

The RA



Volume I: Orientation

Isaac Byrne



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By Isaac Byrne

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Chapter One: Training

My name is Spencer Lawrence. I'm the RA for Higgins 3. RA – that's resident assistant, commonly misunderstood to mean resident advisor. The mistake is an understandable one. After all, sometimes assistance comes in the form of a good piece of advice, right? As for me, I could use a little advice myself. I came to Lakeview University with a plan to study business admin. Five years later, here I am about to begin my super duper senior year to score a degree in communications with a minor in psych. What do I plan to do with them? Honestly? I don't know. I already have my dream job.

This is my fifth year at it. If it sounds like a lot, well, it is. I got into it as a sophomore because the pay was hard to beat. Free housing in the heart of campus, so no commutes. A huge meal plan I could never hope to use up, and if Lakeview's food courts and dining halls weren't five star dining, they were better than whatever garbage I'd wind up cooking myself. The stipend wasn't much, but it was an occasional date night and gas money for my dad's hand-me-down minivan. (It was supposed to be a graduation present, but he'd gotten fed up waiting.) All things considered, it was one of the best-paying undergrad jobs on campus.

All I had to do to earn it was completely change everything about how I lived my life.

I wasn't a troublemaker. Not really. Back before I took on the mantle of RA, I drank sometimes at parties, got high once in a while, let a girl stay the night if my roommate was cool with it. I sure as heck didn't go to my RA's floor programs. If the guys on my floor were heading out to the rec center or the intramural field to play sports, I'd join in, but try to impose organization on it and you lost me. I just wanted to do my thing, and didn't see how some faceless university bureaucracy was going to do anything but hinder me.

It was hard to remember feeling that way, now. For the next four years, I was an RA over at Rowland Hall. It was a men's only

residence hall down in the southeast corner of the campus. I had a great supervisor who'd taught me a lot, and by the time I'd finished my sophomore year, I'd bought in hard. I'd seen how I could really make college better for people. Steer them in the right direction. Put them in touch with new friends and all of Lakeview's resources. Keep them from making some of the more consequential mistakes. Help them appreciate, or at least not be a dick about, other cultures and lifestyles. Let them talk it out, hug it out, or cry it out, as the situation needed. I'd helped talk a guy down from suicide. Put someone who'd fast become at best a borderline alcoholic in touch with counselors. Put out a literal fire, and a whole lot of figurative ones. And yeah, I'd bought a shit-ton of pizza to sucker guys into letting me expose them to some educational stuff.

It wasn't glamorous, and there weren't a lot of thanks. Like any job, it had bad days. (Someday I'll tell you about the time I nearly got shoved out a third story window.) Sometimes, I wasn't enough. But sometimes, I got to make a real difference to somebody, and I loved it. I *loved* it.

This year, however, it was time for something new. This year, I'd gotten bumped from my old gig at Rowland and shifted to the north side of campus over to Higgins Hall. Higgins had been closed for two whole years of renovations. Now, it was the hall they used for all the websites and mailers. It had new furniture, new amenities, a new manager, new RAs, and – most excitingly of all – a new policy. It was the first hall on campus to attempt truly coed. Lakeview has buildings that have long housed all genders, but only with guys on the first floor, women on the second. Men in B tower, women in A. Higgins had five floors. I guess because of my seniority, or maybe because over the years I'd made an impression on Bob, the campus Director of Housing, I was the one who got to take the coed floor.

I have to say, I was stoked. For one, it meant fresh challenges and more to learn about my job. For two, though, gender-inclusive housing meant you had boys and girls to balance out one another's worst tendencies. Having chicks around means the guys actually behaved themselves, tidied up occasionally, kept some of that toxic testosterone they passed around on move-in day at Rowland in

check. Meanwhile the guys prevented the girls from stooping to the worst of their potential pettiness, kept the drama llama fed and satisfied. Win/win.

Higgins isn't a big hall, just five small floors. It made for a very personal, intimate format for the two weeks of RA training leading up to move-in day. We'd gotten to know each other very well. (Maybe *too* well, in one or two cases, but they can't all be winners.) Rowland had had sixteen RAs, but here, it was the five of us. From basement to rooftop that's Savannah, Vickie, Carmen, Vanessa, myself, and Janis. Then there was our manager Ramona pulling her first hall director gig, who I had fast become a big fan of, and our center desk operator Marcus. That was it, our tidy little Higgins family, at least until the residents moved in.

It was a little awkward sometimes, not gonna lie. Marcus didn't interact with us much during training, which meant for two weeks, I'd usually been the only guy in the room. The girls jokingly called me "the diversity hire" when Ramona wasn't around, and there was a real vibe like I didn't quite fit in. This was compounded by the fact that I was told flat-out by Ramona when she showed me to my room that she wanted me to serve as a mentor to the other four, all of them new RAs. It didn't quite sit right, a man positioned as the venerable expert over a group of young women, but half a dozen team builders in, we mostly liked each other, they came to see me as a resource, and I shed some of my anxiety over it. "Diversity hire" gave way to "just one of the girls."

It was tricky at times. See, I'm a reasonably good-looking guy. I take care of myself. And my colleagues, they needed no mentoring at all in that regard. They ranged from Vanessa, who was pretty cute on a bad day, to Savannah. Savannah, of Higgins basement, was so hot that the other girls teased her about whether or not someone else would have to check the smoke detectors in the rooms on her floor because she'd keep setting them off. She blushed, sure, but she wasn't modest enough to deny it either. I made sure to keep things strictly platonic. "Collegial" wasn't really possible when you lived together in addition to working together, so platonic would do. There was a strict policy against staff members dating, which had good

reasons behind it and I supported them, no matter how cute they were. Still, trust falling into the gentle, supportive hands of four beautiful women was enough to make any guy's imagination stray at times.

Thankfully, my ex-girlfriend Marisa had done more than enough to keep me wanting a normal, uncontroversial relationship or none at all. For that, at least, I was grateful to her, nutter that she was. It's got nothing to do with Higgins or RAing or move-in day, but let me just say that she would be my first and last experience dating a professional sexpert. Story for another time, but suffice to say having your girlfriend take post-coital notes on your performance for study and reflection isn't quite as good as a little cuddling.

But hey, speaking of move-ins, tomorrow was the big day. Residents were due to show up starting at 8 AM. It was the calm before the storm, Higgins 3 as silent and still as it would be until winter break. The other RAs and I had the evening to put finishing touches on decorations, bulletin boards, and other preparations for move-in day and orientation. The girls had had their door tags up days ago, but I preferred to wait until the last minute so I don't wind up having to redo them if the roster shifted around. Plus, that way names and door numbers would be fresh in my head for my guys' – and girls'! – impending arrival.

So there I was, crawling down the hallway, writing down the residents' names, one to a tag, sticking them on with some transparent contact paper, and then onto the next. Each one needed a marker and scissors, so the floor with its stiff new carpet became my desk. Crawling was the only way.

I started next door to 310, my room. In 312 we had Lee and Angel, then Terry and Tony in 314. Fun alliteration. Then around the corner we had Alex and Joe, and to the other side of the hall, Shawn, in one of the floor's few singles. (In 319 Higgins even had a triple room, of which I was told there were only a handful on campus. As yet, ours was unfilled – hence waiting until tonight for updates.) Then back to my side of the hall for Jack and Chris, then back to the other to Emma's room. And so on. I was shit with names until I had faces to go with them, but I expected to know my guys first and last

by the time classes started next Monday. Girls, too, though it didn't sound like I'd wind up with many.

Some of these names, though, it was hard to say. It had struck me as weird that my roster was only room numbers and names, and often as not nicknames at that. I hoped it would be convenient in the end. You never knew when James was going to go by James, Jim, Jimmy, Jack, or whatever. I suppose since the vast majority of campus was single sex, I was one of very few RAs who might have some use for that third column.

There were a few obvious ones, and a handful where I could imagine going either way. I'd known women who went by Alex and women who went by Jo, for instance, though the roster clearly stated a more masculine "Joe." I could count on one hand the number of obvious female names, but I kept telling myself that Bob had been hyping the new rooming situation all last year at training events. He was billing it as a big new diversity initiative, and if there's one buzzword these HRL folks never seem to tire of, it's diversity.

With nobody but me living there, the sound of the stairwell door opening and footsteps entering the hallway were impossible to miss. Not too surprising. Most floors had some early arrivals showing up. International students, athletes reporting early for pre-season practice, folks finishing up summer programs and moving from the summer school dorms to their fall housing assignment. This wasn't my first rodeo, though; it was easy to get eager to meet my residents and rush up to greet them, but people moving in had a funny way of carrying heavy stuff. Staying out of their way was a courtesy – plus, it kept me from repeating my mistake my rookie year where I offered a hand, and wound up roped into moving hundreds of pounds of some dude's stuff up the stairs while his jerk dad sat in the car, basking in the AC. Fool me once, and all that.

My focus stayed on the door tags. Move-in day was going to be its usual exhausting marathon, and the sooner I got this done, the sooner I could hit the hay and start resting up. I was bent over on my hands and knees with my ass in the air, shearing off the next scrap of contact paper for Morgan and Tyler's door tags, when behind me...

Someone wolf-whistled.

Honestly? I smiled. Women flirted with me with enough regularity that this was my first time, and I didn't get harassed so often that it didn't remain largely flattering when it happened. Still, the smile had to be squelched by the time I turned to confront my whistler. It was hardly the way to make a good impression on someone, and while "authority figure" was rather heavy-handed for my role, I *did* have to be able to be taken seriously. I wiped the grin off my face, ready to deliver a mild rebuke followed by a warm greeting.

The woman standing before me was... hot. On the shorter side of things, trim but with a dynamite hourglass profile, blonde hair fluffed high from the August humidity, and absolutely rocking the shit out of an orange floral summer dress that, from my vantage point, posed more temptation to my eyes than they'd trained me to withstand. That alone wasn't all that weird. Hot blondes go to school the same as the rest of us. Only... these legs didn't belong to a college student – or if they did, she was nontraditional to the point that they'd never let her live in the dorms. Her hotness was probably shaving off a few years, but objectively she was easily 30, but could easily be into her forties.

The flirty smirk on her face was at least as aggressive as that whistle.

"Um, hi...?" That was what came of three years of RA training in conflict intervention, diversity appreciation, and de-escalation.

"Hey yourself," the woman answered. I was already pondering my options for how to respond to this woman's presence. Some alum checking out her old stomping grounds, maybe? Should I gently ask her if she got lost, or what her business here was? Tell her this was a private residence hall and ask her to leave? Invite her down to my room and try to talk that dress off of her?

Before I could decide, however, a voice accompanied a figure rounding the corner behind her.

"Mom! Oh my god, that's so gross!" Joining my harasser was the answer to the riddle, a woman I'd peg as a few years younger than myself. Next to the wolf whistler, she stood a little blonder, a little shorter, a little more academic with her cute blue-framed

glasses, but no less attractive. She was carrying two boxes, but looked to be on the verge of throwing them at her mom in mortification.

I stood, brushed off my knees, and put my smile back on. “Hi, there. I’m Spencer, the RA. What room are you looking for?”

“318,” the girl answered. “And I’m Dana.”

“Nice to meet you, Dana. C’mon, it’s this way. Are you a freshman?” Against my better judgment, I grabbed one of her boxes. She smiled gratefully, ample reward. Especially considering we weren’t twenty feet from the door to her room.

“Um, yeah. Is it that obvious?”

“Oh, he’s only paying you a compliment, honey. Treasure your youth while it lasts.”

I kept my attention on Dana. This was a classic technique, one I’d used to solid results in years past. Ignore the parents, focus on the student. Most freshmen were pretty excited to be escaping parental clutches. Having people choose to interact with them instead of the Real Adults was novel and empowering. Dana’s mom sauntered along behind us; if she was irritated to be written off so quickly, she didn’t give evidence of it aloud. Plus I had the unsettling feeling that she was looking at my ass, so I didn’t make things worse by looking back.

“Not at all, Dana. Just that most of the folks on the floor are freshmen, so it was a good guess.” Not that my roster said as much, but I’d asked Ramona.

“Oh yeah? Cool. I was sorta worried I might be the only one.”

“Nonsense. In fact, you’re the first person moving in, so that actually gives you seniority, kind of. Ah, and here we are. You can hand me that – then just swipe your student ID right in the slot there, and... voila!”

I followed Dana into the room, her mother right on my heels. I set the boxes down on one of the desks. “Welcome to Higgins 3.”

She looked around the tiny room in wonder. To be fair, the furniture was brand new, and while it was nothing fancy, it was her first place of her own. (At least until her roommate Danielle showed up.) I’d been in a lot of dorm rooms over the years, and most of them split the difference between the bedroom of a slob who’d never

dusted or vacuumed in their life, and a medieval dungeon. These were bright, clean, freshly painted. If the floor tiles were scuffed and chipped in places and the ceiling bore evidence of where past occupants had burned their illicit candles, it was still going to be head and shoulders a nicer-looking pad than would be occupied by the friends she'd be making from other residence halls in the coming weeks.

“Wow, this looks so nice!”

“It looks so nice,” echoed Mrs. Dana, except pointedly at me. Was that *more* flirtation in her tone? Dana was distracted, that iconic “which bunk do I claim?!” battle playing out in her eyes, so at least she didn't have to be embarrassed again.

“So, early move-in?” I opened, taking a space by the closets. Dana's mom was inhabiting the doorway.

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. I'm in the marching band. They had us all living in Ballard, right by the School of Music, but they said we could move into our permanent dorms tonight instead of doing it with everybody else.” Then she made a face, squelched a smile, and I realized she was trying to seem too mature to giggle at her phrasing in “doing it with everybody else.”

“Band, huh? What do you play?” I thought to myself that I'd have pegged her as a cheerleader, but then I had to think even harder not to think the words “peg her” going forward lest I wind up making that same face.

“Piccolo, mostly, but I also play the flute and some clarinet. I'm not very good or anything, though.”

“Nonsense, sweetheart.” Dana's mom eyed her daughter with pride bordering on reverence, then delivered her correction to me. “My baby was in the all state marching and concert band for the piccolo. She's been taking private lessons since she was in fourth grade. She could barely get her hands around the piccolo then. Do you remember?”

“*Mom!* Don't call me a baby!” Dana groaned, blushing.

“She was so cute, trying to learn her fingering, going around the house holding her breath so she could work on her lung capacity, and... what do they call that thing you did, honey, where you have to

blow and blow really fast?” Mrs. Dana’s lips formed an “O” and I lost the specifics of Dana’s cry of agony at her mother’s embarrassing behavior in the display of violently heaving cleavage as she sucked air in and out in rapid bursts.

Her eyes stayed on me through the whole bizarre performance. The only thing I could think was that Dana’s dad must not have been getting the job done for quite a while now. Since Dana, maybe.

“*Anyway*,” Dana said after an exasperated look at her mother, who disregarded it but did slow her roll, “I’m gonna go get another load from the car. Feel free to *not* follow me, Mother. And Spencer, it’s been really nice to meet you. A boy RA, huh? That’s so cool.”

“The coolest.” I flashed my least cool smile. Dorky was better than smooth here. The last thing in the world I needed was a resident thinking I was flirting with her.

“I guess if there’s anything else to know, you’ll tell me? Our summer RA just kind of knocked on doors whenever we had to know something. I’m not sure I ever learned her name. I’m pretty sure I won’t forget yours, though, Spencer.” She smiled, and with the afternoon sun hitting her hair just so, she was radiant. Who knew I’d wind up with such a looker on my floor, huh?

“I’ll make sure you know what you need to know. For now, I’d say there’s not much more than we have our first floor meeting tomorrow night at 7, so we can all meet everybody, details on orientation, all that jizzness.” My eyes shot wide open. Holy fuckballs. “Oh my gosh, sorry! I think I was trying to say business and jizz – jazz! business! jazz! – and... You know, why don’t you go get your next load and I’ll crawl back down the hall and bury my head in the floor.”

Dana giggled sweetly, bit her lower lip self-consciously and she slipped past her mother without another word. After giving her a moment’s head start, I made to do the same – only to be stopped with a gentle yet implacable hand on my chest.

“Hold up, Spencer.”

I held up. “Um, sure. I’m really sorry, about, um... you know. The, ah...”

“The jizz?” She smiled without showing her teeth. “Forgiven. A boy your age... well, such things are known to happen.”

I grimaced. What did you say to that?

“You’re going to keep a close eye on my daughter, aren’t you, Spencer?”

God, I loved the way my name sounded from those lips. I loved it exactly in the way I wasn’t supposed to. “Oh, of course. Not *too* close, that is. But, you know, close. It’s my job, after all. Hehe.” Did I just *say* “hehe?” What was even happening?

“Good. My baby girl needs it. Dana’s a very, very sweet girl. So innocent. You know, she never even had a boyfriend in high school?”

“Oh. That’s, um... no.” What in the name of every single fuck did that factoid have to do with anything?

“I’ll feel so much better knowing she has someone here to keep watch on her for me. Someone young...” Her fingers teased at my pecs. “And strong.”

I tried to inch past her, but it only brought me closer. Unless I wanted to just push past the glorious balcony of MILF tits blocking the way, that door may as well be another cinder block wall. “Well, you don’t have a thing to worry about.”

Her head twisted to one side, poising her lips perfectly for kissing. Why had I gotten so close? What the hell was even happening?! “That’s a load off, Spencer. I’m so grateful. You know, Dana thinks I’m such an embarrassment – I had her so young, she’s always thought of me as more of a bratty big sister than a mother. We’re *so* close, she and I. But I promised my hubbins I’d see to it she was put in good hands. Are you good hands, Spencer?”

When had she grabbed my hands? Great googly fucks, was she going to put them on her...?!

She stopped short. Shit. I mean, thank god. Shit.

“I, um, think I should be getting back to work, ma’am.”

Her smile broke wider as she snickered. “Ma’am, he calls me. Such a gentleman. Go on and get back to work, Spencer. It was just an absolute pleasure meeting you.”

I squeezed past her, our chests barely grazing.

She grabbed my ass. Not a pinch. Not a pat. A full-on open-palmed *grope* .

I managed not to run back to where I'd left my supplies. Dana returned with her second load as I sunk back down to finish up those door tags. I gave her a wave, a smile. She gave me a smile, a wave. That was that. Jizzness as usual.

I had three more early arrivals that evening. They were all three women, which was heartening. One of them actually *was* a cheerleader, and looked the part. One of the others was cute, too, but I couldn't have remembered any of their names if I'd been poised over the brink of a volcano, threatened with a hard shove. Come to think of it, I'd never gotten Mrs. Dana's name, either. And think of it I did, for hours after.

I couldn't let myself use the incident for... that. It wouldn't be right.

About half past midnight, I had to head down the hall to take a cold shower. On my way past Dana's room, I saw the door was open. And that she was in there, in a pair of pink PJs with some kind of tiny cartoon figures all over them. PJs that looked like they would be way the hell too tight for me to fall asleep in them. PJs that outlined each ass cheek perfectly as she bent down in front of her closet, arranging her shoes on a rack.

I didn't know Dana, but I knew where she'd gotten her ass, all right.

That shower was as cold as it could get, and I barely kept my attention on getting clean.

Chapter Two: Move-In Day

For the most part, freshman move-in day at Higgins Hall was no different from Rowland. It was a hot August day, and humid, and for ten hours I was baked alive on the parking lot's fresh coating of black asphalt, directing parents and students and being the warm, welcoming face of Lakeview. Bob and the big wigs at the Lakeview Housing & Residence Life office had sprung for staff t-shirts, these ungodly itchy things that stank like a urinal cake when you sweated in them, which the other RAs and I had all achieved by nine. Between the usual headaches of moving and the added drama of parents saying fare-thee-well to offspring and vice versa, people were not at their best. Experience helped some, but when it came to some random kid's dad shouting at me and the Higgins Ground RA Vickie about insufficient parking spaces, there was bound to be some gritting of teeth.

For me, anyway. Vickie handled her stress in other ways. "You know, you might want to run out and grab lunch. I've radioed the campus parking authority, and they said they'd have the additional spots airlifted in by noon at the latest."

"That they'd... what? They can do that?"

I smiled, and didn't quite elbow her. "She's just trying to add some levity to a stressful day, sir. The parking lot is designed for the number of residents parking here, not the number of residents moving in on the busiest day of the year. We're keeping things moving the best we can." I forced a laugh I'd been saving for my first floor meeting tonight. Reserves were being tightly rationed. "But if they air lift some in, we'll let you know ASAP."

The joke failed to land a second time. "You some kind of wise-ass, kid?"

Ramona swooped in to save me in the nick of time, taking the man aside and giving him the chance to vent his frustrations and "file a formal complaint" about my attitude. I knew as well as she did that the official process for such complaints was for her to listen to them,

then promptly disregard their ever having been uttered. I flashed her a look of gratitude over the father's shoulder, and she thumbs-upped me behind her back. Then I got back to work, notifying a young woman whose bong was visibly protruding from one of her boxes that, while the state had legalized it, campus housing hadn't, and she didn't look twenty-one besides.

She thanked me, then went back to her car to find another way to smuggle it in. The annual dance between stoners and RAs commenced.

Parking lot duty was arguably the hardest assignment on the hardest day. For Vickie's shenanigans, Ramona soon came back to reassign her to the center desk. A nice reward for misbehavior, that. That left the parking lot team with myself, Savannah and Janis. Janis gave me headaches, most times. During the past two weeks of RA training, she'd struck me as the sort of RA who followed and enforced rules with equal blindness. Her fastidiousness came in handy that day, however, nagging foot traffic up and down the appropriate stairwells, sweating dads and daughters filtering in and out smoothly.

Savannah was a ray of sunshine on any occasion, a girl so hot that people were basically always nice to her, which had in turn made her basically always nice. When yet another surly, red-faced dad demanded an explanation about the insufficient parking spots – the fifth so far that day – Savannah patted his shoulder gently and said, “I know, it is frustrating. I'm sorry.”

That was it. Just that, and the man walked away smiling like she'd solved his problem. I don't think she even knew the effect she had on people. It made her easy to like, I thought, or else maybe I was falling victim to it as much as the rest. Meanwhile Savannah kept our water bottles full and disarmed most of the gruffest sorts with her thousand-watt smile.

One of the frustrations of move-in day, however, was that while my whole floor was moving in while I was stuck outside directing traffic. Not my whole floor, technically; the upperclassmen were cleared to move in a few days later, once the freshman had settled and gone through the bulk of orientation. Higgins was pretty heavily

slanted to freshmen, though. My kids were up there forming first impressions, and I wasn't allowed to be a part of them. It stung.

A little after four, things had slowed down enough that the remaining arrivals were deemed capable of handling it on their own, leaving Ramona and Marcus to troubleshoot. We were dismissed from our formal duties. Having sweated off a couple thousand calories, I joined Savannah, Carmen and Vanessa for an early dinner across the street at the Penderdast food court. Then, finally, it was back to Higgins 3 to meet and greet my people.

About half an hour later, I'd met, or at least seen, my residents, and was on the phone in my room with Ramona.

"There's something seriously wrong here."

"Huh? Who is this? Spencer?"

"Yeah, it's Spencer."

"You said something's wrong? Is it an emergency? Everyone safe?"

"Everyone's fine. But everyone's also... Look. There's a problem. I have thirty-two of my thirty-eight residents accounted for, but nobody said... I mean, they're... Everybody's...!"

"Deep breaths, Spencer. It's OK. Deep breaths. You were in the sun an awful lot. Get some water, all right? Do you have any?"

"I don't need water. I need... I need *men*!"

There was a pause. A longer pause. Then a gently teasing laugh. "I'm not sure I can help you there, buddy, but there are apps where you can—"

"Har har." I really did like her. Ordinarily, her easy sense of humor was endearing. Not at that moment, though. "I'm serious. My roster didn't have much more than names on it. So far, every last resident on my floor is female!"

"Every... what? No, that's not right. What do you mean? Literally, every?"

"Every," I repeated gravely. "All female . No exceptions. I mean, *me* , but... that's it. "

The line was quiet enough that I could hear her tapping keys. In her office, no doubt. Probably taking her own water/mental health break. Hopefully looking for an answer for me, though it didn't

occupy her enough not to give me a nudge. “I suppose I should remind you they’re all *women* . We don’t check their genitals to find out whether they’re all female.”

I grit my teeth. I wasn’t a transphobe, but I was also not in the mood to spar with her over the verbiage. “All women, then. Did you know about this? Is it a mistake?”

“I definitely didn’t know about it. You’re sure...? No, of course you’re sure. But that’s just... Your floor is coed, Spencer. Bob was emphatic about it. The other directors overseeing the pilot floors and I met about it multiple times this summer. It’s coed.”

“Well *I’m* here, so technically it still is. But this is pretty messed up right now.”

More typing. Then, “I’m looking into it Spencer . When I know something, I’ll pass it along. For now, just go with it, act like this was the plan. If your women have concerns, reassure them that the university is looking into it and we’ll be in touch soon.” Ramona let out a sigh so heavy that even on speaker phone, it zinged my ears a bit. “Thank goodness this is your floor and not one of the newbies. I’m counting on you Spencer. Take a deep breath, get that drink, and then get back out there and work your magic. Can you do that for me?”

If her ignorance was disappointing, my manager’s faith was the slap in the face I needed to snap me out of my funk. “Yeah. Don’t worry about a thing .” I sounded a great deal more confident than I was.

Projecting confidence you didn’t feel was a core RA skill. I was a skilled RA.

I took that deep breath she’d prescribed, chasing it with a bottle of water from my mini-fridge. Act like this was normal. It ought to be simple enough. Girls weren’t scary or anything. Marisa had once spontaneously choked me during sex, completely unasked. With gusto. Just to see if it turned either of us on. (It had not.) Women didn’t frighten me. What I hadn’t told Ramona, however, was that not only were my residents exclusively female, but they were also only somewhat less exclusively... *hot* .

That's not to say they were all perfect 10's. Individually, most of them would turn heads, and some would even stick in your mind for a time after. But they were cute girls, and it was move-in day, so sweaty and labor-intensive though it was, they'd made sure to look good doing it, and to their credit, they looked *good*. Yes, there were a comforting handful who were... normal looking, I guess you could say. Next to their peers, they looked almost aberrant for having imperfect skin and breasts that obeyed the law of gravity. Still, from what I'd seen, the newly arrived ladies of Higgins 3 were sporting at least an 8 average. Easily. It was an anomaly.

I would have thought it was some kind of prank, but nobody had ever gone to this much trouble to prank someone before. Even so, it would be a lie to say I didn't glance around for a hidden camera as I patrolled the floor. No recording devices that I could see, however; there were only freshmen students puzzling over why their door tags had been misspelled with the male versions of their names. Terry and Tony had turned out to be Terri and Toni. Joe had indeed arrived as Jo. It made no sense.

There was nothing to do about it right this minute, though. For the time being, I wended between the rooms, making introductions and trying to put names to faces. Tonight, I would do my best to make them feel welcome and excited to start their college journeys.

The more I thought about it, the more dead-ended it seemed. Surely when Bob and the Housing & Res Life pro staff came into the office tomorrow, they would fix this. Whether that meant correcting their mistake and replacing half of these girls with the intended boys, or, more likely, redesignating Higgins 3 as a women's floor and sending me elsewhere. The more I thought about it, the more likely the second option seemed. Piss off one lowly employee, or a dozen newly arrived freshmen and their families by making them move twice in two days.

I tried not to let it get to me. The only way I kept my chin up was to keep my mind on the mission. These young women had just taken their first steps into the rest of their lives, and I was here to get them off to the best possible start. They didn't deserve to have their first impression of Lakeview tainted by some mopey guy who was

dreading trying to restart his final year mere hours into its beginning.

No. Tonight, these girls were going to move past their anxiousness, forget the homes they'd left that morning, and make a goddamn lifelong friend or two. That was what I was here to do, and until I was relieved of my duties, I was going to take care of these women like they were my own for the year.

Before long, it was time for the first floor meeting. I looked forward to it every year. I was the sort of guy who you could miss in a crowd but fed off an audience, and a group of freshmen all eager to make good impressions and learn the ropes was about the most receptive audience a guy could hope for. I'd put up signs and made sure everybody was aware. Parents, too, if I could catch them before they bugged off. Getting Mom and Dad to nag them into attending my Very Important Move-In Day Meeting was pretty much the one time of the year I got to appeal to a higher authority than Ramona and the student judicial board.

"WE'RE GETTING TOGETHER IN THREE MINUTES!" I bellowed my invitation (that was really a summons) down both sides of the hall, then made my way to our floor lounge and waited for my residents – my girls – to filter in.

In they came. Some came in pairs, new roommates presenting a united front. Most entered alone. The couches filled quickly, then the arm chairs, then the desk chairs. Soon, there was nowhere left but the floor. The late-comers in dresses and skirts bashfully asked those already seated if they could swap, glancing pointedly at the sole male occupant of the lounge.

Here was my final confirmation that I hadn't missed a secret dude or two in the chaos of move-in day. I stood there in front of a wall of unmistakable femininity.

The assembly didn't do much to diminish what was for me a dizzying array of womanly forms. I'd been drilling myself for weeks not to let myself get caught up checking out any of my residents. Maybe that makes me sound like a pig that I had to make an effort, but I'd been single for a long time. Heck, I'd caught myself checking out Ramona once or twice during training (to say nothing of my

fellow RAs), and she was my married boss. Since meeting Dana and her mom the night before, I'd redoubled my commitment.

Now that I was on my way to being reassigned, though, I let myself at least acknowledge the obvious reality in front of me. Diversity, the guiding star of the Residence Life field, was alive and well in that lounge. We had sweet faces, sexy faces; big tits, perky tits; tight asses, round asses; skinny waists and wide hips; short hair and long; fair-skinned and dark; elegant and casual; tattooed and pierced and ringed and unadorned.

I'd retained a few names. Dana, of course, sitting with the cheerleader across the hall from her. (Sammi, maybe?) Sydney, a petite girl with a healthy tan and sparkling blue eyes. Katrina, who had humbly introduced herself as salutatorian of her high school class (of over 800 students, no less!). Andy – Andi, probably, likely another of those deceptive misgendering misspellings – who had been fighting down tears of homesickness when we'd met. Casey, exploring the extreme end of the spectrum of waist to breast size ratio, and her roommate Amy, whose boobs were practically nonexistent, but suited her shy, tremulous smile. Kim, one of our normal-looking girls, who'd greeted me with a firm handshake. Quinn, who had already added me on facebook, instagram, tiktok and snapchat within the first two minutes of meeting her in what I professionally deemed an impressive display of trust in her RA's attitude toward online surveillance.

“Come on in, everybody. Get cozy, make space. Welcome welcome , and welcome.”

The room remained pretty quiet aside from my corralling them into place. After all, for the time we were strangers in a strange land. That would change soon. Sooner, if I could stop thinking about the ambient hotness and start thinking about fixing their anxiousness. There was an added sense of unease in the room beyond first day jitters, however. It built with the addition of each fetching face. These women had picked up on the same thing I'd picked up on. About five after, I unpropped the lounge door and began by addressing that elephant in our room.

“Good evening, ladies and gent –” Oops. I’d been rehearsing this speech for days now. “Ladies of Higgins 3! Many of you I’ve met, but if I haven’t, my name is Spencer Lawrence. I’m your resident assistant, or RA. Now, before we get into introductions and what are we doing and where do we go from here, let’s start with what I can see some of you are already wondering.”

“Where da boys at?” called Casey, following it with a classy “ow OW!”

“Well put. So yeah, short version? There aren’t any, except me, and I don’t have an answer for you. This wasn’t what I was told to expect, either. Don’t worry, though. I’ve notified our hall director, a kick-ass lady named Ramona, and she’s getting to the bottom of this mixup. We’ll have information soon. Probably not tonight,” I speculated, “since we didn’t really confirm all this until I was making the rounds a little bit ago. As soon as I know something, you’ll know something.”

“Are we going to have to move again?” asked another girl I didn’t recognize, a round-faced doll with enormous, pillowy tits. I swear, I don’t normally even notice things like this, at least not to fixate on it. I was on hottie overload or something. The combination of the August heat and a day of sweaty labor meant there was a lot of flesh hanging out. I was doing my best not to dwell on them. On it, I mean. It. Not them.

“I hope not. I don’t think so? But I don’t get to make that call. I’ve been doing this job for a handful of years now, though, to be honest, it’s much more likely they’ll move me and leave you all where you are. That’s pure guesswork, though. I’d say if you’re nervous about it, maybe go light on the unpacking, but you’ve seen your rooms, now. They’re not that big. Doesn’t take long to re-pack and move if it happens, which again, it probably won’t.”

Another girl spoke up, a snotty-looking brunette whose good looks almost justified her entitled sneer. “How could something like this happen? My housing letter said I was on a coed floor. I specifically requested one. My parents are paying good money for this. It isn’t right.”

“Yeah, I have three sisters at home. I was kinda looking forward to trading some estrogen in for testosterone,” added Quinn, a dark-haired girl with sharp features.

The room quickly became a cacophony of opinions. The pervading sentiment was dissatisfaction; a handful were of the opinion that an absence of a bunch of brutish apes in their midst was a positive. (One of those, an impressively top-heavy Asian girl – woman – with pink stripes dyed into her hair, had the grace to exempt present company from that diagnosis.) After allowing them to vent, I raised my hand and asked for their attention again. There had been voices in the din expressing outrage at the circumstance of a group of women being supervised in their own homes by a strange man, so I was trying to be sensitive to that sentiment. Frankly, I empathized. It wasn't merely bad optics; it was a bad policy.

Before long, they let me have the floor again. “Look, I know this is weird. I don't know what other word to use for it. I wasn't expecting it either. But here we are, right? For now, my number one concern is you guys – sorry, girls – sorry, *women* – having a good start to your new life at Lakeview. So for now, the hell with it, OK? Maybe tomorrow you'll have a new RA or some new neighbors, but tonight, here we are, and let's rock out. You with me?”

There was a positive, if tepid, response, so I amped it up. “I said, are you with me?!” The few who'd made noise before made a little more. Some grins, some grim. “I can't *hear* you! Who's with me?! Come on, who's with me?”

It didn't take much of that to bring things to a stony silence. Then I abandoned the act and let them in on it. “I'm kidding, everybody. See, 'cause that's what a dude might say to a floor of dude-bros, and you're... get it? Come on, I'm kidding. You're going to have a great time here. I promise.”

The levity did the trick. The room had a healthy amount of grins and giggles now. Then someone raised a hand. “Oh, I was going to take questions at the end, but if it's about the current subject...?”

The girl nodded. Fuck, she was gorgeous. Great body, but her face was next goddamn level... Damn. “Yeah, um, you said your roster didn't list gender... Did it list names?”

“Did it...? Um, yeah? That’s kind of what a roster is.” I chuckled self-consciously.

“OK, because my name is misspelled on my door. So is my roommate’s, and so are a bunch of other girls’.”

I frowned. That was a good point. It had occurred to me that we had a fair number of gender-blind names, but some of those were unambiguously male. “Oh. OK, and – sorry, but I’ve met like a hundred people today so I’m still learning names. You are...?”

“Terri. Terri with an I. And my roommate is Toni, also with an I.” The girl beside her, presumably Toni, nodded firmly.

Another girl spoke up, a curly-haired girl with a sparkling stud in her left nostril and a tattoo of an arrow up her forearm. “Mine too. Nikki, but it says ‘Nick.’”

Other murmurs followed. What the fuck was going on? The gender mishap was one thing, but misspelling their names? How the hell does *that* happen? “All right. I’m going to pass around a notepad. I was going to use it for room problems anyway, so feel free to list those if you have any. You know, lights burned out, something missing, whatever. Just add the door tags to the list, and I will get them corrected. So let’s get that moving while we start getting to know each other, yeah?”

Icebreakers commenced. We learned a little bit about each other. Two of them, Charlie and Ellie, planned to take on the same major as me. Once Peyton opened up about being a little homesick, every other girl after her echoed the sentiment until I pivoted to a little speech about how many of us missed our families, so now we needed to make sure we’re being good to each other and taking care of one another, our families away from home.

I pointed to the cloth banner hanging over the door, crafted during RA training during a session in which we each developed a theme for our floor. *We Are Family*, it read. I got to drink in a few grateful tears. Cheesy, sure, but folks get emotional on move-in day. A cheesy banner was better fodder for greetings than everyone dwelling on how much they missed their pets. Whatever helps.

“Just as long as I never have to hear you ask us who is our daddy,” joked Sammi – Sam, on my roster – but good-naturedly.

The meeting went smoothly from there. I'm not sure where I won them over, but the ladies of Higgins 3 warmed to me as much as my all-dude floors had in years past. More so, maybe. We covered the boring stuff. Orientation, scheduling roommate agreements and RCR checks, and yes, behavioral expectations and my role in them. Nobody likes a lecture about the rules, but like in years past, it did make people feel better knowing the do's and don't's. I'd seen coworkers skimp on it in the past so they could avoid coming off as draconian during first impressions, but it only led to miserable residents taking things into their own hands when they didn't know or trust the system.

"All right, that's more than enough listening to male voices on our inexplicably female floor, right?" A few whoops from the more ardent feminists went up. "The rest of the night is yours. If you need anything, my door is always open, OK? Literally. If it's three in the morning and you need something, I'm your guy. So hang out, meet people, make some new friends—"

"Sisters!" amended the room's only chubby girl, whose name I was suddenly embarrassed to have forgotten. She pointed at my banner.

I raised a fist to her in salute. "Sisters indeed. I'll be leading a campus tour with some folks from elsewhere around Higgins, leaving after we head over to get lunch at eleven. Join us – we'll make it fun, get to see where your classes are, and other cool and useful stuff around campus. For now, I'm so glad to meet all of you, I'm so glad you're here with us at Lakeview and in Higgins Hall, and most importantly, I'm finally really shutting up." There were a few more cheers, but more than a few girls flashed me a smile on their way out of the lounge.

At least I'd made a good impression. Once they transferred me, maybe I'd have a shot with one of them.

For a while, I burned what little energy I had left roaming the floor, looking for folks who looked like they could use some help meeting people and getting them out of their rooms. It's always a rough day for introverts, move-in day. I'm a bit of one myself, but

hanging out in your room was all well and fine once one handled the urgent business of having a friend in the world.

This was a good group of women, too. Doors were open, people milling about complimenting each other's décor, hair, or whatever other pretext they could find to start a conversation on a bright note. The magic was happening. Up and down these halls, people were making connections that would see them through college, maybe through life. In all that, I'd played some tiny role. Temporary or no, it felt good.

Content that I'd greased the wheels and done my job for what would likely be the brief window in which I ran Higgins 3, I made my way to my room, kicked off my clothes, and collapsed into bed.

My eyes were just closing when the door to my room opened. There was no knock. It simply opened. Before I could so much as squawk, there was a young woman in my room. It took me a moment to recognize her in the dim light filtering in from the hallway. Quinn, the name came to me. The one who'd social-mediaed the hell out of me earlier. By now I'd accepted friend requests from half the girls on Higgins 3, but she'd been the first.

"Heya, Spencer," she said as she strode right in. She sniffled for a moment, wiped her nose on the back of her hand, and kicked the door shut behind her. It was dark, but she rectified that as well, flipping on the light as casual as if it had been her own bedroom. That I was lying in bed and at the very least shirtless didn't impede her at all. Thank goodness I'd had the sheets on over my lower half, or she would have learned even more.

"Quinn, right?"

"Guilty as charged. I was trying to find some stuff on this campus map they gave us, and I'm getting super dizzy."

"Oh. Sure. How can I help?" I sat up against my headboard, careful to keep my sheets in place.

Uninvited, unashamed, unaware, Quinn came around to the open side of my bed, positioned in one corner against the wall by the door. She plopped right down like I'd offered her a seat. Suddenly I was living in slow motion, a mouth-wateringly rounded ass sinking down right toward me, a tramp stamp of angel wings on display in

the wide gap between her crop top and jean shorts. It settled in right next to me – and I mean *right* next to me, her butt nestled up against my hip.

Quinn unfolded her Lakeview campus map, leaning around so we could both see it. Twisted and leaning like that, I had an amazing view down her shirt. Her black bra had been obvious under that white top, but now there it was, a foot and a half from my face, unobstructed. She ought to be able to feel my breath on them from this close.

“I wonder if you could help me find something.”

“Oh. Um, yeah, sure. Though we’re doing a campus tour in the morning. Maybe you’d rather–”

“What, am I bugging you? Sorry, I thought you said this was cool.”

“Yeah. I mean, sure. So, what were you looking for?”

I tried to listen as she chatted me up about her geographical issues. It was a common problem; the School of Engineering was this nifty little subterranean bunker of a thing, and another academic building was situated on top of the hill it was built into. I clarified the markings for her, trying not to think about the warmth, the softness, against my leg. How little separated us.

Only then, she scampered directly over my body and seated herself on the far side of my bed, leaning against the wall, legs folded. All it meant was that now her shins were against my left hip instead of her ass on my right. What was even happening? And how many times had I asked myself that in the past twenty-four hours?

“So. Old guy to new girl, be straight with me. Is Lakeview actually cool, or is it all study study study all the time?”

“Um, it’s pretty cool, most of the time. And hey, could you not wear those in my bed?” I pointed.

Quinn’s eyes widened in offense. “What? Did you just ask me to take my shorts off? That’s really inappropriate!”

“Your... what?! No! No, the shoes! The shoes, holy shit, not your... The shoes!”

Then she burst into giggles and went right to work on the laces, kicking them off the end of the bed. “I was teasing. You should have

seen your face! I'm not making you uncomfortable, am I? I don't know the protocol and all that shit yet. You just said come on in any time, so. I came in."

I had said that, hadn't I. Shit, even my guy residents had at least knocked first, though! "Don't sweat it. I just had a long day. Hot out, especially on the asphalt, you know? I don't usually call it this early. You're fine."

"Oh, I'm 'fine,' am I? That's how you talk to one of your female floormates?"

"What? No, I meant, you're cool, like—" I stopped myself as her grin widened. "And I've fallen for it twice in a row, now."

"Sorry, I'll stop. Unless you want me to keep going." She winked, but again with the giggles immediately after. In fact, Quinn laughed hard enough at her own joke that she rolled to her side, lying down beside me.

"So you're a super senior, huh?"

"Super duper, actually. Sixth year."

"Holy... How old *are* you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Damn, son! Surprised they still let a silver fox like you live in the dorms."

I rolled my eyes at her teasing, and tried hard to not acknowledge the flirting. This girl, this freshman girl with her kissable little beauty mark on her cheek, with shorts riding up higher and higher the more she rubbed her thighs together, was in my bed. With me in it.

With me in it *naked* .

What the fuck.

"What can I say, I know which asses to kiss. Who could say no to this mug, right?" I made sure my smile was the least charming I could manage.

Quinn grinned. "You know, I think you might actually be pretty cool. Katie, my older sister, she told me RAs were basically just amateur narcs. Guess she was never smart enough to hop into bed with hers, huh?"

“Yeah... You know, speaking of, if someone else stops in here – and I’m not suggesting anything! But... this could look, ah...”

“Oh! Yeah, totes.” Quinn shimmied toward the foot of the bed, but to my dismay, stopped well short of standing. Instead, her now bare foot reached out and tapped the lock with an extended toe.

“There we go. If that’s OK. Is that weird? You didn’t cover RA hangout protocol in your little rules talk.”

“It’s a little weird,” I relented. Her sliding down the bed had hiked her shorts up, baring every inch of her thighs, and her top as well. The bottom of her bra wasn’t quite visible, but that I even had to check for that spoke to how high she’d let it ride.

“Man, I’m sorry. I have boundary issues. Get up, get a shirt on. I didn’t mean to weird you out or anything.”

“Yeah, well, suffice to say that if I get up, it’s gonna get a whole lot weirder in here.”

Her head cocked back. Another snuffle. I really hoped I didn’t wind up sick from this encounter. Or fired. “Oh fuck, homie, are you in your underwear under there?”

“Um...”

And back further. “Oh. OH. Dayum, Spencer, why didn’t you say something? Or lock the friggin’ door when you’re lounging around in your nothings!”

“When I said ‘my door is always open,’ I didn’t count on you taking it quite so literally. Bad judgment on my part, and I’m sorry if I’m making you uncomfortable.” I was not sorry, in point of fact. I hoped she blushed so hard it rocketed her back to her room.

“Who, me? Nah, I don’t get uncomfortable. My mom’s a sex therapist, so I grew up with healthy ideas about all that.”

I wouldn’t have minded if she had fewer healthy ideas. Or if her “all that” hadn’t been directed to my crotch. “Oh, cool.” There. Fewer words. Be terse. Marisa had always hated it when I got terse. If I’d left it up to her, dinner conversation would have continued unabated into the bedroom.

“So what’s the policy on RAs and residents, you know, hooking up? Asking for a friend.” She grinned in a far too friendly way.

So much for terseness. “It’s a hard no, I’m afraid. In fact, I could get in a lot of trouble for your even being in here like this, so...”

“Hey, mum’s the word. No worries, friend.”

Had I gotten so much better looking over the summer that suddenly women were unable to take hints around me, or what? As I pondered how to hint harder (Quinn being three steps too hot to simply tell her to piss off), she tossed her hair back over her shoulder and softened her smile. “You’re kind of shy, for an authority figure. You know that, Spencer?”

“I’m not sure ‘shy’ is the term for being a little fidgety under these circumstances.”

“What, you mean being naked and having a cute stranger girl climb into bed with you?”

I nodded, sighing deeply. “Yeah. Those circumstances.”

“So you agree I’m cute.”

“I think we can safely say it’s an empirical fact. Yeah. Not flirting, but I’m not blind, either.”

She gave her bottom lip a little chew, clearly pleased despite my qualifying the compliment. “Yeah? You like what you see, huh?”

I certainly did, especially given how much she was letting me see. “Look, like I said, I can’t get involved with a resident. I could get fired.”

Quinn scooted closer. Her foot no longer reached the floor. “Who’s asking you to ‘get involved?’ I was just stroking my ego, fishing for compliments. I didn’t even ask you to kiss me or anything.”

That certainly painted a picture in my head. “Right. Sorry.”

“Besides, I can keep a secret. Like, in sophomore year – of high school, obviously – I hooked up with this drummer from another school when I was at this concert to cheer on this guy I was seeing, who played the cornet? Never told a soul.”

“You *just* told someone.”

With a little wriggle of her belly, she squirmed closer. “Someone trustworthy, though. Discretion, see?”

“Hey, look, I’m flattered. Really. If I weren’t your RA, who knows? I am, though, so I think it might be better for you to leave.

For now. Then come back tomorrow, or any other day, and I'll have clothes on, and we can hang."

Except instead, she squirmed again, and this time it left her body gently pressing against my side. "Can I see it, at least?"

"Can you—!" I straightened so fast, I gave myself a splinter from the headboard. I yelped in pain and surprise, reflexively throwing myself forward. A moment later I thrashed myself back under the sheets, but not before I gave her an eyeful of my backside sprawled out on the tiny bed.

"Oh! Oh shit! I didn't mean to freak you out *that* hard! Holy... is that a splinter?" She reached out, touched the place it had entered. It stung like a bitch. "Damn, Spencer, that's a small log lodged in there! Hold still, let me..."

"What? No! No, I'll... I'll get..." Who? Who would I get? Somebody from my all-female staff? Somebody else from my all-female floor? This thing hurt too bad to wait to go to the student health center tomorrow. "OK. Fine. But be gentle, OK? This thing hurts like hell."

"Poor thing. All right. Just let me..."

For a moment, I thought she meant to straddle me, but thank god she didn't push things that far. I held absolutely still as Quinn rose to her knees beside me, gently probing where I could feel the sting in the middle of my back.

Then I felt another hand, this one much lower. I'd managed to get the sheets over my butt, though only barely. Quinn was only barely above that line.

"Um, your hand...?"

"I'm just supporting myself," she lied. There was barely any pressure there. Whatever. Let her finish, and be done with this.

Her errant fingertips quested around my lower back, an immensely pleasurable caress that I might have even believed was meant to soothe me from my current and impending pain had she not just made up a story about it. Then suddenly, before I knew she was at it, there was a sharp tug, a little pinch, and I was informed it was done.

“Not so bad. Not even bleeding, hardly. See?” She set the sliver on my nightstand, one of only two pieces of furniture I owned. It really was a beast of a splinter.

“Thanks, Quinn. Now can I... can... can I...”

That was as far as I got. There was a wisp of cool air as the sheets flew down off my body. I flinched, but there wasn't much I could do. On my back was a good deal more modest than my front. Then there were hands again. This time, right on my ass.

Quinn bent down, her cheek pressed to my bare back near the site of the injury. “You've got a nice little booty here, Spencer. I thought you might at the meeting, but... yeah. This is... Yeah.”

She was kneading me. Fondling me. It felt incredible, not only what she was doing but that this dark-haired vixen was so eager to do it. Too incredible to find the words to tell her to stop. At the end of a long day, the end of two long weeks of RA training trying not to notice Carmen's thong creeping out of her shorts, or Vickie's lips habitually sucking her index finger, or Savannah's... well, anything, it felt almost deserved. The powers that be weren't about to let Spencer Lawrence stay on this assignment. Displace thirty students, or one staff member?

