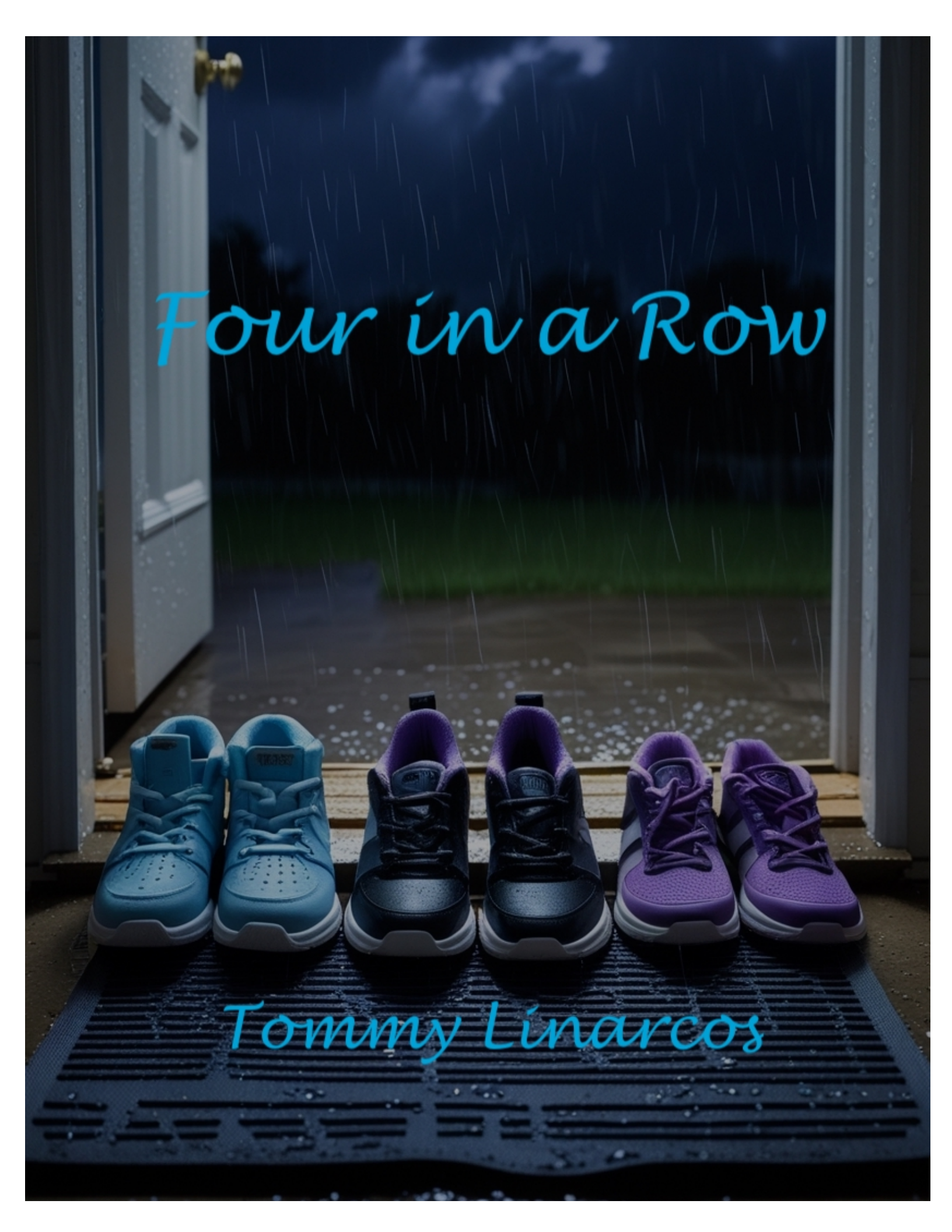


A photograph of three pairs of sneakers lined up on a black doormat in front of an open white door. It is raining heavily, with raindrops visible in the air and on the door frame. The sneakers are arranged in a row: a pair of light blue sneakers on the left, a pair of dark navy blue sneakers in the middle, and a pair of purple sneakers on the right. The background shows a dark, rainy outdoor scene with some greenery visible through the doorway.

Four in a Row

Tommy Linarcos

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Story #12 in the ***Cutting School and Playing Games*** series.

TOMMY LINARCOS

It's been a heck of a week. Thanksgiving weekend stayed quiet, for me. I played some songs over and over and cried my eyes out. Then I pulled myself together. I didn't go out, just stayed in, though Mia came over on Sunday. I didn't want to talk about Conor or Johnny or Silke or Akiko or Ava or Molly or Jazmín or anybody, and Mia understood that. She told me, "Lyla, you don't *need* a guy. You can go for a few weeks without a boyfriend, I'm sure. You've got options, when you're ready, again. Or you can wait for the right one. *Or we can get you the right one.*" We just ate cinnamon ice cream and watched dumb Italian movies on Netflix. And *Jurassic World III* — Mia loves her dinosaurs.

