Summary

Asher and Jordan enjoy the mutual pleasure that their hook-ups bring, even if both are too scared to admit that it means more than just getting off. But when the newly promised football star Spencer shows up, the world that Asher and Jordan thought they knew how to manage spirals out of control.
Spoilers for Season 1 throughout.

Notes

The following chapter contains explicit sexual content, please do in real life as the guys do here and practice safe sex!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Fuck! That’s so hot, dude!”

“Mmh.” Asher agreed with a moan, his eyes not on the laptop placed between them, but on the rippling abs and flexing bicep of Jordan’s arm beside him. “So hot…” He kept jerking himself off, careful not to look at Jordan too often in case he got caught, but thankfully the porn they were watching had two really hot guys with a girl in between riding one of their dicks and sucking off the other one. The camera kept pulling away from the guy’s bodies to focus on the woman’s bulging cheeks, and Asher used those moments to flick his eyes from the screen and back to his best friend’s perfectly muscular body.

“Ahh, damn, look at the way she’s blowing him!” Jordan cried out, his right hand working his cock with increased vigor, trails of precum slicking down from the flared head and greasing the thick shaft in natural lube. His free hand was thrust behind his head, gripping the bars along the center of his headboard, pulling his large pecs taut, the nipples hard and seemingly inviting Asher’s tongue to lick them. “Mmh. That’s gotta feel so good!”

“Yeah…” Asher murmured, his stomach clenching as the urge swept through him. Oh, fuck it, I can just blow it off as a one-time curiosity thing if he over-reacts. The teenager drew a deep breath and leant over between them suddenly, his mouth opening and lips wrapping around Jordan’s cock. Jordan stopped moving and Asher kept his eyes closed, taking his first, experimental slurp of his best friend’s hard dick. “Mmph.”

“Fuck, dude.” Jordan gasped, his hand falling away. He slumped back on the bed and thrust up into Asher’s warm, wet mouth, the obscene noise of his friend choking on his dick somehow made it hotter. Jordan grunted, one hand reaching out to grip the back of Asher’s head, fingers carding through his hair, and guided him up and down on his cock. “Ah, yeah! Oh, fuck, that’s awesome!”

The porn was forgotten as Asher sucked Jordan off until his jaw was sore and his mouth was tangy with the taste of Jordan’s precum. It didn’t matter though, because as soon as Asher started to pull his lips back up over the tip of Jordan’s cock, the football captain started groaning loudly and his dick shuddered against Asher’s mouth. “Fuck yeah! Cum for me, Jordan!” Asher whispered in a husky voice, his hand gripping his own cock awkwardly and jerking off furiously as he held his tongue against Jordan’s flared tip. “Mmmh!”

“Ahh, yeah! Fuck!” Jordan cried out, arching his back again, eyes shut tight as he exploded everywhere, the intensity of his orgasm taking him by surprise. “Ahhh!”

“Fuck!” Asher muttered, gasping when Jordan’s cum splattered into his face and shot across the clenching abs, smooth, toned skin contrasting with the thick ropes of cream. He groaned as his tongue reached out to taste the shots of Jordan’s cum that were dribbling down his face, his own cock shuddering and exploding a second later. Asher dumped his load against the duvet, grinding into the fabric as his ass clenched and released furiously.

That’s how it had started; an impromptu blow job in the middle of a sleep-over the week before Spring Vacation. Asher blinked, realizing that he had been thinking about their first time as he was kneeling in front of Jordan, the guy’s cock buried in his mouth and touching against his throat. Fuck, when did I become such a good cocksucker that I could just zone out in the middle of blowing him?
Jordan hadn’t appeared to notice however; he was still gripping Asher’s hair and groaning loudly, sliding his thick cock back and forward into the wet, willing mouth. He was backed up against the wall, they were just inside the entrance to Asher’s bedroom, both naked, tanning poolside turned into the now familiar mid-week hook-up session. “Mmh, that’s it!”

“Hmm.” Asher pulled off him with a messy pop and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, looking up Jordan’s muscular torso towards his handsome face. Jordan smiled at him and Asher stood up slowly, pressing his body against the other guy’s. “I…hmm, you were close.”

“Yeah.” Jordan admitted breathlessly, his hands drifting down Asher’s tanned back to rest on his firm ass. He spread the cheeks and slipped the fingers of his right hand into the smooth crack, but Jordan tilted his head away suddenly when Asher leaned in. “Hey, I’m not gay, Asher, I’m not kissing you.”

“Right, sorry.” That’s just me. Asher swallowed his bitterness and grasped Jordan’s cock a little harder than necessary, but not enough to hurt. He guided the other guy over to his bed, letting go when they got there. Asher picked up the foil wrapper sitting on his bedside locker and handed it to Jordan, taking the bottle of lube for himself. The cleaner only came in once a week and he always made sure everything was hidden beforehand. It wasn’t as though his father would be surprised he was having sex, he would have just expected it to be with Layla rather than with Jordan. And Asher didn’t even want to think about having that conversation with his father. “You got it?”

“Just a minute.” Jordan muttered, struggling with the pre-lubed condom. “It’s slippery.”

“Always is.” Asher gestured for him to hand it over and he smirked as Jordan groaned when Asher slipped the preventative along his cock. “Don’t cum yet.”

“I’ll try, it’s been too long, dude.”

“Tuesday, that was two days ago.” Asher smirked wider and finished preparing him. He climbed onto the bed and slipped two lubed fingers into his ass, feeling his hole clench around the intruding digits. “I’m ready.”

“Get on your stomach.”

“Mmh.” Asher grunted and laid down, pressing his lips together in anticipation as he waited to feel the weight of Jordan against him, his thick dick would slip inside and connect them together again, just like earlier that week. It was the sensation that Asher savoured and the one that made his cock tingle whenever he caught Jordan watching him during football practice. “Ah!”

“Oh?” Jordan whispered, his lubed cock pressing against Asher’s pert ass cheeks as he lowered himself into position. “Fuck, dude, you’re trembling.”

“I skipped lunch.” Asher lied, reaching out to wrap one arm around his pillow. He managed to hide the flush of his cheeks as his body betrayed him again, shaking harder when Jordan pushed his thickness inside slowly. “Ahhh!”

“That’s it! Damn, still so tight!” Jordan hissed, waiting until his full length was buried inside Asher’s sweet ass, the ring of muscle clutching him firmly. He adjusted their position, reaching down to pull Asher against him, one arm crossing the other guy’s well-built torso. “Oh, yeah!”

“Mmh.” Asher moaned, not caring about the noise; they were alone in the mansion, the gardeners working on the desert rockery by the east entrance. He clenched his ass as tight as he could as Jordan pulled out and released in time to feel the hardness of his body and the ripple of the captain’s abs
when Jordan slammed back into him. Asher groaned, his free hand clutching Jordan’s forearm, fingers and thumb stroking the smooth skin. “Yes! Fuck, yes!”

“Aw, yeah!” Jordan grunted, slamming into Asher harder and harder, grinning when his best friend suddenly went slack and relaxed into his grip. He pulled back onto his heels and took Asher with him, the other guy understanding the change of positions and bouncing up and down on Jordan’s cock as though it was his own personal dildo. “Fuck, dude, that’s so hot!"

Asher rolled onto his back, keeping Jordan buried inside him as they continued to fuck, sweat making their smooth, muscular bodies glisten even as the aircon filtering down from overhead managed to cool the worst of their exertions. He arched his head back, hands running up and down over Jordan’s amazing biceps, palms reaching north to grip his shoulders and pull the football captain deeper into him. “Ahh, yeah!”

“Mmm, yeah, aw!”

“Harder, dude, harder!” Asher urged him on, legs spread wide as his cock drooled precum onto his abs. Jordan groaned and thrust into him with short, rapid movement, pulling Asher’s hips roughly against him, his cock plunging in and out without pause. “Aw, fuck, faster! Deeper!”

“Ahh!” Jordan howled, sweat coursing down his chest and stomach as he leaned forward, closer to Asher to deliver the final few thrusts before he was spent. “Ah, nearly there!” He gasped as his body tensed up and Jordan pulled out of him completely, yanking the condom off and replacing Asher’s tight ass with the lesser pleasure of his own hand. But that didn’t matter so much as he looked down at Asher’s red, lube-slick, gaping hole and Jordan grunted again, feeling his balls tense up and suddenly release. “Awww, yeah, Asher! Here it comes! Yeah!”

“Uh, fuck, yeah!” Asher grinned, grasping his own cock and jerking off in time to Jordan. His tongue pressed through his lips when Jordan’s muscles all tensed up and his handsome face passed from concentration to pure pleasure. Jordan moaned long and hard, cum firing from his cock to splatter against Asher’s muscular chest, a few drops hitting higher along his neck and chin. The rest of Jordan’s load shot across Asher’s abs and dripped onto Jordan’s hands and balls. “Fuck, dude, you came a lot!”

“Yeah…” Jordan muttered, not getting up to head into the bathroom to clean up as he always did, seeming to want to wait for Asher to get off too. He licked his lips in what Asher could have sworn was nervousness before Jordan’s expression became impenetrable again.

“Ah!” Asher moaned in surprise when Jordan reached down and started jerking him off. He released his cock and let his best friend do it for him, Jordan seemingly focused on Asher’s cum-splattered chest, since he never raised his eyes above the other guy’s collarbones. Asher enjoyed the view and the unexpected helping hand, his gaze lingering on the way that the sweat from their sex made Jordan’s smooth skin glisten, his muscles more defined than usual. “Uh! Ah! Oh! Yeah, Jordan!”

“Ah! Ah! Ah! Ahh, fuck, Jordan!” It was enough for Asher to cum, arching his back and thrusting his cock wildly into Jordan’s lubed and cum-slick hand. Asher’s cum shot up and splattered across his naval and Jordan’s forearms in an erratic display until he rolled his head back, body exhausted, and slipping into the pleasant post-cum haze. “Phew, that was epic.”

“Yeah.” Jordan surprised him a second time and crawled up the bed to collapse beside him, lying on his side, facing Asher. “You were…um.”
"Uh," Asher blinked when Jordan leaned in towards him, his hand reaching over to tilt Asher’s face towards him. It was as though he was about to kiss him, but at the last moment, Jordan diverted and pressed his lips against Asher’s cheek. “Oh.”

“Thanks.”

“Err, sure?”

“See you at practice?” Jordan got up suddenly, grabbing a handful of Kleenex from the box on the other side of the bed to wipe the cum and sweat from his body.

“Yeah,” Asher frowned at him. “Jordan, are we…”

“I’ll see you at practice. Don’t be late, we’re running drills until eight.” Jordan replied shortly, slipping on his t-shirt and shorts, jockstrap stuffed into one pocket. “Later, Asher.”

“Um, yeah, later.” Asher frowned at the ceiling, letting his body cool and their mingled cum dry on his chest and abs. “That was weird, he usually just finishes and goes, Maybe-” His phone buzzed, cutting off his thoughts and Asher rolled over to see a message from Layla. He sighed as the other half of his life came crashing back around him, the manufactured part.

_Coffee?_

_Nah, I have practice, I’ll text you after._ He finished typing the reply and rolled off his bed. Asher sat on the edge, his mind’s eye replaying every detail from his afternoon with Jordan, analysing and picking apart each moment when the other guy looked at him, touched him, the almost-kiss at the end. Did any of it mean more than just passion in the heat of the moment? Did Jordan actually _feel_ anything for him, or was he just a quick fuck who wouldn’t say anything for fear of outing both of them?

Asher sighed and stood up, walking towards the shower in the room next door, not even pausing when his phone chimed again. He knew his girlfriend would accept his excuse; she always did.

Jordan sat in his car in Asher’s driveway several minutes after he should have left, but the football captain felt a nervous tension setting into his muscles that just wouldn’t leave. He had almost kissed Asher, almost worked up the courage to do it. It had been something he’d wanted to do for a while now, but Asher seemed to expect that he was just using their secret relationship for sex and getting off, that there wasn’t anything more to it than that.

And at first it had started out that way; quick and rapid blow jobs in the parking lot or their bedrooms or once in the locker room. Asher always took point, somehow secure in his sexuality when they were together and yet completely straight-acting when they were in public around their friends, family, the team. No one would have ever expected that they were fucking each other at least three times a week. Or that Jordan was secretly in…

Maybe it _had_ begun as sex, as relief, as a distraction for Jordan when his sister was spiralling out of control, when football got harder and harder, and they just kept losing. But over the summer things had begun to change; their hook-ups got longer, he lingered more, wanting to talk to Asher, wanting to tell him things, wanting there to be more than sweat and cum between them. Yet every time he had the opportunity to be honest with Asher, Jordan backed out, too afraid to make his thoughts real.

He liked to think that it was because of Layla, Asher’s supposed girlfriend who seemed to be the most effective cover ever. They looked rock solid, and yet Jordan never saw the flare between them
like he had seen with other couples, or when he was alone with Asher and his stomach dropped a thousand feet a second. Asher had said that she was content to wait until marriage to have sex—Jordan wasn’t convinced of that—and Asher always used the excuse of wanting to conserve his strength, stamina, and aggression for the field. Jordan sometimes wondered if maybe they should actually be holding off once in a while and see if it made a difference, but then Asher would catch his eye and smirk, and the thoughts vanished in the haze of instant arousal.

Jordan sighed to himself and started his car. He closed his eyes, savouring the lingering sensation of pressure on his skin, recalling the hardness of Asher’s body as he fucked him; Jordan’s thick cock sliding into that sweet, tight hole that he knew so well. Jordan exhaled and tapped the accelerator, pulling out of Asher’s estate before his not-boyfriend could see he was still there, still aroused at the very thought of him.
The Disrupter

Chapter Notes

The events of this chapter line up with S01E01, and occur several weeks after the conclusion of the previous chapter.

The following chapter contains multiple scenes of sexual activity, please do as Asher and Jordan do, and practice safe sex! This chapter also contains under-age drinking and one instance of a character driving home after he has consumed alcohol. Please never ever drink and drive!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Asher tapped his fingers against the steering wheel, humming along to the music that spilled from the speakers on either side of him. He was waiting for the lights to change when the screen of his phone lit up, an incoming call from his father. Asher sighed to himself, hand hovering over the volume dial before he committed and twisted the sound down low, using his other hand to tap the screen and accept the call. “What?”

“You left earlier than usual this morning.”

“It’s the same time I leave every day.” He replied irritably. “If you actually got up at a reasonable hour, you’d know that.”

“I needed you to take me to the airport.”

“Then call a cab.” Asher snapped at the phone, gunning the engine of his Corvette once the lights turned green. “I’m at the school, I need to go.”

“Asher,” His father paused, a heavy sigh before he continued. “Asher, I won’t be back for a few days, I have…I’m chasing some leads, ok? We’ll figure everything out.”

“Yeah, sure, we can talk when you get back.” Asher muttered. “I don’t suppose you’ll be back in time for my game?”

“Err, um, I don’t-”

“It’s fine.” He cut the man off. Not like I expected you to be there anyway. “I really have to go.”

“I understand, son, see you in a few days.”

“Mmh.” Asher grunted and ended the call, reaching over to spin the volume back up, loud music washing away the bitterness of the conversation as he pulled into the school campus. He dismissed the thoughts that threatened to poison his day ahead, concentrating instead on scanning the gathered students outside the main building for Jordan and the others. Asher smirked to himself as he spotted his best friend getting out of Coach’s car along with his sister. Hmm, no car of his own today? Maybe it’s still in the shop after that puncture last week.

He drove carefully around to the parking lot and reversed into the space he almost always took. Asher felt his lips twitch as a couple of Freshmen slowed down to look at his car. Remind me to
Thank Uncle Ray for getting me this sweet ride! Everyone has been staring ever since I got it, might be something to do with the orange paintjob, but hey, maybe if that’s all they’re seeing, then maybe they won’t notice anything else. He smiled to himself and killed the engine, seeing his phone light up again.

This time it was Jordan, the usual cryptic message to meet him by the edge of the football field. It was vague enough not to arouse suspicion if anyone read it or were snooping through his phone, but Asher knew what it meant. His stomach clenched and excitement thrummed through his body, fattening his cock into raging hardness. Asher quickly got out and locked his car, swinging his bookbag over one shoulder before he set off past the still-gawking Freshmen.

A few minutes later he was at the chosen location and Asher leaned casually against the corner of the school building’s wall, casting his eyes out across the freshly cut grass of the common areas between the football field and locker room. Approaching footsteps made him turn and grin at Jordan. “Hey.”

“Hey, Ash.” Jordan smiled at him, glancing around cautiously before he leaned in and kissed Asher. “Mmh.”

“Hmm.” Asher broke the kiss and smiled wider at him. This was a new development in their hooking up; Jordan had caught him off-guard last weekend, finishing on his abs as usual, and then leaned forward to crush his lips against Asher’s own. He reached out and ran his hands up Jordan’s arms, raising his eyes to find the deep chocolate orbs of his…friend watching him. “C’mon, we don’t have much time until homeroom.”

“You always say that.”

“Yeah, I’m mostly right, I never have enough time to do what I want!” Asher replied with a wink as Jordan wetted his lips and followed him towards the locker room. “You sure it’s clear this time?”

“I swear I didn’t notice JJ was there until he left the showers.” Jordan groaned. “He didn’t see anything, you know that guy can’t keep anything to himself! He would’ve told everyone!”

“Right,” Asher nodded, pushing open the door. “Have you seen Layla?”

“She was talking to Mr Ryder, something about Homecoming, I think.” Jordan answered as Asher ran around the lockers, quickly verifying that they were alone. Once he received the nod, Jordan pulled off his sweatshirt and t-shirt in one smooth motion. “What?”

“Are you sure you want to get naked?”

“Complaining?”

“Never!” Asher smirked back at him, following Jordan’s lead, shirtless in a few seconds. “I like looking at your body.”

“Hmm, well, I…” Jordan hesitated before unbuckling his pants. “I guess you need to have a motivation to keeping doing this; checking me out is a pretty good perk, huh?”

“I, yeah.” Asher muttered, hating the way his chest ached at Jordan’s dismissal. But he knew that attaching feelings to their hooking up was pointless; for all that Jordan enjoyed-or seemed to enjoy-their time together, Asher was almost certain that it was just sex to the quarterback. Falling for my best friend? Damn, can I become anymore of a gay cliché?

“You ok, Ash?”
“Fine.” Asher grunted, getting down on his knees in front of Jordan as the other guy backed up against the lockers, his pants falling to the ground, neon blue briefs bulging with his thick dick. Pushing the thoughts from his mind and focusing instead on the hard cock in front of him, Asher wetted his lips and tilted his head forward, lips kissing the fabric around the outline of the flaring head. “Mmh.”

Jordan rolled his head backwards, enjoying Asher’s ministrations. He could feel Asher mouthing against the thin fabric that concealed his dick, his hands resting on broad thighs, the hot breath from his best friend's eagerness when Asher replaced his mouth with fingers, caressing and massaging Jordan's dick. "Ahh, yeah!" He groaned long and low when Ash's hand hooked inside the waistband and pulled his briefs down just enough to let Jordan's thick dick slip out. Asher laughed quietly when the head glanced against his cheek with a wet splish, his lips taking a brief tour of Jordan's cock head before allowing his hands to start working up and down the shaft.

Asher moved with practiced ease and Jordan closed his eyes, letting the other guy jerk him off as he always did. The pattern of their morning hook-ups was established now; Jordan always finding some way to dodge his sister, their friends, the Coach. Asher had it easier in a way, all he had to do was avoid Layla noticing that he had arrived early. Jordan had noticed that despite the fact they had continued to grow apart from each other, Layla still spent much of her time with Asher. It wasn't like he was jealous of Layla, Jordan always told himself, more that she couldn’t give Asher the same thing that he could.

“Ah!” Jordan blinked, pulled out of his thoughts when Asher swallowed his cock, sliding deep along the shaft until his cheeks bulged outwards obscenely. The view made Jordan’s balls ache longingly and his chest tighten in a way that had been happening more and more around Asher lately. He reached down and carded his hands through Asher’s short hair, closing his eyes before they could match gazes. Instead, Jordan remembered the sensation of sinking his cock into Asher’s ass, the willingness of his hole to take his thickness, the hard musculature of his body responding to Jordan’s errant touches, the soft heat of Asher’s tanned skin when Jordan planted a row of kisses down Asher’s neck in the height of their passions. I love that-

“I love this feeling, but it's not like I'm falling for Ash or anything, I'm not gay. Even in his mind the words rang hollow and Jordan tried to stop thinking about it. He looked down to see that Asher had mostly pulled off his cock, just licking the head and jerking him off. “Fuck, dude, that feels so good!”

“Meh, becoming a pro, huh?!” Asher smirked and dropped his free hand to stroke his own cock, the hard member sticking out of his pants, precum making the head and shaft slick and wet. “And thanks for taking your shirt off, you were right, it sure is one of the perks, well, other than sucking on this monster!”

“Ugh!”

“Haha, close aren’t ya?” Asher grinned and then wrapped his lips around Jordan’s bulbous head again, slurping noisily at the copious precum that leaked from his slit.

“Ahh, fuck, Ash! I’m gonna cum!” Jordan gasped, his orgasm creeping up and suddenly overwhelming him without warning. He glanced down to see Asher pulling away enough to get splattered in the face with his cream. The sight was almost hotter than having Ash blow him off in the first place and Jordan groaned loudly as his balls emptied out onto his best friend’s cheeks, coating his lips and dribbling onto his chin. Jordan let his gaze drift lower, a lazy smile spreading
across his cheeks when he saw that Asher had shot as well, a puddle forming on the tiles under them. *I shouldn’t be the only one enjoying this after all!* “Fuck, dude, that was hot!”

“Yeah.” Asher replied softly, leaning back to grab a handful of tissues from the dispenser on the wall. He mopped up their spilled cum and washed his face clean as Jordan pulled his clothes back on and tucked his half-hard cock back into his briefs.

“Hey, Ash?”

“Yeah?”

“C’mere.” Jordan stood behind him, looking over Asher’s head at the mirror, seeing the abrupt coolness in his best friend’s eyes that was a painfully familiar sight after their sessions lately. Asher turned to look at him, expression guarded, but Jordan leaned in, hands drifting down to rest on Asher’s hips, his head tilting as their lips touched. For a few seconds, the kiss was hesitant, awkward, as it had been on their first time, Jordan being unused to the action. But as they both relaxed, Jordan felt Asher’s lips part and the electric burn of their tongues connecting fired down his chest, diverting to push his heart into overdrive, ultimately reigniting his hardon. “Mmh!”

“Ah!” Asher groaned into his mouth, his hand raised and resting on Jordan’s neck, caressing the smooth skin until eventually Asher forced himself back. “Damn, dude, what was that for?”

“Uh, thanks, I guess.” Jordan replied awkwardly. Oh my god, that felt so good. It felt like he…like I-

“We need to leave.” Asher interrupted his thoughts and gestured at the clock above the gym. “The bell is going to go in like two minutes.”

“Yeah, alright.” Jordan nodded and followed Asher outside, the fresh air cooling his skin and the sight of the football field reminding him of where they were. “Go to homeroom then?”

“Uh huh.” Asher grunted, weaving his way through the stragglers to reach the building ahead of Jordan, a familiar tactic to make it seem like they didn’t arrive together. JJ waved at them and Layla smiled tightly at Asher, the guy nodding and waiting for her to join him. Jordan watched them leave with a strange tightness filling his chest, but he shook his head and dismissed the feeling, half-listening to JJ even as his eyes focused on Asher’s face. *Yeah, no, I enjoy what we do together, but it’s not like I have feelings for him, right? No, no way, it’s just sex.* He breathed a sigh of relief as the bell finally rang. “About time.”

“How come drills are harder when Coach isn’t here?” Asher grumbled as he walked into the locker room behind JJ and Jordan, his skin covered in sweat and dirt. “Do you know why your Dad wasn’t running practice?”

“No idea.” Jordan shrugged and pushed open the door, letting Asher walk in ahead of him. “He didn’t say, but it’s probably a meeting or something.”

“Hmm, I’m hitting the showers.”

“Yeah, me too.” JJ agreed, dumping his gear and stripping naked. The guy had no concept of body consciousness at all, not that he needed to. JJ’s skin was tanned from long days by the pool, smooth enough to see every muscle across his well-built body, boyish grin and good looks that turned every female head in any room, and some of the male ones too. “Jordan, you coming?”
“Ugh, I’ll shower at home.”

“Ok.” Asher shrugged as though he didn’t care and stripped off next to his own locker, before grabbing a towel and following JJ into the clouds of steam. He tried not to be obvious when checking JJ out, but Asher always found it hard not to look when the glistening body was just displayed so overtly in front of him. Asher swallowed hard, pulling his eyes away when JJ soaped up his pumped biceps and broad chest. It wasn’t as hot as when Jordan was inside him, his perfect skin slick with the sweat from the exertions of their activity, but it was close.

“Hey, Ash?”

“Yeah?” He blinked, angry with himself for so easily getting lost in his thoughts. Probably the worst place to zone out, knowing my luck, I’ll end up staring at that dickhead Alphie…. “What is it, J?”

“Layla’s party on Friday.” The other jock walked over to him, suds not quite obscuring the long, thick, but limp, dick that hung between JJ’s legs. “Everyone is going, right? Including the twins?”

“Morgan and Jennifer?” Asher shrugged, desperately staring at the facet in front of him. Think of something nasty, don’t get hard! Don’t get hard! Uh, car crashes! No, uh, that green algae shit that grows on your pool if you don’t clean it! Oh, fuck, um. "Yeah, they’ll be there.” He managed to croak out after JJ turned away to yell something at Alphie. Asher looked at his friend, his eyes automatically dropping to check out JJ’s ass.

“Damn right!” Asher smirked and shrugged when Jordan rolled his eyes at him. “Five minutes, ok?”

“Yeah.”

Asher dried himself off, changing quickly as the team continued to banter and mess around with each other. He didn’t join in with their playful exchanges after every practice, just enough to make the team think he was still one of them and not a…not secretly hooking up with their QB and captain. No one suspected anything though, and even if they did, everyone knew that Asher had a girlfriend who, even to his apathetic eye, was smoking hot.

“Yeah.”

“Ash!” Jordan’s voice cut through his aroused thoughts and he pivoted away from JJ to look through the steam.

“I’ll be done in a minute!”

“Good, I need you to drive me home, Olivia already got a lift!”

“Anything for the captain!” Asher replied in a long-suffering tone, getting a few laughs from the other guys. He smirked disarmingly and finished washing the shower gel from his chest and armpits. Asher grabbed his towel at the entrance, darting to one side when JJ tried to slap his ass with the edge of his own towel. “Hey! Take this!”

“Ow!” JJ howled, backing off after Asher’s retaliation whipped across his butt cheek. “Ok, ok, you win!”

“Damn right!” Asher smirked and shrugged when Jordan rolled his eyes at him. “Five minutes, ok?”

“You finally ready?” Jordan asked once Asher finished brushing his hair and grabbed his bag from the locker.

“Yeah, sure, c’mon.” Asher raised his hand to the guys in farewell and walked out beside Jordan.

“Do you need to call Layla or anything?”
“I’ll do it in the car.” He shrugged when Jordan glanced at him. “Don’t worry, she probably has something going on anyway, planning for Homecoming, I think. Besides, I actually have a decent excuse for once; you don’t have a car.”

“It’ll be repaired by this evening, tire needed to be realigned, or some bs.” Jordan replied, slowing down to take in Asher’s Corvette. “Oooh, damn, bro, I still can’t believe you drive this thing.”

“Why? It was pretty cheap, not even a hundred-k.” Asher smirked as Jordan pursed his lips at him. “Look, my parents got me that Camaro ZL1 last year, right? But that thing had endless problems, and with the divorce neither of them wanted to replace it until the dust settled. I guess you could say that my uncle took pity and got me the Stingray.”

“I kinda wish I had your uncle.” Jordan muttered, sliding into the passenger seat.

“Don’t, he’s an asshole.” Asher replied, joining him in the driver’s seat. “Sure, he’s got money and he’s generous, but he’s also like the biggest donor to that right-wing ‘church’ that’s been set up in the Valley. Bunch of homophobic and racist pricks.”

“Ugh, right.” Jordan glanced at Asher’s angry expression. “Guess you have him fooled too.”

“It seems to be what I’m good at.” He muttered darkly and turned the car on. “Let’s go.”

“Hmm,” Jordan grunted when he noticed that they were slowing down, pulling into a sleepy side-street near the back of one of the large gated communities that made up that part of the city. “You ok?”

“Yeah, I just thought we could take a moment for ourselves, well,” Asher flashed a bright grin at him and killed the engine. “Well, more for you than me!”

“Mnh, I like where this is going!” Jordan grinned as Asher crossed over the central console and straddled Jordan’s lap. He tilted his head to one side when Asher started to kiss his neck, lips brushing along his jaw, fingers hooking into the v-line of his t-shirt. Asher’s hands were eager, and Jordan smirked, pushing the other guy back for a moment, long enough to hunch forward and peel off his t-shirt, settling back onto the seat as Asher grinned at him. "What? It's getting hot!"

"Yeah, it is!" Asher growled, his hands now free to rub across Jordan's broad chest and hard pecs. He flicked the tips of his fingers against the hard nubs of sensitive flesh and Jordan gasped, arching up into him. Asher could feel Jordan's cock, as hard as ever, straining against his pants and he grinned wider.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?"

"It looks like you are taking off your pants!" Jordan arched a brow at Asher as the jock managed to push his trousers down and reveal his own bulging underwear. "You seriously want to fuck here?"

"Tinted windows, dude, no one can see in." Asher reached down and massaged Jordan's dick through the fabric, causing him to moan. "C'mon, it'll be good; hard and fast and you'll be begging me for more once your thick cock is buried in my tight ass!"

"Fuck, Ash!" Jordan moaned again, his mind racing as Asher continued to stroke his raging hardon through his trousers. It was probably a stupid idea, but Jordan dismissed his fears, he was too horny
"Awesome!" Asher grinned wider, his eyes twinkling with delight. He let Jordan struggle with his zipper while he reached down to the storage compartment in the central console, opening it and grabbing the small bottle of lube and a condom. When he turned back, Jordan's cock was standing straight up, precum flowing freely down the head. *Fuck! That's gonna feel so good!*

"Damn, Ash, do you always carry lube in your car?" Jordan arched a brow at him as Asher shrugged. "Ok, give me the condom and—" He stopped speaking as his phone rang loudly in the cramped space. "Gah!"

"Fuck."

"Yeah, that's my Mom. I gotta get this, Ash."

"Hmm, major boner killer." Asher muttered, leaning back from the jock and resting against the dashboard.

"Yeah, I know, Mom, no, I said I'll be there. No, just hanging out with Asher." Jordan rolled his eyes as Asher absently played with the condom’s foil wrapper, waiting for the call to finish. "Yeah… I'll get him to drop me off, yeah, ok, ok, bye."

"Problems?"

"I have to go home." Jordan sighed. “Like, right now, we have this family dinner tonight, and apparently my Dad has big news, so…”

"No hooking up." Asher nodded slowly, bending over to replace the condom and lube. “It’s cool. You’ll be at Layla’s party, right?"

“Yes, but that’s not until the end of the week,” Jordan grumbled, his hands squeezing Asher’s firm ass. “I mean, not like I need this or anything, it’s just for fun, right?”

“Uh, yeah.” Asher frowned quizzically at him and slid back into the driver’s seat, pulling his pants back up as Jordan grabbed his t-shirt from the floor. "We’ll find some time at the party for sure, she’ll be so busy playing the hostess, we can just slip away."

"Hmm, fine.” Jordan sighed again, brows furrowing a little at the mention of Asher’s girlfriend. "You better just drive me home, we’ll play *Madden* tomorrow, yeah?"

“Of course.”

Asher hummed to the song under his breath as he waited for the lights to change, an almost perfect replica of the day before, though without the interruption of his father calling him. He smirked to himself as the traffic began to move, turning off the multi-lane road and onto a quieter boulevard, warm sun filtering through the tinted glass of his sports car to sink comfortably into his sleeveless arms. Asher glanced at the display on his phone, brows furrowing when he noticed that he was six minutes later than normal, Jordan’s daily cyphered message waiting for his attention. “Damn, won’t have enough time this morning, well, maybe, better make it fast.”

He turned into the school parking lot and crawled through the traffic and students, grunting in irritation when he saw that his normal parking spot had been taken by bulky Ford Raptor. “Ugh, what the hell is that? This is LA, not Utah…” Asher growled and swung around, parking in the bay
across from the offending off-roader. He reached over and quickly texted his apology to Jordan. *Be there in a minute, babe...* Asher blinked, cheeks flushing when he realized what he just typed, deleting it furiously. “That was weird, as if Jordan would be my-”

Another beep from his phone made Asher look down, relieved to see that Jordan had replied with the digital equivalent of a shrug and told him to hurry up. “Ok, already at the locker rooms? Well, I guess we never got to finish yesterday, he’s probably pent up.”

“There you are!” Jordan groaned, his voice needier than he would have liked. He bit his lower lip as Asher shrugged and muttered something about the traffic. “C’mon, we have like five minutes.”

“I know.” Asher approached him, holding Jordan’s gaze even as he reached out and slid his hand down the QB’s torso and into his trousers, not stopping until he was able to cup the straining bulge of Jordan’s dick. “Pretty sure I can make you cum in four!”

“Cocky, huh?” Jordan panted, unable to resist bucking into Asher’s grasp. He ignored the voice in his mind telling him to pull back, be more reserved, not so eager, but right now Jordan didn’t care about how it looked, or that they were so exposed, thrust up against his locker, or even that he was about to have double Biology with Layla as his lab partner. All he cared about was leaning forward and catching Asher’s lips with his own, of recreating that fusion burn of pleasure that lit up his entire body when they kissed. “Mmph!”

“Ah!” Asher kissed him back with the same force, lips parting and tongues sliding over the other, a powerful tension singing in the air between them, increasing the potency of every touch, every trailing finger, every inch of skin pressing on skin. “Fuck...”

“Mmh, yeah!” Jordan reached down and pushed his hands aggressively into Asher’s grasp. He ignored the voice in his mind telling him to pull back, be more reserved, not so eager, but right now Jordan didn’t care about how it looked, or that they were so exposed, thrust up against his locker, or even that he was about to have double Biology with Layla as his lab partner. All he cared about was leaning forward and catching Asher’s lips with his own, of recreating that fusion burn of pleasure that lit up his entire body when they kissed. “Ahh, Asher!”

“Mmh!” Asher bowed his head, feeling Jordan’s aroused groans whisper across the nape of his neck. He tilted his face towards the jock’s jaw line and kissed and sucked the sweet flesh at just the right angle, grinning to himself when he heard the increased pleasure in Jordan’s gasps. “You’re close.”

“Fuck, yeah!” Jordan groaned again, suddenly bucking hard into Asher’s crotch as his orgasm crashed over him in a wave of pleasure. He gripped the other guy’s ass hard enough to leave marks and grunted as his cock pulsed and unloaded messily into his briefs. “Fuck!”

“Mmh, ah!” Asher blinked when Jordan pushed him away unexpectedly. “Huh?”

“I, uh, I need to clean up.” Jordan avoided Asher’s eyes, looking instead at the obvious boner that was still tenting Asher’s pants. “Um, you can...I’ll be...uh-”

“Just go.” Asher’s tone was cold, and he shrugged, turning to leave himself. “You obviously got what you came here for.”

“Ash-”

“I’ll see you in class.”

“Fuck.” Jordan muttered to himself after Asher had walked out. *Real smooth, Jordan, it’s not like*
you would have gotten down on your knees and sucked him off, right? Oh, wait! That’s exactly what you wanted to do! At least once… He glared at his reflection in a nearby mirror as the taunting voice echoed through his mind. “I’m not…it’s not like that, Asher could’ve finished himself off if he wanted to, not like this is the first time it’s happened.” The words sounded empty and Jordan sighed as he stepped inside a cubicle, unzipping his pants to wipe away the cum from their encounter. “I never even got the chance to tell him about Spencer.”

Jordan nodded at Asher and JJ as they met up with Layla and the rest of their friends, “I’ll join you guys in a minute.”

“Sure.” Asher shrugged and walked on. “We’ll be at the steps.”

“Yup.” Jordan muttered to himself, eyes lingering on Asher when he and Layla briefly embraced and then pulled away quickly. God, it’s so obvious that they don’t belong together…Well, not like I belong with him.

The uncomfortable thought flashed in front of his mind and Jordan adjusted the strap of his backpack, eyes scanning the quad for the new guy in a vain attempt to ignore his own thoughts. “Ah, there he is.”

Jordan moved forward, catching Olivia’s eye as she turned away from gesturing at the main building. "You must be Spencer. Jordan Baker, QB, team captain." He raised his fist, connecting it with Spencer's, a soft knock.

"Baker? So, you must be-"

"Yeah...Coach is my Dad, well," He paused and smirked at his sister. "Our Dad, I'll take it from here, Olivia. C'mon, I'll introduce you to the team."

"Cool." Spencer replied and walked alongside him.

"Hmm." Jordan didn’t say anything else, idly watching Spencer as he looked left and right, taking in the sprawling complex of buildings and playing fields that made up the campus. A few minutes later, they arrived at the steps where Asher and the others were waiting. "Meet the crew!" Jordan said, a hint of smugness in his voice as he made the introductions. "This is Hadley, Layla, and up top, Lucy, JJ, and Asher."

"Hey guys."

Jordan settled down next to Hadley, leaning back enough that he could still see Asher, catching the other guy’s careful glance. He swallowed hard as an unexpected thrill zapped down his spine and into his crotch, his cock thickening against his briefs as his asshole tingled. The second sensation was different, but strangely pleasurable and Jordan took a deep breath as he tried to focus less on Asher and more on making Spencer feel like part of the team. He watched as the new guy leaned forward to awkwardly shake everyone’s hands. “Hey, um, I think you and Asher play the same position.”

"Oh, receiver, huh?" Spencer looked up at him.

"Yeah, that's me. Broke the school record for receptions last year." Asher replied proudly.

"Ah, me too."

Really? So, add no modesty to that irritating grin. Asher pressed his lips together, ignoring Spencer's response to Layla's question, his eyes narrowing when he noticed the way he was looking at her, the all too obvious signs of mutual interest unfolding in front of his eyes. He maintained his annoyed
expression even as the kernel of an idea began to unfurl in his mind. Mutual interest...hmm, I wonder what would it take for me to move that interest along? I can’t break up with Layla, of course, I don’t want the questions, but if she were to find someone else, if she broke up with me... that’s going to take some planning.

Layla shifted uncomfortably when Asher placed his hand on her shoulder, his eyes flicking up to see Spencer’s gaze shift back towards him. “So, Crenshaw, huh?”

“Yeah?”

“So, lay it on me, Crips or Bloods?” Asher smirked as he took a drink of water, feeling the tension arch upwards at his words.

“Excuse me?” Spencer looked sharply at him.

“Hmm, been dying to check out a Crip-walk for real, only seen one on YouTube.” Asher glanced at Jordan, seeing him shake his head disparagingly.

"He's a joker, Spencer, ignore him."

"Hah, Ash, you wouldn't know a Crip-walk if it bit you in the damn white ass!" JJ sniggered, shoving Asher playfully.

"Nah, it don't sound like a joke to me." Spencer stood up quickly.

"Don't be so sensitive," Asher smirked again, seeing Spencer's emotions boil to the surface.

"Sensitive?!"

Jordan narrowed his eyes at Spencer and then glanced at Asher, seeing the same twist of his lips his best friend used whenever he was trying to manipulate something or someone. Gee, Asher, did you have to sound like such a fucking jerk just to get a reaction? “Um, Spencer-”

"Hey y'all, thanks for the welcome." Spencer grabbed his bag and stalked away. “See y’all at practice.”

"Asher!" Layla hissed at him, clearly pissed off.

"What?" He played innocent, grinning on the inside when he saw her grab her things and go after Spencer. "I was making conversation!"

"No, you were being an ass!"

Jordan moved backwards again, lying on his elbows and he quirked a brow at Asher, but the other jock wasn’t looking at him. He could see Asher’s calculating eyes locked on Layla instead, watching her try and mend their introduction to Spencer. Jordan was vaguely aware of Hadley flicking her hair back and trying to catch his attention, but he kept his gaze on Asher’s handsome face for as long as he could, averting his eyes only when JJ glanced at him. “We’ll see what he’s like on the field, guys, my Dad thinks he’s got potential.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”
Asher smirked at Jordan as they jogged out onto the football field, warm sun shining down from the ever-azure sky over Los Angeles. His best friend smiled back and gestured for him to follow the rest of the offensive line over to where Coach was standing next to Spencer. Asher grumbled under his breath, his good mood vanishing as he pulled his helmet down over his face. *Hmm, better come off cruise-control today, make sure that Spencer realizes who he’s up against!*

Unlike most days, when Asher could pass the time by checking out Jordan’s clenching abs under his short vest and armor combo, or catch the free eyefuls of JJ’s tanned, glistening shirtless body, today Asher found that he needed to concentrate. There was a pressure in the air, Spencer’s integration nothing close to seamless. Asher gnashed his teeth as the new guy intercepted Jordan’s throw, catching the ball that was meant for him. “What the hell?!”

“Haha!”

Asher shook his head and gestured for Jordan to reset the play again. However, after the fourth time Spencer interrupted them to steal the ball from Asher, the receiver was out of patience. “Jordan!”

“Err, yeah?” Jordan glanced at Asher as he stalked over, fury in his eyes. Spencer was on the other side of the field, making a fool out of himself with an endzone dance.

“What the hell, man?”

“I got it.” Jordan pushed Asher back gently, his hand grazing against a firm pec, Asher's loose shirt damp to the touch. “Calm down, Ash. Hey! Yo, you're running the wrong plays.” He called out to Spencer, beckoning him over.

“I’m catching the ball, man, scoring. What’s the big deal?” Spencer smirked at them and tossed the ball back to Jordan.

“Idiot.” Jordan huffed irritably, glancing back at Asher. “He’s beginning to piss me off.”

“Beginning?” Asher growled, his tolerances broken. “This guy is a fuck-”

“Alright, boys, bring it in!” Coach called out, cutting across Asher and directing them to gather around him in a loose circle. “C’mon.”

Asher followed Jordan over, standing slightly closer to him than he intended, though Asher didn’t move away when his forearm touched against the flushed skin of Jordan’s biceps. He blinked as memories of the seemingly endless summer days they had enjoyed over the break; not just the sex—which was always great—but the proximity was almost as good. It had always felt right, always felt as though they were forming a deeper bond than best friends. But Asher knew that was just his emotions projecting onto Jordan, the guy was only using him to get off; *best friends* was about as close as Asher was going to get to ‘something more.’

“Dude.” Jordan nudged him, breaking Asher from his thoughts.

"Ok, we're gonna mix it up a bit." Coach Baker said, looking at the new guy. "Spencer, you ever play safety?"

"No."

"Well, give it a try, now-"

"Man, I don't play defense!" Spencer replied stubbornly.
"You play what I tell you to play." Coach glared at him as Spencer squared off against him. "Is that going to be a problem?"

"I…"

"You get in position or you get on the side-lines!" Coach Baker shouted in response to Spencer’s aggressive posturing.

Asher smirked as he watched the new guy shake his head and stomp off towards the side of the field. "Hey, Jordan, let’s show him how it’s done, huh?!"

"Sure, Ash." He nodded and returned to the offensive line, catching the ball when it was funnelled to him, the work of a moment to find Asher and pass the ball to him. Jordan watched with satisfaction as the ball sailed through the air and landed in Asher’s safe hands, the play singing a sweet note of victory as Asher ran into the endzone. "Nice!"

"Yeah!" Asher grinned and returned to him, both jumping into the air at the same time to bounce their shoulders off the other. The familiar buzz from their contact made him grin wider even as Coach clapped and nodded approvingly.

"That’s how it’s done, boys!"

"Hah," Asher smirked at Spencer as he pulled his helmet off, sweat glistening across his brow. The new guy was sitting on his own helmet, despondent. "Better get comfortable there." No way are you taking my position!

"C’mon, dude, don’t you have anything other than Madden?" Asher sighed as Jordan looked over his shoulder at him, standing in front of the wall mounted TV.

"Well, yeah, but you’d have to be at home to play COD with me." Jordan shrugged when Asher didn’t reply, sitting next to him again. "Besides, I thought you had some tips for how to improve my progression in Career Mode?"

"Yeah, I guess." Asher settled back onto the couch, rolling his head towards the ceiling. He could hear the soft typing of Olivia at her laptop in the kitchen behind them and the motions of the Bakers’ housekeeper as she walked from room to room. Asher shifted closer to Jordan, feeling him go still and glance questioningly at him.

"What?"

"Nothing, just want to get started." Asher smiled and glanced around carefully, before dropping his left hand onto Jordan’s lap, moving his forearm up his best friend’s thigh until it hit Jordan’s suddenly straining bulge. "I suppose I just wondering if you needed to get that other controller from your room?"

"Uh…” Jordan swallowed hard, looking into Asher’s confident eyes. He swallowed hard and almost jumped as the front door opened and closed. Asher quickly moved his hand away and Jordan pulled the front of his sweater out over his hardon. "Nope, we’re good, Ash."

"Ok, cool."

"Hey guys!"
“Hey, Mom.” Jordan glanced at her as she walked into the kitchen.

“Mrs Baker,” Asher replied innocently, smiling at her as she looked his way. “Are you home early or did I lose track of time?”

“It is almost six, were you driving around after practice again?”

“Yeah.” Jordan nodded, focusing on his game and avoiding Asher’s knowing eyes. “Putting Asher’s car through its paces, you know. It’s the new Stingray, beast of an engine.”

“Hmm.” She tutted softly. “So that’s what that is, very shiny.”

“Ugh, I should go, though.” Asher stood up abruptly, replacing his controller on the coffee table even as Jordan looked at him in confusion.

“Really? We just got started.”

“Yeah, but I have work to do and dinner to make. My Dad is out of town on business.” He added to Mrs Baker. “Plus, you know how crazy traffic gets around Sunset Strip this time of night.”

“Yeah, but-” Jordan cut himself off when he noticed that Olivia was watching them a little too earnestly. “I mean, sure, whatever, bro, I’ll see you at school tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Asher grabbed his bag from the end of the couch and looked at him, gesturing with a quick tilt of his head for Jordan to follow him outside. Once they had stepped into the warm evening air, Asher frowned at him, “Are you ok? You went super-straight just now.”

“Yeah, fine, I just…we actually did spend this afternoon driving, but it still felt like I was lying to her.” Jordan folded his arms as Asher unlocked his car. “I want to…um, you know.”

“Relieve the pressure before the big game?” He smirked and nodded. “Layla’s party is in a few days, I told you that we’ll have the time then. Plus, you never know, we might be able to slip away tomorrow when the team are chilling here.”

“That’s super-risky, Asher.”

“As risky as this?” Asher grinned again, inspired by a bold impulse and leaned forwards, kissing Jordan hard. He was prepared to dance back immediately, but the QB grabbed his arms and pulled him deeper, that same thrum of passion that made Asher’s stomach swoop like the most insane roller coaster ride. “Mmh.”

“Yeah, risky.” Jordan whispered when they finally broke apart, smirking at him. He looked up as headlights heralded the arrival of his father and shook his head at Asher. “Fuck, you’re so damn lucky!”

“So it would seem.” Asher climbed into his car, raising his hand in brief farewell as the Coach waited for him to reverse out the drive. That was close! I need to be more careful, I can’t get caught, especially not by Coach…sure, there’s been gay football players, but not any good ones.

Jordan waited for his Dad to pull in and waved at Asher’s car as he roared down the street. “Hey, Dad.”

"Ash get off ok?"
"Yep." He walked back inside, picking up his controller again and unpausing his game.

"So, it wasn't really working out too well out there this afternoon?"

"Hehe, yeah, the new guy wasn't really a team player, was he?" Jordan smirked and glanced at his father.

"Mmh, he'll get there." Coach sat next to him. "In the meantime, could you do me a solid, and take Spencer under your wing?"

"Um," Jordan paused his game and repressed an internal sigh. Asher won't like that...

"Ok, I guess so. He’s not exactly friendly though."

"Just do this for me, Jordan."

"I will, but...why do you care about this kid so much?" Jordan asked, seeing his father’s brows furrow, silence stretching before the Coach answered him.

"You know that I came from Crenshaw, same as Spencer. There were so many ways to screw up, but I got my shot, my chance to get out of there, and I took it." He patted Jordan’s knee affectionately. “I want to give Spencer that same chance, ok?"

"Ok."

"It’s dinnertime."

Jordan turned to see his Mom beckoning them up from the couch. “Coming.”

"Asher didn’t want to stay for dinner?"

"Um, no, I’ll, uh, I mean, he probably should...you know, Layla and everything." Jordan mumbled, catching another appraising look from Olivia. He shrugged it off and turned to his Mom as they sat down. “So, how was your day?”

Jordan glanced at his phone as he rolled down the street in Crenshaw, easing off the gas when he spotted the number on the house that corresponded to the address his father had given him that morning. It had been the first time since school had restarted that Jordan hadn’t been able to meet Asher for what had become an almost daily ritual of getting blown off. But this was important, he had to at least make an attempt to integrate Spencer into the team, even if the new guy hadn’t made the best impression during practice the day before. Jordan parked outside Spencer’s house and sent him a text to come out.

He tapped his fingers on the leather trim of the steering wheel, his music spilling out of the convertible’s open compartment to dance through the hot, dry air. Jordan wetted his lips, tension twisting in his stomach as Asher’s gang-related jib at Spencer the day before came back to his thoughts. He hadn’t been in this part of the city before and it was a far cry from the smooth, clean lines that dominated Beverly Hills’ manicured residential and shopping districts. Jordan looked over his shoulder anxiously when there was a loud bang down the street, his attention pulled back towards Spencer’s house as the front door opened with a screech from the metal grate. “Finally.” Jordan muttered, his outward expression somehow managing to remain composed.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Spencer snapped at him as he hopped into Jordan’s car.
"I'm picking you up."

"In your red car?! In your red hat?!" Spencer snatched the cap off his head and threw it in the back. "You're like a Bloods' poster boy, man, you gonna get your head blown off!"

“Uh,” Jordan gulped and glanced to one side, seeing two tough looking guys watching him. But then he heard a laugh and turned to see Spencer cracking up. “What.”

"I'm just playin, I'm just playin! Damn, just drive, bro."

“Hmm.” Jordan forced a grin and gunned the engine, speeding them away from the neighbourhood and into the wealthier side of the city. He let the music on the stereo do the talking for them, but it didn’t appear that Spencer wanted to chat anyway; the other guy was too busy watching the passing streets and the transition from bustling promenades to tree-lined boulevards. Jordan slowed down again, finger tapping the lever for his turn signal. “We’re almost there.”

“Damn! This your house?” Spencer gestured at the large building and spacious driveway, perched on a generous expanse of gardens at the end of a row of houses that looked out over the rest of the city. “On a coach’s salary?!"

“Ah, well, my Mom is an attorney,” Jordan explained and parked next to Asher’s gleaming Stingray, the metalwork shining in the hot afternoon sun. “Oh, and um, Spencer?”

“Yeah?”

“I should warn you, she’s a hugger!”

“Um, ok, man.”

“Let’s go inside, pretty sure everyone is already out back.” Jordan turned off the engine and waved for Spencer to go ahead of him. “You’re wearing your swimming shorts, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, man, I got that part of your message.” He smirked and waited for Jordan to open the front door. “I wasn’t sure what you were suggesting though.”

“Uh huh.” Jordan blinked and then frowned at the back of Spencer’s head. What the hell does that mean? Does he know? Did he…no, no, he couldn’t know about me and Asher. He pushed the paranoid thoughts away and walked inside. “C’mon, let’s hit the pool.”

Jordan grinned as he watched JJ cannonball into the pool, nearly dislodging Spencer from his inflatable. He sipped his can of soda and allowed his eyes to drift away from the pool. Tilting his head as though to catch more sunlight, Jordan directed his gaze towards Asher and Layla who were reclining together nearby on one of the big loungers. Layla had sat up and Jordan reluctantly avoided looking at Asher to make sure that his girlfriend wasn’t aware that he was being scoped out.

Huh, she’s definitely watching Spencer. Jordan smirked and flicked his eyes back towards Asher now that it was safe. He swallowed hard, throat suddenly dry as he was finally able to look at Asher. The other jock was lying fully back, his face angled at the sun, eyes closed, brows still slightly furrowed, but Jordan knew that his face muscles almost never relaxed unless Asher was asleep. One arm was thrown above him, pulling his pectoral muscle taut and giving his bicep an inviting pump that made Jordan wish he was able to run his hand along that smooth, hard bundle of muscle. Asher’s chest was mostly smooth, save for a trimmed trail of brown hair that led the eye downwards into his board shorts, rising and falling slowly in time to his breathing.
Jordan took another long draught of his soda, pressing the warm metal rim against his lips in a futile attempt to distract his body from reacting to Asher’s. His own shorts suddenly felt constrained and Jordan looked away from Asher completely, driving the heel of his palm into his aroused cock, generating a moment of relief. *Ahh, fuck, missing this morning’s session is really screwing me up right now.*

He glanced at Layla as he cast his eyes over Asher’s body once more, but she was still distracted by Spencer, her gaze lingering on the new guy as he pulled himself from the pool. Jordan smirked to himself, watching when Layla rose from her place next to Asher, leaving Jordan’s view of his best friend unobstructed. *Mmmh, damn, he does look hot, well, muscular, I mean. He works out a lot, of course. I think he’s still dozing though.*

Jordan reached down for another soda, his fingers finding only ice in the bucket kept in the shade of his lounger. *Hmm, I wanted to offer that to Asher, make it less weird than if I just sat next to him. Might as well take Layla’s place, it’s not as if she even cares about him; look at her flirting with Spencer! I could…I am a better friend to him, what he needs. A friend. Yeah. The word rang hollow in his mind and Jordan stood up, grabbing his jacket. He pulled the garment on, using it more to hide his still half-hard cock and the bulge in his shorts than to relieve any chill.*

“Hey, Jordan!” Hadley simpered at him and gestured for him to join her at the edge of the pool.

“Uh, sorry, soda run.” He smiled apologetically, relief surging through his chest when he saw Alphie take the place, coming onto Hadley strong. *Phew, hopefully that gets her off my back, I don’t need a Layla-sized complication to make things even more difficult.* Jordan paused at the sliding door into the kitchen, using his vantage point to skim another glance across Asher’s torso and crotch, before reluctantly turning away and heading into the house. He zipped his hoodie half up, tugging the hem down to hide his resurgent hardon. *Crap.*

“Ok, soda is in the sideboard…” Jordan muttered to himself, kneeling down to open the doors when he heard his father’s voice carrying from the conservatory at the other end of the living room. “Huh?”

“Look, look, don’t worry about it, this Spencer kid is going to be worth the risk.” Coach Baker gestured with one hand, the other holding a phone to his ear. “I recruited him because I want to win! He’s the guy who is going to do that for us.”

*Hmm, maybe? Spencer isn’t half bad when he’s not bucking the rules.* Jordan thought to himself as he straightened up, cans of soda gathered under his arm. He was about to leave when his father spoke again, the words slamming into Jordan as though he had been punched in the gut.

“No, no, you don’t get it; I would not have recruited him if anyone on the squad had half of his potential!” Coach Baker turned on his heel and paced back and forth in front of the doorway, looking out the window, clearly unaware he was being listened to. “All we need to do is swing this ‘smart kid permit’ by the administrators and we’ll have a championship this season…ok, look, bring the boosters down on Saturday and you’ll see what I’m talking about.”

Asher looked up when Jordan sank onto his lounger, dumping cans of soda into the nearby bucket. “You ok?”

“Um, not really.” Jordan grunted, moving to stand up again.

“Where are you going?” Asher patted the space where Jordan had just been. “Sit next to me.”
“Oh, thanks.”

“Oh huh.” Asher blinked at the strange twang of emotion in Jordan’s voice, before dismissing it as he nodded at Layla and Spencer swimming next to each other. The team is here and I’m already catching concerned looks from JJ, it’s obvious that Spencer is moving in on Layla, I guess I should look like I care. Though maybe the suddenly overbearing, jealous boyfriend will be exactly what I need to push them together… "You seeing this?"

"Mmmh.” Jordan muttered, keeping his voice low. "My parents are in the house, my sister is in her room, Ash, but downstairs bathroom is free.”

"We agreed Layla's party, right?" Ash glanced at him, his voice even and smooth. It took effort to keep himself relaxed when Jordan’s eyes met his own. He broke the intense gaze, glancing down Jordan’s open jacket at his muscular torso. Oh yeah, cause that’s not going to make me harder.

“I know, but we didn’t get to do anything this morning, and-”

"This is a good distraction,” Asher turned his attention back to Layla and Spencer. “But she's being so open about it, I can’t just let it happen. A guy like everyone thinks I am wouldn’t.”

“What are you talking about?"

"I have to at least look like I care, like I don't want Spencer making a move on her." 

"It looks like she's the one making the moves." Jordan observed. "Besides, we're all being manipulated.”

"Huh?" Ash frowned at him, seeing his best friend abruptly look away. “Jordan?”

"I'll tell you later but know that Spencer isn't just a threat to your...girlfriend, he's a threat to the team." Jordan replied after an awkward pause. "Especially to you.”

"We need to get rid of him." 

"Yeah." Jordan agreed slowly. “Did you have something in mind? I mean, I assume you’re not talking about murder, right?!”

“Haha!” Asher grinned at him and playfully shoved Jordan. “I think we both already have enough to hide without adding that to our worries. No, I was thinking that the best way to get rid of Spencer will be to show Coach that he’s not the hotshot he’s meant to be.”

“Hmm, that actually lines up pretty well with what I was going to tell you.” Jordan leaned in closer, their shoulders rubbing together in a way that made Asher’s dick twitch. “My Dad wants to have the boosters come down on Saturday to watch our scrimmage, and that’s the night after Layla’s party…”

“Ah, I like how you think.” Asher smirked, looking back across the pool at where the duo were now chatting. “A few drinks to loosen himself up and a few more to get into the party humor, then some shots to top off the night, haha, by the time we’re done, he’ll still be drunk when we’re on the field the next day!”

“Mmh, do you think you can get Layla to invite him?”

“Sure, we got off on the wrong foot yesterday, I can just say that I want to make things right between us. A social event would make that easier.” Asher replied confidently, seeing Jordan’s worried frown. “Relax, I lie to her all the time, well, she lies to me just as much, the only difference is that
I’m actually good at it.”

“Uh huh.”

“Chill, dude, Spencer is as good as gone.” Asher reclined on the lounger again. “And don’t worry, with him hammered and Layla occupied, we’ll have the time we need to, uh, de-stress.”

“Yeah, stress…” Jordan’s tone was weird, and Asher cocked a brow at him, but the QB’s eyes were faraway.

“Anything else on your mind?”

“No, it’s nothing.” He shrugged, smile returning to his face. “I’m gonna see about snacks, talk to you later, man.”

“See you.” Asher mumbled, watching Jordan stand up and walk away.

Wish you could just stay here, but you don’t want it to look weird, do you?

Asher glanced at Jordan when he felt an elbow nudge him in the ribs. “Huh?”

“He actually came.” Jordan was looking towards the entrance, eyes on Spencer as the new guy sauntered in, hoodie zipped up, jacket open. “I wasn’t sure if he would.”

“That’s not regret in your voice, is it?” Asher murmured, pressing himself against Jordan’s body a little too much as he moved past the QB towards the drinks lined up on the sideboard. “We have to do this, he’s too much of a threat.”

“To you and Layla?”

Asher paused with the vodka bottle half-raised and looked over his shoulder when Jordan joined him, pushing a glass towards his own. He shrugged and filled them both, adding a splash of mixer while Jordan chewed on his lower lip. “Appearances are important, Jordan.”

“I know, but-”

“Besides, he’s much more of a threat on the field, we don’t need any more disruptions.” Asher gestured for them to walk over to one of the abstract paintings on the opposite wall, the position giving them line of sight on the whole room and patio out towards the pool. “He’s coming after my position, Jordan, not yours.”

“Right.” Jordan nodded and sipped his drink, foot tapping along to the music playing in the background. “You know, we’re going to have a problem if he doesn’t want to join in.”

“Hmm? Oh.” Asher flicked his gaze away from Jordan’s face and locked onto to Spencer’s half smirk, the guy’s judging expression sweeping over the other revellers, a group doing shots and hits from a bong on Layla’s couch, another few teenagers cutting white powder openly by the piano. “Yeah, he’s already made up his mind about us, probably thinks we’re the rich assholes that match all the stereotypes he thinks he knows. Just another example of why he doesn’t belong here.”

“You don’t have to make it personal, Asher…” Jordan hesitated, his brows furrowing and then he shook his head. “Well, actually, no, you’re right, this is personal.”

“What do you mean?”
“Something I overheard my Dad saying yesterday, I wasn’t going to tell you, but you know.”

“You can tell me anything.” Asher replied earnestly, before swallowing hard, realizing how that would’ve sounded to Jordan. *Shit, vodka must be hitting me faster than I thought.* “Uh, I mean, as a friend, anything you want to tell me as a friend, bro.”

“Right,” If Jordan was thrown by Asher’s deflection, he didn’t show it. “My Dad was saying that Spencer is exactly what we need for the team, in order to win, that the rest of us weren’t worth a damn.”

