

# Chapter One

Jason's hands won't stop shaking. He clenches his fists, his sister's silver ring digging into his palm, but they keep shaking. He bursts into tears the second the door finally closes.

He can hear the footsteps of the police officer walking away. The same one who came six weeks ago to inform him of his sister's death.

Door closed and case closed. In front of Jason, on the sad, small bed in the sad, small room, is everything Becca left behind. Two boxes—a whole life—and Jason’s hope for a future. He is about to age out of the foster-care system. In four months, when he turns eighteen, he’ll be booted out of the group home. Maybe onto the street. Becca was supposed to be here. Becca was supposed to take care of him. But all that’s left of Becca are these two boxes.

It’s hard to breathe. His binder must be too tight. His chest feels like it’s collapsing. It takes him three tries to get his shirt off. He pulls off the material crushing his breasts down flat and throws it on the old blanket on the bed. He feels better, but barely.

Two years on testosterone, male hormones, has changed Jason. It’s made his shoulders wider, his jaw bigger and his body hairier. But without a shirt, it is easy to see what he is. A transgender guy. Someone in danger. The staff at the group home know, of

course. They take him to get his shots and see his doctors. But if any of the other kids found out, Jason would be in for a world of hurt.

He stands in the middle of the room, his mind full of pain and fear. He feels like he’s dying. He can’t breathe at all.

After a while the panic attack fades. As he calms down he realizes he’s half-naked. It would be so bad if someone walked in right now. Running to the bed, he grabs his binder. The door bangs open before he can put it back on.

Panicking, Jason drops the binder and grabs his shirt. If anyone sees his chest, they’ll know what he has been hiding. He pulls the shirt over his head, his back still to the door. He prays for his strong shoulders to help him pass. For whoever it is to see just a boy.

“Yo, Jase, saw the pigs came by again. Did they solve your sister’s murder yet?” The thick voice can

only belong to Derek. Jason hates Derek. The guy is built like a monster and has a personality to match.

It takes everything Jason has in him to sound normal. "Not yet." Ever since he'd yelled at the care worker that his sister couldn't have overdosed, that she never did drugs, not ever, the other teens at the care home like to tease him about it. Especially Derek.

Jason's whole body shivers as he wonders whether Derek wants to fight again. Jason's ribs are still bruised from last time. If he stays facing away, his back is open to possible danger. If he turns around, Derek might see his chest under his shirt.

To his relief, Derek just snorts and bangs back out into the hallway. Jason waits until the door shuts behind him and then rushes to it. He kicks the door stopper tightly into place. It's dangerous. In case there's a fire. He's not supposed to have it. They've taken four off him already, but it's the only way he can breathe in this place.

Safely locked in, Jason walks slowly back to the bed. His whole body feels like it's full of rocks. What is he going to do without Becca? How can this be his life now?

Dropping down on the bed, he knocks one of the boxes over. It tips sideways, spilling its contents onto the blankets.

The copy of Sherlock Holmes that falls out makes him gasp. It was their dad's, the collected stories. When he'd lost his job and started drinking, he'd started selling most of his first editions. But Becca had taken this one. First it had been in her bedroom, on the shelf by her bed. Then, after she moved out, it was on display in her apartment, which Jason was going to move into once he left the group home. Part of their plan.

The book is light brown, with gold leaf on the leather cover and gold-edged pages. Becca has read it so often that the creamy cover is dirty. He reaches out to put the book back in the box. He can't face