

As Expect

by

Ally Evans

aievans85@yahoo.com

A loud KNOCK, and then the scrambling of nails across wooden floor.

FADE IN:

INT. ENTRYWAY, HOUSE - EVENING

Another knock, more insistent this time. A brown PITBULL runs in, skidding across the wooden floor to come to a stop at the door. It's tail wags and it barks again, butting its nose against the door.

PEYTON

I'm comin, I'm comin.

PEYTON (26) stumbles in from the living room. Their damp hair sticks to their forehead and they're pulling a shirt on.

Another knock. The pitbull wines.

PEYTON

Killer, back.

They tug at the dog's collar lightly, and the dog backs away from the door. It drops to a sit, tail pounding against the floor.

Peyton stands on their toes, looking through the door's eyehole. When they step back, their eyes are wide. They unlock the door and hold it open.

RYAN (25) stands on the doorstep. His jaw is tight, and his hand posed for another knock. The hand raised is wrapped in white gauze, spots of red bleeding through.

His shoulders slump, and he smiles weakly.

RYAN

I need a place for tonight... Maybe a couple nights.

He holds up a duffle bag with his good hand, and his smile drops.

PEYTON

I'll make some coffee. Chuck your bag in the spare room.

RYAN
I don't want to be -

PEYTON
If you say that you're being a hassle,
I'll make you sleep in Killer's bed.

Ryan manages a weak laugh.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, HOUSE - SAME

Peyton and Ryan sit on a faded green love seat. A fire is crackling in the large, stone fireplace - casting an orange hue across their faces.

Killer's chin rests in Ryan's lap, and Ryan pats the dog's head while sipping his coffee. He won't look at Peyton - his eyes dancing from the faded rug to the wooden walls covered in paintings picked up from thrift ships and yard sales.

Peyton is sitting in the opposite corner of the couch, spreading the contents of a first aid kit over the wooden coffee table. Their mug is on the edge of the table, forgotten as soon as it was placed.

PEYTON
Hand.

RYAN
Really, it's not a -

PEYTON
Hand.

Ryan sighs and puts his mug down to hold the gauze wrapped hand out. Peyton starts unwrapping the gauze, their motions slow and cautious.

PEYTON
What happened?

RYAN
Nothing. Just a scratch from some glass.

Killer whines and Peyton raises an eyebrow. Ryan shifts under the gaze of both the dog and its owner.

RYAN
Really, it's nothing.

PEYTON
Fine. How are things?

Peyton tosses the used gauze onto the table and grabs for the tweezers.

RYAN
Fine.

Ryan flinches as Peyton yanks a piece of glass out of one of the deeper cuts. They cover the palm of his hand. Most have stopped bleeding, but Peyton pulls out a couple more shards.

Ryan still won't look at them, his eyes fixed on Killer.

PEYTON
How are things with Brianne?

RYAN
Fine. We're fine.

Peyton puts the tweezers back down, grabbing the antiseptic and cotton balls. Killer whines again, nuzzling Ryan's free hand for more pets.

PEYTON
Sorry if I don't believe you showing up on my doorstep with a bleeding hand is 'fine.'

Ryan hisses as Peyton presses the cotton balls over the cuts. He almost yanks his hand back, but Peyton keeps a firm grip on his wrist so that he can't. Killer laps at Ryan's hand.

PEYTON
Spill Ryan. I'm serious about making you sleep in Killer's bed.

Ryan clenches and unclenches his hand when Peyton lets go to grab some fresh gauze.

RYAN
There was a fight.

PEYTON
No shit.

Ryan raises an eyebrow, and they put their hands up in surrender.

RYAN
There was a fight. I shattered a glass. That's all.

PEYTON
That's all?

They yank at Ryan's hand again, but their motions turn gentle as they wrap it in the gauze.

RYAN
I just want to give her space to cool off.

PEYTON
Without your sketchbook. Or your tablet. Or any of your drawing supplies.

RYAN
Well, it's not like I can draw with a sliced hand!

He moves, jostling Killer's head off his lap. He drops his elbows to his knees and covers his face. Peyton raises their hand, stops, and then places it on Ryan's back.

They move closer, rubbing circles between his shoulders.

RYAN
You're not going to let me rest until I talk?

PEYTON
Nope. So you can tell me, or I can force it out of you.

RYAN
I'd like to see you try.

PEYTON
Well, I do know all your ticklish spots.

