

STRAIGHT!?

Based on the Coming of Age Adult Visual Novel

Chapter 1 Beginnings - Part III

The first couple of weeks pass like a monotonous metronome counting each beat of the supine story unfolding. College, for the most part, was boring for Zack. Fumbling through life trying to remain in the background left little opportunity to make new friends and he wasn't overly interested in any of his classmates.

Despite everything that college had to offer, there was only one thing he looked forward to, the moment when Braden walked into their dorm room at the end of each day. Zack's classes were much closer to their dorm building than Braden's were, so he often got back twenty to thirty minutes before his new blonde-haired companion.

Each day Zack would pretend to bury his head in a random textbook he had no intention of actually reading, just so he could take subtle glances as Braden unwound from a stressful day. From the way he would take a deep breath after entering the room, to how he would kick off his shoes and stretch out his arms which then pulled up his shirt just enough to see the small tuft of hair trailing down beneath his waistband.

It took one innocent note and fourteen monotonous days for Zack to become utterly captivated by Braden. Some days they would talk about nonsense until the early hours of the morning, and others would be spent in silence as they studied and completed class assignments. But every conscious thought drifted back to Braden. His plump lips, his sandy blonde hair, his beautiful tanned skin... Zack couldn't pull himself away from the boy. He was a secret siren, calling out to Zack through hums in the night unknowingly casting a spell.

Zack had only been back ten minutes and was already noticing how quiet and lonely the room was without Braden. Not that he's loud, but it just felt empty without his company. Plus, he'd spent weeks trying to fix the thermostat and he finally did something to fix the heat... not that he knew exactly what it was he had done.

Suddenly the door slid open and Braden trudged through with a sigh. He carelessly tossed his bag over his desk chair and kicked off his shoes. Wiping away a bead of sweat from his

forehead and stretching out his aching arms, Braden subconsciously pulled up his shirt exactly how Zack had imagined moments earlier. “Sup man?” he asked, trying to act cool and avoid looking at Braden’s happy trail.

“Nada, another day behind...” he sighed, taking a moment to just breathe and unwind. Braden closed his eyes letting his body relax but quickly scrunched his face realizing that something felt different. “Dude... is it warm in here or did I get Zika?”

“It’s totally Zika. Did you try googling your symptoms? I know that always makes me feel better...” Zack replied sarcastically, remembering his mother doing the same thing whenever she got the slightest cough.

“Ha! I know, right? Fucking internet always gives you the worst possible diagnosis...” Braden chuckled, but then narrowed his eyes walking over to the thermostat curiously. “Don’t dodge the question man, did you fix the fucking heat?”

“I did actually, and I feel pretty boss about it too,” Zack replied, folding his arms and kicking his feet up onto the bed. “I actually met one of the maintenance guys. Dude was kind of an ass at first but he gave me a screwdriver and walked me through the process. It’s taken me a few weeks... but surprise! We have heat!”

“Oh my God, this is amazing!” Braden exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air thankful that he no longer had to sleep in socks and a hoodie. “Dude. You... are... a... fucking... BEAST!”

“My first Do-It-Yourself project. I feel like I’m adulting, I’ll be flipping houses before you know it.”

“Heh, I’m gonna crack up if I see you sportin’ one of those fanny pack/apron things with hammers ‘n shit hanging off it,” Braden laughed, strapping an imaginary belt around his waist and parading around.

“You’ll regret it when that’s ALL I’m wearing around here!” Zack said, wiggling his eyebrows daringly.

“Oh my God... yeah that shit would be crazy. Not gonna lie though, I’d almost pay to see that.”

“Be careful what you wish for...” Zack leaned forward, his daring expression growing more intense.

"I'm not worried about you getting that comfortable with projects anytime soon," Braden shrugged, before sitting down on his bed across from Zack. "Besides, this project only used a screwdriver."

"Well, who knows. Maybe if I track down that maintenance guy again he'll show me the ropes. Give me a job or something. He did say they were pretty busy..." Zack trailed off, thinking of his college debt and how much it was actually costing him.

"I wouldn't hold my breath," Braden replied dismissively, rolling over to lie on his front and scroll through his phone.

"Yeah, me neither. I may look him up though," Zack said to himself, making a mental note to check in with Ernie to see if he had any other jobs for him.

"Well, there's no sense in wasting time. I'm getting out of these clothes to enjoy the heat now that you've fixed it. Hawaii, here I come!" Braden cheered, wriggling out of his hoodie and *slacker* shirt.

Zack tried not to stare, but Braden's tanned skin glistened under the light with sweat. Running his hands through his sandy beach curled hair, Braden slid out of his jeans and tossed them aside. His boxer shorts were baggy, and not at all what Zack expected. "So does it bother you if I walk around the room like this?" Braden asked, slightly embarrassed that he hadn't asked before stripping.

