

TIOS

III JOE

*Our Time Was Now*



*Isaac Byrne*

# **Our Time Was Now**

**By Isaac Byrne**

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## Chapter One

*“Good afternoon, graduating seniors of the Northside High School class of 2019, parents, family, faculty, and guests. We are assembled here today for the last time to commemorate our years as Nighthawks. So, really, this is it. The end. Four long years, and in a few minutes, Principal Beckmann will hand us our diplomas. Then it’s over.*

*As I worked on this speech, I found I was thinking a lot about that. Endings, departures, farewells. Moving on, losing touch. Forgetting. As someone who spent four years here working on the yearbook staff – you can still order yours in the lobby, by the way – the idea of moving on and losing this piece of ourselves... I have to say, it didn’t sit well with me. Don’t get me wrong, you guys. I’m as excited as you are to take the next step. Do some “adulthood,” as the parents think the kids say. Still, as I lace up my metaphorical boots and prepare to embark on that grand adventure called life, there’s a big part of me that is going to miss sitting around Northside in my metaphorical socks. While I was trying to organize my thoughts, I had a bit of a realization that brought me a little comfort with that dissonance.*

*Are you ready?*

*We will always be Nighthawks. Whether these years were engraved in our hearts, or embroidered there, or for some of us flat-out burned into us, it will always be a part of who we are. I still remember a local history field trip from Mr. Wentworth’s social studies class, going to the cemetery at St. Vincent’s and seeing these tombstones with these little birds chiseled into the stone.*

*These years have changed us. While we will keep growing and changing after we depart, today marks the final day of our growth as Nighthawks, and the first day of our transformation into what comes next. So while yes, graduation is an ending, it is also the start of our new beginning – yet still as Nighthawks.*

*We all of us are Northside, forever.*

For the second time that school year, Conner fainted in Miss C’s classroom. At least this time he was luckier about it. For one, he had an audience of one, and for two, Amanda managed to dart across the room in time to catch him. He’d nearly concussed himself the first time, after Jordan humiliated him by announcing to the class that Heather had rejected him. Today, he came to propped up in Amanda’s arms as she smoothed his hair and murmured soothing words he wasn’t yet able to comprehend.

So at least the waking up part was a little better this time.

His sight came back into focus over a few seconds, though as with his faculties, the fuzziness at the edges took some time yet to fade. “You back with me?” she asked.

“Y-yeah. I think so. Wow. Did I...?”

“You did. Nasty habit you’re developing there, from what I’ve heard.”

He grimaced, still trying to take stock of his surroundings. The clock on the wall said 3:20, so he hadn’t been out long. Maybe only seconds. Conner tried to slow his thoughts, but succeeding only made them start racing all over again as he remembered what had just transpired. Suddenly he realized his laptop was still open to Amanda’s profile picture. Had she seen it? By reflex he snapped the computer shut.

She laughed. “You and Jordan in here browsing porn or something?”

What little guile he possessed had not yet returned to him. What was he supposed to say? That he’d just discovered that TIOS had conjured her out of thin air? That she might be the physical embodiment of a stock photo and Jordan’s planted rumor? “Uh, yeah. Something like that.” Wait, what? What did he just agree to?

She arched an eyebrow, but seemed to accept he wasn’t himself yet. In any case, she didn’t look like someone who’d caught him snooping on her, and he tried to come back to his senses. With all that had just happened, that was no easy feat. “All right, weirdo. I’m gonna get you a bottle of water. You stay put, take deep breaths, and no more porn, OK?” She squeezed his shoulder and hurried out of the room.

Before he could even think what he could say to her, what he might do about Jordan and his despicable abuse of TIOS, Kristy rushed into the room, the concerned look on her face assuring him that Amanda had told her what had happened.

“Conner? Are you all right? You look white as a sheet. Oh, sweetie...” She gave him a firm hug, then fanned him with some papers from her desk. “What’re we gonna do with you, huh?”

“I’m sorry.” He didn’t know what else to say. “I think I’m OK. I just need a minute to get myself right.”

“I’m taking you to the hospital, young man. Mrs. Bissell obviously didn’t know what to do for you last time around, so no more school nurses for you. You get yourself composed, then I’ll get you to my car.”

“I... should we be seen together like that?” How was that his first thought at a time like this?

“Medical emergencies are a valid exception to our protocol, sweetie. If Amanda had fainted after being rejected by you, I’d be taking her there instead.”

“What? If she... what?” He shook his head, which only made it swim harder. He gripped his desk for a long moment, dizziness threatening to drop him all over again for a sickening moment. “Do you think I asked Amanda out?”

Her head tilted to one side. “Didn’t you?”

“No!”

“Oh. Sorry, I only... after Heather last semester...”

“I don’t faint every time a girl turns me down, you know.”

“As a girl who’s turned you down, I know.” She patted his shoulder. “So what did happen then?”

“I…” He stopped himself. What had happened was that he’d discovered that Jordan had stolen his TIOS password and used the access to give himself a harem of half-willing slave girls from among the upperclass student body. Add to that, the guy had pointed him to that bizarre anomaly in Amanda’s student profile. Conner wasn’t quite sure what the full implications were as yet, but it didn’t make him rest easy. Yet it was the other thing he’d learned that stayed his tongue.

*“I won’t try to get in your way [Jordan], even if yeah, part of me wants to.” – Conner Fishers*

Conner had been edited by TIOS. Though he knew what had happened, it didn’t remove that piece inside him that prohibited him from trying to interfere. So this was what it felt like to be under the influence of the program! It wasn’t some klaxonic compulsion in his head controlling him, or a whisper from a burning bush compelling obedience. It was a feeling, that same feeling he’d had when he’d spoken those words – a sense that whatever Jordan was up to was drama he didn’t want in his life. Not worth it. Even if the desire to interfere didn’t quite go away.

Telling Kristy, he had no doubt, would lead to interference. Conner banished the thought of telling her, and made himself continue his reply as she looked on, concerned. “I just skipped lunch is all. Low blood sugar.”

Her eyes narrowed in suspicion for only a moment, but then Amanda came back in with a bottle of water. “I had this in my locker. It’s not super cold, but it should be OK.” She twisted the cap, and the two women watched him drink like they were nurses presiding over a truculent patient.

“All right, you think you can walk? Time to get you to the hospital. We can call your mother on the way,” Kristy said when he finished.

“I’m feeling better,” he assured her. Total bullshit, but he wanted answers right now more than anything, and the doctors couldn’t give him that. “Really. I’m fine.” He stood up, carefully, though his reassuring smile was met by disapproving frowns on both faces.

“You fainted – again – and you need to see a doctor,” Kristy insisted in her Miss C voice. She used that sometimes when they were role-playing, which was really hot, but this time it was all business.

“I will. But I have things I have to do first. My mom’s gonna make me go anyway, so I’ll just go with her so you won’t have to give up your evening.” He knew as well as she did that Kristy would enjoy taking care of him, but neither could be so up front about that in front of Amanda. “I promise I’ll go. But what I need right now, what would really make me *happy*, is to go get some food in me and get that blood sugar back up. OK?”

She didn't miss his phrasing. "Amanda, can you go with him? I want to know someone is keeping an eye on him. If he tries to avoid the doc, you call me right away, OK?"

"Sure, I can do that," Amanda said. "Is that all right, Conner?"

"Sounds great," he grunted as he stood up. Perhaps the exertion needed to stand didn't merit a grunt, but there was something about being in front of these two beautiful women that prompted him to do a little grunting. Amanda put a supportive arm around his shoulder and guided him out the door.

"You know, I can walk," Conner said once they were a ways down the hall.

"I know."

"I'm not going to fall again. You don't have to..." He looked pointedly at the hand resting on his chest.

"Do you always fight this hard to stop a girl from putting her arm around you?" But she was grinning, and he grinned back. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, her smile, her touch, was helping to stop his head swimming quite so much.

It seemed she had taken Miss C's mandate to put some food in him to heart, and soon they were in his car headed for a diner he knew a ways away from school. It was no Il Parata, where they'd half-jokingly arranged a date a couple weeks back, but her denim cutoff shorts and spaghetti string tank top weren't quite semiformal dining attire. Pappas's would be good. The food was reliable, but more importantly, it was far enough out he didn't think there was even the slightest chance he'd bump into anyone from school. Seeing he didn't seem to want to talk yet, Amanda turned on the radio and left it on his station.

Conner was glad for an excuse not to talk. Not out of his now defunct reason why he hadn't wanted to talk to her most of the semester. No, the days of feeling threatened and crowded by the presence of a second editor-in-chief were over. Now, with what he'd seen in her profile, he was puzzling out exactly what he wanted to say. Conner decided quickly not to leap in with the whole truth. Heck, he wasn't even certain what the whole truth was. From there, it was fast clear he couldn't do partial truth either. He'd tell her about TIOS and what it could let her do when he was sure she could handle it.

But by the time they were seated in a comfy corner booth, he at least had a guess at where to begin. A season interviewer, Conner already had an approach in mind. Their waitress took their drink orders, and away he went.

"So. Four months in, you're officially a Nighthawk. How's it feel?"

He knew that a lot of women might find a line like that too corny to merit anything but rolled eyes. Amanda, though, was a kindred spirit, and visibly warmed to the question. "You know, it was a little weird at first, but I have to say, I really love NHS. Of all the high schools on the planet, I get the best one. Lucky me, ya know?"

The quote from her profile flashed before his eyes. *I heard she's basically a female version of Conner.* Her response was too close to what he himself might have said – or was he being paranoid? “That’s great. We’re lucky to have you.”

“Easy now, or somebody might think you actually like me.”

“What would the neighbors say?”

She patted his hand, and to his surprise left hers there a moment, giving it a little squeeze. If he’d never so much as talked to a girl before, there still would have been no mistaking the affection in those big brown eyes. He made himself not stare. “So, not that there’s any liking going on, but maybe a little curiosity. Only a little though,” he joked. “Tell me about yourself.”

“Am I being interviewed? Not to be modest, but I think we might want to focus on students who’ve been around longer.”

“No! Geez, I’m trying to get to know you. I realized we’ve been working together all semester, but I hardly know anything about you outside of school.”

Amanda shrugged. “Not much to tell, really. I’m–”

“So – sorry – you guys know what you wanna order?”

Conner’s fist clenched in frustration under the table at the return of their waitress. “I’m fine with just the drink,” he said.

“No he’s not,” Amanda corrected. “Remember passing out earlier? Come on, you need some calories in you.” She kicked him reprovably under the table.

“You need a couple minutes then?” the woman asked.

“Yeah, I guess so.” She assured them she’d be back. “So. You were saying.”

“I was saying there’s not much to say,” she answered, looking down at her menu. “Are the skilletts any good here? I had a light lunch myself, and I am a sucker for breakfast food. I almost never get to eat it, but I freaking love it.”

“Me too. Liking it, that is. My mom’s really awesome about getting up to make breakfast for me and Angelica. You know her? Angelica Buck?”

She nodded, not looking up. “Yeah, a little. She’s your stepsister, right?”

“Yeah. Her dad married my mom summer before last.” Back then, she’d been entering college. And not addicted to his friend Owen’s schlong. “You guys have sex ed together, right?”

“Mm.”

“Is that weird?” he probed. “I mean, being a senior in high school and still having to learn about the birds and the bees.”

She shrugged. “Eh.”

“C’mon,” Conner pressed. “I gotta know. Is it like an advanced curriculum? They skip past the usual anatomy stuff and go right to explaining how to find the g-spot?” His cheeks flushed a bit after the words came out; he’d been spending too much time around Hailey, picking up some of her shamelessness about sex talk.

Amanda didn't seem fazed by it, though. "Eh, it is what it is. I don't really talk to it. What happens in sex ed, stays in sex ed. Ya know?"

"Yeah. I know." Conner remembered the picture saved to the file Jordan had made for his sex ed class. A poster featuring that precise phrase. There was no use trying to push her past this block. "So what about you? Any brothers or sisters?"

"Nope, only child. You got any aside from your stepsis?"

"Nah. My dad passed away when I was still pretty young, and they never got around to having a second kid. And when my mom remarried, I guess they decided they didn't want kids so far apart in age. How about your parents?"

"Uh, only child, like I said." She gave him a wry look.

"No, I got that, but I meant what're they like?"

"I thought you weren't going to interview me."

"I'm not! I'm trying to get to know you."

The waitress returned for their orders – he had to admit her western skillet sounded good, and followed suit – but this time Conner didn't let that put him off. "Anyway, I was saying, trying to get to know you."

"You don't have to try this hard, you know."

He attempted to read her expression. "What do you mean?"

"Conner, I think I've made it clear by now that I like you. You don't have to be all 'look at all the interest I'm showing' to try to impress me, OK? I like you." She took a deep breath. "That's weirdly hard to say. But there. Said it. Ten points, Carpenter."

Conner couldn't help but grin his dopy grin. A pretty girl said she liked him, and like that, it was suddenly hard to focus past it to the very real issues in his life. "I'm not trying to impress you. I genuinely want to get to know you better."

She flashed a pleased, toothy smile. "I bet you say that to all the editors-in-chief."

"Only the ones with legs like yours." She laughed, and he laughed with her.

Inside, some tiny voice was reminding him about Heather, and Hailey, and Kristy, but it was drowned out by more basic instincts. "But yeah, don't you think it's weird we never talk about non-work stuff? I feel like I hardly know you, in some ways. Like I don't even know where you live." TIOS had listed no address for her. Was she just living on the street somewhere? He might have thought she was staying in the yearbook office given her key, but he was in there enough on evenings and weekends to have noticed.

"Well sure. I mean, most Nighthawks you've known from elementary and middle school," she said. "You rode the bus with them, went to parties at their houses, had their parents chaperone field trips. I'm the new girl. Ten weeks to go in the school year, so I guess I always will be."

Was she being evasive on purpose? "Well? Where *do* you live?"

"Basically in the editor's office, these days," she joked. "When I'm not out dealing with the latest 'emergency' from Donovan at the copy shop. Oh my gosh, speaking of,

you're not going to believe what he tried to pull the other day. So you know how he's been trying to push the new microlaser print quality on us?"

Conner was normally a sucker for shop talk, so despite his burning desire for answers, he let her distract him for the time being. She told him all about the situation, and he was as usual drawn into the nerdy drama of it. It was nice being with somebody who didn't merely tolerate his passion, but embraced it herself. Even Kristy didn't love yearbook like he did. For her, it was still only a job at the end of the day; her passion was helping young people, and yearbook was somewhere down the list. For Conner and Amanda, it was their calling.

Their food eventually came. Conner doggedly tried to get anything out of her, but there was nothing doing. Asking about where she'd grown up led to "nowhere special – not even worth the words it'd take to describe it."

Following up on something she said about her own plans after graduation thereafter got him, "I don't really know yet. I know everyone's in a big rush and all, but I've got so much on my plate now I'm not even worried about then yet."

A simple, direct inquiry over the kinds of guys she'd dated in the past got only a shrug, and then, "man, I'm going to have such bad onion breath after all that."

She was impenetrable. If he'd been unsure before, the fingerprints of TIOS meddling were all over her. In the course of an hour and a half, he learned nothing about her life before Northside, her plans after Northside, or anything whatsoever she did when she wasn't at Northside. She'd talk class stuff, gossip, pop culture, and of course geek out with him on yearbook stuff, but he couldn't get a word out of her about her own life outside of school.

Eventually, she seemed to notice not only his probing, but his frustration. "Is something wrong, Conner? Did I say something?"

"What? No, no, it's nothing. You're fine."

"Because you've been giving me the third degree here, and I don't get it. We've worked side by side for months. We don't have to do this whole get-to-know-you stuff, just because it's... you know."

"Because it's what?"

"I mean, our first date. Right?"

Conner nearly inhaled a mouthful of coffee; Amanda rushed over to pat him on the back as he sputtered. "Wow, so I'll take all that choking to mean you hadn't counted this as a date."

"How is this a date?" he asked.

"I don't know – we're sharing a meal, aren't we? Does it have to be planned in advance and two hours later in the evening to be official?"

"No, I mean – I never asked you out!"

“I know. Believe me, I know. But why not, you know? You’re single, I’m single. And after that moment, earlier... I thought...” She glanced down. Bashful was an unusual look on her.

Conner suddenly remembered the moment she was referring to, though. Amanda had told him during class that afternoon that she’d found a way that they could extend his TIOS edits for at least another year. This news came on the heels of a weeks-long campaign of do-goodery on his part, and in his elation at her hard work, there had been a tender moment, heads pressed together, lips close but not quite closing.

That had been two hours ago, though it felt like two years with all that had happened since.

“Oh. Oh gosh.” He was at a loss. He would have thought having three separate concurrent sexual partners would have taught him something about talking to women, yet he didn’t have a clue how to proceed. “I’m sorry. I’m so bad at this.”

“Yeah ya are.” She elbowed him, but only gently. “Remember how I was all ‘Conner, I like you’ and you were all ‘anyway how are your folks’ – remember? So bad.”

“Yeesh. Sorry. Amanda, I do like you. I really do. I know, for a long time, I... we... well, you were there. You know how I was. I wish I’d been as good as you about sharing our responsibilities, and we wouldn’t have taken so long to get to this point.”

“You know, after we kissed at King of Hearts, I thought sure you were going to ask me out.”

“I, um... sorry.”

She rolled her eyes. “It’s not an accusation, ya big goober. And it’s not a request for an explanation, either. I only wanted you to know I’ve been waiting, so I’m probably ahead of wherever you’re at with this.”

“With the maybe-a-date thing?”

“Yeah. For instance, how I called it a first date and you still aren’t sure if it is one.”

“Oh. Yeah.”

“So...” She craned her slender neck towards him, and Conner shoved his empty plate aside quickly so that the dangling strands of her auburn hair wouldn’t get grease on them. “What do I need to do to help you catch up?”

“Catch up? Are you asking how to get me to like you?”

“I guess? I don’t know, Conner! I’m not exactly very good at talking to guys either, if you hadn’t noticed. But I want this to be a date, and I want you to want that, too. So... how do I do that?”

There were a hundred reasons he shouldn’t answer that question. Three of them very significant reasons. Yet in that moment, she was the person in front of him, and she was so pretty, and so sweet, and had made herself so vulnerable...

Instinct took over.

“You could kiss me again.”

“Again? Last time you kissed me!”

“No way, that was all you. I remember, because you were—”

She lunged the final few inches and kissed him. It was a brief kiss, only a second, but it drained a year of tension out of him. Her lips were as soft and warm and wet as they had been in those daydreams he could only now admit to himself he’d been having all semester long.

“Well?” she asked.

“I’m getting closer,” he said coyly.

She kissed him again. This time, she wasn’t just doing it to shut him up. Her lips were joined by her hand on the back of his head, long nails combing across his scalp. Good god, she knew how to relax him.

“So is this a date yet?” she asked as she came around to his side of the table.

“Maybe? This is about how I kiss my totally platonic friends when we go out for a bite...”

She grinned, but then they were really, truly kissing. She welcomed the presence of his hand atop her thigh, and he the occupation of his mouth by Amanda’s tongue. He leaned in, hungry for more, and—

“So you guys ready for the check, then?”

The two broke apart. Conner was blushing furiously, though Amanda’s response was the one he had wanted to make to the woman earlier. She had an impatient look about her, and he wondered how long she’d stood there watching.

It was Amanda who replied first. “Lady, if you interrupt us again, I swear to god in heaven I’ll start throwing stuff. OK?”

The woman looked surprised at the reaction, then hastily dropped the slip of paper on the table and scurried away. “Ah yes, how could I forget this bitch is off the leash,” Conner said, quoting something she’d said in one of their first encounters, when he’d been trying to stake out territory and she’d not allowed herself to be pushed around.

She remembered it, too, thankfully, or he might have had apologies to make. “Something something trail of blood.” Then she picked up the check and reached for her purse. Somewhere inside, part of Conner was wondering, if she has no job and no parents, how does she have money? But most of him was preoccupied by those ruby red lips.

“I can pay,” he offered.

“You almost passed out a couple hours ago. I don’t think I can tell Miss C I was pampering you if I let you buy me a meal, and I really want a good grade.”

He grinned. “Fair enough. Thank you.”

She glanced and saw this was the sort of place where you paid at the register.  
“Shall we conclude our date?”

“Hey now, I haven’t agreed to the terms yet,” he teased.

“What? If a kiss that hot doesn’t meet your date criteria, Conner, where’s your threshold?”

“Truth be told I was kinda hoping you’d go down on me.”

She laughed awkwardly loudly, swatted him in the arm and stood up. “Come on. The booth’s too cramped for that.”

That was as far as either of them took the joke. Amanda paid the bill and the two returned to the car, hustling through the parking lot on account of the spring rain shower that had begun while they were eating. As he settled into the driver’s seat, however, Conner was suddenly reminded of his fact-finding mission as he needed a destination.

“Where do you live? So I can drop you off.”

“Done with me just like that, eh?” She laughed off his hasty attempt at an apology. “You really are too easy, Conner. But you’re right, this was a pretty long day, and I still have homework to get to.”

“Yeah, me too.” Did he? He’d forgotten he was a high school student for a while today. “So, where to?”

“You can drop me off at school, actually. I gotta get some stuff out of my locker before I call it a day.”

*Call it a day*, she’d said. Not *head home*. Was it nothing but incidental phrasing? Was *she* nothing but incidental phrasing?

“You got it.”

They listened to music on the way back, and he tried not to crash the car while he stole glances at her damp body glistening in the setting sun. That, at least, went well. At last, he pulled up to the door near the yearbook room, where her key would let her into the school, which had been locked up hours ago. Miss C’s car was gone, and as there were no big events that night, the lot was almost empty, save for those handful of cars that never seemed to leave.

“Here you go, Madame Editor-in-Chief.”

“Thank you, um, Sir Editor-in-Chief? Not sure how that goes. Anyway, thanks, Conner. You feeling better?” She felt his forehead as if to check his temperature, but it was mostly a pretext to ruffle back his hair.

“Yeah. I’m feeling a lot better. Thanks, Amanda.”

She left her hand on his shoulder. “So are we going to do this again?”

He smiled, but this time he couldn’t make himself forget Heather, Hailey and Kristy. But in this moment, he couldn’t exactly tell her about that, nor did he have any sort of reasonable excuse as to why he’d suddenly turn cold.

Besides, what harm could one more date do?

“Yes. Let’s.”

She smiled. “Can I kiss you again?”

“I look forward to that as well.”

“I meant right now, ya dope.” Amanda raised her hands and addressed the sky.

“That boy is gonna be the death of me, I swear.” That was all the more delay either could brook before resuming what they had begun in the diner. Compared to what he’d been growing used to, it was all very tame, just some kissing and light caressing.

Nevertheless, it was Amanda. It was incredible. She was incredible.

Some time later – neither could have said how long – the beams of headlights broke the spell. It turned out to just be someone using the parking lot to make a U-turn, but the damage was done. “I guess I should really go now,” she said.

“Yeah, I guess.”

She kissed him one more time before stepping out of the car. Ironically, while he’d never so much as touched her breasts, when she bent down to address him, the skimpy tank top revealed everything. Lord, she’d done a number on herself. “See you tomorrow?”

“You better.”

She darted in for one last smooch, awkwardly banging her head on the door frame on the way out. Conner hurried to make sure she was OK, but she laughed it off and finally made her exit.

He took a moment to catch his breath – once that swaying backside was no longer prohibiting him from doing so. That impromptu date, discovering all that Jordan had done, learning what Amanda had done in her correspondence with ASAL... it had been a roller coaster of a day. So much so that he nearly made it out of the parking lot before realizing that he’d never gotten around to telling Amanda about TIOS.

It was going to be awkward. Plus he only now realized, once she was in the know, she’d no doubt be looking for all that had been done just as he had. She’d realize she’d modified her own body into its present state of exaggerated beauty. She’d find out that her crush on him was at least in part the doing of Jordan’s editing. How would he explain that he’d made out with her despite knowing her interest was supernaturally decreed?

Then there was her second period sex ed; he couldn’t even imagine how that blow would hurt.

Still, he had to tell her. As much time as she spent in that program, she’d eventually discover it all on her own even if he said nothing, and who knows what she might accidentally edit into being before then. Conner had been lucky that his early mistakes had mostly turned out benign. As of this afternoon, Amanda was no longer editor-in-chief in name only, but also in the eyes of TIOS. What she did could change the

lives of everyone at Northside. He knew Amanda's writing style backwards and front, and it was not unthinkable that she might reach for hyperbole in a way that could spell disaster.

He had to tell her. As daunting as the prospect was, he had to. For her own sake, and for all of Northside.

He turned down a side street and made his way back to the school – and just in time, too. A ways ahead he could see Amanda in his headlights, still wearing nothing but her shorts and tank top despite the drizzle. She glanced in his direction but didn't seem to recognize the car through the glare, and continued across the way. As he drove up, she ducked in between some of the thick fir trees separating the high school from the adjacent apartment complex. Conner didn't want to risk losing her by going back to the street and meandering through the complex's lots. Plus, with the school so quiet tonight, he figured it was safe enough to leave his car parked here in the lane for a few minutes. He turned on his hazards, shut off the engine, and hustled through the trees after her. They were thoroughly wet, and soaked him in the couple seconds he spent squirming through the prickly branches.

On the other side, he was looking at a lot between two buildings. There were a dozen or so cars, a woman walking her dog under an umbrella, and one scrawny tree that was only just budding and concealed nothing.

But no Amanda.

He squinted. It was getting dim, but not so dim that she'd be concealed by shadows. Where on earth could she have gone? He'd been maybe fifteen seconds behind her; the only way she should have been able to escape his line of sight is if she'd gotten past the trees and broken into a dead sprint.

"Amanda?!" he yelled. There was no answer. He tried once more, but it was obvious she either couldn't hear him or had decided not to answer.

He jogged over to the woman and her dog, who was eyeing him warily. "Excuse me, sorry to bother you, but... did you see a young woman run through here? She would've come from the high school, through those trees. Tall, red hair, white shirt?"

"When?"

"Like, thirty seconds ago?"

She shook her head. "Only person I see come through trees is you."

He frowned. "You're sure?"

"Yes. Sure."

He thanked her and left her to her walk, still looking this way and that for Amanda. But there was no way. Even if for some bizarre reason she had tried to outrun him, a six-foot-tall girl sprinting out of the trees was not something anyone would have failed to notice. Conner even ran back to the trees, to see if she might have doubled back, or even stopped inside them. It seemed crazy, but if she was in fact homeless,

maybe...? He didn't know. There wasn't anything there to suggest someone had been camping out, nor any other sign of her passage.

It was as if she'd stepped away from Northside High and ceased to exist.

Conner didn't know what to make of it. However, it wasn't exactly the only unnatural occurrence he was grappling with right now, and he didn't deem it likely he'd unravel this mystery by standing around getting drenched.

What to do now?

Conner went home. Alone. Against his will.

For the first time since he'd turned Hayleigh into Hailey last October, he was himself caught in the path of the tornado. His first instinct had been to go to Kristy's house. As the only woman in his life who knew about TIOS, she was the ideal sounding board for how to proceed. She'd kick Jordan out of yearbook, help keep him away from the program altogether, help him break the news to Amanda and together get these women protected from what Jordan was doing to them. Maybe she'd even come up with a way for them to get restitution of some kind. She'd be the best possible ally against a fiend like Jordan Fishers.

Which was why he couldn't see her. After all, he wasn't about to get in Jordan's way, even if he wanted to.

Hearing his quote echo almost verbatim in his thoughts cooled his blood at least a couple degrees.

There was no way he could tell her any of what he'd learned without her immediately trying to bring it to a halt. Much as Conner wanted to stop Jordan, he couldn't bring himself to get in the guy's way. Evidently that extended to summoning allies to do it for him. He couldn't even make himself go see her. She had a sixth sense, literally, for his happiness, and she wouldn't rest until she'd figured out what was wrong and tried to make it right for him. He couldn't let that happen.

His next consideration was to talk to Hailey, only there, he simply worried that he couldn't trust her. After all, she'd been sleeping with Jordan on the side all semester. Sure, she'd had a crush on Conner for ages, but there were no assurances that in the here and now she wasn't on Jordan's team. He couldn't fault her for sleeping around, considering his own behavior, but he couldn't count on her siding with him over Jordan either. Heck, she wouldn't even have to take a side; all she'd have to do is tell him "Conner was a total wreck" and boom, TIOS could step in and do who knew what.

There was Heather, he supposed. Heather, he knew, had no love for Jordan. Their brief relationship junior year had soured her on him somewhat, but the stunt he pulled at the yearbook holiday party had really turned her against him. Conner would be safe with her. She'd be kind to him, and not force him to answer questions. Just find somewhere quiet, like her greenhouse or their little spot by MacArthur Park, and be tender to him.

Like she'd been forced to do with Jordan countless times over the past few months.

That was his fault. He'd been sloppy. He'd let Jordan find out about TIOS, and let him steal his password. He was partially responsible for this. And because of what had happened to Heather since, he couldn't look her in the eyes just yet.

To be fair, Owen had actually been his second choice for a confidant, but a brief text exchange revealed he was hanging out with Kirsten Vaughan. Owen had invited

Conner to join them, but remembering her name on Jordan's sex ed roster, once more the editor-in-chief didn't think he could sit face to face with the consequences of his actions. It was going to be a major source of anxiety during school tomorrow. At least half of those girls were in one or more of his classes.

Ultimately, he realized, there was nobody to talk to about any of this. He was well and truly at the mercy of the guy who'd been bullying him since elementary school. Worse, so were a lot of other innocent people.

Conner didn't wind up doing the homework he'd mentioned to Amanda. He didn't get caught up on any yearbook work. He sat, and he pondered, and he tried to think of any way out of this. It seemed so futile. Exactly like the quote, he wanted to stop Jordan, but couldn't make himself actually do anything that might do so. It was like one of those lazy Sundays where he knew he had work to do but couldn't muster the will to get off the couch and do it. A block in the mind, and even knowing it didn't belong there did nothing to dispel it.

Around 2 AM he conceded his helplessness and gave up to get some sleep. When his alarm went off four hours later, he was still awake.

## Chapter Two

*For some, these past four years have flown by too fast, yet still many of us have achieved so much. We have among us scholars, philanthropists, celebrities, and champions. Some of us have already achieved beyond what many ever will. These memories, I hope, will stay fresh and keep our pride buoyant as we move into what challenges await us next. Yet we cannot dwell on these accolades.*

*Glory, after all, must be fleeting, or it is not glorious.*

“Don’t forget the balls, bitch.”

Angelica had not forgotten the balls. With their prickly, not-recently-enough trimmed pubes scratching at her chin for the past ten minutes, forgetting them was essentially impossible. Still, Kirsten Vaughan’s comment had not been born of concern for Owen’s balls’ well-being, but rather her insatiable appetite for toying with her enigmatically compliant playmate.

It was all pretty typical. The bitchy commentary; the smell of Kirsten’s pussy and ass right in her face; the condescending pat on the head or “attabitch” when Kirsten felt like lashing out at Angelica’s pride once again; even the cruel perfect of Kirsten’s body was another blow, and no less deliberate.

Angelica could seldom ask Owen to let her tit-fuck him without Kirsten offering those big stupid perky-huge exemplars of hers. When she caught their boyfriend – and Owen was *theirs*, no matter how they played it in public – staring at her ass, the gorgeous blonde was quick to nestle into his lap, pouring her curves onto the front of his pants. Although Angelica had never felt bad about her looks, it was an empirical fact that the girl was just plain prettier. There simply was no metric by which a boy might pick Angelica’s looks over Kirsten’s. Unless he were in love, and even then, it’d be tough.

Owen had never said he loved her anyway, so that was moot.

So yes, this evening’s activities were nothing unfamiliar. Angelica had texted Kirsten after school to see if she could hang out with Owen, and the answer was one of the two usuals – sure you can hang out with us, or no, I’m busy tonight. The former, obviously, today. They’d rendezvoused at Owen’s house after school, milking that precious 3-6 PM time slot when his parents had not yet come home for all it was worth. Not that they didn’t often fuck in the basement with Mr. and Mrs. Gibson upstairs, but then they had to keep it quiet. Besides, the couch was really the only place to mess around, which was not ideal. The floor too, Angelica supposed, but the carpet irritated both girls’ skin, so it seldom saw use. Except for Kirsten keeping Angelica on her knees.

They’d gone inside and started off with idle chitchat. That was as close to an even playing field as things got. Owen warned them about the test they’d have tomorrow in

Mrs. Thuet's class, sharing what questions he remembered that he'd thought were hard enough to pass on. Kirsten showed them this video she'd seen of this girl who'd pranked her cheating boyfriend by using a body double to make it look like she'd jumped out a window and killed herself. Kirsten laughed harder than the others, but Angelica had been cheated on once herself back in high school – the first time through – and had little empathy where cheaters were concerned.

Before long, the statuesque blonde was smirking her telltale smirk and announced that it looked like Angelica was feeling the need again. Angelica shrugged and agreed. What was she going to do? Turn him down? She'd played that game once, and look where it had gotten her.

So Angelica had been privileged to suck him off for a good half hour, which was to be the highlight of her evening. Kirsten Vaughan, after all, did not suck cock unless it was a very special occasion, and she'd taken to letting Angelica drink down his cum once to get Owen's stamina up for her. Meanwhile, the girl lay beside them on the bed, texting Olivia and Hayleigh, while intermittently spanking Angelica's pert little ass like it had stolen something from her.

Then it was Owen's girlfriend's turn, and Angelica was back to awkwardly craning her neck to be in position to lap away at the union of Kirsten's cunt and Owen's cock. At first, once Kirsten seemed to warm up to the idea of having an extra girl in her girlfriendship, Angelica had assumed the queen bee of Northside was simply bi, and that the girl had figured this profoundly submissive playmate of hers could be counted on not to tell.

Over the past month of their strange triangular relationship, though, Angelica had realized that she was not bi. At least, not much. She wasn't repulsed by the idea of an mff threesome, at least, and was occasionally even game for activities that entailed Owen watching the girls from the sidelines. But it wasn't Angelica's mouth, hands, or body that kept the girl so damn horny all the time – and she was that. As much as Angelica knew she herself literally couldn't get enough, Kirsten made it a point to be on hand whenever Owen was about to come. Those were girlfriend duties, not plus-one duties, she said.

So why did she keep Angelica around? Not like it was her obligation to charity. Kirsten was the sort of person who'd stuff her leftovers in a sewer grate in front of a homeless person just to watch the look on their face. In time, Angelica had realized that what really kept her ready to threesome it up at the slightest suggestion was the opportunity to join her sex life with her greatest love.

Namely, mercilessly bullying a girl only barely beneath her on the social totem pole.

To be fair, Angelica didn't actually hate their arrangement, and not only because she considered "hate" a strong term and strived to use it sparingly. If sexuality was

indeed a spectrum, she was probably not far from where she guessed Kirsten herself was, if only because Angelica had a few years on her and had had more time to abandon childish notions of so-called “normalcy.” At least, that was her read. So much of Kirsten’s lust was wrapped up in her petty spites that she was hard to read.

Angelica didn’t even mind Kirsten’s attitude that much. The sex was hot, she got an ample (if never quite sufficient) share of cock, and figured she was building memories and stories that she could someday traumatize her grandkids with.

She’d known girls like Kirsten most of her life, and had been in their crosshairs more than once. She knew full well their psychology was a one-page book that started with narcissism and ended with being empty inside. Hopefully when the bitch went to college next year, she’d meet a few other girls as evil and self-absorbed as her and finally get to have true friends. Heck, maybe she’d even have a life-changing experience and grow up a little, though Angelica deemed it more likely Kirsten’s tombstone would feature the inscription, “She Was Given Everything She Asked For.”

In the meantime, she slurped away, no longer denying to herself that she thought the flavoring of Kirsten’s pussy made for an improvement over Owen’s default musk. Like in most ways, Kirsten wasn’t the real problem.

The real problem was Owen. Or rather, her and Owen.

She hadn’t had a one-on-one talk with him in over a month – not since Kirsten had first caught her trying. The girl made sure of it, running better surveillance than some government agencies. Angelica knew full well Kirsten checked his phone to see who he’d been texting, and while she might have been able to sneak over some night when Kirsten was with her friends, she was as likely to encounter the two of them together. Kirsten had made it clear that if she caught Angelica trying to horn in on her man, she’d never be allowed to so much as smell his cock again. Angelica believed her. It wasn’t worth the risk to try to go around her.

As to what she’d say if she could get Owen alone, she didn’t even know. So many words lurked at the fringes of her heart. *I’m sorry I wasn’t ready to commit.* Or maybe, *let’s have sex with just the two of us sometimes.* Perhaps *do you care about me at all beyond my role in servicing your dick?* and *What about Kirsten? Sames?*

She didn’t know. She just knew she was unhappy with the status quo. It had been over a year since her last serious boyfriend, and she’d ended that fling without looking back. With Owen, she’d actually found somebody she got along with. Sure, they had their little insatiability kink to attend to, but Angelica had always had her sex drive in hyper mode. Particularly since what had transpired at her parents’ wedding summer before last. That had left an impression on her libido that wouldn’t seem to go away.

Besides, they had chemistry. He had that dry, smart-alecky sense of humor that she liked. Didn’t take himself too seriously, didn’t want to cuddle after sex. Said what he

meant, and usually meant something she was on board with. Was willing to take things at her pace. Made her smile.

It hadn't been perfect – the little shit definitely took some liberties with her cock addiction, for one. Then again, it was cool that she turned him on enough that he wanted to take advantage. She was pretty, she knew, but her whole life she'd had her petite physique, overshadowed by the Kirsten Vaughan's of the world. Seeing how she nevertheless had overwhelmed Owen's judgment and even his civility was actually pretty hot. Sure, she'd never had even Kirsten's middling success with getting him to do a little maintenance on those crazy red pubes of his – but she'd been enjoying herself.

Then he'd asked to take things to the next step, and she'd hesitated. Practically overnight, he'd been snatched away from her by somebody who harbored no such qualms. If anything, Owen was the one trying to steer clear of Kirsten's social circle, pack of ass-hats that they were. Now every inch of that scrumptious, freckled cock of his bore a stamp that read: PROPERTY OF KIRSTEN VAUGHAN.

But Kirsten would get bored of it eventually... right?

"Hey, Fun Size, you're slacking," the girl snapped at her.

"I wasn't gonna complain," Owen said, craning his neck around Kirsten's broad, glistening hips to smile at her. Why did she want to slap him more than Kirsten?

"Yeah, yeah, I'm doing my best," Angelica grumbled. Kirsten wasn't in a mood for excuses and pivoted to ride him reverse cowgirl, her usual position for when she wanted to see the irritation she perceived as humiliation in Angelica's eyes. The blonde seized two handfuls of her hair and held her face to where the crotches were gyrating, but after Angelica made a few solid tongue-to-clit connections, she let up and re-focused on Owen. Or rather, the pleasure she was receiving from Owen.

Angelica was doing a good job ignoring how eagerly that pair of masculine hands was grasping at Kirsten's stupid perfect boobs right up until Kirsten noticed her noticing. "You like that, baby? You like my big tits? Yeah, I know you do." She smirked at Angelica and her breasts like they'd each gotten to select their cup sizes from a list, and Angelica had somehow flunked that particular test.

"Owen? Honey, what was that– *OH MY GOD!*" Owen's mother howled in shock and alarm at the sight awaiting her in her son's bedroom. Her son, mounted by the jiggling curves of his school's sexiest young woman, while his best friend's step sister lapped away at the union of their sex.

A series of shrieks, yelps, and a groan of pain as Kirsten lurched forward off of Owen's cock and threatened to break the thing off. Clothes were snatched in a flurry; both girls skipped their bras in their haste to get dressed, simply tossing them in purses. Halfway through, Mrs. Gibson began pounding on the door. "Owen Gibson! You and your little 'friends' had better get dressed right this instant, and then I want you out here. *NOW!* Do you understand me?"

“I’m coming, mom,” he said, tugging up his jeans. He lowered his voice and addressed the girls. “I’m so sorry. You guys better scoot. That was amazing, seriously. I’ll text you both later, OK?”

Kirsten leaned in for a kiss. “You better, babe.”

Angelica was surprised – as was Kirsten – when he then kissed her as well. “Thanks for this afternoon. See you later, Angel.”

He was the only person she’d ever let call her that. Moments like that were why.

It was Kirsten who opened the door, squeezing her body between Mrs. Gibson and the door frame to get by. “Angelica!” the woman said, a clear accusation. “I’m surprised at you! Do your parents know you’re over here?”

“No,” she mumbled. She was twenty-one fucking years old; her parents never knew where she was, and had no right to expect as much. This wasn’t the time to make such points, though, slinking out of her high-school age son’s bedroom, his cock still detectable on her breath.

“Well I assure you they will,” she said. “And you, miss? Who are you?”

“Olivia,” said Kirsten, but even as she spoke the lie, Angelica and Owen were both giving the truthful answer. Kirsten’s glare at the betrayal was reserved for Angelica alone, however.

“Well, Ms. Vaughan, I’ll thank you to leave my home. I’ll be in touch with your parents as well, you can rest assured.”

“You think you scare me, lady?”

“Kirsten...” Owen warned. To his relief, she didn’t press further and simply huffed out of the house.

Angelica wasn’t far behind, but she didn’t miss Mrs. Gibson saying, “It seems we’ll need to keep a closer eye on you from now on,” before the door closed behind her.

It was the start of a very long evening.

True to her word, Mrs. Gibson called Conner’s mom, well aware of who did the parenting in that household. Shannon handled it well when she approached her stepdaughter, going for a combination of reprimanding bad judgment while emphasizing the need for birth control and offering herself for advice. Angelica hadn’t wanted a second mom, but she had to admit that Shannon was a hell of a lot better of a mother than her own drunken excuse for one. Angelica’s dad only chimed in to say he was disappointed and to ask if she was looking to make a reputation for herself. She wondered if back in his day, having a reputation for being willing to double team a guy with another hottie was a bad thing. Wisely, she refrained from asking, and was let off with a mere two week’s grounding.

Grounded. At twenty-one.

Conner came home later than usual and went straight to his room, so at least she had a night off from his pesky attempts at being a brother. She liked the kid well

enough, but she'd had nineteen years as an only child before he came along, and she wasn't going to reinvent herself at this stage in the game. For now, she didn't feel like dealing with his hollow apologies for the tenth time. He'd find out she'd been found out soon enough.

It was late when Owen finally texted her; she was surprised to see it was not a group text with Kirsten as well.

*You still up?* he asked.

*ya,* she replied.

*you doing OK? how'd it go with your folks?*

*meh. they got pissed but whatevs. grounded me for 2 weeks.*

*lol you going to let them ground you?*

*fuck no,* she answered, then added, *but they don't need to know that either. plus spring breaks any day now so good luck keeping me in then.*

She watched as her phone notified her he was typing. Owen was easily the slowest phone typist she knew. *totally. maybe my mom will let up for break, then forget all about it. it's happened before. anyway, howre things w/u?*

Angelica glared through the floor at the master bedroom. *Not good. They wanted to know how long it had been going on, and I tried to say it was new but my dad said hed heard stuff but though it was just porn lol*

*practically porn, the way we do it ;)*

*Well I don't plan on sharing you with the world,* he replied. *but yeah they freaked tf out. My mom said she's gonna start working from home in the afternoons, at least until after graduation. fuckin ridiculous*

Angelica frowned at her phone. "Fucking bitch," she grumbled. *what Kirsten say?*

*I haven't told her yet. She'll be pissed as hell – might save that for tomorrow at school. :P*

*totes.* Angelica eyed her phone suspiciously. Why was he reaching out to her like this? The next time Kirsten perused his messages, she'd see this. Conversations like this were exactly what she was on the watch for. *so what now?*

*Well we can't do stuff here any more, and we can't do stuff at your place or K's.* This was true. Shannon was a housewife, so there was no privacy here, and Kirsten's housekeeper made the same true for her. *So we may just have to take a brake?*

She was still debating with herself whether or not to correct Owen's spelling when he sent another message. *Are you gonna be OK w/that?*

How could he even ask that? The only way that question wasn't already settled was because he still didn't get how badly she needed his cock. That time after she'd rejected his dance invite had been horrid. She'd felt like a junkie quitting cold turkey, except the craving never died down. All right, that was hyperbole, but only somewhat.

*do I have a choice?*

*I guess not, he replied. But oh well, you were a good time while it lasted right?*  
*lol later*

After a prolonged, floored moment, Angelica began typing out an apoplectic response. How dare he?! She was almost done with her second paragraph when there was a sudden sound at her bedroom window. *Plink*. She looked up. That had been too small for a bird, and at this hour they were in bed for the night. *Plink. Plink*. She went over to the window and raised the blinds. The light in her room made it impossible to see anything outside, so she quickly switched it off.

There, standing in her back yard, phone still in his hand, stood Owen.

“What are you doing here?” she asked in a stage whisper once she’d opened the lower pane. She was on the second story, but standing right beneath her window they could probably touch hands if she reached down and he up.

“I didn’t want Kirsten to snoop. I wanted to check if you were really going to be OK. I mean, I know how... I know.”

Maybe he wasn’t quite so obtuse after all. She wasn’t quite sure what to say. Her instinct was to deflect, to avoid revealing vulnerability. Emotional honesty was not her forte. Except looking at the dim outline of Owen’s face in her back yard, she remembered the last time she’d acted on that instinct and how that had worked out.

“Honestly? I’m not going to be OK.”

He nodded. “So... we’ll have to work something out.”

“Yeah. We should.”

“I can be late to second period tomorrow. How about you?”

Angelica considered. Mr. Lyons was a total prick about tardies, and he had it in for her as it was thanks to his stupid beef with Conner. “How about third?”

“Third’s good, too.”

“Math wing men’s faculty bathroom. Be there.” It sounded gross, but the math department didn’t have any male teachers this year, so it was actually a pretty hygienic place, and guaranteed private. Smokers and stoners had abused this for a time until they’d put in some new ultra-sensitive smoke detectors.

“I’ll be there. G’night, Angel.”

“Night.”

A relieved Angelica floated back to her bed. Owen cared. He’d taken her feelings into consideration and gone out of his way to take care of her. There was something still between them after all!

But then the rest of her mind, the parts less susceptible to that sort of self-flattery, caught up with her, and considered that under this plan, even when Owen was cut off from his diet of threesomes, he was still going to have access to her mouth and pussy whenever he could squeeze her in. If he could find ways to smuggle her into

his pants, he'd be able to do it with Kirsten, too, and she was unlikely to give up her claim on one of the most sought-after guys in school.

*ya, later*, she responded to his last text, then readied herself for bed.

“Mornin’ Miss C – oh, hey, Conner. Lookin’ sharp today, tiger!” Jordan piped merrily on his way into the journalism room the next morning. “Don’t mind me, just checking out a laptop, trying to finish up that pagination assignment during study hall.”

“That’s fine, Jordan,” said Miss C. Conner merely glared and said nothing. A sight Jordan looked forward to getting used to. He followed the procedure, signing out the computer with the earliest number, writing his name, scribbling his intended purpose – *updating project* – and whistled his way back out again.

It was the first day of the rest of his life. Or at least, the first day of the rest of the academic year. Yessirree, two months left of high school, and he meant to make the most of every one of them. For the first time since he’d lost access to Conner’s TIOS password after King of Hearts, he had that spring in his step back. Jayce even asked him if he’d gotten laid the night before, seeing the jaunty little grin on his face.

Jordan had not gotten laid the night before. No, he’d sat at home, looking over his notepad of quotes he’d never gotten around to using. Buried in those pages was a gold mine of sexual adventure. Before long, he’d have every girl in school crawling to his feet and begging to be granted the honor of his cock.

Before long, every girl here would be just like Hailey. Adoring, sexy, and horny as hell.

At first, he was mostly looking for contradictions and redundancies. If he was going to conduct this giant quote dump, he didn’t want to mess anything up. TIOS was finicky as hell and by no means predictable. Moreover, there was no undoing mistakes. Then, the more he thought about it, the more he wondered what limits the program might have. Not that it had failed to deliver on any of his demands as yet, but really, he was more worried that doing that much that fast might do something horrible. This program, after all, was basically magic, and who knew whether or not dumping two hundred quotes in an hour would rend the fabric of space-time. The girls might have their heads explode, or who the hell knew what.

So instead, he started prioritizing quotes. He figured one or two a day would be good, limited enough that it would minimize his paranoia about his blatant abuse of ultimate power backfiring. Much as Jordan had a lot he hoped to accomplish, the class period was only an hour long, after all. Why change forty things when you only have time to enjoy four? Best of all, with this plan he’d have something new and exciting to look forward to every day.

To be fair, things were already good. The girls dressed and undressed at his command. They passively let him do anything he wanted to them. If he threatened to withhold participation points, he could generally coerce them into at least a half-hearted attempt at what he wanted them to do. Some of his bitches were actually eager to fuck him, albeit none of the ones he really wanted to be. But after today, things would be moving once more in the right direction.

Jordan skipped first period. He only had two edits to make, but one of them would take time and effort. Unlike Fishers, he didn't have his own office to hide out in, so he made his way to his and Hailey's spot under the stage and settled in to get to work. He loaded TIOS and logged in with Amanda's password.

"Didn't change it back after all, eh? Stupid slut," he mumbled as he began to work. Good. He'd doubted she would, but all he'd had to dissuade her was the threat of ruining her day second period in perpetuity. He hadn't been sure it would work. So far, so good.

Once he was in, he uploaded a couple photos he'd had saved on his phone for months, just waiting for such an opportunity. This was something he could have done before he'd been locked out, but photo editing wasn't his strong point and so he'd procrastinated. Well, no more.

Jordan had never prided himself on his work ethic, but he thought even Fishers himself would have admired his attention to detail that morning. He even brought up some of Miss C's recorded lectures from the class's site, selecting one on fine points of the image editing software. He painstakingly tweaked this, smoothed out the edges on that, blended the colors between shades until they were so similar he could scarcely tell them apart. Impressive how it seemed to make a difference when he zoomed back out. It wasn't the most complex of undertakings, but he wanted to get it right.

This was something he meant to enjoy for a good long time.

The bell to end first period rang as he was still admiring his work. It didn't worry him in the least that he'd just ditched a class. His dad was never home, so the call home would only reach his trophy wife bitch of a stepmom Barbara, and the worst she'd do was nag him a little before going off to cheat on his dad again. Jordan hadn't even had the chance to upload the quote he'd meant to, but he supposed he could do that in class. Jordan packed up his laptop and veritably skipped to his second period sex ed.

The girls filed in one by one, making their way to the changing screens and disrobing, or for some simply stripping off their scant spring clothing in the middle of the room. He'd never made sense of why some seemed to want the privacy, but why quibble over minutia, right? He watched as the subject of his modifications made her way behind one such, waiting with baited breath for her to come out and reveal the fruits of his efforts.

"What the fuck?"

Heather looked up at him. "Uh... what? Something wrong, Mr. Lyons?"

He looked her over, not that there was any need. Why hadn't it worked? Had Amanda done something? She was sitting in her desk, legs crossed, reading her novel for their Brit lit class. There was nothing about her to indicate she'd tried to thwart his intentions. So why...

He flipped open the laptop and slapped himself in the forehead. “Nothing, Heather. Have a seat.” Jordan rolled his eyes at his own stupidity and at last remembered to click the Save button. Then he looked up and watched as reality adjusted to match the image on his screen.

Deep sepia tones infused with a multitude of colors blossomed on Heather’s skin, appearing before his eyes like she’d been marked by an invisible stamp. Which she had, sort of, he supposed. She took no notice, nor did Jennica, the girl to whom she was talking.

This was a gift. Not for the school at large. Honestly, Jordan hadn’t even done it for himself. No no, this was 100% his first gift to Fishers.

He didn’t know where to look first. There was too much to take in all at once, and his eyes darted from bit to bit. On her right bicep, a tattoo of a preposterously busty naked woman puckering exaggerated lips, surrounded by a crowd of cartoony wolf-whistling admirers. A web of vines ran down her forearm like a canopy, yet through the gaps one could make out a variety of naked women in lurid poses. Her left arm was inked similarly, though there it was a mass of writhing snakes (whose heads all lent them a discernibly phallic aura) piled atop anime-styled women moaning in the throes of passion. It was crowned on the bicep by a heart, like one might see on a construction worker, except where the ones he’d seen in cartoons read “MOM, hers read “COCK” in stenciled letters.

Jordan had spent a good ten minutes on fixing that detail alone. Most of the ensemble he’d stolen from images online, adjusting the underlying skin tone and shape to match Heather’s and then grafting them onto her body. The text tattoos, though, were all his. On the inner slope of her left tit was the word *public*, and on the right *access*, each surrounded by lines and curls that invoked a spurting cock erupting from between those enormous sweater cows. He had to walk behind her to read *BUTT SLUT* right above the crack of her ass. (Still, it wasn’t so close to her crack that it would be concealed by any outfit that didn’t have a shirt tucked into her bottoms.) For his personal favorite, he returned to the front and knelt at the front of her desk, parting her legs to reveal the space between her belly and her cunt. It was now bare, as he hoped it would remain to show off his handiwork, and bore calligraphic letters an inch and a half tall reading *I CONSENT*. After a hundred rants about the importance of consent, he couldn’t help laughing at her now permanent state thereof.

Her back, her thighs, her shoulders, her neck, all bore patterns cribbed from myriad internet searches for “slutty tattoos” and synonyms. He’d thought about going after the face, too, but there, he’d actually worked in by far the most subtle, though perhaps his best idea. It was an off-colored pearlescent splotch on her chin that gave her the appearance perpetually having a dribble of cum leaking out of her mouth. It was the

only remotely subtle change he'd made, yet he found that when he looked at her face, he couldn't stop noticing it, waiting for the phantom spunk to trickle down.

"Mr. Lyons?" she asked, annoyed. "You're creeping me out."

He couldn't help but laugh. Somehow, as always, she was oblivious to it all.

"Sorry, Heather, just admiring your ink."

"Oh. OK." She still looked creeped out, but a bit less so.

"When did you get those, if I might ask?"

"Pretty recently," she answered. "You can't get tattoos in this state until you're eighteen, so I had to wait until then."

"How recently?" he pressed. It never failed to amuse the way people would make excuses for TIOS, no matter how absurd its changes. He supposed that, like real life, weird things happened and people simply learned to roll with it and not ask too many questions.

She seemed to consider. "I dunno, I can't remember the exact dates for all of them. Why, thinking about getting one for yourself?"

"I dunno, you think the same guy who did yours would do mine?"

"I don't see why not."

"Can I ask what possessed you to get these?" He traced his fingers down her cleavage, along the *public access* corridor.

She didn't glance down; somehow, without ever having even looked at them, Heather knew what they said. "Really, Mr. Lyons? How many times have we sat in here talking about how bad slut shaming is, and trying to emphasize sex positivity? I'm just tired of living in a world where a woman has to be shamed for breast feeding, for revealing cleavage—"

"For coming to class with her big fat slut tits out?"

"Right. So I wanted to send the message that I'm not ashamed of my body, and if other people can't handle the way I display it in public, then they're invited to change their minds."

He was still cackling with laughter, ignoring her confused glower, when he heard a voice from the side of the room speak up. "Uh, what's going on?"

Jordan slowly turned to see Amanda Carpenter staring at the scene unfolding between him and Heather. She looked bewildered, and more than a little disturbed – not a look he was used to seeing in his classroom, where he'd worked so hard to cultivate an atmosphere of tolerance. "What's wrong, Legs?"

"I mean... Heather, you didn't have those tattoos yesterday. How did you get that much work done that fast?" She stood up, striding over to inspect her classmate up close. "These don't even look like they're still healing. Are they fake? Where would someone even find temporary tattoos like this?"

Heather looked at Amanda like she was being somewhat dense. “What are you even talking about, Amanda? Temporary? Trust me, these things are permanent.”

She dragged her finger along Heather’s arm, then even scratched at it as if to see if anything would flake off. Heather pulled away after a moment, annoyed. “Hey! Easy, Amanda.”

“This... this doesn’t make sense,” Amanda was muttering to herself. “How could you... how could anyone...”

Jordan, meanwhile, understood exactly what was happening. He’d had that exact same reaction when he’d first realized Hailey and Hayleigh had switcherooed. Utter bafflement. He’d forgotten until this moment that, like Fishers, now that TIOS recognized her as an editor-in-chief, she would be able to comprehend the changes as they unfolded.

He puzzled at how it assigned such privileges. Fishers, for instance, had been invulnerable since the beginning, at least until Amanda’s account had circumvented it. They could evidently edit one another, but not themselves for some reason. For his part, Jordan seemed susceptible to either of their changes, occasionally having to trick himself into noticing something he’d seen Fishers write in, though when he made changes via their accounts he saw things as they were right away. Evidently, from the way she hadn’t balked at sitting in a classroom full of gorgeous naked women, Amanda still didn’t notice anything amiss about the prior changes, though now that he’d used her login to change something...

“What the fuck is going on here?” she muttered to herself, stumbling back.

Jordan answered her rhetorical question. “We’re finally getting started.”

Jordan quickly walked back to his laptop and typed up the quote he’d prepared, quickly looked it over – the only proofreading he’d ever done – and hit Save.

*“What are we doing today, Mr. Lyons?”*

*“The same thing we do in here every day – whatever our teacher says.”*

*– Yuri Andersen and Ashley LeBeau*

“Everybody shut up and sit down,” he announced in a loud voice.

Most of the girls were already seated, but from behind the screens, Maggie and Courtney hustled to their desks. Amanda actually just plopped down on the floor next to Heather’s. The room was nearly silent, save for the bored drumming of fingers by Kirsten Vaughan.

It worked. Holy tits, it worked!

“Spread your legs, sluts.”

As one, every girl in the room spread her legs. A few had to adjust their desks, being too close to a neighbor to get them spread adequately. Every girl was simply staring at her teacher, awaiting his next command. Expressions were a mix of boredom, studious attentiveness, and anticipation. Even Amanda was propping up her knees and

spreading those five-foot legs of hers, the fact that the instruction came from her own account be damned.

“Play with yourselves. You earn your participation grade today when you come and thank me for letting you.”

In near unison, each girl reached a hand between her legs and began to masturbate. No, he realized after a moment. MacKenzie had produced an egg vibrator from her purse and was slipping its small shape inside her. He walked up and down the aisles, the only sounds in the room the slowly quickening breathing of his students. It was a surprise to him how varied their techniques were. It made sense, he supposed; masturbation was something everybody learned for themselves. He remembered that pud Jackson once drunkenly confiding in him that he exclusively used his wrist to get himself off. Jordan didn't even know how such a thing worked, but to each their own.

To Mary Buchanan, for instance, it was a timid thing, her index finger all by its lonesome sneaking between her dark folds to probe her clitoris. Her eyes gazed around furtively, as if worried someone might notice her and judge. Fucking Jesus freaks. On the other end of that spectrum was avowed Satanist Neveah Kinslan. If someone expected the disparity between their religion to extend to their diddling, they'd have been mostly wrong. Neveah didn't look as shy about it, but likewise had one hand holding – then gripping – her desktop as the other calmly stroked her clit, again one finger only.

Then there was Stacy Culpepper, who was smiling her usual flirty smile at her teacher as he walked by, jaw working silently as she pumped two fingers in and out of her pussy. She wasn't even touching her clit. Lauren Tommassini was going for both, her muscly volleyball legs clenched rigidly in place. Stephanie Margulies, to his surprise, wasn't touching her pussy at all, but instead had seized one of those nicely shaped tits in each hand and was fiddling with her nipples like they were dials on a machine, her lower lip sucked into her mouth in concentration and/or ecstasy. Both, maybe. Kirsten's eyes were squinted shut so hard he could almost hear the audio accompanying whatever scene was being projected inside of them. She sat leaning forward in her seat, one hand clenched between her thighs like she feared it might attempt an escape, the other dragging lazy, featherlight circles beneath that shock of blonde hair.

He couldn't help but laugh when he saw Olivia mirroring her exactly, excepting that her eyes were just open enough to make sure she was doing whatever Kirsten was.

Such variety. Such beauty. Such *power*. Ten minutes earlier these girls had been sitting in their classes trying not to fall back asleep, blowing off these final pointless months of school as best they could. In another hour, they'd be doing it again in third period. But here, now, these girls were finally his playthings. The days of coercing and browbeating them into unenthusiased compliance were over. His plans for what quotes and modifications to implement and in which order evaporated in a flood of fantasies,

and he knew he'd be coming to class each morning waiting to see who caught his eye and deciding how best to use them.

Finally they were becoming what he'd always envisioned, even before he'd ever heard of This Is Our Story. More than two dozen gorgeous, attentive, dutiful, willing playthings. Panting, squirming, dribbling, obeying playthings. All his, every day, for a single glorious hour.

"Thank you for letting me come, Mr. Lyons," murmured Amanda.

"Thank you for letting me come, Mr. Lyons," sighed Stacy a few moments later.

"Thank you for letting us come, sir," said Olivia mere seconds after Kirsten.

"Thanks for letting me come, Mr. Lyons," said Heather, sweat glistening on her fresh brands.

"Thanks for the orgasm, Mr. Lyons," offered Angelica a bit sullenly.

Again and again. Tamara Neal was the last of them with only a couple minutes left in the period, trembling out an intense-looking climax before looking around bashfully at a class that had been silently watching her, expecting that her orgasm would mean that the test was over and they could resume socializing. They looked to their teacher expectantly for permission.

"You're welcome, ladies. Show up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed tomorrow, because I think you're finally ready to start working on a new unit."

## Chapter Three

*Some of us have peaked here. Maybe not the peak, but a peak. Meanwhile, others in this assembly I know have been chomping at the bit to get out of here pretty much since freshman orientation. And for a time, maybe that was because of what high school is. The drama, the routine, trying to figure out when we're going to need to know the quadratic formula. Negative b plus or minus the square root of b squared minus four a c all over 2a. That's right, Mr. Lupien, I still remember.*

*But that was then. Now, as we prepare to leave these halls for good, our eagerness isn't because we're desperate to leave Northside, but because we've learned how much more awaits us out there in the world. For all the struggles and hardships along the way, I know each of us are stronger for them.*

When he laid eyes on Heather and her gallery of whorish new tattoos that afternoon, Conner was shocked, yet he was not surprised. He'd known some sort of insult was on its way, though he'd not know whether Jordan would deliver it through his stepsister, through Miss C, through his co-editor-in-chief, or the girl he had apparently chosen. The only woman in his life he'd reckoned would be safe was Hailey, if only because she was already under Jordan's thumb.

Jordan's smirk was the kick while he was down. Today's class was devoted to group reviews of photo batches, making sure senior photos from private portrait studios met with the school's criteria. Most years they only had a handful that didn't pass muster, but due diligence was incumbent upon him. While Conner appreciated that the school's new dress code, or lack thereof, made the prospect of prohibiting a yearbook photo for a couple inches of cleavage ludicrous, the rest of the class still operated according to procedure. Heather joined a group with DeShaun and Don, immediately grumbling with ironic lack of irony about the sexism in the policy. Meanwhile, an image of some woman who looked like an 80's era porn star with bare quintuple D breasts sat uncovered and unquestioned on Heather's forearm.

Conner had braced himself to hide out in his office for the period, trying not to see the evidence of his failure across the room. But the moment he stepped in, Amanda was behind him, an intensity on her face he'd never before seen.

"Is there something you might maybe want to tell me?" she said in a low voice.

He was taken aback. "What, you mean about portrait screening? Nothing especially complex, just—"

"No, about TIOS, and about how this morning I saw..." She looked through the blinds, and he didn't miss the fact that her eyes landed directly on Heather. "Look, it's

nothing I want to talk about, but *something* happened. Something... insane. Tell me you see that.”

Conner was trying to keep up; none of this was quite clicking yet. Then, however, he remembered that while he himself was prohibited from interfering with Jordan, the rest of the school was prohibited from discussing him thanks to a quote he'd included about how nobody cared enough to talk about him. Further, if it had happened during their sex ed class, as might well have been the case... *What happens in sex ed stays in sex ed*, as the poster said.

“I see it.”

“The tattoos?”

He nodded. “Yeah.”

She heaved a sigh of relief. “Oh thank god. I was starting to think I was going crazy. They *appeared* on her this morning, right after... well, never mind.” Conner wanted to confirm that he understood Jordan was responsible, but directing Amanda toward him was every bit as impossible for him as discussing the events of her sex ed class was for her. He'd made up his mind not to get in Jordan's way and that was that. “Anyway, nobody seemed to notice. They're all acting like she's always looked like this! Sure, Heather's always been kind of a, ya know, flirty dresser, but that! And look at them!”

Indeed, while a bit of study could reveal a few of the guys in class checking out Heather's tits, barely concealed in a white blouse knotted just beneath them, that was what would have been happening even if TIOS had never been installed. Those things simply commanded attention – ocular gravity, he remembered her joking once when she'd caught him checking her out. Of course, with Amanda dressed in matching Pride attire, she wasn't exactly inconspicuous herself.

“Conner? Hey, my eyes are up here.”

“Yeesh. Sorry.”

“We can explore the extent of our interest in one another's bodies later, but for now... what the hell is going on? Did... did the yearbook software do that? That can't be possible – only I saw it happen. It was TIOS – I'd recognize that interface anywhere. I even checked – the pictures are all there. Photoshopped and saved under Heather's profile.”

Conner guided her to her desk chair, and pulled his up in front of her. She knew. There was no more dodging the issue; she had access, and she needed to know. Only every time he started thinking this information might help him find a way to beat Jordan, he found himself steering away from anything even suggesting a means of impediment. Amanda listened, wide-eyed, as he explained. He told her about Hailey and Hayleigh switching bodies and the lack of reaction, about how he had accidentally caused Heather's belief in his every word, Miss C's preoccupation with his happiness. It

was embarrassing in the extreme to admit, but she had full access to everything now, and he'd rather she hear it from him than see it on her own.

"I... I don't believe it," she said, suddenly standing up, backing away. "That can't be possible!"

"I can show you. Come here. Look at my desk."

Amanda gave him a questioning glance, but came over and looked at the blank wooden top of his desk. Smooth, clear, nothing marring it beyond a few rings from where a past editor had been in the habit of leaving their drinks unattended. Meanwhile, Conner quickly snapped a picture with his phone and loaded it into TIOS, bringing it up in a spread and doing some hasty editing. It was sloppy, but soon enough...

"Oh my god." But he was relieved that his choice of edit achieved some small portion of levity, as a smile came to her lips after a moment. "A.C. + C.F.? Is that anyone I know?" She traced her finger through the tiny heart that appeared, an arrow piercing it through the middle.

"Man are you ever out of the loop – everybody's been waiting to see when those two are gonna hook up."

She laughed, and some of the tension drained out of her. "So. Wow. OK. Wow!" She sat back down, almost falling into her seat. "Sorry, this is a lot to handle. Geez! I always knew you were a teacher's pet, but no wonder. You got her eating out of your hand, I bet, huh!"

*Eating out of my pants is more like it*, he thought, but thought better of saying. It had been difficult enough to keep Heather from spilling the beans. "I never meant to. I realize I messed some things up, and that some things happened to make my life a lot more, um, interesting." He hoped he wasn't blushing too hard. "That's where I was the past couple weeks, trying to look for ways I could use TIOS to do a little good around here. Share the wealth and all. Here, I'll show you."

He brought up his *magicrock* spread and its bevy of quotes and pictures, and walked her through some of the changes. Her eyes sparkled as she read the things he'd done, listened to him explain some of the backstory behind it. He hadn't done this for the credit – hadn't expected anyone to even know he'd even done it, actually – but he had to admit, getting to see it appreciated did feel pretty darn good. Almost as good as getting to see that mirthful curve of Amanda's lips.

In fact, she seemed to remember those lips in the midst of it all, right after he showed her the edits he'd done for Shawn Howe with his Treacher-Collins syndrome. "Oh my gosh! *That's* why you freaked out when you found out I'd edited my dance picture!" She blinked, suddenly looking herself over. "Wait. Did I... do I look... different?"

"Uh, yeah. Ya look different."

“Oh no. Did I... I didn’t mess myself up, did I? I was in kind of a hurry when I did it – I didn’t want you to catch me on your laptop. Am I a freak? Nobody’s said anything – though I guess they wouldn’t. Oh gosh, oh gosh, oh gosh!”

He laughed. “Amanda, oh my god... no. No you’re not a freak. You... well, you kinda, um...”

“Tell me!” She was reading that what she had done was not a negative, at least, but, unable to appreciate the results for herself, needed him to explain.

“Well, you kinda Jessica-Rabbited yourself, actually.”

“I what?”

“If only there were a before picture I could show you for comparison.” It dawned on him that her profile held a link to the stock photo Jordan had used to create her; he supposed that somewhere out there in the world was the real woman who shared Amanda’s original likeness. That photo, being of whoever that model was, might remain unedited. Either way, he was not ready to tell her about that. Not yet. How would someone react to news like that? He didn’t even know how *he* felt about it.

“So, what, I’m all hot now? That’s what you’re saying?” She grinned, looking rather pleased with herself.

“You were pretty hot before, Amanda. Now you’re... I mean, next level.”

The girl laughed, tossing some of that vibrant auburn hair over her shoulder. “I guess I can kind of imagine it? I remember what I did, sort of. Man, I wish I could see! Maybe we can find a way. I want to see what you see. Holy crap, are you the *only* guy in school who can tell?”

“Basically,” he said, neglecting to mention Jordan, who may or may not have noticed himself. He had access to TIOS, and seemed to have learned how to trick himself into seeing the alterations on Hailey and Hayleigh. But whether he’d noticed that a random dance photo had been adjusted, he couldn’t say. Literally, couldn’t. “There are ways to kind of trick yourself out of it, in some cases. Like... how would you describe Hayleigh McKnight?”

“Stuck-up? Condescending? Bigoted? Mean?”

He smiled. “Physically.”

“I know. I just wanted to say it. I mean, you said you switched them, but in my head, Hayleigh’s really pretty. Nice body, really fit, hair, boobs... all that. You’re saying you can show me how she really looks now?”

Conner retrieved his phone, and like he’d done with Owen last fall, showed her Hailey’s body piece by piece, until finally revealing that the sumptuous body on the screen belonged to the face she recognized as Hailey McManus. Amanda rushed to TIOS to look at Hayleigh’s spread for comparison.

“Oh my gosh, she really is... holy *crap!* I see it now – she’s... I mean, I don’t wanna be mean or anything, but...”

“Amanda. You just described her personality. Come on.”

“Fine. She’s fat and ugly. But that’s so crazy! Like, she still looks like I remember her looking, I’d still have picked the right Hayleigh out of the lineup, but... that doesn’t even make sense. But it’s working! How can nobody notice?”

“Oh, just wait until you get to see the stuff about the dress code,” Conner muttered.

Amanda looked down at her miniskirt and blouse, like Heather’s and the rest of the Pride’s, knotted just below her spectacular buoyant breasts. “What? Am I dressed...? Weird?”

“Let’s just say I’m not complaining,” he answered. She didn’t look like she fully understood his meaning, but he quickly moved on. “But you see why you have to be extra careful now, right? For the normal uses, TIOS is pretty safe, but if you start getting cheeky, or using a lot of figurative language, hyperbole, or flat-out abusing it, it can get really out of hand. I wanted to tell you last night at the diner, but I didn’t know how. Like, how do you tell someone magic is real and they’re the arbiter of how it’s used?”

“How indeed.” She gave the laptop screen a hard look. “Look, I’ll be careful, all right? I’m not going to go power-crazy or anything. I actually like Northside pretty much the way it is.” She took his hands softly in hers and regarded him earnestly, brown eyes bigger even than he’d remembered them. “You know you can trust me, right?”

“I know. And I know mistakes get made, too, so if something does go weird, you can talk to me and I’ll try to help if I can. Or at least be someone you can talk to about it. Undoing things... well, I haven’t found a way to reverse any of it. I don’t think there is one.”

Before he could blink, her fingers speedily brought up his own TIOS spread, topped by his class portrait and listing all the spreads he was tagged in. His face scrunched in apprehension as she clicked to edit the portrait, but he gasped when he saw what she was doing. “Amanda, no!”

“Oh come on, you look good with a dick on your face,” she said, finishing the doodle. Right across his forehead, a big old graffiti penis. “It’s distinguished.”

“Amanda...”

“Oh fine,” she said, closing the picture and clicking to reject the changes rather than save them. “Consider that little scare my official seal of disapproval for whatever you did with Hailey McManus.”

“Whatever I...?” He frowned. “Who says I did anything with her? The picture changes was an accident!”

“Sure, and you had a photo of her in boxers and a tank top in her bedroom because...?” She folded her arms, grinning smugly.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean...”

“All right, just hand over your phone and let me see what you guys’ text convo looks like then, eh? If you’ve got nothing to hide.”

He grimaced. In the very next image after the one he’d used for the demonstration, that tank top was wadded up on the floor, and after that, she was knuckles deep in her pussy on the bed. “All right, fine. But for the record, she liked me before I did that.”

“I know.” She shrugged off his questioning glance. “Girls talk, Conner.”

“Evidently.”

“Wow, so I get it now,” she said, suddenly serious. “This is why you were so excited when you found out we could extend it, isn’t it? You wanted all those gifts you were handing out to last a little longer. Right?”

“Yeah.”

“Man. I wonder what would have happened if we didn’t extend, ya know? Like, would the Haileys suddenly wake up in their old bodies? Would they stay in the wrong ones, but suddenly realize it? Would Heather flip out over those tats?”

As she pondered the issue, he contemplated some of the edits she wasn’t yet aware of. It was then, almost immediately after he considered the dilemma, that he realized that Amanda’s very existence was the result of TIOS’s editing! The stakes were suddenly so much higher. Would it erase her altogether? Would he even remember she had existed?

That thought was agonizing.

“There’s... there’s a lot that I wouldn’t mind lasting longer.”

She nodded. “I get that. But... maybe there’s some things that would be better off going away.”

Conner knew the truth of that better than she did. He’d read over the edits Jordan had made to the girls in his sex ed class. When Conner had gotten suspicious after King of Hearts and changed his password, it had cut him off; the most recent update to the file was from that very evening. But now that he had Amanda’s password, the plight of those poor girls was only going to worsen.

“Maybe.” He couldn’t put the words to it either. It looked like the best he’d be able to do was to hope she’d realize his scheme and find it in herself to bring him down. Maybe she could fight the fight he couldn’t.

“So, what now?” she asked.

“You mean, what should we use TIOS for?”

She rolled her eyes. “No. I guess that might be the question I should be asking, but but what I actually meant was... *this*.” She touched her fingers again to the carving on his desk.

“Oh. Yeah.” With all that had been going on of late, he hadn’t had a chance to think about this question. Amanda Carpenter, once his rival, and now asking him in no

uncertain terms for his affection. Meanwhile, out in the classroom were two women he'd slept with inside of the past week, with a third elsewhere in the building.

He had to say no. It was morally wrong. Wasn't it? All right, technically none of his other relationships had advanced to the stage of monogamy. That probably shouldn't need to be spelled out, though. He supposed Heather had made it quite clear they were only enjoying themselves to the end of the school year, when, if her hopes were realized, she'd be leaving for Berkeley. And Kristy actually seemed to enjoy watching him enjoy himself. And Hailey had been sleeping with Jordan for months now, so surely he couldn't fault himself for sleeping around on her.

But it was wrong. Right?

But it was Amanda.

No. No, he had to do be fair to her. If he couldn't show her what Jordan had done, forcing a crush on her that she may or may not have ever had, he could at least not take advantage of her. "Amanda, I really do like you. You're... you're awesome. I don't know how else to say it."

"And Jessica Rabbit to boot, I'm told." She waggled her eyebrows.

"That for sure doesn't hurt," he conceded. "But... look, I've kind of been, um, seeing somebody. And I'm not sure where it's going, but it's kind of going pretty well, and I don't think I'm ready to end it yet. So I don't want to string you along, or be unfair to you."

The disappointment on her face was evident, but she took it well enough. "I see. Who's the lucky girl? Anybody I know?"

"We kind of agreed to keep it quiet, for now. I promised."

"Fair enough." She looked down, and he saw it was once more to those letters. What had he been thinking? Here he was saying he didn't want to lead her on mere moments after carving their initials into his desk. Before he could apologize, though, she went on. "You know, I'm not asking you to marry me or anything, Conner."

"Uh, I didn't think you were."

"Right. So... why can't we...?"

"Get married?" His eyes widened. Was TIOS running amok again?!

She flicked him in the arm. "Yikes. No, you doofus. I'm saying, why can't you and I date? Keep it quiet, like you said. It doesn't have to be serious. Maybe we'll realize we can't stand one another all over again. It might not work, but I guess I'd like to find out."

