Summary

Women's college rugby AU. Ashlyn and Ali meet playing for competing college rugby teams and strike up a complicated friendship that evolves into much more.

Notes

The first couple of chapters set up the story, so fair warning that Ali doesn't make an appearance right away. I've done my best here to explain rugby very basically without taking away from the story too much. If you want to know more, it's pretty easy to google the positions and basic rules. I'm open to feedback, so feel free to leave comments along the way! I'll try and update at least a couple times a week, but I apologize ahead of time for any delays.

Finally, thanks to the friend who encouraged me a while ago to write this, you know who you are.
It’s dark and the New England air is crisp tonight even though it had been a humid September afternoon. The night sky is clear and hazel eyes look up to take in all the stars that are out. The tired blonde takes in a deep breath as she lays back on the slightly damp grass and whispers to herself “it’s good to be home” as she breathes out.

Ashlyn never realized she was missing the feeling of home until she got here. Satellite Beach, Florida was “home” technically, but she never felt like she truly belonged somewhere until she got to Smith College. It was kind of a funny thought seeing as how she almost didn’t even give this place a chance when she was applying to schools.

**Flashback to Senior Year in High School**

“Ashlyn, have you thought about maybe a complete change of scenery?” asked her guidance counselor with a look that conveyed her concern.

“What do you mean, Mrs. Jacobs? All of the colleges I’m applying to are at least an hour away and all really different I think.” Ashlyn replied defensively.

“They are all in Florida, Ashlyn. I can’t help but wonder if it might be a good idea for you to branch out a bit and use this as an opportunity to really explore something new,” Mrs. Jacobs said encouragingly before cautiously adding “I guess I thought you’d be more interested in getting away from here and building new opportunities for yourself; you’re smart, I think you can get into any school you want to.”

Ashlyn knew what she was getting at. Mrs. Jacobs was one of the few that understood and cared, that Ashlyn had poured her heart out to at her breaking point. It had been a nightmare year for her, she was barely making it through. She didn’t want to run though, she owed it to herself to stand strong.

“I just… I just don’t want to give them the satisfaction of me leaving,” Ashlyn said quietly. “Them thinking that I had to run to get away, that I couldn’t handle it, that I’m weak.”

Mrs. Jacobs looked at her with a furrowed brow “You have to do what’s right for you, Ashlyn. Don’t stay here and stand your ground just to prove a point. This is about your future and nothing else. No one is even going to remember any of this in a couple years and I don’t want you miss out on something that could change your life because you’re making choices based on bad experiences.”

Her words hit Ashlyn deeply in that moment and all she could do was nod and say “You’re right. I’ll rethink the schools I’m applying to.”

Mrs. Jacobs knew that this was finally time to push a little bit and she quickly shoved a Smith College brochure into Ashlyn’s hands saying “I think this might be the perfect place for you.”

Ashlyn briefly looked it over, drawn by the beautiful fall colors of the trees that surrounded the Victorian looking brick building on the cover of the brochure. She read the description on the first page and looked up at Mrs. Jacobs skeptically. “A women’s college? Really? Geez, Mrs. Jacobs when you said new opportunities, you weren’t kidding,” she said with a chuckle and added “Plus, isn’t it cold in Massachusetts?”

Mrs. Jacobs turned a bit red and laughed a bit herself before elbowing Ashlyn lightly and saying “I
wasn’t talking about your dating life! I just think it would be good for you to be around other strong women. Smith is a great school, has good athletics and has produced some of the most powerful female leaders in this country. I have really high hopes for you, obviously,” she winked, “And yes, it does get cold in the winter, but it’s still on the east coast and it’s a beautiful part of the country you haven’t seen.”

It was the truth, Ashlyn had never left Florida. She’d always wanted to travel, see new places, meet new people, but it just never seemed within her reach.

“Besides,” Mrs. Jacobs added “I went to a women’s college and I turned out just fine. You’re looking at a Wellesley College graduate right here! Smith is not too far from Boston, so you can visit a new city, I think you’ll love it. Just promise me you won’t rule it out until you visit and experience the place. Smith has a prospective student visiting program, so I can set it all up and it would be a free weekend trip for you at the very least.”

Even though Ashlyn was still really hesitant, she could see Mrs. Jacobs’ excitement and she didn’t want to let her down. Plus, it was a free trip after all.

“Ok, let’s do it. I’ll go visit.”

Mrs. Jacobs squealed happily and squeezed Ashlyn’s arm before turning around and calling the college right away to set up the visit.

And the rest was history. Despite all her hesitation, all of her nervousness, Ashlyn fell in love with Smith during her prospective visit. She was hosted by a couple of girls on the rugby team who showed her around the campus and told her everything they knew about the college. The campus was beautiful, the people were friendly, the surrounding town was artsy and fun, and she never felt so welcome anywhere before. She was there for just two days and for the first time in her life, she didn’t feel weird, wrong or out of place. To Mrs. Jacobs’ delight, she sent in her application as soon as she got home, hoping every single night that she would be accepted.

She’d never been so happy as when she opened that acceptance letter with her grandmother and Mrs. Jacobs standing beside her. This was it, she was leaving everything she knew and starting fresh in a new place. Although the hate, lies, betrayal, and struggle would always be a part of her story, she was ready to leave it behind in Florida and begin again no matter what it took. She would miss her grandmother, who had always shown her a deep and true love. She would miss Mrs. Jacobs too, but she could always come home during college breaks and visit. It was time to start over and she was ready.

**End Flashback**
First Year

Ashlyn looks up at the night sky feeling momentarily at peace inside and thinking about how great this sophomore year at Smith is going to be. She had spent the afternoon moving her things into her dorm room and chatting with her housemates, ecstatic to see everyone again after spending the summer apart. Tomorrow classes would start and she’d get to experience Smith as a veteran for the first time.

She thinks back on her first year at Smith and smiles; who knew it would have been so eye opening.

She had arrived on campus that first day and shuffled through paperwork and processing before arriving at the steps of Wilson House with all her possessions packed into two suitcases. She had chosen Wilson House as her dorm because it was where she had stayed during her prospective visit; she had fallen in love with the beautiful clock tower the house had. All of the Smith College dormitories were unique in some way, and people at Smith called them “houses” not “dorms” for good reason. They were all generally large Victorian looking houses with cozy rooms that had wood floors and walk-in closets. All the-female atmosphere made them feel more like sororities than dorms. Every house on campus had its own personality and Ashlyn fit into Wilson House so well. It was a house located in the quadrangle section of campus, home to several other large “quad” houses, all known for being where the athletic and party-hard kind of girls liked to reside. Ashlyn had always been the quiet type, but that had all changed quickly in her new home.

Her first year roommate was a tall blonde named Whitney Engen from California. She and Ashlyn had stayed up all night engaged in deep conversation that first night. They navigated orientation week together and had been inseparable ever since, and Ashlyn had a true best friend for once. Although Whitney was a bit more refined than Ashlyn, they definitely underwent some mutual learning experiences their first year. Like the time they both tried polenta for the first time in the dining hall and Whitney choked while Ashlyn spit her mouthful out on the table, making their housemates laugh hysterically.

They had some more meaningful experiences too. Two weeks into school, Whitney had tried to get Ashlyn to go a double date after she had met this guy from nearby Amherst College. He was going to bring a friend and Whitney was begging Ashlyn to go. Ashlyn freaked out a bit, sat Whitney down and looked at her so fiercely that Whitney got scared.

“What’s the matter, Ash?” Whitney asked seriously concerned at the panicked look on Ashlyn’s face.

“Whit, I don’t know how to say this really. I mean, I haven’t really told many people, but I trust you and I’m just going to say it and hope it’s ok…” Ashlyn said as she gulped hard. “I like women, Whit. Um, I always have,” Ash whispered out as she looked down nervously, avoiding Whitney’s eyes, trying fight down the fear of her past experiences threatening to bubble up inside her.

Whitney just started laughing, pulled Ashlyn into a hug and said “Well, that makes you really unique here at Smith… NOT!!! Geez, Ash, I thought you were going to tell me you were dying or something!”

And that was it, the first time Ashlyn came out to someone at Smith, but it would not be the last. From that point forward, Ashlyn felt lighter inside. She never hid the truth from people again and was open about her sexuality. Then again, so was everyone else around her. It seemed like everyone at Smith was at least questioning their sexuality in some way. This campus was truly bizarre like that and wonderful in so many ways.
Given her love of sports, Ashlyn found herself drawn to the rugby team in no time. She had played soccer all through high school and loved it, but it brought so many bad memories with it that she couldn’t bring herself to play again. She and Whitney had become friends with the three other girls in their house who played on the rugby team, Megan, Tobin, and Abby. Megan had been constantly bugging both Ashlyn and Whitney to play, showing up in their room at random hours of the day to plead with them. Tobin and Abby were just as relentless. Knowing how much fun she had with the rugby team girls during her first visit to Smith, Ashlyn had finally agreed and made Whitney join the team with her.

Ashlyn grew to love the game over that first fall season, it was like a mix of soccer and football and it suited her perfectly. Her tall strong frame and aptitude for sports strategy was perfect for the position of lock/loose forward. Her job was to get in behind the scrum (the rugby equivalent of lining up at the line of scrimmage) and either be the first to grab the ball and pass it to a teammate, or to get up ahead and clear space for her fullbacks to run. She was great at anticipating the other team’s moves, an excellent tackler and protector of her teammates. She quickly earned the reputation of being the team enforcer, powerful and a force to be reckoned with on the rugby pitch.

She also quickly learned that the Smith Rugby team had quite the reputation. They were known as the frat boys of campus. They played hard, partied even harder, and were some of the most intense and sought after women on campus. She got used to being around these fun and competitive women and before she knew it, she was one of them. She finally got to learn who she really was, she became comfortable with herself. For the first time ever, she was confident, and people were drawn to that.

By the end of first year, Ashlyn was one of the most popular women on campus. She had spent most of the work study money she earned from working in the campus kitchen on getting intricate tattoos across her body that told her life story. She now had a full arm sleeve filled with black, mythological style tattoos and a large colorful piece across her ribcage. She loved the way it felt to get tattoo work done on her body, she felt like it helped heal her, and it became her trademark. If you asked anyone on campus about Ashlyn Harris, they would all say the same thing: She’s smart, nice, really funny, and she is so damn hot… then they would undoubtedly make some comment about her tattoos. Even the straight girls wanted a piece of her; it wasn’t always clear which piece, but they were drawn to her just the same. People just wanted to be around her, and Ashlyn didn’t mind one bit. The ladies loved her and she loved the ladies. She still had a lot of hurt hiding behind all the walls she had built up over the years, but for once, she didn’t feel so alone anymore; she finally liked who she was.

When the end of year came and it was time to go back to Florida for the summer, Ashlyn felt heavy. She couldn’t wait to see her grandmother, to spend time with the woman who had meant so much to her all of her life. The one she called every night just to hear her voice. Still, part of her wished she never had to go back to Florida at all. Just thinking about it brought pain, even knowing she had come such a long way from being that scared girl who ran away to New England.

It was a long summer, she missed her college friends, she missed rugby, she missed everything about being at college and who she was there. She was always looking over her shoulder in Florida, always expecting the worst. She kept busy by taking a summer internship at an advertising firm and spending the rest of her time with her grandmother and visiting Mrs. Jacobs occasionally (who was thrilled to hear all about her life at Smith). The summer went by mostly without a hitch, but there had been the incident when Whitney had come to visit.

Ashlyn was so excited when Whitney called to say she was going to visit her grandparents for a week in nearby Orlando. Whitney planned to spend a couple of those days hanging out with Ashlyn. Ashlyn was happy to see her and also a little nervous about showing her the very simple life she lived in Satellite Beach. Whitney was great though, showing such enthusiasm for every single thing
Ashlyn showed her. Ashlyn could not have been more grateful for their friendship and that sentiment became even stronger after their trip to the grocery store the first night Whitney was there.

Ashlyn’s grandmother was planning to make her famous mac and cheese for dinner in honor of Whitney’s visit. She had forgotten to get milk and asked Ashlyn to run out to store and grab it for her. The girls hopped in Ashlyn’s Jeep and headed over to the local grocery store. As they made their way through the aisles Whitney noticed two girls and a guy about their age snickering and pointing at Ashlyn. Ashlyn didn’t notice and Whitney didn’t think much of it, figuring it had something to do with the tattoos. As they made their way to the register with a gallon of milk, Ashlyn looked up and saw the same group Whitney had seen earlier. The two girls whispered something, and the guy laughed loudly pointing at Ashlyn again. Her heart went up into her throat and she couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t move. She didn’t remember anything else after that until she found herself looking at the ocean and realized that Whitney had driven them in the Jeep to the beach a few blocks away from the store.

“Ash, talk to me. What the hell happened back there? What was that?” Whitney asked clutching Ashlyn’s hands in hers. She had never seen her friend so frozen like this and it looked like Ash might be snapping out of it enough to talk to her.

“I’m sorry, Whit. I’m really sorry.” Ashlyn said looking down, still trembling.

“Hey, it’s ok. Really. You can talk to me, you know that. What’s going on?” Whitney said soothingly, hoping Ashlyn would talk to her, but not wanting to push her.

And then it all came out at once. Ashlyn gave Whitney the cliffnotes version of what had happened to her in high school through a flood of tears. Whitney just hugged her tightly, floored at what she had just heard. She promised Ashlyn her lips were sealed and that she’d never talk about it unless Ashlyn wanted to; but not before telling her how much she admired her, how proud she was of her, and that she loved her. The two fell back into their easy going banter after that and the rest of Whitney’s visit was uneventful. Summer came to an end three weeks later and Ashlyn was beyond ready to get back to college, to her safety, to her comfort zone.

Here she was, finally back on campus, lying down flat on her back on the dark rugby pitch looking up at the sky and thinking back on all that had happened over the last year. She had noticed her first week on the team that the rugby pitch sat up on a hill and then dipped down a bit. Students weren’t allowed to be on the athletic fields at night for safety reasons, but if you were laying down, campus security couldn’t see you there even when they swept their spotlights over the fields. It had become her place of solitude, where she went to think and be at peace.

She takes in another deep breath, glad to be back and starting sophomore year. She closes her eyes and tries to imagine what this year will bring.

She puts her hands behind her head and smiles, having no idea just how much of a whirlwind this year will be.
Get the Party Started

The first week back on campus had gone by quickly. Ashlyn had recently made the realization that she might want to be a marine biologist and found her class schedule science heavy this semester. She had two biology courses, chemistry, and a history of rock and roll course she had picked just for fun. Classwork hadn’t picked up yet since the first week was always introductions and an explanation of the syllabus and course expectations. So, she had spent most of the week catching up with her teammates and friends.

She was walking across campus Saturday morning on her way to the bookstore to buy her textbooks when she felt someone jump on her back and scream “Asssssshhhhlyyyyyn!”

She laughed, throwing Tobin off of her back before pulling off her Ray-Ban sunglasses and looking over the slim brunette as she shook her head saying “Put some freaking shoes on, will ya Tobs?! What is it with you and shoes?”

Tobin just shrugged, standing there with her pant legs rolled up and barefoot as usual. She was wearing a Smith Rugby t-shirt from two years ago that she pretty much always wore. People assumed she just had several of them. Ashlyn had a sneaking suspicion that she just had the one. That was just Tobin’s laid back style, if you could call it that.

“You going to the Jordan House party tonight?” Tobin asked. “I think most of the team is going.”

Ashlyn was never one to miss a party with her rugby girls and quickly replied “Hell yes I am!”

“Sweet.” Tobin said casually and continued to walk with Ashlyn.

As they approached the bookstore Tobin stopped to pull a pair of flip flops from her backpack and slip them on. Ashlyn just chuckled and shook her head again.

Tobin ignored her and looked up to see the crowd of students already in the bookstore. “I’ll probably lose you in that madness, so pre-game is in captain Abby’s room at 8pm. Be there or be queer!” she said cheerily.

“I’ll be both!” Ashlyn said waggling her eyebrows while giving Tobin a fist pump before losing herself in the mass of students and textbooks.

After buying her books and grabbing a coffee at the campus center café, Ashlyn spent the rest of the day on the science quad lawn getting ahead on readings she had to do for her classes next week. She liked to be prepared and was usually one week ahead on her coursework. Around 5pm she packed up her stuff and headed back to the house dining hall for dinner; she grabbed a piece of lasagna and some salad before sitting down next to Megan, Abby, Whitney, and Tobin.

“Hey, look what the cat dragged in!” quipped Megan as Ashlyn sat down.

“Shut it, Pinoe! You know you want some of this.” Ashlyn joked as she flexed her bicep at the small, short-haired blonde.

Megan and Abby pretended to swoon and faint as Whitney and Tobin laughed at their antics.

“So000, which lucky lady will fall for the Harris charm tonight?” Abby said while scanning the room dramatically for effect.
While laughing at Abby, Ashlyn looked over at the table next to them in time so see a couple new first years staring at her. She shot them a quick smile causing them to turn red and look down. She turned her attention back to Abby and casually replied “You know me, I never plan ahead.”

“That’s the problem!” yelled Whitney as she leaned into Ashlyn’s side. “The number of times I’ve walked in on you making out with some half naked girl. Warn a girl, Ash! That’s all I’m saying!”

“Oh please, Whit! You haven’t walked in on anything that bad. Unlike me who got an eyeful of you taking a ride on that Amherst guy last year!” Ashlyn exclaimed while thrusting her hips to make her point.

“Alright! Alright! Touche!” Whitney screamed while gripping Ashlyn’s arm and burying her head into her shoulder embarrassed.

Abby got up from the table. “And on that note…You guys go get ready. Sarah and I are going to go buy the alcohol,” she said referring to her girlfriend of two years who was also on the rugby team.

Two hours later, Ashlyn was looking in the mirror checking out her outfit for the night. She was wearing a pair of tight dark jeans that sat just below her hips, leaving the waistband of her black Ethika boxers peeking out the top. She put on very light makeup and had chosen to wear a gray t-shirt with cutoff sleeves that let her display her tattoos. She left her hair down, still slightly damp from the shower, and pulled on a black Nike snapback to complete her signature surfer look.

“Always have to look better than the rest of us, huh?” she heard from behind her. Whitney was standing there admiring how her best friend always managed to look so stylish.

“I don’t like to disappoint! You ready?” Ashlyn asked, and then two headed to Abby’s room down the hall.

The pre-game party was already going strong. Over half of the rugby team was already there, crowded into Abby’s room and drinking heavily. Abby was sitting in the corner with Sarah on her lap, hands already all over each other. Megan was standing up on Abby’s bed pouring shots from a bottle of Vodka. Tobin was sitting on the floor on top of her skateboard, engaged in conversation with Alex. Alex was the team’s scrum half or “Queen of the Scrum” as they called her. Tobin totally had huge a crush on her, but she’d never admit it. Alex had a pretty serious boyfriend from back home, but that didn’t stop half the team from wondering just how much alcohol it would take to ever get Alex and Tobin to hook up.

Megan shoved shots of vodka into Ashlyn’s and Whitney’s hands. They both downed their shots with grimaces as the cheap vodka burned their throats. Whitney went back to Megan for another shot, while Ashlyn grabbed a beer and began sipping it slowly. She liked to party and have a good time, but she also liked to be in control of herself at all times.

An hour later, they were on the dance floor at the Jordan House party. The music was loud and the room was filled with a mixture of Smith students and frat boys from other nearby colleges. Ashlyn was dancing with Alex and Whitney when she felt someone bump into her. She turned around and came face to face with a clearly tipsy redhead with a nice smile.

The girl leaned in next to Ashlyn’s ear so she could hear her over the music saying “Hey, I’m Lauren. Nice tattoos.”

Ashlyn felt the warm breath on her ear and smiled, ready to let loose for the night. “Thanks Lauren, I’m Ashlyn,” she said back into the other girl’s ear and gave her a dimpled grin as she slowly began moving her hips against her to the music.
Shortly after, the two had their bodies pressed tightly together moving to the music. Ashlyn had slid her hands under Lauren’s shirt and was moving her fingers around the waistband of her pants. Lauren had her hands around Ashlyn’s shoulders with her face buried into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck. Ashlyn could feel the girl’s lips on her neck and she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t getting turned on. It was time to move this along.

Ashlyn pulled Lauren’s arms off her shoulders and led her off the dance floor. She grabbed a beer and pulled Lauren into the corner of the room. Ashlyn took a few gulps of beer before handing the cup over to Lauren who drank the rest of it down pretty impressively. Ashlyn got further into Lauren’s space, running her right hand up Lauren’s arm. “You’re a swimmer, aren’t you?” she asked, continuing to move her hand up and put it behind Lauren’s neck.

“How’d you know?” Lauren asked looking surprised.

“You have the right build for it,” Ashlyn said looking down at the girl’s lips, “And, your friends over there staring at us are wearing swim team shirts, sooo, I figured,” she smirked.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Lauren shifted a bit closer to Ashlyn, getting more and more flustered as the blonde stroked the back of Lauren’s neck with her thumb.

“Maybe we should give them something more fun to watch?” Ashlyn said in a low voice never taking her eyes off Lauren’s lips.

Lauren’s breath hitched a bit and Ashlyn saw her lick her lips and look at Ashlyn’s lips quickly. That was the only sign she needed. Ashlyn pressed her lips to Lauren’s pinning her against the wall, letting her left hand slip under the front of Lauren’s shirt and running her thumb over the girl’s tight stomach. She left her right hand behind Lauren’s neck and ran her tongue against Lauren’s lips.

Meanwhile, Megan danced her way over to Whitney and Alex who were watching Ashlyn make out in the corner with completely unsurprised expressions on their faces. Megan was about to say something when she heard one of the swim team girls next to her say “Crap, her boyfriend is gonna pissed” as the girl pointed over to where Ashlyn was.

Megan just threw her hands up and yelled “Fucking Ashlyn Harris, of course! Girl flips straight girls like pancakes!” Whitney and Alex just nodded in agreement and they all laughed.

Ashlyn and Lauren stayed locked in a heavy makeout session for quite a while, tongues entwined together and hands roaming around. Ashlyn could tell by the way Lauren reacted to her touch that the girl was clearly nervous and probably had never done this before. Since this wasn’t likely to go much further and Ashlyn sure as hell wasn’t going to push the girl out of her comfort zone, she slowly pulled away from Lauren. The girl looked back at her with hooded eyes and Ashlyn kissed her on the cheek saying “Goodnight Lauren, you’re a great kisser” before winking at her and going over to grab Whitney so they could walk home together.

The second they walked out the door, Whitney nudged Ashlyn hard yelling “Really, Ash, had to for the straight girl with the boyfriend?!?”

“Woah woah woah” Ashlyn held up her hands defensively. “First, she came on to me. Second, she never said anything about a boyfriend! Third, it’s not like we got very far. I mean, I could tell she was kinda nervous, but not my fault if they don’t tell me, right?”

“Right.” Whitney conceded shaking her head. “At least I don’t have to worry about walking in on you and some girl tonight!”
“It’s not that late, Whit, there’s still time!” Ashlyn joked and Whitney rolled her eyes.
“Come on, Alex! You have to hit me harder than that!” Ashlyn said sternly. It was Thursday evening practice and the team was preparing for their first match against Dartmouth College on Saturday. Dartmouth always gave them a hard time and they had lost the last two games to them. Ashlyn wanted to win badly, and she was pushing her team to be more aggressive during their practice scrimmage.

“You know if you don’t get the ball out of the scrum, either I or the other scrum half have it. So, you have to come in fast and hard.” Ashlyn continued to give Alex direction even though Alex was normally the one to be in charge of running the plays.

“Easy, Ash, we’ll just run it again.” said Abby, who was a senior and usually the voice of reason.

“Yeah easy, Ash!” mocked Megan from behind them.

“Pipe down, hooker” Ashlyn teased Megan. Since Megan was the smallest on the team, she played the position of hooker. The hooker’s job was be supported between two prop players on the front line of the scrum and try to hook the rugby ball in with her feet so her teammates could grab it (hence, the name hooker).

Megan stuck her tongue out, but you could tell she loved the attention.

They ran the play again, Ash winning the ball out of scrum a second time. This time Alex hit her square on with enough force to take her down. It was too late though, Ashlyn had passed the ball off to the nearest fullback who happened to be Whitney. Whitney began the run down the field, making another pass to Sarah, who finally passed it to Tobin who ran the ball in and set it down for a try (rugby touchdown).

“Yes, Alex! Way better!” said Ashlyn wrapping her arms around Alex and picking her up in the air.

“Put the Queen down, you’re so sweaty Ash!” screamed Alex as Ashlyn finally complied and they wrapped up practice.

Ashlyn felt good about their chances on Saturday. The team seemed to be more put together and cohesive than it was last year. They had a few new first year players that were showing a lot of promise, they had obviously done well recruiting people to join the team this year.

She helped Abby pick up the rugby balls on the field and smiled to herself. There was just something about being on this field, covered in grass clippings, dirty and sweaty that made Ashlyn feel happy. This rugby pitch and the people on it were everything to her.

Saturday - Game Day

A series of cars pulled up in the quad out front of Wilson House. Megan led the convoy in her Ford Explorer which prominently featured a “Support Your Local Hooker” bumper sticker. Since rugby was considered a club sport at Smith, the university didn’t fund their travel and the girls used their own vehicles to get to and from away matches. The home team was in charge of hosting the away team in their dorm rooms overnight, so this was how the teams were able to travel to games without much funding.
Ashlyn grabbed her overnight bag and jumped into the front seat of Megan’s car yelling “Shot Gun!” as loudly as she could. Tobin, Alex, and Whitney piled in the back of the truck. It was a two hour car ride from Smith to get to Dartmouth, and the girls spent their time talking animatedly about the upcoming match and the Dartmouth girls.

Not all rugby teams were alike and the Dartmouth team was definitely in a league of its own. Although the Dartmouth team was very competitive and athletic, the girls were pretty girly. Most of them came from wealthy backgrounds and they were absolutely beautiful... and, not surprisingly, most of them were very very straight. Of course, that never stopped the Smith ruggers from mingling with them and trying to hook up at the post game party. It was the same game every year and most of the Smith ruggers failed miserably with a few exceptions here and there. Of course, Ashlyn was one of those exceptions, getting a Dartmouth rugger to make out with her at last year’s party.

The Smith team arrived just before noon and set themselves up on their side of the pitch getting ready to warm-up. Most places they traveled didn’t have locker rooms for the away team, so they were used to doing their changing on the sidelines shamelessly.

Ashlyn stood on the sidelines in just her Nike compression shorts and sports bra while she taped her wrists. She looked across the pitch to see the Dartmouth girls snickering at them in their pristine white and forest green uniforms. Already making fun of us, she thought as she glanced over once more just in time to see the most stunning brunette she’d ever laid eyes on. She had an amazing athletic figure and her long muscular legs were like nothing Ashlyn had ever seen. Ashlyn watched her joke around with two other girls and when the brunette’s face lit up into a brilliant smile, Ashlyn could do nothing but stand there staring with her mouth slightly open.

Abby elbowed Ashlyn, breaking her out of her trance.

“What’s looking at, Harris?” Abby asked.

“Huh? What?” Ashlyn said, still distracted by the brunette across the pitch.

“Oh.” Abby said following her eyes and breaking into a knowing smile. “Yeah, no, Ash...don’t even think about it. Really, no chance in hell.”

“Wait? What?” Ashlyn asked curiously, dying to know more.

“That would be Ali Krieger, their captain and scrum half” Abby answered matter of factly.

“Ali? I thought Sydney Leroux was their captain? I don’t remember any Ali Krieger last year, and trust me, I would have remembered her!” Ashlyn said looking back over at Ali who had just caught her staring and seemed to have been staring back for a second.

“You wouldn’t have met her last year, she spent her junior year studying abroad in Germany. Watch yourself today, Harris” Abby advised. “She is seriously good. She’ll have that ball out of the scrum and be halfway down the pitch before you know it. And if you have the ball, she’ll be on your ass in a hot second.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad” Ashlyn winked and smiled at Abby suggestively.

“I’m serious, Ash. Don’t bother. She’s super straight, kind of cold, and can fuck you up if you cross her. I’ll say it again…Not. Gonna. Happen.” Abby admonished and added “Get your head in the game!”

“Right.” Ashlyn nodded and pulled on her red and black checkered uniform before heading onto the
pitch for some warm-up.

Ashlyn overheard a few of her older teammates making comments about Ali as they warmed up “Shit, she’s back, we’re screwed.” “Great, Captain Krieger’s gonna be all over us today.” “Hopefully, she’s out of practice and didn’t play in Germany at all.” Those were just a few of the comments that reached Ashlyn’s ears. Who the hell is this girl, she thought to herself.

She heard “AAAAsssh!!” screamed from from across the pitch and turned to find Heather O’Reilly, one of Dartmouth’s best forwards, waving at her.

“HAO!” Ashlyn yelled waved back with a smile. The two had gotten to know each other a bit when they played each other last year, before Ashlyn had gotten distracted by the freckled girl she eventually made out with. They had texted each other every so often since then and Ashlyn thought HAO was probably one of the least pretentious Dartmouth girls she’d met so far.

HAO turned away and was in conversation with Ali, both looking over at Ashlyn a few times.

When Ashlyn looked back over, the two had stopped talking and had begun running drills on the other side of the pitch again. Ashlyn took once last glance at Ali’s rippling muscles as she sprinted and resigned herself to being in this girl’s face all game… and then maybe in her pants a little later on.

Ashlyn wasn’t the only one taking notice of new faces. Ali Krieger had been across pitch making observations of her own. Germany had been a wonderful experience, but she was glad to be back home with her team again. These girls were like her family and she’d missed them dearly last year. After tearing her ACL and MCL during the last game of her sophomore season, it had been a perfect time to spend the year abroad in Germany. She had been able to study there while undergoing a strict rehab program that had put her in the best shape of her life; now she was back and better than ever.

Having a game against Smith was the perfect way to start the season. Ali always loved a hard fought win. The Smith team usually lost but they never gave it up easily, those Smith ruggers were tough as nails. She was sitting on the sideline having her hair braided by her good friend Kelley, when the Smith team showed up. As usual, five minutes after they got there, the Smith girls were already in various states of undress on the sidelines, not caring who saw what. They had confidence, you had to hand it to them.

As she was talking to Kelley, she noticed Kelley’s eyes move across the pitch and linger briefly on a tall, muscular blonde covered in tattoos. Ali looked at the girl who was standing there in nothing but a sports bra and compression shorts, looking like she just stepped out of a surf magazine. She had to admit, the girl was striking. Ali had always appreciated tattoos and had just gotten two of her own in Germany.

“Well, some things never change” Ali smiled wide and joked with Kelley and Sydney on the sidelines. “Looks like the Smithies have gotten even more…um… intense?”

“Oh just butcher and gayer.” Syd snickered and flicked her head towards the tattooed blonde across the pitch.

“Be nice, Syd. You have plenty of tattoos yourself,” Kelley said quietly.

“Yeah. Yeah. But I also have a hot man to go home to, soooo…” Syd said defensively.

“Ok you two. Enough!” Ali jumped in “Time to warm-up. Let’s go, drills!”
As she prepared to start drills, Ali heard her best friend Heather scream “Ash!” and looked up just in time to see the tattooed blonde smile and yell “HAO!” and wave back.

Ali walked over to Heather and got her attention. “HAO, you know her?”

“Yeah, that’s Ashlyn Harris, she’s the lock forward. Met her at the after party last year, she’s nice. I think Kelley might have uh, talked to her a bit too,” Heather said with a smirk that Ali didn’t seem to notice. “Anyway” Heather continued “She’s pretty good, she’ll be a challenge today.” Heather stated plainly.

Ali looked over and took in the blonde one more time as she warmed-up on the pitch. “We’ll see about that” Ali winked “I mean, no one can contain this” she said as pointed to herself and trying to keep a straight face.

Heather laughed and pushed Ali jokingly before the two started their warm-up drill.
The action is finally heating up in this chapter...

“Ruck, Maul, Pillage, and Burn…” the Smith team started whispering quietly in a low crouched huddle near the ground “We’re gonna Ruck, Maul, Pillage and Burn, eat the babies!” They repeated the same mantra slightly louder each time as they slowly got up to a standing position, getting louder and louder until they were jumping up and down and screaming it. They looked like a bunch of lunatics, but it was a long-standing tradition that was usually effective in intimidating the other team.

A lot of teams had already seen this bizarre pre-game ritual, but the younger players on the opposing teams were always surprised by it. Ashlyn looked up from the huddle to see the all older Dartmouth girls shaking their heads and the newer players standing stock still and staring at the Smith ruggers with their mouths hanging open. “Works everytime,” Ashlyn chuckled while nudging Whitney to get her attention and motioning for her to look over at the newbies on the Dartmouth sideline.

Ali was standing across the pitch with the Dartmouth veterans, she had just finished a conversation with Sydney where she had learned that Ashlyn Harris was apparently a major player who liked to prey on straight girls. Kelley had been involved in the conversation too and she had kept pretty quiet. Usually the one to come to people’s defense when others were being judgmental, the fact that Kelley had stayed quiet the whole time had led Ali to think what Sydney said must be true.

“I’ll never get it,” said Ali incredulously, “they go to a school where being politically correct is the highest priority, but then their rugby team shouts ‘eat the babies’ in their huddle?? I can’t believe they’re still doing that!” The rest of the Dartmouth veterans shrugged and agreed as they headed over towards their rookies to settle them down before the opening whistle.

The Smith and Dartmouth scrums lined up facing each other in the middle of the pitch waiting for the opening whistle to blow. The Smith forwards gripped and entwined with each other in the proper positions to form a tight scrum. Ashlyn took her position behind and between Abby and Logan (the two flankers on the last line of the scrum). Alex stood a few feet behind Ashlyn and a bit to her right. Whitney, Sarah, and Tobin along with three other fullbacks formed a diagonal behind them that stretched across the pitch.

Ashlyn took one last look at the Dartmouth scrum before crouching into position. She noticed Hope Solo, the Dartmouth lock forward, lined up directly across from her behind the Dartmouth scrum. Behind Hope’s right side stood Ali, with HAO just off to her side. Ashlyn’s eyes briefly met Ali’s. They were a beautiful amber brown color and Ashlyn almost got caught up in them before shaking it off and getting focused.

The referee blew the whistle and yelled “Engage!” as the two scrums collided with each other and the ball was thrown into the tunnel created between them. Ashlyn quickly looked through the Smith scrum, seeing that Megan hadn’t been able to hook her feet around the ball. She knew exactly who was going to end up with it.

She looked over just in time to see Ali’s hands starting to reach for the ball coming out of the Dartmouth scrum, and Ashlyn ran right at her. She lowered her shoulder right into Ali’s hip and took
her down hard before she could run with the ball. Ali grunted loudly as she hit the ground with Ashlyn on top of her. She struggled to reach out and place the ball near one of her teammates so they could form a ruck (small three to four player huddle) over the ball to win it back. She could feel how toned Ashlyn’s body was against hers and understood right away why she had just felt like she ran into a brick wall. She saw the ball come out of the back of her team’s ruck pile and HAO picked it up to start the run.

Ashlyn quickly rolled off of Ali giving her a quick wink before running down to the field to help stop the Dartmouth fullbacks. After the ball had gone back and forth a few times (neither team coming close to scoring), there was a pileup of players and the ball was caught under them. The ref blew the whistle, signaling another scrum.

The teams lined up again, this time just over the line on the Dartmouth half of the field.

“Engage!” The two scrums collided again with Ashlyn seeing Megan’s feet hook the ball this time. The scrum had turned with the force from all the pushing and Alex was on the wrong side to be able to grab the ball. Ali noticed that the Smith scrum half was out of position and knew Ashlyn was going to make a break for the ball.

Ashlyn picked up the ball and quickly passed it to Sarah who was just behind her ready to make a run. Just as the ball came out of her hands, she felt arms wrap around her waist and a shoulder slam into her ribcage as she fell backwards into the ground with force. She looked up to see amber eyes looking back into hers. Ali was laying over her, their faces pretty close, and Ali’s right hand was on Ashlyn’s left breast as it had gotten pinned between them like that in the fall. Ali started to get up while mumbling “sorry” and looking a bit embarrassed.

Ashlyn wasn’t going to let her off that easy. She gave Ali a dimpled grin and said “We’ve gotta stop meeting like this” as she tried to sit up. Ali gave her a dirty look and shoved Ashlyn back down hard with her hands before getting up and running down the pitch to catch up with her team.

Unfortunately, Ali was too late and Tobin had reached the try line, Smith had scored first.

The ref blew the whistle a few minutes later and the first 40min half had come to an end.

The Smith ruggers joked around and talked a little more strategy on the sideline during halftime. Ashlyn sat away from them as she usually did, it was her thing. She had her headphones on, blasting some Eminem, and trying to stay focused. Her ribcage ached causing her to shift and look up across the pitch where she noticed that Ali was doing the exact same thing she was: headphones on, head down between her knees as she sat on the grass away from her team. This girl seriously intrigued Ashlyn, but she shook it off and went back to thinking about the game and how she could bring more intensity to it.

Megan took notice of Ali too and turned to the team to say “Wow, we all know who the competitive ones around here are, huh?” as she pointed to both Ashlyn and Ali. The team broke out in a laugh, but they knew better than to bother Ashlyn during halftime. It was always better for them when she stayed focused.

The second half of the match featured more of the same, with Ali and Ashlyn going at each other hard, trying to one up each other on every play. Ashlyn had also had to contend with the beast that was Hope Solo, who had tackled her hard several times. Ashlyn knew she’d be bruised and sore as hell in the morning. Alex, Tobin, and Whitney had also taken their fair share of tough hits as well, with Alex sitting out most the second half after twisting her knee when she was tackled by Ali. They’d all have plenty of injuries to compare at the after party tonight. Ashlyn had spent a lot of the second half trying to direct and coach their rookie scrum half, Kacey, who had replaced Alex.
Much to Ali’s dismay and Ashlyn’s delight, no one else had scored during the game since that try in the first half. Smith had won after a hard fought battle and were feeling damn good about it.

The teams shook hands after the game. Ali avoided Ashlyn’s eyes and walked away quickly after giving Ashlyn a halfhearted handshake with her hand that was mostly covered by her sleeve on purpose. She hated losing. She watched Ashlyn approach HAO and pull her into a tight hug as they stayed talking for a few minutes. Ali headed into the locker room to grab a much needed hot shower before the party started, bypassing the assigned roommate list and making a mental note to look at it afterwards.

As the Smith team gathered their stuff and waited for the Dartmouth girls to be done with the locker room so they could grab showers, Ashlyn walked over to the roommate list to see which of these Dartmouth girls she would have to deal with tonight. She found her name and ran her finger across the page. Her eyes widened when she saw “Ali Krieger” next to her name… Ali had been assigned to host Ashlyn in her room for the night.

Well this oughta be interesting, Ashlyn mused.

The Smith ruggers finally got their chance in the locker room and horsed around loudly while getting ready to meet the Dartmouth team at the after party. The Dartmouth ruggers usually hosted the party in one of the frat houses on campus, which usually meant the smell of stale beer and plenty of horn-dog guys hanging around them. It usually sucked, but a party was a party and alcohol was always necessary after their bodies had taken such a beating on the field.

After her shower, Ashlyn threw on a pair of light colored loose jeans that were low on her hips allowing the band of her dark blue Calvin Klein boxers to show, just how she liked it. She chose a white cutoff t-shirt to go with it. As usual, she left her hair down and slightly damp coupled with some light makeup. She finished the look with a navy and red Hurley snapback.

“Looking really good, Ash” Alex commented from behind her “You got plans?”

“I might have my eye on someone.” Ash said mysteriously.

Abby heard the exchange from across the locker room and shook her head “Here we go,” she muttered to Sarah who looked at her confused, but planted a kiss on her cheek anyway.

The Smith ruggers arrived at the frat house, grabbed beers and started to mingle with the Dartmouth team. Ashlyn noticed that Ali was off to the side deep in conversation with a tall handsome guy who was well-built. She was wearing a pair of dark skinny jeans and tight gray tank top with her hair pulled into a messy bun; she looked really good. The guy she was with had his arm around her and even though she looked a little annoyed, she didn’t look all that uncomfortable either. “Figures.” Ashlyn said to herself.

Ashlyn spotted HAO and they talked about the match over a couple of beers before Megan, Whitney, Alex and Tobin joined them. HAO excused herself to go rescue Kelley from the tickling assault she was receiving from a couple of the frat guys. Ashlyn looked up to see Ali standing by herself finally.

Now or never, Ashlyn thought to herself. She stood up and looked towards Ali again before she felt her hand being tugged by Megan.

“Really, Ash? You’re not serious.” Megan had followed Ashlyn’s eyes and knew immediately where she was headed.
“What, Pinoe? She’s my host for the night, I figured I should at least introduce myself.” Ash stated with a devilish grin.

“Oh boy.” Alex, Tobin, and Whitney all said at the same time as Ashlyn gave them hard look and said “If you’ll excuse me…” and made her way towards Ali.

As Ashlyn got close, Ali looked up at her with an unreadable expression.

Ashlyn stuck her hand out towards Ali and said “Hey, I’m…” but Ali cut her off.

“Ashlyn Harris, yeah I’ve heard. Your reputation precedes you.” Ali spat out harshly before adding “You’re barking up the wrong tree.”

Ashlyn was taken aback by the contradiction that was brunette’s soft lips and the hard words coming out of them.

She stayed silent for a second, and then recovered quickly.

“Well, oookay then. Saw you were my host for the night and thought I’d introduce myself. You’re reputation of being a cold bitch precedes you too. I figured rather than judge you, I’d give you the benefit of the doubt and ask you a bit about Germany. Guess I was wrong and they were right, my bad.” Ashlyn gave it right back to her and quickly turned on her heels to walk away.

“Fuck!” Ali whispered to herself as she watched Ashlyn walk away “What the hell is wrong with me?” She had forgotten to look at the roommate list and had just been a total bitch to the girl she was hosting, a girl she really didn’t even know. Ali quickly grabbed two beers and ran after Ashlyn.

“Hey, Ashlyn. Wait…” she yelled to get the blonde’s attention.

Ashlyn looked back at the sound of her name being called to see Ali behind her with a beer cup in each hand. She raised an eyebrow at Ali skeptically as the brunette caught up to her.

Ali reached out, handed Ashlyn a beer and said “Come on” nodding her head towards the door and motioning for Ashlyn to follow her outside.
Grow to love the tension, because it's going to be here for quite a while. I promise it'll be great when it finally breaks though, and it will break eventually!

Ali walked out to the front porch of the frat house and sat down on the large porch swing. She motioned for Ashlyn to sit next to her and the blonde complied.

“Look, I’m really sorry about that back there, that was completely rude of me,” Ali began in a soft voice. “To be honest, I’m not the most gracious loser and my ex-boyfriend who lives in this frat has been in my space all night” Ali’s voice trailed off as she realized she was making excuses.

Ash gave the brunette a penetrating look as she listened to her mumble, thinking that it was kind of endearing even though she could barely understand what Ali was saying.

“Anyway, that was really unlike me and” Ali began mumbling again before Ashlyn cut her off.

“Ali” Ashlyn held up her hand to get the brunette to stop talking, “Relax. I get it. Let’s just start over, ok?” Ashlyn moved her beer to her left hand, stuck her right hand towards Ali and started again “Hey, I’m Ashlyn Harris.”

Ali knew the blonde had just majorly let her off the hook. She breathe out a sigh of relief and relaxed a bit as she took Ashlyn’s hand in hers and said “Hi, I’m Ali Krieger.”

She felt a surge of warmth and electricity flowing through her hand as it touched Ashlyn’s, and she looked up to see Ashlyn smiling back at her, one dimple showing prominently. She couldn’t help but break out into a big smile herself before the two started laughing a bit as they shook hands.

“So, did you really want to talk about Germany?” Ali asked seriously, not wanting to pass up an opportunity to talk about the country she loved so much.

“Actually, yes.” Ashlyn replied back. “I really suck at languages, but I’m seriously considering going abroad somewhere next year. I really want to travel and get to see some new places, but I also need to go somewhere that would be friendly to a clueless American tourist. Anyway, Smith has a really good Germany program, so it’s on my short list.”

“You’d love it” Ali said animatedly as she preceded to spend the next half hour telling Ashlyn all about her experiences.

Ashlyn sat captivated as she listened to the brunette speak with so much fire and passion, she didn’t want Ali to stop talking. The way she talked about Germany with so much enthusiasm was really attractive and Ashlyn was finding it harder and harder to concentrate on what Ali was saying.

Noticing Ashlyn’s eyes glaze over a bit, Ali realized she hadn’t shut up yet and quickly stopped talking. “Sorry, I’ve been hogging the microphone here. I haven’t gotten to hear anything about you,” Ali said warmly.

“Last time I checked, you already knew plenty about me,” Ashlyn replied in teasing tone.
“Ok, yeah. I admit, I’ve heard some… stuff,” Ali said cautiously, watching Ashlyn’s face carefully.

“Oh yeah? What’ve you heard?” Ashlyn said curiously, her eyebrows raised and a playful smirk on her face.

“Well, I’ve heard you know your way around the ladies pretty well.” Ali got out as a blush spread to her cheeks. “That true?”

“Yes and no,” Ashlyn laughed at Ali’s sudden shyness, “I think I probably get way more credit than I deserve.”

“So, you’re not the womanizing player I’ve been hearing about then? You don’t just love em and leave em, trying to bed as many straight girls as possible? Leaving a trail of broken hearts in your wake?” Ali asked playfully.

“Nah. Don’t believe everything you hear,” Ashlyn said more seriously. “I do like to have a good time, but I don’t really sleep around. My expectations are always clear, I’m not looking to be serious with anyone. As for the straight girls, I’m not saying it’s never happened, but when it has, they’ve always been the ones to come on to me first… I don’t seek them out if you know what I mean. And I’m quite sure no one’s ever been broken hearted over me before.”

“Got it.” Ali replied, feeling like the blonde was still being a bit too mysterious. She found herself wanting to know more. She saw a deck of cards on a small table on the porch and got an idea.

“Hey, give me your hat,” Ali said as she took it from Ashlyn’s head and walked across the porch to put it down on the floor about 10 feet away from where they were sitting. She grabbed the cards and winked at Ashlyn “Game time, Harris!”

Ashlyn looked at the brunette questioningly.

“I feel like you’re still being too quiet, sooo…” Ali continued picking up the deck of cards, “we’re going to throw cards at your hat. Every time one of us gets one in, we get to ask the other one a question. And the questions have to be answered completely honestly. You game?”

“You’re on, Krieger!” Ashlyn exclaimed rubbing her hands together, her competitive side coming out already.

They took turns throwing cards. Ali was the first to get one in. “Alright, do your worst,” Ashlyn deadpanned as she awaited Ali’s question.

“So, were you really just coming over to introduce yourself tonight and talk about Germany, or did you have bigger plans?” Ali asked pointedly.

“Geez, you go right in for the kill, huh?” Ashlyn started before answering Ali’s question honestly. “Well, I did come over to introduce myself and talk about Germany, buuuuut I’d be lying if I said I didn’t find you attractive and wasn’t planning to see if I might have some semblance of a chance.”

“Fair enough,” Ali replied trying to keep an unreadable expression even though Ashlyn’s blunt answer had left her a little flustered.

Ashlyn got a card in next. “My turn!” she said excitedly. “So, I just have to know since you brought it up, did I have any chance with you tonight?”

“Wow, ok,” Ali paused trying to figure out how to word her answer. “I wouldn’t say zero chance, but pretty damn close to zero.”
“Ouch.” Ashlyn said as she placed her hand over her heart dramatically.

Ali found herself continuing on for some reason even though she had already answered the question, “I mean, I got really drunk after breaking up with my boyfriend and made out with my teammate Kelley once, but that was a one-time deal.”

Ashlyn’s eyes widened and she spit out the sip of beer she had just taken. Ali just looked at her and said “real smooth, Harris” as she laughed.

“No wait, that’s the freckled girl, right?” Ashlyn asked seriously.


Ashlyn started laughing so hard she couldn’t breathe. “Oh my god, we’ve totally made out with the same girl!!!” she got out between fits of laughter.

Ali covered her mouth with her hands, her eyes wide. “Oh geez! You’re the girl from Smith that Kelley made out with last year!” Ali said loudly as it dawned on her, finally realizing why Kelley had been so quiet today. “I should have known!” They sat laughing together for another minute before they resumed the card game.

Ashlyn got another card in and decided to take things down a notch after the last set of questions.

“Is that the only tattoo you have and what does it mean?” Ashlyn asked pointing to the black script inked on Ali’s forearm.

“Technically, that’s two questions, but I’m gonna let it slide this time,” Ali said nudging Ashlyn with her shoulder. She ran her finger across the ink on her forearm and casually answered the question, “It’s Liebe. It means love in German. And no it’s not the only one, I have another tattoo.”

“Can I see?” Ashlyn asked quickly. The question was out of her mouth before she could stop to think that the tattoo might not be somewhere Ali could/wanted to show her.

“Um, yeah. Sure.” Ali stood up and took off her tank top, standing there in her sports bra.

Ashlyn felt her heartbeat pickup as she let her eyes roam over the brunette’s toned stomach, but looked up at Ali quickly before she could get caught staring. Ali had turned her left side towards Ashlyn to reveal a large swath of black script inked across her ribcage.

Ashlyn never would have guessed that Ali had such a large piece on her body. “It’s gorgeous,” she said admiring the tattoo as Ali lifted her sports bra to the point of showing a little side boob so Ashlyn could see it better. Realizing she couldn’t read it because it was in another language, Ashlyn asked “What does it say?”

“It’s from the book The Little Prince. First book I read in German. It basically says ‘One can see good with the heart, because what is essential is invisible to the eye’.” Ali answered.

“I love it,” Ashlyn smiled as Ali pulled her tank top back on.

“What about you? Do they have meaning? Are there more?” Ali questioned as she pointed to Ashlyn’s tattoo sleeve, even though she already knew the blonde had others from what she had seen across the pitch earlier that day.

“Technically, you didn’t get a card in yet. Buuut, I’m gonna let it slide this time,” Ashlyn said mocking Ali.
“Yeah everything on my body kind of tells my life story, my body is kind of like my canvas,” Ashlyn said getting serious, but her voice staying calm.

“May I?” Ali asked as she reached for Ashlyn’s arm. Ashlyn nodded and stuck her arm out. Ali gently grabbed Ashlyn’s left wrist and began turning her arm to look at the intricate tattoos that covered it. The warm feeling between them began to spread again as they made contact.

Ashlyn cleared her throat. “That’s Zeus,” she said pointing to her forearm, “and up here is Athena” moving to point at her inner bicep. “They represent my relationship with my father. Up here is a cracked vanity mirror and a princess,” Ashlyn continued on. “My mother always wanted me to be her little princess, and I’m, well… not. I never have been,” she paused for a minute before continuing on. “Down here is a feather turning into birds, it represents me breaking free, following my dreams. That’s pretty much the gist of my sleeve.”

“Damn Ashlyn, that’s deep,” says Ali seriously. “Any others?”

“Plenty,” Ashlyn chuckles. She pulled down the top of her cutoff shirt to reveal her shoulders. “Knowledge speaks. Wisdom listens,” she said reading what was inked across the top of her shoulders. Ali took in the words with a smile, realizing that Ashlyn was a lot more profound than what she showed on the surface.

Ashlyn then stood up to pull up the left side of her shirt with one hand and pulled down the waist band of her boxer shorts with the other, revealing the colorful tattoos covering her whole side.

“I never would have guessed flowers and butterflies for you,” Ali smiled looking over Ashlyn’s side tattoo carefully and sneaking a glance at the well-defined abs that were peeking out of the blonde’s shirt.

“The butterflies were my first tattoo, my grandmother loves butterflies and had them all over her room. She always said it was what got her through her breast cancer treatment,” she said and then pointed to the flowers. “When I was little, my Dad would always get me a surf board for my birthday because I loved to surf, these were the flowers that were always designed on the surfboard.” Ashlyn then lifted her shirt higher and moved her sports bra a bit to reveal the name ‘Christopher Ryan’ written in black. “That’s my brother’s name. He’s my rock. Other than my grandmother, he’s the closest person I have in my life,” she said starting to get a bit choked up thinking about her brother that she hadn’t seen in a while, and cleared her throat again.

“The coloring is beautiful,” Ali said quietly in a bit of a trance, only snapping out of it when she realized she was tracing the inked flowers on Ashlyn’s side with her fingers.

Ashlyn had stopped breathing when Ali touched her and her skin had erupted into goosebumps; she was praying Ali didn’t notice.

“Sorry,” Ali mumbled nervously as she took her hand away noticing that Ashlyn had been really still and quiet.

“It’s ok, still a little sore from the game” Ashlyn breathed out trying to play it cool as she pulled her shirt back down and smiled, “we both obviously love tattoos.”

“My brother is my best friend too, his name is Kyle,” Ali blurted out before she could stop herself. Ashlyn was just so easy to talk to.

“Yeah?” Ashlyn asked rhetorically, but Ali nodded anyway. “You’re a lot different than I thought you’d be, Krieger.”
“Weeeelll, you’re a lot different than I thought you’d be too, Harris,” Ali said playfully.

“Good thing you didn’t judge me then,” Ashlyn tried to say with a straight face, but burst out into a chuckle a few seconds later.

“Shut it!” Ali elbowed Ashlyn and looked down to see that their beer cups were empty. She could hear that the music had been turned up inside and figured the dancing was in full swing by now.

“What do you say we grab some refills and grace the ladies with our presence,” Ali said pointing to the empty beer cups and using her head to nod towards the door.

“Definitely,” Ashlyn said getting up from the porch swing and following Ali inside.

“How are your dance moves, Harris?” Ali asked in a challenging tone.

“Better than yours, Krieger,” Ashlyn quipped back.

“Oh, it’s totally on! Prove it, Harris!” Ali pushed Ashlyn towards the dance floor as she grabbed two more beers on their way.
Dance Interrupted

Chapter Notes

Just a warning that this chapter and likely the next one will contain some issues surrounding bullying and have some slurs in them.
Ashlyn has a rough and secretive past that is slowly going to come out in this story.
There will be a little more emphasis on the rugby action (for those of you who like that) at some point as things start to move along, but right now I am trying to develop the characters a bit. Enjoy the continued tension...

After each grabbing a beer, Ali and Ashlyn had started to make their way towards the dance floor when they were pulled away by their teammates who were screaming “BEER RELAY!!”

This was all part of the traditional rugby fun. The Smith and Dartmouth teams had lined up opposite each other in a single file line, every person with a fresh cup of beer in their hand. Ali and Ashlyn had ended up directly across from each other, first in line for each of their teams. Ashlyn had put a serious expression on her face, trying to intimidate Ali. Ali tried to do the same, but the two of them just ended up breaking out into giggles.

One of the frat boys had agreed to announce the start. The goal of the game was to chug your beer as fast as you could and then flip the cup upside down over your head to show it was empty. The first person in each line would start, then the next person in line would go when they saw the first person was done, and so on, like a relay race. The first team to finish their beers was the winner. Ruggers took their beer chugging seriously, no one ever wanted to be on the losing end of this game.

Ashlyn and Ali got their beers ready realizing they were the first in line. A loud “GOOO!!” rang out and Ashlyn started chugging as fast as she could. She was the fastest on the team and they always counted on her to start them off with an edge. As she was about halfway through, she peeked over at Ali who was already tipping an empty beer cup over her head. No fucking way she thought as she finished her beer, flipped the cup over her head and looked at Ali incredulously. Ashlyn had never seen anyone chug a beer that fast, let alone a girly girl like Ali.

Ali could see the look on Ashlyn’s face and yelled back “Germany baby! Woooo!” Ashlyn chuckled shaking her head and looking down the line to see how her team was doing. She figured the Dartmouth girls would eventually get slowed down somewhere along the line. She was wrong, it wasn’t even close. Smith still had 3 beers to go when Dartmouth had finished and was already screaming victoriously. These girls had obviously spent a lot of time in these frat houses chugging beers.

Ashlyn poured a shot of whiskey from the table nearby and brought it over to Ali. “Victory shot for the winner,” she said giving Ali a dimpled grin.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Ali asked Ashlyn seriously.

“I said, victory shot for the winner,” Ashlyn repeated much more loudly.

“I know,” Ali smirked, “just wanted to hear you say I was the winner again!” She gave Ashlyn a megawatt smile and drank the shot down like a champ.
“Geez, you really are a sore loser aren’t you Krieger?” Ashlyn said hitting Ali lightly on the bicep with her fist.

“Yeah, well, at least I admit it. God knows I can’t lose twice in one day, all hell would break loose!” Ali laughed. “Speaking of which, I believe someone was talking smack about being a better dancer… show time, Harris!” Ali pushed Ashlyn onto the dance floor and let herself get lost in the music.

Ashlyn had to admit, the girl could definitely dance. She watched Ali swaying her hips and moving her body to the music.

They danced in proximity to each other with plenty of space between them. Ali was looking at Ashlyn, challenging her to bring on her best moves. Ashlyn did her best to showcase her talents, occasionally stopping to throw in a ridiculous dance move like the robot to make Ali laugh.

Ali had the most beautiful smile Ashlyn had ever seen, it lit up the whole room. She had a cute laugh to go with it. Ashlyn loved to make people laugh, but she felt like she could waste an entire lifetime just making the brunette smile and be totally happy doing it. That thought had fogged her mind for a moment, but she quickly remembered what Ali had said on the porch a few minutes ago…”damn near zero chance.” That had bummed her out truthfully, Ali was one of the most attractive people Ashlyn had ever seen. It was what it was though. At least she thought maybe she’d made another cool friend like HAO, time would tell. She got out of her head and brought herself back to the present, doing the running man on the dance floor to make Ali laugh again.

Her eyes looked just over Ali’s head to see Alex and Tobin grinding all over each other. That was typical for them, too close all the time, but never crossing lines that everyone else just wanted to see them cross already. It always made Ashlyn a little sad for both of her good friends.

Much like Ashlyn, Ali had been watching Kelley and Hope dance up on each other not too far away. Those two were on and off again all the time, neither one sure of their sexuality or what they wanted from each other or themselves. It was like the blind leading the blind. Ali caught Kelley’s eyes. She quickly flicked her head towards Ashlyn when Ashlyn wasn’t looking and then gave Kelley the eyes that clearly conveyed ‘Why the hell didn’t you tell me?! We’re so talking later!’ Kelley shrugged, smirked, and buried her head back into Hope’s shoulder. Ali moved her attention back to Ashlyn.

The dance floor was getting more crowded by the minute and Ashlyn found herself getting squeezed closer and closer to Ali. They were about a foot apart now when Sydney wedged herself between them to hand Ali a shot and dance with her.

At about the same time, Whitney had moved up behind Ashlyn and put her hand on her shoulder to get her attention. Ashlyn saw that Sydney and Ali were talking a bit, so she turned around to face Whitney.

“So, bestie, what’s up with you and the ice queen? I saw you get majorly shut down a little while ago and then you disappeared,” she said just loud enough for Ashlyn to hear.

“Just a misunderstanding,” Ashlyn replied over the music, “we’re good now, she’s cool.”

“Are you GOOD? Or are you good? Whitney asked knowing that Ashlyn would know exactly what she meant.

“Easy, Whit. We’re good. Just friends,” Ashlyn said casually taking a look behind her to see Sydney still talking and dancing with Ali.
“Spill girl! What’s going on with the surfer?” Sydney said after she and Ali drank their shots and she saw that Ashlyn had turned around to talk to one of her teammates.

“Nothing!” Ali said a bit defensively. “I’m hosting her tonight and was a complete bitch to her when she came over to introduce herself. Anyway, she was nice enough to let me redeem myself and I found out she’s actually pretty cool.”

“Aiiiiight! Just making sure you’re good over here!” Sydney said continuing to dance with Ali.

A cute guy had come over to Whitney and pulled her to dance, so Ashlyn turned back around to dance with Ali and Sydney. She was about to introduce herself to Sydney when the music changed. Iggy Azalea started to blast across the dance floor…

*Imma make you beg, Imma make you beg for it*

*Imma make you beg, Imma make you beg*

Ashlyn heard Ali squeal and then she saw Sydney point at Ali and say “Oh hell no, I know that look! Girlfriend over here is about to get all grabby!” Sydney then grabbed Ashlyn by the shirt and said “I’m gonna go find my man, Dom…soooo, I’m volunteering you as tribute!” and pushed Ashlyn at the brunette who was in hardcore dance mode.

Ashlyn watched Sydney walk away having no idea what had just happened and what she was talking about. Before she even had a chance to figure it out, Ali had pressed her back to Ashlyn’s front and was moving herself up and down.

Ashlyn gulped hard as she felt Ali’s back rubbing up and down her chest. OK, clearly she really likes this song she thought as her mind started getting foggy again with Ali so close. Ali just kept going though, grinding her ass into Ashlyn’s font harder and harder. Ashlyn had never felt so discombobulated. She didn’t know where she should put her hands (if she should put them anywhere) and how much she should move her hips against the brunette. At the moment she was just kind of standing there swaying a bit while Ali did all the work, obviously having a great time.

Ashlyn looked across the room to see Sydney and her boyfriend laughing knowingly at her predicament. Megan and Abby were just off to the left of them watching with their mouths open. Ashlyn gave them a wide eyed look that said “What the hell do I do?” Megan gave her a thumbs up and Ashlyn just finally shrugged and said “Fuck it.”

She snaked her right arm around Ali, putting her hand on the brunette’s stomach and pulling her even closer while she let her left hand rest on Ali’s left hip. Ashlyn started moving her hips to match Ali’s rhythm. She could smell the light scent of peach shampoo coming off of Ali’s hair and breathed it in. The brunette felt so warm against her and Ashlyn couldn’t believe this was even happening right now.

Ali was on a high, she loved this song! Anyone who knew Ali knew that when a song she loved came on, Ali got really handsy. It dawned on Ali for a second that Ashlyn probably had no idea what was going on, but she didn’t care much at the moment. She felt warm and fuzzy from the alcohol and she had a muscular body against hers. It felt good and she wasn’t going to think about anything else. She smiled widely when she felt Ashlyn finally get into it and pull in her closer. It made Ali want a little more and she reached her arms up behind her to wrap them around Ashlyn’s neck, leaning her head back against the blonde’s chest as they moved. She felt hot all over and was starting to sweat, but she reasoned that it was the alcohol working its magic.

Ashlyn looked down at her seeming a bit caught off guard. “Sorry, I just love this song,” Ali
practically shouted while looking up at Ashlyn.

Ashlyn grinned back at her. “That’s ok, enjoy yourself, Krieger! Just admit that I’m killing it out here with these moves,” she said in a cocky tone.

“Yeah, alright, you got some moves Harris, I’ll admit,” Ali played back.

The two laughed lightly, both a little relieved that things were not going to get weird between them.

The song ended and rather than pull apart, Ali just turned in Ashlyn’s arms to face her. They started to move together to the beat of the next song when Ali was tugged back by someone hard enough to turn her around.

Ali looked up to see Brent standing there and she threw her arms up saying “What?” rather harshly as she gave him a dirty look.

He grabbed her forearm tightly, looking over her head to give Ashlyn a hard look “Why don’t I walk you home, Ali?”

“I’m fine right here thanks,” Ali spit back at him venomously and pulled her arm away.

“I said let’s go!” Brent said louder as grabbed Ali by the bicep and pulled her harder.

Ashlyn felt anger rip through her. It was the same guy she had seen Ali with earlier. She didn’t know who the hell he was, but the way he was talking to and touching Ali made her mad.

“She said she was fine here. So, back the fuck off.” Ashlyn said in an angry voice as she put herself between him and Ali.

‘Who the fuck is this dyke?’ he yelled to draw the attention of people around him. “Why don’t you mind your own business and get your dyke hands off my girl here,” he got in Ashlyn’s face and reached around to grab Ali’s arm and pull her forward.

Ashlyn felt cold shoot through her body as it tightened up. She could feel her muscles start to shake, her heart pounding, feeling fear, anger, and pain at the same time. She stood stock still, her eyes unblinking.

Ali had felt Ashlyn tense up and looked back at her as Brent had pulled her forward by the arm. The look she saw in Ashlyn’s eyes shook her to the core. She had seen that look only once before on someone’s face, she’d never forget it, she knew what it meant. The anger coursed through her body and she used every ounce of strength she had to push Brent back as hard as she could. He fell to the floor hard, a look of shock on his face.

“Stay the fuck away from me asshole!” Ali got out in a low growl, her face contorted in anger.

Ali turned around, grabbed a blank-faced Ashlyn by the hand and led her out.

Whitney had seen what happened, she had seen that look on Ashlyn’s face just once before and her heartbeat picked up as she made her way towards Ashlyn. As she got close, she saw Ali’s angry face as she pushed the guy to the floor and then her look of concern as she grabbed Ashlyn and pulled her away. Whitney followed them out, staying at a bit of a distance. She saw Ali get Ashlyn outside and sit her down on a bench. Ali had kneeled down in front of Ashlyn and had her hands on Ashlyn’s cheeks, holding her face. She was talking quietly to Ashlyn who seemed frozen, Whitney couldn’t hear what she was saying. A few minutes later, Ashlyn was nodding, a small smile had broken out across her face.
“I think they’re alright,” Heather said from behind Whitney, the same look of concern on her face. “Yeah, I think so too. What the hell was that?” Whitney asked.

“Ali’s ex-boyfriend is an overly possessive asshole is what that was,” Heather answered plainly. “Why don’t we go inside and make sure all the girls are settled, then we can grab Ali and Ashlyn’s stuff along with our own and bring it back to the dorm for them,” Heather suggested since she and Whitney were rooming together tonight and just a few doors down from Ali’s room.

“Good idea,” Whitney agreed. She looked back one more time to see Ali grabbing Ashlyn’s hand and leading her in the direction of the dorms.
Ok, one more for the weekend since I was inspired today. We have a long way to go with these two and many tough issues to work through as you'll begin to see...

The cool air hit Ashlyn’s face and she knew she was outside, she was being pulled along. There was a buzzing in her ears, she was having trouble focusing her eyes. Her chest felt like it might explode. She felt a hard surface pressed against her back and butt, she realized she was sitting. A warm sensation overtook her face and she could feel soft fingers running over her cheeks.

She could barely hear a faraway voice saying to her “Ashlyn, can you hear my voice? Try to hear my voice. Nod your head if you can hear my voice.”

Ashlyn nodded her head. The voice continued “Good. Just listen to my voice ok, focus on it, just follow my voice.” Ashlyn was starting to hear the voice more clearly.

“Can you feel your feet on the floor?” the voice asked. Ashlyn nodded again. “Good. Can you feel your hands on the bench?” the voice was now clear. Ashlyn nodded a third time.

“Oh, I’m right here in front of you. Take a deep breath and look at me,” the voice encouraged her. Ashlyn did what the voice told her to, but the image in front of her was still blurry, her eyes unfocused.

“It’s ok. Try again, deep breath and try to look at me,” the gentle voice told her.

Ashlyn tried again and the blurry image came into focus. She realized she was looking at Ali, the soft amber eyes unmistakable.

“Hey. There you are,” Ali said warmly while rubbing Ashlyn’s cheeks with her thumbs. “You ok?” she asked.

Ashlyn nodded, the tension finally leaving her. Ali felt Ashlyn’s body relax decided to try and push a little to see how just how ok she was. “I knew my dance moves were good, but I didn’t think they’d put you into shock,” Ali joked cautiously, her eyes never leaving Ashlyn’s.

Ashlyn’s face broke out into a smile and she laughed lightly. Ali breathed a sigh of relief. She took her hands off Ashlyn’s face and grabbed her hand, pulling her off the bench to stand up. “Let’s go get settled in, ok?” she said encouragingly.

“Ok, yeah. Sorry,” Ashlyn replied back in a quiet voice.

“Don’t be sorry, you’re the one who is missing out on my dance skills. What you saw back there was the tip of the iceberg,” Ali said playfully tugging Ashlyn’s hand to get her to walk.

Ashlyn couldn’t help but chuckle, glad again that things didn’t seem weird between them right now even though they should be. Ali had a way of making the awkward seem normal. She walked along holding Ali’s hand, not knowing what to say next, so she stayed quiet.
The frat houses were on the outskirts of campus and they had a 20 minute walk back to the dorms. Ali could sense Ashlyn getting quiet again and she knew the best thing to do was to keep her talking.

“Ok, so we’re not throwing cards this time, but how about we go back to Q and A? You can start,” she nudged the blonde with her shoulder.

“Uh, ok,” Ashlyn said trying to come up with a question. “What’s your full name?”

“Going easy on me I see,” Ali said jokingly. “It’s Alexandra Blaire Krieger. No one ever calls me by that though, my family calls me Alex and everyone else either calls me Ali or Kriegs.”

“Wow, Alexandra Blaire,” Ashlyn said thoughtfully, “that is a pretty serious sounding name. I like it.”


“Well, actually it’s short for Ashlynette,” Ashlyn said seriously.


“No, not seriously! So gullible, Krieger!” she said through her laughing. “It’s Ashlyn Michelle Harris.”

“That’s actually a pretty girly name, it’s cute” Ali said playfully.

“Yeah, well, like I said earlier my mom wanted a princess,” Ashlyn’s voice got a bit more serious.

“Can I call you Ashy?” Ali asked trying to steer the conversation in a lighter direction again.

“Oh hell no! Absolutely not!” Ashlyn protested, making Ali laugh. “Most people call me Ash. A lot of girls just call me Stud,” Ashlyn said trying to keep a straight face but failing.

Ali laughed harder and rolled her eyes “Whatever you say, Stud. You’re turn again, next question.”

Ashlyn paused for a second not knowing whether she should ask the next question on her mind, but decided to anyway. As much as she wanted to forget about what had just happened, she also wanted to be strong enough to be able to acknowledge it and she knew by now that Ali wouldn’t make it weird.

“So, who was that asshole back there at the party?” Ashlyn asked trying not to sound overly serious, but more curious instead.

Ali was taken aback by the question, but she recovered. “That would be my ex-boyfriend, Brent. We broke up before I left for Germany and then he kind of weaseled his way back in to my life for like a week this past summer before I came to my senses. Clearly, he’s not over it.”

“I can’t believe you dated that guy,” Ashlyn said in a low voice.

“Yeah me neither,” Ali replied quickly. “We dated for a year, he was really sweet at first and then he was pressuring me to do things faster than I wanted to. He was a real jerk about it, so I broke up with him and was gone for a year. Then when I got back, he tried to win me back and was all sweet again. A few days into it though, I could tell nothing had changed and I was done with it permanently.”

Ashlyn took in what Ali was saying, and felt the need to get some clarification. “So, you said he was
pressuring you? Does that mean you guys never…” Ashlyn asked implying the rest of the question with her eyes.

“Um, no, we didn’t. I know, it’s weird.” Ali said shyly.

“No no, I was just asking cause a year seemed like a long time to be with someone if you weren’t on that level, you know?” Ashlyn tried to make Ali feel better.

“Well, I’ve actually, um, never, you know…” Ali’s voice trailed off.

“Really?” Ashlyn’s voice squeaked a bit.

Ali began to blush. “I mean, I’ve dated three guys. Two somewhat seriously, but I’ve just never felt like it was right. I know it’s stupid, but I want it to be right, you just don’t get a second chance.” The blush spread down her neck. “Wow, that’s embarrassing. I can’t believe I just admitted all that. Everyone laugh at the virgin!”

“Hey, no. I think that’s cool, Ali. I respect that a lot. Seriously,” Ashlyn said realizing they were still holding hands and she squeezed Ali’s a bit to calm her down.

“Ok, stud. What about you? Do I even want to know how many women you’ve had sex with? And, um, just women?” Ali said, surprising herself at how confidently she had asked such a personal question.

Ashlyn let out a small chuckle. “Yes, just women. I have never been attracted to guys, so that never happened. I pretty much knew I was a lesbian since I was like 12 and couldn’t stop drooling over the US women’s national soccer team,” Ashlyn said laughing at herself for that last part. “As for the how many question, that gets complicated.”

“Why is that complicated? Are there so many that you actually don’t remember?” Ali asked, her eyes getting wide.

Ashlyn laughed at her. “No, you goofball! It’s just that sleeping with women is kinda different than with guys. So, it really comes down to what you define as ‘sex’.” Ashlyn explained using air quotations and putting emphasis on the word ‘sex’.

Ali turned red again. “Yeah I have no idea what you’re talking about, sooo, you’re gonna have to educate me a bit.”

“Well with women it’s all about mouths, tongues, fingers,” Ashlyn started when Ali stopped her.

“Yeah ok, geez, I get that part, Ashlyn!” Ali said turning even redder if that was possible. Ashlyn smiled at her and continued. “Anyway, technically you can have sex with a girl and do stuff to her, but she doesn’t have to have sex with you or do anything to you, you know? Like it doesn’t have to be mutual. Some people would call that sex, some people wouldn’t, it’s complicated.”

“That makes sense, I see what you mean by complicated,” Ali said thinking about what Ashlyn had said. “Ok, let me rephrase my question then,” Ali said getting her confidence back. “How many women have you had ‘mutual’ sex with?”

“Um, actually, just one.” Ashlyn stated honestly.

Ali was surprised, but tried not to show it. “Ok, what about non-mutual?” she asked.

“Uh, four.” Ashlyn answered.
“Hmmm, ok. So, four non-mutual. You’re either really generous or really greedy, which one is it? Or is it a mix?” Ali asked, shocking herself again at the question that had just spilled out of her mouth.

Ashlyn was a little surprised Ali had the guts to ask, but if Ali wasn’t going to be shy about it, neither was she. “Generous, always generous,” she answered.

“Wow, ok. So, these girls just didn’t want to reciprocate? That sucks,” Ali stated questioningly.

“No, it was my decision on that. I uh, just wasn’t feeling it.” Ashlyn said honestly, not believing she was having this conversation right now.

“Got it.” Ali said, completely understanding given her own feelings about sex. “That must have been one special girl,” she said thinking back to what Ashlyn had said earlier.

“Yeah,” Ashlyn let out a long audible breath, “I thought she was,” she said in a quiet, sad voice.

Ali squeezed Ashlyn’s hand tight knowing the conversation had just gotten heavy again. She saw that they had reached her dorm and was glad to be able to end it for now despite her curiosity.

“Here we are! Home sweet home!” Ali said cheerfully letting go of Ashlyn’s hand to get out her keycard and unlock the door.
Ashlyn walked in the door behind Ali and took in the surroundings. Although it had a much more modern feel, the dorm was not unlike her own house at Smith. There was a living room area to her right with some comfy couches and a TV. Next to that was a small library, with books piled all over. To her left was a medium sized room with a kitchenette and two round tables with chairs around them. In front of her was a staircase with an ornate wooden railing.

“Come on,” Ali said as she started up the stairs. They got to the second floor and Ali broke off to the right and stopped in front of the third door down, pulling a key out of her pocket and opening the door. Ashlyn noticed a sign on Ali’s door and stopped to look at it. It was a pink crown made out of construction paper and it said “Princess Warrior” on it in script.

“Princess Warrior?” Ashlyn questioned as she walked in the room.

Ali snickered. “Yep, Krieger means warrior in German. So, the team sometimes calls me Princess Warrior.”

“Oh, so the Queen of the Scrum is actually a Princess! My bad!” Ashlyn joked, referring to the rugby nickname often given to the scrum half.

“You know it!” Ali said as Ashlyn started to make her way around the room to look around. She could see that Ali had a full size futon as her bed, much like her own at Smith. A thin foam pad was on the floor with some sheets, blankets, and a pillow on it; Ashlyn assumed this was her bed for the night.

Ali’s room was a little messy with piles of papers and books here and there, a pile of clothes in the corner, and a plethora of makeup spread out all over the top of her dresser where a mirror hung on the wall over it. She had several pictures up on the walls of her room. Ashlyn recognized HAO, Sydney, and Kelley in most of them. She stopped to laugh at one where Ali and HAO were in their rugby uniforms trying to make hardcore game faces.

There were a couple pictures of a middle-aged couple that Ashlyn assumed were Ali’s parents. Several other pictures were of Ali and a handsome looking guy that looked just like her. He had the same eyes and smile, tattoos covered his body. Ashlyn guessed this had to be Kyle. All of the other pictures were of beautiful buildings and scenery that seemed to be of Germany.

“Nice crib!” Ashlyn said enthusiastically noticing that Ali had been quietly watching her roam the room.

“Thanks!” Ali replied. A knock at the door interrupted them.

Ali opened the door to find HAO and Whitney standing there, concern on their faces. “Hey guys! What’s up?” Ali greeted them, giving them a smile to let them know things were ok.
“Oh um, we grabbed your stuff on the way home. Figured you just forgot it,” HAO said casually trying not to make things weird. She and Whitney held out their hands with Ali and Ashlyn’s backpacks in them.

“Hey, Whit! No Hottie McHotterson following you back tonight?” Ashlyn teased, referring to the guy she had been dancing with.

“Nah. He wasn’t my type,” Whitney joked back, but Ashlyn could hear the edge in her voice. She knew Whitney must have seen what happened; she was sure most of the team probably had. Ashlyn grinned and gave Whitney the eyes that conveyed everything was more than fine. She saw Whitney relax and smile.

“Alright, well, we’ll let you ladies sleep. Just wanted to drop your stuff by,” HAO said as she and Whitney said good night.

“Goodnight Whit, I LOOOOOOVE YOU!” Ashlyn yelled, blowing Whitney a kiss. They all laughed as Ali closed the door.

Ali handed Ashlyn her backpack. “Here, you probably want to get ready for bed. The bathroom is directly across the hall.”

“How convenient,” Ashlyn said as she took the backpack and rifled through it to find her toothbrush. She made her way across the hall to go brush her teeth.

While Ashlyn was gone, Ali changed into a pair of cotton shorts and a baggy t-shirt that said Virginia across the front.

Ashlyn came back to find Ali sitting on her bed playing with her phone. Ali looked up to see Ashlyn still in the same clothes. “Thought you were changing for bed?” Ali questioned.

“Nah. I’ll pretty much sleep in this. Just uh…” Ashlyn’s voice trailed off as she pulled her jeans off and removed her hat. “There we go. All set!” she added, standing there in her cutoff t-shirt and dark blue Calvin Klein boxer briefs.

“Well ok then,” Ali laughed and whistled a catcall at Ashlyn, “Nice underwear, Stud! I’m going to go brush my teeth.” Ali made her way across the hall to finish getting ready for bed. Ashlyn watched her leave and then began catching up on the text messages on her phone.

Pinoe: Wow, Ash, fighting over girls tonight! Everything cool?

Abby: That was one angry dude, where did you go? You ok?

Tobs: Dude, what was that all about?

Queen Alex: Are you hurt, Ash? I hope not. Tobin, Pinoe, and I are ready to go kill that guy if you are!

Whitney: Looks like Ali has it covered, but I’m here if you need me :)

Ashlyn smiled at the fact that she had such good friends. She decided to ignore the texts for now, but winced at the fact that there would be a lot of explaining to do in the morning. She pulled out her charger and found an outlet to plug her phone into as Ali walked back into the room. Ashlyn watched her gracefully walk over to the bed and plop herself down on it.

“Virginia?” Ashlyn asked pointing Ali’s shirt.

Ashlyn considered saying Smith College, but she didn’t want to confuse Ali. “Satellite Beach, Florida,” she stated matter of factly as she settled herself into the makeshift bed on the floor. She could feel the hardness of the floor despite the padding.

“Cool” Ali said and reached over to turn off the light and settled into her bed.

As soon as the lights went off, Ashlyn noticed glow stars plastered all over the room. “Nice touch with the stars, Krieger,” she said in jest.

“Yeah, I’m not really a fan of the dark,” Ali stated honestly.

“Good to know,” Ashlyn replied. The room was silent for a few minutes. Ashlyn shifted to adjust her position and groaned a bit when she felt the hard floor push against her sore and bruised ribs.

Ali heard the groan and felt guilty knowing how sore her own body felt and how hard she and Ashlyn had hit each other during today’s game. She knew the floor was probably really uncomfortable.

“Hey, Ashlyn, come up here,” Ali said moving herself to one side of the bed.

“Huh?” Ashlyn said not understanding.

“I know the floor is uncomfortable, especially after today’s game. So, get up here,” Ali said patting her bed audibly with her hand. “It’s ok, HAO falls asleep in here all the time. I don’t mind sharing if you don’t.”

Ashlyn hesitated, but she had to admit she was sore. “Um, yeah, sure…ok,” she grabbed her pillow, got up and moved to settle next to Ali, leaving a comfortable space between them.


“Yes, much. Thanks!” Ashlyn answered appreciatively.

The room was silent again for a few minutes. Ashlyn was in deep thought. Something had been nagging her since they had started to walk back to the dorms. She just had to know.

“Ali?” she said quietly.

“Yeah?” Ali answered back, clearly still awake.

“Can I ask you something?” Ashlyn said in a whisper.

“Of course,” Ali replied sincerely.

Ashlyn let out a long breath, feeling nervous. “How did you...” she broke off and then started again. “How did you know what to say to me back there? To um, you know, snap me out of it,” the last part barely audible. She just had to know. No one had ever been able to so quickly pull her out of her own mind when she was frozen like that, let alone make her feel so relaxed right after.

“Oh,” Ali paused trying to think of how she wanted to start. “The look on your face, I just kind of knew what it meant.”

“What do you mean?” Ashlyn asked a bit confused, although she could only imagine what her face must have looked like.
Ali sighed and began “My brother Kyle is gay. He came out in high school and it really didn’t go very well. He would always come meet me after school and one day he didn’t show up. It wasn’t like him at all, so I walked over to the high school to go find him. After an hour of looking, I found him sitting on a bench in a nearby park. He was just sitting there, kind of frozen. His wrists were all red and his face and body were covered in permanent marker. I found out later that the football team had taped his hands together in the locker room and drawn fag, queer, and penises all over him.”

Ali’s heart hurt at the memory, but she continued “He didn’t even acknowledge me when I found him. It’s like he wasn’t even there. The look on his face, in his eyes, I’ll never forget it. He was so broken, I could see the pain, fear, and anger etched into him. I just talked to him until finally he seemed to hear me and I got him home.”

Ali let out another deep breath. “His face Ashlyn, you…you had the same one tonight,” she said quietly, letting the words hang in the air.

Ashlyn took in a few deep breaths herself, trying to clear the huge lump in her throat. “Yeah…” she started, “I didn’t exactly have a great time in high school either” her voice cracking. She hadn’t wanted to admit even that much, but she knew Ali deserved the honesty after what she had just revealed about her brother.

Ali reached over to take Ashlyn’s hand. She could feel it tremble a bit and squeezed it lightly. Ashlyn felt like she couldn’t say more at the moment, so she tried to deflect the conversation away from her again. “And Kyle, he’s good now?” she asked.

“Um, yeah, he’s good now. To be honest, it took a while. He fell into the wrong crowd, started drinking heavily and doing a lot of drugs. He overdosed at one point and was in and out of rehab. He made it though, he’s been sober for quite a while. He has his own business and he’s happy, I’m really proud of him. We talk just about every day,” Ali answered feeling a bit lighter knowing how far her brother had come.

Ashlyn couldn’t believe what she had just heard. Her emotions were kind of running all over. She was partly sad to hear how much Kyle and Ali had struggled, but she suddenly felt hopeful too. Hopeful that maybe someone could finally understand what she was feeling inside.

“Chris too,” Ashlyn said her voice cracking a bit again.

“Your brother’s gay?” Ali asked trying to figure out what Ashlyn meant.

“No. In rehab. He’s been there for the last six months. I’m glad he’s getting help, but I’ve been so scared,” she got out in a whisper.

Ali squeezed the blonde’s hand tighter knowing exactly how she had felt when Kyle was in rehab. The room got quiet again. After a couple minutes, Ali knew Ashlyn wasn’t going to say anything else and she knew not to push.

“He’ll be ok, Ash. You’ll see.” Ali reassured the blonde. “I know you just met me and you probably don’t want to talk about it, but if you ever do, I’m here to listen,” she added quietly.

“Thanks,” Ashlyn paused for a second, before adding in the most sincere voice she could “I’m really glad I met you.”

“Me too,” Ali replied genuinely, still in disbelief at how much had happened tonight and how many similarities there were between her and blonde. She heard Ashlyn yawn.
“Good night, Ash,” Ali whispered.

“Night, Alex,” Ashlyn whispered back. She could smell the light scent of Ali’s peach shampoo again, it was comforting. Her eyes were heavy and she felt herself getting pulled into sleep.

It was not lost on Ali which name Ashlyn had just chosen to call her by. She smiled and closed her eyes, still holding tight to Ashlyn’s hand and listening to her breathe lightly.
Ashlyn woke up to the buzzing of her phone and looked over to find Ali holding on to her tattooed arm tightly like it was a teddy bear, her cheek pressed to the bicep. She managed to reach over and grab her phone off the floor with her right hand without shifting Ali too much. She saw it was her grandma calling and quickly answered.

“Good morning, Grandma,” she said cheerily. “Yeah, everything is fine. Sorry, I didn’t call yesterday. We had an away game and I got caught up.” Ali woke up to Ashlyn talking on the phone and just laid there listening, deciding not to let go of Ashlyn’s arm and alert her.

“Of course we won! You know I wasn’t going down without a fight,” Ashlyn continued. “No Grandma, I’m not injured. Sore as usual, but just fine. Yes Grandma, I know you think rugby is too rough of a sport. Yes, I’ll be careful.” Ashlyn said dramatically.

Ashlyn stopped to listen to what her grandmother was saying and then spoke again “Why can’t you tell me now? You know how I am with surprises!” Another pause “Ugh, ok fine, I’ll call you later when I’m settled in,” Ashlyn said in a whiny voice, “I love you too, Gram. Bye.” She touched the end call button and put the phone down beside her.

“Well that was absolutely adorable!” Ali squeaked from besides Ashlyn, letting her know she was awake.

Ashlyn looked over at Ali who was beaming with a huge smile and still holding her arm. Ashlyn smiled back at her and Ali let go of her arm saying “Sorry, I should have warned you I’m a bit of a cuddler.”

Ashlyn chuckled at Ali “Good morning! Sorry to wake you, Princess Cuddles,” she said sarcastically. “I had to answer my phone, my grandma gets worried when she doesn’t hear from me because I usually call her every night.”

“Who knew you were such a softie? Big Bad Ashlyn is a giant teddy bear!” Ali joked.

“Yeah well, don’t go spreading that around or my intimidation factor will be gone and I’ll be getting my ass knocked all over the pitch,” Ashlyn laughed.

“Well, good thing you aren’t playing us again until the end of the season because I’d be knocking your ass all over the pitch myself,” Ali teased.

“Oh please! I seem to recall seeing you on the ground a whole lot yesterday and losing the game, soooo…” Ashlyn teased back.

“Yeah yeah, alright, we’ll see about that next time we play each other,” Ali pretended to make an angry face at Ashlyn and then looked up at the clock to see it was already 9:00am. “Ugh, we’d better get ready and head down to breakfast, the girls are probably already there.”
The two of them headed across the hall so they could each grab a quick shower and change. Ashlyn came back into the room to find Ali dressed and working on putting on makeup. “I’ll be ready in 5 minutes,” Ali said. Ashlyn nodded and began making sure she put everything back in her backpack.

Fifteen minutes later, Ali was still getting ready and Ashlyn was sitting on Ali’s bed playing with her phone. “Seriously, it’s breakfast Ali, not prom!” Ashlyn joked watching Ali layer on her mascara.

Ali rolled her eyes at Ashlyn and continued putting makeup. “I’ll be done in a minute. What are you doing over there anyway?” she asked.

“Just catching up on Facebook,” Ashlyn replied.

“Oooo, friend me!” Ali screeched.

“Oh, so you want to be my friend now?” Ashlyn said playfully.

“Well, I mean, I know you would be Facebook stalking me. So, it’s less creepy this way,” Ali winked at her.

“Riiight.” Ashlyn laughed as she pulled up Ali’s profile and sent a friend request.

Ali grabbed her phone and quickly accepted the request saying “See, we’re already besties!” She finished with her makeup and turned around to face Ashlyn. “Actually, give me your phone for a second.”

Ashlyn looked at her questioningly, but handed her phone over. She watched as Ali typed something on her phone and then held the phone out to take a selfie. She showed the picture to Ashlyn saying “How do I look?”

“You look great,” Ashlyn said smiling at the picture of Ali on her phone which featured her gorgeous smile, her amber eyes prominent. “But, what are you doing?”

“Well, you can’t exactly be my bestie if you don’t have my phone number, right? So, I fixed that and made sure my lovely face will appear if I call you,” Ali said with a grin and handed Ashlyn her phone back.

Ashlyn shook her head laughing, but was secretly thrilled that Ali had just given her her number. She had planned to ask, but this was so much easier. Ali threw her phone at Ashlyn saying “Be useful while I finish up and add your number to mine. Wouldn’t want you to call me and me ignore it because I think you’re a telemarketer.” Ashlyn put her number in Ali’s phone and handed it back to her. She then looked down at her own phone to see that Ali had entered herself as ‘Princess’.

“Princess? Really?” Ashlyn said with a raised eyebrow. Ali laughed, looking at her own phone and seeing that Ashlyn had entered herself as ‘Stud’.

“Better than Stud!” Ali quipped back. “If anyone ever sees that on my phone, there are going to be questions!”

“Oh, well then give me your phone back so I can put my face on there, that should help with the questions!” Ashlyn said with a chuckle.

Ali held her phone pointing at Ashlyn and said “Ok, pose then, Stud!” Ashlyn flexed her tattooed bicep and kissed it as her pose. Ali laughed hard, snapping the picture and saving it under Ashlyn’s contact information. “Right cause that won’t raise more questions!” she said jokingly.
Ali pulled her hair into a messy bun and announced that she was ready to go. They walked together two buildings over to the dining hall. They grabbed some food and saw that there were already two tables filled with their teammates.

As they approached the tables Megan yelled out “Well, well, well, if it isn’t Muhammed Ali and Rocky Balboa,” making an obvious reference to what had happened the night before. So much for eating breakfast before having to answer a million questions, Ashlyn thought.

“Can it, hooker!” Ashlyn yelled back at her. She and Ali sat down besides each other at the table with Megan, Whitney, Tobin, Alex, HAO, Kelley, and Sydney. Abby and Sarah were sitting at the table behind them, but Ashlyn could see they had already turned around and leaned in to join the conversation.

“Where did you two run off to?” Abby asked in a suggestive tone.

“You two disappeared awfully fast,” Megan added.

HAO and Whitney looked at each other and then at Ali and Ashlyn, waiting to see how this was going to play out and ready to jump in if needed.

“Um,” Ashlyn started, but Ali cut her off. “As you all saw, my ex-boyfriend is a complete asshole. I thought Ashlyn was going to kill him, so I pulled her out of there before she could do any damage. As much as I don’t like him, I don’t think it’d be good if I let a Smith rugger kill him, sooo, I figured it was time to call it a night.” Ali stated and then joked “Couldn’t let her go all Rocky Balboa on his ass!”

“Always gotta be the knight in shining armor, huh Ash?” Alex said smiling from across the table.

“You know me,” Ashlyn joked back with them before looking at Ali and saying “And how come you get to be Muhammed Ali?”

“Duh! Because Ali and Ali, it’s in the name!” Ali said laughing. Everyone at the table laughed with her and then went back to eating their breakfast. Ashlyn breathed a low sigh of relief, so thankful that Ali had just completely diffused the situation. She reached under the table and squeezed Ali’s knee lightly to discretely thank her. Ali gave Ashlyn a quick smile and continued eating.

As breakfast wrapped up, the Dartmouth team was heading back to their dorms and the Smith team was making their way to their cars for the trip home. Ashlyn and Whitney chatted with HAO and Ali as Megan, Alex and Tobin walked in front of them to Megan’s car. Ashlyn pulled HAO into a hug promising they’d talk soon. HAO then went to say goodbye to Whitney leaving Ash and Ali standing there.

“I probably should have warned you that I’m a hugger,” Ashlyn said holding her arms out for Ali.

“Yeah, I noticed,” Ali replied leaning into Ashlyn for a hug. As much as Ali really wasn’t much of a hugger, she had to admit that the way the blonde’s strong arms securely wrapped around her made her feel warm inside.

“Ali leaned into Ashlyn’s ear whispering “Remember what I said about talking, ok? You have my number.”

Ashlyn nodded squeezing Ali tighter for just a second as the brunette’s breath on her ear sent tingles down her neck and into her body. She let Ali go, stepping back and hitting her arm lightly with her
fist. “Later, Princess!” she grinned.

“Bye, Stud!” Ali smiled back shaking her head.

Ashlyn was the last one to Megan’s car, so she ended up in the “bitch seat” in the back sandwiched in the middle of Tobin and Whitney. Queen Alex had claimed the front seat. The second Megan pulled away, the questions started.

“All right, Ash, you gotta tell us what went down with Ali last night! Did you two go at it?” Megan asked bluntly.

“Way to be discrete Megan!” Alex said smacking her.

Ashlyn laughed, she knew this was coming. “Sorry guys, I’ll admit it, you were right on that one. That girl is totally straight! So, nothing happened at all. We just talked and went to sleep. After getting to know her a bit though, I have to say she’s kind of awesome.”

“Bummer!” Megan said.

“Wait, dude. Are you crushing?” Tobin piped in.

“On a straight girl? Definitely not! We’re just friends,” Ashlyn replied back quickly. The truth was that she was actually crushing a little bit, but she definitely wasn’t going to admit it. Besides, Ali was very straight, so it would have to be a friend crush.

That seemed to satisfy them and Megan turned up the radio. Whitney leaned into Ashlyn and rested her head on her shoulder. She knew Ashlyn better than that, Ashlyn was totally crushing. “Right. Very believable, Ash,” she said only loud enough for Ashlyn to hear her. Ashlyn nudged her and the two giggled.

Ali fared no better than Ashlyn. Two minutes after she got back into her dorm room, there was a knock at the door. She opened it and Sydney, Kelley, and HAO rushed passed her. “Yeah, sure, come in,” Ali said sarcastically.

“Spill it!” Sydney said right away, all three of them plopping down on Ali’s bed.

“Before I spill anything, someone here has some talking to do! KELLEY!” Ali said with her arms crossed looking at Kelley inquisitively.

“Oh, um, yeah… uh, sorry?” Kelley said shyly.

“So, Ashlyn is the girl you made out with last year? What happened?” Ali demanded.

“Well, Hope had gone back to dating Jeremy and I was feeling kinda pissed. I don’t know. I asked Ashlyn to dance because she was really hot, and then things just kinda progressed and we made out for a while,” Kelley said nonchalantly. Ali looked at her with a raised eyebrow and said “That’s it?”

“Pretty much. I mean, if I’m being honest, and don’t tell Hope this! She was a really damn good kisser and I probably would have done a lot more if she had pushed it, but she was surprisingly respectful. So, after the party she just went to HAO’s room where she was rooming for the night,” Kelley finished before adding, “Enough about me! Why do YOU want to know so bad, Ali?”

“I’m just curious!” Ali said defensively.

“Uh huh,” said Sydney with a doubtful look, “SO, what happened last night?”
“Nothing, really. I mean she came over to talk to me at the party and I was a total bitch and completely dismissed her cause I thought she was hitting on me,” no thanks to you and your gossip, Ali said pointing at Sydney. Sydney shrugged.

“Anyway, I felt bad and she was nice enough to let me apologize. So, we talked for a while and I kinda ended up challenging her to a little dance competition. Then we ended up dancing until Brent the asshole came along. That’s pretty much it. I pulled her out of there because I thought she would hit Brent, even though I was tempted to let her. We came back and got ready for bed and slept, so nothing more to tell,” Ali stated plainly.

“Really?! You dance all up on that girl, bring her home, and do nothing?! That’s just crazy!” Sydney exclaimed loudly.

“What the hell, Syd?! I like men! Remember?” Ali said incredulously.

“Yeah well, so do I,” Sydney said playfully “And I love Dom and he’s hot and I’m not really into the ladies, but if I was single and ready for a little fun… I mean, I’d give her a shot. Girl is fine!” Kelley and HAO nodded in agreement.

“Well ok then. Sorry to break it to you, but nothing happened and we’re just friends,” Ali said shaking her head at them. “You can ask HAO. She stopped by on her way to bed last night.”

“It’s true,” said HAO confirming “those two were just hanging out being boring as hell.”

“Ugh, you need more excitement in your life, Ali. Either that or I have to find someone more interesting to live vicariously through!” Sydney laughed.

The three left Ali’s room, HAO’s eyes making it clear that they would talk more later. Ali settled in to catch up on her assignments for the day.

The Smith Rugby team had arrived back on campus around 1pm and Ashlyn and Whitney went back to their rooms to unpack. Whitney headed off to library for the afternoon and Ashlyn figured she’d work in their room. She remembered her grandma saying she had a surprise and decided she couldn’t wait any longer to call her.

Three rings and her grandma picked up. “Hey Gram,” Ashlyn said, hearing pots and pans clanging in the background. Ashlyn figured her grandma must be in the kitchen.

“What are you cooking?” Ashlyn asked.

“Mac and Cheese, the usual,” her grandmother answered.

“Oh yeah? You have company?” Ashlyn asked knowing that she usually only made that for company or when Ashlyn requested it.

“Sort of,” her grandma replied mysteriously. Ashlyn decided to drop it for now.

“So, is it surprise time? I really want to know!” Ashlyn said like an excited five year old.

“Yes, yes, ok, ok,” her grandma said, “Someone wants to talk to you. Hang on.”

“Oh, ok,” Ashlyn replied wondering what was going on.

She heard some muffled voices and then a deep voice came on the line. “Hey baby sis!”

“Oh my gosh, CHRIS!!?” Ashlyn exclaimed, tears already rolling down her face at being able to
hear his voice.
Ashlyn couldn’t believe this was happening, that she was talking to her brother on the phone. “What are you doing home?” she asked, tears freely rolling down her face with excitement, happiness, and a little nervousness too.

“It’s good to hear your voice, Ash, so good,” Chris said genuinely. “I’m done with the inpatient part, and now I’m doing an outpatient rehab. So, I can be home and maybe find a job and pretty much go back to real life.”

“That’s so good, Chris. I’m so proud of you. Honestly, how are you?” Ashlyn asked wanting to know more.

“I honestly feel really good right now. It was pretty rough going for the first couple of months, but I just stuck it out and now I feel at least confident that I can do this,” Chris replied before adding “I know there’s still a little while to go and I have a lifelong road ahead of me, but I feel like I can face it.”

“That makes me so happy to hear that. You know I’m always here for you, anything you need, ok?” Ashlyn said seriously.

“Thanks. I know, Ash.” Chris replied. “I’ve missed you so much. My life has been boring as hell lately, so I want to hear all about what you’ve been up to. Geez, college girl! I brag about you all the time!”

Ashlyn laughed and spent the next hour telling him all about Smith, the rugby team, her friends, and even stopped to tell him about the weekend and about Ali.


“Really, Chris? I spend the last hour talking about my life over the last year and you focus on Ali?” Ashlyn said playfully.

“Oh come on, Ash! Who are you kidding? This guy knows you better than anyone. You so like that girl, it’s in your voice!” Chris prodded her.

“She’s straight, Chris. And we’re just friends. Yes, she’s really hot and I’m not saying I wouldn’t go for it if she wasn’t straight, but, yeah, not gonna happen!” Ashlyn said.

“Last time I checked, you didn’t give up that easily.” Chris replied.

“Yeah, yeah. No really though, she’s a really cool person and I think we’re going to be good friends. I’m happy with that.” Ashlyn said more seriously.
“Ok, I’ll drop it,” Chris paused, “for now.”

“Very funny. Now go help grandma with the food!” Ashlyn said. “Call me later this week? Or really just call me anytime!”

“Of course I will! I’m going to drive you crazy now!” Chris said animatedly.

“You better!” Ashlyn exclaimed, before getting more serious. “I’m so glad you’re home. I can’t wait to see you! I’m so proud of you and I love you.”

“Me too, Ash. I love you, baby sis! Talk to you soon! Bye.” Chris replied and hung up.

Ashlyn sat back for a while just thinking about her conversation with Chris and letting it all sink in. She was still a bit nervous about how things would go for him, but she felt relief right now and she was trying to just focus on the excitement. After a couple years of feeling lost because her brother was not himself, she finally felt like she had him back. She wished Whitney was around so she could tell someone. She was about to explode, but no one knew about Chris other than Whitney, so there was no one to tell. Then she remembered Ali.

She hesitated for a couple minutes, but Ashlyn was like an excited puppy, she couldn’t wait anymore. She dialed Ali’s phone number.

Ali’s phone began buzzing, pulling her attention away from her German translation assignment. She saw Ashlyn’s picture pop up on the screen and was shocked. She hit the answer button saying “This is totally a butt dial, right?”


“Nope, I was just working on a German assignment, but I’m almost done anyway,” Ali replied.

“Oh? Are you a language major?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yes, German and communications double-major, fun fun,” Ali said sarcastically, “How about you?”

“That’s cool. I’m thinking I’m going to be a biology major, I recently realized I want to be a marine biologist,” Ashlyn replied, forgetting for a moment why she called.

“How interesting! Smarty pants!” Ali teased. “Soooo, did you miss me already?”

“Oh, well, of course! But I actually have some exciting news and I just want to share, but really couldn’t share it with anyone other than Whit, and she’s not here, so…” Ashlyn spoke rapidly having remembered the point of the call.


“Sorry. It’s just, Chris is home from rehab! I just spent over an hour with him on the phone!” Ashlyn said excitedly.

“That’s amazing!” Ali joined in on Ashlyn’s excitement knowing just how huge this was. “How is he? And how are you?”

Ashlyn spent the next 20 minutes telling Ali all about her conversation with Chris, only leaving out the part where they’d talked about her.

“Ash, I’m so happy for you,” Ali said warmly, a huge smile on her face. “I know there are still times
when it will seem hard for him and for all of you, but this is huge. Will you be able to see him soon? Do you guys have a college family visiting weekend in the fall like we do?”

“Unfortunately not until Thanksgiving. Yes, we have a visiting weekend in late October, but my grandma can’t really afford to travel up here. It always falls around my birthday too, which sucks, but at least I spend time with Whit’s family. Maybe next year if Chris is able to get a job, they’ll come up to visit. Anyway, I usually drive home for breaks to save on travel costs. It’s not too bad, only a 24 hour drive. There aren’t any breaks long enough before Thanksgiving for me to do it though, so I’ll have to wait until then. At least it’s not too long from now!” Ashlyn replied.

“I’m sure Thanksgiving will be wonderful this year then,” Ali said, realizing just how different she and Ashlyn’s circumstances and backgrounds were. Ali had never wanted for anything, her grandparents came from old money and had set up her parents as well as her and Kyle with their own very large trust funds.

Ashlyn’s stomach grumbled and she looked at the clock realizing it was 5:30pm. “Sorry, I’m keeping you from dinner, I better let you go.”

“Yeah, ok. I’m really glad you called though, Ash. I’m so excited for you! You can call anytime, really!” Ali said happily, still excited for Ashlyn.

“Thanks. I mean it. Talk to you soon?” Ashlyn asked with a hopeful tone.

“Definitely!” Ali assured.

“Ok. Have a good night, Alex.” Ashlyn said softly.

There was the name again; Ali smiled to herself. “You too, Ash. Bye.”

Ali put on a long sleeve t-shirt and headed to get some dinner. She came back an hour later and decided to try and Skype with Kyle.

A few minutes later Kyle’s face filled her laptop screen. “ALLEEXX!!!” he yelled. “How’s my super star?”

“Ugh, not feeling like a super star after losing our rugby match against Smith this weekend,” Ali replied giving Kyle the details of the game and how she had been tackled left and right by Ashlyn.

“Oh, she sounds feisty and tough. Is she hot?” Kyle asked curiously.

“Why is that even relevant?” Ali said as she pulled up the picture of Ashlyn on her phone and held it up to the screen for Kyle to see.

“Dang, she IS hot! That sleeve tattoo is fabulous! Anyway, I was just curious. But now I’m more curious about why her picture is on your phone?” Kyle remarked with narrowed eyes prodding Ali.

Ali told him the long story about the weekend with Ashlyn, not leaving out any details because she always told Kyle everything and because he would just ask her until she told him anyway.

Kyle listened very intently, not saying a word until Ali was done. “Interesting. So, you didn’t even think about a little girl-on-girl action? Like not even a little?” Kyle asked playfully once Ali was done.

Kyle rolled his eyes and put up his hands defensively. “Ok, ok! I’m just saying, it’s college, Alex. Loosen up and have a little fun! It’s not like any of your boyfriends have worked out, so maybe you should explore other avenues, hmmm?” he said with a penetrating stare.

“What are you saying, Kyle?” Ali asked dismissively.

“Nothing. Nothing. Just planting the seed is all! Anyway, I better go take Luna for a walk,” he said tilting his screen down so Ali could see his dog.

“Aw, ok. Hi Luna!” Ali waved at the screen.

“Oh and Ali,” Kyle spoke up again, “You can pass along my information to Ashlyn for her brother, you know, if he needs support or someone to talk to.”

“Thanks, Kyle. That’s sweet and a good idea. I’ll let Ashlyn know.” Ali said appreciatively. “Love you, talk to you soon!”

“Bye, sis!” Kyle waved his hand dramatically and the screen went blank.

Ali finished her assignments, got ready for bed and laid down. She was deep in thought about her phone conversation with Ashlyn when a brilliant idea hit her. At least she hoped it was brilliant. She got up, went to her computer and looked up Whitney’s profile. She typed out a message and sent it. She hoped Whitney would get back to her soon, she was going to need help if this was going to work.
A long afternoon update since I won’t be around tonight. Feelings are happening :) 

Ali woke up to the loud melodic alarm she had set on her phone the night before. She hit the snooze button twice before finally getting up. Normally, she wasn’t one to snooze, but she was too excited to sleep last night and fell asleep late. It was 9:20am, but her first Monday class didn’t start until 11:00am so she had some time. She checked her phone alerts and saw that Whitney had replied to her Facebook message and friended her. Ali read the message carefully and broke out into a huge smile. Whitney had loved her idea and was ready to help in any way she could. Ali replied back with her cellphone number and told Whitney to call her one night that week so they could plan more. 

Ashlyn had a busy week between classes, assignments, rugby practice and other activities. Before she knew it, Friday was here and it was time to get ready for another rugby filled weekend. Smith was hosting Boston University’s (BU) rugby team which was always a major challenge as they were a Division 1 team. Playing Smith was just like a practice game for them. The Smith team had worked hard all week, hell bent on trying to take down BU that weekend. 

Ashlyn and Alex had come up with a few sneak plays where Abby would break off the flank of the scrum early, with Ashlyn taking her place. Abby would then be the one to grab the ball out of scrum and pass it off to a back. They had hoped that BU would be looking for Alex or Ashlyn to grab the ball first and not notice Abby until she’d had time to give the backs a chance to gain some ground with the ball. After a long Friday practice, Ashlyn and Tobin took care of the equipment and walked back to the quad for dinner. Ashlyn felt her phone buzz in her pocket. 

Princess: Hey, Stud! You guys playing tomorrow? 

Ashlyn’s face broke out in a goofy grin and she quickly typed out a message. 

Stud: Hi Bestie ;) Yes, we have big bad BU this weekend. What about you? 

Princess: We have University of New Hampshire, typical state rivalry. We better win! 

Stud: Right. Because you might kill someone if you lose 2 weekends in a row. Such a sore loser! 

Stud: How’s your week been? 

Princess: Pretty good actually, got a lot done :-) How was yours? 

Stud: Busy, but productive. I feel like between classes, rugby & other commitments, I’m running around like a mad woman! 

Princess: Stop whining :-) I’m kidding, go eat some pasta or something and rest up for tomorrow! 

Stud: Fine :) Call to swap war stories on Sunday??? 

Princess: Of course! Good luck tomorrow badass!
Although Ashlyn had been keeping up her conversation with Tobin while texting, Tobin could tell from the dumb smile on Ashlyn’s face that she must be texting a girl.

“Dude, who are you texting?” Tobin finally asked.

“Oh, that was just Ali,” Ashlyn said coolly.

“Dude, you are totally crushing!” Tobin nudged Ashlyn hard as they walked.

“Really, Tobs, she and I are just friends. There’s nothing else there.” Ashlyn stated plainly.

“Yeah, ok.” Tobin said. “That’s what I tell myself too,” she added in a low mumble that she knew Ashlyn couldn’t fully hear.

“What was that?” Ashlyn asked.

“Nothing, not important,” Tobin smiled at her. “You have to admit you’ve thought about it though, right?”

“Well, duh. I mean she’s gorgeous for sure. I just know it would never happen, so better friends than nothing at all, right?” Ashlyn replied.

“Totally, dude. Totally.” Tobin agreed as the two walked into the dining hall and grabbed some dinner before sitting at their usual table.

Saturday morning arrived and Ashlyn stood along the Smith sideline with the rest of the team. She joined Megan and a few other girls in looking over the BU ruggers and picking out who the good looking ones were. Megan eventually left the group to connect her ipod to the outdoor speakers that had been setup near the pitch for the match. Ashlyn heard the start of Ludacris’ “Fantasy” over the speakers and smiled to herself. The Smith Rugby gameday playlist was filled with sexually charged songs just like this one, for no other reason than to fluster the other team and let them know what the Smith ruggers had in mind for the after party. The BU team warmed up, trying not to let the music affect them.

The teams lined up for the opening scrum with Alex deciding that Smith would try its new play right away. The whistle blew, the referee shouting “engage!” Ashlyn quickly switched places with Abby while Alex faked going for the ball. Megan had been successful in hooking the ball for her team and Abby quickly grabbed it while Ashlyn broke off to Abby’s left to try and protect the play. Not being used to the position, Abby panicked when she couldn’t find a fullback right away and passed the ball to Ashlyn. Ashlyn was surprised to get the ball, but recovered quickly to start the run. She took a quick glance to the right and saw Whitney and passed it off just as she got tackled. Unfortunately, Ashlyn had gotten slammed hard, taking an elbow to the jaw on her way down.

Ashlyn stayed down for a few seconds and got up just in time to see that BU had scored. She had bit her tongue and was bleeding, her jaw killing her. She hobbled over to the sideline to shake it off and get some water to clear her mouth out. The rest of the game went no better. The next time they tried their new play again, it had sort of worked, but the scrum had collapsed and Ashlyn’s hand had been trampled by a metal cleat. A few minutes later, she already had purple cleat marks forming on the top her slightly swollen hand. BU scored twice in each half, shutting out Smith 28 to 0.

The BU team was funded, being a Division 1 team, and was staying at a nearby hotel. The Smith
ruggers were happy not to have to host them overnight after that awful loss. As always though, they were ready for the post game party. The party was being hosted in Wilder House in the quad since several older members of the team lived there and had agreed to set it up. Shortly after the game, the party was in full swing. The BU ruggers definitely knew how to drink and have a good time. Megan was already lip-locked with a short girl who had medium length black hair and hipster glasses. Ashlyn walked over to where Whitney was talking with a cute brunette with dark eyes from the BU team, the same one who had elbowed her in the jaw.

“Hey, ladies,” Ashlyn said as she approached. “I’m Ashlyn,” she said to the brunette.

“Pam,” the girl replied back giving Ashlyn a smile.

The three of them made some small talk until Whitney excused herself saying she was off to get another beer, even though she was just leaving because she knew what Ashlyn was up to.

“So, Pam. Thanks for this nice bruise on my jaw,” Ashlyn joked with the girl.

“Sorry! It just kinda happened,” Pam replied, clearly feeling a little bad.

“The least you could do is kiss it better,” Ashlyn said with a dimpled grin, choosing to just be direct as she moved closer to the girl.

Pam turned red, but leaned in to kiss the line along the left side of Ashlyn’s jaw. Ashlyn brought her hand up behind Pam’s head to hold her there and then turned her head so their lips were brushing. Pam gave in first and moved to deepen the kiss. It started out fine, but after a few minutes Ashlyn got bored. She was kissing a good looking girl, but her mind was wandering and thinking about how Ali’s game had gone. She chalked it up to a rough day and pulled away from Pam.

“Sorry,” she said gently, “my jaw is really sore.”

“Bummer.” Pam said running her hand down Ashlyn’s arm.

“Yeah, well, it’s technically your fault,” Ashlyn teased her.

“I’ll have to really watch my elbow next time then,” Pam said flirtatiously and then walked away to grab another beer, saying she’d be back in a minute.

Ashlyn busied herself talking to Kacey and a few other rookie Smith ruggers, hoping that Pam would get hint. Pam did approach her again a few minutes later, but the interaction was brief with Pam slipping her number in Ashlyn’s pocket and whispering “Call me when your jaw feels better.”

Ashlyn spent the rest of the party just socializing and drinking before calling it a night around midnight. She and Whitney walked home together and Ashlyn dropped onto her bed, falling asleep without even changing her clothes.

She woke up to Whitney shaking her. “Ash, you want to go to brunch?”

“Huh? Oh, sure.” Ashlyn replied sleepily, looking over to see that it was already 10:00am.

Ashlyn rolled out of bed realizing she was still dressed from the night before and figured she’d just brush her teeth and go to brunch like that. She and Whitney grabbed food in the dining room and then sat down next to Tobin and Megan. Everyone else was clearly sleeping in.

Megan looked up to see Ashlyn dressed in the same outfit as last night and couldn’t help herself. “So, who’s room did you sleep in last night, Ash?”

“Seeing as how you’re still in the same clothes, I thought for sure you’d had a lot of fun last night.” Megan said, emphasizing the word ‘fun’.

Tobin chimed in “It’s a valid point, dude.”

Ashlyn laughed. “Nope, I was so tired and sore. I just went to bed and passed right out. Besides, Pinoe, I think you had enough fun for all of us,” Ashlyn winked.

“Yeah, we saw you getting all heated with that little hipster chick,” Whitney joked.

“I may or may not have walked her back to her hotel and stayed a while,” Megan said waggling her eyebrows.

“Stop bragging, Pinoe.” Tobin rolled her eyes.

“Hey, it’s not often I walk away with a girl and Ashlyn the Sex Goddess doesn’t. So, let me have my moment!” Megan said defensively.

Ashlyn shook her head and everyone laughed. “Ok, I better go catch up on all my work,” Ashlyn said getting up to clear her dishes. She walked back to her house and took a long shower. It was a sunny but cool fall day, so she threw on her favorite Smith Rugby hoodie and set herself up on a quiet patch of lawn near the college’s boathouse on the pond. She tried to work, but all she could think about was that Ali was supposed to call her soon.

After 45 minutes of distractedly trying to balance chemistry equations, Ashlyn heard her phone ring and saw Ali’s picture light up the screen. She smiled and answered “Hey, Princess!”

“Hey there, Stud! Whatcha up to?” Ali’s voice making Ashlyn smile wider.

“Decided to try and work outside this afternoon since it’s sunny. In like a month, I’m going to be very upset at how cold it is, so I’m milking it while I can,” Ashlyn replied.

“Oh yeah, that’s right, Florida girl. You must hate winter up here!” Ali said, knowing just how much southerners hated snow. “So, how was the game yesterday?”

“Ugh, not good. Actually, hold on and I’ll show you,” Ashlyn took a quick picture of her bruised jaw and hand and sent them in a quick text to Ali. “Ok, I’m back. Sent you a text.”

“Uh oh, that can’t be good if you have to send photographic evidence of the ass beating you got,” Ali said jokingly. “Hang on, you’re text just came through.” Ali came back on the line a few second later, “Oh my god, Ash! That looks painful!”

“It’s mostly just sore now, looks worse than it is. It was such a slaughter though, we lost 28 to zip.” Ashlyn stated glumly.

“Sounds like your ego might be more bruised than the rest of you,” Ali teased her.

“Very funny! How was your game?” Ashlyn asked, knowing that Ali’s good mood probably meant they had won.

“Great! We wiped the pitch with them 31 to 7! The only thing bruised on me is my shoulder from all the tackling I did!” Ali answered cockily.

“No one likes a bragger, Alex,” Ashlyn joked back in a fake serious tone.
Ali laughed and grinned widely, she loved when Ashlyn called her ‘Alex’. “Oh right, because I’m not about hear about your after party conquests?! Who was the lucky girl this time?”

“Eh, I kissed this girl Pam for a few minutes. The one who actually elbowed me in the jaw,” she replied, hearing Ali laugh. “My jaw was killing me, so I ended up ditching her to hang with some of the team for the night and then was so tired I went home and passed out still fully dressed.”

“Wow, you did have a rough day. No win, no girl, and bruises. Poor Baby!” Ali mocked her.

“Yeah, yeah. What about you? No frat boy?” Ashlyn asked curiously.

“Oh hell no! I am so done with the guys on this campus. Nope, I am focused on graduating and just starting with a clean slate somewhere else,” Ali said. Ashlyn felt her heartbeat pick up at Ali’s answer and mentally reminded herself to chill out.

The two of them spent the next hour bantering, talking about their games in more detail before Ali had to go to a study group meeting. They set up a time to talk the next day, both feeling lighter for the rest of the after having talked to each other.

The next month passed much in the same way, Ashlyn and Ali talked on a daily basis. It became routine for Ashlyn to call her grandma and then call Ali. They got close, talking about anything they could think of. Ashlyn would update Ali about Chris. Ali talked more about Kyle and the rest of her family, filling Ashlyn in about her parents’ divorce just before high school. Rugby and school had kept them both pretty busy. Smith had won its last two games over Wesleyan and Bryn Mawr-Haverford; Dartmouth had also won its last two against Middlebury and Navy. So, both teams were having a pretty good season.

The increased interaction between the two hadn’t gone unnoticed by Whitney. Especially when Whitney could see that Ashlyn had not been so interested in hooking up at post game parties lately. She went through the motions, but it was half-assed and after a few minutes she’d have found an excuse to blow off any girl that she had been flirting with.

“This crush on Ali is pretty serious, huh?” Whitney confronted Ashlyn one night.

Ashlyn thought about lying, but this was Whitney. “Actually, yeah. I’m completely falling for her, Whit. I know, I know, I’m playing with fire and I just need to stop. It’s hard though.” Ashlyn admitted.

“I know, I’m not going to say anything other than, be careful. I don’t want to see you hurt. I get it though, Ali seems really great.” Whitney said smiling through her concern. Ashlyn groaned, Ali was perfect.

Whitney wasn’t the only one making observations. HAO had noticed the way Ali spent half her time talking to or talking about Ashlyn with a goofy grin on her face.

“So, tell me about Ashlyn…” HAO said giving Ali an inquisitive look.

“What about Ashlyn? You talk to her too, so what do you mean?” Ali asked confused.

“Are you seriously going to deny that you don’t have a thing for her? You spend half your day talking and texting her, you’ve spent hours on this elaborate surprise for her which, if I’m being honest, isn’t something you just do for a random person. Plus I haven’t seen you this happy in, well, ever. What gives?” HAO said seriously.

Ali let out a sigh “Nothing gives. I just feel really close to her, she’s important to me. I just feel happy
to have her in my life right now is all.”

“All right, I know the ‘don’t push me’ face when I see it. Just saying though, if you want to talk, you know I’m here.” HAO said warmly.

“I know, just nothing to talk about,” Ali said confidently, unknowingly mostly for her own benefit.

A few days later, Ashlyn’s phone buzzed in her pocket as she walked to rugby practice.

**Princess:** Hey, Ash :-) What’s on the agenda for the weekend?

**Stud:** Hi Princess :) I’m doin bday dinner tomorrow night with Whit’s fam since they’re flying in in the morning for fam weekend. Then we have the traditional parent weekend match against Mt. Holyoke on Saturday. You?

**Princess:** Friday night dinner sounds nice for your bday! My parents & Kyle come in tonight for our family weekend, so I’ll be tied up. We don’t have a game this weekend though. Wish I could be there to help you celebrate :-(

**Stud:** That’s ok. You can make it up to me later ;) Hope you have fun with your fam!

**Princess:** Of course ;-) Thanks, so excited to see Kyle! I’ll miss you though, talk Sunday night when everyone leaves?

**Stud:** You bet! I’ll miss you too :)

Ash laid in bed late Thursday night already feeling a bit down, she never liked her birthday. It had always been a disappointment for as long as she could remember. At least she really liked Whitney’s family, so there was that. She heard her phone buzz and saw a text alert.

**Princess:** Happy Birthday, Stud :-) 

Ashlyn looked up to see that it was 12:00am and smiled, her heart pounded at the fact that Ali had stayed up to text her right at midnight. She typed a quick message back before she fell asleep contented.

**Stud:** Thanks, Alex :) You’re the best!

“Happy Birthday!!!!” Whitney yelled, waking Ashlyn up early and plopping a gift box on her chest.

“Thanks!” Ashlyn said sleepily, but already tearing into the gift. She loved opening presents. Inside was a navy blue Nike snapback with a polka dot pattern. Ashlyn held it out and admired it.

“Thanks, Whit! This is going to look sharp, I love it!” Ashlyn said excitedly, hugging Whitney tight.

Whitney and Ashlyn then got ready to go pick up her parents at the airport. Whitney normally went on her own, but her grandmother was coming this year. Her flight came in shortly after Whitney’s parents got there and there wasn’t enough room in Whitney’s small hatchback for all three of them plus their luggage. So, she had asked Ashlyn to come with her and bring her Jeep so they’d have two cars and plenty of space for everyone. Ashlyn loved Whitney’s grandmother and had agreed to drive her back to campus in her Jeep.

They parked their cars in the airport parking lot, and waited for Whitney’s parents to arrive. About 30 minutes later, Whitney and Ashlyn were both wrapped up in hugs from Whitney’s parents, all of
them headed to baggage claim together to wait for the luggage and kill time before Whitney’s grandmother arrived.

The luggage had finally came out after about 20 minutes and they found Whitney’s parents’ bags. “Should we head back upstairs to the terminal? You’re grandmother gets here soon, right?” Ashlyn asked Whitney.

“So, actually, Ash. Turns out my grandmother isn’t coming,” Whitney said seriously.


“Everything’s fine, she decided not to come this year. But, there’s a couple people over there who look like they could use a ride home.” Whitney pointed over to the luggage carousel besides them with a smile.

“Huh?” Ashlyn said following Whitney’s finger. Standing there were her grandma and Chris smiling and waving.

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide, her mouth dropped open. She almost passed out she was so excited. “Oh my god!” she yelled loudly and ran to her grandma and brother, almost knocking them over as she hugged them.

“What? How? Is this real?” She could barely form words as she hugged them tightly.

“Happy Birthday!” Chris and her grandma said as they held onto her.

Whitney stood back with her smiling parents, taking pictures on her phone to capture the moment and managing to get the three of them to actually pose for a couple. Ashlyn finally let go of Chris and her grandma long enough to go over to Whitney and hug her. “Whit, oh my god, thank you!” she said, knowing that words could not convey how grateful she was.

“Don’t thank me, Ash. Seriously, I was just the facilitator. Ali planned this whole thing, she took care of the flights, hotel, logistics, everything.” Whitney said, loving how happy her best friend was right now.

“Wow,” Ashlyn whispered, completely floored. “I don’t even know what to say or how to thank her.”

“Why don’t you start by sending her one of these pictures I took, I just sent them to your phone.” Whitney smiled.

Ali’s phone buzzed while she was having a late breakfast with Kyle, they were going to meet up with their parents in couple of hours. She opened it to find a text picture of Ashlyn gripping her brother and grandma tightly with each of her arms, the three of them with massive smiles on their faces. Ali’s heart skipped a beat, Ashlyn looked so happy.

_Stud: Alex, I don’t know what to say. I don’t even have words for this. Thank you is so inadequate. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you :) :) :) :) :)_

_Princess: Happy Birthday, Ashlyn! Now go have fun with them! We’ll talk Sunday :-) _
Chapter Notes

Thanks for all of your great comments so far! Ali is slowly starting to figure some things out, but it's a process.

Kyle watched Ali beam as she looked at her phone while they ate breakfast. “What are you looking at?” he said trying to grab her phone and be nosy.

Ali held up the picture of Ashlyn and her family that she had just received. “That’s Ashlyn, obviously. That’s her grandma and her brother.”

“Ok, and the back story is...” Kyle said encouraging Ali to go on, looking at the big emotional smiles everyone in the photo had on their faces.

“So, Ashlyn comes from a kind of poor background. Her grandma and brother have never visited her at college before because they can’t afford it. She actually drives from Massachusetts to Florida and back during college breaks to save money on travel. Anyway, it’s her birthday, it’s family weekend. I...I um, well, with her brother finally being out of rehab, I surprised her by flying them in to see her and taking care of all the arrangements and stuff.” Ali told Kyle.

“Allleeex!!!” Kyle squealed. “That is like the sweetest thing I have ever heard! Like if someone did that for me, I’d marry them so they never got away!” Kyle sighed and continued “So, level with me. What exactly is going on with you and her?”

Ali knew this was coming. If anyone was going to understand though, it was Kyle. “You know, I really just don’t know. We’re really close, but I feel like I still have a lot to learn about her. She means a lot to me and I just want to be around her. I don’t know what that all means, but I’m not sure it matters right now. I’m happy that she and I are friends and I’m enjoying it.” Ali admitted, being as honest with herself and Kyle as she had let herself be up to this point.

“I get that,” said Kyle empathetically, eyeing Ali carefully. “Let me just say a couple of things, and you can just think about them, ok?” Ali nodded and Kyle continued. “If I’m being honest, Alex, I’ve been wondering for quite some time if you just aren’t letting yourself be open to all your options. Watching you date these loser guys, it’s almost like you’re purposely picking guys beneath you so that it will fail. The lack of intimacy with them, I mean, there hasn’t been even one guy that you’ve seemed into. You’re beautiful and smart, you could have anyone and it’s mind blowing that you haven’t connected with anyone yet. It’s always seemed to me like you’ve just been going through the motions, fulfilling expectations, and not doing anything for yourself. Or even thinking about what it is that YOU might actually want. I’m not trying to push you in any direction here, I just think you should let yourself be more open. See the people in front of you for who they are as people and nothing else; forget gender, race, looks, all of it. Focus on what’s important to you and just you. Does that make sense?”

Ali thought about what he said for a minute before replying “Hmmm, HAO kind of implied the same thing you just said the other night. Lately I’ve been feeling like I’m just going down a path that’s been laid out for me. Maybe it’s time to get off the path for a while and forge my own, I guess I owe myself that. Like I kind of always thought I’d end up meeting a great guy in college and eventually
marry him, so I think I was trying to force that for a while. I just realized after the whole Brent thing that the last thing I want is to be married to a pretentious Dartmouth guy. So, I’ve decided I’m done with dating on this campus. Anyway, I’m trying harder to act on what I actually want.”

“I just want to see you happy, Alex.” Kyle said warmly.

“I know,” Ali replied smiling at him.

“So, since we’re being honest here, you totally think Ashlyn is hot, right? I mean, even I think she’s hot and I’m not into the ladies!” Kyle said, going right back to his normal self.

Ali rolled her eyes. “Ok, yes, she’s really attractive, I can definitely admit that. I have a serious fondness for the tattoos. Happy now?”

“Eeeek, I knew it!” Kyle screeched.

“Ok drama queen, I also think Syd’s tattoos are hot, so calm down! Come on, we have to get ready to meet mom and dad!” Ali said, dragging him out of the diner they were in and heading back towards campus.

Ashlyn truly had the best birthday ever and one of the best weekends of her life. She spent hours showing her grandma and Chris all around the campus and the town. They went to her rugby game where she played one of her best games with Smith beating Mt. Holyoke 32 to 10. Having her grandma and Chris be able to see her in this place, see where she was happy and be able to share it with them, it meant everything to her. On top of that, Ali had set her grandma and Chris up in the nicest hotel in town along with most of the other Smith parents. It was one of the first times that they had all felt like they were just like everyone else around them, no one was looking down on them or judging. The trip had been refreshing for all of them.

Chris had spent most of the visit prodding Ashlyn about Ali. Ashlyn gave in a little bit, admitting she was crushing pretty hard, but not giving anything away about the exact depth of those feelings. She knew what she felt inside and figured that if there was ever a time and place for those feelings to come out, they would. And if not, she’d still give Ali her whole heart and then some in friendship. Luckily, Chris was appeased with her crush admission and didn’t dig much deeper.

Sunday morning came too fast and Ashlyn drove her grandma and Chris back to airport. They talked excitedly about their Thanksgiving plans and hugged each other tightly. Ashlyn was a little sad to see them go, but knowing that the wait to see them again was only a few weeks made it feel not so bad. After seeing them off, she headed back to Smith to grab a quick shower and get dressed. She put on a pair of fitted black jeans, a light gray button up shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and a pair of Doc Martin boots. She put on a light layer of makeup and let her hair hang naturally over her shoulders and down her back. She jumped in her Jeep and drove with only one destination in mind. There was no way she was going to say thank you to Ali over the phone.

Ashlyn reached the Dartmouth campus just before 3:00pm. She had texted HAO that morning to see if she knew when Ali was dropping her family off at the airport. HAO had replied saying that they had a 2:00pm flight, so Ashlyn figured she could make it to Dartmouth by the time Ali got back. She pulled up near Ali’s dorm building and decided to wait there until about 3:30pm to see if she could catch Ali. If not, she’d just text her to see where she was. Fifteen minutes had passed when Ashlyn caught a glimpse of Ali walking towards the dorm. She got out of her Jeep and leaned against it, watching Ali get closer across the street. She was wearing a pair of black leggings and a cream colored blouse with her hair down. She always looks so good, Ashlyn thought as she let herself stare at Ali before snapping out of it when Ali got directly across from her. “Alex!” she called out loudly.
Ali’s head whipped around to see Ashlyn leaning against a Jeep, looking dapper in tight jeans and a button down shirt. Ali’s face broke out into a big smile as she hurried over to Ashlyn whose face was also lit up with a huge grin.

“Ash! What are you doing here?” Ali yelled excitedly. Ashlyn threw her arms around Ali and hugged her tightly.

“There was absolutely no way in hell I wasn’t going to thank you in person for this weekend!” Ashlyn continued to hold Ali and Ali relaxed into the hug. “Alex, that was the best birthday I’ve ever had and one of the greatest weekends of my life, it meant so much to me. I don’t know how to thank you.” A single tear escaped Ashlyn’s eye and rolled down her face.

“Hey,” Ali said, pulling herself back a bit to look at Ashlyn. She wiped the tear off Ashlyn’s face with her thumb, “The smiles on all your faces in that picture you sent, that’s all the thanks I ever need, ok?”

Ashlyn pulled her back into the hug for a few more seconds and Ali felt Ashlyn nod, giving Ali one last squeeze before she let go.

“Any chance you’re hungry?” Ashlyn asked smiling.

“Starved actually! I only had brunch late morning with my family and haven’t eaten since,” Ali replied.

“Perfect! I can take you out for an early dinner then. What’s your favorite off campus place to eat, we can go there?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Oh, I know! We can go to Simon Pearce. It’s this neat hand blown glass shop that has a restaurant attached that overlooks a cute waterfall. How does that sound?” Ali asked.

“That sounds excellent. Do you need to grab anything from inside or are you good to go?” Ashlyn asked pointing at Ali’s dorm building.

“Nope, I’m ready to go!” Ali answered gleefully.

“Oh, then off we go,” Ashlyn said sticking her thumb out towards her Jeep and going around to the passenger’s side to open the door for Ali.

Ali took in the all black Jeep Wrangler. “Nice ride, Stud! So chivalrous of you too,” she commented as she climbed into Jeep once Ashlyn opened the door for her.

“Thanks, I named him King Arthur.” Ashlyn chuckled and started to drive.

“Hmmm, I never thought of naming my car.” Ali said a bit ruefully. “Maybe I should!”

“I can only imagine what you would name your car. Probably Barbie!” Ashlyn laughed hard, cracking herself up.

“I would not!” Ali yelled in defense.

“Uh huh.” Ashlyn teased.

The two continued to banter, arriving at the restaurant 15 minutes later. The restaurant was quiet since dinner service was just getting underway, so they got a nice corner table overlooking the waterfall that Ali had talked about. The two of them looked over the menu. “What’s good here?”
“The roasted beef tenderloin and the pork chops are amazing. If you’re more into seafood, the salmon is the way to go,” Ali said confidently.

“Alright beef it is!” Ashlyn made a quick decision. Ali decided on the pork chops. The waitress took their order and the two looked over at the waterfall for a minute before Ali broke the silence.

“So, tell me all about your weekend!” Ali squeaked.

“It was absolutely incredible! I seriously tired my grandma out, you have no idea!” Ashlyn said with a level of excitement that Ali had never seen before. Ashlyn proceeded to give Ali every last detail about her family weekend with Ali listening intently and smiling. Ali then recounted her weekend with her own family. The two of them spent dinner completely wrapped up in each other, oblivious to everything around them, only pausing to acknowledge their waitress.

When the bill came Ali tried to reach for it and Ashlyn snatched it up saying “Don’t you even think about it after what you already did this weekend. This is my treat.” Ali thought about protesting, but she knew Ashlyn wouldn’t let her win, so she just smiled and nodded.

As dinner wrapped up Ashlyn figured it was time to get Ali back to campus and start the drive home to Smith even though she didn’t want to leave. They pulled up to Ali’s dorm and Ashlyn got out to open her door for her. Ali thought this was so cute, and yet, so typical Ashlyn.

“Thanks for dinner, Ash. It was so sweet for you to come all the way up here today,” Ali said as she grabbed Ashlyn’s forearm and began running her thumb over her tattoos. Ashlyn’s arm was tingling where Ali was touching it.

“No, Alex. Thank YOU. No one has ever done anything like that for me before. I just needed to come up here and tell you in person how wonderful this weekend was. I can’t thank you enough, seriously.” Ashlyn said warmly. Ali blushed a bit.

“Oh! Which reminds me, my grandma and Chris gave me a couple thank you gifts to give you!” Ashlyn said, and went over to the Jeep pulling two medium sized gift boxes out of the back seat. “This one is from grandma,” Ashlyn handed Ali the first box.

Ali opened the box to find a beautiful gray scarf with an embroidered AK in white on it. “This is beautiful, where is it from?” Ali said genuinely, looking over the scarf.

“Oh, actually my grandma makes those herself. She literally makes hundreds of them a year, it keeps her busy.” Ashlyn replied smiling.

“I’m so impressed, she could totally sell these!” Ali said, still surprised that the scarf was handmade.

“You’d think,” Ashlyn said, “but there isn’t much use for them in Florida, so she just donates them all to shelters in colder parts of the country.”

“What an amazing woman,” Ali said smiling. “I can’t wait to wear it!” Ashlyn nodded her head in agreement.

“And this one is from Chris,” Ashlyn handed the other box to Ali. “He said to tell you that it’s for you to wear when you’re with me, whatever that means.” Ashlyn said looking puzzled and a bit nervous.

Ali opened the box to find a black t-shirt with white writing on the front that read ‘I’m With Stupid’
and an arrow pointing sideways. They both laughed hard for a few minutes.

“Typical Chris!” Ashlyn said still laughing and added “Can you tell he just got a job at a novelty t-shirt shop?”

“These are great and so nice of them. Please thank them for me!” Ali said sweetly, touched by the kindness of Ashlyn’s family.

They talked for a few more minutes, both dragging their feet about saying goodbye. Ashlyn started to talk about how they would see in each other in two weeks when Smith hosted Dartmouth for the last game of the season. Suddenly she had an idea.

“Wait, do you have classes on Fridays?” Ashlyn asked Ali with excitement in her eyes.

“No, why?” Ali replied.

“When is your last class on Thursday over?” Ashlyn continued to question Ali.

“12:30pm, why?” Ali answered trying to figure out why Ashlyn was asking about her classes.

“I think I have a great idea!” Ashlyn said with a huge dimpled grin. “Why don’t you drive down to Smith after your Thursday class before our game weekend in a couple of weeks? You can stay with me Thursday and Friday night, and I’m sure we can also just room together after our match that Saturday too. That Thursday night is Celebration at Smith, it’s my absolute favorite Smith event and it would be so fun for you to be there!”


“Hmmm, well it’s basically a half vigil/half rally that takes place in the quad annually. It’s an event that was created after some homophobic incidents happened on campus many years ago. Kind of like Smith’s way of saying we don’t tolerate ignorance and hate. Anyway, just about everyone on campus goes and each quad house performs a skit or dance routine and all the acapella groups perform. It takes place on the Wilson House steps, where I live. It’s hard to describe, but trust me, it’s amazing!” Ashlyn rambled on animatedly.

“That sounds like a lot of fun, let me see if I can get another person on the team to drive their car on that Saturday to make up for the lack of mine if I was to come down early,” Ali said thinking about who she could ask.

“I totally hope you can come! Our house performs first to open the event, and my acapella group is scheduled to perform right after that, so I’d be done pretty early on with my duties and could watch the rest with you!” Ashlyn added.

“WOAH WOAH WOAH! Hold up just a minute there, Ashlyn Harris! Did you just say that you’re in an acapella group?!” Ali exclaimed with her eyes bugging out of her head. “How the hell did I not know this? I can’t believe you didn’t tell me!”

“Oh, sorry. Yeah, I’m part of the Smith Vibes, one of several groups on campus. I didn’t realize I hadn’t mentioned it yet! I mean practice with them definitely takes up a chunk of my time, so I figured I must have talked about it in passing, but I guess not!” Ashlyn shrugged. “We mostly host one jam session per semester and then perform at campus events or get hired for campus parties, nothing major.”

“I had no idea that you could sing!” Ali said still bewildered.
“Well, I mean, I can hold a tune and harmonize, but I’m not a great singer. I’m actually just good at beat boxing really. So, I make most of the percussion sounds.” Ashlyn said matter of factly.

“I have to hear this! Come on! Please?” Ali begged Ashlyn.

“Ok, ok,” Ashlyn said shyly, knowing she could never say no to Ali. She spent the next minute beat boxing, switching into various beats and rhythms.

Ali just stood there with her hands over her mouth in awe. “That was so good, Ash! Holy crap! I’m so impressed!”

“Thanks.” Ashlyn replied, smiling at Ali’s amazement at her beat boxing.

“Ok, so after that… forget what I said before about checking to see if someone else could drive. I will so totally find someone even if I have to pay them! I am not missing this Celebration event for anything! I’m there!” Ali said loudly.

“Ah, Awesome! I can’t wait!” Ashlyn beamed. “We’ll figure out details as it gets closer!”

“Definitely! I guess you better get on the road, Stud,” Ali said a little sadly.

“Yeah, it’s time.” Ashlyn pulled Ali into another hug, resting her head on Ali’s and letting herself take a minute to inhale the scent of Ali’s shampoo. “Thanks again, for everything. You’re best, I mean it.”

Ali buried her head into Ashlyn’s shoulder, smiling and feeling warmth spread over her. “You’re welcome. I’d do it a hundred times over again. Thanks for dinner,” she said squeezing Ashlyn tighter.

“Make sure you text me when you get in so I know you got home ok.” Ali said as they pulled apart.

“I promise!” Ashlyn said getting in her Jeep. She rolled down the window. “Good night, Alex.”

“Good night, Ash!” Ali smiled and waved as Ashlyn pulled away, she already couldn’t wait for her trip to Smith in a couple weeks.
Celebration

Chapter Notes

This is a really really long chapter since I wanted to do this justice. So, away we go!

The event described in this chapter is a real rain or shine event that occurs on the Smith College campus, usually on the first Thursday of November. It is described in the historical archives as follows:

The Celebration of Sisterhood began in 1991 as a Quad Vigil in order for the Smith campus and Pioneer Valley community to celebrate lesbian and bisexual connections and culture. The Celebration of Sisterhood was eventually shortened to Celebration, in order for the event to be more inclusive of trans-identified persons. Celebration was prompted to begin after a series of homophobic incidents on campus, and turned into an annual event. Held on the Wilson House Steps, Celebration generally begins with a candlelight vigil, followed by various performances by Smith sports teams, quad houses, and a cappella groups.

Celebration Motto:
Love is not controlled by gender.
It is larger than prejudice.
It is stronger than indifference.
For the love of our community,
And for the love of ourselves,
We Celebrate!
Those who find joy and beauty,
In loving without boundaries.

It’s quite an event that is very well attended by all of campus and the surrounding community; I’ve done my best to describe some of it here. In case you’re wondering what some of these traditionally racy performances look like, I’ve pasted some links below. Thank you to Morrow House and Scales House for posting these fine examples of their past house performances on youtube for the public’s enjoyment :) 

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXjLD1IGEus
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKgybVoeFIk
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DLxg7fUusI

The next two weeks seemed to drag on for both Ashlyn and Ali, both of them excited for Ali’s visit. Both of them had been working hard as mid-semester was upon them and practicing for their upcoming rugby match against each other. It was the last match of the season and neither wanted to lose. Ashlyn had the additional time commitments of practice for acapella and her house’s performance ahead of Celebration. She and Ali still caught up with each other on the phone every night, but it had been hard to have long conversations.

Ashlyn had filled Whitney in on Ali coming to visit, making sure that she was okay with Ali staying in their room for a couple nights.
Whitney laughed, saying “Of course I don’t mind,” before adding “I can’t believe you’re bringing her to Celebration, she’s going to think we’re all crazy, if she doesn’t already! So much for not perpetuating the women’s college stereotype of girl-on-girl action!”

Ashlyn just shrugged with a smile.

Ashlyn loved Celebration, it was her absolute favorite Smith event even though this would only be her second one. The whole thing was raw and real, and it brought out so many emotions. At the end of Celebration her first year, she felt like her eyes had been opened. She had felt an overwhelming sense of camaraderie and community coupled with pride and a sense of purpose. At the same time, there were some solemn elements as a reminder of the constant uphill battle for equality, acceptance, and openness. The event took so many topics that people often thought were embarrassing or vulgar, and laid them out unabashedly for all to see. There was no being quiet, no being proper, and no being judgmental at Celebration. Ashlyn couldn’t wait to share it with Ali, the girl had no idea what she was in for.

Celebration day had finally arrived and Ashlyn was pacing around like an excited puppy all morning. She had gone to breakfast and couldn’t contain herself, making sure that everyone knew Ali was coming even though she had already told them a million times.

“Oh, is Ali coming today?” Megan said sarcastically, “I had no idea!”

“Wait, Ali is coming?” Abby joined in on teasing Ashlyn, “You really should have told us, Ash!”

Ashlyn rolled her eyes at them.

“Seriously dude, try being more subtle,” Tobin suggested.

“Yeah, Ash, your gay is showing!” Alex joked.

“Pretty sure her gay was already showing,” Sarah chimed in, “but, now it’s coming out of her ears in rainbow beams!”

“Alright, go easy on her, ladies.” Whitney said protectively.

“Am I that obvious?” Ashlyn asked.

“YEP!” the whole table said in unison. Ashlyn slapped herself on the forehead, making a mental note to get herself under control before Ali got there.

After her early morning class, Ashlyn spent the next few hours frantically trying to get ahead on her assignments so she could be completely free while Ali was there.

Ali wasn’t much better, she was too excited to pay any attention in her German class that morning. Luckily, she knew the course material well enough that she didn’t need to. She had already packed all her stuff in her car that morning so she could leave directly from class.

Just before 3:00pm, Ashlyn’s phone buzzed. She saw Ali’s picture on the screen and answered it smiling. “Hey Princess, where are you?”

“Hi! I’m am just about to get to campus. Where should I park and meet you?” Ali asked.

“Why don’t you drive into the quad and pull up in front of Wilson. I’ll come down and show you where to park for the weekend so you don’t get a ticket.” Ashlyn replied, already pulling on a hoodie over her t-shirt and making her way out.
“Great! See you in a minute!” Ali said and hung up.

Ashlyn was outside for about two minutes when a shiny white BMW pulled up in front of Wilson House, Ali in the driver’s seat waving at her.

Ashlyn opened the passenger’s side and got in saying “Holy crap! This is a sweet car! I didn’t know you drove a beemer!”

Ali felt a little embarrassed, she wasn’t one to flaunt her wealth. “Uh, yeah, my mom kinda loves BMWs and thinks that they are the best cars ever. So, she made sure that we all had one. She still makes sure that’s what my dad is driving even though they’re divorced, she’s obsessed,” Ali said laughing.

“I love this car!” Ashlyn exclaimed. “Shhh, don’t tell King Arthur!”

“Well, why don’t we switch and you can drive it to wherever we are parking it,” Ali offered.

“I can’t say no to that!” Ashlyn said, getting out of the car quickly and switching places with Ali. “I’m so excited you’re here! This is going to be fun!” Ashlyn added as she began driving. Ali reached over and quickly squeezed Ashlyn’s arm and gave her a huge smile to show her excitement.

They parked the car and Ali popped open the trunk which was pretty full with three travel bags inside.

“I see you packed for the apocalypse,” Ashlyn teased her.

Ali rolled her eyes. “One of those is my rugby stuff and that can stay in the car until Saturday. I just need these two” Ali said, pointing at a medium sized duffel bag and a back pack. She reached over to grab them when Ashlyn stopped her.

“Nope, I’ve got them! You just carry you purse, Princess,” Ashlyn said chuckling.

“You sure?” Ali asked, feeling bad that Ashlyn was going to carry her stuff.

“Yes! We don’t have rugby practice today anyway because of Celebration, so I could use the workout,” Ashlyn reasoned. They began to walk back to Wilson House as Ashlyn laid out the game plan. “So, Celebration starts at 7:30pm. Dinner is at 5:00pm, Thursday is candlelight dinner so I thought we’d eat here tonight and then maybe explore downtown tomorrow. Since we have like less than two hours to kill before dinner, I figured we could drop your stuff in my room and I could show you around Wilson and the rest of the quad a bit until then. How does that sound?”

“That sounds great!” Ali said enthusiastically. She had been to Smith before for other rugby matches against them over the years, but she hadn’t seen much of the campus outside of the pitch and the rooms she stayed in. “What’s candlelight dinner?”

“Pretty much what it sounds like. Normally we have the normal buffet style setup for dinner, but every Thursday night they put out nice white tablecloths and taper candles on all the tables, and we eat family style. The food tends to be better too.” Ashlyn answered.

“Oh, that sounds nice,” Ali said.

They arrived at Wilson and made their way to Ashlyn’s room on the fourth floor. On the door was a whiteboard with messages scrawled all over it. Like all the other doors in the hallway, there was a name sign for both Ashlyn and Whitney with their graduating class year next to their name. The rest of the door was covered in pictures of Ashlyn and Whitney in all sorts of goofy poses and outfits. Ali
looked them over and laughed. She followed Ashlyn into the room. The room was quite large with wooden floors and off-white walls. Ashlyn and Whitney both had futons as beds and each had their own desk, dresser, and bookshelf. There was a large window in the center of the far wall and Ali went over to look out. She realized as she did that they were right in the middle of the house, in the clock tower column. A rainbow flag was hung as a curtain for the window.

“That’s up for Celebration tonight,” Ashlyn said, seeing that Ali had taken notice of the curtain. “Since we’re a center front facing room, we hang up rainbow flags and leave the lights on tonight so they kind of glow down the clock tower during the event. The other non-center front facing rooms will have colored bulbs in them to light those rooms in rainbow colors tonight.” She stood beside Ali next to the window and pointed down below them. “The stage for the event is the Wilson House front steps and everyone gathers on the quad grass to watch.”

“How cool!” Ali said, as she walked around the rest of the room. The room was very organized and neat. Ali could tell which side was Whitney’s and which side was Ashlyn’s based on the pictures on the wall. Ashlyn had up several pictures of her with her grandma and Chris. There was also two pictures of Ashlyn with who Ali figured must be Ashlyn’s dad (he had the same one-sided dimpled smile that Ashlyn did). Ashlyn looked much younger in those two pictures. The rest of the pictures were of friends (many of which Ali recognized from the Smith rugby team). Ashlyn also had pictures up of sharks, beaches, and surfers. She noted that there was no pictures of Ashlyn’s mother from what she could tell. She smiled at Ashlyn who was watching her roam around, “This is such a great room!”

“Thanks!” Ashlyn said, and then pointed to the futon where she had put down Ali’s stuff. “So, we can either share my bed or I can borrow Megan’s air mattress, totally up to you.” Ashlyn said neutrally, even though she knew what she wanted the answer to be.

“I’m good with sharing,” Ali said quickly.

Ashlyn grinned like an idiot until she realized and tried to recover “So, let me show you around the rest of the house and the quad before dinner.”

Ashlyn showed Ali the house and all around the quad and upper part of campus until it was time for dinner. They sat down at Ashlyn’s usual table, joining Whitney, Megan, Alex, Tobin, Abby, and Sarah.

“Hey Ali! Glad you’re here!” Whitney said standing up to greet her, the two had become friendly while planning the surprise for Ashlyn.

Ali thought she’d be subject to a lot of teasing over dinner given that Dartmouth and Smith played each other on Saturday, but everyone was actually nice. She enjoyed a Thanksgiving-like turkey dinner while she listened to everyone talk excitedly about Celebration, she and Ashlyn sharing looks with each other every so often. From what she could tell, this Celebration event was going to be very interesting. She spent a little time discussing handbags with Alex while everyone else at the table rolled their eyes, and then dinner was over.

“Time to go get ready!” Ashlyn said animatedly as she led Ali back upstairs to the room, Whitney following behind them.

Ashlyn and Whitney went off to grab showers while Ali plopped herself down on Ashlyn’s futon and replied to a couple of emails. Ashlyn came back into the room first, her hair damp and she was wrapped in just a towel. Ali’s mouth went a bit dry as she watched Ashlyn go over to the dresser to grab her underwear and jeans. Ashlyn smiled at her and then went into her walk-in closet to get dressed. Whitney came back in the meantime, also in a towel, and did the same thing as Ashlyn,
walking into her own closet to get ready.

Ashlyn emerged from her closet in baggy jeans hanging low around her hips with a black belt and the waistband of black Ethika boxers showing. She had on a white button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up. At the moment, her shirt was unbuttoned showing a black sports bra underneath, the edges of her side tattoo just barely peeking out. Ali swallowed hard, trying to not stare at how defined Ashlyn’s abs were, she had to admit that Ashlyn was seriously in shape.

Just then Whitney stepped out into the room. She was wearing nothing but a pair of tight black boy shorts and a tight white v-neck t-shirt with a black push-up bra underneath. Ali looked at the two of them and their outfits with a curious expression on her face.

Ashlyn saw Ali’s face and decided to explain. “Our house does a butch/femme dance routine. Whit’s a femme, I’m a butch,” Ashlyn said flexing her bicep while Whitney posed with her hand under her chin.

Ali laughed at them. “Well, I guess that explains the sort-of-matching-but-also-wildly-different outfits,” she said pointing at them.

Ashlyn buttoned up her shirt and Ali watched her put on a little makeup and put her hair up into a bun. She put on a black Nike snapback and a pair of black, gray, and yellow Van’s skater sneakers to complete the look. She turned to Ali “So, how do I look?”

Ali was a little flustered. She thought Ashlyn looked so adorable and so hot at the same time, it was quite a combination. “You look great, Ash! I can’t wait to see this performance!” Ali squeaked out.

Ashlyn put a black button up shirt, a hoodie, and beanie into a small bag. She turned to Ali, “Would you mind keeping this bag with you while you watch, I need to make a quick change outfit change after the Wilson House performance.”

“Of course!” Ali replied, she had been looking out the window watching microphones and speakers getting setup on the stairs below them.

“It’s about time to head down, so you should put on something warm. We’ll be outside for quite a while and gets pretty cold.” Ashlyn said to Ali.

“I came prepared!” Ali said, pulling a thick gray Nike hoodie on over a long sleeve shirt and putting on some Ugg boots over her black skinny jeans. She had a white beanie hat to complete the look.

“Aw, look at you Princess, all cute and warm!” Ashlyn smiled, looking over Ali’s outfit.

Whitney raised an eyebrow at the two of them and shook her head as she pulled on sweatpants and a hoodie over her skimpy outfit to stay warm until the performance.

The three of them walked downstairs to see most of Wilson House milling around already in the house living area. Most of the girls were dressed like either Ashlyn or Whitney.

Ashlyn took Ali outside and made sure she had a spot right in front of the steps/stage where many people were already gathered. She put her bag by Ali’s feet and then walked over to a box near the steps, grabbing a candle and program which she handed to Ali. “Enjoy the show, I’ll see you in a little while!” Ashlyn said happily, giving Ali a quick hug and then going to join her housemates.

The event started just after 7:30pm, a hush going over the very large crowd that had gathered in the quad as the opening speaker began talking. The history and purpose of Celebration was recounted as well as an affirmation of the college’s commitment to preserving diversity and respect. This was
followed by the lighting of candles and a moment of silence where a pin drop could’ve been heard.

The Wilson House windows were glowing in rainbow colors and the surrounding quad houses also had rainbow flags hanging out of their windows. Ali was already in awe of how beautiful it all was on this crisp November night.

Finally, the emcee took the stage, welcoming everyone to the event and letting them know there was a slew of fun performances ahead of them. “Now, let’s kick things off and welcome Wilson House to the stage!!!!” the emcee yelled and the crowd went so wild screaming that Ali couldn’t believe this was the same crowd that was so quiet and reverent just moments ago.

Ali joined them in yelling as she saw Ashlyn walk up and take her position in the front center of the stage. Ali recognized Megan off to Ashlyn’s right, Tobin off to her left, and Abby was a bit further back in the second row, several other Wilson girls were positioned around them. They were all dressed pretty much the same, only differing in the colors of their snap backs and sneakers. All of them were standing there with a straight face, their arms crossed and looking tough. Then the femme dressed girls came out and the crowd went crazy again. The femmes positioned themselves so that they were leaning against the butches in all kinds of flirty poses; some buried into their necks while others draped a leg around them.

Ali could see Alex paired up with Tobin and Sarah paired up with Abby. Whitney was with someone she didn’t know. She didn’t know the girl with Megan either. Ali recognized that the light-brown haired girl paired up with Ashlyn was Kacey, the rookie scrum half from the rugby team. Kacey was standing a bit in front of Ashlyn with her back pressed against her, reaching her right arm back around Ashlyn’s neck.

Ashlyn found Ali in the front row and gave her a wink and smile. Ali gave her a thumbs up.

A Wilson girl stepped up to the mic and made a statement about Wilson House’s commitment to the mission of Celebration. The statement was serious and uplifting, but also funny and very sexual; Ali wasn’t even sure how it was possible to blend those elements together so well. The crowd screamed loudly in anticipation once the statement was over.

There was a brief silence during which Ali could hear girls around her yelling names. Most of them were yelling for Ashlyn. Ali knew Ashlyn was well known on campus, but she didn’t quite understand just how popular she was until she was sitting there listening to so many of these people screaming around her.

“Yeah, Ashlyn!” “Get it, Ash!” “Ashlyn, you’re so hot!” “Oh my god, I’m so excited for Ashlyn!” “Work it, Ash!” were just a few of the things she heard yelled out. Then the music started with Jeremih’s “Don’t Tell Em” coming over the speakers…

*Rhythm is a dancer, I need a companion*

*Girl I guess that must be you*

Ali watched as the butch and femme girls grinded on each other sexily for a few seconds before the femme girls walked off the stage. The butches then did a choreographed hip-hop style dance routine that looked kind of boyband like. The crowd was screaming loudly. Ali was grinning widely as she watched Ashlyn execute dance moves perfectly and look so smooth. The butches ended their routine
and the music changed to Jay-Z’s “Can I Get A”…

A group of Wilson girls dressed in black hoodies took the stage (including Abby who was now in a black hoodie). They did a short dance and then pulled up their hoods and turned around to reveal the back of their hoodies which read “Seniors 2015”, each hoodie with a single letter/number on it. A loud cheer went through the crowd. The group dispersed and the music changed to Rihanna’s “S&M” …

The femmes took the stage in their skimpy outfits and did their own choreographed sexy hip-hop routine. They made sure to flaunt their chests and shake their asses throughout the routine, causing the crowd to go wild and yell all kinds of vulgar statements. Ali laughed and cheered for Whitney, Alex, and Sarah. The music changed to Janet Jackson’s “If”…

The femmes danced provocatively to the opening beat. Then the butches came back on stage kneeling in front of the femmes as the opening lyrics started. The femmes took the snapbacks off of the butches and put them on themselves. The femmes then began a sexy dance routine where they were dominating the butches. Then came the chorus.

If I was your girl

Oh the things I'll do to you

I'd make you call out my name

I'd ask who it belongs to

During the chorus the femmes stood in front of the butches, turning their backs to the crowd and unbuttoning the butches’ shirts, taking them off and throwing them into the wildly screaming crowd.

Ali’s eyes went wide as she couldn’t take her eyes off Ashlyn dancing up there in just jeans and a black sports bra. Ashlyn’s muscles contracting, her tattoos on full display. Ali knew she was full on staring with her heart rate getting faster by the second. Judging by the number of people screaming Ashlyn’s name, she definitely wasn’t the only one. She watched the butches turn the femmes around in their arms so they were facing the crowd. The butches then reached down pulled off the femmes’ t-shirts, leaving them in just boy shorts and black bras, making the crowd scream even louder.

If I was your woman,

The things I'd do to you

But I'm not, so I can't,
Then I won't

But, if I was your girl

As the performance and the music ended, the femmes grabbed the butches’ faces and pulled them into a full on kiss. Ali watched Kacey kiss Ashlyn hard, her mouth dropped open in surprise, and a pang of jealousy shot through her. The cheering from the crowd was deafening.

Wow, Ali thought to herself, I wasn’t exactly expecting that. She got herself together as the emcee took the stage again. Ashlyn ran over to her still in her state of undress.

“Hey, having fun?” Ashlyn asked quickly as she grabbed the bag by Ali’s feet and pulled out the black button up shirt. She was sweating a little and a bit out of breathe, her eyes shining as she smiled at Ali.

“This is insane!” Ali said with huge smile.

Ashlyn chuckled, saying “I gotta run! Be back soon!” as she headed back towards the stage putting her shirt on.

“Next up, we have an acapella group performing one of their signature songs for you tonight! Please welcome to the Celebration stage, the Vibes!!!” The crowd cheered again.

Ali watched the group take the stage and form a tight semi-circle around the microphone. More people screamed out Ashlyn’s name a few times. Ashlyn was on the outer edge of the left side of the semi-circle, so Ali had a clear view of her.

The group leader gave them the chord and they started the harmony and beat. Ali started laughing when she recognized the song as Ginuwine’s “My Pony”. She could hear Ashlyn’s beat clearly and was so caught up watching her, just astounded by her talent. She’d never been so fascinated with anyone in her life the way she was with Ashlyn. Ali laughed hard when the group wrapped up the final song lines by pretending to ride a pony. She screamed loudly with the crowd when the song was over.

The emcee got to work announcing the next performance and Ashlyn made her way over to Ali, appearing in front of her.

“So, what do you think so far?” Ashlyn asked excitedly.

Ali grabbed the blonde’s face in her hands, yelling “Ash! That was incredible! You were so good! This is so much fun!” She let go of Ashlyn’s face and pulled her into a quick hug.

They broke apart and Ashlyn pulled the hoodie out of her bag and put it on to stay warm. She took her hair out of the bun and let it hang down loosely, pulling a gray beanie onto her head. Scales House had just been announced and they took the stage performing a dance routine just as racy as the one Wilson House put on.

About halfway through the event, Ali felt Ashlyn wrap her arms around her from behind and rest her chin on Ali’s shoulder. They stayed that way for the rest of the event. Ali was beaming. There were all these people screaming for Ashlyn tonight, Ashlyn could be with any one of them, Ali thought to herself. Yet here she was wrapped up in Ashlyn’s arms with the blonde giving her all of her attention. Ali felt warm and all lit up inside.
The event wrapped up with the Smiffenpoofs acapella group performing an original traditional somber and beautiful song called “Testimony”.

The Smithies weren’t kidding when they had told Ali at dinner that she had no idea what she was in for. Besides a whole lot of skin, several boobs being flashed, and many racy dance performances, a few other choice moments of the event included: a skit about a first year Mormon Smithie realizing she was a lesbian and hooking up with half the rugby team; a skit about what the world might be like if homosexuality was the norm, featuring a gay spin off of Sesame Street; and the best, a girl dressed as a talking vagina (her head serving at the clit) who danced around on stage.

As the event ended, the crowd started to disperse. Ashlyn and Ali broke apart, but Ashlyn reached down to grab Ali’s hand so they wouldn’t lose each other.

“So, the non-quad houses setup table stations with all kinds of stuff throughout campus for the next couple of hours. You up for walking around and checking it out?” Ashlyn asked.

“Definitely!” Ali quickly replied.

They made their way out of the quad and the first table they came to had hot mulled cider. They each grabbed a cup and made their way around campus holding hands the whole way.

“Alright, so tell me what you think?” Ashlyn asked with excitement, dying to know what Ali thought of it all.

“That was seriously something! I’m still kind of in shock. It was so much fun and just complete craziness, and yet it was all so beautiful too,” Ali said thoughtfully and continued, “I’m surprised at how many things I’m feeling right now. I feel free and at peace, but I also feel really empowered. Like I want to put on a cape and be a feminist super hero or something!”

Ashlyn laughed and nodded in agreement, understanding completely what Ali was saying. “That’s exactly how I felt the first time I did this last year. Now you know why I love it so much!” Ashlyn said happily.

They paused to watch some girls shaving their heads with clippers at one of the tables.

“You want to shave your head?” Ashlyn jokingly asked Ali.

“Yeah, no thanks!” Ali joked back, turning her attention back to the blonde. “You were so good tonight, Ash! I seriously can’t get enough of the acapella thing! The women on this campus love you, Stud.”

Ashlyn blushed and shyly said “Yeah, I have no idea why.”

“Are you kidding?!” Ali practically yelled. “You’re smart, sweet, funny and on top of all that you’re beautiful with muscles popping out all over and gorgeous tattoos!

Ashlyn heartrate picked up, heat spreading to her face, no one had ever called her beautiful before. She tried to recover before Ali noticed. “Oh, so you’re checking me out now?” she said playfully.

“Well, when you take most of your clothes off in front of a crowd of people, what do you expect?!” Ali joked back.

They both laughed and then walked in silence for a while, enjoying each other’s company.

Ali was in deep thought as they walked back to the house. She was thinking about how she was
walking around holding Ashlyn’s hand and sipping hot cider on a fall night after having such a fun time together. She didn’t know if it was the event that had stirred up her emotions, but she felt transformed inside. She felt like this moment was perfect right now and she could do this forever and just be happy. She thought about the last couple of months and it just all hit her at once, what she felt for Ashlyn was far beyond friendship. She didn’t know exactly what was there, but she was going to open her heart and let herself find out. After all, hadn’t that been what tonight was all about, openness and love.

Ashlyn was relishing in having Ali by her side, walking along peacefully with no need for words between them. She had already decided long before tonight that she was in love with the brunette. She just had to figure out what to do about it.

They reached Wilson House and headed up to the room. Whitney was already settled into bed reading a book and greeted them as they came in. She and Ali talked for a few minutes about Ali’s impressions of Celebration with Ashlyn jumping in every so often. Ashlyn and Ali then got ready for bed. Ashlyn wearing her usual boxer briefs and a cutoff t-shirt and Ali was in a pair of short athletic shorts and tank top.

They settled into Ashlyn’s bed beside each other and pulled the blankets up. “Goodnight Whit, I LOOOOVE YOU!” Ashlyn yelled across the room like she usually did as she turned out the light.

“Ugh, Goodnight!” Whitney yelled back putting her pillow over her head. Ali giggled.

As soon as the light was out, Ali snuggled into Ashlyn burying her head into her shoulder and wrapping an arm around her waist. After a few seconds, she felt Ashlyn wrap her arm around her tightly and smiled to herself. She knew she had probably just surprised the blonde, but she didn’t care. She just wanted to be close to her right now.

“Goodnight, Stud.” Ali whispered in the blonde’s ear.

“Goodnight, Princess.” Ashlyn whispered back with a huge smile on her face.
As we start to move towards something bigger between these two, just remember it's a slow process ;) We'll get there...

Ashlyn awoke to the buzzing of her phone alarm that she had set the night before for 6:45am. She quickly grabbed her phone with her free hand to turn it off before it woke up Ali. She looked down to see Ali still cuddled up and wrapped around her tightly. Ashlyn pulled Ali more tightly into her with the arm she already had around the brunette and just let herself enjoy the moment for a minute. She wished so badly that she didn’t have to get up. Even with bed head and not speck of makeup on, Ali looked absolutely beautiful.

Ashlyn popped her head up to see that Whitney wasn’t in the room, which was pretty typical since Whitney usually got up around 6:00am on weekdays. She rubbed Ali’s back lightly for a minute and then slowly moved out from under Ali’s grip.

Ali shifted and looked up sleepily as Ashlyn got up. Ashlyn lowered herself close to the brunette’s face whispering, “Hey Princess, I have to work in the kitchen this morning until 9:00am. It’s still early, so you can go back to sleep for a while. Feel free to grab a shower and use anything you need in here, I’ll be back in a couple hours and I’ll bring you up some breakfast, ok?”

Ali nodded, too sleepy to talk, and gave Ashlyn a small smile before closing her eyes and getting comfortable again. Ashlyn pulled the covers up over the brunette’s shoulders. She quickly pulled on a pair of sweatpants, some sneakers, and changed into an old t-shirt. She then pulled her hair into a messy bun and headed to the bathroom to brush her teeth. She saw Whitney standing at one of the sinks dressed for the day and already brushing her teeth. Ashlyn grabbed her toothbrush and stood at the sink next to Whitney.

“Morning, Whit!” Ashlyn said cheerily.

Whitney spit out her toothpaste. “Good morning, roomie! You two looked pretty cozy in there,” she said in a lowered voice giving Ashlyn playful smirk.

Ashlyn dropped her head onto Whitney’s shoulder. “Ugh Whit, last night was seriously perfect, like so good.” Ashlyn said dreamily.

“Yeah, well I think Ali had a pretty good night herself,” Whitney said encouragingly. She didn’t want to give Ashlyn false hope, but she’d seen enough to know that something was going on here between these two.

“You think?” Ashlyn questioned.

“Based on how happy she was last night, I’m gonna say that I don’t just think, I know.” Whitney said winking, leaving the bathroom and a grinning Ashlyn behind.

Ashlyn made her way downstairs to the kitchen, threw on an apron and got to work. After two hours of washing dishes and some food prep, Ashlyn fixed a plate of food for Ali and headed back
upstairs. Carmen the housekeeper was coming out of the kitchenette just outside Ashlyn’s room.

“Hey, Ashlyn,” she said to get Ashlyn’s attention. “I really like this one,” Carmen said in a low voice and nodded towards the door to Ashlyn’s room.

Ashlyn smiled. Given all the conversations and friendly banter she’d had with Carmen over the last year, plus the girls Carmen had seen leaving Ashlyn’s room, it was no surprise that Carmen thought Ali was her girlfriend, or hookup, or something. Clearly Carmen and Ali had been talking while she was gone.

“Actually, Carm, that’s my good friend Ali. She goes to Dartmouth.” Ashlyn corrected her, and then leaned in to whisper “Between you and me though, I really like this one too.”

“Well, then don’t screw it up!” Carmen said winking at her and getting back to work.

Ashlyn chuckled and headed into her room to find Ali showered and dressed, sitting at her desk surfing the internet. Ali turned around and gave the blonde a big smile.

“Good morning, Princess! Brought you breakfast!” Ashlyn said cheerily, setting a plate down on the desk near Ali that contained scrambled eggs, bacon, home fries, and toast. She leaned down wrapping her arms around Ali’s shoulders from behind, “Sorry I had to leave you for a bit this morning, but work study duty calls.”

Ali leaned back into Ashlyn a bit. “Good morning to you! I missed you. This looks really good by the way, thanks!” Ali said pointing to the plate of food.

“Well, eat up!” Ashlyn replied. “Do you mind if I go grab a shower while you eat? Then we can head out and have some fun together.”

“Not at all, go shower.” Ali replied digging into her food.

Once again, Ashlyn came back wrapped in just a towel. Once again, Ali tried hard not to stare as the blonde got ready.

Ashlyn dressed in fitted charcoal colored cargo pants and a white collared shirt which she threw a navy v-neck sweater over. She put on some brown boots, a little makeup, and pulled her hair into a messy bun. Ali looked her over, being ever more impressed with how stylish Ashlyn always looked.


“Thanks. You look amazing yourself.” Ashlyn replied sweetly, taking in Ali’s outfit of black leggings, a light pink sweater and a pair of white Keds sneakers, her hair down. “So, how about we head into town for a while?” She asked a smiling Ali.


The minute they got outside and started walking towards town, Ashlyn felt Ali’s hand brush hers and grabbed it, their fingers entwining. Ali smiled, the hand holding felt so natural between them.

Ali loved to shop, so there was plenty for Ashlyn to entertain her with in downtown Northampton. Ashlyn took her into all the artisan shops and galleries. Ali purchased an inexpensive locally made necklace in one of them. They spent almost an hour in a store called Faces that was sort of like a clothing, interior decoration, and novelty joke shop all in one. They tried on a bunch of weird sunglasses and took lots of selfies together.
Ashlyn looked at her watch and saw that it was already 12:30pm. “Are you hungry?” she asked Ali.

“Yes! Lunch time?” Ali asked back.

“Sound like a good idea! I’m going to suggest we either get slices of pizza, sandwiches at one of the cafés, or some quick service Mexican. Those are usually the best options for a quick lunch.” Ashlyn stated.

“Hmmmm, I’m thinking sandwiches at a café and maybe some coffee to follow that up,” Ali decided.

“Excellent idea,” Ashlyn agreed, leading Ali towards the Woodstar café just off the main street of downtown.

They ordered sandwiches and some waters and picked out a table. Ashlyn pulled out Ali’s chair for her, the brunette smiling and thinking how sweet it was that Ashlyn was always doing little things like that for her. Over lunch they talked a bit more about the prior night’s events, Ali still not over Ashlyn’s acapella skills. Ashlyn spent some time explaining the process of trying out for the acapella groups on campus and how they came to sing to you at your dorm to inform you that you made it into the group. They ordered a couple of coffees to go and drank them as they explored more of downtown.

As it approached 3:00pm, Ashlyn suggested they go back to the dorm to go to tea.

“Tea?” Ali asked curiously.

“Yep, it’s a Smith thing. Every Friday afternoon, the kitchen staff serves tea, cookies, fruit, and snacks in every house living room across campus. People just kind of hang out and chat.” Ashlyn filled her in.

“Wow, you guys have some serious traditions around here. I had no idea Smith did all this stuff.” Ali said.

Ashlyn laughed, “You learn A LOT here your first year!” They made their way back to the house hand-in-hand, only letting go once they approached the living room. Plenty of people were hanging around eating and chatting just like Ashlyn had said.

Megan was already in there with Abby and Sarah stuffing cookies in her mouth. “Hey there ladies!” she called out to them, her mouth filled with cookie.

Ali waved, while Ashlyn cringed and said “Gross, Pinoe!” They settled on the couch next to each other across from the other three ruggers.

Whitney joined them a few minutes later, plopping down next to Ali on the couch and grabbing some fruit. “What’d you guys do today?” she asked.

“Ashlyn showed me downtown, there are so many fun shops.” Ali replied.

“Did she take you to Faces?” Sarah asked.

“Yes! That might have been my favorite!” Ali said.

“Yo!” they heard behind them as Tobin walked in with Alex right behind her, both choosing to grab a spot on the floor near the couch.

Shortly after, Tobin was recounting a funny story from her class this morning. Alex seemed to be
clinging to Tobin and flirting with her all through tea. Ali wondered if maybe she had missed something because they didn’t seem that way at dinner last night.

After tea, Ashlyn asked Ali if she wanted to take a drive to check out what was left of the fall scenery. Ali loved the idea and they piled into Ashlyn’s Jeep, making their way down some rural roads, many with small rivers along the way.

“So, what is the deal with Alex and Tobin?” Ali questioned.

“Yeah, that.” Ashlyn started. “Tobs has pretty much had a massive crush on Alex since like day one. Alex has a pretty serious boyfriend back home, but she barely sees him. They are close, they hang on each other a lot, but that’s pretty much about it. A lot of us wonder if something will ever come of it. Although…” Ashlyn raised an eyebrow and continued, “Last night they got paired up together for the Wilson House performance and kissed, I’m guessing for the first time ever. They look pretty flirty today, so who knows what happened there.”

“Hmmm. That sounds a lot like Kelley and Hope, except they actually sleep together,” Ali said giggling. Ashlyn laughed, wondering just a little bit how close to an Alex/Tobin situation her and Ali were in themselves.

They drove around for a couple hours, stopping in random scenic spots to take pictures together and of each other. They had driven up Sugarloaf Mountain and were checking out the view from the tower up there. The temperature had dropped quite a bit and Ali was feeling a little cold. Ashlyn watched Ali dig into her purse and pull out a scarf to put around her neck. She realized it was the scarf her grandma had made for Ali and just about melted. She put her arm around the brunette’s shoulders, pulling her in close and giving her a dimpled grin. “Nice scarf.”

“Thanks!” Ali said smiling and putting her arm around Ashlyn’s waist to get closer.

Ashlyn’s phone buzzed with a text.

Pinoe: Hey Harris, the ladies want to go over to Packard’s for dinner and pool tonight around 7pm. You and Ali in?

Ashlyn showed the text to Ali and explained that Packard’s was a local pub with good food and pool in the upstairs area. Ali though it would be fun and wanted to go.

Ash: We’re totally in!

After driving around a little longer, the two of them arrived at Packard’s just after 7:00pm to see that the group was already there sitting at a large table. Ashlyn and Ali sat down side by side in the two empty chairs at the table.

“Where’d you guys go after tea?” Alex asked Ali.

“We just took a drive around so Ash could show me the rest of the area. You guys have just as nice of scenery down here as we do near Dartmouth,” Ali said warmly.

Alex nodded her head “It’s a big change from where I grew up in California, but I really like it here.”

“So, Ali, I just have to know…” Megan interrupted them from across the table, “Do you actually think you’re gonna win tomorrow or do you realize that’s it just a pipe dream?”

Ali smiled and shook her head, the teasing had officially begun. “Pretty sure we have a very lopsided winning record against you guys, just sayin.”
Megan pondered how to reply, looking to Abby and Tobin for help. Ashlyn decided to jump in. “Easy, Krieger. We won last time, so I wouldn’t count on a victory if I was you.” Ashlyn joked.

“Oh, I’m not counting on a win, Harris. I’m guaranteeing it.” Ali deadpanned, as the table exploded into a collective “Ooohhh!”

Ashlyn gave Ali a playful look. “Funny, because I’m preparing to have to console you when you lose and get all bummed out and nasty about it.”

Megan chimed in “So, how exactly are you planning to console her, Ash?” The table laughed, Ali and Ashlyn started to blush.

“And that is why I’ll just have to win, so she doesn’t have to ‘console’ me by trying to hit on me again!” Ali played it coolly, nudging Ashlyn with her shoulder.

Ashlyn laughed and they were interrupted by the waiter coming to take their food order. The playful teasing continued over dinner as they ate. Once they finished the group headed upstairs to the pool tables to play for a while.

“You any good at pool, Stud?” Ali asked, grabbing a pool stick and going over to lean on Ashlyn who was leaned against the wall, a pool stick in her own hand while she talked to Whitney.

“Better than you, I’m sure,” Ashlyn said playfully.

“You know I seem to remember having this same conversation about dancing…” Ali said, tapping her forehead with her finger to pretend like she was trying to jog her memory.

“Ok, you’re on, Princess!” Ashlyn challenged her. “Let’s make it more interesting. Winner gets to make the loser to do any one thing they want.”

“Oh, it’s on! This is going to be fun, I’ll have you streaking around the quad tonight in no time!” Ali joked.

Ashlyn laughed. “Well, IF you win, I wouldn’t waste your prize on that...I’ve streaked the quad on several occasions, once during a snowstorm” Whitney and Alex nodded their heads dramatically to show that Ashlyn wasn’t kidding. Ali shook her head and laughed hard.

They setup the balls and Ashlyn told Ali she could break. Ali easily sank three balls in right away before finally missing. Ashlyn gulped knowing she had some catching up to do. Ashlyn sank only two balls before missing and then Ali sank another two. The game went back and forth like this until Ali only had the eight ball left. The shot was too difficult and Ali missed, leaving Ashlyn with one ball and the eight ball. By now most of the girls had gathered to watch them.

Ashlyn sank the first one easily and got ready to try to close it out, looking up at Ali “Ready to lose, Princess?” She took aim and shot, the eight ball headed straight for the corner pocket but veered a bit as it got closer and missed. Ashlyn groaned and Ali screamed out happily.

Ali lined up to take her shot, knowing she could easily make it and win the game. Ashlyn wasn’t going down without a fight, she stood in the area just behind where Ali was aiming. Just as Ali went to take the shot, Ashlyn lifted up her shirt and used it to wipe her forehead, pretending to be sweaty. Ali’s eyes had immediately gone to Ashlyn’s abs causing her to miss the shot. Ali gave Ashlyn a look.

Ashlyn smiled cockily and quickly sank the final shot to win the game, throwing her arms up in
victory. Megan, Alex and Whitney high-fived her. Ali stood there with her arms crossed, pretending to pout.

“Aww, truce, Princess?” Ashlyn asked wrapping her arms around Ali.

“That was totally cheating,” Ali whispered in the blonde’s ear.

“Not my fault you can’t stay focused,” Ashlyn pulled back and smiled at her.

Ali smiled back conceding, “Ok, so what do I have to do?”

“Oh, I’m not cashing in right now. I have to think something good, but I’ll come up with something soon, you can count on it.” Ashlyn said with a devilish smirk.

About an hour later, they were back in Ashlyn’s room getting ready for bed. Much like the night before, they chatted with Whitney for a bit and then got into bed. Ali snuggled right up to Ashlyn, putting her head on her shoulder and an arm over her torso again. This time Ashlyn was more prepared, wrapping both of her arms around Ali securely.

“Night, Alex.” She leaned down and kissed Ali on the top of the head, she felt Ali smile into her shoulder.

“Good night, Ash,” Ali whispered, giving the blonde a quick squeeze.

Ali was the first to wake up, it’s like her body always had a sense when it was game day. She smiled realizing she was still cuddled up with Ashlyn, who was still very much asleep. She pulled back a bit and just let herself watch the blonde sleep for a while. She had been making a conscious effort after what Kyle said to her to start paying more attention to what she was feeling. Right now, she was feeling admiration. Admiration of how beautiful Ashlyn was with her defined jawline, soft hazel eyes, and light freckles peppered across the tops of her shoulders. Not just beautiful on the outside, but a completely beautiful and good person. While Ali had gotten to know so much about Ashlyn over the last couple of months, there was still so much she didn’t know, things she knew Ashlyn was guarded about. She hoped one day she’d get to hear them, to understand how this beautiful person came to be. She felt Ashlyn stir a bit. Ali let her hand fall on Ashlyn’s forearm and traced the tattoos there with her index finger until the blonde’s eyes opened.

“Hey, Stud,” Ali said cheerily, “Ready for Game Day?”

Ashlyn gave her a sleepy smile. “You’re going down, Krieger!”
Post-Game Cashout

Chapter Notes

Seems like most of you are expecting a pretty intense game followed by a really hot after party, let's see, shall we...

After a quick breakfast with Whitney and a walk to Ali’s car to get her stuff, Ashlyn and Ali made their way to the athletic fields. Ali could see that her team had arrived, they were all standing over by the pitch talking to each other. She nudged Ashlyn with her shoulder as they approached the pitch, “Good luck today, Stud. You’re gonna need it.” Ali gave Ashlyn a quick wink and walked over to HAO and Kelley.

Ashlyn made her way over to the Smith sideline to join the rest of her team. She pulled off her sweats like usual and stood there taping her wrists in just black Nike compression shorts and red sports bra. Alex came over and the two started talking a bit of strategy for the game.

Ali was in conversation with HAO and Kelley when she looked up briefly to see Ashlyn wearing very little clothes again. She couldn’t pull her eyes away, completely losing focus on the conversation. She heard a snap of fingers and Kelley saying “Heeey, earth to Ali!”

“What? Sorry,” Ali said tearing her eyes away from Ashlyn.

“I was just saying that maybe we could get brunch tomorrow at this breakfast place I like downtown before we leave, not important,” Kelley said with a smirk. “What is important, is that you’re eye humping Ashlyn over there.”

“I am not!” Ali said defensively. “She has cool tattoos, I was just looking at them.” Ali said simply, trying to cover for herself.

“Alright, if you say so,” Kelley let it go. “I’m going to go have Hope help me stretch my back,” Kelley said walking away.

“So, anything I should know about?” HAO elbowed Ali lightly, knowing she’d know exactly what she was getting at.

“Oh, well, nothing has really happened. I just…” Ali paused trying to find the right words. “Ash and I have gotten to be really close friends, but let’s just say I’ve realized that my feelings towards her are very different that my feelings towards you,” she said pointing to HAO. “I’m just trying to process that for now.”

HAO smiled. “Well, that’s a lot better than the ‘we’re just friends’ routine I got last time, so I’ll take it!”

The teams warmed up to music of the sexually charged Smith playlist. Smith did their normal huddle chant and the teams lined up.

The first scrum got underway “Engage!”

Megan hooked the ball from the tunnel and Alex grabbed it and got off quickly to Sarah who made
a short run before getting tackled by HAO. Ashlyn went over as a ruck formed over the ball and she reached down to grab it. She passed it to Tobin who was just behind her to the right. Tobin evaded two tackles before making a pass to Whitney who ran a few more yards to put the ball down for a try. Ashlyn ran to pick up Whitney in celebration, there was nothing like scoring first. Abby kicked the ball over the crossbar to convert the try and make it 7-0 Smith.

