

First Steps

A Torquere Press High Ball
by Sean Michael



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Torquere Press

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Prologue

The cabin was quiet.

Well, quiet was one hell of a strong term, with Ellen screaming at the top of her lungs and Daniel sobbing hysterically while he fixed their bottles, but at least it wasn't cars and trucks and fire engines and neighbors and stuff.

"Hush now, you two. Daddy's hurrying. Ellie, you're not starving. Danny-boy, breathe. The bottles are coming."

God, he was tired. Ginnie had offered to terminate one, when they'd found out two were coming, but he'd wanted his babies, had paid her all his inheritance to carry them, wouldn't give them up.

Still, he should have saved enough back for a nanny.

Peter put the nipples on the bottles and went over to the sofa where they were carrying on, fat little legs kicking furiously, hands reaching for him. Screams stopping at the sight of the food.

Beasts.

Spoiled beasts.

Beautiful, sweet, spoiled beasts.

He laughed, relaxing, enjoying the sudden silence, the look of pleasure in those pretty, china blue eyes.

"See, there? Daddy promised not to make you two starve."

The trees cast huge shadows over the little yard, into the huge bay window and the sky looked fabulous—violets and pinks and blues. God, it was beautiful here. "Oh, sweets. I want to let you grow up somewhere like this. Somewhere

green and alive and not concrete. Somewhere you can go outside."

Peter had been up in the mountains for three weeks, searching for something, someplace he and the babies could afford. His place in the city was tiny.

Falling apart.

Expensive.

Not suitable for babies.

He chuckled at himself, picking Ellie up to burp because she always ate faster. Burke and Allan and the guys wouldn't recognize him now—his hair was scraggly, he had on old jeans and a diaper on his shoulder and he smelled like baby powder and...

God, he loved them.

More than fucking, more than parties, more than the city. Hell, more than writing, and that was saying something.

Allan had stopped by before they'd headed out, all concerned eyes and frowning and 'are you sure about this weird baby thing, man'. They'd shared some hard words, harsh ones—Allan called him a sell-out, a breeder, he'd told Allan that, at some point, life had to be about more than fucking someone, over or otherwise.

The fight had gotten louder and uglier and then Ellen started fussing, sweet little love so aware, so sensitive, and he'd been derailed, turning his back on his former fuckbuddy, gone to get his daughter and his son.

His family.

Ellie burped about the time Daniel started wriggling and he switched them, putting Danny over his knees.

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Yeah, he needed to find somewhere for them, somewhere warm and safe. Somewhere where his sweets would remember making snowmen and picking flowers and playing.

He needed that for them and damn it, he'd find it.

"Come on, Danny. Burp and we'll all lay down together and rest."

Ellen kicked, setting the music off on her little mobile, her happy laugh filling the cabin.

Chapter One

When the fire warning went up to high, Chad got into the jeep and made a tour of the houses that bordered the forest. He put the no fire signs up at all the campsites, talked to all the hikers and campers he ran into, pressing home the point.

There hadn't been a fire yet on his watch and he planned to keep it that way.

He pulled the jeep into the last house. The old Washer place. It had sat empty the last couple of years, but supposedly someone was in renting for a while, looking to buy. They didn't get too many this way, most folks were summer visitors only, happier renting and not having to worry about the place in winter.

Straightening his hat, Chad went to the front door and knocked sharply.

He didn't hear anything and was about to knock again when the door opened, a man dressed only in a pair of boxer-briefs answering the door. Red-eyed, hair curling wildly, the man looked sort of like a hoot-owl, all blinky and dazed.

"Shh! You'll wake them and then I'll have to strangle you."

"Well I'd hate to see you having to go to jail for murder, so I'll do my best not to wake 'them'. I'm just here to warn you about the hazards of fire this time of year. There's a ban on all open flames right now." He wondered who "they" were, the guy seemed to be too old to be out here with his parents.

"Flames? Oh! You mean outside? I don't think we're ready for that yet." The guy ran his hands through his hair. "Maybe next summer."

"So the rumors are true—you're thinking of buying the place." Time would tell if that was a good thing or not.

"Gonna winter here, too, or just picking the place up as a summer home?"

"Well, I want a place for us to stay, permanently, but this place only has a wood stove and I worry..." A sharp, shrill cry sounded. "Shit. Come in, I guess. I gotta—she's got gas and he'll start up if I don't get her quiet." The man disappeared back into the house, murmuring, hurrying.

Children. Pretty young, too, by the sound of it. Chad wondered where the wife was.

He went in slowly, closing the door behind him.

The guy came back out, wearing a bright red robe, two little babies in his arms, dark-haired and wailing. "Sorry. I'm Peter, by the way. Peter Boone. This is Ellen and Daniel."

"Chad Bristow. And it looks like I woke 'em. Will you forgot the strangling if I help get them quieted down again?" They were damned cute, even with their mouths wide open and screaming.

"You're a brave man, Chad. Have a seat and I'll grab their bottles." Peter hummed and bounced, grabbing two bottles from the counter. "Come on now, beasts. You're making a bad impression with Mr. Bristow."

He grinned when Peter came back and he tickled the babies' ribs.

"Here, Daniel's usually my hellion, but Miss Ellie's got a tummyache." The little boy was handed over, the baby reaching for the bottle, kicking and gurgling.

He chuckled and tucked the boy in the crook of his arm, inserting the bottle into the eager little mouth. "You're a cute little thing now, aren't you?" God, he was a sucker for the wee ones.

"Shh, shh, sweet Ellie. Daddy's got you." He got a grateful smile. "Man, I appreciate the help. It's been a long couple of days."

"No problem. You on your own with them?"

"Yeah, I am. Most of the time it's easy, but when one's sick? Damn."

"What happened to their mother? If you don't mind my asking?" He hoped he wasn't opening fresh wounds.

"Well, Ginnie was a surrogate. I mean, I donated in a cup and paid the bills. The fact that there were two? Was a surprise bonus." He got a tired grin, a wink.

"You decided to bring up two babies on your own? You're a brave man."

And possibly crazy.

"Well, I couldn't have chosen between them, could I?" The little girl finally settled, curling into her father's chest.

"Well, I'd probably call you brave even if it was just one of them." He grinned. He didn't have a lot of faith in the adult version of his species, but this one seemed okay.

Peter laughed softly, patting the baby's back. "Yeah, well, I wanted ... The party scene only goes so far and I wanted a family."

"You could find someone to play surrogate, but you couldn't find a wife for the family picture?" It was a strange world they lived in. And lord knew, he'd *never* understood the

female mind. One of the many reasons he swung the other way. And he realized suddenly that was a pretty personal question, but he wasn't good in social settings. And *that* was one of the many reasons he worked as a ranger.

"Uh. I had a partner when the pregnancy started. I just didn't have him when it was over."

"Him?" Well what did you know. "So there won't ever be a Mrs. Mommy. That's even braver then." He suspected there were a lot less men willing to get into a relationship with a man with kids than women who'd do the same. Of course most guys were jerks, he knew this from personal experience. It was nice to meet one who didn't seem to be.

"Yeah? Brave or stupid, one of the two." Peter settled Ellen on his chest and leaned back, the little one blinking slow, playing with the gold chain around his neck. "So, I don't suppose you have any recommendations about houses around here? I'm wanting to find a good place for my peeps to grow up. Somewhere they can see green."

"Good for you. This is a good area and the people are good folks, not packed in like sardines like at some lakes, either. The fact it's a patrolled park doesn't hurt. This place and the little cottage a few miles down are the only ones for sale and that cottage is small, not really winterized right. All the other places are in the town and that's ... well I'm not fond of being on top of my neighbors."

Peter nodded. "Yeah. I guess I'll just buy a lot of wood for the winter. The babies aren't walking yet, so it shouldn't be dangerous."

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"You'll definitely need a dog, though, if you're moving out here. A nice sheepdog of some sort—one that'll round the kids up and keep them from wandering off once they are walking. I take it you don't have a job to commute to?"

"I'm a writer—plays, novels, articles, anything." Peter gave him a grin. "I just want them out of the city, you know? And I can write anywhere."

"I hear you on the out of the city—can't stand the places myself. I'm lucky I've got a job that keeps me where I want to be myself." And he wasn't going to point out that the ranger house was large and airtight and could use a bit of a homey touch. Just because the man was adorable and rumpled and the little boy in his arms had gone to sleep and was drooling on his arm didn't mean anything at all.

And he was not lonely.

He wasn't fond of people.

"I used to love the city—the noise, the excitement, but I'm getting older, I have the kids. I just want something that doesn't suck my soul dry. Have you been a ranger long? It seems like a very rewarding job."

"Eight years—I was twenty-one, right out of college, but I knew it was what I wanted to do. I put my time in at some of the lesser parks, but I proved I had what it took to patrol a big place like this. Been here four years. It's home." And he loved it.

"Yeah? That's cool! You must know every inch of this place."

"I'm starting to. There's some areas that are a little further flung I haven't been able to explore properly yet, but anyone

gets lost on my watch and they get found again. Haven't had a forest fire since I've been on either. You and yours'll be safe living here."

"Oh, man. I bet you've got some stories." Those tired eyes lit right up, face animated. "I'd love to hear them one day." Poor guy, he was probably starving for some company that didn't drool constantly.

"I've got a few. You should come up to the ranger station sometime. Have supper and let me regale you with my witty tales of ranger life." He gave the man a wink.

"Oh, I'd like that, if you don't mind the prince and princess tagging along." Peter grinned wide. "I'd even bring non-formula flavored dessert."

"Well, how about tomorrow evening? You won't be able to enjoy anything cooked over an open flame—my specialty—but I've got a few slow cooker recipes that are worth eating. Say four pm? To give the kiddies a bit of time to meet the pack and get into trouble?"

"Oh, I'd like that. A lot." Peter nodded, enthusiastic, eyes shining. "Where is the station?"

"I'll get you a map from the jeep. It's just up the hill and around the corner a ways."

He looked down as Daniel shifted and yawned. "I guess I should go and leave you to it." Funny, for once he was reluctant to part company with someone.

"Thank you for the help, sir. I definitely needed it." The little girl was placed in a bassinet, then the wee boy taken from his arms and cuddled beside her.

"Call me Chad and it was my pleasure. Kids and animals, they're my forte."

He got up and held out his hand.

Peter's hand was warm, the handshake firm, the smile honest. "I can see that. It's wonderful."

He chuckled. "My mother calls it ornery and anti-social, I'm glad you don't agree with her."

"Oh, you have been more than social to me. Hell, you rocked my son to sleep. You're the best thing that's happened in days."

"Well it's been my pleasure." He gave Peter a nod, going with a reluctance that surprised him. "I'll see you tomorrow night."

"Yes. Oh! Chocolate cake or cherry pie?"

"Bring one tomorrow and you can bring the other the next time." He hoped he wasn't being too forward, but he hadn't enjoyed anyone's company so much in a long time.

"Oh, that's fair." He got another smile, warm and friendly. "Good evening, Chad. It was great to meet you."

He touched the brim of his hat and nodded. "Nice to meet you, too, Peter, I'll see you tomorrow."

He fetched Peter the map from the jeep and then headed off back to the ranger station, humming along with the radio.

* * * *

Peter got the babies in the van, then the chocolate cake, the diaper bags, the bouncy chairs.

Then Daniel dropped his pacifier and he had to go wash it.

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He relocked the door, made sure everybody was settled, found the sock Ellen'd lost, put it back on, shooed the fly away from the cake and headed out.

God, he wasn't there yet and he was tired.

Still, it had been good to talk to someone who talked back, someone who didn't constantly talk about what he used to be, someone who wasn't scared of the babies. He found himself whistling on the way to the station, almost excited.

The road in was well maintained, the ranger station up a path just ahead of the gate on the road into the park proper. It was down at the moment with a big fire-warning sign on it, but luckily he didn't have to go through it to get to Chad's.

The station was a simple, if fairly large, log cabin with a veranda all along the front of the house. The van was welcomed by what had to be six or seven dogs of varying sizes who all came out to bark away at him.

The barking drew Chad out from inside and he hollered at the animals, dispersing them.

"Look at all the dogs! They don't bite do they?" He grinned, waved. "I brought chocolate cake."

"Sounds yummy and no, they don't. They're all good-natured pups. Strays. You would not believe the number of pets that get left out here when folks head back home. You need any help with cake or babies?"

"Yes, please." He grinned, even with help it would take a few trips. He unbuckled Ellie and Danny, lifting them out of the van, groaning dramatically, making them giggle and squeal.

Chad chuckled and grabbed the cake in one hand and the bouncy chairs in the other.

"Gosh, this is a production, isn't it?"

"Lord, yes." He chuckled, rolled his eyes, and hefted the diaper bags. "This is what they don't warn you about—the sheer amount of *stuff*."

Chad chuckled and led the way in, shouldering the door open and holding it with his foot as Peter went in with the kids.

"Oh, this place is nice!" Clean, if sparse, and warm, the huge windows letting the afternoon sun in. He set the diaper bags down on a well-used sofa, the babies looking around, wide-eyed.

"I moved everything the kids could have trouble with into the office—that's the closed door on the far right. Everything else is pretty much baby-proof."

The front room was large with the kitchen and other rooms off of it in on two sides.

"There's just the kitchen, two bedrooms, and the office. The loft has a bunch of cots—for when people get stuck out here in the winter." Chad pointed to the stairs that were gated off.

"Oh, how neat!" He dug a huge comforter out of one bag and spread it on a sunny spot. "Ellen's crawling already and Daniel's only a few days behind. He's competitive and can't bear when she learns something first."

He put the babies on the blanket, admiring them. Ellen was in a purple sweatsuit, Daniel in bright blue and they were clean and happy and beautiful, black hair shining in the sun.

Chad chuckled and put the cake on the counter in the kitchen and the bouncy chairs on the low, square coffee table and then hunkered down beside the kids. "Hello, sir—do you remember me?"

Daniel crowed and cooed, chubby little hands waving, feet kicking. Ellen, who'd always been the shy one, went still, blinking up. Chad tickled Daniel, letting him catch one big finger in a fist, just leaving Ellen be.

Daniel kept jabbering away, telling Chad God knew what and Peter sat, beaming at Ellie's smile. "Hey, there's Daddy's girl." He met Chad's eyes and grinned. "Danny's my outgoing one, he loves everyone. Ellen? Takes a little while."

Chad smiled back at him, gave a wink. "Eventually she'll want to know what's got Danny so fascinated."

"Oh, you know it." Even as he spoke, Ellen, comfortable now that her daddy was close by, turned to look at Chad, blew the ranger a raspberry.

"Oh-ho, it's like that, is it little girl?" Chad blew one right back at her.

Ellen's eyes went wide and she giggled, kicking her feet wildly, blowing another one. Oh. Oh, God, that was cute.

Baby and ranger both.

Chad chuckled and blew her another one back and then one at Daniel who'd started to fuss just a little at losing his new playmate to his sister. Peter just sat, the sun relaxing him, the house and company soothing his nerves. Chad reached out to tickle Ellen at the same time as he tickled Daniel, making both kids laugh and squeal.

Finally Chad sat back, grinning. "Great kids, Peter."

"They are." Peter grinned back. "Thank you. Man, it feels great, the sun, the warmth. I bet you can see glorious sunrises."

Not that he was flirting.

Because he wasn't.

Chad gave him a slow grin. "You can. Of course the sunsets aren't anything to sneeze at either. Especially if you take the hike up to Shallow Point."

"Shallow Point? Where's that?" He grinned as Ellen rolled over, legs kicking as she headed for the rattle at the edge of the blanket.

"Oh, look at her go, very cool!" Chad leaned back to look up at him. "Just up the road and to your right. It's the first lookout point. The trees drop away and give you a beautiful view of the sky."

"Yeah?" He blushed a little, grinned. "I admit I haven't been exploring yet. The babies keep me hopping."

"You got those backpack carrier things? We could each take one and go hiking one day. Pack a picnic lunch."

"I do. They're great, makes carrying them almost easy." He nodded eagerly. Oh, he'd love that. He could take the camera. "I bet once the leaves start changing it's stunning."

"Yep. The fire warnings are usually much lower then, too. Makes the job pretty easy. You're definitely sticking around then, are you?"

"Unless something drastic happens, yeah. If we can't hack the winter, we'll head back, but the place is quiet, beautiful ... I like it here."

"Did you find out how much the owners wanted for the Washer place?" The question was asked really casually.

"We're still negotiating. It's in my price range, but..." He shrugged, pulled Ellen back from the edge of the blanket. "I'd want to do serious renovations—central heat, lead-free plumbing, and that's way over my head."

"Yeah, the place isn't really livable the way it is—you should have what it's going to cost you to fix stuff up taken off the main price. Hell, if they think you're desperate enough to take it without coming down in price at all you could always stay here, let them know you have alternatives, you know?" Chad wasn't looking at him, was concentrating on the little ones, fingers making them giggle.

"Oh. Can you ... can you do that? Let people stay here?"

"Sure, it's my house as long as I'm ranger here. Part of the deal." Chad shrugged. "If I had a family they'd live with me. Not that I. Well. I mean. It's a no strings attached invitation." He got a grin suddenly. "Though I'd be disappointed if I didn't get to play with the twins on a regular basis."

Peter chuckled. "Yeah, but what about the fussy nights? Ellie's got an amazing scream." He stretched out beside Ellen, tickling her toes. "And people might talk, if you bunked with a gay single dad."

Chad laughed. "My employers know I'm gay and everyone else can go jump off Shallow Point—it isn't any of their business."

"Oh." He chuckled a little and looked over. "I thought gay park rangers were a figment of the collective gay man's fantasy."

"Nope, last I checked I'm pretty real." Chad had a little color in his cheeks.

Daniel pulled Chad's finger down, started sucking hard, a little frown between dark eyebrows.

Chad chuckled. "I think he's thinking that I may be real, but I'm no bottle."

"Yeah, it's getting towards their supptime. I brought applesauce and sweet potatoes today, pretties." He gave Chad a grin. "Can you keep an eye on them while I get bottles made up?"

Oh, the man was cute.

And well-built.

And a ranger.

And gay.

"Can I keep an eye on you guys? Can I? Well I don't know. No, I don't know at all—you're awfully wiggly. And cute. And giggly. Oh yes, you are. And not quite mobile yet, but you're going to be holy terrors once you are, aren't you?" Chad chatted away at the kids, teasing and distracting them.

Peter warmed the bottles, dug out bibs and spoons. God, the kitchen was fabulous and he spent a second staring at the view, letting the water heat.

The giggles were just starting to get stressed when he came back, armed to the teeth with supplies. "Look what Daddy has!"

"Daddy to the rescue. Thank God, I think they were about to explode!" Chad chuckled and picked up Daniel. "You don't mind if I take feeding duty on this little guy, do you?"

"Oh, that would be great. Sometimes I think I need a double spoon, so one doesn't get jealous when the other's getting a bite." He handed Chad a bottle of applesauce and a spoon before settling in with Ellen.

"They'll be feeding themselves soon enough, won't they?"

Chad fed Danny the apple sauce, the wee face lighting up at the taste.

He got the bib on Ellen and nodded. "Oh, God. Yes. When they'll be flinging stuff and feeding each other and..." He shivered.

Chad laughed and gave him a wink. "You mean just like a real family."

"Yes!" He chuckled, tickled down deep. "Not like some amazing, blond, perfect commercial family, damn it."

Ellen blew a raspberry, mouth full of sweet potato, the orange goo spraying everywhere.

Chad laughed all the harder. "Looks like they've already got the spraying food everywhere thing down pat."

"Yes. Turkey girl!" He grinned and tickled Ellen's belly, wiping her face. "You messy, messy girl!"

Ellie just giggled, the sound making his heart hurt it was so good.

Chad was still chuckling, his own feeding proceeding much less messily. "There's nothing like that sound."

"I know it; it makes my chest ache." Ellie started getting the eating thing down, little mouth opening like a bird for each bite. "Did you come from a big family?"

"You could say that, I guess. I grew up in a couple of different foster homes. Lots of kids coming and going. I liked to help out with the little ones. They never judged you."

"Oh, wow. I was an only child, did the boarding school thing. I ... I'm still learning the parenting thing." He'd known what he wanted, though, even if it cost him everything.

"Boarding school? A real Richie Rich, were you?"

"Well, kind of and kind of not. My mother came from a blue collar type family and died when I was little. My father was big money and sort of an ass and got really pissed when mom found out she was sick. My grandmother paid to put me through school after she died and my father got remarried and went into politics." He chuckled. It would have been a painful memory had he not made his career on the stories.

"Oh, that sounds kind of sucky."

"It had its serious suck moments, yeah." He grinned over. "Of course, I remember before my mother died—this quiet, happy, simple life. It's what I want for them."

"Sounds like a good goal to me, Peter. Now me—I never lacked for brothers and sisters, but the only real affection I got was from the little ones."

Daniel blew an applesauce bubble and Chad chuckled at him. "Sounds like these two are going to get a sibling and a great Dad—the best of everything."

"Thank you." He beamed, warmed all through from the praise. "I think you're the first person who's ever said that to me."

"Yeah? You must be hanging out with the wrong people."

"Absolutely." He nodded, wiped Ellen's face and settled her in his arms for her bottle. "That's another reason we left the city."