She was my resident for one night. Victimless crime. Not even a crime. A violation of my responsibilities. A *minor* violation, considering they'd almost definitely be reassigning me. Heck, I practically owed it to myself for the inconvenience.

Then Quinn sunk her teeth into my ass cheek.

I arched my back in surprise, but a kiss that became a lick that reverted to more nibbling soon followed.

Quinn giggle -moaned, which wasn't even a thing I knew women did. “Sorry, always wanted to try that, and here you were, looking like a lil' snack.”

Then she went back to it. Nips at intervals, but mostly just licking and sucking and literally kissing my ass. I'd never fantasized about it before, but now I couldn't imagine why. Thank the good lord I'd taken a shower before bed; it had been a sweaty day. For the time being, I actually had Higgins 3's men's room to myself.

Her body descended atop mine, her lips right beside my ear. “Can I put a finger in you?” she whispered throatily.

One of my job responsibilities was a little sex ed – not the anatomy so much as promoting those healthy ideas Marisa had given her life to, the ones Quinn had picked up from her mom. To that end, I was proud of her, coming to school already briefed on consent.

More than that, though... This sexy little forbidden fruit was whispering throatily in my ear. Of course I was going to consent.

While I gazed back and watched, she gave her left index finger a long, sensuous suck from base to tip. I’d never had anything shoved in there before, but I tried to relax the best I knew how, parting my thighs. My tacit permission granted, she went right for it. For an eighteen-year-old girl fresh out of high school, I have to say, it was some pretty damn aggressive stuff. On my end, though? It felt... strange. Stranger still when she began to wiggle it ever so gently inside me.

Not bad strange, mind. I sure as hell didn’t ask her to stop.

“You like that? Not too much?”

“No. No, you’re doing... It’s great.” It wasn’t like me to be tongue-tied with women, but it wasn’t like women to barge into my room while I was naked and shove their index finger inside me. I was adjusting.

“Roll over. Nice and slow. Bend your knees, so I don’t lose my ring in there.”

“You have a—!”

She patted my behind patronizingly. “You really are an easy mark, Spencer. Now come on. I want that cock. Don’t make me puppet you.”

I did not make her “puppet me,” whatever that was. (I had an idea, but it was too terrifying to contemplate.) I’d been hard since a few seconds after she’d sat down next to me, but as I rolled over, careful not to disrupt her finger, it was more than merely hard. My cock ached with need. It was redder than I’d ever seen it, throbbing demandingly in the air.

Quinn, kneeling between my knees, stared in rapt attention.

“How were you hiding all that under these tiny little sheets?” she murmured as she took it in her free hand. She must have licked her palm or something when I wasn’t looking, because it was already cool, wet and smooth.

The girl on my bed jacked me off while she probed my ass. Even in the moment, it was hard to believe it was really happening. I’d made out with a girl from another floor in Rowland three years back. It was decent, don’t get me wrong, but it ended with me climbing the stairs back to my floor to beat off in the solitude of my own room, saddled with guilt over the illicit contact.

This? This was next level. As in literally, I should have been floating through the ceiling into Janis’s room on Higgins 4. *Hey Janis, don’t mind me, just getting ready to bust an anal nut all over this barely legal freshman, go back to sleep.* I almost chuckled to myself. Would have, if not for past lessons in not laughing at stray thoughts during sex.

Though oddly, it was that stray thought, one I’d barely been aware I’d been harboring, that pushed me across the line. Janis, lying in bed, as naked as I’d been. My coworker Janis, her tightly wound horribly naïve incredibly judgmental flawless blonde-haired high and tight Mormon body, resting after a long day of tolerating her job. My job.

As a rule, I abstained from masturbating to thoughts of friends, coworkers, people I’d interact with on the regular. It was a practice that lent itself to shallow thoughts and shallow motives. I’d broken the rule a few times with Savannah these past weeks, and once with a fantasy of Savannah and Vickie tag-teaming me after our tag-team training sessions on teamwork. Janis’s personality was so far away from something I could imagine in a partner that it actually made her unattractive to me.

Or so I’d thought, right up until the present moment as I sprayed cum like a fountain into the air. I stared, stupefied, as a single dangly strand hit that popcorn ceiling and hung, as if tethered to the bitch living through that ceiling and floor.

Quinn’s finger slid out of me with alarming suddenness. She was clapping in the next breath. “Damn, you were really backed up,

huh?” she laughed, exhilarated. “I think you mostly missed me, but... I got any cummies anywhere?” She twisted this way and that, showing off her body for my inspection.

Somehow, I seemed to have missed her except for a couple droplets on her shoulder. She wiped it off with my sheets. “That was... wild. Incredible. Did your mom teach you that?”

She snorted. “Your dad teach you to jizz all over your ceiling? Gotta say, that’s pretty impressive.” I almost retorted that it had hardly been all over, but then I remembered *I’d just cum on my CEILING*, and shut up. When was the last time I’d erupted anywhere close to that? Middle school? “If the RA thing doesn’t work out for you, I bet you could take that to Vegas.”

“I’ve never had anyone try that before. That was something else. Unless you’re looking to get rid of me.”

“Sorry. Just focus on the complimentary part. That’s the part I actually meant.”

“Well then thanks. Give me a minute for the sparks to clear from my vision and I’ll have one for you, too.”

Quinn grinned, then leaned down and kissed my cheek. “My first night of college. Damn. This is gonna be a crazy next four years, isn’t it? Six, I guess, if I employ the Spencer method.”

“Well they’re probably going to be reassigning me soon, so don’t get too used to seeing me around here. I guess it means what we just did would be cool. Cool to do again, if we wanted.” Then I remembered I was sitting here, satisfied as could be, while she’d not had so much as a finger lain on her. “Oh geez, speaking of, how about I...?”

But her hand planted itself on my chest in restraint. “No, I’m good. I haven’t showered since moving in, so I’m... But hey, wherever you land when they take you away from us, you can invite me over, make it up to me.” She suddenly dove at my face so aggressively I worried it was an attack. From how hard she kissed me, it almost was. Almost.

“Besides,” Quinn whispered when, some minutes later, she pulled away, “fucking my RA would probably be really bad of me, right?”

For once, I considered that she might be teasing, but she never hinted at it in her visage. With that, she at last scooted out of my bed and let herself out the door, even as I flailed to throw sheets over myself in case anyone was walking by. Nobody was at that moment, except then Quinn remembered she'd left her map in my room. I was on my hands and knees, wiping up my cum stains with a sock. She darted in and out (once more without knocking), leaving me not even sufficient time to dive for cover. A moment after the door closed, I heard a woman's voice in the hallway. They hadn't yet learned that these doors did jack squat to cover noise.

“Was that our RA? Was he *naked*?”

He was. He very much was. So much for keeping things under wraps.

Chapter Three: Software

I already had one foot in the hallway when I heard a giggly, “Girl, you need yourself a bigger towel!” If I’d heard it before I opened the door, I would have waited. The voice was right, whoever it was. It was coming from inside one of the rooms, and I was miles from learning voices. I barely knew names, and could only match a handful to faces. It hadn’t seemed like I’d need to, considering the foul up.

The baby blue towel was normal size. Probably bigger than mine, even. It was only that the girl wearing it had several inches on me, and between the amount of it needed to cover the slope of her bust and the sheer scale of her torso, the thing barely covered her ass. I wasn’t sure it did, honestly. I looked away fast. By the time my maleness kicked in for a double-take, she was rounding the corner, where I saw how barely it was doing its job on her boobs.

Fucking Higgins 3.

There were two bathrooms on the floor, men’s and women’s. I felt like a king, at first, striding into the men’s room. Six bathroom stalls, five sinks, four showers, and even a bathtub tucked away in a little closet in the back. I was the only one on the floor with a key to it, I’d been told. The thing looked like it hadn’t been used in years, but it was all mine nevertheless. All this, all mine.

Until Ramona touched base to notify me where I’d been reassigned to, anyway. I’d already packed a bunch of my stuff this morning, to be ready.

It gave me an excuse to hide out after what I’d done with Quinn, too.

My kingly sense faded before too long when I realized almost forty girls were trying to share the same capacity in the other bathroom. I showered quickly, dressed, then hurried around the loop to the other, where sure enough, there was a line of robe and towel-clad girls out the door, awaiting their turn. Damn, but there were a

lot of cute girls on Higgins 3. A man could snap a picture of this lineup and sell posters; they'd adorn half the male dorm rooms on campus.

"Hey, since there's only one of me, and I'm well past done, you guys... Girls, sorry. You—"

"Women," a gorgeous black girl corrected just loud enough to be sure I heard her. Torielle but goes by Tori, I thought. The really soft spoken girl's, Ellie's, roommate.

"Right, sorry. Ladies – if that's all right?" Tori nodded, smiling graciously. "You ladies can feel free to use the men's bathroom."

The smart ones scattered immediately. Some evidently preferred the girls' – women's – room. And one, a tiny little freckly redhead I was quite sure had been wearing glasses when we met yesterday. "Is it... *clean*?"

I laughed. "They closed Higgins down for all last year for the renovations, and before that it was a women's floor. So I've been the only guy using it, and before that any damage is on your team. I think you'll be OK...?"

The young woman caught my upward inflection; we'd all been doing it for a solid day now. "Andi," she supplied. She brightened, if shyly. I'd seen that look before. These freshmen, leaving behind friends and families, being on their own for the first time... It was that smile, when something inside them clicked. A connection made, some small thing tethering them to their new world. I loved that smile.

"Andi. Right. I'll remember that. Why don't you head on down, see if I wrecked the place for you, OK?"

She grinned ear to ear. "OK. Spencer."

I raised my voice as I called after her, so it would reach more ears. "And remember, we're meeting at 11 for lunch, and then we're doing campus tours. Tell your friends!"

Andi giggled, and merrily complied. "Lunch and tour at 11, everybody!"

This place had grown on me overnight. I was going to miss Higgins 3. Miss it like hell.

Quinn's surprise visit had evidently taught me nothing. Right around 10:30, the door swung open not a half second after someone knocked. This time, though, it wasn't some swaggering teenage girl coming to stick a finger in my ass.

Thankfully? Yeah, let's go with thankfully. Easier to keep things straight in my head that way.

"Hey, Ramona!" I hopped up from my desk, more from surprise than anything. Not guilt. No way she knew. Right?

"As you were," my boss said with a bemused roll of the eyes. She'd been in here during training, once, while passing through the floor to make sure mini-fridge deliveries had gone well. I hadn't been unpacked at the time. It looked almost the same now.

"So, here to escort me out? You'll never take me alive!"

She smiled, but it faded quickly. I wasn't sure what to make of it. "Mind if I have a seat?"

I was already sitting back down in the room's only chair, but I gestured her to the bed. "Sorry, I haven't made it yet."

"Good lord, Spencer, you might be the most gallant man I've ever met. I'm a married woman pushing thirty and I don't even make my bed most days. I can handle it." Her eyes went back to one of my posters, depicting a car on a dirt road with an enormous tornado bearing down on it. The caption read, *Perseverance*, and in smaller font beneath, *the courage to ignore the obvious wisdom of turning back*.

"My dad got it for me junior year, when I was thinking of taking a job at my buddy's mom's company. Or I guess he got it for me after I decided to stick with it. Get my degree, that is. He thought it was pretty funny. I'm glad he talked me down, though."

"So am I."

My cheeks flushed a little. All right, so I had sort of a mini-crush on my boss. It's not my fault. It wasn't the physical so much, though she was more than pretty. Sitting in my bed with her legs crossed in a fetching little burgundy sweater dress with her glossy brown hair tucked as if incidentally into this sloppy little pony tail out the right side of her head. Neither was it the accent, something

vaguely eastern European that my untraveled American sensibilities deemed almost musical.

No, it was Ramona herself. She wore her spirit on her face like makeup. In it I saw her compassion, her intelligence, her commitment to her ideals, her kindness. She was one of those rare genuinely *good* people. I'd crossed paths with her time and again over the past couple years as an RA over at Rowland when we did campus-wide staff training and events. I'd noticed her then as the hot manager, but not much more than that. Getting to know her better these past few weeks, I have to say, I was a big fan. Her husband was one hell of a lucky man.

Which made what I knew she was about to tell me all the tougher to hear.

"So. Where are they sending me off to?"

Ramona smiled at my cutting right to it. She was a fan of mine, too; she'd told me as much, grateful to have an experienced staffer on board, plus the diversity I had added to Higgins staff by virtue of having a dick. (Not how she put it, of course.) I knew she'd be sad to lose me, which was some small comfort.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Take a deep breath for me, OK? I knew you'd be anxious, but you look like you're ready to faint on me, Spencer."

I nodded. "Sorry. Just... had a good opening night." (True, even aside from Quinn. Suddenly I imagined a stray blob of my cum dribbling down off the ceiling and spattering on the tip of Ramona's nose. I took another deep breath. "There's some good people up here. My replacement's lucky.")

"Hey. What did I say about getting ahead of yourself?" She grinned disarmingly. "Are you ready to hear me out, or should I come back another time?"

"Now's good. Very very interested in talking about this now."

Grin upgraded to laugh. Soon I'd be back in Rowland, managed once again by John, a nice enough fellow but a bureaucrat's bureaucrat. Goodbye fantasies of quiet autumn one-on-ones sipping coffee with Ramona, smooth jazz playing in the background while we tried to figure out how best to spend my floor's programming budget;

in her cozy little office nook; hello one-on-ones with John in his cinder block dungeon, enduring his unwitting attempts to gas his staff into submission with his daily gallon of cologne.

My for-now boss spoke. I listened. “So first off, Bob did some digging around, and we figured out what happened. Kind of. One of his people up in the home office, the one doing housing assignments for Higgins, fouled up. Big-time. He didn’t say if it was foul play or an innocent mistake, though I’d assume the latter. Procedurally, they do housing unit by unit – so for Higgins, that’s floor by floor. For these new coed floors, they’d split them in half. So in the system, there was one unit listing for Higgins 3 men, and one for Higgins 3 women. With me so far?”

I nodded. “Straightforward enough.”

“Now Bob didn’t have the precise play-by-play of it for me, so I had to read between the lines a bit. Between you and me, I wouldn’t be surprised if somebody’s packing their things over this screw-up, so there’s only so much he can say when it’s an employment issue.”

“Sure, OK. Just... how does this happen? If the system says Higgins 3 dudes, then Higgins 3 chicks, whoever’s doing assignments would have to assume there should be people on both rosters, right? And wouldn’t some rooms be listed in–”

“Hold up, tiger. Our housing software is pretty antiquated, and mistakes do get made. We have a resident on Vickie’s floor who was assigned to two different rooms, a room on Carmen’s floor that had three women assigned to it that she and I just barely caught in time. It’s not what you call a well-oiled machine.”

“You’re just saying that because we have thirty women and zero men assigned to a male RA.”

“Well... yeah.” She shrugged, and frustrated as I was, it alleviated a little tension. “So in regards to the fubar situation we inherited here. My sense of things? A stupid coincidence. It looks like you have enough girls on your floor with names that could go either way gender-wise. My guess is that they skimmed and saw some girls assigned to it named Terry and Alex and Quinn and so forth, assumed it was the guys’ roster, so then they treated the other as the

women's roster, thus in effect making both the guy's and girl's lists all women."

I shook my head. "But... doesn't the system attach a gender role to the applicant? If confusion over names is all it takes to stick people on the wrong floor, why didn't this happen all over campus?"

"The system does. The thing is, Higgins 3 is a coed floor, and while the units are split into two parts for assignments, they're also unified for tasks like billing, work orders, judicial infractions, et cetera. So it didn't try to filter out this gender or that. Turns out the only thing gendering the assignments for Higgins 3 here was the title of the rosters, which if you confuse those..."

"Wow. That's..." I sighed. "That's something."

"If it makes you feel any better, Bob assured me we're getting new software next year."

"Oh man! That's a load off." She issued a commiserating smile. "Man, evicted from my room over a reading comprehension fail."

Ramona looked to that poster again. The tornado seemed even closer somehow. "Well, I was thinking. Maybe... maybe we consider trying a little of that 'perseverance' you're advertising there."

My eyes narrowed. "Wait, am I being fired?"

"Oh my god, no!" Ramona rushed over and crouched in front of me, putting her hands consolingly on my knees. Yeesh, that was not a dress made for kneeling in. Not unless you had incredible thighs, at least. "No no no, Spencer. You have a job, OK? You're going to be fine. There was... talk... of something along those lines. I squelched that hard, though. If it makes you feel better, it didn't take much pressure. You've been around enough and made enough of an impression that Bob knows your reputation. Between you and me, don't be surprised if Bob tries to recruit you into our noble ranks when you graduate."

"I wonder what women's hall he'll assign me to in grad school," I muttered.

Ramona was a big one for touching. I figured it must be more the norm in her culture. Honoring that, I put my hands over hers, if nothing else to show my gratitude for her going to bat for me. "Sorry.

I don't mean to be sour. So then... I'm sorry, what's happening to me?"

"Bob left it up to me, but I think you've got a good head on your shoulders, and I'm going to leave it up to you. Now as you can imagine, we can't very well displace half of your residents. Not even if we wanted to, and I don't. So, we either need to swap you with another RA, a woman, from another coed floor, so she'll have your women's community and you'll have the mixed gender rooms you were expecting. Just not here in Higgins."

Her sincere desire not to lose me came through in her tone. For a moment, I almost teared up. I'd always been a bit of a crier. "All right. Or...?"

"Or... You stay. Here. Under me."

I ignored the phrasing. "But..."

"I know. It's unconventional. It might even cause a little friction. Still, this is 2022, not 1965. If not for that 'reading comprehension fail,' as you called it, these women all would have had a male RA anyway. They simply would have also had male floormates. Insofar as the occupant of this room is concerned, I see no conflict. Moreover, without you, I lose my most senior staff member. We lose our only man on the Higgins staff. I'm left with someone I didn't train, in exchange for a great staff member."

"Wait. Are you saying... I'm staying here?"

"I'm saying you have a choice, Spencer. I realize this might be uncomfortable for you, and likely you'll – we'll – take some pushback over it if you decide to stay. If this is outside your comfort zone, I understand completely. I'll respect whatever you decide. But, if it's something that matters to your decision, just know that I want you here. I did before, and I still do now. But if you decide otherwise, say the word and I'll get the transfer process started."

There was really nothing to consider. I gave those delicate hands of hers a squeeze. She squeezed back.

"You know you're going to have to give up the men's bathroom, Spencer."

"Way ahead of you, boss."

Ramona leapt to her feet, lifting me with her and throwing a hug around my shoulders with a cheer. I hugged back for all I was worth.

Did Ramona kiss my cheek in our moment of celebration? Honestly, I was so excited in that moment, I couldn't have said, and couldn't have blamed her. I was hers, and Higgins 3 was mine.

Chapter Four: The Men's Room

I broke the news at lunch to the girls who were going along on the afternoon's campus tour, which was most of them. Even some of the upperclassmen tagged along to socialize, although they didn't mean to join us for the tour. Reactions were tough to gauge; they had bigger things on their minds than my employment situation, after all. The announcement came and went in between introduction to the Penderdast food court and a Q&A session that only tangentially involved me. Jordyn, a frizzy-haired junior art major, became the focal point for the freshmen's voracious interrogation about what to see and do around Lakeview. I made a note to reach out to her later; it never hurt to have an in with the influencers in one's community.

Quinn was the only one who seemed to object to the news. "I forgot my map – I'll catch up with you guys," she said, though she couldn't know what route we'd even be taking.

So there was that.

Then it was off to the tour, just me and my freshmen, plus Janis and hers. I had by far the bigger crowd. Of the thirty-four women on Higgins 3, thirty-one were freshmen. I didn't know the breakdown of Higgins 4, but Janis arrived with six. We had been paired up to balance each other's groups out, and to give her isolated newbs a few more friendly freshman faces to put names to.

We were very different people, Janis and I. I don't think she liked me any better than I liked her. For purposes of the campus tour, though, our rapport played well. Her by the book style made sure we covered the essentials and major details. She pointed out the main academic buildings, the rec center, the IM field, athletic venues, the student union, cultural centers, the chapel, Greek row, and so on. Meanwhile I was there with my off-the-cuff extemporaneous style to keep up engagement and provide anecdotes or conversation-starters while we sweated our way across campus on a lovely, but toasty, August afternoon.

Groups like ours were out in force as RAs from all over campus were showing their freshmen around. I recognized a good chunk of them, and exchanged greetings as a pretext to let our folks meet theirs, however briefly. By the time we were passing the controversial Captain Jennings statue, depicting one of the campus's founders and a Confederate officer, one thing was becoming hard to ignore.

"Is it me, or are your girls... cute?" Janis murmured as we wended through a raucous crowd of protesters. There were usually some here during the warmer months, and a day like today with lots of new folks to rally to the cause meant they had gathered in force to decry the presence of Jennings' statue.

"I... hadn't noticed," I answered.

"Oh please, no guy is that... un-guy! All afternoon, I can feel the other tour groups turning to stare. It's like we're on the tour bus for the Swedish bikini team, only without the bus."

"Or the bikinis," I pointed out sourly. "Should we stop by the pool, see what we can find?"

It earned me an elbow. Deserving it, I didn't bother dodging. "Guy after all. I cannot believe Ramona is letting this fly. If my parents had found out my floor was all women except for a single central male authority figure, they'd be pounding Bob's door down."

"They may well, at that. I feel a little weird about it myself, but who knows, maybe we'll all learn something from each other."

"I don't think it's the 'learning' that would cause the pounding," Janis murmured, directing a baleful look at two of my girls walking a short ways in front of us. Again. Janis was a Mormon, and for all she insisted she wasn't the strictest adherent of her faith, she came with all the judgmentality of the most irritating sort of religious zealots.

I suppose it would be more accurate to say she was directing that slut-shamey look at one of the two in particular. As it so happened, the same one I'd seen that morning with the insufficient towel. She and the girl with her – her roommate, I was pretty sure – had been walking out in front of the group, staying ahead and waiting at corners to see which way we were headed next. The roommate was, like most of my girls, dressed nice, maybe a little

extra, so they could make good impressions on all the new folks they were meeting.

Towel girl, however, had gone the extra mile.

It was a good time to be in college, with pushbacks against notions of propriety taking a solid drubbing nationwide. The difference even in the relatively short window since my own freshman year was noticeable. I still remember the transition from high school, where shorts had to come down past the fingertips and cleavage was strictly verboten. Suddenly I was in a world where girls had boobs, and legs, and sometimes let me see parts of them.

This young woman had gone rather a bit further.

Badump-badump. That was what I'd been calling her fall fashion game in my head for the past hour. It was the sound of her barely covered ass cheeks semi-rhythmically wobbling up and down, clapping side to side. Peach. That would no doubt be the name of that fabric color on the packaging. Peach spandex, painted across ample hips. The shorts looked like a compromise between volleyball in the gym and on the sand, skimpy to the point of being wholly inadequate. Her butt cleavage didn't merely appear at both the top and bottom of the shorts (though it did do that), but they were so tight, her entire ass crack had swallowed them whole. Or loose? I honestly didn't know which fit would suck your shorts up your butt. I'd never tried.

Maybe I should ask her. Or better yet, maybe I should stop staring before Janis realizes I've once more failed to hear a word she's said on account of those things.

"...these people here like this often?" one of Janis's residents was asking. Good. I hadn't missed anything.

Janis made sure the protesters our crowd was filtering past could hear her answer. "Not this many, but there's some almost every day. It's a lightning rod for liberal rage, unfortunately. So many people who want to whitewash history to appeal to..."

As for the rest of her, she'd picked out a top as loose as the shorts were tight, flowy and breezy. It had no back aside from a few strings holding the sides together. It was hot out with almost no breeze, but twice now the rare puff of wind had coincided with her

turning to look at something to the side, providing a mouth-watering cock-calcifying side boob. No bra. I'd noticed that way back at lunch. I'd been trying so hard not to fixate on her, I'd not even managed to try to pick out her name again.

"...a good thing, isn't it?" one of mine was saying. Tori. Uh, oh. Janis was engaging an opinionated black student about the nuances of glorifying slavers. I should probably get involved here. "Monuments depicting Confederate leaders are anachronistic at best, an affront to..."

Badump-badump turned to look at the statue, a ghost of a breeze coinciding. Holy hell, I could see half her tit. Her face was smiling guilelessly, no more than another smoking hot college girl embracing – nay, flaunting – her sexuality at its peak of radiance.

"Don't you think, Spencer?"

I turned. Janis and Tori were both looking at me. Several of the protesters, too, both those defending Jennings' presence and calling for his removal. Shit.

"Honestly? Fuck this statue," I said. Tori was part of my tribe, after all. If the banner hanging in our floor lounge was to be believed, I'd made her part of my family. My own feelings on the thing didn't matter. If I was going to make this work, I could use some allies. My personal politics aligned well enough with my answer, but this wasn't about my opinion. This was taking sides, and the offerings were my snotty coworker and the Daughters of the Confederacy or my resident and her need to feel accepted. It wasn't really a choice.

Janis rolled her eyes. Tori issued an approving nod. From the protesters and counter-protesters, cheers met jeers. On we went. Captain Jennings went nowhere.

I noticed Quinn, lurking near the back of our group. She was watching me, and kept her distance as we resumed our walk. I didn't know yet how I was going to handle that, though I expected "tough love" to be the euphemism I'd select for it.

I kept my eyes forward.

Badump. Badump.

Residence hall living has its challenges. Not the least of them is making yourself mindful not to call them "dorms" in earshot of

Ramona or the other professional staff. *They're residence halls*, I could hear John and Ramona and Bob and all the rest of that lot retort by some cult-like reflex. Seriously, though. Tiny studio apartments with shared bathrooms, impersonal features, mass-produced furnishings, a list of rules as long as my arm.

Still, there was something to be said for not having a water bill. I'd showered last night after the incident with Quinn, since I couldn't sleep anyway. Again when I woke up, per my habit, and once again after the weather started getting rough on our three-hour tour. An ex-girlfriend had taught me the allure of a cooler shower, and for now, it was hitting the spot. I'd only narrowly avoided a sunburn. Every few minutes, I turned the temperature down a scooch. Incrementalism was the key.

I'd been in there for over half an hour when I heard someone in one of the other shower stalls. Well, no, I'd heard people – female people – turning the other showers on and off several times since my arrival. The notion that there were wet naked female people coming and going separated from my wet naked male personage by an inch of flimsy barricade was part of why I was taking a long, increasingly cold shower.

This sound, however, was not the spray of water, not shampoo and conditioner opening and closing, not that evocative shift in timbre as yielding flesh undulated farther and closer to the water, sheets of wetness cascading off of hot, warm bodies. No. This sound was a voice.

“Any RAs in here?” it asked. Immediately I knew the difference between a voice calling for my presence in need of aid, and one checking if they could get away with something. I kept silent. The stall walls went up well over my height, and down to within a few inches of the floor. Unless whoever this was stood on the stool for their shower caddy and peered over, or on her hands and knees to peek under, I was incognito.

“Are you seriously?” asked a different voice. My ears judged it to be one stall farther away, with the first adjacent to mine. I wondered at the phrasing until I realized I'd misinterpreted. The second arrival had said *Are you serious, Leigh?* Lee, on my initial

screwed-up roster, but really Leigh. (Realleigh.) I still didn't fully comprehend how someone could have gotten these housing assignments this wrong, down to the misspelling of names. Always something around here, I swear. She was my next door neighbor, though I didn't yet have the face and name connected.

"You think it's more awkward to stop a conversation for a shower and then resume after, than to just talk between the stalls? I just wanted to make sure he's not, like, right there, is all. Hi, mysterious shy chick," said Leigh. A wet arm emerged over the barrier between us to wave.

On impulse, I struck a hasty high five. Evidently I was quick enough she didn't detect the size of my hands, because her response was a laugh and a cheery whoop. "You're all right, mystery chick."

"*Anyway,*" said the other girl, two stalls down, "Are you seriously going to flirt with the RA? He's, like, way older than us. And the RA. Not that he isn't kinda yummy, but still."

"Oh my god, Angel, don't be so provincial. My dad is fifteen years older than my mom. Age is such a nothing bullshit social construct. And he's probably only like twenty-five or something, which is way closer. I mean, like, what, are you gonna date some *blech* sophomore who needs a fake ID to buy you alcohol?"

Angel. That was one I remembered. Leigh's roommate, therefore likewise my next-door neighbor in 312. Short, probably not quite five foot, with a smattering of freckles beneath her curly black mop of hair, but with enough curves that they would still have been over the top if she'd been a foot taller.

I'd only learned Angel's name that afternoon, on our way upstairs to Higgins 3 after the tour. She was the girl who'd been walking beside Badump-Badump. Badump-Badump, whom I'd supposed, evidently rightly, to be her roommate. Which made Leigh, the girl I'd just high-fived naked in the shower, also the jiggly girl who'd tormented me with her ass all afternoon long.

"The way you were shaking that booty at him the whole tour, if he was gonna take the bait, he'd be in that shower with you right now, pretty sure!"

By reflex, my eyes shot to the sliver of a crack near the changing area of the stall, shielded from the water. Her hook must be opposite mine, because I could see a fuzzy baby blue something hanging there.

“Oh my gawd, if only! Half the girls in Higgins already met a guy since we got here. I feel like such an ogre. You think he was turned off because I’m taller than him? Guys are always like that,” pouted Leigh.

“You are not seriously going to stand there and complain about being a leggy blonde goddess, are you? Not to me.”

I caught the tip of an elbow over the wall. She must be washing her hair. I could smell the shampoo in the water splashing in from her stall. “Oh my gosh, no! Angel, you are such a smoking hottie! I would kill for your boobs, hand to god!”

The conciliatory, if patronizing, compliment was met in kind. “I’d kill for your ass. Though I don’t think I’d have the ovaries to put it in those shorts, though.”

As the water turned on in the fourth stall, Leigh laughed exultantly at her own shamelessness. “I’ve had those since middle school. They used to fit normal, you know? When I was packing for Lakeview I almost threw them out, but then I was like... nah...”

“You’re so bad!”

“I know, right? But there’s just something about him, you know?”

“Mmm, I know.”

The cold water was powerless against the onslaught of this cliché hot girl banter, with myself somehow at the root of it. I dunked my head in the stream, but there was nothing to be done about it.

“Are you seriously trying to get with him? Or is it just, you know, a game or whatever?” asked Angel. Micro-shifts in her voice conjured images of her scrubbing vigorously at her tiny busty body.

“I mean, if he came at me, I might come at him,” Leigh replied, slyly.

“Come *on* him is more like it!”

The two giggled excitedly.

“I bet he looks really hot naked. Don’t you think?”

“I think you’re setting yourself up to be disappointed,” Angel replied. “Like, he’s the RA! Isn’t that, I dunno, against the rules or whatever?”

“You know who enforces the rules around here, though, right? I bet he’d let me off.”

“Yeah, if you *get* him off!”

“You’re so bad!”

“ Says you, bad girl!”

Droplets of water cascaded up and over the barricades as the two splashed at one another over their separating wall. A wall that in my imagination of the encounter did not exist at all.

“Besides,” Leigh went on in a softer tone after a moment, “I heard? He already hooked up with a girl on our floor. Last night!”

Oh *FUCK* . I froze, and not only because the water was down to its coldest. As the gossip proceeded, heedless of who else might be within earshot to overhear it, I at last relented, cranking the temp up so I didn’t turn into solid ice.

“What? No way!”

“Way! Yeah, you were asleep already, but I heard, like, noises, next door? Voices. Spencer’s, and a girl’s. And I wanted to see if he had a girlfriend so I knew what I was up against, you know? So I cracked our door open, and then I saw that girl, Quinn? slipping out of his room last night, and like – this is so TMI, but if I had to see it you have to hear it. Right after she left his room, she totally *sniffed* her *finger!* ”

Leigh took such a deep sniff that we could all hear her even over the water.

“What? Gross! What does that even mean?” Angel exclaimed.

“Right? So I asked her, ‘have a good time?’ and she gives me this huge, trampy wink and no joke, the fucking slut held it out for *me* to smell!”

“No way! What? No freaking way! You are not serious right now!”

“Yup! I figured he’d, like, come on it or something, you know? So I, you know, I didn’t, obvi, but you could tell she was super proud of herself. Ugh, such a fucking skank, right?”

“Such a skank,” agreed Angel.

“So yeah, I figure if our resident hottie is willing to settle for a little flatty like that with her trampy tramp stamp – I saw it when she was walk-of-shamelessing away; it’s an angel, but you’d hate it, Angel – anyway, I definitely have a good shot, you know? Good warm-up for the next four years, I figure, and–”

SLAM!

I literally jumped at the sound of something solid pounding into something metal mere feet away, the noise enhanced by its reverberation off of our tile surroundings. As Leigh shrieked in alarm, it came again. By this time, I’d realized what it was. Something battering open the door to her shower stall.

“Think you can talk shit about me, air my personal fucking business to whoever, you cheap bottle blonde whore?!” cried a voice that could only be Quinn’s. It sounded so different angry, echoing.

Oh fuck. Oh, FUCK. Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh

“Get out! What the hell are you doing? Are you insane! Don’t– That’s *my* – Don’t you dare *touch* me, you– Ow! Hey! OW!”
fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck!!!

Grunts and shrieks and slaps and growls echoed around the stalls. I dove for my towel. What the hell was happening? No, it was obvious what was happening, but *here*?! How was a guy supposed to...? With *them* ...? In *here* ...?!

Ironically, Angel was shouting for someone to get the RA when I emerged from my stall. She was clasping her towel in front of her, though in the heat of the moment hadn’t wrapped it around her body as yet. She pointed to the fiasco developing in the stall between ours.

There, on the floor of the shower stall next to mine, was Leigh, her wet, naked body enmeshed with the wet, naked body of the girl who’d stuck a finger up my ass and jacked me off so good I almost cum-blasted Janis in the ass through my ceiling.

It was a true melee, the two of them rolling, shrieking, grasping, wrestling. They weren’t trying to punch one another, so much; I’d broken up a couple fights during my RA tenure, and spontaneous fracasés like this usually got so close so fast that it wasn’t really practical. Luckily, they were both wet and slippery, so their attempts

to grab at and maneuver one another weren't getting much traction. Still, Leigh's countenance was pure terror to be assaulted like this, while Quinn's face was unadulterated wrath.

I turned to Angel, speaking fast but keeping calm. Cool in a crisis was part of what experience at this gig bought you. She was too distracted by the brawl to look at me, so, despite my better judgment, I put my hands firmly on her bare, wet shoulders until she made eye contact.

"You need to call or run to the center desk, right now, OK? Get help up here, as fast as you can, Angel." She was still staring in shock. "Angel! You need to—"

She nodded frantically. "Yeah. Yeah!" Angel dashed away, heedless of the show of bare ass she was providing. Not that I had time to look. (Glance, maybe. For a half second, tops.) Meanwhile there were two other girls in the bathroom area, staring, though they couldn't see what I could. They could hear it, though.

"Quinn!" I barked. Sometimes an authoritative bark could kill one of these things in its infancy. "QUINN! Get off of her, *right now*!"

"Talkin' about *my* shit, cunt?!" shrieked Quinn, her rage dulled not at all. "Sniff *this*, you gossippy fucking slag!"

I think she meant to shove her ass, or maybe her pussy, in Leigh's face, and god knew why, but Leigh was struggling like crazy to get out from under her. In the end, it was like one of those cartoon fights with a cloud of dust showing the occasional arm or boot sticking out. Except here, the cloud was sprays of water. Nice, transparent water. And the arms and boots were soft, wet tits and ass.

"Quinn, I need you to calm down. Understand? You're going to hurt each other. Calm down. Just back off, talk this out." The bark had failed, so I went for a gentler approach, trying to bring them — *her*, really — back to reality. Leigh wasn't doing anything more than squirming and trying to keep from being gouged anywhere too sensitive, but Quinn was relentless. If they got to their feet, I might be able to separate them. Unfortunately with them thrashing around on the floor, especially as soapy wet as they both were, I wasn't going

to improve this situation one iota by trying to get physically involved. It wasn't even a case of the consequences of laying hands on two hot naked teenage girls splashing around in the shower; it was simply not wanting to escalate this further with another target.

Quinn finally got the puss-to-face contact she was going for, though it cost her. Leigh finally stopped trying to wriggle out and extricate herself; the affront was serious enough now she started smacking the hell out of Quinn's round white ass. This only initiated further retaliation, of course, and soon Quinn's thighs succeeded in wrestling Leigh on top of her, held in place with a leg lock, and slapping Badump-badump's eponymous butt right back. The two were shrieking and grunting at one another almost constantly. When they tried to weave in words, it was mostly "bitch!" if I was hearing their pussy-muffled invectives correctly.

Someone must have sent out the alert, because the crowd in that crowded space was growing. Split-second decision-making kicked in; I turned to Tori, whom my subconscious decided was the most reliable potential ally in the bathroom. "Can you try to keep people back for me, Tori? Please?"

She was as freaked out as the rest, but I must have picked well, because on my command she quickly put out her arms to block further access to the shower area, ordering those who'd already gotten past the line to fall back. The latter wasn't really working, but it kept me from needing to try, so I could keep trying to calm the nude, thrashing Quinn down before things got any worse.

Then things got worse.

Chick fights, always with the hair grabbing. Funnily, I'd said that very thing during this year's fight response training; Carmen, the RA on Higgins 1, had rolled her eyes and pointed out that if guys had half a brain in their heads, they'd be doing the same. Pulling out hair fucking hurt, and it was a way better handhold than a shirt. A good point, but here in this unclothed brawl, it meant things had gone from scary to dangerous. Quinn had seized a thick handful of Leigh's blonde hair, darkened from the water and still full of suds from her shampoo, and having maneuvered herself back on top, was

grinning down malevolently as Leigh wailed and whimpered at having it jerked about.

“Quinn, last warning,” I said, splitting the difference between bark and beg. It didn’t work any better than the other two.

Oh fuck fuck *fuck* .

There was no choice left but to get involved.

Operating on pure instinct, I reached down over Quinn’s shoulder to offer Leigh a hand. She took it, and in the next moment I wrapped my other arm as snug as I could around her attacker’s waist and hauled the slender girl to her feet. Using our handhold as leverage, it meant Leigh came up with us, keeping Quinn from ripping her hair right out of her head.

That really set things into action, though. By reflex, Quinn whirled around at her new opponent and shoved me back with two hands, knocking me against the far wall. Someone had installed some shower hooks there, ostensibly for the occasional showerer who preferred to exit their stall naked to towel off in full view of everyone in the bathroom. It hit my shoulder so hard my whole arm went numb, but not before I pried Quinn’s fist open for a moment.

The upside was that Leigh’s hair, and thus Leigh, was free. The downside was that rather than take the opportunity to run, the amazonian gallantly came to her rescuer’s rescue.

“Don’t you fucking touch him, you crazy bitch!” she howled, shoving Quinn past me.

“Why, because you’ll tell the whole world if I do?!” snarled Quinn.

The girls launched themselves at each other, with me now in the middle. I was standing bent at the knees for stability on the slick tile floor, as well as to make myself wider and keep the girls further apart. It was mostly working; they could reach past me, but kept them from kicking or biting each other. We were all of us still quite slippery, but it didn’t stop them from grasping at whatever they thought they could get.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, my towel slipped off.

Whatever part of my brain that was still thinking rather than reacting had tried to warn me that this would be an inevitable

consequence of my involvement, but it was give up on modesty or stand there while Leigh had her hair ripped out of her scalp. Quinn was not fucking around. Regrettably, even in the midst of trying to keep them apart, I hadn't lost sight of the fact that there were two smoking hot naked girls rubbing their smoking hot naked bodies all over me.

Which was to say, I'd entered this fight rock hard at being the object of hot girl fantasies, and had only gotten harder as I lived out what was assuredly someone else's fantasy.

They were still at it when Ramona and Savannah arrived on the scene, led by Angel, now a bit less indecent wrapped in her towel. With my help, the two of them double-teamed Quinn and held her against the wall until she was able to convince them she would stand down. Leigh, who had been losing the fight so obviously that it had devolved into her basically hiding behind me from the berserker beauty, now threw herself against me, bent down to bury her face in my shoulder, heedless of our mutual nudity. She was trembling, the poor thing. I couldn't blame her, even as I desperately wanted to run anywhere but here and hide out for a year.

The other fights I'd had to handle hadn't been anywhere near so involved. My first, I'd stood there like an idiot while another RA, my rounds partner Hunter, used his own linebackeresque physique to break things up himself. The next one I'd ended with words alone, or at least the guys decided to back down on their own before matters got out of hand. The last, I'd had to use one of those techniques campus security had taught us, jerking one of the fighters back onto their butt and getting between them; those few seconds of separation as he struggled back to his feet had been enough for him to decide to cool off.

This time, I'd gotten *involved*. Somehow I felt icily calm, even though I sort of knew I shouldn't. Angel draped her roommate's baby blue towel around her, even more useless than before at preserving her dignity now that half the floor had seen her naked from every angle. As Savannah took over for Tori in dispelling the crowd, Ramona saw that Quinn put her bathrobe on and escorted her out of the bathroom. She gave me a long look over her shoulder; completely

failing to read what was a look of empathy, I promised I'd write up the report as soon as I was dressed. I started helping Savannah and Tori, only to be reminded I was still naked. My coworker tastefully abstained from fully stating, naked *and hard as an angry red diamond*. I retrieved my towel, and with a look of concern, Savannah guided me back to my room with her soft hand on my back.

"I'm OK, Savannah," I told her back in my room. God, she was beautiful. It was not the best thing when all I wanted to do was get my body back under control. "You don't need to stay."

"I'm staying," she insisted softly but firmly.

"Uh, mind turning around then, so I can...?"

It was stupid, in a way; she'd just seen me in all my naked "glory." But she turned, and I jumped into a pair of shorts and one of my old RA t-shirts from my Rowland Days. *Welcome to the Jungle*, it read. The lyrical allusion had been antiquated when my old manager had gone to college, but plenty of my guys had understood the reference.

"Why don't you sit down, Spencer," she urged. Not content to let me decide for myself, she ushered me to my bed and sat down beside me.

"I'm fine, really," I insisted. Was I? I didn't know. That was the thing you said, though.

"Spencer, I don't want to worry you, but you're trembling like a leaf." Her voice was so soothing. Girls that pretty shouldn't be allowed to have voices that pretty, too. It left nowhere to hide.

"Really?" I studied my hand. It didn't look like it was trembling, but maybe my eyes were, too.

"That was really brave, what you did. That girl looked like she meant to kill that other one. Someone could have gotten really hurt." She gave me another once over; I complied, turning my arms, twisting my legs, letting her pat my back, my neck. "I'm not sure nobody did. These scratches don't look to be bleeding. Just breathe deep for me, all right?"

I nodded, and complied. Savannah's sweet smile on perfect lips was keeping me from thinking about everything that had happened.

Quinn, Badump-badump, keeping Higgins 3, the fight, all of it. By the time Ramona returned, I was coming down from my adrenaline high enough to begin to notice the trembling. In the back of my mind, the litany that had been running unheard since even before the fight started began anew.

Oh fuck. Oh fuck! Oh, *fuck* . *FUCK*. Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh

Ramona pulled up my desk chair to sit in front of me. She asked Savannah, not me, if I was all right. “He’s in shock, I think, but he’s getting some of his color back.”

“Good. Good. Thanks, Savannah. I don’t know what I would have done if I hadn’t bumped into you on the way up here. Seriously, thank you. That was above and beyond. Brick work.”

The brick was a staff appreciation initiative Ramona had announced. For solid performance. Get it? It hadn’t been awarded to anyone yet, but there had been plenty of nominations throughout RA training. Carmen for taking a risk sharing during some of our sensitivity training. Vanessa, for putting her art skills to work on individually hand-crafted door tags. Me, for running a training session on dealing with difficult people from a book Ramona had given me to read over the summer, before I knew her as anything more than the hot manager.

Naked girls fighting in the shower had not been covered in my presentation. It merited this new nomination, I thought.

“Can I stay?” Savannah could see the request to let Ramona and I talk privately coming . “I don’t want to leave him when he’s like this.”

“I’m fine,” I said again. Neither acknowledged me. Was I not fine? Maybe they were onto something.

Ramona nodded, but Savannah did at least back off into the corner. My vision tunneled so that I only saw my manager sitting across from me, and nothing else. She looked really nice in that sweater dress. Had I noticed that this morning? I must have. She did, though. Nice lady. I liked her.

“Spencer, you were in a fight. I know you think you feel fine, but fights are traumatic, even if you aren’t initially part of them. Are you hurt anywhere?”

I shook my head. Savannah answered, “Some scratches, but I don’t think he’s bleeding that I could tell.”

“I was in the stall on the end when it started,” I said. “That’s why I was naked. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize, Spencer. I’ll be putting in a transfer order to another hall for Quinn as soon as I get back to my office. Assuming she’s not dismissed from the university altogether. If you hadn’t gotten involved... that would have been a great deal worse for the other young woman. I know you’re embarrassed...” Ramona glanced up at Savannah. I followed, only just catching the tail end of her head shake. Right. I’d been seen naked by half my residents, all of them female. And my insanely beautiful coworker. And my boss, also female, also beautiful. I should be embarrassed. I’d forgotten to feel that, with all the other feelings I was fending off. “But you don’t have to be. One of your residents used her towel to block off eyesight, at least a little. I don’t think most of them saw much.”

Savannah murmured something that drew a sharp look from our manager, but I didn’t catch it.

“I need you to do a few things for me. All right, Spencer?”

I nodded. “Sure. Anything. I’m sorry.”

She disregarded my latest unnecessary apology. “I need you to let Savannah sit with you until she clears you. All right?”

“Sure. I really like Savannah. She’s nice.” I smiled at her, and she was smiling back, though with a little something else in her eyes. Right, that was super awkward of me to say. Crap. How long did shock last? Was it getting worse? Had I been talking like this ever since we left the bathroom? She was so pretty. Badump-badump. Cum on the ceiling. Inadequate towels.

“That’s good. If she says so, I need you to go to the health center with her and get yourself checked out. You don’t look seriously hurt, but we’re not taking chances.”

“Right, will do.”

“While the incident is fresh, yes, I would like you to write up a report for me.”

“No problem. Should I mention, you know, the thing about me and Quinn...?” Man, was I going to get fired? That sucked. Savannah was so nice. Ramona, too. Darn. I’m sorry.

“You don’t need to dignify her lies, Spencer. She said something about you, and her...” She let a pause do the suggesting for her. “I won’t let some violent thug smear your good name on her way out the door. Don’t you worry.”

“Oh. All right.”

Ramona stood. She took my hands for the second time that day. It really was a reassuring gesture. I knew it wasn’t practical for every manager to boost morale with literal hand-holding, but I was sure glad mine had that tool in her belt. “And lastly, I’d appreciate it if you let this nice young lady in here to express her gratitude.”

She pulled me after her, leading me to the door to my room. Ramona pulled it open; there on the other side was a still-damp but fully dressed Leigh. “He’s all yours,” she announced. “Give me a little while to deal with Quinn, but then I’d like to talk with you, too. Spencer can help you find my office. All right?”

“All right,” we said at the same time. Ramona gave her a pat on the shoulder, then excused herself.

Leigh launched herself at me lips first.

Her arms twined around the back of my head, holding our mouths together as her tongue assailed mine every bit as vigorously as Quinn had assailed her, and with no more friction. Her chest pressed against mine. It was oddly familiar after what we’d been through. My Badump-badump grabbed my hand, still warm from Ramona’s touch, and clamped it down on her ass.

There was a reason I shouldn’t be letting this happen. I was sure of it. Had Ramona intended this? She couldn’t have. She’d wanted me to do... something, though. Savannah would know. I’d ask her when Leigh let me come up for air.

I don’t know how long my coworker stood there watching us make out before she cleared her throat. Leigh squeaked, whirling. “Oh my god, I didn’t know anyone else was in here!” she stammered.

“I think he appreciates your, ahem, gratitude. Maybe it’s time to show it by not getting him fired, though?” Savannah’s tone

brookered no room for argument, though it wasn't entirely cold.

Leigh nodded, then practically ran from the room. I stood there, not sure what to do, until Savannah gently steered me out of the path of the door, closed it, and sat me back down.

"Was that weird? Is this going to be weird, when I feel, you know, normal again?"

Savannah clapped me on the shoulder affectionately. "Nah, I made sure my residents all see me naked in the first week. Standard stuff for women's communities. I haven't gotten around to the makeouts, yet, though."

Finally, I felt like I could smile again. The curve in my lips loosened something in my brain as I attempted a quip. "I'm a veteran. By the time you get to where I'm at, you'll have it down."

Savannah folded her legs criss-cross on my bed. "I'm all ears if you have pointers, O Learned One."

fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh

Chapter Five: First Night of Duty

“I’m all ears if you have pointers, O Learned One.”

The average size of a room in Higgins Hall was about 140 square feet, about thirteen feet to a side. They hadn’t designated RA rooms when they’d been built, so mine was representative, down to the furnishings. 50 of that went into my two full-size beds pushed together to make a lumpy king. 25 went into the two closets, one for me and one for empty boxes, biding their time until they returned to service in May. 12 for the two desks, 3 for the night stand, and 5ish for my knick-knacks – my weights, a bookshelf, this toddler-sized table my dad had given me as a keepsake of days we both barely remembered fondly. A chessboard sat on it, the pieces in the same place they’d been when we’d to-be-continued our last match back in July. All told, my entire home had about 40 unoccupied feet in it. Not what you might call an open floor plan.