Abby kicked the ball off towards the Dartmouth side of the pitch to restart the game. It landed close to the sideline but stayed inbounds where Ali picked up and made a fast break down the pitch. Damn she’s fast, Ashlyn thought as she tried to close in on Ali. Ashlyn closed in on her and brought her down by diving and grabbing her around the waist. The ball came out of Ali’s hands and rolled out of bounds. Ashlyn’s arm was pinned under Ali, so Ali got up first and then gave Ashlyn a hand to help her up. “Hope you enjoyed that, cause that’s the last time you’re getting me down today,” Ali said cockily.

“Keep dreaming,” Ashlyn played back. The teams lined up for a line out throw where Smith was awarded the throw in since Dartmouth had caused the out of bounds. Each team lifted a player into the air to vie for the ball. Dartmouth won the ball back and made a string of quick passes among their fullbacks that got by the Smith defense. Sydney put the ball on the try line to score for Dartmouth. The teams were even with 20 minutes left to go in the first half.

Ali wasn’t joking when she said Ashlyn was not getting her down again. She was having a great game, moving the ball forward well and making great runs. Ashlyn was not even able to get close to making a tackle on her and was getting frustrated. Fortunately, Smith had done a good job winning the ball back during rucks, so they had kept Dartmouth from scoring again.

With 5 minutes left to go in the first half, the ball got tied up and a scrum was called. Alex decided they should try the trick play they used on BU a few weeks earlier. Only this time, they would purposely mess it up, having Abby pass the ball left to Ashlyn instead of right to a fullback like expected.

Ashlyn and Abby quickly switched positions just as the scrum engaged. Ali noted the position switch trying to signal to Lara (who was filling in for Hope who was sidelined with a pulled muscle in her back). Ali tried to get Lara’s attention, but saw that Megan had already hooked the ball into the Smith scrum. Ali made a guess that Ashlyn was going to grab it and headed towards her. Abby picked up the ball, surprising Ali, who started to change direction when she saw it get passed off to Ashlyn. Ashlyn started to make a run, but Ali was already right there. Ali put her shoulder into Ashlyn’s right hip to tackle her seeing Lara come in late and hit Ashlyn from the left. On the way down Ali had seen Lara’s knee connect with Ashlyn’s head and felt Ashlyn’s back hit the ground awkwardly, there was no way she wasn’t hurt.

Ali’s heart jumped into her throat and she quickly untangled herself from Ashlyn and Lara to look over the blonde who had a pained look on her face and wasn’t moving much. Ashlyn had a deep gash on the hairline of her forehead that was bleeding pretty steadily, her eyes closed. Ali quickly took her rugby shirt off pressing it to Ashlyn forehead while Abby and Whitney motioned for the training staff.

Ali stroked Ashlyn’s cheek with one hand while still pressing her shirt to Ashlyn forehead with the other. “Ash, you ok?” she asked.

Ashlyn opened her eyes to see Ali’s amber eyes looking back into hers. Based on how her head hurt, she thought she’d be more dizzy or disoriented, but she wasn’t. “Yeah, I think so. Just need a minute,” Ashlyn replied.

Ali let out a breath she didn’t even know she was holding. She grabbed Ashlyn’s hand and squeezed
it as the two trainers got beside them. Ali kept holding Ashlyn’s hand while they checked her over, then helped the trainers get Ashlyn to her feet after a few minutes. The trainers walked Ashlyn to the sideline so they could take her to the training room by the athletic fields to check her for a concussion, but they thought she was probably okay.

Ali walked straight over to Lara. “What the hell were you thinking?! I was already there, you have to back off in a situation like that! Learn to get yourself under control or you’re gonna kill someone!” Ali screamed at Lara in front of everyone, before walking off.

Whitney smiled at Ali’s protectiveness of Ashlyn, while HAO went to go calm Ali down.

The first half ended shortly after. Rather than take her time to regroup like she usually did during the half, Ali walked down to the fieldhouse to check on Ashlyn. She walked into the training room to find the trainer closing the cut on Ashlyn’s head with some butterfly strips. Ashlyn was sitting upright on the table, looking tired but otherwise ok.

“Well don’t worry, Princess. I’m fine.” Ashlyn said calmly, noticing Ali standing there with a look of worry on her face. “Just going to need to go get a few stitches when this game is over.”

Ali forced a smile, still feeling bad that Ashlyn had gotten hurt. “You sure you’re ok?” she asked quietly.

The trainer saw Ali’s still concerned face and jumped in. “Oh yeah, this one is a tank!” the woman said slapping Ashlyn on the thigh before adding, “Just some back and neck soreness for a few days and we’ll have to take her over to the hospital for some stitches after the game, but she’ll be good as new.”

“I can take her,” Ali quickly offered.

Ashlyn nodded and smiled, touched at Ali’s offer.

“Looks like I’m off the hook then,” the trainer joked tapping Ashlyn on the shoulder, “if she tackles you again on the way there, I take no responsibility!” They all laughed.

Ali had to get back to the game so she walked over and squeezed Ashlyn’s arm real quick and gave her a smile before heading back to the pitch.

Ashlyn came back to the sideline with 25 minutes left to go in the second half. She quickly saw that the score was no longer even, Dartmouth had scored twice making it a 21 to 7 game. Ashlyn shook her head. She spend the rest of the half screaming directions out to her team and cheering when they did well. Despite the disappointment, she couldn’t help herself from smiling when Ali scored a try near the end of the game and ran by her waving and winking afterwards. The final score was 28 to 7 with Dartmouth winning easily.

The teams shook hands after the game. Most of the Smith ruggers stopping to check in with Ashlyn to see how she was feeling. HAO eventually made her way over to make sure Ashlyn was ok, giving her a hug. Ali joined them after having gone to apologize to Lara for yelling at her like that.

“You clear the air, Kriegs?” HAO asked, turning to a confused Ashlyn to explain. “Mama Bear over here went nuclear on Lara for tackling you so late,” HAO laughed pointing at Ali with her thumb.

Ali chuckled. “Yeah well, she should know better! I shouldn’t have chewed her out like that, but still.”

“Wish I had seen that!” Ashlyn laughed. “You’re so feisty, Krieger! I like it!” she joked putting her
arm around Ali’s shoulders.

The teams figured out who was rooming with who and started to disperse. Ali was going to stay with Ashlyn like she had the last two nights. HAO was going to join the two of them and Whitney tonight, sleeping on a mattress pad on the floor of their room. People were breaking off into small groups to go have a late lunch downtown and then shower at the dorms before the after party in Sessions House.

HAO and Ali went over to grab their bags on the sideline. Whitney came over to check on Ashlyn again after finding out that Ali was going to take her to get stitches. “You in good hands, Ash?” she asked rubbing Ashlyn’s shoulders.

“Yep, I’m good Whit. You guys have fun tonight, I’m going to just stay back and relax.” Ashlyn replied, knowing it was a bad idea to party after the beating she just took.

“Ok, call me if you need me,” Whitney said and made her way off the pitch.

Ali and HAO stopped to talk to Kelley and Sydney as they grabbed their bags.

“See you all at the party in a little bit after we’ve showered?” Sydney asked, Dom had come to watch the game and was taking her to lunch.

HAO and Kelley nodded.

“Actually, I’m taking Ashlyn to go get stitches and then I think I’m going to skip out and keep her company instead.” Ali said.

“Oh man, Kriegs, you have it bad! Not that I can blame you one bit!” Sydney joked. Kelley nodded dramatically in agreement.

“Oh stop it!” Ali exclaimed. “It the least I can do after I was one of the two that caused her to get injured in the first place.”

“Oh huh. Well, you two have fun tonight. Just don’t injure her back any worse than it already is!” Sydney teased. Kelley laughed loudly.

Ali rolled her eyes at Sydney and then pointed at Kelley. “And you stop laughing before I tell the team exactly how Hope pulled her back muscle!” Kelley’s eyes went wide and they all laughed.

“I’ll see you two in the morning,” Ali said pointing to Sydney and Kelley, “and I’ll see you later tonight,” she said looking at HAO. Ali made her way over to Ashlyn who waiting for her.

“You ready to go get patched up, Stud?” Ali asked, taking Ashlyn’s hand as they made their way to Ali’s car.

Ali drove them the short distance to the emergency room in the hospital near downtown. Ashlyn spent a few minutes filling out paperwork and then they sat and waited for over an hour. They were talking about what Ashlyn had missed during the game while she was in the training room when a nurse finally called out “Ashlyn Harris.”

Ashlyn got up and then turned around to look at Ali. “Come in with me?” she asked shyly.

“Of course!” Ali said getting up, happy that Ashlyn wanted her there.

The nurse had Ashlyn sit on the exam table, checked her vitals and set up the needed supplies before
“So, I should probably mention that I really really hate needles,” Ashlyn said quietly to Ali.

Ali walked over to the blonde and squeezed her forearm. “Awww, I’ll be right here okay,” she said reassuringly, before thinking about what Ashlyn just said and adding “Wait, really? I mean you have so many tattoos?”

“Yeah, I have no idea what my issue is. For some reason the tattooing doesn’t bother me, I actually like it. These needles,” she said pointing to the counter next to her “Completely different ballgame. I hate them!”

The nurse walked back in catching the tail end of what Ashlyn was saying. “Uh oh, do we have a nervous one here?” she asked.

“Yeah, she’s not fan of needles,” Ali answered for Ashlyn.

“Alright, well, why don’t you sit up there next to her,” the nurse said pointing to the exam table. “We’ll all get through this together. If you’re good, we’ll get you a popsicle, ok?” the nurse joked with Ashlyn.

Ali hopped up on the exam table next to Ashlyn and pulled the blondes left arm into her lap, clutching her left hand with both of hers. Ashlyn smiled nervously.

The doctor came into the room. “Hi Ashlyn, I’m Dr. Marks, let’s have a look, ok?” Ashlyn nodded.

After taking off the butterfly closures and cleaning up the gash on Ashlyn’s head, he turned to her “Not too too bad, just deep, but it’s on your hairline so you won’t see much of the scar once it’s healed up.”

“Ok.” Ashlyn said quietly, getting more nervous by the second.

“I’m gonna give you a shot of local numbing agent and then I’ll go ahead and stitch it up and get you out of here,” the doctor said calmly.

Ashlyn let out a deep breathe, starting to feel a little shaky as the nurse handed the needle to the doctor so he could numb the area.

“Hey,” Ali reached up and grabbed her chin gently with one hand while still holding Ashlyn’s in the other. “Just keeping looking at me, ok?”

Ashlyn looked into Ali’s amber eyes, letting herself get lost in them and relaxed a little bit. She felt a small pinch on her forehead but just kept focused on Ali. It seemed like only a few seconds had gone by when she heard the doctor’s voice “Ok, so that’s 9 lovely stitches, if I do say so myself,” he joked, admiring his handy work.

“I’m going to put a bandage on this for now, but you can take it off any time and just leave it open. Just make sure you keep it clean and put some of this ointment on it so it doesn’t get dry,” he said handing Ashlyn a tube of ointment before continuing. “Stitches will stay in for 10 days, I’m sure one of your trainers at school can take them out for you. If not you can always come back here. I’d suggest taking some ibuprofen for a couple days too.”

Ashlyn nodded and thanked him as he walked out of the room.

“See now that wasn’t so bad, right?” the nurse asked.
“No, but I still want my popsicle!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali and the nurse laughed as the nurse went over to a freezer nearby and pulled out a box of popsicles they kept in there to bribe small children. “Red or blue?” she asked.

“Blue!” Ashlyn answered like an excited 5 year old. Ali just shook her head and smiled at how adorable the blonde was.

Ali got Ashlyn back to Wilson House and they settled in Ashlyn’s room. “We should get you something to eat, Stud. I don’t think the popsicle is gonna cut it,” Ali suggested seeing that it was already 6pm.

“There are some take-out menus in my desk drawer, we can order something and have it delivered. Would that work?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Perfect!” Ali replied, grabbing the menus and looking them over. “Chinese?”

“Sounds really good!” Ashlyn answered, finally realizing she was pretty hungry.

Ali called in their order and they sat together catching up on their social media on their phones, occasionally sharing other people’s funny posts with each other. The food arrived about 40 minutes later and Ali went downstairs to grab it. They sat down together on the futon, eating right out of the take-out boxes and passing them back and forth.

Ali sat back on Ashlyn’s futon, her back against the wall near the pillows, patting her full stomach. She opened her legs a bit and patted the bed between them motioning for the blonde to come over. “Come here,” She said warmly.

Ashlyn complied, sitting between Ali’s legs and leaning her back into the brunette. Ali wrapped her arms around Ashlyn’s shoulders. “How are you feeling?”

Ashlyn always felt good when she was close to Ali. She smiled and answered honestly “Sore, but a whole lot better.”

“I feel like we need to document your badass injury,” Ali said taking one arm from around Ashlyn’s shoulders and holding out her phone to get a selfie of them. They both made pout faces and Ashlyn pointed to her stitches. Then they took one more where Ali made an “Oops” face while Ashlyn pretended to make an angry face at Ali while still pointing to her stitches.

They looked at the pictures. “These are funny,” Ashlyn laughed.

“We should make them our facebook profile pictures,” Ali suggested.

Ashlyn agreed. “I want the one where I’m pouting so I can get some sympathy,” Ashlyn chuckled as she changed her picture. Ali changed hers to the other picture saying “Done and done!”

“As much as I don’t want to move right now, we should probably shower,” Ashlyn said.

“Yeah, I didn’t want to do anything, but you kinda stink Harris,” Ali teased her.

The two went off to the bathroom to shower, talking over the stalls to each other as they did. They came back into Ashlyn’s room both wrapped in towels. “Feel free to use Whit’s closet to get dressed,” Ashlyn said going into her closet.

Ali grabbed a couple things and went into Whitney’s closet. After putting on her usual boxer briefs
and cutoff t-shirt, Ashlyn sat on her bed and rubbed at her neck and shoulders that were getting sorer by the minute.

Ali walked out with a just a pair of short athletic shorts and a sports bra on. “Sorry, forgot to grab a t-shirt” she said making her way over to her duffle bag.

Ashlyn played it coolly “Well, no need to put one on just for me. We’re at Smith, people walk around in sports bras all the time.”

“In that case,” Ali said plopping down on the bed next to the blonde, I’m gonna wait until my hair dries so it doesn’t get my t-shirt damp.”

Ashlyn let her eyes wander over Ali’s toned stomach and then over the brunettes rib tattoo. “I really do like that tattoo,” Ashlyn said reverently.

“Thank you,” Ali smiled.

Ashlyn laid back on the bed for a minute, trying to stretch her back. It was really starting to bother her.

Ali watched her. “You ok?”

“Yeah, my back is really sore, that’s all.” Ashlyn replied.

“Anything I can do? Want me to get you some ibuprofen?” Ali asked.

A lightbulb went off in Ashlyn’s head. “Actually. I was going to come up with something super embarrassing to put you through, buuuut, I’m a little desperate here. So, I’m cashing in on our pool game bet. Back massage?” she asked hopefully.

Ali laughed feeling like she was getting off easy. “You got it! Just flip over.”

Ashlyn flipped onto her stomach, her head near the foot of the bed and her feet near the pillows. Ali sat just beside her and began massaging her back.

After a few minutes Ashlyn popped her head up. “As much as this feels good because I’m really sore, I’m gonna be honest and say that this isn’t a strength of yours, Princess.”

Ali smacked the blonde’s back lightly. “Well, we’re not exactly going about this the right way, not my fault!”

“Alright then, take the shirt off, it’s bunching under my hands,” Ali said pointedly. Ashlyn complied tossing her cutoff shirt onto the floor.

“Scoot to the middle of the bed,” Ali directed her. Ashlyn scooted herself over. Ali wasted no time in straddling Ashlyn’s hips and putting her hands back on her shoulders.

Ashlyn’s breath hitched and her muscles twitched at Ali’s contact.

“Relax,” Ali said softly. Ashlyn took a breath, let her muscles relax, feeling Ali knead her shoulders.

Ali worked her way up and down the blonde’s back stopping to knead all of her muscles, her heart pounding the whole time.
Ashlyn was tingling all over. Ali’s hands were so warm and soft, she was feeling hot all over. “Mmmm,” she let out a moan she couldn’t hold in. “That feels really really good,” Ashlyn said in a low voice.

“Told you I could do better,” Ali said warmly. She leaned forward more massaging the back of Ashlyn’s arms, her chest brushing the blonde’s back briefly. She loved the feel of Ashlyn’s muscles under her hands.

Ashlyn let out another deep breath, she felt incredibly turned on and incredibly peaceful and relaxed at the same time. Ali had moved her hands to the back of the blonde’s neck, massaging it gently.

The relaxed and peaceful feeling started to take over and Ashlyn let out a soft yawn, Ali had been massaging her for half an hour already.

Ali heard Ashlyn yawn. She swung her leg so she wasn’t straddling her anymore, but left her hands on Ashlyn’s shoulders, laying the front her body half on Ashlyn’s back and half on the bed. She rested her cheek against the blonde’s back.

Ashlyn felt the warm skin of Ali’s stomach make contact with her back and smiled lightly.

“That better?” Ali asked softly, rubbing the blonde’s shoulders with her fingers.

“A million times better. Thanks for taking care of me today, Alex.” Ashlyn whispered.

“Always, Ash.” Ali said closing her eyes.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s breathing get slower and her own began to match it, the two of them drifting off to sleep.

About an hour later Whitney and HAO got in from the party to find lights still on and Ashlyn and Ali on Ashlyn’s bed laying on their fronts, heads at the wrong end of the bed, pretty much in just underwear and heavily asleep. Ali was laying half on top of Ashlyn, her right arm stretched across Ashlyn’s back, her left arm was tucked underneath her but her hand was on Ashlyn’s left shoulder, and her right leg stretched across both of Ashlyn’s legs. Their heads were close together and leaned in towards each other.

“Well ok then,” HAO whispered to Whitney.

“As much as I kind of want this to be what it looks like, knowing these two, it’s probably not what it looks like,” Whitney whispered back.

“I completely agree with that assessment,” HAO said laughing quietly.

Whitney grabbed a blanket and gently draped it over Ashlyn and Ali. She and HAO very quietly got ready for bed and shut off the lights.

“Can’t wait to hear about this in the morning,” HAO whispered from her makeshift bed on the floor.

“Me either.” Whitney whispered back.
Squirt Guns & Turkey

Chapter Notes

We have some holidays to get through and then things are going to pick up.

Ali felt warm sun hitting her face and opened her eyes. She looked around for a few seconds sleepily before she registered the warm body pressed against her. She was laying on her right side and Ashlyn was pressed against her back. The blonde’s tattooed arm was draped around Ali resting over Ali’s own left arm, her hand gripping Ali’s wrist lightly. Ali closed her eyes and let herself feel Ashlyn’s warm skin directly pressed to her mostly bare back.

Ali thought back to last night, realizing she never put on her t-shirt and that they fell asleep like this in their sports bras. Seeing the blanket draped over them, she figured HAO and Whitney must have gotten quite a view when they got back. She looked over to see HAO and Whitney both still asleep. Ali turned herself in Ashlyn’s arms to face the blonde.

Ashlyn felt Ali stir in her arms and began to wake up a bit. She felt Ali’s warm skin against her stomach, realizing neither of them had a shirt on, heat radiating between them. “Ash,” she heard Ali whisper and opened her eyes slowly only to find Ali’s amber ones looking back at her.

“Hmmm?” Ashlyn got out in a quiet moan, her heavy eyes closing again as she began tilting her forehead toward Ali’s. She felt a hand on her face, stopping her head.


Ashlyn opened her eyes again finally waking up. She smiled at Ali and then popped her head up to see Whitney in her bed and HAO on the floor, both sleeping. She noticed her and Ali’s heads were at the foot of the bed her and then remembered last night’s massage and how they fell asleep.

Ali could see the realization come over Ashlyn’s face and just smiled at her, both still holding onto each other.

“I think we’re going to have some explaining to do.” Ali giggled quietly.

“For sure.” Ashlyn agreed grinning. They lingered in that position, looking at each just for just a few moments longer before Ashlyn spoke again. “Might as well make this fun,” she said quietly as she slowly got up out of the bed and made her way to her bookshelf.

Ali watched her grab a small squirt gun off the top of the bookshelf and then climb back into bed, getting close to Ali again and then signaling for her to turn over so she could watch. Ali turned around, her back to Ashlyn again. Ashlyn leaned in close to Ali’s ear and whispered “Ok, when I squirt them, pretend to go back to sleep.” Ali nodded.

Ashlyn quickly shot a spray of water across the room, hitting HAO right in the face. Ashlyn and Ali quickly pretended to be sleeping. HAO shot up, looking around wildly and wiping her face. “What the heck?” she whispered before laying back down.

After a minute had passed, Ashlyn nudged Ali to signal she was going to do it again. Ashlyn very quickly squirted Whitney in the face and then moved fast to get HAO again too before settling back
down with Ali.

HAO and Whitney both sat up looking at each other confused and then over at Ashlyn and Ali. Whitney could see the slight smirk on Ashlyn’s face and she knew who was responsible. “Ash! I’m gonna kill you!” Whitney yelled. Ashlyn and Ali broke out laughing, Ashlyn brought up the squirt gun to get Whitney one more time.

The four of them started to shuffle around and get ready for the day. Ali remembered that Kelley wanted to have brunch downtown and shot her a text to come up with a plan for all of them to go together.

While they were waiting for Kelley to reply, HAO jumped right in. “So, you two, what exactly went on in here last night?”

“Yeah guys, bravo! Good show!” Whitney added.

Ashlyn and Ali looked at each other knowing this was coming.

“Well, it wasn’t what it looked like,” Ashlyn said.

“Yeah, we figured as much,” Whitney noted.

HAO added through laughter “If we thought it was what it looked like, we wouldn’t be asking you now would we? Just curious how you ended up like that without it being what it looked like?!”

“Um, well…” Ali paused thinking about where to start and then continued “I took a shower and was waiting for my hair to dry before I put a shirt on so I didn’t get my sleep shirt all wet.”

“Go on…” Whitney said.

Ashlyn jumped in. “My back was killing from that hit at the game and I was kinda desperate, so I told Ali I was cashing in my prize from our pool game and made her give me a massage.”

“Is that all?” HAO asked.

“Sort of,” Ashlyn continued chuckling “I told Ali she sucked at massages after a few minutes.”

Ali cut Ashlyn off. “Yeah because her shirt was getting in the way, so I told her to get rid of it so I could give her a real massage before I spent a lifetime of being harassed about my massage skills!” Ali said sticking her tongue out at Ashlyn.

“And then we fell asleep mid-massage,” Ashlyn finished.

“Hmmm, well, that explains a lot!” HAO said.

“Yep, this is how rumors get started.” Whitney teased.

Ali’s phone buzzed with a text from Kelley saying to meet at Jake’s breakfast place downtown in an hour. The four of them got ready, dropped Ali and HAO’s bags at Ali’s car, and then walked downtown. They met up with Kelley, Hope and Sydney who had brought their Smithie hosts Alex, Tobin, and Kacey with them. Everyone else was apparently sleeping in or had other breakfast plans. Breakfast went by quickly, everyone having light and fun conversation throughout. Ashlyn and Ali had sat across from each other, shooting each other playful looks and eating food off each other’s plates occasionally.

After breakfast the group walked backed to campus. Ali and Ashlyn lagged behind them a bit.
“This weekend went by way too fast. I had so much fun with you, Ash. Well, minus the head injury!” Ali said.

“It was awesome to have you here. I’m still psyched that you made it to Celebration. Thanks so much for coming and staying the extra days. And putting up with my needle phobia!” Ashlyn replied, already feeling pretty bummed that Ali was leaving.

“Celebration was incredible! I got quite the education.” Ali giggled. “Who knows where I’ll be next year since I’m graduating this year. I want to come back for Celebration again though. Well, assuming you’re here and not abroad somewhere studying. Are you still thinking about that?”

“Yeah, sort of. I don’t have to apply for a couple more months though. I’m torn because I love being at Smith so much and don’t want to waste a year of it away. But, I also really want to travel somewhere new and this is probably one of the only opportunities I’ll get.” Ashlyn mused out loud.

“Well, if you don’t end up going anywhere, I promise to take you to Germany someday and show you everything I know.” Ali said genuinely.

“I’m gonna hold you to that.” Ashlyn said seriously.

“You better.” Ali said. They were getting close to Ali’s car now. “So, I guess I definitely won’t see you until at least after Thanksgiving, right?” Ali asked.

“Yeah. We should try and make sure we plan something in early December before things get crazy with finals,” Ashlyn suggested.

“I like that idea,” Ali smiled. “Don’t know why we haven’t thought of this before, but, FaceTime until then?”

“Definitely! Gotta be able to show you the awesome scar from this bad boy when it’s healed,” Ashlyn said pointing to the stitches on her forehead.

They got to Ali’s car where HAO was already waiting since she was going to ride back with Ali. Ashlyn pulled Ali into a tight hug. “Thanks again for coming,” she whispered in Ali’s ear.

“Thanks for having me here,” Ali whispered back.

“Drive safe, Alex, and text me when you get back.” Ashlyn said before pulling away from Ali.

“Later, Stud!” Ali winked and got in the car.

“HAO!” Ashlyn said giving her a fist pump before she got into the passenger’s side. “Bye, Ash!” HAO waved.

Ashlyn headed back to her room to grab her textbooks so she could spend hours locked away in the library catching up on all the work she needed to do. The next couple of weeks was a lot more of the same. Ashlyn went to class, worked in the kitchen, practiced with the Vibes, and spent many hours in the library. Any other free moment she had was either spent FaceTiming with Ali, who was also pretty busy herself, or laying out on the rugby pitch at night just looking up and being at peace. Pretty soon it would be so cold that even bundling up wouldn’t be enough to let her lay out there, so she was trying to get it in now.

Finally, Thanksgiving break arrived and Ashlyn made the long drive down to Florida as she had done so many times now. She enjoyed the quiet drive, much of it right along the east coast. The rush of anxiety wouldn’t hit her until she was an hour from Satellite Beach. Coming back always had that
effect on her; this place made her jumpy and cautious, but for good reason. She knew the feeling would mostly pass once she got home and saw her grandma and brother, but it never made it any easier to deal with.

She pulled into the driveway of her grandma’s house, the air was humid and warm and the smell of cinnamon was hanging in the air. She knew her grandma must already be baking apple pies ahead of tomorrow’s Thanksgiving dinner. She grabbed her clothes bag and went right into the house. Chris saw her first, jumping off the couch to hug her and yelling “Gram, she’s here!” Ashlyn fell into his strong arms and smiled, the anxiety already started to go away. Her grandma hugged her next, holding her tight for a minute before pulling back to look at her. “Don’t they feed you at school?” she asked, pulling Ashlyn into the kitchen to fix her a sandwich.

She spent the evening helping her grandma in the kitchen for a while until she shuffled Ashlyn out and told her to go watch TV with Chris. Chris was never allowed in the kitchen because he ate too many of the ingredients and usually ended up burning something. Ashlyn and Chris watched Duck Dynasty for an hour, making fun of it the whole time. Chris dozed off towards the end. Ashlyn was about to get up and head back into the kitchen to help her grandma again when her phone buzzed. She saw it was Ali and answered quickly “Hey, Princess!”

“Hey, Stud! Did you make it home already?” Ali asked.

“Yep, got home a couple hours ago and have just been hanging with grandma and Chris. Apparently, I’m so fun that Chris fell asleep hanging with me,” Ashlyn laughed looking over at her sleeping brother. “How about you? Did you have a good flight home?”

“Yes, it was good. Kyle doesn’t get here until morning, so I had dinner with my mom and we’re having a mani pedi session in a few minutes so our nails look good for tomorrow.” Ali replied.

Ashlyn laughed. “You and your mom sound like twins.”

“People actually say that all the time. You’ll just have to judge for yourself when you meet her,” Ali said.

“Already trying to get me to meet the parents, Krieger?” Ashlyn joked.

“Well seeing as how my mom is probably sick of hearing me talk about you. It’s only a matter of time before she exerts her will and makes it happen, Harris!” Ali joked back. Ashlyn smiled to herself, feeling warm inside that Ali talked about her so much to her family.

The two chatted for a little longer, Ashlyn telling Ali about some of the interesting rest stops on her trip to Florida. Ashlyn realized they had been talking for 20 minutes already. “I better go see if my grandma needs help in the kitchen and I better let you go have time with your mom.” she said.

“Ok, Glad you made it home safe. I’ll call you tomorrow before all the Thanksgiving craziness starts?” Ali asked.

“You better!” Ashlyn replied. “Good night, Princess.”

“Night night, Stud!” Ali said, hanging up.

Ashlyn headed into the kitchen to find her grandma sitting at the kitchen table near the living room entrance peeling potatoes, she realized she had probably overheard much of the conversation. Ashlyn sat across from her, grabbed a potato and started peeling.

“So,” her grandma said after a couple minutes of silence “How long have you been in love with
her?"

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide and she sighed, she couldn’t hide anything from this woman. “If I’m being honest, probably the first night I met her,” Ashlyn said, letting herself admit it out loud for the first time.

Her grandma nodded. “I can hear it in your voice. I didn’t hear any ‘I love yous’ in there though,” she said referring to the phone conversation “so, what’s holding you back?”

Ashlyn considered the question before answering, “For one, Ali hasn’t dated women and I don’t know if she ever will. For two, I care too much about her to mess up what we have right now. I’d rather love her in friendship than not get to love her at all. I feel like there is something between us, I just don’t know exactly what it is yet or what it’s going to become.”

“Only time can tell that, but don’t ever give up on what you want and what you love, Ashlyn,” her grandma paused “I have a good feeling about this. When have I ever been wrong?”

“Actually. Never, grandma.” Ashlyn said. The two worked silently for the next hour before heading off to bed.

Ashlyn got up early, made herself a cup of coffee. She put on a bikini and pulled on a wetsuit before grabbing her surfboard and driving down to the beach. She paddled out just beyond where the waves were breaking and let herself sit for a while. As much as Florida didn’t seem much like home anymore, the one thing here that still did was the ocean. Saltwater soothed her soul and it was the one thing she missed most when she was at school. She spent about an hour surfing the waves before heading back and taking a shower. She got dressed for Thanksgiving dinner putting on a fitted pair of jeans, a white button up shirt with a skinny black tie, and a gray button up vest over it. She left her hair down and had just finished her make-up when her phone alerted her to a FaceTime request from Ali.

A few seconds later Ali’s face came into view on the screen. She looked cute with her hair in a bun and plenty of mascara as usual. “Happy Thanksgiving, Ash!” Ali exclaimed with her signature beaming smile.

“Same to you! And good morning!” Ashlyn replied back grinning.

Ali could see the top of Ashlyn’s outfit. “You look dapper, Stud!”

“Thanks! You’re the one with the perfect hair and makeup as always though,” Ashlyn complimented.

“So, I have someone who wants to say hi,” Ali said excitedly. Ashlyn saw Kyle come into view as he and Ali squeezed into the frame together.

“Hi Ashlyn! Nice to meet you!” Kyle waved. “Well, as much as this can be considered meeting someone anyway. So, Happy Thanksgiving!”

Ashlyn smiled at them. “Nice to meet you too, Kyle! I’ve heard a lot about you from Ali, all good of course. And Happy Thanksgiving!

Kyle told Ashlyn she had great tattoos. The two of them launched into a long conversation about their tattoos that then turned into a conversation about surfing, ignoring Ali. After a while, Ali piped up “Yeah, so, I’m still here you guys.”

“Don’t mind her, the Princess here needs constant attention,” Kyle teased.
Ashlyn laughed “Oh, I’m well aware.”

“Not funny!” Ali pouted.

Ashlyn and Kyle laughed and the three of them talked about Kyle’s dog for a couple minutes until Ali’s mom was heard in the background summoning Ali and Kyle.

“Okee, we better go! I’ll go distract mom while you two say goodbye. Next time we need to hang out in person, Ashlyn!” Kyle said.

“Count on it!” Ashlyn said waving to Kyle as he left.

“Well, that’s Kyle,” Ali said happily.

“He is great! Just like you described him. Can’t wait to meet him for real,” Ashlyn said genuinely. Ali gave her a big smile, touched that Ashlyn and her brother seemed to get along so well.

“I better go. I hope you have a great day with your grandma and Chris, tell them I said Happy Thanksgiving. I really miss you, Ash.” Ali said warmly.

“I will. I miss you too, Alex. Happy Thanksgiving!” Ashlyn gave Ali a dimpled grin and waved before she ended the FaceTime session. She held the phone to her heart for a second and sighed loudly before heading downstairs.

Thanksgiving passed as it always did for Ashlyn. With football, her grandma’s delicious food, and a house filled with people. Her grandma always invited over any neighbor or friend of hers that would be alone on Thanksgiving. So, the house was filled with many people thankful to be in each other’s company. After a long day of eating, everyone started to gradually leave and Ashlyn helped her grandma and Chris cleanup. Her grandma went off to bed and Chris was on his phone texting, so Ashlyn went out to the deck to sit for a minute. It was dark, so she couldn’t fully see the ocean view that was normally there, but she could hear the water and she could smell it. Her buzzing phone broke got her attention, a FaceTime request from Ali that Ashlyn quickly accepted while she turned on the deck lights so Ali would be able to see her.

Ali’s face came on the screen, the picture was a little dark, but Ashlyn could make out a light gray beanie pulled low on her head and what looked like her grandma’s scarf wrapped tightly around Ali’s neck.

“Hey Princess, what are you up to?” Ashlyn asked seeing that it was 10:07pm.

“Black Friday Shopping, of course!” Ali squeaked. “Well, not the shopping part yet, just the waiting in line to get into the store part at the moment. It’s pretty cold, so my mom and I keep taking turns standing in line while the other goes to warm-up in the car.”

Ashlyn could now make out a couple of people behind Ali and made a mental note not to say anything embarrassing since Ali was in public. “That sounds like fun. Well, actually, that doesn’t sound fun at all to me,” Ashlyn laughed. “As long as you’re having fun though!”

“I will once the shopping starts!” Ali said excitedly.

“How long to you usually stay out shopping?” Ashlyn asked.

“All night! We usually go until it’s time for brunch in the morning and then spend most of Friday sleeping it off.” Ali replied.
“Damn, Alex, that’s intense!” Ashlyn said with a look of surprise.

“Just feel lucky you’re not here because otherwise I’d make you do this with me,” Ali laughed. “So, what are you doing right now?”

“It’s warm here, so I’m sitting out on our deck just relaxing a bit before bed. The deck overlooks the ocean and I like to listen to the water at night.” Ashlyn answered.

“That sounds amazing. Especially since I’m so cold right now!” Ali said and looked away for a second. “Oh, here comes my mom to switch with me again. Say hi to Ashlyn, mom!” Ali exclaimed. A middle-aged woman who looked a whole lot like Ali came into view waving a gloved hand “Hi Ashlyn! Happy Thanksgiving!”

“Hi! Happy Thanksgiving!” Ashlyn replied back, watching Ali come back on the screen. Ashlyn could tell she was walking.

“Sweet! My turn in the car, I was freezing out there.” Ali said, getting in her mother’s car.

The two chatted about what Ali was planning to shop for until Ali broke up the conversation. “I better go back out there and relieve my mom of line duty so she can come warm up. Sorry to keep you up, it just doesn’t feel right when I don’t say goodnight to you.”

“I know the feeling,” Ashlyn said warmly. “Have fun shopping!”

“I will! Sweet dreams, Stud!” Ali smiled.

“Good night, Alex.” Ashlyn smiled back and ended the call. She knew exactly what she was most thankful for this year, a beautiful brunette who had come into her life so quickly and changed everything she felt inside.
I'm leaving you off with a long one for the weekend. I'll be traveling without internet access, so you'll have to wait to see what happens on spring break ;)

Unfortunately, time had not been on Ashlyn and Ali’s side after Thanksgiving. The two had not been able to find time to meet up and hang out in early December like they had planned. Before they knew it, finals had arrived and time got even more crunched. They kept up their nightly routine of FaceTime chats in the meantime.

Ali came up with the brilliant idea of flying out of Bradley Airport (the closest airport to Smith College) for her trip home for Christmas break. That way she’d be able to spend the night before with Ashlyn and they’d finally get some time together.

Ashlyn wrapped up her finals early, which was easy to do at Smith because there was just a five day period of three daily time slots setup for students to take finals. The students chose which final to take and when during any of those time slots. Ashlyn always chose to take hers early and back-to-back, so she was always done by day two. She had to wait two more days until Ali got there and spent the time getting packed for break, cleaning her room, and catching up on the latest season of Breaking Bad she had been neglecting.

When Ali finally got there and pulled up to Wilson House, Ashlyn practically yanked her out of the car, hugging her tight and lifting her into the air. Ali let out a screech when Ashlyn picked her up and buried her face into the side of the blonde’s head.

“I missed you, Princess,” Ashlyn whispered in Ali’s ear.

“I missed you too, Ash!” Ali said as Ashlyn finally put her down.

“Brrr, it’s freaking cold! Let’s get your stuff and go inside,” Ashlyn suggested. Ali nodded in agreement thinking it wasn’t actually that cold, but remembering that Ashlyn was a Florida girl.

“Your car can actually stay right here. Most people have already left campus and they’re not enforcing the parking rules right now,” Ashlyn said.

Ali opened the trunk to reveal a huge suitcase and a small duffel bag. Ashlyn had already noticed a medium sized suitcase and another two small bags in the backseat. She shook her head, “traveling lightly as usual, huh?”

Ali rolled her eyes. “At least I planned well, so everything I need for tonight and tomorrow is in this duffel bag,” she said, grabbing the bag from the trunk. “And I just need to grab the small blue bag in the backseat that has your present in it. The rest can stay.”

Ashlyn smiled. They hadn’t discussed presents, but she had gotten Ali something too. Ashlyn took the duffel bag from Ali and they made their way up to Ashlyn’s room. Ali noticed that Whitney’s bed was nicely made and the usual laptop that sat on her desk wasn’t there. “No Whit?” Ali asked.

“Her flight home was this morning, so she’s already gone.” Ashlyn answered.
“Bummer, I thought she’d be here and I got her something too,” Ali said, taking out a small wrapped box and putting it on Whitney’s desk. Ashlyn smiled at Ali’s thoughtfulness.

“Speaking of… can we do presents now?!” Ashlyn said with the face of an excited toddler. Ali couldn’t help but laugh at the way Ashlyn could be such a giant kid sometimes, she thought it was one of her most endearing qualities.

“Yes, we can do presents now, Captain Impatient,” Ali teased.

Ashlyn went to her bookshelf and grabbed a medium-sized wrapped box, with a smaller wrapped box sitting on top of it. “Here, open yours first.” Ashlyn said, handing the gifts to Ali.

“Which one should I start with?” Ali asked.

“The big one!” Ashlyn replied.

Ali opened the bigger box to find a black hoodie with red lettering on the front that said ‘Smith Rugby’. Ali laughed and turned it around to see ‘Ruck Me. Maul Me. Make me Scrum.’ written on the back in the same red lettering. “I’m totally going to wear this and get so much crap for it. That’s quite a slogan!” Ali tried it on.

“Aww, you look good in Smith Rugby colors, Princess,” Ashlyn smiled.

“Now I need to get you a Dartmouth hoodie so at least when I wear this I can say I made you wear one of ours,” Ali joked and then paused. “Actually,” she reached into the duffel bag by her feet and pulled out her forest green Dartmouth Rugby hoodie. “Here. You can have this one.” Ali said handing the hoodie to Ashlyn.

Ashlyn smiled and took off the sweater she was wearing and put on the hoodie, it smelled just like Ali. “How do I look?” she asked.

“Perfect, Stud.” Ali said charmingly.

“Ok, open the other one.” Ashlyn said pointing to the small box.

Ali opened the box to find a simple thin silver bangle bracelet with an ornate clasp. She recognized it as one she had seen in a shop in downtown Northampton which she had said she loved. The fact that Ashlyn had remembered and gone back to get it made her melt. Ashlyn was sitting a few feet away in her desk chair and Ali went over and sat in her lap sideways, putting her arms around the blonde’s shoulders. “It’s beautiful and perfect. I love it. You’re so sweet, thank you,” Ali said warmly.

“You’re welcome,” Ashlyn smiled. Ali gave her one last quick squeeze and got off Ashlyn’s lap to grab her present.

“You’re turn!” Ali said, handing Ashlyn a smallish rectangular box wrapped in green paper with little red reindeer printed all over it.

Ashlyn unwrapped it quickly and opened the box to reveal a silver watch with a large light gray face and all sorts of dials. As she smiled and looked it over, she heard Ali say “Turn it over.”

Ashlyn turned the watch over to see it had been inscribed on the back in very small writing. She looked closely and read the inscription “If you come at four o’clock in the afternoon, then at three o’clock, I shall begin to be happy.”

“It’s from the Little Prince, like my tattoo.” Ali said quietly.
Ashlyn looked up at her smiling widely and completely speechless, her heart racing. “Ali…” she started trying to find the words, “I don’t know what to say. This is so beautiful. No one has ever gotten me anything this nice or this thoughtful before.” Her eyes started to get a little watery.

Ali went over and kneeled down in front of Ashlyn. “Well, don’t cry, Stud. Put it on and let’s see,” she said warmly, grabbing Ashlyn’s tattooed arm and slipping the watch on. “That looks great. It’s water resistant so you can wear it surfing. And I have no clue what all those dials mean, so you can read the booklet in the box.”

Ashlyn got up and pulled Ali with her to give her a proper hug. “You have a real knack for leaving me speechless, Krieger. Thank you, I love it.” Ashlyn said quietly in Ali’s ear, and then pulled back. “Come on, let me take you to dinner.”

They walked downtown hand in hand, each donning their new jewelry. Ashlyn was bundled up like she lived in Alaska while Ali was wearing a normal winter jacket. They had dinner in a small Thai restaurant, sitting by the window and people watching while they ate. They took in a free local production of the Nutcracker in a small theater downtown and got back to campus around 11:00pm.

Ali’s flight was in the morning and Ashlyn was dropping her off at the airport before starting the long drive to Florida. They changed onto their usual sleeping clothes and snuggled up together in Ashlyn’s bed, making small talk and joking with each other in the dark until they fell asleep.

In the morning, they moved Ali’s car to the long-term lot on the Smith Campus and moved her luggage into Ashlyn’s Jeep. Ashlyn helped Ali check her bags at the airport and then they hung out together outside of the security line until Ali only had 30 minutes before her flight.

“You know, Harris. I have a real problem with leaving you. I hate it.” Ali said in a joking tone that Ashlyn knew was actually serious.

“Funny, I have the same problem with you.” Ashlyn said quietly. “Buuut, if you don’t go, you’re going to miss your flight.”

“I’ll see you in January, Stud.” Ali said kissing Ashlyn’s cheek and pulling her in for a hug.

Ashlyn’s face burned where Ali had kissed it, she hugged her tight before pulling back. “Safe travels, Princess.” She watched Ali go through security and waved when Ali waved at her after getting through the checkpoint. She stayed until she couldn’t see Ali anymore and then left to start her drive.

The Christmas holiday was much like Thanksgiving. Ashlyn and Ali spent a lot of time talking on the phone and having FaceTime sessions, Ashlyn showing off this year’s ugly Christmas sweater while Ali laughed at her. The two had even snuck away from the New Year’s celebrations they were at to FaceTime with each other during the countdown to midnight.

“What’s your New Year’s resolution, Princess?” Ashlyn had asked Ali.

“To really look inside and figure out who I am and what I want, what makes me happy.” Ali had answered honestly. “What about you?”

“Eat less Nutella,” Ashlyn had joked to make Ali laugh before giving her real answer. “To be more open with people and let my walls down more.”

“Well, it’s going to be a good year then.” Ali had said reflectively.

“I really think it is.” Ashlyn had agreed.
Shortly after New Year, Ashlyn had picked up Ali from the airport near Smith and the two of them spent time together on campus. Smith designated the first two weeks of January “j-term” where students could come back if they wanted to and take fun non-credit courses, practice with their sports teams, or choose to just be on campus doing nothing in particular. Ashlyn always used j-term to get some extra work hours in the kitchen and relax. Ali joined her this year and the two of them spent the two weeks just having fun exploring western Massachusetts and getting to know each other more deeply. They spent hours cuddled up on Ashlyn’s bed having Netflix marathons.

Whitney had come back for the second week of j-term and had been amazed at how Ashlyn and Ali just never seemed to get sick of each other. Even she was a little sad when it was time for Ali to go back to Dartmouth for the start of the semester. Once Ali left, Ashlyn had walked around like a sad puppy for a couple days before Whitney had finally been able to pull her out of her funk by taking her to Missy Higgins concert nearby.

The winter had been very mild one by New England standards until the season’s first major snowstorm hit late evening on February 13th, shutting down just about everything in the region. Ali woke up early on Valentine’s Day to see that the campus was closed due to the weather. The storm had passed and the major roads were clear, so Ali went to Sydney’s room and asked to borrow her Land Rover for the night. Sydney agreed and Ali tossed her the keys to her BMW in case she needed them. She packed an overnight bag, got in Sydney’s truck, and let her heart take her where it wanted to go.

Ashlyn was out on the Wilson House steps helping Meghan and Alex build a giant snow penis to “properly welcome in Valentine’s Day” as Megan had put it. Rather than snowmen, this is what you found in the quad instead.

“That’s a nice car,” Megan said noting a fully customized Land Rover that had just pulled up in front of Wilson House. Ashlyn looked and nodded in agreement, going back to their snow sculpture.

Ali pulled up into the quad and saw Megan, Ashlyn, and Alex building some kind of snowman near the Wilson steps. She had expected to call Ashlyn and surprise her, but this would work too. She got out of the truck and leaned against it, waving at Alex who had just noticed her.

“Hey Ash, a really hot girl just got out of that Land Rover,” Alex said trying to get Ashlyn’s attention.

Normally this would have made Ashlyn’s head practically snap off as she turned to look, but not lately, she only had one person on her mind these days. She just looked over at Alex “Since when do you check out women?”

Alex needed a new plan of attack. “No really Ash, she is like seriously good looking.” Megan had already looked and seen Ali, so she tried to help Alex out.

“Yeah, wow! And she’s barely wearing any clothes!” Megan exclaimed with wide eyes.

Ashlyn finally turned around to look at what they were talking about and found herself looking at Ali. Her mouth dropped open and Ali waved and smiled at her.

“No way!” Ashlyn shouted and practically threw herself down the Wilson steps to get to the brunette. “Alex, what are you doing here?” she said excitedly as she wrapped Ali up in a hug.

“It’s Valentine’s Day, Stud. I had to ask you to be my Valentine.” Ali said matter-of-factly.

“Oh, well, I mean Tobin already asked me this morning. Wow, this is a tough choice…” Ashlyn
joked as she tapped her lip with her finger as if she was thinking hard. Ali smacked her arm.

“Just kidding, Princess. I’m all yours!” Ashlyn said happily. “Who’s car is this?”

“It’s Syd’s. I borrowed it for the night in case I ran into any roads that weren’t clear yet. The BMW is generally fine in the snow, but not in anything deep.” Ali answered.

“Wait, does that mean you’re staying?” Ashlyn asked realizing Ali had said she borrowed it for the night.

“Yep, I don’t have class until 1pm tomorrow, so I’ll head back in the morning.” Ali replied with a smile.

“Ahhh, I’m so excited!” Ashlyn squealed. “Let’s go move the car to the snow lot and then figure out what we want to do!”

“Actually, I believe someone owes me a snowboarding lesson…” Ali said. She had remembered how during her last visit Ashlyn pointed out a hill near the campus that she said people liked to sled and snowboard on when it snowed. She had told Ali that she had taken up snowboarding since it wasn’t too different from surfing and skateboarding, and it was something to do during the New England winter. Ashlyn had promised to show her how to snowboard.

“I totally do! Let’s do it!” Ashlyn answered with enthusiasm, and the two left Megan and Alex to finish the snow penis on their own.

A couple hours later they were perched at the top of hospital hill (named for the old abandoned hospital situated nearby), snowboards in hand. Ashlyn had borrowed Abby’s snowboard and given Ali her own. Lots of other Smithies and other kids from town already there sledding. Ashlyn showed Ali how to bend her knees and adjust the snowboard as needed on a very small slop off to the side of the bigger hill.

“Ready to give it a try?” Ashlyn asked after Ali seemed comfortable with the initial movement.

“Ready.” Ali said nervously.

“Ok, I’ll go down first and you can watch me do it,” Ashlyn suggested. She took off down the hill and Ali watched her in awe and she smoothly made it down to the bottom. Ashlyn waved to her to tell her to go.

“Here goes,” Ali said to herself and let the snowboard start down the hill. She made it about 5 seconds before she fell over. She shook it off and got up to try again. She made it down to the bottom finally after falling four times.

“That was pretty good for a first attempt, Princess!” Ashlyn called out to her.

“That is so much harder than it looks,” Ali said, even more impressed with Ashlyn’s snowboarding skills than she was before.

Ali tried a few more times, getting a little bit better but still not completely getting the hang of it.

“I have an idea. I haven’t done this, but we can try it and see if it works.” Ashlyn said as they reached the top of the hill again. “I’m going to stand behind you and hold onto you and we’ll try to go down the hill together.” Ali nodded, willing to try it.

Ashlyn positioned herself behind Ali, holding out her arms and putting her hands on Ali’s hips. “Ok,
I’m going to be trying to balance you and make adjustments, so just let me, ok?” Ashlyn instructed.

“Ok,” Ali replied.

“Alright, ready, go!” Ashlyn said and the two of them started down the hill. It worked for most of the way down until Ali leaned too far forward for Ashlyn to correct it in time and they both went tumbling. The snowboards went flying and after rolling a few feet, they landed together with Ali on top of Ashlyn, their faces a few inches apart.

They both started laughing and then came to a silent pause where they just looked at each other. Ashlyn let her thoughts just tumble out of her mouth “You honestly have the most beautiful colored eyes I have ever seen.”

Ali looked back into Ashlyn’s hazel eyes which looked green today. Everything in her heart wanted so badly to just lean down and kiss the blonde right now, but her mind stopped her. She knew that doing that would change everything. She knew what her heart wanted, but she needed to get her mind right too. To understand herself. She owed herself that. She owed Ashlyn that too. So, she broke the moment instead, “Don’t think that’s getting you off the hook for tumbling me into the snow, Stud.” She smiled and rolled off Ashlyn before helping her up.

The two of them headed back to Wilson to warm up for a little while and enjoy the afternoon. The kitchen staff had put out special snow day snacks in the living room. So, they grabbed some cookies and hot chocolate before heading up to Ashlyn’s room.

“So, what do you want to do tonight?” Ali asked.

“Well, turns out you came on a good night. The Vibes have a Valentine’s Day jam tonight, kind of like a little concert. So, that’s where I’ll be if you want to come watch,” Ashlyn teased, knowing Ali loved the acapella thing.

Ali decided to play back. “Hmmm, I don’t know. I kinda made plans with Alex to go purse shopping downtown. I mean, maybe I could work something out…” Ali tried to keep a straight face before finally cracking. “Are you kidding?! I’m sooo excited! I get to watch you in action tonight for more than one song! Best Valentine’s Day ever!” she yelled excitedly in a high pitched voice.

Whitney walked in after having been at the library most of the day working on a paper she had due soon. “Ali! Hi! I didn’t know you were coming!” she said seeing Ali sitting on Ashlyn’s bed.

“Hey Whit! Sorry to drop in uninvited, but I came to surprise this Valentine of mine here,” Ali said pointing to Ashlyn.

“Awww, guess that means I can’t sit around with Ash tonight eating boxes of chocolate and wallowing in our sorrows of being without Valentines,” Whitney laughed and Ashlyn chuckled from across the room.

“Guess not. But, you can come grab pizza with us at the campus center before Ash’s big debut tonight,” Ali suggested, figuring Whitney was probably going to the show.

“I’ll take it!” Whitney exclaimed.

The three of them headed over to the campus center to eat dinner before Ashlyn had to excuse herself to go get ready. Whitney and Ali sat talking at the campus center until it was time to go to the show. Ali told Whitney about how she had surprised Ashlyn this morning by pulling up in the quad in Syd’s car.
Whitney got serious for a moment, “You know, Ali. You’re really good for her. She’s been a different person since you’ve been in her life, a happier person.”

Ali got serious too. “She’s really good for me too.”

Whitney nodded and realized that they needed to head over to the show to get good seats.

Ali and Whitney sat two rows back in a large classroom with stadium style seating. A chalkboard at the front of the room had “The Vibes. Yay Love!” Written on it in big bubble letters. About 20 minutes later, after the room was brimming with people, the Vibes entered the room to loud cheers. All of them were dressed in combinations of black, red, and pink, forming the usual semi-circle.

Ali saw Ashlyn and her heart skipped in her chest. Ashlyn was wearing black dress pants with black leather slip on loafers, a red button up shirt with a black bowtie and a black button up vest over it. Her hair was put up into a bun and the sleeves of her shirt were rolled up revealing the watch Ali had given her for Christmas. She looked gorgeous.

Ali didn’t even realize she had gripped Whitney’s forearm on the armrest between them when Ashlyn walked in. “Don’t worry, Ali, I’m sure you’re not the only one in the room who’s eyes just practically fell out of their head just now. She looks really good. I promise I won’t tell her, her head is big enough already.” Whitney joked as Ali mumbled an apology.

The Vibes started the show with combination medley of T-Pain’s ‘Buy You a Drank’ and Usher’s ‘Love in this Club’. Ali was mesmerized by Ashlyn, watching her transition in and out of beats, completely impressed at how skillful she was. The group did three more songs, Beyonce’s ‘Halo’, Marvin Gaye’s ‘Sexual Healing’, and Shai’s “If I Ever Fall in Love Again’ with the audience cheering loudly between songs.

Ali watched Ashlyn move to the center of the semi-circle. Whitney saw the confusion on Ali’s face “Don’t let her fool you, she can sing too, watch.” Whitney said. Ali smiled hearing the start of N’SYNC’s ‘Tearin’ up my Heart’ listening to Ashlyn sing most of the song with a few of the other girls piping in here and there. The adoration Ali was feeling for the blonde right now was beyond compare. To say she was enraptured was an understatement.

The show ended after a few more songs with the Vibe’s closing with their usual signature, Ginuwine’s ‘My Pony’. The audience gave them a standing ovation. Ali hung back to wait for Ashlyn and Whitney headed out saying she’d see them later back at the house. A few minutes later, Ashlyn walked over with her coat in hand.

“Hey Princess, how was the show?” Ashlyn gave Ali a dimpled grin.

Ali gave the blonde a hug. “Ash, it was amazing! First of all, you look so good in this outfit! Second, you were incredible up there! And third, I thought you said you didn’t sing?!”

“I don’t really, just that song.” Ashlyn said beaming at Ali’s compliments. “So glad you liked it.”

“I LOVED it!” Ali exclaimed, taking Ashlyn’s hand as they made their way outside.

A fresh inch of snow had just fallen so the campus was all white. They started to make their way back to Wilson house slowly. Ali noticed a dressed up statue on the way. “What is up with that?” Ali asked, pointing to the statue.

“Oh that’s the statue fountain,” Ashlyn explained walking over to it. “People dress her up all the time for different holidays and stuff.”
Ali stood there looking at how the statue had been made to look like cupid, while Ashlyn crouched down for a minute.

Ashlyn stood back up. “Since I didn’t have time to get you a Valentine, Princess…”

Ali looked down to see Ashlyn had drawn a heart in the snow with ‘A+A’ written in it. “Such a charmer, Stud. Happy Valentine’s Day.” Ali said kissing Ashlyn on the cheek and grabbing her hand again to start walking.

As they walked along, Ali thought about having to leave again tomorrow morning and got a little sad, but it gave her an idea. “Hey, what are you doing for Spring Break?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Usually I would just go to visit my grandma and Chris. Chris is doing really well at his job and they’re sending him to a week-long manager’s training, and my grandma is busy with her volunteer projects all week. So, I’d just be hanging out by myself.” Ashlyn answered.

Ali smiled. “Any chance you’d want to come to Miami with me? My dad has a beach house there that Kyle and I go to a lot. I was going to invite all the girls, but everyone has plans this year. Anyway, it would just be us…”

Ashlyn’s face lit up in a huge smile. “I would love to go to Miami with you!”
Ashlyn felt like the days since Valentine’s Day weekend were just dragging. She was taking a more advanced cell and molecular biology course paired with a genetics course this semester that were keeping her extra busy on top of her other two courses. She had also spent many days agonizing over whether she should apply to study abroad in another country next year. After many conversations with Whitney, Ali, and her grandma, she decided that staying at Smith where she was happy was most important to her. She threw away the applications, feeling finally content in her decision to stay put. Once that was settled, Ashlyn felt like she could breathe a little and look forward to spring.

Since the winter had been such a mild one, with only that one major snowstorm, by early March it was already quite warm, unusually so for New England. The rugby team was absolutely loving being able to get out and practice outdoors for the short spring season that awaited them. They normally had to wait until after spring break before the snow would be melted enough on the pitch to be able to practice outside, but this year outdoor practice started the second week of March. Ashlyn could not have been more thrilled, not only did she love being on that pitch, but she really needed the distraction. Spring break was a week away and she was already antsy.

Whitney had spent the week watching Ashlyn run extra sprints at practice (something she normally hated), pack and re-pack her suitcase a hundred times, and pace around their room as she talked to Ali on the phone. It was Thursday night and Ashlyn and Ali were leaving for Miami in the morning.

“Ash, calm down! It’s spring break, not spring around the room in hyper speed until you keel over,” Whitney joked. “Seriously, relax. What are you so nervous about? It’s Ali, you guys hang out and talk all the time.”

“Sorry. I’m not really nervous, just excited. We’ve never spent this much time together, so I just want it to be perfect, you know?” Ashlyn replied, finally sitting down on her bed.

“Uh huh. Is that all?” Whitney questioned, knowing Ashlyn wasn’t telling her something.

Ashlyn looked up at her, she knew Whitney wasn’t buying it. She didn’t usually hold back from Whitney, so why start now. “No.” Ashlyn sighed. “I uh… I love her. Like love her, love her.” Ashlyn fell back onto her bed and groaned, letting the words hang in the air.

Whitney’s eyes widened. She knew Ashlyn had a serious thing for Ali, but she didn’t know how far it had gotten. Knowing everything that Ashlyn had gone through, she knew this was big. “Ashlyn, that’s wow. I mean, that’s huge.” Whitney said seriously.

“I know.” Ashlyn said quietly, still on her bed looking up at the ceiling.
“You going to tell her?” Whitney asked curiously.

“I don’t know. I mean, part of me wants to. I feel like there is definitely something between us and I think she might feel something too, maybe. I just don’t want to push anything. I would rather be her friend than ever lose her. And I still have so many things to tell her. I want her to really know who I am.” Ashlyn said, sitting up to look at Whitney. “I’ve wanted to just let it all out so many times, but the time just has never seemed quite right.”

“There’s no rush on anything, Ash. I mean, things will happen naturally on their own time. Just relax and let them happen, enjoy your time with her and it will all fall into place when and how it’s supposed to.” Whitney said soothingly.

“Thanks, Whit. That’s good advice. Calm the fuck down Harris and enjoy spring break, got it!” Ashlyn laughed.

Ashlyn got ready for bed and finally settled down to sleep. She and Ali had decided to drive down to Miami and Ali was picking her up in the morning.

Just after 9:00am on Friday morning Ashlyn got a text from Ali letting her know she was there. Ashlyn had been ready and waiting since 8:00am. She quickly grabbed her suitcase and headed outside to find her favorite brunette leaning against her BMW with a big smile. Ashlyn took her in, smiling back.

“You ready to hit the road, Stud?” Ali asked while popping open the trunk for Ashlyn to put her suitcase in.

“You know I am, Princess. Good morning!” Ashlyn said pulling Ali into a quick hug before looking into trunk and adding “Wow, I’m shocked there’s room in there given how you normally pack!”

Ali laughed and slapped her on the arm. “Well I tried to tone it down a bit seeing as how you’d never let me hear the end of it. Plus, bikinis don’t take up a lot of room.” Ali said giving Ashlyn a wink.

Ashlyn got immediately flustered at the thought, but played it cool. “Well, if you have as many bikinis as you do handbags, I’m in for quite a show,” she said winking back at Ali.

Ali gave her a smirk. “Should I start driving or do you want to start?”

“You just drove two hours to get here, so I’ll start,” Ashlyn replied getting in the driver’s seat. She was pretty excited to drive the BMW for a long distance.

The two made their way down the east coast listening to music, bantering and talking about the happenings of the last few weeks, and stopping to grab snacks and take fun pictures along the way. Ashlyn had completely relaxed the first few minutes into the trip, Ali had that effect on her. They switched driving every few hours, but Ashlyn was more used to the trip than Ali was. At one point Ali had leaned over from the passenger’s seat and rested her head on Ashlyn’s arm, falling asleep for a while. Ashlyn relished in the warmth of Ali against her arm, she couldn’t believe she was about to spend a whole week by herself with the beautiful brunette. This was going to be the best week ever.

They arrived in Miami Sunday early morning and Ali had taken over driving since she knew her way around. They drove along South Beach for a stretch before Ali pulled into a long driveway. Ashlyn’s mouth dropped open. She had been picturing this quaint little beach house, this was anything but.

Ashlyn got out of the car to see a large modern beach house with perfectly manicured gardens in the back area they had just pulled into. The front of the house had a large swimming pool and patio that
was surrounded by tropical hedges for privacy. Beyond that was a stunning view of South Beach, a set of stairs from the pool patio area led right down to the sand. “Woah.” Ashlyn got out as she looked around.

“My Dad spends a lot of time down here, he went all out with this place,” Ali said, feeling a little bad she hadn’t warned Ashlyn a head of time.

“This is incredible!” Ashlyn said excitedly. “I mean, wow! This is insane!”

Ali followed Ashlyn as she made her way over to the pool and stuck her legs in. The two of them had changed at the last rest stop into more weather appropriate clothing, so Ashlyn was already in a pair of board shorts and tank top. “Glad you like it, Stud” Ali giggled, coming over to stand behind her.

Ashlyn smiled up at Ali and got a brilliant idea. She stood up to face the brunette and pulled her into a hug.

Ali had seen the devious smile cross Ashlyn’s face and began to say “Ashlyn Harris, don’t you dare…,” but it was too late. Ashlyn tossed them both into the pool. She laughed as Ali splashed her saying “I’m going to kill you!”

“Awww, come on Princess, it’s spring break! Live a little!” Ashlyn joked as water hit her face from Ali’s splashing. “Truce, truce!” she yelled turning around so Ali couldn’t get her face anymore.

Ali laughed and stopped splashing Ashlyn, coming up behind her and wrapping her arms around the blonde’s shoulders. “Why don’t we dry off and I can show you the house and we can settle in?”

“Perfect!” Ashlyn replied, reaching to grab Ali’s legs and give her piggy back ride to the pool stairs so they could get out.

Ali handed Ashlyn a towel from a cabinet on the patio and watched as the blonde stripped off her wet tank top, standing there in just her sports bra and shorts. Ali took in her tattoos and hoped she’d be getting the chance to look at them a lot more over the course of the week.

Ali led Ashlyn into the house, and Ashlyn took it all in. The place was meticulously decorated in modern furniture with an open downstairs layout. There was a large living room that overlooked the outdoor patio with two black leather couches, a black coffee table, and a huge flat screen that hung above a decorative propane fireplace. The walls were lined with bookshelves and filled with books of all kinds and framed family pictures. The floor was dark wood with a comfy area rug under the couches. The living room led into a large marble tiled kitchen with an island where four tall stools stood around it. The kitchen had wide spacious granite counters all around and was full equipped, including a bar area. To the right of the kitchen Ali pointed out two doors. One led to a guest bedroom and the other to a downstairs bathroom with a roomy stone-walled stand-up shower. To the left of the kitchen was a floating metal staircase. Ali led Ashlyn upstairs.

At the top of the stairs directly in front of them, Ali pointed out two guest rooms. Off to the right was a guest bathroom with a huge old fashioned tub in it. Behind them, across from the guest rooms was the master bedroom. Ali led Ashlyn into the very large bedroom which overlooked the ocean and had wide glass sliding door with a walk-out balcony. The room had a king size bed and was designed in a tasteful nautical theme much like the other bedrooms. It featured a huge walk in closet and had its own master bathroom. The bathroom had a large Jacuzzi tub in one corner, a huge marble walk-in shower in the other corner, and a long double sink counter top. Ashlyn took it all in.

“This place is amazing. I love it!” Ashlyn exclaimed.
Ali smiled. “I usually stay in one of the back facing guestrooms up here and my dad uses this master bedroom. But, this is the best room in the house with the best view. So, he had everything cleaned and ready for us. I thought we could, um…share this master bedroom for the week?” Ali said with quiet hopefulness. “If you want to though, you can stay in any of the rooms you want.”

Ashlyn looked over the master bedroom one time before giving Ali a dimpled grin. “I am all for sharing this room with you, Princess.”

Ali squealed and gave Ashlyn a hug. “This is going to be so much fun!” She realized they were still wet and Ashlyn was still partially undressed. “Why don’t we put on some real swimsuits and head down to the beach for a while?” she suggested.

Ashlyn agreed and they went to the car to grab their bags. A few minutes later Ashlyn waited for Ali in the living room having already changed into a black bikini top with a black and white patterned pair of Burton board shorts. Ali came downstairs in a navy and white striped string bikini, making Ashlyn squirm and try to pull herself together as she looked the brunette up and down. She raked her eyes up Ali’s long legs, her taunt stomach, and sculpted arms before clearing her throat.

“You have a baseball bat around here?” Ashlyn asked.

“Um, probably, my dad likes sports. Why?” Ali questioned with a look of confusion.

“The way you look in that bikini, Princess. I’m going to be fighting people off of you all week!” Ashlyn grinned.

Ali smirked back. “I wouldn’t talk, Ash. You look damn good yourself, and women in Miami love some nice abs!” she said poking the blonde’s toned stomach. “Shall we?”

The two laid out in the sand on some towels relaxing in the sun. Being tired from the long drive, they both fell asleep pretty fast. Ashlyn woke up first about an hour later and decided to go for a quick ocean swim while Ali slept. She came back 20 minutes later to find Ali still asleep.

Ali felt cold drops of water on her stomach and woke up to Ashlyn standing over her all wet and dripping on her. “Ahhh, Ash!” she screamed out.

Ashlyn laughed and continued to shake her hair over Ali until Ali finally got up and agreed to take a walk down the beach. They walked for quite a while, taking in the scenery and people before Ashlyn’s stomach audibly growled.

“It’s already 4pm! We should get back and get something to eat,” Ali said realizing she was hungry herself after hearing the blonde’s stomach growl. Ashlyn nodded in agreement and they walked back to the house to get a quick shower before heading out for dinner.

Ali took Ashlyn out to her favorite place to eat nearby, an authentic Italian restaurant called Gol which was a bit of hidden gem close to the beach. They sat outside sharing their pasta dishes before heading back to the house. They hadn’t gotten a lot of sleep with all the driving, so they were both pretty tired. Since Ashlyn was still legally underage, Ali was glad her dad had fully stocked the bar for her so she didn’t have to make her own liquor store run. She opened a bottle of white wine, poured two glasses and brought them out to where Ashlyn was sitting on the patio.

The sun was setting and the two of them sat quietly in the humid night air sipping their wine and taking in the waning daylight.

“I can see why your dad spends so much time here, it’s beautiful” Ashlyn said breaking the silence.
“Yeah, it’s been a good thing for him to get away sometimes. Otherwise he would just work himself into the ground.” Ali replied.

“What does your dad do?” Ashlyn asked, realizing she had no idea.

“He’s a high school soccer coach. All of this,” Ali said pointing to the house “comes from my grandparents’ old money that they so nicely passed along in trust funds for all of us.”

Ashlyn could make out the embarrassed tone in Ali’s voice. “Hey, don’t be ashamed of it. If I was you, I’d be living it up. None of us can help the circumstances we are born into. You just do your best with whatever you’ve been given. You’ve worked your ass off to be where you are, it’s not like you’ve sat back and let things get handed to you, Ali.” Ashlyn said sincerely.

“I know. I just always want to make sure I don’t take any of it for granted and always work and go about things the way my parents do. Like if it wasn’t there tomorrow, I could do without it. That’s what I always aim for.” Ali replied honestly.

Ashlyn smiled. “I like that. Just don’t forget you can let yourself enjoy it sometimes too.”

“Right. I’ll just need you to remind me and help me enjoy it!” Ali joked.

“So, soccer coach, huh?” Ashlyn said, going back to the original question. “I used to play soccer.”

“Me too!” Ali said. “Well, I mean with my Dad coaching, we were pretty much forced to! Kyle only liked it in the beginning, but then lost interest. I played all through high school and then tried to play at Dartmouth, but I just didn’t mesh well with the team. I liked everything about Dartmouth except that soccer team, they were just such bitches. So, I moved on.” Ali said lightly, knowing she’d found a much better place with the rugby team.

“What position did you play?” Ashlyn asked enthusiastically.


“Goal keeper. I loved it. I played for most of high school, I quit my senior year.” Ashlyn said quietly.


Ashlyn sighed. “Long story. I promise I’ll tell you another night.” She said, knowing that she had a lot to tell Ali, but this just wasn’t the time.

Ali nodded and didn’t push. She changed the subject to what her hometown in Virginia was like and Ashlyn listened intently to Ali’s childhood stories, laughing and enjoying the night together.

By 11:00pm they were both yawning and decided it was time to turn in for the night. Ashlyn changed into her sleepwear and laid in bed while Ali brushed her teeth. Ali walked out of the master bathroom in short athletic shorts and the black bra she had been wearing this evening. Ashlyn swallowed hard as Ali rumbled through her luggage and then faced the wall, taking her bra off before slipping on a tank top. Ashlyn watched her back muscles ripple, the side curves of the brunette’s breasts just visible as she pulled the tank top over her heart.

Ali opened the large sliding door, leaving just the screen in place so they could let in the night air. She turned out the lights and snuggled up to Ashlyn like she always did, head pressed into the blonde’s shoulder and arm around her waist.

Ashlyn wrapped her tattooed arm around Ali and breathed out slowly as she felt’s Ali’s bra-less
chest press into her side. Today had been perfect. She kissed the brunette on the forehead.
“Goodnight, Princess. Today was great. Thanks for having me here.”

“Thanks for coming. We’re going to have a great week. Goodnight, Stud.” Ali replied. The two dozing off to the sound of the ocean.

The next two days were just as great. Ashlyn had woken up the next morning and slipped down to the kitchen to find a fully stocked fridge. She made Ali breakfast and then suggested that perhaps she could try and teach Ali how to surf. They rented surf boards and wet suits and Ali watched in awe as Ashlyn expertly rode a few waves before deciding she was ready to give it a shot. It had gone pretty well despite a few early wipe outs and Ali had managed to fully ride one small wave before the end of the day. Feeling proud of herself, the two had gone out to a slightly more fancy dinner before ending their night with a beach walk.

They spent the third day getting pampered. Ali’s dad had surprised them by leaving a gift certificate for a local day spa. So, they spend the day getting massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, and anything else the spa offered. They left the spa feeling totally relaxed and decided to cook dinner at the beach house. Ashlyn quickly learned that Ali’s cooking skills were not top notch, but she did her best to teach the brunette some culinary skills. They enjoyed another night on out on the patio, legs dangling in the pool with their shoulders touching while they talked about the day.

On their fourth day there, the clouds had rolled in and the weather was not great. The two of them had no idea just how symbolic those clouds were about to be.
Warning, we're about to learn about Ashlyn's past, so here come the bullying/harassment, drugs/drinking, and suicide mentions. Grab the tissues and hold on tight. Don't worry though, I promise you'll feel better at the end ;)

Since the weather was iffy and they hadn’t done any shopping yet, Ali thought it would be a great idea to set off down Washington Street and make their way through one of Miami’s hottest shopping districts. Ashlyn wasn’t all that into shopping, but it made her happy to do it with Ali because the brunette loved it so much.

Despite the cloudiness, the weather was still warm and Ali had dressed to kill. She was wearing a floral patterned sun dress that fell just at the knee with a pair of wedge sandals, her long toned legs looking perfect. Her hair was down and flowing around her shoulders, she looked flawless. Ashlyn couldn’t believe she was about to spend the day in Miami with this gorgeous woman by her side.

The two had a fun morning, trying on all kinds of outfits and stopping to grab sandwiches for lunch at a small café. The weather hadn’t cleared up much, so they decided to keep shopping through the afternoon. Ali had just dragged Ashlyn into a boutique that sold handbags, shoes, and hats.

“I'll be right back, Ash. I need to use the bathroom.” Ali said, excusing herself and leaving Ashlyn to browse the boutique.

Ashlyn nodded and began looking at some fedoras on the wall. A couple minutes later, she heard light laughter behind her followed by an unmistakable voice. A voice she had been dreading to hear ever since she left Satellite Beach.

“Well, well, look who it is. If it isn’t Ashlyn Harris, the white trash queen.”

Ashlyn swallowed hard and turned around to face the freckled, blue eyed blonde that she had once grown to love and then to loathe. Beside her was the still handsome basketball star that usually hung on her arm.

Ashlyn sighed, feeling shaky. “Lindsey. Josh.” She said trying to keep her voice even.

Lindsey gave her a devious smile. “Didn’t think I’d ever see you back in Florida again. Alone as usual, I see. And in the ritzy part of Miami, you probably just work here in one of the food trucks, huh? Or are we part of a biker gang these days?” she said pointing to Ashlyn’s tattooed arm.

Josh snickered besides her. Ashlyn stood silent not sure of what to say, eyes looking down, her heart pounding.

Ali had stepped out of the bathroom and made her way towards Ashlyn when she saw two people standing with her. She heard what the blonde girl standing in front of Ashlyn had said in her malicious tone and it made her angry. She had no clue who this girl was, but the way she was talking to Ashlyn made her blood boil. Ali had seen enough of the interaction to know this had to be some kind of ex-girlfriend. At least she sure hoped she had read the situation correctly given what she was
Ali walked straight up to Ashlyn, pretending she hadn’t seen the people in front of her. She grabbed Ashlyn’s hand and buried herself into the blonde’s neck.

“There you are, baby,” Ali said as she began placing open mouth kisses up Ashlyn’s neck making her way up to her ear.

Ashlyn’s breath hitched, all her attention going to the brunette trailing kisses up her neck and setting her skin on fire. She felt Ali’s breath on her ear.

“Just go with it.” Ali whispered in Ashlyn’s ear before pulling back and smiling at her adoringly.

“You ready to head back to our beach house, sexy?” Ali said seductively, before purposely turning around just enough to catch a glimpse of two people in front of Ashlyn.

“Oh, geez, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were talking to someone.” Ali said innocently, pretending to be embarrassed. “Hi, I’m Ali.”

Lindsey and Josh stood there looking surprised, watching this gorgeous girl hang all over Ashlyn.

Ashlyn snapped out of it a bit. “Oh, um, Ali this is Lindsey and Josh. We, uh, went to high school together.”

Ali paused for a second before she let a knowing look come across her face. “Wait, this is THE Lindsey?” she said giggling a bit.

Ashlyn looked at Ali having no idea what she was doing. Ali just continued on.

“Lindsey, I’m so happy to meet you finally.” Ali said holding out her hand for Lindsey to shake it.

Lindsey complied looking confused. Ashlyn looked just as puzzled.

“Seriously, I been wanting to thank you.” Ali said seriously.

“Uh, ok?” Lindsey replied still lost.

“No really. Thank you. Thank for being idiotic enough to let Ashlyn go, now she’s all mine. Talk about missing out.” Ali said with a taunting smile.

Lindsey and Josh stood there with their mouths open. Ali pulled Ashlyn’s hand prompting her to follow while she uttered “What a moron” just loud enough for Lindsey to hear.

“Uh, Josh. Lindsey.” Ashlyn nodded to them one more time and smiled before being pulled out the door by Ali.

Ali pulled Ashlyn by the hand quietly until they were a couple blocks away. She plopped down on a park bench and looked at Ashlyn seriously. “Hey, Ash, you ok?”

“Oh my god, Ali. That was…” Ashlyn started trying to find the words, looking stunned.

Ali freaked out thinking she must have read the situation wrong. “Oh geez, Ash, I’m so sorry. I heard what she said to you and I just figured she must be an ex, and I just didn’t think before I acted.”

“No, you don’t understand.” Ashlyn said simultaneously trying to calm herself and Ali down. “I’ve spent the better part of two years dreading that encounter back there, wondering what it would be like if it happened.” Ashlyn paused briefly before continuing. “I never in a million years pictured it...”
going down like that, walking away feeling like I just conquered the world.” She smiled softly at Ali.  
“You have no idea what you just did back there, what that meant to me.” She let out a huge breath.  
“Thank you, Alex. I have a lot I need to tell you, and I think it’s time I did. Can we just go home?”

“Of course.” Ali said, feeling a bit relieved and unsure of what exactly was happening. If Ashlyn was ready to talk though, she was ready to listen.

They made it back to the beach house. Ali immediately popped open a bottle of red wine and poured two glasses before settling into the corner of one of the couches besides Ashlyn. She stayed quiet, waiting for Ashlyn to speak when she was ready. After a couple sips of wine and a few deep breaths, Ashlyn started.

“I have a lot to tell you. To be honest, there isn’t a single person that knows everything except for me. My grandma knows most of it and my guidance counselor in high school knew a fair amount too. Chris of course has lived a lot of it himself, but I’ve kept a lot from him too. And I told Whitney the very basics of it at one point. I trust you Alex, you’re my best friend.” Ashlyn looked up from the floor to briefly meet Ali’s eyes, finding the warmth and care reflected in them comforting. “I find myself for the first time wanting to tell someone everything. I want to tell you every last bit of it even though I’m so nervous.”

Ali reached over and took Ashlyn’s hand in hers. “You can tell me anything, you know that.” Ali said seriously before going quiet again to let Ashlyn speak.

“I’m just going to start at the beginning. Just stop me if it gets to be too much, ok?” Ashlyn said. Ali nodded, knowing she wouldn’t stop Ashlyn no matter what.

Ashlyn sighed and began. “I grew up in a pretty poor family, you kinda know that. Satellite Beach is not exactly a nice town anyway, but we were still lower on the totem pole than most. My family always got judged and made fun of, and it wasn’t the easiest growing up. We made the best of it though, my parents always tried to make sure we had what we needed and we got by together. I mean, I wasn’t all that close with my mom. She had this vision of this perfect girl dressed in pink who liked tea parties and dolls. I was never that girl, so we butted heads a lot because she was always try to make me into someone I wasn’t. My dad and I though, we were really close. I was always a daddy’s girl, following him around and doing everything with him. Chris and I were close too. He was always making sure I didn’t get picked on too much and he protected me a lot. We weren’t a perfect family by any means, but we had each other at least.” Ashlyn looked down, deep in thought.

“The summer of my freshman year in high school, my dad died of a heart attack. We were devastated. He was the glue that held our family together, and without him, we started to fall apart. Chris started drinking around that time, spending less time at home. My mom got really depressed and just sat around doing nothing really, barely making it to work every day. My grandparents stepped up and started to try and help out. It felt like I really had no one but my grandparents at that point. It was like everyone in my family was in their own world trying to just get by as it was, and then it just got worse.” Ashlyn paused for a second.

“My grandpa got pneumonia and died a few months after my dad. It was a hard blow that none of us could really handle. Life just kept throwing shit our way though. In the same month my grandpa died, my grandmother found out she had breast cancer and started undergoing treatment. Everything and everyone completely came unhinged. Chris was never around anymore, he got in to heavy drugs. I didn’t have him around to help. My grandma was trying hard to be my mother, to care for me, but she was so sick, so I was taking care of her. My own mother was useless, so depressed she wasn’t functioning. Not that anyone could blame her after losing her husband and her dad.” Tears
streamed steadily down Ashlyn’s face and Ali grabbed and squeezed her hand, her own tears rolling down.

“We got a call from the police one day telling us to get to the hospital, my mom had had an accident on the way to work. They had found her car wrapped around a tree, she suffered some pretty severe brain injuries and passed away a week later. The accident investigation suggested that the ‘accident’ was purposeful. Given how she had been, it didn’t surprise me I guess, but it still hurt so bad that she just chose to leave like that. And just like that, everyone was gone except for my grandma. My grandma took care of me as best she could after that.” Ali wedged herself into the corner of the couch and pulled Ashlyn into her so that her back was against Ali’s chest with Ali’s arms around her.

“I became really withdrawn by the end of sophomore year in high school. I never had many friends, so it didn’t really matter and no one really noticed. I didn’t eat or sleep much, I walked around like this shell of a person. I poured myself into skateboarding, surfing and soccer because that was all I had to take my mind off things. Like I said before, I played goalie for our high school team. There was this popular girl on my team, Lindsey, the one you met today. One day she just randomly started talking to me. I had no idea why, she was the most popular girl in the school. Over the next couple of months, she and I hung out a lot at soccer and got to be really good friends. It happened so fast, I just clicked with her.” Ashlyn paused to sit up and sip her wine before settling back into Ali.

“I told her everything about my family, what I was feeling, and she was there for me. She kind of saved me. Kept me from doing reckless things and losing myself. She pulled me into her group of friends and made me feel normal for once. We got closer and closer and then one night we were hanging out, she leaned in and kissed me. The world just kind of exploded. No one had ever liked me, let alone this popular, good looking girl that I was crushing on. So, we quietly started dating, not saying anything to anyone because we knew we’d get harassed. We spent the second half of junior year together. She told me she loved me, she took care of me, she made me feel good about myself. And I believed all of it. I loved her. It was like life had finally given me something good. At the beginning of the school year my senior year, her parents had gone away for a weekend and she had asked me to come over. We started making out in her room and it was getting heated. I wasn’t sure I was ready to take things to another level with her just yet, I was still figuring a lot of things out. She was insistent though and I just went with it. I was glad I had, it felt good and it was everything you kind of picture your first time to be. I left her house that night completely happy, sure that I had somehow been lucky enough to find the person I was meant to be with so early in life.” Ashlyn began trembling a bit and Ali held her tighter, tears still running down both their cheeks.

“The next day, she called and broke up with me, saying she had made a mistake and didn’t want to talk to me anymore. She gave me no reasons. I was devastated. Completely heartbroken. I spent hours wondering what I had done wrong, resigning myself to the fact that I was just unlovable. And just when I thought it didn’t get any worse, it did. It was the movie Mean Girls come to life. I walked into school that Monday morning to people laughing at me and snickering, calling me dyke and all kinds of awful things. I figured she must have told people something, but I had no idea what. I left and went outside to get out of the thick of it, but people were still looking at me. So, I looked at my phone, pretending to be busy so I didn’t have to look at people. I checked my email on my phone and saw there had been an email from the night before. It was an email that had gone out to the whole school containing a link which suggested it was a funny video. I clicked on it and watched the video that pretty much killed me inside.” Ashlyn let out a deep breath and Ali stroked her hair, listening intently at the blonde’s painful words, not knowing how she had even been able to listen this long.

“You know what was on that video? It was Lindsey and her popular friends making a bet. A bet over whether she could get loser Ashlyn Harris to come out of the closet and humiliate her. And she
won that bet without question. The next thing on that video was her fucking me on her bed. My first time having sex put out for everyone to look at, watching me beg her for more, telling her I loved her. Turns out she had been dating Josh that whole time too. It just broke me.” Ali brought her hand up to her mouth, shocked at everything she was hearing. Her heart aching for Ashlyn, not understanding how anyone could ever do that to anyone, let alone Ashlyn.

Ashlyn continued before Ali could say anything. “We didn’t have money to move or for me to transfer schools, so I just had to stay there. I couldn’t bear to press charges because of the greater attention it would bring. I quit soccer, I quit doing everything. I wanted so badly to just be gone, to not exist, but I never had the guts to make it happen. I just did purposely reckless shit like try dangerous skateboard tricks without a helmet or swim so far out in the ocean that I didn’t think I could possibly back. Just hoping that life would just end everything for me because I was too much of a pussy to do it myself. I didn’t want to be my mother. When that didn’t happen, I just worked really damn hard so I could get good enough grades to get the hell out of Satellite Beach. So I didn’t have to spend one day longer than I had to being made fun of and beat up and humiliated. My guidance counselor was really great and she helped me a lot. She’s the one that suggested Smith and getting out of Florida completely. I was never the same after it all, never able to let anyone in. Always scared that people had bad intentions. That’s why I’ve never been able to let women reciprocate with me or be in relationships, I just kind of panic. I want to be able to be with someone like that, to trust someone with my whole self, to be enough for someone. I mean, honestly, things have changed a lot and gotten a whole lot better. I found a home at Smith. Smith is my home, my first ever real home. The pitch is my home, my friends are my home. You are my home, Alex.”

“You’re the first person, I’ve ever wanted to let in. I’m not ashamed to tell you who I am because I trust you. And today…” Ashlyn trailed off as she felt Ali rest her head on top of hers and squeeze her just a little tighter.

“I mean, every time I come back to Florida I get anxious,” she continued. “Always worried that I’m going to run into people I know from high school and how I’m going to handle it. I’ve hated having to come back here just to be able see my family. Always thinking about if I ever saw Lindsey again, and if I’d ever be able to stand strong and walk away from her with my head up. Show that I’m not just some loser who ran away to another state to get away from her. Today, everything I’ve dreaded for two years stared me right in the face. And you came along, Alex, and you protected me like you have from day one. Standing up for me and making me feel proud, making it so I could walk away with my head up. I don’t know how to thank you. Right now that feeling of dread is just gone, and I feel like I can finally let it go. I just hope that everything I told you tonight doesn’t change things.”

Ali sat up a bit, putting a hand on Ashlyn’s cheek and turning her face so she could look at her. She looked deeply into the blonde’s cloudy hazel eyes, wiping the tears from Ashlyn’s face as well as her own.

“Listen to me. I will always be here to protect you, nothing will ever change that. The only thing that just changed was my admiration for you. It was already so high, but now it’s off the charts. I can’t fathom how a person goes through all of that and is still such a wonderful, beautiful, and good person inside and out like you are. You are amazing, Ashlyn Harris. You are strong, and brave, and smart, and truly one of the greatest people I have ever met. You are more than enough for anyone, and you’ll always be more than enough for me. You are everything that is right and good in this world and I’m so happy you came into my life. Thank you for letting me in, for sharing all of that. You can always talk to me, you can always trust me. I’m never going anywhere.” Ali said, her voice full of genuine love and care, her eyes never leaving Ashlyn’s.

“Yeah?” Ashlyn asked quietly.
“Yeah. You can count on it, Ashlyn.” Ali whispered back.

“Thank you, Alex.” Ashlyn said in whisper, feeling drained.

“Now, can we go scour Miami and find that bitch so I can kill her?” Ali asked animatedly, but with a serious undertone.

Ashlyn smiled at Ali’s way of always making things feel easy and normal. “Easy, Krieger. We don’t need bloodshed tonight.” Ashlyn laughed lightly before adding, “Maybe tomorrow?”

Ali chuckled “Deal, Harris.” Ali leaned back into the corner of the couch again, pulling Ashlyn back with her. “Now come here.”

Ashlyn laid her head on Ali’s chest feeling the brunette’s arms around her and listening to her heartbeat. There was no need for any more words between the two of them tonight.

Ashlyn woke up still curled up into Ali on the couch. She remembered the night before and took a deep breath, letting herself snuggle a little more closely into Ali for a few minutes. It had gone better than she could have imagined. She picked her head up and looked at the sun streaming in through the patio door and then looked at her watch to see that it was 7:00am. They had fallen asleep pretty early after everything the previous night. This was their last full day in Miami before the drive back and Ashlyn wanted it to be a great one. She felt so good, so light, and so close to Ali.

She gently woke Ali up by running her fingers through her hair. Ali opened her eyes slowly taking in her surroundings before letting her eyes fall on Ashlyn’s. “Morning, Stud,” she mumbled sleepily.

“Hey, Princess. Looks like we never made it to bed.” Ashlyn replied. “Let’s get ready and I’ll take you out to breakfast.”

Ali smiled wide and nodded. The two of them got showered and dressed before heading down to a café right along the beach for breakfast.

“So, what do you want to do today, Princess?” Ashlyn asked.

“Actually, I was thinking we could take one of the yacht charters out to the small reef and do some snorkeling.” Ali said with a smile, knowing how much Ashlyn loved marine life. She had planned this out well before the trip.

“No way, really?!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

“Yes way! You didn’t think I’d let you leave here without checking out that reef did you, Miss Marine Biologist?” Ali replied happily.

“I don’t know what I did to deserve you Krieger, but I’m not even about to question it!” Ashlyn said playfully.

The two of them spent the afternoon snorkeling around the reef, taking goofy underwater pictures of each other, and taking breaks to lay out in the sun on the yacht. Ashlyn educated Ali on some of the ocean life swimming around them. Ali watched Ashlyn excitedly point out different sea creatures, often knowing more than their tour guide, and wondered how it was possible that anyone could be this smart and this perfect. The things she was feeling inside at the moment were hard to describe, but not a single of one of them scared her or made her pause.

They got back to the beach house around 5pm, with Ashlyn insisting that she’d cook Ali dinner after the day they’d had together. They changed into some comfortable clothes and Ashlyn got started in
the kitchen while Ali got the plates and silverware out. After a few minutes, Ali had finally convinced Ashlyn to let her make the salad since she seemed to be able to handle that. They worked around each other comfortably, occasionally smiling and purposely bumping into each other.

“Looking pretty good in that apron there, Ash.” Ali teased.

“Watch it, Krieger or I’ll let you starve,” Ashlyn played back.

“You cooked enough food for an army, I don’t think starving will be an issue!” Ali laughed.

Ali uncorked a bottle of wine and they sat outside on the patio eating dinner while they scrolled through the pictures on their phones they had taken over the week. The sun had gone down and night was settling in. They had finished eating and were just finishing off the bottle of wine when the sky opened up, rain coming down hard.

Ali screeched and ran into the house grabbing their wine glasses while Ashlyn quickly scooped up the plates and brought them inside with her.

“Whew, that came on fast!” Ali said, standing at the patio door looking out.

Ashlyn put the plates on the counter and came up beside Ali, taking her wine glass from Ali’s hand and watching as the rain drops fell heavily in the pool. She finished her wine in a couple of gulps, put it down on the coffee table and went back to the patio door by Ali. She pulled off her shirt and shorts, until she was standing there in just her underwear and sports bra.

“Ash, what are you doing?” Ali said looking at Ashlyn a bit surprised.

“Live a little, Krieger.” Ashlyn said with a wink and walked out the door into the pouring rain, jumping in the pool.

Kyle’s words echoed in Ali’s head. Loosen up and have a little fun. “Fuck it.” she said stripping down to her underwear and heading outside. It was raining so hard she was soaked before she even got to the pool. She jumped in making a huge splash. It was pretty dark and she was trying to let her eyes adjust when she felt something grab her ankle. Ali let out a scream and Ashlyn surfaced next to her laughing.

“I could hear you scream all the way under the water!” Ashlyn laughed through the downpour.

Ali splashed her hard chasing her across the pool until Ashlyn was cornered and begging for mercy. “Who’s screaming now, Harris?” Ali laughed.

“Ok, Ok, I give!” Ashlyn said, putting her hands on Ali’s shoulders and grinning.

Ali smiled back, looking at the hazel eyes that had become so familiar to her. And then it hit her like a lightning bolt. Here she was in one of the most romantic settings of her life, with this amazing woman that she couldn’t get enough of, and nothing else mattered. Her heart was pounding, reminding her what it wanted, and she was going to listen.

Ali moved closer to Ashlyn, backing her into the wall of the pool, their faces inches apart. She lifted her hand and tucked a wet strand of Ashlyn’s hair behind her ear, leaving her hand on the blonde’s cheek. Ashlyn’s eyes looked back at her softly, exploring her own. Ali could feel Ashlyn’s breathing pick up. She looked briefly at Ashlyn’s lips and moved to close the space between them, hearing Ashlyn whisper out “Alex” just before her lips ghosted over the blonde’s.

The kiss started slow and soft, every nerve ending in Ali’s body firing. Ashlyn let her hands wrap
around Ali’s waist, pulling her in and deepening the kiss. The blonde’s body was on fire, her heart racing dangerously as her lips moved against Ali’s perfectly, like they had kissed each other a million times.

Ali moved her hands behind Ashlyn’s neck to pull her in even closer, whimpering lightly as their chests made contact. She let her tongue run along Ashlyn’s lips wanting more of her. Ashlyn parted her lips, letting Ali’s tongue entwine with her own, tasting Ali’s mouth along with the rain falling heavily on their faces.

They gripped each other tightly, lips moving against each other passionately until they couldn’t breathe anymore. Ali pulled away breathlessly. “Whoa,” she said looking at Ashlyn through hooded eyes and breathing heavily.

“Yeah.” Ashlyn replied, her own chest rising and falling at a quick pace. She gave Ali a dimpled smile and Ali leaned in again.

“Wait. Alex.” Ashlyn whispered, holding the brunette’s face with her hand.

“What’s wrong?” Ali said, concern coming over her face.

“Hey. No. Nothing is wrong.” Ashlyn reassured her stroking her cheek. “I have honestly wanted that to happen since the day I met you. I want this more than anything. I just…” she paused and let out a breath before continuing. “I know this is new to you, and as much as I want this, I don’t want to ever do anything to mess it up. I’d rather be your friend, than not have you in my life. This is a lot, and I want you to be sure you’re ready. No one ever stopped to make sure I was ready, and I don’t want that to ever be the case for you. So, no matter what you’re feeling right now. Just promise me you’ll think about it just a little bit more, and make sure that you’re absolutely ready for this and everything that comes with it. If and when you’re ready and sure, I’m all in, ok?”

“Ok.” Ali replied, understanding what Ashlyn meant, feeling touched by the way the blonde cared for her. Knowing that it was probably a good idea let herself process all this a bit even though she pretty much knew what she wanted. “So, what exactly do we do now?”

“We don’t change anything, we do what we always do, just be us. And if and when you’re ready, you just kiss me like that again, and I’m all yours beautiful.” Ashlyn said lovingly.

“Deal.” Ali replied with a smile, wrapping herself around Ashlyn and burying her face into the blonde’s neck.

They sat there in the pool like that for a while, letting the rain wash over them, until Ashlyn broke the silence. “Hey, I have a question.”

“What’s that?” Ali asked.

“Will you be my date to rugby prom?” Ashlyn said smiling.

“You have a rugby prom?” Ali questioned.

“Yeah. We do one every year. You guys don’t have one?” Ashlyn replied.


“It’s not a Smith thing, I swear other rugby teams do it!” Ashlyn defended. “It’s next Saturday.”

“Ashlyn! You’re leaving me a week to find a dress?!?!” Ali exclaimed.
“Relax, Alex, it’s not a real prom! You can wear sweatpants if you want to, Tobin probably will!” Ashlyn laughed at her. “So, is that a yes?”

“You know I’m going to need a new dress,” she raised an eyebrow at Ashlyn. “And that is absolutely a yes.”

Ashlyn smiled at the brunette. “Good. And maybe bring HAO, Kelley, Syd, and Hope if they’re up for it. It’s always more fun with more people. I can reserve the library in Wilson for them to crash in, it has two pull out couches.”

“You got it, Stud.” Ali said, letting her head back into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck. They stayed out there in the pool a bit longer, listening to the rain fall and enjoying the moment quietly. Shortly after, they made their way to bed, changing into dry sleeping clothes and falling asleep snuggled together like always.
On the drive back from Miami, Ashlyn finally took pity on Ali and explained exactly what rugby prom entailed. The team would hold a charity match on campus in the afternoon, tickets selling for $10 each. The team would split up and play against each other (and anyone else that wanted to join) almost like a practice scrimmage. The selling point, they would do it in prom dresses. After the match, that night the rugby team would host a more typical dance (rather than the usual after party) with some kind of theme in the campus center ballroom just like a prom. People often got pretty dressed up for that, but it wasn’t required.

“I’ve actually seen that in Germany, but I didn’t realize they called it rugby prom! We’ve never done it at Dartmouth.” Ali laughed hard and said she was totally in, if for no other reason to watch Ashlyn play rugby in a prom dress.

Ali dropped Ashlyn back on campus Sunday afternoon, giving the blonde a really long hug while she ran her hands up and down Ashlyn’s back gently. “See you in a few days, Stud.” She gave Ashlyn a kiss on the cheek and she made her way over to her car.


Ashlyn walked in her room to find Whitney already back and sitting on her bed reading a book. “Hey Ash! How was the trip?” Whitney got up and moved over to sit on Ashlyn’s bed.

“Amazing. And scary. And nerve-racking. And completely wonderful.” Ashlyn said with a dreamy looking smile.

“Hmmm, ok. What does all that mean?” Whit asked a bit lost.

“It means I told her everything,” Ashlyn said giving Whitney a pointed look, knowing she’d know what she meant.

“Oh geez. How did it go?” Whitney said curiously, but not wanting to pry too much.

Ashlyn explained the whole incident with Lindsey and how after that she opened up to Ali and it had gone really well. She left out most of the details and made no mention of what happened afterwards, leaving that part between her and Ali for now.

“You go Ali! I so wish I had been there for that! She really is something, huh?” Whitney commented, admire Ali for having stood up and handled things like that.

“You have no idea, Whit. No idea.” Ashlyn said. “Oh, and I got her and some of the Dartmouth girls to agree to come to rugby prom!”
“Sweet! That’ll make it more fun!” Whitney said excitedly. “Glad Spring Break was so good, Ash.” She knew Ashlyn probably wasn’t telling her everything, but she also knew she’d get it out of her when the blonde was ready.

Ali texted Ashlyn that she had gotten back safely and then immediately Skyped Kyle.

“Hello dear sister!” Kyle said playfully as his face came on the screen.

“Hi!” Ali exclaimed.

Kyle pretended to shield his face. “Ok, spill it! Something is up, your smile is pretty much blinding me, so start talking!” He said before folding his hands and sitting up to listen intently.

“So, remember how I was using the beach house for Spring Break?” Ali started.

“Yep.” Kyle said recalling that conversation.

“Well, I left out the part that it was just me and Ashlyn hanging there all week.” Ali said slowly.

“What?! You two totally did it in my bed didn’t you?!” Kyle accused in a teasing tone.


Other than leaving out the details about Ashlyn’s past, Ali told Kyle everything that had happened over the week, including how it had ended.

“Woah. So, wow. I mean, you’re smiling like you just got a new pony. So, does this mean what I think it does?” Kyle asked animatedly.

“Yeah. I really want to be with her.” Ali said with a quiet smile.

“And how are you feeling about all of it?” Kyle asked carefully.

“I mean honestly, the whole coming out thing seems like a lot. I’m just starting to realize a lot of things, so I’m not sure I know exactly what to tell people yet, so that is a little scary. It kind of doesn’t matter though, I just want to be with Ash, be her girlfriend and show her off to the world, you know? No one has ever made me feel the way she does, she’s perfect.” Ali paused and continued. “Of course, I haven’t got a clue what I’m doing physically either and that’s a little nerve-wracking, but I’m hoping I get the hang of that eventually,” Ali said laughing.

“You know, Alex, just because you are with Ashlyn doesn’t mean you have to slap a label on yourself to show people. When you figure it all out and if you want to put a label on it, go for it. Other than that though, don’t do anything just for the sake of other people’s comfort. If you’re comfortable, just let whatever happens with you and Ashlyn stand for itself.” Kyle said wisely.

“Eeeek! Alex, I’m so happy for you!” He squealed before adding “I really like her.”

“Thanks, Kyle. That was actually perfect advice and exactly what I needed to hear. You’re the best.” Ali said genuinely. “Oh and Kyle?”

“Yeah?” Kyle replied.
“Now that I can admit it… Ugh, she is so damn hot!” Ali exclaimed letting her head hit the desk for dramatic effect. “Like seriously, so good looking and beautiful, it’s like she’s not even real!”

Kyle doubled over laughing. “I knew it!!! You suck at hiding things Alexandra Blaire!”

They joked around for a while longer before Ali realized she should go meet the girls for dinner. She said goodbye to Kyle, promising to call him soon. She then composed herself before dinner, making sure the smile on her face was a bit more normal and wouldn’t give anything away. She wasn’t ready to share anything with her friends just yet.

Ashlyn got back from dinner having survived the incessant teasing from Megan, Abby, Sarah, Tobin and Alex about her and Ali going on Spring Break together. Of course, it only got worse when Ashlyn let them think that nothing had happened at all. Megan had made several comments about Ashlyn losing her touch, suggesting she needed to work out at the gym more. They had all laughed pretty hard, including Ashlyn who was just happy no one had been as perceptive as Whit. If things were going to happen, Ashlyn wanted them to be at Ali’s pace and comfort level.

Ashlyn headed outside for a walk, giving her grandma a call to check in as usual as she walked. She dialed the number hearing her grandma pick up. “Hello?”

“Hey Gram! How was your week with all the volunteer stuff?” Ashlyn greeted her.

“Oh, it was good. I finally got Barbara DiRusso to agree to do a craft week at the nursing home.” Her grandma answered proudly.

“That’s excellent! I knew you’d manage to convince her!” Ashlyn replied sharing her grandma’s excitement.

“Enough about that though. Are you going to tell me about your week in Miami? Maybe starting with what happened between you and Ali and what’s changed?” Her grandma said probingly, emphasizing the word ‘changed’.

“Seriously, Gram. How on earth do you know this stuff before I even tell you?” Ashlyn asked, shocked at her grandma’s question.

“First of all, Ashlyn, I read you like a book. Your voice is happy and giddy, I can tell something is up. Second, word around Satellite Beach these days is that Ashlyn Harris has gorgeous girlfriend and lives in a Miami beach house. Care to explain?” Her grandma said, the smile evident in her tone.

“Oh my gosh, really? People are saying that?” Ashlyn asked, a huge smile on her face.

“Yes, really! It spread like wildfire, you know how people here are. Now fess up and tell me!” Her grandma implored.

Ashlyn explained the encounter with Lindsey, telling her what Ali had done.

“That is one good woman, Ashlyn.” Her grandma said appreciatively referring to Ali.

“I know.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“Is that all?” Her grandma questioned curiously.
“Uh, no.” Ashlyn told her grandma the quick version of the kiss she shared with Ali.

“Thought so.” Her grandma said happily before adding, “You’re right not to rush her, but make sure you don’t ever let her go either. That’s one of those people you always fight for, you hear me?’

“I hear you, Gram. Loud and clear. I’m on it.” Ashlyn replied seriously. “Sorry you had to deal with all that gossip before I had a chance to tell you what happened. I mean, it just happened like three days ago!”

“Oh don’t worry, I handled it just fine I think,” her grandma replied in a devious tone.

“Gram, what did you do?” Ashlyn questioned.

“Oh nothing, I just corrected them that it was your wife and not your girlfriend is all.” Her grandma said in a sing song voice.

Ashlyn laughed hard. “You’re the best, Gram, seriously!”

“I told you you’d get the last laugh, Ashlyn. I’m never wrong.” Her Grandma stated. “Have a good night sweetheart.”

“I know, grandma. I love you, have a good night.” Ashlyn replied. She had just gotten close to the athletic fields and sat down on a bench near the waterfall from the stream that separated the fields from the rest of campus. She reflected over the last few days and was flabbergasted at how life could bring on so much bad and then so much good. And then she picked up her phone and FaceTimed Ali, she just wanted to see that smile one more time tonight.
Pitch Perfect

Chapter Notes

So, guess what is in this chapter that you probably weren’t expecting just yet? That’s right, smut. Surprise! :) If that’s not your thing, I suggest you stop reading after the rugby prom game.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ali parked her car near the Smith Athletic fields late Saturday morning, watching Sydney pull up beside her in her Land Rover. HAO and Ali got out of Ali’s BMW while Kelley, Hope, and Sydney got out of the Land Rover. All of them dressed like they were heading off to prom. Ashlyn had warned Ali that she would want something she could run and get tackled in, so all of them had chosen to avoid long dresses and saved the nice stuff for tonight’s party.

Kelley had chosen a green sequined flapper style dress from Target that was slim fitting and fell at her knees. Hope had gone the Target route too and was wearing a simple satiny gray/silver dress that was light and airy. HAO had picked out a ridiculous pink paisley print dress with a short puffy bottom that she found among the prom clearance section in DEB. Sydney went shopping in her own closet pulling out a tight strapless purple dress that she never wore.

Ali had followed Sydney’s game plan of looking in her own closet. She was wearing a form fitting satiny white dress that fell just above her knees. It was a decent dress, except for the awful ruffled flower attached near the left strap. Ali’s mom had gotten her this dress last year and while Ali usually agreed with her mother’s taste in clothes, she hated this dress. She figured if she stained it enough today in the name of charity, she’d never have to wear it again.

The girls approached the pitch in their dresses and cleats, feeling absolutely ridiculous until they saw the array of colorful dresses awaiting them on the pitch. The Smith ruggers had raided the local thrift shop for dresses like they did every year for rugby prom.

Abby was wearing a sea foam green dress with an awful pleated front. Sarah was rocking a teal dress with a bottom that was ruffled enough to be called a tutu. Tobin was wearing an off-white linen dress that looked like a potato sack with a black belt around the waist. Alex had opted for a light yellow one-shoulder strap dress with a hideous orange floral print. Megan looked pretty ridiculous in a red strapless dress that featured a very large bow across the chest. Whitney, however, looked the strangest with a very modest light gray dress that fell above her ankles and could only be described as a frock from the colonial era, all she was missing was a bonnet.

Ali scanned the field, her eyes finally finding Ashlyn. The blonde was wearing a simple silky royal blue dress that fell at her knees and wasn’t too tight or too flowy. It looked like the perfect 80’s style prom dress. Her hair was up in a bun and her make-up was much heavier than usual. Ali grinned widely at how cute she looked. Ashlyn finally caught sight of them, waving and going to greet them.

“Ladies! You’re all looking lovely!” Ashlyn said cheerily, looking over the Dartmouth girls.

They replied in a unison curtsies of ‘thank yous’.

Ashlyn looked Ali up and down briefly. Of course she looks amazing in a not so nice dress, Ashlyn
thought to herself. Her thoughts were interrupted by HAO.

“That is a whole lot of eyeliner and mascara you have going on there, Ash!” HAO joked while Sydney nodded in agreement.

“Hey, 100% or not at all! That’s how we do rugby prom!” Ashlyn answered laughing. She gave HAO a quick hug and then pulled Ali into one too. “Looking good, Princess.” She whispered in Ali’s ear.

Ali smiled. “You too, Stud.” She quickly whispered back in Ashlyn’s ear before they let go.

There was a sizeable crowd there to watch the match and Abby formed two even teams so they could get the game underway. Abby had decided that since the scrum halves and lock forwards usually worked together to make most of the play decisions, they needed to mix the teams to make it equal. She put Alex and Hope on one side and Ali and Ashlyn on the other. Abby, Sydney, Whitney, Alex, Sarah and Hope were on one team. Ali, Ashlyn, Kelley, HAO, Megan, Tobin were on the other.

“Uh oh, we either both lose or we both win, Krieger.” Ashlyn joked.

“Better hope we both win, Harris, or you’re in for a long grumpy night.” Ali teased back.

“Got it!” Ashlyn replied and the two started to strategize. They had decided that since Ali was quicker, she would be the one predominantly going for the ball out the scrum with Ashlyn trying to make some room for her. If Ali was on the wrong side, Ashlyn would try for it. Since Tobin was the fastest back, they planned on trying to get the ball to her first so she could make progress. HAO was the strongest of the backs, so they’d try to use her closer to the try line to fight her way through at the end. Kelley had been assigned to focus on making runs once the ball came out of rucks since she was the sneakiest.

The teams lined up for an opening kick and the ball was quickly tied up on the first play, the ref calling for the first scrum. Ashlyn looked back to her right shoulder, giving Ali a quick smile before hearing “Engage!”

The scrum collided with Megan hooking the ball into scrum quickly. Ashlyn kept close to Ali shielding her from view as much as possible while she picked up the ball. Ali grabbed the ball and made a barreling run down the pitch, her white dress flapping. Abby came right at her and tackled Ali, but not before Ali got the ball to Tobin who made more progress and handed it off to HAO who evaded Hope’s tackle and scored the easy try.

Ashlyn picked up HAO in the air. “Now that’s what I’m talking about!” HAO laughed and pulled the ridiculous paisley puff bottom of her dress back down into place once Ashlyn put her down.

Ashlyn walked up behind Ali and smacked her lightly on the ass “Nicely done, Warrior Princess!” Ali jumped a bit and smiled.

The game just got sloppier and funnier as it went on. Megan’s bow had come undone and the fabric was wrapping around people, so they had to cut it off. People figured out quickly that all you had to do to get Whitney down was step on her dress, so that became a thing. Sydney had already flashed the crowd twice when her strapless dress had come down too far. Kelley’s green sequins were scattered all over the pitch.

At one point, Ashlyn had gotten tackled so hard by Hope that her dress had come up and wrapped around her head. Ali looked over at Ashlyn laid out on the pitch with her blue dress around her head,
a white lace bra with matching panties on full display as the blonde tried to collect herself. After the play, Ali had to tease her. “Nice panties, Harris.”

Ashlyn smirked. “Like I said, 100% or not at all.”

“Right.” Ali laughed, trying to figure out how she might eventually go about getting Ashlyn into that matching lace underwear set again.

The one shoulder strap on Alex’s dress had busted in the second half and she was fighting just to keep her dress on, distracting Tobin for the rest of the match. The best might have been when Megan went in for a low tackle on Hope and ended up with her head up Hope’s dress because of their height difference.

By the end of the match, Ali’s dress looked like it had been attacked by a lawn mower; green stains and dirt all over it, the ruffled flower practically hanging off. Ali and Ashlyn’s team had just barely pulled out a 28 to 24 victory.

Everyone spent a little while on the pitch after the game taking pictures in funny prom poses. Ali and Ashlyn took one facing each other in a perfectly proper pose, except for the fact that they each had a hand on the other’s ass. The girls all headed back to Wilson together to start getting ready for party. The Dartmouth girls had showered upstairs in the bathroom near Ashlyn and Whitney’s room, but then headed downstairs to the library to get dressed together. Ali joined them telling Ashlyn she’d come back up when she was ready.

About an hour later Ashlyn heard a knock at her door and opened it to find Ali, her mouth dropping open when she saw the brunette. Ali was wearing a strapless black satin dress. It fell just above her knees with a small slit up the side and hugged her in all the right places, leaving little to the imagination.

Ashlyn took in Ali’s long legs slowly making her way up to her face, the brunette’s hair down. “Wow, Alex, you look absolutely stunning.” She said sincerely.

“And you, Stud, look gorgeous.” Ali said taking in Ashlyn’s outfit. Ashlyn was in black dress pants with her black leather slip-on loafers, a light gray button up shirt and a black skinny tie, with a black vest to complete the look. She had her hair up in a bun, her make-up light as usual. Ali was a bit flustered just looking at her. She ran her hand down Ashlyn’s arm and grabbed her hand to pull her out the door, “Come on, I already sent the girls over to Abby’s room for the pre-party.”

They spend a little while in Abby’s room having a few drinks and mingling with everyone before people started to make their way over to the campus center ballroom. The party was already in full swing by the time they got there, dance floor filled with ruggers, dates, and friends they had invited. This year’s theme was 90’s High School Dance, so the DJ was already busy busting out the old school dance music.

Ali heard Coolio’s ‘1234 Sumpin New’ and wasted no time pulling Ashlyn onto the dance floor and getting close. She had her arms around Ashlyn’s neck in no time, moving her hips into the blondes, the two finding a rhythm. Kelley and Hope joined right beside them, dancing up on each other like always. Sydney had pulled HAO and Whitney to dance with her not too far from Ali and Ashlyn, all of them watching the two with interest.

The music switched right into C+C Music Factory’s ‘Everybody Dance Now’ and Ali pulled Ashlyn even closer, burying her face into the blondes neck and pressing their bodies together. Ashlyn held onto the back of Ali’s hips, barely able to breathe and completely worked up at the feel of Ali’s body all over hers. She felt a nudge on her arm and looked up to see Tobin and Alex besides her dancing
close to each other. Tobin gave her a wink. Ashlyn smiled and turned her attention back to Ali, not being able to get enough of the brunette. Ali had now turned around, arms reaching back to grab the blonde’s hips, moving her back and hips against Ashlyn’s front.

After 2Pac’s ‘California Love’, the DJ slowed it down to add to the 90’s high school dance cheesiness with Linda Ronstadt’s ‘All my Life’. Ali turned around, putting her arms around Ashlyn’s neck again and pulling her close. Ashlyn wrapped her arms around Ali’s waist and they started swaying together. Ashlyn felt Ali’s forehead pressed to her cheek and took in the scent of Ali’s shampoo and the light perfume she was wearing.

Ali started to run the fingers of her right hand along the hairline on the back of Ashlyn’s neck as she listened to the song, happy to be so close to the blonde right now.

*I never thought that I could feel a love so tender*

*I never thought I could let those feelings show*

*But now my heart is on my sleeve*

*And this love will never leave*

*I know*

*I know*

*Hey, I’ve looked all my life for you*

*And now you’re here*

Ali let it all wash over her. She knew there was nothing else to think about, nothing else to figure out, nothing else to wait for. She pulled back a bit to look at Ashlyn, moving her right hand to hold the blonde’s face.

“Ash,” Ali said just loud enough for Ashlyn to hear. She looked into the blonde’s warm hazel eyes and confidently said “I’m sure,” before pressing her lips to Ashlyn’s and pulling her into a deep kiss. Ashlyn let herself melt into Ali’s kiss, her heart threatening to beat right out of her chest. Time felt frozen between the two of them until they heard whistling, cheers, and applause erupting around them, coupled with a loud “Fucking Finally!” from Megan. They broke apart with a lingering look before looking at their friends all around them cheering and catcalling at them. They both smiled, turning their attention back to each other.

“I’m so so sure.” Ali said one more time with a smile.

“And I’m so all in.” Ashlyn replied, leaning in to kiss Ali again.

They spent the whole night wrapped up dancing with each other, occasionally breaking off to join their friends and give them some attention. As the night was coming to an end, Ashlyn asked Ali if she wanted to walk a bit before they headed back to Wilson and Ali agreed. The day had been fairly warm and though it cooled down a lot at night during the spring, the temperature was still holding at
around 65 degrees. Ashlyn and Ali strolled through campus, Ali leaning into Ashlyn with the blonde’s arm around her shoulders.

As they got closer to lower campus, Ashlyn looked up to see a clear sky and had an idea. She stopped at her Jeep which was still parked near the athletic fields and pulled out two blankets from the back. She led Ali across the very dark athletic fields and towards the rugby pitch saying “I want to show you something.”

They got to the center of the pitch and Ashlyn laid out one of the large blankets, leaving the other rolled up to use as a pillow. She kicked off her shoes and laid on her back patting the space next to her for Ali to do the same. Ali laid down and looked up to see a sky full of stars in the darkness and whispered “Wow.”

“Yeah, I know.” Ashlyn replied. “This is where I come to just think and relax.” She went on to explain how no one was supposed to be here at night, but how the pitch dipped down just enough so no one could see you.

Ali’s eyes had finally adjusted to the dark and she could see Ashlyn pretty well now under the brightness of the three-quarter moon. “So, no one can see us?” she asked.

“Nope.” Ashlyn replied matter of factly.

“Good.” Ali replied, moving herself to hover over the blonde and leaning down to kiss her slowly.

Ashlyn put one hand behind Ali’s neck and the other around her waist pulling her down a bit closer, deepening the kiss. She felt Ali push her tongue into her mouth and she used her own to join it. The kiss was getting more heated by the minute. Ashlyn heard a soft moan not knowing whether it was Ali’s or her own, her body tingling all over as the brunette explored her mouth. She felt Ali loosen her tie, pulling it off, and then starting to work on the buttons of her shirt. Ali had gotten about half of them unbuttoned when Ashlyn pulled away a bit, only then realizing that Ali had already gotten her vest unbuttoned too.

“How, what are you doing?” she whispered out, her breathing heavy.

“I want you.” Ali said looking right into her eyes.

Ashlyn could feel her heart pounding, a deep ache in her core at Ali’s words. She tried hard to keep a clear mind. “Now? Here?”

“Right here. Right now.” Ali replied, leaning down to place a soft kiss to Ashlyn’s lips and making the blonde let out a deep breathe.

Ashlyn pulled back again. “Are you sure? I know what this means to you, Alex. I want it to be everything, to be special. We can wait.” Her eyes never leaving Ali’s.

“I’m sure. You’re everything. I’m here with you, Ashlyn, it’s already perfect.” Ali whispered out gently, the desire in her voice evident. Her heart melting at the care Ashlyn was taking with her. She gave Ashlyn another lingering kiss before pulling herself away. “I want you to be ready too though. To be just as greedy as you are generous even if I have no idea what I’m doing. I’m only ready if you are.”

Ashlyn looked into Ali’s soft amber eyes, never feeling so loved in her entire life as in this moment. She took the brunette’s face gently into her hands. “I trust you with my heart. And I trust you with my body.” Ashlyn said lovingly before giving voice to everything she was feeling inside and putting it all out there, “I love you, Alex.”
Ali smiled, having no doubt about what she was feeling herself. “I love you too, Ashlyn.” She took a
deep breath and whispered out “Now stop talking and show me.”

Ashlyn pulled Ali’s face down to hers kissing her deeply, putting all of her love into it, wanting Ali
to feel everything she was feeling. She let her hands trail down Ali’s sides, feeling the brunette
unbutton the rest of her shirt.

Ali stuck her hand into the top of Ashlyn’s shirt. She dragged her hand from the blonde’s right collar
bone to her left one, pushing the shirt towards Ashlyn’s shoulders and opening it as far as it would
go. She left Ashlyn’s lips, peppering light kisses along her jawline before placing open-mouthed
kisses down her neck. She stopped to lick and lightly suck at her pulse point, listening to Ashlyn’s
heavy breathing.

Ashlyn ran her hands down Ali’s shoulders working her way to middle and slowly pulling down the
zipper of her dress. She stuck her hands into the dress running them along Ali’s back for a minute
before stopping at her bra and unclasping it.

Ali moved back up to kiss Ashlyn’s lips and then sat back on the blonde’s thighs, pulling Ashlyn up
with her. She pushed Ashlyn’s vest and shirt off, running her palm over the blonde’s left breast
before reaching around to unclasp her black bra and pull it off her shoulders.

Ashlyn pulled Ali’s dress down to her waist, her bra going with it. She let her eyes rake over the
brunette’s perfect perky breasts momentarily and then pulled Ali back down on top of her, hearing
Ali’s moan and her own hiss blend together as their chests pressed against each other. Her lips were
back on Ali’s, their tongues sliding against each other. She felt the brunette begin to grind into her
hips and rolled to flip their position, lips still locked.

Ashlyn trailed wet kisses down Ali’s neck, running her hand along the script tattoo on her ribs. Ali’s
body writhed underneath her as she kissed her way down her chest, stopping to kiss the valley of her
breasts before taking the brunette’s left nipple into her mouth and sucking it lightly.

Ali let out a soft whimper, one hand reaching around to grasp the back of Ashlyn’s head while the
other dug into the back of Ashlyn’s shoulder. She moaned deeply as the blonde lightly tugged her
nipple with her teeth before licking it and moving to give her right nipple the same attention. Ali’s
whole body was alive, her core pulsating and soaking wet. Ashlyn’s tongue was flicking over her
right nipple while the blonde’s fingers rolled over the left one. Her hips pressing Ali’s into the
ground.

Ashlyn kissed her way down Ali’s toned stomach feeling the brunette’s abs clench as she placed a
wet kiss to each hip bone as she got lower. Ali lifted her hips and Ashlyn pulled her dress down her
legs and her thong along with it. Ashlyn took in Ali’s naked body in the soft moonlight. “You are so
beautiful, Alex,” she said admiringly as she ran her right hand up Ali’s thigh and along her side.

Ali’s skin erupted in goosebumps and she pulled Ashlyn back down to kiss her, feeling the blonde’s
warm skin against her own. Her moans got louder as Ashlyn buried herself into Ali’s neck again.
She was ready to explode and not sure how much more she could take, everything in her aching for
more. Ali took Ashlyn’s right hand and moved it between her legs. She let out a cross between a
squeal and a moan as she felt Ashlyn run her fingers through her wet folds and begin gently stroking
her clit. “Mmmm, Ash” she moaned out between heavy breaths.

Ashlyn kept her tongue moving along Ali’s neck as she used her middle finger to rub circles on Ali’s
hard clit, the brunette’s hips wiggling against her hand as she added pressure. Ali’s hands were
grasping her shoulder and her bicep, her head thrown back and panting.
Ali wasn’t sure how much longer she could hold on, she wanted all of Ashlyn. “Ash, please baby, I need you. Take me. Make me yours.” She whispered out between panting breaths.

Ashlyn slowly slid a finger into Ali’s tight core, the brunette letting out a grunt and pulling Ashlyn tightly against her. The blonde let Ali get used to it for a few seconds before slowing working her finger in and out, Ali’s hips starting to buck against her hand. She moved faster matching the rhythm of Ali’s hips. “Oh my god… yes,” Ali mumbled out between moans.

“Please, baby, more.” Ali begged, feeling Ashlyn slip another long finger inside her, filling her. She pulled Ashlyn close, her fingers digging into the blonde’s back, a light sheen of sweat covering both of them. Ali felt as though Ashlyn could crawl into her skin right now and she still wouldn’t be close enough. “Don’t stop baby, please don’t stop,” Ali got out as she started to lose focus, everything around her fading. She felt like she was floating, anchored only to Ashlyn buried deep inside her, everything trembling.

Ashlyn felt Ali start to clench around her fingers, she pulled her face close to the brunette’s. “Look at me, Alex,” she said gently, watching Ali fight to open her eyes. “I love you,” she said, crashing her lips to the brunette’s and curling her fingers to send Ali over the edge. Her mouth was filled with Ali’s loud moans as Ali’s back arched up into her, her nails digging roughly into the back of the blonde’s shoulders. She slowed her fingers, watching Ali’s body hit the blanket again, her grip on Ashlyn loosening as she came down.

Ashlyn pulled her fingers out of Ali slowly, letting her catch her breath for a minute. She slowly kissed Ali’s neck and made her way down Ali’s body, running her tongue over her belly button and moving lower to kiss the inside of her thigh.

“Ash, what are you…” Ali got out before feeling the blonde’s warm tongue lick through her folds. “Oh,” she inhaled deeply, her body already on fire from the new sensation. She grabbed the back of Ashlyn’s head pulling her in and moving her hips against the blonde’s mouth.

Ashlyn alternated between licking patterns on Ali’s clit and gently sucking on it. She moved one hand to Ali’s stomach to hold her hips down and the other to clench Ali’s hand, their fingers entwined. Ali was grunting and moaning loudly, mumbling words Ashlyn couldn’t make out.

Ali felt her body start to tremble again, she tugged at Ashlyn’s head. “Yes, Ash. I’m right there.” She felt Ashlyn’s tongue move down and enter her as the blonde moaned, sending vibrations through her core. Ashlyn’s warm wet tongue moved in and out of her and she pulled the blonde’s face deeper, her body going rigid as another orgasm ripped through, feeling herself spill out onto Ashlyn’s tongue.

Ashlyn licked Ali’s folds gently a few more times before moving up to cover the breathless brunette with her body and kissing her deeply. She laid listening to Ali’s ragged breathing for couple minutes, holding her close. “You ok, Alex?”

“Oh my god, Ashlyn…” Ali started, just beginning to catch her breath, “That was incredible. I don’t have words.” She felt an urge already building inside her and crashed her lips to Ashlyn’s, surprising the blonde and flipping them so she was on top. She planted open-mouth kisses down Ashlyn’s neck, stopping to suck on her collar bone while her hand slid down to work on the button of Ashlyn’s pants.

Ashlyn moaned loudly, her skin burning everywhere Ali was touching it. Her core was wet and hot, already worked up from taking care of Ali. She felt the brunette pop the button of her pants and slide the zipper down, tugging at them. Ashlyn lifted her hips, feeling Ali slip her hands under the waistband of her boxer briefs and take them off together with her pants.
Ali kissed up Ashlyn’s legs, pausing to look at the gorgeous woman before her. “You are so perfect, so beautiful, Ash.” She said lovingly, moving to trace the patterns of Ashlyn’s side tattoo with her tongue before working her way up and taking Ashlyn’s nipple into her mouth.

Ashlyn heart was racing, Ali’s body all over hers, the brunette’s warm mouth alternating from one nipple to the other. She felt Ali move and lick the center of her abs, knowing she couldn’t hold on much longer. “Please,” she got out in a deep raspy voice.

Ali complied moving to settle between Ashlyn’s legs, no longer nervous about what to do, wanting to make the blonde feel everything that she just had. She sucked hard enough to leave a mark on Ashlyn’s inner thigh, hearing her lightly yelp, before licking the blonde’s core with one broad swipe of her tongue. “You taste so good, Ash” she said, burying her face back into Ashlyn’s warm soaking folds.

Ashlyn almost came apart at Ali’s words, her hands burying into the hair on the back of Ali’s head, her heels digging into the brunette’s lower back. “Holy shit, Alex, that feels so good. That is so good,” she said barely able to breathe as Ali sucked and licked her clit.

Ali swirled her tongue into Ashlyn’s entrance, hearing the blonde moan “yes” over and over again. She could feel Ashlyn’s body tightening. She moved back to licking Ashlyn’s clit and slid two fingers into the blonde, her wet core engulfing them easily. Ashlyn let out a loud grunt and began bucking her hips into Ali’s hand.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s fingers working in and out of her deeply, her core throbbing almost ready to give. “Yes, Alex. I’m so close,” her voice breaking a bit. “Right there baby, keep going” she panted out as Ali’s fingers plunged into her faster, the brunette’s lips wrapped around her clit. Ashlyn’s legs were shaking, her mind completely foggy.

Ali could feel Ashlyn getting tighter around her fingers and curled them to give the blonde her release.

“Fuck.” Ashlyn let out a series desperate loud moans, her body contracting and shaking around the brunette as she orgasmed. Her moans turned to soft whimpers as Ali pulled out of her and continued to lick her softly as she came down.

Ali crawled up Ashlyn’s body, planting a slow passionate kiss on her lips before laying her head on Ashlyn’s chest and listening to her wild heart beat begin to slow.

“You’re amazing, Alex. I love you so much.” Ashlyn said quietly.

Ali lifted her head to look at the blonde. “I love you, Ash. That was…” she paused trying to find the right words, but Ashlyn cut her off.

“Trust me, I know. I felt it too, Princess.” Ashlyn with a dimpled smile.

Ashlyn grabbed the second blanket tucked behind their heads and pulled it over them, the night air cooler now that they were sweaty. She held Ali close feeling the heat of their skin radiate between them, never remembering a time in her life where she was as happy as she was in this moment. Ashlyn listened to Ali’s breathing completely enamored, realizing that this rugby pitch had truly given her everything.
Of course, I could just end this happy little story here. What do you think, go on or leave it be?
Afterglow

Chapter Notes

The masses have spoken and the story will continue on, which means that you can assume that smut will be interspersed throughout these chapters moving forward. So, prepare yourself that it can pop up anywhere. Especially now that Ali has learned some things :)

Your comments and feedback have been great, I love to read them!

Ali had closed her eyes for a few minutes, feeling the rise and fall and of Ashlyn’s chest, her face pressed against it while her arm laid over the blonde’s waist clutching her closely. Her body was relaxed and calm, her mind racing in contradiction to her body. She had just had sex, amazing sex, with a woman, on a public field, and she couldn’t have been happier about it. She was in love, with a woman. A beautiful, wonderful, woman, and she hadn’t been afraid to say it or act on it. It was completely in contrast to the careful path she’d plodded down her whole life. Kyle had encouraged her to get off the path and look around. She had done that. She had opened herself up not even realizing she was doing it. She had gotten off the path and taken in the surroundings, spotting a flower in the distance. She had looked at it from afar and taken in whatever she could of it as she slowly got closer. She had approached faster and faster as she realized how beautiful it was. And when she was finally looking down upon it, she had finally realized why she had been so drawn to it in the first place and she had let herself go. Let herself admire it fully, let herself love the beauty and detail of it, because she knew that flower had been put there just for her. She was off the path now, nothing laid out carefully ahead of her like before. She was nervous, but also excited. From here out it would be new and unknown territory, but it didn’t matter as long as it all started and ended with that flower. That flower would be her inspiration, her way finder, her anchor along the way. That flower was Ashlyn Harris.

Ali let out a contented sigh, feeling Ashlyn run her fingers lightly up and down her arm. She brought herself back to the moment in front of her, her mind wondering just one more thing.

“Ash?” she whispered.

“Mmhmm?” Ashlyn replied in a questioning hum.

“I probably should have asked before I let you deflower me,” Ali said trying to lighten things a bit before her question. “But, um, are we…” she trailed off trying to ask the right way and starting again. “What are we…” The blonde cut her off knowingly, pulling Ali’s chin up to look at her.

“Alex?”

“Yeah?” Ali replied quietly.

“Will you be my girlfriend?” Ashlyn gave Ali a dimpled grin.

“Hmmm…” Ali considered playfully. “Well, Harris, since you asked. I mean, we’ve already thrown out the ‘I love yous’ and the sex was mind blowing, so… might as well, right? I’ll go with yes.” Ali teased, tilting up to gently kiss her girlfriend.
“So, mind blowing, huh?” Ashlyn said with a cocky grin as Ali pulled her lips away.

Ali dropped her head back to Ashlyn’s chest. “Ugh, I’m not even going to try and deflate your ego right now. Honestly, that was infinitely better than anything I could have ever dreamed up or fantasized about in my head.” Ali admitted before adding, “And trust me, I waited 21 years, there was A LOT of time to fantasize!”

Ashlyn chuckled. “Yeah, well, for a first-timer who apparently had no idea what she was doing, I only have one question. Where the hell did that come from, Krieger?! Seriously, that was most amazing thing I’ve ever felt. You left me breathless. I kind of expected you to be a bit timid. Wrong!”

Ali buried her face in Ashlyn’s neck groaning and giggling for a couple seconds before looking up again. “I was totally nervous! But then, geez, I mean look at you, Ash” she said letting her hand trail across Ashlyn’s defined abs, making the blonde’s breath hitch a bit. “I just let my body take over and went for it. I just kinda did whatever you did.”

Ashlyn smiled. “Well damn, I’m crazy good then.” Ali slapped her on the stomach and they laughed together.

Ashlyn saw the bright light from the faraway campus Public Safety vehicle scan over the fields. Ali pulled the blanket up, trying to get lower.

“Relax, they can’t see us where we are right now and while we’re laying down.” Ashlyn said. “But, that means we need to get dressed and head out before someone comes down to look more closely, which is very likely given that it’s rugby prom night.”

They put their clothes on and pulled themselves together as best they could, making their way quietly away from the athletic fields.

“So, you know they’re all still going to be up partying when we get back, and we haven’t said much or paid them much attention tonight.” Ashlyn noted, referring to their friends and teammates. “You ready to face the music?”

Ali sighed. “Yep, I’m ready. To be honest, I’m pretty sure my friends all saw this coming before I even had a clue. As did my brother, who practically told me to wake up and smell the…well…‘tattooed hottie’ in front of me.” Ali laughed a little. “I want them to know we’re together, and they probably already do. I’m comfortable with all of them, I know they’ll get it, understand, and be happy for me. Beyond that I don’t really know how the rest is going to happen or how I want to handle it. I mean, I want to tell my parents of course. And I guess other people in my family will know eventually too. I’m not sure how much I want other random people to know. I guess that’s a general feeling though, I’ve always been that way about my privacy. I am the ‘ice queen’ after all.”

Ashlyn stopped walking and took Ali in her arms. “We don’t have to figure it all out tonight. We’ll get through each situation as it comes, and we’ll do it together. We can play it however you want to, don’t feel pressured to say or do anything you’re not comfortable with. When I said I loved you, I meant it Alex. That’s all that matters to me. I don’t care what anyone else thinks about it, or says, or does. You are my priority and I just want you to be happy.” She said sincerely.

Ali smiled at Ashlyn, wondering for a second when the hell she had gotten so lucky. “Thanks, Ash. That means everything. What I’m 100% sure of right now is how much I love you, how much I want this, and us. Whether the rest is good or bad, as long as I have you, everything will work itself out in some way even if it’s not easy. In the end, you’re what matters. God knows I’m going to piss off a lot of Smith girls now that you’re off the market, Stud.” Ali finished playfully, leaning in to kiss
Ashlyn deeply and then tugging her hand. “Come on. Time to go show off my tattooed hottie of a girlfriend.”

They walked into Wilson House and peeked into the library to see if any of the Dartmouth girls were in there and came across Kelley and Hope locked in a heated make out session. They were laying on one of the pullout couches, Hope hovering over Kelley who had her hands up Hope’s shirt. Ali cleared her throat loudly to make her presence known and watched them break apart violently, Hope practically getting flung off the bed by Kelley. Ashlyn and Ali laughed hard.

“I don’t know what you two are laughing at! Wait until you hear the stories they’re coming up with upstairs as to where you’ve been all night!” Kelley exclaimed. “They’re all in Megan’s room, pretty much waiting up for you two.”

“Can’t wait.” Ali said sarcastically.

“Well, seeing as how you interrupted us and I think I now have whiplash thanks to Kelley. Do, we at least get the first question?” Hope asked.

Ashlyn and Ali looked at each other and shrugged. “Go ahead.” Ali said motioning with her hand.

Kelley started to open her mouth, when Hope stopped her, covering her mouth. “NOPE! You’ll end up wasting our question asking them what their favorite ice cream is or something like that. I got this!” Hope teased and Kelley stuck her tongue out.

“So, what is going on here?” Hope asked pointing at Ashlyn and Ali. “You’re not really going to try and convince us that you’re just friends, are you?”

“Nope.” Ali stated plainly. “This ladies,” she said pulling Ashlyn into her “is my girlfriend.” Ashlyn and Ali smiled at each other. “And I’m going to casually forget that you two once made out.” Ali said playfully pointing between Ashlyn and Kelley.

“Me too!” Hope agreed.

“And on that note, we’re gonna let you two get back to, uh, work down here.” Ashlyn said.

“Wait!” Kelley yelled, jumping off the bed to pull Ali and Ashlyn together into one big hug with her. “This makes me happy. I love you guys together. Hope does too, but she has the emotional depth of a caveman, sooo.” Kelley said whispering the last part.

“Thanks, Kell.” Ali said genuinely. “Now get back to your caveman over there while HAO and Syd are still upstairs.”

Ashlyn took Ali by the hand and led her up the stairs. “Two down, eight to go! So far so good.”

“Yep, now to survive the teasing torture chamber upstairs and then I can go snuggle you.” Ali said cheerily.

“Can’t wait, Princess.” Ashlyn replied as the two approached the loud voices emanating from Megan’s room.

HAO saw them first. “Hey guys!” She said happily, her and Whitney beaming at Ashlyn and Ali like proud parents. Everyone else turning their attention to them.

“And where exactly have you two been, for, oh, the last 2 and a half hours?” Megan asked dramatically pretending to read her watch.
“Just walking around campus and enjoying the night, so stuff it, Pinoe.” Ashlyn said trying to shut her down.

It was never that easy with Megan though. “Oh right. I’m sure you grabbed a nice ‘six-pack’ and showed her the ‘flower and butterfly border’ before letting her see the rest of the, uh, ‘garden’.” Megan said suggestively, trying to feign innocence.

Ashlyn shook her head before Abby piped up “Alright, alright, leave them alone.”

“I’m sure if they have something to tell us, they will” Abby added, ever the voice of reason among the group.

Ali jumped right in, wanting to just pull the band-aid off at this point. “Actually, we do have something to tell you. And you probably already know, but we’ll just confirm that we’re together.”

“How long?” Alex asked curiously.

“Well it’s kind of been building for a while, but officially starting tonight. So, this is all really new for us and we’d appreciate it if you guys could be discrete. We’re still kind of figuring stuff out, you know?” Ashlyn answered.

They all nodded seriously with various ‘You got it’, ‘Of course’, ‘You bet’ sentiments being spoken around the room.

“Sorry if we kind of surprised you guys,” Ali said feeling a little bad she’d been keeping so much from them, but knowing she’d been keeping a lot from herself too.

“Oh girl, none of us are surprised!” Sydney chimed in. “Seriously, the way you two have been looking at each other from day one could start a fire. We’ve just been waiting for the house to burn down!” There were a lot of nods in agreement around the room.

“Yeah, we’re happy you guys finally got together, the tension was killing us.” Tobin said, Alex beside her nodding furiously. “Especially your proud mamas over there!” Tobin said pointing to Whitney and HAO who were still obviously overjoyed at the whole thing.

“Alright, now give us something for the spank bank and we’ll let you go to bed!” Megan joked and then pouted when Sarah hit her hard in the arm.

“Huh?” Ashlyn said, not getting it.

Ali got it right away, sighing and then giving in, pulling a confused Ashlyn down by the collar to give her a kiss. Half the room awed while the other half whistled and clapped.

Ashlyn smiled. “Good night ladies. Thank you, you guys are the best.”

They walked towards Ashlyn’s room. “Was that ok?” Ashlyn asked.


They got back to the room and changed into sleep clothes, not bothering to use Ashlyn’s closet for once. The symbolism was not lost on Ali who made a joke about not being in the closet anymore as they went to brush their teeth.

Ali snuggled into Ashlyn in bed like she always did, reaching up to kiss the blonde. The two of them got lost for a while in a slow exploration of each other’s mouths, not letting it get too heated since
Whitney would be coming to bed soon. They pulled apart when they heard the door knob turn, but couldn’t drag their eyes from each other.

Whitney smiled at them gazing at each other and got ready for bed. She plopped herself down on her bed and turned out the light. “Good night you two. I’m so proud of you.”

Ali replied first. “Good night, Whit! I LOOOOOOVVVEEEE YOOOUUU!”

“Awww, Harris what did you do to her, she used to be so cool!” Whitney joked.

Ashlyn laughed. “You love it! I LOOOOOOOOVVVEEEE YOOOUUU, Whit!”

“Oh my god, there’s two of them now!” Whitney put her pillow over her head and laughed.

Ali placed a soft kiss to Ashlyn’s lips, whispering “Goodnight, Stud. I love you.”

“Sweet dreams, Princess. I love you too.” Ashlyn whispered back.

Ashlyn woke up the next morning with Ali tangled into her and closed her eyes again for a minute to let herself enjoy the weight of Ali’s head on her chest and the warmth of the brunette’s arm and leg that were wrapped around her torso. She slowly remembered everything that happened yesterday and it hit her that Ali was her girlfriend, she didn’t just have to wish for it anymore when she woke up with the brunette so close to her. She kissed Ali’s forehead a couple times and ran her hands through Ali’s hair until she began to stir.

“Good morning, beautiful.” Ashlyn said to groggy brunette.

“Mmmm, morning baby.” Ali replied nuzzling into Ashlyn’s neck. Ashlyn smiled, the pet name making her a little giddy.

“We should get up and shower so I can take you to breakfast before you have to leave.” Ashlyn suggested.

“Ok.” Ali said, reluctantly getting up.

They headed into the bathroom, brushing their teeth first. Ali’s mind wandered to the last few months as she brushed. It dawned on her that Ashlyn had managed to fulfill quite a few of her romantic fantasies. She had made out in the rain, kissed in the middle of a crowded dance floor, and made love in a field under the stars. Her 16 year old self would have been damn proud. She looked over, gazed at Ashlyn and let her mind drift to another fantasy of hers.

Ashlyn caught her staring and smiled. “What do you want for breakfast?”

Ali shrugged, watching the lone girl who was sharing the bathroom with them leave. She grabbed two towels from Ashlyn’s shower cubby and got close to the blonde. “I don’t know what I want for breakfast. I know what I want to do first though.” Ali said with a smile.

“What?” Ashlyn asked cheerily, not catching on.

Ali cleared her throat and quietly whispered in Ashlyn’s ear. “I want you to take me in that shower and fuck me until I can’t stand.”
Ashlyn’s mouth dropped open, her eyes wide.

Ali smiled. “When you’re done picking your jaw up off the floor and putting your eyes back into your head, I’ll be in there.” She said pointing to one of the shower stalls and walking into it. She turned on the water, got undressed, and got under the stream of the shower, counting down in her head ‘3….2….1….’

Ashlyn entered the stall in a fury, frantically fiddling with the lock to get it closed. She pulled off her clothes as fast as she could and turned to grab Ali. She pinned the brunette to the shower wall with her body and kissed her hard.

“Mmmm” Ali moaned into Ashlyn’s mouth, already completely turned on. Her hands going to grip Ashlyn’s sides.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s hands on her and pulled back a bit, taking them in her own hands and pinning Ali’s arms to the shower wall above her head. She held them there with one arm and moved to suck on Ali’s neck while letting her other hand drop down to tug on the brunette’s hard nipple. She bit down on Ali’s collarbone and then sucked it hard enough to leave a mark before soothing it with her tongue and moving down further to take a nipple into her mouth.

Ali was writhing against the wall, desperately grinding her hips into Ashlyn to get some kind of friction to ease the throbbing in her core. She was breathing heavily and moaning loudly.

Ashlyn moved back up to kiss her. “Shhh, you gotta be quiet baby.”

Ali whimpered into Ashlyn’s mouth before the blonde moved to attack her neck again. “Please. Please, baby. Fuck me.” She whispered into the blonde’s ear.

Ashlyn felt her own core dripping with need at Ali’s words, the dirty talking and vulgar side of the brunette still shocking her but turning her on so much. She moved her hand and ran her fingers through Ali’s soaking wet folds a few times, rubbing her palm on her clit before plunging two fingers deep into the brunette. Ali let out a loud “Fuck” and Ashlyn moved to cover her lips with her own again.

Ali was moving her hips into Ashlyn’s hand, the blonde’s skilled fingers moving in and out of her steadily. “Harder, Ash. Please don’t stop. You’re fucking me so good, baby.” She breathed into Ashlyn’s ear, panting hard.

Ashlyn was losing it at Ali’s words, her own body worked up and ready for release. She let Ali’s arms go, feeling Ali wrap them around her shoulders, fingernails digging into her back. She used her now free hand to pull Ali’s hips into her rhythmically while using her own hips against her other hand to give herself better leverage, thrusting fast and deep into the brunette’s core. Ali’s movements becoming less coordinated, all of her weight on Ashlyn.

Ali’s legs were shaking, her vision was fading, Ashlyn’s hand holding her up. “I love the way you fuck me, Ashlyn. I’m so close.”

Ashlyn felt Ali bite down on her shoulder to muffle her moans as the blonde curled her fingers a few times, sending Ali over the edge. Her body clenching and hips moving wildly into Ashlyn’s hand before the movement slowed. Ashlyn pulled her fingers from the trembling brunette, holding her in a place for a minute before pulling back a bit to look at her. “That was so damn hot, Alex.” She moved forward to kiss Ali, but felt Ali’s hands push her chest.

Ali pushed Ashlyn roughly against the opposite wall of the shower, crashing her lips to the blonde’s
and plunging her tongue in her mouth. Ashlyn moaned into her mouth in surprise. Ali wasted no
time moving down Ashlyn’s body, pausing briefly to bite one nipple lightly and then suck the other
one hard before moving on. She dragged her teeth down Ashlyn’s stomach as she dropped to her
knees.

“Holy Shit.” Ashlyn whispered out trying to stay quiet, but failing to stifle a loud moan as she felt
Ali’s tongue on her clit.

“You’re so wet, baby” Ali mumbled into Ashlyn’s folds as she flickered her tongue back and forth
over the blonde’s clit before sucking it into her mouth.

Ashlyn’s head hit the back of the shower wall, one hand grasping the back of Ali’s head, the other
one along the shower wall desperately trying to grab onto something but finding nothing. She felt
Ali’s tongue dip into her entrance. “Oh my… fuck.” Ashlyn panted breathlessly before looking
down to see Ali’s head bobbing between her legs, and losing it, the orgasm ripping through her. Ali
licked her clean while she caught her breathe. The brunette coming up to kiss her and let Ashlyn
taste herself on her lips.

They pulled away looking at each other passionately, still a bit breathless.

“That was unexpected and I don’t know what that was. But oh my god, Alex, you are so sexy.”
Ashlyn said, still shell-shocked.

Ali smiled, running her hand through Ashlyn’s hair and briefly explained how she had been thinking
about the way they’d fulfilled some of her fantasies and how she had just thought of one and went
with it.

“How many fantasies do you have, Krieger?” Ashlyn asked with a smirk.

“21 years worth. We’re just getting started, Harris.” Ali answered with a devilish grin before adding,
“Hot public shower sex, check!”

“I don’t even want to know how many people just heard us in here.” Ashlyn said realizing that it was
morning and people had probably been in and out of the bathroom pretty steadily.

Ali shrugged and smiled, giving Ashlyn one more deep kiss before they actually showered and got
ready.
Extra Hours

Chapter Notes

A shorter one this time around to start to set up the transitions that Ash and Ali are going to have to face very soon.

Life is going to keep me away from being able to write over the next few days, but I'll be back with an update early next week and in the meantime you can ponder what might happen in the next chapter!

As always, thanks for all the great comments :)

HAO had spent Sunday morning watching an all too familiar scenario unfold. The girls had all gone to breakfast together and she had watched Ashlyn and Ali stay as close as possible to each other, their moods growing more glum by the minute as breakfast progressed and the time to leave got closer. After breakfast, everyone had stopped to chat for a few minutes in the Wilson living room while Kelley and Sydney finished packing up their bags. Ali sat in Ashlyn’s lap on one of the couches. The two had their faces close and were in their own world, eyes never leaving each other. Occasionally one of them would lean in and gently kiss the other. HAO could feel a pang in her heart for them, she knew exactly what this felt like. She felt it every time she left her boyfriend, Dave, who was back home in New Jersey. The two of them were high school sweethearts, she was sure they’d be married someday and the long distance was really hard. She knew all too well what it felt like to just desperately want a couple more hours or even just a couple more minutes. She also knew that sometimes you just needed someone to tell you it was okay to stay, to convince you that you weren’t being dumb by giving in just to get those few extra moments.

HAO went over to Ali and Ashlyn. “Hey, Ali,” she said to get her attention. Ali looked up at her. “I was just thinking that you don’t have class until 1pm tomorrow, so you could just drive back in the morning and hang here for the night. Syd has plenty of room, so I can go back with her.” HAO suggested, watching Ashlyn’s face light up hopefully.

“Hmm, I didn’t think of that.” Ali replied pensively. HAO knew better, she knew Ali had thought of it but didn’t want to inconvenience anyone by being too clingy.

“What do you think, Ash? Do you think Whit could stand me for one more night?” Ali asked optimistically.

“Of course! She loves you! She’ll be in the library until late anyway, she has a paper due Tuesday.” Ashlyn replied trying not to get too excited.

“Ok! I guess I’ll stay then!” Ali exclaimed. Ashlyn’s face lit up like a Christmas tree.

“You sure you don’t mind going back with Syd?” Ali checked with HAO one more time.

“Not at all!” HAO said, mentally patting herself on the back. Ali got up and gave her a hug, whispering a quiet and sincere “thank you” in her ear.

The Dartmouth girls said their goodbyes and made their way out. Ashlyn and Ali headed upstairs,
their previously glum moods long gone.

“So, looks like I get another roomie for the night?” Whitney asked smiling, gathering her books and laptop to head to the library.

“Sorry to impose, Whit. I don’t mean to invade your room,” Ali said.

“No way! I love having you here, seriously, stay all the time. It’s so much easier when I don’t have to entertain that big baby that you call your girlfriend.” Whitney said playfully.

Ali laughed while Ashlyn gave Whitney a dirty look.

“I’ll be back pretty late I think, but I’ll call you when I’m on my way back. You know, just in case.” Whitney winked at them.

“Thanks, Whit! We LOOOOOVVVEE YOOOUUUU!” Ashlyn and Ali said in unison. Whitney just shook her head and left the room.

Although Ashlyn had asked Ali what she wanted to do for the afternoon, it became abundantly clear early on that there wasn’t any need for plans. The two of them just wanted to be together, be close, be touching. They changed into sweatpants and t-shirts and spent the whole day cuddled in up bed. They talked and watched a couple movies on Netflix, leaning in to kiss each other often. Despite having started with a racy romp the shower that morning, the rest of the day had not been about sex. It had been a different kind of intimacy, a sense of peace and comfort between them.

And then night fell, the thoughts of the looming morning causing the desperation to return, the desire to be as close as humanly possible becoming too strong to ignore. They had sated it with their naked bodies pressed tightly together, sweat mixing together, fingers simultaneously buried in each other’s cores, panting and softly moaning into each other’s ears until they had both tumbled over the edge of ecstasy within seconds of each other. It had been the most intense and passionate moment Ali had ever experienced and when it was over, when she was lying there listening to the drum of Ashlyn’s steady heartbeat, she knew she could never and never wanted to experience this with anyone else. It had been less than two days, but she already knew that Ashlyn was her person. Ashlyn would always be her person. The road ahead of them was complicated with the unknown, but she hoped that life and karma would reward her. Reward her for the actions she had taken with her heart a couple of months ago when she had learned Ashlyn wasn’t going to study abroad, before her mind had even realized the significance of what she was doing and why. The thought of graduation and facing the real world had made her nervous before she had even met the blonde, now it completely terrified her. If being a two hour drive away from each other felt like hell, she didn’t want to know what could come after that or how much worse it could get. She would just have to have faith that when life had finally given her something this good, that it couldn’t possibly take it away.

“What’s going on in that beautiful mind of yours?” Ashlyn asked, breaking Ali’s thoughts.


“Always.” Ashlyn replied.

“I was just thinking about the fact that I’m graduating in less than two months and how nervous it makes me about what that means for us.” Ali answered honestly.

“Yeah.” Ashlyn sighed knowingly. “Alex?”

“Yes, baby?” Ali replied.
“You know I’m never letting you go, right? No matter what we have to get through or from how far. I’m always going to fight for you and for us. I promise… and I don’t break my promises.” Ashlyn said seriously.

“Do you know how perfect you are?” Ali said, planting a sweet kiss on the blonde’s lips. “It’s no wonder I couldn’t help falling for you. I really really love you.”

“I love you more.” Ashlyn said with playful charm.

The mutual admission of their fears about Ali’s graduation and the shared commitment to figuring it out had brought some calm for the time being, allowing for relaxation and sleep to finally overtake them.

The next morning Ashlyn felt like she had practically poured her soul into the kiss she gave Ali before she left. What was better, she could feel that Ali had done the same.

Having to part from each other was always hard for them even when they had just been friends, it was worse now that they were actually together. The bright light on the horizon was that they’d be playing at the same weekend long rugby tournament in two weeks.

The Beast of the East was the biggest, most intense tournament of the year and usually brought a lot of excitement. This year, it would also bring Ali’s parents.
After her weekend with Ashlyn, the first thing Ali did when she got back to Dartmouth was Skype with Kyle. Her face beamed as she saw her brother’s face come up on her laptop screen.

“Hi!” she said animatedly.

“Well hello to you! What has you so smiley this morning?” Kyle asked curiously. Ali was usually cheery, but this was out of the norm. He knew it had to be Ashlyn related.

“Well, so, remember how I said I wanted to try being with Ashlyn?” Ali said knowing full well Kyle remembered.

“Ahhh! Spill it already!” Kyle said excitedly.

“I totally went for it! She’s officially my girlfriend!” Ali exclaimed, a huge smile plastered across her face.

“Holy crap, Alexandra! That is, wow, I’m so happy and proud of you!” Kyle said sweetly, pausing to take it all in before adding “So, when you say you totally went for it… did you go for go for it? I mean, I don’t really want to know… but then again, I kinda want to know. Just tell me without getting too detailed maybe?”

“You’re impossible.” Ali huffed and blushed, but continued. “I went for it, went for it,” she said giving him wide eyes and a smirk.

“No way!” Kyle screamed. “I know I shouldn’t be excited that my little sister got laid, but I mean, I was starting to worry you’d never get the goods, you know?! Soooo, how was it? I mean, no details please, but you have a girlfriend, so I’m guessing it went well?” Kyle rambled.

“Geez, Kyle!” Ali blushed. “Yes, it was actually pretty damn incredible and I finally get what all the hype is about. So, next topic please!”

“Ok ok. Seriously, I’m so glad you gave this a chance. I love seeing you happy like this. I can’t wait to meet Ashlyn in person, she seems great and more importantly, great for you.” Kyle said genuinely.

“She is.” Ali paused not sure if she should say what she wanted to, but then just went with it. “Actually, I’m…um…I’m in love with her.”

“Woah. So, this is that serious already, huh?” Kyle asked. “I mean, I’m not surprised, the way you talk about her. Did you tell her?”

“Yeah, I told her. She said it first actually, but I would have even if she didn’t.” Ali said with a smile.

“Ugh, you’re going to make me cry.” Kyle said putting his hands over his heart. “Let me know when I can plan the wedding, ok?”
Ali laughed.

“So, are you going to tell mom and dad?” Kyle asked.

“Yeah, I kind of wanted to wait to do it in person. They are coming up for my tournament this weekend, but then I realized I didn’t want to drop it on them at a rugby tournament. Especially since Ashlyn will be there too. So, I’m thinking maybe I just Skype with each of them tonight? What do you think?” Ali inquired.

“I think the sooner the better. Mom has kind of hinted that she knows something is up with you and Ashlyn, so I don’t think she’ll be surprised. I have no idea about dad, you know he takes things in kind of slowly. I mean, you know how he was with me. So, don’t take it hard if it takes him a while to get it or adjust, you know?” Kyle answered.

“Yep, I talked a lot about Ashlyn to mom over Thanksgiving, so I bet she’s going to be easy about it. Dad is a wildcard, but I’m sure he’ll be fine.” Ali said optimistically.

“As long as you’re happy, just let everyone else do what they’re going to do. I mean it, let yourself be happy, ok?” Kyle said seriously.

“Got it.” Ali smiled. “I have to get to class!”

“Ok. Call me later or tomorrow and let me know how it goes, ok? Love you, Alex!” Kyle said blowing her a kiss.

“Will do. Love you!” Ali said, ending the Skype session and heading off to class.

Later that evening, Ali had started with her mother who shrieked out with an “I knew it!” before Ali even had a chance to finish saying Ashlyn was her girlfriend. Deb said had guessed a couple years back that maybe something was up when Ali’s dating life had been so unusual for a ‘pretty girl your age’. Once Ashlyn came along and Ali couldn’t stop talking about her, Deb was convinced. She told Ali she loved her and as long as Ali was happy, she was happy. Deb even convinced Ali to let her move her flight up a day earlier for the tournament so she could go out to dinner with her and Ashlyn on Friday. The woman had a way of exerting her will. “I can’t wait to get to know the person who finally captured my little girl’s heart, we all know what a challenge that must have been,” she had said, teasing Ali about her ridiculously high standards.

It hadn’t gone quite so smoothly with Ali’s dad. He had stayed pretty quiet throughout, listening to Ali tell him about Ashlyn. When she was done, he had remarked that it all seemed so sudden and not like her. Ali had explained how it took her a while to realize what she wanted, but that she was happy. Ken had mostly just seemed to take in what she said, asking her “Are you sure?” Ali had gotten a bit frustrated and Ken could tell, he said they could talk about it more when they saw each other in two weeks.

Ali’s great mood after talking to her mom had diminished quickly after the talk with her dad. She called the only person in the world who could make it all better.

“Hey beautiful!” Ashlyn answered her phone seeing it was Ali.

“Hey you.” Ali replied, trying to not let herself sound too glum. Ashlyn caught on right away though.

“What’s the matter? You ok?” Ashlyn asked uneasily.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just kind of frustrated, maybe a little disappointed too. I, uh, told my parents about
us.” Ali stated plainly.

“Oh. Did it not go well?” Ashlyn asked, her heart pounding nervously.

“Well, my mom was completely not surprised and pretty happy over the whole thing. Actually, she is planning to come up to the tournament early on the Friday night we get there because she wants you to go to dinner with us, she’s really excited to meet you properly.” Ali said enthusiastically.

“Oh wow. Ok! Well, I’m excited to meet her too!” Ashlyn said, instantly nervous about the dinner and making a mental note to bring something nice to wear. “So, that doesn’t sound like bad news. What happened with your dad?”

“Ugh, he was so frustrating. He didn’t say much, just kept kind of questioning if I was sure and all that. I mean, he kind of did this with Kyle, but I just figured he’d be easier about it. I don’t know, I’m just used to him being so supportive of me with everything. Just made me a little upset.” Ali explained.

“I’m sorry, Alex. I know it must have been hard to have him act that way. He probably just needs some time to process it all.” Ashlyn said encouragingly.

“Thanks, Ash. I know, I wish it was easier, but it is what it is I guess.” Ali replied.

“Hey,” Ashlyn said quietly, “I love you so much, Alex. I know you’re putting yourself through all this not just for you, but for us, and I just… thank you. I know it isn’t easy. I’m always here for you, don’t forget that.”

Ali’s heart fluttered, Ashlyn always knew what to say. “Did I mention how perfect you are?”

“Ummm, you may have mentioned it once or twice.” Ashlyn played back.

“Wish I was there with you right now.” Ali lamented.

“I wish that every second of the day,” Ashlyn said thoughtfully.

“11 more days!” Ali said happily. “Speaking of which, just a heads up that my dad will be at the tournament too. So, I’m sure you’ll meet him one way or another.”

Ashlyn let out an audible sigh. “Well if I wasn’t nervous enough about dinner with your mother, I can now also spend the next 11 days worrying about how your dad is gonna kill me.”

“Let’s just hope he doesn’t bring his gun,” Ali replied and listened to the silence on the phone for a few seconds. “I was kidding, Ash!”

“Geez, Krieger, give a girl a heart attack!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali laughed. “Relax Harris, I’ll protect you.”

“You better!” Ashlyn joked, but took a second to appreciate the fact that Ali had always protected her.

“I should go finish my work for the night. Same time tomorrow?” Ali asked.

“Count on it.” Ashlyn answered.

“I love you, Stud. Have a good night.” Ali said.
“I love you too, Princess. Don’t work too hard! Night night.” Ashlyn said hanging up.

Ashlyn looked at her watch to see that it was right around the time her grandma should be getting home from her volunteer shift at a local nursing home. She dialed the number.

“Hey Gram, how was it tonight?” Ashlyn greeted her.

“Oh, it was fun! We did a little manicure party for the ladies at the nursing home, they loved it,” Her grandma replied sounding excited.

“You’re so good grandma, really.” Ashlyn said, appreciating what an amazing woman her grandmother was.

“Enough about that. How’s your wife? What’s new there?” Her grandma pried.

“How do you always know when things happen? Seriously, it’s uncanny. Never mind, I don’t even want to know.” Ashlyn said before continuing, “Well, my ‘wife’ is technically my girlfriend now, so…”

“About time! And for your information, your voice hides nothing from your old wise grandma! I really like this Ashlyn, I like that Ali, I really do.” Her grandma said matter-of-factly.

“You haven’t even met her yet, Gram.” Ashlyn pointed out.

“Oh, but I will! Better be soon too!” Her grandma said pointedly.

“Promise.” Ashlyn replied.

“Well, my engagement ring from your grandpa is sitting right here waiting for you when you’re ready.” Her grandma said seriously.

Ashlyn sighed and chuckled. “Easy, grandma. We have a long way to go before we get there.”

“If you say so. But Ashlyn?” Her grandma said.

“Yes, Gram?” Ashlyn replied.

“I’m never wrong.” Her grandma said plainly.

“I know grandma.” Ashlyn said.

They talked for a few more minutes, her grandma catching Ashlyn up on how well Chris was doing at his job since he’d been too busy to call much. After hanging up, Ashlyn headed to the rugby pitch to clear her mind like always. She thought for a bit about what her grandma had said. There was no doubt in her mind that nothing would make her happier than having Ali by her side for the rest of her life, her grandma was never wrong. She didn’t let herself get into thought too much because she knew there was a long way to go before that happened, in fact, there was one big hurdle already headed her way: Ali’s parents.

The time before the Beast of the East tournament passed quickly. The Smith Rugby team had been spending time fundraising to cover the costs of the entry fee and hotel stay. They’d gone from selling baked goods on campus to doing a community car wash and even auctioning off single ruggers as dates. Even though she wasn’t single anymore, Ashlyn usually brought in the most auction money, so the team auctioned her off to accompany the winner to the tattoo shop as moral support. Oddly
enough, this brought in $200 and Ali had a good laugh when Ashlyn told her that the girl who won ended up chickening out at the tattoo shop, so they went for coffee instead.

Smith and Dartmouth both played a game the weekend before the tournament. Smith had played at home and beat the local Amherst College team. Dartmouth had gone to play at University of Vermont and lost, making for a night of Ali being really grumpy. Ashlyn had finally gotten her to snap out of it by rapping her favorite Bone Thugs n Harmony songs until Ali couldn’t help but laugh. That and telling Ali that she’d convinced Abby to book the same hotel as the Dartmouth team for the upcoming tournament (it only took stalking Abby around campus and begging for four days.). Once she added that she had more easily convinced Whitney to switch rooms and stay with HAO so that the two of could share a room, Ali’s mood had completely lifted.

With everything in place, rugby teams from all over the east coast converged upon Providence, RI for the annual Beast of the East tournament.

The Smith team had gotten into the hotel around 4pm on Friday. Dartmouth was scheduled to arrive closer to 6pm. Ashlyn got busy getting dressed for dinner right away, knowing she would be meeting Ali and her mom shortly after Ali arrived. She tried to dress well but not overdo it, so she went with dark fitted jeans and a light green button down shirt, leaving her hair down and keeping the makeup light. After a final pep talk from Whitney, Ashlyn headed to the hotel lobby to meet Ali.

Ashlyn spotted Ali right away in a floral patterned spring dress with a stylish black cardigan unbuttoned over it. Geez she’s beautiful, Ashlyn thought as she approached Ali and watched the brunette notice her and smile widely.

“Hey gorgeous!” Ashlyn said pulling Ali into a tight hug and planting a kiss on her forehead.

“You look hot, Stud.” Ali replied, burying herself into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck and discretely placing a kiss there. “I missed you.”

“Missed you too, baby. Where’s your mom?” Ashlyn asked pulling back and realizing Ali had been alone.

“On her way down, she’s so excited for dinner. Fair warning, she’s overwhelming sometimes.” Ali said.

Ashlyn was about to reply when a middle-aged woman who look just like Ali approached yelling “Hi!” and immediately threw her arms around Ashlyn in a hug. “It’s nice to finally meet you in person, Ashlyn!”

Ashlyn hugged the woman back, still amazed by how much she looked like Ali. “Hi. Nice to meet you too Ali’s mom. I see where Ali gets all her beauty from!” Ashlyn remarked charmingly. She knew how to work the mom angle, but she did really mean it.

“Oh, aren’t you sweet?! Flattery will get you everywhere with me. And call me Deb!” Deb said giving Ashlyn one more quick squeeze before standing back to look at her. “Well, you are just beautiful! You sure know how to pick them, Alex.” She said nodding approvingly at Ali.

Ashlyn blushed. “Um, thank you, Deb.” She got out a little stunned that the woman she was trying to charm was now charming her. These Krieger women were definitely a handful.

“Mom!” Ali said embarrassed before grabbing her mother and pulling her to get them headed towards dinner.

Dinner went really well. Ashlyn had relaxed right into it, Ali’s mom had made it easy. Deb spent the
beginning of dinner asking Ashlyn all about Smith and their rugby team, and the rest of dinner had been taken up with Ali’s embarrassing childhood stories. Ali turned various shades of red while Ashlyn laughed and enjoyed every minute of it. The real turning point came over dessert when Ali told her mom how Ashlyn had drawn a heart in the snow as a valentine. When she finished the story, she leaned over and gave Ashlyn a quick, gentle kiss right in front of her mother. That pretty much summed up how well dinner had gone. They headed back to the hotel around 9pm because Ali had told the girls they could come hang out and party in her and Ashlyn’s room tonight. Deb headed off to bed since she was a bit tired from the flight. She stopped to hug Ashlyn goodnight whispering “I’m happy about this. You’re so good for her.” Ashlyn had replied back “She’s good for me.” Deb smiled with the same huge smile as Ali’s and wished them goodnight.

“Damn, Ash. You charmed the pants off my mother, she loves you!” Ali exclaimed as soon as they got into their room.

Ashlyn leaned in to kiss Ali deeply like she’d been wanting to all night. “The only girl whose pants I want to charm off are yours, Princess.” A knock at the door interrupted them.

“Hold that thought, Stud. We have a gathering to host tonight.” Ali smiled, kissing Ashlyn one more time before opening the door to find HAO, Syd, Whitney, and Kelley.

“Where’d you guys leave the rest of the crew?” Ashlyn asked noting that just four of the girls had shown up.

“They’ll be here in a few minutes, I think Megan was trying to get some of the other ruggers around to join if they wanted to. I opened my side of the door that connects our rooms and I figured we could open both up for more space.” Kelley said walking over to the door that connected Ali and Ashlyn’s room to hers and Hope’s.

“Yes, that’s Pinoe for you!” Ashlyn said.

An hour later both rooms were pretty filled up with ruggers from the Smith and Dartmouth teams as well as a few others. Beers had been passed around and everyone was having a good time.

Megan decided it was still too quiet, so she decided to bring in some traditional rugby fun. She began by belting out...

_If I was marrying kind,
Which thank the lord I’m not, sir
The kind of rugger I would wed
Would be a rugby…_

She pointed to Ashlyn. Many times a person shouted their own position out to continue the song, but Ashlyn put her arms around Ali’s shoulders from behind and yelled out “Scrum Half, Sir!”

The room of ruggers joined in unison…
Scrum Half, Sir? Why, Sir?

Ashlyn continued…

Cause I’d grab balls, and you’d grab balls, and we’d all grab balls together!
We’d be alright in the middle of the night, grabbing balls together.

Everyone laughed and Ashlyn continued the song so she could pass it to the next person…

If I was marrying kind,
Which thank the lord I’m not, sir
The kind of rugger I would wed
Would be a rugby…

Ashlyn pointed to Katie, the Smith tight head prop, who yelled out “Prop, Sir!”

The room of ruggers joined in again unison…

Prop, Sir? Why, Sir?

Katie took on the song…

Cause I’d support a hooker, and you’d support a hooker, and we’d all support hookers together!
We’d be alright in the middle of the night, supporting hookers together.

The song continued on for a while, each rugger shouting out different field positions and rugby words. Ashlyn kept her arms firmly around Ali. Ali leaned back into Ashlyn turning her head and pulling the blonde in for a kiss. They got lost in it, deepening it and forgetting about everyone in the room until Ali heard an unmistakable throat clear. She pulled away from Ashlyn and saw her dad standing in the open door to her room. “Shit, that’s my dad” Ali whispered, pushing her beer into Ashlyn’s hands and quickly going to the door.

“Hi, Alex. I didn’t mean to interrupt. I moved my flight so I could be here in the morning for the first match. I just got in, I thought I’d come say goodnight.” Ken said a bit awkwardly.

Hi Daddy. Sorry, I got roped into hosting tonight’s festivities.” Ali said, hugging her dad and trying to hide the blush on her face, she had no idea how long he’d been standing there. It was never ideal for your parent to walk in on you mid rugby party, but while making out with Ashlyn was on a whole other level of blush inducing.
Ken’s eyes scanned the room, falling on Ashlyn who was standing there obviously trying to look at anything else but Ken and Ali. “So, that must be Ashlyn.” Ken said nodding his head toward the blonde who had just been lip locked with his daughter.

“Uh yeah.” Ali said, her face still red. “Ash!” She said, getting Ashlyn’s attention and motioning for her to come over. Now was as good a time as any.

Ashlyn walked over feeling like there was a rock in her stomach, mentally kicking herself for the fact that she was about to meet Ali’s dad having just been hardcore kissing his daughter in front of him. Not to mention that she had taken off her button down shirt and was now just in a tank top and jeans, tattoos showing and a snapback on her head. Could I look like any more of a lesbian thug right now, she thought to herself.

“Hi, I’m…” Ashlyn started but Ken interrupted.

“Ashlyn. Yes, I gathered that. I’m Ali’s dad, Ken.” He extended his hand out and Ashlyn shook it, noting the firm and sturdy grip and trying to match it.

Ashlyn was practically sweating at this point and decided to just go with honesty like she usually did in tight situations. “Nice to meet you. Sorry, I envisioned this meeting going a little more smoothly.” She stated.

“No, no. It’s my fault for showing up unexpected.” Ken replied. “Why don’t we start again and all talk tomorrow.” Ken suggested. He kissed Ali on the cheek and wished them goodnight before walking away.

“Well that went well,” Ali sighed. Ashlyn groaned and nodded, she had serious work to do if she was going to impress Ali’s dad after that.

“Dang, Ash. Crash and burn with the papa!” Abby said, having witnessed much of the interaction. Ashlyn grabbed a pillow and threw it at her “Not helpful, Abby!”

They went back to the party which died down a little while later. As soon as everyone had left the room, Ashlyn sat on the bed staring off and thinking about what happened. She had won Ali’s mom over with no problem, but Ali’s dad was going to be challenge. She was broken out of her thoughts by Ali pushing her back lightly onto the bed and crawling over her. The brunette leaned down and placed several slow kisses up Ashlyn’s neck.

“Whatcha doing, baby?” Ashlyn asked curiously, a bit surprised that Ali was in the mood for this.

“Focusing on my really hot girlfriend and trying to forget the last hour,” Ali replied before crashing her lips to Ashlyn’s in a heated kiss.

Ashlyn moaned into Ali’s mouth, her body immediately responding and her hands wandering down Ali’s sides and resting on her ass. Ali sat back on Ashlyn’s thighs pulling the blonde up with her and wasting no time in taking off Ashlyn’s tank top and sports bra together. Her eyes roamed over Ashlyn’s naked chest before she pushed the blonde back down onto the bed and attacking her neck, gently sucking the area just behind her ear.

Ashlyn was already breathing heavily, she reached down and grabbed the hem of Ali’s dress, pulling it up and over her head. She grabbed the back of Ali’s head and directed the brunette down to her chest. Ali complied, taking one of Ashlyn’s nipples in her mouth and raking her fingers over the other one. “Yes, Alex.” Ashlyn whispered out through panting breaths, her head already thrown back into the bed.
Ali continued flicking her tongue over Ashlyn’s hard and sensitive nipple while she worked open the button on her pants. She pulled the zipper down and dipped her hand into the blonde’s pants, cupping her over her boxer briefs. Ashlyn let out a loud moan “Don’t tease me.”

Ali smiled, she had already tortured Ashlyn enough tonight. She kissed her way down the blonde’s stomach, pulling off her pants and boxers before taking off her own underwear and working her way back up. She gave Ashlyn a slow kiss while letting her hand slide down and running her fingers through the blonde’s wet folds. She ran gentle circles over Ashlyn’s clit, listening to her moan in her ear while she lightly sucked the pulse point on Ashlyn’s neck.

Ashlyn was already close, her hips jerked and she barely grunted out “Please, baby.” Ali gave in, slipping two fingers into the blonde and thrusting and in and out at a steady pace. “Mmmm, that’s so good, Alex. Just like that.” Ashlyn panted out, her legs starting to tremble.

Ali let her whole body cover Ashlyn’s, kissing her deeply and exploring the blonde’s mouth with her tongue, letting her thumb rub over the blonde’s clit while her fingers worked her core. Ashlyn felt Ali’s nipples against her chest and the multiple sensations brought her right to the brink. Ashlyn whimpered “Oh my god, yes, I’m gonna…” but was cut off by Ali whispering in her ear “Come for me, baby.” Ashlyn moaned out a series of curse words, her body going rigid for a couple seconds and then shaking as she clenched around Ali’s fingers and spilled out onto them as she orgasmed. Ali slowed her fingers, letting Ashlyn ride out the high before pulling them out slowly and licking them clean. Ashlyn could only hum out a couple moans watching Ali lick her fingers. She took time to catch her breath, Ali layed on her chest running her hand up and down the blonde’s tattooed arm. When Ali felt Ashlyn run a hand through her hair, she picked her head up, her eyes meeting Ashlyn’s.

“You are truly the most beautiful woman in the world,” Ashlyn said in awe of the brunette. “That and you really know how to rock my world!” Ashlyn chuckled.

Ali didn’t say anything, she just leaned down and gave Ashlyn a slow romantic kiss. The kiss was passionate and tantalizing, Ashlyn’s heart was racing again. Ali pulled back slowly, eyes dark “I want you so bad, Ash. I need to feel you.”

Ashlyn pulled Ali back into a more desperate kiss, her hands already sliding over Ali’s stomach and working their way downward. She left her left hand on the back of Ali’s right thigh and squeezed her right hand between them to settle between Ali’s legs. Ali shifted her hips up a bit and felt Ashlyn’s fingers brush across her clit. She let out a hissing breath, she wanted all of Ashlyn right now.

“Ash, please. I want you inside me.” Ashlyn moved her fingers down to Ali’s entrance and felt Ali drop her hips down, her core engulfing Ashlyn’s fingers easily with a wet squish. Ali started moving her hips riding the blonde’s fingers and moaning very loudly. Ali shifted, picking herself up a bit and putting one hand on Ashlyn’s shoulder, the other on her chest so she could get the blonde’s long fingers deeper. Ashlyn thrust her hand upward to meet Ali’s hips, the brunette’s moans turning into wails of pleasure. “Fuck, Ashlyn, fuck, oh god, oh god…”

Ali was riding Ashlyn’s fingers wildly now, the blonde feeling her own core throbbing again as she watched Ali’s perky breasts bounce as Ali worked her fingers. “You’re so hot, Alex. Let go for me, baby.” Ashlyn breathed out pulling up to take a nipple into her mouth and feeling Ali’s core get tighter and tighter around her curling fingers.

“Ugh, Ashlyn, mmmm, Ash” Ali screamed out before collapsing onto the blonde and kissing her hard. Ashlyn’s mouth filled with Ali’s loud moans as the brunette tumbled over the edge, her hips grinding slowly into Ashlyn’s fingers for a couple minutes as she came down.
“I love you, Ashlyn. You’re amazing,” was all Ali managed to whisper out before she closed her eyes and fell asleep just like that, collapsed on her girlfriend’s chest, body completely spent, Ashlyn’s fingers still deep inside her connecting them together.

“I love you more, Alex.” Ashlyn replied quietly, moving her free hand to stroke Ali’s back before drifting off herself.

Tomorrow would likely not be easy to say the least, but that really didn’t matter to either of them right now.
Ashlyn woke up to the buzzing of her phone alarm. She reached over to turn it off feeling Ali’s weight on top of her. The brunette had shifted in the night, only half on top Ashlyn now, her left arm and leg still over the blonde’s torso and her right limbs curled underneath her and pressed against Ashlyn’s side. Her cheek was flat against Ashlyn’s chest, lips slightly parted and still deeply sleeping.

Ashlyn took a deep contended breath, she was sure there was nothing better in the world than waking up naked with Ali Krieger pressed against her body. She took in the beauty of her girlfriend, makeup from the night before just about all gone, hair tangled and messy. Ali was perfect, even in her most simple state. Ashlyn let her hand trace over Ali’s lean long muscles, starting with the thigh that was draped over the blonde. She ran her hand over Ali’s hip and across her side, stopping to trace letters of the inked script there with her finger.

“Mmmm, best way to wake up ever,” Ali’s sleepy voice broke the quiet morning, her lips curling into a smile.

“I could probably do better,” Ashlyn said playfully, moving her hand to push the stray hair away from Ali’s face and stroking her cheek. “Good morning, beautiful.”

“Good morning, sexy.” Ali replied with a smile, tilting her head up to place a sweet kiss on Ashlyn’s lips not caring about morning breath at the moment. “So, tell me, how on earth could you do better?”

“I could have a cup of coffee for you right now,” Ashlyn grinned.

“Yep, that would have been better. Buuut, you naked with coffee… that might be too much, the universe might explode. So, I’ll just take the naked now and the coffee later.” Ali said running her hand down Ashlyn’s toned stomach and down low on her hip.

“Easy, Krieger. We have our first matches in like two hours. Gotta make sure that perfect body of yours is in top shape for the double game day.” Ashlyn said regretfully.

Ali sighed “Yeah, I know.” She raised her eyebrow at Ashlyn “But, just so you know, I’m saving some energy for later. My endurance is excellent, don’t ever forget it, Harris.” She finished with a wink.

“I’ll start drinking the Red Bull now!” Ashlyn laughed.

“Ok, Harris. Let’s get in a quick shower before it’s time to go kick ass and then make nice with my parents,” Ali said tweaking Ashlyn’s nipple playfully to get her up.

“Ah! Don’t ever say ‘parents’ when you’re grabbing my nipple, Ali!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali laughed and tweaked the other nipple while saying “Parents!”
Ashlyn shook her head and said “You’re impossible, Krieger!” before quickly tweaking Ali’s nipple and running off to the shower before Ali could catch her.

“Ash!” Ali followed after her, fully intending to share the shower and make it a good one even if sex wasn’t in the plans.

Ashlyn had gone to meet up with the Smith ruggers while Ali had gone for a quick breakfast with her parents. Ashlyn had dodged the bullet of having to interact with Ali’s parents again for the time being, but her stomach was already fluttering with nerves over the fact that she’d be having dinner with them later. Whitney had watched Ashlyn pick at her breakfast, not really eating.

“What’s bothering you, Ash?” Whitney asked, nudging Ashlyn to get her attention.

“Huh? Oh, uh, nothing.” Ashlyn answered trying to smile. Whitney saw right through it as always and gave her the eyes.

Ashlyn sighed. “It’s just Ali’s dad. I met her mom and that went so great. Her dad, not so much. I think he doesn’t like me. It’s obviously bothering Ali, but I don’t really know what to do.”

“Yeah, I kind of saw that whole awkward thing last night.” Whitney thought for a minute. “You know, Ash. Your best quality has always been your honesty. So, don’t bother holding back now. Just be honest with the guy and level with him like you do with everyone else. He doesn’t have to like you to respect you at least. Be yourself.”

Ashlyn mulled over what Whitney said and nodded. “Thanks, Whit.”

“You bet. Now come on, head in the game, we have a long day to get through!” Whitney encouraged pulling Ashlyn in for a side hug as the team started making their way to the fields.

Ali hadn’t had a great breakfast either. She had made awkward small talk with her parents, which was really out of the norm since she was close to them and conversation was usually easy. Deb had noticed right away that things were weird, but chose to stay quiet for the moment. When Deb had excused herself to use the bathroom, Ken took the opportunity to prod Ali a bit.

“So, is this thing with Ashlyn like a team dating thing?” Ken asked.

“What?” Ali questioned having no idea what he was asking.

“I noticed last night that a lot of these women seem to be uh, dating, or whatever with each other. Everything with you and Ashlyn seems kind of sudden, I just thought maybe…” Ken was cut off by Ali.

“Seriously?! No dad! I’m not dating her as part of a team bonding exercise if that’s what you’re asking.” Ali said annoyed. “I’m not going to lie and say team members don’t hook up occasionally, it happens. But that’s not what is going on here, ok?”

Ken just nodded sensing his daughter’s anger. Ali continued, “And it isn’t that sudden. We officially started dating not that long ago, but things were in motion long before that. We spent a lot of time as friends getting to know each other, it just took me a while to realize what I wanted is all. I have no doubts about what I want, you can take that to bank.” Ali finished heatedly, tired of her father’s questions.

Deb had walked back to the table catching the tail end of what Ali had said. Ken just said “Ok.”
Before anything else could be said Ali stood up “Come on, I can’t be late. So, we should head over to the fields.”

This year’s tournament host, Providence College, had set up six rugby pitches together using one standard pitch and then converting five other soccer fields and one field hockey field all side by side. This made it possible for teams to keep an eye on each other’s games and scope out the competition, which always made it more fun. Each team played two games on Saturday, with the top eight teams (based on wins, score differential, and number of tries scored) moving on to the single elimination playoff rounds on Sunday. Games were shortened to two 20 minute halves with a ten minute halftime. Teams were broken up by division level, with Smith and Dartmouth both falling under Division 2 level. Dartmouth was slated to play Holy Cross in the first morning slot at 10am, while Smith was scheduled to play Colby College in the second morning slot at 11am.

Ali arrived at the pitch, separating off from her parents and joining her team. HAO watched Ali aggressively rifle through her bag and get ready.

“You ok, Als?” HAO asked concerned at Ali’s seeming agitation.

“Yeah, fine. My dad is just driving me crazy. Doesn’t matter, I’ll get over it. So, what are we looking at?” Ali asked, avoiding HAO’s question by pointing at the Holy Cross team warming up on the pitch, knowing HAO probably already had a good read on their competition.

HAO knew when to drop it. “Uh, they have a really fast flanker, gonna have to watch that. Their props and locks are big girls, they’re gonna hit hard for sure. Their scrum half looks mediocre, you should have that in the bag. The fly half, wings, and backs are nothing special. Shouldn’t be a problem if we stick to our usual game plan.”

Ali nodded, sitting down on the grass to stretch her legs and back. She felt someone rub her shoulders and say “There’s my favorite scrum half. Don’t tell Queen Morgan over there though, she’ll get jealous!” Ali looked up to see her favorite hazel eyes and dimpled smile looking down at her.

Ali reached up to clutch Ashlyn’s hands on her shoulders and squeeze them, her mood lifting slightly as she managed to give Ashlyn a small smile.

Ashlyn crouched down next to her. “Hey, you ok?”

“Yeah, just breakfast kinda sucked. I’m just gonna let it go and get into the game.” Ali replied.