"I don't know, Amanda..."

"Come on, what's the harm? Maybe I'll turn out to be a total freak and you'll run away in terror. Someone, who shall remain nameless but is in fact Marisa, was telling me she went on a date with a guy from Central and he tried to lick her eyeballs. Hand to god."

"Yikes! You don't want to... lick my eyeballs, do you?"

“I was sort of hoping you’d slurp on mine, actually. Here, let me take my contacts out.”

He grinned, but warily. “You don’t wear contacts.”

“Been staring longingly into my eyes, have we?” She batted her eyelashes.

“No, I only do that to your boobs.”

She flashed a look of repulsion. “As long as you don’t try to lick them. Save it for the eyes, OK freak?”

Conner leaned in, tongue extended, and she squealed and swatted him back as he closed on her face. “Looks like somebody’s an eye-tease.”

They both laughed for a moment, but soon it was quiet again. “So come on, Conner. Take a chance. Do you really want to be able to look back on your time at Northside and wonder what we might be?”

He shook his head slowly. “But what if I regret taking a chance?”

She shrugged. “At least you’ll know. You tried, and it didn’t work out. Better that than having to spend the rest of your life wondering what Jessica Rabbit’s eyes taste like.”

“That’s actually kind of a gross thought.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna not bring that up again, sorry.” She took his hands in hers, and Conner marveled at how those slender, delicate fingers of hers engulfed his.

Conner came home that night and started with a long shower. Amanda, as it turned out, indeed was a fan of using her tongue, and he could still smell the spit on him. Not that he was complaining. That girl had been holding a lot of that in for a very long time. It was also not until she bashfully confessed it to him that he realized he was her first. First everything. Her first kiss had been with him at the King of Heart Dance. Her first date had been helping him recover from fainting the day before.

While her profile contained no record of a birthdate, she looked easily old enough to be a year or two out of high school. Still, from a certain point of view she'd only been around on this earth for three months. She was having a lot of firsts, no doubt.

Her first orgasm had been that evening on the couch in Miss C's vacant classroom after he finally lived the dream he'd been harboring since the day he'd met her and dove face-first between those miles of thighs. Followed by her second, third, and several more after. Once he had Amanda Carpenter's legs wrapped around his face, he hadn't been eager to leave.

Once he got out of the shower, he touched base with his mom and attended to doing his usual chores, dishes and garbage duty, then sat with her at the kitchen table. Conner finished his homework while she looked through a catalog for some scrapbooking fabrics. It wasn't until some hours later before he checked his phone for the first time that night and was surprised to see a multitude of texts waiting for him.

*You around?* Hailey had asked at 3:30. She'd chimed in again an hour later with a topless pic, accompanied by *I wanna talk about the other day. Please?*

His fingers hovered over the buttons. What was there to say? Only a few days earlier, he'd learned that Hailey had been hooking up with Jordan behind his back all semester. The other girls had been compelled by TIOS, but he'd scoured Jordan's spread and hadn't been able to find anything he'd done to coerce Hailey in the least.

The two of them hadn't promised to be exclusive – quite the opposite, in fact – but still, to be sleeping with his nemesis? She had to have known how he'd feel about that. For all he knew, she'd been spying on him for Jordan, looking for material to try to entrap him with. Maybe she still was.

That trust had been broken. He didn't respond.

The next had been a text from Owen, wanting to talk to someone about what had gone down yesterday at his house. With all the chaos in his own life, Conner had almost forgotten about it already – had that only been the day before? He decided he'd save that one for last so he could give it his full attention.

Then came Heather shortly before 5. *Hey, just wanted to see what's up.* A few minutes later, after receiving no reply, she added, *You were giving me a super weird look today. Is everything OK? We're cool right?*

There was nothing he could tell her, so he told her nothing. Conner zapped a quick response that she'd just looked really pretty today and he hadn't been able to help

himself. It was incredibly corny, but thanks to TIOS, she believed it. After a brief exchange, they settled on a date night Friday and said good night.

Next came a text from Kristy. He'd suggested several times that she get a second cell phone for conversing, so there wouldn't be so much evidence if anyone grew suspicious. She'd countered that anyone determined to find out would, and anyway he had TIOS to take care of it if they had to. A fair point, he supposed; it'd be far from the worst manipulation to come out of the program.

As for her text... even after the night he'd had, the smoldering description of what she wanted to do to him had him gripping his sheets in clenched fists. That woman sure had a way with words – part of her job, he supposed. It was after nine. Could he make it out of the house without anyone noticing? After the conversation between his and Owen's mother about Angelica's activities, his parents would know he wasn't going to Owen's this time. That kid was grounded for life. Plus if he came back reeking of sex, it'd be a dead giveaway. With a grimace, he promised he'd swing by after school the next day.

The final message was from an unknown number, though the moment he saw the message, he knew who'd sent it. It was the photo that had edited Heather, covered her with those depraved, vulgar tattoos, and could have come from no one but Jordan Lyons. Conner nearly blocked him, but decided he still had one thing to lord over him in return, and would have to satisfy himself with that.

*Get your rocks off while you can, asshole*, Conner wrote. *Soon it's graduation time, and I can bring an end to all of this.* He went through several drafts before hitting send, making sure he'd said nothing Jordan could use against him. He even avoided saying *I will bring an end* instead of *I can*, so that there was no chance the choice could be taken from him.

What a line to be walking. But the fate of too many people depended on his careful diction – of all things to hinge the future upon!

Was the bluff hollow? Maybe. He'd been excited by the thought of the extension, but now that he knew what Jordan was doing to these women, how could he countenance allowing that to continue? Perhaps he'd defy the odds and find a way to bring that sex ed nightmare to an end. Maybe Amanda would do it for him. He'd done a lot of good with TIOS, finally, and he didn't want to give that up if he didn't have to.

Jordan didn't respond, but his phone assured him the message had been read. Good. With that minor moral victory under his belt, he texted Owen to ask him what on earth had happened. How his mother had caught him in the midst of a lurid threesome, even a few lines of description as to what Angelica and Kirsten had been doing prior to their premature conclusion.

*Wait, what? You had a threesome with Angelica and Kirsten?! Conner wrote. Uh, yeah. We've been doing that for like a month now lol – where u been?*

*How the heck did you talk them into that?*

*Took less than you'd think, Owen replied. Ange can't get enough, and K likes to make her work for it. fuckin hot as hell, believe me*

Conner mulled this over. It sounded... wrong, though maybe Conner wasn't in a position to judge people for the sexual indiscretions. After some consideration, Conner granted that the threesome made sense, considering what Jordan had edited into TIOS from Owen's sulky rant about how he could have any girl he wanted. It must have been meant to throw Conner off the scent of the real culprit behind his stolen password – no way Jordan did it as a favor. It certainly seemed to be working as one, though.

*So what now?*

*my moms being a total bitch about it – literally working from home afternoons so she can watch me. had to talk them out of installing a camera in basement ffs*

*Damn, that's pretty serious.*

*no shit – they literally took off the door to the basement steps though. the outside door they're talking about putting an alarm on and not giving me the code. fucking nazi assholes*

Conner expressed his empathy, wondering as he did how his parents would react if they knew half of what he'd been up to these past few months. His mother wasn't usually the sort to be suspicious or paranoid, but since he was now seeing so many women he couldn't manage two dates per woman per week...

At least, if he intended to keep seeing Hailey. Which he didn't. He tried to brace himself for her inevitable sluttish begging for his cock, which only succeeded in inspiring fresh fantasy material.

No. She couldn't be trusted.

*So are you guys taking a break? Conner asked. Or breaking it off, or...?*

*I should – my parents are SO pissed – but I can't do that to Ange, Owen answered. Kirsten can wait 4 a while, or just go away, but ever since TIOS... she practically goes thru with drawl.*

Conner wished he could give his friend a hug. They weren't a physically affectionate pair (or at least Owen wasn't, having only narrowly dodged his dad's strain of dude-bro homophobia), but this was something. That he was thinking about Angelica's well-being, that he could for a moment think of breaking it off with a girl as insanely hot as Kirsten Vaughan simply because she was a horrible person... it was real growth for a guy who'd let his penis do a remarkable quantity of his decision-making.

*Anything I can help with? Happy to provide an alibi for a night out if I can.*

*Your folks always trusted me a little more than they should, Conner offered.*

*maybe. I don't know. not sure I'll ever be more than just a hook-up to her. yknow? not worth getting grounded all summer for her.* Conner wasn't sure which "her" he meant.

Ah, the close of high school, where all parties concerned were legal adults, but still tenants and borrowers of countless essentials. He wouldn't put it past Mr. and Mrs. Gibson to make good on such a threat, either. They favored benign neglect as a parenting strategy, but whenever Owen got caught taking advantage of it, they weren't sparing with the wrath. In eighth grade Owen had gotten caught lying about going to a sleep-over at Luis's that was actually at Penny's house while her parents were out of town. After a serious whooping, they'd sold Owen's bike on ebay and then still grounded him for a month. And he hadn't even gotten a girl to kiss him that time. Kirsten and Angelica had done a *lot* more than kiss him, it sounded like.

*I hear you, man. Want me to talk to Angelica? See if I can learn anything?*

*Nah, if she wants to talk to me, she can talk to me. thx tho,* Owen replied.

*Are you gonna be all right?*

*Yeah, man. Ill talk to u tomorrow. thx*

And that was it. Conner knew he'd been rather removed from all that drama, embroiled in his own pursuits, and the realization that he'd been sleeping with Angelica and Kirsten – at the same time! – was too wild for words. Even Conner, with all his success, hadn't had any prospect of doubling up. Nevertheless, exciting as it was, Conner felt bad for everyone involved. He didn't know who felt how about whom, but he could only imagine if it were him and one of the women in his life. Heck, he hadn't even figured out what he was doing after high school yet. It was like that poem he'd read in Miss C's English class freshman year, where if he chose one path he'd never know what lie down the others.

Then, there was one last correspondence he'd neglected. He'd seen Amanda's name in his inbox, but had wanted to save her for last. She was every bit as verbose in her texting as she was as an editor-in-chief, and he switched off the light on his nightstand as he settled in to read in the darkened room.

*Thanks for an awesome date,* the first text began. She'd sent it while he was still on his drive home. *I don't want to be corny, but I had a great time. I wasn't saving myself or anything, but I'm glad I waited long enough to have my first time be with you. Whoever your mystery woman is (and I'm not asking or anything, I promise!), she's a lucky lady. I don't like to play games, so I'll just say I hope we can do it again sometime. I don't get out much, so I'm up for whatever.*

He wondered if she got out at all, considering what he'd witnessed the night before with her disappearance. But he found himself smiling, reading her words several times before going to the next text. This one was fresh, sent a short while ago while he'd been texting Heather. The tone, he quickly realized, was quite distinct.

*I had too much energy to call it a day, so I went to school and tried to get some work done. I've seen now what has been happening, the stuff you didn't tell me about.*

There was a gap of a few minutes, then another, final message. *Now I see why you didn't. And why you were so nervous about asking me out. But you should know that I only kissed you at that dance because I wanted to, and once I did, I wanted to again.*

*That was nothing to do with TIOS. That was you. And me. This time, TIOS just captured the actual truth of it. So don't feel bad, OK? Jessica Rabbit knows Roger was framed.*

Conner slept very well that night.

## Chapter Four

*As a freshman at NHS, I set a goal for myself to get straight A's, every semester, through graduation. I knew from the get-go that it was going to be difficult, and that I might not make it. I know many of you set goals, too. Aaron Palmer told me about his goal to break the school's homerun record. Liz Smith set a goal to raise \$50,000 for the children's hospital with Dance Marathon. Our teachers set a goal to get as many of us here today as they could, no matter how much we kicked and screamed.*

*Some of us achieved those goals, but some of us didn't. And let's be real – some of us got so caught up with things that we never got around to setting any. Well here's the good news. Today, we're here to graduate, and to say goodbye to Northside. But tomorrow, we're going to wake up and you know what? Life will go on. There will be new roads to travel. What you've done, or not done, is in the past, but we can all, each of us, ascend to new heights tomorrow – whether that's climbing to the next peak, or pulling ourselves, and each other, out of a rut.*

“Good morning, my lovelies,” Jordan said as he strode into class. The girls were in the final stages of undressing for class. As the door swung shut behind him, he was treated to the sight of Abby Couch's bare ass bent over as she unlaced her boots, her dark-tinted pussy framed by two round, ample buttocks.

Another day in paradise.

While it lasted. That little asshole Fishers had gotten to him more than he cared to admit. Sure, this was a great situation, but the son of a bitch was right. Here it was, already the second week of April. Just under two months until graduation, and his life went back to the old way.

He didn't give much thought to what would happen on that day. Sure, there was the chance that these girls would suddenly realize what had been going on all semester and lynch him, but he doubted that. TIOS's entire operating method was to conceal what it was doing. Jordan was betting that June 8th, these girls would wake up no longer under his control, but no more concerned than usual that they had been previously. A yearbook was for preserving memories, after all, and it seemed out of character for this one to suddenly shatter the ones it had helped created.

(Still, he had a ticket to Cancun waiting for him, just in case he needed to lay low for a while.)

“All right, shut up,” he casually ordered them. Instantly, the side chatter ceased. He could get used to that. Being able to use them without them making much fuss had been great, but this was a whole new world. “So, yesterday we started a new unit. Prove to me you braindead bimbos were learning something for once.”

There were a good number of sullen expressions at his abuse, but nobody was willing to risk losing participation points by rebutting him. Soon enough, Hannah Cienfuegos raised her hand. "Right, so we started a new unit on body kinesthetics," she said once he called on her.

"That's right," he said, walking past her desk and giving her a reaffirming tit squeeze on those big brown beauties. "We're gonna start preparing you girls for the real world."

Sarah Stewart lifted a hand and was promptly called on. Honestly, he could hold class discussions just to watch the way these girls' tits bounced around when they raised and lowered their hands. "Mr. Lyons? How is this preparing us for the real world?"

He looked to the rest of the class. "Well, girls? What do you think? Who in the real world might use these skills?" There was an awkward pause, but finally Olivia raised her hand. "Yeah, go ahead."

"Um... strippers?" she said.

"That's right, Olivia, strippers. With the skills I'm teaching you, you girls can find work at any titty club in America. Anywhere else?"

"Prostitutes?" suggested Joanna after being called on.

"Why am I not surprised that becoming a hooker is the first place your mind went to, Jojo," he said, fuzzing her hair. She blushed as a few girls chuckled. "But yeah, maybe. Working girls are mostly getting paid for their holes, but some might wanna see you make getting naked look a little more appealing. Who knows, some of you might even make it as high-class escorts, and who knows what kind of requests might be made of you then, right? Looking at you, Jennica, Kirsten."

Jordan undid his belt, shedding his pants and hopping up on the front desk. He could only imagine how many bare asses had been on this thing since January. "But come on. What's the one shared experience in all of your futures where you might need to know how to shake your bits?"

The class was quiet, the girls looking between each other uncertainly.

"Fitness?" guessed Elaine.

"College?" tried Stacy.

"Standardized testing?" said Kiara, frowning at the laughter her suggestion sparked.

But it was sweet little Mary Buchanan, her purity ring still gracing her left ring finger, who provided the right answer. "Um, for our husbands?"

"Ding ding ding!" Jordan snapped his fingers and gestured for her to come forward. "Why don't you practice your grinding on me, sweetheart."

"Sure, Mr. Lyons." By now, hair ties around the wrist were as much the normal materials for this class as pencils and notebooks were for their others. She swept her straight brown hair into a quick ponytail and turned her back to him, thrusting her ass

back against his crotch and wriggling to the rhythm of unheard music. They'd started drilling on this yesterday, but in his humble opinion, she could certainly stand to practice more.

"Now, what Mary said is right. Sex ed, after all, is about learning about sexuality. For a bunch of hotties like yourselves, being able to please men is going to be one of your primary contributions to the world. Knowing how to excite your boyfriends, someday your husbands, is going to be what decides whether you have a roof over your pretty little heads, and whether that roof is on a mud hut or a mansion. My goal is to graduate you bitches from girlfriend material to trophy wives."

Mary inserted a timid apology as she accidentally squirmed his cock into her pussy, as wet and ready as ever. "I didn't mean to push that hard. I'm trying, honest."

"No prob, babe. Now, try not to think of this as training solely for your husband. Being able to excite and satisfy men is also going to help you advance yourselves in all kinds of ways. Your boss, someday, when you really want that bonus. Maybe even your coworkers for when you drop the ball or need a little extra help on a project."

"There's no way I'm doing a strip tease to get some doucher to do my paperwork," said Neveah peevishly.

"Never say never, Neveah. Though for you, hey, it might be more about convincing the police not to lock those big titties of yours in the slammer." A few girls snickered; the busty goth had a reputation, for sure.

"So you're saying, the more ways we know how to use our bodies to please men, the better off we're going to be in life?" Ashley asked, ever the teacher's pet. They were friends outside of class, and somehow in class that had translated to her sucking up relentlessly. Her efforts to ingratiate herself to him had netted him some fantastic quotes these past two months. Hell, she'd been a pretty kinky slut before he even got to her. Jordan had spent some time preplanning his daily entries last night, and her name was on more than any three of her classmates combined.

"That's right, Ashley. Now, you guys all want to have good lives, right?"

A murmur of assent echoed through the class. Jordan quickly put his hands on Mary's hips to hold her still, then laid his notepad across her back and used her as a writing desk to jot that exchange down verbatim. Might make for a good tool to get them more enthused about his "lessons."

"Good. Now today we're going to watch an instructional video." He plugged his flash drive into the room's video projector and loaded the file. Nothing too advanced, he hoped, just a stripping video he liked that he'd downloaded from a porn site last night. "I want each of you to partner up, and I'll put this on loop. You're going to practice these moves on one another and provide feedback. Understand?"

"Assigned partners or do we pick?" asked Heather.

“You can pick today, super tits. Go on, folks. Partner up, and let’s move the desks out of the way and set up rows of chairs in the middle of the room.” The girls began looking around the room; there was some obvious reticence to seek a partner, few of them being comfortable selecting a same-gendered classmate to practice sex acts on. Jordan rolled his eyes at their stalling, then clapped his hands. “Chop chop, sluts, let’s go! Last girls paired up lose participation!”

That got them moving. Like any other partner project, friends quickly found friends. Evidently the prospect of rubbing themselves on a friend was less upsetting than doing so on a lesser acquaintance. There were a few surprise couplings, but most of them pretty expected. Jordan gave them a couple minutes to adjust the room, forming two rows of seats spaced across the room, each bearing a naked girl sitting in it with a second one standing naked in front of her. All of them were waiting for Jordan to educate them on how to be the perfect sexual objects.

With a grin, he switched off the lights and pressed play, then slunk back behind his desk to watch, and to start editing the freckles off of Courtney Wilborn. They weren’t working for her. “Do your best to do exactly what your guest tutor on the screen is doing, all right, sluts? Then we’ll play again, and you and your partner will swap roles.” He let it run, splitting his attention between the girls in front of him and the busty porn star on the screen. They were trying their best, as near as he could tell in the dim light from the projector. As the heavy pulse of some very typical porn music played from the speakers, he logged into TIOS on his borrowed NHS laptop – only to see an unusual message pop up.

*Error Code 41131: User already logged in.*

Jordan frowned, clicking OK and returning to the login screen. He’d seen this before, but only a couple times. Fishers put in a truly baffling amount of labor into his stupid yearbook, and at all sorts of weird hours. He’d even checked and confirmed it was an error unique to the editor-in-chief accounts; his own student account didn’t seem to care if two computers logged in. Maybe whoever (or whatever) had created TIOS had been unable to handle the possibility of conflicting commands being entered simultaneously? He didn’t know, and now that he was done using Fishers’ account, it didn’t matter what that turd sucker was doing. But that wasn’t why he was frowning.

Looking up, he saw a dozen or so girls doing their best to imitate the porn stars on the screen. Some of them were so awkward he wanted to laugh, but enough were managing to emulate some rough approximation of those moves that the instinct to sit and leer won out momentarily. After that moment, though, he tore his attention away and scanned the room. Sure enough, there was Amanda Carpenter sitting in a desk in the corner, her airbrushed face lit up by the presence of a laptop in front of her.

What the hell? Why the fuck wasn’t she partnered up?!

“Amanda!” he barked. “You think you have some kind of special exemption or something?”

“There’s an odd number of girls today. Yuri’s absent. I didn’t have a partner.” She never looked up from her screen.

Throughout the room, naked, nervous girls looked amongst one another, disturbed by this strange act of passive protest. “Yeah, so shut off your damn computer and double up with somebody. Now.”

“I’d rather not,” she said, and continued working.

Jordan stormed across the room like a thunderclap, not stopping until he was looming over her. “Was I un-fucking-clear?” he snapped.

“No,” she said dryly, only glancing up for a moment. “Was I?”

His fists clenched, but suddenly he was aware of dozens of eyes taking in this scene, watching his authority be challenged and ignored. “Get back to your dancing!” he shouted. “Don’t pay any attention to the two of us.”

He turned back to Amanda as they complied, dancing resuming as if it had never been interrupted.

“Now you...” He snagged a fistful of her hair. “Why don’t you and I have ourselves a little chat.”

Angelica felt like she might have a leg up on her classmates on this particular assignment. Unlike most of them, she'd actually had sex with her partner before.

By now, it was pretty well established that Lindsay Koogan was into girls. They'd all conquered their shame about nudity this far into the course, but Lindsay had vaulted right past that into furtive glances that, coupled with her ever-hard nipples and a pussy so wet you could smell it from four desks over, made it plain. Still, besides her, and the few girls Mr. Lyons had man-handled into a sort-of-threesome on occasion, none of these girls had ever actually squeezed another girl's boobs before, much less munched carpet. Angelica, thanks to Owen, had ample experience.

The only surprise was that, when it came time to pick partners, Kirsten picked Angelica so quickly.

She'd have thought sure she'd pick Olivia, then see if she could con her henchman into taking both shifts while she sat on her curvaceous hind parts. However, the very moment Mr. Lyons demanded they take action, Kirsten had snatched her by the wrist.

"Howdy, partner," Kirsten said in a low voice.

Olivia, already en route to her mistress, reversed course, and her moments of indecision cost her, leaving her with Lindsay. There was no shame in exhibiting one's sexuality in sex ed, but still, to be practicing erotic dancing with a lesbian was well outside her comfort zone. Lindsay, however, was all smiles, guiding Olivia to their practice station with a hand on her bottom.

"Fine," Angelica said. "Who's working it first?"

Kirsten's answer came in the form of taking her seat in the middle of the front row. She gestured to the ground in front of her, and Angelica took her spot. Everyone else was quickly situated, nervous, awkward-looking girls seated in front of even more nervous, even more awkward-looking girls. Beside her, MacKenzie looked so anxious she was practically hyperventilating. "Deep breaths, now," Angelica said, fanning her with a hand. "It's just a little dancing. Nothing to freak out over."

MacKenzie nodded. "I know. Just... my pastor, he says—"

Then the video began to play. It was immediately obvious that the sound quality was terrible, a loud buzzing over credits that introduced their "tutor" as a woman calling herself "Summer Koch." Somehow Angelica doubted it was homophonic with the way the Koch brothers said it. The video started, and then the buzzing was even louder – one of those movies with no mic, only the basic sound-recording of the camcorder. Maybe only a basic cell phone, even. Either way, it was a PoV shot of someone seated in a chair looking up at what could only be Summer Koch, a woman who'd be pegged as a porn star even if she were dressed in a parka and snow pants. She was naked, like her pupils in Mr. Lyons' class, and waved to the camera man.

"Hey everybody, my name's Summer, and I'm gonna show you how to give a killer lap dance. We're talking back room only, OK?" She winked and giggled, somehow

reaching an even higher pitch than her ridiculous breathy voice. She sounded like a fucking airhead, and Angelica was instantly reminded of the first time her stepbrother had walked in on her and Owen last fall. They'd wanted to test how desperate she was for more of that cock, and they'd made her act like Summer here. Assholes. She'd had Owen make it up to her later, riding that sucker until he was begging for respite.

(As for Conner, she'd find a way for him to make it up for her. Someday.)

"So first up, you wanna make sure you're good and stretched, OK? Let's graaaaab those ankles," the woman said, her gigantic and unnervingly misshapen fake boobs concealing her face as she bent double in front of the cameraman, her pussy pointed right at his face.

So it began. Angelica turned away from Kirsten and did her stretches. "Angelica, are you...?" Kirsten said softly, but not so soft that the whole class wouldn't hear it.

"Am I what? Stretching? I'm just doing what the skank in the video is doing," she retorted irritably.

Kirsten didn't say anything further, so she simply went on with the video. "First things first, show your fella what you're working with," she said. As some cheesy techno-porny music began to play, gratingly loud compared to the muted sound of Summer's voice, the woman began spinning slowly in place, cocking her hips from side to side when her back was to the camera, caressing those silicone-infused ta-tas of hers when she was facing him.

In the classroom, the girls did their best to copy it. These were normal high school girls, though, not porn stars, and many of them didn't have the first idea how to make their hips move like that. Stacy nearly fell over, whether because her gyrations threw her off balance or because she stumbled over Elaine's foot, who could say. Some girls were giggling nervously. Easier to treat this as a joke, after all, than to take the assignment seriously. Her own partner merely regarded her with a dry, bemused look, having seen Angelica do far sexier maneuvers than this so far had called for. If Summer had them gargling another woman's pussy juice off her man's nut sack, maybe these girls could begin to catch up with what Angelica had been through.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Lyons was darting across the room to the back corner where, half obscured by the seldom-used changing screens, Amanda Carpenter was apparently ignoring the assignment and working on her laptop.

What the hell was wrong with her? Had she not heard Mr. Lyons tell them to follow the instructions on the video? Was she crazy? Angelica didn't know what the consequences for disobeying were, but whatever they were, they had to be unthinkably severe, because she knew she'd never even consider it. The whole class looked on in horror at her disobedience, a heated exchange unfolding. Mr. Lyons shouted for them to get back to their dancing, and Angelica – of course – obeyed, sitting backward on

Kirsten's knee and rolling her hips in a circle. Kirsten's hands found Angelica's hips, as the man's did on screen.

A moment later, their teacher was dragging a struggling Amanda across the room by her hair, her long legs flailing as she tried to keep up with his rapid strides. "Hey, watch it you fucking cunt!" snapped Kirsten as the girl's bony elbow connected with her ribs on the way past. Angelica had more empathy – really, who didn't have more empathy in them than Kirsten Vaughan – but she said nothing, even when Amanda's heel came down hard on her toes. She supposed this was what came of defying Mr. Lyons. Small wonder the rest of the class was focusing so intently on the screen.

"Remember, this is a back room lap dance, not some prissy main room tease, all right?" said Summer Koch. "Your man's going to want to touch you, and you need to let him, all right? Now scooooooch back until you can feel that big yummy man meat right between your buns, and let his hands go wild, OK? OK!"

While Angelica couldn't feel any meat in her buns, she definitely felt a pair of delicately manicured fingers take hold of her hips and work their way up her sides. Like Summer, she raised her arms up and held her hair out of the way, giving Kirsten easy access to reach around to the front and play with her boobs. The girl had often taken great satisfaction in deriding Angelica's breasts, which, considering the perfect set Kirsten was sporting, was fair, albeit bitchy. Still, she wasn't the least bit shy about her groping, finding Angelica's nipples, hardening by the moment, and rolling them softly between her fingertips.

Around her, similar scenes were playing out. Courtney was gaping at the massive weight of Neveah's pendulous breasts. Mary's chin was trembling as she forced herself to probe Maggie's, a look of religious mortification evident on her face. "Sorry, I have to," whispered Miranda into Abby's ear as the slender dance team member writhed in her lap, pressing her petite little tits into Miranda's unwillingly questing hands.

A chorus of erotic sighs filled the room after Summer instructed them to make their men feel valued in an audible way. But it was actually what Mr. Lyons and Amanda were saying at the front desk which caught her ear.

Well, what Mr. Lyons was saying, at least. He had Amanda's face impaled firmly on his cock as she sputtered and gagged, trying and by all appearances mostly failing to breathe around it. "How'd you do it, huh? I know you can't undo it once it's entered, so how's about you tell me how you pulled it off?"

It was hard to hear them over Summer's vapid giggling as the cameraman started sucking on her neck, and harder still to concentrate as Kirsten dutifully copied the maneuver. The girl knew how to use her mouth all right, and Angelica had to give her full credit for dedication to making it feel like authentic carnal appetite. Still, if all that was required of her at the moment was to keep grinding her butt into Kirsten's

nonexistent cock, she had attention to spare. Enough to catch Mr. Lyons using a word she instantly recognized.

“Come on, bitch, you tell me why you’re not dancing along with the rest of these sluts, huh? How the fuck did you get around TIOS?”

TIOS? Conner’s yearbook program? Angelica knew that acronym all too well. Even if she’d only had the single brush with it, there was no forgetting her brush with a magical yearbook program. Amanda, she knew from hearing Conner griping about her at the dinner table for months, was editor-in-chief, same as Conner, and she knew Mr. Lyons was taking the class, too. A teacher here, but only another student there.

Questions flooded her mind. What could they know about TIOS? What command had Amanda gotten implanted in her? Who had put it there – Conner? Why was it upsetting Mr. Lyons so much?

But the question that froze into the forefront of her consciousness was the very same one that Mr. Lyons was asking. “Tell me how you beat TIOS, damnit!” He forced her head down on his cock so hard Angelica thought he might impale the redhead’s brain.

A sudden hard twist to Angelica’s nipples jerked her back to her assignment. “You space out, Ange?”

“Sorry, I got... sorry.” She looked up to the screen again, where Summer had spun to face the camera. Her fingertips were tracing themselves all over the front of the man beneath her as she rocked front to back. The man’s cock was nestled between Summer’s well-traveled labia, twitching as she stroked herself against it. Angelica, with an annoyed sigh, turned back to face Kirsten and mirrored it the best she could. She had more experience feeling another girl’s tits than her classmates, certainly, but it was still pretty awkward to be caressing Kirsten’s in plain view of dozens of other girls.

It really was one thing that impressed her about Mr. Lyons’ teaching style. Any other class, especially one full of seniors and this close to the end of the year, everybody would be half-assing this assignment. Here, every single ass – whether tight, toned, shapely, curvy, or just plain thicc – was fully engaged. Angelica’s abs were already burning a bit from the constant gyrations, and she could see many of the other girls glistening with sweat as well. Heather, a little rounder than most, was in the back corner positively dripping, those fat titties of hers dripping all over her partner’s face. (Those mammoth mammaries were so big, Angelica couldn’t even tell whose head that was in there.)

Behind her, however, Angelica heard a gasp that could only be Amanda finally being allowed up for air. “Fine, fine, I’ll tell you – just give me a second, all right?!” Her tone was shockingly severe to be using with a teacher, especially one so strict.

“You got to the count of three before I up the stakes, Mandy Cakes,” came Mr. Lyons’ voice. “One... two...”

“Holy fuck! You guys, Angelica Buck’s pussy is dribbling all over me!” exclaimed Kirsten suddenly. “You nasty little slut!”

The sudden attention of every girl in the room – except for the one Angelica had been devoting her own attention to – was riveted on Angelica, who was suddenly, agonizingly aware that she was rapidly humping the blonde bully’s thigh with abandon. Everybody else was humping or being humped, too – that was the assignment, after all – but suddenly, Kirsten had made this not just classwork, but rather something perverted.

“Oh gross!”

“Ew, really?”

“Oh yikes, you can totally see!”

“Her name’s Buck, and she’s here to fuck!” somebody joked, and everybody who got the reference cackled with laughter.

Angelica gritted her teeth, and not merely because Sarah was the millionth clever bitch to try that line. It was also because what Kirsten was saying was for the most part untrue, that what arousal she was feeling was both inevitable when being fondled and rubbed in such intimate ways, and that she’d never “dribbled” out of her pussy in her life. More frustrating still, Mr. Lyons was ignoring the disruption, which meant whatever Amanda had said up there, Angelica had missed it. A chance to cure her mind of its haze of obsession with Owen’s delicious, fragrant, perfectly textured cock.

Angelica sputtered a denial, but the damage was done. The girls on either side of her chair scooted further away, and everyone with even a drop of homophobia, or the lack of courage to deny it, was looking at her with derision. As if girls like Kirsten Vaughan weren’t the stuff of everyone’s stray lesbian fantasies to begin with!

Trying not to see the broad smirk on those plump pink lips, Angelica finished her lesson, scowling at Summer Koch’s freakish fake tits whenever she was instructed to face them. Kirsten never let up either, caressing Angelica’s body, even fingering her pussy with gusto. It was plain that some girls in the class actually came during that segment. Amanda was now laying across the teacher’s desk, ass in the air and completely exposed as he stood in front of her fucking her face with savage relish.

Then, with a giggle and a wordless wave from Summer, the video faded to black.

“Good work, bitches,” he said, grunting as he came in Amanda’s mouth, a trickle of his slime slipping down her chin and into the floor. Angelica was often called upon to be the class jizz mop for such situations, but this time he didn’t seem to notice the puddle. Easy participation points, even if it was a little nasty slurping her teacher’s cum off the floor.

“Now, everybody switch places. Dancers, you’re the dudes this time, and the rest of you lazy cum troughs are gonna see what your tutor can teach you. This will be on the

test, ladies, so no skimping – I expect you to give it your all. Though I will need two volunteers for a side project.”

“Will we have to make up this assignment after school or something? I don’t wanna lose points,” said MacKenzie.

“You sure will, but I’ll throw in a day’s worth of extra credit.” A murmur went through the class. Extra credit was unheard of in Mr. Lyons’ class. The only time he’d ever offered it were for major ordeals like that King of Hearts fiasco, and the only girls willing to do that kind of stuff were the skanks willing to fuck a teacher outside of sex ed class to begin with.

Heather’s hand shot up first, and a moment later was followed by a dozen others. Their teacher gave the fastest hand their wish, then picked her partner, Stephanie Margulies to go too. “All right, the rest of you, get back to your lessons.” He pressed play.

The class quickly complied, weary dancers taking the vacated seats. In the dim light, Angelica failed to notice a broad, moist puddle on Kirsten’s seat until her ass was fully in it. As Kirsten performed Summer’s stretches, she glanced over her shoulder, smirking arrogantly.

As the buxom blonde babe sat down on her lap, two things were abundantly clear. The first was the nature of the volunteer assignment. As Mr. Lyons resumed fucking Amanda’s face, Heather and Stephanie positioned themselves opposite him and were taking turns smack the holy hell out of Amanda’s ass. As someone who’d been spanked more than a few times by the girl now grinding her ass on her lap, Angelica knew full well how bad that had to smart. Mr. Lyons ordered them not to pull back, and neither girl did. Of course. Their teacher had *told* them not to.

The other thing that became clear was that Kirsten was really, *really* into this assignment.

The wetness made it evident on its own. For a moment, Angelica thought to point it out, but she finally understood the true reason behind Kirsten’s false accusation. It hadn’t simply been her standard need to bully her peers. She’d accused Angelica because now, if Angelica tried to call attention to Kirsten’s juicy wet pussy, everyone would only think she was only trying to get payback. Considering how desperately people wanted to avoid getting on this bitch’s bad side, nobody would believe Angelica over Kirsten. Even with the physical evidence being liberally smeared all over her thighs, it wasn’t like anyone was going to reach between the girl’s legs and check the source.

But once the dance started, Kirsten threw herself into it. With the smacks on Amanda’s hind quarters raining down in time to the beat, she was a wiggling, grinding, twisting, groping, licking, leaking lap dancer.

Soon, the class was taking notice of the vigor and enthusiasm of her performance. Olivia preempted any chance for people to be weirded out by letting out a whoop of awe. “You go, girl!”

“Careful Buck doesn’t dyke out on you!” warned Kirsten’s friend Ashley.

The blonde vixen squatted at Angelica’s feet and spread her thighs by hand, then slithered up, dragging her tits up the length of her body, tongue extended and dragging itself ahead. “Just ‘cause she’s a freak doesn’t mean I’m going to take a shitty grade,” said Kirsten, grasping Angelica’s face and smothering her in a rippling bounty of quavering titties. She rubbed them up and down Angelica’s cheeks, the smell of her perfume soaking into her skin, commingling with their sweat. She’d be smelling it for the rest of the day.

Mr. Lyons barked for his drones to focus on their work and quit buzzing around their queen bee, and they complied. What else would they do? Serve themselves up to have their mouths deep-fucked and their asses beat crimson like Amanda? What could she have been thinking?

Kirsten came at least twice mid-leg-hump. Angelica didn’t miss the stern look she directed at Olivia after a tiny gasp of pleasure escaped her lips; Olivia pretended to climax herself, reading the unspoken command with perfect fluentness. Not long after, a few other girls who’d been holding back followed suit and let themselves come. Just like that, getting off with another woman was no big deal. If Kirsten Vaughan did it, it wasn’t perverse. It was trendy.

Another day in sex ed.

The bell rang while the class was still practicing; Mr. Lyons promised to send a quick faculty email so they wouldn’t get marked tardy, since they still needed to clean up and get dressed. Some girls tried to smear hand sanitizer on their legs to wipe up their partner’s dribblings. Angelica didn’t bother; she’d worn leggings today, so if there was any residue left behind, no one would see. When she met Owen in the utility shed by the football bleachers for their lunchtime fuck, it’d probably too dark for him to notice. Hopefully. It’d be super weird, since she couldn’t explain where it had come from. Sex ed had a strict confidentiality policy that she abided as absolutely as her commitment to doing whatever Mr. Lyons told her to. During class, at least.

Amanda whimpered as she tugged her panties and jeans up over her battered ass, but the rest of the class was back into social mode, talking about this and that, complaining about how out of shape that workout had made them realize they were. Angelica started dressing next to Kirsten, and spoke in a low voice. “Mind telling me what the fuck that was all about?”

“What, doing my classwork? I’m getting a good grade in here. I don’t know about your stupid ass, but I’m getting that A.”

“Yeah, sure. Or you’re a lesbian and you decided to embarrass me so that you wouldn’t out yourself with that spectacle you put on.”

Kirsten turned a positively withering glare on her as she tugged her bra on. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m no fucking dyke.”

Angelica pulled her panties up. “I’m not judging or anything. I just... I never knew. I always thought you just liked tormenting me. Why didn’t you say something? I mean, we were already fooling around. We could’ve, like... I dunno, made it better, or whatever.”

Kirsten’s glare faded to mere suspicion. “Yeah, right. Even if I were bi, or gay, or whatever, you’d guys would just try to use it to hold over my head.”

“Come on, Kirsten. We’re not assholes. Owen likes you, for sure. If girls turn you on, so what? I mean, I actually—”

“I’m not like you, OK?” Kirsten snapped. “I date *boys*, and I like *boys*. Fucking freak.”

Angelica was about to point out her obvious enjoyment of having a girl lap at her pussy while she fucked said boys, but then Olivia walked over, removing her hair tie and doing up her last couple buttons on her top. “That was an awesome job today, girl! You were so bad-ass! You’re gonna totally rock the test!”

Kirsten flashed her trademark smug grin. “Hell yeah I am. You weren’t half bad yourself.” She gave a sidelong look at Angelica. “You get any better, and ol’ Suck and Buck here is going to go after you next.”

“Ew!” Olivia said with a laugh. She really did have toadying down to an art, a perfect mix of agreeing with her boss and laughing it off to maintain the social group. Sometimes Angelica wondered how much credit was owed to the girl for keeping Kirsten’s rampant ego from rending apart her own social circle. Lord knew Hayleigh would usurp Kirsten’s spot in an instant if she gained any leverage.

They made their way into the hall, and Angelica let them go ahead. It had been a pretty trippy morning with Kirsten, but that wasn’t what was on her mind right now. She walked over to Amanda, who looked as though she were working up the nerve to put her clothes back on over her battered behind. The tall girl was practically limping.

“Amanda?” she said.

The redhead seemed surprised not to be alone in the sex ed classroom. “Hey, Angelica.”

“You OK? That was... pretty rough.”

“I’ll be all right. Should’ve seen it coming. Nothing I can’t rise above.”

“If you say so.” Even Kirsten’s spankings were mostly playful. What Heather and Stephanie had done had looked brutal. While getting dressed, she’d heard Stephanie complaining about how bad her hand hurt while she was setting up a time to swing by Mr. Lyons’ house to make up her lap dance lesson.

Now, how to ask her about what she'd overheard without bringing up something that had happened in sex ed? Hmm. "Hey, so you're editor for the yearbook, right?" she said as an opener, squatting to pick up Amanda's clothes off the floor and hand them to her. She looked like she might have a hard time bending herself.

"Editor-in-chief." Ugh, the girl sounded just like Conner. He made that same dork-ass distinction every time it came up, too. "With your brother."

Angelica nodded, still trying to find a strategy. What did she even want? She'd heard them talking about TIOS and pounced without thinking. She couldn't just say, *hey, heard you have a program that edits reality. Can I borrow it sometime?* She couldn't even break into Conner's copy, and he was actually pretty trusting of her. What she needed was a way to snag Amanda's copy from her.

And like that, she had an idea. "Oh yeah! Conner, yeah, he talks about you all the time. He's so, ya know, impressed with your, like, editing skills."

Amanda arched an eyebrow for a moment. "Right. He's got mad editing skills, too. It's a real turn-on for me," she said dryly.

Once more regretting her lack of a plan, Angelica dove headfirst into the first tactic that sprung to mind. "You know, that reminds me... I was wondering if you'd mind letting me look over your shoulder sometime, or maybe really quickly do a super-fast fix? You see, I'm worried he's going to use this really ugly picture of me for—"

"No you're not," the girl suddenly interrupted, planting her hands on her hips, two huge yet shockingly perky breasts resting right in front of Angelica's face.

"Um, how do you... I mean, why..."

Amanda spoke softly. "You were trying to get me to let you use TIOS, and the answer is no."

"Use TIOS?" Angelica repeated. Damnit, she was usually smoother than this! "Uh, why would I want to—"

"I don't know, but I'm sure it has something to do with your... I don't know what to call it. Obsession? Fixation? I know you know what I mean. Considering your guy is dating Kirsten, I can only wonder if her treatment of you today was part of it, too."

"What are you even talking—"

But Amanda kept on talking right over her. "Look, you have my sympathy, OK? But the whole point of TIOS is to help us tell a better story about our time here, not to pervert it for kicks. So whatever Kirsten's doing, whatever your situation with Owen is, I'm sorry, but you'll have to handle things on your own."

How could she know all this? How could she speak of it so casually? She supposed as editor (in-chief, she could hear Amanda insist), she could as easily find that file in the system and realize what Owen had done. Heck, maybe old Goner had even gone and told her. Besides, the fact that Owen and Kirsten were dating was major gossip. This girl read her like a book.

“It’s not fair,” Angelica insisted, changing strategies. If bullshitting her way into Amanda’s copy of TIOS hadn’t worked, maybe honesty would. “Conner swears there’s nothing to be done for it, but he won’t let me try. Come on. I only want to make things right. You know full well that bitch has it coming.”

“Listen to Conner,” Amanda said. “You don’t want to become the kind of person who stoops to hurting people to get what they want.”

“What, like what Heather and Stephanie did to you today?”

Amanda looked surprised, weirdly. “Heather and Stephanie?”

“Yeah, they went to town on you for a few measly extra credit points.”

Amanda winced as she tugged her spandex miniskirt over her abused rear end. Friggin’ Pride girls and their lack of panties. “Heather and Stephanie had nothing to do with it. That was all Jordan.”

Angelica didn’t really care enough to talk about what he’d done, so she made a final plea. “Come on, Amanda. You don’t know what it’s like, feeling like this about somebody and having him blow you off for some other girl just because she has a perfect body and five figures of instagram followers.”

Amanda adjusted her top so it covered as much of those tits of hers as it was going to. “The answer’s no. And I know you’re not asking for my advice, but here it is anyway. Simply because you have the power to hurt someone doesn’t give you the right. Thinking like that is how people like Kirsten and Jordan became the way they are. It’s not a zero sum game.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Angelica snapped.

“It means that there’s not a limited amount of happiness in the world, and Kirsten’s happiness doesn’t have to reduce yours any more than Jordan getting off on being a royal fucker has to define me. You don’t think I could destroy that son of a bitch if I wanted to? Of course I could. But if he’s going to treat me like shit second period, that’s on him. Operating at his level only diminishes us, and I won’t let him do that. After graduation, he’s out of our lives for good.”

“Well yeehaw for you, but I happen to *want* Owen to stay in my life after graduation.”

Amanda put a hand on her shoulder. “If he cares about you, he’ll choose you, Kirsten be damned. If he doesn’t, then you’re better off without him.”

Angelica brushed the girl’s hand off and stormed out of the room. She should’ve known that Amanda would be no more help than Conner. No matter. Somehow, some way, she’d make sure he didn’t leave her again.

Amanda spent third period and part of fourth in the nurse's office, icing her brutalized bottom. She'd had to lie to Mrs. Bissell and claim she'd fallen down the stairs, the most cliché lie for explaining abuse-related bruises in the book. It was the sort of thing that, coupled with her low talent for deception and the nature of the injuries, would normally result in a check-in from DCS. For once Amanda felt fortunate not to have any parents so they could not be unduly harassed.

It was still hard to sit down even after icing her backside, but luckily fourth period was a lab that allowed her to stand, followed by lunch which she took in the gym shooting hoops. The women's basketball coach, Mr. Oliveri, had begged her to try out for the team when she'd first started at NHS, but despite her height, Amanda had all the coordination and agility of a drunken pelican. Today, however, it was something to do standing up, and a chance to interact with some classmates she didn't often get to.

Eventually seventh period rolled around, and it was time for her day to begin. Jordan had remained logged in since second period, so she'd had no opportunity to continue on her project during the day. Besides, she'd been wanting to touch base with Conner anyway.

"Miss C? Is Conner in today?" she asked a few minutes into class when he still hadn't showed.

"That young man is finally getting himself in to see a doctor," she said, stepping closer and lowering her voice. "That's twice now he's fainted in my classroom. I called his mom last night to make sure he was being smart about it, and sure enough, it was news to her. She assured me she'd get him in today, and must still be there."

"Oh. I guess that's good, then." Disappointing, but she did worry about his health. He was such a jittery little fella sometimes.

"Did you need help with anything? We're having a project day, so I'm all yours if you need me."

"Nah. I was actually going to check in on a few folks myself."

"All set on the senior portrait approvals?"

"All but the ones Conner said he'd check," she said, her second lie to a staff member that day. But she knew she could easily catch up before it would matter anyway. Miss C nodded and got out of her way, and finally, Amanda was free to return to her work.

First things first – to get that little weasel logged out of her account so she could actually do anything. Not surprising he'd elected to stay logged in. It was actually a security flaw in the software, in her estimation; unless you logged out of the machine altogether, TIOS didn't time out logins. Ergo, all Jordan had to do to keep her out was to leave his laptop signed in all day. She looked out her office windows, and there he was, tapping away at his work station in the corner, no doubt working hard at ruining someone's day.

All right. Go time.

“Jordan? I need you to log out and head down to interview Aaron Palmer. Word has it he just landed a full ride athletic scholarship for baseball, so we want to see if we can get anything out of him for the team spread. Then pick a couple teammates, see if you can get anything worthwhile out of them about Aaron.”

He looked up, clearly aware of why he'd been singled out. “I'm kind of in the middle of something. Can't you send somebody else?”

“I don't mind going,” volunteered DeShaun. “Aaron's a buddy of mine.”

“Which is why you're not going,” she said firmly. Miss C nodded to her for the catch. Students taking advantage of interview time to socialize and pull their friends out of class was a constant risk. “Come on, Jordan, get the lead out.”

“I'll stop by practice after school,” Jordan countered. “I don't have anything going on, and that way there's no class disruption.”

Amanda had anticipated his foot-dragging, however, and planned accordingly. “They have an away game today, so unless you want to ride with them to Fairview and stay for the whole game, you're going to have to do it now.”

He was trying not to scowl. “I don't mind. I like baseball. National pastime, right?”

“Is there some reason you can't do it right now that you'd like to share?” she asked, planting her hands on her hips.

“I can do it later is all,” he said.

She walked over to his desk, well aware that by now the argument had drawn eyes, lowering her voice enough to appear to be sensitive to his dignity while still allowing everyone to eavesdrop if they wished. “Look, Jordan. I know how little you care about yearbook. But when we're in this classroom, you are here to work, and I am here as your boss. That means when I tell you I want you to do something, you do it. Understand?”

There. She'd said it. That had gone exactly how she'd hoped. Her heart was hammering in her chest so hard it actually was sending pangs to her bruised, swollen bottom. *Come on. Say it...*

“I...”

He stopped, then a look of comprehension blossomed. “You're not the boss of me, Amanda. I'm a student, not a minion, and you can't order me around.”

*Damnit to hell!* She'd hoped to seize him in the same trap he'd used to ensnare the girls of sex ed. Other than Amanda herself, that is, as she'd foolishly let him find out today. If she'd been thinking clearly, she'd have kept this development from him until she'd found a way to break his power. Instead, she'd let the cat out of the bag, and now he knew that he couldn't use her own account against her. That didn't undo everything

he'd entered under Conner's login, but the recent compulsion he'd imposed on his "students" to obey him did not extend to her.

Now he knew that. And he'd reacted even more harshly than she might have feared, as the storm clouds decorating her rear end handily proved. Worse, that act of defiance was probably what had made him suspicious to what she'd just attempted.

What she'd said to Conner's sister that morning about stooping to his level was true, and she'd meant it. It did not mean, however, that she wasn't going to do her best to defend herself, and protect her classmates where she could.

Before the argument could go any further, Miss C joined the two of them and took charge of the situation. "That's enough, you two. Amanda, he's right. You're editor-in-chief, not dictator-for-life. You need something done, you ask, and if it's important and you're not getting results, you let me know and I can do the dictating."

"As for you..." She leaned over Jordan's desk; Amanda saw the way he looked right down the neck of her baggy t-shirt. She didn't even know what line in that mess of a dress code edit kept Miss C from noticing and slapping him right across the face. "Amanda made a perfectly reasonable request, and so get your butt moving. Understand, buster?"

Jordan nodded, and with a glare at Amanda, said nothing. "Oh, and go ahead and leave your laptop open. I needed to check up on a couple of your spreads you got behind on."

Clearly he wanted to argue, but Miss C was obviously brooking no further rebuttals to what was again a fairly typical request. In a huff, he grabbed his backpack and stalked out of the room.

After both an apology and thank-you to her teacher, Amanda snatched his laptop and darted into the editor's office. She logged out of his machine and back into TIOS on her own, and finally, she could get back to work. She opened up ccon2se, the spread with most of the edits to her sex ed class, and focused on one of the lines, almost all of it entered under Conner's login, and working its insidious power on her.

Amanda took a deep breath.

"T-today..." she started, but then stopped. Her heart was racing, dread of someone picking up her voice nearly causing her to panic. *No. It's not real. It's TIOS. It's no more real than Hayleigh being a sex icon at 240 pounds. No more real than a rumor.*

"T-today, my... my tea..." She stopped. God this was so much harder than it should be. Why were the visuals so much easier to fight through? Conner had gotten her past the changes to Hayleigh and Hailey in mere minutes, and today when she'd seen Hailey in Mr. Adler's class, she'd barely had to focus to appreciate that she wasn't fat or ugly or anything of the sort. She was gorgeous, in fact, conspicuously so. She would

stand out in a crowd of hundreds. She was thin, and pretty, with a figure that turned heads. Amanda could see that now.

This was not nearly so simple. “Today... my teacher ssss...” Her hand clapped over her mouth unbidden. What was she thinking?!

Amanda looked at the picture on the spread, a poster from their classroom, its inappropriate slogan showing her that the policy was nothing more than Jordan’s selective eye for details. It was his vision for the memories of that class. It didn’t have to be hers.

“Todaymyteacherstuckhisc-cockdown... d-down...” Rushing the words out helped, but only a little. She was sweating bullets. This felt so *wrong*.

She took a breath and tried not to remain calm through it. Only words, nothing more. “Today my teacher... stuck his cock...” She barely faltered this time. “Down my throat.”

Miss C peeked her head into see what the hollering was about. “You all right in here? Get good news or something?”

Amanda was still grinning. “Sorry, Miss C. Just found this new TIOS functionality, and... it’s going to save me a ton of hassle. Sorry, I’ll keep it down.”

Miss C smiled indulgently. “You don’t let up, do ya? Well don’t let me get in your way.”

She’d done it. She’d talked out loud about sex ed! For the first time in months, she’d been able to say something about what had happened in there. And if she could do it, that meant, quite simply, that it could be undone. “Mr. Lyons made Heather and Stephanie spank me,” she managed after only a few tries. Poor things. She knew neither of them were mean-spirited girls in the least, but they were caught in Jordan’s snare.

Jordan. That was right. Not Mr. Lyons. “Jordan is making the girls in his class perform sex acts for him.” Only two minutes to get that out, and she was far less close to hyperventilating.

She tried to write it down, but found her hands trembled too much to make it intelligible. Her speech was stuttery, too, but her mouth didn’t need to hold a pen to communicate. Typing was no better. No matter. She didn’t care enough about what Jordan did to tell anyone anyway.

Wait. Damn him!

Another block. All right, she could do this. She got out her phone and pulled up her text conversation with Conner. Simple test. Just send him a message about her little spat with Jordan earlier. It wasn’t *forbidden* to talk about Jordan. It was simply impossible – no! merely hard, not impossible, *you can do this* – to talk about him.

But first she ought to check the weather, see if she’d need a jacket this afternoon. That seemed way more important than gossip about someone as uninteresting as Jordan.

Fifteen minutes later, she gave up on the text. It was too hard to focus. Every time she tried to write his name, she lost interest and moved on to something else. She knew she could do it, though. Maybe text simply wasn't the best medium, with her phone offering so many means of distraction from such a dull, pointless task.

No. Not dull. Not pointless. It was how he's hiding everything he's done. Anybody who found him doing anything out of the ordinary lost the will to share the information the moment they learned it. Amanda supposed even if she could tell someone, they probably wouldn't be able to do anything about it. After all, the principal couldn't exactly call his parents or the police when she found his every activity so tedious that she deemed it beneath her notice.

Still. This was progress. "Today Mr. Lyons..." She stopped. "This morning J-jordan taught us how to lap dance." What a pig.

Line by line, she looked through ccon2se, telling herself that it was all bullshit. In her head, mostly; it was much harder to speak such affirmations aloud. She did *not* have to strip for his class. She should be offended by the very idea of it. Right? She was ninety percent sure that was wrong. Ninety-five, maybe. She wanted to stop being ashamed of her sexuality and all, but—

*"The only reason we don't call them tits and asses and cocks and cunts is because we're taught to be ashamed of our bodies. We need to stop being ashamed."* – Kirsten Vaughan. Amanda frowned. That's right. She should be embarrassed of being naked in front of her classmates. She would be ashamed to be naked in her other classes, for sure; so yes. Yes, it was shameful to strip for Mr.... For Jordan. She wouldn't do that again.

Unless he made her. He could do whatever he wanted to her, of course. She didn't have to obey him, but there was obviously nothing she could do to stop him from taking her clothes off himself. If, for some weird reason she failed to get them off in a timely fashion herself.

No. Not a weird reason! You don't strip in school!

She caught herself. And he can't take your clothes off, either! That's more TIOS! She closed her eyes, pictured what she would do tomorrow, step by step. Go to second period. Take off her... nothing. Take off nothing. Sit in her desk. Jordan would come over and grab her titties. (Breasts? What was she supposed to call them again? Something in the spread had mentioned that, too.) Either way, Mr. Lyons would squeeze her titties and shove his cock in her mouth. But she wouldn't let him. She'd bend over and lower her panties – and her skirt, she'd be wearing more than just panties! – and take her punishment like a grownup.

She opened her eyes. She was trembling, and her head was throbbing with a headache that was quite nearly a migraine.

There, on the screen in front of her, she saw “*Teachers basically punish us however they want.*” – Amanda Carpenter on the screen. Her own words. She’d let him beat her butt black and blue by her own unwitting contribution.

The bell rang. How could the bell be ringing? But the class was leaving, Jordan eyeing her sullenly through the window. One would think she was the one who’d had him held down and spanked him rather than the other way around.

At least she’d finished the day still logged in. She could leave it like that overnight, at least make him wait until tomorrow morning to use her login again. She wished she could block him out altogether, but once class started, he could do whatever he wanted to her.

Amanda analyzed that thought. She still had a long way to go today. It was hard to imagine reaching a point where she could deny a sustained coercion on his part during sex ed.

Miss C poked her head in the door. “I’m heading out, Amanda – meeting a friend after school. Are you sticking around?”

She looked up at her teacher. “Today in sex ed Mr. Lyons made us watch a video about lap dances.”

Miss C blinked. “Uh... that’s... nice? Can’t believe they made all you kids retake it. Anyway, you coming?”

Amanda sighed. She’d said it. It could be done. She was clenching her fists so tight that it felt like her fingernails might cut into the flesh of her palms, but she’d said it.

“I’m coming.”

## Chapter Five

*When our kindergarten teachers taught us about the importance of sharing, we thought that meant letting someone use our crayons, or not taking too long at the drinking fountain. Only in very distant hindsight did we realize how far that lesson could take us. As we entered adulthood, we also shared in ways that were much more meaningful. In times of triumph, we shared our awe and congratulations. In times of hardship, we shared our sympathy, our condolences. We've given each other some of the best pieces of ourselves – our kindness, our advice, our hard work, our support, and our friendship.*

*On occasion, some of us even shared a little bit too much...*

Hailey was surprised when the door opened even before she could knock, but it was the person opening it that was the real shocker. She squeaked before she managed any words. "Sorry, you scared me – I wasn't expecting... Hi!"

For her part, the busty blonde looked no less surprised to see someone standing on Jordan's doorstep. "Hailey?" She stepped outside, leaving the door only a crack open behind her. "What, ah, brings you here?"

She was here because Jordan had texted her that he needed his favorite little cocksucker, but she couldn't exactly say that. Hailey felt lucky to even be allowed to mess around with a popular boy like Jordan, and she wasn't about to blow it by ruining their secret. "Uh, for, um..."

"Like, a class project or something?" Heather said, adjusting her tank top. Was she not wearing a bra? Yikes, she sure wasn't.

"Yeah, that's right. A class project. Psychology." It was their only class together. Not that Heather was likely to investigate alibis, but still, she wasn't used to lying to people. "How about you?"

"A class project, or something," Heather said, fanning herself with a hand. The night was cool, but she was definitely sweaty. "He said you'd be stopping by, but I guess I thought he meant Hayleigh McKnight. And I thought he meant... well, anyway, he's upstairs, and I think he's waiting for you."

"Thanks. Have a good night, Heather!"

"Yep, you too."

Hailey found herself giving a dirty look at the girl's retreating backside, but gave it up once she was inside the Lyons' house. She'd always heard Heather was a nice girl, but what she'd done to Conner back during winter break... she had no business treating a boy like Conner that way. Hailey would kill to have Conner want her the way he had seemed to want Heather Blake. As it was, he didn't even seem to be on speaking terms

with her. He hadn't answered her texts all week, ever since he'd raked her over the coals about being with Jordan.

"You forget something, sweet—" said a woman's voice from around the corner. As the woman emerged into the foyer and laid eyes on her, she restarted. "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were that other girl, with the tattoos. Or that other one, the skinny one with the hair. Jordan sure has you girls coming and going tonight."

Hailey couldn't guess who that second girl might be, but neither was she sure who she was talking to. It wasn't his sister; she'd had a study hall with Jillian Lyons sophomore year, when Jillian had been a senior. Was Jordan seeing a college girl? And what a college girl, if he was! The woman was gorgeous, albeit in an artificial kind of way. She looked like someone who'd spent a lot of money on her hair and clothes and makeup, and quite possibly her body, too, if the two boobs ballooning out of her neckline were anything to go by. "Uh, I'm Hailey. McManus."

"Mrs. Lyons," the woman said, raising a mostly empty glass of red wine to her. "But you can call me Barbara. All of Jordan's little friends do."

Holy crud, this woman was his mother? Stepmother, clearly. If she was thirty, she was a well-built thirty. "Nice to meet you, um, Barbara. Is Jordan home?"

"I'm sure he's around somewhere," the woman said pleasantly, then turned and yelled at the exposed upper hallway so shrilly it shook the glass in the chandelier.

"*JORDAN! GET YOUR ASS DOWN HERE! YOU HAVE COMPANY!*"

"Oh, you don't have to...!"

The woman gulped down the rest of her glass. "It's no trouble, Janey. He'll be down in a moment, I'm sure. Make yourself at home, all right? Can I pour you anything?"

Was this woman offering her *alcohol*?! She wasn't even nineteen yet! "Uh no, I'll be fine, thanks."

"Suit yourself, dear, but I find the boy's company a lot more tolerable after a couple drinks." With that, Barbara Lyons sauntered back around the same corner she'd entered from, exaggerated curves swaying in her towering stilettos marching heel-to-toe. What a strange, strange household!

But mere moments later, Jordan appeared over the top railing. He wasn't wearing a shirt, and her cheeks instantly flushed with desire. It never took much for her, especially with a boy as cute as him.

"Come on up, Hailey. You look amazing, by the way."

She'd put on a cute top before she left home and hastily put on some lipstick, but that was all she'd taken time for. When Jordan said he wanted her, she knew he meant *now*. "Thanks. You, um, look good too. Like always, I guess." She giggled awkwardly. Hailey joined him upstairs, and nestled herself against him as he lead her down the hall with a hand on her ass. He always knew just how to make her feel good.

In previous visits he'd always had her meet him at the guest house secluded in a grove of trees in the Lyons' expansive grounds; this was her first time inside the main house. He led her down the hall to this amazing room with a pool table and a bar and the biggest TV she'd ever seen in front of expensive-looking leather furniture. Weirdly, sitting by itself in the middle of the room and looking quite out of place was a single metal folding chair, the same kind her family used when they set up the card table in the living room for Doug and the kids at holidays. Hailey could only guess what it was sitting out there for.

Jordan settled into the plush leather armchair and pulled Hailey down into his lap. She always felt nervous slamming her fat hundred-and-twenty-eight-pound frame on him, but he never complained. Almost never, anyway. He was good about helping her remember her place in the world, keeping her grounded. With Conner, she too often found herself getting a big head at the way he pretended to be swept away by her. He was a sweetheart, but it was probably unhealthy.

She wished he would text her back, though.

Hailey rested her head on his shoulder, her hand on his chest. He was already warm. "So... what were you and Heather working on?"

"Eh, just helping her with some makeup work," Jordan answered, slipping a hand between her legs. She did so love the way he helped himself to her body, as if he were hungry for it. It got her so darn hot. Not that that took much.

"Oh. Yeah, I guess with spring break coming up next week, it's time to get caught up. What kind of makeup work was it? She seemed, um, kinda... sweaty."

Jordan smirked. "What, you worried I'm boning Blake?"

"What? No!" She was, of course. Heather was so pretty, and she thought she remembered them dating sometime in the past. She'd had to choke down more jealousy than she'd have ever thought possible to be with Conner despite his obvious on-going crush on her. If she took Jordan from her, too... "No, I was just curious."

"Well don't be. She just sweats easy. Big girls do."

Hailey blushed. Heather was insanely curvy, but definitely had some extra baby fat on her. Still, if she was a "big girl," Hailey shuddered to think what term he might apply to her. Hailey was barely twenty or thirty pounds lighter than Heather, for crying out loud. She was a cow. From his tone, she knew he'd meant to remind her of that fact.

"So how you been, slutcakes? I missed you lately. Been too busy with less cool people."

She couldn't help but giggle with pleasure at his implied compliment. "Uh, OK. I mean... yeah. OK." She suddenly remembered what she'd forgotten to tell him. "Oh! I should tell you – and I swear it was an accident, and I didn't mean for it to happen – but... Conner? He um, sort of... found out you and I were..." She sniffled, ready for him to lash out at her for being so careless and stupid. "He found a pair of your underwear in

my room, and I didn't know what to say, but... I couldn't lie to him, you know? I'm so sorry! I—

Jordan put a finger to her lips, and she greedily sucked it into her mouth, swirling her tongue around it apologetically. "I know. We... talked."

"Are oo mav av me?" she asked, still sucking.

"Come on, how could I stay mad at a pussy like yours?" His hand slipped inside the front of her jeans, then right down into her panties. He casually rubbed a finger between her lips. "I feel bad I even put you in that situation to begin with. If anything, I'm the one who should be asking for your forgiveness."

"Well if you want it it's yours," she agreed immediately. "Not that I was ever mad."

"I know how I felt when I found out I had to share my girl, but I'd put up with a lot for somebody like you. How'd Fishers take it?"

She squirmed against his hand. How could she have gotten so lucky? "He was pretty upset. He kinda left, sulky, and then he hasn't talked to me since. I've texted him but he won't respond."

Jordan nodded, seeming unsurprised. "I don't know how some people can be so hypocritical like that, ya know? I mean, you and I, we both agreed it's OK to see other people, so I never complained about you two. But him... yeesh. Some people."

"Yeah, totally." She was only half-listening on account of his hand in her panties. God, she was such a slave to her drooly fucking cunt. (She considered after that thought whether she was letting her outer sexual monologue impose on her inner sexual monologue, and whether that was a good thing.) "Wait, hypocritical?"

"Yeah, you know. Ironic, really. You were worried about me and Blake, but he's been boning her on the sly for months now."

This wasn't shocking; she'd long suspected as much, and while he'd never outright said it, it would have been her first guess. "Oh. I... see."

"Plus that new girl, Amanda Carpenter? I have it on good authority that he's tapping that."

That would have been her second guess, considering that talk they'd had a couple weeks back. But both? *And* her? "Really? Both of them, huh?"

"I've even heard from reliable sources that he's been fooling around with an older woman. Once, at least, anyway. I even heard it was a teacher at NHS, believe it or not. I think you know who." He slipped his little finger up inside of her, and she quavered at his touch.

"A teacher? Who?!" Jordan didn't answer right away; something in his eye made her think she already knew the answer. She did, of course. After all, they'd both been there that day at the end of last semester and caught Conner fooling around with someone in the editor's office. Hailey had been crushed and run off sobbing before she

could learn who it was. She'd always assumed it had been Heather, but now that she thought about it, it had been only minutes after school, and it was weird that Miss C would have left so abruptly. Besides, while she'd run out of the room to cry her way home and then cry herself to sleep, Jordan had remained behind. He'd probably known about this for months!

"Miss Coszic-Lewandoski?" She was proud of herself for pronouncing it right, with the electricity in her cunt.

"You didn't hear it from me, understand?"

"No way!" Hailey was incredulous. Conner wouldn't do something like that... would he?

But... she was so pretty, and the two had always been so close...

Could she have mentored him in more than just pagination and photo cropping?

Her heart weighed a thousand pounds in her chest, buoyed only by the feather-light probing in her crotch. Hailey found herself trying to press her hips down to get more pressure, but he only pulled back, keeping her on the edge.

"But hey," Jordan said, leaning his forehead against hers, ignoring her pleading whimper, "look at it this way. If he's sealing the deal with babes like that, what does say about you that you kept up for so long?"

Hailey was trying not to cry in front of him; she knew he hated it when she cried. "Yeah, I guess so..."

"Hey, don't you feel bad, pretty girl." He kissed her cheek so tenderly that it could almost have been Conner. "You're still hands down the wildest, sexiest, most incredible girl I've ever been with."

Darn him, he kept making it harder not to cry! Soon enough, the tears were flowing, but to her great surprise, Jordan simply held her and planted little kisses along the trails of tears. And worked that finger like a pro.

How could Conner do such a thing? She'd made her peace, more or less, with the fact that he didn't want a relationship, but she hadn't thought it was because he was having three others on the side! At *least* three – who knows who else he could be fooling around with? She'd never pegged him for a player, but it only showed how flawed her judgment had been.

*You're not being fair*, she tried to tell herself. She had been sleeping with someone else too, after all, and they'd agreed over and over not to get too attached. They'd mess around and have some fun until graduation, then go their separate ways. She'd already been accepted to several universities, so it had always had a finite end date. It was a fling. Just two teenagers getting themselves off with a little help from a friend. She'd told herself that a hundred times.

So why did it hurt so bad?

Hailey wasn't sure when or how Jordan got her out of her clothes, or when he slipped out of his. But when he hoisted her by her hips and told her to "shut up and ride me, you gorgeous slab of tits and ass," she melted against him, and wrapped her pussy around him.

Jordan had never hurt her like that. She didn't have feelings for him like she did for Conner, so he really *couldn't* hurt her. Not much, anyway. If anything, the fact that he was willing to screw her was a major boost to her self-esteem. More than enough to make up for all those times he purposefully took her down a peg, which was the least she deserved for reaching so far beyond her grasp. For Conner, she was a pity fuck, someone to dole out charity to between nights with his other lovers. Jordan, however, seemed somehow genuinely attracted to her. Why or how, she couldn't say, but as he throbbed inside her, thrusting, squeezing her tits till they hurt, she knew in her heart it was unfeigned.

When he finished, she was lying on her back on the pool table, Jordan's cock still twitching in its sensitive, post-orgasmic state. He was still hard; she had no idea how any boy could have such stamina. Conner had usually needed to be sucked and pleaded back to stiffness – small wonder, if he was fucking all those other girls all the time. Jordan, though, she seemed to have no trouble getting hard. Ever.

"I'm sorry I brought that up, Hailey," he said softly, stroking her hips with gentle strokes.

"It's fine. I know you didn't mean to upset me. Sorry I made such a fuss."

"No, I should've known better. For whatever reason, I know you've always had a thing for that backstabbing son of a bitch. Forgive me?"

He shifted his hips, triggering a delicious little aftershock orgasm from her still-recovering pussy. "There's nothing to forgive. I just can't believe he was keeping all that from me, you know? I mean, if he slept with Miss C—"

"If." Jordan rolled his eyes at her naïveté. His conviction fanned her flames.

"—I get why he'd hide that, but the rest... I mean, what's wrong with him? How do you get such a hole inside you that you need to sleep with every person you see, ya know? Shouldn't that be something, I dunno, special?"

Jordan pulled out of her – or nearly, as he then slid slowly, divinely, back in, all the way. "I guess not. Not to him."

"Seriously! It is to me. Mmm, that feels so fucking perfect in your dick puppet's tight little puss-puss, baby. But yeah, like, sex isn't something to just give away like that, is it? How do you just... sleep with someone and not actually feel anything?!"

"You saying I mean something to you, baby?" Jordan asked, twisting his shaft inside her. She fucking *loved* that move. It fucked the very innermost part of her just so.

That Hailey suddenly froze, however, was not from the thrill he had given her, but rather the question he had posed. She did *not* talk about her emotions regarding

Jordan Lyons. Not even to herself. Why, if she started doing that, she might realize all sorts of unpleasant truths that would make enjoying their time together impossible.

“I... I mean...”

He leaned down, silencing her with a kiss as their bodies slid perfectly together, puzzle pieces meant to fit exactly like this. “Because I gotta say, Hailey... I fucking *love* you.”

Later, Hailey would not be able to explain what exactly had come over her. Something inside woke up in response to those words. Something primal, animalistic. Savage and selfish. Only as she was tending to the scratches she had put into his back with a cotton ball and some antiseptic did she realize how out of control she'd been. His buttocks had eight little red marks where her neatly groomed nails had dug in, ramming his cock into her slut cunt as far as she could make it go, then farther.

“I'm so sorry, Jordan – I didn't mean to... I mean, I did, but I shouldn't've...”

He grinned over his shoulder at her. “It's fine, babe. I should've told you a long time ago. I've been with more than a few girls in my life, as I know you know, but none of them hold a fucking candle to you.”

She blushed. “You don't have to say that.”

“I know I don't.” His tone was harsh, as if he'd been about to add *stupid*, but he went on more gently. “I've bullshitted my share of girls, too. But you, I never have to do that with. You're the depraved, eager, gorgeous little psycho slut I've always dreamed of. And, if I may, that piece of shit Fishers never deserved you.”

Again, tears threatened, but this time she simply let them. Wrapping her legs around his waist and holding him inside her, she let him console her in that way he was so fond of doing. Truly, the boy was a marvel in stamina – borderline supernatural in his recovery. He fucked her long into the night, beyond her muscles' capacity to reciprocate, to the point where she was simply lying there with a dopy grin on her face letting him thrust into her pussy or her mouth. When he chose the former, she begged him not to stop; the latter, she played with herself to keep herself wet and ready for him to return.

Finally, it was Barbara, shouting from downstairs, that forced them to call it quits. “*JORDAN! YOUR LITTLE FRIEND NEEDS TO GET GOING! FOR FUCK'S SAKE, YOU LITTLE SHIT, IT'S AFTER MIDNIGHT!*”

Jordan glared with such heat that it should have melted through the floorboards and right through his stepmother's body. “*SHE'S LEAVING, BARBIE!*” he shouted back.

“Yeah, I guess I should, um, go. My mom's gonna be cross with me as it is. I'll just tell her I was with at the planetarium. It was a clear night out, so I think it would've been a good one for star-gazing, even though whenever I go there you can never actually use the telescopes, because there's always these college kids there who never let anyone else in even though the signs say they have to. One time, Doug and I—”

His cock slid into her mouth mid-sentence. Sometimes, she babbled on purpose to get that exact reaction (though this had not been one of those times). “You’d just keep on going if I didn’t stop you, wouldn’t you?”

Hailey didn’t know if he meant keep on talking, or keep on sucking him off; either way, she intended to do the latter until he made her stop. Which he soon did, sadly.

“I love you,” he said as she pulled her top back on, smoothing it down to diminish the wrinkles that had formed while it had lain crumpled on the floor.

Hailey didn’t know if she did love Jordan, honestly. If someone had asked her that morning who her heart belonged to, she’d have said Conner Fishers. At least in her head. Not out loud. Conner wouldn’t have wanted that.

But not any more. Conner had cast her aside for committing a fraction of his own transgression, and Jordan had been here to console her. Maybe it wasn’t love, for her, but she loved the way he’d been tonight. Consoling and tender as needed, but commandingly sexual as desired. Did it matter if she said it without totally meaning it? Hailey wasn’t sure, but regardless, she wouldn’t risk hurting him by not saying it back.

“I, um, love you too.”

She was surprised when he walked her out to her car. Typically, Jordan had more of a don’t-let-it-hit-you-on-the-way-out policy on her visits, but tonight, he held her hand and lead her out to where she’d parked at the end of his driveway. “Try not to sweat Fishers,” he said, leaning inside her window as she started her car, its tired old engine wheezing to life. In this neighborhood, surrounded by all this luxury, it was an embarrassing sound.

“I won’t. I mean I will. Try. Try not to.” She rolled her eyes at herself. “I’ll try not to think about it. I guess he’s having no problem not thinking about me, after all.”

“Sure seems like. You want me to kick his ass, you say the word, and I’ll fuck him up good.”

“Would you really?” She paused. “Just kidding. Ha. Like, obviously.” It wasn’t guilt that had changed her course, though; the idea of Conner being hurt for the way he’d treated her actually felt pretty good. What stopped her was the thought of how bad it would hurt to ask something of Jordan, just this once, only to find out he didn’t really care about her enough to do it. Better to leave it as a thoughtful offer.

“If you say so. Still, he ought to learn his lesson, don’t you think? Feels unfair that he can hurt you – probably hurt these other girls, too – and just whistle his way on home, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Still, not much we can do about it.”

Jordan leaned in the window and gave her a long kiss. She moaned as he reached inside her neckline, stretching and maybe even ruining her shirt, to squeeze her bare tit. God he was sexy. She expected him to stand up so she could roll up her window and be on her way, but instead, he put his lips right up to her ear.

“What if there was?”

## Chapter Six

*So many memories together, going all the way back to freshman orientation. The lake cruise for post-prom junior year. The food fight fall of sophomore year. State baseball champs two years running – hopefully soon to be a third!*

*And who could forget about the most incredible spring break any senior class has ever had?*

The Monday after spring break, the students of Miss C's yearbook class shuffled in, the end of their first day back to reality. At their teacher's direction, they tugged their desks, metal feet groaning on the tile floor, into a circle formation.

"Welcome back, everybody," said their teacher, her ponytail frizzier than usual, like her students still adjusting to life at Northside. "So, as I know you know, we're back, and we're nearing the finish line. As of today, we have six weeks left in the academic year."

"Five weeks four days," corrected Carrie, ever one for technical distinctions. She had a good eye for details, but with such a stickler for an editor once he and Amanda were gone, he sometimes couldn't help but pity next year's staff. "Finals week is only Monday through Thursday."

