

# PAINTING the DESERT

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By Sean Michael

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## Chapter One

Mr. Bartholomew Whittaker watched the kids go screaming out and shook his head. It was the same every spring; they all went just a little crazy. Spring fever might have been a cliché, but like with most clichés, it had something at its roots.

Of course he was experiencing a little spring fever himself.

He drove his little Toyota to the park near home, almost skipping as he walked toward the center of the green space. Raine had called and asked him to meet his lovers by the fountain.

The sun was warm and the earth fragrant with budding life.

Love was definitely in the air.

Grey was lying on the edge of the fountain, sunning, barefoot. Raine sat close by, reading aloud, eating grapes, feet in the water. He could see the sun glinting off the copper bracelets that were a match to his own. Whit's dark haired lovers looked beautiful, so exotic, so fine. That hair was still all black, the mahogany faces smooth and sharp.

Impulsively, he snuck up on them and swept a hand through the water, splashing them.

Raine cried out; Grey just laughed, hand splashing him back without even opening those beautiful dark eyes. He laughed too, bending to kiss Grey's smiling mouth and then Raine's.

"Mmm..." Raine's eyes were shining, warm. "Happy Friday, our Whit. How was your day?"

"Long. Animals of all ages and species are a little crazy during the spring." He smiled at them. "And why are you two away from the gallery and shop?" Raine ran a gallery and Grey an antique store beneath the loft they lived in together.

"Because it's a beautiful day and it's supposed to rain *all* weekend and Grey thought we needed some sun and a walk and dinner somewhere decadent." Raine smiled back.

"Oh, that sounds lovely. And you two look good enough to eat. As always." He sat by Raine, tilting his head up to the sun.

"And you look tired, but happy. I think we should buy plants for the balcony, new sheets for the bed." Raine grinned. "Bring spring into the loft."

He laughed and gave Raine a wink. "As long as the sheets are black or white, or Grey will growl."

Grey smiled, eyes still closed. "And soft. I like soft sheets."

"But not silk. I always slide off those."

"Not satin, that's tacky." Raine giggled, winked. "I was thinking purple."

"Oh, a nice lavender would go beautifully with your skin. Or a red." He leaned past Raine to watch Grey's reaction to their teasing.

"Lavender?" Grey actually opened his eyes, long hawk-like nose wrinkling.

Whit laughed softly. Oh, he did love these two.

"Hot pink." Raine's eyes were dancing.

"Your ass maybe, my Raine."

"Oh... pretty." He caught his breath. So lovely when they played.

Raine chuckled, leaned close. "Would you like that, Whit? Like to fuck me with my ass on fire?"

He met Raine's eyes, clinging to them, the way he wanted to cling to those beautiful shoulders. "Raine... we're in the park."

"So observant." Grey's low, rough, raw voice was full of laughter.

He blushed hard, smiling at Raine and then at Grey, shifting to make room for his cock which made his pants suddenly very tight.

Raine winked. "I'd let you do it, love. Let you warm my skin."

"Would you let him bind you first, Raine?"

Raine pinked, purred. "Anything you want, my Whit."

"The white leather looks so amazing against your skin." He couldn't quite catch his breath and he was rock hard and he couldn't quite bring himself to care that they were in public.

Grey sat up, eyes flashing. "You'd have to bind his cock."

He moaned, pressing against Raine's side, eyes on Grey. "With your fingers to guide mine, Grey."

"As often as you'd have them, Whit." So hungry, so serious.

He reached over to stroke Grey's face. "I'd have them always, Grey."

Grey blushed, face nuzzling into his touch. "Yes, our Whit."

He sighed and let his fingers fall away. "Well I suppose if we're going for a walk we should go before I'm convinced the only place we should go is home." They made him need, his lovers, so much.

"You sound like walking and eating is a chore." Raine winked, proving that he was teasing. "If we get a private room at Liu Chen's, we can feed each other."

"Oh yes..." There was nothing like feeding each other. And doing it in a semi-public location made it more thrilling when feeding became more touching.

Grey smiled. "And we need more wine and something luscious for tomorrow's breakfast."

"Oh, I already know what I want for breakfast. Crème au Raine and Grey." He loved the sensuality of his lovers, how everything was turned into a feast for the senses.

Grey got them up and moving, his lovers flanking him, touching him. They were so beautiful together, so wonderful together and they made him a part of them, the center of them. The walk was pleasant and warm, enjoyable and arousing, the twins filling all his senses.

Raine bought roses to have delivered to the loft. Grey stopped and ordered raspberries and cream and honeyed pecans for the weekend. He added dark, rich coffee beans from the little shop that smelled like mocha heaven. And he gifted each twin with a small bag of chocolate covered espresso beans.

It was normal and special and good, all at once. Laughter and touching, happiness and warm, dark eyes just filled his life.

They ended up at Liu Chen's just as his stomach was beginning to seriously growl. "Perfect timing, as always." He smiled at Grey who managed to keep Raine on track, and what was more, made it look effortless.

The sweet little thing at the counter recognized them, led them to one of the beautifully decorated private rooms. Whit recognized a number of things from Grey's store, all beautiful and old and fine. He let his hand trail along the low table as he sat. It was the same color as his lovers' skin, though not warm and silky as theirs was.

They were given hot tea, menus, Raine almost in his lap, Grey leaning back, long braid black as night against the grey silk shirt.

He didn't bother with his menu, Grey and Raine would argue about what they were to order and then finally Grey would order for them all and the food would be exquisite. Instead, he admired Grey and slid his hand along Raine's belly.

Raine purred and nuzzled. "We should have shrimp and rice, my Grey."

Grey chuckled, shook his head. "Finger foods, Raine. Egg rolls, cheese Rangoon, sweet bits."

"Mmm..." He picked up Raine's hand and brought one of the long fingers to his mouth. "Oh yes, most excellent choice."

Raine moaned, eyes so dark, so needy.

"Oh..." How was he supposed to deny the pleading in those eyes. He let his hand continue down, stroking Raine's cock through the material of his pants.

"Oh. My Whit." Raine moaned, pushed up against his hand. Grey chuckled, smiled, watching them love each other, touch each other.

He leaned in, lips pressing against Raine's, his own cock leaping at the taste of his lover's mouth. Raine's hand slid around his neck, tilting him for the kiss. He hummed, opening wide, tongue teasing Raine's back into his own mouth.

Raine's hair slid around him, slick and warm and loose, scented with the sandalwood and herbs shampoo they had made. His free hand slid around Raine, tugging him closer as he worked the long prick inside Raine's pants.

"The waitress is coming, wanton ones." Grey's voice, deep and rough as sandpaper, brushed across them.

He pulled away with a gasp, turning away from Raine's beautiful eyes, getting caught in Grey's instead, making him whimper softly. He folded his hands in his lap, hiding the hard bulge that pushed at his slacks.

Raine's head came to rest on his shoulder. "You spoil all my fun, Grey."

Grey chuckled. "Not all of it."

Whit giggled, fingers brushing through Raine's hair, eyes on Grey as their waitress came to take their order.

Grey ordered them wine and a platter of food to share, so sure of what would please them, what would tempt them both. He was usually right, too.

Whit leaned forward to kiss Grey as soon as the waitress left. Grey cupped his jaw in one strong hand, tongue sliding in to taste him without hesitation. Moaning, he leaned against Grey's strength.

Raine's hand slid up along his spine. "So beautiful together. So strong, so close. It makes me fly, the way Grey loves you, Whit."

He whimpered this time, back arching out into Raine's hand, lips wrapping around Grey's tongue and sucking softly. Grey moaned, those dark eyes staring at him, watching him, wanting him. They made him feel so sexy and he reached out to slide his fingers along the silk of Grey's shirt, moaning as the heat from Grey's body warmed them.

Raine's fingers slid around, up, finding his nipples and pinching. He gasped, his whole body jerking. He was hard, needy. Wanting. Grey moaned, thumb rubbing his chin, his jaw.

"Love you," he whispered into Grey's mouth, starting badly when their waitress returned. He'd forgotten where they were.

Grey turned to deal with the waitress, Raine holding him, protecting him, his lovers shielding him. So good to him, always making sure he felt good, was happy. He nuzzled against Raine's neck, breathing in the spices of his lover.

The smell of wine filled the air, then Grey moved, lips covering Raine's, feeding Raine a long sip of wine. Oh. Oh, yes. They loved so beautifully, his lovers. He moaned softly, fingers reaching up to slide along their cheeks, to trace their lips where they met. Raine purred, fingers stroking Grey's face, the kiss deep and sweet.

He rubbed his cock through his slacks, transfixed by the sight of them, turned on as he always was by their passion. They separated slowly, Grey purring, nipping Raine's bottom lip.

"How's the wine?" he asked.

"Bright. Sweet. Cold. Delicious." Raine hummed. "Grey, love, give Whit a taste."

"Oh yes, please." He opened his mouth eagerly.

Grey took a long drink, mouth fastening over his, the wine sliding in, cool and sweet. He moaned, swallowing the wine, tongue sweeping through Grey's mouth for the taste of his lover hiding beneath the wine. Grey purred for him, Raine's mouth sliding over his jaw.

They pulled away as footsteps sounded again, signaling their waitress' return. It would be like this all evening, food shared, kisses and gasps, and need, but coming apart again before that need was sated.

The most delicious foreplay.

Raine fed them, fingers soft and stroking their lips, their cheeks. He pulled Raine's fingers into his mouth, licked them clean, enjoyed each morsel that was fed to him. Grey licked a sweet sauce off his lip, smeared soy sauce on Raine's mouth, took a hard, sucking kiss.

He moaned, licking flakes from his own fingers, sucking on them as he watched. Grey bent Raine backwards with his passion and Raine bowed, stretched beautifully. Oh yes. Whit pressed his hand against his prick, rubbing again, moaning as Grey's passion molded Raine. So alike, but so very different. He could never confuse them, never believe them to be interchangeable.

He reached out, fingers sliding over whatever part of them he could reach, just connecting with them.

Grey backed off, Raine whimpering, leaning towards him, lips swollen and wet. "Whit."