Ryan laughs, but it cracks at the end. He drops one of his hands to pet Killer again, who drops its head onto his lap. Peyton drops their hand, grabbing for their mug finally.

RYAN
It's my fault really.

Killer whines.

RYAN
It is.

PEYTON
Can you tell the story without the self-deprecating comments? Because I have a feeling it's not your fault.

Ryan glares briefly at Peyton, but there's no bite to it. He shakes his head.

RYAN
Easy for you to say. You've never liked her.

PEYTON
I liked her well enough before you started dating. But if I must, I promise to be a fair, unbiased judge in your storytelling.

Ryan shifts to face them more. He holds out his pinky. Peyton rolls their eyes, but they wrap their own pinky around his and shake.

RYAN
I just. I mean. It's sex. Brianne wants sex all the time, and I just.

He huffs and waves his hand. Then he runs the hand through his hair.

RYAN
I just never feel like I'm in the mood for it. She's beautiful, and I love her. But I just - she does all these sexy things that are supposed to drive me wild ...

PEYTON
And they don't?

Ryan shakes his head. He picks at the gauze only for Peyton to bat his hand away.

RYAN
I went to the doctor, but they
couldn't find anything wrong. But
something is! I'm - there's got to be
something wrong.

PEYTON
No! Hell no. Ryan -

Peyton shifts, grabbing Ryan's shoulders so he looks at them.

PEYTON
There's nothing wrong with you for not
wanting to have sex. But ...

Peyton bites their lip, dropping their hands.

RYAN
But what?

PEYTON
Have you ever wanted to have sex? With
anyone?

Ryan's shoulders sag and he shifts away from Peyton again.

RYAN
I - no.

PEYTON
Tell me everything?

FADE OUT

IN BLACK:

9 Months Earlier

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN, APARTMENT - EVENING

The pop of a jar opening bounces off the brown, cracked walls. BRIANNE (23) cheers happily. Ryan playfully shows off his muscles as he sets the jar of tomato sauce on the counter.

Brianne turns back to the chicken on the stovetop while Ryan pours the sauce into the pan to heat.

RYAN
Is this what's normal? Cooking
together?

BRIANNE
Says one child of divorce to another.

Ryan looks down at the sauce he's stirring. He glances over at Brianne. He opens his mouth, closes it, then huffs.

Brianne puts down her spatula. She wraps her arms around him, pressing close. She rests her head on his shoulder.

BRIANNE
I'm scared too. About moving in
together, about our parents. But -
this feels right, doesn't it?

RYAN
Yeah - it feels really right. We don't
have to be our parents.

BRIANNE
We don't have to be our parents.

Ryan kisses the top of Brianne's head before shoving her back towards the chicken with a smile across his face.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - DAY, LATER DATE

The door slams behind Brianne, the pumpkins beside it shaking and the cloth ghost falling off its hook.

She drops her bag by the pumpkins and kicks off her shoes. She stalks over the couch and flops onto it. It's unforgiving and she groans when she hits it.

Ryan comes out from the bedrooms door, dressed as a vampire. He holds his hands out to the side, as though expecting her praise. When he looks at her limp form on the couch, his shoulders drop.

He disappears back behind the door for a moment, and when he returns it's without the cape and fangs. He drops onto the couch beside her, a little more gently, and nudges her shoulder. She lifts her head only to glare at him.

RYAN

Lay down properly. I'll give you a massage.

Her glare drops and she uncurls herself so that her stomach is pressed into the couch. He moves as well, shifting so he can start the massage on her shoulders.

RYAN

What's wrong?

BRIANNE

It's just - ugh. People in the office just pass their work off onto me! And my boss expects me to do it all in time, but won't give me a promotion. I'm just expected to do everyone else's work with the pay of an intern.

RYAN

At least it's a paid intern!

She looks over her shoulder to glare at him.

RYAN

Sorry, not funny. Have you talked to your boss about it?

BRIANNE

Have you talked to your boss about it?
What do you think! Of course I did!
Misogynistic prick said I had to
'prove myself' to climb the ladder.

Ryan leans down and presses a kiss to the back of Brianne's neck.

RYAN

He really is a prick. But at least
he's not treating you like you can't
handle it. Besides, you can.

Brianna huffs, but she relaxes under his hands and words.

BRIANNE

You're right. Like always. It's just -
no one said it would be this hard.

