

Chapter One

The first time Zoe Clarke saw me, my hand was wrapped around my dick.

Unfortunately, I wasn't jerking off. If that had been the case, she might have found it sexy—emphasis on the *might* since it isn't a turn-on for every girl, let alone the fact that it would've been weird as shit to be caught masturbating in a bathroom at a party.

I wish I could tell you something you'd love to hear, something exciting, like it was love at first sight instead of an unexpected and weird dick sighting at a random college party. Or that it was a romantic setup, like we crashed into each other while running to class on campus, her books flew out of her hands so I dropped to one knee to help her out and when our heads knocked together, we looked into each other's eyes and the rest was history.

I think you get what I mean, some kind of dreamy movie scene like that, but...fuck no. I know that sounds sweet, and it would melt hearts every time we told people about our meet cute, but, again, that's a no. On the contrary, like I said in the beginning, the first time my eyes landed on Zoe Clarke and hers landed on my dick, I was in a bathroom, in the middle of taking a piss while chatting with my friend.

"And why did you want to watch me take a piss again?" I asked JP, unsuccessfully trying to understand why I had a spectator.

The corner of his lip tipped up lazily and his gaze dropped low as I unzipped myself. "I see it enough in the locker room, man—haven't missed it. I was telling you about Isaac, and you're the one who couldn't hold it until I finished." I gave him a side-eyed look as he ignored me and continued. "Man, you should've been there. The way Coach laid it on him after you guys left—I'm not sure he'll come back to practice again. Hell, I'm not sure *I* wanna go back, and I didn't do shit." He paused for a second or two. "You wanna bet a fifty on it? You think he'll show up?"

I glanced at JP, who was leaning against the wall, eyes closed, face turned toward the ceiling, appearing completely harmless and relaxed. As a rule, JP was never harmless—not on the field, and especially not at a party.

The way Coach had been working us on the field lately, I didn't think any of the guys wanted to be there, at least not the ones who were sane. But, if you loved the game

enough, you handled whatever it threw your way to get where you hoped to get one day. Basically, go big or go home. Always beast mode.

“Not betting. If he wants it enough, he’ll be there.”

Just as the words came out of my mouth, we heard someone open and slam the door. For a brief moment, the blasting music and shouts from the party downstairs drowned everything out. Sure, someone barging in on you wasn’t anything alarming since it would be stupid to expect any kind of privacy at a college party. But when I looked over my shoulder to see who wasn’t patient enough to wait a few minutes, I saw it was a girl hugging the door and did a double take.

“Be cool. Be cool. This is nothing. Easy peasy. I’m *never* making new friends again. You can do this, just open your eyes and turn around, dammit.”

The brunette still had her back to us, her head resting on the door as she muttered to herself.

Frozen on the spot, JP and I glanced at each other; he shrugged, and I watched his lips stretch into a slow, cocky smile. He looked like he had just been handed a shiny new toy. Giving me a chin lift with his distinct smirk in place, he pushed himself off the wall and headed for the poor girl.

“You can do anything you put your mind to, baby,” he said, managing to spook her thoroughly.

As soon as JP spoke, she stopped muttering, spun around to face us, and proceeded to do a pretty damn good imitation of a deer caught in headlights.

“I...”

“You...” JP countered when nothing else came out of her mouth.

As I was getting ready to tuck myself back into my pants, her eyes jumped between JP and me a few times as if she suddenly found herself on the moon and didn’t know exactly how she’d made it up there. Then her eyes dropped down to my hand—which was still very much around my dick. Her gaze flew right back up to my face then dropped back to my hand again.

I could tell she was fighting off a grin because her lips twitched. “Shit! Oh...that’s a...penis—your penis. Shit.” Her voice was barely audible over the muffled music as she

repeated her little staring game a few more times and the color gradually drained from her already pale face.

“Do you mind?” I asked, amused by the way her eyes were getting bigger.

“I didn’t...” She started then closed her mouth as she met my gaze. “Your penis...I didn’t mean to...your penis? I just saw your penis. I’m still seeing your penis. I’m looking straight at it, and it’s right the—”

I met JP’s amused gaze and glanced back at the girl. “Don’t tell me it’s your first sighting.” I turned around so I could tug my zipper back up and save the girl from having a full-on breakdown.

There was a loud groan behind me then a thump that sounded a lot like someone repeatedly hitting their forehead against a door; it made me smile.

“I haven’t seen you around before. Freshman, I assume? You’re fascinating, little freshman. Is it my turn now?” JP asked into the silence. “If my friend’s dick makes you stammer like that, I wanna see your reaction when you check out mine. It needs to be said: mine looks a lot more handsome than his—bigger, too—and if you’d like to give it a taste tes—”

The groan got louder and sounded more like a growl. “Don’t even finish that sentence!”