I was kind of dead inside. I guess that happens when you break up with someone. But I'm not all broken up that Conor isn't in love with me, or doesn't love me anymore, or anything like that. I never thought Conor was in love with me, though I hoped he liked me enough to be more than friends-with-benefits. I wasn't in love with him; I just wanted a boyfriend that didn't expect more than I was willing to do, and liked me enough to be with just me. I have to share the blame, though — I did take the boy's virginity and create a sex monster from that first day on.

And Johnny was right in front of me. The whole time. He just wasn't in our gym class...

Am I obsessing about him now? I can see his eyes, his blue, blue eyes as he begged me to get rid of Conor. He said he'd "take the hit" about breaking us up, let himself be the cause of it so I could let Conor down easier.

God, watching him move on the soccer field... I mean 'pitch.' He would want me to call it a soccer pitch. And those times he walked past me at the end of a game, pulling his jersey off... I know I had a little schoolgirl crush on his brother — literally, a *schoolgirl* crush, right? — but it was Johnny I really wanted. My friend, Johnny.

When I broke up with my "summer boyfriend," I'll call him — I don't want to go into that again — it just looked like a fresh start this year. And Conor was a possibility. And he came with Rory that day to my house, and we played *Girl Talk*, and he made me laugh, and he became my boyfriend. Sort of, I guess.

We brought Johnny into "the gang," and played our games with him. But I shouldn't have "played games" with him. I knew he liked me, and... I don't know... maybe I figured he'd always be there when... Like you put a toy down and expect it to still be where you put it, later.

His blue eyes, again, I can still see them. Looking at me in the rain, loving me on the operating table, gazing into me when we danced at Homecoming and on Halloween, glowing bright in the dark closet together, that cocky look playing hero cowboy to me. Watching me walk away with Conor too many times. Talking to me in class, sitting by me in class, touching my hand under the table in class. Stealing a kiss when we could.

He was the only one who... who asked me about... he was...

He was the only one who remembered how much I wanted to see my father and my new half-brother, and got ignored. Mia doesn't even know that. I didn't tell her. But somehow, I wanted to tell Johnny. His folks aren't split, but I knew he'd understand me. He offered to steal a car so he could drive me down to the south suburbs, but he's only just got his learner's permit. I don't want to mess that up for him with a ticket. Or an accident.

He's a fellow Ravenclaw, and the smartest jock in the school. And he's in the Orchestra. I haven't seen him too much after school lately as they're doing extra rehearsals for the Winter Concert.

Probably for the best. He doesn't want to see me, anymore, now that he's got Akiko. Aki. Kiki. He calls her Kiki. And Mia and I set him up with her.

It's my own fucking fault.

We went skiing at Villa Olivia that next Saturday. Our first trip with Ski Club. It was very awkward. Well, it was awkward for me. Conor was on that trip. So was Johnny and Aki and...

Johnny doesn't even sit at our lunch table, anymore! because Aki doesn't, and he sits with her. He has to. He's her boyfriend, now... Every now and then I see him glance at me at our table and... and then I still have to sit next to him in Health and Geometry and Spanish...

And we convinced Aki to join Ski Club. Her sister is in Ski Club, too, so maybe we didn't have to do much convincing, but whatever. Johnny was with her on the bunny hill as we all got our skills review. When she fell, he helped her up. When I fell...

I got the feeling that when I fell, Johnny wanted to help me up. I could see him look at me and almost move to get me, but something held him back. Aki held him back, that's what held him back. Either physically, or his loyalty to his girlfriend. So, when I fell, Mia and Rory helped me up. Johnny was too far away, anyway. But he was still the first one I looked to when I fell. The one I wanted to help me.

I'm pretty sure Conor was the one who laughed when I fell. Whatever.

That was a day trip. On the van early to get to the slopes when they open, leave when the sun starts to set at, like, four o'clock, nowadays. The sun going down earlier and earlier gets to me. I need the sunshine. Soon, the dark and the snow will feel like Christmastime, but I don't know if it will for me. Heck, I don't even know if it'll snow this month. It's like Illinois doesn't get snow, anymore. Once a month, we get a blizzard, then it melts the next week, and I get to listen to my old teachers say that when they were kids, it started snowing in November and it stayed white through February, and March was slush month. Villa Olivia had fake snow for us, so maybe there's something to that.

There was this one kid there, maybe ten years old, just flying up and down the bunny hill — grabbed the tow rope, sailed to the top, flew down, did crazy eights, grabbed the tow rope again. He did that like twenty times while I'm falling down, trying to get my skis pointed correctly.