Chad nodded, leaning over to grab the second bottle and set Daniel up with his feed. "I'm glad you made your way to my neck of the woods."

"Yeah?" He smiled over, relaxed and easy in his skin, even if he smelled like sweet potatoes. "I am, too."

* * * *

The kiddies were asleep, wrapped up in blankets and curled together in his sock drawer. Chad had dumped the socks out and brought the drawer out to the living room once the twins had dropped off. So now he and Peter were sitting on the veranda, beers in hand, watching the sun go down.

It was quiet and peaceful, enjoyable, and he liked the company. Very much.

The last of the color faded into twilight and he sighed. "Doesn't matter how many times I see that, it's always a great show."

"Oh, it was beautiful. Thank you." Peter looked more put together tonight, jeans, t-shirt, hair brushed. The man was lean, but not skinny, smart, but not snooty. It was a good combination.

"Anytime, Peter." He'd already fallen for the kiddies; it would be so easy to fall for their father as well.

Peter grinned. "So, do your dogs have names? Can I pet them?"

"Oh yeah, they'll love you forever." He whistled and they came running, bounding happily over. "The huge one is Monster. The two labs are Bongo and Slim. The half wolf is, imaginatively enough, Wolfie. The little mutt is Watson. The shepherd attached to his side is Buddy. And the little hound dog is Lady."

"Oh, look at all of them!" Peter laughed, started petting and playing, murmuring to them like they were babies.

Which he supposed they kind of were. His babies, sort of collected like he collected younger kids when he was in the foster homes. "Most of them were family dogs that got left behind for one reason or another. Mostly because people are jerks."

"Ah, poor loves." Peter petted and stroked, pulling a burr out of Bongo's tail, letting Wolfie sniff his fingers.

"They like you. It's a good sign." He winked at Peter. Damn, he was flirting. He didn't even think he knew how, but here he was, flirting hard.

"Yeah?" He got a quick grin, a blush. "Sign for what?"

"That you're someone I'd like to know better. There's not many people make it past the pack."

"Oh, good." That grin bloomed into a full-fledged smile. "I'd like to be known better."

"That works in with my plans." He smiled back at Peter, feeling like a bit of a doof as the twilight darkened. "We'd better go in before the bugs realize we're out here."

"Sure." Peter walked up next to him. "What's for supper?"

"Venison stew." He gave Peter a grin. "One of the perks of being a ranger is lots of game."

"I've never had venison. Cool." Peter's shoulder bumped against his. "You like to cook?"

Oh, he liked that, so he made sure their shoulders bumped again before they got to the kitchen. "I like to burn meat. And I do okay with the crock pot. Mostly I do it because I have to—I'm fair to middling at it. What about you? That chocolate cake looks homemade."

Peter grinned, nodded. "Four years as a pastry chef before the first novel made money."

"No kidding? Wow, you're a keeper." He fought his blush as the words came tumbling out. "I mean, I like food well enough, but I have a sweet tooth a mile long and three wide."

"Yeah?" Peter stepped a little closer, leaning over him to smell the stew, body touching his. "What's your favorite?"

"What's not?" he asked, chuckling, not backing off. "What's your specialty?"

"Chocolate pecan pie." Peter grinned. "Haven't made one in awhile."

"Oh, that sounds damned yummy. What else can you do?" His stomach growled.

"Cherry tarts. Cranberry almond bread. Strawberry pie. Carrot cake."

"Oh, God. Will you marry me?" He was only half joking. Homemade sweets? A real treat.

"Only if you kiss me first. I never get married before the first kiss."

"No? That's probably prudent."

He put the spoon down and turned to face Peter, hands reaching up to cup the man's cheeks. Slowly, in case Peter

had just been joking, he brought their lips together, pressing softly against Peter's mouth.

"Oh." Peter stepped closer, hands sliding around his waist, eyes warm and shining.

"Should we do it again?" he asked, stroking the soft cheeks.

"Yes, please." Peter's fingers traced soft circles against his spine.

"Oh, good." He'd been hoping Peter would say that.

He closed the distance between their lips again, tongue sliding along that tempting lower lip. Peter moaned softly, the sound sliding into his lips, eyes closing, tongue slipping out to stroke his. Oh. Oh, it had been too long since he'd done something like this.

He pulled away reluctantly. "We should eat."

"Okay." He was given a hug, then Peter stepped back.

"Point me toward the bowls and I'll get them."

"First cupboard to the right of the sink and the utensils are in the drawer beside the stove."

He watched as Peter moved about the kitchen, thinking the man looked fine in his home. Just fine. Peter grabbed two bowls and spoons, humming softly, just sort of filling the air with happiness. He stirred the stew and moved the pot over to the table, finding a couple of beers in the fridge and popping the tops.

"Should I grab a loaf of bread?" Peter brought the bowls over, their shoulders rubbing.

"Sure, there's some rolls in the breadbox." Which would give him another chance to watch that sweet ass moving.

"Cool." Peter got them out, looking out the window a second. "Oh. Oh, there's a deer. Right there."

He went and stood behind Peter, looking out over the man's shoulder. "So there is. Pretty isn't she?"

"Yeah. Wow..." Oh, that look Peter shared with Daniel—wide-eyed and happy.

He couldn't help himself, he tilted Peter's chin and took another kiss. Peter responded to him easily, eagerly. Those lips parted, one hand reaching up for his cheek. He slid his tongue in, moaning at the taste, at the sensation. Their tongues moved together, slow and easy, relaxed. Lazy.

Oh, it was nice. Real nice.

Better than any damned stew.

Hell, it was better than chocolate cake or any other pastry.

He slowly turned Peter so they were face to face, front to front, kisses deepening slowly. Peter's hands circled his neck, sliding into his hair. Man had a nice touch, gentle, but there.

The kisses melded one into another into another, their bodies fitting together like a hand in glove. He slid one hand down to Peter's ass, the firm flesh fitting well in his hand. Peter moaned, body rubbing against his, nice and slow, the motions hypnotic. His other hand wrapped in Peter's hair, tilting the man's head, tongue sliding even deeper.

The soft noises got louder, almost constant, Peter arching into him.

With a gasp, he tore himself away. "I don't want to do this. Not like this. Come to my bed?"

Peter nodded. "Are the babies okay where they are?"

He chuckled. "I don't think they're going to get up and crawl away." He kissed Peter's nose. "They'll be fine—we'll leave the door open and we'll hear them if they wake up."

"Yeah." Peter pinked, took his hand. "I want you."

He nodded. "I know the feeling."

He led Peter to his room, praying to God the condoms weren't past their use before date.

Peter's fingers slowly started working his shirt open. "I don't want you to think I'm a slut, Chad. I haven't since before the babies were born, since me and Aaron broke up."

"Well, I don't know, Peter. It's probably been about twice that long since I last did it." He winked at Peter and did some button undoing of his own.

Peter chuckled, fingers sliding over his skin. "Oh, you're warm."

"Yeah? Means I'm alive." He grinned, flexing a little when Peter got his shirt off. He wasn't built by any means, but he wasn't bad either.

"Oh, that's handy. Dead guys? So not sexy." Peter leaned in, nuzzling his collarbone, fingers splaying out over his skin.

His chuckled turned into a moan. "Man, you've got a sweet touch."

"Your skin feels good." The words were whispered over his shoulder, the soft brush of Peter's tongue maddening.

"So does your tongue, Peter."

God, it was likely to short him out. He forced himself to return the touches, to get Peter's shirt off. Peter purred a little, fingers sliding over his belly, stroking his skin. He tilted

Peter's head, bringing their mouths back together again. Peter tasted better than any pastry he'd ever had.

He sat on the bed, Peter crawling into his lap, straddling his thighs, bellies sliding together. Moaning, he pressed his tongue in deeper. He could get used to this. Peter was hard, hips sliding a little faster, hands in his hair. It felt good, to know he was making that heat, that need.

His own prick was pushing against his pants, trying to push out of his zipper.

"Mmm ... too many clothes..." His bottom lip was nibbled, sucked.

"You got that right."

Unfortunately, getting rid of their pants was going to take more concentration than he had to spare. He was too busy with having his mind blown by Peter's hands and mouth. His nipples were rubbed, gently tweaked, then his ribs were explored, petted, bellybutton stroked. His hips were moving, pushing up against Peter, each new touch making him moan, cock throbbing.

His fly was opened, fingers stroking his prick, just brushing it as it was freed to rub against Peter's clothes.

"Shit!" He humped up into that touch, hips just bucking at the touch of fingers not his own.

"Oh, fuck." Peter's fingers wrapped around his cock, rubbing, pumping.

"You don't slow down I'm gonna. Oh shit, gonna come, Peter." It was like lightning in his pants.

"You want me to take the edge off or slow down?" Peter's thumb slid over the slit of his cock, rubbing.

He bucked again. "Edge." Please don't stop, not right now.

"Yeah." Those lips fastened on his throat, licking and sucking, that thumb driving him mad.

"Peter!" He cried out, spunk splashing up over Peter's hand as the pleasure shot through him.

Peter purred, kept petting through the aftershocks, kept stroking. Kept him hard and needing and right there with Peter, his own hands working open the man's jeans, finding the hot cock that spilled from the open zipper.

"Oh..." Peter whimpered, shivered for him, mouth open on his skin.

He pushed his free hand down the back of Peter's pants, cupping the fine ass, squeezing it. Peter arched, ass rubbing into his hands, almost like the man was dancing. It was pretty sexy—he liked it when the guy he was with was into it, let him know it was good. He moaned happily and pushed his fingers along Peter's crease, looking to put a little pressure against the hot little hole.

"Oh..." Peter lifted his head, lips soft against his ear.

"Yeah, Chad. Feels good. Damn."

"What do you like?" he asked, fingers of one hand sliding along Peter's crack, other hand tugging on a sweet, hot cock.

"Oh. Oh, fuck. Like that. Like touching, feeling."

"Oh, you're easy are you?" he teased, rolling them so Peter was beneath him, hands exploring.

Peter laughed, eyes shining, body moving into his touch, nice and wanting. He pushed Peter's pants right off and then his own, lying back down skin on skin from head to toe. Oh, that was sweet.

Their lips found each other again, tongues sliding and licking and tasting. Their bodies worked well together, sliding heat against heat, hips bumping. It felt easy, natural, damned fine with Peter's breath pushing into his lips, hands sliding over his spine.

He reached down to cup Peter's balls, fondling and rolling them as their cocks left wet kisses on their bellies.

Peter spread wide, arching. "Oh. Oh, damn."

"Yeah." Man, it had gone hot again, needy and urgent almost before he'd even recovered from his first climax.

They humped together, moaning, rubbing, Peter's cries going low and needy. "Shit, yes."

He nodded, humping harder, hoping Peter was going to get off soon because coming twice before Peter got any? Was gonna look selfish. Peter bucked, eyes rolling, seed spraying against his belly, hot and wet and fine.

Oh, yeah, that was all he needed to push him over the edge and in another push or two he was coming again, adding to the slick heat between them.

"Mmm..." Peter gave up a low sound that was all about pleasure.

He shifted and settled next to Peter, touching, petting. "Nice. Real nice."

"Yeah." Peter nuzzled his shoulder. "Just fine."

He linked their fingers together, holding Peter's hand as he brought their mouths together again. "We should go eat before your little darlings are up again for their next feed."

"Yeah, I've worked up an appetite." Peter gave him a grin, took another quick kiss.

He reluctantly let go of Peter's hand and climbed off the bed. "You want to borrow a pair of sweats?"

"Yeah, if you don't mind." Peter's hand slid over his thigh as they moved around the room.

He passed over a pair of sweats, his own hand lingering on Peter's belly. "You gonna be warm enough without a shirt?" Yeah, he was enough of a horn dog he wanted to see that pretty chest and belly and back.

"Yeah, I think so." Peter stretched, sliding against his hand.

"Cool." He pulled his own sweats on, leaving his t-shirt off as well—it was only fair.

Then he took Peter's hand and led him back to the kitchen.

And if he was trying to figure out how to convince Peter to stay the night? Well who could blame him?

* * * *

The babies made it until they finished the stew and were working on the cake. Daniel started rumbling and fussing first, nudging his sister, kicking.

"Son, leave her be." He grinned at Chad, shaking his head. "She'd sleep for days, if he'd let her." He was feeling good, warm and loose and happy and relaxed. He'd forgotten how good it felt, to be touched, to share a meal with someone who wasn't going to spit it back at you.

"You could always put them each in their own drawer."

He bent down and picked Daniel up, grinning. "She'll wake up now that he's gone, watch. There's no winning with that girl."

"They going to need more food, or play?"

"A little of both. Once they go down this time, they'll be asleep for the night." He gave Chad a quick glance. He didn't want to invite himself over for the night, but...

"You think they'll be happy in the drawer all night?" Chad asked, eyes darkening.

Oh. Oh, good. "I think they'll be fine. I have plenty of diapers and food."

"Excellent. I like the sound of asleep for the night." Chad reached out to stroke his back.

He nodded, leaning back into the touch, rocking Daniel at the same time, face lifting for Chad's kiss.

"Adorable," murmured Chad, tongue licking at his lips.

"He's a pretty baby." He moaned, lips parting.

"He is, but I was talking about you." Chad's tongue slid into his mouth.

"Oh..." He groaned, almost purring, melting with pleasure. God, he never fell so fast, so hard. Never.

Chad kept the kiss light, hand stroking his back, stepping back as soon Daniel started fussing. "You want me to warm up some food, bottles?"

"You don't mind?" He leaned down and snuggled Daniel quietly. "I'll change diapers and nudge Miss Ellie awake."

"What kind of guy would I be if I sat back and watched you do everything yourself?"

"Typical?" Peter winked and grabbed the changing pad, changing Danny quickly, popping a pacifier into the baby's mouth before he started screaming. If he timed it right, he could have Daniel eating before Ellen woke up.

"I don't think anyone's ever called me typical."

Chad warmed up the bottles and jars of food while he changed the babies, humming as he worked.

The babies cooed and played, Ellen waking up peacefully, happy to lean against his shoulder and watch Chad move in the kitchen.

Chad came over with the food and grinned at her. "Hey lady—you going to let me feed you tonight?"

She tilted her head and blew Chad a raspberry, reaching up for him.

Peter chuckled. "Oh, man. You've been accepted."

Chad took her from him and blew a raspberry back, making Ellen laugh. "It's my raspberry blowing technique." Chad wiggled his eyebrows.

"Oh, I'm thinking I need to experience your blowing technique." He stopped, realized what he said, and shut his mouth with a pop.

Chad gave him a look and then started to laugh. "Oh, that was classic, Peter. Just classic."

He chuckled, then laughed hard as the babies started giggling, little hands and feet going ninety-to-nothing.

Chad helped him feed the babies, the task fun and easy, light with the extra adult to help.

They settled together—all four of them—on the soft comforter, the big picture window showing the forest. This was his favorite time with the babies—they were full and happy, playful. Laughing and reaching for toys. Chad seemed enchanted, every now and then those happy eyes shinning up

at him before Chad's attention was stolen by the babies again.

Ellen was occupying herself by rolling over and over and over, squealing and kicking her feet. Daniel was chasing her, reaching, legs jerking like a little frog. He laughed, heart full, fingers tickling and teasing.

Chad wound up lying down on his back, giving the twins rides, one at a time, pushing them up into the air and blowing raspberries on their bellies as he brought them down.

Daniel loved it right off the bat and Ellen looked scared for a second, until she heard his voice, "It's okay, El. He won't drop my sweet girl."

"Oh, no, I won't drop you lovely girl, no I won't. No, instead I'll send you flyyyyyyying." Chad flew her through the air toward him and Daniel. She squealed, eyes wide, fingers spread. Daniel reached for her.

God, he was in trouble. Real trouble.

He cupped her cheek as Ellen came close, fingers trailing to touch Chad.

Chad smiled up at him, eyes happy, smiling at him.

"You look so fine." He leaned in, kissed Ellen, listening to her giggle while watching Chad.

Chad's smile softened. "It's the kids, they make you see through rose-colored glasses."

"No. They make things sharp, so clear."

"Oh ... You're something else, Peter. Sweet and sexy together."

He blushed, pleased down deep. "I ... Thank you."

"I don't say stuff like that often," Chad told him softly.
"But you are something else."

He shifted until he was resting his head on Chad's belly, kissing Ellen's feet and Daniel's hands. "This feels good."

Chad's fingers slid through his hair, coming to rest on his shoulder. "Yeah. It's nice."

Ellen was starting to snuffle and wriggle, looking for a comfortable place to sleep, and Daniel was rubbing his eyes, one fist in his mouth. "Sleepy babies."

Chad chuckled. "I'll find a quilt to line the drawer with, make sure it's nice and cozy for them."

"Oh, that would be perfect." He turned his head, kissed Chad's belly.

Chad purred softly. "Just want to make sure they sleep through..."

"Mmm..." He moaned, nodded. Yeah. Oh. Yeah.

Chad's fingers slid over his face. "You could make a man lose focus."

"You seem very focused to me..."

"I'm focused on you."

"Is that a bad thing?" He kissed those fingers, nibbling at them.

"It is while your babies are still awake."

Oh, right. His cheeks heated and he nodded, more than a little ashamed of himself. Didn't take much, did it? A good-looking, nice guy and he was back to being a flake. "This is true."

Chad's fingers lingered a moment and then the man was sliding out from beneath his head and standing. "I'll get you

that quilt before I lose myself completely in those eyes of yours."

Peter cradled the babies, Daniel already asleep, Ellie almost there, rocking, focusing on them.

Chad came back a moment later, lining the drawer with a pretty, blue quilt, another one in his arms, presumably to cover the twins.

"Where do you want to set the drawer up for the night?"

"Did you say you had a guest room?" He put Daniel in first, still holding Ellen.

"Yeah, conveniently located right next to the main bedroom. If we left the doors open, we could hear them if they called out."

"Oh, excellent. That's perfect." He grinned over and took a quiet kiss. "Thank you."

"Oh, you're welcome." Chad gave him a wry smile. "I was worried you'd think I was a horndog who just wanted to get the kids asleep and moved so I could have my wicked way with their father."

"Oh, that sounds wonderful. Having your wicked way." He picked Daniel back up so they could move the make-shift crib.

"I'd like it to be."

Picking up the drawer, Chad led the way to the guestroom. The room was small, cozy, decorated simply, the moon shining through the window. Chad put the drawer on the floor where the babies would be able to watch the leaves through the windows. He stroked the little, dark curls, smiling as Daniel cooed.

"They're precious, Peter." Chad told him, taking the sleeping Ellen from his arms and placing her in the drawer.

"Yeah. Yeah, they are." He nodded, humming with his happiness. His babies.

Chad watched him put Daniel down by Ellen, the baby automatically curling into his sister. One of Chad's hands slid along his shoulder, warm and solid.

"Can you believe it? How focused they are on each other?"

"Yeah, it must be something else—always having the other half of you from so early on."

He nodded. "That's why I was so stunned when Ginnie wanted to abort one. I ... Damn."

"Ouch. That seems harsh."

"Yeah. Well, everybody told me I couldn't—I mean, a gay, single dad? One baby is hard enough. At least that's what everyone said."

"Yeah? You're not finding it hard? Especially with the two?"

He shrugged. "It's not easy and, like I said, I thought I'd have a partner..."

"You're doing good though—those babies are *happy*." Chad's other hand came down on his other shoulder and before he knew it, he was getting a massage.

"Oh..." His knees buckled a little, a groan escaping him.

One arm went around his waist, Chad pulling him back against the solid body. "Let's go to the other room."

"Yeah." He nodded, fingers twining with Chad's. "That sounds great."

Chad left a kiss on the side of his neck and tugged him out of the guest room and back into the bedroom. "You want me to finish that massage, Peter?"

"Oh. That sounds good. You don't mind?"

"Do I mind touching you? Yes, horribly." Chad gave him a wink and went to the dresser, pulling a bottle of massage oil out of one of the drawers. The man actually colored a little. "I prefer this to KY when I ... you know." Chad made the universal gesture for jacking off.

"Yeah? Does it smell good?" He stepped closer, his own hand jacking a little.

"Smells like the forest." Chad offered over the bottle, fingers sliding over his belly.

He opened it, moaning at the smell and the touch of those fingers. "Oh. Oh, that's luscious."

"I'm glad you like it." Chad gazed at him, fingers slowly teasing around his waistband, pushing the sweats over his hips.

He put the oil to the side, helping Chad with their clothes, helping to get them both naked.

Chad purred and moaned for him, responsive to his touch. "You'd better go lie on the bed on your front before I change my mind."

He leaned in, took a soft kiss, and then moved to the bed, cuddling in, stretching out.

Chad came and stood by the bed, looking down at him for long moments. "I'm just warming up the oil. And checking out your ass."

"Does it pass muster?" He turned and looked back. Fairly average, as asses went.

"Yeah. It does indeed." Chad grinned at him and then climbed onto the bed, straddling the ass in question.

He hummed, letting himself wriggle, enjoy the sensation of skin against skin. Chad moaned and warm, slick hands slid over his shoulders.

"Oh..." He groaned, eyes closing. Oh, that felt fine.

