

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

# HIS PERFECT MATCH

**Aiden Nicholas**

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## HIS PERFECT MATCH

**By Aiden Nicholas**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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## Photo Description

Two young guys are sleeping in bed. One has fallen asleep on a textbook. He has his arm wrapped around the leg of his friend who is sleeping in the opposite direction. They are both shirtless and are partially uncovered below the waist.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*It may have been too hot, too late, and too boring to study for spring finals in our small apartment, but my anxiety was in overdrive and his larger bed made for my most productive study sessions. Roommates for the past three years he understood my idiosyncrasies. Though, I am not sure how exactly this came to be when we finally passed out...*

Please give these guys a cute story!

*Thank you,*

*Ale*

## Story Info

**Genre:** new adult

**Tags:** college, friends to lovers, nerds, coming out, frottage

**Word Count:** 15,864

# **HIS PERFECT MATCH**

**By Aiden Nicholas**

## Freshman Year

Packing all the boxes into his car was like a really intense game of Tetris for Brendan, except with the added need to drive in his new creation. It wasn't exactly safe, but he made it to University without hitting anything at least. He left before his parents were even awake.

Brendan's new room had what he would call mint green walls. There were two dressers, two desks, two beds, and a small closet. Brendan was glad to see the beds weren't bunked. Being an only child made you get used to having your room the way you wanted it. Once inside he noticed the full-length mirror on the back of the door.

His dorm was on the seventh floor, and Brendan was not looking forward to moving his stuff because he didn't know how it was supposed to fit. He knew he could cut the clothes down easily. He wasn't looking forward to putting his bookshelf back together. He brought most of his books along from his room. Brendan sat on his unmade bed, and pulled his phone out of his jeans to type a quick message. After staring at it he erased what he'd written before typing almost the exact same thing and hitting send.

*I think I brought too much stuff.*

The residential office sent out their roommate assignments early to give people a chance to talk to their new roommates beforehand. Nico emailed Brendan first. They mainly talked about who was bringing what. Brendan wasn't sure what kind of roommate he would be since he'd never had to share a room with anyone before. The Google search he did on Nicolas Patera came up clean. There were some nice photos of Nico in a Speedo, but no criminal record.

Brendan chose the dresser next to the bed he picked and filled it with clothes he thought he would actually need. Coincidentally those were also the clothes in the box easiest to get to in the car. He set up his desk the way that he thought would work. Then he got to work on connecting his router. He knew it would be better than using the school's network.

Brendan decided to take up all the room on the shelf above his desk right away with his favorite books. He knew what he wanted there, although that didn't make even a dent in the amount that he brought from home. He brought his whole collection along so that his parents did not have an opportunity to



throw them away. They probably wouldn't, but he knew it was a possibility. Everything he left at home were things he could do without. When Brendan was finished setting up the shelf, his phone buzzed in his pocket. He opened the text from Nico.

*Dude. How much did you bring?*

Brendan didn't reply right away. He was going to respond "A Lot," but it wasn't really helpful. He didn't want to cause issues on their move-in day. Nico seemed okay from the info Brendan found. He didn't really dig as much as he could have when he got the email with his roommate assignment. He didn't hack into anything difficult. Nico was the type of person that said dude, which meant he might also be the type of person who said bro. That didn't bode well to Brendan, but he knew he shouldn't judge before they even met. Brendan quickly typed in a text message.

*I'll figure it out. No worries. See you in a few hours.*

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It was six hours later that Nico came into the room with his parents. After introductions, Brendan helped them bring up boxes while Nico's mom set up some of Nico's stuff. That included putting away his clothes, making both beds, and cleaning all of the furniture surfaces, walls, and the floor with Lysol and bleach because, as she said, "You don't know what could have touched them."

Brendan liked Nico's parents. They fussed over Nico the whole time they were there. It was nice seeing parents that cared that much. They also helped Brendan with some of his things from his car. They didn't ask personal questions like parents back in his neighborhood would. Nico's dad helped set up the TV, and his mom brought homemade brownies.

Nico went along with his parents sticking around as long as he did because he really hated unpacking. At least that's what he would tell you but he really was already missing them and Brendan could tell. The guy was really close to them. Nico lay down to relax in his comfy new bed. Mattress pads were a great invention.

Brendan clicked around on his computer. He was looking at his class schedule and the map of campus. He was still eating the brownies Nico's mom left. Nico had enough already. He thought about going out to some orientation activities, but he knew they didn't start until later.

Brendan glanced at Nico. He was in really great shape. Water polo and basketball did the body good apparently. This was info Brendan knew from his

Google search on Nico. Brendan stopped working out when he quit the wrestling team in his senior year, but he stayed in shape. Nico's body was really nice though. He was taller than Brendan. He was lean and muscular and had really nice legs. Brendan shook his head at himself; he really did not need to be thinking about his roommate's body.

"Are you joining one of the sports teams here? I know you played water polo and basketball." Brendan talked out of nervousness often, but he quickly realized he should not have said that.

"Wait." Nico sat up from his spot on his bed. "I never told you that." Nico's left eyebrow rose a little. Brendan was pretty sure he couldn't do that with only one.

"I kind of Googled you when we got roommate assignments," Brendan admitted, rubbing a hand through his hair nervously. He hoped Nico wouldn't freak out at him.

"What did you find? I've never actually Googled myself."

"Sports victories. They did a special on you in a local newspaper once I think. That was pretty much it." Brendan left out the rest of the background checking he tried. It didn't give him anything useful anyway.

"Boring. I need to do something more interesting. There actually isn't a real water polo team here. Thought I might join swim. I like being in the water."

"Cool. There are some nice pictures of you on Google search though. You're lucky it's nothing embarrassing." Brendan immediately hid the blush in his face using his laptop. He did not mean for that to come out of his mouth.

"Probably the same shots I have on my Facebook." Nico sighed.

Brendan didn't know what to say next and was pretty sure he was the only one feeling the awkward tension. He stuffed one of the brownies into his mouth and chewed it slowly.

"Those were not homemade by the way. My mom doesn't bake. No longer allowed after almost burning down the kitchen twice."

"At least she knows where to buy good ones," Brendan responded. He really did enjoy the brownies. Nico laughed. It was a loud laugh that should have annoyed Brendan more than it did.

"I won't tell her you know. She might keep getting them for you."

"Cool," Brendan said quickly.

Brendan did not know how he was going to bring up his sexuality when he didn't even know how to have normal conversations with Nico that didn't end up dying off awkwardly. He planned on being out on campus, but he really didn't know how to do that yet. He was halfway in and halfway out of the closet for the entirety of his senior year of high school.

"Why do you have so many books? I thought you were a Computer Science major." Nico wanted to see if he got more than one word answers from Brendan. Their texting was pretty brief. They might as well become friends if they were living together. Plus he thought it would be good before getting into really serious conversations.

"Um, I am a Computer Science major. I just like to read a lot. My grandmother got me started pretty young and my parents didn't mind me extending my library, so I kept doing it."

"Have you read all of them?"

"No. I've probably read fifty-five percent of them. One day I'll get through it all. Maybe."

"I don't know how you've read that many. I saw at least six boxes marked 'books' down there plus the ones in here. I'd be lucky if I could finish half of that."

"There were more than six boxes in the car and that's still not all. I left a few shelves in my room." He rubbed a hand through his short brown hair sheepishly.

"Wow! I do not have time for that much reading."

"I'm a fast reader. I figured I could put up two bookshelves by my desk on this wall." Brendan pointed out where he wanted to put the shelves then paused. He did not want to figure out which books to bring up. The ones on the shelf above his desk were easy to pick. They were the only books he needed.

The shelf included books by Margaret Atwood, Poe, Verne, Hughes, and a few Shakespeare plays that Brendan thought not enough people talked about. Then he added his favorite not-so-classic books. Brendan's fiction obsession was fueled in the last couple years for sure. His grandmother was the one that steered him toward classics, but it wasn't the adventure he needed all the time.

The one book he knew would end up on his shelf was *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan. Fiction stories with LGBT characters were his favorites in the last year. It helped him get through high school. He knew he couldn't have it as

easy as the main character Paul. Collin County was not as accepting as the town in Brendan's favorite book, but it gave him hope when he needed it. It's been one of his favorites since he first got his hands on it. It was one of the books his parents would not have been happy to see that he had and would have gotten all the books thrown out because of the book's possible influence on him.

"What about the other books?" Nico asked.

Brendan paused, for how long he wasn't even sure. "The rest of the books will live in my car for a while."