RYAN

Well you're stubborn enough to handle
it.

She laughs and turns onto her back. She looks up at him, a soft smile stretching across her face.

BRIANNE

You're my everything, you know that
right? I really don't know what I
would do without you.

She pauses, then sits up and wraps her arms around Ryan's neck. She leans in, her voice dropping low.

BRIANNE

Wanna have some fun? Get you out of
this ridiculous costume.

Ryan shifts, putting a bit of distance between the two of them. Her face drops, and his eyes dart away from her for a second. He bits on his lip, but then looks back at her.

RYAN

Sure. If it's gonna make you feel
better.

Brianne's smile lights up her face and she launches herself at Ryan, knocking him onto his back on the couch.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM, APARTMENT - NIGHT, LATER DATE

Ryan sits against the wall behind the bed, his legs bent and

balancing a drawing pad. His eyebrows are drawn together and the scratching of a pencil is all that's heard.

The door opens with a squeak, just wide enough for Brianne to slip in. He glances up with a sigh and lets the pencil drop beside him on the bed. He runs his hands over his face.

RYAN

I have four tattoos to design before Christmas, but I can't - I can't concentrate. Can't be creative.

The mattress tips a bit as Brianne drops onto it. She moves the pad from his lap, depositing both it and the pencil on the ground.

BRIANNE

Is this about Peyton? You sounded worried when you were on the phone with her -

RYAN

Them!

Brianne puts her hands up. She grabs Ryan's hands, pressing kisses to the open, calloused palms.

BRIANNE

Them. I'm working on it, okay? What's going on with them?

She shifts, wrapping her arm around his shoulder and he leans into it. He drops his head onto her shoulder where she brushes back some of his hair.

RYAN

You know how their dad died just before Thanksgiving? Well, their mom is insistent that they come home for Christmas to be a 'proper family'.

BRIANNE

And that's bad why?

RYAN

Their mom was never accepting like their dad and I just ... Christmas is their favorite holiday and it's going to be filled with judgemental, misgendering relatives.

Brianne presses a kiss to the top of Ryan's head and pulls him closer.

BRIANNE

I know, but you can't do anything about it. We're going to your mom's and you know how she is. Peyton is strong, and just knowing that you're worried will probably cheer them up.

Ryan nods, but he continues to gnaw on his lip.

RYAN

Maybe we can do something for New Year's Eve? The three of us? Give them something to look forward too.

BRIANNE

Sure, honey.

She pulls away from Ryan only to throw a leg over him and settle in his lap. She presses a kiss to the corner of his mouth, trailing it down to his jaw.

BRIANNE

Let me help you relax, hm? I can take your mind off things.

Her mouth moves lower down to his neck, but he grabs her hips and pushes her away.

RYAN

I don't feel like it right now, Bri.

BRIANNE

Come on. It'll be fun!

She presses closer again, trying to go back to kissing his neck, but he pushes her away.

RYAN

Seriously! I don't want to Brianne.

She draws back. She climbs off of his lap, slumping next to him with a huff. They both just look forward, the only noise coming from a door below their apartment slamming.

After a minute, Ryan reaches over and picks his pad and pencil back up. There's some shouting from the apartment

below there's, mixing in with the scratching of Ryan's pencil.

Brianne huffs again and shifts. He doesn't look up from his pad.

BRIANNE
Would you have told Peyton no?

His pencil pauses. There's another door slamming.

RYAN
What?

BRIANNE
Would you have told Peyton no?

He looks up from his pad, his eyebrows drawn together. He grabs her hand, pressing a kiss to the back of it. He tugs her hand until she looks at him.

RYAN
Why would you ever think that? I'm in love with you Brianne.

BRIANNE
But you love them.

RYAN
Yeah, like a sibling.

She huffs. Ryan puts his pad aside again, cupping her face and pressing a quick kiss to her lips.

RYAN
Don't doubt that I love you, Bri. I do.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - EVENING, LATER DATE

Christmas lights are strung up behind the couch, but the only sign of a tree that remains is the small pile of pine needles swept into the corner of the room.

There's a BOOM, and a flash of red light outside the window. It covers the pop music playing off of a computer for a moment but doesn't cover the off-pitch singing.

On the coffee table, a bottle of cheap champagne is open and three half-full glasses. Besides, that are empty cans and bottles of other various alcoholic drinks and nearly empty bowls of snack food.

PEYTON
One minute left!

