Any second now, he was going to tell me he’d changed his mind and he didn’t want me to get my things.

Or he'd decide to come in and keep an eye on me. Any second now, this was going to slip out of my hands and—

The knob turned, I stepped inside the room, and shut the door behind me. I wanted to sink back against it and let my knees sag. Rub at my throat and just breathe. But there was no time for that.

I tore through the room, grabbing the sweatshirt that I'd dropped on a chair and my toothbrush from the edge of the sink. I took about ten seconds to shove everything back into my tiny duffel. Everything save my phone, which I left lying on the bed where I'd dropped it.

Sorry, Nolan.

I'd call him once I got to—well, once I got somewhere safe. Wherever that was.

I zipped the duffel and threw it over my shoulder. All my earthly possessions fit into a bag smaller than an airplane carry-on. In other times, I might have found that sad, but tonight, I was grateful.

With a final rushed glance around the room, I nodded. A terrified look at the door sent me back towards it, slipping the chain lock into place and, at the last second, turning the deadbolt. I hoped Stephen had gone back to the car already and hadn't heard any of that. But even if he'd heard everything, I felt safer with the lock turned.

The whole mad scramble took less than a minute, which was good, because Stephen insisted on punctuality. If he said two minutes, he meant it. I flew to the bathroom and heaved on the sliding glass of the window, shoving it up and then pushing the remains of the screen out. I had to stand

up on the toilet to get my leg over, and I couldn't stop picturing Stephen coming in to find me straddling the sill, half-in, half-out.

But in less time than I'd thought, I was letting myself down the other side, landing in the overgrown crabgrass on the far side of the motel. The air felt even stickier on this side of the building, away from the intrusion of the parking lot and street lamps, but I supposed that was to be expected. July in Georgia was never going to be anything but sweltering, even at midnight.

The building was one long, low-slung row of rooms backing up against a patchy forest that appeared to be more kudzu than trees. But I could hear the highway on the far side of the woods, and I knew there was a truck stop by the exit. Someone there had to give me a ride, right? It didn't matter where they were going, as long as it was away from here.

I took a deep breath and ran into the woods.

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