“Oh,” Asher blinked, surprised by the vehemence in Jordan’s voice. His words were spoken faster than normal, a mix of looseness from the alcohol and anger that must have been building all day. “That sucks.”

“Yeah, he also said something about fudging the details to even get Spencer here; ‘smart kid permit,’ is the term he used.” Jordan took another drink and glowered in Spencer’s direction. “We have to get him out.”

“So, how do we get Spencer to talk to us, he just brushed JJ off.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that too much.” Asher caught the edge of Jordan’s glare when he glanced back. “What?”

“It’s…nothing.”

“JJ is shameless, what’s the harm?” Asher arched his brows. “And why do you even care?”

“You,” Jordan paused, seeming to struggle with his words before he just shook his head. “You’re a different person when you drink, that’s all. You act like you’re actually…you know.”

“It’s easier to blame being honest on being drunk,” Asher shrugged, looking back over at their half-naked team-mate. “Besides, you’re the only one who’s actually paying enough attention to notice what I’m interested in.” He felt the tips of his ears burn as the words spilled from his mouth, Jordan’s lips parting as though he wanted to reply, but Asher cut any response off quickly by gesturing towards the balcony. “Our problems are solved; remember how I told Layla I wanted to make a better impression on Spencer this time around? No way is she going to let him leave without us talking. So, you apply that QB charm of yours, and we’re in business.”

“I…Ash,” Jordan reached out for him, before thinking better of the action, his fingers grazing against Asher’s arm. “I am paying attention to you.”

Asher didn’t reply, just downed the rest of his drink. “Knock that back, we’re going dry for the rest of the night, well, do the first shot with Spencer, then fake it out.”

“Ok, I gotcha.”

“Hey, Hadley!” Asher called out as he left his cup on a nearby counter, “Come dance with us! Jordan is smooth as anything, but his moves on the floor will be better if he has someone to contrast to!”
“Sure.” She grinned at him, but Asher caught the irritated glare that Jordan shot his way.

_Haha, sorry Jordan, but two guys dancing looks wrong when there’s a bunch of cheerleaders and other girls around, have to make everything look normal._ Asher smirked at Layla as she passed, guiding a protesting Spencer towards her own group of friends. _Looks like he needs more time to get acclimated, though five minutes should be enough for Jordan to go and “rescue” him!_

Asher returned to Hadley and Jordan, dancing alongside the duo, his eyes sweeping the room, making sure that he didn’t lose sight of Spencer. It became harder than expected as JJ came over to join them, still in his wet trunks, his smooth, tanned body like that of a Greek god. _You have got to be kidding me…_ He could feel his dick harden in his pants and Asher groaned internally, regretting that he hadn’t been able to hook up with Jordan since that Wednesday morning in the locker room. _Twenty minutes on the phone with my Dad this morning only for him to say he wasn’t going to be at the game next week._

“Uh, just a sec, Hadley.” Jordan said, pulling Asher back to reality. The QB broke away from their group and walked quickly across the room, intercepting Spencer before he could leave. “C’mon, man, you’re not leaving already, are you?”

“Yeah, man, this isn’t really my scene—”

“Nah, nah, nah, you just haven’t met the right people yet.” Jordan gripped Spencer’s shoulders and pivoted him around, directing him towards the nearby hot tub, two cheerleaders smirking and waving shyly at them. “This is Lucy and Sara, they’re on the cheer squad, ready to, uh, give you a sample of the support we get at games!”

“Smooth.” Asher drawled at Jordan when the QB walked over to where he was waiting by the drinks counter. “Did you get that from your 1950s misogyny handbook?”

“What?”

“Uh, never mind.” Asher huffed, “Just get Spencer over here, he’s meant to be talking to us, remember?”

“Yeah, but he was going to leave.” Jordan shrugged. “Don’t worry, Ash, he has to relax before he can start drinking with the rest of us.”

“Hmm, maybe.” He folded his arms across his chest, leaning back against the counter. Jordan walked away, heading towards one of Layla’s bathrooms, leaving Asher to continue sweeping the room. He felt warm, the pleasing heat from the vodka washing through his body and making the room float ever so slightly, Asher knew that he was almost at the state where he was just buzzed enough to finally relax and yet not so drunk that he started talking and rambling about things he’d later regret.

“Hey, Ash!” JJ sidled up next to him, a half-empty bottle of champagne clutched in his hand. “You want a drink?”

“I’m good for now.” Asher smiled at him. “You lose your pants _and_ your shirt?”

“Haha, yeah, though no poker tonight, that pool is dope though.” The guy was a little closer than Asher would have been comfortable with if it wasn’t JJ, but the heat rising from the other jock’s body mixed with JJ’s strong cologne and the scent snaked into his nostrils with a burst of arousal that caught Asher off-guard. “I know we got practice tomorrow, so this is all I’m drinking tonight.”

“Mmh.” Asher wetted his lips, eyes travelling up and down JJ’s body, before flicking back to meet
his friend’s unfocused gaze. “You’ll have one with me and Jordan and Spencer, right? Induct him into the team for real?”

“Aw, yeah! Totally, Ash!” JJ grinned and slapped Asher on the shoulder with his free hand. “Let me grab him and you line up the shots!”

Perfect. Asher nodded, smiling wider as Jordan and Layla joined them. “Hey, I was just saying to JJ that we need some shots to celebrate Spencer joining us.”

“Cool.” Jordan agreed.

“I’m down for that.” Layla moved past him and stood next to Asher, preparing the glasses. “Tequila?”

“Nothing better!” Asher cheerfully replied, reaching for the bottle. “Hey Spencer!”

“Hey.” The guy had returned with JJ, his expression still guarded. “Uh, you guys are drinking a lot, huh?”

“Yeah, well, end of the week.” Asher handed out the shots. “Plus, we got a new teammate, that doesn’t happen often, well, not one with your skills.”

“Uh huh, ok.” Spencer seemed to take him at his word, but shook his head when Asher offered him the last glass. “Nah, man, we got training tomorrow.”

“Ah, don’t worry, Spencer.” Jordan reassured him. "It's only Saturday practice, just drills, trust me."

“Oh, ok, I guess one wouldn’t hurt.” Spencer tipped his shot into his mouth at the same time as Layla and JJ. Asher smirked at Jordan and knocked his back in one go, wincing as he did so, catching sight of the QB carefully emptying his glass without drinking it. “Gah!”

“Nasty!” Jordan agreed with a shake of his head. “Need another one to wash that one down, huh?!”

“Uh, no-”

“No, no, no, c’mon, c’mon!” Asher urged Spencer along, finding that JJ had already poured them a fresh shot each. This time both Asher and Jordan tipped theirs on the ground, but Spencer pounded his back. “More!”

“I think that was successful,” Asher whispered to Jordan as they stood at the entrance to the hallway that led to the rest of the house. JJ was still talking to some of the team, his words slurred and veering into gibberish, while Layla and Spencer were sitting opposite each other on the sofas, their eyes unfocused and drunk, each slowly falling asleep. “Good job.”

“You too.” Jordan muttered back, pulling away from him and rolling his shoulders. “I got about an hour until curfew.”

“That sucks.”

“Mmh, plus, you need to get some sleep too, Ash.”

“I will.”

“Ok.”
There was an awkward pause between them as Jordan ran his eyes over Asher’s handsome features, his gaze darting down to rest on the receiver’s ass. He bit his lip and took a deep breath, feeling his chest expand as butterflies rushed through his stomach. Jordan reached out and gently cupped Asher’s ass, leaning forward to whisper into his ear. “Could really use that stress-buster right now.”

“Hmm.” Asher smirked and felt his cock instantly harden. He nodded, turning around and gesturing towards the end of the hallway. “Guest bedroom is the last door on the end, cleaner comes in every morning, and after a party like this…well, Layla never cares who hooks up in the bedrooms.”

“Unless it’s her boyfriend and the QB…” Jordan whispered at him, backing down the hall when Asher cocked a brow at him. “C’mon! Been looking forward to this all week, um, as a-”

“I know what you mean.” Asher answered him quickly, not letting Jordan quantify his words.

I don’t think you do. Jordan sighed to himself as they entered the room, Asher locking it and turning on the lamps. A quick bj or handjob is one thing, that is stress relief. But this is different, better, real.

“You gonna stay in your head all night or you getting undressed?” Asher called out, jolting Jordan from his thoughts. “I know you need twenty minutes to get home, so let’s do this!”

“Charming as ever, Asher, why don’t I just leave the Benjamin on the counter too?”

“Pfft! I am so worth more than that!” Asher snorted as he pulled his pants down, already shirtless, his bulge pushing his trunks outwards.

That’s for sure, I don’t think there is a price for you. Jordan blinked as an unexpected wave of emotion swept through him. He stripped out of his shirt and unbuckled his belt. Not that I can tell you that, of course…stupid, I shouldn’t have drunk this much. Asher was right; this is when the unprotected truth comes spilling out. Jordan looked towards the bed as Asher opened his wallet and pulled out a condom and a small, travel-sized packet of lube.

“Always prepared!” He grinned and gestured at the bed. Asher waited for Jordan to stand in front of him before reaching out and running a hand across his stomach. “Hmm, can you clench your abs, yeah, just like that.”

Jordan placed his hands on Asher’s waist, mirroring his best friend as they slid each other’s underwear off. He smirked when Asher’s cock slipped out, standing horizontal, his own dick escaping with more force, slapping against his smooth naval with a wet splat. Jordan wrapped a hand around his cock, the other grasping Asher’s, and slowly jerked them both off. It was an inversion of what usually happened, Asher seeming content to let Jordan do this.

They didn’t speak other than to moan in pleasure, Jordan’s eyes locked on Asher’s body and their cocks, precum slicking up his hands. He blinked when Asher moved suddenly forward, dropping his hands away and allowing their cocks to slide against each other, a shiver of pleasure that arced from the leaking tip to his heavy balls and then up through his heaving stomach towards his chest. “Ah, Ash!”

“You want me to…” He trailed off, beginning to sink onto his knees, but Jordan reached out quickly and gripped his shoulders.

“No, I don’t want that, not now.” Jordan swallowed hard when Asher looked at him, a momentary vulnerability that vanished a second later, replaced by the careful gaze he knew so well. “Get on the bed, but stay on your knees, I want you to face me as I slide into you!”

“Mmh, sure, you know I love bouncing on your dick!”
Jordan swallowed excess saliva in his mouth as he watched Asher climb onto the middle of the bed, facing away from him, his firm, muscular ass cheeks clenching and unclenching. He tugged on his cock again, keeping himself fully erect even as his free hand searched the bed blindly for the condom. Asher had picked up the packet of lube and was busily coating his fingers, knees sliding further apart as he prepared to slick himself up.

Jordan inched closer, his eyes locked onto the way that Asher squatted down, his ass cheeks spread apart with one hand, his smooth valley exposed and the deep red of his hole just visible before his other hand obstructed the view. He licked his lips eagerly, the concerns of a few minutes ago forgotten as Jordan focused on the motions of Asher’s fingers when they pushed inside his own ass, the lubed digits slipping in with only a grunt of familiar pain mixed with pleasure. Jordan continued to stroke his cock, rolling the condom down his shaft as Asher’s second finger entered, leaving a glistening trail of lube along his butt cheek. It was only when he pulled his eyes upwards that Jordan realized Asher was looking at him over his shoulder.

“Enjoying the view?”

“For sure,” Jordan smirked at him and got onto the bed, crawling up to the top. “But I think this view might be better.”

“You sure? You’ve never wanted to do it this way before.”

“Yeah, but…” Jordan trailed off and then he shrugged. “It doesn’t matter, just get over here, you look ready.”

“Hmm, hard to get ready for a thick cock!” Asher grinned at him and knee-walked across the bed, pulling his fingers free. “But that’s the point, right? Your big dick plunging into my tight hole?!”

“Mmh, yeah!” Jordan groaned at Asher’s description, his hands reaching forwards to grasp the other guy’s waist, his fingers splaying out to feel the shiver of Asher’s ab muscles as Jordan’s cock brushed against his firm ass. Asher reached back and lined them up, nodding at Jordan.

“I’m ready.”

“Ok.” He took a breath, wanting to stretch this moment out. There was always something so perfect about the tension between them here, not just the casual pressure from his cock about to push into Asher’s ass, but something else. It was almost as though this was the closest they got to real feelings, when pleasure and anticipation clashed together and Jordan could actually say the things that ran through his mind every time he saw Asher, every time they kissed, every time they hooked up. But he never did, because Asher always had that guarded look in his eyes, that distance that kept them apart. Jordan saw him frown in confusion and the moment was over. “Now!”

“AH!” Asher cried out, his teeth clenching as he tried to hold back the sound, making Jordan suddenly conscious of where they were. But the explosion of pleasure that came from Asher leaning back and forcing his ass to accept all of Jordan’s inches at once was enough to blast any concerns from his mind. “Oh yeah!”

“Fuck, dude!” Jordan hissed, gripping the duvet and going still as Asher hunched forward, a superior smirk on his face. “Can you take all that?”

“Heh, I like being on top!” Asher grinned more naturally and braced himself on Jordan’s hard pecs, using his leverage to lift his ass off Jordan’s thick cock until he could feel the flared head widening his rim. Then he plunged down with the same energy as before, impaling his ass on Jordan’s cock while the QB panted and arched into him. “Oh, yeah, Jordan!”
“Mmh, fucking ride me, Ash!” Jordan whispered, one hand gripping Asher’s hip and reaching back towards a firm ass cheek, while the other hand grasped Asher’s wrist, feeling his pulse hammer hard under his fingers. “Uh, yeah!”

Asher started moving faster and faster, lifting up, his ass clenching around Jordan’s thick dick, before reaching the apex and letting gravity slam him back down, each time drawing louder moans from Jordan and a deeper pleasure for Asher. He grinned at Jordan’s expression, hole tightening around his cock as Asher pulled one hand from the QB’s chest to focus on jerking himself off. “Fuck, dude, are you close?”

“I’ve never been this aroused before!” Jordan gasped, reaching both hands back to grasp Asher’s ass. He pulled the cheeks wider, rewarded with a groan from Asher, and then bucked up into the hot tightness that enclosed his dick. They were both sweating now, Asher’s rounded shoulders and smooth chest glistening in the soft light from the lamps around the room. Jordan felt his balls tingle and pleasure flood through his body in a crash of released chemicals. “You? You nearly there, Ash?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Asher nodded. “But you cum first and then I can roll off and jerk off until I shoot.”

“Nah, dude, don’t!” Jordan felt a surge of bravery as he said something he’d wanted for months. “Can you cum on me? Like cum all over my chest? That’d be so hot!”

“Sure.” Asher didn’t stop to think the request over, Jordan’s dick quivering in his ass, the guy’s expression turning from hungry arousal into bliss. I know that look. “Aw, yeah, cum for me, Jordan!”

“Ah, Ash! Ah, Ash! Ah, Ash! Ash!” Jordan moaned low and long, clenching his abs and giving one final thrust into Asher’s ass as he felt himself shoot in an explosion of pleasure. “Awwww, yeah!”

“I’m there too, man!” Asher whispered, jerking off furiously as soon as he felt Jordan start to fill the condom. He focused on Jordan’s muscular body, smooth dark skin covered in a sheen of sweat that highlighted his physique, his handsome face and eyes were suddenly enough to make Asher lose control. “Ah!” He grunted, the orgasm slamming through his body, cum erupting from his cock in a thick arc, splattering across Jordan’s collarbone. The remaining ropes fired out onto his pecs, abs, and naval, a creamy mess that made Asher pant and Jordan groan. He was caught off-guard when Jordan reached up and grasped the back of his neck, pulling Asher’s mouth down onto his own, their lips crashing together in a frenzy of unrestrained passion. “Mmh!”

Asher finished cleaning himself off with a tissue and tossed it onto the pile on the bed. Jordan was sitting on the edge, pants already on, his shirt in his hands. “You ok? You haven’t said much since we finished.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Jordan glanced up at him. “Maybe we went too far, Ash, tricking Spencer, I mean. He looked pretty out of it when we left earlier.”

“So?” He shrugged. “We never forced him to drink that much, it was his choice about whether to keep going after that second one.”

“I guess.”

“It’s almost one, don’t you have curfew?” Asher slipped on his shoes and gestured for Jordan to get up. “We don’t want to sabotage ourselves either, huh? A good night’s sleep will make us look even better compared to Spencer!”

"You staying here?" Jordan asked as he stood up and searched for his socks.
"Nah, I sleep better in my own bed." He walked over to the door, unlocking it and cracking it open. "Coast is clear, I’ll leave first, you come out in a few minutes."

"Sure, and Ash?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks." Jordan replied simply. "I’ll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah." Asher nodded, slipping out and closing the door behind him. He walked into the living room, soft music rolling through the small group who were still partying by the pool. Layla had crashed, sleeping fitfully on one of the couches. Spencer was gone too, probably catching a cab back to Crenshaw. But as he made to leave, JJ dropped a heavy arm onto Asher’s shoulder and veered drunkenly into his face.

"Leaving already, dude?!"

"Uh, yeah, JJ." He glanced down at the empty champagne bottle by JJ’s feet, knocked over as the other guy stumbled away from him. Asher sighed, but reached out and steered JJ back towards him, wrapping his arm securely around his waist, open shirt damp from water, sweat, and spilled booze. "C’mon, I’ll drop you home."

"Thanks, Asher!"

"Just don’t throw up over my upholstery." Asher muttered to him as they half-walked, half-stumbled down Layla’s driveway. "You’re not so hot that I’d forgive you."

"Huh?" JJ looked drunkenly at him.

"Nothing, bro, nearly there." Asher gently pushed JJ away from him in order to open his passenger door. "C’mere, get in, let me buckle you up." He knelt down, suddenly conscious that he was really close to JJ, his muscular torso in reach, the guy’s pants lost somewhere in Layla’s party so his bulge was just there. Asher swallowed hard, and then reached in, grabbing the seatbelt and drawing it across JJ’s body, securing it with a click. "Ok."

JJ just smiled at him and Asher turned away, hiding his boner, before he hurried back around to the driver’s side. His mind was clear even as a small voice screamed at him to take advantage of the situation, after all it wouldn’t have been much different from how Jordan used his mouth and hands every morning at school, right? Asher shook his head. JJ might be crazy hot, and I’d love the chance to hook up with him, but I’m not taking advantage of him while he’s drunk, that’s just a shitty thing to do to one of my best friends. And Jordan is…I don’t expect anything more from Jordan than his dick.

The morning sun was hot on his face as Jordan finished his warm-up, Asher arriving beside him, fiddling with one of the straps of his helmet. "You good?"

"Better than him." Asher smirked, nodding over at Spencer as he crouched down next to JJ. "You ready to kick ass?"

"Yup, I can see the boosters too." Jordan nodded when his Dad passed by, moving to welcome the group. "Let’s smash this, Asher, when I get the ball, be in the right place so I can feed you the play, ok?"
“Don’t sweat it, I got your back.” Asher sprinted out onto the field, pushing his mouthguard into place and pulling his helmet down. “You ok, Spencer?”

“Ugh…” The other guy groaned, limping towards the starting line.

“Uh huh, scrimmage day, boys!” Asher shouted out, banging on the side of his helmet. The whistle screamed a moment later and he dashed forward, twisting around Spencer’s slow-moving form and catching the ball deftly when Jordan flicked it through the air at him. “Nice!”

They reformed and Asher was again able to duck around Spencer’s efforts to catch him, Jordan funnelling him the ball. After the third time, Spencer shook his head in Asher’s direction, breathing hard, hands on his knees. “Damn.”

“C’mon, Spencer, get your head in the game!” Asher called out, careful to keep his tone light and encouraging, the boosters watching their every move. “Next play!” He squared up against Spencer again, rocking from side to side as he tried to throw off his opponent, before dashing right and pulling away from Spencer cleanly, arms open to catch the ball. Jordan’s throw was perfect, and Asher grunted as the ball landed snuggly into his grip. A quick dash to the left caused Spencer’s supposed interception to crash out, the other guy falling heavily onto the ground.

The whistle blew again, and Jordan signalled for them to move off the field. Asher jogged past Spencer, pulling off his helmet and spitting out his mouth guard. "Pull it together man, you smell like a party bus!"

"More like Tequila and regret!" Jordan smirked at Asher, his abs clenching and visible, drawing Asher’s eye. They stood next to each other, exchanging a grin as their deception became exposed.

"Hold up," Spencer moved slowly towards them, betrayal on his face. "Last night, I thought that-"

"Thought what?" Asher cut across him viciously. "That we were a team? That we were friends? The only reason you were at that party was because we asked Layla to invite you!"

"To what? You wanted to haze me? Make me look bad? Hey, you got me confused with somebody else, brah."

"Hey, go back to Crenshaw." Asher sneered, as Spencer threw his helmet down aggressively.

"What you say?!" Spencer charged forward, but Jordan pulled Asher back towards him protectively. "Say that again!"

“Alright, I-” Asher’s words were cut off when Coach appeared between them, shoving Spencer away from him. Jordan’s hands were all over Asher’s biceps and shoulder, hauling him backwards towards the rest of the team.

“What?! What?!” Spencer growled, resisting Coach Baker’s attempts to diffuse the situation. “Say that again, bro!”

“I will not let you blow this! One fight and you’re out! Game over.” The Coach hissed, pointing towards the locker rooms. “Go on, go, take a walk.” He turned back towards Asher and Jordan, an accusing finger directed at Jordan. “And you, you should know better than this!"

"No, don't put this on me, Dad, it was all a lie just to get this guy here! Even the permit to have him transfer was a lie!" Jordan fired back, his father looking away from him, frustrated. "A lie to save yourself. Hey, Spencer? You think he cares about you? He's just using you to save his job, that's what matters, not you. You don't matter! You don’t-"
"Jordan, enough." Coach managed to shut him up. "Enough."

Jordan glared at his father, remaining silent, before he stalked away, sitting down heavily on the benches. He glanced up when Asher joined him. “Don’t say anything.”

“Wasn’t going to.” Asher settled back, a subtle smile playing around his features. *That should have been enough to push him off our team, and even if it wasn’t, no way Spencer will want to stay here with us. This is a victory.*

*This is not a victory.* Asher scowled as he paced up and down on the side-lines, waiting for their chance to move onto the field. Standing nearby was Spencer, the other player seemingly ignoring him and watching the crowd instead.

“Ash!”

“Huh?” He turned towards Jordan and followed his wave out onto the field.

“You ok?”

“Fine, let’s do this.” Asher nodded, moving into his position. The whistle blew and the game began, driving all concerns about Spencer from his mind. Chatsworth were an aggressive opponent, catching their defensive line off-guard and slamming in two touch-downs, their kicker’s accuracy resulting in the Eagles going down hard by the end of the first quarter. Asher saw Jordan talking to the Coach and nodded when they switched playstyles, the new tactics allowing them to pull some manoeuvres that led to an evening of the score, before Chatsworth pulled ahead again. Asher scooped up the ball and then found himself crashing into the ground, the ball spinning from his grasp. “Ow.”

The whistle sounded and he rolled over, climbing to his feet as the lines reset, preparing for the next play. He nodded his thanks at Jordan as the QB dusted him off. Asher glanced over at the scoreboard and grimaced. “Quarter four, we only got a minute here, Jordan.”

“We can do it, don’t-oh, Coach wants you.”

“Got it.” Asher moved away and jogged over to the side-lines, ignoring Spencer’s presence next to them. "What's up, Coach?"

"Spencer is going in, good stuff, good stuff." He tapped Asher's helmet and looked at the new guy. "Get in there."

“What? But…” Asher trailed off, his protests lost as Coach Baker moved around him and Spencer sprinted out onto the field. He grunted irritably and pulled his helmet off, using the hem of his jersey to wipe sweat from his brow. *I can’t believe this.*

Jordan glanced at Spencer, brows furrowed when he saw the guy take Asher’s position to his left in the huddle. "We’re all going to be right this time, you got it?" Jordan said, preparing to make the play. "Alright, next pick, you roll left, on one, on one, you ready?!" They clapped and broke apart, returning to their positions.

"Here we go, here we go! Fifty-two! Watch fifty-two!" Jordan called out, pointing towards the player Spencer had identified as injured. “Hike!” The ball was passed quickly into his hands and
Jordan danced backwards, his eyes scanning the field for Spencer. Nice! He cheered internally when Spencer managed to block fifty-two, smashing him into the ground and enabling Jordan to sprint through the opening.

“Touchdown!”

“Yeah!” Asher shouted, jumping into air, pumping his fists as the home crowd erupted with deafening cheers. He ran out onto the field alongside the rest of the team, unrestrained exuberance causing him to hug Jordan, their embrace fleeting as the others patted Jordan on the back. Asher grinned at him, turning away before anyone suspected anything other than two friends congratulating each other. “Awesome play, dude!”

“Thanks, Ash!” Jordan smiled back at him, regret pulling at him when Asher stepped away abruptly. Victory of a sort, wish I could celebrate with you for real though. He wrenched his eyes away as Layla and her friends approached, cheering for Asher, his best friend’s relaxed posture becoming tense again. Instead, Jordan walked towards where his father was helping Spencer to stand, hearing their exchange.

“Are you alright? I may have to keep you on defense after a takedown like that!” Coach Baker joked, guiding Spencer towards the side-line.

“Ah, no, Coach, I’m too pretty for defense!”

“Haha!” He laughed good-naturedly and patted Spencer on the back. "I'm proud of you, son."

The words that should have been his, stolen. Asher’s glory, snatched away by this new guy. Who does he think he is? He made one play and now he’s the golden boy? Nah, this won’t stand. Jordan stopped moving, glaring after their retreating backs, the win suddenly feeling hollow. He looked back towards Asher, seeing that he had avoided Layla and was now talking and joking with JJ.

“Good game, dude.” The Chatsworth QB called out to him, passing by.

"Hey man, can I talk to you for a second?” Jordan said, gesturing for the other quarterback to move closer. “You liked our block, huh?”

“Yeah, receivers don’t usually hit that hard.”

“Uh huh, you should tell your coach that, uh, that Spencer James’ transfer isn’t legit.” Jordan said, a twist of dark satisfaction curling through his chest. The other guy gave him a suspicious look, but then nodded.

“Sure, I’ll do that, thanks.”

“Yeah.” Jordan turned away, walking towards the locker room, catching sight of Layla congratulating Spencer while Olivia hung back. Huh, don’t know why I didn’t notice that before; Olivia’s totally into him. I wonder where Asher went, we should still acknowledge this victory even if it was because of Spencer… He looked around, not seeing his best friend anywhere. “Hey, JJ, you see Asher?”

“Oh, no, he said he had to leave, didn’t want to celebrate with us.”

“Huh, he did get replaced right at the end.” Jordan muttered, seeing JJ nod before turning away, making plans with the rest of the team. I’ll call him later.
Asher tossed his keys onto the counter, dropping his gym bag and gear on the floor next to the washing machine. The house was dark, his father still not back from the extended trip, not that Asher was expecting him to actually be at his game or even care enough to call to see how it went. “All he cares about is appearances after all, we won, great. It still should have been my moment, my play, fuck it.” He grumbled, flicking on the lights.

Walking out towards the patio at the rear of the house, views across the city towards the ocean, Asher paused next to the liquor collection that was perched on top of the sideboard. His eyes lingered on the bottles, a gnawing desire slinking into his stomach, a thirst that couldn't be quenched by what was in front of him, no matter how often he tried. “No.” Asher pulled himself away from the alcohol, resisting temptation. “Not today.” He walked quickly towards his bedroom, feeling his phone vibrate with a message from Jordan. “Saved again, for another night at least.”

Jordan gripped Asher’s hair tight, feeling himself cum hard, thick ropes of jizz splattering into his best friend’s mouth, the other guy holding his position for a second more before getting up and spitting the contents down the sink. “Sorry, it just happened suddenly, I meant to warn you.”

“It’s fine.” Asher wiped his chin with the back of his hand. “I have mouthwash in my locker, toss it over, will you?”

“Here.” Jordan threw the bottle to his friend and then rested his head against the cool metal. “Do you want to jerk off?”

“Not right now, I have a history test, want to look over my notes.” Asher was avoiding his eyes, his tone indifferent.

“Ash?” Jordan stood up, tucking his cock back into his trousers and walked over to stand next to him. “Are we ok?”

“Yeah, Jordan, of course we are.” Asher continued to swirl his mouth clean before spitting again. “I know what, it doesn’t matter, and I’m already late.” He shrugged and pulled away when Jordan reached for him. “See ya at lunch.”

“Sure, but-” Jordan let his words die as Asher walked out the door. “Fuck, is he…I mean, it’s just sex, so…I don’t…” He sighed, his denials feeling more forced than normal. Jordan looked at his reflection, echoing Asher a moment before. “I know, it’s more than that, think he feels the same, but I can’t say anything.”

“Anything about what?” His father’s voice carried across the open space between the locker room and the Coach’s office. “What are you even doing here?”

“Oh, just forgot something last night.” Jordan shrugged and then hurriedly grabbed his bag. “I’m going to class.”

“Ok, tell Spencer I need to see him.”

“Sure.” Jordan nodded, tension treading through his stomach as he noticed the furrow across his Dad’s brows. Guess Chatsworth acted on that bit of information.
Jordan sighed as he parked his car in the driveway that evening. Asher had been friendly all day, but there still felt like there was a tension hanging between them, weighed down by the mass of unsaid words. *How can I say anything to him when I can’t even admit it to myself? It’s hopeless.* He turned off the engine and climbed out, frowning in confusion as soon as he spotted his Mom pacing back and forth in front of the couch, phone in one hand. “Hey, Mom, what’s going on?”

“I’ve already told your sister,” She started, turning towards him. “Apparently Chatsworth are contesting Spencer’s transfer papers, and your father has come up with a solution.”

“Oh?” Jordan swallowed hard as a feeling of dread started flooding through his stomach. “What sort of solution?”

“Spencer is going to be staying with us-during the week. That’ll allow him to continue playing with the football team, since he’ll be legitimately in the area.” She frowned at him as Jordan grunted and looked away. “Your father has made his decision and they should be here shortly. We have plenty of guestrooms, so it should be…”

Jordan let his mother’s words flow over him, walking numbly across the living room to sink into the couch. *Oh, he’s decided, has he? No consultation, no asking us for our opinion? Just taking Spencer in after everything that happened at the party and I’m supposed to make nice with him? Asher is gonna be so pissed.*

He pulled out his phone and quickly texted his best friend, filling him on what had happened. A moment later, his phone buzzed, and Jordan glanced down, a smile pulling at his lips despite everything.

*Playing at being a good boyfriend, date night sucks. But thanks for the info, looks like neither of our plans were successful.*

*Date night? And you’re playing with your phone?*

Yeah, so is Layla, on Instagram, I think. The waiter keeps coming over and she’s flirting hardcore. *IDK why though, he’s not that hot.*

Jordan coughed, stifling his laugh as his Mom glanced over at him. He looked back to his phone. *She still doesn’t suspect anything, huh?*

*Why would she? Lying is pretty natural for us at this point, and we’re both doing this for the appearance. Hey, maybe Spencer staying might actually be a good thing, allow her leave without too much drama.*

*Hah, he’s not staying in YOUR house!* Jordan huffed, locking his phone when he heard the front door open and his father calling out that they had arrived. “Alright.” He stood up, feeling empowered from his brief conversation with Asher, his best friend’s ability to live two completely separate lives was always something Jordan envied. “Hey.”

“Hi.”

Jordan held out his hand to Spencer. “Welcome.” The other guy nodded while Coach Baker grinned, his relief obvious that there wasn’t any lingering bad blood between them. “Um, c’mon, I’ll show you to your room, my sister is finishing up her yoga, she’ll be out soon.”

“Cool.”
Jordan had finished giving Spencer the tour when Olivia swung by. “Hey, um, can you show him the bathroom, you know how the temperature control is so fiddly on that shower.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“See ya in the morning.” Jordan left them to it and walked down the hall to his room. It was next to Olivia’s and near enough to the guest room that he could still hear their voices until he shut the door with a click. He pulled out his phone, checking his messages, relief firing through his veins when saw one from Asher.

_Date is finally finished, made excuse that I have a paper to work on, she didn’t even protest or anything! But nvm, how are you? You want to talk or…_ There was a winky face and an eggplant emoji that made him laugh.

_Hmm, tempting…but, _Jordan paused, suddenly realizing that he didn’t want to have sex with Asher, well, not just sex. “How insane is it that while I was showing Spencer everything, I kept thinking about Layla just ignoring you?” Jordan spoke to his phone softly, seeing the screen blacken, his reply unfinished. “That I wanted to be her, that I wanted to be with you? And Spencer, he’s in my fucking house, as if my Dad getting an upgraded son on the football field wasn’t enough.”

He sighed and sat down heavily on his bed, fingers shaking as he deleted the words he had started, composing a different message. It was somehow easier to type than to say, probably helped by the fact he couldn’t see Asher’s reaction when he read it. _Ash, I really like what we do together, but I want more. Not more hooking up, more from both of us._

_That’s really cryptic, dude._ Jordan grunted when he read Asher’s reply, his heart sinking until another message came through quickly. _Unless you’re asking for us to stop just being FWB and actually be together as a couple? I’m down for that, if we keep it a secret._

“Heh,” Jordan stared at his phone, re-reading the message over and over as if his eyes were lying. “I can’t believe it.” He replied quickly with an affirmation, his heart beating faster as Asher’s final message came back with a heart eyes emoji.

_See you tomorrow, boyfriend…_

Chapter End Notes

_I'd be interested in knowing if readers have an appetite for more a detailed telling of the football games? There'll be drama and reactions and important emotional and relationship moments happening, of course, but are you interested in an accurate relaying of the plays and mechanics that they use in the episodes? Or will I keep it to a more descriptive and broad relaying of what's happening on the field as I did here?_

_I know this chapter is long, but that is the style I’ll be going for in future chapters, having all of an episode's events happen within the confines of a single, large chapter. My aim is for chapter lengths between 10k and 12k. It’s a style I’ve used before and I’ll try and release a new chapter every Saturday or Sunday, so it won’t be too long until I’ve caught up with the newest episodes. There will also likely be smut in every chapter going forward, both quick scenes like in this one as well as more involved scenes._
If you have any thoughts or feedback, I’d be interested in hearing it, especially in regard to the football aspects of the story. Thanks for reading!
Below the Surface

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains multiple scenes of explicit sexual content...and pretty much all the chapters will!

The sun beat down on the vast shoreline and sandy beaches that edged the coast along Los Angeles, a cool ocean breeze sweeping in to take away the worst of the heat. The water was warm to his feet and shins as Asher strode out into the waves, retrieving an errant ball, Butler’s throw going wide. He glanced up once he had the ball in hand, casting his gaze back towards the beach where the rest of the team and their friends were gathered. Some were lounging on blankets spread out upon the sand, idly reading through homework assignments or chatting about the latest gossip to blow through the school. Others were playing in the water or gathering rocks for the fire ring that evening, yet more discreetly drinking early.

The football team were tossing balls back and forth, mostly casual, only some of the defenders taking things seriously and trying to take each other out. Asher smirked when he watched one of the large guys fall into the surf with a noisy splash and then he turned back to Butler and JJ, tossing the ball their way. The atmosphere on the beach was one of friendly relaxation, the usual tension eased by their win last week. Though it still galled Asher that Spencer had been the one to secure that victory at his own expense, the receiver wasn’t as pissed off as he would have been two weeks prior.

His scowl lessened as his eyes fell upon Jordan standing next to the supports of the long, high jetty that ran above them. Asher felt his stomach clench with a mix of nervous excitement, his cock twitching in his shorts when Jordan turned towards him, smooth, shirtless upper body developed into muscular perfection. He pulled his gaze away before he started to stare, conscious that the JJ was aiming his next throw at him. “I’m open.”

“He, try this!” JJ threw high and Asher jumped up, catching it deftly.

“C’mon, man, give me a hard one!” I can certainly think of a hard one you can give me right now! Asher pressed his lips together to suppress his smirk as the thought flashed across his mind. He threw the ball back, watching JJ snatch it from the air, sunshine gleaming on his oiled, tanned arms. The lust passed as his friend turned to flirt with the two girls that were nearby. It had been a challenge for Asher to get used to the fact that he and Jordan were sort of, not quite, together, and that he shouldn’t be looking at JJ the same way that he used to, forming mental porn for jerking off to later. JJ passed the ball to Butler, who in turn flung it wide towards Asher.

He caught it again, turning towards Jordan when he heard the quarterback laugh, the scowl returning to his features as he saw Jordan and Spencer talking and joking with each other. It was almost as though Jordan felt the burn of Asher’s anger as he shot a reassuring smile Asher’s way. Hmm, why is Jordan even bothering with him? Spencer’s been everywhere this week; school, training, his house… Asher sighed and turned the ball over slowly in his hands, eyes lingering on Jordan’s body.

Despite their decision to make their hook-ups more than sex, Asher still wanted to keep the physical side of the relationship as the primary motivator. He felt salvia pool on his tongue as his eyes dipped towards the subtle bulge in Jordan’s shorts, eager to wrap his lips around that thick dick again, have Jordan pounding him hard and fast again. But already this week, Jordan had changed their plans
three times out of nowhere. Asher knew the cause, of course: Spencer. Bad enough that the guy is living with Jordan during the week, but he's definitely smarter than he looks, able to read people as well as he can with the field. Gonna have to be careful around him.

"Hey, Ash, you gonna hold that all day?!"

"Pass the ball, man!"

"Right." Asher muttered and threw it towards Butler. He walked himself out of the game and snagged a bottle of water from the cooler further up the beach. Asher used the momentary relief to watch Jordan speak to Spencer, his eyes lingering on the captain's developed pecs and wind-hardened nipples. He unscrewed the cap slowly, swallowing hard as Jordan threw the ball long for Spencer to catch, his arm outstretched for a second before pulling back to bulging biceps. "Mmh."

He made a show of looking out at the ocean and then around at the others sprawled out across this part of the beach, before bringing his attention back to Jordan’s body. He frowned when he noticed that JJ was looking his way, the beginnings of a question forming on the handsome jock’s face. Asher drained the water bottle and dropped the empty plastic container back into the cooler. He dashed forward, jumping in front of Butler and snagging the ball from him. “You gotta be faster than that if you want to get play time this week, dude!”

“Maybe stop stealing my plays, Ash.” Butler sighed, running beside him. “Throw to JJ and let me see if I can intercept it!”

“Gotcha.”

Jordan shook his arms out as Spencer ran towards the surf where the ball had landed. It was far enough away to allow the QB an opportunity to look over at Asher without feeling too self-conscious. He smiled when he heard Asher, Butler, and JJ bickering over who could throw better, Jordan’s gaze caressing the smooth, lightly tanned torso of his boyfriend. His boyfriend. The words made his heart pound and blood rush through his body, giddiness making him bounce on the balls of his feet as though he was light as an angel. Jordan grinned at Spencer when he returned, handing the ball to him. The QB shrugged as Spencer looked around uneasily, Jordan tossing the ball up and down from hand to hand. “You ok? Huh?”

“Some serious spin on that throw.” Spencer huffed, looking back the way he had come. “Man, we don’t practice like this in Crenshaw, I’ll tell you that.”

“Yeah, well, we like a good regen day.” Jordan replied, glancing to his left again, finding Asher standing in the gentle waves, comfortable shorts hanging down his legs, the cap on his head shading his face from the worst of the sun. Asher met his eyes for a second before looking away, ever careful in public, though Jordan saw the stern angle and obvious jealousy that burned in Ash’s gaze. Angry at Spencer for taking his place, for challenging his spot on the team, for messing up their pleasurable routine this week.

But there was something else to Asher this time, a sort of forced prickliness that rolled off him in angry sheets. It was periodic, and Jordan soon figured out that Ash only turned the emotion on when Spencer was looking at or talking to Layla. His boyfriend was able to play the part of the envious straight guy so well that at times, Jordan had wondered if Asher was actually jealous of Spencer. But then again, Asher could live his double life with apparently boundless ease in a manner that made Jordan’s head spin. I don’t understand how he has the mental stamina to hide everything, mess around with me, and still have no one suspect that he’s actually gay. It must be exhausting, at least
he can be real around me.

Jordan blinked when Asher tilted his head at him and the QB realized he had been watching his boyfriend for too long. He averted his eyes back to Spencer, trying to give the appearance that he had been listening for the past few minutes. Jordan nodded, catching the thread of the conversation. “Yeah, yeah, it’s good for team bonding, you know?”

“Right.” Spencer was looking at Asher too now, scepticism on his face. “I can feel it.”

I’d rather feel something else. Jordan pressed his lips together, suppressing the lust as it threatened to boil over. He cast his eyes across his boyfriend again, lingering on the developed upper body. With everything that had been going on since Spencer moved in and having to drive him to school each day, Jordan hadn’t had an opportunity to hook up with Asher at all. But he needed to feel those pecs again, to have Asher’s warm mouth on his cock and the frantic kisses that Asher gave him. Strong enough to make Jordan feel his presence hours after they had left their secret rendezvous. He swallowed hard as his cock was pushed to one side by his jockstrap, saving him from having to explain his hardon to Spencer. Although judging from the way the new guy was checking out the passing ladies, no explanation might be required.

“I don’t know, man, it seems like some of you guys still don’t like me being here.” Spencer said, turning back towards him. “And we’re facing off against Hawthorne this week, brah, dem dudes bite!”

“Aw, Hawthorne won’t be anything we can’t handle, ain’t that right, JJ?!” Jordan called out, tossing him the ball. He grinned at the other jock as the ball was caught and JJ came over to them.

“Damn right!”

“Ah, ok, hah, I’m a gonna catch you guys later.” Spencer replied quickly, making a beeline for Layla as soon as Asher and Butler stopped playing and turned towards the group.

“Jordan.” Asher muttered as he walked over to JJ, his eyes skipping across his friend’s sweet, tanned muscles and onto Jordan, a hint of a smirk playing about his lips. “Well, no prizes for guessing where he’s going.”

“Mmh.” JJ groaned in sympathy, “Damn dude, he has no shame.”

“Yeah, I can see that.” Asher glowered at Spencer’s back when he knelt down next to Layla, talking to her. He curled his hands into fists and then looked abruptly away when Spencer turned around.

Asher huffed, secretly pleased that the action gave him the excuse to roll his eyes down Jordan’s abs towards his smooth naval. He tossed his ball up and down and shrugged. “Whatever, it’s not like she’s telling him to leave.”

“Yeah, but, Ash-”

“Uh, c’mon, we should check that thing...” Jordan cut JJ off and Asher nodded quickly.

"Yeah." They walked across the sand side by side as JJ shrugged and went back to playing. Asher knew they had to walk past Layla and Spencer and forced another scowl to his face, despite the fact he was grateful for any distraction between them; any excuse he could be use to get Jordan alone. Even just walking beside the shirtless hunk made Asher's fingers itch, eager to grab Jordan’s cock and jerk him off, to see that look of ecstasy at the moment he shot, it was so strangely addictive. “We heading to the parking lot? I left my Stingray on the street.”
“Yeah, I wasn’t really thinking about that, Ash.” Jordan sighed, avoiding his now genuinely angry glare. “Hey, c’mon, you know I want to hook-up; jerking off alone sucks, but we gotta talk about Spencer.”

“He needs to go.” Asher said loudly, making his voice carry. “He doesn’t belong on our team, in my position, he doesn’t even have the respect to learn the plays, Jordan!”

“Dude!” Jordan hissed at him and pulled Asher away, down towards the water. “Look, we already tried to get him kicked out and now the guy is living in my house!”

“You think I don’t know that we failed hard that time? We just need something else.”

“We won the game last week because of Spencer, that’s a bitter fucking pill to swallow, but we did.” Jordan replied, a hardness in his expression that hadn’t been there before. “My Dad thinks he’s the best player in the team, no matter how reckless or undisciplined Spencer has been, he’s not gonna drop him. Hell, Spencer has been coming in late every night this week and my Dad still hasn’t said anything about it. It’s over, Ash, we have to live with it.”

“Jordan-” Asher barked his name, but the QB stalked off, ignoring him. A surge of emotion and courage flared through him and Asher felt an overwhelming urge to reach out after Jordan and grab his arm, do something insane and romantic and just kiss him right there on the beach, no fucks given about Spencer or his girlfriend or the team.

Shit.

But despite the desires raging in his heart, Asher didn’t do anything, he just watched Jordan walk away from him as a leaden ball sunk through his stomach.

Asher sighed and turned away when he lost Jordan’s figure in the crowds at the entrance to the beach. He could hear Layla call out his name, but he ignored her, playing up the role of the jealous boyfriend, the corner that he had backed himself into. She gave up and Asher was able to return to JJ and the others. The guys didn’t say anything about Spencer and Layla, but Asher could see the twist in their expressions. Hmm, well, at least they’re still convinced I’m straight, that smokescreen is pretty useful.

“Hey, Ash?” JJ called out, draping an arm across Asher’s shoulders. “Are you and Layla up to something this evening?”

“What do you think?” He grunted, looking out at the darkening ocean water, the sun setting in a blaze of red and orange. “Why? You planning on waiting around for a while?”

“Nah, I was just wondering if you wanted to hang out, grab something to eat…”

“Maybe so you can drive my Stingray?” Asher smirked knowingly, seeing JJ’s face light up. “Haha, I thought so. Sure, man, I know you love that car.”

“Thanks, bro!” JJ grinned at him and picked up his gear bag as they started walking towards the street. “You know I’m gonna get the ZR1 for my birthday, right? Can’t wait!”

“That’s a killer car, dude, you gonna let me drive it?”

“Totally! We gotta have a drag race too,” JJ replied excitedly, stopping to pull his shirt out of his bag and slipped it on, leaving the buttons undone. “Oooh, maybe up at my cousin’s estate in Thousand Oaks, he has this awesome driveway that’s a couple of miles long, perfect for seeing who’s faster!”

“I’ll take that challenge,” Asher said as they emerged onto the busy sidewalk. He held his bag in one
hand and fished out his keys first, tossing them to JJ, before grabbing his t-shirt. “You wanna go to the usual place? I’d kill for some spicy grilled chicken right now.”

“Deal.” JJ grinned at him again, white teeth against tanned skin. He darted ahead to unlock Asher’s car and hopped into the driver’s seat. “C’mon, dude!”

“Yeah, yeah.” Asher grumbled, pulling his t-shirt on. He climbed in and grabbed his seatbelt, nodding for JJ to go. A grin pulled at his lips as the other jock gunned the engine and pulled out onto the long boulevard with a throaty roar from the Stingray. “Nice!”

“Aw, yeah, Asher! This car is a beast!”

*Mmm, that’s a sound I’d like to hear again, and I ain’t talking about the engine!* Asher thought to himself as he watched JJ change gear using the pedals around the steering wheel, zipping them past the heavy traffic that was heading downtown. Their journey was short, disappointment crossing JJ’s features as he parked carefully at the side of the restaurant. “Enjoy yourself?”

“Too short, Ash, way too short.”

“Haha, I know that feeling.” He climbed out and caught the keys as JJ tossed them over to him. “At least you avoided the bollards this time.”

“That happened once!” JJ groaned at him. “And it was barely a scratch, I paid for it, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m just riding you, dude.” *Though not the way I’d want to.* Asher smiled at him, trying to ignore the thoughts about his straight friend. “Let’s go.”

“Is Jordan joining us? He wasn’t at the beach when we left.”

“Nah, I don’t think so, he probably had to bring Spencer back home.” Asher replied, noticing JJ’s careful nod. “Guess that means you’re stuck with me, bro.”

“Mmmh, could be worse,” JJ leaned in conspiratorially towards him as they walked inside, heading for seats near the pool table. “You could be the Martin twins!”

“Oh? What did you do now?” Asher shook his head in mock disappointment. “Did you get caught?”

“Um, let’s just say that bedrooms with adjoining doors are not my friend!”

“Ugh, JJ!”

“Yeah, but for real, Ash, it was so worth it.” He winked at Asher. “I know you’re with Layla and all, dude, but twins are awesome as long as you don’t get caught. Or confuse their names. Or try to hook up with the first one when you meant to hook up with the second one, but they’re so alike it’s confusing.”

“Haha, I’ll bear that in mind.” Asher laughed, beckoning over a waiter. “Um, yeah, so I’ll have the…”

Jordan sat down next to his father in the living room, Coach Baker having set up his tablet with the latest recorded game from Hawthorne and a list of plays mapped out on a notepad between them. “I’m ready.”

“Good, good, have a look at this play.” He pointed at the screen and sat back. “Their kicker is really
“Yeah,” Jordan answered slowly, settling into the weekly strategy meeting. His eyes followed the players on the tablet as his father continued to talk, discussing possible plays and ways to switch around their team to counter different threats. Usually Jordan didn’t have to speak very much, mostly acting as a mirror for Coach Baker to reflect ideas off. But this time it was a welcome distraction to bury himself in. “I can see that, yeah.”

Jordan felt a cold dread build up in his stomach as he recalled the way he had left things with Asher that afternoon. He had been the one to walk off, angry that Asher was still pushing against Spencer’s presence, that they hadn’t been able to get even one hook-up session in since the previous week. It was difficult trying to keep everything balanced between football, school, home, and their new relationship. Probably doesn’t help that it’s meant to be a super-secret either. Jordan thought unhappily to himself. He blinked when he realized his father was looking at him expectantly. “Huh?”

“I said that Hawthorne’s wide receiver is really quick.” Coach Baker frowned. “Jordan, are you paying attention?”

“What? Of course.” He grunted and glanced at the screen, taking in the plays scribbled down next to him. “Uh, I’m not sure what we can do.”

“Hey guys,” Spencer called out as he walked into the kitchen, rubbing water from his freshly showered hair. “Sorry I missed dinner.”

“It’s cool,” Coach looked at his watch and shrugged. “A bit late though, Spence, everything ok?”

“Fine, Coach.”

“Hmm,” Jordan hummed to himself and pointed at the still image on the tablet. “You know, Hawthorne play too fast for us to do what we did last week.”

“That’s what I said.”

“So, the only chance we got is to switch it up on offense.”

“What you thinking?” His father turned back to him.

“I say we come out with a heavy run-in, knock ‘em down straight outta the gate.” Jordan folded his arms and smiled confidently. “Leave defense as standard and then—”

“Actually,” Spencer broke in, lingering at the couch. “Their offense is where it’s at right now. They got the highest scorer in the district.”

Yeah…thanks for that, Spencer, I got it covered. You can’t take everything from me. Jordan nodded tightly, feeling his teeth grind together when his father agreed with Spencer.

“You’ve got a point, look at this clip.” Coach Baker tilted the tablet so Spencer could see. “We gotta take advantage of him as a run player.”

“…as a run player.” Spencer said at the same time as Jordan’s Dad spoke and the two of them smirked as Jordan sat back, stony-faced.

“Run player.” Coach Baker nodded proudly at Spencer, before he elbowed Jordan. “See? Number nineteen? He doesn’t like getting physical, we can take advantage of that. How did you know that, Spencer? You seen them play?”
“Nah, nah, I’ve just been watching videos, doing research, you know?”

“Right, right, good.” Jordan’s Dad nodded happily.

Jordan resisted the urge to roll his eyes, settling for internal seething instead as his father and Spencer gathered around the screen, debating what plays they should use, and which players would be best. _Fine, swap me out here too, what else is new?_ He stood up abruptly, “I have homework to finish.”

“Oh, right, uh, what about number ten here?” Coach Baker barely glanced at him as he pointed out something to Spencer.

_Grr._ Jordan suppressed his irritation at being dismissed and left the living room, climbed the stairs and stalked into his room, shutting the door with a loud click. “What an asshole! Who does Spencer think he is?!” He paced back and forth in front of the large window that looked out on the back of the house towards the city. “Asher was totally right, why the hell didn’t I listen to him? Sure, Spencer living here sucks, but him interfering in the team is a step too far…”

He continued to stride up and down, muttering under his breath until he heard the distinctive chime of his phone. Jordan huffed and then felt the tension seizing his muscles start to melt away when he saw Asher’s name attached to the text message.

_About earlier, sorry we disagreed. Meet up tomorrow morning?_

“Hah, ever so careful.” Jordan whispered, re-reading the words to himself. He quickly tapped out a response, keeping it generic in case Asher wasn’t alone. _No problem, we’ll figure it out, but you were right, something has to be done. Not sure about the morning, will text when leaving the house._

_Ok, understood, maybe after training we can talk alone?_

_Yup, sounds good._

Jordan slipped his shoes off and peeled his socks down, tossing them into his laundry basket. He dropped his phone onto his bed and plugged in his laptop before stripping out of the rest of his clothes. His fingers hesitated on the neon green waistband of his briefs, tapping gently as indecision raged across his mind. _No guarantee that I’ll actually get to hook-up with Ash tomorrow and today has been stressful enough._ Jordan shrugged and then pulled down his underwear, balling them up and throwing them into the basket too. He spent a moment to carefully lock his bedroom door before walking back to the bed and lying down on top of it.

He pushed back until his head was comfortably supported by the pillows, his phone nearby in case Asher sent him anything else, his laptop diagonal with his face, Incognito Mode opening at his touch. Jordan typed in the address for Pornhub and chewed on his lower lip as his mouse hovered between the search bar and the most popular videos. “Fuck it, might as well go half way, nothing is for sure yet.”

Jordan’s other hand dragged down his chest towards his awakening cock, his eyes darting along the video results, looking for the ones with two guys and a woman, the cursor pausing on an image of two muscular jocks in a locker room. “Hmm, he kinda looks like Asher…ok.” He grabbed his earphones, pushing the connector into the jack before placing one bud into his ear, the other one free in case someone was outside his door.

The video started to play, Jordan focusing on the strong, smooth bodies of the two guys and the way they were flexing in front of a woman who seemed to playing the role of a locker room reporter. He rolled his eyes at the cringey dialogue, his thoughts rallying to replace their innuendo-laden words.
with his own memories of being in the locker room with Asher, careful and secret smiles, casual touches that lingered a little too long. “Mmh, yeah, Ash.” Jordan whispered, grasping his cock as the action finally started on screen.

He was fully hard, leaking precum from a mix of pent-up frustrations and the hot scenes playing out both on the screen and in his mind’s eye. Jordan clenched his ab muscles and felt the corresponding tightness ripple down his stomach and into his thighs, ass cheeks going firm and taut, his hand sliding down his shaft with ease. “Mmh.”

Jordan looked back at the screen and away from his dick, a jolt of excitement rushing through his chest and into his balls when he saw that one of the jocks was sucking off the other one, huge cock causing the guy’s cheeks to bulge obscenely. **Mmh, yeah, that’s what Ash does, swallowing my thick cock all the way! Feed it to him just like that, hear him moaning around it. So hot! Fuck yeah!** Jordan continued to jerk himself off, his free hand reaching between his legs to fondle his large balls, teasing and pulling on them gently as he increased his pace on his cock. The QB milked the head of his dick until precum spilled down the shaft and he could use it as lube. "Aw, aw, yeah!"

**Jordan groaned softly when he felt the familiar tingle in his balls and the twitch of his cock, but he pulled his hands away before he could come, riding out the sensations with rapid thrusts and jerks of his hips into the air. "Ah, fuck, that was close!" Love to be in Asher right now, have his perfect ass sliding down onto my cock, gripping his hips and just pulling him deep. He’d like that, start groaning the way he does! Ah, yeah, yeah, Ash, yeah! Jordan groaned, jerking off again, this time his eyes were closed, the porn completely forgotten as he gave himself over to the collision of fantasy and memory.**

He grasped his cock with both hands, creating a sleeve for his dick to slide and judder through, precum slicking the way. Jordan thrust hard and fast, his mind’s eye providing him with still images of Asher’s face in blissful pleasure as his ass was pounded, his hard, muscular torso covered in a sheen of sweat that made his tanned, smooth skin gleam in the light. "Uh, Ash, aw, yeah, yeah, Ash, yeah!" Jordan whispered to his room, fisting his cock as his orgasm boiled over and his dick exploded in a powerful shower of pearly cum. The first jet arced high and splattered across his right pec, the second going lower and splashing against his clenching abs, while the remainder spilled out on to his smooth naval. His entire body tensed up as he rode the wave of pure pleasure, Asher’s smiling face the image in his mind’s eye.

“Fuck, that was good.” Jordan hissed once the orgasm had passed over him, leaving the jock lying on the bed, sweat and cum dappling his body. “Better have a shower before turning in for the night.”

“Damn it.” Asher glared at his phone, another morning without even getting to see Jordan on his own. He shouldered his bag and closed the car’s door with a snap, looking up to find Layla standing on the curb across from him. *Shit.* “Hey, you alright?”

“Fine.” She waited for him to walk over, “Since when did you start coming in so early?”

“Oh, good opportunity to catch a session in the gym or run some laps.” Asher lied easily, seeing her nod. “What about you? Don’t we normally meet at the locker or homeroom?”

“Yeah, well, I heard a group of Freshmen talking about someone’s bright orange car parked all the way out here, and there’s only one person I know with such, hah, adventurous taste!”

“Huh,” Asher clicked his tongue and walked alongside Layla as they made their way back to the main building. “Just wait until JJ gets his sports car, pretty sure he’ll want something equally as loud,
maybe a neon blue or something.”

“You’ll make quite the pair!” She laughed, touching his shoulder affectionately. “I saw you leave yesterday with him.”

“Yeah, he wanted to drive the Stingray,” He held open the door for her. “We just got some food, talked, played some pool, you know.”

“Was Jordan with you?”

“No.” Asher glanced at her, keeping his expression neutral. “He left earlier, we’re still not seeing eye to eye on Spencer.”

“Oh.” Now Layla was the one being careful. “Uh, so World History first, right?”

“Yeah.” Asher smiled to himself. “But I have Bio afterwards, so I’ll see you at lunch, ok?”

“Sure.” She nodded and smiled tightly. There was an awkward moment as they both turned to the other, Layla hesitating as Asher frowned. Then he leaned forward, one arm wrapping loosely around her shoulders as she stepped into his reluctant embrace. They pulled apart almost immediately, Layla’s head bobbing in the vague direction of Asher’s face. “See you at lunch.”

Asher didn’t reply, moving away towards his locker at the other end of the hallway. She probably doesn’t suspect anything about Jordan, if anything, she might think me and JJ have something going on, we do have a lot in common. But then again, she clammed right up as soon as I brought up Spencer. He grabbed his books and greeted Butler, bumping fists with the reserve receiver and walking with him towards their first class.

The day passed in the slow torture of changing classes and different assignments, Asher greeting Jordan as normal, neither of them allowing any hint of their secret relationship to color their public friendship. Asher tapped his foot impatiently as the last ten minutes of the final class seemed to tick by at a much slower pace than any before it. School was a distraction for him, one he excelled in, but his father’s wishes for Asher to think about an MBA or law or even politics wasn’t going to go anywhere; football was where his heart was. Well, two hearts.

He glanced at Jordan when the QB looked his way, sharing a small grin, before looking back at his tablet, the calculations already finished. Asher sighed in obvious relief when the bell finally rang, and he could leave. He waited for Jordan outside the classroom, picking up JJ as they walked down the hallway towards the locker rooms and the football fields. The usual joking and banter faded away once Spencer joined them, tension replacing the joviality. Asher scowled at the back of the new guy’s head before he felt Jordan nudge him in the ribs. “Huh?”

“Spencer is still playing defense right now, that means you’ll be squaring off against him today.” Jordan replied quietly, letting the other two walk ahead. “My Dad will explain our tactics for Hawthorne after the session, so just, you know, make sure you look good.”

“I always look good!” Asher smirked as Jordan grinned at him.

“I’ll say.” The QB whispered and then jogged ahead catching up to JJ and Spencer.

The sun was shining down from the ever-azure skies above them as Asher passed Jordan on the line
and squared off against Spencer. He grinned at the other guy through his mouth guard, "Time for the Beverly Hills official welcome!"

“Bring it, dawg.” Spencer replied and lowered himself into a coiled crouch.

“Every team is only as strong as its weakest link!” Coach shouted out as he blew his whistle. “Hawthorne is a powerhouse, the only way we’re going to beat them is to know our limits!”

“Hike!” Jordan cried as the guards and tackles collided, the center funnelling the ball back to him. He danced away, looking for Asher and throwing the ball long, grinning when his boyfriend jumped up and caught it, turning in the air, ready to start running towards the end.

Crack!

“Argh!” Asher grunted as he was knocked to the ground by Spencer, the ball tumbling from his hands. He rolled over onto his back, a sick feeling in his stomach as the sound of his bones colliding with the hard surface echoed in his ears. “Aw, fuck, argh…” Asher grasped his leg, releasing the limb as soon as his fingers came in contact with his shin, agony arcing upwards. “Son of a bitch!”

“Ash!” Jordan sprinted over and slid onto the ground next to him. He reached down to press on Asher’s shoulders, stopping him from twisting and turning. “Fuck!” Jordan’s brows pulled together as he watched his boyfriend’s expression shift between pain and anger. “It’s ok.”

“The hell it is!” Asher growled, he rolled his head back onto the ground, looking up to see concern flickering in Jordan’s soulful eyes. He began to reach back to take Jordan’s other hand, but he dropped his arm as soon as Coach Baker and the other players arrived.

“Ok, ok, just stop moving.” One of the assistant coaches said as he looked worriedly at Coach Baker. “He needs the infirmary.”

“Alright, Jordan, Spencer, give us a hand.”

“I got it, Dad.” Jordan said, helping Asher to his feet. He wrapped an arm around the jock’s waist and Asher shifted his weight onto his uninjured leg. Coach Baker nodded, pointing back towards the locker room.