"Technically five weeks three days, with Memorial Day," added DeShaun.

"Five week two and a half days, since we have a half day the Friday of prom," said Carter.

"I'm very happy to see you're all keeping such a close eye on the calendar," said Miss C, reasserting herself. "But before we turn our eyes forward, I wanted to take a moment to touch base and ask if everybody had a good break. After all, we're in the business of recording memories, remember?"

"You get your own line," said Conner.

"So let's open up the floor. What'd you do over break?"

Amanda supposed she should take some credit for it all. Not that she'd done it for the credit, but it was nice for once not to merely record her classmates' memories, but help create them.

It had been the Friday before break when it happened, and it was the strangest little thing. With the distance to spring break now measuring in minutes rather than hours, the staff was barely working, and Miss C wasn't even bothering to press them at that point, running out the clock together with her students.

When suddenly, in the course of an innocent, off-handed comment, lovers and enemies alike became united.

"It's going to be amazing," Siobhan was saying. "My dad got us all spots at this resort his company did work for in Maui. It's going to be amazing. I was looking at pictures earlier, and like, it's right on the sand, practically. It has its own pool, five-star restaurant, there's horse riding, they have a golf course right next to it..."

"I thought you hated golf," said Marisa.

"I do, but you know if they're golf-adjacent, it's totally gonna be ritzy. Check it out. We're gonna have such a killer time, I know it." Siobhan handed over her phone, where apparently the resort info was already up in her browser.

"We? Who all's going?" asked Marisa, thumbing through snapshots.

"Geez, let's see. Me, Devon, Marco, Tiffany – Saunders, not Jenkins, obviously – and... I dunno, everyone, basically. The seniors, at least. Have to be eighteen to get a room." said Siobhan.

As the two continued thumbing through pictures together, suddenly, three people in the room seemed to realize in unison what they'd overheard. Amanda looked across the room to where Conner was sitting by Miss C's desk, and then the two of them scanned to where Jordan was seated on the far wall, looking up from his own phone.

"Conner, can I see you in the office?" she said.

"Uh, should we be...?"

"We should. We absolutely should," she said.

Without another word, the three – Jordan was coming too – stood and made their way to the editor-in-chief's office.

"You heard that, right?" started Jordan excitedly. "How'd she say it...? Marisa said 'who all is going,' and Siobhan said... shit, who did she say?"

Conner was already typing, and Amanda was leaning over his shoulder giving corrections from her own recollection. Soon, they had what they were sure was a close approximation – close enough that they'd easily be able to fix the precise wording – and paused.

"Wait," said Conner. "I'm not doing this if it's going to mean a week of looking over my shoulder, paranoid about who's saying what, watching every word out of my

mouth. Bad enough having to put up with it at school, but I'm not signing on for this 24/7."

"You're in my way, Fishers," snapped Jordan. Conner was already sliding back, having no other option, but Amanda quickly snapped shut the laptop.

"Hold it right there. He's right, Jordan. If we do this, we're going on vacation. We're not going to start another fight. No creepy tricks, no ambushes, no escalations. That's the only way we'll agree to it."

"Fuck what you agree to. If you don't do it, I'll just enter it myself."

She squeezed past him and opened the door. "Miss C? Are we allowed to take the laptops with us on spring break?"

"Are you crazy? Absolutely not," their teacher called back in a firm voice.

Amanda walked back over to the laptop and, before anyone realized what she was doing, typed up the exchange in a new spread, *springbreak19*. "There. Now if you go, you won't have a computer with TIOS installed for a thousand miles."

He scowled. "You fucking—"

Conner stood up, fists clenched. "Watch yourself, Jordan." He made for a poor knight in shining armor, and she certainly didn't need one, but she could kiss him for trying. In fact, she meant to.

"Boys, relax. We can do this. I'm for it. All we need to do is agree to take a week off from Us. Then we'll go relax on vacation, courtesy of Siobhan's rich-ass daddy. But I want to hear everyone say it first."

There was some squabbling, some negotiating, but in the end, they made an agreement, and along with the exchange between Siobhan and Marisa, they added, "*None of us are going to use anything we hear over break to enter later into TIOS.*" – *Conner Fishers, Amanda Carpenter, and Jordan Lyons.*

Suddenly, without quite knowing how, they were aware of a whole host of details – the shuttle buses leaving school the next morning for the airport, flight arrangements, roommates, the return trip... it was like they'd been planning this for months.

Except they, and only they, knew they hadn't.

And so, the entirety of the Northside High senior class – except for Tiffany Jenkins – had a week's stay in a place that, if it wasn't paradise, certainly offered a good view of it.

But Amanda was pretty sure it was paradise.

“Angelica! Lotion!” called Kirsten Vaughan for at least the third time in the past couple hours.

Carter was sprawled out in his swim trunks in a lounge chair at the Rose Pinnacle Resort’s pool, using his sunglasses to pretend not to be watching the girls with interest. One of the pools, anyway. They had two, so that at least one would be out of the building’s shadow at any given time. He’d been here all morning, and frankly, he didn’t have any desire to go anywhere else. Not as long as that insanely hot babe Kirsten was having that other cute girl oil her down at regular intervals. He’d stay if they started charging admission, his spank bank filling to its bursting point.

This place was incredible. Maui was incredible. What had possessed Siobhan’s dad to rent the whole place for the seniors of Northside, he couldn’t have guessed, but he’d never seen anything like it. Carter counted himself among that number who’d never gone on a vacation anywhere, much less a place like this. He was raised by a single mother, and with three siblings, vacations were not on the menu. Many Nighthawks here were on their first vacation, first time out of state, first time outside the continental U.S. Some, it was their first night in a hotel.

He remembered seeing Tye Oldring’s eyes well up with tears when the bus unloaded them in front of the Rose Pinnacle. Carter wished he’d gotten a picture. Amanda and Conner would’ve loved that for the yearbook, but he had a suspicion Tye would’ve beaten him to a pulp if Carter got caught.

The resort was incredible, the food was unbelievable, and Maui was better than anything he’d seen even in movies. Yet that morning, it was having a hard time competing with the spectacle across the pool.

Angelica Buck, whom Carter recognized from pre-cal, picked herself up out of her lounging chair, looking rather annoyed at the request. Carter knew she was a girl, but still, it was hard to imagine anyone complaining about being asked to rub down Kirsten’s heavenly body. Not that Angelica herself wasn’t a hottie. She was shorter even than Carter himself, with straight brown hair currently held in a topknot, with huge sunglasses that only partially concealed the look of displeasure on a frankly gorgeous face. Carter took the opportunity to admire that tight rear end as it bent to retrieve the lotion from Kirsten’s bag. Her own bikini would have been skimpy if she were not so petite, but it nonetheless rode up her ass a bit, and she had to tug it back out with a finger.

If he’d thought he envied Angelica’s fingers as they darted in and out of her bikini bottoms, it had nothing on how Carter felt about them as matters unfolded.

He had to remind himself that Kirsten wasn’t actually posing; she simply somehow looked like that. All the time. In a place where almost every woman present was half-undressed, where most of the women staying in the few rooms in the Rose Pinnacle not in use by the Nighthawks looked like trophy wives hardly older than the

high schoolers, Kirsten nonetheless managed to stand out. The supple curves of her legs, an ass that jutted behind her like a pair of hams. Hams that couldn't help but jiggle fluidly wherever they passed, as if defying anyone to find a reason to look anywhere else. A tiny diamond thigh gap graced the place where legs and ass met.

And that was only the bottom half. Oh, the top...

For that, though, Carter had to wait for Angelica to finish the back side.

The girl was meticulous about it, for sure, leaving no nook unlotioned. She was just as casual slathering up Kirsten's feet and ankles as she was around her hips and butt cheeks. Today, their second full day at the resort, Kirsten had selected a black two-piece, three thin slits cut into each side of the bottoms, which on a butt so ample, it otherwise struggled to cover. It wasn't a thong, but the shape of her kept trying to make it one. Angelica didn't hesitate to squirt a dollop of sunscreen on each mostly-naked buttock and begin rubbing it in. Kirsten helpfully, scandalously, assisted her by spreading her thighs, instructing Angelica to make sure she got *everything*.

"You want me to undo the string? It's starting to look like there's gonna be a tan line back here if I don't," said Angelica. Carter wondered for a moment how he could hear them, but then realized that almost everyone around the pool area was similarly transfixed. A lot of the girls were even pretending not to stare.

Kirsten's answer was to undo the tie holding her top on and rest her head back on her arms, having already let Angelica coat them. Carter adjusted his visor on his lap to conceal an erection that was painfully hard. He couldn't imagine any other woman would ever be able to get him that hard. Side boob. Kirsten fucking Vaughan's side boob.

"Now the front," said Kirsten, rolling over, clutching her bikini top to her chest. There it was, lying across those perfect, massive, shapely tits, held on by nothing more than gravity. Carter wasn't a religious man, but in that moment he prayed to any gods who may be listening for a sudden gust.

"The front? Are your arms broken or something, Kirsten?"

"I don't want to get my hands greasy. Yours already are," the blonde replied, arching a sculpted eyebrow.

The two locked eyes for a moment, and Carter for the first time wondered what conflux of events had turned one beautiful girl into the other's sunscreen applicator. As Angelica crawled back to Kirsten's feet started at the knees, working her way back up, their classmate wondered if the two might actually be... lovers?

No. It couldn't be. That was something that only happened in porn. Besides, everyone knew that until recently, Kirsten had been dating a college guy and had been since she'd been a sophomore. Yet as he watched Angelica work her hands, kneading up Kirsten's thighs, along her smooth belly, over her ribs, up her sides, and begin working in toward the the center, he swore he could see Kirsten's breath quickening as those world class breasts glistened after the touch of that enviable girl Angelica's hands.

Maybe... Kirsten was...

Suddenly, a redheaded guy Carter hadn't even noticed walking across the pool area was bent down and gave Kirsten a kiss. She looked almost as surprised as Carter, but then her hand came down on the back of his head and held him there until Angelica took it as a signal that her work was done.

Man. Owen Gibson was the luckiest guy in the world. "I'm gonna head to one of the hiking trails, see if I can find somewhere half as pretty as you. Wanna come?"

"Sure," agreed Kirsten, sitting up, catching her top just in time to ruin Carter's day.

"Ange?" He looked to the other girl.

"I'd love to," she said, slipping on her sandals.

"Jesus fucking Christ," said a man's voice nearby, and Carter looked over to see Mr. Rodriguez, here as one of the faculty chaperones, staring in the exact same direction he had been, leaning against the bar with some kind of fruity-looking drink in hand.

Carter frowned at his teacher for noticing what he had himself been admiring; adults weren't supposed to pay attention to that kind of thing. But as he watched the two girls asses swaying away, undulating with each step, one of Owen's hands on either girl's hip, he could hardly blame the guy. They passed by Carter without any of them looking in his direction, but the canny yearbook student didn't miss the look of displeasure on Kirsten's face when Angelica smiled up at Owen.

Carter wondered what was so special about the shorter, flatter girl that would induce him to put a frown to the angelic visage of the other. He couldn't imagine what it would take for him to risk driving away a girl like Kirsten Vaughan, much less why Kirsten would let her boyfriend keep the other girl around when she was so clearly so smitten.

“You look like hell, man,” Mike said as Don flopped down on a towel beside him. Before them sprawled an endless blue. Waves the likes of which they’d only seen in movies about surfers crashed in the distance only to gently roll onto the sand nearby, as if too courteous to intrude upon the peace of the vacationing Nighthawks. Nearby, a group had started up a volleyball game with some local kids, laughing at this contest in which neither side had any interest in keeping score. It was all too pastoral.

Don hardly saw it, squinting even behind his sunglasses. “I feel like hell,” he said.

“How can you not be loving this, man? This place is like a whole other universe! I shit you not, like ten minutes ago, I saw Yuri Andersen ride by on a freaking white horse. No joke.”

“Yeah, that’s... uh huh,” mumbled Don.

Mike sat up, inspecting his friend. “You not feeling well or something, man? I can get you to the hospital.”

“Hosp... what? No, man. I’m just tired as hell. Barely been sleeping.”

“What, Lauren keeping you up all night?” Mike grinned.

Don had to smile back, a little. “Some. But like, I have a room right next to Miss C, so we have to keep it pretty chill. Honestly, we mostly... you know... during the day when everybody’s out and about. Though last two days she’s been waking me up at like eight in the morning on her way in from the resort gym.” Lauren, recipient of a full ride volleyball scholarship and captain of the NHS team, wasn’t about to let her vacation get in the way of her twice daily workout schedule.

“That sucks, man.”

“There was some sucking,” Don said, smirking a little. “I swear, she has gotten so much better at that the past few months.”

Mike handed Don a beer from the cooler – they didn’t even pretend to card here – and sat back down. “So what’s up then? You somehow look pale and tan at the same time.”

Don sighed. “Oh, just... neighbors. I’m a light sleeper, and I’m pretty much the only one in the hotel bothering with keeping it quiet or at decent hours.”

“Why don’t you complain to Miss C? She’s pretty cool – I bet she’d keep it anonymous and tell people to shut up.”

“Come on, man, I’m no snitch,” snapped Don. “Besides, it’s... well, never mind.”

“No, what? What’s up?”

Don looked around, as if someone might be lurking behind them on the wide open private beach. “Look, you didn’t hear it from me, but... Miss C is part of the disruption.”

“Wait, *what?!?*”

Don nodded. “Every night since we been here, man, but like, waaay late. Her bed’s up against the shared wall, and she’s... not to be TMI, but not quiet about stuff, man.”

“TMI?” Mike shook his head. “That’s fucking hot, man. You know, for a teacher, she ain’t bad. I had her for sophomore English, and I tell you what, I didn’t hear a word the woman said, but I sure as hell never slept through class.”

Don rolled his eyes. “Don’t talk like that, man. I’ve had her for yearbook since freshman year. She’s good people.”

“She’s tits, Donny boy.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Man, Miss Coszic-Lewandoski, shagging some stranger in Hawaii. Who’d’ve thunk it.”

Don twisted the top off his beer and took a long drink. “Actually... I think it’s one of the other teachers.”

“What? No way! You see who?”

“Nah. They’re at it, like, two or three in the morning. They’re trying to be sneaky about it, and I don’t wanna get caught snooping.”

“Then how do you know it’s a teacher?”

“Well... all right, I got nosy, all right?” Don squirmed, the sand opening a little space under him that he could feel was cooler even through the towel. “I sorta... listened.”

Mike barked a sudden laugh. “You fuckin’ perv, man!”

“I’m not! I just wanted to know who it was, man, same as you. That’s all!”

“Yeah, whatever man. So what’d you hear? She a dirty girl?”

“Well, yeah. Let’s just say Miss C is a real people pleaser and leave it at that. But none of that gave anything away. It was when they were talking after.”

“What, you put your ear to the wall?”

“Come on, you wouldn’t? I wanted to know! Besides, she’s keeping me up all night, so the least she owes me is a good story.”

“Anything juicy?”

“Eh, mostly just sappy stuff. She was talking about how she wishes they didn’t have to hide, how much she’s going to miss him after her uncle’s gone, and he was saying how he’d still be around, but she’s all it won’t be the same. I don’t know what her uncle has to do with it, but they kept mentioning him. It was pretty muffled; I couldn’t follow everything.”

“Her uncle?”

“Yeah, they kept talking about her tío.”

“Who’s T.O.?”

Don could hear in his inflection that he'd said it as an acronym. "Damn, Mike, you don't pay any attention in Spanish, do you? It means uncle, you moron. Guess she must be half-Hispanic or something."

"Oh yeah, I guess that makes sense. I think Lewandoski is a Mexican name. Aw snap, I bet it's Mr. Rodriguez!"

"I hope not. She could do *way* better. But whoever he is, she's definitely way into this guy, and she wouldn't be if it was somebody she'd just met."

"Poor gal. So that's it, huh? Miss C's booty calls keeping you up all night?"

He frowned. "I wish. Heather Blake's on—"

"Hooter Blake!" Mike cheered. It was a nickname that only stuck with a small number of particularly juvenile tit fans.

Small-ish number, anyway. They were some pretty nickname-inspiring tits.

"Yeah, so Heather's the other side of me, and she's been hooking up, too. Quieter, but nowhere near quiet enough. She's up all hours with whoever the hell she's messing around with, and practically as soon as she's done, Miss C starts up. It's like a freaking conspiracy."

"Maybe it's the same guy, moving from one booty call to the next?" Mike joked.

"Heather doesn't need to sleep with a teacher to get her A's," Don assured him.

"I'm more interested in her D's!"

"You do have some concept of what a D cup looks like, right? She's gotta be like three quarters of the way through the alphabet."

"T cups, maybe? 'Cause those babies are tittays, brotha!"

Don humored him with a chuckle. "Maybe O, for O my fucking god?"

"Ha! T & O baby!" Mike laughed, then stood up and whooped joyously, unrestrainedly out at the ocean. He downed his beer, then snagged another bottle and clinked its neck against Don's. "To all the tíos out there, baby!"

Don sighed, closing his eyes. "To the tíos."

Heather, meanwhile, had not given neither her uncles and their hope to steal her inheritance the least bit of thought so far during this trip. There was always something to do here, even if the doing was simply walking around and seeing. What had possessed Siobhan's dad to fund such an excursion was unfathomable, but she was grateful. Grateful enough that this patriarch's generosity may have even taken the smallest bite out of her rage against the patriarchy. Not enough that she had let up on her protest of gendered attire – tonight, a microbikini so scant it showed her contempt for the idea that men could show their nipples at the beach but women who did it were sluts. Some of the Pride girls were taking the week off, but she was a true believer in the war for women to be seen for more than their clothing choices. Someday no man would be able to look at a girl walking around 99% naked and judge them for it.

Some men, she granted, were already ahead of the curve.

"The hours are going by too fast," one such man said, brushing a wisp of hair out of Heather's eye. There was usually a breeze here on these pristine beaches, but by night it was flat-out windy. Seconds later, the hair was back. She liked that Conner kept trying, though.

"We still have four whole days left," Heather said, nestling into his arms. Though it was still warmer than it had been even in the middle of the day back home, it was cool compared to the day's heat, and on any account, she was happy to have a reason to be held.

"I know." The boy rested his cheek on her head. The weight of him was comforting. Anchoring, in this place where it felt she might drift away if she weren't tethered to someone. "But I don't just mean this week."

"I know."

She hadn't really sought an opportunity for deep conversation these past few days. She knew it wasn't truly a paradise, with its own share of problems beneath the surface, but it was an illusion she'd been most unwilling to dispel. So far this week, she and Conner been together as often as not, and this was the topic they had been circling. Their dwindling hours.

Heather spoke into the silence. "I told you this was going to happen, you know. You remember? I told you that everything was running down on the same timer now. Anything that started was going to have to end almost right away."

He sighed in concession. "I am indeed owed an I-told-you-so."

"You're owed several, but I'll restrain myself to just the one."

They sat there together for some time, gazing out into the whitecaps cresting across the horizon. It was hard to believe she was really seeing this splendor. The whisper of the wind in the palms, the waves crashing on the beach, the moonlight. To say nothing of the sweet, attractive young man whose arms were wrapped snugly around her. It was too perfect.

“What would you say if I offered to take a year off, do what you’re doing and stay here, get some of my electives out of the way on the cheap before heading off to Berkeley?” she asked.

“Stay here? If you can talk Siobhan’s dad into it...”

“Not *here* here.” She pinched his leg. “You know what I meant. What would you say?”

Heather allowed him a moment to think it over as she did once more herself. Probably for the hundredth time. This was the first time she’d ever tried the idea out loud though. The first time she was letting Conner know what she’d been considering. She would never be able to tell him, however, how glad she was he’d never fixed those big blue eyes on her and asked her to. Heather knew in her heart what her answer ought to be, but for all her academic talents, she wasn’t sure she’d give that right answer when it counted.

She loved the guy, after all. It felt too good saying the things he wanted to hear.

“I’d tell you that you’re sweeter than I deserve,” he said at last, “and remind you that you’ve been working for Berkeley nonstop for four years now, and you’re not settling for a podunk community college because of some handsome, charming, brilliant and some say well-hung young gentleman.”

She laughed with sudden relief to hear he knew better than to give her the opportunity to be weak, and drew him in for a kiss. “Well now, I don’t know about *charming*...”

The two made out right there on the beach for a while; in the span of a few weeks, they’d gone from making out with the occasional hope of a little manual genital stimulation to having sex on nearly every date. This week, they’d been going at it daily. This place had proven quite the aphrodisiac for her, as was the removal of all her usual cares and burdens. Conner seemed like he got hard from a stiff breeze, though he swore it was only because he thought she was so beautiful. Such a charmer, that boy.

Charming, at least, aside from that one little thing.

“I know about Amanda,” she said in a way that to him must seem out of the blue.

Conner pushed himself up off of her. “What? How did you...” He paused, seeming to compose himself as he processed her statement. “What do you mean? What did you hear?”

Heather rolled her eyes, but didn’t try to extricate herself out from underneath him. “Since you didn’t issue a denial, why don’t we skip right past your questions and you can tell me how things stand between the two of you.” It wasn’t an accusation. But she did want to know, more than she cared to admit.

It wasn’t fair of her. Not like she’d been monogamous while she’d been together with Conner. Sure, it wasn’t quite the same with Mr. Lyons, but sex was sex was sex.

Even so, and even knowing that their timer was running down, she couldn't help but feel a little bit jealous of Amanda.

Conner's lips twisted nervously. "How things stand...? I don't know. We only went on like two dates before Maui. But I don't know if any of this counts. I, um, think we're probably in a similar situation running out the clock."

"You don't sound very sure."

Conner climbed off of her and laid down on their blanket at her side, picking an angle that would shield her from the wind. Maybe that would become her new litmus test for guys – find a guy who shields her from the wind without even having to think about it. "It's complicated, but... after graduation, I think she's going to be, um, going away. For good."

"That's too bad," said Heather quietly.

"Too bad?" He cocked his head back, looking somewhat affronted.

She put a reassuring hand on his chest. "I'm not saying I want to pawn you off on someone, Conner. I'm only saying..." Heather took a moment to steady herself. She didn't get sentimental easily, and when she did, she liked to hurry through it as quickly as possible. "Look, Conner, you're a great guy. Really. Before we went out, I never thought I'd be this happy. With anyone, not just you. But I want you to be happy too, and if I can't be part of that, I want you to be with someone who deserves you. And I like her. She actually kinda reminds me of you."

Ever since she and Amanda had started talking more when she'd joined the Pride, Heather had been struck by how much the girl reminded her of Conner. That fastidiousness in her work, the dry humor, the way she had all that anxiety about what she was doing but tried so hard not to show it. They were almost eerily similar at times.

Conner saw she was struggling with the moment and threw her a little levity. "Is it the legs? You can touch them, if you want."

"I don't know if you know this about me, but I'm actually not super interested in Amanda's legs." Heather pinched him again, though she had to admit that she did like his legs. "Besides, I've got something she doesn't."

"A hard time reaching the top shelf?"

"Shut up!" she giggled, play-fighting at him for a moment. "You know, never mind. I was gonna show you, but I guess if all you want is some long boring legs..."

"Aw, come on. You know I prefer a little meat on those bones." Conner ran his hands along her thighs.

"So I'm meaty now?"

"What? People *like* meat!"

She grinned. Who could waste time being mad about petty crap like poorly phrased compliments in a place like this? "I suppose they do. Come on, Prince

Charming, let's go back to my room so we can show you what you seem to have forgotten."

"Oh come on, what's wrong with out here?" he teased, playfully taking a gentle squeeze of her left breast. Heather didn't know how she'd spent so many years resenting men's interest in her chest, but once she realized how amazing it felt to have a guy actually touching them, playing with her nipples...

None of the guys she'd been with before had known had to handle them, and Conner had been nervous at first too. She remembered him asking if it felt good, and at the time she'd not wanted to discourage him and assured him it felt "amazing." Only the next time they were making out and he want to work on them, it was suddenly like he'd been studying in a guy version of Mr. Lyons' class, because all of the sudden it really did feel amazing. She made it a point to get her boobs in his hands whenever she could.

"Yeah, out here on the beach? I know we're at a fancy resort, but there's still public nudity laws, bucko." The thought was kinda hot, yeah, but she wasn't about to get tossed in jail for uncovering those final few evidently objectionable inches of skin.

"I guess you didn't see the nude beach sign," he said, still grasping.

Heather cocked her head to the side and looked around curiously. She hadn't seen any such sign. Still, Conner had used that tone she recognized, where he sounded like he was making a joke but really he was pointing out something she should have known was true in a gentle way. Besides, it was what she wanted to hear anyway. "Huh, really? I haven't seen anybody using it yet. But... well, if it's not illegal, and nobody's around..."

Trying not to look smug about the way the dear boy's eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, Heather reached behind her and undid the poor, overwrought clasp on her bikini. It was funny, in a way; her bikini was practically a joke, two triangles barely bigger than her thumbs, but the way Conner reacted when she took it off, it was like he was seeing her skin for the first time. It was flattering, sure, not that she needed more flattery about her chest. She knew that they would probably age poorly, but for now, they were still proud and as perky as gravity allowed them to be.

"I will never, ever get tired of that sight. So you know."

"I know." She laid back down on her back. The words *public access* were emblazoned there on either breast, a declaration to the world that a woman's body wasn't meant to be hidden away in some horrible shame shirt. Between them she'd gotten a pattern that, unfortunately, some people might mistake for the explosion of a cock. She'd intended it to look sort of like fireworks, but more elegant, a celebration of her femininity, but, with the way Conner's eyes glazed over when he looked at them...

She shouldn't. She'd sword she would never.

Maybe it was the moon, or the beach, or being half a world away from her normal boring life, or the way this sweet, scrumptious boy was staring at her, but...

Oh, what the hell. Just this once.

“So, my well-hung boyfriend,” she said, helping him off with his boxers and giving his manhood a slow stroke. “Have you ever...”

Heather was having too hard a time getting the words out, so he took a guess. “Ever done it outdoors before?” The corners of his lips turned up. “Sure have. Yeah, once with...” He caught himself, and stopped, looking appropriately remorseful.

His bravado slew her bashfulness. “Really? Don’t stop there. Go on and tell me about all your other wild exploits. Or can I finish.” His jaw clicked shut. “I was going to ask... have you ever... I believe the term is ‘tit-fucked’ a girl before?” She made a face, showing what she thought of that term. One of her most difficult assignments in Mr. Lyons’ class had been learning to hear and use the term, which she did in class, but she didn’t like using men’s words to describe women’s bodies when she didn’t have to.

Heather could read it in his face that he had. Part of her wondered with whom. Amanda? She was pretty stacked. He’d dated Penny Hargrove last year, but she was... well, if boobs were a spectrum, they were on opposite ends. Could flat girls do that? Sex ed didn’t really have many girls with small boobs, and she’d never seen Mr. Lyons try it on them.

Still, not ten seconds ago she’d made it plain she didn’t want him discussing his history with other women, and he applied his learning in his response. “Next to you, I don’t think anyone else’s could qualify for the act.”

She smiled, pleased. A right answer. “Nice. Now, I know I’ve said I’d never... you know. But... we’re in Hawaii, and it’s gorgeous, and... I dunno. I guess, this once, I’m curious what it’s, um, like.” Technically, she was curious what it was like with someone she cared about, rather than enduring the grunts and taunts of Mr. Lyons. She learned almost nothing in his class except how corrupt and abusive and pervasive the patriarchy was, but she supposed he was only working with the curriculum the school had given him.

Unlike her teacher, Conner actually applied a moment’s thought before diving into a girl’s tits. Breasts, rather. “We’ll need to do something about the, ah, friction.”

“Oh. You didn’t bring any sunscreen?”

“It’s after midnight.”

She peered around, but there was nobody around. They were probably a mile or more away from the resort, and at this hour, the place was abandoned. Although even if there had been somebody, not like there was a reason she could give without dying of embarrassment if she had to ask to borrow their sunscreen at this hour.

“Come on,” he said suddenly, and held out a hand to help her to her feet. She didn’t know what he had in mind, but she was game. Here, now, she was game for anything.

Moments later the duo was running into the ocean, their naked skin gleaming blue-white under a three-quarter moon. “Out here? Not sure I can hold my breath that long, Conner,” she said, pressing her body against him. There was nothing quite like the feeling of a warm, wet man against her bare, wet breasts.

“You know, I was just gonna use the water, but now that I have you out here...” Heather yelped in surprise as Conner, her gentle Conner, hefted her into his arms, holding her aloft with a firm grip on her soft ass. “I just want to have sex with you. Is that OK?” She could feel his tip beneath her, waiting.

She beamed at him so brightly that for a moment it dispelled the night. She pressed her lips to his to signal her very eager consent. How had she found a boy this sweet? Heather had offered him the prize of prizes, but he wanted to make love to her instead, to make sure she enjoyed herself as much as he did. (Never mind that with the way Conner’s touch electrified her boobs, she was pretty sure the other thing would be at least as good, if not better.)

But even as he carefully lowered her onto his waiting member, a wave came along and slapped them over with a shriek of surprise, sweeping them along in the wake. They emerged, laughing, on the shore a few moments later, crawling out of the ocean and collapsing nearby on the sand.

“That was sweet, Conner. Thank you for that.” She rolled onto her back, pulling him on top of her. “But now that we’re back on the earth, you wanna...?” Heather grasped her breasts and pulled them apart, making space for him.

“Oh, if you insist.”

Conner titty-fucked her until her tattooed pattern earned their place, and then and there she stopped resenting the artist for mucking it up. He was even mindful of her affinity for having her nipples stimulated, taking his time and playing with them while she let him admire a view that, in his words, was even better than the scenery around them. She couldn’t have said why it felt so much better with Conner than it ever had with Mr. Lyons, but did it ever. She found herself coming twice before he did once, like her pleasure centers had been realigned into the space between her boobs. When he came, she was close enough to a third orgasm that she pleaded for him to keep fucking her tits.

“I’d like to see Amanda try *that*,” she said after, as she rinsed herself off in the Pacific waters. She didn’t know where Conner’s cum would end up, but she’d enjoyed watching and being part of where it had begun its journey.

“Oh wow, yeah, you think she’d let me?” he said, but he didn’t flinch when she punished him with a soft underwater slap.

It was hard to know how to feel sometimes. Conner was fooling around with Amanda Carpenter. And she was sleeping with Jordan Lyons. Who was also have sex with Amanda Carpenter. (Such as his brutality towards her was “sex” in the traditional

sense.) And Amanda was... Yeesh. The whole affair was... not dizzying, quite, but rather a surprising, neat little pattern that nonetheless defied sense. Soon they would graduate and both girls would at last be done tolerating their teacher's instruction. Only then both girls would have to leave. Until then, she was going to enjoy herself, and if she gave Amanda half so much cause for jealousy... so be it.

Was this love?

She loved him. She thought so, at least. Then again, Heather had always thought love would be more... monogamous. But maybe it was nothing more than having someone in your life who made you happy? Heather dismissed the analysis. She was eighteen, nearly nineteen, and she didn't have the arrogance to presume she'd answered the poet's question.

Soon, Conner was holding her again in chest-deep water. The two swayed against the rolling waves, their bodies pressed together under a starry sky. "You know, for years, guys have kind of obsessed over my breasts," she said softly. "Would you really rather...?"

"Honestly?"

"Conner, you don't know how to be anything but honest. That's part of what I love about you." There. She hadn't told him she loved him, quite, but she saw in his eyes he'd heard the near-miss, and was happy at how close it had come.

"Well then... there's no 'rather.' Whenever I can be with you, I want to be with you. I've wanted to be with you for so long that I can barely believe I get to be. And whatever we do, it's together. Until that timer runs out."

She kissed him, and would kiss him many more times before he would have a chance to speak again. To think, she'd come so close to never giving herself a chance to enjoy these final few months of high school. Her eyes had been fixed on the horizon – Berkeley, grad school, and beyond – that she forgot sometimes to immerse herself in the here and now. Somehow, it had taken this sweet, geeky, irrepressible boy to remind her of it. She would miss him so much when the summer was over.

He'd said he wouldn't let her delay Berkeley to stay with him. But there in the Pacific waves of the Maui beach, she made herself for the thousandth time stop herself from asking him to come with her.

Siobhan glanced at her phone, grimacing. Normally her phone's notification screen cut off most of the text, but here, her father's message was short and sweet.  
*\$312,119.80?! CALL ME NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

"Go on ahead, you guys. I gotta call my dad."

"Tell him thanks!" said Hayleigh. "This place is amazing. He must have an in with the owner or something to be able to afford this."

"Or something," Kylee said, dialing.

"Hi Daddy... what's wrong?... why are you... don't shout, Daddy... I told you everyone and you said OK, right?... I mean, everyone. You agreed, remember?... no, I know, but... we can't go back in the middle of... but Daddy that's not fair... no refund? well then why make us... OK, I'll, um, tell everyone... uh huh... all right... yes, Daddy... I love you too, Daddy..."

A few minutes later, Kylee hung up the phone with a smirk. No refund? Well then no cancellation. Not like Daddy wasn't good for it, and she'd make it up to him when she got home at the end of break.

Probably.

Or maybe not.

Kristy had been surprised at how well Arthur Rodriguez moved on the dance floor. This club was something else, too. Back home, on the rare occasions when she and her ex-boyfriend Brent had gone out dancing, they were relegated to one of the two local clubs, one of which was nothing special, and the other was distinguished primarily by its dinginess. This place, though... huge movie-sized screens showed psychedelic imagery, and the bass of the music pulsed in her bones. The people were all young and hot; Arthur was easily one of the oldest people she'd seen here and he was barely forty. They'd only let him in because he was with her.

Even the location was amazing, built right on the beach. Apparently part of the oceanside wall even retracted into the floor when they wanted to open it up, though it was too cold for that tonight, barely in the high 60's. Still, club-goers could come and go through a door that lead out to a partitioned private beach. Inside, there was an artificial waterfall and lagoon, over which dancers writhed in suspended cages.

All in all, it was a pleasant break from being surrounded by goggle-eyed horny teenagers.

Except for the one.

She and Arthur made their way to a table outside on the beach, where the music was muffled enough that they could actually hear one another.

"You got moves, Artie," she said as he handed her a drink.

"You know it," he said, clinking his glass against hers. "You're not half bad yourself."

"Oh, do go on." She flipped her hand at him.

"Seriously, though, I can't imagine what Brent was thinking, walking out on a woman like you, Kris. Smart, gorgeous, funny... you got it all."

She nodded, realizing he'd drunk enough to be consider making the transition from flirty to making a move. Kristy wouldn't be the first faculty member he'd tried it with; Mr. Rodriguez even had a reputation among the students for his wandering eyes. "Well, somehow I manage."

"So you single these days, then? Saving yourself for some new young buck?" he asked.

Even if the answer had been yes, she would have said no. Besides, she'd been drinking more than a little herself. She'd have to be careful not to be too obvious about it on her way back into the Rose Pinnacle. "Nah, I've got somebody I've been seeing for a few months now."

He masked his disappointment rather well, she thought. "Oh? How's that going?"

"I... don't know," she answered carefully. "I like him, and we have fun together."

"Buuuut...?" he prompted. She'd left the unspoken "but" pretty obvious, she supposed.

“But... well, it’s complicated.” Was that ever an understatement. That it was a student was more than complicated enough, to say nothing of whatever role a reality-warping piece of software had played.

“Complicated how?” he asked. “You like him, you have fun... so what’s missing?”

Had she been sober, she would have issued a simple “I’d rather not talk about it” and been done with it. Had she been merely drinking, she might have distracted him with another invitation to dance. But the alcohol was combining with whatever that was that had been passing around and smoked the dance floor to make her both introspective and impulsive at the same time.

“It’s a few things,” she began, taking a drink in a vain effort by her subconscious to shut her up. “For one, he’s sort of seeing another woman – no, two other women now.”

“Wow. Real player, huh? Why would you stay with a guy who’s messing around like that?”

She ignored the subtext of his statement, such-a-guy-doesn’t-deserve-you so you-should-dump-him and hey-now-you’re-single and oh-you’re-here thus why-not-let’s-fuck. Men were such simple creatures. “Because I like him, like I said. And because he makes me happy. But it’s also probably gonna be over in a few months anyway, so I’m just making hay while the sun is shining.”

“What, he got cancer or something?”

“No, but... well, he’s in education, too.” In a sense. “And after the academic year, he’s transferring to another school, and... not sure what that’s going to mean for us.”

“Long distance never works,” he said, again not so subtly.

“It’s not the distance, but... our current set-up works great. We get to see each other every day, and we help each other with our stuff, and...” Kristy trailed off, realizing she’d said too much.

“Wait, he works at Northside? Who is it?” Arthur leaned in, excited to be offered this morsel of gossip. “Shepherd? Adler? That ape Conrad?”

Kristy grimaced, then downed the rest of her drink. What could she say? Arthur might not be a social butterfly, but she still couldn’t make up a relationship and expect it to keep quiet. Telling the truth was out, too. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” she said finally.

“It’s a student, right?” Her eyes widened, and the alcohol suddenly hardened to a rock in her stomach. Oh god. Oh god, shit, no—

“Kris, I’m kidding, geez!” Arthur patted her shoulder. “Good grief, I wouldn’t even joke about something like that if anyone else was in earshot. I know how that stuff ruins careers.”

She let out a breath. “Damn right it does.”

“You wanna keep your secret, fine. But your mystery man must be quite a guy if he can keep a woman like you, if you don’t mind my saying.”

“Thanks, Arthur.” She gave his hand a little squeeze.

“And you know, if you like this guy so much, go for it, ya know? Make him make a choice, and give him a reason to choose you. You want to make it work, make it work. You can’t just worry about making everybody else happy – you gotta worry about your own happiness, too.” He looked her over, flashed a grin she was pretty sure was meant to be charming and seductive. “Woman like you, I bet you could find a way to convince him.”

She considered those words for only a moment, because then he was saying that if she really wanted to be happy tonight, he had a spare key to his room he’d be happy to give her. But later, as she washed her perfume off of Conner in her suite’s shower so that nobody would smell her on him, those words continued to echo in her mind.

Jordan had to hand it to Amanda – this had been one hell of an idea. He might even take it easy on her for a while when they got back. He'd worried that TIOS might have some kind of range limit built in, that practically halfway around the world, things would start to fall apart. But as Ashley LeBeau eagerly squirmed around his cock for the third time that evening, the plush, pillow top mattress beneath them absorbing the brunt of her efforts, things were holding together well indeed.

"I, don't, know, how, you, keep, that, thing, hard," Ashley grunted between bounces, "but, I, fucking, love it!"

Jordan had been very careful not to mess around with his own file in TIOS. After all, start editing himself, and suddenly the person making those decisions wasn't him any more, but rather some alternate universe version that may or may not have the same goals and drives. But he'd let himself splurge on the erections-at-will quote. He'd seen that pud Fishers had followed suit, the little copycat.

Sometimes he wondered if his instantaneous refractory period was causing him to over-focus on his baser instincts, but giving in to his baser instincts had been the whole point of TIOS to begin with, after all.

Jordan had first made out with Ashley at a party freshman year, back when everyone had been going through a seven-minute-in-heaven phase. Back then she'd had no boobs, dagger-sharp braces, and Jordan himself hadn't had the slightest clue what he was doing. Both had agreed to tell everyone it had been an amazing time, and Ashley had. He'd told everyone a more accurate account in order to curry favor with Kirsten, which had gone nowhere. It had taken TIOS to melt that ice princess, and even then, she was heavy on the frost.

Now he fucked Ashley almost daily. She was one of the girls coopted under "*Some of us are going to have sex while we're still in school.*" – *Mary Buchanan*, but unlike the others who'd fuck him out of class, Ashley actually liked fucking Jordan. If not for Hailey, he'd probably give in and do the boyfriend/girlfriend thing like she wanted. But while Hailey tolerated him fooling around, he didn't think she'd be willing to be a homewrecker. Not worth the risk. Nothing was worth the risk of losing that incredible little slut. So instead, they had the same study hall period and their teacher was incredibly lax about hall passes. Now she had straight white teeth, a cute little pair of titties, and Jordan himself knew exactly how to handle her.

There was a knock at the door. Probably Jackson again, pissed off about being ousted from his room. One would think after six days he'd be used to it and have found somebody else to bunk with, but no, he was still being a bitch about having less success than Jordan.

"Someone's, ungh, knocking," Ashley pointed out when it continued.

"Just Jackson. I put the do not disturb on the door – he'll respect it."

But suddenly, a woman's voice was calling out from the far side. "Jordan? Are you in there? I really need to talk to you."

Ashley didn't look surprised at hearing a woman's voice wanting in; she knew full well what kind of guy she was sleeping with, and was almost certainly fucking at least a couple other guys herself. He wasn't the only one with a deserved reputation. She was perfectly ready to disregard it and keep rutting away.

Jordan, however, recognized the voice. "Get up," he said.

Ashley frowned. She was close to coming, and loathe to stop. "I'm almost there," she whined.

Jordan smacked her on the ass, hard so she'd know he meant it – except he'd forgotten who he was dealing with. Ashley whimpered in ecstasy. "Oh fuck yes, Daddy, I've been a bratty little thing, haven't I?"

"I don't have time for your weird fucking daddy iss–"

"Jordan? Please open up," came the voice. When Ashley still didn't let up, he tossed her off of him and rose from the bed, tossing the girl's clothes at her as she cursed him out for his abruptness. Soon, she was half storming, half being shoved into the hallway in her underwear.

"Hailey? You're pushing me out for Hefty fucking Hailey?" snapped Ashley angrily. She might not have the social clout of her friends Hottie Hayleigh or Kirsten, but she was a hot enough girl to suffer from a similar over-abundance of pride. Being forced out for a girl like this was a bitter pill for her to swallow.

"Get the fuck out," he said, then ushered a sobbing, miserable-looking Hailey into his room, slamming the door in Ashley's face.

"Fuck you, you fucking chubby chaser asshole!" she shrieked.

If Jordan still had to work to get pussy, he might have been upset about that, as well as the coming shit storm as she'd surely be running down to the beach to tell everybody who would listen. That was going to suck.

Except then he remembered he'd proofed himself against gossip months ago. Damn, TIOS was the gift that never stopped giving. He forced the smirk off his face as he ushered Hailey into his hotel room.

After all, Hailey looked like she'd just had to euthanize a kitten with her bare hands, which could only mean one thing.

"I d-did what y-you said," she wailed, collapsing against him. He had to hold her up, she was so distraught, and he quickly lead her to the bed. Hailey wrapped herself around him, shaking as she wept.

She couldn't get more words out as yet. Jordan simply held her, stroking her hair and making soothing noises. He wasn't very good at being comforting, but as sad as she was, it didn't take much more than holding her and making the right sounds.

“I did what you said,” she repeated a long time later. The sun was setting now, the final time it would set on their stay.

“Do you feel any better?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I waited down the hall from his room, and when I saw him go in, I went down and pounded on the door until he had to open it. Then I told him that I knew. About all of them. I told him he couldn’t treat people like this, that I wouldn’t let him use people and lie to people and...” She lost herself for a moment again, but composed herself much more quickly this time. “I told him what he was doing was wrong. I told him how he’d hurt me.”

“Good on you.” He pulled her close and kissed her forehead. “Sure, that sow Heather might be shaking her fist at the patriarchy or whatever bullshit she thinks she stands for, but you’re the one really standing up for women. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thanks. He looked like he felt really bad.” She didn’t sound happy about that at all, somehow. How did a pud like Fishers make these women so stupid for him? “I didn’t think he’d... I don’t know what I thought would happen. I was just so mad, you know?”

Jordan didn’t know. He’d been stoking that anger for weeks now, pushing her to this very point. She’d spent most of the break traipsing around Maui, reading by the pool, or, whenever possible, fucking Jordan. But little by little, watching Conner walking hand in hand with Amanda around the city, seeing him sneak away with Heather down the beach, back and forth, had worn on her. Finally she’d caught him sneaking into Miss C’s room the night before, and Jordan had made what turned out to be the last push.

“You have every right to be mad, hon. It’s one thing to be a cock-starved little slut like yourself, or a dude-slut like me. We at least own what we are, right? But a lying, conniving little sneak like Fishers...” Frankly, Jordan was more offended that the guy was using TIOS so little and wasting the opportunity than he was at how he was mistreating anyone. Still, Hailey needed to feel supported.

“Yeah. He... he has no right to be mad at me. I didn’t do anything he didn’t! I did *less* in fact! I’d never sleep with a teacher! Or trick someone into thinking I was going steady with them when I wasn’t! The only reason I never told him about you and me was because I didn’t think he’d care, you know?”

Jordan nodded. The rumor-proof TIOS quote had proven invaluable in keeping his schemes under wraps, but it was pretty damn annoying when it came to offhanded dismissals of people’s interest in him. Trying to tell people stories about his day had become impossible. “But today, I let him have it. I didn’t hold back at all, just like you said I shouldn’t. And when I told him he was a stupid asshole mother fucker, actually – and he said–”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” he said. “Easy there, pretty girl.” He cursed himself for not cutting her off sooner.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to shout,” she answered, her volume reined in. “Anyway, he said—”

“You know what?” he interjected quickly. He’d been listening carefully, making sure she didn’t get those words in.

After all, he’d agreed not to use anything he heard over spring break in TIOS.

“Tomorrow, on the flight home, you should write it all down. Write it in your diary, so you can remember the day you told that dirtbag he couldn’t break your big beautiful heart ever again. Every word you said, every word he said.”

“I... but...”

“You can tell me all about it when we’re back home. I don’t want to let him ruin our last night together. Come here, Hailey.” He rose, leading her by the hand to their balcony. He’d landed a suite on the twenty-third floor of a twenty-five story building, and the view was out of this world. It felt like miles down to the ground, where dark shapes speckled the ground like ants. To their right, they could make out the soft glow of Maui lighting up for the night, and to their left, the sun setting throwing an orange hue across the azure ocean waters.

Jordan wasn’t prone to corny lines, but he could use one right then. Hailey was always a sucker for them. Besides, for once, he actually felt rather corny. “I swear, that’s the best view I’ve ever seen in my life, but you’re still the only thing I want to look at right now.”

Hailey’s tear-streaked face brightened. “Do... do you want to fuck your little slut? Here, on the balcony?”

“Did you see who I just kicked out of my room? Because that skank can’t hold a candle to my perfect little gutter-mouthed fuck toy.”

She squealed in glee, and threw off her clothes so hastily that her top simply flew out into space. Whatever. Jordan didn’t want to see this girl’s tits covered up again until the hotel staff forced him out of the room. Hailey bent herself over the railing and shook her ass invitingly until he seized her hips and pulled himself into that snug little cunt of hers. It drew him in like a tractor beam, and didn’t let up until he was all the way in.

“Get to work, slut,” he growled into her ear.

She giggled in exultation, and shrieked into the darkening sky. “I’M BEING FUCKED!”

She sure was. And soon, Fishers would be fucked too. The son of a bitch had gotten a little too good at moderating his words, and he was annoyingly well-liked around school. Getting someone to say something bad about him was a non-starter. But an emotional confrontation with a shrieking Hailey... now that was going to have something he could use.

That was all he needed. One little line, something to give him some real leverage over that loser. Fishers had the gall to threaten not to extend TIOS? Fuck that. If he lost

Hailey, he'd miss her squealing, pleading, desperate, depraved, sexy, whorish self until he died. So help him, he'd make sure he was in a position to scar Fishers for life if he dared.

DeShaun rubbed his eyes, but there was no mistaking it. That was definitely Hefty Hailey on the next floor down, naked, bent over the railing, her body bouncing in a manner that could only mean she was being nailed, hard, from behind. Downstairs, though... that was Jackson and Jordan's room... right?

They must've changed rooms.

"Squeeze my fucking titties, baby!" she was saying. "Harder! It barely hurts – do it *harder*! You own my mother fucking titties, Jordan, don't be gentle!"

No fucking way...! But sure enough, a pair of hands that could well be Jordan Lyons reached out and took hold of those big fat tits. Hailey's pair was smaller than he would've thought – such a waste. A fatty like that usually at least had big boobs, but these were perfectly shaped C cups at best, he'd bet. Such a shame.

DeShaun's unease at the scene unfolding on the balcony beneath him was at least as much because it sounded like Jordan Lyons, NHS's most shameless man-whore, was fucking its least fuckable girl, but also because when she raised her slender, toned hock on the railing, he feared she was going to fall off. Jordan saw to that though, with a hard grip on Hailey's plain, lustrous mane, jerking her neck back to keep her weight against him.

"Oh GAW-HAW-HAWD you have the biggest bestest fucking dick! Goddammit I can't get e-fucking-nuff of your goddamn dick. Your little slut could never get enough dick ever, but yours... oh FUCK, yours is shredding my fucking cunt!"

Against his better judgment, DeShaun leaned forward to get a look at the face behind the flab. Sure enough, there he was. Jordan Lyons, putting it hard to Hefty Hailey McManus.

Once he'd seen it, there was no unseeing it. It was every bit as horrifying as he'd have thought such a thing would be. Round, bubbly boobs jiggling in off-putting symmetry; her skinny-big ass, the kind made to bounce whole rolls of quarters off of, slamming off of Jordan's abs; a face that might be slammin' hot if it wasn't attached to that lumpless, bulkless body.

But to listen to her...

"Harder, baby, fuck me *harder*! My pussy can take it, I promise. Your fuck toy won't break, baby. You can bend my will however you want, I'll do fucking anything, *any fucking thing*, but you can't break my pussy. It's yours. My honeypot is sweet just for you. You smash that pot and watch how my sticky icky gooey pussy holds together around your big fat cock, baby..."

She never really stopped. DeShaun couldn't make himself watch, but... he had to admit, he didn't mind listening. He doubted anybody else on any other balcony for ten floors was missing much of it either. Who'd have thought Hefty Hailey was cut out to be a phone sex operator? He'd always thought she seemed like a nice person, but... this was one nasty, nasty girl.

Honestly, he almost didn't blame Jordan for stuffing that box. Almost.

Eventually they moved back into the room, and while he could listen to the moans coming up through the floor if he wanted, DeShaun decided he'd been creeping enough for one vacation. Down by the pool, he met up with Brad and Nick.

"We've been waiting for like half an hour. Where you been, D?"

Had it been anyone else, DeShaun would have started gossiping. But, considering it was just Jordan being his usual skanky self... "Nowhere. C'mon guys. Vacation's almost over – let's rock this little island, eh?"

“Well?” Miss C prompted, looking around the classroom. Still no one answered.  
“Don?”

“It was good,” he said, looking at his lap.

“Heather?”

“Really, really fun.”

“Marisa?”

“Pretty good, yeah.”

The students went around the circle.

“Good.”

“It was so good. Thank your dad for me, Siobhan.”

“Cool.”

“Got tan.”

“Yeah, pretty fun.”

And so on. The underclassmen were no more talkative than the seniors.

“Riveting stuff guys.”

“Well, what happens in Maui...” said Don.

“That’s not the saying,” Marisa corrected.

“All right. Well, I hope you all had a good time. Because now, break’s over, and it’s time to get serious. From now on, we’re in the home stretch.”

## Chapter Seven

*Until this point, we Nighthawks have shared a path – literally, as we all know how congested things get around the cafeteria at lunch time. But now, our roads will diverge. Some will go to college, some of us will learn a trade, some will serve our nation in the armed forces, some of us will just try to keep our feet underneath us as we figure out our next move. Although part of us will always live on at Northside, from here, we'll move to new towns, start new families, and have new adventures.*

*Today, however, the lot of us are gathered together in mutual excitement to receive our diplomas, say farewell to Northside, and take our first step into our futures. As I look out into the sea of bright faces, I see people I've gone to school with since kindergarten, and others who only joined us this final semester. (Hi, Amanda!) And though we were forced to coexist in these halls, let's face it – things weren't always easy, getting along with one another.*

*Even so, we tried our best. Most of the time, at least.*

“Well?”

Owen looked at Kirsten obliviously. Which was never a good way to look at her, as everyone around the lunch table well knew. Side conversations trailed off mid-sentence as everyone watched the school's hottest new couple to see what fresh drama was brewing.

“Well what?”

She gestured to where many of the group's eyes had been fixed a moment before, to where Colin Newcombe had asked Kay Stuart to prom. Not the biggest display he'd ever seen, but not bad either – a series of helium balloons, each with a letter on them, dragged in by friends and friends of friends, spelling out “will you go to prom with me?” Technically it had spelled out “will you go to rpom with me?” but it was a minor failing in an otherwise solid romantic effort. Kay had said yes, at least, and promptly reminded about PDA rules by a lethargic Mr. Rodriguez. He hadn't had the energy for more than half-hearted scolding since Maui.

“Half the girls in school already have their dates lined up, but here I am wondering if I'm going to have a king at my side when I'm coronated.” Already, there was little doubt in anyone's mind as to who would be prom queen, least of all in Kirsten's. She stood up, hands on hips, and he knew that if he let her walk away without smoothing things over, there would be hell to pay later. More hell, anyway.

Owen wasn't sure what to say, but with everyone watching, he had to say something. His grounding had been suspended for the spring break trip – thank Conner and thank TIOS for that glorious reprieve! – but back home, it was in full effect. His

mother had mentioned prom explicitly, and while his dad was covertly impressed at the quality of tail his son had pulled, he wasn't looking to publicly defy his wife on the matter either.

Besides, there were... well. Complications. This was hardly the time to say that, though, as he could easily picture Kirsten punching him so hard she knocked his jaw off the rest of his skull.

"I got something in the works, babe – don't you worry," he said, trying to look charming. He didn't know much about how to do that, but he'd seen it on TV.

"That's what you said last weekend," she grumped.

"And I meant it. Come on, baby, you know there's nobody else I'd rather go with, right?" Owen patted his lap, and after a moment, Kirsten's face thawed and she settled down, letting him give her a kiss. She always enjoyed flouting those PDA rules herself; he'd never realized that old horndog Mr. Rodriguez didn't enforce them on the hot girls until he was actually dating one.

"You promise?" she said in her doting girlfriend babygirl voice. He liked that voice, and she knew it.

"Hell yeah, I promise. I can't wait to see how good you look in your dress. I just gotta get the ask all set up proper, so everyone knows my girl deserves more than some lame-ass balloons." Lame? He'd never made a romantic gesture half so bold. What was he getting himself into? Kirsten's beauty had a way of overpowering his judgment.

He was rewarded with another kiss, and the table started returning to its business, save for Olivia, who was fawning as usual. "Aw, you guys are the *best* couple, I swear!"

The two ignored her, also as usual. How could Kirsten tolerate that constant stream of obsequiousness? "Say, speaking of, I gotta go get a few ducks in a row, baby. You mind letting me up, K?"

There was the slightest hesitation before she responded, a ghost of a moment in which he thought he saw suspicion in her eyes, but the inkling was gone before he was even sure he'd seen it. "You got it, O." Their celebrity couple name, OK, had been Olivia's idea, and probably would have gotten her destroyed by Kirsten for the connotation of mediocrity had the group not immediately latched onto it. She was deadly serious about reinforcing her brand; he had a dozen hours of setting up and posing with her for "spontaneous" photos on her instagram to prove it. He'd never realized how much effort went into an insanely hot girl looking insanely hot.

Owen gave her a last parting kiss before swaggering out of the cafeteria. To think, a few months ago he would've been sitting with Conner and Trevor and Kayla and the gang, watching someone kiss those lips with silent envy, yet now here he was running away from them. Not that he was running.

Not until he reached the hallway, anyway.

“Took your sweet fucking time,” said Angelica, locking the door behind him and immediately shedding her top.

“Sorry. There was another Huge Romantic Prom Invitation, and Kirsten started giving me the third degree again. Took me a sec.”

She helped him with his pants and started on her own. “Why don’t you just ask her already? No way your cunt of a mom is going to make her only son miss his senior prom. If you tell your dad you have Kirsten Perfect-Body Vaughan on the line, he’ll tell her to shut it. You know he will.”

“Perfect face, too,” Owen said, grinning.

Angelica’s response was to shove him onto the teacher’s desk on his back. “God, I missed you,” she said as she slithered on top of him.

Owen was never sure how to respond to sincere expressions of emotion, so he simply murmured an “I missed you too” as she sucked away on his neck.

Angelica rolled her eyes. “You’re a dreamboat and all, but I meant *him*,” she said, giving his cock a few strokes with hands so silky smooth they had to have been lotioned not minutes ago.

“Right. And I meant it in the plural, for *them*.” Owen gripped her taut little butt and pulled her higher until a nipple was in suckling range, availing himself of first one, then the other.

“You know we’re on a time crunch here, right?” she snapped after a moment, squirming back down and unceremoniously guiding him inside her. They’d been fucking like this every day, so much of late that there was no longer any need for foreplay.

“I thought you said this room was only in use second period?”

“It is, but I still have a class coming up, and unless you got expelled without me hearing about it, so do you.”

“So? We can skip it. You already have a diploma, and Conner takes attendance for Dr. Laugherty. He knows I’m here today.”

“That’s it, keep talking about my stepbrother while we’re fucking, it’s really really hot.” She sounded serious enough to him that, as he pondered what to do with that, she had to give him a hard look to reinforce her sarcasm.

Owen took her implied advice and shut up. It was surreal, having sex in school. He’d had no idea this room was anything but a storage closet until she’d dragged him in here one morning to suck his cock before school. Apparently she’d swiped a key from her teacher and made a copy – pretty gutsy stuff, he had to say. Owen didn’t even know what class she had in here. He would have guessed some kind of foods class, given how often he found little smudges and wet spots on every conceivable surface, except there was no baking equipment in here. And why the heck were there a bunch of adjustable metal poles stacked up in the back? What were they learning, the joust?

Whatever. Angelica was riding him like a woman possessed, and he could give two fucks if they were in a slaughterhouse or on the goddamn moon. Funny, for most of his post-pubescent life, he'd fantasized about girls like her and Kirsten. Pretty girls, with round parts around flat waists. The hotness, he'd always thought, was the allure.

Now that he'd been with them? He'd realized he had a lot to learn. The hotness didn't hurt, that was for damn sure. But the difference between the two couldn't be more stark.

One of them wrapped herself around his dick, squeezed it with muscles he didn't know girls had when she wasn't sucking on it like it was her favorite candy, and without fail came like he was Adonis himself – every single time.

And one was Kirsten Vaughan. She humored his cock's presence, and if she exerted a little effort from time to time, it seemed mostly in order to not be outshone.

That was just the sex. The rest, the part of being around girls that didn't involve erogenous zones and orifices... that part confused him, and he never quite knew what to make of things. There was his spunky, feisty, spirited and sassy girl across the street (if not technically next door), and there was this other girl, a woman really, whom Owen was fairly sure would kill to protect her claim on him. She'd told him as much, actually, whispered in it his ear as he came.

Was that love? If so, did she love him enough to make Angelica her first kill?

(And how literally should he take that?)

Owen had wanted a girl like Kirsten Vaughan ever since he'd started wanting girls. Actually, not quite. He'd never met another girl *like* Kirsten. She was a volcano, hot as the sun itself and ten times as volatile, glorious and dangerous. Even when she was driving him crazy, he had to admit, her allure was not tarnished simply because she had the heart of a bloodthirsty pirate queen. If anything, that enhanced it.

Only there was Angelica, and while the lion's share of superlatives went in favor of Kirsten, all too often when they were together, Owen found himself missing his tiny, spunky neighbor. But why? He couldn't say.

But for now, it was Angelica and sex, and those things were always both very good. For all her talk of rush, they had time for not one but two goes. The first time she rode him on her teacher's desk, fingers curled in his chest hair possessively if not quite painfully; the second as she went for her clothes, the sight of her bent over, slit exposed and dribbling, still gaping from his initial barrage. He fucked her right there standing in the middle of the empty classroom, both of them trying their best to keep the noise down, and both of them failing.

"So how you gonna ask her?" she said, jumping up and down to squeeze back into her skinny jeans. The dismissal bell had rung right before they came, and now the sounds of students bustling through the halls leaked softly through the heavy door.

"Ask who?"

“Uzo Aduba. Who the hell do you think, doofus?”

He remembered where he was, and who they were. “Right. I don’t know. I’ll think of something. As long as it’s public and flashy, she’ll be happy with it.”

“Sounds about right.” She took charge of his pants, buttoning and zipping them. It struck him how rare for her it was to not be unbuttoning, unzipping. She gave him a quick kiss. Afterwards, her lips rubbed together, tongue darting out, trying to decide if that was Kirsten she was tasting. It probably was. “That, and getting that stupid plastic crown.”

“Oh come on, like you never wanted to be prom queen.” He pulled her up against him, and she smirked bemusedly up at him.

“I just want–” she broke off suddenly. “Hey, we gotta move. Same time tomorrow?”

“Yeah.”

She left, and he waited a minute to do the same. Kirsten wouldn’t like it if they were too obvious.

“Did I hear you use the word ‘pork sword’ in there somewhere?” Jordan asked as Hailey licked the cum off her lips, dabbing at the rest with a hand towel from the guest house bathroom.

She grinned sheepishly. “Sorry. I was trying to do variety and thought I’d try it out. Too much?”

He grabbed a handful of that glorious ass of hers and pulled her back on top of him, where as if by instinct, her hips began to grind her body softly against his. “Hey, don’t let my ass stand in the way of an artist like yourself, babe. You know what you’re doing, and I don’t give a shit if they’re not all Mona Lisa’s.”

Hailey drew his lower lip into her mouth and gave it a few sucks. “I’ll do better next time.”

“Not sure how much better I can handle, super-slut. I’m only one man.”

“Mm, but what a man,” Hailey purred, and like that, she was climbing aboard him again. If there was a woman in the world who could compete with his TIOS-improved stamina, it was this one. Who would’ve thought that of all the girls at Northside, the soul of a true submissive and raging nymphomaniac would have been lying dormant in Hefty Hailey McManus? It made him wonder what other untapped resources existed out there in his classmates.

Than again, he mused as Hailey deftly pivoted to reverse cowgirl, ass cheeks clapping in rhythm, he had enough on his plate as it was. Why go searching for another Hailey when he had his every desire satiated by the one he had? Class was going great, too. Finally, things were more or less like he’d imagined. The girls did what he said, let him do what he wanted, and for the most part were getting pretty damn good at their studies.

There was hardly a one of them that wasn’t a master of one or more sex act. Mary sucked cock like a toothless whore of fifty years experience. Lauren and Stacy could make a killing as pole dancers. Neveah could crack a walnut with her pussy, her kegels were so on point, and he had half a dozen others who’d literally trained themselves to milk a cock dry. His show-and-tell challenge had revealed talents he didn’t know existed.

After seeing the positions Yuri could maintain while still managing to reciprocate to a man’s cock, the only thing that had kept him from ordering mandatory gymnastics training was worry that the girls would hurt themselves. TIOS wasn’t going to be much good when somebody cracked their skull trying to fuck him in a handstand.

Yeah, Amanda was still mounting her little protest. Let her. He had more than enough pussy without her. Yeah, he could force the point if he felt like it, but why? Why have the girls hold her down and gag her bitch mouth so he could give her a proper fucking when he had two dozen others willing and, for many, eager? Seemed like a waste of enthused cooze. She gave him enough time on her account to do what he needed, and

by and large didn't get in the way. Frankly, seeing the leggy redhead sitting at her desk, glaring, fidgeting and scratching until she succumbed to the need to strip or put on her slut garb, was hotter than anything she could manage on his cock anyway. Her protest against his rules was even sexier than that feminazi cunt Heather and her slutty protest against whatever she thought she was protesting.

Hailey grabbed his ankles, his cock straining to the limit of comfort, her hips still working in slow circles, careful not to hurt him while knowing exactly how far she could bend him. She came harder this way, and while usually Jordan didn't give much thought to the enjoyment of his partner, he could watch Hailey get off all day. The thrill of seeing the face and body of that haughty bitch Hayleigh coming like a slut on the end of his dick hadn't worn off.

Plus, it was Hailey. Everything she did was fucking sexy. The way her eyes squeezed shut in pleasure at the same point in each revolution of her hips. The way her breath randomly came in and out in ragged, shuddering convulsions of ecstasy. The way her hair clung to the beads of sweat on her back. The way she didn't let up until she'd milked every last drop he was going to give, as if her pussy were thirsty for it. As thirsty for him as he was hungry for her. He'd never tell her, but sometimes he was imagining her as he used the other girls in his harem. Some had better tits, some had better asses, some had tighter pussies and one or two might be able to claim prettier faces. But not a one of them had her pure, undiluted love of sex.

However, she had one other thing none of the other girls had – expectations. Of him.

“Are you still going to deal with Conner?” she asked, her cheek resting on his chest. It was only the third time she'd asked in the two weeks since they'd gotten back from Hawaii, which he suspected was a tiny fraction of the times she'd wanted to. She'd brought it up on the plane ride home, and he'd told her to forget about it. The following weekend after he'd fucked her in the pool (and the guest house, and the shower), she'd tried again, and again he'd put her off. He had a feeling if he kept it up this way, sooner or later she'd be asking every single time she saw him.

Hailey had been hurt, and she expected her man to defend her. However coy she was being, it was a passive aggressive tactic. She might be a true sub, but she was still a girl, and every girl he'd ever met wanted a guy who'd fight for them. There was no such thing as a pacific when it came to girls and their pride.

“You're still gnawing on that bone, huh.”

“It's just... you said...”

“I know what I said.”

The two were quiet for a while. It wasn't her way to press him, and it wasn't his way to be pressed. Outside, he heard the garage door open and close; that would be Barbara heading out for her girl's night out. He was pretty sure she was actually out

cheating on his dad, but since he had equal suspicions his dad “working late” was cover for the same, he didn’t make a fuss. After all, his dad would probably find out on his own when he decided to care. It’s what had happened to Donna, Leigh Ann, and Patricia, each of whom had been his mistress prior to his divorce, only to be replaced by the next mistress. Jordan hadn’t even talked to his mom in six months, and wasn’t in any rush to pick up the phone and do so. Let that cunt drink herself to death in Florida with her new family.

Fidelity, he supposed, was not something he’d been raised to. It simply never struck him as a very natural arrangement.

“Look, maybe it’s better for you if you just... move on,” he said.

He didn’t expect the suggestion to go over well, and from the stricken look on Hailey’s face as she gazed up at him, he seemed to have predicted it aright. “Move on? But... how can you say that? You know what he did to me.”

“He cheated on you. Sure. But I mean... so what, right? You cheated on him, too. We’ve both cheated on each other. Doesn’t mean I don’t care about you.”

This reminder didn’t faze her. Somehow, it made her dig in her heels harder. “But we didn’t hide it. I knew you were... you know. And you know I was with him. We were honest about it. And you didn’t act like everything was fine and then just stab me in the freaking back the second you found out that—!” She realized she was shouting. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to yell.”

“I like when you yell.”

She smiled, but only fleetingly. “But you said, if I...”

“You don’t need to remind me that Fishers is a fucking dirtbag, Hailey. I know it. I’ve known it longer than you, remember? I’ve been keeping that little turd in his place since middle school. But what’s there to be gained from picking a fight with him? I’ve got all the cards, and all it’ll amount to is seeing him knocked on his ass, and then me having to look over my shoulder to make sure the little bitch doesn’t sucker punch me.”

Still, there was that look in Hailey’s eye. That look that made him feel like he was risking cutting her as deep as Fishers. Whatever else happened in these final days of high school, he couldn’t lose Hailey. While he could use any of a thousand things she’d said in TIOS to make her his cock-worshipping sex puppet again, it was better when she gave it up freely. Much better. He didn’t know why it made a difference, but it did.

She was perfect. He’d trade every single one of his sex ed sluts for her, individually or wholesale. He could not risk losing the best fuck he’d ever had.

Hailey didn’t know he was being metaphorical about his war on Fishers, though he supposed his words could be taken literally as well. *Stay out of my way* was a fairly broad term, after all, and perhaps the guy making a try at kicking Jordan’s ass wasn’t prohibited. That was assuming he and his pit bull Amanda didn’t find some way to get him with TIOS, which was always a possibility. The last thing he needed was to have to

get paranoid, looking over his shoulder, watching everything he said, constantly monitoring TIOS to see what those assholes were typing.

Accordingly, Jordan really had been trying to avoid the little prick. Before Hawaii, he'd been calculating his next strike, eavesdropping as boldly as he dared, ears perked in case there was any rumor to be picked up about Fishers that Jordan could use against him. He was readying for battle, and was fighting to win.

But a week away from it all had done a lot to grant perspective. What did Fishers have that Jordan might covet? Girls? He could have – and had – fucked any of the girls Fishers was sticking it to, except maybe Miss C, and he'd take any of his bitches over that old cunt any day. She was almost thirty, for fuck's sake. Money? Feh. His dad was a millionaire and owned his own business; Fishers was raised by an unemployed stay-at-home mom. Even Jordan's grades were better than that prick's, thanks to TIOS. Flashier car, cooler friends, better parties.

And of course, Jordan still had Hailey.

So sure, Hailey had given him the silver bullet he'd sent her to get over break. It was a hell of a weapon, frankly, and he could fire at any moment. It was tempting. Wiping the dorky smile off Fishers' face had been fun even when there'd been nothing to gain from it but putting that pussy do-gooder in his place. Now, with what Hailey had told him, he had a means to damage the guy for life, to reach inside him to what was most sacred and shit all over the altar. A few taps on the keyboard was all it would take, and while TIOS could be unpredictable, first person admissions always seemed to work strongest, and a simple five-word statement was hard to misinterpret. Fishers was at his mercy and he didn't even know it.

But the more he'd thought about it, the more he kept asking himself, *why bother?*

For the first time in Jordan's life he had real goals. An attack like this could jeopardize all of them, spark a war that Fishers – or that snotty bitch Amanda – might find a way to strike back hard. Without saying as much, Jordan had given them an unspoken armistice. He'd stopped fucking Fishers' girls, Amanda and Heather. Even laid off his snack of a stepsister, too, in case Amanda was using some of that feeble resistance of hers to pass on info about what he was up to second period. Meanwhile, Conner hadn't done more than glare at him in weeks. Jordan could simply leave the guy alone, and in return, enjoy the rest of his days in his self-created paradise. Jordan's second period put Maui to shame.

That was to say nothing of Hailey herself, who was the best thing that had ever happened to him. The best thing that *could* ever happen to him. Other than himself, she was the only thing he had ever truly loved, at least insofar as he understood what love was.

“Just... let's leave well enough alone, OK?”

“All right,” was all she said.

But there was that look.

Though he would never have admitted it out loud, Conner had always rather dreaded the end of school. Not that he minded summer vacation, of course. Who could lament all that freedom and sunshine? Still, school had always been a second home for him. He was far from the most popular guy, but it wasn't hubris to say he was well-liked by most people, and he liked most of them back. It was part of what made him a good editor-in-chief; he really did care about what happened to and around his classmates. Summer vacation was two and a half months where he was no longer the class historian and chronicler, and was simply another kid rotting his brain on video games at his friend's house.

Today, however, Conner found himself adding a countdown to the dry erase board hanging in his locker. Forty-nine days left until it was all over.

"It's forty-eight days," said Owen as he closed his adjacent locker. Lately they'd been hanging out before school again, even riding together again. It was nice. Angelica wasn't allowed to ride with them per Mrs. Gibson's orders. It was a bit awkward, having to drive two cars from the same house to the same destination every day, but Angelica didn't complain. Conner had to hand it to her, she was handling her separation from Owen (and his cock) pretty well, as far as he could tell. Not that she talked to him much, these days. He couldn't blame her.

"How would you know?"

"Got my own countdown going, baby. Forty-eight days until we walk across that stage, snatch that diploma, and never have to come back to this place ever again." Needless to say, Owen did not share Conner's fondness for Northside.

"I'll have to check your math," Conner answered.

"It's counting, dude. I might be getting a C in pre-cal, but I think I can handle counting. Used my fingers and everything, just to be sure."

Conner looked side to side, as if anyone would be eavesdropping on a casual conversation between them. No one one was, of course. "Look, it's not for graduation. It's for the day after."

"I know. I just told you that, like five seconds ago."

Conner rolled his eyes. "No, it's... never mind."

"What?"

"Look. We got this email from ASAL, and—"

"What the hell is ASAL?"

"I have definitely told you this like a hundred times, man. The American Scholastic Annual League. ASAL. The yearbook people."

"They have a 'league'? What, do they team up to bring down... Hmm. I was going for a joke there, but I can't think of a villain dorky enough to be on yearbook level." He chuckled. "Oh hey, there's the joke."

“Anyway,” Conner went on, “they wrote to us about TIOS, thanked us for being trial users. Amanda wrote back and forth with them, and apparently, everything we’ve edited gets undone the day after graduation.”

“Oh.”

“Got your attention now, huh.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“Well that’s a good thing, right?”

Conner gave his friend a surprise look. “Coming from the guy who made my stepsister a cock addict, I’m surprised you’d say so.”

“Dude, come on. I didn’t think it’d... I mean, maybe I did, but... Look, I wasn’t thinking straight. The girl’s crazy hot, and I’d been wanting to hook up with her ever since...” He got a far-off look for a moment, and Conner didn’t want to guess what memory of his stepsister he was enjoying. “Anyway, when you go telling me I can stick it in her—”

“Never in my life did I tell you to ‘stick it in’ my stepsister.”

“You implied it. But yeah, she should be allowed to decide if she, you know...”

“Wants to keep ODing on your dick?”

“Precisely.” Owen paused. “What about you? You know, and... whatever it is you’ve been, ah, doing. With it.”

“What makes you think I’m doing anything with it?”

“Dude.” Conner read his look clearly, and it said, *I’ve been your best friend since kindergarten, and I’m not stupid enough to think you’re the perfect angel your mother thinks you are.*

“Fair point. But yeah, that ends, too. And... other complications. Lots of stuff happened that I didn’t intend. But it’s all over then.”

“So why are *you* relieved? I mean, you and Heather, and Hailey, and Amanda, and...?” He didn’t say Miss C’s name, not in school, but Conner knew who *and...?* was.

“Hailey and I are done. We had kind of a big fight in Maui, actually. She heard about... yeah. And she was pretty pissed.”

“Fair enough.”

Considering she’d been fucking Jordan behind his back all semester, it seemed decidedly unfair to him, but either way, he couldn’t begrudge someone for not wanting to be with someone who didn’t want to be exclusively with them. Hailey was a nice girl, and if he’d hurt her, he regretted it. He’d apologized as best he could, admitted he’d been in the wrong and let her lash out. She’d said some pretty hurtful things, and the more he’d listened to her the more he’d agreed. He’d said a few hurtful things about himself before the end. There wasn’t much more he could do, though, than apologize and let her be mad. She deserved her anger with him more than anyone.

Conner went on. “As for the rest... Heather’s leaving for college mid-summer, almost right after graduation, so the countdown may as well be for her, too. Uh, Kristy – you remember Kristy...?” Using her first name was safer, and Owen followed. “I think that pretty much has to end after school, too, considering she’s, um, still gonna be here next year.”

“Yeah, I guess that makes sense. So, going with the redhead then, eh? She seems like a good fit for you, a good long haul kind of... Whoa, dude – what’d I say?”

Conner evidently hadn’t been able to school his expression. It wasn’t surprising.

The thought of Amanda’s post-graduation status had been eating at him more and more with every passing day. Resetting the files meant returning everyone to how they’d been before TIOS. Which, for Amanda Carpenter, meant she was going to go back to wherever she’d been before she’d sprung into existence in January – nowhere. The same place she’d gone when she stepped between those trees and vanished.

For all intents and purposes, the day after graduation, Amanda was going to cease to exist – and nobody but him, and maybe Jordan, even knew. And since Conner knew what he was doing, and was aiming to do it anyway, that meant he was letting it happen.

Letting her... die.

As students filtered past, heading for athletic practices and club meetings and buses and rides, Conner shuffled over to the rickety, well-stained furniture in the atrium and slumped down. Owen followed, looking concerned. “Hey buddy, breathe. You’re turning white, man. Well, whiter. Come on, breathe...”

It took a minute, but Conner forced the anxiety and the guilt back down. Owen was beside him, where he always was when Conner couldn’t handle things. Still, the guy was only human. “So you wanna tell me what all that was about? More fainting shit? I thought your mom made you see a doctor about that.”

Conner opened his mouth to tell his friend about it. He was going to let Amanda disappear – he could barely think the other word for what he was letting happen to her – but there was nothing else he could do. Not without letting who knows how much depravity continue to endure at Jordan’s hands. TIOS had created Amanda. She wasn’t real. That’s what he told himself whenever the panic began to set in, which only made it harder to look her in the eye when they were together. She sure looked real. Sounded real. Felt real.

