

OUT IN THE FIELD...WITH YOU

BONUS CHAPTER

LANE HAYES

“So how’s married life?”

I shot an irritated sideways glance at Christian before sliding a water bottle across the counter toward him. I opened my mouth to blast him just as Phoenix burst into song from the master bedroom. I folded like a cheap suit.

“Pretty fuckin’ awesome.” I grinned, taking a swig of water. I recapped the bottle and furrowed my brow. “But as you know, asshole...Phoenix and I aren’t married.”

“Yet,” Christian teased.

No doubt he expected me to jump down his throat at the mere mention of marriage. Phoenix and I would be fifth year seniors when school resumed in two weeks. And like a lot of our friends, we had no freaking clue what we wanted to do when we finally graduated. Okay, that wasn’t entirely true. Phoenix would probably get more involved with community theater, and maybe delve into directing. I’d been thinking about law school recently, but that was subject to change. The point was...we weren’t ready to walk down the aisle. But we were one hundred percent committed to each other. Phoenix was it for me.

And when he sailed into the room wearing pajama bottoms

and a snug black tee with his arms open a moment later, singing the theme song from *Oklahoma!* at the top of his lungs, my heart skipped a beat. *Man, I had it bad.*

“Yet,” I whispered.

Phoenix finished the show tune with a flourish, holding the last note before taking a bow. He started when he spotted Christian standing next to me in the kitchen, but recovered like a pro.

“Two sweaty sexy men in my kitchen. Lucky me!”

I crooked my finger at him, rolling my eyes when he fanned himself theatrically. “C’mere, wise guy. I missed you. Give me a hug.”

Phoenix moved to my side and set his hand on my chest before pressing his lips to mine. “I love you, Max, but you need a shower.”

Christian snickered. “I suppose you’d turn me down too.”

“Yep!” He shoed us out of the kitchen, gesturing to the barstools on the opposite side of the peninsula. “Take a seat, boys. I’m making pancakes and you can’t stop me.”

“That sounds amazing, but I can’t stay. Rory and I are heading to LA this afternoon. I’m already running late. I gotta get going.” Christian gave me a fist bump and then pushed me aside to say goodbye to my boyfriend.

I had one of those surreal moments when past, present, and future collided and thankfully, didn’t crash. Christian was my best friend, but he was also my ex. And Phoenix was my everything. My lover, my confidant, my biggest fan, and my dose of reality when I got ahead of myself. He was my present and my future. Not everyone’s ex and current boyfriend could hang out together. Better still, Christian and Phoenix actually seemed to like each other. Which was funny considering they had nothing in common except me.

Christian was the captain of our college football team. He was a six foot four athlete with broad shoulders, brown hair, and

blue eyes known for his calm demeanor and killer instincts on the field. I couldn't remember a time I didn't know Christian. We grew up in the same town and went to the same schools and we both loved sports. I played baseball, he played football. No one suspected we were ever more than friends.

Phoenix, on the other hand, was...unique. He was a couple of inches shorter than my six one, but he was lean and lithe. He moved like a dancer and spoke in a melodic voice I could have listened to all day. He was fun and quick-witted; quirky but graceful. And he was brave as fuck. He didn't think twice about putting on a leotard and reciting Shakespeare in front of five hundred people. Or dying his hair to "get into character". I never knew if he'd show up with pink hair and red lipstick or any shade in between. It didn't matter to me. He was stunning no matter what. Like right now. He'd let his hair grow out over the summer. The natural shade of golden blond complemented his beautiful blue eyes. And when he smiled...I was a goner.

My heart did a funny flip in my chest when he chuckled at something Christian said. I moved to his side and set my hand on his hip. He was mine. All fucking mine.

"...if you don't mind. I can bring the swatch over the next time I'm in Orange."

"Yes, that would work, but it would be better if I saw it in person." Phoenix tugged at the hem of my T-shirt when he glanced up at me. "We're free this weekend, right, Max?"

"Free for what?"

His lips curled at the corner in easy humor. He put his arm around my waist, clandestinely slipping his fingers under the elastic of my workout shorts and boxer briefs. That was another thing I loved about Phoenix. I didn't have to say much for him to know exactly what was on my mind.

"Christian and Rory are getting a new sofa. They want us to give them a color consultation," Phoenix replied with a grin.

“Not ‘us’,” Christian corrected, stepping toward the door. “Just you. Max is welcome to tag along, but home decor isn’t exactly his forte.”

“True.” I shrugged. “We have dinner with my parents on Sunday, but otherwise we’re open.”

“Cool. I’ll text you. But let’s plan on Saturday. We can check out the shop on 2nd Street I was telling you about then go back to our place to barbeque. Rory perfected a steak rub he wants to show off. It’s pretty damn good,” Christian gushed.

