

LBRIS

We know
books

Also by Elle Kennedy

Prep

Misfit

Rogue

Briar U

The Chase

The Risk

The Play

The Dare

Off-Campus

The Deal

The Mistake

The Score

The Goal

The Legacy

Campus Diaries

The Graham Effect

The Dixon Rule

The Charlie Method

Love Gong

ELLE
KENNEDY



PIATKUS

Prologue

BLAKE

Fuckboy till he dies

TWO YEARS AGO

WYATT GRAHAM IS STARING AT me.

It's taken my brain and me several twists and turns to reach this conclusion.

At first, we were convinced he was staring at the oil painting above my head, the weird one depicting his father playing hockey on a rink of lava. Wyatt's twin, Gigi, said it was a gift from their eccentric elderly neighbor, and their dad felt too guilty not hanging it up.

Next, we decided I must have something stuck in my teeth (I don't. I checked), chocolate all over my face from dessert (I don't, also checked), or a huge zit that sprang up after I applied my makeup before dinner (no zits, only obnoxious freckles).

Until finally, we came around to the idea that the hottest man to ever walk this earth is indeed staring at me.

Which raises the question—*why?*

Considering Wyatt views a romantic connection between us as tragically hysterical, I'm genuinely stumped as to why his eyes are following my every move tonight.

As we've done every year since I was born, we're spending Christmas Eve with the Grahams in their beautiful house just outside Boston. It's a tradition. My dad and the twins' dad have been best friends since college and are obsessed with each other, so our families spend most holidays together.

The game room smells like cinnamon from the gingerbread cookies Gigi's mom was baking all day and is lit only by the glow of the fixture over the pool table, which Gigi and Luke Ryder are currently circling. Wyatt leans against the wall, his hand curled lazily around a beer bottle. When he chuckles at the taunt Gigi tosses her husband's way, a little shiver rolls up my spine. Even his laughter gives off a dangerous energy. Wyatt Graham has always been hazardous to my heart rate.

If I wasn't still riding the buzz from the red wine my dad had been too distracted to cut off, I probably wouldn't be openly ogling the guy. But it's impossible not to stare at those veiled green eyes and perfectly chiseled features, just a hint of scruff on his strong jaw. His shirt is unbuttoned to reveal a tight white tank that emphasizes his broad chest, and when he rakes a hand through his messy brown hair, the silver ring on his middle finger catches the light. He wears a few other rings too, including a chunky black one that sort of looks like a wedding band. Hilarious, because Wyatt's never getting married. *Fuckboy till he dies*, Gigi always says.

"Speaking of playing hard to get," Gigi calls, glancing my way.

I snap out of my thoughts, clueless about their conversation and how it got to me.

"What?" I say.

"Diana told me Isaac asked you to be his girlfriend, and you told him you'd—" She snorts, air quoting me. "Take it under consideration."

Ryder gives a soft chuckle while Wyatt sips his beer and watches us. "Yeah." I shrug. "I still don't know how I feel about it."

"You've been dating for two months," she reminds me, her gray eyes twinkling. "Seems like you should know by now if you like the guy."

She's not wrong. I *should* know. And it's not that I don't like Isaac. He's been pursuing me hard all semester. Or, if you listen to my father, "love bombing" me. Isaac comes on strong, no doubt, but I don't believe he's a walking red flag the way my father has declared.

The problem is I'm not sure I can picture us long-term. Isaac is outgoing, goofy, and attention-seeking. I'm sarcastic, a lot more chill, and not looking for the spotlight. I'm good spending the whole day listening to a podcast or reading a book; he's wired to constantly be doing something exciting. Not to mention he's going to the NFL the moment he graduates from Briar University. I know how flashy the NFL lifestyle can be. The money, the women, the attention. That's not me.

Still, the phrase *opposites attract* didn't materialize out of nowhere. Might be a cliché, sure, but it's statistically proven that opposites do attract. Sometimes they complement each other. Other times, those relationships explode in a spectacular fashion.

I don't know yet which kind of opposites Isaac and I are.

