

FOLLOWING THE HEART

A FOLLOWING THE RULES SHORT STORY

LANE HAYES

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This short story is a companion piece to *Following The Rules*. If you haven't read *Topher and Simon's* story, you'll want to check that out first.

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SIMON

Topher's eyes opened then drifted shut again as I traced the mini constellation of freckles on his back.

"Baby, it's time to wake up," I purred, kissing his shoulder.

"Are we late?" he mumbled in a sleep-laden voice.

"No, but we will be if you don't get your fine ass out of bed. C'mon, I have coffee waiting for you in the kitchen. Let's do this." I smacked his butt and headed for the door, pausing to press the button on the automatic blinds.

Topher groaned when sunlight flooded the space a moment later. He sat up slowly and automatically reached for his glasses, perched them on his nose, then stretched his arms above his head with a yawn.

My boy had a thing for routine.

I knew without watching that he'd shuffle naked to the dresser to grab a clean pair of boxer briefs and continue to the bathroom. Within three to five minutes, he'd emerge wearing said boxers and flaunting minty fresh breath. He'd most likely slip on a pair of sweats and a T-shirt in

deference to the cooler temps. Then he'd join me at the island and stare blankly into the coffee I set in front of him, gradually coming to life after consuming at least half a cup.

Which meant I had approximately ten minutes to rehearse my speech. It was important to get the message and intonation right. I didn't want to come across as too enthusiastic. Topher was literally the sweetest natured person I'd ever met, but nobody wanted to deal with an overly peppy partner before caffeine did its job.

Was I nervous? Yeah, I was. And I didn't know why.

Topher might not love my idea, but I didn't think he'd hate it. Even if he wasn't on board, he loved me and he knew I loved him. It didn't matter that we'd only been together for a few months, we were solid. And we'd already been through a lot.

Topher stuck by my side through the tumultuous upending of my career and the media attention we both received once news of our relationship leaked. No, I wasn't famous, but apparently, a former pro football player coming out as bisexual was news-worthy. The coverage had been a bit intrusive. I'd never been in the habit of discussing any aspect of my love life...even when I'd dated women.

First of all, it was no one's business and second, I wasn't interested in being anyone's social media snack to be devoured then forgotten five minutes later. But I agreed to share my story because I figured there were young athletes who needed to see queer representation in sports. It was something that might have made a difference to my younger self. Thankfully, Topher had been very cool about extra the scrutiny.

I was grateful to have someone in my corner who believed in me and supported me.

And who loved sex.

Maybe that sounded a tad shallow, but hey...I liked sex. A lot. And Topher possibly liked it more than me. No kidding. He was voracious on the daily. Always ready and willing to try something different.

The newest thing for us was—well, Topher topping me. Holy shit. I couldn't begin to explain how fucking fabulous it felt to have my prostate massaged. I wished I hadn't held out so long. Not only did it feel amazing, but in a way, it made us closer. Don't ask me what that meant. I wasn't sure.

But I did know that Topher was my favorite human in the universe and I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible...without the ridiculous commute we'd been making over the past few months. So I came up with an idea. All I had to do was sell it.

And there he was. Right on time.

I greeted Topher with a smile and slid a fresh cup of coffee across the island, loving that he'd raided my T-shirt drawer. The USC tee was much too big, but it looked sexy as fuck on him. Or maybe it was his sleep-mussed curly brown hair, pretty green eyes, full lips, or—

"You're staring me," he chided, peering at me over the rim his cup.

"'Cause you're hot."

Topher snorted. "Come join me."

"Nah, I'm good. Do you want anything to eat? I can make a quick omelet."

“No, thank you. I’ll have the blueberry yogurt,” he said, shifting as if to stand.

“Sit tight. I got it.”

I grabbed the yogurt and some extra berries from the fridge, then set them in front him with a spoon and a napkin. He thanked me and tucked into his meager breakfast while I hovered nearby, chewing on my bottom lip nervously.

“Are you okay, Si?”

“I’m fine. Why?”

He shrugged. “You’re quieter than usual.”

“Mmm. I just have a lot on my mind.”

“Come sit and tell me about it.” He patted the barstool beside him then sipped his coffee.