“Fabulous. What can we bring?” Phoenix asked.

Christian cocked his head thoughtfully. “Um...I don’t know. I’ll get back to you. Does two o’clock work?”

I rolled my eyes and shooed him out the door. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. We’ll be there. We’ll look at your dumbass sofa and we’ll promise not to spill beer on it. You better get going before you get stuck in traffic, Chrissy.”

“How do you put up with this asshole?” Christian asked Phoenix playfully.

“I can’t help myself. He’s cute,” Phoenix said.

“I’m not fucking cute,” I grumbled without heat, raising my hand to give Christian a high five.

“No, you’re adorkable.” Christian jumped out of my reach before I could put him in a headlock then moved toward the elevator. “Later!”

Phoenix chuckled softly as he closed the door. “You *are* kind of adork—what are you doing?”

I captured his hands and pulled them behind his back then bit his bottom lip. “I’m gonna drag to our room caveman-style and bury my cock in your ass.”

“And they say romance is dead,” he snickered.

I grinned like a mad pirate before lacing my fingers with his and kissing his knuckles. “Hey, I’m romantic. I’ll read you Shakespeare naked and I’ll even throw in a shower.”

Phoenix fluttered his eyelashes. “Shakespeare *and* a shower?”

“Yep.” I tugged him into the master suite, squeezing his ass before gesturing toward our king-size bed. “Get comfortable. If you want to finger your hole while you wait, feel free. I’ll be right back.”

I shot a mischievous smile, then pulled my T-shirt over my head, shoved my shorts and briefs off, and headed for the adjoining bathroom. I turned the water on and was about to step under the spray when I sensed Phoenix behind me. I glanced over my shoulder and froze at the sight of him wearing a lace thong and nothing else.

“Do you like it?” he asked, snapping the strap on his hip.

I nodded mutely and gulped. “Yeah, that’s...wow. Were you wearing that under your Pjs?”

“Yep. I was planning a striptease act, but Christian doesn’t need to see that.”

“Christian’s not allowed to see that,” I corrected. “Fuck, you’re hot. Take it off and jump in the shower with me, baby.”

“No. I’ll wait here and keep you company. Sunny dropped off a couple of new lipstick samples for me to try. Now’s the perfect time.”

I held his gaze for moment and sighed. “You’re torturing me, aren’t you?”

Phoenix chuckled. “Not at all. I play fair.”

“Yeah right,” I grumbled before stepping into the shower.

I focused on the art of soaping, shampooing, and rinsing while Phoenix chatted on the other side of the glass door. Every other word was muffled by the running water and the hum of the fan, but I liked having him close. It felt homey. He had a way of taking over spaces and making them seem lived-in and cared for at the same time. There were no empty corners in my apartment now. No space for loneliness to creep in and take

over. This was ours. And everything felt better with Phoenix around.

“...so I told them I’d read the script and see what I thought. I’m not sure I’m right for the part though. A violent mobster with a grudge and two days to live.” He leaned into the mirror over the marble counter and finished applying a coat of red lipstick then turned to me with his hand on one hip. “Do I look like mobster material?”

I reached for the towel on the hook next to the shower stall and dried my face before giving him a thorough onceover.

What did a guy like Phoenix see in me? I didn’t get it. He looked like a fucking supermodel doing an artsy spread for a fashion magazine. The kind where sexy, smooth-shaven men posed for androgynous shots. Garter belts, heels, mesh underwear, lipstick, and eyeliner. You know what I mean. I was just a college baseball player entering his final season, wondering what the hell I’d do when I joined the so-called real world. I knew I was considered good-looking. I was tall with dark hair and a muscular, athletic built...but I was ordinary. Phoenix, on the hand, was exceptional. Sometimes, he literally took my breath away.

I finished drying off then tied the towel around my waist before closing the space between us. I set my hands on his hips and brushed my nose against his cheek. “You can be anything you want to be. And you can play any part you choose. Never doubt yourself, baby.”

Phoenix cocked his head in surprise. He recapped the lipstick tube and tossed it onto the counter before snaking his arms around my neck.

“Thank you. Same goes for you, Max. I know you worry about what comes next sometimes, but you shouldn’t. You’re gonna be fine. You’ll find a job you love or maybe you’ll go to grad school before you find the right fit. And I’ll do the same.

Maybe we'll stay here or maybe we'll want to move to LA or to the beach. We have each other, the rest will fall in place."

I gave him a lopsided smile. "I agree. But why do you look so serious?"

Phoenix shrugged. "I don't know. My dick is super confused by my timing."