He reached out with his free hand, tracing Raine's lips. "Yes, my love?"

"Kiss me." The simple plea was need and hunger and love all braided together.

He leaned in, moaning as their mouths touched, hand rubbing furiously at his cock.

Grey's hand pushed between them, freed his cock. "Suck him, Raine. He needs."

Raine whimpered, nodded, sliding beneath the table to take him deep. Moaning, he looked over at Grey, feeling dazed and wanton and needing so badly. Raine's mouth was like a fire around him, tugging, pulling, sucking and it was all he could do to just hold on and enjoy the ride.

Grey's mouth covered his, almost gentle in contrast with Raine's fire. He was caught between them, body shaking, rushing toward completion. He buried one hand in Raine's hair, the other held Grey's head as his body undulated between their mouths.

Raine pulled him in deep, throat swallowing around the tip of his cock. Grey's mouth swallowed his cry as he came, seed pouring down Raine's throat.

Raine drank him down, then sat up, eyes shining. "Delicious."

He blushed, hand reaching to stroke Raine's cheek as Grey's mouth continued its gentle assault.

Grey purred, the kiss lingering before he sat back too. "So good."

He was melted and sated, felt so good. "Oh yes."



He blinked at the waitress when she came back in, asking if they wanted anything for dessert. He just looked at Grey.

"No. We have things at home." Grey's eyes were almost black.

"I'll just bring the bill then," she told them before going.

The door was barely closed behind her when Whit attacked Grey's mouth with his own. Grey opened for him, lips parting, hungry, still sweet.

"She'll be back soon," he noted, hand finding Grey's cock through his slacks.

"Yes." Grey nodded, moaned into his lips.

"Should I stop?"

Raine stood. "I'll go pay. You meet me out front."

"Oh, thank you, Raine." He gave Raine a smile. "You'll be wanting by the time we get home. We'll make it good."

Raine nodded, smiled. "You'll make me fly, love."

He beamed at Raine and then Grey's mouth covered his again, insisting on his attention and he dove into the kiss, hand worming its way into Grey's slacks.

Hot. Hard. Grey demanded his touch, his passion. Demanded pleasure. He gave it, fingers of his free hand pushing beneath Grey's shirt to slide on the warm silk of Grey's skin, his other hand still rubbing hard against Grey's cock.

"Yes..." Grey's growl was accompanied by a full-body shudder, hips jerking.

"Oh, my Grey. So beautiful." He whimpered, licking at Grey's lips, hand sliding into the dark slacks to wrap around Grey's heat.

"Love..." Grey took his hand, humping steadily, so strong.

"I love you." He watched Grey's eyes, watched the passion make them dark, make them shine.

He got a smile, wide and warm and a little stunned as heat poured over his fingers.  
"Yes..."

He moaned, the scent of Grey sharp, strong, rich and masculine.

Grey slumped a little, breathing hard. "Good."

"Yes. Yes, it is." He raised his hand to his mouth and licked the sharp tasting come from his fingers.

Grey groaned softly. "We're going to make our Raine beg, make him burn."

"Oh, yes, Grey. He begs so beautifully." His cock throbbed at the thought, his own completion wouldn't be enough soon. "We should go now, so we don't have to wait too long."

Grey nodded and stood, putting himself together. "I love you."

"Oh, Grey, I love you, too." He admired the long lines of his lover and then finally stood himself, getting his own clothes done up, smoothing a hand through his hair. He imagined he didn't look very much like calm, cool Mr. Whittaker right now.

They headed out together, Raine smiling, eyes warm and knowing. "Come my lovers. Let's go play."

Oh yes, he could do that.

He looped his hands through their arms and off they went, spring fever singing in his blood.

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Raine woke to a bed empty of his Grey.

Not in the bed. Not splashing in the bathroom. Not in a chair. Not home. In the morning. How very... wrong. He frowned, shivering and pushing against Whit, hands sliding through the nut-brown hair.

"Whit? Love? Wakeup. Where is our Grey?"

Whit turned to him, arms sliding around him. "Sh, Raine. Sleep."

He frowned, shook his head. He couldn't sleep without Grey. He never had. "Going to find him."

Whit came properly awake, blinking at him. "Raine? What's the matter?"

"Grey. Grey is not in the bed, Whit." He sat up, frowning, eyes searching the room for... Oh.

Oh.

Two sets of clothes, two red roses, an envelope.

Whit's head rested against his shoulder. "Oh, Raine. Our lover wants to play."

Raine smiled, nodding, fear disappearing, replaced by excitement. "Good morning, our Whit."

Whit rubbed against him. "Good morning. Should you open it, or shall I?"

"You can." He took a long kiss, then reached for the envelope, handed it over.

Whit opened the envelope, grinning wide at the four words scrawled on heavy paper. "Come to the roof."

Whit leaned and gave him a hard kiss before climbing over him. "Let's see what clothes we're to wear. Oh, feel how soft, Raine."

The clothes were warm and loose, comfortable and fine. Sensual. He slid the trousers on, moaning as the soft fabric brushed his cock.

Whit was dressing eagerly, grinning at him, coming to him in between buttons to give him soft, laugh-filled kisses. Once they were dressed, Whit handed him one of the roses, took the other one and grabbed his hand. "Let's not keep him waiting any longer."

He nodded, heading up the steep stairs toward the bright rooftop. When the door opened, he gasped. Flowers! Pots of roses and daisies. Lemon trees in huge pots. In the center was a gazebo, an iron table set with a luscious breakfast.

Whit's soft exclamation echoed his own pleased surprise. "It's magical!"

Grey's soft chuckle filled the air, his heart sitting in the sunshine, basking. "You like it. Surprise."

"You take such good care of us," murmured Whit, handing his rose back over to Grey. "I can't believe you did all this without us knowing!"

"I have been working during my lunches since December."

"So long? Oh, Grey." Whit went to his knees in front of Grey, hands on the long thighs. "Thank you."

Grey smiled, leaned forward and kissed Whit, long and slow, one dark hand held out toward him.

Raine hurried forward, hand joining Grey's. "It's perfect, my Grey. Our own little Eden."

Whit's hand found theirs, tugging him down. "Your taste is missing from the kiss."

"My taste is the same as Grey's." He smiled, cuddling into their embrace.

"No, you are similar, but never the same."

"Never?" Raine leaned in, lips brushing Grey's, then Whit's, the pleasure sweet.

Whit smiled and shook his head. "Never."

Grey smiled, eyes twinkling. "There's food. Coffee. Juice."

Raine grinned. "Berries and cream?"

"And cinnamon pecans."

Whit giggled and kissed them both quickly before moving to fill a plate. "You take such good care of us, Grey."

"It's not just for you. I think it's beautiful up here." Grey smiled, drew Raine close and he settled, curled in.

Whit nodded and brought the full plate over, curling up at Grey's feet and offering the plate to them.

Raine reached down, took a berry covered in cream and held it to Grey's lips, purring softly as Grey ate it. He could feel Whit's eyes on them, loving, admiring, taking as much pleasure from watching as he would from joining in. Grey's lips wrapped around his fingertips, nibbling and licking, sucking. Loving him.

"Beautiful," murmured Whit, fingers soft against his thigh, just rubbing gently.

"You should explore. There's a fountain, a hammock on a stand. A little rock garden."

"You don't want a thank you first?" Whit asked, cheek rubbing against Grey's leg.

Grey hummed, eyes warm and hungry.

"Oh, Whit. He likes that. His eyes..." Raine felt his heart start to pound, cock filling.

Whit beamed and one hand slid along Raine's thigh and then Grey's, teasing across Grey's hip before stroking his belly. Raine leaned in, stealing one long kiss after another. Whit knelt up, face rubbing first in his lap and then in Grey's, breath hot through the soft material of his pants.

"Oh..." Raine moaned, hips rocking, slow and steady.

"You even smell different," murmured Whit, mouth closing over his cock through his pants, sucking, wetting the material.

Grey chuckled, lips finding his throat as his head fell back. Whit hummed, sucked harder for a moment or two and then rubbed a cheek against him before moving over to suck Grey through his slacks as well.

Grey's purr tickled his skin, made him shiver.

"You sound different," murmured Whit, brown eyes smiling up at them as he began to open their pants.

"Yes. We have for years. Since right after college." Since he'd made the single biggest mistake of his life.

Whit's head tilted. "Only since then?" he asked, hands petting gently.

Raine nodded, fingers stroking Grey's hair. "Grey used to sound just like me."

Whit reached up, fingers stroking Grey's throat. "What happened?" Whit asked softly.

He forced himself to meet Whit's eyes, shame still sharp. "There was a man, a dancer. He... He was my lover and he thought it was wrong to... to love Grey."

Grey lifted his head, looked over. "We don't have to speak of it. It was years ago."

"Whit should know, Grey."

Whit shook his head, eyes soft, hand gentle as it slid along his belly. "No, Raine, if it pains you to speak of it, to remember, I don't need to know."

Raine nodded. They never spoke of it. Ever. Perhaps he needed to tell it.

"Grey is right, it was years ago. It cannot hurt us anymore." Raine shrugged. "I was young, foolish, obsessed with being independent and strong."

"I cannot imagine anyone looking at you both and not knowing that you belong together."

"He was religious, said it was an abomination, said he could help me." Raine blushed, shook his head. "But I couldn't sleep. I couldn't rest and... Grey just disappeared." He looked into Grey's eyes, hands reaching to stroke those cheeks. "Everyone said you locked yourself away, screaming for me."

Grey nodded. "As long as I could."

"He was sleeping when I came home. Still crying. It was days before he could even make a sound."

"Oh. Oh, my loves." Whit's love was palpable, washing over them both in waves, Whit's hands sliding on them, comforting.

"His voice was never the same again. I broke it."

Grey shook his head, reached out. "You healed me."

"You are together now," murmured Whit. "And that is what counts."

"We are. All of us." He smiled down at Whit. "All three of us."

"I am the luckiest man alive," murmured Whit, smile wide. "You two make me... whole."

"We love you." Grey drew Whit up into their arms.