"You take such good care of the twins, but there's nobody to take care of you, is there?" Chad worked his muscles slowly, thoroughly.

"I ... Oh, God. That's magic..." He melted, just melted, tension he'd forgotten he was carrying dissolving.

"Oh, you're easy. I'm going to have to remember that." Chad's skin was warm, hands leaving a hot trail on his muscles and slowly down his back.

He moaned, nodded, body rolling and rocking, prick sliding on the sheets. Chad's thumbs pushed at his spine and then into the small of his back, working out knots he hadn't even been aware of.

"Oh..." He whimpered, dissolving into a purring lump.

Chad shifted back down his legs, cock sliding hot and wet tipped to settle between his legs as Chad worked his ass and the tops of his thighs. He arched up, making an offer, entire focus on the pleasure in those hands.

"You wanting, Peter?" Chad asked softly, fingers teasing his crease.

"Yes ... Oh, God, yes. I want you." He rippled, hips shifting.

First Step
by Sean Michael

One of Chad's hands disappeared, returning to tease a wet finger against his hole. "How long's it been, Peter?" Chad asked, voice soft.

"More than a year. Year and a half, maybe." Since just after he'd decided to keep the babies and things went sour.

"Oh, that's a long time to go without. It hasn't been that long since you've been with anyone at all, has it?" That finger kept teasing, rubbing and pushing, but not pushing in.

"Been close. Real cl ... oh. Oh, please..."

"Then it's about time you got to stay overnight in another man's bed."

Chad breathed on his hole and then started to lick. His world shorted out a little, his cry sharp and sweet and low. Humming, Chad continued to lick at him, fingers spreading his ass cheeks wide. The sounds that were coming out of him were raw, low, husky and needy and desperate.

"Shit, that's sexy, Peter."

He moaned, pleased all through, wanting so bad. "Chad. I need."

"Let me get you open and stretched." One of Chad's fingers slid into him, that tongue still working him as well.

He rocked back, entire body moving and shifting, into it, needing it. Chad pushed in a second finger, stretched, holding him open for that tongue.

"Chad!" His head snapped back, shuddering hard, so close.

Chad's fingers pushed, searched, and Chad's free hand slid beneath him, wrapping around his prick. "I'm betting you're going to get it up again pretty damn quick." One hand

pumping, Chad's fingers finally found what they were searching for, nailing his gland.

That was it. Sparks filled his vision, coming so hard it ached deep in his balls. Chad kept stroking, kept stretching, kept licking. His cock didn't even go soft, the pleasure just growing and building.

"I need, Peter. You ready?"

"Yeah. Yeah, please. Let me feel you."

"Shit." The fingers inside him disappeared and Chad got off the bed. "I'm sorry." Chad fumbled through his drawers.

"Oh. Oh, right." He grinned over, watching. "You got me all befuddled."

Chad flashed him a grin. "Yeah, tell me about it. Ah! I knew I had some here."

Then Chad was coming back to the bed, led by his hard, red cock.

"Oh, isn't that fine?" Peter licked his lips, hips rocking again. "I want you."

Chad nodded. "I know, Peter. I want you, too. Trust me, I want you a whole damn lot."

Then Chad was climbing back up onto the bed and settling in place behind him. Peter pressed up, snuggling them together, moaning as their bodies touched.

"Oh. Oh, Peter, yeah." Chad's prick pushed against him and then in, low moans sounding.

Oh. Thick and hard and so hot. Oh, he'd missed this, missed the stretch and burn and intimacy. Chad's hands settled on his hips, pulling him fully back onto that thick prick.

Oh, that was...

Yeah.

And more even.

Wow.

Chad made a low, deep sound and started to move, pulling out, sliding back in like he was coming home.

"Yes. Oh, I ... Feels so good. So good." He was shaking, lost in sensation, drowning in Chad's touch.

One of Chad's hands slid along his back, stroking, petting as that hard cock moved in him. He purred, riding, taking that heavy cock in deep, melted and happy inside.

"Peter. Yeah. Fuck you're tight."

Chad found a rhythm, moving hard and fast.

"So good. Feels so good." He moaned, head falling back.

"Yeah. Fuck." Chad moved faster, harder, cock sliding across his gland.

"Oh! There. Right there..."

Chad kept hitting the same spot, over and over, groaning. He jerked, body going tight, squeezing Chad's cock for all he was worth.

"Fuck! Peter!" Chad called out his name and jerked into him a time or two more, cock throbbing inside him.

His own orgasm rocked him deep inside, crashed over him.

Chad collapsed against him, breath hot, panting in his ear.

"I ... Thank you. So good." They settled onto the blankets, moaning in unison.

Chad's fingers slid on his skin. "Yeah. Sweet."

He purred, cuddled in. Oh, he felt melty and sated and fine.

"How do you feel about getting woken up in the middle of the night?" Chad asked.

"I'm remarkably good at it." He grinned against the pillow.
"Lots of practice."

Chad chuckled. "Does that mean you'd rather sleep through if you get the chance, or you'd like to take advantage of the nice ranger again?"

"Mmm ... sleep is highly overrated..." He rubbed back.
"Nice ranger."

"Sweet daddy." Chad gave him a kiss, pulling up the sheets and comforter and quilt.

"Could get use to this." So easy.

"I know," murmured Chad, quietly enough the words might have been his imagination.

Peter hummed, wrapped himself in Chad's arms, smiling for a second at the thought that his babies were curled up together.

Sleeping.

Happy.

* * * *

Chad woke up at four am, just like he always did to go check the radio, the weather station, and the station's email.

He woke up with his legs tangled up in Peter's, which wasn't just like always, but he liked it.

He managed to get out of bed without waking the man and went to check on the babes. The two of them were curled up together, looking as if there wasn't anywhere else they wanted to be. It was nice to see. Nice to have here to see. He

hadn't thought he was lonely, he liked his own company better than a lot of other men's, but it was going to seem quiet and empty when Peter took his brood and went home.

Shaking himself, he went and turned on the coffee maker so it would be ready when he got out of bed again, checked in with headquarters, smiled at the forecast of rain in the afternoon—they surely needed it. He deleted the spam out of the computer email inbox and headed back to the bedroom.

Usually he wasn't in a hurry and it was nearly five before he headed back for a bit of a lie in, but today? He'd managed the whole thing in just under fifteen minutes. He slipped back into bed, pressing against Peter's warm body, and put a kiss on the smooth forehead, on Peter's nose, and lastly, on the soft lips.

Peter smiled, still asleep, but so happy. He liked that, liked being with someone who was so good with where their life was right now. It made you want to be around them.

He licked at the warm lips, half considering letting Peter sleep through 'til when the twins woke. Then he unconsidered it. Once the babies were awake they weren't going to be able to do this.

He got a soft little noise, Peter scooting closer, lips opening for him. "Morning..."

"Mmm, morning sunshine."

He licked his way into Peter's mouth, keeping the kiss fairly light. Those hands slid into his hair, Peter snuggly and relaxed, rubbing nice and slow. Oh, he could get used to this. He could.

He slid his own hand down along Peter's back, loving the warm skin, the curve of spine.

"Mmm..." Peter's hand stroked down along his belly, fingers petting his curls, brushing his cock.

"Oh, Peter, that's nice. Really nice." His hips rocked into Peter's hand, moving all on their own.

"Yeah. Warm..." Peter moaned, stroked a little harder.

He made a soft, happy noise that sort of morphed into a groan. The forest was still quiet, dawn still far enough off that everything was hushed, waiting. The unusual quiet made their noises seem loud. Or maybe he was just conscious of them because it was so rare he heard those sounds here.

"Oh, this is fine, so fine." Peter's eyes were shining as their hips rocked together.

He nodded. "You feel good. Not just physically touching, but you being here. I don't know how to say it."

"Yeah. Yeah. Feels right." Peter nodded, licking his lips. "Natural."

He rolled them so Peter was on top, his hands on the sweet ass, encouraging Peter to move.

"Mmm..." Peter was hard and hot, rocking steady, eyes watching him.

He smiled up at the man. "Better than a bowl of cereal and a cup of coffee any day."

Peter chuckled. "But how do I rate against pancakes?"

He pretended to consider it, gasping as their pricks slid together. "Pretty well, actually."

"Only ... only pretty well?" Peter moved a little faster, dawn painting the smooth skin.

"I don't know. Can't think with you doing that." He gasped for breath, meeting Peter's movements, pleasure going through him.

"Thinking is overrated..."

"Uh-huh."

He kept moving, hands on Peter's ass, feeling the muscles working under his palms.

Sexy. Hot. Good.

Peter leaned down, sucked one of his nipples hard, making him jerk.

"Peter I..." He was going to be coming any second was what he was.

"Uh-huh." Peter nipped, jerking against his belly.

He cried out, back arching, hips bucking as he came. Peter's heat joined his, wet and good, Peter shuddering above him.

He wrapped his arms around Peter's back, holding on, mouth searching out Peter's. The kiss was warm, lazy, languid.

"Good morning, Peter," he murmured as their mouth's parted, lower lips rubbing together as he spoke.

"Morning, lover." Peter turned pink, but those eyes were steady.

Oh, that made him smile, deep inside, too, like he had a fire in his belly. "I like the way that sounds."

"Yeah? I like saying it."

"Cool."

And weren't they just the pair of saps, grinning at each other, feeling fine. Of course, there wasn't anything wrong with sap ... just look at maple syrup.

One of the babies started fussing a little and Peter grinned. "Good timing."

He grinned. "I knew I liked those two." He gave Peter a quick kiss and let the man go.

Peter grinned, cleaned his belly off, and grabbed his shorts. "You opposed to me bringing them in here for a snuggle?"

"Nope—just pass me a pair of briefs from that top drawer, would you?" He didn't want anything dangling where little hands could find it.

Peter grinned and tossed them over, the fussing escalating until the sounds of, "Morning, glories. Hush now, Daddy's here."

Grinning, he arranged the pillows to prop himself up into a mostly seated position and tugged on the briefs.

In just a second, six shining eyes were fastened on him. "Tell Chad good morning, peeps." Then Daniel was deposited into his arms, Peter sliding in with Ellen.

The baby laughed up at him and he grinned. "Damn, Peter, these are some happy kids. You make a good daddy."

He bounced Daniel a little. "And I bet you're a good baby and peed all night long and now we have to change your stinky little bum, don't we."

Daniel giggled, reaching for him, fingers grabbing his chest. He chuckled. Nothing like a laughing child to make you feel good all through.

They managed the changing and bottles and Peter even brought coffee to share as the four of them played together on the big bed.

"I need to do a patrol today," he told Peter around 7am. "Usually I can start a little later, but I have to hit all the sites because of the fire hazard. You and the kids are welcome to stay if you like, but I'm likely to be most of the day." He wanted to invite them back at the very least.

"Oh, we'll head home. I didn't bring enough diapers for a day and I need to call my agent." Peter smiled over. "Can I see you again?"

He nodded. "Yes, please."

"My place or yours?"

"I know yours would probably be easier baby-stuff wise, but I need to be here during fire-season. I can come pick you up if you like, though, help with the stuff you need for them." If they were going to make a regular thing of this, he could see about picking up a crib somewhere, maybe highchairs.

"I'd like that." Warm lips covered his. "A lot."

"Excellent."

He helped Peter round everything up and pack the kids back into the car. "Maybe you can come prepared for a couple nights next time? Is Tuesday too soon?"

"That's perfect. I'll bring the baby shampoo and the toys." Those eyes shone at him. "Can I call you tonight?"

"Yeah. Here, let me give you my cell. You need me, you can get me on that no matter what."

First Step
by Sean Michael

He fetched one of the cards with the house number on it and wrote his cell number on the back, handed it over.

"There."

"Thanks. Have a good day." He got a caress, a warm, happy smile, then they were pulling away.

He watched until the car disappeared around a bend and then he locked up and climbed into the jeep to do his rounds, whistling happily.

Chapter Two

The weekend had been nice, quiet. Peaceful. He'd talked to Chad, worked some, the babies were good. All was well.

Then Monday night came with the blowing wind and the rain.

The wind made Ellie scream, which made Danny cry. The roof leaked like a sieve into the center of his bed. The bathtub was backing up with something green. There was no way they could live here over a winter. His babies would freeze.

He'd called Chad and asked him to call before stopping by, outlining the situation on voicemail over the screams of the kids—hell, he didn't know what to do. He needed to find another place and he needed to think, but Ellen wouldn't let him put her down and God knew, if Ellen was with Daddy, Daniel should be, too.

He was at his wits' end when the sharp knocking came at the door. It opened before he got there, Chad's head appearing around it. "Peter? Can I come in?"

"You're a braver man than I am if you do." He found Chad a smile, wincing when the wind started and Ellen screamed again. "Oh, God. Shut the door. She's so scared."

The door was closed and Chad held out his hands. "Hand her over."

"I don't know..." He offered the squalling one over into Chad's arms.

"She can't get any louder," Chad assured him, taking Miss Ellen and sitting her in the crook of one arm, walking her to the big picture window. "Sh. Sh. Sh. Now, you just hush a

minute little lady. You don't have to be the loudest one in the room, you know." Chad spoke calmly and stopped at the window, pointing out toward the trees.

"Would you look at that? Look at how the wind pushes everything around. You need to have respect for it because it's so big, but you don't need to be scared of it. You see the sky is like a huge girl. She just wants to play with you and she's blowing raspberries. But she's so big that they're loud and they make wind and rain come down and bend all the trees and blow everything in its path."

To his utter shock, Ellen eased, sniffing, little fingers fisted in Chad's shirt. Peter sat hard, eyes filling with tears, rocking Daniel.

"There you go. Now see, I used to be scared of storms, too, but now I just love them. I love the spark and kaboom of them. Love to watch them. We've got a great view from the ranger house. And you know I think it's a bit warmer there than here, yes I do."

Chad's voice didn't change at all, still soothing and easy for Ellen, but the words were directed at him now. "It's like an ice box in here and it smells funny. You'd better come stay up at the ranger house. We'll take what you need tonight and then move everything else tomorrow or Wednesday depending on when the storm clears out. Is that all right?"

"Oh." He nodded, just ready to collapse and rest for a while. "Please. The bed's ruined here."

"All right, pretty Ellie, do you want to go on a trip back to the ranger house with me and Daniel and Daddy? Do you

remember my ranger house? You got to sleep in a drawer, wasn't that fun?"

When Ellen actually laughed at Chad, the ranger grinned back. "Okay. Let's help Daddy get your stuff together, okay? Can you tell me what we need? Hmm? Bottles? Do you think we need bottles?"

Peter got up and started moving, holding Daniel on his hip and gathering playpens and the suitcases he'd already packed with their clothes and his files and laptop. All the while, Chad's voice calmed them all, giving him something real and sensible to focus on.

"Okay, baby girl, you know what we're going to do now? We're going to go play with the big sky. Let's see how many raspberries we can blow back at her. You remember what raspberries are, don't you?" Chad blew a few at her.

Ellen giggled, reaching up for Chad, raspberry sounding. Peter found a blanket to put over Ellen and leaned up for a kiss. "Thank you. I ... Thanks."

Chad gave him a warm smile, hand sliding along his back a moment. "Anytime, Peter. Sometimes you need a pinch hitter so you can get some bench time, yeah?" Chad dropped another kiss on his lips and then blew a raspberry at him, making Ellen giggle again.

Then they were braving the storm, putting the kids in their car seats with Chad heading back to grab the rest of the stuff while he did up seatbelts and started the engine.

"It's going to be okay, babies. We're going to go get cozy and snuggle with Chad and..." His voice was rough, raw.

Chad loaded the last of their crap into the back of his own jeep and then came over to his window. "Just follow me back and we'll have you on a cozy couch, wrapped in a blanket and sipping hot chocolate in no time."

"Yeah, We're right behind you." All the way.

The rain had backed off a little and there was no thunder or lightening to make the babies go nuts and it didn't seem very long at all before they were pulling up in front of the ranger house.

Chad ran and opened the door and then ran back to their car. "Just get the babies in and I'll take care of everything else. We still can't have a fire, the ban won't be lifted unless this goes on for three days but there's plenty of quilts."

"Okay, I'll get them in." He grabbed the babies and ran for the house—the solid, quiet, warm, non-stinky, non-leaking house.

He put them in the front room and headed back out for the suitcases and the bags of food while Chad muscled in the portable cribs, the extra blankets.

"I told you I'd take care of this stuff, you go in the dry and warm and look after your babies."

"You're too good to me." He ran, helping to bring in one load before pulling out the blankets and getting the babies settled.

Here the rain sounded soothing as it hit the roof, the wind sounding less high pitched as it blew through the trees. The place was solid and warm, kind of like its occupant.

Chad soon had everything brought in and the door locked behind them. "Let me just get some milk on for hot chocolate,

Peter, and I'll help you get everything settled. Those babies of yours seem happy enough now."

He nodded, eyes watery again. "I'm sorry, Chad. I'm not normally a flake. I'm not." He'd just been so overwhelmed with the noise and the bullshit and the water.

"Are you kidding? Stuck on your own with two screaming babies, place falling down around your ears? I'm surprised you haven't collapsed in exhaustion yet." Chad poured milk into a saucepan and put it on the stove, winking over at him. "Besides, coming in to the rescue is kind of an occupational hazard."

"Oh. Right." He stripped off his wet jacket and hung it up with Chad's. "Ellen just heard that wind blow and completely shorted out on me."

"Yeah, storms can be scary for adults, let alone kids. I've learned, though, that they'll take their cues from you and if you can find them fascinating, they'll just follow along as like as not."

The milk bubbled up and Chad added syrup out of a jar with a homemade label, making the whole concoction go a light brown. Two big mugs were filled up and Chad was joining him in the front room.

"There's some more quilts in the closet if you get cold, but we could try body heat to start."

"I'd like that." The babies were curled together, watching them with tired, wide eyes. "I'd like that a lot."

Chad sat with him on the couch, one arm around his shoulders, bringing him back to lean against the ranger. "Your pretties going to let us sit and drink our hot chocolate?"

"Maybe." He leaned, eyes closing. "For a minute, anyway."

A soft, warm kiss was pressed to the side of his forehead.

"Poor Daddy doesn't have anyone to rock him and tell him it'll all be all right."

"Yeah. Yeah, but he has a hero who came and saved us..."

Chad chuckled, another soft kiss pressing against his skin.

"It was my pleasure, Peter. Truly. The place seemed really large when I got home from my rounds on Saturday."

"Yeah, it would be so easy to need this, to need you." He reached out, fingers curling on Chad's belly.

The muscles jumped beneath his fingers and then settled.

"I know what you mean."

He lifted his face, needing a kiss, a touch. "Please, Chad. Kiss me."

Warm lips closed over his, the kiss soft, but growing harder, deeper as Chad's tongue pushed into his mouth.

Yes. Oh, yes. He opened wide, hands sliding over Chad's shoulders. Chad's hand slid across belly, shifting him so they were more or less face to face. He melted, moaning, hands burying in Chad's hair. So warm. So good.

"Shit, you make me forget everything but the way you feel in my arms." Chad pulled out of the kiss, rubbing their noses together. "You think the babies will notice if we disappear for a quickie?"

"I fed them an hour ago..."

"So they'll be going to sleep soon?" Chad sounded so hopeful, looking past him to the little bouncy seats the kids were sitting in on the floor.

"Yeah. Yeah, they're exhausted." He watched Daniel rub his eyes.

"We could sing them a lullaby," Chad suggested.

"We could set up their bed in the guest room and cover them up..."

"Oh, I do like the way you think." Chad beamed at him.

"Not that I don't adore them, but I'm a little more interested in entertaining their daddy just at the moment."

"Their daddy needs to be your lover for a little while."

Chad nodded and kissed him softly. "Time to be an adult."

He got another kiss and then Chad was standing, erection obvious, pushing at the uniform pants and Chad making no attempt to hide it.

They got the crib set up, the babies settled, both of them going down with relative ease. Chad did indeed sing them a lullaby, voice low and soft, soothing. It was warm and home and good and he was so lost, so utterly lost.

Once the little eyelids fell closed for the last time, Chad took his hand and led him to the bedroom with the big bed. The warm hands undressed him, sliding his clothes away, fingers and lips moving over his bared skin.

He pushed into the touches, worked the uniform off and away. "Oh, you feel so good..."

"Yeah, you, too. I've been aching to do this since you left." Chad continued to touch, almost mapping him.

"Yes." He stepped closer, lips tracing those strong shoulders. "So warm..."

"All the better to keep you warm with," murmured Chad, fingers teasing the small of his back.

"Yes." They settled in the bed, legs tangling together, mouths fused as their tongues slid together.

Chad's cock was hot and wet-tipped, moving along his belly as warm hands continued to explore him. His fingers wrapped around the hot flesh, pumped nice and slow, thumb sliding over the tip. So fucking smooth. Hot. Good. Chad's eyes rolled, a moan drawn up from those lips as that heat pushed through his fingers.

"So fine..." He kept touching, shifting so it was both of their cocks.

Chad's moan was louder this time, hands dropping to his hips, pulling him into the same rhythm Chad's body found.

He nodded, warm and relaxed and needing, Happy. He was happy. "Chad."

"Yeah?" Chad was breathless, voice husky.