"No way man, you do you. Hell, I sleep in my underwear and I didn't really ask you if you were ever comfortable with it."

"It doesn't bother me, man. You good... well, long as I don't see you over there with a tent in your pants."

"Well, that shit happens man... and you're one to talk. You're actually wearing a tent!" Zack exclaimed, pointing out how baggy and large Braden's underwear was compared to his small frame.

“Don’t judge man, this shit is comfy as fuuuuck!” Braden fired back, narrowing his eyes. “I don’t like tight underwear man, hate feeling cramped and squashed down there. How do you wear that shit bro?”

“Remember, I told you I was on the swim team back in high school. Years of tight speedos kinda get you used to the feeling,” Zack replied, suddenly feeling slightly defensive. Truth was, he never really felt like that about tight underwear, it always felt more comfortable than having everything swinging about.

“Oh yeah, that’s right. I keep forgetting you were a swimmer,” Braden said nodding his head. He then suddenly pointed right at Zack with an accusing finger. “I can’t believe you still have that hoodie on as warm as it is in here.”

“Well, figured if you walked in and I was butt naked, shit would just get all kinds of awkward.”

“That’s probably true...” Braden trailed off, before shrugging and looking directly back at Zack. “So, boxer party?”

“Well, you know I’m a boxer brief kinda guy. Thus, my shit’s a bit tighter than those parachute shorts you got on. You ok with that?”

“Meh, whatever. Not like I haven’t seen you in ‘em before...” Braden shrugged, ignoring Zack’s playful attempt at teasing.

“Cool, I’m game...” Zack said, hopping up off the bed and dressing down to his underwear. “Better?” he asked, throwing his arms out to display his rather tight black boxer briefs.

“Great, I don’t feel so pervy now,” Braden chuckled, kicking back on his bed so his back was against the wall.

“Heh, the dorm room is now a pants-free zone I guess!” Zack chirped, trying to keep his gaze up so Braden wouldn’t notice his wandering eyes.

“Yep, place is like a Junior High girls’ slumber party...” Braden said, poking fun at them.

"I don't think girls actually do that," Zack said with a raised eyebrow, remembering back to all the teen dramas that would dominate television. "Besides, no pillow fights in our underwear... that's just fucking gay."

"Ha! Agreed," Braden laughed awkwardly, still unsure how to navigate the subject sensibly.

A few hours passed before Zack began to notice his stomach growling. A deep thunderous roar rumbled through the dorm room, but Braden didn't stir up from his phone. It was the pinging and cutting of several bedsprings that finally forced Braden off his bed. It was already getting late into the evening and neither of them had eaten anything all day, college life was relentless... and there was very little time to actually stop and process what was going on.

Venturing across campus to the cafeteria wasn't as eventful as it had been previously. Zack finally found the quickest route which took just ten minutes. To think they had spent nearly an hour searching before just seemed ridiculous, but they had... and were now thankful it was just a pebble throw away.

"Ugh, those beds fucking suck..." Braden finally said, arching his back to crack it. Zack sat across from him, poking at his risotto that looked less like food and more like a bowl of cat puke.

"What kinda bed did you have at home?" Zack asked, not estranged to a bedspring or two popping into his back.

"Nothing really special but it was a queen-size, so definitely a lot more room," Braden replied, taking a bite out of his much more appetizing hotdog. "There's nothing worse than an uncomfortable bed because it fucks up your back and that's just not what I'm about."

"What are you about?" Zack asked, the question feeling a little more direct than intended.

"Comfortable beds man, bouncy enough to sleep in and big enough so my feet don't hang over the edge... not that I've ever had that problem," Braden corrected, knowing he wasn't the tallest guy around.

“Nah, you’re a nice size,” Zack said simply, not looking up from his monstrous risotto as he spoke. The silence that followed eventually made him peer up to see Braden watching him with a raised eyebrow before he realized what he’d said. “Ok yeah, that sounded pretty gay... I’m gonna just throw this shit away and pretend like that never happened,” he said, excusing himself from the table and dumping his food in the garbage.

Zack needed to find something else to focus on; anything else. Braden was constantly on his mind and the last thing he wanted was to come off weird or creepy. Despite living together for a few weeks now, they barely knew each other. Zack wanted to know everything about Braden. What his room back home looked like, his highschool life and even his family. There was so much he wanted to know, but so much he couldn’t ask in fear of sounding intrusive or stalkerish. “Hey, I’m gonna head back and have a shower. Been a long day,” Zack finally said, walking back over to the table. He stood to the side, slightly keeping his distance.