Ashlyn could only imagine how breakfast had gone, she pressed her forehead to Ali’s. “Ok, try and focus for now. Play hard, play safe. I’ll see you after our first matches, we’ll figure it all out. In it together, ok?”

Ali nodded. “Always.”

Ashlyn quickly kissed the tip of Ali’s nose. “Go kill it, Krieger. I’m rooting for you. Well, until we have to play you of course!” Ashlyn chuckled.

Ali got up smiling. She nudged Ashlyn with her shoulder playfully and walked onto the pitch.

As soon as Ali had broken away from her parents, Deb laid into Ken. “What the hell was that at
breakfast, Ken?"

“What, you’re not the least bit concerned about all this?” he replied.

“Actually, no. I couldn’t be more thrilled. I can see how happy my daughter is and if you opened your damn eyes you’d see it too. What the heck are you so concerned about exactly? Is it that she’s with a woman or is it Ashlyn? Cause I’ll tell you, the first one shouldn’t bother you as long as Ali’s happy. And if you take a second to get to know Ashlyn and how smart, sweet, and respectful she is, you’d have no damn problem; she treats Ali like a queen. I know you’re not so closed minded, so what gives?” Deb asked pointedly.

Ken watched Ali glumly warm up on the sideline, feeling bad he’d been the cause of it. He saw Ashlyn approach her and watched his daughter’s face light up like he’d never seen before. His ex-wife had already seen right through the over-protective dad façade. He sighed. “Truth?”

“You know you can’t lie to me if you tried anyway.” Deb reminded him.

“That scares the crap out of me,” he said, his head motioning to Ashlyn and Ali with their foreheads pressed together. “I mean, no, I didn’t expect a woman, but that doesn’t matter. I mean, have you ever seen her like this? It’s in her voice, the way she talks about and looks at that girl. She’s been excited about dating people before, but this, this is different. She’s graduating, and this, I’m terrified.” Ken admitted.

Deb rolled her eyes, but she understood. “I get it, Ken, but it doesn’t mean you can be a jerk about it. She met someone great, be happy about it. She’s grown up, but she’s always going to need her daddy, so be the great one you’ve always been. It’s not that hard.” Deb smiled.

Ken nodded knowing he had a lot to make up for, but for now Ali’s match was starting. He spent the first half watching Ashlyn pace up and down the opposite sideline cheering for his daughter.

The first scrum of the game saw the ball coming out of Dartmouth scrum, Ali marking it the whole way. She went to grab it for a hand off to HAO, but she took her eyes of the ball too quickly and bobbed it in her hands, getting it under control just in time to get slammed by the Holy Cross lock forward. Dartmouth lost the ruck that ensued which led to Holy Cross scoring a try shortly after. Ali tried to shake it off but the rest of the half went no better. She had been slow to react and just off the whole half, taking several hard hits. Dartmouth had managed to hold Holy Cross to the one try, but it hadn’t been pretty. Despite hearing Ashlyn cheering and encouraging her on the sideline, it hadn’t been enough to pull Ali out of her own head.

Ali needed to collect herself, she headed straight to the locker room building right at the half. Ashlyn quickly followed and Ken followed them shortly after, knowing Ali was upset. He’d never seen her play any sport that badly.

Ashlyn found Ali sitting on a bench near the locker room, head buried in her hands. She crouched down in front of her “Hey, Alex. Talk to me.”

“Ugh, that was a disaster! Can’t believe how much I’m letting this get to me, I’m better than this.” Ali got out, clearly frustrated.

“Alex, he’s your Dad, you care what he thinks. It’s ok to be upset.” Ashlyn put her hand on Ali’s cheek, stroking it lightly. “We’ll do whatever will make this easier. We’ll talk to him or I can back off a bit until he comes around, ok?”

“No way.” Ali replied seriously. “I love you, you’re everything. I’m not backing down one bit on
that, Ash. I just need to calm down and not let it overwhelm me.”

“Ok, I’m here, Alex. I love you. I’m not going anywhere.” Ashlyn said, pressing her forehead to Ali’s. Ali leaned down to kiss her, letting her mind finally clear, remembering what was important.

Ashlyn pulled back to look at Ali. “Ok, Krieger. You got this, the game is totally within reach. Play like I know you can, relentless, 20 minutes. I know you can do it.”

Ali was about to reply when they both heard the same throat clear as last night and looked up to see Ali’s dad standing there. Ashlyn cringed figuring he must have been standing the whole time, how many times is he going to see me kiss his daughter she thought to herself. They got up and made their way over to him.

He looked at Ali and pulled her in for a hug. “I love you, Alex, no matter what. Sorry if I made you think any differently.” Ken said sincerely, before adding “Can I borrow Ashlyn for a minute?”

Ali nodded, giving Ashlyn apologetic eyes before walking away leaving her girlfriend looking a bit terrified.

Before Ken could even say anything, Ashlyn took Whitney’s advice and just let her thoughts out. “Look Mr. Krieger, I know we haven’t started off well and I’m sorry about that. The truth is that I love Ali and I’m not going anywhere, so I hope we can get to know each other better and clear the air. I’m sure you think it’s fast and maybe even crazy, and I get it, if my dad was still alive, he’d probably be doing the same thing you are. I don’t have a lot of family left though and I’ve learned that if you love someone, you fight for them and you make sure they know it because life is too short for anything else. So, that’s what I’m doing and…”

Ken cut her off with his hands in the air. “Ashlyn, Ashlyn. It’s ok. This is on me to fix, not you.”

Ashlyn relaxed a bit and let Ken talk.

“When Alex started dating guys, I kind of freaked out a bit and pulled the whole protective father routine. After a little while though, I realized that I didn’t have anything to worry about. Alex has always known what she wants in life and she has never compromised for anything short of that. It’s the same with everything from school work to sports to dating. It didn’t take me long to figure out that she could handle herself, that she made good choices. So, I didn’t have to worry watching all the incorrect guys come in and out of her life because I could see she was just having fun, that she knew they weren’t the right choices. I guess I just wasn’t ready to for the right choice to come along.” Ken said seriously, looking Ashlyn in the eye before continuing. “I can hear the way she talks about you, the way she looks at you. It’s clear that this is different, that’s it right for her. You’ll just have to excuse a terrified dad whose just a little panicked about his daughter growing up and afraid to lose her.”

Ashlyn nodded. “I get it, I do. You’re not going to lose her though, she thinks the world of you and she’s always going to need you. I promise you I’m never going to hurt her or let her down. I really do love her.” Ashlyn said confidently, but still stunned that this honest conversation was happening right now.

“I know. Alex isn’t the only one with it written all over her face,” Ken smiled. “Just took me a bit to realize that I’m not losing a daughter, but just gaining another great woman in my life to protect and love. If Alex loves you, then I have no doubt about the person that you are Ashlyn. So, let’s start this all over. I’m not much of a hugger, but I hear you give a pretty good one.” Ken stood with his arms open.
Ashlyn leaned in to hug him, flabbergasted but feeling great inside. They both heard a throat clear and turned around to see Ali and Deb standing in the doorway, taking a page from Ken’s playbook and eavesdropping. They both had the same big smile on their faces, a couple of tears rolling down Ali’s cheeks.

Ali walked up and hugged Ken “Love you, Daddy. Thank you.”

“Love you too, baby girl.” He replied.

Ashlyn smiled at them before looking at her watch and realizing 10 minutes must have gone by easily by now. “Ali, the game!” she said loudly.

“Crap! Gotta go!” Ali said running back toward the pitch. Ashlyn caught up and ran alongside her.


Sydney and Hope had been busy trying to stall the referee who was getting more annoyed by the second. Kelley spotted Ali and motioned to Sydney and Hope who finally left the ref alone. “Finally, Kriegs, what the hell?!” Kelley yelled.

“Sorry, family drama. Settled now. Let’s go!” Ali said joining the team lined up and ready on the pitch.

The second half couldn’t have gone any more differently than the first half. Ali was in beast mode, scoring two tries on her own and helping on plays that ended in HAO and Kelley scoring as well. Holy Cross didn’t even have a chance, the final score Dartmouth 28, Holy Cross 7.

Ashlyn had cheered alongside Ali’s parents for the rest of match, Alex, Tobin, and Whitney joining in with her until they had to make their way over to their own match.

Ali took a few minutes after the match to strategize for the next game with her team before heading over with her parents to watch Smith take on Colby. Colby was the top ranked Division 2 team and Smith had never beat them, it was going to be a tough match.

Ali walked over to Ashlyn and Alex as they got ready to line up. “Go get em, Stud!” She said giving Ashlyn a quick kiss on the cheek. “You two communicate and watch each other, you can do it!” Ali added pointing between Alex and Ashlyn. Alex gave her a thumbs up and Ashlyn gave her a wink as they went to line up.

Colby kicked off first, Tobin getting the ball and making an impressive run into the Dartmouth half before getting tackled. Alex had won the ball out of the resulting ruck and gotten it to Sarah who made it a few yards from the try line before getting taken down, the ball getting tied up and a scrum called. The scrum turned making Alex’s position useless, but Ashlyn was all over it. She got the ball over to Tobin who ran the last few yards for the try. Smith had never scored first against Colby and the team was letting the high drive them.

Smith was playing incredibly well. Tobin and Alex were on a whole other level in perfect sync with each other and moving the ball effectively. It only took Smith another 6 minutes to score another try, resulting from a string of short passes from Logan to Tobin to Sarah to Ashlyn to Whitney for the score. Ashlyn was in top form, tackling just about any Colby player who got the ball, making it impossible for them to get very far.

“Her anticipation skills are remarkable! She’s really good.” Ken had commented.
“She used to be a soccer goalie,” Ali replied with a beaming smile.

“Well that explains it,” Ken said with interest, realizing just how much he had to learn about his daughter’s girlfriend.

The first half came to a close, Smith leading Colby 14 to 0. Ashlyn got into her usual halftime routine, off by herself trying to maintain focus. She didn’t really need it right now though, she had a lot of good vibes driving her at the moment, she felt good.

“No pep talk?” Ken asked Ali, a bit curious as to why she hadn’t gone over to Ashlyn who was off on her own.

“Nope. She’s just like me, halftime is for intense mind prep.” Ali laughed.

“Figures.” Ken laughed back.

Ali looked back towards Ashlyn who looked up and caught her eye, giving her a dimpled grin. Ali blew her a kiss and Ashlyn pretended it hit her heart and jokingly fell over before righting herself and giving Ali a quick wink.

Deb laughed at the whole thing muttering “Right. Intense mind prep, sure.”

The floodgates really opened in the second half. Tobin scored two more tries and Megan surprised everyone by sneaking in to score her own try after an unexpected pass from Whitney as a Colby flanker was closing in. Ashlyn and the Smith forwards had completely shut down the Colby backs, keeping them from even getting close to scoring. The final score was Smith 35, Colby 0. Smith was ecstatic at the result, the whole team giddy with their first big win over top ranked Colby.

Ali and Ashlyn each went off with their own teams for lunch before the afternoon matches, but not before sneaking a quick kiss while Hope blocked them from view.

Unfortunately their matches were during the same time slot for the afternoon, so there was no watching each other’s games. Ali’s parents did their best to keep track of both games so they could fill the couple in on what they’d missed over dinner. Dartmouth had easily beat University of New Hampshire 24 to 14, while Smith trampled over Southern Connecticut State 31 to 3. Both teams earning a spot in Sunday’s playoffs.

Dinner with Ali’s parents after the games had actually gone really well. The conversation had moved along easily as Deb and Ken got to know Ashlyn a bit better. Ken had asked about Ashlyn’s family and Ali had squeezed the blonde’s hand tightly under the table as Ashlyn gave a brief explanation of how her father, grandfather and mother had all died in relatively short time from each other. Ashlyn had opened up that things had been rough with her grandma being sick too and her brother struggling with substance abuse, admitting it had only been somewhat recently that things had gotten better. Ali was shocked at Ashlyn’s willingness to open up, never letting go of Ashlyn’s hand and admiring her strength. Ken found himself being very impressed by Ashlyn and already feeling protective of her as he had expected to be. Deb continued to treat her like some kind of celebrity, Ali even jokingly telling her mom to stop making heart eyes at her girlfriend. A day that started out so crappy had really turned around into something special.

After parting ways with Ali’s parents, Ashlyn and Ali headed back to their room.

“So, it’s kind of late. You want to try to find the girls for a bit?” Ashlyn asked.

“Nope. I just want time with you tonight. That was a long day.” Ali replied with a soft smile.
“Sounds perfect,” Ashlyn said, starting to strip her clothes off and grab some sleeping clothes. She was about to pull on a cutoff t-shirt when Ali stopped her.

“Stay just like that.” Ali said, taking the shirt out of Ashlyn’s hand and throwing it on the floor. A naked Ali pulled a naked Ashlyn into the bed with her.

Ashlyn laughed. “That better?”

“Much.” Ali replied.

They were both exhausted and it had been a crazy day, so they just enjoyed the contact of each other’s skin, listening to each other breathe with no need for words. Ashlyn had dozed off first. Ali softly kissed her inked shoulder whispering “Love you, perfect” before falling asleep herself.

They would both be thankful for a good night of sleep when tomorrow’s tournament finals were upon them.
A nice long update today, gotta wrap up this tournament properly...

Ashlyn woke up to a pair of soft lips kissing her along her collar bone. “Mmmm, seriously Krieger, you have me hooked on waking up to you.” She got out in a deep groggy voice. Ashlyn finally opened her eyes, noticing Ali was still naked but her hair was combed and she had fresh mascara on.

“Did you really get up to comb your hair and put on makeup?” Ashlyn laughed.

“Kinda. Figured I’d one up you on how you woke me up yesterday, so I had to make a quick trip downstairs.” Ali smirked. “I don’t leave the room without mascara.”

“Right. But you leave the room without clothes on?” Ashlyn teased.

“Nah. I took those back off when I got back up here. All part of the plan. You ready for the universe to explode?” Ali said mysteriously.

“Show me what you got, Krieger.” Ashlyn challenged.

“Well, I got some serious naked…” Ali climbed on Ashlyn straddling her waist, Ashlyn’s breath hitching when she felt Ali’s folds make contact with her lower stomach. Ali dropped down to peck the blonde’s lips. “And, I have coffee!” Ali said, reaching over to grab a to-go cup of coffee off the nightstand beside them.

Ashlyn smiled before letting her eyes go wide and making a loud explosion noise with her mouth while shaking the bed. Ali laughed hard.

Ashlyn grabbed the coffee with her right hand and wrapped her left arm around Ali, pulling the brunette down to lay on her. “Universe officially exploded. You win, Krieger. Best. Girlfriend. Ever.”

“Such a dork, Harris. I always win. Get used to it.” Ali deadpanned.

“We’ll see who’s winning later,” Ashlyn said playfully. “Speaking of, you ready for today?”

“Yes and no.” Ali replied honestly. “Really excited to play. And kind of sad that this is my last big rugby tournament. Can’t believe how fast four years has gone by. It’s pretty surreal actually.”

Ashlyn squeezed Ali with the arm that was draped around the brunette. “I know you’ll play great today and make it a memorable one. Plus, there will always be alumni games and adult leagues you can play in, it probably won’t be the last big tournament you ever play. Just the last as part of the Dartmouth squad.”

Ali nodded. “You always know what to say, Ash. Thanks.”

“I’ll remind you of that when I put my foot in mouth my someday, it’s bound to happen at some point” Ashlyn joked to lighten the mood. “Come on, let’s get ready before we’re late. Gotta get the
Princess of the Scrum to the pitch on time!"

They got ready together, meeting up with their teams in the lobby and heading over to the fields for their matches. They were scheduled to play in the same morning time slots again. Smith was squaring off against Marist College and Dartmouth was set to face SUNY Albany. None of these teams had played against each other before, so the morning was completely unpredictable for everyone.

Unfortunately, they were playing a couple of pitches apart so it would be hard to keep track of each other’s matches. Ken and Deb decided take turns switching off between the two matches so they could keep track of both.

Dartmouth had a good first half. Sydney had turned on the speed and with some great passes from HAO she had scored two tries to break open an early 14 to 0 lead. Smith on the other hand was locked in a tight game with Marist, neither team had scored yet. Ashlyn and Abby were holding down the Marist offense well, but the Marist defense had been just as good at keeping Tobin and Whitney in check. Sarah had gone down early in the first half after taking a nasty hit that dislocated her shoulder. She was done for the day.

Ashlyn pulled on her headphones at the half, sitting down on the sideline to get herself ready for the second half. She took quick glance to see a figure two pitches over doing the same thing; Ali, of course. She smiled to herself, she should’ve known from day one just how connected they were in so many ways.

The second half for both of the games started. Dartmouth didn’t score again. However, Hope had come up with some amazing tackles to keep SUNY Albany from scoring at all, even breaking the nose of the Albany scrum half whose face had unfortunately gotten in the way of Hope’s knee. Dartmouth had pulled out a 14 to 0 win over Albany to move on to the semi-final. After shaking hands with the Albany team, Ali saw that Smith was still playing and made her way over to her parents who were already both over there.

“What’s going on?” Ali asked trying to get a score update.

“No one has scored and they just started a sudden death 5 minute overtime,” Ken replied watching nervously as the first scrum of the overtime got lined up and set.

Ali watched Ashlyn get set, completely mesmerized by the blonde. She took in Ashlyn’s long and strong body, her defined jawline, and perfectly proportioned broad shoulders. She was so unique, so Ashlyn, and just beautiful. Ali smiled to herself, how she managed to win the heart of this amazing woman she’d never know, but she felt damn lucky. Life could really suck sometimes, but it could also surprise the hell out of you in the best way possible too. She watched the scrum engage, seeing Alex get the ball out and off Whitney who made a pretty good run into the Marist half of the pitch before she got tackled with the ball trapped underneath her as a ruck formed over her. The ref called for another scrum after he saw no ball movement.

Ashlyn and Alex had a quick conference with Abby. Ashlyn came out looking determined and Ali knew they must have a plan in mind. Ashlyn always looked intense when she had something up her sleeve.

“She’s got a plan.” Ali said out loud to her parents.

“How do you know?” Deb asked curiously.

“Her face gets all serious like that when she’s up to something.” Ali answered. Deb smiled.
The scrums engaged, Smith making a really hard push with Megan getting the ball hooked into the Smith scrum. Abby went in for the ball while Alex split to her left and Ashlyn stayed centered on the pitch. Abby made a pass to Alex who held the ball just long enough to draw the attention of the forwards, letting them get close before making a long pass to Ashlyn. Ashlyn caught the ball and kicked it straight through the center of the goal posts for a 3 point drop goal. Ashlyn jumped in the air and screamed “Goal kick, baby!!!!” before the rest of the team piled on top of her to celebrate the overtime victory. It was a risky move, but it had paid off. Smith was moving on to the semi-final, the furthest they had ever been at this tournament.

Ashlyn worked her way out of her pile of teammates, finding a beaming Ali on the sideline and running over to pick her up in a tight hug.

“Ash, that was awesome!” Ali yelled.

“You can take the girl out of the goal, but you can’t take the goalie out of the girl!” Ashlyn said proudly, excited she could still make such a long accurate kick. “Congrats to you too! It would be so crazy if we met each other in the final!”

“Easy, Harris. We still have semis to play!” Ali replied knowing the toughest matchups were still to come.

“Don’t kill my vibe, Krieger.” Ashlyn joked.

The two split off again for lunch with their teams before they had to head back for the afternoon semi-finals. Smith was set to face Rutgers and Dartmouth was matched up with Providence College. The games were still simultaneous, but at least they were on side-by-side pitches this time making it easier for spectators to watch both.

Unfortunately, one game had been better to watch than the other. Smith had gotten positively trampled by Rutgers, losing 38 to 7. Smith had shrugged it off pretty quickly, realizing they had gotten further in this tournament than ever before and used that fact to look at it positively. Ashlyn had been a bit disappointed, but one look at the excitement over on the Dartmouth sideline and it had all gone away. Dartmouth had pulled out a tight 7 to 5 win over Providence College when Providence had failed to convert a try.

Ashlyn had run over to find a very excited Ali, quickly wrapping her into a hug. “Alex, oh my god, you’re going to play the final!”

Ali squealed happily. Ken and Deb were already busy on the phone moving their flights to later that night so they could stay to watch the match. There wasn’t much time for celebration or even much preparation, the final match was being played in 40 minutes.

While a lot of the Smith team left and headed back to campus like usual after they were done in the tournament, Abby, Sarah, Megan, Whitney, Tobin and Alex stayed to cheer on Ali and the other girls even though it meant they’d be back late. Ashlyn felt happy to have such great friends. Dartmouth now knew they’d stay an extra night in Providence win or lose. Ashlyn had already known coming into the tournament that she was staying an extra night with Ali too, no matter what happened.

With 10 minutes left before the start, Ali went off to get herself focused as usual. She felt oddly calm, nothing like she thought she’d feel. Ashlyn crouched down next to her to wish her a quick good luck, rubbing her shoulder and saying “This one is yours, Alex. I know it.”

Ashlyn had started to get up to let Ali have her quiet time when Ali grabbed her hand and pulled her
down. “Stay.” She said quietly. Ashlyn complied sitting down next to her on the grass, Ali still holding her hand, their shoulders touching. Nothing was said between them until it was time to for the team huddle before the match. Ali kissed Ashlyn’s hand whispering “Thanks, Stud” before heading over to give her team a pep talk.

The first few minutes of the match were pretty uneventful, so it was hard to tell which team had the advantage. Five minutes into the match though, Hope delivered a punishing tackle to one of the Rutgers backs causing the ball to fly into the air and land right into Kelley’s grasp who ran two yards to put the ball down for a try. This had done a lot to settle the Dartmouth team into the game. Ali had the Rutgers offense figured out early on, she made adjustments to the team and Rutgers found themselves back on their heels for most of the half. Rutgers had tried to make adjustments, but Ali was quick to re-adjust the Dartmouth team to match them. Hope had delivered a perfect drop goal through the goal posts right at the end of the first half to open a 10 to 0 lead over Rutgers. Dartmouth was in the zone, the whole team spent the half much like Ali usually did, quiet, focused and determined.

The second half had been even more glorious. The first scrum had turned, putting Ali out of position. Hope had grabbed the ball and Ali moved so she was right there waiting for the pass. Once she had the ball, she was off down the field with amazing speed. She evaded one Rutgers forward in front of her and there was no one else to stop her. She put the ball down for a try, building the lead to 17. Ashlyn had screamed so loud her voice was just about gone. Deb’s was already raspy after the first half so she had resorted to whistling. Ken looked like a five year old on Christmas morning. The Smith ruggers had never cheered so loudly for another team before.

With 7 minutes left to go, HAO scored another try making it 24 to 0. Rutgers scored a drop goal shortly after to make it 24 to 3, but it was too late and everyone knew the match was pretty much over. It had all been too easy, Rutgers couldn’t pull themselves together. When the final whistle sounded the Dartmouth team was a pile of celebrating bodies in the middle of the field. Smack in the middle of the pile was a sobbing Ali Krieger who couldn’t have been more happy and in complete disbelief.

Ashlyn made her way towards the pile of celebrating ruggers and felt someone fly into her arms and scream. She lifted HAO in the high in the air congratulating her, finally putting her down to let her run off and tackle hug someone else. She finally set her sights on Ali who was still crouched the middle of the pitch, face buried into her hands and clearly still emotional. Ashlyn reached her, crouching down to wrap her arms around Ali and pulling her up into a hug.

“I knew you’d do it! Congratulations, Alex! I’m so proud of you!” Ashlyn said hugging Ali tight before pulling back and using her thumbs to wipe some of the tears off the brunette’s cheeks.

Ali finally let her face break out into a huge smile, jumping up into Ashlyn’s arms and wrapping her legs around the blonde who held her up trying to find her balance. Ali took one look into her girlfriend’s hazel eyes and did the only thing she wanted to do in that moment, she grabbed Ashlyn’s face with her hands and kissed her hard. Ali felt everything around her melt away, her only focus was Ashlyn’s warm mouth anchoring her to the blonde, electricity running through her body and time feeling like it was passing in slow motion. Ali felt a soft moan escape Ashlyn’s lips and vibrate her own.

A clapping and whooping noise finally broke the moment, Ali and Ashlyn looked over to see groups of both their teammates cat calling them. Megan’s voice was the loudest as usual. “Those colors are awful together, you guys look like an exploded Christmas tree!” Megan yelled, referring to the forest green of the Dartmouth uniform and the checkered red and black of Smith’s. Ashlyn shook her head and gave a laughing Ali one more peck on the lips before hearing the all too familiar Ken Krieger
throat clear behind them. Ashlyn put Ali down and the brunette was immediately sandwiched in a hug between her parents.

Ashlyn started to walk away to let them have some time together when Deb reached out and grabbed her arm and pulled her into the group hug. The Kriegers had already gotten really good at making her feel welcome, but she still wanted to give them some time together to celebrate so she excused herself to go congratulate the other Dartmouth ruggers. Ashlyn made her way over to the Dartmouth sideline congratulating Sydney, Kelley, Hope, and HAO with hugs and fist bumps, even stopping to congratulate Lara who was still apologizing for giving Ashlyn the scar last fall that now graced her hairline.

There was a short trophy presentation followed by a whole lot of picture taking. While the pictures were wrapping up Ashlyn went to say goodbye to the Smith ruggers who had hung around to watch the game and celebrate a bit.

“If tonight goes like I think it’s going to, I expect I won’t see you until sometime tomorrow afternoon walking in all bow-legged probably,” Whitney teased, nudging Ashlyn who just waggled her eyebrows.

“You’re an idiot, Pinoe.” Sarah said, earning a middle finger from Megan.

“Yeah, really Ash, ENJOY the win!” Alex joked, one of her arms laced around Tobin’s waist. Tobin giggled “Come back in one piece, Ash. Krieger is a feisty one.”

Abby put an arm around Ashlyn’s shoulders. “Never seen a Smith rugger so happy after a tournament loss before, you’re in deep buddy. Stay out of trouble and have fun tonight, we’ll want stories tomorrow!”

“Alright, stop harassing my girl! I promise to get her back in one piece!” Ashlyn heard Ali behind her and felt the brunette’s arms wrap around her. Ali whispered hotly in her ear “What state that piece will be in after tonight is questionable though.”

“I totally heard that, Ali!” Alex laughed. Ali shrugged innocently and pulled Ashlyn away with her.

“Ok, Stud. So, the plan is to go back to the hotel with my parents so they can grab their stuff and head out to the airport. Then the girls have a dance club they want to go celebrate at for a while tonight, you up for that?” Ali asked.

“I’m up for whatever you want, baby. It’s your night.” Ashlyn answered.

“Good. Cause I’m definitely going to want you over and over and over again.” Ali said with a devilish smile before they reached Ali’s parents. Ashlyn swallowed hard, already flustered and the night hadn’t even started yet.

They got back to the hotel and said goodbye to Ali’s parents, Ashlyn promising that she’d come visit them in Virginia with Ali soon. Then they headed back to their room to shower and get ready to go out with the Dartmouth team.

The second the door to their room closed, Ali had pressed Ashlyn back against the door, crashing their lips together and letting her tongue roam the blonde’s mouth. Ali finally pulled away breathlessly after a couple minutes when she felt Ashlyn’s hands moving up the back of her shirt. “As badly as I want you right now, we really have to get ready and meet the girls,” Ali said ruefully.
Ashlyn groaned, “Fine. But you can count on picking this up later, so save your energy.”

“I already told you my endurance is a force to be reckoned with, Harris.” Ali flirted while heading into the bathroom.

Ali got into the shower while Ashlyn called her grandma to fill her in on the tournament and tell her the good news about Ali’s win. As much as they both wanted to be in that shower together, they knew they wouldn’t be able to control themselves. Once Ali was done showering, Ashlyn got in the shower while Ali worked on an outfit and makeup.

Ashlyn was ready long before Ali was. She had kept it simple throwing on a pair of fitted black jeans and gray v-neck t-shirt that was long and slim fitting along her lanky figure. She put on light makeup just like Ali liked it and left her hair down damp as it air dried from the shower.

Ashlyn sat on the bed waiting for Ali to finish getting ready, she was taking a long time as usual.

“You know babe, if you take too much longer, next year’s tournament will be here.” Ashlyn teased her.

“Very funny.” Ali walked out of the bathroom in tight black pants that hugged every curve of her toned legs and a stylish short white shirt that let her toned stomach peek out, her hair was down and draped over one of shoulders.

“Wow, Alex. How the hell am I supposed to keep my hands off you tonight?” Ashlyn looked her girlfriend up and down, not being able to take her eyes off her perfect legs.

“You’re not.” Ali said with a devious smile. “Besides, you’re the one that makes jeans and a t-shirt look like a fashion runway outfit, so I’m the one who’s not going to be able to keep my hands to myself. And I don’t plan to try either.”

“We better go before we never leave this room,” Ashlyn said quickly, already feeling worked up by the look Ali was giving her.

They spent about an hour in Sydney’s room drinking champagne with the usual crew of Dartmouth ruggers before heading over to the dance club. Knowing she wouldn’t be able to drink at the club, Ashlyn had downed 3 glasses of champagne in Sydney’s room. She felt warm all over and had no idea if it was the alcohol or the fact that Ali had her hand up the back of her shirt, running her thumb along the waistband of her boxer briefs at the small of her back as they walked the short distance to the dance club.

The Dartmouth team grabbed a few tables off in one corner of the club. Seeing the large group, a waitress had come over to make ordering drinks easier and avoid crowding the bar. She began taking drink orders, finally stopping at the table with Ali, Ashlyn, HAO, Hope, Kelley and Sydney.

“And what can I get for you, darling?” The brunette waitress with the piercing blue eyes asked Ashlyn flirtatiously.

Ashlyn didn’t notice. “Uh, just a diet coke.”

“Oh, the responsible one. I like it.” The waitress flirted again, dropping her hand on Ashlyn’s shoulder playfully.

Ali had seen enough. “Yeah, someone has to make sure I don’t get too out of control. Isn’t that right, baby?” Ali said leaning in to give Ashlyn a quick kiss on the lips.
“Um, yep!” Ashlyn said trying to mask her shock at Ali’s forwardness.

The waitress rolled her eyes and walked away to start getting drinks.

“Woah, Kriegs. I’ve seen dogs defend their territory less aggressively than that.” Sydney laughed.

Ali shrugged innocently making the rest of the table laugh. She looked around to see there were plenty of college guys hanging around in the club. She knew she’d be staying close to Ashlyn, there was only one set of hands she wanted on her tonight.

After a couple rounds of drinks, people started to leave the tables and head on to the dance floor. HAO pulled Ali and Ashlyn with her to the dance floor. They danced together for a little while before a cute, kind of dorky guy came over to dance with HAO. HAO obliged him but made it known that she had a boyfriend. The guy had put his hands behind his back to show he was just interested in dancing, so HAO continued to dance with him.

Ali took the opportunity to pull Ashlyn in as close as possible. She wrapped her arms around the blonde’s neck and felt Ashlyn’s hands drop down to her hips. They moved together, hips grinding in rhythm to the song. Ashlyn thumbs were dragging over the sides of Ali’s toned stomach just above the hem of her pants. Ali buried her face into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck, leaving a lingering kiss there. They were two songs in and already sweating a bit, heat radiating between the two of them. Ashlyn moved her hands under the back of Ali’s shirt, dragging them up and down the brunette’s lower back before dropping them down to lightly cup Ali’s ass and pull their hips closer together.

Midway through the third song, Ali’s could feel an aching throb between her legs, she couldn’t take much more.

“Let’s go back to the hotel.” Ali whispered in Ashlyn’s ear.

“You sure? We haven’t been here that long.” Ashlyn replied, wanting to make sure Ali got to celebrate her win.

Ali pulled back to look Ashlyn in the eye. “Ash, take me back to hotel.”

Ashlyn took one look at the dark, hungry eyes penetrating hers and she knew not to ask any more questions. “Ok, let’s go, champ.”

Ali stopped to tell HAO they were leaving. “We’re going to go, but have fun!”

“Nope. You guys have FUN!” HAO teased, knowing she was going nowhere near Ali and Ashlyn’s hotel room tonight. Especially with Hope and Kelley being right next door, that section of the hotel was going to be quaking tonight.

Ali held onto Ashlyn’s arm and stayed close to the blonde on the short walk back. The cool night air had been helpful in calming her libido a bit, otherwise she didn’t know how she’d make it back without throwing herself at Ashlyn right there in the middle of the street.

Ashlyn got to the door of their room, calmly putting in the keycard, all of her movements slow and deliberate. Ali’s mind was spinning, she didn’t know what Ashlyn had in mind, but it didn’t look like the blonde had any plans to give into the heated rush that Ali was feeling. They walked into the room and Ali noticed an ice bucket on the corner desk with a bottle of champagne and two glasses. She headed over to the desk while Ashlyn closed and locked the door.

“It’s from my parents.” Ali said reading the note on the desk, feeling Ashlyn behind her.

Ashlyn didn’t say anything. She reached around from behind Ali and worked open the bottle of
champagne with a pop, filling both of the glasses. Ali could feel Ashlyn’s warm breath on her neck, her core throbbing again. She handed Ali one of the glasses and clinked it with her own. “Cheers to the beautiful champ,” she said, downing her glass over Ali’s shoulder before putting her empty glass down on the desk and moving Ali’s hair to one side. Ali drank her own glass down feeling Ashlyn begin to trail open mouthed kisses down her neck as she tilted her head back to finish the glass. The blonde’s tongue was cool from the cold champagne, Ali just barely managed to put her glass down before reaching back to grab Ashlyn’s head with her hands.

Ashlyn had her hands up the front of Ali’s shirt, lightly stroking her toned stomach while she licked her way up and down Ali’s neck and partially exposed shoulder. Moans were already escaping Ali’s lips and she had pushed her body back into the blonde as far as she could to get as much contact as possible. Ashlyn trailed her hands up Ali’s sides, slowly lifting her shirt up and over her head. She dropped the shirt on the ground and put her hands on each of Ali’s hands that had gone back to clutching the back of her head. She dragged her fingers down Ali’s forearms, slowly down her arms and sides as she sucked lightly on the top of Ali’s shoulder.

The feather light touches were driving Ali crazy. Ashlyn’s hands seemed to be everywhere, her body was hot and tingling. She turned her head back and captured the blonde’s lips with her own, feeling Ashlyn’s tongue entwine with hers in a slow passionate kiss. Ali had tried to deepen it, but Ashlyn wasn’t giving in. She felt the blonde’s hands run up over her stomach and cup her breasts through her bra. She let out a gasp into Ashlyn’s mouth, feeling her nipples harden in response to the blonde’s massaging.

Ashlyn snaked a hand between them, unclasping Ali’s bra and letting it fall off her shoulders and down to the floor, never breaking their kiss. She pulled her mouth away from Ali’s, going back to working on the brunette’s neck while she brought both of her hands up to roll Ali’s nipples between her fingers. Ali arched her back into Ashlyn.

“Mmmmm, yes, baby.” Ali breathed out, putting her hands over Ashlyn’s as the blonde continued tugging on her nipples.

Ashlyn grabbed Ali’s hands and put them on the desk, before moving to unbutton and unzipper Ali’s pants. She let her hand dip down just a little into Ali’s underwear, but not too far down listening to Ali moan in desperation. Ashlyn kissed and licked down the center of Ali’s back, moving down to take off Ali’s high heeled boots before reaching back up and slowly pulling off her pants and underwear, kissing every part of the brunette’s perfect legs on the way down. She stood back up, trailing her right hand up the front of Ali’s thigh, over her taunt stomach and right nipple before using it to turn Ali’s head and pull her into another slow deep kiss.

Ali was breathing heavily, she could feel herself dripping onto the inside of her thigh. She had never been so turned on in her life. She reached back to try and pull up Ashlyn’s shirt, she needed to feel her skin. Ashlyn obliged her, helping Ali pull off her shirt and sports bra. Ashlyn’s hands were over Ali’s again, putting them back down on the desk. Ali could feel the blonde’s hot skin and hard nipples pressed against her back, her core starting to quiver, she didn’t know how much more she could take.

Ali tried to turn around, but Ashlyn didn’t let her. “I’m gonna make you come and scream my name on every surface of this room tonight, starting right here with this desk.” The blonde whispered hotly in her ear, moving her hand down Ali’s stomach and between her legs, starting to rub very light circles over Ali’s clit.

“Oh my god,” Ali panted, her hips moving trying to get Ashlyn to apply more pressure with no success.
“You are so wet, Alex. You’re so hot.” Ashlyn breathed into Ali’s ear, feeling the brunette’s legs start to shake.

“Please, Ash. I need you, I need you so bad.” Ali begged, her voice trailing off into a whimper.

Ashlyn obliged her just a little bit, leaning them a bit further over the desk and entering Ali with just the tip of one finger. She moved in and out shallowly, Ali’s whimpers getting louder.

The brunette’s ass was pressed tightly into Ashlyn’s crotch in desperation. She felt Ashlyn finally slide her finger in a bit deeper, but keeping the same slow pace. Ali’s body was shaking, everything building with no release. Her hands were gripping the desk so hard her knuckles were white. She didn’t even recognize her own voice desperately repeating “Please” over and over again.

Ashlyn slid another finger into Ali, pressing herself down into the brunette’s back to get more leverage. She couldn’t get very deep from this angle, but her long fingers could just curl into the right spot against Ali’s walls. She thrust in and out just a bit faster, feeling Ali’s back muscles contracting against her stomach.

“Please, Ash, let me come. Ashlyn, mmmmmm…” Ali begged again, and Ashlyn knew Ali couldn’t hold on much longer. She gave in, increasing her speed and curling her fingers against Ali’s walls as deeply as she could.

Ali’s body convulsed and arched back into Ashlyn’s, her hands coming off the desk to reach back and grab whatever she could. One hand grasping Ashlyn’s thigh, the other finding purchase on the blonde’s lower back just above the waist of her jeans. “Fuck, Ash, Ash, Ash…” Ali screamed her name over and over again as the orgasm ripped through her. Ashlyn slowed her fingers, pulling them out slowly and lightly running her knuckles over Ali’s soaking folds as she continued to shake and ride it out.

Ashlyn held the panting brunette tightly against her front until she heard Ali’s breathing start to slow. She turned Ali in her arms, putting one hand on her cheek and pulling her in for a passionate kiss before lowering the brunette down onto the desk chair.

Ali felt the cool leather of the chair against her back and felt relieved, not knowing how much longer her weak legs were going to hold her up. She felt Ashlyn licking down her chest, her nipple already in the blonde’s mouth being gently sucked. “Ugh” she grunted feeling Ashlyn moving down her stomach, her tongue leaving a trail of wetness down her abs. All Ali could manage to do was grab a fist full of the blonde’s hair in her hand as her body started to shake again.

Ashlyn kissed Ali’s inner thigh and then started stroking her tongue over her girlfriend’s glistening folds as lightly as possible. “I love the way you taste, Alex.” She let her hot breath ghost over Ali’s core. Ali’s hips were squirming, her hand tugging Ashlyn’s head closer, her combined whimpering and moaning starting all over again. Ashlyn moved her tongue over Ali’s clit tracing light patterns over it as slowly as possible, but Ali was already too worked up and writhing against the desk chair. Ashlyn moved her hand to hold down Ali’s bucking hips and gave into her girlfriend again, dipping her tongue deep into Ali’s entrance and swirling it around.

Ali’s back came off the desk chair, pulling Ashlyn face into her as deeply as possible. “Oh my god, yes, Ashlyn… fuck…. I’m there baby, I’m there…” Ali screamed out. Ashlyn felt Ali’s core clenching around her tongue, more wetness seeping out as the brunette’s hips bucked wildly into her face. She continued licking slowly through Ali’s folds, letting the brunette come down before pulling her on top of her on to the floor.

“Oh my god, Ash” Ali said breathlessly laying on Ashlyn’s chest before reaching up to kiss her
deeply, tasting herself on the blonde’s lips. They laid there for a few minutes, Ashlyn running her hands over Ali’s back enjoying the brunette’s weight on top of her. Ali felt exhausted, but she dug down deep to push herself up and straddle Ashlyn, it was time to show off the endurance she had bragged about.

Ali raked her hands over Ashlyn’s chest, the blonde looking surprised at how fast she had recovered. She leaned down to kiss Ashlyn deeply before pulling back slightly and whispering in the blonde’s ear “I’m the champ, you need to be screaming my name…”
Champagne Toast

Chapter Notes

This is a continuation of the last chapter, so if hot and heavy isn't your thing, definitely skip this one!

Ali raked her hands over Ashlyn’s chest, the blonde looking surprised at how fast she had recovered. She leaned down to kiss Ashlyn deeply before pulling back slightly and whispering in the blonde’s ear “I’m the champ, you need to be screaming my name…”

Ashlyn instantly felt a gush of wetness between her legs, Ali’s aggressiveness was such a turn on. No girl had ever been so forward with her, it was sexy as hell. She closed her eyes feeling Ali run her tongue along her earlobe. Ali’s nipples were lightly dragging over the top of her chest as the brunette kissed her neck and the sensation was making her tingle. She tilted her head to give Ali more access and held Ali’s hips tightly with her hands, enjoying the feeling of Ali’s hot mouth dragging across neck. Ashlyn let out a deep sigh as Ali sucked hard at the bottom of her neck, sure to leave her with a mark.

Then, just like that Ashlyn felt nothing. She looked up to see that Ali had sat back up on her thighs. Ashlyn groaned, grabbing at Ali’s hand to pull her back down, but Ali was reaching to grab the ice bucket from on top of the desk. She put it down on the floor besides them and reached in around the champagne bottle to grab a large piece of ice. Ashlyn looked into Ali’s darkened amber eyes as she watched the brunette put the ice between her lips seductively with a smirk on her face.

Ali leaned down and brushed the ice over Ashlyn’s lips and then slowly dragged it down her neck and over her collarbone before pausing to swirl it over the blonde’s nipple. Ashlyn let out a hiss of pleasure, never feeling anything like this in her life. Ali continued to move down very slowly, dragging the ice down the center of Ashlyn’s abs and finally dropping it in her navel and leaving it there.

“Holy shit,” was all Ashlyn could manage to get out between heavy breaths. She could feel that her underwear was soaked, her skin was on fire with contrasting cold spots from the ice. The dual sensation was almost too much. She felt Ali going lower.

Ali worked on the button of Ashlyn’s jeans while she ran her cold tongue all along the waist band of the blonde’s boxer briefs. Ashlyn could only suck in deep breaths as Ali popped the button of her jeans and worked her pants down her legs. Ali came back up and collected the ice from her belly button with her mouth, dragging it back up the skin of her stomach to swirl it over the other nipple for a few seconds. “Geez, Alex.” Ashlyn gasped out, feeling the ice travel back down her stomach yet again and land back in her navel. She felt Ali’s cold tongue under the waistband of her boxers again as Ali worked her underwear off.

Ali reached for the champagne bottle as she came back up; she poured cold champagne into the blonde’s belly button over the ice. Ashlyn sucked in a deep breath between her teeth, ready to explode at all the sensations. Ali smirked again, running her hand up the blonde’s thigh and leaning down to suck the champagne pooled in her navel into her mouth, leaving what was left of the ice
there. Ali crawled up Ashlyn’s body pressing her lips to the blonde’s, letting the cold champagne drop into Ashlyn’s mouth as she kissed her. Ashlyn swallowed the champagne and grabbed the back of Ali’s head, kissing her with everything she had, her tongue moving frantically against the brunette’s. She wanted Ali so badly her whole body was aching.

Ali pulled back, running a hand through Ashlyn’s hair, the two of them a bit breathless. Ali looked deeply into her favorite hazel eyes, taking in the golden flecks that appeared in them. “You’re so gorgeous, Ashlyn Harris, and you’re all mine.” Ali whispered out putting her hand under the blonde’s chin and placing a gentle kiss to her lips before breaking the tender moment and dragging her tongue down Ashlyn’s neck again. Ashlyn could barely breathe, trying desperately to suck in breaths as Ali took one of her nipples between her teeth.

“Relax, baby. Breathe.” Ali coaxed the blonde, working back down Ashlyn’s stomach and grabbing the now much smaller piece of ice between her lips again. She dragged the ice over the top of Ashlyn thigh and settled between her legs, pressing the ice right to the blonde’s clit. “Unnhh, Alex, ohhh fuck.” Ashlyn’s eyes rolled into the back of her head, one hand going to the back of Ali’s head, the other desperately trying to grip the carpet.

Ali dropped the ice out of her mouth onto the floor. “Shhh, I got you, baby.” She hummed into Ashlyn’s core as she took one broad lick with her tongue up through her folds, realizing just how wet and worked up her girlfriend was as the blonde’s juices coated her mouth and surrounding face. Ali sucked Ashlyn’s clit into her mouth gently feeling it harden and flicking her cold tongue over it. Ashlyn’s ragged breathing was now turning into loud moans. Ali reached up and grabbed Ashlyn’s hand that was still frantically trying to find something to hold on to. She entwined their fingers as she plunged her tongue into the blonde’s entrance, hearing Ashlyn let out high pitched whimper in an octave that she didn’t know the blonde could even reach.

Ashlyn thought she was going to pass out, her body trembling all over, her heart racing out of control, but she didn’t want Ali to stop. “Alex, you feel so good. Please don’t stop, please” she got out almost inaudibly through her moaning. Ali worked her tongue in and out of Ashlyn’s core for a another minute before moving mouth back up to her clit and sinking two fingers deep inside her girlfriend.

Ashlyn’s back immediately arched up off the ground, a series of curse words coming out her mouth. Ali could tell she was close, but she wanted to give Ashlyn everything, make sure she felt it all. She worked her fingers in and out of her girl deep and slow, her tongue still running patterns over her clit.

“Yes, baby. Fuck me, Alex. Harder, please, Alex, ugh, yes,” Ashlyn groaned out so loudly that Ali knew the whole floor of the hotel probably heard it. Ali thrust into Ashlyn faster, giving her what she wanted, feeling the blonde start to shake uncontrollably. Her hand was being squeezed hard by Ashlyn’s as curse words spewed out of her girlfriend’s mouth. Ali curled her fingers a couple times, sucking gently on Ashlyn’s clit and she felt the blonde’s whole body tense up and contract as a loud wail came out of Ashlyn’s mouth when she reached her peak.

Ashlyn’s vision was blurry, she was trying to breathe deeply but only able to take in shallow breaths as she felt Ali placing gentle kisses on her folds and inner thighs. She felt Ali’s body drop down beside her and the brunette’s arms pulled her into an embrace. “Easy, baby. I love you, Ash.” Ali whispered in her ear. She could feel Ali’s hands gently stroking her back and her body was finally starting to come down and relax. She had never been so far gone before, it was incredible.

“I love you more than anything in the world, Alex.” Ashlyn managed to get out quietly a couple minutes later before letting her exhaustion overtake her.

Ashlyn woke up an hour later still in Ali’s arms on the floor, the brunette had dozed off too. Ashlyn
kissed Ali gently to wake her up so they could move to the bed, but Ali had reacted to her touch and melted into her kiss. Their hands had started wandering over each’s skin again, when Ali pulled back and laughed that they were really sticky from the champagne and suggested that they shower.

They didn’t make it very far, and Ashlyn had kept her promise from earlier in the night, eating Ali out right on the bathroom counter. Ali had dropped to her knees and returned the favor once they actually got in the shower. They finally dropped into bed an hour later, getting into another heated kiss and grinding into each other’s thighs until they tumbled over the edge together one last time. They finally fell into a deep sleep still tightly entwined with each other, completely spent and sated.

Ali woke up first around 11am, realizing they only had an hour before check-out. She moved slowly out of Ashlyn’s arms trying not to wake her as she reached for the phone. She asked the front desk for a late check-out, getting an extension until 2pm. She curled back into Ashlyn and went back to sleep, hoping the time to leave would never come.

Ali felt Ashlyn stirring about an hour later and opened her eyes to see beautiful hazel eyes staring back at her.

“Hi, Champ.” Ashlyn said with a dimpled grin.


They both stretched their bodies, feeling sore all over in the best possible way.

Ali got up to call HAO, who had apparently just gotten up herself and was totally hung over as was the rest of the team. They planned to meet in the lobby at 2pm and head home from there.

Ashlyn pulled Ali into the shower with her and the two of them actually just showered this time, staying close and bantering as usual. They got dressed and got their stuff packed up before going in search of food. They had completely missed breakfast, so they settled for lunch in a small café across the street from the hotel. There wasn’t a minute spent without some part of their bodies touching. The approaching time to leave each other was weighing more and more heavily upon them as the seconds ticked by.

They had finally made their way back to the hotel, the inevitable departure had arrived. Ashlyn took a few minutes to chat with the Dartmouth ruggers for a bit. Kelley hadn’t missed the opportunity to point out Ali’s post-sex glow and the mark on Ashlyn’s neck, but Sydney was quick to point out Kelley’s own glowing and the popped collar of Hope’s shirt. Everyone who had heard the conversation busted out into laughter while Ali and Kelley blushed. Ashlyn and Hope just smirked.

Ashlyn walked Ali and HAO to Ali’s car. She gave HAO a quick hug and then scooped up her girlfriend, planting a sweet long kiss on her lips. Ashlyn turned to head towards her Jeep. She made it about 10 steps before turning back around and grabbing Ali’s hand to pull her in for another kiss. HAO waited patiently in the passenger’s seat while this happened two more times before Ashlyn finally found the strength to walk away.

Ali sank down into the driver’s seat and threw her head back against the headrest with a loud sigh.

HAO patted Ali on the shoulder soothingly. “Damn, you two are like watching the hottest, sweetest romance movie ever.”

“I know.” Ali sighed out one more time before finally pulling away.

Ali got back to Dartmouth and called Ashlyn to let her know she got home okay. They talked for a few minutes before realizing they each needed to go get prepared for the next day and get some
sleep.


“Krieger, you don’t even know the intensity of the feelings I have inside for you, there are no words. Love you, Alex.” Ashlyn had replied back just as honestly.

“Good night, Stud.” Ali said.

“Sweet dreams, Champ,” Ashlyn replied before hanging up.

Ali sat back on her bed completely exhausted and never remembering a time in her life she was this happy. She had just captained her team to a rugby tournament championship for the first time in team history, she spent the weekend with her favorite person in the world whom her parents had gotten to know and love, and she just had the most amazing night of her life, her body going to places it had never been before and that she couldn’t even have dreamed of. She wished she could feel the rest of her life exactly like she felt right now.

Life didn’t always work that way though and when there were really good days, there were also really bad ones.
Well, you guys weren't happy with my dramatic foreshadowing. Looks like I'm going to get shanked... yikes!

HAO was up really early for a Tuesday morning, especially for having been so hung over the day before. The weekend win was driving her though and despite that fact that she had two classes and a ton of work to catch up on, she was excited for the day. Dartmouth rarely got much attention for their sports programs and she figured that news had probably spread around campus about team’s tournament win. The team had gotten back late on Monday, so there had been no opportunity to hear the congratulations and relish in the win outside of the bubble of the rugby team.

She made her way over to the dining hall, grabbing a coffee and a copy of The Dartmouth (the school newspaper) and settled into a corner table. She figured there would probably be an article in the sports section about the tournament and she wanted to check it out. She didn’t have to look very hard. As she unfolded the paper, she saw that the tournament win was the top headline. Before her mouth could finish the smile that was forming, the picture on the front page caused it to hang right open instead. “Fuck,” was all she could manage at the moment, the word just rolling right off her tongue.

She stared down at a large front page photo of Ali Krieger wrapped up in Ashlyn Harris’ arms, her legs wrapped around the blonde, hands on her face, and lips locked in a deep kiss on the rugby pitch. The headline above it: “Dartmouth Women’s Rugby wins Beast of the East: What a Ride!”

Who the fuck thought it was a good idea to print this, HAO fumed. She had to look no further than the writer of the article, Carolyn Sargent. The girl who had spent the last two years pining over Brent while Brent spent the last two years trying to get into Ali’s pants. HAO looked at the date of the newspaper and groaned, it had been out since yesterday afternoon. There was no way this hadn’t gotten around campus by now. She knew how Ali felt about her privacy, and while she had obviously let her walls down around her team and her family, this was going to be bad. This was not the day HAO had in mind when she got up this morning. She had to get to Ali to at least give her a heads up.

HAO breathed a small sigh of relief seeing the door of Ali’s dorm room cracked open, that meant she was still getting ready and hadn’t gone anywhere yet. She knocked on the door lightly, hearing Ali yell “Come in.” She walked in to see Ali putting the finishing touches on her makeup and looking really radiant, probably as excited for the day as HAO had been just a little while ago.

“Wow, you’re up early!” Ali remarked, shocked to see her best friend up and so awake at this hour.

“Uh, yeah. Was too excited to sleep, so I went to get a coffee.” HAO said, not exactly sure how to approach this situation. “Hey, I was thinking maybe we should give ourselves a chance to celebrate a little more. Maybe we can skip class today and head off campus to have some fun?”

“I wish. I have too much to catch up on though and I really shouldn’t miss class today. Let’s do a rain check though, ok?” Ali replied.
“Oh, come on, Ali! It’ll be fun, we never do stuff like this.” HAO was pleading desperately, it was the only thing she could think of at the moment.

“What is your deal, HAO? You never want to skip class. Are you ok?” Ali asked worriedly.

HAO knew she was losing the battle, not that avoidance was the best plan anyway. “Aw, fuck, Ali. I don’t know how to tell you this, but I’m just going to rip the band-aid off ok? No matter what, I’m here, ok?” HAO said timidly.

“Um, alright. What’s going on?” Ali sat down on her bed next to HAO, really worried now and wondering what on earth was going on.

HAO sighed and pulled the newspaper out of her backpack, putting it on Ali’s lap. “Sorry, Als. Someone is obviously a total jackass.”

Ali looked down at the paper and took it all in. She smiled for a second at the sweet picture of her and Ashlyn wrapped up in each other, but then the realization hit that this was plastered all over campus and her face dropped. “Fuck,” she groaned quietly, letting her face fall into her hands.

“Yeah.” HAO agreed, quickly trying to be encouraging. “I mean, it’s not the worst thing. It’s not like you murdered someone or something like that. It’s not a bad reflection on you. Just, I know you didn’t want everyone knowing your personal life and now it’s out there. But Ashlyn’s great and you’re happy, and that’s a good thing. I know it’s a big step for people to know, but it’ll be fine, just something to get used to, right?”

Ali let out a deep breath, she felt like her heart was in her stomach, she couldn’t believe this was happening right now. She tried to play off of HAO’s energy and chill out. “Um, yeah. I guess you’re right. I mean, no one really reads this stupid thing anyway. And even if they did, no one’s really gonna say anything, right? Well, maybe Brent, but I can worry about that bullshit later.”

Ali was trying to convince herself that it would be just fine. HAO was letting her go with it, hoping it was true because she didn’t know what else to do at the moment.

“I’m just going to go to class and act normal. I highly doubt anything will even come of this.” Ali reasoned.

“Yeah, ok, sounds like a plan. If you need me though, just call ok?” HAO said holding up her cellphone.

“Thanks, HAO. I really appreciate it.” Ali said, feeling lucky to have HAO right now.

Unfortunately, her reasoning had been dead wrong. Not only had it gotten around campus, but people were talking about it. Ali was fairly popular, so people paid attention. Ali had only made it a few feet out of her dorm before she realized this wasn’t going to be the ‘no big deal’ she had hoped for.

“Heeey, Ali. Surf’s up!” A couple of frat boys had snickered at her as she walked. She did her best to ignore them and kept going, trying to keep her eyes down. That didn’t keep people away though. A guy from her communications class last year walked up beside her and launched into a diatribe about how he and his girlfriend were looking for a third person to join in the fun. Ali gave him the dirtiest look she could muster and walked away.

The comments kept coming. “Didn’t know you liked the ladies, Krieger!” “Damn Ali, didn’t know you had it in you!” “Way to ruck and maul this weekend, Ali!” “You can join me and my girl, Ali, she’s blonde too!” “What a waste, Ali, you need a man!” That was only a few of the many
heard. She managed to get through class and get right back to her room, hoping she never had to come out of it again. She dropped into her bed and just sobbed.

The Dartmouth ruggers had heard plenty of talk and commentary too and had spent the morning doing their best to protect and defend their captain. Many of them had been by her room to check on her, but she hadn’t opened the door or said anything. HAO finally just let herself in around lunch time and plopped down next to Ali, rubbing the brunettes back as she sobbed.

“Hey, Ali. It’ll be ok. I know it sucks, but it’s going to blow over fast. People won’t linger on it for too long. And the team is right here behind you and we’re here for you.” HAO had tried to soothe her. It had worked enough for Ali to at least drink the coffee HAO had brought her. Ali was determined to pull herself together and make it to her 2pm class, after that she could go back to locking herself in her room for the night.

Ashlyn checked her phone every few minutes. She hadn’t heard from Ali all day and it was weird. Whitney had noticed her obsessive phone checking during lunch.

“You ok, Ash?” Whitney asked as they made their way back up to their room.

“Uh, yeah. I just didn’t get a text from Ali this morning like I always do. And usually she texts me at lunch too, but nothing. I sent her a couple texts, but no reply.” Ashlyn answered a bit nervously.

Whitney tried to calm her down, even though she had to admit it was a little weird based on how much those two texted all day. “I’m sure she’s fine. They’re probably celebrating more and she probably just got caught up this morning. Especially since she’s likely very behind on classwork.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you’re right. She always texts me before her 2pm class, so I’m sure she’ll catch me up.” Ashlyn reasoned.

When 2pm came and went, Ashlyn was really worried. She sent HAO a text, hoping to get some kind of response.

Ash: Hey HAO! Have you seen Ali today? Haven’t heard from her. You guys must be busy, but she usually texts, so figured I’d ask.

She got a reply a couple minutes later, a text back from HAO with a picture attachment.

HAO: Hey dude. Uh, things haven’t been so great today for Ali. She’s ok, but you should probably try and call her after her class, maybe she’ll want to talk. Pic81717.jpg

Ashlyn opened the picture to see the front page of the Dartmouth newspaper and groaned. Things had been so good between the two of them and everything had gone relatively easily with Ali’s parents. Their friends had been so supportive and Ali had gotten comfortable in the bubble they had around them between the rugby team and openness of the Smith campus. In all of that ease, it had slipped Ashlyn’s mind how new this all was for Ali and how she wasn’t used to be so open with people about her private life. There was a reason people called Ali the ice queen.

Whitney had heard the audible groan from across the room. “Everything ok over there, Ash?”

“Not really.” Ashlyn said tossing Whitney her phone.

Whitney looked at HAO’s text and let out a sigh. “Such assholes. What are you going to do?”

“The only thing I know how to do, Whit. Be there.” Ashlyn replied sadly.
Whitney nodded as she watched Ashlyn pack a duffel bag with some clothes.

“Cover for me at practice today?” Ashlyn said before heading to the door.

“You got it. Call if you need me. And Ash… tell her I love her.” Whitney said genuinely.

“I will. Thanks, Whit.” Ashlyn speed walked to her Jeep and made her way to the Dartmouth campus as fast as she could without getting pulled over.

Ali’s class got out at 4:30pm and she couldn’t wait to get back to her room, the tears already threatening to escape her eyes as she made her way across campus listening to a few more raunchy comments being launched her way. As she got close to her dorm she heard her named called out. She steeled herself for one more stupid comment, her brain not registering the voice or that the named called out was “Alex”. She looked up to see her girlfriend, looking more concerned than she’d ever seen her.

Ali felt her heart split inside, a pained smile on her face to reflect the emotions she was feeling. Happy to see the only person in the world she wanted to be with right now, tortured by the fact that it was also the last person she wanted to be caught seen with at the moment.

Ashlyn could see the sadness in Ali’s face as she stood there, shoulders drooping. She made her way to Ali ready to scoop her up into her arms and mend the damage of the day, but as she went in for a hug all she felt was Ali’s hand on her chest stopping her. “Alex?” She questioned, her heart dropping a bit.

“Come on,” Ali said motioning for Ashlyn to follow, her voice cracking even trying to get out those two simple words.

Once they got into Ali’s room, the brunette had collapsed into Ashlyn’s arms and sobbed hysterically. Ashlyn held her tight stroking her back and her hair, she hadn’t quite prepared for how upset Ali would be. Maybe prepared wasn’t the right word, she hadn’t expected Ali to be this level of upset.

“I love you, Alex. I’m here. It’s ok.” Ashlyn whispered soothingly. After about 30 minutes, she felt Ali start to quiet down a bit, her breathing becoming more normal. She pulled back to look into the brunette’s mascara smudged, red, puffy eyes.

“Hey, it’s going to be ok. This will blow over soon. And you’re graduating before you know it, none of these idiots are going to matter in a few weeks.” Ashlyn said gently, trying to make Ali feel better.

Ali didn’t want anyone to make her feel better, people had been trying to make it ok all day. It didn’t feel ok right now and all she wanted was for someone to validate what she was feeling. “No, Ashlyn, it’s not ok. This isn’t fucking liberal hippy Smith College were everyone loves each other’s fucking differences! This campus is full of pretentious assholes who have lots of money, lots of influence, and lots of close-minded opinions. I just wanted to get the fuck out of here and graduate with my head high like everyone else and now I can’t even do that!” Ali screamed at her.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to minimize.” Ashlyn said quietly, taken aback by Ali’s outburst.

Ali sighed deeply, feeling guilty, letting her head fall into her hands.

“Come on, we should get you something to eat.” Ashlyn suggested, thinking it might be good for them to get some air.

“I really don’t feel like leaving this room.” Ali replied back coldly.
“I know, Alex. But you can’t stay locked up in here forever. You need eat and get some air, I’ll take you off campus, ok?” Ashlyn tried to persuade her.

Ali knew Ashlyn wasn’t going to give up. She looked outside to see it was already dark out and gave in, pulling on a hoodie and fixing her eye makeup.

They walked across campus to Ashlyn’s car, Ali with her hoodie up and walking at least 5 feet in front of Ashlyn the whole time. Ashlyn’s heart was getting heavier by the minute, Ali had never acted so distant. After a few minutes of walking it dawned on her finally that Ali wasn’t just upset about people knowing about their relationship or questioning her sexuality, but that Ali was also ashamed of being seen with her, she was embarrassed. Just as her the emotions were about to break over her, the one person that could make it all that much worse crossed their path.

“Well, hey, it’s Ali and her surfer girl!” Brent called at them.

“Fuck off, Brent!” Ali yelled at him.

“Oh hey, don’t be pissed Ali. It explains a lot, really it does. Too bad though. If you had just let me slip this baby in you, you’d never have gone dyke.” Brent said grabbing is crotch.

Ashlyn snapped. She grabbed him hard, kneeling him in the groin and then clocking him in the face so hard she knocked him out. She felt Ali grab her and push her away hard.

“ Fucking seriously, Ashlyn?!” Ali yelled, kneeling down to check on Brent.

Ashlyn had had enough. “Yeah, Ali, take care of the guy who just called you a dyke. Great! I shouldn’t have fucking come here. Sorry I’m such a fucking embarrassment for you!”

Ashlyn stormed off to her Jeep heatedly, her hand throbbing.

Ali watched Ashlyn storm off, starting to realize how badly she had just screwed up. Ashlyn had called her ‘Ali’, that couldn’t be good. She turned around in a circle not sure of how to deal with the bleeding, passed out jerk on the floor. After a couple minutes it hit her that that’s all he was, just some stupid jerk who didn’t matter. None of these idiots around her mattered. And she had just pushed away the one person that did. She kicked Brent hard on the shoulder for good measure “Wake up you fucking asshole!” She flagged down some random guy walking by and told him he needed to go, but had found Brent like this, and she left him to deal with it. That’s more than Brent had ever deserved from her.

She ran as hard as she could to catch up with Ashlyn, but it was too late, Ashlyn was long gone.
Mended Heart & Broken Hand

Chapter Notes

Well, despite your hate of the last chapter, I'm happy to report that I haven't been shanked with a shiv yet. So, let's right this ship before the weekend, shall we...

Ashlyn got in her Jeep, shutting the door hard and slamming her fist on the steering wheel. “FUCK!” She yelled out, having used the hand that she had probably already broken on Brent’s face. She pulled away, letting the tears she was holding in start to fall, driving kind of recklessly but not really caring at the moment. Hurt and anger ripped through her, she had thought Ali was different. Yet here she was feeling just as ashamed of herself as she had been back in Florida. She let that emotion control her for a while.

Fifteen minutes down the highway, she had started to calm down a bit, feeling more dejected than angry. With her mind operating more clearly, her thoughts got deeper. Ali was different. When she said she loved Ashlyn, she didn’t just say it, she meant it, she showed it. She had protected her every step of the way like no one had ever done before. When Ali said she loved her, Ashlyn didn’t just have to take her word for it, she knew Ali loved her. So what the hell had happened today? Ashlyn scrutinized her own actions for the answer.

Things had been so good between them, but that didn’t mean that Ali had fully understood herself yet. She had put everything aside to just let her heart love Ashlyn the way it wanted to. She had opened up to her teammates, her friends, her family. She had bared their relationship to all of them and was proud of it, Ashlyn had never expected her to do that so quickly, but she did. She had found a comfort zone, a space to exist happily that would give her the chance to love and to understand herself better. Then through no fault of her own, that space had been broken open, strangers let inside a world she wasn’t ready to show yet. While those people didn’t really matter in the long run, they mattered to Ali right now because they had just infiltrated her space. Ali felt attacked and unprepared. Ashlyn had promised to be there, to take everything slow, to do whatever it took to help Ali understand who she was, to support her even if it meant not being so frank about their relationship. However, at the first opportunity to make good on that promise, she had failed miserably. She hadn’t even let Ali have a day to process and deal with it. She had tried to push to make things ok, to lighten what had happened rather than commiserating and letting it not be ok for the time being. She had jumped to conclusions about what Ali was feeling. And yes, Ali hadn’t communicated with her very well and she said things she probably shouldn’t have, but Ashlyn hadn’t been fair in her approach either. Ashlyn let her mind wander to how she had felt in high school when her own life had been laid out for all to see. She of all people should have understood how Ali felt today, but she had gotten too caught up in herself. Bottom line, she hadn’t been there for Ali like she should have.

Ashlyn felt like a total ass right now. Everything in her wanted to turn around and go back to make it better. She couldn’t do it though, she knew Ali needed her space and she’d probably just make it worse going back there. She’d call Ali in the morning, hopefully Ali would talk to her and she could drive back tomorrow. What she probably really needed to do tonight was head to a damn emergency room, her hand was badly swollen and bruised, she couldn’t even use it to grip the steering wheel. “Fuckin moron” she yelled at herself.
Ali saw that Ashlyn’s Jeep was gone, she had definitely left. She paced around in the empty parking spot, lost at what to do. She couldn’t blame Ashlyn, honestly. Ali had been mad at Ashlyn when she tried to tell Ali not to be so upset, but she had no right to be mad. Ashlyn wasn’t trying to hurt her, she had been trying to help, trying to comfort her. Ashlyn had been right too, the blonde had always been more insightful than she was. Yes, these people around her were making her life hell, but what did that matter. These weren’t her friends or her family. None of them actually mattered at all. They’d be out of her life and never thought of again in a few weeks once she graduated. So, why the hell did it make any difference what they had to say. Ali had this wonderful, smart, beautiful person in her life who treated her like she was the most valuable thing on the planet, why shouldn’t she show her off. Why should she only be proud and blatantly in love in front of her family and friends, why not the whole damn world? Did it really matter what any of these people called her, labeled her, said or thought about her? Not at all. Ali knew who she loved and who she was, and that was all that counted, all that should stand for itself. She knew damn well who she wanted by her side, yet she had pushed Ashlyn away. She had promised to protect her always, and she had just let her down and done exactly what everyone else in Ashlyn’s life had done, make her feel ashamed.

Ali knew that Ashlyn could have been more patient with her, but that still didn’t give Ali any reason to act the way she did. She had lashed out at Ashlyn and yelled at her when all Ashlyn was trying to do was comfort her. She had checked on a guy who had been a complete jerk to her before she even checked to see if her girlfriend was ok. All that after Ashlyn had stepped in to defend her. Ali had every right to be upset over what happened today, she wasn’t going to deny herself that. However, she had no right to treat the person she loved the most the way she had.

Ali needed to make it right. She knew Ashlyn was pissed off and rightfully so, but Ali needed her to know how much she loved her, how proud of her she was, how much she mattered and what she meant to her. She had learned from both Ashlyn and Kyle that you fight for the people that you love. Ali would fight for Ashlyn to the death, and she was going to start right now. Ali didn’t hesitate another second, she sprinted to her car and got going.

Ashlyn felt like she was driving fast, but only an hour had gone by and the drive was taking forever. Her head hurt and her hand was killing her. She was exhausted and she would probably spend half the damn night waiting to be seen in the emergency room. It didn’t help that the asshole driving behind her kept riding up her ass and flashing his damn high beams. She passed the line of trucks in the slow lane and then moved over to let the jerk behind her pass. She waited patiently for the guy to pass her, but he didn’t. He just moved behind her car in the slow lane and started honking and flashing the high beams again.

“What the fuck is the guy’s problem?” Ashlyn yelled out. She thought maybe something was wrong with her car, but she had just had it all checked out at the mechanic recently and everything felt just fine driving. Plus, if something was actually wrong, this guy would have pulled up alongside her by now to get her attention and point or something. “Of course this bullshit would happen tonight!”

She got back in the fast lane to speed up, but the car just got right up her ass again. She was starting to get nervous and angry, not a good combination. She was trying to make out the license plate and the make of the car, but with it being behind her, the bright headlights in the dark made it impossible to see anything.

For the first time ever Ali had used her BMW for what it had been made for, easily driving at speeds around 100mph and hoping she wouldn’t get pulled over. An hour into driving and she had lost hope
she’d catch up to Ashlyn, knowing she’d just have to find her at Smith. Then she’d seen a black Jeep Wrangler speeding down the fast lane ahead of her and her heart jumped. She’d caught up to it, seeing the unmistakable custom license plate: RUGHER. She tried everything to get Ashlyn’s attention, flashing her high beams, honking, but nothing worked. She had tried to call her cellphone, but Ashlyn hadn’t answered. Ali hadn’t wanted to startle her, but she figured maybe she needed to be more blatant to get her attention. She turned on the overhead lights inside the car and sped up.

Ashlyn was getting frustrated with the car behind her still riding her bumper. Finally she saw it move over to the slow lane and speed up trying to get even beside her. Maybe there was something wrong with her car after all. When the car finally pulled even she saw it was a white BMW and the lights on inside revealed Ali, waving to try and get her attention. Ashlyn almost swerved into the guard rail, slowing down and getting control of the car enough to see Ali pointing for her to pull over. Looks like they were going to hash this out tonight after all.

Ali pulled up next to Ashlyn’s Jeep to get her attention and cringed as she watched the blonde notice her and almost crash her car. She tried to signal to Ashlyn to pull over but it was hard to tell if she had understood. Ashlyn had sped up again and pulled in front of Ali. Ali wasn’t sure if she was going to stop until she saw the turn signal on Ashlyn’s car come on to signal she was getting off at the next exit. Ali followed the Jeep off the exit and into the parking lot of a diner that was pretty busy given that it was 9pm on a Tuesday night. Ashlyn had pulled into a spot a little further away from the main crowd of cars. Ali was grateful for that, she didn’t want to be ogled by a bunch of random people while she apologized and admitted how much of a bitch she had been. She pulled up right beside Ashlyn and got out of the car.

Ashlyn got off at the next possible exit, anxious now to apologize to Ali and make things right. She pulled into the first parking lot she saw and parked far away enough from other cars to give them a little privacy. She got out of the car and Ali was at her side before she had even closed her door. One look at Ali’s sad eyes had practically broken her. “Alex, I’m so sor…” she had started before feeling Ali’s finger on her lips.

“No, Ashlyn.” Ali had put her finger on Ashlyn’s lips to get her to stop talking. “Just listen to me.” Ali said removing her finger. Ashlyn nodded, conceding for the moment. “I love you with all my heart, Ashlyn Harris. That is all that matters to me. You are everything I have ever wanted in life, everything I could ever ask for, and I am proud of you and proud to call you mine. I let a lot of people get me down today, people who I honestly couldn’t give a damn about and who mean absolutely nothing to me. You were absolutely right, not a single one of them matters. What matters is you, right here in front of me. I may get frustrated or angry or upset, but I am never ashamed or embarrassed of you. The only one I’m embarrassed of right now is myself and how I treated you today. I will always be here to protect you and love you with everything that I have. What we have together is beautiful and there is no reason at all not to let the world see it. You deserve every last part of me, private and public, and that is exactly what I am going to give you. I love you and I don’t care who knows it or what they think. All I care about is what I think and what I want. And do you know what I want, Ashlyn? I want the first person I gave my heart and body to, to be the only person I ever give my heart and body to.”

Ashlyn was ready to melt into a puddle, but she wanted to make sure she got out what she needed to say. “Wow, Alex. That was, wow. Thank you,” She paused for a second before continuing. “I love you with every ounce of my being Alex Krieger and that is completely unconditional. I am so sorry for the way I acted today. Of all people who should have understood how you felt and how upsetting it was, it should have been me. I shouldn’t have tried to brush off what you were feeling to try and make things better. I promised you I’d do anything to make things easier and I failed at that. I don’t need you to show me off to the world and make a public spectacle to know that you love me. I know you love me. I know because you’ve never shown me any different. That’s all I need, to know that
you love me and that I love you. It doesn’t matter who knows and who doesn’t or what anyone says or does. You are what matters, your love is what matters. To know that you love me will always be more than enough for me, no matter how private or public that is. You are everything to me and I’ll spend every damn second of this life making sure you know it. You weren’t the first one I gave my heart and body to even though I sure wish you were. But I can promise you that I am going to do everything in my power to make sure you’re the last.”

Ali knew there was no way to respond with words. She just grabbed Ashlyn by the shirt and pulled her into the most loving passionate kiss she could; the two of them pouring every emotion out of their lips and into the other. They stayed that way until they could barely breathe, finally pulling apart to look at each other, chests heaving. Ali took one look into Ashlyn’s gold flecked hazel eyes and she knew she wasn’t near done. She pulled open the back door of the Jeep and pushed Ashlyn into it and onto to backseat, climbing over her.

“Alex, what are you doing?” Ashlyn asked realizing they were still in a pretty busy well-lit parking lot.

“I told you. I am going to love you no matter who sees. No matter where it is... even if it’s illegal.” Ali gave Ashlyn a devious grin. “And I’m starting right now,” she leaned down to kiss Ashlyn, pressing her tongue into the blonde’s mouth. The kiss had started heated, but quickly became slow and deliberate. Ali slipped her hand under the waistband of Ashlyn’s joggers and boxers, letting it rest on the bare skin of her pelvic bone. Ashlyn matched her, slipping her own hand into Ali’s sweatpants and running it along her hip. Ali moved her hand down entering Ashlyn with two fingers, feeling the blonde’s fingers enter her own core. They moved in and out of each other slowly, never breaking their kiss. The intensity kept building, but nothing sped up. It wasn’t the heated and brazen sex they normally had. This was loving and passionate, adoring and focused, a physical manifestation of the love and connection between them. There was no loud verbalizations, just gentle breaths and soft moans passing through ever connected lips. Desire, love, heat and a light sheen of sweat all mixed together to produce a euphoric release that left their bodies trembling against each other.


“Yeah…woah is right.” Ashlyn replied quietly.

They pulled back just looking at each other for a few minutes until Ali broke the silence. “You know, this has been a really intense night for two people who have been officially dating less than a month.” Ali chuckled.

“By female-on-female dating standards you should have brought a U-Haul with you on the second date and moved in with me, so technically, we’re way behind.” Ashlyn joked and they both laughed.

Ashlyn sat up, pulling Ali up with her.

“Come on, let’s go eat.” Ashlyn said.

“Here?” Ali asked.

“Yep. Pretty sure I’m never ever going to forget this diner, so I want to be able to say we ate here.” Ashlyn smiled.

They adjusted their clothes a bit and got out of the Jeep, walking towards the diner. Ali reached for Ashlyn’s hand causing the blonde to jump and pull it away.
“Ash, your hand!” Ali exclaimed, grabbing it gently to have a look under the bright lights of the parking lot. Ali had noticed that Ashlyn had taken care of her left handed, but had just assumed it was because of the angle and position they were in in the car. She ran her finger gently over the swelling and bruising, she could only imagine how much it hurt. “That looks bad. We can eat, but I’m taking you to get that looked at right after, ok?”

Ashlyn nodded, knowing she did need medical attention at some point.

Ashlyn settled into a booth while Ali went to wash her hands and then they switched off. When Ashlyn got back, Ali had a bag of ice waiting. Ashlyn looked at her curiously. “I put in a special request with the waitress,” Ali smiled.

Ali took Ashlyn’s hand across the table, gently holding the bag of ice to it. “Thank you.”

“For what?” Ashlyn questioned.

“Breaking your hand on that asshole’s face, and kneeing him in the balls for good measure.” Ali said matter-of-factly. “It was fucking amazing, and so damn satisfying. I kinda hope he can never have children or breathe out of his nose again.” Ali’s face broke out into a guilty smile.

Ashlyn laughed. “Yeah, I’m not one for violence or hitting people, but I’ll admit that felt good.”

A middle-aged waitress with salt-and-pepper colored hair came over to their table. “What can I get you ladies?” She said looking at Ali first.

“I’ll have a cheeseburger with fries and a chocolate shake.” Ali said.

Ashlyn noticed that Ali continued to hold her hand on top of the table with one hand, her other hand applying the ice to it. The fact that she hadn’t let go spoke volumes. Ashlyn smiled to herself. Her thoughts were interrupted by the waitress. “And what can I get for you, Rocky Balboa? You must have worked up quite an appetite punching out the ex-boyfriend!” The waitress chuckled.

“Um, I’ll have the same thing.” Ashlyn replied.

“Great. It’ll be out soon.” The waitress said with a smile and walked away.

Ashlyn gave Ali playful eyes.

“What?! It’s an awesome story, I was dying to tell someone and I was asking for the ice anyway,” Ali giggled.

Ashlyn shook her head laughing. “And why the hell am I always Rocky Balboa?!”

“Better than Mike Tyson, right?” Ali joked.

“Very true.” Ashlyn replied.

Their food came shortly after and they ate carrying on in their usual comfortable bantering style of conversation.

Even though they were about halfway between both campuses, Ali insisted she follow Ashlyn back to Smith so she could take her to the hospital near campus and Ashlyn could already be comfortable in her own room and bed afterwards. Ashlyn parked her Jeep on campus and the hopped in Ali’s car to head over to the emergency room.

They filled out paperwork and waited about an hour for Ashlyn to get x-rays, then waited another
half hour in an exam room for a doctor to come see them.

“Ugh, I hate hospitals,” Ashlyn groaned.

“I know.” Ali said, squeezing the blonde’s good hand while they waited. “Just means you have to stop getting injured.”

“Deal.” Ashlyn joked.

The doctor finally came into the room. “Hi Ashlyn, I’m Dr. Miller.” He said putting the x-ray up to the light board.

“Looks like you have broken the 4th and 5th metacarpals in your right hand, those are the bones just under your ring and pinky fingers. We call it a boxer’s fracture. I’m guessing you punched someone?” The doctor inquired with a friendly tone.

“Uh, yeah.” Ashlyn said shyly.

“Well, it must have been quite a shot.” The doctor joked trying to lighten the mood.

 Yep!” Ali said smiling.

“Anyway, the bones are broken all the way through, but they’re not angled too badly. So, no need for surgery, I can just set them and cast it. You’re looking at about 2 to 3 weeks in the cast and about 6 to 8 weeks total healing time, but you’ll be back to normal once the cast is off. Just no punching anything until that 6 to 8 weeks is up.” The doctor explained and left to get supplies.

Ashlyn nodded.

Ali groaned “Ugh, Abby and the rugby team are going to kill me.”

“Nah. You know the spring season isn’t a big deal other than Beast of the East. We only have two games left anyway. The one this weekend already got cancelled by Amherst College yesterday morning. So, I’ll just miss the one against Mount Holyoke. Besides, my teammates aren’t fans of Brent’s either, they’ll understand.” Ashlyn said trying to make Ali feel better.

The doctor came back with casting supplies. “So, what color are we going with?”

Ashlyn shrugged looking at Ali.


Ashlyn nodded in agreement. “You heard her!”

Twenty minutes later Ashlyn had a red cast that started midway up her right forearm and extended up over her ring and pinky fingers, the other fingers of her hand left free.

“Well, at least it’s my right arm and my tattoos aren’t blocked.” Ashlyn said thoughtfully while they waited for the nurse to come in with the release paperwork.

“Right. Gotta remember the important things.” Ali rolled her eyes.

Ashlyn noticed a sharpie marker on the desk in the room. She went over and grabbed it. “Want to be the first to sign it?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali nodded with a huge smile. She took the marker and thought for a moment. She turned the cast so
“Mein Herz ist in guten Händen. ♥ Princess’ ”

Ashlyn looked it over and looked at Ali questioningly.

“It’s German.” Ali said noticing Ashlyn’s confused look.

“I figured that. But what does it say?” Ashlyn asked.

“It says ‘my heart is in good hands’.” Ali smiled.

Ashlyn leaned over and placed a gentle kiss on her lips. They were interrupted by the nurse. “Ok, Romeo, you’re all set to leave. Just remember the rules, no punching or hitting anything, keep your arm dry and elevate it if it’s swelling, and you can take ibuprofen for pain. The rest of the care instructions are on this sheet.” The nurse smiled at them.

“Got it!” Ashlyn said.

Ashlyn and Ali made their way back to campus.

“You’re staying, right?” Ashlyn asked realizing it was almost 1:30am.

“Of course, gotta take care of my knight in shining armor!” Ali replied. “I’m gonna skip my German class and head back tomorrow evening if that’s ok. I’ll email my professor in the morning, I know he won’t care. I’ve already done enough to earn an A in that class for the semester.”

“Perfect.” Ashlyn said pecking Ali’s lips. “I’m sure Whit is asleep, so we’ll have to be quiet. I have a new toothbrush for you and you can borrow my clothes to sleep in.”

They made their way quietly into Ashlyn’s room and changed for bed, but Whitney woke up and turned on the lights before they could settle into bed.

“Hey, you guys are here?” Whitney said with a sleepy and confused look, glancing at the clock. She noticed Ashlyn sporting a red cast on her hand. “What the hell happened? Are you guys ok?”

Ali spoke up first. “We’re more than ok. Just a very long night and very long story that involves Ashlyn breaking her hand on my ex-boyfriend’s face.” Ali said smiling.

“We’ll tell you all about it in the morning.” Ashlyn said.

“Oh, I can’t wait to hear this!” Whitney exclaimed settling back into her bed as Ashlyn and Ali settled into theirs.

Whitney reached over and turned out the light. “Hey, Ali?”

“Yeah?” Ali replied.

“I’m glad to see that you’re smiling.” Whitney said genuinely.

“Thanks, Whit. Me too.” Ali said, kissing the tips of Ashlyn’s fingers that were poking out of the cast and then giving the blonde a soft kiss goodnight. “I love you, Ash.” She whispered into Ashlyn’s ear before cuddling into her.

“I love you too, Alex.” Ashlyn whispered back wrapping her good arm Ali and pulling her close.

Their eyes had adjusted to the dark and they could just make out each other’s features. They gave each other a knowing look and yelled in unison “Goodnight, Whit! WE LOOOOOVVVVEEEE
“YOOOUUU!”

“UGH!” Whitney grunted dramatically.
Not a whole lot going in this chapter, but just trying to move the story along. Graduation for Ali is coming soon and there are going to be some transitions to get through.

“I give up.” Ashlyn said sleepily as she sat at breakfast stabbing desperately at her pancakes with her left hand, not being able to get anything on her fork.

Ali pulled over Ashlyn’s plate and cut her pancakes for her before sliding the plate back over and kissing her girlfriend on the cheek. “Try it now.”

“Much better!” Ashlyn said while chewing, finally being able to shovel some pancake in her mouth with the fork. “I’m going to starve when you’re not here, this cast is no joke.”

“I was totally planning to make fun of you, but that was so pathetic that I’m just going to agree to cut up your food when Ali isn’t here.” Alex piped up from across the table. Tobin nodded in agreement next to her, making a sad puppy dog face at Ashlyn.

“See, you’ll be in good hands.” Ali encouraged. “And if you can’t get help, just stick to sandwiches!”

Ashlyn just groaned while finishing up her pancakes.

Abby got up and rubbed Ashlyn’s shoulders briefly. “Don’t worry champ, we’ll make sure you survive,” she said before grabbing her backpack and heading out.

Ashlyn smiled and gave a thumbs up. Her friends had been pretty great after she spent the earlier part of breakfast recounting how she had broken her hand. They were damn happy to hear that Brent had gotten what was coming to him and spent breakfast taking turns adding signatures and drawings to Ashlyn’s cast. Megan had signed it “This cast entitles the wearer to sex from her girlfriend anytime she wants up until removal, and probably a long time after that too.” Ashlyn had wagged her eyebrows at Ali as they read the message together and said “Those are the rules for having punched out an ex-boyfriend, Princess.” Ali had winked and replied “Pretty sure you didn’t have to punch out my ex-boyfriend for that, but ok.”

Ali cleared their plates and then tugged Ashlyn’s arm. “Ok, I have two hours to help you get ready and off to your class, Harris.”

“Aw, come on! I don’t even get to skip class today on account of my broken hand?” Ashlyn whined.

“Nope. I will not be the reason for your academic failure.” Ali said strictly. Ashlyn pouted.

“Let’s go get you showered, Stud.” Ali suggested. That got Ashlyn’s attention and made the blonde smile as she followed Ali upstairs for a shower.

“Ash, keep your arm up!” Ali instructed, trying to keep Ashlyn’s cast from getting wet in the
shower. She looked up to see the blonde’s eyes busy raking over her body and not paying attention. Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s chin and tilted her face up. “Hey, Hey, eyes up here.”

Ashlyn smirked. “You’re naked and wet, Krieger. I can’t help it if my eyes have a mind of their own.”

“Stop flirting and focus on keeping your arm up.” Ali chastised playfully. “Now stay still so I can wash your hair. I have no plans to take you back to hospital today to replace your cast!”

They both heard a loud laugh in the bathroom. “Just so you know, Ash, I’m totally not getting in the shower with you to wash your hair! So, get ready to put your head in the utility sink when Ali’s not here!” Whitney called out.

“Oh come on Whit, I promise I won’t look!” Ashlyn joked back.

“Don’t believe her, Whit! Her eyes have a mind of their own apparently!” Ali yelled.

“And on that note, I’m leaving you two to get clean… or dirty, probably. Have a good day ladies!” Whitney chuckled and left.

“You heard her, you might want to get me dirty first so you don’t have to clean me again. It’s only logical.” Ashlyn smirked as Ali finished rinsing the shampoo out of her hair.

Ali smacked Ashlyn on the arm lightly trying not to let on that she was losing her composure, the blonde’s sculpted body was impossible to resist. She grabbed the body wash gel and a washcloth, getting it soapy and dragging it over Ashlyn’s shoulders and chest. Ashlyn’s breath hitched as Ali dragged the washcloth over breasts, along her side tattoo and down her stomach. Ali heard the change in Ashlyn’s breathing, watching the blonde tilt her head back a bit and close her eyes. She dropped the washcloth onto the shower ledge, her composure completely gone.

Ali put her hands on Ashlyn’s shoulders and let her hands follow the same now sudsy path the washcloth had just taken. Ashlyn let out a soft whimper when the brunette trailed her hands across her nipples, but Ali didn’t linger, letting her hands continue to slide downwards. She felt Ashlyn’s good hand clutch her hip and try to pull her closer. Ali looked up to see Ashlyn’s casted arm start to drop. She took her left hand and gripped Ashlyn’s forearm just below the cast, bringing it up above her head and pinning it to the shower wall with a light thud.

Ashlyn looked at Ali with dark, hooded eyes. “Alex?”

“Yeah, baby?” Ali replied.

“I’m definitely not clean anymore.” Ashlyn said quietly, swallowing hard.

Ali crashed her lips to the blonde’s, tongue exploring her girlfriend’s warm mouth while dragging her free hand back down Ashlyn’s body. She wasted no time in running her fingers through Ashlyn’s wet, slippery folds. Ashlyn let a breath out into Ali’s mouth, her abs clenching. Ali moved down to kiss Ashlyn’s neck while starting to rub her clit with light pressure. She could feel Ashlyn’s warm panting breaths on her ear and her own core was throbbing at the way the blonde was so worked up, writhing against the shower wall pulling Ali’s head more tightly into her neck with her good hand.

“Oh my god,” Ashlyn let out in a moan, feeling Ali’s fingers entering and stretching her. She knew she had no chance of holding out much longer, but she was trying desperately. She loved the way Ali felt inside her, filling her up, hand moving against her. “Nothing feels better than you do inside me, Alex.” Honesty poured out of Ashlyn’s mouth along with a series of whimpering breaths as she
felt Ali press against her walls in just the right spot. She moved to grip Ali’s lower back with her free hand, digging her fingers into the soft skin she found there.

Ali pressed her body against Ashlyn’s as tightly as possible, pumping in and out of the blonde intently until she felt her legs start to shake. She curled her fingers and moved her thumb to Ashlyn’s clit, covering Ashlyn’s mouth with her own to suppress the loud moans coming from the blonde as she orgasmed. Ali pulled back a bit, looking right into Ashlyn’s eyes and she let her fingers work in and out of the blonde extremely slowly and deeply for a minute to bring her down. “You’re so beautiful, Ash.” Ali said, removing her fingers and angling the blonde to let the spray of water rinse the remaining soap off of both of them. Her left hand still holding Ashlyn’s cast up. She reached for the washcloth, running it gently between the blonde’s legs to clean her up.

Ashlyn let out a few more soft breaths. Ali leaned back into her, placing a gentle kiss on her lips. “You’re very quiet, what are you thinking about?” Ali asked, noticing Ashlyn hadn’t said a word as Ali finished washing her.

Ashlyn cleared her throat. “I’m thinking about who I want to punch next after I get this cast off so I can break my hand again… that was just…” she trailed off with a smirk.

Ali poked her abs. “Don’t even think about it, Harris. I can be a mean nurse too! Not to mention that you’ll end up getting yourself arrested. And if anyone is gonna slap some handcuffs on you, it better be me!” Ali teased.

“Wow, Krieger. Naughty nurse, handcuffs…You’re doing nothing to dissuade me right now.” Ashlyn laughed.

Ali blushed a bit, pretending to ignore the comment and turning off the water. “Ok, all clean! Let’s get you dressed and off to class.”

“Ugh, I don’t wanna. Can’t we just cuddle in bed?” Ashlyn whined.

“You have to go to class, Ash. You’ll thank me when you don’t fail your finals next month.” Ali said.

“Ok, ok. How about you come with me?” Ashlyn asked hopefully.

“To class?” Ali clarified.

“Yeah, people bring people sometimes, no one really notices and the professors don’t care. Well, except when that person decides to actually comment and argue with the professor.” Ashlyn laughed.

“Does that actually happen? I can’t imagine being a guest and arguing with the professor.” Ali asked incredulously.

“This is Smith. A lot of strange things happen.” Ashlyn answered. “So, is that a yes?”

“Yes, I’ll go. But you have to pay attention!” Ali warned.

“You got it, Princess.” Ashlyn said excitedly.

Ali rummaged through Ashlyn’s underwear drawer hoping to find something she’d wear, digging through lots of boxers until she found a pair of simple black panties.

Ashlyn raised an eyebrow watching Ali put on her underwear. “How on earth do you expect me to concentrate in class when I know you’re wearing my underwear?!”
“Deal with it, Stud.” Ali winked as she threw on a pair of black leggings she had left in Ashlyn’s room last time she visited, smiling at the fact that Ashlyn had washed them for her. She threw on a long sleeve Nike t-shirt from Ashlyn’s closet and immediately smiled at the blonde’s scent all over her. She made the bed while Ashlyn finished getting ready, lifting Ashlyn’s pillow and finding her Dartmouth Rugby hoodie underneath it. She hadn’t noticed it last night. Her heart melted and she trying to decide whether her girlfriend could get any sweeter, deciding it probably wasn’t possible.

Ali watched Ashlyn struggle with getting her jeans buttoned for a minute, but finally getting it. “I would have just gone with sweat pants, but I admire your dedication.” Ali laughed.

“There is no way I’m spending 3 weeks in sweat pants, my fashionable reputation would be ruined.” Ashlyn quipped back as she gathered her books and stuffed them in her backpack.

“Right.” Ali said, rolling her eyes and placing her favorite Hurley snapback on Ashlyn’s head. “Wouldn’t want the ladies to disown you.” She teased.

“They already disowned me, Princess. They know they have zero chance next to you.” Ashlyn said charmingly as she took Ali’s hand and led them out the door.

Ali watched Ashlyn get settled in for class, pulling out a notebook and her text book. They sat next to each other in the middle of a smallish lecture hall with about 30 other students. The professor came in, greeted everyone, and began lecturing pretty quickly. About five minutes in, Ali could tell Ashlyn was struggling to take notes. She could still write with her right hand using her three cast-free fingers to grip her pen, but it was slow going and she couldn’t keep up.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s hand dig into her pocket and she jumped a bit feeling the brunette’s hand on her thigh. Ali pulled Ashlyn’s phone out of her pocket and placed it on the table they were sitting at. She pulled up the voice record feature and pressed the record button, giving Ashlyn a quick smile and a quick pat on the leg. Ashlyn smiled at her, dropping the pen and turning her attention back to class relieved.

Thirty minutes into the class and Ali was completely flabbergasted. She remembered some genetics from high school and figured she would understand what was going on, but she was completely lost within a matter of minutes. She didn’t know genetics could get to this level of complexity. She knew Ashlyn was intelligent, but she had no idea how smart her girlfriend actually was until now. Ashlyn didn’t even flinch when she got called on to answer a question Ali didn’t even comprehend. She sat back in complete adoration of the blonde, wondering how she should thank the universe for this amazing woman who so quickly found a way into her heart.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but… wow, Ashlyn Harris, you are so damn smart. Like really, really brilliant!” Ali said still awestruck as they walked back to Wilson House after class.

Ashlyn tugged Ali into her side wrapping her arm around her shoulders. “What, you thought I was just a pretty face and a hot body?”

“So much ego, Harris! But I’ll give a bit, I knew you were smart, but damn. Took everything in me not to pull you onto that desk and take you in class.” Ali blurted out.

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide. “Well, ok then. I think I’m going to have you help me study for finals,” she said waggling her eyebrows with a cocky grin.

“You bet I will. You just keep talking science to me and I’ll make sure to do things you won’t ever forget.” Ali said flirtatiously.
“Only if I can help you study by making you say sexy things to me in German,” Ashlyn flirted back.

“Now that is a deal.” Ali said, leaning up to kiss Ashlyn.

“Ugh, stop it! You’re making all the single girls jealous.” Tobin said from behind them teasingly.

“Now that is a deal.” Ali said, leaning up to kiss Ashlyn.

“You ladies going to lunch?”

“I think we’ll just grab some sandwiches and head back to my room, I want to spend the last couple hours with this lovely before she has to leave today.” Ashlyn said leaning her head onto Ali’s.

“Besides, I think I see your lunch date right over there.” Ashlyn said pointed over at Alex who was walking towards them.

Tobin grinned and gave Ashlyn and Ali a shy look before heading over to Alex who waved at them.

Ashlyn and Ali ate their sandwiches on Ashlyn’s bed and then laid back to cuddle up together. They didn’t talk much, just enjoyed each other’s company, each of them using a hand to trace patterns on some part of the other’s body.

Ashlyn broke the silence. “Forgot to tell you. I made an appointment with my artist to get a tattoo tomorrow.”

Ali perked up excitedly. “Really? What of?”

“A mermaid.” Ashlyn replied. Ali smiled and stayed silent knowing Ashlyn had deep meanings behind her tattoos, waiting for her to elaborate.

Ashlyn continued. “They’re a major symbol of the ocean, which you know is important to me. Their bodies are in a state of transformation, much like I feel I’ve gone through recently. Those who get close can see they are more than just their appearance, they are complex and mysterious and even dark, but they are free spirits. They symbolize love, power, femininity, and beauty, all things I have learned to connect with and love about myself thanks to you.” Ashlyn finished planting a kiss on the top of Ali’s head.

“That’s beautiful, Ash. Where will you get it?” she asked sweetly.

“My right thigh, I think it will be pretty big.” Ashlyn answered.

Ali smiled already thinking about how sexy and beautiful the new ink would look. “I can’t wait to see it!”

“You won’t have to wait too long. I was thinking maybe I’d come up to Dartmouth to watch you play on Saturday since we don’t have a match.” Ashlyn suggested hesitantly, knowing that while Ali had made a lot of realizations over the last 24 hours, it didn’t mean she was ready for Ashlyn to be back on the Dartmouth campus with her.

Ali smiled excitedly. “Perfect! And will you stay Saturday night so I can properly show you the campus and surrounding area like I should have to begin with?”

“Of course, Princess. But, you don’t have to do that. I meant what I said before about only doing what you’re comfortable with.” Ashlyn said seriously.

“Ash.” Ali said putting her hand on Ashlyn’s cheek. “You are what’s comfortable, ok? I love you and I honestly don’t care who sees that. I was stupid to care in the first place. I have the smartest, hottest woman on the planet and I’m damn proud to show her off. Truly.”
Ashlyn nodded, leaning down to capture Ali’s lips with hers, the kiss getting heated before Ashlyn pulled back a bit. “You know, Princess… you’re still wearing my underwear. I might need that back before you go.” She said with a dimpled grin.

“Come and get it, Harris.” Ali challenged, grabbing Ashlyn’s face with both hands and pulling her back into the kiss. They spent the next hour and a half making sure Ashlyn got plenty of practice with her left hand before Ali had to leave to go back to Dartmouth.
The smell of antiseptic hung in the air, the familiar buzz sounded through the room, and the burning sting coursed up her leg; Ashlyn was at peace. Her mind empty and enjoying the pain of fresh ink being injected into the layers of her skin. Addiction ran in her family, but drugs and alcohol were never her vice, it was tattoo ink that had drawn her in from the very first one she got. She was addicted to the ache, the artistry, the permanency.

After about 6 hours, it was over and Ashlyn walked out of her favorite tattoo shop with a mermaid freshly inked in black on her right thigh. It extended from just above her knee and almost reached the bottom of her hip. As usual, her tattoo artist had given life to her vision and made it even more remarkable than she had imagined. She had been in the tattoo shop all afternoon and the sun had already set by the time she left. She figured dinner was long over, so she grabbed a slice of pizza downtown before walking back to campus. She could have driven into town, but the soreness of the walk home had appealed to her, so she had decided she would walk there and back. It was all part of the tattoo process and she was a full participant.

She arrived back her room to find Tobin and Whitney waiting for her. Both of them appreciated tattoos, but would never get one themselves.

“Ok, show us!” Whitney and Tobin said in unison. Since it had now been a couple hours and Ashlyn was ready to take the bandage off anyway, she pulled off her jogging pants and showed them her new ink.

“That is so awesome!” Tobin exclaimed.

“Wow, Ash, she did a great job on that. That is gorgeous!” Whitney said, before adding “Ali is going to love it!”

Ashlyn laughed and nodded in agreement, she couldn’t wait to show Ali. Despite Ali’s begging, Ashlyn refused to send her a picture, she’d have to wait to see it in person.

Saturday morning came quickly and Ashlyn made it to Dartmouth in record time about an hour before the rugby match started. She found Ali on the pitch working on a few plays with Kelley and HAO. Ashlyn quietly watched her, the way her body seemed to move so effortlessly, the way everything seemed to be in perfect alignment when she ran. Ali was a work of art.

Ali ran plays for about 10 more minutes before noticing Ashlyn on the sideline watching her. Her face broke out into a huge smile and she jogged over.

“Hey gorgeous!” Ali greeted her, planting a sweet kiss on the blonde’s lips before pulling back and going in for a second one right away. “You look so good, baby.” Ali commented, looking over Ashlyn’s outfit of fitted jeans that were cuffed up a bit, a pair of Van’s sneakers, a red and black flannel button up shirt and a black Nike snapback over her loose flowing blonde hair. “Had to wear the Smith Rugby red and black though, huh?” Ali teased.
“You look great yourself, beautiful. I’m a sucker for a girl in a rugby uniform.” Ashlyn said giving her a dimpled smile. “I was going to wear green for you, but it clashed with my cast, which is your fault because you picked red. Soooo, Smith Rugby colors it is!”

“So, when am I going to get to see that tattoo?” Ali asked trying to contain her excitement.

“Um, later? Unless of course you want me to take my pants off right here.” Ashlyn joked.

“Well, seeing as how I have a feeling I’m not going to be able to control myself once I see it, maybe we should wait.” Ali said with a seductive tone to her voice that made Ashlyn’s throat go a little dry.

“Easy, Krieger, you have a game to play. And I fully intend to be celebrating a win, so focus!” Ashlyn said spiritedly.

“This will be a tough one, University of Connecticut is a Division 1 team and they always crush us.” Ali said plainly.

“It’s your last game of college rugby ever, Alex. Tough or not, I already know you’re not gonna let this one slip by you. You got this!” Ashlyn said seriously, trying to get Ali pumped up.

Ali nodded. “You’re right. I’ve got the home pitch, my team, and the most important person in the world cheering me on. I totally got this.”

“That’s what I’m talking about!” Ashlyn exclaimed, tapping Ali on the butt.


Ashlyn sat down on the grass, watching Ali and the Dartmouth team get ready and go through warm-ups. She had to admit the UConn team looked fierce, this was going to be a challenge. She watched Ali off to the side by herself for a couple minutes, clearly trying to collect herself before the team huddle. Ashlyn got distracted by UConn’s loud huddle cheer and when she looked back over, Ali was gone. She felt a shadow over her. “Hey, Ash. Can you help me out with something?” Ali asked kneeling down next to Ashlyn.

“Of course, what do you need?” Ashlyn asked.

“A good luck kiss from the hottest girl here.” Ali said with a smile.

“Hmmm, well it’s not easy to kiss yourself and it might look a little weird. But, hey, whatever gets you through the game, Krieger. I can block you so no one sees you attempt your self-love.” Ashlyn grinned, flirting and trying not to show her surprise at the fact that Ali just asked to kiss her in front of a pretty sizeable number of Dartmouth spectators.

“So cheesy, Harris. Good thing I love you. Now give me my damn kiss,” Ali said grabbing the collar of Ashlyn’s shirt and pulling the blonde in for a lingering kiss. “Much better. Game on!”

“Hey! What about me?” HAO yelled over. Ashlyn got up and made her way over to HAO and kissed her on the cheek with a laugh. “You’re right Ali, I feel luckier already.” HAO teased.

“Find your own luck charm, HAO! That one’s mine!” Ali joked as Dartmouth formed their huddle.

Ashlyn was nervous and already pacing up and down the sideline and the game hadn’t even started yet. She wanted Ali’s last college game to be wonderful. Ali took a hard hit from a UConn forward right off the bat and Ashlyn had to restrain herself from getting on the field and giving that bitch a taste of her own medicine. Ali shook it off though and played a hard first half, the two teams battling
back and forth with no score. Ashlyn spent the first half of the match cheering furiously on the sideline for her girl, to the point that other people watching had definitely taken notice. Ali loved every minute of it, catching Ashlyn’s eyes when she could and smiling at her.

Ali plopped down on the grass next to Ashlyn during the half, shoulders touching. She didn’t say anything, she just hooked her pinky on Ashlyn’s and cleared her mind. With a minute left before the half was over, she looked over at her girlfriend and gave her a huge smile.

Ashlyn saw that Ali was no longer in deep thought. “You so have this, Krieger. Their number 8 is strong, but Hope can probably handle her. You can definitely outrun their flankers and second-row locks. Try letting Hope get the ball to you and let her take on that lock forward while you scoot past the others.” Ashlyn suggested.

Ali nodded. “Good idea, thanks Stud,” she said pecking Ashlyn on the lips and getting up. Ashlyn got back on her feet, ready to cheer Ali on in the second half. The first ten minutes went much like the first half, the teams pushing each other back and forth on the pitch, but no one able to score. After a few successful Dartmouth rucks, HAO had managed to get the ball well into the UConn half of the field before the ball was tied up and a scrum called for. Ashlyn watched Ali set and shift positions with Hope. The UConn lock forward took notice, adjusting her position as well. “Perfect, come on,” Ashlyn whispered to herself.

The ball was hooked by the UConn scrum, but the Dartmouth scrum pushed hard allowing the ball to come out the side where Hope managed to get in a position to grab it. Ali repositioned as well and was right there for Hope to make the quick pass before taking the tackle from the lock forward. Ali broke out into a run, but she could see UConn players approaching fast. She quickly looked for a back to pass it to but she had no one close. She halted to a stop and kicked a drop goal through the posts to get Dartmouth on the board with 3 pts.

“Yes baby! That’s my girl!” Ashlyn yelled from the sideline.

Unfortunately, UConn exerted their strength and scored a try on their next drive, pulling ahead 7 to 3. With 15 minutes left, another scrum was called. Hope and Ali switched up again, with Ali getting ball from Hope and making a long run down the pitch. A UConn forward had wrapped her up in a tackle close to the try line, but Ali had just managed to get the ball to Kelley who fought the rest of the way to score the try, putting Dartmouth back in the lead 10 to 7. The teams battled back and forth again. With less than a minute to go, UConn barreled down the pitch and tried to score a drop goal to tie the game. Ashlyn cringed when she saw the UConn player go in for the attempt, they were so close to the posts it was sure to go through. And then out of nowhere came Ali Krieger, sprinting down the pitch at top speed and diving just in time to tackle the kicker before she could get the shot off.

“YEEEEES ALEX!!!!” Ashlyn screamed at the top of her lungs jumping up and down. The final whistle blowing moments later and the Dartmouth team converging in the middle of the pitch to celebrate the win. Ali never even made it to the team celebration, she just laid flat on her back on the pitch, arms above her head, taking in the moment. It wasn’t like winning the Beast of the East, but it was a satisfying way to finish college rugby. She saw a shadow above her and looked up at a grinning Ashlyn.

“You did it! You were so badass!” Ashlyn exclaimed, holding her hands out to help Ali up.

Ali smiled up at Ashlyn, taking the blondes hands, pulling her down on top of her, and kissing her hard.

A few girls on the Dartmouth team whistled at them and applauded. Then a couple of lesbian
comments came their way from the spectator area and Ashlyn went to pull back, but Ali pulled her right back in and then stuck her hand up with her middle finger extended prominently in the air.

Ali and Ashlyn finally got up after a few minutes and made their way off the field. Ashlyn insistent on carrying Ali’s rugby bag.

“So, UConn isn’t staying and is traveling back today. We’re doing a quick afternoon social which I should probably make an appearance at. Is that ok?” Ali asked.

“Oh of course it is!” Ashlyn replied.

“It’s at the same frat house that we met at our first after party together. So, that likely means Brent will be around.” Ali said. “Don’t worry though, my right hand is perfectly fine if needed.” Ali smiled.

“I’m not worried.” Ashlyn smiled back.

They made a quick stop in Ali’s room to let Ali grab a quick shower and change before they headed over to the party. Both teams were already a couple beers in when they arrived. Ashlyn and Ali walked around together making conversation with various UConn and Dartmouth ruggers, slowly sipping a beer since they knew they wanted to go out to dinner later. They had been there about 30 minutes when Ashlyn overheard one of the frat boys comment “Dude, is that Ali’s girl? She’s hot! Damn, they’re both hot. I would pay serious money to watch them get down.”

Ashlyn turned around and shot the guy a look, noticing Brent standing with him and a few other guys. Brent’s nose had a bump on it and leaned slightly to the left at an angle. He had deep purple bags under his eyes and his cheeks were a mix of blue and yellow. Ashlyn couldn’t help herself, she waved her casted hand at him with a fake friendly smile. Brent just looked down and shuffled awkwardly. The other guys seemed to get the message too, looking away and changing their conversation.

Ashlyn felt a kiss ghost her neck. “I saw that.” Ali said in her ear. “Is my protective girlfriend scaring away the frat boys?” She joked.

“You know it!” Ashlyn replied.

“That’s my girl.” Ali said, grabbing Ashlyn’s hand and leading her outside to the porch. She sat down on the large porch swing with Ashlyn sitting next to her. Ali reached up and grabbed Ashlyn’s hat, getting up to put it a little bit away from them on the porch. She grabbed the deck of cards next to her and gave Ashlyn a huge grin.

“Oh really? So, we’re going down this street again?” Ashlyn asked playfully.

“You know the drill, Harris.” Ali replied handing Ashlyn half the deck.

“Totally not fair! I have a handicap!” Ashlyn exclaimed holding up her cast.

“Alright, well, you get two questions if you get one in then.” Ali offered.

“You’re on, Princess.” Ashlyn replied, throwing her first card and missing.
They each threw a few more, Ali getting one in finally.

“The first time you saw me, what’s the first thing you thought?” Ali asked.

“You took my breath away. And I’m not just saying that, you can ask Abby. I thought you were the
most stunning woman I’d ever seen, you had me mesmerized. It’s like I could already see the fire in
you. I didn’t even know you and I could see it. That’s what I love most about you, you never do
anything halfway, your passion and dedication to everything you do and stand for is nothing short of
inspiring.” Ashlyn answered honestly.

Ali blushed, completely charmed by Ashlyn’s answer. She put her hand on the blonde’s cheek and
ran her thumb over it gently, kissing her on the nose. “You’re so sweet to me.”

They each missed a lot of cards before Ashlyn finally got one in, pumping her first victoriously.

“When did you know you loved me?” Ashlyn asked curiously.

“Celebration at Smith.” Ali said without hesitation. Ashlyn waited for her to continue, trying to hide
the surprised look on her face that it had been that early on. Ali continued. “I don’t know, just seeing
you up on that stage and you were just all lit up inside the whole day. The way you paid such close
attention to me all night, I just knew I was completely enamored with you. I knew that night that
what I felt inside had completely transformed and there was no going back, so I just went forward. I
realized that night that nothing made me happier than you did, you had my heart from that very
moment.”

Ashlyn gave Ali a grin. Ali reached to hold the blonde’s hand and squeeze it. “Ok, Harris, next
question.”

“If you could go back and change anything about us, what would it be?” Ashlyn asked.

“We ended up together, Ash. So, to be honest I really don’t think I would tempt fate and change
anything.” Ali paused and the added, “Though there is always a part of me that wishes I had done
one thing…”

“What’s that?” Ashlyn inquired.

“As much as it would have changed a whole lot, when we sat here together on this porch that first
night, I kinda wish I’d had the guts to do this…” Ali finished, grabbing Ashlyn’s face and kissing her
passionately, the kiss immediately getting heated. Ashlyn moved her hand to the back of Ali’s neck,
trying to get closer. Ali pulled back after a few minutes, eyes hooded, both of them breathing
say bye to the girls so I can give you a quick campus tour and take you out to dinner.”

An hour and a half later, Ali had walked Ashlyn around the entire campus, pointing out several
buildings, telling her campus facts and funny stories, and bringing her through the large greenhouses
in the science complex.

“So, this is an Ivy League college, huh?” Ashlyn asked rhetorically. “It’s a really nice campus, and
the scenery is gorgeous. I can see why you decided to go here.”

Ali smiled noticing the sky was starting to turn orange and pink. “Speaking of scenery, I have one
last thing I want to show you.” She took Ashlyn into the Baker Library building. Ashlyn thought Ali
wanted to show her the library, but they just started up the stairwell, climbing what felt like a million
steps.
“Are you showing me how you get your exercise? Or is there just no elevator in this place?” Ashlyn asked a bit out of breath.

“Sorry, we’re almost there. There’s an elevator, but um, I’m scared of them.” Ali answered.


“Got stuck in one by myself when I was younger and I’ve been traumatized ever since, I always take the stairs now.” Ali said matter-of-factly.

“Hmmmm, good to know.” Ashlyn replied, a bit surprised she didn’t already know this. “I love that I’m still learning new things about you.”

Ali smiled. “What about you, anything that terrifies you?”

“Just one thing.” Ashlyn paused before answering quietly. “Being alone.”

Ali took her hand. “Problem solved. I’m never leaving you alone… even when you want me to.” Ali teased trying to lighten the moment. Ashlyn laughed.

They finally reached a heavy door with a deadbolt lock on it.

“Well that’s a nice door, Princess. I’m not sure it was worth all those stairs though.” Ashlyn joked.

“Very funny.” Ali said pulling her keys out of her pocket and unlocking the door.

“Do, I even want to know why you have the key to this door?” Ashlyn inquired.

“I have spent A LOT of time over the last four years studying in this library late at night when not many people are around. I made friends with the cleaning staff and they hooked me up.” Ali said with a smile. She opened the door to reveal a room that housed clock gears in the middle. She led them around the clock machinery via a walkway that circled the room and led to another door. Ali pulled out her keys and opened the second door. Ashlyn felt the cool air hit her face and realized that they were heading out to a balcony.

“I saved the best for last. This is the Baker Library clock tower, she said leading Ashlyn out onto a square, white, outdoor wrap-around balcony that surrounded the entire base of the clock tower. The view of the campus and surrounding mountain landscape was beautiful with spring green colors in various hues. Especially now that the sun was going down. “This is my peaceful place, where I come to think and clear my head.” Ali confessed to the blonde.

“Wow. What a view.” Ashlyn said in awe, taking it all in. She wrapped her arms around Ali from behind and rested her head on Ali’s shoulder. The two of them quietly watched the sun go down until the sky went from dusk to early night.

“You’re quiet. You thinking about something right now?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali nodded.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Ashlyn prodded.

Ali sighed and turned in Ashlyn’s arms. “I have two job interviews on Wednesday.” She paused not wanting to say the next part, but finally let it out, “In D.C.” Ali closed her eyes not wanting to see the look on Ashlyn’s face. “I’m flying out Tuesday night and then coming back Wednesday night. I’m sorry I haven’t told you, I wanted to, I just… I guess not saying it out loud meant I could pretend it
wasn’t real.”

“Alex, I think that’s great!” Ashlyn said genuinely. Ali opened her eyes to look into the hazel eyes that always managed to comfort her. “It’s excellent that you are trying to start your career, I’m proud of you.”

Ali buried her face into Ashlyn’s neck. “Thanks. I just don’t know how I’m going to do this. I can barely manage being 2 hours away from you. I’m terrified, like elevator terrified, of being even further away from you.”

Ashlyn hugged Ali tight. “I’m not saying it won’t be hard, it’ll be temporary though. We’ll find our way through together. I love you, Alex. Nothing is going to change that, not even distance. I’m always going to be there when you need me. We’ll visit, we’ll talk on the phone, we’ll text, nothing could ever keep me from you… I promise.”

Ali kissed Ashlyn gently. “You’re perfect, you know that?”

“So you keep telling me.” Ashlyn grinned. “Smile, baby. You’re gonna do big things in life, you already have. And I’m going to be right beside you the whole time.”

Ali felt a lot lighter for the time being, Ashlyn always had a way of making everything feel comfortable and easy. She put one hand behind Ashlyn’s neck and kissed her deeply, putting everything she had into it. They stayed like that for a few minutes, just enjoying the feel of being connected together. Ali pulled back lightly dragging her teeth over Ashlyn’s bottom lip, causing the blonde to let out a light gasp.

“You know what else I’ve thought a lot about up here?” Ali asked, eyes locked on Ashlyn’s.

“What’s that, Princess?” Ashlyn replied.

“Sex.” Ali said with sultry smile.

“What are you saying, Krieger?” Ashlyn replied with a devious grin of her own.

Ali unbuttoned Ashlyn’s jeans. “I’m saying, it’s time to show me that tattoo, Harris.”
A Job Close to Home

I was going to leave the clock tower adventure right where it was, but you all seemed excited about it. Who am I to deny you? So, let's start this one off with some clock tower fun...give the people what they want ;)

Ashlyn lay flat on her back on the clock tower balcony, completely naked, coated in a light sheen of sweat and trying to catch her breath. Ali was just as naked and sweaty lying mostly on top of her, face pressed to Ashlyn’s stomach. The brunette wasn’t kidding when she said she had a thing for tattoos. One look at Ashlyn’s new tattoo and Ali had the blonde’s clothes off in no time, face buried between her legs until Ashlyn was spilling out into her mouth.

Ashlyn was stroking through Ali’s hair with her good hand. Ali absentmindedly raked her hand up and down Ashlyn side tattoo. The brunette started pressing soft kisses on the defined muscles of Ashlyn’s stomach, wanting to have Ashlyn again. She could hear the blonde’s breathing picking up and she trailed down to lick patterns on her hip bones.

“Alllex…” was all Ashlyn could manage to whisper out as she felt Ali’s hot breath against her core. Ali was licking extremely slow and light patterns over her clit, just barely touching her, it was driving her crazy. Ali moved a bit lower, swirling her tongue lightly around the outside of the blonde’s entrance. Ashlyn was letting out desperate whimpers, she could feel herself dripping at Ali’s teasing. The pace was maddening, but it also felt incredible. Ali dipped her tongue deep into Ashlyn just once before pulling it back out and continuing her light patterns. “Fuuuuck. Alex, please, let me feel you.” Ashlyn had reached the point of begging.

Ali continued to take her time, reaching up to take the blondes nipples between her fingers. Ashlyn could feel herself losing it, her back now off the ground, hips squirming desperately trying to get more friction against Ali’s mouth. Ali still wasn’t giving in, she continued her light touches, using just the tip of her tongue, running it over every inch of the blonde’s core until she felt Ashlyn just start to tremble a bit. Then she finally gave in, plunging her tongue deep inside the blonde and working it in and out.

“Mmmmm, your tongue… feels so good inside, I’m gonna…” Ashlyn trailed off into a squeaking moan. Ali could feel the blonde’s entrance tightening around her tongue, the hand on Ashlyn’s stomach feeling her abs contract. Ali pressed her tongue in as far as it would go and pressed it against Ashlyn’s walls throwing the blonde right over the edge with a series of ‘fucks’ and “oh my gods” leaving her mouth. She felt Ashlyn tug her head up desperately, and Ali moved up her body.

Ashlyn pulled Ali down to kiss her, not caring that the brunette’s face was covered in her own fluid. Ashlyn pressed her tongue into Ali’s mouth, pulling back to lightly bite her lip and then kissing her deeply again. She could barely move, but she wanted Ali so badly. Ashlyn moved down to kiss Ali’s jawline and then lick down her neck. Ali had tilted her head to give Ashlyn more access, feeling the blonde attack the sensitive spot between her neck and collar bone.

Ashlyn wrapped her good arm around Ali’s back and let the free fingers of her casted hand rest on the brunette’s hip. Ali could feel Ashlyn using her arm to tug her up further, she complied moving up more. Ashlyn’s mouth worked down Ali’s chest, taking a nipple in her mouth and sucking it gently
before tugging with her teeth and soothing it with broad strokes of her tongue. Ali let out a loud
moan, one of her hands going to the back of Ashlyn’s head as she worked her way to Ali’s other
nipple, giving it the same attention.

Ashlyn dipped her head down further, tugging Ali to move up further. Ali complied again moving
herself up further. Ashlyn felt Ali’s slick folds press against her stomach and she didn’t want to waste
any more time, she tugged Ali up harder as she kissed along the brunette’s upper stomach. Ali was
just about straddling Ashlyn’s chest as the blonde continued to tug her up and it finally hit her what
Ashlyn wanted. Ali was so worked up she didn’t think twice about it, positioning her core over
Ashlyn’s mouth and lowering herself.

Ashlyn curled her arms around Ali’s thighs to hold her still and brought her mouth up, wrapping her
lips around the brunette’s clit and sucking it gently. “Unnnhhh” Ali let out a high pitched grunt as
she felt Ashlyn’s mouth make contact, both of her hands going straight into the hair on the top of the
blonde’s head to pull her closer. Ashlyn flicked her tongue over Ali’s clit. “Fuck, Ash, this is so hot”
Ali panted out. Ashlyn was looking right up into her eyes and she wasn’t sure how much longer she
could hold on, leg muscles already struggling to keep her up.

Ali’s hips were starting to move, her hands trying to push Ashlyn’s head lower. “Yes, eat me, fuck
me with your tongue,” Ali pleaded. Ashlyn moaned, loving the dirty talking Ali that came out in
these intimate moments. She gave Ali what she wanted, entering her with her tongue. “Mmmm, oh
my god…yes, don’t stop…please” Ali was panting heavily, her hands clutching fistfuls of Ashlyn’s
hair, her hips riding the blonde’s face. Ashlyn moved with the rhythm of Ali’s hips, letting the
brunette fuck her face. She brought her hand around to lightly rub Ali’s clit with her thumb as she
continued to plunge her tongue deep.

Ali threw her head back gasping for air and exhaling out in a raspy voice “Ash, Ash, I’m coming
baby” followed by several loud moans as the orgasm overtook her. She collapsed a bit, letting her
core rest on Ashlyn’s mouth, feeling it twitch against the blonde’s lips as she continued to lick her
gently. Ali clumsily slid her way down Ashlyn’s body to collapse on her, resting her mouth against
Ashlyn’s ear and breathing out “So, hot. I love you. That was incredible.”

“You’re my whole world, Alex Krieger, you’re beautiful.” Ashlyn whispered back.

Ashlyn clutched Ali’s body tightly to hers, the two of them matching each other’s breathing until
they had both come down and relaxed. The night air now felt cool on their sweaty skin.

Ali pulled up a bit, looking into Ashlyn’s eyes lovingly before giving her a soft kiss. “And now that I
can cross the clock tower fantasy off the list, we should really go get dinner, baby.”

Ashlyn laughed and nodded in agreement. “What are you going to do when you run out of
fantasies?”

“Oh please. I started coming up with new ones the second we kissed the first time. When you have
such a sexy girlfriend, these things come very easily.” Ali replied playfully.

“Is there one where my head gets so big that it floats away? You do nothing to keep my ego in
check.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“No, but wait until you see what I have I mind for your surf board.” Ali said sexily with a wink.

Ashlyn swallowed hard, trying not to get worked up by picturing it. “You are trouble, Krieger.”

“Yeah, but I’m the good kind of trouble. The kind that’s about to let everyone know we’re up here
by bending you over the railing of this balcony and having at you again. So, maybe we should get
dressed before I get us arrested, Harris.” Ali replied throwing Ashlyn’s boxers at her.

“You really might be the death of me, Krieger, but what a fucking way to go.” Ashlyn smirked
throwing Ali’s bra at her.

They pulled on their clothes and made their way out of the library, staying close to each other. Ali
took Ashlyn to a small Mexican restaurant nearby that she loved. They shared their meals, talking
about their most embarrassing college moments while laughing at each other. They came back to
Ali’s room, getting ready for bed since it was already a bit late. Ali undressed Ashlyn, taking her
time to take in every detail of her new tattoo in the brighter light as they laid in Ali’s bed. Even
though they were completely exhausted, soft touches had led to them breaking in Ali’s bed properly
before they fell asleep.

Ali rested her head back against her seat and let out a breath. She looked out the window of the plane
taking in the dark landscape below dotted with pinpoints of light. It was a late flight, she was
exhausted, but her anxiety was high. The wine she was sipping was doing nothing to calm her as she
watched more and more miles of landscape go by, reminding her of just how far she was going away
from Ashlyn. This had been the plan though, long before being together with Ashlyn had even been
a thought. To be back home near her family building the career she’d always wanted.

She had spent her sophomore year researching public relations and marketing firms, settling on the
two most prestigious in the Washington D.C. area. She interned for one of them the summer before
she left for Germany, only to return and intern at the other the following summer when she had
returned from her year away. Both had been a wonderful experience, she knew she’d be happy at
either place. She had sent in her applications in early September and navigated a series of phone
interviews from January through March to learn she’d made the final cut of candidates at both firms.
This was the final step, the in person interviews that would result in getting a job offer or leaving her
aimless.

She’d tried to put other plans in place, but none of them had come through the way she hoped. There
had been one company she had more recently found, one she knew she would absolutely love. The
job was a game changer that would allow her to use her German language abilities in addition to her
communications skills. Nothing had come of it though, so all of her eggs were in one of these two
baskets before her. Baskets that were 400 miles away from Ashlyn Harris.

In truth, she didn’t need a job or even a career. That huge trust fund she had from her grandparents
was more than enough to get her through life. She never wanted to be that person though, ever. She
had done everything to not rely on that money much. Sure, it had meant being able to go to any
college she wanted to in terms of finances. It meant that she didn’t need to work while she went to
school and that she could indulge in extravagances like clothes, eating out, and traveling without
thinking twice about it. Still, she never wanted her life to be handed to her. That’s one of the things
she admired so much about Ashlyn. Ashlyn had worked and clawed for everything single thing she
had; nothing was given to her, she had earned it. Ali respected that so much. That’s what she wanted
for herself too. To work hard and stand out in a job that she could eventually turn into her own
business. At the end of the day, she wanted to know that she had fought and worked for it, that she
had started from the ground up and could be proud. Ali downed the rest of her wine as she heard the
landing approach announcement from the pilot.

She checked into her hotel room and FaceTimed Ashlyn, knowing the blonde’s smiling face and
gentle voice would calm her down. It had worked, Ashlyn knew what she was doing. The blonde
had made jokes and kept the conversation light, keeping Ali distracted and laughing until she yawned from exhaustion.

“Get some sleep, Princess. I’m so proud of you, you’re going to be great tomorrow. I love you, Alex.” Ashlyn said sweetly.

“I love you too, Ash. I miss you.” Ali said blowing her a kiss.

Ashlyn pretended to catch it and then put it on her boob while making a ‘whoops’ face. “Goodnight, beautiful.”

Ali laughed hard. “Sweet dreams, Stud.”

Ali woke up to the normal ringtone of her phone, confused since she was expecting to wake up to the distinct melody she had set for the alarm feature on the phone. She looked at the phone not recognizing the number and answered it. “Hello?”

“May I please speak with Alexandra Krieger?” An unfamiliar voice asked.

“This is she.” Ali replied.

She spent the next few minutes listening incredulously to what the voice was telling her, trying to stay composed. The game changer job, the one she’d been secretly hoping to hear from, but hadn’t until right now; they were impressed with her resume, they wanted an interview.

“I’m actually already in D.C. at the moment.” Ali explained. “I can change my travel plans to stay another day if that would work.” There had been some back and forth to get the scheduling right before Ali answered. “Tomorrow morning is perfect. Thank you for the opportunity, I look forward to it.”

Ali hung up, closed her eyes, and let out a deep breath. Three job interviews, three baskets, and the best one would be last. The next 24 hours was going to be intense. She got on the phone to change her flight to Thursday late morning after the last interview.

She finally jumped in the shower, pulling on a crisp business skirt suit that fit her perfectly and checking herself in the mirror one last time. She heard her phone chime.

Stud: Good luck today, Princess. I’m so so proud of you. Just be yourself and show them who you are, you’re already perfect. I love you. Go crush it :)

Stud: I have class, a double work shift later and Vibes practice after that. Then I need to write a genetics lab report :( Text me to let me know how it went and then call me when your flight lands tonight so I know you got back safely.

Ali broke out in a smile as she typed a reply.

Princess: You’re the best. Slight change of plans, I have another last minute interview in the morning. Won’t be coming back until tomorrow afternoon. I’ll call later to say goodnight, but don’t answer if you’re busy, I’ll leave you a message. I love you, Ashlyn :.*

Ali set her phone to silent, grabbed her stuff and headed out the door whispering “here goes.”

Eight hours later Ali dropped onto the hotel bed in exhaustion. She’d had a quick dinner with her
parents after her interviews and was feeling wiped out after telling them about her day and her plans. She had spent the afternoon touring the two PR firms, socializing with the people she was introduced to, and answering a whole slew of intense questions. Even having to face the dreaded “What’s your biggest weakness?” question twice. It could not have gone better though and she felt some relief. She wouldn’t be jobless, one firm had already made her an offer. The other wouldn’t be extending offers until next week, but hinted strongly that she’d be getting one.

Ali called Ashlyn knowing she’d be asleep soon and not wanting to forget to call. As expected, she got Ashlyn’s voicemail. She smiled at the blonde’s soft feminine voice, totally unexpected if you were judging just by what she looked like. She left a message. “Hey baby, I just got back to my hotel and I’m totally wiped out. Today went really really well and I can’t wait to tell you all about it. I have another big morning tomorrow, so I’m going to go to bed. Good luck with all your work tonight. I’ll call you tomorrow as soon as I’m back. I miss you so much, Ash. I love you.”

She watched college basketball on TV and fell asleep in no time. She awoke to her phone alarm and rolled over to turn it off. She already had two text messages from Ashlyn, one from late last night and one from this morning.

*Stud: I knew you’d do well! Sweet Dreams. Love you.*

*Stud: Good luck with the last interview. You’re so amazing, Princess. Can’t wait to hear all about it when you get back. We have our last game vs. Mt. Holyoke late this afternoon, but I’m not playing obviously. So definitely call, I promise I’ll answer no matter what. I miss your voice. I love you, Alex :)*

Ali typed a quick reply while she got ready,

*Princess: Can’t wait to get back and tell you about my trip later. I love you so much :-)*

Ali finished getting ready. She put on another skirt suit and checked out of the hotel, stowing her luggage with the hotel front desk until her flight later. As she sat in the taxi cab on her way to the interview, she closed her eyes and tried to steady her nerves. This interview was everything.

Four hours later, Ali rested her head back against the seat of the plane. She mulled over how much had changed in the last 48hrs since she was on the flight D.C.; the anxiety was a different kind now, today had gone perfectly. When the last interview was over, she had another job offer on the table. There was no decision to make though, she had accepted it right then and there. Her fate sealed. She didn’t think she’d be so emotional about it. Tears would not stop spilling from her eyes, even when she was trying hard to hold them in. She had made all of her decisions over the past few months with her heart and it hadn’t let her down, she just had to trust now that it never would. Ali was glad that when she adjusted her flight plans she’d had the foresight to choose to fly into a different airport, she knew exactly who she needed right now. The stewardess appeared with a box of tissues, and bottle of water, and some wine. Ali couldn’t have been more thankful.

Ashlyn was on the Smith pitch watching from the sideline as her teammates battled Mt. Holyoke. She shouted out directions and cheered, her team up 14 to 0 after the first half. The second half had just gotten underway. Ashlyn kept checking her phone, Ali should’ve called by now. She figured maybe her flight got delayed a bit. She tried to keep herself distracted by paying attention to the game. “Come on, Pinoe! Work for that ball!”

Ashlyn checked her phone again with 10 minutes left in the game, nothing yet. She was shoving it back into her pocket when she felt arms wrap around her and heard “Ashlyn.” She’d know that voice anywhere, her face broke out into a huge grin and she turned around.
“Alex! What are you doing here?” Ashlyn said excitedly before looking at Ali’s face. The brunette’s eyes were red and puffy, she looked tired, still dressed in a black business skirt suit. “Hey, Alex, what’s the matter?” Ashlyn asked concerned pulling Ali close, her hand on the brunette’s cheek.

Ali closed her eyes for a second. “Nothing… I…” the tears poured down her face again and she buried her face into Ashlyn’s neck.

Ashlyn held her tightly, listening to Ali sob for a few minutes. She heard Ali start to quiet a bit and pulled back. She wiped the tears from Ali’s face and moved a few pieces of stray hair behind the brunette’s ear. “Tell me what’s wrong, baby.”

“Nothing. I just…” Ali paused to compose herself before letting it out. “I accepted a job close to home.” Another single tear coming out of her eye. Ashlyn wiped it with her thumb.

“Alex, we talked about this. That’s great news! I’m so proud of you. We will work out everything else, I promise you. We’re going to be just fine and” Ashlyn was stopped by Ali putting a finger to her lips.

“No, Ash. You don’t understand. I accepted a job close to home. I’m happy.” Ali put her hand on Ashlyn’s chest, over the blonde’s heart. “This is home.”

Ashlyn was confused. “Alex?”

“This is home.” Ali repeated again. “The company I’m working for is based in D.C., but I’ll be working out of their Boston office, and actually working from home 80% of the time.”

“Wait. What?” Ashlyn said, her heart racing, still not sure she was hearing everything right.

“I’m staying here, with you Ash. And I’m so happy.” Ali said with a smile a couple more tears spilling out.

Ashlyn couldn’t even speak. She just crashed her lips to Ali’s and let the emotions spill out into the kiss. Everything seemed to disappear around them in that moment and neither of them knew how long they’d stayed that way. All they knew is that when they finally broke apart, not a single person was left on the pitch; which was perfect because Ali had a lot of explaining to do.
What's the Verdict?

Chapter Notes

Time for some background on Ali's job hunt and where things go from here, among other things... ;)

After having kissed the life out of her girlfriend for who knows how long, Ashlyn plopped down on the grass of the rugby pitch pulling Ali down with her. Ali’s back was leaning against Ashlyn’s side. Ashlyn bent her knees up and pulled Ali into her arms, cradling her and looking down at her lovingly.

“I’m so happy right now, baby. Like absolutely thrilled!” Ashlyn said excitedly, the first words coming out of her mouth since Ali told her the news. “I’m not even sure how this happened or how it is even possible, so you’re gonna have to fill me in cause I’m dying to know.”

Ali smiled up at Ashlyn and started. “So, I’ve always kind of been into marketing and public relations work. I know I’ve told you that and how I eventually want to start my own public relations business someday.”

Ashlyn nodded, waiting for Ali to continue. “Anyway, I have known for quite a while that to do that, I really needed to start out at a big firm or a big company. Build a reputation at a strong place before I could set out on my own. So, I started looking for places to intern my sophomore year in college and came across a couple major ones in D.C. which were perfect. I interned at one of them that first summer and the other last summer. I really liked them both and applied this past September for jobs at them. I went through several rounds of phone interviews at both this past winter until I finally got to this in-person interview round.” Ali paused. “I’m sorry. I know I should have told you all this, I just was so anxious about everything and torn about what I should do. Part of me wanted to just wait and see what happened before I told anyone.”

“It’s ok. I understand. I mean, I know the graduation thing has been freaking you out. And then we started dating and everything has been a little whirlwind. We’ve had enough conversations that I knew you were looking for jobs and stuff, I just didn’t want to push because it didn’t seem like you were ready to talk about it.” Ashlyn reassured her.

Ali nodded and continued. “At the beginning, I felt good about my chances with these two firms and working at one of them. You and I were getting closer though, and suddenly I wasn’t feeling so good about things anymore.” Ali sighed knowing she was about to reveal just how early on her life decisions had revolved around blonde before they were even together. “Spending the holidays away from you, I know we weren’t together yet, but it just made me realize that I didn’t ever want to be away from you. When I thought you might be going abroad next year, I figured maybe being in D.C. would work out because we’d be apart anyway. But then you decided you weren’t going abroad. The same day you made that decision was the same day I started to try to find jobs in New England.”

Ashlyn looked down at Ali with a surprised expression thinking back to the day in mid-February that she had decided to throw away the study abroad applications. She knew they had been on the edge of something with each other by that point. Ashlyn knew she was in love, but she hadn’t known where they stood with each other or where Ali was at with everything. It had still just been a strong friendship at that point, one with a glimmer of hope to turn into something more. And here they were
now, together, in love with each other, and Ali admitting that she had been planning her life around Ashlyn before there had been any life together for them to plan. Ashlyn had never felt so loved. She smiled down at Ali, letting the brunette continue.

“I searched so hard, Ash. I just kept coming up empty handed. The firms here were not quite right and I was getting so frustrated and upset over it. Then I had the idea to look for big companies with public relations departments. I came across a listing for Siemens that I was just floored by. I’m sure you’ve heard of them since they’re a tech giant. Anyway, they’re based in Germany with many U.S. offices. They were looking for a public relations person that could speak and write fluent German to help them pull together their German and U.S. offices in dealing with overseas clients. They were open to this person working from any of their office locations. I saw this job and I just knew it would be perfect for me. I could dive into the public relations stuff and still use my German background. I was so excited, I applied as soon as possible. I thought for sure I was the perfect candidate, but I never heard anything. I was crushed over it, it was the one chance I had to make everything work. So, I just went back to focusing on the D.C. jobs and freaking out about being away from you.”

Ashlyn stroked Ali’s hair, seeing the dejected expression on Ali’s face as she recounted this story. Even though it had all worked out and things were great right now, she could see how much Ali had struggled with everything by the way she was talking about it.

“They called me out of nowhere Wednesday morning and wanted me to come in for an interview. Since I was already in D.C. near their U.S. headquarters, I offered to go there the next day and interview with them and they agreed to it. I can’t even tell you how nervous I was. It was like everything in life was riding on this. I met so many people and they were all great and the company was awesome. I got so many intense questions fired at me though and even had to get on a conference call with a manager in the German office in Berlin to speak with him in German to show I could handle it. The whole time, I just kept thinking about you and us, and what this would mean if I could get this job. And it just calmed me, it made me pull out the best of who I was to show these people.” Ali paused for a second. “Not that I should be surprised, you always bring out the best in me,” Ali said softly leaning up to give Ashlyn a soft kiss before continuing.

“They offered me a job right there. I told them I would want to work out of Boston. They agreed to that and said that I would actually be working from home via computer and phone a lot and didn’t have to be in the office, so it didn’t matter where I was as long as I could occasionally get to one of the offices. I may have to occasionally fly out to Germany as well once or twice a year, which of course is super exciting. We agreed to salary and, yeah, here I am…with a job…that’s located next to the most important person in the world. I love you, Ash.” Ali finished.

“I can’t even believe this is happening. I honestly don’t even have words for how I feel right now. No one has ever made plans around me, Alex. Ever. Truthfully, I’ve been more of an inconvenience in people’s lives than anything else. I mean, I love my grandma and that woman loves me dearly, but even there, I wasn’t in the plans. We’ve known each other for about 7 months, been together for just over a month, and I feel like I’ve known and loved you forever. You have made me a priority from day one, made me a central part of your life. I just… I’ve never felt so loved and so cared for by someone. I don’t know what on earth I did to deserve you, but I’m never letting you go Alex, ever.” Ashlyn said emotionally, tilting her head down to give Ali the most heartfelt kiss she possibly could.

“You’re always going to be my priority, Ash…count on it. The amount of things that have happened and gone right in the last few months is just mind-blowing.” Ali said appreciating just how much life had changed for her.

“Amen, Krieger. I’m waiting to poop out a horseshoe any day now, cause I can’t explain it otherwise. I have never been this lucky.” Ashlyn said with a chuckle. Ali laughed hard nudging
Ashlyn with her elbow.

“Soooo, give me the details! When do you start? What are they paying you? Where exactly are you going to live?” Ashlyn asked happily.

“Oh, right! I start in mid-August. They’re starting me at $65,000, but I get some stock options and bonuses depending on how things work out with clients. I’m not exactly sure what all of that means, but I’ll get my dad to help me figure it out.” Ali answered. “As for where I’m going to live… I want to live here, in Northampton as close to you as possible. I’ll be working from home anyway and the two hour drive to Boston when I need to be there is no big deal since I won’t have to do it that much. I mean, if that’s ok… I don’t want to smother you.”

Ashlyn grinned widely. “Damn. I don’t think my parents ever even made $65,000 combined. I’m so proud of you, Alex. My girl is a big deal!” Ashlyn said. “Oh, and Krieger?”

“Yeah?” Ali replied.

“I hope you smother me to death.” Ashlyn leaned down give her another quick kiss. “So, when do we start apartment hunting for you? And me… because we both know I’m gonna be making myself right at home.”

Ali laughed. “I’m so excited that I’m ready to start like yesterday! Seriously, I want to have as many things in place as possible before graduation in 3 weeks, so I’m definitely going to be looking right away. I figure I can spend some of early summer just relaxing and getting my head on straight and then kind of settle in a week or two before my job starts.”

“Sounds perfect. I can’t wait to help you find a place. You’re such an adult, Krieger.” Ashlyn got a smirk on her face. “Actually, you’re kind of a cougar.” She said waggling her eyebrows.

Ali smacked her arm lightly. “Watch it, Harris. That makes you my prey.”

Ashlyn raised an eyebrow and laughed before getting serious again. “So, I kinda have some news too.”

“Oh really?” Ali questioned.

“I got an internship for the summer.” Ashlyn said.


“It’s a six week internship with a marine biology lab in Palm Bay, like 20 minutes from Satellite Beach. It starts in the beginning of June. It’s paid, so that is awesome.” Ashlyn answered.

“Congrats, baby! You’re so smart and this is so great!” Ali pulled her down for a lingering kiss. “So, how would you feel about me coming to spend some time with you while you’re in Florida? And then maybe coming to spend a little time with me in D.C. when your internship is done?” Ali asked hopefully.

“Thought you’d never ask, Princess.” Ashlyn smiled. “Seriously, this might be like one of the best days ever.”

They sat quietly for a while as the sun started to set, just holding on to each other. Ashlyn broke the silence. “So, with all the excitement I never asked. How did you get here exactly?”

Ali smiled. “When I changed my flight, I chose to fly into Hartford. I just knew no matter what
happened I’d want to be with you. I took a car here from the airport. And since I don’t have class on Fridays, I thought maybe you’d be up for a weekend visitor?”

“Oh, I hope you visit me a lot this weekend. Over, and over, and over again.” Ashlyn said in a sexy deep voice. Ali winked at her. “However, I do have to study this weekend. I don’t have a real final in my invertebrate biology class, so Monday is the last big in-class test. Then I just have a final lab to write.” Ashlyn said glumly.

“Totally ok! I’ll help you study.” Ali suggested.

“Riiiiight. I’m supposed to be studying invertebrates, Krieger. Not vertebrates.” Ashlyn teased.

“Hey, I have ways of making you focus, Harris.” Ali played back.

“Uh huh. I bet.” Ashlyn said sarcastically.

“Just you wait and see.” Ali said mysteriously.

“Ok on that note, we need a celebratory dinner!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

“That sounds great, I’m starving.” Ali replied. “But, I need to drop my stuff in your room first.” Ali said pointing behind them to her suitcase and travel bag.

Ashlyn hadn’t even noticed them until now. “Packing light as always, I see.” Ashlyn laughed. “I can’t believe you dragged all that to the pitch!”

“Like I had a choice in the matter. I needed to have plenty of outfit choices for my interviews, and then I took a car here, so there was nowhere to leave it!” Ali defended.

“My car is nearby, we can put your stuff in there and then drive into town for dinner. Come on my beautiful pack rat.” Ashlyn joked pulled Ali up with her and giving her one more long kiss.

They put Ali’s things in the back of the Jeep and Ashlyn went to open Ali’s door for her. “Also, just so you know. You look like a sexy lawyer right now in that suit. And if Whitney wasn’t in the room for the night, I’d be ripping that right off you and making sure you prosecuted me… hard. You’re totally putting that on me for again.” Ashlyn said looking at Ali hungrily.

Ali gulped and gave Ashlyn a flustered smile before fully composing herself. Ali looked around to see that it was already pretty dark. She got in the Jeep, quickly laid her seat back, and pulled a surprised Ashlyn on top of her. “Welcome to court. You’re late for the trial, Harris. Now get your ass on the stand.” Ali said grabbing Ashlyn’s hand and putting it up her skirt.

“Damn, Alex.” Ashlyn did waste any time, kissing Ali hard and moving her underwear aside to slip her fingers into the brunette’s wet and ready core. It didn’t take long before the blonde’s skilled fingers had Ali screaming Ashlyn’s name through the Jeep as she orgasmed. It also didn’t take long for Ali to slip her hands down Ashlyn’s pants and return the favor, letting the blonde ride her fingers right there on the front seat until they were both spent.

“Fuck, I love this Jeep.” Ashlyn said trying to catch her breath in the aftermath.

Ali laughed. “Me too.”

“So, what’s verdict, Krieger?” Ashlyn teased.

“I’m gonna go with not guilty, Harris.” Ali quipped back. “But watch yourself, I can slap those
handcuffs on at any time.”

“That’s the second time you’ve mentioned handcuffs, Krieger.” Ashlyn noted. “I’m starting to think this is one of those fantasies of yours.” She said curiously.

“That is classified information. For me to know and for you to find out.” Ali said in a sultry voice.

“Well ok then. Way to bring a girl down from orgasm and then get her all hot again.” Ashlyn said in mock frustration.

“Well, hot stuff, time to cool down. If I don’t eat soon I’m gonna pass out.” Ali said.

“Right! Dinner! Let’s go!” Ashlyn climbed off Ali, driving them downtown to a low-key restaurant since Ali was dressed up but she was still in her rugby warm-up clothes.

They decided on ordering several different appetizers and sharing them, finding themselves completely engrossed in each other as usual.

“Hey, Alex?” Ashlyn said, taking her hand across the table.

“Yeah?” Ali replied.

“I can’t wait to do this all the time with you. Have dinner out sometimes for fun, but also cook together and hang out watching TV and stuff.” Ashlyn said lovingly, picturing what things would be like a few months.

“Me either.” Ali said with a huge smile. “I love you, Ash. And I’m so crazy happy right now.”

“Me too, baby.” Ashlyn replied squeezing Ali’s hand.

Today had been wonderful, they had been fortunate, and they couldn’t have been more thankful for that.
Echinoderms

Chapter Notes

I figured we should start this weekend off with a bang... ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“There you are! Are you guys ok?” Whitney asked concerned. Ashlyn and Ali had just gotten into the room, both looked tired but also content. Whitney started to calm a bit at their appearance.

“Yeah, we’re excellent!” Ashlyn answered animatedly, Ali smiling beside her. “Why?”

“It looked like Ali was really upset and crying back at the game, and then when I looked back you guys were in a really intense kiss. Like so intense Pinoe didn’t even try to break you apart with her dumb commentary.” Whitney replied. “We all just kind of left you there, but we were wondering what was going on.”


“Geez, just tell me already! It’s called elaboration you guys, you should try it. Sometimes trying to get stuff out of you two is like trying to steal the Mona Lisa. So, what is it, are you adopting a puppy or something?” Whitney asked with playful impatience.

“Oooo, a puppy!” Ashlyn looked at Ali excitedly.

“Easy, Harris. We’re not there yet.” Ali said knowing exactly what Ashlyn was thinking. She didn’t even have an apartment yet, but it was cute that Ashlyn was already jumping to adopting a puppy.

“As long as it’s not a no.” Ashlyn said hopefully.

“It’s not a no.” Ali answered with a smile, she didn’t know how she was ever going to say no to the giant child she was dating.

“Heeeeelllllloo?” Whitney yelled out to get their attention. “Yep, still here guys!”

“Oh, um, I got a job!” Ali said happily.

“That’s great, Ali!” Whitney said as sincerely as she could, going to give Ali a hug and looking right over at Ashlyn while she did, trying to study her best friend’s face. Ashlyn just gave her a smile. Whitney had had a couple conversations with Ashlyn about Ali likely being in D.C. next year. Ashlyn was sad about it, but she was doing everything to stay positive and strong about it. Whitney had watched her remind herself over and over that the distance was temporary and they’d visit plenty. It was hard to read Ashlyn’s face right now, but she looked happy. Whitney couldn’t tell if she was just trying to be strong in front of Ali, she shot Ashlyn a half smile as she let Ali go.

“It’s based in Boston and she’ll be working from home most of the time and living here.” Ashlyn beamed, finally taking pity on Whitney.

“Eeeeeeek, no way!” Whitney screamed out and pulled Ali back into a hug, grabbing Ashlyn to pull her in too. “Oh my god you guys! This is awesome! Congrats, Ali!”
Whitney pulled back to look at them, finally being able to see the genuine happiness that she had missed in her worried state when they walked in.

“Yeah, you’ll have to put up with me all the time next year!” Ali said.

“Actually, Ash and I have single rooms next year. We just picked rooms at room draw Tuesday night. It’s the end of an era, but just about every junior and senior on this campus have single rooms, so it was time to move on and let the youngins get the big double rooms if they want them. Buuut, we’ll be next door neighbors, so you better visit!” Whitney explained.

“Of course, I’ll visit!” Ali replied. “Room draw?” Ali asked, wondering what the heck that was.

“Yeah, Smith has a lottery in every house for picking your room every year. So, to-be seniors draw numbers and get to pick rooms first, then to-be juniors go, and so on. It’s always super dramatic and someone usually cries.” Ashlyn explained while Whitney chuckled knowingly, thinking about the first-year who had thrown a fit this year when she didn’t get the room she wanted.

“You Smithies are so weird.” Ali laughed.

“Anyway, this is so great! So, what’s the job, tell me about it!” Whitney demanded.

Ali sat on Ashlyn’s bed and filled Whitney in on the basics of it, the mix of excitement and relief in her voice evident. Ashlyn sat there running her hand up and down Ali’s back while she explained it all to Whitney.

“Wow, I’m so happy for you. For both of you.” Whitney said, appreciating how awesome karma could be sometimes. “Oh man, I should probably go sleep in Megan’s room tonight and leave you guys alone, huh?” She teased and watched Ali and Ashlyn shoot each other a look.

“Oh my god, you already found a place to… geez you guys, like freakin teenagers!” Whitney laughed. “In that case, I’m sleeping in my bed!”

Ashlyn laughed and slapped Whitney on the shoulder.

“Ok, I’m going to go brush my teeth now. Try not to start a fire in here.” Whitney shook her head. She brushed her teeth and ran into Sarah, stopping to chat for a little bit. By the time she got back, Ali was snuggled into Ashlyn and fast asleep. Ashlyn was laying there with a huge smile on her face. Whitney gave her a thumbs up and Ashlyn picked up her casted hand to give one back as best she could. Whitney sighed and whispered “Maybe I need a girlfriend.” Ashlyn laughed quietly and nodded slightly making sure not to wake up Ali.

“Ashlyn Harris, I swear to god, if you stick that pen in your cast one more time…” Ali warned. It was 9pm on Saturday night and they were sitting in the Smith Neilson Library. Ashlyn had a reserved study carrel in a quiet spot for the semester, so they were side by side with Ashlyn studying for her test while Ali tried to catch up on all the class work she’d missed over the week.

“It itches!” Ashlyn said defensively.

“I know, but it comes off in 5 days. The last thing you need is to get something stuck in there or scratch yourself and have it get infected. So, suck it up buttercup!” Ali reprimanded her.
“Ugh, this sucks.” Ashlyn whined, sitting back in her chair. They had already been there for three hours and she was getting antsy. “I don’t want to be in here studying anymore.”

“I don’t know how you work in here. Seriously, of all the places in this nice library you could have reserved a carrel for the year, you pick a corner of the second level of the basement with no windows.” Ali said looking around.

“No one is ever down here, I like it. I can’t focus if there are too many people around, so I just come here and zone in. It’s perfect.” Ashlyn replied.

“If by perfect, you mean a little creepy, then sure.” Ali teased her.

“Don’t provoke me, Krieger. You’re talking to a girl who has a million more things to memorize for this test and has just re-read the echinoderm section twice to no avail, I could snap at any moment!” Ashlyn joked back.

“Awww, poor baby. Come here,” Ali cooed, taking Ashlyn’s face in her hands kissing her. She felt Ashlyn’s tongue run along her lips and parted them to grant her entry, the kiss deepening and starting to get a bit heated.

Ali pulled back. “Woah there, Stud. You have to focus.”

Ashlyn sighed. “How am I supposed to focus after that?”

Ali rolled her eyes. “Ok, let me help. Tell me about what you’re studying.”

“Ok. I’m trying to memorize the section on echinoderms and invertebrate chordates.” Ashlyn said.

“And what about them? Tell me about them.” Ali encouraged her.

“So, echinoderms are characterized by a spiny endoskeleton that looks a lot like an exoskeleton, but it’s different.” Ashlyn stated.

“Ok, how is it different?” Ali inquired.

“That’s the part I keep reading over and not remembering all of it.” Ashlyn let out a frustrated sigh, looking down at her notebook to be able to answer Ali’s question.

Ali watched Ashlyn look over her notes with a furrowed brow, she had to admit the blonde was adorable when she was frustrated and pretty hot when she was studying this hard. Ali had an idea.

“Hey, let me help you, ok?” Ali said putting her hand under Ashlyn’s chin and moving the blonde’s head to look at her. She got close to Ashlyn and pulled her into a deep kiss again before trailing kisses down her neck.

Ashlyn left out a soft moan, incredibly turned on and ready to get out of the library. “I thought we established that this doesn’t help.”

Ali pulled back to look at her. “Do you trust me?”


“Scoot forward on your chair and read me your notes.” Ali commanded.

“Um, ok.” Ashlyn complied and started “Echinoderms are characterized by…” She stopped as Ali crawled under the carrel. “What are you doing?”
“You said you trusted me. Now read me your damn notes, Harris.” Ali said sternly.

“Uh, alright.” Ashlyn said skeptically before starting again. “Echinoderms are characterized by a spiny endoskeleton. This spiny skeleton resembles and is often confused with…” she felt Ali pull her pants down, letting them pool around her ankles. She stopped and looked down at Ali, the brunette settling between her legs.

Ali looked up at Ashlyn with challenging eyes. “I said keep reading.”

Ashlyn let out a deep breath and started again “The spiny skeleton resembles and is often confused with an exoskeleton, but has distinct differences.” She felt Ali’s hot breath on her core and then the brunette’s tongue making contact in one broad swipe through her folds. She grunted and put a hand on the back of Ali’s head.

Ali grabbed her hand and reached up to put it back on the desk, looking up at Ashlyn again. “Let me tell you how this works, Harris. You stop reading and I stop too.” Ali said, her amber eyes boring into Ashlyn’s glazed over hazel ones.

“Shit. Ok.” Ashlyn replied quietly, trying to figure out how she was going to read through this. She took another deep breath and tried again. “The differences between the endoskeleton of the echinoderm and the exoskeleton of the arthropod are as follows.” Ali alternated between sucking Ashlyn’s clit gently between her lips, swiping her tongue over it.

“Uhhhh, fuck. The endoskeleton develops from mesoderm instead of ectoderm.” Ashlyn continued. Ali continued to flick her tongue over the blonde’s rock hard clit, running a hand up under her shirt and over her abs. She heard Ashlyn’s voice go up an octave.

“Mmmmm, The endoskeleton is made of calcium carbonate and not chitin.” Ashlyn was trying hard to keep reading while Ali worked her clit.

“The endoskeleton provides somewhat less body protection, doesn’t help retain water, and is…holy crap, Alex…” Ashlyn whimpered as Ali applied more pressure to her clit, “less rigid in terms of flexibility and allowance for growth than the exoskeleton.” Ashlyn’s hand went to the back of Ali’s head again.

Ali reached back up to put Ashlyn’s hand back on the desk and Ashlyn groaned when she felt Ali’s mouth leave her core.

“Keep reading, baby.” Ali urged the blonde on. She heard Ashlyn start again and began circling the outside of her entrance with her tongue.

“Other notable aspects of echinoderms are a radial symmetry system… mmmm, Alex… tubular feet, and a water vascular system… yes, baby, so good.” Ashlyn moaned feeling Ali’s warm tongue move inside her.
Ashlyn voice was starting to shake. “Types of echinoderms are stelleroids or sea stars, echinoids or urchins… I’m close, Alex, uhmmm… and holo…mmm… holothuroids or sea cucumbers.”

Ali pulled her mouth away for a minute, hearing Ashlyn groan again at the loss of contact.

“Don’t stop, Alex, please” Ashlyn begged.

“Shhh, just read me the part about the chordates baby.” Ali directed her.

Ashlyn felt Ali circle her clit with her thumb. “Chordates are all animals with a notochord, dorsal hollow nerve cord, post-anal tail, and…Holy shit, fuck” Ashlyn moaned out as she felt Ali enter her with two fingers. “Uh, and pharyngeal slits during at least some of stage of their lives….you feel so good inside me.”

Ali thrust into the blonde deeply, lifting her shirt to kiss and lick her abs. Ashlyn’s hips were starting to move frantically, her entrance getting tighter around Ali’s fingers. “Finish reading to me, baby.”

“There are two subphyla of invertebrate chordates… I’m really close, Alex, really close…” Ashlyn panted out.

“Come on baby, just finish for me.” Ali curled her fingers to hit Ashlyn in just the right spot.

Ashlyn took deep breath and in one exhalation got out “lancelets or subphylum Cephalochordata and tunicates or subphylum Urochordata…mmmmm, fuck, I’m coming.”

Ashlyn reached down to hold Ali’s head against her stomach while whispering “Alex” several times, her body spasming while Ali moved her fingers slowly in and out to bring her down gently before removing them. Ashlyn’s breathing slowed after a couple minutes, her grip on Ali’s head finally loosening. Ashlyn pulled Ali up so they were both standing and kissed her passionately, tongue everywhere inside the brunette’s mouth. She pushed Ali back against the carrel a bit.

Ali was already really worked up from taking care of Ashlyn, but she tried to keep on track for just a bit longer. She pulled back from the blonde, putting her hand on Ashlyn’s chest to hold her back. “Wait, not yet.” She threw Ashlyn’s notebook on the floor. “Repeat everything you just read to me without looking at your notes.”

“Ughh, fine.” Ashlyn groaned, quickly spitting it all out all the information so she could have at Ali as soon as possible. She didn’t even realize that she had obviously memorized it all despite how foggy her mind seemed when Ali was working her.

Ali smiled sexily. “Good girl. Now you can come fuck me.”

Ashlyn was on her in a second, Ali’s vulgarity making her heated again. She had her mouth all over Ali’s neck leaning her down on top of the carrel, tugging down Ali’s pants, her own still pooled around her ankles. She quickly entered a very wet Ali without warning, making the brunette gasp in pleasure.

Ali was already so close she couldn’t contain what was coming out of her mouth as Ashlyn thrust into her. “Yes, Ash… you fuck me so good, I love how you fuck me… harder baby, please, fuck me harder,” she whispered into the blondes ear moving her hips with Ashlyn’s hand. Ashlyn was quietly moaning into Ali’s neck, pounding deeply inside the brunette.

Ali wanted desperately to hold on longer, but she was already there, all her muscles tightening. “You feel that, baby? I’m coming just for you.” She got out between desperate breaths before letting the orgasm overtake her and holding Ashlyn tightly to her as it washed over her.
They pulled apart after a couple minutes. Ashlyn catching Ali’s eyes. “Geez, Alex. Damn.” She smiled placing a soft kiss on Ali’s lips.

“You got that right, Stud.” Ali said still a bit breathless, both of them sweaty and very flushed. They quickly righted their clothes, realizing that even though it was Saturday night and this part of the library was isolated, they were still in public and could technically still get caught.

“So much for studying,” Ashlyn joked.

“Oh I wouldn’t say that,” Ali said playfully. “Tell me one more time about echinoderms and invertebrate chordates, Stud.”

“Uh, ok.” Ashlyn repeated it all again. As she got to the end she realized that her notebook was still on floor and she hadn’t needed it to reiterate the information. Ali was smiling at her. “Damn, you are good Krieger.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Told you I had ways to make you focus, Harris.” Ali nudged the blonde.

“These fantasies of yours are insane, but I’m loving every damn second.” Ashlyn said flirtatiously.

“Oh, well, that one wasn’t on my list… but, I’m sure as hell putting it on there just so I can cross it off.” Ali laughed. “Come on, Stud. Let’s go downtown and find a late snack. I kinda worked up an appetite.”

Ashlyn smiled and picked Ali up off the carrel and into her arms, kissing her forehead. “You got it, Princess. Gotta feed my ridiculously hot study buddy after all that!”

Ashlyn woke up Monday morning to a text from Ali.

Princess: Good morning, sunshine :-) Good luck on your test today, I’m sure you’ll do great. I mean, you did learn with the best after all. Text me when it’s over and let me know how it went. I love you!

Ashlyn typed a quick reply as she got ready to start her kitchen work shift before she had to go off to class for the test during late morning.

Stud: Good morning to you beautiful! Wish you were here to ‘prepare’ me a bit more, but I think I can handle it ;) I love you too!

Ashlyn was midway through the test when she got to the echinoderms section and had to write an essay describing the main differences between echinoderm endoskeletons and exoskeletons of arthropods. She smirked and began writing. She had written down 5 out of the 6 differences and was struggling to come up with the last one. She closed her eyes and thought back, remembering Ali’s tongue inside her and smiling. She quickly wrote ‘The endoskeleton is located inside the body whereas the exoskeleton is located outside of the body’.

Stud: Test is over, I think I did great. Thanks to my favorite study buddy of course! Only one problem…

Princess: Yay! Glad it went well. What’s the problem?
Stud: I needed a change of underwear by the time I was done writing the echinoderms essay ;) Thanks for that, Krieger.

Princess: You're very welcome, Harris. Go change your panties ;-)
Captain

Chapter Notes

The transition to Ali's upcoming post college life is slowly starting, along with plenty of other fun!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ali’s phone buzzed as she was making her way back to her dorm Thursday evening. She clicked the new text message to see a picture of a slightly yellowed hand with somewhat pruned skin.

Stud: I’m free!!!!!! The fingers near the break are pretty stiff, but apparently that’s temporary. So glad to be out of that damn thing!

Ali smiled, typing back a message.

Princess: Awww, baby, your poor hand! Glad the cast is off though! Looks like we need to rehab that hand…I have some ideas on that ;-) 

Stud: I bet you do, Krieger. Probably some fantasy role play of a physical therapist and her patient.

Princess: I hadn’t thought that far ahead but I appreciate the ideas, Harris. Can’t wait to see you tomorrow! What time should I come?

Stud: Have my scheduled lab final at 10am, should be done around 12:30ish. So maybe we can start by having lunch?

Princess: Perfect! I’ll come meet you outside the lab around then. Call me tonight?

Stud: You know it! Have to hear my favorite voice before bed, Princess. Love you :

Princess: You, Ashlyn Harris, are the sweetest. I love you too :-) 

Ali sat on the stairs outside of Bass Hall on the Smith College campus, the afternoon was sunny but still a bit cool. She took in the budding spring greenery as she waited for Ashlyn, hoping she would be done soon so they could grab lunch and get ready for the busy afternoon Ali had planned.

“Well hey gorgeous.” Ali heard her favorite voice from behind her, her lips curling into a smile before she even looked up. Ashlyn was standing there in her white lab coat with her fitted dark jeans showing from underneath, her hair up in a messy bun, a messenger bag slung over her shoulder.

Ali took in her girlfriend for a second before pulling her into a tight hug and pecking her on the lips. “Hey there yourself, Stud. That lab coat is doing things to me, Harris.” Ali said with an insinuating smile.

Ashlyn raised an eyebrow. “Oh really? Cause I could schedule a little one-on-one lab time right now…” she leaned in and gave Ali a long kiss.
Ali pull back a bit and groaned. “Ugh, I wish! Buuut, we need to grab a quick lunch because we have an appointment in 45 minutes.”

“Appointment?” Ashlyn questioned, a bit confused.

“Yep, we have a busy afternoon ahead.” Ali replied excitedly.

“What do you have up your sleeve, Princess?” Ashlyn was getting more and more curious.

“You’ll see, but first, lunch! Maybe the campus center since that will likely be pretty quick.” Ali suggested.

“Sounds great. The suspense is already killing me, I’m bad with surprises. I get too excited.” Ashlyn admitted while slipping off her lab coat to reveal a tight gray t-shirt with a blue and green flannel shirt unbuttoned over it. She shoved the lab coat into her bag.

Ali’s eyes went right to the way the t-shirt hugged Ashlyn’s toned stomach and chest. “You’re doing nothing to make sure we make it to this appointment on time.” She said letting her hand drag across the blonde’s stomach.

“Not my fault you can’t keep your libido in check. Who would’ve thought you’d be the uh, ‘spirited’ one in this relationship. Lucky for you, I like em feisty.” Ashlyn teased. Ali still had her eyes glued on Ashlyn’s body. Ashlyn reached to lift her chin “Focus, Princess. Lunch. Dessert maybe later, ok?” Ashlyn winked. “That is if you’re still talking to me by then. I kinda have my own surprise.”

Ashlyn added mysteriously.

“Right! Let’s go!” Ali said finally snapping out of it. “Wait, what surprise?” She asked, taking Ashlyn’s hand as they walked.

“I’ll tell you later. After you reveal yours!” Ashlyn promised.

“Ok, very mysterious, should I be scared?” Ali asked.

Ashlyn laughed. “Maybe a little.”

“Oh boy.” Ali raised her eyebrows. “How’s your hand by the way?” Ali asked, realizing she’d been holding it.

“It’s good. Less stiff already. Of course, I still might need your services.” Ashlyn smirked.

“Easy, Harris. Now who can’t keep their libido in check?” Ali played back.

“There was never a question about me being able to keep it in check, we all know I can’t.” Ashlyn laughed. Ali just shook her head.

They each grabbed a half a sandwich and a salad before Ali told Ashlyn that they were heading downtown and led them to her BMV. It was a quick drive and she pulled up to park in front of a brick building a little ways from the town center.

“What is this place?” Ashlyn asked, not able to contain herself anymore.

“This is the real estate agent office that is going to show us like 10 apartments this afternoon. We’re picking a place to live, Stud.” Ali said with a smile.
Ashlyn almost couldn’t say anything. She and Ali had joked around about apartment hunting and how much Ashlyn would probably be there in the apartment, but at the end of the day Ashlyn figured Ali would just pick a place and then take her to see it. She had no idea Ali would actually want to involve her this much in the process. No matter how hard she tried, Ashlyn just wasn’t used to someone making her a priority in their life. “Alex, I’m so completely touched. Are you sure? I mean, this is your thing, I don’t want to impose on it.”

Ali reached over to cup Ashlyn’s cheek in her hand. “Ash, of course I’m sure. I know that everything with us has been crazy fast, but it’s been perfect none the less. I know you’ll be at school and I definitely don’t want to take you away from that or take away from you fully experiencing the time you have left there. But, I also know we’ll be together a lot wherever I am living. I want it to be home for both of us. I love you and I want to do this together. So, are you in?” Ali asked.

“You sure know how to make a girl feel loved. I’m so in.” Ashlyn said leaning in to give Ali a passionate kiss.

Ali deepened it, pulling Ashlyn closer with the hand she had on the blonde’s cheek. She pulled back when she heard her girlfriend let out a light moan. “Ok, Stud. We’re gonna be late, so let’s go do this!”

Ashlyn was giddy from the moment they started. The whole thing made her feel so much a part of Ali’s life, like everything they’d been through and said to each other was being cemented permanently in some way. It was silly, this was just an apartment, but as the afternoon went on and Ali kept asking Ashlyn for her opinion and so carefully considering everything she said, it just made everything feel real and not so much like the fairytale that it felt like sometimes. It had also amazed her how she and Ali seemed to be so much on the same page when it came to what they liked. They had been through several apartments just outside of the downtown area, most of them in quaint New England style colonial houses. Although a couple of them were okay, most were outdated here and there with old wood paneling and floral wallpaper.

There had been one apartment in a house tucked away not too far from the center campus area of Smith that was almost perfect. Unfortunately, it had a tiny kitchen. This normally wouldn’t have bothered Ali one bit since she wasn’t much of a cook, but she knew Ashlyn loved to cook, so she wouldn’t budge on a good sized kitchen. It was little things like this throughout the afternoon that had made Ashlyn realize the extent of her place in Ali’s life.

After seven apartments with no success and four left to go, the real estate agent suggested perhaps skipping to the last one on his list thinking that maybe it would be a winner. He brought them right into the heart of downtown and led them into an apartment that sat just above a Starbucks in a beautiful brick building with large windows. They walked in to find rustic wooden floors in an open layout apartment with a large renovated kitchen that included an island that could serve as a breakfast bar. There was a master bedroom with plush carpet and a nearby full bathroom with a large tub and shower combo and double sinks. There was also a guest bedroom with the same rustic wood flooring and a nearby half-bathroom. The living room area had a working gas fireplace and had two large windows that overlooked downtown Northampton with a view of the city hall building.

Ali smiled, she knew this place was perfect. “What do you think, Ash?”

“Honestly, I love it.” Ashlyn said genuinely. “What about you?”

“I actually love it too.” Ali said excitedly.

They heard the real estate agent breathe a sigh of relief.
“Do you mind giving us a few minutes to walk around and really get a feel for it?” Ali asked him.

“Sure! I’ll just be outside in the hallway when you’re ready.” He answered, clearly trying to do anything to make this apartment work.

As soon as he walked out, Ali pulled Ashlyn into the kitchen area. “So, you think this is the one?”

“I really really love it, I think it’s great. But, you have to think so too, Princess. Do you really love it?” Ashlyn asked.

“That’s why I asked him to leave, I just have to check one more thing.” Ali said.

“What’s that?” Ashlyn asked looking around to see what she’d missed.

Ali pushed her against the kitchen island and kissed her hard, the brunette’s tongue exploring her mouth and hands running up into the back of her shirt. Ashlyn ran her tongue against Ali’s, the kiss getting very heated until Ali realized they had to stop before things got too far and pulled back with hooded eyes.

“Yep. Sold. Welcome home, Stud.” Ali said with a wink, going to get the real estate agent and leaving Ashlyn there with her eyes still closed trying to compose herself.

Thirty minutes later and Ali had signed all the paperwork and written checks for a security deposit and first month’s rent. The real estate agent told her she could pick up the keys in a week, the landlord would be making sure everything was clean and ready to go in the meantime.

“Can you believe we just did that? So exciting!” Ali exclaimed as they headed back to the Smith campus.

“Seriously! That was so adult! And totally amazing!” Ashlyn joined in excitedly. “I can’t believe we’ll be so close to each other and spending so much time together. I can’t wait!”

“Me either. I could spend every second with you and never get tired, Ash. I mean it.” Ali said happily.

“I know, Alex. I don’t even know what I did before you.” Ashlyn replied back honestly.

Ali smiled and squeezed Ashlyn’s hand lightly they made their way back to the car so they could go back to campus. “So, Stud. My surprise is done. What’s yours?” she asked curiously.

“Yeah, it’s NOTHING like yours. I just hope you don’t disown me.” Ashlyn said nervously.

“Spill it, Harris.” Ali demanded.

“Um, so… how do you feel about wearing very skimpy clothes in front of people?” Ashlyn asked quietly.

“Huh?” Ali gave her a questioning look.

“So, tonight is senior banquet in Wilson House and I definitely have to go. And by popular demand, you do too. And… we don’t get to choose our own outfits.” Ashlyn said cringing.

Ali didn’t give her a reaction just yet. “What is senior banquet?”

“Well, every Smith house throws a private party for their graduating seniors. I won’t sugar coat it. It general involves a lot of alcohol and serious nudity, and all the antics that come with that
combination. Every class year has a role. First years have to make seniors funny hats and perform skits for them. Juniors have to write a prophecy about each senior and read it out loud. Sophomores are, um, wenches. Meaning we have to be scantily clad in an outfit of the senior’s choice and serve them all night.” Ashlyn explained.

“Alright, so that makes you a wench. Got it. How does that involve me exactly?” Ali asked, dying to see where this was going.

“Well, I got picked by Sarah. Who purposely chose me because she knew you’d be here and she was hoping for a package deal. Smart girl if you ask me. So, your presence is requested by Sarah as her second wench.” Ashlyn laughed a bit before adding “She already picked you an outfit.”

“Wow, ok then.” Ali laughed. “Smithies are seriously ridiculous! Well, I guess I won’t leave you hanging. Or Sarah for that matter. Guess I should be happy Megan is not a senior! Although, I shouldn’t agree before I see this ‘outfit’ should I?”

“Yeah, probably not. If you it makes you feel any better, we’ll both be showing a lot of skin.” Ashlyn said trying to make it better.

“You are so lucky I love you, Harris. And that I like looking at you in any state of undress.” Ali said playfully. “You did say there would be alcohol right?”

“Trust me. I can personally guarantee no one will be sober, so there’s that.” Ashlyn promised.

“Alright, I’m in. You owe me.” Ali said with a pointed look.

“I can also personally guarantee that I’ll be making it up to you. More than once.” Ashlyn smirked. Ali smiled. “So, when do I get to see this outfit of mine?”

“How about we stop in and grab them from Sarah as soon as we get back?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Ok. Let’s go see the damage.” Ali replied, wondering why exactly she had agreed to this as they drove into the quad.

They arrived at Sarah’s room a few minutes later. Ashlyn knocked loudly on the door. “Yo, Sarah!” Abby opened the door with a big grin on her face.

“Uh oh, not interrupting, are we?” Ashlyn asked, noting the satisfied look on Abby’s face.

“Hell no ladies, you are right on time!” Abby said cheerily.

Ashlyn shook her head, she couldn’t imagine what Abby and Sarah had been plotting. They stepped into the room to see Sarah on her bed with a menacing smile.

“Ok, stop the torture and just show us.” Ali said.

“So glad you’ve agreed to be a willing participant, Ali!” Sarah exclaimed.

“Only because it means Ash here is going to owe me, BIG TIME.” Ali nudge Ashlyn with a smirk.

“I think you’ll appreciate my selections.” Sarah said, grabbing two bags from the corner of the room and handing one to Ali and one to Ashlyn.

Ali reached into her bag and pulled out a pair of Superman booty shorts and a red lace bra. Her eyes
went wide “Wow, ok, that’s not much fabric.”

Ashlyn smiled thinking about Ali wearing it.

“Sorry, Ali. Rules are you can only wear what’s in the bag.” Sarah replied with a devious smile.

As Ashlyn was reaching into her bag, Abby cut in with “You know how Sarah loves her superheroes.”

Ashlyn pulled out a pair of khaki short shorts, a short sleeve white button up shirt that was clearly too small, a red tie, and a pair of black rimmed glasses. “Ah, ok, I see what you did here. A Clark Kent and Superman thing, clever.”

Sarah smiled looking pleased with herself. Ali was about to say that Ashlyn had gotten off easy when she noticed Ashlyn looking over the button up shirt carefully.

“Uh, Sarah. There are no buttons on this shirt.” Ashlyn observed.

Sarah’s smile got wider. “Yep.”

“And there’s no bra in this bag.” Ashlyn said, starting to sweat a bit.

“Yes.” Sarah said smugly.

“Seriously? You’re gonna leave me hanging here?” Ashlyn said giving Sarah a panicked look.

‘Think you forgot something in the bag, Ash.” Sarah replied.

Ash reached in and found what Sarah was referring to, pulling out two medium sized smiley face stickers. Her eyes got wide. “Right. Much better.” She said sarcastically.

Ali and Abby were laughing hard.

“Don’t feel too bad, Ash. Check out what I’m making Tobin wear.” Abby said throwing Ashlyn a bag.

Ashlyn pulled out one of the skimpiest string bikinis she had ever seen and a sash that said “Miss New Jersey.” Ashlyn laughed hard feeling slightly better and throwing the bag back at Abby.

“Alright ladies. Pre-game in my room at 7pm before we have to head down at 8pm.” Abby stated.

Ashlyn grabbed Ali’s hand and led her out of the room “Come on Princess, we have two hours to get some dinner in us, get undressed, and start drinking heavily.” She called back sarcastically into Sarah’s room “Thanks a bunch, Sarah!” only to hear Sarah giggle.

Ashlyn and Ali grabbed some to-go pasta dishes from the dining hall and ate them back upstairs in Ashlyn’s room. Ashlyn had been texting with her brother, sitting on her bed and leaning back against the wall. Ali sat between the blonde’s legs and leaned back into her.

“So, we have like an hour left before we have to be in Abby’s room. Shouldn’t Whit be here getting ready with us?” Ali asked.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. Whit is the smartest person ever and managed to escape this whole fiasco.” Ashlyn replied.

“What?!! How did she manage that?” Ali questioned.
“It’s her mom’s birthday and her dad wanted to do this whole surprise, so she flew home for the weekend.” Ashlyn explained.

“Lucky, lucky. I guess that’s a good excuse though.” Ali supposed.

“Speaking of, I promised I’d send her pictures of this whole ridiculous evening, so don’t let me forget.” Ashlyn said.

“Ok. So, should we get ready soon?” Ali asked, tilting her head back to look at Ashlyn.

Ashlyn put her phone down and wrapped her arms around Ali. “Well, we do have lots of clothes to take off.” She placed soft kisses down Ali’s neck, running her hands down the brunette’s sides until she reached the hem of her shirt.

Ali let out a sigh and reached up with one hand to put it behind Ashlyn’s neck and pull the blonde’s lips to hers. She felt Ashlyn’s tongue press against her lips and she eagerly greeted it with her own. Her free hand went to Ashlyn’s thigh, stroking it up and down.

Ashlyn ran her hands under Ali’s shirt, pulling it up and breaking their kiss briefly to pull it off. She ran her hands over Ali’s tight stomach, bringing her lips back to Ali’s as the brunette softly moaned. Her fingertips wandered under the front waistband of Ali’s jeans and she didn’t waste much time popping the button and unzipping them. Their kiss was becoming more heated, Ali’s moans more insistent and her grip on the back of Ashlyn’s neck tighter.

Ashlyn ran her hands lightly up Ali’s arms and under her back to unclasp her bra, sliding it off her shoulders and down her arms. She ran her each of her fingertips very lightly over the Ali’s nipples, feeling the brunette gasp into her mouth and start to squirm.

Ashlyn turned around in Ashlyn’s arms getting on her knees between Ashlyn’s legs. She put one hand back behind Ashlyn’s neck again, her eyes smoldering as she looked into Ashlyn’s hazel ones. She pulled Ashlyn back into a deep kiss running her free hand under Ashlyn’s plaid shirt and pushing it off the blonde’s shoulders. Ali broke the kiss to nip at Ashlyn’s jaw line before kissing down her neck and stopping at her pulse point to bite it lightly. Ashlyn let out a loud moan. Ali just kept going, moving her hands under Ashlyn’s shirt and pulling it over the blonde’s head together with her sports bra. She ran her thumbs over Ashlyn’s already hard nipples and gave her another deep kiss before moving over to nibble her ear and whisper “Now we’re even.”

Ashlyn let out a deep breath. “I’m about 2 seconds from not being able to control myself and we have 15min left to get ready.” She said with a pout.

“Mmmm, too be continued.” Ali said softly, planting one more kiss on the blonde’s lips and getting up off the bed. “Besides, we were technically getting ready.” Ali teased.

“Right.” Ashlyn said taking off her pants and boxers and rummaging in the bag to pull out the khaki short shorts.

Ali busied herself pulling out her own outfit before she let Ashlyn’s body distract her. This was going to be a long night at this rate. She noticed Ashlyn pulling on the khaki shorts without underwear on. “Going commando, Harris?”

“Yes. And so are you. Unless of course there was underwear in that bag that I didn’t see you pull out before.” Ashlyn smiled knowingly.

“Seriously? This only what’s in the bag thing really means only what’s in the bag.” Ali asked a bit surprised.
“You got it. The only exception is shoes, but given the lack of clothing, flip flops are usually the most popular choice.” Ashlyn said throwing Ali a pair of flip flops.

Ali pulled off her jeans and underwear and quickly slipped into her outfit for the night. At least my ass looks good in these booty shorts, she thought to herself. She threw her hair into a bun and considered herself ready.

She watched Ashlyn slip the white buttonless shirt on over her naked torso. It was small enough that it stayed pretty open, so Ashlyn would be flashing boob all night without question. Ashlyn tied the tie around her neck and left it loosely hanging between the valley of her breasts. She fixed her own messy bun and put on the glasses just as they heard a loud knock and Megan’s voice yelling “Let’s go ladies! It party time!”

Ashlyn grabbed Ali’s hand to lead them out the door when she felt Ali tug her back. “Missing something Harris?” She asked, reaching into the blonde’s shirt and lightly tugging one of Ashlyn’s nipples.

“Oh crap! Thanks!” Ashlyn said, grabbing the smiley face stickers and using them to just barely cover her nipples. Ali let out a loud chuckle, stopping to take a selfie of them to send Whitney later.

They spent the next hour in Abby’s room doing several shots and laughing at each other’s ridiculous attire. The sophomores were definitely showing all sorts of skin and the seniors had dressed in all kinds of strange outfits. Tobin looked like she truly stepped out of the Miss USA pageant. Abby was wearing loose jeans and a t-shirt but had on a rainbow flag as a cape. Sarah had dressed like a sexy cowgirl. Megan decided to just go with boxer shorts and a white cutoff tee that said ‘Make Your Hooker Scrum’; she had her written prophecy for Abby tucked into the waistband of her boxers. Alex, being a first year, looked the most normal in denim short shorts and a black tank top. By 8pm they were all already very buzzed and ready for senior banquet.

“Here we go!” Ashlyn said putting her arm around Ali and heading downstairs. The dining area downstairs had been decorated with streamers and balloons. There was a table with a lot of champagne and wine bottles lined up on it and a keg in the corner. Another long table had been setup with all kinds of food and appetizers that didn’t go together, like chocolate covered strawberries and sushi. There was a long table at the front of the room for the seniors and then other smaller tables and scattered chairs for everyone else.

The night started out somewhat civilized. Ali and Ashlyn had brought Sarah drinks and food as requested, grabbing some for themselves too. The seniors had requested the first year skits first, so the whole room spent time laughing as the first years made fun on the seniors. Then the seniors decided to do their wills before things got too messy.

“This is where seniors will possessions to people in the house.” Ashlyn explained to Ali.

Abby got up first. “So, before things get too wild in here. I have a serious will to make. As many of you know, and of course those of you who play on the team do, I’ve been the captain of the rugby team for the last two years.” The room erupted in loud cheers and Abby bowed. “It’s my job to pass that title on and make sure our team stays in good hands. After talking it over with the senior members of the team, we came to a decision on who we’d like our next captain to be.” Abby paused. “This person has put their heart and soul into the team and we know we’re leaving it in very capable hands. So, without further drunken rambling… Ashlyn Harris, come up here and take this sucker off my hands.” Abby finished holding out a Captain’s “C” shirt patch towards Ashlyn.

