



stress relief

ba tortuga

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

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Chapter One

He had been a big kid—the football player type. Even in college he'd played and he'd enjoyed it. Not linebacker big, but close.

Then he'd gone to work and with work came lunches at the Tavern and decadent suppers at Louis' or Chez Marie or Mekong River. Snacks with Amos and nights where suppers consisted of a bottle of honey and a plate of apples and his lover's skin.

David looked at himself in the mirror, hand sliding down his flat belly. Those days were long gone, rich food and lazy weekends and Amos washed away by icy Russian vodka, a steady mix of uppers and antacids, and hours of work.

He looked good. Lean. Heading toward skinny. Almost quarterback skinny.

Amazing what a lifestyle change could do to ... for a man.

* * * *

It hadn't been bad, loving Amos. Christ, David still thought sometimes it was the best thing anyone could ask for—sex, laughter, long lazy Sunday mornings, ball games and someone to work with and...

Yeah, the sex was fabulous.

Amos liked to play games, liked to see how far they could go before someone got caught. He liked to tease, liked to slowly make Amos mad with wanting. They'd both loved the parts after—the quiet touching, the ways their mouths slid together.

He rested his cheek against his pillow, eyes closed, hand wrapped around his prick, remembering everything he could—tastes and smells and sounds. Remembering the feel of Amos' hand, the way Amos called him 'Baby' so low and fine and it didn't feel stupid or silly or anything because it was Amos' way and David loved him.

Loved him.

And it hadn't been bad.

* * * *

"I've arranged an appointment with your barber, David, and your tailor, in preparation for your trip next weekend." Iris sounded so ... much like Iris, but a little more quiet since Harry died, a little sadder.

"Where am I going next weekend?" He met her washed-out blue eyes with a smile. David trusted her completely, enjoyed being able to not to worry about his schedule, not to have to think about where he was headed and how he was getting there.

She shook her head and gave him a grin. "Your sister's wedding? Remember? You're the best man, David. Your speech was emailed to you last week in Burma."

"Oh. Right. Maria and..."

"Carlton, David. Carlton Evans."

"Have we arranged for a gift?" He checked his calendar, sure enough, he was flying down south Friday night, leaving for Paris 3 am Sunday morning.

"Of course. You gave her a lovely set of crystal and paid for the reception."

He blinked over. "You must like her, Iris."

Grey curls bobbed. "She loves you very much, David. Would you care for anything while I'm out running errands this afternoon?"

"No. Thank you." He meant to say something more, something meaningful, but the phone rang and she picked it up at his desk, her British accent more clipped and clear when she was in pro-assistant mode.

He was handed the phone with a serious look. "Jergens from Berlin. There's a touch of complication with the Weston merger, it appears. You'll want to it take it."

He nodded, popping the lap top open to search for the file as Iris searched through one of a dozen file cabinets and handed him the dossier. By the time he looked up, she was gone.

* * * *

The heart attack was the scariest thing Amos had ever been through. He figured he was dead for sure. It wasn't just a mild heart attack. It was surgery. They'd had to cut him wide open, and damned if they didn't find stuff wrong with some of his other innards at the same time. Now he had a zipper on his chest and belly, a wide, white scar, heavy and smooth.

Now he had a fully functioning heart, but only because of some artery grafting or something. He had one good kidney, and one that was half the size it should have been. There were other things, he was sure, like lingering problems from ulcers and shit, but he tried not to think about it, because he was in good shape, for the shape he was in.

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That wasn't the hard part. Neither was the recovery, or the taking up a new job and rearranging all of his priorities.

The hardest part of the whole thing had been telling David he couldn't stay, and knowing that Dave would never go with him.

* * * *

The water only came up to his calves. Cool and clean and clear, it lapped at his legs, and he sank his toes into the mud, enjoying the feel.

Amos bent to scoop up a handful of that water, letting it slide down his chest and belly, over his hip and down his leg. There was nothing like skinny dipping. Nothing at all.

He'd always been something of an exhibitionist, playing games that almost got him caught. Them caught, when he was with David, but he'd never gone so far as to just strip down in a public place back then.

Sometimes he wondered what Dave would think of him now, standing naked in a fast moving river for all the world to see.

* * * *

Amos sat with his feet up on the rail of his porch, beer in one hand, cigarette in the other. His dog Noodle sprawled on the beer hand side, snoring like a buzz saw.

The sunset was bold and bright, all gold and red and orange, painted across the back of the mountains in broad strokes. The breeze was cool, but not cold. He could smell the river.

All in all, life was good. Amos was content. And if he was lonely sometimes for a certain face, or a certain voice? Well.

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Given enough time the canyon and the river would wear that away.

* * * *

David blinked over at the clock—03:48. Damn.

He was tired of fighting the insomnia, tired of fighting the stress. Hell, he was just tired.

He got out of bed and stumbled across the room to the shower, the path familiar as breathing. Ten years he'd been in this apartment. God, they'd been ecstatic when they'd found it—ninth floor, one big bedroom, one tiny one, closets, a view of the city. The selling point had been the bathroom. The walls were covered in blue tiles, the tub big enough to make love in, the shower surrounded in clear, fog-proof glass so they could use the camera if...

Eh. Cameras were all digital now and God knew the steam could probably ruin them in no time.

David brushed his teeth, took four Excedrin Migraine and half a red without even looking. One nice thing about living alone? Things were always right where you left them.

He turned on the hot water, left the light off. If he left at 5, he could be in his office at 6 and be on the phone to London taking care of business.

* * * *

The scariest night of his life had been the night of Amos' heart attack. He'd spent the entire night on his knees in the chapel, lighting candles and praying, feeling more Catholic than he'd felt since he was an altar boy.

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The sun had come up and shone through the cheesy stained glass and made his hands mottled in greens and blues and reds and...

He'd promised God anything. Anything at all. Just let his lover wake up and be whole and right and good again. When the cardiologist came out and told him Amos was going to be fine, he'd wept, thanked God with everything he was.

Called the office to tell them he'd be telecommuting for a few days.

Sometimes now, in the middle of the night when the apartment was so quiet it hurt, he thought maybe God had a truly evil sense of humor. He thought maybe he'd never promise anything ever again.

* * * *

David enjoyed his job. Oh, forget that. He loved it with a passion.

He loved the pressure and the challenge. He loved business lunches and the coffee in the break room and the way his office was decorated. He loved the way his heart pounded when he was at the edge of doing something special, something big. He loved knowing that people depended on him, could depend on him.

He loved knowing that there was something he was good at—really good at. Somewhere he wasn't lacking. Somewhere he was important.

Somewhere he did things right.

* * * *

Snowboarding. Skiing. Rafting. Hiking.

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A hundred and one things that Amos could do out in the big wide world he lived in, all of them getting him closer to the country he loved.

The canyon walls were red, dotted with gray and green. The trees were all evergreens and scrub, twisted from the lack of rain, made beautiful by deprivation. The river was a black ribbon from the top of the ridge, a silky brownish blue from the lip of his boat, and cold and clear from water level when he was floating through the rapids with nothing between him and the rocks but a life vest.

Most days? It was so damned pretty that he didn't even miss not having anyone but Noodle to share it with.

* * * *

Beans and bacon. They were a far cry from beef roulades and oysters on the half shell and good wine. But over a wood fire? They tasted good. They filled you up. They satisfied.

Amos fed a bit of bacon to Noodle, who snapped it up and sniffed around for more. Besides, you couldn't feed oysters to your dog under the table. It just wasn't done.

Beans and bacon were better.

* * * *

Some days Amos would see himself in a shop window, or in the glassy reflection of the water, and wonder who he was. The way he saw himself, as the pale, soft executive, or the even paler invalid, recovering from major surgery, well, he wasn't that guy anymore.

He was healthy looking. Tanned, with good muscles, okay not a great chest, but arms and abs and legs looked good. He figured his chest was always gonna look a little hollow, but it

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wasn't a bad look. His beard made his face look sharper, less little boy, and his hair was still nice and thick.

Yeah. Some days he didn't even recognize himself. And sometimes that little shock was a good thing.

* * * *

The winter nights were the worst. In the summer Amos was too damned busy to think about it and out under the stars on summer nights, with Noodle to keep him company and a bunch of tourists to look out for, it stayed away from the forefront of his mind.

The winter nights though, when all there was outside was snow, and Noodle was curled up in front of the fire, well, that's when Amos thought of how Dave used to taste, how Dave had felt, inside him and on him and around him.

Curled up beneath his quilts, hand moving fast on his prick, Amos thought about Dave's fat cock, and the way Dave's balls hung, and about that little roll of extra flesh on Dave's belly, just a tiny thing, right around the belly button, and how he'd leave marks there.

When he came on those winter nights it wasn't much of a relief.

Yeah. Winter nights were the worst.

Chapter Two

It was weird. Even after traveling all over the world, staying in every type of hotel known to man, from crappy little motor inns in the Arizona desert to the highest tech, swankiest little thing in Tokyo?

It was still disorienting to wake up and not be in your own bed.

David fumbled across the big assed bed and found a phone, punching 0 and growling. "David Llaves. Coffee, bagel, strawberries. No butter."

Then he shuffled off towards the shower, trying to figure out where and when and why the hell he was ... wherever it was he was this morning. It only took a handful of aspirin and two washes of his hair before he remembered. Right. Vacation.

Rosewood ... No. Cherrywood? No. Somewhere Wood, Colorado. Travel agent guaranteed to be fun and relaxing and yeah ... There should be an itinerary in his portable. Iris would never have let him go without one.

His breakfast was waiting when he finished his shower and he logged on in between cups two and three of coffee. Hmm ... Iris had booked him on a rafting trip, a couple of spa days and some biking thing, all spread out over two weeks. Excellent.

If he worked it right, he could relax, de-stress, get some sun and sleep and land the Greece deal in his spare time. Greece. Right. He reached for the room phone again. "David

Llaves again. I need Greek language tapes located, please, also, I'll need the number of the local brokers brought up and flowers sent to Iris Dean..."

Nothing like a vacation to get the old mind back into working order.

* * * *

The boat was strapped on the trailer, the provisions for a two man, two day deluxe trip were packed. Amos fired up the old pickup and headed up river to meet up with his tourist, some big shot whose secretary called to set up the trip. Corporate credit card. La di da. There was a time that would have been him.

Noodle whined at him and Amos gave him a pat before rummaging in the bag on the seat next to him and pulling out a Twinkie. "Here you go, boy."

The big yellow lab sucked it down and Amos winced and wished he'd unwrapped the thing first. Old Bob would be pulling plastic out of the dog's butt for the whole two days he was gone. Come to think of it, that was kinda amusing. Turning up the radio and singing along with Garth at the top of his lungs, Amos bopped on down the road.

Good Old Bob was probably at the Hotel Colorado right now, picking up his customer. They'd meet up at the boat launch, and Bob and Bob's son would take the truck and trailer, and Noodle, and meet them two days downstream.

It was an arrangement that worked well for the Bobs. He did all the hard work, Bob did all the bitching, and Bob's son got to spend some time in a different vehicle from the old man, which was a novel experience. Amos did wonder

sometimes if little Bob talked to himself as he drove, because the man never got a word in edgewise around Old Bob.

Worked well for him, too. Absently, Amos rubbed the big, smooth scar that ran down his sternum and over his belly. Physical work made him feel pretty darned good. Made him feel right. He rolled down the window and lit up a cigarette. River guiding was his favorite part of the job, even better than leading a hike or snowshoeing. He could only hope Mr. Rich Guy didn't ruin it by being a pain in the ass.

* * * *

David had left his spare cell, his portable and his pda in the hotel safe, along with his passport and various other crap that he'd notice if the staff stole. The cheap cell was wrapped in a hopefully watertight container along with a good pen and a notebook, along with a change of jeans and a couple of light weight shirts and sunscreen.

He'd almost cancelled—the Greek office was starting to make those noises that meant things were going to happen soon—but Iris and his shrink had both made him promise to follow the itinerary—for his own fucking good. Like he was a kid. Well, okay, he could be Iris' kid and he was paying Lew for advice, but still...

He faked an interest in whatever gibberish the old man that picked him up was going on about, half-heartedly admiring the scenery. Maybe he should get a screen saver with mountains. That would be relaxing...

"You listening to me, boy? That there is where they had a rockslide last week. Boulder came down and hit some man's

windshield. Squashed him like a bug." The old man was looking at him out of the corner of one rheumy blue eye.

"Goodness. And people come here to relax, you say?" Wonderful. Nature in all her pre-menstrual glory just looking to make men like him pay for not subsidizing environmental lobbyists.

"Oh, yeah. The ones that don't get lost in the river or flattened by a rock or hit by an avalanche? They have a real good time." He got a broad wink, and then they were turning off the interstate, which was cut right into the walls of what the old man called The Canyon, as if there was only one in the world, and onto a tiny, twisty, switchback challenged road.

"Well, I'm assuming the killer avalanches aren't hunting me right now, and I'll attempt not to lose myself in the river." He arched an eyebrow and smiled. "The rocks? Those might get me."

The old man cackled and told him to hang on as they took a sharp right and went straight down toward the river. He decided that he was simply going to drown when they splashed right in. Him, the old guy, the man's son, and the truck. Blub blub.

They stopped before they went off the bank, however, and his driver hopped out and started grabbing his things out of the back of the vehicle. Well, that was almost enough relaxation for a whole day. He grinned and got out of the truck, inordinately pleased that he hadn't gasped.

The sound of barking came from somewhere off in the brush, and soon enough a large yellowish dog bounded into

view, sniffing him thoroughly before bouncing over to the driver's son and begging for an ear scratching. The brush parted again not long after, and a lean, nut-brown man he assumed was his river guide appeared.

He took about two steps forward before he got a good look at the man and his heart stopped. Just stopped.

There were things that were never supposed to happen in a man's life. You should never have to see your parents naked, you should never have to lose your balls, you should never have to meet the man who left you and the rat race behind to get back to nature. Never.

"Amos."

The dearly held hope that he was wrong died a quick death when Amos stopped as if hit with a brick. "Well, I'll be damned. Dave."

"David." The correction was immediate, instinctive. "Jesus. I didn't expect to see you."

Not now. Hell, not ever.

"Yeah." Amos looked him over, green eyes bright and curious. Noting the changes, no doubt, but that was only fair, as Amos had changed as well. There was a short beard now, neatly trimmed, and the brown hair was streaked liberally with blonde. "You look good."

"Thank you." It was amazing what an eye tuck and a diet of bagels and uppers could do for a man. "You do, too. The years have been good to you."

His heart was pounding and he simply didn't know what to do. He wasn't ready. He wasn't ever going to be ready for this, but why couldn't he have been in a suit? Been in a classy

joint sipping a martini and able to just smile coolly and escape?

Amos snapped out of the shock first, or at least it appeared so, and reached out to take his bag from the old man, nodding. "Thanks, Bob. I'll see you and Bob tomorrow night. You take good care of Noodle, okay? Oh, and he ate a wrapper."

Bob and Bob made faces, loaded up the dog, and he and Amos were alone, as the others drove off without a glance.

"Noodle?" He must look shell-shocked. He sounded fucking stunned.

"Yeah. He looks like an egg noodle and is about as smart as one. C'mon. Boat's this way." He followed along as Amos turned and ambled down a trail he hadn't even seen.

He fumbled his sunglasses on, needing the protection in a sudden, harsh way. He had spent years, years loving this man in front of him, built a whole life with Amos and then, when it was over and done with, built a new life without. He hadn't expected this at all.

He watched as Amos tied his bag down at the back of the raft and covered the waterproof looking compartment with a tarp. Then Amos grabbed a life vest and walked over to him. "You'll need to put this on and then let me tighten it up."

"Are you ... Okay. Sure." He took the vest and wiggled into it. Okay, so he wouldn't drown. That was good. Damn, that only left rocks and avalanches to get him out of this...

The two straps at the sides and the ones at the front got tightened down hard enough to take his breath, all with quick, efficient motions. "The vest has to be tight. If it's not and you

went in the river, it would slide up around your neck and you'd have some trouble. June's early in the summer up here, so the water's still pretty chilly. When we make our stops we can do some wading, but try not to take a dip, okay?" Amos looked him over one more time. "I'm your guide, yeah? I want you to have a good time, but I have to ask you to do what I ask, when I ask, for safety's sake. Okay?"

"You're the boss." He dug in his pocket for a roll of antacids and took three, along with four aspirin, just chewing them all. Damn his fucking pride anyway. Why didn't he just tell Amos this was a bad idea, a fucking horrible idea? The bad idea to beat all ideas.

"I..." Amos blew out a breath. "You want to do this, Dave? David? I'll understand if you don't. Bob's got a two way. I can call him back."

"I ... Oh fuck, Amos. I don't even know what to say to you. I didn't think I'd ever see you again." He shook his head, hand running through his hair.

"Yeah. I hear that." They sat there in silence for a few moments before Amos shrugged and motioned him to the boat. "I'll push out a bit and then you get in over the back."

"Okay." He watched Amos—God, the man looked good, healthy, happy, so different and still the same all at once—and moved toward the water. "When did you learn how to do this?"

"Last few years." The boat slid into the water and bobbed gently, Amos holding the rolled lip of the raft and waiting for him to scramble in. "I did a lot of this kind of stuff as a kid. Picked up my licenses and stuff a year ago."

"Oh." He settled in and listened to the sound of his heart pounding. "You like it?"

"Yeah." That grin was heartbreakingly familiar. "It's good." They shoved off and Amos scrambled in with barely a splash, picking up a long pair of oars and attaching them at the back of the boat. "There's a paddle, there in the front. If I need you to row, grab it and start paddling."

He nodded, glad as fuck for his glasses. Paddling. He could manage that. Hell, he was learning Greek, wasn't he? He learned Japanese and Portuguese and merger law of more countries than most people could name. He could fucking well paddle.

* * * *

Well. Fuck him up the ass with an oar. Dave. If you had asked him who the last person was that he ever expected to see on a rafting trip in Colorado? It would have been Dave.

His ex, Dave.

The man that he still thought of as his one real thing Dave. Fuck a doodle doo.

Amos concentrated on steering and once they got free of the scree on the sides of the banks, he pulled up his sunglasses and put on his hat. And reached for his cigarettes to light one up. Oh, yeah. That was what he needed. He drew in a deep drag, and let it out in a rush.

"Those aren't good for you, Amos." The words, the tone—gentle and low and fond and rich, the hint of Dave's upbringing in the Gulf almost evident—were so familiar, they gave him goose bumps.

God. He closed his eyes for a minute, then leaned down to dip the cigarette in the water and put it in a Ziploc bag. Dave always chided him for smoking. Just like he always ignored the antacids. "So what brings you out this way?"

"Iris." Dave chuckled, ran one hand through that thick hair. Amos wondered if it felt different, with all the silver in it. "My doctor said I needed a vacation; Iris made the arrangements. I flew in from California, will probably go from here to Athens."

"The doctor?" That sounded bad. "Athens?"

"Yeah, I'm brokering a merger between a Greek bank and series of oil interests in the Middle East. We're having some language barrier issues, but I'm hopeful we'll all end up in a satisfactory position."

Well, that put one fear to rest. Much as he admired Dave for making a deal like that, there was not a spark of interest in him as far as doing it. No jealousy that Dave was and he wasn't. "Cool. Congratulations."

"It's not a signed deal yet." The tone of that voice left no question it would be, though, now didn't it. There wasn't even a little of the tentative worry that he had been used to. Looked like that got eaten away along with whatever extra padding Dave had carried when they were together.

A wistful longing for that little roll of fat on Dave's belly hit him, but Amos shook it off and steered them away from an outcropping that popped up so quick it could have been trouble. "Sounds like you're doing well for yourself, Dave."

"I get by, yes. I work hard." A soft chuckle sounded, Dave pushing his sunglasses up. "But you know that, yeah?"

"Hell, yes. You always did." Fuck, but it was excruciating making small talk. They had to do this for two days.

"It's what I'm good at." Dave sighed, rubbed one temple. "This has got to be one of the strangest scenarios I have ever been in."

He surprised himself with a laugh. "Oh, I don't know. There was that one time in Chez Lanieri when the president of Westcorp came up to talk to you while I was under the table."

"Oh, Christ." Dave turned bright red, lips turning up in a huge grin. "I don't know, man. At least there I was in my fucking element."

"Yeah. I guess that's true. Man, I've missed seeing you smile." Oh, shit. He could have bitten his tongue right off. That was a stupid thing to say.

Dave went still, smile disappearing altogether. "Is this where I remind you that you were the one who left, Amos?"

The urge to whap Dave with an oar was damned strong, but he resisted. Manfully. "No." The even tone was hard won and he was proud of it. "I know that."

It wasn't you I left, was what he wanted to say. It was everything else. But really, what difference did it make? He'd left.

"So what's the plan? What exactly are we supposed to do in between making stilted conversation?" Dave sounded ... sad. Tense. Fucking exhausted. "I'm too old to play games when there's no payoff in the end."

"You're supposed to relax. Enjoy the scenery. In a half hour or so there will be some whitewater and that will get

your heart pumping." He should have fucking sent Dave back with Bob and gone and got drunk.

"Right, and then paddle when you tell me to." Dave nodded. "I'm sorry, Amos. I should have just turned around and gone back to the hotel and learned more Greek. You could have had your fee and a free couple of days and I could get back to my life."

"Yeah. Well, if your life is so good why is the doctor sending you on forced vacations?" It came out before he could stop it.

"Because that's apparently what people do and after a hundred and nineteen ninety-hour weeks; he called Mr. Glastonbury and recommended I take two off to unwind." The words were clipped, he could taste the mixture of hurt and anger in them.

"Don't get your silk boxers in a twist, Dave-baby. I was just making an observation." They were going downriver way faster than they should be and he dug the oars in to slow them down.

"My name is David. No one calls me Dave."

"Sorry." Fuck. Fuck, fuck and some fuck for good measure. Amos reached for the cigarettes again and lit one. To Hell with it.

"Your cardiologist know you smoke?" Dave's eyes were on his chest, dark and chocolate brown, peeking over the rims of those black glasses.

Automatically his fingers went to his chest and Amos realized he'd never zipped his vest. Fuck. "No. Yours know about the aspirin and the antacids?"

"Not unless Iris ratted me out, which could possibly have happened." Dave shook his head, bullheaded, stubborn prick. "Damn it, Amos, you have to be good to your body and those things are terrible for you. I almos ... You almost died once, wasn't that enough?"

"Baby, I figure something's gonna kill me. I tried to quit, but man, I gave up most of the booze and I gave up sex. I've got to have one vice."

That was a cop out and he knew it, but there it was.

Dave met his eyes, suddenly deadly serious. "Bullshit. You never could lie worth a damn. It's one of the things I loved about you."

Good thing he knew what a real broken heart felt like, because this hurt almost as much, but not quite. Loved. Past tense. He knew it, sure, but hearing it made it that much worse.

"I like them." There. How was that for the truth.

Dave nodded. "I know. They'll still kill you. I mean, hell, you managed to quit me cold-turkey, yeah? Do my ego a favor and pretend for a couple of hours that I was more addictive than three dollar a pack Pall Malls, would you?"

What the Hell did he say to that? I like my life but I never got over you? The second cigarette got snuffed. "That outcropping there usually has a couple of herons on it."

"Yeah? Are they the same type as the birds in Japan, you think?" The glasses were pushed back up, face turned up toward the sun.

"Well. I'm sure there's differences." Oh, yeah. It was going well. "If you need some water, or have to pee, let me know,

okay? The sun can get hot, even if the water's cold. And there're only so many places to pull off."

To his surprise, Dave started chuckling, the sound tickled and surprised. "Do you remember driving to New Orleans for Mardi Gras? How we were scared to pull off the highway and piss in the middle of the night in Deliverance country? I thought I was going to fucking explode."

"Oh, man." He laughed at that memory too. Both of them full of bad beer and diet cola, bouncing down an old southern highway, their fucking teeth floating. "We got to that all night truck stop and pissed for an hour."

"Maybe two. Oh, God. I swear I still don't drink when I go on road trips, just in case." Dave gave him a full-on smile and suddenly that age fell away and, oh, fuck ... "Of course, there will never be another trip like that one. I laughed until my ribs were bruised."

"Yeah. And we fucked until I thought I would never be able to walk again."

One dark eyebrow rose. "Good to know you're still the epitome of class, Shep." The grin widened. "And yeah, I walked like a cowboy just a bit—but that could have been the tight underwear."

"Oh, Hell, no. That was talent. Mine." Dave had called him Shep. Lord, it had been a long time since anyone had called him that. Amos was a shepherd in the Bible, after all. He grinned back and damned if the mood wasn't lighter. Maybe they could hold it. "Time to get your oar, David. We're hitting our first white water soon."

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Time to go back to work. But maybe the trip wouldn't be as long as he feared.

Chapter Three

There was a little fire going, the smell of something cooking coming to him and David just didn't know if he could sit around the campfire and reminisce about when they were together and he was happy. Not without sitting there and thinking how easy it had been to laugh together this afternoon.

How, once the barbs were shared, they worked together and smiled and admired the birds and...

How quick so many days of putting his shit together could be turned into not so terribly together now.

Not only that? His fucking cell phone couldn't get a signal here.

"Hey." He looked up and Amos held out a tin plate to him. "Hope chicken fried steak and potatoes are okay. I made biscuits too. A truly deluxe meal, I got to tell you."

"Thank you. It looks great." He took the plate, forced himself not to wince as his belly protested at the thought of food. "Biscuits in a skillet. That's damned impressive."

He wasn't even shitting about it. His Shep couldn't make cold cereal on a good day. Maybe ... Maybe that's how he needed to think about it. This Amos—this rugged, useful, healthy man—it just wasn't his Shep.

"Bob taught me." A wide, white grin appeared, Amos' eyes very green in the firelight. "He said I was useless as tits on a boar hog and set about to teach me how to do it all."

"Yeah? He seemed like quite a character. How ... how did you pick here?" He nibbled at the edge of a biscuit, keeping enough back from the fire to be in the shadows.

"I was passing through. I went back to Denver first, you know? But it was..." Amos trailed off for a moment, chewing. Thinking. Still no good at hiding anything, Amos. Everything was right there. "Well, anyway, it wasn't the same as I remembered it from when I was a kid. Too much. So I started down I-70, just sort of meandering. I hit upon this canyon and it was like, okay. Yeah."

"Oh. It is very pretty here. Do you ... I mean, is it hard to find friends here?" David managed to eat a whole biscuit and some mashed potatoes before he washed them down with another round of antacids.

"Friends?" Amos looked baffled, then a light seemed to dawn, and he chuckled. "Yeah. I mean, I guess. I haven't, uh. Well. I don't go looking."

"Oh." Well, there wasn't anything to say to that, was there? It was a shame, because God knew Amos was a demon in bed, but none—not even a little bit—of his business.

"Not a lot of chances. Not like you, yeah?" He glanced up quickly, but Amos was not looking at him, was instead pushing gravy around with a biscuit.

"I ... I guess. I work a lot of hours. I really don't get out much unless I'm on business." Like he'd wanted to ever go through another thing like Amos. Never. He fell in love too easy and he was too old to worry about fucked up diseases and courting and shit.

"Oh." They sat in silence until Amos got up to gather the plates and utensils, the clank making him jump. "You don't eat enough."

"I eat fine. I'm in good shape." His hand went to his belly, the motion immediate. "I finally ditched that spare tire."

That spare tire that had come from hours of lingering over rich dinners and long lazy Sundays in bed and buttered popcorn at terrible B-grade movies.

"Yeah. I noticed." There was a note in Amos' voice that grated on his nerves, but he couldn't see anything but Amos' back.

He opened his mouth to say something, then just shut it. It didn't matter what Amos thought about his body, anymore than it mattered that he thought Amos needed a moisturizer and a decent haircut and should keep the beard. David rummaged through his bag and found a thin sweater to put on. Not because he didn't want Amos to see him, of course. Just because he was getting cold.

"I'll be back. Gonna make sure the boat is good and secure. There's Twinkies in the box over here if you want one." Before he could even open his mouth Amos was gone, but he saw the tiny flare of light in the dark that signaled Amos lighting up.

The lights in the sky caught his attention and he moved away from the fire, found a flat spot and sat and stared. Not as bright as the city lights, but huge, vast and unbelievably beautiful and all of the sudden, David just wanted to go home, wanted to get in a plane and go to his bed and his big-

enough-for-two cobalt blue bathtub and his office where things were reasonable.

"You look lost." He had no idea how much time had passed, but he was cold, because the blanket Amos draped around him felt heavenly. Now he knew why Bob was so emphatic about them being at something close to 7000 feet. "God, Dave. I'm sorry. This can't be very relaxing, you know?"

"That's not your fault. There's no way I could have known, no way you could have." He tried to find a smile and failed completely. "Some people aren't made for this vacation thing anyway. Maybe this is God's way of proving it."

"Bullshit. You obviously need some time off. I mean, you must have an ulcer the size of Montana."

"Nah, Kansas maybe. One of those flat, boring places." There, he found a smile.

Amos didn't. "Yeah, well. That kind of stress can kill you." He could almost hear Amos' teeth click together and he would bet that comment was wished away as soon as it was spoken.

"My work's my whole life, Amos. It's who I am now. I need it." The words were flat and hard the way only truth could be. "If it kills me, it kills me. I'm managing."

"Right. It's none of my business, I get that." He could have handled anger, or resignation, but the hurt in Amos' voice pissed him off.

"Oh no, you don't. You don't fucking get to have hurt feelings about this. You needed out. You needed space and quiet and the motherfucking big sky. You got it. You got exactly what you fucking wanted, Amos, and you don't get to

worry or wonder or nag or fret about me." Oh, Jesus, he was pissed. Sorry motherfucker, left him to play in the water like a big fucking kid and then have the brass balls to criticize.

"I asked you to go with me." The reply came low, quiet and rough.

"To do what? Leave everything we'd worked for? Everything we'd worked towards for years?" David stood up, started pacing. "Goddamnit! I would have supported you, forever. You never would have had to work again. I would have..." He stopped and swallowed, eyes back on the blurry stars. "It doesn't matter."

"You're right. It doesn't. Makes no difference that I didn't want you working yourself into ulcers and heart attacks to support me in the manner to which I was accustomed." Amos stood and pulled out that damned pack of cigarettes, lighting one and pulling hard. "Shit. You're right, you know? I left. End of story. I'll set up your sleeping bag."

"Why of all the fucking people in this fucking town did Iris find you? I was managing so well..." He sat back down, head pounding, just fucking throbbing and he'd have to get up and get closer to the fire to get his pills and he knew his face was red, knew Amos would think he'd been crying.

"Yeah. I hear you." Amos stubbed out the cigarette in the dirt and threw it into the butt can. While he rubbed his head, Amos rummaged, and suddenly his little plastic bottles of aspirin and antacids were under his nose. "Here."

He took the bottles without a word, pouring out two of one and four of another, trying to decide if he really wanted half of one of the valium he'd brought. At least he'd sleep and

then it would be tomorrow and they would be done with this and he could go back to the hotel and tell Iris she'd either get him a flight out tomorrow night or she was fired.

"Dave." Voice soft, pleading, Amos squatted in front of him. "I'm sorry, okay? I am. We had a sweet time today. I promise I'll keep my mouth shut, okay? Why don't you get some sleep?"

"Don't." His voice cracked and he swallowed hard. "Don't be nice to me, Shep. Not now."

"Baby, I can't not be. You ... I. God. Please don't look at me like that." God, Amos sounded as torn up as he felt and it wasn't so dark that he couldn't see the shine of those eyes.

He couldn't swallow past the sob, couldn't bear it anymore, and he just closed his eyes, hiding. "I don't want to love you anymore, but you won't go away."

Strong hands moved over his arms, around his back, pulling him close against a lean familiar body that smelled all wrong, cigarette smoke and pine and river water, but oh it felt right. "Oh. Baby. I know. I tried so hard."

"I miss you." He took a deep breath, let one hand pet that sweet stomach, the edge of that scar. "I've worked so hard, done all the things we said we'd do. And I still miss you."

"Dave." A soft kiss landed on his chin. "I missed you so bad. Even when I decided I had everything I told you I was going off to find. I missed you."

"I ... Shep..." He took a deep breath, the air chilled and flavored with Amos.

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

They stayed like that, because Amos wasn't moving away, just holding him, kinda rocking. Warm, so warm, and the beard was soft, not scratchy, against his neck.

He let it ease him, let himself relax, lean into Amos' arms and not think, not worry, just feel for a minute. Just love for a minute before he had to learn to stop again.

* * * *

Amos was up at five, eyes gritty and throat sore. They hadn't said anything else the night before. Nothing at all. When Amos had finally pushed away Dave was asleep on his feet and it was a matter of nothing to get him to brush and piss and curl up in the down sleeping bag. Which was, of course, when Amos moved to the other side of the fire and smoked and damned well did not cry for a good hour before he finally tried to catch some shut eye.

He stirred up the fire, proud as Hell that it hadn't gone out after he banked it, and got all the fixings for coffee going. Dave would be dead to the world for at least an hour.

One more day. One day of being with Dave and hopefully laughing with him and seeing him and talking to him like a human being. It was going to kill him. It just was.

Water, grounds, pot on fire, a biscuit to keep his damned blood sugar stable, and Amos put his fishing pole together and headed upstream. Might as well try to get some trout for breakfast.

He got back nearly forty-five minutes later with a string of three fish and a better frame of mind. The quiet of the morning, the peace of the fishing and the sound of the water had worked wonders. Until he saw Dave's mess of hair

peeking out over the top of the sleeping bag. A sigh escaped and he lit a cigarette, setting out the skillet and getting the eggs out of the cooler. He could do this. He could.

Dave's eyes popped open at his sigh, rolling in a faint panic for a minute before stopping. Then Dave sat up and stretched, back popping a half dozen times.

"Morning." The silence broke like glass and Amos was damned glad of it.

Dave nodded, slid out of the sleeping bag and pulled on the ugly green fleece sweater that had been discarded sometime in the night. "Yeah. You sleep okay?"

"Sure. Once I got warm, I was out like a light." He smiled, going for light and companionable. "You want one egg or two?"

Dave didn't eat enough and the altitude and cold would conspire to the poor guy hungrier than he'd been in a good bit.

He got a vaguely horrified, just a little green around the gills look. "Just one, please. Thank you. I ... I'm not a big breakfast person anymore." Dave started packing things back into bags, the motions efficient, quick, the mark of someone who lived out of a suitcase and knew how to pack.

"Okay. Hope it won't gross you out, but I intend to eat hearty. That steering is hard work." God, he wanted to just sit down and bawl. He could remember the decadent mimosa Sundays he and Dave had done, making puff pastry from frozen packages and covering each other with sugar glaze. They would laze in bed for hours. Reality sucked.

"No, I can't see that you'd gross me out, Amos." Dave shook his head, grinned down at the bags in his hands. "That's not one of the descriptions I'd use at all." Then Dave just went back to packing up.

"Uh. Cool." Well, what the heck else did he say to that? Especially when he was all warm with memories and, yeah. Other things. Maybe the smell of frying fish would snap him out of it. The fish were cleaned, so he floured and fried and cooked eggs and warmed up biscuits and hauled out the butter and jam. And drank coffee. Lots of it. "Breakfast."

Dave rummaged around, took a half-handful of pills and washed them down with a cup of coffee. Then he took his plate and proceeded to pick.

Amos bit down on the comments he wanted to make, because none of them would help, and he was determined not to have the same frickin' arguments they'd had the day before. One day to spend with the ex-love-of-his-life. He didn't want to fuck it up. "We're gonna hit some fun rapids today. And there's this one spot? An old dead tree. A nesting pair of bald eagles live in it. Bet we'll see them."

"Cool. It looks like it's going to be a pretty day." One cup of black coffee followed another, Dave looking older and more exhausted today than he had the day before.

"It should be. You want me to radio Bob? I can." He just couldn't stand to see Dave look that way.

"Did I fuck it up that bad last night?" Dave sighed, shook his head. "I'm sorry. I'm on vacation; apparently the good sense and stiff upper lip got checked in the hotel safe." He

got a wry smile and a slow wink. "If you want to call Bob, that's cool. No hard feelings from my end, yeah?"