But those girls in sex ed, the ones Jordan would keep “teaching” next year if Conner didn’t stop him... there was no question about where they’d come from. Jordan had turned NHS into a setting of daily rape, and only Conner could stop him, and only by running out the clock.

At least he could vent to someone. Owen would be sympathetic, and besides, he knew about TIOS, so he was about the only friend Conner had who could. He’d

appreciate what an absolute asshole Jordan was for putting him in this position. Heck, Conner wouldn't be surprised if Owen went straight down to kick Jordan's ass, especially once he heard what had been happening to Kirsten and Ang—

He closed his mouth. He'd said he wasn't going to get in Jordan's way, and that meant no sending his friends and allies after him either.

"Yeah. Just some fainting stuff. I get light-headed sometimes. Side effect of the medication."

Owen cocked his head to the side. "A side effect of your anti-fainting medication is to make you light-headed and almost pass out? Who the hell is your doctor, Cliff Huxtable?" Conner didn't answer. "You know, because of the quaaludes."

"I got it."

"You didn't laugh."

"Ha."

Owen gave him a minute to collect himself, and then he was back on his feet and heading for the car. His friend kept close, ready to catch him if he had another spell, but tried not to look it. Though to his surprise, as they neared Conner's car, who should be waiting for them but Amanda herself.

She waved from a ways off, far enough that Owen's low whistle of admiration was audible to no one but his friend. He had good reason to. Not only had Conner showed him the edits she'd made to herself so he could appreciate how the hot girl had become a veritable goddess. (They'd gotten into a good-spirited – and more than a little inebriated – discussion about who was sleeping with the hotter girl one afternoon in Maui. Neither had backed down, but both conceded it was close.) Also, on that particular day it was impossible to say if it was her own edits or if her height simply gave her that much more skin to show, but today's Pride ensemble was hotter than usual.

Bikini day. Heather had told him it was her way of demonstrating that what was appropriate in one circumstance was no less so in another, though Amanda had taken him aside and passed along that the senior Pride girls had simply wanted to get some more mileage out of the money they'd sunk into swimwear in Maui. For Amanda, that was a two piece, fairly conventional bikini that nonetheless had to be one of the hottest things he'd seen her in yet. It might not be flashy, but the red fabric behind her red hair made the rest of her creamy skin a beacon for the eyes. With spring fully here and the weather a bit warmer than usual, she almost didn't look cold.

She recognized the Pride attire for what it was now, of course, but it still seemed to amuse her to dress in such scandalous outfits without anyone but Conner seeming to notice. She got a kick out of watching him sputter when he laid eyes on her. One of these days, he'd have to come to school in a speedo to see if he could manage the same.

He doubted it.

"Hey, Amanda. Need a lift home?" Owen offered as they approached.

“Aw, look at how gallant your friend is. Wish I could find a guy like that,” she said, then tapped Conner on the nose, followed by a quick kiss.

“Sorry, we’re in short supply.”

“But a girl can dream.” She finally seemed to notice the look on Conner’s face. He was going to have to work on that if he was to keep this under wraps – and he had to keep it under wraps. “Hey, you doing all right, Conner?”

He nodded. “Yeah, just a lousy day.”

“Lousy day? I saw you ten minutes ago and you looked fine.” She looked to Owen. “Did he touch you? Here, show me on the doll where he touched you.”

Her levity brought back a smile. “I’m all right. Sorry.”

Amanda turned to Owen. “Say, mind if I borrow him for a minute?”

“Sure, but it’s twenty bucks an hour, or thirty if you don’t want to use a rubber.”

It was a bit more crass than she preferred, but she laughed it off as he slid into the passenger seat. “Are you really OK?”

“Yeah, I really am. Just one of those weird random moods, ya know? Comes and goes like that.” He snapped his fingers. “But seeing you fixed it immediately.”

She smiled, but he didn’t escape an eye roll. “Sweet. So sweet I might throw up in my mouth, but sweet.”

“So what brings you here to my humble car? Not that I mind seeing you again so soon.”

Conner’s second attempt went over better than his first, and Amanda leaned back against the driver’s side window and pulled Conner close, placing his hands on her bare hips. He tried to ignore Owen inside the car, leaning towards where that dynamite ass of hers was resting on the window and pretending to... he couldn’t tell if it was biting or licking, but either way. That guy was never going to grow up.

“Well actually... I was kind of hoping I could talk you into taking a little trip with me.”

That he had not expected. “You want to go out tonight?”

“Not exactly...” Her face had suddenly grown serious, so much so that he now wondered if she’d wanted him close to be sweet or to seek comfort herself. “It’s... well, it’s a second period thing we need to address.”

“Second...?” Oh. Her sex ed class, with Jordan. “What? What kind of date is this? What am I now, your homework? A practice dummy, so you can be a better partner for that bastard?”

“Hey.” Her voice was firm. “It’s not like that, and you know it. So don’t.”

“So what, then? I’m confused.”

She sighed. “Jordan wants to talk. He... asked me to bring you. Conner, hold on!”

But he was already back-pedaling, thudding into the adjacent car. “What? You’re Jordan’s errand girl now? What does he want? What did he put you up to?” He wished he’d checked out a laptop for the afternoon. Then he could see for himself.

“It’s not that. We talked – only *talked* – and he wants to talk to you. Us. Together.”

“About what? To teach me how to give lap dances and walk in stilettos?”

“To talk about finding a way for us all to live out the rest of the year without destroying one another. Peace talks.”

Conner scoffed. “And you believe him? You don’t think this is some sort of trap? Maybe all I have to do is sit down across from him and he quotes someone saying ‘everyone who sits across from me is my bitch’ or something!

“Seriously, Conner? How would he get someone to say that?”

But he wasn’t hearing it. “How could you fall for this? You of all people, Amanda, should know there’s nothing he won’t stoop to. Peace talks? Peace talks!”

“It was my idea,” she cut in, a bit heatedly. “We had another... minor disagreement this morning in class... and... and...”

She trailed off, and he was too distraught not to interrupt. “What? What’d he do to you? Did he hurt you? I thought you said he was leaving you alone! Guess that couldn’t last. See what I mean, though? He’ll do anything to get to me – even if it’s lashing out at innocent people I care about. This is why we can’t–”

“Conner, shut up, OK?” The sheer quietude of her voice commanded more attention than had his shouting. “I appreciate your whole super hero this-is-why-we-wear-costumes moment you’re having, but not right now. You have no idea how hard it is to talk about this, and the more you talk over me, the harder it gets.”

He realized then that she was trembling, and hurried back to her, his anger forgotten in a flash. “I’m sorry. Go on.”

“I told him if he messed with me again, I had something I could use that would seriously fuck him up. And I do. But then he told me that if I tried, he could... well, I’d regret it, suffice to say. Which I would. We traded carefully worded insults for a bit, until I realized how stupid this all was. So I told him we needed to find a way to work this out, and he said there was no point unless it involved you, too.”

Suddenly she collapsed against him, her knees so weak he was practically holding her up. He wrapped his arms around her, rubbing her back softly until she finally stopped shaking.

“Are you OK?”

Amanda shook her head, but she was standing on her own again now. Still, she didn’t let him go. “Neither of us are going to be OK until we resolve this. I don’t know what that looks like, but if we can get assurances he’ll leave us alone, I don’t care what

he does with his stupid little class. I know it upsets you, and maybe you're right, but those girls don't care what he's doing. It's not scarring anybody."

"Not scarring...?! You told me he's hurt you – attacked you!"

"Only me, though. And only because he's afraid of me. Of us. Look, I have to stop talking about it, OK? What happens in..." She caught herself and shook the words off. "I think this is the right thing to do. Like we did with Maui, right? Find a way to let him be a sick little fuck in his corner of Northside, while you and I go about our lives in ours. It was the right call then, and it's the right call now. But we need you to be a part of the discussion, or he'll never agree to it."

"Why?"

She reared her head back. "What do you mean, 'why'?"

"I mean, why? What's the point, Amanda? He's got me by the balls. I can't disrupt his plans – my being there is only going to make things worse. If you want to hash things out with the guy, go for it. I wish you all the luck in the world. But I'm a liability. You're better off without me."

"Hey." Conner didn't look up, so she raised his chin with a finger until his eyes met hers. "Hey. For four months, I was dealing with Jordan without you, and I got less than nowhere. A lot less. I need you, Conner. Come with me."

He stared into those soft brown eyes, and they stared back, entreating. Her grasp tightened around his wrists, holding him against her, forcing herself into his grasp. Her forehead bent down until it rested against his, her hair hanging down to block out everything but Amanda's face.

"I'm sorry, Amanda. But I can't."

## Chapter Eight

*Hard to believe that we're finally at our last high school rite of passage. It's cliché to say it, but where has all the time gone? While we were students here, it never felt like things were rushing by. Only now at the end, it feels like only last week we were sitting down for freshman orientation, first meeting all the kids who'd gone to different schools, taking our first tour of the big scary new building. But every step of the way there was always another milestone ahead. Our first report cards, then our first finals. Our first dates. Our first dance – thanks again to the unsung heroes at Student Council for pushing through sophomore admittance to King of Hearts!*

*First dates, first break-ups, first parties. Winter breaks, spring breaks, summer breaks. Can you believe prom was five weeks ago? It feels like five minutes.*

*But here we are, our last high school first. And our first last.*

Conner Fishers had learned earlier in life than most about the idiosyncrasies of talking during sex. Mostly, he had learned that every girl in the world was different and there was no way of knowing what to expect or how to behave in this regard. Considering how busy his sex life was these days, this made ample opportunities for discoveries, as well as mistakes. As with certain other problems, avoiding the possibility of conflict altogether was his preferred method, but unfortunately, it was prom season. Which meant drama.

Not for everyone, of course. Take Owen, for instance. Owen had it easy. While his mother was still working from home in the afternoons to ensure proper chaperonage, he'd gone to work on his dad who, as predicted, had sat in silent awe of the girls his son had been hooking up with. Privately, he acknowledged that Owen was about to head out on his own into the world, and he might be better served by being eased into that freedom with some guidance, rather than being grounded one day and full-time adulting the next. Mr. Gibson had convinced his wife to let the boy out of the house for prom night – though with a hard midnight curfew the woman wouldn't budge on – which freed him up to make his big romantic ask for Kirsten.

He'd gone all out, renting a costume from the party store and marching into the middle of the cafeteria, faux-ermine-lined cape around his shoulders and crown on his head, unfurling a banner inviting her to join him as his queen. Corny as hell, and she'd chided him after for being such a dork about it, but enough girls had been jealous of the grand overture to appease her ego and secure the yes. Conner had even gotten a picture for possible inclusion in the prom spread of the yearbook.

Minimal drama. Angelica had it even easier; Jackson, keen on nailing the girl he'd wasted \$50 on to take to King of Hearts, had asked her, and she'd acquiesced. As

Conner asked around his lunch table about the others' plans, Trevor and Kayla's relationship was on murky terms after some fighting about their post-graduation plans, but they were still going at least as friends. Penny, Jacqui and Luis were going as a platonic trio as well, all eagerly anticipating a night of looking fancy and getting dancy, as Luis put it.

Then there was Conner.

"So, are you going to ask me to go to prom or what?" Amanda asked.

To be fair, Conner had known this discussion was coming; he'd been avoiding it for weeks and tickets were only on sale until the following Wednesday. He had not, however, expected her to initiate it in the middle of an otherwise immensely satisfactory romp in the editor's office on a rainy Saturday afternoon. A "work break," she'd called it when she spontaneously took off her shorts and panties, then beckoned him over to her desk. The time before that it had been a "editor's conference" on the loveseat in the computer lab, and shortly after they'd arrived, he'd bent her over Miss C's desk for their "morning meeting." She really was too much like him.

Laying on his back on Amanda's desktop, a stack of papers sticking to his backside, he could only look up at the redheaded goddess mounting him and blink. "What?"

Her face soured, though it only somewhat detracted from her beauty. With nobody else in the office, she liked to keep the thermostat nice and high, and with their present course of activity, that kept her body glistening with a faint sheen of sweat all over. Amanda looked good pretty much all the time, but he'd been having to think some very dry thoughts about baseball to keep from letting the sheer sight of her push him over the edge.

"Tell me you were simply caught off-guard by my question and that you didn't actually choose the 'or what' option." She rested her palms on his chest, fingers dancing across his skin.

"The first one," he assured her.

"Do you need a minute to come up with excuses, or do you want to just go ahead and ask?" She bent low, her hair dangling around his face, his cock slowly slipping out of her – though she seemed careful not to let it all the way out.

"Uh, the first one again...?" He'd said it as a joke, though as she immediately arched her back to eject him from her pussy, he could see the joke had not landed. "Amanda, I was kidding!" he insisted.

He was relieved she didn't get off of him, not only because of his hopes to resume having sex, but also because he knew that if she broke contact, it would be because he'd really upset her. "Kidding, huh. Making a lot of jokes for a guy who had his dick in my mouth not five minutes ago. I mean, assuming you, like, ever wanted it in there again."

Conner actually preferred her pussy, but he didn't think that was a distinction worth making. "I'm sorry. You're right, we should talk about it."

Those broad hips of hers rolled in his grasp, teasing his tip, but never quite inviting him back inside. "So let's talk."

"I... well, I was kind of... thinking about not going," Conner said, trying not to be too obvious about repositioning his hips to try to sneak by. It was a lie, of course. Conner lived for NHS events, even the less interesting ones, and senior prom was a lifetime right of passage. A milestone he'd been looking forward to since freshman year.

Which Amanda well knew. "No you weren't. You were thinking about chickening out because you're not sure if you'd rather go with Heather."

"Do I even need to be present for this conversation?"

"You can feel free to walk away whenever you want," Amanda responded, rubbing her wet, satiny labia along his shaft, ensuring he felt anything but. Her weighty breasts swung low beneath her, but as he reached to grasp them, she put his hands right back on her hips, which he was still powerless to direct.

"Come on, Amanda, please! What you're doing... we studied this in government, and it's a definite violation of the Geneva Conventions!" he whined.

She smirked, bending down to suck on his ears. She knew how that got to him, damnit. "Oh yeah?"

"Are you really going to make me beg?"

Her breath was hot against his neck, the sweats trickling down her breasts commingling with his own. Mercifully, she slowly slid herself back down his shaft, which was easily the hardest it had been in a good long time. Back before Maui, he'd actually offered to let her do some graphic designing in TIOS to enhance it like she had herself, but she insisted it was more than enough for her as it was, and settled instead for an inclusion of "*I swear, Conner, it's like you can get hard whenever we want!*" – Amanda Carpenter instead. An authentic comment (TIOS had refuted attempts by the two of them to supply one another lines), but it had been a godsend for keeping up with Heather, Amanda and Kristy.

Since the pronoun "we" had been included, Amanda herself had only once so far abused the privilege, inflicting a massive hardon in the middle of his presentation to the staff. He'd done his best to cover. Sometimes when the two of them worked alone in his office, that was how she signaled to him her readiness. Sometimes not even on purpose, which was actually really hot, in his opinion.

As she nestled herself all the way down his shaft, she released his hands and let them go where they'd wanted to before. Inside her was heaven. Sex pretty much always was, he'd found, but here in one of his favorite places, with one of his favorite people... this was so good it ought to actually be illegal.

Then she lifted herself up, and he fell back out. “Actually, I think I’d rather talk,” she said, removing his hands and pinning them to the desk above his head.

He gritted his teeth, but there was nothing to be done. “Fine. Yes. Good. Let’s talk. Let’s have a nice long discussion on a range of subjects.”

“Attaboy.”

“Look, so yeah... I don’t know why you’re making me talk about another woman while you’re naked and on top of me, but if you’re going to make me, fine. Yes, there’s Heather to consider.”

“Say more about these... considerations.” She resumed the ear play while he tried to organize thoughts.

“It’s just... she and I have been going out on and off since January.”

“You mean, she dumped you like a sack of turnips in January, and then Jordan used TIOS to break down her objections to dating someone in the twilight hours of high school. So you’ve been dating since mid-February. Not three months yet.” She sat up only long enough to put his hands on her breasts and then lean back down, trapping them there between their bodies. “Sorry, you were saying.”

“That’s not... exactly how I would categorize it. She liked me before that. She just...”

“Had her objections broken down by Jordan in TIOS? I can show you the quote he used, if you want.”

“Well if that’s the case you want to make, it’s what broke down *your* objections, too, my dear.” He now knew Jordan had meant to distract Conner from suspicions about his sex ed class with a quote about how the girl he kissed at King of Hearts had had a huge crush on him. Jordan hadn’t known that Conner had kissed not only Heather, but also Amanda that night. Furthermore, neither Jordan nor Amanda knew he’d kissed Miss C as well.

“Sure, but I liked you before all that. Why do you think I kissed you in the first place, ya big goober?” She grinned. God, she was beautiful. And she knew it now, too.

“Doesn’t feel like you like me,” he grumbled. “In fact, feels kinda dry and cold in here to me.”

“Oh no, poor widdle baby!” she exclaimed in mock concern. “Want your Mandy Pandy to warm oo up?”

Conner played along, nodding glumly. “Yes, pwease.”

After giving it a few slow strokes, she guided him to the gates of her pussy. She was steaming hot down there. “Then ask.”

She was overpowering his resolve. “I... Will you...”

But then he stopped himself, then sighed in advance of the reaction he was about to provoke. “Wait.”

“Wait? Seriously?!”

“I don’t want to be an asshole, OK? Let me at least talk to her first. I’ve, um, kind of been avoiding talking to her about it, too, and I know she wants to go together. Heck, her mom even nudged me to ask her.”

Amanda’s parents, naturally, had made no such request, what with the not existing and all. Because Amanda wasn’t real. Which meant if TIOS expired...

He shook himself. No. No thinking about that. Be strong.

Amanda’s plump lips pursed, but she finally nodded. “Fine. Talk to her. But no more Mandy Pandy until you ask.”

“After this time, right...?” He was so horny he didn’t know what she’d do if he said no.

She gave him a dubious look, but soon caved. Her sex drive was every bit as strong as his. “After this time.”

At last, sweet merciful last, she sunk her hips back onto him and they moaned in unison. Once he got his hands in place again he didn’t release his hold on her tits. Her hair thrashed fretfully side to side as her hips bucked against his hardness. Beneath them, somebody’s assignment got well and truly ruined, but the two figured they could edit it aright later. They were co-editors-in-chief, after all.

“So... can we talk about prom?” Conner asked later that night.

“You do realize I can’t exactly talk right now, right?” Heather said after letting his shaft slip out of her mouth.

“Here, why don’t we...” He helped her up from where she’d been kneeling on the blanket they used in her greenhouse. They didn’t come out here often, preferring the less obvious (and more private) space of her bedroom or even the backseat of his car, but on rainy evenings like this, when Heather’s mother wasn’t going to be out enjoying the fresh air and tending to her yard and garden, it was their spot of choice.

He let her take the seat, then knelt down in front of her. It was cold in here, a stark contrast to his prior tryst that day. The girls themselves were the first contrast. Amanda, several inches taller than him with those legs that never quit, porcelain skin that had only finished peeling from Maui-inflicted sunburns last week, almost a literal portrait of the ideal feminine curves after her own accidental editing. Then there was Heather, a full head shorter than him, her skin a maze of lurid and perverse vandalism, possessed of a curvy body still coated with a precisely adorable amount of baby fat, but on which it was hard to look anywhere but those enormous breasts. She actually had a pretty cute butt, albeit on the big side for his tastes, but she really preferred him in the front herself anyway.

“So, about prom,” he resumed, once he’d slid himself gently into her pussy. She was wet and ready; as ever, Heather took next to nothing to have her body amped up and ready to be fucked. He remembered thinking how he was impressed by Amanda’s libido earlier in the day, but when Heather was in the mood, she was almost as bad as Hailey. No doubt it was how she edged herself between their dates, getting herself excited but denying climax. She claimed it enhanced her orgasms when she had them, and that quality mattered more than quantity. It was not his own experience, but he sure wasn’t going to try to talk her out of it if it kept her this horny for him.

Heather made a sound, her own little sound unique to her, a combination of a moan of satisfaction, a whine of pleading, and a grunt of exertion. The buxom blonde often made that sound when they had sex, especially right at the beginning as the sensations overwhelmed her. Rather than curl her knees toward her chest, Heather’s legs spread wide in the expansive armchair, and whether it was a conscious courtesy or sheer providence, Conner couldn’t complain of the unobstructed view of those bouncing beauties responding to his efforts.

When she didn’t respond to his verbal initiation, he went on. “So, like... I wondered, prom-wise, if...”

“Oh my god, Conner, are we really going to hash out plans while you’re inside me? What are we, some wrinkly old married couple hashing out tomorrow’s breakfast for the kids while we work on squirting out another one?”

Conner grinned. “That’s easily the least sexy thing you’ve ever said.”

“You make a half-assed attempt to ask me out while we’re having perfectly delightful chair sex, and that’s what ya get.”

Conner grimaced inwardly. (He hoped only inwardly, at least.) “Oh. Oh, no, I wasn’t asking you...”

“That’s my guy. I kept waiting for you to find a nice romantic moment, and while I – mmm, yes, that right there, keep doing that...”

Heather didn’t finish her thought, which only left Conner plenty of time to ponder his own words. She obviously assumed he was going to ask her. Damn it. Worse, he was pretty sure she now thought that he had. That was the opposite of what he’d set out to accomplish. Though as she pulled him against her, fingernails sinking into the skin of his back, that little Heather-sound issuing right into his ear, it was hard to remember why he wouldn’t want to take this girl any- and everywhere she wanted to go.

Still, the longer they went on, the worse he felt about misleading her. He’d basically promised Amanda that morning, and if he didn’t nip this in the bud, he was going to be setting himself up for some serious Zach Morris shenanigans. Yet it wasn’t until some time later, entangled in their blanket on the floor, before he mustered the nerve to speak up again.

“I, um, actually was thinking that, like...”

“Are you back on this prom thing again?”

“Yeah.”

“Conner, I swear, if my pussy was capable of pinching you right now...” She did something with those muscles, but it was decidedly not a pinch, and had rather the opposite effect in terms of motivating him. Though sweet as she was, he suspected that was no accident.

“I was only thinking maybe it’d be better if we didn’t... you know...”

She smiled, though her eyes were squeezed shut with euphoria. “Sure. I mean, if that’s what you want.”

Well that was a load off. His conscience eased, he redirected his energies to getting and giving the full enjoyment possible. Conner was surprised she acquiesced so easily – maybe this had been the perfect time to ply her after all! Soon enough he was coming inside her. The two had always been bad about timing their orgasms; she would always climax first, and since he was having a great deal more sex, often she would do so multiple times before him, each peak higher than the previous. Then she’d be well on her way to another when he’d finish, leaving her halfway up the slope at the end. TIOS’s gift of stamina meant that was no longer a problem, however, and he rode her to one final grunting, groaning, moaning, mouth-open-with-no-sound-coming-out-at-all orgasm.

TIOS wasn’t *all* bad, he reminded himself.

He flopped onto the blanket beside her, taking in the view of the tinted glass ceiling and the rivulets of water trickling down it, the two of them catching their breath bit by bit. Heather was laughing in sheer exhilaration, clapping his hand in hers.

“Hey, I wanted to say thanks for being cool about the prom thing,” he said after a few minutes.

“It’s all right. Though a tip for the future – try not to hold discussions mid-coitus, all right? Kind of hard to think. You’re better hung than I like to let you know.” She kissed his cheek.

“Gotta keep me humble, eh? But seriously. Amanda’s going to be relieved. She’s been really worked up about... what?”

That look in her eye stopped him cold. “I’m sorry. Go on. Amanda’s going to be relieved... why, exactly?”

“I mean, because now, we can... you know. Go. Together.” Why was she giving him that look? “What’d I do?”

She grabbed one of the armrest covers from the chair and swatted him with it, several times. “What’d you do? I thought you were asking if ‘um, like, ya know, it’d be cool if we didn’t, uh, like...’ *make a big deal out of asking me!* I just thought you were too lame to come up with a good way of asking – I didn’t know you were seriously asking me, *while you were inside me, if you could take your other girlfriend!*”

Conner was too busy deflecting swats of the surprisingly abrasive fabric to fend her off. Her tirade went on for some minutes until it finally halted when she managed to whip him in the eye. Conner yelped in pain, clutching the site defensively. Seeing she might have actually hurt him, Heather dropped her improvised weapon immediately. She had him remove his hand and inspected his eye until she was satisfied that he was fine.

“I’m sorry,” he said as soon as she finished.

“For what?” She folded her arms.

“So many things.” His mind raced to enumerate them, lest the important one be forgotten. “For bringing it up when I did, for being insensitive, for communicating badly. For putting my eye in the way of your swing.”

Her face softened, but only somewhat. “That would’ve been a good swing, too.”

“Babe Ruth’s got nothing on you.”

A faint smile then, and she slumped into his lap where he’d fallen into the armchair. His tension eased. Lap-sitting in armchairs was safe. Close. Warm. Conner put his arms around her, not eager to let her go.

“I guess this is what I get for breaking my own rule,” she said sullenly.

“What? What do you mean?”

“For getting into a relationship right before graduation. I told you it was a bad idea, didn’t I? And now here we are, the sand in our hourglass almost drained, and

you're looking to what happens when it flips back over, while I'm trying to stop these last few grains. This is my fault."

"What? Heather, no. It's just a messy situation. It's nobody's fault." In truth, Conner felt quite sure it was his own fault, but he wasn't about to provoke her into another assault. "I just... I don't even know. I mean, I would love to go with you. You know I would. But..."

"But I'm the past, and she's the future."

Conner frowned. That *ought* to be true. He hated knowing Heather was soon going to leave, and he doubted – hoped, almost – that she wouldn't be back, going on to new and exciting things. Even so, Amanda wasn't his future either, though he couldn't exactly explain that to Heather. He wasn't even sure he understood the situation himself.

It was only then that he realized that what she had just said, her expectation that he would begin dating Amanda full time once Heather moved away. That was no doubt how Amanda must see things, too – no wonder she'd pushed him on this!

Then, an idea hit him. "What if none of us went with a date, and we all just went together as friends?" As soon as the words were out, Conner realized that this was a bad idea. That was well and fine for Luis, Penny and Jacqui – none of them were having sex at the moment, and there was no jealousy factor. But it was one of those ideas that began in the mouth and only later arrived at the brain, and so it was already out of his hands.

To his chagrin, Heather seemed to actually consider it. "Hmm. You know, maybe that could be OK. I mean, she and I got to be friends after she joined the Pride. And it's just a dance, after all. Not like we're signing up for a threesome or anything." She gripped his chin and forced him to look at her eyes. "And we're not, so I'm crystal clear."

For a moment, Conner wondered if Jordan had ever had a threesome with the two of them in his class. He was generally much more disgusted with the guy than envious, but for a moment...

The disgust returned, and he banished the thought. "What? Of course not – I'd never even think. I mean, I'd *think*, but—"

"Stop right there."

"But yeah, you really think so?"

"I mean, if she's OK with it, I guess I'm OK with it. Some of my friends are going stag, so it's not like I'd be the only one. Do you really think she'd do that?"

She sounded skeptical, though not nearly as skeptical as Conner felt about it. But faced with either reneging immediately after offering and hurting her all over again, or a more distant renege-and-hurt with Amanda... "She already told me it's cool, actually. And some of my friends are in the same boat, too, so we'll have good company."

As always, Heather believed him immediately. “Oh. Well cool. I can be down with that. Guess I’ll have to see if I can find a dress now – I figured I’d wait until something was official.”

“What, all out of plastic wrap?” He still had fantasies about her “dress” from the last dance. What he wouldn’t give for a repeat of that, and to see her convince the rest of the Pride girls – particularly Amanda – to join in.

“I was thinking this time maybe just some electric tape over my nipples and pussy and call it a day.” She waited a moment. “That was a joke, Conner. Good grief.”

He couldn’t begin to imagine what the distinction was in her mind between the two, but he wasn’t about to make things worse by asking. “You’re sure you’re all right with this?”

“Relax. We’ll have plenty of time to the two of us between now and when I leave for school. As long as I get at least one slow dance, OK?”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Hopefully Amanda felt the same.

“And just so I’m explicit about it, this is *not* the lead-in to anything. Nobody’s having a threesome at prom. We clear?” Amanda thundered during their meetup the next day. Her voice echoed in Miss C’s empty classroom. Heck, if anyone else was in the building, they probably would have felt the heat of her displeasure.

“Crystal. Wait, I mean—”

“Good.” She was gone before he could blink. He wanted to run after her, but sometimes, he’d learned, it was better to let people calm down. Besides, she’d probably be through the hedge and back into the ether before he could catch her anyway. His Sunday morning was off to a great start.

He had barely slumped down in the couch to begin feeling sorry for himself when the door to the room opened again. “Amanda? Oh, thank... Kristy?”

His teacher stepped around the corner of the computer lab. He was slammed with a sense of *déjà vu* when he saw her. She was wearing a black sports bra and athletic leggings, evidently out for her daily run.

“Oh, welcome Conner,” she said with a dry smile. “I saw Amanda on my way in though. If the length of those strides had anything to do with you, you have my condolences.”

“I think it mostly has to do with her being an amazon, but thanks.” He stood up. “What brings you in?”

“Believe it or not, I actually still work here,” she said, laughing. “I could ask the same of you. I come in almost every Sunday morning, and I hardly ever see you in here. Or Amanda, for that matter. Did I interrupt something? Or... almost interrupt something?”

Kristy knew about Amanda, of course. He’d only recently begun to appreciate the value of a lover who didn’t mind sharing. Not that she didn’t still like to mess with him, leaving signs of their intimacy like the scent of perfume, lipstick prints, the taste of her on his cock. Nonetheless, she didn’t make a fuss. She’d been a teenager once herself, she claimed, and the pranks usually only served to make the other girls more possessive of their time with him. Perhaps that was even her intention, as a favor.

Or maybe she simply knew he liked her quiet way of marking him as hers.

As she sat down beside him, Conner opened up and told her about the prom fiasco and how thoroughly he’d bungled things. He wished so badly he could talk to her – or anyone – about the situation with Amanda after graduation, but there was no way to explain it without revealing Jordan’s involvement, thus revealing his access to TIOS, thus alerting someone who would most definitely get in the asshole’s way.

Kristy listened patiently and consoled adequately. Sometimes he didn’t know what he’d do without her. Even aside from their sexual relationship, she was one of the best friends he’d ever had. She held his hand and assured him it’d be all right, that he was making the most of an awkward situation.

“I wouldn’t expect it to net you a threesome, though,” she said as he trailed off.

“Why does everyone assume that I’m...!”

“Weren’t you sleeping with four different women at one point there?”

“Only three. Amanda and Hailey didn’t overlap.”

“And you don’t think that distinction says anything about you.”

“Fine.” He harrumphed, but it was hard to be indignant.

Kristy ran her fingers through his hair affectionately. “You’re gonna save a dance for me, right?”

“Aren’t we trying to keep people from being suspicious of us? Don’t you think people will think it’s weird if we...?”

“Sweetie, it’s a dance. I wind up getting pulled into a dance or two every dance I chaperone. Nobody’s going to think it’s weird. If it makes you feel safer, I can make it a point to dance with a few other students first – but you better be ready for me when I’m ready for you.”

He nodded, acquiescing. “Heather’s not going to like it.”

“Heather’s got to learn to live with disappointment. Given the size of that chip on her shoulder, I suspect it’s going to play a significant role in her future.”

Conner chuckled. Those two really did not like one another. Until he and Kristy had started fooling around, he never would’ve guessed. She crossed her legs then, and it was a fresh reminder of her scant clothing. In fact, he noticed something. “Ya know, I think that’s the same outfit you were wearing that day last semester when we met up here. The day I you said how you wanted to, ya know...”

“Make you happy?”

“Yeah.” She permitted him to look her over. “I remember when I drove you home after, you tugged down that zipper just a little bit. Did you do that on purpose for me?”

“Conner, I don’t even remember doing it.” She considered a moment, though, and a more mischievous look spread across her face. “Although I suppose I pretty rarely unzip casually. Was it... like this?” Kristy grasped the black metal zipper and gave it a soft pull. It was only an inch or two lower, but it made one mindful that its function was to reveal breasts. Which made one rather excited.

Conner stared, as always rendered to putty by his teacher’s flirtations. “Um, a little lower, I think.”

She pulled it down another couple inches, immediately north of the halfway point. The little mole on her left inner breast peeked out, a mole Conner knew well. “Here?”

It had been, probably, about there. Maybe only where she’d moved it to the first time. It had felt lower last year, before he’d seen her naked.

“Lower,” he lied.

She gave him two more inches, now less than that holding the sides together. Each unclenched tooth on the zipper liberated her breasts to spill ever more outward, as if eager to be freed into her classroom. “It wasn’t like *this*, was it Conner? This low... I mean, this would be entirely inappropriate. In front of a student, that is.”

“Miss Coszic-Lewandoski!” he exclaimed, playing along. “Might I remind you how young and impressionable I am!”

“So you’re saying I’m making an impression?” she said in a husky voice, lowering the zipper the rest of the way. She didn’t part the bra herself, but physics quickly did it for her, her weighty breasts bursting forth and shoving the offending fabric aside. They still glistened with the sweat of her jog over, and her pink nipples were already hard. She threw one leg over him, her mouth covering his and ramming her tongue down his throat needfully.

Conner didn’t need more of an invitation than that. His fingers sunk into the spandex covering her buttocks as she busied herself tearing his clothes off and throwing them across the classroom. Her jogging shorts soon followed; the only clothing that remained on either of them was her wide-split sports bra. The old couch groaned – though not so loudly as its occupants – at the strain of supporting the enthusiastic fuck session atop it.

“Conner, have I ever told you,” she said, panting, clutching his face to where it was sucking on one swollen nipple, “how much I love fucking you in here?”

Kristy allowed him up just long enough to respond. “In your classroom?”

“No, on a couch.” She rolled her eyes. “Of course in the classroom.”

He considered, at least inasmuch as he could think with his busty teacher grinding on his cock. They tended to favor using her house for such activities, given the need for privacy. The classroom had been only sporadically used since Heather had caught them, and then only for brief makeouts and a quick pat or grope. He hadn’t really given much thought to the location’s appeal to her before.

“I didn’t realize. You don’t think it’s... I dunno... weird?”

“That’s what makes it good,” she answered, pulling his face back to her chest so hard she was nearly smothering him. It was a good way to go, he thought. “It’s so *wrong*. I do my job here every day as Miss C, sexless teaching drone, knowing full well how the hormones are raging in every person in the room. Didn’t you ever imagine this while sitting in here? Imagine me, right here, on your cock, fucking you like I was just another one of these little high school girls?”

Conner had imagined almost that very thing so many times it had worn a path in his brain, although in his imagination, her status as a teacher had figured prominently. He liked that she was a little older, an authority figure, that she dressed in her business casual, trying and failing to hide that smoking hot body of hers. He simply nodded, unsure of whether her pause was to wait for a response or to simply enjoy herself.

“I know,” she went on. “I know you do. Five years here at Northside, with you boys’ eyes on me every day when you think I’m not looking. Sometimes even when you know I am. Before you, I could only fantasize about having a man let me drop those inhibitions. But now, now I can just...” Kristy gave a few extra high bounces on his shaft, using her hands to hold him in place and make sure she didn’t bound off and hurt him. “Here, I can let go, be wrong, and slutty, and so MOTHER FUCKING FULL!” she yelled. He’d only heard her raise her voice a few times over the years, but the way it reverberated around the walls when she was angry was no different from her echo when she was wailing in lust.

Conner didn’t know what to say, so rather than risk saying the wrong thing yet again, he slapped her ass like he was spurring on a pony and set himself to giving her the hardest fucking he’d given her since those incredible nights in Maui. Maybe harder, even. He quickly hit the limit of what he could do sitting on a couch and, with strength he hadn’t known he had, carried her, still mounted on his shaft, to the front of the room. There he set her back on her feet, spun her to face the whiteboard, and flattened her face and tits against it as he pounded back into her pussy.

There was no one else in the building. There couldn’t have been, or her screaming would have had them running down to check on her in a flash. “Teach me, Miss C. Teach me how to fuck. Teach me to fuck you,” he grunted.

“Harder,” was all she said. Conner complied with his teacher’s directions, but still, her reaction was to wail, “HARDER!”

She arched her back, and he grabbed her hips to give him more power. He couldn’t remember ever feeling her body tremble like this during sex before. Usually she was so in control. Not today. Today, she was a woman who simply wanted a man to find a use for her pussy and make the best of it. He didn’t even know what came over him, if it was some unspoken signal she was giving him or sheer impulse, but as her neck arched back, he seized ahold of her ponytail and pulled her mouth to his. It was still there when he came, panting so hard he was nearly wheezing, in his teacher’s dripping, frantic pussy.

He didn’t tell her about how her notes from Friday’s class were smudged in blue and green dry erase marker all over her face until she noticed the residue on her tits.

“You have no idea how much I’m going to miss you next year,” she said softly a short while later, her head resting on his naked lap. The way she kept stealing licks at his cock, the way his hand was resting on (and occasionally squeezing) her breast, both knew it would be a matter of time before they went at it again.

“I’ll miss you too. And I won’t be far. Probably. I don’t really know where I’m going yet. Most of the places I’m considering are within an hour or so away.”

“But when you go to school right here in this room, ‘an hour or so’ sounds awfully far. Maybe...” She shook her head.

“Maybe what?”

“I dunno, I was thinking maybe I could visit sometime. Your college buddies wouldn’t know I was a teacher. You could tell them I was a grad student or something.”

“For one, I bet you could totally pass as a college student. You’re only twenty-six, Kristy, and you’re built like every sorority dream girl in every porno I’ve ever seen.”

She looked up at him. “I’ll let that slide and assume you meant it as a compliment.”

“Uh, thanks. But yeah. I might even be sticking around town for a while, so we could keep, you know...”

“Sneaking around?”

“Yeah. I guess.”

“It’s neither a crime nor a violation of my contract to pursue a relationship with a *former* student, you know.”

He looked down at her. “You don’t think it would be weird?”

She was meeting his gaze. “You do, so it doesn’t really matter.”

They were quiet for a time. Sexual tension competed with the specter of their looming separation. Everything would change after graduation. He’d no longer be her student, and she no longer his teacher, yet paradoxically it seemed likely to mean the *end* of their affair rather than the beginning. Then, yes, it would be legal, and if unusual, not unethical. He was moving on, though, and she was remaining here at Northside. There was no obvious way to bridge that divide.

Was there?

“Promise me something?” she said.

“Sure. Name it.”

“Between now and graduation, at least once a week, we meet here and you fuck my teaching license right the fuck out of me. Deal?”

“Deal.” He paused. “That’s not limited to *only* once a week, is it?”

She stood up, grinning, grabbing her clothes and slipping them on. “Come on. I’ve always wanted to have sex in a locker room, and Coach Conrad gave me a key so I could use the showers after I work out on the weekends.”

“I swear, Kristy, even when you’re not consciously trying to, you make me happier than any woman ever has.”

As the orgasm hit her, she swooned into his arms. They didn’t make it to the locker room. At least, not for another half hour or so.

After a final promise to save a dance for her at prom that Friday, Miss C finally went home, her workload untouched (not including when she was bent over her desk, taking it from behind from her star pupil). Conner was finally free to do a little pre-planning on the prom spread, and was determined to make it the best he could. He began with a couple paragraphs on the theme and some flavor lead-in. Then, he included below a few quotes for his own self-interest.

*“Nobody’s going to think it’s weird when [Conner and I] dance.” – Miss Coszic-Lewandoski*

That, he figured, would make sure to keep Heather’s ire in check, and nip any rumors about them in the bud – just in case. Then, for Heather and especially for Amanda, he included another.

*“Nobody’s having a threesome at prom.” – Amanda Carpenter*

He had some doubts that anyone might be having one anyway, but he thought if Amanda saw it, she would appreciate his agreement with her position. He knew how it felt to be sleeping with someone who was sleeping with someone else, and the jealousy was a real thing. Hopefully that would show her he didn’t have any dishonorable intentions. (And if it happened to throw a wrench into something Jordan might intend, that was icing on the cake, but neither TIOS nor any barrier in his own psyche stopped him from clicking Save.)

Conner left the yearbook room with a satisfied smile. He’d mucked things up, sure, but in his defense he’d been mid-coitus in all cases. He hoped he’d done his best to make them right again. If there were awkward moments ahead, there would be wonderful ones, too. After all, spring Spirit Week commenced tomorrow, then Friday was a half day, and that night was prom. This was going to be a good week.

Now, if he could only figure out how to talk during sex, it could be a great one.

“Bitch, if you suck me any better than that I’m gonna cum-blast the back of your pretty little head off,” said Jordan, slumping back in the armchair in the guest house living room. After extending her tongue to show her relish at his gift, she swallowed the last of him down and curled up in his lap.

“Your devoted suck-skank is glad her mouth pleases you,” she replied, giggling happily.

“Devoted...?” He guffawed in spite of himself. “You are one twisted little girl, you know that?”

“You can twist me in any shape you like,” she said playfully.

“Go to prom with me.”

He wondered if he looked half as surprised by his request as she did. What had he said?

“Seriously?! Yes! Oh, Jordan, yes!” She kissed him, and although she knew he didn’t usually allow her to kiss him while she still had his cum on her breath, he didn’t push her away, still trying to puzzle out what the hell had happened. Did he just ask Hefty Hailey McManus to prom? He’d had vague designs on banging whatever girls from sex ed he thought looked hottest, but now... what had he done?

He was yet to answer his own question when Hailey, thinking a good deal faster, had a moment’s pause. “Wait. Is this your way of getting me to forget about how you still haven’t dealt with Conner?”

“What? No, it’s totally unrelated.” That was true. He’d actually hoped she’d forgotten. “I’ve been meaning to ask you for a while now.” Needless to say, that was not true.

Hailey put a hand on his chest. “Jordan, I’m so grateful you asked me. I want you to know that. Six months ago, I was afraid to even talk to you, because you’re so handsome and I’m... you know. I don’t know what you see in me, but I’m really glad we’re together. Did I ever tell you about this dream I had about prom? Like, it wasn’t *our* prom in the dream, but like, I was at some other school where I’m not nobody. Not that I’m somebody, if that makes sense, but... well, anyway, and it was soooo weird because everybody was wearing their normal school clothes except me, so even though I was the only one who looked like she belonged at prom, everyone was looking at me all wtf, ya know? Anyway, so...”

Jordan tried to process as she rambled on. Her chattering used to really annoy him, but over time, he realized that his forbearance for it was a significant factor in what had driven her from confused fuck buddy to doting mistress. Presently, it was a good delay for him to get his mind right while she meandered back to her original point.

“... and even though my veil kept drooping in my face and threatening to choke me, I think it was just my pillowcase in my face. Isn’t that weird?” She took a breath, that long not-quite-gasp that preceded her transitioning from blather to normal

conversation. “Sorry. Anyway, I just... I dunno. I feel like if you’re not serious enough about me to handle Conner, maybe... maybe it’s best if we don’t? Like, I hold it together when it’s us and all, but it still...” She sniffled. “It still hurts. And if I have to see him there, dancing with her – or them, or whatever – I don’t think I will. And I don’t want to put you through that.”

Goddammit. Any other girl he’d ever been with, he’d have known that such concern for him was total horse shit. With Hailey though, he had no doubt she really was worried for *his* sake. It was annoying as hell how much better of a person she could be sometimes. She wasn’t even saying no because he’d refused to honor his promise; she was only worried she’d embarrass him by having a breakdown *because* of his refusal to honor his promise.

On the one hand, it was a handy way to back out of his prom invite. On the other, it meant there was once more something he wanted that that son of a bitch Fishers was blocking. The mother fucker had a TIOS-imposed prohibition against meddling in his business, and *still!*

He shoved Hailey aside so he could reach his phone and typed out a quick text to his editor-in-chief’s number. *Meet me tomorrow morning @ east lot. We have to talk about what you did to Hailey.* He held it up to her, then took her hand and pressed the Send button.

“I’ll take care of him. All right?”

Tears were welling up in her eyes. Hayleigh had never had eyes so big, he was sure of it. “Thank you.” She kissed him again, that salty bleachy tang still on her tongue. “Then yes. Yes, I’ll go to prom with you. If you still want me to.”

He didn’t know if he did. What would this mean? Nobody spread rumors about him, and in the cloistered world of sex ed, he was practically a god. But what would happen when Jordan Lyons showed up to the dance with what everyone else saw as a pariah on his arm? He could hear the snickers, see the shock, the pointing, the disgust on people’s faces.

“And whether you do or not, I’ll still be your devoted suck-skank,” she added.

This time, it was Jordan who kissed her. “Of course I still want to go with you.” This could suck, but he only had a few more weeks to put up with these pricks anyway. He meant to have Hailey for another year, at least, once he got Fishers to see things his way.

She clapped her hands with glee and nimbly slid down to her knees. “I can’t wait! This is going to be the the best prom ever! Say, do you think you could get a picture of us together for the prom thingy in the yearbook? That’m muh *suh* kuhl!”

As his cock slid into her mouth, there was a second reason for the widening of his smile. She was right. He had TIOS, after all. This was going to be a prom worth remembering.

## Chapter Nine

*Can we all just take a moment to sigh in relief that all the high school drama is officially behind us now? For real, though. All those times we got stabbed in the back, or stabbed somebody else in the back, all those petty fights and not-so-petty fights, over girls or boys or... well, pretty much over girls or boys.*

*Remember when you felt so sure you were going to have to throw down or blow up? Well, somehow you made it through, and I don't see anybody blown up out there. And if a few of us had to throw down once in a while, at least we all survived it, right? It's all past tense now. We're all here together, moving forward, and yes apart, together.*

“Seriously, Jordan? What are you, twelve?”

“I was incapable of fantasies this awesome when I was twelve, thank you.”

“I can't believe you—” Conner stopped to allow Lauren Tommassini into the classroom. She gave the two a look, as their argument was blocking the entrance to psychology class, but neither could help looking after her as she swayed past. Jordan didn't even pretend. For Conner, though Lauren was easily the five hundredth girl he'd seen in a bikini so far today, the volleyball captain's bottoms, plunging deep into her butt crack, were too incredible to ignore.

“I can't believe you'd rewrite Spirit Week into this... this... pornographic parody!” he finished.

“Ooooh, alliteration. How long it take you to come up with that one?”

It had come to him during second period – around the time Jordan had been watching Lauren strip out of her clothes for sex ed – but he wasn't admitting it. “Do you have any school spirit at all, Jordan?”

“What are you talking about?” He looked down to his own body, covered only in swim trunks and a pair of sunglasses suspended around his neck. “You're the one who didn't dress up for Beach Day.”

“Is this really what you want? To turn the whole school into some kind of peep show?”

“Dude. It's beachwear. By definition it's all stuff people would wear in public. Hell, your girl Heather's swimsuit covers a damn sight more than what she wore last week. Remember? Not sure she has the ass for a thong, but—”

“You're the reason she wore that too!”

Jordan reflected. “Oh. Yeah, good call.”

“Besides, I hardly think tomorrow's theme is anything anyone would wear in public. How do you—”

“Speedos, eh Bobby?” Bob Jeffery was hustling past, late to his own third period. “I’d say it takes balls, but I can’t help notice...”

“Eat me, Lyons,” he yelled over his shoulder as he ducked around the corner.

Jordan turned back to Conner. “It’s a victimless crime, man. You know what? No. It’s not even a crime! Nobody feels victimized but *you*. Maybe you need to get over your hangups and start joining your classmates in showing a little school spirit yourself.”

Conner had actually come to school wearing swim trunks of his own, but during his routine check-up looking for files Jordan had manipulated, he’d realized what was afoot. Spirit wear was at least voluntary, so unlike some TIOS edits under Amanda’s login, he at least had a choice not to partake in this one. He’d changed back into normal clothes between classes.

“Listen Jordan, you little—”

“I’m going that way, Fishers.” He pointed behind where Conner was standing. Reflexively, the editor-in-chief stepped aside. “Just kidding, going that way.” Again, before Conner even realized what he was doing, he was shuffling out of Jordan’s way. He hoped his glare didn’t look as sulky as it felt. But then Jordan started moving right where he’d stepped, in front of the door to their class, and Conner leapt aside so fast he slammed himself into a locker.

Jordan only laughed, though as Conner collected himself and followed him inside, the bell rang, and he called out to the teacher, “Conner’s late, Mrs. Cullen.”

Their teacher, celebrating Spirit Week along with her students in a swimsuit joined with a pair of shorts, sunglasses, and a dab of sunblock on her nose, looked over at the doorway. “Just because the year’s almost over doesn’t mean the rules don’t apply, Conner. That’s a tardy.”

“Sorry,” he mumbled. It was his first one, he was certain, but it was nevertheless embarrassing. Hailey was in their class, and she didn’t pass the opportunity to smirk at his misfortune, however minor. His apology in Maui evidently had been insufficient, so he was used to dirty looks from her by now. She herself wasn’t dressed for the day, though her counterpart, Hayleigh, was stuffed into a frightfully skimpy two-piece. It was a heck of a defiant stand against fat-shaming. Or would have been, if anyone else noticed how fat she was.

Spring Spirit Week was always the week preceding prom, just as fall Spirit Week lead into homecoming. There was no athletic competition to cap this off, but to Conner’s mind, it served as a final point of Northside pride to cap off the school year.

Fliers had been posted all over school to remind everyone of the themes. There were competitions for most participation by class, and some teachers even gave a little extra credit for taking part. He couldn’t even remember what the themes had been originally, but he knew the kinds of themes the school had always favored. Pajama Day, Old People Day, Twin Day. That kind of thing. Friday of Spirit Week was always

Nighthawk Pride Day, though Heather had complained to him over the weekend that, thanks to her Pride movement, had been shortened to simply Nighthawk Day. He'd let her vent. It was admittedly pretty petty on Principal Beckmann's part.

Only this morning, he'd quickly stumbled across a spread he'd doubtless been intended to find – *AAAAAAAnewspiritweek.tios*, right at the top of the root directory – which contained only an edited picture of one of the Spirit Week fliers. It probably hadn't taken long; select the flier in the photo, delete that section, paint the background white, use the text tool to type new words on it. Now, every flier in school mirrored Jordan's altered version, as did the school's website and the sign in front of the building flashing reminders and notifications with colored lights. Yet without even having to be notified of the changes, the Nighthawks had, to about a 60/40 participation to nonparticipation split, embraced the new change and come to school in their beach attire.

Just when Conner had thought he'd gotten used to seeing the students of NHS flout their old dress code, suddenly every other guy was shirtless, and every other girl prancing around in revealing spandex. Of course, Spirit Week always meant exaggerating the theme, too. "Nerd Day" didn't simply mean to wear a Dungeons & Dragons shirt; it meant pocket protectors, oiled hair with a cowlick, glasses with tape wrapped around the middle... the whole nine yards.

So on Beach Day... well, suffice to say, bikinis seemed to be in season, and he'd seen more than a few students, of either gender, leaving oily suntan lotion marks on their seats behind them. Several girls from the swim team had dressed up in *Baywatch* parody style, even running in fake slow motion from class to class. It would have been hilarious if it wasn't so bizarre.

"You too?" he accused Amanda as she entered their office seventh period.

"Oh come on, Conner. It's Spirit Week. I got extra credit in three classes, and besides – cliché or no – everybody's doing it."

"Still, you know it's only because *he* made them," he grumped, glaring at where Jordan was chit-chatting before class with Don, Marisa and Siobhan. Marisa was looking pretty great herself in–

"Ahem." He turned back to Amanda. "Yeah, there ya go. Remember who butters your bread, boy."

"Sorry. You do look really hot, by the way."

"Thank you."

She did, too. Her swimsuit was simplicity itself, just a blue one-piece, but any clothing that was designed to bare the legs was going to be a homerun on the six-foot redhead.

"You've got to stop letting the little things get to you," she said later as she caught him scowling through the blinds at Jordan for the hundredth time. "We have two weeks

to get the preliminary draft of TIOS to the print shop, and you're over here pouting because the bad man made people dress hot."

"But he did! You don't think there's anything wrong with this?"

Amanda took a breath to calm herself, then came to sit in front of him on his desk. A shiver went through her as the cool desk made contact with the revealed part of her backside. "Conner, you can't let every single thing he does rise to the level of an existential crisis."

"What?! How can you be defending him? You, of all people?"

She put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm not defending him. You're right – I know better than anyone what he's capable of. But just because TIOS changes things doesn't mean change is inherently awful. We don't know how it works, but what seems pretty clear is that whatever it does, people take it as the status quo – part of the story, as it were. Nobody's hurt by it. It's that line between immoral – which it is – and unethical, which it isn't."

"I really wish you'd quit lecturing me on that. Either way, it's wrong!"

"It is, but you're overreacting. Let's be real. Some of those girls in second period *like* what he's doing. They get to have sex, total confidentiality, no diseases, no pregnancy, with a good-looking guy—"

"Oh, so you think he's good-looking?!" Conner snapped.

"Yes, because *that's* the important part of the point I was making. I'm only saying, most of the reason you and I are upset is because we're the only ones who see his immoral conduct."

Conner, however, wasn't interested in such nuance. "Look how he's made everybody dress!" He gestured to the classroom beyond the blinds, where he tried not to notice how visible Miss C's camel toe was in her bikini as she was giving the class a talk about their editing assignments.

She arched an eyebrow. "Yeah. In swimsuits. Like they would. At a beach."

"But... they wouldn't..."

"They would at a beach," she said.

"I don't like what he's doing to them," he persisted. "Or to you."

"Hey. The Galahad routine is cute, but why don't you let your other girlfriend and I shoulder the burden of the jealousy?" she said dryly.

She was changing the subject, but he could see there was no point continuing to complain about his problems when she was bringing up hers. "Sorry. I'll stop."

Amanda bent down and kissed his forehead. "Hey, nothing to get a girl excited over a fella like a little jealousy."

"Lucky me?"

"Damn right, lucky you."

Conner could no longer remember the original schedule for Spirit Week, but since it was officially her edit, TIOS let Amanda remember, who told Conner.

Tuesday of Spirit Week had originally been slated as Crazy Sock Day. It was usually a low point of Spirit Week, best gotten out of the way early. Most of the time it only amounted to people wearing brightly striped socks that they wrapped over the bottoms of their pants. With the new dress code, Conner had been figuring it'd be easier to manage over the ubiquitous leggings of his classmates.

Now, however, Tuesday was Crazy Underwear Day.

Conner marveled at the myriad ways his classmates interpreted this. He'd seen guys yucking it up in girl's underwear, bras and all. Owen had actually come wearing novelty briefs called "Mr. Nose" that were bikini-style briefs with googly eyes pasted on the front, a mustache, smiley face, and – horrifyingly – a hole for a "nose." He complained so much about how narrow the hole was that Conner almost wished he'd take them off, just to shut him up.

Instead, he'd told Owen about TIOS's involvement in the day, and while as usual he couldn't lift the veil from his eyes, his redheaded friend seemed to find it all the more hilarious that he could get away with having his cock out in front of god and everyone without a single teacher complaining. If anything, people seemed amused by it, and at lunch, Kirsten made good on her boast that one kiss and she'd have Owen going full Pinocchio.

It probably didn't hurt that Kirsten herself was wearing a thong and bra with translucent cups, both the same shade of gold as her perfect hair. Most of the hot girls had gone along similar lines, using the day the same way they did Halloween, as an excuse to dress slutty without anyone being able to call them on it. Today was simply more on the nose.

("On the nose" would be where Kirsten was seated when she gave Owen that kiss, an image Conner tried hard to forget.)

If Beach Day had been a flesh parade, Crazy Underwear Day was no different in that regard. Conner, desperate to mitigate this disaster but unable to revert the flier to its original state, at least complained enough that Amanda grudgingly volunteered to amend the photo of the flier to denote that it was Senior Spirit Week, so at least the underclassmen wouldn't be subjected to Jordan's perversions. Beachwear was one thing, but she'd conceded that underwear had more explicit sexual connotations.

It was that very point he foolishly tried making to Heather when she sat with him and his friends at lunch while Mr. Rodriguez was reminding Kirsten that Spirit Week was meant to lead into a school a dance, not a lap dance.

"You don't think this is, ya know, a bit out of hand?" he said, gesturing blandly.

Luis, who was wearing his boxers on his head (and all present suspected that was an “instead of” rather than “in addition to” arrangement), shrugged. “I dunno. It’s all just for fun, man. Surprised you’re sitting it out.”

“Yeah,” said Kayla. She wasn’t observing the day, though on either side of her were Trevor in a pair of superhero underoos and Penny in men’s boxers and a matching plaid bra. “You’re usually all over this. Remember that time we went to Bear Lake and you dove in in just your tights whities? Totally figured we’d get to see ‘em again today.”

“Tights whities, eh?” said Heather, bemused. “Must’ve been a sight.”

“Surprised you’re signed on for this,” he said, looking pointedly at her own white panties and heavy duty bra. All of her bras had to be heavy duty, though. “Pride isn’t going to make a statement about how the school shouldn’t be pressuring young people into wearing skimpy clothing?”

She shrugged, picking at her meatloaf. “We talked about it, but decided that our crusade is against the administration, not our fellow women. You don’t win hearts and minds by shaming the people you’re trying to convert.”

“Still, you don’t think it’s a little... I dunno. Distracting?” Conner pressed.

Heather froze, except her eyes, which locked on his in a way that told him he’d somehow said the wrong thing. “Distracting? How do you mean?”

“I mean... you don’t think that having half the school walking around in their underwear could make it harder to pay attention to class?”

“Wait, we’re supposed to be paying attention in class?” Luis joked. Everyone laughed but Heather and Trevor, who was presently paying a lot of attention to the blonde’s exposed bosom, a fact which his recently exed ex-girlfriend Kayla was trying not to let distract her. Every straight guy in school had the the tattoos on her chest memorized by now.

“So you’re saying if other people’s bodies distract you, that’s their problem and not yours?” Heather asked. He realized his misstep now. Sensing another feminist tirade, Penny was already excusing herself to put her tray away.

“I’m not saying... I mean look,” he said, pointing to where Owen and his Mr. Nose were seated with Kirsten and Hayleigh and their crowd. “You’re telling me that seeing a guy’s naked erection has no effect whatsoever on the environment? If every guy here had their cock out, you’d just be ‘yep, ‘sall good’? Really?”

“Context plays an important role,” she began, and that was where Trevor and Kayla mumbled their intent to leave and hustled after Penny. “If guys were just going around whipping out their cocks, that’s its own problem. But I’m not going to go over to someone who’s just pushing the line with what they’re wearing for Spirit Week and tell them they need to stop having fun because I get to decide how they present themselves.”

“But—”

“Do you see anyone losing control of themselves? Is anyone actually being hurt by what he’s wearing, or are you projecting your feelings about behavior onto his personal space?” Suddenly, she was reaching behind her and undoing the clasp on her bra. He could almost hear her tits sigh with relief at being released, suddenly spilling forward and resting on the table. One pink nipple was dangerously close to stabbing into her meatloaf.

“Holy crap! What are you...?!”

“Sometimes women choose not to wear bras,” she thundered, stuffing it with only a little difficulty into her purse. The thing really was quite massive. “And yeah, I have big boobs, but hey, it’s Crazy Underwear Day, so maybe I feel like being ‘crazy’ by not wearing a bra. So should I go around and check with all the guys if this is OK?”

“Heather...!”

“Tell me who I’m hurting, Conner.” She stood up, looking from side to side. She was pivoting so fast that he could hardly believe the swing of those things didn’t throw her off balance. “Because it looks like the only person upset by it is you. Which means it’s *your* problem. Everybody else is having a good time with Spirit Week. Why do you have to make it into something that it’s not?”

He knew this was not a fight he was going to win. Really, he agreed with her basic premise that people should be allowed to dress how they wanted, albeit not quite to the extent she took it with her Pride outfits. This was not a time to argue; this was a time for apologies.

Without saying a word, Conner stood up and stripped off his clothes. Though he could feel himself flush with embarrassment, he didn’t stop until he was standing in front of her in nothing but his underwear. A few people looked, taken in by the oddity of seeing someone changing for Spirit Week in the middle of the cafeteria, but however TIOS was affecting people’s reactions, it at least kept Mr. Rodriguez from coming over to object.

“I’m sorry.”

She gave him a long look, but finally cracked a smile. “No tigtty whities, huh.”

“Sorry, went with the gray today.”

“You look good in gray.”

“You look good in topless.”

She laughed, and sat back down, patting his seat next to her. *How was she not cold?* he wondered. How was everyone not cold?

Wednesday, once designated Nerd Day, was now Tops or Bottoms Day. There was no official pronouncement of what this meant; even Miss Jackson on the Tuesday announcements had only said the title, not the implication. Sure enough though, a good chunk of the Nighthawk student body arrived in their first period class absent the clothes on one or the other half of their body.

Conner was maintaining his protest, but most of his friends had taken part. For the second day in a row, Owen got to have his dick out in school; the editor-in-chief supposed he should be more surprised that so many guys took advantage of that same opportunity. Heather crushed her fans by going bottomless, while Amanda crushed hers by ditching her top. (No doubt they'd both have plenty of new admirers by day's end, though.) He even got to see Hailey's boobs again in third period, though she gave him a dirty look when she caught him looking. He'd almost forgotten what perfect teardrops those things were.

Of course, one of the strangest parts of Spirit Week was the faculty. While teachers had been freed from their dress code just as students had been, the vast majority still preferred to wear the same clothes they always had. Perhaps it appealed to them as authority figures? Who could say. But in Spirit Week, thanks to Jordan and his stupid, depraved themes, he got to see Mr. Oliver's saggy gray ball sack, Mrs. Brantley's plump legs and hairy vagina, and other sights he'd spend years trying to forget.

Although, he had to say, watching Miss C teach in nothing but her burgundy sweater, those dynamite legs, runner's ass, and of course her mouth-watering pussy... well, at least the day ended on a high note, insofar as the view was concerned. As for Conner's mood, he was becoming increasingly disconsolate, and worse, was running out of people to vent to.

Since he still couldn't come out and tell her everything but was too aggravated by all that was happening not to want to complain to *someone*, he changed the tale around. He made up a story in which Conner had taken a picture of the flier as a consideration for the Spirit Week spread, and Jordan had edited it as a joke when his back was turned. Simple impish prank.

"Jordan did *what*?" Kristy exclaimed. "Conner, you have to be more careful. I hope you realize what could happen if someone found out about TIOS."

Did he ever. "I know, I know. And I feel awful. This whole week I feel like I've been going crazy."

"Crazy? Why's that?"

"What? I mean... look at yourself! You're half-naked. You have been all day. At school. In front of your students."

"I... It's Spirit Week," she said feebly, though he could tell the realization was a bit jarring, if not enough to snap her out of TIOS' grip.

"I'm sorry. I should have said something earlier."

“Maybe.” She shut the door to her classroom and locked the two of them in, leading him over to the loveseat in the computer lab and settling down onto his lap. “Why bother? I mean, none of it’s going to change anything, right? We feel the way we feel. If it doesn’t bother us, why let it bother you?”

“But you’re not supposed to feel like this,” he insisted. “You’re not supposed to let your students see you in bikinis and underwear and... no underwear.”

“You don’t want to see me without my underwear?” she teased.

“You know what I meant.”

“I do, but... sweetie, you’re going to turn your hair grey if you start worrying about making people feel the way you think they’re supposed to be.”

“Not about everything. Just about this.”

“Nobody else seems to mind.”

He sighed. “Everybody keeps saying that, as if everything’s OK if nobody minds. But I mind!”

“I know,” she said softly, smoothing back his hair and planting a kiss on his chin. “Remember, though, if you’re concerned about the way TIOS impacts people, don’t forget that we’re all of us acting according to our environment to begin with. The whole nature/nurture thing skews pretty heavily toward nurture.”

“Yeah, Mrs. Cullen’s always going on about that.”

“Besides,” she went on, “if you want to take it to the level of scrutiny you’re trying to put to this, some of the original Spirit Week themes have their flaws as well. People can and have been hurt by those, too.”

“Hurt? Who got hurt by Crazy Sock Day?”

“All right, I’ll grant that’s not the best example. But take Twin Day.”

“Twin Day? Where you pick a friend and dress the same?”

“Sure. For starters, take Nick Neuhauser. You don’t think that’s a really hard day for him, every time we do it?”

Nick’s twin brother Rick had died in middle school. Conner looked forward to seeing Rick again at graduation, thanks to TIOS. “Yeah, but—”

“But Nick aside, as well as Mrs. Bissell, who I know lost a twin brother during their birth, let’s look at everyone else. Do you have any idea how much drama goes on, especially with the girls, about which friend to dress up as twins with? I heard a story that Olivia Snyder *poisoned* someone to make sure she got to be twins with Kirsten Vaughan. Now I hope that’s some hyperbole involved in the re-telling, but you see my point. When friends have to publicly pick a besty, feelings can and do get hurt.”

“All right, I guess, but...”

“You could make the case that most of the themes are passively injurious to the kids from poor families. Hard to convince Mom or Dad or whoever to shell out money for costume supplies when they’re struggling to pay rent. I’ve noticed before during

Spirit Week how you can tell which buses come from which neighborhoods. The ones from the poorer places have hardly anybody dressed up.”

“Huh. So, you’re saying Spirit Week was already bad, and now it’s just a different kind of bad?”

“Far from it. The opposite, really. My point is that just because some people have problems doesn’t mean everyone else has to stop having fun. We can’t sit here knit-picking who gets to enjoy themselves and how. Everything we do is going to upset someone, and you’d be amazed how many ways people find to suck the joy out of things.” She smirked. “Or, considering how much time you spend around Ms. Blake, perhaps you know what I mean.”

He chuckled. “Your one day to show off to everybody your boobs are at least as awesome as hers, and you squander it.”

She laughed, shedding her sweater and helping him off with his pants. “I dunno, there’s still tomorrow,” she said, lowering her pussy onto his eagerly awaiting cock.

He groaned as her folds enveloped him, squeezing him. “You’re still going to dress for it?”

She gave him a look. “What, and miss Body Paint Day?”

By the end of the day on Thursday, it was hard to believe how accustomed he'd grown to seeing his classmates walking around in nothing but flaking paint. Miss C, now in the know about the oddity, positively reveled in the opportunity, basking in her kink of workplace sexuality. Somewhere during the day, somebody had had the idea to augment it further by using markers, and by the time the last bell rang, everybody was a walking canvas. Even the students who opted to wear clothes like normal had it all over their necks, arms, and cheeks. Conner had let Amanda doodle on him while he went over some of her recommendations for final edits.

"I hope you're happy with yourself for turning Northside into a strip club," he said to Jordan on their way out of yearbook.

"You have to pay strippers. These bitches are free for the looking. Too bad we don't have a bouncer, though, to keep out the uggos."

"Do you have any control over how perverse you let yourself get? I'm just asking."

"Do you have any control over how puritanical you let yourself get? I mean, I saw that shit you wrote. No threesomes? You pussy."

"It's not like that. I'm not like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you."

Jordan scoffed. "Yeah, no shit. Two babes like Carpenter and Blake as your dates? In my book, all that is is the start of a foursome. Those bitches and their plus one beg for it, then you give 'em the night of their lives."

Conner rolled his eyes. "So what about tomorrow? All this, and you finish it off with the same old Nighthawk Day? You run out of pervy ideas?"

"Heh. You'll see, Fishers."

Jordan could hardly wait for the dance. He'd put everything in place to have one hell of a kick-ass night. All he'd had to do was start a conversation at lunch about date swapping, and they'd supplied the rest, like the clockwork cunts they were.

*"Ugh, like any of us cares who anybody dances with?" "Seriously, it's all just some coming-of-age ritual bullshit left over from the 50's. Olivia, we love you, sweetie, but you are such a moron, I swear." – Hayleigh McKnight and Kirsten Vaughan.*

Now nobody should bat an eyelash about him showing up with Hailey, and if he felt like making good on the extra credit opportunity he'd offered his students, she wouldn't mind, either. (He'd left in the part about Olivia just for laughs.)

As for his surprise for Fishers, he had Hailey to thank, too. He'd simply asked her if she thought he looked good enough to turn a head or two, and she supplied the rest. *"Jordan, you're so popular that any girl there would be sooooo excited to get to dance up on you. That'd be sooooo hot!" – Hailey McManus.*

He was going to cuck that asshole so hard, and right in front of Hailey. Better yet, Fishers was going to help him do it.

He may not say it, but it was obvious what hot shit he thought he was, nailing Carpenter and Blake in tandem. Probably still Miss C, the kiss-ass. See how he felt watching them squeal with delight to get a turn with Jordan. Let Hailey see Fishers start to cry like the little bitch he was as Jordan left him with nothing and no one.

Sure, he could have used the ammo Hailey had given him from spring break, but that... well, that was a bit extreme. Best to save that for a last resort. A bluff, in case he really wanted something from the guy.

Jordan supposed he had to credit Heather for part of the fun. For whatever reason, Fishers' little girl panties had been in a wad all week watching the Nighthawk seniors strutting around naked or half-naked. Heather had lobbied the school hard to end their prom dress code. Since time immemorial, girls had been required to wear dresses, and guys required to wear suits (which were almost always tuxedos). In the past few years, controversies had arisen from issues like one guy showing up in a tuxedo t-shirt junior year, or this hard-core dyke Alison Sturrock who'd wanted to come in a suit herself a couple years back. She'd been escorted out by the old principal in front of everybody, whole big deal. He remembered Heather blathering on about it even back then; Jordan had only listened because he hadn't realized how airtight she kept her panties back then. Fucking prude.

So this year, she and her Pride girls had made it part of their whorish little campaign. They'd started a petition, gone to school board meetings, yelled in the face of any school-affiliated adult they could find. In the end, the school board had relented and nullified the dress code, in the quietest way possible. The change had been announced in 6-point font on the bottom of the prom ticket ads posted around Northside. "No dress code."

Jordan, after seeing his success with the Spirit Week fliers, had gone right back to that same page in the playbook. If it ain't broke...

"You look amazing," he said as Hailey met him at the door to her house. At her side, Mrs. McManus ushered Jordan into the house, murmuring compliments about his tuxedo.

"It's not too much?" Hailey asked, spinning in place. She was plainly nervous; this was only the second dance she'd gone to in high school with a date, and even the loser she'd dragged to junior homecoming had bailed on her halfway through. Hopefully she'd forgotten how he'd laughed at her when he saw her crying.

"It's the furthest thing from too much," he assured her.

Mrs. McManus held up her camera, an old clunky thing that reminded him of those giant things they had to use for yearbook. "Come on, you two, let's get some pictures. Oh, you look so adorable together!"

"Mother!" Hailey said, but she was clearly pleased. This was probably the moment of a lifetime for her, getting ready to head to prom with someone so far out of her apparent league, mother fawning.

Of course, her actual league, right now, was with the girls gracing the pages of some classy-as-fuck porn site. If her mother weren't here, Jordan would already be sunk to the nuts in that pussy. The only thing in his way was a pair of panties. And what panties, too! They fit rather loosely, enough to let her body move beneath them without rumpling the red silk fabric. Each side was held up by an elastic band over her hips, each of which was festooned with fake diamonds that sparkled in each flash of her mother's camera.

Aside from that, there was nothing but a pair of earrings and matching heels.

"You're sure you don't want a jacket?" the woman asked as Jordan insisted they needed to get moving. "It's chilly out, and that school is going to have you poor girls catching your deaths of cold. That can happen, you know. My great aunt Tildie died one November – cancer, nothing to do with the weather – but my great uncle Daniel stayed for three hours at his sister's funeral, in the snow, and wouldn't you know it, he caught the pneumonia and died a month after. Then his cousin... what was his name..."

"Mother, I'll be fine. I don't have a jacket that would go with this anyway."

"I don't know..."

Jordan took her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. Moms loved him. "I'll keep her warm, Mrs. McManus. Heated seats in the car, and she can wear my jacket from the parking lot to the hall. I'll take good care of her, I promise."

The woman literally fanned herself before granting her blessing to leave. "My mom thinks you're some kind of perfect gentleman," Hailey giggled as she bucked into the car, the seatbelt sinking between her naked breasts.

"You saying I'm not?"

“I seem to recall you jizzing in my hair not two nights ago,” she laughed. “On purpose!”

“Well I won’t tonight. Your hair looks amazing. You look amazing.”

She rode that glow all the way to the dance. If she was this excited for him now, he couldn’t wait to see how wide she spread when she saw him bring down Fishers. He’d just bide his time, let him fly up nice and high before kicking him into the dirt. What more perfect revenge could there be for abandoning her for Heather and Amanda than to make Amanda and Heather abandon Fishers for Jordan?

Poetic justice.

The dance itself went fine. He was already so used to seeing his classmates naked – and sort of disappointed by how much the uggos and the fatties detracted from the rest – that his change of the rules was almost a let-down for him. Most of the girls worth seeing naked he saw in class every day anyway.

It was a bit confusing having two Haileys in the same cluster of bodies, but since nobody wanted to talk to his anyway, it caused minimal drama. Hayleigh and Jayce were practically glued together; Jackson and Owen found themselves on an unexpected double date as Kirsten dragged Angelica and her date in with hers; everybody else was in free-for-all mode, goofing around and dancing with whoever however. In fact, the whole dance seemed to be a bit like that, with strange groups forming, couples joining and splitting from song to song. He wondered if the “nobody cares who anybody dances with” had had farther-reaching effects than he’d intended?

Sure enough, there was Fishers with his little double-date. His entrance caused a surprising amount of fuss; not only had he arrived with two dates, but two *hot* dates. Weirder still, two *clothed* dates. Heather was looking surprisingly good in a tight white blouse and black slacks snug across the hips, a fedora on her head with her hair gelled back. Very retro. She looked like a 1930’s era gangster, only hella sexier. Amanda, however, was jaw-dropping, entering with that red mane of hers gleaming, waves piled over curls, a silver dress clinging to her body, a short train trailing on the ground behind her. She looked like a princess in a cartoon movie – only with better tits.

Of course, it wasn’t to last. The editors-in-chief were both looking around goggle-eyed at the abundant female nudity; Conner had only just locked eyes on Jordan, glaring suspiciously, when Principal Beckmann pounced on the trio. She immediately took Amanda aside. He couldn’t make out the words, of course, but it was easy to imagine. For Jordan, anyway; Fishers could tell something was wrong, but hadn’t figured out exactly what yet. Good. Let him stew, the little twit.

She and Conner had a brief exchange with the old battleaxe that culminated in the two of them lowering their chins and heading off for a side conversation. He waited to see how they’d handle it, but it went exactly as he hoped. Hailey was watching at his side as Amanda joined Fishers in glowering across the dance floor at Jordan, then

marched out of the hall, returning a few minutes later in nothing but a strapless bra and panties.

To her credit, they matched the dress.

“What would she have come wearing... that?” Hailey asked when they joined a group of their friends and started dancing.

Jordan grinned, knowing she meant the dress and not the underwear beneath it. “Guess Carpenter can’t follow simple rules. C’mon. This is a good song.”

It was a little strange, watching his Hailey be timid. He could tell his quote – her quote – was working. Jordan knew her tells. She was getting turned on, big-time. He didn’t like how much she was looking at Fishers, though. No matter. Soon, once they looked to be having a really good time... he’d make his move. But he wanted to let them get comfortable first. Have a nice evening. Unwind a little.

Then he’d huff and puff and blow that house of loser right in.

It took hours, almost to the end of the dance, but there it was. That look of pure happiness on his smug prick face. Heather on one side, Amanda on the other, the three of them twisting and grooving like the pasty white trio they were. Their friends were nearby, too, which only sweetened things. He waited until the song was nearly at an end, then turned to Hailey and put his hands on her shoulders.

“I want you to watch something for me, okay babe?” She cocked her head to one side quizzically, so even if it cost him some of the theatricality of his moment, he opted to explain. “See Fishers over there?”

She looked over, her expression wilting at the sight of his joyful moment. “Uh huh.”

“In a minute, I’m gonna go over there and show him he’s not such hot shit. I’m going to invite his little bitches to dump him, for me, and they’re going to. He’s going to have to sit there with his dick in his hand while they see what a dickless loser they came with.”

“You’re... you’re leaving me? For Heather and Amanda?” Her eyes widened in horror.

“What? Baby, no, no no no...” He pulled her in and planted a few reassuring kisses on that forehead. How could she think he’d do such a thing? “No, the point is, they’re gonna see what a real man looks like, and then I cut ‘em loose. Let all three of ‘em go home lonely and pathetic, like he tried to make you feel when you wasted yourself on that rat fucker.”

“Oh.”