"So is mine." I tugged the edge of the towel and let it slip to the floor before swaying my hips so my cock bobbed from side to side. "See? C'mere. Let me check out your thong."

He flattened his palm over his lace-covered crotch. "This thing is a little too snug and you look a little too sexy and slick and muscle-y and..."

I pulled him against me, cupping his bare ass before sliding my cock alongside his. The fabric was itchy as fuck. It had to go. I tugged the flimsy straps, loving his sweet sigh when I freed his hard on. I gripped his shaft and stroked him in an unhurried motion, twisting my wrist just the way he liked it.

"And what?" I prodded, licking his neck.

"I forgot what I was going to say."

"Make something up."

"I love you."

I inched back slightly and kissed the corner of his mouth. "I love you too."

"Yeah, but I don't think you know that...you make everything seem possible. I always think I might have a shot at some fabulous role, but you make me feel like they'd be crazy not to hire me on the spot."

"Well, it's true," I said, grabbing his ass and tightening my grip on his pole as I humped his thigh in a mad quest for friction.

Phoenix moaned when I traced his crack. "Thank you for being my person."

I sealed my mouth over his then pulled back to meet his

gaze. “Hey. If you get mushy on me I’m gonna have to get mushy back. You know I suck at that stuff.”

“Try me.” His radiant grin lit his eyes to perfection.

“Okay...the day met you was the best day of my life. Nah. Scratch that. I can do better. Um. I love you so much that I don’t care that you just put red stuff all over my face. Geez, look at me,” I griped without heat as I glanced at my reflection.

Phoenix swiped his thumb across my mouth. “It looks good on you.”

“You look good on me,” I countered, waggling my brow. “How was that?”

“Cornny, but I like it. Come here, Max.”

He gave me a wicked smile before perching on the counter and spreading his legs in invitation. I swallowed hard when he sucked his fingers then tapped his hole and pushed one inside.

“Holy fuck.”

I stroked myself and watched the show. Damn, he was hot. Phoenix leaned back, lifting his right thigh before adding a second digit and then a third, biting his bottom lip and whimpering as he finger-fucked himself. The smudge of red across his mouth and the black lace wispy fabric he’d pushed aside added an unexpected carnal element that pulled me from my sex-hazed reverie.

I opened the drawer next to the sink and grabbed the lube. I poured a little on my cock and drizzled what was left in the bottle over his hole before moving between his thighs.

“Shoot. I think there’s another one in our room. We should just order lube in bulk online and—oh.” He went still when I lined myself at his entrance and pushed. “Oh, fuck.”

“Shh. I got you.”

I moved slowly, distracting him with sweet kisses and dirty compliments about how tight and hot he felt until he relaxed completely and let me in. I rested my forehead against his and

pulled out before driving inside again. And again. Phoenix wound his arms and legs around me, and begged for more. I couldn't move the way I wanted to against the countertop, so I picked him up and carried him into our room, stopping once to fuck him against the wall.

Phoenix raked his nails down sides and tweaked my nipples as soon as his back hit the mattress. I pulled his arms over his head and gave him a roguish smile then let my hips fly.

“Oh my God. Yes. Fuck me, Max. More.”

Our tongues twisted as we moved in synchrony. He met me thrust for thrust, arching his back before pulling his hands free to jack himself when I upped the tempo. I covered his mouth with mine and lost myself in him until a telltale tingling sensation warned me I was close.

“Baby, I'm gonna—”

“Come inside me.”

That was all it took. One more reminder we were completely committed...body and soul. I roared his name as my orgasm crash into me like a freight train. Phoenix was right there with me.

We held each other in the aftermath. I kissed his nose and rolled sideways, taking him with me. He chuckled softly when I pulled out.

“What's so funny?”

“You've got lipstick all over and we just made a serious mess. The duvet need to be washed and—”

“Easy fixes. We got this.” I pushed his hair from his eyes and caressed his cheek. “And you know what? We've got everything. We're gonna enjoy our senior year. No worrying about the future before we have to. Lean on me when you feel scared or freaked out about an audition or something that isn't going right. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere.”

Phoenix blinked furiously then wiped at a tear. “You really are kinda romantic.”

“I told ya,” I said, tickling his sides until he called for mercy. “Come on. Time for another shower. You’re coming with me this time. You made a mess, baby. If you scrub my back, I’ll recite some Shakespeare.”

I pulled him to his feet, jumping out of his reach when he swatted me on the ass and grumbled about who was really responsible.

“Do you know some Shakespeare?”

“Of course I do. Prepare to be amazed.”

And somewhere under the sound of running water and good-natured teasing, a wave of intense gratitude hit me. Not everyone got this lucky. Not everyone found the other part of themselves...and a place to begin again.

SONNET 18- SHAKESPEARE

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.