"No, baby. You just look so tired." The dishes were a good distraction and Amos did them up and packed them away and looked at the sky to check the time. "There she is. Check out the sunrise, Dave."

David watched it, eyes searching the sky. "It's always so different everywhere. Seems like it ought to be the same in Tokyo or on the Concorde or Paris or here."

"Yeah. Never looks the same twice and I never get tired of it." They watched a while, until the pink and gray was gone, and Amos started packing up camp, quickly stripping the site.

David helped, working with him silently, managing not to get in the way and get shit done. They'd always worked so well together and nearly four years slid away as they rubbed shoulders over the tarp and the sleeping bags and the cooler.

They got the boat loaded up, got things tied down. There was a minute of awkward silence, then Dave reached for his hand, squeezed it once, and let it go. "Thank you."

Anything he said might ruin it, so Amos just smiled and said, "You're welcome."

Chapter Four

It had been the longest and shortest day of his entire life. They'd both worked hard to make things pleasant and easy and, after his general stupidity the night before, David figured he should be grateful. Still, the farther they got down the river, the less time he had and he drank Amos in—every sound, every motion, every thing he could have. So he could remember each laugh and the way Amos' eyes creased and the way that beard was different colors. David could hear Iris now, asking about the scenery and him only remembering the way Amos' shoulders looked or the river water and smoke scent. It made him smile, knowing Iris, she'd understand.

He had managed to see eagles and blue herons and even an enormous mule deer, who'd come down for a drink. They'd chatted about nothing, him asking, Amos answering, and long before he was ready, Amos was telling him to pull his paddle in, as they were heading for the boat landing.

There was a quiet ache in his belly, one that was familiar and constant and he focused on it as they moved toward shore.

Amos was quiet as well, the only sounds their breathing and the splash of Amos' oars in the water. The boat jolted as they ran aground and Amos splashed out the back, pulling the boat in and getting him close enough to get out without getting wet. He untied the stuff in the back, finding his one bag easily before helping Amos unload.

"What happens now?" He wasn't sure what the question meant, really, but he had to ask it. Had to.

Those green eyes were dark, clouded with emotion. With fear. "Come home with me?"

He stood, stock still, blinking slow. It was a terrible idea. Stupid. Ridiculous. Pointless and unwise. "Yes. Please."

Relief replaced the fear and Amos gave him a blinding smile, holding out a hand. "Yes." Amos just gripped his hand, grinning, until the Bob's arrived with the vehicles. They loaded up the boat and hitched it to Bob's van instead of Amos' truck and the dog went with the Bob's as Amos loaded his bag in the bed of the pickup. "Let's go."

He got in, refusing to think, even a little. He wanted this, wanted it terribly and wasn't about to let go yet. Not yet. They drove up the canyon wall, it seemed, on another one of those twisty roads, Amos humming along with the radio and he had no idea how much time passed. Nor did he care. The house was more of a cabin with a wrap-around porch. He got a good view of it as he came up the drive, over a small ridge. He would bet the view was fantastic. It made him smile; he lived on the ninth floor, because Amos liked to see out. It suited Amos, to look out over the mountains.

"Here we are." They sat, staring at one another for a minute or two, before Amos led the way to the house, carrying his bag for him. The interior of the cabin made him uncertain as to whether he should breathe a sigh of relief, or run for the hills. It was vintage Amos. Saltillo tile covered the floors, and there was a cast iron and enameled stove with a cobalt tile verge instead of a fireplace. There was one rocking

chair, one overstuffed monstrosity done in gold brocade and a braided rug in greens and reds and blues. A tiny galley kitchen in blues and greens, with another old enamel stove and a beautifully mismatched table and chairs, along with a loft with a huge bed completed the place. "Welcome to my house."

"Oh ... Oh, Shep. It's so you." He couldn't decide whether to grin or cry. David just turned about, touching and looking, breathing the whole fucked up, weird, absolutely Amos-ness of it in.

Amos breathed out loudly, grinning. "Thanks. There's a bathroom out here. Shower and stool. The hot tub is in its own little shed out back." A rueful expression and a laugh came after that. "I spent the rest of my savings on this place, you know? Had to have a nice place to come to."

"You did a good job. I would know it was yours anywhere." A pang of sheer longing hit him, almost made him sway. He turned to face Amos, breath catching in his chest, heart pounding. "Amos. Shep. Love ... I want ... Kiss me. Please."

His asking snapped whatever it was holding Amos away from him and they moved together, Amos' arms sliding around him as Amos gave him the kiss he wanted so badly. Oh, Christ. Oh. Oh. He cried out, hands sliding into Amos' hair, lips parting and tongue meeting his lover's, greedy for a taste. Amos' tongue pushed in, opening him, hands pulling him close. The soft beard rubbed his cheeks, the too long hair curled around his fingers and Amos moaned into his mouth.

It was an unbearably arousing mixture of familiar and brand new, the knowledge that it was his lover, his Amos, here and kissing him and tasting him and wanting him...

Those strong hands slid down his back to cup his ass, pulling him close as Amos rubbed against him, kissing him breathless.

"Oh, God. Shep. Gonna make me come. Been so long." He met those beautiful fucking eyes with a soft groan, licking Amos' bottom lip. "Taste so good."

"Yeah. Oh, yeah, Dave. Baby." Amos nipped his lower lip and reached between them to cup his cock through his jeans, squeezing gently.

"Oh..." He gasped and just gave it up, eyes wide as he shuddered, pushed against that sweet fucking hand and came. A harsh groan answered him, Amos pushing hard once, twice, hips jerking back and forth. Then Amos was calling his name, head falling back, the scent of them sharp and dark.

He leaned in and up and tasted that long neck, hands shaking and working open buttons and searching for skin, whispering soft, broken things that he couldn't just say. It didn't matter because Amos was saying them for him, words coming soft and deep against his skin as they stumbled to the huge double armchair, Amos pushing them down, hands stripping away his clothes, mouth searching his skin.

His fingers found the long scar on Amos' chest, his lips following, moaning soft prayers and wishes against the raised skin, loving that it meant his lover survived.

"Dave." Just that, just his name, over and over, as Amos loved him. Hands and mouth, and that maddening beard, all of them combined to make him crazy.

Oh, God, he was hungry for this, hungry and alive and awake in a way he hadn't been in years, every nerve alight and burning and tingling. He laughed, or maybe he cried, he didn't know. It didn't matter. Especially not with Amos' mouth on him that way, tasting him, taking him in, hands spreading his thighs, chin brushing his balls. He leaned up, watched with stunned eyes as his cock disappeared into Amos' mouth.

"Please. Tell me you're real, that I'm not dreaming."

"Mmm." Licking at the underside, Amos pulled back, tongue moving over the head. "Not dreaming, baby. Right here. With you."

"Oh, Shep..." He groaned, reaching out for those soft curls. "Right here. Oh, love..."

It was like they'd never been apart. Amos knew him, knew what felt good, knew where his most sensitive spots were. Rough fingers moved behind his balls, pressing at the skin there as Amos sucked him all the way down. His thighs parted, toes curling as his balls tightened, pulling up with a speed that stunned him. Amos encouraged him with soft sounds and sweet touches, lips and tongue working him mercilessly. That spiky blonde and brown head moved on him, up and down, and it was just too unreal, but the feel of it couldn't be denied.

"Amos! Love!" The words echoed, loud and happy, so good he almost didn't recognize his own voice, which faded to a

desperate moan as he came, emptying himself into Amos' mouth.

That mouth took it all, Amos moaning around him, hands pushing his balls, getting it all out. Amos licked him clean before pulling away and smiling at him, lips swollen and shining. "Oh. Dave. So good."

He smiled back, stupid and goofy and so very fucked. "Yes." He held his arms open. "You're too far away."

"Yeah." Amos crawled up to him, sinking into his arms and fitting against him like he knew Amos should.

He brought their mouths together, one hand stroking Amos' hip, that fine ass. They kissed, long and deep and more lazy now, both of them worn out from the stress and the exercise and the need that had flared and burned so bright. God, it felt good, to be sleepy and warm and sated and ... Yeah. Good. He hummed softly, petting and just holding on.

"Mmm. Love you." While he was still reeling from that, Amos went lax against him, deep breathing telling him that Amos was sound asleep.

"Oh, Shep. I love you." He kissed Amos' temple, listening to the beat of Amos' heart as he drifted off.

* * * *

The sun woke Amos and for a moment he was completely disoriented. It was his bed, his bedroom with the big windows that looked out on the mountain, but there was someone else in bed with him, warm and clinging, and that was so unusual that he had to work hard not to freak out.

Dave. It was Dave. His Dave, sleeping in bed with him, The moment that thought dawned on him he grinned and ran his hand over the lean hip it rested on. They'd barely had the energy to stagger upstairs and go to be after their bout in the chair. Hell, they hadn't even eaten. Just crashed. His bladder and his stomach both attested to how long they'd been asleep.

Time for some relief and refreshment. Amos leaned down to kiss David's head before sliding gently out of bed, watching Dave for a minute as the man curled up in the warm spot he'd left. God, Dave looked good, even if he was too skinny. Then he wandered downstairs and hit the head before going to rummage in the kitchen. Maybe Dave would eat some waffles.

There was a quiet ringing coming from the pack thrown by the door—Dave's cell phone or pager or whatever going off. He heard Dave murmur, heard the bedsprings squeak just a little. Shit. Fucking thing was gonna get turned off. Amos made a break for it, opening the pack and pushing through it, finding the little phone and thumbing the button. There. All taken care of. Stupid thing. He listened and Dave settled, a soft moan sounding, sweet and dreamy and shaped like his name. Poor guy needed sleep. Amos took his pills and had a cup of tea. He'd make coffee later, when Dave was closer to awake.

He wanted a few minutes anyway to wrap his mind around what they'd done and to remind himself not to think of what might happen.

An hour later he had coffee and hot cakes and blueberry syrup and Dave was stirring and he'd decided to take it one minute at a time.

"Smells good." David peered down from the loft, hair tousled, blinking nice and slow. His lover looked dazed, a little stunned, then their eyes met and he got a grin—bright, happy, pure distilled pleasure and all directed at him.

"Morning, Shep."

He grinned back, all of that just welling up in him, too. "Hey. I made a fluffy bread breakfast. Remembered that was more your thing than fish. There's a robe in the little press if you're cold." God, he felt good.

"Yeah, cool." He could hear David's stomach growl and a bright blush lit that thin face up. "I'll be right down."

Woo. He was gonna get to see Dave eat. He liked Dave's new lean form. He did, even if he missed the belly roll. But he had missed the sensuality of sharing a meal with Dave. Dave came down, wrapped in his old blue robe, the vision fucked up and familiar and not and damn.

"Bathroom's in there." He could wait for one more minute to just grab the guy and ravish him. He could.

"Oh, cool." He got another smile and Dave cupped his cheek, fingers stroking gently before Dave disappeared.

Amos plated up the last of the pancakes and got out the walnuts to toast, throwing them in a pan and tossing them a few times. There. A breakfast fit for a hungry man with a sensitive stomach. He poured a glass of milk too, just in case.

And when Dave came out of the bathroom, Amos pounced and kissed him. Hard. Dave chuckled into his lips and

wrapped tight around him, lips parting immediately for him, letting him right in. Mmm. Minty fresh Dave. Amos took the kiss to places he'd been thinking about for at least two hours, deep and hard. He could have gone on and on, but Dave's tummy growled again and it cracked him up, breaking up the kiss. "Come on, baby. Let's get some food in you."

Those big brown eyes were twinkling and Dave nodded, stealing another quick kiss. "I could definitely eat."

"Blueberry pancakes." They held hands on the way to the table, like a couple of kids. He pulled his chair close, sitting right next to Dave, pouring his syrup and grinning, just feeling fine.

Dave poured the syrup on his own pancakes and cut a piece, bringing the fork up to Amos' lips. "Open up, Shep."

"Mmmm." He nipped the bite off the fork, chewing and swallowing before sharing another kiss, this one sticky with sugar. God, it was familiar enough to make his eyes prickle.

"Are they good?" David licked a spot of syrup off his mustache, damn near purring.

"Yeah. Have some." He cut a bite for Dave, just a small one, enough to entice him, and held out the fork.

Dave took the bite, moaning low, eyes closing as he chewed. "Oh. Those are ... Yum."

Score! The one thing he could do now that he couldn't then was cook. Came with his job. The paying tourists expected good food. And when you lived in snow country you couldn't just run down to the coffee place for a bagel. He licked a bit of syrup off Dave's lips and went for another bite.

Together they managed to eat the pancakes, Dave eating a fair amount before begging off and just snuggling in against his side. He ate twice as much, but he didn't sweat it. Dave would start to eat better and he would work it off. He was a man with a mission. Now, to get the business out of the way so they could spend the day like rabbits. "Do you need to call the hotel, or anybody and let them know you're alive?"

"Mmm ... Yeah, I should. I'm supposed to bicycle or spa or something in a few days. I should let them know I'm busy." Dave met his eyes, just a little nervous. "Am I going to stay busy for the next bunch of days?"

"Busier than a one legged butt kicker." He stroked Dave's cheek, savoring the feel of that stubbly skin. "I want you. Go make your calls."

Oh, sweet Jesus, those eyes went all hot and liquid and pure want as Dave nestled into his touch. "Okay. I'll just be a minute."

"Promise?" He couldn't resist one more taste, just a touch of his tongue to the corner of those lips. "I'll do the dishes."

"You have my word." Then Dave was gone, bending over to grab his cell, dialing Iris, no doubt, and flinging information left and right.

He was proud, because Dave finished up about the same time he did, a half hour later, and they met in the middle of the living room rug for another kiss. He just couldn't keep his hands off of Dave's skin, and he opened the blue robe to smooth them over that tight chest and flat belly. "You feel so good."

"Oh, God. You make me feel so good, Shep, so alive." Dave stepped in, pressing against him and rubbing.

"Yeah. I hear that." He knew just what Dave meant. They kissed and rubbed and danced until he thought they were just going to fall over. "We should go back to the bed, baby. I want all of you this time."

"As much as you'll take." Dave gave him another kiss, this one lighter, teasing, then led him upstairs, fingers twined together, holding on. Like they were afraid to let go, which he knew he was. They got up to the loft and Amos turned Dave to face him and slid the robe off, and that was fucking breathtaking, Dave, framed by blue sky and mountains. His cock throbbed hard in his sweats. Dave was smiling, hands reaching for him, petting his belly, his chest. "You look so good, so happy."

"I don't think I've ever been happier than I am right now, baby." God, that sounded cornball, but he meant every word. He was healthy, he was home, and he had Dave with him. He skinned out of his sweats, showing off a little, proud of his hard earned body.

"Oh ... Oh, Amos..." Warm hands slid over his body, around his cock, cupping his balls. Slowly David sank down to his knees, cheek sliding against his shaft, lips on his hip.

"God. Dave, baby, you're making me crazy." He felt like he was seventeen again. How did he ever think he could live without this man? He stroked David's hair, his shoulders, moaning low.

"I want to feel you. I want you to touch me everywhere. I've needed you so long." The words rang with truth, tongue licking, lapping at the tip of his cock, wanting to taste him.

He gave Dave the chance to lick him, kiss him, taste his need before tugging on Dave's shoulders. "The bed. Before I fall down."

One more sucking kiss came to the tip of his cock, then Dave stood, crawled onto his bed on hands and knees, arching and stretching.

"Fuck. Baby, I could eat you up." Amos slid into bed too, touching all of that smooth skin, David's ass warm and firm under his hands.

"Mmm ... Promise?" David turned, scooting right into his arms, warm and rubbing and open to him, lips trailing over his jaw, his chin.

"God, yeah." He kissed deep, stretching them out on the bed, his legs tangling with Dave's. The body felt a bit different, but Dave smelled the same, tasted the same, had the same hot spots. And those hands, God. They knew every bit of him, knew what he needed, knew where to be soft, where to push in, where to scratch. It made him purr like a kitten who had too much milk. Made him arch and rock and beg. The feel of Dave's lips on his was addictive. Seeing those little brown nipples peak up under his hands was a revelation. And the touch of Dave's cock against his sent him over the moon. Relaxed and easy, Dave drank each whimper, each moan right from his lips. Those dark eyes watched him, smiled at him, loved him. Loved him and he knew it. It was too good, too much. Too big. But Amos went with it anyway,

because he couldn't not do it. He reached between them to touch Dave's cock, so hot and thick and sweet, just like he remembered.

"God. Shep. Love. You feel so good." Dave rocked, sliding that hot prick over his palm. "Want you. Oh, God. So good."

"I don't have any rubbers, baby. But I have lube. Please tell me that we're safe and you can fuck me." He wanted that so bad, Dave's prick spreading him wide.

"I haven't touched another man since you left, Amos. I ... I want you. I always wanted you." The whisper was soft, almost ashamed.

"Oh. Dave-baby." He pulled Dave close for a kiss, almost chaste. "It's been me and my hand all this time. Please. In me." He rubbed harder at Dave's cock, getting it good and stiff so he'd feel every inch.

"Yes. Oh, Christ. Yes. Let me love you." Dave whispered the words against his lips, licking softly. "Lube, Shep. Won't hurt you."

"No. I know. There, in the table drawer." While Dave dug for the lube, Amos sprawled on his back, stroking his cock, lifting his balls. God, he couldn't wait. Had to have Dave in him, like now.

"Found it." Dave turned, looked over at him. "You look so good. So fucking good."

Dave bent and started kissing while the lube was opened, fingers slicked—his nipples, his scar, his belly, they were all licked and loved. Amos moaned and thrashed, begging for it, planting his feet and rolling his hips up. "Need you so bad. Always need you."

"I'm yours. I'm yours." The words were whispered low and two fingers pushed deep, spreading him wide, the burn familiar and rich, moving right up his spine.

So long. It had been so long since he'd had anyone touch him that way. And it had always been this man. "I love you."

"I know. I love you too. I always have. Never stopped." Those fingers found his gland, pegging it, stroking it.

"Dave!" He bucked, legs spreading wider, balls swinging. "Please. Now. Please. I can't ... it's been too long."

"Don't want to hurt you, love." Dave moved between his legs, hands cupping his ass, thumbs spreading him wide and bringing him to that thick cock.

"Not going to. So ready for you, Dave." He was. Aching and empty and so so ready. Dave moaned, pushing into him so slow, so sure, just pushing in and in until he was spread wide, filled and stretched with incredible heat. Oh, God. So full and good and it was Dave. That part felt exactly the same, so thick and heavy and good inside him. His whole damned body arched into it, hips pushing down to take more, cock bobbing, belly tight. He burned and ached and he thought he might just fucking cry.

"Amos..." Dave's hand trailed along his belly, petting him with a gentle stroke, just touching him, those eyes staring at him like he was beautiful. "Oh, fuck. Love."

"Yeah." He managed to let go of the sheets with one hand, tangling his fingers with Dave's. "Yeah. So good, baby."

A smile bloomed across Dave's face and his lover leaned forward, took a long, deep kiss that threatened to make him implode. "Gotta move now. Need to feel you."

All he could do was nod, eyes on Dave's face, watching his lover as they began to move. His lover. Jesus, he thought he'd never say that again. Dave didn't look tired now. He looked happy, hungry, and so right that Amos had to pull him down for a kiss. The kisses went on and on, tongues moving in time with their bodies, rhythm slowly building into something necessary, something fierce and wanton and right. Dave brought their twined fingers down, wrapped them around his cock and started pumping, pulling.

Amos kicked into overdrive, hips rolling in great waves, his cock just about to burst. He was making noises that might embarrass him at any other time, but right now they were perfect, telling Dave just how he felt.

"Come on me. Now, Shep. Need to feel it. Need you to." The words were hard, almost hissed, Dave's teeth sharp on his earlobe, fat prick pushing in deep.

Like the words themselves were all he was waiting for, Amos shot hard, feeling it pull up out of his balls, his belly and spine. It was so huge it made him scream, just babbling love words, urging Dave on. The aftershocks hadn't even started to fade when heat filled him, a low cry vibrating the skin of his throat, Dave shaking hard. He stroked Dave's back and reveled in the hot and the slick and the taste and feel of Dave's sweat. God he'd needed that. So badly. "Oh, baby."

"Mmm ... Love you." Dave cuddled into him, warm and lazy now, mouth nuzzling his throat.

"Love you, too, baby." He did, so much. Everything else? They could figure out later.

* * * *

They did nothing but sleep and touch for the remainder of the day—David didn't think he'd ever spent so long in bed, but when he'd said that, Shep had just chuckled and trotted out some good memories which just led to rubbing and nuzzling and coming and napping again. Finally though, they got hungry and were both really incredibly sticky and, unless Amos had a really stellar manservant lurking about, they were going to have to get up.

The thought of lurking manservants made him laugh and he nipped at Amos' bottom lip. "We need to shower, Shep. You need to eat."

"So do you. Eat I mean. You'd be amazed at what the altitude will do for your appetite. Well, that and all the hot sex." Amos grinned, licking at his lips before rolling up to sit on the side of the bed.

He leaned down to nibble at Amos' hip, tease the dusting of light hair at the top of Amos' crease with his nose. "Hot sex? We're having hot sex?"

God, he was happy.

"Hell, yes." Amos chuckled, petted his hair, his back. "Wild, monkey sex, hot enough to curl my toes and make my head spin. Of course, we're also making love." Amos turned and bent to kiss him one more time, like he couldn't resist, before getting up and performing a back popping, hip twisting stretch.

"Mmm ... you look good, Shep." He did his own stretching, skin sliding on the sheets, stilling as he watched the sun set out the bedroom window, all roses and purples and ... Wow. "Oh ... How pretty."

"Yeah. One of the best parts of living here, you know?"

Amos stood next to the bed until the sky was more black than purple, then popped him one on the ass. "I vote for a quick shower and then some finger foods and the hot tub. What do you say?"

"Works for me." He stood up, blinking slow.

"You know, besides talking to Iris this morning? I haven't been on the phone all damned day. Weird." He rubbed his ear, following Amos down the stairs. "My ear is going to fold back to its normal size."

"Yeah? What a concept. I like your ears." Amos caught him at the bottom of the stairs and nibbled one, as proof. "Whew. Man, do we stink."

He swatted Amos' ass. "Shower, asshole. I'll soap you up."

He didn't want to think about the emails and the messages and the shit waiting for him at the hotel, so he didn't.

"Ooh. Sounds good." The bathroom was so familiar it was like being at home. Which made him happy deep inside.

It didn't take long before the water was going and they were busy rubbing up bubbles between them, laughing as they passed the soap back and forth. He'd forgotten how good it was to have someone to share with, had forgotten how sensual Amos was, how Amos loved to wash him, from head to heels, tickling his toes with the washcloth. He thought he'd just melted into nothing when Amos' fingers dug into his hair, working the shampoo through. "Oh. Oh, that feels like magic..."

"Mmmm. Like wet silk." Amos washed his hair, massaged his scalp and worked out the tension in his shoulders. "I could touch you forever."

"Okay. You have my permission." David returned the favor, not trying to arouse or anything, just needing to touch, to relearn every square inch of Amos' body.

Hell, after the day they'd had, they might never get it up again. But touching was always good and Amos seemed to be just as desperate to get to know him again. The water went cold finally, making them hop out, but then there was the drying off and the rubbing and the rummaging for robes. That of course led to goosing and pinching, maybe a little chasing and definitely a bunch of laughing and grabbing and maybe, just maybe a little random groping as they played their way to the kitchen.

Wine, cheese, crackers and salami. Pickles and olives. Amos had a store of finger foods that they piled up to take to the little shed out off the deck. It was wonderful on the inside, done again in the saltillo and cobalt tiles, with the perfect two seater tub and a wonderful little place to put the food. David fed Amos, one piece at a time, rubbing olives on those kiss-swollen lips, licking drops of wine from Amos' mustache. "I never thought facial hair would suit you. It does. And it's so soft..."

"Yeah? I like it. Makes me look less like a teenager." Amos leaned over and kissed him. "You're buff now, baby. I like it." That bright laugh sounded so good. "Though I kinda miss your baby belly."

He chuckled. "If you keep feeding me like this, it'll come back quick enough. God knows I've eaten more in three days with you than I have in a week."

"Baby, you've worked it right back off. And we'll work more off later." Eyebrows waggling, Amos set the food aside and snuggled up to him, leaning lightly. "Gonna have to get out soon if we keep drinking. Bad for the blood pressure."

He nodded, gathering Amos into his arms. "Anything you need, love."

His hands moved slowly, petting and stroking chest and belly, eyes closing as they floated.

"Mmmm." They stayed there until he thought Amos was asleep, but finally Amos stirred, eyes droopy. "'Mon, baby. Help me out, yeah?"

"Yeah, up and at 'em, love." He stood and got Amos out and wrapped in a towel. "You want the sofa, Shep? Let me clean up the food and stuff?"

"Yeah." Amos was blinky and slow, but his skin was rosy over the tan and he was smiling so bright, clinging a little. "That was perfect."

"What was?" He got Amos onto the sofa, wrapped the quilt around the sweet body. David knelt beside the couch, taking long, slow kisses.

His kisses were returned with enthusiasm, those green eyes bright and happy, and was Amos blushing? "I, uh, kinda built that with you in mind. Does that sound stupid? I mean, I thought I was never going to see you again."

Oh. Oh, Christ. He shook his head. "I ... I thought I'd lost you forever. And you were here."

"Here I am. Fuck the dishes. Snuggle with me?" His Amos was an unrepentant snuggler.

"But I don't think I can get it up for the dishes, Shep." He moved up onto the couch, losing his towel and sliding under the quilt.

"I don't think I can get it up, period. I'm melted." Amos' arms went around him and they wiggled around until they were both comfy, and tangled together. "Warm."

"Mm-hmm.'s good." He couldn't be sleepy again, he couldn't.

"Very. Better than good. Great." Amos petted him clumsily, the even breathing telling David he was more than half asleep.

He watched for a long, long time, watched Amos breathe, watched Amos hold him. He wasn't sleepy, he was just relaxed and happy and just remembering what that felt like.

Chapter Five

They pulled up at the Hotel Colorado and parked, Amos grinning and shaking his head. Dave would stay at the swankiest place in town. They needed to pick up Dave's stuff, because for the next week and a half? That ass was his. They retrieved Dave's stuff from the safe and room, and paid off the bill. Amos almost got sidetracked by that big old bed but decided he'd rather go home before they got into it again. Of course, he couldn't keep his hands off Dave, one way or the other, touching his hand, his hip, the small of his back.

They got everything locked in the truck, and Amos took the opportunity to cop a feel while Dave was bent over. "Hey, let's walk over to the German bakery place and get some breakfast."

Dave chuckled, ass wiggling against his hand. "Eating again?" A phone got hooked on Dave's belt, a pda in a pocket. "Sure. I could use some coffee."

"They have strudel. And yeah, I need my strength. I have a two-hour hike to lead today. I managed to cancel everything else, but that one I couldn't get out of." He grimaced apologetically. "Sorry."

"No sweat, Shep. I haven't checked my email in what? Five days? I've got twenty Greek bankers breathing down Iris' neck trying to locate my ass and talk to me. I'll manage to occupy myself, promise."

"Okay." He didn't want David to think about work, but he knew it had to happen. "As long as you promise to take a shower with me when I get back."

"Mmm ... That sounds perfect. A nice long shower and you can tell me all about your hike and I'll pretend to care that I haven't learned Greek yet." He got a grin and a wink. Dave had lost ten years worth of unhappiness and age in the last few days, the loving and laughing suiting him.

He brushed his hand over Dave's, twining their fingers briefly, loving how Dave was reverting to the guy he knew and loved right in front of him. "Cool."

The German deli had plenty to entice and he managed to get Dave to eat a blintz with his coffee while he wolfed down eggs and biscuits and potatoes.

"Do we have time to hit a grocery store? I need some Tums and you are low on coffee and toilet paper and..." Dave pinked and arched an eyebrow, voice lowering. "Lube."

"You bet. We'll stop by City Market on the way back. I need to pick up some stuff for the hike. Oh, and we got to stop by Bob's and pick up Noodle." He slid his foot against Dave's under the table.

"You're not letting the dog sleep with us, are you? Because I warn you, I'm not ready to share yet." Dave chuckled, face just glowing.

"Me neither." He chuckled. "Noodle sleeps out on the deck a lot. He likes to chase at night." God, he was so happy he was goofy with it.

"Chase what?" Dave stole a piece of potato from his plate.

"Rabbits. River rats. The occasional bigger animal. We don't get too many bears or anything, but the occasional wildcat or deer gets him going." They sat and drank coffee for a bit, playing footsie and grinning like idiots.

"Bears." Dave looked over. "Too many bears. You live in an interesting place, Shep. Bears. I mean ... Bears."

"Yeah. It's a lot different than sharks. You want one of my biscuits? They're really fluffy. They have the best strawberry jam here." Amos was getting the urge to haul Dave off and do naughty things. He had to resist until after three PM.

"Mmm ... I love strawberries. Maybe a bite." Dave scooted closer, knee rubbing his. "And there are no sharks ... Well, no real sharks ... Well, okay, at the aquarium, but those don't count ... Oh ... Mmm..." Dave's eyes closed as he popped a strawberry-coated bite of biscuit into that babbling mouth. The sounds Dave made? Pure sex.

He let his legs fall open and rubbed his thigh along Dave's as well. He was gonna get hard if they weren't careful. Which wouldn't be so bad, but Hilda was a nice lady and he didn't want to offend her by going down on Dave in her restaurant.

"Hey, can we get some biscuits and jelly to go?" He wanted those sounds again, this evening, when they were alone.

"You're spoiling me." Dave licked the red jam off his lips, tongue wet and pink and tempting.

Amos moaned, low and long, adjusting himself roughly. "Spoiling myself, too." The biscuits came and Amos paid and dragged Dave out of the restaurant, back up the street to the truck. As soon as they got in the cab and he made sure no

one was around, Amos leaned over for a kiss. "You make me crazy, baby."

Dave met his hunger head-on, mouth sweet and just a touch sticky, a low moan vibrating his tongue. They made out like a pair of teenagers, kissing and touching like crazy. The only thing that stopped them was Amos' elbow hitting the horn when he turned to push Dave back and kiss him some more. Dave jumped and whacked his head on the window, panting and laughing and all-pink and just kissed, which was second only to just-fucked on good looks on the man. "Oh, shit. You make me crazy, love."

"Yeah. I know the feeling. I was well on the way to the messy jeans. Let's hit City Market and pick up the dog. Then we can go home and make out until it's time for me to leave."

"God, yes. I can stand in the frozen foods section until I deflate." Now that was a plan.

Groceries, dog pick-up and drive home were accomplished in short order and Amos managed to wait until they put the food away before jumping Dave's bones. Barely. Looked like Dave had the same basic idea, those fingers working open his jeans in short order and pushing in to cup his ass.

"Mmmm. Baby. Good." He got Dave's shirt open and leaned down to lick a tiny nipple, loving it with his tongue. So much for the frozen food section helping. They were both damned hard.

Dave whimpered for him, went all goose-pimpled and gaspy. "Love your mouth, so hot, love."

"Mmmm." He loved the taste of that skin. Just loved it so much. He licked down to Dave's belly, dropping to his knees

to worship Dave's little navel. Dave's fingers got all tangled in his hair, petting and stroking, soft little words of need raining down on him. Amos pulled his cock out with one hand, pulling at it as his other hand went to work on Dave's jeans, opening them up so he could get his face in there and smell Dave's heavy musk.

"So sexy. God, so hungry, love." Dave's pubes were soft and silky against his cheek, his lips, the trail of the shiny black hairs peeking over the top of the pretty little silk boxers.

"For you? Always. And I intend to have my fill." Those boxers were so cute, and he left them in place, rubbing his cheek against Dave through them, letting the cloth be its own caress.

Dave gave him a shuddering moan, fingers tightening in his hair. "Oh ... Oh, that feels ... Yeah."

"Yeah. My baby. So sensual." Dave was like a feast for the senses. Amos licked at the cloth, getting it wet, making it cling.

"Tell me again. Tell me I'm yours." Dave's thighs parted, trapped by his jeans.

"Mine. All mine." He mouthed Dave's heat again, moving up to lick at the tip as it poked out of the top of the shorts.

"Oh, shit. Shep. You ... You tease. Oh. Fuck." Dave was jerking, cock growing harder and wet-tipped. That was what he was looking for. Desperation. Amos stroked his own cock harder and harder, peeling the silk away from Dave's prick and swallowing it down.

"Need. Fuck! Love you." Dave arched, fat cock pushing deep, sliding over his tongue, salty and rich and so male. He took it all, and gave everything he could, tongue flicking the underside as he sucked, using his hand to roll Dave's balls. Dave was shaking hard, fingers almost bruising on his shoulders, hips pistoning, desperate with need. He squeezed just the tiniest bit with his hand, sucking all the way down to those black curls and swallowing, holding his own orgasm off by pinching his cock at the base. The noises Dave made were addictive. God, he loved this man. The low cry echoed throughout the cabin as spunk splashed on his tongue, filling his mouth. Moaning, Amos licked Dave clean, taking it all in, hand moving fast on his own cock, hips snapping.

"Oh. Oh, God. Love." David pushed him back onto the floor, slapping his hand away. "No. Mine. Gonna suck you off and tonight, when you get home? Need you to fuck me."

Then Dave's mouth swallowed him down. Amos moaned and thrashed, willing himself not to come, wanting to enjoy it, just for a second. "Baby. Please."

Dave moaned, one finger sliding behind his balls, teasing at his hole, pressing.

"Fuck!" That was it. That was all it took for him and Amos was coming, shooting hard enough to crack his head against the floor, but that wasn't what made him see stars. Dave did that all on his own. That soft, hot tongue cleaned him, licked and lapped at him until each little aftershock had faded.

"Oh, baby. How am I ever going to work now? I'm like an overcooked noodle." He grinned, listening to Noodle bark outside, hearing his name. Dave giggled around his cock, the

feeling so honest, so sweet. He hadn't even known he'd missed it. He chuckled and pulled Dave up for a kiss, sharing their flavors. "I'm going to fuck you so hard you can't walk for a week. Tonight."

"Mmm ... promise?" Dave rubbed their noses together, eyes just dancing.

"You can count on it."

* * * *

Amos had left and he'd made it about seven minutes before he'd logged in, typing frantically, assuring clients all over the world that he was, indeed, watching their interests, dealing with problems, paying attention. Thank God for Iris. She'd been screening his business mails, dumping and sorting and answering all but about 10% of them. He started a pot of coffee and put in his earphones, listening to Iris' gentle jibes about really going on vacation and "tell Mr. Amos I said hello, dears" for a few minutes before they started feverishly working.

He was on his second pot of coffee and knee-deep in Greek business law when the front door opened. The dog bounded in, coming over to sniff thoroughly, tail wagging. Amos followed soon after, grinning at him and waving, but leaving him to work. They had always respected each other's work space. He waved, typing furiously and information moved back and forth. The deal wanted doing, wanted doing now, and he just wasn't having it. "Damn it, Iris. Get Rick and Gilbert on the fucking phone and tell them to run interference for me. I'm not pushing this trip up. I'm not leaving a single

fucking day earlier than I have to. Those two little bastards owe me."

Amos drifted over, crossing the invisible line as his voice rose to come and rub his shoulders.

"Oh..." He relaxed, head falling forward. Right. He was on vacation. Vacation. With Amos. "Iris. I'm done. You're done. Go home. I'll call you tomorrow. I have plans tonight."

He could hear Iris' laughter as he hung up the phone, shut the laptop. "Hey Shep."

"Hey, baby. Sounds like you got a lot done." Amos smelled like wood and dust and water.

"Not enough, but I ... I'm on fucking vacation, right?" His stomach cramped, acid rising. "I'm on vacation here with you."

"Yes. Yes you are. Let those kids earn their keep and do some work." Amos turned him, green eyes wide, searching his. "You're here. With me."

He nodded, losing himself in those eyes with a desperation that scared him. "Yes. God, yes. With you."

He moved into Amos' arms, breathing deep, taking in the real, male scent.

"No more bad work today." Amos' hands moved up and down his back, soothing. Loving. "Just the good stuff. Biscuits and jelly. Lube."

Oh, God. Amos made him happy, made him laugh. "Lots and lots of lube. And showers. And kissing."