"I love you, Grey." Walt kissed Grey, long and slow and then turned to him. "And I love you, Raine." He was kissed as well.

Grey joined their kiss, hands sliding around them and holding them close. Whit hummed, pressing against them both, making such sweet noises. They slid together, one kiss melting into another.

Whit's moans were wanton, hands sliding over him and Grey, touching them both with eagerness. The air was sweet, the flowers hiding the smell of the city below. Magic. His Grey made magic.

Whit's hand found his cock, rubbing him through his pants. Grey's mouth fastened onto Whit's throat, one strong on his ass. Whit cried out, moving between him and Grey's hand, hard against his stomach.

The scent of them, altogether and wanting, filled the air, overcame the flowers.

"You make me so hungry. Both of you."

Grey chuckled. "There's breakfast."

Raine grinned. "There's us."

Whit laughed. "Yes and yes."

Reaching back to the plate, Whit picked up several pecans and fed them to him and Grey, popping the last one in his own mouth. "There, that's one hunger satisfied."

Grey chased after the pecan Whit took, tongue sliding over Whit's lips, making their lover laugh. Whit's laughter soon turned to moans, eyes closing.

"You should suck him, Raine. Let him feel your mouth."

He nodded to his brother, sliding down, slipping Whit's cock free from the soft pants.

"Oh! Oh, Raine." Whit's hand slid through his hair, the soft moans suddenly muffled by Grey's mouth.

His head bobbed, Grey's hand in his hair, guiding him, helping him. Whit's sweet sounds grew deeper, sweeter. Raine smiled, sucking harder, tongue sliding along the shaft.

"Oh, you're so good at that," murmured Whit, hips pushing.

"He's beautiful. So are you." Grey sounded so satisfied, so happy.

"You both are," whimpered Whit. "Beautiful."

"Mutual appreciation society. Come for us." Not so wordy, his Grey.

"Oh." Whit sounded surprised, his hips snapping, pushing the long cock deep into Raine's mouth as come sprayed from it.

He moaned, sucking hard, drinking Whit down.

Whit made beautiful noises, body jerking and then settling against Grey. "Oh. Oh, that was wonderful, Raine."

"Of course it was. Raine's mouth is... special."

Whit chuckled, the sound half drunk. "Yes. Yes, it is."

Grey drew him up, kissed him, long and slow.

"Your turn," murmured Whit, sliding down, hands opening his pants.

Grey nodded, eyes so dark. "Yes, my Raine. Your turn."

"And then you," murmured Whit, hands tugging out Raine's cock, tongue sliding across the tip, gathering the drops that already gathered there.

He moaned, hips pushing up, panting into Grey's mouth.

"You're sweeter," murmured Whit just before wrapping Raine up in his lips.

Grey's hand slid down, rolled his balls, tugged them as Whit sucked. Whit hummed, head going down all the way, nose blowing breath against his pubes. He arched, hips moving so slowly, rocking on Grey's lap. The suction around his cock increased, Whit's mouth so hot, so good.

"Love... Oh, my Grey, what he makes me feel..."

Whit sucked harder at the praise, head moving up and down, tongue sliding across the tip of his cock as it passed.

"Give him what he wants, Raine." Grey's voice rumbled down his spine and he shot with a cry.

Whit's throat swallowed around him, taking him in, drinking him down.

"Oh. My Whit. Mine."

Whit slowly came off his cock to beam up at him, his lover's face blissful.

He reached down, stroked Whit's hair. "Love."

Whit nuzzled into the touch and nodded. "Yes. Love."

Grey chuckled, the sound so rich, so low. "Ready for breakfast yet?"

"What about you, Grey?" Whit asked. Those brown eyes grinned at him and then turned back to Grey. "Don't you want?"

"I can wait." Grey reached out, stroked Whit's jaw.

Whit nuzzled into the touch. "But you don't have to."

Raine reached out, took Whit's hand in his own. "Together, Whit?"

Whit grinned and nodded. "He can't possibly wait for that."

Grey growled as they got his pants undone, freed that long, fine cock.

"Love that sound," murmured Whit.

He nodded; it filled him, consumed him.

Grey shifted, body moving towards their hands. Whit's fingers tangled with his as they circled Grey's cock, the flesh like heated silk. So beautiful, so strong, his Grey. He leaned



in, took a slow, soft kiss. Whit's hand squeezed his fingers tight, a soft moan coming from their lover.

Perfect. This was perfect. His lovers, his life, right there close and warm.

Whit's free hand slid along his and Grey's cheeks, fingers stroking where their mouths met. He turned his face, lips nibbling and nipping at Whit's fingers. Whit moaned again, one finger sliding into his mouth, fucking him.

Grey shifted, taking Whit's mouth, making Whit groan and shake. The warm fingers wrapped with his stuttered, letting him drive the rhythm.

"So beautiful. My loves. The sunshine and the flowers and the wind... You steal my breath."

Whit's hand slid around his neck and pulled him into the kiss. Grey's cry was sweet, the heat splashing over their fingers sweeter as their kiss grew deep. They continued to taste each other long after Grey had come, the kisses feeding on each other.

Grey slowly relaxed back, eyes blinking slow. Raine grinned over at Whit. Their Grey had missed some beauty sleep.

Whit matched his grin and nodded. "You had to get up early to surprise us, Grey. Especially to beat early bird Raine. Such a gift."

Grey nodded, cheek sliding against his shoulder. "I wanted it to be special."

"It's a gift from you. Of course it's special."

Grey smiled at Whit's words, "You should eat. Have coffee. Explore."

Whit kissed Grey again and stood, stretched and started wandering, exclaiming over a pot with baby red roses. He did the same, laughing at the tiny fountain with shiny stones in the bottom. There was a rock garden, too, and little statues and clever pieces and even a bench under a bower.

It was perfect.

Whit poured himself a cup of coffee and moaned as he drank. "Oh, it's just right. This all is, Grey. You've thought of everything."

Grey hummed softly, smiling, eyes closed, dozing in the sun.

Whit came over to Raine, looping an arm around his waist. "So what are we going to do to say thank you?"

"Come up and enjoy it." He smiled, shook his head. "A lot."

Whit grinned and nodded, rubbed a little. "I think we can manage that."

"Yeah. I think so." He leaned, took a coffee-flavored kiss. Whit's mouth opened easily, tongue sliding alongside his.

Oh, yes. They could come up and enjoy this garden often. Together.

Perhaps they should put in a bed...

## Chapter Two

Grey leaned his head down, cheek resting on his arm as he rested through his lunch hour, dozing, the store empty and quiet.

He could hear Raine's voice next door in the gallery, chattering, happy. It soothed him, eased him closer to sleep.

The bell on the door went, Whit's soft voice calling out. "Hi, Grey."

He blinked awake, "Whit? Back here."

Whit appeared around the wardrobe that separated his office from the rest of the store, smile happy as Whit's eyes found him. "There you are. I'm surprised to find you in the back this late in the afternoon."

"Late?" Grey blinked over at the clock. Five hours. He'd slept five hours. "Oh. I... Yeah."

Whit came and pressed a kiss on his lips, soft and gentle. "You okay?"

"Yeah. I guess I fell asleep." He smiled, blushing dark. "Silly of me."

Another kiss landed on his lips. "Did we wear you out last night?" Whit asked, eyes twinkling.

"Mmm... It's a tough job, making my lovers scream, but someone has to do it."

Whit chuckled, arm going around his neck, body pressing close. "Is it really that tough?" teased Whit.

"Not at all." Except that last night, after binding them both, loving them, he had been tired. It was sheer hell, getting to be an old man of thirty something.

A shiver went through Whit, just a small one. "It was amazing, Grey."

"You both were." He pulled Whit closer, pushing into the kiss.

Whit's mouth opened beneath his, tongue sliding against his own. His lover's hands were warm as they wrapped around his shoulders. He hummed, the kiss slow and sweet, the heat between them delicious. A soft moan filled his mouth, Whit growing heavy in his arms as Whit sank into the kiss.

The bell rang again, Raine's chuckle sounding. "You are alive. It's been so quiet, I thought you'd closed."

Whit leaned against him and turned to look at Raine, smiling. "Mmm. He's very much alive. Tastes good, too."

Grey chuckled, squeezed Whit to him. "Let's go upstairs. There's no room in the chair for three."

"You need a bigger chair," Whit told him with a wink.

"I do."

Raine chuckled, came close, one hand on his cheek. "You're warm."

"I have Whit in my lap."

"That would do it."

Whit giggled and kissed him softly, hand sliding along Raine's arm.

Raine winked. "Still, I think chicken and garlic soup for dinner. Just in case there's a bug going around."

"You're fretting." He hated when Raine fretted.

"Oh, that's one of my favorites -- if I'd known all we needed to do to get it was sniffle or feel a little warm, I'd have done it already." Whit teased, easing the tension.

Grey chuckled. "Raine's soups are works of art." He smiled up, meeting Raine's dark eyes. "Do we get biscuits, too?"

"Spoiled man." Raine laughed, nodded.

"No, spoiled would be if he talked you into cream puffs with chocolate drizzled on them for dessert." Whit looked hopeful.

"Oh..." He smiled up at Raine, grinned. "I'll vacuum."

Whit laughed softly. "I'll set the table and get the laundry started."

"It's a deal." Raine grinned, shook his head. "Come, upstairs. Grey can vacuum and nap before the food's ready."

He found himself nodding, agreeing before he realized he'd just woken up.

Whit got up and held a hand out to him, taking Raine's as well. "How did I get to be so lucky?"

"You must have been very good in another life..." Raine grinned, eyes twinkling.

"Exceptionally. You and Raine both."

Whit laughed softly, the sound happy and rich. "So that was make love, do the vacuuming and cooking, and then nap, right?"

"Was that the plan?" Raine unlocked the back door, led them up the steep stairs into the loft.

Whit nodded. "Wasn't it? It should be if it wasn't."

"I think it's a grand plan." Grey followed them, up into the loft, the big bed just waiting for them.