“Ok, keep running drills; Butler, take over as receiver, Dales, you’re on defense, Harvey, act as QB until we get back.” He barked orders as Jordan and Asher hobbled off the field. “Keep working, keep pushing! Iron sharp as iron!”

“Nearly there, Ash.” Jordan muttered to him as Spencer opened the door to the assistant coach’s office. “Here we are.”

“Thanks.” Asher grunted, his teeth ground together in an attempt to control the pain. He sat down on the desk as Coach Baker went to find the nurse. “Help me get my armor off?”

“Sure.” Jordan nodded, working quickly, aware that Spencer was watching them from the other office, glass walls not providing much privacy. He gestured for Asher to lift his arms and together they pulled off the jersey and shoulder pads, leaving him in a tight-fitting vest. Jordan swallowed hard as his eyes met Asher’s, any threat of arousal negated by the pain that he found there. “Lean back, I’ll grab your shorts for later, but better let the nurse take your cleats off, I don’t want to make things worse.”
“Thanks.”

“Now, Asher,” The nurse entered, offering him a small smile. “Coach Baker said you fell awkwardly?”

“That’s right; my shin, ankle, something popped pretty bad.” Asher accepted the offered ice pack from Jordan. “Thanks.”

“Ok, I’ll take a look.” The nurse glanced meaningfully at Jordan. “Mr Baker…”

“Oh, sorry. I’ll go get changed, bet my Dad will want to talk to me and Spencer.” Jordan nodded through the glass at the other office. “We’ll be in there.”

“Yeah.”

“Ok.” Jordan nodded again and backed reluctantly out of the office. He saw that Spencer had already shed his armor and was splashing his face with water. Jordan grimaced and walked over to his own locker, unstrapping his helmet.

“Hey, man, that was a good tackle.”

“I know,” Jordan replied, not looking at him. “Ash just landed awkwardly, it happens sometimes.”

“Your boy isn’t going to be happy though,” Spencer continued as Jordan tensed up. “He’s gonna see this as a personal attack, dude.”

“Don’t worry about Asher.”

“I’m not, I’m just sayin’.”

“Mmh.” Jordan pulled on some shorts over his jockstrap and finally turned to look at Spencer. “He’s hurt but it’s probably nothing too bad since he looks more angry than pained.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Spencer, Jordan.” Coach Baker called out to them. “My office please.”

“How’s Ash, Dad?” Jordan asked as soon as he entered the room, looking through the glass at the nurse bandaging Asher’s foot.

“A sprained ankle, thankfully.” His father sighed, rubbing his face. “It’ll be fine in a few days, but there’s no way he’ll be playing Hawthorne this week.”

“Yeah.” Jordan whispered regretfully, swallowing hard when Asher’s steel-melting gaze penetrated the room and locked onto Spencer. He could almost feel the inferno of rage coming from his boyfriend’s eyes. *Spencer was right, Ash is totally going to see this as a personal attack on him. I gotta talk to him, alone, gotta spend some time with him somehow.* “Um, we’ll have to rotate our receivers, I’ll go tell-”

“I can play both ways, Coach.” Spencer interrupted him. “Put me on offense as well as defense!”

“What?” Jordan turned to him sharply. “You take out Asher and now you think you can just take his position as well?!?”

“I can do it,” Spencer ignored him and appealed directly to Jordan’s father. “You need to put me in.”
“And what happens when you get gassed out there, Spence?” Jordan squared off against him, forcing the other guy to look at him. “Huh?”

“You don’t need to worry about that, you just need to worry about getting me the ball.”

Jordan shook his head derisively. *Arrogant son of a-

“Jordan, why don’t you give us a moment?” His father said, cutting across his thoughts. “Go on.”

“I’ll take Asher home, Dad,” Jordan huffed, irritated at another dismissal. “You don’t need me for the tactics meeting, and Ash isn’t gonna play, so…”

“Fine, just remember that we have the boosters’ function tonight, get home before five.”

“Yeah, I know.” He left the office and went next door, passing the nurse. “Hey, Ash, you ok?”

“Better now that you’re here,” Asher replied softly but he grimaced a moment later when he slid down from the desk, gingerly placing his weight on his injured foot. “The nurse is getting me some crutches, but he reckons that I’ll only need them for today and maybe tomorrow. I just can’t put too much pressure on it.”

“I’m sorry, Ash.”

“Not your fault.” Asher glared at Spencer in the next room before huffing and leaning back on the desk. “But I’m not playing against Hawthorne this week, huh?”

“No. My Dad and Spencer are arguing about whether Spence gets your position as well as being a defender.” Jordan said, seeing Asher’s frown deepen. “I don’t think he’ll get it though; my Dad is already worried about burnout.”

“Whatever, I still have to go to the booster thing this evening, I’ll call my father and get him to pick me up.”

“Um, I bring you home.” Jordan offered. “I’ll just get an Uber back to my place afterwards, let your Dad stay at work.”

“Like I’m gonna refuse that,” Asher grinned in spite of the pain. “Are you sure you can handle my Stingray?”

“I can handle anything you want me to, Ash.” He smirked suggestively as Asher’s brows arched in surprise. Before Jordan could continue, the nurse returned with the crutches. “I’ll grab your gear and meet you at the car, ok?”

“Yeah, I can manage this.”

Asher gestured at the tall steel gates with his phone, using an app to open the security barrier. “Keep going in but take the first right; we’ll go to the guesthouse.”

“You sure? Not the main house?”

“Yeah, I’ve been living out there pretty much since school started.” Asher replied evenly as he looked down at his bandaged foot. “Sure, it’s smaller, but I actually like it, plus it has some nice views over the hill towards the ocean. My Dad stays in the mansion, but whatever, it’s not like he’s here often enough. Turn right now.”
“Sweet place though, Ash, I haven’t been to your house since you moved, well, after the divorce.” Jordan replied, his words faltering. “Uh, sorry, I didn’t mean to mention your Mom…”

“Doesn’t matter.” He shrugged. “She’s the one who decided to leave.”

“Yeah…so, it’s been a while since we’ve had an Asher-party, any plans for one?”

“Hmm, I’m, argh, fuck!” Asher grimaced as his foot twitched and he threw his head back against the seat. “I need to take the painkillers the nurse gave me.”

“Ok, let me park and we’ll get inside.” Jordan said quickly, glancing at him in concern. “Are you sure it’s just a sprain?”

“A bad one, but yeah, it’ll be sore for a while,” Asher mumbled, fishing out the keys as Jordan turned off the engine. “I just want to go and lie down.”

“Ok.”

“Will you stay for a while?”

“You bet!” Jordan grinned at him, relief in his voice. “Feels like forever since we just got to spend some time together. You go ahead to your room and I’ll get you a glass of water for the pills.”

“Thanks,” Asher steadied himself on his crutches and walked to the entrance, unlocking the double doors with one hand. “My room’s at the end of the hall; straight down, I’ll leave the door open.”

“Got it.”

Asher left Jordan in the kitchen and swung himself past the glass dinning table and turned into the short hallway, giving a cursory glance into the other bedroom. He reached out and closed the door, hiding the mess, before finally reaching his room. “Ahh…” Asher sighed in relief as he sat on the edge of the bed, bright patterned duvet feeling soft and comforting under his hands. He reached over and flicked on the two lamps that were attached to the wall on either side of the bed.

“Here we are,” Jordan arrived a minute later with a glass of water. “I’ll leave it beside your bed.”

“Thanks, Jordan.” Asher replied, popping the half-full pill bottle open and shaking out two of them. “Give me a sec.”

“It’s cool,” Jordan shrugged, walking over to investigate the bookshelves. “Get anything new or interesting? You still interested in that Sci-Fi series, um…”

“Call of the Chimera: Guardian’s Wrath, yeah, got the latest one last week.” Asher grinned, pointing at the thick book on his bedside locker. “It’s really good, a lot of space combat in it though, I preferred the ones based in the cities, honestly, it’s cool to imagine all those places.”

“Hmm, they still have football in space?”

“Um, don’t think so, Jordan.” Asher rolled his eyes as the QB laughed quietly. He pushed himself back onto his bed, moving up towards the pillows. “Thanks for the water.”

“Of course, anything you need.” Jordan plumped the pillows and pushed Asher against them carefully. “Put your foot up and I’ll grab another pillow to support it.”

“Take the other one.” Asher gestured at the bed beside him and Jordan nodded, shedding his hoodie first. “Ahh, man, it still hurts.”
“Just take it easy, Ash, give the painkillers a minute to work.” Jordan climbed onto the bed, lying on his front, facing Asher, arms crossed under the last pillow to prop himself up. “You were looking good out there though, before Spencer hit you.”

“Haha, gotta improve my game after your Dad replaced me against Chatsworth.”

“A victory is a victory, Ash.” Jordan muttered, reaching over to rub his hand along his boyfriend’s arm. “And Hawthorne are totally different; they hit like trucks according to the games I’ve seen, but their offensive line is where we should be able to crack them; stop them from scoring.”

“Hmm, I’ll still be there to cheer you on even if I can’t play.” Asher smiled at him, a thrum of excitement washing down his chest towards his crotch as Jordan smirked back and casually flexed his bicep. “You know, this is the first time all week that we’ve been able to do this…and we actually have a bed this time!”

“Oh yeah?” Jordan wetted his lips, hungrily looking at Asher’s body. “What do you have in mind?”

“Uh, I was thinking maybe I could jerk you off or something, these painkillers aren’t worth shit and I’m not gonna be able to move very much.” Asher offered, seeing the QB nod. “I guess I could blow you if you straddled my waist or something.”

“Yeah, that’s not what I was thinking, Ash.”

“Oh.” He blinked, disappointed. “Well, maybe-oof!” Jordan had rocketed forward, crushing his lips against Asher’s, his hands reaching up to gently cradle his head and neck, pulling him deeper. Asher returned the passionate embrace and glided one hand down Jordan’s muscular arm towards his tensing biceps and triceps. He spread his fingers and tried to grip the muscle in one motion, the inability to do so somehow being more erotic. *So big and strong!*

“Mmh,” Jordan moaned into his mouth, grinding against the duvet. He pulled back, lips tingling. “Too many clothes.”

“Yeah, I was gonna say.” Asher smirked, watching Jordan get up on his knees to peel his t-shirt off, dropping to his stomach again in order to shed his shorts.

“Do you need a hand?”

“Nah, I’m good.” He shook his head, sitting upright to take his vest off, bunched abs coming into view as he did so. Asher wetted his lips as his eyes locked onto the shapely bulge in Jordan’s jockstrap, the shaft clearly visible as it pushed the white fabric to the left. He glanced up at Jordan’s face, seeing the QB nod towards Asher’s own trousers. “Yeah, I’ll just push them down if you can pull them off?”

“Yep!” Jordan’s voice was excited, and Asher felt himself smile again. “Done.”

“Thanks, I hate feeling helpless.”

“It’s just for one day, dude, plus you’re the one who’s always doing things for me.”

“What do you mean?” Asher frowned. “Pretty sure I’ve never had to pull your pants down.”

“Yeah, but you’re always the one who sucks me off.” Jordan said, returning to his previous position on the bed, still lying on his front.

“Huh, sounds like maybe you want to change that?” Asher asked as his eyes swept down Jordan’s
broad back and onto his hard ass cheeks laid bare by the jockstrap. “I mean, if that’s what you’re saying, it’s ok if-
"
“Ash,” Jordan interrupted him gently. “I know things have kinda changed between us, but no matter what we’re still friends. So, I don’t want you to feel like you have to keep your feelings hidden from me; you do that with everyone else the rest of the time. You have to have someone you can be yourself around, let me be that person.”

“Thanks, Jordan, that’s really…sweet.” Asher flushed and then cleared his throat. “So, you wanna blow me?”

“Haha, yeah, I do.” He shrugged at the abrupt topic change. “It’ll be the first time I’ve done it though, so maybe don’t expect too much.”

“You’ll be awesome, don’t sweat it.” Asher reassured him. “Don’t overthink it either, just let it happen naturally, ok?”

"That’s it, Jordan, don’t take too much all at once." Asher guided the QB’s head up and down along his shaft, Jordan's tongue doing most of the work as he kissed and sucked on Asher's long dick. "Oh, fuck, you are good at this!"

"I've been paying attention when you do it!" Jordan stopped licking him for a moment to grin up at Asher's face. He continued to slowly jerk his boyfriend off too, long slow strokes that never quite made it to Asher's exposed head, precum gathering across the top and dripping onto his naval and abs. "I'll keep going."

"Not gonna complain!" Asher groaned and leaned back, this time allowing Jordan to take over fully, his head resting comfortably on the pillows. "Aw, yeah!"

Jordan climbed in between Asher's opening legs, lying more on his uninjured one to get a better angle for his cock. He continued to jerk his boyfriend off slowly and determinedly, lowering his face towards Asher's dick before diverting off to the side to kiss at the smooth skin between his thigh and his crotch. One hand left Asher's cock and instead glided upwards to find a hardened nipple, playing with the sensitive bud until Asher's moans were nearly constant. "Going for it now, Ash."

He licked his lips and let salvia gather in his mouth as he prepared to engulf his boyfriend's hard cock. Jordan drew in a breath and slipped his mouth over Asher's cock, catching him by surprise judging from the sudden bucking that pushed the dick all the way towards the back of Jordan's throat. "Gah!" He gagged, pulling off quickly, before recovering just as fast and once again, eased Asher's cock inside his mouth, tongue gliding under the head and first inch.

"Mmh, that's good, Jordan! Just breathe through your nose.” Asher whispered, his hand resting on Jordan's forearm, letting the QB control the pace of the blow job. "Aww, yeah."

Jordan's head bobbed up and down, savoring the new experience as he jerked Asher off at the same time. The taste of his precum wasn't what he had expected but his raging arousal cancelled out any objection to swallowing it. Jordan concentrated his efforts on the head of Asher's cock, turning more on his side to jerk himself off in time to the blowjob. "Mmmh!” He moaned around the thickness against his tongue, the sounds of Asher's panting and groaning above him were somehow even hotter than when their places were reversed, and Jordan was the one getting blown. I think I get why Asher likes this so much! Feels so good!
"Ahh! Ahh! Ahh! Pull off, Jordan!" Asher called out suddenly, reaching down to push him backwards. Jordan stopped sucking him, Asher’s cock leaving his mouth with a wet slurp. "I’m gonna cum!"

"Let me help you." Jordan grinned at him and jerked Asher off with his free hand, his left still wrapped around his own dick, pounding away. "Aw, yeah, I reckon we’re gonna cum together!"

"Ah, fuck! Yeah, Jordan!" Asher cried out, arching his back as he began to shoot. "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" Cum shot out in a high-powered arc, splattering across his chest and dripping down over his abs.

"Oh, man!" Jordan groaned, feeling himself cum as soon as he caught Asher’s expression, his cock spasming in his grip, jets of cream spurting out and covering his hand. He continued to jerk off slowly, using his cum as a way to maximise his pleasure. “Aw, yeah, Ash, that was good!”

“Hell yeah, it was!”

“I need to take a shower before getting changed,” Asher said as Jordan came back from cleaning himself up. “Can you open my wardrobe and pull out my suit? The gray one?”

“You’re still going to the event?” Jordan arched his brows. “But you’re injured.”

“Yeah, but I gotta go, my father will expect it. All his booster buddies will be there.” Asher sat up, swinging his legs out towards the floor. He looked at Jordan and smirked as his eyes dragged down the jock’s still-naked body, the pearly gleam of fresh cum still lingering on his cock and naval. “You look like you could do with a shower too. Plus, I could do with a steadying hand.”

“Uh huh?” Jordan grinned, arms folded as his cock started to harden again. “What about your foot? You shouldn’t get that bandage wet.”

“I’ll wrap a plastic bag around it, but it still aches a lot.” Asher grimaced as he tried to stand, succeeding after a moment. He reached out and grabbed a nearby crutch, using it to steady himself. “Standing on one foot on wet tiles is no fun.”

“Sounds like a recipe to get yourself hurt even more.” Jordan agreed and walked back into the bathroom attached to Asher’s room. He opened the shower doors and hit the lever for the water, glancing over his shoulder as Asher fetched a small plastic bag from the medical cabinet. “C’mer, stand there and I’ll put it on for you. Do you have any elastic bands? I can use those instead of tape.”

“Uh, yeah, check my desk.” Asher waited for him to return, steam coiling out of the shower and into the bathroom. “Thanks, Jordan.”

“Ok, I’ll get in first.” The QB stepped inside, water splashing over his smooth chest and dripping down his body in endless streams. He gestured for Asher to come in, the other guy leaving his crutch next to the wall and grasping Jordan’s forearms for support. There was an ungainly wobble as Asher almost lost his balance before Jordan was able to keep them level, pulling his boyfriend close. “Gotcha.”

Water cascaded over them both, flattening Asher’s normally spiked up hair and washing away evidence of their recent pleasure. He smiled at Jordan and tilted his face towards the shower head, enjoying the heat and steam on his skin. Jordan was moving around him to stand behind Asher, his hands still supporting the jock by lingering at his waist, exposing more of Asher’s body to the high-pressure torrent. There was a distinctive pattering sound as Asher’s covered ankle was hit by the
water, the bandages kept safe by the plastic bag.

Asher leaned back into Jordan’s chest, smirking again when he felt the familiar sensation of the QB’s hard cock lining up against his ass cheeks. “You know, you’re gonna have to be really careful if you’re planning on fucking me, you sure you can maintain your balance?”

“I could pick you up, you bounce on my dick and use my shoulders for support.”

“Mmh, maybe.” Asher chewed his lip. “I don’t know if you’re strong enough to support me though, it’s not like I’m the kicker; Dylan is such a fucking twink!”

“Uh, you’ll have to tell me what a twink is again.” Jordan coughed as Asher chuckled. “Well, do you want to do this or not? I have no idea when we’re gonna get the chance to hook up properly again.”

“Hey, I said it would be tricky, not that I didn’t want to do it.” Asher sighed and awkwardly turned towards him. “Ok, uh, get out and go to the medicine cabinet above the sink; there’s condoms and silicone lube inside.”

“What sort of lube?”

“We’ve used it before, it’s just better designed for, uh, long sessions or ones that take place in the water.”

“Oh yeah?” Jordan grinned at him. “Guess I’m gonna have to try that out if we ever get around to some pool sex!”

“I think you’ve been watching too much porn, dude, pretty sure that it’s a lot less fun than it looks!” Asher smirked and accepted the tube of lube from Jordan. The other guy didn’t need to get himself aroused, his cock was already fully hard, sticking up at an angle from his silky smooth crotch. Asher bent over as much as he could while supporting himself with one hand and used the other one to smear a generous helping of the lube into his asshole. “Ahh, yeah, I was hoping to get you inside me today, just didn’t plan on having to hop while I get fucked!”

“Haha, let me worry about that, Ash.” Jordan said, finishing rolling the condom down to the end of his thick shaft. “Ok, I’ll go in from back here and we’ll see how that works out, if we need to switch it up or whatever.” He waited for Asher to agree and then stood behind his boyfriend, grasping his cock in one hand and using the other to spread Asher’s ass cheeks enough to see the slick gleam of lube against the smooth pink hole. “Phew, I’ve missed this view!”

“Quit teasing me, Jordan!” Asher hissed, rocking back into him. “We’ve got maybe half an hour before my father gets home and you need to leave!”

“Oh, shit, ok.” The QB slid his cock head forward, pausing as Asher grunted at the first penetration. He started moving again when Asher nodded, pushing his cock fully into the tight hole. “Ahh, fuck! God, you’re so tight!”

“And you’re so big!” Asher moaned. “Perfect fit!”

“Hang on, don’t move.” Jordan muttered as he adjusted his grip, slipping one arm around Asher’s stomach to keep him from falling over. The other hand reached down to grip Asher’s hard cock and Jordan slowly jerked him off. “Use your hands to prop yourself up on the wall, let me take care of everything else!”

“You’re the QB!”
“Haha, we’ve never really played up the football fetish before,” Jordan said as he began to move in and out of Asher’s ass in long, even motions, his own ass clenching at each withdrawal, allowing more force on each push back inside the tight, warm tunnel. “But if you want, we could always fuck in just our armor next time?!”

“That’s a legit fetish, you know.” Asher grunted, his breaths coming hard as Jordan started to speed up. “I’ve seen videos! But yeah, actually, that would be pretty hot! Though it might make training a lot more awkward afterwards.”

“Heh, maybe…ah, yeah!” Jordan’s words fell into loud moans as he and Asher started moving against each other with faster and harder motions. The sound of his balls slapping against Asher’s water-slick butt carried over the hiss of the shower and Jordan could feel his boyfriend trembling against his arm. “You ok, Ash? You want to stop?”

“Keep going!” Asher panted, groaning between each word. “Maybe just speed up, I feel kinda lightheaded right now.” He clenched hard around Jordan’s cock as the QB pulled out and plunged back in. “Aw, yeah! C’mon, Jordan, faster, man, faster!”

“Ok, ok. I won’t last another five minutes!” Jordan moaned, slamming his dick in and out with wild abandon, his hand a blur as he stroked Asher off at the same time. He groaned louder than before, reaching the apex of his pace when Asher grunted and began to whisper his name over and over, rocking his ass back into Jordan’s cock, impaling himself on the hard dick over and over again. Jordan adjusted his grip around Asher’s middle to tease his hardened nipples, the motion seeming to send Asher over the edge. “Ahh, fuck yeah!"

"Oh, Jordan, I'm cumming! I'm cumming!" He shot his load hard and fast, splashing into the spray of water, only a few drops lingering on Jordan's slowing hand. As he came, Asher clenched his ass hard, feeling his boyfriend suddenly stop.

"I'm there, Ash!" Jordan cried out, moving again, this time his hips doing the work. He gave a few final thrusts into Asher's ass before pulling out and desperately tugging the condom off. Jordan jerked off frantically, erupting a moment later, cum splattering onto Asher's smooth, pale ass. "Fuck yeah, Asher!"

He let the water wash away the traces of cum from both of them before Jordan helped Asher turn around, the other jock leaning in to kiss him, one hand grasping his neck for support. “That was pretty awesome!”

“Haha, yeah, and just in time too, I reckon.” Jordan smirked as he hit the lever for the shower. “Dry off and rest up for this evening, I’ll grab that Uber and see you at the boosters, ok?”

“Got it.” Asher grinned and let him leave the shower first.

Asher sat on the couch, looking out at the ocean as the sun sank ever closer to the horizon. He was dressed in his gray suit, white linen shirt unbuttoned at the collar, and smart brown loafers left on the coffee table next to his crutches. Asher sighed to himself as his eyes pulled away from the view and travelled across the sideboard, lingering on the fresh vodka bottle that had been added the night before. He clicked his tongue and started to get up, but before he could stand, the front door opened and his father came barrelling through, moving quickly. “Oh.”

“I know, I know, the boosters!” The man called out, dropping his briefcase and keys on the countertop. “The traffic downtown was terrible, even the four-oh-five was crazy after the airport. Oh,
“Yeah.” Asher gestured at the crutches and his foot as his father abruptly cut himself off. “Injury during training today.”

“What happened?”

“The new guy, Spencer James, hit me hard.”

“Son of a bitch!” His father growled, stalking over to stand at the window. “I thought he was meant to be a receiver not on defense.”

“Would you rather he take my position?” Asher fired back.

“Looks like he might have already done that.” The man whirled around, glaring at Asher. “Can you stand? Do you actually need those crutches? We can’t let the boosters see that you’re crippled. It won’t look good.”

“Your concern touches me, Dad.” Asher replied acidly. But he reached out and grabbed the pair of socks that lay across his shoes. “Get me some ice and I’ll put on my shoes when we get out of the car.”

“Right.” His father seemed to ignore the barb and moved back to the kitchen, pulling out a towel and a measuring cup for the ice. “This is the boy from Crenshaw, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh, we don’t need him to win, it’s that damn coach of yours that’s the problem.” He scooped out the ice as Asher slipped his uninjured foot into his loafer. “Have you tried getting rid of him? Spencer, I mean?”

“Of course,” Asher grabbed his crutches and used them to stand up. “You were out of town last weekend, but me and Jordan got Spencer drunk before Saturday scrimmage in front of a few of the other boosters.”

“Well, that didn’t work.”

“No shit.” Asher grunted, swinging over to him, catching his father’s glare. “He was here on some bullshit ‘academic permit’ but even when Jordan tipped off the Chatsworth QB about it, it only made things worse and now the guy is living with Coach Baker!”

“Huh, didn’t think Jordan had it in him.” His father sounded vaguely impressed. “Alright, I’ll see what I can dig up from the rest of them tonight, shake some trees, this guy’s from South Crenshaw, we don’t need that type of gangland thug in our school. Here’s the ice.”

“Got it.” Asher picked up his own keys and nodded at the door. “Let’s go.”

“We’re taking the Stingray,” The man looked pointedly at the keys in his hand. “Leave your crutches here and let—”

“I can still drive.” Asher cut across him aggressively and dropped his crutches by the door. Like I’m gonna let you get your hands on my car. “Let’s go, Dad.”

Jordan pulled on his suit jacket, trying to avoid answering his sister’s questions as Olivia followed
him downstairs. “Uh, I just had to drive him home, that’s why I got an Uber.”

“I figured that much, it’s why I drove your car back here.” She frowned at him as Jordan side-eyed her guiltily. “But it doesn’t take hours to drive back from Asher’s, did you go somewhere else?”

“No, we just played some games, I lost track of time.”

“Mmh, but-”

Jordan was saved further questions when Spencer strolled over to them in the same clothes as he had worn that afternoon. Coach Baker was fixing his tie in the mirror as Jordan’s Mom fussed around him, brushing lint from his shoulders. “Ah, Spencer, why aren’t you dressed? C’mon, we gotta go.”

“I am dressed.”

“Oh, well, uh, just put on a blazer and snazz that outfit up.”

“I don’t have a blazer here.” Spencer replied slowly.

“Well, we can swing by your house and get it there.” Jordan’s Mom smiled at him.

“No…you don’t understand, I don’t have a blazer there either.”

Oh. Jordan exchanged a quick look with Olivia and then the two of them avoided looking at Spencer, the air growing increasingly awkward as the other guy stared at the ground, his disposition pathetic.

“You know what?” Mrs Baker said dismissively. “I think you look just fine, and the boosters can go to hell, you don’t need a blazer!”

“Yeah, yeah, ok.” Coach Baker agreed as Jordan caught his eye and raised a brow.

“Nah, dude, it’s-”

“I’ll take care of it.” Olivia broke in, gesturing for them to leave. “You guys go ahead, and we’ll meet you there, ok?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a plan.” Jordan said quickly, giving his sister a supportive grin. “Later.”

Asher casted his eyes around the gilt-encrusted walls of the long, multi-storied space, two doors behind him leading out to a covered terrace and shrubbery, while the interior was richly decorated in a style that reminded him more of the Imperial Palace in the fantasy series he was reading rather than an upmarket atrium in the center of Beverly Hills. Even the gold leaf has gold leaf!

“Did you hear me, Asher?” His father asked, pulling Asher’s focus back to him. “I said that I finally have some solid leads; the meeting this afternoon proved that my stock hasn’t turned completely foul in this town.”

“Yeah, I heard you.” He nodded, pretending to listen as his father continued to drone on. Asher wetted his lips absently when he noticed that his father was illustrating each point with a half-full glass of scotch, but not actually drinking it. Fuck, I’d kill for a drink right now…though probably not a good idea with these painkillers. “Well, I’m sure you’re doing your best.”

“I…hmm.” The man stared at him as though Asher was mocking him, but something grabbed his
attention by the entrance on the upper level and he gestured with his glass again. "Is that him? The boy that took you out?"

Asher turned and looked, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. *Gee, I wonder? Spencer is the only guy who looks so out of place here he couldn’t even pass as a waiter. Yeah, Dad, that’s him."

“Huh, ok, well, think about what I said to you in the car, Asher, we gotta jump on your uncle’s offer about Yale this weekend.” His father returned to his favorite topic and finally took a long drag of his drink. “I know football is what you like now, but you really need to start thinking about the future and consider following in my footsteps and getting…”

Asher zoned his father out again, this time pivoting carefully to survey the room. A smile touched his lips when he saw the sudden awkwardness spark between Olivia and Layla, Spencer standing in between them, the guy’s eyes drinking in Layla’s form. Olivia’s face became cold and distant and Asher frowned slightly, making the connection between her and Spencer.

Well, well, interesting. But damn, Spencer, can’t you read a situation? Just staring at Layla so openly. Not as if she’s dissuading him though. "Yeah, sure, Dad, I’ll go talk to the boosters."

He was finally able to step away, moving slowly and painfully once he was out of his father’s field of view. Asher leaned against a pillar, grunting as pain flared up and down his ankle. He snagged a glass of tonic water from a passing waiter and took the pill bottle from his jacket pocket, popping another two tabs to try and reduce his suffering. Asher stayed where he was, able to make himself appear less conspicuous as he watched the currents of the conversations flow around the room, talking to the boosters only when they approached him.

Asher’s eyes were on the look out for Jordan, trying to spot the signal they always gave each other at these events so they could sneak off at an opportune time. Even after twice this afternoon, he still felt the tingle start in his balls at the thought of hooking up with the QB again, although he wouldn’t mind just talking to Jordan this time. However, try as he might, Asher didn’t see the signal and he was left to observe the movements of the boosters and his peers.

He watched as the Coach received unwelcome advice, laughing the suggestions off in a friendly manner. Asher saw the way Layla was brazenly flirting with Spencer despite knowing that her supposed boyfriend was in the room too. He frowned when he spotted his father try and gain a measure on Spencer and managed to make everything a little bit more racist, as if the man was capable of any less. Asher rolled his head back against the pillar, his foot now dulled into an aching pulse of damaged nerves and swollen muscle. He felt the world spin unpleasantly and once again the urge to grab something stronger than tonic water washed over him. “Some fresh air might help.”

Asher stood up and walked towards the terrace at the back of the room, stopping when he saw Spencer and Layla heading in the same direction. *Oh, shit! Wait, they haven’t spotted me.* He glanced around and moved quickly to sit on one of the couches next to the open doors, close enough that he would be able to hear their conversation without either of them realizing. Asher was even able to twist up and look through the foliage acting as a sound barrier, spying directly on the duo.

"So what's your story anyway?" Spencer said, turning to Layla. "You and Olivia, what's that about?"

*Ahh, so he picks up on some things, though maybe not in the moment. Asher thought to himself as he continued to listen in, seeing Layla smile disarmingly at him in response.*

"Ok, last time I asked you to size me up, you cut straight to my 'lonely rich girl' core, so-"
"Oh yeah? That was my bad, I didn't want to make you feel like that." Spencer returned her smile.

"No, I mean, you're right, my Dad travels a lot for work; New York, Paris."

"Well, at least you know where he is." Spencer looked back towards the room and Asher slunk down in his seat, making himself less obvious in case the guy spotted him. "My Dad left a few years ago, I ain't seen him since."

"Why did he leave?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Said he had some big new job somewhere, I guess we just weren't part of the plan."

"Um, my Dad's always about the big plan." Olivia answered, looking at Spencer as Asher inched back up, still hidden by the hedge. "Producer career, wife he was madly in love with." She smiled sadly. "I think they only had one kid because they only had so much love left to give. And then...two years ago, we were all on vacation on Aspen-"

"Ahh, the boojee life!" Spencer cut in as Asher groaned to himself.

Scratch that, Spencer can't read any situation! Cracking jokes is not the angle you want to work here, dude.

"Ah." Layla paused, visibly taken aback before she rallied and continued with her story. But Asher had heard enough, he knew what had happened to Layla's Mom, and the devastation that her death had caused.

You better offer some measure of comfort, Spencer if you're going to get anywhere with her. Asher looked back through the privet when Layla stopped speaking, nodding to himself as Spencer moved in for the kiss, but he grimaced when Layla stepped back.

Damn it! Can I catch a break here? You two hook up, Layla dumps me publicly and I don't have to answer questions about why I'm giving her up. All problems solved! She's just too damn loyal...

Asher watched Layla walk away from Spencer, returning to the main room. He sat properly on the couch, but she didn’t notice him even as he continued tracking her through the crowd. Asher shook his head, realizing that he was actually cheering for Spencer and Layla to get together.

Huh, so I can lose football and free myself from a doomed relationship? Or engineer Spencer’s removal and stay trapped with someone I’m just using as cover? Hardly much of a choice.

He sipped his tonic water, letting the nearby boosters’ conversations slip over his ears, the noise strangely comforting. I’m pretty sure she knows too, that’s why she’s stopped even asking about sex. I mean, I managed to swing that excuse all through the off-season so it’s either she suspects the truth or else thinks that I’m some sort of covert religious loon. Well, she has met Uncle Ray, the man isn’t exactly the beacon of enlightenment. Asher shrugged to himself. She’s getting something too though, everyone-except Spencer-respects the fact that she’s “my” girl, so no one hits on her and Layla can do whatever she wants...

“Huh?” Asher struggled to his feet when he saw his father approach Coach Baker and he walked gingerly over to Butler, nodding a greeting. He was close enough to overhear his father offer to buy Coach a drink, symbolic given the free bar, but the words carried enough of an edge to make Asher nervous.

“Asher’s the best wide receiver you got, and you let that South Crenshaw thug rough him up during practice?!” Asher’s father barked at Coach, his voice resonant.
“Woah, careful now, Harold.” Coach Baker raised his hands in a calming manner. “Ok, thanks for the drink.” He turned to walk away, pausing as the man continued to speak.

“When they hired you, I had high hopes. Sure, your pro-career was a bust, but hey, that’s the game.”

“Ah, fuck.” Asher grunted as his ankle flared in pain and he began to hobble over to the two men.

“Ash.” Jordan’s hand found his arm, trying to stop him. “It’s ok.”

“Yeah, don’t think so.” Asher pulled away and kept moving towards the bar.

“After two losing seasons and another one on the way, I guess you’re just getting comfortable losing!” Harold Adams growled, gesturing vaguely at Coach Baker with his recently refilled glass.

“Ah, ok, that’s enough, Dad.” Asher broke in, hand outstretched towards his father as he turned apologetically to Coach Baker. “Coach, I’m, I’m sorry.”

“Why should you be sorry?!” His father snapped. “He’s the reason you got hurt, him and his son!”

“Dad…” Asher muttered, hearing the whispers and murmurs from those around him, his jaw tightening when Jordan's name was dragged into it. “Don’t-”

“What are you talking about?” Coach Baker looked at him sharply.

“I’m talking about how Jordan was behind that contested permit. And now your Crenshaw player is bringing his anger about the situation onto our field and injuring my son!”

“Fuck!” Asher hissed, looking over his shoulder as Jordan glared at him. “Dad, will you-”

“Hey!” Asher’s father put his hands on his shoulder as Jordan glared at him. “Dad, will you-”

“He serious?” Spencer asked Jordan as the QB hung his head and tried to avoid the judgemental stares. “You’re the reason I can’t go home at night?”

“Face it, Coach!” Harold Adams kept going as Coach Baker shook his head in disappointment, looking from Jordan to Spencer. “That boy doesn’t belong here! And neither do you.”

“No! Leave it, Dad!” Asher shoved his father backwards, ignoring the pain in his ankle as Jordan looked at him and then at his own father who was restraining Spencer. The QB left quickly, lost in the crowd as Asher turned away for a moment to try and calm everyone down. “Let’s just go, you’ve made your damn point.”

“Fine, fine,” Harold shook himself free and glared at Coach Baker’s retreating back. “He just made my case for me; that boy, that thug, has way too many anger issues to be on our team!”

“Just leave it.” Asher hissed, grabbing the glass of scotch from his father’s hand. He placed it on the counter and gestured for them to leave. “C’mon.”

“Fine.”

Asher marched the man out to the valet, tapping his uninjured foot impatiently until his car was brought around. He tried to ignore his father’s excuses and raging as they drove home, thoughts
filtering back to his boyfriend and the inevitable fallout that was heading his way. *Sorry, Jordan, I didn’t think it would go down like this.*

“Why? Why, Jordan?” His father glared at him as Olivia and his Mom stayed silent at the other sides of the butcher’s block in the center of the kitchen. “Why did you do it? I just don’t understand.”

*You couldn’t.* Jordan thought to himself as he sat on the stool opposite the Coach. He chewed his lower lip, weighing each possible answer before he said anything. *Spencer is taking everything from me and you’re only encouraging him! He took Asher’s place and I need to protect him, he’s my damn boyfriend! Hah, yeah, like I could actually say that to you, Dad. No way, that would mean that the…other thing might also be true and…just, no, not gonna happen.*

“Well? I’m waiting, Jordan.”

Jordan shook his head and looked at the shiny marble surface of the counter. “We had just won the game against Chatsworth and I scored the winning touchdown, *me.* Feeling like I was on top of the world, feeling like I had finally made you proud.” Jordan half smiled at the memory before his expression darkened. “But I turned around, and there you were, patting *his* back, calling *him* ‘son’, and I…I just reacted.”

“Well, w- if you felt that way you should have come to me.” Coach shrugged. “Why didn’t you come to me?”

“Really?” Jordan fired back. “Because you moved him into this house without asking any of us!”

“Without asking-” Coach stared at him, expression turning from surprise to confusion. He glanced at his wife and saw the look of agreement, before turning back to his son. “That may be the case, but I’m still disappointed in you, Jordan.”

“What’s new, Dad?” He smirked and shrugged expectantly, but the expression on his father’s face said that the words cut too deep.

“Jordan.” His Mom whispered.

“No, no, it’s fine,” Jordan stood up, shrugging again. “I’m always disappointing him, right?”

“No, that is not true.” His father said, moving towards him.

“It is and you know it!” Jordan glared at him and shook his head. “What is it that you said? Huh, that’s right. There’s no one on this team with even half of Spencer’s potential, right?” He snarled the words and stalked away.

“Hey! Jordan!” Coach called out as his son climbed the stairs. “Jordan!”

Jordan slammed his door with a bang and turned the key with a savage twist. He felt all-powerful after the fight, but also fragile as a vase, charged up, but as though he just leapt off a cliff into the abyss. “Fuck…” Jordan pulled out his phone and dialled Asher, relief surging through him when his boyfriend answered almost immediately. “Hey, it’s me.”

“Hey, Jordan.”

“Um.”
“Look, I’m sorry about my Dad, he has such a loud mouth when he’s drunk and there was a free bar and-”

“Did you tell him about the contested permit?” Jordan spoke across him as he heard Asher take a quick breath. “Why did you do that?”

“He wanted to know if we had tried to get Spencer out and I just, I forgot it was him.” Asher sighed. “I’m really sorry, Jordan. Did your Dad chew you out?”

“Mmh, kinda, I think it was more mutual nuking.” Jordan replied. “I said some things, he offered the usual deflection, I don’t know, Ash, things are just gonna be strained for a while.”

“Maybe telling him how you feel will make things better?” His boyfriend offered, voice thoughtful. “Hiding your emotions is a lot of weight to carry.”

“Yeah, I know.” He whispered softly. “Um, but it’s late and I should probably go to bed, we have the game tomorrow after all.”

“Ok. Um,” Asher hesitated, and Jordan frowned. “Goodnight, man.”

“Night, Ash.” He lowered the phone and sighed. What did you expect him to say? Stupid.

Friendship and lust is all we have, there’s nothing else there. Jordan put the phone down and undid his tie fully, turning towards his wardrobe.

Asher stuck his hands in his pockets to ward off the night chill as he stood on the side-lines, watching Jordan set up the offensive line. He had been able to move about with a limp, though the crutches were no longer needed, and he still felt a part of the team, despite only wearing his jersey over hoodie and jeans. JJ was waiting next to him, as part of the defensive team, he and Asher almost never got to spend game time together. “C’mon, Jordan.” Asher whispered as the play began.

JJ jostled against him excitedly as the replacement receiver managed to catch Jordan’s throw. “Alright, Butler!”

“He’s almost there…” Asher nodded, watching the player move through Hawthorne’s defensive line. “Yeah! That’s what I’m talking about!” They all cheered when Butler dived across the line into the endzone.

“Yeah, we’re doing ok, but look at their offense.” JJ said to him, getting ready to switch out. “Those guys are beasts, QB has hot hands, and their receiver is so fast.”

“You’ll smash ‘em!” Asher knocked on JJ’s helmet encouragingly, sending him onto the field as Jordan walked back to stand nearby. Their gazes brushed against each other for a moment before both of them turned back to the game. “Alright, he is fast, but Spencer seems to have his number.” Asher admitted grudgingly as the guy blocked the other receiver from running with the ball.

They switched up again and Asher sighed to himself when Coach pulled Butler in favor of sending Spencer out with the offensive line, choosing to play him in both positions. “Does he even know our plays?”

“Relax, Ash.” JJ glanced at him, “Jordan has a great throwing arm, Spencer just needs to be in the right place.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.” He muttered, fears coming through a moment later when Spencer
was way out of position for Jordan’s throw. “Oh! Come on!” Asher joined with the rest of the team in voicing their disapproval. “What the hell was that?!”

“Ahh, reset, Ash, gotta go!”

“Yup.” Asher watched JJ head back out and looked at Jordan as he slowed to a stop next to him. “Great throw.”

“Yeah, and you would’ve caught it and we wouldn’t be behind.” Jordan growled. “Next time.”

“Yup.”

“Your Dad here? Bet that play made him go ape shit!”

“Haha, it would have,” Asher laughed ruefully. “But he’s not here. Said that since I was stuck on the side-lines, there wasn’t a point in going even though this is the first time he’s been in town on match night. Not that I’m angry about it or anything.”

“Oh yeah, I can see that.” Jordan shared his smile until another collective groan from the Eagles’ crowd made him look up.

“Field goal.”

“Fuck, we’re trailing ten-seven.”

“Recoverable though.” Asher touched his arm quickly. “Spencer just needs to get his head in the game.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll remind him.” Jordan muttered. “Let’s go, Eagles!”

“Hey Dad, I think he’s injured.” Jordan pointed at Spencer holding his ribs as he limped by.

“No, no, he’s just winded.” Coach Baker dismissed his concerns with a wave. “Go find your receivers, have Butler warmed up again in case Yeats can’t support you and Spencer.”

“Fine.” Jordan grumbled, moving along the side-line. “At least they both know the playbook.” He passed Asher, seeing his boyfriend nodding supportively, a shrug of his shoulders to signal his own resignation. *We’re not down yet, we can still win.*

The game moved on, Yeats somehow pulling out a sweet catch that pushed them into a three point lead at the final Quarter. There were forty-five seconds left on the clock and Jordan walked out to gather his offensive line around him. “Ok, here we go. Strong left, twenty-six stretch, twenty-six stretch, got it? On one, on one.” He glanced at Spencer, swallowing his discomfort at the receiver’s expression of confusion. *C’mon, man, it’s the simplest play in the damn book!* “Break!”

Jordan crouched behind the center and waited until he saw everyone in their positions. “Hike!” The ball was funnelled back into his ready hands and the QB danced backwards, eyes searching for Spencer. But he wasn’t where he was meant to be and Jordan got tackled high, just managing to spot the receiver at the last minute. Jordan threw desperately, crashing onto the ground and twisting over to see Spencer fumble the ball. “No!” The nearest Hawthorne player grabbed the ball and ran straight into the endzone.

“Touchdown!” The announcer shouted out.
“Oh come on!” Asher threw up his hands on the side-lines, glaring at Spencer as the supposed super-star managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

“There’s four seconds left, one last play.” JJ offered when he returned from the defensive reset. “Maybe they can do it?”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.” Asher grunted, turning towards Coach as he heard him swap Spencer with Butler, the other receiver blinking in surprise. “Uh oh, I think Butler switched off after the first half.”

“Huh? Oh yeah, he’s not looking so hot.”

Mmh, not sure about that, JJ; Butler is kinda cute, nice arms, innocent look. Asher thought to himself as Jordan reformed their offensive line. He chewed his lip anxiously, watching Jordan get the ball and throw it long and high. But it was too fast, and Butler just didn’t have the speed to get to the ball in time. “Damn.”

“Yeah.” JJ sighed and sagged, no longer his happy-go-lucky-self. “We’ve lost.”

Asher turned away from him, limping towards the exit as Jordan walked past him and Spencer stayed standing, looking out at the field. He spared a glance for the other guy and smirked smugly at Spencer’s disappointed expression. Yeah, you’re not all that you think you are.

“I’ll be glad when you’re back with us, Asher.” Jordan said, falling into step with him after he had spoken to his father.

“Me too.” Asher clapped him on the back in commiseration, his hand sliding down the captain’s arm for a moment longer than was safe; warm, bulging muscle and a sweet scent of mingled aftershave, deodorant, and sweat filled Asher's lungs as he breathed deep. “You did your best, Jordan, that’s all we can do.”

Asher glanced over as the door to his Stingray opened and Olivia sat inside. “Glad you came, wasn’t sure if you knew where I was parked.”

“Asher,” She looked at him sternly. “Bright orange is literally the least incognito shade ever, you might as well have put up a sign that said, ‘Conspiratorial meeting right here!’”

“Oh? Are we plotting something now?” He offered her a smile, but Olivia just sighed and closed her door. “Mmh.”

“So, um, when I was over at your place last week, I noticed that you weren’t exactly into the small talk.” Asher wetted his lips. “And we haven’t spoken since you got back from rehab, so I thought maybe you had said something about…”


“Yeah.” Asher hesitated, choosing his words carefully. “Football is important to Jordan, to me, I just want to make sure that you and I are on the same page.”

“There is no you and I.” Olivia glared at him, shaking her head. “I know what I saw, and what I saw forced me to walk away from my best friend because of it.”
“Ok, but-”

“I lost Layla because I chose to keep my brother’s secret as much as yours, Asher. I didn’t want to lie to her so I had to be the bad guy, and now I get to live with that feeling.” She replied forcefully. “Neither of you asked me to, I know, but I care about Jordan too much to see him get hurt because you’re too afraid to come out.”

“Yeah.” Asher whispered softly, casting his mind back to that night. It had been a crazy party, he and Jordan both drinking, Olivia high on a mix of pills and booze, JJ fucking some cheerleader in full view of the team, Layla getting trashed along with her friends in the boat house. He had taken Jordan upstairs, finding a free room to hook-up in, both of them hammered at that stage, caution forgotten as Asher pushed him onto a chair and started sucking him off. It had been accidental, Olivia walking in on them, she had got far enough to see that it was her best friend’s supposedly straight boyfriend blowing her equally supposedly straight brother. Their eyes had met, Asher and Olivia’s, right at the moment that Asher’s lips were wrapped around Jordan’s dick, the QB moaning in pleasure above him, urging him onwards. By the time Asher had finished Jordan and tried to find Olivia, she was gone, lost in the mad debauchery of that night. He snapped back to the present and looked at her. “I’m sorry.”

“Tell that to Layla.”

“She’s seems perfectly happy flirting with Spencer.”

“Ugh, you’re both fucked up!” Olivia grunted. “But fine, whatever, like I said, I just want Jordan to be safe and happy. I assume it’s still going on?”

Asher went silent, staring out the window. He didn't want to say the words that float in front of his mind, but she took his lack of a response as confirmation.

“Right, of course.” Olivia sighed again, but this time she got out. “Goodbye Asher.”

He waited for her to leave, stillness hanging heavily in his car before he started the engine and revved hard, burning rubber as he sped away from Jordan’s house a mere block away.

Jordan looked up as the sound of shoes echoed along the wooden floorboards, his parents turning expectantly towards the source when Olivia walked in and stopped dead.

“Is this another intervention? Because I can’t handle another rambling letter from Jordan right now.” She looked at them as Jordan smirked and shook his head.

“It’s not, Dad wanted a family meeting.”

“Oh, ok.” Olivia sat down and glanced at him, her eyes darting away before Jordan could meet her gaze. He frowned slightly, but his father began to speak instead, and Jordan dismissed the lingering feeling that Olivia was about to say something to him.

“I’ve been thinking a lot these past few days, and you were right, Jordan.” Coach Baker met his eyes. “I brought Spencer into this house without asking anyone and that wasn’t right. So, right here, right now we’re going to settle this. If you’re not cool, if we’re not cool as a family, then it’s not the right thing to do.”

“So, if we say no,” Jordan said, looking directly at his father. “He’s gone? Just like that?”
“Just like that.” His father replied after a moment of thoughtful silence.

“Huh.” Jordan looked to his left, feeling the weight of that responsibility on his shoulders, but it wasn’t the team or even living with Spencer that clouded his thoughts, it was Asher. Despite the bullshit week that they’d both endured, Jordan still felt as though he was getting closer and tighter to the other guy. It was like they were actually slowly turning into legitimate boyfriends, even if they still had to hide it from everyone. *Spencer can’t take that away from me, though it might make hooking up at home still impossible…*

Jordan looked up, searching his mother and sister’s faces, seeing approval in their eyes, and he turned back to his father. “Spencer can stay, you made the right decision, Dad.”
Asher rolled out of bed with a reluctant groan, his phone showing the time to be just after four-fifteen in the morning. It was still dark outside, the sun not even peeking over the eastern horizon as he looked out the high window in the bathroom. Tiredness pulled at him as he changed into his workout gear, bags left ready the night before, Asher grabbed them on his way out the door. He had a protein shake in his other hand and the keys were stuffed into his pocket next to his phone. The guest house was quiet, and the main dwelling further into the estate was lit from the external lights; a glowing alabaster monument in the distance.

The streets were quiet too as Asher drove down the hill towards the high school. He travelled in silence, unlike the other days this week when he had used the short drive to amp himself up with music. But it was Friday and he was just tired. Stifling a yawn, Asher turned off the boulevard and into the school parking lot. The sun had started to rise as he finished parking and turned bleary eyes towards the football field, the large floodlights beaming white light onto the perfect green turf.

“Ugh…and there’s another one this afternoon, god, I hope we get the weekend off, I’m burning out.”

Asher got out of his car, joining the rest of his teammates in the locker room. There was some chatter and a few exchanged greetings, but most of them were as tired as he was. Even Jordan just nodded his hellos instead of saying it and Asher replied with a forced smile.

“Alright!” Coach Baker called out as the team trudged onto the field. “Let’s go, Eagles! Shake off that tiredness and we’ll start with some stretches!”

“Ugh.” Asher groaned to himself, but followed Coach’s instructions, moving from stretches to drills to sprints to tackling. The hour passed by in a blaze of sore muscles and sweat-slick skin, the morning sunshine washing over them as Coach pushed the team harder and harder. He switched with JJ and Spencer when the defenders started their sprints, leaving the receivers to do sit-ups, shirts cast aside as sweat flowed freely down toned bodies. Asher grunted as he worked out harder and harder, perspiration soaking into his vest as his chest burned and muscles tingled. Well, at least the view is pretty good.

Jordan was opposite him, doing push-ups in quick succession, his muscular arms extending and contracting, making his biceps and triceps bulge. His skin was covered in a smooth sheen of oil-like sweat that made Asher’s dick harden against the confines of his jockstrap. Jordan’s vest was as loose as Asher’s own, the fabric hanging down from his defined torso, allowing the jock to catch glimpses of wide pecs and clenching abs now and again. Their eyes connected for a moment before Asher resumed working out at full tilt, giving everything he had to the exercise, the last one before they started throwing the ball around.
The Coach blew the whistle to signal the change in pace of the training session and Asher climbed to his feet. He glanced over at the QB, a certain tightness gripping his chest. They meant something to each other now; a sensation of progressively growing closer that made every hook-up feel better than the last. However, for all that Asher enjoyed his time with Jordan and the feeling of his hard body against his own, their public friendship was suffering as the team became more fragmented than ever before. They all felt out of sync and Asher knew exactly who to blame. Spencer. Asher glared at the other guy when he moved into place as a defender opposite him.

“You’re here, but you’re not really; still got your head and heart in Crenshaw and that’s holding us down. Wouldn’t be so bad if you were actually in Crenshaw during the week, at least then Jordan wouldn’t be defending you so much…”

“Ash!” Jordan called out to him, snapping Asher from his thoughts. “You ready?”

“Yeah, let’s do this.” He waited for Jordan to make the call and then darted forward, pushing Spencer away from him as the defender went in for the tackle. Asher sprinted down the field, looking back towards Jordan and meeting his gaze. Jordan threw long and high, making Asher leap into the air to grab it, the ball landing perfectly against his chest. The receiver continued sprinting towards the end, ducking around JJ and diving into endzone. “Nice!”

Asher punched the air as Coach blasted the whistle and clapped his hands, “Good job, Adams!”

“Nice, Ash, good twist!” JJ slapped his shoulder in an appreciative manner. Asher grinned at him, gaze taking in JJ’s naked torso, skin tanned golden and his muscles defined. He moved his eyes on quickly, not wanting to make it too obvious and instead caught Jordan’s attention, the QB nodding at him after the touchdown.

“Ok, bring it in, bring it in.” Coach Baker called out. “Not bad, but I’m still not feeling it. Enough for this morning, hit the showers and I’ll see y’all this afternoon!”

Asher grunted and tossed the ball to one of the assistant coaches, before turning towards the sidelines to grab his towel and water bottle. There was a painful twinge along the edge of his ankle and numb tingling up the back of his foot, causing the wide receiver to limp as he walked off the field towards the locker room. Anger began to build in the pit of his stomach as Coach’s final words rang in his ears. Not feeling it yet? I just scored a touchdown! Jordan and me are working fine! Our defenders need some work, but c’mon! We’ve been pushing hard all week!

He stormed into the locker room and slammed his towel against one of the metal containers, relieving his anger in a sharp, short burst. Asher’s vest stuck to his back and sweat crawled its way down his forehead in irritating streams.

"Dude! Chill, my Dad always rides us hard after we lose a game.” Jordan called out, following him inside. “You know that.”

Asher turned back towards him, anger flaring bright as the entire team stopped what they were doing to listen to him. “Yeah, but we didn't lose that game, he did.” He gestured at Spencer. "I haven't had a good night's sleep all week because homeboy here can't hold onto the damn ball!"

Give me patience! Jordan rolled his eyes upwards, looking for a solution that pacified Asher’s fury and also kept the team from breaking further apart. “Hey, he wasn’t the only one that made a bad call last week." Asher glared at him and Jordan looked back with steely determination before arching a brow. He moved away, allowing Jordan to walk forward to address everyone. "Listen guys, we win as a team and we lose as--"

"We know!" Asher cut across him, rage boiling over as he confronted Jordan again. "Ok? We know.
We don't feel much of a team right now and it's all thanks to a guy who doesn't even feel like he's one of us." He's still wearing his damn Crenshaw ring! That tells us exactly who he's loyal to.

“Ash…” Jordan said waringly, noticing that some of the team had gathered behind his boyfriend, while more stood with him, and yet others didn’t make their choices obvious. The tension boiled in the air between them until Spencer slammed his locker door and glared at Asher before turning towards the showers.

“Huh.” Asher grunted, his eyes lingering on Jordan's upset expression. Don't look at me like that, we’ve talked about this; you said you had my back. But I guess that’s only something you’ll promise when we’re alone. “Whatever.” He muttered, grabbing his bag and turned around, leaving the locker room.

“Ash!” Jordan called out after him, biting back his apology when Butler glanced at him. Crap, I can’t go after him, that will look weird. He sighed and dropped his gaze, returning to his locker. What the hell did you want me to do? You're still the receiver, Spencer is still in defense, yeah, we lost the game, but c’mon, Ash, please don’t make this so personal.

“So, um, about this morning…” Jordan mumbled as he sat down opposite Asher at one of the lunch tables overlooking the water feature. His boyfriend glared at him and the QB coughed. “Uh.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Well, did you go home? To shower and stuff? You missed the first three periods.”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it, Jordan.” Asher replied sullenly.

“Oh, well, um, I covered for you.” Jordan tried to catch his eye, but Asher just pushed his food around with his fork, not eating. “Uh, the others are coming.” He nodded his greetings as Layla and JJ came over, Butler and a few of the cheer squad following. “Hey guys.”

“Hey.” Asher muttered, shuffling over to the edge when Layla sat down next to him.

“Your Dad has been riding us so hard this week, Jordan.” JJ said, gesturing with his fork. “We get the weekend off though, right?”

“Dunno, hope so.” Jordan shrugged and then nodded. “Yeah, I think so, he just wants us to get along better, you know, gel.”

“I thought we were doing that already.” Butler frowned, looking between him and Asher. “Well, I mean, um.”

“I know what you mean.” Asher said, nodding appreciatively at him. “There’s only one problem in this team, but Coach is too blind to see it.”

“Ash.” Jordan frowned at him. “Can’t you just leave it for ten minutes?”

“Hmm, I-” He stopped, looking down at his phone, a smirk pulling at his features. “Haha.”

“What is it?”

“Uh, I’ll catch you guys later, gotta talk to Dylan and Liam.” Asher stood up abruptly and walked off without another word.
“Oh, ok.” Layla blinked and exchanged a look with Jordan. “What is with him? He’s been getting more, I don’t know, moody all week.”

“We’ve been doing 2-a-day training sessions, that’s probably it.” JJ weighed in.

“Yeah, plus, Ash is still bitter about Spencer injuring him last week before the game.” Jordan added as Layla pursed her lips. “He seems to be better, right?”

“Still limping, but the bandages are off.”

“Ah, cool.” The conversation petered out as Jordan ate his lunch, suddenly feeling the awkwardness of having Asher’s girlfriend across from him when only the day before he was balls deep inside Ash’s tight ass. Yeah, not weird at all.

Jordan frowned as he rounded the corner of the colonnade, seeing groups of students smirking and laughing at something on their phones. He paused next to a trio of Freshmen and looked over their shoulders to see a gif of Spencer fumbling the ball from last week’s game, the object replaced with a bottle of beer. Hmm, gone viral, I guess I know who’s to blame for that and why Asher rushed off at lunch. Petty and cruel, and…oh, shit, that’s Spencer!

He hurried down the hallway, eager to intervene before Spencer started a fight, his fear for Asher’s handsome face only outweighed a little by his desire to negate the risk to the team if Spencer got kicked out. “Woah, woah! Spence, Spence, Spence! One fight and the principal kicks you out!” He grabbed the other guy by the shoulder and pulled him back. “C’mon, you know that.”

“So, that’s how I’m supposed to stand up for myself?” Spencer glared at him even as Jordan looked over at Asher, seeing his non-football friends exchanging claps on the back and no-homo hugs as they laughed and grinned at each other. “Asher and his boys have been talkin smack and pullin crap like this all week. And I’m just meant to turn the other cheek, huh?”

“No, they’re just being them. They do this to everyone when they mess up a play, even me.” Jordan dismissed his concerns with a shrug. “It’s not personal.”

“Not personal?” Spencer shook his head. “They made a meme out of me fumbling a forty. But yeah, that’s not personal, I guess you wouldn’t see it that way.”

“Hey, that’s not fair.” Jordan clicked his tongue as Spencer looked him up and down derisively, before turning and gesturing at Asher.

“That’s your people.”

“Spence, c’mon!” Jordan sighed, but let him walk away, turning back to look at his boyfriend. Come on, Ash, I’m trying my best here. He caught Asher’s eye, seeing the savage twist in his expression, as though the tactic was meant to hurt him too. Jordan moved past him, not saying anything as he walked into the sun-soaked garden between the school buildings. Why are you acting out? I mean, I know your Mom leaving last year was bad and you’ve struggled a lot with…well, with who you are. But Spencer is not gonna take your place on the team! And so what if he did, we’re never gonna run a play with just one receiver!

Jordan reached the other side and stepped into the cool interior of the sheltered hallways, making his way towards their English class. “Maybe it’ll get easier after the hell training stops next week, we’ll have another game, something for you to aim towards.” He passed his sister by the water cooler and stopped next to her. “Hey, Olivia.”
“Jordan.” She frowned at him and screwed the top of her water bottle back down. “What’s up?”

“I…” He took a breath as his secret almost tumbled out. “Uh, I was just heading to class early, you wanna walk with me?”

“Sure,” Olivia nodded and looked over her shoulder. “No Asher? Or, um, the crew?”

“No, he’s, uh, did you see that video? Of Spencer’s fumble?”

“Ah, Liam strikes again!” Olivia made a gun gesture with her hand. “Things have been pretty tense at home this week; you and Dad finally make up after that row at the boosters’ rally?”

“I think so.” Jordan shrugged. “It’s just hard right now, Dad wants the team to connect and start trusting each other so we can use all our strength to win games. But Spencer doesn’t act like he wants to be here, and Asher is picking up on that. Plus, Ash still thinks Spence is after his spot.”

“That’s not exactly untrue though, right?”

“Well, yeah, but it’s more complicated than that.”

“How?”

The question was innocent enough to almost catch Jordan off-guard, but he was saved from answering when they reached the classroom. He just shrugged. “Team dynamics are hard when you’re the QB and captain.”

“Hang in there,” Olivia smiled at him. “I’m sure things will sort themselves out between you and Asher, and, uh, the team too, of course.”

“Right.” Jordan sat down in the middle row as the bell rang, Asher and JJ sliding into the seats in front of him. *It better, this double life is pulling me apart!*

Asher stood shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the team, forming into a tight-knit circle as Coach pointed at one of the tackles and gestured for him to stand in the center. “Hmm, this again…”

“Ok, boys, you know the drill: when I call your name, you come forward and try and take the man in the middle down.” Coach prepared to blow his whistle as he looked around. “Defense has been our strong suit this year, let’s keep it that way. Butler, go!”