“So you just stay right here, and watch Conner get all the pain and humiliation he put on you. All right?”

She looked to Conner and them again, then slowly nodded. “OK.”

He didn't bother telling her about Fishers' attempt to use Jordan's own words for his own master stroke; she'd find out about that soon enough when the four of them were back at his guest house fucking like animals. Little fucker thought he was so damn clever.

It was time his students learn how to please a man from a pro.

In fact, Conner did think he was pretty clever. It was true neither he nor Amanda had noticed Jordan editing the fine print on the prom posters from “no dress code” to “no-dress code.” What a difference a hyphen could make. Hardy fucking har. It was a crying shame, too, because she’d somehow managed to look even better in that dress than she did out of it. He wanted to go back to her hairdresser and tip them all over again. (Assuming she’d gone to a hair-dresser and hadn’t simply emerged from the mists looking like this. Who knew.)

Admittedly, he didn’t know about Jordan’s intention to go after him. He’d seen the quote from Hailey about having girls get turned on when he asked them to dance, however it had been phrased, but hadn’t thought it had anything to do with him specifically.

He had, however, channeled his irritation at being the only one annoyed with Jordan for a little bit of light-hearted comeuppance. And unlike Jordan’s plan, that one was about to go off without a hitch.

“Can I have this dance?” asked a voice behind him as the music faded.

Conner, Heather and Amanda turned as one to find their yearbook teacher standing behind the group. She was one of the faculty chaperones, and was looking quite fetching herself in a form-fitting purple dress. Apparently the “no-dress code” didn’t apply to faculty. Not as fancy as what the students normally wore, but Conner knew she wouldn’t want to upstage them.

He was about to be disabused of that assumption.

“All yours, Miss C,” said Amanda, stepping back and bowing. Heather looked less thrilled about it, but acquiesced. He could imagine it wasn’t easy, having caught them having last winter. Conner was simply glad she’d kept it to herself.

In the next instant, a new song began. Conner was pretty sure he recognized it – an upbeat song with lots of profanity and suggestive themes, the sort of song that was certainly on the blacklist – but as he saw Kristy immediately put her ass to him and start shimmying in the most erotic display of twerking he’d seen all night, he realized she was the gap in the censor’s defenses.

All around him, students went on with their dancing. A few whoops went up as she flipped her skirt to show a bare ass, cheeks clapping together double-time. Per her quote, however, nobody found it strange to see her dancing with him. He pulled her hips up against him and let her grind herself against his crotch, soon rising to a standing position and taking his hands in hers and using them to rub all across the front of her body. *All* across.

If dancing with Heather and Amanda had gotten his motor running, Kristy had grabbed the throttle and... well, stroked it. Literally. She was jacking him off through his tux without even breaking rhythm, an incredibly self-satisfied smile on her face. When she wasn’t smirking over his shoulder at his dates, that is.

“Where in the hell did you learn to dance like this?!” he shouted over the music.

“I wasn’t always a high school English teacher,” she said back. Then, somehow – the physics of it were beyond him, to say nothing of the physiology – her dress was gone. He hadn’t even seen her unzipping it – could that pressure on his crotch been hers grinding on him and not her hand? or... oh, who cared – but suddenly it was a wad on the floor at their feet. She hadn’t bothered with either bra or panties, and as she moved his hands between her legs while shimmying her butt against him, she was as wet as he’d ever felt her. Nothing got her excited like sex in the workplace, and here, in front hundreds of people, consequence-free...

She wasn’t the only one getting excited, though. Conner supposed he should feel guilty, and expected that come tomorrow, he was going to owe at least one apology when Amanda realized what he’d done. After a whole week of hearing everyone insist that he was crazy to be upset, that it was all harmless, that nobody was being hurt...

Well, he’d cheated a little. He already had a solid editor-in-cheat joke ready for Amanda when she saw his quote additions.

*“Hey, nothing to get a girl excited over a fella like a little jealousy.”*

*“Lucky me?”*

*“Damn right, lucky you.”*

*– Amanda Carpenter and Conner Fishers*

TIOS was pretty strict about prohibiting editors from simply inserting their own words, but when they hadn’t intended their words for TIOS usage, it seemed a good deal more lax.

Sure enough, one look at Heather and Amanda and it was pretty clear it was working. Both were staring. Just standing, and staring. Amanda was flushed head to toe, her skin almost as red as her hair, and Heather was actively rubbing herself just below the waistband of her pants. In fact, he could even see the wet spot forming in Amanda’s panties. Her head twisted to one side, mouth slightly open, tongue slowly moistening her lips; Heather was chewing on her own lower lip, eyes riveted on her date dry-humping her yearbook teacher.

Suddenly, Jordan was with them. He said something in each girl’s ear, and they blinked as if snapped out of some spell. TIOS was really hitting this jealousy-as-arousal thing hard, it seemed, or else they were simply that jealous. Either way, there was only a momentary pause as the two both turned and started dancing with Jordan. They seemed to be into it; no doubt some asinine sex ed scheme he’d wrought.

Meanwhile, poor Hailey was all the way across the gym, staring with those big sad eyes of hers; some of Jordan’s jerkwad friends were talking to her, and he could only guess what they were saying. Not a one of them had said a single kind word to her since grade school, if they even had then. Abandoning the girl to that crowd was almost as thoughtless as what he himself had done to her.

Kristy, however, was not letting up to admire the scenery. She'd demanded a dance, and she plainly meant to have it. When she noticed his attention straying, she pivoted to face him, placing his hands on her wriggling bottom, their pelvises rubbing together with more force than he'd have thought possible. "You look good tonight, Conner," she said in his ear, right before she sucked it into her mouth.

"Kristy, you... damnit, if you keep this up, I'm going to lose it," he hissed back.

She laughed, then threw her head back and practically howled with laughter. "To quote you, Conner, you have no idea how happy you make me."

The song was about to end, he was pretty sure; the refrain was on repeat.

Time to move on to part two of his plan. "Want to get out of here?"

She looked unsure. "I... I'm supposed to stay until close."

"It's over in five minutes. Make up an excuse."

The music stopped, and the DJ began an announcement that indeed, the next song would be the last. "I don't think your dates would like that very much," she said.

"Let's ask them." He lead her by the hand to where they'd just finished dancing with Jordan. He didn't mind that they'd done so; he knew Jordan had left them no choice.

"That was some nasty dancing, Miss C," the boy said, leering at his teacher. For all TIOS let him appreciate her nudity, though, he had no part in the command not to find her dance with Conner out of the ordinary. Let him look, Conner, thought. After all, I owe this next bit to him.

Conner looked between his dates. "Hey, you girls wanna get out of here?"

Amanda took a step toward him and nodded vigorously. "Yes," said Heather unhesitatingly.

"Sure I'm not interrupting anything here?" Conner asked, eyes darting to Jordan.

"Less than nothing," said Amanda.

"Where are we going?" Heather asked, her voice trying not to sound too eager, and failing. She didn't even look back in Jordan's direction.

"Kristy? Mind if we go back to your place?"

Four responses came on top of each other.

"Sure! It's not the cleanest, but... oh, who cares, let's go!"

"Her place? Why *her* place?"

"With Miss C? Um, really?"

"Hey, bimbos, I'm standing right here. Come on. Hello?"

Conner ignored Jordan and spread his arms. Neither girl seemed to understand why, exactly, but neither fought it, and soon he was walking toward the door, an arm around each of his dates. "Lead the way, Kristy."

She didn't bother picking up her dress. On their way out of the gym, Principal Beckmann stopped her to ask why she was walking around naked – her voice far too

casual for such an accusation – but Kristy assured her she'd simply thought the rules applied to students and staff, and had simply been trying to fit in. The principal nodded, murmured a mild rebuke to use judgment next time, and excused her.

The rest of the night was a blur of activity. Nobody really understood what was happening, but teenagers did what teenagers do.

Heather glared at her boyfriend's shaft as it thrust in and out of their trampy, manipulative teacher. It wasn't fair! Heather was younger, he'd had a thing for her since forever, and – of course – her boobs were local legends. How could he be fucking *Miss C* when *she* was right here?

Another flare of jealousy. She could hardly believe how hot this was.

Amanda snapped her fingers to get Heather's attention. "You still with us? C'mon, shove those things in his face. I'll get his balls."

Heather smirked over her shoulder as she buried Conner in her boobage. Maybe he was fucking Miss C, but for now at least, he was absorbed by her.

How long had this been going on? He'd said she was blackmailing him into this – and she believed him, she always believed him – but they seemed to know one another's bodies so well. At least as well as she did. It was weird. This was her first time engaging in group sex outside of class, but she could read the room easily. Amanda was very vocally making things up as she went along, as if she were trying hard to show she was willing to try. Heather suffered no shortage of self-esteem, and knew her way around Conner's body well enough not to have to ask.

Of course, then he moaned "Kristy" into her breasts, the name echoing around like he'd shouted it into a canyon, and suddenly her self-esteem was on far less sure footing.

"You wanna fuck my tits, Conner?" she purred into his ear. There. Those two couldn't compete with her on that front.

Kristy was tossed aside with a squeal of surprise, Amanda awkwardly catching her by her own not-unimpressive boobs. "Hell yeah."

Heather laid on her back, grinning ear to ear as he climbed on top of her, his cock thoroughly lubricated from their teacher's pussy. Only then Amanda's face was on her boobs, licking at them, licking at the cock between them. It felt really good, actually. So good, her eyes squeezed shut and left her completely surprised when Miss C mounted her face to make out with her boyfriend.

She wasn't going to be out-done. With a sneer of envy and contempt directed into the frizzy-haired woman's snatch, Heather started to lick. She still had the cock. For the next few minutes, at least, they could be jealous of her.

“So, Hailey, do you come to these kinds of parties often?” asked Scott Purcell, Olivia’s date, taking a long drink from whatever nasty-smelling concoction filled his red plastic cup.

“No. Not really. Um, have you seen Jordan?”

“He’s around somewhere. Probably in the main house with stepmommy dearest, getting warmed up for ya,” said Jayce Deacons.

“She’s, uh, really pretty,” she said, cheeks heating.

“Don’t be an asshole, Jayce,” Hayleigh chided her boyfriend, smacking him in the arm before taking Hailey aside and leading her away from the cackling boys and their place by the makeshift bar. Hailey was glad of that. Those boys were mean. To her, anyway.

Maybe if she were hot like them she’d be mean, too. Especially if she were drunk like them. Only then, Hailey realized she was being lead to the group of girls outside by the pool. They seemed to be gathered around, cooing praises at how pretty Kirsten’s prom queen crown looked.

“Who else is pumped to have another Hayleigh to hang with. Eh, bitches?” Hayleigh said as they joined the group.

Hailey tried to quell her panic. This was bad. These girls made the boys look nice. These girls were the ones who’d made her fake sick to get out of going to school on picture day. These were the girls who’d gotten her used to crying in the showers after gym class, using the water to hide her tears. These girls were the ones who’d stood there, laughing at her expense, while Jordan dirty-danced all over Conner’s dates.

“The more the merrier,” said Kirsten.

“Hey, you’re Hailey Mc... McSomething. Something not McKnight,” said Angelica Buck.

“McMannish,” said Olivia, giggling.

“McManus, actually,” Hailey mumbled.

“Right. Yeah, you dated my brother last semester for a bit, I remember.” Angelica smiled; it looked too friendly not to have a barb coming after. Hailey braced herself, but all the girl said was, “You look really pretty tonight.”

“Oh. Um, thanks.” She looked around. “Have any of you seen Jordan?”

“Yeah, I think he’s in his room, playing with his computer. Probably looking at porn,” said Kirsten, adding just loudly enough to make sure Hailey heard, “he’s gonna need to if he wants to get it up.”

Hailey managed to escape with only a few more not-so-subtle jibes. Hayleigh’s “You’re so brave, wearing that! If my tummy were that flat, I’d never have the guts to make everyone look at it” was probably the low point. They’d been Hefty and Hottie since forever, and the comparison never failed to cut deep. Especially from Hottie

herself, with her alluringly bulbous curves pouring out of the straining, skimpy underwear she'd worn to the dance.

She made her way up to Jordan's room. Barbara smiled and raised a martini glass to her as she passed through the kitchen. Maybe Jordan would give her a ride home, let her escape from this place. Maybe he'd even apologize? Sometimes – once in a great while – he could actually be thoughtful. Seem to notice he'd hurt her. His bedroom door was ajar, and though she wasn't trying to be subtle, he didn't notice her pushing it open.

Jordan was indeed looking at his laptop, one of those NHS ones the students could check out overnight or for the weekends. He seemed to be rapidly clicking open windows, scanning, closing, repeating. She had no idea what it was; as she drew closer, it looked like it was all a bunch of pictures of NHS students and blobs of text.

She was right behind where he was curled up in his bed, and he was so intent – or drunk – he still hadn't noticed her footfalls on his carpet. Suddenly, however, he stopped, clapping his hands and laughing in what sounded like triumph.

“Ha! You dirty little fucker. I knew you had it in you! You better thank my ass for this on Monday, Fishers.”

Confused, Hailey squinted to make out the words on the screen. First was some exchange between Conner and Amanda about jealousy. What was this? Then, after... *“Two babes like Carpenter and Blake as your date? In my book, all that is is the start of a foursome... Give ‘em the night of their lives.” – Jordan Lyons*

“Foursome...?” she said, eyes widening.

He whirled around. “Hailey? What the fuck are you doing in here? Why aren't you at the party?”

“I want to go home. It's not my kind of party,” she said, trying not to sound as miserable as she felt. “What is that? Did you really say that?”

“What? No! I mean, yeah, but... look, it's all out of context.”

“You were trying to help Conner with those girls?”

“Help Conner? You got it all wrong, slutcakes.” He held up his hands defensively.

“You... you said you were...” She eyed him, suddenly, for the first time since he'd helped her with her bike that winter afternoon, with anger. “You *left* me! You left me with those people!”

“Who? My friends?” he asked, taken aback.

“And they are *not* nice people. They said... never mind what they said. But they're *your* friends. And *you* left me, to go dance with two prettier girls, just to make *Conner* jealous? Because he couldn't be jealous of you with me, right?”

“Hailey, whoa – no, you've got it all backwards!”

“You said you were going to get back at him! You said you cared about me! But all I'm ever going to be to you is Hefty Hailey, enthusiastic pity fuck.”

She stormed towards the door. “Hailey, wait!” His hand landed on her shoulder, but she threw it off, not breaking stride.

“We’re *done*, Jordan!” She glowered over her shoulder the best she could with the tears pouring forth from her eyes. “Kiss my ass!”

“No, kiss me,” Amanda whined, trying to shoulder her way in front of Miss C.

For the life of her, she’d never imagined begging a guy to kiss her, but every time she saw his hands, his mouth, his cock, on or in Miss C or Heather, she wanted him more. Her whole body was crying out for more attention; she knew she’d never been more turned on in her life. She hadn’t known she *could* be this turned on.

Heather resolved the contest by shoving those tits of hers in his face again, probably the tenth time she’d settled a dispute in that fashion. It was effective, at least insofar as getting his attention went. Amanda, however, merely viewed it as an opportunity to take advantage of certain other parts. Miss C evidently had the same idea. As her tongue made contact with Conner’s sopping wet shaft, their foreheads banged painfully together. Neither took more than a few seconds to rub at the sore spot before returning to their play.

Amanda couldn’t say she was *that* surprised. She’d thought Miss C and him were disturbingly close since the beginning of the semester. The way he called her Kristy sometimes when he thought nobody was listening, the way she hovered around his work station, the way she pointed her ass at him whenever she was bending over to help someone. More recent evidence included the presence of some of his clothes discarded in various rooms around the house, as well as the way he knew the exact way to the bedroom even with his mouth covered by both of his dates, blind to the world.

She almost couldn’t blame him. The way Kristy clung to him, craved him, came every time he did with twice the exuberance... she was a sight to behold. Amanda wasn’t even attracted to women, but seeing Conner give another woman *that* much pleasure was driving her half-mad with desire to receive some herself.

Amanda didn’t have much experience sucking cock, but she wasn’t going to let that stop her from coming out ahead this time, like she had when Conner had had to insist that four people didn’t fit in the shower at once, and the other two were already in there... No. This time she wasn’t going to be left on the other side of the glass, kissing him through the pane. If that had been his mouth. It had been too foggy to be sure.

Miss C was smirking at her from her side, lapping up and down the length of him. Let her. Maybe she was the blowjob queen of the three, but Amanda had her own strengths.

Namely, initiative.

“Conner, can I fuck you again? Please?”

“It’s my turn!”

“No way, it’s *my* turn!”

Conner laughed. “Go ahead, Amanda. Since you said please.”

And as she felt her journalism teacher’s hair tickling her ass while she rode him, pleased she was.

In all her time knowing Kirsten, Angelica had never been in the girl's bedroom before. She wasn't surprised in the least to find out that she was spoiled. Nobody could so naturally regard themselves as the center of the universe without parents who'd raised them as such. She basically had an entire floor all to herself, with a second living room, kitchenette, and a bedroom as big as Angelica's and Conner's put together. It was drenched in pink wherever possible, because of course it was. After all, what other color could be more lovely, and treacherous, and ensnaring.

What was surprising about her being here, however, was that Owen hadn't come with. They'd squandered his extended curfew getting drunk at Jordan's guest house, and he was already under way too much scrutiny to fudge the time. Kirsten, who'd been sneaking drinks from a flask in her purse all through prom, was one of the first to drop off. As an excuse to get out of there, Angelica had volunteered to shuttle her home.

Olivia had thrown a tantrum, nearly, over not being allowed the privilege, but that poor dullard could hardly stand up herself. Angelica had to hope the state had standards in place to keep someone *that* stupid from getting a driver's license.

Kirsten was nearly a head taller and with more meat on her bones; Angelica was doing her best to keep her upright as she ferried her into her bed. The prom queen – no shock in that contest – slumped into her bed face first, rolling gelatinously onto her back to giggle at Angelica.

"All right, blondie, let's get you out of those nice dance clothes before you ruin 'em," Angelica said, helping her shed what she'd worn to the dance. A sequined, strapless bra and matching g-string later, she was done.

Nope – the tiara. There.

At least Owen hadn't won prom king. She didn't know why that felt like it mattered, but she was glad anyways.

"Stay," murmured Kirsten. Her legs drunkenly slithered out and tried to ensnare Angelica's, but succeeded only in landing some gentle kicks.

"Yeah, naw, I'm gonna go," said Angelica.

But even blackout drunk, Kirsten's hands still possessed an iron grip and suddenly seized one of her wrists. "Stay. Sooooo horny," she whimpered. Before Angelica realized what was happening, two of her neatly manicured and freshly painted nails were in Kirsten's pussy.

"I can see. But yeah, our boyfriend's not here right now, so... you're on your own."

"Nuh. Girlfriend."

Angelica shook her head as Kirsten humped her pussy against her hand. "No," she said slowly, "he's your *boyfriend*. What with the dick and all. *Boy*."

Kirsten sighed rapturously. "*You're* my girlfriend, stupid bitch. Now lick me." She spread her thighs wide. As her eyes slid shut, Angelica didn't know it was complacency that she'd be obeyed, or that she'd merely passed out.

“Oh, god, Conner, I love it when you lick me,” Kristy purred, her fingers scritching across the boy’s scalp. At his behest, the other girls were each sucking on one of their teacher’s nipples, both glaring balefully between one another and their teacher.

Kristy had never even considered herself bi before, but she had to admit, this was pretty hot. Frankly, anything that took that egomaniac Heather Blake down a peg was at least a little hot in her book. Still, that moment earlier when he’d had them each on their hands and knees, side by side by side, contemplating who to fuck first and who last... He’d spent easily twice as long with Kristy as the others, and they all knew it.

Yep, she still had it.

Sure, in the morning, this was going to be a nightmare. Now she had officially slept not only with a student, but with *three* students, simultaneously. Unlike Heather, Amanda had nothing to hold over her to keep her from blabbing. Maybe TIOS could solve this? Though since the redhead suckling at her left tit was herself editor-in-chief, maybe not. She didn’t understand much of how it worked, and tried not to upset Conner by getting nose-y about it. Regardless, the morning was going to be dicey, to say nothing of the earful Heather was going to put her and poor Conner through.

But for now? This was the hottest thing she’d ever done. The mouths on nipples felt nice yes, but ten times as heavenly was knowing that their Conner would rather be lapping away at her pussy than sticking his cock in either of theirs. And ten times that was the simple knowledge of how deliriously happy this was making Conner, and how happy the memory would make him for years and years to come.

“Amanda, I need you, right now,” he said. And suddenly, the jealousy was back.

Kristy had never been jealous of one of her students before, but as she watched the girl’s red-trimmed muff get split wide by Conner’s insatiable cock, she had to admit, it was a beautiful sight. One she could hardly wait to one-up as soon as she could distract him.

“Why don’t you get your tongue down there this time, Heather?” Kristy suggested.

“Yeah? Why don’t *you* get *your* tongue down *there*?” Heather gestured to her own dripping pussy.

“Fuck, that’d be hot,” Conner grunted, before returning his attention to the redhead adorning his cock.

That was all it took. Heather gritted her teeth, jealousy flaring, as Conner licked his lips at the sight of his mentor tongue-fucking his busty blonde girlfriend.

*Screw tomorrow*, Kristy thought, and tried not to giggle at the squeals of shock and unwilling delight as she slid a pinky up Heather’s ass.

“Hey, asshole,” Jordan said again, louder this time, and with an absolute snarl to convey he meant it. “I said wake up, get dressed, and get the fuck out of here.” The sun was up, but only just, and Jackson’s struggle to understand why he was being yelled at and ordered around at such an hour was compounded by his lingering inebriation.

One by one, he berated his friends out of their drunken comas and kicked them out. He didn’t even need to; he was simply awake and angry and needed someone to take it out on. He couldn’t tell if Olivia was still drunk, or if TIOS had simply given her that confused, open-mouthed expression to go with her new “moron” status. Whatever. She even tried to suck him off by some sex-ed inculcated reflex when she woke up to see his crotch at her eye level, but Jordan wasn’t in the mood. There was exactly one mouth he wanted on his dick right then, and Hailey had responded to only one attempt to reach her that night.

That response had been a simple text message of *Leave me alone*.

When he at last ran out of guests to abuse, Jordan slumped down in his guest house and fumed. If he were the sort to angry-cry, he would have, but his father had hammered that instinct out of him long ago. So instead, he grumbled obscenities and imagined all the terrible things he ought to do to Conner Fishers.

How did that stupid son of a bitch keep coming out ahead? With only the most token of efforts – sometimes even on accident, for fuck’s sake! – he’d managed to fuck Hailey, and had wrapped two of the hottest girls in school around his finger. The hottest teacher, too. Jordan had always thought Ms. Cummings, the gym teacher with those tight little running shorts, took that prize, but after Spirit Week, he’d seen the goods on both, and Fishers had taken the prize.

Only Hailey wasn’t a prize. Not any more. Jordan wanted her. He hadn’t wanted to admit it, but she had changed him. Yeah, his sex ed harem was amazing, but he surprised himself by how often he was imagining Hailey in place of the wet hole around his dick, or how often he was comparing his bitches unfavorably to her.

She was his diamond in the rough.

Was this love? He didn’t know. Maybe love was nothing more than finding somebody who scratched where you itched. So yeah, maybe it was. Whatever word one wanted to use for it, here he was with a few weeks to get back and enjoy the girl he’d always dreamed of. That sweet, sensitive, depraved nymphomaniac he’d taken for granted. Instead of her, though, he’d have a classroom full of girls who tolerated him, did as they were told out of fear of failing, serviced him out of whatever sense of obligation TIOS had put in them. Ten of them weren’t worth one of her. He’d trade the whole lot of them for her, if he could.

If he could only keep her looking like she was; if Fishers and Carpenter weren’t going to ruin all this after graduation; if she’d take him back. If if if.

Fishers. He was out there balls deep in those bitches of his; they'd probably keep on wanting to fuck him even after graduation. Well, except poor Mandy. He didn't even know what would become of her. Serves them right if she just dissipates into thin air. It was cold comfort, though, to think that come June 8th, Fishers would be down to two gorgeous girls wanting to rock his world, and he'd be down to zero. There had to be some way to fix this.

Well... there was always the nuclear option, he supposed. Use the bomb Hailey had armed during spring break and make Fishers as miserable as him.

The sun was high in the sky before Jordan's eyes finally closed. And when they did, they were accompanied by a satisfied little smile.

Conner had never felt more satisfied than he did that next morning. If it even was morning. The sunlight streaming through the cracks in Kristy's bedroom blinds was much lower on the wall than it normally was when he woke up here.

Beside him, Heather was curled up on his left side, Kristy on his right, each slumbering soundly on a shoulder. Craning his neck down, he could see Amanda curled up along the bottom of the bed, her torso bent to leave her cheek resting on his right thigh. With her hair spilling over his crotch, he couldn't even tell whose hand was grasping his cock, and whose was on his balls. Maybe more than one? It was a lot of sensation to process.

Later that day he'd have to make his apologies, maybe squeeze in an I-told-you-so or two or three if anybody remained upset. He knew they'd all enjoyed themselves, at least; none of them had ever come so hard, so often, in his bed before. Hopefully that would dull their displeasure – if they even had any. And maybe it would even get him out of this whole crazy three-woman mess he'd gotten himself into, which wouldn't be the worst thing.

Provided they didn't strangle him.

Only, as the girls woke up, each of their first responses was to smile at him, and in those smiles, he read the same bittersweet message. They all saw that everyone knew things were coming to an end, and everyone knew it was all insane, and everyone knew there was nothing to be done but laugh, and blush, and enjoy the last of their time together at Northside. Even Kristy and Heather shared some secret smile that somehow told him he didn't need to panic.

Only a handful of weeks to go, but that morning, he finally let himself hope those weeks could be times of joy. Who cared what Jordan was doing? Maybe they were right. Nobody was getting hurt, were they? He'd had the most incredible night of his life, and he supposed he owed some small piece of that to the guy.

Maybe on Monday, he'd offer to bury the hatchet.

## Chapter Ten

*It's crazy to think how much we've grown here. I don't just mean height-wise, though plenty of that, too. Remember when you and I used to be able to look one another in the eye, Eddie? Back, I dunno, a foot and a half ago? But I'm talking about growth as individuals. After all, we were at Northside to learn and improve ourselves, right? I'm pretty sure I remember someone mentioning that.*

*The weird thing is – and I don't know about you guys – there's never a day when I woke up and felt any different than the day before. Week to week, month to month... it all felt about the same. Only when I sat down to write this speech and started thinking back on the past four years, suddenly it felt like the Grand Canyon of changes. I have no idea how I got across it, but I'm pretty sure a lot of you have a lot to do with it.*

“What the fuck, Jordan?!” Conner demanded, clutching the side of his face. He looked to the auditorium door, certain someone must have overheard them, but there was no one. As loudly as his ears were ringing, it seemed impossible this could be happening in secrecy.

“Unfortunate necessity,” Jordan said. He wasn't coming closer, but he still seemed ready to move if Conner came at him. Which Conner wasn't even sure he could, on account of TIOS, but for now he was working on being able to see straight again.

“Necessity? How was sucker punching me a necessity?”

“Would it have helped if I warned you first? Come on, that was seventy-five percent at best.” Jordan rolled his eyes. “Just because we're in the auditorium doesn't mean you gotta be a drama queen about it.”

Conner worked his jaw a few times. It was sore, but that was all. There was no way that punch had been seventy-five percent. Seventy-five percent of Jayce Deacons' strength, maybe. “You didn't answer the question.”

“That was for Hailey,” Jordan said evenly.

“For... what?! Are you insane? I've barely even spoken to her in weeks! What on earth did I supposedly do to Hailey to merit that?!”

“No, not like that, dumbass. I mean, that was for Hailey's benefit.” Conner only stared, waiting for more. “Ya see, she'll see I put a nice big bruise up the side of your head, and know I care. Aren't I the best boyfriend ever?”

“For clobbering the guy who broke up with her a month ago? I think you're a little late to the avenging party, Edmond Dantès,” grumbled Conner.

“Who?”

“How on earth are you passing literature? We’ve been reading that book for over a month.”

“And it sounds fascinating,” Jordan said, suppressing a well-timed impulse to yawn. “Anyway, “I guess it’s still bugging her, so... here I am.”

“So that’s why you were so insistent I meet with you this morning? So you could punch me in the face? I suppose I should have expected something like this. I guess I should’ve known.” Conner remembered Jordan’s text, having read it a dozen times before finally agreeing to meet here this morning. *Got something to discuss. Nothing bad lol. You’ll be thanking me, trust me.*

“Well that’s not everything. See...” He paused. “Hey, let’s have a seat. Talk. Man to man.”

“Do I have a choice?”

“I could knock your ass on the floor and talk at you, if you’d prefer.”

The Conner who was still coming down from Friday night’s foursome devised something very macho-sounding to say back to him, but cooler Conners prevailed, and he took a seat. “Oh, let’s dish.”

Jordan hopped up on the railing above the orchestra pit and hooked his knees under the lower bar for balance. His eyes went to the little door to the side, storage for chairs and theater equipment. “You guys ever fuck down there?” he asked.

“Who, me and Hailey?”

“No, you and the Phantom of the fucking Opera, retard. Of course, Hailey.”

Conner wasn’t especially interested in talking about such affairs with Jordan, but there was no point lying about it. “Yeah. Sometimes.”

“It’s great, right? I mean, who knew this shithole of a school had a secret like that? Warm, cozy... and of course there’s Hailey. Any more, that’s where I imagine myself whenever I jerk it.”

“Wow.”

“Oh, grow up, Fishers.”

“No, I mean, wow, you still jerk off even though you have two dozen girls fucking you on a daily basis. Seems kind of unnecessary.”

“Eh, fills the time. And I don’t fuck them all every day. Second period’s only fifty-five minutes long. Maybe that’s enough time for you, though, pencil dick.”

Conner drummed his fingers on the armrest of his seat. “Is this all going somewhere...?”

“Sounds like somebody’s got a little sand in their vagina,” Jordan quipped. “Look, all I’m trying to say is... I like Hailey. A lot. How the fuck you threw her away, and how the fuck you were even lucky enough to get a piece in the first place, I can’t begin to guess.”

“How *I...?!*” Conner stammered. “She’s had a crush on me for years! You’re the one who gave her that awful nickname in the first place!”

Jordan snickered. “To be fair, I only came up with it. It was Hayleigh McKnight who made it stick. I think she just wanted to brand herself ‘Hottie,’ personally, and having a foil helped.”

“I’ll bet you fought it every step of the way.”

“Did you?” Jordan said evenly.

Conner wasn’t about to tolerate equivocation. “You’re only using her because suddenly she got hot!”

“And you weren’t? Tell me, how many dates did you guys go on before you swapped those pictures?” Conner didn’t have a counter to that, so he merely glowered. “That’s what I thought. So don’t go pretending you’re on the moral high ground here.”

“Says the guy who’s single-handedly raped more women than most entire prison blocks.”

“Rape? Seriously? I’ve never heard a one of them say no.”

“Well one, it’s not just not saying no, it’s actually saying yes, otherwise fucking a girl while she was passed out drunk wouldn’t be rape, either.”

Jordan rolled his eyes and then yawned again. “You’ve spent too much time with Blake, bro.”

“And for two, they only didn’t say no because you used TIOS to prevent them.”

Jordan raised a brow. “Oh. So, your little situation with Heather... TIOS made that happen too, didn’t it?”

Conner frowned. “No, she and I... I mean, we dated before that.”

“But you dated a lot harder after, right? Or what about Carpenter? You two must’ve been fucking all the time before the TIOS fairy came along, eh? Or what about Miss C? Oh yeah, don’t think I don’t know you’ve been sticking it to that old cunt. TIOS got nothing to do with that?”

“It isn’t the same.” It wasn’t. Was it?

“You didn’t have the sack to do it on purpose, sure, but you sure as shit didn’t give it all up after you found out how you came by it. Did ya.”

“I... no, but...”

“Jesus, dude, I’m not trying to guilt trip you. I’m pointing out that just because TIOS made it happen doesn’t mean you – and I guess they, somehow – can’t have fun with it. You should see my little bitches. Come like crazy, every time. Some people go their whole lives and don’t have sex this good. I did that for them. You think Hailey was ever gonna realize who she was made to be if we hadn’t got involved?”

Conner opened his mouth, but stopped short. He’d gotten to know Hailey pretty well, and it was impossible to deny she wasn’t a great deal happier now that she’d gotten the chance to act out on her libidinousness.

“All right,” he said at last. “So maybe it worked out all right, in some cases. But what about terrorizing Amanda? Oh yeah, she told me about that, how you choked her into submission. Is that all fun and games to you, too? What’s your glib justification for *that*?”

To Conner’s surprise, Jordan actually hesitated at that. It could be an act, of course, but then again, he still had no idea why they were even talking in the first place. “Yeah, that was shitty, all right. You got me there. For what it’s worth I’m not proud of it. But hey, then again it’s not like she’s really *real*, though, right?”

“Not real? Are you kidding me?”

“Seriously. I mean, she’s basically a character in a play, acting out her part. One of these days, the curtains go down, and she’s done. If I built a doll out of clay in art class, is it a crime to smash it later?”

“If you built a *doll*...? Do you even hear yourself? Wherever she comes from, wherever she’s going, she has feelings and thoughts and a fucking heartbeat.”

“Yeah, maybe, but so does my sister’s dog and it’s sure as shit not a person either. Besides, those thoughts and feelings and all aren’t stopping you from letting her go after graduation, though, are they?” Jordan said with a shrug.

His words cut deep, right to that place Conner fought so hard not to go every time he got to thinking about the future. In a flash, his blood was boiling in veins of solid ice. Jordan must have seen something to indicate he’d gone too far, too, because suddenly he was holding his hands up and was reverting to his placating tone from earlier.

“Hey, you got your reasons. And like I said, it was a dick move. I’ll apologize to her, if it makes you feel better.”

Conner took a few breaths to clear his head before he let himself respond. He was too close to tackling him into that orchestra pit, TIOS be damned. If Amanda could suppress it long enough to hold a conversation, Conner could suppress it long enough to knock him backwards ten feet down into the wooden floor of that pit.

*No. He wants you to be pissed*, he told himself, and simply reminding himself not to do what Jordan wanted was enough. “Wait. Since when does Jordan Lyons apologize to anyone, for anything? I remember you got threatened with suspension last December unless you apologized to me, and you *still* didn’t.”

Jordan’s eyes sparkled, and then he threw back his head and laughed so hard he almost lost his balance on the railing. “Oh my god, I almost forgot about that! Did you know that was when it all started? I came by after school to make that bullshit apology, like it’s my fault you passed out, and found you and Miss C going at it. Hailey, too, actually, only she figured it was Blake, not your teacher, you dog. She ran out crying pretty quick.”

That afternoon was burned deep into Conner’s memory, but he didn’t remember hearing a peep outside the editor’s office. “You stuck around, I take it.”

“Sure did. Long enough to hear you talk her through how to see the new, real Hailey, long enough to hear the bitch throw herself at you even though you’d as much as told her that her feelings were as fake as...” He smirked at the narrowing of Conner’s eyes. “Well, they were fake. So I left, tried the same trick to see if I was crazy or what, and... well, here we are.”

“Here we are,” Conner echoed. “And not that this isn’t a fun trip down memory lane, but why exactly *are* we here?”

“Ah, right. Well, what I was starting to say earlier is this: I want Hailey. I... may have fucked a couple things up with her—”

“You? No!”

“—but I can fix ‘em. With time. And once I have her back, I aim to keep her. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me, and as a guy who got the password to edit the god code, I realize what I’m saying.”

Conner tilted his head back. “Never would’ve pegged you as a romantic.”

“Never would’ve pegged you, ah, for...” He winced and waved it off. “Damnit, was gonna do a pegging you joke but it was coming out too queer in my head.”

“Sure, yeah, that makes sense,” Conner bit back sarcastically.

“Anyway, I don’t give a fuck if you understand it, Fishers. I want her, and I’m gonna get her back, whatever it takes. That bruise will hopefully be a good first step.”

“That’s why you hit me? To impress Hailey?”

“You show me a girl who pretends she abhors violence, and I’ll show you a wet cunt lubing up at the sight of her man kicking someone’s ass.”

“Deep. Remind me to cheat off of you in the psych final. Poetry, too.”

Jordan ignored him. “Now where you come in is... I need more time. Six more weeks, and my carriage turns back into a pumpkin, if you take my meaning. You gotta extend the edits.”

Conner could hardly believe his ears – and that he was still making fat jokes in the middle of asking for a favor. “Wait. So you made me come into school early, punch me in the face, and now you want me to give you another year to fuck your little sex ed harem? Are you insane?”

“No. I told you, it’s about Hailey. Those tramps are fun and all, but now that I got Hailey... every one of them is a downgrade. Variety is *not* the spice of life. Once a man’s tasted filet mignon, he doesn’t want to go back to Oscar Meyer bologna.”

“I’m sorry, Kirsten Vaughan and Lauren Tommassini are the bologna in this metaphor?”

“Compared to Hailey? Hell yeah. They’re hot, sure, and Lauren can do this thing where she...” He shook his head. “Never mind. Anyway, I’m done with that. All I want is Hailey. My Hailey, the way she’s meant to be, a fucking goddess. And since I need you for this... well, here I am, asking nice. Straight up, man to man.”

“Asking... you’re out of your mind. No! No way, never, nuh uh, no no no, NO. Over my dead body. Feel free to quote me on any of this, by the way. No. Fucking. Way.”

Jordan was clearly displeased, but he was controlling it well. “What about Carpenter?”

“It takes all three of us, her and me and Miss C. Even if you somehow convinced her – fat chance of that, by the way – you’d still have to–”

“No, retard, I meant... Look, you said Amanda’s got thoughts, feelings, et cetera, right?”

“She does.”

“OK. So if we accept that, then... what happens to her after graduation? You’re going to just... kill her?”

Conner froze. The idea had been in his head for a while now, but he’d managed to keep from thinking too hard about it. His righteousness about what he was saving his classmates from was some balm, but mostly, avoidance was the only way he managed to keep from breaking down. He *had* to stop Jordan. No matter what.

“It’s not... killing her. not the same.”

“Well if she’s alive and has a heartbeat and all one day, and the next she doesn’t because you refused to do anything to help her, what do you call it? Letting her die, I guess, but you’re always ragging us in yearbook about using ten words where five will do, eh.”

“You really don’t wanna go down this road with me, Jordan,” he said in a voice that was razor thin.

“What? No, I’m on your side, Fishers! I’m saying – keep her! Have another year together! And who knows how long they’ll let it keep going. Maybe even forever. Think about that, eh? Maybe you can’t talk Blake down from her big California dreams, and maybe dating your teacher right after graduation is too scandalous for a couple of... well, for the two of you, but... Carpenter? She could be the one. Nothing stopping you from it but you.”

Jordan had obviously given this a lot of thought, because it was almost exactly the reasoning Conner had been pondering himself in his weaker moments (namely, any moment she was in his line of sight). But still... “It ends at graduation, Jordan. There’s too many people who’ve been fucked with too much for me to put my wants ahead of theirs.”

Jordan sighed. “You’re such a fucking pussy, I swear.”

Conner stood. “We’re done here, Jordan.”

Jordan hurried to block his path up the aisle to the exit. “Hold on there, tiger – hear me out, OK? Still got ten minutes to first period, and nobody’s gonna care about seniors being tardy in April anyway.”

“Move, Jordan.”

“All right, fine. You won’t listen to reason, won’t do me and your ex a solid? So be it. Let me just try two more little means of persuading you, all right? And if those don’t work, I’ll let you go and never bring it up again.”

“They won’t.”

“You say that, but... Come on. When have I ever asked you for anything?”

Conner was glaring, but he wasn’t about to take this back into the level of a fight by pushing him out of the way. If he even could. “Fine. Get this over with.”

“For one... like I said, I’m done with my other girls. I really am. I already emailed the class this morning to let them know.”

“You’re a saint.”

“Can I finish? I emailed them to let them know that for the rest of the year, I’ll be having a substitute come in and take over for me, and they’re to behave as well or better for him as they do for me.”

Conner shuddered. “A substitute? You’re going to let some near-stranger come in and have unfettered access to a group of totally obedient sexually charged teenage girls? Is that a threat, like if I don’t give you what you want, you’ll—”

“You’re the sub, Fishers.”

It took a long moment for what Jordan had said to sink in, and even then, his brain was struggling to keep up. “What? But I’m not... I can’t... I’m a student! I have my own classes! And no, I have no interest in... Why would you...?!”

Jordan finally spoke into his incoherent sputtering. “You were the one who said it was rape, said it had to end. I’m saying, it’s not all so horrible. Doesn’t have to be anyway. So I worked it out with Mrs. Prendergast to tweak your schedule. You’ll get full credit for your current class, and you can take over for me in sex ed, starting today.”

“Do I even want to know how you ‘worked it out’?”

“It was gentler than last time.”

Conner shook his head. “No. No way. I’m not going to participate in... that. I mean, Amanda and Heather are in there! What would they even say if I...?” But both of them could tell he was already entertaining the notion. Second period, after all, was Brit lit, and he’d already had all the Shakespeare he could stomach for a lifetime. And he could get those poor girls out of Jordan’s clutches and into the hands of someone who’d treat them with respect.

Plus...

No. No, it was wrong. He couldn’t.

“I thought you might say that, so I went ahead and had Mrs. Prendergast transfer both of them into study hall. As of today, no more sex ed for either of them.”

“And Angelica?”

“Who? Oh yeah, your sister.”

“Stepsister.”

“Whatever. Hmm. Forgot about her. Well I can arrange that, too. Don’t know what Vaughan’s gonna do without her, but she’ll manage.”

Conner had no idea what that meant, but he didn’t care. “Go right ahead, but the answer’s still no. To the subbing, and to the extension.”

Jordan nodded. “Fair enough. So much for the carrot.”

“Carrot?”

“Hailey told me about your fight, in Maui,” he said.

Conner blinked at the sudden shift of topic, mind already racing and taking a long moment to remember what he was referring to. “Oh. Yeah, that was ugly. I did my best to let her down gently, I swear. She was just... upset. I didn’t know what to say.”

“Oh, she told me what you said. Sounds like you did your best.”

“Thank you...?” Conner didn’t know what to make of this.

“Yeah, she said how you kept insisting that yes, you’d been sleeping around, and how awful you’d felt the whole time, and how she deserved better.”

“But instead she got you,” he said.

Jordan disregarded the barb. “Let’s see, how did you put it. ‘I’m such a...’ What was it? Asshole? Prick? No... Son of a bitch?”

“If you seriously expect me to remember my exact words from spring break, you’re out of your—”

“Mother fucker! That was it, wasn’t it? ‘I’m such a mother fucker.’ That’s what you said, right?”

Conner did, in fact, remember using that term. She’d been furious, calling him out on every misdeed or perceived misdeed he’d ever committed. She’d been right about a lot of them, and he’d agreed that, where it pertained to her, he’d been a mother fucker, all right. The self-deprecation had soothed her, at least a little, at least for a short time, so he’d said it a good many times in an attempt to comfort her.

“Yeah, I guess I did say something like that. So what?”

“So... I was wondering what you think might happen if I quoted you on that, in TIOS.”

“Wait, what?”

“Yeah. I mean, it’s a common expression, right? But... isn’t it funny how often TIOS takes what you say in the most literal possible way? ‘I’m a mother fucker.’ What would you think might come of that?”

Instantly, images of his own dear, beloved mother flashed to his mind. She’d made him breakfast not an hour ago, kissed his cheek goodbye before he left. She adored him, and he her. As far back as he could remember it had always been just the two of them, and they’d always been as close as a mother and son could be.

Aside, of course, from the vile thing Jordan was implying.

But Jordan kept right on talking while he was still reeling from the implication. “You know, it would have been easy enough to quote Hailey calling you a mother fucker. She doesn’t cuss much – aside from during sex – but I could’ve gotten it, I’m sure, what with how you treated her. But you know, I’ve noticed how much more effective TIOS asserts itself with a straight-up first person confession.”

“You’re fucking disgusting,” Conner said. “But you can’t quote that anyway. We agreed, nothing that was said from spring break. Remember?”

“No, we agreed not to use anything we *heard* over spring break. I didn’t let her tell me the whole saucy story until we were right here back in the good ol’ U.S. of A.”

“Hawaii *is* in the... oh, fuck it. And fuck you. You do that, and it’s *on*.” With that, he pushed past him, feeling a surge of satisfaction at his capacity to shoulder check the guy as hard as he meant to. TIOS might not let him get in his way, but it didn’t mean he had to stand there and take it either.

Conner had no idea what would happen if it became “on,” but what was he supposed to do? Admit how he was really feeling?

“So what’d he want?” asked Owen, finishing off a granola bar by their lockers.

“More sleazy, disgusting bullshit. Like usual. No. Sleazier than usual.”

“He wanted you to get to school at 7 AM to shoot the breeze?”

Before Conner could respond, his phone buzzed in his hip pocket. A text from Jordan. It had an attachment, and he clicked to download it from the school’s pokey wifi. “Oh, nothing. You know Jordan, man. He just—”

It finished. There on his screen was a picture he mostly recognized, one of him and his mother at her wedding reception a couple years back. Angelica’s cousin Francine had been their official wedding photographer, and he remembered posing for these while the family and friends inside waited to cut cake. In this picture, he and his mother, the newly minted Mrs. Buck, were standing on a hilltop near the reception hall. The sun had been most of the way to setting, but the light had been great for these sorts of sappy pictures. Conner had been standing behind his mother, he in his only suit and she in her wedding dress, a simple knee-length pastel floral thing. Both she and her husband had been married before, and neither had wanted to get extravagant. She’d looked beautiful, and Conner had quietly felt proud of his own presentation that day.

The original had featured Conner standing behind and to the left of his mother, hands on her hips. Maybe it was a weird pose, but they hadn’t hired a professional photographer, so they’d played along with Francine’s directions.

Only in this version, the one Jordan had sent, there was clearly a bit of tampering. Namely, his pants were bunched up around his ankles, and his mother’s dress was flipped up over her waist.

“Dude!” Owen spat out a mouthful of granola on him as he spied what Conner was staring at. “What the fuck is that?!”

A moment later, another text arrived, this one words alone. *Second period, the old print shop. Or we see what TIOS makes of that picture next to*

The text ended mid-thought, but Jordan was already typing the conclusion. “You son of a...”

Another text buzzed. *“I’m the biggest mother fucker in the world.” – Conner Fishers.*

Conner had thought he'd gotten used to the sight of naked girls. Many of these same girls, in fact, he'd seen naked before thanks to Jordan's machinations during Spirit Week and prom. He remembered well the sight of Joanna Pedretti in her so-called "granny panties" on Crazy Underwear Day; Yuri Andersen had made an impression coming to school with her butt and pussy bared on Tops or Bottoms Day; Stephanie Margulies with a bright red nighthawk emblazoned across her bare back, the only covering she'd had on Body Paint Day; Tracy Dunham sniffing at the sidelines, naked as the day she was born, after her date had broken up with her for another girl at prom.

Only now, here they all were.

Conner was still a teenage boy. A year ago, the mere thought of being alone in a room filled exclusively with the hottest girls he'd ever seen with his own eyes... it would have been its own fantasy had they been fully clothed and entirely ignored his presence. Now, they were all of them sitting in their desks, buck-ass nude, smiling pleasantly after greeting him with a "good morning, Mr. Fishers" that was so perfectly in unison it had to have been rehearsed.

His first act as teacher was to tell Angelica to find somewhere else to be. Anywhere else at all. He hadn't seen her naked since last fall at Owen's house, and even in this company, the sight didn't disappoint. This was surreal and confusing enough as it was without adding his beautiful big-sister-but-not-really to the mix.

Stage fright was something far behind their substitute teacher. He'd never been especially shy in that way, and having to assume leadership as editor-in-chief had dried up the dregs of it. However, he was suddenly learning that the old adage about imagining them in their underwear seemed counterproductive, if seeing them in their birthday suits was anything to go by.

"Uh, I don't seem to have a... what do you call it... list? List of your names."

"Roster?" suggested MacKenzie Wolfe.

"Right."

"Looks like we're missing Heather Blake and Amanda Carpenter," someone said, and while several voices echoed assent, someone pointed out that Lindsay Koogan was also absent. Only then did Conner realize he had no way of recording or submitting attendance anyway.

What the hell was he supposed to do here? Teach? Teach what? He'd seen Kristy doing her lesson plans before, all sorts of notes about required supplies and state standards and accommodations for special needs. What sorts of special needs did these girls have? What supplies was he missing? Strap-ons?

"Are you OK?" asked Danielle Bell, looking concerned.

"I'm fine. Just had a little incident earlier, no big deal," Conner said, subconsciously touching the swollen side of his face. There was definitely going to be a bruise. Hailey would be thrilled.

“I like your shirt, Mr. Fishers,” said Sydney Genovese, beaming.

“Oh, um, thanks. I’d say I like yours too, but...” The girls giggled at his joke, like it was any other class sucking up to a new sub, hoping to get on their good side early to get away with murder later. Lots of these girls were solid students, some honor roll even. Nonetheless this level of good behavior was making him almost as nervous as their nudity. “And please, you don’t have to call me Mr. Fishers. I’m a student here, same as you.”

“We can’t call our teacher by their first name,” said Kirsten, wrinkling her nose. “That’s weird. Gotta keep up some boundaries.”

“Totes,” agreed Olivia. “Like, you know how sometimes you bump into a teacher at the grocery store or something and they’re dressed like normal people, and... like, sometimes, it makes me feel like they’re trying to pretend they’re like the rest of us. You know? I dunno. Super weird though, right?”

“Hey, speaking of super weird, how about we all go put our clothes back on, OK?” Conner said. Part of him wanted to kick himself, but it was the right thing to do.

The girls looked confused, and nobody moved from their desk. Mary Buchanan, prim and ultra-religious Mary Buchanan, raised her hand at her desk, waving it to get his attention when she wasn’t immediately called on. He had been distracted by the sight of her bare breast, which he had to say was one of the most exquisitely shaped he’d ever seen, and the waving didn’t help. He doubted he’d ever be able to see her waving like that in class again without his imagination filling in the lurid imagery. And Mary raised her hand a *lot*.

“Uh, yes Mary?” he said finally.

“Mr. Lyons usually tells us when there’s going to be a costume requirement so we can plan ahead. We didn’t know we were supposed to bring anything for today. My slutty nun costume is still in the laundry from when Mr. Lyons came all over it last time I wore it.” Her peers murmured that they too were tragically bereft of fetishized attire.

“What? Costume? No, I meant... good lord. Put your *clothes* back on. What you wore to school.” Nobody moved. “For crying out loud, I saw some of you changing back there, so don’t tell me you don’t have your clothes.”

Still nothing. “Well? I’m, um, your teacher, and I’m telling you to get dressed. Now.” He was pretty sure Jordan had them programmed to do as their teacher told them. There hadn’t been time to review all the edits to the *ccon2se* spread before second period.

Mary raised her hand again, and was again called on. “Mr. Lyons sent us an email earlier, and he was very explicit that the usual rules applied.”

“Well he’s not here and I am,” Conner insisted.

“Right, but he said he might pop in from time to time to check on us, and he said if he found anyone not behaving according to his expectations of us, he’d flunk us.” She

wincing at those words. “*Flunk* us. I’ve never gotten an F before in my life, Mr. Fishers. I can’t fail sex ed.”

All around the room, the girls agreed emphatically. Whatever those expectations were, clearly nudity was a prominent part of them. “Fine,” he snapped, but he then softened his tone. “Sorry. I’m not mad. Just... I don’t quite know what to do here. This is pretty insane.”

“Well, we were learning about licking, so... we could just keep going with that,” supplied Kiara deBartolo. Conner remembered her from their swimming class in P.E. freshman year, and how hard it had been to keep his attention on his lane and off of her. At the time he’d considered himself lucky beyond compare to get to see this vision of a girl in the school’s antiquated regulation swimsuit everyday. Now she was sitting in front of him naked and, apparently, offering to practice licking... something.

“No, I don’t think we’ll be... doing that,” he said, cheeks flushed.

“So what *will* we do?” someone asked.

Conner sighed. “I don’t know. Is there something you’d like to do?” A dozen hands went up. “Something *not* sexual?” he amended.

Down they went.

Neveah Kinslan made a face. It was off-putting, seeing her heavy goth girl makeup atop that naked porn-star-esque body. “Why would we learn about something not sexual in sex ed?”

“Isn’t there anything you usually do that isn’t... sex stuff?”

It wasn’t the whole class, quite, but the response did feature more voices in unison than he could count. “We do whatever our teacher tells us.”

Issuing a mental reprimand to his cock that it had plenty to do already and that none of this fare was intended for its consumption, Conner gritted his teeth. “Well, Jordan’s not here any more.”

Stacy Culpepper, a girl who had once literally laughed in Owen’s face for asking her to dance at a middle school sock hop, merely giggled. “You’re our teacher now, Mr. Fishers.”

The substitute’s head sunk into his hands, already feeling defeated. His whole life he’d thought girls like these were impossible to get, at least for someone like him. To see how easy Jordan had made them... it was too much.

“Just... take a free day, everybody, OK?”

A cheer went up, and in moments, the girls were dissembling into their cliques, or for a few, simply taking out their phones – where had they even been storing them? – and tapping away. Their teacher, however, was utterly disarmed, having not thought to come with a distraction for himself. As such, he simply kept his head down, stared at his desk, and tried to think very proper thoughts about Amanda, Heather, and Kristy.

Or baseball. Safer yet.

“Is it OK if I draw on the dry erase board, Mr. Fishers?” asked a voice. Looking up – then looking down in embarrassment, then up again as confidently as he could – he saw the sparkling blue eyes of Lauren Tommassini, the school’s state-ranked volleyball player. Every single bit of her was lean without being indelicate, brownish blonde hair up in a pony tail behind her. The hair tie was the closest thing to clothing she had on.

“Sure, go ahead,” he mumbled before returning his attention to his desk. Or trying to, anyway. Trying and failing. Because as Lauren helped herself to the supply of dry erase markers at the board behind him, every so often, the motions of her drawing caused her body to brush up against him. First it was her hip against his shoulder. Her buttocks against the back of his head. Then she dropped a marker, and had to ask him to move aside to crawl underneath to retrieve it from where it had rolled to, her whole body rubbing against his calf in the process.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?” she asked later in the period. By then, the whole board was covered in brightly colored doodles. The hands on the clock declared there wasn’t much longer to endure.

“Why do you ask?”

“You keep shrinking back every time I get near you, like I’m gonna bite you or something,” Lauren said.

“Oh. No, you’re fine. Just... first day jitters, I guess.” It’s this, or risking Jordan’s quote, he reminded himself. He was being stoic. It wasn’t his fault if he couldn’t keep his eyes from flickering down to those cute little tits of hers.

“Yeah, I totally get that,” she said. Then before he could blink Lauren had hopped atop his desk, throwing one toned, copper thigh over his head so that one of her feet dangled alongside either of his knees. Her hands gripped the front edge of the desk, which was the only thing obstructing his view of her pussy.

Mostly obstructing, anyway. Wow, was it pink.

“Can I ask you something, Mr. Fishers?”

“Sure, Lauren. What’s up?” His voice nearly broke when he said her name.

“OK, so like, maybe this is kind of awkward, but...” She leaned closer. “Did you used to have a crush on me? Back, say, sophomore year?”

His eyes widened. The answer was an emphatic yes. Sure, he’d had a crush on Heather since forever, but he’d been as monogamous with his crushes as he’d turned out to be with their consummations. Lauren had always been really pretty, and she’d struck him as being rather down to earth, approachable, in a way girls hadn’t often seemed in those days. Not that he’d had the guts to approach her.

“What? Why, um, would you think, I...”

“I knew it!” she declared, laughing as she nudged his leg with her foot.

“What made you think of that?”

She shrugged. Oh, what a difference clothing made in a shrug. “Well, I remember you used to come to all our home games, and some of my friends thought... I dunno. I always sort of wondered, and I guess I figured if you’re not gonna ask a question like that in sex ed, where ya gonna ask it, ya know?”

Lauren was right, of course, though he’d gone to quite a few away games, too. It had been Owen’s idea, actually – any excuse to ogle girls in volleyball shorts – and for once, Conner had had to concede his pervy friend was on to something. “Well... yeah, I guess I did back then. We had geometry together, and you always... I dunno. I just thought you seemed nice. And pretty.”

Nice. And pretty. Four girlfriends in as many months, and that was all he could manage. Though with three girlfriends in the here and now, it was still more than he should be saying to a naked girl sitting on his desk.

She leaned down further, and suddenly her hands were on his shoulders. “You should’ve asked me out, you know. I thought you were a really sweet guy. I mean, I still do, I guess.”

“I have a girlfriend!” he blurted.

After a moment, she burst into laughter, pounding his desk in mirth. “See? Look at you. I barely even flirt, and here you are with a girlfriend. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t laugh. It’s Heather, right? Or Amanda Carpenter? I saw you with both of them at prom at different points.”

“It’s... complicated.”

Lauren nodded. “Totally, I get that. And I would never want to get in the way of that. My mama didn’t raise no homewrecker.”

“Thanks. I guess.”

“But now that you’re my sex ed teacher, if you were still curious about what it’d be like to just, you know, fuck me, I’d be happy to show you.”

Just when he didn’t think he could turn any redder. “WHAT?!”

“I’m pretty good – straight A’s from Mr. Lyons, with a couple A minuses for finishing him too quickly. My pussy’s really tight, I guess. Not that I’m bragging! It’s one of those things I can’t really help. You wanna see?” As he stood up to back away, Lauren took his hand and guided it towards the place where her legs met. He almost let her, but pulled back at the last moment, just as he could feel the heat of her on the back of his hands.

“I’ll take your word for it,” he said hastily.

“Sure, you need time to feel everybody out, I get that. I’m just saying, if you wanted to... well, no, I guess we only have like five minutes to dressing time, so not enough to do it right. I don’t wanna get another A minus on the first day,” she said with a laugh.

“Right, not on the first day,” he echoed, woodenly.

As she set about erasing the board, he no longer bothered trying to scoot away from her proximity. He couldn't have said if he was too shocked to react, or too turned on to resist any more than he already was. With a few minutes to go, the girls got up to get dressed for third period. When the bell rang, he was the first one out the door.

The photo of the *what happens in sex ed* poster had been saved under Conner's login, so at least he didn't seem to be bound by it. Still, there was a good long while where he considered not telling anyone anything. There didn't seem to be much anyone could do about it, after all, and it was likely to only upset the few people he might confide in. There was no way to explain it to Heather without telling her about all of TIOS, and that was not going to happen. He could only imagine how she'd feel to learn about all the things Jordan had done to her. Kristy, likewise, knew nothing of that class and seemed likely to try to intervene if she found out, which put him up against his inability to get in Jordan's way. Even Owen, usually a reliable confidant, would be happier not having to know his girlfriend sat naked and amicably obedient with him for an hour every morning.

Amanda, however, had to be told. He could trust her not to make waves – if she even could – if he asked her not to. Plus, she had taken pains, literal pains, to make herself tell him about her own experiences there, and it wouldn't be right to keep it from her.

Besides, he had to tell *someone*.

After school, they walked the short distance to the Bean Bag under the pretext of discussing some of the final layouts of their staff's spreads. Instead, as they settled into a pair of gigantic bean bag chairs in a quiet nook, he told her everything about his day so far. The punch, Jordan's demand, his threat, the class. Everything.

To her credit, Amanda listened patiently until he finished babbling through it all.

"Wow. He really is a mother fucker," she said at last. "I mean, kind of."

"Kind of?!" Conner exclaimed.

"Well... your punishment is to sit in a room full of the best-looking girls in school, naked, who will do whatever you say. Ya know, you might be the only guy in school who'd complain about that arrangement."

"I might be the only guy in school who's already dating the most beautiful girl he's ever seen," he said, squeezing her hand.

"And dating the biggest boobs he's ever seen, and the hottest teacher he's ever had," she added dryly, lowering her volume for the last one. Nobody was close enough to overhear anyway, if the two of them even merited eavesdropping. "By the way, I still haven't had the chance to call you out for that stunt you pulled at prom."

Had it only been three days? His morning felt like it had been a year unto itself. "Oh. Uh, yeah. I..."

"Save it. If that hadn't turned out to be as amazing as it was, maybe I'd punch you for that, but... I had fun. A lot of fun, actually, even if it was super duper weird. And how long has that been going on with Miss C? Or 'Kristy,' I guess we're calling her now."

"Oh. Uh..."

“So the whole time. Got it.” She shook her head. “No wonder it took you so long to notice I was flirting with you.”

“In my defense—”

“Nope. No defending. You know I get payback now, right?”

“Payback? You said you had fun!”

“For the jealousy thing, ya jerk. You have no idea how...” She cleared her throat, tugged at the collar of her blouse. “Whenever I think about you and them, it’s just... Rarr.”

“On a scale of one to ten...?”

“Seven.” She considered. “Seven and a half. And now that you have that class... Wow. I dunno.”

“I didn’t do anything, I swear!” he insisted.

“I know you didn’t. Conner, you’re the worst liar I’ve ever met. Still, you have... what, thirty-some more school days? Dr. Laugherty has a countdown going on her board, but I forget. How are you going to make it that long?”

“It’s wrong. I don’t care what happens, I’m not doing it. They don’t have a choice about it, and I’m not taking advantage of them.”

“Also you have at least one amazing girlfriend. I’m sure you meant to say ‘I can’t do it because Amanda is such an amazing girlfriend.’ Right?”

“Right. I mean, you are. You really are.”

“I know I am. For crying out loud, I... I did things I can’t even whisper in a public place for you. That’s some epic girlfriending there.”

“You have no idea.”

She arched an eyebrow. “I have *some* idea. I was there, ya know. Gosh, I can’t believe you weren’t freaking out during seventh period. It felt like everybody in the room knew what we’d done. Like every time Heather or Miss C entered my eyeline it was like we were back...” Amanda shivered. Her co-editor-in-chief, however, hadn’t noticed anything of the sort. He’d spent most of his day in a haze, echoes of Lauren Tommassini’s frank offer reverberating around the walls of his conscience. “I guess I don’t have your practice keeping my cool about affairs with teachers.”

Conner craned his neck around the wall of their little nook to where at least a half dozen other Nighthawks were hanging out in several groups. “Yeah, and lesson one is maybe not talking about it in the Bean Bag.”

She made a face. “Sorry. Good call.”

After a moment, she scooted over and joined him on his bean bag, physics doing its part to nestle them against one another. Conner leaned his head on her shoulder, appreciating anew the perks of being with someone half a head taller than him. “So what do we do now?”

He sighed. “About what? My three girlfriends? The boatload of crazy that just got dumped in my lap? The psychopath who at any moment might try to make me...” He couldn’t even say it.

“Yeah. What do we do about that.” Her arm encircled his shoulder. “Maybe start with the first one?”

He looked up at her, but couldn’t hold it long. “I don’t know. It’s... complicated.”

“It’s bizarre, yes, but is it really that complicated?”

“Isn’t it?”

“Think about it, Conner. In a few months, Heather’s going off to California, and she’s not coming back. As for ‘Kristy,’ I guess there’s no law that says a guy who just graduated can’t start dating his former teacher, but you got to admit, it’s going to be a scandal, at minimum. To say nothing of whether you want to be in a long-term relationship with someone almost a decade older than you.”

“Only seven years,” Conner insisted. “This feels like a sales pitch.”

“It is, but that doesn’t make me wrong.” She pulled his forehead in for a kiss. “Then there’s me. I have no plans after graduation whatsoever. I’m the same age as you, I like you, and let’s face it, I’m kind of amazing.”

He grinned back at her. “You are, only...” He couldn’t form the words. The real complication with Amanda was the one subject he couldn’t broach. How might she react to learning her whole life was made up as a distraction by Jordan Lyons? That it was going to end in a few weeks? That the only way to stop it from ending was to give him what he wanted, and convince Conner to do the same?

How could he sit back and watch this incredible, beautiful, confident, affectionate, kind and kindred spirit away forever?

Yet his only alternative was to provide another year where his classmates, some of whom he’d known since kindergarten, were the sexual thralls of a demented bully with sudden delusions of being a romantic.

“We have to break up.”

“I’m sorry, *what?!?*”

## Chapter Eleven

*We've been talking a lot today about what we've accomplished here at Northside, but I wanted to take a moment to let us remember what we've lost along the way. Not always in a sad way, mind you. For instance, thank you to Mr. Steinfeld for coming out to celebrate with us on his one-year anniversary of retirement. Likewise, let's give it up for the six-month anniversary of the end of the NHS dress code! I guess the caps and gowns are kind of a dress code, but we'll let this one slide, Mrs. Beckmann.*

*Still, not all of our moments of loss have come with such silver linings. I'm sure we all have friends who had to move away during our time here, and I hope we've kept in touch. For those losses that are tragically more insurmountable, let's all take a moment to remember those people. Most especially, I'd like to welcome Rick Neuhauser, graduating with us today, who passed back in seventh grade in an automobile accident. It's great that you're here with us again today, Rick. You've been missed.*

He broke up with Heather later that evening. She took it only marginally better than Amanda had, if only because sadness was marginally less alarming than anger. He'd had to insist so many times that what happened after prom with their teacher was no part of it that, by the time he shuffled down her driveway and back into his car, he felt hollowed out. She had known they'd have to break it off one of these days, but they'd both long figured it would coincide with her departure. That he didn't seem to want to enjoy their final months together was a bitter pill for her to swallow.

Why break up with Kristy? He honestly didn't know, but it felt wrong to break two hearts and spare one. She was by far the most understanding, if only because he insisted he'd be happier like this. She insisted that if he changed his mind, or needed a pickmeup, she'd be delighted to provide a little joy. Nonetheless, it was apparent how his decision disappointed her.

He arrived home late that evening; his mother was aghast at the massive bruise on his cheek. Conner told her he'd gotten sucker punched by a bully at school, and that he was taking care of it. She fretted dreadfully, as she always did when her son had a bad day, but he couldn't stomach being held and soothed by her just then.

The next day he stayed home from school. What happened to his "class" when the sub needed a sub, he didn't know, and he didn't care. They couldn't possibly be doing anything in his absence that was a more egregious violation of school rules than what they'd done when he was there. Still, being cooped up in the house with his mom waiting

on him hand and foot only exacerbated his moodiness, as a constant reminder of the predicament Jordan had put him in.

He remembered when Jordan had come by the house that past winter, ostensibly to work on a yearbook project but in reality to steal his TIOS password, and how that son of a bitch had eyed his mother. How it had made him realize she was still an attractive woman by any standard. How he found himself trying not to look at her.

He'd seen Amanda's efforts to resist TIOS's compulsions. She broke out in sweats and even started shaking, nearly seizing, if she kept it up for more than a few minutes. If she even could. It was as jarring, she said, as stepping off a cliff and trusting there to be some invisible ground underfoot, then trying to keep walking over thin air, never knowing where the boundaries lie.

How long would he be able to hold out if...?

Maybe he could call Hailey. Convince her to take Jordan back? But that wouldn't do him any good. The more Conner thought about it, the more he feared that if he remained resolute about not extending TIOS, the jerk might input that quote out of sheer spite. After all, Jordan could do it the Friday before graduation Sunday and those forty-eight hours could be sufficient to scar Conner for life. Helping Jordan get his sex puppet back wouldn't do him any favors if she doubled in weight mid-June and he no longer wanted her.

There was nothing to do but wait and see, to try not to feel that deep sense of angst every time his sweet, lovely mother came to check if there was anything she could do for him.

The next day Conner left home, but he never made it to school. Kristy texted him to make sure he was all right, and to apologetically touch base on a couple of yearbook matters that were time-sensitive. He responded simply that whatever she and Amanda decided was fine. If the school called to ask about his whereabouts, his mom didn't mention it that evening. Angelica was good enough not to razz him about it in front of her either.

Finally, Thursday he made himself go back to school. He ditched second period again; those girls were the same age as him, so it was preposterous to think they required or benefited from his supervision. The rest of the day was just awkward. Pretending not to acknowledge Hailey's smirk at the fading bruise on his face; trying not to notice how hard Heather tried not to notice him; enduring the ice in Amanda's tone as they were forced to collaborate on a project in seventh period; guiltily dodging Miss C as she tried to hunt him down on his way out the door to check on him.

Jordan, however, had more success in that regard.

"Finally made it back, Fishers, ya fuckstick. Man, that's worse than I even meant it to be."

“You should see the other guy. This’ll fade, but he’s gonna look that ugly for the rest of his life.” Conner retorted. He didn’t break stride, forcing Jordan to hustle alongside him.

“Heh. Nice one. Hey, so the girls tell me you didn’t teach Monday, and you didn’t show up today. What gives?”

“I didn’t feel like baby-sitting your harem,” he replied.

“Yeah?” Jordan suddenly brought his hand down hard on Conner’s shoulder, not merely stopping him but pivoting him about face. “Well start feeling like it. That’s the deal, Fishers. I heard about how you and Blake broke up, and from the looks your other bitches were giving you, sounds like it’s going around. That’s good. Time to have some guilt-free fun, man.”

“Guilt-free? *That* is your definition of guilt-free?” Conner shook himself.

“I’m saying, do your job. You don’t want to make me ask again, do you... mother fucker?”

That smirk was no bluff. With all Jordan had already done, Conner had no doubts he was capable of making good on his threat. Best case scenario, he wound up fucking somebody else’s mother, or mothers exclusively, but even if those prospects weren’t frightful enough, Jordan’s doctored picture would assuredly steer Conner where Jordan wanted him.

“Fine,” he said at last through gritted teeth. “Do you have a roster? I at least want to know who all I’m supposed to be looking at.”

Jordan’s smirk bloomed into a shit-eating grin. “I’ll get you one. Set you up with the admin login so you can even enter attendance, grades, email the class, all that shit. Sound good?”

“Anything I should know that’s not in TIOS? To be clear, I’m *not* touching them, but if you’re so dead set on me ‘teaching,’ I at least want to know what to expect.”

“Most of it’s right there in the page. Hmm, let’s see. Tuesday is costume day, Thursday is lingerie day, so nice work missing those. We’ve covered normal sex, oral, anal – briefly, turned out it wasn’t for me – pole dancing, strip tease, and a handful of fetishy things where it amused me. Definitely try spanking Ashley LeBeau. She... well, you’ll see.”

“I’m not spanking anyone.”

Jordan spoke right over him. “What else... I mean, you can basically do what you like. They’re trained guy-girl, girl-girl, guy-girl-girl–”

“I get it, you turned them into sluts.”

He shrugged. “Plenty of them were already. I just gave them a place to stop feeling embarrassed about it.”

Conner almost snapped something sarcastic about how Jordan was totally blameless, but didn’t want to arm him with such a quote. “Fine. Anything else?”

“You got it. Do whatever you want with the grading – any time someone isn’t giving an assignment their best effort, just tell them they’ll fail them and watch that enthusiasm for learning spark.”

“You actually give them homework and real grades?” Conner asked incredulously.

“Nah, I give ‘em whatever the hell I like. I only flunked a few of them first nine weeks, mostly just to see how they’d take it.” He laughed. “Not well. But hey, they’ll definitely go the extra mile, even out of class, if you give them an F and offer extra credit.”

Conner fought down his revulsion. “Great. Whatever. We’re done here.”

He was rounding the corner when Jordan called out to him. “Done? Baby, you’re just getting started!”

“If your parents find out you quit the track team and your ‘practices’ are actually dates with us, Owen, they’re not going to ground you. They’re going to kill you,” said Angelica.

Kirsten stopped her ride on his cock long enough to make sure her laugh came out with full derision. “What, id Owen afraid of big bad Mommy and Daddy?” She sneered at Angelica, who was leaning over the back seat watching her boyfriend fuck his girlfriend. “C’mon, my man’s no pussy. He just has to put up with his folks for a couple more months, then he’s on his own and can do whatever and whoever he wants.”

There was an uncomfortable quiet in the car as, one by one, each of them pondered who all might be included in that nebulous “whoever.” Angelica knew her preference, but for the time being, Kirsten Vaughan was Kirsten Vaughan. Even aside from being genetically perfect, with flawless skin and hair and complexion and a body that instinctively filed away every last fat cell in the precisely right location to titillate the male gaze, she was also one hell of a fuck. Like everybody in their sex ed class, she’d learned thoroughly how to please a man, and if she didn’t plead for more of Mr. Lyons’ lessons as much as most of the girls did, she nevertheless received a lot of hands-on instruction.

For now, Angelica told herself for the hundredth time, she’d wait, and bank on them tiring of one another when there was no more social benefit to fucking each other. The hottest girl in school and a guy who could have any girl he wants... they were a celebrity couple. Their brand, comprised of their initials, was a term she’d even heard some underclassmen use to describe good matches. “Eddie and Delilah would be totally OK,” someone had said in her seventh period. Ugh. Angelica couldn’t wait for the glamor to fade and for one of them to move on.

It may well never happen, but she had little choice but to wait.

It was the owner of that coveted cock who broke the silence. “They’re not going to find out, Ange,” he assured them. “Shot and disc guys alternate between the fieldhouse and the middle school football field, so even if they check up on me, I can just say I was at the other place. Plus Coach Conrad is lazy as hell, so the meet schedule’s not even on the websssssite.”

His voice was broken up a bit as Kirsten resumed her humping, the car shaking softly from front to back. Angelica wished there was something else to look at, but they were low on private spaces and thus made the most out of Kirsten’s garage. Her housekeeper, who Kirsten glibly explained was also her father’s mistress, could not be relied upon for confidentiality. Ergo while Kirsten’s suite was no good, Donna Maria didn’t ever come into the garage. Only once had they been surprised by the garage door opening sooner than expected, but there had still been plenty of time to hunker down, throw a blanket over the lovers in the spacious trunk of Kirsten’s SUV, and wait for Mr.

Vaughan to go inside. Garage doors offered a lot more warning than the other sort, they had all learned.

“Yeah, I guess. I just don’t want them to flip out on you. Your mom, she’s pretty next level about this, and if she finds out you’re lying... I dunno. I’ve seen it happen where people hit that breaking point in their trust. It’s not pretty.”

“Are you gonna sit there talking about his cunt mom the whole time we’re fucking? Jesus, Angelica – if you insist on following us around like a little lezzie freak, the least you could do is find something sexy to talk about.”

Angelica remembered their lessons on dirty talk. Kirsten had *hated* it at first. She lived her life fully embracing and enjoying being a sexual icon for boys; still, her mouth was purely for bitchcraft, as she put it, and she vehemently resented forcing it to follow suit after her body. Mr. Lyons had partnered them up for practice. Since it was a group grade, the second-time senior had taken her obligation to educate the younger girl seriously, but Kirsten would always make a better dominatrix than a call girl.

Already Angelica was missing second period. Ever since Mr. Lyons re-assigned her as a library aid, she’d found a little spark was missing from her day. Maybe it was weird, but starting her day off with a few orgasms and a nice naked workout had actually been kind of invigorating most days. She wouldn’t miss her creep of a teacher, but he was at least committed to their education. How Conner had gotten the gig during Mr. Lyons’ absence, she couldn’t imagine. She pitied these girls having to deal with Conner and his wishy-washy puritanical notions of sex. She knew better than most people how sucky it was to quit one’s steady diet of sex cold turkey. Some of the girls were happy enough with their female classmates – a few even preferred them – but most preferred cock. Her little stepbrother was too infatuated with those girlfriends of his to give them their proper education, she suspected.

Maybe she should give him a nudge, encourage him to take his job seriously? But no, what happened in sex ed should only be discussed in sex ed – and she was effectively no longer enrolled.

As for her own sex life, it continued to consist of watching Kirsten fuck Owen with a smirk on her perfect face, oftentimes assisting him in getting the blonde off while hoping each time that it might be one of those days where she felt generous enough to let Angelica have some dick.

Today, for the fourth date in a row, was not such a day.

At Kirsten’s bidding, she tongued her clit like a snake on speed when she came close to climaxing. With her help, the buxom beauty didn’t come down for almost an entire minute. She could feel Owen throb and spew come into the girl, snuck a little stroke at his shaft while they were both distracted by their orgasms, and then slunk back to her seat while they got dressed. It was always so transactional with Kirsten; use him to get off, exchange her orgasm for the thrill of being allowed to touch her. The only time

she even got all that excited was when she could combine sex with her love of bullying Angelica, forcing her to join in for whatever degrading act she had in mind that day.