Ashlyn was shocked. She had worked so hard to do everything she could for the team, but it wasn’t all that often that someone who wasn’t a rising senior got made the captain. Abby had been a rare
exception. Ali kissed her cheek and Ashlyn got up with a huge grin to hug Abby and Sarah and two other senior rugby team players from Wilson House. Alex ran over to give her a hug too. Tobin and Megan settled for fist bumps. “I won’t let you guys down.” Ashlyn promised. Abby raised a glass “To Ash, Smith Rugby’s new fearless leader!” and the whole room drank.

Ashlyn took her seat again and Ali pulled her by the collar and into a kiss, mumbling into her lips “Congratulations, Stud. I’m proud of you.”

By the time wills were done, Ashlyn had inherited a sock puppet, two posters of bikini clad women, a bottle opener, and a dildo harness with thankfully no dildo attached. Ali sat there very amused at the bizarreness of the whole thing.

The night just got sloppier from that point forward. Most juniors were so drunk that the senior prophecies were almost unintelligible. Two seniors were spitting champagne out of their mouths like a fountain all over the room. Megan had lost her shirt somehow and people were now autographing her with permanent marker all over her body. Tobin had been forced to take body shots off of Alex several times and the two of them seemed to be getting more and more comfortable and daring with it as the night went on. Sarah had insisted that Ali sit on Ashlyn’s lap right next to her and demanded that they kiss every time anyone clinked a glass. Of course, people caught on fast, so there was so much glass clinking that the two of them were pretty much making out for a while until people moved on to something else. After another request had made its way to Sarah, Ali and Ashlyn were each sporting a matching hickey from each other on their collarbones.

Just as things were looking like they might wind down, one senior yelled that they should all jump in the pond naked. So, there was a parade of scantily clad and nude women making their way from the quad down to the boathouse dock. Ashlyn and Ali were definitely feeling pretty buzzed, but they weren’t full on drunk, so they stayed on the dock with Alex and made sure everyone got out of the water safely before heading back to the house.

Around 1am they finally got back to Ashlyn’s room. Ashlyn had no sooner locked the door when Ali pressed her up against it and kissed her passionately. Ali gently peeled the smiley face stickers from the blonde’s nipples before looking Ashlyn in the eye. “I think it’s time for you to start making it up to me, Stud.”

Ashlyn was already really worked up from being all over Ali most of the night thanks to Sarah. “I think you’re absolutely right.” She put her hands on Ali’s ass and picked her up, bringing her across the room and laying Ali on the bed. She covered the brunette’s body with her own, her hips pressing Ali into the bed as she placed open mouthed kisses on her neck. Ali was already moaning and running her hands all over Ashlyn’s back. She put her thigh between Ali’s legs, applying pressure to her core and getting the brunette nice and worked up. Ashlyn wasted no time in pulling Ali’s bra off.

Ashlyn leaned over to undo the knot on Ashlyn’s tie and went to slide the tie off of her neck when Ashlyn grabbed her hands and stopped her.

Ashlyn’s eyes were dark and Ali got lost in them for a moment until she felt Ashlyn put her hands above her head and she felt the fabric of the tie around her wrists. Ashlyn used the tie to quickly bind Ali’s hands securely to the metal frame of the futon. “Unnhh, fuck” Ali whispered, really turned on by this dominant side of Ashlyn.

Ashlyn leaned down to give Ali a kiss. “Probably not quite what you had in mind, Krieger. And these aren’t handcuffs, but I think it will do the trick.” Ashlyn said with a smug grin before leaning down to lick Ali’s ear and whisper “I’m the captain tonight.”
Chapter End Notes

Should I even ask how you want me to start the next chapter?
Due to popular demand, I'm interrupting the normally scheduled plot advancement to bring you this chapter filled with... Pure. Smut. You've been warned. Anchors away ;)

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Ashlyn leaned down to give Ali a kiss. “Probably not quite what you had in mind, Krieger. And these aren’t handcuffs, but I think it will do the trick.” Ashlyn said with a smug grin before leaning down to lick Ali’s ear and whisper “I’m the captain tonight.”

Ali watched Ashlyn pull back to look at her. She gave the blonde a sexy smile. Ashlyn usually wasn’t quite this dominant and Ali was generally the more aggressive one, so the brunette had every intention of enjoying every second of this. “Aye, Aye Cap!” Ali said with a wink, feeling confident despite her current position.

Ashlyn continued staring right into Ali’s eyes hungrily, making the brunette swallow hard and her confident look start to slip. “No more talking, Krieger… until you’re screaming my name.” Ashlyn said quietly. She hovered over Ali, a knee on each side of her hips, hands beside each of Ali’s shoulders holding herself up so she wasn’t touching the brunette almost at all. She leaned down to kiss Ali on the forehead and then her nose before lightly ghosting her lips over her girlfriend’s. Ali picked her head up to try and capture Ashlyn’s lips, but the blonde pulled back and didn’t let her.

Ashlyn stayed hovering over Ali’s lips, looking into her eyes until Ali finally put her head back down on the bed. Ashlyn brushed Ali’s lips again with her own, taking the brunette’s bottom lip between her teeth and tugging it lightly. She ran her tongue against it and then let it go, making Ali let out a barely audible whine. Ashlyn took her finger and ran it over Ali’s lips, dragging it down her neck, across her collarbone, over one of her nipples, down the center of her abs and along the waistband of the superman booty shorts as lightly as possible. Ali’s back arched off the bed, her body breaking out into goosebumps and desperately trying to make contact with Ashlyn’s but not quite reaching. Ali hissed out “Don’t tease me, baby.”

“You should only be so lucky, Krieger. I’m the captain of this ship and no one comes aboard without being thoroughly searched.” Ashlyn said hotly into the brunette’s ear. The cocky look that had been on Ali’s face just a few minutes ago was long gone. She was already really worked up, Ashlyn’s words just pushing her closer to the edge. Ashlyn used the tip of her tongue to trail down Ali’s neck slowly and then followed the same path her finger just took, never letting her body touch Ali’s. The brunette was pulling against the knotted tie around her hands, breathing heavily. Ashlyn worked her way back up placing open mouthed kisses on Ali’s entire torso, stopping to lightly bite and suck any spots that had caused Ali’s breath to hitch.

Ali’s skin was on fire, Ashlyn’s warm mouth felt like it was everywhere on her body. Her core was
wet and aching, she was trying hard to get some friction against Ashlyn, but the blonde wasn’t close enough for that. Ali squeezed her legs together to try and ease the ache. She felt Ashlyn get off the bed and groaned, opening her eyes. She watched as Ashlyn took her clothes off slowly beside the bed. “You are so beautiful, Ashlyn. So hot.” Ali whispered out admiring her girlfriend’s strong frame and lean, long body.

Ashlyn placed her left knee on the bed and her left hand on Ali’s hip, leaning down to give Ali a slow kiss whispering against the brunette’s lips “Flattery will definitely get you aboard this ship faster.” She moved her head down and licked Ali’s nipple in one broad swipe of her tongue before pulling back and blowing on it lightly. Ali moaned, her hips squirming again, but the blonde’s hand held them down. “I need you so bad, baby, please.” Ali got out.

Ashlyn ignored her pleading taking Ali’s nipple in her mouth and sucking on it while she flicked her tongue over it. Ali’s back was arched off the bed again, whimpering and begging “Ash, please” over and over. Ashlyn just continued to lavish attention on Ali’s nipples for several minutes until they were extremely sensitive and deep red, never letting her body touch Ali’s.

Ali could feel that she had soaked through her shorts, her core feeling wet and slippery and just throbbing for release. Her arms ached from desperately pulling at the restraints. She bent her knees up and spread her legs open hoping to entice the blonde to give her more. “I don’t think I can hold on much longer, Ash. I need you, baby. I want you in me so bad.”

Ali’s words had made Ashlyn oblige her a bit. She pulled Ali’s shorts off slowly, noting the giant wet spot on the fabric. “I put out a gangway for you, but looks like you got wet anyway” Ashlyn said cockily as kissed the inside of Ali’s thighs, biting and leaving a mark on the left one. Ali bucked her hips trying to press her core into the blonde’s face without any luck. Ashlyn pulled away hearing Ali groan again. “Ash, please baby, please, touch me.” The desperation in Ali’s voice was clear.

“Shhh, I got you.” Ashlyn whispered, reaching up to kiss Ali passionately and finally letting her body press against the brunette’s. Ali felt Ashlyn’s nipples press against hers and she started to tremble a bit, her body beginning to reach its breaking point. Ashlyn felt Ali shaking underneath her and decided to start giving in. She moved so her body was lying beside Ali’s and ran her hand down Ali’s stomach. She kissed Ali deeply and gently brushed her finger over Ali’s clit for a couple seconds, feeling the brunette moan loudly into her mouth. Ashlyn softly moaned back, entering Ali as slowly as possible with one finger.

Ali’s lips came away from Ashlyn’s. “Oh. My god. Yes, Ashlyn. Nothing feels better than you do.” Honesty poured from her mouth. Ashlyn moved her finger in and out of Ali very slowly, making sure to hit Ali’s g-spot and bury her finger in as deep as she could each time. She watched Ali’s face, the brunette’s eyes shut and jaw clenched tightly in pleasure, thinking about how beautiful her girlfriend was when she was vulnerable like this. Ali’s muscles were clenching, she was shaking harder, and Ashlyn could feel Ali’s core tightening, she knew Ali was close. Ashlyn didn’t change her speed or depth, but kept working Ali slowly.

Ali could feel immense pressure building between her legs, her head was spinning, she could feel her body quivering. Ashlyn was moving so gently and so deliberately, it felt like she was freefalling in slow motion. She barely registered her own voice calling out “Ashlyn” over and over again in a desperate whisper. Ashlyn’s voice broke through the fog in her head. “Open your eyes. Look at me, Alex.” Ali fought to open her eyes, finding Ashlyn’s soft hazel ones staring back into hers with desire. Ali could feel herself about to lose it, ready to let go and release the mounting pressure. “Look at me when you come, Alex.” Ashlyn demanded, pressing deeply into Ali and curling her finger hard against Ali’s most sensitive spot. Ali felt the orgasm overtake her, fighting to keep her eyes locked on Ashlyn’s, her mouth hanging open as she let out a single wail and then fought to suck in
breaths. Ali had never experienced anything so intense, feeling spasms deep within her core.

Ashlyn stilled her hand but didn’t remove it, her eyes still locked on Ali’s glazed-over amber orbs. She let Ali get in a couple normal breaths before slipping in a second finger and starting her slow thrusting movements again. Ali’s eyes widened as she pulled against the fabric of the tie trying to free her hands to grab onto something. “Ash, oh god, I don’t know if I can…” Ali’s voice squeaked out before Ashlyn cut her off. “Sure you can baby, you’re not even halfway up the gangway yet.”

Ali felt the pressure building again, the sensitivity fading into pleasure, and profanity started spewing out of her mouth. “Fuck. Fuck, Ash. Keep going. Mmmm, harder, I want all of you.” Ali’s body was writhing against Ashlyn’s hand, her fists clenched tightly, prompting the blonde to thrust harder and faster. “More Ash, please. I need you, please. Fill me, fuck me.” Ali begged loudly and shamelessly wanting Ashlyn to completely take over her body. Ashlyn felt her own core clench as she slipped a third finger into her girlfriend, feeling Ali engulf her down to the knuckles.

Ali felt Ashlyn stretching her, knowing it would only take a few more thrusts before she climaxed again. “Oooh, oh mummy my ggggod. Don’t stop, I’m right there.” Ali’s voice shook and her eyes went black, her hands numb from clenching her fists and yanking against the restraint of the tie. High pitched moans escaped her lips as her body went rigid, hips pressing tightly into Ashlyn’s hand as her core convulsed and leaked onto the blonde’s fingers. Ashlyn covered Ali’s mouth with her own feeling the brunette breathe and hum into her mouth before Ali gained enough composure to kiss back. Ashlyn removed her fingers slowly and pulled back to look at Ali who was breathing shallowly, her eyes still glazed over. Ashlyn brought her fingers to her mouth and licked them clean before leaning down to kiss Ali softly, letting the brunette taste herself on Ashlyn’s tongue.

“You’re so incredibly hot, Alex. So, perfect.” Ashlyn said lovingly, running a hand up along Ali’s arm. Ali could only moan back softly with a slight smile. She opened her eyes to find the cocky smirk back on Ashlyn’s face.

“Only problem, Alex, is that I let you on the ship and you made a mess on the deck. Lucky for you, this captain really likes cleaning up your messes.” Ashlyn said in a low purr. She moved down Ali’s body and the brunette held her breath as she felt Ashlyn settle between her legs. Ali didn’t have any words left, she could only whimper as Ashlyn’s tongue ran through her folds lightly.

Ashlyn knew Ali would be sensitive, so she gently moved her tongue all over Ali’s core letting the brunette’s juices coat her face and relishing in the sweet tangy flavor that was so uniquely Ali. Nothing turned her on more than being buried between her girlfriend’s legs, knowing she was the cause of her pleasure and the sounds coming out of Ali’s mouth. Ashlyn could feel her own core leaking, her composure starting to falter as she shallowly dipped her tongue into Ali.

“Ash, I want you. Let me touch you, baby.” Ali panted out, finding her voice again. Ashlyn felt herself slipping, but she wanted to keep control until she had Ali one more time. Ali kept begging through her moans “Please, Ash, let me taste you. I want you.” Ashlyn came apart at Ali’s words, doing the only thing she could think of to maintain some semblance of control. She crawled up and kneeled beside Ali’s chest, leaning down to kiss Ali hard before pulling back and willing her voice to come out confident and steady. “Welcome aboard baby, come check out the view from your cabin.” With that, Ashlyn swung one of her legs over Ali so that she was reversed over the brunette with her knees on either side of Ali’s chest. Ashlyn’s core hovered over Ali’s mouth, her chest pressed into Ali’s stomach, and she lowered her head to let her tongue go back to work on Ali’s center.

“Fuck, Ashlyn, so hot.” Ali mumbled into the blonde’s core as she picked her head up and sucked Ashlyn’s clit into her mouth. She felt Ashlyn let out a moan against her folds and reciprocated with one of her own. Ashlyn was soaking wet and Ali didn’t want to waste any time as she felt her own
orgasm approaching with the blonde relentlessly flicking her clit. She pressed her lips against Ashlyn’s entrance and slipped her tongue in as deep as she could, wishing she had her hands free to pull the blonde’s ass back into her face. Ali thrust her tongue in and out as hard and fast as she could manage. Ashlyn gripped Ali’s thigh and lifted her head to yell “Holy shit, Alex, you feel so good. Mmmm, I’m really close.”

Ashlyn backed herself further into Ali’s mouth and moaned loudly a few times before dropping her head back down to plunge her own tongue into Ali’s core. Ali opened her legs wider and moaned deeply into Ashlyn’s center feeling the blonde starting to tighten around her tongue. She realized Ashlyn might orgasm before she did. She pulled her mouth away. “Hold on for me, Ash. I’m almost there. I want to come with you, baby.”

Ashlyn didn’t know how much longer she could hold it in, so she worked Ali harder by stroking her clit with her finger while she continued to move her tongue inside the brunette. Ali started shaking again and Ashlyn felt Ali’s tongue moving to lick circles on her clit with firm pressure. The blonde’s body started trembling to match Ali’s. Ali pulled away from Ashlyn’s wet center to scream out “I’m there, Ash, I’m there” before diving her tongue back into the blonde.

Ashlyn felt Ali clench and she let her own body give into the orgasm she was on the edge of, her hips gyrating to ride Ali’s face. “Fuuuuuck.” Ashlyn moaned loudly into Ali’s center, feeling Ali vibrate her core with loud moans and mumbles of her own. The two of them letting their orgasms rip through them. Ali dropped her head back on the bed, chest heaving as the blonde collapsed on top of her just as they were, both of them sweaty and spent. They laid like that for a few minutes, bodies tingling in the aftermath, before Ashlyn righted herself and leaned down to kiss Ali slow and deep, the taste of each other mixing in their mouths.

Ashlyn reached up to untie Ali’s hands. She got them free and pulled them against her chest, rubbing them gently to help Ali regain feeling in them as she laid beside her. Ali broke the silence. “Damn Captain, I never expected to sail the open seas on the S.S. Harris quite like that, but… Hottest. Voyage. Ever.” Ali said with a smile.

“Well you definitely have permission to board this vessel anytime, sailor.” Ashlyn gave Ali a dimpled grin and gently kissed her lips.

“The things you do to me, Harris. Just wow.” Ali said quietly.

“Likewise, Krieger. I don’t have words for the things you make me feel.” Ashlyn replied softly. She worked the covers over them and held Ali tightly against her, the brunette’s face pressed against her chest.

Ashlyn felt her eyes closing. She heard Ali’s voice. “Ash?”

“Yeah?” Ashlyn whispered.

“I really love you.” Ali said sleepily.

“I love you so much, Alex. You’re everything and then some.” Ashlyn replied, falling asleep to Ali’s gentle breathing.
Ali is graduating :)
Kyle pretended to shield his eyes. “Ahhhhh, stop it, your post sex glow is blinding me! Things your older brother does not need to see.”

“Yeah, well you’re the one who decided to FaceTime me and be relentless about it.” Ali reminded him.

“Ugh, fine.” Kyle sighed. “Ok seriously, you two are just too damn cute, get married and make me an uncle already.” He said enchanted by the way Ashlyn was cuddled into his sister and looking at her with heart eyes.

Ali shot him a look, but couldn’t help the smile from taking over her face.

“Annyway! What’s up my surf sister?” Kyle directed his attention to Ashlyn. Ali secretly loved the fact that Kyle and Ashlyn usually fell into easy conversation with each other and even left her out sometimes when Ali was FaceTiming with him. She couldn’t wait for her two favorite people to meet in person.

“Hmmmm, well, I was having a great sleep until someone interrupted. Buuuut, if anyone is going to wake me up with a phone call, might as well be the hot guy who looks a whole lot like my beautiful girlfriend.” Ashlyn said charmingly.

“Oh, she is good.” Kyle said amused. “Now I know how she got your panties off so fast, Alex. Think she just got mine off too.” Kyle joked.

“Kyle!” Ali yelled, turning red.

Ashlyn laughed. “We need to find you a nice boy, Kyle.”

Kyle sighed deeply. “Ugh, yes, you do. I’ll settle for some quality time with you two lovelies in two short weeks though! Sooo… I get to help you pick out an outfit for graduation, right?”

“Of course you do! Bet Ash can’t wait to go shopping with us!” Ali said. Ashlyn rolled her eyes.

“Don’t whine, Ashlyn. If you’re good while we shop, I’ll take you long boarding in the potholed wonder that is New England,” Kyle joked.

Ashlyn chuckled. “Deal, dude.”

“Ok, well, I guess I should let you ladies get back to whatever it is you’re doing this morning. Which I am going to avoid thinking about to save myself from lot of extra therapy. Sorry to wake you up, I just wanted to say hi. You know if I don’t make my presence known every so often, I start to get antsy.” Kyle said playfully.

“Love you, Kyle!” Ali said happily.


Ashlyn shook her head with a frown. “Back at you. See you soon!”

Ali waved and ended the FaceTime session. “He is too much.”

Ali wrapped her arms around Ashlyn. “Well, first I’m going to put a pair of shorts on and go brush my teeth. And you’re going to come with me. Then I’m going to come right back here, take my clothes off, and spend the rest of the morning naked in bed with you.”
Ashlyn smiled. “You are truly brilliant, Krieger. So, glad I got me a smart Dartmouth girl.”

The two of them only left the room the rest of the weekend to eat, enjoying having the room to themselves to spend quality naked time together while they caught up on Ashlyn’s Netflix queue. Sunday came too fast as always, with Ashlyn turning around to pull Ali away from her car for several kisses before being able to let her go finally.

The next two weeks were complete madness. Both Ashlyn and Ali had to deal with finals and the typical end of semester stress. Ali made a quick trip to Northampton one night so she could pick up the keys to the new apartment and drop a few things in there already. She met Ashlyn for a quick dinner, too quick, the two of them getting in a heated make out session in Ashlyn’s Jeep before she had to head back to Dartmouth again.

Before Ali even had time to fully appreciate that she was finally done with college, it was the Thursday before Sunday’s graduation and Ashlyn was pulling up in front of her dorm to pick her up so they could get Kyle at the airport.

Ali got in the Jeep and leaned in to give her girlfriend a deep kiss, trying to convey with her mouth just how much she missed her. It definitely worked.

“Mmmm, missed you too beautiful.” Ashlyn said sweetly, grabbing Ali’s hand and holding it in her lap as she started driving.

Ali jumped out of the car as soon as they got to airport, already excited to see Kyle. She and Ashlyn were waiting in baggage claim when Ali squealed, spotting Kyle and running to greet him. Ashlyn watched Ali jump in the air and wrap her arms and legs around Kyle in a tight hug. She smiled, thinking about how much she missed Chris and couldn’t wait to see him next week. Ali and Kyle finally made their way over to Ashlyn.

“Asshhhlyn! Finally!” Kyle yelled loudly pulling the blonde in for a hug where he practically crushed her.

“Hey, Kyle! Nice to finally meet you properly.” Ashlyn replied as best as she could seeing as how the life was being squeezed out of her.

Kyle let go, taking a step back to look the blonde over. “Geez, Alex. She is hot. Look at those muscles.”


“Well it’s no wonder she flipped you like a pancake, Alex. I mean, she could get me to like women too!” Kyle joked. Ali laughed.

Ashlyn tried to reign them in. “Oook, that’s enough from you two! You hungry Kyle?”

“And polite too… yes, I’m starved!” Kyle said dramatically.

The three of them grabbed lunch, where Ashlyn and Kyle admired each other’s ink. Ali blatantly staring when Ashlyn lifted her shirt a bit to show Kyle her side tattoo. “Geez, still? It’s like you’ve never seen it before! Down girl.” Kyle teased, earning a hard smack on the arm from Ali. They spend the rest of the day shopping for Ali’s graduation outfit.

Ashlyn was pretty bored until Ali said she needed her opinion and started pulling Ashlyn into every changing room while she tried things on. Watching her girlfriend constantly stripping off clothes had definitely held Ashlyn’s attention. After three hours, Ali and Kyle finally settled on a simple navy
dress that feel just above Ali’s knee and hugged her body perfectly. Ashlyn couldn’t take her eyes of
the brunette. “You look beautiful, Alex.”

“Oh, I only took me three hours!” Ali laughed, looking in the mirror of the changing room. “Not a minute
too soon either, I’m about to die of thirst.”

“I’ll grab you a water.” Ashlyn offered, leaving Kyle and Ali in the changing room to go get Ali a
water from the food court.

Kyle turned his attention back to Ali, giving her a serious look. “She calls you Alex. How did I not
know until now that she calls you Alex?”

Ali shrugged with a smile.

“Wow, I mean, I could tell it was solid… but, this is like really super serious huh?” Kyle asked.

Ali nodded. “Yeah. As in I have no intention of ever being with anyone else. I know, probably
insane for me to say given how long we’ve been together, but I guess I just know, you know?”

Kyle smiled widely. “Not insane at all. I get it. I honestly just love her. And I love the ridiculous
smile she puts on your face. So happy for you, Alex.”

Ali pulled him into a hug. “Thanks, Kyle. I owe you so much for making sure I gave it a chance and
didn’t let myself screw this up.”

“Stop, you’re gonna make me cry! You’re welcome already, just name one of your kids after me,
ok.” Kyle teased.

Ali’s parents arrived Friday night and Ashlyn’s first dinner with Ali’s immediate family all together
went well. She got to spend a lot of time just hanging out with the Kriegers on Friday night and all
day Saturday. It stirred a lot of emotions in her as she watched them interact with each other,
particularly the way Deb and Ken were still so kind and close to each other even being divorced.
They were that family she always wished she had. The one you saw in TV commercials, whose love
and appreciation for each other was obvious to anyone who even stopped to look for second.
Ashlyn’s family had always been more disjointed. Before all hell had broken loose, they certainly
had loved each other as a family, but the relationships always took on a more individual nature. They
were never much of a collected whole the way the Kriegers were. Still, Ashlyn missed every minute
of what she had before it had all gotten ripped away from her. She loved her grandma and Chris
fiercely and was so thankful to have them in her life, but sometimes she just missed her parents, even
if things had not always been perfect. No matter what she was missing in this moment, her heart still
felt really full. The Kriegers had welcomed her in with open arms. She hadn’t even had time to doubt
herself, they made her one of them from the start. It wasn’t her own family by blood, but they were
her family now too and she was happy about that. She understood now how Ali could always make
her feel so loved, it was in her nature to share her heart so completely, she learned it from her family.

Ashlyn woke up Sunday morning to Ali watching her sleep. She snuggled in closer to Ali. “Good
morning, Miss Super Smart Dartmouth graduate. You excited for today?”

“Excited for sure. Maybe a tad scared to get tossed out into the real world. Definitely a lot nervous.”
Ali answered honestly.
“Understandable. You’re gonna kick the real world’s ass though, you kinda already have. Why so nervous?” Ashlyn replied.

“Uh, I dunno, just a rush of bizarre emotions I guess.” Ali lied, she knew exactly why she was nervous, but she didn’t want to reveal anything. Ashlyn held her tightly for a little and Ali welcomed the quiet moment until it was time for them to get ready.

Ashlyn zipped up the back of Ali’s dress for her, stepping back to look at her. “You’re so gorgeous, Princess. Stunning.”

Ali gave Ashlyn a soft kiss. “You’re looking incredible yourself, Stud.” Ashlyn had on a pair of fitted khaki pants rolled up to the bottom of her calf muscles, a light blue short sleeve button up shirt tucked into her pants that was paired with navy blue suspenders and blue Sperry sneakers. Her hair was in a bun, her makeup light and natural. Ali couldn’t keep her eyes off of her, she knew who she’d be staring at in the crowd today.

“You’re missing something though, Princess.” Ashlyn said.

“What’s that?” Ali asked curiously.

“This.” Ashlyn said pulling a small box out of her pocket. “Happy graduation, baby.”

Ali opened the box to find a gold necklace with a small gold bar held on by each end of the chain. She looked closely to see what looked like map coordinates engraved on the bar. She smiled, pulling it out of the box and noticing the back side of the bar had another set of coordinates on it. “What is this? Ali asked, pointing to the engraving.

“They’re map coordinates.” Ashlyn answered simply with a small smile.

“For what?” Ali asked getting more curious.

“That’s for you to figure out.” Ashlyn said grinning. She was relieved Ali seemed to like it, it had cost her 10 extra shifts in the kitchen.

Ali couldn’t wait. She ran over to her laptop and entered the first coordinates into the google browser. The map showed the Smith College athletic fields, the coordinate marker over the center of where the rugby pitch was. Ali smiled widely and entered the next set of coordinates. The map changed to show the Dartmouth campus, the coordinate marker unmistakably over the Baker Library clock tower. Ali looked up to see Ashlyn smiling lovingly at her from across the room.

Ali close the space between them quickly, pulling Ashlyn in for a romantic kiss. When they pulled apart, Ashlyn whispered “Important places on both our campuses where we’ve shared ourselves.” Ali kissed her again, heart pounding.

“I love it, and I love you.” Ali said quietly against Ashlyn’s lips. “Put it on me.”

“Love you too.” Ashlyn said putting the necklace on Ali. “Come on pretty lady, let’s get you graduated.”

After meeting up with the Kriegers, Ali went off to where she was supposed to meet her graduating class. Ashlyn and the Kriegers got to the ceremony site early, getting the closest spot to the stage in the first row right behind the graduates. Ashlyn looked up to see where they were, the Baker Library clock tower looming right behind the graduation stage. She smiled to herself and tried not to let her
mind wander.

The ceremony started an hour later, Ashlyn and the Kriegers standing up to find Ali proceed in with her graduating class and take her seat. Ashlyn couldn’t wipe the smile off her face. Ali looked beautiful in her black cap and gown, a lei of fresh flowers her mom had given her around her neck, white and yellow honor cords draped over her. Ashlyn tried to memorize everything about the way Ali looked so she’d never forget it.

The ceremony began with an address from the college president, who cracked a few jokes and tried to impart some words of wisdom. He wrapped up his speech and introduced the 2015 senior class president. The senior class president gave a short speech, mostly trying to rile up the audience and remind them of just how momentous the occasion was. When he was done, the college president took the podium again to introduce the next speaker.

“Every year, we ask the very best of our graduating class to address us with their infinite wisdom. This year, we had five students who achieved the highest GPA and they decided amongst themselves who should be up on this podium today. They unanimously decided on the person amongst them who they felt was the most well-rounded, who most exemplified so many of the qualities we value at Dartmouth. So, without further ado, I give you our valedictory speaker, Alexandra Krieger.”

The audience erupted into applause. Ashlyn and the Kriegers all looked at each other trying to determine if any one of them had known about this, but Ali had clearly kept it a secret. Their mouths hung open in surprise as they watched Ali take the podium beaming.

“Thank you President Jones. Welcome faculty, honored guests, family, friends, and the graduating class of 2015!” Ali said as the graduates yelled and applauded loudly.

“Let me also say a special hello to my family, who is really surprised right now because they had no idea I’d be up here today. Hi guys!” Ali found Ashlyn and the Kriegers in the audience and waved to them with a smile. The audience laughed. Ashlyn grabbed Kyle’s hand and squeezed, Kyle squeezed back.

“Two weeks ago, I got called into the president’s office along with four of my fellow students. To our surprise… well, I mean we all knew we worked hard so we weren’t overly surprised, but… anyway, we were told that one of us would be the valedictory speaker for today’s graduation ceremony. The president suggested that we try to decide amongst ourselves who should be the one to speak today. Imagine my shock when they all pointed at me. And here I stand. However, this is not just my moment, but it’s theirs too. So, I’d like to take a moment to acknowledge them and hope that I represent them well up here.” Ali announced each of the four names to the crowd, drawing applause for each person. Then she started the heart of her speech. Ashlyn watched her with rapt attention, completely in awe.

“I’d like to start with a quote from Robert Frost. ‘Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.’ As scholarly and insightful individuals, I think we often like to use this quote when we think about our lives, what we’ve been through, and what inspires us. Let me see a show of hands, how many of you have quoted this in reference to yourself?”

The vast majority of the crowd raised their hands, drawing another round of laughter.

“Yep, me too. I think many of us have thought at one point or another that this quote defines us. It’s funny if you think about it, because if we all took the road less traveled, it would actually be the road most traveled, wouldn’t it?”
The audience laughed again, many shaking their heads in agreement.

“That’s what we want for ourselves though. We set goals, we determine what the correct path is to get there, and we follow it. When we get to the end, we don’t just want to meet our goal. We want to feel like we earned it, like we fought for it, like it wasn’t handed to us or easy, even if the truth is that it was. We want to feel like taking that path to meet that goal was a challenge. What I’ve learned over the last few months is that it isn’t the path or the goal that is the challenge. No, the challenge is allowing yourself to step off the path, to veer off the road. To not be so obsessed with an end goal and to be open to learning and understanding yourself well enough to not need a specific end goal all the time. To know that you can trust yourself to forge your own new path and change it at any given moment, even if you don’t know where you’re going to end up. Or, not to forge any path at all and just wander. For a control freak like me, trust me, it was a really hard lesson.”

The audience lightly laughed again. Ashlyn was leaned forward in her seat, completely captivated by Ali and still clutching Kyle’s hand.

“I have my brother, who I admire more than anyone in the world, to thank for that lesson. He watched me walk down this path that I had laid out for myself with blinders on; never stopping to question if I even wanted the end goal anymore or if that end goal was ever really my own. Despite my stubbornness, he urged me to get off the path and be open enough to look around. To find myself by letting myself freely figure out what I wanted and what was important to me. He told me to, and I quote, ‘Loosen up and live a little, Alex’.” Ali said, with a pretty good impression of Kyle’s voice.

Another laugh went through the crowd.

“I listened to him. And let me tell you what happened. I figured out really quickly that I had been living my life not for myself, but for a lot of other people. That everything that I had convinced myself was making me happy, actually wasn’t. Most importantly, I met someone who changed my life.” Ali looked up to meet Ashlyn’s eyes in the crowd.

“Someone who has taught me what it means to be happy. She has helped me understand what my value is, the potential that I have, what it means to pick yourself back up after a set back, and how to grow without growing up too much. I’ve finally learned not to take myself too seriously, and in her I have found support, strength, inspiration, and love. Had I not left my path, I would have walked right by her and missed out on all of that.” Ali smiled at Ashlyn before looking back over the crowd.

“So, that’s what I challenge you to do class of 2015, and all of you here today. Stop thinking for a moment about being great and doing great things, although I do hope that you all do, and just let yourself be. Take time to step off the path you’re on, veer off the road for a while, forget the end goal. Let yourself wander, take in the things around you; and question everything, especially yourself. You may not find a person like I did or even anything in particular, but you will find something. Loosen up and live a little. Congratulations class of 2015!” Ali finished with a smile and the audience was on their feet in no time clapping for her. A few “Yeah, Ali!” shouts could be heard through the clapping and cheering. Ali stopped to smile at Ashlyn and her family one last time before going back to her seat.

Ken looked over beside him with slightly watery eyes to find Deb, Kyle, and Ashlyn with tears steadily streaming down their faces. He finally let his tears drop down too. Deb reached in her purse to pull out tissues and hand them out. Ashlyn finally dropped Kyle’s hand to see if she could save her mascara. She had used Ali’s makeup this morning and was hoping she had happened to put on the waterproof one.

Ashlyn was so caught up in everything Ali had said that the rest of the ceremony had gone by in a blur and she snapped back to reality once she heard names being called. When it was Ali’s turn to
cross the stage, Ashlyn cheered loudly. She yelled “I love you, Alex” so loud that her voice was raspy immediately after, earning smiles from the Kriegers. HAO crossed the stage a little while later and Hope a while after that, Ashlyn cheered loudly for them too. There were brief closing comments and the ceremony was over just like that, graduation caps flying through the air.

Ashlyn immediately went to find Ali in the crowd of graduates, finally spotting her and lifting her high in the air. Ali leaned right in to kiss Ashlyn deeply. They broke apart, Ashlyn finally putting Ali down.

Ashlyn was still feeling emotional and having trouble finding her words. “Alex, that speech…I’m so proud of you. I love you.” She managed to get out in her now raspy voice.

Ali gave her a beaming smile. “I know, love. I meant every word of that. I love you too.” Ali wrapped her hands around Ashlyn’s suspenders, pulling the blonde in to kiss her again. They stayed that way until they heard Ken’s signature throat clear behind them.

Ali pulled back, giving Ashlyn one last smile before they both looked up to see the Kriegers standing there smiling.

“Daddy!” Ali said going to hug Ken. “Congratulations, baby girl. I’m so proud of you.” Ken said hugging her tight before letting her go to Deb.

“That was incredible, sweetheart. You did so good, congratulations honey.” Deb said, holding Ali’s face. “Thanks, Mom.” Ali said sweetly before going to Kyle.

Kyle was sobbing and he just picked his sister up into a hug like he always did. “Geez, Alex, warn a guy when you’re going to get all sappy like that. Puffy eyes do not suit me.” Kyle joked trying to lighten the moment before getting serious again. “I’m really proud of you, Alex. You’re the reason I’m still here.”

Ali hugged him tighter. “I’m proud of you, big bro. You’re the reason I’m where I am right now, so let’s call it even.”

Ashlyn and the Kriegers spent the rest of the night celebrating with way too much food at a big dinner with HAO and Hope’s families. When it was all over, Ali and Ashlyn finally found themselves in the quiet darkness of the campus. Ali had one destination in mind. She led Ashlyn up to the Baker Library clock tower and stood at the top one more time, Ashlyn’s arms wrapped around her firmly from behind in silence. Ali took in the campus, the empty graduation stage below. She tried to remember all the times she’d stood up here, but none of them stuck out in her mind like the last two she’d shared with Ashlyn. She had always pictured herself being sad on this night and not ready to leave, but she was standing here content and happy, definitely ready to leave. She leaned her head back and took Ashlyn’s lips in hers. They eventually made their way across campus and back to Ali’s room.

Ali took in the emptiness of her dorm room, letting it hit her that this would be her last night here. She knew without question how she wanted to spend it and who she wanted to spend it with.

Ashlyn had been watching Ali quietly, she could tell the brunette was in deep thought tonight. There wasn’t any need for words, Ashlyn wanted Ali to have the time she needed to reflect. Ali stepped to her with a soft smile. She took off her clothes slowly and then took off Ashlyn’s in the same way until they were standing there naked in the middle of the room. Ashlyn leaned down to kiss Ali gently, sweetly.
“I love you.” Ashlyn mumbled against Ali’s lips.

Ali looked Ashlyn in the eye and whispered. “Show me. Love me. Love me til I can’t breathe.”

Ashlyn picked Ali up and carefully laid her down on the bed, she covered the brunette’s body with her own and set off to make sure that Ali never forgot her last night on the Dartmouth campus.
Ali pulled the door to her dorm room closed one last time, a symbolic way of closing that chapter of her life and moving on to the next. She took Ashlyn’s hand and they made their way to their cars. Ali followed Ashlyn’s Jeep to Northampton. She quickly dropped off a few things in the new apartment and then they dropped Ali’s car off with Tobin. Tobin had taken an internship at a local farm for the summer and was staying in Northampton. Ali found this very bizarre, but none of the Smithies seemed to question Tobin’s strange lifestyle, so Ali didn’t either. Tobin had agreed to take care of Ali’s car until she got back in late July.

Ali planned to spend the next six weeks in Florida, dividing her time between staying with Ashlyn and also going to visit with her Dad and Kyle in Miami. After that she’d spend two weeks in D.C. with her mom and Ashlyn before heading back to Northampton. She got in Ashlyn’s Jeep, eager for their road trip to Florida. Ali would finally be meeting Ashlyn’s grandma and Chris in person and she was excited and also a little nervous. Their car ride was filled with their usual banter, lots of stopping to eat at random places and take fun pictures like they usually did.

When they were about four hours away from Satellite Beach, Ali had started to fidget more, her nervousness becoming more apparent. Ali knew Ashlyn had noticed, but she knew she wasn’t the only one doing some thinking. Ashlyn had gotten noticeably quieter as they approached Florida.

“You look really anxious over there, Princess.” Ashlyn broke the silence.

“I’m nervous.” Ali said honestly.

“About what?” Ashlyn questioned.

“Meeting your family. I don’t know why. I guess I just want to make a good impression.” Ali replied quietly.

“Alex, you flew them out to Smith to visit me. You already made a great impression and they already love you. Relax, baby, it’s going to be great.” Ashlyn said encouragingly.

“Ok, I trust you, Harris.” Ali replied. “What about you, you’ve been awfully quiet the last couple of hours. You ok?”

“Yeah, mostly. I’m just thinking about some things. Nothing to worry about.” Ashlyn did her best to be upfront.

“You want to talk about it?” Ali asked concerned.

Ashlyn felt bad, she knew she should be warning Ali about the next couple of days. She knew she could talk to her, be vulnerable with her, but she just wasn’t quite ready yet. “Honestly, I’m not ready to. I will though, I promise.”
Ali didn’t push it any further. She knew Ashlyn would talk to her and let her in when it was the right time for her. She was still a little worried though, it had been a while since Ashlyn had been introspective like this.

It was around 3pm when they pulled up to a light blue house that sat along the Indian River, the outside décor typical of a Florida beach home.

“We’re here!” Ashlyn announced. Ali smiled starting to look around while Ashlyn came around to open her door for her. They had no sooner gotten out of the car when Chris came out the door and picked Ashlyn right up as easily as if she was a child, wrapping her up tightly in his large arms.

“Baby sis! I missed you!” He yelled in his deep voice.

“Missed you too, Bubba!” Ashlyn said with a smile.

Ali watched them, smiling widely at how cute it was. This type of sibling interaction naturally fit her and Kyle’s personalities, but seeing a big macho man like Chris and a tough woman like Ashlyn be so outwardly affectionate with each other really struck her. It was pretty clear what these two meant to each other. Before she knew what was happening, Ali was off the ground and being hugged tightly. Chris had wasted no time in welcoming her too. It was such a contrast to Kyle, who was trim and sculpted. Chris was tall, broad and brawny. Ali was completely engulfed by his large hands and strong arms, she understood now why Ashlyn always felt so protected by him.

“Ali! So good to meet you!” Chris exclaimed.

“Great to finally meet you too, Chris!” Ali said happily and feeling welcomed. Ashlyn stood beside them grinning.

“You are even more gorgeous than in the pictures, Ash showed me.” Chris said high fiving Ashlyn. Ali blushed at the bluntness. He continued. “Way to go, Ash! That Harris charm always works, you learned from the best.” Chris said using his thumb to point to himself while Ashlyn smiled smugly.

Ali interjected. “Oh, great, so there’s two of you with Harris charm, huh?”

“You know it! I taught her everything she knows. Although, I have to say that I think she’s probably outdone me here.” He said clearly referring to Ali. “I’m just going to hold out hope that there’s an Ali for me out there.” Chris said charmingly. Ashlyn laughed at her brother’s uncanny ability to lay it on thick.

“Hey, hey. This one’s mine!” Ashlyn chuckled putting and arm around Ali.

“Ok, that’s enough charm out of you two! Can’t have me swooning all day, I might pass out.” Ali joked.

“Alright, well, Ali… welcome to Casa Harris. Grandma is inside waiting for you two. She said she’s too old to go running outside all wildly.” Chris laughed and went around the back of the Jeep to grab their bags.

Ali followed Ashlyn up a small set of stairs and through an enclosed porch before they entered a fairly large living room area with comfy well-worn couches, a wooden coffee table, and a large tube TV. It looked like there was a kitchen just beyond the living room, but Ali didn’t get much of a chance to see it because Ashlyn’s grandmother walked through the doorway there.

“Gram!” Ashlyn said excitedly and pulled Ali with her towards her grandma. Ashlyn was about to wrap her arms around the woman when her grandma completely bypassed her and went straight to
hug a surprised Ali.

“Well, ok then. I see how it is.” Ashlyn feigned being offended, her smiling face giving her away.

“Ali, I’m so happy you’re here. I couldn’t wait for you two to get here so I could meet the pretty woman who has turned my cynical Ashlyn into a blubbering puddle of goo.” Ashlyn’s grandma said, making Ali laugh.

“I’m happy to be here. Ash talks so much about you and I’m so glad to finally meet you…uh, actually I don’t know what to call you. Ashlyn always calls you grandma.” Ali said frankly.

“Well you can just call me grandma too, honey. Everyone does and I’m used to it.” Grandma replied.

“Ok, grandma it is.” Ali said, hugging the old woman one more time.

Grandma moved the short distance to Ashlyn. “Hi, sweetie. It’s good to have you home.”

Ashlyn hugged her grandma tight, burying her face into her shoulder. “Good to see you, Gram. I missed you like crazy.”

Grandma stepped back and pushed Ali and Ashlyn together. “Let me just look at you two. You are just beautiful together, so radiant.” She said admiring them. Ashlyn turned red and so did Ali. “Ok, Ashlyn, show her the rest of the house and you two go get settled upstairs before you make this sentimental old woman cry.”

Ashlyn showed Ali the large kitchen with lots of counter space and cabinets, a medium-sized table in the corner where it was clear most of the meals were eaten. There was a formal dining room off the kitchen with an ornate china cabinet and dark wooded table and chairs, but the room looked barely used.

“Come on, best part.” Ashlyn said walking Ali out of a sliding door near the kitchen. She walked Ali out onto a large two-level wooden deck. The Indian River running right alongside it, the view was beautiful. There was a matching wooden table on one level of the deck and to the left on the lower level was a medium-sized kidney shaped pool. Ali pressed herself back into Ashlyn whose arms went around the brunette like always. They took in the serene view for a few minutes before Ashlyn said. “Let me show you the upstairs and my room.”

Ashlyn led them back inside and up a long staircase. At the top was a hallway with five doors off of it. Ashlyn stood at the beginning of the hallway to point out the rooms for each door. “This first one on the left is grandma’s room. The one on the back left is a bathroom. The first room on the right is Chris’ room, the middle one on the right is the other bathroom, and the back right is my room.” Ashlyn said. The hallway walls had artistic hangings of butterflies on them. Ali looked at them, remembering what Ashlyn had told her about her grandma’s love for butterflies. Her hand went subconsciously to rest over Ashlyn’s side where the brunette knew an inked butterfly lay underneath her shirt; a blue butterfly she had traced with her fingers many times.

The gesture was not missed by Ashlyn. She took Ali’s hand and led her to the doorway of each room so she could peak inside, finally arriving at her own room. She opened the door and let Ali in ahead of her. Ali wandered around the room taking it all in. It wasn’t at all what she expected.

The walls were pink and the furniture was white, giving it a very feminine feel. In the center of the room was a full-size bed with a navy blue comforter and green throw pillows. The far wall had a large bay window that overlooked the deck below and had a beautiful view of the river. There walls were mostly bare save for a couple of surf posters. A long board was propped up in one corner of the
room. There was a closet with a sliding door that was currently open and Ali could see it was mostly empty. The dresser was covered in framed pictures and above the dresser was a shelf with trophies and awards, many of them appeared to be soccer trophies.

Ali made her way to the dresser and started looking at the pictures. Aside from one picture with the Smith Rugby team, the rest were all much older. There were pictures of Ashlyn as a child and teenager with soccer teams, baseball teams, and basketball teams. She was the only girl in all of these pictures. There was a picture of a young Ashlyn and Chris with their parents. A picture of Ashlyn from high school graduation with her grandma and Chris. The largest framed picture was of a guy smiling widely at the baby in his arms; Ashlyn and her Dad.

Ali carefully looked at each picture, smiling at how adorable Ashlyn was as a kid and how much she had grown up. The pictures also broke her heart though. In just about every picture Ali had ever seen of anyone as a kid, the thing they all had in common is that they always looked happy and carefree; the innocence of being children. It’s not like Ashlyn looked sad in these pictures, but the carefree innocence wasn’t there. Even in the pictures where she was really young, Ali could see the hard lines of the life she had etched in her face. It was heartbreaking. In their intimate moments together, Ashlyn’s eyes always seemed to shine and to have light in them. Ali looked at these pictures and wondered if that light had ever been there before her. It didn’t really matter whether it had, but it made Ali feel resigned to making sure that it was always there going forward. Ashlyn broke her from her thoughts.

“So, what do you think?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali smiled at her. “It’s so pink! Honestly, not what I expected…but there’s still so much of you in it. I love it.”

“Yeah. I wasn’t kidding when I said my mom wanted a princess. I relented on some things, obviously.” Ashlyn laughed lightly pointing at the pink walls.

Ali didn’t say anything. She just closed the space between her and Ashlyn and kissed the blonde as lovingly as she possibly could.

Ashlyn felt her heart skip as Ali’s warm lips moved against hers. She let out a barely audible moan and pulled back to look at her favorite amber eyes. Her lips curled into a smile. This was already the single best moment she’d ever had in this room and she still had so many more days with Ali staying here.

“Come on, Princess, let’s go see what grandma is up to.” Ashlyn said giving Ali one more quick kiss before they made their way back downstairs.

Chris had gone out to pick up some fresh veggies for salad and Grandma was in the kitchen getting ready to start dinner.

“What’s for dinner, Gram? Can we help?” Ashlyn asked.

“You already know darn well what dinner will be.” Grandma said matter-of-factly.

Ashlyn fist pumped in the air, knowing she was getting her favorite. “Best mac and cheese ever! Just wait, you’ll love it.” She said to Ali.

Grandma pointed at Ashlyn. “You go keep yourself busy. Ali is gonna help me with dinner.”

Ashlyn raised an eyebrow. “Oh, um, Gram…yeah I dunno if Ali being in the kitchen is a great idea. She’s not exactly Top Chef if you know what I mean.” Ali slapped Ashlyn on the arm.
“Nonsense. Someone has to learn how to make this for you when I’m not there to cook for you. You look so damn skinny, they don’t feed you at school apparently.” Grandma said persistently. “Now go relax. There’s fresh coffee over there if you want some.”

Ashlyn gave Ali a smile. Ali didn’t know what a big deal this was. Grandma had never ever shared her mac and cheese recipe. Ashlyn made herself a cup of coffee and headed out onto the deck.

Ali worked alongside Grandma in the kitchen. The older woman had made cooking seem so easy and Ali felt relieved that she was able to follow along and be helpful. They made small talk, Ali telling Grandma more about herself and her family, about her new job, and what graduation had been like.

Ali looked up, out the sliding door she could see Ashlyn sitting at the table looking out over the river. She looked to be in deep thought and kind of sad. Ali felt her heart drop a bit.

Grandma saw the concerned look on Ali’s face. “The first couple days of the summer here are hard for her, she’ll be ok, don’t worry.” Grandma reassured her.

Ali nodded, but she felt anything but reassured. Ali knew how Ashlyn felt about coming back to Satellite Beach, but when they left Miami with everything that happened there, Ashlyn seemed to feel better about it. So, Ali hadn’t expected this. She wondered if she had missed something. Had she been so caught up in thinking everything was fine that she hadn’t picked up on Ashlyn struggling.

Ali felt like there was a rock in her stomach. Her thoughts were interrupted when Chris came in to drop groceries off in the kitchen.

“Hello, lovely ladies. Where is Ash?” He asked.

“On the deck. Go cheer her up.” Grandma said. She and Chris shared a knowing look with each other that just further confirmed for Ali that she was definitely missing something.

Ali watched Chris sit down next to Ashlyn. The two them talked for a few minutes, it looked serious. She saw Chris’ hand grip Ashlyn’s forearm, the other hand going to Ashlyn’s face. Ashlyn had turned her face just enough for Ali to see there were tears on it that Chris was wiping.

Grandma tried to distract her. “Will you grab me that spoon, Ali?” Ali went to grab it, feeling shaky now. Grandma addressed Ali, forcing the brunette to turn away from watching Ashlyn and Chris.

“You know, Ali. I’ve worried about her so much until you came along. She’s smart and she’s strong, I’ve always known she could do great things. I spent years telling her over and over that she would eventually come out on top even after everything that happened. I knew that she could, but I just worried that when it came down to it, she wouldn’t let herself. I promised her she’d eventually find someone wonderful, but I constantly worried that when that person came along, she wouldn’t let them in. But, here you are.” Grandma smiled at Ali and continued. “She truly loves you. She’s not even the same person anymore. She’s happy like I’ve never known her to be, it’s magnificent. You’re it for her you know. And in my opinion, she couldn’t have found a better person.”

Ali was touched, she struggled to find words, but she owed it to this great woman who raised the love of her life to find them. “I really love her too. She’s everything to me. Everything that you dream about when you’re younger and then grow up to think isn’t possible. But she’s all of that. She’s strong, and kind, and caring, and selfless. After all she’s been through, I don’t know how anyone can go through that and still be all those things, but she is. She obviously had someone great in her life to model herself after.” Ali smiled at Grandma before continuing. “There isn’t a single part of her that I’m not completely in love with. She makes me happy, makes me feel like anything is possible. She’s it for me too.”
Grandma just smiled. “Oh, I know. I already told everyone in this dam town that you two are married. I’m never wrong, dear. Ashlyn can tell you that.” She took Ali’s hand. “We’re not the most conventional family, Ali. But you’re definitely one of us.”

Before Ali could respond they were interrupted by Ashlyn and Chris coming in. Ashlyn gave Ali a kiss on the cheek. “How’s it going in here, Chef Princess?”

Ali leaned into Ashlyn a bit. Grandma’s words and Ashlyn’s touch had done a lot to calm her. “Good. I think we’ll be ready for dinner soon.”

Ashlyn had been right, it was the best mac and cheese Ali had ever had. Actually it was one of the best dinners she had ever had. Even better was that Grandma had made sure Ali was confident enough to cook it herself, so she would definitely be able to surprise Ashlyn with it some time. Dinner with Ashlyn’s family felt so down home and comfortable, it was nice.

Chris said he would do the dishes while Ali and Ashlyn cleared the table. Ashlyn made herself a cup of tea and headed out to the deck while Ali was finishing wrapping up leftovers. What she really need right now was a beer, but they didn’t drink in the house because of Chris, so she had gone with the next best thing.

When Ali finished in the kitchen she went outside. She found Ashlyn sitting on edge of the deck, feet dangling down just above the water below, her arms rested on the railing in front of her chest. Ali quietly sat down next to her. Ashlyn had been so wrapped up in her thoughts she didn’t even hear Ali come out until the brunette was right beside her.

“Hey.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“Hi.” Ali replied. She could feel the heaviness pouring off of Ashlyn, it made her unsettled. It seemed like everyone in the house knew what was going on but her, she was a bit frustrated and feeling helpless. “Can I do anything?”

Ashlyn just shook her head no.

Ali’s frustration got the best of her, before she could think she blurted out “You don’t have to be a hero, Ash. You don’t have to deal with everything by yourself.” It came out with more bite than she had intended. She could see the hurt look on Ashlyn’s face as soon as she had said it.

“I’m…” Ashlyn sighed. “I’m sorry, I’m not used to…” Ali cut her off.

“No, don’t. I didn’t mean for it to come out like that. I’m just worried about you and worry makes me a little crazy sometimes. What I meant to say was just that I’m here. I’m always here.” Ali said carefully.

Ashlyn’s face relaxed, she grabbed Ali’s hand and squeezed it. “I know. And it means the world to me. There are things I’m still working on being ok with.” That was all she could manage at the moment.

“Ok. And if and when you’re ready to tell me or talk about it, I’m right here. I’ll drop my crazy and be patient, promise,” Ali smiled slightly and leaned her head on Ashlyn’s shoulder. Ashlyn leaned her head on Ali’s, the conversation over for the time being.

They eventually settled into bed together. Ashlyn gave Ali a soft kiss goodnight and held on to her tightly. Ali was tired, her eyes wandered the unfamiliar room for a while before eventually closing when she succumbed to her sleepiness. The first time Ali woke up, she looked up to see Ashlyn’s eyes wide open and staring up at the ceiling. The red numbers glowing from the digital clock across
the room read 12:36am. She cupped the blonde’s face with her hand. “You ok, Ash?” Ashlyn never answered, her body just started shaking against Ali’s and just like that she was sobbing. Ali held her close and stroked her hair, telling her it would be ok even though she had no idea what she was reassuring her about. The uneasy heavy feeling had settled into Ali’s stomach again. After what seemed like at least an hour, Ashlyn had cried herself to sleep. Ali’s eyes were heavy again and she fell asleep too.

The second time Ali woke up, she found the bed empty, the sheets cold beside her. It was 6:52am and she wondered where Ashlyn was. She didn’t have to look too far for an answer, there was a note on Ashlyn’s pillow.

Princess,

Went to catch a few waves and get my head right. Promise I’ll take you with me next time. Be back soon. I love you, beautiful.

-Ash

Ali tried for a while to go back to sleep, but it was useless. She took a shower and got dressed. Then she slipped downstairs and made herself some coffee. She sat at the table in the kitchen and looked over the newspaper from the day before that was sitting there. About 15 minutes later, Ashlyn came in. She was wearing board shorts and a t-shirt with wet spots on it from where her wet bikini top was making contact with it. Her hair was damp and tousled. Ali smiled at her and Ashlyn came over to give her a gentle kiss.

“Morning, Princess.” Ashlyn said sweetly. Ali had hoped Ashlyn would come back feeling better, but she could still feel the heaviness pouring off her girlfriend.

“Morning, Stud.” Ali replied, working hard to keep things light and normal.

“Didn’t mean to leave you all by yourself. I forgot Grandma would be out early to help out at the nursing home and Chris had to open up today at work.” Ashlyn said feeling bad.

“Oh. I just thought they were sleeping.” Ali said, not having realized she was by herself. No wonder it had been so quiet.

“Is it ok if I go shower?” Ashlyn asked.

“Totally!” Ali replied. She sat out on the deck enjoying the warm morning sun until she heard the sliding door open behind her. She looked back to see Ashlyn wearing a pair of gray linen shorts, a navy blue v-neck t-shirt and a pair of flip flops. She looked kind of nervous.

Ali was about to tell Ashlyn how good she looked, but Ashlyn was already beside her talking fast and determined like she had been willing herself to just spit it out. “I need to go somewhere right now, and I really don’t know if I can. I need to try though, and… will you come with me?”


Ashlyn just nodded and they made their way to the car. Ali didn’t know what this was all about, she was nervous. Ashlyn wasn’t usually so unhinged and unsettled, she was usually the calm one. If Ashlyn was anxious, Ali’s anxiety was through the roof.

Ali didn’t have to wait very long to begin understanding. After a short drive, Ashlyn had pulled into a cemetery and seemed to be driving almost on auto-pilot as she maneuvered her way to a lawn with about ten gravestones on it and a small man-made pond in the middle. She parked the car and Ali
watched her grip the steering wheel so tight her knuckles were white and let out a few deep breaths. Ashlyn reached in the back seat to grab a bouquet of white lilies that Ali hadn’t noticed until now. Then she got out of the car; Ali followed.

Ashlyn stood on the edge of the lawn. Ali could see she was shaking and looked like she was ready to head right back into the Jeep. Ashlyn tried to explain, her voice cracking through shallow breaths. “I haven’t been here since my mom’s funeral.”

Ali took her hand securely and made sure she spoke so Ashlyn could hear her clearly. “Come on. Together, ok?”

Ashlyn nodded and walked the short distance to the leftmost gravestone. It was gray and simple with an engraving of flowers that looked a lot like the one’s inked into Ashlyn’s side. The name Harris etched in large letters at the top. Ali took one look at it and finally understood what she had been missing over the last few days. She couldn’t have known, but she knew now.

*Michael Harris July 8, 1966 – June 4, 2010*

*Tammye Harris August 16, 1966 – December 3, 2010.*

June 4, 2010… today was June 4, 2015…Ashlyn’s dad had died 5 years ago today. Ali swallowed down the lump in her throat, she needed to hold it together right now more than ever. Ashlyn needed her. She wrapped her hand around Ashlyn’s hand that was holding the flowers and helped the blonde steady it enough to put the flowers in the empty vase attached to the base of the gravestone.

Ashlyn plopped herself down on the grass and leaned forward, her elbows resting on her knees. Ali sat down next to her and listen to Ashlyn try to steady her breathing. Ashlyn’s voice broke the silence.

“Ok. Ok. I’m going to do this, I am.” Ashlyn willed herself. Ali looked on curiously with concern. Ashlyn continued. “Hi Dad, Hi Mom.” She paused again and then rambled. “Ugh, this feels so weird and crazy. For some reason, I’m still not over this even though it’s 5 years. Chris said his therapist told him to do this and it helped him, so I have nothing lose right. Crazy it is. Ok.”

Ali just watched silently, she wasn’t exactly sure if Ashlyn was talking to her, or her parents, or herself. It didn’t matter though, she was obviously trying to do something and Ali was there to support her. She reached over and took Ashlyn’s hand in hers, squeezing it encouragingly.

Ashlyn felt the warmth of Ali’s hand and she was ready. “Hi guys. It’s been a long time since I’ve been here. Shitty of me, I know. It’s not because I haven’t wanted to, I’ve just been scared to face it. Ironic given that I’m a reckless daredevil about everything else. I miss you. A lot. All the time. It kills me not to have you here, for you to see what I’ve been doing and to share stuff with you. Today’s a good day to catch you up though. I’m halfway through college now, and not just any college, but a good one… in New England. Crazy, right? I decided I want to be a marine biologist, so fear not, my Florida girl ocean obsession is still intact. I quit soccer a long time ago, sorry Dad. I play rugby now,
and I’m pretty good at it. It’s like a cross between soccer and football, I think you guys would like it.” Ashlyn paused to catch her breath for a second, looking down to see one of Ali’s hands in hers and the other gripping her tattooed forearm. She continued on.

“So, lots of tattoos now as you can see. You hate them, don’t you Mom? Still not a princess, sorry. Dad probably thinks they’re badass though. I love them and love putting art on my body that is meaningful. Actually, pretty much this whole arm sleeve is dedicated to you guys. What really freaks me out is that sometimes when I’m trying hard to remember you guys, I find that more and more slips away. Like I forget exactly what your voices sounded like, and what you smelled like, and sometimes even what your faces looked like up close. I hate that, it hurts. I don’t want to forget that stuff. I feel like the tattoos make you a permanent part of me.” A few tears rolled down Ashlyn’s face. Ali let a few of her own fall too as she moved her hand to wipe away Ashlyn’s.

“I hate not having you here to tell you things. I actually can’t believe that I’ve done good things with my life and I want you here to show you that and share that with you. And, frankly, to do things like this… Dad, Mom, this is Ali. My girlfriend. I really love her, like she’s-the-one love her. I know Dad, she’s beautiful, I did good. She’s smart, and funny, she takes good care of me, her family is incredible, and she could kick my ass any day on the rugby pitch. I know you’d appreciate that, Dad. And I know what you’re thinking mom… ‘A girl? Really, Ashlyn?’ Yep, a girl, Mom. Seriously, you can’t be that surprised. Besides, she’s a total princess and I even call her that. You’d love her. So yeah, Mom, Dad… this is Ali. Alex, these are my parents.” Ashlyn was about to continue when she heard Ali’s voice.

“Mr. and Mrs. Harris, it’s nice to meet you.” Ali said confidently.

Ashlyn hadn’t expected Ali to join her in this, but she was extremely grateful that she had. She squeezed Ali’s hand. “They’ve would’ve made you call them Mike and Tam, so you can go with that.” Ali nodded and smiled.

“We never had the perfect family growing up, but I can now appreciate everything we did have. We still had each other, and I miss that. It pains me that I couldn’t fully appreciate it then, but that’s the cruelty of life isn’t it. We don’t know what we have until it isn’t there anymore. But I can always do this, right… come here, and tell you things. Yeah, I promise I’m going to do this more. I feel better, I feel more ok than I have in years. Chris is smart sometimes, rarely, but it happens on occasion.” Ashlyn let out a small chuckle and then got silent.

After a few minutes, Ali spoke up. “Ash, is it ok of I say something?”

Ashlyn nodded, a bit surprised.
“Mike and Tam, um, I just want you to know how great of a person you raised. I love your daughter and I couldn’t feel luckier to have her in my life. Mike, she talks about you a lot, like you’re a superhero. It melts my heart and I hope you know how much you mean to her. Tam, if you’re surprised to see Ashlyn with me, imagine how I felt. I’d never even thought about dating a woman before her, but she stole my heart. And you know, princesses are stereotypically dainty, and girly, and submissive. Ash is definitely none of those things. But I’ve watched enough Disney movies to know that princesses are also strong, and loyal, and leaders. Ashlyn is definitely all of those things. So, maybe you got more of a princess than you think you did after all, even if she’ll never own up to that. I wish this meeting was different, that I had actually gotten to know you. From what I do know, it seems like so much of the two of you is in Ashlyn. I’m happy to meet you in some way though, even like this. Because I do want to thank you for bringing such an amazing person into this world. I feel like she was put here for me, so really thanks. Best. Gift. Ever. You may not be here, but I am. And I promise that I will always love your daughter and protect her.” Ali finished with a small smile.

Ashlyn wiped the tears that had fallen down her face again. “Ok, well, see… I guess I don’t have to go on and on about how awesome my girlfriend is anymore. Although, I probably will again, so expect that. Yeah I know, you totally love her. Told you so.” Ashlyn gave Ali a small smile before finishing. “So, this was good. I’m going to go be a good girlfriend and show Ali around Satellite Beach now. I’ll be back though, I promise I won’t stay away so long anymore. I love you guys.”

With that, Ashlyn got up. She brushed her hand briefly across the gravestone and started back to the car. Ali followed.

Ashlyn paused at the edge of the lawn to look back and let out a deep breath. Ali pulled her into a hug. Everything that needed to be said already had been, but Ali still wanted to make sure Ashlyn was ok. She whispered in the blonde’s ear. “I love you, Ash. Thanks for introducing me.”

Ashlyn pulled back to look Ali in the eye. “I love you, Alex. Thank you for doing this with me.”

Ali felt Ashlyn’s lips press against hers in a gentle heartfelt kiss. She could feel that the heaviness in Ashlyn was gone, she felt lighter herself.
Surf's Up

Chapter Notes

Starting the weekend on a good note ;)

After leaving the cemetery it was clear that Ashlyn was feeling a lot better. Her calm was back, the playful banter right on the tip of her tongue as usual. Ali felt a lot better too. She knew that today was still an emotional one, but it had taken on a more positive vibe after the morning visit with Ashlyn’s parents. Ashlyn had some part of her touching Ali at all times since they had left the cemetery. They were feeling particularly close to each other right now as they drove around Satellite Beach with Ashlyn pointing out different things to Ali.

Not surprisingly, Ashlyn had driven down the coast first to show Ali the beach. They got out and took a short walk in the hot sand.

“So, is this where you surf?” Ali asked looking down the beach.

“Mostly. I have another spot I like to go to too, but the bigger waves are here.” Ashlyn answered. “Maybe tomorrow I can take you surfing?”

“I’d like that. Go easy on me though. One lesson in Miami doesn’t make me a pro surfer like you.” Ali warned.

“You were actually really good. For a first try, I was impressed.” Ashlyn said sweetly.

“Really? So you weren’t just saying all that stuff to get into my pants, Harris?” Ali teased.

“Of course not!” Ashlyn defended before she stopped walking and got a pondering look on her face. “Weeelll, actually, maybe just a little?” Ashlyn said in a quiet playful tone. Ali smacked her on the arm lightly. “What, Krieger? You’re hot, that’s never been in question. And while I definitely wanted your heart, your ass was at the top of the list too.” Ashlyn winked.

Ali shook her head. “I will never understand how you manage to be so sweet and yet so inappropriate too.”

“Oh please, don’t act like you don’t have a bad girl side. In fact, I really like it when she comes out to play.” Ashlyn waggled her eyebrows.

Ali smirked. “You’re impossible.”

“You love it.” Ashlyn replied.


“Oh geez, you must be starving. I didn’t even feed you this morning! Nice girlfriend I am!” Ashlyn said.

“Relax. I’m hungry now, but I wasn’t before. Besides, we had more important things to do this morning.” Ali leaned more into Ashlyn’s side and felt the blonde’s arm wrap around her and pull her
“Do you like barbeque? Cause I have a great place to take you if you do.” Ashlyn asked.

“Love it. I’m totally up for that.” Ali answered.

They made their way off the beach and back to the car. Ashlyn pulled up to a rundown shack looking restaurant with a sign that said ‘J.R.’s Real BBQ’ and had a pig in overalls on it. Ali let out a small laugh at the sign. Ashlyn laughed with her.

“I know. It doesn’t look like much, but trust me. This was my Dad’s favorite place to eat.” Ashlyn said.

“I’m sure I’ll love it. You don’t usually steer me wrong.” Ali replied ready to eat.

The inside looked a lot better than the outside. It looked more like a typical pub inside with a bar in the far corner and two pool tables near it. The other side of the restaurant had several booths and tables, a juke box against one of the walls.

Ashlyn led Ali to a booth and chose to sit beside the brunette rather than across from her. She didn’t care if they looked like that annoying couple, she wanted to be as close to Ali today as she possibly could.

Ali certainly didn’t mind. She smiled feeling Ashlyn slide into the booth beside her, her hand going right to rest on the blonde’s thigh. A couple seconds later a dark haired girl about their age wearing dark jeans, a white t-shirt and a red apron strolled up to their booth looking down at a notepad. “Hi. I’m Karyn, I’ll be your waitress today. Can I start you with something to drink?” She said finally looking up from her notepad. “Ashlyn Harris?! Is that you?” The girl asked animatedly.


“I barely recognized you! You look so different, girl, you look good! Wow. I haven’t seen you in a couple years, where did you disappear to?” Karyn asked.

“Oh um, college, in Massachusetts. I have two years left. I’m just home since I’m working down here for a few weeks this summer.” Ashlyn answered politely. “What about you, how have you been?”

“Same old for me. Still working here obviously. And still with Phil. Oh and we have a baby girl now, Briana! She’s 4 months. I just came back to work two days ago, I’m glad I didn’t miss you coming in.” Karyn explained.

“Oh wow! Congrats to you and Phil, that’s awesome!” Ashlyn said genuinely and noticed Karyn’s eyes look towards Ali. “Oh, where are my manners today. Sorry! Ali, this is Karyn, we used to play soccer together. Karyn, this is Ali, my…”

Ali could tell Ashlyn was about to hesitate so she jumped right in. “Hi, I’m Ali, Ashlyn’s wife. Nice to meet you.” She said extending her hand to Karyn, who shook it. Ashlyn let a small smirk cross her face.

“Well, I heard around here that you got married to total knock out. Looks like that wasn’t just a rumor after all!” Karyn said kindly. “You two look really good together. You look happy, Ash.”

“Thanks, Karyn. I am. You still playing soccer in the adult pick-up league in town?” Ashlyn asked.
“I was until the baby, so, I haven’t played in a while. Maybe I’ll try to get back into it if I find the time. What about you, ever play again?” Karyn replied.

“No. I play rugby now though. That’s how Ali and I met, she played for an opposing team. Actually, Ali played soccer before too.” Ashlyn said proudly.

“That’s great! You should’ve seen this one as a goalie, Ali. Complete beast, so fearless. It was fun to watch her and be on her team.” Karyn said nicely.

“Aww, I bet. I still have to get her to take me out on the soccer field someday so I can try and score on her.” Ali challenged. Ashlyn jokingly raised an eyebrow.

“Well, good luck! I was never able to do it. Anyway, you ladies obviously came here hungry! Sorry to delay your lunch. The usual for you, Ash?” Karyn asked.

“Definitely.” Ashlyn replied excitedly.

“And what can I get you?” Karyn looked at Ali.

“Oh um…” Ali said scrambling to look over the menu she hadn’t even opened yet. “Actually, maybe Ash should just order for me?” Ali said smiling at the blonde.

Karyn nodded and looked at Ashlyn.

“Hmmmm, ok. Ali will do the pulled chicken sandwich with the spicy waffle fries. Oh, and we’ll both have water.” Ashlyn ordered.

“Perfect. I’ll have it out soon.” Karyn replied, heading off to the kitchen.

“She seems sweet.” Ali said after Karyn left.

“Yeah, she is. She was never the brightest, but always one of the kindest. Her dad owns this place.” Ashlyn explained. “So, hi, wife.” Ashlyn said with a grin.

Ali smiled back. “Well, I’m not one to fuel a rumor… buuuut, I really happen to like this one.” She took her thumb ring off under the table and grabbed Ashlyn’s hand. “And, if we’re going to make this believable, we better do it right, Harris.” She said slipping the ring on Ashlyn’s ring finger.

Ashlyn looked down at the plain silver band Ali usually wore on her thumb and smiled. “Right.” She said taking off the titanium band with waves etched into it that she wore on her index finger and slipping it on Ali’s ring finger. “I really like being pretend married to you, Krieger.”

“Me too, Harris.” Ali replied squeezing Ashlyn’s hand. “So, what’s ‘the usual?’” Ali asked, breaking them away from the moment before either of them said anything they probably shouldn’t right now.

“Brisket sandwich with extra barbeque sauce, coleslaw, and a side of baked beans.” Ashlyn replied. “I figured we could share.”

“That sounds so good.” Ali couldn’t wait to eat. The food came shortly after and everything tasted delicious. Ali was amazed that anything this good could come out of a place that looked the way this one did. After eating and a quick round of pool which Ali won, they said goodbye to Karyn briefly and then headed out. It was already almost mid-afternoon and they’d have to be back at the house in a couple hours to help grandma with dinner.

“Where to next?” Ali asked.
“Skate park.” Ashlyn said.

Ashlyn took Ali to the skate park not too far from the Harris home, the ocean providing a nice backdrop in the distance. They sat on the bench watching skaters of all ages trying to work on tricks and skills. Ashlyn explained that this was her favorite place to come when she was young. Ali had heard her talk about it before. It had been Ashlyn’s escape, she was free here, reckless here, and able to let her mind work through things.

They watched for a while until a tall, lanky, older guy with several tattoos and spikey brown hair came over to them carrying his skateboard by his side. “Hey, Ash! I thought that was you. Been a while, dudette!” He said.

“Hey, Todd! I know!” Ashlyn got up to give him a one-armed hug. This time she didn’t want to forget to introduce Ali right away. “Todd, this is Ali. Ali, this is Chris’ good friend Todd. He kinda taught me how to skate.”

“So this the THE Ali! Chris told me all about you. Damn, Ashlyn.” Todd said nudging Ashlyn with his shoulder and shaking the hand of a blushing Ali.

“Nice to meet you, Todd.” Ali said with a smile.

“How are Jill and Skylar?” Ashlyn asked.

“They’re good! Dude, Skylar is so big. Check this out.” He pulled out his wallet to show Ashlyn and Ali a picture of a little girl with light hair and big brown eyes.

“She’s beautiful, and geez, yeah, so grown up!” Ashlyn said incredulously.

“I know, right?! Time flies. Speaking of, you gonna skate?” Todd asked.

“Nah, not today. Just wanted to show Ali the skate park, but maybe another night I’ll take you up on it.” Ashlyn answered simply.

“Alright, alright. Fair enough. Just don’t leave Florida without saying goodbye this time.” Todd waved a finger at her.

“Deal, dude.” Ashlyn replied watching Todd skate off.

She settled back on the bench next to Ali.

“So, does everyone around here have a kid?” Ali asked, she had gotten quite an education today about what being in Satellite Beach was like. It made her appreciate more and more how hard Ashlyn had worked to get out of here.

Ashlyn laughed. “Yeah, kinda. It’s like there’s really not much else for people here. You either get out or you stay here and work, get married, and pop out kids.” Ali nodded and followed Ashlyn’s eyes to see her watching a young girl skating. The girl was trying to drop in to a steep ramp on the edge of the skate park, but kept falling before she could make it to the bottom. “Be right back.” Ashlyn said. Ali watched her go over to the girl.

Ashlyn approached the girl who was geared up with a helmet and pads and frustrated, she couldn’t have been more than eight or nine years old. “Hey, what’s your name?” Ashlyn asked.

“Uh, Kayla.” The girl replied.
“Hey, Kayla. I’m Ashlyn. I grew up here and used to skate here a lot.” Ashlyn said with smile. “Mind if I borrow your board to show you something?”

Kayla shrugged and handed Ashlyn her skateboard.

“So, I was watching you and I have to say it’s awesome that you’re brave enough to be trying to drop in on this thing. You’re as crazy as I was when I was your age. You’re so close too.” Ashlyn encouraged her.

“It sucks, I can’t get it without falling.” Kayla replied.

“I saw that. So, when you drop in, I noticed you lean back and put weight on your back leg. If you do the exact opposite and lean forward and put weight on your front leg, bending your knee… I think you’ll have it. Want me to show you?” Ashlyn offered. Kayla nodded enthusiastically.

Ashlyn stared down at the ramp and let out a deep breath, it had been a while since she did this. Ali watched from afar and cringed when she realized Ashlyn was going to go down this ramp with no padding or helmet on.

Ashlyn dropped down the ramp and immediately it all came right back to her. She shot right to the bottom and went up another ramp across the way, coming down and picking up speed to go back up the original ramp and pop up beside Kayla. Ali let out the breath she had been holding in relief and let herself admire how amazing that just was.

Ashlyn handed Kayla her board. “So, kinda like that. You try it.”

Kayla positioned herself and did what Ashlyn said, getting to the bottom with no problem before turning back to wave at Ashlyn with a huge smile. “Thanks!”

Ashlyn waved back and yelled “Anytime!” before going back and settling next to Ali.

Ali nudged her. “So that was freakin’ adorable. Is there anything you’re not good at?” Ali asked sweetly.

“Yep… resisting you, Krieger.” Ashlyn said matter-of-factly.

After watching that interaction with the skater girl and the conversation they had just prior to that, the question came tumbling out of Ali’s mouth before she could stop it. “Hey, Ash. Do you want kids?”

Ashlyn looked a little shocked, thinking about it and trying to come up with the right words before realizing just being honest was the best bet. “Uh, I um, I did when I was younger.”

“Oh ok.” Ali deflated a bit. She had always pictured kids in her future, but then again, she had always pictured a husband too. It had been more of a curiosity question, her and Ashlyn were nowhere near that level yet. She was a little surprised by Ashlyn’s answer, but she loved her and she’d get over it eventually she figured.

Ashlyn could see the look on Ali’s face. “I wasn’t done.” She said before continuing. “I used to always want kids, I love them. But then I guess being here in this place and then all the stuff that happened, I realized maybe bringing a kid into the world and into my messed up life wasn’t the best idea.”

Ali nodded in understanding, she supposed it made sense for Ashlyn to feel that way.

“But, then there’s you.” Ashlyn said picking up Ali’s chin to look in her eyes. “I um, honestly… I
want kids with you, Alex.”

Ali smiled widely and didn’t even answer. She just kissed Ashlyn hard, leaving them both a bit breathless when they finally pulled apart.

“Come on, Princess. Let’s get home and help with dinner.” Ashlyn said leaving the conversation where it was and leading Ali back to the car to head home.

Ashlyn and Chris grilled steaks while Ali and Grandma made mashed potatoes and salad inside. The mood in the house was a little bit somber, but it was still comfortable. The day had been punctuated with Ashlyn pointing out places that she had done things with her Dad or that had some significance to their relationship. Dinner had gone much the same way with Chris, Ashlyn, and Grandma telling old stories about their Dad. Some of them were serious, others were funny. It wasn’t sad by any means, it was just a fond reminiscence and Ali was so touched by it and glad she was there to be a part of it.

Ali had held Ashlyn in bed quietly for a while, spooning the blonde from behind and stroking her arms. After a while Ashlyn broke the silence. “I’m so thankful for you, Alex. I mean it.”


Ashlyn turned around in Ali’s arms and kissed her slowly for what seemed like hours. It wasn’t sexual, it was just a way to be close after a hard day.

Ashlyn’s alarm blared through the room at 6:00am. Ali groaned loudly while Ashlyn reached to turn it off.

“Come on, Princess! Surf’s up!” Ashlyn said excitedly.

Ali struggled to open her eyes. “This early?”

“Yep, waves are best in the morning. Get up, we need to get going.” Ashlyn directed.

“Ok. Ok.” Ali said rolling out of bed. “What should I wear?”

“We’re not doing anything intense, so normal swimsuit is fine. Just make sure you have shorts on that you can wear over the bikini bottoms, makes it easier to surf.” Ashlyn suggested, putting on a black Hurley bikini top and matching black board shorts.

Ali quickly threw on a black and white striped bikini that wasn’t too skimpy and put a pair of black shorts on over the bottoms. She used the mirror to put on her waterproof mascara and quickly brushed her hair while Ashlyn just shook her head and threw a snapback on over her untamed blonde locks. She walked over and kissed Ali. “Mmmm, morning beautiful. Now, let’s go already.”

Ali could tell by Ashlyn’s chipper mood that today was going to be a lot different than yesterday. Ashlyn strapped two smaller surfboards and one large one to the Jeep and they were on their way. “What the big board?” Ali asked.

“Oh, that’s a surfing longboard. It holds more weight and it’s more stable, a bit different, so I figured I might have you try that too.” Ashlyn replied. Ali nodded.

Ashlyn got to a place where she started driving the Jeep through some heavy shrubbery where a path had already been made by a car having come through here before. Ali looked confused. “My special
“spot.” Ashlyn explained as they came to the end of the path and right up to a small secluded sandy beach.

“Oh wow.” Ali said taking in the beautiful little beach.

“I used to be embarrassed of wiping out in front of people when I was a kid, so my Dad took me here to teach me to surf before I went to the normal beach. The waves are smaller here and better for learning. I’ve never ever seen anyone else here, so I like to think it’s my own private little beach.” Ashlyn said with a smile.

Ashlyn grabbed the two smaller boards from the Jeep and they went to the edge of the water. Ashlyn reminded and showed Ali on the sand how you pop up on the board again to refresh her memory. Then they paddled out and gave it a go. After several failed attempts, Ali got up on the board and rode a wave for a few seconds before falling. Ashlyn cheered her on and Ali managed to ride the next one even longer.

Ali paddled back beyond the break again and sat on her board next to Ashlyn. “Ok, I need a mini break. You catch a few.” She watched Ashlyn paddle and perfectly pop up to catch a wave, cutting through the water and expertly riding it all the way in. Ashlyn rode four waves before settling back next to Ali. Ali was completely flustered and turned on by having spent the last twenty minutes watching Ashlyn’s muscles ripple as she surfed, wet shorts clinging to her body. She tried to compose herself.

“Want to try again?” Ashlyn asked. Ali nodded, hoping this would help settle her libido for the time being. She paddled hard and caught a great wave, popping up and managing to stay on the board all the way in. She heard Ashlyn whooping behind her, riding a wave in herself and giving Ali a kiss. “So good, Princess!” Ali beamed all proud of herself.

“Hey, why don’t we give the longboard a try? We can try and surf on it together. It isn’t easy, but it’ll be fun anyway.” Ashlyn suggested.

“I’m in!” Ali replied and Ashlyn went off to put the smaller surfboards in the car and grabbed the longboard.

Ashlyn had Ali sit on the front of the board as she paddled them out. “Ok, so I think maybe let’s try it with you sitting on the front and I’ll try to catch us a wave and ride in.”

“Ok, let’s try it.” Ali answered.

Ashlyn caught a wave and managed to stay up on it for a few seconds before she lost balance and they both fell off. Ali laughed and splashed Ashlyn before they paddled back out and tried again. The next time went better, until Ali decided to try and stand up too and flipped them again.

“Don’t get cocky, Krieger.” Ashlyn teased and Ali splashed her again. Ashlyn was a little out of breath from all the paddling, so she got them out past the break again and they sat on the board facing each other to rest a little. Ali just stared at her, in awe as usual at how hot Ashlyn was with her muscular body and tattoos.

“Whatcha thinking about, beautiful?” Ashlyn asked curiously, noting the intense look Ali was giving her.

Ali couldn’t hold it back anymore. “This.” She leaned forward, took Ashlyn’s face in her hands and kissed the blonde passionately. Her tongue went right into Ashlyn mouth, eliciting a moan from the blonde whose hands had already gone to rest on Ali’s hips. Ali had no intention of controlling
herself. She trailed down Ashlyn’s neck with wet kisses, stopping to suck her sensitive pulse point while her hands roamed the blonde’s toned torso.

Ashlyn had her eyes closed, breathing heavily as Ali nipped at her neck, her hands digging into Ali’s hips. She felt her bikini top come loose and fall between them onto the board. “Alex, what are you doing?” She whispered.

Ali pulled back. “You sure ask me that question a lot, Harris. You’d think by now you’d know that I know exactly what I’m doing.” Ali winked and Ashlyn swallowed hard. “Now, did I or did I not tell you that I had plans for your surf board?”

“Um, you did.” Ashlyn answered, her voice cracking a bit, turned on by Ali’s controlling manner.

“Exactly. Now help me take these off.” Ali commanded tugging on Ashlyn’s board shorts. Ashlyn complied managing to get her shorts and bikini bottoms off without flipping the board over. Ali was on her in a second, mouth sucking on Ashlyn’s nipples and hands raking down her abs.

“Shit, Alex. Fuck.” Ashlyn panted out, her eyes already closed again. Ali came back up to kiss her hard and Ashlyn managed to work off Ali’s bikini top, massaging the brunette’s breasts with her hands. Ali moaned into Ashlyn’s mouth and then pulled back grabbing Ashlyn’s hands. “Nope, not yet.” Ali said, using her forearm to push Ashlyn back against the board.

Ali put a hand on Ashlyn’s stomach to steady herself and leaned forward between the blonde’s legs, taking one long lick right up her smooth center. “God, you taste so good.” Ashlyn let out a gasp and grabbed the back of Ali’s head to pull her back in. Ali dove back in circling Ashlyn’s clit with her tongue before sucking it gently into her mouth.

“Oh god. Yes, baby.” Ashlyn was whimpering trying not to buck her hips too hard. The motion of the water beneath them and Ali between her legs was almost too much. “You’re so wet, Ash. So hot.” Ali mumbled into the blonde’s core, her face already coated.

“Unnnh” Ashlyn grunted feeling Ali’s tongue enter her. “I love when you fuck me with your tongue, baby. It feels so good.” Ashlyn got out through ragged breaths. Ali drove her tongue in deeper, spurred on by Ashlyn’s increasingly loud moans and desperate squirming.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s tongue go back to her clit, followed by the brunette’s fingers entering her deeply. “Holy shit. Yes, baby, don’t stop.” Everything around her was starting to fade, all she could hear was the sound of Ali’s fingers pumping in and out of her very wet core and the water lapping up around the board. Ali was pressing on her walls and she could feel every nerve in her body firing, ready to explode. “Like that, baby. Unnnh, so close. Keep fucking me.”

Ali could feel Ashlyn’s body start to tense up, her entrance getting tighter. “Let go, Ash. Come for me, baby.” That was all it took, Ashlyn’s body quivered and “Fuck” tumbled out of her mouth several times as she orgasmed. Ali kept fucking her slowly until she was sure Ashlyn had fully come down, giving the blonde’s core a couple last licks after pulling her fingers out.

Ashlyn just wanted to kiss Ali. She sat up to grab the brunette and pull her closer, but she was off balance and got up too fast flipping the board over. The cool water snapped her back to her senses. They had drifted in a little bit and Ashlyn’s feet touched the bottom of the ocean floor, water up near her shoulders. Ali popped up right beside her a second later.

“Smooth, Stud.” Ali laughed, but was met with only a hungry stare from Ashlyn.

Ashlyn still desperately needed to kiss her. She pulled Ali into her arms and kissed her hard, tongues
sliding against each other. Ali’s legs wrapped around Ashlyn’s hips, her arms around Ashlyn’s neck. Ali felt Ashlyn’s hands slide down her side and cup her ass briefly before tugging on her shorts. Ali unwrapped her legs from Ashlyn to let the blonde take them off. Ashlyn reached up and tossed the shorts and bikini bottom onto the longboard floating beside them. She grabbed Ali’s ass and pulled her up. Ali wrapped her legs around the blonde’s waist. Ashlyn felt Ali’s core brush her stomach and moaned lightly, kissing the brunette hard again. She pulled back and leaned into Ali’s ear “I’m going to fuck you so good right now. Hold on tight, baby.”

Ali’s mouth hung open slightly for a second before opening wider to let out a loud grunt when she felt Ashlyn’s fingers slip into her. She sank down a bit onto the blonde’s fingers to get them deeper. “Fuck, Ash. That feels good, baby.” Ashlyn moved in and out slowly at first before picking up the pace, watching Ali’s breasts bounce just above the water. She leaned down to take a nipple in her mouth and heard Ali let out a wail. “Yeeees. Faster baby, you feel so good inside.”

Ashlyn wrapped her arm around Ali’s waist tighter, helping the brunette to move up and down faster on her fingers while she thrust them in deeply. “You’re so hot, Alex. So tight. I love to fuck you, hearing you scream my name, coming all over my fingers.” Ali was coming apart listening to Ashlyn whisper dirty things in her ear as the blonde pounded into her. She knew it would only take a couple more thrusts before she lost it, her hips moving wilding and hard against Ashlyn’s hand, the only thing that was holding her up now. “Oh my god, Ash. Ash, yes, I’m coming, fuuuuuck. Ashlyn.” Ali screamed in Ashlyn’s ear as she gripped the blonde tightly and convulsed in her arms. Ashlyn pulled out of her and just ran her fingers through the brunette’s folds. Ali was having a hard time catching her breath. Ashlyn rubbed her back. “Shhh, breathe, baby. I got you.” Ashlyn whispered.

Ali eventually got herself calmed down and pulled away from the tight hug to look at Ashlyn. Ashlyn kissed her softly. “You are incredible, Alex. So hot and so beautiful.”

Ali could see that light in Ashlyn’s eyes again, she smiled. “Gosh, I love you… and the things you do to my body.” Ashlyn smiled at her.

“So, I guess we can cross surf board off the list. Although, maybe I can cross off ocean sex too, huh?” Ali said playfully.

“You really need to let me see this list, Krieger.” Ashlyn said with a raised eyebrow.

“Nope. I like it better when you can’t see it coming, Harris.” Ali kissed Ashlyn deeply again. She pulled back breathlessly already worked up again. At this rate, it was going to be a long day.
After a morning of surfing and Ali’s surprise surf board adventure, Ashlyn suggested that they lay out on the little beach for a while. It was already a hot and humid Florida day, perfect for relaxing on the sand. Ashlyn had laid a blanket out near a small group of tropical overgrown plants that provided them a little bit of shade from the morning sun. Ali had curled right into her and they had fallen asleep.

Ashlyn woke up to Ali lightly moaning, she could feel the brunette smiling into her neck. She picked her head up a bit confused by Ali’s noises. She smirked when she saw that a newt was slowly crawling up the brunette’s ribcage. Ali obviously thought it was Ashlyn’s hand leaving those light strokes up her side. She knew Ali would freak if she opened her eyes right now. Ashlyn slowly moved her hand towards the newt and quickly grabbed it by the tail and tossed it away from them. Ali opened her eyes at the sudden movement and found a smiling Ashlyn who looked like she was hiding something.

“What are you up to, Stud?” Ali questioned.

“Absolutely nothing! Well, besides enjoying the view of course.” Ashlyn flirted, quickly shifting her eyes to watch the newt dash into the line of brush. “So, you like the wildlife around here?” Ashlyn asked with a playful smirk.


“No reason. You just seemed to be, um, enjoying it.” Ashlyn tried not to laugh. She’d have to tell Ali about the newt sometime and properly tease her about being turned on by it when they were far away from the beach and the brunette wouldn’t be freaked out by things crawling on her.

“Ooook. You’re up to no good. I can tell.” Ali challenged.

“Never.” Ashlyn said innocently, watching Ali trail her hand up and down her abs. Had the sky not gotten dark and cloudy, she would have completely let herself get caught up in the brunette’s touch. “Looks like we better head out, Princess.” She said pointing up to the angry sky.

Ashlyn worked to get her Jeep covered and strap the surfboards to the top. Large drops began to fall as she tied the last strap and quickly got into the car. The sky opened up, rain falling so hard that it was difficult to even see out the car window. The music playing on the radio could barely be heard over the downpour.

“Think I’m gonna wait this one out, Princess. It’ll be hard to drive back down the path in this to get to the road.” Ashlyn said trying to squint through the rain hitting the windshield.

“Good idea.” Ali said turning up the radio. They were listening to the local rap station and Outkast’s Ms. Jackson had come on. Ashlyn immediately launched into rapping along with it. Ali always found it adorable how the blonde couldn’t help herself when a rap song came on. Even if she didn’t
know all the words, she still attempted it. Ali threw down her best passenger seat dance moves while Ashlyn rapped.

Missy Elliot’s Get Your Freak On came on next and Ashlyn decided to use it to her advantage. The blonde moved her hand to Ali’s thigh, running it up and down. “Maybe you should join me on this one?” she said with an eyebrow raised.

“Are we talking about the song?” Ali asked with an innocent smile.

“Nope.” Ashlyn said moving her hand under the hem of Ali’s tank top.

“Just making sure before I take your clothes off and you start asking me what I’m doing again.” Ali said, grabbing Ashlyn’s face with one hand and pulling the blonde’s lips against hers.

It only took them a few minutes to find themselves naked in the back seat of the Jeep, moving against and in each other in a slow, sexy exploration of bodies until they were spent. Ali had collapsed in a sweaty breathless heap onto Ashlyn’s chest, the two of them listening to the rain.

“If you ever sell this car, I hope you charge extra for all the mind blowing sex vibes that will come with it.” Ali joked.

“You are out of your damn mind if you think I’m ever selling this car. Especially after it got upgraded with the mind blowing sex vibes.” Ashlyn replied, leaning up plant soft kisses on Ali’s shoulder. After a few minutes rain had finally let up a bit. “Mmmm, perfect way to wait out a rain storm. You have to be hungry after all that.”

“Food is a definite must right now.” Ali agreed.

“Why don’t we go home and I’ll make us some sandwiches and we can shower too.” Ashlyn suggested.

“Perfect.” Ali said giving Ashlyn a sweet kiss and pinching her cheek before getting up to find and put on her clothes.

Ashlyn made them sandwiches as promised. Since the sun had come out and it had gotten hot again, they sat and ate lunch by the pool, getting caught up in talking well into late afternoon. Ashlyn was telling the story about the first time she tried polenta at Smith and spit it all over the table when Chris walked in from work. “Hey sis and might-as-well-be sis!” Chris said cheerfully.

“Hey brotha man, how was work?” Ashlyn asked.

“Good. Tourists buying a bunch of crap they shouldn’t spend their money on. Keeps the place in business though!” Chris replied. “What’ve you two been up to today?”

“Surfing!” Ali said in a high pitched voice. Ashlyn shot her a quick smirk.

Chris noticed the quick look between the two. “I don’t even want to know.” He started to walk into the house and then turned around. “Oh um, so I haven’t really hung out with the old crew in months. Well, not since I’ve been back. Anyway, Mikey is having a thing at his place tonight and I said I would go for a bit. I told him you were home and he said you should come. You guys up for it?”

Ashlyn faced dropped a bit. “Uh, I don’t know. We might just hang around here.”

Ali jumped right in. “Don’t listen to her. We’re totally in, it’ll be fun!”
Chris smiled. “Awesome! We’ll head out after dinner.” He headed into the house.

Ashlyn looked at Ali confused and a little annoyed.

“Sorry, I know the last thing you probably want to do is go hang out with a bunch of people from around here, but Chris wasn’t inviting us for fun. He asked because he needs us with him, Ash.” Ali said gently.

“What do you… oh!” Ashlyn replied realizing what Ali was talking about. She hadn’t even considered the fact that Chris was going to be trying to stay in control tonight while surrounded by a crowd of old friends and around a lot of alcohol and whatever else. “God, I’m so dumb. I can’t believe I missed that. Idiot.” Ashlyn said quietly looking down.

“Hey, don’t feel bad. I mean it. This is all still pretty new, and I only know this stuff because I’ve been through it.” Ali reassured her. “It’s really hard for them to ask for help when they need it. It’s really subtle and hard to pick up on, but you’ll get used to it.” She put a hand under Ashlyn’s chin and lifted it for the blonde to look at her. “You should feel really glad that he asked you.” Ali pecked the blonde softly.

“I’m glad you’re here to help me sort through this stuff.” Ashlyn gave the brunette a small smile. “I guess we should go shower and get ready so we can just leave after dinner.” Ali nodded.

After dinner, Ashlyn drove them over to Chris’ friend Mikey’s house. It had been a long time since Ashlyn had been to this beach house. It was well known for the over the top parties that attracted all sorts of people from Satellite Beach. She wasn’t looking forward to it at all. She had spent plenty of time at these parties and she knew what they were like, but after her talk with Ali, she was determined to have Chris’ back tonight, it was big step for him to be able to do this. They pulled up to the house and Ashlyn told Chris they’d be right in as she helped Ali out of the back seat.

“Hey, so, just a fair warning. These parties can be a little crazy. And I have no idea who to expect in there, so it might be really weird.” Ashlyn said nervously.

“Relax, baby.” Ali said running her hands up and down Ashlyn’s arms trying to calm her. “I’m here with you, and we’ll be fine. Let’s just focus on Chris, ok?”

Ashlyn nodded. “You look really beautiful tonight by the way.” She said kissing Ali’s forehead. The brunette was in a pair of navy blue shorts that hugged her just right and a white cutoff t-shirt that showed off the bottom of her toned stomach, her pink sports bra showing underneath. Her hair was flowing down over her shoulders.

Ali smiled. “You do too.” Ashlyn had opted for dark gray cargo shorts and a loose black tank top that showcased her tattoos, her hair down with a black snapback over it as usual.

“Kiss for luck?” Ashlyn asked getting closer to Ali.

“How about two?” Ali replied, leaning in to kiss Ashlyn’s neck and then moving up to place a lingering kiss on her lips. “Now, let’s get moving, Harris.” Ali said tugging Ashlyn towards the door.

Ashlyn was uncomfortable the second they walked into the house. The room was filled with people she had gone to high school with as well as many of her brother’s old trouble-maker friends. Chris was already in the corner talking with Todd. Ashlyn could feel a million eyes on her as she made her
way towards Chris, she gripped Ali’s hand harder. She felt Ali squeeze her hand and she couldn’t have been more thankful for the brunette at the moment.

“Yes! You came!” Todd greeted them with a fist pump. Ashlyn was glad Todd was there, he would help make sure things didn’t get out of hand with the other guys and Chris.

“Chris, dude, you should’ve seen this chick yesterday! She just dropped in from the big ramp at the skate park like not even a fuckin’ day had passed. Fearless as ever, dude.” Todd said nudging Ashlyn.

Chris laughed. “Some things never change. She was probably peeing herself though and just trying to show off for Ali.” He teased.

Ashlyn chuckled. “For your information, I was just helping this little girl by showing her how to keep her balance. And… totally peeing myself on the way down!” She admitted.

“You?! I almost had a heart attack when I saw you doing that! I had my cellphone out ready to dial 911!” Ali joined in, everyone laughing.

“HEEEEEYYYY! What is this, the loser’s corner?!?!” Mikey came over with a hand full of beers, holding them out.

Chris shifted his weight. “Nah, I’m good. I’m gonna stick to soda tonight.”

Mikey laughed. “Seriously, dude? You’re getting soft.”

Ali was more than prepared. “It’s my fault. I asked him and Ash to teach me how to surf in the morning. Can’t have my instructors hung over! I’m Ali by the way, Ash’s wife.” Chris gave Ali a thankful smile.

“No shit! Smart girl, baby Harris. You find a girl this good looking, you lock it down!” Mikey commented. Ali rolled her eyes and Ashlyn got closer to the brunette.

“Still the same dipstick, I see.” Ashlyn said lightly punching Mikey on the arm.

“You know it, proud too!” Mikey replied. “Alright, I get it. Don’t mess with surfing. Soda and water is in the fridge, help yourself!” He said walking away.

Ashlyn wrapped her arms around Ali from behind and leaned into her ear. “Brilliant. Thank you, Princess.” Ali just turned her head and kissed Ashlyn’s cheek.

About an hour in and things had been awkward, but bearable. Ashlyn had heard several comments about her tattoos and people trying to figure out who she was with and if the wife thing was true. A girl named Hailey who was in a lot of her classes in high school had somewhat awkwardly come up to ask where Ashlyn disappeared to and what she was doing these days. Ashlyn had explained about going away to college and introduced Ali. Hailey seemed satisfied with the response and didn’t prod much further, leaving to go talk to another group of people after a few minutes.

They mostly just ignored people and stuck by Chris for the night. Ali had dealt with her own set of commentary when she went to the bathroom and heard a couple guys remark that she just needed to find a good man. She definitely had no intentions of telling Ashlyn about that. Ali was more than ready to get out of here and hoped Chris would be ready to call it a night soon. When Ali got back from the bathroom, Ashlyn was sitting down on a barstool at the kitchen island with Chris, Todd, and this guy Mark that Ali had met a few minutes before. Ali plopped down into Ashlyn’s lap, feeling the blonde’s arms wrap around her own. Chris was talking about a customer he had dealt
with that afternoon when they were interrupted.

“Hey! It’s Trashlyn Harris!” A voice behind them taunted.

Ali felt Ashlyn let out a deep breath and shake her head. She turned around to see Lindsey standing there, beer in hand.

Ashlyn didn’t even have time to react before Ali was in Lindsey’s face. “Alex…” she pleaded seeing anger in Ali’s eyes like she’d never seen before.

“Wow, I can’t believe you had the gall to even come over here. Are you that much of an ignorant bitch or are you just fucking stupid?” Ali asked, eyes staring daggers at the blonde girl. Ashlyn gripped the back of Ali’s t-shirt lightly, trying to get some control over the situation.

“What the fuck are you going to do about it, bitch?” Lindsey yelled, clearly feeling brave from the alcohol. The room had gone quiet.

Before Ashlyn even had a chance to move, Ali had slammed Lindsey against the nearest wall so hard that a picture frame had fallen off of it, beer falling to the floor with it. Ali held her there with a fistful of the girl’s t-shirt, forearm pressed into her chest. Lindsey went from cocky to looking terrified.

“The only reason you aren’t on the floor bleeding and broken right now is because she is a much better person than you are. Consider yourself touched by a fucking angel right now.” Ali practically growled out, motioning her head back towards Ashlyn and using her strength to press Lindsey into the wall harder. “I should have you on your knees begging her for forgiveness, but there is no apology you could give that would even come close to cutting it. You’re so fucking pathetic that your own apology isn’t even worth anything.” Ali shoved her into the wall even harder.

“Listen to me really really carefully. I’m only going to say it once. You don’t talk to her, you don’t acknowledge her, you don’t even fucking look at her, ever. You come near my wife again, I swear, I will fucking end you. Are. We. Clear?” Ali spit out with venom.

Lindsey hadn’t looked up, her breathing was heavy from the pressure Ali had on her chest. She slightly nodded.

“No, no. You better answer me. I said, are we fucking clear?” Ali repeated jolting her into the wall again.

“Yes.” Lindsey croaked on.

“Perfect. Go enjoy your sad little life with that complete loser you call a boyfriend. Karma is a fucking bitch isn’t it.” Ali backed away with one last hard shove, staring Lindsey down until she turned and walked out the door. “Holy shit!”, “Run, Lindsey!”, “Fuck, Ash’s chick is intense!”, “Damn!”, were just a few comments heard around the room before people got back to whatever they had been doing.

Ashlyn slowly put her hands on Ali’s shoulders, rubbing them gently. “Easy, champ. You ok?”

Ali calmed at Ashlyn’s touch, letting anger leave and her mind unfog. “Sorry,” Ali mumbled quietly realizing how much of a scene she had just caused. “I didn’t mean to embarrass y…” she started but
didn’t get to finish as Ashlyn’s lips covered hers in a hard kiss. A few whistles were heard across the room. Ali pulled back to see kind hazel eyes looking into hers.

“You will never ever embarrass me, Alex.” Ashlyn smiled sweetly, looking at Ali like she was the only one in the room right now. “What’s the line…Never fall in love with your bodyguard? Too late.” Ashlyn grinned, pecking the brunette’s lips. Ali laughed lightly, dropping her head to Ashlyn’s shoulder. “I really thought you were going to kill her.”

“Oh, that was definitely my first instinct, trust me. I know your good heart better than that though.” Ali said seriously before adding, “Plus, then I’d be in jail with no one to help me enjoy those handcuffs and that would just be tragic.” Ali winked, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

“That would definitely be tragic.” Ashlyn agreed. “Can’t say I would’ve minded if she’d walked out of here bleeding a little though.”

Ali laughed. “Well, if she comes near you again, she will be. I guarantee you that.”

“Yeah, I don’t think she’s gonna come around again. Her face, I really think she might have wet herself.” Ashlyn cringed jokingly. “So fierce, Krieger. It’s doing things to me.” Ashlyn whispered hotly in Ali’s ear.

Ali was about to reply when they were interrupted by Chris who had given them a few minutes after the incident. “So, ladies, maybe that’s our cue to head out?”


Chris put an arm around Ali. “Thanks for having our backs in there tonight.” He whispered.

“Always.” Ali whispered back with a smile.

“We have our very own Harris family superhero. We need a name for you.” Chris exclaimed, this time loud enough for Ashlyn to hear.

“Oh she has one. Chris, meet Princess Warrior.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Princess Warrior?” Chris questioned.

“Yep, Krieger means warrior in German.” Ashlyn explained as they got in the car.

“No kidding?” Chris asked from the backseat. Ashlyn and Ali nodded. “That just totally figures!” He said with a deep laugh. “Princess Warrior, love it! Where on earth did you find this girl, Ash?”

“Heaven.” Ashlyn threw out the cheesiest answer she could think of. Chris snorted.

Ali smacked Ashlyn’s knee lightly. “Such a dorky cheeseball, Harris.”

“You love it!” Ashlyn replied with a goofy grin.

“You know I do.” Ali played back.

“OH. MY. GOD. Stop it!” Chris yelled. “Get us home before I barf back here!”
They got home about ten minutes later, heading quietly into the house and upstairs. Chris leaned in close to Ashlyn as they got to the top of the stairs. “I’m just going to casually remind you that grandma sleeps like a hibernating bear, there’s a lock on your door, and I’m going nowhere near your room tonight.” He said with a smile.

“Right.” Ashlyn replied giving him the eyes. He just gave her a quick thumbs up and whispered “Goodnight, Ali” before heading into his room.

Ali striped off her clothes and sat on the edge of the bed, reaching towards her luggage to grab something to sleep in. She felt Ashlyn settle behind her, the blonde’s bare skin pressing against her back. Ashlyn placed feather light kisses down her left shoulder. Ali melted into the blonde’s touch. “What a long day.” She said quietly. Ashlyn adjusted behind her and started massaging her shoulders.

“Mmmm, that feels so good.” Ali purred. After all the surfing, sex, and the incident with Lindsey tonight, she was definitely feeling sore.

“Come here.” Ashlyn said backing up on the bed and pulling the covers back, switching off the bedside light. She guided Ali to lay on top of her. Ali let out a soft moan feeling her chest press against the blonde’s. Ashlyn moved her hands just above Ali’s butt and started massaging again, working the muscles up Ali’s back from underneath the brunette.

“Mmm, that’s so perfect. You’re the best.” Ali whispered, her breathing become lighter and lighter as she relaxed. Ashlyn just kissed the top of her head and enjoyed the comfortable weight of the brunette on top of her and the warm breaths against her collar bone. She continued working her hands up and down Ali’s back and arms until she heard soft snoring. She lifted her head a bit to see Ali’s face pressed to her chest, mouth slightly parted as she slept. Ashlyn smiled and slowly pulled the covers over them, wrapping her arms around Ali to hold her securely.

“I don’t know what I ever did to deserve you, must have been really really good.” Ashlyn whispered into the dark, burying her face into Ali’s hair and taking in the scent of her shampoo. “I love you, Alex.”
Ashlyn starts her internship and she and Ali finally get questioned about their 'marriage'.
Plus, some science ;)

“Are you excited for tomorrow?” Ali asked as she ran her thumb over Ashlyn’s hand. It was Sunday evening and they were sitting on the beach trying to catch the sunset. Ashlyn was starting her internship in the morning.

“Actually, I thought I’d be a little nervous, but I’m just completely excited.” Ashlyn replied. “Can’t wait to find out what I’ll be doing. Hopefully I’m not just mopping up floors.” She chuckled.

Ali giggled. “That would just be wasted talent, although I’m sure you could also probably kick ass at mopping. Do you ever really get nervous?”

“Definitely. I always try to hide it if I am though.” Ashlyn replied.

“You always seem pretty confident to me, it’s impressive.” Ali said admiringly, she’d always wished she could have the type of confidence Ashlyn seemed to.

“You actually make me nervous… you have from day one. In a good way.” Ashlyn smiled.

“That doesn’t sound like a good thing.” Ali prodded.

“It is. Like I always want to impress you and make sure everything is perfect. You make my stomach flop when you touch me, just like the first time. And like, the kind of nervous where if I ever mess this up, I’d never forgive myself. Where I’m still a little afraid to wake up one day and learn this was all just a dream.” Ashlyn explained honestly.

Ali was totally charmed. “Now that, I totally understand. I call prefer to call them butterflies. And they’ve been taking up residence right here since you came along.” Ali said putting Ashlyn’s hand on her stomach.

“You know I have a fondness for butterflies.” Ashlyn smiled. “I can roll with that, butterflies it is.” Ashlyn used the hand on Ali’s stomach to gently push the brunette back into the sand and then leaned her head back on Ali’s shoulder. They quietly stared up at the now darkening sky, a few stars starting to make their appearance.

“Hey, Ash?” Ali eventually broke the silence.

“Yeah?” Ashlyn replied.

“If there’s ever a point that the butterflies start to leave, promise you’ll tell me. Give me a chance to find a net and see if I can bring them back.” Ali said quietly and a bit sadly.

Ashlyn didn’t need to ask where this was coming from. She’d had enough conversations with Ali about her parents’ divorce to understand how deeply it affected her. She turned over and hovered over Ali, stroking her cheek. “I promise that I’ll always be open and honest with you about what I’m
feeling, Alex. To make sure I always listen so I can understand and not just react. That if there is ever any doubt in my mind, you’ll be the first one to know right away so we can work it out. We won’t be either of our parents because we’ve learned from them.” Ashlyn reassured her confidently.

“There’s that confidence again. Makes me feel confident too. I promise you I’ll do all of the same.” Ali smiled, Ashlyn always knew what to say. It was more than that though, it was the assurance that the blonde never said anything she didn’t mean.

“Besides, these are some pretty massive butterflies, Krieger. I really don’t think they have any chance of escaping.” Ashlyn said playfully.

“Good.” Ali said reaching up to grab Ashlyn’s face. “Now kiss me already so we can send these suckers into a frenzy.”

Ashlyn kissed her passionately, her lips soft but demanding. Ali ran her tongue across Ashlyn’s lips, the blonde parted them to give her access with a soft moan. The familiar electricity surged through her, heart rate picking up right on cue. Ali reached up and lightly rested her hand on Ashlyn’s chest, feeling the blonde’s heartbeat racing too. She moved her hand behind Ashlyn’s neck, pulling her in closer while she slid her tongue against the blonde’s. The kiss continued like that until Ali couldn’t breathe, her lips tingling like the rest of her. She pulled back with hooded eyes to catch her breath, finding Ashlyn’s hazel eyes shining and almost green right now looking back into hers. “You take my breath away, Ash. Promise you’ll always kiss me like that.” Ali whispered.

Ashlyn smiled at her lovingly. “Only if you promise to always kiss me back like that.”

“Done deal. No returns.” Ali giggled. She leaned up to leave one more lingering kiss on the blonde’s lips. “I need to get you to bed, Harris.” Ali said moving to get up.

“Now we’re talking, Krieger.” Ashlyn replied waggling her eyebrows.

“You wish, Stud. I refuse to send you to work tomorrow without a good night of sleep!” Ali warned. Ashlyn groaned, pulling Ali up and wrapping an arm around her for the walk back to the car.

Ashlyn woke up early, moving careful not to wake a sleeping Ali. She got dressed, ate breakfast and got ready to head out for her first day at the lab. She walked up to the bedroom one more time to take in the beautiful brunette wrapped up in the covers of her bed. She couldn’t help herself, leaning down to place the softest kiss she could on Ali’s lips. Ali stirred a bit.

“Mmmm, have a good day, baby.” Ali said sleepily, eyes still closed.

“Go back to sleep beautiful, I’ll see you later. Love you.” Ashlyn whispered, watching Ali fall back to sleep before she left the room.

Ashlyn’s day could not have gone better, she couldn’t wait to tell Ali about it. She checked her phone on her lunch break to find a picture text from Ali; a selfie of Ali and her grandma serving what looked like breakfast together at the local shelter. Ashlyn’s heart melted to see how Ali had decided to spend her day. “Be any more perfect,” she whispered to herself and grinned at her phone like an idiot until one of the biologists sat down next to her and she quickly put her phone away.
Ashlyn pulled up to the house after work to find Ali waiting for her in the screened in porch. The brunette popped right up excitedly to give her a quick kiss.

“How was your first day?” Ali asked, dying to know how it went.

“So amazing! I have so much to tell you!” Ashlyn was beaming.

“I can’t wait to hear it! But first, go get ready because I’m taking you to dinner. Just casual, no need to dress up.” Ali replied, noticing the large bag in Ashlyn’s hands. “What is that?”

“Oh, my work attire for the next few weeks.” Ashlyn said handing the bag to Ali.

Ali opened the bag to see several sets of blue scrubs and a few white lab coats. “Oook. Well this is going to be a problem.”


“You are never going to get to work on time if you’re leaving the house in these every morning. Seriously, we’re gonna have to set your alarm earlier so you have time to get dressed and then re-dressed after I’m done with you.” Ali said sexily, handing the bag back and running her hand down Ashlyn’s arm.

Ashly laughed. “Well, ok then. That can be arranged. Leave time for some extra morning experiments, got it.”

“I love science!” Ali joked. “Now go upstairs and get ready before my mind wanders any further.”

When Ashlyn was ready she found Ali waiting outside by her Jeep holding her hand out for the keys.

“Oh, so you’re gonna drive my baby tonight?” Ashlyn asked skeptically.

“I’m the one who knows where we’re going. And I’m going to pretend you didn’t just call your car ‘baby’.” Ali replied with a challenging grin. “I’ll be gentle.” She promised.

“Uh huh. I’ve heard that before.” Ashlyn teased.

Ali smacked her on the ass. ‘Get in the car, Harris.” She drove them down a familiar road, making Ashlyn smile when she pulled onto the makeshift path Ashlyn had taken her down a few days ago to go surfing, the isolated beach coming into view.

Ali pulled a picnic basket and a blanket out of the back of the Jeep. She picked a spot and spread everything out, lighting a few candles around then and pulling Ashlyn down to sit. Ashlyn looked around to see that Ali had made a fruit and cheese platter, grilled chicken and avocado sandwiches, and potato salad.

“Look at you, Krieger. So romantic.” Ashlyn teased a bit before getting serious. “You’re so sweet. Thanks for this. It looks amazing. Did you make all this?”

“Yep. Taking a page right out of your playbook.” Ali said proudly. “Who’s the Top Chef now?” She joked, pulling out a bottle of wine and two glasses. “Dig in and tell me about your day, baby.”
They ate while Ashlyn explained that she’d been assigned to the marine rehab center in the lab. This meant that she’d be spending her internship in a very hands-on way, helping the biologists save and rehabilitate injured animals. The goal was to get them healthy enough to release them or place them at a local aquarium if they couldn’t be released. Ashlyn was practically bouncing while she told Ali about how she had spent the morning helping to successfully unwrap fishing line that was deeply ingrained into the skin of a poor penguin that had been found on a shipping barge coming into Florida from South Africa. It was her first official ‘patient’, and a rare one too since penguins weren’t usually seen anywhere near Florida.

Ali couldn’t have been any more smitten with someone in this moment if she tried. Watching Ashlyn talk so passionately about her day and what she would be doing made Ali’s feel like her heart was going to flutter right out of her chest and float away. She couldn’t take it anymore, leaning in to capture Ashlyn’s lips in hers, surprising the blonde who melted right into the kiss after a couple seconds.

Ali pulled back. “Sorry, couldn’t help myself.”

“Mmmm, that’s ok. I was ready for dessert.” Ashlyn mumbled against Ali’s lips, kissing the brunette again, the kiss getting heated.

Ali pulled back again. “Wait. I actually made dessert, so we better eat it! Second dessert can wait until later.” She said with a raised eyebrow, leaving one more light kiss on the blonde’s lips and reaching into the basket.

“Two desserts. I like the way you think.” Ashlyn said with a grin.

Ali pulled out a small chocolate cake that had a salted caramel filling. She had spent half the day getting it right. She fed the blonde a forkful.

“Wow. This is so good! I take back every negative thing I ever said about your cooking!” Ashlyn exclaimed. Ali smiled widely. They shared the cake and several more kisses before cleaning up and heading home. It was still fairly early and Ali had every intention of sneaking in to join Ashlyn in the shower tonight.

Their plans were thwarted when they got home to find Chris, Todd and his wife and daughter hanging out on the deck.

“Ashley-N!!!!!!” a little girl came flying over to Ashlyn, slamming against her leg. Ashlyn picked her up in the air. “Sky! Look at you, so big!”

Ashlyn held the little girl over the pool playfully. “Uh oh, Sky, watch out, I dunno if I can hold you up much longer!” Ashlyn pretended to dip her while the little girl screamed out “Ashley-N!!! No!!!!”

Ali laughed, smitten for the second time tonight as she watched Ashlyn pull the girl into a hug and tell her she missed her.

“I can’t believe she remembers me, it’s been like a year.” Ashlyn said to Todd.

“Dude, of course she does. She talks about you all the time. Apparently, you’re cooler than the rest of us.” Todd laughed. “She still hasn’t gotten your name down though, Ashley-N it is!”
Ali laughed and made a mental note to tease Ashlyn with that later.

Ashlyn walked over to Ali with the little girl. “Hey Skylar, this is Ali. Can you say hi?”

The little girl nodded enthusiastically before saying “Hi Ali!”

“Well hi, Skylar! Nice to meet you!” Ali said sweetly.

Skylar reached out to touch Ali’s hair. “Pretty like my hair.” She said.

Ashlyn and Ali laughed. “Yep, you have beautiful hair sweetheart, and so does Ali.” Ashlyn agreed before turning to Todd and Jill. “You guys are in so much trouble. She’s gonna be a princess just like this one.” She motioned her neck towards Ali.

“Nothing wrong with that!” Ali defended.

Ashlyn put Skylar down watching her run over to Jill. “Ali, you met Todd. This is his wife, Jill. Jill, this is my wife, Ali.” Ashlyn made introductions.

Ali waved. “Nice to meet you, Jill. And good to see you again, Todd.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Ali. All good things of course. Nice to finally meet you.” Jill smiled. “Anyone who can make Ash grin like this much of a fool is definitely worth getting to know. So, tell us about yourself. All Chris told us was that you snagged baby Harris over here and that you just graduated from a crazy good college.”

Ashlyn chuckled and sat in the chair next to Chris, pulling Ali into her lap. Ali explained that she was from Virginia, talked about her family a bit, and explained how she’d spent time in Germany.

Todd jumped in, looking at Ashlyn. “Dude, I gotta ask. Last time I checked, you weren’t married last summer or even dating. So, like how did you guys meet and stuff?”

“Oh, well Ali played rugby for Dartmouth and I play for Smith. We actually met when our teams played each other this past fall.” Ashlyn explained.

“Yeah, it didn’t start so well.” Ali laughed. “I heard a rumor that she was like some female Don Juan who picked up women all over the place. We pretty much kicked each other’s butts all over the field at the game. Our team lost and I’m totally a sore loser, so Ash had no chance. She approached me after the game to say hi and I pretty much shut her down before she even got out like two words.” Ali admitted.

“Yeah, everyone told me that she was like an ice queen and to stay away, but I took one look at her and I went for it.” Ashlyn added. “She totally shut my ass down” She laughed. “Buuuut, then she felt bad and we got to know each other over a beer and some dancing.”

Todd laughed. “Yep, relentless is the Harris way.”

Ashlyn continued. “We kinda talked and hung out off and on and got to be friends, it was going well until we had to play each other again. The next game we had against each other, her and this other girl tackled me so hard that I ended up with this beautiful scar.” Ashlyn pulled back the hair on her forehead a bit.

“Ouch!” Jill cringed. “Well this seems like it was doomed to fail!”

“Well, yeah, except she’s a giant baby and I took her to the hospital to get stitches and helped her
deal with her needle phobia and took care of her. Things kinda happened from there.” Ali said smiling down at Ashlyn.

“So cute. Tell us about the proposal!” Jill said. Chris sat back with a knowing grin. “Yeah guys, tell the story.”

Ashlyn tensed a bit and Ali just looked at her, waiting for Ashlyn to start. Ashlyn figured she’d just adapt from something that actually happened. “Oh uh, it snowed really hard the night before Valentine’s Day and both of our schools closed for the day. Ali surprised me by driving down to visit. So, I took her snowboarding.”

“Right.” Ali jumped in. “She purposely crashed the snowboard like a million times to she could be close to me. She laid it on thick all day too, like telling me I had the most beautiful eyes in the world. And then she had an acapella concert that night, so I went to that. I’m not gonna lie, I love watching this girl do her thing with that acapella group.”


“Uh, yeah. I mostly just keep the beat, beatbox and stuff.” Ashlyn answered.

“She can sing too though.” Ali jumped back in. Todd nodded still looking surprised.

“So, uh, we took a walk around campus in the snow after the concert.” Ashlyn continued. “And we stopped at fountain on campus that people had dressed up as cupid.”

Ali interjected. “She drew a heart in the snow with our initials on it and said it was my valentine. And then she sang to me.” Ali said deciding finally have some fun with this story.

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide. “Uh, yeah… I sang.” She said wondering where Ali was going with this.

“Awwww, what did you sing?” Jill asked.

“The first song we slow danced to. All My Life by Linda Ronstadt. It was at a 90s party.” Ali said frankly before Ali could stop her. Ashlyn squeezed her thigh, turning red.

Todd spit out his drink and Chris laughed. “Wow, Ash. No idea you were such a cheeseball.” Todd chuckled.

“Shut up you two! That is so damn adorable!” Jill said dreamily. “So, then what?”

Ashlyn was at a loss for words at this point. She just looked at Ali and waited for her to continue.

“Then we sat down on the edge of the fountain and she told me to close my eyes. So, I did. She pulled off my glove and I could feel her doing something, but I didn’t know what cause it was cold. The she told me to open them.” Ali smiled down at Ashlyn. “When I opened them she was down on one knee and had drawn a ring on my finger with a marker. And she asked me to marry her.”

Jill squealed. “Oh my god, Ash! That is too much, so cute!”

Ali continued further. “Turns out she had called my parents and my brother to ask them first cause she knew that they’d like that.” Ashlyn took note, already feeling her stomach clench at the prospect of having to ask Ken Krieger to marry his daughter someday. “Of course, I said yes, and here we are.” Ali finished, placing a soft kiss on Ashlyn’s lips.

“No ring and she still said yes. You got game, Ash! I’ll give it to ya!” Todd exclaimed. Jill threw a
chair cushion at him, trying not to wake Skylar who had fallen asleep in her lap. Chris laughed.

“It was never about a ring. I knew I loved her right from the start.” Ali said seriously, locking eyes with Ashlyn.

“You guys are going to start a fire on this deck. Talk about true love, geez. Todd, you better take note and start looking at me like that!” Jill teased, breaking their moment. “So, what about the wedding?”

Ashlyn started before Ali could make up another story about Ashlyn singing her vows. “We just got married over spring break, on the beach, at her Dad’s beach house in Miami. Small wedding with just our families. It all happened really fast and we couldn’t be happier about it. Maybe eventually we’ll do something bigger in the future and I’ll get her that big old rock, but being together was the most important.” Ashlyn finished.

“Yep. We wrote our own vows. It was simple, but beautiful.” Ali agreed, smiling and kissing Ashlyn again. Jill smiled at them emotionally.

“That’s quite a story. Dude, you guys are obviously great together. Think you came along at just the right time, Ali. Ash looks like a kid on Christmas these days. We’re all a little nuts down here, but we’re happy to have you in this little ragtag Satellite Beach family.” Todd said kindly. Ali nodded thankfully.

“Of course, I’ll probably never let her live down the singing proposal…” Todd laughed.

“Me either!” Chris agreed. Ashlyn groaned and Ali laughed.

“Alright, we better get this munchkin off to bed.” Jill said, lifting a sleeping Skyler and saying goodnight. Todd followed suit.

Once they left, Chris let out a loud laugh. “Singing proposal, oh man, Ali. That was classic. Too good!” He headed into the house leaving the two on the deck.

Ashlyn playfully stared angrily at Ali.

“What? It’s romantic and sweet. I’d completely melt if you sang to me like that, I’d say yes in second. Plus, it’s totally a grand romantic gesture that is right up your alley.” Ali explained.

Ashlyn shook her head. “Remind me to bust out into song next time I want to sweep you off your feet then.”

“Nah. You don’t have to work that hard. I’m pretty swept up in you already.” Ali said sweetly, trying to make up for her singing proposal story.


“So, beach wedding, huh?” Ali asked.

“Yeah. I don’t know. Guess that’s what I’ve always pictured.” Ashlyn answered honestly.

“I love it.” Ali whispered in her ear, kissing right behind it. “It’s late. Let’s get you to bed, my romantic wife.”

Ashlyn picked her up bridal style. “Guess I never carried you to bed properly, wife” She winked carrying the brunette up the stairs to the bedroom. Ashlyn’s strength never ceased to amaze Ali.
When Ashlyn’s alarm went off early in the morning, the first thing she noticed was that Ali wasn’t in bed with her. She frowned. The sheets were still somewhat warm, so she figured Ali had just gotten up recently. She quickly showered and pulled on a set of scrubs from the bag she had brought home from work yesterday, digging around in the bag to find her work ID badge and clipping it to the pocket of her top. She opted to pull her damp hair into a bun rather than do anything else with it and made her way downstairs. She found Ali at the kitchen table with a mug of coffee.

Ashlyn approached the brunette to give her a morning kiss. Ali had carefully watched her approach the whole way. “Good morning, Princess. You’re up early.”

“There was no way I was missing getting to watch you walk out the door in that outfit.” Ali said, her eyes carefully raking over the blonde. “I made coffee, can I get you some?”

“Definitely.” Ashlyn replied with a smile. Her quickness in the shower meant she had plenty of time to enjoy breakfast with Ali before she had to leave. She pulled out a box of cereal and poured some into a bowl, going to the fridge to grab the milk. Ali took the milk from her for a second to put just a splash in Ashlyn’s black coffee just the way she liked it. Ashlyn took the milk back and poured some into the cereal bowl before putting it back into the fridge. She turned around and was quickly pressed against the refrigerator by Ali. She had less than a second to process the desire in Ali’s eyes before the brunette’s lips were on hers.

“Mmmm.” Ashlyn let out a moan in surprise as the felt the brunette’s warm tongue probing her mouth. She felt Ali’s hand go to the back of her neck, pulling her closer. The kiss was desperate and heated, Ashlyn was flustered and hot after just a few seconds. Ali left her lips with a gentle tug and started kissing down her neck, the brunette’s hand moving under her shirt to rake over her stomach. Ashlyn let out a whimper, digging her fingers into Ali’s lower back where she had rested her hands.

“Shhhh baby, you gotta be quiet.” Ali whispered into Ashlyn’s neck, knowing Chris had left for work but grandma was still sleeping upstairs. She went back to working on Ashlyn’s neck, hand making its way up her shirt.

Ashlyn felt Ali slip a hand under her sports bra and stroke one of her already hard nipples. She let out a gasp trying hard to be quiet, but Ali already had her squirming. Ali pulled away from her neck with a light bite and came back up to kiss her hard, pressing her further into the fridge. Ashlyn felt the tie on her pants loosen and Ali’s hand slip into her underwear, the brunette wasted no time in running fingers through her already slippery folds.

“So wet for me, baby.” Ali mumbled against Ashlyn’s lips before pressing her tongue back into the blonde’s mouth while slipping two fingers into her. Ashlyn’s hips bucked forward into Ali’s hand, moans spilling into Ali’s mouth.

Ali knew they didn’t have much time. She worked her girl hard and fast, thumb rubbing circles over Ashlyn’s clit while her fingers plunged in and out the blonde’s tight entrance.

Ashlyn felt like she couldn’t breathe, the pressure in her core intense. She pulled back from the kiss and pulled Ali into her further, one hand on the back of the brunette’s head, the other digging into the skin on Ali’s hip. Her legs were shaking, the brunette’s fingers filling her up and hitting her in just the right spot. “Aleeex, yes. So good inside.” She barely managed to whisper out between ragged breaths.
Hearing Ashlyn’s heavy panting and whispering against her ear was driving Ali wild. “You’re so hot. Come for me, Ashlyn.” She worked her fingers deeper, feeling the blonde’s core start to quake in response.

Two more thrusts and Ashlyn crumbled, biting Ali’s shoulder to muffle her moans as she shuddered against the brunette in pleasure. Ali pumped into her slowly a few more times before stilling her fingers, holding the blonde up against the fridge and listening to her heavy breathing.

“Oh my god, Alex.” Ali heard in her ear. She slowly pulled her fingers out and licked them clean before leaning up to kiss Ashlyn deeply again. She pulled back leaving the blonde against the fridge dumbfounded and breathless.

Ali walked over to the bowl of cereal on the counter. “Experiment number one. What happens you try to eat a bowl of cereal in front of your girlfriend while dressed in scrubs and looking like a sexy scientist?” Ali picked up the bowl and looked into it. “Results? Hmmm… sorry baby, looks like I have a tendency to make things soggy.”

Ali dumped the cereal into the sink and poured a new bowl, pulling Ashlyn away from the fridge gently and giving her a light kiss before grabbing the milk and adding some to the cereal. Ashlyn could only grin like an idiot, still trying to come down from the sexy encounter.

Ali handed her the new bowl of cereal. “Conclusions? Scrubs are a major turn on… you needed a new bowl of cereal, might want to wait on pouring the milk so fast next time… oh, and you definitely also need a new pair of underwear. I think this experiment was a success.” Ali winked and went upstairs to grab Ashlyn another pair of boxers.

Ashlyn looked down at her watch, snapping out of her daze when she realized she had 10 minutes to eat her cereal and change her underwear. Ali appeared back in the kitchen just a couple minutes later, tossing Ashlyn’s underwear at her and pouring the blonde’s coffee in a to-go mug. Ashlyn quickly changed and grabbed her keys, bag, and coffee mug.

Ali kissed Ashlyn gently. “Have a great day, Stud.” She said with a smug grin on her face.

Ashlyn finally found her words again. “Enjoy your day, Princess. You have about eight hours before I come home and wipe that smug look right off your face.” She kissed Ali hard and headed out to the Jeep, turning to give a surprised Ali a small wave.
Ashlyn had kept her promise when she got home from work. After dinner with Grandma and Chris, Ali and Ashlyn took their nightly walk on the beach recounting their daily activities. When the sun had set, they decided to stay a bit longer and sat atop an empty lifeguard chair on a quieter section of the beach. Ashlyn had covered Ali in soft kisses and light strokes until the brunette was begging for release, only to fall apart with the blonde’s fingers deep inside her once Ashlyn finally gave her what she wanted. It had taken a half hour just for Ali to recover enough to get back down the lifeguard chair, the smug look on her face admittedly long gone.

“Ali dear?” Grandma’s voice broke the brunette’s thoughts as she daydreamed about the prior night’s adventure.

“Oh, um, sorry.” Ali replied, snapping out of it.

“That’s ok.” Grandma said with knowing a smile. “Would you mind getting me the flour from that top shelf?”

“Of course.” Ali reached up to grab the flour. She was spending the morning helping Grandma get lunch ready at the local shelter. Ali had chosen to tag along with Grandma in the mornings ever since Ashlyn started work. Not only did it feel great to volunteer, but she loved being around Ashlyn’s grandma. The woman was truly remarkable. She was strong and matter-of-fact, but also so kind and caring. She had a way of making you feel comfortable and important and loved. Being around Grandma made Ali understand Ashlyn better; she now knew where the blonde’s manners, laid-back nature, and strong will came from.

"So, Ali. Tell me. How are things with you and Ashlyn intimately? Everything working out well in the bedroom?” Grandma asked.

Ali’s eyes went wide briefly, thinking she must have heard wrong. She dropped the bag on flour on the counter a bit clumsily. “I’m sorry, what was that? I missed it.”

Grandma laughed. “No you didn’t, dear. You heard me right. I may be old, but I’m not an old bitty. Now, spill it, how’s the sex?”

“Oh. Um…I’m not sure how to answer that.” Ali said turning red.

“I’d start with an adjective of some sort. No need to be shy, I recognize an after-sex glow when I see one. You two glow a lot.” Grandma said frankly.

Ali nodded silently, now realizing where Ashlyn got her tendency to be candid from too. She did her best to find the right words. “Ok, well…um, it’s amazing and passionate and wonderful.”

“Perfect. Just wanted to make sure it was as good as one would assume it was based on how you two look at each other.” Grandma said with a smile.
“And then some.” Ali answered, letting some honesty spill out despite the fact that she still couldn’t believe she was having this conversation.

“You know, a lot of people are great partners, but not great lovers. Others are great lovers, but not great partners. If you ask me, I think that while separately these things can still make a good relationship, having both of these things is the key to a lifelong love.” Grandma explained. “My late husband and I had both and we were very happily married for 51 years. Don’t you ever tell Ashlyn, but he and I were still sneaking off like school kids to get our sexy time together until the very end.”

Ali smiled, her heart warm at the fact that someone had just described exactly what she had wanted her whole life. To have someone who had actually lived it tell her that it existed held great meaning. “Can I ask you a question?” Ali said shyly.

“You know you can ask anything you want, honey.” Grandma replied in her usual genuine manner.

“How were you sure you had both?” Ali asked.

“When people tell that you that they just know, they mean it. I knew we were great partners because we were very different people, but fit together and complemented each other perfectly. We had ups and downs like everyone else, but loving each other was as easy as breathing. As for great lovers, of course the physical connection was important. More than that, I knew from the very first time that I would never be able to keep my hands off of him.” Grandma answered honestly with a chuckle.

Ali listened with rapt attention, her smile growing wide. It felt like Grandma had just gone into her mind and heart and read her feelings out loud. She thought about the daydreams she had as a teenager when she pictured being in love, she smiled even wider.

Grandma didn’t miss the relieved and content look on Ali’s face. “That’s how you feel about my Ashlyn, isn’t it?”

Ali nodded. “Yes. I feel that way now and I just know deep down that it’s how I’m always going to feel. But, I have a tendency to second guess that the way it feels right now can last forever exactly like it is. I always thought my parents had that kind of love and it wasn’t enough to keep them together.”

“Sometimes relationships can appear very different on the outside than they are on the inside. Don’t ever let other people’s relationships dictate your own. No one else’s feelings and connections are yours.” Grandma responded. “Ali, just because love and passion can come so easily and so strongly doesn’t mean that they come effortlessly all the time. Being and staying in love is also work. The feelings may come naturally, but it’s up to you to make sure that you let yourself feel them and hold on to them. The two of you will grow every single day, but you have to learn to grow together and not separately. Trust in how you feel emotionally and physically and make sure that you honor it, it will never steer you wrong. It’s always completely up to you to be truly in love your whole life, together you make it happen. It’s that simple.”

“Wow. That might be one of the wisest things anyone has ever said to me. Thank you.” Ali said genuinely.

“I see the way you and Ashlyn look at and treat each other and it makes me so happy to see that my granddaughter has found in someone what I had with my husband.” Grandma added honestly.

“You really think so?” Ali asked, touched and getting a bit emotional at this whole conversation.

“I’m never wrong, dear.” Grandma answered simply with a smile. “Now hand me that flour.”
The conversation with Grandma wasn’t the only deep Harris family moment Ali would have that week. On Friday morning, Grandma was off to a planning meeting with the people who helped her organize community activities for people in need. Ali got up to see Ashlyn off to work and then took a shower before sitting out on the deck to read a few chapters in a new book she had started. She was surprised to hear the sliding door behind her.

“Morning, Ali.” Chris said sitting across from her with a bottle of water.

“Oh, hey, good morning. I didn’t even know you were here. No work today?” Ali asked.

“Nope. I have to work a weekend shift tomorrow, so I guess today is my Saturday.” Chris answered. Ali nodded. “Hey did you eat yet?” Chris asked.

“No, I didn’t. I was going to make myself an omelet or something in a few minutes. You want me to make you one too?” Ali responded.

“Thanks, but how about we go get some breakfast together? We haven’t gotten much of a chance to chill together yet.” Chris suggested.

“That sounds great. Let me just grab some flip flops or something.” Ali replied, and they were off.

Chris took her to a café just off the water in nearby Melbourne. Ali decided she was in the mood for sweet, ordering chocolate chip pancakes and a cinnamon latte. Chris opted for the special breakfast combo featuring a whole mess of scrambled eggs and the typical breakfast sides.

“So, Ali. I never got to properly thank you for the other night. I gotta be honest, other than Ash… I don’t think anyone has ever had my back quite like that.” Chris admitted. “And then the way you stood up for Ash like that, well, let’s just say this family isn’t used to that.”

Ali smiled. “Well, get used it. I’m seriously protective of the people I love and you Harris’ have got a permanent spot right here.” Ali said putting her hand over her heart.

Chris grinned at her. “Ash was right. You are something special, Ali.” Ali blushed a bit. “So, this is it huh? You and Ash. It’s really as serious as it looks?” Chris asked curiously.

“Definitely. I’d sit here and try to tell you how much I love that girl, but there really are no words. Kinda crazy, I totally started to give up on the idea of finding ‘the one’ and then Ash just barreled in like a hurricane and swept me away. Just as fast and furious as people claim it is.” Ali said earnestly.

Chris laughed. “Hurricane. Yep, that sounds about right.”

Ali laughed. “Yeeeah, that probably wasn’t the right analogy, especially given that we’re on the Florida coast, but I think you know what I mean.” Chris nodded still laughing as their breakfast came and they dug into it.

Chris got serious again. “Never thought anyone who really got to know this nutty family of ours would ever want to stick around and be a part of it. Good to see I was wrong, gives me hope.”
“You’ll find someone of your own who feels exactly like I do about Ash and your family. I know it.” Ali reassured him.

“Thanks. I hope so. But hey, if I don’t I always have myself. I have lots of things I want to do and for once I feel like they’re a real possibility. If I can get around to actually doing those things, I’ll be happy.” Chris said.

“If you want them to happen, then they will. I believe in you. And you have us to help you along the way.” Ali said encouragingly.

Chris smiled thoughtfully. “You sound just like your brother.”

Ali was taken aback. “Wait. You’ve talked to Kyle?”

“Yep. Wasn’t sure if he mentioned it to you.” Ali shook her head a bit surprised, but she knew Kyle was good about keeping secrets that he didn’t think were his to tell. Chris continued. “Pretty much been talking to him since you passed his number along to Ash for me. He’s really insightful and inspirational for me. I like to bounce ideas off of him. He’s a good chunk of the reason I think there are a lot of real possibilities for me to accomplish the things I want to.”

Ali was so moved, she might have melted right there if it was possible. She felt a tear roll down her face at the idea that her and Ashlyn’s families had now connected beyond the two of them, like their extended life bubbles had come together now too and not just their own personal ones. “I’m am so beyond happy that you two talk.” Ali said in a quiet squeaky voice, it was the most she could get to come right now.

“Aww, I didn’t mean to make you cry.” Chris said, handing her a napkin. “Besides, I’ve learned all sorts of fun things about you.” Chris laughed trying to lighten the mood.

“Oh god, I didn’t even think about that! Maybe I’m not so happy about it anymore. What did he tell you?” Ali questioned playfully.

“I’ll never tell!” Chris joked.

Once the laughter died down. Chris got serious one more time. “I’m glad you’re here, Ali. For Ash. And for the rest of us too.”

“Me too.” Ali answered, lightening the mood again by adding “I mean, I had the sex talk with Grandma the other day, there’s no going back now.”

“She didn’t!” Chris exclaimed.

“She did.” Ali replied giggling. They spent the rest of breakfast laughing over the conversation Ali had with Grandma. For the first time it dawned on Ali that she pretty much had two brothers now. She liked it, a lot.

Knowing that Ali was leaving to spend the next week in Miami, she and Ashlyn spent the weekend
like they always did when one of them was about to leave: always touching and close. By the time they reached the airport for Ali’s flight, Ashlyn felt like she was practically in mourning.

“I hate when you leave me, Krieger.” Ashlyn said, loosely holding Ali in her arms and kissing the brunette’s forehead near the security checkpoint.

“I hate leaving you, Harris.” Ali replied, burying her face into Ashlyn’s shoulder. “It’s only a week though. I’ll see you Friday night.” Ali was spending the week in Miami with her dad and Kyle since Kyle was visiting from L.A.; the plan was for Ashlyn to drive down to Miami Friday night so she could spend the weekend with Kyle too before she and Ali drove back to Satellite Beach.

“Gonna be a long week. I’ll just have to survive by seeing your pretty face on my phone screen.” Ashlyn said playfully.

“If you play your cards right, maybe I’ll let you see more than my face.” Ali flirted.

“Now you’re talking, Krieger.” Ashlyn flirted back. “Ugh, you better go before you miss your flight.”

Ali kissed her deeply. “I love you, Stud.”

“I love you too, Princess. Have a good flight and call me when you land.” Ashlyn said, holding Ali’s hand until the last possible second and not leaving the airport until the brunette had gotten through security and blown a kiss back to her, finally disappearing from view.

The week went by excruciatingly slow even though Ashlyn had been excited that she had gotten to work with a dolphin who was injured by a propeller and help remove a pen cap from a sea turtle’s nose. Friday had finally arrived and she pulled up at the Krieger beach house around 9pm not being able to wait another second to see Ali. Luckily, she didn’t have to. The brunette came running out of the house before Ashlyn even had a chance to get out of the car, crawling into her lap on the front seat and kissing her passionately.

“Mmmm, hey baby. I missed you so much. And that, I definitely missed that.” Ashlyn said, referring to the intense kiss Ali had just given her.

“I missed you too, Ash, like crazy. Let’s grab your stuff and we can fix you something to eat.” Ali suggested. Ashlyn grabbed her overnight bag and followed Ali into the house. Ken and Kyle were in the living room watching TV, they both got up to greet her. Kyle gave her a crushing hug as had become the norm.

“Let’s put your bag in my room and then we’ll figure out food.” Ali said and headed up the stairs. Ashlyn looked at Ken and turned red.

“Sir, I can…” Ashlyn started, but Ken cut her off. “Ken, call me Ken, remember.” He corrected her.

“Right, Ken. I can sleep down here or in any other room.” Ashlyn said nervously.

Ken looked at her seriously and then started laughing, putting a hand on her shoulder and leaning in close. “We’re all adults here, Ashlyn. Remember what I said about trusting my daughter’s decisions?”

“Yeah, I remember.” Ashlyn replied quietly.

“Good. Now get upstairs before she comes down here and starts whining.” Ken joked.
Ashlyn let out the breath she had been holding and made her way up the stairs to Ali’s room.

Kyle sat with them while Ali made Ashlyn a sandwich and some popcorn for the rest of them.

“Hey, Ash. You want to come surfing with me in the morning?” Kyle asked.

“Totally!” Ashlyn replied.

“You going to join?” Kyle asked Ali.

“Hell no. I’ll see you two crazies around 8am when normal people are fully rested and ready to hit the beach.” Ali replied dramatically, earning an eye roll from both Kyle and Ashlyn.

Kyle and Ashlyn hit the beach at 6am, the waves rolling in perfectly for a good morning of surfing. After each catching a few waves, they sat by side on their boards just past the break enjoying the sun and the salt water.

“So, now that I finally have you alone with nowhere to go. What are you intentions with my sister, Ms. Harris?” Kyle asked in a half playful half serious tone.

Ashlyn eyed him carefully. “Is that a serious question?”

Kyle laughed. “Actually, I was just messing with you. Buuut, now that it’s out there, I kinda want to hear the answer.”

Ashlyn smiled at him. “You want the appropriately toned down answer or the raw honest one?”

“Please, you know I love my drama. Raw honesty!” Kyle answered quickly.

Ashlyn nodded. “Ok. Well then, my intention is to be kissing you sister with the last breath I take in this life. Honest enough for you?”

“Wow. Well ok then. Yep, that’s one very crystal clear way of putting it.” Kyle responded happily, fanning his eyes with his hands. “God, you’re making me all weepy.” Hearing Ashlyn put her love for his sister out there so devotedly like that was pretty amazing.

Ashlyn laughed. “You’re the one that asked.”

“I know, I know!” Kyle replied. “So, when are you proposing?”

Ashlyn fidgeted. “Well, truthfully I’d marry her today. But, we’ve kind of rushed everything so far. Don’t get me wrong, it’s been awesome… I just want to do the rest right. I don’t want to have some 2 or 3 year engagement because we’re not ready or able to get married the way we want to. We know we’re committed to each other and I want us to enjoy that for a while until it’s natural for us to get to that next life point. So, I think it will be quite a while before I go there. I want to give her everything, the way it should be. Does that make sense?”

“Totally! I didn’t mean to pressure you on it. I think that sounds perfect. Actually, I’m pretty sure she’s on the same page. Of course, if she gets impatient, she’ll just drop down on her knee before you even see it coming… but, I’ll help you cross that bridge if it gets to that.” Kyle laughed. “Pretty sure that won’t happen though. Princess definitely wants a proposal!”

Ashlyn chuckled. “Good to know!”

They surfed for another hour before calling it quits. They walked up the beach towards the car, Kyle breaking the silence again.
“So, after everything I’ve been through, I’m pretty big on making sure my are feelings known. I know you know Alex loves you, but, well, I love you. You’re family, Ash.” Kyle said seriously.

Ashlyn wrapped her arm around him and gave him a smile. “I love you too, brother.”

Ashlyn woke up to Ali shaking her a bit and whispering. “Hey, Ash. Wake up baby.”

Ashlyn groaned lightly, looking at the clock to see it was 2:14 in the morning. Ali was hovering over her. “What’s the matter? Are you ok?” Ashlyn asked concerned, no longer feeling sleepy.

“Yeah, I’m great. Just, come with me, ok?” Ali said getting up and pulling Ashlyn with her.

“Ok.” Ashlyn said, wondering what was going on, but following Ali anyway.

Ali led them downstairs quietly and outside by the pool. “Take those off and come swimming with me.” Ali whispered, pointing to Ashlyn’s pajamas as she began to take her own t-shirt off. Ashlyn stopped her.

“Alex, your dad. Do I need to remind you that his bedroom overlooks the pool?” Ashlyn said nervously.

Ali sighed and gave Ashlyn a quick kiss. “Let me give you five reasons you should just listen to me and go with it. My dad sleeps like a rock. The windows are closed so he can’t hear us. His curtains are closed. And the pool lights are off so it’s too dark for anyone to see anything.” Ali said persuasively.

“That was four reasons.” Ashlyn said defiantly.

“Right. Forgot the last one.” Ali said before taking off all her clothes and standing there naked in front of Ashlyn. “That enough reasons for you?”

Ashlyn nodded slowly, her mouth open a bit taking in Ali’s toned body lit softly by the moonlight.

“Good. Now live a little, Stud.” Ali winked and got into the pool. Ashlyn let out a deep breath, got naked and joined her.

They stood entwined together at the far corner of the pool. Ali gave Ashlyn a few soft kisses before turning around in the blonde’s arms and leaning back into her. Ashlyn kept a firm grip around her waist.

“When my dad first bought this house, it was right when my parents got divorced. I used to daydream about being in love and sneaking down here with someone late at night because we loved each other so much that we couldn’t keep our hands off each other.” Ali said quietly. Ashlyn smiled into her shoulder, but stayed quiet. She could tell Ali wasn’t finished.

“Then I grew up. I always thought my parents had that kind of love and they’d find their way back to each other. Of course, that didn’t happen. It struck me that it just doesn’t happen like that in reality, you know? That stuff is movies and romance novels. My dating life just confirmed that for me. It’s
still what I always wanted though. It’s so hard to give up that daydream.” Ali rambled on. Ashlyn listened attentively holding her close and trying to understand what Ali was getting at.

“I had a talk with your grandma the other day. She told me a lot about the relationship she had with your grandpa. It sounded a lot like my daydream. She said loving him was as easy as breathing and that she knew from the first time she’d never be able to keep her hands off of him.” Ali explained.

Ashlyn smiled knowingly and cut in for just a second. “Yeah. They were something else. Gram likes to think the two of them were a whole lot more discrete about their um, alone time, than they actually were.”

Ali giggled. “Yeah. We talked about that a bit. The whole conversation though, Ash...it was life altering. To hear that all of it could actually exist from someone who lived that kind of love, it was everything. It made everything I feel for you a reality and not just the daydream that it feels like.”

Ali turned in Ashlyn’s arms to face her. “I love you so much, Ashlyn. Loving you is as easy as breathing. I can’t keep my hands off of you and honestly, I just know I’ll never be able to. It isn’t a daydream anymore, this is reality.” Ali kissed Ashlyn with everything she had.

Ashlyn’s heart was threatening to beat out of her chest. She kissed Ali back trying to pour every ounce of passion, love and emotion she was feeling into it. She knew if she pulled back and tried to speak, she’d never have enough words to convey it all, so she just used her body. She ran her hands all over Ali, using her skin to memorize everything about the way this moment felt and ingrain into her brain. She felt Ali’s tongue on hers, the brunette’s hard nipples pressed to her own, she was almost already over the edge.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s hands all over her, the blonde’s mouth working hard to breathe her feelings into her and Ali trying to do the same in return. The intensity of it all was almost too much, but Ali needed more. She wanted Ashlyn to physically be a part of her right now. As if Ali had actually spoken her thoughts through their kiss and Ashlyn had read them perfectly, she felt the blonde’s fingers slip into her. She gasped into Ashlyn’s mouth, pulling the blonde closer, focusing on nothing but the way Ashlyn moved inside her. There was only one more piece she needed. She reached down and slipped her fingers into Ashlyn. The blonde moaned into her mouth before Ali pulled back and let her heavy breathing fall on Ashlyn’s ear, feeling the blonde’s gasping breaths on her own.

Everything had disappeared but the two of them moving together as a single connected piece in the water. There were no desperate or dirty words spoken, no sounds except their ragged breaths. It was a moment of pure, passionate, intense love in its most physically intimate form. They moved in each other and trembled as they approached the peak together, tumbling over the edge in the same unified way whispering out each other’s names repeatedly. They clutched each other, still connected deep inside each other, slowly coming back down and letting the night reappear around them.

Ashlyn pulled out of Ali, feeling the brunette leave her as well. She grabbed the brunette’s face gently. “You are my breath, my air, Alexandra Krieger. This is so very real, these hands will never leave you. I’m going to love with you the last breath I ever take, I promise you.”

This time Ali had no words. She crashed her lips back to Ashlyn’s and they started the process of making everything around them disappear all over again.
Once Ashlyn and Ali returned back to Satellite Beach, the next couple of weeks seemed to fly by. They had settled into a routine even if just temporarily and they enjoyed it. There was an ease to it all and a comfort with each other that had grown exponentially since that moment they had together in Miami. Plenty of things had not been so routine though, namely the growing list of creative places they’d done the deed. There had been the halfpipe one night at the skate park, between the goal posts of the high school soccer field another night (when Ali had so tactfully used the line ‘let me show you how I score’), against a dock pillar under the local boardwalk one Saturday afternoon, and the top of the ferris wheel at the fair when they got stuck for twenty minutes and Ashlyn found the perfect way to distract Ali from her fear of heights. Of course, Ashlyn’s bed had seen plenty of action too. Ali hadn’t been kidding when she said she couldn’t keep her hands off of Ashlyn. Ashlyn had quickly learned that if Ali was worked up, she was ready to go anywhere and anytime. And it didn’t take much for Ali to get riled up around Ashlyn. Ali had learned that even though she was definitely the more adventurous one (something she was learning about herself), all she had to do was kiss the blonde and Ashlyn was all in and up for anything.

With Ashlyn having only two weeks of work left, Ali was making the trip back down to Miami for three days to spend some time with her dad. Ashlyn and Ali were back at the airport moping and whispering sweet things to each other before Ali’s flight.

“I’ll be back Friday morning, baby.” Ali reassured Ashlyn.

“Which reminds me. I’m bummed I can’t be here to pick you up when your flight gets in.” Ashlyn said regretfully. “I have an idea though.”

“Oh yah? What’s that?” Ali prodded.

“I was hoping you’d come meet me at the lab for lunch on Friday. Things will be quiet and I’ve gotten the okay from my boss to show you around that afternoon. I really want to show you everything so you can see what I’ve been doing.” Ashlyn said excitedly.

“Oh my god, yes! I can’t wait!” Ali replied gleefully. “Ah, my girl in her element! Seriously, so excited!”

Ashlyn laughed. “Easy, Krieger. You’re definitely not allowed to jump me in the lab ok. There are ground rules!”

“Fine, Harris. Agreed. But, I can still be excited! And… I can still be thinking about jumping you even if I don’t get to act on it, right?” Ali waggled her eyebrows.

“You can think whatever your lil heart desires, baby.” Ashlyn said, poking Ali’s nose and making the brunette scrunch her face.

“I’m going to have Chris drive me to work on Friday and I’m going to park my Jeep here at the
airport. I’ll leave the keys in the gas cap for you and text you where I parked it. That way you can just drive to meet me at the lab.” Ashlyn explained.

“Wow, letting me drive the baby by myself. You’ve grown, Harris. I’ll treat it like gold.” Ali teased. Ashlyn shook her head. “I’m sure I’m leaving King Arthur in good, and very beautiful, hands.”

“Ugh, I better go,” Ali said looking at the time.

“Ok, Princess. Have fun with your dad. Tell him I said hi.” Ashlyn said, giving Ali a tender kiss and watching her go through security until she got her usual blown kiss from the brunette and couldn’t see her anymore.

“Finally, some quality time with my daughter.” Ken said as he sat down to lunch with Ali at their favorite Thai restaurant.


“How’s Ashlyn?” Ken asked, knowing that Ali would probably start talking about her soon anyway.

“She’s excellent!” Ali said and proceeded to spend the next 15 minutes proudly telling him all about her work at the marine lab.

Ken had to admit he was impressed. “I really like her, Alex. The more I get to know, the more I see how great of a person she is.”

“Thanks, Daddy. She really likes you guys too.” Ali replied.

“Care to listen to some advice from your old man?” Ken asked.

“No promises that I’ll take it, but let’s see what you got old man.” Ali teased him like she usually did when he got like this.

“You’re lucky. You’ve found what I can only describe as true mad love. It’s so easy to see between you and her. Too easy. It still terrifies me sometimes as a dad to watch you flock to someone else for everything. But, I’m genuinely happy about it. It’s everything a parent wishes for their child. I hope Kyle finds it too. I just want you to realize how rare it is. Don’t ever take it for granted. You can look your whole life for that and never quite find it, trust me.” Ken said thoughtfully.

“What are you saying exactly, Dad?” Ali questioned, focusing on the rueful tone he had at the end of what he said.

“You’re old enough for me to explain this now. Your mom and I love each other. We always did and we always will. We never had that kind of magic though. We went together really well, comfortably. And like I said, there was always love there. It was so easy to look past what wasn’t there. It worked great for a long time… well, until it didn’t. Until we finally realized that we were really great friends with a deep love, but that we weren’t madly in love. Great friends who realized we owed it to each other and ourselves the chance to try and find that kind of love. So, I’m still trying to find it.” Ken explained honestly.
Ali sat quietly for a few moments thinking about everything he had just said, letting it sink in and fuse with all the other deep conversations she’d had in the last month. In many ways, it was the piece she’d been missing all along in trying to make sense of her parents’ divorce. “I get it, Daddy. It explains a lot that I didn’t quite understand for a long time, but I get it now. Thanks for telling me that.” Ali said quietly.

“Good.” Ken smiled at her, Ali had always been so perceptive. “Promise me you won’t take what you have for granted? You found a great person that you clearly have such an amazing connection with. Don’t let that go, it’s important.”

Ali got up and hugged him. “Promise, Daddy.”

“So, your old man has still got it then?” Ken joked.

“Of course! Never lost it. Now my new goal is to find you a hot woman!” Ali teased. Ken laughed. “Kyle said that too. Ok, well, you and Kyle just remember that tattoos are not my thing.” Ken teased back.

“But Daddy, they’re sexy.” Ali whined playfully, knowing the word ‘sexy’ would make him squirm.

“Stop! That falls under too much information.” Ken laughed, trying hard to give her a serious look.

“Ugh, fine.” Ali deadpanned and then broke out laughing too.

“Welcome to Orlando, it’s 85 degrees out already with sunny skies. We hope you enjoyed your flight and that you have a pleasant day.” Ali heard the pilot say over the loudspeaker as the plane landed. She was itching to get off that plane and get to Ashlyn’s lab. She was way too excited for this afternoon, but she couldn’t help it. Finally off the plane, she hurried through the crowds in the terminal and finally found Ashlyn’s Jeep waiting for her in the parking garage as promised. Ali grabbed the keys Ashlyn left in the gas cap and made her way to the lab.

Around 11:00am, Ali pulled up to a large rectangular building that sat right on the water. A dock nearby held several boats and some type of mechanical crane which seemed to belong to the facility. Ali texted Ashlyn to let her know she was there and waited outside of the car for the blonde. It only took a few minutes before Ashlyn was bounding out the door grinning widely at her. Ali took her in as they walked towards each other, the light blue scrubs had yet to not make her flustered. Having not seen her girlfriend in three days, she had to get herself under control so she could keep her promise to not jump her in the lab.

“Hi beautiful!” Ashlyn said leaning in to kiss the brunette.

Ali put her hand behind Ashlyn’s neck to deepen it. She pulled back after a minute, leaving her hand where it was and playing with the small hairs on the back of blonde’s neck that were exposed from having her hair up in a bun. “Hey, Stud. Sorry, just needed to get that out of the way so I can keep my promise to not get all frisky in there.” Ali laughed.

“Keep it in your pants, Krieger.” Ashlyn teased. “You ready?”
“So ready!” Ali exclaimed and followed Ashlyn into the building. They walked through several long white, sterile looking hallways with overhead fluorescent lighting, exactly what Ali was expecting the lab to look like. Ashlyn swiped her badge at several doors before finally stopping at one with a sign that read ‘Aquatic Rehabilitation Center’.

“So, this is not the actual lab I spend most of the day in. This is the large rehab tank. I need to stop here to attend to this guy first, so it’s a great time to introduce you.” Ashlyn explained and then opened the door to reveal a pretty huge looking pool with plexi-glass edging. Ashlyn led Ali right over to the top edge of it where there was a platform that rested level with the water. Ashlyn grabbed two long plastic yellow lab coats and handed one to Ali. “Here, put this on so you don’t get wet.” Ashlyn instructed as she pulled on her coat and slipped on a pair of gloves. Ali complied, laughing a bit at how she probably looked like a deep sea fisherman.

Ali looked into the pool but didn’t see anything. “So, what exactly is in here?” She asked curiously and a little nervously as Ashlyn brought her right onto the platform. Ali started to picture a killer whale jumping up to grab them.

“Relax. I’ll show you.” Ashlyn said calmly. Ali watched her lean over the edge of the platform and tap it loudly three times. About 30 seconds later a dolphin sprung up out of the water in front of them, startling Ali a bit and making her let out a small yelp. Ashlyn laughed and shook her head. The dolphin swam over to the edge of the platform by Ashlyn and poked its head up, appearing to study them. “Alex, this is Kazoo. He’s the one I told you about with the propeller injury.”

“Oh my gosh, he’s cute.” Ali said admiring the dolphin. She’d never been this close to one.

“Kazoo, this is Alex. Can you say hi?” Ashlyn said to the dolphin as she made a quick hand motion.

Ali watched the dolphin flip on its side and put one of its fins up out of the water and flap it around. “Oh, hi!” Ali said in awe, waving back at the dolphin.

“Good job, buddy.” Ashlyn praised the dolphin giving him another hand signal and then grabbing a small fish out of a nearby bucket to give him.

“What are you doing with your hands?” Ali asked, curious about the hand signals.

“That’s how we communicate with him. He’s picked up a lot of them already for being here only a few weeks. He’s pretty smart.” Ashlyn explained. “So, if I do this, he knows he should wave his flipper.” Ashlyn said putting her hand up like she was about take an oath and then quickly flipping it down. “You want to try it?”

Ali nodded. Ashlyn got Kazoo close again by tapping the platform. She pointed to her eyes and then to Ali, signaling that the dolphin should pay attention to Ali. “Ok, go ahead.” Ashlyn said. Ali signaled with her hand, watching the dolphin put its flipper up and wave again.

“That is so cool.” Ali exclaimed. Ashlyn gave the dolphin another hand signal, explaining it told him that he did good, and then gave him another fish.

“Ok, I gotta get him treated now. You can help.” Ashlyn said. “Come over by me.” Ali kneeled at the edge of the platform beside Ashlyn watching the blonde tap it again to get the dolphin back over there. Kazoo floated up in front of them. Ashlyn gave him a signal, explaining that it told him to be still and stay there.

Ali winced at the obvious gash on the dolphin’s back near his tail as Ashlyn examined it. “Trust me, it looks great. Looked a whole lot worse a couple weeks ago.” Ashlyn reassured her. “He doesn’t
really like this part, so you can pet his head while I do this.” Ashlyn instructed.

Ali gently stroked the rubbery skin on the dolphin’s head while Ashlyn quickly lathered on what looked like a thick paste onto the gash. “Awesome, all set.” The blonde said with a smile, patting Kazoo a bit to let him know he was done. The dolphin didn’t move though and nudged Ali with his nose.

“Aww, Kazoo likes you, Princess.” Ashlyn said, making Ali smile. Ashlyn gave the dolphin another signal where she clasped her hands together and pointed to Ali. The dolphin moved towards Ashlyn and flapped his fin near her, splashing her. Ali laughed.

“Hey, hey. She’s all mine pal, not gonna happen.” Ashlyn laughed.

“What was that?” Ali asked curiously.

“Oh, um… so, dolphins don’t actually mate for life like many people think they do. However, they form tight bonds with each other, so they understand pairings. We use that signal with them to understand their pairings and communicate with them about it. I just signaled to him that you were my pairing. He didn’t like that. Looks like Kazoo has a crush on you, Princess. No surprise there!” Ashlyn laughed.

“Ok that is completely adorable. You are completely adorable.” Ali said smiling at the blonde, completely overwhelmed by all the cuteness around her.

Ashlyn smiled back, lightly nudging Ali with her shoulder. She gave the dolphin another fish and let Ali pet him one more time before saying it was time to move on to the main lab.

After hanging up their plastic lab coats, Ashlyn led Ali back down the hallway they had come from and over to another door nearby with a sign that read ‘Marine Rehabilitation Laboratory’. She swiped her card and led Ali into a huge room with several long counters covered in scientific and medical looking equipment. The walls were covered in anatomical diagrams of various sea creatures and featured large whiteboards covered in writing. There were many aquarium tanks of different sizes throughout the lab, quite a few of them empty, but others with obvious occupants. It looked like a cross between an average science lab and an emergency room. Ali was pretty amazed by it, she didn’t expect it to be so big.

“Wow, this is so awesome!” Ali said animatedly, trying to take it all in.

“So, this is where I spend most of my day.” Ashlyn said. She led Ali over to a desk area against the wall. “This is my desk.” Ashlyn said matter-of-factly. The desk featured a very large computer monitor and had some neat stacks of paperwork on it. Ali smiled thinking about how much of a neat freak her girlfriend was, she had never expected that. She looked down closer to see that there was a picture of her and Ashlyn slipped under the plexi-glass desk cover. It was one that Kyle had taken on graduation weekend; Ali was in Ashlyn’s lap, the two of them looking at each other and laughing at something. Ali smiled again, feeling warm inside.

“Oh, actually, come here.” Ashlyn said, leading Ali a few desks over where a middle-aged woman with shoulder length brown hair and glasses sat working. “Hi Beth,” Ashlyn said as they got next to the woman. “I just wanted to introduce you to Ali. Ali this is my boss, Beth.”

Beth jumped up right away. “Hi Ali! I’ve heard so much about you. This one talks about you all the
time. It’s great to meet you!” She said, teasingly poking Ashlyn in the arm. Ashlyn turned a bit red.

“It’s so nice to meet you too, Beth. Ashlyn never stops talking about how awesome this place is and the great people here. I’m having such a good time so far checking it all out.” Ali replied kindly.

“Well, we absolutely love her here. She’s a smart cookie! We’re bummed she’s almost done for the summer, we’ll miss her. I think some of these animals might even miss her more though, she’s made a lot of friends.” Beth laughed. “We’ll just have to LURE her back in.”

“Oh, good one!” Ashlyn fist bumped Beth, noting the fishing pun.

“I try!” Beth chuckled.

Ali just laughed at the two of them.

“Alright, well, don’t waste more time on me. I’m sure Ashlyn has all kinds of neat stuff to show you still.”

Ali looked down to see a medium-sized sea turtle swimming around at the bottom.

“Time to meet some more friends.” Ashlyn said with a smile. She motioned to the pool for Ali to look into it. 

Ali looked down to see a medium-sized sea turtle swimming around at the bottom.

“He’ll come up in a minute for air.” Ashlyn told her as they watched him.

Sure enough the turtle eventually surfaced right in front of them, blowing air out of his nose and creating a mist of water. “This is Bic. I told you about him. I removed the pen cap stuck in his nose a couple weeks ago. But you’re all better now, aren’t you bud?” Ashlyn said touching the turtle lightly on the head.

Ali laughed at the turtle’s name. “Aww, can I touch him?” Ali asked.

“Of course! Top of the head, front flippers, or shell are all fine.” Ashlyn told her. Ali briefly stroked the turtle on the head before lightly running her hand on one of his flippers.

“What’s that on his back?” Ali asked, noting a device attached to the top of the turtle’s shell that looked like a small walkie talkie.

“That’s his tracking device, so the lab can keep an eye on him. He’s all better now, so Beth and I are going to release him on the beach he was found on next week. Technically, he’ll be my first successful rehab and release.” Ashlyn said proudly.

“Good job, baby! That’s so exciting!” Ali gave Ashlyn a quick squeeze, making the blonde grin.

Ashlyn led them to another decent sized tank. “This is Loan, but you definitely don’t get to pet her.” The blonde pointed to the window on the side of the tank since the top had a cover. Ali looked in to see a small, but fierce looking shark swimming around.

“Oh wow. She’s a little bit scary.” Ali said looking at the teeth on this thing.
“You should see her eat, she’s a beast.” Ashlyn replied.

“So, what’s her story?” Ali asked.

“She’s a baby shortfin mako shark, so she’ll get a lot bigger. Some fisherman caught her mother by accident off the Florida Keys and realized she was pregnant and pretty hurt, so they brought her in to a different marine rescue. They couldn’t save the mother, but they saved the baby who eventually got sent here. So, here she is. Since she’s being raised in captivity, the plan is to send her over to an aquarium when she’s ready. Might take a while, she’s pretty feisty.” Ashlyn explained.

“That’s kinda sad. No wonder she’s so angry.” Ali said watching the shark swim around with purpose. She noted a label on the tank that said ‘Loan’. She started laughing finally getting that the name was Loan Shark. “I’m so dumb, I just got her name!” Ali kept laughing. “Pretty funny. Who names them?”

“Oh um, usually whoever intakes them. But, the intern gets the naming rights for any animals that come in during the internship. It’s a job perk!” Ashlyn chuckled. “So uh, I named them. Kazoo because we had to use a kazoo at first to get him to respond, Bic because of the pen, and Loan was just funny.”

Ali laughed even harder. “While these names are great, let me just say that you are definitely not naming our children, Harris.”

“Aw, come on!” Ashlyn played back.

“Come here, I can’t wait for you to meet this guy.” Ashlyn said leading Ali all the way across the lab.

They reached a sizeable corner tank that was as tall as Ashlyn. The water in it was less than halfway up and a rock formation poked up out of the water in the center. At the top of the rock formation stood a penguin.

Ashlyn was beaming as she pointed to the penguin. “Alex, this is Felix. He’s my favorite. Don’t tell the other guys.” Ashlyn said, whispering the last part.

“Oh my god, he’s adorable!” Ali squeaked, putting a hand over her mouth. “Felix?” She questioned looking at the all black and white penguin.


“So, you’re here on a really special day. We get to work with him a bit. You ready?” Ashlyn asked excitedly. Ali nodded emphatically. “Here, slip this on one of your hands.” Ashlyn instructed, handing Ali a rubber glove as she slipped a similar glove on one of her own hands.

Ashlyn opened a small clear door on the plexi-glass tank, just above the water line. “Ok, come here Felix.” Ashlyn said tapping the side of the tank. The penguin dove off the rock and quickly swam to Ashlyn, who picked him up and placed him on a very large counter beside the tank.

“Alright, so unlike dolphins, penguins aren’t quite so trainable. But they still pick up cues and
respond in certain ways, mostly around food.” Ashlyn explained as Felix stood on the counter looking like them. “Felix is actually a pretty much a penguin honor student and he does a lot of cool stuff that I’ve trained him to do…well, assuming there is food around.” Ashlyn laughed and grabbed a bucket from the nearby refrigerator filled with small fish. “These are sardines, they’re the way to Felix’s heart.” Ashlyn smiled.

“Seriously, he’s too cute. It’s overload.” Ali said smiling widely at the little penguin just sitting there watching them.

“You’ve seen nothing yet, Krieger.” Ashlyn replied. “Anyway, so, Felix is a jackass penguin.”


“What? Oh!” Ashlyn chortled. “No, Alex. That’s his breed, jackass penguin. I’m not calling him names! And yes, jackass penguin is the real breed name. They’re native to Africa.”

“Oh! Sorry!” Ali said giggling at herself.

Ashlyn shook her head still laughing a bit. “Ok, Felix, can you say hello to Ali?” Ashlyn said lightly tapping the penguin’s beak and then forming a beak shape with her fingers and opening them. The penguin opened his beak and left it open.

“Ah, so cool!” Ali exclaimed.

“Well, that was good, but not quite it, buddy. Let’s try it again.” Ashlyn said to the penguin, tapping his beak again and repeating the hand motion. This time the penguin let out a noise that sounded like a cross between a honking horn and a donkey sound.

Ali was surprised at how loud it was. “Well hello to you too!”

“Yes! Good job.” Ashlyn praised the penguin. “So, to let him know he did what he was supposed to, he gets a sardine. Want to give it to him?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yes!” Ali replied enthusiastically, shocked at herself that she was so willing to grab a sardine even with a glove on.

“Just grab one from the bucket. And you see how his beak is open? He knows it’s coming. So, just gently place it in his beak head first and he’ll do the rest.” Ashlyn directed.

Ali did what Ashlyn told her, watching the penguin close his beak around the fish and tilt his head back in a few jerks to swallow it. “That was awesome!” She said excitedly.

“So, now I have to weigh him and check out his flipper that we took the fishing line off of when he first came in.” The blonde explained as she placed the penguin on the scale and gently tapped his belly. “When I tap him on the stomach like that, he knows he’s supposed to stay still.” The penguin sat on the scale obediently. “Good job, pal.” Ashlyn said encouragingly, feeding the open-mouthed penguin a sardine and making a note of his weight.

Ali just watched in awe of the penguin and her girlfriend.

Ashlyn tapped the penguin’s left flipper and Felix stuck it straight out. “Good.” Ashlyn said feeding him another sardine while she looked over the flipper. She motioned for Ali to get closer. “See the lines on his flipper?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yeah.” Ali answered.
“That is the scarring from the fishing line. They’re all healed up now, but unfortunately the scarring is permanent.” Ashlyn said quietly, running her fingers gently over the penguin’s flipper.


Ashlyn laughed, letting go of his flipper. “Felix, aren’t you surprised that such a pretty lady just called you handsome?” Ashlyn said tapping his beak, the penguin opening it wide and making it look like he was shocked. “Yeah, that’s what I thought!” Ashlyn joked feeding him another fish. Ali giggled.

“One of the things that we check every day to make sure he’s healthy are his feet. That can be hard to do, so training them to lift their feet up and let their feet get touched is one of the most important things.” Ashlyn explained. “So, today we’re going to work on that and do a little penguin enrichment.” Ashlyn said with a smile.


“You can help.” Ashlyn said as she pulled out a fairly large poster sized piece of paper and laid it on the counter besides them. She opened the cabinet above them and grabbed three small white jars and put them next to the paper before standing next to Ali right in front of the penguin who was waddling on top of the counter a bit. “Ok, so let’s get him to lift his feet first.” Ashlyn gently tapped Felix’s belly again so he would stay still. “Take your finger and lightly tap one of his feet.” The blonde instructed.

Ali did as she was told, gasping as the penguin lifted the foot she had tapped. “Eeeek, he’s killing me! So cute!”

Ashlyn smiled, quickly looking over the penguin’s foot. “Good. Now let’s do the other one.” She nodded at Ali, who tapped the other foot and watched the penguin drop the original foot and lift the other one.

“Nicely done, Felix. I think Alex should let you know you did a good job.” Ashlyn prompted. Ali grabbed a sardine and fed the penguin.

“Alright, enrichment time! You ready to lose your mind?” Ashlyn asked.

“Obviously!” Ali exclaimed.

“Felix here is about to make you some artwork for your new apartment.” Ashlyn said with a dimpled grin. “We call this penguin finger painting.”

“Seriously?” Ali questioned incredulously.

“Seriously. It lets them get used to having their feet touched.” Ashlyn explained as she opened the three jars to reveal different colored paint. “This is non-toxic paint. Looks like we have pink, orange, and green.”

“So how does this work?” Ali questioned curiously.

“If I tap his back, he knows to walk forward. Tapping his belly makes him stop. So, we’ll get him to walk onto the paper. Then we’ll have him lift his feet like before. When he does, we put some paint on them, and then tap his back to get him to walk around.” Ashlyn replied, tapping Felix’s back and getting him onto the paper.

“Wow, ok. This is pretty incredible.” Ali remarked.
“Ok, Princess. You’re the art director. So, get his feet lifted and put some paint on him!” Ashlyn directed.

Ali tapped the penguin’s foot, waiting until he lifted it and then dipped her own finger in the pink paint and spread it on the bottom of his foot. She repeated the process with the other foot. Ashlyn tapped the penguin’s back and he started walking around on the paper leaving footprints.

“That is amazing! So damn cute!” Ali squealed happily and totally impressed. The two of them laughed watching Felix waddle around on the paper until the ink ran out. Ashlyn had Ali feed Felix a sardine and then repeat the process a few more times with other colors. In the end, Felix had created a masterpiece of various colored penguin footprints across the page.

“Can I really keep this? Cause I totally want to frame it and hang it up.” Ali asked, pointing to the paper.

“Of course you can!” Ashlyn replied while cleaning off Felix’s feet a bit. “So, one last thing before I let Felix go relax.”

“Ok.” Ali said.

“Felix actually does like to be held. So, if you want to, you can hold him for a minute.” Ashlyn said with a small grin.

“Really?! I would LOVE to hold him!” Ali said in disbelief.

“Really.” Ashlyn smiled. “So, you’re going to put your hand palm up right by the edge of the counter. I’m going to tap him to have him walk forward onto your palm. When he does, I want you to put your hand on his belly and leave it there. And then just kind of bring him close to your chest so he’s kinda cradled on both sides between your chest and your hand on his belly.” Ashlyn explained.

“Ok. Gosh, I’m nervous I’m going to hurt him or something.” Ali said tensely.

“Relax. He’s used to it and I’m here to help you. So, let’s try it ok?” Ashlyn reassured her.

“Ok. Ready.” Ali said placing her hand near the counter like she was told and watched Ashlyn tap the penguin who walked forward onto her palm. Ali moved her hand to his belly and slowly moved him against her chest like Ashlyn told her. She looked up with a huge smile. “Oh my god, I’m cuddling a penguin!”

“Yep. We need proper documentation!” Ashlyn said pulling out her phone and taking some pictures of Ali with the penguin before moving behind the brunette and getting a selfie of all three of them.

After a few minutes, it was time to put Felix back in his tank. Ashlyn directed Ali to hold him like she was doing and just walk him over to it. She opened the door and had Ali gently place him in the water. Felix dove off of her hand and swam around a bit before climbing back up the rock.

“That was so amazing.” Ali said, completely in awe of the whole thing.

“Isn’t he great?! I love that penguin.” Ashlyn said and Ali nodded in agreement.

“So, I got some pretty awesome news about him this morning.” Ashlyn smiled.

“Since there is no guaranteed safe way to get him back to the African coast. In a couple weeks, he’s headed to the Sea Life Aquarium in Orlando as part of a new exhibit. And since I’m his original trainer, they’re giving me clearance to come see him and interact with him any time. So, we’ll be able to visit him!” Ashlyn said happily.

“Ash, that’s awesome!” Ali squeezed the blonde’s arm in excitement.

“I know! I’m so thrilled! They live to be like 30 years old in captivity and we estimate that he’s only like 5 years old right now, so we’ll be seeing a lot of this little guy hopefully!” Ashlyn beamed.

“So great! We have someone else to visit when we’re down here. I can’t wait!” Ali shared in the blonde’s excitement.

“Alright, so one more thing on the tour. Beth said I had to show you or else.” Ashlyn laughed lightly. “Then I’ll take you over to the cafeteria and we’ll get lunch since it’s already 1pm.” Ali nodded.

Ashlyn took her over to a medium-sized fish tank that looked like one someone might have in their home. Inside was a dark fish about the size of a hand with stunning neon yellow and neon blue stripes.

“That is a really pretty fish.” Ali said looking at it.

“She’s a Juvenile Emperor Angelfish. They’re considered one of the most beautiful fish in the ocean.” Ashlyn explained. “She’s from the Red Sea and was going to be part of an exhibit at Sea Life Aquarium, but wasn’t doing so well when she got there. She’s doing better now after being treated here and I think she’s going back to the aquarium soon.”

Ali nodded. “The stripe pattern on her is gorgeous. So, what did you name this one?”

Ashlyn cleared her throat a bit and pointed to a small label at the bottom corner of the tank that Ali hadn’t noticed yet. The brunette looked down to see that it read ‘Ali’.

“You didn’t!” Ai said with a big smile and wide eyes.

“I did. I mean… it’s an Angelfish, one of the most beautiful in the world… it fit.” Ashlyn smiled sweetly. “Don’t think the other lab staff will ever let me live it down, but yep… I did.”

Ali looked around real quick and then placed a soft lingering kiss on Ashlyn’s lips. “You are too good to me, Harris. I love you.”

“I love you too.” Ashlyn smiled. “Now let’s feed you! Do you want sardines or shark chum for lunch?” The blonde snickered. Ali smacked her arm lightly.

They ate lunch at the lab cafeteria where Ashlyn introduced Ali to a few other biologists that worked there. Everyone had been really nice and Ali could see why Ashlyn liked being there so much. It touched her that everyone she met already seemed to know a good amount about her; Ashlyn really did talk about her a lot.
When they finished eating, Ashlyn walked Ali out to the car; the brunette held the blonde’s hand on one side and clutched her painting from Felix in the other hand. Ali wasn’t sure how she had even survived the afternoon. Watching Ashlyn so passionately doing something she obviously loved combined with the cute animals, it was almost too much. Ali felt like her heart might explode.

“Ash, I just seriously had one of the best days ever. I am so so proud of you, baby.” Ali said as they reached the Jeep. “Thanks for having me come.”

“I’m so happy you liked it, Princess. I am so glad you came. I had a lot of fun showing you what I’ve been doing.” Ashlyn gave her a dimpled grin.

Ali kissed Ashlyn deeply. “Don’t work too hard the rest of the day, Harris. I’m picking you up in 2 hours and I’m feeling all kinds of things right now that I’m gonna need do something about tonight…over and over again.” Ali kissed the blonde one more time.

“Ok. Well. I’m gonna go find me some Red Bull and drink that sucker down before coming home to you, Krieger.” Ashlyn joked.

“You better. I might even show you some new tricks.” Ali winked, getting in the car and leaving a smirking Ashlyn behind.
As promised, Ali picked up Ashlyn from work at the end of the day. Ashlyn had to admit that seeing Ali behind the wheel of her Jeep was really sexy. She got in the car and leaned in to give Ali a quick kiss, but found herself getting caught up in it. She grabbed a fistful of Ali’s shirt and pulled her closer, deepening the kiss and drawing a soft moan from the brunette whose hands went to the back of her neck. After a couple minutes of a very heated kiss, Ashlyn realized she was still in the work parking lot and pulled back a bit winded.

“Hi.” Ashlyn said smiling.

“Hi.” Ali smiled back. “Glad to see you drank that Red Bull. But as much as I want to drive somewhere and continue this, I have plans for dinner.”

“Oh really?” Ashlyn said eyeing Ali curiously.

“Yes. Chris is doing inventory at the shop tonight until late and Grandma is helping run bingo until at least 10pm. So, it’s just me and you, and I’m cooking you dinner.” Ali explained.

“That sounds amazing, Princess.” Ashlyn replied, leaning back in her seat and taking Ali’s hand in hers as the brunette drove.

They got home and Ali went right to the kitchen to get busy.

Ashlyn wrapped her arms around Ali’s waist and planed a soft kiss on the back of her neck. “Can I help, Princess?”

Ali turned around in her arms. “Nope. If you try and help, dinner will never get cooked. Now, you go get comfy and relax. I’ll tell you when dinner is done.” She said kissing Ashlyn on the cheek.

“So, why am I being pampered exactly?” Ashlyn asked.

“Because you named the most beautiful Angelfish in the world after me, Harris. Don’t act brand new, you know damn well how ridiculously romantic you are.” Ali said.

“Don’t hate the player, Krieger. Hate the game.” Ashlyn joked.

“I hate neither. I just wanna play.” Ali winked. “Now get out of my kitchen and go relax already!”

Ashlyn put her hands up in mock defense and left the kitchen to go put on a pair of shorts and a loose tank top before sitting out on the deck and enjoying the evening sun.

Ali had dinner ready in a little under an hour. She had made chicken parmesan that Grandma had taught her how to make and a salad to go with it. Her cooking skills had improved dramatically since she started spending time with Grandma and she couldn’t wait to showcase them to the blonde. She asked Ashlyn to help her bring plates and silverware out to the deck. Once the table was set she
brought out the food, a bottle of wine, and finally a candle.

“Wow, Princess. This looks amazing. Who’s the romantic now?” Ashlyn said watching Ali light the candle.

“I’m still gonna say you are. Dig in, Stud.” Ali replied with a smile.

“This is so good, Alex. I’m so impressed. Seriously.” Ashlyn complimented with her mouth still half full.

“Thanks, baby. Try swallowing before you talk though.” Ali teased her, trying to hide her excitement that Ashlyn really seemed to be enjoying dinner.

After finishing dinner, Ashlyn cleaned up and refused to let Ali help do the dishes. She smiled to herself at how many pots and pans Ali had used, thinking it was completely adorable. When she was done, she sat down on the outdoor lounge chair. Ali brought the rest of the wine over, refilling their glasses and settling on Ashlyn’s lap and leaning back into her. They sipped their wine quietly, snuggling close and watching the last light of the day fade.

“How about we eat dessert in bed?” Ali broke the silence once they finished the wine.

“You made dessert too?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yep!” Ali exclaimed.

“Dessert in bed it is then.” Ashlyn agreed.

“You go ahead upstairs and I’ll bring up dessert.” Ali said.

