



# *Three to Tango*

*Chloe Cole & L. C. Chase*



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## Dedication

*I want to thank L.C. for agreeing to write a book with me. I went into this venture with my eyes wide open, having read about the possible pitfalls of coauthoring. I imagined a learning curve, a window of time where we would struggle and get to know one another's style. I was prepared to do a lot of compromising, and I was 100 percent prepared to roll up my sleeves and work hard. Instead it was like I'd found the other half of my brain, and we spent a hell of a lot more time laughing than we did compromising. Working with L.C. has been a highlight of my publishing career, and I can't wait to do it again. XOXOX lub u, my friend.*

—Chloe

*I'd like to thank my truly amazing friend Chloe for asking me to pen a tale with her. Neither of us had any idea how to go about it when the idea was sprung, but it didn't matter. I found my twin in her, and from day one we were in perfect sync. It was by far one of the best experiences I've ever had. I'm looking forward to writing many more stories with her. You're a rock star, Chloe. XOXO*

—L.C.

*We'd like to thank our wonderful editor, Jana, for giving us this opportunity to share our story and the guidance to make it better.*

## Chapter One

“That’s it, big boy. Take it off,” murmured Jace, his voice low and seductive.

“You’re so bad—” Melody stopped short, captivated by Alec pulling his black T-shirt over his head. Powerful muscles rippled as he threw it onto a nearby bench and jogged back onto the basketball court. His tanned body gleamed a warm gold in the Southern California sunshine.

“Oh, man, you’re so right. That should be illegal,” she gasped when she could finally speak again.

Simultaneously, they reached for the frosty beers between them on the table and drank deeply.

Melody kept her eyes on the court one story below them as she pressed the icy bottle to her suddenly overheated cheeks. “We’re such a couple of pervs.”

“Tell me about it. But I can’t seem to stop myself,” Jace replied with mock regret.

Alec chose that moment to look up from his game of one-on-one to give them a wave and one of his signature cold-shower-not-included smiles. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, “Save one for me!”

“Oh, I’m saving something for you, all right,” Jace said in a low voice, and he and Melody broke into a fit of giggles.

This had been their ritual for the past few months. Every Friday after work, Melody and her best friend, Jace, watched their roommate, Alec, play basketball from their rooftop patio on Manhattan Beach’s popular Strand. Later, when the game was over, the three of them would lounge on the patio well into the night, analyzing Alec’s play over a few drinks. Melody wondered ruefully if he had any

clue that Jace detested sports almost as much as off-the-rack clothes and subpar produce. Jace never let on, but nobody could read him as well as she could. If he cared about someone, he supported them 100 percent. No matter what. It was one of the many things she'd always loved about him.

When the two of them had decided it would make financial sense to fill the third bedroom with another body, it had been a big decision. Things had always been so easy between them, and they hadn't wanted to sacrifice that comfort. But with Jace wanting to renovate his small ballroom dance studio and Melody needing a new car because hers was running on faith, it had seemed like a no-brainer.

Then along came Alec.

And while they were both initially bowled over by his stunning good looks, it had been immediately apparent that he was more than a pretty face. He really seemed to get them and their quirky relationship and genuinely loved being goofy with them. He was cool but not too cool, the kind of guy who made watching *Star Trek* hip. Once they confirmed he had a strong work ethic and good credit, he was in. The transition had been seamless. Almost like the last piece of the puzzle had slipped into place, and for the past six months, things had been going swimmingly.

But despite the success of their arrangement, Melody couldn't help wonder what might have been if Alec hadn't been her roommate, if she'd met him somewhere other than their ROOM FOR RENT ad.

"He's ridiculously sexy and such an awesome guy on top of it. If it wouldn't screw things up with our living situation, I would totally tap that," she said bluntly.

Jace snorted. "Not if I got there first."

"Back up, twinkle toes. He doesn't even play for your team."

"That's what they all say, honey. But you'd be surprised at how convincing I can be."

No, Melody thought, I wouldn't.

It had taken ten years of being friends with Jace and a considerable amount of effort to finally claim some sort of immunity from his charms. And he didn't even like girls. She could only imagine how it would be if he unleashed the full strength of his lethal charisma on her. With his fit dancer's body, angelic face, piercing blue eyes, and the sensual, graceful way he moved, he was a force to be reckoned with—for anyone. One word, one touch, and she'd...

She shivered lightly. *Never gonna happen, so let it go.*

Melody let out a derisive snort, not willing to concede his point out loud.

"No? Okay, smarty-pants. Why don't you put your money where your mouth is?" Jace arched one brow in a clear challenge.

"What's that supposed to mean? You want me to pay to tap that? Trust me, I would have broken open my piggy bank months ago if that was the case."

"Oh no, Hellz," he said, reverting to one of the many derivatives of his longtime nickname for her. Hellody Melody. She'd earned it when they were still in middle school, shortly after he'd transferred. The school bully had harassed Jace for dancing, calling him a sissy, among other things, and a fierce protective streak had risen within her. Without thinking, she had stepped right into the fray and laid the bully out flat with one right hook. From then on, Hellody had stuck.

"No, we're going to do something far more practical. You want Alec. I want Alec. Over the next four weeks, we both go for it. The winner gets him, and the loser—that would be you," he said with a cocky wink, "gets a full month of dish *and* laundry duty."

"I would, but I can't help feeling a little guilty. You're at a disadvantage with all that extra tackle, don't you think?" she asked with feigned innocence, gesturing toward his crotch.

"I do have more than my fair share—thanks for noticing—but it won't be a problem. Do I look worried?"

She studied him. Nope, he didn't look worried at all.

“Love is love, honey. There is no black and white, only gray. Alec is going to fall madly in love with me—watch and see.” He leaned forward, staring at her intently. “So, in the words of the stunningly fierce Heidi Klum, ‘either you in or you out.’”

As she gazed back at him, Melody couldn’t help but wonder why, suddenly, this felt like more than just a game. They’d been attracted to and jokingly fought over the same men before, but it would be different with Alec. They’d bonded with him, cared about him. A sizzle of unrest snaked up her spine. But just as quickly as it had come, it was gone. It would all work out fine, she reassured herself. They were levelheaded adults. And who knew? Either she or her bestie could end up with a great new boyfriend from the madcap scheme, so it couldn’t be all bad.

“I’m in. Shake on it.”

She spat into her palm and held her hand out to him, grinning as Jace groaned. He acquiesced and grudgingly did the same. They shook on it, sealing the deal the way they had since they were thirteen years old with skinned knees and rosy cheeks.

“Seriously, that’s so gross, Mel.” Jace picked up a napkin off the table to wipe his hand clean.

“Yeah, but you love me anyway,” she said, laughing as she stood to grab their empty bottles and move to the doorway. “Another beer, or you want to move to something more civilized?”

“Hey, I’m not a snob. I just prefer quality libations. And that is some quality microbrew, so I’ll take another.”

Jace was still smiling as he watched Mel head into the house to get them another round. The thought crossed his mind, and not for the first time, if part of the reason he’d never been interested in any kind of long-term relationship was because he had yet to find a man whose company he enjoyed quite as much as hers.



Since he had moved out to California back in eighth grade, Mel had been there for him: his first, best, and truest friend. She had been his backup through all things juvenile and his rock when he had finally decided to come out to his religious, Midwestern parents. She was his date when he needed one, and a shoulder to cry on when his wide-open heart was inevitably battered. She was an integral part of every cherished memory he had. He couldn't imagine a life without her in it.

Jace promised himself right then that, no matter how much he liked Alec—and man, did he like Alec, a lot—he would never let it come between him and Mel. If that meant taking it gracefully if Alec chose her, so be it. His heart gave an odd little squeeze at the thought. But he would far rather bury his own desires and needs if it meant seeing her truly happy. And if she and Alec were together, they'd continue to live here. He wouldn't lose the only person he'd ever been completely comfortable being himself with.

He shifted his gaze once again to the man in question, and his stomach did a little flip. From all appearances, Mel was right: Alec was straight. A straight, gorgeous, tanned, sweaty, masculine bowl of man stew. But Jace sensed something...intangible lurking just below the surface. He'd been on the receiving end of a few lingering glances from Alec, the occasional sexy smile with a dark edge to it. He couldn't put his finger on what it was exactly, but something niggled at him—a tiny blip on his gaydar screen. And he wasn't going to give up without finding out whether or not it was just wishful thinking or if maybe Alec had felt the pull between them as well.

"Look what mama found!" Melody interrupted his thoughts as she stepped out onto the patio with a bowl of onion dip, a bag of potato chips, and their beers balanced precariously in her arms.

Jace chuckled. He watched her bend low to lay the bounty on the table, and he couldn't help but to admire her physique. *Alec would have to be blind not to have noticed how sexy she is.* With her long, dark blonde hair and her leggy, lithe body, she looked every bit the professional beach volleyball player she was. How she

managed to maintain that sleek athletic form while eating like a truck driver, he couldn't fathom.

"You know, if you keep putting that crap into your body, eventually, it's going to rebel. How are you going to play volleyball lugging a big, fat ass the size of a Mack truck behind you?"

"I'd rather have a big, fat ass than live on sprouts and tofurkey," she shot back, popping a dip-slathered chip into her mouth with a defiant *crunch*.

She rolled her eyes in exaggerated pleasure, and he laughed. "A well-timed piece of tofurkey never hurt anyone."

"Except the poor tofurkey."

"Don't eat too much. I'm going to cook later." He shook his head as she dug her hand back into the bag.

"Don't judge me. I have some seducing to do. A girl needs to keep up her strength, you know."

"True. And why am I telling you anything? I should just shut up and let you try to seduce Alec with your onion breath and rapidly expanding ass. Shit, I should be *encouraging* you to eat that garba—"

"Aha," Mel cut in, motioning toward the court. "Looks like they're finishing up."

She stood and fished around in the pockets of her cutoff jean shorts, letting out a shout of glee as she came up with a half stick of gum.

"Ug, Mel, that has lint stuck to it."

She shrugged, unwrapped it, and popped it into her mouth. "Luckily, you can't smell lint."

"You're such a boy, Hellz."

She stuck her tongue out at him, then leaned over, grabbed an unopened beer from the table, and moved to the flight of stairs leading to the sidewalk. "Time to

watch and learn, grasshoppah,” she said, tossing a wicked grin over her shoulder. “It’s game on.”

“Wow. Aggressive. I like it.” He let out an admiring whistle. She was halfway down the steps when he shouted after her, “Oh, and by the way, I like my shirts pressed with medium starch. Not light. Not heavy. *Medium*. You might want to write that down.”

She flipped him the bird without turning around, and Jace laughed. He watched her as she headed toward the court—and Alec—noting the little extra swing in her hips.

He had to admit it. She was good.

This was going to be a very interesting four weeks.

## Chapter Two

Melody walked toward the basketball court, heart pounding hard against her rib cage. With the icy bottle in her hand, she pasted on a casual smile that faltered for a fraction of an instant when Alec turned to face her. A dimpled smile stretched across his flawless face. His eyes flashed warmly as he saw her approach. Those eyes killed her. Light green, like worn sea glass, they made her think of fresh citrus on a sultry summer night.

She continued forward until she was standing just a couple of feet away from him. His black curls were damp and tousled, begging to be ruffled. She tried not to stare but failed as the rivulets of sweat trickling down his defined chest demanded her complete attention. Her gaze followed its hypnotic descent over ripped abs, then pooling into his neat little belly button before disappearing into the waistband of the gym shorts slung low on his lean hips. For an exaggerated second, she was struck dumb as her mind's eye visualized the rest of that sensuous journey down...

"That for me, roomie?" Alec asked with a grateful smile.

She gave herself a mental shake. *Get a grip, fool.*

"This? No, this is the grand prize," she said, holding it away from him. "You have to beat me at one-on-one to get it. First one to five wins."

"Aw, take pity on a weary man, Mel. I'm so thirsty. How about I take a couple swigs first, then we play for the rest?" He cranked that heart-stopping smile up to full wattage, and she almost gave in. Almost.

"Well, we can't have you thirsty, can we?"

She reached down and plucked a lukewarm bottle of water from the bench, handing it to him with the sweetest smile she had in her arsenal.

“Ruthless,” he said, chuckling. He twisted off the cap, then tipped his head back and began to drink.

Melody watched, riveted, as he took a long pull from the bottle, his strong, tan throat working as he swallowed. Up and down.

*Holy crap, this is better than porn.*

“Let’s do this,” he said, handing the water back to her.

She barely resisted the urge to touch her tongue to the lip of the bottle to see if she could taste him.

“Let’s,” she croaked and set both the beer and water down on the bench. “I want to get this over with before my beer gets warm.”

“Oh yeah, this is going to be fun.”

They’d played basketball together before, but only HORSE, which required accurate shooting—no defense or physicality. One-on-one was a whole different animal, and Melody was going to make the most of the hands-on nature of the game. She hadn’t played since high school, but she was an athlete and planned to give this boy a run for his money. And look damn sexy doing it too.

Alec picked up the ball and bounced it to her. “Check.”

She rolled the ball lightly in her hands and shot it back to him, signaling the start of the game.

Alec feinted left, then pivoted right, and before she could react, the ball was in the air. It rebounded off the backboard, bobbled on the rim, and dropped through the net.

Melody grabbed the ball as it bounced up. *Well, shit.*

“Ouch, you just got burned. Damn, that had to hurt.” Alec howled, his eyes flashing with amusement.

And damn if that didn’t just ratchet up her competitive streak a little more. She was so going to bring that cocky attitude down a notch. No one outplayed Hellody Melody.

“That’s one, big fella. Four more to go before you start talking smack.”

They moved back to center court, and Melody tossed him the ball.

“Check.”

He shot it back, and she dribbled lightly, left arm extended to protect the ball. Without warning, she broke hard to the right. To her surprise, Alec anticipated her move and blocked her neatly.

“Where do you think you’re going, Hellz?” His solid body was flush with hers.

Melody almost forgot to keep dribbling as his warm, sweaty chest pressed against her breasts. Her nipples pebbled from the contact. She glanced up at Alec’s face in time to see his eyes narrow and pupils dilate. She ran her tongue along her bottom lip and leaned her body harder into his for a suggestive instant. Her heart sang a triumphant tune as his mouth tightened and nostrils flared. *Right where I want you, sweet cheeks.* She pulled back and propelled herself forward, right through him. He stumbled backward with a dazed expression as she blew by him and executed a clean layup.

“Looks like we’re tied, champ.”

“So that’s how it’s going to be, huh?”

“A girl’s got to do what a girl’s got to do.”

Back at center court, Melody couldn’t help but notice that, despite their teasing banter, Alec’s jaw was still tense. Good. That meant he was affected. She might be a tomboy most of the time, but she knew how to play the sexy card when it worked in her favor.

As they continued the match, she made sure to keep things physical: a lingering touch here, a slide of skin there.

It was a close game, with neither able to pull ahead by more than one basket. He played hard against her, which made her like him all the more. His competitive nature wouldn’t allow him to let her win. Most men were too intimidated by her to even play with her, let alone challenge her skills.

She'd seen him play enough to know they would be pretty evenly matched. Alec was strong, physically fit, and well-rounded, a guy's guy kind of athlete. He played on softball leagues in the spring, football in the fall, and basketball whenever the weather was good, which was pretty much all year on the sunshine coast.

He was coordinated and good at handling the ball, but his shot-making ability wasn't quite on par with Melody's. Even though her sport was volleyball, she had been the starting center in high school and could have played college ball if she'd chosen.

After thirty minutes of sweaty, aggressive play, they were tied, four all. It was Alec's turn to shoot, and he bounced the ball toward Melody. Rather than tossing it back, she set it on the ground between them. *Time to dial things up.*

Holding her hands up to form the shape of a T, she put a halt to the game. "I'm going to get a quick swig of water."

Melody walked over to the bench and grabbed the water bottle. Tilting her head back, she took a swallow, then set it down. As she turned to walk back, she casually gripped the bottom hem of her T-shirt and pulled it up until it was just under her breasts. She bunched it to one side in her hand and tied it into a knot, baring her stomach. She felt the heat of Alec's gaze on her and bit back a grin.

"Hot out here, huh?" she murmured as she stepped back to center court.

Alec cleared his throat. Twice.

"Yeah," he said, his voice like gravel. "Pretty hot."

She lifted her arms, scooping the long, blonde hair off her neck. Then she tied it into a loose knot at the back of her head, her eyes never leaving Alec's face. His intense gaze drifted to her breasts as they strained against the T-shirt. It seemed like he was in a trance as his eyes ran over her taut stomach, lingering for a moment on the amethyst belly-button ring, then moving down to her hips where the cutoff shorts hung low.

Mission accomplished, she picked up the ball and tossed it to him. It hit him square in the chest with a *thunk* and bounced off.

“You okay?” she asked, struggling to keep a straight face.

“Yup, good.”

She didn’t miss the flush of color that flooded his cheeks before he turned away and retrieved the ball.

They faced off again. Melody’s pulse skittered as her eyes drifted down the front of Alec’s body and took in the long, thick bulge in his shorts. She briefly wondered what he would do if she reached out and squeezed his stiff cock right then.

*Patience, Mel.*

Alec bounced the ball his roommate’s way, hoping to distract her from the situation developing in his shorts. He usually managed to keep his attraction for her hidden, but damn, she wasn’t making it easy today. Lucky for him, although her tan legs were usually bare in deference to the Southern California weather, she typically kept the rest of the goods under wraps. In fact, except for the occasions he and Jace would go to a volleyball game to cheer her on, he never really got to see the whole package. But even then, watching her play from the stands was nothing like seeing all that real estate close enough to touch.

