CARLY ROBYN

DRIVE ME *home*



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Carly Robyn writes contemporary romances with heat, heart, and humor. When she's not writing or reading, you can find her spending time with her family, scrolling through TikTok, exploring Chicago's restaurant scene with friends, watching a Grand Prix, taking a million pictures of her dogs, or binge-watching anything true crime related while drinking a Diet Coke.

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ALSO BY CARLY ROBYN

Drive Me Crazy

Ella & Blake's story

Drive Me Wild

Josie & Theo's story

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For my Poppop Arnie.
Your love for Mimi is the kind that romance
books are written about.

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AUTHOR'S CONTENT NOTE

This book is written in a light and humorous style but does include explicit language, references to the death of a parent (past, off-page) and a main character who was adopted as a newborn. It is a slow-burn, open-door romance that portrays sexual content and is meant for readers 18+. Please take note!

The focus of this work is on the fictional characters and events within the Formula 1 racing world, and deviations from the current Grand Prix schedule and tracks are intentional for storytelling purposes.

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PLAYLIST

Lover | Taylor Swift
Stick Season | Noah Kahan
Espresso | Sabrina Carpenter
Vienna | Billy Joel
What a Girl Wants | Christina Aguilera
Lose Control | Teddy Swims
From Eden | Hozier
Unwritten | Natasha Bedingfield
Beautiful Things | Benson Boone
Gorgeous | Taylor Swift
Dancing In The Flames | The Weeknd
Talk Too Much | COIN
Kiwi | Harry Styles

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ONE
CHARLOTTE

I REALLY HOPE the person interrupting my dream is cursed to drink the wrong coffee order every morning for the rest of time. Groaning, I ignore the ringing of the hotel room phone and burrow deeper under the covers. Unfortunately, I told the front desk to call until I pick up, so a moment after it stops, it starts up again.

I'm not a morning person. At all. Quite frankly, I'm a grade-A witch until I've had two full doses of caffeine. *Minimum*. When I was a kid, my dad used to wake me up by saying "rise and whine" because there was absolutely nothing sunny about my disposition.

Giving up on my dream—where Jason Momoa is fighting Ryan Reynolds for the honor of buying me my first Birkin—I answer the phone with a groggy "'Ello."

"Good morning, Ms. Walker. This is Khan at the hotel front desk with your wake-up call."

"Yeah, thanks, got it," I mumble, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes.

There's a slight hesitation before he continues. "Shall I call back in ten minutes?"

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Confused, I arch a brow. "Um, why?"

"To confirm your… alertness," he says, his tone uncertain. "Your husband requested that we ensure your timely arrival at the track. Your car will be ready in thirty minutes."

My stomach rolls. *Gross*. I sigh. "My brother."

"What?"

"Theodore's my brother, not my husband." Any future husband of mine better know not to use hotel staff to corral my arse out of bed. "There's no need to call back, though. I'm up. Thanks."

"Okay. Have a lovely day, Ms. Walker."

"You, too, Khan. I take back my wish about your ruined coffee order."

Once I've returned the phone to its cradle, I let out a string of expletives so colorful it would leave Shakespeare impressed and force myself out of bed. I get started on my morning routine at the speed of a crotchety, arthritic old man. Once my teeth are brushed, my skin is moisturized, and my curls are somewhat tamed, I stalk over to my suitcase. Ignoring the AlphaVite polo my brother gave me—there's no way I'm putting that polyester monstrosity on my body—I pull out the three potential race day outfits I brought with me. After a moment's deliberation, I decide on a cream knit midi dress. It's smart, casual, and perfect for Bahrain's weather, thanks to the lightweight fabric. I pair it with my beige Nike sneakers—I think the actual color is "light bone," but I find that anthropologic and weird—and shove my luggage to the other side of the room so it's not visible in the mirror picture I snap for my social media. Then I head downstairs and out the front doors to the waiting car.

