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To Kendall Smith, one of my very best friends.
You've been by my side since we were kids, and I couldn't
do any of this without you.

Maybe Not

Chapter One

I'm convinced that hell has an intercom system and the buzz of my alarm clock is played at full volume on repeat against the screams of all the lost souls.

Which is why I'll never murder anyone, because there's no way I can live with this sound for eternity. I can't even live with it for five seconds.

I reach over and stop the alarm, dreading another day at work. I hate that I have to keep this shitty barista job just to pay for school. At least Ridge lets my sporadic rent checks slide in exchange for my managing his band. It works for now, but *God, I hate mornings.*

I stretch my arms, bring my hands to my eyes, and begin rubbing the sleep out of them. When my fingers meet my eyes, for a split second I think maybe my worst fears have come true and I'm actually burning in hell, because *SHIT! Motherfucker! I'm going to kill him!*

"Ridge!" I scream.

Oh, God. It burns.

I stand up and attempt to open my eyes, but they're stinging too badly for them to be of any use. It's the oldest prank in the book, and I can't believe I fell for it. *Again.*

I can't find my shorts—*God, it hurts so bad*—so I stumble my way to the bathroom in order to wash the pepper juice from my eyes and hands. I find the doorknob and swing the

door open, rushing straight to the sink. I'm pretty sure I hear a girl screaming, but that very well could be *me* screaming.

I cup my hands beneath the stream of water and bring them up to my eyes, rinsing them over and over until the burn starts to subside. Once my eyes begin to feel relief, my shoulder starts to ache from the repeated blows being delivered to it.

"Get out, you pervert!"

I'm awake enough now to know that I actually did hear a girl screaming, and now that girl is hitting me. In *my* bathroom.

I grab a hand towel and press it to my eyes while I shield her punches with my elbow.

"I was peeing, you sick bastard! Get out!"

Shit, she hits hard. I still can't really see her, but I can recognize fists when they're flying at me. I grab both of her wrists to keep her from assaulting me even more.

"Stop hitting me!" I yell.

The bathroom door that leads to the living room swings open and my left eye is working enough that I can tell Brennan is standing there. "What the hell is going on?" He walks toward us and removes my hands from her wrists and then stands between us. I bring the towel back to my eyes and squeeze them shut.

"He barged in on me while I was peeing!" the girl yells. "And he's naked!"

I open one eye and glance down. I am, in fact, completely naked.

"Jesus, Warren. Put on some clothes," Brennan says.

“How was I supposed to know I’d be attacked in my own bathroom?” I say, pointing at her. “Why the hell is she using my bathroom, anyway? Your guests can use *your* bathroom.”

Brennan immediately holds up two defensive palms. “She didn’t spend the night with me.”

“Gross,” the girl mutters.

I don’t know why Ridge thought it would be a good idea to rent a four-bedroom apartment. Even though one of the bedrooms is empty, that’s still two people too many. Especially when guests spend the night and don’t know about the designated bathrooms.

“Look,” I say, pushing both of them toward the door that leads to the living room. “This is my bathroom and I’d like to use it. I don’t care where she slept or who she slept with; she can use your bathroom. This one’s mine.”

Brennan holds up a finger and turns to face me. “Actually,” he says, “this is a *shared* bathroom. With *that* bedroom.” He points to the door that leads to the other bedroom. “And that bedroom now belongs to . . .” He points to the girl. “Bridgette. Your new roommate.”

I pause.

Why did he just call her my roommate?

“What do you mean, *roommate*? No one asked me if I wanted a new roommate.”

Brennan shrugs. “You rarely pay rent, Warren. You don’t really have a say in who lives here.”

He knows I don’t pay rent because I help manage their band, but Ridge does take on the brunt of the financial expenses. He makes a good point, unfortunately.

This isn’t good. I can’t share a bathroom with a girl.

Especially a girl with that good of an arm. And especially a girl with all that bronzed skin.