Even so, there was plenty of room for Savannah to play it off as a joke. Plenty of room for me to play like I never considered it wasn’t. She was all the way over on the bed, dozens of inches away. The far side of the moon, by dorm room standards.

But the smile on her face spoke volumes, as did the considering look on mine. There was no room for either of us to miss the looks.

I crossed the room and sat beside her on the bed, both of us sitting with our legs criss-crossed, a buffer to keep things friendly in our friend zone. After a quiet moment – not awkward, merely quiet – Savannah reached out and delicately scratched a nail against the back of my hand.

“Was it scary?”

Few things brought a guy out of shock like a flirty gesture from a woman like Savannah Grey . It wasn’t sudden, and she didn’t press for an answer while I took a moment, processing, letting it all through the barriers. It was like I was realizing what had happened for the first time.

Holy shit, I'd just been in the middle of a fight. Quinn had been out for blood. If I hadn't been there, Leigh could have been seriously hurt. And the nudity. Good god, the nudity. I'd seen two of my residents buck-ass naked. Three, counting Angel, if you took the "buck-ass" part literally. Who knew how many of them had seen me, a mortifying erection refusing to politely excuse itself as the three wet naked bodies squirmed and struggled all over one another.

I didn't know what to make of it. I didn't feel humiliated. Maybe I would later, when my girls were snickering at me in the halls. The inevitable suggestive comments and dirty jokes that would be a necessary step in the community getting past this. Did I feel aroused by it all? Maybe. Harder to say. The fact that my cock still refused to quit could simply be Savannah's presence, or leftover adrenaline. Could adrenaline make you hard? The girl in my bed sure could.

It had all been so sudden, so wet, so naked, and so violent. I might have lost myself in contemplation, if not for that soft scratching on my hand.

I made myself push down feelings and use words. "Yeah, kind of. I think I was more scared afterwards, once I had time to realize what almost happened. Not my first time breaking up a fight. I was scared the other times, too. Sucks."

The scratch gave way to a gentle squeeze. "Yeah. Sucks."

"This early in the year, too. Everybody already coping with the whole guy on a girls' floor thing." I briefly filled in Savannah on what I'd been given to understand had happened. "Now we already have two girls fighting over their RA, one of them evicted, and—"

"Hold on. They were fighting over *you* ...?" Her head tilted to the side.

Well, shit. So much for keeping that under wraps. If I weren't already so off-kilter, I might have covered, but I was too wiped for lies. "Um... yeah."

Savannah's look hardened, not sternly, but to convey I wasn't getting out of this without an explanation.

"So, I guess Leigh took a liking to me. I'd gotten a vibe like she might be sort of flirting with me on the tour, but I figured no way,

right? Figured I was just getting a big head. Then we both hit the shower when we got back. She didn't know I was next to her, and I heard her make it pretty clear she was."

"OK, but what about the other girl? Quinn?"

My jaw tightened. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Um, sure." I must have looked pretty serious, because she immediately took a second, more serious stab at her answer. "Yes, Spencer. You can trust me." She took hold of my other hand. So warm.

"I crossed the line, see," I began.

"With that blonde girl?"

"With who?"

"The one who just tried to ram her tongue down your throat...?" I saw Savannah's mistake immediately, but she went on before I could correct her. "I saw the, erm, fight. I think she was just confused, and grateful. You can't blame her for being swept up in her emotions."

"Oh. No, that's not who I meant. Actually, I'm talking about the other girl in the fight, Quinn."

"The psycho chick? You did what you had to. If you accidentally, you know, touched something or whatever..."

"Not today. Last night." She finally stopped placating me and let me talk. Like that, the dam, erected only the night before, burst wide open. I spared the gritty details, but I spilled what all had happened. Her coming into my room, ambushing me in my undressed state, jumping into bed uninvited, and... yeah.

"Oh my god. Spencer, that's crazy!" she exclaimed, but she didn't sound disgusted, nor angry. Concerned, more like.

"I never meant for it to happen. But yeah, she heard Leigh and her roommate Angel – the one who went and found you and Ramona? – and lost her shit big-time. I didn't have a chance to talk her down. By the time I knew it was starting, she was literally kicking down the shower stall door. Hmm, guess I should fill out a work order to get that fixed."

As Savannah gently restrained me from retrieving one from my desk, I reflected that maybe I wasn't totally out of shock yet.

She shook her head. “It sounds like this Quinn girl is all sorts of trouble. You make it sound like you crossed the line, but freshman or no, no girl is so la-dee-da that she thinks it’s normal to wander into the bedroom of a guy she hardly knows, without knocking, climb into bed with him, and then blame *him* for crossing a line. It’s not your fault, Spencer.”

“I could have stopped her.” Not that I’d wanted to at the time.

“She could have stopped herself.” She lifted up my hands and pressed a tiny, soft kiss on the back of each. “It’s not your fault, OK?”

“I’m just saying—”

Her grip tightened. “Hey. Hear me. It. Is not. Your. Fault.”

She locked eyes on me, and in their depth, I wondered if maybe she was right. Maybe. It felt weird, contemplating that a freshman girl might have been the aggressor against her super duper senior RA, but it certainly hadn’t been me pushing for it. “Thanks, Savannah. Seriously.”

“You’re welcome. Sounds like you were overdue for a little TLC.”

“Too much TLC is where this whole stupid mess started,” I grumbled.

Self-pity, especially over something like hooking up with a hot girl, was seldom a way to win points with a woman. Savannah was no exception. “Oh, poor you,” she teased, releasing my hands and laying back on the bed. “So... it all went down right here, huh?”

“Yep. You’re contaminating the crime scene as we speak.”

“Yeah? So if I’m the bad cop this time, I guess that must mean it’s your turn to holster your gun and be the good cop.”

“Um, were you not in the showers? You know my sidearm of choice is a nightstick.”

“Spencer! Oh my gawd!”

I held up my hands in protest. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! You can’t set a guy up like that!”

Savannah slugged me with my spare pillow, and while I admit to letting gravity win, it knocked me down beside her. We were giggling hysterically, the both of us, lying side by side, not a foot apart.

“God, you’re so pretty it’s not even fair.” Well *that* sure hadn’t been meant to come out.

“Yeah?” Savannah stopped laughing, but the smile remained. Became something else. It verified that even though this girl was so attractive she probably heard it ten times a day, she still liked hearing me say it.

“Yeah. You might be the prettiest girl I know.” I liked saying it, too.

“I don’t know, Spencer. Not sure you have the best taste in girls.”

“If only I could find a nice one, to show me what I’m doing wrong.”

Her hair was at the exact midpoint between light brown and dark blonde. Presently it was pooled over her cheek awkwardly, obscuring part of her face. We reached for it at the same time. When she felt my fingers, she withdrew and let me brush it back.

“You’re not doing so much wrong.”

For all my self-doubt over the Quinn/Leigh fiasco, I was no prude. Savannah Grey, in my bed, wearing *that* smile? I went in for the kiss. The only thing was, we were lying down, and I’m not a giraffe. Eager though they were, my lips couldn’t reach. Savannah laughed as scooch by scooch I wriggled closer.

On instinct, I stopped one scooch short. I’d been in a bad headspace with girls lately. I wanted to make sure she was feeling— Savannah scooched.

We kissed.

Almost exactly twenty-four hours earlier, a girl had lain right here where we were laying, and jacked me off with a finger in my ass. As many times as my mind had gone back to it since it happened, I still couldn’t believe I’d shot the goddamn ceiling. It had been intense, and dirty, and wrong, and surprising. Making out with Savannah was the opposite of that. She was so gentle. Patient, but not reluctant. Sweet. I needed some of that right then. God knows I’d been wanting it since I first laid eyes on her.

Not RA training, in fact, as had been the case with my first encounter with the rest of the Higgins RAs. No, my first encounter

with Savannah had been way back in the spring, when I'd volunteered to help out with peer interviews for the RA hiring process. Savannah was the only one in Higgins I'd personally interviewed. Then, my instinct had been to be hard on her answers, to press her deeper than I did the other candidates, and be more critical in my feedback. All to prove to myself my own integrity, or some shit, to make myself feel like I could be even-handed with one of the most insanely beautiful women I'd ever seen. She'd done great, really.

I remember on the question about handling a conflict, she told this story about her freshman year roommate, how the two had had nothing in common, hardly talked, never hung out, strangers occupying the same space. So Savannah let the girl catch her reading one of her comic books, and it had actually wound up intriguing her rather than antagonizing. They still weren't besties or anything, but from then on they watched all the superhero movies and shows together as they came out. It was clever, it was motivated by a sincere desire to get to know someone different from her, and it had been effective. On my feedback form, I'd written *fake, lies to manipulate people*.

John and I had a heart to heart about my responses, and the misguided thinking that had spawned them. The first time I met her, and Savannah had made me a better person just by being so hot I'd been suspicious of myself.

"I like kissing you," she said. I'd been about to say the same thing. Lot of lip, sneaky and intermittent with the tongue. It felt like every time I got a taste of that tongue was a little gift. I tried to play it cool, not move too fast. Nothing up asses tonight. As my hand moved from her waist towards her bottom, she distracted me with a sudden shove of that tongue all the way down into my throat as she shifted me back to the hip. After the week I'd been having, it felt good to see a girl show a little hesitation. Besides, I had long fingers. They easily stretched from her hips out to something nice and soft. She didn't seem to mind my squeezing.

We'd been at it for a while, gradually picking up steam, when I decided to renew my efforts at escalation. She was on top of me at

that point, her brownish-blond hair tickling my face as she tried to suck my lower lip off. I took a deep breath – air had not been easy to come by – but before I could say anything, she did it for me.

“So... I’ve already seen you naked today. Maybe, you know, we should even things up...? Just a little!” she said quickly before I could rip all of her clothes off with my mind. “If you want, I mean.”

“I want . Oh yeah, I want .”

My eager reply gave her what she was looking for. She had an ego, that much was clear, but with a face like that, how could she not? She sat upright. I kneaded her hips through her jeans as she took the hem of her shirt and lifted it over her head.

“Wow.” I tried not to roll my eyes at my own knee-jerk response. Real classy. “Sorry, that came out... I just mean, wow. Like, it’s not even fair how perfect you ...”

Only she wasn’t. There was a scar.

To be fair, with her handful-sized, buoyant breasts thrusting straight out into a cute black bra right in my face, I feel like it was understandable that it took me a minute to notice the scar. It was *nasty* . So red it almost look angry, the thing made a deep pucker on the left side of her tummy. It was more or less straight, but close to six inches long and nothing neat about it. My first thought was that it looked like she’d fallen on a chainsaw.

“Oh god. Is it that bad? I’m sorry.” My reaction hadn’t been subtle. Savannah hastily picked her shirt right back up before it had even settled on the sheets.

Quickly, but as gently as I could be while still being quick, I grabbed her wrist. “No! No, I’m just surprised is all . I’m sorry, I handled that shitty. I’m really sorry. You can put it back on if you want, but don’t be embarrassed. OK? You’re so beautiful. Really.”

“In case you wondered why I never wear anything that shows midriff...” she mumbled. I’d let go of her wrist. She was still holding the shirt, still considering.

My fingers roamed across her otherwise perfectly flat tummy. Should I touch the scar? Obviously a sensitive spot, but I didn’t know if respecting her sensitivity or proving I was cool with it was the way

to go. I opted not to. “Well you’re generous not to. Give the other girls a fighting chance.”

A little smile returned to her lips. I’d thought she’d gone to the shirt removal pretty casually for a girl who’d been nervous to have me grab her butt. I’d very nearly failed her test, but maybe I could squeak by with a C.

“You’d think you wouldn’t want to bring up girls and fighting, after the day you’ve had.”

She realized it wasn’t the thing to say around the same time the reality of it sank home for me. Determined not to let this fall apart, I focused on the girl and not the day. “Hey. I didn’t handle that right. And I want to say that I’m curious, and I’m concerned, and I want to know. Someday, when we’re hanging out and we’re talking, I am going to ask about it, if you want to tell me. For right now, though, I am with an amazingly gorgeous woman, in a bed, with her shirt off, and I want to keep making out with her so freaking bad.”

Her mouth was very nearly back on mine when, out of nowhere, the phone rang. It was the room phone, this archaic thing from the 90’s that had been hardwired into the wall and no one had bothered to remove. Some renovation. They only made campus calls nowadays, so I knew it wasn’t a scam-bot. Any other day I would have ignored it anyway, but some part of me that wasn’t fixated on Savannah’s chest remembered that there had been violence, and some very public nudity, and a girl with a story that could cost me my job, and that Savannah was my babysitter while I got my head screwed back on straight.

“Hello,” I grunted, trying to sound casual enough not to harsh the vibe in the room, while peevish enough to make sure the person calling knew I didn’t want to be on the phone just then.

“Hey, is Savannah with you?” Janis. She didn’t introduce herself, but I’d spent all afternoon with her on that tour. She didn’t need to. “Somebody said Ramona put you in her custody after you went nuts on those girls earlier.”

“I... what? I didn’t...! Whatever. Yeah, she’s here. What do you want, Janis?”

“Uh, she’s on secondary tonight? It’s already 8:30 and she didn’t sign in and nobody could find her.”

Fuck! Of all the damn interruptions! Janis’ voice was audible, though, and Savannah was already looking wide-eyed with remorse for her dereliction of duty, hastily pulling her shirt back on and brushing out her hair with her fingers.

“She’s on her way.” I hung up.

“Holy crap, it’s the second night of duty for the year and I already no-showed!”

“Ramona told you to stay here with me, and you did. I think you’re in the clear.”

She shook her head. “You might be *too* good of a kisser.”

“Yeah? And here I was thinking I still needed a lot more practice.”

She let me ambush her by the door and steal a few more. Good heart, that one. She finally squirmed past me, but paused in the doorway to look back with sincere concern. “You’re sure you’re OK, Spencer?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Thanks. You were great today. Cool under pressure.”

“Higgins strong!” she exclaimed jokingly. It had been one of a dozen dorky rallying cries from a hundred dorky team-building exercises during training. *Higgins strong!* had been the one corny enough that we kept using it after – which was to say, the exercise and rallying cry had succeeded at their purpose.

“You promise me you’re going to take it easy tonight, OK? Stay right there. I mean it.”

I nodded. “Right here. Promise.”

“I’m serious. I’ll be checking on you during rounds. If I find out you’ve been out doing hero stuff, there’s gonna be a reckoning, buster. And if that girl Leigh comes back, you tell her those lips are mine tonight, OK?”

“No Leigh, and absolutely no heroism. I can guaran-freaking-tee that.”

Duty. It was a hell of a step up in commitment in Higgins compared to Rowlands and the other big halls. Not even two

hundred residents here, and not many RAs to boot. On normal weeknights there were only two on duty, a primary who sat at the center desk until midnight as the main point of contact for our residents, and a secondary who patrolled the building on rounds, responded if something needed a response, and, after Vanessa expressed her terror at the prospect of making sure the center building was secure (and I'd grant, that long dark hallway to the loading dock was pretty damn creepy), helping shut down the center desk with the primary.

On weekends, we had two secondaries, since misconduct was more likely and it was a lot easier to handle with a partner. A few special nights, like Halloween for example, got the same treatment. Opening week, i.e. tonight, got that same treatment.

Rounds were pretty simple. Walk each floor in the building, look and listen and sniff for problems. Don't get peery in people's rooms (unspoken but true: especially if you're me, the only cis male in a building full of women). Look for opportunities for positive interactions. Watch out for creeps and weirdos who don't belong.

The floors had the same basic layout. A rectangular hallway, with two hallways veering off north and south perpendicular to the skinny sides of the rectangle. There were two stairwells, one at the north end and one at south. The trash rooms, custodial closets and the two bathrooms took up the rectangle's center in the interior of the building, and all along the exterior were the student rooms. The RA rooms were in the middle of the east side, stacked atop each other, right across from the trash rooms. Not ideal real estate. Higgins basement was actually at ground level, but if they called it Basement, the second floor Ground, and the third floor Floor 1, it skirted building regulations that necessitated an elevator. Cheap bastards. Anyway, the "basement" had the building's utilities on the west side, so it was significantly smaller than the rest. That was Savannah's floor, the lucky devil.

On a night like tonight, the secondary RAs on duty met up at the north stairwell on Higgins Basement, patrolled across, then up the south stairwell to Higgins Ground, where they'd split up on either

side of the rectangle at the bathroom entrance, rendezvous by the entrance to the other, and back to the north stairwell, and so on.

All that to say that when Savannah came knocking on my door only a few minutes after she departed to heed Janis' summons, we only had a few seconds to kiss before the other secondary, Vickie tonight, rounded the corner and started wondering where her partner was.

"You should leave this open," she said in my doorway, holding up a finger to forestall Vanessa down the hall.

"If I'd known there were pretty girls roaming the halls in search of kisses, I would have."

"Well now you know. Just don't let any more crazy chicks in tonight, yeah?" She took a step in, out of Vickie's line of sight, and gave me another. Tongue, this time, however brief. "Or if you do, you two wait for me."

One last kiss, and then she poked me in the tummy and sauntered on her way. No doubt she was putting some extra swing in those hips for my benefit. As I watched her go, she stopped to poke her nose in Shauna's room to ooh and aah about their galaxy light. The thing was practically a neon sign announcing that she was a stoner, but stoners made for good neighbors in my book. Kept quiet to avoid drawing attention, and less prone to getting wrapped up in community drama.

As for the light, I'd seen it myself last night. It looked pretty cool, sparkly and soothing at the same time. It didn't have a jot on Savannah Grey, though.

When she and Vickie arrived on Higgins 3 for their 10:00 rounds, I made sure the door was open. I heard her coming, stopping next door.

"Hey, you're Leigh, right?"

Leigh's voice was softer, but I'd been near the door, so I could make it out. "Yeah?"

"I'm Savannah, RA for the bottom floor. We, um, met earlier, next door?"

"I remember." Leigh didn't sound like she was happy to have her brazen flirtation attempt disrupted.

Savannah was unperturbed, though. “Are you doing OK? I know you had a crazy day, and I wanted to make sure you’re all right. Or as all right as can be, under the circumstances.”

“Oh. Yeah, I’m fine. Thanks.”

“Good. That’s good to hear.” The warmth in Savannah’s tone was a sharp contrast to the chill in Leigh’s. “Well, I’ll leave you to it.”

“Yeah.”

Then she was back in my room. No sign of Vickie yet, so we put a door between us and prying eyes and enjoyed a nice fifteen seconds of mouth on mouth engagement. She didn’t even object when I squeezed her ass, this time. Two-handed, even! It felt even better than it looked, and as she resumed her rounds, it looked unbelievable.

An hour and change later, I was in the middle of wondering if Savannah and I were moving too fast when there was a rap at the door. I smoothed my hair and hustled to the door – only to find Leigh standing in the doorway.

My disappointment at her not being Savannah must have been showing, because her first words were, “Oh, is this a bad time?”

I peered each way down the hall, as if Savannah were staking out my room or something. (She was not.) “Hmm? Oh, no, not at all. I was meaning to touch base with you about everything, but honestly...”

“You didn’t know what to say either, huh.”

I nodded. “Pretty much, yeah. But hey, come on in. You can close the door if you want. Or not. Up to you.”

She took me up on the offer. For the third time that day, I found myself sitting on my desk chair with an attractive woman perched on the edge of my bed. I know it was only because there was nowhere else to sit, but it still felt... suggestive, somehow. I’d have to get another chair in here. Surely Higgins had one sitting around somewhere. I supposed I could nab the spare one from Quinn’s old room now that it was single occupancy.

Speaking of Quinn... “So are you all right? Not too banged up?”

“Yeah, I think so. My elbow’s sorta sore, and like, she scratched up my arms pretty good. Plus my ass is kind of bruised up from

where she threw me down on the floor. I guess I can't wear those shorts again for a while, huh."

That right there was why I hadn't gone down to talk to her yet. Comforting somebody after getting attacked was one thing. Doing it after an attack provoked by a very explicit attempt to get in your pants was another altogether. Honestly, I figured she was at least as embarrassed as I was about what had happened afterwards. No sense beating around the bush about it, though. We were next door neighbors for the next ten months. That sort of silence could fester if you let it.

"You looked good in them, for what it's worth." She still looked good. She had on long sleeves now, to cover the scratches, and plain old jeans, but Leigh would have to go out of her way not to look good, especially now that I knew what she looked like underneath.

Still, it was from the heart, from the hip. No RA techniques for de-escalating, no brushing her feelings under the rug, however superficial those feelings had been.

"I know, right? I've had them since forever, like since middle school, and... I guess you heard me telling that to Angel earlier."

"Uh, yeah. Look, I'm sorry. I should have said something. At the time, it felt like it would be too awkward to let you know I was in the next stall. Guess we all learned a big lesson about what awkwardness really feels like." She arched a neatly tweezed eyebrow. "And we're learning even more about it now."

"Yeah we are. But that's why I wanted to come down. I was on the phone with my grandma all evening after, you know, the fight or assault or whatever. She told me it'd only get more super awkward if I didn't come talk to you."

I nodded. "Smart lady, your grandma. You two close, I take it?"

Leigh nodded back. "Pretty much raised me. My mom's a drunk, so she kinda came and went at being a mom, and my dad's always traveling for work. Thinks he's such smoking hot shit. Grandma picked up the slack best she could."

"Clutch. Good on her. Seems like she did a good job of it, considering how you turned out."

Leigh not only crossed her legs, but also folded her arms across her chest. “You don’t even know me. Like, I could be a total crackhead for all you know.”

Hmm. “Touché. All right, so maybe your grandma totally sucks, then.”

Leigh relaxed her posture and even laughed, almost. “She’s pretty chill most of the time.”

“Good. Days like today, it helps to have somebody in your corner.” As a sixth year student, I was well past the days when I called my parents regularly. Still, I’d told them I’d touch base after the chaos of orientation weekend was over. I had no idea how I could tell them about today.

Yeah, so they said I could stay working on an all girls floor. Going great so far, Mom. One little incident where I got sucked into a melee between two naked girls in the shower, but it was really only because one of them got over-attached when I let her shove her finger up my ass and jerk me off after our opening floor meeting.

Or, more likely, *Going totally awesome so far, Mom! Anyway, how’d the Kraken’s vet visit go?*

“So how are you feeling?”

She shrugged. “Like I said, some scratches, bruises. That lady, the manager or whatever, she said I should go to the health center tomorrow and get checked out, just in case.”

“That’s Ramona. She gave me the same advice. I can go with you, if you want. And to make light of it, but actually I meant how are you *feeling* ? It can be pretty traumatizing, something like that.”

“Getting my ass kicked my second day of college, or getting rejected by the hot guy next door?”

“Let’s start with the first one.”

She looked down at her lap. “Yeah. Not great, but Angel’s been pretty awesome about it, especially for somebody I just met yesterday.” It wasn’t easy suppressing my reflexive smile at the prospect of lifelong friends being made right next door. It got easier once Leigh added, “Probs worse for you, though.”

“Why worse for me?”

“Like, I mean, I got jumped by that psycho and everything. But at least, you know, it wasn’t *as* humiliating. I don’t got anything these chicks haven’t seen. You know?”

Ah, right. The fact that a dozen or so women on my floor had seen me buck-ass naked, women I would be living with for the next nine months, hadn’t yet fully crashed home. “Ah. Yeah.” I let out a breath between my teeth. “Nothing like a fight to bring people running. Add some sex to the violence, and that psycho could’ve sold tickets.”

“That’s... one way of looking at it.” She was still staring fixedly at her lap. “So, I couldn’t help but notice that you were, like, you know...”

I grimaced apologetically, not that she saw it. “Oh. You saw that, eh. I, um, guess I was.” Should I apologize? It wasn’t like it had happened on purpose or anything. I offered the next best thing. “That wasn’t because of you or anything.”

“Oh. It wasn’t?”

“No! No. I think it was the adrenaline, heat of the moment and all. And, ah, the friction?”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“Ya. Oh.”

So, this half-apology was flying like a Hindenburg full of fire breathers. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No, I mean, I thought...” She shook her head. “Forget it.”

I scooted my chair closer – but not too close. “Hey, Grandma said you should come talk to me, right? So talk to me. What’s up.”

Her eyes looked up, but her chin stayed down. “I mean... that’s, like, such bullshit, though. Right?”

“What do you mean? I think your grandma’s advice was—”

Now her eyes came up to make sure I didn’t miss a single degree in the dramatic rolling of her eyes. “No, dick. You were hard as a ‘tard the second you came out of your shower stall.”

I didn’t care for her phrasing, but this wasn’t exactly the time for a lesson in inclusive language. “I... what? No I wasn’t.”

“I was on the ground. I had a pretty good view up your towel, stud. And your cock is fucking huge – sorta hard to miss. But sure, friction, adrenaline – tell yourself what you gotta tell yourself.” She snorted. “Wasn’t you, Leigh, my sweet round ass.”

It was my turn to fold my arms. This was fast becoming the most uncomfortable conversation I’d had since... Well, since Quinn came in and talked her way into my ass, last night. “What are you trying to say, exactly?”

“I think you know what I’m trying to say.”

“No, I don’t.”

If she rolled her eyes any harder, she was going to wind up with detached retinas. “You heard me saying I wanted to hook up with you, and you liked it. Hiding over there, listening to us talk about you. Were you totally jacking it over there, or just saving it up for later?”

“Was I... what? Hey now! That would be completely inappropriate!”

“Like how you let psycho girl finger you? Inappropriate like that?”

“How would you know I—”

“OK, so like, look me in the eye and deny it.” When I couldn’t, she gave me a smug *hmmph*. “Yeah. What I thought.”

“All right, fine! So a hot girl who shook her ass at me for three solid miles on our tour today was in the next stall talking about being into me. Sue me for not knowing what to say in that moment! And need I remind you that if Quinn hadn’t blown up, you would never have even known I heard!”

“Is that right?”

“I was trying not to embarrass you!”

“So like, what, eavesdropping on me, high-fiving me while I’m fucking naked, none of that struck you like it might be something that would embarrass me? When I saw a man’s hand reaching over the stall door, I about screamed, but I figured it was you pretty quick.”

I blinked. “Wait, *what?! You knew? You didn’t either! You went right on talking about me! How could you possibly know that*

was *my* hand?”

The answer to that question was obvious, though Leigh gave it an even more thorough answer than my own reflexive analysis.

“You’re the only guy who lives in this entire building. If it were a boyfriend or something, they totally would have said something when I checked to see if it was you.”

“So why did you pretend you didn’t notice?”

“Srsly? That was a freaking golden opportunity to let you know I was feelin’ a lil’ thirsty for you.”

“Uh... I’m not sure I follow .”

Leigh scooted closer and leaned toward me. Even sitting down and several feet away, I felt like she was looming. “Your move? Ball in your court? Or how’d you put it to us last night – my door is always open?” She made a face. I didn’t know the name for the face, but it was not pleased. “Then you held me, totally nakey. I felt that baseball bat of a cock of yours motha flippin’ throbbing against me. If you were any shorter, it might have just climbed right on in then and there. And despite all that... I’ve been stuck in my room, alone, talking to my grandma, for hours now.”

“Wait. You thought I was going to come down there... to see if you wanted to...?”

“I already came in and showed you I wanted to, *after* I freaking *told* you I wanted to! All you had to do was come down and do it. Instead you made me come down here and ask you like a friggin’ pleb.”

Without really knowing why, I slowly stood up. So did Leigh, and once she was up, she was coming at me. I was backing away, but the room was only about 140 square feet. “Leigh, look, I was out of line paying so much attention to that show you were putting on for me on the tour.”

“I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t want you to look.” She grinned, though whether it was smug self-satisfaction or because my butt had hit the window ledge and there was no further I could go, I didn’t know. “That was a workout, I tell ya, swinging my hips like that for, what’d you say it was, three miles? I needed that shower. Worked up a sweat for you.”

“No, I don’t mean that, I mean...” I shook my head. “I’m your RA. I get that doesn’t mean much to you, but it means I could get in big trouble – with good reason.”

“What good reason is there why two hotties who’re hot for each other’s hot parts shouldn’t get hot and heavy?” She hadn’t penned me in, quite, but she was still inching closer. I’d have to push past her if I wanted to escape. Escape, from my own room.

“I’m in a position of authority.”

“Mmm, yeah. Wanna frisk me?”

Hell yes. “No. And you live here. We share a bathroom for crying out loud. If an RA were allowed to mess around with their residents, there’d wind up some creep who’d abuse his authority to coerce somebody.”

All right, now I was penned in. I was half sitting on the window ledge, which exacerbated the tall girl’s capacity to loom. I’d never realized how those extra inches made someone take up your while field of vision. She was close enough now that I could feel our height differential making the first effort at putting a crick in my neck.

“Didn’t seem to slow you down with little miss lunatic .”

“I didn’t plan that. She just came in and sat in my bed, and... came at me. It happened faster than I knew what was happening.”

“Like this?”

How did someone take their shirt off that fast? It was like I saw her arms shift, and then *POOF!* Tits.

Cute ones, too, though that wasn’t news.

“Leigh, what’re you doing?”

Her spine and neck twisted, snake-like, and it put her face in front of mine. “Breaking the rules.”

She kissed me. I didn’t move toward her an inch, I swear. While I was trying to remember how they’d trained me to stop something like this – and why – she was busy moving my hands to her boobs. Unlike Leigh’s casual outer clothes, her bra was sexy as hell, a filmy blue thing that let the color of her skin show through most of it. It was slick, and did nothing to obstruct my tactile impression of the boobs themselves. They were great. I mean, they were boobs – what else would they be?

The kiss ended before I came up with anything. “Are you supposed to be enforcing the rules, Mr. resident advisor?”

“Resident assistant,” I corrected robotically.

Leigh was swaggering in reverse, somehow. I found myself following for a few steps, but when her boobs slipped out of my grasp – when had I grabbed them?! – my brain started working again. At least until she bent at the waist over my bed and pointed her ass my direction, grinning wickedly over her shoulder. I’d thought those jeans looked nice and comfy. Baggy. Hole-free, contrary to the fashion. Absolutely not in any way sexy.

So I’d thought . I’d forgotten to contemplate how easily such loose-fitting jeans could be eased down over a woman’s hips.

Leigh hadn’t worn shoes. Normal enough; plenty of folks didn’t bother around the floor. Her jeans hit the floor and her socked feet slipped right out. Her panties matched the bra. Not skimpy – they covered their charge amply – but they were that same see-through material, so in effect, they obscured nothing. There was, in fact, a little bruise there. Weird that I noticed that, when I hadn’t given a second thought to the scratches on her front.

“Lucky for you I do second chances for tasty hero boys,” she said, shimmying her ass at me. I was walking forward without knowing why. I couldn’t do this, obviously. Though it could hardly hurt to look, from very very close up, could it?

“So what do you think? I’m doing something bad, aren’t I? Isn’t it your job to punish bad girls who do bad things?” Oh *god*. Before I could drool onto my achingly confined cock over that one, I was given an alternative. Still bent over the bed, she hooked her thumbs in the waistband of her panties over either hip, and tugged them down just enough that part of her crack slipped free.

She looked back over her shoulder. “Or do you want to be bad with me?”

“Leigh... I can’t,” I protested. Then I took a step forward.

“You can, and you should. I promise, I’m a really good fuck. I was kind of a big slut in high school.” Her panties slipped a few more inches down. “But if you wanna spank me instead – or first or whatevs – just try not to get the bruises, OK?”

She meant it. Holy god, she *meant* it. I know it's kind of a gauche fantasy, but it comes with the territory. You show me a man with even the most minute amount of authority over women, even if he likes and respects them, and I'll show you a closet spanking fetishist. Not something either of my two major girlfriends to date had been into, and contrary to my very recent track record, I didn't have the kind of game that let me get away with spanking a casual hookup.

I shook my head. No. Savannah. This was hot as fuck, but so was Savannah, and I actually liked her. Respected her. "Believe me it's killing me to say this, you're so fucking sexy, but... I *really* can't."

"Do you want to take them off yourself? If you ask nice, I might even sway around the room some for you, let you get a better look at what I put you through on the tour."

"Leigh, no. I'm serious." I needed her out of here, too, ASAP. I should still have ten minutes or so before midnight rounds made their way up here, and there was no way she'd barge in without knocking after what I'd told her about Quinn last night. No sense cutting it close, though.

"I'm serious, too. Come on, you can't tell me you don't wanna have a taste of this lil' snack. If you were down for whatever that basic bitch gave you, how could you not?"

"I regret what I did last night."

"Not like you're gonna regret it if you don't do this tonight."

"I—" Oh. Oh *shit*. That smirk, it had seemed flirtatious on first pass. But then I saw something, saw ... Shit! "You're not blackmailing me, are you?"

"What? No. Your secret's safe with me, Spencer. And I bet I could make sure Angel keeps her mouth shut about it, too. If you want me to. If you don't care... I'm sure it's killing her to keep her mouth shut."

This was happening. This girl was threatening to tell the world I'd screwed around with one of my residents. Ramona might be willing to believe Quinn was lying about our hookup, but eye witness testimony had a way of vindicating even a crazy bitch like that. Especially if the eye witness was someone who ought to be grateful to

the accused party. Leigh was seriously threatening to get me fired – from my job that provides me room and board – if I didn’t sleep with her.

Later on I’d probably muster some outrage, but... is it wrong that that my first reaction was to want to fuck her *more* ? Nobody had ever wanted me *that* badly.

Right before I opened my mouth to reply, someone barged in without knocking. Leigh squealed and dove for cover behind my bed, but the bed was maybe two feet tall, and Leigh six.

“Savannah, I–” I stopped. This was not Savannah, but a different RA. Vickie.

“Hey Spencer, Sav-WHOA!” She spun away, shielding her eyes.

“Shut the door!”

Vanessa threw it shut. With her inside. Leigh used the courtesy to start throwing her clothes back on.

“Why doesn’t anybody knock around here?!” I accused her. Perhaps unfairly, considering what she’d walked in on. A better question would have been why were so many people naked and intimate in Higgins 310 the past couple nights?

Leigh dove for her clothes. “Is every goddamn resident advisor in this stupid building on a crusade to stop–”

“Savannah said you would be up and waiting! She didn’t mention–”

“Savannah said...? Wait, where is she? Why are *you* here?”

“If you’d let me finish, she said you’d been talking after that thing earlier, but to tell you she couldn’t make it up here and that she’d talk to you tomorrow. Can I turn around yet?”

Leigh said nothing. Wriggling into the jeans was taking longer than wriggling out, it seemed.

“ Why, did something happen? Is everything OK? Can I help out?”

“You seem to have your hands full as it is,” she observed dryly. “And cool your jets, Ace. Everything’s fine.”

“So then what...?”

“Her boyfriend dropped by to surprise her. Guess he’s back in town.”

Chapter Six: Roommate Agreements & RCRs

Roommate agreements. Eighteen questions to try to fend off all the pettiest fights before they happen. Hygiene, visitation, noise levels, communication, all that jazz. Ninety percent of them are pointless. Ninety-five, even. Most people can tolerate the stresses that sharing a res hall room imposes, and where they can't, most find a way to handle it without the pot boiling over. That other five percent, though...

Last year, I had a resident on my floor, Kaiden, who made my recent brushes with success with the ladies look like a parlor trick. He was a player, very good-looking and charming as hell. He was also slutty enough I felt obligated to warn my female coworkers to keep an eye out for him on their floors before the walking chlamydia outbreak swept up their people.

Kaiden's poor roommate George spent every third night sleeping in the lounge or in one of his friends' rooms on the floor because if he didn't, Kaiden would simply go ahead and fuck his catch of the day right there with him in the room. After months of trying to weather Kaiden's inconsiderate man-whoring, George finally confronted him and said he simply wasn't going to be evicted from his own room any more.

That weekend, Kaiden came through with a high mark for his low character and brought not one but two girls home from a party. He fucked the pair on his space on the top bunk. George grit his teeth and turned up the volume on his ear buds until he eventually fell asleep. When he woke up, he hopped out of bed to land, barefoot, on a freshly used condom Kaiden had discarded on the floor. Evidently the thing was like a banana peel in a cartoon, and the poor guy slipped and landed smack dab in a pile of the things. I heard his primal shout from down the hall; it's probably echoing around Rowland to this day. His move-out was processed in the system two

days later, but he was packed and gone before Kaiden and his floozies had breakfast.

No roommate agreement was going to stop Kaiden unless it included an enforceable castration clause. It was a lesson for me, that some people were assholes, and some people didn't know how to deal with assholes. Hence, the roommate agreements.

My first year, it took me until October to corner everybody and get them done, my supervisor riding me every week in our one-on-ones the whole while. My second, I didn't want a repeat, and I hounded those guys and had them done by homecoming.

On Higgins 3, I made it a goal to finish them by the end of opening weekend.

In a way, credit was owed to Savannah. I was working with Jacqui and Sammi the morning after our brief but torrid kissathon and subsequent brutal rejection when I saw her pass by in the hallway.

"No boys overnight," Jacqui was responding to question sixteen. "You can have a friend over if you want, and it's quiet, but no boys."

"Agreed. Iron curtain that shit," agreed Sammi. It was the first item they'd immediately agreed on. They were one of those sets of roomies who were hilariously mismatched even if you could see how it had made sense to someone in the housing assignments office. Non-smokers, good academics, similar socioeconomic backgrounds as near as I could tell. Put them in a room together, and you had in one bunk Jacqui, starting setter for the Lakeview volleyball team. A jock's jock, up at 6 for workouts, in bed by 9 to be up by 6. Intense, driven, competitive. Then across from her you had Sammi, who even during our meeting couldn't be bothered to stop texting the two guys she'd met at parties last night and the night before respectively. She smiled by reflex, ingratiating and sweet in a way that anyone would immediately recognize as a façade as long as they didn't hope for something out of it.

"Except for you, Spencer," she added with a wink and a giggle. Jacqui laughed, and wrote in the exception.

Speaking of fake lying girls who were leading on every guy they spoke to, Savannah knocked at the open door. “Hey, Spencer. Hi, ladies. When you’re done in here, do you have a minute? I need to talk to you.”

“When I’m done here, I have another appointment next door, then the triplets. Then lunch, and I was hoping to hit the rec center, then the orientation thing at the stadium, then back here for more meetings.”

The girls looked between Savannah and I with naked curiosity. She was hot. I was... well, I was their RA, and the guy whose weiner seemed to have made quite the impression since that fight. Typical female community, gossip and drama behind every door. Savannah’s smile was forced. I didn’t care. I was having a hell of a week so far. Finding out the seemingly sweet girl I’d bonded with in RA training and had thought myself lucky to make out with had been cheating on her boyfriend to do so... It was more than I was in the mood to process. I had enough on my plate without girls who couldn’t make up their mind.

“Oh.” Savannah’s forced smile was forced wider. “Sounds like a busy day! Cool for you. Yeah, I’m, um, still trying to schedule mine. Been, you know, tricky.”

“Mhm.” I returned my attention to the survey and read off question seventeen. Not that I needed the paper to rattle it off at this point. These questions were seared into my brain. “If I feel my roommate is not adhering to the conditions of this agreement, how would I prefer to address it? Option one, talk to them myself. Option two, talk to my RA and have them help me talk to them. Option three, I prefer not to talk about it.”

I glanced up. Savannah was still there. It was awkward now. “All right, well, um, if you have some time later, stop by? Or text, or you know, whatever. But I want to talk to you.”

“Yeah, as soon as I get some free time,” I said noncommittally. Mark me down for option three where cheaters were concerned.

I’d never been cheated on. Officially. That “officially” came with a lot of baggage. My most recent ex, Marisa, had told me on our second date that if she were ever going to cheat on me, she would tell

me first so I could dump her before she did. I never got that call, but what I did get was a relationship where, when we'd ask one another how each other's days went, I'd have an anecdote about something I saw on campus or a milestone at the gym, and she'd tell me about the interview she'd had that day with one of her subjects, and her feelings on how big of an object she felt like she could handle in her asshole. Her 9 to 5 was better understanding human sexuality, which meant she was constantly thinking and talking about sex. She was constantly being hit on, overshared to me and about me, and watched more porn than a fourteen-year-old boy. To my knowledge, she never cheated on me, officially, but when she asked me if she could cast a dildo out of my cock for use in her research, I told her that was too far for me. She said she understood, and we broke up, simple as that.

She asked again once we were broken up, and I took a \$200 paycheck from the Institute for my contribution to the sciences. It was more than my RA gig paid in a month. How many people had seen and used that dildo since then, I couldn't guess, but at least we'd been separated.

As for Savannah, I did not get any free time that day. If some of that was taking a little mental health time for myself, I wasn't about to apologize for it. In the past week, I'd been faced with eviction from my job and home, harrassed by a resident's mom, had half my floor see me naked, been manipulated into a sexual encounter not once, not twice, but three times, and finally had a pretty girl kiss me a bunch and then blow me off for a boyfriend I didn't know existed. On top of that, it was the busiest work week of the year and a lot of that was happening outdoors in an August heat wave.

I wasn't about to waste what little sweat I had left on the likes of a girl who could do what Savannah had done. She was damn hot all right, but I wasn't fifteen any more. Damn hot didn't cut it for me.

At least, so long as damn hot didn't come into my room uninvited and shove a finger up my ass while it jerked me off. Which was pretty high up on my list of reasons for sealing myself in my room, too.

Not that it helped. That open door policy was something. Kyu-Ri was waiting outside my door with her roommate Dawn (not “Don,” as the dimwit who’d messed up the roster had labeled her) to squeeze in their appointment. I was getting signatures on RCRs while I was at it. That’s Room Condition Report Forms to the layperson. Why the F wasn’t in the acronym was anybody’s guess, sort of the opposite of the ATM machine phenomenon. A formality to make sure the condition of the room was agreed to upon check-in so we could charge for damages at check-out, and the product of dozens of hours of work by yours truly over the past couple weeks before move-in to get the basics done, so residents could add anything they caught that I missed and be quick about it.

Kyu-Ri wanted to look in her drawers, her overhead bins, crawling around to inspect the underside of the bed while I tried not to notice how her shirt hung down and gave a potentially amazing view of some definitely amazing boobs. I couldn’t catch any letters on the tags on her bras when she checked for scratches inside her underwear drawer – minutiae which no one in the history of Lakeview had ever been charged for in the history of the college – but she had some nice gear, I’d grant her that. Dawn approached the RCR like she approached the roommate agreement, with an attitude of completely not giving half a shit and wishing she had a roomie who felt the same so she could get on with her afternoon. Though if I didn’t miss my read on her, she had as much of a hard time keeping her eyes of Kyu-Ri’s boobs as I did. At one point we caught one another trying not to notice when the thickly accented Korean girl bent over ass up, boobs swinging like udders through a window between her thighs. Dawn and I shared a grimace, then a grin, and then resumed humoring the paranoid international student.

Savannah tried to get me alone on the march from Higgins to the stadium, but I stayed close to my freshmen. If she wanted to explain herself, let her explain to the entire Higgins 3 community why she duped me. (She did not.) She tried again on the walk back while our respective throngs of freshmen commiserated over that spectacularly boring speech about the power of their dreams, but I busied myself letting my girls bombard me with music

recommendations. Once I took one, the whole rest of the walk was one big non-stop bombardment. They were my shield from whatever excuses Savannah wanted to offer.

Whenever I had a spare moment that afternoon, I was in another room. *Hey, got a minute? Cool, let's do some boring paperwork! Haha, but seriously.* I was learning names – real names, no more screw-ups from Bob's housing people – and putting them to faces. Getting to know my ladies, at least broad strokes.

I learned that Destiny in 311 was a nationally ranked PUBG player. (Or ranked on the North American server? Which sounded like nationally ranked, but she made it sound like more than that. I dunno. Either way, badass.)

I learned that Peyton and Sydney were girlfriends (as opposed to girl friends), and that they found it hilarious that for once being gay was working to their advantage, letting them live with their significant other while the straight kids had to be home in bed by lights out. Mixed gender floors had made their way to Lakeview, but not mixed gender rooms. Time and again they giggled not-so-secretively. On bed placement, usually a clarification of who got top and bottom bunk, they laughed themselves silly, lying as they were, side by side in their pushed-together bed. I made a mental note to keep an eye on them; friends from high school often made for the worst college roommates. I didn't know if that extended to girlfriends from high school, but better safe than having things implode mid-September, as such things often did.

I learned that Tori's dad owned his own business, and that her mother was a state representative. She approached her roommate agreement like a contract negotiation, pressing poor hapless Ellie for superior terms to the point where I had to step in on her behalf.

I learned that Lex... Well...

"She doesn't wear a shirt in the room," Jocelyn – Jo – accused, cheeks flushing.

"Buh..." I answered. We'd made it two questions in, this statement shared in response to, *In regards to smoking, I prefer...*

"Is... is that true, Lex?"

“Why do I have to get dressed up in my own home?” the lithe brunette asked, folding her arms across a pair of pert breasts I was now unable to not notice.

Jo shot me a pleading look; clearly this had been weighing on her. Small wonder she’d been one of the first to sign up for an appointment. “You see though, Lex, that it’s not only your home. You’ve got a roommate now, and you’ve only got the one room to split between you.”

“So? Not like I got anything she don’t got, and I don’t care if she looks so long as she don’t stare.”

“You see? I asked her, politely, to *please* keep a shirt on. Or even a sports bra. Anything. But she just ignored me. Isn’t that against the rules or something?”

Lex cut back in. “You think there’s a rule that lets your uptight roommate tell you how to dress?”

“A rule that says you have to dress at all!” Jo looked at me pleadingly. “There has to be something you can do. I can’t have people over because she’s...” She shuddered. Shuddering seemed a bit much, I thought, but to each their own. “And I can’t even be comfortable in the room because unless I stay at my desk and don’t turn around, there’s a half-naked woman in my field of vision all the time!”

“And there’s a controlling prude in mine!”

“At least I’m not some whackjob nudist!”

“At least I’m proud of my own body!”

“I’m proud! I’m just not a slut!”

“Better a slut than some uptight bitch!”

Oh, that five percent.

I took to my feat; sometimes, when voices raised, a little height advantage for the mediator went a long way to suppressing shouts. It paid to loom a little, sometimes. “All right, looks like it’s a good thing we’re here to talk this through, and that we’re doing it early. So obviously we have a difference of opinion here.”

“A difference of *lifestyle*,” insisted Jo.

“Got *dat* right, yo.” Lex shook her head. “You’re the RA. You gonna seriously stand there and tell me I gots to wear something

over my titties in my own room?”

“That’s not what I’m saying. You—”

“See! Told you!”

I could hear thunder rumbling from Jo’s expression. “You didn’t let him finish!”

“Oh come on! If we were boys, you think there’d be a rule about wearing shirts in the room? This is some patriarchal boo sheet if there’s a separate rule for girls than boys!”

“Huh. That’s a good point actually,” I said before I realized I was saying it.

“Ha! See?! Suck on deez titties, Jojo!”

“I think you have to have at least one curve in the letter of your cup size before you can call them ‘titties,’” her more buxom roomie snarked. A low blow.

“Oh whatever. I think he likes ‘em. What you say, Spencey? You like what you see?”

“That’s sexual harassment, Lex! He could sue you for that!”

“Only if he don’t like ‘em. I think he do .”

“Do you even hear yourself? Your dad dropped you off in a Jaguar. You. Are not. Ghetto!”

“Dayum, gurrl, that’s some vicious-ass racist-ass shit right there, ain’t it, Mr. RA Man?”

“We’re both white! How can it be racist if we’re both white?!”

“Oh come on, you can’t even look at me. How you know I’m white, you can’t look at me? Here, why don’t you...”

Oh shit. Oh *shit* had this gotten out of hand fast. “Lex, no!”

“... take a look at *deez* !”

Her shirt hit the floor as Jo and I were powerless to do more than stare in horror. I looked away – after a second – a few seconds, anyway – but it was too late. There was no unseeing it . Jesus, was this what it was like RAing for a girls floor?! Were the other Higgins RA’s constantly seeing their residents naked, being seen naked in turn?!

I tried not to think of Savannah in that moment. Or Quinn. Or Leigh. Or Angel.

No dice. At least I didn’t picture all of them at the same—

Shit.

“See? Not *too* flat, are they? My daddy said he’d spring for a tit job, but I don’t think I need one. How ‘bouchu?” Lex grinned. I think. I wasn’t looking. Glancing a little at most. They *were* pretty cute.

“LEX!” Her roommate’s shriek pierced the air. Frankly, it was far more offensive than any amount of boobage.

What the hell. Three days acting like I was made out of stone, I was out of fucks to give. I looked squarely at her. At them. I shrugged. “I mean, you are kinda flat, yeah, but that’s not necessarily a *bad* thing...”

“Spencer, look me in the eye and tell me why I should go to bat for you when Bob hears about this.”

Ramona had begun the meeting seated at her desk. She had a Keurig in her office; she’d even offered me a cup. As I explained – the both of us trying not to hear Lex shouting corrections from the hallway – she forgot about her coffee. Then she stood up and perched on the counter, classic looming. Now she was pacing back and forth like she was building momentum to throw me out the window. At least Lex and Jo weren’t sitting right outside anymore, relocated so Ramona could hear me out. It allowed me to speak freely. Though speaking freely was sort of the problem.