Brendan knew he would have to tell Nico he was gay. If he had a problem with it Brendan could still maybe switch rooms. Brendan thought about just getting all his LGBT books and putting them out and hoping Nico would figure it out on his own. He read a character that did that once, but he was pretty sure that might only work that well in fiction.

"I have to tell you something," Nico blurted. Brendan looked over to Nico and nodded for him to go ahead.

"I've been nervous about this and I don't like being nervous. It's not a normal feeling for me," Nico said.

"Just tell me. No reason to be nervous," Brendan encouraged. He was really curious to know what Nico wanted to say and why Nico looked like he was going to flee the room at any second. Brendan could see that Nico was sweating.

"I'm bisexual. I just wanted you to know because it's not something I really hide from anyone, and if I end up dating a guy, I don't want it to catch you off guard," Nico said, attempting to be calm.

Brendan's mouth dropped. He didn't have any clue that Nico wasn't straight. It was bad to assume Nico was straight, but that's what Brendan did with everyone. It was the norm so it was just what he assumed about everyone, especially where Brendan came from.

"Glad that's over with." Nico looked away from Brendan, even though Brendan had still not responded. Brendan realized he hadn't said anything yet, but when he tried to form words they didn't come out the way he wanted them to. It was all unintelligible mumbles until he said what he'd been nervous about saying moments before.

"I'm gay!" Brendan yelled.

“Seriously?” Nico asked. He didn’t think Brendan was kidding, but he was suddenly really relieved. He was more nervous about telling Brendan than he’d admit.

Brendan nodded and laughed in relief along with Nico for a while. Neither of them were sure how long they laughed for in their beds, but if anyone saw they would probably think that the two roommates were on some kind of drugs.

“I haven’t really gotten the chance to tell anyone on my own, except for people online,” Brendan admitted.

“Whoa, dude. I feel honored.” Nico laughed after hearing how he sounded saying it.

“You should. I’m so glad I don’t have to worry about it. College is already off to a good start,” Brendan said. He lay back on his bed and let out a breath. He was so glad he didn’t have to worry about Nico. He did not know if he could deal with a homophobic roommate.

“We need posters for the walls though. Anything to make looking at the walls bearable.”

“I don’t know. This shade of green has always been comforting to me,” Brendan joked.

“It’s evil. I don’t know why they didn’t just go with white,” Nico said.

“Then we’d definitely go crazy,” Brendan responded.

“That might be true,” Nico said as he also stared up at the ceiling from his bed.

“We’ll make it work. I’m not worried.” Brendan smiled.

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Neither of the roommates expected things to move so fast in the first week of classes. Most of the teachers jumped right in on the first or second day of their class. The hard part wasn’t the schoolwork so far. It was trying to figure out what other campus activities to be part of. Everyone was recruiting members, not just the student organizations. This was the time that social circles were being formed. With all the moving about, the two usually only had conversations when they were working.

“Did people really know you were bi in school?” Brendan asked Nico. It was a conversation he’d wanted to have earlier, but never got around to. Nico

was really comfortable with who he was. A few days of living with him and that was something Brendan knew for sure.

“Yeah, people knew. Wasn’t that big a deal. I knew I liked girls. I started dating back in middle school. Then freshman year I kissed a guy and found out I like guys too,” Nico said nonchalantly. He slowly sat up in the bed and took off his jacket to throw it at his shoe pile.

“It took one kiss?” Brendan asked.

“There was more than one. Plus some other stuff. Why do you ask?”

“I didn’t have a great coming out experience. I might not have even told you if you hadn’t said you were bi first. I kept trying to convince myself to tell you, but then would give myself reasons not to,” Brendan said.

“I’m glad I told you then,” Nico said. Nico could see how tense Brendan was getting, but didn’t know why.

“How was it with your parents?” Brendan asked.

“My parents were fine. I told my mom and she helped me tell my dad. Neither made it a big deal after they both knew. I went to a dance with a guy sophomore year. Mom still took tons of photos like you see parents on TV doing. School didn’t change much either. My friends and teammates were great. I did get biphobic comments occasionally. People thought I was lying about being bi and said bisexuality wasn’t real,” Nico responded.

“Didn’t that bother you? You could have just dated girls and had no problems,” Brendan whispered across the room.

“Comments like that,” Nico said harshly. He continued before Brendan could apologize. “I won’t hide who I am just because some people are too small minded to understand it. I only invite people into my life who accept me.” Nico stated. Brendan thought it sounded like a line he’d read in one of his books.

“I really wish there was someone like you in my high school. All I had were my books after everything kind of blew up in my face.” Brendan lay back on his bed. He didn’t like talking about what happened and he felt like he was about to tell the whole story.

Nico walked over to his bed and lay down next to him. He waited for Brendan to face him. “How bad was it when you came out?”

“I grew up in Collin County, in one of the most conservative parts of Texas. I’m lucky my parents didn’t try to send me to conversion therapy. A neighbor suggested it to them after I was outed,” Brendan said.

“You were outed... That sucks.”

“It does. Even more when someone I thought I could trust did it. I had a boyfriend and I talked to my friend about it. He seemed uneasy about it, but I didn’t think he would tell anyone. It spread before I could do anything to quell the rumors.”

“I’m sorry. It’s already been pretty nice here. I’m not really shy about my sexuality and people have been cool so it won’t be the same here,” Nico said.

“I don’t know how you do it. You balance school, social life, and everything else like it’s nothing.”

“It’s a skill.” Nico smirked.

“Wish I could learn it,” Brendan said solemnly. Nico was his only friend so far. He met other people, but he wasn’t great at moving anything toward a friendship.

“I broke up with my girlfriend of six months when I came here. I knew I couldn’t handle the distance in a relationship so we ended it. I can’t balance everything. I just try to make it look easy,” Nico said. Nico still felt bad about the breakup and Brendan could tell from the way he spoke about it. It was a more serious tone from Nico.

“I got into reading more after things kind of blew up on me. My friends left me. I didn’t want to deal with the issues there would be from the wrestling team so I quit.”

“That’s why you have so many books,” Nico exclaimed.

“I have read a lot since I was little, but I went kind of overboard last year on the book buying. I read some coming out stories that were good and some that were bad. Some stories of gay people just living happily. Even the ones with tough situations helped.” Brendan liked being able to do this. Just talk about what happened with someone that kind of understood. It almost got really bad back home and he felt like Nico wanted to understand him.

“I’m glad you found something that helped. I’m really surprised you aren’t an English major with how much you read,” Nico said.

“I like to read and write, but I’m also really great at computers when I want to be. I’m a really good hacker,” Brendan bragged.

“I guess that happens when your parents work for Yahoo,” Nico said nonchalantly.

Brendan just looked on confused since he definitely did not mention where his parents worked. He avoided mentioning them at all. He was pretty sure he hadn't mentioned them much in his few conversations with Brendan.

"You are not the only person who can Google someone. Although Brendan Davis is way more common than my name," Nico said smiling.

"I think I'm going to keep you." Brendan laughed. They lay down with their shoulders touching.

"Good because you are coming with me to the Pride meeting tonight. Don't try to get out of it. This will be fun and probably good for both of us," Nico said.

"I know. I'm not good at this. I still haven't told anyone except for a girl that was hitting on me. That was because I didn't know how else to get her to stop." Brendan sighed. He just realized he had only come out to people of his own volition when extremely nervous. Pride is like a Gay-Straight Alliance, except covering a lot more sexual orientations and gender identities. Brendan had not even read about some of them yet. He felt like just walking into the meeting was coming out to a huge group of people.

"You don't come out once. It's over and over again to everyone you meet. Sometimes it will be easy and other times it will be really hard. It feels good though," Nico said.

"I don't think you're real. You are like a fountain of wonderful advice one moment and the next you'll be getting me to watch people do dumb things on Vine."

"Dude, those are not mutually exclusive things. Laughter is the best medicine." Nico smiled.

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"What's wrong? I thought you had fun," Nico said, looking over at Brendan. Brendan was pacing frantically back and forth while holding his phone and flopped down on his bed finally when Nico addressed him.

"I had a lot of fun. It was amazing, actually." Brendan said.

Nico was heading out to go to a party so he planned on leaving it at that since Brendan looked slightly more okay after saying that. Nico was just at the door when Brendan's voice stopped him.

"James is asking me out!" Brendan shrieked.



“Uhm. That was fast. You guys just met at the meeting tonight.”

“We talked during the ice breaker and then he came up to talk to me after it. We exchanged numbers and he just asked me out through text.” Brendan was holding the phone like it might fly away if he loosened his grip.

“Okay. You seem upset by this. If you don’t want to go then just say no,” Nico responded.