By the time we pull up to the designated area at the track, I'm only running thirty-five minutes late. All things considered, like my jet lag, hatred of mornings, and problems with time

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management, I'm doing pretty damn good. I push my sunglasses up my nose as I approach the turnstile at the entryway of the paddock. It's only nine a.m., but the golden glow of the sun is already blindingly bright. A massive banner featuring the F1 logo and its sponsors looms overhead as I dig for my VIP pass. It's attached to a neon orange lanyard, so it shouldn't be difficult to find, but my purse is Mary Poppins' bag come to life. No cute clutches for me. Nope. This sucker is considered a carry-on by select airlines.

Once I've finally located my pass, I press it against the scanner, and the light on the turnstile flashes green, allowing me entry into the exclusive F1 paddock. Located behind the pit garage, the paddock is equal parts fancy and functional. F1 teams and employees do most of their work here, but it's also where sponsors, media, and special guests spend time before and after the events of the race weekend. The layout of the paddock is slightly different at every circuit, but it always resembles a tiny multi-million-dollar village.

I can't help but smile to myself as I make my way down the main path toward the AlphaVite motorhome and take in the details. The Bahrain Grand Prix is far from the first race I've been to. I attended my first grand prix when I was eight months old and have continued annually my entire life. As they always do, the faint aroma of engine oil and the mosaic of team colors lighten my mood. Along my way, I note the reporters setting up their cameras and equipment, the Formula 1 employees leading sponsors toward the hospitality areas equipped with champagne and caviar, and members from each team entering their respective motorhomes for meetings.

The outside of AlphaVite's motorhome is slate gray with large, tinted windows and their signature lightning-shaped logo stamped front and center over the door. One side of the ground floor houses offices, but the bulk of the space is packed

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with employees repping AlphaVite's signature cobalt blue while enjoying breakfast at the cafeteria tables. Drivers' private rooms are typically on the middle floor, so I make my way up there without slowing. I've just cleared the final step when my brother's booming voice echoes down the hall. I'd give him shit for it if I wasn't just as loud.

I consider knocking for all of 0.5 seconds before saying *fuck it* and walking in without announcing myself. Theo's manspread on the small couch in the room, chatting animatedly into the phone. Based on the goofy grin he's wearing, it's his girlfriend. I lucked out in the future sister-in-law department. I always make sure to tell my brother that the best thing that's happened to him as a Formula 1 driver has nothing to do with the world championships he's won. It's 100 percent Josie. She worked for the marketing team at McAllister back when he drove for the team, and at some point last year, they went from friends to adorably-slash-disgustingly-in love.

"Charlotte's finally here," he says.

I roll my eyes at the word *finally* because I know he hasn't been sitting here twiddling his thumbs.

"Yeah," he goes on. "Okay—sure. Miss you, too. I'll call you later, yeah? Mm-hmm. Love you, angel."

He ends the call, then greets me with a warm "you really should knock, you know."

"And you really shouldn't pronounce Worcestershire like it's a hobbit town from *Lord of the Rings*," I counter with a shrug. "But here we are."

At my comment, he whips his head in my direction and frowns. "Where's the shirt I got you?"

"I never wear team merch," I remind him, hopping up onto the edge of the desk.

I've loved fashion since I watched my first episode of *Sex and the City*. I had no interest in the trysts or rendezvous Miranda, Charlotte, Samantha, or Carrie had with the men of

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Manhattan. Nope. The only love affairs I cared about included fabrics, the famous Fendi Baguette bag, and all the fabulous stores. As Rachel Zoe once said, "Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak." So as much as I support my brother's team, their awkwardly fitting, sort-of-itchy polo shirt isn't me.

"You ready for the race?" I ask. I have no interest in arguing about clothing today. "How are you feeling?"

"Don't look so concerned, Lottie." He chuckles. "Driving for a new team may be a bit intimidating, but my fans are still *my* fans, no matter what colors I'm sporting."

"True," I concede, drawing out the word. It's weird, encountering starstruck fans. But time and time again, they stop Theo on the street for his signature or a selfie.

He winks at me. "If I was brave enough to change your nappies when you were a kid, I'm sure I can handle this."

I roll my eyes. "I'm calling bullshit, Theodore. You once called emergency services while you were babysitting because I threw up and you wanted me away from you."

"That's only because—"

"Morning, Roo," comes a voice from the doorway.