"There you go. And I promised you a good fucking." Amos grinned, relaxing against him and kissing. The ear piece of the phone fell clattering to the floor as his arms wrapped

around Amos' neck. They kissed like they'd been doing something besides that for two days, like they just couldn't not. Amos stroked and petted, easing him.

"Mmm ... shower, yeah? A nice long hot ... Mmm ... love when you touch me there." His body just melted into Amos like it knew what he needed, how bad he needed.

"Yeah. I'm a bit smelly. It's warm out there." They wandered to the bathroom hand in hand and started stripping each other off.

"You smell good. Hot and male and good. You never smelled like this before, never knew how hot it was." He turned Amos toward the wall, licking at his spine.

Amos planted hands and feet and arched into him, ass out, back curved. "Yeah? I like getting you hot, baby."

"Oh, shit. You've made me hot from the first time I saw you. Do you remember? Sitting across that table in that trading seminar? I saw you and knew I needed you." He licked his way down that long spine. "Knew I was fucking lost."

"Yeah. And I came on to you like a ton of bricks. Lost a heck of a good networking opportunity. Didn't matter." Amos moaned, legs shaking.

"No, it didn't. We were in each other's pants before the subway got us to your apartment." He knelt down, nuzzling the top of Amos' crease. "I fell in love with you before Monday morning came."

"And I knew by Saturday night when you let me stroke you off at dinner. God. Dave." Balls swinging, Amos spread for him, pushing back.

"Mmm ... So needy, my Amos." His. His lover. His Shep. He let his teeth scrape along the curve of Amos' ass, then his tongue slid into Amos' crease.

"Fuck! Yes. Thought about you so much. Missed you." Amos was scrabbling against the wall, going up on tiptoes.

"Oh, love." He held Amos open, licking at that tight little hole, just barely touching, teasing, driving Amos higher and higher. Loved him. Loved this man. Moaning, hips rocking, Amos gave it up to him, just letting him do whatever he wanted. Trusting him. He whimpered, tongue pointing and pressing in, fucking with increasing speed. Oh, sweet Christ. So good. So hot.

"Love you, baby." His Amos was panting, voice rough and deep.

He moaned, resting his forehead on the small of Amos' back. "Need you. Need you inside me."

"Want that too. Fuck the shower. Want you in bed." He moved back and Amos turned and pulled him up, kissing him hard. "We can shower after."

"Yes. Bed. God, Amos, please. Need it." He was aching inside, willing to bend over right here and ask for it, ask for Amos' cock to push deep and fill him up.

Stumbling back out of the bathroom, they grabbed the lube and headed for the loft. They managed to make it to the stairs, but that was as far as they got. Amos pushed him down at the foot of the stairs and bent him forward. "Gotta have you, baby. I can't wait."

"Yes. Please. Fuck me, Amos." He pushed his hips back, begging shamelessly, just lost in the heat and passion that

was them, leaving the rules and the bullshit and the stress behind. Amos' beard scraped over his back and ass, lips and tongue moving against his crease for a moment, then slick fingers were working inside him, opening him. He parted his thighs, forehead resting on his arms, riding those fingers, hips pushing hard. "Need. Oh, Amos. More."

"Right here, baby." One more finger, stretching him so wide, and then the head of Amos' long cock was sliding against him, pushing in, hot and slick and hard.

"Oh..." Oh, it burned. Burned deep and good and he was never going to be able to live without this again, never going to be able to believe that he could live without this touch deep inside him.

Amos pushed all the way in, hips against his ass, and leaned down to bite his neck. "So good, baby. Missed this so bad."

Then Amos started to move, rocking him with the force of it. He braced himself, meeting each thrust with a low groan, taking Amos deep and hard, thighs spread wide enough that his muscles shuddered.

"Love. Love. So good." It was a chant against his skin, Amos' sweat dropping on him, that soft beard abrading his shoulder. "Love."

"Yes. Love you. Love you so. Oh, God. I can feel you, Shep, so deep." He was babbling, he knew. He did that, babbled on and on and on, words just pouring out like endless promises and he couldn't help it because it felt so good.

"Yeah. Yeah. Need to..." Amos leaned back, pulling him up and back as well, so he rested on Amos' thighs, and reached for his cock, wrapping a callused hand around it.

"Amos!" He jerked, riding hard now, lips open wide, cries just echoing.

They moved faster, Amos stroking him, pushing into him, working together in a rhythm. "Need you to come on my dick, baby. So tight. Want to feel you."

"Yes. Yes. Love you. Fuck. Oh, fuck. Love you so..." He screamed as he came, clenching tight around Amos' cock, world going bright.

"Dave!" A bright pain bloomed in his shoulder as Amos bit down, and Amos' cock jerked inside him, filling him so deep. He slumped back, head lolling, trying to catch his breath. Lord knew, Amos sounded just as out of breath and they held each other up as they leaned. "What you do to me, baby."

"I ... I love you. I love you, Amos."

"Good. Because I love you, too."

They rested together until they were able to get up, creaking and popping, to head for the shower. They still had biscuits and jam to eat.

Work seemed a million miles away.

Chapter Six

Tuesday.

Amos couldn't believe it was Tuesday. Not the Tuesday after the Monday he'd taken Dave out on the river on, either. The Tuesday after that. Dave had been with him just over a week and he was flying. Tuesday made him thud. Hard. Dave's two week vacation had about four days left to it. Fuck. Amos stood there, holding the full pot of water over the coffee maker, wondering why that thought couldn't wait until Friday. Or Saturday. Why did it have to come Tuesday?

Warm arms wrapped around his belly, lips brushing between his shoulder blades. "Morning, Shep. How's it going?"

He jumped, water sloshing dangerously. "Morning, baby. I was just making coffee."

"Mmm ... Coffee'll work. Was dreaming about you." Dave sounded sleepy and sexy and heartbreakingly happy.

"Yeah?" Amos wasn't going to let his worries ruin it for Dave. He just wasn't. Pouring the water and setting the pot back on the burner, Amos braced himself on the counter and rubbed back against Dave. "Was it a good dream?"

"Yeah. It was. We were making love in the sunshine. There's nothing not to love about that." Dave pet him, slow and easy, just holding him.

"Sounds good. There's ways to make that happen you know? Blanket, deck." He turned, leaning back and grinning,

hands moving on Dave's chest. "Butt naked in the sun. But I think coffee and food first."

"Yeah. Coffee, for sure." Dave tilted his head, fingers trailing over Amos' face, eyes searching. "I ... You okay? Have ... have I overstayed my welcome?"

Dave was right. He could never hide anything for shit. "No, baby. Never. I. Well, it's Tuesday."

David nodded, hand cupping his jaw. "Yeah. Wish it was last Tuesday."

"Yeah." He needed a trim, the way his beard was springing back from Dave's hand. "I, God, baby. I don't want you to go."

"I know. I wish I ... I keep trying to figure out a way to stay longer, but I'm legally bound to make this deal. There's a year's worth of planning in it." Dave leaned in, cheek resting on his chest, fingers trailing along his skin.

"Yeah. I get that. I do. I just. Well, it's something I'm trying hard not to think about." Coward, that's what he was. "I'd much rather think about you and the deck and some cinnamon rolls."

"Oh, yeah. I could get into you and your skin and the sun." Lips slid over one of his nipples, soft and warm. "We ... It's not going to be over, is it? I mean, I love you, Amos. I don't want to lose you again."

Fuck. Fear was something he never wanted to put in Dave's voice, ever. "We'd better sit, yeah? I want to make a few things clear." That probably wasn't helping, sounding all cryptic, but he wanted to get them settled first. They went to the big couch and Amos pulled Dave close. Dave curled in

against him and it struck him, suddenly, how he was the only one to see this, to see the high-powered barracuda deal-maker quiet and snugly and vulnerable.

"Okay, baby. Here it is." The hair at the small of Dave's back was baby fine, so smooth against his rough fingers. "I don't want you to go, but I know you have to. I love you. So damned much. When I left and you didn't come with me, I understood. I did. But..." Fuck, he was getting all choked up. Jesus, why did it have to be Tuesday?

David made a soft sound, hands soothing his belly. "I couldn't just leave our life behind. I've done so much, Shep. I made senior partner, did you know that? I bought our apartment and made enough to live on. I'd worked so long, I couldn't just walk away."

"I know." He nodded, chin rubbing David's temple. "But I can't just let you go this time. Not like I did. I can't. I did it once. So we've got to work something out."

Dave went still and then just sort of dissolved, wrapping around him. "Oh. Oh, God. I thought ... Yes. Yeah, Amos. I want to. Please." An embarrassed laugh sounded, Dave's dark eyes shining up at him. "I mean, I'm sure we can discuss equitable long-term arrangements."

That cracked him up. "Oh, baby. Spoken like a true corporate raider. It's not going to be easy." That look was hard to resist and Amos rubbed noses with Dave. "We're going to butt heads."

"There's more fun things to butt, Amos." Dave grinned, then turned serious. "We will and I'll leave here and get busy

and travel and work and you'll get mad as hell and I'll still love you."

"Yeah." His own sigh of relief was loud and Amos laughed. "I just wanted to get that all done with. You know?"

"Yeah. I know." Dave scooted until those warm thighs were straddling him, ass sitting in his lap. "I don't know how to make it work, but I make shit work all the time that people tell me is impossible. We'll figure it out." He got a long, sweet kiss. "Besides, Iris has your phone number. You'll never be able to escape my clutches again."

"Mmm. Good." Tight and sweet, that ass, and Amos grabbed it, pulling Dave down and rubbing up. "I love you, baby."

"Oh ... I love you, Amos." Those eyes went almost black, the worry just fading away. "Need you."

"Right here. All yours." God, he was hard, all of a sudden, in a rush that left him aching. "Anything."

"I want forever." Dave's eyes were dead serious, sure. Stubborn, beautiful, pushy man.

"And I want you. So we're good to go." His chest was tight, but not with the scary, uh oh tight. This was too much to hold in tight and Amos leaned in for a kiss that seared him all the way down to his toes. He was met with blazing heat, Dave hungry and happy and hot against him, so close that he couldn't figure out where he stopped and Dave's skin started. He just had to, yeah, there. Dave's silk boxers and his sweats got pushed aside and they rubbed together as they kissed, hot and hard and so good he nearly yelled. He bit at Dave's

lips instead, letting it sting a little. That got him a soft little cry, Dave shivering into him, fingers clenching.

Oh, fuck, yeah. He nibbled down Dave's neck, lips closing over the pulse point, and Amos sucked up a mark, claiming.

"Oh, fuck. Amos!" Dave jerked against him, rubbing steady, head falling back and giving him everything. Anything. Shit.

"Yeah, baby. Dave. So hot." They rocked and he licked that spot over and over, fingers digging into Dave's hips. God, they smelled so good together, felt so good, all slick sweat and overheated skin and the wet velvet slide of cocks.

Dave's ass was clenching in his hands, burning hot, hips pistoning over and over, cock leaving wet trails on his belly. His own cock was so hard he figured it was going to split wide open, and Amos grabbed them both, working them hard and fast, making unbearable friction. Dave whimpered, body arching as spunk sprayed over his fingers, hitting his belly and chest.

"Fuck! Dave." A harsh moan and a jerk of his hips and Amos was coming too, all over the place. A soft groan sounded and Dave slid down, licking and nuzzling at his belly, his hand, his cock, cleaning him, tasting them together.

"Oh. Baby. You're the most amazing thing I've ever seen." His clean hand threaded through Dave's hair, petting gently.

"Do you know how much I missed this? Missed hearing you call me baby?" Dave's eyes closed and a shudder shook the thin body.

Sooner or later those gut punches would ease. Surely. He tangled his hand in Dave's curls and lifted that sweet face to bend and kiss. "As much as I missed you calling me Shep."

"Yeah." Dave kissed his lips, his nose, his chin. "We were stupid. I'm sorry."

"So am I." He kissed back, rubbed his cheeks against Dave's, leaving pink spots behind. "We're gonna say that a lot, you and me." He grinned. "But for now we'll get that blanket and lay out on the deck."

They would eat cinnamon buns and lick icing and be naked in the sunlight. And they wouldn't dwell on it. Not until Friday at least. It was only Tuesday.

* * * *

For the first time since he'd come to Amos' house, David couldn't sleep. At all. His bags were packed, shit ready to go, stomach roiling as he watching the stars outside the window. It had been different last time. He'd been numb. He'd been shocked. He hadn't been the one leaving. He hadn't known how bad it would hurt to go.

Still.

This time wasn't forever or even close to forever. This time was a few weeks with phone calls and letters and knowing that Amos loved him. God, this sucked rocks.

He turned over and stroked Amos' hair, watching his lover, petting. Amos murmured and rolled toward him, reaching for him, face creasing in a frown. "Shhh..." He eased the lines with his fingers, moving into Amos' arms. "Sleep, love."

"Mmm. Don' wanna." Amos curled into him, arms wrapping about him. "Love you."

"Love you. Going to miss you." He buried his face into Amos' throat. "Going to go broke paying my long-distance bills."

"Good thing you've got money." That sleep rough smoker's voice teased him, Amos stroking his back softly. "We can do this."

"Yeah. We can. Doesn't mean it doesn't ache a little, knowing I'm sleeping alone tonight, on the other side of the world." He kissed the hollow of Amos' throat. "What interesting weirdness do you want from Athens?"

"Something blue." The response was automatic and he had to laugh. Amos loved his blue. "You, actually. Just you. Safe and sound and here."

He nodded, stroking Amos' hair. "Yeah. Would you let me make a place here, yeah? A home office? So I could come on free weekends, if you weren't busy?"

He wasn't moving in or anything, but...

Still.

"Baby, my house is yours. Anything you want to bring, up to and including Iris."

Oh, God, he loved this man. Laughing, he looked up, smiling into those pretty green eyes. "No Iris. I love her, but I want to be able to make you scream, want to hear you when we make love."

"Yeah. We've already got Noodle, who howls when we get too loud. This place might be small for an Iris." Amos got that diffident, I'm going to say something really important but don't want you to think so look. "There's some space under the stairs that would make a great little office alcove though."

"Oh, yeah? I bet it's warm and cozy, too. Just right for watching you nap on the sofa." He smiled wide, trying to be cool, but so happy.

"It is. And you can swivel around and look right out on the deck too." Amos' face broke into a grin, like he was unable to hold it back.

"I'd be able to smell dinner cooking, too." He ran one hand up Amos' belly, stroking the long scar. "And ... and if you ever needed to come to the city? Your key still works."

He could tell the thought made Amos nervous the way his lover stiffened. "Baby, I don't know ... I don't know if I can."

Dave hid his sigh in a kiss. "You don't have to. I won't ask. It's just the truth." Just the facts. Just in case. Just because he always hoped Amos would wake up and come home.

"I know. I just. Hell. I love it here." Kissing him lightly, Amos grinned. "And my doctor says it's been great for my heart."

He grinned back, stepping on that little voice that pointed out that living away from him had been good for Amos, that Amos had been doing fine alone. "Good. I'll try to give you a workout whenever I'm here."

"Yeah? Cool. 'Cause it was always hard to explain to the doc that half my heart was missing." Amos rolled, putting him on the bottom. "Don't ever doubt it."

Dave reached up, wrapped arms and legs around his lover and held on. "I'm going to try, Shep. I am."

"Good." Amos kissed him breathless, the touch tinged with desperation. He was holding on tight, crying out into those

lips, drinking in every bit of Amos he could, hoarding the memories.

"Love. Baby. Dave." Amos chanted pushing down against him, loving on him.

"Make love to me. Want to feel you." Want to remember. Want to remember this.

"God. Yeah." For a moment he was bereft as Amos rolled and reached for the lube, coming back quickly to kiss him again, pet him, leave marks on his skin.

He pushed up into each touch, low cries filling the air. His hands couldn't stop touching, each kiss getting sweeter and sharper, the contact between them charged, desperate and breathless. There was no time for tenderness, no need, and Amos prepared him quickly, fingers pushing inside him fast and deep. David sobbed out his need, hips slamming against Amos, flesh slapping, hands pulling them closer and then closer together.

"Can't wait, baby." Amos pushed against him, the head of that long, sweet cock sliding inside him, filling him.

"Oh, God. Love you. Love this. Need..." He gasped, Amos' prick moving just so and his cock rubbing right there and oh. Oh, sweet Jesus. Yeah. Please. Now. They rocked and thrust and moved so hard their skin went red, sweat breaking out on them, breath coming hard. Amos gave him everything, words and kisses and hard caresses, sending him soaring.

When they came, he kept his eyes wide open, watching the look in his Amos' eyes. His Amos did the same, filling him with heat, eyes insanely green as they looked into his, Amos moaning his name. David held onto that moment with a greed

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

that he'd never shown for anything else in his life. His. This pleasure and hope and truth. All theirs.

Chapter Seven

Getting on the plane and leaving Amos behind was the hardest thing he'd ever done. It was so familiar—getting on the plane, settling back in the chair, ordering the first vodka, turning on the laptop and getting to work. Knowing that Amos wouldn't be at the apartment when he got back.

Oh, Christ. His stomach cramped violently and his eyes closed. He bit his bottom lip, breathing slowly as he dug out some antacids. When they kicked in, he started working, started losing himself in the numbers and rules and money and dates. That made it easier, made it bearable.

Still, he pulled air phone out as soon as he thought Amos would be home.

Just to hear that voice tell him I love you again.

* * * *

Amos was wandering. He'd done two days of hard work at the end of the week and an overnight trip over Friday and Saturday. Hell, he'd been working his ass off trying to pretend that it didn't matter that Dave wasn't even on the same continent he was.

It wasn't working. They'd spoken twice. Once almost as soon as he got home from dropping Dave at the airport, the other Thursday night when Dave caught a break between meetings. Dave had been gone a week and it seemed like a lifetime. It seemed like longer than the almost four years he'd spent never thinking once he'd see Dave again. This was almost worse.

Noodle followed him around the house, from the couch to the shower to the deck, whining softly and nuzzling the backs of his knees. Damn. He was scaring the dog. He let Noodle out to run and, with a soft woof and one last lick, Noodle went. Amos went back to waiting for the phone to ring.

When it did he almost fell over, so lost was he in contemplating how to describe the view. It dawned on him what that shrill ringing was then and Amos lunged for the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hey, stranger." Dave's voice was rough, scratchy, but clear and right there. "How's it going?"

His chest loosened, and Amos flopped down on the couch. "Better. You sound tired, baby."

"Yeah. I just woke up and showered. Was up late crunching figures. What have you been up to?"

"Working. Took a bunch of Mormons on a two day boat trip. You want a copy of the Book of Mormon? I got three." God, it was good to hear Dave's voice.

"Err ... no. No, thank you." Dave chuckled and Amos could hear the rustle of fabric. "I'll stick with Greek business law."

"Yuck. Sounds just as bad. But I'll skip the obvious Shakespeare reference." Settling deeper, Amos cradled the phone between shoulder and ear. "So what are you wearing, baby?"

"Uh ... the robe I stole from you..." He could hear Dave's blush.

"Oh. Oh, baby. The blue one? I love how that looks on your skin." Shit, he was poking the Hell out of his sweats already.

"Yeah. I couldn't leave it, it still smells like you, like your house." Dave's voice got rougher, a little husky.

"Yeah? The couch still smells like us. It's good." It would fade, he knew, but for now it was good.

"Oh ... Oh, God. Shep." Dave's breath got a little faster, a little harder. "I want you."

"Yeah. Oh, baby, I want you too. Miss you so much." It was like a constant ache, that wanting. Made his belly hurt. Made his cock hard as nails. "Wish you were here. I'd ride you 'til we both fell over."

A soft little groan sounded, rich and low. "Oh, yeah. Love to watch you, feel you all tight and hot and holding me. You've got the sweetest ass."

"And your cock is so thick it fills me right up. I miss the way you smell, Dave. Miss hearing you snore, for God's sake." Okay, unsexy there, but he so meant it.

Dave chuckled, the sound almost merry. "I'll remember you said that, next time you want to kick me out of the bed when my allergies are acting up."

He laughed too. He couldn't not laugh. "I love you."

"Oh, I love you, Amos. Keep dreaming about you, about going on the raft with you again and sharing a sleeping bag this time. About all sorts of things."

"Yeah? Dream about us making love under the stars?" His Dave always surprised him. "Moonlight on your skin. Jesus. I'm so hard for you, baby."

"Oh. Oh, God, I want to touch you. I want to see the stars all around you, want to keep you warm. Want to hear your

moan echo and know it's for me." Low and rough as sandpaper, Dave's voice was almost like a caress. Almost.

Too bad it was his own hands that dove inside his sweats to pull his cock out and rub it. "Always for you, Dave. It's always been you."

"You're touching yourself, yeah? I want to be there, licking you, letting you ride my fingers, kissing you. Watching."

"God. Yeah. I'm so hard it hurts, baby." He was and his hand moved faster and faster, hips rising and falling. So empty. "Want you so bad."

"Mm-hmm. Need you. Need your cock and your smile and your hands and ... Oh. Oh, Shep. I ache."

He whimpered, squirming, trying to get closer to that voice, even though it was impossible. His breath was short, heart pounding, balls drawn up tight. "Dave. Baby. Please."

"Yeah, love. Come for me. Love you so much, gonna love you forever, I promise." Dave keened, the sweet babble proving he wasn't the only one who needed.

A high, thin cry escaped him and Amos came all over his hand and chest and belly, wheezing for breath, almost feeling Dave there with him. Damn it. "Oh, God, baby."

"Oh. Oh, yeah. Shep." He got a quiet chuckle. "'m gonna have to shower again, or I'll smell like sex all day."

Fuck. "Wish I could be there. I'd make you wear it. And me." Sticky and sated, Amos slumped on the couch, eyelids heavy.

"Mmm ... Wish you were here too, love. I'd curl up in your lap and nap." A soft sigh sounded. "Never could sleep worth a shit without you, Shep. You ease me."

Jesus. That made his eyes sting. "I know. I worried about how you slept, when we were, you know. Apart."

"Oh. I ... I didn't at all, not for a long time. Still don't much. I ... When I was with you? At your house? It was easy. I didn't need any help."

He wanted to curl up with Dave and let Dave sleep for days and days. But he couldn't, so he would do the best he could. "You need to call me tomorrow night. So I can talk you to sleep."

"I'd like that." He heard Dave take a long, shaky breath. "I love you."

"I love you too, Dave. I do. And we'll see each other soon. Until then? We'll make do, yeah?" Absently, Amos rubbed his come into his skin, knowing they would have to hang up soon.

"We will. Get some rest, my mountain man. I'm going to go play corporate raider."

"Knock 'em dead, Dave. I'll dream of you." No sense in dragging it out, but the small connection was hard to give up.

"I will. Hell, gotta pay our phone bill. Love you, Shep. Goodnight." With that, the connection went dead.

Well, shit. That was that. Until the next call.

Chapter Eight

The house was damned empty. Noodle tried to keep him company, mainly by drooling all over him and sleeping on his legs at night, but it didn't help. Dave was gone. Not for good. Amos would go get the man and drag him back by his hair if he had to. He would. Even if the thought of going back to New York made his chest hurt. But he would.

Right now, though, it was time for Amos to get back to work. He scheduled as much guide time as he could. Not only did it keep him busy, but he was kinda broke, being out of work for two weeks to spend time with Dave. It was worth it, but he had bills to pay.

The Bob's came around a good bit, too, little Bob knowing somehow that he needed the company.

All in all, it was okay. He was getting back into the swing of his life, working hard, smoking like a chimney.

Damn, he missed Dave.

* * * *

David stretched out in his chair, wet and warm from a quick shower. The day had been evil—all stress and anger and gut-wrenching aggravation and...

Oh, he so needed to hear Amos' voice.

The robe was the soft, old one from Amos' house. He'd swapped it for his own and slept wrapped up in it. It didn't smell like Amos anymore, but it felt good, familiar. Homey.

David shook his head at himself. Silly. Still ... it would make Amos laugh.

He picked up the phone and called.

* * * *

"Good lord!" The words were a gasp, Iris' eyes wide.

He looked around. "What?"

"You look ... You look fabulous, David. Healthy and whole—your vacation must have done you well." She pottered in, sat across his desk. "How is Amos?"

David had the good graces to blush and smile. "Fine. Amos is ... Just fine."

"Happy?"

"Yes."

"Coming back to the city?"

"Iris! Of course not. We ... we're looking into long-distance scenarios."

* * * *

"David. It's been ages." Iris' eyes were quiet, concerned. "I admit, after the last few phone calls we had, I quite expected you to spend the weekend in Colorado."

He nodded. "It was a close thing. I needed to stop in here, needed to get some things arranged. I'm hoping to get back there next weekend."

"You're in London for three weeks starting Wednesday, remember. Then back here for the board meeting and then to Sydney."

Oh. He took a deep breath and nodded, tapping out a note to himself on the keyboard. He couldn't get out of doing some of this paperwork and catching up here in the office. "I need to find someone to take the fish, Iris. I'm not going to be home to take care of them."

"Yes, sir. Do you have anything else?"

He nodded. "Have the laundry service come by, I need the things in my suitcase done. Have a laptop sent to Glenwood—the same address you sent that paperwork to in July. Top of the line, good modem."

"Yes, sir. Is there a note?"

David looked up and grinned. "Starting my home office sooner rather than later. Dave."

Iris' eyes practically twinkled. "Yes, David. I'll get right on it."

Oh, he might just live.

* * * *

The box came with a note inside. "Starting my home office sooner rather than later—Dave"

Amos unpacked it. A laptop. Oh. Thank God. He knew Dave wouldn't be home soon, there was too much going on, trips to make to Australia or something. But the laptop was like a promise. One that Dave had made, and obviously intended to keep.

Not to mention the fact that he could get a hold of the man via email now, if he bit the bullet and got service. It would have to be dial-up, he couldn't get DSL, because he couldn't afford to run a line. But he could afford ten bucks a month for that Peoplepc stuff.

It would be like phone sex. But with typing.

* * * *

When did he know he was toast?

Not when he called from the airport. Not when he was taken by the urge to email Amos in the midst of a business meeting.

Not when he mailed handwritten notes.

Or called daily.

Or sent flowers and building equipment and laptops.

No. He knew he was hopeless when he found one of the chew toys Noodle liked and added it to Shep's care package.

* * * *

Flowers. Dave sent him flowers. Blue and yellow and purple and deep red.

Noodle wanted to eat them and the poor guy that had to deliver them was kinda grumpy, but Amos? He loved them.

And when he told Dave about Noodle trying to eat the flowers? Dave sent Noodle a chew toy. Organic, even.

God, he loved that man

* * * *

David hated everyone and everything.

The deal was souring quickly, the bank waffling now, and he was so close to closing. Someone was eating curry—gag—and his dim-witted assistant that the London office gave him was more interested in beer and bud than actually doing something and he'd be damned if Iris didn't have to go play grandma when her daughter spawned.

Not only that? The coffee sucked.

And his feet were cold.

And his laptop was fritzzy.

And. And. And.

And he missed Amos.

* * * *

David's days started at midnight these days, getting up to call across the world to try and catch Shep, talk for an hour or so and then start working. The deal was coming together, the pieces slowly falling into place.

Slowly.

The Mediterranean was lovely and he found amazing bits of this and that to send to his lover—some dishes that were the blue Shep loved, a vase that would go in the bedroom window, a fabulous white knit bedspread that was heavy and soft and sensual and perfect. A book on ancient Greek eroticism. Olives. Cheese.

He rolled over, sleepless, checking the weather in Colorado, wondering if a certain tanned, bearded man was hiking or rafting or sleeping right now.

* * * *

"David? David? Hold up." He turned, the voice familiar, but he couldn't place it right off. He was met with blond, blue-eyed perfection—Tom, Tim, Tam, Tank, something.

"Hey, what's up?" If he hurried home, he could log in and spend an hour or two alone with Amos before Shep needed to get to bed.

"A few of the guys were going to Marty's for a beer and some hot wings, watch the floor show, celebrate the Athens deal. We wanted to know if you would come." The kid was cute, in a puppy dog sort of way, he supposed. Not Amos, but cute.

"I'm not the floorshow type, really, but thanks. I'm going to get home and chill out."

"How about something quieter, something just us? A bit of dinner, maybe a glass of wine?"

"No, thanks. You have fun. Celebrate hard. We're starting on the Williamson contract tomorrow." He headed toward the elevator, head filled with numbers and names and ideas and the promise of Amos, leaving Tim, Tam, Tom, whatever behind.

* * * *

"David, shall I arrange plane or dinner reservations for Thanksgiving week for you?"

He tilted his head, looked at the nondescript table in front of him, laptop open, numbers flashing by. "Hmm? Thanksgiving? Is it November? It's not November."

No, it was August, five days before this deal closed and he could get out of LA and head for London. He hated LA with a passion.

"No, sir. But reservations fill quickly for that time of year."

"Oh, right. Plane tickets, then. I'll head h ... I'll head to Colorado, spend Thanksgiving with Amos." He sent an email while he was thinking about it—maybe he could sneak a weekend in even earlier. Maybe Labor Day.

"Make Christmas reservations, too, please?" Christmas. In the mountains. With Shep.

He grinned, the day suddenly just ... better.

Chapter Nine

The day sucked. Just fucking sucked. The river was getting too low for a good ride, and soon they'd be cutting back the irrigation water and putting him out of that job 'til spring. Didn't stop some damned fool from somewhere in Maryland from piling out of the raft into the river and scraping up their legs, though. And threatening to sue him. Thank God for waivers.

Noodle ate his favorite sweats. The steak he cooked for dinner ended up making him sick as a dog, only not his dog, 'cause Noodle took one sniff and ran off. Should have told him he was gonna pay for it.

And worst? When he was sitting on the bathroom floor at two am, head against the cool, smooth porcelain, heaving and sweating? He didn't have Dave to pet him and soothe him and make him drink ginger ale.

He missed Dave.

* * * *

David sent Amos things. He knew it drove Amos nuts—knew Amos didn't want him spending money, but Amos didn't have the cash and he did and he liked finding interesting things, fun things, soft things. He liked finding soft shirts, expensive sheets, the perfect ceramic tiles for their—THEIR—new front room. He liked knowing that the little house in Colorado was slowly looking like them.

The next package, he packed himself—the collage of them together had been in the closet for months, a little rosewood

box filled old love notes, and a key to his safety deposit box, just in case.

* * * *

On the message machine—

"Hey, love. 's me. It's ... it's real late. My calendar says you're out on the river working, but the vodka's making me lonely and I wanted to hear your voice, even if it was the machine. Love you. Bye."

"Shep, would you rather have aqua or blue towels?"

"Hey, love. Just calling to tell you Iris will be calling about the holidays. Don't freak out, you know she worries. Love you."

"Amos? This is Iris Dean. I was calling to tell you David will be flying in for Thanksgiving at noon the Wednesday before. I know it's very early notice, but I thought you might like to put it in your calendar."

"Hey love. Heading to the airport—I'm making a quick trip to Berlin. Won't be staying, will be back in London shortly. This deal's being bearish. Argh. Miss you."

A soft chuckle sounded. "Hey Shep. Whatcha wearin'?"

* * * *

Amos picked up the mail on the way up to the house, stopping at the box at the main road. Bills and junk and a box from Dave. His stomach flipped a little, flush coming to his cheeks. Fuck, he was a dork, getting all het up over a box. He complained, of course he did, because Dave didn't need to be spending money on him, but it still told him that Dave was thinking about him as much as business when he got something from Greece, or Australia, or London.

This one had pictures and love notes. He found them among the folds of the soft Irish sweater that combined his favorite blue with a green he saw in the mirror everyday.

Oh. Love notes from when they first started seeing each other. Lunchbox notes from two too busy business men, naughty little emails, printed off and doodled on, handwritten silliness about going to the store, be back soon. All of them neatly saved.

Amos picked up the phone. For this? He'd pay for that call overseas. Just to say thank you for loving him.

* * * *

Dave should be calling in about five minutes. They'd set a phone date tonight, not an internet one. Well, Amos had. He needed Dave's voice. Needed to hear Dave go from tired and growly to happy. Needed it bad.

Amos put Noodle out and stripped off his clothes, sliding nude into the bed, letting the really good sheets Dave had sent him from Egypt rub all over, like he wanted Dave to. He was half hard already and Amos had to make a conscious effort not to touch himself. He would wait for Dave.

They had a date.

Chapter Ten

Dave shouldered his carry-on and ignored the luggage carousel. His real luggage was in storage at JFK, waiting to get picked up on his way to London. For this trip? Toothbrush, robe, t-shirts. If he was lucky? He'd only need the toothbrush.

"Help you with the bag, mister?" Oh. He knew that voice. Had waited for it. Needed it. He turned to see Amos smiling at him, even browner nut skin looking soft and smooth above and below the beard. The moisturizer was working.

"That's not what I need help with, stranger." He grinned from here to tomorrow, so glad to see those smiling green eyes. "God, you look good."

"And you look edible. Even if you are kinda bony." Amos looked so happy to see him, and horny, but there was a hint of worry lurking on that much loved face.

"Well, there's is definitely some boniness. You ready to go home? I'm needing you, love." He could hear the want and the tired and the need in his own voice, knew Amos would hear it, too. He was worn through.

"I am." Moving closer, Amos rubbed shoulders with him, brushed warm fingers against his. "Got biscuits and jam, and the hot tub, and some of that fancy massage oil."

"Oh ... That sounds like sheer heaven." They wandered out to the truck, grinning at each other like fools. "Did those feather beds I ordered you come? Did you like them?"

"Oh, yeah. Been waiting for you to come, just to show you how much." They'd tied up over those, Amos yelling at him

over the phone about buying him stuff, until David had calmly explained it was for them, and if he wanted feather beds in their place, he'd send them. Amos had shut right up. "I think I need to kiss you."

"I think that's a fabulous idea, Amos." He nodded, meeting Amos' eyes. "Please."

That was the nice thing about taking a puddle jumper into the back of beyond. No crowds. Amos pushed him up against the truck, meeting his mouth with desperate need. Oh, shit. Shit. Yes.

Nothing like weeks of wanting to make the bottom fall clear out of the earth. He moaned, bag landing on the ground as his arms wrapped around Amos' neck. They kissed and kissed, Amos moaning into his mouth, tongue pushing the sound deep. God, Amos tasted good, necessary, made his head spin and his cock throb and ... Yeah. Welcome home.

They broke away, gasping, as an SUV went by, honking madly. "We'd better get home."

"Yeah. What I want from you isn't parking lot appropriate." He squeezed Amos' hand. "Been too long, love."

"Way too long." Another brief kiss landed on his lips and Amos opened the truck for him, picking up his bag and slinging it in the back before climbing in the other side. "So did Iris like the flowers?"

"She did. You're her new favorite person. She had some of our pictures blown up and framed and hung in the office." Iris had always adored Amos, had been the one person who had been there through all of it—the heart attack, the break up, everything.

"Hey, without her, you'd never have time to talk to me." There was no accusation in that, just admiration. "And she and I both adore you. With that in common? We're good to go." Amos grinned over at him.

"She's a love. I thought I was going to lose her when Harry died. But she pulled through, just worked her ass off." He shook his head. "I couldn't work without her. Hell, I don't even know what city I'm in half the time."

"Well, now you're here. With me." The grin turned to smolder and if they weren't on a twisty mountain road he would have jumped Amos right there.

"Yes. Now I'm..." Home? Here? Where I'm supposed to be? All of the above?

"Home." So sure, so solid. Amos reached over to pet his leg. "And as soon as I get you to the house? Your ass is mine."

"Oh, thank God." He scooted over, twining his fingers with Amos', getting close enough to smell and feel. "How's the river guide business doing? Does it start fading of about now?"

"A little? It will be mostly weekends after this weekend. Always is after Labor Day. But those will be one and two hour trips, a lot less labor for just about as much money." Amos squeezed his hand, and he could smell the cigarette smoke now that he was nearer the ashtray.

"Well, I'm glad I got you this weekend." He rubbed his cheek on Amos' shoulder. "I needed you."

He'd save the cigarette argument for tomorrow. Or Sunday morning.

"I'm always available for you, baby." Amos untangled their fingers and put that arm around him, driving easily with only one hand. "You're it, you know?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I do." He kissed Amos' jaw as he nodded. "God, you feel good. I could spend a few thousand years like this."