Whit bounced onto the mattress, grinning at him and undoing the buttons of his shirt. The sheets were in disarray and Raine straightened them as they all stripped one another, slid onto the mattress together and rubbed. Whit's lips closed over his nipple, fingers sliding on his and Raine's skin.

"Mmm..." He arched, lips finding Raine's, tongue pushing in and tasting.

Whit's lips were warm and soft, tongue hot and wet as it slid across his nipple. His belly was stroked, the tip of his cock teased, Whit's fingers gentle. He rocked between them, cock slowly filling, pleasure sweet. Whit's hums slid over his skin like a caress, their legs tangling. Raine's hands rubbed his back, his shoulders, heating him.

"I want to suck you," murmured Whit, lips finally leaving his nipples. Whit moved slowly down his body, lips and tongue exploring as he went.

"Let me love you while he does?" Raine's voice was hungry, wanton against his ear and he nodded, moaned as Raine's fingers slid down his spine.

Whit whimpered. "Beautiful," he murmured, tongue sliding into Grey's navel.

"Love..." He groaned, closed his eyes and felt, surrounded by heat.

Whit just hummed again, and when his cock bumped against Whit's chin, Whit turned his face down and sucked on the head.

"Oh!" He eyes flew open, legs shifting.

"Whit... Lick just the tip, help me drive him crazy."

He growled low, Raine was giving away all his secrets. Whit's chuckle made his cock vibrate before Whit's tongue flicked across the tip, lips barely holding him in.

Raine's fingers tapped and played at his hole, and he started shifting, shaking, moving between the sensations. "Oh..."

Whit's tongue danced and slid, pushed into his slit for just a second and danced away again as Whit's fingers slid to his balls, rolling them.

"That's right, my Grey, feel us. So hot. So fine." Raine's words were sweet, the pressure as one finger pushed deep sweeter.

Whit's tongue slid around the head of his cock and then Whit began to go down on him, lips tight as more and more of his cock was taken in. His cock pressed deep as Raine's fingers became that long prick, sliding into him, spreading him. Whit took him, throat swallowing around the tip of his cock before Whit pulled back again, lips dragging all the way.

"Love... Love." He gasped, hands tangling in Whit's hair, not guiding. Not yet.

Whit hummed again, head dropping to take him in again, tongue sliding over his cock as it pushed in. Raine moved in time, hips thrusting and pushing him into Whit's lips. Whit's hands slid to cup his hips, meeting Raine's, their fingers wrapping together on his skin,.

"Yes..." Grey couldn't breathe, couldn't focus, could only feel.

Whit's throat swallowed around the tip of his cock every time it went deep, and Whit hummed, making his whole mouth vibrate around Grey's cock.

"Soon..."

"Yes, my Grey. Soon. Come for us, Come now, Whit's hungry for you. He needs you so."

Whit nodded and took him deep again, swallowing as his cock hit the back of Whit's throat. The hands on his hips tightened. Grey's eyes rolled, hips jerking as his orgasm poured out of him. Whit drank him down, mouth continuing to move on him even after he'd come.

He just melted, eyes growing heavy, body squeezing Raine. Whit's mouth finally let him go, the warm tongue lapping at him, cleaning him before moving on to his balls and touching them so gently.

"So good." He couldn't keep his eyes open, just fading.

Whit kissed his belly and his breastbone, his neck and then whispered. "Sleep, lover. I'll do the vacuuming."

He started to complain, but was asleep before the words escaped him.



### Chapter Three

Whit loved the first day of summer vacation.

Oh, he loved teaching, too, but he couldn't deny the attraction of having a summer full of day after day to spend sleeping in and making love, making picnics for his lovers and enticing them out of their stores and into the sun.

And now that Grey had created their rooftop garden getaway, they could enjoy the sunshine and flowers in privacy.

On the first day, the entire summer was spread out in front of him.

He woke early, made love with his lovers, and then went back to sleep.

When he woke again, the loft was quiet, the lingering scent of cinnamon leading him to the kitchen and fresh cinnamon rolls on the counter.

He poured himself the last of the coffee from the pot and ate a roll with butter before putting on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. He didn't care whether or not it was warm enough, it was summer.

Dressed, he headed downstairs. A glance in the gallery proved it deserted and he went in to say hi to Raine first, knowing he was likely to get busy before Grey did as Raine would chatter and schmooze with his clientele.

"Raine?" he called as he went in.

"Yes, Whit love?" Raine was hanging a series of photographs, wearing jeans and a t-shirt, hair pulled back.

"I just dropped by to say hi," he admitted, going over, admiring the long body.

"Hi." He got a warm smile. "Are you enjoying your first day of summer?"

"Oh, yes. This morning was lovely."

He leaned against Raine's back, peeking around his arm at the pictures. "That's a lovely series."

"They're Grey's."

He stepped around Raine and took a closer look. They were all black and white photographs of children. "I've never seen these before."



"These are children from our hometown. I found the images in the boxes upstairs." He got a sly look. "Grey doesn't know they're up."

Whit looked back. "Is he going to be upset when he finds out?"

"He never comes in here. They were rotting in the attic."

"You don't think you should have asked him?" Raine pushed sometimes. When he wasn't fretting or fussing or loving on Grey.

"Why? He just left them." Raine was purposefully not looking at him.

"Raine... maybe he didn't want them seen." He shook his head and sighed. Now that he'd seen the photographs, he would feel strange if he didn't say something to Grey about them. Even if it was just a comment about how much he liked them.

Raine looked over, leaned in for a kiss. He still hadn't quite figured out the games between Raine and Grey, the little power plays they managed when things were the slightest bit off kilter.

He took the offered kiss, tongue sliding out to lick at Raine's lips. "I'm going to tell him how much I like them," he murmured.

"Then he'll know they're here, Whit." Raine stepped closer, rubbing against him.

"I know. And it's not like I'm deliberately running to tell him, Raine. Honest, it isn't. But I can't just pretend I didn't see them." He took a step back, determined not to get distracted by Raine's body. Raine's warm, tall, sexy body.

"He wants to hide away, to never let anyone see."

"Isn't that his choice?"

"No. His talent should be shared."

He frowned. "Just like that, Raine? And what is he going to do when he finds out these are here?"

"He'll pout and growl. I'll fuss and pet and then I'll sell them."

"Sometimes you make it seem as if you live in the same mind and other times you make it so complicated."

"We have two minds; they are just... connected." Raine looked down, looked uncomfortable.

He reached out, stroking Raine's cheek. "I'm sorry if I hit a nerve."

"No. I mean. Oh, it doesn't matter. Help me hang these."

"Oh, no." He held up his hands and backed away. "He'll forgive *you*."

"He'd forgive you anything." Raine winked.

Whit grinned and shook his head. "I'd rather not risk it. Besides, I still think you should let him know you're doing this in case he has objections and that you should listen to those objections before dismissing them out of hand."

"I'm not dismissing them. His art is too beautiful to hide away."

"Have you told him that?" Whit asked, examining the pictures up close again. They truly were stunning.

"A thousand times." Raine tilted his head. "Have you seen him this morning?"

"Not since you both woke me." Whit wondered why Grey wanted to hide away his work. "Why?"

"He was up before me again, restless. Coughing." Raine shrugged. "He's not shaking that cold."

Whit frowned. "Has he been taking his vitamin C and the Echinacea?"

"As far as I know, yes." Raine frowned back. "He didn't come have coffee with me, either."

"Well, we should go see what's wrong, then." He gave Raine a kiss. "I'm sure he's just in a bad mood or something and didn't want to spread it."

Raine nodded, smiled. "Let's see if he's in the store or upstairs in the garden."

Whit took Raine's hand as they went from the gallery to the shop, squeezing gently. "Don't fret, Raine, I'm sure he's fine."

Raine didn't answer, just nodded. "Grey? Grey, you missed our coffee this morning..."

"I didn't feel like coffee, Raine. I just came down to do some paperwork." Grey's voice was rough, more husky than normal.

Whit felt his eyebrows go up. It wasn't like Grey to miss coffee with Raine. Time spent together was celebrated, enjoyed.

They moved into the back, Raine squeezing his hand as they saw Grey. The man was pale except for fevered flush on the thin cheeks. Whit held tight to Raine's hand. It looked like his assurances that Grey would be fine had been false.

"You don't look like you're feeling very well," murmured Whit, trying not to make it an accusation.

"I'm not. I have a cold." Grey growled a bit, but found a smile for them.

"Still?" asked Whit before Raine could. "It seems you've had that cold for a long time."

Grey shrugged, the move so much like Raine that Whit grinned. "It happens."

"It's not supposed to." Raine moved over, already fluttering. "Are you running a fever?"

"Raine."

"What? I worry. I'm allowed to worry."

"No, you're not."

"Don't be stupid. Of course I am."

"Raine."

"Whit! Tell him."

Whit bit his lip. "It wouldn't hurt to make sure you weren't feverish, Grey. Then if you aren't, he won't be allowed to worry any longer."

Grey sighed, face turning up toward Raine. Raine reached out, eyes going wide as he touched Grey's forehead. "Grey... You're burning up."

Whit moved forward to feel himself, knowing Raine would say that even if Grey were just a little warm. He almost snatched his hand away as he put it on Grey's forehead, it was so hot. "Raine's right."

"I'll take some aspirin."

"Come upstairs? To bed? We can close the store, the gallery, for one day."

Whit nodded. "Yeah, I think that's a good idea. I'm pretty sure we've got something for fever. Between that and a day snuggled between us, I'm sure you'll feel a lot better."

"I have to..." Grey looked at Raine, whose frown was growing deeper and deeper. "Can I have cinnamon toast like Nana made?"

Raine nodded. "And spiced tea."

Comfort food. Oh, that would make Grey feel better and give Raine something to do, make him feel useful. Whit nodded. "Excellent."

"Okay." Grey stood, coughing a little, just leaving the store and heading towards the stairs.

Raine looked over at him, eyes worried. "Whit?"

He nodded, worry starting to gnaw at his belly as well. "I'll lock up. If he isn't better in the morning, we'll get him to the doctor."

"Okay. I'll put him to bed and start the tea." Raine kissed his cheek. "Love you."