Then a Greek god steps into the room. Lucas Adler. My brother's best friend and the bloke I've been crushing on for… well, for forever. I drink in Lucas's tall, athletic frame like he's a fine wine and I'm a world-class sommelier. His tousled, wavy blond hair brushes against his forehead, and his bottle-green eyes speckle with gold, thanks to the light leaking through the window. It takes conscious effort not to lick my lips in appreciation.

A lazy grin etches lines around the eyes of AlphaVite's other driver as he takes me in.

Lucas started calling me Kangaroo when I was a kid—because I was constantly hopping around like Australia's

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national animal—but over the years, the name has shortened itself to Roo.

A betraying sort of flush blooms across my cheekbones as I wave and say, "Hi."

"Theo said you were on your way over, so I grabbed a coffee and a croissant for you. Figured you could save it for later if your blood sugar's too high right now." He holds out an AlphaVite-branded coffee cup and a white pastry bag. "Double espresso with steamed milk and two pumps of sugar-free vanilla syrup, right?"

There's no use even attempting a coy smile. No, not when I'm this giddy. So I let an idiotic grin take over. "You know my coffee order?"

A slight pink hue spreads across his cheeks. It's utterly adorable, the way this grown man, with tattoos dusting his body and metal rings gracing his fingers, blushes. I make a mental note to do it more often.

He steps closer and hands me the coffee, the cup still warm even through the protective Styrofoam. "Good memory, I guess."

I take a sip and groan as the familiar flavor hits me. My ovaries do a choreographed can-can dance in appreciation. "You are seriously the best. If I didn't already have a list of baby names on my phone, I'd *so* let you name my first child."

Or let you father them.

"What about middle name?" Lucas counters with a chuckle.

Bringing the cup to my lips to hide my smile, I nod. "I can work with that."

I've made quite a few not-so-brilliant decisions in my life: Believing my ex when he said not to worry about that one girl. Thinking I could pull off low-rise jeans. Getting bangs. Paying to belong to a fancy gym with the hope that it would miracu-

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lously make me want to work out. The list is longer than a drugstore receipt.

But traveling the world with my brother for the Formula 1 season as I figure out what I want to do with my life and what's next after graduating from university? Not one of those kinds of decisions. Add in the bonus of spending my weekends with Lucas Adler, and hell, this may be the smartest decision I've ever made.

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TWO
LUCAS

IF THERE'S one thing my mom excels at, it's laying on guilt thicker than schmear on an everything bagel. The first time I missed curfew, the speech she gave me was so lengthy and fear-inducing that I was never again late coming back from a friend's house. My brothers and I have dubbed it her "Oscar speech" because it's been known to bring tears to a person's eyes, though not in the same way.

I've already apologized twice for being hard to reach, but, ironically enough, she's barely acknowledged that I'm on the phone. Knowing I just need to wait her out, I make myself comfortable on the couch in my suite. Lord knows how long this will take, and the last thing I want to do after dodging her calls for a week is cut her short.

"I have better things to do than chase after you like I'm an annoying telemarketer," she huffs. I don't have to see her to know she's pacing the living room with one hand on her hip. "Is it so difficult to answer a call from your mother? Thirty-six hours of labor, and I talk to your voicemail more than I talk to you."

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"Mom—"

"Oh, no, no, no. You don't get to *Mom* me, Lucas Noah Adler. It's been over a week since I last spoke to you. You barely even respond to texts."

Maybe because her texts consist of phrases like "hi" and "miss you," rather than anything of importance. Though I keep that to myself. But when she finally takes a breath, I gently remind her. "It's the start of the season, Ma. Things have been ridiculously busy, but I'm sorry, okay? I'll be better at keeping in touch."

"*Humph*." Voice softening, she says, "I worry about you being so far away. I like hearing your voice. That way I know you're okay."

"I know," I reply, my heart heavy at the truth in her words. I twist the silver ring on my middle finger. "Promise I'll be better about answering."

"Good," she says. "Now that we've got that settled, have you looked into booking your flight home?"

I drop my head back with a thump against the back of the couch. *This* is why I've been avoiding her calls. "Yeah, I can probably make it in May or June."