The whistle screamed out and Butler charged forward, colliding heavily with the tackle, shoulder pads connecting with a hard thunk. He bounced back and Coach nodded approvingly, swapping out the tackle for a tight end and calling for the kicker to move in. Asher followed the tackles and defenses, his stomach tightening as he prepared for his name to be called. He bounced on the balls of his feet, letting the anger and tension from that morning fire through his veins. Asher ground his teeth as Spencer moved out, spotting the perfect opportunity to bring him down a notch when the other guy turned his back on him.

Asher charged forward, catching Spencer completely unawares and sending the other player flying forward. Spencer crashed into the ground with a groan and Asher danced backwards, smug smirk on his face as he watched the guy growl and twist to look back at him. *Yeah! Take that!*

"Ash!" Coach screamed at him. "Ash, get off my field! I didn't call your number!"
"Yeah, I know." He muttered, unstrapping his helmet and pulling it off. *Worth it though.* Asher glanced up as Jordan tore off his helmet and strode over, his boyfriend’s expression pulled into fury. "Huh?"

"You really crossed the line!" Jordan shoved him hard, pushing Asher down onto the ground, lips twisting into a grimace.

"What?!" Asher jumped back up as discordant mutterings swept through the team and Coach tried to calm them down. He ignored everyone but Jordan, moving aggressively into the QB’s face. "Are you serious right now? For him?!" Asher pointed at Spencer and lunged forward but Butler managed to grab the back of his armor, holding him in place as JJ darted over to help. Jordan snarled wordlessly and curled his fists as the rest of the team erupted into a brawl, two sides clashing with words and shoving, Coach Baker’s repeated whistle blows going unheard.

"What the?! Stop it! Stop it!" Coach Baker screamed at them and gestured furiously for his assistant coaches to come over. "Break it up!"

"We're supposed to be a team! A family! Right now you are nothing more than an embarrassment! Y'all feel like giving up this season? Y'all ready for that? I'm not! And I refuse to let you give up on your futures!" Coach looked at them, pointing at the team as a whole as they gathered in a divided group in front of him after the fight. "Figure it out fast, cause if y'all ain't bonded like glue by Monday, this last week of two-a-days is gonna feel like a damn vacation! Disgusting." Coach muttered the last word as he stalked away.

Asher let his eyes rest on the back of Jordan’s neck during the tirade; the way his boyfriend's shoulders tensed up, arms equally tight, the triceps twisting and flexing unconsciously as he held his helmet in that way of his. He knew the look that was on Jordan's face right now, knew what was coming next; the same old speech that happened whenever something was wrong with the team. But this time there was so much more wrong than a beach day could solve. Asher sighed to himself, the anger still burning hot, flames stoked when he noticed Jordan tense up further, aware of being watched, but his boyfriend stayed silently, stoically, looking ahead at the now empty field. *This is fucking ridiculous, why the hell am I even doing this?!

He gripped his helmet’s chinstrap tight and resisted the urge to hurl it at Jordan and storm off the field. The desire passed a moment later and Asher felt his cheeks burn in guilt at the thoughts that had dominated his mind a few seconds before. *Damn it, I'm sorry, Jordan, but Spencer, he just pushes all my buttons! And then you defended him? What the hell, man?* Asher glanced up when the muffled talking stopped and saw that Jordan had walked forward, gathering the team’s attention. "Huh."

"Coach is right, this isn't who we are. Tomorrow, mandatory meeting, eight-am, Zuma Beach, you guys know the deal.” Jordan offered them a conciliatory smile and spread his hands. "We'll work out together, we'll talk this crap out together, and when the sun sets, we'll come back together."

*Yeah, sounds good, Jordan, just one little problem and he's walking the other way.* Asher shook his head as Spencer pushed past them and strode off in the direction of the bus stop.

"Hey, where are you going?" Jordan called out, staring at Spencer.

"Hey, I got a bus to catch. It's Friday, man, I'm going back to Crenshaw!" The other guy shrugged, the edge of a whine entering his tone as he continued without stopping. "I'll be back Monday."
Asher shook his head, catching Butler’s frustrated grumble and JJ’s disappointed expression. Don’t you realize you’re the problem Jordan is trying to fix? "Whatever." He snorted and gestured for the other two to follow him, neither wasting time falling into step alongside him. “Like we expected anything else.”

“I hate fighting, Ash.” JJ glanced at him, worry filling his voice.

“Yeah, well, maybe we all just need time to cool off.”

“Mmh, you wanna work on the English project then?” The handsome jock asked as Butler took a left when they entered the locker room. He pulled off his jersey and untied his armor, glancing at Asher as he lingered nearby. “We can go to your place or wherever?”

“Um, sure.” Asher nodded, remembering to stop staring at JJ’s smooth, chiselled torso before it became weird. He blinked and looked at the clock behind them instead. “Um, we can hit up Century City and go from there.”

“Cool! Can I-”

“Yeah, JJ,” Asher smirked, looking back at him. “You can drive my car.”

“Sweet, I’ll get you back.”

“Oh, I might just hold you to that.” Asher muttered, letting his eyes drag down JJ’s naked back and onto his bouncing ass cheeks as the defender finished stripping naked on his way to the shower. He moved on before he was noticed, grabbing his own towel, eager to get out of the locker room before Jordan came in.

"Hey, hey! Hold up!" Jordan called out as the team fragmented behind him. He went after Spencer, reaching out to grab the other player’s arm. "You're really blowing us off? You're not gonna show up for your team?"

"Man, I've been showing up!" Spencer turned back towards him. "Every game, every practice, every team beach day. What more do you want from me, dawg?!"

"I want you to want to be here." Jordan fired back, his exasperation laid bare. "To want to be a part of this team! That's more than just games and practices. Man, I just fought my best friend for you." Jordan sighed, his breath hitching as thoughts suddenly flashed across his mind about Asher. We both acted impulsively, but...

"I ain't ask for you to defend me, I ain't ask for none of this! The weekends are the only time I get to see my family. You know this better than anyone." Spencer was glaring at him, and Jordan avoided his eyes. "So y'all can do this team thing without me. After all, I ain't even one of you, right?"

Jordan huffed irritably as Spencer threw Asher’s words in his face and then turned around, stomping off the field angrily. The QB groaned internally and looked over his shoulder, seeing that most of the team were already gone. This sucks. It's been boiling over for a while, but I thought Ash was gonna be ok with it, there’s always more than one receiver, they could’ve shared the position. Though... maybe he thinks he has to be all prickly about it because of the way Spencer has been acting around Layla. Everyone’s noticed. I guess it would look odd if he didn’t care.

He walked slowly off the field, thoughts swirling around his head. By the time Jordan had reached the locker room, there were only a handful of his teammates left, the wet tiles of the shower covered
in a low fog from the heated water. “Hey, Dylan?” Jordan caught the kicker’s attention with a shout. “You seen Asher? Is he still here? I want to have a word with him.”

“Nah, sorry, Jordan, he and JJ left about five minutes ago.” The jock shrugged sympathetically. “See you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Jordan muttered, sinking onto the bench in front of his locker. He fished out his phone and stared at the screen, half hoping that his boyfriend had reached out first. But there was nothing and Jordan grimaced. “More than just the team to fix…”

“Well, I better go over, it'd be weird if I just ignored them. "Uh, let’s go say hi.”

They’re working on the project too, right? We should join them.” JJ replied, walking over before Asher could stop him. “Hey!”

"Hey ladies!” Asher turned on the charm, easily slipping into his role as Layla’s straight boyfriend. He grinned at them when the duo looked up in surprise.

"Oh, hey babe!” Layla smiled back at them as Olivia turned to him and nodded tightly.

"Err, hi.” Olivia swallowed visibly, her awkwardness obvious to Asher as he held her gaze. "Uh, what are you guys doing here?”

"JJ and I are also working on the English thing, so...” He gestured vaguely in their direction as Olivia’s expression froze and Layla nodded slowly her eyes skipping between him and JJ. Oh yeah, she definitely thinks something is going on with me and JJ! At least I can trust him to completely dispel those fears. It might actually be helpful to have JJ here, I spend most of my time with him, well, officially anyway, Jordan and I are more of a secret. Asher smiled at Olivia's discomfort. "I figure four brains are better than two."

"Uh, make that, three brains.” JJ leaned on Asher's shoulder, allowing him to look closely at the handsome defender's grin. "This Shakespeare dude is not really my thing. But, hey, food's on me!” He sat down next to Olivia, leaving Asher to shrug off his backpack and sit down next to Layla.

Asher shuffled to his left, nearer the end of the seat as Layla mirrored him in the opposite direction, a sizeable gulf left between them. He pulled out his tablet and books, trying to make it appear that he needed extra room, rather than the fact he didn’t want to sit beside his girlfriend. But from the hitch of Olivia’s brows, the illusion didn’t seem to be working. Asher smiled, his lips forming the expression, but his eyes remaining cool as he looked over the table at her. So, you and Layla healing the rift, huh? But you haven’t told her the truth yet? I guess your brother really is that important to you, good to know. Not that this isn’t going to be any less awkward.

Olivia spent much of the next twenty minutes watching him over the top of her laptop, but Asher pretended not to notice her curiosity. Layla did the majority of the talking, keeping to their topic as JJ grunted or looked confusedly at Asher for help. Despite the tension in the air, they were making progress, Asher directing JJ to look for images they could use in the project while he focused on the
write-up. He was vaguely aware of Layla inching closer to him, but he kept focused on the screen in front of him.

"Alright!" JJ looked up as Asher glanced at him. "Ready to clean out the system ahead of round two!"

Asher cringed internally and then laughed when he saw Layla's expression. *Yup, fears of that secret love affair are totally quashed!*

"Who's up for more food?!" JJ asked them eagerly.

"You know, you don't need to announce it every time you need to drop a-"

"Why don't I get the food?" Layla broke in as JJ grinned. "And you can go take care of...*that?*

"Right!"

"Does anyone want anything?"

"Nah, I'm good." Asher replied, concentrating on deciphering one of the Bard’s archaic sonnets.

"Yeah, I'll get a drink." Olivia said, preparing to stand.

"Uh, peach and ginger iced tea with…two splashes of soda water!" Layla called out, pre-empting Olivia's order. "It's your go-to, why would I ever forget?!" She stood up with her bag and smiled at Olivia as Jordan’s sister squirmed uneasily.

Asher watched them, a smile playing about his lips, before immediately burying himself in his notebook when Layla brushed past him to wander over to the counter several feet away. He only looked up when Layla spoke, her voice a low hiss.

"I know what you're doing!"

"Trying not to fail English?" Asher replied, acting confused.

"This isn't funny, I already agreed to keep your secret, your perfectly straight boyfriend cover stays intact, happy?" Olivia whispered at him as Asher turned around, concerned that Layla would hear them, but she was standing at the counter. "I talked to Jordan after practice, he told me what happened, your fight and-"

"This has nothing to do with that." Asher cut her off, shaking his head. "I came in here with JJ to get something to eat, work on the project. Maybe we would’ve talked football, maybe not. When I saw you guys, I figured it'd look weirder to just walk by."

"Ash, you need to-"

"I care about Jordan, ok?" Asher spoke quickly, his voice low as he slid over on the seat to be directly across from Olivia. "But I don’t want to hurt Layla either, she doesn’t deserve that."

"Are you for real?" Olivia stared at him disbelievingly.

"This isn’t about covering my ass, that’s just a by-product." He continued in the same urgent tone. "Layla would be devastated, made to look like an utter fool, and Jordan would hate me for destroying his career. And-"

"The third person is you, right? It's so damn hard lying to everyone, huh, Ash?"
“It’s you.” Asher met her eyes as Olivia blinked in surprise. “You’ve kept the secret; this year, last year, despite everything, despite it being the easy way out. You could’ve have made the last few months a lot easier for yourself, but you didn’t. And, well, we used to be friends.”

JJ came back before Olivia could reply and Asher moved back over to sit across from him. “Hey guys!”

“System cleaned?”

“Oh yeah, benefit of all that fibre, dude!” JJ grinned as Olivia grimaced and returned to her laptop. “How’s the project looking?”

“Getting there,” Asher shrugged, letting Layla past as she put Olivia’s drink down and gave JJ his food. “We should give it another hour, I think.”

“And then you’ll be finished?” Olivia arched a brow at him.

“No, of course not.” Asher pulled out his phone as it vibrated against his leg. He was expecting another text from Jordan, having received a barrage when JJ was trying to find parking earlier. Ash entered his password and his eyes widened at the image that appeared when he opened the app. *Fuck, that’s risky! And…super-hot!* He swallowed hard, feeling his cock slip from half-hard to fully erect, Jordan’s picture was a first person view down his torso towards his dick. Headless, but Asher knew that body better than his own. He quickly closed the app and locked his phone, looking up.

Layla was busy typing something into Google and JJ was devouring his muffin, only Olivia was watching him, as though waiting for an answer.

“Oh!” Layla glanced at him, resigned surprise coloring her features. “That’s a pity, maybe we can study at your place, Olivia?”

“Uh…sure?”

“Cool.” Asher saw JJ nodding and pulled out his keys, tossing them to the jock. “You can drive, I want to upload our progress to the cloud, make sure we don’t lose anything.” The excuse came easily to him as he considered the desperate move from Jordan. *Well, there’s a clear apology if ever I saw one. But that’s him apologizing as my boyfriend, not as the captain. We’re going to Zuma tomorrow, we can work on it then. Fuck, when did my life get so complicated?*

Jordan looked at his phone, groaning when there was nothing new from Asher, not even a response to his super-risky sext. “Guess I don’t have a choice, huh?” He got out of his car, parked in front of Spencer’s house in Crenshaw, determined to try and repair the team, even if that meant fixing things with Asher had to come second. The afternoon sun shone down on Crenshaw just like it did on Beverly Hills and Jordan looked around carefully as he made his way to the front door, the street deserted other than himself. “Hi, Mrs James.”

“Jordan, right? Coach Baker’s son?” She answered on opening the door and stood to one side. “Come in, come in.”

“Um, thanks.” He entered and followed her back to the kitchen. “Is Spencer here?”

“Not right now, he’ll be back later, we’re having a cookout this evening.” She smiled as Jordan
nodded awkwardly. “You’re welcome to stay for that, wait for him to get back.”

“Uh, sure.” Jordan offered Spencer’s little brother a smile as he stood at the sink. “Hey.”

“Hi.”

“Um, yeah, I’ll wait for him, we need to talk; football stuff.” The QB stepped backwards out of their way. He hooked his thumbs into the loops of his belt and chewed his lip. “Uh, you…want a hand?” Not that I can cook or anything.

“Sure, why don’t you help Dillon wash the vegetables?” She pointed at the sink and Jordan nodded.

“Yeah, I can do that.” Jordan stood next to him at the sink, looking lost for a moment until Dillion smirked at him and pointed at the pile of potatoes in the basin. “Huh? Oh, um, just scrub them, huh?”

“Haha, ain’t you never cooked for yourself?” The little kid laughed as Jordan shrugged.

“Um, usually everything is left ready…” He busied himself with the root vegetables, following Dillion’s lead as the conversation swung into safer topics like school and football.

“Do you like comics?” Dillon glanced at him as he turned off the water.

“Um, no, I don’t. My best friend Asher loves sci-fi though,” Jordan replied, the hint of a smile tugging at his lips. “Not sure about comics, but he has a lot of space and intergalactic stuff.”

“Mmh, I think I hear the door.” Spencer’s Mom spoke up just as the sound of footsteps revealed themselves to be Spencer and a friend. “Hey, look who’s here!”

“Ah, hell no!” Spencer sighed at Jordan. “What are you doing here?”

“Um, helping?”

“Trying to help!” Dillon rolled his eyes at them as Jordan followed Spencer out into the dining room.

“Why are you here, man? It’s the weekend, my time, my family time.” Spencer shook his head.

“I know, but you saw what happened at practice today, we need unity on the team.” Jordan replied quickly, crossing his arms across his chest. “We won’t ever win if we’re arguing all the time. And I need you to come tomorrow so we can fix this. Don’t worry, I can bring Asher around.”

“Man, don’t you get it?” Spencer said, exasperation rolling off him. “I’m fine being at practice with you guys and I’ll show up on game day, but there’s nothing more. I don’t need any fake friendships.”

“What? I invited you into my home, my life, and you say that?”

“Nah, dawg, you’re cool, but you don’t know anything about me or this hood.”

“Huh, you’re right.” Jordan grinned suddenly as an idea popped into his head. “Your Mom already invited me to stay for the cookout. So, I’ll stay, get to know you better!”

“What?! No, don’t-ugh!” Spencer pretested as Jordan smirked and ducked back into the kitchen. “Oh my god. This gonna be the longest day ever.”
It was a different world, a different galaxy perhaps, between the Hills and Crenshaw, the landscape of the cookout was the same as the parties and barbecues that Jordan had attended before, on a fundamental level at least. But where there had been caterers and cocktails, here it was paper plates and neighbors manning the grill. Where there had been secrets and lies and drama and deception, here it was joy and laughter, friendship and connection. Although, there was little feeling of connection for Jordan as he sat on a plastic chair at the edge of the garden near the fence, a can of no-brand soda in his hand.

He knew it looked anti-social and he didn’t have Asher’s ability to just make himself blend into the crowd or go unnoticed by the room. Jordan still took a leaf from his boyfriend’s book, using his position to scan the revellers and watch Spencer in his natural environment. That was something that he loved about Asher; how quiet and calculating he was beyond the false and forced bravado he deployed to make himself appear more straight. Asher didn’t know that he knew, but Jordan had picked up on the trait more and more as they went from best friends to boyfriends. If nothing else, Asher knew how to observe people and use their flaws to protect himself. And now Jordan too.

“Hey.” He forced a smile as Dillon came over to him, corn cob on his plate. “Is it good?”

“Yeah, don’t worry, Beverly Hills, I’ll sit with you!”

“Haha,” Jordan laughed. “Does everyone around here know that? I have a name.”

“Uh huh.” Dillon sat down and started eating.

“Hmm.” Jordan pursed his lips, looking across the yard to where Spencer was sitting with two of his friends. Their eyes briefly crossed before the other guy looked away. Maybe this was a mistake, maybe I should have just gone to Asher’s house and tried to work things out with him instead? Sure, that would’ve sucked, and not in the way he does, but at least I’d feel comfortable in my own skin. I feel like such an outsider here. But they’re not that much different than me, and Beverly Hills is what, seven miles away?

Jordan looked up from where his gaze had settled on the broken concrete pavement to see that Spencer was waving at him, calling him over. “See ya later, little man.” He said to Dillon and stood up, walking across the yard to Spencer’s table. He could see that they were playing some sort of block based game, but it was foreign to him and instead Jordan nodded his greetings at Coop and the other girl he hadn’t been introduced to yet.

“Aw, look at him!” Coop called out as Jordan stood next to the table. “About time you joined us, baby-face!”

"It's Jordan."

"It's Jordan!" Coop echoed his voice in a sing-song tone. "Look at him, sticking up for himself! Alright Jordan, I like you!" She held out her hand and Jordan clapped it, feeling some of his tension slipping away as the other girl asked a question.

"Where you from, Jordan?"

"Aw, he Beverly Hills all day!" Spencer answered for him.

"My family is from around here." Jordan nodded defensively, matching Spencer's gaze. "My Dad is...from somewhere near here. I haven’t actually, I don’t know exactly."

“Haha, I’m Patience.” She laughed. “Well, sounds like you’re not really from here then.”
“Hah, no, I guess not.” He chuckled nervously and then moved around as Spencer’s friends from Crenshaw High arrived. Jordan recognized some of them from football games, but he didn’t know their names. He slunk away, sitting down at the other end of the table when the guys joined them, Coop and Patience moving their chairs back to make more room. Jordan frowned slightly as he noticed the tension spark between Spencer and his replacement on the Crenshaw offense; a towering wall of a player that looked as though he’d bulldoze through anyone that tried to intercept him. Oh, that’s not going to be fun to play against.

He leaned back, watching their dynamics play out, feeling more like how he thought Asher must feel most of the time; out of place, pretending to fit in, pretending not to be awkward. Although Asher was rarely awkward; angry and prone to over-reacting, sure, but his boyfriend was always able to become a smooth-talker if he had to. He never leapt in either, not unless his temper got the better of him, but Asher tended to observe the situation first and then respond in just the right way to win the conversation or steer events to his own desires.

Jordan wetted his lips as their conversation passed from football to music, something he actually knew a lot about. He shook his head to himself as the replacement receiver mouthed off and Jordan prepared to speak, getting pre-empted a few times before he finally sat up and broke into the conversation.

"So, who had a better flow?" Coop asked as the argument over rappers spiralled into a stalemate.

"Rakim, hands down, dude was a lyrical genius." Jordan grinned as Spencer turned and stared at him, jaw slack. "Crazy mic techniques, the original smooth flow, c’mon, guys, Paid in Full, no one even comes close to touching that album. Greatest of all time." He settled back into his seat with a confident smirk, catching Coop’s approving gaze.

"What?!" Spencer cried out, still staring at him. There was smiles and mutterings of surprise all around as Coop and Patience grinned at him and Spencer reached out to clap Jordan’s hand, the Crenshaw receiver put back in his place. “Dude, where did that come from?”

“Give it up for my boy!” Coop grinned wider and clapped enthusiastically at Jordan as he smiled and shrugged. “Hell, yeah!”

The evening moved on and with it, the group left the adults and kids outside and went indoors, sitting around Spencer’s coffee table as a card game was produced. Jordan played along with them, finally feeling comfortable and a sense of bonding with Spencer. The other guy was less guarded and more accepting as they exchanged answers and scored points. But he started to notice that not everyone was warming to him. The original Crenshaw team members were paying him too much attention, their expressions hard and eyes cold.

Jordan took a sip of his drink, using the opportunity to glance down towards their waistbands. They look a little too close to what I think a gangbanger should be, but I don’t think they’re carrying. No way, Spencer doesn’t strike me as the kind to let them bring weapons into his Mom’s house. Still though, maybe I’m outstaying my welcome. He put the can down, feeling the mood in the room turn sharply, the answer to a question seeming to rile one of the not-gangbangers up. Oh crap.

“What you say, Chris?” Spencer jumped up. “Why you gotta disrespect me in my own house?”

"Yo, when do you get so sensitive? Guess Beverly Hills got you all soft!” Chris fired back. “You don’t have no business wearing that Crenshaw ring no more, it don’t belong to you.”
Jordan thought to himself, images of Asher’s face flashing across his mind. He stood up, supporting Spencer. “You know, I doubt Cam can even touch Spencer on the field. Pretty sure we got the upgrade.” The other guy looked like he was about to shoot him, but Jordan stood firm. “In fact, why don’t we prove it?”

“What you saying?”

“Why don’t you grab your squad, let’s settle this right now.”

“I tell you what,” Spencer added as his former team remained silent. “If ya’ll win, you can take this Crenshaw ring off my finger for good.”

“Deal.”

“Uh, yeah, no, Ash is with me.”

Asher turned to look at JJ when he heard his name, muting the TV in front of them. The other guy had gotten the call a few seconds before, standing up to answer it. He looked at JJ and saw his slow nod. “Hmm.”

“Yeah, yeah, we’ll be there, Jordan, you know you can count on us.” JJ finished and looked over at him. “Jordan’s in Crenshaw.”

“What? Why?”

“Hanging out with Spencer, ran into some dudes from actual Crenshaw and challenged them to a match.” He replied, stooping down to grab his gear bag, discarded from earlier. “He’s called the boys, we gotta go. Uh, I mean, if you and he-”

“We’re going.” Asher interrupted him and stood up, turning off the TV as he did so. “We can’t leave him hanging. I’ll drive.”

“You know the way?”

“That’s what Google is for.” He smirked and patted JJ’s arm. “C’mon, it’ll be good practice for when we see ‘em in the playoffs!”

“If we get that far…” JJ muttered darkly, but followed Asher outside, locking up along the way. “My parents won’t be back before one or two this morning, so maybe victory drinks after?”

“Haha, I thought you’d be less optimistic about our chances?”

“Well, defeat drinks?” JJ grinned lopsidedly. “Either way, Ash, I wanna get my buzz on at least one night this weekend!”

“Yeah, yeah.” Asher laughed to himself and sat into his car, JJ placing his bag on top of Asher’s own in the trunk. He hunched forward, tapping in the location of the match into the touchscreen in the console above the stereo. “South Crenshaw High, right?”

“Yup.”

“Ok, got it, uh, in current traffic, about forty minutes.” Asher muttered and started the engine. He
accelerated hard and screeched down JJ’s long, tree-lined avenue towards the quiet street outside.

“Maybe forty minutes in a Ford, but not this beast!” JJ whooped as Asher gunned the accelerator again and they sped down the street. “Let me put on some music and get us in the zone!”

“Hell yeah, Crenshaw are gonna be tough to beat, no matter if it’s a challenge match or official.” Asher responded, cornering tightly and tapping the break as he exited the suburban street and into the shopping area around Century City. “Hey, when are you getting your car? Looking forward to seeing who’s got the best one!” He flashed a smile at JJ as the EDM started pouring from the speakers, and Asher sped up, overtaking cars with ease.

“Um, not sure yet, probably be after playoffs though.” JJ was about to continue when his phone buzzed, and he looked down. “Butler’s on his way and Hilton is already there with the other tackles, but they’re staying in their cars until we arrive.”

“Rough neighbourhood?”

“Uh, probably, right?” JJ glanced at him as Asher pulled off the I-10 and into the narrower streets on the other side of the city. “There’s gangs everywhere here and, well, maybe we should have called Butler for a ride, he’s got that supercharged Audi.”

“Hmm, it’s white as hell though, better than bright orange, I guess.” Asher mumbled, glad of the distraction as his thoughts were kept from lurching into panic over Jordan’s presence in Crenshaw. “Um, text Hilton back and ask him to make a space for me; I’ll park behind him and Butler can sandwich us.”

“Ok, got it.”

“You didn’t have to call the rest of the guys,” Spencer said, glancing at him as the field was prepared. “I had it handled.”

“Too late!” Jordan chirped, his pride swelling as he caught sight of his teammates walking across the grass towards them. He grinned at JJ as the middle line-backer smiled and led the squad over to him. They clasped hands and bumped shoulders, JJ peeling off to rally the defense as Crenshaw looked on. Jordan was left with Asher standing in front of him, awkwardness crushing the air.

Asher moved forward until they were close enough to talk without anyone overhearing them, but far enough away that it wouldn’t look suspicious to anyone watching the two players. He pressed his lips together, running his eyes over Jordan’s camo vest and guarded expression. “Hey.”

“Surprised you showed up.” Jordan replied, his stomach doing backflips from the way Asher was looking at him. He clenched his hands into fists as the urge to pull Ash against him and invade his mouth with his tongue was almost unbearable to resist.

"We fight, doesn't mean I don't have your back." Asher shrugged, his final word a whispered secret. "Always."

The QB searched his face for a moment before he smiled and accepted Asher’s outstretched hand, using the gesture as an excuse to pull his boyfriend into a tight embrace. Jordan felt his heart pound fast and hard when Asher’s breath touched against his neck, his own chin slotting perfectly into place against Ash’s shoulder. They stayed together for a few precious seconds before they were forced to pull back.
“No armor, Jordan.” Asher said, glancing at his boyfriend as they moved into position against Crenshaw’s defensive line. “The hits are gonna hurt.”

“Then don’t get hit!” Jordan grinned at him and nodded in Spencer’s direction. “Let’s get this game going!”

The game started a moment later, the center funnelling the ball back into Jordan’s hands as Crenshaw moved aggressively towards him. He managed to throw before getting tackled, Asher grabbing the ball and then smashing into the free safety that appeared suddenly on his left. Asher dropped the ball and crashed into the ground. “Ugh.” He spat out a mouthful of blood from a bust lip and got back up, brushing dirt and grass stains from his knees.

Play moved on, hard and fast, just like each team’s tackling strategy. Asher groaned as Crenshaw’s new receiver ploughed through JJ and grabbed the ball, scoring easily. The Eagles gathered around and regrouped, ignoring the minor cuts and bruises that now decorated their arms and legs. Butler had the beginning of a black eye after a nasty interception in the previous play and Jordan relegated him to the tight end’s spot, rotating Spencer in as the other receiver. Asher didn’t argue, saving his energy for the play ahead.

The ball came soaring through the air towards him, Asher jumping up and using his shorter, more agile build to pluck it from the night and tuck it against his chest before he started running across the field. He was able to dodge the two backs when Spencer ran interference for him and before he knew it, Asher was sprinting across the endzone. “Nice!”

“Good job, Ash!” Jordan called out, gesturing for Butler to take the conversion attempt. “Dylan isn’t here, can you handle it?”

“Yep!”

Asher jogged back to the space in front of the posts as Butler lined himself up and one of the backs acted as his holder. He grinned wider when Butler scored, bringing them even at the end of the quarter. Jordan didn’t look happy though and after another quarter had passed with heavy Crenshaw defense and a solid penetration by their new receiver, the home team were up by seven points.

Jordan gathered them into a huddle as Spencer looked off to one side, his Mom in the crowd, glaring at him disapprovingly. Asher nudged Jordan, offering his support. “Ok, guys, tempo isn’t working, I thought we might have a shot, but that defensive line is solid as a rock.”

“Offense is fast though.” JJ complained, squirting his water bottle into his face, drops winding their way down his flushed skin to rest on his pecs, exposed by the flimsy vest he was wearing. “That receiver is a beast!”

“Let me handle him,” Spencer said, sucking down a gulp of his own water. “I know these guys, I know their plays. On offensive we got them, they haven’t changed enough, you gotta just give me the ball.”

“Spence,” Jordan frowned. “Let someone else play defense, this is just like last week, you-”

"It ain't about ya'll, it's about me and them, I got this!” Spencer shouted at him, exasperated, before he stomped away from them.

Jordan sighed and shared Asher’s resigned expression. He pursed his lips in irritation and looked at the other guys. “Ok, let’s try and make this work. Ash, we go Tunnel on forty-two, right?”
"Got it."

He nodded as his mind conjured up the play and turned back to resume the game. Spencer was across the field from him, squaring off against his replacement, a muttered conversation that Asher didn’t hear as Jordan called out the coded play again, the receiver getting ready to move into position.

"Hike!"

The ball was channelled into Jordan’s hands and he danced back, looking for Asher’s opening. He grunted as the defenders broke through and sacked him hard, the ball spinning out of play. Jordan climbed to his feet and looked apologetically at Asher, his boyfriend shrugging helplessly.

Play started again, Crenshaw passing possession of the ball to their QB, Spencer darting forward and intercepting the throw. He dashed along the side-line, Asher shadowing him and shouldering into the one player that tried to stop him. Spencer managed to dive across the line right as the replacement dove on top of him, crushing his legs. "Ow!"

"Touchdown!" Jordan shouted out, clapping Asher’s shoulder as they rushed forward towards the endzone.

"Hey!" A shout echoed across the fields from the direction of the school. "What ya’ll doing?!"

Several security guards moved forward towards them.

"Fuck! Run!" Asher cried out, turning away from Spencer and Jordan towards the parking lot. He caught his bag as JJ threw it at him, both of them sprinting off the grass and onto the asphalt of the lot. The sound of revving engines filled the air and the duo dodged Butler’s erratic getaway and Hilton’s speedy donut to slide across the hoods of other cars and back to Asher’s still-intact Stingray. "It’s safe!"

"I know the car is, but we’re not!"

"I know, I know!" Asher panted hard, jumping inside and switching it on. He barely waited for JJ to get his belt on before he gunned the engine and roared out of the parking lot into the streets beyond. "Fuck!"

"Hahahaha, dude, that was awesome!" JJ exclaimed giddily over the howl of the engine.

"Glad you’re laughing your ass off," Asher couldn’t help but smirk, escaping the streets of Crenshaw and returning to the familiar safety of Beverly Hills. "I wonder if Jordan made it out though?"

Jordan drove quickly through the streets with Spencer by his side, taking him back to Beverly Hills. Despite getting chased off by security and seeing how tough Crenshaw’s team really were, Jordan’s heart felt light and relief flooded through his body. Asher’s back, everything is normal again, and we actually gelled as a team, I’d call that a win! He glanced at Spencer and grinned. "Listen man, I know things got a little intense back there. But on the plus side, the team showed up for you. In spite of all of our internal BS, they showed up. That has to feel good."

"They showed up for you and to stick it to South Crenshaw."

"Isn't that what you were doing?"

"Only because you put us in that situation." Spencer fired back. "We should have never played that game. Now my old teammates won't ever talk to me. Why did you have to come here, man?"
"So, let me get this straight," Jordan snapped. "I showed up in your world and blew everything up? Sounds familiar, doesn't it?"

"I -"

A scream of a siren broke the tension and flashing red and blue lights erupted behind them, a police car visible in the rear-view mirror. "What the hell?" Jordan grimaced and glanced up, noticing that the car wasn’t over-taking them. He put on his turn signal and pulled in next to the curb, a restaurant’s outdoor dining area nearby. Jordan frowned as the cruiser parked behind them and two uniformed men got out. "Is there a problem, officer?"

The cop moved around towards his door as the other one walked alongside the car, next to Spencer. Jordan glanced over and tilted his head in confusion when he noticed the way Spencer was acting. He had gone still, his hands spread out on the dashboard and eyes straight ahead.

"License and registration please."

"Why? I wasn't speeding or anything." Jordan shrugged, puzzled when Spencer looked over at him in fear. Ugh, did you do something? Is that what this is?

"You made an illegal turn at a red light." The officer gestured at the street behind them. "License and registration."

"What?!" Jordan cried, twisting to follow the direction. "How far back? What turn?"

"What are you doing, man?" Spencer hissed. "Just give him what he asked for."

“But-hmm…” Jordan huffed, but then he pulled out his wallet and handed the documents over. He looked at the other cop, frowning again when he saw that the man was now standing slightly in front of them near the hood, one hand resting on his holstered gun.

"What are you boys doing in this neighborhood?" The first cop asked as he looked through the paperwork.

"You serious right now? We've done nothing wrong, man." Jordan replied.

"Jordan!" Spencer glared at him, fear and nervousness obvious in his voice and posture.

"This is harassment, ok?" He turned back to the cop. "My Mom is a lawyer, what-"

"Step out of the car, please."

"What?!"

"I need you to stop resisting and get out of the car now." The cop responded slowly, his hand reaching back for his gun.

"Ok, ok, fine, I know my rights." Jordan said as he opened the door and got out of the car.

"Stand to the side, please."

"I cannot believe this. Just you wait until my Mom gets a load of you, big man, but when I call her, you’re going to-"

"You do what I tell you to do! I don't give a damn who your Mom is!" The officer grabbed Jordan from behind and slammed him into the hood of the car.
"Ah!" Jordan cried out, fear shooting through his body as handcuffs were fastened roughly around his wrists. "Officer! Sir?!" He tried to reason with the cop but was dragged across the road and thrown onto the pavement, the breath knocked from his lungs.

"Get out of the car!" The other cop shouted at Spencer, his hand openly gripping his gun.

"I’m showing you my hands, alright?" Spencer replied slowly, turning and opening the door. "I’m not armed, I don’t have a gun or a knife or anything."

"Stop resisting!" The cop screamed at him, grabbing Spencer and twisting his arms behind his back as he forced the teenager onto the ground.

"It’s alright, just keep looking at me, ok?" Spencer said as Jordan grunted, his chin pushed into the rough surface of the pavement. "Just wait until we get to the station, ok?"

Jordan tried to nod, but he couldn’t move as the cop dug his knee into his back with a savage twist. Shit! Shit!

"Didn’t I arrest you once?" The first cop asked Spencer, smugness filling his voice with an arrogant edge. "Let’s go, leave the car here, I’ll run the plates."

"Stolen for sure." The other cop laughed before moderating himself when the restaurant patrons nearby started taking out their phones. "C’mon, better bring them in."

Jordan rubbed his wrists with his hands, the uncomfortable tightness of the cuffs had chaffed the skin and the cop’s rough takedown would leave a nasty bruise on his back. But he was filled with righteous vindication as he watched his Mom lambaste the duty officer, the other woman unable to get a word in edgeways. His Dad had his hand firmly gripping his shoulder, Spencer standing close to them. After another few minutes, Jordan’s Mom stepped away and gestured for them to leave. "This isn’t over, not by a long shot!"

"I called one of the Assistant Coaches," Coach Baker called back to Jordan during the car ride home as his wife furiously phoned her office. "He’s going to drive your car back to the school, we can pick it up tomorrow."

"Great." Jordan mumbled, letting his eyes skip over the gently lit streets near home until they pulled up and he was able to get out. I want out of these clothes, out of those memories. I can’t believe that happened, I can’t…

"I have Officer Tristle's badge number already, I want to speak to his supervising officer!" Jordan’s Mom slammed the keys into the bowl on the sideboard. "Well he can talk to me now, or he can face me in the morning when I file a lawsuit against his entire department!" She stalked into the other room, the argument continuing with the same fury that had befallen the police officers when she had arrived to get them out of jail.

Jordan embraced Olivia as she rushed towards them, remaining silent as she inquired after him. He shook his head and turned back to look at his father. "How could you not go off on that cop?! Wha- Why didn’t you have my back?!"

"I had your back!" Coach pointed at him, upset raging through his voice as he pulled Jordan into a bone-crushing hug. "I got you home! Why would you even argue with a cop in the first place? Why would you put yourself in that kind of danger?"
"I did what I was taught, I was standing up for myself, ok?" Jordan replied, equally as emotional, though more confused than upset. "Ok, Dad?" He walked past, heading for his room.

“Hey,” Olivia spoke quietly as she knocked on his door, averting her eyes upwards when she saw her brother in just his briefs. “Um, I just wanted to see how you were? But I can—”

“Give me a minute.” Jordan replied, pulling a pair of shorts on and grabbing a t-shirt from the bed. “Ok, sorry.”

“Yeah.” She entered and sat down on the bed next to him, hands in her lap. “So, do you want to talk about it?”

“No.”

“Yeah, I imagine not.” Olivia nodded understandingly and looked at him. “Um, Asher and JJ were at the restaurant with me and Layla today, the English project.”

“Right.” Jordan replied, suddenly careful as he caught his sister’s gaze. “And?”

“Uh, nothing, just after the fight you guys had, he seemed…tense.”

“Uh huh.”

“Have you talked to him since?”

“At the Crenshaw match, we’re cool.” Jordan shrugged. “Need a solid friendship between the QB and the receiver, we got that back.”

“Oh, good.”

“Yeah.” He fell into silence as Olivia fretted with the edge of her sleeve.

“Why don’t you call him?” She ventured, no longer looking at her brother. “You’re…friends after all.”

“Maybe.” Jordan muttered, not noticing her deliberate pause, still too wrapped up in what just happened.

“Alright, I’ll go tell Mom and Dad you’re ok.”

“Thanks.” He nodded, reaching for his phone once Olivia had left. Jordan waited for a minute, looking at Asher’s number on the screen. *What if he doesn’t want to talk to me though? What if the game was just a fake out so the team think we’re solid again? I don’t...no, I gotta call him. I need Asher.* Jordan swallowed and pressed the phone icon.

“Hey Jordan.” Asher answered almost at once. “Man, I was worried about you, thought you’d text as soon as you got out of Crenshaw. That was hours ago.”

“Yeah, sorry, Ash. Why didn’t you call?”

“I would’ve, but Layla came over; it’s the anniversary of her Mom’s death, remember?” He sounded genuinely saddened and Jordan pushed himself up onto his bed, lying comfortably on his back.

“Yeah, I remember.”
“We talked for a while and then she said she had something to do, that was about twenty minutes ago. But, um, you ok? You sound down.”

“Um, I don’t know, Ash.” Jordan sighed, staring up at his ceiling. “I wish you were here right now.”

“Haha, something to do with that high-risk, super-sexy pic you sent me earlier?!”

“Oh, that. It feels like a year ago now.” He smiled for a moment before getting serious again. “No, I, uh, me and Spence were driving home after the game and we got pulled over by the cops. They arrested us, everything felt…felt personal.”

“Right.” Asher replied slowly. “You weren’t speeding or anything?”

“They made up some bullshit minor traffic violation and the cop all but pulled his gun on me.”

“Fuck, Jordan!”

“I know, I know, my Mom bailed us out though.” He sighed. “My Dad was…not himself, I expected him to give those cops hell, but it was my Mom who did all the yelling.”

“That sucks, now I wish I was there.” Asher replied, his tone sincere. “But, um, you want to do something on Sunday? Maybe head up to the Hollywood sign, go to our spot? I’ll drive.”

“Heh.” Jordan laughed despite himself. “Yeah, I’d like that, you’ve been too distant this past week.”

“Ok, cool.” Asher sounded happier. “I’ll let you go, Jordan, and I’ll see you at Zuma tomorrow, right?”

“You got it, we did a lot tonight, taking on Crenshaw. I just don’t know if that’s enough for Spencer to feel like he’s one of us.” Jordan shrugged, closing his eyes. “Goodnight, Ash.”

“Night, Jordan.”

The morning sun was shining bright above the horizon as Asher followed the rest of the team onto the football field, their day at Zuma called off by a mysterious mass text sent out by Jordan early that morning. He could see his boyfriend standing next to Spencer on the side-line nearest the bleachers and headed that way, JJ falling into step with him. “We’re here.”

“Yeah, I can see that.” Jordan acknowledged him with a smile and then turned to Spencer. “The team is here, Spence, and they’re listening.”

“Last night, when ya’ll turned up for me, and when some other shit happened,” He glanced at Jordan. “Well, I realized we ain’t all that different. Crenshaw was a family to me, and I thought that ya’ll weren’t the same, but you turning up, that showed me that you are. I know I messed up last week at the game, but that won’t happen again.”

“It wasn’t just you who messed up, Spencer.” Jordan said. “I lost track of you and missed the throw.”

“Missed a field goal,” Dylan spoke up from Asher’s other side.

“Dropped a tackle in the third quarter.” JJ admitted with a rueful shrug.

"Clouded judgement, unnecessary roughness." Asher said, stepping forward.
"You didn't even play last week." JJ looked at him with a frown.

"That's what kept me from playing," Asher glanced at his friend, before looking back at Spencer. "I lost us the game before you even stepped on the field."

Jordan smiled approvingly at him and then thrust his fist into the space between them, his smile widening as they all huddled up and mirrored his action. "Alright, boys, let's break it down. Get on in here. On three, Eagles! One, two, three."

"Eagles!" The team chanted in unison, breaking out into friendly hugs and pats on the back. Jordan’s attention was pulled away when he saw his father walk onto the field, a smile on his face and pride in his eyes. He nodded when his Dad gestured for him to follow him back into the locker rooms and office.

“So, Zuma is a bust.” Asher said, walking alongside him. “You want to do our drive today then? Lovely day for it!”

“Weather is always perfect in LA, Ash.” Jordan grinned, moving close enough that their shoulders brushed casually against each other. “I gotta talk to my Dad first, but after I’m down.”

“Cool, I’ll grab a set in the weights room, get pumped up.” He gave Jordan a filthy grin and bounced off, his happiness evident.

“Now that sounds good!” Jordan whispered, stepping into his Dad’s office a moment later. The smile faded from his lips when he saw the man’s face. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“We need to talk about what happened last night.” Coach Baker gestured for him to take a seat. "Jordan, I need for you to know that none of what happened yesterday is your fault." His father shifted uneasily from foot to foot as Jordan stared at him, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

"Yesterday you said..."

"I know, I know what I said, um." Coach sat down in front of him, leaning forward to keep his son’s attention. "I was scared. I was angry. And I was wrong. Your mother and I should have had a talk with you a long time ago about the reality of facing the police and being a black man in America, and that’s on me. That’s my bad, so, we’re going to fix that today. Because the most important thing to us is keeping you and your sister alive."

Oh, man, this is insane. Wait a minute, why didn’t he do this sooner if...Maybe it’s because of Mom. Jordan chewed on his lip and glanced to one side before going back to his father. "If I looked like Spencer, would you have had the talk with me earlier?"

His father blinked in surprise, his expression becoming uncomfortable, but then he nodded. "Probably. Yeah, yeah, I... I think I would."

"Why have you never taken me to Crenshaw, Dad?" Jordan looked hard at him. "We live thirty minutes away from where you grew up and the first time I spent any real time there was yesterday. Are you... ashamed of me, is that it?"

"Jordan, of course I'm not ashamed of you, I love you." His father replied reassuringly. "I don't spend time in Crenshaw, but that has more to do with my past. But you know, you're right, I shouldn't keep you separated from any part of who you are. And I have an idea of a good place to start."

“Ok, can it wait until the evening though? Me and Ash are going to hang.” Jordan wetted his lips
and quickly added an explanation when his father quirked a brow at him. “Uh, I want to just make sure the damage from yesterday is repaired; keep that QB-receiver relationship solid.”

“Oh, yeah, no problem. You guys have a good time, I’ll see you this evening.”

“Great.” Jordan smiled and stood up. “Thanks for the talk, Dad, Asher’ll do the driving though.”

“In his fancy-ass car, I’m not surprised.” Coach Baker muttered and waved him goodbye.

The air was clearer above the city, the sprawl of low density housing and commercial zones spread out before them like a patchwork quilt, only interrupted by the clusters of skyscrapers that dominated Downtown. Asher grinned at Jordan who sat beside him on the rock that itself was perched at the top of the hill. The Hollywood sign was nearby, its supports visible to them, but this spot was secreted away on the trail, rough for a car to travel on, but one of the few that wasn’t paved over and busy. Asher didn’t mind a little wear and tear on the undercarriage if it meant the tinted windows would give them more privacy once the sight-seeing got boring.

They didn’t talk much, no need after an initial clearing of the air by Asher, his apology sincere to Jordan. His boyfriend responded with an equal apology, both of them admitting that they lost their cool in the heat of the moment. But now it was fine, their troubles overshadowed by Jordan’s run-in with the cops the night before. Asher had asked him about it, but Jordan didn’t want to go into any more details, just shaking his head. So, Asher had dropped it and instead they chatted about the Crenshaw game, analysing the offensive and defensive players, trying to figure out a strategy to beat them if they were lucky enough to make the playoffs this season.

Asher stood up, stretching his arms above his head and swinging them back and forth as Jordan looked questioningly at him. “Why don’t we head back to the car? I think it’s about time we talked about that message you sent me yesterday. The picture one.”

“Oh yeah? I guess we could.” Jordan smirked and accepted Asher’s hand, pulling himself upright. “I mean it’s worth a thousand words, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, I was thinking more of, um, live re-enactment!” Asher trailed his eyes down Jordan’s tight-fitting t-shirt and hooked his finger into the front of his boyfriend’s chinos, dragging him willingly back to the car.

They were barely inside before Asher crossed the central console and straddled Jordan’s waist, his obvious erection grinding hard against the QB’s chest. “Off.” Jordan muttered, tugging on Asher’s shirt as he peeled his own over his torso and discarded it on the driver’s seat.

“Got it.” Asher reached under the seat and pulled the lever sliding it back to the maximum, so they had more room. He grinned as Jordan’s hands made their way from his bare hips under the waistline of his shorts and around to his butt cheeks, fingers splaying to grip the tensing muscles. “In due time.”

“Oh yeah? You want to have legit sex? Here?” Jordan arched a brow at him, but didn’t refuse, simply tightening and releasing his grip on Asher’s ass. “Well, I know you always have condoms and lube handy, so I guess I shouldn’t be surprised!”

“I’m always ready and eager to ride your cock!” Asher whispered to him, freeing his own dick as he pushed his shorts all the way down and off, taking his underwear along with them. Now naked, he lowered himself back against Jordan’s body and continued kissing him. The QB opened his mouth,
hands raising up his back to hold Asher better, hot breath shared between them as repressed sexual tension was released in a firework of glorious sensation. “Mmh!”

A clash of tongues, licking and slurping and rolling across each other, lips parted wider, both their eyes closed as they gave into their lust. Jordan's hands roamed back across Asher's abs towards his hard dick as he felt his boyfriend do the same to him, massaging Jordan's cock through his pants. He was wearing too much, eager fingers leaving Asher's wet tip to undo his top button and zipper. “Ahh, yeah!”

“Ahh!” Asher made an appreciative noise into his mouth as Jordan's cock was released and he was finally able to grasp it properly. He started jerking the other guy off slowly with long, determined strokes, finishing with a twist and a flick of his thumb across Jordan’s wide head, gathering precum to use on his next pass.

Jordan bucked up into him, enjoying the way Asher's hand felt wrapped around his cock, longing for the moment that would be replaced by his tight, perfectly fitting ass. "Mmmh!" He pulled back, breathing hard and looked down at their bodies; Asher’s already flushed and hot to the touch, his own beginning to slick up from the heat rising between them. Jordan caught Asher’s eye and grinned, leaning back into the seat when his boyfriend took a hand from his cock and instead braced himself on Jordan’s broad pecs, fingers and thumb resting near his erect nipple. “Play with them.”

The whispered words send shivers down Asher’s spine and he raised his other hand from Jordan’s cock, rubbing and flicking his fingers against the hardened nubs instead. He grinned when Jordan moaned loudly, arching back, their cocks suddenly rubbing against each other, precum and sweat providing just enough lubricant to make rutting easy, and not enough so that there was still a pleasurable friction when Asher humped against him.

Asher’s hands on his pecs wasn’t enough and Jordan reached out for him, urging the other guy to use his mouth, his lips, his tongue. “Ahh, that’s it, Ash!” Jordan moaned and shivered as his boyfriend continued to worship his chest, hands wandering across to grip his tensed arms, feeling the muscles flex and twist under his fingers. Asher pulled away from him suddenly and moved upwards, his cock dragging a pleasurable route north over Jordan’s abs. He kissed him hard, no tongues this time, just an enjoyable buzz of lips on lips. "Damn, Ash!" Jordan whispered when they broke apart again. "That was hot!"

"Yeah." He smirked and reached down to the central column, opening the compartment there and pulling out a condom and the sachet of lube. "You ready to fuck?"

"Haha, so eager!" Jordan laughed, nodding in agreement. He waited for Asher to open the packet and use the lube on his cock before Jordan ripped open the foil and rolled the condom down his thick dick. Asher had already lubed himself up and was staring at him, waiting. "Let's do it!"

"Easy!" Asher smirked, climbing onto Jordan's lap, lining his hole up with the engorged cock and then sitting down in one quick motion. "Ahh!" He cried out as the spear pushed his ass cheeks apart and buried inside him with a pleasurable hurt. Jordan's hands gripped his ass cheeks, lifting him up and down as Asher started to ride him, getting used to the size and girth again. An overly enthusiastic bounce made his dick slip out, but Asher quickly grasped it and pushed Jordan back in. "Ahh!"

Jordan grinned at him as Asher rode his cock hard, tanned skin slick with sweat as his hands reached back to grip the door handle and gear knob. He used his position to move faster, ass clenching around Jordan's dick. Jordan gripped his waist tighter, ramming Asher down on his cock at every upstroke, provoking louder and needier moans and cries every time. "Ahh, Ash! Ahh, yeah! You're so fucking tight!"
"Fuck me, Jordan! Fuck me!" Asher panted, his hand moving to grip Jordan by the shoulder in order to free his other hand. He started jerking himself off, fast and relentless, eyes locked on Jordan's face as his expression went from determination to bliss. "You're close, aren't you? You're gonna cum! You're gonna cum so hard, Jordan!"

"Aw, yeah, I'm cumming, Ash! I'm cumming!" Jordan yelled out, thrusting up into his boyfriend's ass, no longer holding back until the waves of pleasure crashed over him and he shot his load into Asher's ass, safely captured by the condom. He grinned when Asher tightened around him, pushing his ecstasy into orbit. Asher was shooting a moment later, thick ropes of pearly white that splashed onto Jordan's chest and abs. "Aw, yeah! Cum for me, Ash!"

"Ahhh!"

Jordan smiled at his father as the barber fussed around him with his scissors. They had come to Crenshaw, Coach Baker explaining that Alvin’s hairdressers had been a cornerstone of the neighbourhood for decades. Jordan liked it, liked seeing his father interact with people who knew him from back in the day. Alvin had plenty of stories too, regaling them all with Coach Baker’s antics from when he was a teenager. “Can’t believe my Dad was that wild, he actually sounds kinda cool.” Jordan sniggered after Alvin had finished his cut. “I wonder what happened?!”

“Yeah, yeah, keep laughing.” Coach Baker dismissed him with a wave and turned to answer a question from one of the other patrons.

“Hmm, look here, Jordan.” Alvin said, gesturing for him to come over to a stack of old high school yearbooks. “This here is your Dad back in school.”

“Who’s she?” Jordan frowned at the young woman his father was standing with, their arms around each other’s waists, happy smiles lost in the dust of time.

“Oh, that’s Grace James, well, Grace Harper back then.” Alvin nodded as Jordan blinked. “Yeah, when they started dating, well that’s what finally settled him down.”

“My, my Dad and Grace James?” Jordan looked sharply at him.

“Oh, yeah!” He pointed at the photo again. “Aw, they were inseparable all through high school, and I just knew they were gonna end up married!”

“Um.”

"But looks like I was way off! Funny how things have a way of working out; her son living with you guys and all!"

Woah… Jordan felt suddenly winded and then his mind started to spin, the pieces of a puzzle he had been unaware of falling into place. Spencer coming to their team, living at their house, his father’s bond with the guy, the way they seemed to think in the same strategic patterns. And now this… No way, no, I mean…Really? It makes sense, but what about Mom? And me and Olivia? And…No, no, I need more than just my hunches. I need evidence. Something concrete. Am I crazy? Am I really thinking that Spencer is my half-brother?!
Apologies for the delays in getting this chapter out. It was a challenging one to do, but I’m happy with the result and I hope you enjoyed reading it. As always, more to come!
Victory!

It never tasted as sweet as it did in that moment. Asher was with the rest of the team, roaring and shouting and slapping each other's backs. Hearing Coach's praise was almost as good as seeing Jordan's grin or hearing the excitement in JJ's voice as they crowded into the locker room, eager to get changed and start celebrating. And it was only the beginning of a winning streak that lasted weeks!

The game versus Inglewood was where Asher first felt like they were truly gelling as a team; Jordan’s throws down the field were matched by Spencer’s fakeouts, setting Asher up for touchdown after touchdown. 42-7 by the third Quarter, for once Asher could enjoy the weary expressions of defeat on his enemy’s faces instead of his own teammates. Then the game in Santa Monica was a masterclass in defensive play; JJ smashing the offensive line over and over, his squad managing to stop play after play with his tight defense. It left the Vikings reeling, wide open for Asher, Spencer, and Jordan to crush them. Their confidence soared with each new game, Asher grudgingly shifting his resentment for Spencer towards admiration as the other wide receiver started displaying his quality, especially in the gruelling match against Westchester.

He could feel the change in the school too, walking down the hallways with Jordan on his right, JJ and Spencer to his left. Their peers turned to them, respect and admiration flowing like tribute to the conquering kings. The winning streak had helped Asher with Jordan too, the tension from weeks ago left behind in cascades of victory and celebratory hook-ups. The locker room, his car, Jordan’s room, even once on a beach recovery day where they were able to sneak away. Life was good…and yet, Asher felt the strain of balancing his secrets every day; Olivia obviously hadn’t said anything about what she saw last year. And Layla was the same as ever, perhaps even more supportive of his “abstinence” since they were winning so many games. That hadn’t stopped her from continuing to hang out with him and the team every Friday though, to Asher’s eternal frustration.

Jordan smirked at his boyfriend, catching the shadow of a smile in response as Spencer compared the merits of his fantasy football team to their recent success. They were in the usual spot; sodas and grilled cheeses arrayed around the pool table as Asher faced off against JJ. Layla sat opposite them, her boredom obvious. You could just leave, give me Ash all to myself. Oh, wait, I already have him! Jordan took a drink to mute his bitter thoughts, turning to follow the game instead. His eyes never made it to the table though, dragging slowly down Asher’s well-fitting t-shirt, his gaze hanging on the imprint of hard nipples bulging out from Asher’s pecs.

The QB bit his lip, mind flashing back to the night before in Asher’s Stingray. They were at the secret place in the hills, looking out across the city. But Jordan didn’t have time for the view, his eyes
were locked on Asher’s shirtless torso, his pecs hard and smooth to the touch, his nipples erect and inviting. Jordan had sucked and licked and mouthed at the sensitive nubs, finding the experience scintillating and erotic and enough to make him jizz his pants at the same time that Asher thrust against him. Getting them both off just by worshiping his nipples was one of Jordan’s proudest achievements and looking at Asher’s chest right now made him want to grab his boyfriend, pin him to the pool table and start sucking all over again, teammates and girlfriend be damned!

Jordan took a deep breath and shifted his eyes from Asher’s torso, secretly reaching down to adjust his raging hardon. *Fuck, we already screwed this morning and I want him again? Why is Ash so damn hot right now?* He sipped his soda again, glancing at Layla, but Asher’s girlfriend still looked bored and oblivious to his interest in her boyfriend. Jordan frowned slightly when he noticed her beginning to look at him before she averted her gaze back to her phone. *Maybe she knows more than she lets on. Well, I guess it doesn’t matter, I’ve seen the way Spencer looks at her, maybe they’ll hook up and free Asher for good. Hah, if things could actually work out, this would be the ideal set up for a double date: me and Asher, Layla and Spencer. Yeah, keep dreaming, Jordan…*

He tuned back into the conversation, stifling a moan when Asher turned to talk to Spencer, his boyfriend unconsciously flexing his triceps and biceps, the muscle pushing out the fabric of his t-shirt. *Fuck, Ash!* Jordan blinked and shifted his gaze as Asher snorted.

"All I'm saying is that going strictly off fantasy points, touchdowns are worth more than interceptions."

"Man! C'mon, a pick can change a game!" Spencer called out, disagreeing loudly.

"A touchdown can win a game!" Asher fired back, but there was no heat in his voice. He was enjoying the banter, having JJ and Jordan next to him, even having Spencer to argue with about things that weren’t important. Asher glanced at Layla, seeing her roll her eyes and sigh dramatically. *Please leave, just let me hang with my boys.*

"So you think your five touchdowns in the last three games are more important than Spencer's five picks?" Jordan spoke up, his voice quiet and calm despite his eyes lingering on Asher. Spencer grinned and looked over at him expectantly. "Well?"

"We're all riding the same wave!" Asher replied noncommittally, taking his shot as JJ gestured for him to go.

"Can we talk about anything other than football, please?" Layla protested loudly as JJ smirked at Asher and his fingers nimbly chalked the tip of his cue.

The linebacker stooped low, lining up his shot, his biceps bulging. JJ’s handsome face split into a massive grin as he used a trick shot to push the ball into the center pocket. "Haha, yeah!"

“Hmm.” Asher grunted, his eyes lingering on JJ’s face, their eyes connecting for a moment, long enough to send an electric thrill down Asher’s spine. The other guy missed his next shot and Asher grinned confidently. "Ok, so, number six, corner pocket!"

“Ugh!” Layla groaned again.

“It’s pool, not football!"

“Still sports, Asher!” She protested. “I’m getting another drink.”
“Cool.” Asher smiled at Jordan as she moved off and then diverted his attention back to the game. The night moved on, pool games and banter, Layla still hanging around despite her repeated attempts to catch Asher’s attention. She waved across the room when Olivia arrived, but the other teenager seemed to get a read on the awkwardness and quickly left.

Asher frowned as Butler took over from JJ and prepare to break; the reserve receiver was surprisingly good at pool, better than he was, but Asher enjoyed a challenge as long as they weren’t betting money on the matches. His scowl deepened as a server arrived with the bill, handing it to him. Asher accepted and looked at Jordan standing beside him. “Hey, who asked for the bill?”

“I did.” Jordan replied, holding his hand out, savoring the precious seconds when his fingers touched against Asher's arm. The short sleeves of his tight t-shirt framed his boyfriend’s muscles perfectly. "So, give me your cards." Jordan took his own out and looked around as Asher lingered next to him, still frowning. The QB grimaced slightly when Spencer wandered over, pulling crumpled bills from his pockets. Someone needs to get him a wallet… “Ah, Spencer, it’s ok.”

“What? Isn’t it enough?”

“No, no, it’s fine.” Jordan shrugged. “I’ll just pay using our cards, it’s easier. I got an allowance card for stuff like this, it’s, it’s not a big deal. You can get me next time.”

“Uh, ok.” Spencer mumbled, picking his money back up and sidling away. “Thanks.”

“Um, I’ll get you next time too, ok?” Asher patted Jordan’s back as he moved around the table to rack the balls for the next game.

“Yep, no problem, Ash.” Jordan finished his drink and then gestured for the crew to leave as he gave the cashier their cards.

“Uh, guys?” Asher called out, spreading his arms when he noticed the team disappearing out the door. "Everybody's leaving?"

Jordan and JJ stopped to look at him. “Uh, yeah, I know we don’t have practice tomorrow, but I’d like an early night for once.”

"I'm not leaving early,” Asher shook his head and grinned. “My Dad's outta town."

"Woah!” Jordan smiled and looked at him. "All weekend?"

“Yup!” Asher nodded, a flirty smirk forming on his lips. Two all-day sex marathons coming right up! He stopped smiling when he saw JJ immediately start tapping on his phone, Jordan encouraging him. “Who are you texting?”

“Uh, everyone?!” JJ grinned at him.

“Um…”

“Am I missing something?” Spencer asked, glancing at Layla as she stopped next to him.