He reached out and pet Raine's belly. "We'll make him better, love."

"Of course we will. He's just got a bad cold and needs petting."

He nodded. "Yes. Go on now, I'll get the door."

He changed the sign to closed and locked up, double checking to make sure the gallery was properly shut as well before heading up quickly. Grey was already in the bed, eyes closed, curled around a pillow. The smell of cinnamon and clove and orange came from the kitchen.

He went to the kitchen first to make sure Raine didn't need him.

Raine was fluttering, bread on the cutting board, kettle on the stove, cinnamon and sugar and butter scattered about.

He went up to Raine and wrapped his arms around Raine's middle, pressing against the long back. "Hey. He's okay. He's going to be fine, Raine."

"I know. I know. I just... It feels wrong, Whit. Something... feels wrong."

He rubbed Raine's belly, resting his cheek on Raine's shoulder. "You sure it's not just because you're fretting?"

"No. Yes. Maybe. I don't know."

"Then we'll wait and see, okay? We'll fuss and feed him, love and cuddle him and if he isn't markedly better in the morning, we'll fret and get him to a doctor, okay?"

"Okay. Okay. Go and wash his face? I'll bring the food."

"Okay."

He pressed a kiss to Raine's back and grabbed a cloth and one of the ceramic bowls from the bathroom, filling it with cool water before going to the bed.

He set the bowl on the side table and stripped before climbing up and pushing Grey's hair back off his face. "It's just me," he murmured, gently running the cloth over Grey's face.

"Mmm..." Grey's skin was dry, hot, pale. It wasn't natural.

He shook his head, and moved the cloth on down along Grey's body, finding it the same. Maybe Raine was right. Maybe this was something more than a bad cold and they should get Grey to the doctor today.

Grey slept through his touches, restless and light, but still sleep. Raine came in with a tray. "Should we wake him?"

Whit nodded. "He needs to eat, I think. And take the pills."

"Okay. Did you get them? We should call the doctor, make an appointment."

"There's some in the side table, I think. And yeah, I think we should. Tell them we need to see him tomorrow for sure." He knew it would worry Raine to show his concern, but he felt it was warranted. If Grey didn't want to go to the doctor, didn't want them to fret, he was just going to have to get better. Now.

Raine nodded, leaned close. "Grey, love? I have food for you. Mamma's tea, too."

Whit got the aspirin from the bottle, handing them over with a smile. "Take these, too."

Grey's eyes opened, watched him. "Pills?"

"Just the aspirin, Grey. For your fever." He stoked Grey's forehead.

"Okay." Grey took them, swallowed them dry. "Do I smell tea?"

Raine nodded, handed over a cup. "Mamma made this every time we were sick. Grey's mug was blue, mine was red."

"And you were always sick together, I'll bet."

"Always." Raine chuckled, handed him a cup of his own. "One of us was always sicker than the other, but we don't do well apart."

Walt nodded, blowing across the top of his cup before taking a sip. "Oh, this is delicious."

Raine beamed, then encouraged Grey to drink more, deeper. "Come on. We're going to make an appointment for tomorrow, just in case."

"I don't like doctors."

"I know, but it's just in case."

Whit nodded. "So if you need to go we don't have to show up without an appointment. It'll go quicker that way." He rubbed Grey's leg encouragingly.

"I don't like doctors..." Grey handed Raine his mug, eyes dropping closed.

"So get better for us and you won't have to see one," Whit pointed out reasonably.

"Kay..." Grey nodded, "Not today. I'm tired, today."

Whit shook his head and met Raine's eyes, knowing already what he would see there. At this point though, he thought that Raine's worry was entirely justified.

Raine touched and fussed, hands sliding over Grey's skin.

He himself settled on the other side of Grey, cuddling close to offer himself as warmth, healing, whatever Grey needed and could take from him. He thought perhaps it spoke louder than words that Grey didn't try to stop Raine from further fussing.

"I'm going to call. You'll take him in the morning? I'll have to open the gallery."

Whit nodded. "I will, Raine. You make the appointment and I'll make sure he gets there."

Between them, they'd get their stubborn lover to the doctor before this cold could have another day to dig in.

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Raine paced, hanging pictures and answering the phone, waiting for Whit to call and tell him his Grey was going to be fine.

But the phone call didn't come.

It didn't come at nine.

At nine-thirty.

At ten.

At eleven he broke down and called Whit's phone.

"Whittman."

"Whit? Where are you? Why haven't you called? What did the doctor say?" He wasn't panicked. He wasn't.

"Now, Raine, you mustn't get upset or worry. We don't know anything yet. They're doing tests." Whit's voice was soft, soothing, at odds with the words, with the things he was telling Raine.

"Tests? What kind of tests? What's going on? Does he have pneumonia?" They didn't do tests for colds.

"No, that's what they thought it was, but they ruled it out. Raine, we'll be coming home soon. I can tell you all about it then."

"Is he going to be okay? Is he sick? Whit? Whit, *please*."

"I don't *know*, Raine!" He could hear the frustration in his lover's voice. "There's something wrong, but the doctors won't say what, they just keep coming up with more tests for him to take and Grey keeps growling and glaring at me like it's my fault." Whit took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I'm just frustrated. I've convinced Grey to let them do this one last test and then we're coming home."

He started to answer when he heard Grey growled. "I will *not*. I'm going home. Whit! We're going home. Now."

Whit sighed. "We're coming home, Raine. We'll be there soon, okay? It'll be all right."

"Okay. Okay, I'll close shop." He should have gone. He should have.

By the time they got home he was shaking with worry, moving from one window to another.

Whit came over to him, making Grey come, too, wrapping both of them in a hug. "He's okay. He's going to be okay." Whit spoke the words as if they were a mantra.

"What did they say? What did the doctor say, Grey?"

"They don't know. They took blood. They wanted to stick a needle in my bones and test the marrow."

"Why? What does that mean?"

"I don't know. I don't care."

Whit sighed. "Come sit down. No, no, come to bed, lets all get into bed together." Whit's eyes looked scared, looked like he was trying to hide it.

Once they were all on the bed Whit started talking. "It's not a cold. It's not pneumonia. They took blood to do AIDS testing. The other thing they're looking for." Whit took a deep breath and took his hand and Grey's hand, holding on tight to them both. "Cancer."

"No." Raine shook his head, lips pursed.

Grey sighed. "I'm not going back."

"No. No, you shouldn't. You can't. What if they say..." He shook his head again. "No."

"You have to go back." Whit glared at him. "He has to go back, Raine. If he has cancer it has to be treated. It *has* to. You can't just ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist."

"No. No, he can't be sick. He can't be." Raine looked at Grey, heart pounding. "You can't be sick. Promise me you won't be sick."

You won't leave me.

Please.

Grey pulled him close, face buried in his throat. "Never leave you."

Never.

Never leaving.

Raine wrapped around Grey, hands tangling in the long hair.

Never.

"Of course he's not leaving." Whit's arms came around them both, holding them together, protecting them from the outside world. "We don't even know if it's cancer and if it is, they have such high success rates these days. It's treatable. He'll get better. He's fine. He's going to be fine."

He snuggled in closer, wrapping Grey in his arms and legs. His. His heart. His soul. His Grey. His.

Grey started rocking, petting him. "Right here. Right here."



Whit's terrible words had finally stopped, one hand stroking along his back, Whit's head resting on his shoulder.

He listened to Grey's heart. Thump. Thump. Thump. Nothing but them. Nothing but peace. Nothing but love.

It was Whit who undressed them, who eased them down onto the bed, still wrapped together and pulled the covers up over them. Whit who got up and locked the door, turned out the lights before coming back to bed and curling up with them again.

Grey just kept purring, holding him, leaning back toward Whit, letting Whit in.

The solid hand, more square, not long like his and Grey's, slid over Grey's skin, over his own, stroking and touching. There. He fought the urge to push Whit away, to keep Grey all his own. Instead he grabbed Whit's hand, held on tight.

Kept them all together.

## Chapter Four

Grey went back for the diagnosis by himself. Just left the store without a word to anyone and went to hear the words they'd been dreading for a week.

Leukemia.

Cancer.

Chemotherapy.

Hospitals.

Needles.

Time and percentages and remission and long-term goals and...

He left a message at the loft, saying he would be home for supper and took the Harley for a drive.

By the time he got home it was late and he was cold inside, even with the warm summer evening.

He walked up the stairs, opened the loft door. "I'm home."

"Grey! My Grey! I've been worried. So worried. What did the..." Raine came out of the kitchen, the dish in his hands crashing to the floor as Grey put the helmet on the side table, exposing his newly shaved head. "No..."

Grey nodded, throat tight.

Raine shook his head. "No. No, you promised."

Whit came running down from his office at the noise, feet thumping loudly on the stairs. Whit's gasp seemed the loudest noise yet.

"I'm going to shower." He headed for the bathroom, unable to bear their eyes.

"Go on," he heard Whit tell Raine. "I'll clean this up and be there in a minute."

Grey shook his head and shut the door behind him, locked it. He didn't want them to look at him. Grey heard Raine's voice, but it seemed so distant, so far away as he stared at himself in the mirror.

He looked alien.

Foreign.

No one would mistake him for Raine again.

Grey roared, fury filling him, fists slamming into the mirror again and again, shattering it.

"Grey!" The handle rattled and there came the thump of bodies against the door.

He sobbed and screamed, blood slowly dripping down his wrists.

The key turned in the lock, Raine pushing the door open. "Grey! No. No, my Grey. Whit, please. Help us."

"Run the water on warm and get his hands under the taps. I've got the first aid kit."

Whit wrapped a towel around his hands after Raine got them into the water and he was sat on the toilet, Whit kneeling before him and carefully unwrapping his hands. "Oh, Grey, you've cut yourself."

"I don't care. Leave me alone."

"No. No, we won't. I won't. Your poor hair. Your hands... Oh, my Grey..." Raine was wailing.

"Stop it, Raine. Grey needs us. If you can't calm down, go and make him something to eat." Whit's fingers were gentle, but firm, like Whit's voice, bandaging his hands.