“I can’t sit. My ass hurts,” I replied, grinning from ear to ear when he put his hand over his mouth and turned a pretty shade of pink. “Are you blushing? I’m pretty sure *I’m* the one who should be blushing.”

That was the damn truth. If anyone had told me a year ago that I’d happily get on my knees, spread my ass open, and beg my boyfriend to fuck me, I would have assumed they’d mistaken me for someone else. Just the memory of white-knuckling the bedpost with one hand and jacking myself while he thrust inside me gave me a chubby.

“Simon!”

I pointed meaningfully at my crotch then made a small production of adjusting myself in my jeans, loving the sound of his melodic laughter. I was constantly in awe of how incredibly easy it was to be with him. That smile, that laugh...this man fucking owned me.

And just like that I was nervous again.

I cradled my mug in both hands and leaned against the island, running through my speech one last time before blurting, "I think we should live together."

Boom! Mic drop. I did it.

The weight of those six little words had been killing me for weeks. Which was silly because knowing Topher, the hard part would be convincing him that I meant it.

Sure enough, he spooned up a heap of yogurt and nodded. "Someday, we will."

"Someday soon," I countered.

He licked his spoon like a porn star and set it on the napkin before reaching for his coffee. "Okay. Someday soon."

I narrowed my gaze and pointed at his breakfast. "When we *do* live together, I'm outlawing that combo. Yogurt doesn't go with coffee."

He pursed his lips in amusement. "You can't outlaw yogurt and I'm pretty sure it's against the law to deny anyone caffeine."

"Hmph. Fine. You can have whatever you want."

"Thanks." He sipped his coffee then checked his watch. "We shouldn't run into too much traffic on a Saturday, but we should leave in fifteen minutes so you aren't late for your appointment with your contractor."

"*Our* contractor."

He frowned in confusion and set the cup down. "Ours?"

"Yeah, I'm going to need your input. That's why I asked you to come with me this morning," I explained, willing him to read in between the lines.

“Okay.” He smiled sweetly as he slid off the stool, brushing my arm on his way to the coffee machine.

All right. I obviously sucked at this.

I raked my fingers through my hair and tried again. With emphasis.

“Because I want us to live *there*...together, Christopher.”

He turned slowly and cocked his head. “I don’t understand.”

“It’s simple. I want to wake up next to you every day in a house where you keep all your clothes. Not just a few pairs of boxer briefs and extra socks.”

“Are you saying you want me to move more clothes here?”

“You’re welcome to move all your shit here now if you want, but that’s not what I was talking about.”

“Oh. Well, I’m not sure what you mean, but I have roommates and a lease I can’t break. This house is lovely, but Malibu is much too far from school and work for me to commute, and the bungalow you bought in Pasadena is... well, it’s kind of awful. But you were planning on selling it right away, so—”

“No, I’m not going to sell it. I never was going to sell it. I bought it for you. For us. I bought it because it has a really fucking beautiful tree out front and a great yard. Plenty of room to plant a garden or whatever the hell you want. It’s yours. Ours.”

His mouth fell open and stayed there for a long moment. He set his cup on the counter when he came to and bit his bottom lip. “You...you bought it for me? For us?”

“Yes.” I swallowed hard. “I didn’t say anything about future plans when I bought it in November ‘cause I didn’t want to freak you out. Everything was a little crazy at the time and I didn’t want you to feel stuck with me in case you decided that blip of media attention had pushed you over your limit. Living together is a commitment. I get it. The things is...I’m committed to you, Christopher. I’m in this for the long run. I want to plan a future with you.” I closed my eyes briefly and sighed. “But...I also don’t want to freak you out. So if my timing is off or if it’s too much too soon, I’m sorry I—”

Topher launched himself into my arms. “I love you.”

Oh, wow. That would never get old.

“I love you too. So fucking much.” I held him close, breathing him in and kissing his cheek tenderly. “So...what do you think? Do you want this?”

He flashed a watery smile and rubbed tears from his eyes. “Yes, of course I do.”

I whooped a victory cry then swept him in my arms again and spun him in circle, raining kisses all over his face before crashing my mouth over his. We broke for air and stared at each other, wearing matching dopey grins.

“Excellent. Then we’d better go meet the contractor so you can tell him where you want your observation deck for your telescope.”