“I didn’t mean anything by it, I swear,” I insisted once more. “She was just so... smug about it, and she was pushing Jo around and all, so I thought, or well, I didn’t *think*, but my reflex was to, you know, maybe rein her in a little...”

“She was too proud of her body, so you opted to take her down a peg. Is that what you’re saying?” The disappointment was plain on her face. “Plus, while it was less an error in judgment and more an error in strategy, you also sided with the little tart and told her we couldn’t force her to wear a shirt in her room!”

“I mean... can we...?”

“Of course we can’t! But you don’t lead with that in a mediation! Now I have to figure out how to support Jocelyn continuing to live in that room. How would you like having to share a room with someone who refused to wear any pants, just let their ‘junk’ hang out for you?”

At about the same moment, our eyes shifted towards Ramona's pants as we applied her broadly worded rhetoric to our present moment. "Not like that!" she yelled. "Damnit, Spencer. Pardon the expression, but you've been a cock in the hen house for less than seventy-two hours, and in that time we've had an accusation of harassment, a naked shower fight, and an allegation of your having been intimate with a resident!"

Uh, what? I blinked. Then I remember: oh yeah, Quinn. The girl who'd made my cum spatter the ceiling. My reaction played, though; she took it as a sign of genuine innocence. "I'm not saying I find it credible, but I'm saying it's going to be a hell of a meeting with Bob, and it's putting me in a hell of a place defending you. This is my first year as a full hall director, you know. Multiple threats of lawsuits for a staff member I personally vouched for, before classes are even in session? You're not making my job easier here!"

Well, fuck. I'd been so caught up feeling sorry for myself about everything, I hadn't even considered how it could affect her. I would have felt bad for any boss in that predicament, but worse, I liked Ramona. She was a good supervisor, and a kind person. "I'm sorry. If you think it's for the best, I can resign." After the week I'd had, I was at my wits' end.

"Spencer..."

"No, I'm serious. This has been... a lot. For me, and I guess for you, too. Maybe it's best if we let someone better suited to those ladies take the helm. I've made some pretty stupid errors. Big ones. It's not your fault. I don't want you looking bad because I let my mouth get away from me." And my cum, for that matter, but I wasn't about to cop to that aloud. It was fair, though. I had fucked up, bad.

"You got me into this mess, and I'm not letting you squirm out of it that easily. Still, I'm going to take that as a sign that you're sincere in acknowledging your mistakes. That's a good start, but I do need you to do better than that. "

I smiled. Ramona was the sort of woman it felt good to be trusted by. "Name it."

Savannah was sitting on the floor outside my dorm room when I opened the door. She hopped to her feet gracefully the moment she

saw me. “Spencer. Hi.”

“Savannah? It’s ten o’clock at night. How long have you been out here?”

“Since you heard me knocking earlier,” she said simply.

“Knocking...? I didn’t hear anyone knocking...”

She shook her head. “I saw you look at me through the peephole, Spencer. If you want to pretend you’re not home, you need to do a better job than that. I may be a first year, but even I know to watch for that one.”

Well, shit. “OK, fine. Either way, I have a meeting. Already have my first roommate conflict to mediate.” That, and a pair of apologies to make. Lex and Jo had spoken with Ramona after I’d left, and she’d texted to say she’d calmed things down some. I wasn’t looking forward to this, but at least they’d agreed to meet me tonight, however late. Time to fester wouldn’t help the situation any.

I mean, you’re a little flat. Damnit, Spencer. Damnit, boobs.

“Exciting. But... I really do *need* to talk to you. I can wait in your room if you want. Or here in the hall. But I’m not leaving until I do.”

I sighed. “Fine. But they’re waiting for me, and we already got off on the wrong foot, so... you can wait inside, if you want.”

She smiled, a slight smile that was nevertheless radiant. It really wasn’t fair that anyone should have lips that kissable. “Thank you. And good luck.” It took effort not to shrug off her pat on the shoulder. She’d hurt my feelings, but if I had to talk it out with her, there was no sense being petty.

The door to 316 was a crack open, but mindful that there was a nudist (a half-nudist?) inside, I knocked and waited to be invited. To my relief, all boobs were tidily covered up. Lex and Jo had set up their chairs opposite one another in a rather adversarial fashion. There was another chair set up for me, a neat little triangle.

“Well, if it isn’t Buggy Boob Critic,” Lex said with a cold look. Jo said nothing.

“You got this chair from the lounge?” I asked as I sat down. They nodded. “Well, I’m grateful for the effort. I’ll take it back down after. Try not to borrow community furniture in the future, all right?”

Jo folded her arms coldly. “Really? *That’s* where you want to start things off?”

I grimaced. “You’re right. I’m sorry.” I grimaced deeper. “Ugh. That’s not the actual apology. Let me try again.”

“Please do.”

I took a deep breath. “I’m sorry. Jo, I’m sorry I didn’t take your feelings seriously. I’ll do better this time, I promise.” I turned to Lex. “Lex, I’m very sorry I said that. At the risk of screwing up all over again, and meaning nothing underneath it, you’re a very pretty young woman, and I was out of my mind to say what I did.”

The girls looked hard at me, then at one another. To my surprise, Lex softened first. “OK. Forgiven.”

Jo rode the tension for a moment, I think to punish me, but finally echoed the sentiment. “All right. Now can we figure this out? Because I’m about ready to request a new room.”

“And maybe it comes to that,” I said, shifting from apologizer to conflict mediator. “But first, let’s see if we can’t figure out how to live together, yeah?”

“I’m not covering up when I don’t feel like it,” Lex stated firmly.

“And I’m not going to sit around with your *flat* boobs hanging out all day.”

“*He* said they’re pretty!”

I raised a hand. “Whoa, there. I said *you* were pretty. I have no opinions more specific than that, and I think I’m already regretting expressing even that much.”

“So you think I should get them done?” Lex asked.

“What? No! I mean, sure, if you want! Do whatever you want with them.”

Her eyes sparkled. “Whatever I want, you say?”

“Spencer!”

Desperation time. I raised *both* hands. Take that. “You two obviously disagree about this. So let’s see where we can find some middle ground.”

“What, you wanna stuff them in a sports bra, like she wants? I like to let ‘em breathe!”

Speaking of breathing, I took a few deep breaths myself. Thankfully, I'd had a few hours to think this over. Great Higgins Ghost, how had I come to a place in my job where I had hours to sit around planning out how to contain a freshman girl's tits?

"Look. Let's start here. Jo, does Lex have a copy of your class schedule?"

"Yeah. It's posted by my desk. Why?"

"All right. So would you agree that while you're away at class, when Lex can be sure you won't be in the room, it's fine for her to dress however she wants?"

Lex brightened. Jo didn't, not quite, but her resistance looked a little less stony. "I guess not. As long as she's not—"

"Hold that thought – let's neither of us get ahead of ourselves. So what I'll do then, is I'll start writing down a schedule of times when everybody can agree that... ah, the dress expectations... are relaxed."

I busted out my pen and notepad and split it into two columns. On the right, I wrote, *While Jocelyn is in class*. I used her full name, so it would feel more official. People were more likely to honor an arrangement if it felt like a contract.

"What's that? What are you writing?" Lex asked, craning her neck.

"So on the left, we'll slate times when you're, let's say, in timeout. And on the right..."

"Tits out!" Lex laughed and pumped a fist. It was only in that moment that I realized she'd expected to be shot down altogether. This was a celebration of a girl who'd expected to lose.

Well, welcome to Higgins 3, Lex. We suck at enforcing nudity rules around here.

We spent a good while detailing when it was all right for Lex to take her top off, operating as though the default was a no. After 11 PM, when Jo said she'd be asleep. When Jo was at the rec center. Jo agreed to communicate if she anticipated being gone overnight or for the weekend, and that became a Tits Out time. As the girls gradually relaxed at seeing they were each having their boundaries respected, Jo even laughed and relented to Lex's request for a final addendum.

Whenever Jo decides she wants to lay around topless too, I wrote.

This floor, I tell ya.

We did the rest of the roommate agreement. It ran smoothly. They signed off on their RCRs, and I snatched up the purloined lounge chair and made for the door. Over an hour. Aside from those initial, awkward apologies, that whole time I hadn't been able to stop thinking about the absolute vision – the lying, cheating vision – waiting for me in my room.

To my surprise, Lex bolted over to me before I could excuse myself and threw her arms around me. Stranger still, Jo joined in, the three of us in a warm, smiley group hug.

“You're good at your job, when you actually try to do it,” Jo murmured into my shoulder.

“You think I should get 'em done?” Lex whispered in my ear.

“Good night, ladies,” I said, and bolted. God love 'em, but my girls were goddamn crazy.

I stowed the chair in the lounge and made my way back to my room, stopping at every open door to say hi, make chitchat, community build, dawdle, delay. Someone was singing in the shower. Was that *Up the Wolves*? The echo made it hard to tell. It was a little late at night for that, but whoever she was, she was a bona fide songbird.

At last, I made it back to my room, 310. The door was a crack open. By instinct, I knocked before letting myself in.

Savannah was asleep in my bed. She'd made herself damn comfortable, too, curled up with one pillow sandwiched between her cheek and her bicep and the other between her thighs. Bare thighs. I didn't love the heat, but it was hard not to concede that girls in shorts made it worth it.

I took a seat in my chair, dragging it noisily a few feet across the tile floor. It had the desired effect. Savannah jolted upright, a tiny line of drool snaking across her cheek. She wiped it off hastily on a sleeve, then squeaked in embarrassment as she jerked her thigh pillow out from between her legs.

“Oh my gosh, sorry! It’s just been such a long day, and I barely slept last night, and...” She seemed to realize the implication of the tail end of her excuse, and trailed off.

“It’s fine. Honestly, that’s the same thing I used it for, so it’s used to it.” I gave her a moment to collect herself. She scooted to the edge of the bed, legs folded beneath her. “So. You ‘needed’ to talk.”

“I wanted to say I’m sorry.” Would that *that* conversation-starter wasn’t so fresh in my mind.

Unlike Jo and Lex, however, I didn’t live with this woman. “It’s fine. You don’t owe me anything.”

“Don’t be like that, Spencer. Please.”

“Be like what? You said you’re sorry, I forgave you. What more do you want?”

“You didn’t forgive me. You said ‘it’s fine.’” She lowered her voice in a parody of mine. “You don’t even know what you would be forgiving yet.”

I sighed, lowering my head into my hand to rub my eyebrows. There was real strain behind those eyelids. “You kissed me, then your boyfriend showed up and you decided to go kiss him. What more is there to know?”

“A lot, actually,” Savannah said with surprising heat in her voice for a woman who’d forced me into a confrontation about her using me to do the PG-13 equivalent of cheating on her boyfriend. “Yes, I have a boyfriend. Yes, I kissed you and I shouldn’t have. Yes, I stood you up last night.”

“Answering a lot of your own easy questions there,” I grumbled.

“But not for the reason you think!” she continued. “Price and I went to high school together. We dated some, years ago, and this summer we reconnected. Then it was time for me to go back to school. I told him I thought we should call it quits, but he wanted to try to make long distance work.”

Rookie, I thought. Long distance relationships were always a horrible idea. I didn’t interrupt, though.

“We’ve been talking all through RA training, him trying to convince me to give him a shot, keep going while I’m here and he’s there, and me... Well, not being strong enough to give a firm no,

apparently.” She shook her head at herself reproachfully. “Last night, he decided to give it one last try to come up here and surprise me.”

“And they say romance is dead.” My hard front was becoming softer by the second. Damn it if I’m not a sucker for mitigating circumstances. My Achilles heel professionally and romantically.

“It’s a three hour drive, Spencer. What was I supposed to do? Tell him sorry, I made out with a guy a couple hours ago so you have to turn around and go home? I didn’t know what to do, and I still don’t know what the right thing would have been. I was afraid he’d get jealous and try to come up here and start something – over what was practically nothing!”

“Yeah, I…” Well shit. I’d been about to make a snarky comment, but then I remembered Quinn. And Leigh, almost. And the way I’d let myself run my mouth at Lex. Savannah looked like she had more to say, so I kept my mouth shut this time.

“So yeah. He and I talked, and we decided to keep trying. He doesn’t mind the drive, he said, and really if I were in a relationship with someone here at Lakeview we’d only be going out on weekends anyway.” She leaned forward, lowering her feet to the floor. “He’s not a bad guy, Spencer. I think you’d like him, actually. And I didn’t do any of this to hurt you.”

“You didn’t hurt me, Savannah. You just disappointed me.” Which was half true. I continued, however, with some truth that was a little harder to get out. “But yeah, I’m less disappointed now. And not about you. Just bad timing, I guess. I’m sorry I was a dick today.”

“Hey. You had good reason to be.” Savannah crossed the room and squatted by my feet, taking my hands. Why did she always have to be holding my hands? And why were hers so damn soft? “Then again, you wouldn’t have had good reason if you’d let me talk to you sooner.”

I smiled. “Lesson learned.”

“Is that how you got so wise, venerable fifth-year RA? I don’t know many guys who own their mistakes so quickly.”

“Oh, that’s just loads and loads of practice in mistake-making. You get good at it, after a while. If that’s wisdom, then call me sensei.”

“You better get good fast, from what I hear, ‘sensei.’” She laughed. “The whole staff is losing their crap, gossipping about you and the Higgins Hotties.”

Things were returning to a normal dynamic, so we let one another go, and she moved back to the bed. That was my new normal, random beautiful women coming and going from my bed at all hours. “Higgins Hotties? Oh good lord, tell me that’s not sticking.”

“Oh it’s sticking. Trust me, your chicas are doing everything in their power to make it stick. You’re doing your part, too. You made quite the, erm, impression during that fight.”

I shook my head. “Oh no. Get in one little naked shower fight and suddenly everybody’s got an opinion.”

“You wish it stopped there. That, yeah, but now with this whole topless girl situation...” This time I got the reproachful head shake. “You got your hands full up here, sounds like. Or rather, it sounds like you better *not* get your hands full.”

Savannah’s cheeks flushed; she wasn’t normally one for off color jokes. Probably heard too many involving her. “Oh, that. Speaking of stupid mistakes, right? That was a hot mess. While you were in here napping, I just did the weirdest roommate agreement ever.”

She arched her brow. “Roommate agreement? What do you mean?”

“Oh man. It was this whole thing. We actually had to hammer out acceptable times for this girl Lex to lounge around half-naked. Jo was keeping notes, typing up a schedule on her tablet for ‘Tits Out’ vs. ‘Time Out.’ Pardon my French – or their French.”

Savannah looked more and more incredulous, but giddily so, by the word. “Wait, what? But... holy crud, Spencer! These chicks are going to eat you alive! I didn’t even know about that one!”

I blinked. “Wait, then... what were you talking about?”

“Last night? Vickie came by to deliver my message, that I couldn’t come up?”

I tried to remember. Last night was so many days ago now. “Yeah...?”

“And that girl from the fight was in here taking another crack at you? I saw you coming out of Ramona’s office earlier when I was checking my mailbox. She must’ve been pretty yikesed out, huh?”

“Everybody was talking...?!” Well *shit* .

“No, it’s totally normal for residents to strip in their RA’s rooms.” She rolled her eyes. “But relax. Vickie was chill enough to include that you seemed to be in the process of sending her packing. I *hope* not on my account...?”

Had that really been how it looked to Vickie? I suppose at the time I’d still thought Savannah was coming back, so maybe. Lord knew part of me had been regretting not taking up Leigh on her extortion all day. That morning, we’d crossed paths in the hallway and she’d simply blushed and scurried away. “Of course not. I mean, she’s a resident. Don’t need any more excuse than that.”

Savannah looked relieved; some folks simply didn’t concern themselves that much with the ethics of that particular edict. “Well good. So, you and I... we’re cool? I really want us to be cool.”

“Yeah, of course we’re cool.”

We talked for a little while after that, and she gave me a big hug before she left. Fearful of another misunderstanding of my open door policy, I locked the door behind her, collapsed on the bed, and masturbated myself to sleep. By the time my consciousness faded, I didn’t even know whose imaginary tits I was sucking on. It struck me when I woke up, naked and a little soggy, that I really ought to care more about that.

“Is that chili?”

“Yeah, wife made it. Nowhere near spicy enough, but she’s from Maine. Don’t think they have spice tech up in Maine yet.”

“I wasn’t asking about the spice. I was asking if you think it’s a good idea to have a bowl of fucking chili in here.”

“I’ll do my best not to spit take . Oh come on, relax. I won’t spill.”

“Better fucking not. Haven’t gone a hundred hours yet and already almost had to pull the fucking plug.”

“So we didn’t pull it, huh? Wasn’t sure what he’d decided after how fubar things went last night.”

“No shit. But no, we just recalibrated, took things down a notch. Then some more notches after the Asian chick, 5905? She practically went into heat.”

“Notches, huh.”

“Yep. Tempted to start a pool to see if we make it through the first week of classes.”

“Always with the pools. I’ll take that action.”

“I said tempted , not actually doing it.”

“You know, this stuff isn’t half bad. Wife might’ve found the spice rack after all. Want a bite?”

“I hate spicy food.”

“Your loss, lady. Me, I can’t get enough of the hot stuff.”

Chapter Seven: Programming Initiatives

Incredibly, I finally got to have a few “normal” days to round out opening week. My open door policy saw some use, but never when I wasn’t fully dressed, and nothing went up my ass. So that was nice. I learned to get discreet coming and going in the bathroom, to the extent that was possible. Hard to say if girls walking around in little towels, clingy pajamas, even sports bras and panties, was the norm in women’s communities, or if my ladies were just shameless.

Rowland had had women’s floors, but I only ever went on them on rounds. That meant my experience with women’s communities was restricted to late at night, when most residents were hanging out in their rooms for the night or already asleep. Plus they expected male RAs to be walking around occasionally. In the mornings, why *wouldn’t* Kendall (not “Ken,” as she’d been listed on the roster) brush her teeth in her underwear? It was probably that way in most women’s communities on campus. My girls simply had that lone male gaze to evade, and most seemed determined not to let it disrupt their lifestyle. I did my best to blend in with the paint on the walls and let them be themselves.

Compared to those first couple days, trying not to wonder if I was hearing heavy breathing from the next shower stall over, and if so, what that might portend, it was easy RAing.

I was on duty both Friday and Saturday nights. I’d signed up for a lot of weekend duty this semester. My friends had graduated and I was single, so it gave me a chance to be a working class hero to the rest of the Higgins staff. I was secondary Friday, doing rounds with Vanessa. She asked in hushed tones as we ascended the Higgins stairwells if it was true about that girl, to which I could only ask, “Which one?”

“In your room,” she said.

That still didn’t narrow things down much, so once the stairs were nice and quiet, I explained that a couple of my girls had gotten

some crazy ideas about their RA. One of them was gone, and the other on notice. Somebody emerged midway through the telling a floor below us; I went ahead and finished, dropping Leigh's name in what I hoped were audible levels. Leigh could use having her dirty laundry aired a little bit before she built up any worse of a name for herself. Indeed, she didn't say more than a few muttered words to me in passing for the rest of Welcome Week.

Saturday I was primary, working the center desk. I had all of my roommate agreements and RCRs done by then, so I spent the evening giving directions to frat houses and apartment complexes to the freshmen heading out to learn the Lakeview party scene, and dutifully filing paperwork. After what I'd put Ramona through, it wouldn't hurt to have her see me busting my butt and getting ahead of the curve on something.

Janis stopped by around 11:30 that night. As secondary, she was supposed to help me close up the center building, though I'd told her at check-in that I was fine doing it by myself.

"You're here early," I observed.

"Yeah, one of my residents is playing this ghetto music insanely loud and I just couldn't handle it. You mind if I use the computer?"

Oh, Janis. I didn't know whether to start with the phrase "ghetto music," the fact that enforcing acceptable levels of noise was part of her job description, or that she'd just walked up and casually asked to evict me from the work I was doing. When we'd done our first icebreakers at the start of staff training, I'd been a little surprised to hear her share she didn't have – had never had, in fact – a serious boyfriend. If she wasn't Savannah grade beautiful (and who was), she was still very attractive, in a precisely banal way. She didn't wear makeup, straight blonde hair evenly cut at exactly shoulder length, blue eyes that sparkled because they were blue yet were nevertheless dulled by her lack of curiosity. She had the confidence only a pretty white blonde girl can, tempered by a worldview that had taught her the world could be handily subdivided into two categories: people like her, and the tragically iniquitous masses – where "iniquity" meant "into things she isn't."

I understood pretty quickly why she was single. She was the sort of girl you fantasized about dumping.

“Go for it,” I replied, vacating the chair and taking a place on the stool in front of the service window. The center desk was the beating heart of Higgins Hall. It was the mailroom, the point of contact for work orders or other such complaints, Ramona’s office (closed and dark after hours), and right next to it, a dated but not entirely disused computer lab. From what I’d been told, it was mostly there for folks who needed but didn’t have a printer, but even now there were some students who didn’t have their own computers. At close to midnight on a Saturday, it was occupied by a single young international woman who looked to be video-chatting family. When she’d come in, she’d asked me in a thick Korean accent how long she had, and I’d promised her she could stay up until the moment I closed up. She’d smiled so big, I’d figured on staying late for her, up until Janis showed up. Janis would want to close at midnight, because that was protocol, and why wouldn’t one follow protocol. Ah, well.

It was a few minutes before Janis and I exchanged another word.

“Are these your roommate agreements...?” she asked, lifting the stack I’d left there.

“Yep. Every last one of them.”

“You’re *done* ?!” Her jaw dropped incredulously. “I can’t even get my girls to sign up for time slots, and you’re done? I think I have four, and you’re *done* .”

“Gotta go after ‘em if you want to get them done,” I said with all the humility I could manage. It didn’t help that I was pretty pleased with myself over it. “Some real doozies this year.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Oooh, yeah.” I slid my stool over and picked out a few. The Tits Out/Timeout one from Lex and Jo in 316, obviously. Over in 307, Terri and Toni had put in writing that they were each cool with the other borrowing their clothes, including underwear, without asking, at any time – and these two were randomly assigned, not friends from high school. My next door neighbors in 308, Casey and Nikki,

had included a clause about using headphones when ‘consuming media,’ which had made sweet little Nikki blush so hard that it was obvious someone had already been caught watching porn. Casey had grinned right at me, glowing with self-satisfaction, when she figured I’d figured.

Somewhat less salacious was Danielle and Dana’s, the latter of whom had insisted upon half an hour every weeknight to have quiet and/or privacy to call her mother. Janis demanded to know why I thought that was out of the ordinary. I let it drop.

There was, however, one thing I hadn’t noticed, that somehow Janis did as she flipped through the pages. “Spencer, did you realize literally every room on your floor checked the same thing on number sixteen?”

I craned my neck. “What’s sixteen? The ‘tidiness of personal effects’ one?”

“No, overnight guests.”

“Yeah?” I looked at the top one, Peyton and Sydney’s. They’d checked off ‘No opposite-gendered overnight guests,’ the last option. Made sense, considering they were a lesbian couple. Still... “All of them?”

Janis nodded as I flipped through the forms. “You’re not wrong,” I muttered, frowning in puzzlement.

“I know I’m not wrong.”

Most of the way through the stack, my frown intensifying by the page, I found a different response on Kendall and Georgia’s. They’d opted to write in an answer – but then I read it. *No boys allowed!* it declared unambiguously.

“I told you,” Janis said when I put the stack down.

“Yeah, you sure did. Doing them that fast, I guess I just didn’t notice. That’s, ah, pretty weird, I guess.”

It was more than weird, though, and Janis was on hand to make sure I didn’t let myself off the hook. “Looks like they should’ve polled the troops before they reinstated you,” she observed casually.

“I have no idea what that means.”

I did, though. It was the same conclusion I’d been trying not to elucidate in my head. “Seriously? It means that your girls don’t want

you there. I would've thought that was pretty obvious."

"It doesn't either. I think we've been mostly getting along pretty well so far, actually," I protested. Too well, in a few cases, but for the most part, I'd thought we were hitting it off nicely.

"You mean other than the time one of your girls accused you of sleeping with her, and you had to fight her naked and hold down the girl she was beating up, also naked. And then the girl you held down went to your room and again, for some reason, got naked." Janis folded her arms, a cold little smile on her bare pink lips. "Right, I could see how nobody would mind living with an authority figure who might tackle you in the shower."

"Oh come on, you know that's not how it was."

"Do I?"

"Seriously, Janis. I don't know what people are saying, but that whole experience actually really sucked. I don't need you trying to make it sound like it was some wild sexy thing."

After a moment, her sneer dissipated, though only after a sniff of disapproval. "Yeah, probably. Sorry. Anyway, you ready to shut down? I'll go kick that Asian girl out of the computer lab; you count down the drawer."

Other than that, it was a pleasant couple days. The weather was nice, people were excited and happy and making friends and settling in, shorts were worn. Was I uneasy at the suggestion my ladies had decided to send me some kind of No Boys Allowed message coded in those roommate agreements? A little, yeah. I wasn't ready to be pushed out yet, though.

I slept on it, then Sunday poured myself into community building. If a door was open, I was knocking on it to make sure folks were ready and excited for their first day of classes. *You know how to find all the buildings? Got your books purchased? Know the drop/add dates and policies? How about good places to grab lunch on campus? I love the way you decorated, by the way! Have you met Person down in Room Number? Because I think she's into Thing You're Displaying too!*

I was en fuego.

It was impossible to say if there was some undercurrent of resentment amongst the populace. What I did know, though, was that things *felt* good. Positive interactions. Bright smiles. Happy girls.

Last year, I'd attended a regional RA conference. Dorky, sure, but my hall director had been trying to encourage me to go into the field professionally after I graduated, and it was an all-expense paid weekend trip to another school. I even hooked up with an RA from Davis, so there. It sparked a year-long inside joke with me and the guys on my floor about "networking" after I bragged about my conquest.

Anyway, the conference had all these sessions to pick and choose from – decorating techniques, recognizing and using your leadership style, tips for soliciting donated food for floor programs, and so on. This one blurb had been vague enough to grab my interest. "Authenticity," it had been called. The whole thing was this interesting (to me) critical perspective on the field, how all this effort we spend being woke and addressing inequality and promoting inclusivity amounted to a bunch of bullshit posturing – when it didn't come from honest intentions.

Now, it made me think about RAs like Janis. Folks who wanted free room and board and would phone in what they had to in order to get it. Not that I judged them for it. Much. Lots of people phoned in their jobs. My first year or two, I definitely had. But as time went by, it made me question how much I believed in it all.

It turned out? I believed a little bit.

The one point I stressed to every resident I crossed paths with was to show up at the final floor meeting that evening. "Is it mandatory...?" asked resident after resident.

"It's a funportunity," I replied time after time. Of course it wasn't mandatory. For crying out loud, who had time and energy to try to punish somebody for not coming to a floor meeting?

It was, however, an important one.

"Welcome, welcome!" I called out as we got things underway. I could hardly believe my eyes. Opening night floor meeting, sure, you could expect almost all of the freshman, and a coin toss for the

upperclassmen. The third meeting, a couple weeks into the semester, most RAs were lucky if they had enough show up to fill the floor government they were electing that night. This second meeting tended, from most accounts and certainly my own experience, toward the latter.

Every last woman from Higgins 3 was in attendance. I counted them twice before I started. They were all here. Even the triplets. It was the RA equivalent of a blowout. It was hard not to giggle in delight – and this was *without* telling them it was mandatory, like a lot of RAs did!

What the heck had I done right?

“I am so, so glad to see everybody here,” I opened. Authentically, I might add. Doubly so, because holy shit was that a lot of legs and boobs in that lounge. I tried not to notice, but with them sitting cross-legged on the floor, sitting on armrests, sitting on the tables, sitting on window sills, every lap filled with another girl, there simply wasn’t anywhere to rest my eyes where there wasn’t skin.

We opened with a couple news items, reminders, and procedural bits. Make sure to turn off the tap behind you in the bathroom, quiet hours finally officially start tonight at 10, the poll results are in and congrats on being the most awesome floor in Higgins Hall.

“Did someone really take a poll...?” Katrina murmured, but loud enough to be heard.

“I asked everybody who matters,” I assured her. The girls laughed. “Now I know we started off the year with, well, let’s call it a little drama, shall we?”

A dozen pairs of eyes shot to where Leigh was sitting beneath Angel. The latter’s massive boobs hid her pretty well, but even with that golden tan, her blush was obvious. Beside her, Charlie put an arm around her shoulder and whispered something consoling. The rest of the eyes, however, went straight to my crotch.

“Damn, and I missed it!” called someone. I missed them likewise.

“Whip it out! Whip it out! Whip it out!” That was Casey. A few more daring girls picked up the chant, but mercifully it didn’t last long.

“Stay classy, ladies.” The agitators looked pretty pleased with themselves. “So. We have two things to tackle tonight, and as promised they are funportunities.”

“So you *are* gonna whip it out...?” Casey pressed, licking her lips theatrically.

“All right now, come on, let’s pretend I still have a little dignity left,” I deflected with a good deal more grace than I felt. I’d been so focused during the fight that I hadn’t internalized the identities of the witnesses, so talking with them one on one or in pairs hadn’t been too bad. In front of the crowd, though, it was hard to forget that a huge chunk of these girls had seen my hard wet dick. I’d worked hard not to find out if there were pictures circulating; nothing I could do to stop it, so the best thing for it was to impose a little willful ignorance.

“So. Thing one. I don’t know if you know this, but folks? You are rich.” They looked around at one another in confusion, mumbling curiously. “Because this floor was supposed to be coed, and thereby supposed to be included in the academic and thematic community program.” The confusion intensified. “Blah blah blah to say... for most communities, Lakeview charges a \$5 activity fee for the year. Enough to order pizza a couple times, basically, as long as you don’t want good pizza.”

“So we got charged more?”

“How much more?”

I surveyed the room. “For us, it’s \$100.”

As the girls looked around doing the story problem, slowly a ripple of energy washed over them. “That’s, like, thousands of dollars,” someone finally said.

“\$100 *per semester*,” I added. Then, as they contemplated how much that was, I hit them with the finisher. “And while most floors’ unused funds disappear at the end of the year, because of the size of the ones like ours, ours rolls over from previous years.”

“How much was left from last year?” asked Tori.

“A little over twelve grand.”

I gave them a moment to process. Not every day a teenager finds out they’ve got a stake in twenty grand. It was Tori again – already my favorite for our future floor governor – who got them focused again. “So, what do we get to do with all that?”

“And that’s the funportunity. We were supposed to be using it on our theme, namely, gender relations. Now that gender relations has basically become me learning to sit down to pee...” They humored me with a laugh. It was mostly true. We had urinals in one bathroom, yes, but I couldn’t use the things when there were women passing through all the time. “We basically get to do anything we want. So. Let’s brainstorm, shall we? Program ideas. We can go places. We can bring in speakers. We can eat, we can party, we can whatever we want as long as it’s not against the law or Lakeview policy.”

The brainstorming took some time to get going, jotting down ideas on a giant flip pad I’d gotten on sale at the teacher supply store. Floor programs weren’t something most of them had ever thought about, naturally. I had a few ideas to get them going, several of which actually got a lot of traction. Far and away the frontrunner was the ever-popular massage night; the student health center had physical therapists in training who could snag some hours coming in and walking folks through the ropes. The most common scenario involved pairing up a girl’s floor and a boy’s floor, but my Higgins ladies insisted they’d rather keep things in-house.

They had lots of other ideas, though. Ideas that people seemed to like got pluses next to them until the detractors said to hold back. Purchasing a big-screen TV and doing movie nights in the lounge. A picnic at Bear Lake, maybe on Labor Day? There was some interest in exploring a few of the campus culture centers, especially the Latinx and API centers. (It felt a little sleazy, bribing them into learning opportunities with tasty ethnic food, but the staff working the culture centers never minded.) Attending a campus sporting event together, starting a book club, starting a knitting group – we had all the angles covered.

When a pause in the excited discussion hit, I dropped my other hidden agenda. “We were also fortunate to have the Hancock Institute here at Lakeview. Anybody familiar...?”

The girls looked around blankly. “The Hancock Institute is... well... They do sex.” Their looks instantly became less blank. “It’s one of the best respected research centers for human sexuality in the world. They have the biggest porn archive in the Western hemisphere, in fact, and it’s all open to the public.”

There was a mix of mortification, confusion, and thankfully, piqued interest. Jo raised a hand, her pinched face placing her in the first group. “Jo. Go.”

“Are you suggesting we volunteer for sex research...?”

“Whoa there, not at all. I’m talking about learning opportunities with their sexperts as teachers. I’ve done programs with their people before, and if it’s in any way about sex, they’re on it. Keeping yourself safe from the creeps out there? They do that. In fact, let me say, we’re *going* to do that.” Yeah yeah, ugly girls get raped too, but these girls had formed a vault of temptation for men of ill intent second only to the upper echelon of sorority houses.

The specificity of the example seemed to satisfy some of the nervous faces, so I went on. “On my last couple floors, we did a program where my guys got together with my girls and we did a thing, maybe you’ve seen, where everybody got to put down anonymous questions about the other sex, and the other sex answered. The Hancock Institute lended us somebody to provide some expert insight, too.”

That part was only marginally true. *Lended us* wasn’t quite the spirit of it. Marisa, one of their graduate fellows in their research department, had insisted on it. I was happy to let her. For one, it was educational and engaging, all the more so when my guys got to have their sex queries answered by a chick as cute as Marisa. For two, not many things made Marisa hornier than getting to stand in front of people and talk explicitly about sex. We barely made it back to my room before she was all over me.

I continued, “ They do all kinds of LGBTQIA+ stuff, so we can have some pride events if we want. They can talk about heavy stuff

like STD prevention, pregnancy prevention, what to do if you or someone you know has been the victim of a sex crime, they do—”

“Sounds like these folks really hate sex,” Casey said, snorting.

I regarded her evenly. “Last year, they came to one of the floors in my building and gave oral sex lessons. With props.”

“Daaaaamn,” said Angel. Which was what I’d said when Marisa, whom I’d recently broken up with, told me she was doing it. Except I’d elaborated a bit to say, *Damn it Marisa, is that really appropriate?* She’d told me I was being a sex-negative asshole and pointed out I could benefit from one of her lessons.

“Look, my point is, you’re not in high school any more. Statistically speaking, most of us are gonna have sex before we finish college, and plenty of us have already. I’m a fan myself.” I paused for the laughter that line had always gotten from my guys in years past when I’d hit them with my big sex-positivity spiel. I did not receive it. Oops. “Plus, statistically speaking, some of us are going to be targeted by some creepy guys. All I’m saying is I want you all to be able to enjoy yourselves, to feel confident, to be safe. So if you heard something you’re interested in, talk to me, and I’ll make it happen.”

“You just want us to learn how to give awesome head,” Casey teased, again. That girl really needed to get laid. Maybe after Leigh assaulted her in the shower for flirting with me and I rushed in nude to defend her, she’d back off.

“Hey, if you want to learn, I know a guy who knows a guy,” I quipped, not to be out-casualed about it all. “Anyway, hopefully you’re not freaking out. I know some of you probably never even got what some might call the basic sex ed birds and bees, and since that’s sorta the foundation of human life, it feels like it’s something worth knowing a thing or two about. For now, though, it’s coming up on eight o’clock already, so let’s get to funportunity number two.”

“Yay, funportunity,” said Jordyn with a sarcastic apathy that was, frankly, kind of adorable.

“We’re gonna get floor t-shirts,” I announced. “Higgins 3 t-shirts. And we’re going to design them ourselves.”

“It’s not my fault!” I insisted to Ramona during our one-on-one Monday afternoon.

We were meeting in the student union, where she'd only recently gotten out of a meeting with Lakewview's director of residence life, Bob. We'd opened with that. She'd manage to clear me in the Lex & Jo scandal; that I hadn't shared the Tits Out/Timeout calendar probably helped. Bob had told her he wanted to talk to me personally, which I was not looking forward to considering all that had happened. Then, before we pivoted entirely away from colossal fuckups, I told her about the t-shirt fiasco.

Or rather... "How could you possibly think that this would be in any way acceptable, Spencer?! I swear, you impressed me so much during training, and John had such good things to say about you. Bob, too, in fact. You made a name for yourself at Lakeview Housing & Res Life. But ever since those young women showed up on your doorstep, it's been one thing after another with you. I'm honestly starting to worry you're trying to gaslight me!"

"I swear, I tried to talk them down. I knew – I know – how it sounds! I said 'let's make t-shirts, who has ideas for a logo or a tagline or something?' I said we could do a meme, or something with the Lakeview bear, or a bunch of other things that were *not* that. But when I opened it up to suggestions, before I knew it..."

"What about Higgins Hotties?" That had been Angel, though I thought I'd caught Leigh whisper something to her right before she spoke up.

"Uh, what?" I asked intelligently. But already, instantly, the girls were clamoring for it. "Um, no way that's going to fly, ladies."

"Come on, Spencer. Did you seriously not notice that we're maintaining an easy 8.5 average up here? Lean into it, I say!" Angel took to her feet, motioning for others to join her. To my chagrin, they did.

"The university has rights regarding how its logos are used," I tried to explain over a roar of boos. Their protests kept my anecdote brief and barely heard. One of the guys in Rowland my first year had learned that the hard way after the campus police showed up to confiscate a box of t-shirts that read Rowland Hall: No Fat Chicks .

"So... what if they don't say Higgins...?"

I looked at Ramona pleadingly. "It all happened so fast."

“I don’t care how fast it happened, Spencer. You cannot spend university funds to sexualize university students. If it says Higgins, Lakeview... legal will have the head of anybody who tries to pull something like this, to say nothing of what Bob or Janie at the Women’s Center will say!”

“I know. I get it, believe me I do.”

“I appreciate that you’re a good-looking guy, Spencer. If you didn’t work for me – and I weren’t married...” Ramona suddenly blanched at her oversharing and shook her head. “Sorry, that was a joke in poor taste. But just because women like you doesn’t mean you get to sit back and bask in their adulation. Sometimes you have to be the heavy .” She threw her hands in the air in exasperation. “Jesus, Spencer. ‘Higgins Hotties!’”

“I told them no. I did! But then...”

“There it is.” Jordyn set the marker down and stepped away from my flip pad. “Higgins mothafuckin’ hotties, y’all!”

I had to hand it to her – considering it was off the cuff and only took her a few minutes, it actually looked really good. Two capital H’s adjoined in the middle. She’d made it look like a trellis, and wrapped around it was a vine coated with a bunch of really nasty-looking thorns. At the top left, crowning the left-hand H, was a big flower.

The girls loved it. Hell, I objected to the thing; I knew Ramona would hate it; and I loved the thing. Seeing my community this pumped for a little token membership merch was an RA wet dream as vivid as the wet dreams these women would doubtless inspire all over campus every night.

“It looks great, Jordyn. Really. Still, that slogan is going to cause some issues.”

“The hell with issues!” Lex countered. “Come on, Spency baby, go to bat for ya girls! Let’s hear it for our boy, yeah? SPEN-CER. SPEN-CER. SPEN-CER.”

Beneath it, Casey and a few of her friends tried another round of Whip It Out .

“They were very persuasive,” I murmured sheepishly. “But the logo doesn’t actually say Higgins on it, does it? We can’t actually stop

them if it doesn't say Higgins, right?"

I brought up a pic I'd taken of Jordyn's drawing and passed my phone to her. I was relieved to see her expression soften a little. A smile even leaked out for a moment. "This is actually pretty sick," Ramona acknowledged, but she caught herself immediately. "But even the Higgins name is proprietary. If that H implies Higgins, we still have grounds to object."

"But if we object, surely they'll just make up a different meaning for it and pretend that's what they meant. Heavenly Hotties, or House of Hotties, or act like one of those posts is an I and it's I Heart Hotties, or—"

"I get it, Spencer, you have some lookers with no shortage of self-esteem. I was a college girl myself not that long ago, you know." She left unsaid that, yeah, she'd also been a hottie. Weird how going from college coed to college hall director had transmuted the way I thought of her from "hot" to "attractive." Sexy, even. Sexy was a classier word, for a classier hottie.

Not that I devoted *much* thought to my, erm, attractive, *married* boss.

"So... I have to tell them no?" I grimaced in anticipation.

Ramona studied the image again, shook her head. Shook it harder. Sighed. "Look," she said finally, and my grin bloomed before she said anything further. Her eyes narrowed, but she didn't have it in her to glare down enthusiasm. "If you go through with this, you *swear* to me – and I mean it, *swear*, Spencer – that this will not be used for bullying."

"For... what?"

"Seriously? It didn't occur to you that a bunch of pretty girls clustered in groups advertising their cosmetic superiority might use that to get crappy to the not-so-hotties of the world? God, Spencer, my objection wasn't because I'm a frumpy old lady who objects to hot young college women being proud of what they are. It's because people like that, some of them, will weaponize any opportunity to drive a wedge between themselves and the less fortunate. Do you remember that little blurb last spring from the Delta Alpha Theta house?"

I shook my head. “Can’t say I do. Don’t really follow Greek life much.”

“Yeah, well, some local, not even a student, was chased out of the house sobbing. A campus policeman saw her – cute little blonde thing bawling Cinderella tears. Cute-ish, anyway. Let’s just say she wasn’t exactly DAT girl material. Anyway, she reported she’d just gone over to confront one of the sorority members over indiscretions with her boyfriend, and apparently the whole house came down on the poor thing like a category five girlicane, telling her she was ugly, fat, poor, et cetera. It was bad enough the Panhellenic Council fined DAT House pretty harshly over it.”

“Huh. Sounds bad. And I’m sorry, but did you just spontaneously throw out ‘category five girlicane?’”

“I used to be a sorority girl, too, Spencer. I was ousted from the tribe, but I still speak the language. Now swear to me you’re going to make it crystal clear that these shirts are to build community, not foster exclusivity.”

“I promise. I’ll go at them one on one once they’re in from the print shop.”

“They’re already at the print shop?!”

Fuck. “They were eager! There’s one right near the art studio where Jordyn is – Jordyn is the one who did the design – where she’s interning this semester. She said she’d take it in.”

“You know, I was a much bigger fan of the ‘better to ask forgiveness than permission’ approach when I was on the permission-seeking side of things instead of the permission-granting,” she grumbled. She glanced one last time at the image before handing me back my phone. “What’s that at the bottom? It’s too blurry for me to read.”

“Oh. Ah, yeah. That’s sort of the other thing I wanted to talk to you about.”

“Am I going to need Tylenol to continue this meeting, Spencer? Or something stronger?”

“No! No, this isn’t another... This is just...” I looked at the indeed blurry words scrawled beneath Jordyn’s drawing, then let a

gust of air out of the corner of my mouth and spat it out. “It’s about my roommate agreements.”

“I’m really pumped, gang. You guys – sorry, you girls – had so many awesome ideas and so much good energy tonight. There is one last tiny thing I wanted to talk about, and this one, well, it’s a little more... personal?”

“Is this about whatever nasty bitch ain’t flushing behind them?” Lex snapped.

“Um, no, and they’re automatic, so it’s probably just a problem with the sensor. Show me which stall after, and I’ll get it fixed. No, it’s actually about your roommate agreements.”

“If we don’t have a roommate, can we go?” Jordyn asked. She’d only just sat back down, but bounced right back up at the promise of escaping a meeting.

“Yeah, I suppose.” She was out the door in a flash. The other single room occupants followed behind her. Katrina, who had recently inherited a single after Quinn’s dismissal, stayed. I made sure to flash her a grateful smile, which the former salutatorian graciously reciprocated.

“We don’t have to go over those again, do we?” groused Peyton. “I know you’re just doing your job, but seriously, that was so boring.”

“No, you’re good.”

“Is this about Tits Out Timeout?” Lex inquired, grinning salaciously. A ripple of inquiries about what the hell that meant crossed the room, but I waved them down.

“No. No, it’s actually that... Well, there’s no easy way to say this, so here goes. I was looking them over, and I noticed that all of you – literally all of you – indicated that you didn’t want any visitation privileges for members of the opposite sex. Namely, um, men. Ever.”

They looked around, not a one of them seeming to grasp where I was going with this. Like I’d said they all indicated they liked the thermostat kept below 70 at night. So what, their expressions read.

“Yeah, so ah, I guess I just wanted to ask if any of you had anything you wanted to say, um, to me?”

“What do you mean?” shy Andi asked quietly. She read my anxiety, though; her voice was concerned.

“Do you guys want a female RA? Like, I guess I’m trying to ask if this was your way of telling me you don’t want guys around, and as the only guy around...”

The chorus of women reassuring me that I was wanted immediately shot to my top five most touching moments ever.

I hate girl bosses! said someone.

No way, we love you! insisted another.

Whip. It. Out! Casey tried once more to start.

They were so loud, so forceful about it, that the girls in the singles came back to see what was going on. Charlie rushed at me and threw a full-on bear hug at me. “You’re not getting out of here that easy,” she said into my chest.

In no time flat, it became this gigantic group hug. I think the only person not in it was Jordyn, who was the last to double back, arriving once it was already underway. She got out her camera and recorded it.

We filed out together, Lex taking me into custody and making sure I knew which stall was “the grody one.” Only later, when I remembered to go back for the flip pad, did I see someone had made a final amendment to Jordyn’s design.

I cleared my throat. “It says ‘no boys allowed.’ With, um, a little caret there to insert a ‘more’ between ‘no’ and ‘boys.’”

Ramona couldn’t help but chuckle at my discomfort. “Yep. Tylenol isn’t going to cut it.”

Chapter Eight: Emergency Programming

“Hey, Spencer. Need any condoms?”

I whirled in the rigid waiting room chair to see Lakeview’s Director of Housing & Residence Life striding toward me. His outfit was not at all what I’d expected, a pair of tight blue athletic shorts and a white shirt spotted with fresh sweat to go along with the sweatbands on his forehead and wrists.

I rose to my feet. “Um... I don’t...” Holy shit, how much had he heard?!

The wiry gray-haired fellow stopped at his receptionist’s desk and reached over the divide. When his hand came back, it was a fat fistful of condoms, which he tossed at me in a spray. “They sent us a dozen boxes of the things. Giving them away wherever I can.”

I picked up what I could, but I’d be here for minutes scraping them all up. From the looks of it, I wasn’t the first person to be greeted outside Bob’s office in this fashion, as there were even more down there than what he’d pelted me with. “Um, thanks?”

“Take some more on your way out. Come on in.” He gestured for me to follow him into his office, so in I went.

It was a spacious office, though not tidy. I immediately saw half a dozen boxes piled up behind his cluttered desk, and surmised their contents. He gestured for me to have a seat in one of the chairs set in a haphazard circle from some past meeting, so I did.

“Sorry I was running late there. Had a match with John at the rec center.”

“What kind of match?”

“Racquetball. You play?”

“Uh, no.”

Bob grunted a laugh as he fetched a bottle of water from a mini fridge beneath his desk. “You and John have that in common, too, then.”

I smiled. “More of a basketball guy.”

“Well, you’ll get there.” He took a long drink. In fact, he drained the whole bottle, then went back for another. “So, Ramona tells me you’re off to a hell of a start over in Higgins.”

“It’s... been an interesting start to the year.” I wasn’t actually sure if this meeting was intended to be disciplinary in nature or what. Ramona had simply told me he wanted to see me, and I’d set up the meeting. Whether this was about the incident with Quinn, or the other incident with Quinn, or with Leigh, or the other thing with Leigh, or...

“I’ll say. We got ourselves a guy on a girls floor. Can’t say as I ever thought I’d see that day come.” He shook his head, settling into the chair next to me. Not across from. Next to. He really had been working up a sweat.

“It was a surprise to me, too, sir.”

“Sir? Bah. It’s Bob, Spencer. Come on, we’ve met before.”

“Sure, just... I’m sorry, I guess I’m a little nervous.”

“Nervous?” He snorted. “What do you have to be nervous about? I’m the one who’s got thirty girls, most of them cute as buttons and six months north of jail bait, being looked after by the oldest RA on campus, who from what I hear has had some difficulties keeping his pecker under wraps.”

Well fuck. “Look, I can explain...”

But Bob waved a hand, then took another long drink while I sat there in awkward silence. “Explain nothing. You screwed up. Explaining won’t change that. Will it?”

“I suppose it won’t.”

“Good. Always find it saves me a lot of time meeting people where they are instead of letting them try to lead me where they wish they’d been. Now. You’re going to do right by these girls, aren’t you Spencer?”

“Yes. Absolutely. I actually really like my community. They’re—”

“Good, because the last thing I need is a bunch of parents barking at me about leaving their baby girls in your hands. I like you, Spencer. Had my eye on you for a while now. John tells me you’re going to be one of us soon enough, and I never miss a chance to recruit the good ones for the home team.”

“Oh. Um, thanks. I think.”

“Welcome. Now, I’ve made you nervous, and you should be nervous. If fifty percent of what that girl Quinn says is true, and fifty percent of what Ramona’s told me since, that’s 100% a goddamn problem.”

“I—”

“That said, you’ve also done a lot right. They tell me your girls have taken a liking to you. We’re attempting a sensitive experiment, so that’s good. Within limits. Limits I trust you’ll be following a hell of a lot closer from now on, right?”

“Absolutely. I’m—”

“Broke up that fight, too, even if it was a humiliating shitshow on your end. That takes guts. Takes commitment to looking after your girls. I like that, too. These girls need some looking after.”