They stumble towards the couch, grabbing the remote and pointing it at the TV. Ryan tries to pause the music, but struggles with Brianne hanging off of him.

He manages to pause the music, just as Peyton turns the sound back on the tv. The Times Square celebration roars back to life on the tv and Brianne cheers.

She grabs her glass and tips it back before filling it up again. She tops off the other two glasses and hands them off to Ryan and Peyton.

PEYTON
Thirty seconds!

Ryan holds up his glass, waving a little where he stands.

RYAN
To another year with my girlfriend and best friend!

PEYTON
Here here!

Brianne raises her own glass, some of the champagne sloshing over.

BRIANNE
To another year of promotions!

RYAN
Fuck yes!

PEYTON
To another year of destroying gender.

RYAN
Fuck gender!

Peyton cheers, and Brianne giggles a little. She leans her weight into Ryan as the three of them count down from ten. With each number, they get a little louder.

The BOOMs outside get more consistent, colors flooding in from the window.

At one, they clink their glasses - champagne spilling over them and the floor - and drink. Putting his glass down, Ryan grabs Brianne by the waist and kisses her. They both sway a little, her glass nearly falling.

When he pulls back, she laughs again, stumbling to put her drink down. Peyton bounds over, playfully pecking Ryan's lips with their own. Ryan pretends to gag, shoving Peyton away as they both descend into a bout of giggles.

Brianne laughs along, though it's stilted and thrown off by her narrowed eyes.

Peyton drops onto the couch, filling their own glass again. Ryan stumbles over to Brianne, pulling her closer and just holding onto her.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - AFTERNOON, LATER DATE

Ryan walks into the apartment, shutting the door with his foot as his arms are filled with a bouquet of roses and a heart-shaped chocolate box.

Brianne pokes her head out from the bedroom and grins at the sight of Ryan struggling to get his shoes off without ruining the flowers. She steps out, dressed in a thin robe.

He manages to get his shoes off and turns, grinning and holding out the gifts

RYAN
Happy Valentine's day!

She laughs, grabbing the gifts and pressing a quick kiss to his lips.

BRIANNE

Very cliche. I approve. I'll put these in water, but you - sit. I've got a gift for you too.

She pushes him towards the couch with a sly grin, and he goes. He drops to a seat and she disappears around the corner into the kitchen.

Ryan leans forward, straightening a stack of tattoo photos on the coffee table. His eyes dart around, taking in the living room for anything that's shifted.

He jumps a little when music starts playing from the Bluetooth speaker.

Brianne steps back into the living room, smiling at Ryan who smiles back at her. She turns, dropping the robe. Under, she is wearing one of Ryan's button-down shirts and stockings. She sways to the music, moving towards Ryan.

His smile drops a little, and his eyes dart around the room. He swallows, hard. She slowly unbuttons the shirt, revealing a lace bra underneath. The shirt drops as she straddles Ryan.

She pushes him down, smirking and still moving to the music. She runs her hands over his chest, rucking up his shirt.

He closes his eyes, takes a breath. He starts to relax, but tenses up again. He grabs her by the waist and pushes her back up.

RYAN

Sorry. I just - can't.

Her shoulders slump, turning in on herself. She climbs off of him, starting to walk away. Then she stops, straightening again before she spins around to look at him.

BRIANNE

Am I not good enough! Does this do nothing for you? Am I - am I not beautiful? Sexy? Enticing? ANYTHING!

RYAN

No, no! You are. I just - I'm not feeling it today.

He leans forward, trying to grab at her hand but she yanks away. She runs her hands through her hair, pacing up and down the length of the couch.

BRIANNE

You know some of my friends are
convinced you have to be gay!

RYAN

What? Why would you even - no! I don't
like guys like that. I like you. I'm
just not in the mood.

She snatches his shirt she'd been wearing off the ground. Ryan slumps, his eyes turning down. He tries again to grab for her, catching her wrist this time.

RYAN

I can take care of you. Alright? I
don't want sex right now, but I can
make sure you feel good.

She stays frozen for a moment, shoulders locked. Then she sags a little and tugs him up. He smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

He nudges her to the bedroom and closes the door behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON, LATER DATE

Ryan sits on the medical bed, his leg bouncing up and down. The little footrest shakes under the movement.

He grabs his phone from beside him, looks at it, then puts it back down. He does this again after a moment. Then again.