“Gosh, that would be amazing. But I have a few questions. There are a lot of practical considerations involved in cohabitation. Financial ones. I don’t have the resources you do but—”

“Money is not an issue,” I intercepted. “Don’t worry about it. We have a lot of time to iron out any concerns that may pop up. We’re a few months away from completion.”

“I was hoping you’d say that because that house is just... terrible.”

He wasn’t exaggerating. The old bungalow was a major fixer upper with decent bones on a quiet treelined street in Old Town Pasadena. Anyone else might have razed it and started from scratch, but I loved the process of bringing something old back to life.

I made a yikes face. “I know. It really is. But when we’re done, it’s going to be special.”

He kissed my neck and grinned. “I believe you. Is this why you were agitated?”

I winced. “I don’t know if agitated is the right word. Nervous as fuck works though.”

“That’s not necessary. I’d follow you anywhere, Simon.”

And just like that I felt like a ten-foot tall indestructible, undefeatable, conquering hero with superhuman strength. The smartest man on the planet loved me. *Me*. That was crazy and amazing. But it was also the greatest gift I’d ever known. I’d do whatever it took to make him happy.

“Would you follow me to the moon?” I whispered, kissing his ear.

“Yes, however, I don’t think you’d really want to live there. The lunar landscape isn’t hospitable. There’s no atmosphere, no weather, no oceans. The surface is in a perpetual vacuum.”

I adjusted his glasses then laced my fingers with his and tugged. “That doesn’t sound like fun. Follow me to the

shower instead. I probably have dried cum on my back. I should do something about that before I go out in public.”

“Ew. Gross.”

“I know, right? Hey, if the moon is out, I vote for Mars.”

“Mars would be worse. Did you know the average temperature is well below freezing? The planet is covered with dust and...”

Here’s the deal, folks...I highly recommend finding someone who makes you smile when they speak a language you’ll never understand. Someone who accepts your limitations and celebrates your strengths. Someone who looks at you like you’re a winning lottery ticket, a newfound star system, and a hundred pounds of the finest chocolate—all at once.

But you can’t have Topher. He’s mine.

TOPHER

A few months later...

MOVING Day went better than expected. Simon had insisted on hiring professionals, which turned out to be a stroke of genius. We didn't have to ply our friends with pizza or host a makeshift thank you party while surrounded by furniture wrapped in plastic. Every box was deposited in the appropriate room with minimal fuss. We effectively eliminated a major stress component in unending one living situation and beginning another.

However, there was still a lot of work to do and the one thing I'd learned about Simon over the past few months was that he had a much higher tolerance for chaos than I did. After two and a half weeks of skirting around a "Clothes I Don't Wear" box in our walk-in closet and another labeled "Miscellaneous Kitchen Crap" in the pantry, I was a little...annoyed. But the giant "Sports Shit"

box impeding my spot in the garage nearly threw me over the edge.

Don't get me wrong. I'd never parked in a garage in my life and had no problem leaving my car in the driveway or the street. But Simon had been adamant about me using the garage. His exact words were, "This is your house too. I don't want you to have to hike from the curb on a hot day or in the rain with grocery bags...or with Gran."

So, here I was on a hot day in June with my eighty-six year old grandmother who'd insisted on a full tour of our newly renovated home...including our garage.

"Oh, my. Isn't this nice?"

I chuckled. "Gran, you've said that about every room in the house. There's nothing special to see. It's just a garage."

"The fancy kind. Christ, it's so clean, you could eat off the floor," Gran enthused, shuffling around the pristine space lined with built-in cabinets.

I shoved the lone box with my foot, grumbling under my breath when it wouldn't budge. "Hmph. Well, when you and Grandpa come over for dinner next week, we'll be eating inside or maybe on the deck if it's nice. Not in here."

"We wouldn't mind at all. I'm very pleased for you and Simon. This is a lovely home, Christopher Robin."

"Thank you. We should get going. Grandpa's going to wonder where we are." I gave the box another kick for good measure before motioning for her to follow me inside.

Gran ignored me. "What kind of sport shit is in that thing?"

“I have no idea,” I huffed, crossing my arms. I probably looked like a petulant child, but this was my first opportunity to voice my displeasure and I wasn’t holding back. “It’s one of the boxes Simon hasn’t unpacked yet.”