“No problem, I’m almost done anyways,” Braden moved to get up, but Zack shook his head and pointed down at the unfinished hotdog. There was over half of it left and Braden hadn’t even touched his fries yet.

“Don’t be stupid man, you’re nowhere near finished,” Zack said. “Eat up, growing boys need their food,” he joked, hoping that would cloud over his earlier comment.

“Ha! Ok man, just don’t get lost,” Braden laughed, going back to his meal. His eyes remained fixed on Zack as he left the cafeteria, still unsure what to make of his new roommate.

Zack trudged back to the dorms slowly, hoping the silence brought on by the dimming skies would help focus his mind. His attempts of derailing his train of thought continued through the courtyard, up the stairs, and to their room as Braden’s face flashed incessantly in his mind.

Draping a towel over his shoulder, he headed for the showers hoping that nobody else would be there. Poking his head quietly through the door, he sighed in relief at the empty room inside. Discarding his towel on one of the wooden benches, he noticed a mop leaning up against the wall that seemed to be calling his name.

With an absent mind, Zack held the mop in his hands for a moment before sliding it up against the door and through the handle to prevent anyone else from coming in. He needed a moment to breathe in peace... a space to find solace without fear of interruption or judgment.

Turning on the hot water he let the room fill up with steam, ignoring the flickering lights and SAW like walls. Stripping down he let the water run over his tanned skin, not caring that the heat was a little too warm. Within minutes his skin turned red but it was the distraction he needed from Braden, from his thoughts.

Eventually, the heat became too much and Zack turned off the water. Opening his eyes, he hadn't realized just how much steam had filled the room. He could barely see an inch in front of his hands. Stumbling over to his towel, he wrapped it around his waist and sat down on the bench waiting for the steam to clear.

Thinking back on his day Zack began to sink into the vapor abyss, allowing the mist to cloud over the image of Braden. He woke up that day already feeling antisocial, not in a serial-killer kinda way, but just a general lack-of-desire-to-be-around-others kinda way.

He had hoped a bunch of people would skip class so it wasn't overly crowded. When he finally did reach the classroom, it was almost entirely empty, and Zack had to take a second to make sure he wasn't in an episode of the Twilight Zone or some shit. He caught one of the students muttering something about class being canceled for the day and he silently cheered thanking the higher powers above. Wonders never cease, and all that proverbial nonsense.

Sat in the void, Zack thought back on the empty classroom and realized that it was at this point in his semi-adult life that he made an interesting discovery about school and college in general.

No one cares...

In his mind, he looked around at the sea of bobbing heads and realized that he's just a number. While responsible for classroom attendance, there's no real accountability. If he chose to stay in bed that morning, life would have endured. Class would have continued and people would have gone about their lives.

Surprisingly, the internal argument with his distracted mind allowed time to flow quickly, and eventually, the steam had all but disappeared leaving Zack in isolation once more.

Collecting himself, Zack made his way back to the dorm room with his clothes bundled up under his armpit. He wasn't sure just how long he'd spent in the shower but it must've been quite some time. Braden was already back and laying on his bed in his underwear. "How was your shower?" he asked, looking up from his phone with a smile.

And just like that, the butterflies began fluttering again... Zack's chest tightened and he wasn't sure what to say without it fumbling out incoherently.

"Yeh, it was warm..." he said, wincing at how awful of a response that was. "Didn't take you long though, you've already stripped back down to your tent boxers!" he joked, trying to change the topic back around to Braden.

"Yeah man, I'm loving this heat!" he exclaimed, stretching out his arms and legs sinking into the bed with a grin. "What do you wanna do tonight? I'm so overstudying, just wanna enjoy this heat while it lasts."

"TV night?" Zack replied simply, feeling somewhat self-conscious that he was standing in just a towel. Sure his underwear was both smaller and tighter, but there was something more intimate about a towel... something more revealing. Any second it could unravel and leave him swinging in the breeze in front of his **straight** roommate, which would be enough embarrassment to kill him.

"Sure, I'm down..." Braden said, barely paying Zack's near nudeness any attention.

After a couple of seconds fumbling around, Zack finally managed to pull his underwear on from under his towel. He then sprawled out on his bed with his head resting against the far wall. Both boys spent the rest of the night watching TV and further rotting their brains. Sharing a few laughs even though some of the programming sucked, but for Zack... it was cool to just hang out. "Dude, these medication commercials kill me," Braden chuckled, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I know, right? It's like 30 seconds of stock footage..." Zack added, sure he'd seen the same clip of the woman looking distressed in a cleaning advert 10 seconds earlier.

"Bro, the shit these people are doing has nothing to do with the drug! Why is she making a roast Zack... why!?"