“Ok, baby.” Ashlyn headed upstairs and plopped down on her bed. Ali came in a few minutes later with her hands behind her back.

“What do you have there, Princess?” Ashlyn asked curiously. “What did you make?”

“Cupcakes.” Ali stated plainly, closing the door behind her.

“Oooo, I love cupcakes!” Ashlyn said in high pitched voice.

“Me too.” Ali said walking over to the blonde. “The thing is, I forgot to bake the cake.” A smirk stretched across the brunette’s face.

“Huh?” Ashlyn asked a little confused.

Ali pulled her hands out from behind her back. “Well, we have frosting.” She put down a can of chocolate frosting on the nightstand. “We have whipped cream.” She put a can of whipped cream next to the frosting. “And we have sprinkles, rainbow of course.” Ali snickered, putting the sprinkles down next to the other toppings. “No cake.”

“Oh.” Ashlyn said completely getting it now. “I think we can make do. I do love frosting.”

Ali pushed Ashlyn back on the bed and straddled her, moving down quickly to capture the blonde’s lips in a heated kiss that had Ashlyn letting out a moan in just seconds. Ali pulled back and leaned into Ashlyn’s ear. “Watching you at work today was both the most adorable and hottest thing I have ever seen. The emotions are really conflicting.” She said hotly. “Right now though, the hot is definitely winning.” She gave the blonde’s ear a lick before climbing off of her, standing beside the bed and grabbing an extra sheet from the clean laundry pile nearby.
“Now, help me take your clothes off and put this sheet on the bed so I don’t make too much of a mess when I cover you in sweet sticky things and lick them off you.” Ali said smugly.

Ashlyn swallowed hard. She got up and quickly stripped her clothes off before helping an already naked Ali spread the sheet on the bed. Ali was back on top of her in no time, the brunette’s warm tongue probing her mouth. Ali pulled back again, one hand on Ashlyn’s chest the other grabbing the can of frosting. The brunette ran a smear of chocolate down Ashlyn’s neck with her finger, doing the same across her collar bone and each nipple before trailing a long line of frosting down the middle of her abs. Ashlyn’s back arched off the bed at Ali’s touch.

Ali put the can back on the nightstand and put her finger in Ashlyn’s mouth for the blonde to lick the frosting off. “Good, baby?” Ali asked.

“So good.” Ashlyn replied flustered.

“Let me taste then.” Ali said moving down to lick the frosting off Ashlyn’s neck, making sure to moan loudly against the blonde’s skin. Ashlyn let out her own loud moan, one hand going to the back of Ali’s head, the other gripping the brunette’s hip. Ali worked her way down the blonde’s neck and collarbone, arriving at her chest and sucking an already hard nipple into her mouth.

“Unnnhh” Ashlyn grunted, tugging Ali’s head closer. After licking and sucking the nipple clean, Ali tugged it with her teeth before moving on to the other one. Ashlyn let out a gasp. Ali worked her way down further, deciding to take a break from the frosting to trace the patterns of Ashlyn’s side tattoo with her tongue. The blonde squirmed underneath her, breaths heavy. She made her way back to the frosting, licking slowly down the blonde’s abs, occasionally leaving small bites across them.

Ashlyn’s back arched up again and she begged. “Please, baby. Don’t tease me anymore.”

Ali sat up a bit to look at her. “Mmmm, but I haven’t finished my dessert yet. Flip over.”

Ashlyn complied, laying on her stomach and feeling Ali’s wet folds make contact with her butt as the brunette straddled her again. She let out a whispered moan followed by a sharp intake of breath as she felt a line of cold whipped cream get trailed down the center of her back. She felt Ali shake sprinkles on her and giggle as some of them rolled down off her back and down her sides.

Ali put her hands on the blonde’s shoulders and slowly licked the whipped cream off the blonde’s back. She pulled at skin gently with her teeth along the way and listened to the blonde moan loudly while she squirmed against the mattress. “Mmmm, Alex. Please, baby, please.” Ashlyn begged, her core aching and needy.

Ali dragged her nipples across Ashlyn’s back and then got off of the blonde and stood beside the bed. “Get on all fours, baby.”

“Uh, ok.” Ashlyn said hesitantly, this was different.

“Relax. I’m gonna take care of you.” Ali said sweetly, running her nails lightly down Ashlyn’s back as she complied and got into position like Ali asked.

Ali placed open mouthed kisses on Ashlyn’s lower back, kneeling behind her and running her hand up and down her thigh. “Looks like there’s cake after all. I plan to have it and eat it too.” Ali said seductively, running her fingers through Ashlyn’s folds.

“Mmmmm, yes Alex.” Ashlyn moaned out, backing herself into Ali a bit to try and get more friction. She felt Ali’s fingers leave and groaned until she felt the brunette’s hot breath on her core. Ashlyn whimpered and Ali began lapping at her clit. “Oh fuck, oh my god.” Ashlyn panted out, hips already
moving around wildly. Ali had worked her clit plenty of times, but something about the way the brunette’s chin made contact with the sensitive skin above her clit while her tongue circled her hard bud from this angle was so incredibly different. “Fuck that’s so good.” Ashlyn said through ragged breaths, her hands grabbing fistfuls of the sheet. She felt Ali’s fingers on either side of her core, spreading her open. “Look at you, all open for me, so sexy.” She heard Ali mumble before the brunette’s warm firm tongue plunged into her, Ali’s chin now pressing on her clit. “Oohh. My God.” Ashlyn moaned louder, turned on by how exposed she was to the brunette.

Ali worked her tongue into Ashlyn deeply before withdrawing it to suck the blonde’s clit into her mouth, only to move and plunge back into her again. “You taste so good, Ash. So sweet.” She whispered against Ashlyn’s wet heat. She felt the blonde start to tighten around her tongue and pulled back.

“Please, Alex. Don’t stop, I need you.” Ashlyn begged as she felt Ali leave her throbbing core that was ready for release. She felt Ali run a hand up her thigh before the brunette’s warm skin pressed into her back and Ali’s fingers circled her entrance lightly. Ashlyn moved her hips back into Ali desperately. “Go in, Alex. I want you inside.”

“Whatever you want, baby.” Ali said, sucking hard and leaving a mark on Ashlyn’s lower back as she entered her with two fingers from behind. Ashlyn let out a whimpering gasp. “Yes, yes, unnh. Fuck, you feel so good like this.”

Ali’s fingers were pressing right into her g-spot with every thrust from this angle. Ashlyn knew she couldn’t last much longer, but she was trying desperately to hold on. Her head was spinning, she was starting to lose focus. She watched Ashlyn’s back muscles ripple as she writhed against her hand. “Alex, Aleeeex, right there. Don’t stop.” She heard herself plead through moans and panting.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s hips moving to meet her hand. She used her own hips to push against her hand for better leverage, her fingers buried deep in the blonde, Ashlyn’s entrance tight and wet around her knuckles. She could feel the blonde starting to clench, her hipp movements becoming random and wild. She watched Ashlyn’s back muscles ripple as she writhed against her hand. “You’re so beautiful. I love being inside you.” Ali whispered just loud enough for Ashlyn to hear her. She reached around and took one of the blonde’s nipples in her fingers. “Come for me, Ash.” As if she had pushed the magic button and said the magic words, she felt the blonde come undone, spilling out onto her fingers while her muscles contracted and shook.

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“Alex, Alex, yes, Alex.” Ashlyn repeated Ali’s name through high pitched moans as waves of pleasure washed over her. She collapsed forward onto the bed, not able to hold herself up anymore. She felt Ali’s fingers leave her, her soft warm tongue replacing them to lick her gently as she came down. “Alex.” She whispered out one more time as she felt Ali’s skin press against her back, the brunette collapsing onto her. They laid there listening to each other breathing for a while, Ashlyn trying to get her composure back. The blonde finally moved to flip over, now hovering over Ali.

“I didn’t get my dessert, Princess.” Ashlyn said intensely looking into Ali’s eyes.

The blonde’s eyes were a dark green, shining, and hungry. Ali was flustered just looking at them. She pulled Ashlyn down for a gentle kiss. “Help yourself, baby.”

Ashlyn spread frosting on Ali’s nipples, making the brunette let out a squeak as she shook sprinkles over them just to make Ali squirm. She grabbed the can of whipped cream and laid a trail from the valley of Ali’s breasts down over her toned stomach and across her hips. She moved lower placing a dollop of whipped cream right on Ali’s clit, earning a surprised gasp from the brunette. Ashlyn
tossed the whipped cream can off the bed and smirked at Ali cockily before doing what the brunette last expected.

Ashlyn dove right in to lick the whipped cream off Ali’s clit, feeling it harden as she sucked it into her mouth. “Oh. Oh my god.” Ali let out in a surprised low moan, hands going to the back of Ashlyn’s head to pull her in. Ashlyn reached back to pull Ali’s hands away, covering them with her own and pressing them to the bed on either side of Ali’s hips.

“Easy, Princess. I want all of my dessert.” Ashlyn said as she licked over Ali’s clit a few more times, making sure it was completely clean before moving herself up and continuing to do everything backwards. Ali’s chest was heaving, trying to catch her breath. Ashlyn licked the whipped cream off of Ali’s hips and then her stomach, stopping to suck lightly in spots that made Ali moan. When she got between Ali’s breasts, the brunette’s back arched off the bed in anticipation. Ashlyn used her hips to press Ali back into the mattress. She moved up to kiss and lick Ali’s neck, going out of order again and driving the brunette insane.

“When, Ash. Want you.” Ali heard herself struggling to form complete thoughts, her body at the mercy of Ashlyn’s tongue. She felt the blonde’s teeth rake over her collarbone and start to move down. Her nipples were hard and tingling in anticipation of Ashlyn’s mouth. Ali screwed her eyes shut waiting to feel Ashlyn’s warm mouth enclose one of her nipples. Instead she felt the blonde’s lips on hers and a finger enter her without warning. Ali let out a pleased yelp into Ashlyn’s mouth, her body less surprised than her mind as her hips were already gyrating. “Mmm, unnh, mmm.” Ali let sounds pour out of her mouth and into the blonde’s as Ashlyn’s tongue moved against hers. Ashlyn was moving in and out of her gentle and slow, creating an aching pressure deep in her core. Ali desperately grabbed Ashlyn’s face pulling her deeper into the kiss, feeling Ashlyn’s moan mix with hers and vibrate in their mouths.

Ali felt Ashlyn add another finger and opened her eyes when the blonde pulled away from the kiss. She watched Ashlyn latch onto her frosting covered nipple, mouth completely covering it while she ran her tongue over it. Ali grabbed the back of Ashlyn’s head, hands weaving into the tousled blonde hair. “Faster, Ash. Mmmm, fast... er. Ash.” Ali was still having trouble getting words out as she gasped for air. When Ashlyn moved to the other nipple, Ali felt herself starting to slip. “Oh, ooooh, close. Ash...lynn, so...close.” Words coming out in bits and pieces between panting breaths. Ali grasped Ashlyn’s bicep tightly, fingers of her other hand digging into the word ‘wisdom’ inked on top of the blonde’s shoulder.

Ashlyn sucked Ali’s nipple hard and worked her fingers faster, making the brunette let out a loud whimper. Ali’s entrance was getting tighter, almost pulling her fingers in. Ashlyn could feel Ali’s tight grip on her arm and shoulder and her body stiffening. Ashlyn buried her fingers deeply inside Ali and left them there, curling the tips of her fingers and pressing the brunette’s walls firmly over and over again. Ali lifted her hips and pressed her body to Ashlyn’s while letting out a wail, screaming Ashlyn’s name several times, her nails just breaking the skin on the blonde’s shoulder as she orgasmed.

Ali pulled Ashlyn down against her, holding the blonde tight. She wasn’t nearly recovered, but she needed Ashlyn again so badly. She flipped them over, looking into Ashlyn’s surprised face, the blonde’s fingers just now slipping out of her. Ali straddled Ashlyn’s hips and then lifted one of Ashlyn’s legs and slipped her own leg under the blonde’s thigh. She slid down slightly and let her clit press right up against Ashlyn’s. Ali let out a strangled breath and heard Ashlyn whisper out a hiss as their equally wet cores met each other. Ali braced herself by gripping Ashlyn’s thigh. She moved her hips slowly, sliding her folds against Ashlyn’s. She tilted her head back and closed her eyes, enjoying the surge of heat and electricity starting at her core and reverberating through the rest of her.
“You feel so amazing on me, Alex.” Ashlyn got out in a shaky voice. Her hands gripped Ali’s hips tightly, giving her more leverage to move herself against Ali and pull the brunette more tightly into her center. The feeling of Ali’s hard clit rubbing against her own, their juices combining to make a soft squishing sound, was so intensely wonderful. Ashlyn could feel herself right at the edge, but she wanted to hold on to this sensation as long as possible, she fought hard to stay in control as they moved against each other faster.

Ali kept her head back, eyes closed, focusing on nothing but her center against Ashlyn’s. The two of them were beyond being able to speak words now. The only sounds were their ragged breathing, the squishing friction of their cores, and the light tap of the headboard against the wall as they slid more furiously against each other. Ali could feel Ashlyn’s fingertips digging hard into her hips, she knew the blonde must be close. Ali was right on the edge herself, trying to prolong things just a bit further but her hips betrayed her, pressing down harder and moving faster against the blonde.

Ashlyn was the first to break. Her hands went to Ali’s ass, gripping it firmly and pulling Ali as tightly to her core as possible. “Unnnh, fuck, I’m coming. Aleeex…look at me. Come with me, baby.”

Ali forced her eyes open and looked into Ashlyn’s, falling apart at the blonde’s words, her abs clenching and her core spilling out more wetness between the two of them. “Ash.” She whispered out barely able to breathe, her grip on the blonde’s thigh loosening a bit. She tilted forward letting herself fall onto Ashlyn’s chest, hand holding Ashlyn’s neck as her hips continued to gyrate involuntarily against the blonde who still had a firm grip on her ass. When she finally caught her breath, she picked her head up to look at Ashlyn whose eyes were tightly shut, her body still trembling a bit.

“Are you still…” Ali asked without finishing the thought. “Yeeeah. Unnh, yeess.” Ashlyn answered desperately, her body riding out another high. Ashlyn had tumbled over the edge with Ali, only to have it happen again seconds later as Ali’s hips kept vibrating against her center. Ali smiled and kissed her deeply, stroking Ashlyn’s face under the blonde was back in control of herself. They laid silently for a while, Ashlyn’s fingers tracing the script of the brunette’s side tattoo while Ali’s fingers traced patterns on Ashlyn’s sleeve.

“How was dessert, gorgeous?” Ali asked quietly.

“Woah, Alex. Just woah.” Ashlyn said trying to find words. “Make me dessert anytime you want, Princess.”

Ali giggled a bit and buried her head into Ashlyn’s neck to get closer.

“I gotta ask. I mean, you have never been with a woman before me. So, where did that come from? I definitely haven’t done that before. What have you been reading, Krieger? Or watching? Oh my god, have you been watching porn?” Ashlyn asked, tilting her head down to give Ali playful challenging eyes.

Ali slapped Ashlyn on the arm, picking her head up and a bit red. “What?! No! Although… that might be fun to do with you…” Ali pondered for a second, hearing Ashlyn chuckle underneath her.

“You’re a freak in the sheets, Krieger, who knew?! I love it! Now back to my original question…” Ashlyn teased.

“Am not!” Ali defended. “Annyway, the first part was all from my own creative genius…” Ali answered.
“I’ll buy that. And the second part?” Ashlyn asked curiously, eyebrows raised.

Ali blushed. “Um… I may or may not have had a conversation on the phone with Kyle when I was in Miami where he mentioned scissoring and I had no idea what that was, so he had to explain it.”

Ali hid her face back into Ashlyn’s neck as the blonde’s eye went wide. “It sounded um… fun.” Ali mumbled the rest into Ashlyn’s shoulder.

Ashlyn laughed hard. “Your gay brother is teaching you lesbian sex positions?!? Wow, what have I gotten myself into?! Oh man… after that though…I might just have to thank him.”

Ali popped her head up and hit Ashlyn’s arm again. “You will not!”

“Easy, Krieger. I’m just kidding.” Ashlyn continued to laugh.

“You may teach sea animals tricks all day, but I can teach you some tricks too, Harris.” Ali smiled smugly.

“You sure can, lovely.” Ashlyn smiled back. She leaned up and kissed Ali softly. “You’re so beautiful, Alex. And gorgeous. And hot. And… really fucking sticky right now.” Ashlyn chuckled, noting how sticky they both were.


“Let’s go!” Ashlyn said rolling off the bed and picking up Ali to carry her to the shower.

They shared a many passionate kisses in the shower, washing each other gently and just enjoying the feel of each other. Since it was only around 9pm, they got dressed in pajama bottoms and t-shirts and sat outside on the deck again, cuddled together in the same lounge chair the way the night had started.

Grandma came in about an hour later and greeted them. “Hello dears. How was your night?”

“Hi Gram. Great! Ali cooked an awesome dinner and then we just hung here and relaxed.” Ashlyn answered.

Grandma took one look at them and knew better. “Sounds like you two had an excellent time.” Grandma said, placing slight emphasis on ‘excellent’ and sharing a knowing smile with Ali, who blushed. “Well, I’m off to bed. You two get some rest.” She said with another pointed smile.

“Love you, Gram. Sleep tight.” Ashlyn answered cluelessly.

“Good night, Grandma.” Ali said in a higher than normal voice.

When they were alone again, Ali broke the silence “Ash, can I talk to you about something?”

“Of course, Princess. Everything ok?” Ashlyn asked concerned.

“Yeah. I mean I think so. You know how I’ve mentioned Emily before?” Ali started.

“Yeah, I remember you telling a couple of random stories about her.” Ashlyn replied.

“She was my best friend growing up and in a lot of ways still is. I haven’t talked to her in a year because she’s been away in Malawi, Africa as part of a college teaching program. There isn’t much way to contact her there, so there hasn’t been much more than one or two quick emails making sure she’s doing ok.” Ali explained. “Anyway, we’ll be in D.C. next week. And she’ll be back home from Africa like two days after we get to D.C.”
“Ok.” Ashlyn said trying to follow along.

“I mean, she’s my best friend, but we haven’t been involved in each other’s lives at all in the last year. So, she knows nothing at all about you or even the 180 degree turn I just made with my sexuality.” Ali said.

“Oh.” Ashlyn said, starting to realize.

“Obviously I want to hang out with her while we’re there. I really want to introduce you and all spend some time together. I just imagine it’s going to be a bit shocking for her. I mean, I think she’ll be fine with it, but I guess I don’t know. I’m a little nervous.” Ali rambled quietly.

“Hey. It’s ok.” Ashlyn rubbed Ali’s back reassuringly. “She’s your best friend, I’m sure she’ll be ok with it even if she is a bit surprised at first. I’ll be right there with you and I’ll do whatever you want or need me to ok?”

“Ok.” Ali answered feeling a little better that Ashlyn was ready to face the potential awkwardness with her.

“I can’t wait to meet her.” Ashlyn said sweetly.

“You’re the best, Harris.” Ali said kissing the blonde softly and curling up further against her.

“Only the best for you, Princess.” Ashlyn replied holding Ali tighter.
Ash and Ali head to D.C. and Ali tells Emily...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After a long breakfast with Grandma and Chris, goodbyes, and promises to come back and visit soon, Ashlyn and Ali got in the Jeep and made their way to D.C. With Ali by her side, Ashlyn had kept her promise to stop by Todd’s house the day before to say goodbye to him and his family. She had also made a quick trip to cemetery to have some one-on-one time with her parents. It was the most satisfied and peaceful she had ever felt leaving Florida.

Since they didn’t have to be in D.C. any specific day or time, they decided to drive about halfway and stop in Myrtle Beach, SC to take in a street festival aimed at tourists. Ali had suggested sampling a bunch of food trucks for dinner which found them sitting on the beach with a bizarre assortment of things to eat. They shared a pepperoni and bacon grilled cheese sandwich, a spicy chicken stuffed corn cake, fried oysters, and a big funnel cake.

“I think I’m going to explode, Krieger.” Ashlyn patted her stomach and laid back in the sand.

“No way, Harris. I need you to carry my bloated awesomeness back to the hotel.” Ali joked letting out a small laugh. “Ugh, no laughing or I’ll really explode.”

“Should we try and walk it off?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Sure. If we collapse in the street at least there are people around.” Ali laughed harder, regretting it immediately as her full stomach contracted.

They walked along the beach for a while hand-in-hand, occasionally stopping in the darkness to listen to the waves crash in. It was in these quiet moments that Ashlyn took a minute to realize how lucky she was to be here with this amazing person beside her. She thought for a second about their evening together, Ali jumping around the festival booths and food trucks like an excited little kid, the way she looked so beautiful on the beach tonight just softly lit by the half moon. Everything about her was just so Ali, and Ali was hers. She had spent her whole life aching for love but being afraid of it because it always came with something else: pain, uncertainty, heartache, loss. With Ali there was nothing to be afraid of, just give love and receive it, it had never been simpler. She knew it wouldn’t always be perfect moments like this, but as long as Ali was there at the end of the day, it didn’t matter.

“You’re quiet. What are you thinking about?” Ali asked squeezing Ashlyn’s hand as they approached the end of the beach where the festival was still in full swing.

Ashlyn smiled. “At the risk of sounding like a complete sap, I was just thinking about how much I love you. How much fun I have with you.”

Ali smiled and stopped walking, pulling Ashlyn close and getting one last moment alone before they got back to the festival crowd. “I love when you’re all sappy. My big tough marshmallow.” Ali teased a bit. Ashlyn chuckled.
“I can be a sap too though.” Ali said, listening to the music from a jazz band drifting across the beach from the festival.

“Oh yeah?” Ashlyn replied.

Ali pulled the blonde closer. “Dance with me?”

“I’ll always dance with you beautiful, you don’t have to ask.” Ashlyn wrapped Ali up tightly and they swayed together on the beach for a while.

“Let’s go back to our room?” Ali suggested.

“Yes, Princess.” Ashlyn agreed, leaving her arm around Ali’s waist and pulling the brunette into her side as they walked.

As soon as they got back into their room, Ali pressed Ashlyn against the door and took her right there gently and slowly until Ashlyn was a shaking breathless heap who couldn’t stand up anymore, Ali holding her up. Once Ashlyn found her legs again, she lifted Ali and laid her softly on the bed, her face quickly buried between Ali’s legs until the brunette was the one left breathless and shaking. They collapsed together and fell asleep, not even making under the covers.

They made it to D.C. the next day a little later than planned because Ashlyn had insisted on finding a nice flower shop to buy Deb some flowers.

“My mom already loves you, Ash. You don’t have to bring her flowers.” Ali insisted.

“It’s isn’t about impressing her, Princess. I’m a good southern girl, you never show up empty handed.” Ashlyn explained

“Uh huh. Well, I do like your ‘southern’ skills.” Ali winked as they pulled into the driveway.

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Krieger. You’re about to kiss you mother with that mouth.” Ashlyn played back.

“Not before I kiss you first.” Ali leaned over and kiss the blonde softly before getting out of the car.

Ashlyn stood outside the car for minute and looked at the house. It was a huge limestone brick house with a long private drive and beautifully landscaped gardens. There was a four car garage with a small half basketball court near it. A soccer goal stood on a large swath of grass on the side of the house. The area wasn’t exactly wooded, but the trees and plantings combined with the somewhat large amount of land around the house made it feel fairly secluded even though it was an urban area. Ali never acted like she had a lot of money, so Ashlyn often forgot about it. However, one look at Ali’s childhood home and it was pretty clear that the Kriegers were not hurting for money.

“Woah! Look at this place. It’s gorgeous.” Ashlyn exclaimed, feeling like she had arrived at some sort of palace.

Ali smiled. “Yeah. It’s home. My grandparents had it built and then gave it to my parents as a wedding gift. It’s kinda crazy that my mom is here all by herself. She’s pretty serious with this guy right now and I think they’ll eventually get married. That will be kinda weird if that happens. I mean, I like him, but I’m sure they’d live here and it would definitely change the feel of the house, you
know?” Ali rambled. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to get off track. So, this is home.”

“It’s ok, Princess. I get it.” Ashlyn reassured her as they approached the door. Deb opened the door and came running out, hugging Ali tightly.

“Girls! You’re here! I’m so excited to see you!” Deb exclaimed. She pulled back and looked Ali over before turning and hugging Ashlyn just as tightly.

Ashlyn held out the bouquet of flowers to Deb. “These are for you. Thanks for having me.”

“Aren’t you sweet?! These are gorgeous! Thank you.” Deb answered kindly, taking the flowers from Ashlyn. “If you ever let this one go, I’ll kill you myself.” Deb said to Ali with a playful tone.

“No worries there, mom. I’m not letting her go.” Ali took Ashlyn’s hand. “Besides, where else would I find such a beautiful personality in such sexy outer packaging?”

“Alex!” Ashlyn nudged her, embarrassed.

Deb laughed at Ashlyn. “Oh honey, you’ve spent too much time around Ken. That is not how we do it in this house. These girls keep it real.” Deb said pointing between Ali and herself.

Ashlyn groaned. “I’m in trouble with you two then.”

“Yes!” Ali and Deb replied in unison.

“Well, come in! Alex, why don’t you girls go get settled upstairs and you can give Ashlyn the tour. Then we can have some dinner. I was going to cook, but I wanted to spend my time with you two tonight. So, why don’t we order in. Maybe some Chinese or Mexican or even pizza. Whatever you are up for.” Deb suggested.


“Yeah that sounds really good. Thanks.” Ashlyn replied going to grab their bags from the car and then following Ali into the house. She walked into a large foyer with cathedral ceilings, an ornate wooden staircase leading upstairs. The house had a pretty open layout, a huge living room to the right with a double sided fireplace shared with the dining room. The dining room had a table that seated 10, a fully stocked bar sat in the corner. Off the dining room was a large kitchen with marble countertops, a double oven, and dark mahogany cabinets. The kitchen had a large glass door that opened up to what looked like an outdoor patio done in the same limestone brick as the house. There were two bathrooms downstairs, one just a half bath, the other a full bathroom with an antique copper tub. A room to the left of the staircase featured floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with books, lush red carpeting, and a beautiful wood desk. It looked like an office that belonged in the White House. The office had a long shelf that featured quite a collection of Ali and Kyle’s sports trophies and academic awards. Beside the office was a game room with a pool table and foosball. No wonder Ali had been so good at pool.

“Wow. This place is amazing.” Ashlyn said quietly to Ali as she followed the brunette around from room to room.

“Thanks. I know it’s over the top.” Ali replied.

“I might need a map so I don’t get lost.” Ashlyn teased.

“Aww, I’ll get you a GPS baby.” Ali joked back.
Ali finally led them upstairs, showing Ashlyn the master bedroom which featured its own outdoor balcony and master bathroom with a huge rain shower. Ali took Ashlyn through another 4 guest rooms, Kyle’s room and adjoining bathroom, and a full guest bathroom before finally stopping at the last door on the left with a small wooden crown on the door. “This one is mine.” Ali said with a smile, pushing open the door to her room. Ashlyn smirked at the crown on the door before going in.

Ashlyn had expected a room covered in pink and lace, but this was anything but. The room was fairly large, painted in a light green with white trim. The furniture was all white. A large low-profile dresser sat along the left wall, a day bed in the left corner. In the back right corner was a desk. A queen size four post bed was along the right wall with colorful throw pillows all over it. In the front right corner was a little table and mirror make-up station. There was a large walk-in closet, which was about half full. Best of all, Ali’s room had its own gas fireplace.

“Alex, there’s a fireplace in your room! Holy crap! This is amazing!” Ashlyn exclaimed looking around.

“That’s why I picked it. Kyle and I fought for this room, but I won fair and square in a backyard soccer shootout.” Ali laughed. “Well, that and the private bathroom.” Ali said pointing to a white door.

Ashlyn opened the door to find a large white tiled bathroom with a Jacuzzi tub in corner with an open granite tiled shower right next to it. A large linen closet sat on the left near the door and a huge double sink counter top ran against the wall, a wide mirror over it. A comfy chair was in the corner besides the counter.

“This is insane. I could live your bathroom.” Ashlyn said shocked at it all.

“Well, had I known you in high school, trust me, I would’ve been sneaking you in here all the time.” Ali replied.

They walked back into the bedroom where Ashlyn took in the smaller details. There were a few framed pictures on the wall, mostly of Ali and her family at all different ages. The picture Ashlyn loved the most was of Ali running down the soccer field intensely, ball at her feet, she looked to be around 12 years old. “You’re so cute!” Ashlyn said looking at the pictures. The blonde turned to the poster hanging above the desk. “Now there’s the straight Ali I know and love.” Ashlyn teased, pointing at the Backstreet Boys poster that most teen girls probably had in their bedrooms at one point or another.

“Shut up!” Ali said tossing a throw pillow at Ashlyn. “Everyone loved the Backstreet Boys.”

“Uh huh.” Ashlyn teased. “Well, maybe if I pulled my hair back a bit, I could look like Nick Carter.” She pulled her hair back with her hands and tried to mimic the pose on the poster.

Ali walked right up to her. “You are so much hotter than Nick Carter.” She kissed the blonde hard, hands going to the back of Ashlyn’s neck. Ashlyn deepened the kiss, pressing her tongue into Ali’s mouth when the brunette granted her access. Ali pulled away, kissing and nipping at Ashlyn’s jawline and neck, drawing a deep breathe from the blonde. She dropped one hand down and slid it up the back of Ashlyn’s shirt.

“If you ladies want to come look at the menu, I can order the food.” Deb’s voice rang through the room, making Ashlyn jump back.

“Relax. It’s the intercom system.” Ali explained. “Don’t worry, it only works one way, so she can’t hear us until I push the respond button.” She walked over and pressed a red button. “Be right down,
mom.” She walked back to Ashlyn who was just watching her carefully and planted another kiss on the blonde’s lips. “To be continued later. I’ve been waiting my whole life to break this room in properly.” Ali winked. Ashlyn swallowed hard and gave Ali a nod, the only thing she could manage at the moment in her flustered state. Ashlyn fixed her shirt and followed Ali downstairs.

Over dinner, Deb had asked all kinds of questions about Ashlyn to get to know her better. The blonde had talked about her family, Smith, and her summer internship throughout dinner. Deb had been incredibly impressed about Ashlyn’s marine biology undertakings.

“Ok, so, charming, good looking, athletic, and smart. Maybe Alex is on to something. Maybe I should date women.” Deb joked.

“Mom!” Ali yelled.

“What?! I’m just teasing! Besides, it’s every mother’s wish for their daughter to be happy and bring home someone like this one.” Deb said pointing to Ashlyn. “Let me relish in it a bit and brag about her!”

Ashlyn turned red and tried to get the attention off of her. “Um, well, thanks. We’ve been talking way too much about me. When I am going to hear all the good stories about Ali growing up that I haven’t heard yet?”

Ali shot her a look.

“Oh, we have lots of that!” Deb said. “Come on, let me pull out the baby pictures!”

Ali groaned as Deb led them into the living room and brought out a bunch of family photo albums. Ashlyn rubbed her hands together excitedly and plopped down on the couch next to Ali sandwiching her between herself and Deb.

After about an hour of naked baby pictures, a story about Ali getting caught by Ken making out with a boy in the locker room after a soccer game, and how Ali had decided to forgo a bra with her prom dress and ended up with a nasty rash from the duct tape she used instead, Ashlyn decided to take pity on a very embarrassed Ali and pretended to yawn.

“Oh, you two must be tired after all that driving.” Deb said. “Why don’t you go settle in. We can talk more in the morning.”

“Actually, mom. Emily got home tonight and I’m supposed to have coffee with her in the morning.” Ali cut in.

Ali had told Ashlyn this earlier after she and Emily had been making plans via text on their drive to D.C. Ashlyn suggested that maybe it would be good for Ali and Emily to catch up on their own first before Ali introduced her. Ali seemed to be on the fence about it, like maybe she felt bad leaving Ashlyn alone with her mom for a while.

“Maybe me and your mom can go to breakfast and she can show me around D.C. a little while you and Emily catch up.” Ashlyn offered.

“We can definitely do that, it would be fun.” Deb chimed in.

Ali thought it over, deciding it might be best to have a one-on-one with Emily before completely shocking her with Ashlyn. “Um, ok. Yeah that sounds good.” Ali agreed.

They said goodnight to Deb and made their way to Ali’s room, the brunette closing and locking the
“Thanks for hanging with my mom a bit in the morning, I feel bad leaving you alone.” Ali said.

“Don’t. You haven’t seen your best friend in over a year. I think it’ll be better if you get some time to catch up. I’ll have plenty of fun with your mom, so don’t rush.” Ashlyn replied.

“I love you, you’re the best. Now where were we before, oh right…” Ali said running her hands along the collar of Ashlyn’s shirt and pulling the blonde in to kiss her.

Ashlyn pulled back a bit. “I dunno, Krieger. This is a little wrong after all those naked baby pictures I just saw.” She teased.

“I’m all grown up, Harris. And really turned on by how great you are with my family.” Ali said seductively.

“Yeah well, you have, uh, definitely grown up in many ways.” Ashlyn said, cupping her hand over Ali’s breast over her shirt.

“There’s my Stud.” Ali smiled hungrily, pulling Ashlyn closer by her belt loops. “The one who is going to take all my clothes off and spend the night making sure I scream her name on every surface in this room.”

“No screaming, Krieger. Use your indoor voice.” Ashlyn warned teasingly before kissing Ali deeply. Ali walked them to the fireplace, fumbling around to turn it on without breaking the kiss. She pulled Ashlyn down on the floor with her as they started an exploration of each other that lasted several hours and moved from the floor to the desk, to the day bed, to the Jacuzzi tub, and finally to the bed until they were fully sated and exhausted.

“You’re incredible.” Ali said breathlessly, burying herself in Ashlyn’s arms.

“Better than Nick Carter?” Ashlyn joked.


“Good answer.” Ashlyn smiled.

“I will never get enough of the way you make my body feel.” Ali said with a soft purr.

“You’re the one with the insane stamina, Princess. You have sex like you play rugby, unstoppable and unrelenting” Ashlyn laughed lightly.

“You know it! I think you pretty much match me in the stamina department though, Stud. On and off the field.” Ali said playfully, kissing Ashlyn’s neck and letting her head rest on the blonde’s chest, her eyes closing.

“I love you, Alex. Sweet Dreams.” Ashlyn whispered, pulling Ali tightly against her under the covers.

“Love you, baby.” Ali whispered back, before her breathing slowed and she drifted off to sleep.

Ashlyn stroked Ali’s hair for a while, watching her sleep until her own eyes closed.
Ashlyn and Deb were sitting down in the kitchen, talking about Deb’s concern that Kyle hadn’t found any long-term boyfriends yet, when Ali walked in after having breakfast with Emily.

Ashlyn immediately noticed her red eyes. “Hey, how was breakfast?” She asked cautiously. Deb watched from the other side of the table.

Ali sat down next to Ashlyn and shrugged, looking a bit defeated. “Ugh, I don’t know. It was so awkward.” Ashlyn stayed quiet and just took Ali’s hand in hers, knowing the brunette would eventually elaborate.

“She was definitely surprised. And she kinda seemed fine with it, but then kinda didn’t. I don’t know if it just sunk in more while we talked, but the whole thing was just off. Normally, we just kind of connect on the same wavelength even if we haven’t talked in a while. It just didn’t happen. It started that way, and then I told her everything. It just went downhill from there.” Ali voice broke and tears rolled down her cheeks. “She didn’t even seem happy for me.” Ali got out in a sob.

Ashlyn pulled Ali into a hug, the brunette crying into her shoulder. Ali was still talking through tears. “I promised her we’d go to her house tomorrow night for her welcome home party. I don’t even know if I can go. I really thought she’d be happy for me.”

Ashlyn wiped tears off Ali’s face. “Hey, beautiful. I’m here, ok? We’ll figure this out. Maybe Emily just needs a little time to process. She wouldn’t have asked you to come tomorrow if she didn’t want you there. It was probably just a lot to take in for her. And if not, then we’ll figure that out too. It’s ok to be upset though, I’m sure it was hard to deal with that reaction from her.”

Ali nodded, trying to calm down a bit. Ashlyn kissed her forehead. “I love you, Alex. It’ll be ok.”

Deb watched Ashlyn take care of Ali, warmed by how well the blonde protected and cared for her daughter. She got up walked behind them and put a hand on each of their shoulders. She leaned in to kiss the top of Ali’s head. “Ashlyn’s probably right honey, Emily was probably just surprised.”

“I’m tired. I think I just want to lay down for a while.” Ali said.

Ashlyn went upstairs with Ali, holding her quietly until she cried herself to sleep. She sat there thinking for a while and finally it got the best of her. She slipped out of the bed careful not to wake Ali and grabbed the brunette’s cellphone. A few minutes later she ran into Deb on her way out the door.

“She’s upstairs sleeping. I’m gonna run out for a little bit if that’s ok.” Ashlyn explained.

“You called Emily didn’t you?” Deb guessed.

“Uh, yeah. How did you know?” Ashlyn asked wondering if Deb had overhead her phone conversation.

“Cause it’s the same thing I wanted to do when she came in upset like that.” Deb said simply. “You know this could totally backfire on you, right?”

“Yes. I just… I didn’t ever have a best friend growing up. Now that I do, I get how important it is. I don’t want her to lose that because of a misunderstanding. I mean, maybe it’s more than that, but it sounds like maybe they just weren’t communicating well with each other.” Ashlyn tried to explain.

“I agree, but I’m a total meddler. So, it’s in my nature to do crazy things like this. I’m more likely to just fuel your fire more than I need to. I’ll just say good luck and I’ll try to cover for you if she wakes up, but you know Alex, she’s perceptive.” Deb replied.
“Thanks.” Ashlyn said walking out the door.

A few minutes later Ashlyn walked into the coffee shop that Emily had suggested. She ordered a cappuccino and sat down to wait for Emily. About five minutes later, a brunette came in who was looking around a bit. Ashlyn figured it was probably her since she looked like an older version of the girl in one of the pictures in Ali’s room. Ashlyn got up and waved in hopes that it was her. The girl came over to her.

“Are you Ashlyn?” She asked.

“Yes. Hi Emily. Ashlyn, nice to meet you.” Ashlyn held out her hand and Emily shook it.

“You too.” Emily said.

“Do you want a coffee or something?” Ashlyn offered.

“Oh yeah. I can get it.” Emily replied.

“No, no. Thanks for coming to meet me. It’s on me. What can I get you?” Ashlyn asked politely.

“I’ll just have a plain latte. Thanks.” Emily answered, sitting down while Ashlyn grabbed the coffee. She looked at the blonde from afar. After her breakfast with Ali, she had finally hopped on Facebook for the first time in about a year and scrolled through Ali’s pictures. She realized by the sequence of photos that Ali and Ashlyn had obviously been close friends for a while and then started dating. The conversation with Ali had been so strained that she didn’t even get to really hear much about their relationship. She had to admit the girl was attractive, even better looking in person. She seemed really nice too. She was already feeling guilty when she left breakfast, it was a lot worse now.

Ashlyn came back with the coffee and sat down. She figured she called Emily in the first place, so she should start the conversation.

“So, I know you’re probably wondering why I wanted us to meet without Ali. Honestly, Ali came home pretty upset after your breakfast together this morning. I think she felt like you were upset with her or not okay with things. After hearing what she said and then putting it together with what she’s told me about you, I don’t know, something seemed off. I mean, you guys are close, and I know it’s been a while, but you seemed excited to see each other until whatever happened this morning. I guess with you having been fine around Kyle all these years, it didn’t strike me that you’d be upset that she’s dating a woman. Maybe I’m wrong though…” Ashlyn started.

Emily dropped her face in her hands. “Ugh, I didn’t mean to make her think that. I am more than ok with her dating a woman.”

Ashlyn felt a little relieved. “Alright, well that’s a good start.” She laughed trying to lighten the mood a bit and saw Emily smile. “I just figured if maybe we talked a bit and got to know each other, maybe it would be good. You’re her best friend, she loves you and I know she doesn’t want things to be weird between you guys. I thought maybe if I could understand better what is going on, I could help Ali understand it. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah it does. I’m really glad you asked me to meet you. It was my fault breakfast got all weird this morning. I feel like a jerk. I don’t know why I felt like I couldn’t talk to her for like the first time ever, I just found myself getting stuck because I was in my own head. I really don’t want things to be weird.” Emily said quietly.

“I know you don’t really know me, but I promise I’m a good listener.” Ashlyn replied, hoping Emily would eventually elaborate if she felt comfortable. “How about I give you the cliff notes version
about me and then maybe we can talk more about this morning?"

“Deal.” Emily said, curious to hear more about Ali’s girlfriend.

“Well, let’s see. I’m original from a small town in Florida that I pretty much hated growing up and couldn’t wait to get out of. My parents passed away in high school, so I pretty much just have my brother and Grandmother now. I luckily got into Smith College and just finished my sophomore year there and absolutely love it. I’m studying marine biology. I met Ali last fall when our rugby teams played each other and we pretty much kicked each other’s butts all over the field. She totally shut me down when I first tried to introduce myself to her, but then eventually decided to be nice and get to know me.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“That’s definitely Ali!” Emily chimed in with a giggle. “Go on.”

Ashlyn continued. “So, we got to be friends and eventually just kind of fell in love with each other. Well, I was pretty much in love with her from the first night we met, but I refused to make the first move, so it all took a while.”

“Wait, Ali made the first move?” Emily asked a bit surprised.

“Pretty much. I mean we flirted and were very touchy for months, but she finally kissed me during Spring Break. Then I wanted her to be sure, so I told her to think about it. And she did and like a week later we made it official. After that we kinda went through all the typical stuff of her telling her parents and other people finding out. Meeting each other’s families and all that. Some of it went smooth and some not so smooth. Like me punching out her ex-boyfriend for example. Overall, it’s all turned out ok so far though. I really love Ali… she’s definitely my one, you know?”

“Wow, you punched out Brent? About time someone did that, such an asshole!” Emily said pleased before adding “She said the same thing about you. Sounds pretty serious with you two.”

“Yeah, it is.” Ashlyn replied honestly. “Which I guess is why I’m here. First, I hate seeing Ali upset obviously. Also though, I never had a best friend growing up, but I have a best friend I met in college and she means everything to me. So, I can only imagine if she had been there my whole life. I wouldn’t want Ali to lose that because of our relationship making things weird.”

“I promise, your relationship with Ali is not making it weird. It actually explains a lot about her that I never stopped to really think about. It all kind of fits now. I guess I just felt kind of blindsided this morning.” Emily explained. “She told me about you guys and it was totally fine. And then I kind of realized that everyone seemed to know but me and I felt really left out. I guess I just felt upset that she didn’t tell me until now. And if I’m being honest, I guess when she started talking about you, she was all lit up and I felt like maybe I’d been replaced.” She finished quietly.

“Oh, Emily. You’ve known Ali since pre-school. She needs you in her life, you could never be replaced, trust me on that.” Ashlyn reassured her.

“Yeah, I didn’t mean to be so insecure about it. I guess I was just embarrassed and hurt that I didn’t know anything and everyone else seemed to.” Emily replied.

“I get that. If I was in your place, I’d probably be upset too. I bet Ali didn’t really explain though. I mean things with us kind of happened fast once we starting dating. While she told her parents and Kyle really quickly and the rugby girls knew because they’d been around us, she didn’t really plan to tell anyone else for a while. She can tell you more about it later, but she actually got outing by her school newspaper when some girl out for revenge decided to print a picture from a rugby tournament of us kissing. The whole thing wasn’t pretty and she had a hard time dealing with it. I think she
probably just wanted to be able to tell you in person since she hasn’t really had much control of the news up to this point. I’m sure it was important to her to tell you on her terms.” Ashlyn explained.

“I didn’t know that. We didn’t get that far this morning, but it makes a lot of sense. I mean, it’s dumb for me to have expected her to tell me over email while I was in Africa and not able to respond for weeks at a time. I just let my emotions get the best of me this morning and it just messed everything up.” Emily replied.

“I think you should talk to her. It sounds like you guys just miscommunicated this morning and maybe talking again might help?” Ashlyn suggested.

“That’s a good idea. Much better than the plan I had of trying to smooth things over at a crowded party tomorrow night. Do you think you guys will come? I really want you both there.” Emily said.

“I certainly hope so. I’m sure Ali would love to be there and you can make sure once you guys talk.” Ashlyn answered.

Emily finished her latte and sat back for a second. “I’m really glad you called me and that we talked. You seem really great and I can’t wait to get to know you better. Ali looks really happy and in love, I’m really happy about that even if I sucked at showing it this morning.”

“Thanks, Emily. I’m really excited to get to know you too. Ali has only given me the basics, so I really can’t wait to hear about all the trouble you two got into growing up. I need the dirt!” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Get ready! I have so much dirt!” Emily laughed. “I promise I’ll call her in a little bit and sort things out. Thanks again for calling me and doing this.”

“You bet. I just hope Ali doesn’t kill me for it.” Ashlyn said nervously.

“If I know Ali, she won’t be thrilled at first, but she’ll get over it. She likes to fight her own battles, but that’s because she’s not used to having someone who is willing to help her do it.” Emily answered honestly.

“Thanks for the advice. I guess I better go face the fire then. I’ll see you tomorrow night hopefully.” Ashlyn said before making her way out of coffee shop and back to the house.

Ashlyn walked into the kitchen to find Deb making some tea.

“She’s up and in the living room. She figured it out like 5 minutes after she woke up and saw the call log on her phone.” Deb warned, handing Ashlyn a mug of tea. “Bring that as a peace offering.”

“That bad?” Ashlyn asked nervously.

“She’s not totally pissed, but she’s not happy either. I think she just needs to understand where you’re coming from. I’ll chime in with support when I can, ok?” Deb offered.

“Thanks.” Ashlyn said before taking a deep breath and heading into the living room.

Chapter End Notes

What do you guys think, did Ash overstep the boundaries on this one?
I Just Need My Girlfriend

Chapter Notes

The great thing about fighting is getting to make up...

Ashlyn walked into the living room ready to face the heat. She found Ali sitting on the couch, a pretty pissed off look on her face.

“Have a good time with Emily?” Ali asked in a low voice, not even looking up.

Ashlyn sat down a few feet from her on the couch and handed her the mug of tea. Ali took it and put it down on the coffee table, refusing to drink it.

“Actually. Yeah, Alex. I had a good talk with Emily.” Ashlyn said, knowing they might as well get into it.

“I don’t know why you did that. She’s my friend and I would’ve handled it. You don’t even know her.” Ali replied, clearly annoyed.

“It’s not that I didn’t think you couldn’t handle it. It just sounded like you and Emily were on different pages and didn’t realize it. I didn’t want it to get worse before it got better because you guys didn’t feel like you could talk to each other. I guess, most of all, I didn’t want our relationship to be getting in the way of another relationship in your life that is really important.” Ashlyn tried to explain.

“It still wasn’t your place.” Ali said shortly.

“I know I probably overstepped the boundaries a little. I get that, but you know what Alex, even though I know you’re not happy about it, I’d still do it again. I never had anyone close growing up, you know that. I never had a single person I could call a best friend or that even knew me that well other than my brother. Do you know how amazing it was to meet Whit and finally have someone positive like that in my life, to finally have a best friend? She’s so important to me and I can’t even imagine what our friendship would be like if I’d known her my whole life like that. You have that with Emily and I could never stand the idea of you giving that up because of me or for any other reason, especially if I thought maybe I could help. I hate seeing you upset and hurt. So, I tried to help, Alex.” Ashlyn pleaded her case.

Ali stayed quiet for a few minutes, but she didn’t look any less mad.

“You don’t always have to fix everything for me, Ashlyn.” Ali said, getting up and leaving the room.

Ashlyn let out a deep breath and whispered to herself. “Well that went well.” She leaned back into the couch and sat there for a while.

Deb came in a few minutes later. “Well Romeo, Juliet still looks pretty miffed.”

“Yep. Guess I’m not getting off easy.” Ashlyn replied feeling defeated.

“So, did things go ok with Emily?” Deb asked curiously.
“Yeah, they went really well actually. Emily is just fine about us being together, happy about it even. Seems like Emily just felt like everyone knew before her and she was upset Alex didn’t tell her sooner. She was just feeling left out and a little jealous. I sort of explained why it was important for Alex to tell her in person and sort of everything that happened at Dartmouth with being outed and stuff. I think Emily is going to call her in a little while to sort things out.” Ashlyn explained.

“Well that’s good news. Maybe she’ll feel better once she talks to Emily.” Deb said encouragingly.

“Do you think I was too impulsive?” Ashlyn asked seriously.

“No, but she’s my daughter. I’m always going to be on the side of the people looking out for her. I’ll always appreciate you protecting her like you do.” Deb replied earnestly. “I talked to her a little bit about it. She’s just being stubborn right now. Don’t worry, it’ll blow over.”

“Thanks.” Ashlyn said, sinking further into the couch. She hated seeing Ali upset, but Ali upset with her was even worse.

Ali pretty much avoided Ashlyn all afternoon. Ashlyn was so fidgety and down about the whole thing that she even went for a run by herself even though she didn’t know the neighborhood at all. Ashlyn and running had a love hate relationship, so going for a run was a sure sign of her desperation at the moment. Ali noticed, but didn’t say anything. She just kept quiet like she had all day.

Dinner was no better. Deb tried to make small talk and Ali replied here and there, but mostly avoided conversation. Ashlyn was quiet too, not wanting to make anything worse. She figured Ali and Emily must have talked by now, but she couldn’t be sure. If they had talked, obviously it didn’t make Ali any less mad at Ashlyn. Ali went right up to her room after dinner.

Ashlyn hung out with Deb for a while and watched TV until Deb finally decided to go to bed.

“Hang in there, Ashlyn. She really will come around. And feel free to crash in any of the guest rooms that you want to, ok?” Deb said kindly.

“Yeah, ok. Thanks, Deb. Have a good night.” Ashlyn said quietly. She couldn’t bring herself to go up to a guest room for the night, so she just watched TV on the couch until fell asleep.

Ashlyn woke up startled when she felt something tug on her hand. She opened her eyes to see Ali standing over her.

“Hey, come to bed.” Ali said quietly.

Ashlyn tried to read the expression on her face, but couldn’t quite figure it out. “Are you sure?” She asked.

“Look, Ash, I’m still upset with you about what happened today, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want you by my side, ok?” Ali said.
“Ok.” Ashlyn replied. She’d take whatever she could get right now and followed Ali upstairs.

When they got into bed, Ali stayed well onto her side. It was the first time they’d slept in the same bed and not touched or cuddled in some way. Ashlyn wasn’t sure if this was better or worse than being on the couch downstairs, but it honestly felt worse. She closed her eyes and just focused on listening to Ali’s breathing, letting the sound calm her.

Ashlyn woke up in the middle of the night to find Ali cuddled into her side. She knew they had just gravitated to each other in their sleep like they always did, but it made her smile. She cuddled Ali closer and hoped things would be better in the morning.

Unfortunately, she woke up to an empty bed, the sheets beside her cold. She took a quick shower and made her way downstairs. Deb was spending the whole day with her boyfriend, so she knew it would just be her and Ali all day. She hoped it would go better than yesterday. She didn’t see Ali downstairs anywhere, so she made some coffee and sat out on the patio for a while. About 30 minutes later, she heard the door open behind her. Ali walked outside holding her own mug of coffee. She was dressed in workout clothes and sweaty; she had clearly gone for a run.

“Can we talk for a minute?” Ali asked, sitting down at the outdoor table next to Ashlyn.

“Of course we can.” Ashlyn said, hoping this was a positive step.

“I talked to Emily yesterday and we worked a lot of things out. She really wants us both to come tonight and I would really like you to come with me. I’m honestly still upset, but I’m working on it, ok? Ali laid it out.

“Yeah, ok. I’ll come with you tonight if you want me to.” Ashlyn replied. She wanted to say more, but she could see Ali didn’t want to hear it.

“Ok. I do want you to come.” Ali repeated. “I need to go over there for a while and help her set stuff up, so I’m going to head out for a bit. Then I’ll come back and get ready and we can head over a little early together?”

“Sure.” Ashlyn agreed, not looking forward to another day hanging out by herself.

Ali nodded and went back into the house. Ashlyn dropped her head on the table in frustration.

Once Ali left, Ashlyn went for another run until she couldn’t push her body any further. She had been gone for two hours before she knew it. She lazed around a bit when she got back and then took a long shower, getting herself ready for the party. She opted for a pair of fitted khaki pants rolled up a few times at the bottom and a slim fitting navy v-neck t-shirt that she paired with some gray slip-on Vans sneakers. She left her hair down and put on some light make-up. Once she was ready, she headed downstairs and shot some pool balls until Ali came home a little while later.

Ali stopped briefly in the doorway of the game room. “I’m going to go get ready and then we can go, ok?”

“Yeah.” Ashlyn replied. Clearly the time apart today hadn’t done much to improve Ali’s mood. She watched Ali head up the stairs and then sat outside playing on her phone until she heard the door open behind her. She turned around to see Ali in a short gray sundress, her long toned legs looking amazing.

“You look beautiful, Alex.” Ashlyn blurted out without even thinking about it.

“Thanks. You look really nice too. Come on, we’ll take my mom’s other car and I’ll drive.” Ali said,
pointing to the blue BMW in the yard.

Ashlyn was hopefully they had made a little progress, but Ali was quiet the whole car ride. Luckily, it wasn’t a long drive to Emily’s house because Ashlyn wasn’t sure how much longer she could handle the silence.

Emily walked out the door to greet them. “Hi ladies! You look really nice!” She gave Ali a hug and then pulled Ashlyn into one too. “Nice to see you, Ashlyn. I’m glad you’re both here.”

“Hi Emily. Good to see you again too.” Ashlyn replied kindly with a small smile. She wasn’t exactly sure how to be around Ali’s friends when Ali was mad at her. She tried to find something to keep herself busy. “Anything I can help with, Emily?”

“Actually, yes! My brother was supposed to get the charcoal in the barbeque all lit and ready, but he’s running late. Any chance you can handle that?” Emily asked hopefully.

“No problem. I’m your girl!” Ashlyn replied, happy to find something to do right now.

“Perfect. The grill is out back on the patio.” Emily said pointing in the direction of the patio.

Ashlyn went out and started to work on getting the charcoal hot. Emily came out and handed her a beer.

“Thanks again for talking to me the other day. It was sweet of you to care so much about Ali and I working things out.” Emily said.

“Anytime. I’m happy you guys are good now.” Ashlyn replied genuinely.

“How are you handling the heat?” Emily asked looking at Ali in the kitchen through the glass door of the patio. She was clearly referring to whatever was going on between Ashlyn and Ali and not the grill.

“Oh um, it’s still blazing. I’m just trying to stay out of the kitchen for now.” Ashlyn answered a bit sadly.

“It’ll be ok. Ali never stays mad for too long. Let me know if I can do anything though.” Emily said sympathetically.

“Yeah, thanks Emily.” Ashlyn went back to tending to the charcoal.

On her way back in, Emily grabbed Ali’s arm and pulled her to the corner of the kitchen away from Emily’s cousin who was helping get food ready.

“You still haven’t let her off the hook?” Emily asked Ali seriously.

“I’m still upset, Em.” Ali answered.

“Over what, Ali? Because your girlfriend hates to see you upset and cares so much about you that she put herself out there and tried to smooth things over between you and someone she didn’t even know because she knew it was important to you? Wow, Ali, you’re right, she really blew it.” Emily
said pointedly, rolling her eyes.

Ali sighed. “I just wished she had talked to me first or given me the chance to try and figure things out myself.”

“Ok, then tell her that. She obviously loves the crap out of you and would do anything for you. I’m really glad she called me and talked to me. Do you really think we’d be at this party all made up by now if it wasn’t for her?” Emily asked. Ali was about to answer, but Emily stopped her. “Actually, better question. If she and her best friend were in a rough patch, don’t you think you’d do whatever you could to help? Especially if you thought maybe the problem might have something to do with how her best friend felt about your relationship?”

Ali considered what she said. “Yeah, I guess I would. Ugh, sometimes you suck, Em. Can’t let me be irrational for like even a minute?”

“Oh please. Poor Ali with the perfect and hot girlfriend who is a knight in shining armor. I feel so bad for you.” Emily mocked.

Ali rolled her eyes and then smiled. “She really is hot, huh?”

“So hot. Like ridiculously hot. You did good, girl.” Emily said walking towards the patio door.

“Look at her out there. She looks like someone killed a dolphin.” Emily said, looking out the door at Ashlyn leaning over the railing and sipping her beer kind while staring off into space.

“Dolphin?” Ali asked.

“Yes, she told me she’s studying to be a marine biologist. I dunno, I just went with it.” Emily laughed. “Maybe I should have gone with puppy.”

Ali laughed too. “Puppy would have worked just as well. She’s a giant kid like that.”

“Annnnyway. Stop being a bitch and go make nice with your girl.” Emily said seriously.

“Ugh, but I’ve been such a bitch since yesterday. I don’t even know what to say.” Ali said quietly.

“I hear ‘I’m sorry’ works well. Try that and then maybe kiss the hell out of her until she forgets you were such a bitch.” Emily suggested.

“Thanks for the advice, Tweedle Dee.” Ali said sarcastically.

“Any time, Tweedle Dum.” Emily giggled. “Now go!” She pushed Ali towards the patio door.

Ali walked up and leaned over the patio railing beside Ashlyn. “Hi.” She said quietly.

“Hey.” Ashlyn replied.

Ali stayed quiet for another couple seconds before saying “I’m sorry,” but Ashlyn had blurted out “I’m sorry” at the same time. They both laughed.

“Go ahead.” Ashlyn said, letting Ali go first.

“I’m sorry I’ve been such a bitch. I just got upset that you didn’t talk to me first and didn’t let me try and work stuff out on my own first.” Ali explained.
“I’m sorry too. I didn’t mean to be so impulsive like that. I just couldn’t stand the idea of you not being in a good place with something so important to you, especially because of our relationship. I hate when you’re upset, Alex. It makes me do crazy things.” Ashlyn admitted.

“You’re not crazy. I really would have done the same thing if it had been you and Whit. I just would have talked you to first. I mean, I’m pretty sure I would have been fine with you going to meet Emily like you did if you had just told me first.” Ali said before adding. “And you have to trust me a little. If relationships I have with other people don’t go well or I choose to not continue them because of how they feel about my relationship with you, it will be for good reason. You’re the most important thing in the world to me.”

“Ok. I promise not to be so impulsive and talk to you first. And of course I trust you. I just never want to see you hurt and if I can protect you in some way, I sure as hell will.” Ashlyn replied.

Ali put her hand on Ashlyn’s cheek, pulling the blonde closer and looking into her hazel eyes. “I love you, Ash. I love the way you care so much about me and protect me like you do. I don’t always need a superhero though, sometimes I just need my girlfriend.”

“Got it. As long as you realize that you make your girlfriend want to be a superhero for you all time.” Ashlyn smiled. “Are we ok?”

“We’re more than ok, Wonder Woman.” Ali replied. She pulled Ashlyn’s face to hers and kissed her softly.

“God I missed that.” Ashlyn said with a dimpled grin.

“Me too.” Ali replied, leaning in to kiss Ashlyn again, this time more deeply. Her hands went to the back of Ashlyn’s neck and she felt the blonde’s hands snake around her waist. Ali ran her tongue against Ashlyn’s lips before pressing it into her mouth, letting the kiss get heated as they both fought for control of it.

Emily cleared her throat behind them. “Well, now this is much much better!” Ashlyn and Ali broke apart reluctantly. “I hate to break up this love fest, but first, this isn’t that kind of party. And second, you’re supposed to be getting the charcoal hot, Ashlyn, not lighting the patio on fire.” Emily winked.

“Right.” Ashlyn smirked. “Well, the grill is ready, so technically my job is done here. Do you want me to grill some food?”

“You’re the best, but my brother just got here and he’ll handle it. So, just enjoy yourselves. A few people just got here, so looks like we are underway!” Emily said cheerily.

The rest of the night went really well. Ashlyn met a lot of people Ali went to high school with and the brunette was not shy about showing her off. If anyone was surprised by it, they didn’t really let on. Ali was clingy all night, rarely leaving Ashlyn’s side and making sure some part of her was touching the blonde anytime she was near her. After a few hours and a whole lot of socializing, Ali was itching to get home. She finally saw Emily across the room and made her way over to her, dragging Ashlyn alongside her.

“Hey Em. You ok if we head out?” Ali asked.

Emily pulled Ali into a hug. “Yep. I know you have lots of making up to do tonight. Try not to hurt yourself.” Emily laughed.

Ali smacked her on the back while they hugged. “Shut up! I’m glad you’re home.”
“Me too.” Emily gave her one more squeeze before letting go and hugging Ashlyn. “Thanks again, Ashlyn. I’m really glad you’re here, and I don’t just mean at the party tonight.”

“I’m happy to finally get to know you. It’s great that you’re back home. Ali really missed you.” Ashlyn replied.

“Ok. Good night you two. Dinner tomorrow night, right?” Emily asked pointing between herself and them.

“Yep! Our place at 6pm, my mom can’t wait to see you!” Ali answered.

“Perfect. See you ladies tomorrow.” Emily waved goodbye to them.

As soon as Ali got home and had Ashlyn in the house, she dropped her purse right in the entry way and kissed the blonde passionately, almost knocking Ashlyn off her feet.

“Woah, Alex. Your mom!” Ashlyn warned.

“She texted that she’s sleeping at Anthony’s place tonight. We’re alone, baby.” Ali said, not even waiting for Ashlyn to reply before kissing her again, letting her hands roam all over the blonde’s body. She pulled back for a second. “We officially fought. It’s time for the mind blowing make-up sex.” She crashed her lips back to Ashlyn’s, feeling the blonde smirk against her lips.

They stayed wrapped up in the kiss, fumbling around and trying to make their way to the stairs. Ali couldn’t wait another second. She pulled Ashlyn into the closest room, pulled the blonde’s shirt off and then worked her pants off too. Ali pulled her own dress over her head and tossed it onto the floor before pushing Ashlyn onto the pool table.

“Oww.” Ashlyn grunted as her back hit the cue ball on the table. Ali reached underneath her to grab it and rolled it off to the side, lowering herself onto Ashlyn.

“Sorry baby.” Ali apologized before leaning down to place hot kisses on Ashlyn’s neck, letting her tongue work the area where her neck met her shoulder. She felt Ashlyn unhook her bra and pull it off, the blonde’s thumbs running circles over her nipples. Ali pulled away from Ashlyn’s neck, arching her back up a bit. “I need you, right now.” Ali said, taking Ashlyn’s hand off her chest and putting it in her underwear.

Ashlyn could see Ali couldn’t handle any teasing right now. She sat up a bit to get Ali’s underwear off and then spread Ali’s wetness around with her fingers before focusing on her clit, rubbing tight hard circles over it with her finger. Ali moaned loudly, her hips moving to get even more pressure.

“Please Ash, I want you in me. Just fuck me, baby.” Ali demanded.

Ashlyn slipped two fingers deep inside the brunette, who lowered her hips to get them even deeper. The feeling of Ali’s hot wetness engulfing her fingers was driving Ashlyn crazy. “Fuck, Alex. You feel so good around my fingers.” She worked in and out of Ali steadily, watching the brunette ride her fingers and move her hips down to meet her thrusts every time.

“Mmm, faster, Ash. So good.” Ali begged moving her hips faster as Ashlyn picked up the pace. She watched Ali’s perfect breasts bounce above her, nipples hard and begging to be sucked. She sat up a
bit and took one in her mouth. “Unnnh, fuck, yeeees.” Ali screamed out. Ashlyn wrapped her free arm around Ali’s hips to help the brunette get herself even deeper on her fingers while she licked her nipples.

Ashlyn could feel Ali dripping onto her fingers, her entrance starting to clench a bit, her movements becoming uncoordinated. Ashlyn flipped them so they were on their sides, she wanted to finish Ali all by herself. Ali threw her leg over Ashlyn’s hip, opening herself up wide for the blonde.

“Don’t stop, Ash. Fuck. Make me come.” Ali begged again, her voice raspy through panting breaths. Ashlyn pumped into Ali and pressed her thumb into her clit, circling it as she went back to sucking the brunette’s nipples.

“Oh my god.” Ali moaned loudly, she could feel Ashlyn everywhere, her vision becoming blurry. She felt Ashlyn curl her fingers deep inside her and her body responded for her, convulsing in pleasure against the blonde and coating her fingers in a gush of wetness. She pulled the blonde from her nipples and kissed her, whimpering loudly into her mouth while Ashlyn’s fingers continued to fuck her slowly through the orgasm. Ashlyn pulled out of her slowly, wiping her hand on her stomach a bit before putting it on Ali’s back and pulling her as close as possible as they kissed. Ali’s hips were still bucking against her involuntarily.

Ali hadn’t even caught her breath yet before she was rolling Ashlyn onto her back again and working her way down the blonde’s body, talking to her between nips and licks. “I want to taste you so bad, want every last drop of you, Ash.” Ali sucked Ashlyn's nipple into her mouth, rolling the other one between her fingers.

“Fuck, Alex. So hot.” Ashlyn’s breathing was heavy, one hand on the back of Ali’s head, the other gripping the side of the pool table. Ali left her nipples and quickly kissed down the blonde’s abs, tasting herself where Ashlyn had just wiped her hand a few minutes ago. Ashlyn squirmed and hissed as Ali sucked hard and left a mark on her pelvic bone before moving to lick her inner thighs. Ali curled her arms under Ashlyn’s hips and stood up, bringing the blonde’s body up with her so only her shoulders were still on the pool table. She dove her tongue right into Ashlyn’s wet entrance, pulling it out completely and driving it back in a few more times.

“Holy fuck.” Ashlyn yelled out, both hands now gripping the sides of the pool table. Ali swirled her tongue deeply into the blonde, pulling her hips as tightly as possible to her face. “Oh my god, Alex. That feels so good. I love when you fuck me with your tongue. Don’t stop, please don’t stop.” The words poured out of Ashlyn’s mouth between ragged breaths, making Ali even more determined. She worked her tongue in and out faster and dropped Ashlyn’s thighs onto her shoulders so she could move her hand around to stroke the blonde’s clit with her thumb.

“Fuck, baby, fuck, fuck, Allleeex.” Ashlyn was quickly coming undone. Her hips were grinding into Ali’s face, trying to impale herself even further on the brunette’s tongue. Two more thrusts of Ali’s tongue and Ashlyn let out a keening wail as the orgasm ripped through her, the full weight of her hips and thighs falling onto Ali’s shoulders as she trembled.

Ali let Ashlyn’s hips down back onto the table, but kept her mouth on the blonde. She licked through her folds gently, licking up every last bit of Ashlyn’s wetness like she promised. She kissed her way back up Ashlyn’s stomach, finally kissing her girlfriend softly before letting her body collapse onto her.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s comfortable weight on her and smiled, wrapping her arms around Ali and squeezing her a bit. “Oh. My. God. Alex.” Ashlyn said, still a bit winded.

“I love you so much, baby.” Ali picked her head up, kissing Ashlyn deeply.
“Mmmm. I love you, Alex. You’re so gorgeous.” She pulled Ali down for another kiss.

“Think you can make it upstairs, beautiful?” Ali asked.


“Good, cause we’re not near done tonight.” Ali smiled seductively.

“Oh yeah?” Ashlyn smirked.

“Yep. I have a new motto.” Ali replied.

“What’s that?” Ashlyn asked curiously.


“I love it. Let’s go make up some more then.” Ashlyn grinned. She picked up their clothes and draped it over her shoulder before picking Ali up and carrying her upstairs.
Just So You Know

Chapter Notes

Since buffalo1221 has decided to go rogue with this heinous Krolo idea, I felt pressured to put out quite possibly the sappiest chapter ever. So, if you don't like it... go seek out buffalo! If you do like it, then buffalo can thank me for softening the hearts of the angry masses. Enjoy the feels... and down with Krolo!

Ashlyn felt soft touches all over her face, trailing down her neck and over her collarbones. She moaned lightly and opened her eyes to see a topless Ali covering her in kisses, sheets pooled around her waist.

“Mmm, good morning to you too, gorgeous.” Ashlyn said groggily. She pulled the brunette down against her, Ali’s warm skin pressing against hers, their bodies molding together perfectly. “I will never get over waking up naked with you, just so you know.”

Ali planted a few more kisses on Ashlyn’s neck. “Yeah, well, I will never get over how hot you are and how good you feel against me, just so you know.” Ali winked. “As much as I want to lay in bed naked with you all day, we have to get up, Stud.”

Ashlyn groaned. “Ugh, why? It’s so early.”

“Because wonderful, I am taking you on a date today.” Ali answered with a smile.

“Really?” Ashlyn asked.

“Really. I know we have dinner with Mom, Anthony, and Em tonight, so I want you all to myself today.” Ali brushed some stray hair out of Ashlyn’s face.

“A whole day with just you sounds completely perfect. Where do I sign up?” Ashlyn grinned.

“Hmmm... right here.” Ali said pointing to her lips.

Ashlyn reached up and kissed her sweetly. “Consider me enrolled. Where are we going?” She asked excitedly.

“It wouldn’t be any fun if you knew all the plans, Harris. Now get your cute ass in the shower with me and let’s get out of here.” Ali said tugging the blonde out of bed.

Ashlyn got up and pranced her way to the bathroom. “I’m cute! I’m cute! She thinks my ass is cute!” She did her best Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer impression.

Ali shook her head. “I really am dating a 5 year old.”

“You love every minute, Krieger.” Ashlyn retorted.


They actually managed to just shower, but that was only because Ali wanted to stay on track and
kept all their kisses from getting too heated much to Ashlyn’s frustration. Ali told Ashlyn to dress comfortably and be ready for walking, so the blonde chose a pair of long black shorts and a white cutoff t-shirt with a pair of Nike running sneakers, her usual black Nike snapback on her head. Ali went with khaki shorts and a tight blue tank top with her own Nike running sneakers, her hair up in a messy bun. Ali mentioned that they’d probably have some relaxation time, so Ashlyn should bring a book or whatever she wanted. So, Ashlyn tossed a few things into a backpack as did Ali.

“First we need some fuel.” Ali said as she took Ashlyn into her favorite café in D.C. They each ordered coffee and a breakfast sandwich and sat down to eat together. Ali held Ashlyn’s hand across the table, thumb stroking the blonde’s hand lightly while she told Ashlyn about some of the more ridiculous conversations she’d had with Emily at this café.

After a while Ali said it was time for them to head out on their next adventure. They drove for about 20 minutes and pulled into a parking lot with a trailhead marked ‘Great Falls Park: Billy Goat Trail’.

“Are you taking me hiking, Krieger?” Ashlyn asked.

“Can’t sneak anything passed you, Harris. What gave it away?” Ali said sarcastically.

“Oh, Krieger’s got jokes.” Ashlyn teased. “Lead the way, Princess.”

They followed a rocky and slanted path along the Potomac River with beautiful views of small waterfalls and rushing water below. Ali smiled to herself as Ashlyn kept up and bounded right alongside her, clearly enjoying herself. They stopped for a second on an overlook to gaze at the water below.

“You know, I used to suggest coming here in high school when guys wanted to go out with me. If they whined even once about how hard the hike was, that was it.” Ali admitted.

“Geez, that is so harsh! I was about to make a comment about how hard this hike was, buuut…” Ashlyn pretended to zip her lip and throw away the key. Ali laughed.

“Relax, Stud. You passed the test a long time ago.” Ali said.

“Wait. Hold up. There was a test?” Ashlyn asked curiously.

“There’s always a test, Harris.” Ali replied.

“What was the test?” Ashlyn prodded.

“I’m just teasing, Ash. But, I knew we’d at least be really good friends, so I guess you passed some kind of test.” Ali said thoughtfully. “The way you didn’t back down from a single question I asked you that first night, I just knew I had to get to know you better. You were so honest and open with me, I really liked that about you.”

Ashlyn just smiled and pulled Ali into her side.

“Come on. My favorite hiding spot is just up a little further and we can hang out there for a while.” Ali said pulling Ashlyn along. They walked for about another ten minutes before Ali veered off the trail through some trees which eventually cleared a bit and revealed a cliff overlooking a fast rushing section of river below.

“Wow, this is beautiful.” Ashlyn said taking in the view.

Ali pulled a blanket and a book out of her backpack. “I figured we could relax here for a while and
“Just chill together.”

“Perfect, Princess.” Ashlyn said giving Ali a soft kiss and sitting down beside the brunette on the blanket. Ashlyn looked around for a while and then pulled out a leather book from her backpack that Ali had seen her with many times. Ali read some of her book, occasionally glancing over to see Ashlyn writing. A little while later when Ashlyn put her pen down, Ali put her book down and leaned into the blonde.

“I’ve seen you write in there a lot. Can I ask what you write?” Ali asked. “I mean, not exactly what you are writing. Just, like do you write for fun or is it more of a personal journal?” She added, not wanting to intrude on Ashlyn’s privacy.

“It’s a journal. I try to write in it every day. Usually about what happened that day, what I’m feeling or thinking.” Ashlyn answered simply.

“No wonder you’re so much more insightful than I am.” Ali said lightly. “How long have you kept it for?”

“Since I was 12 and my grandma got me a journal for my birthday. This is one of many.” Ashlyn replied motioning to the journal on the blanket. “Once I got used to writing in it, I just kept it up. It’s really interesting to go back and see how I’ve changed and grown up over time. My thinking has definitely evolved from my twelve year old angsty self.” Ashlyn chuckled

“So, you really write about everything, huh? Should I be nervous?” Ali nudged the blonde.

Ashlyn laughed. “You’re the best thing that ever happened to these journals, Princess.”

“Yeah, I bet there are some really choice entries over the last couple of days when I was a total bitch.” Ali joked.

“Give me some credit, Krieger, I’m more insightful than chalking it up to you being a bitch. I just wrote ‘Alex is a big meanie’ on those days.” Ashlyn joked before getting serious. “Actually, I’m sure I’ll end up going back to read this particular journal a whole lot.”


“I started this one last summer, so it has our whole history in it.” Ashlyn smiled. Ali kissed her cheek. They were quiet for a few minutes. Ashlyn broke the silence. “You know, if you ever want to read them, you’re more than welcome to. I don’t have anything to hide from you Alex, I trust you with everything. I know I’m safe with you. Fair warning though, a lot of what’s in them is kinda ugly.”

“If you want me to, then I definitely will someday. I know it will be hard as hell to read, but I want to know all of you, Ash. Understand all of you. You’re always safe with me.” Ali replied.

Ashlyn pulled Ali into her. “You are seriously the best thing that ever happened. I love you madly, Alex.”

“I love you too, Ash. So much.” Ali nuzzled herself into the blonde further.

“Actually.” Ashlyn grabbed the journal and searched through the front half of it a bit. “Here.” She handed it to Ali with a particular page flipped open. “Just so you always know.”

Ali read the page.

*September 14, 2014*
Everything changed yesterday. I don’t know how else to say it. I met Alex Krieger and she is going to change my life. I don’t know how or when or why I even think that, but I just know. It’s like watching a movie when a character appears and you just know that they’re key to the whole plot. She walked onto the rugby pitch yesterday just like that character. I couldn’t take my eyes off of her; like she held the key to everything I ever wanted to know and I couldn’t stay away. She’s my game changer, my plot twist, the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. I told her things last night that I don’t really tell anyone and it was different. Usually it feels like a weight when I open up to people, like I’m sinking, giving up control. People say you’re supposed to feel better when you tell people secrets and let things out, that’s not true for me. It makes me feel like I’m drowning in my past. Not with Alex. She was like a life preserver. I talked but I didn’t sink or drown, she tethered me. She held my hand last night and she might as well have held my heart. It’s like she looks at me and can see everything, and I’m not afraid for her to see. I know that isn’t possible and she can only know what I tell her, but that’s what it feels like. I just know I’m safe with her. I can’t say what makes her different other than that she doesn’t make me feel hesitant in any way. I guess if I’m being honest with myself, maybe there is something else different that I feel. I think I love her. No, I know I love her. I don’t really know exactly in what way yet, but it’s there. I need to get to know her, to understand what makes her so different and what she will mean to my life because I know she’s here for a reason. I feel it. The only way I can describe how I feel inside now is to say that I feel as if I found out magic was real. Alex is magic and she’s real. I’m going to write her name here one more time because I know that she’s the beginning of something wonderful: Alex Krieger. She’s going to change my life, maybe she already did.

Ali finished reading with a couple of tears rolling down her face. “Ash…” she held the blonde’s face in her hands gently and gave Ashlyn the most tender heartfelt kiss she possibly could, wanting to feel nothing but that electricity that always flowed between them. Ashlyn wiped the tears on Ali’s face when their lips eventually parted.

“When you said from day one…” Ali started, but Ashlyn jumped in to finish. “I meant it, Alex.”

Ali took Ashlyn’s hand in hers and put it over her heart. “I’m never letting you go, Ashlyn Harris. You’re tethered here safely, forever. Just so you always know.” Ashlyn leaned in and reconnected their lips, moving them together with impossible softness, deliberately trying to draw out every feeling between them and use it to forge their physical connection. Ashlyn’s stomach grumbled loudly and Ali pulled back with hooded eyes.

“Traitor.” Ashlyn said looking down at her stomach.

“You hungry?” Ali asked.

“I shouldn’t be, we ate breakfast not that long ago.” Ashlyn replied.

“You’re always hungry.” Ali smiled and pulled out a bag of trail mix, some granola bars, beef jerky and two bottles of water from her back pack.

“Always prepared!” Ashlyn teased her.

“Like a boy scout!” Ali said proudly.

Ashlyn grabbed a granola bar while Ali dug into the trail mix.

“Alright, Harris. Let’s do this afternoon right, time for yet another round of Q & A.” Ali said.
Ashlyn laughed. “Well I do have a hat. Did you bring cards?”

“Nope. Just fire away.” Ali said positioning herself to sit between Ashlyn’s legs and leaning back into the blonde. She felt Ashlyn’s arms wrap around her.

“Alright.” Ashlyn thought for a second. “Other than with Kyle, have you ever been in a fight? Like have you ever hit someone?”

“Totally. In 6th grade this girl Marcy thought I was trying to steal her boyfriend. I have no idea why, I had zero interest in the kid and never talked to him. It was 6th grade for crying out loud, all I cared about was trying to get my mom to let me wear make-up! Anyway, she decided to be a total bitch and pour her soda in my lap at lunch one day and I completely lost my shit. I launched myself at her and took her ass to the ground until my science teacher pulled me off. There was all kinds of hair pulling, such a girl fight!” Ali laughed.

Ashlyn laughed so hard she snorted. “Oh man, that’s exactly what I would have expected out of you my Warrior Princess.”

“Ok, ok. Let me guess, you probably beat up some guy right?” Ali wagered.

“You know me too well. Yep, I did. At least I was inventive though.” Ashlyn replied.

“How so?” Ali asked.

“I was like 10 years old and I was playing on all the guy’s sports teams and a lot of them would pick on me. So, I was at the beach with my parents one day and there was this thing called red tide in Florida that killed all these fish and they had washed up on the shore. Anyway, one of the kids I played baseball with called me a wimp and said I was a boy. I just got pissed, picked up this big fish and slapped him across the face with it. He was bleeding and everything.” Ashlyn recounted.

Ali guffawed. “Oh my god, that is like the best thing I ever heard! Remind me never to piss you off if we ever go fishing together! Such a feminist, Harris!”

“Ahh, alright. Your turn.” Ashlyn shaking her head.


“Real person crush or like unattainable celebrity crush?” Ashlyn tried to clarify before answering.

“Um, both.” Ali said.

“Ok, so real person would be this girl Brianna that I played basketball with in 7th grade. I don’t know how aware I was that I was crushing on her, but I definitely just wanted to kiss her.” Ashlyn chuckled a bit.

“Wow, so always women, huh? Like from the very start.” Ali noted.

“Yep. No boys allowed!” Ashlyn said proudly. “As for unattainable celebrity, Anastasia Ashley for sure.”

“I don’t even know who that is.” Ali tried to recall hearing the name in the media.

“You wouldn’t. She’s a popular pro surfer.” Ashlyn explained.

Ali grabbed her phone and googled her, pulling up picture of a light brown haired woman with a
really toned body. “Wow, ok, yeah, she’s definitely hot.”

“Yeah, until you came along. Now I don’t even find her that attractive!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

“Oh stop! I’ve got nothing on that chick.” Ali replied.

“Seriously, do I need to pull out my journal and make you re-read the part that says you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen? I didn’t write that for anyone else to see but me, so I definitely wasn’t just saying it. And let’s not forget that the world’s most beautiful Angelfish was named after you. You’re the hottest woman on the planet, end of discussion.” Ashlyn with charming honesty.

Ali leaned her head back and kissed Ashlyn gently. “You are so getting laid tonight, Harris.”

Ashlyn fist pumped into the air. “Don’t distract me, Krieger. Let’s hear about your crushes.”

“Oh, so real person was the captain of the football team in high school when I was a freshman. I actually ended up dating him for like 3 months.” Ali responded.

Ashlyn laughed lightly. “Of course you did, Princess.”

“He definitely didn’t live up to the crush.” Ali said nonchalantly.

“As for celebrity…ugh, fuck… Nick Carter. There, I said it.” Ali groaned knowing the blonde would never let her live it down.

“I knew it!!!” Ashlyn yelled. “So obvious, Krieger!”

“Get to the next question before I die of embarrassment, Harris.” Ali shook her head.

“So lucky I’m letting you off the hook right now. Ok, when you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?” Ashlyn asked.

“Oh, you’re so gonna laugh at this one. I wanted to be a wedding planner.” Ali giggled.

“Awww, Alex. That’s so cute.” Ashlyn nuzzled her face into the brunette’s neck from behind her. “Why a wedding planner?”

“I went to my cousin’s wedding with my parents when I was 6 years old and I was completely enamored with the whole thing. Ever since that I just wanted to be the person who created this magical day for two people.” Ali explained.

“Could you be any more adorable?” Ashlyn squeezed the brunette.


“Spill it, Princess.” Ashlyn listened attentively.

“I still have a wedding scrapbook that I keep. Like I cut stuff out of magazines that I like and ideas and stuff and put them in there. It’s kind of spilled into a Pinterest account now, but I still do it.” Ali revealed.

“Perfect.” Ashlyn said confidently.

“Why is that perfect?” Ali asked confused.

“Because someone is going to have to plan our wedding some day and I’m glad you have the vision
for it.” Ashlyn answered honestly.

Ali smiled and reached her hands back around Ashlyn’s neck. “You really mean that?”

“I never say anything I don’t mean. Just so you know.” Ashlyn smiled.

Ali smiled back at her, just letting the words hang in the air for a minute. “So, what did you want to be when you were little?”

“Well, first I wanted to be a construction worker because that’s what my dad did. He always told me that I was too smart for that, that I could do something bigger. So, I asked him one day who the boss was, who was at the top of construction. And he said ‘The architect. The architect holds all the plans and makes it happen, Ashlyn’. After that, I wanted to be an architect.” Ashlyn said quietly. Ali moved her hands to rest over Ashlyn’s arms that were wrapped around her. She held the blonde’s forearms with her hands and squeezed them lightly. She leaned her head back to rest her cheek against Ashlyn’s and closed her eyes. Ashlyn continued. “I still like to sketch houses and floor plans for fun, I have a whole book full of them.”

“Maybe you can show me some time?” Ali asked.

“Only if you show me your wedding scrapbook.” Ashlyn negotiated.

“Deal.” Ali said. She played with the watch on Ashlyn’s wrist, the one she gave her and that the blonde never took off. It was already almost noon. She knew they’d have to go soon so they could have lunch. “I think we have time for one more question and then we should do eat. Plus, it’s my turn!”

“Let’s hear it, Krieger.” Ashlyn challenged.

“Physically, what’s your favorite thing about me?” Ali posed the question with playfully raised eyebrows.

“Oh geez, I have to pick just one?” Ashlyn asked nervously.

“Yes, just one.” Ali clarified.

“Your eyes, Alex. I wasn’t kidding when I said they were the most beautiful color ever. I find myself getting lost in them all the time. I see so much in them, I feel like they show me who you are. They’re comforting and warm and inviting. And when you look back at me, it seems like your eyes can see everything in me, like they know everything behind mine and no matter what they are always kind. I love how your eyes darken when I’m deep inside you and how they always shine when we’re lying together afterwards. Most of all, I love that when I’m looking at them, I can see your gorgeous smile just below them in my peripheral vision.” Ashlyn replied sincerely.

“Geez, Ash. Could you be any more perfect?” Ali asked rhetorically as she turned around and kissed Ashlyn hard, pressing the blonde down against the blanket with her body.

Ashlyn let out a moan, her hand going to Ali’s face and cupping her jaw. She felt Ali’s tongue run across her lips and came to her senses, pulling back. “Woah, woah, woah, Krieger. Hold up. You’re not getting off that easy. I believe it’s your turn to answer the question.” Ashlyn said playfully.

“What’s your favorite thing about me? It’s my ass isn’t it?”

“Well, you do have a pretty amazing ass. And those abs…” Ali said thoughtfully.

“Stop messing with me, what’s the real answer?” Ashlyn prodded.
“Honestly, it’s not really one specific part of you. And I know you’re gonna roll your eyes because I said you had to pick one thing, but it is really kind of is one thing as a whole, so just hear me out.”
Ali started.

“I’m listening.” Ashlyn said with a smile.

“It’s the way your body fits to mine in every single way, like a puzzle piece. I love that you’re just slightly taller than me. So when you hug me, my head can fall perfectly on your shoulder and your mouth is right there by my ear to talk to me softly. I love that your arms are stronger than mine and your hands are bigger. So that when you hold my hand or wrap your arms around me, I feel completely covered and protected, exactly the way I like. I love that no matter how I am pressed up against you, your body just molds right to mine. I love that it’s a scientifically proven fact that the overwhelming majority of people lean to the right when they kiss, and yet, we both lean left. And I love that when you’re inside me, I always lose track of where your body ends and mine begins, that you become a part of me. I truly feel that you were designed just for me, to fit perfectly to me, no one could ever make me believe different. Just so you know.” Ali finished, her lips hovering just an inch from Ashlyn’s. The blonde’s eyes looking deep into hers.

“I love you, Alex. After everything you just said… if you keep laying on top of me like this, we’re never going to make it to lunch because I’ll want to show you just how well I fit. Just so you know.” Ashlyn whispered.

Ali closed the space between them and kissed Ashlyn deeply, pulling back after a few seconds to mumble against the blonde’s lips. “I could care less about lunch. Just so you know.” She flipped them over towards the edge of the blanket and pulled the rest of it over them, Ashlyn now hovering over her. “Show me how you fit, Ash. Make my eyes shine, baby.”
Chapter Notes

Let me first say that thankfully the whole Krolo thing is over, otherwise Hope would have choked to death in this chapter and ruined Ali’s birthday. So, thank you buffal01221 for righting the ship and making sure that didn’t happen here. I’m traveling for a few days, so there won’t be another update until at least Tuesday. In the meantime, enjoy this nice long chapter cause it’s Ali’s birthday!

Ashlyn finished buttoning the last button of her light green collared shirt as she watched Ali apply mascara. The brunette was sitting at the little make-up station in the corner of her bedroom leaning in close to the mirror. After their hiking adventure and a quick stop to grab a snack on the way home since they’d forgone lunch in favor of staying wrapped around each other, they had made it back home in time to clean themselves up a bit for dinner tonight.

Ashlyn walked over and stood behind Ali, smiling at her in the mirror and watching the brunette’s lips curl into the megawatt smile that made Ashlyn’s heart skip a beat. She ran her fingers through Ali’s hair before moving it off of her shoulder, leaning down to plant a few soft kisses along the brunette’s neck.

“You look really nice. Thanks for the great date today, beautiful.” Ashlyn whispered in Ali’s ear.

“Yeah, well thanks for ending it on a high note.” Ali smirked, leaning her head back a bit.

Ashlyn laughed. “Literally. I thought that last sound you made was going to attract birds. Then you’d really be a princess!”

“You sure know how to make me sing, Stud.” Ali winked and stood up. “You look so hot by the way.” Ali added, taking in her girlfriend’s tight dark jeans and light green button up shirt which the blonde’s eyes had turned green to try and match. Ali fixed Ashlyn’s collar a bit before kissing her. She was about to deepen it when Emily’s voice sounded over the intercom. “You two better have clothes on, I’m coming up!”


“What do you have in mind?” Ashlyn asked.

“Work with me.” Ali instructed as she quickly unbuttoned Ashlyn’s shirt and pushed it off her shoulders a bit, pressing Ashlyn into wall directly across from the bedroom door and directing the blonde’s hand to her ass.

“You are so mean, Krieger. That poor girl.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Trust me, the number of pranks she has pulled on me over the years, she has earned it. Now start moaning, I can hear her footsteps.” Ali buried her face into Ashlyn’s neck, hand going to the blonde’s bra covered breast.

Just as the door knob turned and the door opened, Ashlyn grabbed Ali’s ass cheek and pulled the brunette into her yelling “Mmmm, yes, Alex.”
Emily screeched in horror, purse dropping to the floor so her hands could cover her eyes. “Oh my god you guys!!! REALLY?!”

Ali burst out laughing, not being able to hold it in anymore. “We’re just messing with you, Em! That screech though, priceless!”

Ashlyn joined in laughing. “Yeah, sorry Em, but your face just now! Amazing!”

“Ugh, you fucking suck!” Emily yelled. “I was like, oh my god did I not just warn them I was coming in?!”

“Pay back is a bitch, Em.” Ali teased.

“Well, better than that time I walked in on my parents!” Emily said with a cringe.

“Gross.” Ali commiserated.

“And, seriously, Ali… go figure that you end up with a girlfriend who has better abs than any guy I have ever dated. Not fair.” Emily said pointed over at Ashlyn who was working fixing her shirt.

Ashlyn turned red at Emily’s comment. Ali just nodded with a smile.

“Also, more tattoos than just that sleeve, huh?” Emily asked noticing the ink on Ashlyn’s side peeking out.

“Oh, um, yeah.” Ashlyn said lifting the side of the shirt to let Emily see the tattoo.

“Love the color on that.” Emily complimented.

“Thanks.” Ashlyn replied.

“Should have known. Girlfriend over here goes gaga over tattoos.” Emily said using her thumb to point to Ali.

“Shut up!” Ali smacked her lightly. “She also has an amazing mermaid on her thigh in all black, buuut I’ve had her pants off enough today, so you’ll have to check that one out another time.”

“Alex!” Ashlyn said with wide eyes. Emily laughed.

“What? It’s true! Besides, it’s just Em.” Ali shrugged.

“Yes, it’s just Em. And Em could already tell by the insanely blinding light coming off of you two that wearing pants was probably optional today.” Emily joked. “Guuuys, find me a hot boyfriend to have amazing sex with.” Emily whined.

“That is so not my department.” Ashlyn replied.

“Yeah, I’m shopping exclusively in the women’s department these days.” Ali laughed.

“Oh, so you’re still shopping?” Ashlyn questioned with raised eyebrows.

“Definitely not, just a figure of speech. I already found the perfect dress. Fits me like a glove too.” Ali said in a sexy tone and placed a lingering kiss on the blonde’s lips.

Emily groaned. “Oh my god, will you fucking stop it already?! I was supposed to get you two downstairs, but clearly you haven’t had enough alone time yet!”
“Awww, come here Em. You can have some sugar too.” Ashlyn said pulling Emily into a side hug and making Ali laugh.

“Well, thanks Ashlyn. Watch out though, Ali is territorial.” Emily teased.

“You’re not kidding. She practically peed on me once to stake her claim when a waitress was flirting with me.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“I did not!” Ali defended. “I just ran my hands all over you, called you baby, and kissed you in front of her… no biggie.”

“Exactly.” Ashlyn and Emily said simultaneously. Ali rolled her eyes and walked over to Ashlyn, fixing her collar again.

“Alright, let’s go eat. I’m sure my mom is wondering what we are doing up here.” Ali said.

The three of them headed downstairs to find Deb and Anthony in the kitchen with glasses of wine.

“Hi ladies!” Deb said cheerily.

“Ash, this is Anthony.” Ali introduced Ashlyn to her mother’s boyfriend. “Anthony, this is my girlfriend, Ashlyn.”

Ashlyn shook the guy’s hand, noting that he was ruggedly handsome with brown hair, blue eyes, and a strong frame. It wasn’t surprising, Deb looked just like Ali only older. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too. I’ve heard a lot about you. That’s your Jeep outside right?” Anthony asked.

“Yeah. That’s my baby.” Ashlyn replied. Ali elbowed her a bit in mock offense. Ashlyn jokingly corrected herself “I mean, that’s my car.”

“Better.” Ali said with a smile.

“I parked mine right next to it. I have a custom yellow Rubicon model.” Anthony said excitedly.

“No way! Show me!” Ashlyn exclaimed, and just like that they were out the door.

“Well ok then.” Ali said with an eye roll, making Emily and Deb laugh in agreement. Ali had to admit that it made her like Anthony a million times more that he didn’t even bat an eyelash at Ashlyn and just immediately tried to get to know her. Ali watched from the window as the two of them talked animatedly, pointing at various things on the Jeeps.

Anthony and Ashlyn came in a few minutes later. Ashlyn and Ali went to set the table in the living room while Deb, Anthony and Emily worked on getting dinner onto serving trays in the kitchen.


Ashlyn pondered for a second before answering genuinely. “Well, he’s no Ken Krieger. But I think he’s a really good guy.”

Ali got close and pulled the blonde down by the collar, touched by the answer. “You’re perfect. I love you.” She kissed Ashlyn hard, making sure the kiss would be hot enough so the blonde wouldn’t be able to get it out of her mind for the rest of the night. She pulled back, leaving Ashlyn standing there with eyes still closed and lips still parted.

The blonde cleared her throat and tried to snap out of the daze Ali had just left her in. She followed
Ali to the kitchen to help grab the food, checking her watch along the way. She had just made it back into the kitchen when the doorbell rang.

“Are we expecting anyone else?” Ali asked.

Deb shook her head, a platter of roast beef in her hand. “Must just be one of those Mormon missionaries, they were here last week.”

“You get the door, Alex. I can help your mom with the rest of this.” Ashlyn supplied.

Ali nodded and made her way to the front door. Ashlyn and Deb put their fingers to their lips and signaled for Anthony, and Emily to follow them as they quietly followed behind Ali.

Ali opened the door armed with a story that they were in the middle of an important dinner and the person would have to come back at another time. She was getting her face set into a stern expression when she saw Kyle.

“Oh my god!” She launched herself at him, noting that HAO, Kelley, Sydney, and Hope were standing right behind him. “What are you guys doing here?”

“Um, I’m pretty sure we were invited to dinner. Maybe we have the wrong house. This is the Kruger residence, right?” Kyle joked. HAO joined in “I think it’s pronounced Krooger.”

“Seriously, what is going on?” Ali asked confused.

Ashlyn piped up. “Well, since we are traveling back to Massachusetts over your birthday Tuesday, your mom and I thought it would be fun to have everyone here to celebrate for the weekend.”

Deb intervened. “Oh no, don’t give me too much credit. This was all Ashlyn’s idea!”

Ali beamed. She let go of Kyle to hug all the girls before planting a sweet kiss on Ashlyn’s lips and whispering in her ear. “You are unbelievably amazing. Thank you, baby.”


Kyle observed them. “Well, I was worried dinner would get cold, but I think there’s enough heat around here to keep it warm.” He said nudging them as he walked passed, making everyone else laugh. “Let’s eat people, I’m dying!” He added dramatically.

Everyone settled in the dining room, Ashlyn and Deb bringing out all the food while Emily added more place settings to the table. Ali introduced Emily and Anthony to the rugby girls and they dug into the food.

“So, how was Florida, Ali? What did you guys do?” Sydney asked.

“I spent a lot of time with Ash’s grandma, who is pretty much the most amazing person ever. I helped her do a lot of volunteer work and it turned out to be a pretty amazing experience. And, she single-handedly taught me how to cook, so there was that!” Ali answered.

“WAIT! Back up! Rewind! You can cook now? Are we talking like a hot pocket in the microwave, cause that doesn’t count Alex.” Kyle exclaimed.

Ali threw a dinner roll at him and shot him a look. “No, jerk. Like real down home southern cookin’.” Ali said with an accent.

“I can vouch for her. She made some pretty amazing dinners for us. My grandma is a miracle
“Watch it, Harris.” Ali jokingly warned. “Annnway, Ash worked her internship, which was amazing and she’ll have to tell you all about it. Let’s just say she let me cuddle a penguin!”

Hope choked on a grape tomato and Kelley smacked her on the back to help her out as everyone looked on in concern. “There ya go, Hopey.” Kelley said with a smile. Hope shot her a look but was still trying to compose herself. “I’m sorry, did you say that you cuddled a penguin?!” Hope said in a ragged voice, recovering enough to talk.

“Show the pictures! They’re adorbs!” Kyle encouraged. “Actually, just tell them the whole story! Wait until you hear about what Dr. Love over here did.” He said motioning towards Ashlyn.

Ashlyn blushed a bit and shook her head.

“Yeah, I haven’t heard about this. Go on…” Deb chimed in.

Ali started to pass around her phone with the pictures of the penguin for everyone to see.

“That is stinkin’ cute!” Sydney commented. “Awwww, I want one! Let’s get one, Hopey!” Kelley said earning another stern look from Hope who looked at the picture. “I love penguins, that’s a great picture.” Hope agreed.

“How are you ever gonna beat a penguin, Ash? Seriously, you set the bar too high for yourself now.” HAO teased.

“Oh no, wait for it. Tell the story, Alex.” Kyle urged.

Ali recounted her visit to the marine lab: how Ashlyn worked with the dolphin who ended up liking Ali, the turtle who Ash released the following week, the really fierce shark, all of the excitement with the penguin who made Ali her very own penguin artwork, and how Ash had given all the animals their cute names. Everyone at the table sighed and made cooing noises when Ali told them all about Felix the penguin’s art routine that Ashlyn had taught him.

“Damn, Harris. You are good.” HAO said appreciatively.

“Yeah, Harris, I’m gonna need you to teach Dom some tricks. He’s probably not as smart as the dolphin, but he’s a lot like that penguin. If there’s food, he’ll do anything!” Sydney laughed at her own joke.

“It’s not over yet. Get to the kicker, Alex.” Kyle said, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. Ashlyn was already turning red knowing what was coming.

“Oh well, when I met Ash’s boss she told me to make sure Ash showed me the Angelfish. So, at the end of the tour, Ash finally takes me over to this tank that has this beautiful fish in it. And she tells me it’s considered one of the most beautiful in the world. So, I ask her what she named it and she points to the little name label on the tank and it says ‘Ali.’” Ali explained with a goofy smile.

The whole table let out an “Awwww.” Ashlyn buried her face in her hands.

“Yeah, sorry Deb, I can’t compete with that.” Anthony joked apologetically.

“Who the hell can?!?” Deb replied.

“Oook. Who wants dessert? I’m gonna go get dessert!” Ashlyn said getting up with a blush still on
her face.

“I’ll help you.” Ali said sweetly.


Ali leaned her front against Ashlyn’s back as the blonde arranged a tray of pastries in the kitchen.

“Did I embarrass you too much, baby?” Ali asked quietly, her arms snaking around Ashlyn’s waist.

“Nah. I’ll never be embarrassed to love you.” Ashlyn said with smile, closing her eyes at the feel of Ali against her back.

Ali turned the blonde in her arms, crashing their lips together before Ashlyn even knew what was happening. She felt Ashlyn let out a barely audible moan into her mouth as she grabbed the blonde’s face in her hands to get closer. Ali finally pulled back, quickly licking her lips. “I have a serious problem with being able to keep my hands off of you.”

“I’m so not complaining, Princess.” Ashlyn said, leaning in to get one more kiss.

“What’s for dessert?” Kyle asked walking right into the kitchen already aware of what he would find. “Oh, we’re having sweet piece of ass. My favorite!” He teased them.

Ashlyn let out a loud chortle, earning a light smack from Ali. “Don’t encourage him.”

“I’m just teasing! As much as it’s weird to watch you mack on my little sister, I’m secretly thrilled that you guys are still making out like teenagers everywhere. It’s disgustingly cute and gives me hope for my own love life.” Kyle said. “Don’t mind me, you two just keep stoking the fire. I’m just here to make the coffee.”

Ali shook her head and put her brother in a headlock. “I’m glad you’re here doofus.”

“Watch the hair!” Kyle squealed.

Ashlyn laughed at them and picked up the dessert tray, heading back to the dining room and letting Ali and Kyle have their sibling time. She put the tray down on the table and sat back down next to HAO. “Thanks for coming down here you guys, Ali’s really happy to see all of you. She misses you.” She addressed the rugby girls.

HAO spoke up. “We were happy to come! We never get to celebrate Kriegy’s birthday properly since it’s over the summer. Does she know anything about tomorrow’s game plan?”

“Nope. Think I’ll just tell her in the morning before it’s time to get ready.” Ashlyn replied.

“She’s gonna love it.” HAO said, quickly shutting up as she saw Ali and Kyle approach the dining room with a pot of coffee and mugs.

They all enjoyed dessert and conversation until Anthony said he should get going and left. Deb excused herself to go to bed shortly after. Kyle and the girls sat out on the patio for a while hanging out. Kyle eventually yawned and got up to go inside. “Ok ladies, it’s be real, but I am wiped out. I need my beauty sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Actually. I’m with Kyle, bed time for me.” HAO said, getting up too. The rest of them decided to follow suit, tired from the traveling they did to get to D.C. Everyone broke off into their own guest rooms, except for Hope and Kelley who had of course decided to share.
Ali closed the door of her bedroom behind her and watched Ashlyn start to unbutton her shirt to get ready for bed. She made her way over to the blonde. “Come here you.” She said quietly, putting her arms into Ashlyn’s already unbutton shirt and gripping her waist to hug her. She rested her head on Ashlyn’s shoulder and closed her eyes, enjoying the warmth of the blonde’s skin on her arms.

Ashlyn took in the scent of Ali’s peach shampoo as she rested her head on Ali’s.

“Can’t believe you got everyone to come for the weekend for my birthday. You’re so sweet to me.” Ali said warmly, hands stroking Ashlyn’s lower back lightly.

“I just want to make you happy, Princess.” Ashlyn said lovingly.

Ali brought her head back a bit to look at her. She tucked a piece of Ashlyn’s hair behind the blonde’s ear. “You always make me happy, Ash.” Ali said honestly. “Now, what would make me extra happy is for you to take all that clothes off and take me to bed so I can fall asleep with every inch of you touching me.”

“It’s your birthday weekend, baby. You get whatever you want.” Ashlyn replied, stripping off her clothes before working on getting Ali’s off too. When they were both finally naked, Ashlyn picked Ali up and gently placed her in the bed. She pulled the covers over them and pulled the brunette into her. She gave Ali a slow romantic kiss. “I love you so much, Alex.” She whispered, closing her eyes and lightly running her fingers through the brunette’s hair.

“I love you too, baby.” Ali responded. She enjoyed the heat of Ashlyn’s skin against her own as she traced the pattern of the tattoos she knew by heart on the blonde’s arm. She closed her eyes and let her breathing match Ashlyn’s, sleep quickly taking them both.

Ashlyn woke up first, Ali still curled into her and the two of them holding each other close. Ashlyn lightly ran her hand up and down Ali’s back, giving herself just a few more minutes to enjoy the feel of Ali against her before she had to wake the brunette up. She adjusted herself lower to get Ali’s face close to hers and placed soft kisses on her forehead, cheeks, and chin to wake her up. A small smile formed on Ali’s lips as she stirred.

“That’s such a nice way to wake up. Hi baby.” Ali said sleepily, her eyes finally opening to see a grinning Ashlyn.

“Good morning, sunshine.” Ashlyn said cheerily. “Ready to have some fun today?”

“Oh yeah? What are we doing?” Ali asked, hearing the obvious excitement in Ashlyn’s voice.

“I’ll tell you soon, promise. But first, we both know that we have about 10 minutes before Kyle comes bounding into this room in his underwear. I’d rather not be naked with you when he plops himself down on the bed in his man panties.” Ashlyn laughed and Ali nodded knowingly. Ashlyn got up and grabbed them some t-shirts and shorts. They slipped them on and settled back into bed together as Kyle came in right on cue a couple of minutes later.

“Knock, Knock, put your clothes on!” Kyle said entering the room without even pausing to give them time if they did need to put clothes on. He threw himself onto their bed, wearing nothing but tight black brief underwear. “Good morning, sugar plums!”

“What do you have against pants, Kyle?” Ashlyn mocked and then added. “Also, what if we had been naked?”

“First, pants are not for me and I will not wear them unless I have to. Second, this one and I have seen each other naked like a gazillion times.” Kyle said pointing to Ali. “And face it Ash, it’s
probably only a matter of time before you and I end up in the same boat. So, embrace the nudity. Besides, it’s not like you have anything to be ashamed of Captain Muscles!”

Ashlyn groaned and shook her head wondering how many more times she’d be able to prevent Kyle from walking in on them before realizing it was a losing battle.

“Stop torturing my girlfriend, Kyle!” Ali chastised him.

“Right. Well, up up up, get yourselves ready! I’m gonna go get all sexy in case I find my future husband today.” Kyle said cheerily as he left the room.

Ashlyn and Ali got up and showered together. Ali had tried desperately to turn it into more, but Ashlyn knew they had to stay on schedule and kept their shower short much to Ali’s dismay. Ali sat wrapped in a towel working on her make-up while Ashlyn rummaged around in Ali’s closet.

“Baby, what are you doing?” Ali asked.

“Picking out your outfit for today, beautiful.” Ashlyn called out, finally exiting the closet after a few minutes.

“Hmmmm, ok. Well what am I wearing then?” Ali questioned.

Ashlyn handed Ali a pair of black shorts and her German National Rugby Team jersey that she bought while in Germany.

“Am I supposed to know what is going on based on this?” Ali asked. “Are we doing something Germany related?”

“Maybe. Just put it on, Princess.” Ashlyn answered.

Ali put on a bra and some underwear and slipped into the clothes Ashlyn gave her. “How’s that?”

“Almost perfect. Just one more thing.” Ashlyn rummaged around in her own luggage and pulled out her New Zealand All Blacks national rugby team snapback. She placed it on Ali’s head. “There we go, perfect.”

“So, I’m wearing two rugby team things.” Ali tried to figure it out. “Are we going to watch a rugby match?”

“Uh huh.” Ashlyn answered with a smile. “Not just any rugby match…”

“Oh my god, are we going to watch the All Blacks!!!” Ali asked excitedly. Anyone who knew rugby knew the All Blacks were the best in the world and the opportunity to watch them was one you didn’t pass up.

Ashlyn nodded her head with a big smile while Ali stood there with her mouth open. “And not just the All Blacks…”

“Who are they playing? Team USA?” Ali asked.

Ashlyn laughed a bit at Ali’s slowness. “I gave you all the clues, Princess. Think about it.”

“Wait?! GERMANY???” Ali screamed.

“Nailed it.” Ashlyn said as Ali launched herself at the blonde. Ashlyn caught her and gripped her into a tight hug, almost losing the towel wrapped around her since she wasn’t dressed yet. “Happy
Birthday, Alex.”

“Ash, this is amazing! My favorite team and the best in the world playing each other and I get to go! Where? How?” Ali questioned.

“The All Blacks and Germany are playing here in D.C. at RFK Stadium this afternoon as part of a promotional exhibition match to promote rugby in the US. When I saw it announced a couple of months ago and that we would be here, I made plans for us to go for your birthday.” Ashlyn explained. “Kyle and the girls are all coming with us. We’re gonna make a whole day of it.”

“Ahhh, you’re the best!” Ali squealed. She held tight to Ashlyn, only realizing a couple of minutes later that the blonde was still in a towel which was only holding itself up because Ali was pressing herself against it. Ali purposely backed up a bit letting the towel fall. She put her hand in the center of Ashlyn’s chest and ran it down, across the blonde’s abs and then around her waist line, settling on the small of her back and pulling her close. “Fuck, you’re so hot, Ash.” Ali dipped right down and took one of Ashlyn’s nipples in her mouth.

“Unnnh, Alex.” Ashlyn grunted out in surprise, her hands going right to the back of Ali’s head, the snap back falling to the floor. Ali let Ashlyn’s nipple slip out of her mouth and leaned up to kiss the blonde, craving Ashlyn’s warm tongue against hers. Ashlyn’s body was on fire and she was about to take Ali over to the bed when Kyle’s sing-song voice rang through the room over the intercom. “Let’s go my fairy princesses! We’re gonna be late!”

“Ugh, I’m really starting to hate that intercom.” Ashlyn groaned.

“I’ve always hated it, but lately, the hate runs deeper than ever.” Ali laughed before kissing Ashlyn again. “We’re picking this up later, Harris.”

“Damn right we are, Krieger.” Ashlyn gave her a dimpled grin. “I gotta get dressed!” Ashlyn quickly slipped on some underwear and threw on a pair of khaki shorts along with her favorite All Blacks jersey and a black Smith Rugby snapback with red lettering.

“Awww, I didn’t mean to steal your hat, baby.” Ali said, picking the All Blacks snapback off the floor. “Here, you can wear it.”

“No way. You wear it, Princess. You look cute as hell in my hats.” Ashlyn put the snapback on Ali’s head again. “So damn cute.” She gave Ali one more soft kiss before grabbing the envelope of tickets and pulling the brunette out the door.

Kyle and all the girls went to a restaurant for brunch together before heading over stadium for the afternoon. Ali was beside herself at the whole thing. She was going to an amazing rugby match on US soil with all of her favorite people. The only thing she was missing was her Dad. She felt a little guilty that she had dinner with everyone last night including Deb and Anthony, but that she wouldn’t get to see Ken this weekend before she was heading back to New England. The thought quickly left her as they walked up to the stadium, the area bustling with excited rugby fans.

They made a few loops around the stadium just checking everything out before deciding to find their seats about 30 minutes before the start of the match. Ashlyn handed Ali their tickets. “I suck at finding seats. Here, Princess, lead the way.”

Ali laughed and looked over the tickets, figuring out on the stadium signs which way they needed to go and leading the group. “Geez, you guys, these are amazing seats!” Ali exclaimed as they made their way down to the lower level section at middle of the pitch. “Ok, I think we are over there. Row 10, seats 2 through 8.” Ali yelled back loud enough for Emily and HAO at the back of the group to
hear her, pointing in the general direction just in case.

Ali made her way to correct row, noting that there was someone sitting in the first seat on the aisle. She tapped the man gently on the shoulder from behind. “I’m sorry, do you mind if we just sneak in to our seats?”

Ken Krieger turned around, taking the ball cap off his head. “Sure thing, sweetheart.” He smiled at her.

“DADDY!!” Ali yelled out, hugging him tightly. She saw Ashlyn and Kyle give each other a high five and the rest of the group smiled, all of them having been in on the secret.

Everyone shuffled into their seats, Ali sitting between Ken and Ashlyn. Ali chatted with Ken for a while before finally leaning over to put her head on Ashlyn’s shoulder so she could whisper to the blonde. “You know me way too well, Ashlyn Harris. I love it and I love you.” She pecked the blonde’s lips quickly and then grabbed Ashlyn’s hand and held it tight.

Ashlyn smiled at her. “I love you too, beautiful.”

The match was everything Ali had hoped for and more. It had been competitive and exciting with an electric crowd. The All Blacks had not surprisingly taken the game in end with a 24 – 17 win over Germany. The group went out for a long dinner after the match at an upscale buffet restaurant where they stuffed themselves with steak and seafood. Ken parted from them after dinner, wishing Ali an early happy birthday and a safe trip back to New England. He stopped to give Ashlyn a tight hug and thank her for having planned everything, Ali smiled watching them. Kyle came up with the idea to head to a fun new dance club downtown since dancing was Ali’s favorite, so they went back home to change into appropriate clothes before going out for the night.

Ali had worn a little black dress that left little to the imagination and she had Ashlyn really flustered as she moved against the blonde on the dance floor. Ashlyn breathed a slight sigh of relief when Kyle briefly pulled Ali away to dance with him, Emily, and Sydney. She could feel wetness pooling between her legs from Ali having been grinding on her in all the right ways. Ashlyn walked back to their table to take a few sips of water. She plopped down next to HAO who was texting Dave.

HAO looked up at her. “Someone is getting worked out there.” HAO laughed.

“You aren’t kidding.” Ashlyn replied in agreement.

“Kriegy is relentless on the dance floor. We all know better than to get close to her when a good song comes on.” HAO giggled.

“Yeah I missed that warning. But, I’m not complaining.” Ashlyn winked.

“Oh we know you’re not complaining!” HAO teased. “Neither is Hope.” HAO snickered and pointed to Kelley and Hope all over each other on the dance floor. Ashlyn shook her head.

“So, Dave couldn’t come this weekend?” Ashlyn asked.

“Ugh, no. It’s his parent’s 40th wedding anniversary and he felt bad not being home for their celebration dinner. I really want you to meet him, I think you’d really like him.” HAO answered.

“I have no doubt that I will. You two should come visit when Ali and I get settled in back in Northampton.” Ashlyn suggested.

“Definitely!” HAO said excitedly.

“Duty calls!” Ashlyn said, letting Ali drag her back out on the dance floor. The brunette immediately molded her hips back into the blonde’s, hands going to the back of Ashlyn’s neck. They danced like that for at least another couple of hours, Ashlyn’s body hot all over, before the group decided to head home.

It had been a long day and Ali fell asleep against Ashlyn’s shoulder in the car on the way home. Despite their earlier plan of picking things back up when they got home, Ashlyn didn’t have the heart to wake her. She said goodnight to everyone quietly and carried Ali upstairs to the bedroom. She laid the brunette gently on the bed and removed her dress without waking her, taking off her own clothes so they were both just in their underwear. Ashlyn settled in beside Ali and held her tight, kissing the brunette on the forehead and letting her own eyes close as she breathed in Ali’s familiar scent.

Sunday morning was a bit hectic with everyone trying to make sure they had their stuff together for their trips back home to various places. They all had breakfast together and gave their presents to Ali so she could open them while they were still there. Hope and Kelley had gotten her a set of beer steins for the new apartment. Sydney and Dom had followed suit with a set of artsy wine glasses. HAO and Dave had gotten Ali two fall sweaters she had been eyeing from Nordstrom. Kyle had gifted Ali a new camera and made her promise to take lots of pictures and send them to him. He had already been taking pictures with the camera all weekend without Ali realizing it was for her. So, it was already filled with great snaps from their weekend. “You guys are greatest! Thank you so much!” Ali said, truly grateful for her friends and family.

People made their way out at various times that afternoon depending on their travel schedules. Finally it was just Ali, Ashlyn and Deb left in the house again. It wasn’t exactly quiet though. Ashlyn and Ali were leaving very early Tuesday morning for their drive back. So, the rest of Sunday and all of Monday was spent going through all of Ali’s belongings and deciding what was coming to Northampton with them. Once the decisions were made, they had to carefully pack everything in boxes and finagle it all into Ashlyn’s Jeep. There wasn’t much time for anything but eat, pack, and sleep until Tuesday morning was finally upon them.

Ashlyn woke Ali up with several soft kisses until the brunette was fully awake and smiling. “Happy Birthday, Alex!” Ashlyn said hovering over the brunette and handing her a card and a small box.

Ali opened the card with a picture of rugger tackling a cake on the front of it to find a simple message from Ashlyn:

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Happy Birthday, Beautiful. I’d rather show you how much I love you on your birthday than write about it. So, all I’m going to say in here is that I could not be more grateful for the day that you were born Alex Krieger. This is best day in the world. I love you. Love, Ash
---

Ali opened to the box to find a silver chain with a beautiful charm of a wing dangling from it. She looked it over with a smile. “It’s gorgeous. Why a wing?” Ali said.

“Because with wings you can fly, but you need two of them to do it.” Ashlyn said pulling her own matching silver chain out of her t-shirt, the same wing dangling off of hers. “Alone we barely get off the ground. Together we fly and soar anywhere we want to.”

Ali pulled Ashlyn into a deep kiss before finally pulling back to look at her. “I love you. There are no words for how amazing you are.”
“I love you too, Princess.” Ashlyn replied. “Unfortunately, we have to get ready and head out.” She added with a pout.

They quickly got ready, said their goodbyes to Deb and jumped in the car to start their trip. They were hoping to make it to Northampton by early evening and have some time to unpack few things to get settled in.

Ashlyn had managed to surprise Ali the whole trip with little sweet gestures like having made a special birthday playlist for her and handing her another birthday card with a sweet love letter written in it. The best had been when Ashlyn had stopped in New York City for a late lunch at a German restaurant she had made reservations at. The menu was completely in German and Ali had a blast ordering them all kinds of authentic food to eat that reminded her of the year she spent in her favorite place. Ashlyn had even arranged for the staff to bring out dessert and sing happy birthday to Ali in German. Ali couldn’t remember a birthday that had been better than this one.

By the time they got to Northampton around 7pm, Ali was ready to get into that apartment and put her body all over Ashlyn’s. She was a bit bummed at the fact that they’d be coming into an empty apartment with things all over the place and no real furniture. She had picked out all the furniture at a local furniture store in downtown Northampton before graduation, but it wasn’t going to be delivered for another couple of weeks because the delivery schedule was especially busy in the summer.

“Ready for a few days of an air mattress and complete chaos?” Ali said as they parked the car and made the short walk to their apartment.

“Of course, baby. Don’t worry, we’ll have it feeling like home in no time.” Ashlyn reassured her. They walked up to the apartment door and Ali fumbled in her purse until she found the key. Ashlyn stood behind her a bit as Ali opened the door and finally found the light switch on the wall to turn on the light. As the lights came on, Ali looked into the apartment and blinked her eyes a few times. She couldn’t believe what she was seeing.

With the exception of a couple of boxes in the corner the whole place was set up. The couch, kitchen table, coffee tables, and curtains she had picked out were all there and in place. There were framed pictures of her family, friends, and of her and Ashlyn all over. Books were on bookshelves, dishes were in cabinets, and there was even a vase of flowers on the table. It looked like home, everything perfectly placed.


Ashlyn wrapped her arms around Ali from behind with a smile. “I may or may not have convinced your landlord to help me with this birthday surprise before we left for the summer. He gave me an extra key and I left very specific instructions for a few very awesome rugby ladies who helped me execute it all from afar.” Ashlyn explained. “After you picked out all the furniture, I went back to the store and had them deliver it all earlier. Thank god for the good natured people of Northampton. This never would have been possible in New York.” Ashlyn chuckled. Ali was still in shock. “Want to see the bedroom?”

Ali nodded and Ashlyn walked them into the bedroom. The bed Ali had picked out was all setup and made up with her comforter set and throw pillows. The dresser and bedside tables in just the right spot, her childhood teddy bear even sitting on the bed.

“Happy Birthday, my love.” Ashlyn said sweetly.

Ali was so touched, she couldn’t even say anything. She pushed Ashlyn right onto the bed and kissed her hard, hands roaming all over the blonde before Ashlyn even knew what was happening.
Ali already had Ashlyn’s shirt and bra off and was working down the blonde’s neck before Ashlyn found her voice. “Unnh, yes, Alex.” Ali worked Ashlyn’s shorts off of her and climbed back up to take a nipple in her mouth, sucking it lightly and rubbing the blonde’s center over her underwear. “Fuck, baby.” Ashlyn moaned. Ali was worked up and not stopping to tease her this time around.

“I want you, Ash. So bad.” Ali mumbled, moving to the blonde’s other nipple.

“Mmm, let me take your clothes off, baby. I want to feel you.” Ashlyn said, her voice already a bit raspy. Ali sat up a bit and took her shirt off while Ashlyn worked on getting her shorts off. The blonde tossed the shorts into the floor and unclasped Ali’s bra, pulling it off her shoulders and pulling Ali back down on top of her. “You’re so beautiful, Alex.” Ashlyn said running her hands all over the brunette and slowing things down a bit.

Ali rolled them onto their sides and kissed Ashlyn passionately, running her hand down under the waistband of the blonde’s underwear to slide them off. Ashlyn followed Ali and had the brunette’s underwear halfway down when she felt Ali’s fingers enter her. “Oh god, yes, Alex, yes.” Ashlyn whispered into Ali’s ear, slipping her own fingers deep into the brunette’s core.

“Mmm, Ash. So good inside me.” Ali whispered back. Ashlyn covered Ali’s lips with her own and no more words were spoken, just deep moans and desperate breaths against each other’s lips. Ali had tumbled over the edge first with Ashlyn joining her shortly after. They laid there listening to their heavy breathing while still deeply buried inside each other.

“That’s one way to break in the new bed.” Ali said with a small giggle.

Ashlyn laughed and kissed her lightly. “Oh wait! I almost forgot!” She slowly removed her fingers from Ali, making the brunette let out a soft whimper as her own fingers left the blonde. “Be right back.” Ashlyn said getting up. Ali groaned at the loss of contact and heard Ashlyn washing her hands and then in the kitchen opening the fridge and clanging dishes around.

Ashlyn came back a few minutes later with two glasses of champagne and a small ice cream cake with a candle in it. She sang Happy Birthday to Ali, throwing in a small made up rap mid-way through. Ali laughed and blew out the candle.

“This was truly the best birthday I’ve ever had, Ash. 22 never felt so good!” Ali said, giving the blonde a soft kiss before they dug into the cake. “I love you, love you, love you.”

“Love you too, baby. This night isn’t over though, Princess. 22 is about to feel even better.” Ashlyn said waggling her eyebrows.

Ali quickly found out just how good 22 could feel when the blonde had Ali screaming her name on the couch, the kitchen table, the counters, and the shower before one last slow romantic love making session on the bed.

“Welcome home, birthday girl.” Was the last thing Ali heard Ashlyn whisper before she fell asleep completely spent and happy.
Ashlyn woke up to the sound of a door closing, she found herself curled onto her side in a tangle of sheets. Ali was not in the bed beside her like she expected. Ashlyn groaned a bit, wishing she had woken up pressed against a naked Ali. She heard the sound of a plate being put on the counter.

“Alex?” The blonde called out in her raspy morning voice. A couple seconds later she heard footsteps approach the bedroom door.

“Good morning, sexy.” Ali said with a beaming smile as she walked into the bedroom balancing a tray with two Starbucks coffees and two blueberry muffins on it. She was wearing a pair of gray athletic shorts and a navy Smith t-shirt, both of which belonged to Ashlyn. Her hair was pulled back into a haphazard ponytail, her mascara layered on as usual.

Ashlyn’s lips curled into a smile automatically as she looked at Ali. The brunette always managed to look flawless even when she had just thrown on some random clothes and wasn’t trying. “You already went to Starbucks?” Ashlyn asked.

“You looked so peaceful sleeping, I didn’t want to wake you. I figured I’d go grab us something real quick.” Ali answered as she carefully sat on the bed next to Ashlyn, putting the tray in her lap. She pecked the blonde on the lips and handed her a coffee.

Ashlyn took a sip of the coffee. “Mmm, perfect. You’re the best!”

“I got us some makeshift breakfast too.” Ali said, handing the blonde a plate with a muffin on it.

“You buttering me up, Krieger?” Ashlyn asked playfully.

“Absolutely not. Just showing my appreciation for the last few days.” Ali smiled flirtatiously. “And, maybe buttering you up a little, for later.” She winked.

Ashlyn laughed. “You never have to butter me up for that, trust me.” She sat up a bit more so she could eat the muffin, the sheets dropped and pooled around her waist.

Ali’s eyes went right to Ashlyn’s chest, eyes raking over the blonde’s perfect breasts. She must have zoned out, the next thing she heard was Ashlyn snapping her fingers.

“Earth to Princess.” Ashlyn said with a smug grin.

“Huh? Oh, sorry. What?” Ali looked up at Ashlyn, finally tearing her eyes away from the blonde’s naked chest.

“I did ask what time it was, but never mind that. Whatcha looking at there, Princess?” The smile on the blonde’s face growing even smugger.
“You know damn well what I’m looking at. Like you’d be doing anything different if I was the one who was naked.” Ali said pointedly.

“So, insatiable. I better eat if I have any chance of keeping up with you today.” Ashlyn waggled her eyebrows.

“Yes, you’re definitely gonna want to finish that muffin.” Ali said suggestively, starting to dig into her own breakfast. “Annnnyway, it’s like 10:30am right now. I was thinking we could get ready and then do some shopping for groceries and other necessities. You know, like a coffeemaker. Then we can come back and just chill together, clothing optional. How does that sound?” Ali asked with a smirk.

“I like the sound of that.” The blonde replied, finishing her muffin and purposely giving Ali a view as she got out of bed, stretched a bit, and slowly walked to the bathroom.

Ali caught herself staring, vowing not to give in right now so they could actually get some much needed shopping done. “I’m not falling into your trap, Harris. Now get yourself ready so we can get out of here.”

Ashlyn groaned from the bathroom and got into the shower.

Their first stop of the day was the local Target. Ali picked out all of the much needed items she was missing in the new apartment. A coffeemaker, toaster, blender, and vacuum were the highest priority. After that, they picked out some extra sheets and towels, cleaning supplies, toiletries, and some kitchen cookware and utensils. By the time they were done in Target, they had filled two carts and Ashlyn was glad there was plenty of room in the Jeep. Since it was already almost 1pm by that point and grocery shopping was next on the agenda, Ali suggested having lunch so they wouldn’t shop on an empty stomach and impulsively buy everything in sight.

They stopped at Panera for some salads and sandwiches and then headed to the grocery store. Ashlyn wandered the aisles picking out some basic cooking and baking necessities, while Ali worked on getting the ingredients for some lunches and dinners she had in mind for the week.

Ashlyn was getting some apples when she felt an arm sneak around her waist. She smiled and turned around ready to plant a kiss on Ali’s cheek when she realized it wasn’t Ali at all, but an old familiar face.


“Oh, um, hi Gabby.” Ashlyn replied putting a little distance between them. “What are you doing around here?”

Gabby laughed a bit. “Nice to see you too. I got a job in the area a few months ago, so I’m living here now. You don’t graduate until next year right, did you just stick around for the summer?”

“Cool. Yeah, I’m a junior this year. I didn’t hang around all summer though, just got back a bit early is all.” Ashlyn replied.

“Alright. Well since we’re both around.” Gabby moved her hand to Ashlyn’s forearm. “How about we hang out tonight? It’s been a while since we caught up.”
Ashlyn was a bit surprised by Gabby’s forwardness. She cleared her throat and pulled her arm away slowly. “Actually Gabby, I’m seeing someone.”

Gabby snickered. “Ashlyn Harris has a lady? Really? Can’t be that serious, am I right? I mean, come on back to my place for a night and we’ll see how serious it is. I think you’ll still like what I got, enough to make you forget about anyone else.”

Ashlyn was about to reply when Ali walked right up holding a couple of cereal boxes. “Frosted Flakes or Lucky Charms, baby? I couldn’t decide on which one you’d want.”

Ashlyn breathed a slight sigh of relief. “Frosted Flakes, definitely.”

“Ah, I knew it! That’s what I went with first, but then I second guessed. I should’ve just gone with it.” Ali explained.

“You know me too well.” Ashlyn smiled.

“Yeah, but I still plan to get to know you even better tonight.” Ali said with a smirk, leaning in to kiss the blonde.

Gabby shuffled awkwardly watching them. Ashlyn saw the movement out of the corner of her eye as she pulled back from the kiss. “Oh, sorry. Um, Ali this is Gabriela. Gabriela this is my girlfriend, Ali. Gabby graduated from Smith last year.”

Ali quickly looked the exotic looking brunette up and down. “Hi. Nice to meet you. Sorry to interrupt, just wanted to make sure we have stuff in the apartment to feed my girl.” Ali said motioning towards Ashlyn. She smiled inwardly. Ali had heard and witnessed most of the conversation between Ashlyn and Gabby, choosing to make her presence known when she’d heard enough.

“You two are living together?” Gabby asked, the surprise in her voice evident.

“Yep.” Ashlyn answered simply.


“Oh, no. I just graduated from Dartmouth and am living here now for my job.” Ali answered.

“Dartmouth, geez Ash, classing it up huh?” Gabby said in a mocking tone. Ali raised her eyebrows.

“Anyway, we have to finish up here. We have a busy afternoon.” Ashlyn said wrapping her arm around Ali and trying to diffuse the situation.

“Yeah ok. Nice to see you again.” Gabby replied. Ashlyn nodded.

“Good to meet you Gabby. I’m Ali.” Ali said putting out her hand.

Gabby shook it looking a bit confused. “Yep. I remember.”

“Good. Wouldn’t want you to forget.” Ali said pointedly, dropping Gabby’s hand and pulling Ashlyn in for another kiss. “Bye, Gabby.” She said in a sugar sweet tone, earning a hard look from the other woman.

Ashlyn smiled, giving Gabby a half wave and watching the scowling girl walk away. “Oh my god, Krieger. You are a beast.”
“You knew what you were getting into, Harris. No one messes with my girl.” Ali said smugly.
“Who exactly was that anyway?”

“That would be Gabriela. She was technically the first girl I dated at Smith, so my first Smith girlfriend. She was a senior and we dated for like 3 weeks.” Ashlyn replied.

“She’s good looking. Of course you would date some Latin hottie with a name like Gabriela! You have a thing for older women, Harris?” Ali teased.

“Apparently.” Ashlyn laughed.

“So, what happened?” Ali asked curiously.

“She couldn’t deal with my intimacy issues and totally dumped me. I wasn’t exactly upset about it.” Ashlyn answered honestly. “She would always come around and try to hook up with me after that though.”

“Hmph. Well, glad I set her straight then.” Ali said.

“I love when you get all possessive, it’s hot.” Ashlyn replied, getting close and kissing Ali lightly, letting her hand drop to Ali’s ass and giving it a quick squeeze.

“Easy, Stud. We have to finish shopping.” Ali warned. Ashlyn groaned and went back to picking out apples.

By 4pm they had made it back to the apartment and about an hour and a half later they had finally gotten everything upstairs, small appliances set up, and everything else put away where it belonged. Ali popped open two beers from the fridge and handed one to Ashlyn as she sank down next to the blonde on the couch. “Thanks for going shopping with me today.”

“You bet, Princess.” Ashlyn smiled as Ali curled into her a bit.

“How about I make us some dinner?” Ali suggested.

“How about we both make dinner together?” Ashlyn amended.

“Perfect.” Ali replied, getting up off the couch and pulling Ashlyn with her.

Ashlyn worked on some pizza dough while Ali got the toppings ready and pulled together a quick salad. When the blonde had the dough rolled out, they worked on topping the pizza together.

Ali teasingly threw a pepperoni at Ashlyn. “I like this. This is fun.”

“Me too.” Ashlyn replied, leaning over the counter to give Ali a loving kiss. The brunette pulled her in closer and deepened it. Ashlyn was starting to get flustered as Ali’s tongue explored her mouth when her stomach growled loudly. Ali pulled back.


When the pizza was done, they sat at the counter eating and sharing a bottle of red wine. They put everything in the dishwasher after eating and got ready to settle on the couch together, Ashlyn refilling their wine glasses with what was left of the bottle. Ali turned on the fireplace, dying to use it even though it was still warm out. She figured the central air conditioning would balance out the temperature. She also grabbed her laptop.

“What do you want to watch?” Ali asked, putting her laptop on the coffee table and sitting down
next to Ashlyn on the couch. The internet was up and running thanks to the free wifi from the Starbucks downstairs, but her real internet and cable wouldn’t be setup until the following day.

“Um, Walking Dead?” Ashlyn asked.

“Hmmm. Ok.” Ali agreed. The show was definitely too gory for her liking, but Ashlyn really liked it and she figured they wouldn’t be watching very long anyway. She pulled it up on the Netflix queue and wrapped herself into Ashlyn’s side.

They finished their wine while they watched. Ali nuzzling her face into Ashlyn’s neck when she found the show too gross. Ashlyn just smiled and held her tighter. After one episode, they didn’t bother to put on another one. They were both feeling warm and tipsy from all the wine, their hands starting to roam over each other a bit as they cuddled and talked. Ali dropped her head onto Ashlyn’s chest as she giggled at one of the blonde’s lame jokes, the box in the corner of the living room catching her eye.

“What is that box anyway? I can’t think of anything we didn’t unpack already.” Ali asked eyeing the box.

“I don’t know. Maybe one of my boxes of crap that I didn’t know what to do with.” Ashlyn offered, getting up to pull the box closer to them and opening it. Inside were some wrapped gifts, each with a tag that said who it was from. “Awww, it’s gifts from the rugby girls.” Ashlyn said with a big grin.

“How sweet!” Ali exclaimed. “You never told me who your secret agents were.”

“Oh. Tobin and Kacey were around in Northampton all summer, so they were here for all the furniture delivery stuff. Sarah and Abby are two hours away in Vermont, but they came down for two days when Pinoe was visiting and the three of them unpacked everything. Then Alex was here to visit Tobin for a few days last week and she took care of all the finishing touches like hanging pictures, curtains, and stuff like that. Whitney helped me figure out all the logistics over the phone.” Ashlyn explained.

“As soon as the girls are back, we’re having them all for dinner. And we’ll get Abby and Sarah to come down too, they can stay the night.” Ali said. Ashlyn nodded.

“Want to open stuff?” Ashlyn asked. Ali agreed excitedly.

The first thing they opened was a fancy wine bottle opener from Kacey. Next was a set of cloth napkins, napkin rings, placemats, a table runner, and wine glass charms from Alex and Tobin. “Clearly this was Alex’s doing.” Ashlyn laughed.

Ashlyn opened the gift from Megan and found a decent sized bottle of lube. “Ummm…ok. Fucking Pinoe.” Ashlyn shook her head.

Ali giggled and joked. “Hmmm, maybe we shouldn’t invite Pinoe after all.” Ashlyn put the gift aside and pulled out the last box. The note on it read: ‘Ash & Ali: A little something to ‘warm’ your new place. Enjoy! – Love, Sarah & Abby’

“Here. You open it.” Ashlyn said handing it to Ali. Ali opened the box, her eyes going wide as she handed it back to Ashlyn whose eyes got just as wide. “Oh my god, really?! What the hell?!” Ashlyn exclaimed blushing and looking down at a medium-sized light pink dildo and a black harness that
went with it.

“This is what we get for having rugby friends!” Ali laughed. “Wow, ok then. Interesting.” She added, putting the box on the coffee table and settling back into Ashlyn’s side.

“Sorry. Sarah and Abby are vocal proponents of the strap-on. That’s why Sarah willed me that harness at senior banquet. She’s been harping on me, and everyone else for that matter, about it since I met her. I should’ve warned you. I’m surprised they haven’t made any comments in front of you yet, but I guess this takes the cake. Obviously Pinoe went shopping with them.” Ashlyn said pointing at the box and the bottle of lube.

“Hmmm. So, Sarah is a strap-on girl huh?” Ali asked.

“Yep. And so is Abby.” Ashlyn answered, trying not to think about the time she walked into her hotel room after a rugby match to find Sara drilling Abby against the wall of their room.

“Wait. So, they both…” Ali trailed off.

“Yep.” Ashlyn replied.

“Interesting. I wouldn’t have guessed that.” Ali said.

They sat quietly for a few minutes until Ali piped up again. “Ash, have you ever…” She trailed off again, her eyes going to the box on the coffee table.

“Oh, uh, no.” Ashlyn replied honestly.


“No good reason I guess. It never really came up with anyone I was with. I guess I was never close enough or trusting of anyone enough to go there anyway.” Ashlyn answered, she noted the contemplative expression on Ali’s face.

“Have you ever wanted to?” Ali continued to prod.

“I can’t say I’ve thought about it a whole lot, but with Sarah and Abby bringing it up all time… I’ve definitely considered it.” Ashlyn said thoughtfully.

“So, you’re not opposed?” Ali asked quietly.

“Definitely not.” Ashlyn replied, realizing where Ali was going with her questions. “Why? You curious, Princess?”

Ali buried her head into Ashlyn’s neck a bit as she answered. “Kinda.” She said shyly before she drew courage from the all the wine she drank and found her voice. “Kinda want to know what it feels like to have you fuck me.” She pulled back to look into Ashlyn’s eyes, finding them dark with desire. “Will you?”

The way Ali had asked, the trust she was putting in her, it turned the blonde on in such an unexpected way. Ashlyn didn’t answer with words, she crashed her lips to Ali’s and kissed her passionately. Her hands running up the back of Ali’s t-shirt. Ali let out a deep moan into the blonde’s mouth as she felt Ashlyn’s tongue move against hers. Ashlyn broke the kiss to lift Ali’s shirt and sports bra over her head and then take her own off, wanting to feel the heat of the brunette’s skin on
hers. She ran her thumbs over Ali’s nipples, feeling them harden under her touch as she ran her
tongue along Ali’s earlobe. “You’re so beautiful, Alex. So perfect.” Ashlyn whispered, moving her
mouth down the brunette’s neck and sucking gently on her pulse point as she listened to Ali’s deep
breathing and slight whimpers. She pulled back to look at Ali, dropping her eyes to the brunette’s
hard pink nipples that were begging to be sucked. Ashlyn left a lingering kiss on Ali’s lips and
dropped down to take a nipple into her mouth, flicking her tongue across it and sucking it until Ali
squirmed.

“Mmmm, yes, Ash.” Ali moaned. Her nipple leaving Ashlyn’s mouth with a slight popping
sounding as the blonde moved to the other one. Ali was already trembling slightly between Ashlyn’s
touch and the anticipation of what was coming. Her body was alive and hot with a slight sense of
nervousness, just like their first time together. Ashlyn kissed her again and pulled back to look at her,
feeling the slight tremble.

“Relax, baby.” The blonde stroked Ali’s cheek. “Slow and gentle, promise.”

“I know. I just want you so bad.” Ali whispered, standing up and pulling Ashlyn with her. She
slipped her hands under the waistband of Ashlyn’s shorts and took them off, sliding the blonde’s
boxers off with them. She slid off her own shorts and underwear before pulling Ashlyn back into
another heated kiss, pressing her tongue into the blonde’s mouth. Ashlyn left her eyes closed as Ali
pulled away from the kiss. She felt the brunette work her way down her neck and then suck her
nipple while she rolled the other one in her fingers. “Fuck. Mmmm.” Ashlyn moaned lightly, one of
her hands going to the back of Ali’s head.

Ali kissed her way down Ashlyn’s torso, stopping to dip her tongue into the blonde’s navel before
going right in and licking her clit with a broad swipe of her tongue. “Unnh, Alex.” Ashlyn
whispered, her eyes finally opening to look down at Ali kneeling between her legs. The brunette
didn’t linger long though, grabbing the box off the coffee table and taking the contents out of their
packaging.

Ali worked the harness around Ashlyn’s hips, leaving small kisses along the way. She had no idea
what she was doing, but it seemed easy enough to figure out. She put the dildo in place and then
worked on tightening the harness. They both giggled a bit when she struggled to get the last strap
tightened, but Ashlyn reached down and helped her do it.

“That good?” Ali asked as she stood up. Ashlyn nodded. She felt a little ridiculous standing there in
this harness, but she focused on Ali’s toned body and pushed everything else out of her head. Ali
poured a little lube in her hand and spread it onto the toy before pulling Ashlyn down on top of her
on the couch. She kissed Ashlyn hard, feeling the toy press against her thigh as the blonde laid on
her.

Ali felt Ashlyn kiss down her body, the blonde’s tongue licking through her folds.

“Ash, what are you…oh, mmmm.” Her voice trailed off into a moan as the blonde licked her clit.

“Just making sure you’re ready, baby.” Ashlyn mumbled against Ali’s center, continuing to lick
patterns on her clit.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s warm tongue enter her and let out a loud whimper, burying her hand in Ashlyn’s
hair and pulling the blonde more deeply into her. She could feel herself starting to lose it as Ashlyn’s
tongue worked in and out of her steadily. “Mmmm, Ash, I’m ready.” She panted out.

Ashlyn pulled back only slightly. “You taste so good, I don’t want to stop.”
Ali could feel how close she was. “Fuck. Then don’t, baby. Don’t stop.” She felt Ashlyn swirl her tongue deep inside her and she let go, the orgasm ripping through her as she bucked her hips against Ashlyn’s face and held the blonde’s mouth tightly against her.

Once Ali loosened her grip, Ashlyn crawled back up and kissed her, letting Ali taste herself on her lips. Ali pulled back breathless, still winded from the orgasm. They laid looking at each other for a couple of minutes, until Ali caught her breath.

“I love you, Ash. I want you.” Ali whispered, reaching down to grab the toy in her hand and direct it against her soaking folds.

“I love you, Alex.” Ashlyn replied. “Slow, ok. Tell me if I’m hurting you.” Ali nodded slightly as Ashlyn sat up a bit and positioned the tip of the dildo at the brunette’s entrance.

“I want you.” Ali repeated again as she felt Ashlyn start pressing into her, clutching the blonde’s tattooed bicep.

Ashlyn pushed into Ali slowly, watching the toy disappear inch by inch until it was all the way in. She stayed still, letting Ali get used to it, the brunette’s eyes already looking a bit glazed over. “You ok, Alex?”

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the edge and convulsed against her. “Ashlyn, Ash, Ash, Ash.” Ali screamed out as she peaked. Ashlyn stayed deep inside Ali, stopping her thrusts but circling her hips to add gentle pressure as Ali came down. Ali pulled her down in a tight embrace, the two of them just trying to breathe. The fire place and the heat between them made the room feel really hot.

“Was that ok, baby?” Ashlyn asked quietly, still tightly pressed to Ali.

“That felt so good, so amazingly good. I can’t even describe it.” Ali whispered back, her breathing still a bit heavy. She rolled them over so they were facing each other side by side, the toy finally leaving her. She looked deep into Ashlyn’s hazel eyes before asking her question. “Will you let me show you?”

Ashlyn knew what Ali was asking. She kissed the brunette gently. “I trust you, Alex. I’d let you do anything to me. Show me.” She kissed Ali again deeply, already worked up at the way the brunette’s hard nipples were pressed against her chest. Ali moved her mouth down licking and sucking a trail down Ashlyn’s neck and chest, stopping to lavish attention on her nipples until she could hear Ashlyn’s heavy breathing. She ran her hands down the blonde’s abs and reached down to undo the harness. She got it off quickly and got up to put it on herself, finding it easier to adjust this time as she tightened the straps into place.

She laid back down, hovering over Ashlyn and kissing blonde slowly while she reached down and ran her fingers through Ashlyn’s wet folds. Ashlyn let out a grunting moan as Ali made contact with her clit. “You’re so wet, Ash. So, so wet. So hot.” Ali purred into the blonde’s neck.

Ashlyn gently gripped Ali’s wrist to hold her hand still. “I’m more than ready for you, baby.” She was already so worked up from taking care of Ali and the rubbing of the harness against her that she wasn’t sure she could hold on much longer. Ali nodded, kissing Ashlyn softly one more time before slowly pressing the toy into the blonde’s tight entrance.

Ashlyn’s eyes rolled back at the sensation of Ali filling her. “Holy fuck.”

“You ok?” Ali asked, stopping her movement.

“Yeah, Alex. Keep going, you feel amazing.” Ashlyn assured her in a raspy voice, hand gripping Ali’s hips tightly. Ali pushed slowly again until she bottomed out. She worked the dildo out slowly and then back in just as slow.

“Oh my fuck. Yes, Alex. Please, baby, faster.” Ashlyn moaned out loudly. Ali picked up the pace, pumping faster and harder into Ashlyn as the blonde’s hips began thrusting to meet hers, the two of them working in rhythm together. Ali had never heard the blonde moan so loudly, her name spilling from Ashlyn’s lips over and over.

The sensation was almost too much for Ashlyn to handle. The toy felt good inside her, but it was everything else that came with it. The feel of Ali’s body working against hers, the sound of the brunette pumping into her, the sight of Ali fucking her, knowing that their fluids were now mixed together inside her, she understood why Ali needed to show her. She felt hot and dizzy, the muscles in her body tightening as she tried desperately to hang on a bit longer. “Alex, Alex, fuck, I’m so close, so close. Please don’t stop.” She got out through ragged breaths as she gripped Ali tighter.

Ali could feel the blonde clenching against her, her hips moving wildly and starting to lose the rhythm. She thrust into Ashlyn faster and covered the blonde’s lips with hers as Ashlyn let out a wail, orgasm hitting hard. Ali continued to pump into her slowly, holding the trembling blonde close as she came apart in her arms.
Ali kissed Ashlyn softly a few times, the blonde’s breathing becoming more normal after a few minutes. She laid her head on Ashlyn’s chest. “That was…” Ali started, but Ashlyn finished for her.

“Wow. That was wow.” Ashlyn said softly.

“Yeah, that was wow.” Ali agreed, she gripped Ashlyn tightly and closed her eyes.

Ashlyn could feel sleep overtaking her, her body spent and exhausted, comfortable with Ali still buried deep inside her. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the weight of Ali on her, the feel of the brunette’s warm skin covering hers, and drifted off into a peaceful sleep.
Ali felt hot sunlight on her face and opened her eyes to look around the bedroom. Ashlyn’s naked chest was pressed into her back, the blonde’s arm wrapped snugly around her waist. She remembered last night and thought back to them falling asleep on the couch, but didn’t remember moving to the bedroom. Ashlyn must have woken up and carried her into the bedroom like she usually did when Ali fell asleep. She ran her hand up and down Ashlyn’s forearm, stopping to mindlessly trace shapes and patterns on her skin as she listened to the blonde’s slight snoring. She was lost in thought and hadn’t noticed Ashlyn’s snoring stop as she felt lips press to the back of her shoulder.

“Morning, gorgeous.” Ali heard Ashlyn’s groggy morning voice behind her.

Ali turned around to face Ashlyn. “Hi.” She replied, brushing some stray hair from the blonde’s face and then reaching her arms around to pull her in closer.

“Oww.” Ashlyn jumped a bit as Ali’s hand ran over the back of her shoulder. “That stings.”

“What’s wrong?” Ali asked, sitting up a bit and looking at Ashlyn’s back. “Oh. Yikes. Um. Sorry, guess I got a bit carried away last night.” Ali mumbled shyly, looking at the eight long scratches running across the back of Ashlyn’s shoulders.

Ashlyn lifted Ali’s chin with her hand. “Relax, beautiful. I can handle some love wounds.” She reassured Ali as she stretched her body a bit. “Ugh, I need to work out more, I am actually sore this morning.”

Ali laughed. “Yeah, me too. In a good way.”

“Speaking of, I actually do need to get into a hardcore workout routine over the next couple of weeks so I’m ready for the season. The team will be back early and practicing in a couple of weeks and I need to be ready for that. Any chance you want to be my workout buddy?” Ashlyn asked hopefully.

“Hmmm, let’s see. Watching you work out and get all sweaty and hot? Um, yep. Sign me up!” Ali exclaimed.

“Easy, Krieger. We actually have to work out.” Ashlyn teased before adding. “Well, we can get sweaty lots of ways, but working out has to be one of them.”

“Again I say, sign me up!” Ali repeated, making the blonde laugh and shake her head. “Well, we both need a recovery day. How about we take a long bath together and then we can figure out what to do today?”

“Sign me up!” Ashlyn used Ali’s line and ran into the bathroom enthusiastically.

They took a long hot bath, letting their bodies relax. Ali gently cleaned up Ashlyn’s back with a
soapy washcloth. Afterwards Ashlyn took a hand mirror and angled it over her shoulder to look at the scratches in the large mirror in front of her. “Damn, Alex. That is hot.”

Ali blushed. “Not my fault you know how to push all my buttons, Stud.” She applied ointment to the scratches.

“Like I said. I’m so not complaining.” Ashlyn smirked.

After getting dressed, Ashlyn decided it would be fun for her to show Ali some of the more touristy activities in the area. She took Ali to the Dr. Seuss museum first where Ali was surprised at how interesting it actually was and that there were more adults there than kids. They followed that up with lunch at a local brewery. Finally, they ended with some shopping at the Yankee Candle factory where they left with several scented candles and headaches from smelling far too many of them. They came home and made some simple sandwiches for dinner and plopped down on the couch for the night to catch up on more of their Netflix queue.

The next couple of weeks went by much the same as they settled into a routine together. They would get up and go workout first at the Smith gym. Ali was more stringent about her workout routine than Ashlyn was, so Ali coached the blonde a bit and pushed her during workouts. Despite Ashlyn’s occasional whining, she realized Ali was getting her into better shape than ever and she really enjoyed working out with her. After working out, they would shower and then try and do something fun together for the day. Sometimes that meant running errands or just having a low-key day, but they also did more interesting things like drive into Vermont for some hiking or take a day trip to New York City for a day of shopping. They even got in a beach day trip to Southern Maine on a particularly hot day. They also spent a lot of time working on the second bedroom, turning it into the perfect workplace for Ali while still making sure it served as a comfy guestroom.

They both had to keep reminding themselves that this was still vacation; that Ali would be starting work soon and Ashlyn would get busy with school. They would have to find a new routine at that point, so they had to appreciate the extra time together while they had it. Still, Ali was struck by the smoothness of it all, how natural things always were with Ashlyn. It amazed her that there was never a point at which they got bored with each other. Whether they were doing something exciting or just sitting around quietly, there was an ease to it all, a comfort that never seemed to leave. It had always been this way with them, but Ali always wondered if that would start to change. It hadn’t so far and Ali was starting to understand how it was possible that it would always be this way. There was just something unspoken between them melded together perfectly. She’d never be able to put words to it, but it was there.

Before they knew it, Ali’s job was starting and the ruggers were soon returning to campus for early practice sessions before the fall semester began. Ali had spent the first few days of her new job driving to the Boston office for orientation to get her acclimated to the company before she started working from home. Ashlyn worked out a lot and planned rugby practice sessions and a match schedule while Ali was gone since the ruggers wouldn’t be arriving until later in the week. She also cooked and cleaned to make the brunette’s first week of work go smoothly. The blonde had worked hard to let Ali get ready and out the door in the morning, having a hard time controlling herself when Ali was dressed in her skirt business suits. Ali quickly learned that as soon as she got through the door in the evening, she could expect to have her skirt around her waist and Ashlyn’s face between her legs in no time, dinner would just have to wait. She didn’t mind one bit.
Most of the Smith ruggers returned to campus on Thursday and Ali had Ashlyn make sure that all the girls could make it to a dinner party at the apartment Saturday night. Abby and Sarah had agreed to come from Vermont and stay the night. Ali spent Thursday and Friday working from home while Ashlyn got her dorm room set up with some help from Ali in the evenings. Ashlyn had chosen to sleep at the apartment with Ali rather than in her room, but they had spent Thursday and Friday night hanging out with Whitney, Megan, Alex, and Tobin in Wilson House for a while.

As Ali laid in bed Friday night cuddled into Ashlyn, she thought it was time they’d had a conversation about the upcoming year.

“Hey, Ash. Can we talk about how things are going to go over the next few months?” Ali asked.

“Sure. What do you mean?” Ashlyn questioned, wondering exactly where Ali was going with this conversation.

“To be honest, I want to be able to sleep with you every night. I hate being apart from you. That being said, it’s really important to me that you get everything out of your college experience. I don’t want to take that away from you in any way. I want you to be able to be with your friends like you always have, enjoy your Smith meals and traditions, and spend time in your house and on campus. I know you’ll want to spend time here in the apartment too, but I don’t want you to miss out on stuff because you feel like you have to be here with me all time. You know what I’m saying?” Ali explained.

Ashlyn thought about what Ali said for a second. “Thanks. It means a lot to me that you’re thinking about it and want to make sure it all works out the right way. I definitely don’t want to give up all that stuff you just mentioned. I love spending my time with you too though and I want to make sure that we are making time for us. Having you here is like a dream and I’m not going to pass that up either. I totally get what you’re saying, but I guess I’m not sure what it all means logistically.” Ashlyn replied.

“Well, we don’t have to have a planned schedule or anything. I just want you to know that I’m happy to spend as many nights with you on campus as you want so we can be together. You don’t have to feel pressured to stay in the apartment all the time, we can do both and be flexible about it. And it’s totally ok that you’ll be busy with work and activities. I’m not going to freak out if you need some nights to yourself where we have to be apart. Of course I’ll miss you when that happens, but just being so close to each other and having all this time together that we didn’t have before is already amazing as it is.” Ali said genuinely.

Ashlyn was touched at how much thought the brunette had put into it all. “You’re hot, caring, sweet, thoughtful, smart, and beautiful. You really are the whole package, Alex. Thank you for being so understanding and helping me make sure I make the most of everything. I so seriously love you.” Ashlyn said sweetly, placing a loving kiss on Ali’s lips.

“I love you too, baby.” Ali replied. “It’s not hard when your girlfriend is such a Stud though. I’d do anything for a hottie like you.” Ali lightened the conversation.

“Is that so, Princess?” Ashlyn challenged.

“Absolutely.” Ali answered confidently. She spent the next hour knuckle deep in the blonde, proving it to her over and over again.
Abby and Sarah arrived early afternoon on Saturday. They put their overnight bags in the guest bedroom and then Ali went with Abby to move her car to the guest parking area in the nearby parking garage so that they wouldn’t have to pay to park while they were there for the night. As soon as Abby and Ali left the apartment, Sarah cornered Ashlyn immediately.

“Ok, spill it Harris. How was that house warming gift? You better have put that thing to good use, I put a lot of thought into size and shape!” Sarah got out in a rushed way that sounded like one sentence.


“Come on! You gotta tell me!” Sarah begged relentlessly.

“Ugh, we’re really gonna talk about this?” Ashlyn cringed.

“Did you or did you not promise me that if you ever listened to me and tried it, that you’d tell me how it went?” Sarah said in a challenging tone.

“Yes, yeah.” Ashlyn caved a bit.

“So, you went for it? Did she like it?” Sarah asked inquisitively.

“Yes, we, uh, we both…” Ashlyn trailed off.

Ashlyn didn’t have to finish, Sarah knew what she meant. “Oh, well ok! That’s even better than I thought. Didn’t think you had it in you, Harris. That’s beside the point though. Sooo, fucking tell me already, was it good?”

Ashlyn got a bit red. “Honestly, yeah. It was intense and really hot, for both of us.”

Sarah beamed like a proud parent. “See, I told you! It’s the best thing ever. Now you finally get it, right? I totally told you so! I should write a book on this shit.”

“Alright, alright. I’ll agree that it was pretty incredible.” Ashlyn admitted. “But… I still stand by my original argument, actually, more so now.”

“Oh really?” Sarah prodded.

“Don’t get me wrong, it was really great and I’m sure we’ll do it again. So, I’m not saying you’re completely wrong. Nothing feels as good as Ali does though. Nothing beats the feeling and connection of physically being with her, nothing is as good as that. What makes everything so hot is Ali really. So, I’m still right.” Ashlyn explained bluntly. “And I can’t believe I’m even having this conversation with you, so, are we done here?”

“Hmmm, ok. I’ll concede on that. You’re such a fucking romantic, Harris.” Sarah teased. She was going to harass her more, but Abby and Ali walked through the door.

Abby and Sarah hung out in the kitchen while Ali and Ashlyn got some things together to prep for dinner. Ali went to grab the butter in the fridge and let out a sigh.

“What’s the matter, babe?” Ashlyn asked concerned.

“I forgot to get the white wine. We have plenty of red, but no white. Can you handle the rest while I
run out to get it?” Ali asked.

“Definitely.” Ashlyn responded.

“I’ll go with you!” Sarah piped up.

Ashlyn groaned internally. She knew Sarah was going to grill Ali too. She leaned in to give Ali a quick kiss and whispered in her ear. “Just give the woman what she wants and she’ll leave you alone. She won’t tell anyone anything private anyway, promise.” The blonde’s eyes looked towards Sarah.

“Uh, ok.” Ali replied having no idea what Ashlyn was talking about, but she figured she’d find out soon enough. She found out as soon as she got in the car with Sarah.

“Alright, so I already dragged it out of your girlfriend. What did you think of the strap-on?” Sarah put it right out there.

Ali’s eyes went wide. “Um, wow, ok. Wasn’t expecting that question.”

“Relax. This is kinda my thing. I like to impart my sex toy wisdom on the world. Besides, we’re adults and it’s just sex, so no biggie!” Sarah reassured her.

Ali laughed a bit and rolled her eyes. “Well, gee, when you put it that way…”

“Come on, just tell me. Did you like it?” Sarah pleaded.

Ali remembered what Ashlyn told her before she left, figuring she might as well get it over with now before Sarah tried to drag it out of her again later. “It was definitely a pretty great experience, really hot.”

“Bam! I knew it! I know what I’m doing, girl.” Sarah boasted. “Most people don’t realize how much they’ll end up liking it and how good it feels. Strap-ons are the best!”

“Yeah, I mean, I certainly had never thought about it before and my curiosity got the best of me. Definitely felt pretty amazing.” Ali agreed before adding “I don’t know though, to be honest, I don’t think it was the strap-on that was really the center of how good it all was.”

“What do you mean?” Sarah inquired, not sure what Ali was getting at.

“It was all Ash. What made it so good was Ash, you know. Like that it was her, and it was this intimate moment with her.” Ali tried to explain. “I mean, seriously, the way she touches me is just…I have no words really. It was the way she moved with me, the way she felt that was the center of it all. Doesn’t really matter what we’re doing, it’s great because of her. The rest is just always a bonus I guess. Sorry, I’m rambling. Am I even making any sense?”

“Oh ok, wow.” Sarah said with a smile.

“What?” Ali asked, noticing the look on Sarah’s face.

“You know, Ash kinda said the exact same thing in different words.” Sarah said, kind of amazed by it. “You two… just so insanely in sync. It’s pretty mind blowing. Kind of inspiring really.”

Ali smiled widely and giggled a bit. “Thanks. I really love that girl.”

“Clearly.” Sarah said thoughtfully. “Geez, me and Abby are solid as hell and I will so marry her one day. But compared to you and Ash, it’s like we live on different planets and need relationship
counseling.” Sarah joked.

“You and Abby are perfect together. But yeah, I’m lucky as hell.” Ali responded candidly.

“You’re both fucking lucky as hell.” Sarah agreed. “Now buy me a lottery ticket already, Captain Luck! Better be a winning one too. I mean, I did help you spice things up.” Ali laughed and turned off the car as they arrived at the liquor store and grabbed what they needed.

When Ali and Sarah got back, they found Abby and Ashlyn still in the kitchen just sitting at the counter and talking with a couple of beers in hand. Ali put the wine down on the counter and walked right up to Ashlyn, surprising the blonde by kissing her hard.

Sarah looked on with a knowing smile and took a sip of Abby’s beer. Abby just looked confused.

“Well, hi to you too.” Ashlyn got out in a cracked voice when Ali pulled back, her eyes still a bit hooded. “What was that for?”

“No reason.” Ali said simply and went to put all the food in the oven so it would be ready on time.

The rest of the girls arrived in one big group about a half an hour later with a typical “Knock. Knock. The party hooker has arrived, bitches!” yell from Megan at the door.

Ashlyn ushered everyone into the apartment and showed them around before they all congregated in the living room and dining room areas. Ali was loving how fun it was to have the apartment full of people.

Whitney and Alex came into the kitchen to help out a bit.

“This place is so awesome. I love it.” Whitney exclaimed. She had been away all summer and even though she helped Ashlyn figure out how to make the birthday surprise work, she hadn’t seen the place yet.

“Yeah, I just love this apartment. You guys got such a good place. We’re totally gonna crash in on your time and hang here!” Alex chimed in.

Ali smiled. “Thanks, ladies. We really like it. And, you’re welcome any time. How were your summers?”

“Mine was good. I spent the whole thing interning at a law firm back home.” Whitney replied.

“Impressive!” Ali responded and Alex nodded.

“I was kind of hoping it would help me decide whether I want to go into the whole legal world. I ended up both loving and hating the environment and I still have no idea what I want.” Whitney said a bit exasperated.

“You have plenty of time to figure it out still, don’t worry.” Ali reassured her. Whitney nodded appreciatively.

“What about you?” Ali directed her question at Alex.

“Servando’s family owns a huge winery in Napa, so I worked there for the summer. Mostly in
marketing.” Alex answered.

“Oh wow, that sounds really fun.” Ali said animatedly.

“It was. His family can be overwhelming at times and it definitely felt a little suffocating by the end, but it was still good.” Alex replied. “I’m glad to be back here though, despite the fact that Whit and I have shit ton of work to do this week.”

“Why do you have a ton of work, classes don’t start for like 2 weeks, right?” Ali asked a bit lost.

“I’m the HP for Wilson and Alex and Kacey are HONS.” Whitney explained.

“A what and what?” Ali had no idea what Whitney was talking about. Whitney and Alex giggled.

“AAAAssh! Your girl needs some Smith educating again!” Alex yelled from the kitchen.

Ashlyn and the rest of the girls made their way towards the kitchen. “Uh oh. What did you guys say now?” Ashlyn inquired.

“HP, HONS, explain it.” Whitney said.

“Oh, that one is easy!” Ashlyn started to explain. “HP is House President, HONS is Head of New Students. We elect a whole house government at the end of every year that plans events and stuff for the house and keeps things organized. So, Whit is the big boss this year! She needs to come up with our house theme for the year. Alex and Kacey get to welcome all of our house first years, get them settled in and help run orientation to get them acclimated. And they have to make the house banner, make name signs for all the rooms, all that fun stuff.”

“That sounds like a ton of work! You guys are majorly dedicated.” Ali exclaimed. “You need to make me a freakin spreadsheet of all these damn Smith acronyms so I can keep up!” Ali said to Ashlyn.

“Speaking of ton of work. I need help guys!” Whitney begged. “House theme… I’m thinking Beaver Pirates. Thoughts?”

“Fucking Brilliant!” Pinoe yelled.

“Oh, dude, that is pretty hard to beat. I like it!” Tobin agreed.

“So much yes!” Abby said, Sarah giving a thumbs up along with her.

Ashlyn ruffled Whitney’s hair. “Genius, Prez!”

“Well, that’s settled.” Alex laughed.

“Yeah, I’m on board for sure.” Kacey made a pun and giggled at herself.

Ali was just confused. “I’m sorry. I need clarification on why Beaver Pirates is so brilliant… other than the obvious sexual innuendo.”

“Oh no! I just realized I never told you about Cletus! You still have so much to learn young grasshopper.” Ashlyn replied. Ali looked even more lost. “This is Cletus.” Ashlyn said pulling up an old picture on her phone of her hugging a beaver stuffed animal. “He’s the Wilson House mascot.”

“Cute.” Ali replied smiling at the picture. “Where does the pirate thing come in?”
“We just pick a fun theme for the house every year. Pirates seemed like a good one we haven’t done before. For name signs I was thinking ships for the seniors, skull and crossbones for the juniors, treasure chests for the sophomores, and pirate hats for the first years.” Whitney answered.

Everyone agreed that Whitney’s plan was great. Ali thought it sounded really fun.

“I’m gonna need you to draw me a giant beaver dressed like a pirate for the house banner.” Whitney pointed to Ashlyn.

“I’m all over it!” Ashlyn replied excitedly.

The oven timer went off and Ashlyn and Ali went to get dinner finalized and ready to eat while the rest of the girls made plans to make Whitney’s vision come to life. Ali had made grandma’s famous mac & cheese, baked chicken, and salad. Ashlyn took one look at the mac & cheese and could already tell it was going to be delicious. She stole a few passionate kisses from the brunette in the kitchen.

“I love you, Princess. This is going to be such a great year.” Ashlyn mused, letting her hand wander just under the hem of Ali’s shirt.

“Mmm, you know it, Stud.” Ali replied, going in for one more kiss before grabbing Ashlyn’s wandering hand. “Now hands off before I kick everyone out of here.” She laughed and started bringing food to the table.

When everyone was crowded around the table. Ali made a toast. “I just wanted to thank all of you for the amazing surprise you helped pull off. Ash can attest to how happy it made me. You’re all so wonderful and I’m so grateful to have gotten to know all of you over the last year. Here’s to a really fun year with great people. Cheers and let’s eat!” Everyone let out a small cheer and clinked their glasses before digging in to eat.

The night was a total success, everyone having fun socializing with each other. It made Ali and Ashlyn feel very adult to have hosted their first dinner party. Ali had gotten lots of compliments on the food, prompting the explanation of how grandma had taught Ali to cook this summer. The penguin footprint artwork on the wall had also been pointed out by Whitney during dinner, who knew the whole story already and made Ali tell everyone. Much like at Ali’s house in D.C., the story ended with a blushing Ashlyn who escaped to the kitchen to grab dessert.

The next couple of weeks were a bit chaotic. Ashlyn was running rugby practices twice a day and getting ready for the semester. Ali was deep into her job already, working with two German clients on new projects that she was excited about. Ali joined Ashlyn at evening practices on the rugby pitch when she was done working and played a bit with the team when she could. She was definitely missing rugby and this made her feel a little better. They spent many evenings in the Wilson living room with the rest of the girls helping Whitney pull together the pirate theme. When the first years arrived, Wilson got busier and Ashlyn got right to work trying to recruit new ruggers. Ashlyn and Ali had fallen naturally into their flexible schedule together much to Ali’s relief, sometimes staying at Wilson, sometimes staying at the apartment. So far it had been pretty mindless and was working just fine.

They were lying in bed together in the apartment a couple nights before classes started, still trying to come down from a heated love making session. Ali had just spent the last couple hours appreciating
how extra toned Ashlyn’s body had gotten over the last month with all the workouts. As if the blonde wasn’t already hot enough as it was.

“You excited for classes to start?” Ali asked.

“Yeah. I’m pretty excited for marine ecology class, but also totally nervous about organic chemistry. People have nightmare stories about that class.” Ashlyn voiced her concern.


“You sure can, Princess.” Ashlyn agreed with a smirk.

“What else is on your schedule?” Ali asked.

“I’m taking an intro astronomy course for fun and sports psychology. I figured it might help me be a better captain.” Ashlyn replied.

“So committed, baby. You’re cute.” Ali placed a few kisses on Ashlyn shoulder.

“So, you gonna come to opening convocation with me tomorrow night?” Ashlyn asked. “It’s mandatory for students, but I promise a whole lot of fun.”

“Yeah, listening to faculty make opening night speeches isn’t exactly fun, but of course I’ll go and keep you company” Ali gave in.

Ashlyn just laughed. “Oh, I’m not even gonna tell you about Smith convocation. You’re just going to have to find out for yourself. This isn’t Dartmouth, baby.”

“Uh oh. Should I be scared?” Ali asked curiously.

“Maybe.” Ashlyn replied mysteriously.

Flabbergasted. That was how Ali felt about Smith convocation. She had spent the evening helping Ashlyn and the other rugby girls get into pirate outfits that could only be described as skimpy. Ashlyn was in a black sports bra with a pair of old gray capris that she had cut to look all ragged. A red bandana was on her head and eye patch over her left eye. Alex had on a red string bikini with a tiny ruffled white skirt over it, her black and red striped rugby socks up her legs. She completed the look with large gold hoop earrings and an eye patch of her own. Megan was wearing skull and crossbones boxer shorts to go with the skull and crossbones band-aids she had placed over her nipples; a fake parrot was taped to her shoulder. Tobin went more low-key with a pair of long black shorts and an open white button up shirt revealing a red sports bra that said ‘Pirates’ on it, opting go barefoot as usual since it fit the theme. As the HP, Whitney was dressed full on like captain hook, except she wasn’t wearing any pants; her skull and crossbones black panties on full display. The rest of Wilson House looked just the same. Everyone gathered on the front steps showing a whole lot of skin to take a house picture together.

“You guys are really going to convocation like this?” Ali asked, still a bit shocked.

“Yep!” Ashlyn answered. “And so is everyone else.” The blonde pointed to other Smithies gathering in front of their houses around the quad.
Ali looked around to see that every house seemed to have some theme. One house was wearing just their underwear and bunny ears on their heads. Another looked it had some sort of mermaid theme, so tiny bikinis were the choice outfit. Ali couldn’t believe it. It only got more interesting though.

The Wilson House seniors gathered the house to teach them this year’s chant. Ashlyn explained that every house had a chant, and the seniors would come up with it every year. Of course, this one was pirate themed.

*Yo ho, yo ho, a Wilson life for me.*

We study, we fuck, and some of us ruck.

Drink up and party, yo ho.

We’re sexy as hell and feeling just swell.

We’ll steal yo bitch and yo hoe.

*Yo ho, yo ho, a Wilson life for me.*

The seniors repeated the mantra a few times until everyone got it and repeated it back. Ali stood there with wide eyes. Then it was time to go. The house gathered in a big group and marched towards John M. Greene Hall, all of them yelling the chant as loud as possible. However, they weren’t alone. Every single house across campus was doing the exact same thing. By the time they made it to the hall, it was so loud with all the chanting and cheering that Ali couldn’t even hear her own voice as she held Ashlyn’s hand and chanted along with Wilson. They poured into the hall and all grabbed seats near each other. Ali looked around to see the house banners all hanging from the balconies. Smithies were up and out of their seats running around, cheering, and banging on chairs and anything else they could get their hands on. Several girls had run onto the stage and flashed the crowd, making it even louder as cheers erupted. This was more like a rock concert or some crazy pep rally than a convocation. Ali was floored. Ashlyn pulled Ali into her lap and that’s how they sat through the whole thing. Anywhere else that might have been weird, not here. The only ones as shocked as Ali were all the first years, who also had no idea what was going on.

What had been really funny was to watch the faculty parade in dressed in their academic regalia and get cheered on like celebrities by the students. Ali couldn’t believe that Smithies would display so much skin and nudity in front of all the college faculty, dignitaries, and administration. However, every one of these people was smiling and clearly used to it. It was so bizarre. The speeches from the president, faculty, and students were all fun and fitting of the wild atmosphere. The room would shake with applause and banging when something particularly funny or good was said. The best was watching the poor guest speaker, who clearly hadn’t been informed of what he would encounter, try to talk about his physics career while facing a room full of loudly cheering and scantily clad women.

When they finally made it back to Ashlyn’s room, the blonde barely had any voice left. “So, what did you think of convocation, Princess?” Ashlyn asked in a very low raspy voice.

“I’ve decided Smith is its own planet and nothing is normal here. It’s pretty awesome. I still have a lot to learn about this place, don’t I?” Ali said, getting closer to the blonde and running her hand up and down the defined abs she’d been staring at all night.

“So much to learn.” Ashlyn said quietly. “I can show you the ropes though.” A smug smirk took over the blonde’s face.

“Yeah?” Ali asked, her fingers just dipping into the waistband of Ashlyn’s boxers peeking out of her capris.

“Uh huh. First lesson… how to properly break in your room for the start of the semester.” Ashlyn, picked Ali up and laid her on the bed, hovering over the brunette.
“I like this lesson.” Ali whispered, reaching up to ghost her lips over Ashlyn’s. The blonde kissed her really slowly, hand trailing under Ali’s shirt lightly and already driving her crazy. “You gonna teach me or tease me?”

That was all it took. Ashlyn had Ali’s shirt off in no time, the rest of her clothes going with it shortly after while Ashlyn kissed the brunette’s body all over. Ali had tried to get Ashlyn’s clothes off, but had only managed to work off the sports bra before Ashlyn had her hands pinned above her head, the blonde’s finger running circles over her clit while she licked her nipples. It continued like that until Ali had begged desperately, Ashlyn finally giving in and entering the brunette. It had only taken a few curls of Ashlyn’s long fingers to make Ali come apart, biting Ashlyn’s shoulder to muffle her loud moans that Whitney could probably hear next door anyway.

When Ali had her strength back, she quickly flipped them over, fully intending to wipe the smug smile off Ashlyn’s face. She kissed the blonde hard, tongue going right into her mouth before pulling back to look at her hungrily. “Let me show you what I learned.” She whispered huskily.

“Fuck.” Was all Ashlyn got out before Ali left a mark on her neck and several more down her body as she took the rest of her clothes off. She felt the brunette settle quickly between her legs and smiled smugly again, knowing she had worked Ali up enough that she wasn’t going to tease. She was so wrong.

Ali ran her tongue so lightly over Ashlyn’s wet center, never giving her the friction she was craving until the blonde was a begging mess, leaking out all over the place and desperate for release. When Ali finally decided to stop torturing her, she pressed her tongue to Ashlyn’s clit and pressed two fingers deep into her, reducing the blonde to a whimpering, orgasming, puddle of goo in a matter of seconds. Ali licked up every drop that Ashlyn had spilled out for her and crawled up to hold the still shaking blonde tightly, proud of her work.

“Thanks for the lesson, teach.” Ali grinned smugly as she mumbled in Ashlyn’s ear.


Ali laughed. “Yeah, well. Get really good grades and just see how we celebrate the end of it.”

Ashlyn popped up and grabbed the backpack near the bed. “Ok! I’m ready for class!” she joked.

Ali laughed and pulled the blonde back into her arms, snuggling in close.

“I’m so glad you’re here, Alex. This is going to be the best year at Smith yet.” Ashlyn said softly against the hair on top of Ali’s head.

“Me too, Ash. Love you.” Ali replied sweetly, picking her head up to look at the blonde for a couple seconds before kissing her gently and settling in to sleep.
Now that we've reached a place where Ali and Ash are a bit more settled, this story is going to start picking up a bit more so that I can move it forward.

I usually like to leave you with a bucket full of good feels for the weekend, but try not to kill me because I didn't this time. Just remember two things as you read: 1). Rugby is a rough sport and often results in some nasty injuries; 2) I maintain my promise not to completely break hearts with this fic, so have faith in me.

And on that note ::::puts up chapter, wishes you a good weekend, and runs away quickly::: Yikes!

“Come on! You have to commit to those tackles. You don’t give it up until the person is completely down.” Ashlyn was trying to direct the rookie Smith ruggers. It had been a challenging first couple weeks of the semester and she was finally understanding the kind of pressure Abby had been under. Not only did she have to get her starters ready for the season’s first match, but she also had to teach the new players the game rules and how to play since many of them had never played before. Although this year’s rookies were tough and had lots of potential, many of them didn’t have great sports aptitude and getting the rules and plays across to them had been hard. She had tried to mix the rookies up with the veteran players in hopes that they would pick up the game, but it hadn’t worked as well as she’d hoped. Ali watched from the sideline as Ashlyn’s frustration started to boil over.

“Lynn, we talked about this. There are no forward passes, ever. You have to pass parallel or back. You do that in a game and we give up a scrum or get a penalty.” Ashlyn tried to hold herself in check while she instructed one of their new backs. “Pay close attention to where the person beside you is. If they are ahead of you, you can’t pass it there, ok?” The girl nodded shyly.

Ashlyn went to grab a quick drink of water to calm herself a bit while the team re-ran the play. Ali held out her water bottle as she approached the sideline.

“This is stressful and I’m sucking out there. How the hell did you do it?” Ashlyn asked her.

“The early season is always hard. The newbies will pick it up eventually, it just takes time.” Ali reassured her, but she could see the blonde wasn’t feeling better about it. “Your first match is in three days. Go work on getting your starters ready, and let me work with the rookies a bit.” Ali suggested.

“You sure? You don’t have to do that.” Ashlyn said, feeling bad that she was dragging Ali into her problem.

“Of course I’m sure. I’m dying to be out on that pitch anyway, you know that. I’ll give it a shot and it’ll free you up to get ready for Saturday.” Ali answered honestly.

“You’re the best. I take no blame if you end up killing one of them though.” Ashlyn joked. Ali rolled her eyes.

“Rookies! Asses over here!” Ashlyn yelled across the field, getting the rookies together. “Alright, so,
this is Ali. Ali is a rugby genius and she is going to work with you guys for the next couple days to help get you ready for your first rookie scrimmage this weekend. She also happens to be my awesome girlfriend, so watch your hands during those tackles!” Ashlyn warned jokingly. “I’m gonna be right over here working with the A side starters. So, if you need anything, let me know.” Ashlyn looked at Ali. “They’re all yours.”

Ashlyn spent the rest of practice working closely with Alex, Kacey, Tobin, Whitney, and the other backs on possible plays for the weekend match while Megan had worked with the rest of the forwards on scrum specifics. Ashlyn had occasionally glanced over at Ali. She was a bit surprised to see that Ali didn’t have the rookies running drills, but had them sitting on the grass instead while she talked to them for the better part of an hour.

Ashlyn only had enough time to grab dinner quickly after rugby practice before having to meet up with the Vibes for acapella practice. The Vibes were in the midst of running auditions for new group members, so Ashlyn had been spending extra time with that on top of rugby practice. She gave Ali a quick kiss before running off to grab dinner and change clothes. By the time she finished with her Vibes commitments and completed her chemistry homework, she made it to Ali’s apartment to find the brunette asleep on the couch. She picked her up gently and carried her to bed like always. Ali stirred as Ashlyn pulled the covers over them.

“Hey you. Missed you tonight.” Ali said sleepily.

“Missed you too, baby. Get some sleep, we’ll talk in the morning.” Ashlyn gave the brunette a gentle kiss and wrapped her arms around her snugly. Ali nodded and was off to sleep again in no time.

The next morning, Ali watched Ashlyn rush around and head off to her morning class. She could tell the blonde was stressed and flustered, her heavy schedule getting the best of her over the last week or so. Ali hoped that her helping out at practice would maybe lighten some of the pressure. She showed up a little early to practice that evening and got the rookies started right away.

Ashlyn watched Ali from across the pitch. The brunette had spent about 20 minutes just talking to the rookies again. Then she had them up and doing some really simple drills, like passing the ball and just standing in proper formations on the field. Ashlyn was a bit intrigued by the simplistic approach Ali was taking, finding it a bit strange. Still, she couldn’t have been more thankful for the time to focus on the starters and their weekend match.

Ashlyn finally had a break from Vibes practice that night, so she made time to have dinner with Ali before she had to attend to a pile of homework.

“I gotta ask. What’s with the really simple stuff with the rookies, they learned all that on the first couple of days?” Ashlyn asked curiously after they had ordered their pizza at the campus center.

“I’m not the only one who has a lot to learn, young grasshopper.” Ali teased. “Trust me. It will all make sense soon.”

“Oh, I trust you. Just trying to figure it all out.” Ashlyn replied. “Thanks again for helping. I didn’t know how hard this would be.”

“You bet. I actually really like it, so, it’s helpful for me too. Makes not playing a bit more bearable.” Ali responded. They spent the rest of dinner catching each other up on all the stuff they had been too busy to talk about the last couple of days, both feeling happy that they’d gotten some quiet time together tonight. Ali went back to Ashlyn’s room after dinner, spending some time reading up on the business needs of her two big clients while Ashlyn did some work.
By the time Saturday’s match rolled around, Ashlyn and Ali were both ready to for a game day and some time to unwind. Smith was hosting University of New Hampshire. Since both teams had enough players to do it, they were having a shortened B side scrimmage after the regular match where the rookies and younger players would get a chance to play.

The main match didn’t get off to a good start. Smith was definitely working the early season rust off, letting UNH score twice in the first 10 minutes. Ashlyn and Alex were working well together, but the backs weren’t on the same page so the runs had not been great. The Smith forwards had also missed some easy tackles and were having trouble winning the ball back in rucks. Smith had managed to stop UNH from putting up any more points, but they hadn’t even come close to getting any of their own scoring chances. Ashlyn threw on her headphones at the half and sat off on her own as usual trying to come up with some kind of game plan and calm herself. After about 5 minutes, she knew exactly what she needed to get her head on straight. She looked over at the sideline and met eyes with her favorite brunette, motioning for her to come over.

Ali kneeled behind Ashlyn and rubbed her shoulders a bit. “How you doing over here, Stud?”

Ashlyn smiled a bit, Ali’s voice already working wonders. “Be honest. How does it look out there and what are the options?” Ashlyn asked, knowing Ali had an unbeatable eye for game strategy.

“Is it awful? No. But it’s far from good.” Ali answered honestly. “You and Alex are looking great together and winning that ball well, but that isn’t worth shit if you can’t get your backs where you need them. You two have to communicate with them better, you’re too quiet out there. And you’re all looking nervous instead of being your normal cocky ass selves. You gotta shake that off and just do what you know and not overthink it. Direct your backs a bit better for sure, they look lost. The forwards are actually okay, they’re just playing off the rest of you. You pull it together and play harder and they will too. You can turn this around, but it’s gotta happen fast. UNH is known for pulling out a great defensive second half. So, it’s strike hard and fast or no dice.”

Ashlyn nodded, appreciating Ali’s bluntness and guidance and knowing she was exactly right.

Ali planted a quick kiss on her lips. “Now bring on that cocky badass I fell in love with and go pull your team together.” She patted Ashlyn on the shoulder and left the blonde to do her thing.

Ashlyn gathered her team for a quick strategy session during the last few minutes of the half. She took Ali’s advice and stopped worrying about the match and overthinking everything. She barked out directions on the field, letting her instincts take over and watched Tobin put the ball down for a try just a couple minutes into the half. With their first score of the game, the Smith team transformed and played a lot better. The UNH defense had been pretty good at keeping the Smith backs at bay, but the Smith forwards had stepped up too and kept UNH from scoring. With 5 minutes left, Ashlyn had pulled the ball out of the scrum and surprised UNH by handing it off to Alex on the left rather than Tobin on the right. Whitney fell into step right behind Alex for a perfectly timed pass from the scrum-half that saw Whitney easily running downfield to score the game tying try.

Smith had worked halfway down the pitch on the next drive and had finally pushed into UNH’s half with 2 minutes left. Ashlyn felt a surge of confidence, picking the ball up after winning it out of a ruck and drop kicking it straight through the posts for 3 points. It had been a risky move, but she had let her cockiness come out like Ali suggested and it had paid off. The Smith forwards held UNH off
for the last minute of the match to bring home a win for their first match of the season.