"You're taking way too long to respond," Gigi informs me, grinning. "This poor guy."

"Is this the football player?" Ryder asks as he leans over the table to line up his shot.

"Yeah," Gigi answers for me. "Isaac Grant. He was the resident campus man-whore before our Blakey brought him to his knees." She's the only one I let get away with calling me *Blakey*. Anyone else would get murdered.

"I do have that effect on men," I say, more joking than serious,

but I don't miss the way Wyatt's gaze rests on me again. Every time I glance his way, he's already watching.

Why is he staring? My brain and I are now revisiting the idea that there's broccoli jammed between my teeth. Except that would mean he has a broccoli kink, because the way he's looking at me says *turn-on* and not *gross*. Which is inconceivable to me given what happened on New Year's Eve two years ago.

My mind suddenly flashes back to that god-awful night. The living nightmare I experienced, a tomato-faced, trembling sixteen-year-old, drunk on one glass of champagne, blurting out to Wyatt that I had a crush on him.

And...

He laughed.

I confessed to my crush, and he *laughed*.

Granted, it wasn't in a *ha ha, everyone point at Blake Logan and laugh at how pathetic she is* way. There was no cruelty in his tone. It was more of a nervous laugh, yet it was a hot, sharp knife to the heart. To add insult to injury, he ruffled my hair as he rose from the couch.

He ruffled.

My hair.

And then? The final stab to my mangled, bloody, shredded-to-ribbons heart?

"Probably best to get over that, kid," he said.

Kid.

Part of me died from embarrassment that night. I never brought it up again. Neither did Wyatt.

And now here we are. I'm eighteen, certainly not a kid anymore. And certainly not imagining the heat in his gaze.

I hastily sip my wine and watch Gigi and Ryder finish out their billiards battle. Wyatt doesn't say a single word to me. He spends

most of the game mocking Ryder.

"Eight ball, corner pocket," Ryder says.

"Well, that's ambitious of you, Bill," Wyatt remarks.

"Confident," Ryder returns, then executes the shot to perfection. He lifts his head to smirk at Wyatt. "Anything else to add, Bill?"

"Bill?" I echo blankly, and Wyatt's head finally shifts toward me.

Gigi answers for the boys. "BIL as in brother-in-law. It's their nickname for each other. They think they're being cute."

Ryder racks the balls, and we play another game, this time girls against boys. I blow nearly every shot, because it turns out it's hard to shoot pool when a tall, sexy, intense musician is hyperfixated on you.

Hours later, the house is dead silent, everyone asleep but me. I lie on my bed in the guest room, my restless thoughts drifting back to Wyatt and Isaac and men in general. Whenever I close my eyes, I see Wyatt's deep green eyes tracking me like I'm the only person in the house.

Eventually, I give up on sleep and go downstairs to the kitchen, not bothering to look decent. I'm barefoot and in my underwear and an oversize sweater that barely covers my upper thighs.

I've just finished pouring a glass of water at the fridge when I hear his voice.

"Can't sleep?"

I jump, nearly dropping my glass. Water sloshes over the rim and spills onto my knuckles. "Jesus. You scared me."

I turn to find him standing in the shadows, leaning against the doorframe. A bottle of beer dangles from his fingers, and his hair is even messier than it was two hours ago. He's definitely feeling the alcohol, his gaze more than a little hazy. He looks...dangerous. Tired, drunk, and beautiful.

"Sorry," he says, then takes a swig of beer.

"You can't sleep either?" I sip my water, watching him. "Is your

Wyatt shrugs. "I never sleep."

"Vampire?"

"Obviously."

With a hint of a smile, he steps into the kitchen, his face illuminated by only the strip of lights running beneath the cabinets. Then he tips his head back and drinks more beer.

"Drinking alone, are we?" I try to sound casual despite my thundering pulse.

"Just a nightcap." He takes another sip, his gaze flicking down my legs and back up again, so blatant it triggers a ripple of heat up my neck.

I set my water glass on the counter, determined not to let him see me blush.

"Why's your mind racing?" he asks.