But I did get it, and Mia, Rory, and I had fun learning. Mia has been skiing before, but it's always new the first time after a while, she says. Skiing was fun when we got out on the easy slopes.

But back in school, I had to learn to deal with it. In Health class, Ms. Tattersall had let us move seats to sit at the same table back in October. I had to keep a brave face, now.

"So... how're you and Aki doing?" I'd ask Johnny with a false smile.

Depending on what kind of day Johnny was having, I'd get answers from "Just fine," to a sigh and eye roll, to a stare and tight lips that told me Johnny was still upset with me. But class time was class time, and we're both good students. He doesn't sit next to me in Geometry, and that class is silent as a tomb, thankfully. But we have paired up in Spanish, often, so...

I never asked him what the eye roll meant; I don't think I really wanted to know. He and Aki weren't hallway-kissers, so I didn't have to see that, but I did my best not to picture them making out on the couch watching TV, or making love in his bedroom. The bedroom that had a photo of me on his wall. Had. Used to. Why would he keep that up there?

So, the week went by. I'm okay.

On Saturday, Ski Club went to Alpine Valley across the border in Wisconsin. I did much better there. Didn't fall as much. We all fall, sometimes, just not as much. And just like the previous Saturday, I came home with sore muscles, but a good sore.

"Want to come over? Hang out with us?" Mia asked on Sunday.

"You guys don't want me there when you can be alone," I replied. Really, who wants a third wheel?

"Don't say that. If we didn't want you to come with us, we wouldn't ask you," Rory said. "It's not pity, or charity. You're our friend."

"You don't want to just sit home alone, again, watching TV, do you?" Mia put to me.

"No." I didn't want to. I wanted to be with friends. I just didn't want to get in their way.

"Okay. Where to? Your place? Rory's? The movies? Bowling?"

"Rory's," Mia said. "My mom has her friends over."

"So, your dad's escaped?" Rory asked. "Maybe we *should* go to your place. We can be quiet."

"Haven't faced the man, yet?" I asked him.

"No. Maybe at Christmas he'll have to be friendly." Rory's been afraid to be around Mia's dad ever since she went on birth control. He figures he'll be pulled aside for either a threatening man-to-man talk, or a punch in the nose, or he'll take Rory in the basement to show off his gun collection!

“Do we have to stay in your - ”

“Shut up and just come with us!” Mia yelled at me. So, I put on my shoes, a hoodie, and my blue raincoat, because it was starting to rain. See? Rain in December. I swear, we’re going to have a green Christmas this year. And we got on our way. Honestly, it felt good to get out. My homework was done, so I was good.

We got to Rory’s house. His mom and dad were watching TV together, watching some old black-and-white movie on TCM, all curled up on the couch. It was so cute. They still love each other.

“Thought you were going out?” Rory’s dad said as we scooted past.

“Raining, unless I can borrow the car?” Rory said, waiting for an answer, but all he got was his dad’s raised eyebrow. “Don’t worry, we’ll keep to the basement.” Rory grabbed us some snacks and we went down the back steps, down to his basement bedroom.

The back door was making noise with the wind kicking up. “Guess we’re getting a storm,” Rory said as he shoved the door, making sure it was shut. Four more stairs and there was the door to his room with the big glass window in it.

But the window had a curtain over it, now. Rory must’ve gotten tired of replacing posters over it when Conor tore them. “Hey...! You finally got some nice-looking privacy.”

“Thanks to Mia and my mom and Etsy,” Rory said. Rory’s old bedroom upstairs was now his mom’s crafty Etsy room. Mia and his mom had a bonding moment making those curtains.

We closed the newly-curtained door, pulled off our coats and shoes, and settled onto Rory’s Spider-Man bed. On his cardboard box of a table was a game of *Connect Four* — the vertical checkers tic-tac-toe game where you have to get four in a row, not three. Not just three. It looked like a game had been started but not finished. Automatically, I opened the clasp on the bottom and all the yellow and red checkers fell out.

“Looks like you two were playing sexy rules *Connect Four*, eh?” I shut the clasp, picked up a red checker, and dropped it into place.

“Not me?” Mia said, but picked up a yellow checker and played against me.

“Me and Fiona, but not sexy rules, of course,” Rory said, going through his phone to find a good playlist. “Scott finally arrived and she didn’t need me, anymore.”

“But it’s not a bad idea...” Mia said and dropped a yellow checker down the slot, blocking me at only three in a row. I blocked her at three with my next checker. And so it went.

“Does anyone ever win this game?” Mia asked, trying a new path.

“Occasionally,” Rory admitted. “I was actually beating Fiona two out of three when she bailed.”

“What did you win?” I asked, all sly.