"Well, you can't." A soft chuckle stirred his hair. "We're almost home." The drive had flown by and they were indeed pulling into the long drive, the cabin only about a quarter of a mile off.

"Oh, almost where my ass is yours." He chuckled, watching the view, looking for things that had changed, things he'd forgotten.

"You know it." The leaves weren't quite turning, but the green was tired, and the road was dustier, like things had really dried up while he was gone. Amos pulled up and parked, and the first thing he noticed was the bare wood bones of an addition on the back of the cabin.

"Oh, what's this?" He opened the truck door, laughing as Noodle barked at him from the front.

"Well, you keep sending stuff, I figure we're gonna need more space." Noodle almost knocked him down, bouncing over to lick him and love him, wagging furiously. Amos pulled the mutt off him, telling Noodle to go get the ball, and grabbed his bag out of the back. "I'm thinking a new living room, maybe, so you can have the alcove and the back of the nook for your office and we can make the dining area bigger."

"Oh. Oh, love." He actually felt a little dizzy, more than a little stunned. "Oh, Amos. You..." He turned and pushed into those warm arms, face lifting for a kiss.

"Mmmm." Amos kissed him deep and hard, making them both breathless. They kissed so long that Noodle thought there was something wrong with them and came back, whining and barking.

He chuckled into the kiss, one hand reaching down to pat the poor pup. "He's not used to you being kissed senseless in the front yard?"

"Well, it's not like Bobs are going to do it." They wandered inside, hand in hand, and the big Greek vase he'd sent was directly across from the front door, filled with bright blue and green peacock feathers.

"Oh, it looks wonderful. Just like I thought it would." He turned, pushed back into Amos' arms. "Hey. I ... I'm home."

God, it felt weird to say that, but the look in Amos' eyes? Worth a ton of weirdness. Amos grabbed his ass in both hands and squeezed. "Yep. And this is mine. Get naked, baby. We've got a feather bed to break in."

He laughed, fingers working at his buttons, at Amos', wanting more skin, more sensation, more peace and laughter and love. He got all the help he needed, Amos helping him strip down, pulling and tugging until they were up in the loft, sinking down on a bed that felt like clouds.

"Oh ... Oh, Amos..." He rolled into Amos' arms, one leg wrapping around that warm hip. "Feels so soft..."

"It does. I put it on today. Figured we'd break it in together. That and the sheets." Those green eyes sparkled,

and Amos stroked and petted and nipped at his skin. "Dark blue sheets and your skin, baby. Makes me hard."

"Mmm ... You smell good." He nuzzled in until he could fasten onto the soft skin of Amos' throat, sucking and licking and marking, surrounding himself with heat.

"God. Yeah. Dave." Tipping back, Amos let him have all that skin, all the way up to the start of Amos' soft, well-trimmed beard. Oh, he could just eat Amos up. He groaned, exploring and lapping, drawing up one little mark after another, fingers drawing circles around hard little nipples. That skin was brown all the way to Amos' waist, where it went pale, though not as pale as it had been when he left.

"You've been sunbathing. Oh, I want to see that, you sleeping in the sun, sweating, just beginning to get hard." He rubbed his face against those soft curls, breathing Amos in deep.

"Mmmmmhmmm. Did a lot of napping out on the deck, thinking about you and that blanket and the stars." Legs spreading wide, Amos arched, stretching out long, letting him play.

That made him smile and he ran his hands down Amos' legs, fingers rubbing and massaging as his tongue lapped at those heavy balls. "I want that, too. I'm greedy for you, Shep. I want it all."

"Want you, baby. So bad." Shifting, twisting, Amos pushed against him, cock brushing his cheek, moaning for him, voice rough.

"Yours." He settled his cheek on Shep's belly and drew the tip of that long, sweet cock in, tongue sliding around the tip, fingers cupping the velvet heat of those sacs.

"Dave!" Cock jerking, legs drawing up, Amos pushed into his mouth, petting his hair with both hands. The taste was all salt and man and Amos, sunshine and smoke. Oh, Christ. It made him hungry, made him need unbearably and he opened wide, taking Amos in deep, pulling and moaning, his own hips rocking into the softness of the bed. The moved together so well, like there was music only they could hear. It was so good, too good. Amos' thighs trembled and that tight belly rippled for him and Amos' cock jerked in his mouth. He groaned, fingers sliding down to tease the tiny little hole, pushing Amos farther, deeper, harder.

"Oh! Oh, Dave." Amos bucked, body moving fast and hard as Amos shot deep into his throat, filling him. David swallowed, took it all down, refusing to lose even a drop. He kept sucking long after Amos was cleaned, tongue lapping at the slit, making Amos shudder with aftershocks.

"Baby. You're killing me." Eyes cloudy, hands clumsy, Amos smiled down at him, patting his shoulders.

"No, Shep. I'm loving you. There's a difference." He kissed Amos' bellybutton, the bottom of the wide scar, the spot over that beating heart.

"Mmmm. Love you." He got a dazed grin and a deep kiss. "Want you in me."

"Yes." He reached up for the lube, chuckling when Amos' lips tickled across his chest, tongue teasing.

"I got the good stuff, baby." Amos nuzzled his armpit, nibbled at his ribs.

"Oooh ... spoiling me." He started giggling, wriggling against Amos a little, cock bumping against that warm skin.

"You bet. Want you to keep coming back." Warm fingers closed around his cock, measuring him, testing his hardness.

He whimpered, pushing into that touch. "Always. You make me need."

"You make me crazy. Come on, baby. In." Amos tugged, laughing as he winced.

"Pushy, pushy." He tasted that smile, handing over the lube. "Get us ready. Let me see." There was nothing Amos liked better than showing off and he knew it. The soft moan he got proved it and Amos reached for the lube, petting his hand for a minute before taking it from him. Then Amos was popping the top, getting two fingers slick, legs drawing up. He trailed his fingers along Amos' thighs, ghosting over cock and balls. "So hungry. So pretty. Show me more, love."

"Mmm. God, baby. So good." Amos gave him what he wanted, pushing those strong fingers right inside, moaning and panting. He leaned down, nuzzling and licking at Amos' balls, tongue teasing fingers and hole both, cock throbbing painfully. "Oh. Yeah. Baby. You could help. Put yours in, too." Twisting, Amos raised his hips, giving him the most amazing view.

David groaned, one finger sliding in alongside Amos' stretching that sweet, tight hole for his cock. "Oh, Christ. So tight, love."

"Yeah. Fuck, yeah." Amos' fingers moved against his and that sweet ass clenched tight around them and Amos just looked blissed out, cock leaking like crazy, green eyes hot. "I ... feels. Oh, Dave."

"Mmm ... yes. Need you now. Can't wait anymore. Need, Shep. Please." He pulled their hands away, moving up along Amos' body, cock nudging that slick hole.

"In. Yeah. Need to feel you. Drive me crazy." Opening to him easily, Amos pulled him in, hands on him, touching and loving.

His toes curled up, head falling back as he sank in deep, spreading his lover wide. So tight. So fucking hot. Christ. Legs full of hard muscle went around him, pulling him in tight, not letting him ease up for a moment. Amos held him tight, nipping his neck, making the most delicious noises.

"Fuck. Love. Live for this. Need this. Oh, Christ. Love you." Babbling again. Amos brought it out in him. Oh. Oh, so sweet.

"Missed you so bad." They moved fast and hard, their skin slapping together, Amos' ass against his balls, the prickle of Amos' curls at the base of his shaft as he sank in. Amos was scraping his back up good, fingers digging in.

"Yes. Oh, God." His hand found Amos' prick, started tugging in time with his thrusts.

"Love! Baby, I need you so bad." Amos was just going crazy, riding his cock like nobody's business.

"Got me. Oh. Yours. Shep." His hips were snapping, spine arched painfully, room spinning. "Come for me. Need to feel you."

Anything he asked was his with Amos, and his lover came for him, ass clamping down around him, nails scratching down his back and ass. The world hiccupped and stopped, his focus narrowing to his cock, his balls, his lover under him.

"Like that, baby. Just like that." God, Amos sounded raw, open. Hot as Hell.

"Oh. Love you!" He shot, keening and shaking, completely undone.

"Baby. Love you." They held on to each other, shaking, coming down hard.

"Mmm ... Never leaving this bed again." He settled close, not sure if he wanted to curl in and nap or not waste a single second sleeping.

"Good." Amos wasn't going to let him stay awake, petting him, soothing him. "Sleep for me, baby. I'll wake you in an hour or two for dinner and hot tub. Promise."

"Oh ... The hot tub sounds good..." He grinned up at Amos, stroking that sweet face. Or maybe he just dreamed it, because it was heartbeats later that he was dreaming.

* * * *

The deck was, well, decked out, blankets and quilts and an air mattress and crackers and cheese and ... Amos took a deep breath. Dave was gonna love it. He was. Amos went back in the house after making sure the food was sealed in the cooler so Noodle couldn't get to it. Time to wake Dave up. Amos sat on the edge of the bed and smiled at his sleeping lover. Dave looked more rested already. He leaned down to drop a soft kiss on those slightly open lips. "Baby. wake up."

"Mmm ... love." A slow, sweet smile lit Dave's face up, those heavy black lashes fluttering.

"Hey, baby. Amos grinned down. "Time for hot tubbing."

"Oh ... Sounds perfect." Dave's smile just got wider, his lover pushing up for another kiss. "Love bubbling with you."

"Yeah. Me too. With you, I mean." He had to grin again, happy and horny and goofy as Hell. "Come on. We'll dip and then the sun will be setting and we can watch."

Eager and happy, Dave got up, arms wrapped around his waist as they headed down, fingers so soft on his belly.

"Mmm. God, it's good to have you here to touch, Dave." He loved it. Had to say it.

"Yes. I didn't think it would be so hard, but I need this. Need you." A soft kiss brushed across his nape. "You smell so good."

"So do you. Smell like us." God, they were saps. But he didn't care. He led Dave to the hot tub, the jets already going.

Dave crawled in, eyes dropping closed, a low groan that was just damned near all sex filling the room. Hedonist. He crawled right in beside, snuggling up beside Dave, nuzzling him, letting the water move him. They floated, toes bobbing up periodically. Dave fit beside him, no awkwardness at all, just fit fine. Easy. Lazy. Well, except for the hand cupping his cock. There was a little intent there.

That was nice. Really nice. Amos just purred. Just fucking purred, moving into the touch. Dave's lips covered his, the kiss slowly building as those fingers wrapped around him.

Damn. He loved that taste, loved the feel of Dave touching him. "Love you."

"Mmm ... Love you. You tell me when we have to get out. I could soak with you for hours. Melt my brain." Dave smiled at him, nibbling at his bottom lip, touch so gentle.

He was a bit floaty now that he thought about it and not in the good way. "We should go out on the deck. The lube's out there."

"Mmm ... If Noodle didn't eat it, you mean." Dave winked and helped him up, wrapping him in a huge blue towel—another gift from the David Llaves, World Traveler fund.

"Oh." He giggled. "I didn't think to hide the lube."

Dave laughed softly, wrapping all around him, kissing his cheek. "Come on, you. Let's go rescue our lube."

They stumbled out, mainly because his legs weren't working right. The doc kept telling him no more than five or ten minutes, but he lost track of time with Dave. They flopped down on the airbed and he rolled on top of Dave, kissing hard.

"Mmm..." Dave opened right up, arms wrapping around him and holding tight. The kisses didn't do a bit of good for his equilibrium, Dave stealing his breath away. So skinny, his Dave. Hard bone and soft skin. It was different, disorienting for a moment, but the taste and smell were the same. Still the same.

"Love you, Shep." The words were the same, too, the truth and intensity behind them stronger now than ever.

"Love you, too, baby." It came right from his heart, too. So true. "Wanna make out 'til we can't see?"

"Hell, yes." Dave stretched underneath him, all smiles. "Been wanting this since that first night. Wanting to love you under the stars."

"Yeah." Nibbling his way down, Amos left a sweet purple mark on Dave's neck. Dave's collarbones were sharp, and Amos' fingers trailed over each rib, counting them. Dave's fingers tangled in his hair, holding him close, offering him more.

"Mmm. Gonna feed you baked brie and jelly and those puff things you like, and trifle with jam." He licked and sucked, taking in the sweet flavor of that beautiful skin.

"You ... Oh, love, there. More, please.... You spoil me..." Dave curled around him, sliding so that he was being touched, stroked, held.

He moved to Dave's nipples. licking each in turn before sliding down to the flat belly, nuzzling the spot he loved so much, just below the navel. "Of course I do. Need to."

Dave moaned for him, legs moving restlessly, fat cock full and nudging his chin. "Mm ... don't need to. I'd love you anyway. Loved you always."

"I know." He did. He knew it. Even when he left, he knew. God, that cock smelled so good. Amos rubbed his bearded cheek against it, teasing them both. "Want to anyway."

Soft laughter filled the air, made husky with moans. "Yes. Anything, love. Anything."

Amos reached for the lube, happy to find that Noodle hadn't chewed on it, and found it next to Dave's hip. Thank goodness. He opened it, getting his fingers good and slick, and slid one inside Dave's body at the same time he took that

fat prick into his mouth. That would teach Dave about spoiling.

"Oh..." Dave's thighs parted, heels pushing into the mattress as those hips started rocking, riding his fingers. He just sucked and licked and fucked Dave's tight ass with his fingers and went to town, loving Dave in to a puddle as the sun went down behind them. When Dave was thrashing and moaning and open, Amos pulled back and got himself wet, real wet, and settled between Dave's thighs, nudging with his cock.

"Oh. Oh, yes. In me." Dave pulled his knees up and back, so sexy, so wanton—open and spread and his.

He hung there for just a moment, taking in the deep flush of Dave's skin, the dazed look in Dave's dark eyes, the quivering, hard cock. Then he squeezed in, moaning as the tight and heat surrounded him. Their sounds mingled together, mixed all into something unbearable and real and hungry. It wasn't fast and hard. It was slow and sweet, the night air its own caress around them. He reached for Dave's cock, wrapping one hand around its girth, pumping slow and even.

"I dreamed this." Dave's eyes were wide, focused on him. "Oh, Shep ... So fucking beautiful."

"You. You're the.. oh, baby." Suddenly it was crawling up his spine and Amos pumped harder, pulling Dave's cock as he thrust, needing more. "Gonna soon."

"Love you..." Dave arched for him, toes curling, hands still holding those legs open for him.

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

"Love you, baby." Amos couldn't hold it back anymore. He smacked into Dave, hips jerking as he shot, a harsh cry ripping from him. Dave watched him, almost drinking the sight of him in, before relaxing and giving it up, heat pouring over his hand, ass rippling around his cock. They flopped together, Amos trying to make sure his whole weight didn't land on Dave. Before long, their breathing evened out and they started to cool off, and Amos wrapped the quilts around them, snuggling. "Good."

"Mmm ... yes." Dave was drawing circles on his belly, his hips. "Better than good."

They would rest, and cuddle, and he would feed Dave finger foods. He was right. Dave loved it. Dave loved him. And that was the best feeling under any stars.

Chapter Eleven

He hurt.

Not a gee-I-miss-Amos hurt. Or a gosh-I'm-worn-out hurt. Or a toothache hurt.

This was deep and harsh, something rocking his belly deep inside, something fiery enough to make him sweat, make him shake as he stumbled from bed to bathroom.

Enough to make him not surprised when he emptied his stomach and the toilet was filled with blood. Oh God. He was sick. Really sick.

Scared, too.

What if it was something serious? What if it was something deadly? What if...

No. No, he just got Amos back. He couldn't.

He wouldn't.

The hot water in the shower was so heavy and he sank to the floor of the tub, resting. Warm.

God, he hurt.

* * * *

London was busy, but Sydney was sheer hell—his body wasn't ready to go from early Fall to early Spring and fourteen hour work days became eighteen to twenty-hour days as the deal tried to sour on him. Dave told himself he was just stressed and tired when he lost all the weight he'd put on in Colorado. He told himself he was just worried and overworked when he needed the pills to get up and get moving and nothing—nothing—made his belly stop burning.

He told himself he would start taking care of himself as soon as he got back to the city, got back to where he and Amos weren't on two entirely different schedules. He told himself he would tell his doctor if he kept vomiting blood, kept waking up with the taste of bile in his mouth.

He told himself he would see Amos soon.

Soon.

As soon as this deal gelled.

* * * *

"You look terrible, David. Let me call the physician."

"No. I have to file these papers. Go on, Iris. Please." He blinked down at the pile of papers, ignoring the look in Iris' eyes.

"Can I get you anything?"

He shook his head. "No. I'm good."

* * * *

"I've called an ambulance, David. Please, be still."

He twisted, the world gone dull grey with pain, the taste of blood in his throat. "Hurry. Tell them to hurry."

Faded blue eyes stared down at him, skeletal hand dry on his cheek. "Shall I call Amos for you? Have him come?"

"No!" He shook his head, tears flowing freely. He hurt. Oh, he hurt. "I promised ... I promised never to ask him to come."

"He needs to know..."

"No. I won't have it. I ... Oh ... Oh, God." He closed his eyes, the conversation was over.

* * * *

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

Iris listened to the surgeons, taking notes and nodding. She had David's phone, his wallet, house keys, ruined suit. She put the clothing in the trash, his particulars in her briefcase and went to find a waiting room.

She'd know David wasn't well. She could see it in his eyes, in the way he was dissolving before her eyes; every time she saw him again he was thinner, paler. Fading. Not even having Amos back had stopped it, really.

Stupid, silly, dear man. If they lost him over this pride nonsense she'd...

Well, kill him.

It was time to call Amos.

Chapter Twelve

The hospital actually smelled worse than the airport and Amos wondered if it was because he'd spent so much time in them. The bad memories associated with antiseptic and cleaner were never going to go away. He was very afraid they were about to get worse.

Amos followed the driver who had picked him up at JFK, looking for any familiar face, Maria, maybe, or Iris. Anyone who could tell him what was going on.

"Mr. Davenport! Mr. Davenport! Oh, I'm glad you've arrived. He's just out of surgery." Iris hurried over, steel grey instead of salt and pepper now, but those blue eyes were familiar, capable, and the hands that took his were warm and strong. "It is good to see you. I wish it were under happier circumstances."

"Hey, Iris." He didn't want to seem rude, but he was so worried he kinda brushed off the greeting. "Where is he? What's wrong exactly? Surgery?"

"He's in recovery. The doctor says he can have a visitor in a quarter hour. Come and sit, Amos. Our David's a sick lad." She led him down the hall to a quiet waiting room. "He had three serious ulcers, one that had eaten through his stomach and was dumping acid, the other two were only days from perforating. He's down to skin and bones."

Oh, fuck. He knew. Damn it, he knew there was something so wrong, but Dave kept telling him no on the doc. Amos let Iris sit him down and hand him something to drink and he

was just staring at his hands, ears ringing. Dave was sick. Really sick.

"They've gone in and patched him up and the surgery went well, but the surgeon says he'll need to speak with you regarding David's recovery. He seems to believe there will be some issues."

"Issues?" Meeting her eyes was hard, because he felt like he should have done something. Anything. "What kind of issues?"

"I imagine he's alluding to the concoctions David takes to keep his schedule, although the stress and alcohol and the lack of sleep and food might also be problematic." She gave him a firm look. "David is a grown man, Mr. Davenport. This is not your fault, any more than it was David's fault the last time you spent time in this hospital."

She had that Mary Poppins voice thing going and it always braced him. "Thanks, Iris. Are you ever going to call me Amos?"

He got a warm, almost wicked grin. "Are you going to take my employer away with you to those mountains of yours and assure his well-being?"

"Yes. I am." He grinned back, chest loosening. If she was joking, Dave wasn't gonna die or anything. And he was going to get to take Dave home with him. Home. Oh, it was a good thing he had finished the addition. They could put the bed down there for the time being.

"Well then, Amos, tell me what you need and I'll arrange it. I have David's things here. I had to discard his suit. I have no idea what condition the apartment is in, unfortunately..."

"Uh. It's probably pretty dusty. But I know Dave wouldn't want some cleaning service in there, so I'll go clean later. But he will need clothes, soft stuff, you know. I know when I was in the hospital I just wanted fleece and flannel and jersey knit." He stilled his hands, which were taking on a mind of their own, patting his pockets for cigarettes.

Iris pulled out a pad and began making notes. "Right. I'll have some things delivered, along with a toothbrush and hairbrush and..."

"And a pack of Lucky Strikes." He grinned, knowing the answer to that one.

"No, Amos. I won't buy David's pills and I won't buy your cigarettes." Oh, that was firm.

"Excuse me? Are you with Mr. Llaves?" A little round red-headed nurse smiled at him around the edge of the door. "He's asking for a Shep, if that's one of you."

"That's me." Amos stood, tripping over his own feet. "He's awake?"

"Well, awake is a strong term, but yes. He's extremely groggy—don't expect sense." She led him down the hall. "He'll be in the ICU for a day or two, his blood pressure is a little touchy. It happens when they lose so much weight."

The recovery room was bright, the beeps and whooshes eerie and familiar.

"Yeah. I know from the touchy blood pressure." Amos stopped at the foot pump sink and washed his hands with the hand savaging soap, drying off and following the nurse to David's bed. Oh. God. Amos breathed deep, trying to hold it together.

Dave was the color of the sheets, except for the dark hollows under those eyes and a black shock of hair. They had him hooked up to the auto blood pressure monitor cuff and a couple of drips and a tiny oxygen hose, but it was better than he'd feared. Really. Because Dave's eyes opened as he walked up. "Hey, baby."

"Shep. You ... You're here." He got one of those pleased, surprised smiles, just a little dimmed. One hand moved across the sheet, looking for him.

He took that hand, carefully moving it clear of wires and hoses, petting so gently. "Of course I am. Love you, baby."

"Sorry. Sorry. Said I wouldn't ask for you." Dave's head rolled, eyes blinking and red. "Love you."

"Oh. David, no. Don't you dare be sorry. You should have asked. Should have come to you so much sooner." His chest was all tight again, eyes stinging. "But that's okay. We'll get it together."

"Yeah? Okay. Take me home, Shep. I want to go home." Dave frowned, eyes closing. "Take me home."

He petted Dave's hand until Dave slipped back into sleep, and for a long while after, watching his chest rise and fall. Fuck. Fuckity fuck. Right. There was a lot to do.

When Amos was pretty sure Dave was going to sleep for awhile, he went back out to the waiting room, stopping on the way out to wash up. "He looks like shit."

"He's been very ill." Iris popped the cell phone plug from her ear. "Did he talk to you?"

"Yes. He wants to go home. We need to find out how long he's going to have to stay here. Then we need to find out how

long it will be before he can travel. We'll stay in the apartment until then. Don't worry about the medications and such. He will take them for me. I also need you to get together the most important stuff he was working on and delegate it to whoever he trusts the most. Anything they can't handle, give to me." His own voice surprised him, clipped and business like and he'd better not have to do this executive shit for long.

Iris nodded. "There's not much. The deal in Sydney closed Monday, that's what he's been killing himself over..." Blue eyes blinked up at him. "Oh, that was badly worded, wasn't it?"

Like a sucker punch to the gut, yeah. But he patted Iris' shoulder. "It's okay. It's only the truth. So he was winding down for the holidays?"

"Yes. Everything is in the preliminary stages now—there's a trip to Chicago planned between now and Thanksgiving, January between DC and London. Shall I foster these two off? That frees our schedules until February. I'll have the surgeon contact you with information and have a car available. Do you have a key to the apartment and shall I have any food delivered?" God, he'd forgotten how well Iris dealt with everything.

"Yes on the trips, and I still have a key, Dave sent me one, and yes please on the food. Just lunch meat and bread and cheese. Eggs. And anything the doc says Dave can have, soft food wise, as he gets better."

They could do this. They could.

"I'll look into it. His clothing should be delivered in the morning." She handed him a pda. "Here's his information. I'm going to take care of things. You should go get some rest. Tomorrow will be harder. Tomorrow he'll be asking to go home."

He could do that. Tomorrow. Tomorrow he'd be ready for it.

He'd find a way to get Dave home.

* * * *

He kept waking up and blinking and then figuring out he was asleep again. Everything hurt, but somehow the pain pills and whatever they'd done felt better, felt easier inside. The tearing burn was gone, replaced with a steady ache. He just wanted to grab Amos and go home and curl in his bed, snuggle until things were right, watch those mountains outside their bedroom window.

David stopped, frowned. Amos.

Amos had been here.

He was almost fairly sure of it. He blinked, eyes popping open, searching his hospital room. Amos was there, sitting in the plastic chair in the corner under the TV, snoring lightly, head back and mouth open.

Oh. Oh, God. Amos. Here. But ... He moaned as he moved a little, trying to reach, to see better.

Those green eyes flew open, Amos sitting straight up in the chair. "Dave. Baby. Stop, you're going to hurt yourself."

Amos came over and settled next to him, looking tired as hell and good as anything he'd seen.

"Amos." He reached out and held on. Tight. "What happened? Want to go home."

"Shhh." Amos petted his hand, soothed him with soft words. "Just let me tell you what happened. I'll repeat it as many times as you need, okay?"

He knew those words. He'd said them to Amos once.

"I ... Okay. Okay." He blinked hard, trying to concentrate, trying to make it easier. "Did I call you? I promised I wouldn't."

"Iris did. You got really sick, baby. Really sick with ulcers. You had to go to the hospital, which is where we are. You had to have surgery on your stomach." Amos just kept talking to him, telling him what was going on, petting him.

Ulcers. Oh. Oh, God. Thank God. "Only ulcers. I ... Oh, God. I thought I might have cancer. I thought ... Oh. When can I go home?" He didn't even notice the tears on his cheeks until they slid off his chin.

"Shhh. Oh. Baby." Amos caught his tears and wiped them away. "We're gonna go over the why didn't you later. Trust me. But for now you just have to rest. They want you here until you get stable enough to go home. You had one that ate all the way through, baby. That's bad."

"Sounds disgusting." He nuzzled into Amos' hand, breath hitching. "You're going to take me home with you, right? You promised me Thanksgiving in the mountains."

"I am. We're going to have our dinner out in the new room. You should see the windows. The view is amazing, baby." Oh, those green eyes were sparkling with moisture, hand tight around his.

"Okay. I can't wait. I hate hospitals." He tried to reach up, stroke Amos' cheek. "I'm sorry, love. I didn't want you to have to come here. I know you hate it here, too."

His poor, sweet love.

"Baby." Amos swallowed hard. "I know you promised and all, but I hate the thought of you sick and hurting and afraid to tell me. Please promise me you'll tell me." Amos kissed his cheek, resting next to him on folded arms.

He scooted just a little, enough that he could smell and feel his lover, watch those pretty eyes. "I was scared. I thought ... I thought I was going to die." He took a hitching breath. "But I'm not. Not today."

Not today or tomorrow, either. Damn it.

"No. Not even close. We've just started to get it right, Dave. You're not leaving me." Amos nuzzled him, careful not to move his tubes. "Doc says two weeks at least before you can travel, after you get out, and then he says you can ride. He doesn't want you flying."

"Two weeks?" He shook his head, sighing. There's no way he'd ask Amos to stay that long here. "Is he sure? I could just fly out to you ... When will he let me go back to work?"

If it was two weeks and no flying ... That meant he could pass the Chicago deal off...

"Yes, he's sure. Iris is arranging a nice SUV for us. We can drive. And you've got a clear schedule through February. O'Neill is taking Chicago. The January stuff in London will be farmed out between now and then, and your job until then is to get well and make me happy." Those bright eyes were

serious as a heart attack. And didn't that thought make him grimace.

"February..." He blinked, suddenly a little scared. That was ... months. It was what? October? "That ... that's a really long time to have to recover."

A really long time to be with his Amos. Oh.

"Baby, I am not taking any chances with you. I want you well, and besides, that means we get a lot of snuggling." That grin was a ghost of its usual self, but sincere all the same.

"I like snuggling." He found half a smile of his own. "We get Christmas, too."

"We do. And New Years. We can ring it in right." Amos was petting him, soothing him, smiling for him. Meaning it.

"No champagne, though. I don't think I want any more champagne." His eyes were getting heavy, his body relaxing under Amos' touch.

"No more champagne is right. We can have milk." That soft voice started to lull him as Amos went on, telling him what they would do. He just listened, so tired, so sleepy, just let Shep talk and touch and be there to hold him as he sank under again, still holding on.

Chapter Thirteen

Amos hadn't noticed that first night, since he was so damned tired, but the apartment hadn't changed more than a few bits since he left. It almost broke him when he did, when he was cleaning the bathroom and dusting and changing the sheets. Heck, it did break him. He sat there on the blue tile floor of that fancy bathroom and cried like a baby.

Thank goodness he'd gotten that over with.

Now he was bringing Dave back there to recover enough to get in a car and go back home with him. To Colorado. He had Dave's meds and all of the liquid stuff they said Dave could have, and he had Dave, asleep in the backseat, curled up against him while the driver pulled into the parking garage.

It was about time. "Hey, baby. Time to wake up. We're here."

"Hmmm? We're there already?" Dave blinked awake, moving slow, careful. "That was quick."

"Yeah. Holding out an arm, Amos helped Dave straighten. Damn, he knew how that felt, when your brain told your body to do something and it just didn't. "I'm going to get out and come around, okay?"

"Mmm ... 'kay. Yeah. I ... Oh, wow. Tell me the elevator's not broken, love?"

"It's not. I checked it out before." Slow and easy, he helped Dave out of the car. The driver was going ahead to open doors and call the elevator. Bless Iris for being the efficient wonder she was.

"Oh, good." Dave leaned into him, resting every few steps, pale and sweating by the time they hit the elevator.

"Almost there, baby." The weight was a welcome burden, because they were done with hospitals, both of them. He had decided. That was that. They finally got in the apartment and he took Dave right to the bedroom, easing him down on the bed.

David just cuddled in, eyes closing for a second, before looking around. "You cleaned. You didn't have to ... I would have..."

"No. You will not. You will relax and recover. End of story." Dave's shoes were the first thing to come off, then the jacket, so carefully. "Besides they wouldn't let me stay a lot of the time and I needed to do something."

"End of story. Pushy kid." Dave chuckled, the sound pained, but nowhere near as bad as it has been. "What are our plans now, love? You can't expect me to just sit here."

"I can for a few days. Trust me. I know. You'll want to sleep." When Dave was in pajamas, Amos sat on the bed and pulled Dave close. Dave needed rest. Needed to sleep. Needed to be okay.

"Oh." The sound was joyful, rich, full of pleasure as Dave snuggled in. "Oh, God. Oh. Love. You're here. I've missed you."

"Oh. Baby." Shit. He was going to hold it together damn it. "Scared me. Love you."

"I didn't mean to. I was hurting so bad. I was so tired." Dave wrapped around him, moving slow, but scooting close,

words slurring just slightly. "I don't rest so well without you. You ease me."

"That's my job, yeah?" Amos slid down, stretching out and letting Dave snuggle into him, holding and loving. "I love you so much."

"I love you. Christ. I ... Stay. Please." Dave looked up at him, eyes a little watery. "I don't ... It's gonna be hard. The pills. It's been a long time since I haven't had them."

"I'm right here, baby. Just let me get naked and pee?" Squeezing gently, Amos kissed Dave's cheek before sliding away. "You need anything while I'm up?"

"I suppose vodka and tonic is out of the question?" Teasing bastard.

That lightened the load though, made him smile. "Yeah. Just like a Delmonico was out of the question with me, yeah?"

He did his thing and came back, watching Dave move restlessly. That Dave automatically settled when he slid back in the bed was telling. "Here, now. Rest, Dave."

"You're still pushy." Dave licked his shoulder. "When can we get all adult and kinky again?" Those exhausted, mostly asleep eyes almost twinkled at him. That was his Dave, always teasing, always pushing.

"When you can stay awake through it." He petted Dave's back, soothing.

"You're always trying to put me sleep, love. I just always..." The words were broken by a yawn, Dave's eyes falling closed.

"We have time, baby. We'll talk when you wake up." It made him feel good to help Dave sleep, help him rest. It felt like love.

* * * *

Okay, two days of snuggling and liquid diet was okay. Three days? Slightly less okay—well, the snuggling was still cool. But six days?

He was ready to get back to work, to his life. "I don't want any more tapioca. Ever."

Amos cracked up. "I don't blame you, Dave. But you're doing so well."

"Well? I'm eating smooshy pap, I'm letting O'Neill baby sit my deal, I still can't sit straight. You never let me out of bed and I fucking well sleep all the time." He growled, giving Amos his best 'I'm pissed' look.

"Yep. I'd say that was doing well." Unfazed, Amos folded another sheet, fresh out of the dryer. "You needed the sleep."

"I'm tired of sleeping. I want up. Now. I want coffee. I want my computer." He was whining. He hated whining.

"No, no, and no." Those green eyes were sharp and bright, looking him over, assessing him. "You could sit up with me maybe. On the couch. Watch a movie."

"A movie?" He blinked, completely derailed. "Do I have movies?"

"Well, we do now." Setting the laundry aside, Amos went to pick up a few DVD cases. "There's even some porn. But I don't think you're up to that yet."

"I'm tired of being in bed. I want enchiladas. I want a blowjob. I want a bath. I want to..." He caught Amos' eyes

and blushed. "I want to sit on the sofa and watch a movie with you. Please."

Whiny. Not dumb.

Grinning, Amos helped him out of bed, easing him up and over to the couch. "Baby, there's nothing I would like more than to suck your brains out through your dick. But the doc ixnayed that kind of stress until he clears you."

"That's not stress. Not at all. I swear." He settled, stretching out as best he could. The pain was eased, mostly just stiffness, a dull, throbbing ache. The worst was the tired, the exhaustion that wouldn't ever fade. "Can I have a coke? Something?"

"How about a Popsicle?" That grin got even bigger and Amos bounced a little and he knew Amos was thrilled to be able to offer him a treat.

He tilted his head. "Grape?"

That might actually be good.

"Yep. I got them yesterday." Bounding off, Amos got him a Popsicle, unwrapping it for him and handing it over.

"Ooh..." He popped it in his mouth, moaning at the cold shock of the taste, the bright sensation. "Oh, good. Very good."

"You have to go slow on it, baby. Don't shock your tummy." The happy smile didn't undermine the seriousness of that at all. Amos plopped down next to him, gently easing him over and putting an arm around him.

"You just want to watch me suck it slow." He leaned in, relaxing, cuddling right in.

"I got to get my jollies somewhere." The TV clicked on and Amos thumbed on the DVD player, snuggling right up to him.

"Mmm ... love you." He finished the Popsicle, stomach cramping slightly and he grabbed Amos' hand, placing it on his belly, enjoying the warmth.

Amos rubbed gently, so gently, nuzzling his neck. "You can live vicariously. I got a blow 'em up movie."

"Oooh. Explosions. I like explosions." He almost purred, just melting. "Love you."

"Good." Amos nipped his neck. "You're gonna be spending a lot of time with me." They settled in to watch, and he thought maybe that was about as ambitious as he wanted to get.

* * * *

It was weird, having Amos back in the apartment, having Amos in the city, having Amos in the bed that had been theirs but was now his because their bed was in another house. Things were different—he'd spent more time in this apartment in the last ten days than in the last year. The place looked lived in, used—DVD boxes and cream for his scars and blankets piled around.

Amos had cleaned out the cabinets in the bathroom, in the kitchen. All the booze was gone, all the carbonated drinks, all the candy, all the antacids and aspirin and ... other pills. Even the coffee. Gone. Replaced with prescriptions and milk and eggs and pear juice and herbal teas and bread.

Sort of like how his pillow had been replaced by a warm, soft shoulder.

Stress Relief
by BA Tortuga

It was like Amos had decided that things were going to change.

David wasn't sure how he felt about that. He'd think about it later. After a nap.

He curled around Amos and went right back to sleep.

Chapter Fourteen

Amos was going to kill Dave. There wouldn't have to be any more recovery, because Dave was just going to be dead. Yep. Dead. Dave was a terrible patient. He complained. He whined. He ... reminded Amos of himself right after the heart attack.

Flipping pages in his *Field and Stream* magazine, Amos waited in the waiting room while Dave had his two-week check up. By damn that doc had better say Dave was ready to go home. They had followed the diet. They had followed the sleeping and medicine regulations. They had refrained from sex. It was getting to the point where Amos figured maybe he ought to have his blood pressure checked while he was at the doc's office.