She makes an obnoxious buzzer noise. The sound is so loud I cringe and pull the phone away from my ear.

"Nope. Wrong answer," she says. "You *can* make it. When was the last time you visited? Last summer?"

"You saw me in December."

She and my dad stayed with me in Monaco. We spent the week sailing like we did on the summer waters of Cape Cod when I was a kid. As one of five boys, I don't often get uninterrupted one-on-one time with my parents, but they make the effort, and I'll never take that for granted.

"Don't play coy with me," she says, her tone suddenly haughty. I can picture her standing in the middle of the room now with her chin raised. "It's time you came home for longer than a day or two."

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My chest goes tight at the thought, and I rub at my sternum absentmindedly. "It's not as easy as you think, Ma. I have commitments here, and with the season—"

"I know, honey," she says with a sigh. "But it would mean a lot to us, especially *me*, if you could make the time to come home every once in a while. The whole family's driving to Montreal for the grand prix in May. What if you came back with us afterward? You could stay for the week. We all miss you."

I lower my head, sighing in defeat. I'm not one to air my dirty laundry, so my mom doesn't know why I've been avoiding Boston for the past few years. Taking a surprise trip back only to find my brother Jesse was dating my ex? The ex I was interested in getting back together with? Yeah, I'd say that's a solid reason to avoid my hometown.

But she's right. It's been far too long since I've spent time with my family. The ones I want to see, at least. "All right," I acquiesce. "I'll see what my team can do."

"That's all I can ask," she says, a pleased tone marking her words. "It'll be nice to have all of my boys home again."

My shoulders slump. Boston hasn't felt like home for me in quite some time, but I don't mention that.

"I won't keep you any longer," she continues. "Good luck today, little lion. We'll be cheering you on."

I try not to cringe at the embarrassing nickname. We all have them: Grayson the gentle giraffe, Lucas the little lion, Jesse the jokester jaguar, Ezra the elegant elephant (by far the worst of them), and Finn the ferocious fox. "Thanks, Ma. Love you."

"Love you more."

Once I've ended the call, I shoot off a text to Mitchell, my manager, and Natalie, my assistant, asking them to make travel plans. That way I won't be tempted to back out.

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Then, putting the conversation out of my mind, I change

into my race suit, which is adorned with sponsor logos and hugs me like a well-worn glove. I only zip it up halfway, leaving the mandatory fireproof undershirt to cover my torso. With as scorching as it is outside, I aim to avoid overheating at all costs. My helmet coordinates with the suit, though it's got a few light blue accents on the side as well as the American flag and my lucky number seventeen. One side is already marred with scratches, thanks to one of the practice sessions, but like the tattoos that wind up my arms and my thigh, each one tells a story.

As I step into the garage, I take a moment to absorb the atmosphere. Mechanics and engineers adjust my car's settings, checking the tire pressure and fine-tuning every aspect of the sleek racing machine. The distant hum of engines rumbles through the air, welcoming me like a long-lost friend.

I exchange nods and brief greetings with familiar faces as I head toward Charlotte, who's standing next to my race engineer. She's curvy in all the right places, and her dark brown hair—a stark contrast to her fair skin and blue eyes—brushes past her shoulders. Her heart-shaped cheekbones are naturally pink as she listens to the engineer go on about something.

Objectively, it makes sense for her to spend the season with AlphaVite. Why shouldn't she take the opportunity to travel the world while she figures out her next steps? But subjectively? That's a whole different story.

Theo's an easygoing guy, and not quick to anger like Blake is, but if he knew I had a thing for his little sister? He'd go full berserker mode. Thanks to my actual brother, I'm all too familiar with how breaking bro code can ruin a friendship. I'm not about to screw up my relationship with Theo just because his sister's got a smile that can get me to say yes to anything, a laugh smoother than oak barrel–aged whiskey, and a body I'd like to map out with my tongue.

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With a long exhale to shake off those thoughts, I approach

and greet Charlotte by lightly tugging on the end of one of her curls.

She whirls around, a less-than-pleased frown on her lips. But when my identity registers, her lips tip up into a smile. "Oh. It's you," she says, giving me a small wave. "'Ello. You ready?"