“I don’t know how to be in a relationship again. After my last one, it’s... difficult,” Brendan said.

“Okay. Tell me more about it. If you want to I mean. I want to help,” Nico said.

“You had plans. You even put your shoes back on already. You hate shoes. You even took them off at the meeting,” Brendan said with his voice still much higher than normal. He was really freaking out over it.

“I’d rather talk to you. Stop trying to avoid it. I can hang out with them later. They won’t even remember I wasn’t there once they start drinking.” Nico kicked off his shoes before sitting down next to Brendan on his bed.

“When my friend told someone at the church about me it spread through town like wildfire. It got worse from there. The boyfriend I had at the time was a secret relationship. With my forced outing, he broke it off. He couldn’t be seen with me. Then I had to deal with my parents finding out. It was a lot to handle at once,” Brendan said.

“That really sucks. You can have something better this time. If you think you should wait though, there will be more opportunities to date. You are a really smart guy and aren’t that bad looking.” Nico snickered.

“I’m going to try. I just don’t want to mess it up. I mess everything up.”

“When have you messed anything up?”

“Besides the situation with my first boyfriend, I should have told my parents before it got to them. It would have lessened the blow a little. I could have even just left some hints so they weren’t blindsided.”

“It wasn’t your fault at all. No one should have outed you and people in your town should have kept their mouths shut when they found out. You cannot blame yourself for losing your first boyfriend; it’s not your fault he wasn’t willing to be out with you.”

“I’ll stop blaming myself,” Brendan said. He knew it was something he needed to stop doing, but putting the blame on himself was easier. He couldn’t be mad at everyone else.

“If you want to go out with him then go for it,” Nico said.

“I guess I should text him back then. You’re a great friend Nico,” Brendan said as he pulled out his phone.

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“I’m staying here for break. It’s fine. I’ll survive,” Brendan said.

“You shouldn’t spend the holidays by yourself,” Nico said.

“It would be much worse at home, believe me. Thanksgiving was horrible. I’m the black sheep in our family now and I can’t deal with my cousin’s rude questions and overbearing aunts and uncles on top of my parents again. I already cleared staying with the university,” Brendan said tiredly.

“What about James? I thought you were going to ask him. What happened?” Nico asked.

“I did. We’ve only been together a couple months. It’s too soon to meet his parents,” Brendan said.

Nico could tell that Brendan was repeating what James said. Brendan had really fallen for him fast and seemed sad they couldn’t be together for the holiday. Nico and James both had a group call at one point. He thought James was probably right about it being a little soon to bring Brendan home to meet his family.

“My parents will be here in three hours. Pack your bag. You are coming home with me for the holidays.”

“I can’t spring that on your parents.”

“My parents think you are a good influence on me. If I tell my mom you plan on staying here alone then she would offer our guest room herself. I’m calling her now. Pack your bag.” Nico said it with his you-aren’t-changing-my-mind tone.

Brendan could be stubborn too, but actually, he really did not want to be alone for three weeks. Even if it would give him more reading time. Brendan grabbed his luggage and started to pack like Nico told him. When he looked over at Nico after the phone call to his mother he saw a huge smile on Nico’s face.

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Brendan learned a lot in his weeks at the Patera residence. Nico's family was so different from his. His mother always pretended that she knew how to cook, but everything she "made" was actually store bought. Most of the family still pretended she made it herself, which was really nice because everyone knew.

"We love the kid, but he doesn't always plan things well. You knew what you wanted to do going into university," Nico's father said to Brendan the night before Christmas. A lot of the family seemed to want Nico to hurry up and figure out what he wanted to major in. It wasn't like he wasn't trying different things; he just didn't know what his thing was yet. Computers were kind of forced upon Brendan because of who his parents were. The hacking was more of a *him* thing though.

Comments like those would have bothered Brendan if he was in the same situation, but nothing usually fazed Nico, so when something did it really surprised Brendan. The first day they arrived they found out that they'd actually be sharing Nico's bed while they were there. Nico's cousin, Eliza, was already occupying the guest room.

"Already bringing home a boyfriend. It's only been four months since you broke up with Kim and started school. You really do move fast," Eliza said when she first arrived for the holidays. There was a really frustrated look on Nico's face, and his body language was different than Brendan had ever seen. It was like he couldn't decide whether to defend or go on the offensive. Nico had mentioned his breakup with Kim a couple times. It was definitely a sore spot for him still.

"This is my roommate. He was going to be alone for the holidays so I invited him along." Nico sounded a lot calmer than his body language was projecting. Eliza backed down then.

She kept hinting that Nico and Brendan were more than roommates. Usually when only they were in the room. Brendan never got to respond before Nico would yell that they were just roommates and say whatever else he needed to say to get her to leave. Brendan thought the two acted more like siblings than cousins. They'd argue and then be friendly the next minute like nothing happened. They'd get along really well until one did something to annoy the other.

It made Brendan wish he had someone growing up. His father didn't have any siblings. His mother's family was distant or maybe it was just his mother

being distant from them. Either way when they did meet up for holidays it was awkward. At least from what Brendan could remember. Christmas dinner at Nico's house was huge. Family from all over Illinois came. Brendan met many other cousins, aunts, and uncles who Nico made sure knew right away that Brendan was his roommate upon introduction.

Brendan loved playing with Nico's little cousins. Nico's Aunt Helen asked him if he had met a nice girl or guy while at school and no one batted an eyelash. Nico didn't like getting all the questions about school, but Brendan was so blown away by how much sexuality wasn't an issue to this family. He finally said something to Nico about it the night after Christmas.

"I can't believe your family is like this." They were lying in Nico's bed trying to get some rest. Most night's they'd play video games or watch movies until one of them fell asleep, but the holidays were tiring at Nico's house.

"I know they are great. I take it for granted sometimes, but I do realize how lucky I've been. Mom wants you to come back next year so you're always welcome." Nico sounded hopeful. Brendan dozed off shortly after.

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"I was right. You do have feelings for him. I could tell right away. You are so readable."

"I am not. You wouldn't know if you didn't hear me talking to myself earlier."

"Not my fault you had a panic about being in love with your roommate in the middle of the night and decided to talk to yourself outside my door." Eliza had a smug look that perfectly mirrored one of Nico's signature looks.

"I'm not fully over the Kim breakup and he's been there. He's so smart and focused. He's overcome so much with his family. I don't know how he can't see how amazing he is. I tried to distance myself at first, but he's become my best friend," Nico said.

"He really has no clue does he?" Eliza sat down on the stair and beckoned for Nico to sit too. He was vulnerable and Eliza actually let down her guard in that moment too.

Brendan stood near the door of Nico's room listening. He woke up when Nico got out of bed, but Nico didn't notice. He wondered when Nico started feeling that way, because if he had said something before James it might have been different. He knew it would have. They hit it off really well right away,

but James had been fantastic. Brendan was falling in love with James. He knew it was fast, but it was how he felt. He just didn't want to be hurting Nico either.

"Not that it matters, but I approve of him. He's too good for you actually," Eliza said.

"Wow. Thanks Liz," Nico said. It was the first time Brendan heard him use the nickname for his cousin.

"Why haven't you said anything?" Eliza asked. It was a question Brendan wanted answered too, among several others.

"I'm his closest friend and I don't want to ruin it. Losing him would hurt a lot. I can handle just being his friend, it's just a little hard right now. He fits in so well with everyone here. Every time I think he'll stop being amazing he just gets better," Nico said. Brendan was definitely blushing.

"I figured it was just the boyfriend. When he talks about that guy it's worse than when I had that crush on Matthew Springs back in freshman year of high school. I hate myself for getting like that over a guy," Eliza said with such disgust in her voice that Brendan was slightly offended.

James was great. He made Brendan forget about the heartbreak he felt back in high school. He treated Brendan like he was special. He had the right to sound a little like a lovesick teenager when talking about someone he cared that much about.

"I was fine until we had to share the bed, thanks to you staying here. We are spending more time together than in school because there isn't any homework, meetings, or practices and it's really nice."

"It's not my fault mom had to travel for work. You know she'd rather I'd be with the whole family on Christmas. You'll be able to get over this though. Trust me."

"I know. I'm not really blaming you. I'll be fine. I think it was just hitting me how stupid I was not to notice how great he was sooner. I just need to go date someone soon," Nico said.

"He's your roommate. It would have been a bad idea for you two to start dating anyway. If it didn't work think of how awkward it would be then."

It was the last thing Brendan heard before he quickly returned to the bed. Eliza was right. It could have ended really bad. He didn't know if he should say anything for the first few minutes he lay in the bed, but decided that he

wouldn't. If Nico needed to talk about it he would. Brendan wasn't going to make him feel any different than before he knew.