The door opened and they called him in and Amos popped up like a jack in the box, hoping it was good news. The nurse led him back into a room where Dave was getting dressed, the doctor sitting on a stool, making notes. "Mr. Davenport. I was just talking to your life partner and I have good and bad news for you both."

Crap. He hated that shit. He glanced at Dave. "What's the bad news?"

"The bad news is that Mr. Llaves will need to be incredibly careful for the next six to twelve months and give up certain items permanently—alcohol, amphetamines, coffee. He has a complete list." David looked furious, blank and careful, but Amos could see the anger in the lines of his eyes.

Amphetamines. Amos raised a brow, but let it go. That was for later, when he could get Dave alone. When he didn't have to be on and could get good and mad. "Okay. We can do that. What's the good news?"

"He's healing extremely well. He's gained seven pounds—and I want to see him gain another twenty-five pounds in the next few months, by the way—and his blood pressure is good. I think he's capable of travel—not flying, but driving."

His breath whooshed right out. Thank God. Home. They could go home. "That's the sweetest thing I've heard in a bit, doc."

David was buttoned up, glaring at the doctor. "Is there anything else, Lew? Any other patient-doctor confidentiality you want to break?"

"No. Just keep feeding him, keeping him low-stress, lots of rest. No flying, no jet-setting, no work." The doctor didn't look concerned in the least.

"What about sex?" It popped out before he could help it and Amos blushed, but didn't take it back.

"No acrobatics. If it doesn't hurt him, the exercise is good for him."

"He is standing right here, Doc."

"Yeah, and boy is he grumpy." He grinned at Dave, waggling his eyebrow. They'd deal with the big stuff. No way they wouldn't. But he was so happy about home and touching of the naughty kind that he could wait to be pissed.

Dave gave him a look. "I don't get grumpy."

The doctor—Lew, Dave called him—started laughing. “No, not Dave. Take him to the mountains, Amos, take care of him.”

“I will. Thanks for everything you've done.” He shook hands with the doc and grabbed Dave's arm. “Come on. I'll call Iris, get us a car.”

“What? We're leaving today?” Dave stumbled beside him, still three-quarters caught in his snit.

“Yep.” They sailed right by the desk. Iris had already handled the pesky insurance and paperwork and shit. “Today. As soon as we can get the stuff packed. I'm taking you home.”

“Pushy bastard.” Dave's growl was half-hearted, almost a token pissed off, rather than a sincere one.

“Baby, you have no idea. We get home we're gonna sit and talk and you have some serious explaining to do, but right now I just want you and home and us.” Amos waited until they were around the corner and by the elevators to give Dave a hard kiss.

“I...” Dave wrapped around him, cuddling close and warm, lips parting for him.

“Mmmm. Good.” God, he'd needed that. The reconnect. The feel of Dave against his mouth. “Love you. No matter what, okay? Let's go.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Dave gave him another dazed, gee-I-love-you-take-me-home-and-love-me grin. “Go.”

They went, Dave resting mostly while Amos packed and called Iris and got together a big bunch of food Dave could eat on the road. Bless her, Iris promised to have the

apartment closed up for them and she got them a custom SUV with a driver, where Dave could stretch out in the back. Looked like they were going to road trip in style. Good thing Dave had the big bucks.

"I need my files, my laptop." Dave wandered in from the bedroom, suit bag in hand. "How long am I staying?"

Amos stopped packing his clothes, turning to stare at Dave. That anger was trying to pop up and Dave didn't need it and neither did he. Not now. "Until it's time for you to go, I guess."

"What the hell does that mean? Am I staying a week? A month? Should I pack my robe or leave it here for when you're gone?"

"I told you before you're clear until at least February. And I thought..." Amos took a deep breath, clenching his hands. "I thought you were coming for good."

"Oh." Dave watched him for a long minute. "What am I going to do about my job, my clients when I come? And I want some of my books, then."

"We can have anything you want, you know? And your clients, baby, they can talk to you just as easily on the phone. The doc said no work, no stress. Iris is doing so good, and so is O'Neill and you can do more of an advising thing until you're solid on your feet and I can travel with you when you have to go so bring your robe." Fuck, that was babble, pure and simple.

"You don't want to go home alone." Dave took a deep breath, refusing to drop his eyes. "You want me there permanently."

They weren't questions, just straightforward facts.

"Yes." There was no other way to answer. Just yes.

"Then I better get my robe. So ... so I can go home." Dave looked more than a little stunned, more than a little happy, more than a little worried.

"Yeah. Home. With me." He went over and pulled Dave close, holding on tight. They were going home.

* * * *

He was tired. Grouchy. Sore. Never getting in a motherfucking car again. Ever. Damn it.

He wanted something to help him stay awake, stay alert. He was fucking tired of being tired, being in bed, being asleep. And he was NEVER eating mashed potatoes again.

"You okay, Dave? You need anything?" Amos sounded as tired as he felt.

"A cup of coffee and a long bath, for both of us." A long, hot bath.

"Oh. Damn." Rolling his shoulders, Amos gave him a slow grin. "That sounds like a good idea."

They were still standing in the entryway, staring at each other, too tired to move.

"Yeah. With bubbles and champagne and strawberries and then up to bed for blowjobs." Okay, so he might not be energetic enough for blowjobs, but the coffee would take care of that.

"Bubbles we can do. Champagne is a no and strawberries I don't think we have. Peanut butter maybe. Come see what I did."

They went to the new addition Amos had put on and the bed was there, ready and waiting for them, facing the windows so they could see right out.

"Oh. Oh, wow. It's..." He looked around, eyes wide, more than a little stunned. "You did this for me."

"Yeah. I knew the stairs might be a bit much, you know? So I thought this would be perfect. And your office is under the stairs nook and against the back wall. I uh, had Bob build you a desk. You can see it later if you want." If he wasn't mistaken, that was a deep flush above the beard on Amos' cheeks.

To his complete horror, David felt his eyes fill with tears. Oh. Oh, shit. He ... He didn't deserve all this. Amos was too good to him. "Shep. Love."

"Baby, don't. Please." Amos stepped close and grabbed him, holding him close, leading him to the bed so they could sit. "It's your home, too, yeah? If you want when you get up to the stairs every day we can move your office up there, or the bed or whatever." Poor Amos. He sounded so worried.

"I'm okay. I am. I just ... I'm tired, Amos. I'm tired and you're so good to me and me? Me living here and happy because you're here? Not to mention I sleep all the damned time." He started fussing and now he couldn't seem to stop. "I want some ... I mean I need something to stop sleeping so much. Especially now when it's so easy. With you, I mean. Sleeping."

"No." Amos' voice was hard and so were those green eyes when Amos pulled back to look at him. "You need to sleep. A lot. To get well. I promise baby when you're healthy again

you won't need as much and you won't need ... help to stay awake."

"You don't know, love. You don't know how hard it is, how hard it is to stay awake, to make the big deals. It eats my life away."

"I don't know? Do you know why I had a heart attack, baby? Why I drank myself to a stupor when I wanted to sleep? I know." There was no bitterness there, or pity. Just love and sympathy. "But you're going to let other people help you make the big deals and have a life again."

"And what..." He closed his eyes, suddenly nauseated, acid burning his throat. "What if I decide not to go back? What if I get used to this?"

What if I fall away out here?

"What if you do? Is that a terrible thing? Baby, you've done amazing things. You're the top in the game. Do you have to keep on?" Amos petted him, looked right into his eyes. "Is it so bad to think of doing something else?"

"It's all I am, all I know." He met Amos' eyes, didn't back away, from Amos or himself. "I don't know if I can do anything else."

"Well, you can do me." Amos grimaced and sobered again. "Sorry. But I think ... I think we have time to think about it. And maybe take a bath and nap."

He opened his mouth to argue, then let it close. "Yeah. I'm tired. You're tired. We're all tired. I have months to think on it."

Months.

God.

"Yeah." Stopping the petting in favor of helping him out of his clothes, Amos kissed him gently. "I love you, baby."

"I know." He found a grin—a real, honest to god grin. "I sort of count on it, love."

"Oh, good. Let's get that bath." Amos pulled him back up and helped him out of his pants. A spark lit Amos' eyes and he got pushed back down on the bed, legs spread wide as Amos knelt between them. "I forgot. There was something I wanted to give you first."

Amos' breath was hot on his thighs and then Amos was licking his cock, nuzzling his balls.

"Oh." He blinked down, half scared that his cock wouldn't respond. Oh. Oh, no. No, there it was. Damn. Yes. Fuck. Humming, Amos spread him a little wider and took him right in, working him as he hardened.

"Amos!" His hands tangled in Amos' hair, hips moving in tiny little jerks. Licking and sucking and loving him so good, Amos put one hand on his hip, holding him down a bit and used the other hand to cradle his balls.

"Love. I ... Christ. Oh, been so long. Please." He started babbling, eyes wide open, watching, needing. Loving. There was no teasing, no holding back. Amos drove him hard, wet heat engulfing him again and again, that sweet tongue working on him. One finger slid behind his balls, pushed against his hole. "Please." He spread wide. "Oh, God. More, Amos."

Amos gave him what he wanted, pushing against his hole, that finger sliding in mostly dry, so gently, Amos swallowing around him, nose buried in his curls.

He came with a soft cry, so sweet. Oh, Christ. So sweet.
"Love. My love."

"Mmmm." He came down slow and easy, Amos licking him clean before grinning up at him. "I don't know about you, baby, but I feel better."

"Uh-huh." He grinned like a goofball, slumping onto the mattress. "Better. Damn."

"Maybe nap first and then bath." David looked up and Amos was stripping off, using his t-shirt to wipe down, giving him a grin. "I, uh. Well, I could use one too. A nap. A bath too."

"Oh. Yeah. Come here." He held his arms open, curling into Amos' warmth as they snuggled. "Mmm ... good."

Amos pulled the deep blue and green quilt over them and settled against him. "Yeah. Good. The rest can wait."

"Yes. God. Nap. 'kay?" He was tired. Amos was tired. They were fucking tired.

The rest? Could wait.

Chapter Fifteen

God, he needed a cigarette.

Dave was ... well. They were home. Dave was happy to be with him, he could tell, and happy to be in the middle of nowhere. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that Dave was sore and tired all the time and not recovering according to the artificial schedule Dave had in his head.

Lord knew he understood that. He did. But he was getting to the point where he couldn't take much more. If Dave would just sleep, would just rest and let his body get where it needed to be, it would all be good. But Dave was so determined, so impatient, that there was no ease to it.

They had agreed that Dave could start answering his email, so Amos left him propped on the couch with the laptop and headed outside to play ball with Noodle and sneak a smoke. Amos lit up and it was damned good. So fucking good.

He finished the smoke and headed back inside, stunned to see Dave pacing, beer in one hand, Iris doing something for him via the cell. He marched right over and took the beer away, giving Dave a look before taking it and dumping it out in the sink.

Dave glared at him. "Oh, no. You were out there smoking. I can have a beer. Good for the gander and all that shit. No, Iris, I was talking to Amos."

"Not the same thing. Hi Iris." He figured while he was raising his voice, he might as well say hi to Iris too.

"Is too. Don't play this double standards shit with me. Iris says hello." Dave looked pissed as hell. "No, Iris. I am not telling him that."

"Telling me what?" He was reaching the very thin edge of his patience.

"Nothing. I need to go. Tell O'Neill I'll call him tomorrow. I want this shit taken care of." The phone was clicked off, Dave's dark eyes flashing. "What's up?"

"You know the doctor said no alcohol, Dave. Am I going to have to worry what you're doing every time I leave the house?" God, he hated snarling at Dave but he couldn't seem to help himself.

"Your doctor said no smoking and we both know what you were doing. Quit nagging." Dave ran one hand through his hair. "I'm tired of being tired."

"I am not nagging! And I happen to be in the best shape of my life. You aren't. Hell, you just had surgery!" Furious, he paced, trying not to yell, not to lose it.

"So I'm a little thin. I've been busy. I've been working. I'm better now. I'm tired of being sick. I'm done with it."

"God damn it, Dave. If you go right back to what you were doing you'll get sick again. What do you not get about the whole message from the universe thing?" He was shouting now, because he was scared. Scared that Dave was going to leave.

"I..." Dave met his eyes, suddenly pale. "I don't ... I can't ... I'm going for a walk. I need a walk."

"Don't you run away from me." He grabbed Dave's arm, holding the man still. They were going to talk about it if it killed them. Which it might.

Dave gave him a look—a little shocked, a little mad, a little hopeful maybe. "What the hell is going on here, Amos?"

"We're getting some things settled. You can't just pick up where you left off, baby. It doesn't work that way. And you can't just pretend I don't know about the speed and the alcohol and shit. I do now." He didn't know what else to do, just threw the hard stuff right out there.

"I needed it. I couldn't do it ... I couldn't work without it. Christ, love. I couldn't. I still can't." Dave started pacing. "You left Amos. You left and I couldn't sleep and I couldn't eat and I couldn't do anything but work and work and then the money started rolling in and I couldn't stop."

Oh, fuck. Oh, God. "I asked you to come with me. I did." This shouldn't be about him. "Baby. You can learn. You can learn to do something else. Sleep, eat, do fun stuff. I promise."

"I know you asked. I know." Dave shook his head. "I'm not blaming this shit on you. I'm not. I'm the one who started making money, I'm the one who needed the help to cope. Hell, I'm less than useless out here. If I'd have come with you, where the fuck would we be? Shit, Amos. I'm worth millions of dollars. Millions. All earned in the last few years, trying to forget about your ass."

He needed to sit down. Like right then. Amos groped for a chair or the couch or something. Millions? Fuck. "You're not worthless."

"Are you okay, love?" Dave helped him sit. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. Christ. You're pale as a sheet. You want water?"

"No. I mean, yeah. I'm okay. Fuck, baby. You did good." Shit. Millions.

"I did. I worked my ass off. I did every deal there was, every fucking trip, until I had a reputation for the deal maker, for the guy who could smell the money." Dave shook his head. "I could, you know? I'd be up, three days, four and I could make the deals."

"You always had more drive than I did, baby." Or at least more stamina. No wonder Dave was having such a hard time.

"I missed you. I needed it. I needed to..." Dave flushed, turned away. "It doesn't matter now. We just have to figure out what to do next. Do you want coffee?"

"No. And neither do you. You can't have coffee, baby." He sounded like a Jewish grandmother but he had to. Had to keep Dave healthy. "Come sit with me? Please?"

One dark eyebrow raised. "God, you're cute like that." Dave came over, sat right next to him, damn near in his lap. Made him feel good, let him know that even though they were having words, Dave was needing him. Just like he always needed Dave.

"I know it's hard. Believe me. I know. But can we try?" He put his arms around Dave and held tight.

"Always. Damn it, Amos. I'd give everything up for you, if I had to. Everything." Dave relaxed against him. "I might bitch about it, but I'd do it."

"We'll just start with the uppers." That was probably going to ruin the mood, which was starting to look good as Dave kind of melted against him, but he wanted that out.

Dave sighed, but kept snuggling. "I'm not sure if I can work without them, but I'll try. Now, you toss the smokes."

"Fuck." Amos sighed, too. "Deal. Anything for you, baby. Anything."

* * * *

He tackled Amos between the office and the stairs.

Three days of no smokes was making his lover as snarly as one of the so-called bears that wandered the woods and Dave was done. They had doctor's orders to be together. Just them. Alone. Making love and eating and playing. And they were both being royal pricks.

So, he waited as long as he could, then he tackled Amos and knocked them both to the floor.

Amos went down, the breath whooshing out, staring at him, fire in those green eyes. "What the fuck?"

"Hi. Want you. Fuck me." He took a hard, hungry kiss, tearing at Amos' flannel, searching for skin.

"Oh. Oh!" Amos' hands came up to hold his head, holding him down for another kiss, tongue pushing deep. Oh, there they were. Fuck, yes. He got his hands on Amos' belly, nails leaving little trails. That's it. Fuck me. Need you, Amos.

"Baby. Yeah. I need ... Uhn."

God, he loved it when Amos got like that, where he could barely talk. Those hands moved over him, tearing at his clothes, finding his skin, bruising. He nodded, tearing open Amos' pants, moving to straddle that long, heavy cock. He

was slick and ready, fingers lubing himself up just for this. Just for Amos. He pushed down, arching, body just taking Amos right in. Eyes wide, Amos stared up at him, mouth open and gasping. "Jesus God, baby. You, you're. Oh, fuck."

"Yes. Yours. Fuck me."

Face set in lines of pure need, Amos grabbed his hips and did just that, pushing up into him, fucking him hard and fast, words coming just as quick. "Dave. Love you. God. Yeah."

David nodded, body working furiously. "Needed this. Christ, Shep. Needed this so bad. Your cock, so deep."

Nodding and moaning, Amos reached for his cock, hand closing around it and pulling. Those hips kept moving, slamming up into him, raising him off the floor. Fuck, that's what he needed. The burn and stretch, the ache and push deep in his belly. Amos. Deep inside him. "Fuck! Love!"

"Yeah. Love. Love you." Their skin slapped together, Amos opening him impossibly wide, hand on him moving fast. "Baby. Please."

"Yeah. Oh..." His scream—and that's what it was, a scream—echoed through the cabin, his come spraying over Amos' chest and belly.

"Oh, God." The moan sounded like it was ripped out of Amos and that sweet cock jerked inside him, filling him with wet heat.

He slumped a little, resting against the wall. "Oh. Damn. Just what I needed."

"Mmm." Petting his belly, Amos grinned at him, looking goofy. "Thank you, baby."

He chuckled, hand stroking the soft curve of Amos' hip, ass clenching around Amos' cock. "Mmm ... thank you. Let's do it again."

"Uhn." Blinking, grinning, Amos nodded and pulled him down to roll with him, putting him on the bottom. "Let's do it all day, baby. I've missed this."

"Hell, yes. I got plenty of time." He laughed, hips riding that long cock. "Plenty of fucking time, beautiful man."

"Good. Because your ass is mine, baby. All day long." Oh. Oh, Amos was laughing, smiling, looking happy again, the lines on his face fading. Hell, yes. That was just what they needed. Just what he needed. Amos kissed him, lips soft and sweet on his. "Love you."

"I know. I love you, too." He tightened his body again, grinning, happy. "Come on, Shep. Let's play ride 'em cowboy."

Chapter Sixteen

They were pretty unlikely to get Trick or Treaters out where they were, so Amos asked Dave if he wanted to go to the big to do down at the hot springs for Halloween. Dave said no, kinda diffident like, so Amos figured Dave would rather stay home with him, but that didn't mean they weren't going to have Halloween.

Amos radioed Bob with a list of things he needed and, while Dave was out taking a walk with Noodle, Bob snuck it in for him. Pumpkins for them to carve. DVDs from the movie store. Streamers of bats and ghosts to hang around and purple lights to put around the big window by the bed. No candy. Dave had a hard time with straight sugar. But Amos could make pumpkin cupcakes and harvest stew and...

Okay, maybe he went a little overboard. But it was Halloween. And he had Dave there with him. He couldn't help it.

Thank goodness Dave was getting stronger and was taking good long walks, because he was just barely done when Noodle came bounding in, barking and sniffing and looking for Bob.

"Oh something smells fabulous..." Dave wandered in, cheeks a healthier pink, eyes dancing. "Oh, Shep! You've been busy."

Amos grinned and threw Noodle the big bone Bob had brought, shooping the mutt outside to chew it. "Happy Halloween, Dave."

"Happy Halloween." He got one of those wide-eyed, stunned, I-can't-believe-I'm-home grins that Dave got every now and again, then his arms were full of his lover.

"Mmmm. Hello there." God, Dave smelled good. Wind and leaves and wood smoke. Amos took a kiss, rubbing his beard against Dave's cheek. "I got us pumpkins."

"You're kidding! Really? I ... I couldn't tell you the last time I carved a pumpkin." Dave's hand came up and cupped his jaw, fingers carding through his beard.

"Yeah. I love those silly things. And we can toast pumpkin seeds." His lover felt amazing against him, always did, maybe because he knew what it was like not to have Dave there, in person, holding him. And that smile lit up the room far better than the late afternoon sun.

"Oh, yum." Dave chuckled, wiggling until they clicked together, belly to belly, Dave's weight warm and solid against him. "Are we going to play dress up and tell ghost stories, too?"

"Surely." Nuzzling and nibbling, Amos started working at Dave's belt. "We could start with the undressing, though."

"Mmm ... The undressing is good." A warm hand pushed under his flannel shirt, fingertip circling his nipple, teasing. "And then I want my treat."

His nipple drew up tight and hard, making him gasp. "Oh, I have lots of treats for you, baby. But the stew needs a bit and the muffins and pumpkins can wait." Amos took Dave's hand in his and tugged. He and the Bobs had moved the bed back to the loft over the weekend, and that's where he wanted to be. "Let's go upstairs, yeah?"

Dave chuckled, cupped his jaw. "Oh, so I get the best treat first? Excellent."

"Treats for all." They stumbled up the stairs to the loft, not quite able to negotiate the twisty stairs locked together like they were, but they made the bed eventually and Amos tumbled Dave down on it, kissing Dave breathless.

It had been damn near a month since Dave came home and the energy and heat and solid leanness beneath him attested to the fact that it was what they'd needed. Dave's hands tugged at his shirt, stripping his easily. He still missed the tiny belly, but the too-thin boniness was going, leaving behind a solidity that Amos was relieved to see. He struggled with Dave's buttons, bending to lick at one nipple when he freed Dave's chest.

"Mmm ... hot, love." Dave moaned, shifting under him, heavy, thick cock rubbing against his hip, hot even through the denim.

"Damn. Baby. Need." Amos pulled back, yanking at the rest of their clothes, needing the naked. There. There was Dave, all skin and heat, cock red and wet for him. Fuck. Beautiful.

Dave stretched for him, hand slowly working that fat prick, eyes admiring him. "Yeah. Yours next, Shep. Wanna see you."

Nodding, unable to look away, Amos stripped off with clumsy fingers, damned near drooling at Dave all stretched out for him. He finally got his jeans off, after nearly spraining his back to do it, and gave Dave a little show too, stretching and bending. It was only fair.

"God, you're fucking sexy, Shep." Dave turned toward him, hand sliding over his belly, his thighs. "So fine."

"Me? Nah. I'm just ... me. I'm all scarred. You're amazing, baby." He leaned down, took a kiss, loving the feel of Dave's lips, soft under his.

Dave wrapped around him, moaning, holding close. "Don't you talk trash about my lover. I need him."

"Good. Because he can't hack it without you." Could they get any sappier? But it was true. He loved Dave to death. He rubbed, pressing down against Dave so that thick cock dug into his thigh.

"Oh, fuck, that's sweet." Dave leaned up, took a hard kiss, hands on his ass, pulling him down harder.

"Mmhmmm." He pushed into Dave's mouth with his tongue, letting Dave cradle him, the rough texture of hair over soft skin mixing with Dave's scent to make him fucking dizzy. So good.

It was familiar and hot and sweet—and still arousing, still enough to make him hard enough to cut glass.

"Baby. Want you in me." They fought over it, who was going to do who, 'cause it was just too much, too good.

"Gonna ride me, let me watch you?" Those fingers slid, teasing his crack, fat cock throbbing against his thigh.

"Yeah, baby. Gonna melt on you." He would, too. Dave made him crazy. Made him scream.

Dave stretched, reaching for the lube, rubbing up against him at the same time, nice and hard and hot. The tube was opened and Dave grabbed his hand, slicking his fingers. "Get ready for me."

That look was hot enough to etch steel. Amos nodded, licking his lips and reaching behind himself, arching his back to push his own fingers inside. The scrape and burn made him gasp, made his head fall back, arching up. "Dave!"

"Sweet Christ." Dave slicked up that heavy cock, pulling hard and steady, watching him. "Shep..."

"Yeah. M'almost ... Ready." Too fast, maybe, too soon, but he needed and he wasn't waiting. Amos crawled up and straddled Dave's hips, lifting up and grabbing Dave's cock to get it centered. He was stretched wide with a grunt and a tug, Dave pushing into him and staying, spreading him open. So wide, so damned deep. Dave was a fucking miracle of nature. "God. Baby. Please."

He was sweating, his chest and belly damp, his cock so hard it ached.

"Yeah, love. Yeah." Dave's hands encouraged him to move, slide up and down on that heat. He moved. He couldn't not move. The feather bolster was soft under his knees, padding him as he rose and fell. Dave was splitting him open, making his thighs shake, making his belly clench as they went faster and faster. One of Dave's hands wrapped around his prick, squeezing and pulling in time. "God, look at you. So fucking hot."

"Only for you, Dave." Or at least that was what he meant to say. It kinda came out as a series of whimpers. Amos braced himself and pushed down hard, needing Dave to be with him, and he was close. Too close.

"Uhn." Oh, that sound was low and hungry and desperate and fucking sweet to his ears.

"Now, baby. Now. I gotta." That was all Amos got out before he shot, coating Dave's hand and belly and chest, shouting out his pleasure. Dave managed to get one hand up to that open mouth, tongue sliding through his come before those hands brought him down into a few hard thrusts, heat filling him.

"Oh, God. Dave." Amos flopped like a rag doll, landing on Dave's chest, wheezing for breath. "Damn."

"Uh-huh." Dave stroked his spine, lips open and hot on his jaw.

"That was one Hell of a treat." He chuckled, thinking of all of the tricks they could get up to later. "Happy Halloween, baby."

Dave gave him a kiss, full of lazy laughter. "So far? Very happy."

"Yeah? Just wait 'til you taste my stew."

Chapter Seventeen

Snow.

Big, fluffy stuff, maybe five inches. Amos got up and took Noodle out, but that was it. After that he was going back to bed and snuggling all morning. He ran back up to the loft and slipped back into bed with Dave, grinning and wondering if Dave was ever going to get used to him slipping back into bed half frozen. "Hey, baby. It's snowing."

"Shep! Cold! Damn!" Dave turned and pushed into his arms with a squeak, rubbing and snuggling close.

"Yeah. It's damned cold out there. Noodle didn't even want to stay out." Amos hummed and rubbed, warming up nice.

"Mmm ... Didn't freeze anything off out there, did you?" One of Dave's hands cupped his ass, soft kisses warmed his jaw, his throat.

"Don't think so, baby, but you might oughta check, just to be sure." He ended with a sound that was half moan, half chuckle. Damn, he loved Dave's hands on him.

"Wanton." David ducked under the covers, lips sliding down his belly.

His muscles clenched right up, rolling under Dave's mouth, his head getting all swimmy. "Yeah. You have a way, Dave."

"Just love you." That stubbled chin scraped his cock, soft kisses brushing only the line of his pubes.

"Love you, too." Amos spread and stretched and arched, trying to get Dave's mouth where he really wanted it. That

mouth made him crazy, had haunted his dreams when they were apart. Nothing else ever felt so good.

Dave licked the tip of his cock, flattening that hot tongue over the slit and dragging so fucking slow. Oh, fuck. Dave was gonna kill him. He tried rally hard not to wrap his legs around Dave, knowing he'd probably squeeze hard enough to hurt, letting his legs fall open further instead. Dave's hands took advantage of the motion, cupping his balls, fingers rubbing the sensitive skin behind.

"Dave!" Amos bucked and panted, his balls pulling up under the soft touches, cock just throbbing with his heartbeat. "No worries about frostbite now, baby."

"No. No, Shep. So fucking hot, love." Dave groaned and took his cock in deep, sucking hard and sure.

"Oh." Long, drawn out moans came out and his hands found Dave's shoulders, petting and loving as Dave's mouth sent him flying. Hot and wet, so good that it made him ache, Dave gave him everything. One long finger teased his hole, pressing but not entering him, making him jump and push deeper into Dave's lips. He was going to start babbling any minute, just begging, he knew it. Dave made him crazy.

"Baby. Please. I need you. Come on ... please."

Yep. There it was.

Dave moaned, tongue working the tip of his cock. "How, love? What do you want?"

"Want—" Oh, damn. His brain must be melted. Amos tried again. "Want you to ride me, baby. Want to feel you on my cock."

He heard Dave's low cry, felt the nods against his belly.
"Yes. Oh, God. Yes."

Then Dave was crawling up his body, moaning the whole way.

"Yeah, baby. Like that." He felt the same fire, the same need. After all this time, Dave could still do it to him. So fast and hot.

Dave reached for the lube, slicking those thin fingers so that Dave could ... Oh. Oh, fuck, that was pretty. Those dark eyes flashed as Dave got himself ready, burying two fingers deep. Fucking sexy, his Dave. He loved to watch that, loved the flush it brought to Dave's cheeks, loved the sounds Dave made just for him. He reached for Dave's cock, stroking it lightly before moving to pinch Dave's nipples.

"Amos..." Dave's hand wrapped around his prick, rubbed the tip against that tight little hole.

"Yeah. Now. So hot, baby. Jesus, the way you look when you do that." Grabbing Dave's hips, Amos pulled down, hips pushing up.

"Love!" Dave arched for him, eyes wide and spine bowed. So expressive, so fucking willing to give him everything.

They moved together, Dave's body gripping him so tight, his hands moving over all that smooth skin. The scent of them together was dizzying, hot and strong and male, and Dave's cock was so pretty, just begging for his touch. Dave leaned over him, grabbed the headboard and started moving faster, low groans filling the air. Yeah. That let him lean up and put his mouth on Dave, going from neck to chest, tongue

moving on Dave's nipples as his hand worked Dave's cock as Dave moved on him. Fucking perfect.

"Love you." Dave moaned, eyes closed, focused on their movements. "Love you, Amos."

"Good. Love you, baby." He was pretty much grunting caveman style now, so close that he could feel it rise in his spine, just sweating like crazy. Amos bucked, pushing hard into Dave, working for it, pulling on Dave's prick. He could feel Dave's orgasm build, tight and rippling and hot around his prick as Dave shuddered and shook.

"Fuck! Dave." Amos lost it, his own shout ringing in his ears as he shot so hard it took his breath, filling Dave full.

When the dust settled, Dave was panting on top of him, loose and sated and snuggling.

"Mmm. Hell, baby, that was hot enough to melt the snow." Amos chuckled, snagging the covers and pulling them up.

"Yeah? Good." Dave grinned against his chest. "Does that mean we get to stay in bed and snuggle until spring?"

He laughed. Dave dealt pretty well with the wild and woolly backwoods most of the time, but snow was still not his favorite thing. "Off and on, yeah. And if I have to go out in it, I know I've got you to warm me up."

"Always." Dave nuzzled and settled. "Anytime, Shep."

The best part? He knew it was true. They were solid, and he could always count on Dave to be there.

Cut down on his risk of frostbite, for sure.

* * * *

Amos had never tried to cook Thanksgiving dinner before, but he wanted to do it up right this year for Dave, so he'd

called Iris. Bless her heart, she walked him through the turkey thawing and stuffing and how to prep everything the night before and he was baking turkey and pies and everything else was done, just needed reheating when the turkey was ready. Which would be a few hours yet. He'd gone a little overboard. They were going to have some serious leftovers.

He bounced on the bed next to Dave, figuring Dave'd slept in long enough. Dave's eyes flew open, looking around for a second, then landing on him and a huge smile crossed that thin face. "Mmm ... morning. Something smells good."

"Yeah. You do." He sniffed, enjoying the scent of fresh from bed Dave. "Come watch parades."

"Parades? Oh, Thanksgiving." Another grin, lazy and happy. "Happy Turkey Day, Shep."

Dave was starting to look better, the pale grey pallor gone, the dark bruises under those eyes disappearing with rest and food and hours and hours of good, hard sex.

"Happy Thanksgiving, baby." Damn, but Dave was looking good. So much happier. Not completely well, yet. Still not a hundred percent. But so good.

Dave opened his arms and drew Amos into a warm embrace, their lips meeting, Dave curling around him and snuggling close. "I can't believe it. Do ... do you know what I did last Thanksgiving?"

Oh. "No, baby. What'd you do?"

"I was in Hong Kong, working a deal. Iris called the hotel and they served me turkey and noodles and chutney." Dave's eyes got quiet. "The deal hit a few days later."

"I was with Noodle. I had turkey loaf from City Market and beer." He grinned, rubbing noses. "So this year? Unbelievable improvement."

"Absolutely." He got another kiss, this one edged with hunger, then Dave pulled back. "What's turkey loaf?"

"Kinda like uh ... olive loaf. Or ham and cheese loaf. It's nasty, baby." They were going to miss the parade. Amos grabbed Dave's hand and pulled him up, stuffing him into the ratty old blue robe Dave favored before towing him down to the couch.

Dave was all chuckles as he settled, one hand worming in to pet his belly. "No coffee?"

The question was becoming familiar, the whine less and less audible as Dave's habit eased.

"No. No coffee." Damn, he would love a cup himself. But he promised the doc and he meant to keep Dave healthy. "There will be pumpkin pie later though."

"Ooooh! With whipped cream? Really?" So cute. More than a little sexy too, those shining eyes.

He had to steal a kiss. "Yeah. With whipped cream. The real stuff." God, Dave made him smile so big, made him happier than anything.

"Mmm ... you're too good to me." Dave cuddled even closer, almost skin-on-skin closer and oh, damn, this was sweet, being glomped by his warm, sexy, happy lover, the scent of cinnamon and sage in the air.

"Nope. Just good enough." Before they got too sappy he freed one hand and flipped the remote switch to turn the TV on, the parade just starting. They watched, laughing and

critiquing, singing along with the carols that they knew. Dave's hand stayed on his belly, petting and patting, dark head heavy on his shoulder. He couldn't think of a better way to spend the day, curled on the couch, smelling the good smells from the kitchen and lazily feeling each other up.

Well, at least until the turkey came out of the oven. That made the day almost perfect. Damn, he was good. The turkey was well done but not bone dry, the stuffing was a little too chunky but it worked, and he would swear Dave looked like a python when they were done eating, with a visible belly bulge. "We need to work some of that off, baby, so you can have pie."

"Pie? Oh, Christ. Shep. I'll not need to eat until ... January maybe?" He got a grin, Dave sauntering over to push into his arms. "Haven't eaten so much in years."

"Yeah." His own belly was kinda tight. "Feels good."

"Yeah. Nap? Snuggle? Nice long hand job on the sofa? Mutual masturbation? What's your pleasure?" Oh, those dark eyes were dancing, all wicked tease.

"Hand jobs. Snuggle leading to nap. Nap. Bath. Pie. Who says I don't know how to make a schedule?" There was a little spot of gravy on Dave's lip and Amos licked it off.

Dave chuckled, lips chasing his tongue. "I like your schedules better than Iris'..."

"I thought you might." He herded David back toward the big gold couch, making sure the TV was off. They didn't need a soundtrack for a hand job. Dave was in a pair of loose sweats, warm and cozy and perfect for a little rub here, a stroke there. Wonderful. He stripped out of his own jeans and

shirt and grabbed a blanket to curl up in, nuzzling Dave's neck.

"Oooh. Naked-Shep. My favorite flavor." Dave moaned a little, scooting closer.

He reached into Dave's sweats, fishing for that thick, heavy cock. "Yeah? I like warm, happy Dave."

Dave's fingers wrapped around his cock as Dave grinned. "That why you keep me that way?"

"You bet. My favorite dessert." Amos grinned back, taking a kiss, nothing urgent. Just sweet and good.

Their hands started to move. The best part was that they knew—they knew where to touch and how, how fast and how hard and how tight. Dave knew that the ridge of his cock was sensitive and he knew that Dave's ball sac would draw up tight at a touch. They knew, but it was still good every time. He lightly touched the skin just behind Dave's balls with the tips of his fingers.

Dave rippled for him, toes curling and fingers tugging him close. "Shep..."

"Yeah, baby. You make me crazy." That skin just called to him, and he nibbled and licked at Dave's lips while he petted.

"You ... you know that makes me go off. Know it makes my toes curl."

"I do know, baby. I love it. I love your face when I do it. Love you." Amos kissed Dave hard, tongue pushing deep. Dave opened right up, fingers slipping over the slit of his cock again and again.

Revenge. That's all it was. Revenge.