The door opens and a DOCTOR (49) walks in. He puts a file down on the table beside his computer, sits, and turns towards Ryan.

DOCTOR

Well, Ryan, I have good news for you.
Everything looks perfectly healthy.
You're producing a normal amount of
sperm and testosterone.

RYAN

There's nothing? Is there something else you can check?

Ryan leans forward a bit on the table, but the doctor shakes his head. He shifts away from his computer, rolling on his chair as he clasps his hands in his lap.

DOCTOR

There is nothing biologically wrong with you from what I can see. If you're struggling with an abnormally low libido, it's nothing physical.

Ryan sighs and rubs his hands over his face. He stands, the table shaking at the suddenness, and shoves his phone in his pocket.

RYAN

Is that all? Because if it is, I should get going.

The doctor raises his eyebrows but nods.

DOCTOR

You're welcome to go. If there's anything else you'd like to run tests on, just give us a call.

Ryan turns on his heel, the door slamming behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN, APARTMENT - EVENING, LATER DATE

Ryan and Brianne sit at the kitchen table, silently eating a chicken and rice dinner. Ryan's pad sits next to him, and he occasionally puts down his fork to make marks on it.

After a minute, Brianne puts down her fork and looks at Ryan. She clears her throat, getting him to look away from his paper.

BRIANNE

Am I bad at sex?

Ryan lets his pencil drop, his eyebrows pushing together. She crosses her arms and raises an eyebrow at him.

RYAN
What? No. Why would you ask that?

BRIANNE
So I'm not bad at sex, you are
attracted to girls, and you are in
love with me. But everytime I want
more I have to push and beg for it!

Ryan sighs. He pushes his plate away and drops his elbows onto the table.

RYAN
I'm just - I'm not in the mood for it
like you are! It's not the same for
me.

BRIANNE
Not the same? What - not the same as a
normal, *healthy* human?

RYAN
I know, I know. I - I went and saw a
doctor the other day. But they said
there wasn't anything wrong with me.

Brianne's shoulder's slump and she pushes her plate away as well.

BRIANNE
I didn't know you went to get it
checked out.

Ryan looks up from his hands, raising an eyebrow.

RYAN
I told you I was going to the doctor.
I didn't say why - I didn't to have
this fight *again*. But I told you I was
going.

BRIANNE
No. You didn't.

RYAN

Yes, I did. We were in the living room. I was playing with the new drawing tablet I got. You were watching *Easy A*.

BRIANNE

You did not tell me anything. And even if you did, you should know by now that I don't listen when I'm watching *Easy A*!

RYAN

Well maybe you should pause it next time when you're partner is talking to you!

Brianne's mouth drops open.

BRIANNE

Don't fucking make this about me! Next time maybe you can get up and pause the movie yourself. Unless you can't get that up either!

Her chair screeches as she pushes away from the table. She storms out of the room and the bedroom door slams behind her. There's some rattling of objects as it does.

Ryan sighs and stands as well. He collects their plates, storing the barely touched food away.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING ROOM, TATTOO PARLOR - DAY, LATER DATE

The hum of a tattoo machine is barely heard over the music blasting through the room. Ryan is leaning over a WOMAN (45) sat in a worn, black chair. He's focused on her arm, eyes narrowed in concentration.

The needle whirs as it presses into her skin. He pulls it back and wipes. Presses the needle in, and wipes.

After a minute, he leans back and beams.

RYAN

All done. Why don't you get up and check it out?

The woman stands and moves towards the mirror Ryan gestures too. She twists her arm, looking intently at the tattoo on her bicep.

It's an impressively detailed pocket watch, but with only six roman numerals on it:

XII IX II VII XI XVII

Underneath the watch, in small cursive letter, is the name Isabel.

She turns back towards Ryan, tears filling her eyes. She grabs him and hugs him tightly. He's stiff at first, but then returns the hug.

WOMAN

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

RYAN

No need to thank me. Your daughter deserves only the best memory.

The woman nods. Ryan grabs a box of tissues and hands it to her. She takes it with a watery smile and dabs at her eyes.

WOMAN

My husband was considering getting one too. On his back.

RYAN

Just send him over. I would be happy to sit down with him and design something.

She squeezes his arm before grabbing another tissue and blowing her nose.

WOMAN

I can't believe how lucky I was to find you and this place. No one could have done it better.

RYAN

Really, I'm happy that you like it so much.