Cut the shit, man, he counseled himself firmly. He had found the perfect situation: an awesome place on the beach, reasonable rent, and two roomies who had quickly become his closest friends. He wasn’t going to allow his base urges to fuck that up for him. Things inevitably went to shit in a hurry when you crossed that “roommates only” line. But *damn*. It was hard living with two amazing, gorgeous people and not letting his cock take the lead for once. Guess that meant he was growing up.

It was past time to finish this game so he could take a quick—and very cold—shower and get back onto safe, more familiar ground with Melody. He couldn’t tell if



she was deliberately flirting with him or completely oblivious, but he didn't trust himself not to react if she kept it up.

It'd be a hell of a lot easier if she'd pull her shirt back down, though.

When the ball came back to him, Alec put his game face on. He caught it with a *snap*, turned on a dime, and moved to the left. Driving forward quickly, he lofted the ball toward the net, his aim true.

Melody seemed to come out of nowhere, her long legs making short work of the distance. Bending low, she launched herself into the air, her feet a yard off the ground. He watched in awe as she plucked the ball out of the air scant inches from the basket, then landed gracefully on her feet. She took one step back and sent the ball flying through the air.

*Swoosh.*

"How do you like me now?" she crowed, raising her arms in the air as she rocked her hips in a sexy circular motion, spinning around in a victory dance.

He let out a low whistle and then began to clap. "Shit, girl. You've been holding out on me. That was unreal." He shook his head in shock. He knew she was good, but watching and playing were two different animals.

She blushed prettily and executed a neat, ladylike curtsy that was a total contradiction to the warrior who had just schooled him at b-ball. How could a girl be so fucking cool and so fucking hot at the same time? He found himself envying the guy who finally won her heart.

He walked over to the bench and picked up the now warm beer, handing it to her with a flourish and a smile. "To the victor."

"Thank you, kind sir. I—" She stopped short, holding the beer straight in front of her as she bent low and groaned.

"What's the matter, Mel?"

"Cramp," she gasped.

He took the beer, put it on the ground, and pushed her down to sit on the bench.

“Where?”

“Right hamstring.”

“Lie on your stomach.”

She turned and stretched her long form out onto the bench. He looked down for an instant and wished he hadn't. His imagination soared. Mel, in the same position, naked, while he took her from behind. Would she like it if he nipped the back of her neck? Would she groan if he gripped that fine ass in both hands as he plunged his cock into her wet pussy? Would she call his name?

Alec shook his head and took a steadying breath. He knelt down in the sand next to her legs, grasped the back of her toned thigh, and began squeezing and kneading the muscle. God, her skin was hot and smooth as silk under his hands.

She moaned under his ministrations, and his hands stilled for a moment. Blood drained from his brain, heading south. How many times had he dreamed of getting her to make that exact sound? And it sounded so much better live than in his dreams.

*What a dick. Your friend is hurting, and all you can think about is making her come.*

Alec closed his eyes tight, trying to block out the sight of her shapely thighs and firm, curvy ass. He continued to rub, forcing himself to think of anything but the woman lying on her stomach before him. Baseball. *How about those Angels this year?*

Damn, but he could still feel the silky skin under his palms, could still hear the sounds of pleasure coming from her lips, could still smell the clean sweat and pear-scented body spray that was perfectly Mel.

*Work. Think work. Flagstone, aggregate, paver stones... Paver stones would be perfect for the Simpson patio job...*

“Better?” he asked briskly, hoping to God the answer was yes.

“Yes, thanks so much.”

His eyes snapped opened as the husky tone of her voice registered through the fog of desire enveloping him. He took in the whole picture: the pulse pounding in her neck, her full lips slightly parted as she took short, shallow breaths. When he lifted his gaze to meet hers, a jolt of heat shot straight through him, settling in his groin.

Melody wanted him. If only for that second, Melody *actually* wanted him.

## Chapter Three

Jace eyed the clock on the wall with a scowl. Two minutes since the last time he looked at it an hour ago. Or at least that's how it felt. How long did it take to play a round of one-on-one anyway? And why was it bothering him so much? He'd watched them for a few minutes, but if he wanted to keep pace with Mel, he knew he needed to focus on *his* game, not hers.

No doubt she had already made progress. The girl was driven and didn't take any challenge lightly. What he did see of her first foray wasn't very promising for him. It seemed that in no time at all, she'd already made an impact on Alec.

To counter, Jace decided his first attempt at winning Alec would start with one of his roommate's favorite dishes. Because hadn't his Grandma Mabel always said that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach?

Jace had somehow become the household chef over the years, but he was happy with the position. He cared about his roommates, and Alec was just like Mel when it came to food: a garbage can. By cooking for them he could at least make sure they had a healthy breakfast or dinner to combat the damage from the processed foods they shoveled down their throats the rest of the day. Even though they gave him a hard time about it, he knew they appreciated his efforts.

Alec loved Mexican food, so, in the spirit of challenge, Jace made buffalo steak burritos with sautéed veggies, fresh, homemade salsa—extra spicy, just the way Alec liked it—and a crunchy, fully loaded baby romaine salad. He put out a bowl of organic tri-colored tortilla chips, a side dish of fresh guacamole, and a plate of perfectly cut lime slices. Then he centered the table with an ice bucket full of cold beer.

Just as he looked up to see the hand on the clock inch another slow minute forward, Alec and Melody burst into the house laughing and shoving at each other like teenagers.

“Shit, Jace,” Alec said with a grin as the pair crashed their way into the kitchen, “why didn’t you tell me Mel’s a ringer?”

Jace chuckled. Mel had everyone fooled. She was a whole lot more than just a volleyball player—she was one of those natural athletes who excelled at everything she tried. “What? She kick your ass?”

Alec opened his mouth but snapped it shut for an exaggerated inhale. “What is that incredible smell?”

“Certainly not you,” Melody teased, punching Alec lightly in the biceps.

“Hey!”

“Steak burritos. J-style, of course.”

“A *real* steak burrito?” Alec asked, his eyes lighting up, “Not tofu or that veggie-burger crap you call meat?”

“Only the real thing for you, baby.” Jace winked at him and was rewarded with a bright but slightly puzzled smile. Okay, it was a start. He’d taken the first step outside the lines—he usually reserved terms of affection for Mel and boyfriends—but Alec had responded. Albeit tentatively. Now that he had him off balance, it was time to press him just a little more.

Taking an inward breath of courage from the universe, Jace stepped forward, placed his hands on Alec’s carved, muscular shoulders, and turned him around.

“There’s nothing hotter than a big sweaty man, but I prefer them clean at the dinner table,” Jace said in a low voice near Alec’s ear.

He let his hands slide down Alec’s strong back, palms open, to rest on lean hips, then gave his roommate a push toward the doorway. Jace groaned inwardly at the feel of all that hard flesh and smooth skin under his hands.

"I'll join you," Melody said, coming up behind them. Alec and Jace turned in unison. Focused on her, Jace couldn't see Alec's face but knew it registered the same shock that had to show on his own. Mel and Alec in the shower? Together?

And there was that strange, painful squeeze in his chest again. Suddenly, he wasn't sure if it was because he didn't want to think about Mel with *Alec*, or because he didn't want to think about Alec with *Mel*. Damn, what the hell was the matter with him? *Gay, remember?* So then why was he feeling possessive of her?

Melody gave them a coy smile. "In my own bathroom, you dogs."

Alec laughed but was shocked by how husky his voice sounded. The combined heat of Jace's body so close behind his and the sensual slant of Melody's smile sent images dancing in his head that were best left ignored. They were his roommates. His friends. They had a good thing going on here, and the last thing he wanted to do was fuck that up.

Jace gave him another push, his hands hot on Alec's back. "Shower, stud boy."

Alec looked over his shoulder at Jace and froze. Like a deer caught in headlights, he was rendered immobile by the brilliant gleam in the dancer's intense sapphire eyes. His brain briefly disconnected. *Holy. Shit.*

As he stumbled through the doorway, Alec glanced over his shoulder one more time to catch Melody leaning into Jace's ear. Whatever she said was too low for him to pick up, but the look on Jace's face said it all. The two were in cahoots, and Alec had a sneaking suspicion it had something to do with him. There was definitely a change in the atmosphere tonight that had his body thrumming in a quiet state of anticipation. He looked forward to figuring out what the hell they were up to.

Jace laughed, and as Mel turned away, he smacked her playfully on the ass. Seeing Alec still in the doorway, watching them, she winked at him as she squeezed past, so close her erect nipples scraped across his bare chest. He barely suppressed a groan. He looked back at Jace, who winked again, this time clicking his tongue at the same time, before turning back to set out their dinner.

And what the hell was *that* all about?

Alec was still shaking his head when he stepped under the hot spray of the shower minutes later. That touch basketball game with Mel, Jace cooking one of his fave meals for dinner, and the two of them with their meaningful winks and flirty comments...

He'd been completely turned on playing ball with Mel. She was something else. And then the fire that burned into his bare skin when Jace touched him. If they kept this up, he was going to be reciting a whole lot of boring work-related materials in his head.

But they were his roommates, good friends. Jace and Mel had been partners in crime for so long it was hard to tell them apart. They had their own private way of communicating that was near impossible for anyone else to decipher. They were the perfect couple, even though they weren't actually a couple. The last thing Alec wanted to do was come between them. But damn, they were both so hot.

He closed his eyes and imagined a naked Melody standing in front him, her perfect skin wet and slick. Her long body pressed up the full length of his, her firm breasts and hard nipples sliding against his chest. His fingers tangled in her hair...and Jace's fingers gripped his. The length of Jace's agile body rocked behind him, his hard cock gliding along the crack of Alec's ass.

Alec groaned. Blood rushed from his northern head to his southern one. He placed a hand against the cool tile of the shower wall for support while the other found its way down his abdomen. He imagined it was Jace's hands sliding over his body and digging into his hips, holding him steady, while Melody's hot, wet mouth closed over his hard length.

*We're going to rock your world, Alec.* Daydream Jace growled, then bit the back of his neck. *Fuck.*

Alec wrapped his hand around his dick and began to pump, imagining what it would feel like with his cock buried to the root in Melody's mouth while Jace's cock seated balls-deep in his ass. Together the roommates rocked him in a steady,

practiced rhythm. In and out, up and down, perfectly choreographed like one of Jace's sensual dances.

Alec pumped his hand faster, squeezing harder, at the erotic image. Mel's hot lips pulling at him, sucking him as she ran her tongue over the swollen head of his dick. Jace working his ass deeper, harder.

*Fuck.*

Electric bolts shot outward from the base of his spine, his balls tightened, and he let go, coming hard, pulsing again and again onto the shower floor as he fought to stifle a yell.

He couldn't remember ever having jacked off so hard before. But hell, the idea of being with Jace and Melody together... Now that the image was firmly planted in his mind, he'd never be rid of it. Not without bringing the fantasy to life. But how could he do that? It was totally insane to even think about suggesting it to his roommates. They'd kick him out without a second thought.

Or would they?

Whatever was going on with the two of them tonight, he couldn't have mistaken the vibes he was picking up. Any red-blooded male would have to be completely oblivious not to have noticed the way Melody was flirting with him. Out on the basketball court, when she'd looked back at him from the bench, her eyes dark and lips parted, he could honestly say he'd never seen that side of her before. It was all he could do to keep from pulling her up off that bench and kissing her senseless.

And then there was Jace. What was up with those long looks, sly winks, and that business of running his hands down Alec's back? As far as he knew, Jace thought he was straight. He'd never given them any kind of sign and had certainly never told them that he swung both ways. It could be that his gut was on the mark this time and Jace really had been flirting with him.



Already his stomach was beginning to tighten again. He was going to have to maintain a running landscaping commentary in his head to keep his cock from embarrassing him in front of them.

A bang on the bathroom door interrupted his thoughts. “You trying to grow gills in there, homeboy?” Melody’s voice was muffled, but it was pure Mel. No flirty undertones, no sexual innuendos.

“Keep your panties on, sister.”

“Last one to the table gets warm beer!”

Okay, that was more familiar ground. Relief filled him, but so did a chasing wave of disappointment.

“Stop it, Alec,” he mumbled, giving himself a quick wash, then turning only the hot water lever off. A solid blast of cold would do him good. He stayed under the chilly spray until he began to shiver, then stepped out and toweled off.

There must be a full moon tonight. Either everyone was mad from lunar pull, or his imagination had been completely running away with him. Which was highly possible.

If he didn’t know any better, though, he’d swear they had both been flirting with him. But they had never once made any kind of subtle or overt move beyond friendship. Even if they were now, Alec didn’t think he should respond in kind. Better to just sit back and see which way the wind was blowing.

And hope it blew in his direction.

## Chapter Four

Sunlight speared through curtains fluttering gently on the cool ocean breeze and burned through Alec's eyelids. He groaned and rolled over to see his alarm clock flashing 8:17 a.m. Saturdays were for sleeping in late, especially this Saturday. The near constant bombardment of erotic dreams featuring his roommates had kept him awake all night.

Heavy bass beats reverberated through the floorboards beneath his bed, amplifying in his chest and matching the steady rhythm of his pulse. Blood rushed to his southern regions.

Jace was dancing.

Alec's bedroom was above what had originally been the garage. When he'd moved into the house on the Strand, Jace had renovated by closing in the garage and knocking out a wall to accommodate more students. He taught, choreographed, and competed in ballroom dance. Even though the room was soundproof, for the most part, if Jace cranked the volume, it was like living over a nightclub.

Alec wasn't much for arts and culture, preferring sports and outdoor adventures, but he had watched Jace dance on occasion. He had always been in awe of his roommate's graceful, sensually fluid movements. He wondered if Jace had any idea how sexy and inspiring it was to watch him dance.

Alec hauled himself out of bed with a groan and slipped into a pair of loose gym shorts, then padded downstairs on bare feet. He had every intention of going straight to the kitchen for a fresh hot cup of joe but instead found himself stepping into the studio.

The renovated studio made up the whole lower level of the house. Two walls held floor-to-ceiling mirrors with a dancer's barré running along each; a small desk, stereo system, and flat-screen TV sat against another wall; and what had originally been the garage door was now a bank of windows.

Standing just inside the door, Alec leaned against the small desk as he watched Jace dance alone with his reflection.

Jace was only a couple of inches shorter than Alec's six-two. His muscles were long and well defined on his lean frame, but his uninhibited movements gave his body a larger presence. He wore his dark blond hair cropped short, accentuating his eyes. And those eyes held the power to mesmerize Alec like no man—or woman—he had ever met.

A faded black tank top molded tightly to Jace's lithe torso, and baggy shorts hung loose on his narrow hips. A light sheen of sweat coated his sun-kissed skin, enhancing the muscle definition earned through years of dedicated training and hard work. But it was more than Jace's physical beauty that drew Alec. Jace had an inherent charm that was impossible to deflect. His presence was a commanding force, reaching out and capturing everything in its path. Anyone he turned those sapphire eyes on was lost. No contest.

Flashes of yesterday's shower fantasy bounced through Alec's mind. His abdomen tightened in response.

*Damn.*

Alec knew that daydream was going to haunt him, but he'd hoped he'd be able to keep it somewhat in check. He groaned and turned to leave the studio before embarrassing himself, but Jace caught his movement and spun around with a smile. The deer-in-headlights reaction caused Alec to freeze in place again, just like last night, when that intense, dark gaze had locked on him.

Jace strode toward Alec like a panther on the hunt, stopping only a few feet from him to turn down the stereo on the desk.

“Hey, Alec,” Jace said as he grabbed a towel off the chair and wiped his face and neck. Alec’s gaze followed the motion with rapt attention.

“Hey.”

Heat radiated off Jace in rolling waves. Heat that wrapped around him like a lover’s hands, slow and seductive and 100 percent sex. “What’s up?”

*My dick.* Alec almost laughed out loud. “Not much.”

Jace was the only person Alec had ever met who could reduce his communication skills to one step above those of a grunting Neanderthal. He usually did a better job of hiding it, though. Those damn dreams and his overactive imagination were going to do him in.

A trail of sweat trickled down Jace’s neck, and Alec had the sudden urge to lick it away.

*Flagstone, paver stone, aggregate, flagstone, paver stone, aggregate...*

Jace regarded him for a long moment. Then the light in his eyes changed, and his mouth curved into a slight grin, as if he’d just come to a conclusion that pleased him. “You busy?”

“Ah, no.”

“Want to help me work out a new choreography?” Jace slid the towel slowly down his torso.

*Oh, what I wouldn’t give to be that towel...*

He cleared his throat, but his voice still came out too rough. “What?”

Jace’s grin stretched into a warm smile, and Alec knew instinctively he should turn around and run. Right now. But he didn’t. He was too curious—and far too attracted.

“Your mom taught you how to tango, right?” Jace asked, his tone casual, unaware of Alec’s inner turmoil. “I have a wicked idea that, if this works, is going to turn every head at the International Dancesport Championships.”

“She taught me to tango, but that was a long time ago. I’m way rusty,” Alec said, grateful his voice sounded normal again.

“No worries. I’ll get you back up to speed.”

Alec hesitated. This was so not a good idea. Just the thought of tangoing with Jace, being that physically close to him, made his dick twitch.

“Uh, well—”

“Come on,” Jace said, tossing his towel back over the chair and striding away to resume his place in front of the mirrors.

Despite his reservations, Alec was compelled by his roommate’s command and took a tentative step forward.

“Stand right there.” Jace pointed to a spot on the floor a couple of feet away.