"I wanna know what the target audience is for this channel! Like all they have are lawyers begging you to sue people for the medications you take and then... BAM more medication commercials," Zack laughed, holding his stomach to stop it from bouncing up and down.

"Don't forget sad animals that need adoption," Braden pouted, glancing over to Zack with puppy dog eyes batting his lashes innocently.

"Christ, now that shit makes me need medication. I don't know what kind of medication, but something..."

"Right?" Braden giggled, rolling back over to bury his head into his blanket to stifle snorts of laughter.

"Oh, God..." Zack murmured, gripping Braden's attention. "Not this bathtub in the field commercial again! Who the fuck carries this shit out their anyway?"

"Oh shit, that reminds me..." Braden said suddenly as if he'd forgotten to throw his golden ring into Mordor. "I was leaving the cafeteria earlier and you said you used to swim, right?"

"Yeah, back in high school I was decent," Zack nodded, intrigued with where this was going.

"So it looks like they have a swim team that's recruiting. I saw a flier outside on the bulletin board, and thought that would be great for you," Braden grinned, noticing Zack's eyes light up at the mention of a swim team.

"No shit? There's a pool! I'm down, I mean... it's been a while but I may be up for trying out for sure!" Zack exclaimed, excitement ringing in his voice for the first time since being at college.

"This is a bigger school than I came from so there's probably a lot more competition."

"Bah, you'll be fine," Braden shrugged, shaking off the hint of doubt coming from Zack. "Not that I know for sure cause you could sink like a rock for all I know... but dammit I'm trying to be supportive!"

"Heh, thanks, man. I may look around, any specific requirements for it?"

"I don't remember, didn't pay a lot of attention to it cause I don't know shit about swimming. I just saw the flier and figured I'd mention it to yah."

“Cool, thanks... I may check it out then. See what I can find tomorrow,” Zack said, trying to think if he’d packed his swim gear or not.

At some point, after watching several more hours of shit TV, they both fall asleep with the soft hum muttering to itself through the night. The extremely loud bathtub commercial that Zack hated with a vengeance began to blur out of the TV at an ungodly hour, rocking him awake in a fit of sweat.

Angrily clicking the off button on the TV remote, he threw his head back against the pillow with a heavy groan. He hated being woken up in the middle of the night, it was the worst feeling... being ripped from your dreams by something so sudden.

Braden’s quiet snores soon caught his attention, and Zack watched silently as his chest rose up and down softly. It was weird, the feelings that began to stir for Braden. He didn’t know how to act, what to say... or who to be around him.

He looked peaceful, blissfully unaware of the effect he was having on Zack. That stupid note and toothy grin were captivating... enticing Zack to delve deep into his thoughts and emotions. Falling for his roommate was never the plan, it was the total opposite of what Zack wanted. College was supposed to be a new start, building up the man he wanted to be and making friends that he could finally feel comfortable around.

Zack knew now, that couldn’t be Braden. With how he felt over a simple kind gesture... how he felt when Braden walked into a room. They barely knew each other and yet, Zack couldn’t wait to see him each day.

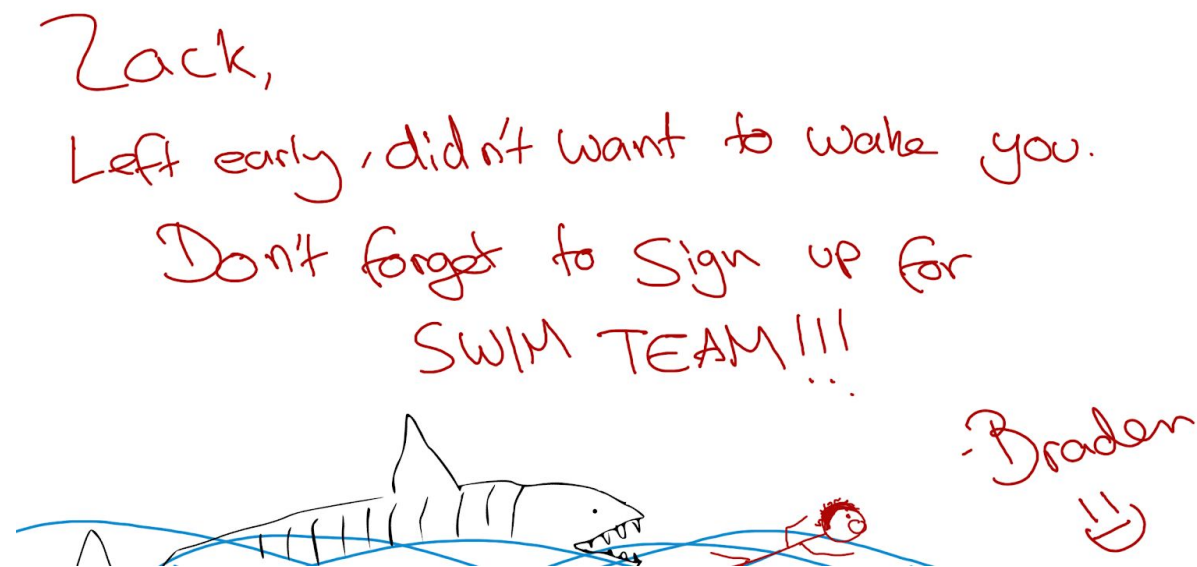
Flipping over to face the wall, Zack tried his best to drown out his thoughts. But he lay with his hands over his ears and eyes scrunched tightly through the early hours of the morning, only falling asleep when the birds started to sing.