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"We should live together." Nico yawned. He had just woken up from a nap.

"Hate to disappoint you, but we kind of already do," Brendan responded from his bed. It was March now and his bed had become his official workspace for all future midterms and finals studying. His tidy desk was for gaming.

"Next year. I wanted my best friend to dorm with me again, unless you wanted to room with James," Nico said.

"I kind of just assumed we were going to dorm together again," Brendan responded. He saw Nico's smile widen more than he thought possible.

"That's good because I already know what dorm we should go to," Nico said.

"If the room is bigger I'll be happy," Brendan said. They made the room work, but it would be nice if there was more space, mostly for his books.

"The upperclassman dorms are a lot better than the freshman ones. It can't get worse."

Brendan thought that sounded like when people said what's the worst that could happen right before something bad happened, but he thought acknowledging that out loud might make it true.

"There is no way James's parents would let him move in with me by the way. They know about me though. James was surprised they were so cool about it. He said they weren't the worst when he came out, but I'm the first boyfriend he's mentioned to them. He didn't know how they'd react," Brendan said.

"Your parents would probably flip," said Nico. Nico still hadn't met them and probably wouldn't. Every story Brendan told about them made him really happy to have the family that he did, even with their many flaws that he'd have no problem pointing out to you.

"They would probably just ignore it or try to pretend I said nothing and send me away. They don't even care that I haven't been home since school started."

"At least they are still paying for you to go here."

"As long as I'm in computer science they won't stop. I'm thinking of picking up an English minor though. I could do that without them caring.

Already talked to the head of the English department about it.” Brendan sounded excited.

“I’m glad you are doing it,” Nico said. He didn’t sound as excited as Brendan though.

“What’s wrong?”

“I think I’m going to major in Anthropology,” Nico murmured.

“That’s great, isn’t it? Talk to me.”

“I liked the class I took in it Fall semester. The professor was great and the things I learned have kind of stuck in my head. I still don’t know what I plan to do after school though,” Nico said.

“You’ll have plenty of options. You go to a job interview and you’ll talk about all the skills you gained from taking classes in something that you loved. Plus your parents will be so happy you picked something they won’t care about your after school plan right away,” Brendan concluded.

“Was it that obvious I was worried about what my parents would say when I told them?” Nico asked.

“Most people want to make their parents happy and I think I know you pretty well now,” Brendan said.

Nico nodded. He didn’t want to disappoint them. Being one of the first of his cousins to go to college was kind of a big deal to them. He’d have something to say when family members asked him his plan now at least.

“I know I told you this a few months ago, but thank you for letting me go home with you over the holidays. I never had anything like that, even before I came out. My parents have always been kind of cold. I thought it was normal until high school.”

Brendan had thanked him a lot since they came back to school. “They like you more than me now,” Nico whined.

“Not totally true.” Brendan laughed. He did like the attention he got with them. Plus he loved the desserts Nico’s mom kept sending him, even if they had the potential to make him fat.

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## Sophomore Year

Brendan was getting ready and stressing way too much considering he and James had been dating for over a year now. He was really thankful Nico dragged him to that meeting freshman year because the chance he would have met James otherwise was low. The door opened, almost knocking Brendan over. He didn't flinch much after dodging it. He just stared back at the mirror still not sure which tie to wear.

"Sorry, I always forget to open that slower," Nico said. He dropped down onto his bed, took off his shoes, and flung them to the corner of the room that had his other shoes in a pile. Brendan didn't really respond. He had his one-year anniversary date with James and he was trying to not freak out.

"Why do you hate shoes?" Brendan asked. He didn't know why he never asked that freshman year. Nico only wore shoes when he really needed to and Brendan wasn't sure if anyone ever asked him why. Some other people started doing it though.

"I just don't like them much. My feet should be free. I wear sandals now because they are a bit better and most places on campus require at least that. I don't really like most clothes."

"I noticed that too," Brendan said.

"You act like I'm always naked. Go with the blue tie by the way." Nico thought it made Brendan's blue eyes pop more than the other one.

"Thanks," Brendan said. Brendan plopped down on his bed and put the blue tie on over his black dress shirt.

"I can name all the underwear in your drawer and describe them. That includes underwear that I don't understand how anyone has the confidence to wear."

"I look good in them. No one I've been with has complained," Nico said.

"Half of campus has seen you in your disco thong!" Brendan exclaimed.

"Not true. It's like, forty percent, tops." Nico feigned offense.

"You make opportunities to take your clothes off at parties. Sometimes you're sober when this happens. Most of the time you're the only one without clothes!" Brendan accused.



“Still an exaggeration. The compliments are nice. Especially the ones that are just people complimenting me with the way they look at me. Next time I start a strip poker game at a party you should join.” Nico grabbed his laptop and opened up his Amazon.

“I knew that was just an excuse for you to show off your underwear. There are probably pictures of you that could be used as blackmail,” Brendan said as he pulled out his dress shoes from under the bed.

“It’s only blackmail if you care about people seeing it. I’m not blackmailable,” Nico responded. Brendan nodded at that even though he was pretty sure blackmailable wasn’t a word.

“You know, you could pull off something a little bit sexier too.” Nico stared at his screen and then back at Brendan. “Early birthday gift maybe.”

“Stop whatever it is you are doing on your laptop. I’m fine with my current underwear,” Brendan said.

“Come on. James would love it, trust me. I know just the thing to get you,” Nico said as he turned the laptop around.

“I’m not looking. My boxers are fine,” Brendan insisted.

“Nope. You need an upgrade. Not too dramatic. No thong or G-string unless you’d go for something like that.” Nico laughed at the disgusted expression on Brendan’s face.

“I guess the boxers do leave more to the imagination, but I’m pretty sure once he gets to the boxers they don’t stay on long, if you’re doing it right.”

Brendan shook his head at Nico. “Why are we friends?”

“You’re stuck with me. I’m your roommate.” Nico laughed maniacally.

“I know the master plan now. Got to go though, I’ve got a date with James.”

“I know. You put like seven sticky-notes about it up,” Nico said, looking at the wall that had become Brendan’s notice wall a week or two after they moved into the larger room.

“I’m sorry. I get nervous and think I’m going to miss things and sticky-notes happen,” Brendan said, looking around the room. The sticky-notes were mostly contained to his desk and bookshelf at first. Now the mirror and wall above his bed also had some notes on it. He wondered if he should take them down.

“It’s fine. I got used to it freshman year. I kind of like it actually. The room’s more colorful. Plus you deal with my shoe hatred and waking you up when I wake up for class. What’s planned for date night?”

“James and I are going to the play being put on by the theatre department.”

“The main stage shows are so good. I might go see it later this week.”

“You should. If it’s good, I’ll let you know.”

“Cool. So I can be naked in here since you’ll be gone.”

“Oh my god! I’ll make sure to knock before I come back in then.”

“You don’t have to. Nothing you haven’t seen.” Nico smirked.

Brendan’s face flushed. He heard Nico start to laugh as he shuffled out of the room.

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Nico had been puking for the past two hours with Brendan trying to give him water whenever he wasn’t puking. Brendan was also praying that he wouldn’t have to take his very drunk and handsy roommate to the hospital on a school night.

Brendan had been working on an assignment from his Programming Languages class that night and was about to finally head to bed before he heard the banging on his door. Brendan quickly got up and ran over to the door.

“Here’s your roommate,” said a blonde girl in a slim black dress. She pushed Nico inside. He stumbled toward his bed. Brendan turned back to the girl who he was sure he’d never seen Nico with before then.

“Wait! How much did he drink?” Brendan whispered. The RA probably wasn’t up, but he was being cautious.

“Too much, and he’s not my problem anymore.” The girl strutted off with her heels clacking down the hall on her way to the stairs.

Brendan closed the door to see his roommate trying and failing to take off his shoes. He got one off and threw it at the door, almost hitting Brendan in the process. Then Brendan went over to help him take off the other one.

“Shoes suck!” Nico shrieked out in a drunken almost-yell. Brendan put his hand over Nico’s mouth. Brendan did not want Nico to get caught like this. He did not need an alcohol violation, especially since he wasn’t even twenty-one

yet. Nico's mother would freak out if that happened. The least he could do for her hospitality whenever Brendan came to visit was keep her son alive and off probation.

Nico made the face that Brendan knew meant he'd be hurling and Brendan had never grabbed the trash can faster in his life. He was glad Nico waited until after Brendan moved his hand before he went for it.