Jace let his gaze travel down the length of Alec’s muscular, tanned body. *Good Lord, doesn’t the man own a shirt?* He remembered the feel of that taut, warm skin under his palms last night. They had burned for hours afterward, and even now, he felt the tingle left in its wake. He clenched and released his hands, then shook them out.

When his gaze returned to Alec’s, it was met with an unmistakable answering flare of desire. *No. Way.* He could not have read that look wrong. Having been on the receiving end of lust more times than he could remember, he never misread when another man wanted him. And that look said, without a doubt, that Alec wanted him. *Straight* Alec. Could he dare to hope?

Jace pulled his eyes away with effort. He cleared his throat and, in a voice far lower and rougher than intended, said, “Follow what I do.”

After refreshing Alec on the Argentine Tango and showing him the steps he was unfamiliar with, Jace was surprised at how quickly he picked it up. The routine included some fast and slow leg hooks and switch steps that had the potential to put both dancers on the floor, so of course, it had to be tested with a partner. At least

that was the guise under which he presented the suggestion to Alec, who, after his initial hesitation, surprised him yet again when he appeared genuinely eager to do so.

“You take the lead, stud.”

“So I’m in control, then?” Alec responded with a dimpled grin and challenge in his eyes.

“This time.” Jace winked as he stepped forward, placed both hands on Alec’s shoulders, and spun him around so their positions were reversed.

“Stay.” He dropped his hands and stepped away from his hunka-hunka-burning-love dance partner, until his backside bumped against the desk. Flashing a grin he hoped expressed exactly how attracted he was, Jace turned around to cue up “La Cumparsita” on the stereo.

He let out a long, low breath and squared up his shoulders before turning around to face Alec. Jace dropped his head slightly so he was looking at his partner from under lowered eyelids. Alec held his position as Jace moved toward him on the beat, sensually rolling his hips into each step. He stopped an arm’s length from his partner and placed one hand, palm flat, against the center of Alec’s chest. They circled each other on a matched beat, eyes locked. Jace pushed Alec away and then stepped forward into his frame: one hand in Alec’s, the other resting on a solid shoulder, while Alec’s free hand rested hot on the small of Jace’s back. Right knees bent, left legs extended behind, they mirrored each other’s stance. For a long moment they held the position, motionless.

Being in Alec’s arms, his face close enough to share the man’s warm, sweet breath, was like a dream come true. And Alec was right there with him. There was no hesitation in his posture, no discomfort in his dark, smoldering eyes. Alec was as affected as he.

*Mel’s going to shit.*

Melody walked through the door of Jace's studio, shimmying her shoulders to the beat of the music. Maybe if she asked nicely, Jace would dip her. She'd always loved to dance with him, even though he was about a thousand times more graceful than she could ever be. When they were younger he used her as a practice partner once in a while. God, how she'd loved those stolen moments in his arms when she could press her body to his and hold him close and pretend he was hers for just a little while. Of course that was before she knew for sure that he would nev—Mel stopped in her tracks, shock chasing away the memories as she took in the scene before her.

The tango was generally sensual, but her roommates were locked in the most intensely erotic version of the dance she'd ever seen.

Banked passion hung heavy in the air, thick enough to choke on. If she hadn't seen it herself, she'd never have believed it. They looked like a couple: the kind of couple everyone aspired to be, that single people envied.

A sudden wave of guilt washed over her. She felt like a Peeping Tom, witnessing something intensely intimate and private. But she was too mesmerized to look away.

Oblivious to their audience, the pair pivoted counterclockwise with Jace's leg wrapped around Alec's hip, chest to chest, their faces as close as possible without actually touching. As they stepped back and pivoted around each other, Melody couldn't help but notice their shorts. How could either of them not realize the woodies they were both sporting? She expected it of Jace, but Alec too?

*Straight, my ass...*

Melody loved watching Jace dance, but seeing him and Alec together like this did something new and exciting to her insides. Something shocking but undeniably sexual. Images flashed in her mind: her body between theirs, all heated sweat and flexing muscle and graceful motion...

A low moan escaped Melody's throat, heat rushed down into her abdomen, and wetness pooled in her panties. She had never been more turned on in her life. She'd thought playing one-on-one basketball with Alec was better than porn?

Alec stopped Jace, leading him back while stepping forward, flexing his left knee. Jace kicked his leg under Alec's. The step was called a gancho, Melody remembered. But she'd never seen it quite like this. Jace kicked his leg up, held it for a second, then slid it slowly down the inside of Alec's left leg.

"Shit." Her knees weakened, and she half-fell against the desk. Her movement caught the attention of the two dancers. They both froze, arm in arm, chest to chest. Identical gazes of shock locked on her. For an endless minute, no one so much as moved a muscle, let alone breathed.

Then Melody reached over and turned off the music, unsurprised by the husky quality of her voice when she spoke. "Do you two have any idea at all how fucking sexy that was?"

And the three-way trance broke.

Jace looked down at himself and muttered a curse under his breath before turning away, but Alec held her gaze with an expression she'd never seen on his face before.

Pure, unadulterated lust.



## Chapter Five

Melody surveyed the living room with a critical eye. It screamed “boho chic,” which would have been all right, except she’d been going for “seductive lair.”

Only a half hour left until Alec got home, and now she had to start all over again. *Damn.*

Her apprehension wasn’t over Roomie Appreciation Night; that was nothing new. They’d been doing it every other Saturday for the past six months. Usually they would have dinner, play a board game like Scrabble or Monopoly, then settle in for a cheesy, late-night horror flick and popcorn. It was all very domestic and homey, but that was so not the vibe she was shooting for this time. She wanted to make sure whenever they spent time together, Alec got to see a new, more sensual side of her. Jace would be there too, of course, but she wasn’t going to let that stop her. Alec’s perception of her had to be permanently altered before he would ever truly consider sleeping with her and, as always, she was going to charge forward with a full-court press.

*So what’s sexy? Think sexy, Mel.*

Blowing out the linen-scented candles, she replaced them with the ones she and Jace had picked up at a sex shop months before. She brought one of the little jars to her nose and smiled with satisfaction as she inhaled the rich scent of vanilla and a touch of sandalwood. What had the clerk said? “*Sandalwood heightens sexual excitement.*” Yep, that would do the trick.

She eyed the vintage, crackled wineglasses with the kitschy charms on the stems on the coffee table. *So boho.* Surely they had something sexier than that.

*Martini glasses!* She went to the hutch, pulled down three, and gingerly placed them in the freezer to chill.

Next? Music.

Typically, they would listen to CDs by whatever new indie band one of them had discovered. But that wouldn't do at all for tonight. Squatting next to the stereo, she ejected the Arctic Monkeys' latest offering, then leafed through their extensive music collection and plucked *The Best of Sade* from the mix.

As the smooth strains and silky voice purred seductively from the speakers, Melody flashed back to the image of Jace and Alec dancing in the studio. Heat pooled between her thighs as she recalled the intensity of the moment, the raw need that had pulsed in the room—and her desire to join them.

They'd all acted like nothing had happened, brushing it off. But it was there, the white elephant in the room. Jace had shot her an exasperated look as he'd called a halt to the practice session. He clearly felt he'd been making headway with Alec, and she had effectively cock blocked him. She tried not to focus on why his annoyance with her had stung so much. They were competing for the same guy, not trying to share him. That he would want to have some alone time with Alec to work his magic was to be expected. So why had she felt so left out?

She shook off the unsettling question, then spared a glance at the clock and ran into her bedroom. Ten minutes to change and throw on some makeup. She yanked off her tank top and cutoffs, rifling through her closet in a mad rush.

Jace took the stairs leading from the studio two at a time. Usually, he got in a good hour later than his roommates on Saturday evenings, but tonight he'd made the conscious decision to put off some of the dance-studio paperwork until Monday. He wasn't interested in letting Mel have sixty minutes of uninterrupted time with Alec if he could help it.

He walked in with a "Honey, I'm ho-ome!" and headed straight for the fridge to take out the shrimp he'd bought that morning for their meal. He found himself

dancing a little cha-cha as he seasoned it. The realization that there was music seeping in from the living room made him stop to actively listen. *Ah...Sade. Well played, Hellz.*

By the time Mel's door opened a few minutes later, dinner was on the grill, and he was at the counter whisking the salad dressing. "Hey, baby doll, shrimp kabobs and mandarin salad okay for you? I know you'd rather ha..." He trailed off as she walked in the room.

"I've decided that tonight we're going classy. We're going to dress like grown-ups and have martinis and listen to grown-up music. Now be a good boy and go put a suit on."

He heard what she said, but the words didn't compute. He was too taken aback by her appearance—and the shocking fact that his cock stood up and took notice—to really let them sink in.

She wore a thin black cotton dress that hung sensually off one shoulder. It skimmed her curves lightly, then ended abruptly midthigh. Nude fuck-me pumps capped off mile-long, tanned legs. Her golden hair was swept up into some kind of sloppy twist, barely contained by a clip. Her makeup was light with glossy lips and sun-kissed cheeks. She was stunning. Jace shifted from foot to foot, looking for safe ground.

"Grown-ups?" he parroted.

"Yeah, grown-ups. Now hurry up and change before Alec gets here, so I don't look stupid dressed up all by myself."

Jace had finally gotten a handle on his unusual reaction. Then she turned to get something from the freezer, and his train went off track again. The front of the dress had covered her breasts with no hint of cleavage. Her back, however, was completely bare, fabric draping from the exposed shoulder, then plunging to her lower back. If he tugged it an inch lower, he would see her ass.

Fighting to get his voice back for the second time, he said, “Wow. You look amazing.” His voice was a little huskier than he would have liked. What the hell was going on with him?

*Mellz. Friend. Female. Get it together, Jace.*

“Thanks. You want a martini or a cosmo? I’m buying.”

“Uh, surprise me. I’m going to change. Be back in a sex...er...sec.” Jace practically ran out of the room. All the talk of seduction over the past week was creating a sexually charged atmosphere in the house, and he was just getting swept up—that was all. As soon as the bet was over and one of them, or neither, won Alec’s heart, things would go back to normal.

He scanned his closet for something that could compete with Mel’s look, settling on a light gray suit with a peach silk tie. She’d win the fashion-show portion of the evening, hands down. He was going to have to shine elsewhere.

Melody stood in the kitchen with her head in the freezer. While she’d gone in there to get the martini glasses, she’d stayed there to cool her flaming cheeks. If she didn’t know better, she would have thought Jace was physically attracted to her. The way his pupils had dilated and his breathing had grown erratic. She could have heard a pin drop when she’d walked into the room. She pressed a shaky hand to her still-warm face.

*Okay, get a grip and make some drinks. As much as you want him to, Jace doesn’t do girls.*

Putting the strange moment aside for later examination, she shut the freezer door and took the shaker out of the cabinet. She poured in Grey Goose, lime juice, triple sec, and a splash of cranberry juice, then packed it with ice, put the top on, and shook.

The front door locks tumbled as she poured a shaken-not-stirred martini into a glass. Alec walked in a moment later, looking dirty, rumpled, and totally fuckable.

A sudden shock of intense heat rushed down her abdomen. *Oh, hell-oo.*

“Long day?” she asked, holding out the chilled glass.

His stunned expression was almost comical. He looked like someone had hit him on the head with a brick. If he had been in a cartoon, steam would have shot from his ears.

She gave him a big smile. “Cosmo?”

The weariness of his day melted away at the sight of Melody, and just like that, Alec was wide-awake. She was so vital and alive. And that dress... Why wasn't he supposed to fall in love with her again? Oh yeah, they were friends and roommates. Something about complications. But from where he stood right now, it didn't seem complicated at all. It was very simple. He wanted Mel. Badly.

“Thanks.”

Her fingers brushed his as he accepted the drink, and a bolt of heat shot from her touch to his groin.

He took a long sip from the icy glass without even glancing at it. The tangy blend of citrus and vodka tasted almost as delicious as she looked.

“What's the occasion?” he asked, motioning with his glass and raking her frame with his gaze.

“Mel says we have to be grown-ups tonight,” Jace said as he breezed into the kitchen.

*Holy shit.*

Jace looked sexy as hell—like he'd just stepped out of a *GQ* cover shoot—wearing a no-doubt expensive and perfectly tailored gray suit. The crisp chrome lines complemented his eyes, turning them to intense cobalt.

As Alec stood in awe of all the beauty around him, images from his shower daydream the week before came flooding back. His cock ached as he imagined flipping Mel's short dress up just a few inches and burying himself deep in her

pussy with one long stroke. A flash, and then Mel was behind him, plastered against his back, watching over his shoulder as Jace knelt before him, sucking him off.

Alec took a long pull of his drink to wet his parched throat. Then cleared his throat and tried to behave like everything was normal. “Wow, you guys look awesome. And you’re putting me to shame. I’ve been knee-deep in potting soil and fertilizer all day. I look like a peasant among royalty. I probably smell like one too.” He shoved his half-empty drink at Jace. “Take this. I gotta shower. Be right back.” Then he hotfooted it to the bathroom, trying to conceal the growing tent in his shorts.

Alec completed his shower in record time but took an extra minute to shave and slap on some cologne. Hell, he wasn’t going to play the role of the ugly friend. He didn’t own a suit, though, so he made do, pulling on a pair of tan chinos and a white dress shirt he left untucked. He didn’t bother with socks or shoes.

Heading to the door to rejoin his roommates, he paused when Jace and Melody burst into peals of laughter. He loved listening to them laugh like that. They were so uninhibited with each other. Straining against his bedroom door to hear more, he was rewarded with another round of giggles.

“Well, as hot as we both look tonight, he’d have to be dead not to notice. I’m predicting a very interesting night for one of us,” Jace said. “Preferably me.”

*Wait, what?*

“Think again, twinkle toes. I was hoping I wasn’t being too obvious with the dress, you know.”

“Oh, you mean the dress that has ‘horny and single, please take me’ written all over it? No, I think it’s *very* subtle, honey.”

“Silly boy, if it said that, you’d be wearing one too.”

Again, they broke into laughter.

Alec tried to quiet his suddenly erratic breathing so he didn't miss anything. A few murmured words were spoken that he didn't catch, then Mel's voice. "But seriously, desperate times call for desperate measures, and subtle isn't cutting it. We have to get serious, and may the best roommate win."

"What can I say? When you're right, you're right. So we turn the heat up a bit. No hard feelings no matter who he chooses, though. Pinky swear?"

Alec froze. Okay, so maybe he hadn't been imagining all their recent flirting. His gut churned a bit as he tried to take it all in.

They obviously had a bet going, and he was the prize. Hurt warred with excitement. Although the three of them were really close, he always felt like he was *just* on the outskirts of their twosome. And here he was again, not quite the third musketeer. He hated that they had secrets they didn't share with him.

On the other hand, they both wanted him. Wasn't that some fucking stellar news? If he put aside his initial hurt, he had to admit that he still wanted them too.

Not the type to look a gift horse in the mouth, Alec came to a decision quickly.

His roommates had no idea just how hot things were about to get.

Melody's eyes were glued to the bottle, her heart pounding as it spun round and round.

It was kind of surreal how they'd gotten there. After a delicious dinner of perfectly seasoned shrimp and crisp Mandarin salad—*touché*, *Jace*—they had moved into the living room with their second round of cosmos for board-game time. While she and Jace had pored over the options in the closet, Alec had dropped an absolute bomb on them.

*"How about truth or dare?"*

Jace's expression had been priceless, and she could only imagine what hers had looked like. They'd both been too stunned to answer, and the silence was deafening. Could a better opportunity have fallen into their laps?

*“What’s the matter? You guys chicken?”*

Jace had followed Alec’s lead and continued with the lighthearted banter. *“Chicken? Oh no, he didn’t just call us out like that, Hellz.”*

*“You know, I was the truth-or-dare queen back in the day,”* she’d said, preening.

*“Funny. Me too,”* Jace had deadpanned.

Alec had shot them a feral smile, a mischievous glint lighting his eyes. *“Well, then, I guess it’s on.”*

They’d quickly negotiated the rules, opting to incorporate another childhood favorite into the mix. The person whose turn it was to ask the question or come up with a dare had to spin a bottle. Whoever it landed on was “it.” If it landed on the spinner, the person to his or her right would be the recipient of the question or dare. In the interest of women’s lib, ladies first went out the window, and they had done rock-paper-scissors to determine the order. Alec was the first to spin.

As the wine bottle rotated on the coffee table, Melody tried to appear nonchalant, but her gaze was glued to the whirling decider of fate. The silence was almost absolute. It was as if all the air had been sucked out of the room in anticipation. And she realized she wasn’t the only one holding her breath. Alec and Jace sat deathly still, lips pursed. Only their eyes gave away that they were alive.

The bottle slowed to a snail’s pace. Finally, it stopped.

*Jace.*

*“Truth or dare?”* Alec asked, a challenging light in his eyes.

*“Dare.”*

Alec seemed to wrestle with himself, his jaw tightening. Again, the air grew thick as they waited. The music that had seemed so quiet before now overpowered the room.

*I gave you all the love I got*

*I gave you more than I could give*

*Gave you love*



Sade's smoky voice told a sultry tale of longing, and suddenly it felt unbearably intimate, almost uncomfortable. Melody had to resist the urge to turn it off. She looked up and found Jace staring at her, a bemused expression on his face. It was gone a moment later when Alec finally spoke.

"All right, Jace. Kiss Mel."

## Chapter Six

The room grew oppressively quiet as Sade paused between songs.

What the fuck had made him say that? He'd meant to ease into it, be cool. They were obviously both into him, but a threesome wasn't on their radar. Alec wondered if they even recognized that they were attracted to each other. He'd let his own personal fantasy and curiosity get the better of him, and he may have just blown the whole thing. He wanted to bite his tongue off for suggesting it. Just as he opened his mouth to take it back, Jace spoke.