“Ah, listen, Asher’s parties are legendary!” Jordan replied, pointing towards him. “Go on, JJ.”

“Hmm, doesn’t look like he wants to throw a party.” Spencer said as Asher turned away from the group and back to the pool table.
“Are you kidding me? Asher lives for these parties.” Layla brushed away his concern. “It’ll be the first one since he moved to the new house.”

Asher ignored Layla’s invitation to Spencer, his thoughts churning as Jordan and JJ joked and laughed behind him. Damn, Jordan, can’t you see that I don’t want to do this? He shook his head, waiting for his two best friends to leave, waving Layla and Spencer off too. Butler had remained, looking at him expectantly. “Uh, sorry, bro, I’m gonna have to…”

“Uh, yeah, sure, I get it.” Butler nodded. “See you at your party tomorrow then?”

“You bet!” Asher forced a grin to his face, his emotions shrouded by false enthusiasm again. He pulled his keys from his pocket and left after taking the last mouthful of his drink, crunching the ice as he walked out. His car was parked nearby, the brilliant orange a welcome sight after the ambush at the end of the otherwise pleasant evening. Sitting inside and watching the console come to life, the low, intense roll of his music slipping from the speakers, Asher took a deep breath.

The car was the one thing that was truly his, and yet it still just existed to serve a part in a larger deception. He turned on the lights and pulled out into the medium traffic, gunning the engine a moment later in time with raising the volume of his music. Asher shook his head, thoughts ripping through his head, the party tomorrow falling way down the order of importance. Of all of our problems that rich people hate to talk about, beyond drugs or drinking, scandal or sex, we never talk about poverty, not really. We never want to confront that crippling spectre of the loss of wealth. How am I supposed to tell anyone that? Even Jordan? No, no, I can’t. This is who I am. Asher ran his hands over the leather of the steering wheel and glared at the road sign as he turned off for the house. “It’s not my fault, I know exactly who to blame. Not that it’s gonna help me tonight.” But that bottle of Smirnoff will…

“Hmm.” Jordan hummed to himself, checking his phone for the tenth time that morning. But there was no message from Asher, no phone call, not even a risky sexy pic of his post-workout pump. In fact, the last time he had heard from his boyfriend was the night before, when they were arranging to meet up at the usual spot for pool and banter. Jordan pressed his lips together and shrugged. “Well, I guess I’ll see him tonight.”

He walked downstairs, slowing to a stop when he found his Dad standing at the bottom in front of the mirror, dressed up with a tie in either hand. “Hey.”

“What do you think?” His Dad asked, turning around.

“What do you think?”

“What do you think?” His Dad asked, turning around.

“What do you think?”

”I’m holding up two ties!” The man laughed as Jordan frowned.

“Err,” The stripes would look better, but fashion, styling, that’s… I don’t want to look- Jordan suppressed his thoughts before they could form the word and he shrugged. "Solid blue."

"Ugh, I think I’ll go with the stripes."

"Glad I could help." Jordan laughed and followed him into the office. "What’s it for?"

"Oh, your Mom's got one of her things tonight, but, eh, what's up?"

"Um, just letting you know I might be over my allowance limit this month." Jordan stood in front of his father’s desk as the man frowned and opened the accounts on the computer.
“Jordan, it’s becoming a habit.”

“Well, Spencer is hanging out with us more and more, and that’s great, but he can’t always afford to pay, so I’m taking the slack.” He explained. “Asher also owes me for a few nights, but I know he’s good for it, so he’ll just get me back another time.”

“Yeah, I know. Ok, um, look, I’ve been in Spencer’s shoes and he does not want you to be paying for him.” His father replied. “I know you’re trying to do the right thing, Jordan, but it’s not your responsibility.”

“But he’s yours?”

“While he’s under my roof, he is, yeah.” The man stood up. “So, I’ll take care of it, and you won’t have to worry about that anymore, ok?”

“Uh, sure.” Jordan blinked, a sinking feeling forming in his stomach as curiosity came back to haunt him. He hadn’t really done anything about the suspicions he harboured about his Dad and Spencer, about them being…related. Jordan hadn’t even told Asher, he needed more than just suspicion and feelings. But this, helping Spencer out financially, on top of him living with them…things were beginning to tip in Jordan’s mind.

His thoughts flicked back to Asher again, he had meant to confide in his boyfriend the day before, but their horniness had consumed them both and Jordan had forgotten about his secret. But I still should tell him, after all, Asher is the guy who's been able to carry on a seemingly legit relationship with Layla AND me at the exact same time! He knows how to keep secrets, hell, he can probably tell me more about how my Dad might be hiding the truth!

Jordan nodded as his father walked past him, clapping him on the shoulder. The QB wetted his lips when he realized that his Dad hadn’t closed down his computer. He looked around surreptitiously and crept around to the other side of the desk, sitting down in front of the monitor. It was left open on Crenshaw Trust Bank. Jordan chewed his lip and then used the mouse to select “Other Accounts”, his stomach tightening when a dialogue box opened to prompt him for his password. “Damn it, what could it be?”

“Not over there, you idiot!” Asher snapped at the movers JJ had hired to set up the party. “There! Fuck’s sake!” He turned away, reaching for the half-empty vodka bottle that was standing on the counter nearby. Last night had been obliterated in a haze of strong alcohol almost to the point that Asher had been able to forget it until JJ’s crew arrived to get the mansion ready for tonight. He hadn’t asked his friend for the help, but then, JJ had always assisted him with this in the past, and he knew the linebacker got as much enjoyment out of their parties as Asher himself did. Or at least, he usually did.

The teenager walked out onto the patio by the pool, gulping down another mouthful of burning fire. He closed his eyes, savouring the floating sensation that washed across his senses, elevating him out of his unwanted party. The sounds of more engines winding up the driveway prompted Asher to open his eyes and he nodded to himself when he caught sight of the DJ and his equipment vans. “Ah, good, I could do with something else to get lost in.” He checked his phone again, sighing as JJ updated the Instagram page he had set up for the party. Asher raised the bottle to his lips, gulping down enough vodka to make his eyes water and his throat close in protest. “Fuck!”

“Err, Mr Adams?” One of the movers was behind him. “Where do you want the speakers set up?”
“Around the pool.” Asher managed without slurring. “And put a few inside the house, uh, up on the balcony. That’s where I want the DJ too.”

“Yes, sir.”

Asher sat down in a lounger, watching the movers scurrying about, some setting up tables near the middle of the pool, ice and red plastic cups being placed next to the kegs that Butler had managed to scrounge from somewhere. He didn’t ask any questions though, it saved him the trouble of having to provide any booze for them; JJ had already sent out a BYOB request on the Instagram, and no one ever expected food at an Asher Adams party. Another few gulps and Asher stood up, dropping the empty bottle into the trash and taking a deep breath.

Strength surged through him as the world slid into the comforting haze of drunkenness. You know what? I got this. I’m Asher Adams! I can fool them all; I’m a master of deception! I’ve been screwing the QB for months without anyone knowing, one party isn’t going to be a big deal! Besides, Asher knew from experience that it was the poker game that everyone was coming for. He grinned again and sauntered into the house, swinging by the drinks cabinet to take out another bottle of vodka, this one fresh and unopened. Asher spilled a generous amount into a plastic cup and then added a small measure of soda to dilute it. “It’s gonna be fine!”

Asher grinned from his perch next to the DJ on the balcony above the pool area. The party was in full swing; music pounding out from the speakers set up around the house, beer, shots, alcohol flowing freely between his friends and teammates. He spotted Olivia and Spencer arriving, but Jordan wasn’t with them. Asher paused with his cup raised to his lips, realizing that he hadn’t heard from his boyfriend all day. Another song he loved came on and he let the thoughts slip away, bobbing his head in time to the music.

His eyes swept along the pool area and lingered on the paved area nearby where most of his teammates were gathered, muscular torsos hidden by the occasional open shirt, or laid bare in favor of board shorts. There were girls in swimwear too, of course, Asher careful to not be so obvious, to ensure that nothing was suspicious, even if he licked his lips longingly as he watched Butler and Dylan jumping on each other in the pool, dunking the other on and off. Asher smirked and took another drink of his vodka and soda, the music slotting into his ears pleasingly as the world swung and moved around him.

He was truly drunk now, the pre-drinking all day only edging him closer to oblivion, but this was exactly the place Asher wanted to stay in, so close to losing his carefully maintained composure, and yet still just in control enough that he didn’t make his desires known. Jordan didn’t like him when he got like this, always pressuring Asher to ease off, to not get so out of control. But his boyfriend wasn’t here, and Asher enjoyed cutting loose for once. His smile faded when he noticed Spencer and JJ peel off from the main party and head towards the parking garage. Uh oh.

Asher drained his cup and crumpled it up, tossing it in the trash as he staggered inside, eyes hurting as he went from the bright late afternoon sun and into the dim interior. He shook his head and took the stairs quickly, the journey from one side of the house instantly forgotten as the alcohol powered through his system. Asher rounded the corner as he heard JJ and Spencer’s excited voices. “What you guys doing?” Tension rolled through his stomach as shards of glass etched panic across his nerves when he saw they were inside the very rare Porsche Roadster, JJ’s hands on the steering wheel. "No, no, no! No! Guys, out of the Porsche!"

“C’mon, Ash!” JJ looked at him playfully. “Let’s go for a ride!”
"No!" Asher snarled, "I mean it! If you get one fingerprint on this car, my Dad's gonna kill me!"

"Aw, relax, man," JJ drawled, getting out. "When did your Dad get this? And why haven't we taken it out for a spin yet? C'mon, Ash, you know it'd be awesome!"

"Err, he got it a few months ago." Asher swallowed, shrugging. "It's not really for driving around, just for looking at."

"Hmm, ok," JJ looked him up and down, as though reading the tension. "You need a drink, bro. C'mon, I got some good stuff for you and me to share. Uh, you're welcome to join in, Spencer."

"I'm good."

"Ok. Ash?" JJ looked at him, lips parted in a way that would normally send Asher's pulse racing. But his heart was already hammering for a different reason, the jock moving forward to inspect the bodywork. "Drink?"

"Yeah." Asher sighed, relaxing as JJ nodded and left. He glanced at Spencer as the other guy lingered, his clever eyes watching every move. The alcohol was pulsing through his system, making him less tight than usual, less in control of his emotions. Asher clenched his jaw and turned away, Spencer speaking up as they moved away from the car.

"You alright, man? You seem kinda-"

"I'm good." Asher cut across him, forcing a reassuring smile. He gestured for them to follow JJ. "Let's just get back."

Jordan frowned at the screen. He had been here for two hours without getting caught, but his Dad’s password still eluded him, and there was no other information on the computer that might have given him some insight on his father’s relationship with Spencer. There was something in that bank account though. *Maybe if I pretended to be my Dad? Gave them a call, they wouldn’t ask for his password then, right?*

He glanced at his phone, grimacing when he noticed that Asher had texted him, the message containing more errors than usual. “Damn, he’s drunk already? Gah, I gotta get to him, but this is important too!” Jordan picked up the office phone and dialled the bank’s number, deepening his voice when it was answered.

“Hello, Crenshaw Trust, how may I help you?"

“Ah, yes, ahem, yes, this is Billy Baker, just calling to confirm a wire transfer recently made to your bank.” Jordan looked around nervously in case his Dad was coming back.

"Can I have your pin, please?"

"Uh, my pin?" He looked into the book next to him, making a show of searching for the non-existent record. "Uh-"

"Jordan!" His father's voice cut across his mutterings and Jordan quickly hung up.

His heart was pounding as his father came into the office and Jordan stood up abruptly, beginning to back out of the room. "Hey, Dad."
"What's up? Who was on the phone?"

"Uh, the bank! Um, just calling to check on some allowance card purchases, you know?" Jordan nodded as his father stared at him, unconvinced. "So, uh, Asher is having this thing tonight, so I will, uh, see you later!" He patted his father on the chest and darted out of the room. Oh my god that was too close! The QB pressed his lips together to stop the worried groan that was building up inside him from escaping. But it seemed to work as his Dad didn’t call him back into the office and Jordan was able to grab his keys and leave the house unscathed.

Traffic was mild and Jordan rolled into Asher’s estate as the sun was setting in a blaze of orange and red fire on the far horizon. The music was still pumping out around the pool, but the only ones lounging in the chairs and dipping their feet were the potheads and other druggies that Asher had probably shoved out of his house, Jordan was aware that his boyfriend had no problem with them as long as they had their fun away from his expensive possessions. He smirked as he stepped over several classmates who had already given into their lust and were having a casual foursome on the patio by the pool. Oh, yeah, this is an Asher Adams party for sure! I bet he’s already got the poker game started.

Jordan stepped inside, following the sounds of revelry as he navigated the unfamiliar house. He walked into what looked like an exclusive lounge at a private club; a DJ spinning tracks in the back, frosted glass lining one wall, the dark shapes of wine bottles on racks behind the pane. The room was crowded, hot with the gathered people, a faint haze hanging in the air from vape smoke. Jordan pushed through, passing Dylan as he doled out shots of green liquid. He accepted the offered glass and knocked it back before making his way over to the poker table in the center of the room.

“Hey, Ash, Layla.” Jordan called out his greetings as he crouched next to his boyfriend, eying the empty glass of ice by Asher’s hand, a half-full bottle of Jack Daniels on his other side. Asher was wearing a white t-shirt that showed off his arms as well as the one from the night before, although the sexy contrast between his tanned skin and the bright material made Jordan’s dick twitch. “Sorry I’m late.”

“At least you’re here now!” Asher grinned at him. “Since you’re one half of the planning committee, I thought you’d be here with JJ! Although maybe it’s a good idea you only came now.”

“Yeah…” Jordan muttered, looked across at their friend, sitting nearby in only his tight-fitting trunks. “You on a losing streak, JJ?”

“Ah, hand like a foot, Jordan!” The football jock shrugged, gesturing at the stack of bills and the chip still next to him. “But I’m not ready to fold yet!”

“You might wanna reconsider.” Asher drawled, tossing a stack of recently won Franklins onto the pile. “At the rate you’re going, you might just lose your trunks as well as everything else!”

“Hey, you want my CKs, all you have to do is ask, Ash!” JJ fired back, looking across the table as Butler’s girlfriend smirked at him. “Well, if it has value…” He put down his cards and his hands disappeared under the table, only to reappear a moment later after some shuffling around with his white trunks hanging from one hand. JJ smirked and tossed them on the pile as Butler and Layla stared at him. “Hah!”

Jordan glanced at Asher, seeing his alcohol-addled eyes gleaming mischievously. Oh, come on! I know you’ve got such a hard-on for the guy, but seriously? His used underwear?! “Ash…”

“Let’s see ‘em.” Asher proclaimed, grinning wider as JJ laid down his cards and Butler’s girlfriend followed suit. “Aww, not bad, not bad. But not this! Eight-high straight, read it and weep!” He
grinned as JJ groaned and reached in to pull in the pot towards himself. “Not sure what I’ll do with these, though…” Asher mused, holding JJ’s trunks up by the waistband. “I suppose it depends on how much you want them back!”

“Shots!” Dylan cried out, delaying the next hand. “Drink up, boys!”

“Hey, Ash?” Jordan hissed at him as Layla got up to use the bathroom. “You able to come away for a bit, I need to talk to you.”

“I’m on a roll, Jordan, bad luck to leave the table.” Asher replied, checking carefully to make sure he wasn’t being watched as he balled up JJ’s trunks and stuffed them into his pocket. Jordan was frowning at him and Asher shrugged. “He’ll want them back, I might need an ace in the hole!”

*I betting you want a different type of hole filled.* Jordan clicked his tongue and sighed. “Ok, fine, whatever, but-”

“Hey, your sister was here earlier.” Asher said, pouring himself another JD, adding a splash of soda to the ice. “With Spencer too, that was a surprise. But it was good that they’re both coming out with us, especially Olivia, missed hanging out with her. They were really getting along well too.”

“Uh, what?” Jordan blinked in alarm. “Where are they?”

“Um, I think I saw them in the gallery last.” Asher sipped his drink, nodding for Butler to start shuffling the cards as Layla returned to her seat. “There’s a…we got a collection of Impressionist paintings a while back, not really my taste, but they’re pretty enough.”

“Yeah, ok, thanks, Ash.” Jordan stood up, clapping his boyfriend on the shoulder. “I’ll find you later.”

“Sure, Jordan!”

Asher glanced at his cards, foot tapping along to the music as JJ stared him down and Butler shifted uneasily in his seat. “Hmm.” He waved away the excess vape smoke from someone behind him and turned around, brows raising as he spotted one of the girls he vaguely recognised from Biology grinding up and down on the free safety. “Ok.” Asher turned back and looked over at JJ again, eyes drinking in his naked form, toffee colored skin and muscular body was always a tough distraction to ignore. He shook his head. “I fold.”

“Nice!” JJ cried out as Butler groaned and revealed his cards. “Four of a kind!”

“Grr.” Asher growled irritably, pulling away from Layla as she patted his arm. He wished Jordan was back beside him, but the QB had been gone for twenty minutes and Asher felt his luck beginning to sour as his mind turned towards his boyfriend and away from the game. He blamed his foul mood on the cards and took another drink as JJ shuffled and Butler stood up, surrendering his spot and his wallet. “Ok, again.”

“Dealing.” JJ nodded, spreading the cards out.

Asher consulted his cards and smirked, offering an easy grin that he had become good at faking for everyone. Layla raised her brows at him, but Asher was watching JJ, waiting for him to raise. The hand progressed and Asher grinned openly when JJ folded, allowing him to sweep the nice collection of loot into his arms; money, clothes, pills, and jewellery. The teenager looked up when Olivia and Spencer entered the room, but Jordan wasn’t behind them. Asher gestured at the vacant
spot that Butler had vacated. “Spencer! Jump in, man!”

"Nah, I'm good, man."

"Aw, c'mon!" Asher said as the others called out for Spencer to join them. "You're the only person at the party that doesn't want a seat at the table!"

"Haha, just trying to keep my clothes on, alright?"

"Well, just bet money then, I saw you holding all that cash today." Asher smiled jokingly. "Or is that like an emergency fund?"

"Ooooh!" The hiss raced around the room.

"Alright, deal me in!" Spencer said as he sat down next to JJ, cheers meeting his words.

Asher ignored the flicker of jealousy that rushed through his chest when he realized that Spencer probably had a better view of JJ’s smooth, naked body than he did; one of the hunk’s many temporary girlfriends occupying the space between Asher and JJ. JJ was comfortably drunk, a healthy flush spreading across his face while Asher was living in that precarious place that balanced between total-blackout drunk and dizzy drunkenness that kept him functional. He took another drink, forcing himself to swallow even as his body tried to resist. Asher ignored Layla’s concerned frown and instead gestured for Dylan to hand out more shots. “Ok, let’s get this game going!”

"What are you playing with?" JJ asked Spencer.

"Is this enough?" Spencer said, pulling out a sheaf of C-notes.

“Oh, yeah.” JJ smirked and looked down the table at Asher. “Right?”

"It's enough." Asher nodded and waited for the cards to be dealt. “Let’s see what you got, Spencer!” He examined his hand when it arrived and took a drink to cover his disappointment. Spencer was at the other end of the table, nodding along as Brian next to him raised. “Well?”

“I raise.”

“Same.” JJ nodded, tossing his bills onto the pile.

“No, I fold.” JJ’s date refused, shaking her head.

“Ok, I raise.” Asher followed suit, watching the round complete, Brian and JJ folding along with Olivia. He placed his cards down and smirked as Spencer groaned and surrendered the pot. “Early days yet, Layla, you deal.”

The game continued, the bets varying in size and victory flowing around the table. Asher inspected his cards and shook his head. “Nope, I fold.”

“Hmm, I re-raise you one Dare Chip.” Layla said, picking the chip up and placing it on the pile as the room oohed and ahhed. JJ was looking at Asher with a smirk, but he just shrugged, unaware of Layla’s plan.

“Ok, I’m calling you.” Spencer acknowledged, tossing his own chip on the pile.

“Alright, turn them over.” Layla replied, flipping her cards to reveal the ten and Jack of Clubs. “Full House!”
“Damn, Two Pair, you got me!” Spencer laughed as Asher and the others gasped. He threw his cards down and shrugged. “Alright, what now?”

“So, I know you're new to this, but I just won your Dare Chips, so you have to do anything I say!” Layla smiled at him, leaning forward.

“Alright, hit me with it.”

“Go skinny dipping in the jacuzzi.”

“Easy,” Spencer laughed as the others oohed again. "For how long?"

“Well, that part's up to you,” She paused, grinning. "And Olivia Baker!"

Asher smirked, shaking his head, relief coursing through his veins. He was a better player than I thought! Still though, I almost wish you had used that chip to pull yourself away from this game and spend time with Spencer.

Asher watched as a pair of shoes were dropped on the table and he nodded, looking greedily at the loot pile. He had suffered a few bad hands and losses but winning that pot could claw it all back for him. “I call.”

“With what?” JJ shrugged at him. “Huh?”

_Crap, I have a chip, but...no, I got this hand. And I'm the king of this party, I can't just fold, not now. Jordan hasn't come back, and he obviously hasn't found Olivia yet or I'd hear the shouting from here. Ahh, the risk..._ Asher pushed his lips together as JJ looked expectantly at his sparse pile of chips. He summoned his poise and shrugged, flicking a Dare Chip into the pot. “Name it.”

"A spin, in Daddy's Porsche." JJ said, confidence radiating off the naked jock.

“Err,” Asher grimaced and began to shake his head, "Anything but that."

"You want to stay in this hand, those are the stakes." JJ replied firmly.

Asher could feel the tension boiling in the room. He wasn't going to lose anything by folding, exactly, just all the loot from earlier in the game, but he'd still lose face. _And winning one of JJ's Dare Chips means I could...mmh_ A swirl of bad decisions clouded his mind and Asher considered his cards again. “Ok, let's see 'em. Triple Queens.”

"Ugh, pair of fours!" Tiffney sighed and looked longingly at the shoes she had just wagered.

JJ seemed to falter for a moment and then flipped over his cards. "King high, straight!"

“What?!" Asher barked, leaping up to check the cards. He glanced at JJ's smirk and felt a block of ice sink through his stomach, barely hearing JJ’s demands for the keys. But Asher recovered quickly, pulling himself together. _Optics are everything; as long as nothing happens, everything will be fine._

“Dude!” JJ stood up suddenly, prompting everyone to recoil and shrink away, the jock obviously having forgotten he was naked. “C'mon, hand over the keys!”

“Fine, fine.” Asher muttered, for once not taking advantage of JJ’s naked form right in front of his eyes. “I'm going with you though.”
“No one I’d rather have, bro!” JJ grinned at him, grabbing his shirt and shorts from the chair nearby. “Let go put that ride through its paces!”

Asher followed him outside, nodding for Butler to raise the garage door as JJ jumped into the Porsche and started the engine. “Just—”

“I got this, bro, don’t worry.” JJ reassured him, appearing to be more sober than Asher was. He tweaked one of the wing mirrors and nodded. “Let’s roll!”

“Yeah.” Asher muttered, catching a glimpse of his expression in the rear-view mirror. He swallowed hard as he realized how scared he appeared. Well, shit.

Jordan rounded the corner, finding himself at the garage area near the road. “This place is like a maze!” He muttered, jumping back onto the verge when a silver blur shot past him, Asher and JJ barely visible inside the speeding car. “Uh, something tells me I’m missing one hell of a party.” Jordan shrugged and turned around, heading back inside. The poker room was mostly deserted, just a few people left over from the spectacle going on in the garage. Jordan caught the eye of a Senior who was on their reserve team. “Hey, Steve, you seen my sister?”

“Uh…” The guy was obviously trashed as he struggled to raise his drink to his lips. “Um, check the hot tub…”

“Huh.”

“Watch out for Spencer!”

“What?” Jordan barked, anxiety rushing through his body. He ignored the attempted reply and instead took off, sprinting through the rooms of the house, finally slowing when he heard the sound of running water and the hum of a motor powering something in the room in front of him. Jordan strode forward, stopping dead when he spotted Spencer and his sister floating in the jacuzzi, the blue water hiding anything that might be happening underwater. “Olivia?!”

"Jordan!" She turned around as he glared at them.

"Party's over."

"Hey, man, we weren't doing nuthing." Spencer protested.

"Good." Jordan snapped, his suspicions curling around his chest like a poisonous viper. "Get out, now."  

"Don't tell me what to do!"

"Olivia, you don't realise what you're doing."

"Go away, Jordan!"

"Maybe we should-" Spencer began but Olivia waved him off.

"No, Spencer, stay."

"I'm not leaving until you do." Jordan replied firmly.

"I can't get out." She hissed at him.
"Olivia, get out of-

"I'm naked! We're both naked!"

Oh, god, oh, eww! Jordan felt his stomach churn and his jaw go slack. He looked over at Spencer, but the jock avoided his eyes and Jordan huffed, moving to pick up a nearby towel. "Great. That's super-great, now this moment will be forever burned into my memory! Let's go."

“Don’t talk to me. Ever!” Olivia clung to the towel along with her shredded dignity and flounced out of the room with as much posture as she could manage.

Jordan stooped to gather his sister’s discarded clothes and rose to give Spencer a disparaging look. He left silently, following Olivia and handing over the clothes. “I’ll go tell Asher we’re leaving.”

“Don’t bother!” She pulled on her dress and glared at him. “Just leave me alone, Jordan!”

“Well, let me explain!” He called out as she made to leave again.

"It took a lot for me to come here tonight!” Olivia whirled around and shouted at him. "I was finally enjoying myself and you ruined it!"

"I, I know you like him, I know you do, but it's a bad idea, ok? Trust me."

"It's none of your damn business!” She screamed at him as Jordan looked at his feet.

"I think he's our brother!” Jordan blurted out, prompting Olivia to turn to him, her question breathless.

"What?"

"I think Spencer is our brother.” Jordan looked at her, his expression serious. “I have evidence, kind of. Let's head home and I’ll tell you about it.”

“But…what…what about Asher? Err, his party?"

“There’ll be others.” Jordan shrugged. “This is important, and I need your help.”

“Oh my god,” Olivia whispered, shaking his head. “Alright, let’s go.”

"That's how you drive a car!” JJ proclaimed as they walked away from the Porsche, having returned seconds before. “Hell, yeah, so worth that Dare Chip!”

"I’m just glad you didn't kill us.” Asher muttered, his mind instantly reaching for the nearest bottle of vodka as soon as he returned to the house. "Alright, everybody, let's get back to the poker game."

"Asher maybe we should-" Layla began before pointing frantically over his shoulder. "The car!"

“What?” Asher turned and felt his pulse sky-rocket as he watched the car roll down the driveway towards the open gate and the street. “NO!” He chased after it along with the rest of the revellers, but he was too late to stop it, able only to witness it crash into a Ford with a smash of broken glass and dented bodywork. “Oh no!” Asher felt his legs turn to Jello as his eyes surveyed the damage in front of him. JJ was behind him shocked expression and mouth opening to apologise or explain or something. “It’s fine,” Asher muttered, turning to Layla. “But, um, maybe you can send everyone home while I call a tow company.”
“Sure.” She patted his chest comfortingly and moved away, gesturing for everyone to go back inside.

JJ stayed next to Asher, looking guiltily from the crashed car to his friend, “Um, Ash, I-”

“I told you it’s fine, I’ll take care of it.” Asher forced a smile and held up his fist for JJ to bump against. “Although, if you know who owns the Ford, that’d be helpful.”

“Not sure, but, um, let me take care of that.” JJ replied, returning the gesture. “You just focus on getting your Dad’s car fixed, ok?”

“Yeah, I know a guy.” Asher lied smoothly, gesturing for JJ to go back inside as he pulled out his phone. He sighed, strangely calm as he confronted the mess in front of him. It was one of the worst nights of his life, and yet he was able to hold it together without any hysteria. I’d kill for a drink right now, though. Asher thought to himself after he finished the call to a nearby tow company he found on Google.

He sighed again, this time sitting down on the kerb that ran along this edge of the property, waiting for the truck to come. Asher could hear the sounds of the other engines from the opposite side of the house as Layla broke up the party and sent everyone home. A few minutes later, the tow truck arrived, and Asher stood up, gesturing at the Porsche. The operator grimaced sympathetically and nodded for him to wait, moving around to set up the ramp.

JJ emerged five minutes after that, his arm around the shoulders of a Junior that Asher vaguely recognized, his friend obviously smooth-talking the accident and spinning it. He was good at that, JJ, able to turn a negative into a positive, as though getting into a crash at Asher Adams’ party was a good thing, an honor in fact, something that the owner could boast about (quietly) to boost his own social standing. Asher smiled at JJ when he came over. “We good?”

“He won’t say anything, and I’ll slip him a couple of bills on Monday for any damages.” JJ nodded, crossing his arms and leaning on Asher’s shoulder.

His breath smelt of fresh bourbon and Asher leaned his head back, breathing in the scent along with JJ’s cologne and sweat. He felt his cock harden in his pants and the urge to move closer, crush his lips against JJ’s was almost overpowering. There were no thoughts of Jordan, no considerations of how much he was about to risk. But before he could act on his alcohol driven impulses, JJ pulled away, smiling at Layla. Foiled again! You- “Hey,” Asher muttered, drowning out the bitter voice in his head. “Everyone gone?”

“More or less.”

“Thanks.” Asher nodded, waving JJ off. “You can take off, too.”

“Are you sure?” Layla looked at him, her brows furrowed with concern.

“Yeah, this is going to be a mess to clean up.” Asher gestured for her to go. “Thanks for everything, though, I’ll text you later.”

“Ok, just, maybe don’t drink anything else, Asher.”

“Hah, yeah.” He muttered, sitting back down on the kerb. Now that he was finally alone, he allowed his true feelings to surface, misery and despair turning his features sour, his eyes bleak. I probably have just enough to cover the tow truck, but anything else? “Hopeless.” He glanced up when Spencer came and sat next to him.

"Know that look."
"Huh? What look?" Asher frowned, walls of armor and facades of carefully built reputation snapping back into place.

"In my neighborhood, there's a look you see on a lot of people's faces." Spencer was giving him an appraising stare. "Desperation."

Asher didn't reply, clasping his hands together as he glared into the street.

"It's easy to spot, it's a different look than fear."

"What makes you think I'm desperate?" Asher tried to rally his fading confidence as Spencer shrugged.

"C'mon, man, all day something ain't feel right about this party. You ain't got no pictures of you or your family in this house, you always seem to be forgetting your wallet, and you let everybody else pay for this party." Spencer took a breath, waiting for Asher to look at him, but when he didn't, he kept talking. "Ain't so hard to spot someone with no money, man."

Asher was glaring at the road again, listening to Spencer drive a spear right through his defenses, the truth whispered by the other jock. He shook his head and stood up, making to walk away.

"Look, I know you in trouble, bro."

"You don't know anything."

"I know somebody who can fix that." Spencer nodded at the car, now loaded onto the bed of the tow truck.

Asher chewed his lip, weighing up the offer, reluctant to accept help from Spencer. Like I have any other option. I suppose it depends on what he wants in return; Layla maybe? I'd take that trade. He nodded and sighed. “Fine, where is this person?”

“Crenshaw.”

“Ah, of course.” Asher sighed and then gestured for Spencer to join him in the tow truck. “Let’s go, your guy will work at night?”

“Sure thing.” Spencer nodded and walked alongside him towards the truck.

He looked up and down the street cautiously, beginning to regret agreeing to come to Crenshaw with Spencer. The tow truck driver got out as they arrived at the fixer’s yard, preparing to drop off the car. Asher followed Spencer around the front of the truck, catching sight of several shiny, high-end cars behind the steel gate that was being pulled back. He reached out and grabbed Spencer’s shoulder, keeping his voice low. “Hey, uh, are these cars stolen?”

“What?! Nuh!” Spencer cried out, meeting Asher’s gaze. “Well, uh, I mean, maybe. Look, don’t ask, alright?"

“Ugh...” Asher groaned as he let him past. This is a terrible idea! That Porsche in a garage full of stolen cars? I’m doomed! And I’m probably dead too, gonna be shot any minute, the silver car and flashing lights from the truck is only adding to my visibility!

He hunched his shoulders and drew his collar up as he walked over to where Spencer was standing
with the owner.

"This is Asher."

Asher saw the guy, Big J, look him over with a faintly curled lip and he offered a guilty smile in return.

"And this..." Spencer trailed off, gesturing at the ruined car behind them.

"Let's see whatchu got." Big J replied, moving over to inspect the damage. "Alright, so what are we looking for here? Good as new? Or good enough?"

Asher frowned, glancing at Spencer. "Good as new."

"That could take some time; got to order original parts, at least a week."

"Alright, how about good enough?"

"Spencer..." Asher shook his head.

"Hey, we got everything we need right here." Big J interjected. "Trust me, it'll look good as new!"

Asher grimaced but nodded silently.

"Alright, Big J, do your thing." Spencer said. "How much is this gonna cost?"

"How much you got?"

"This enough?" He pulled out the wad of cash from the poker game and held it up as Asher looked on.

"It's enough."

"Hey, thanks." Asher nodded at Spencer, his tone genuine. "But I'm guessing this is still going to take all night, huh?"

"Probably."

"Ok, um, I'll get a ride back with the tow truck and hit you up in the morning about collecting this thing."

"Hey, Asher?" Big J came back over to them after directing his crew to bring the Porsche into the shop. "You can stay here, man, while I work. There's a McDonalds down the block."

"Um, ok, that sounds like a good idea." Asher looked around carefully, his eyes landing on a large wrench nearby. I guess that could be used as a weapon if it comes down to it. "I'll see you later, Spencer."

"Take care, man."

“Olivia, please, hear me out!” Jordan said as they entered the house, lowering his voice. “It’ll make sense in a minute!”

"No." His sister shut him down quickly, striding into the kitchen. "No, Jordan, I'm not entertaining
"Open your eyes!" He gestured frantically at her as she opened the fridge. "Dad moved Spencer into our home, treats him like a son!"

"How else is he supposed to treat him, Jordan?"

"He also took me down to a barbershop in his old neighbourhood." Jordan continued earnestly, ignoring his sister's weary expression. "And one of the old guys said Dad and Spencer's Mom used to date, like serious."

"Hmm." Olivia straightened up. "Ok, well, that still doesn't mean-"

"And he also deposited money into a Crenshaw bank account." Jordan cut across her, delivering his ace in the hole.

"Whose bank account?" Olivia looked at him curiously.

"I don't know." Jordan admitted, sighing. "I called the bank to try and find out, but I needed Dad's pin."

"Ok, ok, um, we'll make our next move in the morning, Jordan." Olivia replied, looking shaken. "I don't know his pin, but maybe we can find out."

“Yeah, good night.” Jordan muttered as he let his sister walk past. The QB pulled out his phone and flicked through to Asher’s number, tapping out a quick apology for leaving the party early. He hummed, looking around the kitchen before deciding to go to bed. “I’ll catch up with him tomorrow, there’s still another day before his Dad gets back, we’ll be free to hang out.”

Asher greeted Spencer at the edge of the lot as the sun crept higher towards its zenith. He was sucking on the last of the soda in his fast food meal, popping open the top to pull out the ice and crunch it down. Well, that was an adventure, never been to a McDonalds with bulletproof glass on the doors and windows. Tastes the same though… Asher waved at Spencer and gestured back at the shop. “Big J said he fixed it, but he went out for…something, said he’d be back in a few hours.”

“You got food, huh?”

“Didn’t save you any.” Asher smirked as Spencer arched a brow. “I’m still pretty drunk. It’s been a few hours, but like, I was drinking for, uh, all day yesterday? So, yeah, even the car crash only sobered me up for an hour or so.”

“Are you always this chatty when you drink?” Spencer asked, sitting on the hood of a car opposite him.

“Mmh, sometimes.” Asher shrugged. “I guess I’m just curious why you’re helping me, surely you want something?”

“It’s the right thing to do.”

“Haha,” He started laughing but stopped when Spencer shook his head. “Wait, you’re serious?"

“Well, maybe some answers, Asher.” The other guy looked at him sternly. “You going to tell me whose car we just fixed?”
“Ah, that’s a pretty steep price: the truth.” Asher muttered, looking at his cup, the ice mostly melted. “It belongs to the family that owns the house, they’re always out of the country, and we rent the guest house so I can play ball in Beverly.”

"Why you doing this? Pretending you got all this money?"

"A year ago I wasn't pretending, we were loaded." Asher fired back. "Lost everything overnight."

"Man, I've seen your car, doesn't look like you've lost everything." Spencer gave him a judgemental look.

"It was a gift." Asher shook his head. "And it's mine, the one thing I absolutely own, not my father's, not anyone's. And the rest...am I supposed to change who I am? Nah, no, I can't do that, not this way. I don't know how to be the poor kid." He missed Spencer's glare, looking instead at the empty cup. "It's all about optics in Beverly; if you look right, talk right, say the right things, no one notices what's really going on."

"Asher."

"Spencer!" Big J came out from the shop, his expression grim. "We got a serious problem. Come on back."

"Uh," Asher stared at the empty space where the car had been just this morning. "Where's the Porsche?"

"Good question." Big J shrugged. "I was gone for two hours, two and a half at most! Someone must have boosted it!"

"No, no, no, no!" Asher groaned, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry man." Big J offered him an apologetic look.

“This is...huh.” Asher paused, an idea springing to mind. He followed Spencer outside, the wheels of his mind slowly turning. Well, maybe if was stolen, then my problem has been solved. Sure, I'll need to say that I was having a party in the house and take the heat for that. But it would have been insured, they pay up, maybe not a replacement but...best of a bad situation? Ugh, it stretches the limits of what anyone would believe. Fuck.

“Hey, Asher? We’re here, c’mom.”

“Huh?” He looked up, seeing that they were at a barbers. Asher followed him inside, standing off to one side as Spencer spoke to one of the employees.

“Hey, Coop.”

“Who’s this?”


“Hmm.” She gave him the once over and nodded at Spencer. “What you doing here, man?”

“You know that party last night?”

“Yeah.”

“Beverly Hills can get pretty wild,” Spencer smirked as Asher leaned against the back of a nearby
couch. “Crashing vintage cars wild. But, um, Big J said he’d fix it and he did, but now when we went to get it, it’s been stolen.”

“Stolen?!” Coop stared at him.

“Right out of Big J’s lot.”

"What you gonna do?"

"It's gone, Coop." Spencer muttered, his words heavy. "And it's all my fault, if I hadn't taken it to Big J's..."

"It might not be gone yet."

Asher looked up sharply, paying their conversation more attention. Oh? Coop moved closer to Spencer and he couldn't hear more than a few words. Something to do with a Shawn and Spencer not liking it. Gangbangers?

Oh, god, they are gangbangers! Asher thought to himself as a tricked out saloon car with neon green trim and massive alloy rims pulled along the pavement across from where he and Spencer stood at the entrance to the barbers. That's it! I'm getting shot! This is such a bad idea! He swallowed hard, trying to ignore the screaming voice in his mind, and stood up alongside Spencer.

The door opened and a guy stepped out who didn’t match Asher’s stereotype of what a car thief and gang member should look like. Huh, he’s actually kinda…cute with that baby-face. But I bet that’s the grin he gives you right before he stabs you twelve times and dumps your body in the river!

"Sup, Spence!" The gangbanger grinned at them, swaggering over. He glanced at Asher while gesturing at Spencer. "Me and him go way back, we used to get into some trouble back in the day. I remember we used to play darts in my uncle's garage, tore that board up!" Asher glanced at Spencer with an arched brow. "Until he picked up a football one day and never looked back. Suddenly I was a bad influence. So when Coop called I thought, 'nah, she must be playin!' Spencer James don't need any help, but here you are."

Damn, give the villain monologue a rest! Asher thought to himself as the gangbanger continued speaking.

"Here I am." Spencer said, matching the other guy's gaze.

"I know this is hard for you, but I'm going to need you to say it. Cos we equals now." The gangbanger held his gaze, a smirk pulling at the edges of his lips. "Say it! You. Need. Me."

"Spencer, you don't need to do this." Asher cut in, shaking his head.

Spencer swallowed and grimaced, his expression wooden. "I need you, Shawn."

"Damn, that felt good!" Shawn grinned and turned back to Asher. "I made some calls, but it wasn't my crew. But you can't boost a car that pretty and not be running your mouth about it."

"So, you know who has it?" Spencer demanded as Shawn smirked and shrugged wordlessly.

"Let's take a ride!"

Spencer followed Shawn as Asher blanched and took a deep breath.
"Aw, nah, nah." Shawn held up his hand to stop Asher from following them. "Just Spence."

Oh. Ok then. Well, I wasn't worried. Asher shrugged to himself as Spencer doubled back to him.

"Look, uh, just chill here for a while, Coop will take care of you."

"Are you good?" Asher called out, watching Spencer nod and climb into the back of the car.

Jordan nodded reassuringly at his sister as they made their way out onto the terrace from the kitchen; their father doing work by the grill in the light of the setting sun. "Hey Dad!"

"Hey, yo, what's happening?" He looked up from the Eagles' folder propped open on his knees.

Jordan sat down while Olivia perched on the couch, both of them nervous, but his sister hid it better.

"So, um, how was the dinner last night?" Olivia started.

"Ah, your mother was a rock star, she deserves a medal for dealing with my behind." Coach Baker replied as they smiled.

"Right, right, so..." Jordan paused, clasping his hands awkwardly as Olivia glanced at him. "So, um, uh, when I was getting my haircut, Alvin said something about you and Spencer's Mom... going to high school together?" He left the sentence hanging, hoping his Dad would catch on. "You never told us about that."

"Oh, uh, I guess, I guess it never came up."

"Right." Jordan nodded, pressing his lips together.

"So, were you friends?" Olivia probed further.

"We ran in the same circles," Their father looked to one side, frowning as though to remember the past. "I don't know if we were friends, really."

"Uh huh." Olivia exchanged a look with Jordan, her brother tapping his thumbs together nervously.

"But you guys, if you don't mind, I've got a lot of work to do for next week's game, so..."

"Uh, yeah!" Olivia nodded quickly. "I-"

"Goodbye." Coach Baker said firmly, cutting off any further conversation.

"Ok," Olivia stood up at the same time Jordan did.

"Awesome." He smiled awkwardly. "Thanks, Dad."

"Alright."

Jordan waited until they were by the front stairs and out of their father’s earshot to reach for Olivia’s arm and whisper triumphantly. “See?! I told you he’s hiding something!”

“An old girlfriend maybe.”
“Or his illegitimate son!”

“You’ve been watching too much *Game of Thrones,*” Olivia sighed at him. “We don’t know enough yet.”

“That’s why we need to get into that account, see who he’s been sending the money too!” Jordan fired back, seeing his sister sigh before she nodded. “Yeah?”

“Ok, if it’ll satisfy your suspicions.” Olivia frowned. “I’ll do it tonight when he and Mom are out at dinner.”

“Cool, I was gonna make plans to hang with Asher anyway, see how epic his party really was last night!” Jordan grinned as she shrugged. “Let me know what you find.”

“Obviously.”

Woah, he got it back! Asher jumped up when he saw Spencer rolling along the kerb towards him in the silver Porsche.

"So, how's it look?" Spencer asked as Asher grinned from ear to ear.

"Good enough!"

"C'mon, man, let's go."

"Oh my god!" Asher gasped, climbing inside quickly. He gestured for Spencer to go. "Get us back to Beverly Hills, the less mileage this thing does the better!"

"You got it!" He held out his hand, grinning when Asher accepted it and they shook on it.

They drove in silence until Spencer pulled into the estate’s entrance and guided the car back to its position inside the garage. Spencer killed the engine and dropped the keys into Asher’s hand. “Thanks.”

“Sure.”

“You need a ride back to Crenshaw?” Asher offered, adjusting one of the mirrors absently. “Uh, in my Stingray, I mean.”

“It’s cool, the Bakers are only a couple of blocks from here, I’ll run it.”

“Ok.” Asher fell silent and tension stretched between them before it broke into relieved laughter as they exchanged a glance.

“Hey man, that was crazy!”

"Oh my." Asher managed, shaking his head.

"So, you took down all the family photos, huh?" Spencer gestured at the voids on the wall where two picture frames had obviously hung.

"Yeah, I figured someone would ask why I wasn't in any of them." He replied, shrugging.

"Man, it's got to be exhausting, pretending like that."
There's a truth And this is the little lie. "You have no idea." Asher said, glancing at Spencer, words tumbling out that he didn't mean to say. "I don't know how much longer I can keep this up. You going to tell anybody?"

"No, nah, man, you good, you good." Spencer replied evenly, shaking his head. "I think there's one person you should tell though."

"Huh." Asher looked away. I'm guessing you don't mean Jordan. "You know what my Mom did when my Dad went broke? She packed up and left."

"Man, Layla ain't gonna do that."

I wish she would, hah, maybe I should tell her then. I might finally be free and you can get what you want, Spencer. Asher let the vicious thought flow through his mind. He looked around at the car.
"How much is this going to cost you?"

"I don't know yet, but it's coming."

"I owe you, Spencer." Asher waited for the jock to look at him. "Thank you."

After he had cleaned up the car and shuttered the garage doors, Asher swung through the house, still in disarray after the party. He paused next to the poker table and shook the mostly empty bottle of Jack Daniels disappointedly. “Hmm, barely enough for a decent glass. Whatever.” Asher raised the bottle to his lips and tipped the strong liquor into his mouth, sucking out the drops thirstily. Discarding the bottle, he searched through the rest of the room, slipping behind the bar to find an open bottle of vodka stuck in the mini-fridge. “Mmh, maybe one shot gone from it? Perfect!”

He wandered back through the house, snagging a plastic cup and a flat bottle of soda on his way to the pool. Asher kicked off his shoes and socks, shucking his pants leaving him in his t-shirt and trunks, but there was no one else around. He sat down on the edge of the pool and sighed contentedly as he soaked his feet in the water. “Ahhh, that’s so good!”

Asher unscrewed the vodka and poured enough to fill the plastic cup to the middle, adding a dash of soda to color it away from clear. He breathed in the sharp scent of the alcohol before taking a long draught, savoring the hard burn that ripped down his throat into his stomach, heat flaring outwards in its wake. Asher smiled to himself as the weight of the car’s destruction was finally lifted from his shoulders. He leaned back, looking upwards at the black sky above him, the sheltered nature of the estate blocking out almost enough of the city’s light to see the stars. “Thank god I’m back, that is not an experience I want to repeat. Crenshaw was…horrible, just horrible.”

He shuddered, taking another deep drink, enjoying the quietness and peace, the sense of safety that pervaded the estate, so different from the under-developed neighbourhood so close to the Hills. “What?” Asher glared at the water as though it was challenging his thoughts. “I know it’s petty and elitist, but that’s how I feel, even if Spencer did help me for no apparent reason.”

“Talking to yourself, huh?”

“Jordan?!?” Asher twisted around suddenly as the voice came from the pathway leading to the front entrance. “Uh, I didn’t hear you come in.”

“Probably because you were too busy arguing with that floating pool toy.” His boyfriend grinned and tossed a brown paper bag at him, Asher catching it deftly. “Here, burgers, from that place I know you like so much. There’s fries too.”
“Thanks.” Asher grinned up at him as Jordan kicked off his shoes and socks, his smile widening when the QB pulled his t-shirt off too, sitting next to him in just his shorts, legs slipping into the water. “What did I do to deserve this?”

“Uh, it’s an apology for not hanging around last night.” Jordan shrugged when Asher frowned. “Long story, I’ll fill you in while we eat.”

“Mmh, it’s still warm.” Asher smiled again, pulling out the aluminium foil wrapped burger. “Thanks, Jordan.”

“Just glad to spend time with you.” The QB replied, leaning forward to kiss him. Their lips pressed together, and Jordan flicked his tongue across Asher’s before pulling back abruptly. "Fuck, Ash, started early, huh?"

"Hah, you would if you had my day." Asher replied evenly, offering the bottle of vodka to Jordan. “I have another cup around here somewhere.”

“I’m good.”

“You don’t have to go home, my Dad is out of town until tomorrow evening, remember?” Asher took a swig of the bottle as Jordan rolled his eyes. “Ahh, yeah, you being here with me was what I wanted for this weekend you know?”

“The party…” Jordan covered his face with his hand. “Damn, Ash, I didn’t think.”

“You’re here now.” Asher mumbled, resting against Jordan, his head on his boyfriend’s shoulder. “I missed you, could’ve used you today.”

“Yeah?”

“JJ took the Porsche out last night and crashed it.” Asher said as Jordan pulled his arm around his shoulders, keeping him close. “Spencer helped me fix it; a guy in Crenshaw, good work, but, well, it was an adventure.”

“Huh, I think I got you beat.” Jordan replied, taking a bite from his own burger. “I think Spencer is my brother.”

“What?!” Asher pulled away and stared at him. “For real? Your Dad…but you guys are almost the same age, that’d be…”

“I know, I know what that means.” Jordan acknowledged. “I’m finding it hard to believe my Dad can live a double life like that though.”

“Hmm.” Asher shrugged, downing a handful of fries with a vodka chaser. "I understand." "Well, yeah, I guess you do, with me and then Layla." "No, not just that..." Asher paused before lying down fully on his back, head tilted so he could see the house behind him. "This...it's all a lie. All of it, Jordan." "What are you talking about, Ash?"

“Heh, we’re broke, flat broke.” He replied, still looking away from his boyfriend. “My Dad took a bailout from his brother just to keep up the appearance of being wealthy; we don’t live in this house, we’re looking after it for a family that’s always out of the country. We rent the guesthouse, both of
us. And that’s only so I can still play ball at Beverly. My Mom didn’t divorce my Dad because things got bad between them, well, it was, but she left because all the money was gone.”

Jordan listened in silence as his boyfriend continued to speak, the secrets rushing out like water from a dam. After a few seconds of silence when he didn’t say anything else, Jordan turned towards him and looked down at Asher. He swallowed hard when he saw the tears in his eyes. “Ash, what’s wrong?”

“You’re going to leave too now, right?” Asher squeezed his eyes shut, trying to avoid seeing Jordan’s expression twist into disappointment. “I don’t have any money, I’m not gonna be able to pay you back, and I lied to you and-”

“Ash, Ash, stop.” Jordan whispered, pulling his boyfriend up and hugging him tight. “I’m not leaving you, we’re not breaking up over something as stupid as money, I love you!”

“What?” Asher sobbed, opening his eyes to see Jordan smiling at him. “Seriously?”

“Dude, I don’t care if I have to pay for every meal we ever eat again as long as you’re right beside me to enjoy it!” Jordan’s lips pressed together as he leaned forward, resting his forehead against Asher’s. “I’m not letting you go, Asher, I need you, you’re the only one that gets me.”

“Yeah.” Asher managed, drawing a deep breath as his composure slipped back into place. “Thanks, Jordan.”

“Of course, always, Asher.” He gestured at the vodka and shrugged. “At least this makes a lot more sense now. I get flustered just thinking about us, but I thought you had the bad end of things trying to live a legit double life, and now I find out it’s actually three lives?! Me, Layla, and the money, Ash, you’re going to burn out under all that pressure.”

“You know now.” Asher mumbled, reaching for his burger. “I’m going to tell Layla tomorrow too, Spencer already knows. I had to rely on him bailing me out with the car.”

“You should have called me, Asher, I’d do anything for you, no matter the cost.” Jordan responded quickly, taking his hand. He waited until Asher looked at him and they kissed again, the contact becoming more passionate as Jordan got used to the taste of the alcohol in Asher’s mouth. “Mmh.” Jordan pulled Asher closer to him, his hand gripping his boyfriend’s shirt as their kiss became deeper. Asher’s left hand was on his bicep, stroking the skin while his other hand dropped into Jordan’s lap and grasped the cloth-covered hardness he found there. “Ahh, yeah.” Jordan licked his lips as they broke apart, Asher’s eyes heavy with lust. “Get out of your clothes.”

“Easy.” Asher grinned, kneeling up to strip off his t-shirt and drop his trunks. Jordan finished getting naked and pulled out a condom from his wallet. “Oh?”

“Always prepared.” Jordan smiled, darting forward to kiss him again. He moved away as Asher nodded and got onto his elbows and knees, raising his ass up for Jordan to get started. The QB tore open the foil wrapper, heart pounding as excitement collided with necessity and he quickly rolled the condom onto his hard cock. “Uh, I don’t have any lube.”

“The condom is pre-lubed though, right?” Asher glanced over his shoulder, reaching back to pull his ass cheeks apart. “Don’t go slow, just push right in and I’ll get used to it.”

“Hmm, ok, if you’re sure.” Jordan almost hesitated, biting his lip as his fingers curled into Asher’s crack, feeling his heat from the hole. The QB lurched forward, lining himself up by sensation, before gripping Asher’s shoulder and hip, using the position to thrust inside him in one hard motion. “Ugh!”
“Argh!” Asher yelped, gritting his teeth. Jordan leaned into him, his lips finding Asher’s back and shoulders, kissing away the sting of his entry. “I’m ok, it just hurt that first time.”

“Maybe we should go into the house?”

“Later, you’re here now.” Asher shook his head and rocked backwards, encouraging Jordan to start moving. The strokes were long and slow at first, but as Asher began to clench tightly around the thick shaft, he could hear Jordan grunt and moan, enjoying it more, losing control and slamming in and out of him with energetic vigor. “Ahh, yeah!”

“You’re so fucking tight, Ash!” Jordan hissed as his hands moved down to gain a better grip on his waist. He sunk deeper into Asher’s ass, adjusting his posture so he was kneeling behind his boyfriend, able to deliver faster, harder thrusts. There wasn’t much talking beyond that however as each of them chased their pleasure with groans and moans, urging the other on. Asher had reached down and was already jerking himself off, milking his precum to make his hand slick and easy to stroke with. “Ahh, yeah!”

“Mmh, yeah, Jordan!” Asher panted, his breath hard to catch, pulse hammering in his ears as his pleasure began to hit its peak. *I fucking need this so bad! Aw, yeah, pound me, Jordan! That’s it, so fucking close!* He clenched tight around Jordan’s big cock as it continued to slam in and out of his ass. Asher lifted himself up, moving into a similar kneeling position in front of Jordan, as his boyfriend locked his arms around Asher’s chest. Jordan’s lips found his neck and throat, kissing him hard as Asher jerked himself off, bucking back and forth as he rode Jordan’s cock.

“Uh! Oh, I'm gonna cum!” Asher groaned, impaling himself harder on the QB's dick. He kept jerking off as Jordan's hands changed position; one gripping his hip, the other reaching up to clasp Asher's strong pecs and tease his nipple. “Awww, yeah!”

“Cum for me, Ash!” Jordan whispered, sucking in the sweet flesh on the side of his boyfriend’s neck. He could hear Asher’s panting, needy groaning as his hand moved faster on his cock. Jordan continued to fuck him, his hand on Asher’s hip joined by the jock’s own, their fingers intertwining as he bounced up and down on Jordan’s dick.

“Uh, yeah!” Asher mumbled, suddenly letting his body go slack, though he kept his asshole tight, allowing Jordan's dick to hold him up just as ropes of cum spurted out of his dick. "Ahh! Aah! Yeah, Jordan, yeah!" He leaned back into his boyfriend, savoring their intimate connection at the pinnacle of his orgasm. Jordan was kissing his neck, slowing his thrusts as he let Asher ride the wave of pleasure. “Ahh, yeah, yeah, yeah!”

“Mmh, so hot!” Jordan moved his hands back up to Asher's pectoral muscles, pulling him into a hug against his body, his cock spasming inside the tight hole as his own orgasm began to fire; the undeniable eroticism of Asher's figure, his explosive cum shot, his panting, gasping words was just too much. “I’m gonna shoot!”

“Give it to me, Jordan!” Asher dropped down on his elbows again, hand still jerking off his now sensitive cock, pain and pleasure mixing together as Jordan gripped his ass cheeks and rabbited in and out in a series of rapid thrusts. Asher grunted, lips parting when he felt Jordan pull out and heard the wet slap of the condom being discarded. Seconds later, his boyfriend's cock was grinding against the cleft of his ass, warm cum spilling out as Jordan jerked off enough to finish his orgasm.

"Ahh!" Asher groaned in surprise when he felt Jordan push back in, the unexpected pleasure and dangerous sensation making him gasp as his own dick shuddered again, a second orgasm taking him by surprise. “Dude!”
Jordan didn't push in far, just enough to slip the head of his dick into Asher's hole. He enjoyed the sight of his cum spilling down Asher's crack, his asshole red and gaping from the ardent fucking. He ground against Asher a few more times, each of them moaning loudly, before Jordan let his cock slip away and rest against Asher's balls. The QB leant down and kissed the center of Asher’s back and ran his hands down his boyfriend’s hips to slide under his chest, using the action to pull Asher back up against him, their lips finding each other this time.

After another few moments of passionate kissing, Jordan pulled away and rolled over, dropping into the pool with a splash. “Ahh, that feels good!”

“Mmh, it sure did!” Asher stood up and grinned at him before he stepped of the edge of the paving and into the water. He dunked his head and emerged a second later, his hands running across his body to wipe away the cum. “Hey, Jordan?”

“Yeah?” He swam over to Asher, treading water in the middle of the pool. “Are you ok? Not too sore?”

“Um, I’ll be fine, I just wanted to…what you did at the end.” Asher shrugged, his muscles beginning to ache after their fast-paced fuck. “It was really hot, but in the future, I’d prefer if you ask me first.”

“Right, I got carried away, sorry.” Jordan moved closer to him, leaning in to kiss Asher again. “Glad you thought it was hot though!”

“Haha, that was an intense session.” Asher replied, lying on his back and beginning to float. “We should head inside for round too; we got all night, right?!?”

“Hell yeah!” Jordan grinned, swimming forward to pick Asher up. “Let’s go!”

Jordan was gone by the time Asher woke up, mid-morning sun pushing through the half-closed blinds. He groaned and sat up, throwing on a pair of sweat pants and a t-shirt in order to stagger into the kitchen. His stomach revolted when he saw the half-full bottle of vodka left on the coffee-table and Asher was able to make it to the toilet before vomiting. “Ugh, gross.”

A cup of strong coffee later found him sitting on the patio overlooking the city. Asher glanced up as Layla walked across the pavement towards him. “Hey.”

“Hey. I didn’t hear from you yesterday.”

“Oh, sorry, it was a crazy day.” Asher shrugged, gesturing at the chair next to him. “I’m glad you stopped by though.”

“What happened with the car?” Layla asked as she sat down, concern on her face. “Did you get it fixed?”

“Yeah, Spencer helped me out, he knew a guy in Crenshaw who could do the work, no questions asked.” Asher glanced at her, reading Layla’s sudden tightness in her expression and posture. “He’s a good person, I’m not sure I would have helped me if I was in his position.”

“Asher…”

He sighed, shaking his head. “It’s been coffee all morning.”

“That wasn’t what I was going to ask.” She frowned at him. “Why did Spencer have to help you?
Couldn’t you just bring it to a mechanic nearby?”

“Haha,” Asher laughed bitterly. “That’s the question alright.”

“I don’t understand.”

“This house, the car, the wealth, it’s all a lie; a carefully crafted illusion to hide the fact that we are broke.” Asher huffed, staring out at the city below them. “My Dad lost everything a while back, and I mean everything. His family gave him just enough support to keep up appearances, but there’s nothing left. We rent the guest house here, mind the mansion for the family that really lives here.”

“Oh.” Layla blinked in surprise when Asher looked at her. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I didn’t know how, I thought my Dad would fix it like he always did.” He shrugged. “But he didn’t; a week went by, then a month, and then I was trapped. I couldn’t just turn around and say ‘Surprise, the Adams are poor!’ So, we fake it, he’s trying to get another job; that’s why he’s out of town, but…now you know. There’s nothing here for you.”

“You are.”

“What?” Asher glanced sharply at her. “What do you mean?”

“Asher, I wasn’t with you because you had money.” Layla moved closer to him, slipping her hand into his as he stared at her in surprise. “I’m not leaving you because it’s gone. I love you, but if we’re going to have a future together, you have to be honest with me.”

“Hmm.” Asher bit his lip, holding her gaze. He managed to remain calm externally even as his muscles felt like stretched lightning, threatening to start shaking at any moment. Asher nodded as Layla smiled at him, the same cold block of ice was sinking through his stomach as it had done on the night of the party. It was followed swiftly by whispers of I’m gay! I’m gay! I’m gay! echoing through his mind. But he clenched his jaw and refused to allow the thought to be turned into words even as Layla held his gaze.

The moment passed and Layla stood up, “I forgot my sunglasses in the car, but when I come back, we can talk more. You can tell me anything else you want to, ok? I’m here for you.”

“Yeah.” Asher mumbled, waiting for her to leave. He got to his feet, walking to the edge of the raised patio, his next words directed at the vast cityscape stretching out in front of him, his girlfriend far out of earshot. "I'm gay." The words were unfamiliar in his mouth, uncomfortable even, whispered for the first time aloud ever. "I'm...gay."

Chapter End Notes

Apologies on the lack of updates for this story, I had to juggle some personal and professional responsibilities the past few weeks, but hopefully I’ll be on a more consistent updating schedule from now on. Thanks for reading!
Jordan spread syrup on his pancakes absently, his mind in turmoil as he continued to think about Spencer and the possibility that they might be related. He had found himself watching the other jock a lot more over the past week, both when they were at home and when they were training, paying special attention to his father and Spencer’s interactions. Jordan hadn’t found anything different or unusual and he was considering asking Asher for help. They had talked about the situation a few times after training and before school during the week, but Jordan wanted to give his boyfriend space too after having to come clean about his financial situation. It wasn’t that Asher was pulling away or acting different, but Jordan also didn’t want to add more strain to their relationship. Anyway, I have Olivia more or less convinced. Maybe…I can never tell if she’s on board or still not believing me.