"Oh, I ... I'm in trouble here." He met Chad's eyes. "Real trouble."

Concern flashed through the warm eyes. "What's wrong, Peter? I'm not going to hurt you."

"No. Nothing's wrong. I ... I'm falling in love. So fast. So hard."

"Oh, Peter." Chad's hands stroked along his back. "You're not alone."

"Oh ... Oh, good because I ... You feel so right."

Chad nodded, bending to lick at his neck. "My house wasn't the only thing empty after you and the babes left."

"Oh. Oh, love..." He held Chad close, hips rocking, tears pricking his eyes. "Yeah."

Chad hummed softly, hands returning to his hips, rocking them together. They moved faster, heat building up steadily, slowly, making low sounds, feeding them to each other.

"It so good," murmured Chad, a shudder moving through him.

"Yeah. Yeah, gonna..." He nuzzled the hollow beneath Chad's ear.

Chad shuddered again, crying out as heat splashed against him.

"Oh..." He gasped, hips jerking as he came, toes curling up tight.

Chad tugged him close, face buried in his neck, just holding them together. He relaxed, purring, moaning.

"Stay, Peter. Here. You and the babies. It's warm and safe and a good place to live. There's plenty of room. And you're wanted."

"Stay? You mean, seriously? Permanently?" Really?

"Yeah. I mean seriously permanently. Unless that's, you know, too weird. In which case no. No, of course not, I just meant until you found something suitable."

He chuckled, took a kiss. "I could get into seriously permanently, Chad."

"Yeah? Because that is what I meant. Really. I know it's fast, but I ... well, I'm not exactly a people-person, I don't open up easy or let people in and with you ... there never was any question of not letting you in."

"You know the babies are going to grow up, right? Be kids, and mouthy teenagers and stuff?"

Chad chuckled. "You do remember me telling you about growing up in foster homes, right? Mouthy teenagers are my specialty. Right after adorable babies and rambunctious kids."

"Oh, good, because I want you to be part of their family, part of their memories." A partner, a lover, a friend—he wanted it all.

Chad nodded. "They just sweeten the deal, Peter."

"Yeah? We'll have to tell them tomorrow. Tell them we're home."

Chad beamed at him. "Really? You'll stay seriously permanently? Let me be a part of your lives, of your family?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, love. Please. I want that." He traced Chad's face, nodding.

Chad turned to kiss his hand. "My head keeps telling me I should be more careful, that it can't be real, but my heart insists it doesn't get any realer than this."

"My head keeps saying I have to be careful, for the babies. My heart says the babies knew from the first."

Chad nodded, face suddenly solemn. "I'll hurt you before I'll hurt them, Peter, and I'll hurt myself before you."

"Oh, love." He drew Chad down for another kiss, cupping his lover's face. Those eyes held his, full of truth and caring, honesty and love

The rain started coming down harder, their kisses long and languid, little promises whispered between them.

He was warm and safe, his babies happy, his lover in his arms. It seemed like a dream. One he hoped he never woke up from.

* * * *

Chad woke up around nine pm, his stomach growling, letting him know he'd skipped supper. He'd not had a choice, though. He'd been planning to grab a bite to eat after his rounds and then go check on Peter and the babies, see how they were weathering the much needed storm. Instead he'd come home to a message where Peter sounded at wits' end, Ellen screaming her head off the whole time.

Ranger Chad to the rescue.

It hadn't even been a conscious decision really, he'd just gone. And now he'd invited them to stay, to be his family. Wow.

Damn.

He was a lucky man.

He'd always thought he wasn't going to get a family, much as he wanted one. He was a gay man, though, thirty, shy, with no ties to anyone and happy and settled in his life.

But those babies ... they'd snuck in and grabbed hold of his heart from the first time he'd held Daniel and convinced his twin sister to give him a smile and a giggle. He'd been caught then, even if he hadn't realized it.

Then there was Peter...

Chad didn't believe in love at first sight, didn't believe you could know it was the perfect fit so quick. You had to take time to get to know a person, to learn them, to see if your edges fit their nooks and vice-versa.

Still, the fact of the matter was that he and Peter were like two parts of the same puzzle, locking into each other just right.

He wasn't going to question it, or worry on it. He was just going to accept it because he'd had a lonely life growing up in foster care and had been alone since he'd left the group homes and he was holding on to a chance to be a family with both hands.

His stomach growled again and he chuckled. Peter was going to be hungry as well and if he remembered correctly, the babies would be up again for some food and a cuddle and play before going down for the night.

Sliding out of bed, he pulled on a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt. Damn, that storm had blown in some cold air. Hopefully it would ease off or the rain would continue long enough they could light a fire. If not, at least the place wasn't drafty and there were plenty of blankets.

He put some soup on the stove to heat and quickly made a couple of cheese sandwiches to grill when Peter woke up and then sorted out the stuff brought in from Peter's place. They'd have to fetch the rest in the morning and figure out where to put everything, what else they were going to need to make sure the station was babyproof—those twins would be crawling and walking soon.

He had to inform head office as well, and fill out the paperwork. But it could all wait for morning.

He checked on the kids. They were starting to stir, but not yet awake, which he hoped would give him and Peter a chance to eat. He stood at the edge of the bed, watching Peter sleep for a moment, enjoying the peace in the handsome face. It felt good, knowing he'd be waking up to Peter every morning.

Bending, he kissed his lover softly. "Hey, sleepyhead."

"Mmm ... love." Those eyes blinked open, a relaxed, happy look in them. "Oh, still raining, hmm?"

"Yeah. With any luck it'll keep going for a couple more days, bring the fire hazard levels down." He smiled. "I've made a little supper, just soup and sandwiches. Thought we could indulge before the babies wake."

"Oh. Oh, you spoil me." Peter pushed up into his arms, kissing him enthusiastically.

He hummed happily, hands sliding on Peter's skin. Oh, he could get distracted so easily...

He pulled back. "I sorted all your stuff. We'll have to get the rest of it tomorrow and you can call and cancel whatever kind of lease you had going."

"Mmm ... yeah. Yeah. I need to go buy warmer clothes for the wee ones, too. Winter's closer than I imagined it would be."

"Oh, it'll warm up again for a bit, but it does get colder sooner. We'll need to make a list of what all is needed to make the place safe for them, too."

He watched Peter get dressed, enjoying the man's body. Peter wasn't buff or anything, but he was in decent shape. Turned Chad's crank, anyway.

"Yeah. I have a storage building in the city with our stuff, too. The good cribs, books, that kind of thing..." He got a tentative look before the heavy navy sweater hid those pretty eyes.

"Cool. The place could use some more stuff—make it look like a home instead of a transient ranger station." He wanted

Peter to feel comfortable making changes, additions. "It shouldn't be too hard to merge our stuff, make it work."

"Yeah? I don't have any furniture to speak of, except the babies' things and my recliner." Peter was back in his arms, hands sliding around his waist.

He gave Peter another kiss. "A recliner?" That was the one thing he'd always wanted and just not gotten around to getting. "Is it strong enough to hold two?"

"It is. Comfy, too. I have slept on it rocking babies many nights."

He chuckled. "Well now there's someone to play back-up and give you a hand. Now come on, those babies were stirring ten minutes ago, they're bound to be up any minute and you need some food in you."

"Yeah." Peter bustled around a little, fixing them drinks and getting the bottles set up while the sandwiches cooked.

They sat side by side at the kitchen table as they ate, which made for easy access in the touching department, which he found himself doing a lot. Peter's body just called to him.

They could hear the babies, cooing and gurgling, occupying themselves. "Man, they're going to be miserable when I separate them into their own cribs again."

"You don't let them sleep together usually?"

"Well, I did, and then the pediatrician fussed at me. So I tried separating them and they were inconsolable, so I said I'd try again after we settled." Peter shrugged. "They're just so close, you know?"

Chad snorted. "Does the pediatrician know them like you do? I had one foster mother, always tried to keep the little ones separated and they always snuck in to cuddle together in the night anyway. The one that allowed it? The kids at her home were happier, slept better."

"Yeah? They're happy babies, they just used to look at each other through the slats, sobbing..." Peter blushed. "I couldn't do it."

Chad looked at Peter, horrified. "Why the hell would someone think that was better?"

"Because I'm supposed to be encouraging them to be independent—you know, different clothes, different toys, different beds."

"There's encouraging and then there's being cruel. And they're only babies. When they're old enough to be in beds of their own? Give them that option, let them make the choice themselves." He shook his head suddenly. "I'm sorry. It might not be my place."

Peter's hand covered his. "If we're going for seriously permanent, then I don't know who else's place it would be."

He turned his hand and squeezed Peter's. "That's great. I told you how I grew up looking after whoever was littler than me, so I have an idea or two of how a kid ought to be raised."

Peter nodded. "Good. I haven't had anyone to talk to about them. New mom groups frown on single, gay guys, you know..." Those bright eyes glanced up at him. "Except I'm not anymore. Single."

"No, I guess you aren't." He kept hold of Peter's hand, smiling at the man. "It's going to take awhile to get used to the concept, isn't it? I mean, it feels good, right. But new."

"Yeah. Yeah, we just met, we just clicked." One of the babies started whining, the other joining in. "Ah, break time's over."

"Lets go see if the magic raspberries still work on Lady Ellen." He put their dishes in the sink and followed Peter into the twins' room.

The babies reached up, laughing and squealing until the thunder sounded. Then they both stilled, eyes wide.

"Oh, goodness! Somebody's bowling in heaven!" Peter's voice was enough to make Daniel reach for his daddy, Ellen right behind.

Chad chuckled. "All right, which one of you wants to come to me?" He held out his arms. "And I don't mean you, Peter."

"Damn." Peter chuckled as Daniel bulldozed Ellen over to get to him. Ellen frowned, rolling over to get to her daddy.

Chad chuckled. "And I was worried they might not warm up to me very quickly."

It made him feel good, being accepted just like that by these kids. He was hoping to be Daddy Chad when the time came, or Dad if Peter was gonna be Daddy.

"They know we're home." Peter blushed and scooped Ellen up, wrinkling his nose playfully. "Oh, you two are so getting a bath tonight. Stinky beasts."

"That sounds like fun. Splashes!" He laughed as Daniel put chubby little fingers in his mouth and tried to pull off his lower lip. "After food, though, I'm guessing."

"Oh, yes. Applesauce and bottles?"

Ellen's shriek was a definite affirmation.

"What, no brussels sprouts?" He led the way out to the kitchen, glad he'd already set the high chairs up.

"Ew." Peter winked and dug out some food. "Danny's a lot more willing to try new food. Ellie? Is a picky thing."

"I had one foster mom called that 'particular'." She hadn't meant it as a compliment, either, but they'd turned it into one at the home, behind her back.

The babies were hungry and ate well, grabbing at spoons and babbling at each other, obviously pleased at being able to eat together. It was domestic and settled and Chad felt good deep in his bones.

And then came the bath. More like water wars, but all in fun, and Peter looked sexy with his hair tousled and his shirt plastered to his chest, soap bubbles on that thin nose. And there was the laughter, the juggling towels and getting the twins in sleepers and his heart was going to burst when he found himself on the couch with Peter and the twins in his arms, covered in a quilt.

He sang lullaby after lullaby, humming softly when he finally ran out of words. He had a sudden flash of them, five years from now, reading books as part of this routine, little fingers following along as the twins learned to read.

Peter's eyes were closed, Ellen sound asleep, little Daniel watching him with slowly blinking eyes.

He smiled at the wee boy. "You're my nightowl, are you? Gonna come on my rounds with me when you're older? Once a week, you know, I'm supposed to go out and make sure

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by Sean Michael

everything's as it should be in the dark of night. It would be nice to have company." How could anyone think these two didn't have their own distinct personalities?

Daniel cooed softly, smiling as Peter's hand came up, patting his back, still sound asleep. Chad cooed and smiled back.

His family.

Damn.

You'd be hard pressed to find a man luckier than him.

Chapter Three

By the time the summer vacationers were all gone and the park getting ready for a long fall and winter, he and the babies were set up. Home. Enjoying the long, lazy days, the crisp evenings.

Daniel had a tooth and Ellen was fighting with her first one and both of them had grown suddenly, thriving on the extra attention and the extra play. Peter chuckled at himself, puttering around the kitchen, a chicken soup bubbling away, wearing one of Chad's old sweatshirts and humming along with the music on for the kids.

Guess they weren't the only ones thriving.

Ellen was in her swing, sleeping and feverish with her tooth. Daniel was watching the lights on the TV and looking for all the world like he was waiting for Chad's truck to appear in the big window. Sure enough, a couple of minutes later he started gurgling and headed for the door in the half crawl, half butt-drag he'd recently mastered, babbling away.

The door opened and Chad came in. "Well now, here's a greeting a man likes to have when he gets home!"

Daniel was picked up and thrown up into the air, Chad catching him on the way down, both of them laughing.

"He's been watching for you for the last half hour." He moved Ellen, swing and all, into the babies' room. She'd sleep another couple of hours, easy.

"Yeah? That's my boy." Chad blew raspberries on Daniel's belly. "Ellie okay with that tooth?"

"She's got a nasty fever and a temper to match it. Wouldn't keep her lunch down." He wandered over for his welcome, lifting his face for a kiss. "Your nose is cold."

Chad moved Daniel into the crook of his arm and pressed their lips together. "I was hoping Daniel's tummy would warm it up."

"Mmm ... Hi." The kiss deepened, his hand sliding over Chad's belly, petting.

Chad purred, deepening the kiss. One little hand patted their cheeks, Daniel's gurgles adding to their happiness.

Peter ducked his head, nibbling and kissing his Daniel's hand, the baby squealing happily. "Oh, you spoiled boy, you like having the attention all to yourself, don't you?"

Chad laughed and tickled Daniel. "He had his turn as the cranky, tooth-cutting baby."

"He did." Of course you'd never know it now, Daniel grinning and goofy and laughing for them. For Chad. "Oh, is your favorite person come home to you? Fickle boy."

Daniel giggled and he laughed along at his brave, happy boy.

"Hey, Ms. Ellie still isn't a hundred percent sure of me. Especially when she's a cranky girl, which is lucky for me, isn't it?" Chad chuckled at him.

"Ellen just is a Daddy's girl." He looked over, curious. "As opposed to a ... what do you want them to call you, love?"

Chad colored. "I like Dad as you have Daddy already."

"Oh..." He leaned down, nuzzled Daniel, heart just pounding. "Did you hear that, baby? Your dad's got you."

"Oh good. I hoped you wouldn't mind. That I wasn't infringing." Chad hugged him tight.

He took another kiss, cuddling in for another snuggle. "There's chicken soup and biscuits."

"Oh, Daniel's not the only one spoiled. Lunch was a hell of a long time ago."

"Well, come on. We can eat together and then maybe we can get Ellie to hold something down."

He got bowls and spoons and some rice cereal for Danny, humming happy. "God, I'm sappy. Happy, but sappy."

"It looks good on you," Chad told him, depositing Daniel in his high chair. "Delicious in fact." Chad gave him a heated look full of promise.

"Oh..." He blushed, bit his bottom lip. "Love..."

Chad beamed at him. "Hold that thought, lover."

He leaned over, nuzzled Chad's ear. "Want more than a thought..."

Chad chuckled. "I've got way more than a thought for you. Once my number one fan is in bed with his sister? Your ass is mine."

"Oh..." He moaned, hips shifting, cock hard as glass.

"Promise?" It was still so new. So hot. So necessary.

"Yes. God, this is the hardest. Coming home and having to wait to ravish you..."

"You make me feel so sexy." He stole another quick, hard kiss.

"You are sexy, Peter. You certainly get my motor running."

"Yeah..." He copped a quick feel before settling, bouncing with anticipation.

Chad's eyes barely left him as they ate, only Daniel occasionally pulling Chad's attention away for a tickle or help with his cereal.

Peter managed to eat a few bites, then busied himself with playing footsie, watching those cheeks flush. Chad played back, foot sliding up along his thigh, eyes hot.

"Love you." He spread a little, hips rocking in the chair.

Chad nodded. "I know. I love you, too." Chad shifted and fussed under the table a moment and then it was a socked foot that slid up his thigh. Suddenly he had a lap full of foot working his package.

"Oh..." His thighs tightened, eyes rolling.

Chad kept working his cock, toes curling and uncurling. He pushed toward the touch, eyes hooded. Chad hummed, eyes watching him.

"You ... Love, you're going to make me..." Oh, fuck, it was hot.

"Yeah, I hope so." That foot just kept on moving.

He reached down, bucking, holding Chad's foot against his cock. Chad moaned, toes working hard.

"So sexy."

He jerked, filling his jeans, gasping low, hands gripping the table. "Chad..."

"God, Peter. You make me want."

"I want you. I'm hungry, love." He stood, shaky, gathering the plates.

Chad nodded and turned to Daniel. "Hey, little man, you willing to go down for a nap? Your Daddies need some grown up time."

Thank God his son was in a peaceful mood, settling easy for Chad as he stripped down.

Chad came out of the kids' bedroom. "Lord love him, he went down with his bottle like a dream."

"Thank God..." He didn't play, just launched himself into Chad's arms, mouths slamming together.

Chad's hands slid on his skin, fingers splayed, touching him all over before finally landing on his ass and tugging him in tight.

"Yes. Want. Love you." His head fell back, throat working, hands tugging Chad's shirt open.

"So sexy. Peter..." Chad's mouth followed the line of his throat.

"Yours. Lover." He pushed the uniform shirt off, worked open Chad's belt.

Groaning, Chad, pushed eagerly into his touches. He knelt down, mouthing Chad through the cloth, hips humping the air. Chad's fingers slid through his hair, pulling him against the hard bulge.

"Yeah..." He worked the buttons, the zipper. "Need."

"God, yes. Please."

Chad was as desperate as he was. He got his lips wrapped around Chad's cock just in time for Chad to start taking his mouth, pushing hard and deep. Chad's hands wrapped around his head, holding him in place as groans and moans rained down on him.

He sucked hard, groaning, humming, needing it.

"Oh, soon, love."

Peter opened, swallowing hard, needing, pulling Chad in deep.

"Peter!" Chad cried out, cock pushing deep as come poured down his throat.

He drank his lover down, purring, hips rocking.

"Oh, God, Peter. So good." Chad tugged at him.

He straightened up, lips brushing against Chad's, groaning. Chad's tongue pressed between his lips, hands sliding to his ass again. Yeah. Love. Damn. He opened wide, ass rubbing into Chad's hand

"Make love to me, Peter."

"Oh ... Oh, love..." He nodded, hands sliding over Chad's body.

The sweet belly rippled for him. "Bed."

"Yes. Bed." He managed before he was reduced to grunts and clicks.

Chad shuffled them in the right direction, lips sliding on his neck again. He went, focused on that sweet heat in his hands, the idea of that fine ass around him.

Chad lay back on the bed, spread out for him. "You know where the lube is?"

"Uh-huh..." He leaned down, spread those tight cheeks with his thumbs, tongue sliding over the tight little hole.

Chad bucked, a swallowed scream sounding. "Love."

Yes. Yes, love. Fuck. He didn't play, pushed his tongue into the tight hole, fucking his lover, wetting him. Chad's hands fisted in the sheets, heels planted in the mattress as Chad humped up.

He groaned, lifting up, pushing between Chad's thighs.

"Now. Want. Love."

"Fuck, yes. Please." Chad reached for him, moaning.

He lined up, pushed in, eyes rolling back in his head.

"Love. Love. In. Love."

"Hot. Peter." Chad moaned again, the tight heat around his cock rippling.

"Yeah..." He started moving, pushing deep, loving Chad with all he was.

Chad tugged him down to bring their mouths together, feeding heated sounds into him.

He pushed and grunted, moving hard and fast, needing so much. "Love!"

Chad met his thrusts, hands sliding restlessly on his skin before settling on his waist and holding on.

He wrapped his hand around Chad's cock, pumping firmly. "Come for me. Please."

"Peter!" Chad cried out his name and bucked into his hand, heat spraying. He jerked, heat sliding up his spine, tingling and fine. "Oh, Peter. Love you. Love you."

"Love..." His eyes rolled and he came, shuddering and gasping.

Chad's hands tugged him down, sliding warmly on his skin as their mouths met.

"Love you. Damn." He cuddled in, snuggling

"Oh yeah ... Damn, this is sweet. I'm glad it doesn't have to end."

"Yeah. Yeah, love. I could stay here for..." His words trailed off as Ellen started screaming, awake and pissed. "A second or two and then I have to get our daughter."

Chad chuckled and gave him a kiss. "I'll warm her food, see if we can't get her to eat."

"Yeah, she needs to." He stood up, grabbed two towels and threw one to Chad, wincing as the screams escalated. "I hear you, baby. I'll be right there."

Chad cleaned up and tossed him a pair of sweats. "Why don't you get the food and I'll go get her."

He pushed down the instinct to rush and do it himself, and made himself nod and let Chad help. "That works. She's hurting, so don't take it personal if she freaks out."

Chad gave him a kiss. "I won't. Which is why I thought I'd go get her." Chad headed off to the twins' room.

He headed out to the kitchen, warming the milk for rice cereal, listening to Ellie's screams turn to sobs.

Chad came out, murmuring softly to Ellen, bouncing her a little and stroking her cheek. "Poor darling. Teeth are a dreadful business."