"Well, whatcha got for me, Hellz?" He wiggled his eyebrows and gave her a leering grin.

She pressed her hand to her forehead as if in a swoon and put on her best Southern belle accent. "Dear Lawd, if this is a dream, don't wake me."

Dropping her hands to the floor, she crawled over to Jace on all fours, her lips puckered comically.

Jace leaned forward and kissed her, a light brush of lips, then pulled away.

"No way. Not gonna cut it," Alec said with a snort, trying to disguise the tightness in his throat. "That's how you kiss your aunt. I want to see some tongue. What kind of sham are we running here? Queens of truth or dare, my ass."

"Ew, you kiss your aunt on the mouth? You might want to call somebody about that, honey," Jace joked. "And anyway, it was the first dare. You have to leave something to work up to. You don't have the crème brûlée before the salad, do you?"

"I don't have the crème brûlée at all. Wait, what's crème brûlée?"

Melody forced out a stiff laugh at the boys' banter, but in reality her brain had short-circuited. Jace's lips had been so warm, so soft against her own. She resisted the urge to press her fingers to her mouth.

"Fine, whatever. If that's how you want to play it," Alec said, shaking his head in mock disapproval.

Jace's gaze cut to hers, and his eyes narrowed with determination, zeroing in on her lips. Melody wondered if he could hear her heart pounding, because she couldn't hear anything else.

He bent low, his warm breath fanning her mouth. "Okay?" he asked, his voice almost a whisper.

Unable to speak, she nodded, mesmerized by his darkening blue eyes.

Jace ran just the tip of his tongue over the bow of her top lip and then traveled to the bottom. Her mouth parted, and he accepted the invitation, entering with a slow, sensual slide. His lips were firm, his tongue magic as he made love to her mouth. An ache swelled low between her hips, and her nipples pebbled. The focus and passion so evident in his dance translated beautifully to kissing, and he led her masterfully, mercilessly.

Melody trembled with the effort of holding still when every instinct urged her to grab his head and latch on to him, to fall on the floor and pull him over her so he could use that magic tongue on the rest of her body.

Of all the times she had dreamed about it over the years, she had never imagined kissing Jace would be this incredible. Once she'd come to terms with the fact that he would never feel *that* way about her, she had convinced herself they wouldn't have any chemistry.

She so was wrong. This was like taking a breath of air after being underwater too long. Exhilarating, heady, *necessary*.

She let out an involuntary whimper, breaking the delicate spell.

Jace pulled away and gave his head a shake. He tried to quiet his harsh breathing, but it was no use. As he came back to earth, he realized he wasn't the only one breathing hard.

Alec sat on the edge of the couch, leaning toward them, nostrils flaring, chest heaving. Mel sat back on her heels, darkened eyes wide in astonishment as the pulse in her throat leaped.

With a start, Alec sat back, shifting in his seat. He began to clap slowly, then with more exuberance as he let out a wolf whistle. "Damn, you two really can't turn down a challenge, can you? Well done."

Alec's praise washed over Jace like fine wine, and he smiled.

Mel grinned too, still looking a bit dazed.

*Good.*

Jesus, where the hell had that come from? Why would the fact that he'd affected her make him so happy? And why had he enjoyed their kiss so much? This was about Alec, not him and Mel. He had never looked at Mel sexually before this silly bet of theirs. But he had a zipper full of stiff cock for the second time with only Mel to blame that told a different story.

"Who needs a refill?" Alec asked as he stood.

"Me."

"Me too," Jace added, standing as well. "Be right back."

Jace made his way to the bathroom to splash cold get-with-the-program water on his face, while Alec picked up the glasses and went into the kitchen.

"Need help?" Melody asked as she pushed herself up from the floor and followed Alec into the kitchen. She couldn't just sit there on the living room floor alone. That would give her way too much time to think about what just happened between her and Jace. She'd been down that road many times, and no matter how hot that kiss was, she knew her feelings for Jace would never be returned.

Focus on Alec, she reminded herself. Only Alec.

“Sure.”

She opened the freezer, took out the ice, and held it out for Alec. His gaze drifted from her face down her neck to her stiff nipples. He licked his lips and turned away.

“I’ll mix. You get the glasses.” His voice had that sexy low growl again that did funny things to her already jumbled insides.

In the center of the kitchen, a large island took up most of the floor space, so as he stood at the counter mixing ingredients, she had to turn sideways to walk past. As she did, she made sure her breasts brushed against his back, lingering a little longer than necessary. Her nipples tingled, and she was rewarded with his low hiss.

“Excuse me,” she whispered in her best seductive voice.

She grabbed the clean glasses, then headed back the same way she’d come, again rubbing against his back. “Excuse me.” Another seductive whisper.

He froze, then put the shaker down with a bang and turned to face her, fierce expression on his face and fire in his green eyes. He gripped her hips in his hands and jerked her forward until her pubic bone rode his erection.

“Is this what you’re after, Hellz?” he asked, his voice like gravel.

He ground his cock against her, and she groaned, wetness flooding between her legs. He lowered his head and captured her mouth. If Jace’s kiss had been a dance, Alec’s was a battle. Consuming, raging hot, and furious. She wanted nothing more than to slide her ass up onto the countertop and beg him to fuck her senseless.

She thrust her hips against his, matching his intensity. His hard, strong hand closed over her breast and plucked at her waiting nipple as the other pinned her hips to his. She gasped, tearing her mouth away. “Jace will be out in a second.”

He nodded, pressed his forehead to hers, and took a deep, shaky breath. Then he abruptly dropped his hands and turned. The sound of the bathroom door opening

spurred her into action. She moved to Alec's side and busied her hands cutting a lime. No easy task when her whole body still quaked.

"Got everything?" Jace called from outside the doorway.

"Yup, be right out. See if you can find another CD. That one has been around twice already," Mel said, her voice shakier than she would have liked. She scooped up the drinks and walked slowly toward the door.

"See you out there," she whispered.

Alec was glad Jace hadn't come into the room. He needed another minute to get himself under control. He'd been a hairbreadth away from fucking Mel right there in the kitchen, and his cock hadn't caught on to the fact that it wasn't going to happen. He was so hard it hurt. A case of blue balls was not what he'd signed up for tonight.

He wondered briefly if he should tell his roommates he knew about their bet. Judging by the tone of their conversation, it didn't appear that they were just out to see who could fuck him first. It really seemed like they were both into him. How he'd gotten so lucky, he couldn't fathom.

Six months ago he would have been over the moon to have landed either of them. They were both great catches. But now? He had his sights on the whole package.

He wanted the three of them to be a team. If two got together, someone would invariably be left out. He'd felt just a tiny bit of that already, and it wasn't fun. Even if they thought they could all handle it, eventually it would eat away at the relationship, and someone would end up hurt. That was the last thing he wanted, because he loved them both, and they loved each other. He didn't want to lose either of them or for them to lose each other.

He just had to convince them that they belonged together. All of them.

Where to start?

One at a time. Mel first—she'd be much easier to convince. She was already halfway there, having loved Jace for the past ten years whether she wanted to admit it or not. And judging by the reaction to that kiss between them in the living room...

"Time to get back out there." He turned on his heel, grabbed a bag of chips, and headed through the door.

Glancing at his roommates, Jace couldn't help notice the atmosphere had changed again, but he couldn't put his finger on how. Despite the weird moment with Mel, he'd hoped that truth or dare would continue, and he would get his chance to make some sort of impression on Alec. Sure, Mel would never suggest that they kiss, just like he would never suggest that Alec kiss Mel, but he could ask some provocative questions and maybe find out if Alec had ever thought about, or had been with, a man before.

But when Mel had come back into the room, she'd seemed distracted and wouldn't meet his eyes. As confused by their kiss as he had been? Whatever the case, the night had lost its magic.

He needed some time alone to process everything that had happened.

"Okay, I don't want to be the party pooper, but I have a lot of rehearsing to do over the next couple days and can't afford to be tired. Are you guys calling it a night, or should I put my ear plugs in?"

"Wh-what do you mean?" Mel stuttered.

"I mean, are you going to stay up yakking and keep the music on or..." He trailed off. She looked visibly flustered.

"Nope. You can turn it off. I'm going to do the dishes and hit the sack myself." She shot him a weak smile.

"Me too," Alec said. "And I'll take out the trash."

"You guys want help?"

“You did the cooking, so you’re off the hook,” Mel said.

Jace was grateful for the reprieve.

As he snuggled into his comfortable bed, he put his brain to work. He started out hatching a plan to seduce Alec, but instead kept replaying the kiss with Mel. Her soft lips, her sweet smell. Why couldn’t he stop thinking about her?

He flipped over and pushed the image away. Time to focus on Alec.

Mel had been right. Time was running out, and aggression was the name of the game.

Melody tried to stay relaxed and give off a just-hanging-out-washing-the-dishes vibe, but it wasn’t easy when she was feeling more of an I-want-to-fuck-your-brains-out. After what had happened earlier, Alec was as good as hers. There was no denying that he wanted her.

As much as she and Jace had joked around and made it into a competition, she knew her best friend really liked him too, which made the victory bittersweet. The last thing in the world she ever wanted to do was hurt Jace in any way. Still, to the victor go the spoils. And her hormones were raging; she couldn’t wait to claim her prize. It might not be today, or even tomorrow, but it was going to be soon. Her stomach fluttered with anticipation at the thought.

If things went well and he was interested in more than just hooking up, they would tell Jace then. But for now, it would be just for her and Alec.

She was up to her elbows in soapy water, finishing off the last of the glasses, when the front door opened. She froze, breath held, as footsteps paused in the kitchen doorway. An endless moment passed; then Alec padded in, stopping just behind her.

She withdrew her hands from the soapy water to rinse them and willed herself not to react, not to turn around.

*You made your move; now let him come to you.*



Her patience was rewarded an instant later. Alec's finger brushed her nape, descending downward in a slow caress, following the indent of her spine to her bottom. His hot mouth pressed a kiss to her bare shoulder once, then again. His hand stole around her body to cup her breast, teasing her nipple through the thin cotton. She let her head fall back with a moan.

"Quiet, Mel," Alec whispered, his lips brushing against the shell of her ear. She shivered and nodded. "All night long, I wondered if you had on a backless bra or no bra at all. Now that I know, I wish I didn't, because it's driving me crazy." He let out a low, harsh laugh. "How can you be so sexy without even trying?"

"Who says I'm not trying?"

He released her breast and slid his hands to her hips, pressing her ass against his thick arousal. She gasped and wriggled.

Alec took in a shaky breath. "How far are we going to take this?"

This was going to change everything, but she was past rational thought. She wanted Alec, and she wanted him now.

"How far do you want to take it?"

He didn't answer but released her hips to slip his hand under her dress, flipping it up until her ass was bare. The cool air hit her, and she drew in a breath.

He didn't touch her for a long moment, and the wait was almost unbearable. She was completely exposed. It was at once delicious and terrifying.

Did he like what he saw? And more importantly, was he as aroused as she was?

Finally, big, warm hands cupped her bottom almost tenderly.

*Jesus, no fucking underwear either.*

She was a walking wet dream. He could come right now and die a happy man.

He palmed her ass with both hands, squeezing and rubbing the soft, pliant flesh. Would she let him fuck her there? His cock pulsed in response to the idea.

Alec moved his hands to the shoulders of the dress and pulled it down to her waist in one swift motion. Mel swayed against him, panting. He ran his hands over her smooth, flat belly, pausing to finger her sexy little belly-button ring, then up to cup both bare breasts. They were a perfect, pert handful, and he ached to see them, but she felt too good to let go, even for an instant. He plucked her nipples, reveling in her intake of breath.

“Take your hair down.”

She reached one hand high over her head, releasing the clip that held her beautiful mane of golden hair. It spilled down her back like sunshine, and he couldn’t stop himself from burying his face in it. He inhaled the fresh scent of pears that was unique to her.

Somewhere inside him, a dam broke. He shifted, pressing a knee between her thighs until they were spread wide. Kneading his way past her ass cheeks, he paused as he reached her pussy. *Wet silk*. He held his breath, pressing two fingers into her clutching heat. She groaned, her back arching.

“Shh.”

She leaned forward to rest her elbows on the countertop. He thrust his fingers deeper, biting back his own groan as her slick walls squeezed him. Damn, he needed to be inside her *now*.

He pulled his fingers away, then reached down to unbutton his pants. As his cock sprang free, Mel reached her hand back between them and closed a fist around him. Helpless, he thrust himself more fully into her hand. She began to work his dick in long, firm strokes. In moments he was pumping his hips in counterpoint, a colossal orgasm bearing down on him hard.

*What the fuck?*

Just as he was about to wrench himself from her clever grasp, she stilled, releasing his shaft. She delicately circled the head of his cock with one fingertip, letting out a satisfied purr as she encountered the drop of moisture that clung there.

A jolt of pure animal lust shot through him, and the need to bury himself inside her overwhelmed all thought.

He pulled back for a second, fumbling briefly through his pocket, then donned protection. Wrapping a fist in her hair, he grabbed his dick, rubbing it up and down against her hot slit. Slippery with her moisture, he centered himself and slid home in one long thrust, not stopping until his hips were anchored to hers.

Mel whimpered, and her pussy fluttered over him. His balls tightened, and his cock throbbed in response, every nerve ending aflame. Desire clawed at him, urging him to move, to thrust, but she was so damn tight. Shaking with the effort of remaining still, he leaned forward to whisper, "You okay, Mel?"

"God, yes." To emphasize her words, she retracted from him until only the head of his dick was still inside her, and then slammed her ass back against him. He let out a loud grunt before he could stop it.

They both stilled. Jace was a pretty heavy sleeper, but that had been loud. They waited in tense silence for any sign they'd woken him.

Mel quivered, and Alec flexed his hips. But for the sound of the blood pounding in his head, the house remained silent. He took that as a good sign and reached around to cover her pelvis with his hand, pressing her back toward him.

Slipping his index finger into her folds, he found her clit, plump and slick. He massaged it in quick, light strokes as he plunged into her from behind, settling into a merciless rhythm. Deeper, harder, each time until his pelvis slammed against her ass. His balls tightened almost painfully, ready to launch, the urge to come a grinding need.

Mel's body tensed, and she tossed her head back, teeth bared. He tightened his grip on her hair as he growled low in his throat. She was close...so close.

"Come for me, Mel."

He pounded his cock into her, increasing the pressure of his fingers. Her legs shook from the tension, and her breath came fast. She froze, and then all hell broke loose.

“Ahh, Alec, yeah,” she cried out, her pussy gripping his dick as she came.

All thoughts of silence fled as his own orgasm slammed through him. Hot liquid pulsed from his swollen cock, and he shouted, delirious. Intense waves of pleasure crashed over him, rocking him on his heels. Mel would have none of it, as she pushed back against him, making sure he stayed deep inside her until he was drained.

He collapsed over her, pinning her between his body and the countertop, spent.

He knew sex with Melody would be hot, but that was...that was... *Shit*. He was so screwed now.

If he couldn't pull the three of them together, he would have to move out. There would be no way he could go on never having Mel like that again, and there was no way he'd be the wedge between her and Jace.

No way.

## Chapter Seven

Melody awoke Sunday morning to the smell of coffee brewing and bacon frying. Turkey, no doubt. She lay there for a moment in her air-conditioned cocoon, brushing away the cobwebs when it hit her.

She had done the nasty with Alec.

Giving herself an air high five, she giggled like a silly teenager, then covered her face with a pillow and let out a muffled scream. The sex had been so exhilarating and delicious. She couldn't wait to tell Jace.

*Jace.*

Her eyes stung, and she pressed the pillow hard against them, her exhilaration deflating like a balloon. How could she tell him? It would break his heart, no matter how cool he tried to play it. But at the same time, it went against the grain to keep it from him. They told each other everything. When she'd lost her the scholarship to her first-choice school because she'd defended a friend against some bullying bitch, Jace had been her rock. When her mom had nearly died of cancer, he had listened to her cry every day for months. But in spite of her love for Jace, even though she knew he really had it bad for Alec, she couldn't walk away. Because she had it really bad for Alec too. For the first time, she was truly afraid of what this might do to them all.

Shaking off the sense of foreboding, she tried to focus on starting her day. She would know the lay of the land soon enough. Tossing the pillow aside, she sat up in bed, raised her arms high above her head, and began a light stretching routine. Her muscles warmed quickly as she worked out the morning kinks, ending in the lotus position.

It had been a late night. Even though she had physically been in bed by midnight, the last time she'd looked at the clock, it had read 2:27 a.m. She had tossed and turned, unable to stop replaying the encounter with Alec over and over in her head. And if she was being honest, she had also spent a fair amount of time thinking about her kiss with Jace.

A shiver ran through her as she thought of those soft, firm lips and clever tongue. Her nipples stiffened as imagination took flight, memories colliding until they melded into a sensual collage: Jace's mouth on hers, drinking in her cries of delight as Alec took her from behind. Heat pooled to her center, and she closed her eyes, taking a deep breath.

"You getting up or what?"

Mel's eyes snapped opened. Jace was standing in the doorway, spatula in hand.

"Breakfast is almost ready." He stepped into the room, looking for a clear pathway to her bed. "Ugh, this place is a nightmare. Why is it that your hamper is empty, but you have a week's worth of clothes on the floor right next to it?"

"Sorry, Mom. I promise I'll pick up after breakfast. They're all clean anyway. I was in a hurry getting dressed last night and didn't have a chance to hang everything back up."