Then it was over. She'd give Owen a lift home, dropping him off down the street so his parents wouldn't see him arrive with her. The ride home would be awkward and mostly silent, or at best idle chit-chat. She knew full well he was still interested in her or he'd have told her to get lost a long time ago. With Kirsten calling the shots, he seldom even benefited from her participation in their threesomes. Most times, if she got to touch him at all it was incidental to Kirsten's efforts to use her as a fuck toy.

But he wouldn't say it. He wouldn't act on it.

He planted a half-hearted goodbye kiss on Kirsten's flawless red lips. "See you tomorrow, K." She opened her car door, readied to head out to her car with him.

"You know it, O. And hey, Angelica – do you have the notes for Dr. Laugherty's quiz tomorrow?"

"Huh? Oh, I think so. You need 'em?"

Kirsten looked at her like she was an idiot. "Why the fuck do you think I brought it up?"

Owen rolled his eyes at his girlfriend's catty behavior for the millionth time. "I'll meet you at the car, Ange." He gave Kirsten a perfunctory goodbye kiss, then opened the garage door and made for his car a short ways down the street.

Angelica nodded and grabbed her bag, sifting through it to find her physics notebook and holding it out to Kirsten as she smoothed her skirt down over her flared hips. "What are you doing?"

"Uh, you said you wanted my notes...?"

Again, that look of exasperation. "That was to get to talk to you alone, dumb-dumb. I'll get the answers from this dork in first period like usual." Of course she would, Angelica thought. It never ceased to amaze and disgust her the way guys lined up to do her favors. Angelica knew she could probably manipulate the geeks if she needed to, but even if the practice wasn't a little gross, she'd also have to apply effort to do it. For Kirsten, they just offered.

"So... what's up?"

"Can we talk straight? No bullshit?"

Angelica folded her arms, eyes narrowing. Considering Kirsten's tendency to speak her mind as plainly and cruelly as possible, she could only imagine what "straight talk" might entail. "Sure. No bullshit."

"Great." Kirsten climbed into the back seat across from Angelica, indelicately waving her round ass in her face as she squeezed over the seats. She settled down with her knees against Angelica's thighs, closer even than was necessary in the close confines of the SUV.

"So...?"

“So I know you hate me and you want to steal Owen from me,” she said bluntly. “Don’t get me wrong, he’s hot all right, and it’s for sure a turn-on knowing the guy you’re fucking could be sticking it in any cunt in school and he picked yours. Every time, just... *suck it, every single one of you bitches, ya know?*”

“Uh...”

“But why you fixate on his crotch like a dog on a milkbone, I can’t relate. He’s above average at best.”

Owen was, in Angelica’s experience, actually big bordering on huge, but maybe Kirsten’s infamous college boyfriend she’d had until dumping him for Owen had been a porn star or something. Or maybe she was only trying to slight Angelica’s taste to be a bitch – which sounded far more likely to her.

Angelica shrugged and said, “He barely fits in me. Maybe you’re just loose.” Kirsten’s eyes sparkled like they were about to shoot lightning bolts. “Sorry, you said you wanted to talk straight.”

After a moment, Kirsten seemed to decide to see the humor in it, and let it pass with a smirk. “I think he fits just right,” she went on. “But since there’s no denying you want him more than I do, I thought I’d make you an offer.”

Angelica steeled herself. Access to Kirsten’s boyfriend’s cock was always conditional. “What is it this time? Wash your car? Do your homework? Babysit Olivia?” That girl got dumber by the day, she’d swear it. Angelica had never seen a girl giggle so often or so easily.

“None of the above, thanks.”

Angelica folded her arms across her chest. “I know you’re not looking to do me favors, so... what do you get out of pimping him out, Kirsten?”

The blonde reached out and tucked a stray wisp of hair behind Angelica’s ear. “You,” she said simply.

“Me? What do you mean, me?” She scooted a few inches back.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m not some dyke or anything. Open-minded, sure, but I’m straight. Still, I gotta say, the way you bow and scrape and grovel for that man... I’d be bullshitting myself to pretend I don’t love it. So that’s what I want. You do for me like you do for him, and he’s yours. For good. Or however long you can keep him amused after he’s had all this.”

Angelica’s mind was racing. She could have Owen back – the way things were! She’d get to fuck him and suck him and get that cock in her and on her and through her every day. She could stop feeling like some kind of leper. She could help him get over this vindictive, manipulative cunt and make him happy again. It felt like it had been so long since she’d seen him happy for longer than it took for his jizz to rush from his balls to Kirsten’s pussy.

Only... “What exactly do you expect me to do?” she asked guardedly.

“Whatever I want. Oh, don’t pout like that – I don’t want to humiliate you publicly or anything. But when we’re alone, you do what I want you to do. I’ll even try to make it fun. And no ducking me, either. I call you, you answer that phone and get your ass where I say I want it.”

“So, what, you’re saying you want me to be some kind of... on call sex toy?” Angelica laughed at the notion.

Kirsten, however, did not. “Yeah, basically. Like I said, it’s not that I’m into girls. But seeing a hot little ass like yours scurrying to do what it’s told... not gonna lie, I could watch that shit all day and not get bored.”

“You seriously want me to...?” Angelica stared, incredulous.

“I seriously do. Or hey, you can stay in the back seat and keep sucking his cum out of my pussy. Suit yourself.”

Angelica considered. She was basically Kirsten’s bitch already – Olivia could hardly hide her jealousy – and this could conceivably give her back what she’d rightfully seduced. Owen’s parents were a problem, sure, but he wasn’t going to be living at home much longer, and frankly, his parents only had so much room to be upset that their cute nineteen-year-old son was hooking up with girls.

Suspicion was a necessary filter around Kirsten Vaughan, however, and Angelica didn’t let her unslaked lust dull that inclination. Simply because she was offering it didn’t mean she had to take it. Maybe she was bored with Owen and looking to move on, so she figured she’d cash in? Angelica didn’t feel like buying her neighbor’s junk at a garage sale when she could just take it out of the dumpster that night.

Not the most flattering metaphor for Owen, true, but with the smell of his and Kirsten’s commingled fuck sauce heavy in the car, she wasn’t inclined to be charitable at the moment.

“Suppose I take you up on it. What’s to stop me from just blowing you off, keeping him for myself? He likes fucking you well enough, but that doesn’t mean he’s gonna automatically take you back if I renege.”

Kirsten looked pleased, if anything, to have her opponent consider such malfeasance. The cat enjoyed its game more when the mouse struggled. “You really think taking him back is the only way I could get to you? I know you so well, Angelica.”

It was a vague threat, and maybe it was a hollow one. Kirsten, Hailey, Ashley, Olivia and their whole clique might be the queen bees of Northside High, but that didn’t mean she was omnipotent. Besides, school was ending soon, and Angelica knew better than any girl at NHS how much graduation ended that era of girl drama.

Nonetheless, to say Kirsten was vindictive was like saying fire was hot.

“Fine,” Angelica said at last. “Trial basis. You push it too far, I’m out, come what may. And you will call Owen back in here right this minute to inform him of your decision, or no deal.”

Kirsten's phone was already in her hand before Angelica finished her sentence, and Angelica had barely had a chance to wipe off any smudges of Kirsten's lipstick from her mouth when the garage door once more swung open.

“You seem stressed, Mr. Fishers,” said Lauren, plopping her bare ass down on his desk.

Conner thought before responding that her presence was only compounding that very issue. “Hey, with the last few weeks of school ahead of us, who isn’t,” he said.

She wasn’t put off so easily. Like the rest of the class, their teacher and his apparent apathy towards their behavior and education – or “education” – was rather baffling, even distressing. In large part this was because they expected a teacher, even one who was a fellow student, to take their job more seriously, like their other teachers. In larger part, this was because they couldn’t understand why he was so resistant to their charms when their old teacher, and really, every straight guy at Northside, were so receptive.

As they dutifully probed this conundrum, Conner had had to insist that they stop trying to touch him or he’d report them to Mr. Lyons. This had lead into an involved discussion of the distinction between the girls being bad and the girls being naughty, one which had left him going to sleep that night with the first case of blue balls he’d had in half a year.

Still, unless he wanted to micromanage every single one of them, it was impossible to stop them from trying to get to him. For some, it seemed to be a game. Olivia and Kirsten and some of their friends broke into a fit of giggles when they caught Conner staring at them as they compared busts; only then did he realize the comparisons were old hat to them, staged solely to attract his attention. He didn’t catch what Kirsten called him as he look away, crimson, but he doubted it was polite. The next time he looked up, several of them were openly masturbating at their desks, and it was impossible to tell if they were still toying with the sub or if this was simply how they passed the time in here. None of their peers seemed to object.

If they objected to anything, it was to his literal hands-off approach. Whatever Jordan had done with TIOS to make them think of this as a real class, some of them actually expected to learn something, or at least to be given opportunities to get good grades. Regardless of what they might have thought of pole-dancing demonstrations and having to write essays about their most depraved sexual fantasies, those had at least been assignments. In spite of everything, the presence of that semblance of normalcy had been enough to quell their misgivings and give them something to work towards.

For reasons beyond their comprehension, their teacher had left them in the hands of this shiftless, lazy substitute, seemingly with no lesson plans whatsoever, nor anything other strategy to occupy them. More than once, they’d approached Conner with some very frank suggestions about the sorts of things he might ask them to do in order to better assess their learning. Not counting sex ed, he had three other classes a day with MacKenzie Wolfe, and it was increasingly hard to concentrate on class when he

could hear her voice echoing in his mind, offering to show him how good she'd gotten at sucking a cock while simultaneously tit-fucking it.

Insofar as intelligence was measured in this class, a lot of these girls were rather brilliant, and annoyed that they didn't get to show it off. Some of these girls had never felt successful in any class in their lives, and Conner almost – *almost* – felt bad for not letting them pursue that feeling.

Then there were the girls who were just plain bored. They didn't particularly care to take advantage of the hyper-sexualized environment for self-amusement, and they weren't worried about their GPAs. They simply resented him for adding to their school day an entire hour of sitting around with nothing to do and nowhere to go. Unsure what else to do, he brought in some board games his mom still had sitting around at home from when he was younger. The novelty lasted all of one day, then it was back to glaring at the man who'd made them get out of bed at 6 AM only to have one class, then go right back to sleep. Only naked, in public, and at a cold and uncomfortable desk rather than a soft warm bed.

He invited them to make use of the modular gymnastics mats they'd evidently borrowed from the gym to sleep on and apologized that the school didn't let him adjust the temperature. They rolled their eyes, unfolded a mat, found a partner to snuggle with for warmth, and tried to sleep it off.

As for Conner, he spent each class period sitting at his desk, doing his best to get some yearbook work done and not be distracted by the dizzying array of flesh all around him. The costume days were somehow even harder. Nudity was at least in some ways natural, but the whorish outfits they'd rustled up for his class were impossible to read as anything but advertisements for their sexuality.

That day was such a day. Lauren, for instance, had changed into a pair of sparkly plastic shorts, obscenely brief and tight, and a cut-off t-shirt so brief it left her nipples exposed if she didn't tug it down every time she moved her arms. Which she didn't. Most days in the week and a half since he'd taken over, the girl amused herself by doodling on the board; today, apparently, she felt like chatting.

“So, what's getting you down, Mr. Fishers? Wanna talk about it?”

He arched an eyebrow. “With you?” Lauren had always been nice to him, but they were a far cry from friends. He'd been invited to her birthday party in first and second grade, but that was as close as they'd ever been.

“Sure. Why not me?”

He couldn't help but smile at her plainspoken offer. “Thanks, but I'm not sure I could explain it all if I tried. Lots going on, I guess.”

She nodded. “Yeah, I hear that. Still, ya know, I'd be happy to try to help, if you want. A while back, we learned how to—”

He held up a hand. “Please, I definitely don't need a blowjob. Thanks, though.”

Lauren arched a neatly sculpted brow. “I was about to say how to give massages, but way to assume I can’t wait to get your cock in my mouth.” She batted at his arm playfully.

“Oh. Sorry, just...”

“Yeah, I know. These girls are like babies needing pacifiers with those things. Anyway. So...?”

“So... what? You mean, a massage? No, I’m really OK.”

“Come on, I’m good at it. Really. You’ll feel better. And it beats sitting here doing nothing all period again, right? Not your fault Mr. Lyons didn’t leave you anything to do.”

Four or five increasingly feeble protests later, Conner found himself laying down on a padded massage table the girls kept folded up behind the changing screen, his face looking at the cold tile floor through a window in the surface.

“Wanna take off your shirt? I can do it with it on, but it’s a lot better without it. Your call.”

“Shirt on,” he said quickly. He would not let this massage snowball into something else.

“Suit yourself.”

A few times over the years, Conner had found himself in the happy position of having someone give him a backrub, and each time it had been delightful. Not because the girl in question had been especially skilled, of course, but because it had been a girl, any girl, touching him, and because backrubs were relatively hard to screw up. For the first time, he was receiving the treatment from someone who had an actual idea of what she was doing.

He had to say, the distinction was profound.

Lauren found muscles he hadn’t known he’d had, hadn’t known how much tension they’d been carrying, and targeted them with laser precision and dogged firmness. By the time she asked again if she could persuade him to remove his shirt, he did so without even thinking twice. She knew what she was doing, and he’d be damned if he was going to stop her. Before long, he could see the toes of multiple girls gathered around the table, though Lauren shooed them away from doing... whatever these girls might think to do. They stayed close, though, he was sure of that, yet he couldn’t be bothered to care about having an audience. Once upon a time, Conner would have had a of panic attack being half-naked and surrounded by girls like these, but that Conner was long gone. This one was lying here wondering where they’d been hiding that fragrant oil that the captain of the volleyball team was now rubbing over every inch of his skin.

He didn’t realize how eager his erection had grown until she climbed on top of him and mashed it into the table. Thank goodness for that padding.

Lauren didn't warn him first; one moment she was grinding an elbow into his shoulders, and the next, her weight was pressing down on him. Neither said a word; it seemed to simply be part of the act for her, nothing more than a better way to apply pressure where needed. As she bent down to rub up and down his arms, her mostly bare breasts lay firm against his back, and though he'd seen them dozens of times by now, the feel of them was something else, and immediately he found himself missing the sight.

As the five-minute mark arrived and the girls began to dress themselves for third period, it was that precise thought that he was only half-realizing. So naturally when she asked if tomorrow, he'd like her to do his front, he agreed without a second's hesitation.

Conner saw Lauren several times that day. Once in the halls, again the cafeteria, and she delivered a packet of papers to Mrs. Brantley during her period as an office aide. She acted like nothing was weird, except when she caught him staring at her next to Mrs. Brantley's desk. Then, her only reaction was to give him a soft smile and depart without a word. Whatever had happened that morning, she didn't treat him like he was anyone but the same old Conner Fishers.

Maybe he hadn't taken advantage of her after all. Maybe it was a platonic thing that simply happened to occur with the pair being three quarters naked on account of unrelated and incidental happenings.

Maybe she was still grateful for the Hannah Montana CD he'd gotten her in second grade.

In any case, the next day she reminded him of her offer to do the front, and he acquiesced almost immediately. She said nothing of his erection throbbing in his jeans, not even when she once more joined him on the table, its length nestled in that blessed space between her naked thighs.

The day after she did the front again, only this time they were both completely naked. And that time, he fucked her.

“Hey, sorry about the other day,” Lauren said the following Monday as she finished stuffing her clothes in her purse. “I hope you’re not mad or anything.”

“Wait, you’re apologizing to me?” Conner sputtered, his own apology having been preempted. “How could I possibly be mad at you?”

She smiled. “Good. We kind of have an unspoken policy not to talk sex ed outside of class. Just... super weird, you know? Nobody would feel comfortable sharing or experimenting if that stuff was going to become public.”

He blinked. “Are you talking about when I tried to talk to you in the hallway?”

“Uh, yeah. Why, what’d you think I meant?”

“I meant where I made you have sex with me!”

“Made me... what? Conner, I’ve been trying to get you to have sex with me for like two weeks now.” She laughed, then laughed harder. Nearby, more than a few girls laughed along at this apparently absurd notion. “I’m sorry, it’s just... we had sex, and you thought...” She shook her head, fighting down still more laughter. “Didn’t you have fun?”

“Sure I did! I mean, a lot of fun, actually, but...”

“But...?” she prompted when he failed to articulate an objection.

“But I’m, um, your teacher. I was taking advantage.”

“Wait, you think... you forced yourself on me? Is that it?” She looked stupefied by this notion.

“Of course I did! Someone *made* you take this class, *made* you do what the teacher tells you! Someone made you all get naked and learn how to dance and strip and massage and... and fuck! Then here I come and right off I’m taking advantage of the position you were forced into. It was wrong.”

“Oh, Mr. Fishers,” Lauren said, voice oozing sympathy. Most of the class was watching now, intrigued by their teacher’s outburst. She sunk into his lap, stroked his hair. Conner tried to push her hand away, but she persisted. “You’re right – about some of it. It’s super lame they made us all re-take sex ed, and I guess some of our class policies are a little... ya know. Out there. But that doesn’t mean you did something wrong.”

“Lauren, I–”

But the volleyball captain had some experience in talking over people when she needed to flex her leadership muscles, and she could do it without even raising her voice. “Before I took this class, I’d never had sex with anyone. I’d jerked off my ex-boyfriend, thought it was gross, and hadn’t gone any further than that. I was probably gonna wait until marriage – or tell myself that I was, and then eventually get drunk and hook up with some rando in college. But know what I learned in this class?”

“What?”

“I learned that I really, *really* like sex.” She paused, but Conner didn’t know what to say to that, so she went on. “In hindsight, I can’t believe I was waiting. Not that I’m a slut or anything, but like, what’s wrong with two people having sex if they both have fun?”

Mary Buchanan sneered. “There’s a lot *wrong* with it. Pleasures of the flesh are still against the will of god, even if they’re... you know.”

“Pleasures of the flesh?” said Yuri with a smirk. Mary only gave her a dirty look before clasping her cross pendant – the only thing she wore – and murmuring a brief prayer.

Lauren shook her head. “I’m not getting into the Christian stuff, but I’m not really religious, and I don’t see the problem. I like sex, I’m in a place where I can do it safely and privately, and... well, you have the only cock in the room, Mr. Fishers.”

“And the only reason I’m the ‘only cock in the room’ is because someone locked you in here with me,” he insisted.

“What, so like, you feel guilty or something?”

“Exactly!”

Lauren flicked him in the forehead and giggled at his reaction. “Well stop it. I get it, you’re in sex ed with a bunch of cute girls. Sure. But hey, some people are born to rich families, some people ace a test with lucky guesses... Hell, my own brother has this thing in his genes where he doesn’t get itchy from mosquito bites. You got to teach sex ed. Maybe someone else made it happen, but don’t feel like you’re in the wrong just for being lucky.”

“Lauren...”

“I liked having sex with you. Did you like having sex with me?”

Of course he had. His memory had made a permanent file for sightings of Lauren’s ass in her volleyball shorts years ago, and the real, naked, jiggling thing was even better. “I... um...”

“I didn’t hear a yes, and I’m about to be kind of offended,” she said, but she was smiling.

“Well yes, I did, but–”

“So whatever’s making you feel bad, get over it! Whatever brought us all here, everybody enjoyed it and nobody minded!”

“I minded,” said a girl’s voice. Lauren and Conner both scanned for the source and soon found it in the reproachful countenance of Sydney Genovese.

“Syd...?”

“Mr. Fishers, you used to check me out, *all the time*. Remember? Like, back in eighth grade, or maybe seventh, we had the same gym class and I swear, you and Luis probably lost twenty pounds between the two of you running right behind me, every day. Remember?”

He'd forgotten, actually, until that moment, but as the class snickered over the accusation, she went on. "Then you show up as my sex ed teacher, and you don't even *try* to fuck me? You didn't even touch my butt or anything. No offense, Lauren – I'm only saying, there are other asses in this class."

"Oh. Um... I'm sorry...?" Conner said reflexively.

But Sydney only glowered. After his inaction only threatened to continue, Lauren whispered in his ear. "I think she wants you to... you know."

This could not be happening. Lauren, insisting he was being silly *not* to take advantage of his position. Sydney, glaring at him because he *wasn't* being a pig. Then again, he remembered Heather, complaining how he'd never so much as asked to fuck her legendary tits; Kristy, chastising him for not having more developed fantasies of his teacher; Amanda, practically enraged that he'd seen her only as a colleague and not a potential sexual partner.

"Sydney... can I see it?"

She folded her arms across her chest and refused to look at him. "You've seen it, like, a hundred times now. You just didn't care."

"No! I mean, well, yes, I *saw* it, but like, I was trying not to look. This is my first time teaching sex ed, or whatever this is, and I was trying not to make you uncomfortable."

"I took off all my clothes, and you took that as a sign that I didn't want you to look at me?"

"I'm sorry, OK?" Somewhere inside him, the eighth, or maybe seventh, grader who'd pretended to be mad at Luis for making him jog behind the petite blonde, watching her pony tail shimmy in time with her butt cheeks, was indeed sorry. Albeit for different reasons. "Come here and let me check it out, OK?"

She frowned, but he thought the frown lessened as she finally strode over to him, turning away and thrusting her butt back at him for inspection. It really was a glorious thing, tight and perky and all muscle, a dark-colored slit just visible between the cleft. "Wow," he said after a moment. He'd meant to simply humor her, but once he got to staring, it was actually pretty hard to look away. "That is one amazing ass, Syd. Seriously."

"You don't have to tell me, I'm the one who ran cross country the past seven years to sculpt the damn thing," she said, but she was smiling now, if barely.

"You know it's all right to touch us, right? This is sex ed, Mr. Fishers," instructed Lauren. When Conner did nothing, she took his hand and, with far less resistance than he felt like he should have mustered, placed it right on Sydney's taut bottom. She surprised him by squirming deeper into his grip. It was insane how toned it was. Kristy jogged four or five days a week and her ass was nothing like this.

"Nice, right?" Sydney said, somewhat smug.

“Wow. Yeah. So nice.”

“You see, Mr. Fishers?” Lauren said. “You need to ditch those inhibitions if you’re going to be a good teacher. Or at least, if you want to have any fun with your job.”

“I... I...” Conner stammered, tongue-tied by the ass in his hand and the ass in his lap.

“Girls – how many of you were offended Mr. Fishers didn’t try to have sex with you?”

Numerous hands flew up. Sydney’s. Then came Stacy, Abby, Neveah. Kirsten, of course. She’d broken up with Owen out of the blue less than a week ago and she was nonetheless offended her ex’s best friend wasn’t trying to fuck her. That ego was unparalleled. Olivia’s hand went up on a quarter second delay behind Kirsten’s. Then other hands came up, more timidly. Jennica, Stephanie, Courtney, Ashley. Soon, all but a few hands were up, and those seemed to correspond to girls he’d seen nodding to Mary’s anti-sex outburst earlier.

“So, are you gonna teach us or what?”

## Chapter Twelve

*Looking back, I can't even imagine where the time went. My calendar says that finals were four days ago, but I can't convince my brain that it wasn't four years ago. Remember spring break? Who could forget that? That was actually two months ago, not a lifetime, like it feels. Going through the day to day could feel like such a slog, but now all I can wonder is where all the time went.*

*Just like that, it's over.*

"Hey, Amanda, what would you think about swapping the order on the homecoming parade and career day? I was thinking the homecoming parade would make more sense next to the... Oh. Um... I take it you don't like it."

"I've never been dumped before, OK? Now I'm locked in a room for an hour a day with the guy who did it, so I'm allowed to angry cry once in a while."

"Oh. Yeah, I know this is kind of awkward and all."

"Ya don't say."

"Look, I just want you to know—"

"Switch 'em. Anything else?"

"Uh, no. I think that's it."

"Good."

*Five days later*

"Say, could you hand me the—"

"Get it yourself, then shove it up your ass. Unless you've got one of your little sex ed sluts filling it already."

"Come on, don't be like that. This—"

"This wasn't your idea. I know. You've only said it like a thousand times. And I believe you. Which only makes you all the more pathetic for not coming up with the idea for yourself, since you were going to fuck everyone who's not nailed down anyway."

"I'll get it myself."

"Peachy."

*One week later*

"What is it this time?"

"Sorry – I'm heading out, the office is yours. I just wanted to say you look really nice today, Amanda."

“I look really nice every day, asshole. Say, maybe you should enroll me in your little class so you can see just how nice? Wouldn’t that be swell, sucking your dick for B+’s! Your magnanimity is unparalleled!”

“I’ll leave you to it then.”

*Twelve days later*

“Hey, you two. Either of my editors-in-chief have the final sales tally?”

“Yeah, Miss C. Total yearbook sales this year: 1,488. That’s market saturation of just over 72%.”

“What? That can’t be right.”

“Maybe it’s too soon to spoil the surprise, but what the heck. Us girls got together while you boys were distracted by the sportball contest and stole math and the ability to change tires all by ourselves. Brace yourself for the collapse of the patriarchy.”

“No, I only mean... last year, we only sold eight hundred and change, and that was our best year ever. Are you sure?”

“Let me see... hmm, one plus one, plus one, carry the one, plus one, plus another one...”

“We get it, Ms. Carpenter. You two should be so proud! Not only did you put together the best annual Northside has ever had, but better yet, more students than ever are going to take it with them. I knew you two were savants the moment I laid eyes on you, but this... I’m blown away, seriously.”

“Same. You know, I never could have done this on my own.”

“I know it.”

“Thank you, I guess is what I meant to say. You did an amazing job.”

“I... Yeah. I mean, you too. I guess.”

*Two weeks later*

“Cleaning out your desk so soon, Conner? What, did Miss C find a third editor-in-chief?”

“Nah, I’m just... just clearing out.”

“Why? I mean, we still have two weeks of school left. Unless you’re dumping all the finishing touches on my desk.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“You’re acting weird. Stop, and tell me what’s going on.”

“Look, I should have offered a long time ago, but... I’m moving my stuff out of the editor’s office. It’s all yours. I’m sorry I didn’t clear out back after... you know, and gave you some space.”

“Oh, good grief. I know I was mad for a while, but you don’t have to go slinking out with your tail between your legs. Sit down, unpack, relax. I’m not gonna bite your head off or anything.”

“Says the hundred-pound bitch off the leash...”

“Heh. All right, maybe I will. But you owe me a head, at least, so sit down and take it like a man.”

“As you wish.”

“That was so not a *Princess Bride* moment.”

“What, the film with the giant rodent?”

“Have you... no, you’re rhyming. Oh my god, stop. Just stop.”

“Someone get this chick a mop.”

“OK, get back to packing.”

“I’m done, I swear.”

“Good.”

*Fifteen minutes later*

“You going to the party after graduation at Bear Lake Sunday?”

“Yeah. You?”

“Yeah.”

“Cool.”

“See you there?”

“Sure. That’d be nice.”

That was all there was to it. Time went on in its inexorable way as if to gently remind the soon-to-be graduates that there was nothing to do but go forward. So they did. Owen and Angelica stole away for whatever moments they could. Angelica paid her private penance to his ex. Heather invited Conner to go shopping with her for her college dorm room furnishings. Jordan ignored Conner, who returned the favor in kind. Miss C quietly reveled in seeing her star pupil smile more day by day. Amanda quietly sulked in seeing her co-editor seem to miss her less. Nothing was quite perfect, but then, it seemed likely nothing was meant to be, and that good enough was good enough.

It was June 2<sup>nd</sup>, only four more days of class before graduation. Most teachers were done with lessons for the year. They were either reviewing for finals, hounding students for make-up work, or showing barely justifiable movies to oblivious classes while they hastily caught up on grading at their desks. Mr. Fishers, as he'd slowly gotten used to being called, was an exception in more ways than one, and meant to go on teaching right up until the end.

"All righty, we're going to need a volunteer." Conner opened class immediately after stripping down to his boxers. Today was a "costume day," a holdover from Jordan's tenure he hadn't been able to correct. With the girls dolled up in myriad skimpy and tantalizing outfits, he didn't want to jump the gun.

More than a dozen hands shot up. His students were increasingly eager to get in on these lessons, as many had realized they'd soon go back to their regular, sexless lives, fraught with awkwardness, shame, risk of pregnancy and disease and all those other things they'd learned about in this and their conventional sex ed classes. It had taken Conner some time to come around to the realization, but these girls, beautiful though they all were, didn't all have instant access to mutually desirous sexual partners, and most were keen on enjoying their "education" until the end.

"Ashley, come on up," he said, then immediately weathered the storm of sighs and muttered complaints. He tried not to show favoritism, but it seemed no matter who he called on, some were certain the girl was a teacher's pet.

Ashley beamed as she staggered up to the desk, walking uneasily on towering heels that complimented her parody secretary costume. Her hyper-curved body was stuffed into a blouse that wouldn't have been able to be buttoned even if she hadn't elected to tie it beneath weighty tits. A skirt that probably wouldn't have fit her appropriately ten years ago, before her wide hips and out-thrust ass developed, completed the ensemble.

"All right, now today we're... no, no, you can stay standing." He helped her back up from her knees. Jordan had some of them trained to preempt intercourse with oral, and though he'd assured them it was unnecessary and couldn't even find anything in TIOS requiring it, many persisted in the warm-up exercise. As if the sight of two dozen nubile half-naked classmates weren't enough.

She giggled and apologized, “Sorry. Habit!”

“I know – no worries. So today, I wanted to take the opportunity to stress the important of safety. Who knows something about how to keep safe when you’re ‘getting yo freak on,’ as you guys call it?”

“Nobody calls it that,” said Elaine with dry bemusement.

“Come on, I keep up with the hip young lingo,” quipped Conner. After seeing his full social awkwardness around the gaggle of pretty girls, he’d taken to covering for it by pretending at being a lame old teacher. It worked well enough. “Now come on. Safety. Whatcha got.”

“Condoms,” said Danielle.

“The pill,” added Joanna.

Jennica answered without waiting to be called on. “IUDs.”

“Don’t get, like, totally super drunk and pass out, or like, fuck some totally random dude or chick or whatever?” guessed Olivia.

“Little young to be drinking, aren’t ya?” chided Conner.

“Mr. Fishers, get real!” she protested, giggling.

“All right, so those are all, more or less, good thoughts. What the heck are they paying me for? No, but actually, I was thinking of last Friday’s incident.”

As one, all eyes went to Sydney Genovese, who still had a little bruise on the side of her head. The ambitious cheerleader had taken it upon herself to try having sex standing up, one leg over Conner’s shoulder – only in the middle of things, she’d cramped up, lost her balance, fallen and hit her head on Lindsay’s desk. For a sickening moment he’d worried she’d been gravely injured, but she popped back up with an embarrassed grin.

She offered to finish him off with her mouth, but he sent her to the nurse just to be on the safe side.

“So. What can we learn from what happened to Sydney?”

“Don’t be a cum-drunk little klutz,” sneered Kirsten. As usual, people laughed no matter how mean she got. It was the only thing to do to keep oneself out of her crosshairs.

“Stretch?” said Sydney once they quieted down. “We always stretch before practice, and I guess I sorta forgot in here.”

“Great suggestion,” Conner agreed. “Mind you, stretching probably isn’t necessary for most sexual positions. Still, if you’re going to fuck like a cheerleader, you gotta stretch like a cheerleader, right? Plus, with bodies like yours, what guy wouldn’t get excited seeing you ladies limber up? Win win. So Syd, why don’t you take everybody through some basic stretches and get us warmed up while I get started with Ashley.”

Sydney began, instructing everyone to stand up and make space in the middle of the room. A few girls balked, but a gentle reprimand from their teacher as Ashley drew

down his boxers with her teeth was more than sufficient. As usual, he let the girl pick the activity, and sure enough Ashley had him in her mouth in seconds. Sometimes he wondered that girls would choose to suck cock when alternatives were available, but then again, he liked going down on girls, too, so maybe it was the same? He didn't know. He'd learned more about sex this past month than he probably would in the rest of his life. He'd learned enough to know he'd never learn enough to keep him from wanting to learn more.

With Sydney's semi-practical display unfolding, he knew he wasn't going to last long. No matter. He had all period, and all week. Then that would be that. He could see why Jordan had thought this experience might corrupt his judgment. Not only was it an opportunity to fool around with most of the hottest girls in school, but it was also proof positive of what Kristy had tried to tell him all along. From the very first time he'd expressed misgivings over TIOS playing a role in her new-found appetites, she'd insisted there was nothing wrong with two consenting adults consenting to be adults. Someday he'd have to thank her for that lesson, along with so many others.

Then, as he was erupting in Ashley's mouth, the door swung open, and in stepped Jordan Lyons.

The two of them had two classes in common, and so they saw one another every day. Nevertheless, they had both developed some skill at the art of avoiding the other, which had made cohabitation somewhat more bearable. Nevertheless, in this particular class, Conner also happened to be stark naked, so his first instinct was to cover himself. With his clothes folded and sitting on his desk chair – save for his underwear, which were currently in use as a kneeling pad – Conner looked around for a frantic moment before settling on the most immediately available concealment. Namely, Ashley's face, which he held firmly in place on his cock.

To her credit, she didn't make any fuss over it, and continued dutifully slurping away.

"Mr. Lyons? What the hell are you doing back?" demanded Neveah as he swaggered in.

"Oh no, does this mean Mr. Fishers is leaving us?" asked Mary, clearly disappointed. She'd made her peace with her Catholic upbringing by engaging only in exchanges of oral sex, a freedom which her prior teacher had not permitted. Conner had even told her she didn't need to participate at all, but she still sucked his cock at least once a week, insisting she wanted to *earn* her participation grade. Besides, she'd reasoned to her fellow students of faith, it would be handy to have some methods short of intercourse to keep future husbands satisfied with waiting for God's approval.

Her husband would likely be content to wait for a very, *very* long time.

Mr. Lyons silenced the class's rumblings with a raised hand. "Just stopping by to check in with my sub, bitches. Why don't you give us a little privacy? Everybody partner

up, rub your tits against your partners and giggle nice and loud for me, OK? And do it at the back of the room so the men can talk.”

There was some grumbling, but nobody balked at an explicit order from their teacher. Each girl found another, glumly shuffled to the back of the room and did exactly as he'd said. It was unclear whether tit-rubbing was to be done topless or not, so there became a mixture of girls who removed their tops and those who didn't. It was hard to giggle without smiling, evidently, and so soon the classroom was filled with a chorus of high-pitched tittering from giggling girls engaging in an activity that could serve no purpose but to titillate the male gaze.

Ashley, meanwhile, knelt between her teacher and her sub, peering up curiously but exhibiting no outward sign of impatience or discontent.

“Nice little fig leaf you got there, Fishers.”

“What the hell do you want, Jordan? I wasn't aware you were planning spot inspections.”

“Easy, dear colleague. I'm only checking in, seeing how things are going out this way. Looks like you got these fillies good and trained, eating out of... oh, let's call it the palm of your hand.” He tapped Ashley on the head. “Leave the nice man in your mouth, sweet cheeks, but let's get that ass up here.”

Ashley complied, awkwardly struggling from her knees to standing up bent at the waist. Conner was braced for a scraping, but to her credit, he barely felt a tooth. “You expect me to believe you weren't keeping tabs on what was going on down here.”

Jordan, meanwhile, was admiring the ambiance while moving up behind the girl and undoing his pants. Conner reflexively averted his eyes, and by the time he glanced back, Jordan had sandwiched Ashley between them. She was trembling now, her body primed for something it had never before experienced even in the chaotically sexual environment of sex ed.

“Can't say as I have been, actually. For one, you know full well that the poster means I can't do check-ups.” He gestured to where, on the east wall, the *What happens in sex ed...* poster was hung. It had been ripped one day when Conner was fucking Tracy Dunham against the wall and she came so hard she lost her balance. A little scotch tape had patched it right up, though.

Jordain continued, “And for two, I gave the class to you and I meant for you to do whatever you wanted with it. Can't say I'm surprised these whores broke down your reluctance, but I guess now that you and Blake and Carpenter and... ahem, 'Kristy,' are done, it was only a matter of time.” As he spoke, he began a leisurely rhythm of thrusts into Ashley's waiting pussy. Almost immediately, her mouth, wrapped placidly around Conner's cock, initiated a fresh blowjob, tongue slathering him eagerly as the force put into her from behind substituted the usual bobbing motion.

“Yeah, yeah, you locked me in a room full of beautiful naked girls accustomed to daily sex without consequences, and I gave in. It doesn’t make you any less of a shit for setting this up in the first place.”

“Oh come on, don’t play at being offended, Fishers – you’re a garbage actor. You know as well as I do that this class is the highlight of most of these bitches’ days. At worst, it’s a blow-off class, and at best, they get to spend an hour fucking and getting sucked on. Tell me you don’t buy the lie that girls don’t love sex every bit as much as we do, man. You’d think Hailey would’ve taught you that, if nothing else.”

Conner didn’t have a ready retort for that. As he finally drudged one up, Jordan cut him off. “Did you ever take my advice, give this little skank a swat or two?”

“What? No, I did not spank them. For crying out loud, I’m not a sadist – why would I...?”

He trailed off because right then, Jordan wound up and gave Ashley’s round, quivering bottom a smack that echoed around the classroom, audible even over the omnipresent mindless giggling. For just a moment, she opened her eyes wide as a sound that was somehow a mixture of shriek and groan reverberated through Conner’s cock. Then they squeezed shut again, and she was sucking him off like never before. Her hands lanced out and clamped down on his buttocks, pulling him into her mouth so that in the next moment, she was in effect being fucked at both ends. Jordan, his smirk at the ready, gave her a fresh spanking every so often, and she whined if he took too long about it.

“Sadist? Yeah, she sure seems like she hates it,” he laughed. “Doncha, Ash?”

Her only response was to whimper and shimmy her ass from side to side invitingly. “What on earth did you do to her? This is pretty sick, even for you, Jordan,” Conner accused.

“Pretty sure this had nothing to do with me, man. She was like this from the first time I gave it a go. She forgot her costume, I gave her a little incentive to remember, and... the rest is history.”

“Mmm, I haven’t forgot again, Daddy,” she mumbled as she lapped at Conner’s shaft.

“So, things not going so hot with Hailey?” he asked. “Must not be, if you’re down here with us.”

“Far from it. That shiner really did the trick, honestly, plus a bullshit apology. Got all the pussy I can handle from her without having to worry about satisfying these brainless little nymphos.”

“They’re not... Jesus, can you even get it up if you’re not fucking someone over or shitting all over them? Just because they had the misfortune to attract your interest doesn’t mean they’re subhuman.”

“Whatever, man. As far as I’m concerned, this is a no holds barred sexnasium. Girl walks through those doors, she’s just another plaything in our toybox, same as all these other bitches.” He gave Ashley another slap on the ass, and Conner could tell she came then and there.

There was a silence then, at least from the two boys plugging either end of Ashley LeBeau. The girls were still jiggling and giggling, many of them already sweating with the exertion of the perpetual motion they’d been ordered to. Which only made them look hotter, as perverse as the situation was to Conner. Ashley was going to make him come; that was for sure. Even with Jordan’s bucking torso and self-satisfied face in front of him, the girl was sucking his cock, and how. For some reason he didn’t want to go before Jordan, and opted to distract himself before he lost the unspoken contest.

“Well? Am I relieved as your sub, ‘Mr. Lyons’?” he asked snidely.

“Looks like she hasn’t relieved you quite yet.” Jordan rained a few blows on her backside, and Conner’s cock popped right out of her mouth so she could wail and plead for her daddy to keep punishing her. “But nah, if you really want to know, I was curious if you’d reconsidered our arrangement. Coming down to the wire, you know.”

Conner glanced around. The class was still panting with effort from their “assignment;” Ashley was clearly in another world. It seemed safe enough to talk. “Yes, I’ve considered.”

“Oho! And?” The jerk’s eyes glinted.

“Not a damn chance. And your coming here today only made it all the more clear. I won’t give you another year of this, degrading and abusing these girls. Sex is sex, but it’s clear that you’re not going to be satisfied until every last one of them is…”

Hailey. That’s what he’d meant to say. But Ashley began deep-throating him just then, loudly gagging on his cock, and it threw him off. Still, Jordan got his meaning.

“The girls I could take or leave. Except the one.”

“So it’s what, true love?” Conner rolled his eyes. Then they stayed rolled for a moment as Ashley dove down again.

“Sure. I mean, why not? I’m as human as the next guy. Maybe I’m not some faggot romantic like you, but hey, weird as it is, Hailey and I are made for each other. At least, the way things are.”

“Could you be a little more shallow?” Conner snapped. “God, do you even know how pathetic you are? You say you love her, but it’s nothing more than the sex that you really love. She turns you on and does what you say, and you can’t tell the difference between a girl with low self-esteem and a strong libido, and a girl who actually has feelings for you.”

“Seriously? So physical attraction, that’s nothing to the noble Conner Fishers, huh? That’s why you waited until Hailey flipped to have a go at her, huh? And your other little skanks, too – the fact that they’re all fuckin’ hotties had nothing to do with your

interest. If I'd used a pic of acne-scarred paraplegic with a cleft palate instead of a sexy redhead with legs for days, you'd still have humped it out with your little soulmate. That what you're telling me?"

Conner wished he could formulate cogent response, but... right then, he came. Even his second time that period, he blasted forth like a geyser; it was almost a surprise he didn't feel it splat into the back of Ashley's skull. She didn't even stop. No, she only swallowed and moved from gargling his dome to slurping his balls, squealing in fevered delight as her "daddy" spanked her ass beet red, then came in her, bucked her to the floor, and cinched up his pants. Conner, meanwhile, hastily retrieved his own underwear, and so the two stood at least partially covered, each eyeing the other with a baleful glare over Ashley's trembling, masturbating body.

"You're so full of shit, Fishers. I got one up on you, and that pisses you off so much you'd rather let her die than let me be happy. Yeah, I know I've pushed you around here and there, but this? This is pathetic. Everything that's happened, the one thing you care about is getting payback on my sorry ass."

"The one thing I care about is protecting them from a prick like you."

Jordan sneered. "That's why you're such a miserable little fuck. For once in your pussy life, you've got something that makes you exceptional, and your only thought is to use your edge to keep anyone else from being exceptional, too."

"Say whatever you want. The answer's still no, Jordan."

Jordan shook his head, tugging his shirt back on as he walked toward the door. "Does she even know, man? Did you ever even tell her?"

"If I thought it'd make anybody's life any better, I would."

"You mean, if you thought it'd make *your* life any better. You're the biggest fucking coward I ever met, man. Me, I did some nasty shit to get what I got – shit you don't even know about. Shit that keeps me up at night sometimes, to be honest. But fuck me, I'd rather go down swinging."

He left. The door slamming behind him.

Conner told the girls they could knock it off, then both they and he slumped into their desks, catching their breath. He couldn't let that asshole bully him again. Jordan was manipulating him, again – that was all there was to it. Only... was there anything to it? Was he really being selfish? Was he...

His phone buzzed, and he saw it was a text from Jordan. It had come so fast he couldn't be farther than the end of the hallway. *You got until Friday to reconsider, "Mother fucker"*

The threat was still there. God, that son of a bitch even had him doubting his resolve. He didn't know what would happen if that quote went into TIOS, but he couldn't let that stop him. Amanda found the strength to resist it, briefly, occasionally.

He could too. If it meant... *that*, then he could resist all weekend if he needed to. Then TIOS would reset, and everything would finally be over.

Amanda, too.

Conner needed advice.

A great deal of contemplation went into determining that no, there was no way to frame his plight as a hypothetical and seek his mother's advice. No suitable metaphor seemed to exist that covered the range of his inability to confront Jordan directly, his dread of losing Amanda forever, or his dread of what he might do if that quote were entered. Try as he might, Conner could find no way to circumspectly ask, "is it still the right thing to do if it means I have to live the rest of my life knowing I fucked you, mom?"

So that was out.

Angelica was no good, either. Yes, she knew about the existence of TIOS, and while he'd never told her much about what all it had done, she certainly knew firsthand about Jordan's depraved activities. Bizarre as it may seem, she somehow didn't connect the two, seeing no link between her craving for her neighbor's cock and meekly serving as Jordan's sexual plaything for several months. Nonetheless, he'd put her through enough already, and he already knew her perspective would be too biased to bother seeking. TIOS had turned her into a cock-sucking slut, and she'd say anything she could to get out of that bind. Which was more than fair. Of all the things he'd done as editor-in-chief this year, that was the one that he regretted the most.

Owen was no good in this capacity, either. Yeah, he'd gotten over the break-up with Kirsten quickly enough. (Conner had made good and sure of that before allowing her to continue in his class, though he never had actually fooled around with her. She was one of those few, like Mary, who didn't seem interested for some reason.) By all accounts Owen hadn't availed himself of any of the other options despite the "any girl he wants" quote. Nonetheless, Conner knew his best friend better than he knew himself, and the guy simply wasn't going to take what Jordan had done lying down. Even if he did, Conner couldn't imagine how he'd feel finding out his fling with Kirsten Vaughan had been the result of a computer bug, that his confidence and popularity were a farce.

His other friends knew nothing of TIOS. The only other people who did were Amanda herself, who was obviously not an option, and Kristy. He cringed at the thought of Kristy finding out about what all Jordan had done. Conner definitely couldn't tell her about it – she'd lose it. Jordan deserved her wrath, yes, but Conner wasn't about to sic the school authorities on him.

If only there were some way he could tell her, but insure that she'd keep it strictly in confidence.

"Of course, Conner. You're my student, yeah, but only for a few more days. You're going to be my friend for long after that. Anything you tell me as a friend stays between us."

He smiled as he typed it up in a blank spread and hit save. “Thanks, Kristy. I’ve missed talking to you outside of class. It’s weird, you know? Pretending we’re normal teacher and student.”

She smiled at him in that way she did, as he did at her. “Now, as to the nature of this liaison, is this something I should be locking the door for, or...?”

“No, nothing like that,” he said hastily.

“Well, so much for my birthday present,” she said with a little laugh.

“Oh! I totally missed it! I feel like such an ass – happy birthday!”

She waved it off. “It was last week. Terrible time for a teacher’s birthday, honestly. No energy and totally slammed, and I’m supposed to be excited to go out to a country line dancing place with my sister.”

“Wow, she really does not know you.”

“She knows I don’t run into former students on the south side of town like I do when I hit the venues up here on the north. Then again, nowadays the idea of being scandalized by my kids seeing me in my club wear is kind of passé.”

“Mmm, club wear.” He hadn’t meant to entertain the fantasy, but once the seed was planted, the words spilled out in spite of himself. “Sorry.”

Kristy only grinned at him, shook her head, and excused herself to lock the door after all. She returned and settled down beside him on the two-cushioned sofa. “Don’t apologize, Conner. I know you said you wanted to call things off, and I of course respect that. Considered doing the same myself more than once. But you also know full well that if you wanted me to play dress-up for you...”

“I know. And you’re making it really difficult to not take you up on it.”

“You think I’m making it difficult now? I’m barely trying. I can show you making it difficult, if you like.”

For a long moment, he considered letting her. “Maybe another time. After graduation, or something.”

“If it’d make you happy. I’ll miss this couch, though. You really know how to turn a woman into putty once you get her on this thing, you know.”

Conner flushed, part pleased and part simply aroused, and cleared his throat before continuing. “Thanks. Yeah, I, um, actually wanted to talk to you about something else. If that’s OK.”

Like that, she dropped the subject. “Sure, Conner. What’s up?”

“It’s about Amanda,” he began, and then, for a long time the words simply poured out of him. He didn’t tell her everything, quite, but he didn’t hold back much. He managed to avoid the sex ed class altogether, though he came near enough to mentioning it that he was sure she could tell there was more he was leaving out. Still, by the time he finished babbling through it, he’d at least adequately explained his present plight.

“That’s... a lot to take in,” she said finally. It was the first time in nearly an hour she’d spoken more than to prompt him to continue. She was clearly disturbed.

“I know it. And I’m sorry to dump it all on you. I just didn’t know who else I could talk to, and I’ve kind of been freaking out.”

“Well I can certainly see why. You know, it’s not quite sinking in yet, but when it does... wow. Amanda, appearing right out of nowhere like that. You know, I’d even thought before that it was weird how little she talked about her old school. Like, I’d think a yearbook editor-in-chief would wax nostalgic, but she’s always been such a closed book. I guess now I know why.”

“Yeah, it threw me for a loop, too. Still not sure what it means, her being created by TIOS, but it still feels plenty real, ya know?”

“I think you and I know better than most how real Amanda feels.” For once, Kristy’s own cheeks flushed a bit, remembering their post-prom foursome. “As for Jordan... ordinarily, I’d take that boy aside and put him through his paces, but... well, you came to me as a friend, so I won’t make this an official matter if you don’t want me to.”

*Good old TIOS*, he thought. “Thanks, Kristy. So... what do I do?”

“On which issue? Seems to me you’ve got three.” She ticked them off on her fingers. “The extension question, the related issue with Amanda, and then there’s Jordan’s little threat.”

“Any and all subjects would be nice to have some counsel on,” he answered.

She took a moment to consider, leaning back against the armrest and stretching out her legs across his lap. It wasn’t flirtatious, not really, merely a sign of her level of comfort with him.

“For the extension,” she said after a few minutes, “I think you have to go with your gut. It requires unanimous consent of the three of us to override the reset – if I’m phrasing all that technical jargon right – and I’ll tell you straight up, I’m fine continuing. This has been a great year for me, the best year of my professional life. It’s been an interesting year for NHS in general, truthfully. This school could use more interesting, frankly, and I know I could use more...” She trailed off, eyeing him only briefly.

“So if you decide to extend, you have my support. I can only imagine what all Jordan may have done – and something in your eyes tells me I’m happier not knowing – but sometimes you have to weigh the good against the bad.”

“The bad feels pretty heavy, though,” he said hesitantly.

“Sure it does. You’re a kind person, and the idea of bad things happening to people can’t feel good. But you’re also a leader, and I think you know a thing or two about keeping your eye on the prize. Big picture.”

“So you think I should extend it?”

“That’s not what I said. I said *I* would extend it. I said *you* should follow your gut.” She jabbed a finger into his belly to emphasize her point.

“All right. What about Amanda? Should I... hell, *can* I tell her? I mean, how do you tell someone their whole life is a spin-off from a few stray words input into a computer program?”

“I don’t know that that’s entirely true, Conner.”

“No, it’s true – I can show you her profile. It’s–” He reached for his laptop, discarded next to the couch, but she stopped him.

“You miss my meaning. I’m willing to believe that’s how it started for her, but is it fair to say that she’s nothing more than her origin? The friends she’s made, the contributions to life here at Northside, the connections she’s built... those have all been her. Those are real.”

“So you’re saying she’s as real as you and me, then?”

She leaned her head back, waves of frizzy brown hair dangling off the arm of the loveseat. “I don’t know about all that, Conner. Metaphysics isn’t exactly my area of expertise. The only philosophy I’ve ever really studied was to understand this weird compulsion to please you, and I wouldn’t call myself an ‘expert’ on that either. I’m only trying to say that simply because a flower’s made out of silk doesn’t mean it can’t brighten a place up.”

“So a no on metaphysics, but a yes on metaphors.”

Reference to vocab terms never ceased to make her smile. “You know what I’m trying to say. Which is to say, I don’t know. You have an easier time seeing through the fog when it comes to TIOS than I do. She definitely feels very real from where I’m sitting.”

“So I should tell her?”

The direct question gave her pause for a long moment. “I don’t honestly know. If you do, I can foresee one of two responses from her. One where she freaks out and does everything in her power to convince you to let her... stay? If that’s the word.”

“‘Stay’ feels better than ‘live,’” he grumbled. “What’s the other?”

“The other, I worry she’ll freak out and go the other direction. It can’t be easy finding out you’re... part of a story. She might not want it to go on.”

Conner frowned. “So I shouldn’t tell her.”

“Sweetie, you ought to know me well enough by now to know that I believe in a person’s right to freak out in extreme circumstances. I’m not sure how much good it’ll do, but if you’re asking for my advice, I think that for her sake, and for your sake, you’ll feel a lot better down the road not playing god and at least giving the girl fair warning.”

It was quiet for a little while, then. In the hall, they could hear a custodian bulldozing the superfluous end-of-year garbage down the hall. There was always more around this time, as lockers emptied out and lazy students opted to use the floor as a

trash can. Kristy didn't speak; Conner sat there, imagining how he would broach the subject to Amanda, and how she might react. The first option seemed impossible, and the latter seemed potentially catastrophic.

"All right," he said at last, drained from merely acting out the conversation in his head. "So what about this situation with Jordan, and this nasty little threat of his?"

"Ah, yes, the 'mother fucker' thing. On that front... well, I have an idea, but I'm not sure you're going to like it. But if it works, at least you shouldn't have to worry about any Oedipal complexes."

"Whatever it is, I'll definitely like it better than *that*." He leaned in. "What's your idea?"

“Thank you for coming in today, Mrs.—”

“Just Barbara, please,” said Barbara, seating herself awkwardly in a desk clearly intended for her. It was strange, sitting in one of these. It had been more than a decade since she’d last done so. “And it’s no trouble. I work from home, and I set my own hours.” Still, she made sure her tone conveyed that it was at least *some* trouble.

“Oh? What do you do, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Homemaker,” the woman added curtly.

“Ah, very cool. The unsung heroes, right? Your stepson seldom opens up about his home life, so I only recently realized his father had remarried. I’m sure we’re well past the congratulations point on that, but still, I’m at least glad I could get ahold of someone.”

“Yeah, Harry’s hard to reach sometimes. Believe me, I know. On the road as often as not, so I’m just happy when I know where he is, much less what he’s up to.” Her tone was pleasantries with a twist of girl talk, but really, Barbara was glad whenever the son of a bitch was gone. She had no doubt he’d cheated on her – she didn’t do the laundry but she inspected it sometimes before the housekeeper got hold of it – but still, a prenup was a prenup, and it was a small price to pay for her lifestyle.

Small enough, anyway.

“Sure, sure. I take it he’s traveling presently, then?”

“Look, Miss... Cozy Lewandrozy,” she said, frowning at the teacher’s nameplate. Who hyphenated two unpronounceable names like that? “How about we get to it and you tell me what I’m doing here today. What’d he do this time?”

Miss C nodded. “Kristiana’s fine. Kristy, if you’d rather. And, well... I’m not sure we have time to cover what all your son has been up to. He’s been a very busy boy.”

“Yeah, he’s a regular handful, that one. Still, aren’t there, what, three days of school left? He’s about to become society’s problem. Maybe we can just let the world sort him out as best it can.”

Another nod. This woman was placating her, and barely bothering to hide it. It grated. “I’m sure it will try, but there are nonetheless some things we still need to address while there’s time, and I wouldn’t be doing my job as an educator if I didn’t at least make an effort.”

“Try away then, Miss Kristy,” Barbara said dryly, wishing to god she had a martini to help her through this. Honestly, this woman didn’t look much more engaged than she was, as if talking about the boy was so boring for her she could only go through the motions. Lord knows Barbara couldn’t be bothered to pass on information about the kid.

“He’s, well... sorry, excuse me,” the teacher said, stifling a yawn. “You know, it might be easier to show you than to tell you. Would you mind coming with me?”

“I suppose not,” Barbara said. What had the little shithead done now? Vandalism? The way he treated their guest house with his little girlfriend, Barbara wouldn’t be surprised.

The pretty young teacher stood and lead her out of the room. With classes done for the day, there was practically no one here, though Barbara could recognize the overall sense of abandonment that colored the halls. She herself had been out of high school for fifteen years now, though she remembered it with at least some fondness. She’d been the It girl then, the hottest cheerleader on the squad, had her choice of the boys and was invited to every party worth going to.

Now, she was just a bored trophy wife spending her allowance and making sure her own marital indiscretions maintained their discretion.

The teacher didn’t seem to feel the need to make more chitchat while they went wherever it was they were going, which suited Barbara fine. Hopefully this would be over soon so she could get back home and have the chance to lay out by the pool for a while and watch Antonio the pool boy do his “work.” She tried not to notice the way the janitor’s head snapped around as she walked past. Surrounded all day by nubile girls prancing around in as little as the school’s dress code let them get away with (if they even had a dress code), and she still caught his eye. Yessir, Barbara Lyons nee Goodson was still one hell of a sexy mama.

“Right in here, if you please,” said the woman – Misty? something like that, but not so strippery – as she held open a door.

Barbara stepped into the room. A classroom, obviously, though a little oddly furnished. A ring of desks around the edges, a poster or two on the wall. But the only other decorations in the room were a series of what looked like changing screens near the back wall, and a few poles erected a short distance from that. Barbara had never taken her friend up on her invitation to take pole dancing classes, but she knew what they looked like. What purpose they might serve in a classroom was way beyond her.

The room, however, had one other detail of note, that of a young man seated behind the teacher’s desk, a laptop unfolded in front of him. He looked familiar, but with all the people Jordan had coming and going, she’d be hard-pressed to say if he was one of them, or which one. Lately the boy’s company had been pretty exclusive with that unseemly girlfriend of his, but most of the time since she’d been handed the reins of so-called motherhood from Jordan’s father, he had been a popular one.

Still, the young man looked pleasant enough. Good-looking, even, if in sort of a banal way. Like he was an extra in a catalogue, not modeling the clothes but merely there, slightly out of focus and smiling brightly to show what fun the clothes were having on the picture’s subject. He looked like exactly the sort of sweet, bland, unobjectionable nobody that would make an ideal target for Harry’s son’s bullying.

“What’s this about?” she asked guardedly. She wasn’t about to be held to account for Jordan being an asshole. She didn’t approve of bullying, but the way schools treated it these days, it was like they expected every kid to simply be... nice. It disregarded human nature.

“Barbara, this is Conner Fishers. He’s been teaching Jordan’s sexual education class this past semester,” the woman explained.

This kid was a teacher? Wow, maybe she really was getting old. Not where it mattered, though. Her cosmetic surgeon had seen to that. “Jordan was taking sex ed? As a senior?” Talking about Jordan bored her to her core, but still, that idea was a little surprising. If they were hoping to teach him the parts of a woman’s body, they were several years too late.

“He was teaching it, actually,” said the young man evenly. That made more sense. Didn’t it? No matter. It felt true. He gestured for her to sit at the desk set up across from him, and she did so. It was still strange being back in one of these old things, and heaven knew her breasts now took up enough desktop space to be inconvenient. “Kristy, I think I’ve got this. Thank you.”

“Good luck, Mr. Fishers,” she said with a weird little smile. Were they...? Definitely a bad idea to hook up with a coworker, but she couldn’t really blame the guy. That yearbook teacher was a biscuit, and as she took in the confident demeanor of this Fishers character, she had to say she might have underestimated him.

“So – Conner, right? – what’s this about? Can you really have a parent-teacher conference when the student is the teacher?”

“Can you really have a parent-teacher conference when the parent is a stepparent?” he replied.

It was funny, really. She couldn’t imagine how many times she’d had to clarify that she was Jordan’s *step*mother, if only because having an almost nineteen-year-old biological son would add years to her own age. Something in the way this young man had said “stepparent,” though, had rubbed her the wrong way. Who was he to imply she was anything less than Jordan’s mother? Lord knows she bent over backwards to be nice to the little brat – practically let him do whatever he wanted.

“A stepmom is still a mom.” Sometimes it felt good to object to something for the sake of objecting. “Now what’s this about.”

For some reason, that made him smile, and he hastily typed something into his laptop. “Didn’t think that’d be that easy,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Excuse me? Are you going to sit there typing emails or whatever? Because if so, I have other places to be, thank you.” She squeezed herself back out of the desk and made for the door. “I didn’t come all the way down here to have my time wasted. Jordan’s graduating on Sunday, so until then, you’re just going to have to deal with—”

“Sit down, please,” said the young teacher.

“Excuse me? I—” But she was already taking her seat. This kid really did have some confidence. He was a man who spoke and people listened. “Fine. So what is it Jordan supposedly did this time?”

“Oh, nothing all that unusual. Called me a mother fucker, in fact.”

Barbara scoffed. They called her all the way down here for this? “Well he’s called me worse, believe me. If you’re going to work with kids, maybe you ought to see about developing a thicker skin.”

“Actually, I think I’d rather work with adults – at least for tonight.”

Neither his tone nor the cheesy way he waggled his eyebrows left any room for doubt. This boy, who couldn’t be much older than her son, was coming onto her! And hard. “Now look, I’m a married woman, you see, and—”

“Are you and your husband happy? From what I remember Jordan saying, you were nothing more than a trophy wife. Though if you don’t mind my saying so... what a trophy.”

“Mr. Fishers! I...” Truth was, she didn’t mind him saying so. Sure, “trophy wife” wasn’t exactly a flattering term, but she’d rather be that than squirt out children for some assistant manager making thirty grand a year. “I’m sorry my son called you a mother fucker, but there’s nothing I can do about it. So if you’ll excuse me...” She remained seated though. He’d told her to sit down, and it felt wrong to disobey the teacher, even if she wasn’t a student.

Mr. Fishers came around to the front of his desk and sat, looming over her. “I didn’t mean to say I disagreed with your son on that point, actually. In fact... I was rather hoping you’d prove me right.”

She gaped. How could anyone be so forward! Barbara got hit on all the time, but having a man simply walk up to her and tell her he wanted to fuck her...?! “I... I couldn’t possibly...! I mean, I’m, um, married, technically...”

So why was she suddenly so turned on?

“We have a policy here in sex ed. Your son started it, as a matter of fact.” He gestured to a poster on the wall, and read it along with her. “What happens in sex ed stays in sex ed. Your husband will never find out, Mrs. Lyons.”

“He... he won’t?” Barbara heard herself ask.

“Nope. Now, I do have finals tomorrow, so unfortunately I don’t have all night. How about you get out of those clothes and we see if we can’t make an honest man out of young Jordan.”

Barbara could only nod and begin to strip. What else could she do? He was the teacher, after all. The sex ed teacher, no less. He was naked before she was, and she treated him to a little show as she she peeled off her skirt and tossed her bra across the room. Next thing she knew, she was bending over the teacher’s desk, chewing her bottom lip nervously as she waited for Mr. Fishers to get into place.

God, this was hot. It was so sudden. So sleazy! So *wrong*. She was immediately as turned on as she'd been since well before she'd married Harry.

From her vantage point, she could see he'd been working on something, some kind of document. Maybe just keeping up paperwork on parent meetings? The only two things on the screen were her own words, "*A stepmom is still a mom.*" – Barbara Lyons, another quote she couldn't make hide or tails of, "*Girl walks through those doors, she's just another plaything in our toybox, same as all these other bitches.*" – Jordan Lyons.

She didn't know what it was about, but she was glad Mr. Fishers was more eager to fuck her than to lecture her about her asshole stepson.

"You left your pantyhose on, Mrs. Lyons," said a voice from behind her.

"The sex ed teacher isn't smart enough to think of a way around that?"

He tore them asunder without skipping a beat, and without another word, fucked her raw right there on his desk. This man, this Mr. Fishers, he was like no man she'd ever been with. He came in hard and thrust fast, yet didn't forget he had hands. And lips. Barbara was disappointed that he came sooner than she would have liked, only then he never even went soft and kept right on going. He fucked her laying on her back on the teacher desk, bent over a student desk, up against one of those stripper poles, fucked her in her pussy, in her mouth, in between her tits. Fucked her like he was a pro, like he did it every day and there was no mystery to her pleasure.

At some point, he held up his phone and told her to say cheese, and she stopped moaning long enough to grunt the word for a picture. Then he was going at her again.

She was in a stupor, panting and trembling from the zillionth orgasm of the evening, when she saw he'd zipped up pants she hadn't realized he'd been putting on.

"You're leaving?" she said, rather more poutily than she'd meant to.

"I am. Thank you for that. I had an incredible time. Better than I would have thought."

"Call me sometime?"

He bent down and kissed her forehead. "Your number is in Jordan's file. And hey, maybe I'll see you at graduation Sunday?"

It wasn't a yes, but he was gone before she could try another tactic. Slowly, she composed herself, threw her shredded hose in the garbage, and staggered back to her car.

## Chapter Thirteen

*From here on out, there's no more kid gloves. From now on, it's responsibilities and consequences and big decisions. Up until now, we've been able to feign innocence to keep ourselves out of the mud, but here on out, it's for real.*

"You know, your bitch mom sure isn't making this easy on us," Angelica said, carefully folding her skirt over the back of the desk. She knew too well what happened in this room to want to risk letting it pick up stains from whatever her brother and his "students" might have done in here second period.

"First off, don't call my mom a bitch, and second off, yeah, the bitchery is definitely getting pretty old. But hey, at least she's conceded she can't ground me any more after school's out," Owen answered, being far less careful with his pants as he dumped them on the floor. If he knew what his best friend did in here, he definitely would think twice. Then again, he had no problem hanging out in Conner's bedroom, and lord knows the kid must've spanked it in there at least a million times.

With neither of their houses a suitable locale, she'd had to swipe Conner's key and make a copy so they'd at least have somewhere private to fool around. Kirsten's garage had been bad enough, but his house had his hawkish mother, who'd put a security system on the exterior basement door that notified her if it was opened. Her house featured the less vigilant but still not braindead Shannon, who was unlikely to allow her stepdaughter to have him over when Conner wasn't around after Mrs. Gibson's panicked phonecall about her discovery.

So they had this, at least. For a few more days, anyway.

"About time. I mean, my dad never caught me with my high school boyfriend – my old high school, that is – but he definitely wouldn't have freaked like this. Your mom catches you in one little threesome and suddenly you're a prisoner." She set about unrolling the cot mattress rolled up in a side cabinet and spread it out on the floor, and Owen quickly joined her. She sighed contentedly as he kicked off his boxers and she got her first sighting of his cock that day.

For a time, Owen had been weirded out that this unknown classroom with its creepy poster had its own stripper poles, changing areas, and mattress (to say nothing of the occasional absentmindedly discarded article of women's clothing). She'd told him it was spare props from the drama department, and he'd stopped questioning it. He really was a simple lad. Or at least, he'd learned not to question a good thing.

Owen settled in beside her in his usual position as she started stroking him to hardness. She felt weird having a "usual" position, like some old married couple, but as much time as she spent working that cock, there was only so inventive anyone could be.

Besides, as he reminded her when she got a little too creative from time to time and tried out some of the positions she'd studied under Mr. Lyons, she didn't need to try hard to satisfy him.

"So are you going to the party Sunday night, after the grad ceremony?" she asked. "You know, that thing at Bear Lake?"

"Yeah, I think about everybody's going. Why, are you?"

"I think so. I mean, I was going to if you were, anyway."

The cute ginger boy gave her a sudden kiss. "Can't imagine yourself having a good time without me?"

"Thanks to your mom, I've definitely had to learn how to entertain myself," she grumped, but then her tone softened. "But no. If you were still gonna be wearing the orange jumpsuit, I could hardly go out and have a good time when my boyfriend's stuck at home after his last day of high school. I'm not a *total cunt*."

"Hey now, I happen to like cunts – I'll not having you use the term as a negative." He was ready now, and she took it as an invitation. Like every other time since she'd first taken him inside her, it instantly felt like her world was back the way it was supposed to be. All the stresses and aggravations melted away as she nestled her hips down to meet his.

The sex was good. It was always good. After her playful punches had landed a little too hard a few times, he'd learned to stop teasing her about how excited she got and simply enjoy having a girlfriend who came like crazy every time she got to fuck him. He hardly even noticed how much better she'd gotten at sex this past semester, but she supposed with stupid Kirsten's stupid perfect body in his face, he could hardly be blamed for tunnel vision.

Well, he could be blamed a little.

As if on queue, her phone beeped right then, the ringtone she'd set for Kirsten herself. Damn it. Whatever. Right now Kirsten was in fifth period and she couldn't expect Angelica to run to her during classes. They should be in class now too, after all. Whatever. Owen had a study hall this period, and she already had a high school diploma and could give a shit about reviewing for finals in pursuit of a second.

She'd given up wondering what was happening behind the scenes on that, whether the counselors had gotten ahold of her transcripts, and if so, how they'd rationalized that her transcripts would say she'd already graduated from Central. She'd been pretty annoyed at having to put off college for this at first, but being around Owen every day had made it worth it. Most of the time.

This was definitely one of the times.

"I love you," she whispered afterwards, curled up half on top of him, gently rubbing little circles on his damp cock with her thumb.

“I love you, too.” He kissed her again. She was obsessed with his cock, yes, but his lips were pretty good, too.

“Oh yeah?” She grinned. She’d had guys say that to her before, but none that she’d said it to first. “Well I love you more.”

“Pfeh.” Owen flicked her shoulder. “You say that, but only because you don’t realize how much I love you.”

“Nonsense. I love you like you love deep dish pizza.” She knew it was gross, talking like this, but sometimes it was kinda fun to be gross.

“Come on, I wouldn’t stick my dick in deep dish pizza. That’s a friends with benefits situation at best.”

“Also grease burns, when you put it that way.”

“Also that.”

“OK, I love you like...” she pondered. “I love you like you love Grand Theft Auto.”

“How many times have I told you, I could quit that whenever I want? Is that what you’re trying to say?”

“No,” she giggled, wracking her brain. What did he definitely *love* love? “OK, got it. I love you like you love Kirsten’s boobs.”

“That’s all the more you love me?” He made himself frown. Still his cock twitched in her hand, she noted with only mild irritation.

“Don’t pretend. I’ve seen you literally drool on those things.”

“Sure, they’re awesome boobs, but they’re also attached to Kirsten. Fuck that noise.” He was still pretty bitter over their sudden break-up, to say nothing of the snickers directed his attention from some of her friends since then. Hayleigh McKnight had done a fake-coughed “herpes” when he walked by their table at one point, though Angelica had interceded and convinced the queen bee to call off her swarm before it got too bad.

She nuzzled her cheek against his smooth, pale chest. “OK, fine. I love you... hmm. How much... Mind you, I don’t want to over-do it here.”

“Which is why I win,” he said.

“Oh yeah? How much do you love me, hot-shot?”

“Easy. I love you like you love my cock.”

Angelica gasped. “No way.”

“Oh yeah way.”

“Nobody’s ever loved anybody that much.”

“Well look at me, breaking barriers.”

“Say it again,” she said climbing back on top of him. In that moment, she didn’t care that they didn’t have time. He could miss some review.

“What, how much you love my cock?”

“No, the other part.”

He blinked, surprised. "I love you?"

She moaned theatrically. "You are a charmer, aren't you? Now again, without the question mark."

His hands came to rest firmly on her sides, his eyes resting firmly in hers. "There it is."

They made out like that for a while, both trying hard not to be cognizant of the oppressive ticking of the second hand on the room's clock. Only a little bit to go in fifth period. Her phone issued Kirsten's beep again, and was again ignored. They only had so much time left this afternoon. Then only two more days like this, then...

Owen was evidently following that same train of thought. "So, we haven't really talked much about what we're going to do after graduation."

"We know what we're doing. I'm going back to college, you're doing your so-called e-learning." She avoided eye contact. He was too good at reading when she was being evasive.

He read it anyway. "It's not so-called; I'm just getting the basic stuff out of the way on the cheap. And you know that's not what I meant. Not what are you doing and what am I doing. Us. What are *we* doing."

"I know that's what you meant. Like, what's going to change? Your wonderful mother aside, things are good, yeah?"

"I mean... Conner said all that stuff from the yearbook expires the day after graduation. So... what happens if you wake up Monday morning and suddenly wanna rip my dick off?"

Angelica flicked him in the forehead. "I'm not gonna rip your dick off."

"Thanks."

"If anything, I'll bite it off. Quicker, more effective."

"Angel...!"

"I know, I know. But yeah, I mean, I've thought about it. It's pretty fucked up, you know, knowing your head is fucked up but not feeling like it is. I bet this is what mad scientists feel like."

"I thought you were majoring in public relations."

"Mad scientists need good PR more than anybody."

"You know, I was trying to have a serious discussion here..."

"I know, I know. But look, it's gonna be fine, right? Conner said it expires, not that it undoes everything it's done. So even if it stops doing what it's been doing, it's not going to reach back in time and mess with the way we felt all this past year. So yeah, maybe I won't still be all, can't-get-enough-y, maybe, but it doesn't mean I'd suddenly not want it at all." Angelica gave it a long, loving stroke. "Trust me, I'll still want it."

"You say that now..."

“I definitely liked cock before you came along, you egomaniac. Sure, maybe yours was my first obsession, but trust me, I definitely liked sex since I started having it. You know, back when you were in middle school.”

“Cradle robber.” He pulled her on top of him, and she pushed off his chest to rest herself atop the object of that obsession. God, but it felt good. She was so dreading the end of fifth period. “But still. I mean, like... what happens next? Yeah, we’ll both start – restart, whatever – college, but what about our the two of us as a couple?”

“I said I’ll still wanna be with you. What more is there?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I didn’t know if you wanted to, like, get out from under our parents roofs or whatever. You know, maybe like, get a place or something.”

“You want to...?”

The beginning of the broad smile that was blooming inside her was only beginning to form when her phone beeped yet again. By this time, Owen was tired of the interruption. It was a stretch, but he was barely able to reach her purse and drag it over. He was going for her phone! She panicked, and that panic gave him long enough to reach inside and seize it from where it rested atop the other contents.

“Geez, who’s blowing up your phone in the middle of fifth period?” Owen said.

“Wait wait wait!”

But he’d already seen the notification. “Kirsten? What the hell does she want with you?”

Angelica, of course, knew full well what Kirsten wanted with her. Maybe not in the specific sense, but Kirsten only ever wanted one thing. Her tongue was tired just thinking of it.

“I don’t know,” she lied. “Here, lemme see.”

But he was already reading. Aloud. “‘Today, three thirty, my place. Bring that little dental floss bikini you got.’ ‘Don’t be late again or I really will take your precious ginger boy right the fuck back.’ ‘Bitch you better answer me when...’” He looked back to Angelica. “Angel? What the hell is she talking about?”

“I...” What could she say? “It’s not what it sounds like.”

He scooted out from under her, nearly dumping her onto the cold tile floor. “I don’t even know what that sounds like. What the hell is that supposed to mean? Why is she telling you how to dress and where to go?”

That he’d somehow dated the gayest girl in school for three months without realizing it was a testament to the blinding radiance of her hotness, Angelica supposed. Probably mere male entitlement, unable to believe god would create such hotness and then point it in the wrong direction. Then again, nobody else in school had noticed either, except maybe Olivia, who while Angelica was pretty wasn’t gay herself, seemed apt to pretend she was if it would please her mistress. How the whole school had bought that “I have a boyfriend in college” story for all these years had been a mystery to her for

a while, though Kirsten had confided to convincing her cousin who was a model in San Diego to pose for the role on occasion to help preserve her secret. Creepy ass family, the Vaughans.

“I can explain,” she said, then was surprised that he sat there quietly to let her. Crap. “Look, Kirsten never cared about you, OK? She never even *liked* you.”

“Never liked me? Why would she date somebody she doesn’t even like?”

“She saw that everybody wanted you, so she had to assert herself by taking you. To show off. Then when she found out how bad I wanted you, and she...” She took a deep breath. He wasn’t going to like hearing this any more than she liked knowing it, but there was no way around it. “She wanted *me*, not you.”

“What do you mean, she wanted you?”

Was he really that dense? Practically every orgasm Kirsten had ever had in their time together had been Angelica’s doing. “Kirsten’s a lesbian, Owen. Why do you think she was so cool with you having a second girlfriend? Does she strike you like the kind of girl who shares? Like, anything? Fuck, Owen, she almost stabbed a fork through your hand when you tried to eat one of her fucking french fries, and she threw most of them out.”

“So then what the hell is all this about?” He tossed her phone at her. It bounced off her abs before she could catch it.

“You think a girl like Kirsten gives up when she wants something? Have you *met* her? She finally had herself a girlfriend – or at least somebody to go down on her when her boyfriend was recovering. What, was she was gonna go, ‘oh, yeah, you guys go have fun, I’ll be over here all by myself?’”

“That doesn’t answer the question. What is *that* about.” He pointed to her phone. The glass looked to have cracked from where it hit the floor.

“She said it was the only way she’d let me have you! She said I had to...” Words failed her for a moment. “What the fuck was I supposed to do, mister she-can’t-get-enough? You did that to me, then you cut me off!”

“I cut *you* off?! Are you serious?!”

“OK, so I fucked up when you asked me out, OK? I fucked up. I was wrong. I liked you, and I was scared and stupid and a little mad and I fucked up! Happy now? I thought we’d make up after the dance – I didn’t expect you to be so pissed off you ditched me for the biggest bitch in the known universe!”

“That’s harsh criticism, coming from *her fucking girlfriend!*” he shouted. As the echo faded, he took a few breaths and lowered his voice. “How long have you been fucking Kirsten behind my back? How long? Since we broke up?”

Angelica looked down. “Why do you think she was willing to break up with you in the first place?”