She saw him, glared like he was to blame for everything, big tears starting that broke his heart.

"Oh, now, that's not fair, Ellen." Chad chuckled and shook his head. "You'd better learn to be immune to that, lover, or she is going to work you until the day you die."

"Oh, I'm not sure I can be. Look at those pretty eyes all sad..."

"Uh-huh. Just imagine them with the boy you won't let her date attached."

Chad went to put her down in her high chair, but she started to scream again and so back into his arms she went. "Why don't I just hold her while you feed her? And we might find a carrot or something cold for her to gnaw on."

"Date? My baby? Oh, I don't think so..." He grabbed an apple-juice soaked washrag that had been in the freezer and handed it to Chad while he made a bottle.

Chad laughed, rubbing the cloth on Ellen's gums. "But, Peter, look at those pretty eyes all sad..."

Peter chuckled as Ellen started sucking, pulling hard on the cloth. "Oh, she's hungry."

"Yeah. You ready to feed her?"

"Yeah." He got a rag all ready and started feeding, his fussy one eating eagerly.

Chad kept them both amused with a soft running commentary on teething, the mush Ellen was eating, and dating daughters.

It didn't take long before Ellen was turning her face away, whining. "Let me get you her bottle and some Tylenol for her." Chad nodded, rocking her and pushing the cloth back into her mouth.

It was something he was still getting used to, having another set of hands, another adult around. He was beginning to count on it.

So were the babies.

So, he sort of thought, was Chad.

* * * *

Ellen cut one tooth after another and screamed the entire time.

At least that's what it felt like to Chad as he dragged his butt out of bed at three fucking am for the fourth or fifth night in a row.

Not that he was really complaining, one look at that red face, pudgy little hands reaching out for him, and he couldn't possibly stay mad.

"Oh, baby-girl, you aren't doing this the easy way, are you? It's okay though, your Dad's here now and we'll find you that frozen cloth and rub those poor, tortured gums, yes we will."

He got the cloth out and she started gumming it eagerly while he put a bottle on to warm for her. They'd been feeding her whenever she'd let them, trying to make up for her being off her food. Once it was warm enough, he settled on the couch under a quilt and sort of dozed off as she sucked on the bottle.

He was startled awake by the sudden emptiness of his arms, the cuddling warmth disappearing. His eyes flew open, the sight of Peter gently carrying her back to bed sort of grey in the morning light.

Man, he hadn't meant to fall asleep, but there was something about holding her, or her brother, asleep that just said safe and home and rest now.

Peter wandered over, hand soft on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, love. Come to bed. You need your sleep."

He got up and wrapped his arms around Peter, kissing softly. "Hey, you get her alone all day and take most of the times she wakes up. I didn't mean to fall asleep like that."

"She looked happy enough." Peter cuddled in.

He kissed the tip of Peter's nose and walked them slowly back toward the bedroom. "I was supposed to do my four am rounds. Oh well, it'll keep. Do you think she's going to be done soon? That cry has to be one of the most heartbreaking sounds..."

"She should, yeah. The pediatrician said it'll get easier, too."

"Thank God, 'cause this is getting to the point where it's almost traumatic." He grinned at himself. Damn, he was hooked. And he loved it.

Loved them.

He pulled Peter down onto the bed with him, slowly exploring his lover's mouth. Peter curled close, moaning, hands roaming over him. He hummed for Peter, moving into the touches and trailing his own hands over the wonderful skin.

"You need your sleep, love." Peter's tongue slid down his neck, his chest.

"Uh-huh." Sleep was the last thing on his mind with Peter working him like that. And he wasn't going to complain for a second.

"Taste so good." Lips wrapped around his nipple, sucking hard.

He gasped, bucking up against Peter. It was like there were electric shocks running from Peter's mouth through his

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nipple to his cock. Peter's fingers wrapped around his prick, pulling in time with the suction, thumb sliding on the slit.

"Peter!" He shouted out his lover's name, bucking, coming hard, just like that, the orgasm catching him by surprise.

Peter moaned, stroking nice and easy, loving on him.

"Oh, love ... you make it good to be alive."

He was nuzzled, licked. "I just love you."

He held Peter tight. "I know. I love you, too." He closed his eyes, hands sliding on Peter's skin.

"Mmm ... sleep, love. Sleep, I've got you."

Oh, that felt good, having someone to hold him, to count on. He'd never had that before. He liked it. He fell asleep, curled in Peter's arms.

Chapter Four

"Da!" Ellie's cry was sure, happy, hands held out to him, little fists opening and closing.

Oh.

Oh.

Oh oh oh.

"Chad! Chad! Come here!"

She talked. She called him Da.

Chad came in a hurry. "Peter? You okay? The twins?"

He looked up, eyes teary. "She talked."

"Oh. Oh, Peter. Peter." Chad beamed at him and then at her. "What did she say?"

"Come on. Come on, do it again. Who am I? Do it again."

Ellen, sweet little lover she was, grinned up at Chad and crowed. "Da! Dadadadadadadada!"

"Oh! Oh, God, Peter! Listen to her!"

Chad laughed and crouched next to him. "Do it again, Ellie!"

She giggled, clapped her little hands and squealed, thrilled with the attention. "Da-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!"

Chad nudged him. "She said our name."

He nodded, grinned wide. "She did." He nuzzled Ellen's cheek. "Da da da da da."

Daniel scooted over, little face wrinkling up, tugging Chad's sleeve.

Chad chuckled. "Somebody's jealous his sister's getting attention." Chad tickled Daniel's ribs. "How about you? Can you say Da?"

Daniel giggled and blew a huge raspberry. That got Ellen to giggling hard, almost hiccupping. Chad laughed and blew one back. The man looked happy. Really happy.

He leaned against Chad, face lifting for a kiss, so in love it hurt. "Hey."

"Hey, lover. Our babies are growing up." Chad gave him a soft kiss.

Peter nodded. "They are. So beautiful. Our family."

"Yeah." Chad looked at him, face suddenly serious. "I want to make it official, Peter."

"Official?" He tilted his head, heart hiccupping. "What ... what does that mean, love?"

"I want to adopt the twins. Be their other dad legally as well as in our hearts."

"Oh." He blinked, heart pounding hard now, swallowing, world going a little grey around the edges. "Really? You want that? Us? Really?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I really do—I hope you know that. And I hope you want that, too. You're not upset about it, are you?"

"No. No, I ... I just never thought. When I started this I wanted to, but then things broke up and I'd convinced myself it wouldn't ever happened and..."

Ellen frowned at him, then pushed into Chad's arms. "Da!"

Peter nodded. "Yeah, baby. Yeah. That ... that's your dad."

"Yeah." Chad beamed. "I'm your Dad." Those eyes looked over at him. "You're good with this, Peter? It makes you happy?"

"Happy. Scared. Overwhelmed. So fucking in love it hurts."

"Oh, good. That makes two of us. But I'll tell you one thing. Everything in me says to grab hold of the three of you and hold on for dear life. So that's what I'm going to do."

He nodded, buried his face in Daniel's soft neck. "Yeah. Yeah, love. Please."

Chad's hand was warm on his back, the twins squirming and giggling in their arms. Each one was given a soft kiss on the cheek and then a raspberry right to the neck and then Chad kissed him, lips so gentle on his own.

Little hands patted them, fingers grabbing their shirts. It was what he'd wanted, since the beginning. A home. A family. A partner.

Little Ellie said "Dadadada!" again and Chad laughed and the kiss got harder for a moment before Chad's lips left his. "I love you, Peter. And you, Daniel and Ellen."

Daniel giggled, arching back and wriggling, heading for the stuffed lion on the comforter. He let Daniel go, chuckling as Ellen followed. "Mmm ... Look at them, love. Our babies."

Chad shifted to sit behind him, legs on either side of his, drawing him back against the warm chest. "Yeah. They're magic all right."

He was all wrapped up in watching them play, in the warmth of Chad behind him. "The holidays are coming up, love. The babies' first Christmas."

"Yeah. Do you think they'll be okay if we put up a tree? I usually go out and cut one down, the station has some decorations, but we could head into town and pick up a bunch. Make a day of it and get their presents and stuff, too."

"Oh, I'd like that. We can make a day of it—take them for their nine month check ups, talk to a lawyer about the adoption, maybe get some pictures of the babies made, if they're not fussy."

"Wow, all that and lights and presents, too?" Chad was quiet a moment. "What about making it a weekend? We could go in Friday morning and do the lawyer and doctor. Stay at a hotel over night which would give us all day Saturday for shopping and pictures." Chad's lips found his neck, nibbling as gentle fingers stroked his belly. "If we stay somewhere pretty decent we could have room service after the twins are asleep. It would be like having dinner out."

"Oh..." He grinned. They'd never done that. They'd never dated. "That sounds perfect. We could find a place with a pool and take the babies in together."

"Oh yeah! Have you ever had them in the water before? There's a lake up further in the park, but I figured if you wanted to take them swimming you'd have said something. They're pretty young yet."

"I haven't, no. I couldn't, not with both of them, but they love their baths so much..." He grinned as Ellen either tried to hand Daniel a toy, or beat him with it. It was a little unclear.

"I'll call around and see if there's someplace nice with a pool and room service that won't cost us a fortune. I'm assuming you had a lawyer for the paperwork with the twins' mother? Would he be a good bet for helping us with the adoption papers?"

He nodded. "Karyn's a love. I'll send her an email either tonight or in the morning, get the details."

"All right. How does two weeks this Friday sound, if you can get the doc and lawyer scheduled? That's still over a week before Christmas."

"That works. Hell, in two weeks, Daniel might be able to call us, too. Do you think, pretty boy? You think you'll be saying Da in two weeks?"

Chad chuckled. "Are you kidding? Given the attention Ellen got? He's going to be able to say 'Dada look at me!' in no time at all."

"Hell, knowing him? It'll be 'Dada! Feed me!'"

Chad's chuckles turned to laughter as Daniel crawled over to them, gurgling, arms up to be held. "You said the magic words."

"Little bottomless pit!" He pounced and tickled, Daniel's sounds pure magic.

Chad scooped up Ellen as she made her way over to them, too, and flew her around the room.

God, it was good. So good, it was scary.

Peter closed his eyes and said a little prayer against Daniel's belly. Let it stay this way.

Please.

* * * *

They'd driven into Juneau and seen the lawyer first and then the pediatrician. Both twins were healthy, progressing well, and if the doctor had been taken aback by his being there, she hadn't said so.

It had gone well at the lawyer's, Karyn had let them know it was up to the judge, but her opinion was that, as the twins'

biological mother wouldn't have any objections and Peter was their biological father, there shouldn't be any problems. She suggested drawing up papers, wills and stuff to prove they were in each other's lives for good, and Chad had nodded and mentioned getting Peter signed on all his legal papers with the Ranger Service. It was supposed to be a Christmas surprise for Peter, but he figured that look of joy was good any day of the year.

Now the twins were cranky with the need for a nap and he was feeling growly himself, as they'd skipped grown up food altogether. Checking in just took a moment and they were soon in the elegant room. The Westmark Baronoff Juneau was right downtown and kind of ritzy, but he wanted to treat Peter to something special. They hadn't dated at all, really, hadn't had a normal courtship, and he wanted to do nice things for Peter like buy him supper and pamper him a little.

The bed was huge, they almost wouldn't need the playpen they'd brought to sleep the twins in, except if they all slept together he and Peter couldn't fool around, so he set it up while Peter changed the babies.

Unhappy faces turned up to him when he came over with cereal and two bottles. Poor things were tired and their normal routines just shot to hell. He rubbed Peter's back. "Let's get them fed, yeah?"

"Yeah, love. They've had a long morning and been so good. Such well-behaved little beasts."

He nodded, holding his arms out, wondering if Ellen would come to him with their world all topsy turvey or if it would just be Daniel.

Ellen looked over, arms up, demanding. "Da! Da!"

Peter chuckled, took Daniel, who got all teary and trembly-lipped. "Oh, ho! Daddy's not good enough anymore?"

"Hush and let me enjoy it." He winked at Peter and picked Ellen up, all beams as he settled her in the crook of his arm and set to feeding her. Daniel settled quick enough, eating like a starving thing. Their boy was almost a pound heavier than his sister, Ellen about three-quarters of an inch taller.

He coaxed more food into Ellen as she started to balk and then replaced the spoon with the bottle, grinning as her eyes started to droop almost immediately. "Someone's tired."

"I know it. She'd sleep through the night every night if Mr. Night Owl here didn't poke her." Peter grinned at Daniel who was chuckling and grabbing for the spoon.

"The doc mentioned splitting them up to sleep again—seems real keen on that. What do you think about getting them beds they can get out of on their own, so they can have their own beds, but crawl over to each other if they need to?"

"Well, I was thinking, maybe we could rig something up where Danny'd have to work to get at her. Maybe a cushion between them? That way, we could have it in there at night, but leave it out for naps, so they can play?" Ellen was sound asleep, applesauce on her chin.

"That would work." He wiped the applesauce off and smiled over at his lover. "You're really good at this Daddy thing, Peter."

"You're not half-bad yourself, love." Peter chuckled as Daniel turned to look at him, blew a raspberry.

Grinning, he blew one back. "I do my best."

He got up and settled Ellen in the playpen, covering her with her quilt and stroking her sleeping face. God, she was something else. They all were. And in a few months, God willing, they'd officially be his.

Daniel was handed to him as Peter went to wash the bottles and bowls. "What did you want to eat, Chad? Anything tripping your trigger?"

"I didn't get a chance to look at the menu. Something fancy, though, that we wouldn't make at home. Maybe some wine? Pretend we're grown ups." He gave Peter a wink.

"Are you trying to get me tipsy?" Peter chuckled, settled on the sofa and opened the menu. "There's lasagna, chicken parmesan, steak medallions in wine sauce..."

"You make a mean lasagna, but the other two sound good. We could each get something and share?" He rocked Daniel in his arms, smiling as the little eyes finally started to shut.

"Oh, that sounds good. Want to share some cheesecake, too?" Peter's voice was soft, low, eyes watching them. "That's so beautiful."

He smiled at his lover, warmth filling him. "Cheesecake sounds good, lover. What about an appetizer thing? They got any of those?"

"Fried mushrooms, olive tapenade, shrimp, onion strings."

"You choose, they all sound good."

He rocked Daniel a moment more and then laid him in next to his sister, covering him up. He took a few minutes to watch them sleep, beautiful little faces that looked so angelic when they slept.

He heard Peter's voice, ordering quietly, then warm hands wrapped around his waist. "Love you."

He straightened back up, leaning against his lover. "Yeah, Peter. I love you." His hands slid on Peter's, caressing. He kept wanting to pinch himself, make sure it was real. Even the bout of flu that had followed Ellen's teething problems hadn't soured any of it for him. "Did they say how long the food would be?"

"About an hour. They'll knock and leave it at the door. I didn't want them to wake the babes."

He grinned. "Oh, that gives us time to check out that mighty big bed."

"Why, I do believe you're right..." Peter's hand slid down, cupped his cock.

He groaned, hips pushing automatically into that touch. That was all it took to make him slide from interested to needing, Peter's touch like a match to dry tinder.

"Mmm ... so fine." Peter opened his fly, fingers sliding in to touch, to cup his cock.

"Oh. Oh, love..." He pushed into that touch, shifting them so they were facing away from the twins. The bed, for all it was only two or three steps over, seemed so far away just now.

"Want to taste you, love. Want you to take my mouth." Oh, God, those things, whispered into his ear? Incredibly hot.

He shuddered and nodded, cock hard and throbbing in Peter's hand. "Please."

Peter settled on the end of the bed, eyes shining, lips open, fingers pushing his jeans down.

He whimpered, hands going to Peter's shoulders as he stepped out of his jeans.

"Want you..." Peter's lips brushed the tip of his cock, soft, sweet.

"Oh, yes. Peter. God." He whimpered again and it was all he could do not to shove his cock down his lover's throat. Peter made him need so hard.

That tongue slid out again, teasing. "I won't break, love."

"Not even if I go all wild animal on you?" he asked, stroking Peter's cheek.

"Not even then." Peter nuzzled his hand. "I want you."

"You just make me lose all track of sense, Peter."

"Fuck me, Chad. Let me feel you."

"Oh, God." He couldn't deny Peter, not when the man wanted the same thing he did in the first place. He pushed his prick between Peter's lips, watching it split them as he sank deep.

Peter moaned, sucking hard, hands around his hips, pulling him deeper. He groaned, hands dropping back to Peter's shoulders as he moved slowly, pulling almost all the way out and pushing deep again. Oh, God, it was good. Peter's eyes fastened on his, shining up, so hungry.

He moaned and slid faster, the look in those eyes almost better than the heat and suction around his cock. Soft groans and whimpers surrounded him, Peter pulling harder, swallowing.

"Oh, I love you," he murmured, as what felt like lightning went pushing up his spine.

Those fingers tightened, eyes darkening. He let go, trusting Peter to take him, pushing harder and harder as passion drove him. God, it was good, Peter open and needing, taking him in and in and in.

"Soon," he warned, whisper strained.

Those fingers tightened, tugging him hard. His own fingers gripped Peter's shoulders as he pushed in deep, shouting as his orgasm shot from him. His lover took everything, swallowing and watching and so hot.

"Oh, Peter, love you, love you," he whispered the words, hoping his shout hadn't woken the twins. He wanted to return the favor.

"Love you." The tip of his cock was kissed, one of the babies snuffling, but settling back down.

He pushed Peter back onto the bed and climbed up on top of his lover, rubbing.

Peter moaned, arching into him. "Yeah..."

He pulled open Peter's pants, pushing them apart far enough to let that sweet prick out. It was hot and good in his hand, like a silken fire on his palm.

"Oh. Oh, love. Please. I need..." Peter arched, body rocking.

"What do you want, Peter? Anything, I'll give you anything." He stroked Peter's cock, dropping kisses on the warm skin of his lover's neck.

"Don't stop. Just don't stop..." Peter arched, baring that pretty throat.

He moaned and wrapped his lips around warm skin, sucking as his hand worked Peter's cock.

So sweet, those needy little cries, the way Peter pushed into his hand over and over.

He scraped his teeth along Peter's skin, his lover's heartbeat pounding beneath his lips.

"Love..." Peter's feet dug into the mattress, body shuddering.

"Yeah, my Peter. God, you feel amazing."

"Yours. Chad, love. Please. Close."

"Yeah? Come for me then. Show me." He squeezed Peter's cock tighter and licked at the mark he'd left on the long throat.

Peter gasped, shaking, spunk spraying, wet and hot.

He moaned, hand slowing, sliding on Peter's prick. His lover blinked slowly, sinking into the mattress. He curled around Peter, humming and licking.

"Love you. So much." Peter's hand curled around his waist.

"I love you, too." He gave Peter a warm kiss.

"I'm so glad we did this. It's been a long day, but it's been fun. Good."

"Yeah. Tomorrow will be easier, we can relax, take our time. Play."

"Yeah." He nuzzled in. "What are we getting the twins for Christmas?"

"Mmm ... bath toys. Maybe those walker-saucer things apiece?"

"Cool. I was thinking one those things with the wire tracks that the different shaped wooden beads travel along. Like what they had at the doctor's office in the waiting room?"

"Oh, I think they'd like that." Peter stroked his face. "What do you want?"

"I have my family. I'm good."

Peter hummed, stroked his belly. "Then socks and sex toys, huh?"

He laughed. "Yeah, I can keep them in the same drawer."

"Hey, that drawer held our babies' butts!" Peter chuckled, winked.

He laughed. "I'll trade it out for the underwear drawer then."

"I love you, Mister..." Peter's voice trailed off and he lifted his head. "Are we going to change the babies' last names?"

"You mean to Boone-Bristow?" He frowned, thinking about it. "I don't know. What do you think?"

"Well, I'd sort of like us all to have something in common..."

Chad grinned. "You offering to change your last name, too?"

"I..." Peter tilted his head. "I could. Not professionally at this point, but personally. But yeah. I could."

He shook his head and rubbed his nose against Peter's. "I was just teasing—I don't need you to. It would be nice if the kids had my name, too, though."

"I'd like that, too. It'll make things easier when they're in school, when they're more active."

"Yeah. Makes them ours in others' eyes."

He smiled and cuddled close. He didn't need anything like that. He knew.

"Yeah." Peter put his head down, eyes closing.

He kissed his lover's forehead and pulled the covers over them. "Why don't you take a nap until our supper gets here?"

"Mmm ... 'kay, love." Peter curled in, already snuffling and snuggling, just like a certain pair of twins he knew.

He smiled, heart so full.

"Love you," he whispered, just watching Peter sleep.

* * * *

The mall was crowded.

Insane.

Loud.

Bright.

They'd bought mega-saucers for the twins, bath toys, stockings, Christmas outfits. A cookbook for Christmas cookies. Ornaments. Christmas videos and CDs.

The babies were doing pretty good, blinking and kicking in their stroller. He was beginning to sport a bit of a headache, but at least he'd found some woodworking tools and a couple of movies for Chad.

Speaking of Chad, his lover was looking a little frazzled, a little wiggled out. "You okay, love?"