Oh, God. Dave knew that drove him completely insane and he arched, moaning into the kiss. Dave chuckled, fingers moving faster. He started moving his hips, begging silently, his own fingers moving, pressing hard at the skin between balls and ass. Chuckles turned to whimpers and Dave's hips started rocking. Wanting.

Yeah. Fuck yeah. He rocked back, their legs brushing, his wrist against Dave's cock, kisses long and deep making him breathless.

"God. Your hands. Shep. Love." Dave was whimpering, groaning.

"Yeah, baby." Time for that hand job. He grabbed Dave's cock, savoring the heft of it, stroking hard.

"Shit." Dave responded in kind, fingers tugging, making his toes curl, his hips raise off the sofa.

He pulled and humped and tried to breathe and finally Amos just gave up and shot hard, letting his head fall back as he groaned. Dave cried out, damn near crawling into him as those thin hips pumped, driving into his hand.

"Baby. Love you. So damned pretty." He just watched, breathing hard, fascinated by his lover.

"Tell me again." Those dark eyes were damn near black, wide, watching him.

"Love you, Dave. So much." He didn't care how much Dave needed to hear it, he would be happy to say it.

"I ... Oh, love!" Dave jerked, shot all over his belly, fingers hard on his shoulders.

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"Yes. Oh, good." So damned beautiful like that, so happy and right and sweet. Amos gave Dave a sweet kiss, rubbing cheeks. "Happy Thanksgiving, Dave."

"Yeah, love. It is." Dave nodded, eyes shining. "Very."

Chapter Eighteen

He heard something outside—something rattling the trashcan and Noodle was whimpering and snuffling and Amos was already asleep upstairs and he wasn't scared that it was a bear or a raccoon or a mountain lion or something. He wasn't. Honest.

Hell, he'd dealt with sewer rats, hadn't he? Yes. Yes, he had. And Amos would be pissed if he let that dog get eaten by some weird forest beast.

David picked up the cast iron skillet and opened the back door, whistling at Noodle, who ignored him completely in favor of sniffing whatever was out there. "Noodle!" He hissed. "Get in here! Quit ... smelling that ... thing. Don't make me come out there."

The damned dog stayed so he stepped out onto the porch, reaching for Noodle's collar when the soft whimpering caught his ears, the trash cans rattling. Noodle barked up at him, obviously trying to tell him something that Amos would get right off but he wasn't frigging Grizzly Adams, damn it and...

He bent down to take a good look.

Oh. That wasn't a bear's hind end. That was a little black puppy. A skinny, scared, whining puppy with its head caught in the trashcan, the metal digging into its fur.

Oh. Oh, poor little thing.

"Amos! Amos, love! I need you."

Oh. Poor sweet thing.

He heard Amos snuffling from upstairs and then Shep came dragging down the stairs, robe flapping open.

"Baby, what's going on? It's cold out there. If it's Noodle tell him to get his ass ... oh. Oh damn, here, let me help." Amos came flying out the door with a couple of dishtowels, ready to help him get the pup unstuck.

They managed together, Amos holding the poor little body and him working the pup's head loose. The cuts weren't too bad, but they were bleeding and the poor thing looked scared and lost and hungry and...

And if Noodle didn't quit drooling on his neck, David was going to barf. Because dog drool? Ick. "Noodle! Stop it. What now, Shep? He looks hungry."

"Lord knows he probably is or he wouldn't have been there. Let's give him a little bit of Noodle's canned food, see if he can do that without barfing it back up." They were a motley procession, Amos with the pup wrapped in towels, him behind carrying the wadded up paper towels and Noodle bouncing around like he'd done something really fine, maybe found a treasure. "Get me some newspapers out of the recycle yeah?"

They got the pup set up on newspapers in the corner of the kitchen and Amos nodded. "Get him about two tablespoons of wet food, baby. I'll be back with a blanket to make a bed for him."

Amos took off, leaving him with a nosy Noodle and a half-wagging pup.

David gave the little thing the food—which was sniffled and pawed and whined at for about ten seconds before the wolfing

down commenced. For a little puppy? It ate fast. That long tail started moving faster, the entire little black body wagging while Noodle pushed a long nose under his arm, wanting a look and a lick. He was going to have to take a long bath and scrub off layers of drool at this point.

"Hey." Amos was back, arms full of old blankets and more newspaper. "Wow, he'll be asleep in no time, as quick as he ate that. Good thing Noodle is a big goof. Don't think we'll have to worry about him getting all territorial." Amos grinned at him, wide awake and goofy looking himself, and plopped down the bundle of stuff. "We can make a makeshift fence to keep him in the kitchen, too, save the floor from poo."

"Poo, huh? Ick." David winked up at his lover as the puppy and Noodle both climbed into his lap, trying to get at each other. "Uh ... Yeah. A fence. A not-me fence." The pup felt warm against his hand and he smoothed out its fur. "Where do you think he ... she ... it came from?"

If Amos said 'a mother dog', David was going to bite him.

"Oh, I imagine someone dropped," and here Amos picked up the backend of the pup, "her on the side of the road. She's pretty small, a lot skinny, but obviously weaned. They probably just couldn't find a home for her."

Amos grabbed Noodle's collar and pulled and the big lug plopped in Amos' lap instead and started drooling on him. Maybe they'd take a shower together. Thank goodness he didn't have to get up and commute in the morning.

"Oh, that sucks. Poor baby." He frowned and petted, stroking the floppy ears and being careful around the sore on her neck. "I mean, at least in the city there's ample food and

no bears and lots of shelter." She licked his fingers, curling up a little in his lap and making a sweet little snuffly noise. "I thought she was a bear or a raccoon. I went out to rescue Noodle..."

Not that the beast had needed rescue.

"Noodle is too lazy to fight a bear or a raccoon. He'd just go hide." They laughed and Amos watched him and the puppy with the cutest expression before telling him to hold her steady so Amos could dose her sores. "Anyway, they drop them off out here just for that reason. Lots of predators, not a lot of food. They figure they'll go quick that way. We'll keep her for now, figure out what to do with her tomorrow. Help me with the fence."

They made a makeshift fence out of dining chairs and sheets and boards, one that wouldn't keep Noodle out if he wanted to go over it, but one that would keep the puppy in. The pup cried when he put it down on the nest of blankets and newspapers, but then Noodle started licking it, the dumb mutt, and all was well.

They tiptoed out, and Amos put an arm around him. "We need a shower."

"Yeah." He smelled like puppy spit and Noodle and Alpo and medicine and his sweats were hairy and filthy. It was gross. Not nearly as upsetting as he'd thought it would be, just gross. They headed into the bathroom, stripping and tossing clothes into the hamper. "You tell Iris about this and my reputation for being a barracuda is shot."

"Oh, yeah. Iris doesn't know you're a cream puff." Naked Amos, even snorting derisively, was a good thing, and naked

Amos turning on the water hot enough to make steam was an even better one.

"I'm not a cream puff! I'll have you know I'm almost terrifying in my field." He took the whole naked opportunity to grab Amos' butt and goose.

Hard.

* * * *

The dogs were gonna drive him nuts. Amos figured he should be glad that Noodle liked Bear, didn't go all territorial, but the way they tore around the house together like a couple of frat boys on too much tequila was enough to make a man crazed.

When his best pair of water shoes ended up chewed to death that was the last straw. Amos went looking for them with fire in his eye and he was just about to go out in the yard after them to beat them both to death with the remnants of the damned shoes when Dave called from up in the loft. "Shep? I think the dogs ate all my underwear."

Well, Hell. That? Was too good to be true. How could he possibly punish them for doing him a favor like that? Amos dropped the shoe and headed upstairs.

What did Dave need underwear for anyway?

Good dogs.

* * * *

Amos woke up, heart pounding hard, dreaming that Dave was gone, off to Greece, or Australia or something to make a deal. Thing was, the bed was cold, and Dave was gone and Amos knew a moment of deep, blinding panic before he heard Noodle snuffling and grunting.

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Sneaking over to the loft rail, Amos looked down, and there was Dave, with Bear in his lap, petting her and crooning low, while Dave sent Noodle chasing after a nerf ball over and over to keep the big goof from sitting there too.

It didn't take much more than that to reassure him.

Dave was home.

Chapter Nineteen

There were four pills left in a little pocket in his travel bag. Four. Red and shiny and long. Four.

He'd come to Colorado with ten of them and had managed, in three months, to only need six. Those last four worried him some, because once the fourth was gone, that only left three and three meant they were almost gone.

And almost gone meant he was going to have to make a decision. He'd had the ten when he left the city. He hadn't bought any more. He wasn't lying to Amos.

He put the pills back in the bag and closed the closet door. Maybe he'd just stick with the four.

* * * *

Fuck he wanted a cigarette.

His power bar had blown, taking the toaster and the microwave with it, so there was no toast unless he did it under the broiler and if he wanted to replace the fucking things it meant a drive down into Glenwood in a foot of snow.

If he was going to do that, he might as well pick up a pack of smokes while he was in town. Driving that road was nerve wracking. Smokes would help.

Amos headed upstairs to grab his boots and clothes, and there was Dave, sleeping in their bed, all smooshed down in the feather bolster, ass up and head down in Amos' pillow.

Amos sighed, dropping his boots and stripping off his robe. Suddenly he didn't need a smoke so bad after all.

He had Dave instead.

* * * *

Snowmen.

Big ugly misshapen snowmen. Little cute snowmen. Perverted snowmen. Snowbunnies. A passable snow turtle. It was silly and stupid and a waste of time and he was cold and tired and...

He threw a snowball hard, hit Amos right on the butt. God, it was fun.

* * * *

The phone rang and he picked it up. "Hello?"

"David? David, is it you?"

He blinked, taking a minute to recognize his baby sister's voice. "Oh! Hi! Merry almost Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you, too. I spoke with Iris today, she says you and Amos are together, in Colorado. She said I could call you, that you wouldn't be busy."

David nodded, hating the tentative quiet in that sweet voice. They'd never fought, but they hadn't been close for years, not since Mamma died. "Of course you can call. I ... I'm retiring, thinking about retiring. Leaving the firm. Only doing a bit of consulting. How're you?"

"Retiring? Wow. Good for you. Good for both of you. I ... I have news, Davey. Big news."

"Oh?" He braced himself for the worst.

"We're pregnant. I'm having a baby. In May. You're gonna be an uncle."

Oh. Oh, wow. Oh, God. He was grinning ear to ear, almost bouncing. He hurried out to the front room where Amos was

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by BA Tortuga

snoozing. "Shep. Shep, love. Wake up. We're going to be uncles! My baby sister's going to be a momma."

He heard happy, relieved laughter as he handed the phone over to Amos to let him congratulate for them.

They were going to be uncles.

Oh, wow.

Chapter Twenty

Amos loved Christmas.

The years he and Dave had spent apart didn't count. Those were bad years, ones that saw Amos sitting in front of the fire with Noodle, staring at the empty mantle and smoking like a chimney.

Now that Dave was back? Amos was in hog heaven. When he'd cleaned the apartment, Amos had found their huge box of silly Christmas decorations and he'd brought it with them. He got them a tree and kept Noodle from pissing on it and Bear from teething on it, and was putting the untangled chile shaped lights on it when Dave came down for breakfast.

"Oh, how fun!" Dave blinked and chuckled, hair all rumpled and mussed, scratching his belly. "Are those hot peppers?"

"Yeah. Well, fake ones. I bought them last year to add to our stock of weirdness." Amos loved Dave any way he could get him, but sleep mussed and blinky was one of his favorites.

"I like the light up popcorn strings best." Dave wandered over for a kiss, pushing right up against him.

"Mmm. I like the Dave ornament best." Amos grinned, pulling Dave on his lap and kissing hard. Dave purred and snuggled right in, still warm and dozy and sexy as hell. "Hey, baby." God, he loved feeling something besides ribs when he held Dave close, loved that Dave was getting healthy again. Loved that they were together. "Gonna help me?"

"Deck the halls? Of course." Dave chuckled, hand sliding down his belly to circle his navel. "Or did you mean another kind of help?"

Oh. Oh, damn. "I'm always willing to accept a hand, baby. You know that." Amos grabbed Dave's hand and pushed it down his body over his sweats to his cock, which rose quick and hard.

"Oh, Santa! Is that all for me?" Oh, God, that laughter felt good, felt damned good. Almost as good as that hand rubbing his prick.

"Every last bit." He let Dave hear his happiness in his voice, see it in his eyes. Amos wiggled. "Be even better if you unwrapped it."

Dave worked the tie of his sweats open, fingers teasing. "I love unwrapping gifts. Wonder what's in there..." Those long fingers dipped in, wrapped around his cock and jiggled.

"Fuck!" Dave's hand was warm, firm, the skin so soft and good against him. Amos leaned back on his hands and lifted his hips, starting to pant. "Love."

"Yes. Love how you want me." Dave started stroking, lips soft and hot on his neck.

"Always want you. Missed you so bad when you weren't here." Damn, he was babbling, but the lights behind his eyes had nothing to do with Christmas, and everything to do with what Dave was doing with that hot hand.

"Gonna have every Christmas from now on. Gonna make you happy, Shep." Dave pushed closer, almost in his lap.

"You make me damned happy, Dave. Oh. There. Yeah." Amos stretched out flat, and spread wide, wiggling, letting

Dave at his clothes. Dave got his shirt pushed up, hungry lips fastening around one nipple as that hand tugged. Amos petted, moaning at the tug of Dave's lips on his skin. He'd have to get Dave's PJs off, and soon, but right then all Amos could do was feel. Dave shifted, pulling the flannel top up enough that his cock rubbed that flat belly on every upward stroke.

"Oh, baby. Want you. So bad." He always wanted Dave, no matter what. Always.

Dave pushed up, giving him a deep, burning kiss. "All yours, Shep."

They were more on a level now and Amos reached for Dave's pants, pushing at them, wanting more skin, still more. Low moans pushed into his lips, husky and sweet, Dave's heavy prick hard against his thigh. Fuck. That was all he could take. Amos pushed Dave off, ignoring the oof of Dave's breath whooshing out. Then he stripped them both, needing so bad. Dave's cock was stiff for him, ready and waiting, and Amos just had to taste it, so he bent and took it in his mouth, licking and sucking.

"Amos! Love!" Dave arched, cock spreading his lips, already leaking salt for him.

"Mmmm." He pulled harder on Dave's pretty prick, lips really working, hands spreading Dave wider. The scent made him dizzy.

"Please. Please, Shep. I need. So good." Soft and needy, the breathy promises and pleas filled the air.

"Yeah." Amos breathed the word over the head of Dave's cock, licking one more time before spinning toward the couch

to rummage for lube. Lube, lube, yeah, there it was. Never let it be said he wasn't a boy scout. He got Dave's prick good and slick, then reached around to do himself up so he could ride.

Dave gave him a broken, needy sound. "So fucking sexy, Shep..."

"Yeah. You are, baby." He laughed, straddling Dave's waist and taking him in, just like that. All the way down. Dave's eyes rolled, hips bucking up and seating that fat cock deep inside him, hands landing hard on his hips. "Uhn." Now it was his eyes rolling, whole body snapping taut as he started moving. The tender skin of his inner thighs rubbed against Dave's hips, his hands on Dave's thighs as he moved to get a better angle. Dave scooted down a hair, shifting just right to give him what he needed, lightning sparking up his spine. "Dave! Baby! God, yeah. Right there."

Amos rolled and dipped, fucking himself hard on Dave's cock, hands reaching for anything solid as the world spun. Then Dave's hand wrapped around his cock, pulling hard. Oh, damn. He wasn't gonna last. Not like that. His whole body shook, his cock pushing into Dave's hand, his ass clamping down on Dave's prick.

"Yes! Love!" Dave jerked, slamming him hard, filling him with heat.

Amos thought everything in him was gonna come out when he shot, he came so hard, spattering Dave's belly and chest. "Oh, God, Dave-baby."

"Yeah. Love you. Wow."

"Mmm." He flopped, boneless and warm and happy. "Love you. And as soon as we recover I'll show you the new ornament I got."

"Ho ho ho." Dave chuckled and wrapped warm arms around him.

Laughing, Amos hugged right back. "I'll even give you a place to hang it if you give me a few minutes."

"Oh, now there's a reason to be a good little Dave." He was given a long, happy kiss. "Maybe this afternoon I'll make us eggnog."

"And I'll make us something warm and comforting for dinner, yeah?" God, he was happy. "You bring back the Christmas spirit, baby."

Amos held tight, kissing Dave thoroughly. He had Dave and that was all he wanted for Christmas. Every year.

* * * *

David hadn't celebrated Christmas at all the years that Amos and he were split up. Not beyond giving Iris her bonus and driving himself into a blind stupor, anyway.

This year? Well, this year he was moving a little slow and he didn't think Amos was gonna give on the eggnog issue, but there was cookie making and a tree with ornaments and carols on the stereo. There was a red and green velvet spread on the bed, candles and such everywhere and there were presents—a guitar for Shep and a pair of new boots and a few kitchen gadgets.

He'd wanted so much to get Shep something huge and fancy—a truck or such, but Amos had his pride and the fact was? They'd have a lot for fun car shopping together,

deciding what they needed, haggling for it. Then it would be theirs and it wouldn't hang over them.

Dave smiled over at Amos who was making hot chocolate and singing along with the radio, looking fine in worn jeans and bright red socks.

Maybe he was getting good at this relationship thing. Maybe, this time, he was starting to do it right.

* * * *

Amos was singing White Christmas long with Bing Crosby and stirring hot chocolate when he looked over to see Dave staring at him. The look was pure mush, all happy and goofy and just so darned sweet that Amos felt the love all the way across the room.

He had to go kiss those smiling lips. Had to. He took the milk off the burner and waltzed right over, planting a big old kiss right on Dave's mouth. And once he started kissing? They didn't stop for a good long while and the hot chocolate was kinda curdled when he was done.

He was going to have to get more milk.

* * * *

Amos piled all of his gifts under the tree. They were lopsided and lumpy. Lord, knew he wasn't the best wrapper. But he had stuff for Noodle and Bear and a few for the Bobs and he was pretty pleased with the result.

Of course, he still had a ton of stuff to wrap for Dave, but the man was like a little kid. The minute he heard wrapping paper he was wandering up to the loft all casual like to see what Amos was doing. Amos figured he'd have to be sneaky. That could wait, though, because the sound of wrapped

presents moving about had brought Dave out of the office alcove to the living room and Amos couldn't wait to see his reaction.

Not necessarily to the tree, but to the fact that Amos was naked except for a strategically placed red bow.

* * * *

Humming Auld Lang Syne, Amos set up the champagne chiller with a bottle of sparkling grape, and set out the little platters of crab puffs and cheese and sausage. My, how things had changed. Back when he and Dave lived in the city, they would have spent New Year's Eve out at some swank party.

Now? They were spending it at home, alone. Well, if you didn't count the dogs. Speaking of, Amos nudged Bear's nose away from the sausage balls. "Look, you silly mutt. If you eat it all now, there won't be any for midnight!"

"Not only that, but your farts will drive us all outside." Dave held out a couple of doggie biscuits—one for each of the mutts. "Sausage balls are not for puppies, no matter what Shep told Noodle."

"Hey I put chives in them. That's supposed to help with the gas." Amos grinned, watching the dogs bowl his Dave over and commence to licking him to death. Damn, but it made him laugh 'til his ribs hurt.

Dave struggled to sit up, grinning from ear to ear. God, he looked fine—easy and relaxed, cheeks pink, dark hair tousled, eyes shining. The guys in the office would never recognize that laughing, happy, easy-going man. "Chives? Oooh. I've

graduated to getting chives? Fucking A? That means bloody marys are right around the corner!"

"Uh, no." He grinned apologetically. "Chives are fairly mild, you know? Bloody Marys? Not so much."

Dave stuck his tongue out, laughing hard as Bear tackled him again, knocking him back and standing on his chest and barking triumphantly, little tail wagging ninety to nothing.

"See? Bear knows what's good for you." Amos came over to help, pulling Bear up and off and shoos both dogs off to the sun room. "So I was thinking snacks, then hot tub, then fake champagne."

"Fake? Even at New Years?" Dave wrinkled his nose, then pressed close. "You forgot the kissing part. The nice, long, we're together at New Years kissing part."

"Nope. Didn't forget that at all. Before, after, and during." Kissing Dave lightly, Amos chuckled. "I never forget the kissing, baby."

Dave grinned, arms wrapping around his neck. "Good. The kissing's one of my very favorite parts."

"Yeah? I like the groping, too." To prove his words, Amos gripped Dave's ass and squeezed. "And the licking and the sucking."

"The fucking's not half bad. Oh, and the rimming." Dave cuddled right in, rubbing against his belly. "Then there's the kink."

Torn between laughing and moaning, Amos rubbed right back. "Yeah. The occasional tying up and driving crazy."

God, he wanted every new year to start this way.

"Mm-hmm. The teasing, the toys." Dave grinned, eyes wicked, playing. Beautiful bastard—Dave was having too much fun. "The oiling and lubing and fisting and filming."

"That sounds like a hell of a list of New Year's resolutions." He had to nibble at Dave's neck, rubbing his beard against the soft skin there.

"Oh, those were the things I'm thankful for ... Oh ... Shep ... Right there. Damn." Dave's hands tightened on his shoulders. "I haven't started resolving yet."

"Yeah?" He bit down, tasting sweat and heat and Dave. "So what do you resolve this year?"

"Going to make this work. Never going to lose you again. Never going to do the surgery thing again."

"Oh, baby." That deserved a kiss, so Amos gave one, deep and happy and yes I love you, too. They were both so determined, so damned happy, wanting to be together. It scared the heck out of him sometimes and he thought maybe it did Dave, too. The kiss went from deep to hungry to needy just like that, Dave's hands sliding down his belly to stroke his cock, rub it through his jeans. A moan went from his mouth to Dave's and Amos pushed against the touch, wanting. Always wanting. Dave started unbuttoning, unzipping, baring him to the air and those fingers and that touch. He had to break the kiss, gasping for air. "Love ... baby. Oh, God."

Dave nodded, then sank down to his knees, nuzzling his prick, inhaling with a soft moan.

"Oh, fuck!" Amos widened his stance so he wouldn't fall right down, pushing into Dave's touch. That was the most

talented fucking mouth west of the Mississippi. Hell, east of it, too.

"Yeah, Shep. After this." Then Dave took him in deep, swallowing hard around his prick.

Yeah. Hell, yeah. Amos thrust, trying not to move too hard or too fast, but he couldn't help pushing right in, savoring the wet warmth. Dave closed around him—all white-hot and wet—hands tugging him in deeper. Humping hard, Amos petted Dave's head and shoulders, loving on him as best he could. He loved Dave's mouth, loved it. Dark eyes stared up at him, loving him, watching him need and move and thrust.

"Oh, God, baby." Amos just lost it at that look, just gave it all right up, shooting hard, yelling loud enough to bring the dogs running.

Dave took him all, then made a show of protecting his package from the dogs, laughing and cuddling close. "Oh, no. Mine. All mine."

"All yours, baby. Lord almighty that was good. C'mere and we'll do more of that kissing you like." Amos tugged, trying to get Dave up. Dave found his feet, then pushed close, humming low, and brought their lips together. "Mmm. Yeah." Amos kissed hard, hands moving all over Dave, fighting clothes. "Couch, babe, and you can fuck me like crazy."

"Uh-huh..." Dave nodded, hands sliding around to cup his ass. "Want you."

"Yeah. Yeah." God he was hot, still, always. He backed toward the couch, which just happened to rub his ass into Dave's hands.

Dave squeezed, pinching harder. "Uh-huh. Yeah."

They tumbled together, Amos on the bottom, Dave on top, between Amos' legs. Fucking perfect. Amos rubbed, feeling Dave's cock hard against his thigh. "Not to sound cliched, but do me, baby."

Dave chuckled, nuzzling his collarbone. "Lube, cliché-boy."

Amos dug under the cushions, fingers scrabbling. There! A triumphant crow and he handed it to Dave. "There. Now, please."

He got a nod and it didn't take anything, nothing at all before heavy, slick fingers pushed into his ass. Amos pushed, bore down, opening right up for those fingers. He arched, body going tight and hot, sweat breaking out on his skin. "Baby. Please."

"God, you're so hungry, love." The fingers slid away, the thick tip of Dave's cock replacing them.

"Need you." He pulled at Dave's back and hips, wanting Dave in him, needing so bad. "Make me crazy." Dave moaned, pushing in, stretching him with that thick cock. "Uhn." Amos spread wider, burning and aching, but so good. So good. There was nothing in the world like Dave's cock. Nothing. Amos wrapped his legs around Dave's waist and rode the feeling, cock rising again between them.

"Love this. Holding me so tight." Dave ducked his head and started moving faster, fucking him harder.

"Love you." His whole body rocked with each thrust, just moving with it, letting Dave take him flying.

"Yes. So fucking tight, Shep. Love." Dave arched, hips shifting, cock sliding across his gland.

Amos yelped, hips snapping, cock trapped between them as Dave kissed him. His eyes rolled, hands clutching. Begging with his whole body. Dave pegged that spot again and again, slamming into him, driving him mad. Damn. Oh, damn. Amos reached for his cock, stroking it hard, looking up at Dave. That much loved face was flushed, hot, so fucking pretty. "Dave..."

"Yes. Amos. Love. Fuck." Dave's fingers joined his.

Fuck if he wasn't going to come again, just like that. Who the hell said you got too old for it? Amos felt it in his belly, in his spine, too strong to deny. One last pump, one last thrust of Dave's prick and he was a goner, shooting all over their joined hands.

Dave brought their come-slick hands up to his own mouth, licking and moaning as he jerked, cock pulsing, filling Amos with heat.

"Mmmm. Hell of an hors d'ouvres, baby." Amos grinned lazily, laughing as the damned mutts nosed Dave's butt.

"Better than anything at the Tavern, Shep."

"You bet. And hey, it fits with begin the New Year like you'd like it to go on, yeah?"

"Shit, yeah." Dave relaxed down against him, nuzzling. "Kissing. Sucking. Fucking."

"All of the good things in life." Amos sighed happily, hands stroking down Dave's back. Hell, maybe if they were lucky there would be a sausage ball left. Of course, the way Bear was farting? That wasn't likely.

Chapter Twenty-One

Cross country skiing went pretty well. Dave was competitive as Hell, and determined to learn the new skills Amos wanted to teach him. So the cross country stuff? Went like owl shit, quick and slick. Downhill skiing turned out to be another matter. They'd left Noodle and Bear with the Bobs and headed up to Aspen so Dave could try his hand at it. Amos enjoyed the heck out of it himself, both on skis and on a snowboard, so he figured it would be good.

Anyway, Dave did real well on the bunny slope and did all right on the intermediate hill, too, so Amos got a little too complacent and decided Dave could hit the big time slopes with him. Which was, of course, when Dave lost control and he tried to help and they both went down in a display of sheer ineptitude that left the ski patrol speechless.

So they were back at the lodge, in their private room with the Jacuzzi tub, and Amos was helping Dave get out of the snow gear and cursing himself for getting them both all banged up. "That's one heck of a bruise, baby."

"Yeah. Sorry." Dave might blush from now until the end of time. Maybe longer. "Of course, middle-aged executives are supposed to do weird shit like this, right? Try and kill themselves on a ski slope trying to impress their younger, studly lovers?"

Dave would be cute all flushed and embarrassed and naked if it wasn't for the goose bumps. Time to get in the tub

and get warm. Amos pushed them in that direction. "Baby, I took that hit just as hard as you. Snow's slick."

Dave chuckled, moving a little slow. "I need to make myself a memo about that, love. How're you doing? Okay?"

"Yeah. But I figure we can get in that Jacuzzi and then we can give each other a nice rub down." He waggled an eyebrow, pinching Dave's unbruised butt cheek.

Dave squeaked and jumped, then wiggled for him a little. "Rubbing. Now there's a winter sport I can get behind."

"Oh, yeah. Bundling is a good, one too. Of course, I'd rather get behind you." He laughed, happy just to be with Dave.

They poured themselves into the hot tub, Dave moaning as he went in. "Oh, God. That's it. I'm staying right here. Forever."

Amos laughed, groaning a little too. "Wish I could. Damn that feels good, baby."

He moved close, leaning against Dave, letting the jets press them together. Dave nodded, eyes closed, one arm sliding around his back and holding on.

"Mmmm. Oh that's as good as a hot buttered rum and you in a snowsuit." He grinned, turning to Dave and putting his head on Dave's shoulder.

Dave cuddled in, humming and petting and floating with him. "Almost as good as the one at home."

"Hey, we don't have to wonder if Noodle took a whiz in this one." The chuckles made his legs float and Amos watched his toes rise to the surface, giggling a little.

"Well, okay now. I have to admit I never wondered before. Of course, I will now." Dave was snorting, legs curling up underneath his thighs.

"We put the cover on it, he can't get to it. Now if Bobs use it while we're gone we'll have to worry." Mmmm. Dave legs. He liked Dave legs. Amos rubbed a little.

"Shep, you are an evil, evil man." One of Dave's hands dropped to card through his pubes, fingers swirling. "Sexy, but evil."

"Evil? Me?" He tried batting his eyelashes, but figured he looked more blinky than sexy. He settled for leaning forward and rubbing his beard against Dave's neck. "Love you. Thank you for going skiing with me."

"Thank you for being patient with me." Soft kisses brushed against his forehead, his nose. "You tell me when we need to get out. No getting sick on me."

"Mmmhmmm." Hot tubs did lower the blood pressure and with his heart problems ... well, sometimes he had to cut the fun off in mid-fun. "Kiss me?"

"Oh, yeah." Dave leaned in, licking and lapping at his lips. "Love you."

That was just what he needed to get his blood pressure evened out. Hell, Dave could raise it like no one else. Amos moved closer, 'til even the water couldn't get between them, and kissed Dave hard.

Dave's moan tasted sweet, lips opening right up, tongue sliding alongside his own. They were certainly warm now, Dave's goose bumps all gone. Amos sucked gently on Dave's tongue, lips closing on it briefly.

"Mmm..." Dave's hands were roaming, cupping here and stroking there and driving him nuts.

They floated together, bobbing up and down a little with the water, kissing and loving until Amos felt a little lightheaded. Okay a lot, and not from the kissing, damn it. "Dave-baby? I think we need to get out."

"Okay. Let me go first and I'll help you." Dave slid out from under him and climbed out, then reached for him. "C'mon Shep. Let's go snuggle."

He sorta flopped out of the tub, Dave helping him just as he's helped Dave out on the slopes. They fell together on the bed and Dave grabbed the covers, pulling them up around them to keep them warm. Damn that man was good to him.

Soon as they got settled he went for another kiss, showing Dave a little gratitude.

"Hmm. You're feeling better." Dave stroked his arms, his back, getting his blood flowing.

"Always feel good with you." He was getting his share of the rubdown, but he was falling down on the job with Dave. Amos started rubbing too, his front against Dave's, his hands against Dave's back.

"You spoil me." Dave was licking at his neck, nuzzling and snuggling. "So good to me."

"That's what I was just thinking about you, baby." Careful not to jolt their bruises, Amos moved them so they were on their sides, face to face. Perfect for some slow loving.

"Hey, Shep." Dave nudged him, rubbing a little.

"Hey. God, you're warm." That was just perfect. He hooked a leg over Dave's thigh and brought them together to rub even more.

"Uh-huh. Well-cooked. Feels good." The blankets were soft and heavy against them, the weight seeming to push them closer.

"Me, too." He chuckled, the air warming with his breath. "Gonna kiss you now."

They kissed, even better than in the hot tub, lips and tongues meeting and pressing and rubbing. He could feel Dave's eyelashes brushing his cheeks, lips so hot, hands so soft. Moans and low hums filled the warmed air under the covers. Hands started moving and Amos got his settled on Dave's hip, rocking them a little, just nice and slow.

"Mmm ... 's good. Love you. My Shep..." Dave groaned low, the sound rough and sweet all at once.

"Yeah. Love you too, baby. So much." Their cocks slid together, made him gasp with how right it was. Damn.

"Oh, do that again. Love that sound." Dave scooted forward again.

"Uhn." The tips of their cocks rubbed, exchanging heat and moisture and Amos moaned, low and breathy, giving Dave his sounds.

"Used to dream about this. Don't have to anymore. Got the real deal." Dave was grinning, shifting, happy.

"Right here and awake and needing you." Fuck, he wished they'd gotten the lube. He wanted Dave in him, but they didn't have anything nearby. "Want you so bad."

"You have me. What do you want? How do you want me?"

"Want everything with you, baby. But this is good, just like this." He slipped his hand from Dave's hip to move it between them, grasping their pricks.

"Mmm ... Yeah." Dave leaned in, lips fastening onto his throat and sucking with a gentle pressure.

"Oh. Damn, baby." That felt amazing. The moved faster and faster, the soft and slow getting more urgent, hands and lips adding to the heat. Dave hummed, pulling harder, pushing against him, teeth just scraping his skin.

"Fuck!" Amos pulled hard at them, hand closing tight, leg hooking behind Dave's ass and pushing.

"Oh. You liked that." Dave rolled them, landing on top of him, pulling up a bruise on his throat, hips pushing down against him. Hell, yes he liked it. Made his cock throb, made everything hot and red and good. He grabbed Dave's butt, fingers dipping into Dave's crease, his other hand still between them, moving furiously. Dave was humping against him, sounds vibrating against his throat, one of those hands on his ass, pulling him closer.

"God, baby. Gonna be soon." How it went from soft and warm to hot and needy he wasn't sure, but it did and he was so close he could feel it in his spine.

"Uh-huh. Soon." Dave jerked, biting down into his shoulder, heat spraying over his belly. He wailed, hips pumping up as he gave it up, adding his own spunk to the mix, loving the scent of them together.

"Mmm..." Dave groaned and sort of melted into him, snuggling.

"Yeah. Hell of a rubdown, baby." Amos nuzzled, holding Dave tight.

"Uh-huh. Have to do it again later."

"As long as we don't have to fall down and freeze our balls off first."

"We'll lie and say we did." Dave's chuckle tickled his jaw.

"Sounds like a plan." They'd get room service, maybe get some massage oil. Much as he liked skiing? Where Dave was concerned he could have more fun off the slopes.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Spring.

It was spring.

Well, maybe that was a bit premature, but the crocuses were pushing up through the snow. That meant it was time for Amos to prove how manly he was and drag the grill out for the first cook out of the season.

Noodle and Bear thought it was a prime idea, loping out into the snow and back to the deck, spraying him with cold, wet melt every time. Damned mutts. By the time he got the charcoal going in the chimney and all of the equipment out, like tongs and shit, he was freezing his nuts off. Time to go in and warm up until the coals were ready.

Dave was right there, in his little office and Amos waltzed right over and stuck his hands under Dave's shirt. Not better way to warm up, that was his philosophy. Dave's eyes went wide, then he squeaked, muscles jumping under his touch. "Shep! Cold! Love! Oh!"

"Nah. It's spring, baby." He laughed, sliding his fingers up to pinch Dave's nipples.

"Sp ... sp ... spring? No way." Dave's little nipples went rock hard, pushing right into his fingers.

"There's blooming flowers out there. And I'm gonna grill you some salmon." Squeezing those tiny bits could become a full time obsession.

"Oh ... Like salmon..." Dave's eyes were dark, blinking slow. "Like your hands more. Damn."

"Good thing I started a big enough fire to stay hot long enough for me to warm up." Amos bent and nibbled at Dave's neck, just above the collar of his shirt.

"Mmm..." Dave let his head fall back, low moans vibrating Amos' lips. Wanton. Hungry. All his. Damn it was good to have Dave there, all day and all night, whenever he wanted to touch and kiss and love. Amos spun Dave's chair around, pressing his lips to Dave's and kissing hard. Dave reached up, pulling Amos down into the curve of his body, happy sounds filling his mouth.

He staggered a little, then sort of slid down to kneel on the floor, Dave bending to keep them pressed together. "Mmmm. Good, baby."

"Always. God, you taste so good..." Dave kept pushing, tilting him over, mouth ravenous, hot on his skin.

"Yeah. Hot, baby. Need you." That shirt had to go and Amos yanked on it, getting it off over Dave's head before diving back in.

"Uh-huh." Dave's hands worked open his pants, hunting for his cock, so smooth, so fucking hot.