The bell rang. At that Owen leapt up and started dressing himself in a rush. “Owen, don’t go. Talk to me, OK? You can yell at me if you want, but don’t go. Please?” But he wasn’t slowing down, a stream of invective mumbled barely loud enough for her to hear. “Owen, please?”

She was too distraught to keep up, so by the time he was at the door she could only dart behind one of the changing screens before everybody in the hallway got a look at her naked body. “You know, maybe you should sit out that party Friday. I think Kirsten’s going to be there, too, and I wouldn’t want it to be awkward for you, having your girlfriend and your boyfriend bump into one another. In fact, maybe you should get back to college sooner rather than later.”

The door slammed behind him.

An hour later, around a corner, down a flight of stairs, and after three hallways, Conner tried to brush past Jordan to get into Miss C's classroom, but was stopped short with a hand on the chest.

"Hey there, Fishers."

"What do you want, Jordan?"

"Curious if you had a chance to reconsider my proposal yet."

Conner felt confident he'd gotten around half of Jordan's bargaining position. He'd already tried to enter the mother fucker quote under his account, but like always, TIOS objected to him quoting himself. There was still the other half, though. "No, not yet."

"Clock's ticking, buddy. This time tomorrow, I wanna hear a better answer, or I'll seriously revise your after-school activities." With that, he patted Conner on the shoulder, a little too hard, and headed into the room ahead of him.

The room smelled fantastic. It was their end-of-the-year party day, and the staff had brought in all sorts of food to celebrate. Miss C and some of the staff were already busily rearranging the room from her last period class to reconfigure for party mode. By now, there was only one deadline left, and that was for Conner and Amanda to confirm the final account details with the print shop. They'd already begun printing the bulk of the order, as most of it had been finalized for some time now. Ordinarily, it would have been all finalized weeks ago but he was dragging his feet, for obvious reasons. For everyone but Conner, though, the work was all done and behind them.

Conner pitched in with the setup, and soon enough the bell rang and the party officially commenced.

"Welcome, everybody!" Miss C said, turning down the music she'd only just begun playing. "I wanted to start today with a few words. Get the speeches out of the way so we can get to the serious business of celebrating, right?"

"Hells yeah!" said Marissa. DeShaun and Siobhan echoed some approving whoops.

"First off, I want to commend every one of you on a wonderful product you've created this year. *This Is Our Story* has been – and I am not using hyperbole here – the single best annual I've ever been a part of. I've been to some ASAL conventions, and I think it might be the best one I've ever seen. It's professional, it's accurate, and most importantly it's a vivid reflection of your time here."

She sat down on the front of her desk. "It's one of the unfortunate truths in yearbook that, since the product doesn't come out until the summer after the school year, you don't get to hold your achievement in your hands until it's after the fact. Some schools rush out an inferior product, but we do things right, and–"

"Yeah we do it right," said Don to a mix of laughs and groans.

Miss C only shook her head, still smiling, and continued. “That takes time. So that means your work is for the future, not the now. But I want you to know, there are two moments when your work will be really important. The first is coming up pretty soon. The prints will finish up, and the shipment will come in sometime late in July. We’ll get them out ASAP – and one last plug, if any of you are willing to volunteer to help me distribute them this summer, I’d be super grateful.”

Nobody volunteered, but many of them already had. Plus, whether or not Carrie had Conner or Amanda’s gift of vision, their successor was a work horse. She’d get those books out, come hell or high water.

“Anyway, we’ll pass them out, and then it hits them. Your classmates will get them right as summer is over, right before people head off to college, or as they’re settling into their new jobs and figuring out their next moves, or for the underclassmen getting ready to come back here for another year in the trenches. And it will be one last look at their time at Northside. I know I’ve said it a hundred times, but people need to be reminded from time to time who they are, because it’s easy to forget. Your work will do that. Their activities, their studies, their community, and most importantly their friends. You’ve given them that.”

It was Amanda who started up a round of applause, and everyone soon chimed in. They’d worked hard, and deserved to be proud. Conner certainly was.

“What’s the second time?” Heather asked. She was wearing an almost normal outfit today, shorts and a t-shirt, except that every bit of it was two sizes too small, and clearly showed her lack of bra or panties. By now, even Conner didn’t notice.

“Thanks, Heather. The second time is going to be different for everybody, but it’s a longer ways off. It’s going to come sometime way off in the future. Maybe five years from now, maybe fifty. That’s when one of our Nighthawks will be looking for something in boxes in their attic; or their kid – or grandkid – sees your book gathering dust on a bookshelf and asks them about it; or when they’re missing someone who’s no longer in their lives and need to see their face again. And they’ll open up *This Is Our Story*, and they’ll suddenly be a teenager again. They’ll laugh as they remember some petty fight they had with an old friend they wish they still talked to, maybe cry when they start seeing those who’ve gone too soon.”

Her eyes were misting somewhat, and she took a moment to blow her nose. “Sorry, you guys. I know I’m too young to be nostalgic, but I tell you what. I graduated eight years ago, and we’ve already lost two from my class. One from cancer, and... well, it doesn’t matter. My point is, I still have that yearbook. Whenever I want, I can go back to that time when we were all bitching about being stuck in school together every day, and they’re still there. They’ll always be there.

“You seniors, I think you’re already feeling what I’m saying here. But trust me, you guys, that’s going to be you, too. No matter where you go, how you change, what

awesome and sometimes awful things life throws your way... part of you is always going to be the person you were here in high school.”

DeShaun stood up and raised his cup of sparkling grape juice. “To Miss C!” he called out. After a moment, the rest of the class followed suit, clinking red cups together like they were crystal filled with champagne.

“Thanks for that, DeShaun. All of you, thank you. And now, before we get to the main entertainment, Amanda, Conner, you guys have any last words for your staff?”

Amanda took the initiative first. Though she was dressed about the same as Heather, it somehow looked more natural on her. She was a girl who looked right in tight clothes. Damn, she was pretty.

“I won’t take long, gang, but I wanted first to commend you for doing an awesome job this year. I know I’m still one of the newest faces at Northside, but thanks to what you guys have done I feel like I haven’t missed a thing. It’s been a privilege working with you, and I want you to know that whenever I was on your case, it was only because Conner made me do it and I never would have pressured you for a minute if I’d been given a choice.”

There was a little laugh, and Conner shrugged and nodded gamely. “But seriously. I only wish I could have spent more time with you, and I’m grateful for the time I had. Thank you, all of you.”

Conner didn’t miss the way her eyes narrowed ever so slightly when she scanned across the corner where Jordan was lurking with Don, the two of them mostly ignoring the speechifying, but nonetheless it was a fine opportunity for a second toast. She gestured then to Conner.

“All right, I know we’re about speeched out, but first, let me echo what Amanda said. You guys did great work, and I am so, so proud of what we’ve accomplished. Moreover, let’s give it up for Amanda herself, eh? She took this bad boy farther and better than I could have, and with less time to do it in.”

He paused for some polite applause, and gave Amanda a moment to blush. For someone with so much self-assuredness, she sure didn’t handle compliments well. He worked in a similar pat on the back for Miss C as well, who waved it off and signaled for him to wrap it up.

“As for me, I think we’ve told one hell of a story this year. You guys captured the heart and soul of what it was like to be here, to walk these halls, and that takes talent. It takes keen eyes, and wise hearts. You know me, and you know I don’t give praise where it’s not due.”

“Conner, you praise us all the time, man,” interjected DeShaun, and the class laughed along. “I was beginning to think you were trying to get yourself tagged in the cheerleading spread.”

“Right, that’s what I’m saying. I don’t give praise where it’s not due. And it’s due. When we picked the name *This Is Our Story*, I worried that as your editor, it’d wind up being my story.”

That had indeed been true, even before ASAL had offered the TIOS software. As the year had progressed, however, he’d been more judicious than usual about micro-editing their spreads than he had been as assistant editor last year. He’d always had an idea of exactly how a thing should be phrased, or how best to filter an image, when to stop typing and what words to end on. This year, particularly when he realized what his edits could do, he’d only done so sparingly, and only to help them capture the experience, the group, the person, the way he thought they’d meant to. His priority became helping them actualize their intentions, and the results had been outstanding. Though he was the editor of *This Is Our Story*, they were all of them the authors.

He took a breath and raised his cup for one final toast. “But you guys made it ours, all of us, so... yeah. You fucking rock, guys. That’s it.”

“Language!” chided Marissa, eyes sparkling merrily. But Conner knew better than anyone that Miss C didn’t give two shits about swearing.

They gave everybody a few minutes to refill cups and to start chowing down on snacks. Miss C pushed hard for them to take more, as she was loathe to wind up with a pile of cookies and brownies left over like after the Christmas party. Then, it was time for Heather and Conner to show everyone the project they’d collaborated on throughout this past year.

The meta-spread.

They’d compiled their efforts as a slideshow styled as yearbook entries with pictures, quotations, and other memories from this past year. He let Heather take the lead on it, insisting they were probably all tired of hearing his voice by this point in the year. (Some agreed a bit too eagerly, but he couldn’t blame them.)

It really was a lovely way to close out the year. They’d planned out the order of the presentation meticulously the previous weekend, even with all the studying they’d needed to do. Heather’s mom had been happy to see Conner at the house again, though Heather reminded her it was only a school thing. Conner had insisted they break with their original intention of going through the spread in TIOS itself; it let him be a little less nervous about what all he might inadvertently do.

It opened with a picture of the yearbook on their philanthropy day from back in April, volunteering at a senior center. The entire staff was there, sans Amanda, smiling brightly. It was captioned, “*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.*” – Anne Frank. From there, it went through the year, mostly chronologically, making sure to get at least a shot or two of everyone. They even included Paul Engstler, a freshman who had an incredible penchant for creating

drama with himself at the center, and who had dropped yearbook four days in. He'd been a hoot while he lasted.

Everyone marveled at how they'd changed over the year, though only Conner and Jordan really saw the marked shift when the dress code had been altered. There was a shot of Miss C where it looked like she was sleeping at her desk (she protested that she narrowed her eyes when reading from her computer); Carrie huddling with Amanda and Conner; a few shots from spring break in Maui; a shot of Amanda on her first day; a selfie with the so-called senior squad of DeShaun, Marissa, Jordan, Siobhan, Heather and Don at the Bean Bag.

(Conner had recognized the date of that photo; it had been the same day they'd first installed the TIOS software.)

Someone had even gotten a picture of DeShaun helping Conner to the nurse's office after fainting at the Christmas party. Conner hadn't known Heather had added that in, but she mollified his embarrassment by reminding everyone that DeShaun had gotten to be a hero for a day, and thanked Conner for being his damsel in distress. Six months later, it was easy to laugh off.

There were plenty of quotes interspersed – funny ones, inspirational ones, a few that were cheesy and even touching. They weren't able to get something memorable from everybody, but they figured it was a quality over quantity scenario, and nobody seemed to mind. They finished with a picture Miss C had taken on the first class meeting last August. She'd taken it to help her with names of new people and memorizing the seating chart, but had helpfully passed it along for the meta-spread.

Heather had even insisted on including the quote by Miss C that had, at least in part, lead to her affair with Conner. Nobody else present took it as anything more than an expression of love for her students. She and Conner shared a coy smile for a ghost of a second – interrupted, ironically, by a picture someone had taken of their dirty dancing at prom. Siobhan even teased, "In a few days, he won't be a student any more...!" The class laughed off the absurdity, and on went the slide show.

Regardless, by the time it was over, if anybody had doubted the message of Miss C's speech, none still did.

Conner looked forward to the meta-spread all year, as he had in years past. He lived for nostalgia, after all. Nevertheless, it had all been muted by the growing dread about what he had to do next.

"That turned out really great, Conner," said Heather afterwards, as the class resumed party mode, the music turned back up. "Not that I ever had my doubts."

"You don't know how to do anything sub-par," he replied, adjusting his stance so he couldn't see Amanda in his peripheral vision.

"You would know," she said, and laughed as he turned red. "I'm playing, Conner. Well, mostly. I think we both did pretty good."

He nodded. "I think we did, too."

"I'm really going to miss you next year, you know," she said softly. "You're hands down the sweetest guy I've ever been with."

Considering she'd dated Jordan for a while junior year, it didn't seem a high bar, but he knew she'd also dated other guys who weren't total dicks, so he took it as the level of compliment she had meant it. "I'm going to miss you, too. You know, I had a crush on you since... I don't even know. Middle school for sure. I was always too scared to act on it, though. You were so pretty, and so smart, and..."

"See? Sweet." She patted his cheek. "The guys at Berkeley are going to have a lot to live up to."

"They... wait. So, does that mean... you did it? Like, official?"

She nodded, her grin splitting her plumply lovely face. "I had a bunch of final projects and presentations this semester, so I only have two final exams to go. One is in Brit lit, and Mrs. Brantley already told me that as long as I give my usual effort, she guarantees I'm good to go. Then there's this one, and... after prom night, let's just say I think I can count on ol' Kristy Cumsgood-Licksemsloppy to not want to bring any scrutiny on her."

Conner nearly spit out his drink at the nickname, and she laughed even as she flinched. "Kristy... what?!"

"You've never heard that? Oh my god, you're such a teacher's pet. I've heard people calling her that since like sophomore year," she said, rolling her eyes. "Anyway, yeah. I did it. I already told Uncle Phil – he's executor of the will. He was so pissed. Then I told him how much tuition at Berkeley cost, and I think he almost threw up. Suck on that, gramps, ya old dead bastard."

He pulled her into a hug. "I couldn't be happier for you. UC Berkeley, wow. Man, I always knew you were going to do something awesome with your life. I just wasn't sure if you'd do it here or... out there in the world. For your sake, I'm glad it's the second one."

"Me too. Ya know, if I ace these finals, I can still make valedictorian. After the bullshit with this final last semester, it's really close, but I still have to have a speech ready, in case."

"You? Over-prepared? No!"

"Would you mind proofing it for me? I've never done this kind of thing, and I'm sort of nervous. The internet says you just have to say some clichés and drudge up nostalgia, but I want to try to personalize it some without making it too drawn out. I went to my cousin's graduation a few years back, and it was brutally hot in the gym."

"Sure. I charge by the word for my editing skills, but I think you and Moneybags McGrampa can afford me."

“Thanks,” Heather said with a giggle, but after a moment she looked serious again. “You know, you said once...” She paused, took a drink, and tried again. “You said once that you’d follow me to Berkeley, if I got in. I mean, I’m definitely not asking you to or anything, but... I guess I’m just curious.”

“Curious...? About what?”

“You know,” she said, uncharacteristically bashful. “Would you really have followed me, or were you just saying that because my shirt was off and you were trying to get the pants to follow?”

“I wouldn’t...!” he sputtered.

She held up a hand; only once she’d stopped him in his tracks did he reflect he’d never really had to work all that hard to get a girl’s pants off. “Whoa, I was teasing. I know. But... yeah. Were you? Serious? At the time, that is.”

He reflected, and he didn’t need to reflect long. He remembered that evening in the greenhouse, and he expected he would remember it for the rest of his life. “Yeah, I was serious. Come on, where am I going to find another woman like Heather Blake?”

She took half a step closer. “I think you’re doing just fine at finding pretty girls,” she said, but he could tell she was nonetheless pleased.

“Pretty or not, nobody else has ever been like you. If somebody told me the only way to find another girl as awesome as you was to uproot my life and move to the coast, I’d kind of have to be an idiot *not* to, right?”

“OK, *now* you’re trying to get back in my pants,” she said, but she took another step closer, so that those stupendous breasts of hers were pressed unmistakably against his chest.

“How dare you.”

“Hey, watch out, Blake, don’t wanna make him faint at another party!” called Don suddenly, and with so many eyes suddenly on them, both took a quick step back. Like that, the spell was broken, and she bashfully excused herself to talk to some of her other friends. Class was nearly over by that point anyway. Still, he had one last item of business on the docket for today.

Amanda had to be told.

## Chapter Fourteen

Naturally, he put it off until the last moment. The bell had rung and the class was fleeing the school, some of them for the third-to-last time. Amanda was gathering her things from the editor's office when Conner stepped in.

"Hey, Amanda."

She looked up, but only for a moment. "Hey, Conner."

"Are you heading out? Do you have anywhere to be?"

"Why? You have some interest in my social calendar now?"

"No, I just— I mean, yes, but not..." He took a breath. "I wanted to talk to you for a minute, if that's cool."

"You need to quit staring so hard at my ass first, if that's the case," she said with her back to him. How did she know? And how did anyone have an ass like that? He tried to look at something else, but with her bent over her desk like that, there was nothing for it but to study something else in the room.

"Sorry."

Finally, she stood up and he could at least strive for eye contact. The skintight top didn't make it easy. "Apology accepted. You were saying?"

"Oh. Yeah. That I wanted to talk. If that's OK."

"That depends. What did you want to talk about?"

"Um, us, kind of."

"Let me stop you right there. No."

As she moved to walk past him he quickly interposed himself. "Amanda, wait. Please."

Behind them, Miss C saw the two were having some kind of moment and courteously excused herself to monitor the halls. They were alone.

"There's no conversation worth having on that topic," she reaffirmed.

"Yes, there is. There are things you don't know."

Amanda put her hands on her hips. "Like what? Why you dumped me?"

He nodded glumly. "Like that."

"You know what, Conner? Save it. Whatever it was, I don't care."

"No, but—"

"But what? It's complicated? Gee, you don't think that didn't occur to me when I started seeing a guy who was also dating Heather Blake, and for all I know, his yearbook teacher? Yeah, it occurred to me that it might be complicated. But even if you're a big slut, I liked you anyway, so I went along with it to see where it'd go anyway. Then out of the blue, you dump me so you can play sultan to Jordan's harem."

"You know that's not why I did it."

“But you did dump me, and then you did start fucking two dozen other girls.”

“You were fucking Jordan the whole time we were together, and I never accused you of anything!”

“Because he *made* me. Because he *terrorized* me. What’s your excuse?”

“He made me, too!”

“Oh yeah? Put a gun to your head, said ‘fuck all these girls or so help me!’ That how it went down?”

“He had leverage!” he insisted.

“Leverage,” she repeated. “He had leverage, so you broke my heart with no warning or explanation, and then immediately set to banging the hell out of the who’s who list of Northside hotties? That’s what you wanted to talk about?”

“No!” he exclaimed, then forced himself to lower his voice. “Look, you know it’s hard for me to talk about it, because of... you know.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s hard. I mean, TIOS made it hard for me not to keep having feelings for you, too, but what can I say, I was willing to put in the extra effort.”

“You know what? Fine. Fine, I’ll...” He took a deep breath. Wow, it was hard. Here he was, trying to tell her what Jordan had done, knowing she might well try to stop him out of spite. It didn’t hurt, exactly, but it was draining as all hell. Like he was trying to violate something essential to his nature. If Jordan had managed to make Conner have sex with his own mother, and then Conner had for some reason tried to post a video of it on social media and then act it out on stage in front of the whole school... this felt as impossible and mortifying and wrong as that would be.

But he could get through it. For Amanda.

“He thinks he’s in love with Hailey McManus,” he said through gritted teeth. He began sweating almost immediately, a cold sweat. Luckily he’d already told her about the body switch a while back, to explain why Hayleigh wasn’t in sex ed despite being ostensibly one of the hottest girls in the senior class. “He forced me to take over the class to show me what he’d done wasn’t wrong, I guess so I’d extend TIOS, so McManus could stay in McKnight’s body and he could keep having his fun.” He gasped for air without realizing he hadn’t been breathing.

His plight didn’t look to have moved Amanda. “Wow. Sounds like true lust, all right. She must be one hell of a girl if he’d take her over that whole group.”

“She... is,” he said, though this time the reason it was hard to say was completely different.

“Jesus, Conner, you fucked her too?! Did you set that up on purpose?”

“No! It was an accident, I swear. But she’d had this huge crush on me, and suddenly she was all, you know, and then when I gave her a chance I found out she was *really*... I mean...”

“Ugh, yeah, I get it, she’s a good lay. Were you still with her when we were...?”

“No,” he said. “Well, only briefly. I broke up with her like right after you and I started going out.”

“I hope she got all the courtesy that I did before you tossed her to Jordan Lyons like a little snack cake.”

“They’d apparently been messing around for quite a while before that, too. Actually, he overheard me telling Kristy last winter break about how I’d accidentally swapped them, and how to see through it. That’s how he found out about TIOS in the first place.” He tugged at his collar. “A guy like Jordan, he found out there was a hot girl with no self-esteem, and...”

She paced from one end of the small office to the other. “So let me get this straight. You turned this poor awkward girl hot, slept with her, then she started also sleeping with Jordan, then you also started sleeping with Heather, and me, and I suppose Miss C? Is that about it?”

“Um, yeah, I guess. For what it’s worth, I—”

Her snort cut him off. “Save it. Like I said, I knew you were complicated. None of this changes any of that. Though it does make me feel like I should get tested.”

“Actually you already slept with Jordan, so—”

“I know, OK? Please don’t remind me. And by the way, none of that excuses you turning into a total whore. A bigger whore, that is.”

“I know, but... I’d broken it off with, well, with everyone, and I was lonely and feeling shitty, and... you’ve been in that room. You know how those girls are. I’m not saying I’m a pity case or anything, not by a long shot. But I was stuck, against my will, in a room with two dozen naked horny beautiful and mostly willing girls. I mean, I’m human.”

“Mostly willing?” she said, her voice taking on a dangerous tone.

“What?” He realized then what she must have been thinking. “No, I said ‘mostly willing’ because most of them were totally willing, and the ones who weren’t, I never laid a finger on. The group was mostly willing was what I meant.”

She relaxed after a moment. Somewhat, anyway. “OK, so great. So now I now you’re a slut, and a gentleman, and a victim. Cool. I’m all ready to write up the Conner Fishers spread now. Anything else?”

“Yes,” he said firmly. “Look, none of that was even what I meant to tell you. You deserve to know, but that wasn’t why I wanted to talk.”

“Far be it from me to stop you from getting what you want,” she said, folding her arms.

“There’s something I have to show you. In TIOS,” he said.

“Holy lord, what did you let that idiot do now?”

“I didn’t...” Only he had. All of this was his own fault for not being more careful in the first place. “OK, so I did. But still, you have to see it.”

“Fine. Show me.”

He took a seat at his desk, and she pulled up her chair to sit beside him as he logged in. Conner had already thought – a lot – about what the best way to broach this subject was, and hadn’t come up with anything.

Time to wing it.

He ran a search for his own name, and clicked to open his profile. “What’s this look like to you?”

“A slut.”

“No, I mean the whole thing.”

“A manipulator. A player. A lack of integrity.”

He sighed, then shifted to another profile. “OK, how about this?”

“Owen Gibson. Your buddy, right? I have a couple classes with him.” She scanned the page. “Demographics... contact info... family details... all looks pretty normal to me. Shellfish allergy? Do we have access to medical info in here?”

“Yeah, because *that* would be the problem with TIOS and overreach.” The look she gave him communicated she was not going to sit through any more sarcasm. He brought up another profile, arbitrarily choosing DeShaun’s. “This one?”

She perused more quickly this time, her patience clearly strained. “Typical. Didn’t know his dad – dads – were gay. Huh.”

Conner did a double-take, suddenly realizing the same thing. “Oh. That wasn’t the point.”

“So you’re saying there is a point to this? Could we get to that?”

He nodded, and with that, brought up Amanda’s own profile. There it was, the conspicuous lack of information, nothing but her class schedule and her personal cell phone. He still hadn’t figured out how she had a cell phone other than that she needed one to do her job as editor-in-chief, and therefore she had one.

“Yeah?” she said.

“This doesn’t look any different to you?”

She checked again, then shook her head. “Why, should it? Did he change something about me? I swear, I will beat his ass black and blue if he—”

“Amanda, no. Nothing’s changed since your profile was created. But... look at the quote, Amanda.”

He read it along with her.

*“Wait, we’re getting a second editor-in-chief?”*

*“Yeah, that’s what I heard somebody saying. I guess she’s new.”*

*“Who is he?”*

*“She.”*

*“Whatever. Do we know anything about her?”*

*“Not much. I heard she’s basically like a female version of Conner.”*

– *Marisa Garcia and Don Egerton*

“Well that’s hardly a flattering depiction,” she said when she finished.

“No, I mean... Amanda, try to be objective. This is a TIOS thing, right? So you have to concentrate. Do you see anything different here between your profile and the others?”

She looked it over again, but shrugged. “We’re different people, so yeah, everything’s different.”

“Look, Amanda. No parents listed. No home address. No transcript from a previous school. Nothing but a picture and a quote discussing the sudden appearance of a second editor-in-chief.”

She was quiet for a long moment. He tried to read her face, but it was blank stone. Finally, he couldn’t take it any more. “Amanda, do you get what I’m saying? I think...” He stopped himself, for the thousandth time trying to think of the best way to tell someone this, and for the thousandth time confounded there was no better way. “I think Jordan started a rumor that we were getting an editor-in-chief, waited to hear his friends talking about it, and put that quote in TIOS using my account and... made you.”

Again, she said nothing. “Amanda?” He waited another long moment. “Amanda, did you—”

“How long have you known about this?” She turned her head to look him in the eye, half her face pale with the white glow of the monitor’s light.

“Right around the start of this quarter. It was right after we first got together. It was the same day he pulled the whole stay out of my way thing. You see, that’s why he—”

“And you waited until now to show me this.”

“I know. And I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Amanda. I didn’t know how to tell you, and I knew he was only trying to get me to extend TIOS, and with what he was doing to you and to the other—”

“So you knew about this, for two months, and you didn’t think I deserved to be told.”

“But it was because—”

“Because Jordan stole Hailey from you, and you had to beat him. And you knew if you told me, you might not win.” She folded the laptop shut.

“What? Beat him? No! No – all right, yes, I wanted to make sure he couldn’t keep hurting people. Using people. But Hailey, she had nothing to do with it!”

“Really? Oh, maybe I misunderstood. Tell me where Hailey fits into the timeline of events here.”

He tried to think. “OK, so I found out she was sleeping with someone, and then I found out that someone was Jordan. Then I realized he’d gotten my TIOS password or else he’d never have slept with the original Hailey. So I confronted him and he said he had feelings for her, and he sounded like he might mean it and I was stupid, I was so

stupid, so I told him I'd stay out of his way – that's where he got that – and to have fun while it lasted because it was all resetting at the end of the year, and that was when he told me... yeah."

"Oh, I see. Sounds like she's totally uninvolved then."

He didn't miss the sarcasm. "None of this is simple, OK? But the more I thought about this, about what it meant, the more it kept eating at me, making me hate myself. With TIOS resetting, it meant... and finally I couldn't..."

Conner took a moment and summoned the guts to at least look her in the eye. "I couldn't make myself sit back and watch you... I don't know. Fade away, or whatever's going to happen."

Amanda's face twisted in displeasure at putting what she herself had immediately realized into words. "Leaving aside for a moment how unbelievably selfish and cowardly that is—"

"What? I wasn't—"

"YOU WERE!" She slammed her fist on the desktop, and he fell silent. She continued in a quiet voice. "So, leaving that aside as your grounds for hurting me, you didn't tell me because you, and I think I'm remembering your words right, you couldn't let him hurt people and use people."

"Exactly. Yes."

"So before you invited him into your home and left him alone with your magical reality-warping software password," she said dryly, "he wasn't hurting anyone? He wasn't using anyone?"

"Sure he was," he protested. "You know Jordan. He's always been a bully and a schemer. You should hear some of the stuff Heather told me about when they dated."

"Which I'm sure also has nothing to do with your need to win at all costs," she said, dryer still. "So if your motive was to stop him from hurting and using people, and he was doing that before anyway, do you have any reason whatsoever to think he won't keep on being this same miserable prick even if TIOS reverts?"

"He'll still be an asshole, sure, but he won't have that kind of opportunity."

"Didn't you *just* say he was hurting Heather before all this?"

"Yeah, though—"

"And didn't you say he gave up the whole sex ed harem for Hailey?"

"I mean, I guess, but—" Conner stopped. By now, he'd been expecting her to cut him off again. "I see the point you're making. But what you told me about what he did to you, what he did to some of those other girls... You said he attacked you. Hurt you! Didn't you? Was I supposed to leave him the opportunity to keep doing that? No!" It was his turn to pound the desk in frustration. "I couldn't let him do that to you again."

The fire in her eyes diminished, though didn't burn out. "That's fair," she said after a moment, finally sounding more like herself. "But damnit, Conner, you should

have told me! I could have helped you! We could have figured this out together! Or... fuck, I don't know, I could have at least made a bucket list and checked off a few items!"

"I know. You're right. I'm sorry. I should have told you right away."

"But you thought I'd make you go for the extension. To save my own bacon."

"I thought... I dunno. I thought it would make things harder. Harder to beat him, maybe, like you said. I just... you don't know how it feels to watch him treat people like garbage, bully people, and to keep getting away with it, year after year!"

She held up a hand. "I'm sure your rage against the mean man who picked on you and your special lady – make that ladies – is profound and all. Right now, though, let's try to center our attention on the fact that I might have, what, around a hundred hours or so left to live. Maybe that's a bigger problem right now."

"You're right. I'm sorry." Although her eyes were watering, they looked no less fierce. Still, he had some tissues in a desk drawer, and he offered them to her. She accepted.

"But you know, we don't really know what's going to happen," he said, trying to sound optimistic, "if the files revert to 1.0 status, or whatever that email said. After all, this is the original version of your file, so maybe you'll just keep on like you are now."

"Like I am now? A fictitious orphan who lives to edit yearbooks? What does such a person do when they're no longer in high school? Get into the freelance yearbook editing racket?"

He considered not saying anything, but figured there was no more point in keeping secrets. "Well... where do you go when you're not in high school now? I tried to follow you home once, after our first date. But you stepped into those trees that divide our parking lot from the Meadow Glen apartments and then you disappeared. Vanished into thin air."

"Yeah, I guess that's what it would look like."

"Can I... Never mind."

She rolled her eyes. "No, go ahead. Trust me, you won't say anything shittier than you have already."

"I was going to ask where you go when you're not... here. Is it some kind of *Field of Dreams* thing?"

"I've never seen it."

"You should. It's really good."

"You know, my schedule might not have a lot of time in it for watching old movies at the moment," she said, letting herself give a self-pitying laugh. "But... I don't really know where I go. I mean, I'm an editor-in-chief. I do all the things that an editor-in-chief of a high school yearbook does. I go to classes, work on yearbooks, collaborate with my team." She touched his arm. "When I'm not doing those things, I'm just... not."

“Not what?”

“Not anything. At some point, it’s time to do those things again, and then I’m doing them. It’s hard to explain. Like, I know other people go to movies and visit relatives and have homes and families and stuff, but that’s not me. I guess it’s sort of like having one arm and watching people do the bench press. Looks interesting, but you can’t ever do it so there’s no point really considering it.”

“Huh. I guess I can see that. So like... where do your clothes come from?”

She shrugged. “Where do Heather’s come from? Her mom’s a waitress, but she has a new kinky outfit every day of the week. TIOS does what it needs to do for the story to unfold.”

“Huh. Good point.”

Her head sunk to the desk, and he could soon perceive she was crying. Not sure what else to do, he put a hand on her back, and when she didn’t bite it off, he rubbed softly. After a few seconds she threw her arms around him and sobbed on his shoulder. Her tears soaked through his shirt and into his skin as he held her. He said nothing. He’d already said too little, and too much.

Some time later, the two of them were seated on their couch in the computer lab. Miss C had popped in only to grab a few things and excuse herself without a word. She’d worked around high school students long enough to know when not to interrupt. Amanda hadn’t cried all that long, really, but it had taken her a long time to want to talk to him again, and yet when he’d offered to get out of her hair, she’d told him to stay.

Finally, she spoke. “It’s really weird thinking that somewhere out there there’s another girl who looks exactly like me,” she said.

“Not exactly like you. Remember? You made those unwitting adjustments. The picture in your profile adjusted with them, but if you click the link to the original, it’s you pre-changes. But yeah, you’d definitely pass for twins. Only you’d be the hot twin.”

“What a shock, a man found a way to bring hot twins into the conversation.”

“Sorry, I—”

“Oh, hush. You’ve apologized enough for one day. Though I do look forward to hearing more of it tomorrow, and every day I have left after that.”

“You got it. I really am... Well. Anyway.”

She stretched out her legs, draping them over his lap and reclining against the arm rest. “Man. And to think... what’d it say? ‘I heard she’s like a female Conner.’ You know, we slept together.”

“So?”

“Don’t you think that’s like the height of narcissism? Obviously we have a ton in common. It’s why we work so well together, and why it took us so long to stop being pissed at each other.”

“If I had legs like yours, I’d sleep with *myself*.”

“Hey, with my twin floating out there somewhere, maybe I will.” She smiled, but it gave way to a sigh. “So you really broke up with me because you were too big of a chickenshit to tell me what you told me today?”

“Basically.”

“What about Heather? I know you two broke up around the same time. Miss C, too? She’s seemed less flirty with you the past while.”

“I guess I figured if I couldn’t be with you, I didn’t want to be with anyone.”

“Aw!” She made a face, flattered, that he soon realized was only a face. “And to think you were totally fine being with the three of us at the same time, Don Juan. Sucks a little of the romance out of it.”

“Low blow, but fair.”

“And that’s why you, shall we say, availed yourself of the offerings of your charming second period students? Too lonely to be alone, too wounded to be in anything serious?”

“I don’t know if I ever analyzed it, but it feels about like that, yeah. I’m sor... I won’t say it, but you know what I mean.”

She brushed her hair back out of her eyes. “I know. And hey, if it makes you feel any better... I had myself a little sidepiece, too.”

He sat up. “What? Who?”

“None of your business, that’s who. But nobody important, and nothing serious.”

“Wow, you’d think I would’ve heard. Even if nobody else realizes quite how hot you are, you’re still definitely a hottie. People talk about girls like you.”

“Eh, I might’ve maybe used TIOS to... make certain arrangements regarding confidentiality and, um, minor improvements in performance. And that’s all I’m going to say on the subject, and if you try to dig around about it I will drag you off into the void with me when I go.”

They each laughed, but the joke was too real. He put a hand on her knee, as much to try to comfort her as to comfort himself. “So what do we do?” he asked at last.

“You have to ask? I mean, I don’t want to die. Don’t get me wrong, I hate the idea of that scumbag profiting from it as much as you do...” She looked up at him. “OK, *almost* as much as you do. But I don’t wish him ill so much that I’m willing to risk dying over it. He’s hurt people, yeah, and maybe he’ll hurt people more than he was already going to if we extend TIOS. I know I’m the least objective person in the world on this front, but... that doesn’t seem like it’s worth someone’s life, does it?”

“When you put it like that, no.”

“Is there another way to put it?” She sat up and put her hand over his on her leg. “That’s not rhetorical. We have to be unanimous on this, so talk to me.”

It took him a moment to work up the nerve to speak, knowing she wasn’t going to like what he was going to say. “I’m going to try to find a way to spit this out. It’s just

that... Jordan's using you as a hostage." He waited, but she didn't argue. "And Jordan is also the one who, through whatever weird power, brought you into being. Which means he's basically, however we want to put it, invented a hostage that he can threaten to force us, to force *me*, to let him get away with all his raping and abuse of power."

"Hmm. Yeah, that's another way to put it all right."

"Come on, I'm trying to talk about it."

She squeezed his hand. "I know. So what it sounds like what it comes down to is whether you think I'm a real person, or Jordan's imaginary hostage."

"I didn't say you were imaginary."

"But if you were really so worried about preventing Jordan from hurting people, you'd have counted me as one of the people he might hurt, right? Instead of one of the people he's already hurt, and you'd rather not see hurt again."

"That's... that's not how I'd characterize it."

"Conner, I'm as real as anyone else in this school. At least where it counts." She waited until he finally looked up and made eye contact before continuing. "And for what it's worth, I'm not sure it counts as rape. Disgusting, yes, but... I don't think we're traumatized, like we would be if..." She sighed. "If I'd been raped every day for two months, I wouldn't have still wanted to sleep with you. There's not really a word for what he did to us, but it's not rape. Like, because of the way he did it, we didn't object or deny consent, but he was shitty about the way he accepted our acceptance. If that makes sense."

"It's probably splitting hairs, considering he's the one who removed the capacity to consent in the first place," Conner said. "It's still rape."

"Morally yes, but not ethically," she retorted.

"This again," he said with a groan, but when her eyes narrowed to remind him what he'd put her through, he relented. "All right, how?"

"Remember? Ethics is about how your actions impact others. He singled me out for abuse, because... well, fuck his because. But the rest of those girls could go home at night and sleep sound. No dread, no nightmares, no trauma. I'm not defending the son of a bitch. But as one of his victims, probably the one he was worst to, I'm trying to give you context so you don't go all white knight on this and feel like you need to avenge us. We're OK. I got it as bad as anybody, and I'm telling you, we're OK. Really. You can ask them if they disagree. If you can get them to say anything about Jordan."

He shook his head. "They won't, but... I don't need to. I believe you."

"You do?" A thin smile crept across those plump ruby lips.

"Let's do it. Let's extend it," he said.

"You mean it?"

"Amanda, I hate that I ever didn't. I was so stupid to think I could handle something like this on my own. I don't care – I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry."

She rolled up to her knees and threw her arms around him. “I forgive you. I may still give you crap for it, but only because you’d benefit from a little more humility. I swear, give a guy the keys to one little god program and he starts thinking he’s a big freakin’ deal.”

He laughed, pressing his forehead to hers. “Thanks to you, now I’m co-big-freakin’-deal.”

She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him. Or maybe she was only touching his face and he kissed her? He didn’t care. He was kissing Amanda again, and that was all that mattered.

“So were they better than me?” she asked when she finally came up for air.

“Not a one of them. Though you know who came close...” He grinned. She almost did. “Oh, wait until I tell you about this stunt Jordan tried to pull on me. Speaking of, if you could, I need you to enter a quote of mine for me.”

“Nuh uh, buster. Story first.”

Conner told her all about his evening with Barbara Lyons. He spared the saucy details, but she howled with laughter as he told her.

“I knew you were a mother fucker from the first time I met you.”

“Guilty.”

Amanda curled up in his lap, and though she was a little bit big for such things, he was more than happy to bear the burden. “So what are we gonna do a year from now?”

“For now, let’s focus on what we’re gonna do a week from now.”

“Actually, for now let’s get that quote entered.”

“Why? If we’re doing the extension, there’s no reason for him to carry out the threat,” he said.

“Conner, Conner, Conner,” she said reprovably. “The editor-in-chief of the yearbook, and you don’t think boning your enemy’s mom is a memory worth recording for posterity?”

He grinned. “Well put, madame editor-in-chief. And while you’re doing that, I got one I need to input real quick myself.”

*“I am a mother fucker.” – Conner Fishers*

*“I’m as real as anyone else at this school.” – Amanda Carpenter*

## Chapter Fifteen

“Every obstacle they put up in our path, we overcame. The tests we were given, we passed. The hardships along the way, we endured. My fellow women and men of the class of 2019, we did it! There’s so much more to do, but for today, we did it! Congratulations, and I’ll see you all out there as we look for our next mountains to climb!”

The proud parents and families erupted into applause along with the rest of the graduating class. Conner made an effort to clap the loudest of all of them as Heather bowed and departed the stage, her tassels bouncing on her cap. His proofread of the speech the day before hadn’t changed it much, though he had to admit it was a lot better hearing it in Heather’s voice than reading it on his computer. As Heather took her seat, a faculty speaker, Mr. Rodriguez, did his best to follow the valedictorian’s impassioned words.

The week had finished in a blur, so much so that there had scarcely been opportunity to bask in all the wonderful and poignant moments. He’d had to say goodbye to all of his teachers. For the last time, he and Owen cleaned out their lockers side by side. Taking his last high school exams. Sending the email to ASAL requesting the extension, and receiving a prompt, if curt, confirmation and acceptance of their request, along with a reminder that their access expires the day after graduation.

Amanda had called Wednesday evening, asking if she could stay at his place when, for the first time, she didn’t simply cease to be between school days. After smuggling her past Conner’s parents, they shared a bed, but no more than that. Both were content with that arrangement for the time being. The next day, they explained their decision to Miss C, who agreed to let Amanda stay with her until. When the two went home that evening, they found Miss C’s garage filled with piles and piles of Amanda’s clothes.

Thursday, after Jordan confronted him again about the extension and got his answer, he got to watch the baffled look on his face when, true to form, he tried to carry out his threat anyway and found that it had already been recorded. That disgusting photo he’d edited of Conner and his mother, previously saved as a draft, had been updated and finalized using the selfie he’d taken with Barbara.

“Jordan, how many times have we told you that you need to make sure your quotes include specifics whenever possible?” Conner said, clapping him on the back. “Lots of mothers out there, after all. I didn’t want to get in your way, so I went ahead and entered it for you.”

The next morning, the moment second period was over and Jordan was no longer her teacher – after she and Conner thoroughly examined their files for any last-minute

edits – Amanda changed her TIOS password and permanently blocked the creep from accessing the system. What was done was done, but at last a dam was blocking the flood.

Conner's own "final exam" in sex ed had been a comparatively humdrum assignment of giving a goodbye kiss. Some of the girls had been disappointed not to get anything more involved, but nevertheless many of them were cunningly inventive, to say nothing of thorough, in what a "kiss" might entail. No fewer than five girls invited him to call them over the summer – amidst numerous "summer school" puns – though Conner assured them he'd done more than enough teaching for a good long while. He made sure they all got an A+; it was the least he could do. In fact, he was pretty sure that A+ had been the nudge that boosted Heather to valedictorian status, even though she'd never attended the class when he taught it. Her name had still been in the gradebook, though, and she deserved it for having to put up with Jordan.

Then it had been time for the graduation rehearsal, and he'd failed to hold back tears at the arrival of Rick Neuhauser, talking and laughing alongside his brother Nick. Age aside, they were exactly as Conner remembered them from before the car accident that had cut Rick's life tragically short in middle school. They bantered like nothing was out of the ordinary. When Owen asked him what was up with the waterworks, Conner merely shrugged and said he was emotional about Sunday's ceremony.

Conner's and Angelica's grandparents had arrived Saturday; the graduates shared a wry look as her Grandpa Stanley pondered grumpily why he had to go to a second graduation ceremony, considering they'd just been to one for her two years earlier. The other adults quickly moved in to soothe the crabby septuagenarian, assuring him that it was nonetheless a special day. If Conner had ever had worries that TIOS's potency might unravel away from Northside, the placid acceptance of their relatives washed them away.

Then it was time to graduate. Speeches, ceremony, then the reading of the names. Parents cheered their daughters and sons even though they'd been asked not to, like they always did. The gymnasium was hotter and more crowded than had been promised, as it always was. The graduates were too dizzied by everything happening to appreciate the gravity of it all, as they always were. It was a graduation.

It was the Northside High School class of 2019 graduation.

“So how do you two feel?” Shannon Buck asked Conner and Angelica on their way home. “All grown up? Ready to start putting on your pants two legs at a time?”

“Grown-ups do that?” Conner asked from the back seat. Beside him, Angelica likewise looked puzzled. Between them, a fresh pair of diplomas were stacked atop one another.

“See? Plenty left to learn,” she said with a chuckle. “I really am proud of you two. If I don’t say that enough, I want to make an especial point to tell you today.”

“You tell me you’re proud of me all the time, Mom,” said Conner.

“Thanks, Shannon,” said Angelica, then shifted to a dryer tone. “High school graduation was so much fun, maybe I’ll do it again in a couple years.”

“I’d think two would be plenty for you,” said Shannon blithely. If there was cognitive dissonance in that statement, he didn’t notice it. “So what’s next on the agenda?”

“I’m going to that party at Bear Lake tonight, remember?” said Conner. He’d been pretty explicit with her. She’d even given her permission to drink and to be his designated driver, if he needed one.

“I’m probably just gonna hang out with grandma and grandpa. I haven’t seen them since your wedding and all, so seems like the thing to do.” She shrugged.

Conner had not been surprised when she’d told him she wasn’t going to the party. Owen had vented to him about their fight the other day. He’d almost abused his teacherly privileges to confront Kirsten during class about what the hell she’d been doing. He could almost understand her lashing out like this by coercing his next girlfriend to cheat on him if he’d been the one who broke up with her, but since that wasn’t the case, it all seemed too petty and cruel for pretty much anyone but Kirsten. What would possess anyone to do such a thing?

“That’s good of you, but I meant... you know, life-wise. Summer’s here, and pretty soon you’ll need to make decisions. Not to pressure you,” Shannon added quickly, “but because whatever you do, I want to be able to help you guys get ready however I can.”

Conner had marveled at the *laissez faire* approach she took to his higher education. It was funny, in a way. They’d scrapbooked together since he could remember, and she was quite the amateur historian. Maybe she was simply so focused on preserving the past that she seldom turned around to consider the future.

“I’m going back to college,” said Angelica when Conner didn’t respond right away. This was no secret; she’d already signed up for her fall classes. “Pick up where I left off. Only two more years until we get graduation number three.”

“You’re going to do great, Angelica. But what about the other stuff? Is there anything – anyone – else?”

Conner was surprised to see his usually cocky stepsister's cheeks flush. "I... I don't think so. I don't know. I was thinking of maybe moving in with someone, but I don't think that's gonna happen now."

"With one of your friends? Leslie? I remember you said she was looking to get her own place."

"Eh, it doesn't matter now. Looks like I'm still yours to put up with for now."

With the car stopped at a light, Shannon turned to look her stepdaughter seriously. "I don't 'put up with' you. You're my daughter, and I love you. You're welcome to stay as long as you want, and you can come back any time you want. We'll always have a bed for you. Understand?"

Angelica looked confused by the sudden kindness. "Yeah. Thanks. Light's green," she said after a moment.

"Now this didn't-work-out situation... is that with Owen?"

Both passengers gasped in shock. They'd known she knew about them – Mrs. Gibson had made sure all parents were informed – but that had been months ago, and they had been keeping it secret ever since. Even Conner had barely seen them together, and he spent more time with Owen than anybody. Nevertheless, it was uncharacteristically blunt of their mother to delve so openly into their business.

"Why would you think it was Owen?" Angelica asked guardedly.

"Just a sense I had."

"He and I are past tense. It was just a high school fling, ya know? One and done. In and out." She made a face. "OK, forget that last one. But yeah, we're over."

"Well I'm sorry to hear it," said Shannon somberly. "I always thought you two would be good together."

"Really? Why?" said Conner before he could stop himself. Angelica gave him a back-handed smack in the arm almost before the words were out.

"Oh, I don't know. Similar senses of humor, the way you two always bickered back and forth in that flirty way you had. And obviously there's some attraction there," she said with a wry smile. "Plus he's a nice boy. You deserve a nice boy."

"Yeah, well, I guess everybody's niceness has limits," she mumbled.

"I'm only saying, high school flings aren't necessarily 'one and done,'" Shannon continued. "I met Conner's dad when we were in high school. Lots of my friends met their spouses there, too. Not that I'm encouraging you to get married, of course. I only mean to say, high school has a funny way of stretching out into the rest of your life. The things that happened there can follow you. And I know, I know, as of an hour ago you've reached that point in life where 'high school' has become an adjective synonymous with 'childish,' but remember, you're not any more adult than you were before that ceremony, and I don't think you were 'children' this morning."

"That's some deep stuff," said Angelica after a pause.

“I’m still coming down from a lot of fancy speeches. I promise I’ll be back to normal soon,” she said, smiling at them in the rear view mirror. “So how about you, sweetie? I’ve tortured Angelica enough. Your turn.”

They were driving down a four-lane street then, and who should pull up beside them while his mother and sister were talking but a well-traveled station wagon. In the rear seat, closest to Conner, was none other than his classmate and fellow graduate Tye Oldring. They hadn’t said more than a few words to one another since Conner had interviewed him during that philanthropy kick he’d had around the start of the last quarter. That encounter had been typical of most interactions Conner had had with him since all the way back to elementary school. He’d spent six weeks in a juvenile detention center after clobbering Owen in middle school (the last of many straws), and had been suspended so often it was hard to imagine how he was allowed to return to school. Tye’s dad had been in prison since they’d been in second grade, and word had it his mom was no picnic.

However, during that interview, he’d gotten a sarcastic quote for TIOS. “*My home life’s fuckin’ great.*” – *Tye Oldring*

Presently, Tye was packed into the car with his mom, his three sisters and what looked to be a grandma. Up tempo music was blasting from their car, and it appeared the lot of them were awkwardly dancing, made all the harder by the presence of ice cream cones in the children’s hands.

TIOS had done so much, to so many, and Conner suspected it had done a great deal more than he even knew simply through the process of creating the yearbook. With school over, with TIOS suddenly behind him, he was still reeling too much from what he’d done, from the tangled web of relationships he’d formed, to have any idea what he might do next.

So, after waving back to Tye, he said as much in response to his mother’s question. “I don’t know.”

“Why not? Because there are so many great options, or so few? I have a hard time believing the latter.”

He shook his head. “It’s definitely not the latter.”

“OK, so... what are some of the options? I’m not asking you to pick something here and now, but I’m curious what all is up for consideration.”

He considered. He’d been considering this all week. All year, really, in varying iterations. “Lots of things. Like, you know, college.”

“Any closer to picking where?”

Conner had been accepted everywhere he’d applied; his status as editor-in-chief on top of his solid grades had made him a shoe-in for any school with a journalism program. “Not really. I, um, was considering this school in San Francisco. Maybe. Probably not, though.”

“San Francisco? Wow, that’s pretty exciting. What’s in San Francisco? Or should I ask, who’s in San Francisco?”

“Lots of people, Mom. Lots of schools in the area.”

“Is that near Berkeley?” she asked, failing to keep a knowing smile from her lips.

“Anyway,” he went on, “I might just stick around here for a while, save some money so I’m in better shape when I leave for school. Lots of my friends are staying local, too, so that’s an advantage.”

“Any friends in particular you’re keen to stay near?” The way she intoned the word “friends” left no doubt what she was really asking about.

“Mom! Geez, are you designated matchmaker today or what?”

“I’m only curious,” she said, disregarding his indignant tone. “I mean, I know you’ve been... busy, and I wondered if I’d ever get to meet the young woman.”

“How would you know if I’ve been busy?” he said sulkily. Meanwhile, Angelica was enjoying the exchange immensely, glad to be out of the hot seat.

“I do your laundry, Conner,” she said.

It was his turn to blush, and Angelica threw her head back and howled. “Sorry,” he mumbled. Good grief, she’d been putting up with that this whole past semester and hadn’t said anything? The woman was a saint.

“So, I still don’t get a name?”

Angelica snorted. “What makes you think there’s only one name?”

“Angelica!”

“Just teasing,” she said, smirking. “I know you’re all *class*.” She knew full well he’d taken over sex ed after she was relegated to the library during second period.

“Shut up, Angelica!”

“What? I was simply apologizing. It was definitely wrong of me to suggest you were being promiscuous. My sex ed teacher always said that slut-shaming was a no-no. Did that come up in yours at all? Eh?”

The fact that she could say the words out loud was proof enough no such thing had ever happened in that class. “Says the girl who got caught having a threesome!”

“At least I never hooked up with my—”

“Kids!” barked Shannon with uncharacteristic finality. “How about you two take this up later when I’m not around so I don’t have to learn a bunch of things I’d rather not know?”

Each of them murmured a sullen apology.

“I guess that’s what I get for being nosey,” Shannon remarked. “At any rate, don’t take too long making your plans, sweetie. Things have a way of moving quickly out here in the world, so don’t take so long planning that you forget to act. And that’s all the momming I’m going to do, OK? Except to say how proud of you both I am.”

“You said that already, Shannon.”

“Well I still am.”

“You’re sure you don’t want to go to the party?” Conner asked Angelica as he was pulling on his shoes. She was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling that was too pitiful for him to ignore.

“I’m sure.”

“It’s not hopeless, you know.”

“Coming from the eminent sex ed scholar, that means a lot,” she said dryly.

“I’m serious. He wouldn’t be as upset as he is if he didn’t have feelings for you. Maybe you could, you know, explain it to him. Why you, um... you know.”

“Why I’ve been cheating on him with his cunt ex-girlfriend for the past two months?”

He drew in his breath through his teeth. “Two months? Sorry, that’s... youch.”

“You’re telling me.”

“You know, some people would—”

“If you say that some people would be jealous of me, I will rip your syphilitic dick off and grate it like parmesan over your shrieking mouth.”

He stopped his thought. “Are you OK? I mean, yes, there’s the break-up and all, but... I know things are more complicated. The program and all.”

Her laugh then was a mirthless thing, practically a croak. “This might shock you, Conner, but not everything that happens is because of your stupid program. Sometimes things just happen.”

“I know that. I only mean that, what with the ‘obsessed’ thing...”

She sat up on her bed and fixed him with a hard look. “Goner, you’re legally my brother, but you’re also a step, so I’m gonna cancel sibling mode for a sec. K?”

“Sure,” he said warily.

She let out a weary sigh. “I was kind of obsessed with his cock before you ever wrote that stupid line.”

Conner jerked back, stunned. “Wait, what? But... did TIOS reach back and...?!”

“TIOS? God, what did I just say? Your program was barely involved. No, Owen and I... Remember how I got really drunk at our parents’ wedding?”

He thought. “Sort of? You kinda hated me then, so I was trying to stay away. I was actually kind of scared of you back then, believe it or not.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re scared of me now, Goner. You’re scared of women in general. We’re not all as delicate as your dear sweet mumsy, and she’s only half as delicate as you think she is.”

He pursed his lips. “So you were saying, about the wedding.”

“Right. So yeah, I was hammered, not quite blackout drunk but pretty drunk. And Owen saw how I was doing, and...”

“What? He took advantage of you while you were drunk?!” He supposed after he said it that it wasn’t *that* shocking of a concept. Owen’s libido had often outpaced his

judgment, and he'd only been sixteen at the time. Suddenly, having graduated, that sounded decidedly immature.

"Do you want me to tell the story, or just keep guessing? Geez. No. He took care of me. Held my hair out of the toilet, made sure I didn't pass out, tried to help clean the vomit off my bridesmaid dress. That kind of thing. Anyway, eventually he gave me a lift home before my dad saw anything, and by then I was sobering up a little, and weddings make me crazy horny—"

"Ew."

"Oh don't pretend you don't think I'm hot, too. Anyway, so yeah. Suffice to say, I got to know his cock pretty well that night, and—"

"Ew!"

"You know, for a guy who fucked six girls a day for two months, you're awfully squeamish about this shit."

"Sorry. I'll stop."

"The point is... your friend is hung as fuck, and he's got a goddamn instinct for how to use it. At first I figured I'd just been drunk and hormonal, but then we messed around some more before I went home the next day, and... no. It's that good."

"How did I never know about this?!" Conner exclaimed incredulously.

"Because I asked him not to tell anybody. I told him I'd had fun, but that he was a little young for me, and asked him not to ruin it by going and telling all his friends."

"This is Owen *Gibson* we're talking about, right...?"

"I also told him I'd deny it, and then I'd burn his house down. Up until you got so surprised after that TIOS thing happened, I always sort of figured he'd told you and you had the decency not to bring it up."

"Nuh uh. Never said a word."

She smiled, but it faded quickly. "So yeah. After that, he obviously wanted more, but he never did more than flirt a little. I sorta figured maybe, someday, when he wasn't jailbait, but then you did that thing and... I stopped waiting."

He slumped down to a seated position beside her on her bed. "Whoa. I guess I feel a little less dickish about it, considering."

She gave him a shove, and he was so thoroughly caught off guard he fell all the way to the floor. "You thought he got the words 'I can't get enough of your cock' out of me with there being no truth behind them? What kind of slut do you think I am?"

Conner picked himself up, rubbing his behind. "Fair. Harsh, but fair."

"Kinda surprised you're going to the party yourself. Your last night with access to your beloved TIOS, and you're going to blow it watching a bunch of kids get drunk and desperately try to fuck their crush one last time."

"It's my last night with a lot of those horny drunk kids, too."

“Eh. Ya know, Shannon was right about one thing. I graduated from high school two years ago, and between staying local and social media, I still see half those people all the time. These days, high school never really ends. You move on, but only part of you. So don’t worry they’re gonna fade out of your life. Trust me, it all keeps going.” She flopped back on her bed. “Ugh, I sound old. Go to your party, Goner. Have a good time.”

“Yeah. Uh, have fun playing pinochle with your grandparents.”

## Chapter Sixteen

Bear Lake had been selected for the celebration partially because it was a cool place to have such a thing, but also because it was a stone's throw from Northside High. The school was on the west side of the street. On one side was a subdivision, on the other the Meadow Glen apartments he'd seen Amanda disappear near once, but behind it was a quarter mile or so of woods, through which lay Bear Lake. It was a community park, which meant there was a handy pavilion, some electrical outlets for speakers, bathrooms, and of course the lake itself. It wasn't meant to be accessible via the high school, but considering the occasion, the graduates skipped the park's lot and instead hiked across the football field, through the woods, and down the hill to the lakeside.

Angelica's description of the party wasn't quite spot on, but it was closer to the mark than he'd give her credit for to her face. By the time Owen and Conner arrived, it was already in full swing. Kegs, furnished by the seemingly bottomless generosity and pocketbook of Siobhan's dad, were situated in the pavilion, though some had brought their own alcohol from home. Music was pumping at a pretty loud volume, DJed by none other than Neveah Kinslan, whom Conner had gotten to know in his class. It was a chaotic environment, but happily so; groups expanded and contracted constantly as friends ventured out to speak to acquaintances and classmates.

Conner and Owen grabbed themselves a couple drinks and found their gang. Trevor and Kayla were dancing, having gotten back together two weeks before, but Jacqui, Penny and Luis were sitting on a picnic table near the water, chit-chatting and watching people swim in the fading light of the lingering June sun. After a bit, Conner excused himself to do some mingling. He was, after all, editor-in-chief of the yearbook; getting to know everybody was kind of his thing.

He had just finished a goodbye hug with Nick and Rick Neuhauser when he almost bumped face-first into someone he'd been quite hoping to avoid. The stop was sudden enough that Conner's beer sloshed out onto his shoes.

"Careful, Fishers," Jordan said with a sneer. "You get any of that shit on me, you're a dead man."

Beside Jordan was none other than Hailey, looking as pretty and as meek as ever. "Sorry. I didn't see you."

"Yeah, you're sorry," Jordan taunted in that timeless bully tone. He'd perfected it back in elementary school. Evidently Hailey had forgotten somewhere along the way how much of his practice at it had come at her expense.

"Come on, Jordan, school's over. We're done. Let it go, man."

"Done? You think we're done? You little pussy – you're not done with me. Look at these losers, Fishers. All of them clinging to their pussy Nerf high school life. They're

almost as pathetic as you. All of you, stuck in this life, living in the past. But not me, man. I'm out of here, for good. Done."

"That explains why you came to the party, like the rest of us Nerf pussy losers, huh?"

"Hailey wanted to come, so I came." He pulled her against him with a hand in her back pocket. If he cared that to everyone but Conner, he was embracing a pariah, he didn't show it. "I take care of my girl."

Conner couldn't help himself. With no more idea of what Jordan's plans were, he had no path to stay out of the way of, and so he fired back. "Hey, speaking of taking care of women, I saw your stepmom at the ceremony today. I was going to go over and say hi – you know, to be polite and all – but you know me. Such a mother fucker. Shame, though. She's such a fine lady. Big supporter of your education, I hear."

The bully's hands were suddenly in front of him, clenched into fists. "You wanna go?"

"I sure do," said Conner. At that, he turned and walked away. Amanda had been right. There was nothing to be gained by a contest with a guy like Jordan. There never had been.

Then, a moment later as he was again walking through the crowd looking for other people he wanted to touch base with, there was a tap on his shoulder. He flinched, half-expecting it to be followed by a sucker punch, but when he turned he saw it was only Hailey, now by herself, shaking her head.

"I told him not to fight you," she said. "He wanted to, but I asked him not to."

"Oh. Thanks then, I guess."

"Considering I'm the one who made him hit you in the face after prom, I guess I owed you one."

Conner had nearly forgotten; the shiner had been the least of his troubles at that point. "Hailey, no. I probably had it coming, considering what I did to you." Conner remembered where he was, *when* he was, and quickly continued. If there was a time for closure, this was it. "I am sorry, you know. I really put you through the ringer this year, and you didn't do anything to deserve it."

Her mouth twisted, but she merely shrugged. "The heart wants what it wants, I guess."

"It does. Boy does it ever. Still. Hailey, you're one of the kindest people I've ever known. We may not have been right for one another, but I want you to know, I think the world of you."

Her eyes were cold, as cold as they'd been these past months when they sat across the classroom from one another, every day third period. Yet after a moment, they warmed, albeit still not quite to room temperature. "I think you're a nice guy, too, Conner. And I guess it all worked out anyway, huh?"

“Yeah, looks like you and Jordan are doing good together, huh,” he said, still perplexed by that. Nonetheless, Jordan had that same third period class, and he’d seen day by day how the two of them interacted. He’d even seen someone tease Jordan over it once, and Jordan had reacted almost as hotly as he had to Conner moments ago.

“I guess so? I don’t know. I’m not sure I actually, you know, *like* him... but we have fun at least. I still don’t know what he sees in me, but I’m glad he does.”

There it was again, that tragic, painful self-loathing so core to Hailey’s nature. “Hailey, you’re sexy as hell. That’s what he sees in you.”

She scowled. If there was a sure way to get her hackles up, it was to try to raise her self-esteem. “Don’t say that. It wasn’t true then, and it’s plain mean now. I know what I look like, Conner. I’m OK with it. Jordan puts up with me the way I am, and that’s all that matters.”

After managing to not quite vomit from that sentiment, Conner suddenly had a thought. “Hang on. I wanna show you something,” he said, fishing out his phone.

It took him a minute, but he held up his phone to her, ushering her to one side of the pavilion so nobody else would see. “Tell me what you see.”

She looked at him like he was crazy. “Uh, somebody’s calves, I think? It’s zoomed way in. Looks like they’re in a bathroom stall at school. Did you...?!”

He cut her off, adjusting the image. “And this?”

“Um, her thighs. And, um, her... bottom.” He could hardly believe the same girl who’d referred to herself unprompted as a jizz-obsessed fuck demon was suddenly too bashful to say the word “butt.”

“You think she’s hot?”

“I’m not into girls, Conner. Who is that? Is that your stepsister? It kinda looks like her. Skinny. Athletic.” She looked at him askance.

“What? God no!”

Her eyes widened as her bottomless pit of self-esteem offered up a thought. “Is this some other girl Jordan is sleeping with?”

“No!” Yes, actually, but he wouldn’t get through this if he let her panic. “Just look. I promise, this is going somewhere.”

He stopped himself from telling her who it was yet, but gave her a glimpse of an accompanying image that showed Hailey’s/Hayleigh’s magnificent breasts, and even one of her smile with its perfectly symmetrical white teeth.

“Conner, why are you showing me this? I mean, good for you that some super hot girl is sexting you, but I don’t have feelings for you any more. I’m done being jealous,” she protested at last.

With that, making sure her eyes were on the phone, he zoomed out.

“That’s... that’s... but...” She shook her head. That doesn’t make any sense. “It’s... it’s me. But it’s Hayleigh. Like... what’s happening, Conner?”

At that, he switched his phone to camera mode and set it to mirror mode. “Don’t worry about how. Just know that you’re you, and you’re gorgeous.”

“I... look like *that*?!”

“Told ya. Sexy as hell.”

“But...!”

“Ask Jordan. He knows. And if he won’t tell you, come back to me and I will. OK?”

Conner slid his phone back into his pocket and patted her once on the shoulder before walking away. He glanced back to see her lifting her shirt to reveal smooth abs, pinching her flat tummy in disbelief.

He didn’t know what would happen between Hailey and Jordan. Hell, he didn’t even know what he wanted to happen. Maybe Jordan was actually making her happy, and this would only improve things. Maybe she’d see it that he was using her all along and dump him so she could find someone better. In that body, now that she knew how to open someone’s eyes to it, she’d have a much easier time. It’s what he should have done the day he’d figured out that little trick with Owen, but better late than never.

Whatever happened, at least she could see the truth.

Some time later, Conner was on his way to touch base with Owen and the rest when he caught sight of someone he'd been looking forward to seeing. Amanda saw him at almost the same moment, and they quickly made their way to one another.

"Hey there, madame editor-in-chief,"

"Former editor-in-chief," she corrected. "School's over, remember?"

"TIOS still recognizes us until tomorrow. I'm wearing that badge until they take it from me."

"Suit yourself," she said with a grin. "After the semester I've had, I'm glad to be done with it. Mostly."

A new song started then, and some cheers went up at a popular choice. Neveah knew her audience. "Say, you wanna dance?"

She grinned on one side of her mouth. "Depends. If I say yes, am I agreeing to another foursome?"

"Sorry, three's as big as I go these days," he joked.

"Oh good lord, just come on," Amanda said, seizing his hand and dragging him out to the dance floor.

They danced with one another. After a little while, Don and Marisa saw them, and soon most of the senior yearbook staff was dancing in a big cluster, taking turns performing moves in the middle. The staff took turns either laughing at one another's silliness or cheering at their skillfulness. Conner fell in the laughing column, but Amanda...

"Damn, Carpenter's on fire!" called Don. Indeed, a larger group was forming as she danced in a way he recognized all too well. This was something she'd learned in second period. She'd come tonight looking good – Amanda never looked *bad*, but good even for her – and the way she was moving her hips, the way she wriggled, the way everything moved... Hell, even the way her hair whipped around was pure sex. He hadn't even noticed it until she grasped it, but the pavilion featured several steel poles as supports. They didn't allow the same maneuverability as the poles in class, but she was still able to perform a handful of jaw-dropping maneuvers.

Amanda evidently recognized the song, and she timed it such that when it ended, it left her gripping a handful of Conner's shirt, their bodies pressed tightly together, her plump red lips right at eye level. A chorus of male howls and more than a few prompts for Conner to make a move went up.

"You wanna get out of here?" she said in a low voice. "With me?"

"More than anything," he answered immediately.

"You got your car? Kristy dropped me off."

"Uh uh."

She released his shirt and stepped back. "Good. I'm gonna mingle for a while, but I'll see you in an hour or two. OK?"

Dumbstruck, he stood by as she patted his cheek and sauntered away.

He had given in to the temptation, the practicality really, to use TIOS to let him get an erection at will. As he plodded out of the pavilion, he lamented not having given himself the capacity to will one away. Since technically Amanda could also give him an erection at will, maybe it was her doing. He looked after her, and didn't even kid himself that he was simply trying to get another look at her unbelievable ass.

It was definitely her doing.

Soon after, as he was hugging another elementary school classmate goodbye, he turned and once again found himself catching the eyes of an ex-girlfriend. It was sort of strange, really, seeing Heather in a simple white blouse and pastel blue shorts. It gelled with his memories of her from the first seven semesters of high school, but not at all with the last one. The last day of school, she and the Pride girls had worn nothing but tassels and g-strings, their final middle finger to the patriarchy. He'd seen tattoos on her body he'd forgotten Jordan had put there. (Amanda, usually a participatory Pride member, had drawn the line at that stunt.)

"Conner! I've been looking for you," she said warmly, greeting him with a tight hug.

"Looking for moi? I'm flattered."

She smiled. "I mean so I could avoid you, sorry."

"Right, right. Let me just crawl under that bench then, and—"

She caught him by the arm as he pretended to follow through on it and both laughed. "I love your speech today, by the way. Great job."

Heather shook her head. "No way. That thing was so full of clichés and redundancies, I can't believe Principal Beckmann approved it. Thanks, though, for looking over it for me. I appreciate it."

"My pleasure."

Conner stopped talking then; it was too easy to simply bask in her company. After a moment, though, she filled the silence between them. "You wanna go for a walk with me?"

"I dunno, I hear there's some real creepers in these woods..."

"Who called us creepy? That's what we get for releasing hostages," she joked. But then she held out her hand and the two were off and away. As they got farther from the party, their comfort with silence grew. She led him along the shore of the lake, proceeding until they could barely hear the music, and could only see the party from the tiki torches and a few cell phone lights visible in the distance. The crickets were louder here than the speakers.

"Pretty night," he observed, not sure what to say.

"Do you want to go swimming?" Heather asked suddenly.

“Swimming?” He was caught by surprise. “Sure. Oh, but... I didn’t bring a change of clothes. Kinda suck to be wet the rest of the night. It’s supposed to get down in the 50’s.”

She eyed him with wry bemusement for a moment before shucking her blouse without even unbuttoning it. Her shorts followed a moment later, and she set them down on a nearby picnic bench. “Gee, if only there were some way not to get your clothes wet,” she teased.

Conner didn’t need to be asked twice, and a moment later he stood there beside her in his boxers. He reflected on the strangeness of being so instantly aroused by the sight of her in fairly conventional underwear, whereas the stripper garb from Friday had been almost passé.

Heather was looking at the space between her breasts where the words “public access” were tattooed across the inner slopes of her breasts. “You know, sometimes I don’t know what I was thinking when I got these,” she remarked, turning her attention next to the busty stripper on her right bicep. “Everybody’s used to ‘em here, but some of this is going to be hard to explain at Berkeley.”

Conner frowned. One of Jordan’s pettier ways of jabbing at him had been decorating Heather’s body in tattoos the likes of which most hookers would blush at. “They’re... quality, at least.”

“Yeah,” she said, pivoting and trying to look behind her. “Still not sure how I ever thought ‘butt slut’ in my tramp stamp slot was going to be empowering. Oh well. Too late now.”

“Yeah, too late now.” That son of a bitch. He returned his attention to his underwear. “I guess I can take these off when we get out and go commando after.”

“Or, you could man up and remember I’ve seen it all before and fold them neatly on the table,” she said.

This time, she let him take the lead, and lead he did. He was already half-erect, even in the cooling night air. Probably still lingering from Amanda.

Amanda!

Conner could read the room. While Heather was certainly accustomed by now to casually displaying her body, there was a world of difference between showing skin to defy the Man and inviting your ex-boyfriend to go skinny-dipping with you. In that moment it felt like he had to make a choice on the spot, decide the rest of his life. Who was he going to be with? His pulse quickened in a sudden bout of anxiety, but before he could do more than panic at the implication, Heather was naked as well and guiding him by the hand into the water.

It had been a warm day, and while the lake wasn’t what he might have called pleasant, neither was it too chilly. It only took a minute or so to acclimate. Heather waded out into the sandy lakebed until her titanic tits were concealed beneath the water.

Conner stood on the opposite side of her from the shore, though their height difference still left him crouching to keep his own body from being exposed to the breeze blowing across the lake.

“Not exactly Maui, is it,” he said.

“What is?” she said, looking around. “It’s not bad, though. My family used to come here for the Fourth of July when I was a kid, before my grandpa died and everybody stopped talking to everybody. I can still see the fireworks in my head.”

After a moment, Conner laughed in spite of himself. “What?” she said, mildly annoyed at his reaction.

“No, no, it’s not you, it’s just... you said fireworks, and I tried to think of some cheesy line, and... let’s just say even in my own imagination it did not go well.”

She grinned. “You know you don’t need cheesy lines with me.”

“Good thing, because I definitely did not have anything of quality.”

“I’m going to miss this place,” she went on after his interlude. “Not just the lake, I mean, but here. Home.”

“Oh yeah – how long before you head out? I remember your summer program started not too long after graduation, but until today I guess it still seemed really far away.”

“Friday.”

He gasped. “That soon? Wow. That’s... wow! Are you all ready to go?”

“I have some packing to do, but the dorm rooms are pretty small, so I can’t bring that much. Still trying to figure out what books I wanna bring and what ones I want to make sure are still at home waiting for me.”

He nodded. “Yeah. Your poor mom is gonna miss you like crazy, I bet. But I guess what I meant was, are you *ready* ready?”

She sighed, then dove under water and came up a moment later, her blonde hair dark in the moonlight, slicked back against her head. Maybe it was like Maui – at least, the best part of it.

“I don’t know,” she said after a moment. “It seems like almost everybody from school is either sticking around here and working, or going to a state school. I’m the only person I know going to Cali. It’s going to be weird, suddenly not knowing anyone or anywhere, you know? We spent four years in yearbook learning the hell out of Northside and the community, and suddenly I’m not going to know how to get from my dorm room to the cafeteria.”

He let himself drift towards her. The water was perceptibly warmer as they drew closer. “For the tuition you’re paying, I’m pretty sure they won’t let you starve.”

“You know what I mean, though, right?”

“I know.”

She sighed, but concluded it with a wistful smile. “And it all comes after the best semester of my life. I was being active, finding meaning, leading people, my classes went great... I met this really sweet guy...”

As she finished speaking, she closed the remaining distance between them, their bodies rubbing softly together beneath the water. “Anyone I know?”

She shook her head. “Don’t be coy, Conner.”

“All right.” Slowly, his arms wrapped themselves around her body, and she melted into him, her cheek pressed firmly into his shoulder, her arms grasping him tight. “You know I’m going to miss you like crazy, right?”

“You are?”

“I am.”

“What about Amanda?” she asked in a small voice.

Less than an hour earlier, Conner had agreed unhesitatingly to go home with her, with the unspoken agreement of sex to follow. Yet now, with Heather in his arms, it was impossible to imagine being with anyone else. “You know, there’s something I never told you when we were together,” he said.

“Don’t say you love—” she started quickly, but he put a finger to her lips.

“Not that. No cheesy lines. What I was going to say was, for as long as I can remember liking girls, I’ve thought you were the most beautiful person I had ever seen.” She kissed his finger, and he withdrew it only to position mouth a few inches from hers. “Of course, back then I was a stupid horny middle schooler, so it took me a while to appreciate the rest. How brilliant you are. How deep you are. How you can get along with anybody, and everybody wants to be around you. How passionate you are. How... is it weird to call you... I dunno, *good*?”

“It’s not weird.”

“That, then. How you care about the world as a place.” He squeezed her soft body against his. “How careful you are about who you let get close. How incredible it feels to be let close.”

“Conner...”

“I never said anything because I felt like such a dork to have all these feelings for some girl I only knew from class. But the more I got to know you, the more everything I thought I saw was confirmed, and expanded.”

Her hands rested softly on the back of his head, pulling their foreheads together. She rubbed her wet button nose against his. “So why are you telling me now?”

“I’m not sure,” he answered. “I guess maybe so when I tell you how much I’m going to miss you, you’ll know I’ve been feeling this way since forever.”

It was impossible to say who kissed who; their lips moved together in harmony, and their tongues followed. It was Heather, for certain, who leapt into his arms, locking her legs around Conner’s waist. He caught her with two hands under her buttocks, her

body buoyant and light in the cool water. They gasped as one as he lowered her onto his shaft, their genitals transitioning in a rapturous instant from brisk water to torrid flesh.

“You have no idea how much I missed this,” she moaned.

Conner, who had had more than enough access to pussy since their breakup, soon realized how much he had nevertheless missed being with Heather. Rather than try to tell her, he put himself into showing her. He carried her deeper into the water so he could stand upright easily, then settled into a slow, steady rhythm. When he and Heather had been dating, he'd thought he was a practiced lover, considering how many women he'd been sleeping with. Now, he was coming off of two months of having sex with more than a dozen women a week. Women who were committed to exploring positions, women who would give him honest feedback, women devoted to improving their technique, women who competed for sexual accolades.

It was revealed in small ways. The way he moved his hips; the coordination of hands, mouth and pelvis; his attunement to her responses. The distinction was all in small increments here and there, but the effect on her was electric. Remembering how sensitive her nipples were, he left her bottomed out on his cock and stimulated her with rotations of his hips. His cock swirled around and around inside her while he tweaked her buds between thumb and forefinger. When he'd been practicing, it had been a distraction to make himself mindful of distinctions, but he felt he owed it to the girls to show them the best possible time. Now, watching Jody's eyes alternating between squinting shut in peaks of pleasure and shooting wide when new peaks were discovered, it felt more than worth it.

Once or twice she forgot herself and her cries echoed across the still surface of the lake, but when they finally stumbled back to the shore some time later, no one had come over to snoop. Considering how many members of the senior class had seen the two of them naked or nearly so, such modesty was almost laughable, but it was nice to still have her to himself.

“Looks like we forgot to bring towels, Little Miss Hop On In,” he observed with a grin.

“We can air dry. If somebody comes over, we can just jump back in.”

“And hope they don't take our clothes.”

“Don't be a pessimist, Conner. It doesn't suit you.” She sat down carefully atop the picnic table, her feet resting on the bench.

“Do you remember what we did on the beach at Maui?” she asked softly. “Right after we did... that.” She gestured to the water.

His grin broadened. “Do I ever.”

“Did... did you like it?”

“You really have to ask?”