“Wouldn’t you like to know...” he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

Mia blocked me again at three, and I just fell back on the bed.

Slowly, I realized that Rory was on one side of me, and Mia on the other. The lights were low and a sexy Weeknd song was on the Bluetooth. One hand was on my right thigh, another hand was moving across my arm to my left breast. “What’re you guys doing?”

Mia snuggled up to me. “It’s been a little while since we fooled around, you and me, and I figure it’s been at least two weeks since you got any action from Jughead...”

“Three weeks,” I corrected her about Conor. She said Jughead. Johnny called him Jughead.

“...and you’ve always said you wanted to try me out, again,” Rory whispered, licking my ear.

“I did say that.” I could sit up and stop all this, but maybe I didn’t want to. No, I know I didn’t want to stop them. Because of Conor and Rory, Mia and I didn’t have much “study” time alone, or need it. I shouldn’t say that. What Mia and I do is altogether different than how Conor and I made love.

Let me rephrase that.

How Mia and I make love is altogether different than how Conor fucked me.

And here I was being offered the tender touch of my two favorite people who wanted me to feel better. The notion had only just occurred to me, but I was already feeling it, falling into the idea of relaxing and letting go. Of letting Mia do her magic that only a girl knows how to do, as well as letting Rory fuck me the way he did back in September. Yes, I wanted Rory to fuck me, and not make love to me. I needed to be held down and fucked like he did before.

“Close your eyes,” Rory whispered, biting my earlobe.

Mia said something more, whispering something into my other ear, trying to convince me to go along with this, seduce me, but I didn’t need to hear it. I was already getting wet just thinking about what was to come.

I put my hand to my forehead. “Oh, my, I feel so faint...” I said, and pretended to pass out.

I love being undressed. Conor was actually pretty good at it, but he was always anxious to get to the action. So, on Rory’s Spider-Man bed, I just floated, my eyes closed. I could feel Mia’s hands undoing the zipper of my hoodie while Rory was taking off my right sock, pinching at my heel and pulling at my toes, not ripping it off. He didn’t try to tickle me, but it felt good to stretch my toes while he played his finger along the underside. Then he repeated with the left sock.

Mia waited until he was done, then had Rory lift me up. I reacted to the motion, but kept my eyes shut tight. Rory kept his balance well and I felt better when he found the height Mia wanted. With my arms splayed out, she was able to remove my hoodie and then my shirt with only a little adjustment here and there from Rory. My shirt coming up and inside-out over my head is such a different feeling when you're not doing it yourself. I was a little nervous, hoping Rory wouldn't drop me, but I kept my eyes closed and breathed evenly. I was with the two people I trusted most.

"You're floating, Lyla, among the clouds," Rory intoned near me, "where you belong, my angel. But the warm breeze is making you lose your clothes."

I suppressed a smile at Rory's drama. But yes, I wanted that feeling of not being in control. I wanted to feel weightless. I wanted to forget everything.

My hair flowing through my shirt's neck hole felt really odd, but sexy, like two hands encircling my tresses and pulling along to the ends and letting them fall. It's not something you've ever felt before unless someone else does it for you and you're at an odd angle, like hanging your head over a couch arm.

"Little by little..."

I felt the silent clicks of my bra clasp behind me, but Mia didn't remove my bra, yet. *Why not?* I wondered. Then my jeans button popped. There was the answer.

The zipper...

Rory shifted me a little, but I still felt sure he had me, and Mia pulled my jeans down over my butt. Rory secured me in his arms, and Mia pulled at my cuffs, and then my jeans slid down my legs, slower than I ever would have done so.

I felt free, floating there in Rory's arms, though I knew we weren't done.

Mia moved my arms atop my body, my hands by my waist, and then my bra lifted, and she made sure the straps slid and lifted my arms as they went south.

Rory couldn't resist a quick lick of my right nipple as he moved my body slowly lengthwise above his bed, and I felt I was coming in for a landing. Just as my backside touched the comforter, Mia's fingers grasped the waistband of my panties and peeled them downward — off my waist, over my thighs, a hook at my knees, along my calves, and off my feet, which I helped with by pointing my toes.

His hands free, Rory caressed both my breasts, but continued sucking on my right. I could perceive he was doing some disrobing of his own, but I still didn't open my eyes. He didn't tell me to, yet. But I had to know. I moved my right hand and felt his bare thigh, then drew inward and found his hard cock. My fingers instantly wrapped around it.

"Mmm... Is this for me?" I asked the air.

"If these are for me," Rory mumbled from my chest.

“Anytime,” I smiled. Then added, “So long as Mia’s good with it.”