Brendan didn't want to leave Nico like that, but he went to get water for when Nico finished. Nico spilled the first cup all over himself. He maybe got a quarter of the water into his mouth. Brendan came in with a second cup. Nico had his shirt off now. Brendan sat down on the bed.

"I'm going to help you drink this, okay?"

"I don't need water," Nico said defiantly.

"You're drunk. You are drinking the water. Be more quiet too. Please." Brendan pulled the cup up to Nico's lips. Nico crossed his arms like an upset kid, but let Brendan give him the water.

"Where did Dianne go?"

Brendan assumed Dianne must have been the girl with the loud shoes that delivered his roommate to him. "She probably went home."

"Dianne. Nice. She took care of me even after my pickup lines. I don't feel well," Nico said. He looked like he would puke again so Brendan quickly handed him the trash can.

Nico proceeded to hug it to his chest. Brendan waited to see if he was going to puke or not. When Nico didn't, Brendan tried to give Nico more water. He drank it again, but immediately started puking right after. He barely missed Brendan's hand that time.

"It's coming out. That's the good thing," Brendan said, patting Nico on his back as he continued puking into the garbage can. Nico had gotten drunk like this before and was usually fine after puking it out. He'd have a killer hangover in the morning though.

For Nico, getting it all out took much longer. It was off and on for over two hours. Brendan had to make sure Nico stayed up until he was really ready to sleep it off. He didn't want his best friend to die of alcohol poisoning. He kept drinking water in the not puking periods even though Brendan wasn't even sure it mattered now.

The biggest issue was the smell. Brendan sprayed some Febreze, but it was only a temporary fix. Their room was slightly larger than the one they had freshman year, but no matter where he sat he knew he'd still smell it.

Nico practically yelled, "I'm sleepy." He immediately realized his mistake and put both hands over his mouth. Brendan would have laughed if he wasn't worried they had already woken up someone on their floor.

"You don't have to take care of me. Go to bed. You have class," Nico said.

It was maybe the fifth time he had told Brendan to stop taking care of him, but Brendan wasn't going to listen. He also kept saying he was sorry for getting so drunk. Brendan knew Nico would do the same for him though.

Brendan's body betrayed him when he yawned loudly. He needed to keep them both awake until he was sure Nico was done puking. Brendan sat there hoping that he wouldn't pass out in one of his classes the next day. If he even went to class.

Brendan let Nico ramble about the party he went to and meeting Dianne. During that time he had more water and didn't puke once. Brendan thought that was a good thing, but wanted to wait a bit longer, even if the sun would be coming up soon.

Brendan snapped his fingers in front of Nico to try to keep him from falling asleep.

"I'm so sleepy now. Nothing left to puke. I promise," Nico said. He sounded less drunk than he had an hour ago. He also stopped touching Brendan as much, which Brendan was very glad about. Brendan eventually nodded drowsily.

"I need you to lie down on your side though. I'm going to go rinse the trash can because the smell is going to make me puke next," Brendan said as he exited the room with the trash can.

When he got back Nico was only wearing his black mesh underwear. He might as well have been wearing nothing with the eyeful that Brendan was getting. He moved his eyes away quickly, but he was tired and the image was already there.

Brendan was glad Nico wasn't wearing a thong, or any of the other things that weren't really underwear that Nico owned. The fact that Nico decided to wear any at all was a good thing. Nico once said that his underwear reflected how much he wanted to get laid. Nico's "disco thong" and the jockstrap slash

G-string thing that Brendan reluctantly ordered Nico for his birthday also fell into the showoff category. Silk underwear and no underwear meant he wanted to get laid, which happened for him a lot. He did own regular boxer briefs though, and Brendan thought it was because they were actually the most comfortable.

Brendan wished that confidence rubbed off on him a little. Brendan was still struggling just being out in public with James. James was great at making him break out of his shell though. They could hold hands here and it was great. People didn't really care, or if they did they didn't say anything. He still took small steps with James.

Nico didn't think it mattered if he was with a girl or guy. He'd make out in public, grind with them at parties, or whatever. Nico just didn't care. Everyone else were the odd ones to him. He was being himself; his extremely confident self. It worked well on him.

"The garbage can is right on the side of your bed. Lie on your side until you fall asleep." Brendan really did not need to look at his roommate right now.

"I want to cuddle." Nico was drunkenly yelling again.

"Just go to bed," Brendan responded. He was not getting in bed with his drunken roommate. His barely clothed and drunken roommate on top of that. That would not go well. Brendan prepared to move back over to his bed to get some sleep.

"I won't lie on my side if no one is spooning me," Nico said as he rolled onto his back. Brendan sighed. Nico would probably be okay sleeping like that, but he wasn't sure.

"Fine. You try anything and I'm pushing you off your own bed."

Brendan got in the bed once Nico turned back to his side. He hesitated before he moved his body against Nico's. Brendan couldn't see the smile on Nico's face when Brendan wrapped his arms around Nico. Brendan was going to try to just sleep a little and hopefully wake up before Nico so he could go to his bed and hope that Nico wouldn't remember this part when they woke up.

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"I was just home in the summer. How did they change my room that fast?"

"You were with my family for Thanksgiving this semester so they really had plenty of time to do it. Didn't you expect them to change your room last year?"

“Yeah, but since they didn’t freshman year I thought it would be fine.”

“At least they boxed up all your stuff, right?” Nico asked. He was really happy his parents would never turn his room into a yoga room, mainly because he could not imagine his mother doing yoga.

“It just kind of means they really don’t want me there. Like she wasn’t even going to mention the room change at first when she called.”

“I’m sure that’s not true. What did she call about?”

“They wanted to know if I needed help getting an internship. They said they could set me up with one. Then she asked if I’d be staying in town to get ahead on work for the holidays again.”

“I thought they knew where you were when you came with me,” Nico said.

“They do. I think they think I’m really staying with my boyfriend so they just ignore it. I think they hope ignoring my sexuality will make it go away. Now they are ignoring me all together apparently.” Brendan frowned.

“Not totally. They offered to help you get an internship. They want you to be successful. Your parents are just difficult. One day they’ll come around probably.”

“I wish my family was like yours or James’s. James’s family took a while, but they accept him now. Your family was awesome right away when you told them.”

“There’s the family you are born with and then there’s me and James. You can pick who you consider family in life. I know I pick you,” Nico said.

“Thanks. You were going to tell me about your date before I unloaded on you like that.”

“Not much to tell. Dianne and her kind of boyfriend are great to hang out with.”

“So I’m guessing the guy she tried to hook you up with wasn’t great to hang out with since you are avoiding it.”

“He was hot, but he could not keep a conversation going. Best part of that double date was watching Dianne almost bowl a perfect game.”

“Note to self; don’t bowl against Dianne,” Brendan said as he wrote it down on a blue sticky-note from his desk.

“Don’t play anything against Dianne. She would hustle you out of all your money in a sport she’s never heard of before.” Nico laughed.

“Sorry the date didn’t go well though,” Brendan said.

“I might just need to be single for a while. I’ve not had any luck keeping relationships the past year.”

“Yet you probably have had more sex than me.”

“Not my fault you and James act like a married couple.”

“We do not. You are too awesome to be single for long though,” Brendan said.

“Thanks, man.” Nico smiled.

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“Why are you acting all serious all of a sudden?” Brendan asked. Nico had a serious expression on his face, which never looked right on him. He even sent Brendan a text saying they needed to talk earlier in the day.

“Remember last year when I was worried you and James might want to dorm together? Well you’ve been together longer now. What are you planning for next year?”

“I don’t know. I still don’t think James will want to move in together at all. He likes having his own space too much. Why do you ask?”

“I want to move off campus.”

“Wait! You want to get an apartment?”

“I don’t want to move into another dorm, even if we stay in the same hall next year. My parents think it’s a good idea too.”

“That would be good. I feel like I won’t be the best housemate though.”

“You are the best roommate ever. How would you not be a good housemate?”

“I can’t cook and I suck at cleaning since I never really had to do it. We had a cleaning service come to our house twice a month,” Brendan said.

“Your side of the room is way cleaner than mine ever is.”

“That’s true. It doesn’t mean I know how to actually keep an apartment clean.”

“You’ll be fine. As for food I actually know how to cook. I needed to learn so that I could stop mom from poisoning us all if she decided she wanted to try to cook one day.”

“You can’t cook for us all the time.”

“I won’t have to. You can still have a meal plan with the school while off campus. We’ll just eat at the student center like we do now. The place I want to live is a ten minute walk from campus.”

“That doesn’t actually sound bad.” Brendan took out his phone.