I hesitated. He looked at me expectantly, almost annoyed that I didn’t immediately respond. “I will. Really. It’s had some challenges, but they’re good folks. Engaged, passionate, great community. They’re—”

“That’s great, Spencer, really. You know, you really ought to learn racquetball. It’s not hard to be tolerable. Even if you can’t play on my level, I’m of an age where dominating men who ought to trample me carries some appeal. Can’t be young again, so I settle for beating down the young. You decide you want a match sometime, call my secretary, she’ll pencil you in.”

“Um, yeah. Great. Maybe I will.”

“Fantastic. Now, you got anything else for me? I assume you’ve got a brain, so don’t make it some confession of things you’ve managed to get away with.”

“Oh. I mean, I guess not...?”

“All right. Now when you march out of here, I don’t want to look out that window and see you without your pockets filled, understand?”

“Um, what?”

“With condoms, Spencer. Haven’t you been listening to anything I’ve been saying?”

“Oh, right. I will. I mean I did. I mean—”

Bob took my hand and pulled me to my feet. “Good boy.” Before I knew it, I was being all but shoved out his office door.

Right before I was pushed out, though, I dug in my feet and turned to face him. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course. Go.”

“I wondered if you could tell me anything about how this happened. You know, about how we wound up with a coed floor that was all girls, and me.”

Bob scrutinized me for a moment. “What’d Ramona tell you?”

“Not much. Just that somebody made some kind of procedural mistake.”

“Well there you have it.”

I stopped him again before he could oust me. “Well yeah, but... I guess I just don’t quite get it. Accidentally making two half female floors and putting them together, I guess. But whoever did it... They changed people’s names. Shauna was down as Shawn, Terri and Toni, both with a I, were spelled with a Y, like guys names. Kendall and Georgia were down as Ken and George. It was like...”

“Like what?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know, like somebody wanted everybody to think that we had the coed floor we thought we did. I mean honestly, how do you get a housing application for Jacqueline Patterson and put her down as “Jack?” She’s on the women’s volleyball team, for crying out loud.”

Bob studied me for a moment. Only a moment, though. “Some people are bad at their jobs, Spencer. Bad enough, in this case, that they don’t have one here any more.”

“Oh.”

“Fill those pockets, Spencer. Fill ‘em full.”

When I made it back to Higgins, pockets overflowing with more condoms than I could use in a year of irresponsible hookups, I reported immediately to Ramona and told her I’d spoken with Bob, and that he’d chewed me out and considered it over with. Which, maybe, he had.

“What’s with the bulge...?” she said, pointing.

“With *what* ?!” I sputtered, covering my crotch until I realized I’d misunderstood the bulge. “Oh. Geez, sorry. He’s got all these condoms he’s trying to give away, I guess.”

Ramona nodded knowingly, laughing at my moment of discomfort. “Ah, right. Mind if I...?”

“If you...?” Why did talking about condoms with my pretty – *married* – lady boss make me so tongue-tied? Not like she–

As I stood there uncomprehendingly, Ramona reached into my pocket and fished out a few condoms. “Just in case,” she said.

“In case...?”

“Never know when I’ll run into a student who needs one.”

Every community on every campus has its quirks and nuances. My first year, we had a vocal performance major who warmed up his pipes before performances in the showers. Every time, it was like that scene in *Shawshank Redemption*, us grunts perking up like groundhogs as his throaty bass reverberated around our grungy halls. Or speaking of, there was Grungy Jr., the guy everybody learned to keep clear of because he used this nasty “organic” soap that made him smell like old socks. (The “junior” was on account of how often he boasted he was a legacy, like getting into a state school like Lakeview took connections.) My second year, we had a lot of sports guys on the floor, so weekends and playoffs made for throngs of dudes hanging out in the lounge to watch together. I came in second in our fantasy football league, and I don’t even watch football. (My then-girlfriend Johanna had a weird gambling thing she was into, and she gave me tips.)

As classes started up and college life began to become what college life would be, the self-proclaimed Higgins Hotties and I established a dynamic of our own. I didn’t have a baseline for life in a woman’s community, so I didn’t have expectations. Day by day, though, it became more normal to have my throngs of beautiful, bubbly ladies wave hi to me on the sidewalks of Lakeview, for my door darken with yet another shapely silhouette with a question or a need, to shower in a stall between two soapy, naked bombshells idly humming to themselves.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't masturbating more than I had at any time in my life since I accidentally witnessed Debbie Hudson changing out of her swimsuit at Chad Beasley's pool party in eighth grade. Still, gradually, this stranger in a strange land was adjusting to his new normal. There was hotness all around me, and like anybody, I found ways to cope.

To be sure, everyone was adjusting. Maybe not the upperclassmen, who stoically behaved as if their RA wasn't a man, changing with their doors cracked open, strutting around the floor in towels and PJs as if the male gaze could never penetrate their lair. The habits they seemed to have built up over years in their prior residence hall communities did not dull in my presence.

Moreover, they set examples. Once Amy, my sophomore in 300, started doing her morning routine in her underwear, it seemed like half the girls on the north side of the floor followed suit. Showing off? Displaying resilience to a perceived threat? Idle sluttiness? Probably some of each, depending on the owner of each bubbly bottom bent over the sink, jiggling furiously with each swish of the toothbrush.

(The south bathroom became my exclusive choice after that trend started up. What else did a guy RA do? *Hey, girls, I'm tired of seeing your boobs swaying around while you're leaning down to wash your faces. Don't test me on this one!*)

At times, sure, I wondered if maybe I was some kind of chauvinist for noticing it as much as I did. Five years at Lakeview in which I'd seen no shortage of beautiful women, and I'd never found myself ogling like some creepwad alumni coming back to relive his glory days as a thin veneer to scope out women he'd long since aged out of.

Suddenly, though, those women weren't random or rare. Up until now, I'd thought myself lucky if a cute girl was walking the same direction as me in leggings. Those were good days. Maybe I'd wind up in a study group with a pretty one, or had a chance to chat with one at a party. That was how it was supposed to be. Except on Higgins 3, almost every girl was top notch gorgeous. I interacted with them every day. For crying out loud, it was my job to get to know

them better, to build relationships with them, to be a presence in their lives and, on occasion, in their rooms. There was no helping noticing them.

In time, I told myself, I'd adjust. These first days together, though... I was embarrassed to admit it, but I actually bought myself a spray bottle and filled it with cold water. Whenever I found myself thinking of one of my Higgins ladies as a body and not a person, I started giving myself a spritz.

I'm not sure if it helped, or if I just started developing a Pavlovian erection in response to a cool mist. But hey, at least I could tell myself I was trying not to let them turn me into a pig.

My battle with my conscience to tame my eyes, ears, and well, other parts, wasn't the only one I was losing, though. Some of my struggles were unsexy indeed.

"They said I needed to talk to you, some kind of form I have to fill out before I can officially move out," Marta announced as she ambushed me on my way back from class the second Monday of the semester.

"I... what? Moving out? What's going on? Is everything OK?"

"It's fine. I'm just moving out. Do you know what form they're talking about or do I need to go back to the center desk and tell them again."

I frowned. "No, I know. The RCR – remember, that thing with the room conditions on it? But I'm sorry, I just didn't know you were moving. Did something happen between you and Kim?"

"Can you just get the form? Sorry, I have all my stuff ready and I've been waiting for like two hours for you to get back so I can get out of here."

"Oh. Yeah, sure. I'll go snag it and be right back."

The form was waiting at the center desk; whenever possible, though, they tried to get the relevant RA to handle the process. Andi popped into the hall and waved at me, clearly wanting me for something, but I was on a mission. I could feel Marta's eyes boring into my shoulders as I hustled downstairs to retrieve it. I even dared to glance up to where I thought her room was once I was down in the

courtyard. There she was (one window over from where I'd guessed, but not bad), glaring.

Marcus was our full-time center desk attendant. We RAs had to work six hours a week during the day shifts sorting mail, answering phones, helping residents if they needed something. Marcus did everything we didn't – which I'd learned over the years was a lot. I liked him pretty well, even if he was a self-proclaimed “grammar nazi.” (Not a term Ramona liked hearing him use, but it seemed she hadn't put her foot down about it.)

“Marcus, do you know anything about one of my residents moving out?”

He pivoted his chair away from the monitor. His feet swung into two heavy bags filled with the day's as yet unsorted mail. “Shouldn't end sentences with a preposition, my man,” he chided with his usual grin.

“You caught me,” I acknowledged, trying to force one in return. “But seriously, though, do you?”

“Shouldn't start with a conjunction, either,” he added, though he was approaching the window. I could see he had the RCR ready. “Yeah, she was down here. Marta Bukowski, is it?” he said, reading her name off the form.

I accepted it from him “That's her. Any idea why she's moving? She seemed pissed, and the way she was looking at me, it felt... I dunno, personal. Maybe I'm projecting.”

“Maybe not, though. She came down here in a mood. I inquired as to the why of it – I got to, that's just the system so I can notify those who need notifying – and she said, and I believe this is a quote, that she ‘wasn't Higgins 3 material.’ I didn't press further. You can make of that what you will, my man.”

I sighed. “Oh.”

That was all he said. It was all I needed him to, all anyone would need him to. Marta was one of the Three. That was what Savannah and I decided to call them when it came up on rounds the other night, though we'd each chided the other over how shallow and horrible it was to say. (Yes, with a little giggling. Sue us.) Three

women on Higgins 3 who somehow had the audacity to be normal-looking people.

Marta was, if I were being frank, on the ugly side. Crooked teeth, bad skin, her weight situated in her hips and shoulders and nowhere else. Not her fault, of course, and to be frank in a less dickish manner, I liked her. She'd come to Lakeview to study art, like Jordyn, and I'd already caught her several times sitting in the lounge doing sketches of myriad objects, or in one case, Charlie, who'd volunteered as a model as her way to patronize the arts. It was quietly inspiring, watching talent develop. Still, the phrase 'Higgins 3 material' from one of the Three could only mean one thing.

Marcus might be well into his 40's, way past petty college drama, but I'd already learned he was good at keeping his finger on the pulse of Higgins. Our floor had a reputation.

In spite of Martha.

I hurried back upstairs, form in hand. What could I say to her? Should I even try? In a very obvious way, she was different, and it was a rare person who didn't mind standing out as lesser. That year I'd had all the jocks on my floor at Rowland had been humbling for me, living with so many guys in tip top physical condition, and I kept in pretty good shape. Not that being normal made her any less, but this was the real world, and comparisons were automatic. I'd already seen posts on social media of pics from around the floor, with comments asking what [insert member of the Three] was doing photobombing the shot by merely existing in it.

"You're sure you want to do this? We're going to miss you around here." That was what I went with. It was simply too big an elephant in too small a room.

Marta's roommate Kim, incidentally also a member of the Three, was also present. She wasn't glaring like Marta, but neither did she look pleased. She kept quiet as her momentarily-to-be ex-roommate insisted flatly that she was sure, and could I please get on with it. I gave the room a quick once over. She'd been here less than two weeks, and nothing was out of place. The RCR was formatted to be signed by each occupant of the room upon arrival, along with the RA, and another blank for each of the three to sign again on

checkout. I signed the form. Marta signed the form. Only Kim's checkout signature was missing. Then Marta was grabbing her backpack and storming out of Higgins 3.

I watched her go. She stopped at the stairwell door and looked back at me, sniffled once, and stormed out.

"Do you think she's going to be OK?" I asked Kim.

"She'll be better once she's away from here," Kim muttered. Then her door shut with her on one side and me on the other.

"Hey, um, Spencer? Could I come talk to you...?" I glanced up from my feet. Andi again.

"Oh. Yeah, sure. Just... give me a bit? Kind of needing a moment here."

"Oh! Of course, yeah, I'll just... yeah. Some other time."

I have to say, it was a blow. Residents came and went, and yeah, I barely knew her. Still, to know I was a part of fostering an environment that someone found so toxic they felt they had to move to get away from it... It kept me up a while that night, no lie.

Could I have done something differently? The fact of the matter was, most of my girls *were* hotties. The term applied, objectively. I tried to run the math on it, guessing what percent of the campus were 8's and above (a crude notion, I know, but I told myself it was math and we needed a number). Then how many spots were in the residence halls, extrapolating the odds a given room would have such a person, then the odds it would have two, from there the odds there would be nineteen such rooms on one floor. Just how long were the odds on *this many* perfect asses all living in the same building at the same altitude? And poor Marta, thrust into it with her forgettable physique and unforgettable lip hair.

I talked with Ramona about it at our one-on-one . It felt awkward to be blunt with my attractive female boss about the problem caused by such a concentration of attractive females. Awkward for me, anyway; if Ramona felt uncomfortable being adjacent to the subject at hand, she never let it show. It was hard to imagine her making anyone feel uncomfortable. She had that way about her. In any event, she encouraged me to take those feelings of guilt and regret and channel them into some floor programming.

“Anti-bullying” was the explicit theme she suggested. I wanted to point out that having incredible boobs wasn’t really bullying, per se, but I conceded that Marta seemed to have regarded them that way.

“And then there were Two Threes,” Savannah said when I told her the next night as we closed down the center desk. She managed to suppress a giggle, barely, but when she saw I wasn’t with her it died fast. I know it wasn’t mean-spirited, a joke on numbers and mediocre wordplay more than a 10 dunking on some uggo. She channeled her misstep into sitting down with me and brainstorming a programming solution. Andi popped by again, and I winced at not having followed up with her after she didn’t turn up the night before. When she saw Savannah curled up cozily in my bed, however, she practically fled, as if she were intruding on something sacred.

On a long enough timeline, I’m sure I could have come up with something better. There were quality anti-bullying materials out there, people who’d done it and done it better. In the end, though, we settled on that laziest yet most satisfying of programs, and by the next afternoon, I was walking up and down the halls putting up fliers for a Thursday night viewing of *Mean Girls* in the floor lounge. Our floor government wasn’t going to be elected until that weekend, when Tori would indubitably claim the governorship, so I couldn’t even spend floor funds to get pizza or snacks. Programming without food was like painting without paint; mostly you were throwing mud at a wall and hoping it stuck and made something people could recognize.

And yes, in my defense, I did stop by 304 again, but Jean told me her roommate was at class for the evening. I left a message for Andi and invited Jean to *Mean Girls*. Mission accomplished, I guess. Yay me.

I was in the midst of sticking up the last flier in one of the north bathroom stalls when there was a sudden tap on my shoulder. I about jumped out of my skin – it was still pretty nerve-wracking for me, walking around in what was basically a women’s bathroom.

“They said I need to do some kind of form filling outing thing with you before I can move out,” said Laura. Gaunt Laura, with her beak of a nose and neither legs, nor ass nor breasts to redeem it.

Laura, a girl who'd come to my room the Saturday of Welcome Week to ask a hundred and one questions about the best local pizza, best campus food court, best music venue, etc., beside herself with excitement to start her college life. Laura, a Three.

I retrieved the RCR. We signed it, and she left without another word.

Plans adjusted. They needed to. I only had one Three left. God, it felt ridiculous to think of it that way, too. Kim was anyone's 5 and a boyfriend's 7; she had a solid body but with eyes a little too close, nose a little too prominent, forehead a little too five. I made it a point to single her out for an invitation to the night's program.

"Oh, that's that one movie, right? I think my mom really liked that," Kim said noncommittally. Her door wasn't fully opened. From what I could see of her room, she'd not done much redecorating since Marta's departure.

"It's a classic for a reason."

"Oh. I mean, I have some reading to do tonight, so..."

I nodded empathetically. I'd worked hard on that nod. It would probably be my finishing move if they ever Mortal Kombated me.

"Oh, totally. Academics come first, for sure. What's the reading?"

"Eh, an article for H114. History."

Nod. "Oh yeah? What and where in history?"

Kim shifted her weight. "It's a survey course. Europe during the height of imperialism and conquest."

"Oooh, dark stuff." Nod, nod. "What's the article about?"

"Huh? Oh, I think it's, like, the American Revolution as part of a turning point, or something?"

"That sounds interesting. I guess on the plus side, you probably already know a bunch about that from high school, so it should be an easy read, yeah?" Noddity nod nod.

Kim slowly cracked a smile. "OK, OK, I'll come to the movie. Shouldn't be a hard read or anything."

"Hey, there's our Kim. I'll save a seat for ya. We're starting up in five, so head on down whenever you're ready." I gave her an affable, if somewhat bro-y, clap on the shoulder, and swaggered back to my room.

Or I tried to, anyway, but from across the hall I heard someone crying. Jean and Andi's room.

Any other day, I would have minded my business and let it hang. Andi was one of the girls I barely knew as yet, quiet and reserved. Her attempts to get my attention this week had been our first interactions since signing off on her roommate agreement two weeks ago. Still, Andi *had* reached out, twice. I'd failed enough residents for one week.

I gave 304 a gentle knock. There was a beep of surprise, a sniffle, some more sniffles, and finally the door opened to reveal Andi. She had her hair up in a thick red braid like usual, though there were frazzled ends hanging out here and there. Even if I hadn't heard her, it would have been obvious she'd been crying. The poor girl was still wiping her eyes with her arm as the door opened; when she saw it was me, she startled and recoiled her arm so fast it knocked her broad-framed glasses off. We both knelt down to pick them up at the same time and bumped our foreheads, hard.

"Oh gosh, I'm so sorry! Are you OK?" she squeaked, rubbing her own forehead.

It hadn't felt great, but some male gene in me insisted I downplay it. Andi wasn't a bombshell like... well, like lots of them, but she was very pretty, curvy but with a slender neck and waist that almost felt like they were apologizing for the excesses, a face that was perpetually a little sad like it was mortified to be attached to such a body. It evoked a male response.

"I'm fine, Andi. Here," I said, extending my hand to help her up. I'd managed to hold onto her glasses through the donk, which I placed back on her face once she realized I held them.

"Oh. Thanks."

"Thanks? You're easy to please. I'll be sure to bonk your noggin again sometime."

Andi laughed. Laughed *way* too hard. For like a second, anyway, and then her eyes filled with self-consciousness so wide I worried she might cry again. I stepped in quickly. "Hey, I know we keep missing one another this week."

“Oh, it’s OK. It’s nothing important. I just, um... You said, I think, at that one meeting...?”

I gave her a moment to finish the thought, but in that moment, Kim’s door swung open right across from us. “Are we doing this, or what?” She was smiling.

“Yeah, I’ll be right down. Tell them not to start without me, OK?” I returned my attention to Andi. “Hey, we’re getting together to watch *Mean Girls* in a minute. Do you want to come?”

She looked after Kim. Tori and Georgia seemed to have heard us talking about the program, because both of their doors opened and they started after Kim. “Um, I’m not sure I, um...”

“Sure, yeah, I sort of heard you... yeah. Maybe not feeling up to lots of company, huh?”

“Yeah, you could say that.”

I nodded. “Tell you what. Can you hold tight for me for a couple hours, and then come find me, OK? After the program, I’ll be in my room all night. Door is always open and all that.”

Andi’s face brightened at the offer of a timeline. “Oh. OK, yeah. That’ll be nice. Thank you.”

I patted her forehead. “Hey, if I give one of my residents a concussion, I’m at least obligated to listen to her problems, right?”

Another too-hard laugh. It was awfully endearing. Would it be as endearing if it were one of the Three and not this teary geek-chique redhead with her ample cleavage? Ah, well. I still had one.

There were eighteen of them waiting for me in the lounge when I arrived. Outstanding turnout. Tori had already tasked herself with taking up a collection and getting some pizza ordered, for which I thanked her and reminded everyone that floor government elections were coming up this Sunday, so do help me pressure Tori into being our governor. She pretended, half-heartedly, that she wasn’t sure if she was interested. Casey saluted and called her “bitch boss,” which earned both narrowed eyes and a flattered smile.

As for Kim, she was settled in a chair off to the side, more isolated than I’d have liked, but as half a dozen trim bodies filled in the open space, soon she had no choice but to be connected to the group as it sprawled its way toward her. It would have to do.

While Tori placed the order, I led a brief talk. “So who’s seen this before?”

Most of the hands shot in the air. A few moments of excited chatter followed. “It’s October third!” cried at least a dozen voices in near unison, followed by elated giggles.

“We’re going to have to do something special when *Mean Girls* Day actually gets here. But yeah, I’ve always liked this one myself. It’s—”

“I bet you like it!” That was Casey, again trying to get my goat, as if it were a controversial opinion.

“Not just for the cast,” I stressed with a conciliatory grin. “But there’s a lot going on in here. Castes forming, groups colliding, stresses between in groups and out groups. There’s a lot of ways *Mean Girls* is a reflection of the real world, when you think about it. It’s actually based on a book called *Queen Bees and Wannabes*. I have a copy, if anybody wants to borrow it.” Something a girl I’d dated in high school had given me a week before we broke up that had gathered lots of dust since. “Now when you hear that title, what comes to mind?”

I led a discussion for a little bit, keeping an eye on the energy in the room. Where possible, I tried to steer it in the direction of bullying and othering, without putting too fine a point on it. As they started to get restless, I shut up and started the movie, hoping our talk would steer their mind to the themes at hand. Pizza showed up around the time of the Halloween party. I was pleased to hear some of their discussions while they loaded their paper plates veer toward the ways the various girls in the show stereotyped one another, how they let their differences drive wedges in between them.

Not in those words, of course. “I’ve always shipped Janis and Regina. They’d be *such* an awesome couple if they didn’t hate each other’s groups so bad, right?” said Charlie around a mouthful of green peppers and cheese.

I tried not to watch Kim too closely, but from my vantage in the back of the lounge, I did watch her some. Now that I was looking for it, there was a discernible otherness to her. She didn’t engage as readily as the others, didn’t blurt comments for the congregation.

Even when the pizza arrived, she ate one and only one piece, as if afraid to look indelicate in front of so many delicately shaped bodies. (To be honest, I restricted myself to the same, and I'd ponied up twice as much cash as the rest of them.)

Still, as the movie went on, lively discussion drowned a good deal of it out, though nobody seemed to mind. Kim wound up seated right by Sammi and Casey, easily two of her most intimidating floormates. By the time of the big meeting in the gym, the three of them were talking and laughing together, peas in a Higgins 3 pod. Even as I tried to keep folks from fleeing the minute the movie ended so we could discuss it, the girls were already making points of their own. It was simply a matter of bringing everybody into the same big group talk.

It was tricky, circling around the subject of the way physical attractiveness could cause rifts. It was almost like talking about race relations in a room full of white kids with one black girl in the corner. You wanted to educate the privileged, but you also didn't want to further alienate the standout.

It was Casey who accosted Kim directly, though. "Is it true your roommate left because she felt like she wasn't one of us?"

Side chatter stopped in an instant. Cold pizza dropped back to plates forgotten. My heart seized in my chest. That was a big question, and to the only girl in the room who'd never made a fellow trip for doing a double-take.

To my incredible relief, whatever had transpired during the past two hours had readied Kim to answer frankly and honestly. "I mean, yeah. It's just... kinda weird? 'Higgins Hotties' and all that. Maybe some of you know what I'm talking about."

Kim looked around the room.

Everyone looked back, awaiting an explanation of what was weird about proclaiming one's hotness.

"Or maybe not. But I mean, there's so many girls on this floor that are so pretty, and... I dunno. Sometimes, I feel like..." I projected all the courage to her that I could. "I feel like the odd one out, you know? Like, I like everybody here, but sometimes it feels

like there's sort of two tiers of people. The 'Higgins Hotties,' and the 'Higgins Notties.'"

A chorus of voices quickly insisted to Kim that she was absolutely a Hottie, which only led to her doubling down and insisting that it was indeed a thing.

"People don't actually say that, do they? That's like the meanest thing I've ever heard," opined Dana. I tried not to think of Savannah and I chuckling at the Three.

Everyone listened as Kim explained an encounter from the previous weekend. It transpired at the Penderdast food court, in which a group of boys sitting behind her and Marta chatted at length about which girls from Higgins 3 they wanted to "get with," only in what were apparently some really crude terms Kim opted not to repeat. When Marta's curdling rage finally boiled over and she confronted them – defending the honor of the Hotties themselves – they had the audacity to laugh in her face, at which point they lobbed the Notties bomb in her face.

"That's *horrible*!"

"What kind of boy would say such a thing out loud where decent people could hear him?"

"I hope she fucking punched them. And then ran them the fudge over."

"I am so, so sorry you two had to go through that. That's *awful*."

"Did you get their names? Because I will make it my mission to see to it they never get laid for the rest of their lives."

I fucking *loved* these girls.

And then there were hugs. Kim had gotten animated during her tale, and the outpouring of support and affection broke her down into grateful sobs. I was beside myself. My first floor program, hardly any thought put into it, and... *this*. Maybe Ramona wasn't going to regret hiring me after all. Another program like this, and she might–

"You guys! You guys!"

Jordyn threw open the door to the lounge. She had two huge boxes, stacked on top of one another so we couldn't even see who was carrying them until she dropped them. *Happiness is an*

unexpected package , I was fond of saying after years of working mail rooms and seeing people's faces when someone sent a care package or birthday present or what have you. Every eye was turned to her as she shredded through layers of tape until finally she got to the contents.

It was red, whatever it was. Bright, flashy red.

"Ta da!" Jordyn snatched a red scrap from the contents. Cloth , apparently. It unfurled, and she held it out in front of her. "The t-shirts are in, you guys!"

There it was. The design she'd doodled on the dry erase board, reproduced with more care, then diminished (if slightly) in reproducing it for the shirt. The adjoined H's, wrapped in thorny vines, a big pink flower at the top left. It was colorful. It was cool. It was community-building. But it was also

"Kinda short, don'cha think...?" said Kendall.

It was fucking *short* . Not "this will get chilly in the winter" short . No, it was "where's the rest of the t-shirt?" short. My jaw worked wordlessly as I tried to imagine what these would look like on a human body. Maybe they'd stretch a little? While I hoped, Jordyn was already tossing them out. They were packed by sizes, starting with the Smalls, then the Mediums, and then three Larges – one apiece for Kim, Casey and Kyu-Ri respectively, the latter two needing them only because of their massive busts. (There were two more left in the box for Marta (an XL, in fact) and Laura that went unclaimed, plus more in the smaller sizes for the girls not in attendance.)

"Let's try 'em on!" Jordyn exclaimed.

"There's a boy in the room!" exclaimed someone. Dana, I thought. I would have liked it if there had been another dozen voices concurring with her, but there was only the one .

I was on the far side of the room from the exit, blocked by the mob of t-shirt giddy goddesses. As I tried to pick out a path through, any means of egress before this got any more out of hand, Casey yelled, "Turn around or don't, baby!" and jerked her shirt off over her head. She had a bra on, mercifully, which I could say from weeks of living next door to her was by no means a given. I spun around to

face the windows looking out at the parking lot as her cackling floormates followed suit. I could hear shirts flying across the room, sliding down walls to the floor. More than one hit *me*. The girls who might have been less keen on stripping their tops off in front of me were bowled down by the peer pressure of the more shameless.

I know this because I'm a goddamn human being, and so help me god, I couldn't stop myself from peeking – just once! – at the reflection of this debacle in the window. I tried to point out that there were windows, but it only made them take a few steps back. We were on what was effectively the fifth floor, after all; people on the ground would see me, staring wide-eyed into the dark, and a bunch of girls' heads bobbling around celebrating their new shirts. They didn't care who saw, so long as they could hurry in joining the group uniform, to be part of the Higgins Hotties assembly.

As for that peek, it was the most boobs I'd ever seen out in the same place at the same time. It was more boobs than I'd ever seen in a porno, much less real life. (Marisa would have said it was only because I didn't watch enough porn, but seriously, what studio hired two dozen actresses for one scene?) Most of them had bras – but not all. Not all, not by any means. Tori and her prominent ebony orbs, another viewing of Leigh's round tan tits. Amy's were so small it would have seemed weird for her to be wearing one, though her nipples seemed to be fighting to make up for it. And Jordyn, and Charlie, and Dawn, and Sammi, and Destiny, and Lex, and...

Though again, the rest were wearing bras. I set a lifetime record for most shirtless girls beheld in a single second, which was all the longer my conscience would indulge me before I made myself stare through the glass into the parking lot below.

“Put yours on, Spencer!” someone said, reaching around to slam one in my hands. I held it up, mostly to stall putting it on – an eventuality I could already feel myself being pressured into accepting. It was the same as theirs, except mine covered my stomach.

No, I realized after a moment. Where theirs read “no ^ more boys,” mine read “our † boy.” The B was raised up as if squeezed in

after some humbugger made the designer strike through the T in what would otherwise have been “Toy.”

“Well that’s inappropriate.”

“Put it on!” someone yelled, and then a dozen more someones clamored for it. It was nerve-wracking, taking my shirt off in front of the girls (with Casey and at least a couple others cat-calling me), but they’d all already done it, and besides, the sooner I capitulated, the sooner I could start working on how to get all those t-shirts back so I could burn them before Ramona ever found out.

Admittedly, it felt great. Soft cotton, and if it was tight, it was flatteringly tight.

I turned around to a chorus of cheers, as if I were the spectacle here and not the dozens of girls stuffed – barely – into their skimpy counterparts. And I mean stuffed. It felt like half of Kyu-Ri’s bra was hanging out the bottom, Large size be damned, and she wasn’t alone. Casey’s weighty tits stretched hers to its limits; their sheer size forced it to cling to her underboob rather than expose them by hanging down from the nipples as some of her less busty companions’ did.

“Hawt. Eez! Hawt. Eez! Hawt. Eez!” It was Jordyn who began the chant in celebration of her design, but soon it spread to every tongue. Good god, I was dead. Ramona had been pissed about the design, pissed they’d skirted university censorship, pissed I hadn’t nipped this in the bud. On some of my girls, these shirts were only an inch or two of underboob before nipples emerged and they became truly pornographic.

I had to do something. If any of them were bold, confident, slutty – pick one – enough to wear these out and about on campus, I was dead. This job would be a fond addition to the spank bank, and I’d be homeless and penniless.

It took everything I had, barricading them in there and reasoning with them. Only when I convinced them that the moment these shirts appeared in public I would assuredly be fired and replaced (and where would that leave their “no more toys/boys” joke?) did they relent. There was no putting them back in the box – though Casey flirtatiously offered to let me follow her back to her room and “recover” hers – but I at least assured what I hoped and

prayed were heartfelt commitments never to wear them except around Higgins 3.

Shit, I'd have thought none of them would even want to, but some of them managed to make succumbing to my plea sound like a great sacrifice. Like they didn't have other tops that showed off what incredible tits they had or something. God.

The girls left the lounge once more echoing Jordyn's "hotties" chant, quiet hours be damned, as the handful who hadn't come down for the program emerged from their rooms to have a slutty Higgins Hotties half-shirt thrown at them. Meanwhile, I took a moment to stand in the lounge, hard as the brick walkway outside Higgins Hall, and slowly convinced myself to start moving, to clean up the food, the plates, the dozens of abandoned t-shirts. I'd have to email my girls to come down to my room to pick them up.

I stopped in the middle of throwing out a box of pineapple-tainted pizza, half-uneaten, to rethink that thought. *I'd have to email my girls, to come down to my room, to pick up dozens of abandoned women's tops, because they'd stripped them off, with me in the room.*

Fuck.

Oh, and there was someone's bra, too. 34 E, black lace. That , I left on the floor.

Carmen was on duty that night; I heard her barking for my girls to pipe down, respect quiet hours, get back in their rooms. She didn't check the lounge like she was supposed to, but I was glad. I hadn't come up with an explanation yet. I wasn't sure there was one. Once the lounge was restored to tidiness, I finally shuffled out with a pile of discarded women's shirts in my arms – then doubled back to retrieve my *Mean Girls* DVD.

I walked around campus for hours after that. It didn't even occur to me I'd forgotten to change out of my own red shirt until I stumbled back up the stairs.

I forgot all about Andi.

The next day, Kim woke me up at 8 so I could complete her RCR. Emptied of hers and Marta's belongings, the barely lived in

room 303 was still in immaculate condition, as our signatures and Marta's each attested.

Chapter Nine: Homesickness

“Spencer.”

I stood up a little too fast. I hadn't expected anybody to notice me back here. Not that I wasn't allowed to be back in the filing area. At times, I had to be. Times like this. But I'd lingered.

“Come with me.”

I nodded. There wasn't much to say. When someone catches you leaning against a file cabinet, crying, hiding, you can't tell them you won't come with them. I was a puppy who'd eaten the stuffing out of her favorite toy, so pitiful over my own stupid mistake that I accepted whatever rebuke was coming. So I followed Ramona around the way to her office. She pointed, and I slumped down onto her sofa. There were chairs for more formal ones, but I wasn't ready for a chair.

It was pathetic, I knew that. That whole toxic taboo against men crying had nothing to do with it. Still, this was crying over my job, not something personal. Crying over something I wasn't even sure I could have helped. It wasn't *my* fault my girls were happy to show off, and that Kim wasn't. I wasn't bawling or anything, and I hadn't been doing it for very long. Still, there I was.

A box of tissues slid into my bleary field of vision. I took it as a cue, seizing one and dabbing at my face. I didn't *need* to sniffle, but I sniffled once. Despite the availability of tissues, for some reason it felt gross to blow my nose in front of Ramona. I don't know why. I steeled myself to sit up and explain why she'd found me in such a state. Only then, there was her weight pressing into the sofa beside me.

There was a soft hand, rubbing my back, softly.

Yep, so I cried some more. Nothing brought out the tears like someone willing to indulge them. Someone knocked at one point. Ramona excused herself, had a brief exchange I didn't even hear.

Then she was back, just rubbing softly, until finally I was all cried out.

Only once I was finally done being a pitiful mess did I realize our proximity. Hip to hip, her arm resting on my back. She was leaning into it, our hair brushing softly together, only an inch or two from resting on one another. Awkwardly I scooted back. I'm not sure why. She was only being nice, but my boss was a woman, and a pretty one. Sometimes I felt like I noticed that all too often. If she'd been born a decade later, that might have been her strutting around in a tight red half-shirt last night, crowing up and down the halls about her own hotness. Could have been her, making sure Kim knew she wasn't one of them. And Marta, and... and, um... and the other one. What was her—

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked softly.

I refused to start crying again at forgetting the final identity of the group of miserable, normal residents on my floor, formerly known as the Three. “Not much to say, I guess. I screwed up.”

“Screwed up what?” She cocked her head. Her glasses slipped a fraction of an inch down her button nose.

“You know. With my girls. Women, sorry.”

“I'm not sure I know what you're talking about. Do you mean the move-outs this week?”

I only nodded. Ramona leaned a little closer, pressed a little harder. “Did something happen?”

My girls held a flesh parade and made sure that everybody saw the sad little float made of mud and recycled trash for what it was. That they hadn't meant to didn't help. It did mean I couldn't present it that way to Ramona. It was a nice reminder that I needed to broach *that* subject while I was in here. Fuck.

“No, nothing ‘happened.’ They just... Did they talk to you, when they asked for the transfer?”

“No. One I never talked to; she checked out with Marcus. Of the two I did, the one this morning in particular had a pretty unhappy way about her, but otherwise...” She shrugged. “I don't generally pry unless I have an inkling that there's something I ought to know. Which you seem to be saying that there is.”

I took a few deep breaths. Then a few more. It probably didn't do much to assist my reassurances. "Really, nothing specific. But I think... This is weird to say, but... I think they moved out because they didn't feel like they fit in with the rest of them."

"Yeah, you'll have that sometimes. You hate to see it escalate to the level of moving out, but it happens. Sometimes a square peg ends up in a field of round holes."

I tried not to dwell on the way Ramona's warm voice said the words *round holes* and refocused. Damn what that shirt fiasco had done to my libido. "No. I don't mean they were early risers or didn't get along with their roommate. I mean... Look, to be blunt, they felt like they were too... too... ugly. Too ugly to live on my floor."

Ramona arched an eyebrow. "I... don't even know what that means, Spencer. Talk to me."

So I explained the best I could, trying my best to keep myself out of it. The part about changing in the lounge was omitted entirely, and the shocking reveal of just how shockingly revealing the shirts were became an "error at the t-shirt shop" that I was "looking into." I might have even snuck in a bit about my insisting we drop the matter there rather than asking for the mistake to be rectified.

What a hero I was.

"And is that why you're upset? Because these three women moved off your floor?"

I gave a weak shrug. "We drove them out. We made them feel like they weren't good enough. I was sitting back, having fun being one of the gals, and didn't realize I was ignoring the kinds of signals we were giving off."

"Spencer, let me stop you right there. That whole thing you just said? It's a big tangled snarl of we's and I's. You are not Higgins 3. You are one person. War parties of hot girls preying on not-hot girls didn't begin on your floor, and they won't end there, either. It happens sometimes. I processed a transfer for a young woman on Vanessa's floor the other day, and if she didn't quite say it this way, what she did say made it clear she felt ostracized by her affluent roommate and her roommate's affluent social circle."

"But they—"

“But nothing, Spencer.” There was that soft, soft hand again, but this time it was soft soft firm, squeezing my shoulder. “There are almost two hundred women crammed into our one tiny residence hall. I guarantee you that your Three—” *No*, I amended, she only meant my *three*, no caps. “—aren’t the only ones losing sleep wondering how they’ll compete with the folks up on 3. Inequality breeds resentment.”

“But...”

“Hey.” She cupped my chin, forced me to look up at her. This close, I was sucking in her perfume with every breath. God, her husband was a lucky man. “You have thirty-some girls on your floor who think you’re amazing. Did you know I got emails from not one, not two, but *three* mothers personally complimenting you for what a good influence you’ve been on their daughters?”

“What?”

“Yeah. I didn’t even know that was a thing that happens. One of them – Dana’s mom? – already asked me if there’s a way to get her daughter on your floor again next year.”

Good god. The squeeze of my ass must have made a hell of an impression. “That’s crazy.”

“That’s a sign that you are making these young women feel cared for, and safe, and included. Me, I’m with you. I don’t love that we lost three residents because their self-confidence couldn’t keep up with the rest of your floor. It feels bad. But I’ve also never heard of an RA getting... fan mail, I guess you could call it, from his residents’ parents. I wasn’t even going to tell you, but the way you were sniffing, I thought you could use a pick-me-up.”

“Wow.”

This time, her head leaned in until it was touching mine. Her arm slid down my shoulder to my side and rubbed affectionately. “I don’t want to play favorites, but there’s something about you, Spencer. You’re reminding me why I got into this job. You’re...” She sighed, breathing in slowly, deeply, as I did the same under the veil of that rich perfume of hers. “You’re going to make me late for my 10:00.”

She sat up, and I sat up, and we both chuckled away the intimacy of that moment before we could think more of it. “Thanks, Ramona. I feel a lot better.”

She stood, smoothing out her skirt while I tried not to notice the proximity of that skirt to my face. Her tone was back to business again. “Good. Now if you find yourself feeling like your girls are *deliberately* causing problems, you get on them, all right?”

“Yeah. Will do.”

“Maybe I should say that I’ve seen you take them in hand, so it might be worth adding: don’t go *too* hard on them.” She flashed a sly grin.

My boss put her hand on my shoulder, jokingly referencing the time she’d seen me wet, naked and turgid. Maybe it ought to have made me uncomfortable. In a sense it did, only the discomfort came only when I realized it felt weirdly... nice. In a way not at all appropriate with my attractive *married* boss.

I shifted in my seat. If she noticed me wriggling away from her touch, she didn’t look offended or nervous or anything. “I’ll keep an eye on things.”

“I know you will. And since I can see you’re anxious, I’ll give you all the notice I can before those empty rooms are filled. That might be none at all, but sometimes I get notifications before they show up to config their key. Sorry I can’t promise they’ll only send you more ‘Hotties,’ but you never know. I should tell you, though, that Bob and I decided we’re not going to try to integrate the floor with men as we fill openings. One thing to have a veteran staff member in there with those girls. Quite another to invite Chad and Doug into the equation.”

“That’s a load off. Though as for the Hotties, trust me, I’ve got way more than I can handle.”

This time Ramona had to hide her look of smug bemusement behind a hand. “I’m sorry, Spencer. I’m sorry! It’s just still too soon for a comment about you ‘handling’ your residents. I’ve always been a that’s-what-she-said-ophile, and you’re killing me with that.”

I humored her with a dry, nonplused look. “Go on, get it out of your system.”

After three cackles and a solid guffaw, she finally relented. “I’m sorry. I promise it won’t happen again. Good grief, I’m going to get a letter in my file. Forgive me. Yeah? I’m genuinely sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Really, it was. The most frustrating thing of it all was knowing she wasn’t flirting. If she were anyone but my boss, I’d have made a counter-jibe about how it was her turn to dive into the naked shower fight dogpile next time it came up, just to make her blush, but she looked genuinely repentant. And again, looked like my boss.

She helped me to my feet and led me to the door with one gentle hand on my shoulder. I left Ramona’s office feeling better. Some. It left me feeling a little something else, too, but then I made my way back up to Higgins 3 and chalked it up to the perpetual mid-grade arousal I’d been grappling with for weeks now. I passed not one, but two of my girls in their brand new Higgins Hotties shirts. Ellie smiled and waved as I walked past her room, but Angel made it a point to pluck at the fabric of her shirt and thumbs-up me. I think I smiled back, but it was hard to be sure.

I was done with classes for the week, not ready for classwork. Back in my room, I collapsed into my bed, turned on some comfort TV that I barely even saw before falling asleep. I dreamt of seeing myself wallowing in all that self-pity, then slapping me in the face and telling me to get a grip on myself and be a bit less pitiful. In response, the crying me fell on my shoulder and cried even harder, crying and crying until my shoulder was wet with his/my tears. Until I started feeling... damp? Like, *really* damp. Like damp in the real world. *Knock it off*, I grumbled at the weepy mess resting on my shirt, sobbing. That sure did it. Then it was a flood, a clingy, weepy flood. Soon I was too grossed out by my own hysterics and forced myself to retreat toward the waking world.

“That’s enough!” I snapped as my eyes fluttered open.

“I’m sorry!” Andi leapt up and ran out my door before I even knew she was real.

Oh right. Andi. So much for feeling good about myself.

It took a minute, sorting through it. There really was a soggy spot on my shoulder. She’d been in here – damn my adherence to my open door policy! – and... had we talked? I’d been saying...

something. In my sleep, but muttering. Shit. Whatever had been happening, I had a sobbing resident whom I'd neglected for days fleeing into seclusion.

I gave myself a pinch and hurried after her. Nobody in 304 answered when I knocked, but on the second try, I could hear someone crying inside. Well, if she could tromp right on into my room while I was sleeping, surely I could be forgiven for returning the favor while she was awake and in pain.

I almost didn't see her at first, curled up under a big ball of sheets and blankets on the top bunk. The crying intensified when I said her name, though, and the shuddering mass gave her up. Jean wasn't in, I noted, so in lieu of a need to explain my presence, I gently closed the door behind me and made my way over to the bunk beds. A disheveled red braid was all I could see of the person beneath it all, twitching as she tried and failed to choke down her tears.

"Hey there, Andi." The only response was a high-pitched whimper, one so embarrassing it led directly into more body-wracking sobs. Had I looked this pathetic to Ramona? Not that I meant "pathetic" in some kind of contemptuous way. It was only that the term applied. Sometimes, even the toughest folks waxed pathetic.

"Um, I'm not exactly sure what I... I mean, I was asleep." My hazy awareness only told me I'd been a little gruff.

"I'm sorry! I don't nmm mmhmmfmmbehhhh, mehhgehheg... !" Whatever she'd been trying to mutter into her pillow, it was lost in fresh sobs.

This was fresh ground for me. Not that I'd never comforted a sobbing woman, but in the past it had been friends, girlfriends. My six-year-old cousin, once, after her brother scared her with a garter snake he'd scooped up in the grove by my aunt's house. This was professional comforting. Remember Ramona, I ventured to put a gentle touch on her back, giving it a soft rub, watching for any sign of recoiling to tell me I'd overstepped. Andi simply kept crying.

When she didn't show any signs of slowing after a bit, I thought out a next step. Apologizing for being snippy in my sleep at a woman I still didn't know how she'd come to be beside me seemed tricky, so I went after easier feelings. "I'm so, so sorry I haven't managed to

talk with you sooner. I said I'd come find you after the program last night, didn't I?" She didn't respond. Couldn't. "That's right. And I... I got caught up in some of my own problems and forgot all about it. I'm sorry. Really. Not like, oops sorry. Like apology sorry. I hate that I let you down like this."

After a minute, Andi managed a few sniffles, a feeble attempt at composure. "It's okay." She squirmed a little, I think to dab at her tears with her sleeve. "I should've waited for you to wake up. That was stupid. I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't go down there, meaning to... do that."

"Hey, no, you're fine. I said my door's open any time, didn't I? Gotta get smarter about locking it during those rare exceptions. Plus I'm gonna go out on a limb here and say something's really bothering you, so I'm glad you woke me up. I'd feel a lot crappier if I'd blown you off again than having a minorly weird wake-up."

There was another apology embedded in more sobs. Ugh, what a portrait of pitiability. I was helpless. I stood there next to her bed rubbing her back until I was tired enough I laid my head down on my other arm on the bed space behind her. We were close. Close enough I had opportunity – and time – to reflect on how pleasant she smelled. A mix of some kind of earthy shampoo and a mild but fragrant floral perfume. Subtler than Ramona's. Sweeter. It was nice. Every now and then I'd try to say something to ease her out of it. After a time, she finally calmed herself enough to engage with me for more than a few mumbled words.

"This is the most time I've spent talking to someone face to face in weeks."

She sounded marginally more composed than prior attempts. I tried to reel her further in with some light-hearted humor.

"Technically we're not face to face, you know. I'm learning a lot about braiding technique back here, though."

Andi rolled over to face me, her teary mess of a face landing just an inch outside of uncomfortably close. She had kitten breath, I noted quickly, but it was endearing under the circumstances. I withdrew my hand. "*Now* we're face to face," she said.

"So we are. And it's a nice face."

She made that face girls make when you compliment them and they don't think they're presently deserving. "Yeah right."

No need to pursue the point. If she didn't know she looked great even at her worst, it wasn't my place to correct the score. Thank you Lex for teaching me to shut my stupid mouth when it came to making observations on my girls' appearances. "So. Andi. Talk to me. Something's been bothering you."

It took her a moment to summon words, still teetering on the brink of sobby messdom as she was. "I... um... this feels really, really pathetic to say."

"You don't need to impress me, Andi. I'm here to help whether it's an amazing one-of-a-kind impressive problem or a stubbed toe."

The lighter-hearted approach seemed to be working. After another sniffle that actually sounded pretty gross, she took a breath, and began to unload.

"I hate it here," she opened. "Not *here*, but like, at Lakeview. It's been two weeks, and I feel like I haven't made any friends. At first me and Jean were hanging out a lot, but she started making friends with these girls in her classes and now I barely see her either. We haven't even gone to eat together since, I don't know, last week sometime. Well no, we ate pizza together last night at the program. But we didn't even sit next to each other."

It sounded like there was more coming, but she'd paused to let me speak, so speak I did. "Yeah, I saw that." *I also saw you in your bra changing into your new shirt. Speaking of, wanna come back to my room, see if you can ID your top?* "But you know, it's OK not to be best buds with your roommate. More common not to be, in my experience. Sometimes it's just somebody who doesn't snore too loud, you know?"

"But I haven't made any friends anywhere else, either! I try, but I don't... I don't know how. Does that sound incredibly lame or what? I mean, I went to all the meetings and all the orientation stuff, and I went to your program last night, but I just feel like maybe I don't fit in here with the, you know, 'Hotties.'"

Oh fuck, this again. "Did someone say something? Damn it, the whole point of that program was to *stop* people from choosing their

company based on what they look like. And you're not even...!" Whoops. That sentence certainly had a poorly considered beginning. Nothing so consoling as being told *you're not even ugly*. "You're one of them, I mean."

It was decidedly *not* a good cover, but it did bring a smile to her lips rather than send her into fresh sobs. Or a complaint to my boss. "You think I'm a Higgins Hottie?"

Plainly she didn't attach a negative stigma to the term, so I went ahead and leaned into my slip-up. "Andi, you're an incredibly pretty young woman. Jordyn made those shirts with you in mind, I promise."

Another snuffle, another smile. "That's... thank you. I, um..." Like that, the smile faded, and tears returned. "I, um, broke up with my boyfriend. From back home? I mean, I didn't break up with him. We broke up."

Ah, there it was. The catalyst. "He broke up with you, you're saying."

I barely made out the blubbering mess of word salad that followed. What I took from it was that she'd convinced – and the way she stumbled over the word, I took *convinced* to mean some real down and dirty convincing – her fella not to break up when she moved away to Lakeview. Only, once she was gone, the decision became undecided. Andi was very pretty, yes, but he was going to school hundreds of miles away. I inferred that he was having a lot easier time meeting people than she had, and she seemed at least half sure that he'd cheated on her before finally, firmly, insisting they officially break it off. Those negotiations had begun as early as move-in week, and ended last weekend during a suspiciously timed early Saturday morning phone call, during which she'd heard a woman's voice nearby.