She pats his cheek, collecting her bag.

WOMAN

I'll get out of your way and pay upfront. I'm sure you have other appointments.

RYAN

Just a lunch date with my girlfriend. She's bringing me something to eat.

The woman nods and pats Ryan's cheek one more time before turning and heading to the front, tissue box still in hand.

Ryan's eyes wander past the woman to the window of the tattoo parlor. He smiles when he sees Brianne climbing out of her car from across the street. She's carrying a brown bag and walking towards the parlor.

She slows and stops, her eyes moving from the parlor to a HOMELESS WOMAN huddled against the wall of the building. She kneels down beside her, talking back and forth. Then, she holds the brown bag out to the woman who takes it with shaking hands.

Brianne covers the woman's hands with her own and says a couple more words. She then stands, leaving the bag with the woman and heading towards the parlor.

Ryan is beaming now but glances over as the customer taps his shoulder. She clasps his hands, smiling up at him.

WOMAN

Don't stop what you're doing. Your art deserves to be seen.

He goes red and ducks his head. He smiles even more and squeezes her hand.

RYAN

Thank you. Now get home to your husband, and I'm gonna go take my girlfriend to lunch.

She nods, squeezes his hand one more time, and turns to leave.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - AFTERNOON, LATER DATE

The door snaps shut behind Ryan. He shrugs his coat off, tossing it on the chair beside the door before kicking his shoes off. He drops onto the couch, pulling out a folder of photos from the bag he drops beside him.

He grabs his portfolio from the coffee table, flicking through it. He pulls some photos out and adds some of the newer ones in.

The door opens and slams shut, Brienne storming in. She drops her bag on the floor before stalking to the bedroom. The door slams shut behind her, the TV rocking dangerously on its stand.

He looks at the bedroom door, sighing. He pushes his portfolio back on the table, stands, and heads into the kitchen. He returns with a bag of cookies and goes to the bedroom door.

He knocks before pushing it open a little -

INT. BEDROOM, APARTMENT - SAME

He pushes the door open, but doesn't walk in. He holds up the back of cookies and opens his mouth but

Before he can say anything, Brienne chucks a show at the door. It slams closed in Ryan's face -

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - SAME

His shoulders slump. He tosses the cookies onto the coffee table and drops onto the couch.

After a moment he unlocks his phone and pulls up google, typing in:

Can't please my girlfriend.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN, APARTMENT - EVENING, LATER DATE

Ryan is elbow deep in soapy water, a pile of dirty dishes beside him. The bags under his eyes are more like suitcases, and his skin seems colorless.

There's the sound of keyboard typing from the other room.

RYAN

Hey Bri, I wouldn't mind some help with these dishes. You know the ones we both have been avoiding.

BRIANNE

I've got work to do!

RYAN

I thought you said you were done for the night and going to watch *Easy A*. And you know, not listen to me.

There's a loud sigh and the sound of a laptop shutting. Brianne steps into the kitchen, arms crossed.

Ryan raises an eyebrow at her, his eyes darting to the pile of dishes beside him.

BRIANNE

So you expect me to work ten hours a day, do extra work because my boss is an ass, and come home and work again?

RYAN

I expect that I'm not the only one pulling the weight of cooking and cleaning! I work too you know. And we both live here.

BRIANNE

Oh yes, because you're so stressed about the tattoo parlor. Tell me again how the customers sing your praise. Or how far up your ass your boss is. You know - since it's not like you have anything else going on down there.

The glass in Ryan's hand shatters, red blooming on his hands. Brianne's eyes dart towards the blood. She grabs the paper towels and steps towards him. She reaches out to help, but he just snatches the paper towels and steps away. She turns to one of the cabinets, digging through it.

RYAN

You know, maybe Peyton was right.
We're moving way too fast. We don't
even talk anymore!

She pulls a first aid kit out, slamming it on the counter.

BRIANNE

Ooh and it's back to Peyton! Peyton
this, Peyton that. You'd think that
Peyton was your girlfriend and not me.

RYAN

First - not girlfriend. Second, why
the fuck do you keep bringing this up!
They're my best friend. You're my
girlfriend.

BRIANNE

What's the difference between me and
them, really! You don't fuck me, you
don't fuck them. You love me, and you
love them. You claim it's different
but I really don't see how.

Ryan chucks a bloody paper towel into the sink, ripping another one off and pressing it to his hand.

