“I can’t wait for you to come,” Ethan murmured in my good ear.

Since Ethan was my boyfriend, that could have been seriously hot. If we were in bed. Or even on the landing of the back stairs in the student center. My dick still perked up some every time I took those stairs.

Unfortunately, we were in front of the science center on the east campus. With his best friend Makayla, and Samantha, a girl from their bio class. And the *coming* Ethan was talking about was me coming to spend Thanksgiving with him and his parents.

Yeah, that was a great plan. Me, inbred trailer trash and felon, walking in to meet dentist dad and legal secretary mom. *Hi Mr. and Mrs. Monroe, I’m sleeping with your son. I’ll try not to steal anything.* I think I’d have felt more comfortable going back to the Industrial Home for Boys, which was the official title of the hell-hole juvenile detention center where I’d spent two birthdays.

The thing was, being around Ethan made what was obviously the worst idea ever seem possible. Ethan made everything seem possible. Like me having a boyfriend in the first place.

I still tripped over that word, *boyfriend*. Not because of the gay thing. Truth, it was kind of a relief to know for sure I was. I’d been a freak all my life because of my different colored eyes and weird streaked hair. Being queer seemed almost easier.

Wait, that was bullshit. My boyfriend *made* it easier. See, he has this smile. Happiness just pours out of him, and that turned me inside out in the worst—and the best—way ever. I still don’t believe he’s mine, that I get to kiss him and touch him and come with him—in the other way, not the home-to-meet-the-parents way.

Nice shit just didn’t happen in my life. I didn’t get the prize. I got the kick in the teeth. I sure as hell didn’t get to go home with my hot boyfriend to his perfect gay-accepting parents and have the kind of Thanksgiving I’d only ever seen on TV.

Ethan draped his arm over my shoulders while Makayla said something about deep-fried turkey.

I tried not to flinch. Not because of sizzling turkey—I’m not vegan or anything—and not because of the gay thing. Well, maybe the gay thing some, though I knew we weren’t likely to get beat up for hand-holding on campus. The bigger thing was getting used to having someone touch me, that way. Just because.

I didn’t flinch, but I got tense. After shooting me a look, he kept his arm across my back, not tight, but there. A weight I couldn’t ignore. Not that I wanted to.

He leaned his head against mine, turned to whisper into my good ear. “Everything will be great. All my friends already love you. My family will too.”

I didn’t believe him, Ethan’s a hopeless optimist, but that he picked up on my tension, and tried to reassure me in his oblivious-to-shitty-reality way, meant something. It meant a lot actually.

Then his breath tickled my ear and I was almost a believer. A rush of heat went right to my dick.

“Are you coming with us to lunch?” Ethan had an expectant look on his face, brown eyes wide like a dog waiting to be patted on the head for not doing his business in the house.

Oh, right. In addition to getting used to the whole boyfriend idea, there was the extra layer of expectations that came from all his friends—and him assuming I always wanted to join in.

“Yes. Thanks for asking,” I told him, and if he had a tail, he’d have wagged it. Yeah, he was adorably trainable.

“We don’t have to stay long,” Ethan added, proving how much of a good job I was doing on the training. “We can go catch some alone time before I have to go to work study.”

Ethan understood that I wasn’t exactly the most social human on the planet. Even if I wanted to be, group conversation got dicey because lots of what came in through my left ear was static. But in Ethan-speak, alone time meant making out someplace, or sex if his roommate wasn’t going back to the room after lunch.

Maybe I wasn’t the one doing all the behavior conditioning. Ethan knew how to make me sit up and beg too.

I headed for the dining hall, ready to leave Makayla and Samantha and their shorter legs in the dust, but as I got close to the door, I had to yield to a group of sorority pledges, chanting and marching in lockstep.

Samantha caught up and sniffed. “Some people are so desperate to belong they sacrifice who they are.”