My heart went out to her. It was a tale as old as coeds. The broad strokes of it I could have guessed before she'd said more than that they'd broken up. Long distance relationships almost never worked. Never, actually, in my experience. I'd done the same as a freshman. Like Andi's ex, I'd been the one to break it off. Once school stopped feeling like you were staying in some weird hotel and started

feeling like a new phase of life that one's partner wasn't a part of, it was just hard. I got why people kept trying, but I got why they kept failing, too.

By the time Jean came in, Andi had gone back to crying so hard it required another round of back pats. My presence in their room surprised her, clearly, and Andi was in no position to hide her emotional state. "Hey, Jean. Sorry, the two of us were just talking about some stuff."

"Oh. Um, do I need to leave...?"

"Andi, do you want to talk in my room?"

Andi did. The ticking time bomb of desperate, needy, sexy teenage girl shuffled down out of the top bunk, accepting my hand for help, and trailed behind me back to my space in 310 like a baby duck.

We – mostly she – talked for over an hour. On top of her difficulty making friends, exacerbated by her depression over being dumped, she was struggling with a separate level of homesickness, too. She had a close relationship with her mother, but between her mom's new hours at work and having a roommate around in the evening, it was hard to really lean on maternal support. Her big sister had gotten married over the summer, and was too busy with her new husband to have much time for her. That was her impression, anyway, and the impression was all that really mattered insofar as loneliness was concerned.

I listened a lot, said little. Her problem was a normal enough one. Homesickness and heartbreak, both common, normal, and relatively easily treated. All she needed was to develop an attachment or two and she would be fine in no time. I couldn't come right out and say that, of course, any more than Ramona could have told me to go out and try to do a little good to my girls, which was all my own weepy mess problems had needed.

I didn't try to rush her, either. It was Friday evening. I wasn't on duty and, like usual, I didn't have plans. She curled up at the head of my bed, knees hugged to her chest in a way that, in that dress, prompted me to offer her a blanket. Andi had bigger things on her mind than whether her dress showed a little underwear, so I wound

up having to sit there next to her to have an excuse to tuck it in right. A little more intimate than I normally liked to get with a resident to say the least, especially after recent lessons at the college of hard knocks, but modesty was plainly the last thing on her mind. She'd been so lonely she'd been crying on my shoulder in my sleep. Crying on it while I was awake suited her far better. So I nestled in beside her and let Andi vent, cry, whine and wallow deep in self-pity.

“What do I do, Spencer? I've never felt this... this *alone* before.” It was the first time she'd actually asked for advice, though she'd probably said the other bit at least a dozen times by then.

“My honest opinion? Before you know it, things are going to be better. You got dumped, and that's hard. Trying to meet people and explore and put yourself out there, especially while bearing that fresh wound, makes a tricky thing trickier.”

“So you're saying people don't like me because I've been depressed?”

“No! No, not that at all. You haven't made friends – *yet* – because people haven't gotten a chance to know you. Depression makes opening up and giving people that chance a lot harder. But you're going to do it. You know how I know?”

“How?” She looked over at me, eyes adorably wide and vulnerable. There were so many dried tear smudges on her glasses I don't know how she could see.

“Because you came to find me. That means you've got it in you to try, to get yourself help, to reach out to people. You just need to keep doing it until you find the right people, the ones who are going to value you the way you deserve.”

“But what if everybody's already made their friends? Like, what if people have made their social circles and just don't have any room left for anybody?”

It was silly enough I had to make sure I didn't laugh. “Andi, nobody works that way. Everybody's always open to making new friends.”

She gazed up at me. “Yeah? What about you?”

That got personal in a flash. “What about me?”

“I mean, you seem to hang out here on the floor all the time. I never see you go anywhere, never see you have anybody over. That’s, um, kind of why I thought maybe you would understand. That probably sounds so mean! God, stupid, stupid, stupid!” She conked herself reprovably on the side of her head. “I’m so sorry, you’re being so nice to me, and you’re so warm, and sweet, and what do I do, I call you a big stupid loser like me. No wonder nobody wants to be your friend, Andi, trying to drag everybody down to your stupid loser level. God, I—”

Through it all, my contribution to this sudden and alarming transition from self-pity to self-hatred was to sputter something along the lines of “hey, whoa, no, no way, no you’re, no, come on, whoa, that’s so, no” and watch it fail to slow her down. Worse, she kept on hitting herself, too. She wasn’t being gentle, and it wasn’t easy to witness.

Finally, there was nothing for it but to maneuver around and stop her. I knew I wasn’t supposed to lay a hand on a resident, ever, but hey, I’d already burned that bridge to the ground and pissed on the ashes. Plus, this resident was in my bed, letting out feelings that I’d let fester by ignoring her for a whole week, so I felt responsible for her well-being in a way I normally didn’t.

She didn’t resist when I forced her hand still. Really, she capitulated the moment I touched her. Andi stopped moving altogether, looking up at me with an unreadable expression. The brief struggle to reposition myself had swept the blanket aside though, and after a moment I realized I’d wound up with my knee, bared below my shorts, settled directly against her underwear, now re-exposed as she was still curled up in that sad little ball.

Hopefully she wasn’t feeling the awkwardness like I was, because I wasn’t about to back down and let her resume that ugliness. “Andi. You’re not stupid. You’re not a loser. You’re here at Lakeview because you’re smart. Because you’re going places. You’re just having a rough start, all right? I promise you, I will make it my personal mission to help you find a place, with some people, where you can be yourself and be appreciated like you deserve.”

Her chin quivered. I don't think she was ready for talking again yet.

"I promise. And I know you're hurting right now, but believe me – buh- *lieve* me – that won't last. You're a Higgins motha fuckin' Hottie, and before long, you're going to find a guy, right here close by where you get to see him every day, be with him whenever you want."

Her chin lifted. Still quivering.

I'm not an idiot. I knew, I absolutely knew, that I could have kissed her. She would have welcomed it with arms wide open. Legs too, if I wasn't mistaking the heat against my knee. I'd learned my lesson though, thanks to Quinn and Leigh. Plus, romantically, I didn't go for fixer-uppers, and Andi needed some fixer-uppering even aside from being lonely. Before she could make a desperate move herself, I settled back down beside her, facing the foot of the bed like she was, and gave her a moment before I gently nudged her with an elbow.

"How'd I do?" I asked with a little jocularity.

The hug that followed was intense, almost fierce, though Andi was not one for fierceness. "You did good," she insisted into my once more damp shoulder. The girl was going to dehydrate if she kept crying like this. At least these were happier tears.

"But hey, I want to stress – that's not some speech they teach RAs to get their residents to quiet down. I mean it. Things will get better if you keep putting yourself out there. And I will be your wingman all the way. I'm already thinking of some girls on the floor I ought to steer your way."

"Yeah?"

"Gimme a bit. Maybe tomorrow I'll do one of those 'impromptu' meal outings, microtarget a few doors. I'll figure it out. Promise."

This hug was smaller, but no less sweet. It lasted until I finally had to "all right, all right, don't reward me until I've earned it" the thing away.

"Um, do you mind if I... you know, hang out? With you? For a while? I know I've already taken up your whole afternoon but... Jean doesn't really like me, and I know she hates that I'm always there moping around, so maybe I could..." Then she shook her head, and I

could feel the energy moving back to her smacking arm. “No, that’s so selfish. I’m sorry. I’ll get out of your hair. Obviously you have better things to do on a Friday night than—”

“Pick the movie, Andi.”

Damn that quivering chin of hers. “Really?!”

“We can at least give Jean ninety minutes. Besides, I’m a super duper senior. All my friends graduated years ago, so maybe I need to work on making some new ones, too.”

I figured out pretty fast that I’d overdone it.

Andi wasn’t subtle. There was nothing subtle about laying down on her front, right in the middle of my bed on that big crack where the two long twin mattresses met beneath the fitted sheet, with her feet waving in the air beside me. They were like those inflatable tube men, wiggling around to make sure I didn’t miss the big sale down at where her dress was constantly threatening to slide up over her butt. Everything must go, they said, and with every micro-adjustment on the bed, the dress shifted, and always in the direction she wanted it to.

I’d insisted she could put on whatever she wanted, and doubled down when she suggested some rom-com I half-remembered from bad dates years ago. “Sounds great,” I’d told her. “I love that one.” Then came an hour and a half of looking back over her shoulder at me at every joke, beaming, making sure I was loving it as much as she was. I tried. It wasn’t a great movie, nor even a good one, but I tried. I got practiced pretty fast at forcing a smile whenever I saw that braid start moving.

It took some doing, not sending back any mixed signals. Smiling was one thing, but I had to fold my arms across my chest so they weren’t hanging down, brushing against her bared legs. (Andi kept those things smooth, I noticed on the several occasions when I slipped up.) The movie wasn’t holding my interest, but I occupied my time on my stated mission of who I might be able to set her up with on a friend date. Every now and then I ventured a question about her interests. Anything specific – “do you like football?” – was met with a variation on “oh, sure, yeah, I could get into that!” Anything vague – “what do you like to do for fun?” was reflected right back at me with

some kind of “oh, you know, all kinds of stuff. What do *you* like to do for fun?”

It was flirtation, and she was terrible at it. Thank goodness she had that cute round caboose and that adorably kissable pathetic puppy dog face. For her sake, I mean. I’d known some unattractive girls with her level of game, with her level of desperation, and more than one of them had wound up becoming blowjob queens as a means of making “friends.”

Not that *that* was a thought I needed in my head right then.

I even tried opening the door. It was a little awkward still, letting anybody walk by see I was lying in bed next to someone, but I figured it would signal that nothing was going to happen, at least. Except what actually wound up happening was that the triangle of yellow fluorescent light streaming in from the hall landed on exactly two things: Andi’s ass, and my eyeballs. Three things then, I guess. I headed to the bathroom after the movie ended, but when I came back, not only had she not left – not even moved, except a few more inches on the hem of her dress – but she’d started another movie.

“This one’s kind of long,” she said apologetically, “but we can stop it whenever you want.” She left unsaid exactly *why* she hoped I’d stop it. At least it was less overt than my now unfettered view of the very uppermost portion of her thighs, parted slightly for ease of access.

I told myself, again, to be patient. She was distraught, lonely, probably horny, and she thought she’d met a nice guy who might take care of all that. Not like they had resident training, with a session on why it was unethical and forbidden to flaunt your ass at your RA. All I had to do was not send mixed signals, and be ready to say no if she made an actual move.

“Oh my god Spencer, did you see the graffiti down on–” Vickie, no doubt in the midst of her first set of rounds, froze in the doorway, saw me in bed with Andi. Saw where that sliver of freshman panties was sneaking out. “Oh. Sorry, didn’t realize. You two crazy kids have fun. I won’t tell Savannah.”

Then the woman winked.

Winked!

And shut the door before I could come up with a single word of rebuttal.

“Who’s Savannah?” asked Andi, peering back at me. She was going to need a chiropractor, the way she kept doing that.

“She’s another RA. On the basement floor.”

“Oh. Oh! I think I’ve seen her.” She blinked as that mental image slammed home. “OH. I should probably go, huh? I don’t want to get you in trouble with your girlfriend. Not that I—”

“Stay,” I ordered.

Hang on, did I just *order* something? And was that order for her to *stay* ?!

It made sense, probably. In that brief window during which Andi was processing the intrusion, I’d been going from 0 to fuming at the idea that Vickie, or anybody, would think Savannah had some reason or right to know who I spent my time with.

We’d made out, briefly, *once* , weeks ago! I don’t care how perfect a woman’s face is, she doesn’t get dibs on me! What the fuck?!

“Is... is something wrong? Did I say something?” Andi asked nervously.

“No. No, not at all. Sorry, Andi. You’re great, really. Just... Savannah. Goddamn Savannah!”

“Oh gosh!” Her eyes flew wide. “Did you get dumped, too? I’m so sorry! Here I’ve been—”

“She did *not* dump me,” I snapped. How widely had Vickie spread this? How many people thought Savannah had squatters rights on me?

“ *You* dumped *her*... ?!” The look of awe on her face was like I’d invented the very concept of the breakup.

I waved her off, seething. Was this coming from Savannah herself? Things still rocky with goddamn Price, so she wanted to keep a handy backup boy toy in her pocket? Or was she setting herself up as the Queen of Higgins, ruler of all men in her realm?

All right, so I knew even in the moment it wasn’t that. Still, I’d been beating off twice a day or more, surrounded by gorgeous women who teased, flirted or outright harassed me every other time I

stepped out my door. I'd spent all night consoling a girl who was a walking billboard for (pardon my French) pity fucks. I'd passed up on Leigh, a blonde bombshell among blonde bombshells, for her! *Leigh!* Not hours after pinning her wet naked body beneath mine, cock ablaze, in full sight of half the floor, and my boss, and Savannah, and my busty blonder neighbor who'd been waving her ass at me like a checkered flag at the NASCAR EZ-Fuck Series comes to my room to plead for me to finish where we started, and instead I'd a'hyucked my way out of it for a girl who'd blown me off for someone she'd already dumped named goddamn *PRICE!*

Not that I'd been dwelling on it or anything.

"I'm sorry." Andi looked ready to cry again for having done whatever it was she did for me to react like I did.

"Oh crap, no. I'm sorry, Andi. Ever get that where you don't know you have a capital-b Button until somebody hits it?"

"Yeah, totally," she said agreeably, obliviously.

"Let's get back to the movie, yeah? Or do you just want to hang out and talk?" I laughed self-consciously. "Or shit, you're probably ready to be done with me by now."

"No! Oh my gosh, no! I'm having a really nice time," Andi insisted, whirling around to face me. "This is nice. Really nice. Really."

"Yeah?"

"Yes." She took one of my hands in two of hers. The movie played on behind her, as forgotten by her as it had been by me since the moment she'd picked it. "So, um, what did you want to talk about?"

I reciprocated the squeeze. "Tell me about Andi." While I listened, I wrote myself a story problem, and set my mental clock by the answer.

For almost exactly two hours, Andi told me about Andi. She told me about her rural upbringing. Her job detasseling corn in the summers. Where her accent came from. (Her father was from Alabama; one generation removed, she merely tended to drop the g's in -ing's.) Her grandmother, an unremarkable-sounding woman of whom she was very fond. Her two outdoor cats and her indoor cat

Gullet. I got to see a picture of Gullet. A picture of Andi with her parents. Andi with Gullet. Andi with her ex-boyfriend. Lots of Andi with her ex-boyfriend.

By the time midnight rolled around, I'd learned her favorite color (blue, but maybe yellow sometimes), favorite subject in school (art), her sign (Aquarius), her favorite Disney movie (*Aladdin* – but the original one, not the new one, but maybe the new one), her favorite sport (probably kickball, and which sports was I into by the way?). She told me about her plans for her major, unless those fell through and then maybe this would be her plan, unless she met a nice guy and things got serious and then maybe it would be OK to get married and start a family instead. Then she seemed to remember how families are made, and blushed, and actually ogled my crotch for a few seconds, and blushed harder.

Yes, I had a plan. It was barely even a plan; any person with a penis could have intuited that paying some attention to this attention-starved girl would coat her panties in Teflon. Nevertheless, my eyes were on the clock, and my mind on doing this the right way.

Midnight came.

“Hey, wow, already going on midnight .”

“Really? Oh my gosh, we've been hanging out for, like, eight hours!”

“No joke. You know, I probably ought to send you back to Jean before she starts to worry I'm up to something with her roomie.”

There it was. An unspoken threat to send her back to her miserable life, and a veiled reference to what she'd probably had on her mind since I started rubbing her back. That hadn't been why I'd done it, any more than Ramona had sexual inclinations towards me in rubbing mine. But I had done it.

Emotions warred on Andi's shy face for a moment. In the end, they actuated in exactly the way I'd thought they would. “Up to something? Something like what...?” A knowing giggle. She couldn't *say* those things, but she could giggle about them.

“Nothing you're old enough to hear about,” I quipped. Keeping it light was key. I wasn't going to let her get hurt. Just some harmless fun.

“I turned eighteen in January!” she protested with a laugh, shoving my chest playfully. Her hand lingered a bit.

“I tell you what, Andi, when you decide you’re ready to put yourself back out there, you are going to absolutely destroy the men of Lakeview.”

I hadn’t phrased it well, but she took on a sly smile. “Destroy? How do you mean?”

“I mean...” I shook my head, avoided looking at her. It wasn’t easy with her sitting facing me, so close our knees were touching. “I’m sorry. I’m not supposed to notice, but you are seriously, seriously attractive.”

If she’d wanted to smile any bigger, she’d need a second mouth. “Really?”

“I’m ‘really’ not supposed to notice,” I stressed. “Sucks to be the only guy on campus who’s not allowed to flirt with you.”

“Are you really not allowed? Like, why not? What if you really like someone?” She blushed, but smiled no less brightly. “I don’t mean me or anything. But, you know. Like Casey or Leigh or somebody.”

Apt choices; I could have almost certainly fucked either of those two if I knocked on their door and said hi. No time for that now. In the reflection of my closet mirror I could see it was 12:03. Right now, Vickie and whoever she was on duty with would be counting out the register at the center desk, closing down the computer lab.

“It’s really a no exceptions kind of thing. Wouldn’t want some RA using his ‘phenomenal cosmic power’ in their itty bitty living space to take advantage of somebody.”

The *Aladdin* quote landed. Instead of pondering the murky ethics of a petty dictator RA bullying someone into sexual favors, she giggled at my feeble imitation of the inimitable. “OK, but like, what if the resident said they were all right with it?”

“Not sure that’d matter much when it got to the RA’s boss, unfortunately.”

Andi seized my hands earnestly. “What if the resident promised they would never, ever tell anyone? What if she was really, really

good at keeping secrets?” Like that, the hypothetical of it was over. It was an offer. A request, even.

“Andi, I... Wow. Don’t get me wrong. I want to. I do. I’m hating myself for saying anything other than ‘well OK then sounds good to me.’”

“You could. I promise. It would be just between us. Hand to god.”

“I believe you. I do. But still, that’s not the main reason it wouldn’t be right. You’re hurting, and you’re lonely. I couldn’t take advantage of that.”

“But—”

“Andi, come on. You made it pretty clear you’re looking for a boyfriend, and I can’t be that, even if I were looking for a relationship, which to be totally honest, I’m not.”

“Well sure, but—”

12:07. Probably on their way down to the loading dock by now; counting out the drawer didn’t take long.

“Don’t get me wrong. You’re beautiful, you’re sweet, you’re all around great. But for now, why don’t we put a bookmark in whatever we’re both feeling and starting tomorrow, I’ll make it my mission to help you find yourself a guy who deserves you.”

“What if I already found one?”

I gave her a rueful shake of the head. “See? There’s that sweetness. But I’m serious. We’ve had an amazing time tonight, but when the light of day returns and I’m keeping my promise to be your wingman, we’re both going to hate me if we do anything tonight.”

“No. I could never hate you.” We were already touching, but somehow she scooted even closer. “Hear me out, OK? I’m tired of feeling lonely, and ugly, and sad. Tonight is the first time since I came here that I was actually happy I did. I don’t want to spend another night crying into my pillow while Jean yells at me to keep it quiet. I like you. You said you think I’m, you know, um, attractive. Pretty.”

“I did say that, I suppose. Still...”

“I’m not asking you to be my boyfriend. I don’t wanna get you in trouble or anything. I promise, I won’t say a word. And I’ll be

really good to you! I'd do whatever you want, I don't care. I just want to be with somebody who makes me feel good about myself. There's nothing to feel bad about."

I noticed it was 12:10, and felt bad about noticing. They'd be typing up the rounds log to summarize the night's activity, so the primary on duty could finish it up after midnight rounds. All I had to do was wait for the sound of that heavy RA duty key ring jingling down the hall, and I could kick Andi out right in time for Savannah to wonder what Vickie had promised not to tell her about. Remind her that I could, if and when I chose, and then shut my door in her beautiful face. That was all. A few more minutes.

"You really make it hard to say no, you know."

She grinned. "So say yes. Pleeeeease? I'll be so good to you, and so quiet."

This was not the plan. I could still say no. I could. I unquestionably should. I *had* to. *Fuck!* Fucking *fuck*. FUCK. "I can't, Andi. I'm sorry. But I can't. You can tell me it wouldn't be taking advantage until you're blue in the face, but I'd know better. I'm sorry. So very, very sorry."

FUCK! Fucking ethics, fucking Savannah, fucking Ramona, fucking hot sweet redheads begging me to let them do anything I wanted! FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU—

"Let me suck your cock, at least? Please? I, um, really, really like giving blowjobs. Pretty pretty please?"

Apparently I was a sucker for please's.

For the first time in my life – maybe in recorded history – a woman thanked a man for consenting to receive a blowjob. Once I gave her that slightest nod, she wasted no time at all tearing into my underpants. Andi wasn't content to simply unzip and get to work; she took my shorts all the way off, tossed them across the room and pounced on my cock with so much enthusiasm it launched her glasses down to the very tip of her nose, barely hanging on. I could actually feel the frames brushing against my slick shaft as she bobbed.

Her eyes locked on mine over those rims, monitoring for my satisfaction. No different than when we'd been merely conversing,

they were an easy read. They were saying that she saw this as an audition. If she sucked my cock skillfully enough, freely enough, worshipfully enough, maybe I would change my mind. There was no going back now. You couldn't tell a girl in the middle of pouring out her heart along with her saliva onto your cock that you'd really meant it about not being available for a relationship. Now, there was nothing left to do but give the girl a good night and then make good on my word later.

She was hella enthused about sucking the cum out of me. Frankly, I wasn't worried about landing her a new beau.

I unloaded in her mouth right as my alarm clock ticked 12:16. Not impressive staying power, but it would be a rare woman who minded a blowjob running short. Fruits of skipping my evening jerkoff and instead spending hours and hours adjacent to a dress plainly disinterested in covering the ass of its wearer. She might not be the chestiest Hottie on Higgins 3, but man, DAT ass, as the Delta Alpha Theta girls happily advertised on their infamous sweatpants. She seemed surprised somehow, dribbling my spunk out of the corner of her mouth down onto her dress.

The center desk was closed. Vickie and the other secondary would be starting rounds at Higgins Basement any moment now. Some people hurried through the last set of rounds to get to bed. Some people dawdled, letting their tiredness get to them. I'd been on rounds with Vickie several times, enough to know she was the second sort. Vickie, who thought she was doing me a favor by not telling my business to Savannah. Who had probably told her within minutes of walking away from my door.

"Can I return the favor?" I tried to sound eager, but not too eager. Not that I wasn't eager. I was. Ordinarily, though, I liked to take my time with such intimate things. Bestow due gratitude, and if I liked the girl, maybe cuddle a bit before diving back in. Make a night of it, not a quick sweaty half hour. Tonight, though, there was no such time.

"You mean, you want to...?" She glanced anxiously at her crotch. "Or, I mean, obviously you don't *want* to, but like, you mean, do *I* want you to...?"

“I want to,” I assured her. Good lord, this girl. I’d have to be very careful who I delivered her to.

“Oh. I mean, yeah. That would be... You don’t have to, you know. I didn’t just do, you know, *that*, to get you to... *that*.”

“I’m not paying a debt, Andi.” It was tricky displaying patience. “I really want to. If you don’t want me to, that’s fine, but don’t be coy on my account.”

“Oh. Sorry, my boyfriend – my *ex* -boyfriend – always thought that was gross. He said it was something only lesbos did.”

I waggled my shaft in the air. It was already regaining steam. “Do I look like a lesbian?”

She giggled, amused by the attempt at levity, but also pleased to see I still had some fight in me. “Oh. Wow. You’re already... wow. You know, um, if you wanted, we could...” She took a deep breath. Licked her lips. There was still cum clinging to them, a glistening sheen. “We could, you know... do it. *It*, I mean.” Another deep breath. “Sex. You could have sex with me, if you want. I want you to, that is. Like, I’ve kind of wanted you to all night, but I felt like it would be too slutty to say it.”

12:20.

I couldn’t. The blowjob was bad enough, but that was too much. Trying not to look over at my desk where the heap of Bob’s condoms filled every empty space, I lied in the hopes she only had eyes for me. “I’m sorry, but I don’t have any protection, unfortunately.”

“That’s OK. I have an IUD. My boyfriend – ugh, I mean my *ex* – he liked to do it to me. Like, a lot.” *To* her? “So my sister took me. It hurt a little, but then I didn’t have to worry, so that was good. Anyway, yeah, if you want to just come in me, you can. It’s cool beans by me.”

The more she talked, the more fucked up she sounded, and weirdly, the more I thought that girlfriend Andi didn’t sound so bad. Clearly not brain thoughts, though. No, those sentiments bore the fingerprint of another organ entirely.

Still, I believed her. I was paranoid about such things usually, sometimes to the point of offending my partner. When Marisa told me how many people she’d been with, I’d actually taken some

convincing to add my name to the list. Andi, though, was not capable of straight-faced lying to me, nor perpetrating a ruse of this length and magnitude in some bizarre scheme to get pregnant off of me. She wanted sex.

Or, to put it in her terms, she wanted to Do It, and if I felt like coming in her, ya know, cool beans. Why the hell did a cool beans fuck sound so goddamn appealing right then? Eyes darting, looking for any excuse to say no, they instead found their answer to that question in the pile of casually abandoned tops from last night's program piled up on my desk chair.

“OK.”

“Yeah?” she brightened, though only for a moment. “Do you want me to go change into something, you know, cuter? My underwear is really bleh today. I wasn't figuring anybody would see it, so... But yeah, I'd be happy to. Oh, I could put on my Higgins Hotties shirt!”

12:22.

“I was hoping you wouldn't be wearing anything much longer, actually.”

Andi giggled almost manically, flushed with pleasure. “OK. Do you, um, want me to... get naked? For you? I mean of course for you, who else, duh. But I mean, I'll take my dress off, if you want. And, um, the rest. Just don't get mad if you don't like it...?”

“I promise, nothing you could do right now would make me mad.” Man, if I ever saw that ex of hers, he was going to get one hell of a firm escort out of our community. “I can't wait.”

“Oh! Sorry, right, I didn't mean to make you impatient!” She hopped up. I didn't bother telling her that's not what I'd meant. Her hands trembling with excitement, she struggled to get the buttons undone down the front of her. Andi seemed anxious that I wasn't smiling, but really, I was simply transfixed. After a moment, she grunted in frustration and simply hauled the thing off over her head.

I learned two things at that moment. One, that Andi had been right about her underwear. Plain gray, a little baggy, and worse, on a body that would be easy to flatter with a tighter fit. Two, as she

hastily arched her back to unclasp her bra, I learned that I had been wrong about her breasts. Those weren't breasts at all. They were *tits* .

"What...?" she asked as my head tilted. When had I stood up? When had I crossed the room toward her?

"How were you hiding *those* ...?" I shook my head in disbelief. I wasn't a boob man, strictly speaking, but I suppose I liked big boobs as much as the average guy. Andi's weren't big, per se, but they were *perfect* . Round, soft, smooth, barely jiggling tits. Tits like they were fresh off the assembly line at the perfect tit factory.

"Oh, *Spencer!* "

Huh. I hadn't realized I was moving until suddenly I felt a tight, wet warmth wrapped around my cock. I'd spun her around, evidently so I had the luxury of holding her upright by those mouth-watering handholds of hers. Her face slumped against the wall, or the closet or door or wherever I'd driven her. Her glasses *clacked* against the surface, bending and nearly falling off. Then I fucked her harder, as hard as I felt like it because she'd told me I could, and they dropped to the floor.

I was fresh off of an orgasm, so I was primed to take my time about it. To enjoy myself until I finished Doing It To her and Cool Beans jizzed in her if I wanted to. Andi, on the other hand, seemed to have been bottling up a lot of her sexual energy of late, because in less than a minute I was the only thing holding her up as she shuddered, gasped, and clawed at the dozens of layers of paint on the cinder block walls as she almost immediately began to climax.

"I'm coming!" she squeaked.

I gave her ass a slap. What? Since when was I the kind of guy who smacked a girl's ass while I plowed her from behind? Since when *any* of this? "Don't stop, Andi. Let yourself go. I've got you now. I've got you."

"Oh gosh oh gosh oh gawwwwwsh !" She really did follow orders. She was a slender thing, but suddenly most of that slender body was entirely being held up by yours truly as she thrashed.

"Come for me, Andi."

"I'm coming!"

Another slap. “Don’t stop. You’re doing so good. Don’t stop now. Don’t ever stop.” Had I *ever* been this talkative during sex *this* intense? It was like all the pent-up horniness I’d been stuffing down these past weeks was erupting out of me all at once in all manner of unpredictable outlets.

Andi whimpered. I could feel her dribbling around my shaft. I’d never felt a pussy this wet before. It was like fucking a stick of butter. Except the stick of butter had incredible tits and said things like “if you want to come in me , cool beans.”

Or, more precisely, it was saying, “I’m coming! Coming, coming, coming, coming, coming...!”

On a typical night, rounds took about twenty minutes from start to finish. On a Friday night, Higgins was less populated but the portion of that population present was more prone to sociable behavior. Call it an average of plus one minute per floor. Vickie was prone to chitchat, so double the increase. With a ground and basement floor before the numbers started, I was on the fifth floor of six, room 310, my room, being roughly halfway down that floor, so call it 4.5 out of 6 floors. Thirty-two minutes, times 75% of the path to be walked, plus two minutes for the Korean kid who always needed to be asked to leave the computer lab by the center desk, and...

The door swung open.

We were right next to it, I realized, Andi’s soft pretty face smushed sideways against the wall, my hands pinned against it by her tits right by the light switch.

“Hey, Spencer, I– *WHOA!!!* ”

Only it wasn’t Vickie. It was Savannah.

“What are you doing?!” I shrieked.

“She said come in!”

“She said she’s com- *ing* !”

“Oh gawsh and I still am! Oh gosh oh gosh oh gosh...”

A voice from further down the hall just reached my ears over the slicky wet sounds of me fucking Andi. “Who’s coming...?” Apparently my cock had decided I wasn’t going to stop simply because there was an audience.

“Shut the door!”

Savannah shut it. In her panic, she shut herself inside.

Savannah gaped.

Andi came.

Me? I was an overachiever. I managed both.

Then I stumbled back, and... oops. “Sorry, Savannah.”

Chapter Ten: The Log

Savannah knocked. Loudly, for going on 1 AM in a building where anything percussive got two echoes minimum. She even added a *very* distinct, “May I come in, Spencer?”

Rather than give her the anxiety of another entry like her last one, I simply opened the door for her myself. “Of course.”

In spite of herself, Savannah glanced around the room as if I might have another resident hiding naked under the bed or something. “Thanks. I... Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

This time, Savannah sat down on the chair – I’d moved the pile of my residents’ discarded shirts into my closet – and let me have the bed. Probably worried about what she might sit in, though I knew full well all of my cum had gone directly into Andi, who had hurried directly back to her room with her dress still half-unbuttoned. Cool beans. Savannah had stood a better chance of stepping in it out there in the hall than sitting on it in here.

“So. You said you wanted to talk. So...” Savannah held out her hands invitingly, but even so couldn’t make eye contact.

“Sure. Yeah. So I guess first, you deserve an apology.” This stung. I hadn’t even apologized yet, but simply acknowledging the need was a bitter pill. I’d had ten minutes since Andi ran out half-dressed and Savannah let me stammer out a request to allow me to explain. Vickie’s promise “not to tell Savannah” about my simply being in a room with Andi – before there was even anything untoward happening! – still rang in my ears, though. The idea that Savannah should have a say in my affairs because we kissed once...!

I took a slow breath. The right to indignation had been forfeited somewhere between pleading blowjobs and cool beans fucking.

“You mean for inviting me in to see you doing one of your girls? Or for *coming on me*?” Her teeth clenched on that one.

All right, sure, she really did deserve to be pissed over that. I'd been on the cusp when she came in. Then when Andi started squirming and spasming on my cock, and one of the hottest women I'd ever seen stood staring, slack-jawed, at where it was all happening... I pulled out right in time to spray Savannah all across her torso. And a bit on her neck. And chin. Her cheek.

"Both. Very both. I'm really sorry. I didn't mean for any of that to happen. Not what happened with Andi—"

"Is that the girl...?"

"Yeah. And certainly not for you to come in and... Yeah. All of it. I'm really, really sorry."

Savannah plucked at her shirt fretfully. My shirt. I couldn't very well let her finish rounds walking around spattered in cum. Since I couldn't hand out one of my resident's shirts, I'd offered her the first shirt I saw in my drawer. Unfortunately, that had been one of the leftover Higgins Hotties shirts. I tried not to summon the image of Savannah's incredible body in that skimpy joke of a half-shirt. She'd refused it before I'd realized how insensitive it was to offer it, but only after she was gone did I wonder if it was because of that scar on her abdomen and not because it was objectively slutty.

"Thank you for apologizing," she said simply. "I know you didn't mean to, erm..."

"Right," I finished for her. Better than finishing *on* her. "And you can keep the shirt. Or burn it, whatever."

"I'll get it back to you once I get it through the laundry."

"Oh. Well, um, thanks. That's really nice of—"

"Spencer, how many of your residents have you slept with?" Savannah blurted. She looked like she'd even surprised herself.

"What? None! I mean, just the one, tonight. And I didn't even—"

"One? Seriously? Because there's that girl Quinn, who said you did. The other girl from that fight in the shower, the one Vickie said she saw you with. And now Randi—"

"Andi."

"Whatever! Look, Spencer, that's not OK! These girls aren't here for you to... use! They're your residents!"

“I know!” I hugged my knees to my chest self-consciously. “Like I was trying to say, I didn’t *mean* to—”

“Didn’t mean to?!” She threw her hands in the air. “Explain to me how you wind up *inside* a woman without ‘meaning to!’”

“She was homesick!” God, that sounded pathetic, even to me. “And her boyfriend just broke up with her. I was trying to comfort her. Be nice, you know? But she was needy and clingy and she was low-key hitting on me all night and... and...” I couldn’t add what my brief encounter with Vickie had done to my headspace. It wasn’t fair to blame Savannah for it. It wasn’t even rational. “It wasn’t my plan. I didn’t invite her in here intending for that to happen. It just... happened.”

“We’ve worked together for a month, Spencer. A month. Do you know how many men I’ve worked with where I saw their erect penis, *twice*, in the first month?!”

“Less than half, probably.”

For a ghost of a second, a smile threatened at the corners of her lips. “None! None but you. Maybe it’s hard – difficult, I mean, not ‘hard!’ – oh god. Maybe it’s *difficult* working here with a bunch of cute girls. But you have got to get your shit together! I didn’t say anything to Vickie, but she’s got to have some questions about why I slammed your door in her face, to say nothing of why I finished rounds in one of your t-shirts, blushing so hard it felt like my face was on fire.”

“I’ll talk to her, too.” I’d already considered the necessity of that. “And you’re right. I... I hadn’t counted on, um...”

“On what?”

How to say it? Whatever. It was late, and I’d spent the past eight hours with the world’s most available hot girl. “On how, I guess... *possible*, any of this would be?”

“Possible? What does that mean?” she asked suspiciously.

I could tell she was worried I was referring to how possible fulfilling my dreams of banging a bunch of random hot girls was, so I went on quickly. “Like, that girls like these would be this... willing, I guess?”

Her suspicion gave way. “Spencer... You’re a good-looking guy. Call me superficial if you want, but I wouldn’t have kissed you otherwise. It’s only natural some of these girls, fresh out of high school, would be attracted to someone like you.”

“No – I’m not being humble.” Not much, at least. “I’m saying, I didn’t think a floor of girls would be so...” Ugh, to say it. Why was it so hard to be frank in front of this unbelievably gorgeous woman? Oh right, because that. “I didn’t think they’d all be so fucking *horny* all the time!” I managed at last.

To my surprise, the first signs of real mirth touched her features then. “Seriously? You... You didn’t think a group of three dozen teenage girls, all living next door or around the corner from a single hot guy they have all to themselves, would carry a little sexual energy with them?”

“Well... no. Don’t laugh, dammit. I was an RA in Rowland for two years and never once did one of my guys try to sleep with me.”

That only made her laugh harder. Harder than was merited, certainly. It was infectious, though, and before I knew it she had me going to, insisting between breaths that it was anything but funny. It didn’t last long, but it brought some much-needed levity to the room.

“Look,” she said finally, when she could speak evenly again, “if you’re going to rely on the restraint of these girls to keep you on the moral high ground, you should go ahead and sign away your soul now.”

“You sound like Janis.”

She wrinkled her nose in distaste. “Don’t ever say that. But I’m being serious! These girls will hook up with you because you’re cute, because you’re conveniently located, because they want to show off, because they’re throwing a party this weekend and they want to make sure you don’t bust them. They’re freshmen college girls – not a demographic known for sexual restraint. Which is why *you* have to do better. Set some boundaries, and defend them for crying out loud!”

Savannah stood up and jabbed me in the chest authoritatively. “This is the last time I want to see... *that* . Understand? For tonight...”

I'll believe you that she wanted it. She sure, ahem, sounded like she was having a good time."

That was an understatement. I couldn't remember ever making a girl come as hard as I had Andi.

"But if Ramona asks? Or if I hear a whisper of it happening again? I'm telling everything I saw. I... I want us to be friends, Spencer. But I don't know if I can be friends with someone who's..."

Seducing. Whoring. Preying ?

"Who does things like this," she finished, possibly meaning any or all of those.

"OK," was all I said.

Savannah showed herself to the door. "Sorry for the stern talking-to, I guess. I'll, um, get you your shirt back soon."

I glanced at where her cum-stained shirt hung off one peg of my headboard. "Same."

Follow-up with Andi was a good deal less dramatic. I stopped by 304 the next morning, asked Jean to give us the room for a moment. She said she needed to take a shower anyway. She gestured for me to turn around; before I realized what I actually should have done was leave the room, the thoroughly pierced raven-haired girl was already changing out of her skimpy PJs and into a skimpier towel, then was on her way.

As for Andi, I had my whole spiel ready, and didn't give her a chance to sneak a word in edgewise. I went over how she had been great, how my job didn't let me do that whether I wanted to or not, how I meant what I'd said about helping her find a wonderful guy. I apparently managed to avoid the land mine of making it sound like a rejection, mistake, or regret, and was rewarded by her tears being kept to a minimum. I promised to stop by soon with some opportunities for her to meet people. I offered a hug. She tried to kiss me, too, but I think my refusal cemented it for her that we were done. I sure hoped so. Jean returned right as we were wrapping up. Her towel hit the floor the moment my back was turned. She didn't seem to care when I made my escape, opening the door for any who might care to peep on her while she was still naked.

Goth girls. Sheesh.

As for Operation: Cover Your Ass, I called Vickie and asked if we could meet up, talk.

“Oh? About what?” she said far too innocently.

“You know damn well what.”

“You know, I’m actually pretty busy this weekend. Maybe next—”

“Please, Vickie. I can be down there in two minutes. Or whenever’s good for you. Whatever you know, whatever you think you know... Let me explain, and don’t say anything to anyone until we talk. Please?”

She conceded. Apparently she actually was busy, because she said the earliest she’d have time would be Sunday night. As it so happened, we were on duty together. Given her well-deserved reputation as a gossip, I didn’t like letting it go that long, but there was nothing else I could do.

Everything else felt like a holding pattern until then. With Savannah’s upbraiding still echoing in my ears, I was on my best behavior around Higgins 3. Which, frankly, only made the multitudes of temptation all the more obvious. These past weeks, I’d regarded it all as distractions, happenstance. Now I couldn’t help but wonder how much of it was happening as part of a series of individual plans. Was Savannah right, and I was simply living with a bunch of horny teenage girls who were crushing on the first cute college guy they’d met? It sounded crazy, but it was a lot more straightforward of an explanation than Bob and Ramona conspiring to get me laid.

Were they really hitting on me and not just peacocking? Could women peacock? I didn’t know the answer to either question, but it was the first that occupied my thoughts.

So I did what anyone in my situation would do: I started a log.

Friday evening: Andi, it began. That’s as much as I wrote. I wasn’t going to forget the details any time soon.

Saturday 9:45 AM: Jean undresses with me in the room (x2) read the second entry.

Saturday 10:00 AM: Went to morning routine. Found Amy brushing teeth in bra and boxers. “Boxers” was a semantic issue,

too. My boxers fit like thin, breezy athletic shorts. Amy's had been painted onto that well-shaped rear, and short enough to show off her butt cleavage. It seemed to be the only kind Target sold, considering how many of my girls wore the exact same style.

Saturday 11:15 AM: Dawn stopped by (no knock) to invite me to lunch. "Joked" she hoped would lure Kyu-Ri. Wouldn't that roommate conflict be fun when it inevitably exploded, the horny lesbian trying to find a way into her busty international student roommate's panties.

Saturday 2:00 PM: Went to the rec center to work out. Saw Nikki. We didn't speak, but she took a spot on the treadmill right in front of mine. Jogged for a solid half hour in white leggings. And a thong, I nearly added, but it felt crass. There was no hiding a black thong under white leggings, though.

Saturday 3:45 PM: Noise complaint from Angel. Went to 313 to ask them to turn it down. Sydney (eventually) answered the door in her HH shirt and shorts, drawstring untied, physically holding them up. Noticed Peyton in bed, blushing under sheets. I definitely caught them fucking. Was I reading too much into the "anything else we can do for you" after she lowered the volume? Or not enough?

Saturday 6:30: Eating alone at Penderdast. Casey & 4 others asked if they could eat with me. Table only seats 4. Casey tried to sit in my lap. She had probably been teasing. Once I dodged, they all giggled hysterically. She compromised and scooted my hip aside, leaving us sitting one ass cheek apiece to our seat.

All right, I would grant Savannah this: I definitely could fuck Casey. If I did wind up getting fired, tapping that was going to be my final act on my way out the door.

I went out on a bar crawl with a couple guys from one of my classes Saturday evening. When we'd set it up, I'd figured it would be good to make some new guy friends, inject a little testosterone into the quagmire of estrogen my life had become of late. They turned out to be a little more dude-bro than I cared for. I toughed it out, but it wasn't a match. Eventually, mildly tired and more than mildly buzzed, back to Higgins 3.

Sunday 12:30 AM: Came home to find Carmen and Janis breaking up a party in 302. Kendall and Georgia were being combative so I stepped in. Both girls quickly dropped their attitudes and hugged me. Helped staff break up party , had a talk with K&G. After , they followed me back to my room and we watched a movie. Fell asleep on either side of me. They would have stayed there all night if I hadn't woke up to the sound of Janis passive aggressively whistling through the 2 AM rounds. Both girls had fallen asleep with a hand on my chest.

Sunday 10:00 AM: Extended conversation with Danielle during shower about how weird it is to be standing three feet away from a naked person of the opposite sex having a conversation.

Danielle was tall enough we could even make eye contact over the stalls, if we went up on tiptoes. Her suggestion.

Sunday 2:00 PM: Andi stopped by, promised she could be discreet if I wanted to do it again. She also apologized for not offering me a blowjob first, and said she would be happy to open with one again next time, if I wanted. I reminded her how close I was to losing my job. She didn't seem as worried about that as I might have liked. Maybe she thought if I did, it would do away with all my excuses. To be honest, if I did get fired, I might stop by and let her suck the Casey off of me on my way out to the parking lot.

Sunday 4:45 PM: Lex got locked out of her room (Jo went home for the weekend). Got key from front desk; while letting her in asked how they're getting along. Lex noticed me noticing hitachi on her desk. Laughed, said "nice having the room to herself." And here I'd thought it was the girl who'd insisted on Tits Out time I'd have to worry about being too unrestrained about her sexual appetites.

Sunday 8:00 PM: On way to center desk, heard music in the lounge. Found Terri doing lewd dance in lewd outfit. Said it was a TikTok trend. She asked me to record so she and Toni could do it together. Declined (had to get to work). I don't even like the word "lewd." It's such a slut-shamey word, it should barely exist. But that outfit. That dance! "Lewd" was the only name for it.

Though the top, at least, still probably covered more than the shirt I'd approved for her.

"Dang, Spencer. You're actually kind of a gigantic slut, huh?"

Vickie, as it turned out, did not share my sentiments about slut-shaming. At least not when it came to men. "I don't mean to be," I answered sheepishly, adding, "and keep your voice down. We're at the center desk, for crying out loud."

She cracked the tab on her can of diet root beer. She had a back-up, I noticed. Had the eggheads at A&W made some kind of progress on this front? If so, why hadn't I been notified? "So? Who's stopping by the center desk at ten o'clock on a Sunday? Chill."

Vickie had a point, but I wasn't in the mood to concede it. "I could lose my job, you know. Which means losing my room and board – i.e. homeless and starving. You get me?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Vickie snorted. "So now what? You said you didn't want me to tell anybody. I didn't. Good thing, too. When I saw Savannah leave your room with a fresh t-shirt, I figured... Actually, I didn't know what to figure except she'd taken her shirt off in your room, which draws all kinds of the wrong conclusions. Say, why *did* she change, anyway?"

I'd already told her about Quinn (vaguely) and Andi (almost as vaguely). With a sheepish grimace, I mumbled what had happened to Savannah's shirt moments after she barged in.

"NO FUCKING WAY." Vickie's jaw dropped, and in the blink of an eye she was in a full-blown giggle fit. "Oh my god. You fucking *came* on Savannah Grey!"

"Shhhh! Would you keep it down?! Good god, Vickie, if I wanted everyone to know, I wouldn't have given her a change of clothes, for crying out loud!" I grumbled. It did nothing to abate her delighted laughter. It only abated thanks to the intervention of that root beer can.

She was so excited that she began talking before the liquid left her mouth. "No. No way. *Everyone* should know this. She thought she had you on the hook so hard, and then *BAM*, here comes tasty homesick girl, and Savannah's your fucking jizz rag! Oh my god in Valhalla, that's too fucking good!"

“Wait, wait, wait. What do you mean, she thought she had me on the hook? You said something like that the other night. Did she actually say something, or are you just assuming I’m her bitch or something?”

“First off, every guy is a bitch for Savannah Grey . Second off, I thought you called me into this powwow because you *didn’t* want me to spread tales?”

“Make an exception.”

Vickie snickered. “Fine, fine. No, she didn’t say it. Not in those words. But duh, brah, obviously she wants your hog or she wouldn’t have hooked up with you while she was on a break. She’s not a flirt, and she’s not a slut. Ergo, stands to reason, she made out with you because she likes you. You think just because her beef is back in the picture that she doesn’t still like you?”

“If she’s got a thing for me, she has a funny way of showing it, blowing me off completely.”

Vickie backhanded me, semi-gently, on the bicep. “You are such a dude, dude. Savannah’s pissed because she thought she had this hot new upstairs guy, but douchey old long distance guy is being sweeter than she knows how to rebuff. If she shuts him down, she’d compromise her self-image as a sweetheart, but if she doesn’t listen to her girl parts she’s betraying her self-image as a romantic. Tale as old as time, Buzz.”

I was still processing her reasoning for a moment. I suppose it made sense, albeit rather cynically. I was guilty of tryharding at playing Mr. Nice Guy myself sometimes for pretty much the same reason. I wondered then how much of Vickie’s game was fueled by having an ear for gossip, and how much was an instinct for psychoanalysis.

As she polished off her first can, I caught all the way up.

“Buzz...?”

“Yeah. You know, Lightyear...?”

I shook my head.

“Because you and your pal Woody are Andi’s favorite new toys? Come on, man, you’re making me look dull out here.”

“How was I supposed to get from ‘Buzz’ to there...?”

“Look, man, forget Savannah. Maybe she’ll still be hot for you whenever she’s found a guilt-free way to rejoin our noble bachelorette ranks. And by the way, ‘Price?’ Ugh. But as it stands, you’re nailing everything with at least one tit and a willing hole up on Higgins 3. Which, to my mind, is what you ought to be really concerned about.”

“Believe me, I am.” I let out a sigh, slumping down in Marcus’s rickety office chair. A girl from Vickie’s floor happened by then to check her mailbox. Vickie pivoted seamlessly into chitchat with her resident, and the moment she was out of earshot, whirled back to me.

“You are? Because it sounds like you’re letting your so-called Hotties – stay classy, by the way – run roughshod over you. You’re the boss boy, Spence! But these girls got your number.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” I grumbled.

Apparently those seven monosyllabic words were enough to spark a new level of curiosity in Vickie. Enough that soon, I found myself signing into my cloud and bringing up my log. Vickie read along, pausing for me to elaborate where appropriate.

“This is real...?” she asked, stupefied, when I was done. “Like, you’re not making this up.”

“It’s real.”

“Spencer, that’s... This is...” She shook her head until her incredulity lifted her to her feet, hands thrown in the air. “That’s *insane*. That’s what that is. I’m not calling you a liar or anything, but that?” She jabbed a finger at the monitor on the line about Kendall and Georgia. “That’s mother fucking *nuts*.”

“You weren’t this taken aback when I told you about Quinn, Leigh and Andi,” I pointed out.

“First off, I was being nice. Second, that’s straightforward shit compared to this. One girl who oopsed her way into a hot naked guy’s bed, one girl who found out about it and wanted to pull rank, and an insecure girl on the rebound. Those made sense. But all this...? That’s really just from the past two days?”

“Yeah, well... Savannah said they’re just teenage girls. And a few twenty-somethings. They’ve got hormones.”

“Savannah wouldn’t know horny teenage girls if they sat on her hot stupid face. I know, and I’m telling you, normal girls don’t act like that. Is this new? Like, maybe your girl Andi was talking you up around the floor and...?”