When Zack woke the next morning, it was already way past his alarm. Trying to find his phone through squinted eyes he finally flicked it on noticing it was nearly lunchtime. Braden had already left for the day, leaving his bed messy and unmade as usual.

Taking a moment to wake up, Zack swung his legs over the side of the bed and began to get ready. There was no use in showing up to class halfway through the day, what would be the point? Instead, Zack decided to rummage through his bags until he finally found his swimming gear.

A pair of tight yellow speedos tucked neatly at the bottom of his suitcase that he'd pushed underneath his bed. They were part of his high school team's uniform, the colors signifying their school. Zack presumed that they would be suitable for the time being, and if he really needed to buy a new pair he could ask Ernie if there were any part-time jobs available around campus.

Packing the tiny yellow speedo into his bag, Zack searched for his notepad in case he needed something to write on. He finally spotted it on Braden's desk, open with a red pen splayed out on the paper without its top.



“Ugh, why does he do this to me?” Zack sighed, his chest feeling light as if all the air had rushed out of his lungs. Flipping the notepad shut he shoved it into his bag, out of sight out of mind.

It didn't take too long for Zack to finally stumble across the pool. He had a vague idea of the direction from when he and Braden got lost the first few nights and wandered aimlessly through the campus finding all sorts of buildings and complexes.

As the automatic door slid open, Zack's jaw dropped to the floor in awe. The pool was fucking HUGE, way bigger than anything they used back in high school. Chlorine filled the air and the sound of distant splashing echoed through the open space as swimmers raced up and down the length of the pool.

“Hey, can I help you with anything?” a tall boy asked, pulling himself out of the water and walking over to Zack. His lean, tanned body had a sizeable but intricate tattoo displayed across his pecs and down his right arm.

“Erm, yeah...” Zack trailed off, unable to keep his eyes from drifting down the boy's body. “I heard about the swim team and wondered if there was anything around here about sign-ups or tryouts...” he explained, averting his eyes back up to meet the boy's playful gaze.

“You mean that poster?” he pointed out, water dripping from his arm as he pointed to the wall behind Zack. Pinned up was a simple poster that looked like it was designed by a toddler using WordArt for the first time. “Yeah, not my finest work but it gets the message across,” he winked, shrugging and taking a step closer.

“It says I need to get a sports physical, where the fuck do I even get that at?” Zack asked, reading the poster intently trying to ignore the boy standing behind him.

“There's a physician's office on campus, not hard to find. Though it can be a bitch to book an appointment... I'd do it sooner rather than later.”

“Well, it's definitely something to look into. I'll see if I can track it down, thanks for the help man,” Zack said sheepishly, offering his hand.

“Mikhail,” the boy replied, taking Zack's hand and shaking it eagerly. “It was nice to meet you, I'll see you around...” he trailed off, waiting expectantly.

“Zack...” Zack replied, feeling a little awkward. It was a weird feeling, he wasn’t sure if he felt strange because Mikhail was standing in a tight speedo with his skin glistening under the harsh white lights, or if it was because he’d spent so long out of the pool and away from this environment.

Offering a final warm smile, Zack exited the pool complex rubbing his temple with frustration. How was he supposed to make friends when every nice guy that smiled at him was diverting blood from his head directly down to his pants.

Annoyed, exasperated, infuriated... Zack felt trapped in a prison of self-doubt. The thoughts rushing around in his head shooting waves of uncontrollable emotion through his body, crippling any sort of normal friendship he desired.

Retreating back to the dorms Zack took solace in the shower room, bringing the mop up against the door again to barricade him in isolation. “What the fuck is wrong with me?” he asked, holding his head between his hands fighting furiously with his inner demons.