Okay, that wasn’t so fierce, but it felt good to say something.

Her eyes twinkled merrily. “I see. And tell me, my darling boy...how do you feel about unpacked boxes?”

“Not great,” I admitted. “He hasn’t even opened them. I’m tempted to do it myself, but that seems like an invasion of privacy. Just because we live together now doesn’t give me the right to poke in his things. He should deal with these himself.”

“I agree with you on that last point, but I highly doubt that ‘Sports Shit’ will reveal any great secrets. Let’s take a peek, shall we?” She rubbed her bony hands together mischievously.

I swept in front of her and shook my head. “No, Gran. We can’t.”

“Whyever not? You know what they say about hiding shit in a cupboard. This box is begging to be opened.”

“Not by me. I refuse to be a meddling boyfriend. It’s so unbecoming.”

Gran narrowed her gaze. “Playing the martyr is infinitely more unbecoming.”

I gasped. “Martyr? I’m not being a martyr!”

“Sure, you are. If something is bothering you, speak your mind, boy. Unless Simon is a mind reader, he’ll never know what’s troubling you. Communicate!”

“I do communicate! About important things anyway. This isn’t important, it’s just...bothersome.”

Gran smiled kindly. “May I give you a word of advice?”

“Sure,” I sighed.

“Communicate every little thing. If your feet are cold, tell him. If your day was ruined because it started out with runny eggs and burnt toast, tell him. If you saw a rabbit on your way to the lab, tell him. Life is in the details. Don’t hold them back. How else will he know that you’re cranky when your feet are cold, that you hate runny eggs, or that bunnies make you think of spring and Easter candy and chocolate and the time you ate so much of it that you ralped all over the kitchen floor and—”

I waved like a traffic cop. “Okay, okay. I get it.”

“Good. Details matter. Now, let’s see if there are any jock straps in there.”

I snickered at the naughty gleam in her eyes and shrugged. She was right. Simon didn’t keep secrets. He was straightforward, open, and honest. It was one of the many things I loved about him. He wouldn’t care if I let my grandmother pop the lid on this box. He didn’t let small things bother him and neither should I.

Gran regally gestured for me to do the honors, clapping gleefully when I pulled out a football helmet.

“Wow. This is heavy.” I turned it upside down, studying it like an odd archeological find.

“Oh, let me try it on.”

“Gran...”

“Come on, Christopher Robin. When will I ever have a chance to wear a real football person costume again? I’m

old!”

She had a point.

“Fine.”

I sniffed the helmet before gently lowering it over her head. Then I stepped backward to give her a good once-over and immediately dissolved into laughter. I couldn't help it. The sight of my small, round grandmother dressed in a pretty floral print dress with her signature pearls and sensible, albeit stylish shoes wearing a helmet designed for a ginormous athlete was hysterical.

“How do I look?”

“I...you....” I snorted, bending at the waist with a new round of giggles just as the garage door slid open.

“What's going on here?” Simon demanded. He dumped a workout bag on the floor and set his hands on his hips.

I sobered for half a second to admire the view and indulge in one of my frequent “pinch me” moments.

My boyfriend was a god. No kidding. Simon Murphy was tall, dark, and impossibly handsome. I couldn't believe my luck sometimes. I woke up to that hunk in my bed every day. Me. But as lovely as he was on the outside, he was even better on the inside. He was a good man with a kind heart and an appreciation for the absurd. I hoped that included Gran wearing his helmet...next to the opened “Sports Shit” box.

“We're just—she's just...” I glanced over at Gran striking ridiculous poses and lost it again.

Simon draped his arm over my shoulders and joined in. His deep laughter bounced off the walls, wrapping me in a sweet cocoon.

“Wow. You look like a natural. I’m calling my old agent now. What position do you play, Gran?” Simon kissed my temple then moved to the box and pulled out a football.

“I’ll play the role that doesn’t require running or touching that thing.” She pointed at the ball in his hand before fussing with the helmet. “Help me out of this. I’m drowning.”

Simon tossed the ball to me and pulled his phone from his pocket. “We need a few pics first. Come on, you two. Show me what you got.”

We hammed it up for the camera, striking a few silly poses before packing the helmet and football away.

I went into the house to grab Gran’s purse and returned in time to catch the end of their conversation.