"C'mon now." I nudge her with my elbow. "I'm always ready for race day."

"I figured as much, but it felt like the nice thing to ask." She beams up at me, those blue eyes sparkling. "My fantasy team and I are rooting for you to kick some arse today, by the way."

I let out a chuckle. "What's your team name? Walker this Way?"

The mile-wide smile that blossoms across her face and showcases her dimples warms me from the inside out and makes me feel like I've won before the race has even started. "No, it's Holy Walker-Moly, but that's a good one. Honestly, the possibilities are endless. Walker on the Wild Side, Walker Flocka Flame, Walker-ness Monster. Oh! And Walker on Sunshine. That's an oldie but a goodie."

"Wow. My guess is lame in comparison to those choices."

"Not any lamer than your Crocs," she teases, lifting her brows and eyeing my feet, even though I'm not wearing my favored sandals.

"Hey, my Crocs are cool and comfortable." I waggle my brows. "You can't make fun of the guy who remembers your coffee order. Don't you know that's a rule?"

Her dimples wink. "Oh, is it, now? I talk a lot, so it's nice to know someone's listening."

I'm sure as fuck not about to own up to remembering nearly everything Charlotte Walker's said to me since well before I noticed her in *that* way. I know she enjoys her morning toast best when it's a little burnt, she doesn't like her toenail

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polish and fingernail polish to match, and she always chooses the purse when playing Monopoly.

Before I can come up with a clever response, a loud whistle, courtesy of our team principal, David Green, captures my attention. Several feet behind Charlotte, David is standing out on the pit lane in front of the garage with Theo by his side.

Ah. Time for his pre-race motivational speech, or as I've come to call it, his "Al Pacino in *Any Given Sunday*" speech.

"Good luck out there," Charlotte says, gently squeezing my bicep.

"You, too," I say, then immediately cringe when I realize that sentiment doesn't apply. *Oy vey*. "I mean enjoy… watching."

What the fuck?

Charlotte tips her head back and laughs. "Holy Walker-Moly needs you to score some major points, so get it together, Adler."

Spending all season in her proximity? Yeah. I definitely need to get it together.

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THREE
CHARLOTTE

I BARELY HAVE the athleticism to wrestle my tits into a sports bra, yet my brother can drive a million-dollar car at 375 kilometers per hour like it's second nature. Genetics truly baffle me. On the monitor, Theo's car gains speed heading into a hairpin turn that will push him into a sharp kink in the track. My breath catches in my throat as his brake pressure spikes on the telemeter indicating the exceptional amount of pressure he's unloading onto his front left tire as he goes into the turn. As his car straightens out and he speeds toward the Ithaca car a few seconds ahead of him, I clap and release the tension riding in my shoulders.

"Great job," David says, complimenting my brother through the radio. "Hit DRS on the straight after turn eleven."

I adjust the chunky noise-canceling headphones I'm wearing as I turn to another screen. Each shows a different angle or portion of the track, which is one of the benefits of watching the race from here rather than the grandstands. When I was younger, I used to prefer watching the races from there. My dad retired from F1 before I was born, but he'd take me to the Melbourne Grand Prix every year. We'd sit with the

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fans like regular attendees, despite his status as a former world champion, and munch on popcorn and candy as we cheered and whistled for the cars barreling down the track. Without him, it feels strange, so I tend to watch in the garage now.

"Good race so far, yeah?"

I glance in the direction of the deep voice, then tip my head back, because the man strolling toward me is built like a fucking national monument. He has to be nearly two meters tall. Seriously. There's no way his three-piece charcoal suit isn't custom made. His broad shoulders would easily burst the seams of any department store ready-to-wear piece. Good lord, he must've been a massive baby. I shudder at the thought of his poor mother giving birth—*focus, Charlotte!*

"Uh, yeah, I reckon the team will have a podium win," I reply, giving him a friendly smile as I rack my memory for the bloke's name. Theo introduced me to every person on the team the day we arrived, like I was a show pony, and I thought I'd done well remembering, but I come up blank. It's surprising, really. I should remember someone this tall.