I felt a nude Mia crawl up on my left side; her landing strip tickled the back of my hand. “Mia’s fine with it,” she said. “Today.” Mia took my left breast in her mouth and, when she did, Rory disengaged from my right. I could sense he was removing his shirt, finally, and I held onto his cock the best I could while he kicked his jeans off and removed his socks. He didn’t want me to let go! Then he climbed on, and the three of us were naked in his bed.

Their hands started wandering. Everywhere. My stomach. My arms. My calves. My throat. My fingertips. My shoulders. Everywhere but where they knew I wanted a touch, or at least a finger. Oh, they pulled at my pubes, but they never dipped inside me. There wasn’t an inch of skin that they weren’t caressing or massaging for me, except where I was fused to the bed, though I wondered if I would be rolled over, soon.

But no. Lifted a little, yes, as Rory hooked my thigh in his arm and lifted me up a bit so Mia could run her fingers over my ass and in-between the cheeks, grazing my anus, but she stopped short of my pussy.

Rory set me back as Mia found her way up to my hair, running her fingers through it lightly.

Then Rory kissed me. I’ve kissed him before; kissed him hello and goodbye, and kissed him like I meant it. Rory kissed me then like he meant it, with just enough tongue. And I gave it back that way. I’d always been a little jealous that Mia got Rory this year. No, not jealous. Is envious a better term? Or just the same thing? Ah, it’s just semantics. Johnny would know.

Fuck.

Don’t think about that. Just enjoy Rory’s kiss. And Mia’s fingertips.

I still hadn’t opened my eyes. In my mind, I saw a kind of cartoon Rory and a cartoon Mia doing things to me. Maybe Pixar-like, maybe all papercrafty like a cool stop-motion movie by Wes Anderson or something. Nothing definite, just that it was a fantasy in the clouds.

Rory left my mouth and Mia took over the kiss, and for one brief moment, all three of us were kissing, or both of them were kissing my lips. I so love them both.

Then Rory’s fingers found my clit. I gasped and jerked forward, almost sitting up, but Mia caught me and eased me back down. “Take it easy, you’re going to like this,” she told me.

“I thought *you* might...” I started.

“We’ll get there, too,” she hummed. “Lyla, you are the most important person in the world to both of us. We’ve dreamed of holding you between us, of both of us making love to you at the same time. We don’t ever want you to feel alone.”

Between Rory’s magic fingers and Mia’s magic words, I didn’t know why I was starting to cry, but I know there were tears in the corners of my eyes. Rory was massaging my body while Mia massaged my soul.

Rory shifted and started moving down the bed, keeping one hand on and in my pussy, but the other traced my leg until he found my foot. He lifted it to find his way between my legs, and soon his tongue was doing what his fingers had been only seconds before.

“Didn’t get to do this, yet, Lyla,” he hummed into me. “Got a taste when we played Girl Talk, but only a tease with Clue. Thought maybe Milkman Mo might get to make a delivery to Ballet Betty, but no...”

I wanted to laugh a little, but his tongue was all over my labia, up and down, dipping inside me. I wanted to scream a little when he finally found my button. I wanted to talk dirty to him and tell him what I really wanted while he got me to the point where I knew I was going to cum. I wanted to do all of that, but Mia kept my mouth occupied with hers, and I could only manage to whimper. And she was kneading both of my breasts, but that almost goes without saying.

My body began bucking, as I needed more air than Mia was letting me have.

“Is Rory taking you there, baby? Is Rory going to make you cum?” Mia asked, switching to my throat, letting me breathe.

“Yes...” is all I could get out, even after wanting to run a dialogue. *“Rory’s making me cum...”*

“Don’t fight it...”

*“I am **not** fighting it! I want to cum. I want to cum so bad. Please Rory, don’t stop... Don’t stop...”* I really don’t think he had any plans of stopping, but I just had to beg him. Rory’s tongue is magic; Mia is so fucking lucky. She’s trained him well. I mean, I know how she likes it, and I know how she does it for me, and Rory was doing all the right things in the right order.

And then it hit me. I knew it was coming, but it hit very suddenly, like being dropped backwards into a pool. But not a blue pool, not a cool pool — but a bathtub, deep and warm and glowing and...

I started a scream, but Mia quieted me with her own mouth on mine, reminding me that we were in a house with parents home on a school night. A Sunday, but we were going to school the next day. *Damn.* I shook my head to clear those thoughts, and bit my tongue to quiet myself. But I had to whimper or something, I had to let out that passion as my body convulsed on the Spider-Man bed. There was some thunder outside, the storm had finally hit, I guess, and I wondered if I could time a scream with the next thunder clap, so Rory’s folks wouldn’t hear it.

Rory left my pussy, but I barely knew it. It was fine, I needed the break for the sensitivity, but I wished he’d return, or Mia took a turn. I was still ready for more. I quivered with some aftershocks, but I basically became a rag doll, a smile permanently drawn on my face.