“I don’t know – I mean, you looked like you liked it, but I didn’t know if you did compared to, like, other stuff.”

“I liked it. A lot.”

He was momentarily hypnotized by the sight of her casually playing with her boobs, but her voice snapped him out of it. “Did you wanna... again?”

“Seriously? I mean, yeah, but we can do other stuff instead if you’d rather. I don’t wanna leave you out.”

A sly grin slowly crept over her cherubic face. “Honestly, I kinda... like it. Is that weird?”

“Of course not. But, if I can ask... why do you like it?”

“Well for one, it sort of felt good, the way you rubbed my nipples while you... yeah. For two,” she said, pausing briefly as they heard a shriek, followed by laughter, from the direction of the party, “OK, so yeah, I know I have these huge boobs that everybody’s always staring at. And I guess it felt sort of weirdly, I dunno, empowering? Like, to give someone permission to go there.”

Conner couldn’t help but laugh. “Feels good to be the gatekeeper to the kingdom of heaven, eh?”

She grinned. “Yeah. So, before they dry off...”

“Hell yeah!”

She laid back on the picnic table, her enormous breasts flattening under their own weight and flopping to either side. They were almost the size of her head, he’d swear it. Conner went to climb aboard, but she stopped him with an arm across them.

“I want to hear you ask first.”

“Pretty please?” he said, unsure what exactly she wanted to hear.

“Pretty please, may you... what?”

“May I climb on top of you?”

A coy smile. “Climb on top of me and...?”

At last he thought he got it. “Climb on top of your amazing body and fuck the most perfect tits I’ve ever seen in my life.”

“Proceed,” she said, withdrawing her arm.

He didn’t need to be told twice. He mounted her and dove cock-first into the holiest of holies, Heather Blake’s tits. When he’d first started crushing on her, she was too young to have much of anything. Year by year he’d watched as they sprouted and blossomed into those two perfect, jiggling, heaving, fleshy globes of raw sex. Physically it couldn’t compete with her pussy or her mouth, but psychologically – nay, spiritually – it was nirvana.

Lauren and Joanna came strolling through while he partook of Heather’s sacrament, but when they saw him, they paused, gave him a big thumb’s up, and turned

back the way they'd come from to give him his privacy. He was going to miss them, too, albeit not compared to Heather.

In fact, he found himself holding back, trying to prolong the act, as if he could take long enough that she'd be too late to go to Berkeley and stay here with him forever. But when she spoke up, looking at him with those big blue entreating eyes, he had to wonder if her tits could read minds.

"Come with me to Cali," she said.

His excuse for delay gone, he came. It was a veritable geyser. It coated the fountain tattoo between her tits, her chin, pooling quickly in the hollow of her neck. To his surprise, she simply laughed, pulling down and kissing him. "Who knew California was such a turn-on for you," she giggled.

In that instant, he spoke on impulse, from the heart, without a moment's hesitation. "I'll go. I'll do it. If you'll have me."

She moaned happily, squeezing her tits and then pulling him down for another kiss. He pressed himself against her, jizz be damned.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed as his weight fell on her. "Catch your breath, Conner – no more fainting, OK?"

It was only after, when they'd rinsed off in the lake and put their clothes back on damp bodies, that he began to really get light-headed enough for fainting to be a concern.

What had he done?!

It was easy to keep smiling, somehow, even though his mind was racing. On the one hand, it felt so unbelievably right. Heather Blake, the girl he'd dreamed about since he'd been old enough to have such dreams, had invited him to go with her into the next step of her life. She wanted him. She might even love him. He'd already been contemplating such a move, so it wasn't completely out of left field. He wouldn't have applied to schools out there if he hadn't seriously considered it. It was a change of pace, adventure, some of the country's most gorgeous weather and most important of all, one of the country's most gorgeous women. Heather.

What seemed to be causing his dizziness was that even as part of his mind was being swept away in that current, the rest was clinging for dear life to its roots. As exciting as California would be, it felt like he'd slammed the door on other possibilities. Like the possibility which, an hour ago, had felt so imminent and deliriously rewarding that he'd felt like he was slamming the door on this one.

To say nothing of other "doors" who weren't in attendance that evening.

As they made their way back to the party, she kissed him and told him he could go enjoy himself with her friends; she was going to do the same with hers. She promised she'd text him the next day and they could start making plans. He told her he couldn't wait. Part of him couldn't.

"Am I mad, or did I just see you coming back from a walk by the lakeshore with Heather Blake?" asked Owen as he walked over.

"You're not mad," said Conner, taking a long drink from his cup.

"Your hair looks wet. Her hair looked wet, too," observed Penny in a casual tone.

Conner gave them nothing more than a simple, "Yep."

"Weird, I didn't see either of you carrying wet swimsuits," Jacqui noted.

"Nope."

"Did you bone Heather?" asked Luis.

As one, the others turned and swatted at him as he ducked and backed away. "What? What'd I say?!"

With Luis's gauche comment forgotten, they congratulated him on "whatever" had happened. Only at that exact moment, someone joined their circle. "Congratulations on what? What'd I miss?" asked Amanda, walking up behind him.

The group fell conspicuously silent, and Conner spoke quickly. "Got another acceptance today."

"Oh? What school?"

He quickly threw Southwest State University, who had written him several weeks ago, feeling like a heel as he did so. “Oh, well good for you,” she said. “Say, I don’t suppose you were still thinking about getting out of here, were you?”

Conner was glad for her beneficent change of topic. “Sure, if you are. Oh, and I was Owen’s ride, so—”

“Go ahead, man. I’ll hitch a ride with one of these bums,” replied Owen. “Oh, but I left my wallet and phone in your car – I’ll come with and get those, then you two crazy kids can... drive home. Or whatever.”

“Owen,” grumbled Conner warningly.

“What, like we’re not going to at least make out?” said Amanda. “Come on, it’s my first ever Sunday night out – am I supposed to pretend I don’t want to enjoy myself?”

There was some semi-awkward chuckling; her tone was one of humor, but none of them understood the comment at all. But then Conner’s friends bid him farewell, Luis flashed a thumbs up and mouthed an awe-struck “dude!” once Amanda’s back was turned, and the three of them set out. Conner let Amanda lead the way, and Owen, sensing the moment of awkwardness, followed close behind her, chatting her up as Conner tried to fight down feelings of how unfair this all was.

Why should he have to choose between them? How could he have such incredible opportunities in his life, such incredible women, and have to eliminate all but one? He was rather thoroughly preoccupied with his spurt of unmerited self-pity. So much so that, when Hayleigh McKnight chose that moment to call out “Look, everybody, there goes Most Likely to Suck Dick for Nickels!” at Owen as they walked past, his first reaction wasn’t the usual jolt of fear that accompanied any interaction with that girl and her friends.

It was anger.

Hayleigh and the others were hanging out near a fire pit, the glow casting their faces in the ominous red that seemed likely to accompany their eventual fate. Her boyfriend Jayce was there, drinking from a can of Coors Light, as was Jackson, Angelica’s second choice date to the King of Hearts dance. There were Sydney, Courtney and Ashley from class, along with boyfriends or aspiring boyfriends. Of course sitting on the far side of the fire, regarding them with a venomous smirk, sat Kirsten Vaughan, with her chief toady Olivia mirroring the smirk at her side.

Curiously, sitting there staring into the fire, heedless of the brewing conflict, sat Jordan Lyons. There was no sign of Hailey. Even pissed off as he was, there was a part of him that cheered for her.

Rather than retreat, as these jerks no doubt expected them to do, Conner strode closer. “What did you say to him?” Conner demanded. Most of the guys retorted immediately with a sound of mock fear, except for Jayce, who as always stood by ready to beat someone to a pulp to impress his illusorily sexy girlfriend.

“Oh, did we find his first customer?” she sneered. “I think I hear some change rattling in those pockets, guys! You hear that?”

Several of her friends responded in the affirmative as Amanda closed with Conner and Owen. “Just walk away, guys. Fuck those people, OK? This is your last day having to deal with them. Walk it off.”

Conner had vented to her the other day about Kirsten’s involvement in Owen and Angelica’s breakup; at the time, he’d been seeking her input if there might be an easy TIOS fix. Ultimately they decided it was best not to meddle uninvited. Still, it was bad enough letting Kirsten get away with wrecking his relationship without unleashing her friends on them.

Conner wasn’t having it. “Shut up, Hayleigh. Just shut up. For once in your miserable lie, shut the hell up.”

Jayce took two steps forward, fists cocked, but Hayleigh stopped him with a hand on his forearm. It looked to be a practiced routine for the two of them. “Nobody’s talking to you, loser, so why don’t you sit down before you pass out on us, all right?”

Conner glanced to Owen, whose eyes were locked on Kirsten’s. He had no doubt this fresh round of taunting came at her behest after the drama between her and Owen and Angelica. How any of that could be laid at Owen’s feet was anyone’s guess, but whether or not it was his fault, it had somehow become his problem.

“You know, I don’t get you, Hayleigh. I’ve known you since, what, first grade? And you have always been like this. You have everything. Rich parents, tons of friends, good looks. What could possibly be missing that you have this need to try to hurt people?”

She laughed with dramatic volume, as the people nearby had begun to see something brewing. It wasn’t every day someone stood up to Hayleigh McKnight, after all. Now that they’d graduated, who knew when they might get to see another ass-kicking by Jayce? It probably didn’t bode well for Conner, since an audience was likely to be prejudiced to her side, but he didn’t care.

It was Olivia, however, who responded. “Oh wow! You hear that, Hayleigh? I knew he’d been stalking you all year, but I totally didn’t know it went all the way back to first grade! You better change your security code on your door, just to be safe.”

“I dunno, he and gay-boy there look too into each other to have any interest in me,” said Hayleigh, Hailey’s pudgy face contorted with contempt.

“See, that’s what I mean!” Conner shouted back. He wasn’t playing to the crowd like they were; he was simply too tired of their bullying to keep it held in. “Owen didn’t do anything to you! I didn’t do anything to you! The only thing we’ve ever done is to put up with your bullshit for the past twelve years. Well you know what? High school’s over. Time to grow the hell up!”

Hayleigh was clearly not used to having anyone stand up to her, and he suspected that he was about to be having a brief and humiliating clash with Jayce, and then rather than making out with Amanda, she'd be driving him to the hospital.

Instead of escalating things, however, Jackson yelled out from behind her. "Fags!" And a fresh round of cackling went up from many of those gathered around.

There was no point. He saw that. These people were assholes, and yelling at them was hardly going to change it. and if he kept at it, he was likely to get his ass kicked. He'd like to think spunk and righteous anger counted for something in a fight, but in the end, Jayce was a state ranked football player, and in his experience the size of the dog in the fight counted a great deal.

Only he'd forgotten he was standing next to Amanda Carpenter. Not until after she finished speaking would he remember her words to him the first day they met: *This bitch isn't on a leash. She's a hundred thirty pounds with a two-ton bite and a long bloody trail of ripped-out jugulars spreading out behind her from the punks who thought it'd be cute to pull on her tail.*

"Fags, huh?" Amanda said, stepping forward. A look of confusion went through the popular crowd. Bullying girls was typically handled differently from bullying guys. Jayce couldn't simply beat Amanda up if she got too mouthy. "I dunno, I think Conner's a pretty solid lay, myself. What do you think, Olivia?"

Olivia stiffened. This was obscene! That had happened in sex ed, only all of the sudden, what happened there was coming here! "How about you, Ashley? Courtney? Sydney? You guys think he was good? How hard did he make you little sluts come?"

"You're not supposed to talk about that!" hissed Ashley, scowling. A murmur went through the growing crowd of on-lookers as she inadvertently confirmed Amanda's accusation.

"Oh, come on, Ashley, I bet if you asked real nice, Papa Fishers here would bend you over and give you that spanking you're craving. Whaddaya say?"

"Shut up!" screeched Olivia. Indeed, the girls in that crowd from period two looked on the verge of panic. This was simply not done, discussing such things in the open.

"Look," said Hayleigh, clearly perturbed by the effect Amanda's words had had on her posse, "I don't know who you think you are, new bitch, but you're starting to piss me off."

"You know what pisses me off? Cunts like you who use homophobic slurs to try to put people down. I mean, you're sitting here calling Owen gay? First off, fuck you for treating that like something shameful. And second, you look me in the eye right now and tell me that if he told you he wanted to fuck you, right now, you wouldn't let him."

Hayleigh gaped. "What?! Are you crazy?! I... I..."

Conner was struggling to keep up with this vector of Amanda's attack until he remembered that she was his co-editor-in-chief, and knew all about how Jordan had tried to throw Conner off the scent of who had really hacked his account with a red herring. *"I could have my pick of girls!" – Owen Gibson*

"Huh? Any of you? Come on guys, ask your ladies. Ask if there's a one of them that wouldn't spread their legs for Owen here if he hinted he was interested. Go on, ask 'em," pressed Amanda.

"What? Tell her, babe – he's just a nobody ginger pussy!" implored Jayce. "Tell that fag where he can shove his little fag cock."

Only she didn't. It was clear she wanted to, but with Owen standing there in front of her, she didn't dare signal she wasn't interested, in case he decided to pick her as his replacement for Kirsten. High school might be over, but that rivalry was alive and well.

The sounds of shock from their audience once more became mocking laughter, only this time directed in the other direction. Finally Olivia gave a desperate look at Kirsten and stated, "I... I wouldn't!" Her voice broke mid-declaration.

"Oh really? That's too bad, because he was just saying how he was totally into you, Olivia," replied Amanda. "I thought you might have a shot."

"He did? Seriously? Wow!" said Olivia, eyes widening in apparent delight. In her tube top, the sudden presence of hardened nipples was obvious to anyone who looked at her for more than a second.

"As for your friend back there, Hayleigh" Amanda went on, taking an aggressive step forward, her red hair blazing in the firelight. "I only say this because I know every shitty word you just said mouth came right out of Kirsten's mouth, up your ass and out the other end. You really ought to give the gay-bashing a rest considering your buddy there?" She pointed to Kirsten. "She's the biggest lesbian in all of Northside."

The crowd gasped as one. What was she saying? This didn't sound like the usual gay-bashing one heard from jerks in the halls. This new girl seemed to frown on that. She sounded like she meant it, and she sounded like she knew what she was talking about. In an instant, Kirsten's alibi of the college boyfriend struck every single Nighthawk as no more plausible than a girlfriend from Niagara Falls.

Amanda thundered on. "I normally wouldn't approve of outing people without their permission, but if you're going to blackmail girls into eating you out, maybe you need to come out and admit that you're on the market. I'm sure there's a girl out there who'd be desperate enough to get in your panties that she'd be willing to put up with the bile spewing out of your soul, you evil fucking bitch."

Through it all, from the moment Hayleigh had first called them out to the end of Amanda's tirade, Owen had simply stood by glaring at his ex. Finally, as she gaped in horror, his glower melted away and became a thin smile.

Hayleigh's stringy hair whipped around as she spun on Kirsten. "What's she talking about? You're... you aren't a lesbo, are you?" When Kirsten merely glared at her redheaded assailant, Hayleigh gasped. "Oh my GOD! I let you see me...! You fucking...!"

Whatever she said was drowned out by a round of applause and cheers of goodwill. If there was one thing people loved more than watching hot girls be sassy, it was watching a bully get their comeuppance.

It was then that Owen stepped in front of Amanda and Conner and raised his voice so Kirsten could hear it over the exclamations of her so-called friends. "You never deserved either of us," he said simply, then turned and walked away.

Even as Kirsten's clique dissolved in shrieked accusations, stammered denials, and desperate demands from the guys for reassurance from their girlfriends, Amanda put her arms around both of the boy's shoulders and guided them away. The crowd parted for them as if they were celebrities. Which, for the next few minutes, they were.

"I can't believe Kirsten's a lesbian!" Conner exclaimed. Both of them gave him an incredulous look. "What?! Seriously, she hides it really well!"

"That was amazing," Owen said as they cleared the edge of the gathering and entered the woods. "You didn't have to get involved in that, Amanda."

She released them then, as phones were needed to serve as flashlights in the dark grove. "Conner's my guy. That means you're my guy by association."

"Well thanks. I really *shit!*" He let loose a few more curses as he tripped face first over an exposed root. "Anyway," he went on after they helped him up, "I appreciate it. Kirsten... I almost feel bad for her. Ever since I realized she's like that. I tried to talk to her about it, but she just cut me off, wouldn't admit to anything, swore I was crazy, threatened to ruin me. Tried to, even."

"With friends like those, it's hard to blame her," said Conner.

"I'm sure they'll work it out, Kirsten being Kirsten," Amanda said. "Queen of Northside High. They'll tear her down, and tomorrow she'll pull some strings, work her magic and be right back on top. If there's one thing I've learned about high school, it's that everything is cyclical. Things end, then there's a brief pause before things start right back over."

Silently, Conner hoped that applied to his friend and his sister, but he didn't try to force the point. Angelica could fight her own battles, and he'd meddled too much as it was.

They made their way to the car in companionable silence, and he waited until Owen had retrieved his belongings from the car before pouncing on Amanda, nearly tackling her into the driver's side door mouth-first. She reciprocated as eagerly as he did, holding the back of his head to keep him from letting up for a second. When his own hands didn't act quickly enough, she moved them to her breasts herself.

“I literally made these things for you, you know,” she managed between kissing his lips, neck, and jawline. “You better make good use of them.”

“To be fair, all of you was made for me to begin with,” he said, making sure to amply demonstrate his appreciation for those perfectly sculpted tits.

Suddenly she stopped kissing. “Huh. You know, I never really thought of it like that.”

He paused, though didn’t relinquish his grip. “Is that OK...? I didn’t mean—”

“No, no, it’s... it’s actually... kinda awesome. I was literally made for you,” she said. “Must be why you fit so good, huh?”

“Just admit that you TIOSed yourself the perfect pussy,” he replied. “The rest was only practice.”

Amanda retorted, “What? Says the guy who gave himself unlimited stamina!”  
Amanda retorted.

“That’s not a denial...”

She held up a finger to contradict him, though it didn’t stop him from sneaking another kiss before she spoke. “Perfect hair? Sure. Whiter teeth? Fine. Flawless skin? Yeah, I guess. Trimmer waist? You bet. Rounder ass? Guilty. Rocking tits? Check and mate. But perfect pussy?! How *dare* you, sir!”

He pressed back against her. “Man, could have fooled me.”

“It must be naturally perfect,” she said before drawing him into the back seat.

As he followed her down, however, she put her hand on his chest. “One last thing we need to get out of the way.”

“Perfect legs? I was surprised you didn’t mention those.”

She smiled, but it was more subdued. “You want to tell me why you smell like the lake?” she asked.

Like that, he snapped out of it and the tiny bubble his mind had erected around this moment burst, letting in awareness of the entire rest of the world. Before he could answer, she went on. “And while I’m really excited you got into Southwest State, maybe you can tell me about why Heather’s hair was sopping wet as she floated back from your walk.”

“Look, I can explain,” he began, but she cut him off immediately.

“Conner, I’m not looking for excuses. I just want to know what’s going on in here,” she said, tapping the center of his chest. “Now that I’m ‘real’ and all, I have to start thinking about that future I almost didn’t get to have.”

“Amanda, I didn’t extend TIOS to make you feel like you owe me anything,” Conner said quickly, sitting back in his seat.

“I know that,” she snapped. “Geez, Conner, of course you didn’t. But you did make me see what I was about to lose, and you did let me change that, and you can’t make me not love you for it. Hell, you yourself observed not five minutes ago that I only

came into being because of you, albeit indirectly. I know you didn't do either as some kind of *Weird Science* thing, so chill. You're not that kind of asshole."

"What kind of asshole am I?"

"Why don't you tell me, starting with what you and Heather were doing by the lake."

His first instinct was, as it always was, to try to cushion the blow, to avoid hurting people when possible and to minimize conflict when not. Yet even if he couldn't see in her eyes that she wanted the truth, he had to figure out for himself what he wanted, and he couldn't do that with apologies and excuses.

"We had sex," he said.

"I must've really gotten your pilot lit," she huffed.

"As a matter of fact you did, but it had nothing to do with anything. It's... look." He took her hand, and though she almost recoiled, she opted to let him keep it. "I've had a thing for Heather since the day I hit puberty. Even before that, maybe. So when I finally got a chance to be with her, nothing else mattered. It was like I was this kid who'd come home from trick or treating, and even though he knows he'll make himself sick, he's wanted that candy for an entire year and he has it and now he's gonna eat that whole bag."

"That's a metaphor, all right."

"I know your semester has been its own roller coaster, but it's been pretty wild on my end, too. First Hailey, then Kristy, then Heather, then you—"

"Then Kristy and Heather *and* me."

"—and I haven't had a chance to figure out what I want. What's *right*. When I thought I was going to lose you, I stopped thinking about that as a possibility, and I thought I'd lost Heather even before I got her with this Berkeley thing, but now she's asked me to go with her, and I don't know anything any more. Hell, I should probably do everyone a favor and take a vow of celibacy."

"You wouldn't last ten minutes," she said, but there was little warmth to it.

"I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted for being a big dumb slut, but I've known you were one of those for a long time now." She took a deep breath and squeezed his hands tighter. "Look. You know I like you. You're my kind of big dumb slut. I like you so much I've wanted to strangle you at times. I don't know if I know what love is, but I might even love you. Maybe not. I don't know. But I'd be lying if I didn't say I want you to stay with me. In a way, being with you is almost all I've ever known, and I hate thinking of a future that doesn't have you in it."

"I hate thinking of leaving you behind. I hated that thought even when I didn't think I was gonna get to be with you anyway."

“That’s good, Conner. You know, I can’t make your decision for you – though once you see the underwear I picked out tonight, I might be proven wrong on that – but let me say this. If you stay here, I think we’re going to be awesome together. I already got a couple callbacks on some job applications and I’m going to make a killing selling all the old slutwear Jordan and Heather had me dressing in to creeps on the internet–”

“Seriously?”

“Don’t hate,” she said, frowning. “I gotta get money from somewhere to get by, and you wouldn’t believe how much people will pay. Anyway, I’ll be out of Miss C’s place real soon so there’s no more weirdness of coming to see me at your former teacher slash lover’s house. And then I’ll get your cute little ass over to my new pad whenever I can get my hands on you. Which I hope is a lot, because, well, like you said. We’re made for each other.”

She pulled him closer to her, then seized him by the belt and pulled him back on top of her and reminded him of three things. First, her promise that her underwear was sexy as hell, skimpy red satin the made her hand-sculpted body even shapelier. Second, as the windows in the car began to thoroughly steam up, was how much better she looked without it. Third, once his tongue was about to fall off from how long he’d been savoring that heavenly space between her heavenly thighs, was how right he’d been about her pussy. From her own moaning and flailing, she seemed to be enjoying a reminder of her own.

“Damn, you’re amazing,” he panted, slumping down into his seat. His sweaty, naked skin clung to the upholstery.

“Pfeh, that was nothing. Now imagine if I actually tried to seduce you into staying,” she said with a laugh, resting her head in his lap.

“That *wasn’t* seduction?”

“You want me to seduce you, you’ll have to stick around and give me the chance.”

“You’re home early,” said Angelica as he strolled inside. Everybody else was in bed, and their grandparents seemed to have made their way back to their hotels for the night. Angelica was sitting on the living room in boxers and a tank top, looking like she was meaning to head to bed before long herself.

“Looks like.”

“Party not fun?”

“A little too fun, actually.”

“Oh?”

He shuffled his way up the few steps from the entryway to the upstairs level.

“Well, you were right about the party.”

“Ha! Called it.” Then, her eyes sparkled cunningly. “So which one of your crushes was it?”

“Which ones, more like it.”

She laughed, then put a hand over her mouth. “Sorry, sorry, I can tell you’re in a mood. Just... good grief you’re bad at making decisions and sticking to them.”

He’d meant to go to bed, but instead he found himself sitting down in the living room armchair adjacent to her. “No kidding,” he said. “Got the chance to rewrite reality, and I still can’t figure out how to live my own life. Maybe I really am a loser.”

“Who said you’re a loser? You’re a lot of things, Conner, but loser isn’t one of them.”

“Oh!” He remembered his parents were asleep downstairs and lowered his voice. “Oh my god – you should have seen it!” He told her all about the scene that had unfolded between Kirsten and them, sparing no details. “Oh man, they turned on her in a flash! I could tell Olivia was about to scream when she realized all their ‘partner activities’ in sex ed were really just makeouts with her lesbian BFF.”

But Angelica didn’t look nearly so amused. Not amused at all, in fact. “Wait a minute, go back. What was that about how no woman could resist him? I mean, I like the guy, but he’s not exactly a Hemsworth.”

Conner winced when he realized what he’d said. “OK, so, promise you won’t be mad?” Then he was in story mode again, explaining about Jordan’s use of Owen’s rant at King of Hearts. “Owen didn’t know. He still doesn’t *know* know, I don’t think, or at least not why. But– Angelica, what’re you– OW!”

But she was already on him, hitting him over and over. Her knuckles were like tiny points of steel as he pleaded for her to stop.

“You asshole!” she whisper-shrieked, hitting him again. “You fucking asshole!”

“What?! What did I do?!” He said, holding his hands up defensively.

“What did you do? Oh, I dunno, you got your magic program, used it to give your friend a free ride–”

“You said you already liked him!”

“But you didn’t know that, did you?” she countered hotly. “Then right as we’re having our first fight, you let some jackass hack your account and turn *my* boyfriend into bachelor of the year, and you didn’t even say anything?!”

“What difference would it have made if I’d said something?!”

“I would have *known* you fucker, that’s what!” She cocked a fist again, but didn’t let it fly this time. “Do you have any idea what it’s like to know my boyfriend could *replace* me whenever he wanted? That the only reason that bitchy little closet carpet muncher only ever stole him from me was because your stupid program told him he could? I could have told him! She only took him because he could have anybody, which meant she had to be the top pick out of anybodies. You practically wrapped him in a bow and dumped him on her egomaniacal doorstep, you ass!”

“I thought you said TIOS wasn’t the root of all our problems,” he protested, then flinched as she punched his arm again. For such a tiny thing, she sure was strong.

“That was before I knew you spent your whole year trying to make my life insane!” She looked to be about to hit him again, but stopped. “OK. That’s it. You and me, right now. You’re going to make this right. You broke it and you’re going to buy it, or so help me you really will be a goner, Goner.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“We’re going back to NHS, you’re going to open up TIOS and let me fix this.”

“What? No, I can’t do that!” he sputtered. “Besides, it’s too late!”

She looked at the clock. “It’s only 10:30. I don’t know if TIOS is some kind of pumpkin at midnight kind of arrangement, but even if it is, we still have time, and damnit, the way you fucked me over, you are going to for once in your stupid life act like my brother!”

They drove separately; Angelica said she didn't want to ride in a car that stank of sex and lake scum, and she sure wasn't about to allow him to stink up her ride. Conner had insisted on a moment to get a quick shower in, but he'd been in and out in under five minutes. It hadn't been enough to change Angelica's mind about sharing a ride, but at least he smelled halfway decent. She rode right on his tail the whole way there like she was afraid he was going to try to escape.

Plenty of cars were still in the lot; doubtless the party at the lake would go on for hours yet. They were sporadically parked; more than a few of his classmates seemed to have had the idea to use their cars the same way he and Amanda had, judging by the fogged up windows and subtle rocking of several cars conspicuously moved away from the main cluster.

Conner had made his peace with Angelica's plan on the way over. She had a point, after all. He'd treated her badly, and she hadn't deserved what had come her way. Moreover, he was sure that Owen cared about her. Maybe he could help his friend get out of his own way for once and be happy, too.

Plus, unrelated to either of them, he had thought back to Heather and her complaint about her tattoos, and reasoned maybe he could find a way to help her out. It was the least he could do, to try.

With a mental note to return his copy of Kristy's keys to her before he left (for California? to go home and wait for Amanda?), he keyed open the door near the English hallways and let the two of them in. Angelica hadn't bothered getting dressed before she left; she'd thrown on flip flops and hopped in the car. They were unimpeded in reaching the yearbook room. It already looked transformed from how it had looked in class Friday. Textbooks were packed away in cabinets, bulletin boards torn down and stuffed in the trash. The recycling bin overflowed with old handouts and files, and Kristy's desk, usually piled with assorted papers and educational gadgetry, was completely cleaned off. It almost didn't look like the same room, though strangely, the office had reverted to its first semester status. The extra teacher desk had already been removed, and the couch shoved back from the computer lab to where it belonged. Probably just as well there hadn't been room for both. If that thing had stayed in here all semester, he and Amanda could have fallen seriously behind.

Conner retrieved a laptop from the cart and headed for his office. Amanda rolled her eyes when he asked her to look away while he login in, but she complied. She stood over his shoulder as he navigated to the spread they'd used to enter Owen's initial quote about her.

*"I can't get enough of your cock."* – Angelica Buck

"You two really are a-holes. You know that, right?" she said, shaking her head at it.

“Hey, I feel bad, OK? I’m letting you fix it, aren’t I?” Conner grumped. “Speaking of, do you have some concept of how to do that? He and I have talked and all, about you,” he said a bit uneasily, “but I don’t know that I have a silver bullet. Often as not when we’re talking relationship stuff, it’s venting about problems, which doesn’t really help.”

“I already know what I’m doing,” she said. “Slide over the laptop.”

Conner hesitated. “Maybe you could run it by me first? I might have a better sense of how TIOS might interpret it.”

“You don’t get editorial oversight on this Conner.”

“Hey, who’s editor-in-chief here?”

“I didn’t get any say-so for *that*,” she said, pointing at the screen, “so maybe fuck off and let me do this my way.”

“I don’t know...”

She rested her hands on his desk, looming over him. “You really think I’d do something to hurt him? Is that seriously what you’re worried about?”

“Not on purpose, but...”

“I love him,” she interrupted. “He loves me, too. That’s all there is to it.”

The last time he’d let someone get ahold of his TIOS account, they’d acted on their most selfish impulses and turned the students of NHS into a living playground. Jordan’s motives had been entirely for Jordan. Angelica, however...

He pushed the laptop toward her. “Go ahead.”

She nodded, spinning it to face her, then typed for a minute. She looked like she was thinking pretty hard, but he didn’t ask about what. He knew remembering exact wording was tricky, and TIOS would reject quotes until they were exact.

Suddenly she stopped typing and looked up. “How do I save it?”

“Button at the top left. I think third or fourth one over, looks like one of those ancient disk thingies from the 80’s.”

“Got it.” With that, she folded the laptop shut, kissed his forehead, and said, “See you at home, Conner.”

“Holy crap, you called me by my name.”

“Don’t get used to it, little brother.” She fussed his hair, and without another word, she was gone. He waited for the door to shut behind her before opening the laptop again and, as she surely knew he would, opening up the spread again. There, beneath that edit from last October, was another quote.

*“I love you like you love my cock.”*

*“No way.”*

*“Oh yeah way.”*

*– Owen Gibson and Angelica Buck*

He laughed. He laughed so loud it startled himself. That, Conner supposed, ought to even things up nicely. Though it certainly sounded like the impending death knell of Owen's welcome under his mother's roof. Good for them. In that moment, he knew she wasn't going back to her car. No, Angelica would be marching right out across that parking lot, through that grove, finding him, and getting started with life after graduation.

In his delight over her edit, he almost didn't notice she'd written more, and if anything, it was more surprising still.

*"I'm not ashamed of who I am."* – Kirsten Vaughan.

It was the third, however, that hit home, as if she'd read the lines of anxiety in his face, heard the broiling rage still simmering in his gut – and known exactly what to say. For a long time, Conner had wondered why, with two editors-in-chief, two victims of Jordan's machinations, that he was the only one who'd tried to do something to rein him in. He'd simply assumed Amanda was blocked somehow through Jordan's edits, or maybe that girls just didn't get mad like that. What he read next, however, suddenly made it all clear.

All this time, Amanda had been steering clear of him not out of fear, not because TIOS had compelled her to, but that... *"Operating at [Jordan Lyons'] level only diminishes us, and I won't let him do that. After graduation, he's out of our lives for good."* – Amanda Carpenter

Too amped to return home and sleep, yet too drained to attempt something more poignant, Conner set himself to the task of fixing Heather's tattoos. He was feeling good, and when he felt good, he liked to try to do good.

TIOS, as usual, was not at its most user-friendly when it came to trying to undo edits. Deleting the edited photos was a nonstarter. He tried replacing the pictures Jordan had modified with her original picture day photo, but that didn't work. He would have liked to see if a quote might override a photo, but he didn't have an ideal one ready. Could he edit a more recent photo, post-tattoo? Upload a picture from last year's yearbook and alter the date to make it more current? Better to look a year younger than have "choke me daddy" written in barbed wire inspired script in a ring around her neck.

He was reaching his wit's end when a voice in the doorway nearly made him jump out of his skin. "Conner?"

"GAH!" he yelped. He rubbed his eyes, acclimated to staring at a bright monitor in a dark room, and squinted. "Kristy?"

"Yeah. What are you doing here? Trying to sneak in a last-minute miracle?"

"Something like that. What about you?" He stretched and managed to hit the office's light switch. She was dressed ultra-casual in sweat pants and a baggy t-shirt for the Lady Nighthawk's soccer team, her wavy hair in a pony tail.

"I had one of those late night cravings for ice cream. I was making a quick run to the gas station to see what they had when I saw your car parked in your working-late spot."

"Huh. You know, I was at your house a little bit ago. I thought about stopping in, but... I dunno. The last time you and Amanda and I were there together at night..."

She laughed. "You had the most amazing sex of your life?"

"Well... yeah." He laughed with her. "I dunno. I don't want things to be weird between the three of us."

She entered the office, settling on the couch. "I hear you. I've had my share of roommates over the years, but she's the first one I've been in part of a foursome with. You should see the two of us, blushing every time we see each other in a towel. I guess we'll get used to it, though."

"Yeah, Amanda said she was going to try to get out of your hair as quickly as possible. She sounded optimistic."

"She probably shouldn't be. A girl with a high school diploma, no money, no social security number, nonexistent credit, no work history... it's going to be a transition for her." She smiled fondly at where Amanda's desk had sat. "But I'm happy to have her for as long as she needs me. That girl's family, as far as I'm concerned."

"Thanks, Kristy. Really. When I 'made her real,' or whatever, I didn't really think about the practical aspects. It's a load off to know she's got somebody who cares about her looking out for her."

“You’re talking like you’re not going to be around to help out,” she said. “And since you were staring at a naked picture of Heather on the laptop when I came in, I suppose I can guess why.”

“What? How’d you...?”

“I’ve gotten really good at seeing what’s on a monitor in the reflection of somebody’s glasses over the years. Easier still in the dark. And from your lack of denial, I take it that’s the plan, then? Off to California? Palm trees and beach babes?”

“I told her I would. She asked me tonight, and I said yes.”

“You told her that, huh,” she said, catching the nuance of his phrasing like a true English teacher. “Did you mean it, or did you say yes because you were sucked in by those... oh, let’s say big blue eyes, and couldn’t say no?”

“I don’t even know any more,” he said with a sigh. “I want to be with her, but...”

“But you want other things,” she finished. Conner nodded. “Can I ask if I’m one of the other things?”

“Of course you’re one of the other things.”

She smiled. “That nice to know. I worried when you called things off that you’d lost interest, but I knew you had a lot going on and I didn’t want to complicate your life more than it already had been.”

“I’m the one who complicated things. You’re the one who always helped me feel like I could handle it.” He moved across the room and sat next to her. Lord, how he’d missed being this close. “You always supported me, took care of me, listened to me, were patient with me. I am not even kidding when I say I don’t know how I would have made it through high school without you.”

They smiled there at one another in the silent high school building for a long while. It was good to not be trying. Worrying. Deciding things. She would wait for him, and would support him and advise him no matter what he did. She really was one in a million.

Then he saw her nipples tenting out her t-shirt.

“Sorry,” she said, noticing his noticing. “I think your compliments have kind of a Pavlovian reflex built up now.”

“No apology necessary,” he said quickly. “I gotta say, being with you and your whole making-me-happy thing... there’s nothing else quite like it.”

“I’ll say. You have no idea how incredible it is to automatically get as good as you give. Everything just...” She held out her hands. “Sorry. I suppose I have to watch what I say, if you’re going to run off with Heather.”

“That’s the thing. I told her yes, but... earlier tonight, I told Amanda I wanted to stay with her. And the whole time I was with both of them, I kept thinking about you. I’m a mess. And probably the most selfish guy on the planet.”

“You definitely are a man who wants to have his cake and eat it, too, I’ll grant.”

“I thought you liked it when I ate your ‘cake,’” he teased.

“I do, and if you told me you wanted to, I’d have these sweatpants off before you could get your mouth open,” she said. “But only if it would make you happy. Sometimes cake has a way of confusing things.”

“You know, you say that, but I think the only two times all night I’ve felt clear-headed was when we were...” He fell silent, cheeks coloring. He hadn’t meant to admit to his activities.

“Seriously? Both of them, in the same night?” she asked, adopting a scandalized look. “You really are incorrigible, Conner. Was it fun?”

“It was incredible.”

“Good. I like seeing you happy.”

“I like seeing you seeing me happy.”

She laughed. “So, are we going to have sex too, or am I the odd woman out?”

“I think if we do, I’m going to be right back where I was three months ago. Aren’t my teachers supposed to help me make forward progress?”

“I’m not your teacher any more, Conner. And I happen to have liked where we were three months ago. Those were happy times. Lots of them.”

“But... I’m really trying to figure out what to do next. I’m supposed to start thinking about life after high school.” He sat on his hands to reduce the temptation to touch her; she’d already as much as admitted she wanted him to. “Like, what would a life with you and me even look like?”

Kristy seemed to consider the question. “All right, let’s explore. You and me, as an official couple. Hmm. I’ll start with the positives for me. I like being with you. You made me love my job again. You’ve given me the most amazing sex of my life, and lots of it. Against all odds, my sweet little Conner has somehow become the most roguish and mysterious man I’ve ever been with, and I’m not exception to the rule in liking that.”

“Roguish and mysterious?”

“Conner, you’ve literally altered reality, waged a cold war of yearbook editing magecraft against your enemy, helped the helpless, wooed countless women... If you’re not roguish and mysterious, I don’t know who is.”

“Huh. Who knew?”

“So. What else. There’s going to be the roll-out of the news, which could be tricky. We’ll have to tell our closest friends and family first. I know my parents won’t be judgmental. They’re actually farther apart in age than you and I are, though my dad was in his forties when they got married. Still. Hmm. My sister’s been pushing her kinky teacher-student fantasies on me for years, so I know she’ll be stoked for me. How about you? How do you think your people would take it?”

Conner really hadn’t considered how they’d respond to the news of a legitimate public relationship between consenting adults; he’d always been preoccupied with

keeping them from finding out about the illicit affair. What if it ceased to be illicit though?

“My mom would support me. She always liked you, and I think she’d come around pretty quick. My sister and my stepdad... I don’t know, but I don’t think they’d freak out, and I guess I don’t much care if they do. My friends... I mean, it could be embarrassing here and there. Maybe only at first? But I guess you’re one of... no, *the* hottest teacher in school, so I think there would be more jealousy and bro back-slapping than anything. I guess it’d be weird, a little, for some, but I think most would get it. Once we go public, anyway.”

He didn’t say that Heather would be a huge exception. If he cast her aside for Kristy, she’d be livid. But the same was going to be true to a lesser degree of the two girls who didn’t get picked no matter what.

Unless he went the celibacy route. Maybe that was what his karma demanded.

“Good. So we can handle the novelty factor. Other than that, am I wrong to think it’d otherwise be really good? We get along so well, we have such good sexual chemistry... I’m not just saying this, but I wouldn’t even mind if you brought us a third from time to time. You got so excited, I just...” She rubbed her thighs together. “Mm.”

Man, she was incredible. “Mm is right.”

“Other than that, we’d be a couple. We’d go to movies, eat out, shower together in the morning before work, I’ll try to get you to go running with me, you’ll try to get me into board games. We’ll complain about our days, make up for it with our nights. Tons and tons of sex, I’m saying. And I could get back to doing what I like best – making my man happy.”

Conner closed his eyes as she spoke. How he’d missed this with her! The proximity, the intimacy, the potent sexuality of her. She was so much more confident than any other girl he’d been with, so above the kinds of petty things that often intruded on his relationships. She didn’t play games, and spoke from her heart. He trusted her almost as fervently as Heather trusted him.

And the sex, god, the sex... If she’d been in his sex ed class, she’d have been near the top in raw hotness. Nevertheless, she edged both of her competitors out in raw generosity. Blowjobs, handjobs, titjobs, her pussy, even her ass... Whatever he was in the mood for, she wasn’t simply willing to humor him, she was eager to provide it. She was skillful, inventive, energetic, flexible, and above all, unhesitatingly devoted. She almost always came when he did, and if she did an especially impressive effort and he had the presence of mind to pass on his gratitude, she often came again after they were done. It was incredible.

So incredible that he couldn’t pass up on what may be the last opportunity to take her up on it in some semblance of good conscience.

“Know what would make me happy right now?” he said.

He didn't have to say another word. She stood up, and without saying a word removed her shirt. She wasn't wearing a bra, as he'd been able to tell from the moment he'd switched on the light. She kicked off her shoes and then the sweatpants followed. Her panties went off at the same time. She dumped her clothes on the floor of his office and then went down after them, kneeling at his feet.

"Yes," she answered, then undid his pants, pulled down his underwear, and sucked him into her mouth.

He could tell right away she meant to take her time with this one. She knew even better than his most proficient students how to alternate between a blowjob whose purpose was to make him come and one whose purpose was to give him pleasure. This was the latter. Slow, deliberate licks; frequent slathering of his balls to give him a chance to come back from the brink; liberal use of her hands so she could micromanage her tongue on his tip; and, after a time, light conversation.

"So what were you working on before I came in? What was your big final project?" she asked, pulling his hips down so she could wrap his slicked cock in between her tits.

"Hmm? Oh, I was trying to undo Heather's tattoos. She said something tonight about how she felt a little self-conscious heading off to school with them, and I thought I could do her a solid. No luck so far, though."

"That's sweet of you. I may not be her biggest fan on the faculty, but that's a heavy burden to bear. You wanna keep working?" She smashed her tits against his shaft, rubbing them up and down in tandem.

"There's no way I could ask you to stop at this point," he said.

"Who said anything about stopping? I can fit under your desk."

She did. How she'd known that she would was anyone's guess, but she did. So there he sat, tinkering with approaches, while his former teacher enthusiastically fellated him under his work station.

Better yet, she was a good sounding board for ideas. "Maybe the problem isn't TIOS locking you out of edits, but rather the way the file structure is indexing the image," she posited, nuzzling her cheek against his cock as she spoke. "Try going into the Active Links sub-menu and unchecking the tattoo pic's CMI attributes, see if that shakes anything loose."

"Son of a bitch...! You're a genius, Kristy!"

Her solution didn't let him delete the image or revert it, but it did let him continue editing it. From there, it was only a matter of using other images of her with similar lighting to paint over it with flesh tones. The blur might result in skin that was a little too clear, but a lack of body hair was a small price to pay for not having "I CONSENT" indelibly written where her pussy hair should be. It took him several hours, with Kristy periodically asking for updates, before he was satisfied, but finally he hit save.

“It’s going on two in the morning,” he said. “Graduation day is over. I wonder if it’ll still take.”

She gave him a few loud and affectionate slurps before replying. “I think there’s good odds. They do backups and updates on their servers first thing in the morning – that is, first thing in the morning for their team. Once in a while I run into errors on account of it if I’m doing something bright and early. Usually starts around six, six thirty.”

He ran his fingers through her hair. “You’re a treasure, you know that?”

She pulled him deep into her throat and moaned in response to his moaning. “I know,” she said after she caught her breath.

“Now I really want to come,” he said. “And I want to do it in your pussy. Time to make your man the happiest he’s been all week.”

He helped her out from under the desk. She took a moment to stretch, then lead him by the hand to her desk in the classroom. “Will you do something for me, Conner?” she asked as she laid down on her side atop the desk, legs spread wide, pussy already visibly gushing.

“Sure, anything.”

“Call me Miss C while you fuck me?” She grinned coyly.

Conner had to stifle a groan as his cock became painfully erect. “That is the hottest thing you’ve ever said.”

“My sister’s not the only one who’s got fantasies about fucking some hot young buck. I just thought it’d be creepy for you while I was still your teacher.”

Conner raised her ankle over his shoulder and slid her so her pussy lined up where he needed it. He pressed inside her by millimeters, luxuriating in every hot wet inch of his fantasy teacher’s smoldering slit.

He bent down, her runner’s legs having no trouble spreading to allow him down close enough to kiss her, but he stopped short. “You’ll always be my teacher, Miss C. Now do your job and let me earn a little extra credit.”

With a sound that was a mixture of sexual bliss, laughter, and pure joy, Conner fucked Miss C right there on her desk like he’d fantasized about doing since he’d been a freshman. Like he’d fantasized about doing again ever since he’d done it the first time.

By 5:00 AM Monday morning, the day after graduation, Conner was alone in Miss C's classroom. She'd not bothered to restate her case; like Amanda, and like Heather, she'd made it plain she wanted to be with him, and had demonstrated it wonderfully. Like with the others, he'd told her he wanted to be with her and had meant it. And, like with the others, he couldn't imagine bricking up those other two doorways for good.

The light of the rising sun was beginning to show itself in the darkened corridor outside the room. He'd had all year – his whole life, really – to figure out what he intended to do after high school, and suddenly it felt like he had to make up his mind on the rest of his life in an hour.

There was Heather. Sweet, passionate, brilliant Heather, who trusted him wholeheartedly. He could imagine a life where they went out west, got swept up in new places, new faces, movements and revolutions the likes of which seemed to always begin in places like that. Heather was going to be a somebody in this world, he had no doubt of it. Her desire to push herself was never satisfied. She'd captured hearts and minds with her protests, exceeded her judgmental family's expectations, out-performed every other student in their class, yet still she'd hit the ground running in the next step of her journey. He wanted to be there for her, to cheer her on and bask in her achievements, to be the backbone of a great woman. It could be a good life.

But there was also Amanda. She was starting her life practically from scratch. Penniless, orphaned, next to no exposure to the world beyond what TIOS had seen fit to put in her head when she'd been put here. There was an allure to that, going into the unknown together with someone who knew even less of it than he did. She was quite a woman, though; she'd make her mark in whatever she chose to pursue. With her beauty, charisma and intelligence, it was absurd to think she could mean it when she said they were made for one another. Still, it somehow felt true. There was something altogether natural about their chemistry, as if she filled in all his gaps, and he hers.

Except there was Kristy. The only one of the lot of them who seemed to truly accept him as is, every layer of the onion. Though she was only seven years their senior – a gap that would be trivial within another decade – she had acquired a wisdom beyond her years. Kristy understood people and she loved them anyway. She'd given a huge part of her life to his own passion, and she had been an integral part of his own growth into the person he wanted to be. Plus, as she'd said herself that fateful autumn afternoon, she wanted more than anything to see him happy. He didn't think of himself as an unhappy person, but then again, maybe that was in part because she was so good at her calling.

Why did he have to choose? Besides the obvious, of course. Even if he could have kept all three of them, which geography alone prohibited (to say nothing of morality), he owed it to himself as much as to them not to do something so selfish. Besides, it would be nice to have a "normal" relationship, to have a stable solitary person in his life. No

more secrets, no more cleaning off his cock between rendezvous to minimize jealousy, no more thinking of one woman while he was wrapped in another.

Like it or not, he had to move into the real world. And he didn't like it, to be sure. Conner allowed himself a moment of pure petulance and sulked at his desk. Sulked more than he already had been, that is.

He knew that for many, high school had been the worst of times, awkward and lonely, full of rejection, disappointment, and petty cruelties. Still, that had decidedly not been his experience. Maybe he was an optimist, but at a school like his beloved Northside, he didn't think that had been most people's experiences. Even before TIOS, he'd enjoyed coming to the same place every day and watching everybody grow little by little. He didn't want to stop learning increasingly obscure math techniques, to stop being surprised by the cafeteria's menu of the day, to sweat through his ugly gym uniform, to have enemies to conspire against and friends to conspire with. To be surrounded and confronted every day by these women who inspired and terrified and thrilled him through and through.

Here at Northside, everything had seemed possible. And really, it all had been. It was a safe, quaint, typically atypical microcosm of the larger world, and for four years, it had been all he'd known. He loved it here. He always had.

But it was over, and now it was time to grow up. Like Heather had said in her speech yesterday, there was so much more to do out there. Like Heather had said...

He froze.

Like Heather had said.

Like they'd all been saying.

The battery on his laptop had died by then, so he hurriedly replaced it with a fresh one. He could hardly make himself sit still as he waited for the system to load. When it did he moved the cursor on the desktop and double-clicked the icon labeled *This Is Our Story*.

## Chapter Seventeen

*Ten weeks later...*

Conner Fishers stepped up to his new school with a sense of awe. This place looked enormous. He'd seen it before, of course, even been inside, but knowing that it was where he was going to be learning for the next four years was indeed daunting.

He wasn't alone, at least. That would have made this hard. At his side was his best friend of many years, who was doing a much better job of regarding the sprawling brick building with a spiteful lack of awe.

"It's not *that* big," he said, casually spitting into the asphalt of the parking lot, already hot in the August morning sun.

"Gross, man. You've been doing that lately. It's really not cool. Since when did you start spitting?"

"Yeah, I guess there aren't really any spitters in your family, huh," Owen answered, eyes sparkling.

"You and Angelica are freaks, man. I honestly don't know what she sees in you."

"I'd show you what she sees in me, but I'd hate to diminish your already fragile sense of manhood."

Conner huffed as they started walking toward the main entrance. "My sense of manhood is doing just fine, trust me." To prove himself, he turned to Lauren Tommassini, who happened to be walking by then. The athletic girl's legs carried her a good deal faster than the boys. "Hey, Lauren. Have a good summer?"

"Conner!" she exclaimed, smiling brightly. She had always been such a sweetheart. "I had a great summer. Missed seeing everybody, though, that's for sure. How about you guys?"

"Pretty good," said Conner simply.

Owen responded more thoroughly. "Summer doesn't end until mid-September, actually, and I gotta say, the way you are rocking those leggings, Lauren, my summer's only getting better."

"Thanks!" She grinned at him, slowing her pace to match his. "Say, Owen, I was wondering if maybe you were free this weekend, and you wanted to—"

"Oh, I want to all right," he said, but shook his head, "but I'm spoken for."

"I don't care," she said. "It doesn't have to be a big deal or anything."

"Thanks, but I'm happy with what I got. But hey, Conner here is single. Maybe you and he could...?"

"Yeah, maybe," she said, already beginning to put distance between them as she resumed her natural gait. "See you guys in class!"

“Those legs, man,” said Owen as Conner held the door for him. “Anything that fine ought to require a permit.”

“What does that even mean? Like, is that a gun thing? A car thing?”

“It’s a damn she’s got the tightest little ass I’ve ever seen thing,” Owen answered. “Except for Angelica’s, of course.”

“I swear, I do not get you. You got a super-hot girlfriend who’s a junior in college, and here you are hitting on freshmen.”

“I’m not hitting on her. Or if I was, it’s only because I love the way you sister gets all possessive when she thinks I’m gonna cheat on her.”

“I’m sure she gets plenty of practice. You two, dude. I get tired just imagining...” He realized what he was saying, and cut the thought short.

“No, go on, I’m really interested to hear what you’ve been imagining.”

“Shut up, dude. Come on, let’s find our lockers.”

If the outside had looked massive, the interior was enormous. The main hallway was nearly as wide as a city street, flooded with people from seniors who knew its geography backwards and forwards to freshmen like themselves who were tourists in a foreign land. Luckily the school’s website had a map on it, and however dorky it was to be GPSing his way around the school with his phone, they found their lockers before too long. They were arranged alphabetically by year, so Fishers and Gibson were only a handful of lockers apart. His prior yearbook experience, dealing with students who transferred in and out throughout the year, left him wondering how they accommodated new arrivals, but he supposed he didn’t need to know.

They spotted their friends already congregating together and joined in, everyone trying to downplay their nervousness and excitement over the new environs. Some did better than others. Penny managed to give a lost student directions as she looked around despondently, then swaggered back to her friends. Trevor, meanwhile, was so anxious he was practically squeezing through Kayla’s hand. She didn’t complain, though.

A bell rang, and while it was their first day here, it was easy to observe protocol from the upperclassmen. The echo of slamming lockers reverberated around the halls, and students started making their way to classes. Teachers emerged from classrooms, urging expediency and providing directions as needed, and the friends promised to meet up and lunch and went their separate ways.

School had officially commenced.

His first class was to be one of his weaker suits – math. The teacher, Mr. Lupien, was a portrait of a man trying to act engaged in spite of all the signals that he was sorely missing his summer break. It wasn’t quite “Bueller, Bueller” levels of tedium, but there was ample downtime as he took role, assigned a seating chart, distributed and reviewed a sheet of course expectations, and handed out textbooks.

Conner chit-chatted as much as anyone, touching base with friendly acquaintances about their summers. Nick and Rick were both in his class, as were a few other familiar faces. Hayleigh McKnight was there, and he made it a point to avoid saying hello to her. Not that she would have even responded. At their old school, she'd had a habit of dating well-muscled jocks and wielding their possessive inclinations like a cudgel. He could see why. The girl was positively thicc; even her curves had curves.

Also present, to Conner's mild discomfort, was her unfortunately homophonically named counterpart, Hailey McManus. Where Hayleigh was the quintessential unconventionally attractive hot girl, Hailey was all conventionality, with her adorable dimples, bright smile, glossy hair and trim figure. She was even starting to grow some (conventionally) nice boobs. While Conner didn't really see what most people found so cute in Hayleigh, he actually thought Hailey was surprisingly attractive for a girl with such a reputation as an untouchable.

"Conner!" she said, sliding into the seat next to him. It had been left vacant by a student who was still on vacation with his family. "It feels like it's been forever! How are you? How was your summer?"

Conner opened his mouth to answer, but didn't get the chance. "Mine was pretty good, I guess. Doug – do you remember Doug? My little brother, you met him a few times, I think – he's going to be in fifth grade this year, and let me tell you, he sure knows how to *act* like a fifth grader, if you know what I mean. The other night, it was my turn to pick what we did for dinner because it was Thursday and that's my night, and I wanted to do meatloaf but Doug threw *such* a fit that we wound up doing lasagna just to shut him up. It was still pretty good, I guess. Plus we'll have leftovers for days and days and days, and I've always thought lasagna was better reheated than the first time around. Is that weird? I don't meant to be weird. Sorry. Anyway, yeah, my summer mostly good."

"That's good," he said when she paused for air. "Glad to hear it. Mine was pretty good too."

"Well yay for us having the same math class! I always get nervous when I look around and I don't see many smart kids in my class, like maybe the teacher thought I wasn't doing super well so they put me in a class with – I don't want to say slower, but you know what I mean? And yeah, but you're really smart, so I know I must be in the right class." She leaned closer. "Maybe we could, you know, study together and stuff sometime?"

"Study? Uh, we haven't even been taught anything yet."

She blushed. "Duh, yeah. Sorry. That was stupid, I'm sorry."

"No, Hailey, it's OK." He paused. Taking an interest in Hailey's life had, historically, turned out with a lot of mixed results for him, but he had to admit he was

curious. Curious enough he had to risk getting involved. “So, how are things with you and what’s-his-face?”

Hailey smiled coyly. She really was quite pretty. He didn’t care what anyone said. There was just something about her. “Conner, are you asking if I’m single?”

He blinked. “Uh, no, I’m just... you know. Making conversation.”

She nodded, but the smile didn’t fade in the least. “He and I broke up over the summer. It just sorta made sense. We talked it over, and I guess I just got tired of the way he treated me, you know? Like he was doing me a favor by being with me, even though it always seemed like I was the one doing favors for him.”

“And he didn’t try to win you back again? I remember last year, he... you know. Took it pretty far.”

She shrugged. “Guess not. The day after I broke up with him, he just... *whoosh!*” She made a motion with her hand like a plane taking off. “Up and left. Just like that, out of our lives forever. Which is fine by me, you know? I’d already told myself I wasn’t going to give him another shot.”

“Oh yeah?”

Hailey nodded. “At some point, I looked at myself and decided I was worth more than that. I wanted to be with somebody who saw me for what I really am.”

The way she was looking at him... had Hailey learned to flirt since they’d last spoken? Shy, awkward Hailey suddenly being so direct and plain-spoken. Confidence was actually a pretty sexy look on her, he decided. Should he make a move?

What the heck, why not? Nothing to lose. “So yeah, Hailey, I—”

“Conner Fishers,” droned Mr. Lupien suddenly. “Come get your textbook. Ms. McManus, get back to your assigned seat, please.”

“Thar she blows!” called Hayleigh as Hailey walked past her.

“You know you’re twice my size, right Hefty?” Hailey shot back.

Hayleigh gaped, but in the end didn’t do more than glare. He supposed that as one of the cutest girls in their class, she didn’t get spoken to that way often, but object of male lust or not, there was no denying it was true. There was that new confidence again.

He’d have to arrange that study date sometime.

The two didn’t get the chance to speak again that class period, but he went ahead and invited her to sit with his friends at lunch. She really was a sweet girl, and he figured whether or not they wound up having any chemistry, she would at least make for a cool friend. The one-two combination of quiet confidence and loud humility was actually rather charming. Once she got used to having people talk to her and didn’t need to bottle up whole paragraphs all the time, she’d make for a good addition to the group, too.

If nothing else, they sheltered each other from the pack of popular kids in the center of the cafeteria. Hayleigh had already found new muscle in the form of Jackson; Kirsten Vaughan was seated in the middle of the table, a new pink streak dyed into her

golden hair. Seated in her lap and not subtle in the least about stealing kisses was Lindsay Koogan, but Olivia Snyder (with her own pink streak in evidence) was holding hands and giggling with Ashley LeBeau in manner that did not smack of platonic friendship. Word had it Kirsten had come out over the summer, and now any girl who hadn't publicly stated her open-mindedness to experimentation was persona non grata. Lesbian was the new black, apparently.

Conner caught Owen's gaze lingering on Kirsten's plunging neckline a little too long at one point and elbowed him under the table for good measure. He tried not to be an entirely useless brother.

"Only looking, man. Trust me, I'm not stupid enough to try to hook up with the most obvious lesbian in Northside history," Owen assured him.

"Not twice, at least."

"Exactly."

By the time his last period of the day rolled around, he felt like he was already gaining a sense of direction for the school. It was a big building, but it was surmountable. He barely needed to glance at his map as he navigated to the English hallway and down to his final class.

Yearbook. His favorite class at his old school, hands down. What an awesome way to end the day.

He walked into the class with wide eyes, eager to take it all in at once – who he would be working with, who would be teaching him, what tools he would have to work with. It was a rather large classroom, actually, and oddly structured. To one side of the room there was a heavy black curtain, open presently, behind which was situated a small computer lab with clunky old desktops. On the other was a door that seemed to lead into another small room, offset. Did the teacher have her own office in addition to the classroom?

She wasn't present, so for now he was on his own recognizance. Unlike most of his other classes, this class was students of all grade levels, freshmen up through seniors. He saw some friendly faces and sat down next to them. DeShaun clapped him on the back and welcomed him to their circle; Marisa and Siobhan were less enthused, but they didn't object. They were starting on the routine summations of their summer breaks when a fifth person sat down at the final desk in their cluster.

"Hey everybody," said the new arrival, and the mere sound of those words was enough to stop Conner's heart in his chest.

Heather Blake.

He let the others reply first, willing his voice not to break when he said a simple "hey" back at her. She was prettier even than he remembered. She'd tanned some over the summer, and her flawless skin was bronzed and unblemished.

Almost unblemished, he amended in his mental notes. There was a tiny tattoo of a female symbol with a closed fist in the center etched in hot pink on her ankle. Whoever had put it there had done good work.

“I guess we’re playing round seven of ‘how was your summer,’ eh,” she said.

“Yeah,” said Conner, then realized she was actually listening to him. Why did he get so nervous around her! “So, um, how was it? Yours, I mean. Your summer, that is.”

She laughed. “I had this amazing summer program in California at UC Berkeley,” she said. “It was so good. The campus, the climate, the people... it’s exactly what I hoped it would be.”

“That’s great! Seriously, it sounds really awesome. I’ve thought about moving out there myself, you know.”

“Seriously?”

“Of course seriously. Why would I make something up?”

She laughed. “I can never tell with you, Conner. I guess I should just ere on the side of assuming you’re always being honest, huh.”

“It’s a safe bet,” he said, then adopted a cartoonishly evil tone. “Or was I lying?!”

“I believed it,” Heather said with a placating giggle.

“So yeah, California,” he went on. “You, um, meet anybody?” He cleared his throat. “You know, like, friends and stuff, or whatever.”

“I made some friends, yeah. As for stuff or whatever, I actually went with my boyfriend.”

“Oh? That’s really cool. Lucky guy,” he said. Was he being cool, or lame? He honestly had no idea.

“Oh he got lucky all right,” said Don, high-fiving DeShaun.

Heather rolled her eyes. “You guys are so immature sometimes, I swear.”

“Swearing’s against the rules, Heather,” he quipped, and the guys fell to laughing at one another’s dumb jokes as Heather turned away from them.

“It’s almost hard being back here, you know what I mean, Conner?” He nodded, but gestured for her to keep talking. Good listening skills, something he’d learned a lot about with his girlfriend over the summer. She’d really been such an amazing confidante.

Heather went on. “Like, I’m happy to be back and all. I am. I missed my friends, I missed the relationships. I even missed school itself, to be honest. Still...” A far-off look came over her. “Part of me – part of both of us – is still out there, studying at Berkeley, taking classes, fighting the patriarchy. Does that make sense?”

Conner nodded seriously. “It makes total sense.”

“But it’s good to be home again. There’s good people here, too, and good fights to be fought.”

“Fighting the patriarchy? Heather, I have belts bigger than that skirt, and your top doesn’t even have a back,” said Siobhan.

“So?”

“Yeah, so?” said Conner. He supposed her outfit was a bit revealing, but for one, he was all in favor of Heather Blake revealing her body, and for two, it wasn’t like the school had a dress code.

DeShaun took the opportunity to change the subject then. “So hey, does anybody even know who the teacher is in here?”

“Or know how to pronounce her name,” added Don, looking at the printout of his schedule. “It’s like... Cozzic... Coss...”

“You can call me Miss C,” said the voice of a coming from that side office he’d noticed on the way in.

Conner looked up, and then found his eyes wouldn’t let him look away. Standing there in the front of the room was one of the most beautiful girls – women, really – he had ever seen. Tall, leggy, busty, and with skin that looked like she’d been professionally photoshopped. A thick mane of auburn hair hung halfway down her back. She hardly looked old enough to be a teacher, but Conner speculated she might be new to the profession.

“Do we have assigned seats, Miss C?” Marisa asked. “Because Siobhan and I actually work really well together, and so like—”

But it was not this stunning newcomer who responded, but rather another woman emerging from the same room. “She’s not Miss C,” the woman clarified. “I am. I’ll pronounce it once for you so you can claim you heard it, but feel free to forget it right after. Coszic-Lewandoski. There. Commence forgetting. But Miss C is fine by me. Welcome, everybody.”

Miss C, he saw, was a really good-looking woman in her own right. Unlike the redhead, she was clearly a little older, though he wouldn’t be surprised if some students mistook her for one of them from time to time. She had a heck of a body on her too, though he felt a little creepy ogling a teacher.

A murmur of hellos came back at her from the class. “All righty, let’s get this ball rolling, shall we? So I’m Miss C, and I teach English and yearbook. To all you freshmen, welcome. I’m so excited you’re here with us, and I can’t wait to show you what you’ll be creating. And to my returning staff, welcome back. Last year... I’m going to level with you guys. Last year, we made a product that was a—”

She was nonverbally interrupted by the sudden presence of a raised hand. Miss C paused her introduction, clearly a little irked at being taken off-script. “Yes? Your name, then your question.”

“Don. Um, who’s that?” he asked, pointing at the redhead.

“Ah. This is Amanda Carpenter,” she said. “So—”

“What’s she doing here?” he interrupted.

“I was getting to that, but fair enough. So, Amanda is a lot of things. First and foremost she’s my teaching assistant. She’s here on an internship, learning the ropes but mostly she’s helping us all out. Last year she was editor-in-chief of our yearbook, and I assure you that for what we do, she is the best of the best.”

Amanda, for her part, neither blushed nor waved away the praise. She regarded the class proudly, a woman very much aware of her own worth. “Also, since it’s bound to come out... Amanda is also my daughter.”

This time it was one of the upperclassmen who interrupted. “Your daughter?!” exclaimed the girl.

“That’s right, Carrie.”

“Isn’t she almost the same age as you, though?” said the same girl. Carrie, apparently.

“Yes, but...” Miss C looked to Amanda, who addressed the question.

“We’re probably getting into a little TMI on day one, but last year I was in a bad way, and... look, so I was homeless for a little while. Then when school was over I didn’t have anyone or anybody and she took me in. Yes, we’re more like sisters in age, but no, that doesn’t matter legally. So. There you have it.”

“That’s so awesome!” declared Carrie, and suddenly the upperclassmen were surrounding the teacher and her daughter/intern/protégé, hugging and celebrating with them. The freshmen didn’t quite know what to make of it, but it was at least apparent they were dealing with a close-knit group. They had evidently liked their editor-in-chief, and were both surprised to hear of her situation and relieved to hear of its resolution.

Whatever had happened in here last year sounded like it was one heck of a ride.

“All right, all right, we have a class to run here,” said Miss C, smiling fondly at her students. Conner liked that smile. It was a smile that said she cared about her students’ feelings. A lot of teachers cared about their students’ career prospects, or their test scores. The good ones, in his experience, smiled like that. He liked her right away.

Though it was admittedly hard not to let himself be distracted by Amanda Carpenter. Even with Heather Blake seated beside him. He couldn’t decide who was distracting him more.

“So. This is yearbook. My first question is for you freshmen – oh, and it looks like we have a junior new to the trade. So it’s a simple one, but maybe not an obvious one. Ready?”

They looked at one another, nodded.

“All right, here goes. What,” she began, pausing for dramatic effect, “is a yearbook?”

The five of them looked around at one another. “Uh, how exactly is this not an obvious question?” Heather asked.

“So answer it then,” replied Miss C.

“A yearbook is a photographic and textual record of a given year at a given school, she replied.

“Ah, you’ve described the format, but not the function,” said Miss C, and Heather’s face instantly soured. She did not like being contradicted. This teacher had definitely gotten off on the wrong foot with her. “H<sub>2</sub>O is two hydrogen molecules and an oxygen molecule, but what it is, is water. The original home of all life on earth, the fuel that sustains us. Its function is key to understanding the thing.”

“This is too friggin’ deep for me,” muttered Don.

“So again, what’s a yearbook? Everybody, take a second, get out a piece of paper, write down an answer. Compose your thoughts, and we’ll come back together at the end of the period. In the meantime, I’ll call you up alphabetically to get you set up with access to our editing software.”

Conner retrieved his notebook from his backpack and closed his eyes, considering. Instead of focusing his thoughts, though, it scattered them like a dandelion in a stiff breeze. His mind drifted, borne on winds of fantasy and history and imagination and something like imagination only too real. He saw it all like pictures and words on a page, written and erased and rustling in competition, all of them happening at once at the same time, only that time was past and present and eternity.

He saw himself strolling down a Pacific beach. Jogging down the sidewalk outside the high school. Walking through a gap in a hedge. Sitting in his bedroom, staring out the window; he wasn’t alone.

Heather was there, talking to him about her new classes at Berkeley, helping him label his boxes for shipping, reminding him for the tenth time of his new zip code. This was a more mature Heather, developed physically to voluptuous perfection and developed spiritually to fearless valor. She was talking excitedly about how short the commute was from her dorm to his apartment, and how much time she intended to spend in the latter.

Owen was there as well, with Angelica. A moving truck was parked in the street, and boxes were moving from both houses into the back end. His mother sat in the rocking chair on their front porch, scowling whenever they were looking in her direction, but only then. He pinched her rear end while she was loading her nightstand, and she squealed in alarm before playfully accosting him, dragging him into the van and sliding shut the door.

Amanda, too. They were in his kitchen at home, looking through photos of their summer together, the road trip they’d taken, camping at Sapphire Creek. His mother sat across from them, trying not to look too pleased as they considered what would be the

most worthy inclusions in their first post-high-school scrapbook, and made sure to leave plenty of room for what both quietly hoped were many more years of additions.

Even Miss C was there. Here, rather; it was Conner who wasn't here. He was waiting in the parking lot to surprise her at the end of her first day, on a pretext of visiting old teachers but in reality to get in some of that good classroom sex they'd had to miss out on over the summer. Later that evening they planned to go out on their first public date, walking hand in hand into the Beanbag Cafe, basking in the surreptitious stares of former students, former classmates.

All of these things happening at the same time, and if he let his mind wander, he began to see his other classmates too, the lives they would go on to lead, had gone on to, were leading in another world. One more real but no less fantastical than this.

Conner opened his eyes and only had time to hastily scribbled down a few words when Miss C called him up to her desk.

"So this is the great Conner Fishers I've heard so much about," she said as he sat next to her. Sandwiched in between Amanda and Miss C, it was a bit of a strain on his teenage libido. Honestly, simply knowing Amanda had risen to the level of editor-in-chief, his dream job, was easily the sexiest feature on a woman who had a lot of sexy features.

"You have?" he asked, confused.

"I have. Your old yearbook teacher recommended you to me very highly. Editor-in-chief material yourself, I was told." Amanda nodded, apparently also somewhat impressed by what they'd heard.

"Wow, cool," he said. "That's me."

"All righty. So, let's get you all set up. Your user name defaults to your school email prefix, so cfishers in your case. Go ahead and enter a password. Use whatever you want, but bear in mind you'll have to update it every thirty days."

"Really? That seems kind of often. Why's that?"

"There were some issues with password security last year," said Amanda. "We sorted it out with only a few casualties. Now we're a little more careful."

"Oh. I guess that makes sense. We had some problems with that last year at my old school, too."

Conner made up a novel password, and both he and Miss C wrote it down. She then slid a laptop over to him that prompted him to enter them into the system. The acronym *TIOS* was stamped in the background, but there was no clue as to what it stood for. It then asked him to select his user profile level from a drop-down menu, and after glancing through the options, Conner selected staff.

"I thought you said you were editor-in-chief," Conner said to Amanda. "There's no option for that."

“I was, but that was last year. Carrie Gilbert over there is our editor, but no in-chiefs any more.”

“Oh.” As he finalized the login, the screen showed its default menu, a daunting array of menus, sub-menus, photo editing tools, word processing options, and more. There was a file structure set up to display files by their link to student profiles, as well as a folder labeled “Your Files (1).”

“I already have a file?” he said, cocking his head.

“No,” said Miss C, “but once you create some, it will...” She saw then what he’d seen. “Huh. Well that shouldn’t be there.”

She clicked on the folder, and it showed a single file, named *tios.tios*. “That’s a weird name for a file,” commented Amanda. “The dot tios is the file extension, but... what do we have, Kristy?”

Kristy. Hmm. She looked like a Kristy, but it was hard to think of calling a teacher by first name. She opened the file. It looked to be nothing but text, and only a few lines of it.

“You didn’t write this?” Amanda asked, addressing the question to Miss C. “It’s got your name right there.”

“It doesn’t sound like something I’d say, but it’s always easy to take a quote out of context. Half the stuff people could mean almost anything if you decontextualize it.”

“Amen to that,” agreed Amanda emphatically.

They read the rest of it in silence.

*“Part of you is always going to be the person you were here in high school.” – Kristiana Coszic-Lewandoski*

*“All of you, stuck in this life, living in the past. But not me, man. I’m out of here for good. Done.” – Jordan Lyons*

*“These days, high school never really ends. You move on, but only part of you.” – Angelica Buck*

*“High school has a funny way of stretching out into the rest of your life.” – Shannon Buck, mother of Conner Fishers*

*“If there’s one thing I’ve learned about high school, it’s that everything is cyclical. Things end, then there’s a brief pause before things start right back over.” – Owen Gibson*

*“Part of us will always live on at Northside... So while yes, graduation is an ending, it is also the start of our new beginning – still as Nighthawks. We all of us are Northside, forever.” – Heather Blake*

“Isn’t Heather Blake one of the other freshmen?” asked Amanda.

“Yeah, the little blonde girl with the sour grapes attitude,” said Miss C. Conner didn’t feel comfortable defending her just then.

“Any idea what this is, Conner?” asked Miss C.

“You got me.”

There was a long silence as they each re-read it, struggling to make meaning out of the seemingly meaningless statements. “Dated June eighth. Day after graduation, I think. That’s when they purged all the old user accounts from the network. Not sure why this stuck around.” She shrugged. “Oh well. We’ll just...” She tapped the delete button.

*Error: insufficient user privileges (EIC 1) 0014001*, read the message that popped up.

“Huh. Well, we’ll worry about this some other time. For now, it doesn’t seem to be hurting anything. Anyway, nice meeting you, Conner.” She patted his shoulder as a casual dismissal. “Hey Carrie, your turn.”

She went on with her process, though seemed to encounter no other anomalies. Conner didn’t know what to think about his; the quotes all seemed so obvious that it seemed strange someone would bother writing them down. Why not quote someone on the color of the sky or the wetness of water while they’re at it? Why the quotes all came from people he knew was strange, he supposed, but there was no logic to it. Could the system have simply grabbed names from his file and filled them into sample quotes?

A mystery for another day.

With a few minutes to go in the period, Miss C got the last student set up and returned to the front of the room. “Okey dokey, handsome folkies, that took a little longer than I’d counted on. We won’t have time for people to read their whole essays, but I still want to hear your thoughts. What’d you come up with? What’s a yearbook?”

She looked around the room. After Heather’s answer had been met with rebuke, nobody was eager to try their hand at it. She’d been top of their class last year, after all. “All right, I’ll call on some people. Let’s try out our freshmen – trial by fire. You there. Don, was it?”

Don looked panicked. His “essay” looked to be about eight words long. “Yeah?”

“You sound unsure. Don’t panic. What’d you write, Don? What’s a yearbook?”

“Uh, it’s, like, a souvenir of school, or something?” He grimaced, aware of his own poor answer. “I don’t know.”

“Fair enough, I like a guy who can admit he doesn’t know something. What about you, miss...?”

“Marisa.” She glanced at her paper. She’d made more of an effort, but looked unsure of how to condense two paragraphs into a brief answer. “It’s about memories. That’s what I think.”

“Memories, good. I think you’re onto something, Marisa. Anybody else?”

Slowly, Conner raised his hand.

“Aha, a volunteer! Excellent. Conner Fishers, right? Sorry if I repeat names a lot, but I’m trying to drill them into my head.”

“Yeah.”

“All right, so what do you have for us, Conner Fisher? Why are we here? You agree with Marisa there, that we’re doing this for memories’ sake?”

“I think memories are part of it,” he said, “but I don’t think that’s enough.”

It was Amanda, in fact, who answered, a thin smile on her ruby lips. “Why not, Conner?”

“Because a memory is small. It’s a moment, an incident. Like... you go to the back of the yearbook, and what do you find?” He looked around the room. Nobody answered, so he went on. “The index. Everybody’s name, and all the pages they appear on. I think if the point was to show a memory, you’d put each person on part of a page, alphabetize it, and done.”

“So why don’t we do it like that?” Miss C asked. She seemed intrigued.

“Because then it’s fractured, incomplete. On Heather’s page we’d see she’s in a lot of academic clubs, that she’s in band—”

“I dropped band, actually.”

“—what she looked like on picture day, and so on. For seniors, maybe a quote or something. I don’t know how you guys do it. So Heather could look at it and remember she did those things, but it doesn’t mean anything to anyone else because – well, you brought it up earlier when we were signing in. It’s got no context. It’s nothing but things that happened.”

Miss C glanced at the clock. Their first day was very nearly done. “OK, so if that’s what a yearbook *isn’t*, tell us what it *is*. What’s the point?”

“The point of a yearbook – of a *good* yearbook, of the kind of yearbook I want to do – is to tell a story.”

The bell rang, but it was the first day of school, and muscle memory had faded somewhat over the summer so the students didn’t immediately leap to their feet. Miss C nodded approvingly, and he couldn’t help but smile. She smiled right back, and he swore that the broader his grew, the broader hers. He could already tell they were going to get along great.

“Well put, Conner Fishers. All right everybody, go home, recharge, and when we come back tomorrow, let’s get to work. I think we’re gonna have ourselves one hell of a story to tell this year.”