"It's just ... damn, it's busy, you know. I haven't seen this many people in one spot in a long time." Chad was holding onto a bag, knuckles tight.

"Yeah, you want to find a cup of coffee and sit?"

Hell, they had enough stuff, they could get the rest when they ventured out for groceries.

"Yeah. Maybe some food. Just a bite of something." Chad gave him a tight smile. "I think everyone in Juneau's out here today."

"Could be." He looked around, caught sight of a table in the back of the food court. "You take the babies and go sit, I'll bring some coffee and danishes."

Chad kissed his cheek. "Thanks, Peter."

Then his lover was hightailing it down through the maze of tables.

He wandered up and ordered two coffees, two cherry danishes and one sugar cookie for the babies to gnaw on.

As he headed down to where Chad and the babies were he overheard two ladies talking about how cute it was to see a daddy out with his babies, wondering where the mother was and if maybe Chad was single because he was damned cute. He arched an eyebrow, but grinned. Daniel was reaching for Chad, Ellie pouting, little mouth moving ninety-to-nothing. It was cute. Adorable. All his.

He put the tray on the table. "Here we go."

Ellen crowed. "Da!"

"Yes, Ellie. Daddy got you a cookie."

Chad chuckled. "She's been babbling non-stop since we sat down. Telling me all about all the stuff she's seen."

Chad picked up Daniel now that he was there to take Ellen, bouncing the boy on his knee. "I can't figure out what people see in living all packed in like this."

"Convenience, I guess. Excitement?" He shrugged, split the cookie in half, handed one half to Chad. "I moved up here to get away from that."

Chad nodded. "And that's one of the main reasons I'm a ranger. Just me and my family and the land for miles in any direction."

"And the beasts and the birds." He nodded, grinned over. "Will we get snowed in, do you think?"

"Yeah, I do think. I have every year I've been here. Easily for a few months. The snows really start to hit in January. We should make sure we stock up on absolutely everything before heading back."

"Yeah. Food. Diapers. Maybe warm clothes the next few sizes up?" Okay, so that thought was a little scary.

"Sounds good." Chad's hand slid along his arm. "Hey. Worse comes to worst, we'll sit in our underwear under quilts in front of the fire. And snowed in doesn't mean I can't get out with the snowshoes and find us some meat for the stew pot, you know? It just means the roads are closed. Hell they've been closed a time or two already this year and you didn't even know."

"Yeah. I just ... It's a little overwhelming, you know? Last winter I was..." He blinked. "We'll need to get the babies' birthday stuff, too. They'll be a year old in February."

Chad nodded. "Good idea. Because even if we're not snowed in, we're not going to want to come all the way back here until spring. Not when we can do groceries between here and home." Chad frowned. "Maybe we should stay another night and do the groceries first thing in the morning before making the drive home?"

"I can do that." He'd have to check his account balance, too. His next royalty check wouldn't come through until January.

Ellen looked over. "Da!"

Daniel laughed, caught stealing Ellie's cookie. "Dada!"

Chad laughed and took the cookie out of Daniel's hand, giving it back to Ellie with a tsk and a shake of his head.

"Now, Daniel. You want more, you just ask, you don't steal from your sister, that's not nice."

He got a grin. "I don't suppose you bought more? I don't think the arrowroots are going to cut it as a follow up to the sugar cookie. Oh, and I've got a special stipend that comes in at the beginning of December. For stocking up the storeroom. Have you seen the storeroom? It's off the shed and already has a pretty damned impressive store going."

Peter nodded. "Yeah. We should be okay. Hell, I can think of lots worse than being in the house with you, playing cards as the snow falls."

Chad nodded, grinned. "And there's the shortwave radio if you want to talk to anyone. Email. That's how I like my contact with people."

"Well, I have a book due to my editors April 1st, too, so I'll be able to..." He stopped, gave Chad a mock-glare. "I'm not people, am I?"

Chad thumped his arm. "You're not people, you're my lover. Big difference. And you don't need to worry about whether or not you've paid as much as me for stuff and vice-versa. The lawyer said we needed to show we were serious about being a family with more than just filing adoption

papers—maybe we should go ahead and get a joint account. Work out a budget and stuff."

He grinned, heart warming, and lowered his voice. "Will there be a porn item in the budget."

Chad gave him a look. "Why Peter Boone you *are* a hound dog." Then Chad leaned in. "Of course there will. You can pick that kind of thing up online from the big cities down south, you know."

"Oooh..." Peter grinned, nodded. "I'd like tha..." He broke off as Ellie screamed, Danny fighting her for the cookie, squeezing her arm. "Daniel James Boone—no pinching!"

Chad got up and moved over one seat so Daniel couldn't reach his sister. "Not good, Daniel, I'm very disappointed in you."

Ellen was sobbing, face buried in his shoulder, Daniel starting to tear up and pout. "Oh, now. You're not dying, El. Come on, calm down."

Chad sighed. "Maybe we should split them up. I'll take Daniel and we'll find your Christmas gift while you take Ellie and shop for their birthday?" Chad had started bouncing Daniel, not looking at all happy about having to brave the crowds again.

"Okay. You take the stroller and I'll take the wailing wall and we'll meet at the truck in an hour?"

"Okay. If you're done before then, feel free to check. I don't think we'll be the whole hour."

"Cool." He gave Chad a smile. "I love you."

Chad expression softened. "Yeah, Peter. I love you."

Then the man put Daniel in the stroller and headed back out into the main traffic, back stiff. His wonderful in an emergency, strong, capable lover just fell apart in a crowd of shoppers.

He grinned. "Come on, baby. Let's go get your dad a couple of shirts and a pair of gloves and we'll pick your birthday presents."

He shook his head and waded back out into the fray.

* * * *

Christmas morning.

It had been a long time since Chad had a reason to celebrate it. It was pretty damned exciting, but he managed to wait until 5:30 before he started kissing and nudging Peter.

Peter snuggled in, patting his ass. "Shh, love. S'okay."

He actually giggled, tickled and happy and not sure whether he wanted to make love or go get the kids and start Christmas more.

He felt Peter's smile, the soft kiss to his shoulder.

Smiling himself, he rolled Peter onto his back, following and rubbing gently, bringing their mouths together. Peter moaned, lips parting for him. He fed the noise back to his lover, tongue sliding in between the warm lips. His tongue was sucked, Peter lazy and gentle, rubbing against him.

He purred, presents all but forgotten as he moved with Peter. Peter moaned, hands sliding through his hair, petting, loving on him. He reached down, hand wrapping around their pricks, stroking slowly.

"Mmm ... good. Love. Morning."

"Morning, Peter. Merry Christmas." He kept stroking, moaning.

"Oh, merry Christmas." Peter smiled for him, face lighting up.

God, there was his Christmas present, right there, Peter all lit up and loving him.

He brought their mouths back together, kissing Peter eagerly. Peter twined their fingers together, both of them stroking, pumping.

"Oh, love. So good. So very good."

He pumped harder, faster, keeping hold of Peter's eyes.

"Mmm ... Don't stop. Want you."

"You got me. Never gonna stop."

Not ever.

"Oh. Oh, yes..." Peter started thrusting, moaning low.

He matched the thrusts, shivering as pleasure swept through him and made everything else fade away.

"Close. Love." Peter's cry was low, needy, echoing.

"Do it, Peter. Let me feel it." He buried his face in Peter's neck, breathing in the scent of his lover, pumping hard.

Peter went stiff, heat spraying, his name echoing in the room.

"Oh!" He cried out, hips pushing hard and in a moment, he was coming, too, the pleasure coming up from his toes.

Peter nuzzled into him, licking, moaning. "So good."

"Yeah. Merry Christmas, lover." He rolled to the side, staying close without crushing.

"Mmm ... Merry Christmas." Peter stole a kiss, grinning wide. "It's still dark."

He chuckled. "You're not going to make me wait until the sun comes up, are you?"

"You mean you don't want to wait 'til May?"

"Not for a second. I want to watch those babies tear open their gifts and I want to unwrap mine. Again." He waggled his eyebrows.

"Oooh." Peter scooted closer, teasing, rubbing.

He laughed, tugging Peter in even closer, so unbelievably happy it hurt.

"Our first Christmas. Our babies' first Christmas." Peter grinned. "Can you believe it?"

"No. Pinch me?"

Peter's fingers slid over his chest, then his nipples were tugged. He moaned, a shiver going through him as the sensation went straight to his prick.

"Believe it yet?"

"Almost," he murmured, looking into Peter's shining eyes.

Peter stroked his nipples again, lips brushing his.

"Oh, lover..." He pushed against Peter, hand sliding to return the caress.

"Oh ... I believe..." Peter moaned, arched.

"Uh-huh." He slid his leg over Peter's.

"Oh ... The babies will sleep a while longer, love..." Peter shifted, pushing into him.

"Yeah? You saying I can play with my favorite present some more before I even get out of bed?"

"Yes. Please." Those pretty eyes were fastened on him, wide, hungry, happy.

"Oh, good." He gathered Peter to him and rolled onto his back so Peter's weight was on top of him, warm and just right.

Peter wiggled, hands sliding over his skin, petting. "All this for me?"

He moaned, pushing into the touches, smiling up into Peter's eyes. "Every single bit, Peter."

"Good." Peter leaned down, brought their mouths together.

He opened up to his lover, arms sliding along Peter's back, finding his ass, cupping it.

His cock was firming up again, pressing eagerly against Peter's skin.

"You going to let me ride you, love?" The position was one of Peter's favorites, riding his cock, touching him, sharing long kisses.

He whimpered and nodded, cock going from filling to full and needing just like that. "Oh, yeah. Please." He nodded, fingers sliding into Peter's crease.

Peter moaned, thighs spreading, hips pushing into his touch.

Chad reached over to the side-table and grabbed the tube of lube. He got his fingers slick and then went back to touching, playing with Peter's ass, spreading the slick along the warm crease. Peter's lips slid along his skin, breath hot and panting against him.

"I love you," he whispered, fingers finding Peter's hole, one pushing into that incredible heat.

"Oh ... Love you. Chad..." Peter sighed, the sound happy and sweet.

He nodded, finger working in and out of Peter's body. God, it was good between them. Better than anything he could have ever dreamed for himself.

"More, love. Please." Peter squeezed his finger.

"Patience, Peter. I'm just taking my time. Enjoying it." Teasing because that made Peter beg and look at him with desperate, needy eyes. He slipped a second finger in alongside the first, pushing, searching for Peter's gland.

"Oh..." Peter's head lifted, entire body moving for him.

He whimpered, sliding in another finger, his teasing derailed as Peter's pleasure spurred on his own.

"Yes..." Peter sat up, gasping, body rippling.

Moaning, he kept his fingers moving, stretching, loving on Peter. "Can't wait to be inside you, lover."

"Oh. Oh, I want. I need you." Peter raised up, scooting to take his cock in.

He drew his fingers away and guided the head of his cock to Peter's hole, moaning as Peter bore down and took him in. It was all he could do not to buck up and take his lover in one long stroke. Peter groaned, lips open, panting, so sexual, so sensual on his cock.

He reached up to touch Peter's chest, fingers sliding over nipples, belly, stroking through the short curls.

"Yes ... Love you." Peter started moving, riding him, moaning low.

He gasped, hips moving to meet Peter's body. "Oh ... love."

"Yes. Harder. I need." Peter took his hands, put them on those slender hips.

Moaning, he wrapped his hands around Peter's flesh and started to thrust up. God, Peter was tight and hot and it felt so damned good. Peter threw his head back, giving him a good, long look at how his lover needed. He set his feet on the mattress and just let Peter have it, putting all of his own need and want and love into each thrust.

Peter started pumping that long cock, hand working it hard.

"Beautiful," he gasped, pleasure like a fire going through him.

"Love you. Close. Chad. Please..."

He thrust harder, shifting to slide deeper, groaning as Peter's body tightened around his cock. The cries were low, deep, Peter's seed splashing against his belly. Peter's ass clamped down hard around his cock, rippled and demanded his orgasm. He gave it up with a cry, heat pulsing from him.

"Fuck, yes. Love this, Chad. Love you. Love *us*."

He nodded, hands sliding up along Peter's sides so he could tug his lover down. "Love you, Peter."

Peter cuddled, pulling the covers over them.

He wrapped his arms around Peter, finding his lover's mouth and kissing him long and slow. Peter purred, just purred for him, tongue sliding against his. It was warm and cozy and just about the best Christmas Day he could imagine.

Damn, he was a lucky man.

Blessed.

Home.

Chapter Five

The snow started falling on Monday, heavy and still and constant.

Really, really constant.

By Tuesday night, Peter was starting to stress about it. What if they got snowed in? What if one of the babies got sick? What if he had a heart attack? What if the house caught on fire?

Jesus.

Just.

Jesus.

He wandered from room to room, Ellie frowning at him every time he passed.

Chad was sitting on the couch with a book, Daniel sleeping in his arms.

"Peter." Chad looked over at him on one pass. "Bored?"

"No. Worried. It just keeps coming down." He'd lived the last ten years on the twenty-eighth floor. He didn't *do* weather. What was he thinking?

Chad frowned and then glanced over at the window and nodded. "Snow does that. Especially in January. It'll stop soon enough. And then we can take them out and build snowmen and make baby snow angels."

"What if something happens? What if you have to get out?" Ellie started whining, tugging at her ears and frowning mightily.

Chad put his book down and shifted to sit, Daniel still snuggled up in the crook of one arm. "Come and sit with me, Peter."

Peter grabbed Ellie first, along with her cow and a little blanket. "What was I thinking? Bringing brand new babies to the middle of nowhere?"

Chad grabbed his hand once he'd settled, squeezing tight. "You've just never been through a serious snowstorm before. You'll be old hat at them in no time."

"What if one of the kids get hurt? What will we do when they have to start school?"

"I'm trained in first aid, and we have a great internet school system up here—they only need to go in a couple times a year for State testing, otherwise everything else is done online."

Chad squeezed his hand again and leaned over to rub their noses together. "The ranger station is weather ready, love. We're safe as bugs in a rug here."

"I know. I ... I'm scared, Chad. I'm not used to this—none of it." He hadn't *been* a father this time last year.

Chad's arm went around him. "It's okay. It can be scary your first time. I remember my first time out here. We got snowed in early on and while it's pretty quiet here in winter anyway, after that it was so quiet; there just weren't any sounds. It was eerie. But I was all on my own then. You've got me here and I'm not about to let anything happen to you or the twins."

Ellie started reaching for Chad, legs kicking as she fought to get to him. "Da!"

Chad grinned, looking delighted and he held out his free arm. "Can you grab Daniel so she doesn't wake him?"

"Sure." He took his son, Daniel muttering, face turning toward his skin. "Shh. Shh, sweet boy."

Chad blew a raspberry on Ellie's tummy, making her giggle and call out his name again. "Da! Da!" Then his lover smiled over at him. "See? The kids know they're safe here with us."

"I'm trying to have a snit, Chad." He found Chad a grin, trying to relax.

Chad chuckled and leaned over to give him a quick kiss. "I can't love it out of you until the twins are down for the night. Will it keep?" Chad gave him a wink.

"Butthead."

Ellen hooted, reaching out and whacking Danny on the shoulder as she tried to get her brother's attention.

Danny started crying and Chad frowned. "Hey now, baby girl, we've talked about this before—that wasn't very nice."

Still, despite his words, Chad blew another raspberry on Ellie's belly, distracting her from her brother.

Danny fussed and kicked, rubbing his eyes. Peter sighed and rocked, humming low.

"I'll get their bottles warmed up."

Chad put Ellie on the ground and gave her one of her rattles. "There you are. I'll be back in a minute."

"Da!" Ellie started crawled, following Chad right away.

Chad came right back and picked her up; his lover was wrapped around Ellie's finger. "How am I supposed to get the bottles warmed up on the stove if you're following me around,

hmm?" She was given another raspberry to the belly, and Chad nibbled on her fingers, making eating noises.

God, that was sweet. Peter just sat and stared a little, at least until Danny decided that Daddy staring at his sister was not fun and grabbed his cheeks.

"DA!"

Peter blinked, chuckled. "Yes, you little goober. Da."

Chad put Ellie on his hip and bounced her there, heading for the kitchen. "You going to help your daddy make bottles?"

He could hear the two of them chattering at each other as Chad worked.

"God, little one. What are we going to do, huh? I'm so in love with him it hurts."

Danny just gurgled and laughed, reaching for his glasses, pretty eyes awake and sparkling.

A few minutes later Chad returned with his girl and two bottles. Chad was teasing Ellie, putting the bottles against her chest and then whipping them away again.

Ellen took it well for maybe three times, then the high-pitched wail of doom filled the air, Danny going stiff and still a half-second before bursting into tears.

Chad winced and came to sit next to him. "Sorry." One of the bottles was passed to him, Chad trying to tempt Ellie from her tears with the other one.

He popped the bottle into Danny's mouth, one cry stopping straight away. Ellie took a little longer, then settled down, fingers holding tight to Chad's. "That little girl is going to have you wrapped around her little finger."

Chad grinned. "She already does. To be honest all three of you do." Chad didn't seem too concerned about it.

"I'm scared, you know, being out here so far from everything. I keep thinking about 'what ifs'."

"I won't let anything happen to you or our babies, Peter. You know that, don't you?"

"Our babies." God, that gave him a rush. "Say that again."

Chad gave him a soft smile, eyes bright. "Our babies, Peter. Ours."

"Oh, god." Yeah. Their babies. Their family. "One more time."

Laughing, Chad indulged him. "Our babies. Our babies. Babies. Ours."

"I love that." Laughter filled him, top to bottom, Danny bouncing a little on his chest. Ellie starting to giggle around the nipple of her bottle.

Chad leaned into him, bringing their mouths together, the kiss filled with their laughter.

It was dangerous, the way Chad eased him, drew them in and made them his family. Dangerous, but so good.

The kiss lingered until Danny's hand touched his cheek.

Chad drew back slowly, smiling at him. "Snug as bugs in a rug, Peter."

"I hope so, love. I don't think I could leave you now."

"No talk of leaving, Peter. We love each other—we're a family and that means we're all in this together."

Chad smiled down at Ellie. "She's nearly out."

"She's been very busy today, trying to keep her Dad's attention."

Ellie reached up, touching Chad's face and just jabbering, formula sliding over her lips.

"That's one of the nice things about the snow. Nothing to worry about, nothing to focus on but my family."

Chad looked out, watching the flakes that were still coming down. "I'll make you some of my world-famous hot chocolate later."

"Oooh. Hot chocolate. We can run a hot bath and drink it there."

"Mmm ... sounds like the perfect way to pass the time while they nap." Chad's eyes darkened, and he wiggled a bit, moving closer.

"Horndog." He leaned.

Ellie kicked and laughed. "Da!"

Chad sighed. "You're supposed to be going to sleep, Ellie. Your daddies haven't had grown-up time in a couple of days."

He got a wry smile. "Warm milk is supposed to make you sleepy, especially when you're a baby."

"Da da da da da." Ellie was telling Chad something, holding his face and jabbering away.

Chad laughed. "Man, I wish I knew what you were saying, little girl. I bet you're telling me all the secrets of the world, aren't you?"

"Either that or she's explaining how she's the best sister in the universe."

Such a pretty girl.

"Best sister, best daughter, best beautiful little girl ever." Chad gave him a grin. "Man, you are going to be spoiled rotten, aren't you?"

"Yep, and her smart, strong brother will be the finest man on Earth."

Danny chirruped a little, just happy to cuddle and listen to them talk.

"He'll take after his father then, will he?"

Peter blushed, meeting Chad's eyes. "After both of them, yeah."

Chad leaned in, kissed him gently, ignoring Ellie's chatter and patting hand.

He turned his head, kissing Ellie's fingers, Danny's temple, before leaning down to rest against Chad's shoulder.

Lord, he was a lucky man.

* * * *

The snow finally stopped midday on Thursday, the sun coming out and making the fresh snow just shine. They'd gotten a few feet of coverage—digging out was going to be a bitch, even with the snow-blower.

"Hey, Peter, you gonna be okay on your own for awhile with the twins? I'm gonna start digging us out."

"Of course, I was alone with them for months." Peter was typing away, the kids playing in a playpen at his feet.

Chuckling, he went over and dropped a kiss on top of Peter's forehead and blew one to each of the twins. Then he started suiting up, pulling on his ski pants and jacket, the old beat up boots that fit just right in his snowshoes.

"We could take the kids out and make snow angels instead."

"Snow angels? Are they old enough?"

"All right—snow stars. We'll put them in their snowsuits and then use them like cookie cutters in the snow."

He grinned over at Peter.

Ellie stood at the edge of the playpen, shaking and blowing raspberries, trying desperately to get their attention.

"The kids want to come play. Come on, take a break from the typing. You haven't lived until you've played in three feet of fresh snow."

"I don't think I've ever seen three feet of fresh snow." He got a grin, a wink. "Is there any sun at all?"

He stuck his tongue out at Peter, the snow nearly blinding as it shone off the snow. He opened the front door, grabbed a handful of snow and packed it into a loose snowball. Taking careful aim, he tossed it at Peter. It landed on Peter's shoulder, breaking apart and falling over his front.

"Damn! Careful of the laptop!" Peter pushed the laptop away and jumped back, grabbing the snow from where it fell and advancing on him.