I looked back over my shoulder at the retreating pledge group in reluctant sympathy. Wasn’t I doing the same, tagging along with Ethan’s friends, trying to belong? I’d already fucked up my life once doing that. Getting fooled into thinking I had friends four years ago had left me with a broken rib in a crashed stolen car with two grand of liquor cases for the cops to find. That had earned me a nice stretch of belonging in juvie. Aside from that interruption, talk in the deli line and at the table was focused on Thanksgiving break like they all had some poor feathered bastard lined up in their Bushnell rifle scopes.

“Wyatt, have you ever had a deep-fried turkey?” Makayla asked. I liked Ethan’s bestie, as she referred to herself. She was considerate enough to always say my name when she was talking to me in a group so I could focus in.

I considered last year’s Thanksgiving bucket of fried chicken back at the trailer in Van, West Virginia. Mom had had to work. “Wouldn’t that be the same as fast food?”

“Oh my God, no.” Her eyes went wide. “There’s no breading on it. And the skin is super crispy. The meat is so juicy you could cry.”

I didn’t have much experience with girls and sex—or girls and sex separately—but Makayla looked like talking about deep-fried turkey was about to give her an orgasm.

“Maybe you and your deep-fried turkey need some time alone together?” Ethan suggested.

She reached across and stole one of the potato chips from his tray. “Be nice or I won’t try to keep some safe from my uncles so you guys can try it on Friday when you come over. Of course, it’s not as good the next day.”

“Friday?” I turned to look at Ethan.

He offered me one of those Ethan smiles that, with his brown eyes, made a simple *no* feel like drowning a bag of puppies. Not that I ever had. Contrary to some of the stuff people said, we don’t eat dogs in Appalachia.

Makayla didn’t need another person to carry on a conversation, so she ignored my question and went on to list the various other items her family served for Thanksgiving.

Under the table, Ethan put his hand on my thigh. “Makayla and I figured out we only live about an hour away. She invited us to come down and hang out with her on Friday. Catch a movie.”

Point for, less parent time. Point against, still more people. Lots more people based on what I knew of Makayla.

The old trailer and a bucket of Colonel Sanders’s special recipe started looking like the better option.

“We don’t have to go if you don’t want to.” Ethan’s thumb drifted toward my inseam.

Of course, the trailer didn’t offer Ethan, specifically, alone time with Ethan. Being a virgin until nineteen meant I had some serious catching up to do. I was majorly dick-whipped.

Speaking of extra people, Ethan’s roommate Connor joined us, along with his girlfriend, Amy. The realization that Ethan’s room was empty sank in with a balls-deep tingle. Ethan’s hand on my thigh got warmer.

Samantha interrupted Makayla’s rapturous food descriptions with an opinion that Thanksgiving was about the white-washing of the eradication of indigenous cultures, with Connor’s girlfriend offering philosophical counterpoints about the bloody origins of other festivals. Connor got intense about his Italian combo sub, making sure his mouth was full so that it would be hard to drag an opinion out of him. I might have done the same, but thinking about Thanksgiving break and facing people who would actually want to talk to me had killed my appetite for my turkey on rye way more effectively than Amy’s most lurid description of loincloths dipped in goat’s blood.

This was nuts. We’d only been dating for three weeks. What kind of crazy person dragged a boyfriend home to meet the parents after three fucking weeks?

The kind of crazy person whose thumb was definitely on the inseam of my jeans now, working up into some interesting territory. My jeans were tightening on my dick, which was fortunately—or unfortunately maybe—trapped on the left side. Ethan always sat on my right, so he could talk into my good ear. Maybe I should start dressing right. At the moment, I wished I had on looser jeans.

I swallowed around my dry throat. Yeah, I’d said I loved him, he’d said he loved me. But when we did, it had been after a tense day full of emotional puking. Also, I’d gotten an A in Intro to Psych and I knew all about the feel-good chemicals of infatuation. As the buzz of arousal got amplified by the smile on Ethan’s face, everything I’d learned about how drug addiction affected the brain made a hell of a lot more sense.

I sure as shit needed a fix. With a sneaky smile that didn’t quite make it fully onto my lips, I shifted forward on the cafeteria seat, forcing the balls totally into Ethan’s court.