Although she managed to keep her tone light, her heart thumped out a techno beat. Jace was utterly delectable in striped pajamas. Of course, he only had on the bottoms since she was wearing the top. They shared jammies because Melody preferred sleeping in a shirt and underwear, and Jace liked sleeping shirtless. The thought made her feel even worse than she had before. She knew how much Jace wanted Alec—even though he played it down. Could he really step aside without ever feeling a niggle of resentment toward her? Would their friendship pay for it? Their lives were so intertwined; they were like two halves of the same whole. Heads and tails. Yin and yang. Cookies and milk. Straight and gay, she reminded herself for the thousandth time.

She swallowed the sudden lump in her throat. "Beat it so I can change."

"Yes, ma'am." He picked his way back the door and turned. "Doth milady care for freshly squeezed orange juice with her vittles?"

She grabbed the nearest throw pillow and launched it at his grinning face. His reflexes were quick, though, and the pillow bounced off the door he'd managed to shut in the nick of time.

"So is that a no?" he asked through the door, chuckling.

"It's a yes. Now don't talk to me again until I've had my coffee."

Despite the typical playful exchange, her heart sank. It *was* weird between them. Suddenly, Jace seeing her in only a shirt and underwear was totally different than before. And most mornings Jace would get into bed with her and spoon her while they chatted. But not today. The comfort level they had shared for over a decade had vanished in the wake of that one kiss.

Melody's stomach clenched, fear and despair again clogging her throat. What if they could never get it back to the way it used to be?

Alec bounded up the stairs two at a time. Ever after a four-mile run, he was wired, thrumming with energy. Strange how in just a day's time, his entire world had turned upside down. Granted, he'd had a great life before yesterday. But now his eyes were opened to the possibility that he could literally have everything he'd ever wanted. It both thrilled and terrified him because, in order to make it happen, he needed to risk his newfound closeness with Mel *and* his friendship with Jace.

The door burst open just as he reached for the knob, and Jace came crashing through, almost smashing into him.

Jace reared back with a hand over his heart, a foot short of him. "You scared the shit out of me."

Alec smiled. "Sorry, I'll try not to come up the stairs again."

“Wise ass. I gotta run. There’s an egg-white-and-spinach omelet for you on the counter. I’m off to meet my sister and the kidlets at the zoo. I’ll be back around dinnertime.” He leveled Alec with a killer grin, then jogged down the steps like he didn’t have a care in the world.

Alec kept his eyes trained on Jace, taking one last look at what he stood to lose by opening this can of worms. When he was out of sight, Alec stepped into the living room and closed the door behind him.

Time to talk to Mel.

He’d promised himself the second he had time alone with her he would bite the bullet and come out with it. He just hadn’t thought it would be so soon.

“Forget something?” Mel called from the kitchen.

She walked in a second later and gave him a nervous smile. “Oh, hey. I thought you were Jace.”

They stared at each other for a long, tense moment, and Alec’s brain stuttered. Even in her comfy clothes with her hair tangled around her face, she was so sexy. He ached to touch her.

“Mel, about last night...” He paused, trying to get his thoughts back on track.

Mel’s face fell, and she blinked rapidly before turning her attention to some nonexistent lint on her yoga pants. “No, no. I understand. Heat of the moment and all. It’s all good. We’re totally cool.”

Alec moved to stand in front of her before she could turn away, and put a hand under her chin, urging her to meet his eyes. Hers were suspiciously shiny, and he cursed himself for being so insensitive. He should have thought about what that sounded like to her—the opening line of a textbook blow-off. “Really? Because I thought we were a little more than cool. Last night was unbelievable. In fact, it was probably the best eleven minutes of my life.”

Mel laughed and laid her head on his shoulder. He wrapped his arms around her and realized that she was trembling. “You scared me. I thought—”



“Sorry. I was just trying to put into words how great it was, but I botched it. I want to talk to you about something, though, okay?”

“Sure.”

Mel sat on the couch, and he sat across from her on the ottoman. She stared at him, still looking wary.

Despite the fact he’d spent his entire run thinking about what to say and trying to anticipate all of her possible reactions, now that she was sitting there in front of him, his mind was a total blank.

*Spit it out. No matter how you say it, it’s not going to get any easier.*

“I know about your bet with Jace,” he blurted. *Smooth. Very smooth.*

Mel flinched, and her face paled.

Words tumbled from her mouth in a rush. “He told you? I swear it isn’t what you think. We both really lo—like you. This isn’t just some game.”

Relief washed over him, and he realized just how important it had been for him to hear her say that.

“No, he didn’t tell me. I overheard you guys talking. And I know it’s not a game. Man, I’m really fucking this up, huh? I’m not mad at either one of you. In fact, it’s just the opposite.”

He said a silent prayer and laid it on her. “I like you both too. A lot.”

She stared back at him through narrowed eyes, nonplussed.

“I want to be with both of you. And I want you to be with both of us. Do you know what I’m saying, Mel? I want us to be exclusive. The three of us.”

His words hung heavy between them, their weight almost crushing him, constricting his lungs until he could barely breathe.

She shook her head almost imperceptibly, but he saw it and braced himself.

“I-I don’t even know what to say. Jace is gay. He doesn’t want me like that. We’re friends. And you, I didn’t know you were into guys.” Fire lit her eyes, and she

sat up straight, her shoulders squared. "Wait, are you fucking with me? Is this a joke to get back at me for the bet? Because if it is, it's not funny."

"I wouldn't joke about something like this, especially after last night. I see the way you and Jace look at each other. You can say it's friendship all you want, but that kiss last night told another story." Alec leaned forward and took her trembling hands in his. "You know what the weird part is? Even though I'm crazy about you both, I wasn't jealous. That's when I knew I had to at least try. And no, I'm not gay, but if I find a man I'm attracted to, I don't hide from it. I think love is love, and if you're lucky enough to find it, you grab on with both hands." He paused and gave her hands quick a squeeze. "That's what I'm trying to do. I care about the both of you. A lot. You each fill something in me that makes me a better person." Even to his own ears he could hear the pleading undertone in his voice, but couldn't seem to stop himself.

"Did you talk to Jace about this already?" Her flat tone gave him no indication of what she was feeling.

"No. I wanted to talk to you first."

"Have you thought about the possibility that even if I say yes, he might say no?" Melody dropped her gaze to their clasped hands, the words quiet as she spoke. "Then where will we be?"

Alec put a finger to her chin, urging her to look at him, hoping she would see how serious he was about this, how much he wanted the three of them to be a single unit. "I don't know. But I do know that I'm willing to risk it."

"Easy for you to say. I could lose my best friend. Do you know what you're asking of me here, Alec? Of us?" She gazed at him, confusion and pain clouding her eyes. "Even after spending most of last night wondering what you and I would say to each other today, I can honestly say I never thought it would be this."

"Mel—"

She held up a hand, and he snapped his mouth shut. "I can't do this right now. I need some time to digest everything."

She stood, then went to her bedroom and closed the door behind her.

A wave of nausea roiled in his belly. It was done. Even if he wanted to, it couldn't be unsaid. There was no turning back now, and there was nothing left for him to do but wait. He had no idea how long Mel would take to decide, but it was already long enough for doubt to toy with his mind. He might have just destroyed the best friendships he'd ever had.

He stood up and ran a hand through his hair, not quite sure what to do next. He turned for the kitchen. A couple of beers ought to quiet the voices that whispered he'd made an irreversible mistake.

Melody threw on a ball cap, laced up her favorite sneakers with shaky hands, then let herself out of the house and started walking. She lost track of time as she walked, turning the situation around and around in her mind. It had taken several miles and several stops, but after a hot-fudge sundae, a soft pretzel, and a hot dog, she'd finally gotten past the initial shock.

At first, it had been a huge blow to her ego. Almost as if Alec had said, *You're not enough for me, Mel*. But the more she thought about it, the more she realized it wasn't that at all. Alec was in love with two people, just like she was. And if she had the chance to be with both of them, she should take it.

Ah, but there was the rub. Jace could say no. And if he said no, it would because he didn't want *her*. She didn't think her heart could handle that type of rejection from him. Not to mention, if Jace said no, then who would Alec choose to be with? What if they both rejected her?

Mel kept pounding the pavement, her brain in overdrive.

She'd spent the better part of an hour thinking of all the things she stood to lose by agreeing with Alec and attempting to get Jace on board. It seemed important that she spend equal time thinking about all the things she stood to gain as well.

First thing: Jace as a lover. And really, even if that were the *only* thing, wouldn't it be enough? As much as she always tried to categorize her feelings for Jace as past tense, it was time for some tough self-love and a bit of a reality check.

She was now—as she had always been—madly in love with him. That love had grown out of their unshakable friendship. It had been enough for a long time: to love Jace from a distance. But now they had crossed a line, and damned if she didn't want to stay on this side of it. Their kiss had lit a sensual fire in her belly that still burned.

And then there was Alec. Sweet, gorgeous, sexy Alec, who made her heart pound with a new and wild love. She'd had one delectable taste and didn't want to give him up.

So what if she really could have them both? Wouldn't she be a lucky girl?

When Mel walked back into the house, Alec was on the couch watching an old black-and-white movie. He muted it when she stepped into the living room.

"Hey," he said, his tone tentative.

"Okay."

He sat up straight on the edge of the cushion, his expression hopeful. "Okay?"

"Yeah, okay. Let's do it. Let's try to convince Jace."

"Seriously?"

Melody smiled. "Seriously."

Alec jumped up and pulled her into his arms. He pressed his mouth to hers in the sweetest, most reverent kiss. Everything in her wanted to melt into his warmth, but she steeled herself and stepped out of his arms.

"Let me finish. I know Jace, and I know how his mind works. This is something new and different. It doesn't follow the master plan he has set out for himself, so we're going to have to handle this very carefully."

Mel looked into Alec's warm green eyes, then looked away. Until this was settled, she needed a clear head. "I think we actually have a shot of convincing him, but you have to do exactly as I tell you."

## Chapter Eight

“Good morning, gorgeous,” Melody said as she stumbled into the kitchen. Jace was standing at the stove with his back to her in a pair of loose-fitting sweatpants, snug tank top, and bare feet. The boy was always barefoot.

“Good morning, doll,” he said over his shoulder.

She was struck by a sudden overwhelming urge to stride right over and kiss him—not chaste like friends, like they used to do, but full-on, like lovers. Like the kiss they’d shared this past weekend. If he said no to their proposition, she didn’t know how she’d go back to the way things were after that kiss. But a life without Jace in it was unimaginable, so she’d just have to learn to deal with it.

*God, I hope he says yes.*

Between work and planning, it had taken two days to figure out how exactly they were going to broach the subject with him. In the end, Alec had agreed that they stood a better chance of Jace accepting the idea if it came from Alec first.

Since they’d made the decision, Melody’s confidence had grown. Maybe it wasn’t romantic yet, but she knew Jace loved her in his own way. They wouldn’t have been so close for so long if not. She also knew by the way Jace looked at Alec, watched him when he thought no one was looking, that he loved him too. He would see this was the perfect situation. But now that the day was finally here, doubts began to wiggle their way in. What if she was gambling the only thing, the only person, she couldn’t possibly function without? Was it really worth it?

Melody pushed confusion and worries away with force, then cleared her throat. “I hope you’re not making a gourmet breakfast for me today.” She poured a cup of morning thunder, then sat at the table. “I’m just going to grab a Pop-Tart and run.”

Jace spun around with eyes wide, mouth forming a perfect O, one a hand over his chest and the other holding the spatula out like a weapon. “Blasphemy!” he gasped in mock horror. “There’d better not be anything of the sort in *my* kitchen, Hellz.”

Melody laughed, then, feigning innocence, laid on her haughty Southern belle tone, “Why, sir, I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

He turned back to his task chuckling, and she relaxed a little. It felt good to banter with him again. The last couple of days had felt strained. That kiss had changed their dynamic on some fundamental level. Maybe the tension between them had more to do with him liking the kiss than anything else.

In search of a distraction, her gaze slid around the kitchen and landed on the counter. The counter Alec had bent her over as he pounded into her from behind and bit at her nape, his hot breath in her ear short-circuiting her brain. Heat skimmed over her skin at the memory, beelining to her abdomen. She shifted in her chair and squeezed her thighs tight together as she stifled a moan. She would never look at that countertop the same again.

“Melody?” Jace’s voice cut into her thoughts. She looked up into his beautiful blue eyes and saw concern in their depths. “Are you okay?”

“What? Of course.” She slapped what she hoped was a carefree smile on her face, then took a sip of coffee, retreating from his far too observant gaze.

“You zoned out for a minute there.”

“I’m all good,” she said lightly. “Just daydreaming.”

“Oh-kay...” Jace paused for a moment and then much to her relief, turned back to his breakfast prep, letting it go. “Well, where are you running off to anyway?”

“I’m not running off just yet,” she said. “You didn’t think I was serious about skipping out on one of your gourmet specialties, did you?”

“Better not, baby doll.”

"I am taking off soon, though. Gotta go down to San Diego for a volleyball tourney. I won't be back until tomorrow night."

"I don't remember you having any games this week." Jace turned and placed a plate of fresh-cut oranges on the table, then went back to the stove.

"My team doesn't, but USD needs a spare, and you know I've got the best spike in the state."

"Modest much?" he teased.

Alec stumbled in wearing nothing but low-slung shorts, bed head, and bare feet. What was it with these guys and their bare feet? And why were they making her heart stutter in her chest and her whole body run hotter than a Texas summer day lately? It wasn't like she hadn't seen them before. Who knew she'd develop a foot fetish?

"Hey," he said, voice gruff and so damn sexy.

"Morning, sunshine," Jace sang as he turned around with two steaming plates in his hands and placed them on the table. "Sit."

"Damn, that smells good." Alec dropped into his chair. When Jace turned back to the stove to fix his own plate, Alec looked over at her and winked. Tonight was the night. Hopefully, if all went well with him and Jace, the three of them could sit down tomorrow night and set their new living arrangement into motion. And then Melody could act on all those crazy images in her head of the three of them together. *If* he said yes...

Pressure on Melody's knee distracted her from the worrisome thoughts. She looked up and met Alec's eyes. He mouthed, *It'll be okay*, then gave her knee another squeeze. She nodded and smiled.

She dug into fluffy eggs scrambled with smoked salmon, avocado, and tomatoes and almost creamed her panties right there. "Oh my God, Jace." She moaned and rolled her eyes. "You've done it again."



He watched her through hooded eyes as he reached for his glass of juice and tilted his head. "Thank you, my dear."

"Ditto," Alec said.

They ate in silence, and when Alec's plate was spotless, he leaned back in his chair with a mischievous expression on his face.

"So Jace," Alec said nonchalantly, "I gotta work for a while today, but since the girl's away, the boys should play. What do you say? Up for a little man action tonight?"

The mouthful of juice Jace had just taken did an about-face and exited his nose in a glistening orange shower.

Melody tried to hold back her laugh, but then she made the mistake of looking over at Alec, and they both burst out in hysterics.

Point to Alec.

He had to be joking around, Jace thought as he hooked his heel over the barré and leaned into his knee, stretching his hamstring. Alec was straight, and even though Jace had been picking up some contradictory vibes lately, he still couldn't believe his roommate had meant the comment the way he'd taken it. But if he did, well... Jace smiled. After tonight Alec would be his lover, and Mellz would be his laundry wench.

*Mel.*

He couldn't stop thinking about the kiss they'd shared on Roomie Night and how her lips had felt against his. More confusing was why he kept thinking about it. He didn't do girls. Granted, Mellz didn't classify with the rest of the female population, but still.

"Hey, Jace." Mel walked a few feet into the studio, gym bag over her shoulder. "I'm outta here. The kitchen is all cleaned up."

"Thanks, honey," he said. "Show 'em how a real woman spikes."

“You know it.”

Mel stood there looking at him with a contemplative expression on her face for a long moment. She bit down on one side of her lower lip. Jace dropped his leg back to the floor and turned to fully face her, hating to think that she might feel unsure around him. That kiss, which neither of them should still be thinking about, wasn't meant to be any more than it was. A dare.

So why didn't that explanation sit well with him?

Mel released her lip, rolled her shoulders back, hitched her chin up, and walked toward him looking confident and determined.

She stopped mere inches from him, her clear blue eyes flashing. She reached a hand up to the back of his neck, pulled his head to hers, and kissed him. There was nothing tentative about it. She slanted her lips over his, soft and warm and hungry, and when his own lips parted in shock, she dived in, her tongue luring his into an erotic dance, telling him that yes, she remembered their kiss, and it wasn't just a dare. And damn if he didn't feel a rush of joy in his chest at the thought. Then she broke it off abruptly and stood back with her trademark “watch out, world—Hellody Melody's in the house” smile.

“Later, twinkle toes,” she chirped, as if she hadn't just kissed him like the world was about to end. “You've got thirty hours alone with Alec. Make the most of it.”

She turned on her heel and, without a look back, left him standing in the middle of his studio, dumbfounded, lightheaded, and...stiff.

Not only had Mellz just given him a wide-open court to seduce Alec, she'd stirred a desire in him he'd never before experienced. A desire he suddenly wanted to fully explore.

He shook his head, turned back to the *barré*, and met his own confused eyes in the mirrored wall. “Some gay man you are,” he told his reflection. “Kissing girls...and *liking* it. The gay police are going to revoke your membership.”

Knowing his reflection wouldn't ease his confusion, Jace concentrated on dancing, letting movement and music settle his thoughts and clear his mind. He had one chance to seduce Alec, and he needed to make the most of it. He would think about the Melody situation tomorrow.