"I don't know," I lie.

"You thinking about that guy? The football player who asked you to be his girlfriend?"

I hesitate. "Yeah."

He moves closer, propping a hip against the counter. "You don't want to say yes."

"I... He's really into me. And he's sweet."

"Sweet," Wyatt echoes, like the word bores him. "That's not an answer."

I'm utterly aware of how close he's standing. How his voice has dropped just enough to feel like it's sliding under my skin.

"I don't know if I want a relationship with Isaac," I confess. "He's not... I don't know...serious, I guess. Everything's kind of surface level with him."

Wyatt's mouth curves in an infuriating little smirk. "How's the sex?"

My cheeks are burning. "It's... We haven't..." I'm flustered. Ugh. I never get flustered. I hate that Wyatt Graham brings out that side of me. "We haven't slept together yet. But we've done other stuff."

"Okay. How's the other stuff?" He laughs suddenly. "You know what? Don't bother answering. If you were satisfied with the football player, you wouldn't have been eye-fucking me all night."

My mouth drops open. "Excuse me?"

"What?" He grins, swallowing another swig. "Am I wrong?"

"I was *not* doing that."

"Yes. You were." He licks a drop of beer off his bottom lip, raking that hot gaze over me. Slow and deliberate.

I hate how my heart races just from him looking at me like that. "You're the one who was staring at me all night." I lift my chin in challenge. "Why?"

He goes quiet. I assume he's not going to answer or that he'll throw out a dismissive response, but he surprises me by saying, "I don't know."

My heart flips.

"But I can't seem to stop," he finishes, his voice dropping another octave.

He moves toward me, his hip trailing over the counter as he gets nearer.

I swallow, only to find that my throat is a desert.

"Blake," he mutters.

"Hmm?" I tilt my face up to his, my pulse skittering.

His eyes lower to my mouth. The tension between us is palpable. I'm practically inhaling it. How is this happening? Since when does Wyatt Graham look at me like he wants to kiss me?

And since when does he reach out and cup my cheek?

And lower his head?

And—

Without warning, his lips brush the side of my neck.

It's a featherlight caress, a whisper of a graze, but I can scarcely breathe. I don't want to make a sound or move a muscle for fear that he'll stop.

His hand slides up, long fingers skimming my waist over my sweater. As I stand there frozen with desire, he kisses his way up to my ear, unleashing goose bumps everywhere his mouth touches. His breath is hot over the lobe as my name once again breaks on his lips.

"Blake..."

I force myself to speak, even if it means breaking the spell. "What are you doing?"

"Don't fucking know," he mumbles against my cheek. "Want me to stop?"

"No," I whisper.

The stubble on his chin tickles my jaw, and I tilt my face, desperate for a real kiss, but he denies me. Instead, those hungry lips find my neck again, and I gasp when he suddenly lifts me up on the counter. My ass collides with granite, and then I'm locked in by both his arms, his biceps straining as he hovers over me.

Slowly...achingly slowly...he starts to lower me backward.

My hands instinctively loop around his neck, and heat flares in his eyes when my nails dig into his skin.

He smells so good. I don't know what that scent is, but I'm desperate to breathe it in. Something a bit spicy, a little smoky, and entirely masculine. His lips are mere inches away. God, I want to kiss him more than I want my next breath.

"This..." He buries his face in the crook of my neck again. "Is a fucking bad idea."

He's right. We're on the kitchen counter in his parents' house. At

any moment, someone could come downstairs and catch us.

But I couldn't stop this if I tried.

His tongue travels up my neck at the same time as he parts my thighs and steps between them. He presses himself against me, and I whimper at the feel of his long, thick erection straining inside his jeans.

"Are you turned on?" His voice is a low tease at my ear, and his hands are gripping my waist now, slowly dragging my lower body toward his.

"Mm-hmm," I manage to get out.

"You wet for me?" Breathing hard, Wyatt rolls his hips and grinds against my throbbing core.