RYAN

We're really doing this again? Look,
I'm sorry that you're horny and I'm
not. I'm sorry that I'm not in the
mood, and that you never listen to or
respect that!

Brianne slaps Ryan, hard. The sound echoes through the kitchen. Ryan stumbles a little in shock, looking at Brianne with wide eyes. Her jaw is set, her eyes cold.

After a moment, she turns and storms out of the kitchen. Ryan just looks down at his hand where the blood flow has started to slow.

He snaps the first aid kit open, breaking off one of the plastic latches.

He wraps his hand in gauze. From outside the room, there's the sound of cloth ruffling and then a zipper closing.

Brianne returns as Ryan shoves the first aid kit back under the sink. She chuck's a duffle bag at his feet.

BRIANNE

Get out. Don't come back for at least the weekend.

RYAN

What the hell Brianne! You can't kick me out of my own apartment.

BRIANNE

Oh go fuck yourself! It's not like I can.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, HOUSE - NIGHT

Peyton and Ryan are still on the love seat. Ryan has squished himself into the corner as best he can. Killer, however, has decided to sprawl between the two and is nosing its way into Ryan's lap.

PEYTON

I knew things were moving to fast.

RYAN

Oh yeah, and she seems to think I'm ready to jump you. I'm sick and tired of your two being at each other's throats!

Killer barks. Ryan sags and scratches behind Killer's ear.

PEYTON

Let me finish, will ya? And I liked her well enough before. I was worried when you got together. She seemed pushy, but you seemed happy! And now

I'm hearing that she's not respecting you.

RYAN
She's not -

PEYTON
She is! She's upset you're not in the mood, fine. But she's taking that and hurting you mentally and physically because of it!

RYAN
It's not like that!

PEYTON
But it is! You're just too blind to see it. You've been attached at the hip since you met her, and you're too desperate to have a better relationship than you're parents did to see than you're just as bad.

Ryan flinches. Killer whines. Ryan drops his legs a little and Killer drops its head into Ryan's lap.

He isn't looking at Peyton. Peyton rubs their hands over their face.

PEYTON
Sorry. I didn't mean to say it like that.

RYAN
It's okay. I mean, we have. We did get attached really fast. I just...

Peyton shifts a little, shooing Killer back to the ground. After a moment, Ryan leans into them. Peyton wraps an arm around Ryan's shoulder and sighs.

PEYTON
I'm really really sorry.

RYAN
I told you, it's fine.

PEYTON
Not about my comment.

Ryan shifts back a little, tilting his head as he looks at Peyton.

Peyton sighs and shifts a little too. They open and close their mouth, then run their hands through their hair. They drop their hand, scratching Killer's ear.

PEYTON

Have you ever heard of asexuality?

RYAN

The plant thing? Where they reproduce by themselves?

PEYTON

No. Yes, but. It's a part of the LGBTQ community. Asexuality - having little to no sexual attraction towards any gender.

Ryan's eyes go wide. Then his eyebrows draw together.

RYAN

No. I like Brianne. I like girls. I want to date them, to kiss and hug and be together.

PEYTON

Romantic attraction and sexual attraction are different. You can want to be with girls romantically, but not to be with them sexually.

Ryan slumps back against the couch. He runs his hands over his face.

RYAN

You think?

PEYTON

I've thought for a while. But sexuality isn't something you just go up to someone and push onto them. But maybe I should have. If I had -

RYAN

Stop. Stop it right there.

Killer barks in agreement.

RYAN

You are not going to put blame on
yourself for this. It's not your
fault, at all.

Ryan shifts and looks down. He takes a deep breath and looks back up to meet Peyton's eyes.

RYAN

Tell me more.

PEYTON

About?

RYAN

Football - what do you think!

Peyton lets out a little bit of a chuckle and leans back on the couch.

PEYTON

I mean, I don't know if I'm the right person. I'm not asexual -

RYAN

But you're my best friend. And you know me better than anyone else. I'd rather figure it out with you than some random forum online.

Peyton nods. They shift and reach for their phone.

PEYTON

Let me message a friend for some resources, and we can go through it together.

There's a soft clicking from the phone as Peyton types. Killer whines and jumps back onto the couch, pressing its cold nose against Ryan's cheek. Ryan chuckles a little, pressing Killer away until the dog settles on his lap.

RYAN

Does this mean I'm not broken?