He startled when he heard footsteps on the stairs nearby and refocused on eating his breakfast. There was muffled conversation in the hallway and a moment later, Spencer entered the kitchen. “Hey.”

“Hey, man.” Spencer opened the fridge to get some juice, turning to Jordan with a confused expression. “Something wrong with Olivia?”

"What did she tell you?" Jordan replied, immediately becoming defensive, anxiety filling the pit of his stomach. Damn it, how does Asher play it cool all the time? He’s never nervous!

"Nothing, she just acting strange. Looking at me like..." Spencer frowned at him as he got a glass for the juice. "Like you looking at me right now."

"Uh..." Jordan blinked and averted his gaze guiltily. He cut up his pancake and stuffed the pieces quickly into his mouth to avoid having to talk to Spencer. “Mmph!”

“Morning, Spencer.” Mrs Baker came in from the office, smiling at them. “Did you get some pancakes?”

“Aw, no, I’m good; got Mom’s homemade corn muffins.”

“Oh!” Jordan swallowed and dove forward to snag one when Spencer opened the box. He grunted when his hand was slapped away. “What?”

“Nuh uh, you can have half.” Spencer glared at him, breaking one in two. “Moms only makes these once a year.”

"Wait! Spencer, is today...?" Mrs Baker looked at him as Spencer turned to her with reluctance. "We have to celebrate!"

"Celebrate what?" Jordan asked, oblivious.

"Spencer's birthday!" His Dad came in, announcing it as he kissed his wife.
"Wait, you knew about it too?"

"Of course I knew about it, I did his transfer papers."

Jordan suddenly stopped eating and look up sharply. *Or you know about it because he’s your son and our secret half-brother! Sure, the transfer papers make sense, but it’s clearly the perfect cover! And you do the paperwork for the entire team, you telling me you know Ash’s birthday? Or Butler’s? Nah, this is evidence for sure!*

“I really don’t want a party, Mrs Baker.” Spencer was saying as Jordan tuned back into the conversation.

“Well, it’ll be a small thing, just a few friends, some lunch, we won’t even call it a party.”

“Uh…”

“Dude, there’s no point resisting,” Jordan said as his Mom took out her tablet to start preparing. “Parties are kind of her thing.” Spencer sighed and drank his juice.

“You heading off now, Jordan?” His Dad asked, finishing his coffee. “I can bring Olivia and Spencer if you want to get in that extra workout you were talking about.”

“Oh, thanks.” Jordan nodded and stood up, eating the last of the corn muffin. “Really nice, Spencer!” He brushed the crumbs from his t-shirt as he walked towards the door, picking up his bag on the way. Olivia was coming slowly down the stairs as Jordan took his keys from the common bowl on the sideboard. “Hey, Dad said he’ll drop you off. Um, with Spencer.”

“Oh thanks, Jordan,” Olivia glared at him. “That won’t be awkward at all!”

“See you later!” He grinned toothily.

Asher pulled into his usual parking spot, turning off the engine as he noticed Jordan heading right for him. “Uh huh, he looks stressed.” He sighed and got out, grabbing his book bag while leaving his gear bag on the passenger seat. Asher raised his hand as Jordan came closer. “Hey.”

“Hey, Ash.” Jordan replied, his face muscles twitching as he glanced from side to side. “You good?”

“I’m good, but you aren’t.” Asher looked him up and down before shrugging. “C’mon, we got half an hour before homeroom and no one uses the pool on Friday mornings.”

“Uh, I said I’d work out,” Jordan muttered, adjusting the strap of his bag. “Need to get some, err, tension off my chest.”

“Haha, I have a better way.” He grinned, winking suggestively as Jordan’s eyes widened. “C’mon, it’ll be more fun and just as sweaty!”

“Oooh!” Jordan smirked and walked with him, their shoulders rubbing casually as the backs of their hands brushed against the other. “How are you anyway, Ash?”

“Can’t complain, it’s the weekend, almost.” Asher shrugged, glancing at him. “You know that your Mom is throwing Spencer a non-party party, right? I just got the Evite.”

“Uh, sounds about right.” He gestured vaguely in the air. “Spencer didn’t want anyone to know it was his birthday today, no party, just a family gathering back in Crenshaw…My Dad knew about it
“Ahh, you suspect that he knew before handling the transfer?”

“How did you-”

“I guessed.” Asher shrugged before looking around to make sure they were alone. He hooked his arm with Jordan’s and smiled supportively. “Official documents all have DOBs, he’d need to have made sure Spencer was of age, it all makes for reasonable logic. But…it doesn’t disprove your theory that he’s actually Spencer’s real father. Did you pursue that bank transfer lead?”

“We don’t have an address or anything, just that it’s in Crenshaw.” Jordan replied, a small plume of warmth erupting through his chest at Asher’s closer contact. He pushed open the door to the swimming complex and they both looked around to make sure the coast was clear. “Um, we’re good.”

“Ok, let’s use their locker rooms; there’s plenty of cubicles and stuff if we need to hide!” Asher grinned and released him, leading the way over to the nearby door.

“I feel like you’ve thought about this too much!” Jordan laughed, following him inside as the scent of chlorine filled his nostrils. “Hmm, I almost prefer stale sweat and team spirit!”

“Yeah?” Asher smirked, turning and pushing Jordan against the wall. He trailed his hand down Jordan’s t-shirt and hooked his thumb into his pants, dragging them out enough to reveal Jordan’s flat naval. “Mmmh!”

“Uh, actually, Ash,” Jordan placed his hand on Asher’s wrist and caught his confused gaze. “I want to suck you instead.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, I really enjoyed it last time, it was super-hot!” Jordan whispered excitedly as he and Asher swapped positions. He gestured for his boyfriend to take his top off and busied his hands with unbuckling Asher’s belt and rubbing his bulge through the fabric. “I’ve actually thought about it a lot since then, imagining sucking your dick again, the feel of it in my mouth, the way you sounded…man, it’s been my go-to jerk off fantasy every night this week!”

“Wow, that’s hot, Jordan!” Asher groaned, feeling his pants pushed down to his knees, cool air rushing around his body and caressing his nipples, forcing them into arousal. He pinched and rubbed his right pec as Jordan got on his knees, mouthing at Asher’s underwear-restrained bulge. “Aww, yeah!”

“Mmh!” Jordan moaned, grabbing the sides of Asher’s trunks and he ripped them down, his hard cock slapping against Jordan’s cheeks with a satisfying impact. The jock didn’t waste any time, one hand moving to wrap around the thick shaft while his mouth slipped onto the flared mushroom head, lips gently locking around the rim. He flicked his tongue over and back across the tip, his free hand slipping into his pants to pull out his own dick and he started stroking. “Aw! Mmph!”

“Aww, yeah, suck it, Jordan! Suck it!” Asher moaned, bucking into him, trying to get his boyfriend to take more of his cock. He succeeded after a moment of Jordan resisting, his cock sliding into the hot velvet smoothness of his boyfriend’s mouth. Jordan took his hand away from Asher’s shaft and instead slipped it between his legs, fingers pushing up along the smooth crack towards Asher’s ass. Asher started bucking back and forth between Jordan’s lips, his asshole clenching tight every time he felt Jordan’s tongue do a circuit of his cock. “Aww, yeah!”
“Mmh!” Jordan moaned around the hardness, jerking himself off as all his problems and fears fell away. All he had to concentrate on was making Asher feel good, his own pleasure mounting as he relived his fantasies from the previous weeks. Jordan could feel himself getting close already and he pushed his other hand deeper between Asher’s ass cheeks, finally reaching the hot smoothness of his clenching hole. He pressed the pad of his index finger against the entrance, redoubling his cock-sucking efforts as Asher groaned loudly and suddenly gripped Jordan’s hair. The jock pulled off him as soon as he felt Asher begin to shoot, his entire body tensing up. “Ah, yeah, Ash!”

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” Asher cried, pleasure boiling through him from his sensitive nipples to his not-quite-fingered hole and down through his cock as he shot his load all over Jordan’s face. “Aw, yeah, Jordan!”

“Mmh, give it to me, Ash!” Jordan groaned deep and low as he felt Asher’s cum paint his face and neck. His own cock erupted seconds later, ropes of his cum spurting out onto the floor. “Ahh! Ah, yeah!”

After cleaning up and wiping the floor, Jordan left first, Asher saying that he’d head to homeroom from the other exit. Jordan stopped off at his football locker next to the gym, changing his t-shirt for a pullover he had, stuffing the t-shirt into his gym-bag, Asher’s cum having dripped onto the hem. He looked around carefully, but he was alone. “Good, good, Asher had a point though, I need to figure out where that money is going. It could be the critical piece of evidence we need!”

Jordan found his sister lingering in the stairwell between homeroom and their World History class, her eyes locked onto Spencer and Layla across the hallway. He smirked and crept up behind her, whispering into her ear as she jumped. "You know you're not allowed to be jealous of Layla talking to your brother, right?!"

"I'm not jealous!" She hissed back as Jordan raised a brow. "And stop calling him that!"

"Ok, how are you still denying it?" Jordan asked, following her out into the hallway. "You're the one that called the bank, remember? Dad's been making monthly payments for seventeen years. By the way, how old is Spencer today?"

"It doesn't prove anything."

"Hmm." Jordan clicked his tongue. "Ok, so let's find out who the monthly payments are going to then?"

"No."

"Olivia."

"Have you even once thought about what happens if it's true?" Her expression was serious, and Jordan just looked back, undeterred. “Not just to us, but what about Mom, and Spencer, and Dad? It would totally ruin everything; our family would be broken!”

"Listen, you might be ok burying the truth, but I'm not." Jordan said his eyes flicking away as Asher rounded the corner. His boyfriend gave him a secret grin and they clasped hands for a brief moment, the same Jordan would do with Butler or JJ, though his skin never tingled when he did it with his other friends. The fleeting contact was enough to send a warm shiver down Jordan's spine as Asher smirked and kept walking. Jordan turned back to Olivia, looking at her expectantly as she frowned at Asher’s retreating back. "What's it gonna be?"
“The answer is no, Jordan.” She shook her head. “Some secrets are better left alone, especially if they’re going to hurt people we care about.” Olivia gave him a strange look, her brows pulled together before she turned away.

“Huh.” Jordan pursed his lips, a fresh wave of anxiety rolling through him, washing away the warm contentedness he had felt after hooking up with Asher. **Maybe I was too happy to see Asher? Maybe it came off as something weird? I don’t know, maybe Olivia just doesn’t want to think about Spencer in that way if she still has the crush? That’d be-** His thoughts were cut off as the bell rang above him and Jordan shook his head, walking to class with unease still clawing its way through his stomach.

“Thanks.” Asher said as the server set down their sodas. He took a sip, watching Jordan lose against JJ, his boyfriend demonstrating how terrible he was at pool. “Ugh, Jordan! Not *that* one!”

“I thought that was the ball I could hit?!” He looked at Asher as JJ sniggered. “Aw, man…”

“It’s ok, bro,” JJ patted his shoulder and moved around to take the shot, his arm stretching out and short sleeves riding up to accentuate his tanned muscles. Asher flicked his gaze from Jordan to JJ, watching as the other guy pocketed his targeted ball with ease. “That’s how it’s done, my man!”

“I suck at this.” Jordan offered Asher his pool cue. “Save me from losing?”

“Pretty sure that ship has already sailed and sunk.” Asher put his glass down and stood up as Jordan huffed. “But, fine, I’ll see if I can salvage something from the wreckage!”

“I have three balls left, Ash, you’re not even close.” JJ said confidently, crossing his arms, his biceps a smooth, bulging distraction. “Give me your best shot!”

*I’d rather give you something else!* The thought sprang unbidden into his mind and Asher blinked, ignoring the handsome jock as he lined up his next shot. He pocketed one ball, then a second as Jordan celebrated, JJ growing silent. “Hmm, not sure I can make the next one though.”

“Yeah.” JJ muttered, pulling out his phone.

“Dude? You still playing?”

“Err, yeah, sure.” JJ locked his phone and grinned at them. “Gotta end this fast, boys, I got a booty call to get to!”

“Haha, who’s the lucky lady?” Jordan asked, reclining on his stool as he watched them finish the game.

“Oh, err, you know Cindy Barmae?” JJ replied, his eyes flicking up to meet Asher’s steady gaze. “On the cheer squad? It’s nothing serious, but who’s gonna turn down a free bj, huh, guys?”

“Who indeed?” Asher smirked even as JJ potted the final ball. “Good job there was no money on this, Jordan, JJ would’ve cleaned you out!”

“Yeah, yeah, ok, ok.” He waved their mockery away. “Now that we’ve established that I suck at pool, can we get out of here?”

“Yeah, sure.” Asher shrugged, glancing at JJ as he stooped down to get his jacket, t-shirt stretched across his muscles. “See you at Spencer’s non-party tomorrow, JJ?”
“I’ll be there.” He grinned suddenly, turning to Jordan. “Oh my god, dude! I never told you about Asher’s car last weekend!”

“Oh, not that!” Asher scowled, moving over to cut him off. “No.”

“Fine, fine, tomorrow for sure though.” JJ smirked wider, pulling his jacket on. “It’ll be better with a big crowd anyway!”

“Goodbye, JJ.” Asher said firmly, steering JJ towards the door, hands on his back. “Go and enjoy your hook-up, you player!”

“Haha, that guy, huh?” Jordan laughed when Asher returned to him. “That story is about the crash, right?”

“Yeah.”

“He doesn’t know about–”

“No.” Asher cut across him quickly, shaking his head. “Only you, Layla, and Spencer know that truth, no one else needs to. Are you done? Can we go?” He changed the subject quickly and Jordan nodded, drinking the last of his soda.

“Yeah, I still have a few hours until curfew though, do you want to grab some takeout and drive around?”

“Sounds perfect.” Asher smiled and followed him outside. He pulled out his keys and opened the Stingray, sitting into its clean, polished interior. Once Jordan was inside, Asher turned on the engine and pulled out onto the street. The sun had set already, and the lights were coming on across the city, the sky turning into deep blue twilight. He reached over and tapped the button for his music, keeping the volume low in case Jordan wanted to talk.

“Over there, use that drive-thru.” Jordan pointed and pulled out his wallet. “I got this, Ash.”


“It’s cool, you’re burning gas bringing me around.” His boyfriend insisted as Asher rolled to a stop in front of the speaker. “Um, I’ll have…”

They parked along a street near the beach, the boardwalk busy with people as Asher and Jordan got out, eating while they walked out towards the end of the pier that stretched into the water. Surrounded by strangers and people he knew he’d never see again, Jordan felt freer and more comfortable with Asher. They didn’t hold hands or anything romantic, but just being there with his boyfriend made Jordan smile. He glanced over at Asher, seeing furrowed brows and an irritable expression clouding his handsome face. “Hey, you still aren’t mad that I paid for the food, are you?”

“I just wish I didn’t have to rely on your charity.”

“It’s not charity, Asher.” Jordan slowed his pace and Asher turned to him. “We’re together, and to be honest, I was actually really hungry!” He smirked as Asher started to laugh. Jordan balled up his paper bag and tossed it into the nearby trash can. “Pew!”

“Nice!”
“Well, I might suck at pool, but I can still throw a football, or a paper bag.” Jordan grinned and threw his arm around Asher’s shoulders. He felt his boyfriend stiffen for a moment before he relaxed; none of the other tourists or locals were paying them any attention.

They walked until they reached the end of the pier, Asher stopping to take a deep breath and look out at the waves rolling towards the beach, the lights around them reflected in flecks and crests of the water. Jordan leaned on the wood railing, facing back towards the city. “You ok, Asher?”

“Sure…” He frowned over at Jordan. “Why?”

“I don’t know, something about the ocean always makes me think.” Jordan shrugged. “Especially about the future; me, you, football, college, all that stuff.”

“I’m just trying to get to the next day.” Asher muttered. “That’s enough of a challenge.”

“Hmm.”

“We should probably head back, it’s gonna take at least forty minutes to return to Beverly at this time of night.” Asher said after another few minutes of comfortable silence between them. Jordan nodded and they set off down the pier towards the street. “Layla said she was doing something tonight, err, damn it, I can’t remember what was it.”

“You weren’t paying attention?” Jordan arched a brow at him.

“Not really, it was Biology and JJ was sitting right in front of us,” Asher laughed, shaking his head. “He was hitting on that new girl, trying to show off his own biology, if you know what I mean?!”

“Ugh, your jokes are terrible.” Jordan shoved him playfully. “I actually saw Spencer and Layla talking this morning, maybe they were making plans or something?”

“I can only hope.” Asher muttered. “I don’t understand her, Jordan, I thought that we had hit this nice balance of her living her life and me…not having to do anything. But then when I came clean about the money, she, she said she ‘loved’ me.”

“What?”

“Yeah,” Asher grimaced, shaking his head as they neared the start of the pier. “I don’t know, dude, maybe she was just saying that, I didn’t feel like there was any emotion behind her words, like it was what she thought she had to say in that moment. But Spencer has shown clear interest and I’m not doing anything to stand in their way, at least, nothing beyond what I have to appear to be doing.”

“Huh?” Jordan frowned. “What do you mean?”

“It’s all about optics, Jordan.” Asher smiled at him, the twinkle of confidence returning to his eyes. He gestured at his car, several younger teenagers admiring it. Asher grinned wider when he saw one of them take a selfie with his orange sportscar in the background. “I swear, there are way hotter supercars in this city…”

“And how many of them are parked here?” Jordan made a show of looking around. “I don’t see any.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Asher shrugged him off and walked over to his car, flashing a smile at the jealous and admiring looks he was getting. He opened the doors with a click and prepared to get inside.

“Yo, brah, this is your car?!” One of the teens called out. “Sick ride!”
“Thanks!”

“You must be loaded!” Another muttered as Jordan got inside.

“Haha,” Asher just laughed and sat into the car. He glanced at Jordan, seeing him frown. “I didn’t say anything, no need to lie.”

“I noticed. This car, it’s like your shield,” Jordan gestured at the dashboard as it lit up. “Like in those books you read with the heroes and stuff. It’s how you’re able to fool everyone into thinking you still have money, that’s why you won’t sell it.”

“Hmm, pretty astute, Jordan.” Asher whispered, backing out carefully. “The day I have to sell this beauty is the day I finally admit that I’m broke and in serious trouble. But that day hasn’t come yet, and yeah, it’s a shield; everyone sees it and assumes I’m wearing shiny plate armor underneath.”

“You can lower your defenses around me, Ash.”

“I know, you’re the only who knows everything after all.” Asher smiled sadly, entering the long line of traffic waiting for the lights. “I’ll drop you off, ok?”

“Yeah, um, your Dad at home?”

“For tonight, yeah, I think so.” Asher frowned, his pulse lowering as they returned to safer subjects. “I think he said something about going to San Diego tomorrow for a few days to find some old friends who owed him money from their start-up days. Not much, but it’d be something.”

“Ah, ok.” Jordan nodded as he reached over to play with the radio. “Maybe we can hang out tomorrow night then after Spencer’s party.”

“No-party!” Asher corrected with a laugh. “But yeah, I’d like that.”

Asher swam underwater, holding his phone out to record himself as he cut through the liquid like a shark, coming up for air in time to hear Layla laugh at him. “What?”

“How many times are you going to do that?”

“Hey, you were the one who said it had an underwater mode!” Asher grinned as he moved down the length of the pool back to where Layla sat on the edge. “Plus your pool is better suited to artistic shots, the one back at the house is more, uh, more of a party pool.”

“Yeah, I heard about the hook-ups that happened there last week.” Layla smiled and shook her head ruefully. “I hope you cleaned those tiles afterwards.”

“Don’t worry, they were freaking sterilized!” Asher placed his phone on dry land and swam around so he was opposite Layla. “Hey, thanks for inviting me over after practice, it’s really nice to just float instead of running and tackling.”

“How many times are you going to do that?”

“Hmm, I’ll admit I had an ulterior motive.” Layla purred, dipping her leg into the water and drawing it across the surface towards him. “Seeing you in boardshorts was only half of it though!”

“Oh?” Asher swam further back as Layla sank fully into the water. He swallowed uncomfortably when she got closer. “Hey, um, didn’t you say that we had to get ready for Spencer’s party?”

“We have time.” Layla slipped her arms around him and kissed his cheek. “Besides, we can be
fashionably late; this won’t even take twenty minutes.”

“Uh, I don’t think so, Layla.” Asher managed to pull himself away and he swam for the steps, climbing out of the water. “We have a big game next week and I want be on full power for it, sorry.”

“But-

“We’ve been doing so well lately, and I don’t want to jinx that, the team depends on me.” Asher grabbed his towel and started drying off. “And just for the record, I’m pretty sure the Evite said it started at ten, that was an hour ago, we’re about as fashionably late as we can be.”

“Fine.” Layla gave up and climbed out after him. “Are you going to be ok hanging out with Spencer? Are you nervous or something? You seem really on edge.”

“Uh, I guess.” Asher shrugged, letting his back and chest dry in the warm LA sun. “It'll be weird hanging around Spencer right now, him knowing-”

"The truth?"

"Hmm." Asher hummed non-committedly. One truth at least.

“I know the truth about you,” Layla sat down on a towel nearby. “Is it weird hanging around me?”

Asher didn’t answer the question, pushing his wet hair back from his forehead instead. She looked at him expectantly and he shrugged. “A little, sure.”

"How long are you going to keep this up?"

"I don't know, I haven't marked a 'Come Clean' Day on my calendar.” Asher grabbed the towel and started drying off again. "I'm not asking you to lie for me."

"Well, I'm just not interested in being party to elaborations."

"Yeah, well," Asher sighed and turned away from her to check his phone. "I told Jordan."

"What? When? Last night?"

"After I got the car back." Asher could feel her frown at his back. "I told him before I told you."

"Why?"

Because he’s my boyfriend and he’s way more important than you. He shrugged, waiting for the urge to be truly honest to pass by. After a long pause, Asher turned back to see her pained expression. "He's my best friend, I trust him more than anyone."

"Huh." Layla clicked her tongue.

"He was the one who convinced me to tell you, I'm beginning to think that was a mistake."

"Don't you want to be honest with me?" Layla asked, standing up.

When has that ever been our MO? Asher resisted the impulse to back away when she came closer, though he could feel his muscles stiffen and become tense. He avoided her eyes and shook his head, "I think we both prefer it when things are simple. I didn’t want to lie to you, of course, but little white lies have helped our relationship to stay stable.”
“It’s more than a white lie, Asher.” Layla reached out for him. “Look, I love you for who you are, money or not, but you need to figure out who you are. You need to love yourself, Asher, accept your…new reality.”

“Uh huh.” Asher grunted, avoiding her eyes as she kissed his lips. He didn’t react, simply standing there until she sighed regretfully and moved away. *Accept myself? I wonder if you know more than you’re letting on?*

“I’m going to get changed.”

“Great, I’ll be a few minutes.” He mumbled, sitting down on the towel after he unlocked his phone. There was a message from Jordan; *Looking forward to seeing you at the non-party!* He replied quickly and neutrally before deleting the conversation, Asher was sure Layla couldn’t crack his password, but he couldn’t take that risk.

*Be there in thirty minutes. See you then.* Jordan grinned when he saw Asher's response and returned to playing his video game. He adjusted his headset as his character crouched on the rooftop. “Hmm, I could try building—”

“I have an address!” Olivia announced, thrusting a piece of paper at him.

"What?” Jordan blinked, a burst of gunfire coming from his left.

“Gah!” Olivia tugged his headset off and looked sternly at him. "I have a Crenshaw home address for the wire transfer. You wanted answers, let’s go.”

“Ok, ok.” Jordan quit *Fortnite* and stood up slowly. “Right now?”

“It’s not Spencer’s address, but there has to be a clue there. We’ll be back before the party kicks off, there’s no one here.” Olivia gestured at the caterers as they walked past with decorations and food. “Come on, Jordan, Mom and Dad are outside, they won’t even notice we’re gone.”

“Yeah, ok, let me get my keys.” He led Olivia towards the door. “Um, actually I need to grab something, be right back.” *Asher will still be here when I get back, we can hang out then. Besides, this could be the critical proof we need!* “Ok?”

“Waiting on you, Jordan.” Olivia gestured at his convertible urgently, turning to check that they weren’t being watched.

“You know, the last time I drove into Crenshaw didn’t end so well.” Jordan muttered as they backed quietly out of the driveway and set off down the quiet street. “Let’s hope we have better luck this time.”

“Hah, I think every cop in the city knows to avoid pulling you over after Mom went all out on the police department.” Olivia replied, watching as the green, leafy streets turned into wide boulevards of bustling shops and then into less developed neighborhoods, the signs of wealth disappearing over a short eight mile drive. They pulled off the main thoroughfare and continued along a residential side street, Jordan slowing down and parking opposite the house that was on the address. “I think that’s it.”

“Yeah, ok.” Jordan nodded, chewing his lower lip. He undid his belt and reached into the backseat for a box of Chocoburst that he snagged from one of the caterers earlier. “Let’s go!”
"Why do you have a box of candy?" Olivia frowned at him.

Jordan looked from her to it and then back again, his trust in his flawless brain logic becoming undone. "Uh, we need a reason to knock on the door, duh!"

"Um…" Olivia was staring at him as though he'd lost his mind. "So, your big plan is to pretend you're an eight year old?!"

Jordan narrowed his eyes at her, before opening the car door and getting out. Together they approached the two old men arguing on the porch, Jordan silently preparing his sales pitch. "Hi. I-

"Aren't you a little old to be selling candy?"

"Uh," Jordan looked down at his box of ChocoBurst and then up again as Olivia tried and failed to hide her smirk. "Um, we-

"Got any with peanuts?"

"Um, it's an assortment." Jordan replied sheepishly, offering the box to the man.

"Is this your house?" Olivia asked.

"Nah, this is Willie's crib." He replied, nodding at the man beside him.

"How long have you lived here?" Olivia asked him.

"Since your Daddy was born," Willie replied as a chill went down Jordan's spine.

"You know them?" The other guy asked as Willie nodded slowly.

"These here are my grands-"

"Uh…" Jordan looked at Olivia, seeing his own surprise reflected in her eyes. "I, um."

"Why don’t you two come inside?" Willie said, getting off the chair to guide them into the house. Olivia nodded and gave Jordan a gentle shove to get him to move, both of them following the man inside.

"Woah!" Jordan gasped, seeing a picture of his eight-year-old self playing soccer on Willie’s sideboard. "Is that me?"

"Yup, you used to play soccer before picking up a football." His grandfather replied, pointing Olivia towards another table.

"Oh my god, I can’t believe Mom used this picture for a card!" Olivia covered her face, mortified.

"Hmm, you still dancing?"

"Err, no, no, not like this." Olivia smirked and shook her head as she looked down at the glittered monstrosity that was her dress in the photo. "I can’t believe I wore this!"

"So," Willie turned to look at them as he moved slowly over the sofa. "Why now? Why come visit me after all these years?"

"Well, um, we didn’t know you were here." Jordan explained, sharing a look with Olivia. "Our Dad said that you had moved to Arizona."
“Did he now?”

“Yeah.” Jordan followed Olivia as she sat down on a chair and he perched on the arm, looking at their grandfather as he scowled at the fireplace. “Sorry.”

“So, your Dad is keeping me a secret? I guess he doesn’t know you’re here, then?”

“No, we were…um, you guys don’t talk much?” Olivia asked, glancing at Jordan as he nodded. “We had no idea you were even here, we were just, uh, following a money trail.”

“Yeah, well, Billy has forgotten where he came from. I pushed him to get his dreams and make something of himself. His successes were because of me! But money changes people, make them think they are better than what they came from.” Willie replied bitterly. “However, if that means that every month, he wants to send me a little check of appreciation, I’m going to cash that. But that’s about the extent of our relationship.”

“Oh.”

“Um, we should go.” Jordan said as the air became uncomfortable. “We have a birthday party to attend.” Huh, I guess the search for the truth just hit a brick wall.

“Um,” Olivia paused as they reached the door. “We’d like to come back again sometime to visit, if that’s ok?”

“Sure, sure.” Willie nodded welcomingly. “I’ll be here.”

“You know, why don’t you come with us?” Olivia offered, “Maybe you and Dad can reconnect and fix things between you?”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Willie shook his head. “But thank you for the invitation.”

“Mrs Baker really doesn’t do small scale, huh?” Asher grinned as the door was opened for them and he swept inside, Layla following him. The house had been transformed into the setting for a fully-fledged birthday party, comparable to Jordan’s or Olivia’s, with tables groaning under the weight of food and drinks, and another table dedicated entirely to gifts for Spencer. Balloons and streamers hung from every corner, lawn games set up on the patio near the pool, more food lined up outside.

Asher looked around as he and Layla sipped their sodas, making small talk with some of the people from school. He couldn’t see Jordan, even though JJ, Dylan, and Butler had gathered out by the giant Jenga tower and were playing each other. Asher looked back as Layla caught his attention.

“Huh?”

“If you want to go talk to the crew, go ahead.”

“Ah, thanks, I’ll just use the bathroom first.” He put down his drink and made his way through the house, stopping when Jordan’s Mom came out of the office. “Err, hi, Mrs Baker.”

“Asher, enjoying yourself?” She placed a caring hand on his shoulder. “And how many times do I have to tell you to call me Laura?”

“Another time, I guess.” He smiled disarmingly. “Um, is Jordan here? I haven’t seen him since we arrived.”
“Oh, um,” She glanced out the window and shrugged. “His car is here, maybe he’s upstairs. Will you go and get him, please, he can’t be unsocial at Spencer’s…event.”

“The non-party is really good, Mrs Baker!” Asher grinned and took the stairs quickly. The upper floor was quieter, and he made his way along the hallway, pausing in Jordan’s open door when he caught sight of the shirtless jock changing. “So there you are!”

“Huh? Asher?” Jordan blinked and turned around quickly, struggling to work the stiff top button of his jeans into the hole. “What are you-”

“Why don’t I give you a hand with that?” Asher smirked, surprised when Jordan suddenly pulled him into the room and shut the door. “I guess we could be really quick if you want?”

“No, Ash,” Jordan shook his head furiously as Asher reached out and ran his hand over Jordan’s shoulder and down onto his pectoral muscle. “My sister is literally next-”

“Jordan, are you-” Olivia knocked and opened the door without waiting, her question cutting off abruptly as she walked in on them. Asher had dropped his hand immediately and Jordan pulled his jeans up as high as they could go in a desperate attempt to hide his bulge. Olivia paused and then closed her eyes before shrugging and looking at them again. “Oh, hey, Asher. C’mon, Jordan, the party is this way, we don’t want to be missed!” With that, she left again, shutting the door after herself.

“Um…what just happened?” Asher blinked, looking between the door and Jordan.

“A near-miss?” Jordan glared at him as he sat down to finish getting dressed. “Dude, what the hell were you thinking?!"

“I wasn’t, sorry.” Asher walked over as Jordan pulled his t-shirt on. He leaned down and slowly kissed Jordan, savoring the press of their lips and the way his boyfriend reached up to pull him deeper.

“Aww, man, I wish I could blow this party off to spend the afternoon with you, Ash.” Jordan whispered, standing up. He placed his arms on Asher’s shoulders and took a deep breath. “Ok, let’s go.”

“JJ and the guys are outside playing with the Jenga,” Asher said as they left the bedroom. “You coming to join us?”

“In a minute, I want to talk to Olivia first.” Jordan said, walking downstairs, catching sight of his sister talking to Spencer’s friend Coop. “I’ll find you guys later.”

“Yep.”

“Ehh, Olivia? Can I talk to you for a minute?” Jordan guided his sister into the office.

“I was talking to her!”

“Right, great, but are we going to talk about GW?!”

“Who?” She frowned in confusion.

“Grandpa Willy?” Jordan gestured as though it should have been obvious.

“You…” Olivia was looking at him as though he was a crazy person again. "We've known him for
an hour, you can't use an abbreviation already."

"It's a codename." Jordan looked affronted. "What if he knows about Spencer?"

"We talked about this; Spencer is not our brother." Olivia whispered back firmly. "The fact that...GW was at that address just disproves your entire theory."

"Maybe, maybe not." Jordan fired back defensively. "Either way Dad's still lying about his history with Grace and we have to find out why!"

"N-no, no!" Olivia shook her head as Jordan smirked and backed out of the room.

He headed outside, seeing JJ reach for a block from the giant Jenga tower. Ah, Asher must be out there. Jordan passed through the door, smiling in greeting at Layla and Butler as he rounded the tower to see Asher standing on the other side beside JJ. Both jocks had their arms folded across their chests; Asher’s broad shoulders stretching the fabric of his t-shirt taut across his biceps while JJ had on an equally tight vest that showed off his strong, tanned arms and upper body. Damn, check out the gun crew! Asher is still hotter though!

"Haha, Asher was all, 'No! Please! No!'" JJ said as he pulled the block out, his voice going higher as he imitated Asher's voice.

"Alright, you're exaggerating a bit." Asher grunted, stooping to grab a loose block.

"Please, go on." Jordan smirked as he encouraged JJ to continue with his story, drawing an irritated glare from Asher. Pretty sure he’d never be this easy-going on anyone else if they were teasing him like JJ is right now. But then again Asher has…a weakness when it comes to his other best friend. "What happened next?"

"It was crazy!" JJ grinned, coming over to Jordan. "The car just kept rolling right out into the street!"

"That's because you forgot to put the parking brake on." Layla interjected sharply.

"Ahh, it doesn't matter." Asher defended him quickly. "Why are we even talking about this anyway? It's fixed, move on."

"Where'd you take it?" JJ asked, folding his arms.

"I know a guy." Asher replied vaguely.

"You know a guy who can fix a 1959 Porsche Roadster?" JJ held his gaze, incredulous. "In one day?"

"Jay, leave it," Jordan called out. "It's just a matter of money, right, Asher?"

"I guess." He mumbled, seeing Olivia glare at him and walk past. Asher avoided her eyes and shrugged at JJ and Jordan. "Like I said, it’s done."

"Hmm, kinda like my drink." JJ grinned at him, leaning on Asher’s shoulder and whispering his words into his ear as Jordan frowned at them in confusion. "This party is feeling a little dry, huh, Ash?""

"I guess you could say that.” Asher replied softly, breathing deep as JJ’s breath revealed a sharp note of vodka to his words. The smell mixed with his cologne in a way that reminded him of their
proximity the week before, the same desire uncurling inside his chest. “You got a solution for that, JJ?”

“Always, bro, just don’t let Coach see you.” He moved, turning so their bodies were even closer and tipped several drops from a silver hip flask into Asher’s soda. “Hit me up when you need a refill.”

“Thanks, bro.” Asher grinned at him and took a sip, the mixed drink searing a path down his chest. The effect was enough to purge away the awkwardness of having to lie to his friends, but when Asher opened his eyes Jordan was looking at him judglingly. “What?”

“JJ is a bad influence on you!” Jordan laughed suddenly and threw his arm around Asher’s shoulders, pulling him closer as they walked towards the pool. It was an affectionate gesture and Asher kept taking sips of his drink to make sure it seemed nothing more than two friends having a quiet conversation.

"Thanks for having my back about the car."

"Always." Jordan muttered, smirking at him. "It was either that or messing up my move and collapsing the tower on JJ."

"Haha, I'd almost pay to see that..." Asher blinked and became sombre. "If I had any money of course."

"It'll be alright, Ash."

"Yeah, sure." Asher pulled away from him before their closeness became suspicious. “You want to get some food? I saw some killer looking fried chicken, better grab some before Butler wolfs it down. I swear that dude has hollow legs.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed!” Jordan agreed, following him over to the tables. He was stopped when his father stepped abruptly into their path. “Uh, hi Dad?”

"Come with me, now." Coach Baker glared at him as Olivia followed Jordan inside. “Go towards the office, I can’t believe who I’ve just seen in the house!”

“Oh…Is Grandpa Willie here?” Jordan asked guiltily, waving Asher on towards the food without him. “Well, we can explain.”

"You invited him here?!” Coach Baker glared at Jordan.

"How is it that you are mad at us right now?" Olivia responded quickly. "You’re the one that lied about our grandfather our whole lives!"

"It's complicated." Their father held up his hands as Jordan glanced from one to the other, following the conversation.

"How is it complicated? He lives half an hour away, why would you hide him from us?"

"Look, ok," Coach Baker closed his eyes and tried to wave away their concerns. "I realize this is confusing for you both. I had to make a decision to protect this family, and it was the right decision."

"Says who?"

"Says me, that's who." He replied to Olivia's question. "I'm gonna tell him he's gotta get outta here!"
"Wha-"

"Are you afraid something is going to get out?!" Jordan asked suddenly as a rush of courage filled him.

"What is that supposed to mean?!" His father came back, hissing his words as confusion was writ large across his face. "Do you think I'm keeping secrets from you?"

"I know you're keeping secrets!" Jordan snapped back, as his Mom came over, looking at them in confusion.

"What are you guys doing in here?"

"Laura! C'mere!" Coach Baker gestured her over frantically. “C’mere, c’mere!”

"I don't know if you this, but your fat-"

"Yes, yes," He cut her off as they formed a small, awkward huddle. "Willie is here, and these two invited him!"

"It was Olivia." Jordan immediately threw her under the bus as her gaze snapped up, betrayal on her face. "I told you it was a mistake."

"Oh, ok, Sherlock Holmes! But this wasn't my big idea, it was yours!"

"Mine?"

"Yes!"

"You're the one who has the hots for Spencer!" Jordan hissed back, his finger stabbing the air to reinforce his point.

"Woah! What?" Their father arched a brow.

"Oh, you're an ass!" Olivia glared at him. "I know that this whole thing started because of you and your messed up Daddy issues!"

"Woah, hold up-" Billy tried to interject, but neither of them were listening to him.

"My Daddy issues?" Jordan gasped.

"Yeah, your Daddy issues!"

"My Daddy issues?!

"Enough!" Their Mom snapped, cutting off their hissing match as Jordan and Olivia glared at each other. "Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on here? And why for the love of god is your father in our living room?!"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Billy shrugged.

"Spill it now. Or else!" Jordan’s Mom threatened and he felt backed into a corner.

"If you want to know, you got to ask." Olivia said.

Jordan sighed. Moment of truth. He turned to his father and asked, "Is Spencer our brother?"
Jordan looked intently at his Dad as the man took a deep breath and gestured between them. "You two think that I'm Spencer's father?"

"No, I didn't." Olivia replied, drawing Jordan's ire. "And then I did, and now I, I don't know what to think. It was Jordan's theory."

"Nice." Jordan shrugged defensively. "Thanks a lot."

"Enlighten us, Jordan." His Mom said as he came under the glare of the possible future District Attorney.

"Um," Jordan swallowed hard, feeling his confidence waver. "I wish I had Asher to back me up right now, he'd know how to find the words. "Err, well, you moved Spencer into our home-"

"Woah, woah, hold on, I had no choice." His father broke in immediately. "Because you tried to block his transfer to Beverly Hills."

"And then at the barbershop I learned you had a past with his Mom!" Jordan continued in the face of his father's resistance. He pivoted quickly to his mother, "Sorry you had to find out this way, Mom, but Dad and Grace J-"

"I know they dated in high school." She turned his Scud missile into a damp squib with one sentence. "I know."

"Is that your bombshell evidence?" Jordan's father demanded.

"Well, uh, you lied to us when we asked you about it!"

"And, uh, you were making payments for seventeen years and we thought it was child support, but, uh, the address led us to Grandpa Willie..." Olivia trailed off as though realizing that the evidence wasn't helping.

"Exactly." Their father's angry grimace filled the space. "And now he's in my house!"

"Sorry." She muttered in a small voice.

"I'm speechless," Their Mom looked between them. "You two are the worst detectives in the world."

"The worst!" Coach Baker echoed his wife.

"The investigation was flawed." Olivia accepted.

"Ok, ok, just to be clear," Jordan pressed the issue, suddenly realizing that his Dad hadn't actually answered the original accusation. "You're not Spencer's fath-"

"Jordan, no." Coach Baker held his gaze as he spoke. "I am not Spencer's Dad."

Jordan scowled as Olivia slid behind her father and mouthed 'I told you so' at him. "Ok, well, um," He clapped his hands together, forcing a grin as he tried to salvage his collapsing interrogation. "You know what? This has been a great learning experience! I say we put this little misunderstanding behind us and go get some cake!"

"Yep!" Olivia replied quickly and made to push past their parents, but their Mom held up a hand to stall them.
“This case will remain open until we determine the appropriate punishment, but until then, we have
guests! So, could everyone just smile?!” The final word sounded like a threat and Jordan nodded
quickly.

“Hey, Ash? You ok?” Jordan asked, finding Asher sitting by the pool, facing away from the party.
His boyfriend was staring out at the views stretching behind the house, Downtown LA visible in the
distant heat haze. Jordan sat down next to him, glancing into his cup. “Empty, huh?”

“JJ is out.” Asher replied, his words slightly slurred. “Beginning to think that carrying an extra flask
might be a good idea.”

“That doesn’t sound like one.” Jordan said gently. “You don’t need alcohol as a crutch, Asher.”

“It makes the world easier, makes some things less real and makes other things more solid.” Asher
mumbled, tipping the very dregs of the plastic cup into his mouth, savoring the final dribbles. “And it
makes me think…”

“Yeah?” Jordan prompted but Asher didn’t elaborate. “Um, is this about what happened earlier?
Having to, um, bend the truth with JJ and Layla?”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Jordan.” Asher groaned, lying back and closing his eyes. “But I’m just
not sure if I’d be a better liar if I didn’t remember it the next day.”

“You need to take it easy, Asher, this isn’t that kind of party,” Jordan turned to him fully, letting his
eyes drag across Asher’s arms and chest. “My parents are already pissed off, you don’t want to run
afoul of them right now.”

“It’s still better,” Asher continued to speak, his words seemingly more muddled. “Having a little to
take the edge off; it’s when the real person is allowed to come out. It’s when you can finally say
what you really think and feel instead of hiding behind what people expect.”

“This isn’t you, Ash.” Jordan shook his head, seeing Asher crack open an eye to look at him. “I
know you, remember? You like being in control, you need to be, you’re living three lives,
remember?”

“It’s exhausting keeping everything up, Jordan.”

“Ok, um, why don’t I.” He cut himself off as Asher sat up abruptly. “Where are you going?”

“I need to use the bathroom.”

“Are you going to be sick?” Jordan stood up with him, but Asher shook his head. “Ok, I’ll be here if
you need me.”

“We’ll get a refill.” Asher said, offering him a smile. “Virgin, I promise. C’mon, Jordan, we better
spend some time with the crew so us being off along doesn’t look…you know.”

“Yeah, ok, sure.” Jordan nodded, his brows pulling together in concern as Asher staggered slightly.
But his boyfriend shook it off as though his leg had fallen asleep and Jordan watched him walk
away. He was about to follow Asher when Jordan realized that his sister had been observing them
the past few minutes from the other side of the pool. *Crap, better fly under the radar for a while. Uh,
there’s Stacy from the cheer squad, I can talk to her!*
Asher was able to hide the worst of his tipsy state as he came out of the bathroom and walked through the living room. He paused when he saw Layla, before turning and carefully moving over to where she was sitting. Asher grabbed a nearby cup of soda and chugged the drink, trying to mask his breath, before sitting down opposite her. "Hey."

"Where did you disappear to?" She blinked, her expression becoming more disappointed. "You're drunk, Asher."

"So? Might as well be broke and drunk, huh? Isn't that what you'd prefer?" Asher glared at her. "Rather than, ah ha, bending the truth?"

"I don't like it when you lie in front of me."

"I would've figured you'd be used to that by now," Asher muttered, his gaze reaching across the room to where JJ was hanging out with the crew.

"It just makes me an accomplice to those lies," Layla talked over him. "And it's embarrassing to watch."

"Sorry that my life embarrasses you." Asher grunted, leaning back when she tried to reach for his hand.

"That's not what I said."

"Yeah, whatever, you do what you want. Just don’t expect a ride home.” Asher stood up and staggered away, ignoring the concerned looks from several of his teammates as he was forced to use a hand against the wall to guide his feet out to his car.

“Dude!” JJ called out, wrapping his arms around Asher’s chest in a protective hug, his breath a hot tickle in Asher's ear. “Where do you think you’re going? No way am I letting you drive like that.”

“I'm fine.” Asher muttered but he didn’t try and pull away from his friend’s warm, strong embrace. “I can manage.”

“Nope, not happening!” JJ reached down and plucked the keys from his hand. “I’ll drive you home, I got a lift here so it's cool.”

“Fine.” Asher huffed, glancing at his serious expression. “You’re about the only person I trust to drive that car anyway.”

“Right, c’mon, bro, I got you.” JJ steered him towards the exit. “Plus I saw Coach in the kitchen, and he’d kill us both if you got caught, even if you did drink most of my flask!”

“Heh, yeah.” He nodded, the other jock’s words sliding into his ears with a pleasant smoothness. Asher glanced in the mirror next to the front door as he leaned closer into JJ’s grip around his middle, feeling his hard body against his back. Layla had obviously followed him out, but she was just standing at the other end of the hallway, watching them, her expression icy.

“Watch the step.” JJ muttered, guiding Asher out to his car and propping him against the side as he opened the passenger door. “In you go.”

Asher was vaguely aware of JJ above him, buckling him in, his friend’s cologne a comforting blanket of warmth. The door shut with a click and then the driver’s door opened, JJ sitting in. “Dude,
did you lace that vodka with something? It’s hitting me way too fast.”

“Oh, so basically floor polish.” Asher groaned, the world spinning around him unpleasantly. “That would explain a lot.”

“Sorry, bro, you know my Dad is super-chill about alcohol-”

“I know a way you can make it up to me! Asher swallowed the words that threatened to spill from his lips as he ran his eyes along JJ’s exposed arms, muscles pulled taut as he gripped the steering wheel. “Um, we’re nearly there, right?”

“Yeah, I remember the way.” JJ nodded, slowing down, the engine becoming a throaty roar instead of a ravening howl. “Do we have to dodge your Dad?”

“No, he’s gone for tonight.” Asher mumbled, pointing at the approaching gate. “Drive into the guest house instead of the main one; I crash there when I’m drunk or just need my own space.”

“Cool.” JJ grinned at him. “You know, I might stick around if you want, it feels like we haven’t hung out for ages. You’re always with Jordan or Layla or-”

“Heh, Layla, there’s a relationship that’s hit the rocks.” Asher sighed, still looking at JJ as they drove slowly up the paved driveway towards the smaller guest house.

“You’ll figure it out, Ash.”

“Yeah, sure.” He waved the reassurance aside when JJ stopped and turned the car off. “Hey, thanks for doing this, man.”

“What are friends for, Asher?” JJ grinned toothily at him. “Especially when they accidentally give you super-high proof vodka!”

“Yo! Why are you kicking him out?!” Spencer intervened even as his Mom hissed at him to come
back. "You ain't seen your Dad in years and here he is, making an effort?"

"Stay out of this!" His Mom grabbed his shoulder, trying to diffuse the situation.

"You don't know our history, son." Coach Baker fired back as Jordan winced.

_Oooh, bad choice of words!_

"Let's get something clear here, Coach, is it his history I don't know about or the one you got with my Mom?" Spencer demanded.

"That was a long time ago." Grace replied when Coach didn't.

"So why ain't you tell me?"

"I didn't want you to know, it was my idea." Grace said as an uncomfortable silence spread throughout the party. "You transferring to Beverly...I thought if you knew that Billy and I had a past, I-"

"So you lied to me?" Spencer cut across her, his tone hurt. He shook his head and turned to Coach Baker. "And you told me not to go see my Dad, but that's because he would have told me about you and my Mom, right? That he was gonna tell me the truth, right?!" He kept turning around, catching sight of Olivia's upset expression as Jordan shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot. "Why don't nobody look surprised?" Spencer backed away, muttering, "I'm out."

"Where you going?"

"Dad may have left, but at least he never lied to me like this." Spencer huffed and gave them a disappointed look. "I got tickets to a football game."

_Well, that was awkward..._ Jordan grimaced and slipped away, passing the food table, only stopping when he saw Layla dabbing her eyes in the mirror at the other end of the hallway. "Um, are you ok?"

"Jordan? Oh, sorry." She sniffed and forced a smile. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine…Asher, right?"

"Did you see him?"

"He was drunk," Jordan nodded carefully. "But, um, I don’t see him now, did, uh, did you guys get into a fight?"

"I guess," Layla gestured vaguely at the door. "He’s gone. Him and JJ."

"Uh." Jordan swallowed when he heard the vehemence in her voice. "I don’t-"

"It’s obvious! I can’t believe I’ve been so stupid." Layla cried again, shaking her head as Jordan shrugged, confused. "Asher and JJ! They’re obviously…hooking up!"

"What?! JJ?!" The QB baulked at her. "He’s totally straight! And, err, Asher too, of course. But JJ has a different girl every week, he is not gay. But, um, I did notice him and Asher slipping something into their drinks earlier, maybe Ash got wasted and JJ took him home?"

"I…I suppose."
“Yeah, you know what?” Jordan gingerly placed his hand on her shoulder. “I can just go over there and check on them. Like, if, uh, there’s something going on with them, I can text you and, uh, you can, um…” He made a random gesture in the air as Layla took a deep breath and nodded. “Yeah?”

“Yeah, thanks, Jordan.” Layla managed a small smile. “It’s probably nothing, it sounds insane when I say it out loud; Asher and JJ? No, no, I don’t…But, um, I’m glad to have you as a friend.”

Great, great, and I thought Spencer screaming at my Dad was awkward… Jordan forced himself to smile. “I’ll head over now, and if you don’t hear from me you can just assume all is totally straight and A-OK!”

Jordan knocked on the door of the guesthouse, entering after hearing a loud shout. Asher’s car was parked on the driveway outside and didn’t show any signs of damage, which Jordan took as a good indication that both JJ and Asher had managed to get here without issue. He walked inside, past the kitchen and into the open plan living area. Asher and JJ were sitting on the couch, playing video games, both looking up as Jordan came in. “Hey guys.”

“Hey Jordan.” JJ bumped fists with him as Jordan stood behind them.

“Jordan,” Asher was sober again, at least as much as Jordan could tell, no longer slurring his words. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to find you, err, both of you.” Jordan moved around to sit on the armchair. “You missed a hell of a blowout argument with Spencer though; epic family bullshit that now everyone knows about!”

“Damn, makes me kinda regret leaving.” Asher smirked as JJ resumed the game. “But I’m pretty sure I would have done something equally embarrassing if I had stayed thanks to JJ’s hyper-proof vodka!”

“I already apologized for that, bro.”

Yeah, I wonder how? The treacherous thought snaked through Jordan’s mind before he could stop it. Asher is calm and relaxed, but he’s got a new t-shirt on and just shorts. JJ is still wearing what he was at the party, shoes off to be more comfortable. Was there anything to what Layla said? No way, Asher might have a total hardon for JJ, but he’d never act on it, right? Yeah, but you never thought he’d blow you off that time you started watching porn together…it’s Asher, anything is possible.

“Jordan! Earth to Jordan?” Asher reached over and slapped his arm gently until he frowned and looked up. “Dude, you were spacing out. You sure you didn’t taste any of JJ’s vodka?”

“I’m sure.” Jordan forced a smile and shrugged. “You guys are crazy; my Dad would have freaked out if he caught you.”

“Good thing I’m pro at not getting caught!” Asher smiled smugly.

Not helping right now, Ash. Jordan groaned internally.

“So, you going to hang with us? I mean you’re here now.”

“Um, sure?” Jordan shrugged, following Asher’s eyes over to the bottles of alcohol collected together on the sideboard. “You’re not thinking of driving anymore, right, Ash?”
“The only place I’m driving to is my bed!” Asher grinned, looking at both of them. “There’s plenty of food, drink, video games, you guys up for a sweet boys’ night in?!”

“Hell yeah!” JJ nodded enthusiastically.

“Sure, sounds fun.” Jordan agreed.

“This couch is really comfortable, by the way, so whoever wants it can sleep on it.” Asher said, taking the controller from JJ as their character levelled up. “The other bedroom here is being used as storage.”

*Smooth lie.* Jordan thought before he frowned. “Wait, what do you mean whichever of us wants it?”

“Well, my bed can sleep two people comfortably.” Asher smirked at him as JJ laughed.

“Yeah, bro, the couch will be fine.” He grinned and casually flexed his arms, vest riding up. “I normally sleep naked, so I don’t think you want to deal with all that!”

*You’d be surprised how much he wants to ‘deal’ with all of that.* Jordan wetted his lips, catching Asher’s playful smirk. “If you promise to keep your underwear on, JJ, I think we’d all fit on Asher’s bed.”

“Uh, I’ll always take a bed over a couch.” The jock laughed, standing up to walk over to inspect the drinks. “I’m gonna get some ice.”

“Cool.” Asher waited for him to walk out to the freezer in the utility room before turning to Jordan. “What the hell, dude? Why are you inviting JJ to sleep with us?! Well, not like that, but you know what I mean.”

“Yes, I do.” Jordan folded his arms across his chest. “And I know you’re totally into him!”

“Dude!”

“Don’t give me that, we’re not going to be hooking up with him here anyway,” Jordan hissed back, smiling at Asher suddenly. “And don’t pretend you won’t enjoy it, you can thank me tomorrow!”

“Oooh.” Asher leaned back, smiling again. “I guess I can force myself to suffer through.”

“Suffer through what, dudes?” JJ returned with a bucket of ice, placing it next to the drinks.

“Whooping your ass in *Mario Cart!*” Jordan crowed, gesturing for Asher to change game systems. “It’s been way too long since I crushed you on Rainbow Road!”

“Aww man, I hate that map!”

Jordan woke up, his body feeling incredibly hot in the stifling air of Asher’s bedroom. He rolled over, pushing off the duvet as he felt movement beside him. *Oh shit! Asher and JJ are in here with me…and we’re all barely wearing anything. Fuck, and last night is kinda more blurry than I’d like.* Jordan stayed on his back, looking up at Asher’s ceiling, his boyfriend still asleep based on the breathing beside him. He chewed his lower lip, shuffling onto his side, morning wood held firm and bulging by his white briefs.

Asher was on his side, facing away from Jordan, his bright blue trunks hugging his perfect ass in a way that made Jordan groan before he could stop himself. He knew from past experience that Asher
slept soundly, and he could turn his boyfriend over without waking him. Afterwards, Jordan flicked his hungry gaze across Asher’s chest to where JJ was still slumbering, one arm flung out above his head, resting on the pillows, the other arm loosely held close to his chest. Jordan frowned when he noticed that JJ had his leg bent, his green trunks riding up, the close edge of his tan-line showing around his waist.

Jordan bit his lip, dragging his gaze back to Asher’s handsome form. So, do I sneak out of here like it’s the walk of shame? Maybe Olivia covered for me with our parents, I don’t remember if I told them I was sleeping over at Asher’s. Hell, I don’t remember anything after we started doing shots of that green liquid. Ugh, gross, I have that nasty, sweet taste in my mouth. Do I wake these guys up and ask what the hell we got up to?

He froze when JJ mumbled something and turned over, Jordan’s eyes widening as he caught sight of the other jock’s bulging dick. Holy fuck...no wonder Asher is so into him! JJ is totally a grower! Jordan averted his gaze as JJ settled and continued sleeping. Ok, they’re not getting up for hours, it’s just after six, I can make it back before anyone at home wakes up. He slipped out of the bed, searching for his clothes, a confused frown appearing on his face as he found his t-shirt on the hallway floor, next to the bathroom. “Ugh, I hope neither of them remembers anything about last night either.” Jordan doubled back after he got dressed and returned to Asher’s room. “Goodbye, Ash, I’ll talk to you later.” He whispered, daring to lean in and kiss his boyfriend’s forehead. JJ was apparently still asleep, and Jordan slipped away silently.

His own house was quiet, and Jordan was able to sneak inside without waking anyone up. The debris from the party had been cleared away, returning everything to normal. Jordan climbed the stairs, changing into his shorts and a loose, sleeveless shirt, dumping his clothes from the night before into the laundry basket. Apart from the smell of spilled alcohol—which he could blame JJ for—Jordan wasn’t able to detect anything that might have been cum from him and Asher (or JJ) doing something they’d regret that morning. He sighed in relief and padded downstairs, heading into the back yard.

The sun was hot this morning, blue skies overhead as Jordan sat on the edge of the pool, soaking his legs in the water. There was still a bruised sensation in the air around him, as though yesterday’s secrets had torn something when they were forced into the open. Jordan sighed to himself, closing his eyes. Maybe I should have woken Asher up, leaving him with JJ just...like that...no, Asher wouldn’t try and hook up with him. I’m beginning to sound like Layla. Yeah, because she was so wrong. Everything was accurate except the guy Ash is actually cheating on her with.

"Hi."

"Morning." Jordan opened his eyes and glanced up at his sister as she went to grab a blanket to sit next to him at the edge of the pool. There was silence for a few minutes until Jordan sighed, "So, um, you were right, you know? I should've just left it alone."

"Actually, you were the one that was right," Olivia replied softly, glancing at him as he stared at the ripples in the water. "The truth may not always feel good, but it's the only way to move forward."

“Um,” Jordan frowned, feeling them slip into dangerous territory, the rawness in his sister's voice making his pulse speed up. “I don’t—”

"I'm sorry we're not close anymore." Olivia caught his eye.

"That's my fault."
"No, it's not, it's mine." She insisted. "I let you think otherwise, I let everyone else think it, even myself, but I'm the one who pulled away."

"Why?" He asked as an awful inevitability slid into the conversation when Olivia broke eye contact and looked into the pool. "You can tell me anything, I'm your brother."

"Right, um, ok," Olivia took a deep breath and began to speak. "So, last year at one of the parties, I don’t actually remember which one it was, I was so messed up."

"It’s ok."

"Well, um, I remember I got totally wasted and you and the team and Layla-everyone was there. People were getting drunk and high and hooking up and…" Olivia glanced at him quickly before looking away again. "And, uh, I went upstairs for some reason, the music was pounding, everything was so loud, and I guess that was why you guys didn’t hear me."

"Olivia—"

"Jordan, just let me finish." She took another deep breath and this time turned to him, placing her hand on his. "I pushed open the door to a bedroom and, well, Asher was giving you a blow job. I knew it was you because I could see your face in the mirror opposite the bed, it was your voice, it was…"

Jordan felt his pulse rocket and his ears fill with hissing insects. Oh, no! No! No! No! He tried to pull away but her grip turned to iron and Jordan looked at her, fear in his eyes. "Olivia, I…"

"Asher saw me." She held his gaze along with his hand. "He recognized me, and I just backed out, left. I think he was going to come after me, left. I didn’t know what to do, Layla was my best friend, but you’re my brother, so I had to choose you. And I didn’t want to lie to her, so I just pulled away, pretended that it was the addiction that did it."

Jordan closed his eyes, as though wishing he hadn't heard any of that, as though he could somehow stuff the revelation back into the box and toss it in the ocean. Olivia was still holding his hand and she shuffled closer to him, offering him an understanding smile when he did open his eyes. "I, I don’t know what to say."

"I wouldn’t say anything, I promised Asher, sure, but at the time he said it was a one-off thing."

Olivia said. "You were drunk, he was drunk, I didn’t think there was anything more to it, but he kinda came out to me. And yet he’s still with Layla, so…"

"He’s gay." Jordan nodded, speaking quietly.

"And you?"

He swallowed hard, avoiding the question.

"It’s just, I don’t think that the party was a one-time thing." Olivia continued on. "I think that my brother is sleeping with his best friend and I’d have no problem with that if it weren’t for the fact that his best friend is lying to the person who used to be my best friend. It’s not going to end well, Jordan."

"Yesterday, huh?" Jordan cleared his throat, staring at the water. "When you came into my room,
that’s…when you knew?"

“I’ve suspected for a while. And…Asher spoke to me about a month ago, he said you’re still hooking up with him.”

“Did he?” Jordan muttered.

“He didn’t say if you were gay or bi or questioning or anything.” Olivia reached up to tilt his face towards her, waiting for Jordan to look at her. “And I love you no matter what your sexuality is; it doesn’t matter to me if you’re with a guy or girl or whatever, as long as you’re happy.”

“Thanks.” He whispered, his chest hurting as emotion cracked its way through armor he didn’t know he had. “I, we’re, we’re together. But it’s a secret, you can’t tell anyone, ok?”

“I already promised him I wouldn’t.”

“Good, because Mom and Dad would-”

“Love you no matter what, you know that.” Olivia said firmly, hugging him as Jordan felt his eyes well up.

“Yeah, ok, maybe, but I’m the QB in the football team, I can’t be gay!” Jordan cried, shaking his head. “No one is going to…I’d lose everything, I’d-”

“Jordan, it’s ok, breathe.” Olivia rubbed his back comfortingly. “You don’t have to make any decisions and I’m not going to say anything, but Asher has to let Layla go, it’s not fair.”

“I know.” He sniffed, wiping away his tears. “I know it isn’t, but I don’t think Layla is fooled; she pretty much said it to me yesterday. But she thinks it’s JJ Asher is hooking up with, not me.”

“Oh.”

“You don’t sound surprised.”