He sticks out his hand in introduction. "Mitchell Abramson."

"Lucas's mom-ager," I blurt out, pumping his hand energetically.

"*Mom-ager*?"

Heat creeps up my neck, but I give him a tentative smile. "Dad-ager works, but mom-ager rolls off the tongue a little better." Head tilted, I shrug. "Obviously, he's not your kid, but you've been with him since he was twelve, right? When he won the US Karting Championship, you saw his talent and potential. So you acted as his guardian so he could travel the world and compete, yada, yada, yada?"

He studies me for a moment, his lips downturned. "How do you know all of this?"

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"It's on his Wikipedia page," I say, angling in conspiratori-

ally. "And as his number one superfan, I stalk it every day, looking for new information. Did you know that Lucas prefers the red Gatorade to the dark blue one—which is blasphemy—and that he's allergic to feather pillows?" With a slow blink, I shake my head. "Not a very badass allergy for someone who rocks a leather jacket, but I'm not one to judge."

That's a lie, I totally am.

Mitchell's brows shoot into his hairline. "You—wait, what?"

"I'm taking the piss out on you, Mitchell," I say with a grin, straightening. "I know all of that because he told me. Duh."

Though I imagine some of that can be found online. Lucas is the only American driver on the Formula 1 grid, which makes him a unicorn of sorts. Most Americans focus on motorsports like NASCAR and IndyCar, since in order to gain experience and make a name for oneself in F1, a driver has to spend a significant amount of time in Europe, competing in karting events and single-seat series. Luckily for Lucas, Mitchell saw his talent early on, and here we are.

"You're Theo's sister," Mitchell says, snapping his fingers and pointing.

"Charlotte," I correct him, though I keep the usual vitriol out of my tone, considering I did just call him Lucas's momager. I swear if I had a penny for every time someone referred to me as "Theo's little sister" or "the other Walker," well, I wouldn't be rich, but I could definitely put down a deposit on a Chanel Classic Flap Bag. I've been living in the shadow of Theo's success my whole life. I don't begrudge his career or achievements, but it's hard to follow in his footsteps knowing I'll sprain an ankle even trying. My family has never made me feel as though I can't measure up. But with a brother as outgoing as mine? A man whose name and talent are known around the world? How could I compete?

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Mitchell nods. "Right. Charlotte. Lucas mentioned that you'll be following your brother around for the season."

The irritation I've been holding back almost spikes at those words. Nose crinkled, I say, "Following him around sounds lame. I much prefer to say I'm taking advantage of him so I can eat, drink, and shop my way through the world."

He snorts at my deadpan delivery.

I'm not embarrassed about needing time to pull myself together, but I don't owe him, or anyone, an explanation. And although Theo is helping expense my travels, it's because he insists on it. I'm not kidding. He wouldn't talk to me for three days when I tried booking a hotel room with my own credit card. My brother's the only person in the world who can out-stubborn me.

Mitchell nods, the corners of his lips quirking up. "If I hadn't been tipped off by the blue eyes and smile, your charm definitely would've done it. The Walkers don't exactly fly under the radar."

I raise my brows and fight off a grin. "I don't know how to tell you this, but you don't fly under the radar either. You're built like Mount Everest."

When he tosses his head back, his booming laugh is loud enough to be heard over the noise in the garage. "Because I'm tall?"

"Um, yeah. I'd probably need an oxygen mask to climb you."

He makes a strangled sound, his brows shooting up again. Only then does my inadvertent insinuation hit me.

"Not that I'm interested in climbing you," I say, feigning nonchalance, despite the way my stomach twists. "No offense, but you're too old for me, and it'd be a little on-the-nose ironic for me to have daddy issues. What I mean is that it'd take me a while to get up there if I did."

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For a moment, Mitchell just stares, but eventually, he shakes

his head and chuckles. "I knew your dad back when he raced for McAllister."

A bolt of excitement works its way through me. "Really?"

"Yep. Worked for his driving partner's manager back then," he reveals with a small grin. "He was a great guy. Always had a smile for everyone."