“What are you doing?” Nico asked.

“Talking to my parents about it. Figured I should get that over with,” Brendan said.

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Brendan got off the phone and was just relieved to be done with the conversation. He wasn’t even sure what just happened. His mom put him on speaker then his parents were talking over each other and him.

Nico looked on only hearing Brendan’s part of the conversation. He was confused by what he heard, but knew Brendan needed a moment to collect himself after talking to them. Nico waited for Brendan to come back to him. Brendan looked like he was in a different place completely in his head. He got like that sometimes and Nico was the only one that knew that you shouldn’t try to snap him out of it. Brendan just needed to think when it happened and he usually came out of them fine.

Nico didn’t want to stare the whole time so he pulled up the info on the apartment that he wanted. It wasn’t the biggest apartment, but there were two bedrooms. There was a nice sized area where they would probably put the TV and couch. The kitchen was good enough. He didn’t think the two of them would have an issue sharing a bathroom. Brendan could use all of his walls for his sticky-notes if he needed to since he had his own room. It would be perfect.

“They said they’d pay for it.”

“They’ll give you the money for the apartment. That’s good.”

“No. I mentioned it and then Mom put Dad on and then they said they’d give me money for it. Dad said it would be good for me to not live in the dorm and get more life experience. They planned on giving me the money room and



board would have been plus Dad wanted to give me more because of living expenses or something. I said that I didn't need more. Then they said they'd just pay for my rent and your rent."

"I can't let them do that."

"I tried to tell Dad that. So did Mom actually. Dad said he's already written the check to send to me though. So the money is coming." Brendan breathed in relief. It wasn't because of the money, he was just happy he survived that phone call at all. One at a time his parents were fine, but together it only mattered who could talk over the other the loudest.

"We could just let them pay for it. I just won't tell my mom and dad because they would probably freak out if they knew."

"I am okay with that," Brendan said.

"Are you okay?" Nico asked. Brendan still had a far off look about him.

"I don't know. In two years I'm out of here and I can't go back. They are going to try to set me up with a job probably near them and I can't handle that." Brendan looked a little frantic to Nico.

"You don't have to listen to them then. You can go your own way after college. You should," Nico said.

"I will, but it won't be easy." Brendan took a deep breath in and out. He moved his legs out on his bed so that he was in a more comfortable position.

"I'm going to miss our bed talks when we have different rooms," Brendan said. Nico laughed.

"Our rooms will be across from each other. You just have to come freak out on my bed so it's easier. I'm too lazy to come to you."

"I cannot believe the two of us got matched together by residential life."

"I know. Dianne hated her freshman year roommate," Nico said.

"That's because they slept with the same guy," Brendan responded. He heard the whole story in detail one of the nights Dianne crashed at their place because she was too drunk to walk home and Nico was too drunk to take her.

"That so could have happened with us. James is hot. The whole 'I want to find a guy that's tall, dark, and handsome' thing, but in real life. That's your boyfriend. Plus he's smart too. Plus..."

“I know, I know. Still, Dianne doesn’t even like her current roommate. Plus I know tons of other people who had big roommate issues first year. You and I just kind of talked about things and didn’t start hating each other. It’s nice. I don’t even think a guy could have gotten in the way of it,” Brendan said.

“True. I remember what happened to James freshman year. I would not have been able to handle someone like that.”

“Yeah, I don’t know how James dealt with it. That guy has to be the most homophobic person on campus.” Brendan shook his head remembering back to James first roommate.

“He had you. I mean it seems like you helped a lot. Plus he only had to deal with him for one semester before they got rooms switched.”

“They probably only put us together because we both did a sport or something, but it’s worked out well,” Brendan said.

“It probably was something like that, or maybe it was actually random.” Nico laughed again.

Brendan’s smile stopped abruptly. “I should probably tell James what happened and our plans for next year.”

“Oh yeah. He might want to know you’re living off campus next year. He’ll probably be at our apartment more than his place.” Nico attempted to speak nonchalantly.

“Probably not. James likes his space like I said. It’ll be nice having him over sometimes though,” Brendan responded while he waited for James to pick up.

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## Junior Year

Nico walked into the room to see Brendan still in his bed with the covers over him. He'd been like that since he came home two nights before and at first he left him alone. He didn't know how he could help if Brendan wouldn't even tell him what was wrong. Today, thanks to Facebook, he figured out exactly why Brendan wasn't leaving his room.

"Brendan." Nico shook the figure he hoped was his roommate in the bed.

"Go away."

"You are getting up and going to shower. Then we are getting you some food. I can order calzones and ice cream. Let's watch a movie or something." Nico hoped this would appeal to Brendan.

"I don't want to," Brendan mumbled.

"We can get Thai food too. I know you liked that the one time we went there," Nico pleaded. He hoped throwing food at Brendan would get him out of bed.

Nico heard what sounded like some kind of whine from Brendan. Nico didn't know what it meant. Brendan's stomach grumbled loud enough for Nico to hear through the layers of sheets right after that.

"Seems like your stomach likes my idea," Nico said. Brendan still didn't respond. He wouldn't leave the apartment since whatever happened with James ended their relationship.

"You'll get through this. Just come with me," Nico begged. He wasn't sure if what he said helped or if it was the way he said it, but Brendan mumbled something unintelligible again. A moment after he let go of the clutch he had on the cover above his head. Nico slowly pulled the cover away revealing his roommate. His sweat soaked through the covers and a musky smell hit him right away. Nico tried not to make a face at the smell as he pulled Brendan from the bed and handed him a towel.

"You definitely need a shower. Go clean up." Nico pushed Brendan out of his room. Brendan grabbed a pair of his pajamas on the way out.

Nico grabbed the sheets from Brendan's bed and put them next to Brendan's hamper. He sprayed the knock off Febreze Brendan picked up from the dollar store on most things in the room before exiting.

He was happy to hear the water going in the bathroom when he came out. A shower was step one to getting his roommate back into society. Nico was really upset with James for hurting Brendan like this, but at the same time he was kind of relieved they were over and that made him feel terrible.

Nico smiled at Brendan when he came out of the shower. Brendan already looked better with a change of clothes and just being clean.

“Thanks for getting me cleaned up.” Brendan sounded so broken that Nico didn’t know what to do.

“I really hate seeing you like this. Talk to me,” Nico said.

“I feel like it’s what happened in high school again. It’s different, but the feeling is like when I realized that I was alone then. That I’d lost friends and that Sam didn’t want to be my boyfriend anymore.”

“You didn’t wallow then. You got yourself out of it. This time you aren’t alone. I’m not going anywhere,” Nico said. He guided Brendan to their sofa so they could sit down.

“He didn’t even explain why. I knew with Sam. James just said that he couldn’t be with me anymore.” Brendan put his head into one of the throw pillows.

“I’m sorry,” Nico responded because he didn’t know what else to say. He wished he had something helpful to say, but his longest relationship was way less than a year. Nico knew he never had anything like what Brendan had with James.

“I was in love with him,” Brendan murmured. Nico could hear it in his voice, the brokenness that manifested itself in two days of barely leaving his bed and forgetting to groom himself. Nico just wanted to stop it anyway he could.

“Go talk to James and get him to tell you why he ended it. Maybe you guys can work it out, and if not, then I don’t know,” Nico said. The closest he’d seen Brendan to his current state was after some not-so-great conversations with his parents, but those were easier to fix.

“It won’t matter. He made it very clear he didn’t want to be with me anymore. Our anniversary was three weeks ago and it all seemed fine then.”

“If you need to cry it out, go for it. My shoulder is always available for a crying spot if the couch pillow isn’t to your liking.” Brendan threw the pillow at him.

“I don’t want to cry anymore. I just want him back.” His voice was so low and frail. Nico wanted to kill James, but knew that hurting James would only make Brendan upset at him.

“You can get through this. You’ve been through a lot Brendan. You always come out a stronger person. You can do anything.”

“Did you read that in a self-help book somewhere?” Brendan was attempting to joke, but there was no heart in it. He followed it up with another comment before Nico could come up with a witty response. “I don’t deserve a friend like you,” Brendan said.

Nico was so mad at James for making Brendan feel like this. He wanted to make it better anyway that he could. “You deserve so much more. He never deserved you if he was willing to hurt you like this.” Nico realized he had probably said too much right after. He knew what was behind his words, but he wondered if Brendan would hear it. Nico lied to himself about being over Brendan for so long it was even taking him off guard.

Brendan scooted over to Nico and put his head to his roommate’s shoulder. Nico put his arms around his friend. “Thank you for caring about me,” Brendan mumbled the words into Nico’s shoulder. Nico held him until Brendan decided to pull away.