Mia lifted my arms over my head. I couldn’t move, anyway, so she could do what she wanted. Rory was moving. Mia was rolling on top of me. Were they going to attack my breasts again or...?

Then I felt something slip over my wrist, and over my other wrist. “Um...?” I think I uttered before those two somethings pulled tighter. Not tight, just tighter. And then Rory took ahold of my ankles and pulled me toward him so I was stretched out. I was being tied up!

“*Oh!*” I squealed loudly! How could I not? My eyes shot open and I saw Rory move up my body.

“Relax, baby, you’re not going anywhere,” he told me with an evil grin.

I tugged at my restraints. Not to get out of them — I loved this! — but just to test them. I glanced up at both my hands and saw two men’s ties; I thought I recognized the purple one Rory wore at Homecoming to match Mia’s dress, but I’d never seen him wear the other one, which had a Santa and snowflakes on it. I knew that if I really wanted to get loose, I could. But I didn’t want to! I was with my friends; I knew I wasn’t in any real danger or peril. I trusted them.

And Rory was going to fuck me! Yes!

I pulled against the ties again, like I was struggling. “What are you going to do, Rory?”

“Nothing, little angel,” he said, lining his blond cock up to enter me. “Nothing. Don’t worry.”

“Why am I tied up?” I whined playfully.

“Just to keep you safe...” he said, dipping the tip of his cock into me.

“Are you going to fuck me? I’ve never been fucked before...” I whimpered.

“Yes, I’m going to fuck you...”

“Will it hurt?”

“Oh, angel, it’ll only hurt a little bit, a little sting, and then it’ll feel wonderful.”

I was so freaking wet nothing could hurt me when it went in, but I loved the virgin game we were playing.

“*You’ll love it.*” With that he fell forward and speared me with his cock.

And he was right. I loved it. God, yes, I loved it!

Rory fucked me hard, just like I wanted him to, like he did at my house, but in a new way. He slammed his cock into me again and again. We rocked his bed, but down here in the basement there were no floorboards to creak. If only I could scream as loud as I wanted to.

I gritted my teeth and pulled on my restraints, feeling the false tension in my arms. “*Fuck yes... Rory... fuck me, Rory...*” I moaned under my breath.

He pressed down on my shoulders, pinning me like he had before, and just pistoned that cock in and out and in and out, hard and fast. Mia is so lucky. So freaking lucky.

Mia wasn't on the sidelines, either. She'd been whispering in my ear along with the play acting, telling me everything would be okay if I did everything Rory asked and he'd let me go if I was a good girl. And she was in charge of my breasts, of pinching my nipples, when Rory wasn't flat on top of me.

But he did rise up, and he took ahold of my ankles, again, stretching me to full-length with the ties. This time he lifted me behind my knees. Not fully in the air like before, but my entire pelvis was a foot or two off the bed, my neck and back still holding me steady. He pulled my legs wider and got right in there and pounded me in the air.

"That's it, Lyla... that's it... I love fucking you, Lyla... fucking Lyla's golden pussy..." Rory growled. It was almost constant, these little grumbings, always saying how much he loved to fuck me. This is what I'd asked for, but I knew from Mia that Rory could be as tender and loving as he was being rough now.

I'd never had this happen to me before. Conor was never creative enough, unless we played a game for inspiration. I wondered if Johnny would be? Didn't matter. Rory was.

I had to let it out. I made little screams, little yelps, with each of Rory's thrusts, hoping they didn't alert his parents.

Soon, Rory allowed me down; it must've been taxing to keep me aloft. He just got in there close, bending my knees and turning me on my side. Now this was just like before! It's a different feeling having his cock enter me sideways, the way the flatter sides fit now, the way the rounder sides fit now...

"Oh, yes, Rory, yes... Oh, give it to me... fuck me, Johnny..."

Yes, I'd said 'Johnny.' I don't remember exactly where we were at in the lovemaking when I said it, but I know I said it. I might have even said it a couple of times, I don't know. I worried Rory might take offense, but he never said anything. Mia, however, did slap my ass, but that might've just been because my ass was sticking out, then.

Rory twisted me back and put my feet on his shoulders and continued his 'assault.' I tapped his cheek with my toe to see if he remembered what else he'd done to me, and he did. He took my toes into his mouth and sucked on them.

That was the magic button. Those nerve endings shot a jolt straight into my spine, like the lightning outside, and I was hit with another spastic orgasm. My feet left his shoulders and I just convulsed while he continued fucking me however he wanted.

As I recovered, I turned to Mia who was all smiles, knowing what I was feeling. I kissed her hard and said, "Come here." She looked at me with a question in her eyes because she was already 'here.' *"Here,"* I said again, with intent, licking my lips, and she understood.