"Yeah," I say with a beam of my own. Formula 1 is etched into the fabric of my family history. For my dad, it was a focal point. For Theo, it has been a borderline obsession. For me, it's always remained in the periphery. But I'd be lying if I said part of the reason I was so open to spending the season with AlphaVite was to experience the magic of the sport for myself.

As our conversation peters out, we both focus on the screen, catching the moment when Harry Thompson, an Everest Racing driver, overtakes Lucas during a tight turn.

I wish I could say the rest of the race is nail-biting. Instead, Blake Hollis, my brother's best friend and former teammate, maintains the lead. Theo struggles to overtake the car ahead of him, and Lucas and Harry duke it out for second place, with Harry securing the spot in the second to last lap.

Pride swells in my chest as my brother hops out of his car, smiling at fans behind the crowd barrier, then thanks his team for a job well done. Although he won't outwardly show it, he's not happy with his performance. Unless he's on the podium with a trophy in his hand, he doesn't think he's done well enough. I'm only competitive about board games, so I can't imagine the pressure that comes with the potential to win millions rather than Monopoly money.

Theo congratulates the other drivers and signs a few hats before waving me over. "The only perk of you not wearing blue is that you're easy to spot."

I grumble under my breath as I give him a quick hug. He's sweaty, and if I dislike my own sweat—hence the reason I

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despise working out—then I sure as hell don't want his on me. "You did great out there."

His brows crease as a hint of disappointment filters through his features. "Hardly, but thanks."

"Fifth place still earns points," I remind him. "And it's only the first race. You've got a lot of time to work your way onto the podium."

"I guess," he mutters. "But I should've been more aggressive."

"Grr," I tease.

That earns a grin from him, and this time, the smile reaches his eyes. "Weirdo. I'm going to call Jos really quick before I'm hounded for interviews. You good?"

I flash him a thumbs-up. "You don't need to hover, Theo. I'm fine on my own."

"Old habits die hard," he says with a chuckle. "Catch ya later."

As he heads off to call his girlfriend, I zero in on the man I've been covertly glancing at for the past fifteen minutes. It'd be hard *not* to notice Lucas. He's not broody like Blake or loud and outgoing like my brother, but he commands a room all the same. Standing by his car, which is parked in its respective place, he's focused on a reporter holding an ESPN microphone. Not wanting to interrupt, I stand off to the side, watching as he answers post-race questions in a smooth, calm, and steady tenor.

The pit area is a sea of organized chaos, full of people celebrating victories with high fives and cheers or chatting about improvements for the next race, so I don't expect Lucas to notice me. But as if he can sense me, his head jerks in my direction, and his eyes pin me to the spot. He nods to the reporter in a way that simultaneously says "we're done here" and "thank you so much" before strolling toward me.

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Hello, handsome.

"Hey, Roo," he says, unzipping the top of his racing suit. Even though it only exposes the shirt he's wearing underneath, it feels like he's performing a strip show just for me. "How's Theo doing?"

Only Lucas would be more worried about how Theo's handling of placing fifth than celebrating his own win.

"How are *you* doing? Fifteen points in the bag to kick off the season is a hell of a way to start, Adler."

His face, already flushed from the race, turns a deeper shade of red. "Just doing my job."

"Modest as ever." I sigh. "I swear, if I had even a fourth of the talent you do, I'd be so fucking annoying about it you'd want to gag me. Not in… well, you know, *that* way." I wave a hand, going for flippant. "Or maybe you would. I don't know what you're into."

Did I just insinuate he may be into BDSM?

He arches his brows and coughs out a laugh. "You have talent, Char."

I shrug. "I'd hardly call the ability to recite every line in *The Devil Wears Prada* a talent, but to each their own."

"That helmet you helped design for Theo is sick as hell," he argues. "There's no way I could ever do something as artistic as that."

"Thanks." Now I'm the one whose cheeks heat. I've been helping design Theo's helmets for years. They're nothing ground-breaking, but it's a fun, creative outlet. This year his helmet fades from a black night sky in the front to a cloudy light blue sky in the back, with the Australian flag running through the middle. In the gold design swirled along each side are a few hidden *J*s and my dad's number.