Suddenly, a familiar face flashed in his mind. His brother... once lost now found, staring back at him through glass eyes. The cold stare of his best friend... his only friend... a harsh reminder that Zack had nobody. After his brother’s accident, his parents distanced themselves more than just asunder, that even the concept of family was jaded and shattered. “A number... is that all I am now?” he asked, feeling the inner workings of his mind begin to fall apart.

Staring into the mirror hung up on the wall, Zack hated the boy looking back at him. His stupid vacant expression, his armor of humor, and washed out attire a simple distraction from the fact that he didn’t want to be noticed. He didn’t want people... he didn’t want Braden to see him for who he truly was. But he had suppressed his inner demons for so long that he now couldn’t remember what life was like before his brother left.

Buzz* *Buzz

Zack’s back pocket rang, his phone ripping him out of his hole of self-pity. “Hello?” he answered, the caller ID showing as unknown.

“Hey man, how’d it go?” Braden’s voice rang through, soothing Zack’s ears like a soft melody.

“How did what go?” he replied, stepping back from the mirror and walking over towards the glass wall.

“The swim team... did you sign up or what!?” Braden asked excitedly, his voice practically jumping through the phone.

“Fuck, yeah! I stopped by the pool just now actually...”

“Aaaaaaaand...?” Braden trailed off impatiently.

“And I need a sports physical before any sign-ups or tryouts. Damn man, you’re like a pushy parent trying to get your kid to do extracurriculars!” Zack chuckled, but Braden didn’t respond for a moment and instead just breathed heavily down the phone like he was running.

“Yeah sorry man, I’m in a rush. My next class is across campus and I have like, no fucking time to get there so I’m sprinting like crazy!” he exclaimed, before seeming to brace himself for either a large jump or sudden crash. *“Anyways I gotta go man, just wanted to check in. See ya!”*

“Bye,” Zack said to himself, the phone cutting off before he could reply. Shoving it back in his pocket, he brought his hand up to his forehead with a sigh. “What is this guy doing to me...” he muttered.

The mop, unbeknownst to Zack, had slid out from the door handle and was laying flat beside the glass wall. Not paying attention to his footing Zack stepped backward onto the mop, the wooden handle sliding out from underneath which sent him flying back and crashing into the glass wall... shattering it entirely.

Laying in a pool of shards, Zack remained motionless unable to pick himself up from the mess. Only when he felt the trickles of blood running down his arms did he sit up, noticing shards sticking out all over his body. “Fucking great, just what I needed today...” he groaned, picking out the pieces of glass one by one. They weren’t large shards, but enough for Zack to need the First Aid kit hung up on the wall and to cover his body with plasters that were supposedly ‘skin color’.

Picking up the device of betrayal and searching for a store cupboard Zack found the mops accomplice... the bucket. Grabbing a brush and a few trash bags he spent the best part of forty minutes sweeping and mopping until there was no trace of the shattered glass wall.

Remembering how busy Ernie mentioned he was, Zack figured he might as well clean up the rest of the room while he was at it. Wiping down the shower walls and scrubbing old jizz stains off the shower floor, Zack gagged more times than he cared to count. He cleaned out the lockers and just as he was about ready to call it a day, he noticed a stack of lightbulb boxes in the store cupboard.

As luck would have it, there were enough bulbs to fix the dodgy lighting and the room instantly looked a thousand times more inviting than before. "Place looks hella better," Zack grinned, proud of his work. The creepy music that would play in Zack's head every time he walked in stopped, and now... despite it being a painful accident, the glass wall was gone, opening the room up making it much more breathable.

"Making me wear this stupid fucking thing..." a familiar voice grumbled as the shower room door flung open.

"Hey, Ernie!" Zack greeted warmly, eager to show off his maintenance abilities.

"Well, lookie here. If it isn't my personal hero," Ernie grinned, piecing Zack's handful of trash bags and the clean shower room together. "This place looks great. Kid, what-is-it you kids call people nowadays? A Beast?"

"Ernie, you're making my slang uncomfortable..." Zack said with a raised brow.

"Heh, sorry kid. You kids today don't even know how to use slang. The shit you say doesn't make sense."

"Oh, yeah... you're totally right. We should sooo bring back shit like 'rad' and 'tubular'. That was waaay more contextual," Zack mocked.

"No, now you just sound like a ninja turtle," Ernie laughed, "how old do you think I am anyway?"

"Hmmm....?"

“Yeah, nevermind. You’re on my good side, let’s not fuck that up,” Ernie chuckled, and Zack nodded along agreeing with him. “I’m quite impressed you’ve managed to get this place cleaned up though, even the lights! Damn boy, you got some skill getting all those in without electrocuting yourself.”