I'm shocked by how fast the pleasure builds. How natural it feels to wrap my legs around him and rock my hips to meet his thrusts. And yes, I *am* wet for him. I'm soaked. Desperate to tear off my underwear, rip off his jeans, and pull him inside my body. As I claw at his zipper, he grinds harder, and I'm momentarily distracted by the jolt of pleasure that ripples through my clit.

Oh fuck, I'm close to coming.

I tighten my legs around him, straining for deeper contact, for relief, for anything that will ease the relentless ache between my legs.

When his thick erection slides over my clit again, a desperate, throaty moan slips out, loud enough to wake a person or six.

And to finally break the spell.

He abruptly lifts his head, and now he's peering down at me, eyes wild and hazy. As if realizing what he's doing, he stumbles backward.

I instantly grieve the loss of his body heat, the wisps of impending orgasm dissipating like a cloud of steam.

"Jesus," he mutters. "Go to bed, Blake. Please."

My lips are still tingling, aching for the kiss that almost happened.

My body continues to tremble from his chest caging me on the counter and his hard dick pressed up on me.

I stare at him, my heart pounding so hard it hurts. "I don't want to go to bed."

Wyatt's eyelids close for a second, then blink open as he drags a hand through his hair. "Then I will."

Disappointment crashes down on me as I watch him disappear up the stairs. He doesn't look back. Not even once.



I don't sleep a wink. I'm too riled up. Too turned on. Too angry. Too confused.

Too everything.

I'm not the kind of girl who likes drama. If I was, I would've already agreed to be Isaac's girlfriend; he's as melodramatic and over-the-top as they come. Me, I've made it a point in my life to be as drama-free as possible, which is why Wyatt's erratic and unpredictable behavior last night grates so much.

Why the hell did he mess with my head like that?

Although I'm up at dawn, I force myself to remain in bed until a less obscene time, finally heading downstairs around 6:45. Everyone else is still asleep. I don't hear any whispered voices. No soft footsteps. So I'm startled when I enter the kitchen to find Wyatt drinking a coffee at the counter.

The same counter where he dry humped me into oblivion last night.

"Morning," he says.

His tone is...normal. No awkwardness. Not a trace of tension.

"Morning," I reply.

"Coffee's fresh." Wyatt nods toward the counter.

I hide my frown as I walk to the coffee maker. "Did you sleep at all?"

"Not really." He watches me, casually sipping his coffee like he hadn't set me on fire a mere six hours ago.

Silence descends over the kitchen. I grab a mug from the cupboard. Wyatt says nothing as I pour, as I observe him over the rim of the mug.

Seconds tick by. The silence drags on.

Finally, I can't take it anymore.

"Are we not going to talk about last night?"

A wrinkle appears in his brow. "What do you mean?"

I stare at him. "Do you not remember what happened?"

Wyatt gives me a blank look that makes my stomach sink. "I was pretty gone," he admits, scratching the back of his neck. "Did I do something stupid?"

I search his face for even a flicker of memory, but all I see is blank curiosity. "You don't remember *anything*?"

"No. I was wasted." He studies my expression. "Shit. Was I an asshole to you? What did I say?"

The knot in my chest tightens. He really doesn't remember.

"No," I say, forcing a shrug. "You weren't a total ass. Just made a couple comments about Isaac and our relationship."

He smiles faintly. "Sorry. I was probably just looking out for you."

Then, in that maddeningly big-brother way he'd done two years ago, he reaches out and ruffles my hair.

"Don't listen to me, kid. I don't know shit about love." Wyatt shrugs. "You should give your football player a chance. Seems like he genuinely likes you."

My cheeks are scorching. I don't know whether to be mortified or furious. "Yeah. Sure. Thanks, Wyatt. Maybe I will."

Chapter 1

BLAKE

Bitten by a gator in a sandpit

PRESENT DAY

AIRPORTS WERE CREATED BY THE devil to test humanity.

Truly, I cannot think of a more dehumanizing experience. Doesn't even matter if you're arriving or departing—you're herded into lines like the vile cattle you are, crammed into holding pens disguised as gates, and forced to beg for scraps of seating and water that doesn't cost twenty-six dollars.