“Well…your boyfriend is pretty transparent about his feelings towards JJ.” Olivia smirked as Jordan grimaced when she used the term for the first time. “Plus, JJ was naked for pretty much all of Asher’s poker game last week and he was eying him up a lot.”

“Yeah, I was there when Asher ‘won’ JJ’s underwear.” Jordan smirked as Olivia stared at him. “He’s kind of crazy, I guess.”

“Is that why you love him?” She smiled and patted his hand. “If I get the coffee, we’ll keep talking?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Jordan nodded, a weight lifting off his shoulders to settle in his stomach. Even Olivia noticed Asher having the hots for JJ…and I left them both in bed, half-naked, together. Maybe not the best decision, Jordan.
Chapter Notes

This chapter contains problematic drinking patterns and should not be taken as an endorsement for underage drinking or alcohol abuse. There is also a scene of mild sexual content and one of brief violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“God damn it!” Asher cursed loudly as he watched JJ miss his tackle and crash into the ground. He looked to his left when Asher felt another pair of eyes swipe across him, finding Jordan averting his gaze too quickly before their stares met. The receiver grunted and shook his head, ignoring his boyfriend’s tightening shoulders; Jordan had been acting weird all week and Asher had no idea why. He looked back at the field again, nodding this time as he watched Spencer catch the ball return and sprint downfield. They were in the final quarter against Culver City, a team they should have pounded into dust, but Jordan had been holding back all game, almost as though he was deliberately avoiding throwing to Asher. In fact it had been Butler and Spencer that had scored almost all of their twenty points.

“Ok, defense out! Offense in!” Coach shouted out, clapping his hands as he switched the squads. “Go! Go! Go!”

Asher pulled on his helmet and slipped in his mouth guard, nodding encouragingly at JJ as he jogged past, dirt and grass stains on his jersey and arms. “Hey!” He grunted when Jordan shouldered past him, apparently not seeing him in his haste to get to midfield. Asher glared at his boyfriend’s back before moving on, walking over to his position, nodding when Jordan called out the play.

“Eagle forty-two! Eagle forty-two! On me, on me!” Jordan clapped his hands and grabbed the ball as soon as it was funnelled out to him. He danced backwards, eyes scanning the pitch. Jordan saw Asher, the receiver looking back at him, wide open, but the QB hesitated too long before he threw. The ball sailed through the air and forced Asher to turn around, running straight into the linebacker that had been sacking him all afternoon. “Ah. Oops.”

“Agh!” Asher cried out as he impacted the hard ground, his armor giving him some protection even as his vision blurred for a few seconds. He barely heard the scream of the whistle before Butler hauled him upright. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, no problem.”

“Hmm.” Asher grunted and stormed over to where Jordan was standing with the rest of the team, spitting out his mouth guard. Fury courses through him as Asher balled his hands into fists and he shouted at Jordan, “What the hell was that?! Where were you throwing the ball?”

“Right where you were supposed to be.” Jordan answered tightly, squaring his shoulders as Asher invaded his personal space and glared at him. “Run the right routes and we’ll be fine, Ash.”

“You-”

"Hey, hey!" Spencer broke them up. "We ain't got time for this, c'mon!"
Jordan watched as Asher huffed angrily and stomped away towards the sidelines as Coach called for a timeout. The QB felt his stomach clench and muscles tighten when JJ grinned and offered Asher a bottle of water, spraying the liquid in between the bars of his helmet, drenching his face. *Was that what is was like last Sunday, Ash? Did JJ cum all over your face like that?!* The thoughts were venomous, and Jordan felt his cheeks heat as guilt immediately replaced his anxiety. *I have no idea if they actually hooked up, that was unfair.* It had been the same all week; Jordan found himself over-analysing every interaction between Asher and JJ, every conversation he listened in on, every casual gesture or affectionate touch JJ made towards Asher before regretting the thoughts and suspicions at once.

He had noticed it before, of course, JJ was always very tactile when it came to Asher, finding opportunities to brush against his shoulder, hug him, lean into him. *It's not like I'm jealous,* Jordan found himself thinking as Coach explained the next play to him and Spencer. *I could do all those things with Asher too, it's just...I don't want anyone to get the wrong impression. We have to just be friends to everyone. Besides, all that touching is why Layla still thinks Asher is hooking up with JJ.*

“You got that, Jordan?”

“Uh, yeah, sure.” He nodded absently and moved back to the center of the field as Asher’s smile disappeared on his return to Jordan’s left flank. “Um, ok. Blue fifty-two! Blue fifty-two! Hike!” Jordan grabbed the ball as soon as it was presented to him and he moved backwards as Butler ran along the right flank before being blocked off by the safety. The QB grunted when he realized that Asher was the only one who was left open. Jordan threw the ball high and long, but it was too late, and he grimaced when Asher was sacked again.

“Ow!” Asher gasped, shaking his head to clear the black spots that were dancing in front of his eyes. His eyes locked onto Jordan and crossed the field, the cauldron of fury that had been bubbling before was now an inferno spilling over inside his chest. "What the hell was that, man? He almost took my head off!"

Jordan pressed his lips together and looked back at him, using his extra height to add a smugness to his expression that Asher frowned at. There was a flicker of compassion in the QB’s eyes before it vanished again, and Jordan opened his mouth to reply. “Well, Ash-”

"Hey, what's going on with y'all?” Spencer called out, pushing them away from each other as the team looked on in confusion. “You've been off all day, get yo ass in the game!"

Asher resisted for a moment until Spencer caught his gaze and nodded forcefully. “Fine, whatever.” The receiver muttered and he stalked over to the huddle as Coach beckoned for them to join.

“Hey!” Coach shouted out to him even as Jordan’s eyes lingered on Asher. “Look at the time, hurry up! Hurry up!”

"Do y'all want to lose this game today?!" Coach demanded as he paced irritably around the huddle. "Do y'all want to lose this game?! Y'all got two seconds! Under two seconds to make this right!"

"Hey, I can still make this play, Coach." Spencer said, but Coach shook his head and dropped his voice.

"No, they're going to be all over you." He sighed and turned to the rest of them, speaking at his normal volume. "Two seconds, y'all! Two seconds to make it happen! Go!"
Jordan wilted slightly under his father’s furious glare while beside him Asher practically radiated hostility. The QB swallowed hard when he looked to his left, catching JJ’s determined expression as the huddle broke and the defender patted Asher’s helmet encouragingly. *Ok, so maybe JJ can touch Asher more in public without caring about how it looks, but I still have a better body than…* The thoughts trailed off as JJ stretched his arms out above his head before putting them down and crossing his arms across his chest, his jersey riding up to flash his tanned abs. *Ok, so maybe he has better arms! That just means-

“Jordan, man, let’s go!” Spencer called for him to return to the pitch. “Get your head in the game.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know, last play.”

“Look, we should run check eagle instead of standard,” Spencer said to him quickly as Jordan nodded. “That linebacker has been hitting Ash all game long, they expect us to try and get to him.”

“I got it,” Jordan nodded and pointed at Butler. “Check eagle! Check, check eagle! Ready, ready, hike!” He waited for the ball and turned to Spencer, faking the pass to him as Culver City’s defenders charged the line. Jordan evaded their attempts to catch him, still making it look as though he intended on throwing it downfield. One of the defenders was racing towards him, but Spencer dived forward and cleared the way for Jordan to sprint through and score the winning touchdown. “Yeah!”

The crowd erupted behind him and Asher grinned as the sweet taste of victory filled the air. But a moment later it was turned to bitter ashes as Jordan avoided his eyes and didn’t stop to take his usual, brief, hug of congratulations. Asher frowned at him, ignoring the pats on his own back. *What the hell, Jordan? What did I do? You’ve been like this all week and it fucking sucks.* He unclipped his helmet and pulled it off, wiping the sweat from his brow as he closed his eyes, the faint wind kissing his flushed skin. *You won’t even return my texts or calls, how am I meant to understand if you won’t talk to me?*

Asher was dimly aware that the team had left the pitch and it was just him and the coach left, talking to each other. He opened his eyes and plodded off the field, walking into the corridor that led to the locker rooms. It would be easy to just hit the showers, grab his bag and go, try and figure Jordan out when he was alone, but Asher felt a surge of anger well up inside him when he stepped through the door and saw his boyfriend standing in front of his locker. The QB had just pulled his helmet off, dropping it onto the bench, his back still turned to him, the tight pants framing Jordan’s ass in a way that always made Asher hard. But not today. "What the hell was that game about?!

"You know Ash, I pass to you, you whine. I don't pass to you and you whine!" Jordan turned to him, not taking a step back even though they were very close to each other. His smooth skin was glistening with sweat and Asher ground his teeth, mind's eyes providing images and memories of other times when Jordan's skin was like that, when *he* had made Jordan gleam in such smooth, hot perfection. He blinked when Jordan shoved him back. "We won the game, man, so shut the hell up and stop whining!"

Asher wetted his lips and stared at Jordan, confusion and upset churning through his chest. He didn't reply however, too afraid that he'd say something he'd regret, instead Asher shouldered past Jordan and went over to his own locker. The jock dumped his helmet and gloves inside, looking up when JJ came over to him, his usual grin somewhat dimmed by a concerned look in his eyes. Asher glanced over his shoulder, catching Jordan watching them just before he looked away. *What the hell, dude?*

"Twenty blazing hots in one hundred and twenty seconds!" JJ said to him, excitement in his voice.
“Uh, what?”

“It’s the spicy wing challenge, c’mon, you’ve seen other guys try it!”

“Oh, that.” Asher nodded as he remembered the challenge that JJ had been talking about all day. He sighed, not reacting as his friend huffed and leaned on his shoulder with one arm, the other propping him up on the locker’s door. “I was just gonna head home, JJ, I’m kinda sore.”

“Aw, no, c’mon, Ash!” JJ grinned at him and leaned in closer, the pink of his tongue just visible between his lips before he spoke again. “Please, Ash, you gotta come, I need you there to cheer me on!”

“Um, I don’t know, man.” Asher shrugged, looking into his friend’s handsome face. Sweat was still pouring off him, mixing with JJ’s cologne and aftershave and deodorant; a cloying, heady scent that Asher drew in as he closed his eyes. But a moment later the spell was broken when Coach arrived to quell the cheering and Asher shrugged again, turning around towards the front of the locker room.

What’s your problem, Jordan? It’s almost like you’re…jealous.

“What the hell are y’all celebrating for?” Coach demanded as the cheering died down. He stalked back and forth as Jordan hooked his hands into the gap between his jersey and his armor. Asher had shuffled around to stand next to him, but the QB tried to ignore him and focused on his father’s disappointed expression. “Culver City are in dead last place in the league and that was one close game!”

Jordan shifted from one foot to the other, his eyes avoiding Asher’s face, though his gaze lingered hungrily on Asher’s bunched triceps, the thin band of fabric wrapping around the smooth skin of his arms at the elbows making his biceps look larger and more defined. He frowned again when he risked a quick pass over his boyfriend’s handsome face, seeing Asher staring at the floor. Huh, I guess he isn’t that broken up about almost losing the game. But is he thinking about JJ or- Damn it, I have to just ask him straight out if they hooked up or not! And tell him that Olivia told me she knows too because…Hold up, is that what this is really about?

He felt a tendril of self-hatred pushing through his chest and shame clouded his mind. Jordan let his gaze slide down onto the floor alongside Asher’s own. He knew that he shouldn’t have taken his anger and surprise and shame out on Asher, on the one person who actually got what he was going through. It wasn’t Asher’s fault that Olivia had seen them at that party, in fact, Asher went out of his way to make sure Olivia wouldn’t tell anyone. And the JJ thing… They’re two of my best friends no matter what else, they just wouldn’t do that. Asher has such a hardon for him though and JJ…no, that dude is so straight you could use him as a yardstick! Jordan blinked and became acutely aware that his father was giving him a dissatisfied look and he nodded, taking silent responsibility for their performance in the game.

"If y’all play like that against Malibu, they're going to crush us. Shower up and take all your behinds home. Ain't no reason to celebrate." Coach finished his tirade with another disappointed look before he shook his head and walked out the door.

JJ nodded slowly before turning to grin at them all. “Time to celebrate, boys! Woot!”

Asher tossed his gear bag and backpack into the passenger seat of his car, kneeling on the driver’s
seat as he pushed the backpack into the footwell. It was only when he straightened up and glanced over his shoulder that he noticed Layla was standing behind him. “Oh, hey.”

“Hey.” She replied softly, wringing her hands. “Um, my father wants to take us out for dinner, um, with Chynna.”

“Right.” He muttered, watching as she evaded his eyes and instead looked at the orange bodywork of his car. She had been neutral towards him since Spencer’s party, the occasional moments of warmth that were quickly revoked as though she remembered that they were still meant to be fighting over his lies about being rich. But there was something else driving her careful avoidance, some sense of guilt that he couldn’t figure out. Asher had spoken to Butler and a few of the others from the team, but apart from Spencer’s big blowout with his mother and Coach Baker, no one said anything about Spencer and Layla having “a moment.” So why do I feel like she’s always on the verge of apologizing this week? Whatever, her Dad’s in town, that always makes Layla weird, not Jordan levels of weird though. I really don’t want to have to go and play the role of super-straight boyfriend right now...

“Asher?”

“Yeah, yeah, I heard you.” Asher sighed and bowed his head, turning back to grab his keys from the seat. His eyes caught on the silver hip flask that he had taken to carrying with him in the last few days. It was sitting innocuously in the cup holder like a leftover soda can. Asher licked his lips and suppressed the urge to make a grab for it, resisting the desire to shove the world sideways into a pleasing haze of almost-not-real. He could hear Layla talking behind him and then the unexpected sensation of her hand on his shoulder. Asher’s arm darted out and he stuffed the hip flask into the pocket on his side of the car.

"If you don't want to, I can-"

"It's fine," He turned, fixing a smile on his face, the almost reassuring weight of that false life resting on his shoulders again. "I mean, I'd love to."

"Oh, ok!" She grinned, the light fading a little when he went around to the other side and opened the door for her, taking his bags out to put in the trunk. "I know we're still rocky, Asher, but I'll be glad just not to be alone with my Dad and Chynna, urgh."

"Hmm." Asher didn’t reply as he returned to the driver’s side, starting the engine and backing out as Layla reached over to put on his music. “The usual place, I guess?”

“Yeah, that’s where the team are going too, right?” Layla paused and then continued; her words careful as Asher burned through a changing red light. “I heard that JJ is doing some sort of competition?”

“Uh, it’s nothing,” He shrugged and tapped his fingers along to the beat. “Just some spicy wing eating challenge.”

“Oh, you don’t want to see him? Err, I mean, watch him?”

“No, watching JJ stuff his face with wings is not exactly high on my post-game celebration list.” Asher smirked and shook his head, pulling over as they arrived at the front of the restaurant. “Oh, I’ll have to park around the back.”

“It is pretty busy.” Layla nodded. “The team is already here; I see Jordan and Olivia too, ah, and there’s JJ. No wings though.”
“You must really not want to meet Chynna,” Asher laughed as he slowed down and moved into the lot, driving carefully until he parked in an empty space next to Butler’s shiny new Lexus. “Pretty sure JJ is your other least favorite person in the world.”

“What? No, I, I just, um.” Layla caught his appraising look and she shook her head. “I like him fine, it’s just he can be a bit…”


“Yep!” Layla answered quickly and hopped out of the car. “I have to, uh, ladies’ room. I’ll, um, I’ll see you in there.”

“Sure.” Asher nodded, waiting for her to disappear from his rear-view mirror before he reached down and pulled out the silver hip flask. He wetted his dry lips eagerly and unscrewed the cap, the urge to take a quick sip was almost overwhelming. Asher paused when he noticed his phone’s notification light flashing and habit forced him to reach over and check. “JJ started a live video…he’s Instagramming his contest…of course he is.” He smirked and then looked guiltily at the flask. “I don’t need it, not yet.”

Asher stepped out of the car, hesitating as his hand slipped onto the curved edge of the flask comfortably. He groaned to himself and then slid the container into the free pocket of his jacket. “But I might need it later.” Asher locked the car and headed towards the restaurant, regret already clawing at him for not taking a drink when he had the opportunity.

Jordan watched as JJ devoured the wings in front of the team, the rest of them cheering him on as he tried to eat the basket in the given time, fingers messy and chin and lips covered in spicy sauce. Olivia was sitting next to him, her expression a mix of revulsion and fascination. The QB half-smirked when he caught a glimpse of his sister’s face, before he looked back at JJ. *Damn, he can really put those wings away! I know he has a crazy appetite, but this is actually kinda impressive, really messy though.* Jordan blinked when he realized that he had been staring too long and JJ was looking back at him, a glimmer of something else in his eyes that vanished a moment later when the other guy shifted his gaze back into the basket. *Crap!*

He knew that JJ was more than just a dumb jock, of course, but Jordan never understood why Asher liked him so much. Sure, JJ had a great body and a nice smile, but Jordan had never really thought the linebacker had much going on other than partying and playing football. *Maybe if I had actually talked to Asher about this, or even just asked JJ straight out if something happened…but I can’t do that, it’s way too risky. And even if he did want to say anything, why would he? It’s not like he knows about me and Asher, and JJ’s not even gay for fuck’s sake!*

“Yeah!” JJ cried out, triumphant as he finished the challenge with a few seconds to spare. “Oh my god, my mouth is on fire! Ah! Ah! Ah!”

“Here, bro.” Butler pushed the jug of lemonade across the table to him.

“Aw, thanks!” JJ grinned and grabbed the jug by the handle, searching for a glass before he shook his head. Tears were streaming from his eyes as the spicy nature of the wings made his skin flush, cheeks burning red. “I can’t wait!” The jock shrugged and then started tipping the lemonade into his mouth without pouring it into a glass first.
“Chug! Chug! Chug!” The team started to chant as JJ kept drinking, half rising from his seat as though that would somehow increase the rate at which the cooling liquid would be poured inside.

Jordan remembered to join in with the cheering even as Olivia stared at them in embarrassment. But as JJ began to reach the end of the jug, Jordan’s eyes locked onto the way that the lemonade was spilling around his mouth and cascading down his neck towards the open collar of his shirt. Thoughts sprang uninvited into the QB’s mind, toxic visions of Asher being with them, Asher kissing JJ, Asher licking that sweet dew from JJ’s smooth, tanned skin. Jordan felt a strange twist in his stomach as the images flickered before his mind’s eye, a thrill of something that was almost pleasure unfurling and then lancing into his crotch as he gazed at JJ’s glistening skin. He blinked suddenly as he noticed an uncomfortable bulge in his pants.

Why the hell am I hard? What the fuck is this? Asher is the one who has the hardon for JJ!

“Yeah! I did it!” JJ cheered alongside the rest of the team, raising his muscular arms into the air in victory. “Oh man!”

“Uh, yeah, good job.” Jordan mumbled, shifting around uncomfortably. He forced a grin when JJ glanced at him, that same calculating glimmer in his eyes for a second before it was replaced with his usual exuberance. Jordan averted his gaze quickly and found himself looking across the restaurant to where Asher was sitting with Layla and Layla’s Dad.

I wonder which of us is more uncomfortable…

Asher let his eyes settle on the fries in front of him, the strained notes of the conversation between Layla and Chynna passing across the table. The dinner was awkward, but it always was with Layla's father, the man spending more time on his phone than looking up. He shifted his arm slightly, so it brushed against the side of his jacket, feeling the presence of the hip flask, comfort radiating outwards. Good to have it, it's just for reassurance, I don't actually need to use it, or take a drink or anything, but if I did...well, it'll be here. Asher thought to himself, taking a bite of his burger, wishing he could burn the tension of the meal away with just a small hit of what was in the silver flask. He could feel his chest tightening as the need grew and expanded, and he was on the verge of excusing himself to go take a drink in the restroom when Chynna gestured at him.

“So, I don’t know much about football, Asher, what position do you play?”

“Oh, wide receiver,” Asher answered, putting down his fork and perking up. "I'm, I'm one of the best receivers in the league, actually, Coach thinks I'm a lock for All State."

"Couldn't tell by today's game." Layla's Dad muttered, sparing a glance up from his phone. Asher's jaw tensed in response. "It was rough out there."

"Thanks to our QB playing blind!" Asher answered tightly.

"Uh, Dad and Chynna just got back from the Galapagos Islands," Layla intervened quickly.

"Oh? That’s cool.” Asher nodded, a half-truth falling from his lips with such ease he didn't notice until Layla looked at him sharply. "My Dad had plans to take me snorkelling there next summer, you know, private jet, yacht, uh..."

"Excuse me," Layla whispered and slipped off her stool. “Bathroom.”

“Huh.” Asher watched her go in silence. Oh? Upset? I didn’t even lie that time. Plans, sure, plans change, Layla. Ah, but there’s our waiter, Spencer, perhaps the dashing young server can go and sweep dear Layla off her feet and give her the honest life she so clearly lusts after. He blinked and
refocused on the conversation as Spencer paused next to their table. Asher’s lips twisted into a half smile when he heard the barb Layla’s father directed at him about the man’s common origins with Spencer; born in the hood, realness and truth and blah, blah. *Oh, don’t worry, I got the message.*

Asher yawned into his fist as a wave of exhaustion crashed over him. He stood up suddenly, seeing the man stare in surprise. "You’ll excuse me, I have somewhere to be." Asher started to walk away, not caring that the bridges were burning behind him. He pulled out a few dollars from his wallet and put it on the table, unwilling to let the music producer pay for his dinner. Asher scanned the room, his eyes crossing with Jordan’s as the QB stood near the pool table, but his boyfriend looked away abruptly and Asher’s mouth hardened. JJ saw him and raised a hand to wave him over, but Asher shook his head and the jock nodded, disappointment evident on his handsome face. Instead, Asher walked over to where Olivia and Layla were talking, hearing the last of her conversation.

“…my Dad certainly likes Spencer.”

"Your Dad doesn’t like me." Asher said, prompting Layla to turn around, flustered. "So, I’m taking off."

"Oooh, in your private jet?!"

"It's been a long ass day and I don't have the energy for this. The game sucked, talking your Dad sucked," Asher nodded at Olivia. "Your brother sucks!" *In all the good ways and the bad..." I'm going home."

"Asher..." Layla muttered regretfully.

"Uh, hang on." Olivia stood up, walking after him. "Asher, wait!"

"What?" He snapped, stepping outside into the warm night air and striding away from the restaurant.

"Do you want to hang with us?" She reached out to stop him. “Me and Jordan and—"

"Why would I want that?" He stared at her as Olivia looked pointedly back in the window towards Jordan. "No, I'm going home. And I don’t think he wants to see me; he’s made that pretty clear.”

"You should make up with him, repair the damage from today. And last…weekend.”

“What are you talking about?"

“I thought you’d know…” She trailed off suggestively and gestured into the restaurant where JJ and Butler were playing pool. Asher just frowned at her. “I, ok, look, Jordan thinks that you—"

"Stop." Asher shook his head, glaring at Jordan through the window, the QB not seeming to notice him as he stood next to the table. "He's the one with the problem, not me. If he wants…no, never mind, I'm done. I'm gone." Asher walked away, reaching into his pocket for his keys, his eyes skipping over a young man in his twenties who was heading the other way. *He’s cute. Not Jordan levels of hot, but does that even mean anything if Jordan hates me now? He doesn’t even want to talk to me, how am I meant to figure out what I’ve done if he looks away from every glance and acts super hostile all the time?* 

Asher sighed when he made it to his car, glancing over his shoulder to see Olivia shaking her head and walking back inside. He opened the door and climbed into the car, transferring the silver flask from his coat pocket to the cupholder in the central console. Asher stared at it for a few minutes, feeling the gnawing need to slake his thirst and banish the awkwardness from his mind. He wetted his lips and squeezed his eyes shut, managing to outlive the urges before he started the car.
With the bright lights of the console and the gentle growl of the engine pulling Asher back into reality, he was able to resist the voice that whispered about how much easier everything would be with just a small sip. Asher pressed the button for the media center and let the soothing beats of the music track wash over him. He nodded as the urges settled back to a more reasonable level, allowing him to reverse and spin the car around quickly, leaving the restaurant in a squeal of tires and burning rubber. Asher kept the music on high, so loud that it was the only thing he could hear, relying on the mirrors to tell him when to pull out of the way for a speeding ambulance or police car.

He waited until he reached the safe confines of the estate’s outer gate before he finally gave in and reached over to take the flask in his hand. Asher watched the gates open slowly, relief and regret mixing through his stomach. He didn’t want to remember the game, the awkward dinner, the fact that Jordan was punishing him for something he didn’t even know about. Asher didn’t try and fight the urge this time, feeling a sweet relief when he unscrewed the top of the flask and raised it to his lips. The warm metal was bitter against his mouth, but the sensation was soon replaced by the burning intensity of the sharp, tangy vodka. Asher drank deeply, as though it was sweetest water after a long game, feeling it burning its way down his throat in a fury of cleansing fire. He closed his eyes to savor it, the delicious poison that he knew was a problem, but it just made everything so…much…easier.

The house was dark as Asher eased his car up the drive and around to the rear of the main dwelling, parking in the usual place. He frowned, a pleasant buzz blotting out his thoughts as he got out of the car. “Oh, that’s right, Dad’s gone on another money making scheme, well the others were a bust, might as well see how this one goes!” Asher grabbed his bags from the trunk and, with the hip flask in one hand and keys in the other, he managed to get inside without stumbling or tripping over. The world had stopped feeling real, his vision turning into a pleasing haze of fluid colors, rounded corners, and smooth edges, all thoughts of Jordan pulled from his mind. The room spun around him and Asher dropped his bags on the floor, leaving the keys on the counter. “Huh? When did this get empty?” Asher mumbled, shaking the flask over his mouth to get the final drops on his tongue. He discarded the flask and used his hands to guide himself over to the drinks collection nearby.

The alcohol was hitting him quickly, tired body not resisting as he blinked and steadied himself against the wall. Asher considered the array of drinks available in front of him and then grabbed a half-full bottle of vodka, unscrewing the top quickly. “Ah, I don’t really need a glass.” Asher slurped to himself and drunk straight from the bottle, only stopping when his eyes started to water, and he started to gag. “Ugh.” He moved away, everything feeling numb until his legs hit the couch and Asher sat down abruptly. The jock lay back, his hand loosely holding the bottle, raising it to his lips every now and then until finally, at last, the world twisted away from him and darkness swallowed him from his waking nightmare.

Jordan frowned at Olivia as they drove home, waiting until she was looking at him. “Well?”

“What?”

“Are you going to tell me why you’ve been giving me the evil eye all evening?”

“What are you talking about?” Olivia shook her head as Jordan sighed and arched his brows. “Oh, well, I can’t believe you’re treating Asher like this; he’s your boyfriend, Jordan, not some twink you’re paying for sex!”

“How do you know that term?” Jordan’s frown deepened.
“That’s not important!” His sister glared at him. “You told me last Sunday that you and Asher were together, more than just…whatever you were when I stumbled in on you last year.”

“Yeah, ok, I don’t need to relive that again.” He muttered darkly. “Like you and Spencer in the hot tube, can we agree to just purge those memories?”

“Hey, you were the one getting the blow job!”

“Olivia!” Jordan barked, his grip tightening around the steering wheel as embarrassment washed over him.

“I’m just saying that you said Asher was important to you, so I don’t understand why you’re punishing him for trying to keep your secret safe.” Olivia carried on, unperturbed. “Unless…”

“What?”

“Do you think Asher and JJ hooked up?”

“No!” Jordan snapped, grimacing as he turned onto their home street.

“Ok.” Olivia replied, turning to look out the window.

“Why?” The QB slowed down, glancing at his sister as suspicion sped through his mind. “Do you think they hooked up? Did you hear something or-”

“You definitely think they hooked up!” Olivia shook her head with a laugh. “You should talk to him, Jordan, Asher, I mean. And I don’t think they’d hook up, but I do think that you’re giving him the cold shoulder because of what we talked about last weekend. You’re freaked out, right? I’m not going to tell anyone.”

“Good, good.” He nodded and averted his eyes when Olivia looked over at him. A wellspring of unwanted emotion flowed through Jordan’s chest and he coughed awkwardly. “I…I don’t know if… and I can’t be anyway, I’m the quarterback, I can’t be-”

“Jordan, stop.” Olivia touched his arm. “The label isn’t important, Asher is, and you have to talk to him.”

“Why do you care so much?” Jordan pulled into the yard and stopped the car, looking at the house instead of his sister.

“I’m worried about him,” Olivia shook her head, expression serious. “You didn’t see his eyes this evening when he came to tell Layla he was leaving. He’s under way too much pressure, he’s going to crack, the lies and the secrets are tearing him apart.”

“Don’t be dramatic, Ash was probably just tired after the game and…everything.” Jordan shook his head, getting out of the car. “He’ll be fine. But I’ll text him now, ok?”

“Ok.” Olivia gave him a smile and patted his back affectionately.

He couldn’t sleep, restlessly turning over on his side, then his other side, then finally lying on his back, staring up at the not-entirely dark ceiling. There was a slight intrusion from the outside lights creeping through the edges of his blinds and Jordan frowned. Part of him wanted to get up and try and fix the problem, but another part was content to let it go, knowing, perhaps, that no matter which
But not tonight. Tonight his thoughts raged back and forth, some of Asher, some of JJ, some just random notes of things he saw or said during the day. He had texted Asher, like he told Olivia he would, but his boyfriend didn’t answer back. At the time, Jordan had figured that was just Ash blowing him off after the week of trouble, but now…Jordan pressed his lips together in frustration, rolling onto his stomach. He ground against the bed for a moment, feeling his cock harden in his silky boxers, a thrill of pleasure skipping down his chest and tingling against his balls.

It was another thing that he and Asher had avoided doing, for almost a week now, Jordan had to make do with jerking off and looking at porn to get his daily relief, well, often several times a day. It wasn’t as if Asher had been the one to suddenly push him away to arm’s length, but every time Jordan thought about kissing or fucking Ash, his mind’s eye was filled with images of JJ doing that to Asher. JJ’s strong arms wrapped around Asher’s smooth torso, JJ’s full lips pressing against Asher’s neck, JJ’s hard dick spearing Asher’s muscular ass cheeks. Jordan grunted unconsciously, pushing his own hardness against the bed, no longer banishing the sexual images as they lingered under his closed eyes.

He slipped his hand in between his body and the mattress, fingers seeking out his cock until his hand wrapped around the bare shaft, his other hand pulling his boxers down, legs widening when he was finally naked. Jordan groaned softly, the need to cum so close to the surface that he didn’t care that he was now actively fantasizing about what might have happened between Asher and JJ. His hips grinded urgently against the mattress, imagining the moment when JJ’s big cock pushed into Asher’s ass, making his lips part in that way of his, the expression Jordan knew so well; a twist of pain and desire and pleasure. He imagined JJ was rougher than he would be, but Asher liked that, liked the feeling of JJ’s hands gripping his waist hard and slamming into his ass with force enough to create a slapping noise that Jordan could almost hear.

Jordan rolled onto his back, his hand working his long, thick cock faster as he kept his eyes closed, pausing only to kick the duvet off his hot body. Sweat slicked across his pecs, cooled by the sudden revealing of his torso, his nipples standing to attention and encouraging his free hand to move away from his dick and instead pleasure himself in other ways. “Ah, yeah, Ash!” Jordan whispered quietly to the empty room. “Ride that big dick! I know you want to! Mmh!” His legs were bent at the knees and Jordan spread his thighs wider, his hole clenching and unclenching as he imagined playing both roles in his fantasy; JJ’s powerful thrusts and Asher’s tight hole, each boiling over with pleasure and desire and lust.

His hips moved back and forth, muscles flexing as he brought his fantasies ever closer to fruition, his hand in constant motion, his balls tightening at the same time as his ass did. Jordan knew he was close, knew he was going to cum everywhere, but he didn’t want to slow the tempo or wrench his hand away to edge some more; he needed to cum now. “Ahhh! Ahh, Asher! Yeah, Asher! Ash! Ugh!” He groaned, abs clenching as finally he started to feel the overwhelmingly pleasurable sensation of his orgasm, the lust-filled visions in front of him lingering on Asher’s body and JJ’s knowing smile, the latter winning out as the last ropes of cum splashed against his naval and chest, leaving Jordan sweating hard and panting harder.

“Oh man! Oh fuck! Damn!” Jordan whispered, tilting his head back to rest on his pillow as he pulled his hand away and let his spent cock slink down to half-hardness. His chest and abs were slick to the touch; a week’s worth of cum drenching his dark skin. As the feeling of pleasure began to dim, Jordan felt an awkward twist in his chest, a sort of guilt for using his two friends that way. It was
more than that though, watching JJ more this last week, I… He scowled, unwilling to let the thought finish. “So what if I don’t care, Asher still should have told me that Olivia knew about us, it’s a… betrayal.” The word felt too harsh, but Jordan shook his head and used his boxers to clean the mess off his torso. He dropped the underwear onto the floor and rolled onto his side again, slowly drifting off into confusing dreams.

“Ugh…” Asher groaned, rolling over onto his side. Sun was pouring in through the glass doors that led out onto the rear patio, the hot spears of light falling across his face and chest. Asher blinked bleary eyes, reaching up to wipe away the sleep and brush his hair from his forehead. He managed to get to his feet, albeit somewhat unsteadily as the world lurched unpleasantly away from him. Asher closed his eyes and waited for everything to stop spinning before he made his way to the bathroom down the hall. “Gah, my mouth tastes like something died in it.” He grunted, grabbing a glass and filling it with water to wash out his mouth, gargling the liquid in an attempt to remove the foul taste. “Better.”

Asher returned to the living room, stooping down to pick up the empty vodka bottle from the night before. He frowned at it and struggled to remember what had happened after he had come back from the restaurant. “I...no way I drank all this…it must have spilled out or something.” Asher chewed his lip nervously, still examining the bottle. “Whatever, I guess it doesn’t matter.” He tossed it into the trash, making a mental note to dispose of the garbage before his father got back. Pretty sure he wouldn’t care anyway.

The sunlight was pleasantly warm on his face, but Asher pulled himself away from the patio doors and instead picked up his phone. “Bunch of texts from Layla, apologies and then…heh, yeah, sure, go do your things on the weekend, what do I care?” He grunted, replying quickly and dismissively. Asher paused when he saw Jordan’s text message, a hand rising to unconsciously stroke the fresh stubble on his chin and jaw. “Huh.”

Ash, we should talk. We should’ve talked on Monday. So, call me.

“ Hmm.” Asher glared at the screen, seeing the timecode next to the message. “One text, Jordan? You sent me a text at half eleven and didn’t bother to follow up when I didn’t call you? It’s…it’s stupid.” He muttered the last word and turned away, throwing the phone back onto the sofa as he walked over to where the liquor collection was. Asher wetted his lips, hands automatically reaching for the glasses kept next to the table, soda stacked neatly underneath everything else.

“I just…I just need it today.” Asher spoke aloud to the room as though daring the emptiness to challenge him. “It’s a quick morning pick-me-up, the hair of the dog. It’ll just be enough to take the edge off, and right now, the world is nothing but edges.” He sighed as he picked out a bottle of dark colored bourbon, pouring a generous amount into the glass, with just a splash of Coke to dilute it. “I need the energy, Coke is mostly sugar, it’s…” Asher didn’t finish the sentence, letting it fall away, his lies not even convincing himself.

He walked out onto the patio and collapsed into a nearby lounger, careful not to spill his drink. The first sip was strong, and he pulled a face, almost spitting it out, but then a memory from the night before surged to his mind’s eye; Jordan deliberately looking away from him when Asher tried to make eye contact. “Yeah, fuck that.” Asher muttered, taking a second gulp, trying to ignore the way his stomach lurched in protest. But after another few smaller sips, he was able to drink it normally, his worries falling away into the gentle vortex that seemed to have taken hold of everything on the edges of his vision.

The doorbell rang suddenly, pulling Asher from the smooth, soft doze he had been slipping into. He
groaned and shook his head. *They can come back, I’m, I’m not here.* Asher ignored the second and third rings, grumbling as whoever was outside started banging on the door. “Ugh…fine!” The jock stood up, grabbing the doorframe to steady himself when an unexpected wave of drowsiness came over him.

“Asher?! Asher! C’mon, open up!” It was Jordan’s voice on the other side and for a moment Asher swayed in the doorway, looking quizzically at his drink. “Ash, c’mon, please open the door! I know you’re in there, your car is outside!” He banged on the door again and Asher blinked, suddenly much more aware.

“Shit, uh, ok.” He muttered, hiding his drink behind some of the books on one of the low shelves nearby. Asher raised his voice as he darted over to the door, “Um, I’m coming, Jordan.”

“Finally!”

“Yeah, I,” Asher stopped, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror by the door, taking in his messy hair and sweat-stained t-shirt that he had slept in. “Um, actually, just give me a minute, I gotta get changed.”

“Well, can you open the door? I feel ridiculous talking to you through it.”

“Um, no…uh, you, you stay there.” Asher replied awkwardly, hearing Jordan’s throaty groan of protest from the other side. “I’ll be five minutes.”

“You know that I’ve seen you naked multiple times, right?” Jordan shouted at him as Asher took off towards his bedroom. “And I’m not just talking about the locker room!”

“Jokes, that’s something.” Asher muttered, stripping out of his t-shirt and grabbing a face cloth as he walked back into the bathroom. He ran the tap, multitasking as he gave his torso and arms a rapid wash with the cloth, his free hand brushing his teeth with vigor. A swift gurgle of mouthwash later, Asher darted into his room and pulled a short-sleeved hoodie from his closet. He rolled his eyes as Jordan hammered on the door again, flattening his hair at the back and sides, pulling it into a natural crest at the front. “I said I’m coming!”

“About time.” Jordan huffed at him when Asher finally opened the door. “What the hell were you doing?”

“I just woke up.” Asher replied defensively as Jordan arched a brow, using his extra height to look over Asher’s head into the room. “Do you wanna take a tour or are you gonna tell me why you’re here?”

“Oh, yeah, I thought maybe you had someone else in there!” Jordan half-smiled at him, but Asher couldn’t tell if he was joking or serious.

“Who would I have in here? My father is…out of town. Just me, Jordan.”

“Oh, right, right,” Jordan mumbled, looking to one side. “His Instagram did put him at the mall.”

“What did you say?” Asher frowned, unable to make out his boyfriend’s muttering. “Uh, never mind. I assume you were banging on my door for a reason?” *Like an apology? Or an explanation? Or anything to justify the past week of silence?*

“Yes, yes, uh.” Jordan nodded, holding his gaze for a few seconds before looking at his feet. “My Dad wants to talk to us, both of us, together. Um, I guess it’s because of-”
“The match last night, yeah, an idiot could figure that out!” Asher snapped, immediately regretting his short temper when Jordan’s posture stiffened, and his jaw tightened. “I meant-”

“Whatever, I thought we could go together, my car.” Jordan spoke over him and gestured over his shoulder. “Save you on the gas, right? I know you probably need to conserve it since-”

“Let’s just go.” Asher growled, no longer feeling sorry for being angry with Jordan.

Jordan kept glancing at Asher as they drove towards the school, but his boyfriend was just glaring out of the window, unwilling to engage with him at all. He had given up on the small talk when Asher hadn’t even responded to Jordan’s desperate attempts to entice him into a conversation about the weather. *Ok then... he doesn’t seem happy at all. I mean, I know I ignored him all week and I can’t expect him to just turn around and everything to go back to normal. But how am I meant to talk to him about this? I overreacted and now-*

“Jordan, it’s the next left.” Asher’s voice cut across his thoughts. “You better indicate, or you’ll get beeped like last time.”

“Uh, thanks.” Jordan blinked, glancing at Asher, but his boyfriend was still looking away from him. They pulled into the school parking lot; empty save for a few cars here on the weekend. Jordan drove over to the entrance closest to the gym and stopped, gesturing for Asher to get out. “C’mon, he’s in his office.”

Asher didn’t reply and they walked in awkward silence through the silent halls of the school, entering the gym and locker room to find Coach Baker sitting on the bench outside his office reading from a tablet. Jordan wetted his lips and gestured vaguely at Asher. “We’re here.”

“Beverly Bests Culver... Barely’.” Coach read the title of the article out to them and raised his gaze when the teenagers remained silent. “Huh.”

“Yeah…” Jordan sighed as Asher didn’t respond. His boyfriend’s gaze was boring a hole through the floor by Jordan’s feet, thoughts as impenetrable as his emotions. *Ash...*

"So, you guys gonna make this easy on me? Tell me what's going on?" Coach spoke up, his words seeming to break Asher from whatever spell he was under.

The jock blinked and he looked up at Jordan expectantly, as though willing to take his cue from the QB. Jordan wetted his lips, words springing to his mind as though this was something he had planned or even thought about. *Dad, I'm gay and dating Asher...* He was so taken off guard that Jordan frowned at Asher and shook his head. He saw the moment of upset register in Asher's eyes before it was replaced with hard steel. *Please don’t out us both, Ash.*

"He needs to learn how to read a defense!" Asher snapped, balling his fists.

"He won't stop bitching about 'pass to me'-"

"-I should have been the receiving-" 

"Don't throw me-"

"I wasn’t trying-"

"What's it gonna be, Ash, huh?!” Jordan snapped, seeing that hurt in his boyfriend's eyes again. But
this time there was a slow hint of something stronger than mouthwash on Asher’s breath. Jordan swallowed hard and clenched his teeth, glaring back at Asher. He felt like he was about to break, the strain of lying and secrets and covering his emotions with anger because he felt he couldn’t express them normally, that it wasn’t manly or straight to say what he was feeling, what he wanted. Jordan stuffed his hands into his pockets and drew air into his lungs as the chorus of shouting in his mind reached fever-pitch. “What do you want from me?! I can be your Quarterback or I can-”

“Jordan!” Asher growled, stopping him from saying the words he might later regret. “All you gotta do is pass the damn ball to me when the play asks for it.”

“Well if you were in the right position, and not trying to get all over the defenders, then-”

“What are you even talking about?!” Asher shouted back at him, fury and confusion rolling off him in equal measure.

"Ok, ok." Coach called out, giving Jordan an odd look as he spread his hands placatingly. "Back in my day, Coach would make us walk all the way home from practice together so we could work it out."

Asher was staring at Jordan now, but the QB just gritted his teeth and ignored him.

"But times have changed so...I'm going to take you boys on a little field trip instead. C'mon.” Coach Baker gestured for them to follow him and they did so, walking out into the parking lot. “Jordan, you drive, Asher, sit in the front next to him.”

“Fine.” Asher muttered, sitting inside as Jordan huffed and walked around to the driver’s side.

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

Jordan started driving, following his father’s directions to go north, slowly figuring it out along the way. *Coast road, ocean on our left...Malibu. Has to be. They’re our next game, he probably wants to show us what we’re facing. Now sure that’s gonna help me with Ash though, he probably hates me by now.* The morose thoughts filled Jordan’s mind as he took his eyes off the road every now and then to look over at his boyfriend, drinking in his handsome features. Jordan pulled his gaze away whenever Asher caught him looking, the strange twist of his lips so unlike the playful smirks Ash used to give him when they drove this road earlier in the summer.

They used to take trips up the coast, sometimes with the rest of the crew, other times just the two of them. These were small excursions to get out of Beverly Hills and be somewhere different. They were just hooking up then, so there wasn’t *meant* to be any special meaning to the trips. But as Jordan reflected on the past, he realized that those journeys held a special place in his heart; Asher wasn’t just a hot, willing mouth to get him off, he had genuine feelings for the other guy. He smiled to himself, remembering the careful, secret pictures they had taken along the beach, nothing risky, nothing lewd, but still so dangerous that Jordan made sure they were deleted before they left the ocean, saved only to his mind.

*Those were good days, yeah, the sex was awesome and fun and...why couldn’t I have left it like that? There were never any emotions or feelings, no strings, no hurting. Jordan huffed quietly to himself, drawing Asher’s confused attention. But when he looked over at his boyfriend, Jordan just saw the same hard, steely gaze as before. Damn, I can feel his anger, he must be pretty upset. But I don’t know how to fix this, if there even is a fix. Olivia thinks I should just talk to him, but I don’t*
think Ash wants to talk to me. Or maybe I just don’t know how I should respond to him.

Jordan remained silently, astutely aware of his father in the seat behind them, forcing him to just drive when he could have been talking to Asher, at least trying to offer some sort of explanation and defuse the charged tension in the air. He pulled off the highway and drove slowly into the grounds of the Malibu Charter School, following his Dad’s directions over to the football fields. As they got out, he could hear the shrill pulses of the whistles of coaches over the bleachers and Jordan followed Asher and his father into the stands. The football team were running drills as they began to climb the steps, Coach Baker pausing to touch Jordan’s arm. “Huh?”

“Cheerleading squad are practicing too.”

“Yeah, so?”

“So it looks like one of them is taking a break.” His father looked at him meaningfully and Jordan nodded. “Alright then, we’ll be above you.”

Asher leaned on the railings next to Coach Baker, his expression sour as Jordan talked with the cheerleader standing directly below them. This is ridiculous!

"Why aren't you out there practising with the rest of your squad?” Jordan asked, resting against the chain-link fence, his fingers rubbing slowly against each other, an action designed to make his biceps appear more prominent in his somewhat loose t-shirt. He smiled at her. “You on a break?”

"It's the same five routines every game,” She sighed. "I can do this in my sleep."

"Now that I'd like to see." Jordan smiled and arched his brows. It did not have the desired effect and she frowned at him, stepping away from the fence.

You have got to be kidding me! Asher snorted at Jordan’s failed attempt to flirt, drawing a curious look from Coach. Oh, I bet she’ll be lining up to have you leer at her like a stalker!

"You want to watch me sleep?" The cheerleader stared at him as Jordan grinned, arching his brows again.

"Can that be arranged?"

"That depends." She smirked and twirled the ends of her hair.

Oh, you cannot be serious! How the hell did he come out on top after doubling down on the creep factor?! It must be because he’s so dam hot! Asher growled in his throat, not caring that Jordan’s father was giving him another strange look.

"Depends on what?” Jordan said, holding the cheerleader’s gaze, his teeth gently biting his lower lip.

"You asking me on a date?” The cheerleader smiled and waited expectantly.

“Ah, hmm.” Jordan grinned and looked at the ground before he started walking away from her, back to his father and Asher in the bleachers above the field. He caught the edge of Asher’s disgusted expression and shrugged. “Hey.”

“Get anything?” Coach Baker asked.

“Hmm, not really.” Jordan shrugged. “They…”
Asher tuned Jordan out, his eyes sweeping the field as he watched the Dolphins run drills and practice their defensive lines. His gaze lingered on number ninety-nine, an easy grin pulling at his lips when the guy pulled off his helmet and met his eyes. Though the connection was momentary, Asher smirked wider. *Ah, ha, I know that look!* He glanced back at Jordan, his boyfriend faltering in the face of Asher’s grin.

“Anything else?” Coach Baker demanded.

“Oh, yeah, they’ve really strong sidelines, but the backer’s got bruised ribs.” Jordan shrugged. “Their defense looks like a nightmare though.”

“Yup, that’s Jay Delgado.” Asher nodded at ninety-nine as the jock walked past them, pouring a bottle of water over his face and hair, the drops glistening in the sunlight. “He’s the best defensive end in the league.”

“Hmph!” Jordan’s grunt of annoyance was low enough for Asher to almost not hear it. Delgado stopped in front of them, almost as though he was showing off for them, pushing his wet hair from his face and casually stretching and flexing his strong arms in their direction. “How do you know?” Jordan demanded, jealousy infusing his words.

“When my Mom moved to Malibu, I came to look at a few schools here. He lived close enough, we hung out, he’s a good…player.” Asher replied, shrugging and glancing at Jordan as he paused on the last word, seeing his boyfriend’s eyebrows arch. "But I decided to stay at Beverly instead."

"Mnh, lucky us!" Jordan muttered snidely.

"Dude, what's your problem?!” Asher exploded, rage boiling over as Jordan just looked back at him calmly. *Is it because I'm not sucking your dick right now so everyone can see what a big man you are?!* Asher bit back those words before they became audible and just glowered at his boyfriend instead.

"My problem?"

"Yeah!"

"Reall-"

"Hey, hey, stop it!" Coach spoke over both of them. "Easy. Ya'll firing shots in the wrong direction."

"Hmm." Asher grunted, watching Jordan for a moment longer before returning his eyes to the practice field.

"That's the enemy, right there."

Asher and Jordan stood on the side-lines as Coach Baker walked over to the other coach, the Dolphins’ practice finished for the afternoon. The QB stared straight ahead, letting the tension sit in the air between them until it was unbearable, and he turned to Asher about to speak.

“Asher! I thought that was you in the stands.” Number ninety-nine came up to them, grinning at Asher and all but ignoring Jordan. “Been too long since I’ve seen you around here.”

“Delgado.” Asher bumped fists with him, smiling as Jordan’s mouth narrowed, the QB looking as though he had bit into a lemon. “Yeah, been working my butt off at Beverly trying to get ready for
“Uh huh, I can tell!” He grinned suggestively and rolled his eyes over Asher’s body. “I reckon we’re pretty ready for you too. Uh, from watching your games, I mean.”

“Sure, you guys look good out there, the defensive end is real…tight.” Asher replied with a smirk, feeling Jordan tensing up beside him. “But I get the feeling that penetrating that line is gonna be hard.”

“Yeah, ramming straight in isn’t recommended.”

“Best to slip and slide, huh?” Asher added softly as Delgado stepped closer to him. The other jock finally glanced at Jordan, his eyes narrowing as he noticed the QB’s intense glare and interest. “But, hey, I guess we’ll find out who’ll be on top next week, right?”

“For sure,” Delgado dipped a hand into his gear bag and pulled out his phone. “And if you’re in the mood for some, haha, post-game analysis, hit me up. I never got your number during the summer.”

“Full of regrets?” Asher replied softly, accepting the guy’s phone. “Guess I can’t leave you hanging.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure and get you…next time.” Delgado grinned at him when he got his phone back, the expression slipping into sheepishness slightly when he glanced at Jordan. “Later, Asher!”

“See you.” Ash smiled and waited for him to leave, turning to an astounded Jordan. “You look surprised.”

“Uh, yeah, how did you know he was…you know?!”

“That’s just how it’s done, bro.” Asher shrugged. “Call it instinct, call it history, call it what you want. Point is, if you’re gonna make a connection so you can pump it for info, at least make the selling look good.”

“I wasn’t really flirting with her, I was...” Jordan trailed off, sighing. “My Dad wanted me to find out what the team’s status was, I couldn’t refuse him. I didn’t know you had hooked up with Delgado over the summer.”

“We never did.” He shook his head. “Sure, we flirted a little, but he was super careful, don’t know what changed, maybe he came out. Doubt it, but he didn’t seem to care that you were here.”

“Yeah.” Jordan grunted irritably, folding his arms across his chest. “Why did you make it look so good, Ash?”

“Because lying is what I do best?” Asher shrugged, gesturing vaguely at him. “Because you’ve been ignoring me all week and I thought making you jealous might actually work. Did it?”

“Hmph.”

“Fine, never mind Delgado anyway, he might be the key to their defense, but the rest of their team is pretty solid too.” Asher said, nodding at the Dolphins’ coach, using the gesture to mask his rising emotion and heartbeat. “We need to be on the same page when we’re on that field, Jordan, even if…”

“If what?”
“Even if we’re nothing off it.” Asher felt anger flare through him when Jordan just turned away, hiding his face. "Seriously? Dude, this passive aggressive crap is getting old."

"It's better than the alternative, trust me." Jordan muttered, still not looking at him.

"Dude, what the hell is going on? I haven't done anything to you." Asher lowered his voice a fraction. "At least nothing you didn't want me to."

*Yeah, and what about JJ? Did you do all those things to him?!* Jordan struggled to remain silent, the questions almost bursting out as he closed his eyes, almost wishing Asher would just disappear.

"Fine, whatever." Asher glared at the back of his head. "I'm done trying. Ok? It's over, we're over. Don't pass to me, don't talk to me, I don't care. It's on you now." Asher turned, blinking away the tears that had suddenly formed in his eyes. He started walking away, no thought of where he was going or that Jordan was his ride back home. “I can’t believe you-”

"Maybe I'll talk to Layla."

Asher stopped dead and twisted around to look at Jordan. "And say what?"

"That you cheated on her."

"Yeah!" Asher raised his voice angrily. "With you!"

"Or JJ." Jordan stared him down as Asher frowned in confusion. “She already thinks you’re cheating on her with him.”

"Is that what you think? Is that why you’ve been so weird all week? You think that me and JJ…” Asher snorted and shook his head. “Of course you do, that would explain everything since you started acting hostile after we all got hammered last Saturday. But when you’re considering outing me to Layla, why don’t you tell her how much you love sucking her boy-”

"Shush!" Jordan hushed him furiously, striding over, his eyes wide in fear and anger.

"Oh, yeah! Yeah, that's right, you don't want anyone to know!" Asher grinned vehemently at him, gesturing angrily. "You don't want them to know that you're a big fag-oof!" Asher reeled backwards, slamming into the AstroTurf. His nose exploded in blinding pain and blood poured wetly down his lips and chin. He blinked and tried to stand up, seeing Jordan's shocked expression through dazed eyes. “You dick!” Asher glared at him and charged forward, pushing Jordan away furiously. The QB didn't react for a minute, but then he used his extra height and strength to shove Asher back. "Screw you!"

“Screw yourself!” Jordan snarled, wrestling against Asher before he hooked a foot around his ankle and threw him to the ground. The QB dived on top of him and started repeatedly punching at him, Asher twisting back and forth, managing to avoid the most serious blows while trying to shove Jordan off him. “Gah!”

“Grr!” Asher grunted, throwing Jordan backwards and scrambling to his feet. “You son of a bitch!”

“I, wait, Asher, I…” Jordan tried to explain when Asher tackled him, arms wrapping around his waist and twisting right, causing both of them to collapse onto the ground. Asher was on top of him now, furious expression marred by blood smeared across his chin and neck.

“What the hell are you two doing?!” The explosive shout came from across the field and Asher rolled away from him as Coach Baker stormed over.
“I…” Jordan looked up when his father shouted at them, but Jordan could barely hear him over the pounding of his pulse and the intensity of Asher's fury. "Shit."

The sidewalk along the coastal road was quiet, only the rush of cars passing ahead and behind them could disturb the roll and crash of the ocean waves on the beach below. The sun was blazing across the cloudless afternoon sky, hot enough to make t-shirts stick to sweaty skin. They walked in silence, well, Asher walked in silence, wiping the still wet blood from his nose and lip as Jordan filled the awkward emptiness between them with whatever words he could find.

"Do you really think he's going to make us walk all the way back?" Jordan looked at him, guilt clouding his expression.

Silence.

"It's like ten miles, dude."

More silence.

“Asher…”

"Did you mean what you said?" Asher stopped, hands touching the railing as he looked out at the sun turning the cresting waves gold. "About telling Layla?"

"I was angry." Jordan sighed, pressing his lips together. "But you know I couldn't do that, it's mutually assured destruction."

"Right." Asher breathed in the salty air, and glanced at him, seeing Jordan looking down at his bloodied knuckles. "Why are you so angry with me? I don't understand what I did wrong."

"Olivia told me about last year."

"Huh?"

"Last year, the party, you, me, a door that wasn't closed?" Jordan coughed, uncomfortable.

"Oh, that. Yeah, I remember." Asher nodded, frowning. "Why did she tell you though? We had an agreement."

"She wanted the truth to be out there, at least between us, maybe not to Layla though, that would just hurt her. But, um, your agreement was part of the problem. I feel you should have told me that she knew."

“Ah.” Asher grunted. “It was for your protection, I offered to let her use the info to blackmail me, just me, but your sister isn’t like that. And me and you, Jordan, we were…nothing, using each other, that was it.”

“That was never all it was.” Jordan replied softly. He licked his lips nervously and turned to Asher, tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Ash, I, I lost my temper, I never should have punched you."

"Ah, it looks worse than it is." Asher shrugged him off. “Seriously, bro, I get hit harder in training.”

“You’re still bleeding.” Jordan cried out, covering his face with his hands. “I can’t believe I did that!”
“Dude, it’s fine.” Asher touched his arm and pulled his hands away. “What’s a little blood between friends?! Besides, I was kinda asking for it, I almost gave everything up, and in front of the blighted Dolphins too, ugh.”

“Blighted?” Jordan arched a brow in confusion.

“It’s from *Dragon Age*, you play a lot of a game and before you know it, you’re talking about ‘blighted this’ and ‘darkspawn that’!”

“Oh huh.” The QB pressed his lips together. “Look, Ash, that’s not the only thing I need to apologize for, I know I’ve been a really shitty boyfriend this week. I guess when I found out that Olivia knew I, I freaked out, I’ve never even said the words out loud to myself. I couldn’t deal with her just saying it, making it real.”

"The words? Oh, *those* words, haha.” Asher paused and looked around at the empty street and deserted sands beneath them. "There's no one here now but me and ocean. Why don't you tell us?"

"I don’t know, Ash..."

"Alright, well, I'll go first: I'm Asher Adams, I'm gay as fuck, and I really like Jordan Baker!” He called out in a loud voice, twirling around on the road, arms stretched out. “Hahahaha!”

"Get back here!” Jordan reached out and pulled Asher back onto the safety of the pavement, hugging him close. “Are you drunk right now?!"

"Not right now."

"You're crazy." Jordan whispered against his ear. "You must be because I really like you too, even if that makes me...gay."

"I knew you could do it." Asher leaned his head back and smiled at Jordan, his hand clutching the QB's own. "I forgive you. And I forgive you for being jealous of JJ because he and I most assuredly did *not* hook up.”

“Yeah…” Jordan stepped away and frowned. “But you like him, don’t you?”

“He’s hot.” Asher admitted, glancing at the transferred blood on his hands. “And I like hanging out with him, and you know, being honest, if you hadn’t been into us hooking up, I probably would have gone to him instead.”

“You think he’d be into that?”

“Maybe? Probably? I think JJ just enjoys getting off.” Asher shrugged as Jordan grimaced uncomfortably. “Hey, I’m being honest with you, Jordan, I can’t add another set of secrets to those I already have. JJ and I didn’t do anything last Sunday, we just woke up, he made breakfast, and I drove him home. That’s it.”

“And what about Saturday night?” Jordan wetted his lips. “Do you remember what we got up to? Because I’m...drawing a blank.”

“It wasn’t anything too crazy, I think...we just drunk way too much.” Asher reassured him, reaching out to touch his arm. “So, are we good now? We can go back to being secret boyfriends and pretend this never happened, right?”

"You probably shouldn't." Jordan pulled away. "I blamed you for the fact that I'm too scared about
losing everything if I come out. My Dad, football, the team, my future. There aren't any gay pro players, Ash, I don't want to be a trailblazer. I just want to play football."

"Then don't be the pioneer." He sighed, watching Jordan wrestle with the bare emotions. "But what if I left Layla, would that make things better, easier?"

"I don't think so." Jordan shook his head. "There's already been some rumors about how come I don't have a girlfriend, so maybe that cheerleader from Malibu-"

"What the fuck, dude?!" Asher glared at him. "My relationship with Layla is built on the understanding that there will be no sex, you can't tell me that tramp from the Dolphins is going to share the same values!"

"Asher-"

"Screw you, I thought we were getting somewhere." He stormed off.

"Asher!" Jordan called after him, chasing his boyfriend down. "Talk to me! Help me figure this out. What are you gonna do, Ash, walk all the way home?!"

"Pretty much!" Asher called angrily over his shoulder and broke into a trot.

“Damn it, Ash!” Jordan growled and ran after him. “C’mon, bro, slow down!”

“Fine.” Asher stopped suddenly. “What do you want from me, Jordan? And do you think you can seriously juggle a false girlfriend and real boyfriend?”

“What else am I meant to do?”

“I’m not saying that we come out.” Asher shook his head and folded his arms across his chest. “But I know what sort of person I am, I’m the type of guy that can lie to Layla and not feel bad about it, most of the time.”

“Asher…”

“No, I know I’m a bad person, I know that when she eventually finds out, no matter if we’re broken up or she walks away, when that moment comes, whatever anger and upset she has, I deserve it.” He replied simply as Jordan frowned. “But this girl, this cheerleader, she’s innocent, Jordan, and she’ll be expecting you to want a lot more than just a peck on the cheek and the feigning of a functional relationship. Don’t do this.”

“I’ll think about it.” Jordan shrugged, catching Asher’s disapproving stare. “I’m sorry, Ash. I know it wouldn’t be the same as you and Layla, but at least the rumors would stop, right?”

“Maybe.” Asher admitted as he took a deep breath. “Look, Jordan, I’m tired of fighting. I didn’t tell you about Olivia knowing because I wanted to protect you, and I like JJ because he’s hot and we have a lot in common, but I would never hook up with him or any other guy while we’re together. And this cheerleader…all I can do is tell you it’s a bad idea.”

“Thanks for being honest, Ash.” Jordan replied as he pulled Asher close to him, a sense of calm washing over as their arms wrapped around the other. “And don’t feel too bad about liking JJ, um, I maybe, kinda had a…sex dream about you two last night.”

“What? Hahaha!” Asher broke into laughter as they broke apart. “Dude, I’m going to need those details!”
“I bet!” Jordan grinned back, the growl of his car’s engine coming down the slip road towards them forcing him to shrug. “Another time, I guess.”

“You bet.” Asher smirked, looking over as Coach Baker stopped next to them, sipping on an iced coffee.