Carefully, she moved on top of me. Rory could see what was happening and helped with the transition. Mia got in place and I went after her pussy like it was the most delicious pudding ever made.

Don't be cute and ask me the flavor. It was Mia flavored, and that's good enough for anybody!

"Baby, I've missed this. You take such good care of me, baby," Mia moaned on top of me.

"Lick that pussy, Lyla. Lick Mia's fuckin' pussy," Rory moaned from behind Mia. I couldn't see him anymore, but I could tell from his thrusts he was going to cum soon.

"You want to give her your cum?" Mia asked him.

"I'd love to have your cum, Rory," I squeaked out. I love watching boys cum. I'd love to have Rory cum in my mouth or on my tits.

"I'm gonna cum... I'm gonna fuckin' cum in you, Lyla... Can't have it today... because I wanna fuckin' cum inside your pussy for-" and then Rory went stiff and blasted his cum inside me, again and again, holding tight onto my knees. He stopped thrusting and I could actually feel it jet inside me, I could feel the heat of it inside me.

Then he began again, thrusting lightly, calming down. I could hear his breath, but couldn't see him, and felt him collapsing. His head appeared by my right side and his hands started stroking my belly and thighs. I gurgled an unintelligible "I love you, Rory" from Mia's pussy, but he understood.

"I love you, too, Lyla," he breathed.

"We love you," Mia said above me. She shifted off my mouth, leaned forward, and released my bonds. Like skiing, my arms were a little sore, but a good sore. This is why you play the games and exercise in PE, not just walk around the red line.

Given my freedom, I pulled Mia off of me and laid her on her back, shifting her to the center. Rory moved, shut off his bedside lamp, turned on this beer sign — like a night-light, and waited patiently to see how we ended up. He lay back at my side and became our stroker, our caresser, our massager as I took up position at Mia's waist and continued eating her pussy. It was cool with the rainstorm continuing outside, only now we could see light flashes through the basement windows.

I could sense Rory watching how I did it, making Mia moan, as if taking notes. Occasionally, I made eye contact with him, and we just smiled at each other, comfortable in our friendship.

That's how this all started with Mia. Friendship. We'd seen each other's bodies changing at the pool, in the locker rooms, and trying on clothes — that was nothing new. We were not nervous about noticing how we were developing, asking about each other's experience. A step forward was helping each other learn how to shave what we needed or wanted to shave. We did both shave our pussies, once, but hated it; I felt like I was nine, again. But I do like to keep it clean down below.

But it was one particular sleepover where Mia was brave enough to ask me if she could kiss me, that she'd kind of wanted to, and not just to practice how it would be with a boy. I had to admit, I'd wanted to, too. So, we did. For a good while. Kissing led to touching. First, it was outside our nightshirts, but I ran my hands under hers, and soon we both pulled them off, touching her breasts tenderly, like I'd wanted to, instead of just helping fix each other's boobs trying on a dress or a bikini.

Mia was the first to suck on my breast, though. She was amazed at how pink my areolas were, and how wide they grew when I got turned on.

I was the one who pushed past the panties boundary, and touched Mia's insides for the first time. It wasn't that first night, but the week after that when I licked her pussy, and then she licked mine. The next time, we showed each other how we did it with our fingers, still kind of embarrassed even after all we'd done, and then tried licking again.

Then came toys, and breaking of cherries, and... and just holding each other when boys were being stupid, or when our high school boyfriends weren't as nice as we thought they were. And the first to know after the loss of our virginities.

When all else failed, when everyone else failed us, we still had each other.

I had brought Mia off twice when she turned the position around and went down on me. Rory had recovered and took Mia from behind while she did. That night, there was never a point where the three of us were not connected.

We'd rolled under the comforter and dozed, a bit. It gets cold down in the basement — who knew? But it was weird because then it got too hot, me in the middle still, so we threw it off, then there was a chill, again, so we cuddled more. And Rory's cock was poking me, so he fucked me again, and kind of went back-and-forth between fucking me and fucking Mia. We all laughed about whether he'd have enough cum left to paint our tits, but he wound up cumming inside Mia, at first, though he did poke me again so we both got some, and I was like, "See how great birth control is?"

It was somewhere after nine when we woke up, again, and we all knew it was time to start getting dressed. We slowly got going, finding underwear. Then there was a stomping on the ceiling above us — a signal that Rory's dad wanted him, I found out. Rory threw on his pants and shirt quickly, and dashed upstairs barefoot. Mia and I put things on a little faster, then.

She was helping me find where Rory had tossed my socks in the dark when the basement door opened.

And there stood Johnny Walker.

The outside door four steps up was still open, and all the cold, rainy air followed Johnny in.