“...lovely home, Simon. So beautiful. I’m sure you’ll both be very happy here,” Gran said, patting his arm affectionately.

“Thank you. I think so too. We have a couple of minor details to iron out, like the landscape lighting for the deck and a box or two to unpack.” He kicked the sports box for emphasis and cast a brilliant smile my way. “But we’re happy with how it turned out. Right, babe?”

I grinned. “Yes. Very happy.”

“Wonderful. Grandpa and I look forward to dinner with you...but now, take me home. That old man will be wondering where I am.” She kissed Simon’s cheek and turned to me. “Shall we, Christopher?”

“I’m ready.”

“See you soon, babe. I’m gonna jump in the shower. Later, Gran,” Simon hollered, stripping his T-shirt over his

head.

“My, my, my. He’s a dream,” Gran crooned as we headed down the driveway.

“Geez, Gran.”

“But he’s no mind reader. Communicate, my boy. Communicate.”

I PLANNED my speech on my way home from dropping off Gran. I hated confrontation and did my best to avoid it whenever possible. But Gran was right. Communication was important. In fact, I’d made a big deal early on in our relationship about being frank when it came to things like... sex. It was good to know if your partner was comfortable playing with toys before investing in a top-of-the-line leather paddle. And for the record, Simon said yes, so I bought it.

The point was...honesty mattered.

I tossed my keys on the console table in the entry and marched into the great room ready for battle.

“Hey, baby. Want a sandwich?” Simon raised a half-eaten baguette, then gestured toward the lunchmeat and avocado on the island.

“No, thank you.”

“Are you sure? This is tasty.” He took a bite and beckoned me close.

I obeyed, unthinking, stopping short when I realized he was wearing nothing but a towel. His hair was damp, his

feet were bare, and yeah...no clothes. Just a small piece of terrycloth separated me from his gorgeous dick and—

Whoa. Focus.

“I’m positive. I’m not hungry...for a sandwich,” I added, stealing another peek at the bulge behind his towel.

Simon noticed my wandering gaze. He undid the fabric with a flick of his wrist and let it fall to his feet, revealing my tattooed hunky man in all his glory.

“Hungry for something else?”

“Y-yes,” I whispered in a dazed tone, resting my hand over his left pec. The feel of his warm skin and hard muscles made me dizzy. I swayed slightly when he sealed his lips to mine and unbuttoned my shirt. One button, two... “No, wait.”

I pushed out of his grasp and bent to retrieve the towel, bumping my nose against his half-hard cock. Oh, boy.

Simon grabbed my elbow and pulled me against him, burying his face in my neck as he cupped my balls through my khaki shorts.

“Fuck, you’re hot.”

“Hot? Yes, it’s warm outside. Eighty something degrees, I think.”

“Not the temperature,” he chuckled, unbuckling my belt. “You, baby.”

“Me? Well, my core temperature is on the rise at the moment, but—”

“I’m sure it is.” He licked my jawline and nibbled my earlobe. “Let’s go to our room and get you naked.”

“Oh, we have to stay here,” I moaned.

“Mmm. Do we have lube out here? I want inside you.”

“Oh, geez. Okay, lube. Lube is here. Somewhere. I...but —” I whirled out of his arms and held my hands in the air.

“Shh. I’ll find it.” He released me, moving to the far end of the island with his erection leading the way as he pulled open drawers willy-nilly. “Nothing here. Or here or—”

“Stop! I have official business to impart,” I panted.

That got his attention. And he found the lube. He jiggled the small bottle triumphantly, flashing a Cheshire cat grin before turning to me.

“What kind of business?”

My mind went blank. I forgot my well crafted speech. I forgot my name too. And who could blame me? My sexy lover was looking at me like he couldn’t decide if he wanted to worship me or eat me. Unopened boxes didn’t matter. He could do whatever he wanted and leave his stuff scattered everywhere and—

Okay. *That* was the problem.

I pushed my glasses up my nose and fixed him with a serious stare.

“Simon, I’m irked.”

“Irked?”

“Yes.”

“At me?” He frowned when I nodded. “What did I do?”

I lost a bit of steam as I sucked in a gulp of air and rasped, “Boxes.”

He squinted so hard he probably gave himself a headache. “Huh?”

“Box, Simon. Boxes!”