“Let’s go watch *Parks and Recreation* in my room. If anyone can get you to laugh, it’s Leslie Knope.” Nico smiled. Brendan laughed a little as if he were thinking about something from a previous episode he’d seen. It wasn’t Brendan’s normal laugh, but it was a start.

They went to Nico’s bed and watched two episodes of *Parks and Recreation* before Brendan fell asleep again. Nico tucked him in before changing into his pajamas and falling to sleep himself.

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Brendan was still a horrible cook. He felt like all he needed was to practice. He never had to cook at home because his nanny took care of it, or when he got older his mother gave him money for food. Family dinners were not a thing like they were in Nico’s family. The first two years of college Brendan would just order food in or go to the cafeteria. It was almost Thanksgiving now and he really wanted to bring something to Christmas at Nico’s house this year. He just didn’t think it would be as difficult as it was.

“What’s that smell?” Nico rushed into the house to see flames coming out of his favorite pan and his roommate frantically trying to put it out.

“Why are you in the kitchen? We talked about this before. I cook for us if we need food and don’t want to go to the cafeteria,” Nico scolded.

Brendan focused on getting the fire out. Then he took off his sock and climbed on top of a counter to try to cover the smoke detector before the smoke alarm went off. He almost fell off the counter doing so, but Nico got there in time to make sure he didn’t. Once the smoke detector was covered Nico turned on a fan to try to blow some of the smoke away.

“I was trying to make something to take to Christmas dinner with your family this year. I’ve been going there for so long and I never really contribute anything. I wanted to do it for Thanksgiving, but midterms were already freaking me out so much I couldn’t,” Brendan rushed out.

“Next time just buy something and say you made it, like my mom does. Please.”

“I need to be able to do this. I don’t want to be like my parents. I want to do things on my own. I need skills that are useful in everyday life.”

“This better not be about James. I thought you were better about what he said to you now. I know it was just around three months ago and you are totally allowed to still be hurting, but the reason he gave you was bull.”

“It’s not about him. Even though it might look like it is,” Brendan insisted.

“Sure. Whatever you say,” Nico scoffed.

“I don’t care if James thought that I didn’t know how to take care of myself and be my own person. I care that this time next year we will be a semester away from graduating and I won’t know how to cook for myself when I get out of here,” Brendan claimed.

Nico looked into the sink to see the ruined food Brendan attempted to make. “What were you trying to make exactly?”

“That was manicotti. Before that I tried to make a pie. That’s in the trash already.” Nico got out something from the shelf to scrape the manicotti into the trash with the pie Brendan had apparently attempted. He went back to the sink and started to wash the dishes that Brendan used. Brendan got into his spot to dry the dishes after Nico finished washing them. They did it the same way every time Nico made dinner.

“If this is important to you then we try again, except with my supervision this time. Especially if you are going to try to make Italian food for a family of Italian and Greek Americans.”

“You’ll teach me how to cook?” Nico nodded. Brendan was happy that Nico wasn’t mad at him for almost burning the apartment down.

“I can’t promise you will get anywhere near my own level of cooking, but I can teach you how to not burn down the apartment we’ve only lived in for four months. Let’s leave the sock over the smoke detector for now though.”

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Spring finals were starting in two days and Nico was okay. He felt like he was prepared for most of his finals. It helped that his finals for two classes were papers. Those were pretty easy for him. As long as he had Brendan check them before he turned them in. Nico was going to study for the European History test and after he took it on Monday he’d spend his next two days making sure he would pass his last test, which would be on Thursday.

Brendan on the other hand was absolutely freaking out. If they were sleeping in the same room like when they dormed together Nico was sure it would have driven him insane already. Nico peeked into Brendan’s room to see the entirety of the room covered in sticky-notes of all different colors. He was sure that it was only one wall the week before. Then he could hear Brendan pacing around his room for the entirety of the past hour when he was working on his paper. They both needed a break.

“What are you doing? Why is your mattress on the living room floor?” Brendan questioned Nico, but let Nico pull him out of his room.

“You need a break, so I’m helping you. My mattress is on the floor because my room is a sauna. So is yours. I don’t know how you can do it,” Nico said.

“I must have been too focused on not failing out of college to notice the temperature,” Brendan responded.

“You are not going to fail. Your grades have been great. Even if you bombed the final you’d be fine. You aren’t going to bomb it though. You’ve been studying nonstop and I’m sure you know enough for a good grade by now.”

“You’ve never taken one of Pollick’s tests.” Brendan shook his head.

“I’ve had equally difficult teachers before, but stressing is not helping you. It’s just turning your room into a giant sticky-note. How can you even use your notes when they are spread out on tiny pieces of paper like that?” Nico asked.

Brendan frowned. “I thought you didn’t mind my sticky-notes.”

“I don’t. I even put some up on my wall because I missed seeing them, but your room is obsessive right now. Plus you haven’t sat down in over an hour, maybe more than that. Go sit on the bed. We study better together anyway.”

“We sit quietly near each other and you occasionally distract me with YouTube.”

“It worked for the first two years of college for us. Just go get your laptop.”

Brendan sped back into his room. Nico thought he’d have to drag him out again, but Brendan actually returned to the front room and speed walked over to the bed with his laptop still open.

Brendan immediately realized how much cooler it was from the open windows nearby. He took a moment to let himself cool off before he began studying again.

Nico returned to his spot on the bed. He looked over the essay. He wrapped it up on his own and didn’t want to bother an already stressed out Brendan so he sent the essay to Dianne to look over it. He could definitely expect her to have a few hundred corrections he should make when she sent it back. Nico could move on to other work, but he could still see Brendan freaking out even if he was sitting in one place.

“What are you doing?” Brendan asked suspiciously.

“You need to relax. So we are going to play the pickup line game.” Nico smiled wickedly. They played the game a few times and Brendan always quit after only a few of Nico’s pickup lines.

“You are on,” Brendan said.

“You seem confident. Want to make a bet? Winner gets to make the loser do whatever they want for a day sometime after finals,” Nico wagered.

“I think I can agree to that. First round is TV pickup lines and I’m going first.” Brendan sounded a lot more confident than the last time they played.

They both knew the rules. The first to get too uncomfortable to continue loses. Nico was pretty sure that would always be Brendan because he usually quit in the first round.

“Is that a sonic screwdriver in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?” Brendan always started off with Doctor Who. Nico knew some Doctor Who pickup lines as well that he could use.



“They call my penis The TARDIS. It’s bigger when it’s inside.” Nico smirked. He felt like he executed that one well. He definitely liked the flushed look on Brendan.

“Winter isn’t the only thing that’s coming.” Brendan didn’t sound as embarrassed saying that as Nico thought he would.

“Come out with me tonight. I’ll show you my Mr. Pointy.”

“I’m tired of this old broom. Got anything else I could ride?”

“My claws aren’t the only thing erect right now.”

“Have you ever licked the Liberty Bell?” Brendan was surprised that he was able to use that line before Nico.

“I don’t have to be a medical professional to diagnose you with an extreme case of sexy.” Nico winked jokingly.

“Revenge is a dish best served cold; my love on the other hand, is best served hot and steamy.”

“Are you single? Because I’d love to start a non-nuclear family with you.”

“Let’s park and get some recreation going.” Brendan was happy Nico let him do the first Parks and Recreation one.

“I wanna get to know your Lil’ Sebastian.”

“Ever done it in a blanket fort?”

“It’s not just my friendship that’s magic.” Nico thought using that one would at least get a laugh out of Brendan, but he was determined.

“Treat Yo’ Self to my penis.” Brendan squealed. He got so red after saying that one that Nico stopped to laugh before he continued. The difficulty Brendan had with saying it probably had more to do with it being some abomination of grammar though.

“Want to be the subject of my next erotic friend fiction? This one will be for real.” Nico didn’t know how the two of them had moved closer together on the bed, but he was getting as nervous as Brendan normally got when they played.

“Next round. I’m not even sure if we both understand what shows those even came from.” Brendan laughed.

“Moving on to school subjects then. I’m surprised you are able to say some of the things you said already so this should be good.” Nico tried not to not

check out Brendan's muscles when they were sitting this close but the tight shirt he was wearing was not helping.

Brendan just jumped right into the round. He thought he had enough things in computer science alone that could win this game for him. "I'll bet my hard drive is the biggest you've ever seen," Brendan started.

"Let's pretend you're full of C14 so I can date you." They both laughed at that one. Brendan stopped himself so he could refocus

"If you ever need to get rid of a Trojan, don't hesitate to call me!"