Peyton stops typing. There's a woosh of a text being sent, but Peyton isn't looking at it. They put their phone aside and turn to fully face Ryan.

PEYTON

No matter what. You are not broken.
Period. Just because you don't want
sex, doesn't mean you're broken.

Killer barks, lapping at Ryan's hand.

RYAN

But everyone does it. Every
relationship has it.

Peyton sighs and falls back a little, running fingers through
their hair again.

PEYTON

Yeah, it seems like that. But it
doesn't have to be. You remember
Alice?

RYAN

Do I remember the girl you dated
through most of college? No, Peyton.
I've completely forgotten her.

PEYTON

We never had sex. It wasn't a part of
our relationship.

Ryan raises his eyebrows. He shifts and resettles.

RYAN

You never?

PEYTON

Nope. She had some physical issues
going on, so we never did.

Ryan chews on his lip. Killer butts against Ryan's hand,
earning more scratches behind the ear.

RYAN

So you think that I'm?

Peyton sighs and shrugs.

PEYTON

Have you ever looked at a girl, hell
anyone, and thought 'I want to bang
them?'

RYAN
No.

PEYTON
Any celebrities you'd kill to have a one night stand with? Or had dreams of them?

RYAN
No.

PEYTON
Porn?

RYAN
Never used it myself - but I don't. Does that mean I'm asexual?

PEYTON
Sometimes, yes. No. It's different for everyone. But - Ryan most people who aren't asexual have those feelings at some point.

RYAN
So I am broken?

PEYTON
No! It's just - different. It's just like some people don't feel that way about the opposite gender, or the same gender.

Ryan groans and lets his head fall back.

RYAN
Well what's it supposed to feel like!

PEYTON
It's hard to explain. I guess - well I get all warm around them. I want to touch them, but not just in innocent safe for public ways. I'll have dreams about them, imagine what it's like with them. It's just - I want to have sex with them.

Ryan stands, dislodging Killer. He paces the room, running his hands through his hair. Killer jumps off the couch, following behind Ryan as he paces.

After a minute, Ryan drops back down. His shoulder slumps. When he looks back up from his lap, his eyes are glistening with on coming tears. Then he laughs a little, as the first tear slips out.

Suddenly, he's laughing and crying at the same time. Peyton wraps themselves around Ryan, pulling him close.

RYAN

There's - there's nothing wrong with me. I'm - I'm okay. I don't need to be fixed.

PEYTON

Of course not, Ry. You've never been broken. You're you, and nothing needs to change about that.

After a minute, Ryan pulls back and wipes his nose with the back of his sleeve.

RYAN

Tha-thank you. I just. I can't - I didn't. I don't know how much longer I could have gone thinking I was broken.

Peyton squeezes Ryan's good hand. They grab both of their empty mugs, standing to take them to the kitchen. They stop, looking at Ryan.

PEYTON

Pride's next weekend. I'm meeting up with some friends to go shopping for it tomorrow. Wanna come with? You might get to get some other opinions.

Ryan shakes his head and wipes his eyes.

RYAN

No. I need to talk to Brianne tomorrow. maybe figure us out.

PEYTON

You wanna take Killer? He likes you too much to let anything happen.

Ryan smiles and shakes his head again.

PEYTON

If us doesn't work, don't beat
yourself up over it. And you're
welcome to crash here for as long as
you need. I mean, I'm kinda lonely in
this big ole house dad left.

RYAN

Good to know.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - MORNING, NEXT DAY

Through the apartment window, Brianne and Ryan can be seen. They're both sitting on the couch. Ryan is turned towards Brianne, but she's sitting straight forward and not looking at her.

Ryan's hands move as he speaks to her. She tenses, and snaps her head towards him. He flinches back a little.

She snaps at him, her hands flying as well. He tenses and pushes back, speaking over her. Brianne stands, turning to face Ryan. She's yelling loud enough it's almost heard through the window.

Ryan throws his hands up and stands as well.

Both stop. She looks at Ryan with her mouth agape. Her shoulders fall in a sigh and her face softens. She steps towards him, then steps back. He shakes his head. He hugs her, quickly though, then goes to the bedroom.

Brianne kicks the wall. She then turns to the coffee table, collecting folders and binders of Ryan's work. She grabs the duffle bag - emptied and brought back, and carefully tucks them inside.

She sighs again and sinks onto the couch, covering her face with her hands as her shoulders shake.