"Do you need to get back to interviews?" I ask, nodding over his shoulder. "There's a blond reporter shooting daggers at me like I bought the last brioche bun at the bakery."

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He cranes his neck, peering over his shoulder, and when

the woman spots him glancing her way, then turning right back toward me, her glare goes from menacing to murderous. I give her a smile anyway because I'm friendly and petty like that.

"That's Miranda," Lucas huffs. "Ella refers to her as Satin Satan."

I lift a brow and bite back a smirk. The satin part is obvious enough since she's wearing a satin shirt that's so tight across her chest, I'm shocked she hasn't popped a button. But the Satan part? Color me intrigued. "How'd she earn that nickname?"

Lucas runs a hand through his hair. Without his signature silver rings adorning them, his fingers look oddly naked. "She insinuated that Ella's success stems from her relationship with Blake and not her work. Something about getting the exclusive scoop during pillow talk."

I let out a scoff as a thread of irritation works its way through me on Ella's behalf. "Why the hell would Ella and Blake talk about G-force in bed when they could be focusing on the G-spot?"

Head thrown back, Lucas laughs, and I swear the sound could win him a Grammy. It's deep and inviting and rattles me straight to my bones. It comes to an end far too quickly, though, when a media person from the team—Alex, maybe? Alfredo? Anthony?—calls out to him, warning him that it's time for the press conference.

"Are you going to watch?" Lucas asks with what might be hope in his eyes. Before I can answer, he adds, "I'm sure you have better things to do, and Theo won't even be there, so no pressure."

Listening to drivers answer questions about differential throttle and torque would never be on my list of favorite pastimes, but there's no way in hell I'm turning down the opportunity to unabashedly admire Lucas for thirty minutes straight. "I'll be there."

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FOUR
LUCAS

SIPPING my beer from my seat at the bar, I survey the hotel's ballroom. From here, it's obvious that no expenses were spared for this party. Not that I'm surprised. As far as glamour-drenched sports go, F1 takes the cake… and the doughnuts, eclairs, and macaroons. The high-top tables are draped in white tablecloths and decorated with elegant floral arrangements. A small band plays on a wide staircase on the opposite side of the room. And white-gloved servers weave through the partygoers, offering canapés and champagne. Like I said: fancy.

I undo the top button of my shirt and tune in to the argument Theo and Blake are having about how Everest's tire strategy played out during the race. Argue, I suppose, may not be the right word. It's more like Theo making grandiose claims and waving his hands around to accentuate his points and Blake rolling his eyes a lot and disagreeing on occasion.

I've just zoned out again when Theo nudges me with his elbow. "Mate, that bartender has been eye-fucking you for the past thirty minutes."

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I don't need to look to know who he's referring to. The

woman has been watching me since the moment I sat down. Though I know where this is going, I sigh and take the bait. "So?"

"Are you going to get her number?" Theo prompts. "Celebrate your win on the track with a win off the track?"

His cheesy line makes me cringe. "I'm going to bed after this. *Alone*."

With a shrug, he says, "Okay."

That's it. No argument, no pestering.

His simple compliance creates an uneasy sensation in my gut. Not once in our twenty-plus years of friendship has Theo let a topic go without offering up his opinion.

Blake smirks like he's thinking the same thing. Like he knows Theo isn't done.

And he's right. A moment later, Theo drums his hands against the table and declares, "If you're no longer interested in random fucks, you should let us set you up on some dates."

My gut sinks. *There it is*.

Blake nods. "Ella has a few friends that you'd like." He lifts his chin and scans the crowd, looking for his girlfriend.

Ella travels with Blake not only to support him, but to interview drivers, engineers, and fans for her podcast, *Coffee with Champions*. It's why, instead of hanging out with us at the bar, she's off schmoozing and networking.

"I don't know where she is, but she's mentioned setting you up a couple of times," Blake says, bringing his rocks glass to his lips.

"Josie, too," Theo adds.

Blake sets his drink down on the lacquered bar top. "So you'd have options."

"And then we can triple date, so you don't feel like a fifth wheel."

I bite back a derisive snort. *Leave it to Theo to subtly point that out*.

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