Alec stepped through the front door, and his first thought was that he'd somehow walked into the wrong house. Other than a low light in the kitchen, the only illumination came from candles on the coffee table. Instrumental music he didn't recognize played quietly, and mouthwatering smells had his stomach singing along.

Even if he and Mel hadn't already agreed to his seducing Jace, he would have succumbed to his roommate's ploy like a bee to honey. Alec couldn't help the low chuckle that escaped his mouth. Jace would be shocked to know he didn't have to go to all the trouble.

Deciding to have a little fun with the situation, Alec turned his smile upside down and called out Jace's name.

Jace sauntered into the living room and blasted him with a laser-beam grin. Alec's brain short-circuited when the blood that kept it functioning fled south.

Jace's dark blond hair was stylishly spiked, and a diamond stud in each earlobe flashed in the light. He wore a long-sleeved, dark peach V-neck shirt that looked painted on his body and made his vivid blue eyes pop. Stonewashed jeans with silver and red piping on the pockets hugged his long, lean dancer's legs. They were strategically threadbare at his thighs and crotch, which made Alec's groin tighten. He was barefoot with a silver ring on the index toe of his left foot, and damn if that wasn't the sexiest thing Alec had ever laid eyes on.

The man looked like a fucking rock star.

Alec pulled in a deep breath, holding it for a three-count before releasing. *Let the games begin.*

“Damn, Jace, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had a date tonight. I’ll just shower quick and take off.”

“What? No, wait. This—”

“Smells amazing in here,” Alec cut him off. “I wonder if I should be jealous.” He flashed a confused-looking Jace one of his stun-them-with-dimples smiles and winked, hustling past his roommate before he could respond. Alec fought back the laughter that bubbled up from the bottom of his belly until he had the rushing water of the shower for cover.

Back in his room, Alec stuck his legs into a pair of old Levi’s and pulled a snug-fitting, dark blue T-shirt over his head. The sleeves rested just short of the thickest point in his biceps. Flattering, if he did say so himself. He ran his fingers through damp hair, letting the strands settle where they wanted. When he turned to leave, Jace was standing in the doorway with a glass of white wine in each hand. He lifted one toward Alec.

“I don’t have a date tonight,” Jace said, voice low, gaze not leaving Alec’s as he took the proffered glass.

“So what’s with the den of love?”

“While the girl’s away, the boys should play.” Jace mimicked Alec’s comment from breakfast, then shrugged. “Figured just because Mel isn’t here doesn’t mean we can’t have a nice dinner together.”

Alec regarded him for a long moment. His body already on high alert in his roommate’s presence, his groin thrummed in anticipation. At this rate a gentle breeze from the ocean would send him over the edge.

“Trying to win my heart through my stomach?”

Jace responded with a sly grin and meaningful look, then turned away and mumbled something under his breath. Though not low enough for Alec to miss what sounded like “and that’s not all.”

Alec followed Jace down the hall, through the living room, and out onto the patio. White tea lights lined the entire railing. A red cloth covered the worn surface of their patio table, which was set for two with a three-candle centerpiece and a bottle of wine chilling in an ice bucket.

Jace pulled out a chair, turned to face Alec, and nodded his intention.

“You aren’t playing around, are you?”

His roommate smiled, waiting for Alec to take his seat. “Not when it comes to food.”

As Alec sat, Jace turned around to grab something off a tray table, then placed a martini glass with some sort of colorful seafood dish in it and four rectangle chips angled on top in a decorative touch.

“First course, lobster ceviche with mango pico de gallo and yucca chips.” Jace sat in his chair across from Alec and waited for him to take the first bite. The combination of sharp pepper, crisp cilantro, and sweet mango exploded on his tongue, and he groaned.

“Shit, Jace. I’ve had shrimp ceviche before, but this is in a whole other zip code.”

“And we’re only just beginning.” Jace smiled like he had a secret, holding Alec’s gaze an extra, heated beat, then dug into his own appetizer. Alec shifted in his chair in search of a more comfortable position for his already swelling cock.

With their first course finished and dishes, wineglasses, and bucket cleared, Jace disappeared into the house and returned with two steaming plates.

“Second course, filet mignon with artichoke, black truffle crumbs, and truffle jus,” he said, setting a plate in front of Alec, and added quietly, “Thick, just how I like it.”

He was turning away as he spoke, but Alec caught the teasing expression in Jace’s eyes and the grin he tried to stifle. Returning from the tray table again, Jace

placed a glass of red wine at each setting. “And a full-bodied Barbera to complement.”

Jace sat and again waited for Alec to take the first bite. His knife slipped through the tender meat, which melted in his mouth as rich flavors assailed his senses. He closed his eyes and groaned his appreciation.

“Heaven above. I pity the man who attempts to resist you.”

“Are *you* trying to resist me, Alec?” The low, rough edge of Jace’s voice sent a volt of electricity straight to his cock. He looked up, and they locked gazes.

“Not if you keep feeding me like this.”

“So Grandma was right about the way to a man’s heart.”

“Grandma’s always right,” Alec said, his own voice just shy of a growl.

Neither man so much as blinked. Alec could have sworn by the charged current tickling his skin that a storm was brewing. *Fuck, I gotta get out of these jeans.*

Jace broke the trance, standing up abruptly and taking his plate with him. He reached for Alec’s plate but stilled when Alec reached out and wrapped his hand around Jace’s forearm. Heat burned his palm from the contact and raced up his arm, spreading throughout his body.

“Leave it,” he ground out.

“Next course is dessert.” Jace’s voice was jagged, and his breath was coming in short and fast.

“Are we going to fight over who gets the *top*-ping?”

## Chapter Nine

“What?” Jace croaked as his heart kicked into hyperdrive, and his ears buzzed.

“You found me out. My straight arrow is a little bent.” Alec winked.

*A little bent?* Jace’s brain misfired in the process of computing.

His not really straight roommate—*not really fucking straight*—stood with his citrus gaze locked on him. Alec took the dinner plate and placed it back on the table, then turned Jace to face him. Alec’s hand loosened its grip on his forearm, tickling fine hairs that stood on end as it coasted down over his wrist and along his fingers, pausing a beat before slipping off their tips. A cool ocean breeze magnified to biting ice in the absence of that burning caress.

“Don’t fuck with me, Alec,” Jace said on a reedy breath. “I’m playing for keeps.”

“So am I. And I’d never fuck with you.” He stepped in close, his body a mere inch from contact. His voice dropped an octave. “But I do want to fuck you.”

Jace’s brain stuttered and locked up for a second. Thunder boomed in his chest and echoed in his eardrums. Alec wanted him? *Oh. My. God.* Alec wanted *him*.

And all those little blips on his gaydar had been legit.

Jace wanted this man, loved him more than he’d dare admit to anyone, even Mel, and now that he was a breath from realizing that desire, he couldn’t move. Heat flooded his body, and he suddenly had no idea what to do next.

Alec’s gaze drifted down and fixed on his mouth. Warm breath gusted over Jace’s cheek, and a wet, pink tongue darted out to moisten full lips. Jace groaned low in the back of his throat, and then Alec’s lips were pressed against his. Hard and strong but soft as satin, asking for permission. Jace tested the feel and shape

and taste of lips he'd been dreaming of far too long now, and sank into his roommate. When he nipped at the lower lip with his teeth, Alec opened, and Jace wasted no time diving in. He caressed the hot tongue, wrapped it in his, and sucked it into his mouth, earning an encouraging groan for his efforts. Alec tasted earthy with a hint of sharp spice that Jace wanted to bottle for his own private elixir.

Alec's hands gripped his shoulders, then slid up his neck and cupped his face as the intensity ratcheted up a notch. Jace threaded his fingers through silky hair and pressed his mouth harder against his roommate's. Their tongues began a rhythmic duel, darting in and out, chasing and teasing. Teeth collided and scraped, and their breathing drowned out the ocean waves below. Jace pushed the full length of his body into Alec, who met him in equal measure, trying to crawl inside and merge their bodies into one entity.

Alec's kiss was everything he'd dreamed it would be, and like nothing he could compare to.

Jace rocked his hips forward, pressing his hard cock against Alec's. He needed to break free of the restricting jeans, needed to get them both naked, feel nothing but skin on skin, but he couldn't pull away from that glorious mouth. He detangled his fingers from Alec's hair and dropped his hands to cup a perfect ass, and then settled into an erotic, fevered grind.

Jace knew he wasn't going to last as they rocked against each other. The need had been too long, grown too intense. He'd wanted the man too much. He couldn't stop. Neither could Alec, it seemed. Pressure built in Jace's tightening balls, his cock throbbed painfully against his fly, and electric charges shot down his spine. He was going to come in his damn jeans like a teenager. Jace groaned into Alec's mouth as white lightning flashed behind his eyes, blasting a million pinprick stars into the night sky. Alec broke their kiss, his head falling back as he followed Jace off the edge and ground out Jace's name on a long curse.

Their rocking slowed and coasted to a comfortable halt. The pressure between their bodies eased, but contact didn't break. Jace held his roommate's gaze as a



crooked satisfied smile spread across his handsome face. He couldn't help smiling back in turn.

"Damn."

"Yeah." Alec chuckled low and deep. "Tell me there's another course."

"There's another course." Jace's own voice sounded hoarse and ragged.

He couldn't have dreamed it better. Alec his lover and Hellz his laundry slave. All of a sudden the kiss Mel had laid on him in the studio earlier flashed in his mind, and he felt...not exactly guilty but maybe a little penitent. Like she should be here too. Jace gave his head a shake. No, Mel should not be here. This was about him and Alec, but he still couldn't shake the feeling that Mel should be a part of this. Because that kiss had done something to him he never would have imagined. And it wasn't a spontaneous dare. It was premeditated. It meant something.

But then she had given him an open window to work his magic on Alec tonight. She wouldn't have done that if the kiss really had meant something more. So maybe it was just his imagination, which had admittedly been running pretty wild lately.

He pushed Mel from his mind and focused on the man in his arms.

Thank God that silly challenge was over now, and he had the hottest, gayest straight boy he'd ever met coming in his jeans for him.

"First, I think we need to get of our pants."

"Good call," Alec said, and he reached for the top button of Jace's jeans, undoing them one calculated *pop* at a time.

Jace moved his hands to Alec's jeans, opening the button and sliding the zipper down while he took his lover's mouth in a solid but slow kiss, savoring the taste and easy slide of Alec's tongue.

Alec shoved his hand inside Jace's jeans, wrapping his cock in a burning grasp. Jace moaned, "Lord have mercy, honey. You'll get me hard again in record time."

Alec chuckled into his mouth. "Mmm, sticky."

Jace leaned into Alec, taking his lips in a hard, impassioned kiss while forcing him backward as he walked him blindly off the patio into the living room. Mouths still fused, Jace hooked his hands under the hem of Alec's shirt, forcing it up as he traced the ridges and lines of muscle and dips between ribs. They bumped into the corner of the couch, righted themselves before toppling over, laughing and kissing. Alec's shirt fell to the floor; a few steps later Jace's shirt met the same fate. Then jeans fell by the wayside as they hopped out, one uncoordinated leg at a time, banging into each other and against the walls, leaving a trail of discarded clothing.

"Bedroom?" Alec growled into Jace's mouth.

"Shower."

Clad in only towels around their waists, Alec followed Jace into the kitchen. His gaze fixed on the muscle play of his lover's back and stray droplets of water that fell onto strong shoulders from still-wet hair. Skin that he'd just spent the last ten minutes running his hands over every inch of was still damp and flushed from the heat of the shower. Alec smiled. First time he'd ever simply enjoyed the feel of a man's body without having sex.

Jace pulled out a chair at the table for Alec. "Sit."

"Such a dom," Alec clucked, enjoying the flash of white teeth as Jace smiled.

He shook his head and leaned into the fridge. "Not even close, lover."

Alec watched in silence, liking the way "lover" sounded in that deep voice, as Jace pulled two containers from the fridge. He opened one and tossed its ingredients into a skillet on the stove, then popped the other container in the microwave. He turned and fixed his gaze on Alec while he waited.

Those dark blue eyes blazed with promise and sensual warmth that heated his skin. Soft, full lips curved into a knowing smile, capped by a single dimple. He really was in the thick of it now. There'd be no repair if Jace didn't go for it.

Just as he drew a mental breath and opened his mouth to broach the subject, the microwave dinged, and Jace turned away.

“Why didn’t you tell us you’re bi?” Jace asked. “You are bi, aren’t you?” He pulled two plates down from the cupboard.

“Yeah, uh. Didn’t seem relevant.”

“You knew I was gay when you moved in.” Jace returned to the table and placed a decadent and somewhat phallic-looking dessert before him.

“Yeah, well...”

Jace didn’t push, much to his relief, and moved to sit.

“Third course...or would this be fourth?” He winked at Alec as he sat across from him. “Havana bananas with rum, chile jelly, and just for you, extra chocolate sauce.”

Alec dug in, then groaned: sweet and spicy with just a kick of heaven. He closed his eyes and let his senses focus on the punch of flavor that flooded his mouth. When he opened his eyes, Jace was staring at him with a wolfish grin and predatory gaze, loaded fork frozen halfway between his bowl and mouth. That heavy, intense stare sent a flush of heat to Alec’s abdomen, and his groin tightened.

Jace could ask anything in the world of him right now, and he would willingly obey. It was out of character, but there it was. He was completely at the mercy of this incredible, gorgeous man.

Time for the hard part: telling Jace what he and Mel wanted for the three of them. More than ever Alec prayed this would work out. He needed both of them more than he thought possible, and now that he’d had a taste of each, turning back would be impossible.

“Listen, there’s something I want to talk to you about.” Finished with dessert, he pushed his chair back and angled it away from the table so he could stretch out his long legs.

“Oh yeah?” Jace put his fork down and stood up. He came gracefully around the table, his eyes never breaking connection, and knelt in front of Alec. A shiver of excitement lit Alec’s awareness with acuity as his cock began to swell with anticipation at Jace’s nearness.

“Yeah, uh, about you and me and Melody.”

Strong hands gripped his knees and pushed them apart as Jace settled between his open legs. “She’s good with us getting together. No worries.”

“I know.”

“You know?” Jace raised his eyes to meet Alec’s as he parted the towel. Cool air blanketed his heated skin, sending a thrill up his spine. He’d been asked a question. What was it?

“Well...” His hips rose of their own accord, reaching for what Jace silently promised. He was achingly hard now, begging for touch, his eyes fixed on Jace’s mouth. “M-Mel’s so cool about everything. So...”

Jace regarded him for a long second, then, with a smile, slid his hands up Alec’s thighs, dipping between his legs and wrapping both around his hard length. Alec groaned and pushed into Jace’s burning grip.

“So?”

“It’s not that. It’s—” A clever mouth covered the head of his dick, rendering his mind instantly blank. “Ah shit, Jace.”

He felt Jace smile around him as he took him deeper into his mouth and began working him with his tongue.

“Jace...”

“No more talking.” Jace spoke around his shaft; the vibration sent a rush of electricity ping ponging in every direction.

“It’s important.”

“So is this.” Jace growled and then sank onto his dick, taking the full length deep into his throat, and that was it. Alec’s brain was officially off-line.

Alec dug his hands into his lover's short hair, grabbing what he could. Jace's velvet mouth sucked him tip to root, and that wicked tongue laved around the head. Jace's hands were hard on his hips, controlling his thrusts.

And then cold air shocked his sensitive skin. Jace had stopped.

"No no no. Not done."

Jace stood, grabbed Alec by the hand, and pulled him from his chair until their bodies were flush together. "I thought you wanted to fuck me," Jace whispered against his ear.

There was something Alec wanted to say. Something important. He couldn't for the life of him remember quite what it was. All he knew, all that mattered, was that right now, this amazing man was his.

He tugged at Jace's hand and led him to his bedroom almost at a run.

Alec pulled the towel from his lover's waist and pushed him down onto the bed. His gaze roved slowly over the man stretched out before him. Long, lean muscles, honey-colored skin, captivating sapphire eyes...glorious cock. God, he was beautiful.

Jace ran a hand down his abdomen, wrapped it around his cock, and gave it one slow stroke up, then down. "You like?"

"You know it."

Alec moved to his bedside drawer and removed lube and condoms, tossing them on the bed beside Jace, then crawled over his body.

"I want to kiss you." He lowered his mouth and claimed those full lips in a kiss meant to tell Jace he was his now and he wasn't letting go.

"I want to bite you." His teeth caught Jace's dancing tongue and scraped down to the tip; then he captured it in his mouth and sucked as Jace moaned and lifted his hips to meet Alec's.

"I want to suck you." He kissed Jace's chin, along his jaw, and up to his ear, where he traced the shell with his tongue.

"I want to fuck you." Alec exhaled a slow breath in his ear, loving how it made the man underneath him writhe and moan.

"God, yes," Jace gasped, clamping his hands down on Alec's hips and digging his fingers into the flesh.

Alec nipped, scraped, and kissed his way down Jace's neck over his collarbone, continuing on to hard little nipples. He laved his tongue around one, then grabbed it in his teeth, pulled it into his mouth, and sucked. He pinched the other one between a thumb and finger and heard his name ground out in a rough plea.

He worked his mouth lower still while he reached down and took the other man's solid cock in hand, stroking and twisting, then closed his mouth over the head and sucked. Jace shouted and twined his fingers into Alec's hair, gripping his head and thrusting upward.