“Boxes?”

“Yes! I know my timing is inopportune—” I pointed at his impressive cock and continued, “—but I have a terrible fear that I’ll try to convince myself that little things don’t matter and they’ll become bigger things that *do* matter. And I’ll tell myself this your house and I shouldn’t dictate where you put your belongings. I’ll probably want to pay rent then, which will make you angry. You’ve been very adamant about monetary obligations. And generous too. But I don’t want you to be my sugar daddy and I don’t want to walk around on eggshells wondering if I should speak or be silent. I think I should speak, so I’m speaking now and there you have it. I don’t like boxes.”

Simon nodded like a deer in headlights. “Boxes...plural? I probably should know this already, but...which boxes are we talking about? The one in the garage and—”

“‘Clothes I Don’t Wear’, ‘Kitchen Crap’, ‘Sports Shit’!”

“Okay, okay. Got it. I’ll take care of them tonight. I promise.”

“Oh. Well, thank you. I appreciate it,” I replied, raking my teeth over my bottom lip nervously. “I’m sorry to make a fuss. I’m sorry about...interrupting a romantic moment, but it seemed important. Of course, it seems pretty darn silly now.”

“Hey, don’t do that. No apologizing. Come here.” He waited for me to close the distance then draped one arm over my shoulder and lifted my chin. “I have something to say too and I need you to listen.”

“Okay.”

“This is your house too, Toph. Mine and yours. We share it. I know you have a thing for order, so I probably should

have clued in sooner that a stray box or two might bug you —”

“You told me to park in the garage but I can’t because of ‘Sports Shit.’ Maybe on a subliminal level you’d rather store sports memorabilia there than house my car. That’s okay with me, but I’d prefer to know that. I don’t want to make mistakes,” I said, hating that my voice cracked.

“First of all, you give me far too much credit. I don’t do a lot of subliminal thinking. You know me. I just fucking forgot. I’m sorry. And second...we’re going to make mistakes, babe. No matter how hard we try. We’ll get on each other’s nerves and piss each other off once in a while.”

“I don’t want to do that,” I whispered, blinking when my eyes welled.

“Me either, but we’re only human.”

“Humans are not intelligent.”

Simon chuckled as he hugged me close, and kissed my cheek. “Maybe not, but you’re a very smart human. And I think you’re right. Communication is important. We have to make that our number one rule. I want to know when something bothers you, Topher. Talk to me. Tell me everything. I love you and I never want you to doubt that.”

“I love you too...so much.”

He captured my mouth in a searing kiss, pouring every ounce of feeling into the connection before picking me up and carrying me to our room.

He stripped my clothes off, licking and sucking at my neck, my nipples, my cock. Then he pulled back the duvet and pushed me onto the mattress, covering me like a

blanket. He kissed a sexy trail down my torso, pausing to swallow my length while he fingered my hole. When I tugged at his hair and begged for his cock, he lubed up, and slowly made his way inside me.

Simon made love to me, moving with a tenderness that spoke a thousand words. And I heard every one of them. *I love you, I want you, I need you. Mine, mine, mine.* He let the tempo steadily build, rocking his hips as he pushed my legs farther apart, thrusting insistently till I fell apart. He came with a roar a moment later, pumping cum deep inside me, and trembling wildly in the aftermath.

We laughed at the mess we'd made, but we were too spent to do anything about it. We let a peaceful quiet settle between us instead. And when our breathing returned to normal, we rolled to face each other, entwining our limbs and chatting about other important things...like the amazing sandwich he'd made and how cool it was going to be when we could use vegetables from our own garden.

"I'll want to plant tomatoes for sure. And red lettuce. How about you?" He drew a lazy circle on my hip.

"Carrots sound good. And I'd really love a lemon tree."

"We can do that."

"Are you going to be in charge of planting?" I asked.

"We both are."

"I know nothing about gardening."

"You can follow my lead. I know a few things." Simon kissed me hard and smacked my ass for good measure. "For now...follow me to the bathroom, bad boy. We both need a shower and you need something to eat. Chop-chop."

I propped myself on my elbows, surveying the mess of tangled sheets. I heard running water and soft singing. I smiled as I rolled out of bed to join him, following the sound of his deep voice, the sound of his bare feet on the tile...the sound of my heart.