"Eat?" Raine sounded lost and Grey just closed his eyes, hiding from them all, hiding inside.

"Raine. Food. It's what you do. Cook for us. Or stay and help, touch, Grey, let him know you still love him, that you still find him sexy."

Whit leaned in and licked at his earlobe and whispered. "It's strangely sexy, Grey."

Grey sobbed, pushed closer, Whit's fingers petting his scalp.

"I know. I know, Grey." Whit's fingers slid over his scalp, soft, wet kisses raining on it, mapping it.

Raine's heat disappeared, steps leading the quiet cries away. Grey just slumped, leaned on Whit. "I'm sorry."

"Sh. Sh. It's okay, Grey. It's okay. You didn't choose this." Whit's fingers stroked his scalp, his back, sliding over his shoulders in long sweeps. "It'll be okay. It *will*."

He shook his head. "I can't do this."

"Yes, you can."

"I'm going to die."

"No, you aren't." Whit shook his head. "I've been looking things up on the internet. They can cure cancer now and we'll pursue the most aggressive treatments if we need to. You aren't going anywhere."

Whit grabbed his hands, holding them. "Look at me, Grey. You are not going to die. Not for a very long time yet."

He met Whit's eyes, mind racing. He and Raine had insurance, just for this sort of thing, but who would run the shop and who would take care of things and who would help Raine and and and and....

"We'll take care of everything, Grey. The only place you are indispensable is here, in our hearts." Whit's hand sent to his own heart, tapping it. "Everything else will work out."

"I..." He shook his head, standing and heading for the tub. "I need to get clean."

"All right. A bath or a shower? If you have a bath, Raine can get in with you and I'll wash you both with that new oil."

"I don't know." He shook his head, overwhelmed. "I don't know, Whit."

"A bath then. I'll get it started and go find Raine. Okay?" Whit kissed his head again and started his bath, the scent of roses soon filling the air.

It was Whit's fingers that slowly undid his buttons and pulled the shirt from his shoulders, undressing him as if he were a child.

He bent his head and simply trusted in Whit to help him, to guide him because he was lost.

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Whit got the tub full and Grey settled in it with his hands resting on the sides, a pillow behind his head. His shaved head. Oh, God.

There was a knot in his stomach and it was starting to climb. He was sure for a moment he was going to throw up and then he heard a quiet sob from Raine and he pushed it back down. Raine needed him. Grey needed him. He would not fail them.

He followed the noises, finding Raine sitting on the floor in the kitchen, long hair curtaining his face, shoulders shaking lightly. Whit went and knelt next to Raine, hands on those shoulders.

"His poor hair. My Grey..."

"It'll grow back, Raine. After they've finished the treatments and made him well." He pushed Raine's own long hair away from his face, fingers drying the wet cheeks.

"Did he tell you what kind? What's happening? When?"

Whit shook his head. "I didn't ask, I just wanted to take care of him. There will be time for all of that, Raine. Right now we need to support him. To make sure he knows we love him even with the cancer and his hair gone. To make sure he knows and we know he's alive. He *is* alive, Raine. Come see and feel for yourself."

"Are his hands okay? Should I clean up the glass?"

"His hands are fine. I'll get the glass if you just go and get into the tub with him. Love him, let him know he's still wanted, still sexy. He needs you, Raine, more than ever."

Those beautiful dark eyes stared at him. "I'm scared."

"I know -- I am, too. But it's going to be all right. This isn't the death sentence it was ten, fifteen years ago. He's going to be all right, Raine. I truly believe that. I do." And he did. Because he couldn't imagine a world without Grey; he wouldn't even try.

Raine searched his eyes, then nodded, lips pressed hard together. "He will. I need him. We need him."

Whit nodded. "We do. And right now he needs us to be strong for him." He pressed a kiss to Raine's mouth. "I know you can do that, Raine. For him."

"I don't know if I can look at him. His head." Raine blushed. "He doesn't look like my Grey."

"Look into his eyes, Raine, listen to his voice, feel his hands. He *is* your Grey. Listen to your heart, Raine. It will tell you."

He kissed Raine again, harder this time, almost angrily. Raine opened for him, accepted his anger, his pain. It was what Raine did, opened to them. He kissed and kissed and kissed until that lump in his stomach felt as if it was going to leap right out of him and into Raine and then he broke their mouths apart, panting hard. "Go to him, Raine. I will be there in a moment with the broom."

"Yes. Yes, Whit." Raine nodded, lips swollen and soft. "I will."

"Good."

He stood and helped Raine up, fingers sliding over Raine's cheeks again to remove the tear tracks. Raine found a weak smile, then almost ran to the bathroom, calling softly for his brother.

Whit nodded and took a deep breath. It would be all right. It had to be.

He found the broom and the dust pan, still not thinking, and headed to the bathroom.

Raine was already in the tub, holding Grey close, fingers petting the bald head. "Mine, Grey. My love, my heart. Always. We will heal you. Make you well. Whole. Love you."

Oh, yes, that eased that knot in his stomach just a little, made it bearable and Whit set to work, cleaning the glass from the floor and around the sink. He'd get another one ordered, have someone come in and do it.

Grey's eyes stayed closed, but the hard lines around the lush mouth were eased, the line of Grey's body relaxed.

He worked as quickly as he could, wanting to be with them. Needing to be with them. Soon he was stripping, sliding into the tub behind Grey.

Raine smiled at him, the look a touch tremulous, a little worried. He smiled back, fingers sliding encouragingly along Raine's arm. They would do this. For Grey. His other hand slid over Grey's scalp. He pushed away his own disappointment over Grey's hair being gone and focused on how it was different, interesting.

"It's ugly." Grey's voice was heartbroken, lost.

Raine shook his head. "It's your head. It's soft."

"It is. And surprisingly shapely." Whit turned Grey's head slightly, looking at his profile. "It makes you look very fierce."

Raine nodded. "A warrior. A hawk. I will touch and touch until it feels good to you."

Whit beamed over at Raine. That was it, nothing would make Grey feel better about this like Raine's voice and hands.

"Here, try this," He murmured, reaching for the oil. He poured some into Raine's palms.

Raine stroked the oil into the bare skin, fingers easing the trauma of the shaving, the exposure. Grey moaned, a shudder moving through the strong body. "Oh, that's right. That's better. My sweet Grey."

Whit nodded and oiled up his own hands, putting them on Grey's shoulders and massaging them.

As the tension faded, the shudders started again, wracking Grey and then easing.

Raine looked over at him, eyes worried.

"It's okay," he mouthed, finding a smile for Raine. Grey needed to work through his rage and his pain, needed them there to pick up the pieces and help him go on.

Raine nodded, continuing to touch and pet and stroke, loving on Grey.

Yes. Yes, this was what they needed. He rested his own head against Grey's back, hands wandering randomly, just touching and loving on the soft, warm skin.

Grey floated, easing, relaxing between them, letting them love him. Oh. Better. Better.

He started to press slow, gentle kisses along Grey's spine. He wasn't trying to arouse Grey, just letting his lover know how special he was, how much Whit still loved and wanted him.

"Promise me we can stay in here forever." Grey sounded almost asleep.

"I promise we will be together forever," murmured Whit. "The three of us, like this." He could not give Grey this moment, but he would do everything he could to give Grey the three of them for always.

Raine nodded. "You will not be alone. You are not alone. Never."

"It is impossible."

Whit let his eyes close and let the moment carry him, let the warmth and the love soothe away his thoughts.

Eventually, Raine touched his arm. "He's sleeping."

"Do you think we can move him without really waking him?" For Grey sleep was healing, necessary.

He imagined Grey would sleep even more than usual and Raine even less, all his energy and worry keeping him going.

"He'll get cold in here, but he's okay for a while. When we start dinner, we can move him." Raine met his eyes. "Is there special food he should have?"

"As much natural as possible. They think carrots especially contain anti-carcinogens. I'll do more research tomorrow and find you recipes."

"Okay. We need to know what the doctor said, but after dinner, yes? After some pasta and wine."

"Yes. Let him sleep and eat first and then he can tell us. We need to eat, too. We need to keep our strength up for him."

And Whit decided that until he knew for sure what the doctor had said, there was nothing to worry about, so he pushed the ball of worry down deeper until he could ignore it.

He reached out for Raine with one hand, stroking the skin so like Grey's.

"I'm glad you're here." Raine's eyes met his. "So glad."

"Me, too," he said softly. "It's where I belong. With you and Grey."

It was where they all belonged. Together. All three of them. Well and happy and healthy.

Raine nodded. "Forever."

"Yes, Raine. Forever. I promised."

Raine's eyes filled again. "I promise, too. Now we have to get Grey to."

He nodded. "We will. It's what he wants, Raine. He wants to stay with us."

Raine nodded back. "He has to."

"Yes. He has to." Whit nodded, hand squeezing Raine's leg. "He will."

"We all will. Together."

"Yes, love. Together. The three of us." He nodded. Happy and healthy. All of them. Even Grey. Especially Grey.

He leaned past Grey's body to press a kiss on Raine, losing himself in the flavor there, concentrating on that instead of letting his mind rabbit on.

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Raine cooked pasta and chicken and veggies and bread. Poured wine and make a crostada, stopping every few minutes to go look at Grey, watch him sleep.

Whit was cleaning, pacing.



They were both waiting to talk to Grey.

Whit came through the kitchen with the broom, sweeping with hard, jerking strokes and biting his lower lip.

"Dinner's ready." He didn't know what else to cook.

"Oh. Oh, good." Walt nodded. "I'll help you set the table."

"Okay. The good plates?" Oh, what if Grey threw them or something...

Whit shook his head. "No. No, it's supper like any other, yes?"

"Yes. Yes." Except Grey was sick and bald and scary and he felt like he was going to vomit.

Whit nodded. "Yes. Lets go get him." Whit took his hand and they went to the bed together.

Another sob escaped him when he saw the poor naked head, all that beautiful hair gone.

Whit squeezed his hand. "Strong, Raine. For him."

He nodded, swallowed hard. "Yes. For him." He reached down, shook Grey's shoulder. "Grey, Grey love? Supper's ready."