Johnny moved forward, reached out and took my hand. I initially pulled away — his coat was all wet from the storm, his hair was dripping, and he had a wild look in his eyes. His blue eyes. But he followed and pulled me in to him. His other arm held me fast.

I didn't want to look at his face. If I did, I don't know what I would do, what I would say, what this all meant. But he made me look at him and he kissed me. And at first, I resisted; he'd just ran in here grabbed me and kissed me. But I knew. I knew this was Johnny. And I wanted to kiss him. God, yes, I wanted to kiss him. And I did. I didn't care that his coat was getting my shirt wet. I didn't care that his hair was dripping on me. I just cared that he was holding me and that I was kissing him.

The wind stopped as Rory came back down the stairs and closed the back door, then closed his basement door. We were all back in the beer sign semi-darkness.

"Johnny?" I came up for air.

"I went to your house, first, then Mia's, and finally got sent here," he told me. "No one was answering a text." I think we all felt guilty about that one. Mia got Johnny a towel from on top of the washing machine. He wiped his face, and swabbed his coat. I took the towel from him and shook his hair. "I had to see you."

"Guess so," Rory intervened, making Johnny take off his coat. "What's up?"

Johnny looked around. He spoke to all of us, the three of us, but looked right at me. "I broke it off with Kiki."

Part of me was overjoyed with that news, but it wasn't like 'Oh, boy, now we can be together forever!' I didn't know what to say.

"What does that mean, Johnny?" Mia asked.

"It means..." he began, but he looked confused, like 'Why don't you all understand?' He just looked to me. "Lyla?"

"I don't want to be the cause of that, Johnny," I told him.

"Lyla, you're the reason for everything," he told me.

"Is she okay?" Mia asked. "Did she take it well?"

Johnny still had a look of confused amazement. "She's fine. You three set that whole thing up for us. We never belonged together, and we knew it. She said you guys told her it would be good to have someone like me be her first. So, she did. But she's not in love with me any more than I was with her."

"But she was your crush..." Mia tried explaining her side of the Mystery Date.

"Was," Rory said in Johnny's defense.

"Nothing's the same as it was during the summer," Johnny told the room. "We gave it a shot for a week or so, but... But, no." He looked at me. His wild eyes had turned sad. "Lyla?"

I looked away from his blue eyes. I looked at the floor, at his wet shoes, at my bare feet.
 “Johnny...”

He picked my chin up. “All I’ve wanted... All I’ve ever wanted is you. I waited for you, I fought for you, I wandered because of you, I betr-...” He stopped. I think he was going to say something about Mia and Rory and the troubles he caused. That maybe I caused by not... by staying with...

“But that’s all on me, not on you,” Johnny corrected himself. “All I need to know is if you still have feelings for me,” he said. “Tell me you don’t still want me,” he challenged me.

I looked back at the floor. At my feet. How do I just go from Conor to Johnny? Well, I didn’t. I had a couple weeks to recover from Conor. And to curse myself for letting Johnny go and setting him up with Akiko. Hadn’t I just been wishing it all were different? You know, maybe I can blame my mother. If she hadn’t called me home that day we were playing *Operation*, I could have been with Johnny, and it would have been a lot easier to break up with Conor after only a week or two than it was at two months.

And how do I take Johnny just an hour after he broke up with Aki? Didn’t he need time to recover, to reconsider?

“Angel,” Rory called to me. “Angel?” I looked up from the floor. I looked at Rory. “Don’t be a fool, this time.”

“Baby?” Mia called to me. “Tell him.”

I looked back at Johnny. At Johnny’s blue eyes and I just melted. “Oh, Johnny!” I cried into his sweatshirt and hugged him so tight. Johnny got the message and held me as tightly. Then he pulled my face up and kissed me.

“Finally,” Rory said from somewhere behind my Johnny.

We held each other for a time and didn’t let go.

Rory and Mia sat back on the bed, turned the lamp on, and put on their socks. I pulled Johnny over to the bed and we sat, too, four in a row. Rory really needs to get some chairs, but there was room for the four of us: me and the people I loved the most. Neither me nor Johnny was thinking about having sex, and I don’t think I could after all that with Rory and Mia, anyway, but I still needed to put my socks on, too.

Johnny noticed the *Connect Four* game. He looked at it, considered it, then picked up a red checker and dropped it in. “I win.”

Mia came to attention immediately. “Where? I don’t see...”

“Here. Diagonally,” Johnny pointed out. Four red checkers connected. Neither of us had seen it a couple of hours ago. Now it was plain. Four in a row.

“Pretty sneaky, Johnny,” Rory said. Johnny looked to him, but Rory just had a big smile on his face.

“I was red,” I told my boyfriend.

“Then we win,” he said.