

Note from Kele: This is one of those scenes that I fully understand WHY I cut it, but I still like it quite a bit. In my mind, this is one of those scenes that actually did happen, even if I couldn't fit it in the book. Makes me happy I finally have somewhere to put all these.

In the case of this scene, there's two reasons why I cut it.

The first was simply pacing. Alex and Matt's relationship was far more important to the reader than the living dynamic between Alex and Holly. Leaving this in would've dragged down the front end of the book.

Second, it was too controversial. Writing it allowed me to better understand the long-term living situation of Alex and Holly, which was quite unique. They are best friends, and both very open, carefree people with their bodies. They have also been pretending to be long time, live in boyfriend and girlfriend. I guess I needed a scene that allowed me to understand why and how they were able to pull that off. Ultimately, I needed to know, even if the reader didn't.

We see in the flashback scenes that the two of them have always been comfortable being naked in front of each other to the point that it makes others uncomfortable.

Holly's mother was a stripper, and was always a very free, independent spirit, which is a large part of the reason Holly is the way she is. Holly loves her mother, but she also gravitated towards Alex's family for their stability. After Alex and Will's parents died, she stuck around. These facts didn't end up in *Starfish and Coffee*, but they are quite relative to Holly and Will's story I plan to finish one day.

He brewed a cup of regular coffee for him, and then made Holly's favorite, a concoction that smelled more like dessert than coffee. He

added cream and a shitload of sugar to hers, further destroying the beauty of a simple cup of morning coffee, and then made his way to the bathroom.

She left the door open, so the mirror wasn't steamed despite the hot mist pouring out from behind the curtain. He pushed back the cheap, clear plastic and set her coffee on the window ledge.

“Sugar with a side of coffee,” he announced, seeing that Holly had a headful of shampoo that dripped over her bare shoulders and down her chest in white rivers.

“Thanks. You rock,” she announced and then tilted her head back under the water.

He studied the long, silky brown strands of hair that clung to her tan skin. Her breasts were full, perky, and free of tan lines because there was a corner to the left of their house that was hidden from the prying eyes of beach goers. She laid out whenever she got the chance, which granted, wasn't that often, but it did the job.

Alex didn't have tan lines either.

He stared at her nipples, resisting the urge to reach out and inspect them curiously. He'd

come into contact with Holly's tits plenty of times over the years, but never with intent.

"What're you doing?" Holly asked, blinking past the water to frown at him.

"Trying to make myself like 'em."

Holly looked at him dully. "I think that ship has sailed, Alex."

He pushed off his boxers, and stepped into the shower. Compelled, he reached out and touched one of Holly's nipples, so much bigger and rounder than a man's. On instinct, he squeezed her breast.

Holly swatted his hands away. “You’re looking at me like the frog we dissected in eighth grade.”

Alex reached for her breast again. “Maybe we should try and do it.”

Holly smacked his hand once more and shuddered. “You officially need to get laid.”

“Gross?” Alex repeated, unable to hide his insult. “I look almost exactly like Will and you fucked him every chance you could get. Ask anyone, I’m hot.”

“Yeah, but your brother liked women. Forgive me if I don’t want to do it with a guy who looks at my tits like a science experiment.”

Holly stepped around him, freeing up the shower spray as she reached for her coffee.

“Why don’t you just go out with that new cook if you’re so hard up? He seems discreet.”

“I wish you’d stop hiring gay cooks,” Alex huffed. “You’re gonna out both of us.”

“He’s cute and he acts like you’re the god of Mirabella County. That boy’s got stars in his eyes. You’d probably really enjoy each other.”

Alex grimaced as he got his hair wet. “He’s not really my type. Too young.”

“He’s twenty-two. That’s only six years younger than you.”

“I dunno, he’s too — pretty.”

“You like pretty.”

“I like handsome, not pretty. There’s a difference. And his hair’s too —”

“Blond?”

“Yeah.” He lifted his eyebrows thoughtfully as he poured shampoo into his hand. “You know I like dark haired guys. And this kid’s too small, breakable. Twinky — I don’t like twinky.”

“So you’re looking for a handsome, buff guy with dark hair,” Holly mused as if considering the applicants. “Perhaps with light eyes.”

“Mmm,” Alex sighed wistfully, working his short hair into a lather and thought of his dream. “That’s always nice.”

“Maybe a rich executive—Go for the whole package. Have your cake and eat it too.”

Alex dipped his head back under the water to hide, but that didn't stop Holly from pushing the point.

“Maybe someone who goes by the name of Matt Tarrington,” she said loftily. “Hey, you know what, there's a Celia Tarrington who comes into the restaurant every morning for breakfast. I heard she has a son named Matt—Maybe we should ask her if he's available?”

“Okay, I get it,” Alex grumbled in annoyance. “I'm having a hard time getting over him.”

“A hard time? It’s been six years. At what point do you start seeing other people? Everyone in this town thinks we’re gonna get married. That’s so pathetic – for both of us.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty pathetic.” He worked at scrubbing his body, doing it with more force than necessary. “I hate the closet.”

“Then why are you in it?”

“Matt and I were so close. People could suspect him if I came out. I just don’t want that for him, the speculation.”

“So you’re gonna live a lie to protect a man you haven’t seen in six years?”

“Yup, that’s the plan.” Alex nodded sadly.
“At least one of us should be happy.”

“Wow.” Holly stepped out of the shower, coffee still in hand. She set it by the sink and then grabbed a towel off the shelf over the toilet. “When you fall, Alex, you do it hook, line and sinker. I really do wish your brother was more like you. That’s romance novel stuff—endearing for sure. Too bad real life is fucking up the happy ending for you.”

“You gotta stop reading that trash,” Alex said with a laugh.

“Fuck you, it’s not trash. Read some before you start judging. Besides, it’s all I got.” Holly

worked on drying her long hair. “The whole town is waiting for me to marry a closeted gay man. A fictional love life is better than nothing.”

Alex considered that for a moment, before he sighed and pushed the curtain back to look at her earnestly. “I’m sorry, babe – for everything. I wish my brother wasn’t an asshole. I hate that you’re in the closet with me.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’d be alone anyway. You’re not the only one having a hard time recovering. You Hunter men leave your mark. Sometimes I wonder if Matt is really as happy as his mother says he is.”

Alex stood there staring at Holly, who was every straight man's dream. Then he thought about himself and the young, pretty cook who'd been following him around like a lovesick puppy. How fucked up was life that he and Holly were living a lie so elaborate even they were starting to believe it. With the exception of sex, they were as settled as two people could be. Maybe he should fuck the new cook, if no other reason than to make sure Matt hadn't really destroyed him for all other men. He had, after all, just attempted to sleep with Holly – a new low.

“God, Matt better be happy,” Alex finally whispered. “I hope all this was worth it.”

Holly straightened back up, the towel wrapped around her hair. “It’s not.”

“Thanks for making me feel better.” Alex let the curtain close as he turned back into the shower. “Glad we had this heart to heart. I can always count on you to rub salt into an already painful wound.”

“If I’m not gonna tell you the truth, who is?” Holly asked unapologetically. “That’s what best friends are for.”