Laughing, he got his jacket on and zipped up before Peter had reached him. "Think how much fun a snowball fight'll be."

"I'm going to trounce you." Peter's eyes were dancing, the babies beginning to fuss in fear that they'd be left behind.

"Yeah? You think you can take me on? Winner gets hot chocolate and a blowjob?"

He ducked away from Peter and tossed the man's snow pants at him.

"I'll kick your butt." Peter looked more interested, more engaged than he had in days.

"Oh, I can think of a few things I'd like you to do to my butt." He winked and grabbed the twins' snowsuits, circling around to them the long way to avoid Peter.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Don't tempt me."

Ellie started bouncing, eyes lit up. That little girl *loved* to go outside.

"You been missing your daily outdoor adventures, little girl?" He put Daniel's snowsuit in the playpen and grabbed her out, laying her on top of her own and starting to work her limbs into the suit.

Peter was right behind, laughing and teasing Daniel, bundling the sweet boy up. It felt good, hearing Peter chuckle and sound happy, excited.

He'd been worried about the worry and silence over the last few days while the snow had fallen, and he was glad Peter had bounced back so quickly.

In no time at all they had two star shaped bundles giggling and chattering at them.

"Come on, son. We've got to beat your dad's butt."

Danny hooted, arms waving. "DA!"

"Have you ever worn snowshoes?" They were likely to sink right down if they didn't wear them.

"No..." They headed onto the little porch that he'd uncovered. Peter's eyes were huge. "Look at all of this..."

He slipped his own snowshoes on and headed down what was the front path when it wasn't covered in snow. "How about the front porch is your territory then." There wasn't nearly as much snow there, given it was protected a little.

He'd have to teach Peter to use them sometime soon.

"Don't drop her in the snow!" Peter's voice rang out, even as Danny laughed, watching his sister, who had huge eyes.

"She'd be fine if I dropped her on her back." Chad kept his face straight for a moment before laughing. "Don't worry, I'm not going to drop her."

"No, she'd pout at you for *weeks*." Possibly months. Hell, Ellie might never forgive any of them.

He laughed and made sure he was holding her properly—he could hold the baby in one arm and make snowballs with the other hand.

"Shall we get your Daddy and your brother?" he asked her.

"Da!" She pointed imperiously toward the porch where Danny was waving violently, trying to catch their attention.

"You see that, Peter? Ellie thinks we're going to kick your butts!"

He scooped up a bunch of snow and pressed it against his chest, forming a rough ball.

"Not a chance. Come on, Danny. Let's get some snow!"

Peter grabbed a handful of snow, balancing Danny on one hip.

Chad gave Peter enough time to form the snowball and then tossed his own missile right at Peter's head.

Peter ducked, the answering snowball whacking his leg.

"Oh ho! You've done this before!"

He grabbed some more snow, taking a few steps to the left as he formed it into a ball. Ellie giggled, bouncing on his hip. He tossed the snowball at Peter's chest this time.

Peter used Danny as a shield, grabbing another handful of snow.

"Cheater!"

He went for more snow himself, nearly dropping Ellie in the process.

"Da! Dadadadada!" A snowball bounced off the top of his head.

"You tell them, Ellie!"

He lobbed his snowball, cheering as it hit Peter square in the shoulder.

Peter started laughing, Danny crowing and slapping those snow-covered shoulders.

Chortling himself, he grabbed some more snow and shuffled over to Peter, tossing it up in the air over his head so it came down gently over Peter and Daniel's faces.

Daniel blinked up, gasping, the little pink-cheeked face looking overjoyed.

"Oh, Peter look."

Chad did it again, coming in closer and letting Ellie get in on the falling snow.

Ellie reached up, and Daniel's face was a study of pure joy.

He tossed more snow, utterly in love with the looks on their faces, a tight feeling in his chest.

"Look at them..." Peter sounded undone, awed.

He nodded, throwing more loose snow into the air—he'd do it forever if it kept his babies and his lover looking like that.

The little flakes caught on dark eyelashes, on bowed lips. Those babies were the prettiest things he'd ever seen.

And they were his. His and Peter's and he almost couldn't believe it. He looked over at Peter, knowing he was wearing his heart on his sleeve, but just not able to help it.

"Yeah." Peter's eyes were filled with tears, the smile unmistakable.

He nodded and kissed Peter softly, then two little cheeks.

"I won," he said with a grin, not meaning the snowball fight at all.

"Yes. We both did."

He nodded. "Yeah."

Ellie cried out "Da!" and he grinned, tossing her up into the air and catching her again. "Were we ignoring you, lovely girl?"

Ellie squealed, wiggling madly. Oh, somebody liked that.

He did it again, sending her a little higher this time, laughing as he caught her. Those giggles were just as wonderful as the amazement at the snow had been.

Peter was swinging Danny, laughing and singing, making the baby boy jabber. They switched babies, his son—*his* son—heavy in his arms.

He tossed Danny a few times, but not as high, knowing Danny wasn't as into the big air throws as his sister was.

"Look at all that snow, Danny. This time next year you're going to play in it. And it's just going to get better every year." He could just imagine the snowball fights they could have when the twins were older. The snowman building contests. The hot chocolate cook-offs.

He chuckled. "Maybe I can wait to do the shoveling. It's not like the snowplow will be by for a few more days."

"I think that you can wait, I can take an afternoon off from writing to settle in with hot cocoa and popcorn..."

"Mmm ... buttery fingers. One of my favorite kind." He gave Peter a wink and bounced Daniel in his arms.

"Just one?" They headed in together, the house feeling almost too warm after having been out.

"I have many favorites."

They stripped the twins down first, and then themselves, all their cheeks bright and rosy. Ellen coughed a few times and Chad reached over to tickle her under her chin. Her cheeks were pink and she was kicking and chuckling, arms and legs working.

"Would you like some hot chocolate and popcorn, Ellie? I bet you would. Maybe we have some applesauce for you."

"I bet a bottle and applesauce and maybe a cookie would go over famously."

Ellie grabbed his finger, legs kicked. "Ba-ba."

"A bottle? You want your bottle? Peter did you hear our clever daughter ask for her bottle?" He laughed, tickling her. His crowing and playing was interrupted by the radio, and he sighed. "Daddy's got to get that. I'll be right back, Peter."

He answered the call, assured headquarters that he'd survived the storm. "It wasn't much more than a large snowfall—not much wind, we didn't lose any trees in the nearby vicinity. Won't be going anywhere 'til you get the roads cleared though."

"Yeah, that might be a week, okay?"

Chad chuckled. "Have I got a choice? We'll be fine. I'll call in if we run out of anything before you get to us."

"Good. Over and out."

"Is everything okay?" Peter showed up, baby food jars in hand.

"Yeah. Headquarters was just checking in, making sure we were okay and that there wasn't any damage." He smiled and took one of the jars and a spoon from Peter. "They should get to the roads before the week's up."

"Yeah? That's nice that they pay attention."

He nodded. It was a part of the job. "Our nearest neighbors might be really far away, but we're not alone out here. So who's getting the..." he looked at the bottle in his hand, "strained beans?"

"Not Ellie. She poots."

Chad chuckled. "Yeah, but she giggles like crazy every time she does—it's almost worth the stink."

Grabbing Daniel, Chad set him up in his high chair and started feeding him.

Peter got Ellen settled, feeding her a few bites before she squealed and grabbed the spoon.

"She is going to be such a handful," Chad noted, as Daniel continued to let himself be fed, the sweet natured boy. "She's gonna lead Daniel into so much trouble."

"She's a fierce girl." Peter helped, very carefully, pretending not to help.

"She sure is. Fierce. Stubborn. Hard-headed." He winked.

One eyebrow arched, Peter grinning over. "Are you suggesting something?"

"Who me? I don't know what you're talking about." Look at him, butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Butthead." A dollop of applesauce went flying.

His mouth dropped open. That had so not been Ellie. He retaliated, lobbing a spoonful of beans right at Peter. "Oh, you evil, evil man!" Peter was laughing so hard the applesauce missed.

It almost made him relent. Almost. His second spoonful hit Peter on the side of his mouth.

"Ew. This is nasty." Peter spit out the food, causing both babies to blow raspberries.

"Oh, now, that is!" Both the twins were now covered in the food that had been in their mouths.

"I think it's bath time."

"I think you're right." Peter was laughing hard, eyes just dancing.

"I always am," he teased.

He managed to get a couple more mouthfuls into Daniel, and then grabbed his boy up. "We *all* need a bath. You think my old tub'll hold us all?"

"Not a chance, but we'll get them washed and settled and then you and I can have a nice, long, leisurely one..." Oh, that smile promised wickedness.

He was half hard through the whole washing process because of that smile, and if he hadn't loved bathing the twins so much, he might have hurried it.

Still, by the time the twins were settled and asleep he was very eager to have Peter all to himself.

He headed to the bathroom, frowning when he didn't find the man there. He went to the bedroom, the kitchen, even Peter's office, frown getting deeper and deeper. By the time

he got back to the bathroom he was getting incredibly grumpy.

Of course, then he smelled the hot cocoa and heard the low music and saw the candles lighting up a fine, naked man.

"Oh. Peter, you..." He grinned, and started to strip.

"Yeah. The water's run. Warm."

"Looks hot to me."

He slid in behind Peter, humming happily. "Oh, this is nice."

"It is." Peter leaned against him, the sigh content and sweet.

He nibbled at Peter's neck and then reached for his mug, sipping the chocolate. "Hmm ... I can't decide which one tastes better."

"I do, of course." Peter's laugh echoed in the room, warming him through to the bone.

"Yeah, love. You do."

He put the mug down and went back to his nibbling, hands sliding on Peter's skin beneath the water as he hummed along to the music.

Peter drew his hands down into the water, down along the flat belly.

He grinned against Peter's skin. "I think I'm being led."

"Hmm?" Butter wouldn't melt in that mouth.

He nuzzled the spot where Peter's shoulder and neck met, hands deliberately moving to miss Peter's cock and slide over the sharp hipbones instead.

"Oh, that feels good." Peter's hips rolled up, ass sliding on the bottom of the tub.

"Yeah?" He licked his way up Peter's neck, chuckling, going 'ew' suddenly at the taste of strained beans.

"Someone missed a spot."

They started laughing, both of them just tickled, holding on to each other.

He turned Peter's face, taking in the laughing eyes, the smiling lips, and then closed the distance between their mouths.

It was like the touch of their lips together ignited playful and easy into passion and need, and his tongue pushed into Peter's mouth.

Peter groaned, lips wrapping around his tongue and sucking.

Chad's cock went from interested to needy, firming right up against Peter's ass. Groaning, he grabbed Peter's hips again, tugging his lover back against him.

Peter squeezed, trapping his cock in those tight muscles.

He deepened the kiss, his hands tightening, his groan trying to turn into a whimper.

That squeezing became rhythmic, steady.

"Don't make me come," he begged. "I want to be inside you."

"Oh, god. Yes." The sweet squeezes slowed, giving them both time to play, to feel.

Humming happily, he let his hands start wandering again, one going south to cup Peter's balls, the other sliding up, searching for the little twin nubs of flesh.

"Feels so good, love. So very good." Peter shivered, nipples going tight while those soft balls drew up.

"It feels right."

He wrapped his hand around Peter's cock, stroking lightly.

"Mmm. Not too much..." Peter pushed up into his touch.

"I know." He didn't want to push either of them over the edge. Not yet.

He let his thumb rub the tip, the fingers of his other hand sliding across to tweak one nipple and then the other.

Between the heat of the water, the slick slide of Peter's skin, and the pure joy of having some quiet time together, Chad was in pure heaven.

Their mouths met in another kiss, the passion flaring between them again, before they deliberately banked it once more, taking their time, making the most of it.

"Let's go to bed and make love."

"That sounds like heaven." Peter stood up, giving him a look at the tight, perfect ass he was about to take.

"And this looks like heaven." Licking his lips, Chad bent forward to kiss one ass cheek, and then the other.

"Mmm. You feel so good, love." Peter's steps stuttered, slipping a little in the water.

Chad grabbed onto Peter's hips, steadying them both, and resolving not to distract anymore. At least not until they were safely under the covers in their bed.

Climbing out of the tub, he grabbed a towel and wrapped it around Peter's shoulders, maybe distracting just a little as he patted along Peter's body, drying his lover.

"Chad..." Peter's cock was heavy, full, throbbing for him. The very tip was wet and dark, proving how much Peter

needed him. He swallowed and nodded, hand slipping to stroke Peter just once, the heat of Peter burning his palm.

Then he grabbed Peter's hand and dragged him to the bedroom, doing a pretty good caveman imitation.

"Don't forget the lube." Peter bounced on the bed, eyes turned toward the window. "It's snowing again."

Chad didn't even look out the window—he knew the lube wasn't on the sill. "It's winter, it does that." He grabbed the lube out of the little drawer in the bedside table, thinking that they were probably going to have to get a lock for it soon enough.

"You are an observant park ranger..." Peter settled on hands and knees, offering him that fine ass.

"Oh, yeah, and right now I'm observing all over your ass."

He climbed up onto the bed behind Peter and dumped the lube next to them, his hands sliding on the soft skin of Peter's inner thighs, fingers teasing the warm balls in their sac before he grabbed himself a double handful of ass.

Peter laughed, pushed back into his touch with the greatest sound. "You make me crazy, Chad. Make all the lovers I had before seem ... like nothing."

He kept kneading Peter's ass, a little stunned and a lot touched by Peter's words.

Bending, he placed a soggy kiss in the small of Peter's back. "Thank you."

Peter settled on his hands, nodded. "Now, love me."

"Yes, Sir." Grinning, he squeezed Peter's ass again, and then reached for the slick.

It splurged out onto his fingers and he slid them along Peter's crack, rubbing the little hole when he got to it, the skin hot and wrinkled.

He thought he could feel every motion of Peter's body, every squeeze and wink of that tiny hole.

Groaning, he pushed a finger in, the heat incredible, the walls of Peter's body like clinging silk.

Leaning over Peter, he pushed in another finger, kissing Peter's neck and spine as he slowly spread his lover open.

"Love how you touch me." Peter gave it up to him, eagerly, easily, just opening up and up for his fingers.

"Good," he murmured against Peter's skin, pushing a third finger in. He slid them in and out and spread them wide while they were inside Peter. He pushed them deeper, fingertips stroking, looking for Peter's gland. He knew when he found it.

"Chad! Chad, again!" Oh, his vocal lover. Right there. Everything got white-hot and needy, Peter's ass squeezing his fingers almost brutally tight.

Panting, he pushed into Peter's body with his fingers, hitting that spot again and again. He rocked with his lover, his prick sliding along the inside of Peter's thigh, leaving the skin slick with his pre-come.

"Please. Please. Chad. Love. Need you. Fuck me. Need you to fuck me."

"Yeah. Yeah, you got it." He pulled his fingers from Peter, groaning at the way his lover's body clung, didn't want to let go.

Then he was pressing his cock to Peter's hole, pushing right in.

"Yes..." Peter rolled back, taking him in deep as they panted. "God, yes."

"Yes," he echoed, stilling a moment after his hips were pushed up tight against Peter's ass. He slid his hands along Peter's back, slowly moving them up and down, feeling the warmth and silk of Peter's skin beneath his fingertips.

Then, with a moan, he grabbed hold of Peter's hips and drew out a little, pushing back in immediately.

It earned him a grunt, a deep, needy sound. Peter raised up on his arms, rocking on hands and knees.

"Yeah, Peter. Just like that." He pulled and pushed, hands dragging Peter back on every forward thrust, the two of them finding a rhythm, skin slapping as they came together hard over and over again.

"Love you. Fucking love you." The little moaned obscenity sent a zing through him, made him harder.

He nodded, only gasps coming out of his mouth, and a heartfelt groan as Peter's body squeezed tight around him.

He managed to let go of Peter's hip with one hand, wrapping it around Peter's needy cock instead.

Hot and hard, dripping for him, that prick jumped when he got his fingers around it, jerked hard and fast, driving them both.

"Love you," he mouthed against Peter's skin, no breath left for actual words. His hips pumped, his hand squeezed, his whole body on fire and barreling toward climax. Peter whimpered, bucked and jerked and shot, ass milking his cock and making his eyes roll.

First Step
by Sean Michael

His hips kept pushing, instinctively trying to push himself deeper as Peter's orgasm triggered his own, that squeezing ass demanding every drop of come.

It sent a shudder through him, his spine seeming to shiver. And then he collapsed onto Peter's back, panting hard.

"Love..." Peter was burning against him, skin sheened with sweat.

"Yeah. Love you." He kissed the skin beneath Peter's mouth, and then slowly pulled out, shifting to collapsed next to Peter.

He grabbed the covers with one hand and Peter's arm with the other, tugging.

Peter snatched a towel from the basket under the bed, cleaning them both up before snuggling in. "It was a good day."

"Yeah. Of course they've all been pretty damned good lately." Smiling, he put a kiss on Peter's forehead.

He was one lucky ranger.

Chapter Six

If one more snowflake fell...

One more baby coughed until it puked...

One more shrill scream sounded...

Ellie started screaming, tugging her ears and wailing miserably. Peter's hands slammed on the table, every muscle in his shoulders tight and sore, his head pounding. It had been this way for two days and he was about to lose his mind. Nothing seemed to ease them, nothing lasted long enough and he was just...

Trapped.

Fucking trapped.

She wailed again and Daniel joined her and Peter just stood and headed outside before he screamed, before he snapped.

The cold hit him and he just stood there, bare-footed and bare-chested, eyes burning in his head, fingers curled into fists.

"Damn it, Peter, close the door!"

Chad growled at him, and Daniel's screaming was muffled by a bottle.

"Don't you fucking scream at me." He grabbed the door, slammed it hard enough the glass shook in the frames. God *damn* it.

The door closing cut off the noise of the babies screaming, blessedly muting the noise.

It was grey out, snow falling. Again.

Still.

What the fuck ever.

Peter closed his eyes and just breathed for a second. In. Out. In. Out.

Ellie's screaming got shriller, enough that it was loud through the door again, and then all of a sudden it stopped.

Okay. Come on, Dad. Buck up and go be nurturing and shit. You can do it.

He headed back in, shivering a little, the snow melting on his shoulders.

Daniel was in one of the swings, sucking on a bottle, eyes drooping, closing at a snail's pace and then opening again, while Chad held Ellie horizontal to the floor, swooping her around the living room and making soft airplane noises.

He headed over to the kitchen for aspirin, grinding his teeth and clenching and unclenching his fingers.

"I don't know how long I can keep this up," Chad told him on a nearby pass. "Is it time to give her more pain reliever yet?"

"Twenty ... no, ten minutes. Is her fever coming back?"

"I don't know. You want to get that ear thermometer thing and see? Maybe she'll let you put it in now that she's not screaming her head off." Chad looked about as tired as he felt, arms working, keeping Ellie moving.

"Maybe. If she doesn't get better, I'll need to get her a doctor." He grabbed the thermometer, hiding it from her as he came closer.

Chad nodded. "I'll call headquarters and tell them we need the road cleared as soon as possible. She'll get better though. Babies get colds, right?"

"Yeah. They get colds and poxes and pneumonia and all sorts of things." He whipped the thermometer up, getting her temperature as quick as he could. "And they break things and tear things and fall and get cancer..."

Oh, her fever was going down.

"Cancer? What are you talking about cancer?" Chad had stopped rocking Ellie and was staring at him.

"What?" Christ, his head hurt.

Ellie started working herself up again, and Chad sighed and started bouncing her. "Ten minutes, right?"

"Eight. Let me take her a minute." He reached for her, Chad's hands and Ellie's belly hot against his icy cold fingers. Which, of course, just made her scream louder.

That set Daniel off again, too, and Chad closed his eyes, mouth twisting as he sighed. "Everyone goes through this and actually gets through it, right?"

"That's what they tell me. Maybe I'd be better at this if I was a woman." He held Ellie close, almost screaming himself.

Chad snorted. "Nobody, not woman or man could love these babies more than you do. They just need to stop screaming."

"God, yes." He groaned as the timer on the stove beeped and he started the process of getting Tylenol and Dimetapp into his babies.

And thank the Lord it seemed to take this time, both of them quietening down, their eyes closing.

"Oh, God." Chad looked at him. "I'm scared to put him down in case he wakes up."

"I'm scared to do anything." He stared over at Chad, shocked to find himself shaking. "I'm scared that I've made a terrible mistake."

What had he been thinking? Trying to raise twins? What if he wasn't a good dad? What if he wasn't enough?

"A terrible mistake? What? You mean me? I'll put him down. It's okay, I was joking. Mostly."

Chad put Daniel in the day bed, and came over, taking Ellie from him, putting her down next to her brother.

"I mean me. Don't go all panicky idiot on me now."

Chad grabbed his arm and tugged him over to the couch, and they sank down onto it together, the silence almost loud. "What do you mean you?"

"I mean ... Look at me? Freaking out and almost crying because they're sick? A year ago I was in a high-rise apartment drinking martinis and turning down offers at parties. Now I smell like baby spit and I'm getting a pot belly!"

"They've been cranky and not sleeping and screaming for days, Peter. Do you have any idea how badly I've wanted to scream back at them at the top of my lungs? How many mental bargains I've made for just a few minutes of quiet? You've been handling this like a pro!"