I chuckled.

It should be said that JP wasn’t exactly the smoothest guy on the planet, but apparently that didn’t mean shit to college girls. He was one of those guys who attracted girls no matter what he did or said. Compared to him, I was the opposite—I tried my best not to get distracted by girls. He’d say some crazy shit to them, yet they’d still hang on to his every word. He’d say jump and they’d ask, *Which bed?* Him being one hell of a running back didn’t hurt his odds of getting laid regularly either.

Don’t get me wrong, I had my fair share of girls who’d have loved to get my attention, but early on—around kindergarten—I found out that I’m a one-woman kind of guy. Interestingly, that seems to be another reason girls seem to flock to my side. Trust me, this is not me being vain or pretentious, it just seems to be the way life goes when you’re a football player who has a shot at going pro. It has nothing to do with how I look; frankly, Chris, our starting quarterback, is the pretty boy on the team, not me.

Football players—we’re practically catnip to college girls.

I turned on the tap to wash my hands and glanced at the girl to see her reaction. She still had her back to us, but at least she was no longer banging her head. If JP was about to get his dick out for a show and tell, I was out of there. Whipping out dicks with my teammates for girls was where I drew the line of friendship.

Sending me a quick grin and wink, JP clasped his hands behind his back and leaned down to her ear. “Booo!”

The girl flinched, turned around to face him, and did a little shuffle back when she realized he was standing a lot closer than he had been a few seconds before.

“Thank you for the offer, but I don’t want to see any dicks at all,” she stated, and then she started to back away from him as my friend stalked his new prey.

“Aww, but you’d really like mine.”

When I couldn’t find anything to dry my hands with, I wiped them off on my jeans as I watched their awkward interaction until her back hit my chest and she let out a squeak.

“That’s my cue.” I glanced down and saw that her head was tilted back and up. She was watching me intently. Even from that close, it was hard to tell what color her eyes were, maybe green with hazel specks around the rims of the pupils.

Realizing I was staring into her eyes and easily seeing how panicked she was, I frowned, took a step back, and glanced at JP. “Ease up on her, man. Come on, let’s head out.” Before I could step away, the girl faced me, grabbed my arm, and held on tight.

“No—you can’t leave,” she blurted out, surprising both JP and me. “I’m here for you.”

I raised my brows and sent JP a confused look. He just shrugged. He was still wearing that *I’m so intrigued* smile on his face as he very openly checked out her ass.

“I mean, I’m not here for you,” the girl explained, and my gaze went back to her. “But I came *in* here for you.” She squinted a little, her nose scrunching in the process. “You know what I mean? You probably don’t. I followed you in here because I really need to ask you something.” Her voice rose with panic, but she kept going. “When I say I followed you in here, I don’t mean I’m stalking you or anything like that because that’d be crazy. I don’t even know you, right?” She let out a nervous laugh, patted my arm awkwardly, and then seemed to realize she was actually touching me. She snatched her hand back and clasped them behind her as she took a step away. “Not that I’d stalk you if

I knew you, but that's not the point right now. I just...really, really need to ask you something before I make a fool of myself out there, and I thought what better way to do that than when he is alone...and I thought you'd be alone in here, and..."

I didn't understand a thing she was saying, but before I could respond, JP jumped in. "So, you're sending me away, huh? And here I thought we had something special."

She looked over her shoulder at him. "Sorry. I didn't see you follow him in here, and I didn't realize this was the bathroom anyway. If I'd seen you, I would've waited outside. I had no idea guys did that going-to-bathroom-together thing. It's sweet that you do though." Her eyes met mine for a second before she quickly looked away and addressed JP again. "It'll just be a minute, really, then you can come back and have him all to yourself."

He arched a brow at her but otherwise stayed quiet.

She glanced at me, and whatever she saw on my face made her wince. "Sorry, that sounded bad, didn't it? Not that being gay is bad or anything. I shouldn't have assumed. My friend is gay, and I know how hard it is when people say the most stupid fucking things and how much he—"

JP laughed and shook his head. "You should stop while you're ahead, girl. My offer still stands if you want to come find me after you're done with my boy here."

After that, he opened the door and left me alone with her. Crossing my arms over my chest, I relaxed against the sink.

She turned back to me, let out a long breath, and smiled nervously. "That was bad, wasn't it?"

"The whole thing, or just the last part?" I couldn't help myself; I smiled back at her. I'd had some girls do crazy things to get my attention so they could get in my bed, but I didn't think that was what was happening here.