She read my rejection of her theory and let me respond. “No. This is pretty much how it’s been.” I gave a few more examples. The girls changing into their slutty t-shirts with me in the lounge, Dana’s mom flirting with me, even the weird no boys allowed coincidence on the roommate agreements. A hundred little moments of cracked doors and whispered comments and straying gazes and attempted chants.

“Fuck me.” She made a wry face. “Since it’s you, I should point out I don’t mean that literally. But man. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah... This is...”

“This is what? You know something?”

Suddenly Vickie was crouching between my knees. After all her shouting and carrying on, now her voice was low, intimate. Clandestine. “I know people, Spencer. And this isn’t like people. Have you considered at any point over the past month that there’s something really weird going on, and you’re at the center of it?”

I frowned. “I mean, it’s unusual, sure, but... what do you mean, exactly? Weird how?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. But look at it. There you are. A good-looking guy, yeah, but so what. Now correct me if I’m wrong, but what I heard was that this whole guy RA on a girls floor was some kind of large-scale typo?”

I explained what Ramona had told me, a housing officer who’d used shorthand in a way that made the roster look coed when it was anything but. What very little I’d learned from Bob. It sounded pretty ridiculous when I said it out loud, and I remembered then thinking the same when Ramona first explained it. I’d simply gotten used to it.

“Yeah, that’s about what I heard.”

“You sound like you don’t believe it, though,” I said cautiously. Where was she going with this?

“I’m not saying anything. Only that that’s a huge coincidence, if it’s true, to explain – partially – another huge coincidence. For that to be true, you’d have to have a dozen or more girls with non-gendered names–”

“Or nicknames. Like Kendall and Georgia were Kenny and George on my roster.”

“Bleh, of course they were. So yeah, you’d need that. And they’d all have to be smoking hot–”

“Not *all* of them were hot.” She arched an eyebrow up at me. “OK, all but a few. Although, um, I guess those few are all gone now.”

“Spencer, you’re missing the forest for the trees, babe. My point is, what are the odds that out of the, say, hundred hottest freshmen girls at Lakeview, a third of them wound up on *your* floor? You, a penis-possessing boy person.”

“You know, I actually ran the math at one point. It’s meaningless, kind of, since you can’t mathematically rate attractiveness–”

“Try me. You eight, me seven but I can go full nine if I want it.”

“–but if I recall, the odds were something in like a billionth of a percent, factoring in available housing options, the size of the incoming freshman class, and the best I could do for an X factor, for my being the guy RA of the girl floor.”

“A billionth of a percent. Sounds high.”

“People win the lottery every day, Vickie. Unlikely things happen sometimes.”

She chuckled, but still spoke in that same conspiratorial half-whisper. “Or, you’re a guinea pig in some kind of weird hottie zoo, and someone’s testing how much booty can be tossed in your lap before you break.”

“I broke on move-in day, so that theory’s gone.”

“Or whatever!” she hissed. “Don’t be so literal. My point is, what if there’s something... deeper. Something making this happen. I don’t have a why, yet, but everything in my gut tells me that if half of the stuff I’ve heard and seen is true, there’s more to it than hormones and typos.”

“If you’re trying to make a big conspiracy out of this, though,” I went on, “you’re forgetting a pretty important counterpoint. Namely, the Higgins staff. Say what you want about Janis, but she’s pretty, and you’re pretty, and Carmen, and Vanessa, and obviously Savannah...”

“Why ‘obviously’ Savannah?”

With the view I had down Vickie’s neckline in her crouching position, it was hard to say in the moment, but I went on with my broader point anyway. “The staff here, they fit the same profile, and I can’t imagine the powers that be would or could impose hiring decisions to make sure every woman I routinely interact with in Higgins is beautiful.”

“You think I’m beautiful?” She grinned, but impishly.

“I think you’re making something out of nothing. Yeah, the math on working with five attractive female RAs is better than living with thirty, but there’s also Ramona. Another looker, if we’re being honest. But she’s also on board with everything that’s happening. If this is some kind of weird experiment to see what happens to a normal guy immersed in a cauldron of hormones, Ramona would have to be in on it. Heck, I made out with Savannah, so her too, probably. Maybe you’re in on it, too, for all I know.”

I was kidding, and I’d thought it obvious that I was kidding, but she still looked very serious. “Who says I’m not?”

“What? Come on, I’m making a point. Don’t...”

Vickie’s hands settled on my thighs. “Don’t what?”

“Don’t *that* .”

She rubbed up and down them, inching closer towards the middle. “But what if I want to? I’m a young, horny, hormonal girl, alone with the inimitably sexy Spencer, RA to the stars.”

“Vickie, you can’t—”

Then she vaulted into my lap. She landed with her pelvis pressed firmly on mine, legs hooked over the arms of Marcus’s fragile office chair. “I can. Come on, you have to have noticed me noticing you. And Vickie? Short for Victor, maybe, right? Maybe I’m just another one of your Hotties.”

“You’re making me really uncomfortable.”

“So lets take our pants off. Get comfortable.” She pressed herself against me, whispered in my ear. “You won’t believe how comfortable I could make it feel, Spencer. It won’t ever want to leave.”

I didn’t have a rebuttal for that.

“Tell me you want me more than Savannah, and I’ll rock your fucking world, right now,” she went on, her breath hot and wet against my ear. “Tell me she’s nothing, that you want *me*, and I’ll get back on my knees and suck ten years off your life right through that legendary cock of yours. Right here, right now, at the center desk. Nobody will even have to know. They’ll come up to say they’re locked out, or they need change to tip their dasher, or just to say hi. And they won’t know that the reason you’re red in the face is that there’s a girl ten times sexier than that frigid bitch Savannah Grey kneeling under the counter giving your dick the lovinest suck it’s ever known.”

I had no words. My cock was doing its darnedest to stab through all the layers of clothes between us to get at that pussy. I’d always been a sucker for dirty talk, and Vickie’s gift for gab was seeing some incredible new use all the sudden. Could she really mean...? No, that was nuts. No one was *that* jealous. She had to be proving some kind of point. Right? But... what?

“Holy shit, Vickie, you’re so—”

Our lips met. With both her fingers seizing handfuls of my hair, there was nowhere else to go, though I wouldn’t have gone there if there was. Her kiss tasted like root beer, but the regular kind. Maybe I’d have to give the diet a try. I couldn’t seem to stop sucking on her tongue.

Vickie suddenly released me, leaning back, but only with her neck, just out of range of my lips. It was enough to let me remember I was at work, in full view of anybody who might happen by. “I, um... Maybe we shouldn’t, erm, at least until, you know, when we’re both...”

That was all I had. At work or no, if she so much as looked at them, I was going to rip my pants off here and now.

The duty radio, sitting beside me on the desk, beeped, and Carmen's voice came through. "Vickie? Waiting for you to start rounds. You coming?"

"Am I coming? Radioing the wrong RA," she joked with a sly grin. Without moving a single unnecessary muscle, her chest still squashed firmly against mine, Vickie picked up the radio, holding it to the side of her mouth so that her lips brushed mine when she spoke. "Sorry about that, Sandiego. I was helping Spencer with something at the center desk. He's having a hell of a hard time up here. Be there in a sec."

I groaned when, a moment later, she slithered up my body and back to her feet.

"I... You... That was..."

"Obviously," she said. Then, when I only stared at her uncomprehendingly, "You know, like 'obviously Savannah?' Now there's your 'obviously Vickie,' dickhead. God. You didn't really think I meant it, did you? How do you guys make it through the day with your brain flying copilot to your penises?"

"Vickie, you *kissed* me. Are you... are you..." My voice dropped to a whisper. "Are you *in on it*?"

Vickie shook her head. "See? There you go using your head for a change. Like I said, normal girls don't do... that." She opened her other can and chugged it, shooting it like a basketball at the trash can with a hopeful "Kobe!" that didn't pay off. "Anyway, think about what I said. And whatever you do, leave me the hell out of it. If you are into something weird, I sure as hell don't want to get dragged into your drama. I'm a drama llama, but I don't go slip on my mama drama trauma pajamas for a piddly \$200 a month. You figure something out, I'm interested, but whatever you're into? Thank you no, no thanks."

She caught me watching her leave the center desk and smirked, but well pleased, over her shoulder.

What the hell had just happened?

And what the hell was going on?

"Hey, what did we tell you about using their real names in reports?"

“Huh?”

“Here. ‘Prime met with Andi in 310. She made advances...’ And so on. Not her number. Andi.”

“Oh. Can’t we just do a control H on that shit? It’s so fucking tedious looking up their serial numbers over and over again, hour after hour, day after day.”

“Pff. Do your homework. I had the major players memorized before classes started.”

“Bullshit. We didn’t even know who the major players were until... Shit, we still don’t. Like anybody thought Andi, or 4897 or whatever she is, was going to win the pool. Hundred to one.”

“Who’d you have?”

“3283 all the way. Fucking should have, too.”

“32... That’s Charlie, right?”

“You call that gorgeous piece of coed ass Charlene when you dare speak of her, you Philistine.”

“Yeah, I could see that. Hell, my stupid ass went with Peyton. Then she shows up with her goddamn girlfriend.”

“Ha. Bound to be at least a couple. Can you believe somebody actually picked... Fuck, you’re not gonna make me look up her number, are you?”

“You’re kidding right? That’s for the reports, not the watercooler.”

“Oh. I mean, obviously. But you know, Ramona.”

“I saw. Unbelievable.”

“Unbelievable is right. Wish our boss had an ass like that.”

“Hey. Not cool.”

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, just make sure you use the numbers, right? Anything leaks...”

“I know, I know. Wouldn’t mind seeing Ramona leak, all over—”

“One more word and I’m writing this up.”

“All right, all right. I’ll use the fucking numbers from now on. Prude.”

“Attaboy.”

Chapter Eleven: Floor Government

Tori snapped her fingers in my face. “Spencer?”

For days, Vickie’s words echoed around my head. By day, the suggestion that something was seriously off about my status quo. Every swishing skirt, every braless boob, every perky “morning Spencer!” was another cause for suspicion. By night, my subconscious improvised a hundred different variations of those things she’d said on my lap. One night, Savannah joined her, the two of them verbally sparring around my cock about whether they were blowing me because, as Savannah argued, girls get horny sometimes, or as Vickie countered, something about me was irresistible to women. The sexier the woman, she said, slobbering up and down my shaft as she fingered her pussy with abandon, the greater the need. Savannah shook her head, hair sweeping every which way, as she insisted she was just a horny, horny girl, and I was a tasty, tasty man.

“Spencer!”

I blinked. “Sorry, Tori. I, um, haven’t been sleeping well.”

“Yeah? Because you zoned out staring at my chest.”

As my mind returned to my present meeting in the Higgins 3 lounge, I almost laughed. Stuffed into that skimpy crimson sheath of our floor shirt, there was visible underboob on display. By then, I’d heard enough complaints from the girls that the shirts had been cheaply made and shrunk in the washer to believe them. Because of course they shrunk. But why, fucking *why* was someone, or some incredibly juvenile force of nature, introducing all this skin into my life?

“I’m sorry. I didn’t even realize where I was... Sorry. I’m back with you. You were talking about the program.”

Higgins 3’s newly elected governor narrowed her eyes, but decided there was no point lashing out further. “Right. So I took the suggestions you gave me and did some research myself. Lots of good ideas in there. I’ve asked some of our women – trying to focus on the

ones I think are most likely to attend – and there’s some with real interest. On the easy side, there’s plenty of excitement for a regular movie night after the success with *Mean Girls* last week. Only costs us some food and beverages, so I’d say that’s a no-brainer.”

“Sounds good. You want to come up with some titles? Or I can ask around. Don’t want to subject you ladies to my taste in movies. In any event, we can shoot for Thursday nights.”

“I was thinking Thursday, too. And sure, I can come up with the title. I’ll email you once I know and you can do the advertising.”

“Done. Next?”

“Your proposal of a massage night from the election night meeting resonated nicely,” Tori continued. As the mere act of breathing incrementally revealed more and more pillowy brown underboob, I concentrated on maintaining eye contact while we hashed out a plan for that. I knew a woman from the Lakeview Health Clinic who’d helped out with my Rowland guys, a woman from a previous life when encounters with beautiful women were less commonplace. I told Tori I’d get in touch and schedule it.

“Finally, there’s sex,” Tori said weightily.

“Uh, sex?” I sat up straighter.

Tugging her shirt back down into place, Tori’s patience looked strained. I had most definitely not been on point that night. “Your suggestion that we do some programming on sex and sexuality, safety, et cetera? Do you not remember that?”

“Oh! Right. Yes. Sorry. Go on.”

She gave it another tug. Our floor governor could have spared herself a lot of glaring if she’d worn a shirt that fit over her chest. I couldn’t exactly turn off my peripheral vision. “Right. So I think that’s a pretty real need. We have about ninety percent freshmen here. That’s girls who haven’t been taught how to spot and protect themselves from a predator, girls who don’t even know what a roofie is, some girls who never even got sex ed at whatever basic bitch Catholic school they attended.” She shook her head. “You don’t even wanna know how many of our girls have been living it up at house parties, frat parties, taking whatever drink Jaden and Braden and Aiden put in their hands without even thinking twice about it.”

This was starting to sound awfully specific. “Have you heard something? Did something happen?”

“I’m just saying a little education would help,” she said. This time, it was Tori averting her eyes.

“Tori, I’m not asking you to betray any confidences . But did you hear something?”

After a long pause, she said simply, “I’ve heard something.”

“Can you tell me who?”

Tori shook her head.

I softened my voice. We were alone in the lounge, but one never knew who was out in the hallway, about to walk in. “Was it you?”

She shook her head again.

I was glad I wasn’t looking the issue in the face (unless Tori simply didn’t trust me enough to reach out), but still. Fuck. One thing to know all the statistics; another to be told they’re applying themselves to people you know and live with. People I’d come to care about.

I gave myself a moment to process, to wonder in vain, and got on with it. “Fair enough. And let me say: I’m relieved it’s not you. Thanks for bringing it to my attention. You’re right, let’s make this a priority. I have a program in mind. I’ll set it up early next week. We’ll do some promoting at movie night Thursday. Sound good?”

“It’s a plan,” Tori said. Then, eyeing me askance, she added, “Maybe encourage everybody to wear their floor shirts to the movie. Give you a little practice keeping your eyes where they belong, hmm?”

I tried not to watch her swagger on out of the lounge. I really did.

Tori texted me the movie she’d picked a short time later. *A League of Their Own* . Solid choice, crowd pleaser all the way. I modified a flier I’d drafted for a movie program with my Rowland guys last spring. It felt good changing the artwork for *Animal House* to a more progressive choice. Take that, patriarchy. Then I headed to the RA supply office (a charitable name for a 3’x4’ closet where they crammed a bunch of art supplies, a first aid kit, and the duty walkie

chargers). Six copies on canary yellow to catch the eye, then off to put them up in bathrooms and across from the stairwell doors.

After , I walked the floor. I'd created a very doors wide open kind of community, something I'd never attempted in my previous years. Intentionally, considering the myriad sorts of stank associated with all-male living spaces. On Higgins 3, however, easily half the doors were open most evenings. If they were closed, it usually meant either no one was home, there was work being done, or someone was changing.

So far, at least, they usually changed with the doors closed.

It was a powerful asset for community building. Already, the Higgins Hotties were accustomed to their RA popping in routinely to say hi, check on issues, get to know them. I'd kept mental notes on those who felt a bit too big-brothered by it and employed a lighter touch, but most seemed to feel glad to have big brother watching them so closely.

That night, I followed up with Terri on her TikTok successes. I'd given her a follow, and my lord what the algorithms had taken *that* to mean. Every other suggested follow was some kind of thirst trap. She invited me to help her record the next one. Her roommate Toni usually did the camera work (i.e. held out her phone, applied every skincare filter known to man, and hit record), but Toni was taking a long time getting back from class, so I would do. For the next fifteen minutes, I watched her repeat a sexy little maneuver while lip synching to one of Beyoncé's latest tracks. A "viral trend," she insisted, which I suppose made sense. You couldn't bounce your tits *that* hard in a top *that* low cut, with boobs *that* big, without generating a few clicks. Thankfully Toni arrived between takes four million and five to relieve me.

Katrina had been nervous about her first college exam. She'd been salutatorian of her graduating class, and I'd tried to reassure her that tests in college were far less challenging than her AP exams had been in high school. I knocked, asked how it went, and she leapt from her chair and bounced across the room like she was a background dancer in Terri's video. Still, she squealed that I'd been right. She'd nailed it. Scores weren't out yet, but she'd walked away

as confident as she'd ever felt. Once I pried her off of me, we high-fived. Then out of nowhere, she blindsided me by asking when they might move someone in to replace Quinn. I said I didn't know, and tried not to remember more than that in the presence of the bubbly blonde brainiac.

When I greeted Dana, I didn't realize that she was in the midst of her daily phone call with her mom. When I went to apologize for the disruption and excuse myself, however, she chased me down and pulled me into her room, closing us in together. Before I knew what was happening, her phone was in my hand against my ear, and I was answering a dozen questions about Dana. Yes, she was behaving herself. Yes, she was going to class. No, she hadn't gotten any tattoos that I'd noticed. Yes, she was making friends with good kids. No, I hadn't seen any boys "sniffing around." Oh god no, *I* wasn't interested in sniffing around. Until that last, I'd been either giving the flattering answer or echoing whatever nods and shakes of the head Dana gave me. At that, she snatched her phone back with an aggrieved "Mooooom! I told you we can't date the RA!"

Not wouldn't. Can't. Maybe it was the same to her. Maybe. Girls had urges, I'd been told. But this was a bizarre conspiracy, I'd also been told.

Against my better judgment, I popped by 319, Higgins 3's sole triple occupancy room, taking up a bit of extra space thanks to the configuration of the adjacent floor lounge. I didn't like to think about that one. The triple room had been unoccupied until after classes started, at which point it was taken over by none other than Allison, Addison and Maddison, a set of identical sophomore triplets. They were the only ones of my residents I'd known of prior to the start of the semester after they made literal headlines during their freshman year, my super senior. All three had rushed the same sorority, but only two had been accepted. The other two walked, but not until after they went through the chapter's initiation rites. They went to the school paper and outed all the hazing they'd been subjected to. Big scandal. And, incidentally, big publicity for the beautiful blonde trio, whose instagram endorsements were paying for the tuition of all three. Juicy gossip, those three.

Their mere existence was more temptation than man was meant to grapple with. They might not be a point or two below the floor average, but they were triplets. *Triplets*. Thankfully, they were far less involved in floor goings-on than most of the Hotties. They'd made their own social circle freshman year, and mostly used Higgins 3 to sleep and do homework. That evening, I knocked, asked if everything was going well, they said "yeah" with an implied "what's it to you," and I scurried away before my eyes betrayed my honorable intentions.

Sincerely disinterested, or a clandestine agreement not to fight over me? It had to be the former.

Charlie surprised me once again with her ability to transmute my questions about her into questions about me. I started with a simple "how ya doin'" level query, and before I knew it, she'd sat me down in Destiny's vacant chair and was following up on my sense of guilt over the departures of the Three. I hadn't even meant to open up to any of them about that, but Charlie and her soft eyes and softer voice got me talking. She insisted again that night it wasn't my fault. I acted like I agreed. She hugged me like she saw through the act.

I'd already forgotten a lot of my residents of the past few years. I knew Charlie would be one I'd remember.

Speaking of things I couldn't forget, I touched base with Andi, of course. I learned that the movie selection had been her choice, in fact, after being consulted by Tori. We'd created a new floor government position for her. While Tori and I agreed "secretary" held some negative connotation, when we explained what we were asking of her and described the "floor historian" role, Andi had shrugged and said, "So basically a secretary? I can be secretary."

Jean was present, so we talked in my room. Andi had made enough noise that there were rumors out there, but sometimes the best way to quell rumors was to tell a way less interesting story. One-on-one meetings in my room might draw eyes, but sending her back out a few minutes later sweatless, undisheveled, breathing evenly would suggest we had nothing to hide.

We did have something to hide of course, and we'd have more if I left it up to her. I didn't miss the ten different frequencies of come-

fuck-me she was broadcasting, but I kept my distance, hands to myself, kept the compliments she fished for as superficial as possible, and tried to set the tone. I was doing well for a while.

Right up until Andi cocked her head to the side and asked, “Do you want to do it again?”

“Uh, do what again?”

“Me.”

Obviously. “Andi, we’ve talked about this...”

“I know. But I like you so much! You’re such a nice guy, and it seemed like you had fun, and I know I had a lot of fun, and I promise I can keep it a secret, nobody would ever know!”

“If anybody’s walking by, they can hear you saying that right now. Plus, there’s the people who already saw, remember? But that’s not even the point. The point is, it could create a lot of problems.”

Andi was all pout. “Like what?”

“Like... OK, so say some weekend, Jean wants to have some friends over, have a little party.”

“Like Kendall and Georgia the other night? I heard some girls talking about that in the bathroom. I didn’t know they were so bad.”

I didn’t dare mention how they’d followed me home and held an accidental sleepover after I’d butted in. “Right, like that. I know you two don’t really hang, but you didn’t have plans, so she figures it’s better to invite you than risk you ratting her out.”

“I would never!”

“Sure, but you and I are friends, right?” She beamed. “So maybe she’d be nervous. Anyway, her friends get noisy, I respond, and there you are in the thick of things. Now, am I supposed to write up my girlfriend?”

“I wouldn’t try to use that to get out of trouble,” she said, though I could see she was beginning to see my larger point. It would cause issues.

Suddenly, she hooked a finger in her neckline and tugged it down to showcase her boobs. A bit heavy-handed. This girl really didn’t have a flirt game to speak of. Only, what she said next was weirdly one of the hottest things I’d ever heard. “But I could make it up to you after...”

I don't know why it hit me like it did. I'd never liked the disciplinarian part of my job. It created barriers, damaged relationships. The paltry authority at my disposal made me feel like a poser when I wielded it. Still, the idea of this surprisingly sexy, shockingly sheltered girl offering to repay me for forcing me to discipline her... It hit a button.

The improved access to her tits didn't hurt.

But no. No, no, no. She was hot, but I wouldn't want to date her even if I could. I sure as hell wasn't ready to get fired over it, which is what would inevitably happen when we blew our cover even worse than we already had.

"Andi, I—"

"I could give you a, you know, a 'blowjob,' if you want. Like before, but I'll be better this time, not rushed. I'd be happy to. My boyfriend — my ex-boyfriend — always liked when I did that. Except he called it 'sucking dick,' which sounds really nasty. I guess 'blowjob' does too, but maybe less nasty. But I want to, if you want me to."

Last winter over in Rowlands, I'd made a bulletin board about the civil rights movement for my January requirement, themed around MLK Day. Not my most inspired work, but they can't all be Rembrandts. One January night I was on duty, and the fire alarm went off. We ran to the board, then down to where it says the sensor's tripped. My floor. Turned out some racist fuck on my floor tore down my bulletin board, wadded it up in front of a Muslim student's door, and lit it on fire. It hadn't done much damage to the building, but to the community... I went gangbusters finding out who'd done it, room to room with impassioned speeches and livid tirades, a full-on righteous fury until finally someone gave me a name.

In that moment, with Andi threatening to suck my hardening shaft between her sweet, soft, generous lips, I channeled *that* Spencer . I needed him, before the Spencer who'd let Quinn paint the ceiling pearly white with a finger up his ass took the wheel.

"Andi, I said no." She stepped back immediately, startled by my tone. "If you make an advance on someone and they say no, it means

you stop. Not try harder. Understand?”

“But... please? Just let me... please,” she whimpered. “I’ll be so good, I swear. Just give me a chance to show you how good I can be to it , please!”

Three please’s . Fucking hell. No. No no no think of the fire think of the fire think of the fire hate crime hate crime I have a dream

As she sank to her knees, I stepped away and opened the door. “Out, Andi. Now.”

She stared up at me, dumbfounded. I got the impression that it was less her being shocked that I would refuse her, and more that she was disappointed in herself for the shortcomings of her own salesmanship. *Maybe if you’d just taken your shirt off all the way, stupid* , it seemed to say.

While she was still processing, a group of girls walked by. Casey, Sammi and Lex, thick as thieves as usual. They’d been a little too close, moving a little too slow, for me to believe they hadn’t been eavesdropping. Lex giggled at Andi’s distraught visage decidedly uncharitably. “Oh my god, she was literally *begging* to suck his cock!”

Sammi snickered. “And he said no! I’ve, like, *never* heard of a guy turning down a beej!”

Andi threw herself at the door, ramming right past me. She was intercepted, however, by a surprisingly sturdy Casey. Even as I prepared myself to intervene, or at the very least scold them for bullying, she surprised me by bracing Andi with two hands on her slumped shoulders and regarding her with compassion. Fake? Probably, but I wouldn’t make anything better by presuming.

“Hey, hey, slow your roll, chick,” she said. She didn’t sound sarcastic that I could tell.

“Let me through,” Andi whined. Her back was to me, but her crying was obvious in her voice. The valve on those waterworks was lubed up a little too well.

Casey glanced over her shoulder at me and subtly held up a finger to hold me back. “Hey, don’t be like that. You’re too pretty to be crying over some boy. You’re a Hottie, not some Nottie.”

There was that term again. Hadn't one of the Three said something about that? I couldn't remember their names, right then.

Andi didn't seem much for words. Casey lifted her shirt to dab at the girl's tears. Good god, no bra. I only caught the underside of those delectable boobs of hers before I averted my eyes, though Sammi and Lex get a good chuckle out of my discomfort.

"There ya go, babe. You can't let some dumb boy get to you like that – gotta repre-fuckin'-sent!" Casey clapped Andi's defeated shoulders encouragingly. Then she grinned at me, briefly, over her shoulder. "Can't fault you for your taste, though. Our boy can get it, huh? Not your fault he's off the market, though. Forbidden fruit, right? Bet he tastes so sweet."

"Casey..." I warned in a low voice.

She made a mildly apologetic face. "Come on. Andi, right? Tonight, you're hanging with us, Andi. We're gonna get you out of that... frock? I dunno what a frock even is, but I bet it's gotta be that, right?"

"For sure," Sammi echoed solemnly.

Andi stiffened. "You want to... take my clothes off...?"

"If you let me finish!" Casey went on with a laugh, "I was gonna say, out of that frock and into something as fine as the rest of you. Come on. I bet I got some stuff that'd do those tits justice. Or we could stuff you into some of Lexi's shit, stretch it the fudge out, yeah?"

"Hey!" Lexi frowned. At *me*, for some reason. "Everybody around here's such a critic of the itty bitty titty committee. You guys suck. I'm so getting them done."

Oh yeah, the time I called her flat. Apparently Ramona's talk hadn't stuck as well as she hoped.

"I was only playing, ho-bag. You know I think you're hella tasty-looking. Little snack, Little Debbie over there." Casey playfully nipped the air in Lex's direction, and like that, the girl was mollified.

Then the three of them were walking away, a protective triangle around Andi. Once they rounded the corner, I heard Sammi ask if she'd managed to get anywhere with me. I was relieved to hear Andi proclaim that of course she hadn't. Then I was the one

eavesdropping, listening to Casey casually compliment Andi's tits. Before I heard their door seal them away from me, I heard Andi thank her, and insist that Casey's were "real real big, like almost too big, but in a good way!"

Like that, Andi made some friends.

The next time I saw her was two days later over at the Penderdast food court. I was standing in line at the Taco John's when I saw them enter. She was dressed in a tank top and booty shorts alongside the other three, her thick braid undone so that her hair could bounce and swish in time with her tits and ass. When she saw me, she waved and blew a kiss, but only after Casey beat her to it. Casey's gaze lingered, and I gave her an appreciative nod. She winked, and sauntered on her way. She resigned her made-up position as secretary, a title we'd never given her, the next day.

I decided then and there not to thank Casey more directly. I wasn't sure I'd be able to resist giving her that fucking she'd been chasing since Welcome Week, and Vickie and Savannah's voices both assured me she'd say yes if I asked.

Movie night was once again a hit. Tori and Andi had been right on. We had the perfect combination of girls who could quote every line and girls who'd never even heard of it who got to experience the magic for the first time. Jacqui proposed getting together Saturday to play softball at the big field by the student union. As a member of the Lakeview volleyball team, she even managed to score us the necessary equipment, even though because of her scholarship, she wasn't herself allowed to play.

After the argument over who got to have The Boy on their team, I joined her in channeling our inner Stilwell. Deep down, though, I was all Ira Lowenstein. I loved these girls.

The way Angel's boobs kept popping out of her neckline whenever she swung the bat had nothing to do with it. It was a bonus, though.

Both occasions were fine opportunities to advertise other upcoming programs. The massage night had been scheduled for right before midterms, when stress tended to run higher. I plugged it merely to score some brownie points, but it was too far away as yet to

merit our focus. I hadn't forgotten about what Tori had said. Ramona and I had discussed it over in our weekly one-on-one, and agreed a prompt response was merited.

Luckily for me, I had a connection.

"Spencer! Hang on, let me just... there." I hung on, waiting in the entryway to her tight but cozy office in the ill-lit basement of this unfamiliar building. She paused the feed playing on her monitor and swiveled her office chair around to look at me, crossing her legs at exactly the right moment. "How you been, man? You look like you've lost a little weight."

Marisa hopped to her feet and, quite uninvited, patted my stomach. It was almost clinical, the way she did it. Oh, who am I kidding, it *was* clinical. I knew full well what her touch felt like when it wasn't.

"Yeah, been hitting the gym pretty hard this semester. Seems to be paying off."

"I'll say. I can feel your abs through your shirt. Your girl – girls? – have to be loving that. Can I see?"

She didn't wait for a response. Up went the bottom of my shirt, and I was once more treated to a thorough probing of my not-quite sixpack. I was getting there, though. It was at least a daily occurrence that someone on the floor asked me if I wanted to hit the gym with them, and when there wasn't, it was hard to be around so many incredible bodies without putting in a little effort just so as not to embarrass yourself. I'd been in good shape before RA training. I was getting close to badass now.

"Marisa..."

She made a face. "All right, all right. Still, nice work. Dang." She looked one last look, then let go of my shirt.

"Is it my turn now?" I asked dryly.

"Oh, don't get fussy. You like being looked at. You like being touched. I have wider boundaries. It's not that we're subjected to different standards. We simply have different preferences."

It never took long for me to remember why Marisa and I had broken up. Not that she acknowledged we had. To her, we'd decided to spend time together and have sex with each other for a while, and

then we decided to not do those things. To her, it was more like someone who'd decided to stop eating bread for a while. They might want to eat some more later, but for now, nah.

“So, new office, huh? You just sit in here and watch porn all day? Living the dream.”

“Your dream is sharing a ten by ten office that smells like feet with two other grad students? Be better, hon. Plus, I don't know about you, but in *my* dreams, I'm the one doing the fucking, not sitting around watching it.”

“Yeah, fair enough.”

“Though now that you said it...” She plopped herself back down in her office chair, gliding back to her desk until bumping up against it. It was implicit that I was to follow, so I did. “So when you saw this, you assumed it was porn?”

She hit the spacebar, and the feed resumed playing. It was some shapely redhead in a sequined bikini doing squats in a shower. That shower had better lighting and more space than any shower I'd ever seen. At the right side of the screen, a chat window displayed lewd comments and plain old simps being simpy. It scrolled by too fast to catch more than the gist.

“Uh... if this isn't porn, then what is it?”

“That's what I'm studying,” she said, her eyes riveted to the gyrations of the woman on the screen. “There's a debate raging about whether the advent of livestreaming is a game changer, or if it's just old-fashioned voyeurism with a new skin.”

“Oh.” I observed for a moment. I knew Marisa could have – and had – watched porn for hours at a stretch without even touching herself, but I guess I was old-fashioned in feeling a little weird looking at someone dancing in the shower over my ex-girlfriend's shoulder. “So if this isn't porn, then... what is it?”

“I'm not sure. Maybe porn, honestly. It could easily fit most definitions, even clinical ones. Soft core, yeah, but still, it's visual, she's conventionally sexy, wearing revealing clothing, and while the damned chatbot is censoring anyone who dares to come out and say they're beating off, no doubt lots of them are.”

“So then why the question, if it's 'clinically' porn...?”

“Well, look at it another way. She’s not naked. Shit, for a shower, she’s overdressed. She’s not doing explicitly sexual things. No fondling, no masturbating. You missed the bathing segment, but she didn’t dwell overlong on her breasts, butt, or genitals. She’s a woman pointing a camera at herself while she cleans herself.”

“She’s wearing a thong bikini and doing squats.”

“Astute. Still, go to the right beach and you might see a woman dressed like this, bending over or what have you. And obviously that’s not porn. Her butt isn’t even pointed directly at the lens,” Marisa countered. “It’s titillating, sure, but is it pornographic? With that body, she could be sitting at a diner sipping coffee in a sweater and jeans and it would turn heads. We’re all of us drawn to people who turn us on.”

It made me think of Terri, raking in clicks with shirts that displayed her nipples prominently and moves that made sure the audience almost got to see them. I didn’t think of what she did as porn. Good thing, because the university would come down like a hammer on it if she got caught doing porn in the residence halls.

Still, Terri wasn’t charging people to see it. She liked the attention and the sense of minor celebrity was all. Fifty bucks had been donated to shower girl since Marisa had made me look at her. “Don’t people have to pay, or subscribe or whatever, to watch this? Paying for it makes it feel, I don’t know, ‘pornier.’”

“Buying a subscription gets rid of the ads, though anyone can watch. Lucky for me, the site has a deal with my big bosses here at the Hancock Institute to get around all that. Anyway, it’s an interesting study. She’s really quite good at whatever it is she’s doing. Banal as hell – and you know me, I’m barely attracted to women to begin with – yet I still find it’s hard to look away. Look, now she’s just... brushing her hair, karaoking Disney songs. Tempting fate if you ask me, but it’s fascinating, right?”

“Yeah, totally.” I mean, it was, but again, not with Marisa here. Man, how long had it been since I’d watched porn? Not since the summer, I was pretty sure. I’d never been a junkie or anything, but especially when I was single, I usually liked a visual aid when I was taking care of things. I guess I hadn’t needed one for a while now.

“Something tells me you didn’t come here to talk to me about the latest break-throughs in smut,” Marisa said, pivoting back to look at me. She propped her feet up on the table behind me, displaying those legs of hers. Those had always been my favorite feature of hers. She was petite – never call her short – and her thighs were no exception. Looking at them always made me wish there was *more* of them, even if adding to them would revoke the wish. The feel of them in my hands used to drive me wild.

When it came to Marisa, attraction had never been the problem. The opposite, really. Talking about sex 24/7, on the other hand...

So I told her about my unusual placement in Higgins 3, right up to the point of Tori pointing out that we could use some expert insight ASAP. Marisa had been working with the Hancock Institute researching human sexuality for three years now. The programs she’d helped me with had been a huge hit with my guys in Rowland. Like a lot of male floors, you could usually count a program a success if you got four or five dudes to come. Once they saw my hot Latina girlfriend strutting down the hall in her fishnet stockings and halter top, pizza boxes in hand, they’d flooded the lounge and listened with rapt attention.

To her credit, it hadn’t only been because she was a hot girl talking candidly about sex. She was passionate about it. Frank. Nothing was taboo for Marisa, not even actual taboos. I knew firsthand that she had plenty of boundaries, but none when it came to her research and comfort talking about it. Marisa could stand in in the middle of a circle of horny sweaty college boys talking about the risks and rewards of swallowing cum, or choking your partner, the issues and non-issues with incest, all without batting an eyelash.

“So they plunked *you* down. You. Spencer Lawrence. The same guy who had to ask me what an IUD is. The guy who, when I told him my period was late, said, and I quote, ‘oh, that’s a bummer.’ They made *you* the custodian of a group of teenage girls.” She shook her head. “Glad to see Lakeview’s Res Life program is running as smoothly as ever.”

“You always said I was too much of a gentleman. They just found me a place where the trait’s useful.”

She grinned. “I did say that, didn’t I. Still, the way you described it...” Her eyes narrowed. “You fuck any of them yet?”

“What? No! Yet? No!”

She laughed. “OK, that was way too defensive for a man who hasn’t nutted to these women at least once. So what *did* you do?”

“Come on, Marisa. I didn’t come here to get interrogated. And I’m sure the woman who slept with not one, not two, but three of her college professors has no standing to accuse me of anything inappropriate.”

“So you did get your dick wet then, huh.” She laughed. “Man, I always forget Dr. Kerling. What would I do without you to remind me of all my old flames?”

“Get a notebook and track them yourself? Until you run out of space.”

Marisa did love a good-natured attempt at slut-shaming. She quite literally had no shame whatsoever – not one sex act she’d ever performed embarrassed her in the least, and that included her first sexual experience making out with her first cousin when she was in middle school. To her, it had been simple curiosity with no malefactors involved, no embarrassment merited. I met her cousin once at a family gathering, and wondered how he’d feel if he knew how many people had heard the story.

“OK. So your Naughty Hawties need a heads up about sex in the real world, is that it?”

“Basically. I don’t want to get all ‘you could get AIDS or an unwanted pregnancy and every man is out to rape you’ or anything. Most of them already heard all that at orientation and/or in high school. But something to help them take care of themselves and each other would be good, and if we can combine it with something fun and interesting, like you do, that’d be good.”

She nodded. “Makes sense. Gotta keep the troops entertained, right?”

“And it doesn’t have to be you, of course. If you’re busy, you can point me to somebody who–”

“Of course I’m going to do it. You think I’d miss the chance to see my former lover surrounded by his cadre of baby ducklings? No way.”

I gave her a stern look. “Please don’t embarrass me in front of my residents. They still have to respect me after you leave.”

“You sound very confident that they respect you now.”

“Marisa...”

“Oh, cool your sixpack, Tarzan. Can I see it again, by the way? You were always up there in my spank bank, and I am so going to jill off to this when I get home.”

“No!”

“Fine, be that guy. Let’s get you on the calendar.”

Chapter Twelve: The Sexpert

“Spencer? There’s some old slut trying to sneak around the floor. She says she knows you.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Thanks, Angel. Good looking out .” I met my suspiciously glowering resident at the door to my room, where I found not only the woman I expected to see, but also Angel’s roommate. “Hey, Leigh. Hi Marisa. Come on in.”

Marisa smiled gratefully, though I suspect it was more to thumb her nose at Angel. “Thanks, bud. Ladies. You coming to the big show?”

Both of them regarded her with open suspicion. “What show?”

I slid Marisa past their gauntlet and into my room. “In the lounge, fifteen minutes, be there. You want to do me a solid, help me make sure everybody’s there, OK? It’s gonna be good. Sex stuff.”

I tried not to redirect my gaze to Leigh, the girl I’d wrestled naked and rejected not once but twice. I failed. Her eyes blazed with sudden interest.

I dismissed my girls and shut the door. “I told you to call when you got here. I have to hound them all the time not to let their guests wander around unescorted, and now here’s mine, showing herself around.”

“I wanted to observe them unspoiled. Didn’t see much. You weren’t kidding, though. Some of these girls are serious lookers.”

“Some? Who did you see that wasn’t?”

“I only saw some, so I can only vouch for some. I’m a scientist, remember.”

If there was one thing Marisa loved – besides sex – it was insisting on her core identity as a woman of science while looking anything but. Not that a scientist had to look a certain way, of course, but I didn’t know many who showed up to a presentation looking like Marisa. A ruffled plaid skirt that showed ample thigh above black stockings, and a tight black top that showed off her midriff even with

the skirt hiked up to her navel. Plus combat boots, because it wouldn't be a Marisa outfit if there wasn't something incongruous about it. If she looked one scooch hotter, I'd think she was looking to be compensated for her appearance tonight in cock. Which, I reminded myself, she might be. Sex had no value judgment attached for her, and while she wasn't the sort to cavalierly go around breaking hearts, she knew I knew her M.O. That meant I was fair game any time we both felt like saying yes, and then she could leave after breakfast with her conscience clear.

"Like what you see?"

I winced. "Sorry. You look really good. I didn't mean to stare."

"Eh. After how much you hyped up your Hotties, I wanted to fit in."

Meaning she wanted to rub her hotness in their smug faces.

"Looks like you're on the right path."

"Yeah? Because since the moment I stepped onto your floor, I've gotten suspicious glares from everybody I've seen. When I told those two I was looking for you specifically, they reacted like I was here to stuff you in a sack and kidnap you."

I checked her for a sack. Finding none, I said, "Looks like I'm in the clear."

"You look good, too, by the way. So that's your special boss man shirt, huh?" I shrugged as she inspected my modified version of the floor shirt. It had shrunk, same as the girls' had, so it fit tight. It really seemed to make them happy whenever I wore it. I knew how it looked on me, though I hoped at least some of it was simple camaraderie.

"Yeah. You'll probably get a chance to see the other style at the program."

"I hope so. So, tonight. We're doing the safety spiel first, yeah? Then did you have a phase two in mind?"

"Nah, not for this. I want to make sure they know some of the basics of how to protect themselves from creeps and assholes, but beyond that, if you can make it fun, interesting..." Her look of mild resentment at my momentary insinuation that she might not lasted

only a moment. “Oh who am I kidding, of course you’re going to make it fun and interesting. It’s you.”

“Man, it’s just wild that you’re still here living in the dorms.” Marisa dragged her hands along the built-in desk like it was some novelty.

“It’s a residence hall, actually.”

“What’s the difference?”

“A dormitory is a place where you sleep. Like, remember when we visited Greg and Hilary, and their room was like a closet with bunk beds? That’s a dorm. A residence hall is—”

“Forget I asked,” she said blithely. “You know, I visited my mom a month or so back, and I wound up driving my little brother to school. Can you believe he’s in tenth grade already?”

I’d only met Manuel a couple times, but it was hard to think of that kid in high school. I said something to that effect, and she went on. “So I thought, while I’m here, I’ll go say hi to some of my old teachers, you know? So I wandered around a bit, wound up heading down to the band room, thought I’d say hi to Mrs. Hobbs. Maybe, I dunno, see a piccolo sitting out and see if I could still play, right?”

“Sure, sure.”

“She was busy with a student, right, so I just sort of walked around a little, and I stepped into my old practice room. You know, one of those sound-proof ones so you can... It doesn’t matter. But not thirty seconds there, and hand to god, I’m lubing up.”

I schooled my features. Marisa made it a point not to exhibit embarrassment, ever, about her body. Not on any level. Sometimes that meant telling all our friends we couldn’t make the party because she had a massive UTI and she needed me to rub ice cubes on her back to soothe her. More often, though, it meant shares like this.

“See, this boy Jimmy Soo used to... Well, I guess he wasn’t a boy. He was one of the woodwind tutors. I guess he was like thirty or something? But he had youthful energy. Anyway, he used to finger me in there. Like, alllll the time. It’s funny, like, I always loved band, but it made me wonder how much of that was Mr. Soo playing my clit like a fiddle in the practice room. I asked Mrs. Hobbs if he still worked there, but she said he got married and moved out west.

Probably just as well. It was hot when I was a kid, you know? But probably would have been awkward now.”

It went without saying that she meant it would be awkward for *him*, not her. I’d never once heard Marisa condemn any sexual urges, including some that frankly ought to be. (I was only now learning about Jimmy Soo Fingerblaster, whose name went immediately on that list for me.)

“That’s... interesting. Can I ask what made you think of it just now?”

“Hmm? Oh, no, it’s just being with you, here in your dorm – residence, no fuck it, whatever. Anyway, being here with you, like old times... I guess I’m surprised how much it turns me on is all. State-dependent arousal is actually a really interesting sphere of study. Lots of great material on it at Hancock.”

“You’re incorrigible, Marisa.”

She grinned. “Yeah, I know. But don’t act like you didn’t notice this little spank-me-daddy-I’ve-been-bad skirt the second I walked in. You know, we probably have time, if you wanna...? I haven’t gotten off since Tuesday morning. I’d be quick, and, well.”

It was my turn to look mildly annoyed at her insinuation. “The program starts in ten minutes.”

“Yeah, I know.” As if Marisa couldn’t clock her orgasms with a stopwatch.

“I should probably be out knocking on doors now, actually.”

“Or,” she said gamely, “or? You could ask me if I’m wearing any panties tonight, and let that dot dot dot into a quick romp. We both want it. I wanted to jump you right there in my office the other day, Spency Sixpack. We’ll be more clear headed for the program if we do it first.”

“Rather than doing it after, you mean.”

“Yeah, exactly.”

I shook my head. “Incorrigible. I’m gonna knock on some doors. Join me if you want, or jill one out and meet me in the lounge. Your call.”

Marisa remained behind. It was weird, having been dealing with all this sexual energy everywhere around me the past month.

Marisa brought that energy with her everywhere, and I hardly noticed it any more. She was the only woman I'd ever met who could assure me she'd make sure not to get my bedsheets all cummy and get a simple "thanks" in response.

At 8:00 sharp, the ladies of Higgins 3 and I met up in the lounge for Marisa's program. Snacks were set up on the counter near the sink, as yet untouched, but I'd kept the drinks sealed up in the fridge for their part in the program. Marisa was nowhere to be seen yet, but my girls had turned the hell up. Twenty-six present, including Allison, one of the triplets in 319 who had so far been our most aloof community members by a wide margin.

Every single resident was wearing their Higgins Hotties shirt. Moreover, every single one of them was wearing a frightfully judgy frown.

"Hey... Is everything OK...?" I asked nervously. Had someone died?

"How do you know that girl, Spencer?" demanded Leigh.

"That girl's name is Marisa, and she's a researcher at the Hancock Institute. I've done programs with them in the past."

That explanation, however, did nothing to soften faces. They were eerily, to a woman, scowling. Had Marisa said something? In case she'd somehow inadvertently made a bad impression, I spoke up to vouch for her. "We, ah, also used to date, a couple years back. But it ended amicably. She's good people."

"I thought so," Angel declared, arms folded beneath her massive bust. I could literally see the bottom of her breasts resting on her forearms in that thin-stretched red shirt. "The way she asked for you, the way you looked when you saw her..."

I had no idea why they cared, but I could see that they did. "Really, it's fine. We dated on and off for a year or so, and we both decided we'd be better off seeing other people. We're still friends." Friendly, anyway. Not like we really hung out, but we'd reached to one another a few times over the past couple years since we'd been together. Even done a friends with benefits thing a couple times over winter break last year. "Um, can I ask why are you all so, um..."

“It’s not fair,” said Emma, one of our upperclassmen. “We agreed, no boys allowed except you. But now you’re bringing up your ex-girlfriend.”

“I... what?”

“She’s right,” insisted Sammi. “If we can’t have boyfriends, it’s only fair you don’t have girlfriends.”

“What?! Hey now, I never agreed—”

“We didn’t think we needed to ask,” interjected Kendall, her roommate Georgia nodding firmly at her side.

My head was swimming. What were they even saying? Why—

The door swung open, and in walked Marisa. The discussion ended, crashing into a wall of solid ice.

“All right, ladies, settle in!” I projected positive energy, as if it would keep Marisa from noticing the dozens of glowers aimed at her. “Here’s our guest presenter. Everybody, this is Marisa Gutierrez. Like I said, she’s a researcher with the Hancock Institute. If you have questions about sex, sexuality, sexual orientation... Pretty much anything to do with sex, she’s a great resource.”

Marisa waved as the girls stood their ground. The couches, the chairs, vacant. “Well hey there, fellow ladyketeers.”

Nobody said anything. I looked around imploringly, but all eyes were on our newcomer. For once I would have even settled for being the target of one of Casey’s signature cat calls. Nada.

“Like he said, huh? So I’m to understand you were talking about me before I showed up?” Marisa looked around, unperturbed. Doing a good job of *seeming* unperturbed, at least. “Anything I can help clarify?”

“You dumped Spencer,” accused Andi, of all people. Though at least from her, the resentment made sense. The rest of them...

“Whoa now, she didn’t ‘dump me.’ I told you, we dated, we broke up. It was *amicable* .”

Marisa, however, responded to their overprotective posturing rather than any bruises to my ego. “Is that all? Well aren’t you gals sweet as can be. Let me reassure you all then. Yes, Spencer and I dated. Yes, we had a great time. A lot of great times, in fact.” In response to my *are you freaking kidding me* look, she nudged me

with an elbow playfully. “And then we decided we’d both be happier having great times with other people, and we were, both of us, happier. No lie, you should get after him sometime to see the next chick he hooked up with.”

“Marisa!”

She laughed away my rebuke. “But really, no hearts broken. I still adore him. And I’m so, so touched to see you all realize what a super guy you have looking out for you here.”

“We look out for *each other*,” corrected Charlie. But expressions were softening. Good lord, what had I done to deserve this kind of protection?

“You sure seem to. And that’s great. It actually serves as a great segue into what brings me here tonight. Looking out for ourselves, and for each other.”

I nodded, probably way too vigorously. “That’s right. Come on, really, let’s grab some snacky snacks, settle in, listen in. OK?” *Please?* I said with my eyes.

To my relief, my Hotties relented. If they didn’t look thrilled, they looked satisfied that they’d made their point. Whatever the hell their point was. Were they staking out territory or something? Why? *All* of them? I’d have to talk to Vickie about this.

Regardless, Marisa started her spiel, opened with a couple relatable anecdotes about the party scene at Lakeview, and from there transitioned into safety tips. All stuff I’d heard a hundred times, and probably things the girls had heard during orientation. By now, though, they’d been around, been at parties, talked to girls who’d had things happen to them. It was real now.