"I..." He looked at Chad, desperate and, if he was honest, scared. "I had to go outside before I lost it."

"Yeah, I noticed. And you left the door open." Chad touched their shoulders together and sighed, hands rubbing at his face. "I don't know what to tell you, Peter, you've been their dad longer than I have. But I can tell you this much—

you think it's a bad thing, that you went outside before you lost it?" Chad shook his head. "Because it's not, you know. You went outside *before* you lost it. I had lots of foster siblings whose folks didn't."

"I'm ... I just. Christ, I'm tired, Chad. I'm tired of the snow falling and I'm tired of them screaming and I'm tired of my head hurting so goddamn bad."

"I know. I know. Come here." Chad pulled him in close, arms going around him. "Why don't you close your eyes for a few minutes. I'm sure the babies will let us know the moment they need us."

"You don't mind?" He settled in, eyes so dry they made a noise when he closed them.

"Well, I was hoping we'd dance a jig or two, but if you'd rather sleep..."

"Bitch." God, he loved that man.

"Well that's better than panicky idiot," murmured Chad, hand sliding on his arm, soothing him.

Chad's husky chuckles followed him right into a trouble sleep.

* * * *

Chad didn't think it could get much worse than the twins being as sick as they'd been, and spending what felt like two solid days screaming. And then hot on the heels of Daniel and Ellie finally turning the corner and starting to get better, Peter'd come down with a high fever that worked itself into the same cold the twins had suffered through.

Peter was bundled up in bed, while Chad had relegated himself to the couch—with the twins still in recovery phase and Peter down for the count, he just couldn't get sick—there was no one else to pitch in.

The twins had finally dropped off around two am, and a quick check on Peter had found Chad's lover also deeply asleep. With a groan and a prayer he wasn't getting sick himself, Chad spread a blanket over his legs and let himself get some much needed rest.

He woke to a violent coughing and the smell of hot cocoa and something baking. He could hear Ellie cooing, hear the creak of Danny's swing. Frowning, he looked around a little wildly, trying to pinpoint where the coughing was coming from. Damn, that sounded like Peter was trying to lose a lung.

"H ... hey." Peter was gray and swaying a little, blinking at him a little owlshly.

"What are you doing out of bed? Have you been baking?" Had Peter lost his mind? Chad got up and went over, arm going around Peter's waist before the man keeled over.

"Uh-huh. You've been so good to us." Peter leaned against him, just burning up.

"You're delirious. Let me put you back to bed. Or maybe a quick lukewarm shower to cool you down some." The man swayed with every step. "You should have woken me, Peter."

"Not delirious. I made food." Peter stumbled a little bit. "Ellie's feeling better."

"Yeah, both kids are better." Still sick enough to be low-key and Chad felt somewhat guilty that he was glad they weren't all the way better, but he had his hands full as it was.

"So what did you make?" he asked, as he led Peter back to the couch, figuring his lover might want to be close to the kids for awhile. Besides, the couch was comfy enough to sleep on, as he'd just proved.

"Blueberry muffins and eggs." Peter sank like a stone, curling up under the blanket with a soft sigh.

Well, he could smell the muffins cooking in the oven. "What did you do with the eggs?" he asked, sniffing again—nothing was burning.

"Uh ... The microwave?"

"Cool. Are you hungry?" Chad wrapped blankets around Peter and double checked to make sure Ellie was still happy in the playpen, Daniel still dozing away in the swing, little fingers curled into fists and resting near his face. He blinked and shook himself, trying to wake up completely—they definitely could both use some food in them.

Ellie waved at him, rattle in hand, just beaming as he walked by. "Da!"

"Hey, baby girl." He waved back and went to see what was going on in the kitchen. It looked like Peter'd even done the dishes and Chad shook his head, finding the eggs scrambled and cold, still sitting in the microwave.

He threw them out and started a new batch, while he put bread in the toaster and made up enough bottles to last them through tomorrow. The sleep had done him good, but he

could feel the tickle in his throat, and knew that it was only a matter of time before he came down with it as well.

Unless he staved it off.

Looking through the cupboards, he found the vitamin C and the Echinacea, and he swallowed a few before pouring out two big glasses of orange juice and setting them on a tray. He buttered the toast when it popped and split out the eggs onto two plates. Utensils, a couple of napkins, and he headed back into the living room—there was still about ten minutes left on timer for the muffins.

Ellie kept jabbering away at him, happy as anything to just smile and wave and talk to him. Thank God she was feeling better.

He set their breakfast up on the coffee table and shook Peter's shoulder gently. "You hungry?"

"Yeah. Yeah..." Peter smiled over at him. "My head fucking hurts, babe. No wonder they were screaming."

"You want something for it?" he asked, fingers rubbing at Peter's temples, feeling the heat of fever there, although he thought maybe it wasn't as bad as it had been.

"That's good." Peter's eyes closed, the man just slumping back against the cushions.

"How about some food? Scrambled eggs and toast. There's juice, too." He kept rubbing Peter's temples, his own stomach growling.

"You should eat. I need to take the muffins out."

"Don't worry about the muffins, Peter."

He did want to get some food into Peter before it got cold. "What if I fed you?" He asked around a mouthful of egg and

toast. He speared a forkful of food and airplaned it to Peter's lips. "Open the hanger door."

Peter chuckled, lips opening. Ellie heard them and laughed, little rattle shaking wildly. God, he loved those sounds, the ones that meant home and family, that meant his family was okay, even if they were a little under the weather.

He managed to coax half the eggs into Peter, and then left him with a glass of orange juice while he went to take the muffins out. He could hear Daniel waking up, so he warmed a couple of bottles up as well.

"You need to eat, lover." Peter came wandering back, stopping to ease Ellie up out of her playpen. "Christ, you've gotten heavy, girl."

"And you need to sit, or even lie down. You aren't going to get better wandering around and baking and stuff." Peter was a worse patient than the kids.

He handed over a bottle and put a few muffins on a plate to put on the coffee table, so they'd be in easy reach, then fetched Daniel out of his swing. Peter settled on the sofa, cradling Ellie to his chest and pushing the nipple in her lips. Chad sat next to them with Daniel, taking up a similar pose.

He leaned his head against the back of the couch, alternately watching Daniel and Peter with Ellie. God, tired as he was, he wouldn't give this up for anything.

There was a faint rumble in the distance and he grinned. "Hey. I think that's the snowplow."

"Yeah? You going to leave us for the quiet bustle of town?" Peter winked, smiling back.

He chuckled. "Not this lifetime. Ken'll probably drop in and make sure we're all right though."

"Maybe he brought some cough medicine." Peter pulled the blanket tighter around him. "You want me to go get dressed?"

"Nah, you're decent. He'll be here in about ten minutes unless the roads are worse than I suspect." He kissed Peter's forehead. "I should freshen up, though, can you take Daniel, too?"

"Sure." The babies were both holding their own bottles, happy and lazy, more than willing to rest with their daddy.

God, they were gorgeous. All three of them.

He made short work of brushing his teeth and his hair and threw on a shirt he hadn't been sleeping in all night. By the time the snowplow was coming up the path to the station, he was ready. It felt a bit weird—the first person they'd seen since Christmas.

"Hey man!" Ken Whitefeather waved at him, grabbing a box from the passenger seat. "I brought supplies. There's more in here. How's it going?"

"Awesome, thanks man." He grabbed a second box and followed Ken in. "We had an evil cold blow through, but everyone seems to be on the mend."

He dumped the box on the coffee table. "Peter, this is Ken Whitefeather. Ken, this is my family—Peter and the twins. Ellie and Daniel."

"Hey guys. Man, you look *worn*." Ken stayed back, nodded. "I brought some fresh fruit, milk, some juice, odds and ends."

Peter smiled, waved awkwardly around the babies. "Nice to meet you."

"Oh, man, fresh fruit. I think you just made Peter's day. How bad is it out there?"

"We've seen worse. It's going to be a long, hard winter." Ken shrugged. "Cord Pollack sent his wife and kids into the city to winter. Said he couldn't do it with them."

Chad winced. Oh yeah, that's what Peter needed to hear. "I can't say I blame him. That station's barely livable in the summer. We're good here. Best of everything."

To his complete shock Peter nodded. "Chad and I are looking forward to having the babies to ourselves. How many parents get that opportunity these days?"

Chad just nodded and added, "I can't imagine sending them away."

Peter's eyes held his a second, really at peace for the first time in days. At least until Peter started coughing again.

Chad looked wryly at Ken. "I don't supposed there's cough drops or something in one of these boxes?"

"You know it. Honey lemon." Ken winked. "I also brought some movies."

"Damn, now I don't have an excuse to watch *Gladiator* for the fortieth time." He grinned and shook Ken's hand. "Thanks, man, we appreciate it."

"Anytime. I'll be back by in a couple of weeks, just to check. Call if you need us."

"You know it." He shook Ken's hand again and walked the man out, waving as the snowplow slowly headed back down the drive.

He headed back in, closing the cold out with the door. The two boxes drew him to the coffee table. "It's like Christmas all over again."

"Yeah. What's in there?" The babies were set down again, Ellie holding onto the coffee table and trying to walk, Danny crawling like mad.

Chad opened the first box, grinning. "Apples and oranges. Wow, a pineapple, two papayas, and a pomegranate. Cheese, milk, and a couple bottles of juice."

He tossed one of the oranges at Peter.

"Mmm." Peter caught it, brought it up to smell. "Yum."

"And this one has ... bread, Tylenol, cough medicine, cough drops, formula, two comedies, two action flicks, a couple of mystery books, a deck of cards, and a cribbage board." He grinned. It really was like Christmas.

"Oh, this is excellent." Peter grabbed the cough drops, looking like a kid in a candy store.

Chad laughed, making Ellie squeal, and Daniel come crawling over to him, tugging on his pants and wanting up. "God, you're cute."

"They're wonderful." Peter blew a raspberry at Ellie, Daniel jabbering at him ninety-to-nothing.

It was good to see Peter smiling, happy. It had been a damned hard week. He put Daniel back down and rolled a ball, watching his boy go eagerly after it.

With Daniel happily playing with the ball, and Ellie trying to walk herself around the coffee table, Chad sat with Peter. "You're looking a lot better."

"Good." Peter smiled at him, leaned into his arms. "I'm ready to."

"Yeah? You think you can stay up after the twins go to bed tonight and we can watch a movie. I'll pop some corn and everything."

"I can sure try." Peter's cheek rested on his chest, eyelashes tickling.

"Mmm ... good. Good." They could use a normal night after the babies and Peter being so sick. He stroked his fingers through Peter's hair, watching the twins suck on their bottles.

Peter fell asleep, fingers moving idly over his leg. Ellie crawled over, using his legs to climb up, staring at Peter. "Da!"

"Sh. He's sleeping, sweetie. You should play with your brother." He knew if he moved Peter would wake up. Of course it was also hard to resist those chubby cheeks.

Ellie reached out, stretching for Peter's nose.

"No, you don't, you little imp." He grabbed her hand and touched her on the nose to distract her. "You just believe everyone should be paying attention to you if you're awake, don't you? Well, I'm here—you'll have to make do with me." Those pretty eyes just twinkled, her smile shining, teeth bright.

He grinned back, reaching down the side of the couch and finding a rattle. He chuckled at himself, looking around. There was kiddie stuff everywhere, the mantle was growing pictures, too: the twins, Peter and him.

The child gate cut off the loft with its extra beds, and soon they'd need one for the kitchen, or to childproof all the cupboards and drawers. His life had been taken over.

And he couldn't be happier.

* * * *

"Chad! Chad, come *here!*" Peter sat at his desk, just staring over across the living room, stunned. "Lover, *hurry!*" Chad couldn't miss this.

Chad came running from the office, stockinged feed sliding on the hardwood floor. "Peter? What's the matter?"

"Look!"

Danny and Ellie were standing together, swaying. Then Danny looked at Chad and took a single step forward. "Da!"

"Oh my God!" Chad sounded about as stunned and amazed as he felt. His lover took a step toward the twins, arms opening up. "That's it, Daniel. Come to daddy."

Ellen frowned, staring at Daniel, even as Danny took another wobbly step, arms reaching for Chad. Peter slipped down on the floor, grinning at his daughter. "Look at your brother go!"

Chad laughed, settling down on his haunches. "Go, baby boy, go. That's it, come on, you can do it."

"Da! Dadada!" Daniel started speeding up, managing another two steps before launching himself into Chad's arms.

Chad hugged Daniel tight, still laughing, face lit up with joy. "You walked! Such a smart, wonderful boy!"

Ellie dropped down, crawling over to Chad and Daniel, pushing into the embrace. Peter opened his mouth to tell her

to not be jealous when she hugged Danny tight, her happy, delighted laugh ringing out. "Oh, Ellie, you're wonderful, too." Chad hugged them both tight, meeting his eyes over their heads.

His throat was tight, so he just nodded. Yeah. Yeah, they were just wonderful.

Just wonderful and theirs.

"Hey, shift back a few feet. Let's see if he'll do it again!" Chad got Daniel's attention and pointed at him. "You want to show Dad how you can walk? Can you go to Dad?"

"Da!" Daniel gave him a grin and Peter nodded.

"Come on, Danny. Come here." Walk to me. Let me see.

Chad held him up, fingers around the little waist and then slowly letting go. "Go on, Danny. Go see Dad."

Danny balanced, then gave him a grin and took about a step and a half before he landed on his butt. Danny blinked, stared, and then laughed like a loon.

Chad snorted and helped Danny stand again. "You big silly. Give it another go."

This time Danny did it, walking right into his arms and cuddling in for a hug. Peter rocked his son, so proud he couldn't bear it.

"God, Peter. This is..." Chad shook his head. "I love you."

"Yeah." He kissed Danny's dark hair, grinning as Ellie turned and reached for Chad, demanding her own hugs and praise.

Chad fell back onto his back and lifted her up, flying her in place, making her squeal and laugh. Danny clapped and blew a raspberry, waving and laughing. He grabbed Danny, lips

finding the warm little belly to tickle. It was hard to believe that a couple weeks ago he was ready to scream in sheer frustration.

They played for a little longer before the babies started wriggling, heading for the pile of soft blankets and toys and juice bottles. Peter grinned over at Chad, just beaming. "I didn't want you to miss that."

"That would have been a tragedy! Wow. His first steps." Chad chuckled and crawled over to sit next to him, arms looping around his waist. "I was sure Ellie was going to be the first to do that."

"She doesn't like falling." Ellie was playing very diligently with her favorite stuffed dog, jabbering at it and feeding it her bottle.

"Yeah, but she's been walking around hanging onto that coffee table for days and days."

Chad kissed the side of his neck.

"Uh-huh..." He lifted his chin, goosebumps rising on his skin.

He could feel Chad smile against his skin, and then he was given another kiss. "You taste good," Chad murmured. "Under the baby-powder."

"Bitch." He chuckled, scooting even closer. "Baby powder is quite the aphrodisiac, I hear."

"Where did you hear that?" Chad's lips wrapped around his earlobe, tongue playing with the bit of flesh.

"Uh ... Nickelodeon?" Don't stop, love.

Chad laughed, chest rising and falling against him. Then the sound was cut off as Chad went back to seducing him,

mouth nibbling at his earlobe again before sliding down along his neck, the touch warm and soft and good. Peter let himself relax into the touches, heavy-lidded eyes periodically checking on the kids. As he relaxed, Chad started to let a hand wander. It slid beneath his sweater, stroking up over his belly and then further up, fingertips teasing his nipples one at a time.

"Lover..." His nipples drew up almost painfully tight, each touch sparking through him. Christ, it had been awhile. Too long.

"Right here," whispered Chad, even as he shifted, spreading his thighs and bringing Peter back into the lee of his body.

With Chad's strength behind him, he was free to rest back and enjoy it as Chad's fingers pinched lightly, sending sparks shooting from his nipples right to his cock. The tongue working his neck added to the sensations, making them bigger. Slow and steady, the heat between them bloomed, his cock pressing against his zipper, throbbing nice and easy as pleasure filled him. He could feel a matching hardness against his ass, Chad not rubbing or pushing against him, letting it just happen.

A soft hum tickled his neck and Chad's other hand teased along his waistband, fingers occasionally dipping into it to stroke his skin below the belt. He pulled his sweater down, checking on the babies, who were both blissfully, blessedly sound asleep, curled together in the blankets.

"You feel good. Even better than you taste. That *could* be because of the baby powder." Chad nipped at his earlobe and then soothed it with his tongue.

"We should have put the babies in their bed. I want you." More than just about anything.

"So we bring the baby monitor out here and we go to our bed," Chad suggested, hand sliding to cup his hard-on through his jeans.

"You think they'll be safe?" He rolled up, humping a little bit.

"We'll close the bathroom door and put a chair in front of the kitchen entrance and they'll be just fine, Peter. Our home is safe for them." Chad's hand squeezed and rubbed, teasing him.

"Oh. I. Uh..." He needed. Now. He also wanted the anticipation, this amazing want, to stay.

He could feel another smile against his skin, Chad grinning at him. "You what, babe?"

"Need." His cock ached, throbbed in his jeans.

Chad nodded. "We should go into the bedroom, then." Chad nuzzled his jaw and rubbed their cheeks together.

"Uh-huh." Peter moaned, clamping his lips together as Danny shifted. "Let's get them in the crib. Then we don't have to worry at all."

Then he could just let go.

Chad squeezed him through his trousers again. "Whatever you want, Peter."

"I want to feel you in me. I want to make love." Jesus, he wanted.

Chad groaned, cock pushing against his ass. And then Chad stood and headed for the babies. "Come on then. I want you."

They managed to get the babies settled without waking either up for more than a second. Then they made a beeline for the bedroom, both starting to strip.

Chad chuckled. "Ever seen two men get naked this fast before?"

"Nope." He grinned, tackling Chad and sending them both to the bed. The soft chuckles turned to laughter, Chad's arms going around him, his lover's mouth latching onto his shoulder, hot and sucking. Oh, that was just what he needed. He grabbed Chad's hand, pushed it down to his prick. "Good."

Chad groaned around his skin, fingers curling around his cock and stroking him firmly, thumb pressing against his slit.

"Yeah. Yeah." His hips started moving immediately, humping up against that touch.

"Save it for me, Peter," murmured Chad, free hand sliding down to tease at his crack.

"Trying." He chuckled, the sound a little breathy. "It's been a while."

Chad let go of his cock and reached for the lube. "Then I better get down to business."

"God, yes. Please." He turned to hands and knees, ass shifting. Please.

"Peter..." Chad's fingers slid over his ass, lingered sweetly, and then they parted his ass cheeks and Chad's tongue touched his hole.

Oh ... His eyes rolled, fingers curling into the sheets. Just like that. Chad licked again, and then again, tongue hot and wet and incredibly good against his skin.

"Don't tease. I need you." He spread wider, the offer clear.

"Need this?" Chad asked before pushing his tongue in.

He nodded, then shook his head. He needed that. He needed more. He just *needed*.

Chad's tongue fucked him, pushing into him again and again. So damned good, and making him need even harder. He balanced on one hand, reaching down to stroke his own cock. The touch made him moan, made him rock back faster. The amazing licking stopped suddenly, and Chad settled between his legs, the heat of his cock rubbing along his crack.

"God, yes. Hurry." At his words, Chad's hands slid up along his spine, massaging, slowing him back down. Letting him feel.

"Been too long to let it be over too soon." Chad's prick nudged his hole, and then the head slipped in, spreading him wide and holding there.

"Love..." His eyes closed and he dropped his head down on his arms, focused on feeling.

Chad moaned and slid in a little further. "Hot. And tight. Peter. So tight."

"Yours." He could die happy. Right now.

"Uh-huh. Mine." Chad slid in the rest of the way, cockhead bumping against his gland, lightening shooting up his spine.

"Yes!" Jerking, Peter pushed up on his arms, rocking so Chad rubbed over his gland again and again.

"Want to do this forever, Peter." Chad's hands wrapped around his hips, tugging him back harder and harder.

"Okay. Good. Good plan. Fucking excellent plan..." Flying. He was fucking flying.

Chad moved faster, filling him over and over, sending him soaring. "Yeah, forever."

"Love you. Don't stop." He was close, right there on the edge and flying.

"No stopping," whispered Chad, hands tightening on his hips, pulling him in harder.

That was all he needed, seed pouring out of him in waves as his hips pumped.

"Peter!" Chad plunged into him a few more times, hips jerking. Then his name was called again, Chad coming deep inside him.

"Needed. Needed that." Needed Chad.

Chad grunted in reply, hand squeezing his cock gently. Then his lover pulled out, whimpering softly as their bodies parted. Peter sort of melted, relaxed down to the bone. Chad settled beside him, tugging him in close, arm warm and heavy across his waist.

His lover's breath was warm on his neck, Chad nuzzling. "Happy, Peter?"

He thought about it for a minute. He had his babies, his home, his lover, his writing. His whole life.

"Yeah. Yeah, honey, I am."

Chad's smile was slow and sweet, the kiss he was given going right to his soul.

"Good. Me, too."

First Step
by Sean Michael

"Good."

It was.

Better than anything he'd ever imagined.

END

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