With a grimace on her face, she shook her head, eyes dropping to the floor. "I just assumed this was your room and you would be alone and then when I came in, you had your...ummm...and then he was in here with you..." She met my gaze then quickly looked away. "And your...thing was out, and then it all went to hell from there."

Yeah, she was not the type who chased after football players.

Another nervous laugh and she was backing away from me toward the door.

“So, I’m sorry? And...thank you?”

My smile grew bigger. “For what?”

She rubbed her hands on her jeans, shook her head, and just appeared miserable as she looked anywhere but at me.

“At this point? If I’m being honest, I really don’t know. Thank you for talking to me? For not kicking me out? For letting me see your penis?” Her eyes closed on their own and she shook her head, took a couple steps back, and lifted her hands, palms out, pausing when her back hit the door. “I didn’t mean it like that—I wasn’t trying to see your penis or anything like that. I told you, I didn’t even know this was the bathroom. I mean, I assume it wasn’t your best moment, so why would I wanna see”—her hand gestured toward my crotch area—“your...that...but it looked like you’re a shower instead of a grower so that must be...good for you? Congrats? Not that you’d want a stranger to congratulate you on something like that, but you’re a football player, so maybe you like compliments?”

For a few seconds, the silence stretched between us and I was unable to hide my grin. Now that my dick wasn’t out and JP wasn’t with us to put the moves on her, I took in her features: straight brown hair that framed her face and reached just below her shoulders, pale skin, big doe eyes that were something between hazel and green—I still hadn’t decided—slightly plumper bottom lip, flushed cheeks from what I assumed was embarrassment. And then there were other things, like her C-cup boobs trying their best to rip through her tight t-shirt—I did have eyes, after all—her hourglass figure, and great fucking legs—not too thin, not too thick, just perfect for my taste.

I made sure to look into her eyes and nowhere else as I ran my hand over my short hair. Considering where my mind was going, I didn’t think it was smart to spend more time with her in a bathroom. “You remind me of my sister,” I said, completely out of nowhere, shocking both of us. “You’re a little shy, aren’t you?” She did remind me of Amelia. When she was nervous, she talked endlessly, too, did a lot of rambling. Even though she knew she didn’t make much sense, she couldn’t stop it. Being shy was the only answer that made sense.

She laughed and seemed to sag against the door. “You seeing me as your sister doesn’t bode well for me, especially if you knew what I was trying to ask—not that you should see me as someone who you would want to or could...just forget about that. What made you think I was shy? Wait. Wait.” She raised her hand. “I take that one back too. Don’t even answer that.”

Another awkward silence stole our words as I stared at her and she stared at my chest until someone pushed on the door and made her lose her balance.

A head peered through the partly open door. “Ah, sorry, dude! Didn’t know this was occupied.” He pushed the door open a few more inches to look around inside. “We’ll come in after you two are done.” After giving me a thumbs up, he slowly disappeared.

As soon as the door closed, my brunette—scratch that, *the* brunette let out a deep breath and focused her gaze on me. She appeared steadier, but based on the way she was tugging on her shirt—which had *Smile for me* written on it in big bold letters—I wouldn’t have bet money on it. Curious as hell, I waited for her to continue.

“You know what, I already made a mess, so at this point, asking this won’t—no, *can’t* make things any worse.”

Already intrigued by her, I gestured with my hand for her to go on. “I’m all ears.”

As I tried my best to hide my smile, she took another deep breath. “I need to kiss you,” she blurted out quickly. Closing her eyes, she groaned. “That wasn’t the best way to break it to you. Let me try again.”

I raised my brow. “You need to kiss me.”

“Need to, have to—I mean they’re all the same thing, right?” A quick nod. “I mean, I don’t want to kiss you, not really. I didn’t choose you.”

“You didn’t choose me.”

“Nope, I didn’t. It’s not that you’re not good-looking—you definitely are, in a rugged sort of way, which would work for me. I’d kiss you if I had to, but you weren’t my first choice.”

“You’re doing wonders for my ego. Keep going.”

“Okay, I’m thinking that *really* wasn’t the best way to go about this. Let me start over and see how that goes. My roommate, Lindsay, kind of dragged-slash-forced me to come here tonight, to the party I mean. She thinks I’m not living the ‘college experience’ to the fullest. We came, met her friends—it’s my first year, and I’m meeting new people, so that’s good, right?” Without waiting for me to give an answer, she took a deep breath and kept going. “Nope, not good. Her friends realized I’m not adventurous at all because I don’t tend to talk very much when I’m in a big group and prefer to just stay back. I like to take things in at first, observe, you know? I don’t like to have too many eyeballs on me.