"Unh." Fuck, that warmed him so good he thought he might explode. He reached for Dave's pants, the chill gone from his hands, wanting Dave's thick cock in them.

"Shep..." Dave arched, belly sucking in, helping him out.

"Yeah." There. Dave's hot prick pushed right into his hand and he pulled, leaning to kiss and nuzzle and nibble. They rocked together, Dave's hand matching his rhythm stroke for stroke, the kisses growing longer, hotter. They played,

tongues touching and pushing, tasting each other so long and well that Amos had to pull away for air. "Baby..."

Dave just groaned, words all faded, eyes staring at him like he was fascinating. Fuck. Much as he loved Dave's hands on him, Amos wanted a taste more. He pushed Dave back in the chair and leaned down, breaking Dave's hold on him reluctantly. But oh, the taste when he bent and took that fat cock in his mouth was more than worth it.

"Love!" Dave's legs sprawled, chair springs creaking violently as those hips rocked up towards his mouth. Yeah. That was the sound he heard in his dreams. Amos sucked and licked, working his hand at the same time. Dave's hands were hard in his hair, tangling, touching, that heavy cock throbbing in his lips.

Lips sealing tight, Amos sucked hard, hand dropping to Dave's balls to touch and roll, his own cock bobbing, aching. A sharp, wild scream sounded, Dave jerking and coming hard, spunk filling his mouth. God. So good. Amos licked it all up, taking his baby right in. Then he pretty much crawled into Dave's lap, rubbing against Dave's belly and thighs like there was no tomorrow.

"Yeah. Hot. Good." Dave took him in hand, pumping hard, free hand pushing into his jeans, teasing his hole.

"Fuck! Dave. Baby." The last sound was harsh and guttural as Amos came hard enough to see stars, pushing against Dave, gasping and moaning.

The touches continued until the shuddering stopped, then Dave licked his fingers clean.

"Oh, damn, baby. That was hot enough to make spring come early." Amos grinned, kissing Dave's nose.

Dave chuckled, licked his lips. "Go and sear fish for us. I'll log off and make a salad."

"Sounds like a plan." He laughed out loud. "And I'll even wear my gloves."

Dave grinned, took his hands and put them on that soft belly. "You do that."

"So long as you promise to get me warm again if I get cold, Dave-baby, I'll do anything for you."

Chapter Twenty-Three

There was a playhouse in the backyard. Amos figured it was a playhouse, because it was too small to be a shed and too big to be a doghouse. Way, way too big. Never mind that it said "Bear" over the front door and had a doggie bed in it. There was no fucking way that was a doghouse.

Nope.

Not one damned way.

Still, Amos figured he'd better go ask Dave, just in case. He stowed his pack right inside the back door and pushed his mud-caked shoes off. There was always some damn fool who slopped out of the boat too soon and got stuck in the mud and Amos always had to get out and help. He went through more shoes that way.

He found Dave, surprise surprise, at the computer, typing away and singing along to Aida. It was cute. Well, cute but for the cup of what smelled suspiciously like coffee next to Dave's elbow. "Hey, baby. You're not supposed to have coffee and you know it. And is that a doghouse in the back?"

"Huh? Coffee? How was the trip? Noodle's doghouse is being delivered tomorrow and I'm having a pool built between them.

A pool. Amos went for the easy thing first. "That smells like coffee. What is it?"

"Uh..." Dave grabbed the mug and drained it dry. "Nothing. All empty."

"Damn it, Dave." Amos headed straight for the kitchen, opening doors and searching cabinets. "That shit is bad for you."

"It's coffee—no big deal. You like coffee." David tried to head him off at the pass, scooting between him and the cabinets by the fridge. "How was the water?"

"Cold. And the mud was slimy." Amos was trying not to get pissed, but damn, he had to be able to trust Dave not to order coffee while he was away, didn't he? "Move, baby."

Dave frowned, shook his head. "I'm not a kid, Shep. Chill out."

"Chill out? Hell, no. You almost died, baby. I am not going to chill out. Not about this." Amos knew he was probably overreacting, but damn it, coffee was the worst fucking thing for Dave and there was a two story deluxe doggie palace in his fucking backyard.

"I'm not doing anything illegal. I'm not going anywhere." Dave pushed one hand through the thick salt and pepper hair. "No fighting, man. You just got home. Do you like the doghouse?"

Deep breaths, he thought. Deep, deep breaths. "It's ... well, it's really big, baby. What do they need with a pool?"

Dave tilted his head. "I figured it would keep them out of the hot tub." Dave took a step closer to him, hand trailing over his forehead. "You look tired."

God, he was. He was so fucking tired, after almost a week of rafting and hiking and falling down the side of a damned mountain with a bunch of tourists from New Jersey, who were

not exactly goat footed or polite. "Yeah. I'm tired. Really tired."

Those dark eyes got more concerned, more worried. "Come upstairs. We'll have a bath. I'll love on you and you can nap."

"Yeah, okay." Amos laughed. "Just don't put me in the doggie pool." Shit, he was getting goofy. Maybe he needed to take his pills, which he'd forgotten to pack and there was a guilt thing after yelling at Dave about the coffee.

"The doggie pool hasn't been ordered yet, Shep." His hands were taken and he was led upstairs, Dave's fingers warm, sure.

"Oh. Right. Baby, you need more to keep you busy if you're ... where are the dogs anyway? Usually Noodle greets me. The Bobs take them into to town for ice cream?" They got to the top of the stairs and Amos leaned, feeling Dave warm and firm against him.

"I hired someone to come groom them both. Sally will deliver them after supper. She brought Noodle some neat treats, too."

"I got Noodle groomed once. They painted his toenails pink. We'd better sit, baby." Amos was just swaying, feeling light-headed as anything. Maybe he needed to eat something, too. Sucked when you gave up your protein bars because the eight year old dumped the peanut butter and bread in the river.

"Fuck. Shep. Amos. Love." He was muscled onto the couch, a blood pressure cuff strapped around his wrist, Dave

going from zero to sixty in nothing. "When's the last time you ate? Have you been taking your pills? Fuck."

"It was a raunchy trip." He grinned at Dave, having to laugh at the way they mothered each other. "And I ate ... last night sometime."

"Last night isn't good enough." Dave frowned at the pressure cuff and went mother hen, bustling up and down and in the kitchen and bitching and fussing and shaking that tight little ass and worrying on him. It was cute. Really, really cute. So cute he might even forgive the coffee. As soon as he found the rest and threw it away.

Once he had some food in him and his pill and a glass of water big enough to float both dogs without a pool he felt much better and he grabbed Dave on the next pass, pulling him down to snuggle. "So what's with you and the dog stuff all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I was surfing around for stuff and found a guy who'd built a doghouse with an elevator and I thought our dogs needed a house. Maybe not an elevator house, but a house."

"You're a weirdo, Dave." Amos leaned again, feeling better than he had in days, arms coming up to hold Dave close. God, Dave felt good.

"Your weirdo. The dogs will love it. We can even get them waterbeds." Dave's lips trailed along his jaw, his chin.

"No waterbeds, Dave. They'd puncture them and we'd have a flood." It took maybe a fraction of an inch to turn and catch Dave's lips with his, licking along the lower one. "Love the way you taste."

"Love you. Been a long fucking week." Dave moaned for him, fingers pushing through his hair.

"Yeah." He leaned back, pulling Dave across him, feeling the still too skinny ribs against his chest, feeling their hipbones bump. "Too long without you."

Dave nodded, fingers working his shirt open, teasing his nipples up into hard little points.

That was better therapy for the tired and grumpy than a chicken sandwich, that was for sure. Amos moaned, trying to get closer, body arching up. "Good."

"Always has been." He got a long, slow, sweet kiss, Dave's hands sliding down to unbutton his jeans.

"Yeah. Always." He smiled, reaching for Dave's clothes too, wanting skin.

"Love that smile." Dave tugged off both their shirts, bent down to lick his throat. Oh, that was much better. He mapped Dave's spine with the tips of his fingers, spreading his legs to cradle Dave and hold him tight. Dave made everything better, just everything.

"Mmm..." Dave worked his jeans open, fished out his cock and started pumping. "Feel good to me."

"Damn! Dave-baby!" Breathless, muscles jumping, Amos pushed up, getting more contact. "Yeah. Feels ... oh."

"Yeah. Oh. Tell me, have you been missing me? Been jacking off under the moon while I'm up here?" God, Dave sounded sexy, hot.

"Been missing you so bad. Dreamed about you." Wiggling, he got Dave even closer, so he could get to Dave while Dave touched him. Dave wasn't naked. That was bad.

"Mmm ... good dreams?" Dave chuckled and pulled harder, sucking in that flat belly for his fingers.

He scrabbled, finally getting to Dave's fat cock and pulling, nodding furiously. "Yeah. Had to be quiet, yeah? Had to and it was so hard."

"So hard..." Dave groaned, hips rocking. "Surfed and surfed while you were gone. Thinking about you. Wanting you."

They moved together so good, felt so right together. Always had. With any luck they always would. If Dave stopped drinking coffee and he stopped fucking with his blood pressure, but he wasn't gonna worry about that. Not right now. Now he was gonna concentrate on the feel of Dave's skin and the way they smelled together. Dave wriggled out of his pants and suddenly they were all skin—two hands and two cocks and two mouths all working.

"C'mere, Dave. Yeah, like that." Dave straddled his thighs and Amos rocked and suddenly it was right there, fluttering up his spine. "Gonna come, baby. Gonna come so good." Dave just nodded, bottom lip held between those teeth, eyes rolling as they moved faster, harder. His hips snapped up, his back a hard arch, and Amos came hard, crying out, hands clenching on Dave. "Oh, Jesus, baby."

"Yes. Shep. Love." Dave followed him, heat sliding on his fingers, slick and sweet.

Damn. They curled together, Dave leaning down so they could kiss deep and sloppy. "Love you. But we still have to talk about the coffee. And the dogs."

"What's wrong with the dogs?" Dave was stroking his belly, nuzzling his shoulder.

"Well, they don't need a condo. Or a pool." Amos moaned, curling in and letting Dave pet his week away. There were, he reflected, a lot worse things for Dave to get into than doggie comforts.

"No? You don't like the dog house?"

"It's a bit big, baby." A huge yawn took him by surprise. "Even for Noodle and Bear."

Dave chuckled, fingers closing his eyes. "It's just for Bear. Noodle's is bigger."

God. They'd have to talk about it later, though. After he'd had a bit of a nap. And after he'd thrown out that coffee.

* * * *

Man, Amos was being a...

A...

A...

A turd.

That was it.

He didn't like the waterbed idea for the dogs. He threw the coffee away. He threw the coffeemaker away. Told the Bobs not to give him any and not to answer questions about doggie condo building.

Bastard.

Dave headed back from Glenwood Springs in the old truck, cappuccino—light, heavy on the milk, see? he was okay—in the cup holder, a doggie treadmill in the bed. The dogs needed to exercise in the winter.

He got back to the house just in time to see Amos waving the Bobs away in their own truck. They'd been over working on the deck where a few loose boards made it hazardous to their health. The dogs bounded out to meet him, barking and wagging and at least someone was glad to see him.

He tugged out the groceries and the mail and the dog biscuits, doling one out to them both. "Hey, Shep. How's your day going? I bought a treadmill for the pups for the wintertime."

Amos wandered over, peering in the back of the truck. "A treadmill. For the dogs."

"Yep. For the winter. The lady at the pet shop said they were all the rage." He smiled over. "I got you some more work shoes, too. You said the others were ruined."

Grinning, Amos ambled over and pulled him close. "Can you really see Noodle on a treadmill?" He got a kiss, deep and hard and happy.

He chuckled, holding on tight, one hand stroking over Amos' cheek. No. Not really, but it would be fun as hell trying. Amos pulled back, licking his lips and frowning. "Coffee."

Oh, shit. "Cappuccino lite, double milk. I was good."

"Good?" The frown got deeper, storm clouds gathering. "Goddamnit, baby, can't you just do what the doctor tells you for one day?"

"Oh, for fuck's sake, don't. I didn't fucking drink lye. I had a cappuccino." He stepped back, shaking his head, irritated. No one used to give a shit what he did, so long as he made money. He was a frigging grownup, wasn't he? "Come on, Shep. I don't want to fight."

"I don't want to either. But I don't want you getting another hole in your belly, either." Scratching at the scar on his chest, Amos shrugged. "Come on, I'll help you unload the treadmill."

"Thanks." He walked back to the truck bed, working the tailgate open so they could pull the thing out. Bear was going to look too cute on it. Speaking of Bear, the silly thing was licking the back of his knees and snuffling his pockets and Amos was laughing at him. It was good to see that wide smile split Amos' soft beard. Maybe they'd skirted the issue after all.

"Stop begging, silly beast. I gave you a treat when I got home." They muscled the treadmill onto the front porch where Bear preceded to bark at it, teeth bared and all.

Amos just dissolved into laughter, holding his belly and whooping. "That's it Bear. Kill it."

David couldn't quite decide if he was pissed or tickled and it wasn't until the laughter started that he decided which one he was going to be. It got even worse when Noodle hopped up on the thing, circling once before flopping down and promptly closing his eyes. He though Amos was going to bust a gut, or maybe fall right over. Tears were streaming down Amos' face. He harrumphed and stuck his tongue out at Shep. Bastard probably coached them. "They just need some instructional level support."

"Yeah." Amos wheezed. "We need to get them a hamster. With a little wheel. So they can get the idea."

"Yeah." He shook his head and took the groceries in, letting the door slam behind him, the sound satisfying. He

used to be a force to be reckoned with. Powerful. Respected. Now? He had to sneak out to have a coffee and got laughed at. Now he went fucking grocery shopping and watched fucking television—knew the names of the assholes on Forbidden Fruit or Jock-Itch Island or whatever.

God, he needed a drink.

"Baby?" Amos came in and he heard the struggle the dogs put up when Amos left them outside. "You okay? I was only joking."

"Yeah. I'm cool." He put the milk away, watched his hands shaking he was so frustrated.

"Doesn't look like it." Just like that Amos was there, petting his back, fingers lingering on the knobs of his spine. "I ... I'm sorry if I pissed you off, Dave."

"You didn't." He shook his head, resting his forehead on the refrigerator door. "I'm just ... I used to be something, Amos. I have to go back to work. I can't keep spinning my wheels."

There was absolute silence behind him, for the longest time, Amos' hand stilling on him. When he finally looked up, Amos was white as a sheet. "You're leaving?"

"I..." He was going to be sick. For the first time in months he could feel the acid and stress and pounding of his heart. "I don't want to. I don't want to go, but I can't just sit. I'm boring. I'm old. I ... I used to be someone on the edge and now I'm all milk and oatmeal and ... How can you like me like this, Amos?"

"I like you any way I can get you, baby. And I've been more worried about your health than anything. Can we. Can

we sit down?" At least Amos' hand was moving again, stroking him, warm through his shirt. He nodded, swallowing hard, moving away from the fridge and into Amos' warmth without even thinking about it. Amos hugged him tight, beard rubbing his cheek, and they were moving heading for that gold monstrosity of a couch. They sat, Amos pulling him close again, letting him rest against Amos' shoulder. "Is it just that you have to do? Or do you really have to go somewhere else to do it?"

"Hmm? I'm tired of being..." He shrugged, sighed. "I don't even know what I am, Amos. I need to be me again, but..." David closed his eyes, caught in a web of embarrassment. "I don't want to leave you. I don't want to lose us."

"You're not going anywhere without me. If you need to go, I'm going with you." Nuzzling, Amos held him close, so damned sure.

"You'd go with me?" The words fell from him before he'd even registered what Amos said. Amos hated the city, hated the whole thing.

"I'm not giving you up this time, Dave. I can't. If you've got to go somewhere else, then that's that." A sharp laugh came out. "Look what happened last time I let you go without me."

"I..." He took a deep breath, blinking hard, not sure whether to laugh or cry. "I know what happened. I'm more careful now."

"I know you are. Even with the coffee. But ... well, would it be shitty of me to say I hope you couldn't just run off without

me that easy?" Damn. Amos sounded just as tight in the throat as he was.

"Easy? Fuck. Nothing's fucking easy without you. It never was. Not even when I wanted it to be, not even when I was on the top of my fucking game." He laughed and the sound was almost bitter. "Everything I worked for. Everything I knew and I couldn't forget the one person I needed."

"God. Baby. I'm sorry." Curling into him, Amos just sort of rocked, petting him, never once letting go. "I just. I couldn't. But I've got my head screwed on straight now. I could go back, if you need me to."

He took a deep breath, then another. "We ... We'll figure it out. We'll sit and talk and figure it out." He tilted Amos' face up, looked into those eyes. "Yours. Not letting you go again. Not letting you let me go."

"Thank God." Leaning in, Amos kissed him, hard, and he tasted panic and need and love, all right there. He just dove into the kiss, tongue pushing into Amos' mouth as he groaned. He needed. Now. Needed to know they were going to be fine, going to love each other.

Amos pushed him back along the couch, crowding right over him, pressing down on him, the kiss going desperate, bruising his lips. He opened wide, pushed back, hands dragging along Amos' ass, pulling hard. Demanding.

"Umm." Moaning, Amos rubbed against him, lips and tongue taking his mouth by storm. One of Amos' legs slid between his, pushing his thighs wide, giving him delicious friction. Damn.

"Uh-huh." He nodded, grabbing harder, damned near sobbing he wanted so bad. Right now. Right now so that none of the other shit mattered. "Need you, baby. Can't ... God. Now."

Amos pulled back enough to get to their pants, opening them with clumsy fingers, and both of them gasped at the heat of it, the feel of skin on skin.

"Yes!" He arched, jerking and rubbing, biting at Amos' lips. "Dave, baby. Yeah." This was simple. This he could do and when Amos reached between them and grabbed them both in one hand and started stroking the easiest thing in the world to do was forget everything else.

Forget everything but them. Together. Now. Loving.
The rest could wait.

* * * *

He knew Dave didn't get the whole coffee thing. Lord knew it wasn't like Dave did it often, just once in awhile, and the more Amos bitched the more likely he was to sneak around and do it, just to be defiant or something.

But.

When Amos smelled coffee on Dave's breath or found a tiny bag of special roast hidden in the cornmeal container, it made his belly hurt, made his chest all tight. Made him remember what it was like to see Dave in the hospital, all pale and weak from having surgery and he never wanted to go there again. Ever.

So he bitched.

And he yelled.

And he was really afraid that if he kept it up Dave was gonna leave him, because he was being an asshole and he didn't know how to stop.

Coffee scared the Hell out of him.

* * * *

Things were better. Not perfect, maybe, but better.

Hell, not that life with Dave was ever bad. Life with Dave was infinitely preferable to life without him, even if sometimes Amos thought he might go crazy with doggie condos, waterbeds and pools.

They were working it out and Dave was feeling better and Amos wasn't as scared that Dave was going to up and leave. Dave hadn't even snuck a coffee in ages, which made him happy as a clam, because he couldn't see Dave in a hospital bed again, all pale and sad and sick as a ... well, not a dog, because their mutts never even ate grass.

Sick, anyway.

Amos parked the truck and hauled the groceries out, petting Noodle and Bear on the way in. He'd gotten Dave a coffee flavored slushie and he didn't want the damned thing to melt to much, so he'd driven like a maniac to get back from the City Market in town. "Dave, baby? I'm home."

The smell of coffee hit him right in the face when he walked in, and a serious sense of deja vu came over him. Jesus. Didn't they just do this? Well this time he wasn't tired out from a trip and sick from not eating. This time he was going to kick Dave's ass all the way to Hell and back until he understood that his health had to come first. He bellowed as he hit the kitchen. "DAVE!"

"Shep?" He heard the squeak and scrape of Dave's chair, then the sound of Dave running towards him. "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

He should calm down first, no doubt, but Amos just couldn't, all the fear and worry and everything he had all bottled up just popping out.

"God damn it to fucking Hell, Dave, I went away for a fucking hour and you're doing it again!" The smell was so strong that the pot should still be on, but it was empty and cold. Didn't matter. He was on a roll.

"Doing it? Doing what?" Fucking shit. Now it was okay to lie about it? Stand there and look like he couldn't fucking smell everything?

"I can smell coffee all over the damned house, baby, and it sure as Hell isn't the slushie I brought you." Which was now on the living room floor with Noodle and Bear lapping it up, no doubt.

"I'm not drinking any coffee, Amos." Dave sighed and headed back towards his little office.

Amos went after him. No way was he weaseling out of this one. "So what? You're just making a pot and sniffing it?"

"No, asshole." He hadn't heard that cold, angry snap in a long time—and never here—the sound grated down his spine. "Iris sent me a package that came while you were gone."

"So you've got Iris in on it? Jesus. I thought she at least knew better." His own back went right up at the harsh sound, his chest getting tight. He hated fighting, but he was willing to fight for this.

"Yes, Amos. Iris and I are participating in a huge fucking conspiracy to smuggle coffee beans into the highly protected state of Colorado. You've found us out." Dave stepped into the little alcove that was his office, reaching down to pick something up from his desk.

Amos crowded in behind Dave, his whole body quivering, trying so hard not to say something he'd regret forever. Because Dave would make him regret it for sure. "You think it's funny that I worry about your health?"

"No." Dave turned, pressed a little candle into his hand, one of those fucking smelly candles. "I think it sucks you treat me like I'm fucking incapable of being a functional adult. Get out of my way."

The candle was hot, even through the little glass holder, making him curse and almost drop it. "Well, if you hadn't snuck around and had stuff you weren't supposed to, I wouldn't be so suspicious."

"Coffee. Amos. Fucking coffee. Not booze. Not pills. Not anything else of the thirty thousand fucking things I got to give up." Dave was building up a head of steam, cheeks getting red, lips tight and white.

He had his own head of steam up and he set the candle aside, poking Dave in the chest. "I know! Okay? Don't you think I know? I gave up the booze and the parties and the job and the apartment and I fucking gave you up, too, which almost fucking killed me. I'm not gonna lose you again, damn it."

"Yeah, I remember. I'm the asshole who got to know that his best offer wasn't good enough." Dave laughed, the sound

humorless and dull. "I got to fucking be replaced by Noodle and the Bobs. If I hadn't come here, hadn't come across you? You'd still be fucking happy with your river and your pack-a-day habit telling the tourists stress'll kill them."

Oh, fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Amos blinked, feeling the sting in his eyes and the pressure under his sternum growing and growing. "You think I didn't think of you every damned day? You think I snuggled up to the Bobs at night? You think I didn't build this fucking house for you? Why do you think I smoked a pack a day?"

"No. You don't get fucking sympathy from me. My fucking phone number didn't change. You had a motherfucking key. You could have come home or called. Written. 'Dear Dave, Home, happy. No stress. Fuck off and die. Amos.'" Dave swallowed hard, pale but for two hot spots on his cheeks. "I need to get some air. I need a walk. Get out of my way."

"No." He caught Dave as he tried to push by. "No. We need this out. You're right. I didn't call." How could he call, knowing Dave would never come live with him and he couldn't go back? How could he write when that would just mean a long distance relationship neither of them could sustain in the long run? "I couldn't be a kept man, baby."

"I never asked you to be. I w..." Dave closed his eyes, took a deep, slow breath, then another one. "I don't know what you want me to say."

"I don't know either." He didn't. He wished he did. God knew, he wished he did. "I just ... I want you to be here tomorrow."

"I didn't leave you before." Dave shook his head. "I did stuff that was bad for me. Okay. I did. I had to cope. I had to find a way to fucking cope when things went to hell and then I couldn't stop. I couldn't sleep. My other choice was to lay down and let your leaving kill me."

"I know, baby." Amos' legs were shaking. "I know I'm the one. I'm sorry, baby. I am." He wanted to scream. He just wanted to sit down on the floor and cry. "But I'm not you. I'm not strong enough to go on if you're the one who goes."

"Oh, for fuck's sake!"

Dave's hand slammed on the desk, hard enough to send shit flying. "I'm not going anywhere! Nowhere. I'm staying right here in this place with you and the dogs and the trucks. I'm staying if I'm pissed at you, if you're pissed at me. I'm more stubborn than you are, you mistrustful bastard, and I'm not leaving you, get it? Listen and I'll tell you again. I. Am. Not. Leaving. You. You irritating bastard!"

"Oh." Amos grinned, reaching for Dave and holding on for dear life. "That's good to know."

"Don't you grin." Dave's hands wrapped around him, hugging tight, fingers squeezing and holding. "I'm still mad."

"Okay. You can be mad." They sort of waltzed over to Dave's office chair and plopped, because Amos' legs went right out from under him, relief and the sudden lack of his righteous anger making him weak. "I love you," he said hopefully, breathing in Dave's scent, coffee and all.

"I love you. Bastard." Dave leaned into him, cheek just a little rough against his own.

He nodded, because there was no denying it. He was a first class shiny bastard. Dave felt good in his arms, though, warm and solid and there and Amos wasn't going to complain if the man called him names. "I brought you a slushie. But I think the dogs ate it."

"Oh, man. You'll have to take me to eat pot roast at Mary Ann's tomorrow night to make up for it." Dave kissed his temple. "And I get pie. With ice cream."

Squeezing, Amos actually got out a laugh. "You got it, baby."

A kiss landed on his ear. "Good. Love you. This is my home."

"Mine too. You're here." There was still stuff they needed to work on, obviously, the way they'd flown at each other, but Amos could lay the biggest worry to rest. Dave said he wasn't leaving and the stubborn fool meant it, that was that.

Coffee? Would be harder to put aside, but together they could do just about anything.

"Yes." Another lick tickled his ear. "Here and staying."

They could do anything, including, uh ... oh. That. Dave's hands started wandering and Amos went from limp with relief to not so limp in no time, needing so bad. "Good. Then you won't mind if we..."

Amos tilted Dave's face, giving Dave a kiss, deep and hard. Dave jerked, tongue pushing into his lips, a low, deep moan vibrating between them. Oh, that was so much better than arguing. Amos kissed hard enough to bruise, needing to feel it, wanting that spark between them. He grabbed Dave's ass, pulling them even closer together, rubbing. Dave bit his

lips, eyes dark, hungry. "Could have skipped the fighting and just had make-up sex."

"Nope. Needs the spice." He grinned, that look in Dave's eyes his favorite thing ever, the flatness gone entirely. They kissed some more, until both of them were breathless and his damned back protested. "Let's go to bed, baby."

"Yeah. Bed. Fucking. Kissing. A little screaming." Dave grinned at him, winked. "Leave the candles down here."

They staggered upstairs, stopping only to shove the dogs back outside and to kiss. A lot. By the time they got up to the loft Dave was mostly naked and Amos was working on it as well, struggling out of his pants. Dave knelt down by the bed, pumping the thick prick that was already full and hard for him, lips sliding along his shaft.

"Fuck!" Amos stood there stupidly, hips moving, looking down at Dave, petting Dave's hair. So hot, the sight of his own cock sliding in and out of Dave's mouth. The feel of it was even hotter, wet and good.

"Uh-huh. Next. This first." Those lips wrapped around the tip, sucking, tongue sliding in slow circles.

God. His fingers slid into Dave's mouth along with his prick, feeling them together. Fucking amazing. "Baby..."

Dave moaned, sucking his fingers, eyes sparkling, hot.

"Want you in me, baby. Want you to fuck me hard." Amos took his fingers out, tugging Dave up so they both went back on the bed before reaching behind himself to rub at his hole with his own fingers. "Now."

Dave was watching him, nodding, breath coming quick. "Yeah. Now. Shep, damn..."

Turning, Amos spread for Dave, legs falling wide open.
"Now. Yeah."

That cock pushed right in, sure and firm and thick and ...
Dave. All Dave.

"Love you."

"Love. Oh." Stretched so wide around Dave he thought he was gonna bust, Amos started to move, hips sawing back and forth, trying to take it all, trying to hold Dave forever. Dave was panting, breath coming quick, eyes fastened onto him like Dave was making sure he was staying right there. Hell, he was panting too, sweat popping up all over as he worked them, harder and harder, his cock just aching.

Dave's hand grabbed his prick, pumping hard. "Need you, Shep. Come on my cock. Let me feel you."

"Oh, fuck." It came out as a long moan, his whole body shaking, and Amos clamped down on Dave's cock as he shot all over their chests. He came so hard he thought his head might pop right off and it felt so good he gave Dave that scream he'd talked about.

Heat filled him, Dave jerking and whimpering above him.
"So fine. Shep. Love."

There was nothing like his Dave. Nothing. Especially when they were together like this. They plopped down on the bed, gasping for air, petting each other weakly. "Oh. Baby. Good."

"Uh-huh. Sorry about the whole fighting coffee thing."

"So am I, Dave-baby. More sorry that I didn't trust you. I just get scared." He nuzzled, knowing Dave would get what he meant on that one.

Dave nodded, fingers on his cheek, his beard. "Yeah. I know."

"I'll buy you breakfast in the morning."

After snuggling. And maybe more makeup sex.

"Waffles with strawberries."

"And we'll stop and get a pie. With ice cream."

They'd get through the next day, and the next. Dave was staying and Amos would get over the whole coffee thing and they'd figure everything else out eventually. Yeah. Things were definitely getting better.

Chapter Twenty-Four

"I need to come back to work, Iris." He watched Amos load the truck, walking back and forth, looking like the weight of the world was on him. It wasn't fair—he loved the house, the mountain, the dogs.

Amos.

But he just couldn't sit around and do nothing and yeah, yeah he was scared about that whole 'sliding into bad habits thing' because he missed the booze and the rush and the sense of euphoria that he'd bet he'd get again and it would be so easy to get it and he was going to have to be strong and, damn, at least Amos would be with him if Amos really would come with him even though that was probably less than fair given that Amos hated the city and they both loved their cabin—theirs, it was their now and...

"...work, David dear?"

He shook his head. "Excuse me?"

Iris chuckled. "I said, quit fretting. Why don't you make another small fortune working from home doing consulting work, David dear?"

"Consulting work?"

"Yes. You know, make your old clients pay you exorbitant rates to advise them what to do as you don't do it anymore?" God, Iris was brilliant. Beautiful.

"You'd stay on with me? Leave the firm?"

"Of course, just don't ask me to move to the mountains. I quite like my little walkup."

"It's a deal. Look. I need to discuss this with someone and I'll conference call with you this afternoon—clear a spot from 3 to 5 and we'll plan."

"Of course, David. I'll ring you then. Tell your Amos hello from me."

Oh. Oh, yeah. He was going to. So going to. He hit the back door running, ready to knock that baggage right off his partner's shoulders. "Shep! Amos! Love! I have a plan!"

* * * *

"Iris, you tell Ivers I want the email today or we're charging him double. Have you found yourself some office space? I told Karen that you had final say on the rental..." He paced from office to kitchen, keeping an eye on the chicken soup for their lunch, pouring a big glass of water for him and then filling the pups' bowls.

Iris was nattering on about whether they needed two offices or an office and a boardroom, her voice nervous and excited all at once.

"We just need one office, Iris. We'll only be in when we have to. I have an office here." A beautiful office with a view of Amos and their sofa and their kitchen.

"Yes, but you've got clients lined up for at least six months, some are going to want to see you in person."

"Well, maybe we can arrange something. Is Rog still doing the software developing for us—chat rooms and everything? Ask him about teleconferencing equipment, that might be okay." Oh, and camera equipment and him and Amos and the big bed...

Oh...

He stopped and grinned, eyes sliding outside to where Amos was cleaning on the storage building. Oh, that had possibilities. The sun was shining and Amos was too, shirtless in the bright spring sun, sweating just enough to make those lean muscles stand out. He lost track of what Iris was saying, of the soup bubbling on the stove, the puppy chewing on his ankle.

Damn, that was fine.

Amos turned back toward the house and grinned at him, waving before closing up the shed and heading back toward the house.

"I need to go, Iris. My ... uh ... lunch is ready."

"Oh, well..." He could hear the laughter in her voice. "Have a nice lunch, David."

"Uh-huh. You too." He clicked off his headset, heading for the backdoor.

Amos met him at the edge of the deck, grin splitting the smooth pelt of his beard. "Hey, baby. Time for a break?"

"Oh, yeah." He stepped forward, hands sliding up along Amos' belly, shivering at the sensation of hot, damp, slick skin.

"Mmmm." Amos hummed for him, stretching under his hands, showing off. "What's got you all het up, baby? If it's something I did you need to tell me, so I can do it again."

Dave leaned forward, tongue sliding over that salty skin towards a nipple. "The sun makes your skin just shine..."

"Oh. Dave. Good." His Amos just melted against him, hands finding his shoulders and holding him close. "I'm glad you looked, then."

His lips closed around one nipple, pulling the flavors of Amos into him, fingers moving to work the soft, worn jeans open. Amos helped him, sucking in that flat belly to give him room, pale scar drawing as tight as the nipple in his mouth. Sweat and heat and bright spring sunshine was what he tasted on Amos' skin and Amos' cock was all need as it pushed into his hand. Bless that man for not wearing underwear. His groan was long and low, fingers wrapping right around Amos' prick and sliding, his own cock going from interested to needing, just like that.

"Oh, God, baby. So good to me." Amos just sounded happy and horny and carefree. It was a great sound. His knees hit the floorboard, lips sliding over Amos' belly towards the wet-tip of that cock. Amos' fingers slid up his neck and cheeks to dip into his mouth, opening it wide so Amos' cock could slide right in, making them both groan. Amos pulled back to rub the head over his lips, making them wet before pushing back in, deep as he could go. He whimpered, damn near vibrating with something close to pure need. His lips closed over the smooth, stretched skin, working Amos like a melting bomb pop on an August day.

"Yeah." Those lean thighs and that tight belly worked as Amos thrust, moving in and out, taking his mouth deep and easy. Amos was petting him, his hair and cheeks and shoulders, fingers tracing every line and curve of muscle and bone.

His hands circled Amos' hips, holding on, encouraging the motions. As if Amos needed any encouragement. That long

cock bumped the back of his throat, Amos pushing in, humping hard.

When they'd been new lovers, when the need seemed never ending, they would meet in maintenance closets, bathrooms, deserted offices, freight elevators for this. He'd thought nothing would ever be as exciting, as good. But now? With the sunshine and the wind and Amos' moans filling the air? Better.

Amos groaned, the sound low and dark and pure sex as hot spunk filled his mouth, Amos' cock twitching and jerking and giving it all up to him. Swallowing hard, David took it, didn't miss a drop, tongue cleaning Amos' cock before letting it slide free.

"Oh, baby." Amos grinned down at him, legs trembling just the tiniest bit. "That was good."

"Yeah." He licked the tip of Amos' cock, moaning low. "Real good."

"Unh." Amos shuddered. "We should go in, baby, so I can do for you too."

"Mmm ... Course I could make sure you're in a doing mood before we go in..." He wrapped his lips around the tip of Amos' prick, sucking softly, tongue sliding against the slit, knowing it drove Amos nuts.

"Oh, I can't imagine not being in a doing mood around you, Dave." Amos twitched and grew under his lips, cock barely going soft before getting hard again. David chuckled, fingers sliding to cup Amos' balls, roll them so gently. Amos responded to him so well, just melting. There was nothing he

could do that this man wouldn't love and it amazed him every day. "Well, you've got me by the balls, baby. What now?"

He chuckled, stroking, pulling. "Now I get you to fuck me, nice and slow. Reinforce the amazing perks of my new job."

"New job?" Poor Amos. Had to be hard to think with him teasing and those bright green eyes were trained on his mouth, but he didn't think it was for what he was saying.

"Uh-huh." He licked, then started with the soft, sucking kisses to that pretty cock. "I'm a consultant, now. Get my own office. Cheerios whenever I want. A good hard fuck when the need arises."

"Oh. Fucking. Fucking is good, Dave." Amos petted him, hands moving again, ruffling his hair, patting his cheeks. "Can I suggest the couch?"

"Oh, yeah." He stood, moaning a little at the lost of Amos on his lips. Silly, because they were going twelve steps and then fucking, but still...

He got a kiss for his trouble, Amos rubbing against him and pushing into his mouth deep before pulling away and dragging him toward the house. Those sliding jeans and that bobbing cock might have been funny if he didn't want so much. His hand stroked Amos' ass, fingers splaying over the soft skin. "Want you."

"This is a good thing." That husky chuckle drew him right on behind until they got in, tumbling to the couch. "I want you, too, Dave. Want to be in you, bad."