Ashlyn found Ali as soon as she got off the pitch. “You are fucking brilliant, Krieger.” She said to the brunette, wrapping her in a tight hug and lifting her up a bit.

“Someone has to get your ass in gear, Harris.” Ali replied back. “Speaking of, I have to go get those rookies warmed up.”

Ashlyn helped Ali get the rookies ready to start their scrimmage match. She was curious to see how it would go since many of UNH’s B side players were second years and had more experience overall. The Smith rookies had looked pretty awful in the practice scrimmages Ashlyn had them play before Ali had worked with them, so she wasn’t confident that Ali’s review of the basics had done a whole lot to improve things.

After the first 15 minute half, Ashlyn realized she’d never question Ali’s rugby skills ever again. The Smith rookies had not only held their own, they had scored three times and were killing it. Ashlyn was dumbfounded.

“How?” Ashlyn asked Ali on the sideline, not able to get anything else out at the moment.

“I sucked when I first started rugby. The only thing that helped was to work hard on all the individual basic components, learn the rules well, know what my position and role on the field was, and then just let the rest pull itself together naturally when it was time to actually play.” Ali explained. “I figured it might work with them. I wasn’t sure it had until right now. Looks like it came together more naturally than we expected.”

“Unbelievable. You are so good at this!” Ashlyn praised the brunette who just smiled proudly. An idea suddenly hit Ashlyn and she felt stupid that she didn’t think of it before. She excused herself from Ali for a minute and went over to talk to Megan and some of the other ruggers before coming back to watch the rest of the match next to Ali. “Hey, so, any chance you’d be willing to help us out at practice and stuff the rest of the season?” Ashlyn asked hopefully.

“Heck yeah! I’ll totally help you guys out.” Ali didn’t even hesitate. “Plus, it’s bonus time with you, Stud.”

“Perfect!” Ashlyn exclaimed pulling Ali into her side and watching the rookie ruggers continue to dominate in the second half.

When the match was over Ashlyn gathered the team for the usual postgame talk, calling Ali over after a couple of minutes before addressing the team again. “As you all know, rugby is a club sport at Smith, so we don’t have any official coaching. That being said, this team has had volunteer coaches in the past that have been great for team development. A lot of you have worked with Ali this week and obviously she’s been an amazing asset to us. After talking things over with the other team leaders and making sure Ali was up for it… well, welcome Ali as our new rugby coach!” Ashlyn said excitedly and the team clapped enthusiastically.

Ali was shocked. She had no idea it would be so official. Ashlyn couldn’t possibly have known how much it would mean to her. She had always thought that eventually she’d want to try and coach a team for fun because she loved the game so much, but she didn’t expect to happen so fast or like this. She was thrilled. She sat there with a huge dumb grin on her face until she realized she should probably say something. “Thanks everyone! I’m really excited that I’ll be working with you, even if it means I have to cheer for you when you play Dartmouth later in the season which will totally kill me. Seriously though, I’m touched that you want me to help you out and I’ll do whatever I can to make sure you have a good season.”
UNH was traveling back that evening and didn’t hang around at the after party for very long. Smith however had taken the opportunity to hardcore celebrate their first successful match of the season. Whitney, Alex, and Tobin had even taken the party back to Ali and Ashlyn’s apartment and crashed there for the night. Ali had laughed the next morning at how she was a proper rugby coach now that players passed officially passed out on her living room furniture.

Although they were still pretty busy, the next couple of weeks had gone more smoothly. Ashlyn fell into a better routine and managed to get ahead of schoolwork. Having Ali help out at rugby had been huge. Smith had traveled to Wesleyan and Haverford, pulling out easy wins at both and maintaining a perfect season so far.

By the second week of October, the weather was getting colder and feeling more and more like fall. Ashlyn showed up at the apartment that Monday night with her clothes covered in food. Ali had just seen her at rugby practice a couple of hours before and she definitely had not looked like this.

“What the heck happened to you?” Ali asked incredulously.

“Quad riot.” Ashlyn answered simply.

“Why was there a riot?” Ali questioned, wondering what the Smithies has been protesting this time around.

“To try and get the President to make tomorrow Mountain Day. It’s tradition.” Ashlyn replied, realizing Ali didn’t know about Mountain Day. It would be a lot easier to not have to explain things once they got to the point in the year where Ali was already familiar with the Smith events and happenings since she’d experienced them already. Unfortunately, they hadn’t really gotten close until Celebration last November, so Ali was clueless about everything that came before that.


“The college president picks a random day in the fall and gives everyone the day off from classes to enjoy the day with fall activities or just do whatever they want. No one knows when it’s coming, the college bells just ring at 7am one morning to let everyone know. The rules are that it has to be some time before the Columbus Day weekend, the weather forecast has to be nice, and it never falls on a Friday.” Ashlyn explained. “Everyone always tries to guess and put off homework and studying and stuff, it’s kind of funny. Anyway, the quad riots with a giant food fight every year when they want the president to make the next day Mountain Day. So, here’s hoping it’s tomorrow!”

“Now that is awesome tradition! I wish I had a Mountain Day at Dartmouth, that would have been amazing.” Ali mused.

“Which reminds me. Would you mind sleeping with me in my room this week since it will likely happen one of these days? That way we can hear the Wilson House bells ring when it’s Mountain Day.” Ashlyn asked.

“You bet. Let me grab some stuff. And you get the hell out of that clothes and shower, you reek.” Ali said holding her nose.

Tuesday had not been Mountain Day, much to the disappointment of the Quad. However,
Wednesday morning the college bells rang and the campus was abuzz with Smithies heading off to enjoy the day in all kinds of ways. Ashlyn had gone to breakfast downtown with her house while Ali went home and worked extra hard all morning so she could take the afternoon off and spend it with the blonde.

While everyone else went apple picking and hiking, they had stayed in the apartment in bed together deliberately exploring every inch of each other. The last few weeks hadn’t afforded them much time to be intimate and they had missed the feel of each other terribly. When they were entangled together in a sweaty, spent and breathless heap, Ashlyn had put words to exactly what Ali was feeling.

“Everything is right in the world when I’m with you.” The blonde had whispered.

“Exactly.” Ali quietly replied, crashing their lips together until she couldn’t breathe anymore.

Another Saturday was upon them and the Smith ruggers gathered on their own pitch for their match against Boston University. Ashlyn had tempered her expectations, knowing this was the toughest match-up they faced every year against the Division 1 team. Still, with Ali having coached them so well, she was hopeful that they might pull out a win and stay undefeated.

Most of the first half had been a battle with both teams fighting hard. Smith had stayed sharp enough to keep BU from scoring, raising their confidence that they still had a chance. Ashlyn and Alex were in sync and communicating well with their backs, but BU’s defense had been too good to give them much room to work with. Ashlyn was dying to talk to Ali at the half and maybe come up with a game plan to push the envelope a bit.

The ball was tied up in a ruck with 7 minutes left in the half, the ref calling for a scrum. Alex tossed the ball into the tunnel perfectly and Megan hooked it fast. The Smith scrum expertly pushed forward, giving Ashlyn a clear chance to grab the ball. She had planned to pass it off to Tobin, but then saw that she had running room and started the drive herself. She had been so focused on the open hole in the defense that she didn’t see the BU flanker close in on her. She felt a sharp pain explode through her side as she felt herself hit the ground.

Ali watched from the sideline as Ashlyn was completely blindsided by a tackle from the BU flanker. It was a hard hit, the BU player’s shoulder going right into the blonde’s side as they both collided at a full run. Ali heard the solid thump sound from the hit from across the pitch and cringed watching Ashlyn get taken down mercilessly. When she heard the blonde emit a loud high pitched groan, she didn’t wait for the ref’s whistle to signal the out of bound ball before she started onto the pitch. It felt like it was happening it slow motion, she ran while Whitney sank down near Ashlyn and the blonde began writhing around in obvious pain. She ran and now wished Ashlyn wasn’t moving so much. She ran until she finally got there and desperately sank down next to Whitney.

Ashlyn was rolling around, eyes screwed tightly shut, a low growling escaping her lips as she struggled to take gasping breaths. Ali took one look at the pain on her face and yelled across the field with a desperate hand motion towards the Smith athletic trainer. “Linda!” Her voice coming out stronger than it felt. Whitney tried to still Ashlyn’s movement a bit.

Ali took the blonde’s hand and squeezed it gently. “I’m here, baby. What hurts? I’m here.”
Ashlyn clutched her left side with her free hand, her breathing starting to take on a more normal rate. By the time Linda kneeled down beside Ali, Ashlyn had opened her eyes and gotten out a few choice words.

“Fucking hell. Fuck.” Ashlyn grunted. The vulgar words doing a lot to calm Ali at the moment as Ashlyn finally squeezed her hand back.

Linda ran a quick head injury protocol. “What your name?”

“Ashlyn. My head is fucking fine, Linda.” Ashlyn replied.

“Just answer the questions, baby.” Ali tried to soothe her.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Linda continued.

“Two.” Ashlyn sighed.

“What day is it?” Linda asked.

“Saturday.” Ashlyn replied getting more agitated.

“Ok, one more, who is this?” Linda pointed at Ali.

“My whole world.” Ashlyn answered easily. Ali almost let herself smile, but the pain still etched on the blonde’s face had made the moment anything but sweet.

“Ok, so no signs of head trauma. What else hurts, kiddo?” Linda tried to assess the situation calmly.

“My left side, like my ribs. I have a lot of pain there, but I think it’s getting better. I just need a couple minutes.” Ashlyn replied, hopefully the awful deep ache would subside.

Linda lifted the blonde’s shirt a bit. The area near the left side of Ashlyn’s ribcage was red and looking a bit purplish already even under the coloring of the tattoo. “Think we can get you up and over to the sideline?”

Ashlyn nodded and sat up with help from Ali, Whitney, and Linda. She let out another grunt as they got her to her feet. She leaned on Ali a bit but seemed to walk just fine getting off the pitch. Ali let out the breath she felt like had been holding this whole time. Linda checked the blonde over again on the sideline, pressing areas of her ribs lightly and eliciting a few yelps.

“I don’t think it’s anything major, but we need to get those ribs checked out with an x-ray at least. I’m thinking there is probably at least some kind of small fracture there even if it’s just hairline.” Linda said to Ashlyn and Ali.

“Can it wait until after the match?” Ashlyn asked, wanting to stay and at least help coach the team if she couldn’t be playing. The end of the first half had just been signaled and ruggers had started to make their way over to check on her.

“Yeah, it can wait a bit if you feel ok.” Linda answered. “Ali can take you to the ER when this is over and get you checked out.” She handed Ashlyn’s an ice pack and the blonde winced as the cold hit her side.

Ashlyn felt Ali’s hand on her cheek, looking up to meet her favorite amber eyes.

“You doing ok, Ash?” Ali asked.
“Yeah, just a rough hit. I ache a bit, but I’m fine.” Ashlyn answered honestly.

“You scared me.” Ali said quietly.

“Sorry, Princess. I’m ok though, promise. Not gonna let a cracked rib stop me.” Ashlyn reassured her with a smile. “Go get the team together and work your Krieger magic, ok? Courtney is probably the best option to take my place.”

“Got it.” Ali smiled back and left a lingering kiss on the blonde’s lips before leaving to gather the team.

Tobin, Alex, and Megan appeared just a few seconds later. “You ok, Cap? Still have your boobies?” Megan joked through her concern like usual.

“Yeah that was some hit.” Alex added.

“I’m ok. Maybe broke a rib or two, I’ll find out later when I get checked out.” Ashlyn said looking up at them from the ground. “Think you can you can adjust your position to help Court out there, Tobs?” She asked.

“Yah. I’m on it. Don’t worry, just take care of yourself dude.” Tobin answered confidently.

“Alright. Alright. You guys go listen to that gorgeous woman of mine and let Princess Warrior lead you to victory.” Ashlyn motioned towards Ali who was talking to the team.

“We got this.” Megan reassured her as they walked away.

Ali got the team ready and back out onto the pitch for the second half. She sat down next to Ashlyn on the sideline to watch with her. The blonde was sitting up and holding the ice pack to her side.

“How are you feeling, baby?” Ali asked concerned, thinking Ashlyn looked a bit pale.

“Better. The ice is helping.” Ashlyn answered as she grabbed Ali’s hand tightly. “Can’t believe you have to take me to the hospital again.”

“It’s ok. We managed just fine the first time, right?” Ali said sweetly.


“Hey. I’ll be right beside you, ok? Just an x-ray and it will be done.” Ali reassured her and kissed her hand. Ashlyn nodded. Ali felt Ashlyn take a couple of deeper breaths beside her.

“Alex, what about the dog?” Ashlyn asked quietly, taking another deep breath.


Ashlyn chuckled lightly. “No, um, not dog. The cat.” Another deep breath. “Maybe the cat, yeah the cat.”

Ali looked at the blonde in confusion. “Baby, what are you talking about?” Ashlyn definitely looked pale, a slight sheen of sweat on her upper lip. “Hey, you ok?”
Ashlyn let out another deep breath. “You know, the dog. Our cat.”

“Ash, what’s going on? We don’t have a dog or a cat. Talk to me, you ok?” Ali searched Ashlyn’s face, the blonde’s hazel eyes looking glazed over, a couple beads of sweat near her hairline.

“Yeah, they’re in the Jeep. For sure.” Ashlyn continued to ramble in a low voice. “Alex?”

Ali felt Ashlyn’s grip on her hand go slack, the blonde’s eyes rolled back and her body slumped over.

“Linda!” Ali screamed for the second time that day as she worked to lay Ashlyn back on the ground. Ashlyn eyes were fluttering and unfocused, skin ashen and clammy.

Linda made it over to them checking Ashlyn’s pulse and eyes. “What happened?”

“She seemed fine a second ago and then she was pale and sweaty, she started saying weird stuff, and she passed out.” Ali got out in a shaky voice. “Come on, Ash. Wake up, baby.”

Linda lifted Ashlyn’s shirt and pressed her hand over the blonde’s stomach. It looked a bit swollen, the normally defined abs not so apparent as usual. Ali watched the look of panic cross the woman’s eyes.

“Shit.” Linda muttered pulling out her phone and dialing 911.

“Linda?” Ali questioned desperately, but Linda was focused on nothing but the phone call.

Ali got closer to Ashlyn. “Ash, wake up. Open your eyes for me.”

“Alex?” Ashlyn’s voice mumbled quietly before her eyes opened a bit.

“I’m right here. Stay with me, ok? You’re ok.” Ali said letting a bit of relief wash over her until Ashlyn turned her head to the side and threw up, her eyes fluttering closed again.

“I’m at the Smith College athletic fields and we need an ambulance fast. I have a rugby player who collapsed after a hard tackle. She’s in and out of consciousness, I have reason to think she’s hemorrhaging internally.” Ali’s mouth dropped open as she heard Linda speak into the phone, she was starting to feel a bit dizzy.

“Linda Wallace. I’m the athletic trainer. Female, I think 19. Her pulse is definitely there but a bit weak, she just vomited. No, she’s pretty much out right now. Yes, the abdomen is firm and distended, discoloration near the left ribcage. Breathing ok, maybe a little shallow. Yes, I hear them approaching.”

Ali clung to every word leaving Linda’s mouth in disbelief, the sound of sirens getting louder. Everything felt like it was going in slow motion and fast forward at the same time as the ambulance pulled right up close to the pitch and the paramedics approached.

“Ladies we need some space.” They had forced Ali back a bit, but she had refused to let go of Ashlyn’s hand. The female paramedic had taken one look at Ali’s face and said no more, working around her quickly to get Ashlyn strapped onto a backboard and into the ambulance. “You riding with her?” The woman had asked. Ali tried to form an answer but found her mouth too dry, she just nodded.

“That’s her girlfriend, Ali.” Linda spoke up for her. “I’m driving over there as soon as I can leave here and I’ll meet you there.” Linda addressed Ali.
“Ali, I’m Patty.” The female paramedic said to her. “Sit right up here next to her. We’re gonna get her taken care of, ok?” The woman said sympathetically. Ali just nodded again, sitting in the tiny space of the ambulance and squeezing Ashlyn’s hand tightly.

Ali felt like this was all some horrible dream, but it was the seriousness of it all that had sobered her. The serious look on Linda’s face. The serious speed at which the ambulance was traveling. The serious hospital they were heading to rather than the local one downtown. The serious concern the paramedics seemed to work with despite trying to reassure Ali. The serious medical terms being used between them in the ambulance. And the serious Ashlyn that had made her heart drop to the floor.

The blonde’s eyes had opened again in the ambulance, a few muffled noises coming out of her mouth through the oxygen mask over her face. Patty had lifted it and the muffling became clear words.

“Alex?” Ashlyn sounded defeated.

“I’m right here, baby. You’re gonna be ok. Just stick with me, ok? Stay with me, Ash. I got you.” Ali had shocked herself with the calmness of her own voice.

“Alex.” Ashlyn’s hazel eyes met her own. “I love you. Alex.”

It was too much seriousness. It wasn’t the sweet I love you that Ali always heard leave the blonde’s lips. It was the serious I love you. The one that people uttered desperately when they knew something was seriously wrong.

“I love you too, Ash.” Ali’s voice had betrayed her this time, quivering and breaking a bit as her heart pounded. She felt like throwing up. “You’re ok, baby. Just stay with me.” Ashlyn’s eyes had closed again and Patty had replaced the mask.

“Her blood pressure is low from the bleeding. It’s normal for her to go in and out like this.” The woman tried to reassure her.

The serious ambulance was traded for the serious trauma unit at the serious hospital where Ali had been whisked away by serious nurses into a bland waiting area where a few other people sat with serious faces. Ali had plopped down helplessly in one of the chairs, everything feeling surreal, her body starting to tremble. The vibration of her phone in her pocket had pulled her from her thoughts. She had answered to hear grandma’s serious voice on the other end.

“Ali, the hospital just called me. What happened?” Grandma asked.

“She got hit hard at the rugby match and we thought she maybe fractured a rib, but she seemed ok. Then she passed out and they think maybe she has some internal bleeding, we just got to the hospital and they’re working on her, but I don’t know anything else.” Ali tried to explain with words that ironically didn’t seem adequate enough to convey the seriousness of the situation.

“Oh, honey. Listen, I’m going to do everything to get there when I can, but I don’t know how this is going to go. I talked to the nurse on the phone and I think they’re planning to take her into surgery. I’ve told them you’re to make the decisions, so they’ll be talking to you. I trust you to take care of her. She’s strong Ali, but she needs you. Promise me you’ll take of our girl?” Grandma asked.

“I promise.” Ali promised seriously, not even sure exactly what she was promising.

“Call me when you know anything.” Grandma had said before hanging up and leaving Ali all by herself again.
“Family of Ashlyn Harris.” A nurse had called out in the waiting room and Ali had popped up not even knowing how much time had passed.

Family. That word was serious too, good serious. The only comforting serious Ali had heard since everything came crashing down. Ashlyn was her family. It was so strange that it had taken something so drastic to illustrate something so apparent.

The nurse led her through a door and into another serious looking room. Ali wasn’t sure how much more seriousness she could handle. A man dressed in scrubs came into the room and sat down across from her.


“Hi, Ali. I’m Dr. Silverman and I’m working hard to make sure we get Ashlyn all patched up, ok?” He didn’t seem to be quite as serious as the others and Ali wasn’t sure whether that was comforting or not.

“Let me lay it out for you bluntly because that’s how I do things. Ashlyn has a lot of internal bleeding and she’s lost a lot of blood that is pooling in her abdomen. Based on the blunt trauma and the location, right now I’m guessing a ruptured spleen or maybe a liver injury. I can’t pinpoint what it is until I get in there and there really isn’t time for us to run a full CT scan and wait for the results to tell us. So, I’m taking her into emergency surgery as soon as possible so we can stop the bleeding. I’m planning to go right in with an open incision because that will give us the most flexibility to figure things out even though it means a longer recovery and more scarring. The problem right now is getting her stable enough to do that. Her vitals are all over the place from the blood loss and I can’t take her into surgery like that. I won’t lie to you, we’re not in a critical spot yet and we’re going to do everything to stay away from that, but right now we are definitely in a serious condition status.”

There it was: serious. The word had finally been said out loud, confirming the reality of how it had all felt.

“Let me lay it out for you bluntly because that’s how I do things. Ashlyn has a lot of internal bleeding and she’s lost a lot of blood that is pooling in her abdomen. Based on the blunt trauma and the location, right now I’m guessing a ruptured spleen or maybe a liver injury. I can’t pinpoint what it is until I get in there and there really isn’t time for us to run a full CT scan and wait for the results to tell us. So, I’m taking her into emergency surgery as soon as possible so we can stop the bleeding. I’m planning to go right in with an open incision because that will give us the most flexibility to figure things out even though it means a longer recovery and more scarring. The problem right now is getting her stable enough to do that. Her vitals are all over the place from the blood loss and I can’t take her into surgery like that. I won’t lie to you, we’re not in a critical spot yet and we’re going to do everything to stay away from that, but right now we are definitely in a serious condition status.”

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“I’ve given her a shot of adrenaline to get her heart pumping faster and hopefully raise that blood pressure. We also have her started on a blood transfusion. She seems like she was responding well to it before I came out to talk to you, so I’m hopeful that we’ll be getting her into surgery very soon. If it’s the spleen, we can manage that. Based on the amount of internal bleeding, I would guess that it would be beyond repair, but we can remove it and she’d be fine with just a few long-term concerns. The liver is another story, that’s more vital, but it’s also a larger organ and has greater healing capability. I can’t promise what I’m going to find in there, but I’m feeling confident that whatever it is we can find a solution to it. Let’s hope that I’m right about the spleen for now, I feel good about that being it.” Dr. Silverman finished.

“Can I see her?” Ali’s voice cracked.

“Unfortunately, we have her prepped for surgery already so we can move immediately, so we can’t have anyone back there. I’m going to keep you posted on everything though.” He tried to reassure her, but the look of dread on her face must have been apparent.

“Listen, Ali. I’m really good at what I do. I promise I’m going to take really good care of her, ok?” He added calmly.

Ali nodded numbly and let herself get led by the serious nurse back into the serious waiting room with the serious looking people. Whitney saw her come in and popped up out of her chair to race to Ali’s side.
“Ali?” Whitney’s serious eyes searched her face and Ali lost it. She fell into Whitney’s arms and sobbed hysterically, all the seriousness she’d encountered flooding her mind and tearing her apart piece by piece.
Ali didn’t know how long she cries in Whitney’s arms, she only knew that tears had stopped falling eventually and the numbness had settled back in. She had pulled herself together enough to tell Whitney what was happening. She had hoped to see some indication on Whitney’s face that maybe this wasn’t as bad as it seemed or sounded, but she had seen none. She had called grandma and Chris, barely being able to get all the important facts out before she felt like she was losing her voice. The more she repeated the facts, the heavier they felt, the more power they held over her.

Tobin, Megan, Alex, Kacey and a few other ruggers had arrived a short while later along with Linda. Alex had hugged Ali so tightly she almost couldn’t breathe; for some reason that felt good, breathing seemed to hurt right now. Whitney had filled them all in. And Megan Rapinoe was crying. Megan Rapinoe, who never took anything seriously and found a way to joke through everything, was reduced to weeping in the waiting room. That’s when the reality hit Ali. Ashlyn was seriously hurt. Even in the best case scenario, the outcome meant recovery and something permanently altering. In the worst case scenario, the doctor had said ‘critical’. In that case they were talking about survival without actually saying it, right? Not surviving; that option was actually on the table. Ali’s mind hadn’t even been able to process that. But Megan Rapinoe was crying and the reality of the range of outcomes had become clear as day.

Ali was trembling so hard that she hadn’t even feel her phone vibrate. It was Whitney who reached into her pocket to grab it for her, even helping her hit the answer button when her own fingers couldn’t manage it. Kyle’s face had flashed on the screen and Ali stepped just outside the waiting room, needing desperately to hear his voice.

“Hi.” She answered, her voice sounding awful even to herself.

“Alex, I’m so sorry. I just talked to Chris.” Kyle said. The somberness of his almost always cheery voice served as another reminder that the heaviness of the situation was not made up like she hoped it was.

“Kyle. What do I do?” Ali’s voice cracked and shook, she was ready to break again.

“Alex, you’re gonna hold it together, one minute at a time.” Kyle instructed her carefully. “You’re gonna keep yourself together, minute by minute and keep doing it. She is going to come through that surgery and need you there. You’re gonna be strong for her and you’re going to be there. That’s what you’re going to do.”

“Ok.” Ali muttered brokenly.

“I’m right here, Alex. Call me if you need me, ok? I’m flying out tonight on a red eye and I’ll be there in the morning. Text me or call, tell me what happens. I’m not turning this phone off even on the plane, ok?” Kyle said.
“Ok.” Ali got out again quietly.

“I’m gonna be helping you feed her jello in the morning.” Kyle tried to lighten it as much as he could.

“Promise?” Ali asked desperately trying to cling to something. She knew Kyle couldn’t make any promises about what the outcome would be, but she needed to hear it anyway.

“Promise.” Kyle answered, understanding exactly what his sister needed at the moment. “One minute at a time, Alex. I love you.”

“Love you.” Ali’s voice cracked again as she hung up. She had slumped against the wall, giving herself a minute to breathe before heading back into the waiting room when the serious nurse found her.

“Ali. The doctor wanted me to let you know that they stabilized her vitals enough and they’ve taken her to surgery. He’ll come right out to talk to you when it’s over, ok?” Ali could only nod.

She managed to type out a text to Chris and Kyle with the update. Then she headed into the waiting room and informed the girls before plopping down in a chair and doing exactly what Kyle had told her to. She watched the second hand make its way all the way around the clock, making sure she held herself together for the full minute. When that minute was over, she started the next one. Her eyes rarely left the clock.

It had been an hour already. Ali didn’t know if she should be hoping for shorter or longer. Which one was better, she had no idea. She had kept her eyes on that clock, minute by minute. So much had appeared in the face of that clock already. The long, wavy blonde hair that she loved to run her fingers through. The beautifully inked skin patterns that she had completely memorized. The lightly freckled shoulders that she loved to press her cheek to. The single dimpled smile that had never failed to melt her heart. The impossibly soft lips that fit perfectly to hers. The gold-flecked hazel eyes that stared so lovingly back into her own and never wavered. It had all appeared in the face of that clock and she couldn’t look away, not for one minute.

4 hours 12 minutes and 17 seconds, that was when the door across from the waiting room opened. The same scrub-clad doctor from before calling her name.

“Ali. Come on back with me.” He motioned and Ali went through the door, back to the serious room they’d talked in before.

“We’re out of surgery now and Ashlyn did well. Overall, I’m pleased with how it went.” Dr. Silverman started.

Ali felt the constricting tightness in her chest release a little bit. Ashlyn did well. She was alive, the rest could be worked out.

“Her spleen was ruptured beyond repair like we had estimated. We removed it completely and stopped the bleeding from that. She also had a stage 2 laceration on the liver about 3 centimeters long that was another source of bleeding. We managed to stop that by cauterizing it. I expect that it will heal up on its own and not leave any lasting problems. Her bottom two ribs on the left side are fractured, but not badly. So, those will heal like typical broken bones in about 3 to 6 weeks. She lost a lot of blood and we removed 6 pints from her abdomen. As a result, her blood pressure is still on
the low side and we still have her on a blood transfusion until it comes up to a more normal level. I expect that to happen within the next 24 hours. Full recovery from this type of blood loss can take anywhere from a week to about a month and she may be at higher risk of anemia and feel a bit weak sometimes. I’m going to start her on iron supplements to speed the process along. This is a lot to recover from all at once and the next week or two are going to be painful for her, but I’m confident that she’ll make a full recovery. It will take about 4 to 6 weeks to recover from the procedure itself, but she’ll start to feel better around 2 weeks. The total recovery for her to be back to completely normal is anywhere 4 to 6 months.” Dr. Silverman finished with a slight smile.

Ali was both heartbroken and completely relieved at the same time. She couldn’t bear how badly Ashlyn was hurt, but knowing she’d soon look into those eyes again and tell her she loved her, it almost made nothing else matter at the moment. Her mind raced trying to process everything the doctor had just said, trying to ask the right questions. She asked the first one that came to mind. “Is the spleen like an appendix? Like, do you just not need it?”

“Not quite. While the appendix has no discernible function, the spleen does have an important role as an organ. The spleen acts as a blood filter, has some blood storage, and aids the body’s immune system by helping produce antibodies. Luckily, we have other blood filters and antibody producers in the body, like lymph nodes. So, we can certainly survive without a spleen, it just isn’t the ideal. Practically what it means is that Ashlyn will be immunodeficient, meaning her body’s ability to fight disease is now permanently diminished to a certain degree. So, she’ll be more prone to infections and illness. However, she’ll be able to function completely normally and even go back to playing sports. It’s more just something that requires a bit of future caution. From now on she’ll have to be properly vaccinated for everything she can be and any sign of sickness has to be treated carefully. Even a slight cold is going to require an immediate trip to the doctor and likely be treated with antibiotics even just as a precaution. Until she is fully healed from surgery, I am putting her on a full course of antibiotics for the next couple of months. This will help ensure no infections develop in the meantime.” Dr. Silverman explained. “The liver should heal fairly quickly and I’d like to keep her admitted until we see that. I’m going to say that she’ll be here for at least 6 days and then we can go from there.”

Ali nodded, it was permanent and altering, but it was completely doable. “Thank you. I don’t really know what else to say besides that. I’m honestly grateful. Is there anything else I should know?”

“It’s my job and I’m very happy that everything went well.” Dr. Silverman smiled appreciatively, before getting serious. “There is one more thing I want to go over with you. It’s inconsequential now given the outcome, but I still want to make sure you’ve been informed about it.”

Ali studied his suddenly serious demeanor and sat forward a bit to listen carefully.

“Like everything else I have explained today, I’m just going to tell it to you like it is. About halfway through the surgery, we lost her for about a minute.” Dr. Silverman said somberly.

“Lost her?” Ali wasn’t quite sure she was understanding correctly.

“Yes. Her vitals completely flat-lined for about a minute. We used a defibrillator twice to shock her heart and bring her back. She stabilized quickly after that and came through the rest of the surgery perfectly. The amount of time was minimal, so there is no damage or anything to worry about from it. The only indication you will see is there are slight burn marks on her upper chest and side from where the defibrillator pads were placed. This is a normal thing because of the current used and will heal completely in just a few days, but I wanted you to expect to see those marks. Again, this is nothing that we need to be concerned with given the outcome, but something I wanted you to be fully aware of.” Dr. Silverman finished.
Ali’s mouth hung slightly open, her head was spinning. She had almost lost her. She had watched every single minute tick by on that clock while Ashlyn was in surgery, and Ashlyn hadn’t been with her for one of those minutes. Ali needed to know which one.


Dr. Silverman was slightly unprepared for the reaction and it took him a second to register what she was asking. “Oh, let me check.” He flipped open Ashlyn’s chart and looked through the pages. “The flat-line was recorded at 7:11:18pm and the heartbeat recovery was recorded at 7:12:18pm. So, actually, exactly a minute.”

Ali nodded, vowing never to forget that time. That one minute ingrained in her mind forever.

“Thank you, again. For everything. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it.” Ali said in the most heartfelt way she could. Her level of gratitude for the man sitting in front of her beyond compare.

“You’re welcome, but again, it’s my job.” Dr. Silverman gave her a smile. “They’re getting her set up in recovery right now. They’ll let her completely come around and check to make sure she’s come out of the anesthesia okay and then they’ll move her into a private room and start her on the pain medication which will knock her out pretty good again. So, in like 15 minutes when she’s in recovery and waking up you can go and be with her for the night, ok? Just remember she’ll be really out of it and that’s normal. You can head back out and give everyone the news and then the nurse will come get you when you can see her, should be very soon.”

“Thank you so much.” Ali repeated her appreciation again, feeling good about getting to see Ashlyn in a just a few minutes, minutes that might actually drag longer than the ones she’d already waited through.

Ali went back out to the waiting room, giving everyone the good news and letting them know that she’d be able to see Ashlyn soon, but that visitors would have to wait until tomorrow. There had been more tears and tight hugs, this time in relief. She called Grandma and Chris, who had already gotten their own call from the hospital, and cried with them in an outpouring of pent up emotion. She texted Kyle and her parents and then quickly went to the bathroom to make sure she looked at least somewhat presentable for her love of her life. In all honestly, she looked awful, but she did her best fix herself a bit so her appearance wouldn’t upset Ashlyn; this was the start of putting on that strong face and moving forward. She spent a few more minutes with Whitney in the waiting room before the nurse came to get her.

“Ali. Come on back.” The serious nurse looked a bit less serious now. “Fair warning, she’s doing great but she is really really out of it. She’ll probably seem oddly alert and loopy for a little bit as she really comes out of the anesthesia and then we’ll give her some pain medication that will knock her out pretty good for the night. I just don’t want you to be surprised.”

Ali nodded feeling like she was prepared since the doctor had warned her too. She couldn’t have been prepared however for the extremely pale Ashlyn she found in the recovery room, hooked up to all sorts of machines. There was a heart monitor with wires running to her chest, an IV drip, a blood transfusion setup, an oxygen sensor on her finger, a blood pressure cuff attached to her arm, an oxygen tube under her nose, and likely other things Ali couldn’t see at the moment. Ashlyn’s face was mostly colorless, her closed eyes had dark circles under them, her lips were chapped, and Ali could see the edges of the angry red burn on her chest that the doctor had warned her about peeking
out of the hospital gown. The site broke Ali’s heart, but she had also never seen anything more
beautiful in her life. Her Ashlyn, alive and breathing, and beautiful.

The nurse in the room taking care of Ashlyn watched as Ali approach the bed cautiously. “It’s ok,
honey, you can touch her and get close. She’s doing well. She’s coming around and in and out, but
she’ll be more awake in a little bit I’m sure. We’re going to try and get her to eat a couple of crackers
and drink something to try and stave off any nausea before we give her pain medication.” The nurse
reassured her with a smile.

Ali nodded and got close to the bed, leaning down to plant a soft kiss on the blonde’s forehead.
While mostly everything smelled like antiseptic, she could still make out the faint old spice and ivory
soap scent that was distinctly Ashlyn’s when she kissed her. She let herself breathe it in for a second
before she pulled back, a smile curling over her lips. She looked down at Ashlyn for another few
seconds before she saw her favorite hazel eyes.

Ashlyn’s eyes opened and scanned the room before landing on her hand. She shifted her arm a bit
and studied it. “Am I bleeding?” she asked, looking at the blood transfusion tube. Her voice was as
hoarse and grainy as Ali had ever heard it.

“No dear. You’re fine.” The nurse answered her.

“Then why?” Ashlyn asked trying to lift her arm again, still fixated on the tube.

“You were bleeding a lot before, so we need that to help you out, ok? But you’re not bleeding now.”
The nurse explained calmly.

“Ok.” Ashlyn replied after a few seconds, her eyes scanning the room again and this time landing on
Ali. “Hi.” She said simply, a very slight smile on her lips.

“Hi baby.” Ali replied softly, trying hard not to cry.

Ashlyn was quiet for a minute, her eyes closing again. She opened them and looked at the nurse.
“This one called me baby. I like her.” Ashlyn said. Ali’s eyes widened a bit having not expected it.

“I hope so dear, that’s your girlfriend.” The nurse explained simply.

Ashlyn looked back at Ali and then at the nurse. “My girlfriend? She’s the most beautiful woman
I’ve ever seen. You sure?” She closed her eyes again.

Don’t worry, she’ll snap out of it eventually.” The nurse explained.

The blood pressure cuff started automatically, waking Ashlyn up again. “That will go off every 15
minutes so we can monitor her blood pressure until it comes back up.” The nurse explained to Ali.

Ashlyn studied Ali for a few seconds. “Hi. You’re really beautiful. I like you.”


Ashlyn looked at the nurse. “She loves me. You hear that?”

“I certainly hope so honey. She’s your girlfriend.” The nurse repeated again.

“You’re really my girlfriend? Like MY girlfriend? Me?” Ashlyn asked looking back at Ali with a
mix of surprise and curiosity on her face.
“Yes, sweetheart. I’m all yours.” Ali answered, taking Ashlyn’s hand in her own. The blonde squeezed it gently.

“Really? You’re beautiful.” Ashlyn asked again.


Ashlyn looked back at the nurse. “She’s my girlfriend. Beautiful. I’m going to take her on a date.”

The nurse laughed. “Easy Romeo. Let’s try some crackers and ginger ale first, ok?”

“Ok.” Ashlyn replied, her eyes wandering the room again. The nurse handed her a cracker and helped her put it up to her mouth. The blonde chewed half of it, a good portion of it falling out of her mouth in crumbs. Ali helped wipe them off a bit.

“My throat hurts.” Ashlyn said, mouth half full and more crumbs coming out.

“That’s from the breathing tube during surgery. It’ll go away in a couple days.” The nurse explained, more for Ali’s benefit than Ashlyn’s. She put a straw in Ashlyn’s mouth so she could sip some ginger ale.

“Hmmph, surgery.” Ashlyn repeated after drinking, looking contemplative for a moment. She turned back to Ali. “You’re my girlfriend?”

Ali nodded with a smile.

“Have we? Have we ever, you know?” Ashlyn said with slightly wide eyes.


“Well damn. Wish I could remember that.” Ashlyn said with a slight grin.

“You will once the medication wears off, Romeo.” The nurse chimed in.

“Sweet.” Ashlyn said picking up her arm and dropping it. Ali figured she was going for a fist pump and failed.

“Alright, I want to check the feeling in your legs, ok? So, I’m going to touch your toes and you wiggle the ones on the foot I touch.” The nurse instructed lifting the blanket from Ashlyn’s feet and touching the toes on one of them. The blonde didn’t move. The nurse furrowed her brow. “Can you feel my touch on your foot? Can you wiggle the toes on the foot I’m touching?”

“Can she touch me instead?” Ashlyn looked towards Ali with a smile. “I like when she touches me. Ali laughed so hard she snorted, causing the nurse to laugh hard too. Ali couldn’t believe it. Ashlyn just had a major surgery and lost an organ and yet here she was making Ali laugh.

“Alright, Romeo, she can help out.” The nurse motioned for Ali to come to the end of the bed and had her touch Ashlyn’s toes which the blonde promptly wiggled with a huge grin on her face.

Ali went back to the side of the bed and held Ashlyn’s hand again.

“Alex. So beautiful.” Ashlyn said quietly, her eyes gaining the ability to focus more and looking into Ali’s.

Ali smiled. “I was wondering if you remembered my name, Stud.”
“Of course. Alex. You’re my girl. Alex.” Ashlyn said softly, squeezing Ali’s hand a bit.

The blood pressure cuff went off again and Ashlyn closed her eyes for a minute, her face grimacing a bit.

“How are you feeling, Ashlyn?” The nurse asked.

“Hurts.” Ashlyn replied, her eyes still closed.

“Alright, we’re going to fix that for you.” The nurse assured her and then addressed Ali. “She’s come pretty much all the way out now and everything looks good enough, she ate and drank a bit. The blood pressure is still a bit low, but it’s coming up, so that is good. I’m going to give her some pain medication and get her settled in her room. We’ll get you a nice comfy chair and you can be with her, ok?”

“Thank you.” Ali said with a nod. The nurse made some notes in a chart and documented all of Ashlyn’s vitals before another two nurses came in and the rolled Ashlyn’s bed and equipment into a nicer looking and larger room with a pillowed chair beside the bed. The nurses set everything up and the nurse from the recovery room connected a morphine pump into Ashlyn’s IV port, explaining to Ali that the button attached could be pressed every 10 minutes to deliver pain medication as needed. She gave Ashlyn a first dose of pain medication and told Ali that Ashlyn would soon sleep for several hours.

Ali leaned over and kissed Ashlyn’s forehead again, brushing a few pieces stray of hair aside and stroking her cheek lightly.

Ashlyn opened her eyes a bit, struggling to hold them open. “Alex. Don’t leave me.” She whispered out in a low and very raspy voice.

“Promise, Ash. I’m not going anywhere. I’m right here and I’m not leaving you, ever.” Ali assured her.

Ashlyn struggled to open her eyes again. “Alex. I love you. Alex. Beautiful.”

“I love you, Ashlyn. So much.” Ali said softly, pressing her forehead to the blonde’s. “Close your eyes, baby. Go to sleep. I’ll be here beside you when you wake up. I love you.”

Ashlyn listened, closing her eyes and falling asleep. Ali gripped the blonde’s hand tightly, watching her for quite a while. She watched the rise and fall of her chest and the flutter of her eyelids as she slept. She took in every detail of the blonde’s face and let a few tears roll down. She took in every inch of what she almost lost, and did in fact lose for one minute. The world had been without Ashlyn Harris for one minute; she had been without Ashlyn Harris for one minute. That was one minute that Ali would never forget, one that she didn’t ever want to live through. She vowed to get that minute back somehow.

Ali sat down in the chair next to the bed when her legs finally tired, never letting go of Ashlyn’s hand. She listened to the blonde’s light breathing and the rhythmic low beep of the heart monitor and let sleep overtake her.

Ali woke up a bit disoriented a few hours later to the sounds of a blood pressure machine, morning sun streaming in through the hospital window. She was still clutching Ashlyn’s hand. The nurse in
the room smiled at her.

“Just checking on her blood pressure. It looks good, so I am going to take the transfusion setup off now.” The nurse explained. “When she wakes up we’ll need to get her to eat and then we can give her some more medicine. I can get you some coffee if you’d like?”

Ali nodded gratefully. “Yes, I’d love some.” She looked over at Ashlyn, noting that the blonde looked much less pale. The nurse finished up her work and left the room, promising to come back soon with coffee. A few minutes later, Ali felt a squeeze on her hand. She got up and leaned beside the bed to find Ashlyn looking around a bit.

“Alex.” Ashlyn’s voice sounded even hoarser than before.

“I’m right here, Ash. How do you feel, baby?” Ali asked, kissing the blonde’s cheek.

“Mmm, Alex. It hurts, bad.” Ashlyn replied, the pain on her face evident.

“I know, love. You’re gonna be ok. We gotta get you to eat and then you can get your medicine. The nurse will be back in a minute.” Ali tried to soothe her.

“What happened?” Ashlyn mumbled.

“You got hit really hard at your rugby game. You injured your spleen and your liver and you had to have surgery. You’re gonna be okay though, you just need time to heal.” Ali explained as simply as she could.

“Did we win?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali smiled a bit at her question. Typical Ashlyn she thought. “No one won, baby. The game was 0 to 0 when you collapsed and they decided to stop playing after that.”

“Sucks.” Ashlyn stated simply.

“Yeah I know.” Ali agreed. She noticed a few tears running down Ashlyn’s face. “What’s the matter, Ash? You ok?”

“Yeah. Sorry. I thought I messed up bad.” Ashlyn said softly.

“Why did you mess up?” Ali questioned with concern.

“Last thing I remember is you. I thought I left you. I don’t ever want to leave you.” Ashlyn said through a few more tears.

“Shhh. Hey, it’s ok baby. We’re right here together and you didn’t leave me. And I didn’t leave you, ok?” Ali stroked the blonde’s cheek gently and wiped the tears, knowing she’d have to pick the right moment to eventually tell Ashlyn everything.

“Ok.” Ashlyn replied. “I love you, Alex. I love you.”

Ali smiled at her. “I love you too, beautiful.” She placed a very light kiss on Ashlyn’s chapped lips and finally got a smile from the blonde.

The nurse came back into the room with some coffee for Ali and a tray for Ashlyn with some apple juice, jello, and chicken broth. “Hey, looks who’s up. Perfect! I’m going to have you eat either the soup or the jello and drink your juice and then I can get your medicine. You doing ok?”
“Yeah. I have pain.” Ashlyn answered.

“Where do you have pain?” The nurse inquired.

“My stomach and my shoulder.” Ashlyn replied.

“Ok, those are normal from the surgery. How bad is it on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst pain you could imagine.” The nurse asked.

Ashlyn thought for a second. “Like a 7.”

“Alright, well, eat up and I’ll go get your pain medicine.” The nurse said motioning to the food tray and exiting the room.

Ali moved the tray closer. “Ok, baby. Which one do you want, soup or jello?”

“Ugh, neither.” Ashlyn cringed.

“You have to eat one of them.” Ali said firmly.

“Definitely not the soup.” Ashlyn replied still cringing.

“Ok, the jello then.” Ali said opening the cup and grabbing a spoonful.

“Ugh, gross. I hate jello.” Ashlyn said in a disgusted tone.

Ali was about to reply when a familiar voice came through the door.

“Ashlyn Harris… last night while you were in surgery, I promised my sister that I would be here helping her feed you jello this morning. I don’t break promises. So help me god, I am gonna force feed you that damn jello if I have to!” Kyle said animatedly from the doorway, holding a teddy bear and a balloon.

“Kyle!” Ashlyn and Ali said in unison.

“Good morning, ladies!” he said cheerily, giving Ali a quick hug and reaching down to squeeze Ashlyn’s arm. “How you doing champ?”

“I hurt and jello is awful.” Ashlyn answered. “But, I have this gorgeous nurse, so I’m pretty damn good.” She said smiling at Ali.

“Uh huh. Not much has changed I see. Guess you didn’t get hit in the head then.” He joked, taking the spoon from Ali and putting it to Ashlyn’s mouth. “Now eat, Harris, or I’m walking around this room in my underwear.” He threatened.

“Ok, I give!” Ashlyn swallowed a spoonful of jello, making a face.

Ali watched them, remembering Kyle’s promise last night when she was at her most desperate. When she took his advice and watched every minute tick by, holding herself together for every single one of them as they passed by; not knowing that for one of those minutes, she had lost the love of her life. She would never forget that one minute. That one minute that could have brought her to her knees and destroyed her, but didn’t. One long minute that would always serve as a permanent reminder of just how much she had to be thankful for. She would never take another single minute with Ashlyn Harris for granted ever again.
Some of this was inspired by a viral YouTube video of a guy that doesn't recognize his own wife right away when he wakes up after surgery. It's pretty great and I definitely recommend it if you haven't seen it yet.
The first day had been pretty rough. Unless Ashlyn was knocked out by drugs, she felt like someone was twisting a knife in her gut. Her shoulder alternated between sharp pain and a burning sensation. The nurse had explained that the nerves near the spleen, liver, and diaphragm were the same ones that connected to the shoulder and often caused a kind of false pain there after surgery.

People had been constantly in and out to visit her, mostly the rugby team and friends from Smith. The room was already filled with flowers, stuffed animals, and baskets of snacks that she wasn’t allowed to eat yet. In fact, Kyle had now force fed her jello three times already. Even the girl from BU who had tackled her had driven the two hours from Boston just to drop off a large bouquet of flowers and give Ashlyn a sincere apology. Ashlyn had been touched and assured the girl that she had no ill will towards her.

Whitney had sat on the edge of her bed and stared at Ashlyn for a long time as if she was scared she was going to drop dead at any moment. Alex and Tobin had fusssed over her like two nervous hens, making sure her blanket was just right and she was comfortable, even though Ali was already doing that. Luckily Megan came in a short while later and brought her usual repertoire of joke material to lighten the mood, commenting that she was expecting Ashlyn to feel “Spleendid” today. After 20 minutes, she had made Ashlyn laugh so hard it felt like her stomach was going to explode. Ali had promptly kicked them out so the blonde could get some rest and recoup a bit from all the visits.

Ali hadn’t left Ashlyn’s side despite Kyle’s protests that she should go get some rest while he stayed with Ashlyn. She was still wearing rugby warm-ups from the game and hadn’t showered at all. Eventually she had relented during the afternoon in having Kyle go to her apartment to grab her some fresh clothes and a few other things she needed. By that point Ashlyn was already exhausted and feeling rough, thankful for a few minutes alone with Ali.

“How’s my girl?” Ali asked with a smile, pulling up Ashlyn’s blanket a bit to make sure the blonde was warm enough.

“I definitely didn’t think it would be this painful. I feel like I got run over by a truck, or five.” Ashlyn admitted. “Still, feels great to know there are so many great people in our lives though, huh?” She commented looking around the room at all the items visitors had left her.

Ali took her hand and held it tight. “Yeah, we have some pretty amazing people to be thankful for.”

“You should go get some rest when Kyle gets back. I’m sure my ass will be asleep for a while by then anyway.” Ashlyn encouraged. “I’m worried about you.”

“I’m not leaving you, Ash. I can shower and stuff here.” Ali said firmly.

“Well, yeah. I wasn’t gonna say anything, but you kind of stink, Krieger.” Ashlyn teased trying to soften up the brunette a bit.
Ali laughed. “Oh, Harris has jokes.”

“Seriously, Alex. Please, for me? Just take a couple hours. You can even just go to Kyle’s hotel across the street like he suggested. It’d make me feel a lot better if I knew you got to relax, shower, take care of yourself.” Ashlyn pleaded with her, her hazel eyes soft and big.

Ali felt her resolve slipping, but tried to argue. “I don’t want to leave you.”

“I know. I don’t want you to leave either, but, let’s face it. It’ll be well worth the wait when you come back all fresh and sexy with all that mascara layered on. You’re my hot nurse, baby.” Ashlyn said charmingly. “Please?”

Ali knew she couldn’t deny this woman anything. “Ok, but no more than a couple hours. I’m coming right back after I shower and get myself together. I can rest here plenty.”

“Thank you, baby.” Ashlyn replied, bringing Ali’s hand up to her lips to kiss it. The blonde winced as she brought her arm back down.

“You ok?” Ali asked concerned.

“Yeah. I really really hurt.” Ashlyn said quietly.

Ali stroked her cheek for a minute before a nurse came into the room. “Perfect timing.” Ali addressed the nurse. “She’s having a lot of pain.”

“That’s why I’m here. Time for you to get more rest young lady. You have a big day coming tomorrow.” The nurse said mysteriously.

“Uh oh. Big day?” Ashlyn asked nervously.

“Yes. They’re going change that surgical bandage in the morning and get you cleaned up a bit. That also means we’re getting rid of that catheter and getting you up and walking at least to the bathroom.” The nurse explained.

“Yes, that definitely sounds a lot like hell right about now.” Ashlyn replied. “I was actually kind of liking the fact that I didn’t have to get up to pee anymore.” She chuckled.

The nurse laughed lightly. “The bright side is that it means you can go back to solid food. Plus, you’ll thank us when you’re all cleaned up with a fresh bed.”

“Real food. Sign me up!” Ashlyn said enthusiastically, making Ali smile.

“You better get your rest this evening and tonight, you’re going to need it. So, let’s get your pain medication going and we’ll get you some more jello for when you wake up in a while.” The nurse winked, having heard Ashlyn’s earlier tirade about the grossness of jello.

Ashlyn groaned and looked at Ali who gave her a sympathetic smile. The nurse gave Ashlyn her pain medication through the IV and left the room. It only took a couple minutes before Ashlyn’s eyes got heavy.

“I love you, you’re everything.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“I love you too, Ash. Get some rest. I’ll be here when you wake back up and I promise to look sexy as hell.” Ali replied a bit playfully.

Ashlyn gave her a tired grin while Ali stroked her hair, her eyes finally closing. Ali watched her
sleep, her favorite thing in the world.

Kyle came in a few minutes later carrying a large bag with some outfits, make-up, and toiletries.

“Hey sis. Did she conk out again?” He asked looking at a sleeping Ashlyn.

“Yes, mom. I’ll be back really soon. Make sure you don’t leave ok? I don’t want her alone if she wakes up.”

Ali rolled her eyes. “Promise I won’t go anywhere. Now go!” Kyle shooed her out the door after Ali planted a kiss on the blonde’s cheek.

As much as Ali had protested leaving the hospital, she had to admit it felt good to take a hot shower and get into some fresh clothes. She ordered a sandwich and fries from the hotel room service menu and then got started on her to-do list. She first called grandma and Chris to check in that they were all set for their flight in the morning. They were flying in to visit for two days and Kyle was going to pick them up at the airport around noon and get them settled into the same hotel so they could easily spend their time with Ashlyn.

Next Ali called her boss. She knew she could work from the hospital if need be, but it would be distracting and she could use a little leeway if possible. Ali felt bad calling him on a Sunday evening, but he had been more than nice about it and completely understanding. He had told her to just keep an eye on any emails that needed an immediate response, but to forget everything else for the week because it could wait and family came first. Ali had thanked him profusely, smiling when he had so simply referred to Ashlyn as her family without a second thought.

Ali finally worked on sending emails out to Ashlyn’s advisor and her professors. It had taken her a while to track down their names and email addresses on the Smith website. She knew the blonde wouldn’t be back in class for at least 2 to 3 weeks and would soon start to panic about her class work. She was hoping that something could get worked out early on to make it less stressful.

It had only been two hours, but Ali felt seriously accomplished. She was already missing Ashlyn and hurried to finish getting ready so she could get back to the hospital. She made sure to get her make-up just right and took time to straighten her hair. Although she would have loved nothing more than to put on hot outfit for her girl, Ali knew that comfort was more practical at the moment. She rummaged through the bag Kyle brought her and found that he had brought clothes for both her and Ashlyn. She slipped on a pair of black leggings and threw one of Ashlyn’s long sleeve Smith shirts on over it, knowing the blonde always loved it when Ali wore her clothes. She took one more look in the mirror and headed out the door.

Ali got back into the room to find Kyle watching football on the tiny hospital TV while Ashlyn slept. Ali smiled at the sight and waved to Kyle.

“You look nice and refreshed.” Kyle complimented her in a quiet voice.

“Thanks.” Ali said making her way over to Ashlyn and kissing the blonde’s forehead, looking her
over. “Did she wake up at all?”

“Just once for like two minutes. She asked where ‘Princess’ was. I told her you went to the hotel to shower and she just said ‘good’ before going back to sleep. It was cute.” Kyle answered observing Ali take Ashlyn’s hand and continue to watch the blonde sleep. “This…” he said pointing between the two of them. “This is most adorable and beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. Gosh, the love is just... She’s lucky to have you.”

“I’m lucky to have her.” Ali said seriously.

Kyle could sense the weight behind her words. “You ok, Alex?”

“Yeah. Just still sorting out my emotions over all of this I guess.” Ali replied honestly. “I don’t know what I’d do without her. This was a huge wake up call, you know? I mean, if I’d lost her…” Ali trailed off.

“Hey, Alex. You didn’t lose her. Everything is ok and she’ll be fine.” Kyle reassured her, but she didn’t seem to look less perturbed.

Ali gently let go of Ashlyn’s hand. “Can we?” She looked at Kyle and motioned towards the door.

“Yeah, of course.” Kyle answered making his way outside of the room. Ali took one more look at Ashlyn and joined Kyle just outside the door of the room.

Ali took a deep breath and just whispered it out. “Kyle, I did lose her. She died on the operating table for a minute before they could bring her back.”

Kyle’s eyes went wide. “What?”

“They had to shock her heart twice to get her back. That’s what that red mark on her chest is from.” Ali explained. “I mean, it was only for a minute, but I’m struggling with how I feel. On one hand I feel lucky, on the other I feel terrified.”

Kyle hugged her tightly. “Oh, Alex. It’s ok. It’s a lot for you to process. Fuck, it’s a lot for me to process.”

“I haven’t told her yet. Grandma and Chris know too, but they’ve agreed to let me tell her when I think it’s time. I just, I don’t know how to tell her. When she woke up from the surgery she was so freaked out and upset that she thought she had left me.” Ali said quietly. “I can’t stop thinking about it. I lost her, even if it was for just that stupid minute, it still scares me.”

Kyle formulated his thoughts before speaking. “You didn’t lose her. She’s still here, Alex. You can’t spend your life obsessing over the possibility of her not being here or you’ll never just enjoy the fact that she is. You can’t always control what happens in life, you can only control how you deal with things and how you live. I mean, remember when you tore your ACL and MCL your sophomore year?” Kyle said. Ali nodded and he continued. “You had no control over that, it just happened. But, you worked your ass off to get better and back into shape and you’ve flourished ever since. This is no different. It happened and things are ok, you just have to live your life now and just be thankful for what you have. Focus on the feeling lucky and not the feeling terrified.”

“Thanks. I needed to hear that.” Ali hugged him a little closer. “How do I tell her though? I don’t want her to freak out. I mean, do I tell her at all?”

“You and I both know what it’s like to be down and out. Right now, she probably needs to just focus on recovering and getting better. The less complication involved in that, the better.” Kyle
advised her. “My honest advice, you should definitely tell her. You guys tell each other everything, I
don’t think keeping a secret that big helps either of you. You know her better than anyone, you’ll
know when the right time is. And, she’ll have you right here to help her through it if it upsets her.
Actually, I’m sure in the end you’ll help each other through it.”

“When did you get so smart?” Ali asked playfully, feeling a bit relieved.

“Please. I’ve always been the smart one. Just cause you went to Dartmouth Ms. Thang doesn’t mean
shit!” Kyle teased. “I’m the brains of the Krieger clan. You just sit there and look pretty and let Kyle
handle the hard stuff.”

Ali smacked his arm. “You’re so delusional.” She paused and got more serious. “Thanks for being
here. I couldn’t do this without you.”

“You bet. I wouldn’t leave my two sisters hanging. I freakin love that girl in there and everything she
means to you.” Kyle said sweetly.

Ali gave him another tight hug. “Speaking of, I better get back in there in case she wakes up. You
should go get some rest for the night.”

Kyle nodded. “Indeed. I need my beauty sleep to complement this amazing brain of mine.” He
laughed. “I’ll come by to say hi before I go pick up Ash’s family tomorrow. Now get in there.” Kyle
motioned towards the room.

Ali stood beside the bed for the next hour and just watched Ashlyn sleep. She stroked her hair, she
held her hand, she rubbed her arm gently, anything to be connected to the blonde. The night nurse
came in with a tray of liquid dinner for Ashlyn and quickly checked her blood pressure, waking the
blonde up.

“Alex?” Ashlyn called out sleepily.

“Right here, baby.” Ali said, getting close to the bed again.

“Mmm, you’re back.” Ashlyn smiled. “You look gorgeous and you smell nice. Love when you steal
my clothes.”

“I know, Stud. I wore this shirt just for you.” Ali smiled back. “They brought you some more
delicious jello. Want to try and eat?”

“Ugh, I need real food.” Ashlyn whined.

“I know. Tomorrow, ok?” Ali empathized. “Just one more night of this. So, be a good Stud and eat
it?”

Ashlyn groaned.

“Do I need to call Kyle?” Ali warned.

“No.” Ashlyn answered quickly. “One condition though.”

“Ok, what?” Ali played along.
“After I eat that crap, you come lay in bed with me.” Ashlyn pleaded.

“Oh, Ash. I don’t want to hurt you.” Ali said ruefully.

“Alex, it hurts whether you’re in this bed or not. I’d much rather have you in it. I need you next to me. Please?” Ashlyn begged, her hazel eyes soft and big again.

Ali wanted to be close just as much as Ashlyn did. She knew there was no fighting it. “Ok. But first jello, and no whining!”

“Deal.” Ashlyn had never eaten jello so quickly or willingly in her life. She finished the last bite and gingerly scooted over on the bed to make room. She patted the space beside her. “Come on, Princess.”

Ali nervously crawled into the bed trying hard to make sure she didn’t shake it too much.

Ashlyn smiled at her. “I’m not glass, baby. Relax. It’s fine. Come here.” She lifted her arm for Ali to settle against her shoulder. Ali melted into the blonde’s warmth and relished in it.

Ashlyn closed her eyes and inhaled the smell of Ali’s shampoo. “God this feels so good. I missed you.”

“I missed you too, Ash.” Ali let herself sink a little further into the blonde. “You doing ok?”

“So much better right now.” Ashlyn let out a contented sigh.

“I’m serious. How’s the pain?” Ali asked.

“Getting worse again. Probably because the medicine is wearing off. I’m handling it right now.” Ashlyn answered honestly.

“Maybe I should call the nurse in? Or you can hit your medicine button and see if that helps.” Ali suggested.

Ashlyn let out a deep breath. “Actually, can I talk to you about that?”

“You can talk to me about anything.” Ali replied.

“I don’t want to hit that button anymore, even if it hurts. And I want to talk to the doctor and nurses about the drugs they’re giving me.” Ashlyn said seriously. “I just, I hate hospitals. They remind me of my dad and grandpa dying. And these drugs make my mind all foggy, they feel so easy to slip into to make the pain go away. It scares me. I think about Chris and my Mom, and I don’t want to get into anything that’s going to be some easy solution I never escape from. This atmosphere and my family history, I just, I need to be in better control even if it’s harder. Do you know what I mean?”

Ali understood completely. “I know what you mean. And I’m with you completely, ok? We’ll figure out what the best options are in the morning. I’m here, Ash. I got you.”

“I know you do. I feel safe with you.” Ashlyn whispered through another deep breath.

Ali could tell there was more going on. “What else is going on in that beautiful mind of yours?”

“I don’t know. I can’t shake that feeling of leaving you. Can I tell you something without you thinking I’m nuts?” Ashlyn asked quietly.

“I’ll never think you’re nuts, promise. Talk to me.” Ali reassured her.
“You’re the last thing I remember. I remember telling you I loved you and you saying it back. My head was spinning and I hurt so bad I wasn’t sure what was going to happen. And you told me to stay with you, and I was trying so hard, but my eyes just wouldn’t stay open. I could hear you though and I could hear other things and people. Then I didn’t hear you anymore for a long time, but I could hear things around me. I figured if I could just keep hearing, keep listening, it meant I was still there and still with you. I was so afraid I wouldn’t see you again, Alex. I fought so hard to keep listening to things because I didn’t want to leave you.” Ashlyn paused for second. Ali stayed quiet, knowing she wasn’t done. “The sounds became so distant after a while, so far away and I couldn’t make anything out or understand any of it. I could still hear something though, like muffled waves, so I just kept fighting to listen. And then,” Ashlyn out a long breath. “Then it got further and further away and then I heard nothing and I couldn’t move and I couldn’t do anything. It just felt like nothingness, I don’t know how else to say it. I remember this absolutely horrific pain in my whole body and then the distant sounds came back and I started fighting again to hear them. That pain. I was so scared. So afraid that I’d messed up and left you. I don’t ever want to leave you. I just can’t shake that feeling for some reason.”

Ali’s heart was in her throat. She grabbed Ashlyn’s face gently. “Hey, you’re right here and that’s all that matters.” She stroked the blonde’s cheek. “Ash, you were in and out of consciousness a lot and there are things for me to tell you and explain about everything. Right now though, you need to focus on getting better. Can you do that and trust me to tell you all the details when you’re a little better?”

“Of course I trust you, Princess. You’re my sexy nurse after all. Nurse Hottie Krieger!” Ashlyn tried to lighten the mood. Ali laughed a bit and then they silently enjoyed the closeness of each other for a little bit.

“Alex?” Ashlyn broke the silence.

“Yeah, baby?” Ali replied.

“Kiss me?” Ashlyn asked softly, hopefulness in her tone.

“You never have to ask, Ash. Just be careful, ok?” Ali tilted her face up and gently took the blonde’s lips between her own. It was soft and demanding, passionate and loving, electricity surging through both of them. Like all the others before it, the kiss felt like magic. Yet, somehow it felt like there was so much more behind this one. It was slow and deliberate, both of them making sure to breathe so they wouldn’t have to pull back breathlessly to take a break. Neither of them wanting to let the moment go.

The pain that had been so prominent just a few moments ago was temporarily masked. Ashlyn’s senses were filled with Ali instead. Her taste, her touch, her scent, the soft moan she had let out against her lips. Ashlyn pulled back slowly to look at her, completing the immersion of senses. “You’re perfect.” Ashlyn whispered, looking into her favorite amber eyes before leaning in for another long kiss.

After a while Ali pulled back reluctantly. “You need to sleep, Ash.”

Ashlyn would have argued, but she was exhausted and Ali was right. “Ok. Stay right here beside me though? Please?”

Ali was still nervous about hurting the blonde, but the way Ashlyn had asked so desperately broke her resolve. “Ok. If you get uncomfortable you have to tell me. Promise me.” Ali negotiated.

“I promise.” Ashlyn replied. She leaned her shoulder into Ali’s, the brunette holding her hand in her
Ali reached up to turn off the overhead light and Ashlyn fell asleep listening to Ali breathe. Once Ashlyn was snoring and deeply sleeping, Ali let herself relax a bit and closed her eyes.

Ali didn’t know how long it had been since she fell asleep, but she woke up to Ashlyn’s clutching her arm tightly. The blonde was shaking and sweaty. “Ash, what hurts? How bad?” Ali asked.

“My abs, my shoulder, my side. Pretty bad.” Ashlyn got out through gritted teeth.

“Do you want me to get a nurse?” Ali asked.


“Ok, love. Just listen to my voice. Try to do what I tell you.” Ali said softly as she turned her body a bit to face the blonde. She wiped Ashlyn’s sweaty face with her sleeve.

“Ok,” Ashlyn replied, letting out a small whimper and shaking harder.

“Take slow, deep breaths. Can you do that?” Ali instructed her. She felt Ashlyn work on regulating her breathing, slowing it down. “Good, baby. You’re doing good.”

Ali slipped her hand under Ashlyn’s hospital gown, running her hand back and forth across the blonde’s shoulder gently. “Can you feel my hand on your skin?”

Ashlyn nodded.

“Focus on my hand against you. Does it feel ok?” Ali said calmly.

“Yeah. Really good.” Ashlyn replied in a barely audible whisper.

“Concentrate on the heat of my hand, how it feels. Feel it run back and forth on your skin.” Ali directed her. Ashlyn had stopped shaking and Ali could feel her tense muscles start to relax a bit.

“Doing so good, Ash.” Ali told her. “When I was little, my mom used to tell me the story of Cinderella every night before bed. I’m going to tell you that story. Just keep breathing slow, focus on my hand against you, and just listen to my voice, ok?”

Ashlyn gave a very small nod, her head dropping slowly to lean on Ali’s chest. Ali told the long drawn out version of Cinderella that Deb had made up for her as a kid when she begged for more time before bed. By the time she had finished, Ashlyn was back to snoring lightly. Ali smiled and pressed her lips to the top of Ashlyn’s head, closing her own tired eyes and falling asleep like that.

Ashlyn woke up pressed as closely to Ali as she possibly could be without hurting her stomach. She had pain across her abdomen, but it was not as sharp as it had been during the night. She thought back to Ali’s sweet voice lulling her to sleep. The effect the brunette had on her, her ability to calm and soothe her was immeasurable.

Betty, the morning nurse, came in with a tray of supplies and was about to say good morning when she saw Ashlyn cuddled against a sleeping Ali. “I’ll finish my other rounds first and give you like another 15 minutes ok?” She whispered.

“Thank you.” Ashlyn mouthed to her gratefully and watched Ali sleep until she finally had to wake
her up. She peppered the brunette’s face with several kisses until she saw a smile form on Ali’s lips. “Good morning, gorgeous.”

“Morning, Stud. Sorry, didn’t mean to oversleep on you.” Ali said sleepily, her eyes finally opening.

“You didn’t. I just woke up a few minutes ago too.” Ashlyn reassured her. “The nurse will be in soon to do her thing.”

Ali nodded. “How do you feel this morning?”

“I have pain, but not as bad as last night.” Ashlyn responded. “Thanks for last night, for staying with me and helping me.”

“I’m always here, you know that.” Ali leaned up and pecked the blonde’s lips.

The nurse came back into the room. “Sorry to interrupt ladies, but we have to start today’s treatment.”

“Right, the torture. Bring it, Betty.” Ashlyn addressed the nurse with a challenging grin as Ali slipped out of the bed.

“You’re gonna regret that, Ashlyn.” Betty played back. “I’ll be as gentle as I can, ok. First thing is to get that catheter out.” She said closing the door to the room and pulling the curtain around the bed too. “Ali doesn’t have to be here for this one, so that’s up to you. I really just need her for the incision care and how to get you out of bed tutorial.”

“Will you stay?” Ashlyn asked Ali.

Ali nodded knowing this morning would be as hard for her mentally as it would be for Ashlyn physically.

Betty removed the covers and lifted the bottom of Ashlyn’s gown, her hand gently grabbing the tube and explaining she was going to deflate the balloon holding it in place. “Ok, here goes. You’ll just feel a little pinch, ok.” She slowly tugged the tube free. Ashlyn let out a very tiny whimper and made a face, squeezing Ali’s hand.

“Ok, that was the easy part. Ready for the next?” Betty asked.

“Easy. Right. Keep it coming.” Ashlyn said sarcastically trying to be tough.

“We’re going to open up the surgical bandage and clean up that incision. Then we’ll get you into the bathroom for a quick shower while we change your bed.” Betty helped Ashlyn take off the rest of the hospital gown and then got to work on cutting the bandaging that went around Ashlyn’s stomach.

The blonde looked down at her torso for the first time, assessing the damage. She had kept her head up until now, a bit afraid to look down at herself given the amount of pain she was in. She looked up at Ali who was doing the same thing, the brunette’s mouth hanging open a little. Ashlyn squeezed her hand. “It’s ok, Alex.” She whispered just loud enough for Ali to hear her.

Ali could never have imagined the extent of it. Ashlyn’s left side was so dark purple that it practically hid her colorful side tattoo. Betty removed the bandage to reveal a long incision that ran from just under her sternum down to her belly button in a straight line right down the middle of her abs. The wound was held closed by a neat row of more staples than Ali could count. If that wasn’t enough, there was a red rectangular mark above Ashlyn’s right breast and another matching one just under
her left breast. She swallowed hard at the significance of them, memorizing their exact location. She knew right then exactly how she was going to tell Ashlyn about it, and how she was going to gain that one minute back.

“What is that from?” Ashlyn asked looking at the red marks herself and breaking Ali from her thoughts.

Ali chimed in quickly, knowing now was not the time and giving Betty a look with her eyes. “I think one of the nurses said that it’s just skin irritation from the heart monitor.”

Betty covered for her. “Yeah, some people are sensitive to the glue on them.” Ashlyn nodded, having accepted the explanation. Ali let go of the breath she was holding and focused on what Betty was doing.

“Ok. So you’ll want to clean the incision daily for the next 2 to 3 weeks. You do that with a soft washcloth and some warm soapy water. A good antibacterial soap like Dial is perfect.” Betty reached into a bowl of warm soapy water to pull out a washcloth and squeezed it out a bit. “So, you just very very gently run it over the incision, don’t apply any pressure. I would even suggest just letting the washcloth sit on the incision for a few seconds.”

Ashlyn grunted a bit, her face in a grimace as Betty cleaned the area. Ali watched Betty intently and squeezed Ashlyn’s hand tight while she ran her other hand up and down the blonde’s arm, trying to comfort her.

“I know. That’s really tender.” Betty said apologetically as she finished up. “Ok, so we don’t put a bandage back on it now. It just stays open so it can heal better. It should start to feel less tender in a couple days. Those staples won’t come out until about day 14, so you’ll still have those for a while and need to clean them daily like this.” Ali nodded in understanding.

“Ok, let’s try and get you up.” Betty said, dropping the railing on the bed and motioning for Ali to watch. “So, to get her up with as much support as possible, we want to first roll her on her side towards the very edge of the bed. And let her legs start to dangle off.” Betty helped Ashlyn roll on her side, the blonde already letting out a moan in pain. “I know, Ashlyn. You’re very very sore, this is going to hurt for a little while. Bear with me.”

Betty continued “Now you want to support her back and shoulders and help her sit up and then immediately get her into a standing position in one controlled motion. You ready to try it, Ashlyn?”

“Yeah.” Ashlyn said through gritted teeth. Ali was heartbroken at watching her have to go through this, but she was trying to stay focused on learning how to care for her.

Betty got the blonde up slowly in one movement, Ashlyn letting out a fairly loud yelp. “And we’re up! Nicely done!” Betty cheered the blonde. “Now, let’s take slow steps into the bathroom right there.” Betty led the blonde into the bathroom attached to the room. Ali looked on, shocked at how difficult it seemed to be for the blonde to just walk across the room. She was wobbly and clearly stiff. Once inside the bathroom, Betty got Ashlyn into a reclining seat in the shower.

“Oh. So, this is just a normal shower now that we already cleaned up the incision. Completely up to you how we do this. I can do it myself. Or Ali can help me do it. Or if Ali is up for it, she can do it herself and I’ll go change that bed.” Betty laid out the options.

“You know my choice.” Ashlyn said with the first smile she had let out since they had started this whole thing.
“Figured.” Betty laughed. “You up for it, Ali?”

“Yep. I can handle it.” Ali said confidently.

“Ok, I’ll be right in the room. If you have any trouble, just pull that string and I’ll be right in to help.” Betty said pointing to a string on the wall attached to a switch that would alert the nurses.

Ali started the water and made sure it was a comfortable temperature. “So, making me work, Harris?”

“Damn right. If anyone’s hands are going to be on this body, I definitely want them to be yours and when we’re all alone.” Ashlyn smirked. “This is going to be the best part of this hellish morning.”

“Easy, Stud. We’re keeping to just a shower in here, remember that. No funny business.” Ali said firmly.

“So strict, Nurse Hottie Krieger!” Ashlyn teased.

“Not that strict, Harris.” Ali said with a wink, taking off her own clothes.

Ashlyn stared at the brunette’s body in awe. “Well, hello gorgeous. Damn, Alex.”

“Just so I don’t get my clothes wet. Don’t get any ideas!” Ali warned.

“Ok, ok. I’ll just sit back and enjoy the show.” Ashlyn flirted.

Ali grabbed a wash cloth and washed every part of the blonde’s body gently. Ashlyn felt really relaxed even though her incision still hurt from being in this position. Ali then washed her hair, giving her a soft kiss on the lips when she was done. “Ok, let’s get you dried off and then I’ll get Betty back in here to help me get you back into bed.” Ali said. Ashlyn nodded in agreement. Once Ashlyn was mostly dry, Ali pulled the string to get Betty’s attention.

Betty came in just a few seconds later. “How are we doing in here?”

“She’s all set.” Ali answered. Betty and Ali helped lift Ashlyn from the chair in the shower and got her back over towards the bed.

“Alright, the bed is ready. Let’s just get a fresh gown on you while you’re standing.” Betty pulled a clean gown around the blonde and Ali tied the opening up. “Now, we just get you back into the bed the same way we got you out, just in reverse.” She supported Ashlyn and let her down into a sitting position before swiftly moving her into a lying down position on her side and helping the blonde roll onto her back. Ashlyn let out another deep grunt. “Ok, torture over. Nicely done, Ashlyn!” Betty praised her.

“You did so good, baby.” Ali leaned down to kiss her lips gently.

“You’re big prize is some real breakfast.” Betty exclaimed. Ashlyn fist pumped, making Betty and Ali laugh. “We’ll start simple with some toast, eggs, and juice. If that goes well, we can amp it up a little. I’ll go get you some food and then we can give you your pain medication to help you recover from the morning.”

Ali piped up right away so Ashlyn wouldn’t have to. “Yeah, Betty. About that. Ash asked last night about stopping the pain medication. She knows it will hurt more, but she wants to move away from using it. So, what are the options for that?”
Ashlyn grabbed Ali’s hand, so grateful that she had advocated for her like that.

“No problem.” Betty replied. “I’ll confer with her doctor, but we can move to just Ibuprofen and keep up with fluids from now on.”

“Perfect. Thanks, Betty.” Ashlyn finally spoke.

“Anytime. Whatever you want, don’t be shy about asking. We’re here to take care of you.” Betty replied genuinely before leaving to get the food.

After a solid breakfast, Ashlyn was exhausted and in pain. Ali suggested she get some rest since grandma and Chris would be there in about 3 hours. Ashlyn tugged Ali’s hand until the brunette got back into bed with her and repeated the same routine as the previous night to help the blonde sleep.

Ashlyn fell asleep to the sound of Ali’s soothing voice and thought about seeing her grandma and Chris when she woke up.
And we're still on the road to recovery with Nurse Krieger at the helm... plus, it's Ashlyn's birthday :)

Ali heard her phone buzz and carefully reached over to grab it without waking Ashlyn. It was a text from Kyle.

Mr. No Pants: Stopped by, but you two were snoozin’ so I didn’t wake you. Just picked up the Harris clan. Should be over to you in like 45min to 1hr. Xo

Ms. Mascara: Thanks! I’m gonna wake up Ash so she’s ready. See you soon XoXo

Ali looked at the time on her phone and noted it was 12:15pm. They had slept for almost three hours. Ali hoped Ashlyn would be a bit more recovered from the morning activities. She hated to wake her when she was getting some good rest, but she knew Ashlyn would want to be up and ready for when her family got there.

Ali ran her hand through Ashlyn’s hair a couple times and then ran her thumb over the blonde’s lips before kissing her softly. Ashlyn started to stir.


“Mmm, Alex.” Ashlyn mumbled and rubbed her face into Ali’s shoulder, her eyes still closed.

“I know you’re tired, babe. Grandma and Chris will be here soon though.” Ali rubbed Ashlyn’s arm lightly.

“Hmmmp. Ok.” Ashlyn finally opened her eyes, squinting a bit to look around, her eyes settling on Ali.

“How are you feeling?” Ali asked her.

Ashlyn shifted slightly, trying to assess herself. “Not too bad for now. I can tolerate it.” She smirked at Ali. “I mean, I might need you to take your clothes off again later when it gets bad again, but we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Ali tapped the blonde’s nose. “Watch it, Harris. You’re about kiss your grandmother with that mouth.”

“Not before I kiss you first.” Ashlyn said doing her best to lean in but her sore body not letting her get very far.

Ali closed the space and kissed her, letting the kiss get passionate for a few minutes before she pulled back. “Why don’t you eat your lunch before your family gets here. You’ll need all the energy you can get to handle Chris.” Ali said pointing to the tray that had been left in the room.

Ashlyn laughed and agreed. “What’s for lunch?”
Ali made her way over to the tray to have a look. “Looks like a turkey sandwich with some chips and a salad. Not so bad. Actually looks decent. Better than jello, right?”

“What I really need is a burger and fries, but I’ll take it.” Ashlyn replied. Ali helped her get everything unwrapped and then checked her emails while the blonde ate.

Ali was happy to see that all of Ashlyn’s professors had replied to her emails and had started one long email thread with her advisor to come up with a plan. It looked like they were prepared to have Ashlyn Skype into class sessions once she was a little better and out of the hospital. Ali was impressed by how accommodating they were and prepared for helping her get back on track when it was time. Each of them had also sent a personal message to Ashlyn with their best wishes for her recovery. She read Ashlyn the emails while she finished eating.

Ashlyn just smiled and didn’t say anything at first. “You’re so good to me, Alex. You know me so well. Thanks for taking care of all that. I don’t know what to say.”

“I love you and I’m taking care of you. You don’t have to say anything at all.” Ali replied standing beside the bed.

“Oh. I won’t.” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows and reached up slowly to grab a fistful of Ali’s shirt and tugged her down for a kiss.

They were interrupted by the sound of Kyle’s sing-song voice. “See, I told you see was in good hands!”

They broke the kiss and looked up to find Kyle, Grandma, and Chris looking at them from the doorway. Ali blushed a little bit.

“Gram, Chris!” Ashlyn squealed excitedly from the bed, using her hand to motion them over.

“Hi Sweetheart! I’m so happy to see you.” Grandma got to the bed first, doing her best to lean in and kiss Ashlyn without hurting her. “I was so worried. But I know Ali’s been taking such good care of you.”

“Hi Gram. I’m so glad you’re here. You look good. I missed you.” Ashlyn replied. “And yeah, I have the best and most beautiful nurse on the planet.”

“Well, I’m not going to lie. You look a bit like hell, but we’ll work on that.” Grandma said in her usual blunt tone. “Starting with these.” She gave Ashlyn a bag with two tins in it.

Ashlyn took the tins out to find them filled with homemade chocolate chip and sugar cookies, her two favorites. “Ahhh, you’re the best! I just started eating real food this morning too, perfect!” Ashlyn started munching on a chocolate chip cookie.

Grandma gave Ali a tight hug before sitting down in the chair next to the bed and letting Chris have his turn.

“Hey lil sis, so glad you’re ok.” He said quietly and moved in to press his forehead to Ashlyn’s.

Ali had been ready to intervene because Chris was usually so rough and tumble with Ashlyn, but she stood there in awe as he was so gentle with her. It dawned on Ali in that moment how losing Ashlyn would have destroyed this little Harris family that had struggled so hard and clawed together to survive.

Ashlyn put her hands on Chris’ face, she knew he was upset. “I’m just fine, Bubba, relax. Your
“Sister is a tough bitch, remember that.”

“Ok. Just stop getting hurt all the time dumbass.” He chuckled.

“And he’s back!” Ashlyn announced with a smile.

“Here, I got you something to replace that god awful hospital gown with.” He placed a wrapped box in her lap.

Ashlyn opened it to find a black t-shirt with red lettering that said ‘Give Blood. Play Rugby.’ She laughed, appreciating that Chris always coped with humor. “Doesn’t get more appropriate than that.”

Chris made his way over to Ali and hugged her firmly, picking her up off the ground briefly. “Thank you.” He whispered just loud enough for only her to hear before putting her down. Ali gave him an extra squeeze before they broke apart.

Ali watched Ashlyn joke around with Chris and Kyle, the blonde’s spirits were high and the visit was providing her with a good distraction from the pain; Ali was glad for that.

“I could use a coffee. Come on, Ali. Let’s give these three what Chris calls some ‘bro time’.” Grandma announced with a head shake and Ali laughed.

“Be back soon, baby.” Ali said, kissing Ashlyn on the cheek. “And you two, go easy on her.” She said pointing at her eyes and then pointing back at Chris and Kyle with the ‘I’m watching you motion’.

Grandma took Ali’s hand and led her out of the room and towards the cafeteria. “How are you doing, sweetheart? You look as tired as Ashlyn does.”

“I’m ok. Getting the hang of all this. I’ll admit I was pretty frazzled at first and just shaken by everything, but I’m coming to terms with it and just focused on getting her better.” Ali answered honestly.

“You’re a gem, Ali. I mean that. I don’t know what she or the rest of us would have done without you.” Grandma said kindly. “It’s still beyond me why anyone would willingly play rugby, but there must be something about it that’s worth getting practically killed.” She tried to maintain lightness in her voice before getting more serious. “Are you going to tell her?”

Ali nodded. “Yeah, I am. I want her to focus on getting better right now, so I’m going to wait a bit until the time is right. I think it will be good for both of us if she knows. To be honest, she knows something. She’s brought up how she felt like she left me a couple times now.”

Grandma nodded. “Doesn’t surprise me. You hear all these stories about people who have died temporarily during surgery. They say all kinds of different things, but the bottom line is that they all seem to know that something happened even before anyone tells them. It’s all a bit creepy if you ask me, and I’m a religious woman.”

They each grabbed a coffee and sat down together at a table in the cafeteria. “Can I ask you a personal question, Grandma?” Ali asked.

“Of course you can, dear.” Grandma smiled.

“How did you do it when your husband died? I mean, everything turned out ok with Ashlyn, but the idea that it almost didn’t is just eating at me. I can’t even imagine if… I don’t think I’d survive it.” Ali said a bit sadly.
“A part of me didn’t survive, truthfully. There’s a piece of me that went with him and that was probably the hardest. In the end though, life isn’t forever and nothing is guaranteed. I think we all know it ends at some point. The thing is though, I could say that we enjoyed every minute we had together. We lived life together, that’s really all there is to it. I could be confident that we didn’t waste the time we had no matter how long or short it was.” Grandma grabbed Ali’s hand. “Ali, you can’t dwell on the what ifs. They don’t matter. What matters is what’s in front of you, live for that and don’t waste a minute of it. No matter what life throws at you, if you lived it thoroughly, you won’t have any regrets and much fewer sorrows.” Grandma said wisely and squeezed Ali’s hand one more time. “Now stop frowning, dear. Your smile is too beautiful to hide.”

Ali gave her a smile. “Thanks, Grandma. Kyle told me pretty much the same thing.”

“Your brother seems like such a great man. He’s been wonderful for Chris. I’m glad they finally met in person.” Grandma replied.

“He’s had his struggles, but he’s grown into a really amazing person. I’m really proud of him.” Ali said.

“You and Ashlyn have pulled together quite a family here.” Grandma noted.

“Yeah. I guess we have.” Ali agreed, thinking about how their families had become so melded together.

“Speaking of which. We should probably get back. Chris probably has Ashlyn wrestling by now.” Grandma laughed.

“And Kyle is probably cheering them on.” Ali joked.

They got back to the room to find Chris sitting on the edge of the bed talking animatedly with Kyle and Ashlyn listening and smiling. Despite the blonde’s smile, Ali could tell she was uncomfortable and that something was off. “Hey guys, can I have a couple minutes with Ash?” Ali asked.

They all agreed and left the room, but not before Kyle joked “Keep it clean, ladies, we’ll be right outside.” Chris high-fived him with a chuckle.

Once the door was closed, Ali studied Ashlyn for a second. “You ok, baby?”

“Yeah, I’m great.” Ashlyn said, her voice bit high pitched.

Ali crossed her arms. “You totally have to pee don’t you?”

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide. “Ok, that is just uncanny! How did you know?”

“You look uncomfortable, you’re clenching your legs together with your hands pressed to your lap, and you haven’t gone to the bathroom since this morning. The real question is, why are you lying about it?” Ali raised her eyebrows.

Ashlyn sighed and dropped her head a bit. “I hurt and I may or may not be terrified of having to get up again.”

“Oh, Ash. I know it hurts, baby. But letting your bladder explode isn’t gonna help you. Actually, it’s probably causing even more pressure in there that isn’t helping. Come on, I’ll help you and we’ll do it together, ok?” Ali encouraged her.

“Ok. Sorry.” Ashlyn replied defeated.
“Don’t be sorry. It’s ok. I know it hurts.” Ali comforted her. She dropped the railing on the bed and had Ashlyn roll on her side, just like the nurse showed her. “Ok, take a deep breath and just let me do all the work. Ready?”

Ashlyn nodded and Ali pulled her up smoothly, supporting her weight. “So good, beautiful. You, ok?” Ali checked with the blonde.

“Yeah, not so bad.” Ashlyn let out a breath.

Ali helped her slowly walk to the bathroom, rolling the IV setup with her and making sure not to get it tangled in anything. “Ok, just hang on to my shoulders and put all your weight on me, I’ll lower you myself.” Ashlyn finally got on the toilet and let out a relieved sigh as she peed, a smile finally on her face.


“So much better.” Ashlyn laughed a bit.

“Alright, same thing for the way back. Just put your weight on me and let me do the work.” Ali lifted her and got her back to the bed, helping her lay back down with slow controlled movement. “You did great, Ash. Was that so bad?”

“No, really sore, but not the nightmare I was expecting. I feel a lot better. Thanks, Princess.” Ashlyn said shyly.

Ali smiled at her and gave her a quick peck on the lips. “Now I can bring those clowns back so you can properly laugh at their jokes. Don’t worry, I won’t tell them you had to pee this whole time.” Ali assured her.

“I love you woman.” Ashlyn yelled across the room as Ali went to open the door.

Everyone stayed until dinner time rolled around and they decided to let Ashlyn eat and relax as well as go get dinner themselves, promising to be back in the morning. Ashlyn wolfed down a grilled cheese sandwich and tomato soup, finishing with a yogurt which was now going to be part of her daily menu to help protect the good bacteria in her digestive system while she was on antibiotics for the next couple of months. Ali had grabbed a slice of pizza from the cafeteria. They were just finishing up dinner when Abby and Sarah showed up with an hour left for visiting hours.

“Ash! Holy crap, how are you?” Abby went right over to Ashlyn and Sarah followed.

“Hey guys! I’ve been better for sure, but doing okay so far.” Ashlyn answered while Sarah hugged Ali quickly. “What are you doing here, it’s Monday night?”

“We were away for the weekend in Montreal and we got back really really late last night. So, we went to work today and when we got home Abby checked our voicemail to find like a million messages about what happened. We jumped right the hell in the car and came here.” Sarah explained. “So sorry we didn’t know and didn’t come sooner. My god, Ash.”

“Probably better that you missed all the drama.” Ali chimed in. “She’s doing great so far.”

“Geez, I make you captain and you end up losing an organ. I should’ve known you’d go all out and get hurt like an insane rugger.” Abby teased.

“Yeah, way to go, Ash! Gonna be months before you can use that housewarming gift again.” Sarah chided.
Ali blushed and Ashlyn shot Sarah a look. Sarah just shrugged with a sly grin on her face.

The hour went by quickly and Abby and Sarah had to say goodnight. Ashlyn and Ali thanked them profusely for making the drive from Vermont just for a brief visit. As soon as they left, Ashlyn rubbed her eyes and yawned.

“It was a long day for you. We need to get you to sleep.” Ali said.

“Yep. It was nice to have everyone, but I’m really wiped out.” Ashlyn agreed.

“Bathroom trip first and then we can get the nurse to give you your medicine?” Ali suggested.

“Definitely.” Ashlyn replied. Ali got her to the bathroom and then settled for bed. The nurse had come in the meantime to give her the medicine she needed. Ashlyn was glad to be back in bed, the pain was starting to radiate across her abdomen and making her feel unsettled.

Ali didn’t need to be asked this time, she gently climbed into the bed next to Ashlyn and worked on getting her comfortable. She stroked her tattooed arm, talking to her quietly until Ashlyn was asleep.

“I’m going to spend every minute of the rest of my life making sure you know how much I love you, Ash.” She whispered to the sleeping blonde.

The next few days went by more quickly than they had both expected. Grandma and Chris had gone home on Wednesday morning. Kyle had gone back home on Thursday. Ashlyn still had visitors coming and going. Mostly the Smith ruggers, but also a special visit from some of Dartmouth ruggers too. Whitney had been a constant presence, hanging out whenever she could. Ashlyn felt a little bit better every day, being able to move more and the pain becoming less sharp and more dull and sore. Of course, she had her fair share of frustration and discomfort, getting particularly moody when the rehabilitation specialist would come and make her walk around the hospital for an hour every day. Ali had been her rock through it all, never complaining and always finding a way to calm her. Since Ashlyn’s worst pain always seemed to come at night when she was trying to fall asleep, she had not only heard the lengthened Cinderella story several times, but Ali had now invented one for Peter Pan and Snow White too. She had even made special trips to get Ashlyn some real food when the blonde couldn’t stomach what was on the hospital menu. Ashlyn’s smile couldn’t have been any bigger when Ali walked through the door with a burger, fries and a milkshake.

By Saturday morning, Ashlyn was trying hard to pay attention while the discharge nurse laid out all of the home care instructions and made sure she understood how she needed to take care of herself from now on. She couldn’t wait to go home. As soon as all the paperwork was complete, Ali got her right to the apartment and settled her on the couch with her Netflix while she cooked grandma’s mac & cheese. It had been amazing to have a home cooked meal and be in her own bed. It had also been the first night she’d been comfortable enough to lay on her right side and fully cuddle into Ali. It felt so good and so comforting, it was the most peaceful she’d felt since she got hurt.

Even though Ali had to resume working that week, Ashlyn just loved being around her. She listened enraptured while Ali spoke on the phone to her German clients. She had no idea what the brunette was saying, but she found it incredibly sexy. Ashlyn had successfully Skyped into her classes, feeling good that she was able to follow along and that she hadn’t missed much. At first, it was still a bit difficult for her to sit up for any significant length of time, but by the end of the week she could see improvement and was able to sit up for a couple of hours at a time. Whitney, Megan, Tobin and Alex had come over to hang out with them just about every night. They helped Ali cook and all ate
dinner together, it made Ashlyn miss campus just a little bit less.

Although Deb and Ken hadn’t been able to visit because they were both teachers and smack in the middle of the school year, they had each insisted on Skyping every night now that Ashlyn was resting at home. They wouldn’t be satisfied until they had personally talked to Ashlyn over the computer screen and asked her how her day was. Despite thinking it was sweet, Ali rolled her eyes at their overbearingness, but Ashlyn just found it endearing.

Ali had been diligent about taking care of Ashlyn’s incision, and given that the brunette would shower with her every night and gently wash her, Ashlyn wasn’t complaining one bit. Ali’s hands felt so good on her body and Ashlyn knew what her first question for the doctor was going to be at the follow-up appointment. She didn’t care if Ali was probably going to kill her afterwards for asking it.

On Saturday, Ashlyn made progress by walking around downtown Northampton for a couple of hours with Ali. The rugby team had traveled to play Dartmouth that afternoon and it was Ali’s way of distracting her since there was no way she could travel yet to watch the match. Although Ashlyn had been in a bit of a funk over missing the rugby match, her cheery demeanor was back when the ruggers took Ali and Ashlyn out for breakfast Sunday morning, announcing that they had beaten Dartmouth 17 to 7. Ali couldn’t say she was thrilled at the news of her alma mater’s loss, but seeing Ashlyn smile was worth it. The blonde had managed to sit through breakfast and hang out for a little bit without being too uncomfortable. Ashlyn still had a lot of soreness, but she was finding that she could enjoy a little more normalcy with each passing day.

Ali woke up early Monday morning and watched Ashlyn sleep for a little while. Just a couple of weeks ago, she had been so excited for this day; the day the love of her life was born. She had made a grand plan to take Ashlyn away for her birthday weekend to the Maine coast where she had gotten them a private beach house right on the water. Although the weather was already cold, Ali knew Ashlyn loved being around the ocean. She had planned for them to have a spa day and then she was going to take her to a huge county fair that was going on nearby because Ashlyn was a giant kid at heart who loved things like that. The Smith Ruggers were supposed to come meet them on Sunday for a surprise lobster bake birthday bash. When Ashlyn got hurt, Ali had been forced to cancel all of those plans. She’d scrambled over the last week to come up with a new plan, but it had been hard with Ashlyn being right beside her the whole time. With a little help from Whitney though, she had managed to come up with something.

Given everything that Ashlyn had been through, Ali had decided that today would be all about appreciating the simple things. She kissed every inch of the blonde’s face to rouse her, finally seeing a smile appear on Ashlyn’s lips and her sleepy eyes open.

“Happy Birthday, beautiful.” Ali said, planting a sweet kiss on her lips.

Ashlyn looked thoughtful for a second. “It’s the 19th already? Geez, I kind of lost track of the days, I completely forgot my own birthday.” She laughed.

Ali giggled. “Welcome to your 20’s!”

“Woohoo! I made it to double digits baby!” Ashlyn exclaimed. Ali laughed so hard that Ashlyn
knew she must be missing something. “What’s so funny?”

“Double digits, huh?” Ali teased her. “You realize 19 is a double digit right?”

Ashlyn slapped her forehead. “Wow, not my finest moment.” She laughed at her own stupidity.

“Don’t worry, I’m just gonna chalk it up to the fact that you just woke up.” Ali said still laughing a bit. “So, you ready to get those staples out?”

Ashlyn nodded her head enthusiastically. “Can’t wait! Not that I want to start my birthday at the hospital, but I want these staples out so bad. They are so not comfortable.”

“Let’s get ready and head out. We’ll have some fun once your appointment is done, promise.” Ali replied. “But first, a birthday gift!” Ali brought over a small wrapped box.

“Sweet!” Ashlyn said as Ali handed her the box. She opened it to find a solid gold bracelet that was almost like a bangle, but it had one wider section and came together with a hook style clasp. Ashlyn noted the symbol engraved on top of the wider section. “This is beautiful, Alex. What’s the engraving?”

“Actually, it’s the most fashionable medical alert bracelet I could get you. Your doctor told me you should wear one from now on, so I tried to get you a nice one. The standard options were god awful, so I had that one made by the jeweler downtown. That is the medical alert symbol on top. Inside on the back is your medical information.” Ali explained.

Ashlyn looked inside the bracelet to see “No Spleen. Immunodeficient. Blood Type: O+” engraved on the inside of it. She felt warm inside at how much Ali cared about her and wanted to keep her safe.

“Sorry, I know it’s not the most exciting gift, but I wanted to do everything I could to make sure you’re always taken care of.” Ali said quietly.

Ashlyn smiled at her. “This is one of the most meaningful gifts I’ve ever gotten, Alex. It’s beautiful, I love it.” She said clasping it right onto her wrist and then kissing Ali deeply. “I love you.”

“I love you too, Stud. We have to get ready though, your appointment is in just over an hour and I still need to get you showered.” Ali replied.

Ali got herself and Ashlyn showered and ready. Rather than head to her own car, Ali walked them to Ashlyn’s Jeep and handed her the keys. She knew Ashlyn was in good enough shape now to drive and that she was probably missing her ‘baby’ as the blonde so commonly referred to her Jeep. This was the beginning of appreciating the little things today.

Ashlyn looked at her with surprise. “Wait, you’re letting me drive? You feeling ok, Krieger?”

“As much as I’m a totally worry wart, I understand that you’re completely capable. It’s your birthday and I’m gonna calm down and we’re going to enjoy it. So, yes, you’re driving.” Ali answered.

“Eeeeeeek, you’re the best!” Ashlyn squealed as Ali helped her get into the driver’s seat. The weather was chilly but Ashlyn rolled the window down anyway and cranked up the music. Being back behind the wheel of her Jeep made her feel free. It definitely took her mind off of the fact that she was heading to get staples pulled out of her body.

Ashlyn filled out some quick paperwork before sitting down in the waiting room with Ali. It didn’t take long before she was called in. She grabbed Ali’s hand and they walked into the room together.
The nurse took all her vitals and then said the doctor would be in soon. Ashlyn started to fidget while they waited.

“You nervous?” Ali asked, gripping the blonde’s hand a little tighter.

“Kinda.” Ashlyn answered honestly. “I can’t wait to have these out, but I hope it doesn’t hurt too much.”

“You just focus on me, birthday girl, and I’m sure it will be over before you know it.” Ali reassured her as the doctor walked in.

“Hi Ashlyn. How are you feeling? Has Ali been nursing you back to health?” Dr. Silverman asked with a smile.

“Good. I’m still sore a lot, but definitely getting better I think. All thanks to my nurse.” Ashlyn shot Ali a quick smile.

“Excellent. Let’s have a look at my handy work and hopefully we’ll get you metal free in a few minutes.” Dr. Silverman said.

Ali helped Ashlyn unbutton her shirt and get onto the exam table, standing off to the side and holding the blonde’s hand. Dr. Silverman looked over the incision carefully and palpated certain parts of her abdomen. Ashlyn winced a couple of times, but seemed to be doing ok. The bruising on her side was now lighter and mostly shades of gray and yellow. The red marks from the defibrillator were completely gone now, just a little dry skin in those two areas was the only indication left. Dr. Silverman asked Ashlyn to try to tighten her stomach muscles, then slowly twist her torso to the left and right, and finally to stretch her arms above her head. She was able to do all of it despite having some occasional pain. Dr. Silverman seemed pleased.

“This looks really good. The incision is healing really nicely, so the scar will stay a thin line I think. Your movement is good for where we’re at post surgery. Your CT scan from the day before you left the hospital showed that the liver laceration was pretty much closed up and there was no more internal bleeding at all. I think you’re in really great shape here. So, let’s get rid of those staples.” He said cheerily.

Ashlyn smiled and Ali felt relieved at the news.

“Normally the nurse would do this, but my schedule is clear for the next 30 minutes and I think I’m better at it anyway, so I’ll remove them myself. Just let me have the nurse come in with the proper supplies.” Dr. Silverman said leaving the room.

“My little super star patient.” Ali cooed.

“Well, I’m in the care of Nurse Hottie Krieger, so I can’t take all the credit.” Ashlyn flirted.

Dr. Silverman came back in with a nurse in tow, carrying a tray. He picked up a tool that look like a specialized pair of scissors. “You ready? You might feel a little tug or a pinch with some of them, but it should be mostly pain free, ok?”

Ashlyn nodded and gripped Ali’s hand a little tighter.

“Well we go.” Dr. Silverman said as he started removing the first staple.

Ashlyn hadn’t felt much with the first few, just a little tenderness from the incision. She started to relax a little, but then felt a sharp pinch and yelped a bit.
“Sorry.” Dr. Silverman apologized. “Hopefully we won’t have too many like that one.”

Ali leaned over and got close to Ashlyn’s face. She put her free hand on the blonde’s cheek and turned her head a bit so Ashlyn was looking at her. “Slow deep breaths, baby. Focus on me, ok?” Ali said calmly.

Ashlyn took a few deep breaths and let herself get a bit lost in Ali’s eyes. She felt a few more sharp pinches, grimacing and squeezing Ali’s hand harder, but Ali kept her focused on her. After about 15 minutes Ashlyn heard Dr. Silverman’s voice.

“Ok, that’s all 41. You’re officially staple free!” He announced. “How does it feel?”

Ashlyn and Ali looked down to see a pretty closed incision. Ashlyn sat up just a little bit and stretched her torso a bit. The area still stung from the staples being removed, but she already felt lighter for some reason. “It feels a lot better already.” She answered.

“Yeah, the effect is pretty immediate. You’ll find that the area is looser now and not so pulled tight, so you’ll have more comfortable movement.” Dr. Silverman explained, putting words to exactly what Ashlyn was feeling. “Just to make sure it heals well and stays nice and closed up, I’m going to apply just a little bit of medical glue to it and cover it with steri-strips. That will help prevent any infection from developing and aid healing. You’ll clean it every day just like you have been and just let the strips fall off on their own as time goes on.”

Dr. Silverman applied the glue and the strips and then Ali helped Ashlyn sit up on the table.

“Oh, so you’re all set. You’ll have another CT Scan in about a week so we can check on everything and I’ll have another follow-up appointment with you a week after that. Hopefully all will continue to go well and that will be the last time you see me before you go back under your normal doctor’s care.” Dr. Silverman laid out the plan. “Any other questions you have?”

Ashlyn jumped right in. “Yeah actually. When can I start having sex again?”

Ali’s eyes went wide and she turned red.

Dr. Silverman didn’t even flinch. “At this point it’s pretty much whatever you can tolerate. We just took the staples out, so I’d give it another day or two just to make sure you don’t stretch anything too fast. But, I’d say you’re good to go otherwise.”

Ashlyn groaned a bit internally. After hearing that she knew Ali would definitely make her wait those two days. “Perfect, thanks.”

“Anything else?” He asked.

Ali tried to be the more responsible one. “So, she’s been trying to push herself a little bit as she feels better. Assuming she’s feeling okay doing it, is it fine for her to try and sit up longer and walk around more, etc.?”

“Definitely. And it’s good for her to try and slowly get back into a normal routine. Just don’t overdo it and when you feel pain, slow it down or stop what you’re doing. It’s pretty much as simple as that for now.” Dr. Silverman answered. Any other questions?”

Ali and Ashlyn shook their heads no.

“Ok. So, let me just make sure you’re good to go here.” Dr. Silverman looked over his notes on Ashlyn’s chart. He looked up with a smile. “Well, hey, happy birthday, kiddo!”
“Thanks!” Ashlyn said grinning.

“You’re all set here. So, get out of here and enjoy the rest of the day!” He said, walking them out.

By the time they approached Northampton, it was already just before noon. Ashlyn had started to drive towards the parking garage near the apartment, but Ali spoke up.

“Nope. We’re gonna have some lunch first. I thought we could do the campus center.” Ali suggested.

Ashlyn smiled. She hadn’t been back on campus since she got hurt. “That sounds great.”

A few minutes later they were sitting in the bustling campus center with their usual slices of pizza. A few people had come over to see how Ashlyn was and make small talk. Word had definitely spread around campus about her injury. Once it was back to just the two of them, Ashlyn sighed contently.

“This was a great idea. I can’t tell you how much I missed this mediocre pizza.”

Ali laughed. “I figured. How are you feeling?”

“A little sore and tired, but ok.” Ashlyn replied.

“I was thinking we’d go to Wilson for the day and just relax in your room together.” Ali said. “Maybe have a little shark movie marathon; Jaws, Deep Blue Sea, Sharknado if we’re feeling up for something completely ridiculous.”

“Oh my god, you’re perfection, Krieger.” Ashlyn said excitedly. “Let’s do it.”

Ashlyn walked through the door of her dorm room with a huge smile on her face. Just being back on campus was invigorating. The comfort of being back in her room wasn’t something she could even fully describe at the moment.

Ali closed the door behind them and turned on the TV to get Netflix up and running while Ashlyn looked around the room. She took the blonde’s hand and walked her over to the bed, starting to unbutton her shirt slowly.

Ashlyn watched her carefully. “I’m so not complaining right now, but whatcha doing?”

“I meant it when I said we were going to relax this afternoon. You heard your doctor, so no funny business. Buuut, no one said we couldn’t relax naked.” Ali smirked. She finished taking Ashlyn clothes off and helped the blonde lay down. Ashlyn watched her carefully as she took her own clothes off and then got under the covers with her.

Ashlyn let out a soft moan when Ali’s hot skin pressed against hers. “You feel so good, Alex.”

“I meant it when I said we were going to relax this afternoon. You heard your doctor, so no funny business. Buuut, no one said we couldn’t relax naked.” Ali smirked. She finished taking Ashlyn clothes off and helped the blonde lay down. Ashlyn watched her carefully as she took her own clothes off and then got under the covers with her.

Ashlyn let out a soft moan when Ali’s hot skin pressed against hers. “You feel so good, Alex.”

“You too, baby. Easy though.” Ali said quietly, enjoying the warmth of Ashlyn’s body. “Just get yourself comfy, ok?”

Ashlyn nodded and rolled onto her right side. She laid her arm across Ali’s waist and scooted as close as possible to the brunette, resting her head on Ali’s chest. She felt Ali put one arm around her shoulders and lay the other one over the forearm she had across the brunette’s waist. “Ok, definitely comfy.” Ashlyn said contently.

“Good.” Ali smiled. She leaned down to take Ashlyn’s lips in her own in a romantic kiss. “What shark movie do you want first?”
“I honestly don’t even care right now.” Ashlyn replied, her eyes closed as she relished in the feel of Ali’s skin on hers.

Ali giggled. “Jaws it is then.” She started the movie, but it went mostly unwatched.

They spent the afternoon looking at each other, running their hands across each other’s bodies, whispering sweet things, stealing kisses, and even napping a bit. It felt so good that Ashlyn had even gotten a little happily emotional about it, Ali wiping a couple stray tears from her face.

When Ali saw that it was 3:30pm, she stroked Ashlyn’s cheek and tilted her head up to look at her. “Now that you’re all relaxed, Stud, we have somewhere to be. I need to get you dressed.”

“How’s ok.” Ashlyn answered, wondering where they were going. She stayed in bed while Ali threw on a pair of sweat pants and a hoodie. Then Ali got her up and helped her slip into her own pair of sweat pants and her Smith Rugby hoodie. She walked Ashlyn back out to the Jeep, and this time Ali drove them a short distance across campus to the athletic fields. Ashlyn was beaming by the time they pulled up. “We’re going to rugby practice?!?!?” She asked ecstatically.

“Damn right we are!” Ali joined in the excitement. She helped Ashlyn out of the Jeep and grabbed a folding chair and blanket from the back before leading the blonde over to the side of the pitch. The team had dropped everything and started cheering and clapping when Ashlyn arrived on the sideline. Ali got her settled into the chair with the blanket over her since it was pretty chilly out. They watched practice together, Ashlyn even chiming in with some directions and ideas for the team off and on. Every rugger had come over at one point or another to talk to them.

Ashlyn was smiling so much her face hurt. Being back out on the pitch with the girls was freeing even if all she could do was sit there. She loved this pitch, it made everything feel right, as did the woman beside her. She grabbed Ali’s hand and kissed it, trying to convey her appreciation.

When practice was over, Ashlyn stayed on the field until the last group of them left, just wanting to take it all in for a little longer. It was starting to get a little dark.

“Ready to head back to Wilson for dinner, cutie?” Ali asked.

“Yes! Smith dinner sounds oddly good right about now.” Ashlyn replied eagerly, ready to sit down with all her friends like normal.

Ali walked them back to the car and drove them back to Wilson. She helped Ashlyn in the door and then let the blonde walk a little bit ahead of her into the dining room.

“SURPRISE!!!!!!!” A huge group of girls shouted as Ashlyn walked in, streamers everywhere. Ali smiled behind her. All of Wilson House had pulled together a surprise birthday dinner for Ashlyn. Whitney and Ali had schemed over the last week to pull it off.

Ashlyn was definitely surprised. She stood there with a dumb grin on her face, looking back at Ali with a ‘did you know about this’ look, but knew right away from the smile she got that Ali was in on it. “Oh my god you guys! Thank you!” Ashlyn exclaimed looking around. The room was decorated with streamers and balloons all over. They had pulled one of the comfortable reclining chairs from the living room for Ashlyn to sit in and labeled it ‘Birthday Bitch’s Chair’. The kitchen staff had purposely made sure it was Ashlyn’s favorite taco night for dinner. They had even baked her a funny cake that looked like the game Operation, only the person looked like Ashlyn.

Ashlyn had an amazing night celebrating with her housemates, opening lots of presents and eating way too much cake. It wasn’t a typically wild Wilson party, just a fun time where she could socialize
with everyone. When it was all over, she was thoroughly exhausted and completely happy. Ali got her back up to her room where Whitney, Megan, Alex and Tobin spent a little time with them until Ashlyn yawned and they made their exit.

Ali repeated the same game plan from the afternoon and got both of their clothes off before getting Ashlyn into bed and holding her close.

“Did you have a good birthday, beautiful?” Ali asked.

“Honestly, the best. We didn’t even do anything major and yet it was so special. Thank you, Alex. Today was beyond perfect.” Ashlyn said genuinely.

“That was the whole point. To just enjoy the simple things together.” Ali said stroking the blonde’s cheek softly. “Happy birthday, Ash.”

“You’re perfect.” Ashlyn said running her hand over Ali’s stomach and kissing her passionately. She didn’t ever want to stop, but she pulled back as she started to feel some pain across her abs.

Ali could feel the blonde’s muscles tense a bit. “You ok, baby?”

“Yeah, just a little pain. I guess I’ve probably worn myself out a bit today.” Ashlyn admitted.

“Let’s get you to sleep birthday girl.” Ali smiled at her.

Ashlyn nodded in agreement. “One more request?”


“Let’s see what you can do with The Little Mermaid tonight.” Ashlyn said playfully.

“You got it, Stud.” Ali chuckled and set to work on a new story while she stroked Ashlyn’s back.
Ashlyn woke up on Tuesday morning determined to go to chemistry class. Ali helped her get ready and then joined her in the Wilson dining room for breakfast. She was happy Ashlyn was feeling well enough to go to class, but she couldn’t help the slight anxiety that had set in as she watched her girl head out the door by herself. It had been the first time since Ashlyn got hurt that the blonde was going to do something without Ali’s help.

Ali went back to the apartment and tried hard to focus on her own work. She worked on a marketing and promotion proposal for a new Siemens product soon to be released by the company’s Munich headquarters. She had been fidgety over the last couple of hours, dying to know how Ashlyn was doing in class. Was she pushing herself too hard? Was she in pain? Did she realize she could leave if she wasn’t comfortable? The questions kept swirling in her head as she tried to concentrate. Just when she thought she couldn’t take it anymore, she heard the apartment door open.

“How was class, baby?” Ali asked, dying to know how it had gone but trying to act casual.

“So good! I got through the whole thing and it wasn’t so bad. I had to get up once and walk around a bit because I had some pain, but it went away fast and I was ok.” Ashlyn stated proudly.

“I’m so glad to hear that.” Ali replied, genuinely glad that it had gone well. Ashlyn was trailing more kisses down her neck and she was tingling all over, her legs getting weak. “Mmmm, Ash.” Ali lightly moaned and forced herself to turn around, putting her finger on the blonde’s lips before she lost her resolve. “Easy, Harris. Thursday. Not a second sooner.”

“Ugh, come on.” Ashlyn whined. “Technically Wednesday is two days.”

“Exactly. And we’re waiting until that whole two days is up.” Ali said firmly.

“So strict, Nurse Hottie Krieger.” Ashlyn pouted.

“Besides, if you feel good today, imagine how good you’ll be Thursday.” Ali said persuasively.

“Good point.” Ashlyn conceded and waggled her eyebrows.

“You want some lunch?” Ali asked.
“Most definitely.” Ashlyn replied.

“Go settle on the couch and I’ll make us something.” Ali led Ashlyn out of the office. She pulled together two chicken salad sandwiches and grabbed two waters and a bag of chips before heading to the couch to join Ashlyn.

They ate lunch while Ali explained her marketing plan for the new Siemens product she was working on. Ashlyn was impressed by the level of detail and foresight that Ali had put into it. “You’re so smart, baby.” Ashlyn complimented her.

“I wouldn’t talk Ms. Marine Biologist who can talk to penguins.” Ali replied pointing to the penguin footprint artwork that hung above the couch.

“Speaking of. I’m feeling like I want to try my other marine ecology class today. It’s shorter than chemistry is anyway. It starts in 30 minutes, so I have to get out of here soon.” Ashlyn said.

Ali promised herself she would stop worrying so much. “Ok, just don’t push yourself too hard.”

“Promise.” Ashlyn replied. “And, any chance I could get you to take me to rugby practice tonight if I promise to just sit down and relax? I’ll lay back and chill for the whole rest of the night after that, I swear.”

“Of course I will.” Ali answered. She could tell Ashlyn was being really good about trying to get back into a normal routine without overdoing it.

“You’re the best, Krieger. I better get going, but I should be back by around 3pm.” Ashlyn gave her a lingering kiss and headed back out the door.

Once Ashlyn was gone, Ali let out deep breath. It was definitely time. She had known it was time last night when she was listening to Ashlyn snore lightly against her chest, when she had promised herself that she wasn’t going to put it off any longer. She walked across the room, picked up the phone, and she made an appointment.

Ashlyn was back by 3pm as promised. Her second class had gone as well as the first. She admitted she was a little bit tired and took a short power nap while Ali finished working before it was time for rugby at 4pm. The blonde had stayed true to her word and sat through practice, but that hadn’t kept her from giving her replacement Courtney a bunch of directions. Ali smiled to herself on the sideline watching Ashlyn try and contain herself when Courtney made obvious mistakes. Ashlyn had stayed patient though and just nicely gave the girl quality feedback to help her improve; Ali was impressed.

“You’re getting really good at this captain thing.” Ali complimented her as she rubbed her shoulders a bit.

“Thanks!” Ashlyn replied appreciatively, knowing Ali wouldn’t have said that unless she meant it. “I think the rookies miss you. Why don’t you go give them some attention?” Ashlyn suggested.

“You sure. I don’t want to leave you by yourself over here.” Ali double checked.

“I’m good. Go to it! Besides, I like to watch that fine ass of yours when you run.” Ashlyn winked at her.
Ali definitely felt good getting to play a bit as she scrimmaged with the rookies. She had been feeling a bit uneasy after she had made that call that afternoon. Getting her heart rate up and her adrenaline pumping was helping.

After practice they had dinner in Wilson with the girls and then decided to head back to the apartment for the night. Ashlyn was pretty tired, but she needed to make some progress on her chemistry homework if she was going to make up her missed time. Ali had sat on the couch with her back against the arm, she helped Ashlyn lay back between her legs and quietly watched the blonde balance chemistry equations for quite a while as she rubbed the top of her shoulders. Ashlyn couldn’t think of anything more boring to do than watch someone balance chemistry equations, but Ali seemed to be clingy tonight. She had also been a little distracted.

“You ok? You’ve been kinda quiet tonight.” Ashlyn asked while she worked on her homework.

“Yes. I’m good. Thinking about what else I can do for that marketing proposal and also kind of tired.” Ali lied. She had been anxious ever since she made that appointment this morning, but she wasn’t ready to tell Ashlyn about it yet.

By Wednesday night Ashlyn was worried. She had come back from geology class to find Ali staring off into space in her office. She hadn’t even heard Ashlyn come in. Ali had seemed a bit better at rugby practice, but then just picked at her dinner and barely ate. She continued to be both clingy and distant at the same time and Ashlyn couldn’t pinpoint what was wrong. She asked Ali a few times if she was ok, but the brunette just kept insisting that she was just stressed about the proposal. Ashlyn wasn’t buying it. She had seen Ali stress about work before and it hadn’t been like this. Ashlyn knew Ali was huge worrier when it came to Ashlyn’s health, especially lately. She wondered if maybe Ali was worried about Ashlyn wanting to be intimate again as Thursday was almost upon them. She held Ali closely Wednesday night and figured she’d tell Ali in the morning that they could wait longer or go slow if she wasn’t comfortable.

Ali woke up early Thursday and watched Ashlyn sleep, tracing the black inked patterns on the blonde’s arm with her finger. She admired the intricate designs and curved lines that blended one image perfectly into the next. Today was the day.

Ashlyn opened her eyes to find Ali watching her intently. “Good morning, Princess.”

Ali gave her a small smile. “Morning, baby.”

Ashlyn could still sense something was wrong. “Alex, you’ve been a little off the last couple of days and…”

Ali cut her off before she could finish, putting her finger over Ashlyn’s lips. She wanted to get out what she had to say before Ashlyn said anything else. “I’m sorry, I know I’ve been a little out of it. I’ve just been a little bit anxious about today. I have an appointment today at 3pm and I need you to come with me. I really need you to come and hold my hand.” Ali explained nervously.

“Alex, you’ve just spent the last two weeks doing nothing but holding my hand. Of course I’ll go with you and hold your hand.” Ashlyn was concerned by how mysterious Ali was being, but she’d do anything for her. “Can I ask what the appointment is?”
“I don’t want to say just yet. Can you just trust me and kind of let the day unfold? I promise it will all make sense eventually.” Ali said seriously.

“I trust you completely. I’m here, Alex.” Ashlyn leaned in and kissed her softly before pulling back and trying to read the brunette’s eyes. Unfortunately, they weren’t giving anything away.

Ashlyn had been trying to get back into the swing of things with the Vibes. She had scheduled a full morning of working with some of the girls to catch up on what she’d missed and then she had astronomy class right after that. She wouldn’t see Ali until right before it was time for the mystery appointment and it made her a bit nervous. Ali had helped her get ready as usual and then Ashlyn gave her one more long kiss before heading out for the day.

The suspense was killing Ashlyn all day. She made up a million scenarios in her head of what this appointment might be, especially because Ali seemed anxious about it and had kept it secret. That was very unlike her. Ashlyn wondered if maybe this was some kind of therapy thing or even a gynecology appointment. Nothing seemed to make sense and the day just dragged on. Normally she would have been excited to learn all about Saturn’s moons, but today she couldn’t wait to be out of class. As soon as class was over, she made her way to the apartment as quickly as possible, getting there at 2:40pm. Ali was already waiting for her.

Ali gave Ashlyn a long hug and a sweet kiss. She looked a bit calmer than earlier. “You ready?” She asked.

Ashlyn nodded and Ali took her hand and walked them out the door. Rather than get in the car, Ali walked them just a very short distance down the street and stood in front of Haven Tattoo Studio. “We’re here.” Ali said, pulling a surprised Ashlyn inside with her.


Ashlyn was really confused. “Um, hey, Lis. Yeah, I’m on the mend. What’s going on?” She looked between Ali and Lisa trying to figure it out.

Lisa helped her out. “What’s going on is that I’m inking your girl.”

Ashlyn turned to Ali. “You’re getting a new tattoo?” Ali nodded with a slight smile as she bit her lip nervously.

“Come on ladies, follow me.” Lisa led them into the private room in back, which made Ashlyn wonder right away where exactly this tattoo was going to be located.

She watched Lisa and Ali lean over the side desk together to go over the design. Ali gave her final approval and Lisa got the stencil ready. Ali gave Ashlyn her trademark smile before unbuttoning her shirt, getting completely topless, and laying back on the table.

“Oh then.” Ashlyn whispered to herself, taking the seat right beside the table, trying not to stare at Ali’s perfect breasts. She watched Lisa lay down two stencils. One right above Ali’s right breast and the other just below the left one. Once Lisa lifted the stencil paper Ashlyn got up to look at the design.

7:11:18pm was over Ali’s right breast. 7:12:18pm was under Ali’s left breast. It was in a simple
clean font, each line about 1 inch high and 4 inches wide. She heard the tattoo needle buzzing start and she looked down at Ali questioningly, but the brunette had already closed her eyes and grasped Ashlyn’s hand. Ashlyn just sat back down and watched Lisa make the design permanent by injecting black ink into Ali’s perfect skin.

Ashlyn watched Lisa work, racking her brain about the significance of the tattoo. It was a specific time, a span of one minute exactly. She thought back to important life events Ali had told her about and special moments in their relationship, but she had come up empty. She couldn’t remember Ali ever talking about a specific time like this. She couldn’t wait to find out what it meant and why Ali had been so mysterious about it all.

About an hour and a half later, Lisa was done and Ali sat up admiring the tattoo. “It’s perfect, Lisa. Thank you.”

Even though Ashlyn had no idea what it meant, she had to admit the tattoo was sharp and she loved the way it looked on Ali. She squeezed the brunette’s hand. “That looks great, baby. Nice work, Lis.”

“My pleasure.” Lisa said, covering the two areas with bandages.

Ali led Ashlyn out of the tattoo shop a few minutes later and quietly walked with her. Ashlyn couldn’t take the mystery anymore. “So, you gonna tell me about the tattoo?”

“Yes, really soon. Just want to get somewhere first.” Ali replied. She didn’t want Ashlyn to have to walk too much further, so she brought them to her car and drove them to the Smith campus. She took Ashlyn over to the statue fountain. She was drawn to this fountain and thought of it right away when she was trying to decide where she would explain everything to Ashlyn. The blonde had once dropped to her knees here and drawn a heart in the snow with their initials in it on Valentine’s Day. They hadn’t even been dating then, but the moment had remained a poignant one for Ali.

Ali sat down on the end of the fountain and helped Ashlyn down to sit with her. It was just starting to get dusky out and it was quiet on campus since people were mostly at dinner by now. Ali was thankful she’d timed it right and they’d have some private time. She collected her thoughts for a minute before speaking.

Ashlyn watched Ali closely and waited patiently, knowing Ali would talk when she was ready. The brunette looked up, her amber eyes looking directly into Ashlyn’s own hazel ones. She took Ashlyn’s hands in hers.

“I love you, Ashlyn.” She said sincerely.

“I love you too, Alex.” Ashlyn replied, feeling nervous now about what Ali was going to tell her.

Ali let out a soft breath and then started. “Ash, do you know what a defibrillator is?”

Ashlyn was a bit surprised by the seemingly random question. “Uh, I think so. That’s what they use to like shock people when they have a heart attack, right? Like that thing that hangs in the gym in case someone passes out and their heart stops.”

“Yeah, that’s it.” Ali replied. “Do you know what it does?”
Ashlyn was completely lost, but she just went with it. “I mean it kinda shocks the heart back to life, but that’s all I really know.”

“Yep, pretty much. Specifically though, the paddles get placed in a way that kinda boxes in the heart and then an electric current runs through it to make it beat and pump.” Ali explained.

“Ok.” Ashlyn listened.

“You know, it’s funny. I’m telling you this right now and I’m just realizing that it’s pretty much exactly what you do.” Ali said contemplatively.

“What do you mean?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali elaborated. “I mean, you pretty much surround my heart, Ash. You protect it. And your love sends a current through me that makes my heart beat. You make me feel alive. Metaphorical, I know… but it fits.”

Ashlyn smiled at her and squeezed her hands. “You’re sweet. I know exactly what you mean.”

Ali smiled back before getting serious again. “I’m getting off track. Do you know where the defibrillator paddles get placed?”

“Not really, just like what I’ve seen on TV, but it’s probably not all that accurate. Somewhere in the middle of the chest?” Ashlyn responded unsure.

“They have very specific placement.” Ali explained. “One goes right here.” Ali put one of Ashlyn’s hands above her right breast where her new ink was. “The other goes right here.” She put Ashlyn’s other hand under her left breast, right over the other tattoo spot.

Ashlyn could only nod. That explains the placement she thought to herself. She started to wonder if one of Ali’s grandparents or even Ken had had a heart attack at some point.

“Do you know what they don’t show on TV though?” Ali asked.

“I don’t know. What?” Ashlyn responded.

“The defibrillator leaves red burn marks from the electrical current.” Ali said quietly, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

Something had finally connected in Ashlyn’s head. She thought about the red marks on her chest after the surgery and how they were exactly where Ali was holding her hands now. “Alex?” She asked searching Ali’s face for answers.

“When you got hurt Ashlyn, I knew you were really hurt. But it wasn’t until the doctor came out to tell me that you were severely bleeding internally and you needed emergency surgery but that he couldn’t stabilize your vitals enough to do it, that I realized how serious it was. That there was actually a chance that you wouldn’t survive it.” Ali paused for a second.

Ashlyn watched tears roll down Ali’s face, all she could do was listen intently.

Ali continued. “I broke, Ash. I completely broke down in Whitney’s arms. I was terrified. And then Kyle called me because he had already heard from your brother and grandma. I was panicked; I asked him what I was going to do. He told me that I was going to hold it together for the next minute, and then start over and hold it together for the next minute after that. He said I was going to keep doing that minute by minute until you were out of surgery and then I was going to be strong
and be there for you. He pulled me together. They got you stabilized enough and took you into surgery shortly after that. I did exactly what he told me to. I stared at the clock in the waiting room, thinking about you and all the things we’d done together. I watched every single minute tick by for 4 hours 12 minutes and 17 seconds. That’s when they came to tell me you were out of surgery and that it went ok.”

Ali pulled one of Ashlyn’s hands up to her lips and kissed it before continuing. “You know what I found out when the doctor talked to me after your surgery? I found out that you weren’t with me for one of those minutes that I had watched so carefully tick by. You died on the operating table for exactly one minute, Ash. They had to shock your heart twice to get you back.” Ali finally said it out loud. She searched the blonde’s eyes which had gone wide. Ashlyn was quiet so Ali decided to go on.

“Nothing has ever shaken me so badly before. All I wanted to know was what time. What exact minute I was watching on that clock when you were not with me. 7:11:18pm to 7:12:18pm, that was the minute.” Ali finished quietly.

Ashlyn let her head fall into her hands for a minute, letting herself make sense of it all. She spoke up after a few minutes. “So it was real then? That stuff I told you about. I really did leave you?” She asked.

Ali nodded. “After you told me about that awful pain you felt before you started hearing things again after hearing nothing, I asked the doctor about whether people can feel the defibrillator shock under anesthesia. He said that because of its strength, the short electrical shock of the defibrillator often bypasses the nerve pain blocking mechanism that anesthesia provides. So, that is what you felt. He said that most people don’t remember it.”

“Geez, my god.” Ashlyn let out a deep breath. “I really did leave you.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you until now. I honestly struggled with the whole thing and it ate at me. I couldn’t believe I almost lost you and I was so terrified over it. Knowing how I reacted to it, I wanted you to focus on getting better and not have to think about it until you’d had a chance to recover a bit.” Ali paused for a second to put her hand on Ashlyn’s cheek. “What I’ve come to realize is that it doesn’t matter that you left me for that minute, Ash. What matters is that you came back and that you’re here now and with me.”

Ashlyn nodded and Ali continued.

“The thing is, I never want to forget what I almost lost. I never want to take a single minute with you for granted ever again. And once I found out about that minute without you, I vowed to get it back. This tattoo I got today was the start of me making good on that promise, the start of me getting that minute back. Getting this tattoo done with you right beside me was getting that minute back. You always kiss and touch my tattoos when we make love. And every time you make the journey between these two tattoos, I’m gonna get that minute back over and over again. I’m going to look down at this tattoo for the rest of my life and think of you, surrounding my heart protectively, the heart that belongs to you. I’ll think of what I almost lost and what I’m lucky to have, and remember never ever to waste a single minute with you.” Ali let it all out.

Ashlyn’s tears now flowed freely. Tattoos had such deep meaning to her, the pain sacrificed to get them and their permanence. “You tattooed me on your body, Alex.” She said quietly, still trying to process everything and feeling touched and honored, loved and lucky.

Ashlyn just leaned in and kissed Ali passionately, heatedly, needing to feel her as intimately as was possible in public right now. After a few minutes and with as much resolve as she could muster, she pulled back to look at Ali. “I promise I will never leave you again.” She was about kiss Ali again when the brunette stopped her face with her hands.

“You can’t promise me that, Ashlyn. And I can’t promise you that either. Life happens, things happen. We can’t change that. What we can promise is that we’ll make sure we enjoy every moment we have together, whether it’s good or bad.” Ali said seriously.

Ashlyn understood and nodded. “Ok, then I promise we’ll enjoy every moment we have together in life.”

“I promise too.” Ali replied. She gave Ashlyn a romantic kiss and then broke it to look at the blonde. She wiped the tears off Ashlyn’s face and kissed her nose. “Come on, Stud. After all that, I think I owe you dinner.”

They had dinner in a small Italian restaurant downtown, choosing an isolated table. They stayed mostly quiet, just looking at each other and holding hands over the table. Ashlyn stroked her thumb over Ali’s hand. Nothing really needed to be said right now.

When they got back to the apartment, Ashlyn took Ali’s hand and led her to the bedroom. She kissed Ali softly and started to unbutton her shirt.

“Ash?” Ali questioned.

“It’s Thursday, Alex. I want to start getting our minute back.” She whispered in Ali’s ear, slowly starting to trail kisses down Ali’s neck and making Ali shiver.

Ali held herself together for just a few more seconds before she let Ashlyn completely melt her

“Promise that you’ll tell me if something hurts so we can slow down or stop.”

“Promise.” Ashlyn mumbled against her neck, continuing to press her lips and tongue against the sensitive skin. She stopped to lick and nibble at the brunette’s pulse point, feeling her heart beat against her tongue. The taste of Ali’s skin intoxicating her. She pushed Ali’s shirt off her shoulders and onto the floor, running her hands up and down her back. She stopped when her hands found the clasp of Ali’s bra, undoing it and letting it fall to the floor next to the shirt. She stepped back a bit to look at Ali, eyes raking over her perfectly taut stomach, her perfect breasts with perfect pink nipples, her perfect toned arms, and up to her perfect beautiful face. “You’re so beautiful, Alex.”

Ali put her hands on Ashlyn’s neck and pulled the blonde to her for a kiss, slowly pressing her tongue into her mouth and exploring every inch of the warm space. Ali gently dropped her hands to the hem of Ashlyn’s shirt, working them around the back and up inside of it to feel the blonde’s hot skin against her palms. She broke the kiss and pulled the shirt carefully over Ashlyn’s head and then repeated the motion with Ashlyn’s sports bra. She ran her hand across Ashlyn’s neck lightly, stopping to peck her lips before kneeling down and taking off the blonde’s pants and boxers. She stepped back and took the rest of her own clothes off before taking Ashlyn’s hand and walking her to the bed. Ali helped Ashlyn lay down and then laid down beside her. She traced over the blonde’s body lightly with just her fingertips, her eyes taking in every defined muscle of her gorgeous body. Ashlyn had her eyes closed, letting out soft breaths as Ali touched her. Ali leaned down close to her lips and whispered “You’re a work of art Ashlyn Harris.” She kissed the blonde deeply.

Ashlyn moaned into Ali’s mouth, her heart pounding at Ali’s light touches. She rolled onto her right side and put her hand on Ali’s stomach, gently pushing the brunette onto her back. She pulled back from the kiss and put her weight on her right arm so she could hover over Ali a bit. She planted
kisses on Ali’s neck, trailing down her collar bone and across the top of her chest before stopping at the bandage over the new tattoo. She peeled it back slowly and admired the black writing, 7:11:18pm. She kissed the area just beside it and replaced the bandage. She looked up to see Ali’s eyes closed, a smile on her lips. Ashlyn kissed down the valley of Ali’s breast and worked her way over to the right one, taking Ali’s pink nipple in her mouth and flicking her tongue over it.

Ali felt electricity flow through her body. “Mmmmm, Ashlyn.” She moaned in a low hungry voice, her hand going to the back of the blonde’s head.

Ashlyn took her time, rolling her tongue over Ali’s nipple and sucking it gently until it was rock hard and a light shade of red. She kissed her way over to the left one and gave it the same attention, watching Ali’s chest heave as the brunette’s breathing got faster. She let go of Ali’s left nipple with a wet popping sound, kissing down her left breast and stopping at the other tattoo bandage. She lifted this one too, admiring the black ink, 7:12:18pm. She kissed the skin just beside it, right along the edge of Ali’s script side tattoo, before replacing the bandage. It was the end of a trail she would spend the rest of her life kissing down to reclaim a minute that could never really be reclaimed, but that they would reclaim in their own way together anyway as many times as possible. “I love you.” She heard Ali whisper from above her. “I love you too, Alex.” She whispered back before kissing over the familiar black script on the brunette’s ribs.

Ali could feel Ashlyn’s arm starting to shake under her weight, the blonde supporting herself on it as she hovered over Ali as best she could. Ali very gently rolled Ashlyn onto her back. “Let me take care of you.” She whispered before kissing the blonde hard, Ashlyn letting out an immediate moan in response. The brunette left a trail of wet hot kisses down Ashlyn’s neck and shoulders, leaning over her but careful not to put any of her weight on the blonde. She worked down Ashlyn’s chest and stopped to lightly suck the area above the blonde’s right breast where a telling angry red mark had once been. She followed the same path with her mouth that Ashlyn had just taken on her own body; licking and gently nipping at the right nipple and then the left before stopping with a kiss just under Ashlyn’s left breast.

“You feel so good, Alex, so good.” Ashlyn said breathlessly, her body feeling hot and tingly. Ali’s touch feeling like it was healing every inch of her body.

Ali very lightly traced the patterns of Ashlyn’s side tattoo with her tongue, the colorful ink that currently hid the damage underneath it like an art piece placed over a hole in the wall. She kissed Ashlyn’s pelvis, making the blonde whimper, and then made her way up the left side of her abs beside the incision that had saved her life. When she got to the top, she kissed her way down the right side of the blonde’s abs just like she had the left.

Ashlyn was squirming and breathing heavily. “Please, Alex, please. I need you.” She was begging.

Ali placed one of her arms across Ashlyn’s hips very carefully, knowing she couldn’t make the blonde wait any longer. “Relax, baby.” She said as she settled between Ashlyn’s legs. Ali moved slowly so Ashlyn wouldn’t jerk her hips. She pressed her tongue against the blonde’s soaking folds and licked them softly, a moan leaving her lips as she tasted the sweetness she’d missed so desperately over the last couple of weeks.

“Oooh, Alex. Oh god, I missed you.” Ashlyn said in a raspy voice, her breathing very heavy and ragged already. Her core was pulsating and throbbing under Ali’s touch. Ashlyn gripped Ali’s arm that was over her hips with one hand, the other grabbing a fistful of sheets beside her as Ali licked patterns over her clit and sucked it into her mouth. Heat spread through her body and she wasn’t sure how much longer she could hold on. “More, please, more.” Ashlyn pleaded.

Ali could feel Ashlyn’s body trembling as she dipped her tongue into Ashlyn’s wet heat, the
blonde’s fluids covering her lips and face.

“Yes, Alex. Yes, please, don’t stop. Don’t ever ever stop.” Ashlyn moaned uncontrollably, the pleasure rippling through her. “Your tongue, your amazing tongue, oh god. Deeper, baby.” She panted.

Ali pushed her tongue into Ashlyn as deep as it would go, she moved it in and out quickly. She moaned and hummed into Ashlyn’s center, feasting on the blonde’s wetness. Ashlyn began to clench around her tongue.

“Alex, baby. I’m so close, Alex. Right there.” Ashlyn alternated between loud whimpers and moans, her body trembling harder. She felt Ali’s thumb circle her clit while her tongue moved deep inside her, the orgasm finally taking hold of her. She felt a deep ache as her abs involuntarily clenched, but the pleasure more than masked the discomfort as her whole body surged with a tingly energy that felt incredible.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s body tighten and convulse, a burst of wetness spilling out on her tongue. She lapped it up eagerly while holding Ashlyn’s hips down in hopes that the blonde wouldn’t be hurting herself. She continued to lick gently until Ashlyn stopped shaking and her muscles relaxed. Ali wiped her face a bit on the back of her hand and crawled up to lay beside the blonde. Ashlyn immediately pulled her in for romantic kiss.


Ali smiled widely at Ashlyn, admiring how beautiful she looked with her hair strewn wildly on the pillow and her body covered in a light sheen of sweat. She would never get enough of this woman. Ali could tell Ashlyn’s body was spent by the way she laid there a bit lax. It had been more activity than the blonde had experienced in weeks. She ran her hand up and down Ashlyn’s tattooed arm, ready to cuddle into her and relax.

“Wait, Alex.” Ashlyn got her attention. “I want you. I want to taste you. I need you.” She said almost desperately.

Ashlyn’s words had stirred Ali’s core again. She wanted Ashlyn just as badly. “Ok.” She whispered into Ashlyn’s lips and she gave her a soft kiss before moving herself up to straddle the blonde’s face, her core hovering over Ashlyn’s lips.

Ashlyn didn’t hesitate, she ran her tongue through Ali’s soaking folds listening to the brunette let out a gasp. She sucked Ali’s clit and lips into her mouth, making out with her hot center before tracing random shapes over Ali’s clit with her tongue.

“Oh my god. Baby. Ash. Yes, baby. Love me.” Ali gripped the headboard of the bed with both hands as Ashlyn’s arms curled around her thighs and brought her down closer against her mouth. The first time they had done this it had been hot and wild. This time it was slow and passionate. Ali felt like Ashlyn was tattooing her core lovingly with her tongue in intricate and intimate patterns. “Yes, Ashlyn. Love me. Love me more, love me deeper. Love me.” Ali called out through desperate breaths as she felt Ashlyn enter her with her tongue, a wave of intense pleasure radiating through her body. It only took a few more thrusts of Ashlyn’s tongue inside her before Ali was spilling out all over her face, her body shaking hard while she screamed the blonde’s name and came apart. “Ashlyn. Ash. I love you. I love you. I. love. you.” She rested her head against the wall behind the bed, trying to collect herself and regain some control over her muscles.

Ali crawled down and laid beside Ashlyn, giving her a slow, deep kiss. She wiped both of their faces
with the corner of the sheet. They both giggled a bit and Ali pulled the blonde into her chest, assuming the position that they had become used to sleeping in recently. Ali stroked Ashlyn’s back while Ashlyn ran her hand along Ali’s stomach.

“I love you, Ashlyn Harris. Always.” Ali whispered.

“I love you too, Alexandra Krieger. Forever.” Ashlyn said quietly back.

They were both asleep just seconds later, emotionally and physically spent.

They had both woken up content and clingy with each other. Ali had made them breakfast and they ate it much like they had eaten dinner last night, hands held over the table, not wanting to spend a second not touching. Unfortunately, Ashlyn had scheduled two make-up labs for chemistry and a late day session with the Vibes. Ali was going to be just as busy trying to get her marketing proposal done by 5pm. They stood in the living room trying to part ways for the day.

Ashlyn hugged Ali tightly for a couple minutes before finally planting a loving kiss on the brunette’s lips. “Have a good day, Princess. You’re gonna nail that proposal. I’ll see you tonight.”

“You too, Stud. I’ll miss you. Good luck with your chemistry labs and knock em’ dead with the Vibes.” Ali replied. She quickly pecked Ashlyn’s lips one more time before letting the blonde walk out the door.

Though she had been busy, Ashlyn spent the day processing everything that Ali told her last night. She felt oddly calm about the fact that she had actually died. She figured maybe, in part, it was because in the end she had lived, and she was still here. She was still here and she knew exactly what she was living for. She knew who made her heart beat and who she loved. She knew who and what she was here for.

Ali heard the door to the apartment open around 7pm. She walked out of the kitchen to greet a smiling Ashlyn. The blonde held out a bouquet of a dozen red roses for her.

“I thought a lot about what you said last night. You were right, we can’t ever promise each other that we won’t ever leave. I can promise you this though… I’m going to love you with all my heart until the last rose dies.” She handed the bouquet to Ali and leaned in to kiss her softly. “I’m going to grab a quick shower, come join me when you’re done putting those in water.” Ashlyn said, walking into the bedroom.

Ali grabbed a vase from the cabinet and laid the roses out on the counter to trim them. She was a bit confused about what Ashlyn had said, especially because these roses would last a week at most. She thought perhaps that Ashlyn was being metaphorical, that she had said that because there would always be roses alive somewhere on earth and that these in front of her were just symbolic. She trimmed each rose as she pondered it, her lips curling into a huge smile as she got to the last one.

“Ashlyn Harris.” She whispered to herself with her heart fluttering in her chest. The last rose in the bouquet was fake. It would never die.
Side note, I just want to thank all of you for all of the wonderful comments you leave me. I read every one of them and love to hear what you have to say. So, thank you so much for reading and keep them coming ;)

Chapter End Notes
Return of Nurse Hottie

Chapter Notes

It's Halloween and Celebration and Ali has definitely gotten used to being a nurse, so...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ali heard dresser drawers being opened and closed followed by the sound of hangers sliding back and forth in the closet.

“Ash, what are you up to? It’s way too early on a Saturday.” Ali asked not even opening her eyes. She was stomach down on the bed with the sheets pooled around her waist. The cool air hitting her bare back. She felt the bed dip a bit beside her and warm kisses getting trailed up her back.

“Mmmm, that feels nice… but it still doesn’t answer the question, Harris.” Ali purred groggily.

“I was looking for my costume, baby.” Ashlyn mumbled against Ali’s skin.

“Why do you need a costume?” Ali questioned, too curious to let it go even though Ashlyn was approaching the back of her neck and making her tingle all over.

“It’s Halloween, Alex.” Ashlyn answered simply.

“Well duh. The question is, what will you be doing on Halloween that requires a costume? Please tell me you don’t trick or treat.” Ali prodded.

“Ok. I don’t trick or treat.” Ashlyn chuckled.

Ali could feel the blonde’s smile against the top her right shoulder. “Ugh, you do, don’t you? I’m in for a long day and night, aren’t I?” Ali let the questions flow.

Ashlyn laughed. “Maybe.” She sucked on Ali’s neck, her bare chest pressing into Ali’s back.

“Unnh, fuck it. I don’t even care right now, just keep doing that.” Ali replied, her mind foggy. Ashlyn was nibbling just below her ear, the blonde’s hand running up and down her side.

Ashlyn stayed in place a bit longer before reluctantly pulling her lips off of Ali. “Yikes. As much as I’d love to be let off the hook so easily right now, it’s Saturday and it’s past 9am, baby. And you know what Saturday is…”

Ali let out a deep groan. “Saturday’s a Rugby Day!” She yelled.

“That’s my girl!” Ashlyn said proudly. “We have that late morning match with MoHo today, remember?”

“Right. I actually forgot about Mount Holyoke since the match got added to the schedule late.” Ali replied.

“Anyway, Megan coordinated with their captain. We’re doing a costume post-party in Wilder House afterwards.” Ashlyn explained.
“That explains your rummaging.” Ali said. “Wait, does that mean I need a costume?”

“Yep. Don’t worry though, I looked in your closet and have it all figured out.” Ashlyn said enthusiastically.

“Oh god. I don’t even want to know. I’m gonna end up in a bikini or something, aren’t I?” Ali asked nervously.

“Hmm, not a bad idea. I had something else in mind, but…” Ashlyn started but got smacked in the face by Ali’s pillow. “You don’t get to sexually tease me and then verbally tease me too.”

Ashlyn laughed. “Ok, seriously. Gotta find my costume!” She went back to rummaging while Ali got up to brush her teeth.

Ali came back to find Ashlyn’s bare ass sticking out of the closet while she continued to rummage. Ali shook her head and smiled. As ridiculous as Ashlyn could be sometimes, Ali was really glad the blonde was just about back to her normal self. Today marked 4 weeks since her injury and she had been doing really well. Her CT scan and follow-up appointment showed that her liver and the severed connections to her spleen were healed and closed. The steri-strips had completely fallen off her incision and while it was still a deep purplish red, it was completely sealed up and no longer so tender. Her ribs had not fully healed quite yet, so she still had soreness and aching. Still, she had made great strides.

“Ah! Found it!’ Ashlyn yelled from the closet, breaking Ali’s thoughts.

“Ok. Let’s see it.” Ali said.

Ashlyn held out a Ninja Turtle adult pajama onesie in one hand and an orange mask in the other, a huge smile on her face.

“A Ninja Turtle?” Ali laughed.

“What? They like pizza, surf, and kick ass. Is there a more appropriate costume for me?” Ashlyn joked.

“Good point.” Ali conceded. “What’s amazing is that you have better abs than the turtle ones on that costume. You should have just painted your skin green!” Ali noted, her eyes fixating on the blonde’s perfect abs.

Ashlyn waggled her eye brows. “Yeah and now that I have this nice scar down the center, I don’t even have to work on getting that mid-definition line anymore. Permanent six pack baby!” Ashlyn joked about the perk of her incision. Ali just shook her head.

“Alright, Michelangelo, where is this brilliant costume of mine?” Ali asked curiously.

Ashlyn went back into the closet, pulling out some of Ali’s clothes and then going into the living room. She returned and handed everything to Ali.

Ali took stock of what Ashlyn handed her: A pair of skinny jeans, her white Hunter rain boots, a slim fitting yellow button up shirt, a white belt, and a microphone from Ashlyn’s X-Box Rock Band game. “Um, Ash, what on earth is this supposed to be?” Ali asked puzzled.

“Just put it on. You’ll see.” Ashlyn instructed.

Ali did as she was told while Ashlyn got ready. Ashlyn emerged a few minutes later looking like the
perfect Ninja Turtle. “You look cute.” Ali smiled at her. “So, what is this?” She pointed down at her own outfit.

“Hang on, just a couple of adjustments.” Ashlyn pulled the belt off of Ali’s jeans and put it high on her waist, over her yellow button up shirt instead. She unbuttoned the top three buttons of the shirt, making sure Ali’s cleavage was in perfect view. “There. Much better.”

“Ok. And I’m supposed to be…” Ali was getting impatient as she stood there holding the microphone in her hand.

“You baby, are my April O’Neal.” Ashlyn giggled. “Can’t have Ninja Turtles without their hot reporter!”

Ali laughed hard. “Right. Oh my god. Why did I agree to this again?”

“Hmmm, cause you love me?” Ashlyn said innocently.

“Damn right I do.” Ali pulled her in for a long kiss. “Come on Stud, we gotta go fight crime!”

Ashlyn chuckled. “Cowabunga Dude!”

They arrived at the Smith pitch 20 minutes later. Of course, they were the only ones dressed up because everyone else still had a rugby match to play before the party happened. Ali felt a bit foolish, but no one even flinched at them. The two of them worked the sideline together, coaching the team and helping Smith pull out a 21 to 14 win. Although it was frustrating for Ashlyn not to play and Ali had to keep her from running up and down the sideline, she was doing a great job directing the team. Courtney had one of her best games yet and Alex was getting used to communicating with Ashlyn from the sideline regarding plays instead of on the pitch.

When they arrived at the after party, Ali got a better understanding of the Ninja Turtle costume. Tobin was dressed as Rafael, Alex was Donatello, and Whitney was Leonardo. Megan was dressed in knight armor with fake spikes on the shoulders and claimed she was Shredder, the Ninja Turtles’ villain, but everyone just kept assuming she was someone from Game of Thrones much to her dismay. Once the shots started getting poured and passed around the room, the party got louder and wilder. Lots of costumes had gotten much skimpier over the last couple of hours and there were far too many people dancing to non-existent music and making out. Because of her medication and recovery, Ashlyn couldn’t drink and Ali didn’t either in order to support her. After participating in a couple of rugby songs and trying to make conversation with tipsy ruggers, the two of them just cuddled up in a corner and laughed together at people’s costumes. After three hours, Ashlyn was feeling a little tired and just wanted a little quiet time with Ali.

“Hey, Princess. How about we sneak out of here and walk downtown for some dinner?” Ashlyn whispered into Ali’s ear.

“That sounds so perfect.” Ali replied with a smile.

They snuck out of the party only saying goodbye to Whitney.

As they walked through campus, it dawned on Ali that they were still in costume. “Are we stopping
to change first?"

“Nope. We still need our costumes.” Ashlyn replied casually.

“For what?” Ali inquired.

“You’ll see.” Ashlyn answered mysteriously. “Besides, this is Northampton and people dress up strangely on any given day.”

“Ok.” Ali decided to just go with it for now. She noticed Ashlyn was once again taking them the long way around the outskirts of the campus rather than through it. “Ash, why do we always go the long way? Cutting through campus and out the main gate is faster. Please tell me you realize this.”

“We go the long way because someday I’d like to actually graduate.” Ashlyn answered matter-of-factly.

“I’m lost. What are you talking about?” Ali was confused.

“Smith has many famous alumnae. Nancy Reagan, Julia Child, Gloria Steinem, and Barbara Bush to name a few.” Ashlyn told her.

“Impressive, but what does that have to do with anything?” Ali was still confused.

“Nancy Reagan, Julia Child, and Gloria Steinem all graduated. Barbara Bush didn’t. Do you know what Barbara Bush did that the others didn’t?” Ashlyn asked.

“No, what?” Ali responded.

“She walked through the Grecourt Gates before graduation day.” Ashlyn said with a smile. “And that, Alex, is why none of us ever do it until we graduate.”

“You can’t be that superstitious.” Ali said incredulously.

“Oh, we are. Try to get anyone on this campus to walk through these gates, it’d be like you were murdering them.” Ashlyn replied. “You should see what it’s like right after graduation. Every single Smithie is out here trying to get a picture of themselves walking out the gates.”

“That is so ridiculous.” Ali shook her head.

“Maybe. But I’m not gonna chance it. So, we go the long way!” Ashlyn continued on their current path.

They approached downtown and Ali felt much less ridiculous as they passed by several people dressed as zombies, vampires, a witch, a clown, and someone she swore was supposed to be Michael Jackson. Ashlyn quickly gave her the ‘I told you so’ eyes. They enjoyed a nice casual dinner at a local pub and chatted for a while before Ashlyn realized it was dark out already. “Come on, Princess. Time to get this show on the road.” Ashlyn stated.

“Are you going to tell me what we’re doing now?” Ali asked.

“We’re trick or treating!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali laughed at the joke until she realized Ashlyn was serious. “Wait? You’re serious?”

Ashlyn laughed back. “Kinda. Just one house. We trick or treat at the college president’s house. She gives out full sized candy bars and everything. Not something to be missed!”
“Ok, that I can handle! I thought for a second you were really going to walk me up and down the streets of Northampton.” Ali said relieved.

Ashlyn laughed. “I know. That’s why I left it so mysterious all day. You’re so easy to fluster, Krieger.”

Ali pushed Ashlyn lightly against the brick wall outside the pub they had just left and kissed her hard, pressing her tongue into her mouth and stroking the back of her neck with her hands. She pressed her thigh against Ashlyn’s core until she heard the blonde moan softly and then she pulled back. “Now who’s easily flustered, Harris?” Ali challenged with a smug smile, looking at Ashlyn’s still hooded eyes. “Let’s go trick or treat, baby.”

“Fuck. I pick treat. We could just go home.” Ashlyn suggested with a smirk.

“Hell no. You said full-sized candy bars, we’re going.” Ali replied.

They got back on campus and followed the crowd of costumed Smithies to the president’s house. There was quite a line at the door. Ali realized that the president was not just handing out candy, but also chatting with each person individually. As they got closer, she could hear the president ask the student’s names and what their costume was, what house they lived in and their major. Ali was impressed that the woman was making such an effort. She took a minute to marvel at the gorgeous white mansion of a house that overlooked the pond on campus. She cuddled into Ashlyn a bit as the cool breeze picked up. Soon enough they were standing in front of the president herself.

“Ashlyn!” The president said happily, moving to quickly hug the blonde. “How are you feeling? You look good.”

Ali watched them a bit shocked that the president knew Ashlyn by name and greeted her like a friend.

“K-Mack! I’m doing much better. Almost back to normal. And thank you for that sweet basket you sent. I’ve been bad and haven’t gotten around to thank you notes yet.” Ashlyn replied kindly.

“You’re welcome. I feel bad I haven’t checked in personally. I’ve been so busy. I checked in with your advisor and he said you were back on track and doing great. I was happy to hear that.” Her eyes drifted towards Ali.

“Oh. Kathleen, this is my girlfriend, Ali. Ali, this is Kathleen McCartney, the Smith president.” Ashlyn introduced them. “Ali’s been nursing me back to health.” Ashlyn smiled proudly.

“Nice to meet you.” Ali replied, shaking Kathleen’s hand.

“Nice to meet you too, Ali. Forgive me, are you a Smithie? There are so many of you, I’m trying to get to know everyone!” Kathleen said warmly.

“Oh, no. Actually I just graduated from Dartmouth this past spring.” Ali answered.

Ashlyn piped up. “She’s a marketing analyst for Siemens. She played rugby for Dartmouth and that’s how we met.”

“Impressive!” Kathleen replied smiling at Ali approvingly. “I’d love to get to you know you better, but tonight’s a busy one. Maybe we can have you both for dinner one night really soon?”

“Sure! We’d love to.” Ashlyn answered cheerily. Ali nodded with a smile.
“Perfect. I’ll get it set up!” Kathleen said handing them each two candy bars. “Bill is inside watching TV if you want to say hi.” She said pointing to the door behind her.

“Yeah, we’ll go say hi.” Ashlyn confirmed and led Ali through the door. She led Ali into this gorgeous entry way with a New England colonial décor. The house looked like a museum inside. Ali looked around with wide eyes as Ashlyn led them into a living room that looked like a library with a giant TV in it. A gray-haired man with a dark red sweater and gray pants was sitting on the couch watching the screen.

“Hey, Bill!” Ashlyn called out, getting his attention.

“Oh hey, Ashlyn! How are you doing? Kath told me about that nasty hit you took.” Bill replied.

“Yeah, it was rough, but I’m much better.” Ashlyn replied. “Figured we’d say a quick hello before heading home to eat these.” Ashlyn chuckled holding up the candy bars in her hand. “This is Ali, my girlfriend. Ali this is Bill, Kathleen’s husband.”

Bill laughed. “Yep, that’s me. The man behind the woman! Hi, Ali. Good to meet you.”

Ali waved. “Nice to meet you, Bill.”

“We’ll let you get back to your show. Just wanted to drop in and say hi. Promise we’ll come back another night when you guys are so inundated.” Ashlyn said.

“Perfect! We’d love to have you over. Shakespeare and Twain miss you, but I’ve locked them upstairs tonight because of all the excitement.” Bill replied.

“Aw, next time.” Ashlyn responded with a small pout. “See you later. Happy Halloween!” Ashlyn gave him a quick wave and Ali followed suit.

“Happy Halloween! Good to meet you, Ali. Take care of that one, she’s reckless!” Bill called out to them as they left.

“Will do!” Ali waved one more time and followed Ashlyn back out the door. They got a bit down the path from the house before Ali stopped Ashlyn. “What was that?! You didn’t tell you were on a first name basis with the college president!” Ali exclaimed. She had read a little about this woman when she’d seen her in the local news and was pretty impressed.

“Oh, yeah. I helped the kitchen staff prep and set-up a couple events at her house my first year and I got to know her and Bill pretty well. Apparently, they liked the way I set stuff up, and now they will ask for me if I’m working that day. Anyway, she’s pretty awesome and I call her K-Mack.” Ashlyn explained. “Shakespeare and Twain are their two black cats, very cute. They have four kids too, but they’re older and I’ve never met them. Anyway, she’s awesome and you’ll love her.”

Ali shook her head incredulously. “You are something else, Harris. Such a charmer. No one can resist you.”

Ashlyn blushed a little. “As long as you can’t resist me, that’s all that counts.”

Ali gave her a smirk and played with the zipper on Ashlyn’s costume. “I’m thinking you’re pretty irresistible. And I’m thinking we should go back to your room and my marine biologist can show me how you get a turtle out of its shell.” Ali kissed Ashlyn lightly on the neck.

Late Tuesday, morning Ali was in the midst of making some adjustments to an advertising campaign for one of her clients when someone knocked on the apartment door. She opened it to find Whitney there holding a duffel bag. “Hey, Ali.” She stepped in and gave the brunette a quick hug.

“Hey, Whit! What’s up?” Ali asked, curious as to why Whitney had come over so randomly.

“I have to make this quick cause I know Ash will be out of class and over here in like an hour. So, Celebration is Thursday night...” Whitney started.

“Yes! I can’t wait!” Ali exclaimed. After her first experience at Celebration last year, she couldn’t wait to do it again. And this time, she and Ashlyn wouldn’t be dancing around each other like they had been last time.

“Perfect. So, you know how we’ve been working our whole performance around, Ash?” Whitney asked.

Ali nodded. Since there was no way Ashlyn’s body was up for any dance routine, Wilson decided to find a creative way to still make her a main part of the performance without making her have to move too much. Ali hadn’t seen the performance at all because Ashlyn had kept her away from the rehearsals and wanted her to experience it firsthand. The very basics of it were that Ashlyn would be a patient while the rest of Wilson danced around her in medical themed attire. Most of campus knew about her injury, so the house knew it would be a hit if they did it right.

“Well, Ash likes to pull out the surprises most of the time. Buuut, Wilson decided we’d like to surprise the hell out of her for once. How do you feel about prancing around in a really skimpy outfit in the freezing cold in front of a crowd of screaming Smithies?” Whitney asked with a devious smile.

“Can’t say that’s my usual game plan, but, count me in!” Ali exclaimed. “What’s the plan?”

Whitney handed her the bag, watching Ali’s eyes go wide at the contents, and told her how it would all go down. Ali was nervous, but agreed. She couldn’t wait to see Ashlyn’s face.

On Thursday, Ali got ready at the apartment before heading to meet Ashlyn and the other girls at Wilson House for dinner. She had made sure to put on really baggy sweat pants and a hoodie so Ashlyn wouldn’t suspect anything. It was supposed to be a cold night anyway, so she knew she could get away with it. She tossed a hat, gloves, and a pair of black heels into her purse before heading out. Just like last year, dinner was spent talking excitedly about Celebration before everyone went upstairs to get ready.

Ali sat in Ashlyn’s room, watching blonde put on a pair of men’s pajama bottoms and a matching button up top. “Looking good Stud, all cozy and ready for bed.” Ali teased a bit.

“You’re looking cozy yourself, Princess. I just wanna get in bed and snuggle with you. It’s freaking cold outside.” Ashlyn replied. She sat beside Ali on the bed and pulled the brunette into a slow kiss. They were interrupted by Whitney coming in a few seconds later.

“Knock, knock. Save it for later, you two!” Whitney yelled, walking into the room. She was wearing some skimpy white shorts and a tight short sleeve button up shirt that was mostly open with the bottom ends tied up in a knot so that her stomach was exposed, her white bra and cleavage
prominently featured. On her head was a white nurse hat with a red cross on it.

“Nice outfit.” Ali winked at Whitney. “I can’t wait to see this performance!”

“Sexy Nurse Whit! One of my many nurses for the evening!” Ashlyn joked.

“Speaking of, we better get downstairs.” Whitney reminded them.

The Wilson House girls gathered in the living room, many in sweats that Ali assumed were covering outfits similar to Whitney’s. The rest of them were dressed in blue hospital scrubs and surgical masks. Tobin and Megan were in scrubs while Alex was in sweats, suggesting she was in a sexy nurse outfit. Ali laughed to herself about this year’s version of butches and femmes.

Once again, Ashlyn went outside and set Ali up in the front row by the steps so she had a good view. She placed her backpack with her change of clothes next to Ali. “Enjoy the show, Princess. I’ll see you in a little bit.” She placed a kiss on Ali’s lips and went on her way.

Ali watched the huge crowd gather and opening ceremony began with the usual candle vigil. She relished in the quiet of the moment, thinking about how different things had been last year. How much she had changed, how much her life had changed, in ways she always wanted but never expected. She had watched Celebration last year and sat back in awe of and, if she was being honest, in love with Ashlyn Harris. What a difference a year had made. Ashlyn Harris was all hers and she couldn’t be happier. Last year when Ashlyn had snuggled up to her in the cold, there had been a part of her that wanted to kiss the blonde. She hadn’t been ready back then and she never would have had the guts to do it anyway. This year though, she was going to kiss the blonde every damn time she felt like it and then some.

Ali snapped out of her thoughts to the MC introducing Wilson House to open the Celebration stage. She grabbed the heels from her purse and put them beside her to get ready. The Wilson girls in scrubs came out first to cheers from the crowd. They were followed by the girls in sexy nurse outfits, making the crowd get even louder. The sexy nurses hung all over the scrub-clad girls as Whitney read the house statement, powerful as usual.

Robin Thicke’s ‘Blurred Lines’ started and the girls in scrubs started a short dance routine on their own while the sexy nurses retreated behind them. Ali watched wondering when Ashlyn was going to make her appearance, but she didn’t have to wait long. The nurses rolled out a bed onto the center of the stage with Ashlyn sitting in it propped up with pillows, covers up to her chest, a thermometer in her mouth. The crowd yelled wildly for her, screaming Ashlyn’s name and all kind of things about how hot she was. Ali just smiled and joined in the cheering for her girl.

The nurses alternated between dancing sexily with the scrub-clad girls and pretending to tend to Ashlyn. As the song began to near its end, the nurses stripped the shirts off the scrub-clad girls, leaving them in just black sports bras on top. The crowd screamed loudly and then got ear popping loud when two nurses pulled the covers off of Ashlyn and stripped her down to her boxers and sports bra with Ashlyn feigning surprise. Ali let herself take in her girl’s toned body before taking off her sweats and putting on her heels. Her heart was beating wildly and she was nervous. She wondered how on earth these girls got up on this stage and did this every year. Then it was time.

The music changed to Tweet & Missy Elliot’s ‘Oops (Oh My)’. Ashlyn waited for Kacey to come in from the back of the stage and approach the bed dressed as a doctor. Ashlyn was supposed to strip Kacey slowly and push her down on the bed as the finale. Instead, she saw Ali walking up the Wilson House steps in a white lab coat, a nurse hat, and black high heels. Ashlyn’s mouth went dry as Ali approached the bed with a smoldering look on her face. The sexy nurses and girls in scrubs from Wilson assumed flirty poses and stayed still so the focus was on Ali and Ashlyn.
The crowd was screaming wildly, but Ali tuned them out and focused on Ashlyn. The blonde’s mouth hung open a bit and Ali gave her a smile. She walked over to the bed and grabbed the strap of Ashlyn’s sports bra, pulling her up to sit on the side of the bed. Ali moved to stand between her legs while she put her hand on Ashlyn’s cheek and dragged it down her neck, down her shoulder, and finally down her side. She felt Ashlyn’s breath hitch. Ali slowly unbuttoned the lab coat and quickly pulled Ashlyn’s face against her stomach for a second before lightly pushing the blonde back onto the bed. Ali took off her lab coat and the crowd got louder than she could have imagined. She wasn’t paying attention to that though, she was watching Ashlyn’s eyes widen and darken and her mouth drop open even further.

Ashlyn raked her eyes over Ali. The brunette was wearing an extremely skimpy pair of white lace underwear with a red cross on the crotch and a matching sheer white lace bra with small red crosses covering her nipples. She had long white sheer stockings that ran up to her thigh and black high heels. Ashlyn almost couldn’t breathe as looked Ali up and down. Ali climbed in the bed and straddled Ashlyn’s hips carefully. She quickly ran her hand across the blonde’s upper chest and then proceeded to give Ashlyn a lap dance. Ashlyn could feel Ali grinding against her, the brunette’s amber eyes never leaving her own. Ashlyn was sure she had let out a moan, but she couldn’t hear herself over the music and crowd screaming, her hands going to Ali’s hips. Just when she thought she couldn’t take any more, Ali planted a hand on each side of her head and leaned down to kiss her hard. The other nurses and scrub-clad girls moved to spin the bed around in a circle while Ashlyn and Ali continued to make out. Wilson had never heard the crowd cheer so loudly. Ali finally broke the kiss and winked at a hooded eyed Ashlyn before whispering “Surprise, Stud” in her ear and climbing off her to help some of the Wilson girls wheel the bed away. Ashlyn composed herself and fist pumped to the wild crowd as she got led away.

When they finally got off the stage, Ashlyn pulled Ali into a hug. “Fuck, Alex. You are so hot.” She planted another kiss on Ali’s lips and pulled the scantily clad brunette against her skin.

“Easy there, kids! You still have to sing, Ash. The Vibes are up next. Get dressed!” Whitney threw Ashlyn’s backpack at her feet and handed Ali her purse.

“We’re continuing this later.” Ashlyn said hotly to a smug Ali before quickly grabbing her clothes and throwing them on. Ali put her sweats back on and headed back to the crowd. She got several high fives and back pats from people around her, making her blush. She couldn’t believe she had just done that. A lot had definitely changed in a year, namely, becoming an honorary part of this insane Smith community.

Ali watched Ashlyn take the stage with the Vibes. She was wearing baggy jeans, a flannel shirt over a tank top and her usual snapback. Ali smiled at her girl looking a bit like a thug. The rest of the Vibes were dressed in similar fashion. She watch mesmerized as usual as Ashlyn started the beat while the harmony started. The Vibes launched into Pretty Ricky’s ‘Grind on Me’, one of the girls coming forward to sing the opening chorus. Before Ali knew it, Ashlyn had assumed the center position to perfectly lay down the rap portion of the song. Ali let out a loud whistle, causing Ashlyn to look at her and wink. The group did one more verse of the song before transitioning into R. Kelly’s ‘Ignition’ and ending on the lyrics “take it to ya room and fuck somebody” with a dramatic hip thrust to the delight of the audience.

Before Ali knew it, Ashlyn was wrapping her arms around her from behind. “Hey, beautiful. Having fun?” Ashlyn whispered in her ear.

Ali felt Ashlyn’s chin press into her neck and she tilted her head back to do exactly what she wanted to do last year, taking the blonde’s lips in her own. “You were amazing, as always, Stud.” She pulled away to hand Ashlyn her hoodie so the blonde wouldn’t freeze and then pulled Ashlyn’s arms
around her again, relaxing into the blonde’s warmth to watch the rest of the performances.

They spent the next hour laughing and cheering together, stealing many kisses from each other. Towards the end, Ashlyn had snuck her hands up Ali’s hoodie and was running them up and down her stomach while she trailed kisses on the exposed part of the brunette’s neck, both of them getting a bit flustered.

When the show was over, Ashlyn pulled Ali towards the Wilson House entrance, just wanting to put her body all over the brunette’s. Ali stopped her. “Nope. You owe me some hot cider and a walk around this campus still, Harris. I fully intend to kiss you in every place I wanted to last year and didn’t have the guts to.” Ali told her frankly. “Then I’ll go take care of my patient.” She winked and led Ashlyn towards the quad exit.

Chapter End Notes

So, I can either completely move on to the holidays or spend a little more time with this nurse outfit before I move on... reader's choice ;)
Blue Light Special

Chapter Notes

Well, since it was a unanimous vote... here are 2217 words of nothing but Nurse Ali taking care of her girl...you know, in the name of science ;)

After walking to each and every one of the Celebration table stations and kissing Ashlyn all over campus, Ali had the blonde right where she wanted her; hot and bothered. Ashlyn had led Ali right back to Wilson House at a quick pace without much being said between them. Ali had draped her arm around Ashlyn’s waist and slipped her hand just into the waistband of her boxers, stroking along the edge with her thumb as they walked. Ali knew Ashlyn was flustered, but she didn’t realized quite how flustered until the blonde dropped her keys twice trying to get the door to Wilson House open. Ali picked them up both times for her and giggled. “Easy, baby.” She whispered in Ashlyn’s ear. The blonde finally got the door open. Megan was walking out of the living as they walked inside.

“Hey ladies…” Megan started, but Ashlyn put her hand up and cut her off immediately.

“I love you, Pinoe, but absolutely not right now.” Ashlyn just walked past her pulling grinning Ali with her.

“Wow, oook. Get it, Ash!” Megan called to them as they walked up the stairs.

Ashlyn opened the door to her room, soft blue light illuminating it from having changed the light bulbs for Celebration. She closed the door behind her and immediately pressed Ali up against it, crashing her lips to the brunette’s and letting out a moan she had been suppressing for the last hour. She moved her tongue against Ali’s, the two of them fighting for control of the kiss until they were both breathless and had to pull back.

Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s face. “Slow down, Harris. What kind of a nurse would I be if I gave my patient an asthma attack?” She slipped out of Ashlyn’s grasp and made her way across the room to Ashlyn’s iPod and speaker dock. Ashlyn watched her and tried to catch her breath a bit. Ali went through the album list, deciding on Massive Attack’s ‘Mezzanine’, something a little different but with a sexy beat. She turned it up a bit and Ashlyn raised her eyebrows questioningly. “I fully intend to make you scream my name and I don’t want to keep your neighbors up.” Ali said in a sultry voice before making her way back over to the blonde whose lips were slightly parted.

Ali got close and slipped her hands under the back of Ashlyn’s hoodie, running her hands as lightly as possible up and down the blonde’s bare back and breathing into her neck. “Hmmm, you feel a little warm. Maybe we should do something about that?” Ali mumbled, her lips brushing the skin on Ashlyn’s jaw line. Ashlyn could only let out a whispered moan as Ali undressed her so slowly it was almost torture. As she removed each piece of clothing, Ali let her fingertips gently drag across the newly exposed skin. Ashlyn’s breathing was ragged by the time Ali had her standing there completely naked. Ali had barely touched her and Ashlyn could already feel the wetness pooling between her legs.

Ashlyn tried work her hands into Ali’s hoodie, but the brunette stopped her by holding onto her hands. “Nope. I’m the nurse. I do all the work around here.” Ali slowly took off her sweat pants, walking Ashlyn backwards towards the bed and then pushing her down gently so she was sitting on
the bed. She placed a knee on either side of Ashlyn’s legs and straddled her hips. She leaned down
to kiss the blonde passionately before pulling back and pulling the hoodie over her head, her breasts
right in Ashlyn’s face.

Ashlyn leaned in and covered Ali’s bra covered nipple with her mouth, her fingers digging into the
side of Ali’s hips. The material was thin and sheer, Ali let out a moan at the sensation before pulling
her body back a bit. Ashlyn let her eyes rake over Ali’s body in the skimpy nurse themed lingerie.
“You are so damn hot, Alex. So fucking hot.” Ashlyn’s voice was low and raspy. “I want you so
bad.”

“Glad you think so, cause I think you are the sexiest human being I have ever laid eyes on.” Ali
replied hungrily “Problem is, we haven’t determined whether your heart is healthy enough for sexual
activity.” Ali quoted the Viagra commercial with a smirk and tried not to laugh. “As your nurse, I
think it’s my responsibility to test it out.” Ali slowly pushed Ashlyn back onto the bed and hovered
over her. She let her skin just brush the blonde’s, but kept her weight off of her. She moved in and
lightly traced the outside of Ashlyn’s lips with her tongue before kissing her deeply. She nipped and
kissed her way down Ashlyn’s jawline, neck, shoulders, collarbone, and chest. Ashlyn was
squirming underneath her, her breathing heavy and punctuated with soft moans.

“Alex, I want you. Please.” Ashlyn was begging breathlessly, her core hot and begging to be
touched.

Ali continued to take her time and tease the blonde, not ready to drop the nurse act yet. “We’re not
done testing things out. Be a good patient and relax.” She dragged her lips and tongue over every
inch of Ashlyn’s torso, going as far down as her pubic bone before working her way back up and
kissing down the blonde’s arms; finally stopping to kiss her finger tips. She then placed a few soft
kisses on the scar running down the blonde’s abs before taking an already hard nipple into her
mouth. Ashlyn grunted, her back arching up a bit as Ali firmly flicked her tongue over her nipple.
Ali moved to give the other nipple the same attention and continued to alternate between them for
several minutes until Ashlyn was a whimpering, trembling mess beneath her.

“Hmmm, you’re all hot and sweaty and I don’t have a thermometer. You’re particularly hot right
here.” Ali barely ran her fingers through Ashlyn’s folds. “Guess I’ll just have to get creative to see
how hot you are exactly.”

A purring noise escaped the back of Ashlyn’s throat, her skin on fire everywhere Ali had touched it.
She could feel herself dripping out onto the sheets. “Oh god, Alex. Please, just, please.”

Ali could hear the desperation in the blonde’s voice and decided it was time to give her girl what she
wanted. She ran her hands down Ashlyn’s thighs and settled between the blonde’s legs which had
opened wide for her. Ali took one swipe of her tongue through Ashlyn’s center and her face was
covered in the blonde. “So wet for me baby, so hot and wet, and all open for me.” Ali mumbled
against Ashlyn’s clit before sucking it gently into her mouth, her fingers tracing the mermaid tattoo
adorning Ashlyn’s thigh.

“Al…ex. Mmmm. Fff…uck.” Ashlyn only got out a few words before she felt Ali’s warm tongue
slip inside her. Everything was building to the point of eruption and Ashlyn was trying desperately to
hold on just a little bit longer, her hands gripping the back of Ali’s head while her hips moved against
the brunette’s face. She was letting out high pitched moans through heavy breaths.

Ali thrust her tongue into the blonde a couple more times before Ashlyn let out a loud grunt and her
body clenched, another round of wetness spilling onto the brunette’s tongue. Ali licked her gently a
couple more times before pulling away and quickly taking off her underwear. She positioned herself
between Ashlyn’s legs and lowered her clit directly onto the blonde’s.
“Alex. Oh my fuck.” Ashlyn screamed out raggedly, her hips moving to ride out the rest of her orgasm against Ali.

Ali stilled Ashlyn’s hips. “Let me do the work, baby. I got you.” Ali rolled her hips slowly, her soaking folds gliding easily against Ashlyn’s. Ali felt the moans escape her own throat paired with deep hissing breaths. The heat and wetness of Ashlyn’s core had Ali so close already, but she moved methodically against the blonde, working Ashlyn up again. “You feel so good, Ash.” Ali was panting, her hips starting to move faster.

Ashlyn dug her fingers into Ali’s hips as the brunette’s hard clit pressed into her own, the two of them finding a perfect rhythm together. She was almost ready to let go again and pulled Ali more tightly against her. She felt Ali’s lower body start to quiver. “Let go, Alex. Let go with me.” She said breathlessly, gripping Ali’s ass and pulling her in even tighter.

“Ashlyn, oh, yes. Unnnh, YES! Yes, yes. Ash.” Ali yelled out, her body convulsing as the orgasm ripped through her body. She heard her name repeatedly leave Ashlyn’s mouth a minute later before the blonde’s body shook and her hips stilled.

Ali moved to lay beside Ashlyn and faced her. “Think you’ve got a clean bill of health, Harris. Well, besides your temperature. You’re fucking hot, but that’s normal for you.” Ali smiled at her.

Ashlyn smiled back and tugged at Ali’s bra. “Off. I want every inch of your skin on mine right now.”

Ali sat up a bit, taking the bra and stockings off. She laid back down and studied Ashlyn’s face in the soft blue light of the room, stroking the blonde’s cheek and leaning in for several quick kisses.

Ashlyn pulled Ali in close ran her hands up and down the entire length of the brunette’s back in long strokes until she could feel Ali’s breath hitching at her touch. She kissed Ali passionately until they both couldn’t breathe again and Ali had rolled onto her back a bit to try and catch her breath. Ashlyn trailed her fingertips over the now healed ink over Ali’s right breast. She ran her fingers across Ali’s right nipple and then her left, feeling them harden at her touch before tracing the tattoo under the brunette’s left breast. Ali let out several soft moans and Ashlyn reversed the path, doing it all again in the opposite direction.

Ashlyn leaned down and repeated the path again and again, replacing her fingers with her mouth, until Ali was panting.

Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s face and gently lifted it so the blonde was looking at her. She took Ashlyn’s hand and trailed it down her stomach and between her legs. “Ash. Fuck me. Please.”

Ashlyn pressed two fingers slowly into Ali and moved them easily in her slippery center. She moved slow and deep, her eyes never leaving Ali’s as loud moans escaped the brunette’s lips. “I love how you feel inside, around my fingers. So tight and wet and warm.” Ashlyn whispered to her.

Ali’s words tumbled right out in reply, her voice deep and husky. “You fuck me so good, Ash. Mmmmm…keep fucking me, baby, nothing feels as good as you do.”

Ashlyn worked Ali at the same slow deep pace, their eyes locked on each other.

Ali’s breathing got heavier and heavier, she could feel the pleasure mounting deep inside her. Ashlyn’s slow pace was intense and amazing, the blonde applying pressure in all the right places. Ali let her eyes leave Ashlyn’s to drop down and watch the blonde’s hand move in and out of her core deliberately. Her moans louder and more desperate now as she gripped Ashlyn’s bicep. “Unnnh, god
yes. I love to watch you fuck me. Look how good you are, baby. I’m so close, keep going.” Ali looked back up into Ashlyn’s darkened hazel eyes.

Ashlyn kissed Ali slowly, leaving her fingers deeply inside the brunette and just curling them in place to apply pressure in just the right spot.


Ashlyn pulled back and met Ali’s amber eyes. “Come for me, Alex. Come all over me.”

Ali fell apart at Ashlyn’s words yelling her name loudly a few times and pulling her body tightly to the blonde’s, writhing against her as Ashlyn continued to stroke her deeply until she came down. After laying there listening to each other breathe for a while, Ashlyn slowly removed her fingers from Ali and kissed her a few more times.

“We have the best sex on the planet and no one will ever convince me otherwise.” Ali said quietly.

“You’re amazing. I love you, Princess.” Ashlyn whispered back sweetly.


They were silent for a while, just holding each other and placing light touches across each other’s bodies.

“Ash?” Ali broke the silence.

“Yeah, Princess?” Ashlyn responded.

“I seriously don’t think I can be without you anymore, not when I don’t absolutely have to be.” Ali voiced softly. “You’re my family. I want to spend the holidays with you.”

Ashlyn smiled and looked at her, completely touched. “I want the same thing, beautiful. We’ll work it out and make it happen.”

Ali kissed her gently, satisfied with the answer. She closed her eyes with her face pressed to Ashlyn’s chest, their bodies still entwined together.

“Alex?” Ashlyn whispered into her ear.

“Yeah, baby?” Ali replied sleepily.

“You melt my heart.” Ashlyn said genuinely, closing her own eyes and taking in the smell of Ali’s shampoo.

Ali smiled widely and squeezed Ashlyn’s back gently with her hand before letting sleep overtake her.
Thanksgiving Marriage

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the more delayed update, it was a busy week. I’m not sure if I’ll get up another one before Monday, but this one will hopefully leave you feeling thankful!

Ali was exhausted. She had spent her Monday in the Boston office because one of her German clients was visiting in person. It had been wonderful to meet with him and go over the marketing plan face-to-face, but it had been a long day that had required her to be on her toes the whole time since any issues needed quick resolutions and action. She was finally approaching Northampton after a 2 hour drive back and she couldn’t wait to get home and relax. She saw that it was about 7:30pm and frowned a bit knowing that Ashlyn wouldn’t be home before at least 8:30pm because of practice with the Vibes.

Ali climbed up the building stairs towards the apartment and smelled some kind of delicious food that someone was cooking. She realized how hungry she was and tried to remember if there was still leftover Chinese food from Saturday in the fridge. If not, a bowl of cereal would have to do because she had no energy for anything else. She opened the door to the apartment to find that the lights were on and the delicious smelling food was coming from her own place.

“Hey gorgeous!” Ashlyn called to her from the kitchen. The blonde was in sweat pants and a sports bra, mixing up something in a pot. Ali’s face broke out into a huge smile. The table was set nicely for two, an already lit candle placed in the middle. As if she wasn’t already damn sure of it, it struck Ali that she was the luckiest person on the planet. She had come home after a really long day to her incredibly attractive girlfriend not only cooking her what smelled like an amazing dinner, but doing it half naked to top it off. She snuck a quick look at the blonde’s toned torso which even after months of being together, she still couldn’t stop staring at. “Be any more perfect.” Ali whispered to herself as she dropped her bag and made her way towards Ashlyn.

“Hi lovely.” Ali hugged Ashlyn tightly, burying her face into the blonde’s neck. “Mmm, you smell good.”

“Just showered.” Ashlyn replied, giving the brunette a lingering kiss before turning back to the stove.

“What is all this, baby?” Ali asked. “I thought you wouldn’t be home until 8:30pm or so?”

“Vibes got cancelled since there was a lecture tonight that a few people had to go to. So, I thought I’d surprise you with some dinner. I figured you’d had a long day to her incredibly attractive girlfriend not only cooking her what smelled like an amazing dinner, but doing it half naked to top it off. She snuck a quick look at the blonde’s toned torso which even after months of being together, she still couldn’t stop staring at. “Be any more perfect.” Ali whispered to herself as she dropped her bag and made her way towards Ashlyn.

“You’re seriously the best. I had a good but totally exhausting day and was just thinking I’d have to settle for cereal because I was too tired to deal with dinner. I’m starving! Whatever you’re making smells so good.” Ali said appreciatively.

“It’s roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans.” Ashlyn informed her. “Can’t wait to hear all about your day, but first, go get comfy. As much as I love you in that power suit, I want to you go get all cozy so we can eat and relax. Dinner will be ready in like 10 minutes.”
“So. Perfect.” Ali pecked Ashlyn’s lips twice and headed towards the bedroom.

“Hey, grab me a t-shirt while you’re in there. I started cooking and didn’t get a chance to finish getting dressed.” Ashlyn called out.

Ali turned around to look at the blonde. “Nope. I like you just like that.” She winked and walked into the bedroom.

Ashlyn listened intently while Ali recounted her day over dinner. Then Ashlyn had filled Ali in on what she missed at rugby practice. Eventually, the conversation led to the holidays and how they might go about splitting time between their families. They had quickly decided to spend New Year alone together, so that was easy. Then they realized that Ashlyn’s family made a bigger deal out of Christmas Eve, whereas Christmas Day was more important to Ali’s family. So, they figured they could manage to make that work by doing Christmas Eve with the Harris clan and Christmas Day with the Kriegers. Thanksgiving, on the other hand, had them stumped. Ali’s family usually got together at their home in D.C. and had dinner together. Ken and Deb had been particularly adamant in making sure that their Thanksgiving family traditions remained unchanged after the divorce. Ashlyn’s grandmother always did her usual big Thanksgiving dinner where she invited people in the community that had nowhere else to go. Ashlyn had been willing to accompany Ali and spend the holiday with the Kriegers, but Ali knew how small the Harris family was and the importance of their time together, so she couldn’t accept the offer. They sat at the table for a while trying to come up with various scenarios, but not getting anywhere.