"If I were an enzyme I would be DNA helicase so I could unzip your genes." Nico wasn't that into science, but that had been a favorite of his since it helped him pass Biology in high school. It also helped that Brendan was actually wearing jeans.

"Are you sitting on the F5 key? 'Cause your ass is refreshing." Brendan was definitely a little more red from saying that one and his flushed skin was something Nico wanted to touch.

Brendan was really happy his pants weren't tight because Nico would have seen how aroused he was getting.

"You have nicer legs than an isosceles right triangle."

"My servers never go down, but I do!"

"If I told you that you had some nice secondary sex characteristics, would you hold them against me?" Nico wasn't sure that actually made sense, but it sounded sexual enough to use it.

"If my right leg is the cell wall and my left the membrane, do you want to be the cytoplasm?"

Nico almost said yes. Brendan was really close to Nico. Nico's legs were touching his. Brendan felt like he was going to do something he knew he shouldn't. Brendan's challenging look was not helping at all. Nico closed his eyes and shook his head.

"You win. I can't go anymore."

"Why are you quitting?" Brendan grabbed onto Nico's arm so that he couldn't get up to leave like he was going to.

Nico stared at Brendan's hand on his arm and it wasn't stopping his erection from wanting to break free of his pants. "You've successfully made me

uncomfortable in two rounds. You are the..." Nico's sentence was cut off by his roommate's lips pressing against his.

Brendan was nervous from the anticipation of what he was doing, but he was following through now. He took his hand from Nico's arm and pulled it up to the side of his face. He was happy when Nico kissed back. Brendan's other arm went to Nico's leg and started to travel up his body.

When Nico fantasized about kissing Brendan he was always the more aggressive of the two, but this was way better. He let himself get lost in the moment. He loved being able to touch Brendan this way. He let his hands explore Brendan's body.

Brendan broke the kiss and smiled. His eyes really lit up. "I take it this means that you still like me."

Nico stared at Brendan trying to figure out what he was talking about. "How long did you know?"

"I heard you talking to Eliza the first time I visited with your family, but I was already with James and... You moved on and we were fine so I didn't say anything." Brendan was a little out of breath from the kissing. Nico was lying back on the bed now with Brendan above him. Brendan brought himself down for another kiss. They went at it again, but Nico pushed Brendan away this time. He took a few breaths before he started to talk again.

"I had to move on, but my feelings for you didn't ever fully go away. It was like I'd be fine with just being your friend and then I'd get really jealous of James other times. It was rough."

"I should have said something when I realized what I felt for you, but I didn't want to ruin our friendship."

"I can't be your second choice. If I'm just a rebound from James I can't handle that." Nico broke eye contact with Brendan after saying it. He didn't want to stop, but he knew it had to be more.

Brendan's indigo eyes widened in surprise. "You aren't. Nico, if I can have you I'm not letting go ever."

"You're really over James." Nico sounded doubtful.

"I think James knew I had feelings for you before I could even figure out I did. Everyone did. I just want you."

Nico looked into Brendan's eyes. He wondered if that was the real reason the two broke up. "I was going to say something before we graduated. I would not have been able to leave without telling you," Nico said.

"I beat you to it this time. I'm more confident now because of you. I don't worry about going against what my parents want when I get out of here as much. I can cook without burning down the kitchen... if supervised. I know that I don't want my life outside of college to not have you in it. I also really want to keep kissing you if you are okay with that."

Nico didn't think he could smile more than he was. "This isn't a dream right?"

Brendan shook his head and laughed. "What's the dependent variable for you getting dinner with me Friday night?"

"It's a pretty good chance if we can cuddle out here tonight," Nico said.

"Definitely not a problem after we get some more studying done," Brendan said. He pulled himself away from Nico and went back to his laptop.

"Seriously?"

Brendan just smiled and got back to work.

"You are such a nerd," Nico teased.

"The nerd you're dating." Brendan didn't think anything would stop him from smiling the way he was right then.

"We are dating now so that means I can finally" –Nico moved to the other side of the bed and got behind Brendan– "touch the butt." He finished as his hands slipped to Brendan's jeans. He kissed at Brendan's neck slowly. He moved up to lay a kiss on Brendan's cheek before he reached his ear and nibbled on it a little. Nico wrapped his long arms around Brendan.

Brendan had never closed his laptop faster than he did then. Brendan leaned into Nico as he went back to work on his neck more feverishly. Nico was going to definitely leave a mark and Brendan didn't mind. He couldn't help the moans that were escaping his mouth. Nico guided Brendan back up the bed so they could make out like they had before. This time he didn't plan on stopping them.

Brendan didn't know how kissing Nico could be so different than James. He was definitely passionate with James when they were together, but kissing Nico was more. He thought it must be just how long they'd both been waiting to do

this. Brendan could tell how much Nico wanted him. He hoped Nico could feel it too. Brendan let his hands go under Nico's shirt and he pulled it up until Nico lifted up to throw it off before connecting with Brendan's lips again.

Nico wanted to get the rest of their clothes off, but that would mean he'd have to stop kissing Brendan, and he wasn't sure if he'd be able to do that. He settled for grinding down into Brendan while they kissed. Brendan seemed to like the idea as he reached around to grab Nico's butt and pull their crotches together. They jerked against each other as they kissed.

They kept grinding against each other. Brendan moaned into Nico's mouth. Nico pulled himself away from Brendan's mouth to go back to his neck. He decided that he really loved being the cause of Brendan's pleasure. He knew Brendan was vocal when he had sex, but it was so much better being the one to cause it. He wanted to keep doing it forever.

"I'm going to lose it before I even get my clothes off if you don't stop." Brendan could feel an orgasm coming and didn't want to come in his pants. He should have known Nico would take that as a challenge.

He pushed their crotches together harder and faster. Brendan groaned and whimpered. He didn't want to be too loud because he was sure someone in one of the other apartments would hear, but when his orgasm finally hit him he couldn't stop the moan. Hearing Brendan's moan threw Nico over the edge. He came harder than he thought he ever did before. Nico lay down on top of Brendan, kissing his neck and face softer than before.

"I can't believe you made me come in my pants." Brendan laughed.

"You can. At least I did it too. Plenty of time to try other things later though," Nico said.

"You might actually kill me,," Brendan responded. He leaned in to kiss Nico passionately. "We should go change clothes."

Nico lazily got up and ran into his room. He quickly returned with a pair of sweat pants. He stripped Brendan slowly. Taking off his tank top first to admire his abs. Then he stripped off his pants and underwear.

"Here, take my sweatpants. No underwear because that's the best way to wear them." Brendan put on the gray sweatpants. Nico really just wanted to see his ass in them. Brendan helped Nico get out of his sticky pants and underwear. He put on a clean pair of boxers. Brendan ran into his room to grab a book before Nico could stop him.

“You still want to study.”

“Just for a little while. I am officially not stressed.” Brendan kissed Nico before opening his book. He lay down on the bed and figured he would just read over the chapter once or twice before going to bed. Nico lay down on the other side of the bed cuddling against Brendan’s leg. Eventually Brendan fell asleep on his book, but his arm was wrapped around Nico’s leg. He wasn’t sure when either of them fell asleep, but it didn’t look like he got far in the chapter. They woke up later in the same positions once light was coming through their windows.

“Tonight do we get to actually cuddle?” Nico asked groggily.

“Yeah, we can. We really don’t need two bedrooms anymore.” Brendan didn’t ever want to leave Nico’s bed.

“I know. We could get another roommate.”

“Let’s talk about that idea later,” Brendan said.

“I just realized something,” Nico said suddenly.

“What?” Brendan asked.

“My parents are going to be so excited. They will probably have tons of gifts for us or something.”

“I don’t know. It might be different now that I’m dating you and not just your roommate.”

“Nope. My family loves you. Even Eliza likes you. My aunts and uncles are going to start asking when we’re getting engaged. Mom will already have plans for the wedding when we do. Next Thanksgiving will be crazy!” Nico exclaimed. Brendan laughed along with Nico thinking about it.

Brendan could definitely see himself marrying Nico, but that wasn’t happening that soon. It didn’t matter when it would happen. Brendan felt like every moment from then on out would be fine because he would be with his best friend.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*Aiden Nicholas a.k.a. Christopher Richardson is a writer from Chicago, Illinois. His love of creating stories led to getting his bachelor's degree in English from Illinois Wesleyan University. He has work published in literary magazines and is currently working on a full length LGBTQ+ science fiction novel. This is his first M/M romance. Aiden would love to hear feedback from you so feel free to comment on his blog or connect with him on any of his social media accounts.*

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