Alec sucked him deep, hollowing his cheeks, then retreated back to the head and rolled his tongue flat over the tip, tasting the musky flavor of Jace's arousal. He sat up, reached for the lube, and poured a liberal amount into his palm. He moved back up Jace's body and took his lips in a demanding, aggressive kiss that Jace returned in equal measure. Alec slipped a hand between his lover's firm cheeks and worked his tight opening. Jace moaned and pressed onto his fingers as he stretched him. "Now. Please, now."

He broke off and handed a condom to Jace. "Glove me, baby."

Jace did as he was bid with trembling hands. Alec lifted his lover's legs and hooked them over his shoulders, took himself in hand, and pushed his way in, one gloriously hot, slow inch at a time until he was fully seated, then began to rock. He pulled out to the tip of his cock, and when he pushed back in, Jace bore down on him.

"Harder," he ground out.

Alec responded. He thrust harder and faster. He gripped Jace's cock and began to stroke in time with his thrusts. Jace held his thighs in a death grip, his face a combination of blinding pleasure and sweet pain.

The throbbing shaft in his hand told Alec that his lover was about to come. He pulled and pumped harder, and then Jace yelled and spilled over Alec's hand and onto his clenching stomach. The sight was enough to send Alec over the edge, and his own orgasm racked his body as he shouted.

Spent, he pulled out and collapsed on Jace, cum smearing between them.

Alec rolled off and padded to the bathroom. He returned minutes later and flopped back down beside his lover, wiping his stomach with a damp towel. Jace looked up him with adoration in his shining eyes, then chuckled sheepishly.

"What?"

"Best. Dinner party. Ever."

Alec smiled, then leaned down and kissed him, slow and tender, while rapturous warmth spread deep within his chest. He was a goner.

Jace turned onto his side, pulling Alec's arm with him, tucking it against his heart. Alec settled in behind Jace and thought, yeah, best dinner party ever.

Jace bounded up the steps with winged feet, feeling like a kid on Christmas morning. Alec was up there, and he couldn't wait to get back into his arms. It had been so hard to leave him this morning, but the kids counted on him. The Mad Hot Ballroom classes he taught for underprivileged kids were one of the most rewarding things he'd ever done. Seeing their confidence and self-esteem grow with each class gave him hope and reinforced his belief that the world at its core was fundamentally good.

It had been tempting to stay in bed and wake Alec with a very special breakfast course. Instead, he'd pulled quietly away, not wanting to disturb him.

Mel would be home by now too. He wondered if Alec had told her or if he was waiting for him to come home so they could tell her together. His elation faltered briefly, and something akin to loss niggled at him. No, he wouldn't lose Mel over Alec. Why couldn't he have his lover *and* his best friend? Nothing would change,

nothing had to change, so there wasn't anything to worry about. Yet that little seed of doubt didn't tumble away with the wind.

He opened the door and stepped into an empty living room; then he heard Mel's laughter on the patio. He moved toward the open glass doors and caught sight of Mel and Alec. His feet tangled under him, and he stumbled. He grabbed the corner of a chair for support. The smile that had been giving him cheek cramps for the better part of the day fell like an overdone soufflé.

Alec was leaning against the patio railing, his legs spread—with Mel between them. Alec's arms were wrapped around her waist, holding her tight to his chest.

And they were kissing.

*What. The. Hell?* Sharp, cold pain lanced his temples, and the air in his lungs froze.

They stopped, and Mel's mouth was moving. Jace couldn't hear what she was saying over the frenzied buzzing in his ears and the stabbing needles in his head. He focused on pushing past the buzz to hear the tail end of whatever Alec was saying, but all he caught was "was amazing."

"More amazing than me?" Mel asked, her voice seductively playful.

Alec nipped at her lower lip. "A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell, sweetheart."

*Sweetheart?* Jace dug his fingers into the back the chair, keeping him upright.

"Dog," Mel grouched, and then she stretched up and kissed him soundly.

Flashes of her lips against his, and of his on Alec's bombed Jace's mind. Was it just yesterday that he'd kissed the both of them? A sudden wave of lust rushed through Jace's body to battle with the hurt, startling him with its intensity. And right on the heels of that unexpected hunger came the crushing weight of betrayal. The conflicting emotions were too much to bear. Pain pinched deep in his chest as a cold fist squeezed the life from him. It might not be so horrific if he didn't love the both of them so much.

"I didn't get a chance to talk to him yet, but I'm sure it's going to work."



“Didn’t talk? What kind of games were you boys up to?”

What the hell? Mel *knew*? He had just spent the most incredible night of his life with Alec, and Mel knew, and there she was kissing him. The both of them laughing about it. Big joke on Jace.

Anger welled up from his belly, scalding, burning his throat and his eyes.

“Yeah, just what kind of games were you up to, Alec?” Jace asked flatly as he stepped through the patio doors.

Startled, Mel and Alec broke apart, each with a vivid mix of shock and guilt on their faces.

“Jace...” Melody gasped. “It...it’s not what you think.”

“I’m not an idiot, Melody,” he spat. “Spare me your lame denials of the obvious.”

“No, Jace. We wanted to talk to you about this. About something Alec and I think will be perfect for us all.”

“You and Alec?” he mocked. “So what, he sleeps with both of us to decide who he wants? After...after...” The fist squeezing his heart twisted, tearing it fiber by fiber. The pain burrowed deeper. Wouldn’t stop, wouldn’t let him breathe. How could Alec do that to him? Jace had thought last night meant something more than just a cheap fuck, that it was the start of something amazing. But Alec wasn’t playing for keeps after all.

“What was it? Give Jace a thrill before pulling the rug out from under him? A pity fuck?” Mel recoiled as if he’d actually slapped her, then stumbled back a step. Regret slammed into him, but he couldn’t stop. Anger and pain and humiliation had pushed him beyond caring that words could cut deeper than any physical weapon.

They’d used him.

“And then you gave me open court yesterday. After you kissed me. What the fuck, Mel?” His voice cracked on her name.

“Jace...” Alec stepped forward, moving his body slightly in front of Mel, protecting her from...*him?*

“And you...” Jace clenched his hands into fists, holding his arms rigidly at his sides. “What the fuck are you playing at? Taking us for a fucking test drive?”

“Jace, don’t. I know this looks bad, but it—”

“Fuck you!” Jace roared as hurt and loss scraped his throat raw. His vision blurred and narrowed. He had to get off this emotional roller coaster. Had to get away from here, away from them. “Just fuck you,” he whispered, the wind sucked from his sails. He turned on his heel and charged out of the house.

## Chapter Ten

“Shit,” Alec muttered.

Mel stared at the door Jace had just slammed. She resisted the urge to chase him. He wasn’t ready to listen to anything she had to say. Panic lapped at her as she contemplated the possibility that he might never really come back.

To be fair, his accusations weren’t so off the mark. She had kept her relationship with Alec a secret from him. And rather than just going to him and talking about the three of them together, she conspired behind his back.

She closed her eyes, but the image of his face, stark with pain, was burned into her lids. She’d seen him hurt before but never like this. And never by her. When the chips were down, she was supposed to be the person he ran *to*, not *from*.

Dimly, she realized that Alec had moved to stand in front of her.

“Hey, it’s going to be okay. He just needs some time.”

Melody’s pain welled and overflowed, morphing into a volcano of molten fury, ready to consume anyone in its path. “Don’t tell me what he fucking needs. I *know* what he needs. Jesus, don’t you get it? Everything was fine until you came here,” she shouted.

Alec jerked back, his face paling.

The anger seeped out of her, and suddenly she was exhausted, like someone had drained her battery. She wrung her hands in front of her.

“I’m sorry, Alec. I’m sorry. But a week ago I had my best friend, and we were fine. We didn’t have a worry in the world. And then you put all these ideas in my head, fantasies of something that could never happen, and I started to believe in

them.” Tears pricked her eyes, and she tried to swallow past the lump of regret wedged in her throat.

Alec pulled her stiff body into his arms, rubbing her back and making soft noises in her ear until she found herself hugging him in return. The tears that had threatened broke free, and Alec held her tight as she cried.

“I know you’re hurt. And maybe you aren’t giving me enough credit here, because I am too.”

Melody pulled back and looked up into his wounded face. Those captivating green eyes were stormy and reflected the pain she felt. There was no denying he spoke the truth.

“I love Jace, and I love you. I know you’re afraid right now, but his reaction was the result of a misunderstanding. Yes, we hurt him, and yes, he’s angry, but it wasn’t a rejection. He hasn’t even been given the choice yet. Once we explain, once we tell him how much we care, I think we still have a chance.” Alec cupped her face tenderly in his hands and pressed his lips to hers in a gentle kiss.

An ember of hope began to burn within her. She gave Alec a tight squeeze before breaking their kiss. This wasn’t his fault; she’d been a willing participant. She couldn’t remember why they’d thought this was a good plan. It wasn’t supposed to happen this way. And now, they had to try to fix what they’d broken.

Straightening her spine, she pushed her fear to the side, focusing only on her goal and what she needed to do to get there. “Okay. So let’s show him how we feel. He’s got to come back sometime tonight. He has a competition tomorrow, and all of his stuff is here. And when he does, we’ll blow his mind.”

It was almost dark out as Jace walked into his studio, soaked to the bone and shaking. A mild sixty degrees, but the unseasonably chilly rain had leached the last of his warmth.

He didn’t bother with the lights, making his way to the CD player in the shadowed room. By the glow of the stereo, he made out the cover of the disc he

wanted, popped it in, then hit Play. Danny O'Donoghue sang the words Jace's heart couldn't speak.

*What am I going to do*

*When the best part of me was always you?*

*What am I supposed to say*

*When I'm all choked up and you're okay?*

*I'm falling to pieces*

He pressed his head against the mirror and banged it one time.

"What the fuck?" he shouted to no one. His heart sat in his chest like a shard of glass, cutting deeper with every beat.

Jace had been in love before. At least, he thought he had. But this...this was unlike any pain he'd ever felt, and he didn't know if he'd ever recover.

He peeled off the shirt the rain had almost glued to his body and kicked his sopping shoes onto the mat in the corner of the room as the music seeped into his bones, drowning out his thoughts. He closed his eyes and sank into the vocals and haunting accompaniment that filled the studio until his body found the rhythm and began to sway.

Then he started to dance, pouring all of his sadness and anger into the movement.

The thump of the bass drum vibrated the floor. "He's back. I'm going to get him," Melody told Alec.

"I'll come with you."

She took his hand in hers and held it to her cheek. "Please, Alec. If this works out, I'll never ask you to step aside again. But I need to do this myself. No matter what happens here, things are going to be different between him and me, and we need to talk about it. I'm sorry if that hurts you."

He nodded, his face grim. "Okay. Hurry, though. It's killing me that he thinks last night was just some game to me. Can you at least tell him how sorry I am and that I love him?"

"Of course I will. I'll—*we'll* be back up soon."

"You have twenty minutes, and then I'm coming down. That's more than fair, Mel. I can't be in the dark much longer than that. I'll lose my mind."

"That's fair. Twenty minutes." Melody pressed a hard kiss to his mouth, then headed down the stairs to the studio, her pulse pounding in time with the music. Stopping just outside the door, she tamped down the nausea that threatened. This was Jace, *her* Jace. Everything would be okay. It had to be.

She opened the door and saw him dancing in the near dark, a man possessed. This was no polished ballroom routine, but a lyrical free-form expression of heartbreak.

The tears that had been locked and loaded since he walked out finally broke free and streamed down her face. Salt stung her lips where she'd nibbled them raw. She pressed a hand over her mouth to keep from sobbing out loud. She'd done this to him.

When the music finally ended, so did he, on his knees, arms at his side, bare chest heaving. The room was silent but for the tapping of rain on the windows and Jace's labored breathing.

"I know you're there. I can smell you, Melody." His voice barely a whisper.

"I—It's not what you think." She cleared her throat and tried again. "I should have told you. I know that now. But I love you. We love you."

"*We*. Who the fuck is *we*? You and your boyfriend?" He let loose a bitter laugh and stood, tense and guarded. "Is this the part where you tell me that neither of you meant to hurt me and that you hope we can all stay friends? God, Mel, I slept with him! And somehow, between last night when he had his dick in my mouth and today when the two of you were sucking face, something changed, and I didn't get

the memo. So great for you. You win. Send your clothes to a professional laundry service and send me the bill.”

The pain in his voice shattered her soul. If she didn’t convince him right now, she’d lose him forever.

She walked toward him slowly, tears still flowing. “I didn’t win. Either we both win or we both lose.”

“I don’t even know what that’s supposed to mean, and I’m not in the mood for word games. I’m going upstairs to take a hot shower and get some clothes. I’m going to stay at my sister’s until I figure out what to do from here.”

“Dammit, listen to me!”

He met her gaze with a challenging stare.

This was it, her one chance to make him understand.

“I knew you and Alec were going to hook up. In fact, he and I talked about it for a couple of days beforehand. He overheard us talking about our bet last weekend, and we...had a moment. We ended up sleeping together. I was going to tell you, but I wanted to make sure it wasn’t just a onetime thing, because I knew you’d be hurt. Then, we got to talking the next day. Alec told me he really cared about me, loved me in fact.”

Jace’s indrawn breath made her rush to finish. “But that he loved you too. He said that he wanted to be with both of us.” This next part was going to be the hard part. The ‘Melody is raw and vulnerable, soft underbelly exposed’ part.

*Rip it off, like a Band-Aid.* “He said he knows how much I love you too, and he could tell by our kiss that we wanted each other. See, he doesn’t want to take turns or toy with us. He wants us all to be together. An exclusive threesome.” She swallowed hard and added. “And I want that too.”

The silence was louder than the music had been, and endless moments passed.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you slept with him when it happened? You could have told me. You know me better than anyone. I have an open mind. I would’ve listened to what you had to say.”

“It’s because I *do* know you so well that I couldn’t tell you straight-out. If you knew that I’d already slept with Alec, you’d have never agreed to the idea. You’d have automatically put him on your off-limits list and stepped down gracefully. But don’t you see? It’s the three of us that works. And I wanted to make sure we were all on level ground. If you felt like Alec and I were an established couple, it never would have worked. I know you want him.”

Jace bobbed his head once, then averted his gaze to fix on the liquid lightshow that played out against the studio windows.

“The question is, do you want me too? If the answer is yes, then I want you to think about it.”

He didn’t turn to look at her as he spoke. “And that’s why you kissed me yesterday morning.”

Melody nodded, then took a step closer, drawing his attention back on her. He still seemed hurt and confused, but the anger that had vibrated around him was gone. She lifted a hand to his damp, bare chest and pressed it to his heart.

“I love you so much, Jace. I always have. You have to believe that. And I wouldn’t risk our friendship if I didn’t think this could be something amazing.”

She leaned into him, her breath suspended as she waited for him to pull away. He didn’t. His heart raced beneath her palm. Closer she moved, until their hips touched. And still he didn’t move. Melody slid her hand from his chest up his neck, past his pounding pulse to his face, where she brushed his perfect lips with her fingertip.

Gazes locked, Jace opened his mouth, capturing her finger with his teeth, nipping gently. He groaned and closed his eyes. A heady mixture of elation and desire coursed through her, but a second later he pulled away.



“Mel, I still—I’m not sure. I don’t know if this is something I can do, and I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Can we at least try?” Mel knew she was pleading, but she didn’t care. She’d get down on her knees and beg if she thought it would help.

“She’s right, Jace.”

Startled, they both turned to face Alec.

“Sorry. You had a few more minutes, but I couldn’t stand it,” he said to Melody with a shrug.

She nodded. He’d lasted a lot longer than she could have in his shoes.

He turned his attention to Jace, and the warmth in his eyes reflected in the sincerity of his voice. “It probably doesn’t mean much, but I’m so sorry. I know now that we handled this wrong. All I can say is that we never intended to hurt you. I really do love you. I am playing for keeps.”

She nodded at his words, and it took all her strength not to hug him, try to comfort him, because he was hurting too. They all were.

The three of them stood quietly as the rain continued to fall.

Jace spoke, his voice a whisper. “Okay.”

She and Alec’s eyes met. *Okay?* Had he just said okay?

His voice was stronger the second time.

“Okay, we’ll try.”

## Chapter Eleven

He couldn't fully make out their expressions in the dim light, but Jace felt the fearful tension in the room dissipate as another, different kind of vibe took its place.

He was a little shocked at what he'd just agreed to. But the more he let the idea sink in, the more it appealed. If he was being honest with himself, even though he was hurt and angry when he'd seen them kissing, his first and immediate reaction had been desire. He had wanted to be a part of them. Together.

Maybe it had never registered before because he'd always thought he was firmly gay. Maybe he and Mel had been dancing around this their whole lives. How many times had told her he wished she were a man? But from the beginning they'd drawn lines in the sand and filled them with concrete, their roles defined and set—until Alec had showed them a way across the lines.

It was crazy to want two people, to love two people. But he did. And they did. He believed that.

Now that he'd agreed, he didn't know what to do next. When it came to sex with a woman, he was still a virgin. He'd popped his boy cherry when he was sixteen with Jimmy Miller at a dance competition in Sacramento. And after that, there had been no reason to try women.

Now, adrift in uncharted waters, the confidence and exuberance he usually brought to a sexual encounter had abandoned him. All he could do was stand there, looking at Mel's silhouette against the pale blue glow of the stereo behind her, and hope that she'd make the first move.

Or maybe Alec would.

Rain tapped a haunting beat against the windowed wall of the studio while his anticipation grew.

Alec ended the standoff. He stepped cautiously toward Jace, the way one would approach a panicked dog. Warm, strong hands cupped his face; then firm, velvet lips caressed his mouth. Alec's kiss was heartfelt and full of conviction. That unique, heady spice filled Jace with trust—in him, in them—and he knew instinctively what Alec was telling him: that he was loved and this was right.