All this is to say: I'm ready to murder someone by the time a staticky voice over the PA announces that after an unfortunate *forty-two-minute* delay, our bags are finally being unloaded from the plane. So please be patient, folks. The conveyer belt will belch out those bags any minute now. We promise.

It's official. I live in Logan Airport now. I'm never leaving.

When I was a kid, my dad told me this airport was named after him. Even worse, he kept the lie going for so long that I used this fraudulent information as a "fun fact" about myself during a sixth-grade presentation. "Logan Airport is named after my dad, the famous hockey player," I bragged to the class, at which point my

teacher chided, "This is untrue. We don't tell lies in this classroom, Blake," and I went home crying.

Speaking of my father, he calls while I'm waiting at baggage claim with the rest of the cattle.

"Hey, Dad." I scan the carousel, which is finally spitting out the first few bags. I flew business class, so my suitcase should be coming out first. Theoretically. This airport has already fucked me once tonight.

"Hey, sweet pea. You still at the airport?"

"Yep." I already texted him the second we landed, but I knew that wouldn't be enough to satisfy him. He needs to hear my voice. Otherwise he assumes the plane crashed in the Atlantic and my "just landed!" message was a prescheduled text or a glitch in the phone matrix.

Did I mention my father is a wee bit overprotective?

"I wish you let me pick you up," Dad grumbles.

"My car's at the airport. Long-term parking, remember?"

A man steps forward and jostles me hard as he tries to find his bag. I glare at his back because he's, like, eight feet tall, and now I can't see the carousel at all.

"Do you want to come home for dinner tomorrow night?"

"Maybe," I say absently. "I'll see what Isaac's thinking."

There's a pause.

There's always a pause.

That's what happens when your father can't stand your boyfriend.

"I mean, if he's busy, *you* can still come," Dad says in a hopeful tone.

"Don't sound too excited about the prospect of me coming alone."

"Look, kiddo, it's not that I don't like him—"

"You hate him," I cut in.

"I don't hate him. I just don't like him."

I choke on my laughter and sidestep the giant in front of me. Peering at the emerging suitcases and duffels, I finally catch a glimpse of red. I always tie a bright hair scrunchie around the handle of my black suitcase.

“Dad, I see my bag. I’m hanging up now.”

I disconnect before he can argue and elbow my way through the waiting travelers. I might be small, but dating a football player has taught me some tricks. I don’t even apologize to the guy who squawks in outrage when my arm connects with his ribs. His fault for not moving when I said, “Scuse me.”

I grab my suitcase, and from there it’s a short trip to the parking level. Five minutes later, I’m leaving the airport garage behind the wheel of my Land Rover. Well, Isaac’s. He has two cars, so he lets me drive the SUV while he always takes the Porsche.

My father, of course, thinks Isaac’s passion for cars is super fucked up and a sign of psychopathy. This coming from a mechanic’s son who can rebuild an engine without batting an eye. Because when *he’s* into cars, it’s a totally normal, healthy hobby.

But when Isaac Grant likes cars? I’m about to be the subject of a true-crime documentary.

A least my mother doesn’t overtly hate the man I’m living with. *Overtly* being the operative word. I sense she doesn’t love him either, but she’ll never say it out loud. Mom has way more tact than that.

Still no text from Isaac, I realize. That’s unusual. My dad and his little man gang refer to Isaac as the “Love Bomber.” Even now, after we’ve been together for two and a half years, living together for one, they refuse to give him a chance. At this point, I think Dad and his hockey buddies just hate Isaac because he plays football. With that said—and I’m *not* conceding that my boyfriend is a love bomber—Isaac does blow up my phone constantly. I’ve been in Paris for the

past two weeks, and even with the time difference, he was texting me all the time.

Tonight, he ignored my just-landed text *and* the on-my-way-home one I just sent.

A prickly sensation tightens my stomach as I glance at my phone. It lights up the moment I check, but my burst of relief fades into annoyance when I see it’s my dad.

Shocking.

“You need help,” I say in lieu of hello. I turn onto the highway ramp. “Like, serious help. We need to get you in therapy.”