“Maybe I should call Kyle and see if he has any ideas.” Ali suggested. “He’ll at least probably have some advice if nothing else.”

“Good idea.” Ashlyn agreed, handing Ali her phone so she could FaceTime Kyle.

“Sis! And pretty much sis!” Kyle yelled, his smiling face filled the screen. “So, why are we shirtless? You didn’t call me to brag about the hot sex life we all know you have, did you?”

Ashlyn and Ali had forgotten they were just in sports bras. “Oh, oops. Sorry! We were just lounging around the apartment and forgot.” Ali explained.

Ashlyn chimed in. “This from the guy who doesn’t wear pants like 80% of the time.”

“Touché.” Kyle said. “So, what’s up? How are you two?”

“We’re good. Just trying to figure out holiday plans and wanted to see if you had some advice.” Ali explained.

“Ok. So, what are the plans so far?” Kyle asked.

Ali explained how they had figured out Christmas and New Year, but were stumped about Thanksgiving.

Kyle listened until Ali was done talking and then yelled out. “Boom! Nailed it!”

Ashlyn looked at Ali confused, but Ali was just as clueless. “Nailed what? Are you playing video games while we talk again?”


“Still lost over here.” Ashlyn jumped in after noting that Ali looked just as confused as she did.
“Look, ladies. You two are all sorts of in love and we all know that you just went through a whole lot. We’ve been waiting for the moment when you two figured out that you don’t want to be apart for the holidays.” Kyle explained. “Chris and I have been talking about it and we figured it all out.”

“Oh boy.” Ashlyn whispered starting to imagine the trouble Chris and Kyle could get into with their crazy ideas.

“What do you mean you figured it out?” Ali asked skeptically.

“Alex, Alex, Alex. Did we not determine that I was the smart one in this family? I think we did.” Kyle teased. “And as the smart one, with Chris’ help, we got this shiz on lock down.”

“Just spill it already.” Ali whined impatiently.

“Ok. Ok. Geez, Princess, relax.” Kyle rolled his eyes. “We’re all doing Thanksgiving together at the Harris’ house.”


“Really!” Kyle’s voice rose a few octaves. “We know how Ash’s grandma likes to take care of the people in the community who don’t have Thanksgiving of their own. So, we’re getting together at the Harris’ and cooking two Thanksgiving meals. The first one we’re all taking over to the community center and pitching in to serve it to people who need it during the early afternoon. The second one we’re going to enjoy together as one big family for dinner.”

“Oh my god, that’s perfect!” Ali exclaimed. Ashlyn was nodding and beaming beside her.

“It’s ok. You can say it. I’m brilliant. I know.” Kyle joked. “Well, I did have a lot of help from Chris. So, we’re like masterminds together.”

“You are definitely brilliant!” Ashlyn replied enthusiastically, her hand gripping Ali’s tightly in excitement.

“Why thaaank you!” Kyle bowed. “Sorry, I really gotta go take Luna for her nightly walk, she’s whining hardcore. But we’ll talk again this week and coordinate the final details?”

“Definitely!” Ali replied. “And Kyle…”

“What up, Alizzle?” Kyle responded.


“Yeah, thank you so much, Kyle. I gotta call Chris and thank him too.” Ashlyn added.

“We’re just looking out for you two like you’ve done for the two of us for so long. So, you’re very welcome. Love you!” Kyle waved. “Now, go put some clothes on!”

“Love you!” Ali smiled.

“Night night, Kyle!” Ashlyn added before they hung up.

Ashlyn and Ali just looked at each other with huge smiles before Ali let out a squeal and launched herself into Ashlyn’s arms. Now that they knew they’d be together over the holidays, they could properly relax. They spend the rest of the night cuddled up on the couch watching TV and making plans for their holiday time together.
The two weeks before Thanksgiving had been busy, but great none-the-less. The promotion strategy Ali had worked so hard on had been a huge success in Germany and she had been asked to mimic it for a US audience when the product was released stateside. It had resulted in a hefty bonus, which Ali didn’t need but was happy about regardless. It made her feel good that she was capable of earning for herself and not reliant on the money in her trust fund. Ashlyn and Ali had traveled to Vassar College with the team for the final Smith Rugby match of the season. The team had been down 10 points at the half and the two of them had managed to coach them to a comeback win of 28 to 17. It meant that Smith had an undefeated fall season for only the third time since 1969. Of course, the team had jokingly thanked Ashlyn for getting hurt during the BU match and causing it to be interrupted, avoiding what would have likely been a guaranteed loss. Although she still had tiredness, stiffness, and aching, Ashlyn was now moving better and feeling pretty much normal. She had been cleared by her doctor to start light exercise and she and Ali had gotten in the habit of taking a long walk together every night. Ashlyn had also resumed her work shifts in the Wilson kitchen, which made her oddly happy. She hadn’t realized how much she missed being around the staff and feeling productive.

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving, they had taken an early flight to Orlando to start the holiday. Given that Ashlyn still got tired a lot, Ali had suggested they fly and rent a car for the week. Ashlyn had agreed, convincing Ali to rent a Jeep even though Ali knew Deb would be asking why they didn’t opt for a BMW. After getting their luggage at baggage claim and making their way to the rental car, Ashlyn laid out the game plan.

“Grandma and Chris won’t be home until around dinner time, so I was thinking we could do a few things before we head to the house.” Ashlyn said.

“Sure. What do you have in mind?” Ali asked.

“First, I thought we could do a late breakfast at that place on the water we went to over the summer. Then, I have someone I want to visit.” Ashlyn said excitedly.

“Breakfast sounds perfect, I’m hungry. Visit?” Ali replied in a curious tone. Ashlyn usually didn’t like to visit people in Satellite Beach.

“Yeah. I’m pretty much dying to see Felix.” Ashlyn admitted.

“OOOh Felix! Yes, so cute!” Ali squealed. She thought Ashlyn wanting to visit her penguin friend was absolutely adorable.

The breakfast restaurant was small inside and filled up when they got there, so they had to wait for a table. Ashlyn led them out to the deck where they stood silently looking out into the ocean. Ashlyn had taken a few deep breaths and wrapped her arms around Ali from behind, sticking her hands in the front pockets of the brunette’s jeans. Ali smiled and leaned back into her. Ali had always liked the ocean, the beach, the sun, the tanning, but she had never felt any spiritual connection to it like Ashlyn did. That had changed quickly when she met the blonde. The ocean soothed Ashlyn and by default it now soothed her too. She could feel the way the tension left Ashlyn’s body as she watched the waves roll in, the deep calm breaths the blonde would take inhaling the smell, the peaceful aura that surrounded her girl when there was salt water around.

“Ashlyn, party of 2!” A waiter yelled out, breaking Ali from her thoughts. They sat down and quickly ordered their food, already knowing what they wanted. Although she wasn’t rushing them
through breakfast, Ali could tell Ashlyn was excited and dying to get to the aquarium. So, rather than make too much small talk, she wolfed her breakfast down so they could get going sooner. A short while later they were pulling up to the aquarium. Ali noticed Ashlyn was starting to fidget.

“You ok, Ash? You seem kinda nervous.” Ali asked a bit concerned. The blonde had been so cheery at breakfast.

“Um, yeah. I am a little nervous.” Ashlyn admitted.

“Why are you nervous?” Ali placed her hand on Ashlyn’s thigh to try and calm her.

“This is gonna sound so dumb and pathetic.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“I’ll never think you’re dumb or pathetic, just tell me.” Ali encouraged her gently.

Ashlyn sighed. “What if he doesn’t remember me?”

“Awww, Ash. I bet he will, you spent so much time working with him.” Ali tried to reassure her despite knowing nothing about penguins’ memory abilities. “And, worst case, he doesn’t remember you and you can spend some time getting reacquainted.” Ali lightly grabbed Ashlyn’s face and looked into her eyes. “Relax, baby. It’s gonna be fun no matter what, ok?”

“You’re right. Let’s just go in and roll with it.” Ashlyn agreed.

“There’s my laid-back surfer girl.” Ali planted a lingering kiss on her lips before they got out of the car.

It took them a few minutes to get checked in with the aquarium security staff before they were met by one of animal trainers who brought them over to Felix and his current trainer.

“Hi. I’m Grant, you must be Ashlyn. I’ve heard a lot about you from the marine lab.” A skinny dark haired guy with blue eyes and a goatee held out his hand towards Ashlyn.

“Hey, Grant. Nice to meet you. This is my girlfriend, Ali. So, how’s Felix doing?” Ashlyn asked him.

“Hi Ali.” Granted gave a slight wave. “Felix is excellent! I’ll take you over to the exhibit and get you two setup with wetsuits so you can work with him a bit. We haven’t added much to his repertoire, just trying to stay consistent for now. We do a lot of the painting work with him in children’s groups, it goes over really well.”

“Wow, that’s great.” Ashlyn replied excitedly. A few minutes later all three of them were in wetsuits and standing in waist high water in front of Felix who was situated comfortably on a fake rock formation.

“Hey Buddy!” Ashlyn said happily. “You remember how to say hi to, Ali?” She tapped his beak and made the motion of opening her hand like a beak. Felix let out a loud honking bark sound and Ali giggled. Ashlyn relaxed a bit seeing that the penguin still remembered what she taught him. She went through her usual routine with him, proudly watching him execute it all perfectly while Ali looked on. When Ashlyn had Ali hold him, Grant excused himself.

“I’m going to feed the other penguins on the other side of the tank. I’ll let you guys handle his lunch and give you some time.” Grant pointed to a bucket of anchovies in the corner and left them.

Ashlyn eventually helped Ali move Felix back to his rock perch and they fed him a bit. “Alright,
time to see if he actually remembers me.”

“What do you mean?” Ali asked.

“There’s one thing I taught him that was just for fun and not part of the essentials that got passed on to the training staff here. So, guess we’ll see if he can remember.” Ashlyn explained. Ali looked on a bit nervously, hoping Ashlyn didn’t get let down.

Ashlyn tapped the penguin quickly three times right on his tiny little tail. Felix turned around in a circle once and then wagged his butt slightly. “Ahhh, yes! He totally remembers!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali grinned widely at how cute and ridiculous the blonde was. “Awww, see. He won’t forget you.”

“Guess not.” Ashlyn was beaming, clearly feeling very happy.

They spent a few more minutes with Felix until Grant came back and it was time to say goodbye. Ali watched Ashlyn have a quiet little chat with the penguin, feeling absolutely smitten over the fact that her girlfriend was having a serious conversation with a penguin that didn’t actually know what she was saying. Afterwards they toured the aquarium a bit before finally heading out and over to the Harris house.

When they got to Ashlyn’s house, no one was home yet as expected. They brought their bags up to Ashlyn’s room and decided on grabbing a shower together since they had just been waist deep in penguin water. Of course, with an empty house, a quick shower turned into a heated kiss which quickly turned into Ali falling apart with Ashlyn’s fingers buried deep inside her, and shortly after featured Ashlyn unraveling with Ali’s face between her legs.

A towel wrapped Ali plopped herself down on Ashlyn’s bed, the blonde quickly following beside her. “I am so relaxed right now, it’s insane.” Ali purred.

“Shower sex will do that.” Ashlyn joked, running her fingertips along Ali’s collarbone. “As much as I want to just take a naked nap with you right now, we have like 2 hours until Gram and Chris get home. I’m thinking it might be nice cook some dinner for them. We can make extra so there will be leftovers for Kyle when he gets in later tonight.”

“That’s an excellent idea.” Ali agreed.

“Let’s get dressed and we can get stuff at the store to cook.” Ashlyn said getting up and starting to dig through her luggage.

They made it back from the grocery store with about an hour left to spare. Ashlyn wanted to fully take advantage of the warm Florida weather and decided on grilling steaks, chicken, and marinated vegetables. Ali worked on getting some baked potatoes in the oven while Ashlyn prepped the grilled food. As they were finishing cleaning up, Chris burst through the door excitedly. His deep voice filling the house.

“Asshat! Where you at?” He made his way into the kitchen and picked Ashlyn up in a hug like he usually did.

“Easy!” Ali yelled from across the kitchen.
“Oh yeah, crap! Sorry!” Chris put Ashlyn down and looked her over to make sure he hadn’t hurt her.

“Relax, kids. I’m just fine!” Ashlyn said defiantly.

Ali and Chris both breathed out a slight sigh of relief.

“Hey Ali! Glad you guys are here. I missed you two.” Chris gave Ali a firm hug, the brunette up on her tiptoes as usual when Chris pulled her into his tall frame.

“Missed you too big man.” Ali replied.

“Yeah, we definitely missed you ass clown.” Ashlyn teased.

Ali was glad she hadn’t earned one of these horrid Harris sibling nicknames yet, it was probably only a matter of time before Chris stopped being polite enough to give her one.

“What on earth are you two doing in Gram’s kitchen?” Chris asked.

“Figured we give Gram a break and make dinner.” Ashlyn answered.

“Cool. Suck ups. I’m all for having food cooked for me though.” Chris teased earning him a light punch on the shoulder from Ashlyn.

“Please, you’re helping me grill. Not getting off the hook that easy.” Ashlyn informed him.

“Ugh, fine!” Chris whined.

Grandma walked in the door about 20 minutes later, not even saying a word but pulling Ashlyn and Ali together into one big hug. “My girls. Glad you’re home.” She pulled back to look at Ashlyn.

“And you’re still too darn skinny, we’ll fix that this week.”

Ali giggled.

“Oh you think I’m just talking about her? I mean you too!” Grandma exclaimed looking at Ali. “I’m gonna fill you two up with so much pecan pie, you just wait.” Grandma eyed the food prepped for dinner on the counter and knew immediately what was going on. “How sweet. You ladies figured out dinner. How come you never cook for me?” Grandma eyed Chris.

“Is that a serious question? You know I burn most things.” Chris asked incredulously.

“I don’t know where I went wrong with teaching you household skills.” Grandma shook her head and Chris laughed.

“Anyway. Let me see.” Grandma lifted Ashlyn’s shirt a bit to look at the scarring. “Well that looks pretty great actually. They get better and better with these things. You’re still feeling ok?”

Ashlyn rolled her eyes. “Yes Gram, nothing has changed since we talked on Sunday.”

“I’m just checking, don’t you sass me!” Grandma defended. Ali laughed at them.

Ashlyn grilled expertly while Ali got everything else set up for dinner. Grandma shuffled around the kitchen anyway, not knowing how to relax. They enjoyed a great dinner together with Grandma and Chris insisting they’d clean up.

Ashlyn and Ali relaxed on the deck for a while after dinner, watching the sunset and talking with
Chris. Ashlyn was lighting a few citronella torches to keep the bugs away when Ali heard a car door close in the distance. She launched herself down the deck stairs and around the house, Ashlyn followed behind her.

“Kyyyyyye!” Ali screamed, throwing herself into his arms before he had even fully gotten out of the car.

“Alex! Hi!” Kyle screamed back before he put her down and then hugged Ashlyn tightly too. “Hey Ashy!”

Ashlyn groaned as she and Ali led him into the house. “I swear between you and Chris, maybe this was a bad idea.”

Kyle laughed. “You love us. Which is why I’ll be nice and not call you that this week. How’s the six pack, champ?”

“Pretty good.” Ashlyn lifted her shirt a bit to show him.

“Didn’t deflate the Schwarzenegger muscles, so I’d say you’re better than good.” Kyle said playfully.

“Don’t be jealous that I have a hottie” Ali teased him. “Speaking of, any updates on your love life?”

“Nooooope!” Kyle said dramatically. “Dates here and there, no one special though. I swear, everyone is just looking for a hook-up. Maybe I just need to look in better places.”

“I hear Christian Mingle and E-Harmony are great!” Ashlyn joked and laughed hard.

“Hmmmm, I do like a nice altar boy.” Kyle deadpanned.

“Gross!” Ali slapped him.

“I’m kidding, Alex. Geez!” Kyle rubbed his arm. “So, I hate to ask, but can we grab some food. I’m pretty hungry.”

“Perfect. We just made dinner a little while ago and fixed you a plate. I’ll just heat it for you.” Ashlyn replied.

“Sweet! Thank you.” Kyle said appreciatively, following the girls into the kitchen.

“Kyle dear!” Grandma greeted him. “Welcome to our home. The girls can show you around after you eat something. How was your trip?”

“It was good, easy plane ride. And the drive from the airport was quick too. Thank you for having me, I’m excited that we’re all together.” He replied kindly with a smile.

“Well, we’re happy to have you all. Now that you’re here, I’m going to excuse myself and go to bed so I can be up early. Goodnight everyone.” Grandma headed upstairs.

Kyle ate dinner on the deck while catching up with Ashlyn and Ali and helping Chris tease both of them relentlessly. Chris eventually excused himself to go to bed too since he had work for a couple hours in the morning.

“Ok, now that everyone left on the deck has already seen you naked, show me the ink!” Kyle practically shouted at Ali. Ashlyn shook her head.
“I don’t have to get naked to show you, geez.” Ali pulled down the top of her shirt to show him the first tattoo and then lifted it from the bottom and pulled up her sports bra a bit to show him the second one.

“Oh, I love it! It’s sweet and powerful, you did good.” Kyle approved.

“Thanks.” Ali smiled.

“Meanwhile, I got my own new addition.” Kyle said.

“You got a new tat?” Ashlyn asked excitedly.

“Nope.” He lifted his shirt to show off his new nipple piercing.

“Ouch, that had to have hurt.” Ashlyn cringed. “I mean, it looks great, but ouch!”

“I think it suits you.” Ali chimed in. “I bet the boys will love it.”

“I hope so!” Kyle replied. “Anyway, now that show and tell is over, I should get to the hotel and get some rest. I’ll pick up Mom and Dad when they get in and then bring them over tomorrow so we can start the cooking extravaganza.”

“Sounds perfect.” Ali replied. She hugged him tight and walked him out to the car while Ashlyn cleaned up the remaining dishes.

Ashlyn and Ali had been nervous about their families being together. They didn’t have any reason to think it wouldn’t go well, but they were still on edge Wednesday morning before Ali’s parents got there. It was just uncharted territory and they didn’t know what to expect. They felt silly a few hours later when everyone was happily getting along and cooking alongside each other in the kitchen. Grandma and Deb had planned everything on a perfect schedule so that all of the food would be prepared on Wednesday and ready to heat and eat on Thursday. They had even worked out a food schedule for the oven so that everything would get cooked on time for the two meals they had planned.

Ashlyn couldn’t remember the last time this house had felt so cheery and full. Having it full of people she loved all enjoying their time together was magical. She was amazed by how natural it felt. She had anticipated it might start a little awkwardly, but she had been pleasantly surprised when it all came together so seamlessly.

Ali was having similar thoughts. She had always loved Thanksgiving with her family and was thankful that it had never changed even after her parents got divorced. She had nothing but good holiday memories, and yet, something about this time together with Ashlyn and her family felt so much better. She felt a cranberry hit her cheek and looked up to see Kyle and Ashlyn with devious smiles on their faces. She gave them a playful dirty look and continued peeling potatoes.

The guys were the first to get antsy about being in the kitchen all day. Once they started playing around too much and messing things up, Grandma and Deb promptly sent them outside to the deck where they spent a couple of hours talking about who knows what until it was time to go out to dinner. Ken had treated everyone to a pre-Thanksgiving Day dinner at a nice seafood restaurant in
nearby Palm Bay. Deb and Ken told funny stories about Kyle and Ali growing up and Grandma had countered with stories about Ashlyn and Chris. Ashlyn learned that Kyle once put super glue in Ali’s mascara to get back at her for telling on him that he didn’t do his homework. She not only had to go to the hospital to get the glue dissolved when one of her eyes got stuck shut, but she also got in trouble for wearing makeup when she wasn’t supposed to be. Ashlyn had laughed until Grandma told the story of how Chris used to let Ashlyn drink his soda and then lock all the bathrooms and make her laugh until she peed herself. Then he would yell “Grandma, Ashlyn peed her pants again!” making everyone think Ashlyn had a weak bladder. When Ali, Kyle, Ashlyn and Chris were all thoroughly embarrassed, Ali’s parents and Kyle headed back to their hotel for the night.

“I’m exhausted. I can’t imagine how you feel.” Ali cuddled herself into Ashlyn. The blonde’s arms wrapped around her waist as they laid in bed.

“Welcome to Thanksgiving with the Harris family.” Ashlyn chuckled. “Gram is a beast, she never stops.”

“You aren’t kidding. Today went so well I thought.” Ali mused.

“Agreed. It was so easy, not at all weird or even a little awkward like I expected.” Ashlyn paused before just being straightforward. “This is the first time we’ve ever been around people who have a lot more than we do but haven’t judged or made us feel less than in any way. Your family is amazing, Alex. Like truly good.”

Ali smiled. “That’s cause you aren’t less than in any way, in fact, quite the opposite. I don’t think my family has ever felt so welcomed. We aren’t even this comfortable around our own relatives and we’ve known them forever. I know you have all been through so much, but the amount of love you give and goodness you have in your hearts is amazing. Anyone who can’t see that and appreciate it is just stupid.”

The laid quietly for a while, both realizing the magnitude of what it meant in their relationship to have their families together and close like this. Ashlyn heard Ali yawn.

“We should sleep, tomorrow will be long and we’ll be at a disadvantage after we eat the turkey.” Ashlyn joked and turned out the light.

Ali met Ashlyn’s lips and kissed her deeply. “Mmmm, I’m so happy right now. Goodnight, Ash.”

“Me too. Sweet dreams, Princess.” Ashlyn replied and slowly stroked Ali’s back, falling asleep shortly after hearing the brunette’s breathing get lighter.

Thanksgiving Day had finally come and the Harris kitchen was bustling in the morning with everyone trying to complete their cooking related duties. There had been quite a bit of rushing around, but they had made it to the community center on time to serve up the lunch they had cooked for the 15 or so people who had been looking forward to it. Much like Ali was before she had met Grandma Harris, the Kriegers had always been charitable with their money, but had no real hands-on experience with volunteering. Ali was shocked at how well her parents handled it all. They were helpful and outgoing. Not that Ali expected them to be awful, but she thought they might be a little shy and hesitant.
Of course, it hadn’t gone completely smoothly. As they were serving lunch, several people had come up to Ashlyn to see how she was doing after her injury.

“I’m doing much better, Ruth. How have you been?” Ashlyn had replied politely to the older woman’s question.

“Oh, pretty much the same old.” Ruth turned to Ali. “And this must be your lovely wife, I’ve heard so much about her!” She said excitedly, patting Ali’s arm. Ashlyn and Ali’s eyes went wide as Kyle, Ken, and Deb turned to stare at them with shocked looks on their faces.

Kyle, of course, couldn’t let it go and piped up as soon as Ruth walked away. “Oh my god, did you two…” He just gave them the eyes without finishing. Deb and Ken stood beside him with the same questioning look.

Ali got nervous. “Oh, um, no. Well, the thing is…” She started rambling, making it worse.

Thankfully Grandma stepped in. “Relax, they didn’t do anything. It’s my fault, I’ll explain. You three hold down the fort.” She pointed to Ashlyn, Ali and Chris and turned to pull the Kriegers over to the side of the room. Ashlyn was a bit nervous about what she would tell them, but tried not to show it.

The Kriegers came back looking more relieved and went back to being normal. Ashlyn and Ali breathed a sigh of relief. Deb teased them. “You could have told us, newlyweds.” She winked. “We could have at least gotten you a wedding present.”

Apparently, Grandma had explained how Ashlyn had a mean ex-girlfriend who picked on her and Ali had set the girl straight. When rumors started around town that Ashlyn had an amazing girlfriend, Grandma admitted that she had fueled the fire and tried to protect Ashlyn a bit more by saying that Ali was her wife. The Kriegers seemed to think it was funny that Grandma was the one at the center of the rumor mill and laughed it off. Of course, Kyle hadn’t missed an opportunity the rest of the afternoon to tease them about it even more, especially over the fact that Ali had a possessive streak went it came to Ashlyn.

Once their time at the community center was over, they went back to the Harris house and had an equally wonderful Thanksgiving together. There was both serious and funny reminiscing about each family’s prior Thanksgivings, a lot of talk about how great the afternoon had been, and of course, lots of football watching. Grandma and Deb spent time just talking at the table while everyone else had hung out in the living room alternating between napping and watching TV. Ali had fallen asleep for a while in Ashlyn’s lap before waking up and joining Grandma and her mother for a bit.

Ashlyn took the opportunity to head out to the deck to steal a few quiet minutes. She liked to do this every Thanksgiving, look out to the river and remind herself that she had a lot to be thankful for. Over the last year, she had more to be thankful for than she’d ever had. She heard the door open behind her and turned to see Ken walk out onto the deck.

Ken sat down in the chair beside her and stayed quiet for a while, enjoying the moment with her. He broke the silence shortly after. “So, what are your intentions with my daughter?”

Ashlyn lightly grinned. “Is that a serious question?”

“I was just teasing you, but, let’s say it’s a serious question. You’re planning to marry her, aren’t you?” Ken said more seriously.

It had come out more like a statement than a question. “Am I that obvious?” Ashlyn replied.
“Very. I can see it in Alex too. Both of you seem very committed to each other. It’s the next logical step really.” Ken told her. “It’s funny, when you first started dating and I saw the way she looked at you, it scared me as a Dad. You’re pretty much telling me right now that you’re going to marry her. I should be absolutely terrified, just like I always thought I’d be. I’m not though.”

“Thanks, I appreciate you saying that.” Ashlyn said thoughtfully. “Just so we’re clear though. As much as it’s the next logical step and everyone around us probably thinks I’m going to drop down on one knee any day now… to be honest, I don’t want to rush it. I don’t want to be engaged for the sake of the status of it. I want it to happen when we’re actually ready to plan the big wedding that I know Alex has dreamed of since she was a kid. I don’t see that being realistic while I’m still in college. I don’t need a marriage certificate to be committed to her, love her, and treat her as if she was my wife. That being said, when it’s about to happen, you’ll be the first to know. I won’t ever ask you for permission to marry her, because only Alex can give me that…but I will ask you, Deb, and Kyle for your support.”

“I knew I liked you.” Ken lightened the mood a bit. “Seriously, that’s very sensible and actually really touching to hear. Thanks for sharing that with me. And, for the record, you already have my support. Of course, that doesn’t mean I’m not going to make you ask for it when it’s time. I have to have my fun too.” He laughed.

Ashlyn smiled. “I’d honestly do anything for her.” She played with the medical bracelet on her wrist. “I’d come back from the dead for that woman.” She said quietly.

Ken reached over and squeezed her arm knowingly. “So I’ve heard. What I’m most thankful for this year is that you’re so resilient and that you’re here with us and with Alex.”

Ashlyn looked up a bit surprised.

Ken grinned at her. “Lesson one: Your wife is pretty terrible at keeping secrets.”

They both laughed and were interrupted by Ali coming out onto the deck. “Hey, what are you two talking about out here?”

“Manatees.” Ashlyn said quickly. “Football.” Ken said at the same time. They both realized they sounded guilty. Ken tried to cover. “Football and Manatees. Ashlyn was trying to tell me how they communicate, but I’m a bit dense and couldn’t follow the logic, so I changed the conversation to the Redskins.” He laughed. Ashlyn nodded.

Ali giggled. “I came at the right time then.”

“Yep. I’ll let you save her from my football ranting.” Ken got up and went inside.

Ali sat in Ashlyn’s lap. As soon as she got comfortable, Ashlyn pulled her down for a really passionate kiss. There was so much fire behind it that Ali felt a surge of energy pulse through her entire body. She kissed the blonde back heatedly, tugging Ashlyn’s bottom lip lightly with her teeth before letting her tongue meet Ashlyn’s. They stayed in the intense kiss until Ali felt like her lungs would explode from lack of air. She finally pulled back to catch her breath, finding a beautiful softness in Ashlyn’s hazel eyes that were a blend of green and gray at the moment.

“What was that for?” Ali asked with a smile, her heart still pounding.

“It’s Thanksgiving, Alex. I’ve never been so thankful for anything in my life as I am for you.” Ashlyn answered in honest simplicity, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Ali kissed Ashlyn’s nose and then her cheek. “Trust me, Ash. I know exactly how you feel.” She
wrapped her arms around Ashlyn a bit more tightly and they just sat quietly for a long time.

Ali finally broke the silence. “So, you’re about to feel not so thankful.”

“What?” Ashlyn asked concerned.

“Cause I’m dragging you out Black Friday shopping all night in exactly one hour. Time to bring it, Harris.” Ali challenged.

Ashlyn groaned. “Seriously, Krieger?”

“Buck up, Harris.” Ali gave her one last kiss before climbing off her lap. “I’m gonna go look at the newspaper ads to figure out where we should stand in line first. Look on the bright side, it’s warm here we don’t have to stand in the cold.”

“At least there’s that!” Ashlyn answered. She knew she was in for a long night.

A couple hours later they were standing in line outside of Nordstrom in Orlando where Ali saw some amazing deals on makeup and handbags that she couldn’t pass up. Ashlyn had to admit that Ali knew what she was doing. She had told Ashlyn to park as far from the store entrance as possible because as much as the walk sucked, they would be happy later when they didn’t have to sit in traffic to get out of the lot.

They had been standing in line for an hour already and had about thirty minutes to go. Ali was wearing the same dress she had on all day, the very one that had made Ashlyn stare all day and wish they had had time to sneak off together. Ashlyn had decided that if Ali was going to make her stand in line for so long, she certainly wasn’t going to make it easy. She had spent the last hour placing discrete touches on the brunette, running her hand lightly across her waist and right in the middle of her lower back. Places that Ashlyn knew would work Ali up in no time. She had to fight back her laughter when Ali suggested they play their Q & A game so they didn’t get bored. Ali was obviously flustered and trying to distract Ashlyn, and herself.

Ashlyn agreed with smug grin, telling Ali she could ask the first question.

Ali thought for a second, trying to come up with a question that wasn’t too personal since there were people around them. “How about, favorite color that isn’t officially named? Like, for example, sunset.”

Ashlyn decided she was going to keep up her efforts. “That’s easy I have two.”

“Ok, what are they?” Ali asked.

Ashlyn leaned in close to her. “The dark brown of your eyes when we’re about to have sex. And the amber color of your eyes when you’re done screaming my name. What’s yours?”

Ali cleared her throat trying to stay composed. “Well, I was going to say the soft pink of your lips, but I have to admit that I really like your answer. Your turn.”

“What’s your favorite thing that I wear?” Ashlyn asked.

“Oh good one. Hmm, well I love all your outfits. I honestly love that you manage to make anything look fashionable. But, I think my favorite is when you’re just relaxed and completely yourself, and it’s just us and no one else. So, your boxers and cutoff t-shirt.” Ali answered. “What about you?”

Ashlyn leaned in even closer to the brunette. “Clothes could never do you any justice, Alex. You’re
way too beautiful. My answer is your tattoos. You’re up.”

Ali could feel her face getting hot and she was starting to shift her weight, wishing there weren’t people around them right now. She cleared her throat again. “What’s the best thing you’ve ever eaten?”

Ashlyn smirked and put her mouth right next to Ali’s ear, whispering “You.”

Ali couldn’t take it anymore. She kissed Ashlyn hard, not caring who was around them at the moment. When she pulled away a few seconds later, she started to tug Ashlyn’s hand. “Fuck the makeup, let’s go.” She just wanted to find a quiet place with Ashlyn right now before she exploded.

Ashlyn stayed rooted to the spot, a smug look on her face. “Oh hell no, Princess. We’ve waiting here for almost 2 hours and we only have 10 minutes left. We’re not leaving here without makeup and handbags.” Ashlyn insisted.

Ali groaned trying to pull herself together. The store opened soon enough and they spent about an hour shopping before leaving with a bag full of makeup and a new handbag for Ali. Ashlyn had also picked up a new pair of sunglasses. They made their way across the parking lot and Ashlyn smiled seeing that everyone else was struggling to get out and their Jeep was right by the exit with no one parked around it, so they’d be out in no time.

“So, where to next, Princess?” Ashlyn asked enthusiastically as they got to the car, finding that she was actually starting to enjoy herself.

Despite the shopping distraction, Ali’s body still hadn’t calmed down. “The backseat.” She answered pulling Ashlyn into the Jeep with her and crashing their lips together. “So glad we didn’t go for the BMW rental.” Ali mumbled into Ashlyn’s mouth as she worked her hands up the blonde’s shirt.

About 30 minutes later, Ashlyn was trying to catch her breath in the back of the Jeep with her clothes in disarray and Ali on top of her in a similar state. “I fucking love Black Friday.” She said breathlessly.

Ali smiled victoriously. “And my job is done here.”
Since it was a bit of a rough day for Spirit fans, here's a nice long Harris Christmas chapter. In the meantime, I'll work on the Krieger Christmas chapter while figuring out how to best sew together a Spirit and Pride jersey...

Ali woke up to a loud bang at the door. She lightly groaned and picked her head up from Ashlyn’s chest, prying her eyes open to look at the red numbers on the digital clock: 3:19am.

The banging happened again and was followed by a loud voice on the other side of the door. “This hooker is a looker and where there’s hoes, it snows!” Megan’s voice traveled down the hallway. “Wake up bitches, there be snow!”

“Ughhh, Ash. Ash, wake up.” Ali nudged her girlfriend a few times before Ashlyn woke up.

“Huh, what? You ok?” Ashlyn woke up confused.

“I’m fine. Why the hell is Pinoe running around at 3am yelling about snow and waking people up?” Ali asked in a grumble.

“No. I’m confused.” Ali dropped her head back down onto the blonde’s chest, pulling herself closer and feeling Ashlyn’s warm skin against hers. “Mmm, never mind.”

Ashlyn snuggled into Ali and they closed their eyes again, but a few seconds later the noise was back. “Let’s gooo, ladies! Snow time, show time!” Pinoe yelled again.

“Babe, seriously, what the hell?” Ali was definitely awake now, her hand on the middle of Ashlyn’s chest holding herself up.

“Ugh. It’s the First Snow Party. Pinoe is in charge this year. Means that the first dusting of snow happened. Food and drinks in the living room. Smith tradition in most houses.” Ashlyn mumbled out in short sentences.

“I’m all for Smith traditions, but fucking 3am for a party? You totally should have warned me before I agreed to sleep here so much.” Ali whined.

“First snow can happen any time, unfortunately 3am this time.” Ashlyn opened her eyes finally, feeling more awake. “Alright, I’m up. Let’s go join the Wilson crew.”

“Guess I could use a snack.” Ali agreed. They both got up and headed over to the window, finding a completely white, snow-coated quad below.

“Pretty.” Ali said taking in the snowy scene.

“You’re pretty.” Ashlyn flashed a quick smile at the brunette and pecked her lips, making her way towards the door.
“Ash.” Ali got the blonde’s attention.

“Yeah?” Ashlyn turned around.

“Clothes, baby. Then party.” Ali laughed a bit.

Ashlyn looked down to see that all she had on was a pair of Calvin Klein boxer briefs. She was completely topless, as was Ali who just had on a pair of boy shorts. “Right.” She grabbed a pair of sweat pants and a hoodie for herself and then tossed a set to Ali.

Most of Wilson House was gathered in the living as they got downstairs.

“What took you so long? I said snow, not sex. You weren’t supposed to get in a quickie first.” Megan teased them. Ashlyn grabbed a pillow off the nearby couch and threw it at her.

“Some of us woke up very confused and needed yet another Smith tradition explained to them first.” Ali explained. “Seriously, how many more traditions am I going to be blindsided with?”

“Like a million. I’m not even sure I know them all.” Whitney joked. Ali shook her head.

Ashlyn grabbed two cookies from a tray on the coffee table and a cup of hot chocolate to share. She sat in a plush chair and pulled Ali into her lap, handing the brunette a cookie.

“Fitting.” Tobin said from across the room where she was sitting on the floor leaned into Alex who was sitting behind her.

“What’s fitting?” Whitney asked.

“It’s December 1st. You know, first day of winter, dude. The first snow fits.” Tobin mused.

“Um, Tobs. December 21st is the first day of winter.” Ashlyn piped up. Alex giggled.

“Well, yeah. I don’t know, I’m tired.” Tobin laughed.

“Please! You’re not the one who had to monitor the weather forecast for the last month and wait up to see if it actually snowed when they said it was going to. And get hot chocolate made, and put out cookies!” Megan exclaimed. “At least it actually snowed when they said it would!”

Everyone in the room thanked Megan and clapped for her. She bowed a few times dramatically.

After about 40 minutes of bizarre conversation because everyone was pretty loopy from it being so early in the morning, many people were heading back to bed. Ashlyn led Ali back upstairs, following Whitney ahead of them.

“Hope you can get a few more hours of sleep.” Whitney said to Ashlyn and Ali as she headed into her room.

“Gooooodmorning, Whit! We LOOOOVE you!” They yelled back.

“Oh, geez, why? I’m moving to another floor next year, I swear.” She replied back sarcastically.

“Please. You love us.” Ashlyn winked and Whitney nodded in defeat before they both walked into their rooms.

Ashlyn and Ali tried to go back to sleep, but it was no use. They were both too awake.
“Alright, tell me about Christmas at your house.” Ali said, curling herself into Ashlyn’s side.

“Ok. Well, I guess the best word is chaotic. The Harris family is not one for preparation. So, we do everything last minute on Christmas Eve. I guess that’s why Christmas Eve has always been more of a big deal with my family. We do all our Christmas shopping, decorating, cooking, everything on Christmas Eve. By Christmas Day we’re so tired, we pretty much do nothing.” Ashlyn laughed. “It’s a lot quieter now with just Grandma, Chris, and me though. Grandma only invites a couple of her friends over and that’s about it. We have fun though. It used to be a lot more craziness when my parents were around.” Ashlyn got a bit quiet.

Ali stroked her arm. “What was it like when you were a kid?”

“I mean, kind of the same as now. Just more going on, I guess. Like my favorite thing and probably the funniest is that we would spend the whole afternoon decorating the outside of the house in Christmas lights and all kinds of tacky decorations. Of course, it was Christmas Eve though, so it was all that work for just the one night. It was my Dad’s thing. He loved it. Me, him, and Chris would just go nuts all afternoon. The house looked like Christmas threw up on it when we were done; so many lights and stuff that you could probably see it from space. Thank god it was only one night, I’m sure the neighbors would freak otherwise. It looked so dumb, but we were so proud of it every year. I miss that. Turning the lights on and just staring at it for a while. The whole thing was so ridiculous and funny.” Ashlyn explained.

“Wish I could have seen that.” Ali said quietly.

“After my Dad died, my mom boxed up all the decorations and lights and stuff and gave it away. So, we never did it again.” Ashlyn said, pausing for a moment. “You know. I think I have a picture of it somewhere.” She got up and rummaged in her closet, pulling out a box that had lots of loose pictures inside of it. After a few minutes she pulled put a few pictures and showed them to Ali.

They were pictures of the Harris home absolutely covered in Christmas lights. Ashlyn wasn’t kidding when she said it looked like Christmas threw up on it. There were rainbow lights of different sizes, some huge bulbs, others tiny. There was a huge hideous plastic Santa statue that lit up as well as a snowman that was similar. There were large candy cane decorations that stuck into the lawn and several light up snowflakes. To top it all off were 5 plastic light up reindeer. Ali looked over the pictures and smiled along with Ashlyn. They were obviously so proud of it. Ali traced the picture with her finger, noting how happy Ashlyn looked and wishing she had been around for one of these Harris Christmases before they changed.

“Anyway, you get the point. You don’t have to deal with that, but you will have to deal with the late shopping, crazy cooking, and last minute tree purchase and decorating. That has never changed.” Ashlyn said with a smile.

“Sounds perfect.” Ali planted a kiss on the blonde’s lips. Ashlyn yawned. “Come on baby, let’s try to sleep.”

Ashlyn agreed, climbing back into bed and pulling Ali into her.

The next couple of weeks were busy for both Ashlyn and Ali. Ashlyn studied hard for hours on end, taking her finals all back-to-back over two days and finishing up early as usual. Ali got herself ahead
on all of her client work matters so she could take vacation time over Christmas and New Year. Before they knew it, it was December 22nd and they were flying to Florida to start their holidays. The flight got in fairly late, but Chris was already there waiting for them.

“Assssssshhhhh!” Chris lifted her into the air as usual while Ali quietly cringed a bit, knowing that Ashlyn was perfectly capable of telling him if something hurt. The blonde appeared to be completely back to normal these days, but Ali still worried.


Ali looked on curiously. Ashlyn was complimenting him, but it seemed to Ali like something was off in her voice. Her thoughts were broken by Chris lifting her in the air too. “Geez, Chris, warn a girl!” Ali yelled while giggling.

Grandma was waiting up for them when they got home. She hugged them both tightly and offered them food like ten times before finally heading to bed. Chris stayed up for a little longer with them, making jokes until Ashlyn finally said it was time for bed. When they finally got into Ashlyn’s bedroom, Ali could see on the blonde’s face that something was wrong.

“What’s going on? You look upset.” Ali sat down next to Ashlyn on the bed and reached to hold her hand.

Ashlyn let out a sigh. “Sorry. It’s Chris. I don’t know. The last couple of weeks over the phone, he’s been all peppy. I thought maybe I was making it up in my head, but look at him today, he’s like all smiley and stuff. It’s weird.”

“Why is that weird? Maybe he’s doing really well right now. He’s not always going to struggle. He looks happy.” Ali tried to understand why Ashlyn was upset about Chris being happy.

“Or maybe he’s not doing well at all.” Ashlyn said glumly, her knee bouncing up and down nervously. “This is exactly what he was like when he started doing drugs. He just got all crazy happy for no reason and he seemed great. Then it was all shit from there. I know Christmas is probably hard for him. Fuck, I can’t believe this. I thought he’d talk to me if he was struggling or even Kyle. Fuck.”

“Hey. Relax for a second, ok?” Ali moved her hand to Ashlyn’s cheek, pulling the blonde’s face to look at her. “I know it’s scary, but it doesn’t mean he’s not doing ok. He’s been doing really well until now and he has been talking to you and Kyle. I think you should talk to him before you jump to any conclusions. Not trusting him if nothing bad is going on can be worse for him than anything else. He needs you and all of us to believe in him and believe that he can always do right for himself. So, trust him until he gives you a reason not to. Give him the benefit of the doubt until you know otherwise.” Ali spoke gently.

“Ok. You’re right. Maybe I’m just paranoid, it’s just scary.” Ashlyn explained.

“I know, Ash. I do. He has a lot more people in his corner now than he used to though. If he’s not on the right track, we’ll find a way to get him back there together. Just don’t assume he’s not on the right track. He could be happy for a lot of reasons. Just talk to him.” Ali said confidently.

“Ok. I will. Thanks, Alex.” Ashlyn pulled Ali into a tight hug, letting some of her worry melt away for the time being.

Ashlyn didn’t get the chance to corner Chris and talk to him, only because Chris had cornered her first the next morning as she made coffee. She was just making a second cup for Ali when Chris came into the kitchen.
“Hey, got a minute for your awesome bro?” Chris asked.

“Of course I do. And don’t flatter yourself.” Ashlyn joked with him and motioned towards the deck. She couldn’t quite read his face at the moment. If Chris was about to tell her things weren’t going well, she was going to need the nature around her to help her calm down.

“Cool.” He replied, following her out.

They sat down at the table on the deck and looked out at the water for a few minutes, neither of them saying anything. Ashlyn’s nervousness got the best of her. “So, what’s going on? What are you not telling me? Something is up, I can tell.”

Chris just smiled. “Can’t hide nothing from you, Nancy Drew.”

Ashlyn got more nervous. He seemed like he was trying to deflect with humor, the usual Harris go-to move. Her heart was beating rapidly.

“So, I uh… I met someone.” Chris said shyly.

Ashlyn felt the tiniest bit of relief, hoping she had just heard right. That this was just about a girl. She played it cool. “Wait, like a girl? You’re dating?”

“No, like a dog. Yes, a girl, dumbass!” Chris said sarcastically. “I’ve been seeing her since just before Thanksgiving.”

Ashlyn felt fully relieved now, sliding right back into her normal banter with Chris. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me?! I should’ve known. You’re all stupid happy, like a freakin’ Dodo bird with heart eyes.” She hit him on the arm. “So, what the hell?! Tell me about her.”

“Her name is Susan. She’s a florist in the shop next to the one I work in. I don’t know, we talked all the time on the mornings that we opened up the shops and then I finally asked her out to dinner after like months and it just kind of happened.” Chris explained.

“A florist, that’s hot.” Ashlyn teased. “So many questions! Ok, so is it like official? Like are you just still casually dating or is it serious at all?”

“Pretty official. She’s my girlfriend if that’s what you’re getting at.” Chris answered. “Sorry, I know I should’ve said something before. I kinda figured I’d fuck it all up by now, you know?”

“Oh, I know that feeling. I wonder what the hell I’m doing right with Ali every day. But, dude, I’ve learned to just go with it. I think we’ve had so much screwed up stuff happen that we just expect it to keep on coming. Always waiting for the hammer to drop. That’s not a good way to live and I’ve had to learn to relax, a lot. You need to do that too. Good things happen, we need to remember that.” Ashlyn empathized. “I’m so excited for you.”

“Thanks.” Chris smiled the same goofy grin that seemed to be plastered on his face lately. “So, what you said about Ali just now. Kinda what I wanted to talk to you about… Ash, like, I think I found my Ali. Like, I’ve told her everything and she’s still here. I’m definitely in love with her, I just haven’t told her yet.”

“Oh wow, ok then.” Ashlyn smiled widely realizing the whole situation finally. “Wow. So, really serious.”

“Yeah, wow.” Chris replied. “And in the spirit of not fucking this up… what the hell do I get her for Christmas? Ugh, I’m dying over here. I don’t want to blow it.”
Ashlyn laughed a bit. “Relax! Ali and I got you, dude. We’ll figure it out together and pull off a serious Harris shopping caper. More importantly, when do I get to meet her and will she be around for Christmas? Has Gram met her?”

Chris let out a sigh of relief. “You’re the best, seriously. She’ll be in Ft. Myers at her parent’s house for Christmas, so she leaves tomorrow morning. I’m supposed to have breakfast with her before she goes, so I need to shop tonight. Gram met her last week, but I made her promise not to say anything until I could tell you in person. They seemed to get along really well. Susan loves Gram. As for you meeting her, you and Ali want to swing by the shop for lunch and meet up? She wants to meet you anyway, I brag about you all the time”

“Oh, heck yeah we do! It’ll be perfect, we’ll get to know her a little bit. I suck at shopping, but Ali is a shopping goddess. She’ll be all over this. We’ll hit the mall when you get out of work.” Ashlyn reassured him.

“Awesome. I’ll take Gram’s car and you can take my Jeep for the day so you can come meet me and stuff.” Chris coordinated. He got up and pulled Ashlyn into a tight hug. “Freakin’ love you, Ash.”

“Love you too, Bubba. So happy for you.” Ashlyn replied, her face smooshed into his chest. “Have a good day at work. I’ll go tell Ali and then we’ll see you at lunch.” Chris nodded and went off. Ashlyn sat on the deck for a few more minutes, letting the relief and good feelings wash over her. She went inside to make Ali a fresh cup of coffee and headed upstairs to wake the brunette.

Ali felt kisses all over her face and then a few trailed down her neck. “Mmmmm. You just keeping doing that.” She weaved her hands into Ashlyn’s hair, her eyes still closed.

“I’d love to, but we need to get showered and ready.” Ashlyn pulled back, watching Ali’s eyes finally open to look at her. “Made you coffee, gorgeous.” She picked up the mug from the bedside table.

“You’re perfect.” Ali sat up and took the mug, taking a sip. “And, you look like you’re feeling better than last night?” Ali said inquisitively, noting the shine in the blonde’s eyes and the dimpled smile on her face.

“I am. Chris has a giiiirlfriend.” Ashlyn said in a mocking tone.

“Awww, no way!” Ali exclaimed. “We should’ve known. What did he say?”

“He’s known her for a while. Her name is Susan and she’s a florist in the shop next to his and they’ve been officially together since just before Thanksgiving. He uh, well… he called her his Ali.” Ashlyn smiled.

Ali’s mouth dropped open a bit and she put her hand over her heart. “You guys are gonna to kill me with this Harris charm, I swear it. How cute! If Chris is anything like you, this girl had no idea what she’s in for. He probably already has her swooning. Ahhh, so exciting!”

“So, he’s freaking out about what to get her for Christmas. I told him we’d go shopping with him tonight and help him out. Plus, we’re meeting him for lunch so we can meet her.” Ashlyn explained.

“Oh, I am so on it! We’re gonna get this girl the perfect gift!” Ali said excitedly. “I’m excited to meet her. I wonder what she looks like,”
“Guess we’ll find out soon. That’s what I told Chris, that you had the shopping part down!” Ashlyn laughed and pulled Ali into a quick kiss. “Thanks for making sure I didn’t doubt him.” She said more seriously.

“That’s what I’m here for. Now, how about a shower?” Ali suggested. Ashlyn replied by quickly pulling off her clothes and heading to the bathroom.

After getting ready, the two of them had breakfast with Grandma who told them a little about Susan and their dinner together. Grandma really seemed to genuinely like her and told the girls that she thought Susan was really good for Chris; that she hadn’t ever seen him so pulled together like this. Grandma had mentioned how it had been a very long time since they’d had a Christmas where everyone was doing well and happy. Ali thought about how much she’d watched the Harris family transform in the last year. Knowing that she had even a little bit to do with it made her feel warm inside, exactly how Christmas should feel.

Ashlyn had to admit, she was impressed. Lunch with Susan had gone so well. She was really sweet, but she also had no trouble calling Chris out when needed and fitting right into the inappropriate banter than flowed between the Harris siblings. Her and Ali got along really well too and seemed to have similar interests, namely shopping and fashion. Ashlyn smiled watching Ali slyly try and pry information out of the girl that might help them buy her a good gift. Susan wasn’t a huge athlete, but she loved watching sports and was big on running for exercise. She was good looking too; she was about Ali’s height with light brown hair and blue eyes. She definitely had a runner’s body, trim and defined. Most importantly, Ashlyn had watched the way her brother fawned over Susan and the way this girl babied him right back. Ashlyn knew right away that this girl was here to stay and she was glad for that. When lunch was over, they parted ways and Ashlyn shot Chris a thumbs up when Susan wasn’t looking. Ashlyn and Ali spent the rest of the afternoon walking the beach and talking a little bit about their impressions of Susan. Both of them agreed that Susan was a very good addition.

Not long afterwards, they found themselves at the local mall with a very nervous Chris trying to find the perfect gift. Ali took control of the situation quickly.

“Ok, calm down, big guy. Let’s talk this out.” Ali said. “Have you ever been to the mall with her?”

“Once. We had lunch here two weeks ago.” Chris answered.

“Ok. Did you go anywhere besides just getting food here?” Ali asked.

“We walked around Macy’s afterwards to kill time, but that was it.” Chris replied.

“Alright. I can work with that.” Ali held Ashlyn’s hand and started to lead the three of them to Macy’s. Once they entered the store, she turned back to Chris. “So, when you walked around in here, did she try anything on, look at anything, or say she liked something?”

Chris thought for a minute. “Um, kinda. She looked at a few shirts, but I don’t know if she liked them really. She tried on a pair of shoes, but decided against them.” Chris paused. “Oh, and she tried on a pair of earrings she seemed to like, but chose not to buy them because she had too many.”

Ali smiled and tapped Chris on the cheek. “Good boy.” She led them to the jewelry counter. “Can you point out the earrings?”

Chris circled the counter for a while, eventually pointing out a simple pair of pearl earrings with a
tiny sterling silver leaves as the base. “It was these.”

“Pretty. Ok, well that’s your gift.” Ali said simply. Ashlyn nodded in agreement.

“What?” Chris looked a bit shocked. “Ali, I appreciate the help, but really? That’s it? I mean these are $25. Shouldn’t I be getting her like one of those diamond earring sets?”

“Chris, trust me. It has nothing to do with the cost. The first Christmas gift Ash got me was a simple bracelet I had pointed out that I liked from a shop in downtown Northampton. The fact that she paid attention and remembered, it melted me into a puddle and we weren’t even dating then. Trust me on this.” Ali persuaded him. “Besides, it’s way too soon for the diamond jewelry thing, keep it simple.”

“She’s right.” Ashlyn agreed. “It should come from here,” she pointed to his heart, “not from here.” She pointed to the wallet in his pocket.

“Alright, I’m trusting you. Let’s do it then.” Chris paid for the earrings and had them wrapped.

Since Grandma was having a few friends over for an evening of cards, the three of them had dinner at the mall food court before Chris headed off for a movie date with Susan. Ashlyn had her own plans for the night and the weather had helped her out perfectly.

Ashlyn drove up the coast a bit until it got dark. She put on the high beams and roof lights on Chris’ Jeep, navigating her way down the dirt path towards her isolated beach spot where she taught Ali how to surf.

“Come on beautiful, it’s a perfect night for star naming.” Ashlyn said, looking up at a perfectly clear night sky and grabbing a blanket and the star chart she brought with her.

“Fun! It’s warm here too, so much easier than in Northampton where it’s getting so damn cold.” Ali replied happily.

With Ashlyn taking an astronomy class this past semester, Ali had taken an interest in it and had been helping Ashlyn with her homework when she had to use a telescope to map out constellations. After Ashlyn had learned that only brightest stars in the night sky were actually named, just under 2000 of over 15 million of them, the two of them had started a quest to find unnamed stars and name them for fun. They would usually look for constellations they didn’t need a telescope to see and then look up the stars on Ashlyn’s star chart. If any weren’t named, they would write in a funny name next to them on the chart. It had become their new way to relax at night on the rugby pitch when the weather was cooperative. Unfortunately, they hadn’t been able to spend as much time doing it lately with the New England temperature dropping.

They sat together on the blanket looking up at a sky filled with stars. Ali had pointed out a few constellations and Ashlyn had used the soft glow of her phone to check them on the chart, but the stars had been named. After about half an hour Ali finally found a nameless one.

“Alright, Princess. What’s the name?” Ashlyn asked, smiling at the brunette’s excitement of finding one.

“Hmmmm, let’s see, something ridiculous. How about Barnaby?” Ali said.
Ashlyn laughed. “Yep, that qualifies as ridiculous!” She wrote the name on the chart and then wrapped her arm around the brunette.

They searched the sky again for a few minutes. This time Ashlyn pointed out a constellation. Ali looked down at the chart. “Oh, good one! There’s an unnamed one there.” She pointed to a star on the chart.

“No, I’m pretty sure that one is named.” Ashlyn disagreed.

Ali argued back. “No, look, see. You’re looking at the one right there and that has no name.” Ali pointed up and then back to the chart, trying to show the blonde that she was looking at the chart wrong.

“I’m telling you, Alex. It has a name.” Ashlyn continued to argue.

Ali got a little frustrated. “Ok, then. Show me where.”

Ashlyn pointed up to the star and down to the chart again.

“See! That’s exactly the same one I was saying. Look, no name on the chart.” Ali felt vindicated.

“Well, maybe the chart isn’t updated. It has a name.” Ashlyn said softly.

“What are you talking about? How do you know it has a name? Last time I checked, you don’t work for NASA.” Ali continued to argue.

Ashlyn chuckled and pulled a small wrapped box and an envelope out of her pocket and handed it to Ali. “Check it out. Envelope first.”

Ali opened the envelope to find an official certification that the star they had been looking was named ‘Princess Krieger’. Ashlyn had had the star officially named for her. “Ash…” Ali started, but Ashlyn cut her off.

“Open the box, Princess.”

Ali opened the box to find a silver star charm with the star coordinates etched on it.

“So you can always find it.” Ashlyn told her as Ali looked it over. “And, if we’re ever apart for any reason, you know where I’ll be looking. We can look at the same star until we’re back with each other.”

Ali took off her wing necklace and added the star charm to it. “You are so sweet, Ashlyn Harris. Like so damn perfect, have I mentioned that? Because seriously, it doesn’t get more perfect than you. I love you.” She leaned in and kissed the blonde deeply.

Ashlyn pulled away for just a second. “Merry Early Christmas, beautiful.” She crashed her lips back to Ali’s, the star naming long forgotten for the next hour as they kissed passionately and slowly, stopping to look at each other frequently. The two of them were both quite worked up, but the sweetness of the moment had stopped them from making it more than that. Both of them just wanting to be close, appreciating each other and what it meant to be together this year.
In contrast to the quiet and comforting night before, Christmas Eve was madness. Ashlyn had been completely right about the hustle and bustle of the Harris house. Grandma was already up at 6am working in the kitchen like a mad woman. She was so focused and on such a schedule that it was actually hard to help her because it took away too much time for her to explain what needed to be done. Ashlyn and Ali still helped her for a little bit while they waited for Chris to come back and go shopping with them. He had walked in the door about 30 minutes late with a huge grin on his face. He immediately went up to Ali and hugged her.

“She totally loved it. You are a genius.” He said happily.

“Any time, big man.” Ali smiled.

“Ok. Ok. Don’t crush my woman. So, it went over well, huh?” Ashlyn asked.

“Like so well that she left later than planned.” He chuckled.

Ashlyn laughed. “Christopher, are you going to thank Ms. Ali for getting you laid on Christmas?” She said in a motherly tone.

Chris picked up the joke. “Thhhaaaank you, Ms. Ali!”

“Ewww, I did not want to know, but you’re welcome.” Ali cringed.

Alright! All of you, out of my kitchen! You’re distracting me with your sex talk. We’re all happy for you, Christopher, but keep it out of my kitchen!” Grandma exclaimed. Ashlyn burst out laughing, stealing a couple of cookies from the fresh batch that had just come out of the oven. Grandma hit her lightly with the spoon and repeated her command for them to get going.

The three of them headed off to the mall. Chris split off to do his shopping while Ali and Ashlyn had previously decided they were going to do joint gifts and did their shopping together. They got Chris a whole collection of new video games that he wanted. They got Grandma the knitting needles she had talked about and a few books that Ashlyn saw on her to-read list. Ali generally hated last minute shopping, but she had to admit that it was a little bit thrilling to be racing around trying to get everything in a short time while fighting crowds of people. Chris met them about two hours later and they decided on stopping to eat lunch at the mall despite the fact that they still had to get a Christmas tree.

Ali had been getting antsy to get back home and was trying to hurry them along, she knew the afternoon would be busier than they expected.

“Relax, baby. We just have to set up the tree. We have more than plenty of time for that.” Ashlyn tried to get Ali to calm down.

“I know, but Grandma probably needs help in the kitchen.” Ali argued. “I don’t want to leave her by herself all day.”

“Ok, I promise we’ll be quick with the tree.” Ashlyn told her, making Ali relax a little bit.

The blonde had stayed true to her word. Ashlyn and Chris had picked a tree in record time and gotten it into the house and setup just before 1pm. It just needed to be decorated, which they would do all together later that evening.

Chris sat down on the couch to watch TV and Ashlyn looked at Ali. “So, you wanna go help Gram in the kitchen for a while and then maybe we’ll grab a nap before dinner?”
“Nope. We have a lot to do actually. Get up, Chris!” Ali exclaimed. “Come on you two!”

Chris looked at Ashlyn who shrugged at him and just followed Ali. The brunette led both of them into the garage and pointed to a huge pile of different sized boxes. “Ok, we need to work with this for the rest of the afternoon. So, let’s get to it.” Ali smiled.

“What the hell is all this stuff?” Chris asked. He hadn’t realized there were so many boxes in the garage, he had just been in there a couple weeks ago and they weren’t there.

“Questions later. Right now, we need to pull them outside.” Ali instructed.

“Alex, what is this?” Ashlyn asked, feeling lost.

“Just trust me, ok?” Ali gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“Always do.” Ashlyn replied grabbing the first box and bringing it outside like Ali told her. Chris followed suit, and about 15 minutes later, the three of them had all 23 boxes outside.

“So, I’m just going to say Merry Christmas to both of you and tell you to open them and get busy.” Ali said with a huge grin.

“Ok.” Ashlyn said, again looking at Chris who started to open the first box. Ashlyn went for the box in front of her as well. The two of them stood back to look at the contents of their box. Chris’ had rainbow Christmas lights, Ashlyn’s had plastic light up candy canes. They both still looked a bit confused.

Ali tried to help them out. “Every one of those boxes has Christmas decorations in them. We’re going to decorate the hell out of this place today, just like when you were kids.” Chris and Ashlyn’s faces lit up in big smiles as they looked at Ali.

“How?” Ashlyn asked.

“I tried to find everything I could that matched that picture you showed me. I had it all shipped here and Grandma kept it in the garage. You’d be amazed what you can find on Ebay when you search for vintage Christmas decorations.” Ali replied. “Now go open it all. We have work to do!”


“You got it!” Ashlyn agreed. She made her way over to Ali. “You’re incredible. This is so thoughtful and so meaningful, I don’t know what to say. You have a habit of leaving me speechless, Krieger.”

“Good, Harris. We don’t have time to talk. Now get busy.” Ali smiled and left a lingering kiss on the blonde’s lips before pushing her in the direction of the boxes.

Chris and Ashlyn pulled everything out while Ali sorted it into piles. After a while, Ali realized it had gotten quiet and she looked back to find Ashlyn and Chris standing next to a huge plastic light up Santa with tears streaming down their faces.

Ali went over to them in concern. “Ok, crying is not part of the plan. What’s wrong?” She put her arms around Ashlyn.

“Seriously, Ali. How did you manage to do this?” Chris spoke up first.
“I told you, I went on Ebay and just tried to match the stuff from Ash’s picture of your house all decorated. Is Santa not the right one?” She asked, trying to figure out what was wrong. She started to worry that this was bringing up too many memories for them and that maybe it wasn’t such a good idea.

“No. He’s the exact one.” Ashlyn sniffled and reached down to touch a burn hole in the back of the Santa that looked a different shade of red than the rest of the plastic. "Dad put the wrong bulb in him one year and it got too hot and burned a hole right in this spot. He sanded down the plastic to take some of the black spots off and then spray painted it red, but he got the wrong red. So, it didn’t match. This is the actual Santa, Alex. You got the actual Santa.” Ashlyn squeezed Ali tightly.

Ali was beside herself, her eyes wide. “Wow, as much as I’d love to take credit, I didn’t do that intentionally. I had no idea. Geez, what are the chances? Seriously, I have no idea how that happened. Christmas miracle?”

“Christmas miracle.” Chris agreed quietly, wiping his face and going to get busy again so Ashlyn and Ali could be alone.

As soon as he was out of earshot Ashlyn buried her face into Ali’s neck and hugged her even tighter. “I don’t know how you’ve managed it, but you’ve slowly mended every single thing inside me that was broken, Alex. I’d be lost without you. This is everything, you have no idea. I love you.” She kissed Ali softly, never wanting to let go.

Ali finally pulled back first. She wiped Ashlyn’s cheeks with her hands. “Merry Christmas, baby. I can’t possibly fix everything, but I sure as hell am going to spend my life trying. I love you, Ash. No more tears, let’s have some fun and do this right. Show me that sexy dimple.” Ashlyn gave her a dimpled grin. “Excellent. Now get to work, Harris. The house isn’t going to decorate itself.”

By just after 4pm, the three of them stood back looking at the house and agreed it was perfect. Of course, perfect meant that it looked like a Home Depot seasonal display from 1990 had exploded and landed on the house. They took turns taking pictures in front of it even though it was still daylight and you couldn’t fully see all of it yet.

“Oh, so we flip the ceremonial switch when it gets dark around 6pm.” Chris said excitedly.

Ashlyn nodded in agreement and tugged Ali’s hand. “Come on. Let’s go relax and then get ready for dinner.”

When they got to Ashlyn’s room, the blonde shut the door and kissed Ali hard. Ali moaned into her mouth, feeling Ashlyn’s tongue run across her lips. She moved her own tongue to meet Ashlyn’s, each of them fighting for control of the kiss that was growing more heated by the second. Ashlyn moved down her neck and Ali closed her eyes, feeling the blonde’s hands move up her shirt and rake over her lower back.

“Mmmm, baby. We have less than an hour to shower, get dressed, wrap gifts, and re-pack all our stuff for the flight tonight.” Ali tried to hold herself together, knowing if they gave in they’d never get ready on time.

Ashlyn groaned. “Want you so bad.” She mumbled against Ali’s lips, kissing her passionately again.

“Later tonight.” Ali promised her.

“We’ll be with your parents tonight.” Ashlyn gave her a doubtful look.

“Yeah, in a big house with lots of rooms and thick walls. I’m not going to bed without having my
way with you, Harris.” Ali reassured her. “Buuut, if we don’t get packed, we’ll miss our flight and then we’ll never get there.”


Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s face in her hands. “Make no mistake, not letting you take me right now is definitely not winning. Just an unfortunate necessity.” She left a kiss on the blonde’s lips before turning to pull out what she needed for the night and re-pack the rest of her suitcase.

By 6pm, they were downstairs helping Grandma put out the food and work on any finishing touches.

Ali watched Ashlyn put out plates, silverware, and cups. The blonde was in a pair of skinny jeans and a white button up shirt underneath the ugliest Christmas sweater vest Ali had ever seen, her hair pulled into a bun. Her sweater vest featured three cats in Santa hats playing with balls of red and green yarn. She looked adorable and Ali couldn’t help but smile and watch her.

“Come on ladies, it’s show time!” Chris announced from the doorway. People would be arriving soon and he wanted the house decorations all lit up before then.

All four of them stood on the lawn, Chris with the main plug in his hands. “We ready?”

“Go for it!” Ashlyn replied excitedly. A few of their neighbors had heard them outside and seen that there were decorations up earlier in the day. They gathered outside of their own homes to watch, knowing just how long it has been since the Harris home had been decorated on Christmas. Chris put the two ends of the plug together and an immediate blinding light illuminated the house. He and Ashlyn let out a loud whoop and Grandma clapped. The blonde immediately took out her phone to snap more pictures while some of the neighbors clapped to. Ali had never seen anything that looked so tacky and yet so beautiful at the same time. The hours of scouring the internet to find all this stuff had been well worth it. Well worth seeing Harris family reclaim their Christmas. Well worth the beautiful, heart stealing smile on Ashlyn’s face.

They spent the rest of the night mingling with Grandma’s friends, eating too much food, decorating the tree, and opening gifts. Chris and Grandma had loved their gifts. Ashlyn and Ali had gotten some great gifts as well. Grandma had gotten them bathrobes which she had monogramed for them herself. Chris had gotten Ashlyn a set of custom interior lights for her Jeep which would light the inside of it in any color she wanted when she had them on. He had gotten Ali a pair of nice headphones with a note that said they were for when she needed to block out Ashlyn.

At 11pm, Chris drove Ashlyn and Ali to the airport for their late flight to DC, so they would already be with the Kriegers by Christmas morning. Ashlyn and Ali had changed into some comfortable sweatpants and hoodies and said goodbye to Grandma. Ashlyn took one more look at the decorated house as they pulled away. It had been a pretty wonderful Harris Christmas, thanks to Ali. She felt a little bad Chris would have to clean it all up on his own, but he promised he’d get Todd to help him and that it was well worth it.

Chris had hugged Ali so tightly at the airport, she thought she might break in half. “You’re the best Christmas gift this family has ever gotten.” He had whispered in her ear. Ali was so choked up all she could manage to say back was “Merry Christmas.”
The flight was mostly empty given the late hour and the holiday. Besides Ashlyn and Ali, there was maybe about 10 other people scattered throughout the plane. Everyone had spread out in different spots, so it felt almost like a private flight. Ashlyn sat by the window in the back part of the plane with Ali leaned into her. The stewardess had handed out free pillows and blankets on account of the holiday and came around with drinks and snacks before telling everyone to just hit the button if they needed her.

Ali pulled a blanket over them and leaned in to kiss Ashlyn slowly. When she pulled back, Ashlyn could see the mischievous look on the brunette’s face.

“I can see the wheels turning in that brain of yours, Krieger. What are you up to?” Ashlyn asked.

Ali leaned into her ear. “First, it’s definitely later, and you remember what I said about later. Second, my fantasy list definitely includes joining the mile high club.” Her hand cupped Ashlyn’s center over her pants, making the blonde jump a bit.

Ashlyn’s eyes went wide, her body reacting faster than her mind at the moment. “Right here?” She whispered.

Ali trailed kisses up her neck and got right near her ear again. “Right here. Right now. Fuck me.” She said huskily, grabbing Ashlyn’s hand under the blanket and placing it under her shirt and on her stomach as she sucked the blonde’s neck lightly.

Ashlyn’s throat went dry, her eyes darkening at Ali’s words. “You’re so hot.” Ashlyn ran her hand further up Ali’s shirt and slipped it under her bra, taking a nipple between her fingers. Ali gasped into her ear, the brunette’s warm breath making Ashlyn erupt into goosebumps.

Ali couldn’t wait any longer. She pulled Ashlyn’s hand into her pants. “I’ve been waiting all day, baby. Please.” She whispered hotly against Ashlyn’s jaw.

Ashlyn lightly ran her finger over Ali’s clit. “You’re so wet, baby.” She took a quick look around to make sure no one was approaching before slipping two long fingers into Ali and kissing her, muffling the brunette’s soft moan just in time. She pulled back to look into Ali’s dark eyes, her mouth was slightly parted. “You gotta be really quiet.” Ashlyn whispered, starting to pump in and out of Ali’s tight wet core.

Ali closed her eyes and buried her head into Ashlyn’s neck, her hot breath against the blonde’s ear again. “Oh god, yeeees. Yes, yeeees, fuck.” Ali’s hips squirmed against Ashlyn’s hand as she whispered breathlessly. “Faster, baby.”

Ashlyn picked up the pace a little bit, working her fingers in and out deeply with a bit more speed. She could already feel Ali getting tighter around her fingers.

“So, so close. So, good.” Ali was already on the edge after just a couple of minutes. “Yes, Ash. Fuck me, don’t stop, so cl…close.” Ashlyn let her fingers bottom out and then curled them to send Ali hurling over the edge. “Oh god, oh god, yeeees. Ash, oh god, Ash.” The brunette’s fingers dug into Ashlyn’s bicep as she trembled slightly with her muscles clenched, riding it out.

When Ali’s breathing finally slowed a bit, Ashlyn pulled her fingers out slowly and brought them up to her mouth to lick them clean. Ali was so turned on, she had her hands down Ashlyn’s pants, filling the blonde with her fingers before Ashlyn even knew what had happened.

“Fuck, Alex. Holy shit.” She was already close and Ali had just started. Ali didn’t let up though, her thumb running circles against the blonde’s clit while she thrust her fingers into her. Ashlyn felt Ali’s
lips on her neck and felt herself start to convulse, spilling out onto Ali’s fingers as she bit down on her own hand to keep from screaming out as the orgasm tore through her. Ali slowed and continued to thrust deep and gentle as Ashlyn came down.

Ali leaned in and kissed Ashlyn softly, continuing her deep slow strokes, feeling the blonde’s breathing start to pick up again.

“Oh my gggod, you feel so good.” Ashlyn whispered, the pleasure rippling through her as she felt Ali’s fingers press in and out of her so slowly. She could feel the pressure building deep inside her again. The slow pace driving her crazy and setting her on fire. “Alex, please, I want to come again. Make me come.” She begged.

Ali stilled her fingers, leaving them deep inside the blonde and curling them over and over again. “Oh fuck. Yeah, right there, right there, yes.” Ashlyn loudly whispered. Ali covered her lips with her own to keep her quiet, her fingers curling with more pressure now. Ali felt Ashlyn’s hips buck against her hand and then the blonde let out a few gasps into her mouth before Ali felt hot wetness spread all over her fingers.

Ashlyn rested her head against the back of the seat and closed her eyes taking deep breaths, wrapping an arm around Ali and pulling the brunette against the crook of her neck. Ali closed her eyes too.

“We’re beginning to make our final descent into Washington, D.C., please prepare the cabin for landing.” The pilot’s voice came over the speaker and woke Ali up. She was resting on a sleeping Ashlyn’s chest, blanket pooled at their waists, her fingers still buried deep in the blonde. She pulled them out slowly, waking Ashlyn.

“Sorry baby, I’d stay there all night, but I don’t think that’s a safe landing position.” She winked, wiping her hand on the blanket.

Ashlyn grinned. “Welcome to the Mile High Club, Krieger. I believe you’ve earned yourself a double gold membership.”

Ali gave her a quick kiss. “Damn, I guess we’ll need a longer flight so I can get the triple gold next time.”
Alright, time for some good feelin’ Christmas fun with the Kriegers... Of course, I’m still never happy when the Christmas music comes on the radio before we’ve even had Thanksgiving, but writing Christmas chapters makes me feel slightly better about it :)

“Alizzle!” Kyle’s voice rang through the baggage claim area of the airport, drawing a few looks from the security officers nearby. “Kyle!” Ali ran to him and jumped into his arms as usual while Ashlyn made her way over to them, dragging their bags behind her.

“And the wifey!” Kyle teased putting Ali down and hugging Ashlyn.

“Hey bro!” Ashlyn replied cheerily.

Kyle stood back to look at them. “Hold up. Wait a second… I know that look, Alexandra! The two of you!” He pointed at them and yelled out. “Oh my god, was it the airport or the plane?”


“So totally busted!” Kyle exclaimed. “By the way, that is just dirty! Seriously, like the bathroom is gross on planes.”

“Wasn’t in the bathroom.” Ali mumbled again, turning a bit red herself.

Kyle’s mouth dropped open. “Holy crap! In the seats? Really?! Like really, really?”

“Yes, really. It was a practically empty flight and we got a free blanket. Now can we please move on from this conversation.” Ashlyn piped up, trying to end the discussion.

“Alright, I’ll drop it, Ashy. Only cause it’s Christmas!” Kyle joked. “Come on, Mom and Dad are waiting up for you.”

Ashlyn rolled her eyes and Ali laughed, both of them following Kyle out to the car.

The Krieger house was festive and beautiful, like nothing Ashlyn had ever seen in real life. Everything in the house looked like it came out of a high end catalogue. The lights outside were all plain white and perfectly framed the windows which had indoor white candle lights on the ledge of each one. A wreath hung in the middle of the door with a red bow. Inside there was a thick rope of balsam pine twisted down the banister of the stairs. Christmas candles and jars filled with Christmas candies and little red and green jingle bells were perfectly placed throughout the house. The living room fireplace had different colored stockings hanging above it with each person’s name. Ashlyn smiled seeing a green stocking that said ‘Ashlyn” in red across the top that hung right next to a white stocking with ‘Alex’ written in green on it. In the corner was a beautiful blue spruce Christmas tree lit up in all white lights and decorated with little white and gold bows and clear glass ornaments; the only color on the tree were ornaments that looked like maybe Ali or Kyle had made them as kids. An angel sat at the top of the tree and perfectly wrapped presents surrounded it at the bottom. Ashlyn looked around trying to take it all it. It felt both homey and comfortable, but also a bit like she’d just walked onto a movie set.
“I think they’re in the kitchen.” Kyle said walking in that direction.

As soon as they walked into the kitchen, Deb jumped up from the counter where she was having tea with Ken and Anthony. “You’re here!” She pulled them into a hug together and then stepped back to look at them. “You look lovely, girls.”

“We’re in sweats, Mom.” Ali rolled her eyes.

“Still, I think you look good. I missed you!” Deb replied.

“This place looks amazing. Really beautiful.” Ashlyn complimented.

“How sweet. Thank you, I try hard to bring the holiday cheer.” Deb said flattered.

Ken made his way over and hugged Ali. “Hi sweetheart.”

“Hi Daddy.” Ali smiled widely.

Ken then hugged Ashlyn. “Hi Ashlyn, glad you’re here. Hopefully you’ll stay once you’ve seen Krieger Christmas.” He laughed.

“Can’t be any worse than Harris Christmas, I assure you.” Ashlyn played back. “My brother’s not here telling fart jokes, so you’ve already one-upped us.”

Ken laughed. “It is way past my bedtime, I just wanted to make sure you got in ok. So, I’ll see you all in the morning.” He made a general wave to the room and headed up the stairs as everyone in the kitchen yelled goodnight.

Deb turned to Anthony. “What about you darling? Are you staying?”

“No, no. I’ll head home for the night and come back tomorrow for dinner when Patty is around.” He said referring to Ken’s girlfriend. “Let you guys have your morning together.”

It was the thing that Ali most liked about Anthony. He had always been respectful of their time together as a family and understanding of his role in their lives. He was never absent, but he knew when to give them their space. She joined Kyle and Ashlyn in saying goodnight to him and watched Deb walk him out.

Deb waltzed back into the kitchen carrying a stack of paper and pens. “I’m off to bed too, but you kids have work to do before bed. You know the drill.” She put the paper and pens down in front of them and then pulled out a package of Oreo cookies.

“Really, Mom? It’s like 2am.” Ali whined.

“I’m so ready!” Kyle said in a chipper tone.

Ashlyn had no idea what anyone was talking about, so she sat silently and waited for an explanation.

“It’s tradition. Besides, how is Santa going to know what to bring you if you don’t tell him? And, the man in red does need his cookies. Now get to work!” Deb kissed Ali on the head. She did the same to Kyle and Ashlyn and made her way upstairs.

“You heard the woman!” Kyle grabbed the paper, pens, and cookies and went into the living room.

“Care to explain?” Ashlyn looked at Ali.
“My mom makes us write a Christmas list for Santa before Christmas morning. And we have to leave out cookies for him too.” Ali explained, feeling a bit ridiculous.

“Ooh, fun!” Ashlyn said genuinely excited. This was the kind of stuff that she had never done, even as a kid.

Ali couldn’t help smiling at Ashlyn’s childlike excitement. It sparked her own excitement for their Christmas list task, something she just realized she’d become so jaded about as an adult and had taken for granted. “You’re adorable, you know that?” She kissed Ashlyn deeply.

They heard a throat clear from the doorway of the kitchen. Ashlyn immediately jumped back from Ali, almost falling off her chair. “Geez, Kyle. I thought you were your Dad.” Ashlyn breathed a sigh of relief. As comfortable as she’d gotten with Ken, she still didn’t want to hear that Ken Krieger throat clear from behind her when she was making out with his little girl.

Kyle gave them the eyes. “Seriously, you guys didn’t get enough on the plane? Come on, let’s get going so we can get sleep.”

“Ok, Diva. We’re coming.” Ali replied.

Kyle smirked deviously. “Oh I bet you are.” He ducked as Ali picked up a Hershey kiss from the candy jar on the counter and threw it at him.

The three of them sat on the couch with paper and pens in hand, working on their Christmas lists. Ashlyn was the first to finish. She sat back and watched Kyle and Ali in deep concentration as they tried to compose their lists.

“Already?” Ali asked a bit surprised.

“What can I say, I’m a simple surfer girl.” Ashlyn winked and went into the kitchen. She grabbed a glass of milk and sat back down next to Ali, opening the package of Oreos on the coffee table.

“Hey, hey. Those are for Santa!” Kyle warned her.

Ashlyn pulled her hair around her face like a beard. “Ho, Ho, Ho. I just need to be fatter, which is where the cookies come in.”

Ali laughed. “There’s plenty of cookies, Kyle. Plus, I want some too. Also, Santa is Mom.”

“Ok, fine. Toss me one.” Kyle replied, catching the cookie Ali threw to him. He got up and went to the kitchen for his own glass of milk.

Ali watched Ashlyn dunk a cookie in her milk. “Hmph, a dunker huh?”

“I’m sorry, is there any other way?” Ashlyn challenged playfully.

“Yep, twist!” Ali twisted an Oreo open and licked the crème from the center.

“Twister.” Ashlyn shook her head. “So wrong in so many ways. Figures you wouldn’t want to get your hands dirty, Princess.” She dunked another cookie in her milk.

“Dunking is stupid.” Ali stuck her tongue out jokingly.

Kyle finally chimed in. “Both of you are stupid for having this argument. There is only one right way. Watch and learn.” He twisted his cookie open, licked the crème and then put the two halves together to dunk them in his milk. “Ta da!”
“Not impressed.” Ashlyn shrugged.

“Yeah, no.” Ali agreed.

“You both suck.” Kyle whined and got back to his list.

Ashlyn arranged some cookies on a plate for Santa while Ali and Kyle finished up and then sat back down beside Ali, running her hand up and down the brunette’s back as she leaned over writing.

“Done!” Ali announced proudly, sealing her list in the envelope and leaning back into Ashlyn.

“Me too!” Kyle wrote one last thing and sealed his own list. He grabbed Ashlyn and Ali’s, putting them in a pile by the cookies Ashlyn had placed on the small table near the tree.


“Yes please.” Ashlyn answered.

“Definitely.” Kyle agreed.

They made their way upstairs. Kyle fist bumped Ashlyn and gave Ali a hug goodnight before going into his room.

Ashlyn flopped down onto the bed feeling completely exhausted.

Ali picked up the two pajama sets that had been laid out on the chair beside the bed. She held them up for Ashlyn to see. “My mom always gets us Christmas pajamas, you want A Christmas Story or the Grinch?” She asked the blonde.

Ashlyn giggled at how into Christmas the Krieger’s were. She looked over the two pajamas. The Christmas Story set had green pants with little toy rifles all over them and a red t-shirt with the Ralphie character and the line ‘You’ll shoot your eye out.’ The Grinch set had black pants with Grinch faces all over it and a dark green t-shirt with a huge Grinch face and the line ‘You’re a mean one, Mr. Grinch.’ Knowing which movie was her absolute favorite made the choice easy.

“Christmas Story, for sure.” Ashlyn replied. Ali tossed her the pajamas and they quickly got ready for bed.

Ashlyn was exhausted, but she took a minute to let her mind process everything. She spooned Ali in her arms securely, taking in the scent of her peach shampoo, the brunette’s perpetually cold feet pressed against her legs as usual. This is what it felt like to be happy, to feel safe, to be in love, to have all those warm fuzzy feelings that came with the holidays and being around family, to actually experience all those things you see in movies but think you’ll never achieve in real life. “Alex?” Ashlyn whispered in the dark.

“Hmmm?” Ali replied, already starting to fall asleep.

“Merry Christmas, beautiful.” Ashlyn said softly, a smile on her face.

Ali turned around in her arms. “Merry Christmas, baby.” She replied, leaving the softest of kisses on Ashlyn’s lips and curling herself up the blonde’s arms before closing her eyes again. Ashlyn held her snuggly and let her own eyes close.
Deb was the first one up on Christmas morning as usual. She made herself a cup of coffee and sat on the couch waiting for Ken. He was usually the next one up and then they’d go wake up the kids together for present opening. She grabbed the stack of Christmas lists and began reading them like she always did. She had to admit that Kyle and Ali were probably getting too old for this, but she loved reading them. Although she had already gotten their gifts, it usually gave her ideas for next year.

She opened Kyle’s first, finding a short but very specific list as usual. It started with a line of men’s skincare products and also included hair clippers, a Prada backpack, and a whole host of camera accessories. It ended with a long diatribe on how Santa had not gotten him a single thing on last year’s list and how it was time for Santa to step it up because he had been an ‘extra good boy’ lately. Deb shook her head and smiled. If he didn’t look so much like her and Ken, she might wonder where on earth Kyle came from; his exuberant personality was nothing like either of them.

She opened Ali’s list next, seeing exactly what she expected from her baby girl. It was a long list of various make-up items, shoes, handbags, sunglasses, some iphone accessories, and some clothing items. She laughed when she saw that a blender had made the list and realized just how much more domestic Ali had become over the last year. The list ended the same way as every other one before it: ‘And as always, a pony!’ Deb laughed to herself. One day she’d actually have to rent a pony and give her daughter the shock of her life.

Deb had left Ashlyn’s list for last, knowing it would be the most fun since she had no idea what to expect. Given Ashlyn’s style, she was assuming sneakers, hats, and maybe some electronics. It hadn’t been at all what she was expecting. Ashlyn had written it like a letter.

Santa,

Thanks, but no thanks. Over the years I’ve asked for many things that I’ve never gotten. Last year I didn’t ask for anything, but got everything. I got inner peace, family, and love. I got Alex Krieger, and she’s more than I’ve ever deserved. I think you’ve done enough big guy, so thanks for that. Not saying I’ll never ask for something again, but I’m good for a very very long time.

- Ash

Deb read the letter twice, marveling at the humble, kind, and remarkable woman her daughter had been lucky to find. Of course, seeing the way they complemented each other, Ashlyn had been lucky to find Ali too. She mused at how life could be truly wonderful sometimes and come together so seamlessly. She put the letter back into the envelope and slipped it into Ali’s stocking.

Ali heard a knock at the bedroom door, yelling a sleepy “Come in.” Ashlyn stirred beside her, the blonde’s arms securely around her waist.

Deb walked into the room and sat on the edge of the bed. “Merry Christmas, girls. Time for presents!”

Ali sat up and Ashlyn followed suit, rubbing her eyes.
“Merry Christmas, Mom.” Ali replied, getting a kiss on the forehead from Deb.

“Merry Christmas.” Ashlyn smiled. Deb leaned over and hugged Ashlyn really tightly for a few seconds. It was a bit strange, but Ashlyn just figured the woman was happy about Christmas morning.

“Alright, living room in 10 minutes! Your Dad is waking up Kyle.” Deb walked out of the room.

Ali got up and rummaged around in their luggage, grabbing her toothbrush and handing Ashlyn hers as well. After brushing their teeth, Ali gave Ashlyn a proper good morning kiss and led the blonde downstairs to the living room. Ken and Deb were in the kitchen making coffee and getting together some pastries. Kyle hadn’t come downstairs yet. Ali pulled Ashlyn into her arms and cuddled up to her on the couch. “Get comfy, baby. This takes quite a while.”

Ashlyn looked at the tree and realized just how many presents were under there. “Yeah, I can see that this might take a while.” She pointed at the presents. She noticed the cookies and letters were gone from the small table beside the tree. “Hey, where did the cookies and letters go?”

“Mom, I mean ‘Santa’ took care of them.” Ali answered mockingly.

“Wait, does she actually read them?” Ashlyn asked nervously.

“Yes. Usually gives her ideas for next year’s gifts.” Ali replied.

“Oh.” Ashlyn said quietly.

Ali noted the sheepish look on Ashlyn’s face. “Oh god, Ash. What did you ask for?”

“Nothing bad, I swear! No big deal, I just didn’t know she read them. Kinda figured you guys just did it for fun and tossed them out, but guess not.” Ashlyn shrugged. She had just figured out why Deb hugged her so tightly this morning.

Once everyone was settled in the living room still in their pajamas with coffee and food, Deb handed everyone their stocking and they all dug into them. They were filled with all kinds of small stocking stuffers and candy. Ali pulled out the letter in hers curiously and read it. She smiled widely and put it away while Ashlyn was still distracted with her own stocking. She looked up and caught Deb’s eyes across the room. Deb put her hand over her heart and smiled and Ali nodded knowingly with a big grin on her face.

Then the real present opening started. Ashlyn had been flabbergasted by the fact that she had as many presents under the tree and Ali and Kyle did. The Kriegers could not have been more welcoming or made her feel any more like one of them. They had gone around the room, everyone taking turns opening one gift at a time.

Ali had gotten a new make-up caddy and two pairs of shoes from Deb and a car safety kit and a new ipad from Ken. Ashlyn had gotten surf board wax and a Hurley wetsuit from Deb and a complete soccer kit from Ken which included shirt, shorts, sock, shin guards, goalie gloves and cleats.

Kyle had gotten them a joint gift. It was a collection of framed pictures of them together that he had taken without them realizing. They were absolutely beautiful and both Ali and Ashlyn were so touched. There was one of Ali on Ashlyn’s back as they walked down the beach in Miami, one of Ali curled into Ashlyn’s lap at Thanksgiving, and another of them sitting on the deck of the Harris home leaned into each other watching the sunset. Ashlyn’s favorite picture had ironically been taken in her least favorite place: it was a picture of Ali lying next to Ashlyn in her hospital bed, brushing some hair from the blonde’s face as they looked at each other. The way Ali was looking at her in that
picture, nobody had ever looked at her that way before and to have it captured like this was everything. The gift had made Ali tear up. “Kyle this is just…” Ashlyn started, but Kyle cut her off.

“Nope. No need for any more words. I can see that you both love it. The gift speaks for itself. Love you both.” He said sweetly.

“Love you too.” They replied and got up to hug him.

Ashlyn and Ali got to give their gifts. They had gotten Ken a new Northface jacket in the colors of the soccer team he coached along with a deluxe grilling set since the one at the Miami beach house had seen better days. They had gotten Deb a gift certificate for a complete spa day and pair of dangling gold earrings. Their gift to Kyle had complemented his gift to them perfectly as they had gotten him two new camera lenses and a high capacity external hard drive so he could store all the pictures he took.

Finally, the only two gifts left were from Ashlyn and Ali to each other. Ken, Deb, and Kyle sat back comfortably, ready for the gooey show of affection that was sure to happen. Ali went first, handing Ashlyn a long, flat, rectangular box that was a little bit heavy. Ashlyn opened it to find a brand new longboard skateboard, but not just any one, a custom one. The top of it featured the flowers from Ashlyn’s side tattoo, with the German script of Ali’s side tattoo running behind it. On the underside of the board were elements from Ashlyn’s tattoo sleeve, Zeus, Athena and the feather and birds all surrounding the word “Liebe’ running down the center, matching the tattoo on Ali’s forearm. Ashlyn ran her hands over the designs in awe. “Wow, Alex. This is amazing. It’s beautiful. I love it so much. The designs are so exact.”

“I got the original designs from Lisa to get this made. Tracking down my tattoo artist from Germany was a bit harder, but I finally reached him.” Ali explained. Ashlyn leaned over and gave her a chaste kiss, making sure that there was enough behind it to let the brunette know more was coming later when they weren’t in front of her parents.

“We’re so testing this out later!” Kyle said giddily to Ashlyn as he looked the longboard over. “This is gorgeous. You nailed it, Alex. You’re up, Ash. No pressure.” He joked and sat back like he was watching a movie. Deb slapped him on the arm.

Ashlyn handed Ali a medium-sized flat box. Ali opened it to find an envelope inside. She opened it and looked over the contents. Two airline tickets to New York City that left Washington D.C. three days from now and a reservation for a deluxe suite in a Times Square hotel. Her face lit up as she looked at the dates of the reservation. “We’re going to be in Times Square for New Year?!”

Ashlyn nodded with a smile. Last New Year when they’d talked on the phone, Ali had told Ashlyn about how she’d always dreamed of being in Times Square on New Year and watching the ball drop in that crazy New York City crowd. It was something on her bucket list. After everything that had happened over the last few months, Ashlyn thought it was time to cross something off the list, keeping the promise to enjoy all their moments together.

Ali squealed and launched herself into Ashlyn’s arms, squeezing her tight. “I can’t believe we’re going to do this together! I am so excited!” Ali screamed. “How did you even get a reservation? Aren’t they booked out for like 5 years ahead of time?”

“Sarah’s mom hooked me up big time. She’s a travel agent and knows the owner of the hotel. If for some reason the weather is awful, we can still watch the ball drop from the room because it overlooks Times Square.” Ashlyn explained. Ali kissed her quickly and hugged her tightly again.

“Wow, ok. I give up!” Kyle piped up. “You two are perfect and adorable, you both win at life. Ugh,
I need a boyfriend like yesterday!"

“Awww, Kyle, I love you!” Ali said, making her way over to him and helping him and Deb bring the empty coffee mugs into the kitchen.

Ken took the opportunity go over to Ashlyn. “Didn’t think anyone could beat the longboard, but, nice touch kiddo.” He said appreciating how happy Ashlyn made his daughter and how thoughtful they were to each other.

“Thanks.” Ashlyn smiled.

“So, I wanted to explain my gift. Alex said you played soccer, but quit. When I asked her why, she said you associated it with some bad memories.” He paused and put his hand on her arm. “I love soccer and everything about the game. I associate it with family. Honestly, no pressure at all, but I usually kick the ball around with Kyle and Alex when we’re together and we play a bit. I thought maybe you could join us and maybe make some new memories. Really though, no pressure.”

Ashlyn was completely touched at the meaning behind Ken’s gift, his want to bring her into is world and his family. She couldn’t think of anything she wanted to do more. “Ken, I would absolutely love that. Thank you.”

“Good. Krieger soccer is an hour.” Ken said, heading to the kitchen as Ali walked back into the living room.

Ali sat down next to Ashlyn and pulled her into a long kiss now that they had a minute alone. “Ash, New York sounds amazing, but that must have cost you a fortune. We honestly can do something else. I’ll be happy just to be with you.” It had dawned on her that hotels in New York City often costs thousands for just one night when there was something big going on, let alone one that overlooked Times Square on New Year’s Eve. And they were staying for several days on top of that.

“Relax. Like I said, Sarah’s mom hooked me up big time. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to do it and would have come up with something else. Promise.” Ashlyn explained.

Ali let herself get excited again. “Well, in that case, I can’t freakin’ wait!” She kissed the blonde again.

“Yeah, well, I can’t wait to try out this beautiful longboard. I can’t get over it, look at this thing. It’s amazing. I really love it, Alex.” Ashlyn ran her hand over the longboard that was propped up beside her. “I’ll have to take it out for a spin later with Kyle. Right now, though I have to get ready.”

“Ready for what?” Ali questioned.

“I’ve been recruited for Coach Ken Krieger’s squad.” She pointed to the soccer kit in the pile of her gifts.

“Wow, is it almost 11am already? I thought it was earlier. We usually kick the ball around for a bit before a quick lunch.” Ali said before adding. “You really don’t have to play if you don’t want to, my Dad can be a bit pushy with the soccer sometimes.” She knew soccer was kind of complicated for Ashlyn.

“He wasn’t pushy at all. And I really want to play. I’m excited about it.” Ashlyn reassured her.

“Alright, Harris. Don’t say I didn’t warn you. Brace yourself for the trash talk, cause I’m not sparing you one bit.” Ali challenged.
“Bring it, Krieger.” Ashlyn played back.

Just under an hour later, they were at a nearby soccer field with Kyle and Ken. Ashlyn tried to juggle a ball with her feet. She found herself a bit rusty at first, but after about 10 minutes she had the hang of it again. She was at least better than Kyle, but she couldn’t touch Ali. Ashlyn watched in awe as the ball moved swiftly between Ali’s feet in perfect, graceful control. They moved on to playing 2-on-2, Kyle and Ken versus Ali and Ashlyn. Unlike rugby where they were pretty equal in skill level, Ashlyn had to admit that Ali was so much better than her at soccer. Everything she did with the soccer ball seemed effortless. Ashlyn certainly held her own, but Ali was miles above her. Then again, she had never been much of a field player, the goal was always her place.

“Ok, Princess. I’ll admit, you are way better at soccer.” Ashlyn conceded.

“Usually I can back up my trash talk.” Ali said cockily. “You’re pretty good yourself though. You have Kyle beat.” Ali mocked her brother.

Kyle gave her a dirty look.

“Eh, I’m ok. I’m not used to playing on the field though. I only ever played in goal really.” Ashlyn replied.

“Which reminds me, get in there!” Ken pointed to the goal. Ashlyn got up excitedly and headed towards it, putting her gloves on.

Ali watched as Ken and Kyle lined some balls up. “Woah, woah, woah! Absolutely not! You guys are crazy if you think I’m letting you take shots at her!” Ali yelled at them.

“Geez, calm down, Mom!” Kyle replied. “We’re just having fun, it’s not like we’re gonna rip them at her.”

It didn’t do much to calm Ali down. Ashlyn walked over to her. “Hey, I know you’re worried, but I feel fine. I’m not going to do anything nuts, I promise.” Ashlyn tried to persuade her.

Ali took one look at the excitement in Ashlyn’s eyes and felt herself crumbling. “Fine.” She turned to look at the three of them. “But you keep the ball on the ground, nothing above the waist!” She warned and turned to Ashlyn. “And you, not even one dive!”

“Deal!” Ashlyn agreed with a huge smile and ran back between the goal posts.

Ali watched as Ken and Kyle lined some balls up. “Woah, woah, woah! Absolutely not! She is not even 3 months out of surgery. You guys are crazy if you think I’m letting you take shots at her!” Ali yelled at them.

“Geez, calm down, Mom!” Kyle replied. “We’re just having fun, it’s not like we’re gonna rip them at her.”

It didn’t do much to calm Ali down. Ashlyn walked over to her. “Hey, I know you’re worried, but I feel fine. I’m not going to do anything nuts, I promise.” Ashlyn tried to persuade her.

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“Deal!” Ashlyn agreed with a huge smile and ran back between the goal posts.

Ali looked back to Kyle and Ken for confirmation that they had heard her. “On the ground, we got it.” Ken assured her and Kyle nodded in affirmation.

Now it was Ali’s turn to be in awe. She watched Ashlyn easily block shot after shot. The blonde’s feet moved quickly and she seemed to anticipate where the shot was going before it was even taken. Ali was definitely impressed, and if she was being honest, really turned on. She had only seen that type of focus on Ashlyn’s face in two other places: on the rugby pitch and when the blonde was between her legs. She composed herself and walked over in front of the goal.
“Pretty impressive, Harris.” Ali said with a smirk, watching Ashlyn smile at her compliment. “But, that’s because I haven’t taken a shot yet.” She watched Ashlyn’s smile drop into a challenging expression.

“Oh boy, this is gonna be good.” Kyle crossed his arms and nudged Ken who nodded in agreement.

“Alright, Princess. Let’s see what you got. I’ll even give you some warm-up shots.” Ashlyn got in position.

Ali kicked the first shot towards the bottom right corner, but Ashlyn was there to stop it. Ali realized that she had looked at the area before she kicked the ball and it had given her away. She kicked the second shot more to the center but just off to Ashlyn’s left. The blonde easily stopped that one too. Ali realized she had picked her head up in that direction before she kicked, another giveaway. Ali kicked the third ball at the right corner again, but again, Ashlyn was there. This time she had planted her foot in that direction, yet another giveaway.

“I expected better, Princess. Is that all you got?” Ashlyn teased her from the goal. Kyle and Ken laughed watching them.

“Just practicing. I’m ready now. You ready to give up a goal, Harris? Cause I’m ready to score one.” Ali trash talked.

“Keep dreaming, Princess.” Ashlyn replied. “Buuut, since you’re so confident, want to make it interesting?”

“Definitely! When I score, you have to spend a whole day shopping with me in New York.” Ali laid out her terms.

“You’re on. When you don’t score, you have to go to the top of the Empire State building with me.” Ashlyn said, knowing the only way up there was by way of elevators, which Ali hated.

“Ok. Get ready to shop until you drop, Harris.” Ali set the ball down in front of the goal and mentally coached herself: No looking at the spot or picking your head up, and don’t plant your feet in that direction, no giveaways.

Ashlyn watched Ali’s body and movement carefully as the brunette approached the ball. Ali took a shot at the far left corner and watched as Ashlyn easily moved in front of it and blocked it. “DAMN IT!” Ali yelled out in defeat.

Ken and Kyle laughed loudly, going over to high five Ashlyn who was already gloating. “Aww, better luck next time, Princess.”

“Seriously, how the hell were you already there? I didn’t give it away. You just guessed, right?” Ali tried to figure it out.

“Nope, you turned your hips just slightly to the left on your approach.” Ashlyn replied proudly.

“You’re good, Harris.” Ali admitted.

“Why thank you, Krieger.” Ashlyn kissed the brunette’s cheek.

“And you two gave this up for rugby?” Ken asked incredulously. “I’ll never understand it. You’re both so good.”

Ashlyn spoke up first. “Tell you what. When the weather is warmer, we’ll teach you some rugby, get
“Alright. I’m game. You have a lot to prove though!” Ken replied.

“Okee. T minus 10 minutes before Mom starts blowing up our phones and telling us to get home for lunch.” Kyle interjected. They quickly grabbed their stuff and headed back to the house.

By the time they got back, Deb had set out simple lunch of cranberry walnut chicken salad sandwiches, garden salad, potato chips, and homemade lemonade. Ken recounted Ashlyn and Ali’s penalty shot competition to Deb while Kyle added color commentary that had everyone laughing. As lunch wrapped up, Deb laid out the game plan. “Ok, so, dinner is at 6pm sharp. In the meantime, I just need Kyle to help me get the table décor ready since he’s just going to rearrange anything I’ve done anyway. The rest of you go shower because you all smell awful, and then relax.”

“You don’t want help with dinner or anything?” Ashlyn checked.

“That’s very sweet of you, but I realized a few years ago that being able to relax with everyone was a better use of my time on Christmas. So, everything was prepped and cooked yesterday. I just have to keep an eye on that roast in the oven and the rest just needs to be heated. Easy peasy.” Deb replied.

“Come on, babe. Time to shower and get all spiffed up.” Ali pulled Ashlyn upstairs.

“Shower with me?” Ali had asked when they got to her room.

“Uh, what about Kyle? Never know when he’s gonna grace us with his presence.” Ashlyn pointed out.

“First, I locked the door. Second, he’ll be busy for at least the next hour. He’s absolutely meticulous when it comes to setting the table for Christmas.” Ali assured her.

“If you say so. I’m not passing up naked time with you, Krieger.” Ashlyn replied with a smile, stripping off her clothes, grabbing a towel, and walking into the bathroom. Ali watched her carefully, feeling hot all over just seeing Ashlyn’s muscles ripple when she took her shirt off.

It had only taken Ashlyn washing her back and a few light touches from the blonde in the shower to make Ali lose the small amount of control she had been holding on to. She pressed Ashlyn to the wall of the shower and kissed her hard, working her way down her neck and the tops of her shoulders.

“Thought we were supposed to be relaxing.” Ashlyn got out between breaths.

“Watching you focus in the goal like that was one of the hottest things ever, I’m far from relaxed.” Ali admitted, sucking the skin over Ashlyn collarbone.

“You like me between the goal posts, baby?” Ashlyn tried to work Ali up further.

“Uh huh.” Ali dipped her head and quickly ran her tongue over Ashlyn’s nipple before bringing her
face up level with the gasping blonde. She put one of Ashlyn’s hands on each of her thighs. “I like you better between these posts though.” She looked down briefly.

Ashlyn didn’t need to hear anymore, her composure was as long gone as Ali’s. She flipped their positions, pressing Ali to the shower wall and quickly descending down the brunette’s body with nips and kisses, pausing at tattoos and nipples to lavish them with extra attention.

It didn’t take long before Ashlyn was positioned right where Ali wanted her, the blonde’s tongue running patterns over her clit until Ali’s legs were ready to give out. She felt Ashlyn’s warm tongue enter her and she looked down to watch the blonde bob her head with purpose between her legs, the look on her face determined and focused as always. Ali tried to hold on just a bit longer, but when darkened and intense hazel eyes looked up to meet hers, she lost it, pulling Ashlyn’s face tightly against her core and letting the blonde’s name roll off her tongue in fits of pleasure.

Ali let her legs give out a bit as she came down, sliding down the shower wall and grabbing Ashlyn’s face with her hands to kiss her romantically. She laid the blonde down against the cool tile of the shower floor and climbed over her. She made love to her girl slowly, running her hands over every inch of Ashlyn’s body and using her mouth, tongue and fingers in every way she could think of on Ashlyn’s core until the blonde was reduced to a trembling and spent heap on the shower floor. She removed her hand that had been covering Ashlyn’s mouth when she orgasmed loudly and climbed up her body, kissing the blonde deeply as Ashlyn hugged her tightly.

“Wow, Alex.” Ashlyn panted out.

“You got that right.” Ali whispered back, her cheek pressed to Ashlyn’s. ”Mmmm, I’m way relaxed now. You’re definitely a keeper.” She purred and then laughed at her own pun.

Ashlyn giggled. “Such a dork, babe.”

“I’ve been waiting to make that joke all day since I saw you in the goal. I couldn’t help myself.” Ali pulled back to look at the beautiful hazel eyes beneath her that were now a breathtaking shade of green. “I love you.”

Ashlyn’s mouth curled into a dimpled smile. “I love you too, Alex.” She pulled Ali down for one more kiss before the two of them finally got up and finished showering.

Ali handed Ashlyn a towel. “We better make sure we look damn good so they think that’s why we took so long up here.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” Ashlyn saluted her.

Ali stepped back to look at her and Ashlyn in the mirror. She had to admit, they had done a damn good job of looking good. Ashlyn was in a pair of fitted black dress pants with a light gray button up shirt and a skinny red tie, her hair up in a bun and light makeup on her face. Ali had opted for a red dress with a sweetheart neckline that fell a few inches above her knees and matched the color of Ashlyn’s tie. She has layered on the mascara as usual and left her hair flowing over her shoulders.

“You look stunning, Princess.” Ashlyn told her.

Kyle whistled at them from the living room. “Looking hot, ladies!” He said approvingly. He was dressed in black dress pants and a black button up shirt, his usual color combo. “You’re not fooling anyone though, I know that didn’t take an hour and a half.” He winked.

Ali shot him a look and Ashlyn’s eyes went wide, both of them looking around.

“Relax. Dad went out to pick up the dessert and then get Patty. Mom is still upstairs getting ready.” He explained. “Give me a little credit!”

“Very little.” Ali replied with a pretend dirty look. She pulled Ashlyn down next to her on the couch and got comfortably snuggled into the blonde. The three of them spent the next couple of hours watching ‘A Christmas Story’ on TV while Ashlyn recited all her favorite lines.

By 6pm the house was more animated with everyone gathered around the dinner table. Deb and Anthony sat together at one end of the table across from Ken and Patty. At the other end, Kyle sat next to Ashlyn and Ali who were sitting close together as usual. Since Patty and Anthony didn’t know Ashlyn that well, a lot of the dinner conversation had revolved around them getting to know her bit. It had evolved into Ali bringing up all the crazy Smith traditions. Ashlyn had spent at least an hour explaining them while Ali filled in details here and there about her own experiences with them. Kyle had, of course, felt the need to add his own one-liners where he felt appropriate.

Dinner had been really fun and the food had been amazing. Ashlyn was so full she could barely move. “You’re going to have to roll me into the living room.” She joked to Ali as everyone had made their way in there to relax and make room for dessert. The night had unfolded like a good Christmas movie after that, leaving Ashlyn to marvel at how perfect this all was. Deb had put on some Christmas music and after a little while everyone got into singing some of the songs together while they sipped their drinks.

“You have a really nice voice, Ashlyn.” Patty complimented her.

“Thanks.” Ashlyn said shyly.

“She’s in an acapella group.” Ali stated proudly.

“No kidding!” Anthony exclaimed.

“Wow!” Patty added.

“I didn’t know that.” Ken said from across the room.

“I knew, but I’ve never heard her.” Deb chimed in.

“Well, I haven’t heard her either, but Alex says she’s fantastic.” Kyle put his two cents in.

“She is! She’s amazing!” Ali bragged.

Ashlyn was now a deep shade of red. “It’s no big deal. I don’t really sing. I do bass, so the percussive sounds.” She said shyly.

“You should hear her lay down a beat.” Ali kept bragging.

“Acapella seems so complicated. I don’t know how people do it. There’s so much going on.” Patty mused.
“It’s actually not that hard if you know how to take apart the music and break it into harmonies. Once you can assign one harmony or beat to each person, everyone just focuses on their part and it comes together.” Ashlyn explained.

“Interesting.” Anthony replied.

Ashlyn got an idea. “You guys want to try it?”

“UM, YES!!” Kyle screeched out quickly.

“Oh, fun!” Deb agreed.

“You know I’m in!” Ali kissed Ashlyn’s cheek.

“I’m sure I’ll stink, but I’m game.” Anthony said.

“I’ll try it.” Patty said and Ken just gave a thumbs up.

“Alright. So, I’ll handle the beat. I’m going to tell you to do something very specific and you just do that when I point to you.” Ashlyn explained. She pointed to each person in the room and gave them a role.

She had Deb singing a harmony with an Ooooooh sound.

She had Anthony going Dum Dum Dum Dum.

Patty was assigned to sing a slightly lower harmony similar to Deb’s in a Hmmmmmmm sound.

She had Ken assigned to sing Ba da da da.

Finally she told Ali and Kyle they were singing the song lyrics since she knew they were the only ones in the room that knew the song. She had picked the song the Vibes had just performed at the all college holiday concert: N’SYNC’s ‘Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays’.

She went over all their parts with them one more time, letting them practice a bit. “Ok, I’m gonna start the beat and then I’ll bring you all in as the parts come up. Just do your part when I point to you. Ready?” Ashlyn asked.

Everyone nodded to acknowledge they were ready and Ashlyn started a beat boxing rhythm. Everyone’s eyes went wide in surprise, listening to her make sounds that sounded like an actual drum set was in the room. The only one was not shocked was Ali, who just smiled proudly.

Ashlyn held the beat for a few more seconds and then pointed to both Deb and Anthony to get the song started. Kyle and Ali started singing when the melody got to the right place, Ashlyn pointing to Ken and Patty to change the harmony appropriately when needed. As it got more complicated, Ashlyn’s fingers were pointing around the room very quickly, but everyone seemed to keep up. They got through two verses pretty well before Kyle decided to have fun and sing very flamboyantly, making everyone laugh and the harmony to fall off track. Ashlyn was laughing so hard, she couldn’t keep the beat anymore and the whole thing fell apart.

Everyone was clapping at the end. Ali had draped her arms across Ashlyn’s shoulders and whispered to her. “You’re adorable, so cute.”

“I’m so impressed.” Ken said amazed. “How do you make those sounds?”

“Yeah, how do you even realize you can do that?” Anthony asked.
“I have no idea. I always liked rap music growing up, so I just used to try and make all the sounds. I didn’t know it was useful until I got to Smith and heard people doing it in acapella groups.” Ashlyn responded.

“Seri, Ash… that is pure skills.” Kyle high fived her.

“I want to see you in action someday.” Deb said.

“Yeah, you’ll all have to come to one of her concerts or something one day. It’s a lot of fun.” Ali told them.

“I’m totally visiting when there is a concert!” Kyle exclaimed.

“Alright, let the woman breathe.” Ali joked. Ashlyn shot her a thankful look, ready to not be the center of attention.

“How about dessert?” Deb asked and everyone agreed that they were ready.

After more conversation over dessert and coffee in the living room, Ken and Patty headed out for the night. Ken hugged Kyle and then did the same to Ali and Ashlyn, telling them to have fun in New York and to be safe. “Merry Christmas!” Ken and Patty called out as they walked out the door.

Deb and Anthony said goodnight soon after and made their way upstairs. Kyle, Ali and Ashlyn stayed up for about another hour discussing Kyle’s latest attempts at online dating. By the time he had gotten through the story of his last date who had shown up with a dog leash around his neck and said ‘This puppy needs a master’ Ashlyn and Ali were laughing so hard they couldn’t breathe.

“Oh my god, Kyle. This is gold. You need to write a book!” Ashlyn told him.

“I should! Dating is so painful, I might as well profit off the madness! You guys are so lucky, you have no idea.” Kyle replied.

“I’m gonna suggest getting offline and just meeting people. Seriously, it can’t get any worse.” Ali supplied and yawned.

“Time to get Princess to bed.” Ashlyn said looking at an obviously sleepy Ali.

“Definitely.” Ali acknowledged.

“Yeah, me too.” Kyle said and then pointed to Ashlyn. “You and me. Longboarding tomorrow!”

“For sure.” Ashlyn answered. “Merry Christmas, bro. Love you.” She gave him a quick hug.

Ali hugged Kyle tightly too, giggling at something he said in her ear.

“Merry Christmas, newlyweds! Love you huge!” He shouted across the hall as they made their way into Ali’s room. Ashlyn flashed him a hang loose sign with her hand.

Ashlyn laid on her back, her arm around Ali holding the brunette closely to her chest. Ali was absentmindedly running her hand lightly up and down the scar on Ashlyn’s stomach.

Ashlyn broke the silence. “This Christmas… the last two days with our families was just…”

“Perfect.” Ali finished for her.

“Yeah.” Ashlyn confirmed.
Ali tilted her head up and gave Ashlyn a slow deep kiss. “Merry Christmas, baby. I love you.”

“Merry Christmas, Alex. I love you so much. Sweet dreams.” Ashlyn replied, letting a smile creep across her face and closing her eyes.
Resolutions & Nuptial Proclamations

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday! This chapter is pretty long because I wanted to do the NYC New Year experience justice. I almost left you on a cliffhanger, but decided I just couldn't do it to you and wrapped it up like a nice present instead haha. Have a great weekend :)

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are now making our final approach into New York City. The weather is a cold 48 degrees, but it’s sunny and clear. We’ll be landing in just about 15 minutes. We hope you’ve enjoyed your flight and thank you for flying with us.” Ashlyn woke up to the sound of the pilot’s voice over the loudspeaker. She looked over to see Ali listening to music and reading a magazine next to her. After all the Christmas travel and then a few extra days with Kyle and Deb that were jammed packed as well as a visit with Emily, Ashlyn had fallen asleep quickly on the plane.

Ali had taken off her headphones when she noticed Ashlyn had woken up. “Hey sleepy, we’re about to land.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to pass out on you. I was tired.” Ashlyn replied, her voice low and raspy from sleep.

“It’s ok. Glad you got a nap in. We have the whole afternoon to explore the city. I’m really excited, it’s been a long time since I’ve been to New York.” Ali said all giddy.

Ashlyn reached over and squeezed her hand. “I’m really excited too. We’re going to make this fun.”

After getting their luggage from baggage claim, they took a cab to their hotel. It had been the busy lunch hour rush and Ali held Ashlyn’s hand tightly, closing her eyes for most of the crazy cab drive through the city where she was sure they would crash at any moment.

“We made it in one piece, Princess.” Ashlyn snickered.

Ali finally opened her eyes to see that they had arrived at the hotel. It was the Hilton Doubletree Suites, which apparently had some of the best views of Times Square on New Year’s Eve. Ashlyn had dutifully walked up 17 flights of stairs with Ali to their room, leaving the bellhop to bring their luggage up in the elevator. It was worth the climb, their room certainly did not disappoint. It was a sizeable king bed suite with a separate living room area and a bathroom featuring a large Jacuzzi tub. A huge window spanned one side of the room with a perfect view of where the ball would drop just below them to the right. They could see everything going on in the middle of Times Square from their room. A bottle of champagne and a basket of all kinds of snacks had been placed on the coffee table with a handwritten note from the hotel owner thanking them for their stay and wishing them a prosperous new year.

“This is incredible, Ash. This room is insane! You know people in high places, Harris.” Ali said appreciatively.

“Yeah, I need to get Sarah’s mom a gift. I have no idea how she pulled this off. Seriously, I wasn’t
expecting anything on this level when I asked her for help pulling this together.” Ashlyn admitted.

“The fact that you even thought to bring me to New York for New Year is the sweetest thing ever, this room is just a bonus.” Ali said genuinely, looking up from her phone. She looked back down and her eyes widened. “Holy crap. Did you know that rooms in this hotel like ours are going for $9000 per night on New Year’s Eve. People sell kidneys for less than that!”

“Woah! I had no idea. That is crazy! We better milk the hell out of this.” Ashlyn joked.

“Oh, I fully intend to!” Ali exclaimed. She was gonna have fun walking around this hotel with Ashlyn and acting like those people who thought it was no big deal to spend crazy money to stay at this place during the holiday.

Ashlyn gave Ali a quick kiss. “I’m gonna change out of my plane clothes and into something slightly nicer and then maybe we can go find lunch?” She suggested.

“Great idea. I should probably change too.” Ali answered.

When they finally got changed and stepped out into the bustling crowd of Times Square, Ashlyn wrapped an arm around Ali’s waist and pulled her close. “What do you want for lunch?”

“I’m thinking pizza. Can’t come to New York and not have some of the best pizza ever, right?” Ali replied.

“Right you are, Princess. Let’s find some pizza.” Ashlyn agreed.

They found a little pizza joint just away from the main Times Square area that had excellent reviews even though it wasn’t much to look at. They ordered four different slices from the pizzas on display and settled into a small booth to share them, choosing to sit next to each other instead of across from each other.

Ashlyn could see their reflection in a nearby mirror and she laughed to herself a bit. They were totally being that annoying couple that sat together and fed each other like complete cheeseballs. Ashlyn didn’t care though. For someone who had spent most of her life worrying about what people thought of her and being easily embarrassed, this was one of the things that had surprised her most about being with Ali. Ali brought out the cheesy, romantic, goofy side of her and she couldn’t care less who saw it or what they thought. She loved this woman and she would take every opportunity to show it no matter who it was in front of, even if it made her look like a stupid dork, she didn’t care.

“What are you smiling at, cutie?” Ali asked her, noting that goofy grin on Ashlyn’s face.

“Nothing. Just that I love you.” Ashlyn answered.

“So sappy, Harris.” Ali teased.

“Only for you.” Ashlyn snuck one more look in the mirror at their reflection.

Shortly after, they were back on the streets of the city wandering around and making their way through crowds of people. “What do you want to do first?” Ashlyn asked.

“Settle that bet.” Ali stated quickly. “Empire State Building it is. I want to do it and get it off my mind.”

Ashlyn felt bad that Ali had clearly been worrying about it. “Hey, Alex. We don’t really have to do that. Seriously, it’s ok. It was just a dumb bet for fun.”
“No way. I never back down from a bet. I lost, we’re going.” Ali was adamant.

“Alright, well, first I should tell you why I made that bet.” Ashlyn paused to see Ali listening intently. “I mean, for one, I wanted you to take the shots on goal seriously. It was already just ground shots, but I knew you’d go too easy on me because you were worried about hurting me. I figured if I made it something serious, you’d give it your all. Second, you’ve helped me through a lot of things I was scared of without you even realizing you were doing it. Needles for starters, dealing with people from my past, and visiting my parents to add to the growing list. I’d like to return the favor if you are actually up for trying it. But seriously, we really don’t have to.”

“No. I want to. I mean, I’m terrified, but I also don’t want to miss out on something great like the Empire State building because I have some irrational fear. I want to do this with you. I haven’t had to get in an elevator in over 5 years, I’ve avoided it for that long.” Ali said resolutely. “Well, that and I just made you climb up 17 flights of stairs. It’s going to be a long trip if we keep doing that.”

“Ok. Let’s do it.” Ashlyn gripped Ali’s hand tightly. “So, talk to me. I know you got stuck in an elevator once and it freaked you out, but what exactly scares you about it?”

Ali thought about it a bit before she spoke. “I guess it’s the feeling of being trapped in this small space and not knowing if anyone is coming to help you. Then all the thoughts of running out of air or the elevator dropping come into my head too. It just causes me to panic.” Just the thought of it was already making her a bit nauseous and shaky.

“So, are you generally claustrophobic?” Ashlyn probed a bit.

“Not generally. I guess it’s just when I know or feel like I’m trapped and can’t get out, then the small space gets to me.” Ali explained. “I know, it’s stupid.”

“You’re not stupid and being scared of something doesn’t mean you’re irrational. It’s ok. I can understand why it scares you so much.” Ashlyn empathized.

They had just arrived at the Empire State Building and Ashlyn could see the look of dread that had already come over Ali’s face. “Sure you want to do this?” Ashlyn checked again.

“Yes. I want to try.” Ali said with determination, but it came out sounding much less confident than before.

They paid for their tickets inside and waited for the elevator that would bring them to the top. Ashlyn held Ali against her and could feel the brunette trembling a bit. She stroked Ali’s cheek gently. “The worst that can happen is that you wind up stuck on an elevator with me for a while. Would that be so bad?” The blonde tried to level with Ali.

“I guess not. You are pretty damn cute.” Ali tried to joke her way through it.

“I’d never let anything happen to you, Alex. I promise.” Ashlyn said seriously.

“I know.” Ali buried herself in the blonde’s comforting arms, letting herself relax just a little bit.

The elevator came and they stepped into it, standing towards the back corner. Ali started trembling again as soon as the doors closed. She already felt trapped, her heart racing out of control. Ashlyn got close to her. “Hey, I got you. You’re ok.” She said soothingly. Ali was breathing heavy and looking at the ground. “Alex. Look at me.” Ashlyn put her hand under Ali’s chin and lifted it up so the brunette was looking into her eyes. “Focus on me and listen to my voice, ok?”

Ali nodded and let out a deep sigh.
Ashlyn took Ali’s right hand and worked it under the top of her jacket and shirt so that it could rest directly on the skin of her chest. “Can you feel my heart beat and my breathing?” She asked.

Ali nodded again.

“Ok, just keep looking at me and try to match it. Try to match my breathing and my heart beat, ok?” Ashlyn spoke softly.

Ali let herself get lost in Ashlyn’s eyes, the beautiful gold –flecked hazel orbs drawing her in. She could feel Ashlyn’s steady calm beating heart under her hand. It anchored her, not letting her mind float away to the panic of what might happen. The next thing she knew, Ashlyn’s voice was pulling her back to reality.

“We’re here, beautiful. Time to get off the elevator, we’re at the top.” Ashlyn led Ali out of the elevator. “You ok?”

“Yeah. I feel good.” Ali let out a huge breath and smiled.

“You did so good, Alex.” Ashlyn praised her and wrapped her in a hug. Ali beamed, feeling great about herself. Ashlyn stepped back and wiped the single tear that had rolled down Ali’s cheek before giving her a quick kiss. “So proud of you, baby.”

“That was the sweetest thing I’ve ever seen.” They heard from behind them. They turned around to see a middle-aged woman and the elevator security guard standing there. Ali had been so focused on holding it together and Ashlyn had been so wrapped up in Ali that neither of them had realized there were two other people in the elevator with them.

The security guard smiled and got back in the elevator, heading down. The middle-aged woman approached them. “My husband is terrified of heights and he refuses to come up here with me when we visit NYC even though this is my favorite. I’m going to have to take a page out of your book someday.” She smiled at them. “Hope you have a great New Year.”

“Thanks. You too.” Ashlyn replied for them.

They walked over to the edge of the roof and looked out at the view. They could see the whole city below them. “Wow, so worth it. Look at it.” Ali said excitedly. She took in the view for a few more seconds before turning back to look at Ashlyn. She took the blonde’s face in her hands and kissed her passionately, surprising Ashlyn a bit. She eventually pulled back just enough to mumble “thank you” against Ashlyn’s lips.

They did quite a few laps around the top of the building, looking through the binoculars provided in different stations and pointing out landmarks in the distance. Ali took several selfies of the two of them and had also gotten another tourist to take a nice picture of them together. They had spent a good hour up there before they got really cold from the windy conditions and decided to head down. Ali had definitely felt her fear creep back in as got back into the elevator, but this time it was much more tolerable. She just looked into Ashlyn’s eyes like before and calmed herself while clinging tightly to the blonde, knowing Ashlyn would never let anything happen to her and trusting in that.

Ali took a deep breath when they finally got to the bottom and walked out of the elevator. She let herself completely relax and smile.

“Look at you, Princess. Two elevator trips in one day and you’re as perfect as ever.” Ashlyn winked at her.
“Thanks for doing that with me.” Ali said seriously.

“I love you. I’d do anything for you.” Ashlyn replied sweetly.

“Anything?” Ali questioned playfully.

“Uh oh. What do you have in mind?” Ashlyn squinted at her.

“The 5th Avenue shopping strip is looking pretty good right now. Just saying.” Ali said.

“Nope. Sorry, Princess. Save it for tomorrow when we spend the whole day shopping.” Ashlyn told her with a smile.

“Wait, seriously? Pretty sure we established that I lost the bet, Ash.” Ali said trying to figure out if Ashlyn was just messing with her.

“Pretty sure it was the worst bet you’ve ever made because I’d never take you to NYC and not spend a day shopping with you.” Ashlyn grinned.

“Pretty sure you’re the best, Stud.” Ali slipped her arm through Ashlyn’s. “Come on, I have ideas.”

Ali took them to the wax museum first where they posed for a lot of funny pictures with the wax sculptures. Ashlyn had some hilarious poses with E.T. and Bob Marley, while Ali had opted for a nice girlie pose next to Marilyn Monroe that had Ashlyn snickering and calling her Marilyn for the next hour. After leaving the wax museum and sharing a soft pretzel from a street vendor, Ali took Ashlyn to Dylan’s Candy Bar, a three story candy shop that was one of the largest in the world. Given that they both had a sweet tooth and Ashlyn went into child mode around candy, they walked out of there almost an hour later with bags and bags of gummies, jelly beans, and chocolate.

They went to the Museum of Natural History next. Ali didn’t realize that Ashlyn was so into dinosaurs until the blonde stood there fascinated by the huge T-Rex skeleton.

“Oh my god, I freakin love dinosaurs!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali laughed at her. One of her favorite things about Ashlyn was the childlike wonder and excitement she often had. The blonde had a way of appreciating simple things that everyone else seemed to take for granted. “I had no idea you liked them. I guess dinosaurs don’t typically come up in day-to-day conversation.” Ali said, loving that there were still so many things about Ashlyn for her to learn.

“I had this 3rd grade teacher that was obsessed with them and everything we did that year kind of revolved around them. I think it rubbed off on me because I loved it so much. I would have repeated 3rd grade over and over if I could. I actually did this T-Rex sculpture for our dinosaur project that year. I shaped it with a coat hanger that I twisted to make like a skeletal frame. Then covered it in play dough for the actual sculpture. Only the yellow, blue, and brown play dough was on sale though, so that’s all my parents could afford. I thought T-Rex would look stupid in any of those colors, so I mixed the blue and yellow together to make green play dough. I thought I was a total genius. I broke apart some plastic forks for the teeth and claws. I was so proud of that thing, I got an A+ too!” Ashlyn reminisced fondly. She looked up to see Ali giving her a megawatt smile. “What?” She asked.

“You are so seriously the cutest person ever.” Ali stole a kiss from Ashlyn under the T-Rex skeleton.

They walked around the whole museum, learning a bunch of new things. Ali had a particularly good time watching Ashlyn get so fired up about the ocean exhibit where she gave Ali a whole lot of extra
information about seahorses and other marine animals that were featured. It was already dark outside by the time they left.

“After all that sugar earlier, I’m definitely crashing and could use some real food. Dinner?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yes, please!” Ali responded, she was starving.

“What are you up for?” Ashlyn asked.

“Hmmm. Anything really. Might be fun to do something really touristy since we’ve already kind of done that all day.” Ali offered.

“Oh, I know. How about Junior’s? We can do cheesecake for dessert.” Ashlyn suggested.

“100 times yes! That sounds delicious, let’s do it.” Ali replied.

They had to wait about half an hour to get seated, but ended up in a nice corner booth. They both ordered off the barbeque menu, Ashlyn getting shrimp and ribs and Ali getting chicken and ribs. Ali internally smiled at how she would have previously never ordered anything messy like ribs on a date. Ashlyn had certainly turned her world around, she was comfortable with the blonde and could always be herself. Ashlyn held her hand across the table as usual, at least until the food came and their hands were needed. Dinner was excellent and the cheesecake was even better.

They walked around outside afterwards, trying to walk off the big meal they just ate. Ashlyn had an idea. “One more thing for the night, Princess.” She walked them over to Rockefeller Center and looked at Ali. “Ice skating?”

“I’m in!” Ali exclaimed, looking the busy rink with the huge lit up Christmas tree above it.

They rented skates and headed onto the ice, each of them realizing that the other one actually knew how to skate.

“Where on earth did you learn to skate, Florida girl?” Ali asked a bit surprised.

“I always rollerbladed in Florida, so it isn’t that much different. But, I also got roped into trying out for the ice hockey team at Smith my first year, it’s another club team. Anyway, it was so damn cold and I hated it, but I did stick it out through the first couple of training weeks where they taught skating skills for people who had never played before.” Ashlyn explained. “What about you, Princess?”

“There was a couple years when I was like 10 or 11 years old where I was a little tired of everything being about soccer and I wanted to do something girly like ballet or something. Anyway, I ended up picking figure skating because some of my friends were doing it. It was lame, but I did it for 2 years just to fit in.” Ali admitted.

“Awwww, little skating Princess!” Ashlyn cooed. “Can you do tricks?”

“I used to be able to, it’s been a long time. Let’s see.” Ali stretched a leg out and twirled in place, rotating around completely a few times.

“Ok, I’m impressed. I’d fall on my ass if I did that! This is all I got…” Ashlyn executed a hockey stop, creating a small pile of snow with her skates. Ali gave her a thumbs up. They held hands and skated around in laps talking and joking with each other until it was time for the center to close.
“Brrr, it’s so cold.” Ashlyn pulled up the collar of her coat as they returned their skates.

“My poor surfer girl!” Ali pulled her close. “Let’s go get you all warmed up.”

They bought some hot chocolate for the walk back to their hotel and then headed up to their room. Both of them were pretty exhausted since they had just flown in that morning and then had a full day together. This time Ali had led a surprised Ashlyn towards the elevator rather than climb up the stairs yet again. She was still scared, but holding onto Ashlyn closely, she knew she could do it. She made it to the top unscathed, her body relaxing quickly once they got out.

“So brave, my Princess Warrior.” Ashlyn kissed her cheek and walked them to their room

Ali stood by the window of their room looking down at all the lights and people in Times Square. “It’s amazing how bright and busy it is down there at all hours, it’s like the middle of the day no matter what time it is. City that never sleeps for sure.” She remarked.

Ashlyn stood behind her and planted a few kisses on her neck. The blond had already stripped down to her boxers and sports bra for the night.

“Well hey, sexy. Sorry, got caught up checking out the view. I think this view is better though.” Ali said turning around to take in the long muscled body she’d never get tired of looking at.

Ashlyn smiled. “Go get comfy and we can sit on the couch and watch the action together.” She pointed out the window.

Ali went to put on a pair of boy shorts and her own sports bra while Ashlyn grabbed a blanket from the closet. They settled onto the couch together, Ashlyn’s back against the arm of it with Ali laying between her legs and her back leaned into the blonde. Ashlyn’s arms were wrapped around Ali snuggly from behind with the blanket over them. They sat quietly taking in the city scene below. Ashlyn would occasionally kiss Ali’s neck and Ali would turn her head to place soft kisses on her lips.

“Today was so good. I love this, Ash. My time with you. I’ll admit I always worried about falling in love and then eventually finding that things with that person got boring after the first couple of months. Like you just get comfortable and that’s it. It’s just not like that with you. It’s comfortable, but never boring or static. I’m always learning new things about you and I love that. The more time I spend with you, the more I want. There is no getting enough of you. I love every minute we have together, honestly.” Ali poured her heart out.

Ashlyn smiled widely. Usually she was the one to spill her heart out romantically, but clearly Ali was the romantic one tonight. “I love you, Princess. And I know exactly what you mean.” Ashlyn grabbed her phone. “Do you know Brandi Carlile? She’s an indie artist I think.”

“Never heard of her.” Ali answered.

“Anyway, Bree on the Vibes really likes her and wanted us to try and add a song of hers to our repertoire since the Smiffenpoofs have already used her stuff too. So, we started listening to some of it to see if anything jumped out that we could work with. This one song completely reminded me of you and how I feel when I’m around you. It’s weird because if you listen to it from a purely lyrical perspective, it sounds almost obsessive. But if you look at it in the context of love, it’s a reminder of how powerful love is and how intense the feelings are.” She found the song on her phone and played it.

Ali listened to the lyrics, finding that they resonated with her too.
Today I sang the same damn tune as you
It was lady in red, I hate that song
and I know you do too
You didn’t catch me singin’ along
but I always sing with you
Nice and quietly, cuz I don’t want to stop you

I know I could be spending a little too much time with you
but time and too much don’t belong together like we do
If I had all my yesterdays I’d give ’em to you too
I belong to you now
I belong to you

I see the world the exact same way that you do
We lend our hands and take our stance
in tandem when we do
but I lied and said I knew the way
I hid my eyes from you
I still don’t know why, I probably didn’t want to scare you

I know I could be spending a little too much time with you
but time and too much don’t belong together like we do
if I had all my yesterdays I’d give ’em to you too
I belong to you now
I belong to you

“Yeah, I’d say that song nails it.” Ali smiled and leaned back to kiss Ashlyn again.

Ashlyn didn’t know when either of them had fallen asleep, but she had woke up around 3am to find that they were still on the couch in the same position they had been in earlier in the evening. Ali was leaned back against her, breathing softly against her chest. Ashlyn moved slowly out from behind the
brunette and carefully carried her to bed, pulling the covers over them and holding Ali close.

They fueled up the next morning with breakfast in the hotel lobby, which turned out to be pretty darn good. Then, as Ashlyn had promised, they hit the shopping districts hard. Ashlyn watched patiently while Ali tried on outfit after outfit and didn’t complain when they were lugging bags of stuff Ali had bought all over NYC. Of course, it hadn’t been all about Ali. The brunette had picked out a couple of button up shirts and two new ties for Ashlyn that she couldn’t wait to see on her girl. As much as shopping had never quite been her thing, Ashlyn had to admit it was pretty fun to splurge like this with Ali. The day had actually gone by pretty quickly. They went back to the hotel to change for their evening plans. Ashlyn put on a pair of slim fitting dark jeans and a navy blue button up shirt, one of the new ones that Ali had just bought her. She paired it with one of the new ties, a light green one, and let her hair flow down naturally. Ali changed into a pair of black skinny jeans with a cream colored light sweater, the gray scarf from Ashlyn’s grandma around her neck and her hair in a simple ponytail.

“You look hot, Ash.” Ali complimented her.

“You always look hot, Princess.” Ashlyn replied right back. “Let’s go, we’re gonna be late for our reservation.”

They had dinner at a steakhouse that had great reviews and then they headed to the theater district to take in a showing of Chicago on Broadway. Ali had held Ashlyn’s hand tightly through the show, watching the blonde really get into it. She thought it was really cute how much Ashlyn loved music. She had even laughed when Ashlyn walked down the crowded streets afterwards throwing up jazz hands and singing random choruses from the show. Normally Ali might have been embarrassed, but Ashlyn was just too adorable for her to care at the moment. Then they had sat in a bakery café near the hotel sipping lattes and sharing some pastries. Ashlyn had gotten cannoli filling on her lips and once Ali had wiped it off, Ashlyn had licked it off the brunette’s finger and looked at her intensely. Suddenly Ashlyn wasn’t so adorable anymore, she was downright hot, and Ali couldn’t wait another second to get her clothes off.

The lights in the room were off, but the glow of Time Square from the window lit the room perfectly. Ali had her lips on Ashlyn’s the second they walked in the door. Tongues were already exploring each other’s mouths eagerly and moans were exchanged through parted lips. Ali walked Ashlyn over to the couch and pushed the blonde down onto it. She hovered over her, taking off Ashlyn’s jeans, tie, and shirt before she took off her own clothes and climbed on top of her. They moved their bodies together, lips never leaving each other, until Ali felt like she might explode. She unclasped her own bra and shimmied out of her underwear while Ashlyn’s hands ran along her sides and down her thighs. As soon as Ali’s bra was off, Ashlyn leaned her head up to take an already hard nipple in her mouth, sucking it until it was a light shade of red and Ali’s head was thrown back moaning. Ali couldn’t take any more. She put Ashlyn’s hand between her legs and begged her. “Fuck me, Ash. Please.”

Ashlyn wasted no time filling Ali with her long fingers, the brunette riding them hard on her lap. Ashlyn moved her hand to meet Ali with every thrust, moving fast and deep just like the brunette wanted her. She watched her girl intently. Ali was beautiful like this; her hair moving wildly around her face, her eyes screwed shut in pleasure, her lip between her teeth, her perfect perky breasts bouncing up and down, her toned stomach clenching with each thrust of her hips. Ashlyn’s core was
spilling out just looking at this gorgeous woman who was in this state of pleasure because of what she was doing to her. Ashlyn curled her fingers, wanting to watch Ali come apart on top of her. It only took two more thrusts before the brunette was digging her fingers into Ashlyn’s sides, convulsing and screaming her name repeatedly and finally letting herself collapse onto the blonde breathlessly, her heaving chest in Ashlyn’s face.

It hadn’t taken long for Ali to recover. Not long at all before she had pulled off the rest of Ashlyn’s underwear and worked her way between the blonde’s legs. No time before she had licked up all the wetness Ashlyn had already spilled out for her and then filled the blonde with her tongue to make her spill out even more. It had seemed like only minutes before Ali had Ashlyn transformed into a quivering mess beneath her, deities and profanities coming out of her mouth as she orgasmed.

“Oh my god, Alex.” Ashlyn held Ali tightly to her, still trying to catch her breath several minutes later.

“Good, baby?” Ali asked quietly in Ashlyn’s ear.

“So good.” Ashlyn replied, her voice raspy and low, turning Ali on even more.

“Good. Cause I’m not near done.” Ashlyn looked up to see Ali’s eyes dark and hungry.

“Wow you’re hot.” Ashlyn whispered, already feeling her core throb again.

“Bedroom, Ash. Fuck me again.” Ali purred in her ear, making Ashlyn’s skin erupt in goosebumps.

“Fuck.” Ashlyn swallowed hard, easily picking her up off the couch and carrying her to the bedroom. They had gone another round, this time deeply buried inside each other at the same time until their bodies shook together and they couldn’t breathe anymore.

Again, Ashlyn had caught her breath to find the same dark hungry brown eyes looking deeply into hers. Ali’s voice back against her ear. “Jacuzzi, baby. Fuck me again.” And just like that they had gone yet another round in the tub until their skin was pruned and they truly couldn’t move. The water had grown cold and the minute Ashlyn had any energy back, she lifted Ali out of the tub and dried her off a bit. They fell into bed still a bit damp, completely sated and spent, bodies pressed together tightly as they both quickly fell asleep.

Ashlyn woke up first, Ali’s hair wildly strewn across her chest, the brunette’s face pressed against her skin. She shifted a little bit, feeling a bit stiff. Her body was definitely a little sore, in the best way possible, but still sore. She thought back to last night and smiled to herself. Ali sure knew how to work her body, there was no question about that, her world had definitely been rocked. She watched Ali sleep for a while, tracing the script tattoo on the brunette’s side with her fingertips. She still couldn’t get over how much she loved this woman. It almost didn’t seem possible to love someone this much and this unconditionally.

Ali finally started to stir, her eyes opening to look up at Ashlyn.

“Good morning. You’re so beautiful, Alex.” Ashlyn said sweetly, leaning down to kiss Ali on the forehead.

“Mmmm, you are so nice to wake up to. Best. Ever.” Ali nuzzled her head into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck, leaving a kiss there, and squeezing her a bit.
“You ready for a wild New Year’s Eve?” Ashlyn asked with a dimpled grin.

“So ready! Still can’t believe we’re doing this!” Ali replied animatedly.

“How about a big breakfast and then a really late lunch since it will be hard to do a proper dinner with the crowds being so crazy.” Ashlyn suggested.

“Perfect.” Ali slowly got up and pulled her hair into a ponytail.

They both quickly threw on some comfortable clothes so they could go eat. Ali freshened up her makeup and Ashlyn threw on a snapback, and they were out the door. They opted for an all-you-can-eat brunch buffet since it was already past 10am. Knowing they would be up really late, they came back to the room and slept again for a little while before getting up and going out get coffee and then finally coming back to the room again to shower and get ready.

Although they both wanted to dress up because it was New Year’s Eve, they knew they’d be standing out in the cold for hours and had to be practical. Ashlyn put on some fitted flannel-lined jeans, a white button up shirt with a navy cable knit sweater over it and her warm AllSaints boots. Ali went with a similar outfit of skinny jeans, a thick form fitting gray sweater, and her Ugg boots.

“You look perfectly cozy, Princess.” Ashlyn said looking over Ali’s outfit.

“Can’t wait to snuggle up to you, Stud.” Ali fixed Ashlyn’s collar.

There had already been people gathered in Times Square when they went to breakfast that morning and more and more had gathered as the afternoon went on. Since their hotel retained a clear space in front for its own guests, Ashlyn and Ali didn’t have to go stake out a spot until around 6pm when the hotel suggested that they get situated by that time.

Around 4pm they took a walk just down the street from the hotel to get some burgers and fries at Shake Shack. It had taken them 20 minutes just to walk the short distance through the crowds of people on the street. By the time they got their food, ate, and made it back to hotel it was already past 5:30pm. They quickly went back up to their room, Ali braving the elevator for 10th time in just 3 days. Her body had tensed up and she had clutched Ashlyn tightly every time, but she had managed not to panic even once. They bundled themselves up as warmly as possible in puffy coats, hats, and gloves. Ashlyn had placed a 2016 silver plastic tiara on Ali’s head and then, just like that, they were in the madness of Times Square huddled among the loud and boisterous crowd. They watched the ball light up and rise to the top of the pole it would sit atop until it was time to make its descent to the bottom as midnight approached.

It was like TV come to life Ali thought. She had spent her whole life watching Dick Clark’s Rockin’ New Year’s Eve on TV every year, watching the masses of people in Times Square looking cold, but always happy and celebratory as they stood there for hours waiting for the ball drop to signal the New Year. Every time she’d watched it, she told herself someday she would be there to experience it in person, and here she was cuddled up to the only person in the world she wanted to be with in a moment like this. It felt exactly like she’d thought it would, alive and exciting, almost like an entire city’s heart was beating at the same time. Of course, it was also just as cold as it looked too. She and Ashlyn shivered and snuggled together, freezing, but somehow still incredibly happy; just like all
those ‘fools’ on TV as her grandpa had often called them.

They spent the first hour people watching the crowd around them and pointing out all kinds of silly things people were wearing. After that, Ali had resorted to her usual Krieger Q & A to distract them from their very cold extremities that were starting to go numb.

“If you could vacation anywhere in the world right now, where would you go?” Ali asked first.

“Hmmm, somewhere warm!” Ashlyn joked before answering. “Well, actually, it would be warm. I’ve always wanted to go to Bora Bora and stay in one of those tropical huts that sit right above the perfectly clear blue water. I mean sleeping right on the ocean, amazing. What about you?”

“That sounds nice right about now. I would go to Austria. It has so many similarities to Germany, but yet it is such a distinct country. I just love that part of Europe, the mountains and alpine terrain are beautiful. I always wanted to visit Vienna when I was in Germany, but I didn’t get the chance.” Ali replied. “Your turn.”

“If you were a superhero, what would your super power be and what would you call yourself?”

“As much as I’ve always wanted to fly, I think I would want the ability to time travel and just transport myself to anywhere and any period of time I wanted to. I already have my superhero name, Princess Warrior.” Ali winked, making Ashlyn laugh.

“That you do, Princess. When I was a kid, I wanted to be invisible. Now though, I would want the power to heal myself and others. As for my name, I don’t know… Ash Bash? The Blonde Surfer?” Ashlyn tried to come up with something good.

“I’m gonna go with Captain Dimple.” Ali teased. “Alright, next question. What is your most hated word and your favorite word?”

“Interesting. Most hated has to be chunky. There is just nothing good associated with that word in my mind. I don’t even like chunky peanut butter, yuck. And favorite, I guess it’s mellifluous.” Ashlyn answered.

“I don’t even know what that word means.” Ali admitted.

“I didn’t for a long time either, but as soon as I heard it and learned it, I thought it was the best word ever. It means a sound that is sweet, soothing, and pleasant to hear. As in… Alex, your voice is mellifluous.” Ashlyn explained charmingly.

“So sweet, baby.” Ali kissed her softly. “My most hated is the word moist. That word is just plain gross. I can’t even think about it. My favorite is serendipity. It just rolls off the tongue so nicely and who doesn’t love happy accidents or unexpected happenings that change life for the better.” Ali answered. “Your turn for a question.”

“Ok, your top two lame jokes. Go.” Ashlyn said.

“Good one. Ok, let’s go with one of my European classics. What’s the best thing about Switzerland?” Ali started.

“No idea.” Ashlyn waited for the punchline.

“I don’t know, but the flag is a big plus!” Ali giggled.
“Oh that was pretty lame, Krieger. But I’ll admit, it’s funny.” Ashlyn laughed. “One more to go.”

“What did the vegetables say at the party?” Ali asked.

“I don’t know, what?” Ashlyn replied.

“Lettuce turnip the beet.” Ali laughed at her own joke.

“Wow, extra lame! Pretty good though.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Let’s see you beat it.” Ali challenged.

“A neutron walks into bar and asks the bartender how much for a drink. The bartender says, for you, no charge!” Ashlyn snickered.

“Such a nerd, Harris.” Ali couldn’t help but laugh at her. “What else you got?”

“How do you find Will Smith in the snow?” Ashlyn asked.


“You look for fresh prints.” Ashlyn smirked and chuckled.

Ali laughed pretty hard. “Ok, now that was funny!” She hugged Ashlyn tight. “Last question. What’s your New Year’s resolution?”

“To not take a single minute for granted. With you, with my family, with my friends, with what’s left of my time at Smith. I want to start off my senior year in the fall knowing that I enjoyed it all to the fullest so that when it’s time to move on, I’ll have no regrets. And I really want to work hard to get back on the rugby pitch this spring. What about you, Princess?” Ashlyn answered.

“Similar to you. I want to make sure I’m consciously enjoying every minute with you. For us to keep doing things like this, not being afraid to take chances or do things on a whim. I want to be better about making time for my family and friends that I don’t get to see all that much. And I want to keep doing well at my job. I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished so far and I really want to keep it up and learn new things so someday I can go off on my own.” Ali finished.

With three hours left to go before midnight, the announcement was made that the live music performances were starting. They turned their attention to the main stage where they watched Ryan Seacrest introduce the band Magic! who took the stage to perform ‘Rude’. Ali swayed in Ashlyn’s arms to the music, neither of them feeling all that cold anymore and just enjoying themselves. Soon after that, the hotel staff began handing out a round of champagne to their guests. The two of them sipped their glasses of champagne as they watched a bunch of random dancers, performers, and local artists take the stage one after another.

With an hour left to go they watched a video of 2015 highlights on the huge Times Square screen. Jenny McCarthy, the co-host, did a TV segment right in front of them. They joined the people around them in waving at the camera with big smiles, wondering if anyone they knew was watching at home and seeing them on TV. At 11:30pm, Ryan Seacrest took the stage to introduce Taylor Swift who came out to perform ‘Style’. Ali went absolutely crazy, her hands up as she danced close to a grinning Ashlyn who danced right along with her. The hotel staff passed out a second round of
champagne as it got even closer to midnight. The crowd was electric at this point, the excitement building. Ashlyn and Ali had never experienced anything quite like it before. The sheer number of people packed into Times Square was mind blowing.

At 11:50pm, Ryan Seacrest announced the final performer of the night. O.A.R. took the stage to perform ‘Peace’ and John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’. Ashlyn and Ali sang along loudly with the rest of the crowd. The song ended right at 11:59pm and the ball began its minute-long descent as the crowd counted down. They looked up, watching the flashing and glittering sphere slowly come down towards the numbers that would soon light up to reflect 2016. Ali’s heart was pounding with anticipation… 5…4…3…2…1…

Ashlyn took Ali’s face in her hands and kissed her so deeply and passionately that Ali felt like she was floating. The crowd was roaring, confetti was hitting them in the face and flying all around them, ‘Auld Lang Syne’ played through the speakers, but all they could focus on was each other. They kissed for what seemed like both forever and no time at all; until the music had ended, the confetti had mostly settled, and the crowd had become a bit quieter as people settled or began to disperse. Ali had finally pulled back breathlessly to find beautiful hazel green eyes looking back at her, the same eyes that housed her whole world. The electricity surged through her body and the words came tumbling out of her mouth…

“Marry me.”

Ali had heard her own words ring in her ears, she had felt the vibration in her throat as they had rolled off her tongue so easily. Still, she wondered momentarily if she had actually said it out loud. The hazel green eyes looking into hers had gotten wider, confirming that she had indeed said it audibly.

In truth, it didn’t surprise her one bit. That is how it had been with Ashlyn from the moment they met. The blonde had always drawn the honest and raw feelings right out of her completely unfiltered. Whether it had been shutting Ashlyn down the first time she introduced herself, kissing her in the pool in Miami and then on the dance floor at rugby prom, telling Ashlyn she loved her and wanted her on the rugby pitch the first time they had sex, or letting her fear overtake her without shame as the blonde held her tightly in the elevator. She was private and careful with everyone else, but with Ashlyn it was all on her sleeve, out in the open the moment it crossed her mind. And in this moment, when her mind could only think about how much she wanted to spend every second of the rest of her life with this woman beside her, could she really be surprised that those two words had come out so easily, so serendipitously?

Ashlyn looked into her favorite amber eyes, wondering if she had truly just heard what she thought she heard come out of Ali’s mouth. She knew the shock must have been evident on her face, but Ali looked just as shocked. Given the look on Ali’s face, Ashlyn knew she must have heard right. She said the first thing that came to mind. “Is this a real proposal, Alex?”

Like everything else with Ashlyn, Ali’s answer came out in simple honesty. “No. And also, Yes.” Ali paused, her eyes never leaving Ashlyn’s. “No… because I know you, Ashlyn…better than I probably know myself. And you know me…also better than I know myself. Because we both know
that you’ve always wanted to propose and that I’ve always wanted to be proposed to. Because I know you well enough to know that if you haven’t asked me already, it’s because you’re waiting for something. And whatever that something is, I know it’s good, and special, and worth waiting for. Knowing that you’re what’s at the end… I’d wait forever for you.” Ali paused again squeezing Ashlyn lightly. “And also, Yes. Yes… because with you, everything that I feel with you and crosses my mind when I’m with you comes right out unfiltered. Right now, what I’m feeling and thinking about is how much I want to spend the rest of my life with you. My mouth has spoken for my heart like it always does when I’m with you. So, while I’m not proposing, I am telling you with unabashed honesty that I want to marry you.” Ali finished.

Ashlyn leaned in and kissed Ali slowly. “Real proposal or not.” She looked right into Ali’s eyes. “The answer is yes. It will forever be yes. You’re right that I’m waiting for something, but make no mistake, I will marry you, Alex.”

Ali leaned in and kissed the blonde deeply. “This better be a damn good proposal, Harris.” She mumbled against Ashlyn’s lips.

“Count on it, Krieger.” Ashlyn replied with a smirk. “Besides, pretty sure I already married you. All of Satellite Beach would back me up on that.” She winked.

Ali laughed. “Right, forgot. Come on wifey, there’s a bottle of champagne waiting in our room. And right about now, I’m thinking I’d like to skip right to the honeymoon.”

They finally emerged from the bubble they’d been in for the last few minutes and looked around to see that at least half of the crowd had dispersed and the street was littered with confetti and all kinds of other celebratory remnants. The 2016 sign was still brightly flashing through Times Square.

Ashlyn pulled Ali in for one more romantic kiss. “Happy New Year, Alex. I love you.”

“Happy New Year, Ash. I love you too.”
“Hey Ash, how was your surprise New York trip? I missed you!” Whitney stood in the open doorway of Ashlyn’s dorm room, a suitcase beside her and a duffle bag on her shoulder. Ashlyn and Ali had gotten back to Northampton after their New York trip a few days ago. Now that January term had started and the dorms were open again, Ashlyn had gone to Wilson to unpack a few things and settle into her room a bit. Several other Wilson people were starting to arrive as well.

“Whit! Missed you too, buddy!” Ashlyn ran over to give Whitney a hug. “New York was…oh man, it was amazing!” Ashlyn replied, her voice conveying that she was still swooning a bit over the whole thing.

“Oh boy. You sound like someone just got you a French bulldog, but then you would have posted like a million pictures of it by now, so that definitely didn’t happen. Must have been quite a trip. Spill!” Whitney entered the room and sat on Ashlyn’s bed.

“Hold up, I’ve barely talked to you since Christmas. So, first, how was your trip home and your holidays?” Ashlyn asked, genuinely wanting to catch up with Whitney before she even thought about getting into her own happenings.

“Hmm, Christmas was great. Pretty standard Engen family holidays with lots of heated Monopoly games and another pair of ugly hand knit wool socks from grandma.” Whitney snickered. “Oh well, at least my parents got me a new laptop since mine was crappy, so that was exciting!”

“Any hometown hookups I should know about?” Ashlyn questioned, knowing Whitney had a tendency to hang out with guy friends from high school when she went home.

“No. Though I did agree to a date with Jake.” Whitney said sheepishly.

“Whit! We talked about this! Why, why, why?” Ashlyn threw her hands up. Whitney’s ex-boyfriend was a complete loser who had managed to charm his way back into her life more than once only to have Whitney dump him again several times, usually in less than 48 hours.

“I know, I know! I suck at saying no and he’s so pathetic, I feel bad. I agreed to go to coffee with him, but after 10 minutes he managed to insult my mother. So, I smacked him and left.” Whitney explained with a satisfied smile.

“That a girl!” Ashlyn high-fived her.

“Not much else to tell. I met up with Alex in the Napa area for New Year and we had a good time at a party with some people she knew. But you already knew that cause I texted you. So, tell me about your trip and that stupid gaga look you had on your face when I asked you about it already!” Whitney exclaimed and looked at Ashlyn with rapt attention.

“The Christmas surprise of the New York trip went over super well. Ali was really excited about it. We got an amazing room that overlooked Times Square and honestly had the best time ever.
exploring the city together. We actually managed to pack in a ton of stuff in just a few days.” Ashlyn told her.

“Yeah yeah, ok. Get to the good shit, Ash!” Whitney shot her a look. “I know something happened, you’re so obvious.”

Ashlyn rolled her eyes. “So, we did the whole Times Square New Year’s Eve thing. We kissed at midnight and all that. And then Ali kinda, well… she asked me to marry her.” Ashlyn’s voice came out in a higher octave.

“What?!?! She proposed and you didn’t tell me! What the hell, Ash?!?! What did you say? Are you engaged?” Whitney was shooting out questions faster than Ashlyn could process them.

“Woah, easy Whit! It’s not what you think.” Ashlyn explained. “She wasn’t really proposing, it just kind of slipped out of her mouth in the moment. And we talked about it a little. I mean, she said she knew I wanted to propose and she really wants to be proposed to. So, she was just telling me she wanted to marry me. It wasn’t a proposal, but… I don’t know, it was still kind of everything. Know what I mean?”

“Geez, yeah, I’d say so. I mean, if you’re not engaged yet, I guess that’s the next best thing right.” Whitney said thoughtfully. “That leads me to a question I still haven’t gotten a straight answer to… so, why exactly haven’t you proposed yet?”

“Oh god, not you too. I feel like I’ve been asked that a lot lately.” Ashlyn sighed. “I want it to be perfect. Because Ali deserves that. I don’t want it to be some rushed thing just because we know that it’s the next step. I want it to be when we can both be dedicated to taking the time to actually plan the wedding I know she wants. With me busy with school and her just getting into this new job, it’s just not the time for it. Plus, I pretty much know when and where and how. So, it’s going to happen!” Ashlyn explained yet again.

“Alright, alright. Just curious. I get what you’re saying. I have no doubt whatever you have up your sleeve is going to be perfect, prince charming.” Whitney smiled. “Speaking of, where is your princess?”

“Working at the apartment. She has some catching up to do after taking time off for the holidays. I figured I’d get a few things done myself and stop distracting her for the day.” Ashlyn replied.

“Bummer. I better go unpack all my crap too. Maybe the three of us can find time for dinner tonight?” Whitney asked hopefully.

“Definitely! I’m planning to cook tonight anyway. Why don’t you come over and join us?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Only if Ali wouldn’t mind.” Whitney answered.

“Of course not. She was just saying last night she missed you, so I’m sure she’ll be thrilled. I’ll text her and tell her you’re coming over.” Ashlyn said. “And tomorrow, you ready to hit it hardcore?”

“For sure! You better be ready for an ass kicking. No mercy for you!” Whitney warned her. Ashlyn had asked Whitney to help her work hard to get back into shape over the winter break so that as spring approached, she’d be ready for rugby.

“I’m ready!” Ashlyn yelled out the door as Whitney opened the door to her own room next door.
Whitney hadn’t been kidding. Ashlyn had come into the apartment every evening of the last two weeks with her clothes soaked with sweat. Ali had freaked out the first couple of times, thinking Ashlyn was overdoing it. Whitney had eased her worry though, promising that they were just doing long but non-intense workouts. Ali had to admit that Ashlyn was looking stronger. Although the blonde was never really out of shape, Ali had noticed her muscles getting harder and more defined and her energy seemed to be better too. Whatever Whitney was doing, it was definitely working.

“Honey, I’m home!” Ashlyn yelled through the apartment teasingly like she usually did.

Ali came out of the office to greet her. “Hey, baby! Perfect timing, I just finished up for the day.” She gave Ashlyn a quick kiss. “I don’t have much food in here, so we can either order in or do some grocery shopping and then cook something.”

“Order in, if that’s ok. I still need a shower and I’m actually pretty tired today.” Ashlyn said, already stripping off her sweaty clothes.

“Yeah, you actually look pretty tired. Did you guys do something new today?” Ali asked concerned, noticing that Ashlyn seemed to be moving a bit sluggishly and she looked a bit worn down.

“No. The usual. Workout with Tobin and Whit this morning, Vibes practice this afternoon, and then my late afternoon workout with Whit again.” Ashlyn answered from the bathroom as she turned on the shower. “Probably what I get for eating a bagel this morning and not fueling properly. I’m just gonna grab a hot shower, get rid of these tight muscles and good as new. I’m up for anything, so you can order whatever you feel like.”

Ali grabbed the menu for their favorite Chinese food restaurant and placed and order. By the time Ashlyn had taken a long shower and emerged from the bedroom in her sweatpants and t-shirt, Ali had dinner set out on the coffee table and the latest season of Orange is the New Black queued up on Netflix.

Ashlyn took one look at the layout and smiled widely. She sank into the couch next to Ali and leaned in to give the brunette a sweet kiss. “You’re the best.”

It wasn’t long before Ashlyn was leaning back into the couch patting her stomach. “So full. That was good.”

“Seriously, you barely ate. You ok?” Ali asked noticing that Ashlyn had only eaten about half what she normally would.

“Yeah. I’m tired, but fine. Plus, I ate late because Vibes practice went over lunch and I just grabbed something quick before I had to go meet Whit in the afternoon.” Ashlyn insisted.

“Well come here then.” Ali leaned against the arm of the couch and pulled Ashlyn into her, massaging the blonde’s shoulders gently.

“Mmmm, that feels amazing.” Ashlyn leaned herself further into Ali, letting the brunette’s hands work her achy muscles.

Halfway through their second episode of Orange is the New Black, Ashlyn was already snoring.
lightly and curled up into Ali. Ali slipped herself out from behind the blonde and quickly cleaned up
the food and dishes before waking her up. She felt bad waking her and wished she could just carry
her to bed like Ashlyn so often did for her, but she had never had quite enough strength to do that.
“Hey, cutie. Let’s go to bed, ok?” Ali shook Ashlyn lightly until the blonde opened her sleepy eyes
and nodded. Ali smiled as the blonde shuffled to bed with her help and fell right back to sleep as
soon as she hit the sheets, leaving Ali to be the big spoon for once.

Around 3am, Ali woke up sweating profusely and wondering if she had turned the heat up too high.
She was about to get out bed when she realized the heat was coming from Ashlyn. She touched to
blonde’s forehead, finding it sweaty and hot. She grabbed the thermometer, glad she had invested in
the technologically advanced option that just scanned the forehead to get a temperature reading.
Ashlyn didn’t even stir when she checked her temperature. Seeing 104.1 on the thermometer screen,
Ali was sure she did it wrong. She tried it on herself, seeing 98.1 appear on the screen before trying it
on Ashlyn again, only to see 104.1 pop up for the second time. That’s when it dawned on her, the
tiredness, the achy muscles, the lack of appetite, the sniffling when Ashlyn was falling asleep on
the couch; how could she have missed it. “Shit.” She whispered to herself. She quickly pulled on some
sweatpants and a hoodie and worked hard to wake the blonde up.

Ali had managed to get Ashlyn to the car without all that much trouble, but Ashlyn had mumbled
deliriously the whole way to the emergency room. If Ali wasn’t so panicked, she might have laughed
as Ashlyn went on and on about a special orange tree that was guarded by poisonous iguanas. She
kept insisting that one of the iguanas had bitten her. An hour later, she held Ashlyn’s hand tightly as
the blonde slept while the emergency room staff worked to get fever down and get her rehydrated
and started on a course of antibiotics. They were waiting a few hours to recheck her fever and see
how the IV fluids helped before deciding on whether or not to officially admit her. As she sat there
stroking the blonde’s hand, the reality of what life would be like with Ashlyn not having a spleen
finally sunk in. She couldn’t afford to miss the small cues that Ashlyn was getting a cold.

By 6am, Whitney joined her after getting Ali’s frantic text a couple hours before. “You guys ok?”
Whitney said, looking at a clearly upset Ali sitting beside the bed that contained a very passed out
Ashlyn.

“I think so. They’re trying to see if she’ll improve a bit before they decide whether or not to admit
her. She had a crazy high fever when we got here. It came down a little bit since then, but not
much.” Ali explained, her worried state obvious.

“That happened fast. She was a little slow in our afternoon workout, but she seemed fine honestly.”
Whitney thought back to earlier in the day to try and figure out if Ashlyn had exhibited any
symptoms.

“I feel like an idiot. I noticed she was tired and she even said she was tired. Then she barely ate
dinner and she was kind of achy. She fell asleep really early and she was even sniffling a little bit.
It’s like I knew something was off and I didn’t think to probe. I’m so dumb, I should have known
better. I mean, they warned us about how quickly a simple cold could become serious. I can’t believe
I didn’t pay closer attention. I blew it, big time. I’ll never forgive myself.” Ali said sadly, chastising
herself.

“Hey, Ali. Calm down and don’t be so hard on yourself. This is not something you or Ash are used
to yet. She would have thought you were crazy if you brought her to the ER for being tired and not
hungry. I’m sure it will get easier for both of you to figure out what isn’t normal as time goes on, but
for now, it’s a learning process. You got her here pretty damn quickly.” Whitney tried to reassure
her.
“I can’t believe how dangerous a stupid cold can be. Look at her, she’s so sick, Whit. It took a matter of hours. I’m terrified.” Ali stroked Ashlyn’s arm gently.

“I know it’s scary, but Ash is tough as nails. She’ll come out on top, she always does.” Whitney tried to be positive. One of the nurses brought in an extra chair and Whitney held Ali’s hand while Ali held Ashlyn’s.

Eleven hours and many cups of coffee later for Ali and Whitney, Ashlyn was finally awake and coherent.

“Alex. You look pretty.” Ashlyn said hoarsely as she smiled tiredly at Ali who was standing beside the bed.

“And she’s back!” Whitey joked a bit from across the room. Ali finally let a smile grace her face for the first time in hours.

“Why am I back in this hell hole? I feel awful. What happened now?” Ashlyn questioned looking around the room and picking up her arm with the IV in it.

Ali stroked Ashlyn’s cheek softly. “You have a really bad cold, baby. And a really high fever that they’re trying to bring down. Can I get you anything?”

“I’m thirsty. My throat is on fire.” Ashlyn replied.

“I’m on it.” Whitney said to them. She headed into the hallway and flagged down a nurse who came in shortly after with a cup of ice water and another one with Gatorade.

The nurse checked Ashlyn’s temperature again, finding that it had come down to 101.2 over the last few hours. “All your vitals are good and we have you on antibiotics now. If we can get you to eat something, maybe we can get you out of here really soon.” She informed them. She came back 20 minutes later with toast and scrambled eggs which Ashlyn wolfed down in record time. Ali could tell Ashlyn wasn’t hungry but that she just wanted to get the hell out of there.

By 9pm, Ali had Ashlyn back home in their own bed and sleeping soundly. Ali quietly pulled out her laptop and tried to catch up on the work she had missed even though she was exhausted. She lasted about two hours before she went to sleep herself, making sure to set an alarm for a couple hours later so she could check up on Ashlyn and make her drink some fluids. That was pretty much how the next two weeks went.

The cold lingered and Ashlyn struggled to fight it off. She had spent the rest of January term in bed and after that only left the apartment to go to class, which Ali insisted on driving her to and picking her up from so she wouldn’t have to walk anywhere in the cold. Ashlyn had struggled to get her homework done between periods of sleep. While the cold symptoms had started to dissipate somewhat after the first week, the fatigue certainly had not. And just when she was finally starting to feel a bit better and more normal, she developed a hacking cough that kept both her and Ali up at night. Ashlyn was living on Robitussin and cough drops to keep it manageable and she had grown extremely frustrated.

“Seriously, just drive me to Wilson and I’ll sleep there. Or just shoot me.” Ashlyn offered at 2:30am one night after she had just woken Ali up for the third time in an hour with her coughing. “I’m really sorry, Alex. I’m draining you.” She was feeling beyond guilty at this point. Ali had dutifully taken care of her for weeks, making sure she had everything she needed. She had been sweet and kind and always patient despite the fact that work was busy and she was falling behind on things. Ashlyn could tell she was running the brunette into the ground.
“Nice try, Harris. Not happening. I don’t care if you wake me up a million times, I’m not leaving you. Also, this princess doesn’t do guns. If anything, I’d kiss you to death.” Ali said resolutely while trying to inject some humor. “Come on, let’s calm that cough down and get you back to sleep.” Ali unwrapped a cough drop and dropped the wrapper into the steadily growing pile beside the bed. She propped them both up on pillows and had Ashlyn rest on her chest while she rubbed her back gently. The cherry cough medicine smell that had become so familiar recently hung in the air between them.

“Thanks for taking care of me. You’re way too good to me.” Ashlyn whispered.

“I’ll always take care of you.” Ali whispered back. Ashlyn had fallen back to sleep fairly quickly, but Ali continued to stroke her back for a while longer. Yes, she was tired and worn down, but for the first time she felt like an important and irreplaceable part of someone’s life. Even though Ashlyn had always conveyed that, it had taken the blonde getting sick again for the concept to really cement itself into Ali’s head. Over these last couple of weeks, she had watched Ashlyn sleep a lot and had taken the time to reflect about their time together and how the holidays had gone; how entwined they’d become in each other’s lives. They needed each other; it was a simple but powerful truth. One that was worth countless sleepless nights and anything else life could dish out.

As mid-February approached, Ashlyn was definitely on the mend and feeling a bit livelier. The cough was still hanging around, but it had gotten better and less frequent. Since Ashlyn had been spending all of her downtime at the apartment and they hadn’t made an appearance in the Wilson House dining room in weeks, Ali invited the rugby girls over for pizza on a Monday night. Ashlyn’s uncontrollable excitement two hours before anyone had even gotten there was enough to tell Ali it was a brilliant idea. Well sort of brilliant.

Megan had arrived in top form, noting that the apartment smelled more like a nursing home than the sex palace it usually did. Of course, she had only been teasing about Ashlyn being sick, but it definitely made Ali wonder given that she and Ashlyn had definitely had their fair share of marathon sex sessions since they moved in. She watched Whitney smack Megan in the back of the head while making a mental note to air the place out more often.

Halfway through dinner, Alex decided to unceremoniously announce that she and Servando were thinking about trying an open relationship since they were apart so much. Tobin had as unsubtly as possible choked on her pizza, coughing bits of pepperoni onto the coffee table and then apologizing profusely when she could finally breathe again. This had prompted Megan to make an awkward situation even more awkward as usual.

“So when you say ‘open’… do you mean like open to dating other guys? Or are we talking like Alex’s love muffin is also now open to all the ladies around here who want a taste?” Megan waggled her eyebrows.

“Oh my god, Pinoe!” Ali shrieked.

“And she went there.” Ashlyn said, completely unsurprised.

Tobin buried her face in her hands while Alex turned a deep shade of red and shook her head.

“Oh, that’s enough out of you, hooker. I’m putting you in time out!” Whitney tried to diffuse the
awkwardness and change the subject. “Anyway. So what are the romance queens doing for Valentine’s Day this weekend?” She looked at Ali and Ashlyn.

“Oh um…” Ashlyn started trying to come up with an answer. Ali took note of the somewhat panicked look on her girlfriend’s face and then answered for them. “Not much. Ash is still getting better and it will be nice to just relax and maybe get out of the apartment for something simple, but no major plans.”

“You guys could just sit home in your underwear eating ice cream on Valentine’s Day and I’d still be thinking relationship goals.” Alex joked. “Seriously, you make the rest of us look bad.”

“That actually sounds like fun. Ice cream and underwear it is!” Ashlyn leaned into Ali on the couch.

After a few too many games of Rugby 15 on Ashlyn’s Xbox, the girls finally decided to call it a night. Ali put dishes into the dishwasher while Ashlyn cleared the pizza boxes in the living room. The two of them had been so focused on Ashlyn being sick that Ali hadn’t put a ton of thought into Valentine’s Day. Ali had planned to try and get out a bit later in the week to get Ashlyn a gift, but after seeing the look on the blonde’s face earlier, she had a different idea. The two of them had barely been out of each other’s sight over the last few weeks, so it was no wonder neither of them had a game plan.

“So, about Valentine’s Day. Can we talk about it for a second?” Ali broached the subject while they laid in bed together.

“Sure. What are you thinking?” Ashlyn propped herself up a bit. She had a few gift ideas, but she needed to find some time away from Ali this week in order to actually go out and pick one of them up. Easier said than done since Ali had been so careful about being around her while she was sick.

“We’ve obviously been focused on other things lately and I was thinking that rather than put pressure on ourselves, how about we agree to no gifts?” Ali suggested. “We’ll just enjoy our day together without spending money on gifts for each other. Honestly, that’s the best gift ever, just being with you.”

Ashlyn smiled. “I can get behind that. After all, you are my favorite person to spend time with, Princess. Assuming you’re not sick of me by now.” Ashlyn emphasized the word ‘sick’ with a joking smile.

“Such a dork, Harris. I’ll never be sick of you… and your lame humor.” Ali kissed the blonde softly, but Ashlyn quickly deepened it. It had been weeks since they had been intimate and Ashlyn was determined to make up for it. She moaned when Ali’s tongue brushed against hers and let her hand wander just under the hem of Ali’s shirt.

Ali gathered all her willpower and pulled back. “Don’t even think about it, Stud. Not happening.” She gave Ashlyn a quick peck on the lips. “As much as I’d love to be all over you, we’re not wasting any of your energy until you’re completely better.”

“Ugh, fine.” Ashlyn groaned before putting on her best puppy face. “Naked time?”

“I believe we’ve reached a compromise.” Ali smiled and watched as Ashlyn stripped of her clothes in record time.
Ashlyn melted into the feel of Ali’s warm skin against hers, she felt a million times better already.

The rest of the week flew by. Ashlyn had gotten herself back ahead of her school work, while Ali had mostly caught up on her own work. With Ali’s no gift rule for Valentine’s Day, Ashlyn felt less panicked and ready to enjoy the weekend with her girl. She always did her best thinking when there was no pressure, and there had still been plenty of thinking to do. Ali may have instituted a no gift rule, but Ashlyn was a woman of technicalities.

There was a long duration snow storm forecasted for Saturday and into Sunday afternoon. At their practice on Friday morning, the Vibes had decided on cancelling their usual Valentine’s Day Jam for Sunday evening since many people probably wouldn’t show up. They opted to reschedule for a couple weeks later and turn it into Winter Jam instead. Although Ashlyn had been looking forward to getting back into the swing of things with her acapella group, she was also glad to have the whole day to spend with Ali uninterrupted.

Ashlyn and Ali got in a grocery shopping trip early Saturday morning before the snow started. Ali had come up with the idea for them to spend the weekend cooking and baking all kinds of good food and having a movie marathon while they were snowed in. The forecast had not been wrong and by the time they got home from the store, there was already an inch of snow on the ground. Ashlyn had made a chicken, broccoli ziti casserole while Ali baked cupcakes. Then they cuddled up on the couch and started working their way through the Harry Potter movie series, making several trips to the kitchen for pasta or cupcakes and occasionally stopping to watch the snow fall.

Around 10pm Ashlyn convinced Ali to take a walk in the snow. Of course, Ali had made sure Ashlyn was completely bundled up and had her looking puffier than the Marshmallow Man by the time they left the apartment. It was snowing so hard that they weren’t actually able to get all that far, but it hadn’t stopped Ashlyn from nailing Ali with a few snowballs for fun. It also hadn’t stopped Ali from pushing Ashlyn into a fresh snow pile in retaliation. It definitely didn’t stop Ashlyn from kneeling down to draw a heart in the snow with their initials in it like she had done the year before. And it certainly didn’t stop Ali from kissing Ashlyn so hard that the blonde thought she might have actually orgasmed right there in the middle of the sidewalk. They returned to the apartment and took a hot shower to warm up before logging more hours of naked time in bed together.

Ashlyn woke up Valentine’s Day morning to the sounds of Ali banging around in the kitchen. She decided to stay in bed and put the finishing touches on her own morning surprise so she wouldn’t ruin Ali’s plans. Ali came in about 45 minutes later with a tray of pancakes and orange juice to find Ashlyn sitting up in bed with a smile.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Stud.” Ali set the tray of pancakes down on Ashlyn’s lap and gave her a soft kiss. Ashlyn looked down to see a stack of heart-shaped pancakes that honestly looked a bit more like Mickey Mouse than hearts, but she would never tell Ali that.


Ali took one look at it and smiled widely. Only Ashlyn would have folded every single one of her cough drop wrappers into tiny flowers and used flex straws to put them all together into a bouquet. “Oh my god, you’re the cutest!” Ali looked at the blonde adoringly. “I thought we said no gifts?” Ali
jokingly challenged.

“Technically you said no spending money on gifts. I’ve just repurposed and recycled. Just like you repurposed that pancake mix into these awesome heart-shaped pancakes, sooo…” Ashlyn played back and dug into the pancakes, sharing them with Ali.

The snow had continued to fall lightly throughout the morning. They lazed around most of the morning and afternoon, playing some video games with Ashlyn trying to help Ali improve her skills. By late afternoon, Ashlyn had gone into the kitchen to start preparing the roast beef she was making for dinner while Ali worked on peeling the potatoes for the mashed potatoes she was going to make as one of the sides. Once the roast was in the oven, Ashlyn pulled Ali into the shower with her, relishing in having an excuse to run her hands all over the brunette’s body since Ali was still being stubborn about making sure Ashlyn was better before letting things heat up any further.

Ali towel dried her hair and threw on some sweats, heading back to the kitchen to start cooking the potatoes and veggies since the roast would be done in about 30 minutes. Ashlyn came out a little while later looking so hot that Ali dropped the spoon she was holding. The blonde was dressed in dark fitted jeans, a slim fitting white collared shirt, and a red skinny tie hanging a bit loosely from her collar. Her hair was up in a bun and she had light makeup on. Ali composed herself. “So, you look totally hot. What is all this?” She looked Ashlyn up and down.

“It’s Valentine’s Day dinner and even though we’re not going out, I can still look nice for you, right?” Ashlyn replied with a smug grin.


Ashlyn laughed and called out “Dinner is in 20 minutes, Princess. Don’t overdo it!”

Of course Ali didn’t listen. She came out of the bedroom in skinny jeans and a tight dark red top that showed plenty of cleavage, her makeup done up perfectly and her hair smooth and flowing over her shoulders.

“Wow, Alex.” Ashlyn stood in the kitchen stunned. “You look incredible. We need to have stay at home dates more often.”

Ali smiled. “Thanks, Stud. I’m starving, let’s eat!”

They enjoyed a sweet and quiet dinner together and were just finishing up when the doorbell rang. Ali went over to the speaker and said hello, but there was no reply.

“Just buzz them in. It’s probably some poor delivery boy stuck out in the cold trying to deliver flowers or food or something.” Ashlyn said nonchalantly. Ali shrugged and hit the buzzer, staying near the door to see if anyone knocked. After a couple minutes passed and no one knocked, Ali figured Ashlyn was right and headed back into the kitchen to help clean up. She had just gotten to the refrigerator when someone knocked at the door.

“All you babe.” Ashlyn held up her wet hands from the dishes. When Ali went back to the door, Ashlyn quickly dried them and quietly got behind the brunette. Just as Ali was about to turn the doorknob, Ashlyn started a beat rhythm behind her.

Ali turned around. “Ash, what are you doing?”

“Open the door, Alex.” Ashlyn replied, going right back into the beat.
“Uh, ok.” Ali opened the door to see all 13 Vibes standing there dressed in outfits just like Ashlyn’s. No sooner had she opened the door, they had quickly gotten into harmony with Ashlyn’s beat and started singing.

Like a moth to a flame
Burned by the fire
My love is blind
Can’t you see my desire
That's the way love goes
Like a moth to a flame
Burned by the fire
That's the way love goes
My love is blind
Can’t you see my desire?

Ali recognized Janet Jackson’s ‘That’s the Way Love Goes’ and felt Ashlyn’s arms wrap around her waist from behind. She could feel the blonde’s chest vibrating against her back as she carried the beat, making Ali tingle as she felt Ashlyn’s warm breath on her neck.

Come with me
Don't you worry
I'm gonna make you crazy
I'll give you the time of your life

I'm gonna take you places
You've never been before and
You'll be so happy that you came

Oooooh, I'm gonna take you there
Oo-ooh hoo-ooh oo-ooh
That's the way love goes
Hoo
That's the way love goes
That's the way love goes
That's the way love goes

Ashlyn was pressed tightly to Ali’s back, swaying them both back and forth. Between the lyrics and the way Ashlyn was pressed against her tightly, Ali was feeling really hot all over and trying hard not to let it show in front of the other girls. She was hoping they were too wrapped up in singing to notice. A couple of her neighbors were now in their open doorways listening to it too

Don't mind if I light candles
I like to watch us play and
Baby, I've got on what you like

Come closer
Baby closer
Reach out and feel my body
I'm gonna give you all my love
Ooh sugar don't you hurry
You've got me here all night
Just close your eyes and hold on tight...

Just when Ali was feeling so turned on she wasn’t sure she could handle anymore, Ashlyn dropped the beat and the Vibes’ melody changed. Ashlyn slipped out from behind her and came to stand in front of her instead, taking her hand and singing Brian McKnight’s ‘Back at One’.

One... you're like a dream come true...
Two... just wanna be with you...
Three... girl, it's plain to see that you're the only one for me...
And four... repeat steps one through three...
Five... make you fall in love with me...
If ever I believe my work is done
Then I'll start back at one

So incredible the way things work themselves out...
And all emotional, once you know what it's all about, babe...
And undesirable for us to be apart...
Never would've made it very far...
'Cause you know you've got the keys to my heart
'Cause...

One... you're like a dream come true
Two... just wanna be with you
Three... girl, it's plain to see that you're the only one for me
And four... repeat steps one through three
Five... make you fall in love with me
If ever I believe my work is done
Then I'll start back at one.

Ashlyn kissed her softly as the song ended. The rest of the girls whooped and clapped as did Ali’s neighbors.

Ali hugged Ashlyn tightly for a few seconds, hearing “Happy Valentine’s Day, baby” whispered in her ear. She pulled back and looked at the Vibes standing there smiling at them. “Come on in, ladies!” Ali motioned into the apartment.

Bree spoke up for them. “We’re actually headed to dinner, just stopped by to help a girl out.”

“Thanks homies!” Ashlyn gave them a thumbs up.

“Yeah, that was incredible. You are all amazing! Thank you so much.” Ali said genuinely.

The girls responded with a combination of goodbyes and Happy Valentine’s Day wishes, with Shay calling out “Get it, Ash!” as they made their way down the stairs.

Ali closed the door behind her and then leaned against it, giving Ashlyn a megawatt smile. “Let me guess, that doesn’t qualify as a gift either?”

“Absolutely not. Just a little singing.” Ashlyn said innocently.

“Uh huh.” Ali said walking over to Ashlyn slowly. “Always gotta find a way to blow me away, don’t you?”
Ashlyn was opening her mouth to answer when Ali grabbed the collar of her shirt and kissed her passionately. The brunette pulled away and left Ashlyn standing there with still hooded eyes and an elevated heart rate, two could play at this game and she was about to pull out the big guns.

Ali walked over to the couch. “Well since you so totally broke the rules, my turn to break them. Have a seat, Harris.” Ali patted the couch next to her.

Ashlyn was intrigued and took a seat, waiting for Ali to make her next move.

“Let’s play a little game of ‘remember last year’, shall we. Hope your memory is sharp, Stud.” Ali said mysteriously.

“Ok, I got this.” Ashlyn said confidently.

“Easy one first. Where did I ask you to go with me last Valentine’s Day?” Ali asked.

“Miami for spring break.” Ashlyn smiled smugly, knowing she got the answer right.

“Good.” Ali smiled. “Gonna get harder now. What were you struggling with before we went to Miami?”

Ashlyn thought for a minute, but she couldn’t come up with anything. The smug smile no longer on her face as she looked perturbed.

Ali helped her out. “It involved applying for something.”

Ashlyn thought for a second before finally realizing. “Oh, duh, going to study abroad.”

“Thank us.” Ali encouraged her. “And what did you decide?”

“To stay at Smith because I didn’t want to miss out on my time here. And, if I’m being completely honest, because I really didn’t want to be that far away from you, but I couldn’t tell you that then.” Ashlyn answered.

“I know. Just like I didn’t tell you that I started looking for jobs in New England that same day.” Ali smiled. “Three more questions, baby. What did I tell you when you were trying to make your decision?”

Ashlyn thought back and came up with the answer. “You said not to worry if I decided not to go because someday you promised you’d travel with me.”

“Bingo. Good memory.” Ali continued. “And what’s my favorite place in the world besides in your arms?”

“Easy. Germany.” Ashlyn replied quickly.

“Nailed it.” Ali smiled. “How about you put it all together and figure out what my last question is.”

Ashlyn went over it all in her head, her eyes going wide. “Alex, seriously?!” She asked excitedly.