Anyway, you don't care about that, so blah blah blah, more talk, more cringing on my part."

She shut her eyes and shook her head. I just stood there, watching her, listening to her, waiting for her to finish her story. I couldn't really have moved even if I wanted to; she was...it was all too...*captivating*—that's the word I was looking for. She was all over the place and yet she was captivating as hell, a fresh breath of air, for some reason.

"Then they bet—kind of dared me that I couldn't kiss a random guy. I said sure I could just so they'd stop talking about me, because what are they gonna do? Expect me to follow through on that? Are we in kindergarten? Pffttt. And, okay, fine, I was a little offended, but they were kind of right. I'm not adventurous or spontaneous. Not into kissing random guys, either. I've never done it, but I figured it's easy enough. Anyway, they said I wouldn't have the balls to kiss the guy *they* wanted me to kiss, because apparently that's also a thing in college—daring, betting, kissing random people..."

"Wow," I said before she could go on, and she lifted her eyes to me. It was my lame attempt to make sure she took a breath before she passed out. "There seem to be a lot of things about college I didn't know about, and I'm not even a freshman anymore. I've never kissed a random girl before either—didn't even know it was a requirement." I actually had, but she didn't need to know that. I got kissed by random girls sometimes, especially after a good game when everyone's adrenaline was running high, but I never had the urge to go kiss a random girl just because. Maybe I just hadn't seen the right random girl because at that moment I could see the appeal.

"See!" she exclaimed, her body relaxing a bit more. "That's what I said. Anyway, we're coming to the painful part, so I'll just push forward. My roommate, Lindsay, grabbed this poor guy who was walking past with his buddies and told me to kiss him, so I did, just a quick peck—that's nothing, right? I didn't even touch the guy, just leaned up and pressed my lips against his. It was pretty anticlimactic, actually, and since I've had a little bit of beer..." She lifted three fingers, presumably indicating the number of beers she'd had, then tucked her hair behind her right ear. I studied her lips—all this talk about kissing, and she had those beautiful shiny pink lips... "I didn't even feel a thing," she continued. "No butterflies. No nothing. The guy didn't look all that upset about it since he tried for a second, longer kiss."

I bet he didn't, I thought. I bet the lucky bastard wasn't upset about it at all.

She started talking even faster, making it almost impossible to follow her thoughts.

“But then Lindsay’s friend, Molly, randomly pointed at you. You were talking to some guys across the room, and she dared me to kiss *you*. What’s so special about you, I have no idea.” I opened my mouth, but she held up her hand and continued without a pause. “So, I had to say I could because I’m not good with dares and bets. I get a tad bit competitive. Since I got away with just a peck with the last guy, they dared me to go full out with you. Again, I don’t know if you’re some kind of hotshot or something, but I guess there is something about you that makes you special enough for them to insist that much. Maybe you’re their type, I don’t have a freaking clue. I asked them to give me a few minutes and followed you here so I could ask your permission before I attacked you in front of everyone or at least attempted to attack you in front of everyone to basically suck your face. Now, after what I’ve seen...just to make sure...you’re not gay, are you? Because if that’s why they insisted so much...that’s cruel.”

When she kept looking at me expectantly, I straightened up and rubbed the back of my neck.

“This is probably gonna sound like a lie to you, but...” *How to say this?* “As much as I’d love to help you out with your dare, I have a girlfriend.” We’d only been out once, but still... “She’s late getting here, but she’s probably out there now, and I think I should—”

“Ah. Oh. Oh, of course. Okay.”

I watched her eyes bounce all over the place, her gaze touching me only once or twice, and even then, only for a second. Then she blindly reached for the handle, opened the door, and stepped out.

“I’m really sorry, you know,” she started, her voice slightly louder in an effort to be heard over the ruckus going on outside. Her eyes dropped down to my pants then came back up to my eyes. “About that...and everything else. This whole night has been weird...weird and stupid. I’m just gonna leave, and...” Another step away. “Yeah. Sorry,” she repeated, her eyes focused on my shoulder instead of my eyes as she kept backing away.

That’s when I realized her eyes were watering. Having a sister teaches you a thing or two about these things, and I knew this girl was seconds away from crying.

“Wait. Hey, wait!” I yelled, quickly walking after her before she could disappear.

She glanced back at me over her shoulder without stopping.

“What’s your name?” I yelled louder.

She gave me a small smile, something between sad and horrified, just as I watched that first tear slide down. Then she was gone, disappearing into the crowd before I could reach her.

Why I wanted to know her name, why my eyes looked for her every now and then the entire night...back then, I didn’t know.