Marisa made sure of it, sharing her story of passing out drunk at a house party and waking up unsure if someone had assaulted her. I made sure of it as I distributed drinks, dropping the occasional M&M in their cups, an illustrative lesson in watching one’s drink being poured to make sure nothing was slipped in it. I made sure they knew I had resources in case of an assault, how to get a safe ride home if they were drunk, the number to call an ambulance if they thought they’d been slipped something, on and on. All those things women were burdened with knowing that most men didn’t ever think

about. Whatever bizarre wariness had gripped them leading up to the program, they sobered up as we scared the living shit out of them. If the unfortunate young woman Tori had alerted me to was present, she didn't say, but odds were fair that there was more than one getting a crash course in hindsight.

Finally, Marisa clapped her hands and leaned forward in her chair at the center of our little assembly. Faces were still grim, but no longer pointedly at her. "All right, that's probably enough doom and gloom. If you have more questions, Spencer has my contact info, or you can pop by the Hancock Institute any time. I'll give you a tour of the public parts myself – it's pretty awesome in there ." I braced myself for a *private parts* joke, but she kept it mature. You never knew with her . " So what we've been talking about so far is worst case scenarios. Now, I want us to have a chance to talk about the good stuff."

"What's the good part of sexual assault?" asked Leigh cattily. By now, though, Marisa seemed to be doing all right with her crowd, and Leigh got enough narrowed eyes for her not to press further.

"Not sexual assault, hon. No, I'm talking about the *real* good stuff. Sex. That's my real job. To better understand that oldest and best beloved of all pastimes. Biologically, psychologically, socially, the whole shebang. Why we do it, how we do it, how we can make it more pleasurable..."

A murmur went through the crowd. Most of them were fresh out of high school. For many, this was the first time someone had ever talked about sex with them except to do PR for AIDS or warn them about pregnancy. Pleasure had been promised by the media, yes, but the educational system covered it with dire foreboding.

"Raise your hands, ladies, if you have things you ever wanted to know about sex but didn't ask? Couldn't ask ? Didn't want to muck up your browser history on the family PC?"

There were some giggles, but a few hands went up. Once a few hands went up, dozens followed until nearly everyone had one up. I joined in, too.

"Same. I've been at this for years, and there's still more I want to know. But it can be a little embarrassing right? For sure in front of

a big group, but even when it's only you and your partner. People will keep behaving the same way for *years* simply because they can't bring themselves to ask a question or state a preference. A girl I was friends with in high school didn't have her first orgasm until after she'd had her second kid. No joke. All because she felt like she'd hurt her boyfriends' feelings if she shared they weren't taking care of business."

She hadn't run this by me, but this wasn't our first rodeo. I chimed in, "We want everybody to be comfortable here. So what Marisa and I will do is pass around some scraps of paper, and you can write any question you want on it. Then Marisa and I will draw them at random, so nobody will know whose question it was. I think you'll be surprised how often your friends here were wondering the same thing you were."

The girls were piqued. We hadn't brought paper and writing utensils, but it only took a couple minutes for them to run back to their rooms and retrieve them. When I realized we'd somehow gained a second triplet in the process, I did a recount and saw we were up to a full thirty. Only missing one triplet (I wasn't sure which) and Destiny, who Charlie confirmed was confining herself to her room with a nasty cold, but who had sent down a question with her roommate.

"Before we go any further, I realize that having a guy present might make some of you uncomfortable. Might make you uncomfortable to ask me to leave, too, so if you want me to—"

"I can't get an answer to my question if you go, dude," Lex said, and by the outpouring of agreement, I conceded that I was being too modest, and took a seat.

"Speaking of, feel free to mark if you're looking for guy perspective, 'expert' perspective, or regular girl perspective," Marisa instructed as they scribbled out their curiosities. "If it's the last one, we'll open it up to the floor and let anybody who wants to weigh in do so."

After a few minutes, we'd collected all the questions they had. Marisa and I sat ourselves in the middle of the circle. Someone turned off the lounge's fluorescent lights and switched on the much

dimmer corner lamps. It was an intimate setting now. I could hardly make out faces, just pair after pair of perky college girl tits straining at their Higgins Hotties tops.

With an eager grin – Marisa *lived* for talking about sex – she drew the first piece of paper, uncrumpled it, and read.

“Oh. Looks like this one is for the boys,” she said, looking to me. “She asks, ‘what’s the number one physical trait boys find attractive in girls?’ And the physical is in caps, so no cop-outs, Spencer dear.”

Every last eye in the lounge was on me as my face reddened. I was glad for the dim light. “Um, I’m not sure that question has an objective answer, gang,” I said with a chuckle.

Casey rolled her eyes. “Oh come on, Spencer. You don’t have to speak on behalf of all boys in the universe. What do *you* like on a babe? It’s tits, right? Yeah, you’re a tit man, I can tell.” She thrust forth her incredible chest.

“Hey now, let’s not, ah–”

But Marisa wasn’t having it. “Let me assure you, Spencer likes tits. Now that’s not to say it’s his favorite feature, or that he even has one. Believe it or not, there are men who really do fixate on eyes, or teeth, or hands. The question was for Spencer, though, so I think this is an excellent opportunity for him to role model the filter-free, honest communication we’re striving for here.”

I dropped my voice to a whisper, which did nothing when I was surrounded by listeners. “Seriously, Marisa?!”

“Do you like eyes?” asked Katrina, lashes fluttering.

“What about lips?” inquired Shauna, puckering softly. Or maybe that was simply how hers looked all the time.

“I’m telling you guys, it’s tits!” insisted Casey, pumping a fist in the air, jiggling hers like mad.

“Sure, but not huge cow tits,” amended Georgia, in the minority of girls not threatening to burst out of her Higgins Hotties shirt. Her nipples were plain even in the lounge’s wan light. “Right, Spencer?”

“Whatever. I totally saw him checking out that one RA’s legs when they were on rounds the other week. Such a leg guy,” swore Terri, crossing hers in a pair of shorts so brief that they may as well have been underwear. (Actually, was that underwear?)

“Fuck legs – legs are just ads for a great ass, huh, boss man?” Jo declared as she bent down to pick up some discarded paper plates.

“Some guys like long hair, I know,” speculated Amy, flipping her dark tresses over her shoulder, where they hung halfway to her butt.

“Tons of Americans fetishize the Asian woman,” said who else but Kyu-Ri.

“Or the Latinx?” countered Marisa, a hair's breadth from succumbing to peals of impish giggles.

“SMILES!” I barked suddenly. Waaay too loudly. “I, um, like a woman’s smile. A lot.”

The cacophony fell silent. Thirty lips bent into thirty smiles. “Awwww!” said a dozen or more.

“Never heard of a guy wanting to fuck a bitch’s smile,” grumbled Sammi, one of the only nineteen-year-olds I’d ever met whose tits were so big they were already starting to sag.

Casey snorted beside her. “What do you think a blowjob is, dumbass?”

Andi nodded. “Yeah, it’s all about the blowjobs, dumbass.” Sammi’s cautionary glare silenced her though.

Marisa was unfurling another piece of paper even as I tried to scramble back into reality. “All right, next question. Let’s see here... Hmm. Somebody’s got some real dude handwriting. What’s...” She cocked her head to the side. “Oh. Unclear who this is for, so we’ll open it up to anybody. It says, simply, ‘what about anal?’”

“That’s for Spencer,” said Jordyn quickly. “I mean, I think.”

“You guys, come on...!”

Marisa put a hand on my arm. “Calm down, Spencer. They’re not asking for your personal sexual history. Only your thoughts on the act.” She addressed the room. “Usually when I do this at dorm programs, we get a girl floor and a guy floor together, so there’s, ya know, more than one guy. Obviously Spencer can’t speak for his entire sex, but if he’s comfortable, I think we’d like to hear what he has to say. And if he’s not, then we need to respect that.”

I was still processing what in the wide fucking world was happening, so my ex continued. “Now for my part, I’m not big on

anal? I think I like the idea of it more than the reality. Conceptually, it's something 'dirty.' Taboo. One of those things where you can't just give your partner a sensual kiss and just Do, right? You have to ask. Avert your eyes, and ask, like... 'hey, babe, do you think, maybe, you might want to try...' and then he knows you're *into* him, right? Or that you're a kinky slut, maybe.

"Only then... OK, this is probably TMI, but when it finally came to actually doing it? It was just... ow. The vagina, it's set up to basically take any penis out there. There's loads of bullshit about tight ones, lots of 'uwu my poor virgin pussy!' but really, they're hella elastic, and even big penises aren't that big on the vagina scale. Now the anus, on the other hand..." She shuddered theatrically. "Let's just say I was a little too small. Or else he was a little too big? Both, maybe. Anyway, that's my personal impression. I'd probably add a little more if we had any gay men in here, since that might make it of particular interest, but... alas."

I tried to wall her off with my stare, but Marisa bulldozed right through it and finished her sordid tale. By then, whether or not it was true, it sure felt like everybody understood the reason for my wide-eyed stare.

"That wasn't about me," I said tersely.

Marisa seemed to realize she'd gone too far this time and grimaced. "Right, of course. Sorry, I should have mentioned ." Then she snickered in spite of herself. "Spencer here came in and out no prob."

No one laughed.

"That was a joke."

Still.

"Right, I forgot he said y'all had already seen it in action..."

I sighed in exasperation. She was in rare form tonight. Maybe I should have fucked her before the program just to shut her up. "How about we move onto a question not for me?" *Or about me*, I added mentally.

Marisa flashed a half-hearted smile. (But still, half.) "Sure, sure. OK, let's see what we got. Something not for Spencer."

She unfolded and unwadded the pages, murmuring through the text.

“Do boys really like sex with virgins,’ no...

“How do you (Spencer) feel about footjobs,’ no...

“Do you have a girlfriend,’ no...

“Do you *want* a girlfriend,’ Seriously? No...

“Whip it out,’ Are you kidding me, ladies? Come on.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Casey...” She had the audacity to look affronted.

At long last, however, Marisa found one that worked for her. “OK, here we go, this is a great question. ‘What do you think about masturbating in the shower?’”

“Oh, gross!” exclaimed at least a couple. There were likewise more than a few panicked, sheepish expressions.

“Right, see? This is where that whole biological, psychological, social breakdown I was talking about really comes into play.

Masturbation. I have this quote on my wall in my office:

‘Masturbation is cheap, clean, efficient, and free from any possibility of wrong-doing – *and* you don’t have to go home in the dark. But it’s lonely.’ That was a guy named Robert Heinlein, not that it’s important but too many years of grad school means I can’t not cite.”

“Wasn’t he that guy who had all those creepy incest fantasies?” asked Katrina.

All eyes immediately shot to the two representatives of Lakeview’s iconic triplets. “What?” demanded Allison, crossing her arms beneath her breasts.

Marisa refocused. “So let’s talk about that ‘gross’ nonsense first, huh? The difference between touching your body, privately, for pleasure, and the difference between doing so for, say, hygiene, is barely a distinction. Anybody think it’s a bad idea to wash your vagina from time to time? No? So really, we’re talking about social distinctions. We all know the person in the next stall over is naked and touching themselves, so for my money, I don’t see much of a difference why or how. Plus, let’s be real. You live in the dorms, so—”

“Residence halls,” I said automatically.

“What’s the difference?” asked Dana.

“So,” Marisa went on, eyeballing me irritably, “it means you share space, like, all the time. I’m sure some of us have snuck in a quiet jill in our bunk while we think our roommate is sleeping,” she said, basking in startled, awkward glances by more girls than I’d have guessed. I had class bright and early the next morning, so I tried to forget which. “Which makes the shower the perfect place! It’s free, automatic lubrication. It’s white noise so you can breathe a little heavier. It’s a free rinse for your cum. Or ‘ejaculate’ if you want me to play the fancy research lady and not be real.”

“Fuck that, be real,” said Jo eagerly.

Marisa grinned. Real talk about sex was foreplay for her. “It’s a place that’s intrinsically linked with nudity, with sexual behavior. And I checked your bathrooms here before I came down and saw you even have those little seats in there, so it’s not even a slipping hazard. Me? I sprung for one of those detachable shower heads, one with just the right nozzles, and... yeah. Whew. Yeah.”

“Maybe we don’t need to be quite so anecdotal...?” I suggested softly.

“That’s a good call. Anyway, in short, masturbate in the shower as much as you like. Not saying it’s cool to make other people uncomfortable with a big ordeal about it, but that’s generally the golden rule of sexual conduct anyway – don’t make other people uncomfortable, and if you do, apologize and back off. That’s all there is to it.”

Marisa continued the activity, practicing a little extra restraint in reading the questions aloud now that it was already too late. Apologize and back off, indeed. The girls were loving it, and if I was still on edge after the way the program had begun, I could concede it was more in line with the effect this activity had had on my guys back in Rowland. If I blushed a bit more, I was the only guy in the room, and, well, the Hotties were the Hotties.

So we talked about the social dynamics of threesomes, before, during and after. We talked about friends with benefits. We talked about porn. We talked about streaming adult content. We talked about whether scissoring was a thing, with Terri and Toni failing miserably not to let everyone see who had asked it, and who had

been asked about. I empathized . As with the questions about blowjob tips, the practicalities of titty-fucking, was it weird to ask to be spanked, role-playing scenarios with disparate power levels (cop-civilian, Daddy-daughter, and needless to say, RA-resident). Many of them were explicitly or implicitly addressed to me. I answered what I could, and choked down my embarrassment through the rest.

It gave me time to make sense of it all, though. Their initial attitude toward Marisa, all the flirty questions in the Q&A. They were having a little fun teasing me, that was all. It shouldn't be so surprising considering how they usually carried on, but it had taken me a while to realize the practical joke of it all.

Savannah and Vickie entered the lounge, looking surprised to see the entirety of Higgins 3 gathered here. Rounds time, evidently. I gave a wave as Marisa went on with her answer.

“Right, facials. Like a lot of sex acts, it's much more a trope in pornography than a common practice. That said, however, most people do watch porn, and there are plenty of people who enjoy emulating the kinds of things they see. You should never feel pressured. No matter what some guys say, once they've released their cum at you, what you do with it is 100% up to you. Swallow, spit, aim it at the floor – ceiling, if you're ambitious – or heck, hose yourself down. It's up to you.”

Our new arrivals looked a lot more surprised to hear *that* upon entering. My girls were riveted, and Marisa didn't interrupt herself for strangers. Knowing her, she was stoked to have two more members in her audience. My coworkers stared , wide-eyed.

“That said, the question was specifically facials, though I'll extrapolate that to the broader notion of letting him come on you in general. Is it degrading? Well, if you feel like it is, then it is, so don't do it – unless you get off on being degraded. Some do. But for some, it's one of those little things we can do to please our partner. I know I keep harping on it, but *communicate* . If you choose to give him a vote and you're not sure what he wants, just ask, ‘where do you want me to take it?’ Remember, cum washes off. Really easily, in fact. You're allowed to be squeamish, but always know that sex means

touching and sweat and cum. There is no such thing as sterility in sex.”

Savannah’s eyes looked like they were about to pop out of her head. Vickie wasn’t far behind.

“Did you ever... do that? With...?” Leigh’s eyes darted to me. They’d given up on asking me questions, but apparently asking Marisa about my sex life with her was still on the table.

I used the arrival of my coworkers as an excuse. “I think that’s a little personal, Leigh, and I think you know that. Now come on, it’s ten o’clock. I know plenty of you have class early. Let’s head back to our rooms and do some processing. But first, let’s thank our presenter, yeah?”

“Best presentation ever,” said Jacqui.

“Fuck going to my room. I’m hitting the muh fuckin’ shower, yo,” said Lex.

“Promise me you won’t tell my mom you taught me about taking cum on my face,” said Dana gravely.

“I won’t. I didn’t!” I squeaked.

Marisa waved me off to go touch base with Vickie and Savannah while she faced a throng of girls with follow-up questions and requests for her contact info. In the span of two hours, she’d gone from pariah to Hottie heroine.

“What in the hell was *that* all about...?” asked a dazed Savannah.

Vickie whipped out her cell phone and tapped the clock. “And, so you know, it’s midnight. We saw you had a program going at ten, so we kept out of your hair. When you were still going on our second set of rounds, we figured... Yeah, I don’t think we figured we’d walk in to find out you were training your girls to take facials. Bold. Ramona’s idea?”

“That’s not what it looked like – weird timing is all. Marisa is a presenter from the Hancock Institute. She’s just really sex positive, and the girls, um, were...”

“Full of hormones?” suggested Vickie with a thin smile, eyes flickering to her rounds partner.

“They were curious. Is there something wrong with letting them ask an expert in human sexuality questions about sex?”

Savannah frowned at where Marisa was fending off questions about how long we’d been together, how we’d first hooked up, if I really was the guy in her anal sex anecdote. “I mean... there might be.”

“Oh come on, Savannah, at least these girls are learning from your example and preemptively aiming Second String here’s jizz away from their clothes, right?”

“Second...?!” Savannah’s kind eyes widened in outrage as the slight registered. “That is *not* funny!”

“It isn’t,” I said. Had she waited to pitch that joke to me when Savannah wasn’t around to hear it, then yes, it would have been hilarious. I waited until the last few who were meaning to leave left; Casey had an armload of leftover snacks, and invited me to come get some if I was thirsty.

None of it was liquid.

I kept my voice low, mindful of Marisa and the final few hangers on. “Look. I’m going to handle it. They decided to prank me tonight, try to make me uncomfortable. Teasing, that’s all. I’ll sleep it off, and... figure out how best to respond tomorrow.”

Savannah looked dubious, or maybe just disturbed, but Vickie merely shrugged. It was a relief that my explanation made sense to someone else. “Best response to a prank is no response. It gets a rise out of you, it’s worth doing again.” Her eyes flitted to Savannah instructively.

“You’re probably right. Look, I have to escort my presenter out – I don’t want to keep you. Sorry about... whatever that was.”

They both looked me over, but there was nothing to say except good night.

Once I was clearly paying attention again, the girls pumping Marisa for information about our history realized the faux pas and excused themselves. It was down to just the two of us.

“Now look, before you–”

“What the *fuck* was that, Marisa?” I snapped. “From them, it’s a crude bit of tasteless humor. From you, though? That was shitty,

encouraging them like that. I don't think I've ever been so embarrassed in my life. I told you some of them have crushes. You thought egging them on was the way to handle it?"

She looked chastised, something I wasn't sure I'd ever seen from her before. The woman was usually shameless. She sniffed regretfully. "I'm sorry, OK? At first I thought I'd poke at you a little bit. I told you we should have had sex before I came down here. I always talk too much when I'm horny – you *know* that about me. Plus you always take this stuff so seriously, you know? I thought you were overstating. I didn't realize they were so..."

"Come off it. They're freshmen, Marisa. Somebody put the idea in their heads to fuck with me, and they ran with it. I didn't need you pouring gasoline on the fire."

"You're right. I had no idea things were this serious. I know you warned me, but... I didn't listen. By the time I saw that it had gone from harmless crushes and a little too much curiosity to flat-out harassment, I was out of my element. I... I'm sorry. Don't be mad, OK? Ugh, I wish we were still going out so we could have makeup sex. You can't makeup sex a fuck buddy though. Ugh, and I was gonna give it to you so *good* tonight, too! Fuck."

"Marisa, do you see how that's maybe *not* helping?"

"Hey, I still will if you want. Seeing a guy in that much demand, it..." She caught my expression, and held up her hands. "Sorry. Rejection accepted."

To her credit, she helped me clean up the lounge before I walked her out to her car. We didn't say much. I didn't know what to say. When I went back upstairs, I made sure to lock the door in case somebody decided to push their luck on tonight's hijinks. I even thought I heard someone lightly try the knob at one point, but it was probably just the draft from the stairwell door opening.

It had to be that. What else could it be?

I lie awake for quite some time that night, reliving that whole humiliating encounter, wishing it hadn't made me hard as fuck.

Chapter Thirteen: Behavioral Expectations

When I came back from my morning class I crashed, my body demanding the sleep it had been denied the night before. I slept in until almost one, but woke up still hard. No shower for me today, thanks. Once I was dressed, I rushed out the door before I could be waylaid by some Hottie looking to push her luck. I went to my afternoon class where I heard not a word my professor said, then the rec center, and finally hit the Penderdast food court. I took my meal to go, eating out on the loading dock behind the Higgins center building. It was as private as I could get without going into full retreat.

“Spencer...?”

“Hm? Oh, hi Ramona.”

“I’ve been meaning to call you. You and I, dear, need to talk.”

I should have retreated.

“Oh. Look, I can explain.”

“You do excel at that. Finish up, then come find me in my office. I need you to help me make sense of what’s going on up on Higgins 3.” She blew a stray wisp of hair away from her glasses.

“Again.”

I chewed slowly.

A short while later, I brushed the crumbs off my shirt and shambled into Ramona’s office, glumly closing the door behind me. She was at her desk, looking as attractive as ever as she typed out an email I didn’t dare squint at. Was this finally where she was notifying Bob that I was fired? If so, I couldn’t have even said why except to agree that it was probably merited. Whatever I’d done, I’d done something.

“So. You seem like you have some kind of clue what happened. Talk to me.”

I nodded. Then, with apologies at regular intervals, I walked her through last night, from my conversation with Tori we’d already

discussed to its culmination in the 4-hour program last night. I left Vickie and Savannah out of it, as well as the most lurid details of Marisa's advice. The rest, though, spilled. Spilled until we were wading in the stuff.

"So... yeah. I don't know who complained, but that's what happened. It was only a prank," I insisted, to her as well as to myself, "and I promise I'll try to make sure it never happens again, but—"

Only then, Ramona was moving to the little sofa beside me. Her presence reminded me how little it was. I squirmed to make space, but she rested a hand on my shoulder. "Hey. Spencer?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean for any of—"

"*HEY.*" Yikes. I forgot she could do that authoritative voice. "Listen to me. Spencer, I asked you in here today because this morning, I've received half a dozen emails from your residents asking for new shower heads. All the same model. All I wanted to know was if you knew anything about this or if your governor was launching her own remodeling campaign."

"Tori? Oh my god, I'm—"

"*HEY.*" I fell silent. "Spencer, what happened last night... Are you all right?"

I blinked. "What? Am *I* ...? Of course I am. I mean, am I fired?"

"Fired? Why on earth would I fire you? Is there something you haven't told me?" Ramona put her hand to her mouth anxiously.

"You know. Because they were all... jealous. Of Marisa. And the flirting. The shirts. You were right about those. And, um, the questions. Anal. And the rest."

She cocked her head a bit over "anal," but moved past it quickly.

"Spencer, dear... I don't know why you think I would be upset with you over your girls' inability to..." She shook her head. "Last night wasn't your fault. You know that, right? If anybody did wrong, you were the victim, not the perpetrator."

"I... what? No, see, I brought in Marisa, and we... they..."

She put her finger to my lips. Then, to my surprise, my boss planted a small kiss on my forehead. I was even more surprised that I

wasn't bothered by it. It was sweet, and tender, and if my nostrils didn't deceive me, a little bit minty.

When she spoke, her Eastern European accent came through stronger than usual, which I had learned in these past months happened when she was speaking unfiltered. "What do you think I would say if Carmen came in here and told me that last night at a program, a bunch of male residents had asked her a thousand questions about her turn-ons? If they grilled her ex-partner about her sexual histories? If, even after it was made clear the advances were unwelcome, the young men continued to proposition her for sex?"

"I think you'd be on the warpath," I said, adding quickly, "but that's not how it was. They were just teasing, that's all."

"Did you think it was funny?"

"I mean, it was kind of embarrassing, but nothing I can't handle."

"Yeah, well, in the words of one of my mentors: too much haha, pretty soon boohoo. Spencer, this behavior is unacceptable. All this time, I've worried about how having a man in charge of a group of young women might negatively impact them. Now I see that I should have been worried about how it might hurt you."

"Really, it's—"

"It's not OK. It is absolutely not. It is toxic, hostile behavior, and I simply will not abandon my favorite staffer to the whims of a group of women who seem to have no boundaries at all for how they treat their RA."

I sniffled once, then twice. I didn't cry. Almost, but there were too many feelings swirling around to settle long enough on any one of them. Ramona pulled me in and held me, rubbing my back and letting it happen. Maybe I was just moved by her concern. Maybe I needed someone to not want anything from me. Maybe I was, after weeks of resisting teasing and flirting, simply tired.

"So what are you – what are *we* going to do about it?" I asked. She still hadn't released me. I was all right with that.

"I've half a mind to drag every last one of them down to my office and run them through the campus judicial system for sexual

harassment,” she said hawkishly. “But it would take months to hear so many, and besides, it’s obviously not how you want to handle it.”

“Yeah. I’m not mad or anything. I’m just... I... Mm...”

There were those divine fingernails of hers, once again empathetically trailing up and down my back. It was a bit familiar, coming from a boss, but she had motherly instincts, and I didn’t mind. Ramona, at least, wasn’t going to mess with my head about her intentions.

She continued, “If I thought I could round them all up and talk some decency into the lot of them, I would, but honestly, I’d rather have it in writing anyway. So I’ll sit down this afternoon and draft an email addressing their behaviors. Hopefully that will be that. I’ll try to look for an excuse to stop by the third floor now and then in the next week or two and make my presence, and my displeasure, felt.”

“That sounds... good.”

“It sounds kinder than they deserve by far, but it will have to do. I’m here to take care of you, Spencer. You’re my guy. The only guy I’ve got.”

When I was in second grade, I got in a fight on the playground after school. Mark Bryant had cut in front of the line for the slide, and I told him he wasn’t allowed to do that. A great battle ensued in which two seven-year-olds shoved each other a bit, and ultimately, I missed in one such shove and wound up throwing myself on my face in the mulch. I got some cuts – scratches, really – on my face, and Mark either felt so bad for me, or was so worried he’d get in trouble over it, that he helped me up and let me go down the slide ahead of him. All involved parties departed recess satisfied with their contributions to civic culture.

My mother, however, was horrified when she saw the scratches. She called the school and went ballistic on them. The next day, our principal came to our class and read Mark the riot act in front of god and everyone. Whatever consequences they gave him, they were enough to forestall retaliation, but the rest of the class shunned me as a snitch for at least a week, which as a second-grader may as well have been a year. My recesses became solitaire tetherball matches,

punctuated at intervals by someone hurling invective or pebbles in my direction.

Ramona's email left my mother in the dust.

Residents of Higgins 3,

Recently, your Resident Assistant put together a floor program regarding safety and education on sexuality in the university environment, which I am told was attended by almost all residents. During that program, numerous members of your community used that well-intentioned program to thrust unwanted sexual attention on the sole male member of that community. It is my responsibility to inform you that these behaviors may constitute sexual harassment, in violation of the Lakeview University campus residential code and state law. You have previously been informed, but let me reiterate: staff members are prohibited from engaging in sexual relationships with residents, so to force yourself upon him in this fashion is rude at best, cruel at worst.

It may be that the intention was to tease, or to pull a "funny" prank. Rest assured that these are not defenses for those behaviors. Harassment, be it of a staff member or a resident, is not acceptable, and I will not permit it. Further infractions will result in sanctions and/or criminal charges.

I realize your living situation is an unorthodox one and that you may not have intended to cause any harm. You women have a golden opportunity to learn about intersex cohabitation this year, and I hope you reflect on this incident and come away from it considering how you might intervene to prevent someone from being harassed, how you can support and comfort victims of harassment, and how you can adjust your own behaviors to prevent further such incidents.

You are students of Lakeview, ladies. It is my hope that going forward, you will do better, and show Spencer the respect, support, and consideration that he deserves. I know that he cares deeply about his community, collectively and as individuals. That is a special thing, and it may be worth considering how you own that privilege.

– *Ramona Tinsley*

I read it twice. Then I fled the building.

I was still walking around campus, ignoring all the buzzing from my phone until I finally shut it off altogether. I even spent a little while in the chapel. They'd just renovated it last year, and I had to say, it looked great. Soothing. A fine place to ask forgiveness, and to contemplate one's mortality. The sky was starting to darken by the time I conceded that I may as well face the music. Mercifully, for once everybody's doors were closed as I made my way back to my room.

Someone knocked on my door before my shoes were off. It was Tori, with Katrina and Dana on either side. Governor, vice governor and treasurer. Representatives of the people, come to voice their displeasure.

"Do you have a minute, Spencer?" Tori asked.

"Of course. I assume this is about the, you know, letter. Email. Thing."

The girls nodded, letting themselves in quietly. Katrina spoke first, saying, "That's right. First off, I want to apologize."

"Apologize?" I blinked. I'd expected them to be here to make sure I understood how pissed off everybody was at being chewed out over a prank. Why would they be apologizing?

Katrina nodded, eyes downcast. "Yes. I'm so sorry. I may not have been the one who wrote 'whip it out,' but I was letting myself get sucked into it all as much as anyone."

"I'm sorry too," said Dana. "I was raised better than that."

Tori chimed in as well. "I'm sorry to have made you uncomfortable."

Hmm. Maybe these three were contrite, if contrition were even merited, but no doubt I'd be hearing it from the rest for weeks or months to come. I waved away their sorries. "Water under the bridge. But there's a second off coming, I take it?"

"Can you come with us?"

"Is the pillory set up in the trash room?"

"Please," Dana said simply.

I arched a brow, but there was no reason not to. Not sure what to expect, but sure I wouldn't like it, I followed behind the local government around the corner, past the bathroom, and down to the lounge.

The entire floor was there.

Katrina and Dana each took one hand and nudged, then finally had to tug me from the hall into the lounge.

“Um... hi?”

Before I knew what was happening, I was surrounded. For a moment, I tensed. The specter of Mark Bryant, come for its vengeance at last.

Except instead, I found myself in the middle of a thirty-three-way hug.

A chorus of apologies issues from my Hotties. Some of them were in tears, even. It all went on for minutes, minutes of a mob of young women swarming me, pressing themselves against me, squeezing me, asking my forgiveness. When the ones holding were ready to let go, they were promptly replaced by a fresh body, fresh apologies. Some of them even kissed me on the cheek, and once or twice on the neck, but it was all such a blur I couldn't even have said who.

Maybe I needed to reread Ramona's email. Or shit, go downstairs and tell Vickie she'd been absolutely right.

The hugathon went on for some time. There was no sound save for the apologies and the sniffles. I didn't know what to make of it all. It was absurd. The farthest thing from necessary. There was no way to tell them that the reason I'd been so upset wasn't because of how invested they'd seemed to be in my sex life, but how frustrating it was not to be able to do a damn thing about it.

I don't think that my feelings crystallized until that moment.

Finally, someone gently pulled Charlie off of me, and the hugging ended. I was in the middle of the lounge now, the Hotties spread out in rings around me. Tori stood at my side.

“That's more like it, ladies. I know some of us felt we were unfairly called out, but I'm proud of you all for having the guts to come down here and help make things right. Now—”

I held up a hand, and Tori permitted me to speak. “I’m sorry, but... I’m not really sure why, um, or maybe what I did to , you know... I’m sorry, but this is a lot to take in. I expected to come home and find you guys—”

“Girls,” corrected Lex.

“Sorry, you *girls* pissed off because you thought I was complaining about you or whatever. I didn’t. I was just taken aback by everything last night, and my boss noticed, and...”

I trailed off, and Tori took back over. “Spencer, I think I speak for everyone when I say we’re glad to be with you. We don’t know how we all wound up here, or how you wound up our RA, but...” She panned the crowd. “The man doesn’t get why we’re here tonight, Hotties. Would anybody like to speak up and say why?”

I swiveled in place, waiting for someone to speak up, to make sense of how I was suddenly surrounded by all this support and kindness when I’d my heart told me I should be receiving anything but. When they kept quiet, I was actually relieved. These young women, girls, *my* girls, were far too enamored of me for their own good, and doubly so for my own good. I didn’t know how Tori and the rest had cajoled them into—

“That psycho tried to kill me,” said Leigh suddenly. “She might have done it. You know, you don’t really know what to do when you’re, you know, naked. Like, your body says cover up, hide, ick, but someone’s pulling your hair, hitting you, so you can’t. I couldn’t do anything. But Spencer, you came out, even though it meant letting everybody see... yeah. But you didn’t care. You protected me.”

I thought she was done, but then she went right on. “Then when I went to thank you, to ask you if you wanted to hook up or whatever, you... said no. Like, no guy has *ever* said no to me before. Not about anything, really, but especially not about that. I was embarrassed, but looking back, I thought, here’s this guy who legit only looked out for me because... he wanted to. Not because of my tits, not so he could get a quick lay. Just to... help.”

Angel patted her roommate’s back as she fell silent, head lowering. Should I respond? But then Danielle was talking. “It was the roommate agreement. Remember those?” A few chuckles, a few

nods. Already those felt like the ancient past. She looked at Dana as she went on. “When we first moved in together, I thought I was gonna straight-up *murder* my roommate. Every single night on the phone with her mom, for like hours. Always the same stuff – classes, staying safe, what sorority are you rushing, are you meeting any boys. Over and over. I was about ready to lose it – and then here comes our guy, and he convinced me to open up, take a risk and be honest, and... we fixed it. Like, we worked it out, moved past it. Thanks to that stupid piece of paper I made a new best friend.”

Dana beamed, eyes watering, and the two rushed together for a quick hug. They were still at it when Kendall took over, Georgia at her side. They talked about their party that got busted, and how scared they were about getting in trouble, and how I kept it cool and put things in perspective. “And then we were still kinda drunk, kinda, you know, and he let us follow him back to his room and crash with him for the night. Didn’t even touch us, even though he could have. You were more worried about making us feel OK than about what we’d done.”

The Hotties began settling to the floor to show they didn’t have anywhere else to be, leaving only myself, Tori, and the speaker standing. I liked to think I could take a compliment, but one after another after another like this... I didn’t know what to make of it.

Peyton and Sydney commended me for making them feel comfortable being gay after they took a risk by sharing it. Lex thanked me for helping her and Jo work out their Tits Out/Timeout arrangement – and, to my chagrin, for helping her decide to get breast enhancement surgery. There was no tactful way in this company to tell her they looked great already, so I blushed and let Jacqui thank me for being good about enforcing quiet hours so she got enough sleep for her 6 AM volleyball practices. Charlie, for standing in for her big brother and taking on his hugging responsibilities when she really needed a squeeze. Kyu-Ri for taking time to work with google translate so I could help her find all her classes, as well as taking her to the Asian culture center where she’d made good friends with some other Korean students. Ellie talked about how she’d always been kind of a wallflower, but I had made

sure not to forget about her and checked in to make sure she was doing OK. Jordyn, for my support for her “hot-ass t’s,” which for a moment I mistook for hot-ass tits on account of being surrounded by so many. Terri for helping her with her tiktok stuff, and not being judgy about her aspirations to be a “pro e-thot.” Whatever that was.

Andi said nothing, but she held my eyes in hers and made sure I knew. Jean, however, chimed in to thank me for saving her roommate from being such an annoying clingy hermit – though she gave Andi a gentle nudge, which was met with a sheepish grin.

Casey stood up, and I braced myself for another round of “whip it out,” but instead she surprised the hell out of me. “I’ve been dating the same guy since freshman year. Of high school, I mean. And... you guys, I... we...” Then she was crying. Ugly crying. Her friends hurried to her sides to hold her up. “I miss him so fucking much, but I’m way the fuck out here so I can’t kiss him or touch him or fuck him, and talking isn’t close to enough like I thought it would be and that’s just been such a part of me for so goddamn long, you guys.” She sniffled piteously. “I was ready to drop out and go back home, but he said I owed it to myself to stick it out, and that he got it if I needed someone, just for a while, right? And I felt so fucking hoey even thinking about it, but like, here’s our guy, little fuckin treatsa pizza, right, and he’s all I can’t even touch you girls even if you beg me to, and I’m like... yeah.”

She suddenly threw herself at me so suddenly it startled me, her arms wrapped around mine so I couldn’t even hug her back. Her words were murmured into my chest, where her tears quickly soaked through. “And so I got to get some of it out of my system, you know? Say the shit I wanted to say but not who I wanted to say it to, and he just took it, and let me bug the fuck out of him, and I’m sorry if I made you feel bad about it but I fucking love you, man!”

That culminated in another mass hug, this time centered on Casey. I barely understood the psychology behind it, but she didn’t need me to.

When we finally broke it off, I cut in. “You guys, this is... I don’t even know what to say. You’re amazing, all of you. I’ve always liked my job, but living here, with you all... It’s...”

“A wet dream come true?” said Sammi, to a chorus of giggles.

I shook my head. “I was going to say ‘it’s a pleasure,’ but thanks for making that sound sketchy. So just... thank you. All of you, really. I have no idea how Tori rounded you all up for this,” or how every single girl on Higgins 3 was free on a Friday afternoon for that matter, “but you’re officially released. You can go about your business.”

Tori held up a hand before I was even done speaking. “No, sorry, but they can’t. Or shouldn’t, I guess. While we’re all here, I thought this might be an excellent time to discuss some new behavioral expectations.”

“What, you mean, like, new rules? Don’t we already have enough?” whined Jordyn. I remembered how pissed she’d been during our second floor meeting to find out that just because the state legalized it, she still couldn’t smoke weed in the residence halls.

“Real talk. I think we all know last night didn’t start with last night. We’ve all on this floor been acting like we don’t have any men. Spencer has been pretty patient with it, all things considered. A saint’s restraint. We’ve heard the rumors, sure.” More than a few eyes went to Leigh. To Andi. To Casey, despite her fresh admission. “We all know, though, that that’s on us, not him.”

“Well—”

Tori wasn’t having it, though, which was just as well. “I think this is a good time to touch base with one another and see what, if any, behaviors we need to re-examine in light of our diverse community.” She looked to me with a sly grin. “How’d I do?”

“Perfectly said. But really—”

“So,” Tori said right over me yet again, “I’ll lead us in a discussion here and see if we can’t identify any problem behaviors with a do’s column for things that are within everybody’s comfort level, and a don’t’s column for things that aren’t. For instance – I’ll start – I’ve noticed a lot of you ladies have gotten pretty comfortable walking around in just a towel when you’re heading to the showers.”

As Tori walked over to the white board by the door and set up her columns, there were some indignant looks. “What are we

supposed to do, wear a whole outfit? I don't want my shit getting wet," grouched Jo.

"Towels are fine," I assured her. "That's what I do sometimes."

Tori looked between the two of us, then turned to the board and wrote, *wear towels to the shower* under the Do column. "OK. While we're talking about bathroom attire, I've seen more than a few heinies in nothing but underwear down there. I'll bet some of you would feel pretty freaked if you were in Spencer's flip flops and had to share a bathroom with a bunch of guys in nothing but their boxers."

I shook my head. "I see your point, but really, I'm not out to set a dress code like we're back in high school. This is your home. If you're comfortable, I'm comfortable." What a contemptible lie. Denied time to process privately, I simply wasn't ready to give up all of my eye candy without at least thinking it over. I might have a saint's restraint, as Tori said, but I was still human.

Tori uncapped her marker almost the moment she'd recapped it, and wrote *wear underwear to the bathroom* in the Do's.

"Next up, and I'm gonna go right ahead and slot this in the Don't's ..."

ask him to "whip it out" etc., she wrote in her bubbly handwriting.

"I know you said your thing Casey, but so we're all hundred percent clear."

"As long as we can add 'whipping it out' to the Do's." Casey's grin was ear to ear. Tori's wasn't, but it made for balance in our little universe.

Perhaps my inclination toward permissiveness had not been a great idea. Later that weekend, when Tori and the other floor government reps and I got together to formalize the list (at their insistence, not mine), we would have a long talk about whether Do and Don't were the apt names for the columns. I was responding to it as if it were comfortable and uncomfortable. Framing the things I didn't object to as Do's sounded like they were requirements. *Fine* and *Not Fine* might have been better, but Tori insisted that the

document had been ratified democratically and was therefore binding.

I had my reservations , but the final list spoke for itself.

DO

wear towels to the shower

wear underwear to the bathroom

introduce him to your girlfriends (This one stemmed from a discussion of same sex guests; again, the final phrasing wouldn't have been my choice, but I didn't want to deprive them of *all* their freedom to tease.)

be polite to his female guests (In regards to some regret over initial attitudes toward Marisa.)

knock before entering his room (In memory of Quinn.)

hugs! (Charlie.)

attend floor programs if possible (Another unnecessary one, but the girls were still abuzz over the previous night's presentation, and wanted this experience codified.)

apologize if/when you cross the line → better yet, make it right! (Almost Marisa's advice, funnily.)

MOAR HUGZ (Someone, probably Charlie, added this after our meeting concluded, but Tori decided to leave it.)

DON'T

ask him to "whip it out" etc.

wear HH shirts outside of H3

change with your door wide open (I wasn't sure why "wide" was included, but it was included.)

allow sexual noises to be heard in the hallway

ask about his current/former sex life

get him fired!!!!!!! The discussion on this was in sort of a "snitches get stitches" perspective, not my fav, but I wasn't about to object to a reminder for them to keep their occasional excesses under wraps.

Indeed, I left the meeting with an absolute certainty that occasional excesses would continue. Nay, *must* continue. These girls.

Sunday, Tori and Katrina went out to Home Depot and bought the new shower heads on the Higgins 3 dime. Emma, a sophomore majoring in engineering, volunteered to install them. Definitely the sort of thing that ought to merit a work order, but I didn't have it in me to cast aspersions on her capabilities over something so pedestrian. Monday morning, I took my shower in the middle stall. It had been the closest one open. Those nozzles were an improvement, I had to hand it to them.

Soon, there was a Hottie in each of the adjacent stalls.

"Is that you, Spencer?" asked a soft female voice. In the din of three showers, I couldn't be sure whose.

"Gooooood mornin'."

In each stall, a slender hand reached up and removed the shower nozzle from its bracket. To my left, I heard the sound of a body thudding against the divider between us. To my right, a shallow gasp. They could be anyone. They were everyone. As the sound of rhythmic splashing and ragged whimpers filled the showers, I stopped caring. They wanted this. I wanted this. The three of us took care of our urges separately, together, in unison. I let them both towel off and depart before I exited my stall.

Charlie was waiting outside the shower area, her trim, adorable body wrapped in a fluffy pink towel. She smiled brightly, then came up and gave me a tight hug.

"Whoops! Towel almost fell off. Sorry, Spencer."

"Don't worry about it, Charlie. And hey, enjoy the new shower heads."

She turned to them, studied them, unconsciously licked her lips. Meanwhile, I was doing the same, except with Sydney's ass, where she was scratching the portion exposed by her panties with one hand while doing her makeup with the other.

I waited until Charlie's shower was running, then went right back in. Cleaner to do it here than back in my room. It was to be my second of four showers that day, and I never wanted for neighbors.

The new nozzles were a hit.

"Aaaaand that's the checklist."

"Really? The whole thing?"

“Yep. ‘12: Overt masturbation,’ ‘41: routine/codified states of undress.’ Oh, and obviously Those were the last ones, aside from number 1, obviously.”

“‘Acceptance.’ You’d think that would’ve been the first box, ya know? Never understand where we found a guy who fought so hard not to take advantage of two and a half dozen hot, horny, adoring college chicks.”

“Guess Bobby was right about him, huh. Still don’t know if Prime’s my hero, or the biggest idiot I’ve ever met. Well, not *met* met, but... you know what I mean.”

“Cyberstalked?”

“You are such a boomer. Nobody says cyberstalking any more.”

“I bet some of those Higgins kids would if any of them knew we’d been pointing thermal scanners at them night and day for the past month.”

“At least we didn’t go ahead with the cameras.”

“Kinda hard to publish your findings when they include secret footage of a bunch of teenagers’ dorm rooms.”

“Because aiming mics and thermal at them is so ethical?”

“Pff, ethics. We left that behind on day 0, man. I’m talking about legal. This state, if you can get the data from outside, doesn’t matter how you got it.”

“Yeah. I know. I work here too, remember? Not about to risk prison over this.”

“Yeah yeah. Gonna get a lot more interesting from here on out, though.”

“Do you think he even suspects?”

“Of course he does. Ever since he had that chat with 2629.”

“Yeah? I didn’t see anything about that in the logs. Do we need to juice her?”

“Protocol says no, but my curiosity about what she’ll do says go for it.”

“We don’t need another 5425 on our hands, man.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Good television makes for bad science, the director always says.”

“I do say that, don’t I.”

“Sir!”

“Sir.”

“Phase 1 finalized?”

“Ah, yeah. Here, let me bring up that checklist for you...”

“Fuck the checklist. Are we ready to move on our not? This wasn’t cheap. If this doesn’t pan out, it’s gonna ruin us.”

“So, do we go ahead? You’re authorizing—”

“You have to ask? Of course we fucking proceed. If we have to flood that dorm with porn stars and juice them cross-eyed until they’re triple-teaming him with blowjobs morning, noon and night, we proceed. Understand? There’s no going back.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll review protocols with the team, implement tonight and confirm when it’s underway.”

“Tonight? You’ll do it right this minute. I got you eggheads the roster you said we needed, but I can’t lengthen the school year for you. Midterms are coming up, dammit. I want to hear they’re begging for it by Thanksgiving break.”

“Right. But... Never mind. I’m on it.”

“But what? Speak your mind. I didn’t hire you because you’re an idiot. If you’ve got reservations, I want to know what they are.”

“Um, it’s just... you said you want them begging for it? They’re not far from there now, sir. He’s already... Well. Aren’t you worried he’ll break? I mean, if he... if they...”

“Yeah, if...?”

“If some whistleblower notifies the ethics committee, they’ll bury us, sir. It was already a near miss just filling Higgins 3 with the girls, much less keeping it from 6818.”

“How the hell do you remember all those—”

“Then I guess we better make sure anybody who finds out about it has too much in their hands and mouths to do anything with any whistles, shouldn’t we.”

“But... Can we really...? Erm. Sorry. Yes, sir. I’ll get Phase 2 going ASAP.”

“See to it you do. This kid is exhausting my goddamn patience.”

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Students

Katrina



Nikki



Quinn



Georgia



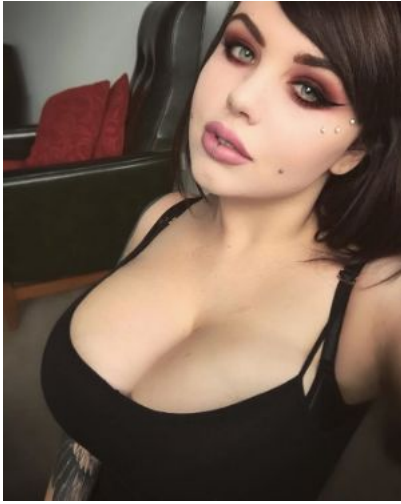
Kendall



Andi



Jean



Ellie



Tori



Amy



Casey



Shauna



Dawn



Kyu-Ri



Jordyn



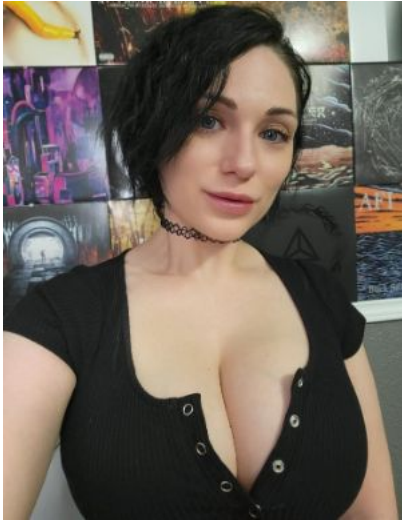
Destiny



Charlie



Angel



Leigh



Peyton



Sydney



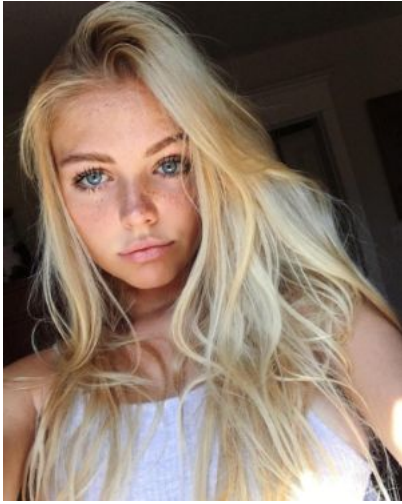
Terri



Toni



Jacqui



Sammi



Jo



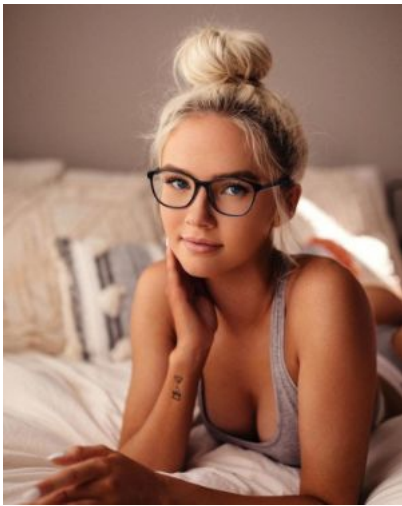
Lex



Emma



Dana



Dana's Mom



Danielle



Allison, Madison, Addison



Staff

Marisa



Janis



Romona



Savannah



Vickie



Floor Plan

Higgins 3 Floor Plan & Roster (approximate)