“Maybe, Stud, I’m not exactly sure what you’re thinking. For all I know, you think I’m taking you to see a magic orange tree guarded by poisonous iguanas.” Ali teased a bit.

“Oh my god, are we going to Germany?” Ashlyn asked with desperate anticipation, ignoring Ali’s teasing.
“Damn right we are, I’m taking you for Spring Break!” Ali squealed, joining in the excitement as Ashlyn practically pummeled her into a hug.

“What? How?” Ashlyn could only speak a few words in her ecstatic state.

“I found out on Friday morning that I have to travel there to be at two important meetings with clients in the Munich office. Even though it’s just those two meetings, they’re having me go for 6 days just to get further acquainted with the culture since they claim that will help with understanding my German clients and idea building. Essentially, I’m getting paid to vacation. So, I arranged for it to happen while you’re on Spring Break so I could take you with me. No better way to get reacquainted with the culture than to show my favorite person in the world my favorite place in the world.” Ali explained happily.

“I can’t believe this is happening! I am so excited! You have no idea, I’m so so so excited! I don’t even care that you just completely schooled me at my own Valentine’s Day game!” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Ali laughed. “Your fault for breaking the rules, Harris. But, I’m not overlooking the fact that I’m still a complete puddle of goo after what you just pulled with the Vibes tonight. You know how I feel about you singing…”

“And I find myself singing a lot more lately, what a coincidence.” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows playfully.

“So, we’ve gotten off track. How about we talk more about Germany tomorrow and get back to our regularly scheduled Valentine’s Day program?” Ali asked.

“Yeah? What do you have in mind, Krieger?” Ashlyn questioned.

Ali walked into the kitchen and grabbed two spoons and a pint of ice cream from the freezer. “Well, I was planning for ice cream on the couch in our underwear. But, now I’m thinking ice cream in the bedroom with no underwear.” Ali winked and walked towards the bedroom. “And, if you play your cards right, Harris, I might put a cherry on top.”

Ashlyn cleared her throat and jumped up from the couch. “I freaking love cherries!”

Ali poked her head out of the bedroom door. “Me too.”
It's been a busy week, so I apologize for the lag in updates. We're starting to approach the end of this fic (I anticipate maybe another 5 chapters) and after Ash's junior year, you'll see some time jumps to move things forward appropriately. Just wanted to prepare you as we move along. In the meantime, enjoy lots of lovin' and learnin' in Germany :)

Ali felt Ashlyn’s hand resting on her thigh, the blonde’s thumb stroking small circles on the fabric of her jeans. She had her head tilted back and her eyes closed, mentally going over the list in her head to make sure she hadn’t forgotten anything. Of course, she had done this so many times that Ashlyn had teased her relentlessly over the last few weeks. Not that she could blame the blonde. Ali had spent more time making sure everything with Ashlyn was in line than she did anything else. She had made more to-do lists than she could count.

As soon as the trip details were firmed up, Ali spent over an hour with Ashlyn at the doctor’s office asking more questions than Ashlyn ever could have come up with. By the time they left, Ali and Ashlyn’s doctor had figured out a full game plan that included daily low-dose antibiotics, vitamin and iron supplements, and vaccinations for pneumonia and meningitis. Luckily, Ashlyn had already gotten a flu shot, so that was off the list. Ali had even bought Ashlyn one of those days-of-the-week pill cases and diligently portioned everything out for her. The blonde had whined about it and said Ali was treating her like a grandma, but she wanted to do everything in her power to make sure Ashlyn didn’t get sick again, especially with them traveling to another country.

Ashlyn could see the concentration on Ali’s face even with the brunette’s eyes closed and she knew Ali was doing it again. She leaned into Ali’s ear “Your head is going to explode, baby. Relax and stop worrying. We didn’t forget anything, I took my medicine, and everything is fine. Even if we did forget something, we’re currently flying over the Atlantic, so it doesn’t matter right now. I know we didn’t forget anything though, so relax.” Ashlyn pressed her lips to Ali’s neck, letting them linger there for a few seconds. “We’re on our way to Germany, smile.”

Ali let out a sigh and opened her eyes. Ashlyn was right, no use worrying now. Her lips curled into a smile as she felt the blonde’s warm lips against her neck, her skin erupting in goosebumps. “That is going to do the very opposite of relax me, Ash. And this flight is way too busy for us to get to the point where it does relax me, so better come up with a new plan.” Ali gave her the eyes.

“Ok, so I’ll toss relaxation out and go for distraction then.” Ashlyn nibbled lightly on Ali’s neck and moved her hand just a bit further up her thigh, her thumb still stroking circles.

Ali let herself enjoy it for minute before grabbing Ashlyn’s chin with her hand and pulling the blonde’s face up to look at her. Her core was already starting to throb and there was no way she was getting through the second half of the 12 hour flight if Ashlyn was going to be teasing her the whole time. “If you don’t cut that out, I’m going to spend the first few hours in Germany bringing you right to the edge over and over again and then pulling back every time right before you come. For hours, do you hear me?” Ali said quietly and smugly, giving the blonde a quick peck on the lips.

Ashlyn heard her loud and clear. “Ok, so, movie?” She squeaked out, holding up her ipad.
“Much better idea.” Ali agreed, reaching to hold Ashlyn’s hand and watching the screen.

Six hours and many failed attempts by Ali to get Ashlyn to learn German phrases later, they had landed in Germany.

If anyone had asked Ashlyn how well she knew Ali Krieger, she would have said ‘She’s my best friend and the love of my life and while I’m still learning things about her and probably always will, I’ve gotten to know her better than I’ve known anyone else in my entire life.’ This is what Ashlyn thought about as she laid holding Ali tightly against her on their last night in Germany. How she would have so confidently answered that question before, not knowing just how much she had been missing.

It started as soon as they had gotten off the plane, the emergence of the Ali Krieger that Ashlyn had never experienced. Ashlyn could only stand back in awe and watch as it had all unfolded. The way Ali’s eyes lit up and shined as she looked over the German signage in the airport as they navigated their way through customs and baggage claim. The seamless manner in which the brunette had taken one look at the sunny day outside the large airport windows and had quickly pulled their heavy coats out of their bags, knowing that the sun betrayed the actual cold temperature of the air as if she had already been outside. It was as if Ali and Germany were old friends who had just greeted each other after a long absence; the type of friendship where the length of the absence never mattered and they just fell right into their normal pattern as if no time had passed at all.

Ashlyn had followed and watched with intrigue as Ali led her by the hand through the airport. The brunette had led them to an area with taxis and smiled at Ashlyn’s surprise that most of the taxis were Mercedes, Audis, and BMWs. Ashlyn sat in the back of the Audi that had pulled up to the curb for them and listened to a slew of foreign words roll gracefully off of Ali’s tongue as she directed the driver to their hotel. She had heard Ali speak German before, but something about the way it sounded so confident, smooth, and happily spoken in that moment had stirred things inside her.

Ali’s company had spared no expense on their accommodations. They had arrived in their room at the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski to find a gorgeous king bedroom suite with large windows that overlooked the unique and beautiful architecture of Maximilian Street. There was a lavish living room area with a comfortable couch and other chairs, a mural of an old building covering the wall. There was also a small kitchen and bar area just off to the side of the living room and a separate small room that served as an office. The bedroom was its own separate room and it had a very large bathroom attached which featured a wide deep tub and shower combo and a double sink. It also featured something that completely befuddled Ashlyn.

“Babe, check this out… side by side twin toilets! What is up with that? Is it like a German thing to go to the bathroom together? That’s a little gross.” Ashlyn exclaimed pointing to what she believed to be two toilets side by side in the bathroom.
Ali laughed so hard she almost couldn’t breathe for a minute. Ashlyn stood there looking at her like she was crazy. Ali finally stopped laughing enough to give Ashlyn a quick kiss on the cheek and explain. “You’re the freakin’ cutest, I swear. That’s a bidet, Ash.”

“A what? A birthday?” Ashlyn asked, trying to understand what Ali had said.

Ali laughed again, finally apologizing when Ashlyn gave her a hard look. “Sorry, sorry. It’s pronounced like bee-day. And it’s not a toilet or a child’s sink like many people think. It’s for washing your lady bits… or man bits as the case may be. Very European.”

“Seriously? So you like put your vajayjay over that thing and turn on the water?” Ashlyn asked giggling and looking over the porcelain fixture carefully.

“You got it, Stud. Europeans are into that extra cleanliness.” Ali shrugged her shoulders.

“Hmmph. Interesting.” Ashlyn looked at the bidet contemplatively. “Did you use it before when you were in Germany?”

Ali smiled. “Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies, Harris.”

“Ha! Krieger gives her lady bits the Euro treatment.” Ashlyn chuckled. “You know, I could think of some pretty kinky things to…”

“Easy, Harris.” Ali cut her off.

Ashlyn continued to snicker as she went into the bedroom and threw herself onto the bed.

“Now that is a great plan.” Ali said, watching as the blonde laid face down into the mattress. With the 12 hour flight and the time change they had pretty much lost a day traveling. What was now 4am at home was 10am in Germany. They were both tired and hungry, but the tired was winning out at the moment. “We can’t let ourselves get too off track with the time change. So, how about we nap for a couple hours to take the edge off and then I’ll take you to lunch.” Ali suggested.

“Mmmhmm.” Ashlyn moaned her approval, and kicked off her sneakers without moving much.

Ali shook her head and stripped down to her underwear wanting to be as comfortable as possible for their nap. She pulled back the covers as much as she could seeing as how Ashlyn was lying on them and quickly got under them.

Ashlyn had lifted her head a bit as she felt the bed dip beside her, catching a glimpse of Ali’s bare skin as the brunette pulled the covers up. “You sure know how to motivate me, Krieger.” Ashlyn jumped up and quickly stripped down to her underwear too, crawling back into the bed and pulling Ali close.

Two hours later, Ali was waking Ashlyn up with kisses all over her face. “Alllllleeex.” Ashlyn whimpered tiredly.

“Wake up, baby. Time to show you the greatest place in the world!” Ali was beaming happily.

Ashlyn opened her eyes to take in the beautifully happy face hovering above her own. “You’re seriously beautiful.” She told the brunette honestly.

“Charmer.” Ali kissed Ashlyn softly. “Now get up, fancy pants! We’re outta here in 10 minutes!”

Ashlyn had never seen Ali get ready so fast. They really were out the door in 10 minutes, bundled up
and out on the streets of Germany.

“Are you as starving as I am?” Ali asked.

Ashlyn nodded eagerly.

“Good! I’m gonna show you how to eat Bavarian style.” Ali led Ashlyn by the hand into a pub-like restaurant just a few doors down from where they were walking.

They were seated at a small table with a server coming right over to greet them. Ashlyn had no idea what the pleasant looking older man said, but Ali had smiled widely and said a few words which made the man smile right back at them. Ashlyn tried to pay closer attention to what Ali was saying, hearing “zwei Bier und eine Brezel bitte” come out of the brunette’s mouth and getting turned on like she usually did when Ali was speaking German. The man nodded and walked away. “What did you say?” Ashlyn asked.

“He welcomed us to the restaurant and said we were very lovely and pretty. I thanked him and told him you were my girlfriend. Then I ordered us two beers and a pretzel to start.” Ali explained simply.

Ashlyn laughed to herself. She had just gotten turned on by Ali ordering beer and a pretzel. “Wow, pulling out the girlfriend card right away?” Ashlyn said surprised.

“We’re in a very gay friendly part of Munich, so I decided to show you off.” Ali smirked.

“And beer and pretzels, sounds really good… and like a complete German stereotype.” Ashlyn teased.

“Oh honey, you’re about to get a serious education about what real beer and pretzels taste like. Wait for it.” Ali said seriously.

“I trust you, Princess.” Ashlyn said lovingly, grabbing Ali’s hand across the table like she always did.

“You better, cause I’m ordering your lunch too.” Ali shot Ashlyn a smile and squeezed her hand.

Ashlyn was amazed by the food. The pretzel tasted like a pretzel, only a million times better than any one she had ever had in the U.S., it was soft and perfectly salty and chewy. The beer was like nothing she’d ever experienced and it was practically its own meal with a heavy and complex hoppy flavor she couldn’t fully describe. Ali had done her right when it came to lunch too. The brunette had ordered her the German version of her American favorite, a plate of cheesy noodles with fried onions on top called Kässpatzen. “Oh god, that was so good. Like magic really.” Ashlyn sat back, she had eaten way too much.

Ali flashed a megawatt smile, proud that she had done a good job with their first German meal together. “Let’s go walk it off.” She left a few bills on the table and led the blonde out of the pub, knowing exactly where she wanted to go.

“Wow.” It was the only word Ashlyn could say as she took in her surroundings. Ali had taken her into this massive park with beautiful gardens, over-the-top landscaping, fountains, and a waterway running through it.

“This is the English Garden or the ‘Englische Garten’” Ali explained as they walked around. “It’s legit my favorite place that I’ve ever been.”
Ashlyn was just as taken by Ali as she was by the garden. The brunette was all lit up like Ashlyn had only ever seen her in intimate moments, yet in a different way. There was a new kind of passion and fire in her that was showing through, a depth to her shining eyes, and a spring in her step. She was glowing and gorgeous, and Ashlyn couldn’t have wanted her more. “Alex.” She stopped walking to get Ali’s attention and crashed her lips to the brunette’s the second she turned around to face her. “This feels like a dream.” Ashlyn said as she finally pulled away a bit breathlessly and looked into those bright eyes she loved.

“You’re a dream, Ash.” Ali said quietly. “I never knew what this place was missing until right now…” She kissed Ashlyn gently. “You. It was missing you.” Another kiss. “And now it’s the most perfect place on earth.”

Ashlyn put her hand over her heart and sighed. “Take it down a notch, baby. You already had me swooning at ‘This is the English Garden’.” Ashlyn winked and Ali shook her head.

“You ain’t seen nothing yet. Prepare to have your world rocked.” Ali said animatedly. She walked them along the waterway until they came to what looked almost like a small bridge that crossed over it. Ali stopped just before they started to walk over it. “I’ve wanted to show you this from the first time you told me that you surfed. This is where my mind went right away. I pictured myself standing here with you and I just knew, even back then, that we would eventually be here together.” She led Ashlyn to the center of the overpass. “German surfing!” She exclaimed and pointed down to the water below.

Ashlyn looked down to see a rushing river below them, the water pressure created what looked like a cresting wave at one specific spot just below them. The water itself was a fascinating sight, but it floored Ashlyn to see that people were surfing the wave created by the current. “Holy crap, woah, look at that! Insane! Like look at it! They’re surfing on a river!” She exclaimed.

Ali watched the blonde take in all the action with childlike amazement. This was exactly the reaction she was looking for. “Isn’t it incredible?” Ali asked rhetorically. “I was completely amazed by it before I even knew anyone that surfed. Now I find it even more captivating!”

Ashlyn stood there mesmerized as these people in heavy duty wetsuits expertly rode this static wave that stretched across the river. The way they sort of barreled in quickly from the river bank and then balanced themselves just enough to get going, finally settling into a smooth surfing rhythm after a few seconds, it was almost artistic. “I have no words. This is just mind blowing! How is there a wave like that on the river, is it always there?” She asked trying to make sense of it all.

“Yep. This is the Eisbach River and it’s a man-made waterway. Apparently, this happened because of the way they laid the stones under the water. It’s a combination of the water volume and the rocks underneath that constrict the way it flows. So it creates this current that forms the wave.” Ali explained. They sat there watching with rapt attention for at least half an hour.

Ashlyn shivered a bit as the breeze picked up. “I just realized how cold it is! How are they even doing that, it must be freezing!” She said still watching the surfers in awe.

“Yeah, that’s the crazy part. That water is maybe like 30 to 40 degrees right now at best. I mean, I know wetsuits help, but I bet it’s still so cold. Dedication!” Ali said appreciatively. “I’m all for you going down there and trying it, but I don’t know how you’d handle the cold, Florida girl.”

“Yeah, I think I’d die!” Ashlyn agreed. “This is so cool though!”

After an hour of watching the surfers, they finally dragged themselves away. Ashlyn wrapped her arm around Ali’s waist as they walked along the streets of Munich with Ali stopping to point out...
landmarks. Their first stop was a small café where Ali ordered them coffees and an ‘Apfelkrapfen’ which was like an apple fritter. Ashlyn thought it was one of the best pastries she’d ever tasted. After that, they had stopped at a couple of cathedrals. Ashlyn was impressed with their sheer size and the intricate architecture. Of course, they had also stopped in all kinds of little shops and stores along the way. By the time it was dark, they were both pretty spent. Ali had decided to take them to a little eatery nearby that specialized in wiener schnitzel. Ashlyn had no idea what that was, but Ali explained that it was almost like a thin, breaded, fried steak that was served with fried potatoes and salad. Of course, it has been just as delicious as everything else they’d eaten so far. Ashlyn had been really nervous about liking the food in Germany, but she should have known that Ali wouldn’t steer her wrong.

While they had both felt a bit more energized after dinner and could have explored the city a bit longer, they found themselves walking right back to the hotel. They had walked silently, neither of them questioning their destination. Their bodies had been talking all day with soft touches, stolen kisses, and gentle strokes. The passion had been building between them through the afternoon. Ashlyn enamored with the fire that seemed to ignite in Ali the minute they got to Germany. Ali enchanted with the way Ashlyn was falling in love with her favorite place in the world. It had all reached a boiling point, the explosion finally happening when the hotel door was closed and locked behind them.

Clothes had been tossed around the bedroom between heated kisses and desperate whispers of ‘I love you’ ‘I want you’ ‘I need you’ ‘Please.’ Ashlyn laid on top of Ali, her hips pressing the brunette gently while locked in a passionate kiss. “Mmmm, Ash.” Ali moaned, dragging her lips away from the kiss because she couldn’t breathe anymore. Ashlyn had touched her so little and she was already close. She felt the blonde kiss down the familiar path between her tattoos, her nipples hardening like rocks in Ashlyn’s warm mouth. She let out a soft hiss as Ashlyn sucked hard enough to leave a mark just under her left breast, the blonde’s nipples pressed against her stomach. She couldn’t wait anymore. “Ash, I need you inside. Just. Please.”

Ashlyn didn’t leave her wanting, pressing two long fingers into Ali’s dripping wet center and stroking her slowly. She heard Ali gasp and felt the brunette grab her head with one hand and hold it against her stomach while she worked in and out of her tight core. “Mmmm, yes, mmmmmm, uhh, fuck, mmmm.” Ali moaned loudly and moved her hips to meet Ashlyn’s thrusts. Ashlyn could feel Ali’s core throbbing around her fingers as she pumped faster and as deeply as possible, the brunette was fighting hard to hold on longer. “Mmmm, oh my god, uhhh, Ashlyn, Ash.” Ali’s core was so tight around her fingers and Ashlyn could see the concentration on her face, trying not to let the orgasm take her just yet.

Ashlyn moved up to look into Ali’s eyes, the dark brown eyes revealing just how close she was to the edge. “Just let go, Alex. I’ll fuck you all night, baby, you can let go.” She said hotly. That was all it took. “Unnh, Ash, Ash, yeesss, Ashlyn. Oh. My. Unnh, Ash.” Ali’s whole body tightened as she dug her fingers roughly into Ashlyn’s shoulder blades, waves of pleasure coursing through her as she felt herself spill out onto Ashlyn’s hand. “Oh god, Ash.” Ali was breathless as she clutched Ashlyn tightly against her.

Ashlyn pulled back to look at Ali after the brunette finally caught her breath a bit. “Hey.”

“Hi.” Ali replied with a smile and kissed Ashlyn hard, her tongue pressing into the blonde’s mouth. She sat up a bit, moving down Ashlyn’s neck with sloppy kisses and nips. Ashlyn let out breathy moans as Ali worked her neck and flipped their position. Ali moved down further and licked her tongue over Ashlyn’s nipple, sucking it gently into her mouth before repeating the action with the other nipple. She alternated between the blonde’s nipples until Ashlyn was panting loudly and starting to tremble a bit. Ali moved back up a bit and kissed the tops of Ashlyn’s shoulders, her
tongue quickly swiping over the inked skin as she rolled the blonde onto her side and settled in
behind her. Ali spooned Ashlyn, both arms wrapped around her. She rolled Ashlyn’s nipple between
her fingers with one hand while the other reached around to stroke light patterns on the blonde’s abs.
Ali continued to lick and suck on Ashlyn’s neck and shoulders from behind her.

The multiple sensations were driving Ashlyn crazy with anticipation. The brunette was tightly
against her, hard nipples pressing into her back. The fact that she couldn’t fully see Ali was
amplifying everything. She wanted to let Ali take her time, but she was struggling to do it, her
moaning betraying her as she tingly all over at Ali’s touch. As if Ali could read her mind, she felt
the brunette’s hand dip lower and fingers stroke through her folds softly. “Yes, Alex.” She breathed
out in a low husky voice she almost didn’t recognize as her own.

Ali took her time, running light patterns over Ashlyn’s clit and dipping down to circle her entrance
occasionally. She loved the way she could feel Ashlyn’s back vibrating against her chest as the
blonde moaned so much she practically purred. The amount of wetness on her fingers told her that
Ashlyn couldn’t possibly last much longer. She nibbled Ashlyn’s ear as she whispered. “You want
me, baby? Tell me where you want me.”

“I want you, Alex. So ba…bad.” Ashlyn’s response came out through heavy breaths. “Fuck me…
fuck me so hard.” Ashlyn let the vulgar words slip right out to convey what she wanted.

That was all Ali needed to hear. She pulled up Ashlyn’s leg to rest on top of her own and plunged
two fingers deep into the blonde, earning a deep grunt from her girl as her fingers were easily
engulfed down to the knuckle. “God, Ash, you’re so wet baby. So hot.” Ali purred in her ear.

“Oh my fuck, oh god, Aleeex. You feel so good. Don’t stop, please, don’t.” Ashlyn practically
screamed out through desperate breaths. Ali was so deep inside her, driving into her with the perfect
amount of pressure, and hitting her in just the right spot every single time from this angle. “Fuck,
fuck, just like that. Yes, yeah, right there. Unnh, Alex, fuck.” Ashlyn closed her eyes as the room
started to spin, her body on fire. She reached around behind her to grab Ali’s ass and pull her even
closer.

Ali couldn’t remember the last time Ashlyn had been this loud. The blonde was writhing in her arms
and she knew it was a matter of seconds before Ashlyn came apart. “Come for me, Ash. Come all
over me so I can fuck you again.” She thrust her fingers in two more times and felt the blonde shake
all over, her name repeatedly coming out of Ashlyn’s mouth in loud wails. She left her fingers deeply
inside Ashlyn and listened to the blonde try to regulate her breathing as she came down. Ashlyn had
barely caught her breath before she turned around in Ali’s arms and kissed her desperately. Ali felt
Ashlyn’s fingers enter her, her own fingers still inside the blonde. She opened her eyes when Ashlyn
stopped kissing her.

“I want you again. I want you to come with me.” Ashlyn said with hooded eyes, leaning back in to
kiss Ali. They stroked each other slowly while they stayed lip locked in an intense kiss, trying hard
to convey every emotion through their lips. They came apart together this time with quiet moans and
gasps filling the practically nonexistent space between each other’s mouths. They fell asleep
entwined together immediately after, only for Ali to wake up an hour later with Ashlyn’s tongue
buried deeply inside her. She had clutched at the back of Ashlyn’s head and pulled the blonde into
her center, using her hips to grind against her face until she felt the wetness seep out of her and she
was spent once again. Ali had crawled down just a few minutes later and settled between Ashlyn’s
legs to return the favor, savoring the sweet unique taste of her girlfriend until Ashlyn was screaming
and quivering again. She had only made it partway back up the blonde’s body before laying her head
down on Ashlyn’s toned stomach and falling asleep. “Wow” being the last thing whispered out of
her mouth as she heard Ashlyn’s soft “I love you” travel down to her ears.
Ali was glad she didn’t have to be in the Siemens office until late morning after their night of love making. She got up at 8am to shower and get ready while Ashlyn slept in. Ali ordered them some room service for breakfast and woke Ashlyn up with a few soft kisses and a fresh cup of coffee.

“Mmmm, baby. I love you so much.” Ashlyn said groggily, finally opening her eyes to see Ali sitting on the bed beside her in a pinstriped skirt suit, a mug of coffee in her hand and a smile on her face. “I swear, Alex. I don’t know how I got so lucky to get to wake up to you every morning. Look at you. Beautiful.”

“So sweet, Stud. I’m the one who gets to wake up to this gorgeous face and this incredibly hot body.” Ali said tapping Ashlyn’s nose and then lifting the sheets a bit to peek at the naked muscled body she knew was beneath them. “Yep. I’m the lucky one.” She looked up with a smile and kissed Ashlyn on the forehead. “I have to get to the office. My meeting should run about 3 hours and then I’ll be back. Are you going to hang around here or try to explore a bit?” Ali asked.

“Hmmm, well, I’m gonna grab a long shower and then maybe I’ll try to venture out. I won’t go far though or go anywhere that I need to talk to people.” Ashlyn laughed at her lack of language skills.

“Ok, sexy. Call me if you need me and I’ll call you when I get back if you’re not here. I love you.” Ali left a lingering kiss on Ashlyn’s lips and rushed off to her meeting.

The meeting went really well and had ended a bit early. Ali left feeling accomplished and proud of her work. She knew Ashlyn probably wouldn’t be back at the hotel yet and let her heart lead her back through the English Garden where, sure enough, she found Ashlyn perched at the top of the overpass watching the surfers below. She quietly wrapped her arms around Ashlyn from behind.

Ashlyn felt arms encircle her waist and she recognized the touch immediately. The scent of Ali’s shampoo filling her senses. “Alex.” She said almost dreamily and she turned her head a bit to look at her. “Missed you.”


“Yeah, the surfing thing blows my mind.” Ashlyn replied, looking back down at the water. “How was your meeting?”

“My meeting was great. Let’s go try it.” Ali said quietly.

“Try what?” Ashlyn replied, a bit lost.

“Surfing.” Ali said simply.

“Oh. Well, I’d love to, but it’s so damn cold!” Ashlyn exclaimed, thinking that Ali wasn’t serious.

“You only live once, Ash. YOLO baby, let’s go!” Ali took Ashlyn to a shop not too far away where they quickly rented the heaviest wetsuits they could find. The suits had a hood on them to cover their heads and came with special gloves and boots. They each picked out a surfboard and headed back to the river.

“We’re really gonna do this? You’re actually going to try this?” Ashlyn was still beside herself at the
whole thing.

“Damn right we are, Harris!” Ali replied.

Again the side of Ali that Ashly hadn’t quite seen before… alive, fiery, and filled with wild energy that she couldn’t contain. She was stunning and Ashlyn couldn’t stop watching her.

It had turned out to be one of the greatest things Ashlyn had ever done. She had watched a few surfers as they entered into the wave from the bank of the river and committed their movements to memory. Then she approached it like she did skateboarding, all in and all at once. She launched herself into the water and quickly popped up on the board hoping for the best. She had nailed it, feeling the water move under the board as she balanced and rode what felt like the smoothest wave of her life.

Ali had watched a bit nervously as Ashlyn got in the water. She could only admire her girl’s bravery as Ashlyn left it all to chance and dove right in from the bank. She watched the blonde’s face turn from slight terror to pure elation as she popped up on her board and cut her way through the waves, letting out a loud “Wooooo!” that made Ali’s heart practically melt.

Ashlyn rode for as long as she could. She had no trouble staying up on the board, but her legs were tired and shaky pretty quickly because ordinarily you would never ride a wave that long. Eventually she took a deep breath to brace herself and jumped off the board, letting the freezing cold water engulf her. The cold had taken her breath away a bit and stung like hell, but it had been so worth it.

Ali needed considerably more help and after conversing in German with one of the other surfers, Ashlyn and another surfer held the board steady for her in the wave until she could pop up and ride it a bit. She lasted less than a minute before she lost her balance and fell off, but she was so proud and excited that she had even managed it at all.

They sat on the river bank afterwards cold, wet and tired, but with adrenaline still pumping, Ashlyn could only look at Ali in disbelief. Disbelief that they had just done that, disbelief that they were in this beautiful place together, and disbelief that she could have loved Ali any more than she did just a couple hours ago. She pressed her cold lips to Ali’s equally frigid ones and tried to convey everything she was feeling by touch until the cold was finally too much for them. They quickly dropped off their rentals back at the shop and hurried to the hotel to warm each other up they only way they knew how, not leaving the room again until dinner and a night of dancing at a local club.

The next day, Ali woke up and said “I think you need another stamp on your passport, baby.” With that, she took Ashlyn to the nearest auto rental place and told Ashlyn to pick out any car she wanted to drive. Ashlyn had picked out a gorgeous black Mercedes Benz that came with all kinds of bells and whistles. Ali paid for the rental and tossed Ashlyn the keys, directing her to the Autobahn, the German highway where there was no speed limit. Ali smiled watching Ashlyn happily cruise down the highway at around 100mph like a rich teenager who just got her license and a new luxury car.

“Alex, this is sick! Holy crap, people are speeding right around me too. And this car! Eeeek!”

Ashlyn squeaked with excitement at the whole thing.

“Just don’t kill us, Harris! I’ll handle the radio, you keep your hands on 10 and 2!” Ali warned her and starting playing with all the fun features in the car, secretly enjoying herself as much as Ashlyn was.
“Where exactly are we going?” Ashlyn asked, seeing that Ali had entered something into the car’s GPS.

“Salzburg, Austria!” Ali replied giddily. “I had a really strict rehab schedule when I was in Germany. So, between that and classes, I never got the chance to go.”

“Wait, we’re going to another country?” Ashlyn was a bit surprised. “How far is it?”

“Less than 2 hours. I guess it depends on fast you drive,” Ali laughed. “It’s just over the border and supposedly it’s this super quaint and historical little city.”

“So cool!” Ashlyn punched the gas a little harder, really getting a feel for the smoothness of the car. “This highway is meticulous. You could never drive like this in the U.S., you’d end up killing yourself on road bumps and potholes.”

“Seriously. I guess that’s why we have speed limits and Germany doesn’t.” Ali agreed.

They continued their small talk until they reached the border checkpoint where they had their passports stamped and their car checked before being waved through. They drove another 15 minutes and found themselves in the middle of what looked like a fairytale. Salzburg was situated right amongst rolling hills and small mountains, all of them still snowcapped and picturesque. There was a castle up on a hill that overlooked the middle of the city which was lined with unique looking houses and buildings. They felt like they had just walked into the Sound of Music.

“It’s breathtaking. Can’t believe I didn’t come here before now.” Ali looked around in awe of it all. It was just like she had always pictured Austria would be.

“I had no idea how amazing this part of Europe was. I mean you see all these pictures of Paris, Madrid, and Rome and you know they are all must-see places. You don’t hear all that much about Germany or Austria, but I’m so blown away by it all. It’s so beautiful here.” Ashlyn replied with her own thoughts.

They wandered for a little while exploring the small city until Ali told Ashlyn that they had a tour reservation to get to. The brunette had scheduled them for a tour of Eisriesenwelt, the world’s largest ice cave. It was magnificent. The cave was vast and covered in crystal clear ice, perfectly formed icicles hanging from all parts of it like they had been hand sculpted and placed there. It had made both of them wonder just how many amazing places like this there were on earth that they didn’t know existed. After the ice cave, they spent some time touring the castle and then walked around checking out all the little local shops around the city. They stopped to try out various snacks rather than sitting down for a big meal. When it was late evening, they made the trip back to Munich dropping off the rental car and heading back to the hotel. As they had every night of their trip so far, they moved against and inside of each other fueled by the intense emotions of the day, releasing it all in fits of passion until they were too spent to do anything else but sleep.

Their 4th day in Germany had been the perfect mix of activities they both loved. They spent the day in the shopping districts, Ali’s favorite. Ashlyn could only watch adoringly as Ali shopped her way across Munich, picking out a new handbag and a few new outfits. Ashlyn smiled calmly knowing she had only packed her second suitcase half full because she knew Ali would come back with more than she had come there with. Of course, she had fun shopping herself, picking out some fun suspenders and a very German fedora with a feather in it. By night, Ali took Ashlyn to a huge street
fair, knowing the blonde loved all things fair related. They sampled what seemed like a million
different kinds of sausages and potato dishes, drank pints and pints of beer, listened to a few German
bands play music, and took in the display of lights that had decorated the streets. They had walked
around so much that their legs had barely been able to carry them back to the hotel.

On their last full day in Germany, Ali had her second meeting at Siemens. This time Ashlyn had
opted to wander just near the hotel, figuring out how to order a coffee on her own and sitting down
in a local cafe to write down everything in a journal entry. After jotting down a description of all the
things she had experienced with Ali over the last few days, she found that she lacked the words to
explain the wonderful and intense emotions behind it all. She usually tried to close each entry with
how she was feeling. At the end of this one, she had simply written ‘Liebe’. Finally gaining a true
understanding for the word inked into the skin of Ali’s forearm, the only word that stood a chance in
conveying how she felt right now.

When Ali got back from her meeting, they spent their final day as relaxed as possible. They walked
leisurely and went back to all of their favorite places. They had spent a couple hours in the English
Garden again, this time opting to take a foot paddle boat through the waterway to experience it in a
different way. Ali had of course taken Ashlyn back to watch the surfing one last time. Ashlyn then
took Ali’s hand and led the brunette back to all the shops that Ashlyn had seen her get excited about.
They ate dinner at the same pub from their first night, ordering the same food. Finally, they ended
their night at the small cafe near the hotel with two coffees and the same apple fritter dessert. It has
been a fitting way to end their trip, a peaceful repetition of enjoyment. Back the hotel, they had made
each other scream in pleasure for hours on every surface of the room they could manage it, ending in
a clutched sweaty heap on the bed.

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As they lay their holding each other in the dark, Ashlyn could only marvel at the Ali Krieger that she
had just gotten to know on this trip. She thought she knew Ali so well, yet, so much more had been
revealed. It was as if Ali’s soul had been completely bared to her, laid open for Ashlyn to see and
admire. Every vulnerability, every bit of drive and energy that Ali usually held so tightly inside had
come out in its raw form. The brunette had been ignited and it was the most beautiful thing Ashlyn
had ever seen. She was completely enamored with every single piece that composed the masterpiece
that was Ali Krieger. Although it had seemed impossible to feel anything more deeply than she
already did, over the last few days she had completely fallen in love with Ali all over again.

Ali Krieger thought she knew what it was to love Germany. The country held pieces of her soul that
she had never shared. As she laid in Ashlyn’s arms on their last night, she realized that this beautiful
country had been nothing without Ashlyn Harris beside her. She had worn her emotions on her
sleeve these last few days, exposing all those unshared parts of her and letting them all recreate
themselves as she experienced everything anew with Ashlyn. She had watched the blonde’s simple
childlike wonder as she fell in love with Germany just as Ali had, appreciating both the exciting and
mundane with equal enthusiasm. Ali had let herself fall in love with Germany in a way she never
knew she could, through the eyes of the other half of her soul, through the beautiful hazel eyes of
Ashlyn Harris. In the process, she realized that she had not only fallen more deeply in love with
Germany all over again, but with Ashlyn too.

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“Ich liebe dich.” Ashlyn whispered the most important German phrase she’d learned into the dark
room, not sure if Ali was still awake.


“Alex?” Ashlyn said, needing a translation.

“You take my breath away, Ashlyn.”
“Attention, this is your captain speaking…” Ashlyn cupped her hands over her mouth, speaking loudly and trying to get the attention of the rugby team who was getting ready to start practice. Everyone turned to look at her. “Your captain is back, bitches!!!”

The announcement was met by shouts and applause from the Smith ruggers.

“Aye, Aye Captain!” Megan shouted and saluted her while Whitney picked Ashlyn up in the air.

“I missed my number 8!” Alex said sweetly, giving Ashlyn a tight hug before Tobin jumped on both
of them.

Finally, Courtney had come over and handed Ashlyn the rugby ball she was holding. “Pressure is off, I was just keeping it warm for you, Cap.”

“Yeah, well, we all know it’s just a matter of time before I find myself on the sideline with some other kind of injury. So, stay on your toes Court!” Ashlyn teased her replacement.

Ali couldn’t help but feel a bit better about everything watching it all unfold. The team loved Ashlyn and they needed her on that pitch, just as much as Ashlyn loved rugby and needed the team. Ali of all people knew what it was like to have that triumphant moment of coming back from a major injury. She sure as hell wasn’t going to take away from Ashlyn’s joy by being overprotective. She spent the practice mostly distracting herself by working with the rookies and coaching the team a bit while keeping an eye on Ashlyn.

The New England winter had not been so forgiving this year and the ground had just started to get soft enough to practice outside after the winter freeze. This time last year, Smith was getting ready for Rugby Prom. This year they had pushed Rugby Prom until after the Beast of the East Tournament and were readying themselves for a warm-up match against Dartmouth on Friday evening that Ali had set up for the two teams.

Since Ashlyn hadn’t been with the team in so long and everyone was just getting back into the swing of things with the new spring season, the practices leading up to Friday’s match had been mostly focused on game strategy and position on the pitch. With Ashlyn focused on putting plays together, she hadn’t been so adamant about the tackling drills she loved making the team do. This had done a lot to calm Ali’s nerves over the course of the week. Ashly had definitely been a bit rusty at first, but after a couple days everything had come together nicely.

“You’re amazing, you know that?” Ali said while helping Ashlyn pick up cones after Thursday’s practice wrapped up.

“Well, I do have this pretty awesome dimple. I’m guessing that’s not what you meant though.” Ashlyn teased, giving Ali a grin and pointing to the dimple that appeared there.

“That dimple is the greatest, for sure. I was talking about you leading the team though. You’ve become a really great captain and you obviously learned a lot from being stuck on the sideline. The team looks great after this week, you really pulled it together.” Ali complimented her.

“Thanks, baby. You saying that means a lot.” Ashlyn stole a quick kiss from the brunette. “Guess that means you’re ready to watch your alma mater get demolished tomorrow.”

“Really, Ash? Had to ruin the moment with Smith Rugby trash talk!” Ali pretended to give Ashlyn a dirty look before laughing.

“Not my fault you went to Dartmouth, Krieger. And that Smith has been the better team over the last year.” Ashlyn continued to jibe.

“Watch it, Harris! Just because I help coach Smith and I happen to have a thing for their hot captain, doesn’t mean that the Dartmouth green doesn’t run through these veins.” Ali ran her finger over the vein of her forearm.

“Oh yeah? Tell me more about this hot Smith captain?” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows.

Ali laughed. “I would, but that snap back is looking a little tight, Ash. If your head gets any bigger, it will explode.”
“Alllllleeeex.” Ashlyn whined, pulling the brunette in to kiss her softly.

“I was wrong.” Ali smiled as she pulled away from the kiss.

“About what?” Ashlyn questioned.

“Having a thing for the hot Smith rugby captain.” Ali answered. “It is so much more than a ‘thing’. That girl sets me on fire.” Ali winked.

“Yeah, well, don’t tell anyone… but, I fell in love with the Dartmouth captain last year.” Ashlyn whispered with a grin.


Ashlyn got serious. “Everything. She changed my life.”

Ali crashed her lips to the blonde’s, pinning her to the outer door of the equipment closet in the field house.

“Fire! Fire! Oh no, wait… my bad, just some ruggers getting it on! Never mind, go about your day people!” Megan yelled from behind them. “I’d ask if you two were joining us at Wilson for dinner, but it looks like you have plans to eat out!” She added.

“Great timing, Pinoe. As always.” Ashlyn said sarcastically while Ali just shook her head and shot Megan a playful death glare. “But yes, we’re going to Wilson for dinner.”

“Excellent! I can walk with you guys. Wouldn’t want you to take any detours and be late for dinner.” Megan continued to tease them. Luckily Tobin and Alex came along, saving them from being harassed the whole way to dinner.

Of course, after dinner at Wilson, Ashlyn had been quick to remind Ali about their plans to ‘eat out’ for dessert. Much to her dismay, Ali reminded her that she needed rest for her first game day back with the team and took her out for ice cream instead.

“Ali!!!!” Kelley jumped on Ali’s back in the middle of the Smith rugby pitch. “Where the hell have you been!!?”

“Hey Kel!” Ali reached her arms behind her to hug the slender freckled girl on her back. “I know, I know. I had plans to visit you guys at Dartmouth more in the fall, but then someone over here had to go get all banged up!” Ali pointed to Ashlyn with a playful smirk.

“We know. I was just kidding. We definitely missed you though! Glad Ash is better now, that was scary.” Kelley dropped down from Ali’s back. Ali turned around to see that Syd was right beside Kelley nodding in agreement.

“Hey girl!” Syd hugged Ali. “I heard you make a good nurse!”

“The best and hottest!” Ashlyn chimed in from a few feet away with a huge grin.

“I see the fire hasn’t cooled down.” Syd raised her eyebrows.
“Never. I mean… have you seen her?” Ali said playfully, her eyes looking at Ashlyn. “Speaking of, how’s Dom?”

“He’s good! On his way… with a little surprise actually.” Syd answered and Kelley smiled widely.


“A hot one.” Kelley replied giddily.

“Oh my god, Kel! Go over there and get yourself under control!” Syd warned her. “You’ll see, Kriegs. Dom will be here soon.” The two of them walked away towards the Dartmouth sideline to start warming up with their team.

Ali shrugged and closed the short distance between her and Ashlyn. “Ready to kick ass?”

“Damn right I am! I’m so excited to finally be playing again! Feels like it’s been forever.” Ashlyn replied. She was pumped up for this match.

Ali gave Ashlyn a quick kiss for luck, but she was back to feeling like there was a rock in her stomach. She had been fine watching Ashlyn practice all week, but she couldn’t have been more nervous about the blonde playing her first game since the injury. She was about to swallow her fears and give Ashlyn a pep talk when the blonde let out a loud squeal.

“Ahhh! HAO!” Ashlyn yelled out and waved, seeing HAO making her way across the pitch with Hope and Dom beside her.

Ali whipped her head around and quickly ran over to HAO, practically throwing herself into her arms. “I can’t believe you’re here! I didn’t know you were coming!” Ali said loudly and so quickly it came out all mumbled. Ali turned to say hi to Hope too, but Kelley was already smothering her.

“Hey ladies!” HAO draped one of her arms around Ali and the other around Ashlyn. “We couldn’t miss the first Smith vs. Dartmouth thrown down of the spring season! You look good, Ash. So much better than those god awful pictures Ali texted me when you were recovering. That was some injury!” HAO squeezed them both with her arms.

“Thanks! I feel great! So glad you came.” Ashlyn exclaimed. “I better go get the team warmed up though. I’ll see you after. Dartmouth is going down!” She yelled over her shoulder as she made her way towards the team.

HAO looked right at Ali. “You are flipping a shit right now, aren’t you?”

“Uh. Yeah. And badly too. We both went through hell with that injury. I’m freaked out she’s gonna get hurt again.” Ali admitted. HAO read her like a book and she knew it was no use hiding it.

“I know, I’d probably be the in the same boat if I was you. It’s Ash though, she’s one of the toughest people I’ve ever met. Plus, she’s looking so ridiculously fit right now. Bet you’re loving that!” HAO replied trying to reassure Ali.

“Oh, I am. She’s been hardcore working out. I didn’t think her body could get anymore defined…I was wrong!” Ali smiled just thinking about it. “I’m sure I’ll be fine and over it once she gets through a game. Really glad I have you here to help me through this first one.” She said appreciatively.

“Happy to be of service! Shouldn’t you be over there with them, Coach Krieger? Such a traitor!” HAO teased her and pointed to the Smith sideline. “Red and black are not flattering colors for you, Kriegs.”
“Yeah, yeah. I just can’t say no to that girl!” Ali snickered and made her way over to Ashlyn and the rest of the Smith team. She watched the Smith ruggers do their usual intense huddle chant and then gave Ashlyn a quick kiss as the game started. She was hoping that by the end of the game, that rock in her stomach would go away. She never expected that it would be there for a different reason once the match was over.

It started with the very first scrum. Alex had been out of position and Ashlyn went in for the ball that Megan had hooked back into the Smith scrum. Ashlyn grabbed the ball like she normally would and didn’t even try to get a pass off. Instead she had almost frozen a bit and focused solely on protecting her body. In trying to avoid the hit, she had dropped the ball and lost possession for Smith. Ali found in very unusual, but figured it was a fluke as she watched Ashlyn shake it off. Then it happened again, and again, and again. Every time Ashlyn had the ball and someone came in to tackle her, she just recoiled and let the ball fall out of her hands in an effort to protect herself. What was worse, she was missing defensive tackles left and right, letting Dartmouth backs slip though her arms because she wasn’t committed to the tackle.

Just like any veteran rugger, Ali knew exactly what was going on, they called it rookie syndrome. Every year a fresh batch of rookies would join the rugby team and it would take months to get them to get over their fear of being tackled and hit. A good rugger has to be fearless and unafraid of being taken down. The focus must always be on the ball and where your teammates are so you can already be making a move while you’re hitting the ground. It was plain as day to Ali and everyone else watching, Ashlyn was afraid of being hit. Not that anyone could blame after what had happened, but no one had expected it from Ashlyn who had been fearless from day one. Clearly, Ashlyn hadn’t expected it herself.

The match was 24 to 7 at the half with Dartmouth leading. Ali watched Ashlyn come off the pitch, say a few words to Courtney and head to the field house without looking back. Ali knew immediately that the blonde had just taken herself out of the game. She headed right to the field house, finding Ashlyn slumped down on one of the benches in the locker room. Ali had started to speak, but Ashlyn just put her hand up to stop her “Sorry, Alex. I just can’t right now. I need some time.”

“Ok.” Ali replied quietly and walked away. As much as she understood, Ashlyn had never been one to push her away. She had been so worried about Ashlyn physically, but she had no idea it was Ashlyn’s mental state that would end up being the problem.

Ashlyn came back onto the field just before the second half started. She stood silently next to Ali only opening her mouth a couple times to bark out a few directions to Alex and Courtney. In the end, Smith hadn’t been able to recover and Dartmouth won the match 38 to 14. The rest of the evening hadn’t gone much better. Everyone had gone to Jordan House for the after party. Ashlyn sat beside Ali, drinking a beer and leaning into the brunette while trying to act like she was fine, but she was far too quiet and everyone knew better.

HAO plopped down next to Ali when Ashlyn went to get another beer. “How’s she doing?”

“Not good. She hasn’t said much. What do I do?” Ali asked, feeling helpless.

“You know exactly what to do, Kriegs. You were a captain, you do what you always would have done in a situation like this. Plus, you know exactly what it’s like to make a comeback. Help her and, honestly, help yourself too. You both need to get your heads right.” HAO replied bluntly, patting Ali’s shoulder and getting up as Ashlyn walked towards them. Ali clutched Ashlyn’s hand when the blonde sat back down getting a small smile from her. She thought about what HAO said for a while
and finally realized what she needed to do.

Ali woke up with Ashlyn holding onto her tightly. When they had gotten back to the apartment last night, the blonde had said very little and just held onto Ali tightly in the dark. Ali had felt a few of Ashlyn’s hot tears hit her skin and just hugged the blonde tighter, neither of them saying anything until they fell asleep. She watched Ashlyn sleep for a few minutes, taking in her peaceful features before steeling herself for what was coming. This was not how she had planned to spend the morning of their one year anniversary. She took a deep breath and got to it.

“Ash, wake up.” Ali shook the blonde a bit.

Ashlyn opened her eyes and looked around a bit, her eyes settling on Ali who looked a bit serious.

“What time is it?”

“8am. Get up.” Ali said.

“It’s Saturday, Alex. What’s more important than cuddling your girlfriend in bed?” Ashlyn asked playfully. She was still upset about what had happened yesterday, but she wasn’t going to let that ruin their anniversary. She shoved it all aside and put a smile on her face.

Ali only half smiled back. “I’m serious. Put on your workout clothes. We’re out of here in 20 minutes.” She got up and walked in to bathroom.

“Um, ok.” Ashlyn was confused. Ali was never this serious. She got up slowly and put on a pair of running pants and a t-shirt, layering a hoodie over it and pulling on a pair of sneakers before pulling her hair into a bun.

Ali came out of the bathroom a few minutes later in a similar outfit.

“So, what exactly is going on here?” Ashlyn asked, trying to figure out what the heck was going on.

“Just trust me, ok. Grab us a couple of waters from the fridge. I’ll be downstairs.” Ali replied and walked out the door.

Ashlyn was now seriously perturbed. Ali had been all business and pretty cold. She hadn’t acted that way since the very first time Ashlyn talked to her. She hadn’t even kissed her good morning and it was their anniversary. “What the fuck?” Ashlyn whispered to herself.

Ali drove them to the rugby pitch, pulled a rugby ball out the trunk and walked to the middle of the pitch. Ashlyn followed her quietly, not sure what to think or say at the moment. She finally broke the silence when they got to the middle of the pitch. “Seriously, Alex, what is this?”

“This, Ashlyn, is us both getting our shit together. You’re afraid of getting hit and I’m afraid of you getting hurt. We’re not leaving here until we fix this.” Ali answered simply.

“Come on, Alex. I don’t need this. I’m fine.” Ashlyn was annoyed. “It’s our anniversary, let’s go to breakfast.”

Ali wasn’t backing down. “Oh really, you’re fine? Then explain why you looked like a rookie in
their first match yesterday. At least I was just honest with you about what I’m afraid of. The least you can do is be honest back.”

Ashlyn sighed. “What the hell do you want me to say? I’m fucking scared of getting hit. I’ve never been afraid a fucking tackle before and it sucks. Happy now?” She said angrily. “Can we go?”

“You want to go? Here.” Ali threw the ball at the blonde, who caught it. “Get past me and score a try and we’ll go.” Ali got herself set.

“Can’t believe we’re doing this.” Ashlyn mumbled and tucked the ball under her arm, confident she would get past Ali and be out of there in minutes. She backed up a bit and then started a run towards Ali, trying to make a few moves to get around her. Before she knew it Ali was right on her and tackling her to the ground, the ball coming out of her hands.

“What the fuck, Alex?” Ashlyn yelled, picking herself up.

“Are you a rugger or not, Harris? That wasn’t even a full tackle on my part and you let that ball fly out. Drop it again and I’m just going to hit you harder every time you do.” Ali challenged. Her stomach was in knots. It had taken every ounce of strength she had to go after Ashlyn like that. She was scared she was going to hurt her, but she knew she needed to do this. For both of them.

“Again.”

Ashlyn tried again, only to get tackled by Ali right away, the ball coming out a second time. “Try again.” Ali directed her. Ashlyn tried a third time. This time Ali dropped her shoulder right into Ashlyn’s hip and took the blonde down really hard, just like she’d promised. The ball had come out yet again.

“Fucking fuck!” Ashlyn was pretty angry now at the whole thing.

Ali just pushed her harder. “Focus, Harris. Stop dropping the fucking ball. Again.”

On the fourth attempt, Ashlyn got tackled really hard again. This time though her anger and frustration had taken over, leaving no room for her to overthink things. Ali landed squarely on top of her, the ball still in Ashlyn’s hands.

“About time, butterfingers. Again.” Ali picked herself up of Ashlyn as she taunted her. She turned around and smiled to herself a bit. She was starting to feel more confident about tackling Ashlyn, realizing the blonde could handle it.

Ashlyn smirked defiantly as she watched Ali get set again. “Get ready for me to score, Krieger.”

“Bring it, Harris.” Ali smirked back.

Ten attempts later, Ashlyn still hadn’t scored or even come close to getting past the brunette. Ali had taken her down solidly every single time, but Ashlyn hadn’t shied away, the ball still firmly in her grasp every time. Her body was sore already, but she wasn’t backing down and neither was Ali. Both of their fears long forgotten in the spirit of competition. “Again.” Ashlyn was now using Ali’s line.

Over an hour after they had arrived and countless tackles later, Ashlyn had finally scored. She went hard to the right before cutting left and catching Ali off guard, easily slipping past her to put the ball down on the try line. “Woooo! Suck on that, Krieger!” Ashlyn yelled triumphantly with a fist pump before Ali pummeled her to the ground at the try line.

Ali had landed on top of Ashlyn, both of them laughing a bit at the whole thing. They were both
covered in grass and mud and really sweaty.

“Hey.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“Hi.” Ali whispered in reply.

Ashlyn brought her hand up to cup Ali’s face. “You’re so damn hot.” She pulled the brunette into a heated kiss, both of them releasing all of the intense emotions of the morning. Ali pulled back first, rolling off of Ashlyn and trying to catch her breath.

“You ok?” Ali asked.

“Sore because you just handed my ass to me all morning, but never better. Thank you, Alex.” Ashlyn said sincerely. “I love you…and I can’t believe you just hit me that hard for over an hour.” Ashlyn laughed.

“I love you too, baby. You’re the best lock forward I ever played against, never doubt yourself. Now suck it up, we’re meeting the girls for a late brunch and we definitely need to shower.” Ali winked and kissed Ashlyn one more time before getting up and pulling the blonde to her feet. “Proud of you.” She hugged Ashlyn tightly, before taking her hand and leading her off the pitch.

Ashlyn could only smile at the morning she just had. The day they had met, she and Ali had gone tit for tat on the rugby pitch. It was fitting that they’d started out their anniversary that way too. Most people would have just tried to reassure and comfort their girlfriend into doing better next time, but not Ali. No, Ali Krieger could be such a wildcard sometimes. Even a year later, she still kept Ashlyn on her toes, something the blonde couldn’t have been more thankful for. Of course, Ashlyn had some tricks of her own.

After a nice brunch with the Smith and Dartmouth rugby girls, the Dartmouth ruggers headed out. Ali had pulled HAO aside to thank her for the advice and the two of them finally made plans to have HAO and Dave visit over Memorial Day Weekend. As soon as everyone had parted ways, Ali suggested an afternoon adventure for their anniversary. “How about we go for a nice hike up Mt. Greylock? I’m sure it will be pretty with everything just starting to bloom.”

“Nope. Sorry, baby. We actually have somewhere to be in 20 minutes.” Ashlyn looked at her watch and walked them in the direction of her Jeep.

“Wait. What are we doing?” Ali asked curiously. She should have known Ashlyn had plans.

“You’ll see.” Ashlyn replied mysteriously.

Fifteen minutes later, Ashlyn was walking them through nearby Look Park. They approached one of the fields were there was a hot air balloon stretched across the grass, a large fan at it’s opening helping to fill it up with hot air as the balloon slowly inflated.

“Oh cool!” Ali exclaimed. “We’re going to watch hot air balloons get launched?” Ali asked. They had occasionally seen hot air balloons floating above Northampton and Ali had once wondered where they launched from.
“Sort of.” Ashlyn replied. “We’re going to watch it launch from inside the basket.” She smiled.


“Seriously. We going up in it.” Ashlyn told her, noting the look on Ali’s face. “Relax. I’m a little nervous too and have no idea what to expect. The owner of the balloon does this all time and is one of the best in New England. I’ve been assured it’s safe and really fun. I figured we could kind of conquer it together for our anniversary. Trust me?” She held out her hand.

“I trust you, Ash.” Ali took her hand. She was definitely nervous and couldn’t believe that she was about to let herself get into a tiny basket dangling from a balloon and float off into the sky. She had to admit it was seriously romantic though.

They made their way over to a middle-aged woman with short hair who perfectly fit the Northampton lesbian stereotype.

“Hi ladies. I’m Michelle. You must be Ashlyn and Ali.” She smiled at them and pointed over to two guys working with the balloon. “That is Pete and Alan. They’re our trackers for the afternoon.” The two men waved at them. “So, we’re getting the balloon pretty filled up right now. It should take another 10 minutes or so before it’s floating and the basket is right side up. When that happens we’ll get into it and start our trip. Pete and Alan will drive around and follow the balloon from the ground every step of the way. The goal is for them to be there to help set it down wherever we land and then drive us back here.” Michelle explained.

So, we won’t land back here?” Ali asked.

“Nope. We can only control the up and down movements of the balloon with the hot air. Besides that, we rely on various wind currents at different altitudes to make the balloon head in particular directions. We only have so much control of that, so that’s why the spotters follow us.” Michelle answered.

The answer definitely made both of them a bit more nervous, but Michelle seemed competent and confident.

“Sometimes the landing can be a bit hard or the basket can drag, so we do ask that you sign a waiver for that just in case. The worst I’ve ever dealt with was bumps and bruises. The goal is to have Pete and Alan right there to guide the basket down by hand with perfect smoothness, but we can’t always guarantee that we’ll land somewhere they can drive right up to in time to do that. It’s a nice calm day and not windy, so I anticipate no problems.” Michelle finished and handed them waiver forms.

“Wow, ok.” Ashlyn said. “Still in, baby?”

Ali was nervous, but she knew she could do it if Ashlyn was with her. “I’m in as long as you are.”

“Oh, away we go!” Ashlyn signed her form and Ali followed suit. A few minutes after that they were huddled into the basket floating just a few inches off the ground, a huge rainbow colored balloon above them.

“Ready?” Michelle asked.

They both nodded and felt the heat of the flame that had risen above their heads. They held onto each other tightly as the balloon started to lift upwards. It turned out to be nothing like either of them had expected. It was incredibly peaceful; a soft, slow upward floating that felt almost magical. What you imagined it might feel like as a child if you held onto a bunch of helium balloons and floated away, like cartoons often did. It was pin drop quiet up there too. They had an amazing view of the
Pioneer Valley below as they floated over it. It was like a dream. Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s collar and pulled her in for a long sweet kiss, both of them forgetting that Michelle was even in the basket until they heard her sneeze.

“Sorry, lovebirds.” Michelle teased a bit, apologetic for having broken the moment. She pointed out a few landmarks below so they could get their bearings and then gave them a wink before saying “Just ignore me and carry on.”

Ali nestled herself against Ashlyn as she took in the landscape beneath them, the blonde’s arms wrapped firmly around her. Ali couldn’t have imagined a more perfect moment if she tried. “This is amazing, baby.” She whispered into Ashlyn’s ear.

“Happy Anniversary, Princess.” Ashlyn whispered back, giving Ali another gentle kiss.

About an hour later, Michelle made her first landing attempt in a farmer’s field. She had prepped them to bend their knees upon landing and not brace themselves too much so the impact wouldn’t be so hard on them. They had both clenched a bit nervously and followed her instructions, but the balloon drifted too close to some apple trees and Michelle had to pull it back up and try another spot. The second time, they attempted an open grass field near a park. This time Pete and Alan had managed to drive right up onto it and were there to guide the basket down for a perfectly smooth landing. As soon as they were out of the basket, Pete and Alan went to work getting the balloon deflated and ready for transport. In the meantime, Michelle pulled out a bottle of champagne toasted Ali and Ashlyn, handing them each a glass.

“The first men to fly a balloon were French and brought a bottle of champagne with them. When they landed, the farmer whose field they were in believed they were aliens. The only way they could prove they were not was because they had the champagne. It’s now common tradition to bring champagne on a balloon flight. If we land on someone’s property, we give them the champagne as thanks. If not, we drink it ourselves. So, here’s to you two!” Michelle explained.

After enjoying the champagne, they were dropped back off at Look Park. Ashlyn took Ali to dinner at their favorite Italian restaurant downtown.

“I still can’t get over it. That hot air balloon was the most amazing experience.” Ali mused out loud as they walked around after dinner. Ashlyn always managed to sweep her off her feet, this time literally.

“I’m so glad it turned out well. I was nervous it would be a disaster!” Ashlyn admitted. “I’m surprised we didn’t end up as that couple with bruised and sprained ankles after a bad landing.” She joked.

“I think I gave you enough bumps and bruises this morning.” Ali teased. “Speaking of, how are you feeling?”

“I won’t lie, I’m sore. I’ll be just fine though. I can handle a little tough love.” Ashlyn smiled and squeezed Ali’s hand.

“How about I make it up to you?” Ali smirked, knowing it was time to pull out her own surprise.

“What do you have in mind?” Ashlyn smirked back.

“Follow my lead, Stud.” Ali led them as they walked.

“I’d follow that ass anywhere, Princess.” Ashlyn flirted.
Ali walked to them to East Heaven Hot Tubs and Spa. Ashlyn grinned as they walked in the door. East Heaven was a well-known local spot where you could rent out private hot tub rooms. It was expensive, but got amazing reviews. She watched Ali go up to the desk and inform them of her reservation. A few minutes later they were led to a rustically decorated room with a round hot tub in the center and shower against the far wall. The lighting was perfectly dim.

“Slight problem. I didn’t know to bring a swimsuit, Princess.” Ashlyn smiled, running her hands lightly up Ali’s arms.

“Pretty sure that’s not a problem at all, Stud. I didn’t bring one either.” Ali kissed Ashlyn really slowly. They stripped each other, never breaking the kiss until they finally moved to get into the hot tub.

“Mmmm, that feels so good.” Ashlyn moaned as she leaned back into Ali in the hot water, the brunette massaging her shoulders. Ali kissed the stop of her shoulders softly.

Sarah McLachlan’s Mirrorball album began playing in the room. Ashlyn looked back at Ali.

Ali shrugged. “I told them to just pick whatever they wanted for music. They had a bit of an outdated album selection anyway.”

“Picking Sarah McLachlan for two women on a hot tub date. If that doesn’t scream Northampton, I don’t know what does. I’m surprised they didn’t go for Melissa Etheridge.” Ashlyn laughed and Ali giggled.

The music had actually been perfect in setting the mood though. Their hour in the hot tub had been spent making out and placing light touches all over each other, but never taking it further than that. It was relaxing and intimate, comforting and flustering all at the same time. Ashlyn had never experienced something so sensual and sexy without actually having sex. Every one of her muscles was relaxed and tingling, Ali’s touch leaving a trail of soothing fire all over her.

When the lights flashed to signal they had 15 minutes left, they took a quick shower and put their clothes back on. They were back out and walking to the apartment a few minutes later, the cool air feeling good on their heated skin.

“My body feels so amazing right now.” Ashlyn said as they approached the apartment, trying to give voice to the sensations she was feeling at the moment.

“That’s because your body is amazing, Stud.” Ali replied flirtatiously. With the experiences they’d had all day, their feelings for each other had just been building up, needing that one final release to bring it full circle.

Ali locked the apartment door behind her and didn’t waste any time pulling Ashlyn into the
bedroom. Her lips were on the blonde’s immediately, her tongue probing Ashlyn’s warm mouth. She ran her hands under Ashlyn’s shirt, raking her hands up the blonde’s lower back before pulling the shirt up over her head and going back to do the same with her sports bra. Ashlyn moaned as Ali trailed kisses down her neck, stopping to lick and suck on her pulse point. “Unnnh, Alex, yes.” Ashlyn breathed out, egging the brunette on.

Ali wasted no time pulling off Ashlyn’s pants and boxers before making quick work of her own clothes and pushing Ashlyn gently back onto the bed. She climbed up the blonde’s body, leaving soft kisses up the tattoo on her side before going back to her neck.

Ashlyn buried one of her hands in Ali’s hair, the other gripped the brunette’s hip firmly. Ali’s strong thigh was nestled between her legs, putting tantalizing friction on her clit. Ali worked down her chest and encircled Ashlyn’s nipple with her tongue, flicking over it a bit and then sucking on it. “Ohhh god.” Ashlyn’s breathing was heavy. Her body felt warm and relaxed with electricity surging through it from Ali’s touches, her center was soaking wet with the competing sensations. Ali moved over to the other nipple, lightly tugging it with her teeth and earning a gasp from the blonde before soothing it with her tongue, sucking it firmly, and releasing it with a loud pop. She felt Ali move down her stomach with open mouthed kisses until she settled between her legs, the brunette’s hot breath against her core. Ali’s thumb rubbed light circles over Ashlyn’s clit for a few seconds, causing her hips to jerk up. “Mmmm, yes, baby.” Ashlyn moaned loudly, trying to push towards Ali to increase the pressure. The brunette laid an arm over Ashlyn’s hips to steady them and moved in to slowly lick through her wet folds with her tongue. “Oh mmm, my god.” Ashlyn weaved her hand into Ali’s hair and pulled her closer.

“So wet, Ash.” Ali mumbled into the blonde’s wet heat, circling her tongue around the entrance. “You taste so good, baby.” She plunged her tongue inside of Ashlyn a few times before moving back to her clit to lick patterns over it and suck it into her mouth. Ali used her tongue to alternate between stroking Ashlyn’s clit and working deep into the blonde’s core, never spending too much time in either spot before moving back to the other again.

“Holy fuck, unnnnh, Alex. Yeesss. Your tongue feels so good.” Ashlyn got out between panting breaths. She felt like Ali’s mouth was all over her center and the pressure was building deep inside her. She tightly gripped the sheets with her free hand and tried to unfog her mind so she could ask for what she wanted. Ashlyn used the hand on Ali’s head to pull the brunette away, groaning a bit at the loss of contact as she did. “Alex, wait.”

Ali picked her head up, her face showing concern. “Are you ok?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” Ashlyn tried to speak through heavy breaths. “I just…” She rolled over and reached into the drawer of the bedside table, pulling out the strap-on and holding it out for Ali. “I want you.”

One year ago on this day, Ali had given Ashlyn everything. She had kissed her on the dance floor and given Ashlyn her heart, her love. Later that night, they had made love on the rugby pitch and Ali had given Ashlyn her body, letting the blonde be her first. The moment had been poignant for Ashlyn and she had wished that she could have done the same. That she could have given herself for the first time to Ali, who actually loved her and deserved it. It wasn’t until a few days after they had used the strap-on for the first time that it dawned on Ashlyn that she had finally gotten her wish. What had made the experience so amazing wasn’t the toy itself, but the fact that she had never given her body to anyone in that way. Ali was her first, she would be her only, and Ashlyn wanted to give herself to the brunette that way all over again.

“You’re the only one who’s ever been with me this way, Alex. I love you and I want you.” Ashlyn
Ali leaned down and kissed Ashlyn’s deeply, her mouth still coated in Ashlyn’s fluids, letting the blonde taste herself on her lips. Both of them moaned into the kiss, letting the emotions of the moment wash over them before finally pulling back. Ashlyn sat up and helped Ali adjust the straps around her hips before laying back and feeling Ali settle between her legs again, the toy pressing against her inner thigh as the brunette hovered over her.

Ali worked the shaft of the strap-on through Ashlyn’s folds, coating it in the blonde’s wetness. She leaned down to kiss Ashlyn passionately again before positioning it at the blonde’s entrance and looking into her beautiful green hazel eyes to be sure.

“Please, Alex. Be my only.” Ashlyn said quietly, her voice deep. She let out a soft moan as Ali entered her slowly, feeling the brunette completely stretch and fill her. “You feel so good inside me, mmm, so good.” Ashlyn gripped Ali’s hips tightly to pull her in more deeply, the brunnete’s body coming down and pressing against hers.

Ali slowly moved her hips back, pulling the toy most of the way out before slowly filling Ashlyn again inch by inch, letting her get used to it. The pressure of the dildo against her own clit making Ali moan a bit. She looked down at her girl, eyes tightly shut in pleasure, blonde hair strewn over the pillow behind her head. “Look at me, Ash. Open your eyes, baby.” Ali instructed, her face hovering just over Ashlyn’s. The blonde complied, looking up at Ali as the brunnete thrust into her against slowly, swirling her hips as she bottomed out. “You’re so beautiful, Ashlyn.” She thrust in again.

“Oh my god, please…please, baby, keep going.” Ashlyn moaned out, trying hard to keep her eyes open and focused on Ali’s. Her heart was pounding and Ali was so deep inside her, the raw need starting to take over. “Harder. Please, Alex, fuck me. Alex…make me yours.” Ashlyn begged as Ali moved her hips faster.

Ali pressed her body tightly to Ashlyn, her mouth on the blonde’s neck as they moved together, both sweating and hot. Ali sucked hard on Ashlyn’s collarbone as she picked up the pace even further, working in and out of her girl and earning a deep grunt from the blonde who gripped her hips even tighter. She moved up and kissed Ashlyn hard, pulling out of the blonde and hearing Ashlyn groan into the kiss at the loss of contact. Ali rolled Ashlyn on her side a bit and slid in behind her, knowing the effect this position had last time with just her fingers.

Ashlyn felt Ali settle in behind her, the brunnete’s nipples against her back. She brought her hand back to grip Ali’s lower back as the brunnete lifted the blonde’s leg back to rest over her own and entered Ashlyn again. “Oh my… fuck, baby, unnnh, Alex.” Ashlyn screamed as brunnete gripped her thigh from behind and pounded into her. The sensation was so intense, the tight knot building in her lower belly as the toy hit the perfect spot with the perfect pressure. “Alex. Alex. Right there, please, right there. Don’t stop.” The blonde continued to moan loudly, her hand grabbing Ali’s ass roughly and pulling the brunnete in deeper. Ashlyn’s eyes were tightly shut, the room starting to spin as she took desperate panting breaths.

Ali could feel Ashlyn starting to clench around the shaft of the dildo as it got harder to move. She knew the blonde was about to come apart. She moved her hand down to gently stroke Ashlyn’s clit and made sure to pull the strap-on almost all the way out before thrusting it back in deeply again. That was all it took to send Ashlyn over the edge, the blonde’s muscles ripping and convulsing against Ali as her name left Ashlyn’s lips in a wail along with a string of profanities. Ali left the toy deeply inside Ashlyn, swirling her hips slowly as the blonde came down. She wrapped her arm around Ashlyn’s waist and held her tightly, planting soft kisses across her shoulder.

“You’re so amazing. Nothing feels as good as you do.” Ashlyn said honestly after catching her
Ali smiled behind her and gave her a light squeeze. She was hoping she hadn’t zapped Ashlyn’s energy too badly. The pressure of the dildo on her clit as she watched herself pound into Ashlyn had set her on fire. As usual, it was as if the blonde could read her mind. Ashlyn turned in her arms and kissed her so hard it took Ali’s breath away. Ashlyn’s tongue was in her mouth, the blonde’s hands running over her stomach and up her sides.

“Get up, baby.” Ashlyn finally pulled back from the heated kiss and stood next to the bed, pulling a hooded eyed Ali up with her. The blonde quickly worked the strap-on off of Ali and onto herself, pulling Ali into her when she was done and raking her hands up the brunette’s strong back.

Ali smiled as she felt Ashlyn work down her neck and kiss over the first tattoo on her chest before the blonde took her nipple into her mouth. Ali had been expecting it, but it made her gasp just the same. Ashlyn trailing across her chest between those symbolic tattoos and working hard to get their minute back would never cease to send sparks shooting through her body. She held the back of Ashlyn’s head as the blonde kissed her way to the other nipple, sucking it firmly and making Ali moan loudly. Ali let Ashlyn finish her path before sitting down the edge of the bed and pulling Ashlyn’s hips toward her, surprising the blonde. She couldn’t wait much longer for Ashlyn to take her, but she wasn’t going to let the strap-on still covered in her girl go to waste. She took the toy into her mouth and sucked on it, relishing in the sweet flavor of Ashlyn with a slight moan and watching the blonde’s eyes go wide. Ali made sure to push the dildo back into Ashlyn’s clit as she worked it in and out of her mouth, hearing Ashlyn’s breath hitch.

“You’re so hot, Alex.” Ashlyn whispered.

Ali let the toy slip from her mouth, her core throbbing, wet, and ready for Ashlyn. “Come fuck me, baby.”

Ashlyn didn’t waste any time, she gently pushed Ali back on the bed and kissed down her taunt stomach before kneeling down beside the bed and sucking Ali’s clit between her lips while running her tongue over it. She easily slipped two fingers into Ali while she continued to stroke her clit lightly with her tongue.

“Mmmm, oh god, baby, yes, yes.” Ali’s head was thrown back into the bed, back arched into the air as Ashlyn quickly worked her to orgasm. “Ash, I’m gonna… fuck, yes, Ash, Ashlyn, unnnh.” Ali screamed out, her walls clenching around Ashlyn’s fingers as the pleasure ripped through her.

Ashlyn removed her fingers and continued to lick Ali softly, letting the brunette ride out the high and come all the way down. Now that Ali wasn’t so worked up, she could take her time with the brunette. She took her still wet fingers and used them to spread Ali’s wetness over the shaft of the toy before running the tip of it through Ali’s folds a few times. Ashlyn placed each of her hands on the bed next to Ali’s shoulders and leaned down to kiss her slow and deep.

Ali could feel the dildo pressing against her center and she wanted Ashlyn again. She dragged her lips away from Ashlyn’s. “Make me come again. I need you, Ash.” She reached down and guided the tip of the toy to her entrance.

Ashlyn stood back up again and spread Ali’s legs widely, pressing and watching Ali engulf the toy inch by inch, some of the brunette’s wetness pooling at the base. “So wet and ready for me, Alex. So hot.” Ashlyn started to work in and out extremely slowly, Ali’s walls getting less tight around the shaft as she got used to it.

Ali closed her eyes tightly as Ashlyn filled her, the pleasure taking over and heat spreading over her
body. “Yes, baby, fuck me, Ash. Fuck me hard baby. I want to hear you fucking me.” Ali pleaded, already lost in the moment, her hands grabbing fistfuls of sheets. Ashlyn complied, wrapping her hands around Ali’s thighs and dipping into her faster. The brunette moved her hips to meet Ashlyn’s every thrust. “Ooooh, unnnh, mmy god. Fuck.” Ali yelled through ragged breaths.

Ashlyn pulled out of Ali and flipped the brunette over on all fours and slipped the toy back into her, wanting to give her a new sensation.

“Fuck, Ash, that’s so good. Don’t stop, baby, fuck, harder.” Ali whimpered, reaching around to grab Ashlyn’s ass and pull the blonde into her even further. Ashlyn grabbed her shoulder and let out a soft moan while working Ali fast and deep, wet slapping sounds filling the air and bringing Ali right to the brink. “Mmmm, I’m so, fuck, close. Ash, oh my god.” Ali’s heard her own raspy voice yell out before stars starting popping behind her eyes. “Ashlyn, Ashlyn, baby, oh fuck, fuck, Aaaash.”

Ashlyn gripped Ali’s hip tightly with one hand and moved the other to Ali’s nipple, pushing the brunette right over the edge and collapsing onto the bed. Ashlyn tumbled down with her, pressed to Ali’s back, both of them breathing heavily.

“Oh geez, baby. Woah. That was, ugh, wow.” Ali got out a few minutes later, still pretty breathless.

“It’s always wow, Alex.” Ashlyn kissed Ali’s shoulders before rolling off the brunette and quickly pulling off the strap-on. She pulled Ali into her arms and threw the covers over them, kissing her gently. “I love you so much, Alex. This has been the best year of my life and I can’t wait for the rest of them with you.”

“You never cease to amaze me, Ashlyn. I can’t imagine anyone else by my side in life. I love you madly.” Ali replied, going in for another kiss.

They laid there silently, enjoying the feel of each other, their hearts pounding with the unspoken emotions in the room as Ali traced the inked patterns on Ashlyn’s arm.

“Alex, does it feel like it’s been a year to you?” Ashlyn asked quietly.

“No, Ash. I feel like my heart has been yours and loved you forever.” Ali put words to her thoughts.

“That’s what I want thinking too.” Ashlyn whispered back and pulled Ali tighter into her chest, feeling as if the parameters of time ceased to exist when they were together.
Yin & Yang

Chapter Notes

Another chapter update because I'm traveling for the rest of the week for work and won't be able to put out another until next week. So, read slow!
Now that these two have spent a full year together, we're really going to move. So, you'll see the quick time jumps as we head to the finish. Hold on to your hats ;)

The smell of mothballs mixed with detergent filled the air as Ali pulled another hideous dress over her head. She looked at the salmon colored disaster in the mirror, noting the white lace edges along the bottom hem that fell just above her knees. It also featured a perfect circle-shaped cutout right in the center, exposing her belly button. She wondered who in their right mind would make this dress, but she had to admit it was a winner.

“Oh, hell yes! That is just divine, darlin’.” Ashlyn came into the dressing room behind her. The blonde was wearing a short purple dress with huge puffy sleeves that came down to her elbows.


Ashlyn spun a circle and curtsied, making Ali laugh even harder. “The real question is, am I going to see that hot white lace bra and panty set this year?” Ali asked with a waggle of her eyebrows.

“Maybe. Or I could save it for the after party.” Ashlyn said suggestively, running her fingers around exposed part of Ali’s stomach.

“You do that, baby. But right now, this stench is giving me a headache.” Ali gave Ashlyn a quick kiss and pulled off her dress before she started to smell like it.

It had been another successful Smith Rugby trip to the thrift store to get Rugby Prom dresses. Tobin had selected a green dress that was a covered in what looked like fabric leaves that made her resemble the Jolly Green Giant. Alex’s dress looked like a normal yellow short prom dress from the front, until you got to the back and noticed a large swath of zebra print fabric had been inserted into it. Whitney had been smart enough not to pick a long dress this time and found herself a short leather wedding dress that made her look like a biker chick eloping in Vegas. Megan beat them all with a red dress that had a puffed bow tied in the back and featured a huge fake orange jewel in the middle of the chest.

Rugby Prom had been another success with the team still fired up over their prior weekend’s third place finish at the Beast of the East tournament. This year they had raised over $2000 for charity with their mangling of ugly dresses in a hard fought match. At the real prom party afterwards, Ashlyn had looked dapper in a gray suit with a navy blue bowtie that matched Ali’s form fitting short navy dress. This year’s theme was Sex in the City with the room decorated to resemble the New York skyline. The DJ stuck to New York style club music which had been perfect for Ali to get close and grind up on Ashlyn all night until she had the blonde completely flustered as usual. They snuck away as soon as they could and found themselves lying under the stars on the dark rugby pitch where Ali found the matching white lace bra and panty set she had been hoping for under Ashlyn’s suit.
Ashlyn had forgotten to lock the door to her room after Rugby Prom, too caught up in Ali to think about it. Normally, it wouldn’t have mattered, but this morning it did as Alex knocked and didn’t give Ashlyn time to answer before barging into the room. Ashlyn scrambled to pull the covers up over her and Ali who were very naked.

“What the heck, Alex?” Ashlyn asked as Ali woke up and realized they weren’t alone, burying her head into Ashlyn’s shoulder.

“Sorry guys. I just… I need major help.” Alex looked seriously discombobulated, not even flinching at the fact that Ashlyn and Ali were naked and entwined in each other under the covers of the bed.

“What’s going on?” Ali popped her head up.

“I uh, oh boy… I kissed Tobin last night. Like really kissed her.” Alex explained. “I don’t know what to do.”

Ashlyn couldn’t have been less surprised by the news. Everyone knew it was just a matter of time before something happened. “Hold up. Are you in here because you don’t know what to do or because you know exactly what you want to do and it’s freaking you out?” Ashlyn tried to level with her. Although they were unlikely friends, Ashlyn and Alex were pretty close and Ashlyn could read the girl like a book.

Alex pondered the question for a second. “Fuck. The latter.”

“Yeah, thought so.” Ashlyn replied. “What are you thinking exactly? Is this like a side thing to Servando or are you looking for something more? Cause you know it’s not gonna end well if you string Tobin along.” Ashlyn warned, trying to look out for Tobin too.

“I know. I guess that’s what’s messing me up. I let myself go into this thinking it was a side thing and now I’m not so sure it’s just that.” Alex answered honestly.

“Can I offer some advice here?” Ali piped up. Alex nodded. “First, talk to her. She should know what you’re thinking, you owe her that. Second, step back and figure out exactly what you want and be sure of it. Third, if you figure out that she’s what you want, then make it happen…kiss the hell out of her and don’t look back.”

“What she said.” Ashlyn smiled at the familiar sounding advice.

“Hmmm, ok. Thanks, ladies. Sorry to interrupt, I needed that.” Alex thanked them and left the room.

Ashlyn looked at Ali at soon as Alex left. “Kiss the hell out of her, huh?”

“Worked for me.” Ali winked and leaned up to kiss Ashlyn softly.

Two weeks later, Tobin had made a joke at a post-match party and out of nowhere Alex had kissed the hell out of Tobin in front of everyone. Alex had finally figured out what she wanted and followed Ali’s advice.

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Ali paced the apartment back and forth most of the day. She hadn’t been able to sit still or get any work done despite trying hard to distract herself. She finally decided on going for a long run to try and burn off energy, knowing that Ashlyn wouldn’t be home for at least a couple more hours. She
ran 8 miles, her lungs burning and her legs feeling like jello by the end of it. She jumped into a hot shower to soothe her sure to be sore muscles. She had just wrapped herself in a towel when she heard keys jingle and the door to the apartment open. She came out of the bathroom to find Ashlyn dressed in a gray business suit, looking simultaneously professional and stunning.

Ali couldn’t wait any longer. “How did it go?! What happened?” She asked anxiously. Her heart started to drop when she saw the serious look on Ashlyn’s face and the blonde’s eyes drop to the floor.

Ashlyn picked her eyes up to look at Ali and let a smile come over her face. “I got it!”

Ali jumped up excitedly and ran to hug Ashlyn, her towel dropping to the floor in her haste. “So proud of you, baby.” Ali covered Ashlyn’s face in kisses before planting a long one on her lips.

“Damn, Alex. If you’re gonna get naked and be all up on me like this, I’ll interview for a summer job every day.” Ashlyn smirked, looking down at her girlfriend’s sexy toned body.

Ali kissed Ashlyn more deeply and then pulled back leaving the blonde with parted lips and hooded eyes. “Tell me all about it. Then we’ll celebrate properly by getting that suit off.” Ali winked.

Ashlyn had gotten a summer job at the prestigious Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory in Cape Cod Massachusetts. She would be spending 8 weeks of the summer with some of the best marine researchers on the planet studying the really unique marine ecology environment of Woods Hole. She had worked hard to even get an interview and was shocked when they had offered her the summer job immediately afterwards. Her only hesitation in taking the job was that she would be away from Ali during the weekdays for 8 weeks since Woods Hole was almost a three hour drive from Northampton. She hadn’t figured out housing options yet, but the lab had offered to set her up in a room on their campus. Ali had of course reassured Ashlyn that they could handle it just fine for 8 weeks and preceded to make the blonde think about nothing else but the excitement of it all as they celebrated properly like she had promised.

The following weekend, Ali had rented a quaint New England style beach house near Woods Hole so that she could help Ashlyn get to know the area better and feel more comfortable with it. They had a fantastic weekend together exploring the southeastern Massachusetts coast. On Sunday, Ali sat with Ashlyn on the sand near the house watching the waves roll in before they had to leave in a couple hours.

“Nice house huh?” Ali asked.

“Yeah, it’s pretty amazing. This view is pretty unbeatable.” Ashlyn replied, breathing in the ocean air deeply.

“Glad you liked it, maybe we can come back.” Ali suggested.

“Definitely!” Ashlyn answered excitedly.

“I was actually thinking we’d come back sooner rather than later.” Ali said.

“Yeah?” Ashlyn asked.

“Yep, like June 1st. And stay longer too, like say through August 1st.” Ali smiled.

“Alex?” Ashlyn looked at her girlfriend, starting to piece it together.

“Welcome to our summer beach house rental, beautiful. Our 8 week home away from
Northampton.” Ali said giddily.

“You’re serious?” Ashlyn face broke out into a huge grin.

“So serious. I’ll work from here and you’ll go to work and we’ll have an amazing summer together on the beach.” Ali explained. “The best part of having the job I do and money to spend is that I never have to be away from you, Ash. You have no idea how thankful I am for that.”

Ashlyn replied the only way she could at the moment. By scooping Ali up off the sand, kissing her passionately and carrying her into the house to show her just how much she loved her for next couple of hours before they had to leave. As they lay there spent and exhausted, Ashlyn ran her fingers along the black script on Ali’s side and could only snicker to herself.

“What’s so funny?” Ali inquired.

“Just amusing that we don’t even live here yet and we already broke in the bed and the shower.” Ashlyn replied with a smile. She looked at her watch. “Unfortunately, we have to get back so I can make it to Vibes practice tonight. We’ll just have to wait a few more weeks to break in the rest of this place.”

Ali sighed contently, already picturing what they would do on that spacious kitchen counter.

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People often told Ashlyn that life had balance. That when there was too much good, some bad usually came along to even it out and vice versa. Ashlyn found it to be generally true, although, when there had been so much bad in her life in high school, she had seriously questioned if she’d ever see the good. Then she had found a home at Smith and Ali had come into her life, the good finally rushing in all at once to outweigh the bad. Of course, fate had stepped in and put some obstacles in the way to restore the balance again with her injury. Still, Ashlyn couldn’t help but feel like she’d won. Even the bad, the worst day, was still a good one with Ali by her side.

So, when Ali got really sick in early May following a string of good happenings, Ashlyn couldn’t be overly surprised. The yin had come in to complement the yang as usual. Ashlyn had left the apartment early to complete her final lab for her animal physiology course since there was no real final exam for that class. She was committed to getting it out of the way early so she would be done with it and not have to worry about it when finals started in two weeks. She had quietly gotten ready so she wouldn’t wake Ali up, knowing the brunette wouldn’t get up until 8am to start working. When she came back almost three hours later, she found Ali still in bed completely lethargic and trembling, barely able to answer a single question Ashlyn was asking her. Ashlyn had felt how hot Ali’s forehead was and started to panic, quickly figuring out that she had no idea how to use the stupid fancy thermometer that Ali kept in the apartment and not able to find another one. She had tried to get Ali up out of bed to take her to the hospital, but Ali had been in too rough a shape to move much. It had set Ashlyn into a frenzy, running to pull her Jeep up to the apartment door and carrying Ali to the car and then into the emergency room herself. She hadn’t even thought of calling an ambulance in her anxiety to get Ali help.

After IV fluids and medicine to bring the fever down, Ali had finally woken up almost 8 hours later, looking like hell but still as beautiful as Ashlyn had ever seen her. It had been the longest 8 hours of the blonde’s life and Ali’s amber eyes searching her face had been like seeing an angel.

“Ash?” Ali called out weakly.

“I’m right here, beautiful.” Ashlyn got up from where she had been sitting beside the bed holding
Ali’s hand. “How do you feel?”


“I’m going to get the nurse in here, ok love? I’ll be right back, promise.” Ashlyn reassured her.

“K.” was all Ali managed to reply back.

The tests had come back showing that Ali had viral pneumonia and that the chest pain was likely lung related. Still, they had decided to play it safe and keep Ali on a heart monitor for the night just to be sure.

“Hold me?” Ali asked once the technician who set up the heart monitor left the room.

Ashlyn crawled into the bed beside Ali and pulled the brunette into her arms, protecting her. Just like Ali had done for her so many months ago. It was Ashlyn’s turn to worry, to keep Ali safe and take care of her. As the brunette snored against her chest, it hit her how terrifying the last few hours had been. How easily a stupid viral cold had brought her to her knees as if it had infected her own immune-deficient body. Ali was everything. Her other half. The biggest part of her life and the one that held the most meaning. She couldn’t fathom ever losing her. Ali would be fine of course and this hadn’t actually been that bad, but even a moment of not knowing that for sure had been too much to handle. Ashlyn understood now just how much Ali had gone through when she had been the one injured and sick. The strength the brunette had to have to get through it all and take care of her so well.

Ashlyn stroked Ali’s hair lightly, listening to the sound of the brunette’s strong heartbeat echo through the room reassuringly. She watched the monitor intently, observing the peaked lines run across it, never seeing anything more beautiful than the illustration of Ali’s heart beating on the screen. It dawned on her in that moment just how much she had and also what she was missing. Her story didn’t just have a new chapter. With Ali coming into her life, her story had a whole new book. Ali the central character, the storyline that brought everything together. With that realization, she slowly pulled her phone out of her pocket careful not to wake Ali, and snapped a picture of the monitor.

The next few weeks were a bit of a blur. Ali had been released from the hospital after 2 days and Ashlyn had babied her for two weeks until she was finally feeling much better and mostly back to her normal self. The blonde had worked furiously to keep up with studying for her finals and her end-of-semester commitments while she nursed Ali back to health. Even going so far as to make sure Whitney or one of the other girls was always with Ali when she couldn’t be. Despite it being a bit much at times, Ali found it endearing, feeling like she and Ashlyn had managed to grow even closer somehow.

When finals were over and the stress had finally died down, it was Ashlyn’s turn to be mysterious. Ashlyn’s turn to whisk Ali into the tattoo shop and lay down on Lisa’s table after stripping her shirt off with Ali watching curiously beside her. It had been the most painful tattoo that Ashlyn had ever gotten and the blonde found it fitting that the most central and important piece of her story had required the most sacrifice. She squeezed Ali’s hand tightly for the better part of an hour as the buzzing needle reverberated off her sternum. When it was done, she opened her eyes to see Ali standing over her looking at the black ink.

Ali’s eyes wandered over the design. A peaked line running vertically right down the center of Ashlyn’s chest, right over the blonde’s heart. Starting just below the center of Ashlyn’s collar bones and stopping just before the start of her upper abs. The end of the peaked line transformed into a script of German words. ‘Mein Herz schlägt für dich’. My heart beats for you.
“Ash, is that…” Ali trailed off emotionally.

“Your actual heartbeat, Alex.” Ashlyn finished for her. The missing and most important part of her story finally permanently inked into her skin.

Ash, how come you didn’t want to stay to watch graduation like a lot of the other girls were doing?” Ali asked as they drove in Ashlyn’s Jeep on their way to D.C. to visit with Deb and Ken for a week before Ashlyn’s summer job started. Kyle would be visiting them in a few weeks on Cape Cod in their rented summer beach house.

“I stayed my first year for commencement weekend. It’s a whole weekend of really traditional and really amazing events. I almost can’t describe the experience. It’s as traditional and inspiring as you would expect from Smith, which is why so many alumnae come to campus and so many students stay to watch it. I guess after seeing it once and getting so blown away by it, I didn’t want the effect of it to be lost. So, I decided not go again until it was my turn to graduate and experience it. Weird, I know.” Ashlyn explained.

“That’s not weird. I was just curious since everyone seemed so into it. Sounds like it’s really something.” Ali replied.

“Just wait. It’s like no graduation I’ve ever seen or heard of. It’s going to knock your socks off.” Ashlyn said with a smile.

“You knock my socks off, Harris.” Ali flirted.

“Why don’t we pull over for a while and we can see what else I can manage to knock off you, Krieger.” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows with a smirk.

Ali responded by leaning over and placing a few kisses on Ashlyn’s neck, making the blonde’s breath hitch. “I do love the backseat of this Jeep, Stud. And for the record, my socks are already off, way off.” She whispered hotly into Ashlyn’s ear and ran a hand up her thigh.

“Fuck, Alex.” Ashlyn had never pulled off the highway so fast, finding an isolated wooded rest stop and not even making it to the backseat before Ali was riding her fingers atop her lap, the brunette’s perfect breasts bouncing in her face until Ali spilled out onto her hand. Only then did they make it to the backseat where Ali settled between Ashlyn’s legs and got her face just as messy as she had gotten Ashlyn’s fingers.

A couple hours later they finally made it to D.C., both of them trying hard to conceal their disheveled appearance and goofy smiles from Deb and Ken who had been cooking dinner for them with Anthony and Patty. Ken hadn’t noticed, but Deb had shot them playful look and suggested they might want to freshen up before dinner.

The week in D.C. had gone by pretty quickly with many shopping adventures with Deb and several nights out with Emily. Since school hadn’t let out yet, Ashlyn and Ali joined Ken for one of his soccer practices with the high school boys team he was coaching. Ashlyn had immediately thrown on a pair of gloves and jumped into the goal when it came time for the team to split up and scrimmage against each other. Ali took her place as Ashlyn’s right back and admittedly loved the blonde barking directions behind her. She watched in complete awe as Ashlyn blocked shot after shot from these boys who were actually pretty good with her Dad’s coaching. She admired Ashlyn’s fearlessness. The way she threw her body without a second thought and with no hesitation. It was the same reason she was such a great rugby player. Ali wondered if perhaps someday the two of
them would let soccer back into their lives again alongside rugby.

“That’s everything from both cars.” Ashlyn said lugging the last bag of luggage into the beach house, beads of sweat on her forehead. Luckily the beach house was fully furnished and all they really needed to supply was clothes, toiletries, and food. “Grocery store next?” She asked.


Three hours later, the fridge and cabinets were full as were their stomachs from the dinner Ali had cooked. They sat on the private beach behind the house next to the fire that Ashlyn had started in the fire pit.

“Remember AOL instant messenger? I used to chat with my friends who were just across the room on AIM, we were so obsessed. I’m sure you probably did too. What was your AIM name?” Ali asked randomly.

“Another round of Krieger Q & A is upon us.” Ashlyn joked. She loved how Ali had been doing this from the first day they met. “SurfSkateOrDie18. What about you?” She answered.

Ali laughed. “That is so you, my Florida bad ass. Mine was PrincessDefender11.”

Ashlyn chuckled. “Oh, Princess. Of course it was. I bet all the boys wanted to chat up the AIM Princess.” Ashlyn teased and shifted behind Ali, pulling the brunette’s back against her chest and wrapping her arms around her snuggly from behind. “What do you admire most about yourself?” Ashlyn took her turn.

“My keen fashion sense, duh!” Ali joked before answering seriously. “I guess my perseverance. Somehow no matter what life has thrown at me, I’ve managed to find a way through it. I don’t know where I got it from or where I’ve found the strength at times, but I’m thankful for it. How about you?”

“My loyalty. It’s to a fault sometimes, but there’s something about being able to stand behind the people you love without question that feels good. Even my mother, who I didn’t have the best relationship with. We may not have gotten along or understood each other very well, but I stood behind her just the same.” Ashlyn explained.

“I love that about you too, baby.” Ali leaned back and kissed Ashlyn’s jaw line. “Is there anything you carry in your wallet that I don’t know about?”

Ashlyn pulled her wallet out of her back pocket and took out a guitar pick. “From my first concert. Green Day. Chris was so into them and so of course I was too because I copied everything he did. We never had money to go to concerts or anything like that though. Chris won tickets by calling into a radio show and he took me instead of taking one of his friends. It was one of the best nights of my life. I caught this guitar pick.” Ashlyn rolled the black pick with a green skull on it in her fingers and handed it to Ali who looked it over. “What about you, what’s in that purse, Krieger?”


“Ok, wasn’t expecting that. Are you allergic to something I don’t know about? Cause I should probably have one if you are.” Ashlyn replied with concern.

“Nope. Not allergic to anything. Emily got stung by a bee once in middle school and had a bad reaction to it. It freaked me out so much that I’ve carried an epi-pen in my purse ever since in case
I’m ever around someone who needs it.” Ali explained.

“You’re such a wildcard sometimes, Alex. I love it.” Ashlyn left a few kisses on Ali’s neck. “If you had an extra hour every day, what would you do?”

“Easy. I’d spent it with you. Doesn’t matter what we were doing, as long as we were together.” Ali replied quickly.

“Good answer, Princess. Because my answer is you. I would always do you.” Ashlyn sucked on Ali’s neck where it met her shoulder.

“Ash.” Ali whispered breathily, moving her head to give the blonde more access and gripping Ashlyn’s forearms with her hands. “Think we have a couple extra hours right now.” She added in a whimper as electricity shot through her body.

Two hours later, they had broken in the beach and the kitchen counter.

The rest of the summer on Cape Cod had been no different. Ashlyn started work, coming home after her first day completely excited that she was assigned to the research team that was tracking sharks that found their way into Cape Cod Bay during the warmer months. She would even be spending time out on the boat with the team who tried to capture and tag them with tracking devices so they could better understand why the shark population in the area was growing. Ali worked from home as usual, coordinating with her German clients and even getting assigned her first big US client when Siemens partnered with a new company and felt confident in Ali being able to handle it. Kyle had come in like a whirlwind as usual to visit them three weeks into the summer. His thoughts after spending a week with them were that they either needed to adopt him or start popping out some nieces/nephews for him because their level of domesticity was through the roof.

Mostly though, the eight weeks had been spent working hard by day and spending the evenings wrapped up in each other on the beach. They spend 4th of July watching fireworks over the Cape Cod Canal. They celebrated Ali’s birthday with a weekend in beautiful Martha’s Vineyard. On most weekends they explored both the touristy and hidden parts of Cape Cod, finding that no matter how much time they had together, it never seemed to be enough. There were always things to learn about each other, adventures to undertake, and, when all else failed and even when it didn’t, there was always the mind blowing sex.

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When Ashlyn’s job was over, she and Ali spent a little over a week in Florida visiting with grandma and Chris. Ashlyn was happy to see that Chris and Susan were still going strong, the woman had easily become one of them just like Ali had. Susan was good for Chris and for the first time ever, Ashlyn worried a bit less about him.

Ali had finally gotten the hang of surfing. Ashlyn had teased her that it had only taken her like ten trips to Florida and countless surfing lessons, for which she had been knocked off her board by Ali with Chris laughing nearby as Ali countered with a threat to withhold sex. Of course, Ashlyn had made sure Ali didn’t make good on her threat by walking around in the smallest bikini she had the next day. They spent a lot of time on the water together over the course of that week, Ali finally gaining a true appreciation for surfing and the peace it brought Ashlyn.

The night before they left to go home, Ashlyn pulled Grandma out onto the deck for a private moment while Ali was upstairs showering. Only a few words had been said between them, but they both knew the importance of it.
“Gram. You know what you’ve been wanting me to take. I… I’m ready to take it.” Ashlyn said.

“I’ve just been waiting for you to ask for it, Ashlyn. You know that, sweetheart.” Gram answered with a knowing smile.
As much as you all thought we were ready for a proposal in this chapter... not yet! Ashlyn has work to do first :) Two chapters left to go as we head toward the finale! I hope to get one more up before the holidays.

The start of senior year had Ashlyn feeling nervous. She had always been expecting to feel that way at the start of her last year at Smith, but now it was for a completely different reason than she had been anticipating. As soon as she had gotten there, Smith had become her home and she knew that it would always feel that way no matter how far she went from campus. She had worried that once she graduated, she wouldn’t know what to do or where to go; that she would be aimless and homeless in many ways. With Ali, that panic had gone away as she quickly learned that the brunette held her heart and that Ali was home. Of course she would miss Smith as soon as she left, but it also meant she’d be really starting her life with Ali, something she couldn’t wait to do. Ali had been her key to being at peace with graduation and enjoying her last year at Smith without the panic of feeling lost. At the end of the summer, she was feeling totally excited to start senior year. Then as she thought more about it, the nervousness had come rushing back in. This time it wasn’t about actually leaving Smith, it was about leaving everything in good hands.

It had only taken Ashlyn two days back on campus to realize that the rugby team would be losing Whitney, Megan, and Tobin as well as herself and a couple other seniors. The team had certainly acquired some decent younger players over the last couple of years, but only now were they really starting to play well. Losing the seniors would be a big blow to the team who had been so strong the last couple of years, making it further in tournaments than ever before and finishing seasons with impressive records. There was always new player recruitment, but new players usually needed a lot of training and time to be good. It wasn’t every day you got someone like Alex Morgan who came in and became a strong starter right away. As the captain, it meant Ashlyn had her work cut out for her if she wanted to leave the team in good shape at the end of the year.

It wasn’t just the rugby team. Her first practice back with the Vibes had brought the realization that she was their only real percussion person. There was one other girl who did bass and backed Ashlyn up on certain songs, but as of now there would be no one to properly take over once Ashlyn graduated. Much like rugby, the Vibes were at the mercy of new recruits and had to rely on talented people trying out in order to fill much needed spots. Ashlyn had never felt so much pressure in her life.

Ali had tried hard to calm Ashlyn down, explaining to her that people would always rotate, that it was just how college worked. Sometimes it would make for good years and other times for bad ones, but that it wasn’t all on Ashlyn to solve it. She had reminded the blonde as gently as possible that these groups existed long before she came to Smith and would continue long after she left it. Ashlyn realized Ali was right and it calmed her a bit, but she still felt responsible for making the transition smooth. It had led to a nerve-wracking two weeks as the rugby team recruited new rookies and the Vibes held auditions. Ashlyn had been more serious than usual and Ali was starting to worry. So, when the blonde walked into the apartment on a Tuesday night three weeks into the semester with a huge grin on her face and a slender and short African American girl in tow, Ali wondered what was going on.
“Hey baby.” Ashlyn gave Ali a quick kiss before turning towards the other girl. “Crystal, this is my girlfriend, Ali.” She turned to Ali. “This is Crystal, my protégé! I invited her for dinner tonight, hopefully that’s ok.”

“Of course it’s ok.” Ali replied with a smile. “Hi Crystal, welcome. Nice to meet you.” She held out her hand.

“Nice to meet you too. Nice place!” Crystal replied, shaking Ali’s hand and looking around. “I feel like I already know you. This one hasn’t stopped talking about you.” She pointed to Ashlyn.

“Yeah, sorry. Apparently, we’re ‘that couple’.” Ali joked. “So, are you new to Smith?”

“Yep. Fresh off the bus from New York.” Crystal chuckled.

“Awesome. Should I ask about the protégé thing?” Ali looked between Crystal and Ashlyn.

“Crystal is one of the newest Vibe members.” Ashlyn said excitedly. “Come on girl, show her what you do.”

Crystal shook her head a bit and then launched in an intense beat boxing rhythm that left Ali wide eyed. This girl was definitely as good as Ashlyn and clearly had potential to be even better. “Wow! Ok, I get the protégé thing now.” Ali exclaimed. “That is serious skill. I don’t know how you guys do it.” Ali admired.

“And if that wasn’t enough, she ran track in high school and is crazy fast. I think she’d make an excellent back. That is if I can convince her to play rugby.” Ashlyn expectantly raised her eyebrows at Crystal.

“I said I’d think about. Not sure I wanted to be pummeled into the ground though.” Crystal replied.

“It’s not so bad. I could help you learn all the tackling stuff so you know how to hit and take a hit without getting hurt. Seriously, rugby is the best. You should at least try it.” Ali tried to persuade her. Ashlyn nodded in agreement, putting her arm around Ali proudly.

“And now I know why I got invited to dinner, so you two could gang up on me.” Crystal teased.

“Damn right!” Ashlyn played back.

By the end of dinner, Ali had gotten Crystal to agree to come to the next rugby practice. She had to admit she really liked the girl; she was almost like Ashlyn’s mini me only a lot feistier. Not to mention that Ashlyn’s smile and playful nature was back now that she felt some relief about rugby and acapella.

Ashlyn’s instincts had been right. Crystal was an amazing back and earned a starting position right away. She had fit right in with team and scored 5 tries in their first two games of the season to help Smith clinch wins. Ali could already picture the look on Sydney’s and Kelley’s faces when Smith played Dartmouth in a couple weeks and they saw Crystal play.

“Seriously, Ali?! No heads up or warning ahead of time that we’d have to stop Speedy Gonzalez? Such a traitor!” Sydney complained playfully as the Dartmouth and Smith rugby teams packed up their things after their match. Dartmouth had gotten crushed 28 to 3 with three tries scored by Crystal alone.
“I’m not a traitor! I was secretly hoping you guys would win, but even I have to admit that Crystal girl is a phenom. Besides, telling you would technically have been cheating. It’s bad enough I have to be a neutral party every time you guys play each other!” Ali explained.

“Yeah, leave her alone, Syd. She has it really rough. I mean if Smith loses she has to go make her hot girlfriend ‘feel better’. If Smith wins, she has to listen to us whine and then go ‘celebrate’ with Hottie McSurfer. It’s a tough life getting seriously laid by a hot blonde no matter what.” Kelley said sarcastically.

“You guys suck.” Ali pouted.

“Awww, Princess. What’s with the face?” Ashlyn walked up and pulled Ali into her arms before looking at Syd and Kelley. “Are you two harassing my girl again? Not her fault you can’t beat this.” Ashlyn taunted flexing her arm.

Sydney and Kelley laughed. “You two are so lucky we love you. Ready to party?” Kelley said and led the way.

As usual the after party was held in the frat house it normally was and Ali was glad that most of the guys she knew in that frat had now graduated, Brent included. She planted herself in Ashlyn’s lap and handed the blonde one of two beers in her hand. Ashlyn had motioned Crystal over and introduced her to Sydney and Kelley, who ended up falling into comfortable conversation with Crystal and tried to playfully persuade her to transfer to Dartmouth.

Kelley sat wide eyed as she noticed Tobin and Alex all over each other in the corner of the room. “Woah. When the hell did that happen?”

“Last Spring.” Ali answered nonchalantly.

“Damn. And the sexual tension is still that intense? Geez.” Sydney chimed in.

“Yeah, Tobs is a bit of a slow mover. I think Alex is going to explode one of these days.” Ashlyn joked.

“Someone needs to get that girl a vibrator.” Sydney laughed.

“Already did.” Megan piped up.

“Gross, Pinoe.” Whitney replied cringing.

“Oh well, some action is better than no action. Looks like Tobin is about ready reach a breaking point anyway.” Kelley said, still watching the two. “Trust me. I would know.”


“Excellent.” Kelley gushed a bit. “She uh, she got a new job last week about an hour away. We’re finally gonna do this right.”

Ashlyn high fived Kelley and Ali let out a whistle. “Now we just need to find Whit a nice guy and get Pinoe to ask out that hipster musician she’s been secretly pining over for weeks.” Ashlyn exclaimed.

Whitney nodded and Megan flipped her off.
After a beer relay which Smith lost, a couple of rugby songs, a few beers, and lots of close dancing Ashlyn and Ali had wandered outside to the porch for a little quiet time. Ali snuggled into Ashlyn’s left arm and they enjoyed the silence for a while before Ali broke it, knowing they didn’t have long before someone came out to drag them back into the party.

“Ask me a question you’re afraid to know the answer to.” Ali said quietly, knowing they’d already learned so much about each other on this porch with honest questions and truthful answers.

“Can we get a puppy?” Ashlyn asked with a small smile.

“Be serious.” Ali lightly smacked the blonde’s arm.

“Well, I was kinda being serious, but ok.” Ashlyn let out a sigh. “What happens if I end up at a graduate school that isn’t in New England next year?” With applications due in just a couple months, Ashlyn had been trying to figure out which schools to apply to so she could pursue her marine biology degree. Some of the programs were in places she wasn’t sure Ali could work from.

Ali was glad it was such an easy question for her, but she could sense Ashlyn’s nervousness. “Oh Ash, what happens is what will always happen. I will go anywhere you do and figure out how to make my job work. And if it doesn’t, I’ll either find a new one or start going about building up my own business. No matter what, I’m always by your side, ok?”

Ashlyn let out the breath she was holding. “Ok. You’re the best. I love you.”

“I love you too, Stud. Now relax, I’m not going anywhere. As for the puppy… as soon as we figure out where we’ll end up for a while and settle in, yes, we can get a puppy.” Ali smiled.

Ashlyn’s eyes lit up. “Seriously?! Like even a Frenchie?”

Ali laughed and pulled Ashlyn’s closer. “Yeah, babe. Even a Frenchie.”

“I seriously love you woman!” Ashlyn said excitedly. “Alright, Krieger, I’m waiting for your question.”

It was Ali’s turn to tense up and take a deep breath. “How many kids do you want? I mean, well, if you still think you want them.” They hadn’t discussed the topic since that first time in Florida, but lately Ali had been wondering about it again. Every house at Smith had two professors who were their house fellows and would occasionally join the house for dinner or bring surprise snacks. A couple of weeks ago Wilson’s house fellow, chemistry professor Sam Trainor, had come for dinner and brought his two year old son with him. Ali had adoringly watched Ashlyn play with the little boy for over an hour and her mind had wandered to the original conversation with the blonde, realizing they hadn’t gotten too far into it.

Ashlyn wasn’t sure how to answer the question. If Ali was afraid to know the answer, that meant there had to be a right answer and a very wrong one. She swallowed hard trying to buy time to figure out whether she should say just one kid or maybe five. She had no idea whether Ali wanted a small family or a big one. She was about to panic when she realized that the right answer was usually just the honest one.

“Of course I still want kids with you, Alex. I know we’re not anywhere near there yet, but I honestly do want to raise a family with you. My answer on that won’t ever change.” Ashlyn started, feeling Ali relax a bit beside her. “As for how many, I really don’t know. I’ll honestly be content with whatever you want and whatever life hands us. I think maybe I want more than one, but whether that’s two or five, I have no idea. Life has a way of throwing both curveballs and great things at
people. I think we’ll just know what’s right for us when we get there. Whatever it is, I’m going to be happy with it. I have you and that’s everything.” Ashlyn answered truthfully.

Ali leaned in and kissed Ashlyn passionately, the blonde making her heart pound as usual. She was recently starting to think that she wanted a big family and was worried it would freak Ashlyn out given their original conversation. She should have known that somehow they would always find a way to be on the same page with each other.

“Hey you two! Stop making babies on the porch and get in here! We’re having a beer relay re-match!” Megan yelled from the doorway.

Ali and Ashlyn pulled back and laughed at Megan’s timely comment. “Be right there, Pinhead.” Ashlyn replied to Megan, who rolled her eyes and went back inside. Her attention going back to Ali’s eyes.

“One more question for fun, Harris.” Ali smirked.

“Bring it, Krieger.” Ashlyn challenged.

“Let’s say things had been different the first night we met and I had been willing. Would you have slept with me?” Ali asked curiously.

“Oh you wish, Krieger. As smoking hot as you are, I wouldn’t have let it get that far.” Ashlyn replied honestly.

“Why not?” Ali asked, a little disappointed at the answer.

“Because Princess, my heart was already way too invested from the start. I would never have done anything that would have ruined it, no matter how badly you wanted this body.” Ashlyn smiled smugly.

“Please, Harris. Let’s not forget I was talking hypotheticals.” Ali teased. “And what about now that you know there’s no way you could ruin this?” She asked flirtatiously.

“Well, now I’m wondering if you still have the key to that clock tower.” Ashlyn grinned.

“Thought you’d never ask, Stud.” Ali said pulling a key out of her pocket and leading Ashlyn off the porch.


“Smith is going to lose anyway. Are you really gonna delay this for that?” Ali challenged.

“Hell no!” Ashlyn skipped off the porch happily, never more willing to give up a chance to redeem her beer chugging skills.

Ashlyn could hear herself moaning in her sleep, but she was in this limbo between being kind of awake and kind of in a dream. The dream so good she didn’t want to wake up. She was dreaming that Ali was gently sucking on her neck and lightly stroking her lower abs, the gentle touches driving Ashlyn wild. She let out a louder moan and woke herself up, opening her eyes to find that she hadn’t been dreaming at all. She put her hand on the back of Ali’s head and let herself enjoy the tingling overtaking her body as Ali worked lower over her collarbone. She looked at the clock after noticing it was dark in the room, 12:08am. They had just fallen asleep about two hours ago.
“Mmmm, Alex. What are you doing?” Ashlyn whimpered curiously, but not wanting the brunette to stop.

“Two words. Birthday. Sex.” Ali answered quickly, moving her head right back down and taking Ashlyn’s nipple into her mouth.

“Oh. Oh Fuck.” Ashlyn whispered in a shaky breath as Ali moved to the other nipple and started running her hand over Ashlyn’s center through her boxers.

Ali didn’t make Ashlyn wait long, moving her hand into the blonde’s boxers and plunging her fingers deeply into her core as she continued to lavish her nipples with attention. Only a few minutes later, Ashlyn came undone underneath her, the blonde’s chest heaving as she tried to catch her breath.

“Happy birthday, Stud.” Ali whispered hotly in Ashlyn’s ear, leaving a lingering kiss on the blonde’s lips.

“Unnh, damn. Best midnight birthday wish ever.” Ashlyn smiled, her body still tingling as she pulled Ali tightly against her.

“Good. Now go back to sleep, beautiful. We have to be up early.” Ali said, stroking Ashlyn’s hair lightly.

“What for?” Ashlyn questioned.

“That’s for me to know and for you to find out, Harris.” Ali replied mysteriously.

Ashlyn wanted to get more information out of the brunette, but Ali’s hand softly running through her hair was putting her to sleep. “Hmmmph, ok.” Ashlyn closed her eyes and gave into the soothing touch.

Ali had woken up Ashlyn 6 hours later. The brunette had packed a couple bags for them and informed Ashlyn she’d be missing her class that day before driving them to northern Vermont. Since Ashlyn was now 21, Ali surprised her with a food and wine tour the first day. The next day started with a couples massage at the upscale hotel they were staying at followed by a craft beer tour where they hit up a couple local food dives featured on TV along the tour route. Ali made sure to get Ashlyn back to campus on Saturday in time for the rugby match against Mount followed by a special birthday after party the rugby team threw for Ashlyn.

By Sunday night, Ashlyn was exhausted, falling into Ali’s arms in a satisfied sweaty heap as she thought about her long birthday weekend. “I’ve never had so much alcohol and sex in an 84 hour period.” The blonde mused as she pressed her head to Ali’s bare chest.

“I didn’t keep track of the alcohol. As for the sex, FYI, that was 21 times and one for luck.” Ali smirked and pulled Ashlyn into one last kiss before it was time for sleep.

“No wonder I can’t walk right. Happy birthday to me!” Ashlyn chuckled and pulled Ali in even closer. “God help me when I turn 40!”

Ashlyn and Ali’s favorite night of the year was perfect as always. Ali watched with rapt attention as Ashlyn and the other Wilson girls worked the Celebration stage expertly with their sexual dance moves; her eyes unable to look away from Ashlyn’s rippling muscles and tattoos on full display in just jeans and a sports bra. She couldn’t help but give the blonde an intense kiss when she was trying
to make a quick change for the Vibes performance, making the group wait for Ashlyn to finally join them.

With Crystal having joined the group, the Vibes had majorly stepped up their game being able to perform songs with really complex beats. Ali smiled widely as she heard them perform Iggy Azalea’s ‘Beg for It’, the first song she and Ashlyn really danced to together, knowing the blonde must have had something to do with the selection. The song blended smoothly into Beyoncé’s ‘Irreplaceable’ with the beats so solid that if you closed your eyes, you’d think someone actually had a drum onstage. Ali had never heard the Celebration crowd cheer that loud before. As usual the cold night marked the point at which fall was closing and winter was soon to take hold, the leaves falling to the ground with holidays on the horizon.

Thanksgiving this year found the Harris and Krieger families together in celebration again at Grandma’s house in Florida. Ashlyn was glad to see that Grandma was actually doing as well as the older woman had been telling her on the phone. Chris had moved in with Susan in early October and Grandma had been living alone again. Chris and Ashlyn had been checking in with her constantly, but Grandma had assured them she was fine. Ashlyn was relieved to see that she was being truthful, knowing she should have been more trusting of just how strong her Grandma was and how well she handled herself.

After a morning of volunteering followed by a huge Thanksgiving lunch, Ashlyn spent some time on the deck with Chris for some much needed bro time while everyone else either watched football or napped inside.

“So, Bubba. When are you getting married?” Ashlyn asked playfully, having watched how her brother practically followed Susan around like an eager puppy all day.

“How about right after you marry Ali.” Chris shot right back at her with a smile.

“Touché.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“Seriously, do I have to ask you again. When the hell are you gonna ask her?” Chris inquired seriously.

“Let’s just say I have the precious and the plan, I just need the time to lay the ground work.” Ashlyn did her best Golem impression when saying ‘precious.’

Chris laughed. “About time. You gonna tell me what the plan is?”

“Yes and no. I’ll fill you in when its time.” Ashlyn said mysteriously.

“Awww, come on!” Chris whined.

“Let’s just say you know more than you think you do.” Ashlyn smirked.

“I have no idea what that means.” Chris replied.

Ashlyn laughed. “Good. That means you won’t blow it!”

Kyle came out onto the deck. “What are you two talking about out here?”

“The preecious!” Chris said in a low raspy voice. Ashlyn laughing and doing the same Golem impression right after him.

“You two are so damn weird, but I can’t take anymore football. So, weird it is.” Kyle plopped down
in a chair next to them not getting the reference. “Besides, I might as well get in some time with you two before your ladies come to claim you.” He rolled his eyes and teased.

“Yeah. We really need to find you a date before you get any more jaded about love.” Ashlyn said.

Kyle smiled and cleared his throat.

“Oh, Bro. I know that look. Better tell us before we pull a full Harris inquisition.” Chris warned.

“Ok. Ok. So there may be a boy.” Kyle’s voice squeaked a bit.

“Really?! That’s great! Tell us everything. Does Alex know?” Ashlyn said excitedly.

“Alex didn’t know, but she sure as hell does now! You better start talking, Kyle!” Ali spoke up from the deck door behind them with Susan in tow.

“Alright, geez. Can’t a guy have any secrets?!” Kyle defended himself before explaining that he’d been seeing a guy named Max for about a month and it was going well. He hadn’t told them about it because he didn’t want to jinx it, but promised he would be more open about it if things kept going well.

Ali had spent the rest of the holiday weekend grilling him with all kinds of questions until Kyle finally relented and pulled out a picture.

“Ahh, he’s so cute! And what a body on him too! Way to go!” Ali squealed happily for Kyle.

“Yeah, geez Kyle.” Ashlyn fist bumped him.

“What can I say…” Kyle said proudly. “We Kriegers get the hotties.”

“Damn right!” Ali agreed whole heartedly, dropping herself in Ashlyn’s lap as usual.

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Christmas had arrived in a flash with Ashlyn getting through finals and finally mailing in all her graduate school applications. They had decided on the same game plan as last year, spending a few days and Christmas Eve in Florida with Ashlyn’s family before getting to Ali’s house in D.C. in the very early morning hours of Christmas Day. Ashlyn had relished in the feeling of having some tradition back as she, Chris, Susan, and Ali decorated the house in the tacky decorations Ali had bought the year before. It was no coincidence that the longer Ali was in her life, the better things had gotten for her and her family. Ali had brought so much positive change into her life. Ashlyn could only smile knowing that between this Christmas and the next one, she’d be the one making a change.

When they arrived in D.C., Deb had once again insisted on the letters to Santa even though it was already past 1:30am. Ashlyn was the first one to finish again, having no trouble coming up with this year’s request.

Dear Santa,

This year my only wish is to have a very important conversation with you and your two helpers regarding a certain Princess. Please meet me at Baked and Wired at 12pm the day after Christmas.

-Ash

Ashlyn sealed the letter with a smile, having already gotten Emily to steal Ali away for lunch the day after Christmas so she could be sure to get her Christmas wish. The conversation had gone exactly as
she’d hoped, now all she had to do was be patient. Of course, that was easier said than done.

“What’s your resolution?” Ashlyn asked Ali. They were sitting on the beach in Miami just outside Ken’s beach house as midnight approached. Since Ken was in D.C., Kyle decided to host a small New Year’s party at the house and Ali had decided they would join him after finding out Max would be there since she was dying to meet the new guy in Kyle’s life.

“To start taking a little more initiative towards starting my own business. I mean, I don’t think I’m close yet. There’s a lot of research and things to understand and plan before I could even consider it. So, I think it would be good to start sooner as opposed to later so I can work out any problems early.” Ali answered.

“So smart, Princess.” Ashlyn ran her thumb over Ali’s hand that she was holding.

“And… I want to travel more with you. We had such a great time in Germany and I really want us to see the world together.” Ali added.

“I can so get behind that!” Ashlyn smiled.

“What about you?” Ali asked.

“To finish out this year at Smith with a bang and have a great graduate program all lined up for when I leave. Now that I know what I want to do, I don’t want to slack off. I want to get that marine biology degree and get started doing what I love. As for the rest of my resolution, I can’t tell you yet.” Ashlyn finished mysteriously.


“I could tell you… but then I’d have to marry you.” Ashlyn laughed lightly, knowing she was dropping a huge hint that Ali would never get because she would assume Ashlyn was just being silly.

Sure enough, Ali had missed the hint. “It’s totally the puppy. You can’t get anything past me, Harris.”

“You know me too well, Krieger.” Ashlyn smiled to herself just as the alarm signaling midnight went off on her watch. She pulled Ali into a deep kiss that turned heated in no time, leading them to quietly sneak past the people in the house and head upstairs to ring in the New Year properly.
Here's the second to last chapter before I get busy with the holiday this week. So, you can expect the final one next week! I think I've dropped enough hints in this chapter that you might have at least some idea of the timing and location of what is about to happen as we hit the end. In the meantime, have a Happy Thanksgiving (what are you thankful for?). And if you're not celebrating Thanksgiving, then have a wonderful end of the week!

“Hey, how about a free oil change on your car?” Ashlyn asked Ali while they were sitting down to dinner. They had only been back in Northampton for a couple days after being away for the holidays.

“Sounds great to me. What’s the catch?” Ali asked curiously, taking a bite of the chicken Ashlyn had made them.

“No catch other than me borrowing your car for a demonstration.” Ashlyn replied. “Every year there is a basic car maintenance course for women offered at Smith during J-term. Turns out the woman who normally teaches it can’t do the first two days of it and was looking for a person to fill in for her. I offered and she accepted. I get to do the oil change part. I figured I’d do your car one day and mine the other. I’m getting paid too, so that’s great.”

“Holy crap, you know how to do an oil change?” Ali said wide eyed. “You know what… never mind. Of course you do! You always manage to surprise me Harris, but I’m finally learning that there is nothing you don’t do. I’m just gonna smile and enjoy watching you walk around in greasy overalls and looking like a hot mechanic.”

Ashlyn laughed. “I can guarantee the greasy. I don’t know about the overalls, but I’ll see what I can do.” She winked at Ali. “Seriously, you should come watch the day I do your car, it wouldn’t hurt for you to learn it. It’s pretty easy actually. My dad taught me when I was 13.”

“Alright, Stud. I’ll go, but fair warning. This princess doesn’t do grease.” Ali replied. “Where’s the class?”

“Smith has a garage on campus at the physical plant that they use for the campus vehicles and equipment. It doesn’t get used during J-term, so it’s empty right now and has all the needed tools. It will be held there. I’ll do my car first on Monday and then yours on Wednesday.”

Ali picked up her phone and added it to her calendar. “Wednesday it is.”

Ali barely made it through the Wednesday course. Ashlyn did an amazing job and she tried hard to pay attention. In the end, all she really learned was how hot Ashlyn looked in baggy jeans and a tight white t-shirt covered in grease. Her mouth had gone dry the minute she saw the blonde’s biceps flexing while she worked with a wrench. After class though she had learned one more thing. That she didn’t mind grease as much as she thought she did; a lesson learned by fucking Ashlyn right there in the garage on the hood of her BMW while the blonde desperately dragged greasy hands all over her back.
The New England winter had been brutal with constant snowstorms. It made it hard to drive around and Ali was glad she hadn’t been required to make too many trips to Boston as of late. While she had started to get the hang of surfing, snowboarding had not come so easily despite Ashlyn’s best efforts to teach her with all the snow on the ground. After hours and hours of trying, the best she could do was stay up on the board for about 15 seconds before she toppled over. She realized that she was a much better skier and decided to stick to that and leave the snowboarding to Ashlyn.

Since last Valentine’s Day had been so low key, Ashlyn decided to really go all out this year. Whitney had started dating a lacrosse player from Amherst named Ryan in early December and things had been going great with them. He and Ashlyn got along really well and schemed together to surprise the girls with a weekend getaway to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Once Ashlyn realized this guy was good for Whitney and saw that Whitney really liked him, she made it her mission to make sure Ryan was well equipped in the romance department. Helping him plan the proper Valentine’s getaway was part of the lesson plan. He had learned two important things just planning the trip.

When deciding on a location, Ashlyn had taught him the first lesson.

Lesson 1: Places and activities that lead to cuddling up by a warm fire are always a good idea.

When Ashlyn insisted on arranging for champagne, flowers, and chocolates in their rooms, the second lesson had become apparent.

Lesson 2: You can never overdo the cheesy romantic gestures.

The four of them had a great time together, with Whitney and Ali skiing and Ryan and Ashlyn snowboarding. After a long day on the slopes, several cups of hot chocolate in the ski lodge, and a six course dinner, each couple headed off to their rooms. Ashlyn pulled Ryan aside for one last word with him.

“Lesson 3. When possible, always spend the extra money for your own private room. Which leads me to Lesson 4… don’t stop until her whole body is shaking and for god’s sake, use condoms.” Ashlyn laughed and punched him lightly on the arm. Ryan could only shake his head and give her a thumbs up.

“Come on, Whit. I need my wingman!” Ashlyn said anxiously walking into Whitney’s room.

“For what?” Whitney was confused. Ashlyn hadn’t called her a ‘wingman’ since before she started dating Ali.

“Bundle up. We’re going downtown.” Ashlyn replied.

“You can’t be serious.” Whitney said looking out the window as snow came down so hard it looked like a white sheet out there. “The roads are a mess.”

“That’s why we’re walking.” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows.

“Ok, crazy. What is so important that we’re going to risk being turned into abominable snowmen?” Whitney teased.
“You’ll see. Seriously, I need my wingman.” Ashlyn said mysteriously but unrelenting.

“Alright. Let me put on some warm clothes.” Whitney gave in seeing that Ashlyn looked anxious and fidgety. “How come you didn’t recruit Ali for this adventure?”

“Don’t you think that if I could have asked Ali, I would have?” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows. “Besides. Ali is my girl, not my wingman.”

“No need to butter me up, Ash. I’m already onboard for whatever the hell this is.” Whitney laughed as they walked out the door.

The snow was so bad that what would normally be a 15 to 20 minute walk had been a 40 minute one. Ashlyn pulled Whitney into the upscale jewelry shop downtown, the two of them shaking all the snow off of their clothes just inside the doorway.

Whitney watched with curiosity as Ashlyn walked right up to the middle-aged man behind the counter.

“Hey Tom, got your message. So, we’re good?” Ashlyn asked with nervous excitement.

“Hi Ashlyn. Wow, I didn’t think you’d come today in this mess! But yes, it’s ready. Let me get it.” Tom replied kindly and walked into the back room, coming out again a few minutes later with a small box that he handed to the blonde.

Ashlyn took a deep breath and opened the box, smiling and relaxing immediately.

“Holy shit?!?” Whitney yelled out loudly beside her, causing Tom to look at her with a slight smile. “Sorry.” She mumbled. “Ash, is that…”

“Yes.” Ashlyn replied to Whitney before turning her attention back to Tom. “It’s perfect, Tom. Thank you so much, this is exactly what I wanted.”

“You’re so very welcome!” Tom replied proudly. “I worked on it myself. That is one special lady.”

“You have no idea.” Ashlyn smiled back at him before turning back to Whitney as Tom rang up the bill. “What do you think, wingman?”

“Wow. Just wow. That thing is unbelievable and so stunning. Seriously, it’s gorgeous. And huge! I thought you were using your Grandma’s?” Whitney replied looking at the sparkling diamond that was easily 1 full carat.

“This is my Grandma’s. She and I talked about it and we agreed that making it personal was important. I had them polish the main diamond and I redesigned the band just slightly to add some smaller diamonds and make it just a touch more modern, but the rest is all original.” Ashlyn explained, pulling a photo of the original up on her phone. It looked exactly the same only shinier and more sparkly with a slightly more modern look that included more stones.

“So, what’s the plan? When?” Whitney asked.

“I’ll fill you in on the way home.” Ashlyn said with a smile.

By the time they made it back to Wilson House, Whitney was beside herself. “Damn, Ash. I wish I had even an ounce of your creative genius. She’ll never see it coming. I can’t freakin’ wait!”

“Thanks, Whit. Now we just have to keep it on the DL, I have a lot of work to do still.” Ashlyn
replied giddily.

“My lips are sealed. You need any help?” Whitney offered happily.

“Actually, yes. I need your expertise.” Ashlyn answered.

“Ooo, in what?” Whitney inquired excitedly.

“Travel arrangements.” Ashlyn smiled.

Late February and early March had been a bit of an emotional roller coaster for Ali. Ashlyn had given her a pile of 10 journals and told her that she should read them. Ali remembered them discussing this the previous summer, but she had still been surprised nonetheless when the blonde handed her the box and told her that she wanted Ali to know every corner of her soul. Her exact words had been “Only then can you understand exactly what you mean to me, Alex.” Ali had blazed through them, hanging on every word. She felt so honored, so special that someone would bare their entire being to her like that. It was also one of the hardest things she’d ever had to do.

One of them had been filled only with sketches of houses and floorplans from Ashlyn’s days of wanting to be architect. Ali took in the detail of every single one of them, loving each stylistic variation and hoping that one day Ashlyn would design their house. The rest of the journals were filled with Ashlyn’s every thought in the same scripted handwriting. Some of it had been funny, Ashlyn’s crushes and her prank wars with Chris. Some of it had been happy, her surfing adventures with her Dad and when she’d hang out with him at work at a construction site. Some of it had been sad, Ashlyn’s heart break when she lost her Dad, her Grandpa, and her Mom. The worst of it had been completely soul crushing, the dark days when Ashlyn didn’t want to live anymore because being dead seemed to be the better alternative. As she waded through it all, she found herself holding Ashlyn a little closer at night, loving her more deeply, and admiring the strength of the woman in her arms more with each word she read.

Ashlyn’s words were so profound that they infiltrated Ali’s emotions, her moods constantly changing so much that the blonde had to repeatedly remind her that it was the past. Just when she reached the darkest point and Ali wasn’t sure how much more she could read, the clouds had started to lift. There had been Smith, the wonderful rugby team with the friends Ashlyn had made, and finally Ali herself. Ashlyn had been a woman transformed, everything finally in a peaceful harmony. Ali read about herself through Ashlyn’s eyes and heart, never in her life feeling so loved, so cared for, so important. The last entry was dated August 14, 2016. From the description of the previous day’s events, Ali could tell it was the day before they left Florida to come back to Northampton last summer. The last part of the entry and the end of this particular journal read:

Like so many other mornings, I woke up today wrapped up in Ali’s arms with her beautiful eyes looking back at me. Her smile brighter than the sun, as always. And I know for sure, as I have known for so long already, that this is how I want to wake up every morning for the rest of my life.

Ali put the box of journals back in Ashlyn’s closet, leaving the last journal opened to the last page and placing it on Ashlyn’s pillow. Underneath the final sentence Ali placed a post-it a note:

Me too, Ashlyn. You are the most beautiful human being inside and out that I have ever met and will ever meet. You’re my inspiration, my hero, my everything. I love you with all my heart, for the rest of my life. Count on it, Harris :-)

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“You open it. I can’t do it.” Ashlyn stared at the somewhat thick envelope from the University of Miami and held it out to Ali.

“Oh come on, it’s just as thick as the other ones! You totally got in!” Ali encouraged as she pushed it back at Ashlyn.

The decision letters from graduate schools had been coming in steadily. Ashlyn had already gotten into Boston University, University of North Carolina, and University of Maine. All of them were top notch programs that she would be happy to go to, but she had been hoping for University of Miami. Boston University was arguably one of the best in the country and would have meant not having to move very far, but University of Miami had an excellent program and would mean being closer to family for both her and Ali. After talking about it together over many conversations, they had decided that University of Miami was the top choice with Boston University being the second. One of their biggest considerations was being closer to Grandma as she got older. Siemens also had smaller offices nearby and a larger corporate office in Orlando, allowing Ali to continue with her job.

“Please?” Ashlyn pushed the envelope back at Ali, her hands shaking a bit.

“Fine. Such a baby, Harris.” Ali teased as she tore it open and squealed in confirmation. “We’re going to Miami!!!”

“Ahhh, seriously?!” Ashlyn asked animatedly.

“Duh! You’re a freakin’ genius, baby. Of course you got in! And you’re fully funded too! Geez, Ash, you’re getting paid to get your Ph.D., how awesome is that?!” Ali replied, her voice squeaky with contentment. “I am so so proud of you!” She pulled the blonde into her arms and kissed her hard.

After calling Grandma, Chris, and the Kriegers to tell them all the news, Ali gathered the rugby girls to take Ashlyn out for a celebratory dinner. As they walked back from dinner, Ali laid out the new plans for spring break which was only a week away. They had originally planned on sticking around and having a low key week since they had planned a trip to London over the summer after Ashlyn graduated. However, Ali insisted that their time would now be well spent trying to find an apartment in Miami so they could be less stressed about it after graduation and just focus on settling in. Especially since Ali’s current lease was up at the end of May and it would be a perfect time to move. Ashlyn agreed and they booked the spring break trip before settling down on the couch together in front of the fireplace.

“You know. I’m actually going to miss the crazy intense seasons in New England.” Ali mused, snuggling further into Ashlyn.

“Me too. Buuut, we’ll have the beach and surfing instead!” Ashlyn replied with a grin.

“I guess we better take advantage of the fireplace while we still have one.” Ali smirked and pulled Ashlyn down on top of her onto the floor.

Ashlyn gave her a dimpled grin. “I love the way you think, Princess.”

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Three days into spring break and what felt like a million apartment showings later, Ali and Ashlyn signed a lease. Come the end of May they would be moving into a two bedroom Miami beach cottage that was right on the water. It had a spacious deck, a balcony off the master bedroom, and an open floor plan with a large kitchen and breakfast bar. It had a modern beach house style that was
typical of the current Miami housing trends and the two of them fell in love with it immediately. Ashlyn could already picture herself surfing the waves behind the cottage and letting their dog run around the beach, her wife by her side. She snapped out of it when she noticed Ali watching her closely and mentioned that the beach would be great for a puppy, causing the brunette to shake her head.

Kyle had joined them at Ken’s beach house for the week and given them his stamp of approval on the new place. He and Max had spent an hour in the cottage suggesting possible decorating strategies before Ashlyn got bored and suggested it was time for dinner.

While Ashlyn and Max went out to get wine and dessert, Kyle and Ali worked on some appetizers. Ali had seen the look in Ashlyn’s eyes before as she stared out into the water from the deck of their new place and she couldn’t wait to talk to Kyle about it, happy to finally get him alone.

“I think I know when she’s going to ask me.” Ali said with a smile.

“Eeeek, really?! Do tell!” Kyle played along.

“You should have seen her face today, looking at the beach behind the cottage. I mean, I think she’s been waiting to graduate, to feel settled. It doesn’t get more settled than that.” Ali explained. “She loves the beach too. I can just see her doing it there shortly after we’re moved in.” Ali let her mind wander a bit before laughing and adding. “And probably with a puppy in tow! I should take bets on whether she attaches a ring to his collar.”

“That does sound very very Ashlyn.” Kyle agreed. “I think you might be right, B. So exciting!” He smiled to himself knowingly. Ali had no idea what was coming and it was going to be great.

Ali admired Ashlyn’s dedication. She had the rugby team practicing indoors and working out weeks before the spring season officially started. Ali had joined them and could see a huge difference in her own strength, let alone how amazing Ashlyn was looking these days. It had gotten to the point where it was hard to go to bed at night looking at the perfect v line disappearing into the hem of the blonde’s boxer briefs and not put her hands all over her so they could actually sleep. Of course, there had been plenty of sleepless nights where she hadn’t been able to help herself.

As soon as the weather was warm enough, Ashlyn worked the team just as hard in outdoor practices. The seniors were determined to go out in grand fashion and their enthusiasm had been infectious among the rest of the team. It was no surprise that Smith Rugby had taken the Beast of the East tournament by storm.

This year’s tournament was held at the University of New Hampshire. Ali had run into the unfortunate luck of having a client emergency, leaving her stuck in Boston for a meeting on the first day of the tournament. She got through it as quickly as she could, finding a strategy to adjust the promotion of a product that had been promised to be released in June, but would now be delayed until September. She rushed out the door at 3:30pm, making it to the tournament around 5pm just in time to see that it had wrapped up for the day. She saw Alex and Tobin coming out of the locker room and quickly approached them.

“Hey guys! How did you do?” Ali asked hurriedly, dying to know what happened. She had texted Ashlyn but knew the blonde would have left her phone in the locker room.

“Crushed it! We’ll play tomorrow in the quarterfinals!” Alex answered excitedly.
“Yes! Can’t believe I had to miss it. Where’s Ash?” Ali asked.

“Still getting ready. The locker room is booming right now with everyone trying to shower and stuff, she should be out soon.” Tobin answered with a slight grin.

A few minutes passed and Ali was starting to get a bit antsy as they were joined by Whitney, but still no Ashlyn. Then a random girl walked up to Ali and handed her a rose saying “For you” before walking away just as quickly as she had come over.

“Uh, what was that? Who was that girl?” Ali was a bit weirded out.

“Yeah, strange.” Whitney shot a knowing look at Alex and Tobin. “That was that Syracuse captain.” Just as she finished another girl walked up to Ali, also handing her a rose and saying “For you” before walking away.

“What the hell?” Ali let out. “Who was that and what is going on?”

“SUNY Albany captain. And I suggest you just roll with it.” Whitney smiled.

Another girl, another rose, and another identification by Whitney. “UConn captain.”

Boston University, Providence College, University of New Hampshire, Marist College, Wesleyan, Middlebury, Colby… more captains, more roses, until Ali was standing there with 23 of them in her hands. Sydney, being the Dartmouth captain, came out of the locker room last, handing Ali the 24th rose. “That is one hell of a woman you have, Ali.” Sydney said earnestly, giving Ali a quick hug and getting out of the way just before Ashlyn came into view. The blonde emerged from the locker room in fitted gray dress pants with a white collared shirt tucked into them. She had on stylish suspenders with a red skinny tie, her hair pulled up into a bun, her makeup just right. Ali’s mouth dropped open at how perfect she looked.

“Happy 2 year anniversary, Alex.” Ashlyn planted a sweet kiss on her lips and looked down at the 24 roses in Ali’s arms. “One for every month we’ve been together… and one for luck.” She handed Ali the last rose herself.


“You look stunning yourself, baby.” Ashlyn said looking over Ali’s navy dress.

“Thank god for work, otherwise I’d be in sweatpants and looking like a mess.” Ali replied, happy she hadn’t had the time to change.

Ashlyn laughed. “You never look like a mess. Come on, we have dinner reservations.”

Ashlyn took Ali to Simon Pearce, the first place they ever had dinner together. She made sure they sat at the same table and ordered the same meals. She raised her glass of champagne and toasted Ali. “To meeting the most amazing person in the world, falling in love with her, and having the best two years of my life.”

“Ditto.” Ali replied, clinking their glasses together, taking a sip and then pulling Ashlyn by the tie to kiss her across the table, not giving a damn that they were totally overdressed for this restaurant and that people were probably staring at them.

After dinner they laid on the hood of Ashlyn’s Jeep while parked near the main UNH rugby pitch, looking up at a really clear sky. Ashlyn had pulled out the star chart they kept in the Jeep and they
found Princess Krieger pretty easily in the night sky. It reminded Ali that she had come prepared for tonight as well.

“So, I got distracted by your romantic evening, but I got you an anniversary gift.” Ali said, reaching into the Jeep for her purse before getting back onto the hood next to Ashlyn. She pulled out a medium sized wrapped box.

Ashlyn was shocked at how Ali had fit it in her purse. “You’re like Mary Poppins, Krieger. What else you got in there?”

“Just a small country.” Ali laughed.

“Probably!” Ashlyn teased.

Ali nudged her. “Open it.”

Ashlyn opened the box to find a beautiful antique sextant. The sextant was an ancient navigation instrument that used celestial objects to measure distance and direction. Her Dad used to have one and she always wanted it, but it had been given away unknowingly by her mother. She turned it in her hands, admiring it carefully.

“The way you love the stars and the ocean so much, I thought you should have one. It’s gonna look great in your office someday, to-be Dr. Harris.” Ali explained.

“I love it. You know, I actually know how to use this. My Dad taught me.” Ashlyn said reminiscently.

“I know, Ash. I read your journal.” Ali replied quietly, making the intention and meaning behind the gift clear.

Ashlyn was moved to tears. That Ali had so carefully read those journals and pulled out the smallest details. That she had understood the feelings behind what Ashlyn wrote so well, that she could pick out something so subtle that someone else would read and find so insignificant, but to Ashlyn was so implicitly important. In that moment Ashlyn realized that through those journals Ali had mapped out her entire heart; learning every beautiful and dark place that existed there, memorizing it, understanding it, and loving it unconditionally.

Ashlyn kissed Ali so softly, so romantically, and with so much feeling that it left both of them trembling a bit. “I love you, Alex.” The words had never left her mouth so whole-heartedly as they did right then.

“I know. I love you too, Ashlyn.” Ali whispered back, her heart feeling like it might explode.

“I know.” Ashlyn kissed her again.

Smith lost to Colby in the final and came in second in the Beast of the East tournament with Crystal breaking the record for most tries scored in the tournament by one player. It was the best result they’d ever had and, combined with their prior Fall record, had assured their place as first in their division. As excited as Ashlyn was about going out on top, it was far from the most important thing that had happened that weekend.
Ashlyn closed the blue booklet in front of her and shut her eyes for a few seconds. The last essay question, the last answer, the last final exam. Done. Over. Her Smith education closed as easily as she had flipped that blue exam book shut. She handed the exam in to the monitor at the front of the room and walked out with a smile plastered on her face. She was happy and she was ready; destiny firmly in her hands, making her own luck for the first time ever. It was not what she had expected of this moment four years ago, but that made no difference now because she finally realized that Smith was just one piece of a whole. A whole held by the woman she was ready to cement herself to forever.

Ali had prepared herself for Ashlyn to be a bit reserved and introspective after her last final. She knew what Smith meant to the blonde and while Ashlyn seemed ready to move on, the actual moment of finality was certain to bring some deep thinking. So when Ashlyn walked in the door with a huge smile and picked Ali up into a tight hug, the brunette was more than shocked. Contrary to Ali’s expectations, Ashlyn seemed light and happy, with a spring in her step that Ali wasn’t sure she’d ever quite seen before. The good mood had rubbed off on Ali too, both of them excited for graduation weekend.

“So, tell me a bit about it. What happens during Smith Commencement weekend?” Ali asked since Ashlyn seemed so willing to talk about it finally.

“So, it starts Saturday morning with Ivy Day. All of the alumnae come back to campus for reunion and they join in on Ivy Day. It’s a celebration of both the alumnae and the graduating seniors, symbolizing the connection between the college and its graduates. So there is a parade of alumnae that ushers in the graduating seniors behind them. Everyone traditionally wears white and seniors carry a red rose at the parade that goes down Elm Street and ends up in the quad for the ceremony portion. The senior class president makes a speech and plants Ivy on the campus that will grow through the years. Every class year to graduate from Smith has ivy growing somewhere on campus as a symbol of their mark and time here. The parade is really fun because the alumnae carry signs that reflect the years they were at Smith and where they are in their lives now.” Ashlyn explained. The blonde continued. “Then Saturday night is Illumination. The campus is lit up in Japanese lanterns to symbolize the bright future of the graduating class. They start illumination with a candlelight ceremony before lighting up the Smith 2017 class sign in the middle of Paradise Pond and then lighting the lanterns. All the acapella groups are scattered throughout center campus and people walk around enjoying the lights and listening to the music. Then Sunday is commencement, which has lots of little traditions to it. The ceremony is officially opened by the county sheriff with an old fashioned mace. The faculty and honorees come in and then the seniors take a special parade route into the quad led by a bag pipe band. The parade route is like an inside-out sock to ensure that every member of the graduating class passes each other before taking their seat. We graduate by house rather than by general alphabetical order because the houses are central to who you are on campus. Lucky for you, we’re considered Martha Wilson House and not just Wilson House… so you’ll have to wait a lot less time than you might think.” Ashlyn chuckled before continuing again while Ali listened attentively.

“Let’s see. The stage is actually set right on the Wilson House steps, so extra cool for the Wilson people. Oh, and we don’t get our own diploma when we cross the stage. We just a get a random one that belongs to someone in the graduating class. Then after the ceremony is over, the graduates parade out of the quad and head to the lawn of King House and Scale House to form a spiral circle. It’s called the diploma circle. We pass diplomas around the circle until everyone finally gets their own. It ensures that most of the graduating class will have touched your diploma before you get it. That’s pretty much it. Cool, huh?” Ashlyn finished.

“I can’t wait either. It’s going to be an unforgettable weekend.” Ashlyn grinned widely.
Luminous Future

Chapter Notes

Well, we’ve officially reached the end of this story! When I started writing this, I had no idea it would be this long. I think that ending it at 69 chapters is fitting for some hot ruggers though ;) I wanted to thank all of you for sticking with me along the way and leaving such excellent comments and feedback. I hope you enjoy the end of it. I have decided not to write an epilogue because many of you expressed interest in a Part 2. I will definitely be taking quite a while away from writing because my wife is due to give birth to our son in less than three weeks...so, I have my own adventure coming up :) However, I hope to come back to bring you Part 2 at some point.

Since this chapter does include music and some of you might be wondering what these songs sound like together...I’ve put together a very crude version for you that lacks proper transitions, but you can get at least get a sense of it if you’d like to: https://youtu.be/sGjyc4imG9Y

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alizzle! And Captain Muscles!” Kyle yelled at Ali and Ashlyn through the airport as he walked well ahead of Ken and Deb.

“KYLE!” Ali screamed and ran towards him, throwing herself into his arms like she usually did. “I didn’t know you were coming with Mom and Dad!” Ali knew months ago that her parents were coming. They had insisted that they be there for Ashlyn’s graduation. Both Ali and Ashlyn were touched by it and had agreed they could come even though it meant more people to juggle for the weekend. Ali definitely wasn’t expecting Kyle to come too.

“Duh! First off, Ash is like my sister and I wouldn’t miss this graduation for anything. Second, there was no way I was going to miss this whole acapella shindig tomorrow night. Ash totally promised we could come for a concert and then we never did it, so I have to get it in before I lose my chance.” Kyle explained, finally putting Ali down.

Ashlyn reached them and gave Kyle a tight hug. “Hey bro! So great to see you! Where’s Max?”

“He has a major photoshoot in Orlando and couldn’t make it.” Kyle said with a sad face. “He was so bummered, but I’m sure you’ll see him in Miami. We’ll all get dinner when you guys get down there since we’ll be there for the next three weeks.”

“Awww, total bummer.” Ali commiserated. “We’ll send him lots of pictures!”

Ashlyn nodded and wrapped am arm around Kyle who smiled.

Ken and Deb caught up to them just a minute later, everyone hugging and greeting each other.

“Is your Grandma here already? And what about Chris?” Deb asked Ashlyn.

“Yep. Grandma, Chris, and Susan got here early this morning. They were pretty tired from the early
flight, so they’re grabbing a nap before dinner.” Ashlyn replied.

“Perfect. I made us all reservations for tonight. Dinner is on me.” Ken told them.

“Wow, thank you. You didn’t have to do that, but thank you, that’s really sweet.” Ashlyn smiled at him appreciatively.

“This is a big deal and we’re celebrating this weekend properly!” Ken put a hand on Ashlyn’s shoulder.

A few hours later the Krieger and Harris clans sat together at one big table in an Italian restaurant downtown. It felt a lot like Thanksgiving with everyone in light conversation and occasional playful banter. Of course, Chris and Kyle started a bet to see who could get more pieces of bread into Ashlyn’s water glass until Susan and Ali put a stop to it when the blonde hadn’t noticed and swallowed a few pieces of mushy bread with a horrified look on her face.

Ashlyn took a minute to take in everyone at the table together. Soon they would all be a lot closer and able to do this more often. She couldn’t have felt luckier to have such a wonderful family supporting her this weekend and smiled as she thought about what lay ahead.

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“Ashlyn, you look so beautiful.” Ali was blown away by the blonde as she walked into the Wilson dorm room Saturday morning to find her ready for the Ivy Day parade. Ashlyn was in white dress pants rolled almost to mid-calf, a white button up shirt that was tucked in neatly with the sleeves rolled up to her elbows, a light gray skinny tie with thin white stripes running diagonally across it, and black slip on loafers. Her hair was up in a bun and her makeup was light as usual. “Gosh, look at you.” Ali said, mesmerized as she grabbed Ashlyn’s hand and gave her a soft kiss.

“Thanks, baby. You look amazing yourself.” Ashlyn ran her hand along Ali’s side admiring the perfect fit of the light blue dress she was wearing. “I know who I’ll be staring at in the crowd during this parade.” She winked at Ali. “We better get going. I’m supposed to be downstairs for pictures with the girls before we have to line up at the President’s House.”

“Wait. You need one more finishing touch.” Ali grabbed Ashlyn’s wrist and ran her fingers over the watch the blonde had been wearing ever since Ali gave it to her.

“What’s that, baby? Do I need more mascara?” Ashlyn teased.

Ali stuck her tongue out before smiling. “As much as I know you love that watch. I think this weekend calls for a little more bling.” She slipped the watch off Ashlyn’s wrist and handed her a box from her purse.

Ashlyn opened it to find a shiny silver watch with a large face covered in small diamonds and dials. The word bling was a serious understatement. “Oh my god, Alex! This is freakin gorgeous! Wow… someone is gonna cut my arm off for this thing! I don’t know what to say, it’s amazing!” Ashlyn looked over excitedly. This was by far the most expensive thing she owned besides her Jeep and by the looks of this watch, she wondered if maybe the Jeep came in second.

“I know you really love that other watch and will probably still wear it more often, but I wanted to make this one special too. Turn it over.” Ali said.

Ashlyn turned it over to find Brandi Carlile lyrics engraved into the back of it: “Time and too much don’t belong together like we do.” Ashlyn grinned widely remembering the conversation they had in New York about the song and was left a bit speechless at how perfectly this weekend was already
“I love it. I love you. Thank you.” She gave Ali a deep kiss.

“Happy graduation, Stud. Now let’s get you downstairs for pictures!” Ali pulled Ashlyn out the door.

Ali watched the girls gather in groups in the Wilson living room as they took pictures, snapping many of her own. Every single one of them looked stunning in their white outfits and black shoes. When it was time to head out, she walked with Ashlyn and the other girls to the President’s House before leaving her girl with a sweet kiss and going to find their families who had gone to stake out a good spot on the parade route. She found them just near the entrance of the quad and stood between Kyle and Chris. “Wait until you see her, she looks incredible.” Ali gushed to Kyle.

“Keep it in your dress, Alex. It’s gonna be a long night!” Kyle teased her.

Although most people in the crowd were wondering how a parade of alumnae and graduates could possibly be so exciting, it definitely didn’t disappoint. It was incredible to see so many women from different class years come back to campus just for this, all looking so great in white. Each group carried a sign indicating their graduation year. It started with those who had only graduated a year ago and ended with an adorable little old lady in a wheelchair who had graduated in 1939 and was 99 years old. It was pretty amazing to see how invested these alums were in the college, even being so far removed from it.

The best had been the variety of signs held by the different class years that reflected the generation in which they graduated and where they were in their lives now. Many of the women in their 30’s had their kids with them and held signs about motherhood like “I was pushing pencils and now I’m pushing strollers.” The women in their 40’s had particularly hilarious signs that said “Floppy isn’t just for discs anymore” and “Middle-aged girls gone wild.” The women in their 50’s had a sign that said “Our facebook was phonebook and it was made of paper.” A group of even older alums held a sign reading “We made memories…and now we forget them.” It was apparent to everyone in the crowd that Smith women never lost their strength or their sass.

Finally, a group junior and sophomore students walked just behind the alumnae with huge strings of ivy over their shoulders and behind them came the graduates. Everyone cheered loudly as they paraded in with their red roses, smiling widely. Ali met Ashlyn’s eyes and blew her a kiss which Ashlyn caught and placed on her heart. Of course, Chris and Kyle couldn’t let it go and started to blow kisses dramatically at Ashlyn too until Grandma smacked them both on the back of the head. Kyle jokingly shot her a look to which Grandma replied “Get used to it, you’re part of this family now, honey. Now be a good boy.” Ali laughed so hard she almost spit.

The rest of the Ivy Day ceremony went fairly fast with a few speeches, ivy planting, and alumnae awards. Everyone took lots of pictures with Ashlyn and Deb took a million of Ali and Ashlyn together before they all went off to brunch together. The rest of the day was spent exploring downtown Northampton together and relaxing a bit in their hotel rooms before planning to meet up for dinner again.

Ali pouted as Ashlyn took off her Ivy Day outfit when they got back to the apartment to relax together for a couple hours. “But you look so good.” She whined.

“The reason I’m taking off my clothes, Krieger, is so I can get in a naked nap with you. Unless of course you prefer me dressed, in which case…” Ashlyn was cut off by Ali.

“Nope. Ready for bed! Let’s go, Harris.” Ali had taken off her dress in lightning speed and jumped onto their bed.
“Remember, Princess, I said nap. We have a long night with Illumination.” Ashlyn playfully warned her.

“I’m perfectly capable of being good.” Ali protested.

“Uh huh. I’ve heard that before.” Ashlyn got under the covers and pulled Ali close to her, shutting her eyes at the feel of the brunette’s warm skin pressed to hers. “You’re perfect.” She whispered.

Ali just kissed her gently and buried her head into the crook of Ashlyn’s neck. It didn’t take Ashlyn long to fall asleep. Unbeknownst to Ali, Ashlyn had not been able to sleep the night before and spent her time just watching Ali peacefully slumber, taking in all of her features and listening to her breathe. It had been worth every waking second, but Ashlyn knew that she desperately needed a nap if she was going to get through the long performance with the Vibes tonight during Illumination. She cleared her mind as best she could and let herself melt into the brunette’s arms.

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Ali woke up feeling gentle kisses on her lips, the bed beside her empty. She opened her eyes to see Ashlyn hovering over her a bit. “Time for dinner already?” She mumbled.

“Not yet, baby. Grams said earlier that she wanted some one-on-one time with me, so I promised I’d go meet her before dinner for a little bit. Is it ok with you if I go do that and then meet you and everyone else at the restaurant?” Ashlyn explained.

“Of course. I figured she’d want to steal you away at some point. I mean, you’re graduating and she pretty much raised you, I’d expect nothing less. She’s probably as nervous as you are.” Ali smiled and reached up to get another kiss.

“Oh, so I’m nervous huh?” Ashlyn raised her eyebrows.

“Yep. You think you’re so good at hiding things from me Harris, but really, you’re not.” Ali snickered. “I was nervous before graduation too. It’s gonna be fine, promise.”

Ashlyn did everything she could to stifle her laugh. “You know me too well, Krieger. I know it’ll be ok, I’m just antsy I guess.”

Ali sat up a bit finally getting a good look at her girl. “Wow, Ash. And I thought you looked good this morning. Damn. Just…whew.” She swallowed hard. Ashlyn was wearing slim fitting blue jeans with brown belt that had a gold buckle, a white and blue checkered button up shirt under a fitted gray vest and a navy tie. Her hair was down with a navy snapback over it, her makeup light, and her new watch on full display with the sleeves of her shirt rolled up. It was a little bit fancy, a little bit casual, and totally Ashlyn. It was flawless.

“Guess I’m two for two today then.” Ashlyn grinned, watching Ali look her up and down hungrily. “You know me too well, Krieger. I know it’ll be ok, I’m just antsy I guess.”

Ali let out a smitten sigh and leaned her head back against the headboard. After a few minutes she called Kyle, figuring he’d be up for keeping her company while she got ready.

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“So, are you ready?” Grandma asked as she walked with one of her arms through Ashlyn’s. They had decided to walk through campus before dinner since the weather was so warm.

“Yeah. I’m ready, Gram.” Ashlyn replied honestly. “I mean I’m still nervous, but I feel like my life is finally starting and I’m so ready for that.”

“You look ready. I’ll never forget when you came home after your first year here and you told me that you never wanted to leave. You still had three years left and you were already worried about graduation. Remember what I told you?” Grandma asked.

“I remember. You said that time changes and fixes everything. That no matter how we feel now, we’ll almost always feel differently once time has passed.” Ashlyn paused. “I thought you were out of your mind back then. I never thought in a million years I’d be ok with leaving this place. I should have known. You’re…” Ashlyn was cut off by Grandma.

“Never wrong, sweetheart.” Grandma finished for her and squeezed her arm lightly.

“Yeah. I’m going to miss this place so much. It’s really been my home in so many ways, but, home is definitely where the heart is. Wherever Ali is, that’s home.” Ashlyn said quietly.

“As it should be.” Grandma replied with a smile. “Before all the craziness of the rest of this weekend, I just want to make sure I tell you that I’m so proud of you, Ashlyn. I’m proud of the woman you have become and the choices you’ve made. Your parents and grandpa would be just as proud as I am. Look at you, you’re shining, you’re beautiful, you’re accomplished, and you’re just getting started. I love you, sweetheart. And I love Ali too, what a wonderful woman you’ve found to complement you. No matter how nervous you get, just remember we’re all so proud of you and we’re always behind you. And don’t ever forget…” Grandma started but was cutoff.

“You’re never wrong. I know.” Ashlyn finished.

“You got that right!” Grandma laughed.

“Thank you, Grams. That means the world to me. I love you too and I can’t thank you enough for all that you’ve done for me. You’re the reason I’m here.” Ashlyn hugged Grandma tightly just before they approached the restaurant.

“No, sweetheart. You’re the reason you’re here. Now let’s get this party started!” Grandma gave Ashlyn a kiss on the cheek before they headed into the restaurant.

They walked into the restaurant to see the Kriegers and Chris and Susan waiting in the entrance area. Ashlyn’s eyes immediately went to Ali who was in a short black dress that fit her perfectly, her makeup impeccable, and her hair down and flowing over her shoulders. “You look stunning, Alex.” Ashlyn patted Kyle on the back before putting her arm around Ali’s waist. A few minutes later their table was ready and they enjoyed dinner together before it was time to head back to campus.
Ali stood next to Ashlyn and the other Wilson girls as the seniors all held lit candles and waited for the Smith 2017 sign to light up in the middle of Paradise Pond to signal the start of Illumination. She squeezed Ashlyn’s hand, feeling the blonde get a bit fidgety. Ashlyn squeezed back just as the sign finally lit up, their hands coming apart to join in the applause. Everyone stood there admiring the sign for a bit and talking animatedly before blowing out their candles and starting to disperse towards center campus.

“Guess that’s my cue to go warm up.” Ashlyn said taking Ali’s hand again. “You should go and enjoy the lanterns for a bit with them, the acapella groups don’t start for about a half hour.” The blonde said as she pointed towards their families. “The Vibes are at the statue fountain.”

“Really?! That’s awesome! I thought you said the Smiffenpoofs get the best spot at the fountain and the Smithereens get the next best in the Arch walkway since they are the oldest groups? Don’t you guys usually get the spot by Seelye Hall?” Ali asked, remembering what Ashlyn had told her about Illumination night a while back.

“Yes, but we had a meeting and everyone agreed we’d change it up and shuffle things a bit to be more fair.” Ashlyn lied through her teeth. She knew she wanted her last performance with the Vibes to be at the statue fountain and had all but offered her first born child to the Smiffenpoofs to get them to switch. With a little help from President McCartney and the Vibes agreeing to let the Smiffenpoofs have the stage first at next year’s big Fall Jam session, the group had agreed to make the switch.

“Ahh, so exciting!” Ali gave Ashlyn a quick hug. She could tell the blonde was tense. “Hey.” She lifted Ashlyn’s chin up with her hand. “You’re going to be so great. Don’t be nervous about it being the last one, you’ll be back to sing as an alum and you’re going to kill it tonight. Pretend you’re singing to me and go out with a bang.” Ali encouraged her.

Ashlyn could only grin widely at the pep talk. “Out with a bang. You got it, Princess.” She gave Ali a soft kiss and went to go meet up with the Vibes.

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Ali only let everyone enjoy the gorgeous Japanese lanterns illuminating the campus for about 15 minutes before she told them that they had go stake out a spot at the fountain to watch the Vibes. She assured them they’d still have an hour after the performance to take it all in together with Ashlyn. At Ali’s insistence, they arrived in time to watch the Vibes finish warming up. A few people had already gathered there to form a small crowd.

“Hey guys!” Ashlyn said excitedly. “I saved you a front row spot right in the center.” She pointed to a spot about 12 feet in front of the Vibes and had them all stand there. She then grabbed a folding chair from near the fountain and set it up for Grandma so she wouldn’t have to stand the whole time. Ali melted a little bit at how caring Ashlyn was, especially when it came to her Grandma.

Just before the show started, Alex, Tobin, Megan, Kacey, Logan and Courtney showed up and stood behind Ali and the rest of the family. Tobin’s and Megan’s families were with them too.

“Hey ladies! You came!” Ali waved to them.

“Of course! We gotta support the Cap!” Megan answered for them.

“Where’s Whit?” Ali asked curiously, a bit surprised she wasn’t there.

“She’s still walking around with her family. She should be over here soon.” Alex replied casually.

Everyone spent a couple minutes introducing themselves to each other’s families and chatting before
it was time for the Vibes to start. Ali watched Ashlyn take her usual place on the outer left side of the semi-circle with Crystal next to her. She gave Ali a quick wink and a smile, getting a nose crinkling smile back from the brunette.

Bree stepped forward. “Hi everyone. Welcome to Illumination night! We’re the Vibes and we’re gonna do the best we can to entertain you for the next hour and a half. This is the last performance for the seniors, so hopefully you’ll help us keep the energy high! Let’s get this show on the road!” She stepped back and played the correct note to get the group started with Beyoncé’s ‘Halo’.

Ashlyn was in top form. With her and Crystal together, the beats almost sounded too perfect to be acapella. Ali was mesmerized as usual, her eyes never leaving Ashlyn except for when Kyle nudged her to say “She’s freakin’ amazing!” The group did Mario’s ‘Let me Love You’, Michael Jackson’s ‘Billie Jean’, Fountain of Wayne’s ‘Stacy’s Mom’, Shai’s ‘If I Ever Fall in Love Again’, and One Republic’s ‘Apologize’ among many other songs. The energetic crowd grew larger as the show went on. The Vibes alums in the crowd even joined in on a couple of songs that the group always kept in their repertoire for just that very purpose. When Ashlyn wasn’t helping Crystal keep the beat and helping the group keep harmony, her eyes were on Ali.

With about 15 minutes left to go, Bree stepped forward again. “We’re getting to the end of the show and you guys have been amazing! We’re going to do something different and end it on a special medley of songs we’ve been working on. So, enjoy it and thanks for coming to listen to us and showing us so much love tonight!” The audience clapped as Bree stepped back and played the note to get the group in harmony.

Ali smirked as she heard the beat for Iggy Azalea’s ‘Beg for It’ start, knowing Ashlyn had worked that song into the Vibes routine because it was the first one they’d danced to together. Ali was focused completely on Ashlyn, watching the blonde’s body bop up and down rhythmically as she carried the beat. She was too focused to notice her family and Ashlyn’s family shoot knowing looks at each other. Too focused to see that the entire Smith Rugby team was now behind her in the crowd along with Emily, Sydney, Kelley, Hope, HAO and Dave, Abby and Sarah, and Ashlyn’s high school guidance counselor Mrs. Jacobs. Too focused to see that Whitney was now there too, making sure all of these people were in place before giving Ashlyn a quick thumbs up as the blonde quickly looked over the crowd for the first time all night. Ali let herself get wrapped up in the sound of Ashlyn’s beat and didn’t notice the blonde take a quick breath and give the Vibes a barely visible nod about a minute into the song. What finally broke her trance was the record screeching sound that Ashlyn and Crystal made to stop the song.

Ali heard a soft harmony start, recognizing it as a song her southern freshman year roommate at Dartmouth used to play. She listened to the opening of Rascal Flatts’ ‘Bless the Broken Road’ and began wondering when the Vibes had gotten into country music. Her thoughts quickly escaped her when she watched Ashlyn walk to the center of the semi-circle to start singing, the blonde’s eyes looking right into hers.

I set out on a narrow way many years ago

Hoping I would find true love along the broken road

But I got lost a time or two

Wiped my brow and kept pushing through

I couldn’t see how every sign pointed straight to you
Every long lost dream, led me to where you are

Others who broke my heart, they were like Northern stars

Pointing me on my way, into your loving arms

This much I know is true

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you

Ashlyn walked over to Ali and took her hand, pulling the brunette close to dance with her as the Vibes transitioned into another song. Linda Ronstadt’s ‘All my Life’, their first slow dance together. Ashlyn swayed briefly with Ali in her arms, singing right near her ear.

Am I really here in your arms

This is just like I dreamed it would be

I feel like we're frozen in time

And you're the only one I can see

Hey, I've looked all my life for you

Now you're here…

Ali’s mind had just started to catch up with what was going on, realizing she should have known the blonde would do something like this to make the night special. She still had no idea of the extent of it though. Ashlyn kissed her cheek as the short song ended, leaving Ali still in the center of the Vibes semi-circle as she turned around and started a fast beat for Boyz II Men’s ‘Thank You’. Ashlyn let Crystal pick up the beat and turned around to face Ali again as she sang, the Vibes backing her up.

I was young (BOP)

And didn't have now where to run

I needed to wake up and see

What's in front of me, nah-nah-nah

There had to be, a better way (a better way)

To show I'm grateful (hmmm)

So I thought up this song
To show my appreciation for lovin’ me so long
You don’t know much you mean to me
Cause even though when times got rough
You never turned away
You were right there
And I thank you (thank you)
When I felt I had enough
You never turned away
You were right there
And I thank you (thank you)

The harmony transitioned again into Rachel Platten’s ‘Stand by You’, Ashlyn’s eyes never leaving Ali’s as she sang and got a little bit closer again to the brunette.

Yeah, you're all I never knew I needed
And the heart, sometimes it's unclear why it's beating
And love, if your wings are broken
We can brave through those emotions too
Cause I'm gonna stand by you
And oh, truth, I guess truth is what you believe in
And faith, I think faith is having a reason

Ashlyn reached inside her shirt to grab her wing charm necklace and reached out to grab the matching one that Ali was always wearing, getting close and holding them together in her hand.

No No No, love, if your wings are broken
Borrow mine so yours can open too
Cause I'm gonna stand by you
Even if we're breaking down, we can find a way to break through
Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through hell with you

Love, you're not alone, cause I'm gonna stand by you

Ashlyn dropped the necklaces and stepped back just a bit as the harmony transitioned yet again into Justin Timberlake’s ‘Mirrors’.

Aren't you something, an original, 'cause it doesn't seem merely assembled
And I can't help but stare 'cause I see truth somewhere in your eyes
Ooh I can't ever change without you, you reflect me, I love that about you
And if I could, I would look at us all the time
'Cause with your hand in my hand and a pocket full of soul
I can tell you there's no place we couldn't go
Just put your hand on the glass, I'm here trying to pull you through
You just gotta be strong
'Cause I don't wanna lose you now
I'm looking right at the other half of me
The vacancy that sat in my heart
Is a space that now you hold
Show me how to fight for now
And I'll tell you, baby, it was easy
Coming back into you once I figured it out
You were right here all along
It's like you're my mirror
My mirror staring back at me
I couldn't get any bigger
With anyone else beside me
And now it's clear as this promise
That we're making, two reflections into one
'Cause it's like you're my mirror
My mirror staring back at me, staring back at me

Ashlyn took Ali’s face in her hand, getting close again.

Yesterday is history
Tomorrow's a mystery
I can see you looking back at me
Keep your eyes on me
Baby, keep your eyes on me…

Ashlyn pointed from Ali’s eyes to her own, letting her hand drop to take Ali’s as the song transitioned to Elton John’s ‘Your Song’.

‘Cause yours are the sweetest eyes I've ever seen
And you can tell everybody this is your song
It may be quite simple but
Now that it's done
I hope you don't mind
I hope you don't mind
That I put down in words
How wonderful life is while you're in the world

Buckets of fake snow were thrown over Ashlyn and Ali by a few of the Vibes and Ashlyn bent down still singing the song to draw a heart with ‘A+A’ written in it, one of her hands still holding Ali’s. Ali could only smile and blush like she had been this entire time, swept up in it all, but still not realizing what was actually happening. She glanced up for the first time looking to their families who were all smiling, her mom and Kyle crying, and in that brief glance she noticed everyone else that was in the crowd watching. That’s when she started to understand what was happening. The statue fountain, everyone they loved and cared about there watching, the song selection, Ashlyn being so nervous, the heart drawn in the fake snow. She was stunned, glad Ashlyn was still singing because she was speechless right now. Her heart pounded so hard she was sure everyone could hear it even over the music. Everything seemed to move in slow motion.
I hope you don't mind
I hope you don't mind
That I put down in words
How wonderful life is while you're in the world

Ali looked down to meet Ashlyn’s eyes, it finally dawning on her that the blonde wasn’t getting up. Sure enough Ashlyn was down on one knee as the Vibes harmonized in a soft hum before going silent, leaving only Ashlyn’s voice to sing the words to Train’s ‘Marry Me’. Ashlyn gripped Ali’s hand tightly.

Together can never be close enough for me
To feel like I am close enough to you
You wear white and I’ll wear out the words I love you
And you’re beautiful
Now that the wait is over
And love and has finally shown her my way
Marry me

Ashlyn pulled a small box out of her pocket and opened it to reveal a shiny beautiful diamond ring.

“Alex Krieger, being with you feels like winning the lottery. And not just because you’re beautiful, and smart, and passionate, and caring, and completely wonderful in every way. Even though you are all of those things and more, when I say I feel like I’ve won the lottery, I’m thinking back to the first night we met. I asked you if I had a chance with you and your reply was, and I quote, ‘Pretty damn close to zero’.” Ashlyn grinned, earning a smile from Ali and a laugh from the crowd.

“But, here we are together over two years later and in love, with me feeling like I’ve beaten impossible odds to have gotten here. There is nothing in this world I want more than to spend the rest of my life with you. You are my other half, my home, my everything, and I love you with all my being. Alex, do me the honor of being my wife. Tell me that I’ve won the lottery. Will you marry me?” Ashlyn asked and waited for Ali’s response.

Ali could barely breathe at the perfection of this moment, knowing already so long ago what her answer would be. She dropped down to her knees, taking Ashlyn’s face in her hands and kissing her passionately. She pulled back just long enough to say “Yes! You’ve won the lottery, Ash. A million times yes!” before kissing Ashlyn again.

Everyone in the crowd had been holding their breath and finally let out loud cheers and applause.
The Vibes added their own celebratory twist, singing Bruno Mars’ ‘Marry You’ behind them. Ashlyn and Ali ignored it all for a couple minutes, wrapped up in kissing each other. They finally pulled away breathlessly after a couple of minutes, Ashlyn pulling Ali to her feet and slipping the ring on her finger. Shortly after they were surrounded by their family and friends, everyone wanting hugs and a look at the ring.

Grandma got the first hug, pulling Ali in tightly and whispering “That ring has decades of good karma. I hope it brings you all the love and happiness it brought me.”

At that, Ali snuck her first real look at the ring, seeing that it was classic with a modern flare. She couldn’t have envisioned a more perfect one if she tried, but it was the significance behind it that made her heart melt. She gave Ashlyn another quick kiss before Ken and Deb finally got to them.

“Congratulations baby girl, you found one incredible person.” Ken hugged her before looking at Ashlyn. “You’re everything I could have wished for her, welcome officially to our family.” He hugged the blonde tightly. Deb could only get out a few words through her happy tears, saying “So beautiful!” a couple times before pulling them into one big hug.

Chris and Susan got to them next, Chris lifting them both off the ground a bit with each of his arms. “Sorry Ali, guess this means you’re officially part of the prank war. Keep one eye open!” He said as Ashlyn slapped him on the arm lightly.

Finally Kyle, who had been standing back and documenting the whole thing with his camera, came forward still a bit teary like Deb. Before he could say anything, Ali hugged him and spoke first. “Thank you. This would never have happened if you hadn’t talked sense into me way back at the beginning.”

“Don’t ever forget it! Especially when it comes time to plan the wedding!” Kyle said sassily, before adding “So happy for you two!” He then looked at Ashlyn. “And you, whether I’m proposing or being proposed to, you are so going to be the one planning it! So, be prepared! I’m still swooning and I’m not even the one who got engaged.”

The next 20 minutes was filled with everyone else in the crowd coming to congratulate them. Ali finally got to meet Mrs. Jacobs in person while Ashlyn thanked Whitney profusely for her help with getting everyone there and in place without Ali knowing. With a half hour left before Illumination was over, Ashlyn finally managed to pull Ali away from everyone so they could enjoy it by themselves.

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“So… how was that for going out with a bang, Princess?” Ashlyn asked smugly as they walked along a quieter path lit by lanterns while holding hands.

“I’m still at a loss for words. Ash, that was the most romantic and perfect proposal I could ever imagine. I can’t believe we’re engaged! I’m so happy, baby. I love you so much.” Ali stopped to kiss Ashlyn softly. “I also can’t believe I technically gave you a pep talk about proposing to me without knowing it!”

“Yeah, that was pretty damn funny. I was trying so hard not to laugh. It did calm my nerves though, thank you, Princess.” Ashlyn teased.

“I still can’t believe you did all that. How long have you been planning this? And tell me about this ring. I love it, it’s so beautiful.” Ali asked.
“Well, that’s my Grandma’s engagement ring. When my Grandpa died, she told me she wanted me to have it so that the love in our family would be passed on. She saved Grandpa’s wedding ring for Chris for the same reason. I had it slightly redesigned to be a bit more modern, but the diamond and everything else is all original. I thought it would be good luck to go with a ring that had so much love and history already behind it. I hope that’s ok.” Ashlyn finished quietly.

“Ash, this means everything to me. I couldn’t love anything more.” Ali answered honestly, admiring the ring again while holding Ashlyn’s arm in hers as they walked together.

Ashlyn smiled and continued. “As for planning, if I’m being honest, I feel like I was planning from the day we started dating. But, I got the ring from Grandma last summer, so really almost a year. I asked your parents and Kyle for their support at Christmas before putting all the final plans in place.”

“A year?! And they all knew?!” Ali asked incredulously.

“Yes, Princess. It takes a while to redesign a ring, ask your family for their blessing, get the acapella group to learn all those songs perfectly, bribe the Smiffenpoofs to change locations, and get everyone to travel here without you knowing.” Ashlyn smirked.

“Wow. I’m seriously blown away. I don’t know how you came up with all that, but it was so perfect, Ashlyn.” Ali leaned in and kissed her again just as they approached the area outside the greenhouses.

“I didn’t actually. You did.” Ashlyn gave her a dimpled grin.

“What do you mean?” Ali asked a bit confused.

“Remember two summers ago when Todd and Jill asked us how we got engaged? What did you tell them, Alex?” Ashlyn asked with a smirk.

“Oh my god! No way!” Ali exclaimed remembering the story she told about Ashlyn singing to her at the statue fountain, drawing a heart in the snow and proposing.

“It was from your script, baby. I just went with a real ring this time instead and maybe embellished some details a little.” Ashlyn winked.

“You never cease to amaze me. I love you.” Ali whispered in Ashlyn’s ear, pulling her close.

“I love you too, Alex.” Ashly replied. They stood there embracing for a couple minutes before they noticed a few people going around to blow out the candles in the lanterns. “Well, I guess that’s it for Illumination. Should we go find everybody?” Ashlyn asked.

“Nope. They’ll be fine.” Ali said confidently. “Right now, we’re going to grab some blankets and I’m going to make sweet love to my fiancée on that rugby pitch.” She pointed towards the athletic fields.

“I love the way that sounds.” Ashlyn replied with a huge grin.

“Which part?” Ali asked with a smile.

“All of it. Especially the fiancée part.” Ashlyn answered and pulled Ali by the hand towards her Jeep to get some blankets.

They spent over an hour in the middle of the dark rugby pitch, loving every inch of each other just like they did the first time. With her fiancée in her arms, both of them spent and sated on the pitch, Ashlyn looked up at the same star-filled sky she stared at with such uncertainty 4 years ago, now
feeling completely certain of everything. She could never have imagined a better last night at Smith College.

“You ready, beautiful?” Ali asked, fixing the yellow and white hood on Ashlyn’s black graduation gown an hour before the ceremony was supposed to start.

“Never thought I’d ever say this, but yeah, I’m so ready.” Ashlyn replied.

“I’m so proud of you, Ash.” Ali gave her a long slow kiss that started to get a bit heated when Ashlyn deepened it. “Easy, Stud. We have to get you graduated first and you need to be at the lineup area in 10 minutes.” Ali pulled back and made a last adjustment to the blonde’s honor cords as Ashlyn groaned a bit.

Ali left Ashlyn inside the very empty Wilson House dorm room and stood outside, giving the blonde a minute to herself. Ashlyn looked around the room slowly and took in a deep breath. And just like that it was only a room, a room with a lot of memories, but still just a room. She took one last look and closed the door behind her, smiling at Ali and taking her hand, the feeling of security and home rushing into her at the contact of their skin.

The ceremony was completely over the top with traditional pomp and circumstance just like Ashlyn had described it. Ali was impressed at the grandness of it all. It made sense now why she had heard several alums mention that they never even bothered to go to their graduate school graduations because they knew it would never be as meaningful as the one at Smith. The speaker, Smith’s own Gloria Steinem, was the perfect mix of insightful, funny, and wise. Ali squeezed Kyle’s and Grandma’s hands tightly as Wilson House was called to the stage. Ali let out a loud whoop as Whitney’s name was called, knowing Ashlyn’s was coming soon.

“Ashlyn Harris, summa cum laude.” President McCartney called out.

Ali watched her gorgeous blonde fiancée cross the stage in her cap and gown with a dimpled grin as she hugged the president. Ali cheered loudly along with their families, while a few air horns sounded across the quad from the ruggers in the audience. Just as Ashlyn approached the end of the stage, Ali yelled out “I love you, Ash!” as loud as she could. Ashlyn smiled and blew her a quick kiss before making her way back to her seat. Tobin and Megan followed shortly after, but Ali had very little voice left after cheering so loudly for Ashlyn.

When Ashlyn came out of the diploma circle with her own leather-bound certificate in hand, Ali kissed her so hard she almost knocked the blonde off her feet. “Congratulations, Stud!” There were lots of congratulatory hugs and pictures and a few goodbyes between graduates before there was only one last thing to do.

“Wait!” Ali stopped Ashlyn as they got to the Grecourt Gates with the blonde finally ready to walk through them. “We’re doing this in style, baby.”

“What exactly do you have in mind, Princess?” Ashlyn asked curiously.

Ali didn’t reply, glad she had spent so much time working out with the rugby team recently. She just picked Ashlyn up in her arms bridal style and walked through the gates with the beaming blonde wrapped up in her arms, Kyle documenting the whole thing as he snapped pictures of them.

Ashlyn placed the framed picture of Ali carrying her through the Grecourt Gates taken just a week
ago on the dresser in their new bedroom. She looked at it carefully, taking in the huge smiles on both their faces and the shiny ring on Ali’s finger. Talk about getting the princess and living a fairytale she thought to herself.

“Hey, Ash. Can you come in here?” Ali called to her from the living room.

“What can I do for you, Princess?” Ashlyn asked, looking at Ali sitting on the couch. They were mostly moved in, but had spent the morning unpacking the last couple of boxes to complete the finishing touches.

“Sit. I want to show you something.” Ali said patting the couch beside her.

Ashlyn complied and sat close to the brunette seeing a binder in her hand. “What’s that?” She asked curiously.

“You know how you said you figured out your proposal by the story I told Jill and Todd that night?” Ali asked.

“Yeah.” Ashlyn replied.

“And do you remember what you told them about us getting married?” Ali probed.

“Of course. I said we got married on the beach in Miami.” Ashlyn answered simply, still not sure where exactly this was going.

“Exactly. I started this two days after that night. You’re not the only one with grand plans, Harris.” Ali smiled and handed Ashlyn the binder.

Ashlyn opened it to find all kinds of ideas for beach weddings. Ali had filled pages of the binder with pictures, clippings and designs for ceremonies and receptions on the beach. As she flipped page after page of romantic scenes by the water, she practically melted into a puddle herself. “Alex, I love this. It’s just...I don’t have words, I just love it.”

“Good.” Ali kissed her gently. “We can look at it more later and figure out what we like, but right now, I want to show you something on the deck.” She pulled Ashlyn to her feet and left the binder on the couch.

“Ok.” Ashlyn said following Ali outside.

“Special delivery today for you.” Ali said pointing to a medium sized cube covered by a blue blanket in the middle of the deck. She gently pushed Ashlyn towards it.

Ashlyn lifted the blanket to find a crate. Inside was a tiny black and white French bulldog puppy in a red collar staring back at her curiously. “No way! Alex, seriously?!” Ashlyn yelled out, opening the crate and picking up the puppy who fit right in the palm of her hands. “It’s so cute!!!”

“So seriously! It’s a boy and he needs a name.” Ali smiled at a beaming Ashlyn as the puppy licked the blonde’s face. “He loves you already! What are you going to name him?”

Ashlyn thought about it for a second before answering. “Gilbert!”

Ali laughed, recognizing the name of the official worldwide supplier of rugby balls. “Too perfect! I love it! Now we need to get Gilbert a proper collar tag.” She said as she got closer to Ashlyn and the puppy.
“Oh, I thought he already had one.” Ashlyn replied, thinking she saw something on his collar when she picked him up. She held the puppy in her hands and inspected his collar more closely, finding a silver band with a simple row of diamonds inlaid through the middle of it that encircled the whole ring. Ashlyn looked up to see Ali looking back at her lovingly. “Are you proposing with a puppy, Krieger?” Ashlyn asked with a chuckle.

“Technically, yes. I just thought you should have a ring too. I can’t wait to marry you, Ashlyn Harris.” Ali closed the space between them and kissed her deeply. It was broken just a few seconds later with Gilbert licking their faces.

“That is not gonna fly in this house, dude. Never interrupt sexy time.” Ashlyn jokingly warned the puppy who just looked at her. She looked back to Ali. “I love you woman. You’re perfect and I can’t wait to marry you either.” She gave Ali another quick kiss and pulled away before Gilbert could get impatient again.

Ali took the ring off Gilbert’s collar and slipped it onto Ashlyn’s finger. “I love you too, baby. Let’s go walk this little guy.” She grabbed the matching red leash from next to the crate and handed it to Ashlyn.

Ashlyn walked down the beach feeling completely content and so in love her heart felt like it might explode. She breathed in the ocean air and thought back to the vision she had when she first stood on the deck of their new home a couple of months ago: Ali beside her with a puppy running alongside the two of them. The only thing different was that Ali wasn’t her wife…yet. But soon. Very very soon.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for taking the time to read this fic! Definitely let me know what you think of the ending.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!