Perhaps that was a ridiculously fanciful sentiment, but it was true. Simon was my heart, my other half. He read me like an old familiar map, navigating my quirks with patience and a kindness that left me dazed and bewildered. I might not know how we got here, but I was grateful we'd made our own rules and followed our hearts. This was a beautiful place to be.

COMING SOON! RULES OF PLAY- JULY 2021

Geeks rule! Get ready for Book 2 in my new geeky series,
The Script Club!

EXCERPT FROM RULES OF PLAY- JULY 2021

Ten minutes later, I put my computer bag on the floor of Aiden's white Chevy pickup and hoisted myself onto the passenger seat.

"So, what's your bright idea?"

Aiden pulled his seatbelt on then revved the engine to life before casting a sideways mischievous glance at me. "I think we should trade services."

Say what?

"Do you want a blow job or something?"

He snorted. "I think those repairs are gonna cost more than a blow job."

"How much does a BJ cost? I've never bartered for one or given one for services rendered."

Aiden's eyes creased in amusement. "Well, gosh, neither have I."

I stared at his handsome profile before shifting my gaze to the darkening sky. Twilight had descended, painting the sky pretty shades of pink and purple. I thought about commenting on the traffic or the weather to bridge the conversation gap until he spilled his grand idea.

Instead, I blurted, "I give an amazing BJ. We could add a hand job or three as incentive."

"Might want to watch that sarcasm, boy. I'm in the midst of a long dry spell. I might just take you up on that."

My dick gave an involuntary twitch. I ignored it with practiced ease as I studied Aiden's strong profile. He'd taken off his uniform shirt at the garage and pulled on a red plaid button-down. The lumberjack look was now complete and it was a damn fine view.

Screech. Halt. Terminate.

I liked Aiden, but I was not...repeat, *not* allowed to lust after my brother's best friend.

"Fine. I'll behave. So...what do you want to trade?"

He turned onto Colorado Boulevard and came to an abrupt stop behind a yellow VW van covered in peace bumper stickers. It was always busy along this stretch, but it seemed worse tonight. He strong-armed his way into the lane next door and sighed as if resigned to the prospect of traveling at a snail's pace.

"Your brain for repairs."

"And what part of my brain do you need?"

"Well, it's a bit of story."

I gestured toward the traffic. "It looks like we have some time."

Aiden inclined his head. "True. Listen, G, what I'm about to tell you needs to stay on the DL. In other words, if you were to pick up your Bronco and I wasn't at the shop, I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to anyone there. Hank is my uncle, Timmy is a cousin, and there are another five or six relatives in the garage or who work the front

desk. I don't want them to know until it's a done deal. First of all, I need that job and second, I wouldn't quit until I had something else lined up...preferably in my chosen field."

"Which is?"

"I've been taking online courses in sports management to become a baseball analyst," he said in a rush.

"Cool. What's that?"

Aiden furrowed his brow and not gonna lie, even in his semi-dark truck, it was a formidable look. "You're a space analyst. It's like that, but for baseball."

I shifted in my seat, nearly choking myself on my cape. I loosened the fabric around my neck and glowered. "I'm not analyst and I'm an aerospace engineer. More specifically, my field is orbital mechanics."

"Does that mean you're the guy to call when my rocket won't blast off?"

I snort-laughed. "You got problems with your rocket, Aiden?"

He threw his head back and guffawed. "You dirty-minded little fucker. I have no problems and zero complaints about the state of my rocket."

"But you also just claimed to be in the midst of a dry spell. Perhaps there's a correlation," I teased.

"Yeah, I don't think so. I've just been busy." The stand-still traffic gave him ample opportunity to pull off a scathing glare before refocusing on the traffic. He smacked the steering wheel grumpily. "Damn, this like a parking lot. Do you have time to grab a drink? We can chat about a possible deal over a beer. What d'ya say?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lane Hayes loves a good romance! An avid reader from an early age, she has always been drawn to well-told love story with beautifully written characters. Her debut novel was a 2013 Rainbow Award finalist and subsequent books have received Honorable Mentions, and were winners in the 2016, 2017, and 2018-2019 Rainbow Awards. She loves red wine, chocolate and travel (in no particular order). Lane lives in Southern California with her amazing husband in a not quite empty nest.

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