I look away from her. I hate that she's hot. I hate that she's a brunette, because I really like her long, light brown hair and the way it's pulled back, all messy and shit.

Dammit!

"Well, this has been a really fun bonding moment," Bridgette says, walking toward me. She shoves my shoulders, pushing me back toward my bedroom. "Now wait your turn, Roomie."

The bathroom door closes in my face and I'm standing in my room again. Still naked. And maybe a little emasculated.

"You can leave, too," I hear her say to Brennan, right before the door to the living room slams shut. Seconds later, the water begins running in the shower.

She's in the shower.

My shower.

She's probably taking off her shirt right now, tossing it on the floor, pulling her panties down over her hips.

I'm fucked.

My apartment is my sanctuary. My man cave. The only place I can go where my life isn't ruled by women. My boss is a woman, all my professors are women, my sister and my mother are both women. Once Bridgette steps into my shower and makes it her own with all her girly shampoos and razors and shit, I'm screwed. That's *my* shower.

I walk to Ridge's bedroom and flip the light switch a couple of times to give him warning that I'm coming in, since he's deaf and can't hear me knocking or stomping toward his room like a kid about to tattletale on his little brother.

I flip the switch two more times and then swing his door open. He's lifting up onto his elbows, groggy-eyed. He sees the anger on my face and he begins to laugh, incorrectly assuming I'm here about the pepper-juice prank.

I hate that I fell for it. I'm such a deep sleeper though, and he gets me every damn time.

"That prank was stupid," I sign to him. "But I'm not here because of that. We need to talk."

He sits up in bed and reaches over to tilt his alarm clock so that he can check the time. He looks back at me, agitated. "It's six-thirty in the morning," he signs. "What the hell do you want to talk about at six-thirty in the morning?"

I point in the direction of the new roommate's bedroom. *Bridgette*.

I hate her name.

"You let a *girl* move in?" I make the sign for roommate and continue. "Why in the world would you let a *girl* move in with us?"

Ridge makes the sign for Brennan's name. "That's all him. I don't think he would have accepted no for an answer."

I laugh. "Since when are girls important to Brennan?"

"I heard that," Brennan says from behind me. "*And* saw you sign it."

I face him. "Good. So answer the question."

He glares at me and then looks at Ridge. "Go back to sleep. I'll handle the five-year-old." He motions for me to follow him into the living room, turning out Ridge's bedroom light as he exits.

I like Brennan, but the fact that we've known each other for so long makes me feel like he's my little brother some-

times. My *annoying-as-fuck* little brother. My little brother who thinks moving his women into our apartment is a good idea.

“It’s just for a few months,” Brennan says, continuing toward the kitchen. “She’s in a rough spot and needs a place to stay.”

I follow Brennan into the kitchen. “Since when did you start providing rescue homes? You don’t even let girls spend the night when you’re done with them, much less move in with you. Are you in love with her or something? Because if that’s the case, this is the stupidest decision you’ve ever made. You’ll get tired of her in a week, and then what?”

Brennan faces me and calmly holds up a finger. “I told you earlier, it’s not like that. We aren’t together and we never will be together. But she’s important to me and she’s in a tough spot and we’re going to help her, okay?” He takes a bottle of water out of the fridge and opens the cap. “It won’t be that bad. She’s in school and works full-time, so she’ll hardly ever be here. You won’t even notice.”

I groan, frustrated, and run my hands down my face. “This is great,” I mumble. “The last thing I need right now is some chick taking over my entire bathroom.”

Brennan rolls his eyes and begins walking back toward his bedroom. “It’s a *bathroom*, Warren. You’re acting like a little shit.”

“She *hit* me!” I say in defense.

Brennan turns and cocks an eyebrow. “See what I mean?” He walks into his bedroom and closes the door behind him.

The water turns off in the shower, and I hear the curtain slide open. As soon as the door to her bedroom shuts, I walk