Just as Jace relaxed and began to settle in, Alec broke away and reached for Mel, pulling her into their intimate circle. With one hand still holding Jace, he slid the other behind Mel's head and kissed her soundly.

Jace couldn't pull his eyes away, mesmerized; his mouth watered.

Alec broke from Mel and turned his gaze on Jace, leaning back a mere fraction, but enough for Jace to understand.

He shifted his gaze to Mel and held it for a long moment. Her eyes sparkled like the falling rain caught in streetlights. His body thrummed, but he was still too unsure to move. Mel closed the distance for him and pressed her lips to his. Testing, enticing him without pressuring or rushing. He parted his lips, and she slipped her tongue inside. The taste of peppermint shocked his mouth as his tongue joined the dance she'd started. He deepened their kiss and was rewarded with a low keening moan.

Soft, warm hands settled on the bare skin of his waist, and Mel pulled him toward her so their hips bumped. Just as he lifted his hands to her cup her face, a strong, large hand cruised up his spine, leaving sparks in its wake.

Alec.

Jace had become so engrossed in kissing Mel he hadn't noticed that Alec had removed his shirt and moved behind him. Silky skin wrapped around hard muscle pressed into his back while smooth softness molded to his chest. The hand that had run up his spine now rested on his shoulder; the other hand slid possessively over

his torso and fanned out on his abdomen. A hot breath against his neck, just behind his ear, sent a shudder racing through his body.

“You’re beautiful together.”

Teeth latched on to the corded muscle at the base of his neck. Every single nerve ending in his body ignited.

The hand on his abdomen lowered, slipped inside the band of his pants, and gripped his aching shaft while Alec’s hard cock ground against his backside. Then the strong hand was replaced by a softer one. Although he was distantly aware of who was who, the lines blurred, and it felt like countless hands were everywhere at once.

Alec forced Jace and Mel to move as one unit toward the desk. Mel bumped against it and sat decisively as Alec shoved papers onto the floor. An already naked Alec slid Mel’s shorts off as she pulled her shirt over her head. Then Alec hooked his hands in the waist of Jace’s wet pants and pushed them down his legs.

Pale blue light from the face of the stereo ghosted Mel’s body and defined the lines and curves of smooth, flawless skin.

“God, you’re beautiful, Melody,” Jace said, his voice rough.

“And so are you,” Alec whispered as he turned Jace’s head and kissed him with aggressive possession. Jace swayed from the force of it when Alec released him and stepped back, blending into the shadows.

Mel reached out for Jace and wrapped her hand around the back of his neck, pulling him toward her. “I love you, Jace.”

He stepped between her open legs and took her lips, his hands firm on her hips. She wrapped her long legs around his waist, took one of his hands, and brought it to her breast. It filled his palm, firm and soft. He rolled her nipple between his finger and thumb, and Mel moaned into his mouth, making his swollen cock ache for release. She ran her hands along his chest and his abdomen, then stroked his throbbing cock.

She broke their kiss and asked in a raspy voice, "Do you still want to try?"

"Yes." He nodded quickly, surprised by his lack of hesitation. "Oh yes."

Distantly he heard foil tearing behind him, and then started in surprise when strong hands reached around and rolled a condom over his dick.

Then Melody took Jace in hand and skillfully guided him inside her body.

*Oh. My. God.* His knees threatened to buckle under him. One deep stroke, and he was buried to the hilt, firmly encased in blistering liquid silk. Inside a woman, inside Melody. His best friend. His best *girl* friend. But she was more than that and always had been. He knew that now.

Her body was hot and slick as it pulsed around him, tight but so incredibly smooth. The feeling was new. Different but intense, and he moaned as her heat clutched him.

Cool, lube-slicked hands cupped his ass and divided his attention. His breath hitched in his throat, and a shiver charged through his pinging body. Alec kissed his shoulder blades as long sure fingers moved between his cheeks and deftly set to relaxing the tight ring of muscle.

Alec moved with him as he slowly pumped into Mel. She arched her spine and threw her head back as Jace rocked forward, impaling her, then rocked back onto Alec's fingers.

Jace moaned in complaint when those fingers retreated. He heard foil tear behind him a second time, and then groaned with desire when the head of Alec's thick cock pressed against his entrance. Alec pushed his way in slow and sure, stretching and filling him, until he was fully seated.

"Oh. Mother. Mercy..." Jace ground out on the edge of sensation overload. The three of them stilled for an extended breath with him buried deep inside Mel and Alec deep inside him.

"Feel good?" Alec's words fanned a hot breath across Jace's shoulder. He could only nod, having lost the ability to speak coherent words.

Alec grabbed Mel's ankles and pulled her legs around his waist, trapping Jace between them, and then he started to move. The three of them rocking, grinding, thrusting in erotic unison.

How different but equally amazing his two lovers' bodies were. Mel was an athlete with the body to prove it, but she was still feminine. Her highly toned body was still soft, her corners rounded. If she were a dance, she'd be an American waltz, a sensual glide across the dance floor. Alec's hard body was unyielding, his corners sharp and defined. Where Mel was a smooth waltz, Alec was like a *paso doble*. He was the matador—passionate and strong—and completely in control.

Jace loved it, loved it all.

For ten years Melody had dreamed of this moment. Ten years she'd fantasized and longed for Jace to want her as more than just a best friend. Now that it was finally happening, she realized her every fantasy had paled miserably in comparison.

He made love to her the same way he kissed: masterfully leading her in a graceful, sensual dance.

He leaned over her, his arms braced on either side of her shoulders, holding himself up from crushing her into the desk. He lowered his head, and she met him halfway, biting gently on his lower lip, pulling it into her mouth. Jace groaned and then broke away, throwing his head back. She watched, mesmerized, as every emotion he felt displayed across his beautiful face. A light sheen of sweat glistened on his skin.

She dug her fingers into his biceps and tightened her legs around Alec's waist, holding the three of them securely together.

"I want to watch you come for him, Mel," Alec growled roughly. His hands held her legs for leverage as he pounded into Jace. Then he nipped at Jace's shoulder.

The intensity and pace increased as all three of them raced for the edge. Jace shoved his hands under her bottom and lifted her hips up, better positioning

himself to thrust harder into her. That one shift was all it took. Her body exploded, and her pussy clamped down on Jace's cock. She shouted out his name as a blinding orgasm gripped her.

She faintly heard Alec say "Yeah baby, that's it," and then Jace slammed into her on a guttural roar as Alec slammed into him and yelled.

Jace collapsed over her, his body hot and sweaty. Then Alec wrapped his heaving body around Jace, and she was pinned beneath both men, their combined weight heavy against the unforgiving surface of the desk. But she wouldn't dare complain and break the intimate bubble they were encased in. Her one dream had finally come true.

All three were panting and heaving as they waited for their heart rates and breaths to slow. Overwhelming emotion welled deep inside her. This was right, the three of them together, the love they shared. A perfect union. She had Jace, and she had Alec.

A rumbling stomach interrupted the peaceful post-orgasmic haze, and Melody groaned.

"Oh my God. That can only be Alec."

"Oops."

She giggled; then they laughed in collective satisfaction.

"Get off me, you beasts. I'm suffocating here."

Alec grabbed one of Mel's hands, Jace held the other, and he led them upstairs. He and Mel had planned a whole night to convince Jace around to their way of thinking, but things hadn't gone exactly as planned. They'd thought sex, if they got to it, would be last, not first.

Alec grinned ear to ear. Damn, he was one lucky SOB. Watching Jace and Melody together had been the hottest thing he'd ever seen, and to be a part of that,

with them... Yeah, life couldn't get much better. Now he could explore all those fantasies he'd been harboring since he'd moved in.

He led them into the main bathroom, where they stood shoulder to shoulder, looking at the glass-walled custom-built shower.

"Well, it's for sure too big for one," Alec said, wondering if the three of them could fit.

"Two can easily fit," Mel added.

"We need to knock out another wall and expand the bathroom," Jace said.

Alec and Mel both turned to Jace, who rolled his eyes and shrugged. "What? We need one big enough for all of us."

Mel stretched up and kissed him, then opened the door and stepped inside. "Well, come on, boys. Let's see if this'll work."

Alec and Jace stepped in behind her and shimmied their bodies so they were all in with Melody sandwiched between the two of them. Just enough room to maneuver.

"Good enough, I say," Alec chirped and flipped on the water. "Hurry up. I gotta eat."

After all parting to their respective rooms to dress, Alec headed for the kitchen wearing only boxers to meet up with his lovers. He found them already there and paused, leaning against the entry for a moment.

Jace wore a pair of pajama bottoms, and Mel wore the matching top with girl boxers. Jace had his backside against the island with Mel wrapped up in his arms, their heads rested together. They were so beautiful together, and they were both his. A contented smile stretched across his face. He had everything he could ever want right there in front of him.



“Looks like I need to get me some matching pajamas,” he said, stepping forward. They both turned and graced him with warm smiles and loving eyes that made his chest swell.

Yep, one seriously lucky SOB.

Mel pulled out of Jace’s embrace and turned him toward the table. “You go sit. Alec and I prepared a feast for you.”

Alec pulled a chair out for him. “Sit.”

“Such a dom,” Jace joked, sitting down as Alec winked.

He and Mel had set the table with every classy accessory they could find: crisp white tablecloth, burnt red silk placemats, Mel’s grandma’s best silver, and white candles centered around a dozen red roses.

With all the flourish of a five-star restaurant waiter, Alec snapped out a cloth napkin and laid it in Jace’s lap, accidentally on purpose brushing fingers over his groin, earning himself a playful slap on the wrist. Then he poured sparkling apple juice into a champagne glass and handed it to Jace.

“Since you’re always cooking for us, we decided to join our considerable culinary talents and cook for you,” Melody said as she lowered a plate in front of him.

Alec had to bite the inside of his lip to hold back laughter as he watched expressions of shock, disbelief, and horror play out on Jace’s face.

On the plate were two sandwiches, cut into three fingers each and neatly stacked. They were accompanied by cherry tomatoes and cucumber slices.

“Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches? With veggies?”

“Using all organic ingredients,” Mel said proudly.

Jace looked up at both of them; his eyes sparkled as he fought to keep a straight face. Then his shoulders started shaking, and he gave up the fight. He tossed his head back and laughed heartily. Alec joined him, and after casting eye daggers on the two of them, Mel finally gave in.

“It’s a good thing you two already have my heart, ’cause you sure wouldn’t get it through my stomach.”

“Man, not even our one-day anniversary and already the complaining,” Mel shook her head in mock disapproval.

“Truth, Hellz? No complaints here,” Jace said in a solemn tone.

“Good,” Mel and Alec said over each other.

She gave him and Jace a tremulous smile. “So, you guys ready for bed?”

## Chapter Twelve

They stood looking blankly at each other for a moment. Clearly there were some details they'd have to work out with this new relationship of theirs.

They settled on Jace's room because it was the only clean one, and he had the biggest bed. Considering that Alec's sheets were messy from last night, and Mel's had been hit by Hurricane Hellody, the decision was easy.

As they filed into his bedroom, Jace's stomach did a nervous flip. Yeah, they had already done the deed, and it had been spectacular, but it was all still so new. And exciting.

He wondered if they were going straight to sleep or—

Mel lifted her arms and stripped her pajama off, tossing it on the floor. Her breasts were bare, pert nipples hard and begging to be touched. He swallowed hard and edged closer.

"Damn, Mel. You're gorgeous," he breathed. He bent and took her nipple into his mouth, sucking deep. Her moan was cut off, and Jace glanced up to see her in a lip lock with Alec. His cock pulsed at the sight of them. He straightened and noted with a thrill that Alec was naked. Jace led them to the edge of the bed.

"Lie down, Mel," he whispered, a scene in his mind begging to be played out.

Her pupils dilated, and she wet her lips, then nodded.

"On my back?"

"Yes."

She did.

"Now take off your boxers," Alec ground out.

She raised her slim hips and slid them down her long legs, wriggling sensuously until they were around her ankles, then kicked them away.

She gave them each a challenging stare as she lay beneath their heated gazes, naked and proud.

“What now?”

“Now? Alec is going to eat your pussy while I suck him off.”

Mel’s lips formed an O, and she quivered lightly, her chest rising and falling faster.

Alec placed a hand on each of her trim ankles and slid them slowly, excruciatingly upward. Jace bent to kiss her as Alec caressed her thighs, spreading them. He teased her lips with his tongue, loving the fullness of her mouth against his, so different from a man’s. She twitched, then tensed and sucked his tongue hard. Alec had clearly found his mark. Jace’s cock jerked in response as Mel’s kiss grew fevered. He slid his hands to her breasts, teasing her nipples with a light caress, and she moaned into his mouth, then broke away.

“Damn, it’s almost too much,” she groaned.

Power and elation soared through him as he continued to caress her. He watched from the pillow as Alec worked her with his tongue, alternately lapping at her pussy, then burying his face deep between her thighs. His cock grew painfully hard.

Jace crawled to the bottom of the big bed, working his way to Alec’s side. He squeezed his hip, and Alec shifted to his side, turning his head to stay in contact with Mel. Alec’s cock bobbed before him, a scant inch from his mouth. Jace snaked out his tongue, licking a bead of moisture from the head. Alec groaned into Mel’s pussy and flexed his hips. Again, Jace licked him, this time a long, slow slide of tongue, then sucked the swollen head into his mouth as Alec arched helplessly toward him.

Jace accepted his invitation and began to suck in earnest, pulling his thick cock deep, until it touched the back of his throat. Alec shouted then and began to

pump his hips in a frenzied rhythm. Jace moaned deep in his throat as his own cock leaped in response.

“Flip this way, Jace,” Mel commanded, her voice thick with need. “I want you in my mouth.”

Alec shifted so that his body was perpendicular to Mel’s, his mouth never leaving her. Jace released him with a sucking *pop* as he flipped his own body to line his hips up with Mel’s mouth. They formed a perfect love triangle. Jace smiled to himself, until Mel’s plump lips closed around him, and all thought fled.

She gripped him in her soft hand and stroked him up and down as she sucked, and his cock surged. He wrapped his mouth around Alec and began to suck as well, closing his eyes and allowing the sensation to overtake him.

The feel of hot, hard dick in his mouth, pressing against the tender back of his throat, warred with the pulling heat at his groin. In and out, farther, deeper. Mel increased the pace, her mouth expressing her sudden urgency. Her hips bucked. Alec groaned in response and thrust into Jace’s mouth, hips moving like a piston. Mel’s hungry mouth pulled at him, dragging him under. She stiffened, letting out a keening cry, and her hips jerked. Jace’s climax crashed over him, blood roaring in his ears as he gripped Alec’s ass in his hands, pulling him deep into his throat, stifling his own cries as he came hard into Mel’s mouth. Dimly, he felt Alec tense, then felt the twitch and hot, salty cum spurting down the back of his throat.

Half an hour later, after hot cocoa and cleanup, Jace lay on his back at the foot of the bed with his head hanging off the edge perfectly, completely, and incandescently sated. Two pairs of legs tangled with his, and the cheek-cramping grin was back.

After the gourmet sandwiches Mel and Alec had made for him, he had whipped up veggie omelets for them. The sandwiches were surprisingly tasty but didn’t quite hit the spot.

The bed rocked, and warm fingers crawled up his thigh.

“Come up here, baby,” Mel said, her voice soft and sleepy.

Jace righted himself and crawled up to the head of the bed, settling in between Mel and Alec. She rolled onto her side away from Jace, pulling his arm with her. He tucked her into his chest, his hand clasped in hers, while Alec settled in behind him and wrapped his arm over the both of them, tucking his hand between theirs, a perfect triple spoon.

“Good night, Melody. Good night, Jace.”

“Good night, Jace. Good night, Alec.”

“Good night, Alec. Good night, Hellz.”

Jace chuckled and added, “Good night, John-Boy.”

His lovers both chuckled; then Melody stuck him in the ribs with her elbow. “Both of you shut up and go to sleep, or you’re out of here.”

Jace smiled as he kissed her bare shoulder and drifted off to sleep, cocooned between the two people he loved most.

THE END

Loose Id Titles by Chloe Cole & L. C. Chase

*Three to Tango*

## About the Authors

### Chloe Cole

Chloe Cole is the happily married mom and stepmom of a passel of boys. When she's not writing, she loves to read, play poker, eat chocolate and go to the movies. She hates yard work, almonds, hypocrites and bugs (except for lady bugs, on account of their cute outfits). When she grows up she wants to be a pirate. Or, like, a ninja maybe. You can contact Chloe at [www.christine-bell.com/ChloeCole](http://www.christine-bell.com/ChloeCole) or via email at [rcbell64@yahoo.com](mailto:rcbell64@yahoo.com) She loves to hear from her readers!

### L. C. Chase

Artist by day, author by night, L.C. Chase is a hopeless romantic and adventure seeker. Many of those adventures have become fodder for her stories. The first time she left home, she traveled 1200 miles to California—to be a rock star—with two hundred dollars in her pocket. A four-year walkabout took her on a coast-to-coast back roads tour of the USA, across both of New Zealand's islands by bicycle, and a short road trip in NSW, Australia. Now that L.C. has two of the coolest nephews on the planet, she calls the Canadian West Coast home. When not writing or reading sensual tales of romance, L.C. can be found drawing, painting, or running the trails with her goofy Australian Shepherd, who, if he were human, would be a stand up comedian. You can visit L.C. at her website [www.lcchase.com](http://www.lcchase.com).