“You boys good?”

“Yeah,” Jordan looked at Asher and slowly nodded. “I think so.”

Asher had finished eating his chicken and rice when the message arrived, JJ’s wording had the usual exuberance Asher associated with his friend, although even in text form, he could tell there was a note of caution attached to the gossip.

Dude, you hear about Jordan’s new gf?!

“Gf? Girlfriend? What the hell?” Asher muttered, texting JJ back at once. Nope, who is she?

Ripley something, didn’t get the dets, Butler told me as he was leaving, but it’s all over Insta. She’s a Malibu cheerleader.

“Her?” Asher growled, flashing back to Jordan’s awkward flirting that afternoon. What’s the post of?

Someone snapped a pic of them on the side lines, next to the bleachers in Malibu, bro. JJ’s reply carried a hint of outrage that made Asher smirk before the follow-up came a few seconds later. Look, Jordan is free to get off wherever and with whoever he wants, but that Malibu chick is a spy!

“Whoever he wants…” Asher mused to himself as he read the response. “I wonder if that includes me, JJ? Anyway, we don’t need a panic going into our next game.” Dude, chill out! Even if Jordan is hooking up with Ms Malibu, no way is our QB gonna give something up.

Yeah, ok, Ash, I guess you’re right. Asher nodded to himself as JJ replied to him again, although his heart started beating a little faster when an unexpected offer arrived with the next text. Bro, it’s Saturday night and I’m all alone, you wanna hang?

“Uh, crap…” Asher swallowed hard, thumbs hovering over the screen. “Dude, don’t tempt me, that could be read so many ways!” Um, sorry, JJ, I got a paper to write tomorrow, need a clear head. But next week is Homecoming, so once we pound Malibu into the ground, we’ll definitely party!

Lol, you know it, Ash! The response was accompanied with a winking face emoji and a stuck out tongue.

“Ahhh.” Asher made a clicking sound and left his phone on the countertop, beginning to pace back and forth behind the couch. His eyes kept darting over to the liquor collection, his bourbon from that morning had been retrieved and placed on the coffee table, a few cubes of ice bringing the temperature back down to drinkable. Asher hadn’t felt the urge to drink before his exchange with JJ, his earlier conversation and clearing of the air with Jordan had made him feel warm and sated.

But now…now all he could think about was the Malibu cheerleader sinking her claws into his boyfriend. “With the post on Instagram, it gives him, her, both of them, it gives them the perfect reason to start dating or hooking up or whatever. He wouldn’t…but it’s good cover…but she’d want his…argh!” Asher shouted out, stopping his pacing as anger rushed through him.
“Why the hell does he want to go further into the closet instead of coming out?! Or, hell, let him stay there for his entire career, I don’t care, I just…I want what everyone else has.” Asher muttered as he shook his head. “Fuck it, the paper can wait, I need a damn drink.” He walked over to the alcohol and grabbed the bottle of JD, carrying it back to his glass on the coffee table. “I just need one, just one to stop the, stop, ah, I need to take the edge off. It’ll just be one.” Asher promised to himself, picking up the glass and closing his eyes as he drank the dark liquid greedily, fire rushing down his throat and expanding across his chest. “Ahh.”

But one drink always turned into two and three and ten…Midnight found Asher sprawled on the lounger on the patio at the rear of the guest house, empty bottle of bourbon rolling away from him as he lay back, unfocused eyes staring up at the light polluted sky of the city’s fringes. We’re never going to be together… Asher’s thoughts were sluggish and glacial, arriving in short bursts between merciful rushes of blank nothingness as he lost all sense of time and space in his drunken stupor. Me and Jordan…Never going to be the ace team on the field…perfect high school boyfriends off it… He let his head roll back as the world spun out of control and the almost familiar uncertainty of another blackout came to devour him, the teenager letting himself go without resistance.

Chapter End Notes

This will likely be the last update for at least a month due to a suddenly intensive workload, I hope to resume posting this story from mid-May onwards. Thanks for reading.
This chapter contains minor drug use (weed/pot) which I do not endorse. There is also copious underage drinking, please enjoy alcohol responsibly.

Asher glowered at the black open-top Jeep stopped in the middle of the rapidly filling parking lot, watching as Jordan made out with Ripley. *The Malibu cheerleader...I’m not sure their display is public enough though; only the whole school can see what he’s doing and who he’s doing it with.*

The thoughts rushed through his mind as white-hot rage bubbled at the center of his chest and Asher gripped the strap of his gym bag tighter. Jordan, it seemed, was oblivious to his presence at the edge of the science block and with only a few minutes until homeroom, Asher wasn’t confident that Jordan could disentangle himself in time to meet him in the locker rooms as usual.

Although it was becoming less usual; only twice in the past week had Asher been able to hook-up with Jordan. The rest of the time was devoted to crafting his new *straight* life. Asher huffed under his breath as he continued to watch the couple; Ripley’s hand very obviously in Jordan’s crotch. *I wonder is he faking that too? He said he thinks of me, but…I know who I am, I know what I want. But Jordan, he’s never said the words, he said he wanted Ripley as a shield but-

“Whatchu doing?!?”

“Huh?” Asher was jolted from his thoughts of betrayal by JJ’s arrival behind him, the other jock draping his arm around Asher’s shoulders as he smirked. “Hey.”

“Hey yourself.” JJ grinned wider, following Asher’s gaze. “Hmm, you turn into a creepy voyeur, Adams?”

“No need, they *want* everyone to look.”

“Huh, jealous?!”

“What?” Asher arched his brows and looked at JJ, careful to keep his tone confused. “I mean, Jordan’s our captain and she is from Malibu, I just thinking that…”

“Enemy infiltrator, huh?” JJ nudged him conspiratorially. “Do we have to do something?”

*Oh, I wish. And not just the obvious.* Asher bit his lip to stop his thoughts slipping out, breathing deep instead, savoring the heady scent of JJ’s aftershave and deodorant, so potent this close to his friend. He blinked and then shook his head. “No, it’s his choice, man, I just don’t want him to be distracted when we’re so close to the big game and finally getting into the playoffs.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean.” JJ finally pulled away from him and leaned against the wall next to them, his head tilted to left towards Asher. “Homecoming this weekend, gonna be lit, man!”

“I guess, you can never really let loose at this one though with the match the next day.” Asher shrugged, glancing between Jordan and JJ. “I heard from Dylan that you finally made up with the twins; taking them both to the dance!”
“Uh, yeah.”

“You sound so thrilled!” Asher laughed. “What’s up? Don’t like double trouble?”

“I think everyone like twins, Ash.” JJ folded his arms. “At least for that part…it’s the rest. They asked me, I couldn’t really say no.”

“Well, at least you’re getting laid out of it.”

“Nope.” He sighed again. “Not even getting off; I want to have that extra edge against Malibu, you know their offense is tight. I need all my juice!”

“Hmm.” Asher struggled not to react too much as a battery of images flashed through his mind. He couldn’t help but drop his gaze down JJ’s colorful shirt towards his navy shorts, Asher’s eyes grazing against the subtle, but noticeable bulge. “How long have you been holding it?”

“Um, about forty minutes.” JJ looked sheepishly at him when Asher snorted. “I’m starting from today; no way I could hold off all week.”

“Forty minutes ago…but we did early morning laps.” Asher left the sentence hanging and smirked. “You naughty dog!”

“Please, like I’m the first guy who’s jacked off in those showers!”

“Who’s jacked off in what showers?” Butler glanced between them as he walked around the corner from the parking lot. “What the hell are you guys talking about?”

“Uh, I’m, just…” JJ struggled for a moment and then sighed. “It’s nothing, man.”

“JJ was talking about saving his, um, strength for the match.” Asher replied smoothly. “He’s sacrificing his desires for the good of the team! No fun with his dates on Homecoming!”

“Oh, well, at least you two have dates.” Butler huffed.

“Aw, we’ll all hang out; you know the girls just want the perfect image for the Intsa, right?” JJ grinned good-naturedly at him and Asher.

“Yeah.” Asher muttered, agreeing with his friend as a different set of images slipped through his mind. *I can see JJ in that shower all too well; his sweet tanned body, muscles pumped after our workout this morning…and even though I’ve never seen it hard, I’ve seen his dick plenty of times; he’s never been afraid to show it off. Mmmh, gonna have to continue this line of thought later if Jordan doesn’t meet me after school.* He sighed to himself, turning back towards Jordan as the first bell chimed through the school buildings. His supposed boyfriend wasn’t showing any signs of stopping his session with Ripley and Asher felt his lip curl in disgust.

“Hey, Ash?”

“What?”

“I got the good stuff off my Dad for tomorrow night.” JJ said, gesturing for him to come closer as he lowered his voice. “I promise it’s much better than the last time.”

“You mean the floor polish that nearly blinded me?” Asher smirked as JJ rolled his eyes. “It better be, can’t get through the dance dry, bro.” *Hell, I can’t make it through this morning.* He dropped his hand, patting his trouser pocket to feel the reassuring shape of his trusty hip flask. “You gonna tell
“Mmh, you’ll see tomorrow.”

“Cool, I-”

“Coach Finks.” Butler cut across him waringly as one of the assistant coaches came towards them. The man was on the phone, but he paused to point towards the school. “Yeah, Coach, we’re going.”

“Hmm.” He grunted, adjusting his bag and glancing one last time towards the parking lot as Ripley’s Jeep pulled out, Jordan standing on the pavement watching her leave a stupid grin on his face. Asher scowled and then followed Butler and JJ towards the doors, frowning as he overheard a snippet of the conversation Coach Finks was having.

“Look, I know it was a stupid mistake, the tablet has…well, the password is…no, no, I don’t know about the new policy. I have-”

“Ash, let’s go, man!” JJ called out and pulled Asher’s attention back to him.

“Yeah, I’m coming.”

Jordan hummed to himself as he walked along the corridor towards homeroom, glancing up at the posters and banners hanging from the walls, streamers and bunting celebrating Homecoming and their upcoming game with Malibu. Each time he saw the dolphin and eagle on a poster he felt an uncomfortable twist in his stomach; a reminder that even though he and Asher were able to perform as a tight team on the field, their personal relationship was strained by Ripley. Jordan had been on several dates with her, making sure each time was in a public place where his friends or schoolmates were sure to be. Despite the fact that his ruse seemed to be working and Ripley appeared to remain oblivious to his true feelings and desire, the whole thing made Jordan uncomfortable and he knew Asher was upset by it.

*It’s necessary, the whispers about me have stopped, no one suspects anything anymore. If Asher could just give me a few weeks, I can break up with her and we can go back to being us.* Jordan thought to himself as he slipped into the classroom, taking his seat next to his secret boyfriend. Asher was facing away from him, talking to Dylan and Butler, and Jordan hesitated before greeting him, unsure if Asher had spotted him in the parking lot. “Uh, hey, Ash.”

“Jordan.” The other jock grunted and half-looked at him, before turning back to Dylan. “So, do you reckon Thanos is...”

Jordan chewed on his lower lip, letting Asher’s conversation pass him by and he sighed, pulling out his phone to check Twitter. *I guess he did see me. He’s been pretty angry these last few days, well, after we hook-up, he’s his normal horny self, beforehand. I don’t understand how he seems to be able to separate the sex and the intimacy though. It’s like we can fuck, but then he’s still angry about Ripley. Huh, maybe if we had kept things casual he wouldn’t even care?* Jordan glanced at his boyfriend again, this time running his eyes over Asher’s loose white t-shirt and down his broad back towards his trousers, the tell-tale sign of a hip flask stuffed into his pocket. It could have been his wallet, but Jordan knew better.

It wasn’t so bad at school, Asher seemed to be in control of his drinking, and Jordan didn’t feel like he could confront his boyfriend on the topic while he himself was tricking Ripley and using her as a cover. The nights and evenings were worse though; the few times he did see Asher over the past two
weeks, the guy tended to slur his words and seem unsteady on his feet. But whenever Jordan tried to help him or said anything, Asher got defensive and Jordan was too afraid of what he might say in public in a drunken bout of anger that they never had an argument about it. Even then, Asher seemed aware of what he was doing, Jordan just recognized the piercing, haunted look in Ash’s eyes more and more. He had seen it a few times before when Asher really dropped his guard, but it seemed that the limits of his tolerance had already been reached. Jordan sighed again and turned back to his phone, resigned to being ignored after what he did in the parking lot.

Asher nodded as Butler and Dylan moved on, greeting their other friends. He looked across the room, avoiding Jordan’s bowed head to see Layla enter. Asher smirked slightly when he noticed Spencer look at her and Layla pause, before moving quickly towards her desk next to Olivia. *Please, you two are so obvious! I don’t know what happened, but something definitely did, I can practically smell it. You’ve been so stiff around Spencer all week, Layla, and you’re not good at hiding your emotions, guess you’ve never had to.*

He pressed his lips together, left hand in his pocket, the smooth metal of the flask was now warm to the touch, but Asher knew the liquid inside would still be cool enough to slake his craving thirst. Asher tapped the surface as the urge to just take a drink raged through his body, but he resisted long enough for the teacher to come in and take the rolcall. The action was what brought him comfort and relief, much more than the actual alcohol; that just provided a means to slide through his life without having to remember each moment of Jordan’s bullshit and Layla’s guilt and Spencer’s obvious interest in her. He usually managed to stay away from temptation during school hours and for training, at least, once he had taken the sip in the morning. Just enough to satisfy the cravings, just enough to ensure that the hangovers weren’t crippling.

It was mostly brain fog anyway, a softening of his vision to where everything had round corners and enabled him to drift through the day, most days anyway. But even with the liquid stress reduction, Asher still kept his edge, ever careful around the other guys, always watching his classmates for signs that they suspected him. His relationship with Layla always seemed to rubber-band back to the de facto status that they had been stuck in for the past year, although he had noticed that she was still awkward and tense around JJ. But Asher didn’t care about that, despite JJ always being friendly; touching and leaning against him, everyone knew what a player JJ was.

Jordan didn’t have that reputation however; Asher couldn’t even remember the last time Jordan had seriously dated anyone. Although, apparently that was the problem; the high school QB always had to have a girl otherwise there was something wrong with him. Asher glared at the desk as the thought sidled into his mind. The same was true for all of them of course, it’s why he had stayed with Layla for so long, even if it looked as though he might finally be free of the relationship. He should have been happy that Layla and Spencer did something together; he didn’t have any proof, but he knew the look. It had been what Asher had been waiting for ever since he started hooking up with Jordan. But with his boyfriend now making a grand show out of having a girlfriend, Asher wasn’t sure Jordan was the same as him. *So where does that even leave us?*

Despite the tension that dominated their interactions off the field, when it came to practice, Jordan and Asher still managed to work well together. The offensive team felt solid and the mix between Jordan’s good throwing arm and the receivers’ ability to catch the ball was reflected in each practice and in Coach Baker’s smile at the end of the last training session before the Malibu game. It was only after they had got back to the locker room that he came in to talk to them, calling for the team to gather around.
Asher was in the middle of pulling his jersey off when he heard Coach’s voice and he stopped, leaving the bunched material half up his chest. He looked over at Jordan in his black vest, sweaty skin slick and inviting. But Asher pulled his gaze away before Jordan could meet his eyes, attention falling onto JJ’s shirtless body instead. *Hmm, usual smooth, tanned chest, skin looking like he just oiled it, damn!* Asher blinked when he saw JJ’s arch his brow. *Fuck, getting sloppy, Ash.* He felt himself blush, but was able to pass the color in his cheeks off as exertion from the exercise, wiping his face with his towel.

“Alright, gather round,” Coach Baker gestured at them and grinned. “If ya’ll play like that on Sunday, we’ll crush Malibu!”

“Yeah!” Asher cheered along with the team, seeing Jordan smirk at him.

“Homecoming is tomorrow boys, so no more practice until the big game.” Coach continued, half-turning away before he pivoted back to them and raised a finger. “That being said, keep it classy! No drinking, no staying up all night. I need everyone firing on all cylinders, we have a big game this weekend. Alright, have fun tomorrow!” He gave them a little shimmy and then left as the team laughed and cheered before turning back to their lockers.

Asher smiled and dragged his eyes up JJ’s torso, lingering for a second on his hard nipples before flicking his gaze up towards his handsome face. He could feel his cock hardening, trapped painfully in his cup, hiding his obvious attraction even as he accepted JJ’s half hug and handshake. Asher glanced over fast enough to see Jordan look away, but he shrugged and nodded as JJ talked to him before they both grabbed their towels and headed for the showers, Asher able to conceal his hardon long enough for it to subside once he stopped looking at the other guys.

He was brushing his still wet hair when Jordan came up behind him, the sound of his bag dropping on the bench announcing the QB’s presence. “Hey.”

“Hey, Ash. Everyone is gone, we’re alone.” Jordan moved around so he could see Asher’s face and they could talk more easily.

“Yup.” Asher nodded, sparing a glance for him. “Of course, it was equally as empty this morning.”

“I’m sorry, I needed to…” Jordan trailed off. “It’s not important, I missed you.” He reached out for his boyfriend, resting a hand on Asher’s pumped bicep, his fingers stroking a casual circuit between the dark fabric of his shirt and the smoothness of his skin. “We haven’t really had much chance to meet up this week, guess we’re both to blame for that, huh?”

“You sure?” Asher glared at him. “Because last time I checked, I’ve been available pretty much all week. It’s you who’s been MIA, well, not missing, I know where you are and what you’ve been doing.”

“Ash…” Jordan sighed, shaking his head. “Look, I know this sucks right now, but I’m building a cover, making sure that people don’t have any suspicions. A few more weeks and no one will-”

“I’ve heard that all before, Jordan.” Asher dropped his brush into his bag and zipped it closed. “The only thing you’ve accomplished is to make yourself look like a fool. Not to mention the fact that Ripley is a *Malibu* cheerleader.”

“So?”

“So, don’t you think it’s awfully convenient that she’s super into you just as we’re about to take them
on?” Asher shook his head as Jordan pulled away and folded his arms across his chest. “Even if she is buying this...act, she could still be trying to sabotage you, distract you before the big game.”

“Fuck, dude.” Jordan stared at him, replying thoughtlessly, "Is it so hard to admit that she might actually like me?"

"I like you!" Asher growled, his emotions boiling over into words he regretted as soon as they left his mouth. "Hell, I might even love you, Jordan!"

“Uh?” Jordan reeled back his eyes wide. “What...Ash...I didn’t-”

"Forget it, go have fun with the Malibu tramp, JJ wanted to grab something to eat anyway.” Asher snapped, his cheeks flushing. “Forget I said anything.”

“Asher! Asher, wait!” Jordan cried out fruitlessly. “Fuck!” His phone vibrated against his leg and he pulled it out, checking the message by habit. “Oh, Ripley...nah, nah, I gotta talk to Asher.” Jordan texted back quickly, blowing her off as he stuffed his phone into his pocket and picked up his bag. He found Asher in the parking lot next to his car, talking to JJ across the hood. Jordan hurried over, catching the last words his boyfriend was saying.

“...it’s cool, I don’t mind giving you the lift if, oh, hey Jordan.” Asher nodded at him as though nothing had happened between them only minutes before. “Good practice.”

“Yeah, it was.” Jordan frowned at him, unnerved by how Asher could switch so easily from his true nature to the façade he wore the rest of the time. “Um.”

“You good, bro?” JJ asked him, arching a brow as he leaned against Asher’s car. “You look a little out of it.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m good, it’s just, uh, nothing. You guys look like you’re about to go somewhere.” Jordan recovered quickly and glanced at Asher. “We should probably go over the tactics for the game again, Ash.”

“Dude, it’s Homecoming,” JJ smirked at him and stopped slouching. “Lighten up, tactics can wait until Sunday, right?”

“Yeah, Jordan, you should loosen up.” Asher added his tone unreadable. “Why don’t you join us, we were just going to grab something to eat.”

“Usual place?”

“Yup.” Asher nodded. “I’m giving JJ a ride, so meet us there?”

“Of course you are.” Jordan muttered, catching a strange look from JJ. “I’ll...see you there.” He turned away and walked down the row of cars towards where Olivia was waiting for him. “Hey sis.”

“Hey.” She gestured at the car. “You ready?”

“Can you drop me off? I’m meeting Asher and JJ at the restaurant.” He sat into the car, frowning when Olivia glanced at him. “What?”

“You’re not meeting Ripley?”

“Don’t you start too.” Jordan groaned as Olivia huffed and muttered something under her breath. “Just...just please go.”
“Fine, but it’s no wonder Asher is pissed at you.” Olivia sighed at him, starting the engine. “You can’t do this to him, Jordan.”

“What about him and Layla?”

“I think everyone can see that car wreck coming,” She muttered again, looking over at him. “They don’t fit together, and I can’t remember the last time I saw them being anywhere as close to each other as you are with Ripley. I saw you two in the parking lot this morning, it was…you’re just using her, Jordan. You’re being such a jerk.”

“I know.” He replied quietly, looking out the window as they made the short trip along the busy promenade. “I’m not…proud, but my reputation, this will help it and then Asher and I can, it’ll make things easier.”

“Fine, I’m not going to argue with you about your justifications for this scheme.” Olivia sighed at him. “But don’t be surprised when this all blows up in your face. You’re not Asher, Jordan, you’re too honest to keep a ruse like this going.”

“Err, thanks?” Jordan frowned, hopping out when Olivia stopped opposite the restaurant.

“Go on, I’ll park around the back.”

“Ok.”

“I can’t believe you’re taking both of the twins, man, that’s nuts!” Jordan shook his head as JJ grinned and spread his hands wide.

“Well, who am I to refuse them all this?!”

“Who indeed?” Asher murmured as he dipped a fry into his ketchup. He looked up to see Jordan watching him, the edges of his eyes crinkling suspiciously. “I still think that you’re lowering your standards bro, even if you’re not looking to get off; you’ve already had the twins.”

“I’m not that much of a player, Ash!”

“Uh huh, right.” Asher smirked and Jordan laughed too. For a moment it felt like it always had been with the three of them, the moment slipping past as Spencer moved behind them to deliver a pizza. Asher smirked wider as the pizza was revealed to be a heart-shaped proposition for the couple nearby. “Hahaha.”

“Ugh.” Spencer shook his head as he backed away.

“What? Too corny for ya?”

"Nah, no." Spencer glanced at him and then quickly averted his eyes, his guilt too easy to read. “Ya’ll just take this homecoming thing very seriously. It's just a dance.”

“Yup.” Asher grinned along with JJ, the other jock leaning in across the table to swipe a handful of Asher’s fries. “Hey!”

“You want em back?”

“No, help yourself.” He shrugged, catching Jordan’s jealous expression before the QB hid it. *Huh, well at least you care a little bit.*
“Cheers.” JJ grinned at him again, white teeth contrasting against his tanned skin. He caught Spencer’s attention as the server walked over to clear another table. “Hey man, who you taking to the dance?”

“Oh, uh, no, I don’t.” Spencer shrugged. “I’m flying solo.”

“Huh, alright.”

“Keeping your options open, huh, Spence?” Jordan winked at him as Spencer forced a laugh and returned to his duties.

"You know, I can respect going solo.” Asher said, eyeing Jordan up across the table.

"Yeah?"

"It's better than rolling with a rival."

"Mmm." Jordan sighed and shook his head, as JJ laughed at them both. "Here we go again, Ripley is just a girl-"

"I noticed."

"I like her," Jordan continued, seeing the hardness in Asher's eyes. "Who cares where she goes to school?"

"Hmm." Asher shared another smirk with JJ, but when he looked back at Jordan, his grin became more poisonous and his voice pitched higher. "Traitor."

"Huh, traitor to you or to the team?" Jordan asked quietly as JJ frowned. "I guessing you have the bigger problem."

"We all have problems, Jordan." Asher replied carefully. "Like, is Coach aware that you're hooking up with that Malibu tramp? Or is that something else you're keeping from him?"

“I really don’t like you calling Ripley a tramp, Ash, at least she’s honest about who she likes.”

“Hmm, honest, huh? That must be something she really values, right?” Asher smiled, his eyes remaining cold as JJ looked from one to the other in confusion, his lips parted. “I mean, wouldn’t it just suck for it to turn out that she’s a spy? Trying to sabotage you?”

“You’d know all about being undercover though; how many secrets have you been keeping from all of us?”

“Only the stuff you don’t need to know, Jordan,” Asher replied sharply as his boyfriend sat back in his chair. “I don’t have to justify myself to you; you’re the one who decided that having a girlfriend was more important than…the team.”

“I never said more important.” Jordan said earnestly. “Just, um, of different value. It might pay off in the long run.”

“Providing there is a long run.”

“Dudes, what the hell are you talking about?” JJ stared at both of them. “Like, Ash, do you really have a problem with Jordan’s girl? Or is this something-”

“Um, hey.” Layla interrupted JJ and looked at Asher.
“Hi.”

"Can we talk?" Her tone was brittle, and Asher nodded, standing up. “Thanks.”

“Sure.” Asher glanced back at Jordan, seeing fleeting guilt and fear flash across his face. "Uh, yeah, what is it?"

“Outside.”

“Ok.” He frowned and shrugged at Jordan and JJ as they looked at him in concern. Asher followed Layla towards the front door, passing the counter where Spencer was standing. It was all he could do not to grin at the guilt-ridden expression on Spencer’s face. *You never guard your emotions; it makes you so easy to read. But I wonder if this is the time when she finally comes clean and I will be free? Have to be smart though, have to be angry even when I’m anything but.* Asher took a deep breath as Layla stepped outside and beckoned him away from the entrance. “So, what’s up?”

“There’s something I have to tell you.” Layla chewed her lip and avoided his eyes. “Something happened last weekend.”

“The shooting?” Asher asked, his suspicions confirmed when Layla shook her head. “Something else?”

“I came back here afterwards, I was meeting my Dad, saying goodbye, I was…upset and you were,” She cleared her throat, looking past his shoulder. “You weren’t here. But Spencer was.”

“Uh huh.”

“It was nothing, it just happened, I didn’t, I…we kissed.” Layla admitted in a small voice, pressing her lips together.

Asher remained silent for a moment, the anger that he thought he needed didn't feel right and Asher tossed it aside, nodding instead. "I forgive you."

"What?"

"I understand, you were upset over your Dad and you got caught up. Spencer was there and I wasn't. Emotions bleed and things happen.” Asher tilted his head back slightly, Layla's heels making her taller than him. "But let's face it, things have been rough lately. I…with my Dad, and with us, the money, the lifestyle, the lying, it's been..."

"What are you saying?" Layla looked at him, emotion thick in her voice.

"Maybe, maybe this happened for a reason?" Asher swallowed, his pulse ticking higher as Layla folded her arms defensively. "I've noticed the way Spencer acts around you, seen the glances you share-"

"Asher, stop, don't-"

"You can't save a sinking ship, Layla, and we're pretty full of water." He cleared his throat, the emotions feeling almost real. "You and Spencer might actually make a good run of it. Better than we ever did."

"I want you, Asher." Layla reached out for his arm and looked into his eyes. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry that it happened, but it won’t again. It’s you and me, Asher, I love you and nothing is going to change that.”
“Layla,” Asher started, beginning to feel as though his victory was crumbling before him. “You and Spencer should—”

“No, no, Asher, listen, there’s nothing for me with Spencer except guilt and sorrow if we break up like this.” Layla pleaded. “It was my fault, this mistake, don’t, just give me another chance!”

Another chance? Asher scowled at her, feeling the volcanic rage boiling inside of him as she tried to convince him that this was a one off. This is your way out, Layla, don’t tell me that you don’t want to leave!

“Asher? Say something.”

“Yeah…” Asher bowed his head. “I guess, it wouldn’t be good for the team if we broke up before the Malibu game; I mean, with me and Spencer on the team, it’s better if we just leave any decisions until next week.”

“I’ll make it up to you, Ash, I promise, I’ll…”

He just grunted, ignoring her words as she leaned into him; their embrace was short and standoffish, Asher turning his face away when Layla tried to kiss him. Let her think that I’m still angry. But this can’t last; a win on Sunday might convince her that we’re ok. Other, more risky strategies are going to have to be used.

“Uh, I’ll see you tomorrow, Ash!” Jordan called out as he passed them by, Ripley’s black Jeep pulling up by the curb. He hopped inside and the pair sped away, Layla slipping out of Asher’s limp hug to leave him staring down the street.

Seriously, Jordan? I’m trying to untangle my own clusterfuck of a relationship, why do you have to go and make things more complicated?

Asher sighed, only brightening up when he heard the door open and JJ step outside, a quick glance over his shoulder confirming who it was.

“Hey, Ash, all ok?”

“It will be.” Asher glanced at his friend, JJ smiling at him as he slid one hand into his pocket and sauntered over. “You done in there?”

“Your fries were getting cold, so I rescued them!” He grinned and then held out a carton. “But your burger was a lost cause, so I got you a new one.”

“Thanks, bro, you didn’t have to do that.” Asher smiled at him and accepted the carton, his fingers briefly touching JJ’s own. He tried to ignore the jolt that the contact sent down his spine, tingling in a way that used to only happen around Jordan. Asher fished out his keys and held them up. “You wanna drive?”

“Yup!” JJ grinned wider at him and took the keys from Asher. “Hey, do you want to watch the college game this evening? I got no plans ahead of the dance and we can hang out until the game is on.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Asher agreed, his hand returning to tap on his hip flask out of habit. The desire to forget the afternoon and the stupid admission of his true feelings to Jordan was strong; JJ getting to drive was just another enabler. Maybe I can slip into the restroom before we leave and-

“Oh and we can try out that new brand of vodka from the distillery my Dad bought recently; he finally got a few bottles into his personal collection.” JJ smiled knowingly at him. “No one said we had to wait until tomorrow to start celebrating Homecoming, huh, Ash?”
“It’s not a rule!” He nodded and felt the desperate urge to take a drink fade back into an irritable itch that could be soon satisfied.

Asher took a deep breath as he looked at Layla when she stepped out of the Uber that had brought her to the Bakers’ house for the pre-Homecoming meetup. “Hey, you look good.”

“Thanks, you too.” Her tone was brittle, awkwardness and tension filling the air as they slowly walked up the driveway towards the door. “I didn’t see you last night, I thought maybe you’d come over, I could’ve…we could’ve-”

“Talked?” Asher cut across her quickly, looking ahead of him. “Yeah, I wasn’t really in the mood for anything like that.”

“Oh. What did you get up to then?”

“I hung out with JJ, watched the college game.”

“Right, of course.” Layla replied softly, but Asher ignored her expression and stepped forward to ring the doorbell.

Ah, Spencer. Asher blinked as the door was opened by his teammate and he walked inside, flipping to his exuberant self without missing a beat. He could hear Layla’s hitched breathing behind him as she followed him inside, passing by Spencer, emotions writ large on the football player’s face.

“Alright! Who’s ready to turn up?!?”

“Yeah, there he is!” Coach Baker laughed, his phone held up, clearly ready to take a group photo. “C’mon, get in there, at the front. You look good, ya’ll look amazing. Get in there, everyone, Spencer. Ok, ok, don’t do that with your face, Jordan. And…boom!”

“Hey guys,” Asher bumped fists with JJ and then Chris, Olivia’s date, as Jordan nodded at him, his hands clasped in Ripley’s. “We heading out or…”

“Oh, we have about half an hour before the limo comes.” Olivia gestured towards the kitchen. “There’s non-alcoholic cocktails on the breakfast bar; help yourselves.”

“Cool,” Asher nodded and turned away from Layla abruptly when she tried to step closer to him. Better than nothing, I guess, and I already had a few pre-drinks so virgin fruit juice won’t be so bad.

“Hey babe, will you grab me one too?” Ripley called out as Jordan followed Asher into the kitchen.

“Sure.” Jordan flashed a smile and once he was out of view from the main group, the QB reached out to touch Asher’s shoulder. “Ash.”

“Jordan?” Asher glanced at him as he helped himself to a cocktail glass, the rim sugared, deep red liquid inside smelling fruity and rich. “You look good.”

“Yeah, so do you.” Jordan bit his lip and ran a hand down Asher’s shirt, fingers splaying across the fine white cotton, the feel of hard muscle underneath was a welcome relief from the softness he had been experiencing with Ripley. “So, um.”

“This isn’t really the place for any sort of conversation.”

“You seem…angry.” Jordan pulled his hand away when JJ came into the kitchen, one of the twins
on his arm. The QB gestured towards the patio and Asher followed him outside. “Is it because of Ripley?”

“Not exactly.” Asher took a sip and then grimaced. He placed the cocktail glass down on the nearby table and took out a silver and gray panelled flask. Asher unscrewed it and tipped a generous measure of clear liquid into the glass. He looked up at Jordan’s disapproving expression and slipped his flask back into his jacket pocket before taking a long draught of the cocktail. “Much better.”

“You’re crazy; my Dad is literally in the other room! Don’t you know what will happen if he sees you?” Jordan folded his arms unhappily.

“I don’t really care,” Asher shrugged. “I hate these fucking dances; it’s all pretend, at least for us, right? Well, definitely for me.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I’m not angry that you’re taking Ripley to the dance,” Asher replied after another drink. “This is the perfect exposure for you, huh, the QB and his girl, dancing around the gym, ain’t it all perfect and cliched?!”

“Ash…” Jordan sighed, hearing the bitterness in his boyfriend’s voice. “What’s going on?”

“Layla kissed Spencer. Or Spencer kissed Layla, I’m not really sure which.” He replied as Jordan’s brows arched. “Good news, right? You’d think so. You’d think that this would be the perfect moment for her to just let go and allow me to finally do something that I should have done a long time ago.”

“But you came with her tonight.”

“But it is over, right?” Jordan asked, pressing his lips together, brows pulled tight. “So, you’d be… clear?”

“I’d be single in their eyes, but I can live with that.” Asher played with the sugared rim of the glass and glanced over his shoulder as Chris and Olivia stepped outside, going to the other end of the patio, drinks in hand. He turned back to Jordan and shrugged. “I agreed with staying together for the sake of the team; the last thing we need is for Spencer getting distracted when Layla and I break up because of him.”

“Exactly, she still thinks there’s a chance for us, somehow.” Asher drained his glass and glanced over his shoulder as Chris and Olivia stepped outside, going to the other end of the patio, drinks in hand. He turned back to Jordan and shrugged. “I agreed with staying together for the sake of the team; the last thing we need is for Spencer getting distracted when Layla and I break up because of him.”

“But it is over, right?” Jordan asked, pressing his lips together, brows pulled tight. “So, you’d be… clear?”

“I wish you’d reconsider what you’re doing, Jordan; let Ripley go after the game and don’t get mired down in a pointless relationship. Assuming, of course, that it is pointless.”

“Meaning?” Asher just looked at him and then shrugged. Jordan glared, “You think that I was lying to you; that it was all just a, a phase?!”

“I didn’t say that; I’ve just noticed that you play the role of horny straight guy really well.”

“You jerk!” Jordan huffed and shoved past him, snatching Asher’s glass away. “You a mean drunk, Ash.”

“So I’ve heard.” Asher muttered, letting Jordan go, his teeth clenching when he heard Ripley ask him if he was alright, Jordan dismissing it with an uncomplicated lie. He walked away to the far end of the patio that overlooked the pool and reached inside his jacket for his hip flask. Asher unscrewed the top off and took a deep drink, savoring the strong, violent burn that rippled down his chest and sunk into his stomach. His eyes watered and Asher shut them, letting himself rock slightly back and
forth as the vodka flooded his system. Asher flicked his eyes open when he felt someone clap his shoulder and the familiar pleasant tingle of aftershave tickled his nose. “Yeah, JJ?”

“You’re gonna be running out before we even get there, bro.” The other jock leaned in close and opened his jacket, showing the extra pocket skilfully added to the interior. “Lucky for you, I always bring extra.”

“Hell yeah!” Asher grinned at him and screwed the top back onto his own flask. “I’ll come find you when I need it, alright?”

“Sure.” JJ glanced carefully over his shoulder, relief on his face when he looked back at Asher. “I’m beginning to think you were right.”

“About what?”

“Bringing two dates; they’re teaming up on me, Ash!”

“Uh huh, must be terrible for you.” Asher smirked, turning around fully as Jordan made his way over to them. “At least they’re only interested in you, right?”

“Yeah, can’t believe Spencer did that, man.”

“You know?” Jordan asked in surprise, catching the end of their conversation. “Did Asher tell you?”

“Last night, yeah.” JJ nodded, looking between them. “You do know the details…right?”

“I told him a few minutes ago.” Asher explained as Jordan glared at him. “But I think we should keep it quiet; I don’t want that mistake to affect the team, understand?”

“You got it.”

“Of course, Ash.” Jordan moved closer to him. “I’ll always have your back.”

“Good.” Asher nodded, feeling something click pleasantly between him and his boyfriend again. He must have communicated the sentiment in his tone because Jordan grinned happily. Asher was about to speak again when Ripley joined the group, linking her arm with Jordan’s and smiling at them.

“There you are, I think we’re about ready to go; the limo has just arrived.” Ripley glanced at Asher and JJ. “You two look guilty, but I guess drinking in Coach’s house is pretty ballsy.”

“What? Us?!” JJ shook his head quickly as Asher rolled his eyes. “Nah, never!”

“What of it? It’s a party, right?”

“Exactly, I figured one of you might be able to hook me up.” She smiled sweetly at them as Asher frowned and JJ sagged. “I can ask louder if you want?”

*Thanks for the defense, Jordan.* Asher thought to himself as his boyfriend squirmed uneasily. He nodded at JJ, “Give her the spare flask.”

“But—”

Asher leaned in to whisper to JJ without the other two hearing, “Don’t worry, I’ll get it back, trust me.”

“Fine.” JJ grunted and covertly pulled out the flask and palmed it to Ripley, who in turn discreetly
placed it into her purse. “You better enjoy that.”

“Now, now, boys, we can all share!” She smiled again and slipped away as Jordan looked after her, his lips parted.

“You sure know how to pick ‘em.” JJ muttered, no longer looking pleased with himself. “Do you really think you can get it back, Ash?”

“Oh, I think so, I have a silver tongue, she’ll come around.” Asher glanced at Jordan and saw him suddenly look worried. “Right, Jordan? Don’t you agree that I can talk her into doing what I want, maybe with some well-placed…facts.”

“Yeah.” Jordan gulped, pulling at his collar as he chose his words carefully. “But it’s only booze, Ash, surely you wouldn’t do anything rash just to get a flask back?”

“After JJ put in so much effort?”

“I didn’t really-”

“And you know how much I’m going to need the liquid support tonight,” Asher spoke over him, his eyes boring into Jordan’s panicked expression. “Especially since I won’t have the usual backup, you get my meaning?”

“I, um, I understand, I’ll see what I can do.” Jordan replied as JJ frowned. “But, um, come on, I hear my Dad calling us, it’s Homecoming.”

“That it is.”

Asher forced a smile as he and Layla poised for the photographer in the corner of the hall, before moving away quickly when the flash buzzed and collapsed into starry darkness. He followed Layla into the center of the floor and nodded at the decorations as she pursed her lips, looking around. “It looks good, you did a good job.”

“Thanks.” She frowned, glancing at him and then stepping closer. “You’ve been drinking.”

“It’s a party,” Asher shrugged, tilting his head back. “And I haven’t had much; just enough to get the buzz on, you know?”

“I, I suppose.” Layla sighed resignedly and looked away from him. She tsked and gestured at the table with punch on it. “I told them to put the red cups next to the red punch!”

“Yeah…you better go sort that out.” Asher replied half-heartedly. He shook his head as Layla walked away, turning instead to take in the rest of the room. The music was already flowing through the air, most of his friends and teammates arriving as he watched. “Hey, Rhodes, Dylan.” Asher greeted the other two jocks with nods and fist bumps, turning away as their dates dragged them onto the dance floor. His eyes locked onto Jordan and Ripley standing at one of the tables, laughing and smiling. *Ugh, I need another drink.*

He slipped past Jordan, his boyfriend not appearing to notice him, and Asher left the hall behind to walk through the somewhat eerie deserted corridors of the high school. The restroom was empty; Asher checking each cubicle to make sure before he pulled out his flask and tipped the contents into his mouth. He kept going until his eyes watered and blurred and his throat was column of burning fire. Asher closed the flask and shook it gently, “Nearly out. Gonna have to get the reserve from
Ripley sooner or later. I can’t believe she pulled that stunt back at the house and Jordan is still cool with her!"

Asher swallowed the bile that threatened to rise and turned on the faucet, splashing cold water into his face. "Better." He muttered, standing up and using a stack of paper towels nearby to pat his skin dry. Just as he was finished, the door opened and one of the basketball jocks came in. Asher nodded at him and left quickly, returning to the dance hall. He scowled when he saw Jordan and Ripley on the dancefloor, dancing and bopping, his boyfriend’s hands on her hips. He could feel the anger that had been simmering under the surface flare violently and Asher forced himself to remain calm, balling his hands into fists.

"Asher," Layla touched his arm. "There you are."

"I had to use the bathroom." He muttered, pulling his gaze from Jordan to look at Layla, seeing the irritated expression on her face. "What?"

"The got the banners wrong; that one is meant to be outside and the football one is meant to be over the stage!" Layla gestured at the offending signs. "I told them!"

"It’s just a stupid banner."

"That stupid banner is how we’re acknowledging your football team!" Layla shook her head. "I worked really hard on this and now it’s messed up."

"Well, how about some punch?" Asher offered and turned away quickly, but Layla followed him over to the table.

"I can’t do anything until the banner is fixed."

"Uh huh?" Asher pivoted back to her, sensing an opportunity, his voice rising with each word he spoke. "Are you sure this is just about the banner? The banner is fine, Layla, no one cares about the damn banner!"

"Everything ok?" Spencer walked over and Asher side-eyed him furiously.

"Ok, man, I just want to-"

"I know what you want to do." Asher spat at him, anger flaring as alcohol made the words spill out. "And I told Layla that I was fine with all that, but apparently, she loves me more, so one little kiss between you two isn't breaking this thing up!"

"Asher..." Layla stared at him as Coop ran interference with Spencer, pulling her friend away. "Are you...did you take another drink just now?"

"Who can blame me with the way you’re carrying on?" He growled and stalked away through the dancing couples.

"Hey, Ash, wait a minute." Jordan called out as he saw his boyfriend walk by. He followed Asher into the corridor, reaching out to grab his arm, but Asher pulled away irritably. "Woah, calm down."
“Easy to say.” Asher snapped; his brow furrowed. “Shouldn’t you be dancing with the Malibu tramp?”

“Fuck, how wasted are you?”

“Not nearly enough.”

“Yeah, well, I got it back.” Jordan looked around carefully before continuing. “I gave the flask back to JJ; I didn’t think you needed any more.”

“Oh?” Asher blinked and folded his arms across his chest. “And why is that, Jordan?”

“I have eyes.” The QB placed both hands on Asher’s shoulders and stepped closer to him. “You gotta calm down, Ash, you’re getting me worried. This is about Layla, right?”

“I just want it to be over, Jordan, I’m tired of pretending.” He bowed his head, speaking at his boyfriend’s chest. “You know, we could just blow this joint right now, just take off, ditch the dates and go somewhere else.”

“I…I can’t do that Asher, it could look, it would look weird.” Jordan shook his head and quickly pulled away when the door to the hall banged open and a group of their classmates spilled out. “We both need to be seen here.”

“Right, of course.”

“But tomorrow night, win or lose, we’ll do something, ok?” Jordan tried to reassure him, but Asher just shrugged moodily. They headed back inside together, Asher breaking off quickly, leaving Jordan to watch him leave. He sighed to himself and then walked over to the punch table, his original mission when he had left Ripley at their table. After filling two of the cups, Jordan wove his way through the dancing couples and groups to reach the cheerleader. “Hey now, I’m gonna take that look personally.”

“Yeah, sorry.” She smiled at him, pausing her shredding of the ticker tape that decorated the table. “Are you bored?” He leaned in to kiss her cheek, pulling back and glancing up to see several of the football team nearby. Nice, plenty of watchers.

“I’m not bored with you around.” Ripley stood up straighter and ran a finger down Jordan’s chest, flipping at his tie. “But what do you say that we leave this charming dance and go somewhere else?”

“Um, and do what?” Jordan was distinctly aware that JJ and a group of the defensive line were close enough to them that their conversation wasn’t private. “Did you have something specific in mind?”

“Oh, well, you can take my hand right now, come with me and experience a night full of surprises!” Oh crap. I knew this was coming, but…fuck, all the guys are watching. I gotta do this, or those rumors will never stop. The thoughts flashed across Jordan’s mind as he stood close to Ripley. He could see her expression becoming uncertain and Jordan quickly smirked. “I love surprises.”

“Yeah, I thought you would.” Ripley smiled and took his hand, guiding him out of the hall, passing the group of grinning jocks. “We’ll call an Uber.”

“Sure.” Jordan mumbled, a sinking sensation in his stomach, a feeling of wrongness permeating his decision. It doesn’t matter, just have to play along with this, I’ll figure it out if it happens. I mean, I think she wants it, and I guess I could imagine that she is-
“Hey QB!” Ripley called out, twirling around as they got to the front of the school. “Get out of your mind and into the moment!”

Asher leaned against the corner of the main building, the night air cooling against his alcohol flushed skin. He was finishing his flask, taking sips of the vodka every few seconds. He frowned as the front doors opened and Jordan and Ripley came out, holding hands. Asher felt a bitter taste in his mouth, his stomach plunging uncomfortably. The world was blurred and soft, spinning gently around him as he rubbed his fingers against the rough stone of the wall, anything to bring a little feeling back into his numb hands. *So you’ll skip out with her and not with me? Says it all, Jordan. All you care is what other people think about you.*

He watched them until they disappeared into the twilight of the parking lot and then Asher forced himself to stand, reaching for the wall as he almost lost his balance. Asher waited for a minute or two until his vision steadied enough that he could walk in a straight line without staggering too much. He took a deep breath and headed back into the school building, making it to the nearest water fountain.

“Oh, there you are, Asher.”

“What is it now, Layla, are the balloons the wrong color?” Asher muttered, his back turned as he took a drink.

“We need to talk.” She ignored his barbed question and gestured towards the other end of the corridor. “It’s important.”

“Right.” Asher wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and nodded for Layla to begin. “What?”

“Um, you were right yesterday.”

“What?”

“About us, all of this was a mistake, coming to the dance and just thinking it would all blow over.” Layla swallowed and tried to catch his unfocused gaze. “I think we should break up, Asher.”

“Thank god for that.” Asher muttered indistinctly, seeing Layla frown, but it seemed she didn’t hear him as she continued to speak. *It’s finally over, but I have to act hurt, act as though I actually cared. Time to twist the knife a bit.*

"It hasn't been working for a long time, Ash, and-"

"Don't call me that." He glared at her, determined to push Layla away for good. “This is about that kiss, right? And Spencer, of course. But I’m curious, did you manipulate him too? I mean you spent long enough flirting with him ever since he got here. Oh, and let’s not forget what happened at the boosters’ function when you…” Asher grinned horribly as he trailed off and Layla stared at him.

“Yeah, I saw that, I see a lot of things, Layla.”

“That’s not…it’s not like that, Asher.”

“Hmm, maybe, so for Spencer’s sake, do you have actual feelings for him, something genuine there that you didn’t want to admit to yesterday? I mean, either way it doesn't matter, right? You’ll just use him too; there’s more of your father in you than I thought.”

"Hey, um, you've been drinking, and you're hurt, maybe you should, uh, just go home?" She offered; her hands raised peacefully.
"Why would I leave, Layla?" Asher snapped, surprised at the emotion that thickened his voice and made his eyes water. "Sure, everyone else has left! My Mom, my Dad, my-ugh, everyone important is gone, why not me too, huh?"

"That wasn't what I meant." She reached out but Asher backed away.

"No, no, nah, I'm not leaving, this party is just getting started." He grinned nastily at her. "But don't worry, you and Spencer go ahead and have that final dance together."

“Asher! Asher!”

He turned away, ignoring her calls after him, shouting out. “Not your boyfriend anymore, don’t have to listen to you!” Asher smiled to himself when he rounded the corner that led towards the dance hall. Relief flooded his body for a moment before the sensation was quickly wrenched away when he realized that Jordan wasn’t there. Jordan had betrayed him. The breakup didn’t hurt, of course, but he had to make it seem like it did, still had to sell the straight jock story. Asher pushed open the doors to the hall, letting the upbeat tempo of the song wash over him as he loosened his collar and pulled his tie away from his neck.

No, it didn’t hurt; Layla's breakup. What hurt was that Jordan would rather run off with some cheerleader he only met a week ago than stand next to Asher, even as a friend, even as just the team captain, even to broker peace between the football players. That was probably the move he should be making; confronting Spencer and starting a fight. But it’s not him that I want to hurt, not him that I need to break free of. I need to make sure that there’s no way that Layla can even think there’s a possibility that things can go back to what they were.

He patted his jacket pocket and remembered that he had run dry. But JJ has more, he always has extra. Asher thought to himself, wandering across the dancefloor as his vision blurred and sharpened, the alcohol from earlier finally hitting him. It wasn’t enough, he could still see Jordan and Ripley walking out of the dance, could still see the concern in Layla’s eyes as she tried to soften the blow. No, he needed to obliterate this night from his memories and there was only one sure-fire way to do that.

“JJ, bro, there you are!” Asher slurred his words slightly, smirking at his friend as he broke into the group conversation, Rhodes casting him a wary look. “Open up, give me the extra!” Dylan was standing nearby, brows arched as Asher pawed all over JJ’s chest, hard muscles and smooth cotton under his fingers until he found the cool metal in the guy's pocket. “Nice.”

“Whatever you need, Ash.” JJ grinned at him in a way that was almost-

Asher blinked away the drunken thoughts and instead screwed open the top of the flask and clinked it against JJ’s other one in the jock’s hand. “Bottoms up.”

JJ took a quick look around the room for the chaperones before nodding at him. “Cheers, Ash.”

They both drunk, Asher drinking deeply until he almost gagged. “What?” He spat at Dylan, the kicker backing away, both hands raised. “Yeah, good.”

“You sure, bro?” JJ half-smiled at him, slipping his own flask into his pocket. “Do you wanna-”

“No, it’s time to party!” Asher grinned and turned away, openly taking another drink. He only stopped when he felt someone grab his elbow. “Huh? Oh, hey, Olivia.”

“Do you want to maybe chill on the drinking?” She frowned and held open his jacket, spotting the other flask. Olivia shook her head as Asher just shrugged. "Look, I recognise a downward spiral
"When I see one."

"No, no, no, I'm celebrating!" Asher took another quick gulp and grinned at her. "You see Layla cheated on me with Spencer, so I am finally fucking free!" He grinned wider as she stared at him. "Of course, I don't see your fine ass brother around here, so I guess I'm celebrating alone."

"Asher, keep your voice down." Olivia gestured at JJ and the other football players nearby, but he didn't seem to notice. "You?"

"I..." He paused, seeing the guilt in her eyes and huffed. "Huh, you knew, didn't you? About Layla and Spencer?"

Olivia remained silent, breaking eye contact.

"I thought you were different, I thought we had each other's backs." Asher glared at her. "If you told me sooner, I could've planned, I could have made it a whole lot less painful and we'd all be fucking free of our secrets. Including Jordan. He wouldn't have to make out with that one-step-away-from-a-stripper Rip."

Olivia slapped him, hissing at his surprised face, ignoring everyone's gasps. "You're embarrassing yourself!"

"Might as well take the house down with me then!" Asher pushed past her and surprised JJ by leaning in and pinching the reserve third bottle, before waltzing off the dancefloor.

"Dude!"

Asher ignored him and settled down on the bleachers in the shadows to drink himself into oblivion. JJ had started across the dance floor towards him, but stopped when Layla and Spencer came in, holding hands. The music turned into a slow song and Asher smirked to himself as he took a drink, hearing the whispers and muttered remarks directed at Layla and Spencer as they danced closely to each other. I should be happy about this, I am, I guess, finally able to stop living one of the lies, well, not quite yet. Everyone is expecting me to play the jilted lover, so I better stay that way for a while. It's kinda true I guess; Jordan is gone and I'm...I'm the one left behind.

"It's ok, it happens to everyone." Ripley rubbed his shoulders comfortingly. "Besides, even though the beach is empty, I can imagine..."

"It's not that." Jordan cut across her tersely. He was sitting up, facing the ocean, Ripley behind him. "It's not...it's not even you, it's definitely me." I didn't feel anything when she took off her clothes, literally no reaction. I guess that means Asher...yeah, him I feel something for, even just thinking about him. "Sorry."

"Um, ok."

"I thought," Jordan took a ragged breath and glanced at her as she pulled her dress back on and sat opposite him. "I thought I could...fake this, I guess. I'm not...I've been lying to you."

"You're gay?" Ripley replied her expression carefully neutral. "Am I right?"

"Uh huh." Jordan nodded miserably. "I'm sorry."

"Right."
“I never should have done any of this, I just, the team and, uh, I’m their QB, I have to be…”

“Jordan, um, thank you telling me.” Ripley reached out to touch his arm, her voice calm and reassuring. “And I understand what you’re talking about, but you’re not the only gay football player I’ve met; there are others.”

“Sure, but I bet their Dad isn’t the Coach.” Jordan blinked away the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes. Alright, why don’t I embarrass myself even more?! He glanced at her and shrugged. “You don’t seem angry?”

“Well, I’m not thrilled that the hot guy I’ve been making out with all week is likely more interested in my brother than me, but I am glad that you didn’t have sex with me just to prove a point or look good in front of your bros.”

“What? Did you-”

“Hmm, not just a bimbo cheerleader!” She smirked as he stared at her. “I began to notice that you got extra…affectionate whenever someone from your school was around. But I wasn’t entirely sure until, well, until a few minutes ago.”

“Are you going to tell people?” Jordan asked in a small voice, his heart beating faster as the thoughts of his secret being revealed caused his breathing to hitch.

“No, of course not, that’s your right, Jordan, I wouldn’t take that away from you.” Ripley settled back on the sand and looked out towards the ocean. “So, do you have a boyfriend, or have you been repressing these feelings all this time?”

“I have a boyfriend,” Jordan nodded, relief coursing through him. “Although I think he’s pretty pissed at me right now.”

“Yeah, I get that. If I had to watch my man go hang around and casually make out with a girl he’s not really into, I’d be pretty angry too!” She smirked as Jordan rolled his eyes at her. “Now, now, don’t pout, you nipped this in the bud before things got serious.”

“I’m not sure Asher is gonna be as easy to convince as you were.”

“You don’t have to worry about that for tonight, here, take a hit of this, you’ll calm down.” Ripley reached into her bag and pulled out a rolled-up white cylinder and a lighter. “Go on, just one drag, you’ll feel better.”

“I…I don’t know.” Jordan squirmed uncomfortably and Ripley shrugged, taking the joint for herself.

“No pressure, let’s just chill and enjoy the sounds of the waves.”

“Ok.”

Asher glowered at the dancing couples as he continued to drink, his vision twisting and sharpening before dulling again with a circular lurch. He was nearly out again, JJ’s reserve third flask already drained to barely a quarter left. His thoughts chugged together, arriving in bursts before fading away without catching hold, no memories of what the past half hour had been other than a sensation of betrayal and anger. Asher could pick out Layla’s face on the dancefloor, occasionally looking over at him, a mix of pity and guilt in her expression. No matter what she said…beginning to think she might regret dancing with Spencer…change is hard. She thinks I’m hurting because of her…time to burn
that final bridge...

His hands were numb and difficult to direct, but Asher struggled on until he had the cap screwed back on and the flask was secured in his jacket pocket. When the music changed into an upbeat rhythm, Asher stood up, swaying as the blood rushed to his head. He bopped along to the sound, winding his way through the crowd of teenagers towards the stage, climbing up and leaning across to the DJ. “Hey, give the mic for a minute? I’m gonna introduce the football team; gonna smash the Malibu Dolphins tomorrow!”

“Sure, here.”

“Thanks.” Asher smirked, impressed by how his words weren’t as slurred as he expected them to be. The jock turned around, facing the crowd with a grin. “What’s up Beverlyyy?!” He grinned wider when the cheer went up and the music faded away, giving him clear air. "A-allow me to introduce you all to the best damn football team in Southern California!" He paused again to allow the cheering and clapping to die down a little. "Aaron Miller, Mr Strong Safety himself, get on up here! Make some noise everybody!" Asher was barely aware of Aaron as he leaned in for the greeting, his eyes skipping past towards the rest of the crew. He pointed at JJ, "And that beast...that beast, JJ, my boy! Best damn linebacker I've ever played with!" Asher grinned as he watched JJ dance excitedly onto the stage, briefly touching his back as they hugged and then JJ stepped away.

Asher wetted his lips as he turned back to the crowd, his grin falling away once his gaze caught Layla and Spencer standing together. "And of course," Asher took a deep breath, feeling his voice catch slightly in a mix of emotion and anger. No Jordan to introduce... "The real MVP, Beverly's latest transfer, Spencer James." Asher clenched and unclenched his free hand rapidly as a cheer went up from the crowd. Time to burn. "Haha. He's the best there is, huh, Layla?" He looked down at them, staring Layla dead in the eyes. "I mean you did cheat on me with him, so you would know. No, no, it's ok, really, yeah, it's cool. You guys shouldn't feel guilty, I mean, Spencer was only giving her something that I wasn't! So, so, don't feel guilty, because technically, I cheated first! Tell her, Olivia."

Asher paused, hearing the furious whispers rip through the crowd and seeing Layla turn and look at Olivia, betrayal forming on her face. He waited for a moment longer before laughing. "Haha, no, no, she knew about it, she didn't tell you, but, haha. Oh, no, no, no, hang on, Layla, no, no, you got it all wrong!" Asher grinned as a giddy vehemence rushed through him and he bounced on the balls of his feet. “Nah, I didn’t sleep with Olivia, it was her brother that was fucking me!” Asher grinned wider as Layla gasped and stared at Olivia. “Hahaha!” A strange weight was lifted from his chest as he watched the destruction he had wrought start spiralling out of control, but before he could enjoy it too much, Coach Baker stormed the stage, grabbed his arm, and dragged him away. “Hey!”

The euphoria drained almost immediately when Coach pushed him out of the hall and into one of the long corridors near the locker rooms. Asher felt his stomach clench uncontrollably as the words he had just spoken echoed in his head along with the awful sensation that Jordan would never forgive him. "Coach, I'm sor-"

"I don't want to hear it!" He stopped and turned around sharply. "You drank alcohol on school property!"

"Yeah, but-"

"Quiet!" Coach hissed and Asher sagged, protests dying on his lips. "Was anyone else on the team drinking with you?"
Asher shook his head, tears gathering in his eyes. "No. It was just me."

"Ahh," Coach sighed heavily. "You leave me no choice, I'm suspending you for the next two games."

Asher blinked, shocked, staring at him. "Coach, please! Tomorrow is Homecoming!"

"Umm hmm."

"Scouts are going to be at that game, I have to play! Please do not do this to me!"

"Unfortunately, son, you did this to yourself." Coach wagged a finger in his face. "Now go home and dry out, you've embarrassed yourself and this team enough."

“But Coach!” Asher called out as Coach Baker turned swiftly away and walked back towards the dance. “Coach…fuck!” He cursed and balled his hands into fists as the rage and guilt and fear pummelled through his system. "What the hell did I just do…" Asher stumbled out of the school building, heading for the football field parking lot, figuring that it would be the emptiest.

Asher wasn’t sure how he got there, all memory of making it to the bench on the sidewalk lost in a haze of burning alcohol. All he knew was that he was here now, and his hand held the near-empty flask of vodka tight as though it was his last grip on reality, the rest sliding away in a numbing twirl of random thoughts and general queasiness. He rolled his head back, looking up at the light polluted sky above him, vaguely aware that his phone was constantly buzzing in his pocket. But Asher was too lethargic to think about reaching down and checking it. Instead it was all he could do to raise his hand and bring the flask to his lips, savoring the burning drops of alcohol as he reached his tongue out to taste the rim, metal unpleasantness not lingering. Just enough to take the edge off, right? Except now it's all edge and nothing is taking it off.

He felt himself slip in and out of consciousness, his eyes closed to stop the world from spinning so fast around him, even if the sensation returned with a violent burst every time he moved his head. Asher blinked uneasily when he felt the wooden bench creak next to him. "Jord...oh." He didn't resist when Olivia pulled the near-empty hip flask from his loose grasp, letting her shake out the last remaining drops. She closed it up and slipped it back into his other jacket pocket. Asher looked blearily at her. "Where's Jordan?"

"I don't know, Ash."

"Hmph, I messed up." He muttered thickly, tears falling from his eyes onto his cheeks.

“Yeah, you did.” She replied softly. “But I’m gonna get you home, can’t leave you here like this.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m so sorry for not updating sooner, it’s been an unexpectedly busy few months and the last week. I expect the next 5 weeks to be equally as busy, so I’d be surprised if this was updated again before the start of August. Thank you reading this story, I’m blown away by the interest in this one!
I’ve been thinking about doing a story based on these characters pretty much since I saw the first episode of "All American" earlier this year, but I wanted to wait a little while until we got to know these characters better in canon before pressing forward. This story will likely follow along with the key plot events of the show, with the major difference of Asher and Jordan being closeted gay characters carrying out a secret affair. The first chapter is mostly for establishing their relationship and the continuing story will be a mixture of smut, drama, and secrets. If you enjoyed it, let me know!

P.S The summary is likely to change in the future, it's the one thing I always dread writing when uploading something new!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!