“Yeah, it was pretty bad in here,” Zack shrugged, thankful that his jeans and hoodie hid the plethora of plasters covering his arms and legs. “Oh shit, I almost forgot! I got the thermostat working too.”

“Great! That’s another job down that I don’t have to do! Well here, you might as well take this then since you seem to be gaining a knack for this kinda shit,” Earnie said, handing over a spare toolkit.

“I was kinda wondering if you had any more odd jobs and stuff. You said you were busy and I...” Zack began, but Earnie cut him off before he could explain.

“Look, kid. You’re alright, I’ll give ya that. And you’re right... we’re always running behind. But no official jobs are going right now and I can’t exactly pay ya either. You know how much we make? I got a family at home to feed on the pennies they give us to keep shit tip-top.”

“I’m cheap! I promise!” Zack pleaded, clasping his hands together as if praying to Ernie.

“Jeesh... ok kid, tell yah what... it’s not necessarily a better offer but I may have something for ya.”

“Shoot,” Zack grinned, eager to hear him out.

“So we do maintenance but we do janitorial stuff too. Usually, the cleaning gets pushed on the back burner when maintenance projects take longer than expected to finish. So basically, if you can handle some cleaning stuff you’ll probably find shit in about you could make decent cash with.”

“So I keep what I find... no questions asked... and in return, you might teach me a few other tricks in your spare time?” Zack asked, wiggling his eyebrows keen for Ernie to confirm.

“Yup, best I got right now,” he replied with a shrug. “But I’ve found all sorts of shit in here before. Phones, clothing, tools... some other weird shit you don’t even wanna know about...”

“Hmmm, alright I’m down. I’ll give it a try,” Zack agreed, shaking Ernie's hand to seal the deal.

“Regardless of how long you do it, it’ll help me out, kid. For that, I’m grateful,” Ernie smiled, before picking up his other toolkit and heading for the door. “I’ll see ya around, hope you find some good stuff you can pawn off.”

“Yeh, thanks, Ernie. See ya,” Zack waves, waiting a minute to examine his work once more before heading back to his dorm room.

Conscious not to fall too far behind with classes, Zack spent the rest of his afternoon reading through textbooks and taking notes. As if by clockwork, Braden walked through the door at his usual time, kicking off his shoes and wiping the sweat from his forehead. Hearing him run on the phone earlier gave Zack a little more clarity as to why Braden was always sweaty after class, the poor guy runs around campus all day.

Today, however, Braden kicked off more than just his shoes. His jeans and shirt quickly followed and were tossed carelessly through the air, his jeans nearly hitting Zack square in the face. “Shit man, you about took my eye out,” Zack chuckled, picking up the jeans and throwing them back at Braden.

“Sorry man, I’m just loving this heat!” Braden exclaimed, dropping down onto his bed like a starfish.

“How was your day?” Zack asked, closing his textbook and notepad.

“The hard part’s over but I feel like crap,” Braden exhaled, enjoying the brief relaxation of splaying out in bed. “Should probably go hit the shower though, I stink of sweat.”

“Sounds good, I was thinking about hitting the shower early tonight too,” Zack said, but suddenly realized that he hadn’t washed any of his towels. “Shit, all my towels are damp. I don’t have any fresh ones...” he sighed.

“That’s cool, I have a couple fresh ones still. You can borrow one, just make sure you wash it before you give it back. Don’t want your junk all over my face...” Braden said, chuckling to himself as he tossed a towel over to Zack. “And I’m calling first dibs!”

Braden wrapped a towel around his waist and dashed for the door, exuding a sudden burst of energy Zack wasn’t expecting. He waits a few minutes, giving Braden a head start, before wrapping himself with the fresh cotton towel and heading for the shower.

Opening the door, Zack smiled to himself proud of the work he’d done. The room still smelled of musty balls but at least he could see shit in there now. It was a far cry away from the horror film set he walked into on the first day. A soft humming caught his attention through the steam. Moving past the lockers, Zack peered around the corner to see Braden in the shower. He hadn’t seen Zack come in and stood with his back to the room humming to himself.

Zack quietly walked over to the bench to set down his stuff. Sitting on the bench, he took the opportunity to appreciate the new light and flipped a proverbial middle finger at the wall he accidentally demolished earlier.

Braden’s soft hums soon become louder, beckoning Zack with an enticing melody. Unable to ignore the call, he glanced across to Braden for a brief glimpse but instantly lost the battle of self-control.

Water raced down Braden’s tanned skin, dripping from strands of his hair that hung in front of his face. He placed his right hand up against the wall and arched his back, stretching his muscles and letting the warm water massage into his skin.