Whit's fingers joined his, sliding on Grey's skin.

Grey opened his eyes, frowned. "I don't want to wake up."

Whit stroked Grey's cheek. "You need to, love. We need to eat. To plan."

Grey looked scared. Stubborn and scared. "I don't want to."

Still Grey got out of bed, moved toward the table. Whit gave him a look, but didn't say anything, just walked with them.

They settled, the mounds of food everywhere, and Grey actually smiled. "You're going to make me fat, if you keep worrying."

Whit chuckled softly, smiling back at Grey.

"Eat. Eat. It's good." He took a plate for Grey, filled it, poured the wine, nerves just clattering.

Whit's hand touched his, pet him gently. They all managed to sit. start picking at their food. He couldn't stop looking, stop staring at Grey's head.

Whit finally pushed his plate away half-eaten. "I'm sorry. I can't keep pretending. I need to know what the doctor said, Grey."

Grey shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it."

Raine sighed, reached out. "You have to. We have to hear."

Whit nodded. "We need to know what it is, to understand what you need to do to make it better. How we can help."

"Leukemia. It's leukemia. They wanted me in the hospital today. I said no."

Whit drew in a sharp breath. "Tomorrow then? You go in tomorrow?"

"No. I'm not ready."

Raine blinked. "But Grey..."

"No."

His heart was pounding, throbbing.

"You have to go." Whit's voice was calm, almost too calm, but sure, so sure. "You have to do what they tell you to do and get better. Cancer spreads. Fast. If you don't take the treatment right away it could be too late."

Raine nodded. "You listen to Whit. He knows. We'll be with you, go with you for all of it, but you have to go."

Whit nodded. "I have the rest of the summer off. And then I can take a leave of absence. We'll hire someone to run the shops, or close them down for awhile. You need to do this, Grey. All together. Raine and I promised. You need to promise, too. You need to stay with us."

"Even if I do -- the chances aren't great." Grey sighed. "The doctor said I will need chemo and tests and radiation and then they'd see."

"Everything," said Whit. "We will do everything and anything to make you better. You aren't leaving us, Grey. You aren't."

Raine stood, walking over to hold Grey's hands. "I promise you that we will be with you, but we have to kill it. We have to."

Whit nodded. "Raine is right. We can't let this thing eat away at you."

Grey sighed. "It's poison."

"It's medicine. We'll get you better and then go somewhere to heal." Raine squeezed Grey's fingers.

"That's right." Whit petted their hands where they were joined. "We'll both go in with you tomorrow. Stay however long you need to be there. We won't leave you there alone."

Grey squeezed his hand tight. "I don't want to."

Raine nodded, "I know."

Whit took a little hiccupping breath and squeezed their hands. "Of course not. But it's not going to just go away on its own, is it?"

"No. No, it's not." Grey sighed, leaned into Raine.

"We'll help you beat it," murmured Whit. "This thing isn't going to get us, okay? Together. We'll make it right."

"I hope so. I do." Grey stood up, shook his head. "I'm not hungry."

Raine sighed. They didn't need to start this now.

"We could curl up together on the couch," suggested Whit. "We haven't fed each other in awhile."

Raine nodded. "It's true, Grey. Little nibbles. Kisses. Sips of wine."

Please, love.

Please.

He just wanted to care for Grey, to help.

Whit was already up, putting together a plate, filling it with little bite-sized chunks of everything, grabbing a glass of wine. "I think there's a fire already laid, just waiting to be started."

Grey let himself be led, let Raine press close and start loving on him again. Raine kissed and cuddled, licking and touching as best he could. Healing. Whit joined them, stroking and kissing as well, sneaking small bites into Grey's mouth. Grey growled softly, but ate, nibbling on their fingers, their lips.

Whit got up at some point to get the fire going, the heat and crackle of it soon warming the room which had seemed unusually cold for July.

He found a smile for Whit, which got stronger as Whit nodded, eyes supporting, encouraging him.

Whit leaned in and kissed Grey's head, fingers sliding on the bald skull.

Grey sighed and frowned and Raine shook his head. "It's fascinating, Grey. So soft, sexy and I can't stop looking."

"Definitely fascinating," agreed Whit. "It draws my fingers." He leaned in and whispered loud enough for them both to hear. "Like when you shaved Raine's groin and I couldn't keep my hands away."

Raine heard the soft rumble, knew Grey was pleased, was starting to be turned on. Whit moaned softly, fingers sliding on Grey's head, his other hand sliding down to stroke Grey's belly.

He met Whit's eyes, nodded. "Beautiful Grey, we need you so."

"Yes. Always," murmured Whit, lips sliding over Grey's face, finding his mouth.

Grey opened to Whit and Raine headed for an ear, licking and nuzzling, whispering soft promises and perversions. Whit whimpered, pressing against Grey, hand sliding back over to touch Raine's belly.

Yes, this was what they needed. Loving. Touching. Passion. Something real. Something normal.

Whit's hands opened and closed on his sweater, moving to find skin. The whole time, he and Grey kissed, Whit's eyes closed, face a study in pleasure.

He stripped his own clothes off first, then started on Grey's, baring the dark skin for Whit to touch. Whit moaned his thanks, fingers sliding on his skin, on Grey's, exploring and caressing, the touches drawing low moans from Grey.

Then he focused on Whit's clothes, the creamy skin so warm, so soft. And Whit was so responsive, pushing into his fingers as he removed the clothes.

"Whit, love him. Make him fly." His mouth trailed over Grey's shoulders, tasting, touching. Needing to remember this, now.

Whit moaned and pressed close against Grey, sliding their bodies together as he devoured Grey's mouth. Whit's fingers slid over Grey's skull, cock pushing against Grey's.

Grey wrapped those long arms around Whit, pulled Whit closer. "I need."

"Oh, me too, Grey. Will you fuck me?" Whit was breathless, his expression wanton, his voice pure need.

"Yes. Yes." Grey growled, pushed Whit down onto the sofa, hands reaching beneath Whit and spreading his ass. Raine grabbed the oil, slicked his hands and started readying them both.

Whit pulled his legs up and apart, gazing up at Grey.

"Love you." Grey's voice filled the air as Raine brought that hard cock to Whit's slick hole.

Whimpering, Whit nodded, legs sliding over Grey's shoulders. Their lover's eyes rolled slightly as Grey's cock pushed into him.

"Oh. Oh, don't want to lose this." Grey's voice rumbled through the room.

"We won't." Raine reached down, fingers sliding over Grey's hole.

"Won't lose it," gasped Whit, body rolling beneath Grey.

"Promise me."

Together he and Whit moaned, answering. "Promise."

Whit's body writhed, moving to meet each of Grey's thrusts. "Oh, so good."

Raine pushed two fingers in deep, free hand working his own cock. "Yes, good. Grey, love."

Whit grunted. "Oh yeah, Raine. There. He liked that."

He smiled, nodded, added another finger. "Forever. Inside you. Do you hear me?"

"He hears," murmured Whit. "I can see it in his eyes, feel it in his cock."

"Good." Raine bit down, marked Grey's shoulder. "Good."

Grey and Whit both jerked, Whit's eyes rolling.

"Raine. Raine, I love you." He could hear the desperation in the rough voice.

"Yes. Not leaving me. Not love."

Whit whimpered, hand reaching for him, sliding with his on Grey's skin so they were all three connected.

"Soon," whispered Whit. "I won't be long."

Raine nodded. "Right here. With you both."

Whit nodded and moaned. "Good. Good. Don't stop moving, Grey. Don't stop, please."

"Won't. Can't. Need." Grey bucked, bent to Whit's throat.

Whit's head went back immediately, exposing the line of his throat. "Yes! Oh!"

Grey growled, ass clenching his fingers, muscles going tight. The scent of Whit's come was heady, all Whit. Raine bucked, coming into his fist, eyes just rolling.

Whit's gasping breath's were loud, his hands sliding along Grey's back, reaching to touch Raine, too. Raine leaned against Grey, held on. He could do this. He could.

Whit's legs slid down, coming alongside Grey's hips to cradle them both. "Oh. I needed that."

Raine nodded. "We did."

Whit hummed. "Feels so good. So good. Never giving this up."

Grey nodded, held on. "Never. Please."

"No, never. Ever." Whit's hands clung to Grey, to him.

Raine just nodded. Tomorrow they would go together. Tomorrow they would make Grey well.

Tonight they would be just them.

## Chapter Five

The doctor had him checked into the hospital by noon, needles in his arm, in his hips, in his arm. By five at night he was getting a full body scan, by nine a spinal tap.

By midnight, he was ready to go home, snarling at anyone who came close.

Raine was standing at the window, looking out, back to him, but Whit refused to be cowed, just taking whatever he dished out and offering love and support in return. It was maddening.

"Go home. I'm going to be in here forever. Some of us should be home."

"Home is wherever we all are, Grey. So we're all home, because we're all here." Whit's fingers were warm and soft on his face.

He sighed, shook his head. The room wasn't bad, there were two chairs, a bathroom, a television. If he didn't hurt and have needles all in him? It might be okay.

Oh fuck that.

It wasn't okay.

At all.

"If we snuggled, one of us could lie with you, sleep with you." Whit was trying so hard.

"The nurses will bitch." He shifted, his hip aching where the biopsy needle had gone.  
"When can I go home?"

"When they know if the cancer's spread and after you've had your first treatment." Raine sounded... like him.

"Come lie with him, Raine. I'll bitch back at any nurse that says anything." Whit carefully pulled back the covers. "Take off your shirt so you're skin on skin."

"I want to go home." Grey hated this, hated being here.

"I know." Whit stroked his forehead again. "I know."

"Find out how long it'll be?" He met Whit's eyes. "Please."

"I can do that." Whit bent and kissed him gently. "I won't be long."

Grey nodded, moaned when Raine slipped into bed with him. "I'm sorry, brother."

Raine nodded, sobbed. "I will not allow you to leave me."

"I know."

"I love you."

"I know."

Whit came back, the look on his face telling Grey he wasn't going to like it. "They'll do your first treatment tomorrow and if nothing goes wrong we can go home the next morning."