“You hung up on me,” he accuses.

“Yes, because I’m busy.”

“Are you on your way to that fancy building of yours?”

“It’s not that fancy,” I object.

To be fair, it is. Isaac wasted no time spending his NFL signing bonus. I’m proud of him, though, and I have no doubt he’ll have a hell of a rookie season this fall. At Briar, he was the star of the team, helping them win three national championships, and he was named MVP three years in a row.

“It’s just you’re not a building person,” Dad is saying. “You love houses. And porches. Nice, big, wraparound porches where you can sit on a wicker chair and read. Where do you even read, Blake? Is he depriving you of reading?”

“Oh my God, stop. And guess what, Dad? I love houses, but I’m also fine with condos. And even if I wasn’t, sometimes you need to make compromises in relationships, right?”

“Oh really? Did *he* compromise? You still have a year left of college. He couldn’t even be bothered to find something in the middle? When I played for Providence and your mom was still at Briar, we found a place between Hastings and Boston. Meanwhile, the love

bomber makes you commute an hour and a half to school?" Dad grumbles in displeasure.

Truth be told, that did irk a little. Since Isaac was able to graduate a semester early, he convinced me to break our Hastings lease and move to Boston where he could be closer to his new team and have access to better training facilities. He starts training camp in a few months, and he's determined to excel. And he was so excited about this condo. It's difficult to say no to Isaac when he's looking at you with those pleading little-boy eyes.

Still, I refuse to give my dad the satisfaction of being right.

"It's fine. I don't mind the commute, actually. I got some of my textbooks on audio, so I'm able to study as I drive."

"You will always defend this potato, won't you?"

I choke out a laugh. "He's not a potato!"

"Good point. I like potatoes."

"Dad," I warn.

"Fine. I'm gonna let this go."

"No, you won't. You'll just bitch about him the next time we talk. Anyway, I'm going now. Tell Mom I said hi and I'll text her later."

The rest of the drive is blessedly quiet. Except, damn it, it's back. The uneasy churning in my gut. A humming noise in my body urging me to turn around, have dinner with my parents, don't go to the fancy high-rise near Beacon Hill.

I once read about a lady down in Florida who ignored her sixth sense. She wrote a whole memoir about it. She claims that on a regular old Sunday morning, every cell in her body was telling her not to take her kids to the playground that day, but she ignored the humming, prickling, buzzing sensations in her stomach.

Moral of the story? If you don't listen to your internal warning system, you're going to get bitten by a gator in a sandpit.

But that probably won't happen to me tonight.

I scan my key to get into the underground of our building, then ride the elevator up to the twenty-third floor, juggling my purse and carting my luggage behind me. As I walk down the carpeted hallway toward my front door, the little hairs on the back of my neck are standing on edge. Something feels off, but I can't for the life of me figure out what.

I've never been insecure about our relationship. Yes, Isaac attracts attention wherever he goes and is about to be an NFL star, but I never worried he might get bored of me. He's infatuated with me, and he's been a good boyfriend. It didn't even occur to me that he might stray.

And yet as I approach my door, with my phone too silent from Isaac's lack of texts, I'm envisioning a trail of clothing from the front hall to our bedroom.

A discarded bra, a thong, his boxers...

You're acting crazy, a voice informs me.

I totally am. If he was cheating on me, there's no way he would have someone in there right now. I'm not surprising him by coming home early. He *knew* I was due home tonight. He told me to have a safe flight eight hours ago, then chided me when I told him that's sort of up to the pilot and beyond my control. Isaac isn't exactly in love with my dry humor, though I suspect that's mostly because it usually goes over his head.

I turn the key in the lock and enter the condo. Despite myself, my gaze drops to the polished floor. No underwear trail. That's a good sign.

"Babe?" I call.

No response. But his shoes are in the hall. His keys and his wallet are on the kitchen counter. I wander deeper into the apartment toward our bedroom, still battling that anxious feeling. I feel crazy.

The door is ajar. Slowly, I nudge it open.