Nodding, Dave settled up on his hands and knees, hand working his pants open. Amos helped him, sliding his pants

off, hands rubbing his skin, before bending to rub that short, soft beard against his lower back.

"Oh. Oh. Love. Amos. Shep. Damn." He swallowed hard, shivering.

"Mmm, yeah." Those rough fingers pressed into his hips, thumbs sliding to open him up, and Amos' mouth was there, wet and hot sliding down his crease, tongue pushing against his hole. His fingers dug right into the couch, his cry ringing through the room as a dull, hot ache grew in the pit of his belly. Pressing close, Amos spread him wide, tongue fucking his ass, wet and deep. One hand dropped around his hip to find his cock, circling and pulling, fingers teasing the head.

"Oh. Oh. Oh, Shep. Gonna make me. Fuck, Shep. Please."

"You want me in you, baby? Want me to fuck you into the middle of next week?" Amos moved back, hand stilling on his cock to steady him for the two wet fingers that slid inside him.

"Yes. Shep. Oh, sweet fuck. More." He panted, hips moving, riding those fingers, so hungry.

"So hot, baby. So good." Those fingers moved, searching out his most sensitive spots, pegging him, stretching him. Amos gave his cock one last squeeze before moving to stroke his belly, hand flattening to put him in just the right position. "Ready, Dave?"

"Please. Need you." He rippled under the touch, breath pushing out of him as Amos pushed in.

"You got me." That was it, that was all it took and Amos' fingers slid out so that long cock could slide in, scalding hot and hard as anything.

"Yeah..." His toes curled, muscles tightening. He could see the washed out blur of the sky, just filling the window.

Amos pushed in deep, hips banging against his ass, hot breath on his neck as Amos bent to bite his nape. "So fucking hot, baby, so good."

David nodded, almost sobbing with his need, jerking and riding and damned near fucking himself on Amos' cock. Deep moans matched each movement, Amos moving in time with him, hands sliding on his skin, back to his cock to pull and stroke. The heat and pleasure filled him up, as good as the afternoon sun on Amos' skin, just what he needed.

"Love you, baby." Amos pulled and pushed, biting and licking, fucking him like a madman. Sweat dripped on his back, the scent of Amos strong, male, the scent he'd come to think of as mountain man Amos.

It had never been like this before, never been so raw, so feral, so real. "Shep. Love you."

"Come on, Dave baby. Come on." They were slick, sliding against each other, the backs of his thighs feeling bruised where they smacked together. The need in Amos' voice made him gasp, made him smile. Made him clench tight around that long prick and shoot, balls aching.

"God!" He knew that tone, knew the facial expression that went with it, knew it was coming even as Amos slammed into him, grunting and panting, filling him. He collapsed down, heart pounding, feeling so good that he didn't even mind the wet spot. Amos flopped down with him, and he could feel Amos' heart thundering against his back. "Jesus, Dave."

"Uh-huh. Good. Love you." He hoped Amos wasn't wanting more than that.

"Mmm." Obviously not. Looked like snuggling and grunting was good enough for his Shep. He wriggled until his knees and elbows were in good spots, then melted into the couch. Amos melted into him, nuzzling his shoulder. "I like your new job, baby."

"Yeah, Shep. The career of my dreams." He smiled, eyes drifting closed.

They would nap. Then maybe they'd do some more work. In the hot tub. Or in bed.

Who said having a home office wasn't productive?

Chapter Twenty-Five

The city had a lot of shit Amos hated.

Crowds, filth, noise. God, he'd gotten soft, living out in the middle of nowhere. When Dave had to go back to the city to see Iris' office and meet with a bunch of folks so his consulting business could really get going, Amos had said he'd go too, half afraid Dave would stay and never come back no matter what his baby said.

He probably didn't have to worry. David didn't seem to be having any better of a time than he was and after two long days of suits and meetings and taxis and vegetarian take-out, Dave was looking as rough around the edges as Amos felt.

Their apartment was still the same and the bed was still as comfy, but both of them were too restless to settle in it, snarling at each other and flipping channels on the TV until Amos thought he was going to crazy. Finally, he got up and went to the bathroom, getting out his kit bag and trimming his beard, knowing that Dave would be in shortly. The man couldn't resist watching him.

Sure as shit, it didn't take five minutes before Dave wandered in, settling on the window sill, looking fine in jeans and one of his old t-shirts. He watched Dave watch him, sneaking a glance in the mirror every so often. Damn, he hated to see the man look hollow cheeked and baggy eyed in just a few days. "We should go out tonight, baby."

"Yeah? I could handle that. Where do you want to go? Dancing?" He got a grin, those dark eyes shining a little.

"Yeah. Thought I'd clean up the mountain man look a little and we could find out if that little place with the good music and the high balcony is still there." Amos got out his razor to clean up his neck and upper cheeks, happy with the length of the beard.

"I love the mountain man look." Dave shifted a little, hand falling to his lap. "I remember the last time we were on that balcony, Shep."

Grinning, Amos lightened up on his grip on the razor, figuring he'd better watch it or he'd cut his throat by accident. "Yeah. Me, too. 'Course, if you think we might mess up the memory we can find somewhere else."

He hoped Dave would vote for the balcony, because damn, he remembered that so well.

"Mess it up?" Dave shook his head, grin going wide. "Add to it, maybe."

"Oh good." The scrape of the razor along his throat made him shiver. So did the way Dave was looking at him.

Dave licked his lips, moaning, hips shifting a little. "Been a long time since we played like that."

"Yeah. Not much place to play where we are." He could just see them down at Marshall Dillon's, sneaking around behind the stuffed grizzly. The very idea made him snort. "Having Noodle and Bear as an audience is kinda disconcerting."

"Having Bear decide that your dangly bits are a chew toy is more than disconcerting, Shep." Dave chuckled, then sobered a little. "I miss the pups, man, miss the house."

"Yeah. Yeah, so do I." The stubble gave way and Amos washed up, tucking the razor away and splashing on a little of the cooling moisturizer stuff Dave had gotten him. The he turned and went to give Dave a kiss. "It's not the same. That should probably be a relief, huh?"

"Should be." Dave's fingers brushed over his cheeks, his throat.

Moving between Dave's legs, Amos leaned, nuzzling. "But, hey, I figure since we're here, we might as well have a good time. Dancing with you is something I miss baby."

"Mm-hmm." He felt the grin against his cheek. "Can we have cosmopolitans?"

Lord, Dave would push it any time he could. "If I can have a cigarette."

"Damn." He almost thought the pout was real until he saw Dave's eyes, all lit up and laughing.

"You're evil. You think we have any clothes that will work?" Nipping at Dave's lower lip was kind of addictive. Amos did it again, just because.

"You have that blue-green shirt, the one that hugs your belly. The grey slacks." Dave moaned, opened a little wider.

"Mmm." The kiss was deep and slow and sexy as Hell. "And you have that pair of black pants and that charcoal sweater."

"Yeah. We'll look fine." Dave breathed right into him, fingers sliding over his shoulders and down his spine.

Shifting, rubbing, Amos nodded. "You always look fine. You know what I like you best in, besides nothing?" His hands slid up along Dave's side, pulled up the t-shirt.

"Hmm? What's that, Shep?" Dave lifted his arms, let him pull the shirt off.

The shirt hit the floor and Amos' fingers found Dave's nipples, squeezing lightly. "That ratty old fisherman's sweater and your oldest pair of jeans. Especially when you've been napping in them."

The grin he got would have stopped a clock. "You just like knowing I'm home to stay."

"Yeah. I do. I surely do, baby." Dave got it. He really did and that made it all that much better. He popped the button on Dave's jeans, opening the fly up wide.

Dave's cock pushed right out, the tip leaving a dark spot on those fancy silk boxers.

"God. Always ready for me. You have any idea how hot that is?" Amos thought for about half a second what he really wanted before dropping to his knees and rubbing his newly trimmed beard against Dave through the cloth. He heard the crack as Dave's head hit the window, hips pushing up towards his face. There was no corresponding ow, so he didn't bother to ask if Dave was okay, just peeled those sexy as fuck boxers down and let Dave's cock out, rubbing again, this time against bare skin.

"Shep!" Dave rippled a little, thighs parting. "Going to ride you on the balcony, Amos. Going to bend over the rail and take you..."

"Promise?" He grinned up, meeting Dave's eyes. "Want you to, baby. Want to dance with you until we're so hard we can't walk and feel you in me while we watch everyone down there not knowing."

"Fuck, yes. Promise. Hard and deep, right there. Take you until you come and then go back to dancing until we're ready to do it again." Dave smiled for him, winking.

"Sounds like Heaven." The scent of Dave was heavy, rich, and Amos breathed deep, lips finding the shaft of Dave's cock, tongue coming out to lick.

"Mmm..." The groan was low, sweet, echoing through the room in a way that was so familiar, sparking a hundred memories in him. Now a hundred and one. Hungry, needing, Amos grabbed Dave's hips and opened wide, sucking Dave in deep, lips and tongue working down, then up. Might as well make it a memory to smile over.

"Shit! Love!" Dave's hands dropped to his head, his baby moving right into it, hips rocking, fucking his mouth. God, Dave tasted so good, salty hot, a tiny bit bitter, but addictive. Amos took as much as he could before backing off, one hand dropping to Dave's balls, stroking lightly. Soft and tight and damn if Dave didn't shift into his touch, hips moving to fill his palm with the velvet skin, tickle him with the slick, dark hair.

So responsive. Hell, that was one of the reasons he'd fallen in love with Dave in the first place. No one had ever responded to him the way Dave did. Not ever. He played Dave's body, cock, balls, thighs and belly, touching, licking and kissing.

"Love you, Shep. Damn." The low babbles started, filling up all the empty spaces, Dave just singing for him.

"Mmmhmmm." That was his favorite song ever and Amos went in search of more, sucking strongly, moaning around the flesh in his mouth, head moving up and down faster and

faster, turning slightly side to side to increase the sensation. He heard the gasp, felt Dave's fat prick jerk and swell, then Dave was coming for him, little whimpers and sobs bouncing off the tiles. His tongue caught the first burst as he pulled back, then Amos swallowed Dave down, loving the rich, dark flavor. When Dave was clean, he grinned up, petting Dave's belly. "Love you."

Dave gave a weak little chuckle, eyes blinking slow-slow. "Love you. Christ, Shep. You make me fly."

He laughed. "Do we need to take a nap before we go out?"

"Oh. Naps are good." Dave turned a great shade of pink. "I guess I'm used to having them now. With you."

"A slower kind of life is a good thing." Amos stood, kissing Dave deep. He would keep while they napped. He could wait until they went dancing to let Dave melt his tiny brain. They stumbled into the bedroom, his arm around Dave's waist.

"You're my good thing. The rest is just slush money." Dave pulled him down into the soft mattress, hands warm and sure.

Oh. Oh, damn. "You're the best thing. Get some rest, baby. We've got some dancing to do later." Amos snuggled in, arms and legs around his Dave.

* * * *

Okay, so he missed the icy burn of really good vodka, but the lights and the pound of the bass was still the same. The press of bodies. The smells of smoke and men and cologne and leather and sweat. Amos.

Amos rubbing up next to him, moving like a dream, like sex on legs, eyes hot and hungry. So hungry. Fucking

predatory, even. You could take the man out of the mountain, but these days you couldn't take the mountain out of the man and instead of fitting in, Amos stood out. It was hot as anything.

Even hotter? That hunger was for him. Not for the pretty little twinkles with their \$60 haircuts and their perfect bodies. Not for the muscle-bound studs leaning in the darker corners. Him.

Dave stepped closer, let his hip nudge Amos' cock before stepping back again. They'd been dancing long enough to work up a sweat and beads of it ran down Amos' throat, beaded at his temples. Amos was hot, hot enough to feel every time they swayed close, and he smelled like sex. Pure sex. Those gray slacks strained over Amos' cock, let him see what he did to Amos. His heart thrummed, part of him wanting to drag Amos up the steel stairs, bend him over and thrust deep. The other part was jonesing on the anticipation, the wait.

Amos had promised him teasing and he got it, that fine body twisting and turning against him, the shirt he'd picked out clinging, showing just a hint of Amos' scar. He did his fair share of tease, moving close enough to touch, then away, holding that hungry gaze. Once or twice—maybe three times, who was counting?—he dragged his lips over Amos' cheek, the hollow of Amos' throat, tasting.

Amos turned, ass brushing his cock, shaking to the beat suggestively. "Needs to be soon, baby."

"Upstairs then." He grabbed Amos' hips, tugging them tight together, letting Amos feel him.

"Yeah. Yeah." Amos turned, gave him a hot brush of lips, then led the way, taking him up the stairs, giving him a heart pounding view on the way. The stairs had been painted a shiny chrome since the last time they'd done this, the metal banister still vibrated with the music. He got a bright, horny grin, Amos turning to lean over the balcony and wiggle at him, ass shaking. He gave Amos a swat and a squeeze, fingers teasing the crease of Amos' ass. Amos jumped, looking over his shoulder, green eyes dark as sin in the low light. "Need you, baby."

"Got me, Shep." His hands, trembling and jittering, slid over Amos' ass before working his own pants open. "Drop them for me."

Not even looking to see if anyone was watching, Amos straightened, working the gray slacks open and pushing them down to the tops of his thighs before bending again, giving him a view of pale, round cheeks.

"Oh, sweet fuck." He groaned, growled, stepped forward and bent, tongue sliding along the hot crease.

"Dave! Baby!" The music echoed his heartbeat and Amos pushed into his touches, moans sliding in and out of the beat. "You're killing me, baby."

He groaned, lips moving up along Amos' spine as he spread Amos with his thumbs. He was burning, buzzing, as high as any pill had ever made him. "Killing you? No, Shep. Fucking you. Loving you. Right here."

"I'm ready. So ready." The long spine arched for him, each bit of bone and muscle standing out. Amos was definitely ready, just begging for it. He didn't make Amos wait any

more, didn't make himself. He just pushed in, the lights flashing in his eyes. A long, low moan sounded, more like a growl, Amos' thighs shaking. "God, baby. Dave. Yeah. Look at them all down there. They have no idea."

"If they did, they'd wish they were me." His hips moved in time with the music, plowing into that perfect heat, rocking hard.

"Oh, I'm the lucky one." The hitch in Amos' breath told him he'd hit the right spot, so he pegged it again, making Amos squirm and pant.

He rested his forehead on Amos' spine, focused on his cock and those low, vibrating sounds. They danced, the memory of the last time they'd done this strong, but this memory would be distinct, new. Amos squeezed him tight, scalded him with heat, begged him with words and body. This time, he knew how much he needed this man.

Dave reached around, hand moving fast, pumping Amos' cock for all he was worth.

"Oh, God, baby. Gonna shoot. Gonna. Feels so good." He could feel Amos' cock jerk in his hand, could feel the contractions around him, knew Amos was teetering on the edge.

He nodded, teeth scraping down Amos' back, leaving dark, damp marks on the thin shirt. Fuck yes. Now.

"Oh. Dave." It came out as a half shout, but was lost in the noise of the club soon enough. Amos' hands gripped the rail, knuckles white, as Amos' body gripped him, pulling him in. Hot, wet jets of completion fell over his hand as Amos came.

He sobbed, hips jerking as he drove himself to orgasm, the world shrinking to his Shep, his lover.

It took a long while for the music to come back into sharp focus, his heartbeat slowing enough to hear it. Amos rested under him, breathing coming back down as well, hand coming back to stroke his hip. He stepped back, pressed a handkerchief into Amos' hand, dropped a kiss on one shoulder. "Damn."

"Yeah." Amos cleaned up quickly, turned to give him a quick kiss. "I was just thinking tonight how I couldn't remember what was good about the city. This? Good."

"This and bagels and lox from the deli on 53rd." David winked, leaning into Amos' arms. "Ready to do it again?"

Amos grinned, licked at his lips. "Anytime, Dave-baby. Anytime."

"Cool." He laughed, rubbing up against Amos for just a minute before heading off towards the stairs. "Catch me if you can."

* * * *

Okay, so this whole fucking coming to the city for a few weeks so he could get some work done? So not working for him. It wasn't that he wasn't getting any work done, he was. Lots. Hours and hours worth.

And Iris was efficient as always. And the deal was working. And the guys had offered to take Amos out for dinner, out for pool, out for drinks.

All cool—Amos was restless, bored. Frustrated. Out.

With a couple of damned beautiful men. With a couple of damned beautiful gay men. With a couple of damned beautiful gay men with money.

And time. And a reputation for hot parties. With hot sex. Not that he was stressed about it. Or worried.

Because he wasn't.

Really.

Just...

That whole going home to Colorado thing was sounding damned appealing. Because, really, Amos didn't like the city anymore, or the crowds or the parties. Amos said so all the time. In fact, he should be home any minute. Really. He should.

Just about the time he had himself convinced that Amos would walk through the door, the phone rang, making him jump half out of his skin. He fumbled with the receiver, dropping it twice before getting it to his ear. "Yeah?"

"Hey, baby." There was heavy music in the background, the sound of a lot of voices, but Amos was still loud and clear. "Do you think you could send that fancy car of yours for me?"

"Yeah, sure. Where are you? Is everything okay?" Not that he was worried.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm at some club. Uh ... Club 2099. The guys want to party, but I'm really tired." He was probably imagining the strain in Amos' voice. Just putting it there because he was ... not worried.

"I'll be there in twenty minutes. Don't go anywhere." Bastards. Assholes. Not taking care of his lover.

Not that he was worried.

"Thanks, baby. I'll be right here."

He called for his car, throwing on a pair of slacks and a good shirt, just in case. The traffic was atrocious, the noise worse and his not-stress and anti-aggravation? Pretty fucking stunning by the time he hit the door of the club.

His eyes adjusted to the gloom and the flashing lights and smoke, and it only took him a few minutes to find Amos in the crowd, smiling at one of the guys and shaking his head, pointing toward the door. Then one of the guys moved closer, rubbing up against Amos. His Amos.

His. Damn it.

He made his way across the club, almost—not quite, but almost—growling under his breath. Amos moved away, but the guy followed, sort of flowing against Amos, and when he walked up those green eyes flashed at him gratefully. "Hey, baby."

"Hey." He gave the interloping asshole one of his patented fuck-off-and-die glares, holding it until the little prick melted away. His.

He got Amos' patented bright grin. "My hero. Sorry to pull you away from work, baby, but I didn't bring cab money with me and they were nowhere near ready to go. This place doesn't even have a pool table."

David growled, nodding. "I wasn't working. I was waiting for you."

And not worrying.

The smile faded a little. "Sorry, Dave. I was trying to get them to bring me home, you know? I should have stayed home."

"No." He shook his head, meeting Amos' eyes. "No, love. We should have stayed home. With Noodle and Bear. I want to go home. But first? I want this."

He pushed into Amos' arms, brought their mouths together hard enough to split his lip. Amos melted, arms coming up to hold him, tongue coming out to catch his. Yes. Fuck, yes. His. His lover. His man. He tilted Amos' head, pushing harder, wanting everyone to see. His. That soft beard abraded his face and one of Amos' legs came up around his hip as the kiss went on and on. He groaned, hands on Amos' ass, tugging him closer. Shit. Yes. Loved this man. Still.

Amos broke away, gasping, hands stroking his neck. "Baby. Let's get out of here."

"Yeah, these assholes? Don't deserve what I've got." He took another kiss. "The car's outside."

"Thanks, Dave." Tugging his hand, Amos led him to the door, ignoring one of the dealmakers who wanted to know where they were going.

They piled into the back of the car and he raised the privacy window, Dave's mouth fastening on Amos' throat before they pulled away from the curb.

"Mmm. Dave. Baby. Yeah." That long throat was bared to him as Amos tilted back, giving him what he wanted.

"Mine, Amos. Those sexy kids, they see you and they want you. They're young and beautiful and wild, but ... You'll have to make do with your old man, 'cause I'm not sharing."

"Oh. Love. Not old. Want you. No one else. If I wasn't trying to get a ride home I would've fed that puppy his teeth." Amos loved on him, lips moving over his face.

"Oh, I'd have paid to see that." He took a long kiss, nuzzling, licking, needing.

"Yeah? Oh. There." Shifting, Amos stretched out a little and pulled him down. "Love you."

"Yes." He reached down, cupped Amos' cock. "Christ, I need you. Need this."

A sharp cry came from Amos, his lover spreading as much as the car would allow, humping up. "Baby, please."

He nodded and pushed himself down and back, tearing open Amos' slacks and taking that long, pretty cock in. Pulling hard. Demanding.

"Oh, Christ! Love you. Oh." Thrashing, Amos tangled both hands in his hair, holding him close.

Yes. Love you. My Amos. My love. My ... Oh, fuck, this was hot, so good.

Amos was loving it too, babbling at him, thrusting up, promising him the world. He didn't want the world. He wanted this. He wanted lazy mornings with laughter. He wanted evenings together on the gold sofa. He wanted his Shep. Dave got him, Amos crying out, thrusting into his mouth, the sound one of pure surprise as Amos shot hard. Yes. Oh, yes. He swallowed hard, refusing to let a drop escape, to let a bit go.

"Damn, baby." Amos patted him, hands clumsy.

"Uh-huh. Love you." He sat up, pulling Amos into his arms. "This isn't working for me, love. I don't want to do this anymore." God, it was hard to say, even if it was true.

Scrambling up, Amos looked at him, eyes wild. Panicked. "What? Do what? I'm sorry, baby. I shouldn't have gone out.

I just thought I was bugging you too much, thought I'd get out of your hair."

"What? Stop. Amos? Love?" Oh, fucking shit. No. They were not doing that, not again. Amos had to stop panicking. He grabbed Amos' face, pulling him down for a hard kiss. "I meant the job, Shep. The city. Being here."

"Oh." Amos clung, kissing him back. "I should have known that, huh? Sorry. I just ... this whole week has been fucked up, you know? The first week was okay ... but. We need to go home."

"Yes. I ... I can't do this anymore—the new guys are pushing, the schedule's fucked. I ... I threw up this morning. I don't want this. I want you to take me home." He met Amos' eyes. "Please."

"You threw up ... Okay, that's it. I'm calling Iris when we get back to the apartment. We're going home tomorrow. Not losing you, baby." Struggling to right himself, Amos grabbed Dave and hugged him close. "Love you."

"No, you're not losing me." He leaned back, met Amos' eyes again. "I won't leave you again, Shep—not for love or money. I need you."

That got him a weak chuckle. "Does that make us all co-dependant? And God, baby, that was fucking hot. Do it again soon?"

He grinned. "Which part? The near-molestation in the bar or the pounce attack in the car?"

"Well, the bar's back home? We'd get our asses kicked. So I'm thinking the car. You marked me, Dave-baby. Got all manly and possessive. Fucking hot."

"You're mine, Amos." He reached out, rubbed the dark spot on Amos' skin. "Mine."

"Yours, baby. Every inch." Amos bent to lick at his wrist, his fingers.

"Yeah. Now, take me upstairs and give me every inch. When we're done, I'll get us packed." Amos would need to sleep, but he was feeling wired for sound.

"Sounds good, baby. Sounds so good." Grinning, Amos did his pants back up, taking his hand and kissing him.

"It does." Christ, his Amos looked happy and his chest felt looser and ... Yeah. Sounded good.

And for the first time that whole night, he wasn't worried. Not one bit.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The river was getting low, which meant that Amos didn't have as much work, but the water was warm finally, and still high enough to swim some, so Amos figured it was a perfect time to reward him and Dave for all the time spent in the city getting Dave's business set up and go out on a trip. Dave had agreed enthusiastically, which told Amos volumes about where Dave was mentally, and made him smile and kiss Dave so hard that they didn't manage to get out of the house for two days. They finally did, though, with the Bobs babysitting the dogs and set to pick them up two days later downriver.

Two days of just him and Dave and a boat and a tent. Goddamn, life was good. He patted his pocket absently, looking for cigarettes that hadn't been there for at least six months, and grinned at himself, steering the boat around a rocky outcropping. "It's a gorgeous day, baby."

Dave grinned over, all tanned and relaxed, jeans damn near white with age and sporting a blown-out knee. "Perfect. You thirsty yet?"

"Yeah." Beautiful, but hot as the hubs of Hades. "I could have something."

Dave leaned, dug out a bottle of water, giving him a look at that pretty ass, the lean thighs.

"The view is damned amazing, too." He couldn't help it, he had to raise an oar and dribble a little river water down the little strip of skin between Dave's shirt and jeans.

David squeaked, chuckled, hips jerking and rocking a couple of times and making any retaliation worth it. "Oh, that's so not professional, Mr. River Guide."

"Good thing you're not a paying customer, huh?" Chuckling, Amos did it again, giving that ass a light tap, too.

"Oooh, you're cruising, Shep." The words would have been more effective if Dave hadn't been laughing, eyes dancing as the water bottle was tossed over. "Come on now, I know the drill. Tell me I'm going to see cranes."

"Oh, you're going to see something much more rare than that, baby." Winking, Amos slowed the boat, back paddling to make sure they'd hit that nice, deep pool coming up before clamping the oars down tight and unzipping his life jacket.

"More rare than cranes?" Dave crawled over towards him, eyes shining. "You trying to seduce your clients?"

"There's only one I ever even considered having my way with." He grinned, feeling the boat shift and shiver beneath them, tucking his lifejacket neatly away before starting on his cargo shorts. "And yeah, naked river guide is pretty rare."

"Mmm..." Dave nodded, leaning down to fasten those smiling lips on his inner thigh, fingers pushing the shorts out of the way.

"Oh. Damn, Dave. Baby..." Amos groaned, spreading his legs as his shorts slipped down to his ankles, watching the way the sun worked on Dave's hair. "That feels good."

Dave nodded, hands sliding under his ass, just like that, thumbs rubbing lazy circles. Shifting, keeping one eye on the river, Amos moaned, letting Dave have him anyway he wanted. They slid right into the pool just like he knew they

would and, unless he got the oars out and moved them back into the current, that was where they would stay.

The sun was pouring on them, Dave's mouth hotter as it moved over his balls, his cock. His cock lifted, filled, his balls going tight as Dave worked him. Dave's life jacket got in the way of his petting, so Amos moved his hands to Dave's head, stroking his hair, offering words of praise, love.

Dave wiggled, jeans sliding off as that mouth moved up his belly. "Can you fuck your old man in this contraption?"

"Hell, I can try." Amos had no idea if the boat would hold up to a fucking, but the water wasn't really safe for it, so he was gonna do his best.

"I'll take it slow." He got a kiss, Dave's tongue pushing in deep, legs straddling his. He shifted them automatically as the boat dipped, finding better balance, but the old girl held, the stiff pilot's seat making it work. His hands found Dave's ass, holding and squeezing, pulling Dave up for a kiss as hot as the sun on their skin. Dave opened right up, settled against him, inner thighs brushing his hips.

"Mmm." He nuzzled Dave's neck, licking at the salt, sucking at Dave's collarbone. "Do we have anything, baby?"

"In my pack, but..." Dave's fingers wrapped around his cock, settling it against a suspiciously slick and hot little hole.

"Oh." Moaning, Amos pushed up, eyes rolling as he slid easily into Dave's body. "Oh, baby."

"Uh-huh." Dave's mouth slid along his jaw, breath pushing right out.

"Yeah." Slowly, carefully, Amos started moving, hips pushing up as Dave opened right up for him, letting him in

deep. The trees on the bank and the blue sky framed Dave's head and shoulders, made it perfect, made it better than anything.

He could see the river reflected in those dark eyes, flowing and wild, free.

"Love you. Love you, baby." His life was so full now, so much better with Dave back in it, and he'd never felt it more than he did now. They moved faster, Amos pushing and pulling and kissing hard. Dave's cock was hard, hot against his belly, leaving wet kisses as Dave babbled into his lips. Amos let go of Dave's hip with one hand, reaching between them to circle Dave's cock, feeling the soft, hot skin against his palm, the wetness against his fingers. He bit down on Dave's neck, sucking up a mark, low noises coming from his chest as he thrust hard.

"Gonna come, Shep. Gonna make me." The words were low, needy, Dave's ass squeezing him.

"Oh, God, baby. Want you to. Want to feel it." Wanted to see it, needed it. Amos leaned back so he could watch, stroking hard, hips jabbing. Dave arched, mouth open, sun pouring over him, the heat and need making him glow as he came, spraying seed between them. The tight, hot grasp of Dave's body doubled, tripled, squeezed his own orgasm right out of him, his shout startling the birds right out of the trees.

Dave's laughed followed them. "Oh. Look at that!"

Amos chuckled, petting Dave's skin, rubbing the come in. "Hey, you got to see cranes, too. See? I told you I was a professional."

"You were meant for this, Shep. No question." Dave looked happy, whole, chuckles tickling his skin.

"So were you, baby. Meant for me. So glad you're here." God, Dave tasted good, and they smelled like sex, strong and male. "Wanna skinny dip?"

"Hell, yes." Dave's hands squeezed him, those eyes laughing. "I need to work up an appetite. You're making biscuits."

He gave Dave a kiss, moving them down off the seat, grinning as he dumped Dave right over the side of the boat. "Well, get swimming then, baby. Can't have you not getting hungry." Amos jumped in feet first, splashing them both. Dave's hands pushed him down into the water as he came up, those eyes just laughing.

Sputtering, laughing, Amos let Dave's hands and the silky feel of the water wash away whatever last bit of stress he had left in him. "Hell of a lot better than our first boat ride together, huh?"

Dave nodded, gave him a grin. "Yeah. Thought the earth was going to swallow me up when I saw you."

"I was wishing it would swallow me." They came together for another kiss, treading water easily. "I've got you now. You're not going anywhere."

"Nope. Found my way home."

Amos nodded, goosing Dave and striking out for the other side of the pool. Home. And he was going to do everything he could to make sure Dave never regretted it.

* * * *

The biscuits were perfect, smeared with strawberry jam, eaten sitting in Amos' lap and snuggling against the hint of chill in the night air. The stars were amazing, the sky vast and black and beautiful. God, he was happy.

"You? Look like Noodle after passing a Twinkie wrapper. Happy as anything. It's a good look." Amos was smiling at him, teeth white in the midst of that shaggy beard.

"Oh, so not a sexy image, Shep." He snorted, fingers reaching out to pinch Amos' hip.

"Yeah, but it was the first thing that popped into my mind." Squirming, Amos tickled his ribs, licking jelly off his lips. "Been thinking about that first trip we took all day, and Noodle ate one, you know?"

"Yeah, you mentioned it to the Bobs before they left. I think you did it on purpose." He chased Amos' tongue with his lips. "You regret it? That first trip?"

"Hell, no. I just wish we hadn't had to go through some of what we did." He got a kiss, deep and hungry. "We're better than we were for it, though."

"Yeah. I got..." He took a deep breath, turning to straddle Amos' thighs. "I got to come home."

"Yeah. Damned glad you did, baby." Amos' fingers slid into his hair, holding his head still for a kiss that he felt all the way to his toes.

He pushed his hands into Amos' shirt, wrapping around, holding on, body sort of melting against Shep's.

"S'getting cold, baby. We should move it inside." Amos nodded toward the tent, and he could feel goose bumps on Amos's chest backing up the claim.

"Mmm ... 'kay. What all do you need me to clean up out here?" He stood, gathering up the last of the biscuits, helping.

"Just get the food cleaned up and I'll get the fire." The smack on the butt, and the smack of lips, was a promise, Amos' eyes twinkling. They worked well together, fast, efficient. Looking forward to that tent.

He finished first, stripping out of his clothes before diving into the sleeping bags and snuggling in. "Come on, slowpoke! I'm freezing!"

Didn't take much longer and Amos was there, sliding in with him, naked and chilled. "Damn. For such a hot day, it's a cold assed night."

He rolled into Amos' arms, rubbing, chuckling at the sound of their skin sliding together.

"Mmmm. You're going to warm me right up." They were warming up fast, Amos' lips moving across his neck and shoulder, loving on him. The smell of the air was crisp, the scent of Amos warm and rich, so male. Amos' hands were warm now, running down his back, rough calluses catching on his spine, finally resting on his ass and squeezing. Amos' cock pushed against his hip and that was even hotter.

"Damn." He draped one leg over Amos', scooting them closer still.

"Yeah. Never get enough of you." If he ever worried about that, about them cooling off, getting old, or just getting tired, Amos assured him daily that it wasn't going to happen.

He shook his head, mouth searching out Amos'. "No, already did our doing without. I need you now."

"Want you, baby. Want you in me." Amos rubbed some more, cock sliding, wet and hot. "Had you today. Want you to have me." His breath caught and he nodded, prick throbbing, pushing against Amos' belly, so eager. "So good, Dave. So good." Amos was touching his cock then, fingers running up and down, testing his hardness.

"Yours. Shit, Amos." He gripped the strong shoulders, started pumping, hips pushing into the touches.

"Mine. So, so mine." Amos rolled away for half a minute, came back kissing and petting, one hand sliding down to his ass, wet fingers sliding against his hole.

"Oh." A shudder rocked him, head to toes, hips canting back for the touch.

"Yeah. God, you're hot, baby. So good to me. How do you want it? On your back? With me behind you?" One finger slid into him, opening him.

"I ... Oh, more, love..." His thighs spread, back arching. Amos pushed into him, two fingers spreading him, the pressure good and right. Amos lips were hot on his neck, his shoulder.

"Thought ... Oh, fuck. There ... Thought you wanted me to ... Oh..." He knew he was saying something. He just didn't know what that something was.

"I did. I do. But, damn, Dave. So hot. I just love how you go crazy when I do this." Amos chuckled. "Can we do both?"

Both. Like he was still a kid. He moaned and rolled, pinning Amos to the ground, tongue sliding down that scar, then belly. Cock. Balls. That tight hole.

"Oh. Oh, baby. Yeah." Opening wide, Amos dug his heels into the ground lifting into the touch of his mouth. "Please."

He cupped Amos' hips, spreading those cheeks with his thumbs. Being all cramped up in the bottom of the sleeping bag was worth it, for those low, needy cries. He got all of them he could take, Amos squirming and panting, begging him with hot words. They were steaming that tent right up. Finally his cock insisted that it was time to stop playing, stop tasting and bury himself deep in that sweet, perfect heat.

"Ready for you, Dave. So ready. Please, baby." Amos wiggled as he slid up, meeting him halfway, open and ready for him.

They fit together like nothing else and he arched as he slid deep, heart pounding like it would break. Amos took him in, thighs rubbing his hips, hands clutching his slick skin. They moved together so well, so perfect, the smell of wood smoke and river water better than any fancy city cologne.

"Want this forever." He met Amos' eyes in the darkness, hips starting to move in slow, steady strokes.

"You got it, Dave. Promise." Arching to meet him, Amos pulled him down for a kiss, one hand sliding back to his ass, touching, pushing.

They rocked together, bodies touching damned near everywhere, both of them holding on.

"Love." Sharp teeth nipped at him, Amos' hands solid on him, hot and good. They were going to set the tent on fire.

"Yeah." He reached down, took Amos in hand, determined to bring them over together.

"Oh, God." Amos just leapt into his hand, cock pushing, harsh moans filling the air.

"Come for me, love. Please. Need to..." His hips were snapping, his cries winging up into the sky.

"Dave!" All he had to do was ask and Amos was coming for him, spilling over his hand, between their bellies, heat pressing down on him, just like that. So easy. So good. Stars exploded behind his eyes as the grip and squeeze of Amos' body pulled the pleasure right out of him.

"Oh. Good. Love you." Amos was as out of breath as he was, just gasping, hands moving in clumsy circles on his back. He nodded, slumping down, panting, still riding the aftershocks.

Amos reached down, pulled the sleeping bag up to cover them as they cooled down, pressing a soft kiss to his cheek. "You know what, baby?"

"Hmm?" His legs found their spot tangled with Amos', hand curled on Amos' belly.

"Wherever you are? That's home to me. Thanks for coming back to me."

"I had to." He stroked the scar on Amos' chest. "You're my sure thing, Shep, my forever."

"I love you, Dave. No more leaving. For either of us." Amos petted his back, warm and secure.

"Love you, Shep." He settled, listening to the sound of the river, the wind, the lull of Amos' breath. It wrapped around him. Eased him.

Brought him home.

—END—

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