“Oh... my... God... that ass,” Zack whispered to himself, biting his lip unable to look away. Braden’s cheeks were sculpted to perfection, a Greek statue come to life. He lathered his body with soap, the suds and bubbles enhancing his features and drawing even more attention to his behind. Zack shifted awkwardly, his dick starting to get hard under the towel.

Suddenly, Braden turned around and they locked eyes. Zack’s heart thumped furiously, terrified of what Braden could be thinking.

“Oh my shitting God, Zack! I didn’t hear you come in!” he exclaimed, keeping his front facing the wall and using his hands to hide his junk.

“My bad, man. I wasn’t trying to be a ninja,” Zack explained, hoping this wasn’t going to create tension between them.

“Dude, I don’t know what happened to the screen in here but there’s no fucking privacy at all anymore. This isn’t cool,” he said, wiping soap and water from his face.

“Yeah, I noticed that when I came in,” Zack replied, trying to act shocked and thankful that the plentiful steam would blend the miscolored plasters to his skin.

“You mind coming back in a few when I get done? I hate to kick you out, but I’m totally not cool with having two of us in here with no screen.”

“Sure, no problem man,” Zack said, keeping his eyes averted from Braden to not make him any more uncomfortable. His dick had gone soft in an instant and didn’t need to try and hide it as he walked out.

Pacing back and forth in the room his heart thumped out of his chest. He couldn’t figure out if it was because he almost got caught staring, or if it was because he was really starting to feel something for Braden. Several minutes of panic went by before the door finally creaked open and Braden walked in sheepishly.

“Er, the showers all yours now man,” Braden said, looking up from the floor to meet Zack’s gaze. “Thanks for waiting, I have no idea what happened to that wall. The privacy sucked in there before but now it’s really bad. I feel like I’m in the fucking army.”

“Yeah, wonder if they’ll put a new one up... it’s really weird it just disappeared,” Zack lied, the act coming painfully natural to him.

“Right? Fucking weird man, hopefully they fix it...” Braden began but lost his train of thought as his eyes narrowed in on Zack’s arms. “Dude, what happened to you? You’re covered in bandaids,” he said, worry thick in his voice as he dove across the room.

“Oh, it’s nothing...” Zack said, panicking and looking around frantically for inspiration. A picture of Braden with his family caught his eye, a family portrait in a nice garden with lots of greenery. “I fell into a thorn bush when I was looking for the pool earlier. Shit got me good, man.”

“Yeah man, there’s like twenty bandaids here. You better hit the shower, you don’t want any of that getting infected,” Braden said, ushering Zack out of the room seemingly forgetting about their awkward encounter.

Taking a sigh of relief, Zack hunted down his nemesis the mop and propped it up against the door, ensuring it was secure before dropping his towel. Braden had believed his lie and seemed to be more worried about his fake thorn bush accident than the shower incident.

Turning on the water, Zack embraced the heat and let the water run through his hair and down his body. He had to admit, if it wasn’t for the mop blocking the door he would be worried about being in the shower like Braden. He’d always been shy about being naked in front of others.

Thankfully, he was able to chill out and felt totally relaxed. Well, except for his aching dick! Zack’s whole groin had butterflies, his heart wouldn’t stop thumping after seeing Braden in there earlier. His mind began to race with crazy thoughts... about that ass...

“Of fuck, I’m starting to get hard again...” Zack groaned. “Shit, I need to think of something else,” closing his eyes he tried to focus his mind on anything else that wasn’t Braden. “This isn’t working... fuck, I can’t stop it.”

With a groan he pushed it down, trying to ignore the sensation. But the urges and desire were too much, controlling the chemistry in Zack’s body. “Fuck, now it’s really aching... this isn’t going to go away on its own,” he groaned, giving in to the fantasy and grabbing his cock with a hard squeeze.

His body shudders as he pushes it down again, feeling it grow harder in his hand. Leaning on the wall for support, the torrent of butterflies in his stomach felt like they were on fire. Pumping his dick, he bit as lip as the warm water massaged his body with a seductive touch. He clenched his ass cheeks, feeling the sudden build-up in his groin.

“Shit... I’m gonna cum,” he groaned out, giving his cock one last hard pump. Braden’s ass enveloped his mind and he Zack couldn’t think of anything he’d rather cum to at that moment. The orgasm tears through him like a freight train, two weeks of build-up splashing across the shower wall in thick ropes.

It took everything he had not to scream, but a few muffled and pathetic whimpers escaped as the last few drops drained out and fell into the swirling water below. "Oh my fucking God I needed that..." Zack panted, taking a second to breathe before reality hit him.

He just jizzed all over a public shower thinking about his college roommate who isn't even into guys. "Fuck, what am I doing?" he said through deep breaths. "This is starting to get a lot heavier than I thought..."