"Another night?" He frowned. "I want to go home tomorrow."

"They want to make sure you don't react negatively to the treatment, Grey. This is important. Raine and I will stay. You won't be left alone."

"Someone has to open the store and the gallery..."

"It's the summer. I put up a sign saying you were closed for business until August." Whit sat next to the bed and took his hand, smiled at him and at Raine. "I was thinking we should put an ad in the paper. Hire someone to run things for a few months, so you don't have to worry."

"How can I afford that? We'll have to dip into the fund." Grey sighed. He and Raine had been hording that money for years, keeping it for their retirement.

"Won't having the shops open pay for themselves?" Whit asked. "If it makes more sense just to be closed, then we can do that. Or Raine and I can take turns running them."

Raine sighed. "We'll take appointments for the antiques, Grey. You don't have walk-ins anymore hardly. It's all designers."

"It'll all work out, Grey. I've got savings, too." Whit held his hand. "Everything will be fine. You'll be fine." It was Whit's mantra lately.

He just growled a little and nodded. Right. Fine. "My hip hurts."

"I'm sorry," murmured Whit. "Would you like some ice? Or I could rub it."

"I don't want you to rub it, the incision hurts." He hated being pouty. "Ice would be good."

"Okay, love." Whit squeezed his hand and went again.



Raine pet his belly, humming low. "I'm going to get the softest sheets for the bed, oranges and treats, it'll be so relaxing."

"I just want to be normal for you. I just want to be home."

A nurse came in, Judy she'd said her name was. "Your... Mr. Whittman said you're uncomfortable. I can give you something for the pain."

"My lover. And yes, my ass hurts."

Raine tsked. "His hip hurts, from the biopsy."

"Well I'll just get something to add to your drip then, shall I?" she took his chart and looked it over. "Yes, the doctor's left a script for painkillers. Just ring the bell next time you need, Mr. Holstein."

"He will. I'll make sure of it." Raine smiled over, nodded and Grey fought the growl.

Whit came in as she went out, with a cup full of ice chips. "Did the nurse have any news?"

"She had happy drugs. That and the ice should help."

Grey blinked over at Raine. He could answer for himself. Mostly.

"Oh, cool. I asked her where I could find the ice." Whit smiled at him.

The ice did help and the low buzz did too and he found himself smiling at Raine, eyes caught in his twin's.

Whit fussed unobtrusively, tucking the covers around him and Raine, finding another one to put on them, adjusting the lights, lowering them slightly.

"Love you." He stroked Raine's face. "I hate knowing I'm not going to look like you."

Raine nodded. "I know, but you will heal. Whit always knows us apart."

Whit nodded. "I always have." Whit stroked Raine's head and then his. "This is not the biggest difference between you. Just the newest."

"What is the biggest difference?"

"Your attitudes toward life and sex."

He blinked over at Whit, relaxing in Raine's arms. "Tell me. Talk to me."

Whit took his hand and held it, smiling at him. "Well, for Raine life and sex are about sustenance, food, feeding and tasting. For you sex *is* sustenance, food, feeding, tasting. Life is visceral, like sex. Raine seduces life, you take it."

"Raine is like magic, like a storm."

"Yes, but you are the earth beneath it, you feed the storm."

Raine hummed behind him. "And you are our center, our Whit."

Whit blushed softly. "I am yours, there is no doubt of that."

Grey nodded, the room swimming a little. "Ours. Ours."

"Yes, love. Yours." Whit squeezed his hand and stroked his skin, the sensation almost not there.

"I'm sorry, Whit. Raine." He hadn't meant to get sick.

"Sh," whispered Whit. "You don't need to apologize, just to get well again."

He leaned forward, whispered. "I'm scared, Whit."

Whit nuzzled him and whispered back. "I know. Hold on to me, Grey, we'll make it through this together."

"Promise?" He heard Raine's sobs distantly.

"I promise, Grey. I promise."

Whit's voice was right there, cutting through the drugs and the fear.

"kay." His eyes dropped closed. "I believe you."

"Good. Because I'm not letting you go, Grey. We're not letting you go."

Soft lips pressed against his cheek. "I love you, Grey."

"Love..." He nodded, sinking under, fingers twining with Raine's.

## Chapter Six

A couple of hours after they finally got back from the hospital, Whit left Grey in the big bed, Raine wrapped around him. He headed up to the roof garden and curled up in the big chair they all called Grey's chair.

Arms wrapped around his middle, he put his head on his knees and started to cry. The sobs hurt, pulled from deep inside him, made him just shake. Grey's beautiful hair gone. His skin already turning sallow, slightly puffy. Cancer in his bones. It wasn't fair. Not their Grey, their beautiful, strong lover. *His* beautiful strong lover.

He put his head back and screamed at the sky, threw a tantrum, even stamped his feet on the chair. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair.

By the time it started to grow dark, he'd cried himself out.

He slipped back downstairs and took a quick shower before going to heat up some leftovers from one of Raine's feasts.

He brought the plate over to the bed along with a glass of Perrier and sat. "Hey, lovers. Time to wake up."

Raine smiled up at him, eyes searching his face. "Whit? Love?"

He found a smile for Raine, found his strength again for them. "You've both been asleep all day. Time to eat."

"Grey? Grey-love? Whit brought food. Are you hungry? I know I am..."

Grey looked up, winced, shook his head. "I don't know..."

"Just try?" Whit asked, pushing the fear and worry back down. Always pushing it down and away because if not he was going to just shake apart. "I'll feed you myself."

Raine sat up, nodded. "Little bites, the nutritionist said. Little bits and try to keep what you can down."

Grey sat up, nodding. "I'll try."

"I brought some of those soft egg noodles in a light sauce. And the chicken Raine made the other night." The night before Grey went into the hospital.

"Maybe a bite of noodle..." Grey took a bite, then another, moving so slow.

He fed Raine as well, and a bite or two to himself, pacing them to match Grey, so Grey wouldn't feel out of step with them.

Grey refused the chicken, drinking the water, nibbling on the pasta. "It's good to be home."

"Yes, it is. It didn't smell right at the hospital." It was perhaps an odd thing to fixate on, but it was what had bothered him the most.

Raine nodded. "And it was too loud, too busy. Here, Grey can rest, heal himself."

"Yes." He nodded and smiled, encourage another bite into Grey.

He wouldn't admit it out loud, not even really to himself, but he was worried at home in a way he wasn't at the hospital. Some part of him believed that as long as they were at the hospital, the doctors would not let Grey die.

"I just want to be here. I just want to rest." Grey leaned back into the pillows, eyes closing.

"Of course. Sleep is good. How about one more bite first though?"

"One more." Grey nodded, lips parting.

"How's your hip? Better?" Raine petted Grey, stroking the smooth skin. That poor hip was bruised, dark.

Whit got two more bites into Grey while Raine fussed, beaming at Grey after the second one. God, he was treating Grey like a child. Grey apparently thought so, too, beginning to growl at them, frown deepening.

Whit put the plate down and did the best thing he could think of to prove that he didn't see Grey as a child. He kissed his lover, putting everything he had into it. Grey's hand slid around, cupped his nape, held on. He whimpered, surprised need rising in him, making him deepen the kiss. Grey opened, let him in, let him have everything.

He shoved the plate toward Raine, letting it go, trusting Raine would catch it, not particularly caring if he didn't. Grey moaned low, fingers rubbing his nape, working the tension from him. His own hands found Grey's skin, sliding on his shoulders. He swept his tongue through Grey's mouth, and then again.

"I'm home." Grey shifted, wincing a little. "Feels good."

"It does. Feels right." He nuzzled into Grey's neck, licking, searching out the taste he knew.

"Home. I'm home."

Raine chuckled, nodded. "You are, my Grey. Repetitive, too."

Grey snorted, throat moving under his lips. "Bitch."

It made him grin, made a wave of happiness and hope go through him. It felt almost normal. He moved down Grey's chest, searching for the sweet nipples.

"Mmm. Whit. Whit..." Grey was purring, undulating slowly under him little big cat.

It felt so good, feeling like this, touching, the desire building between them. Raine moaned, hand sliding over his ass, his balls, loving on him.

He pushed back into the touches, wanting skin on skin. "Naked," He muttered into Grey's mouth.

"I don't know if I can get it up, Whit." The kisses continued though, sharp and sweet.

He stroked Grey's face, looking into those dark eyes. "Let me just love on you. I don't need you to fuck me. I just want to love you."

"Oh..." Grey nodded, nuzzled into his touch. "Please."

"Yes." It was what he needed, what Grey probably needed, too. He sat up and worked his shirt off before lying back down against Grey, moaning at the heat as their skin slid together.

"You feel good." Grey curled into him, purring, cuddling.

"So do you. Always so warm." He bent, tasting Grey's neck, ignoring the taste of hospital and chemicals and searching for the *Grey* he knew was beneath them.

Raine hovered around them, offering random touches and kisses. He pushed into Raine's hands, his own busy with Grey, his lips mapping skin. Grey hummed low, moving and sliding under his hands. It was beautiful. Perhaps more so because it was threatened.

Whimpering, Whit pressed harder.

"s okay. I'm home."

"Home, yes. Oh, yes, where you belong, Grey." He nodded, pressing closer as his mouth found a nipple and wrapped around it, sucking on the small bit of flesh.

That sweet nipple drew up tight, going hard for him. He groaned around it, sucked harder, tongue flicking right across the very tip. Grey moaned, rippling beneath him. Whit was hard as anything, each response from Grey sending him higher, as if his whole body were celebrating.

"Love you..." Grey's voice was replete with need.

"Oh, my Grey, I love you, too." He proved it with his hands and mouth, loving on Grey with all he had.

Raine gave him as much as he gave Grey, hands and lips driving him mad. He moved between them, right where he belonged and as long as he just concentrated on the sensations. Grey relaxed into the mattress, soft sounds constant, warm.

He moved down, exploring the still perfect belly, the lovely ridges of Grey's abdomen. So fine, so smooth, Grey shifted and rolled beneath him.

He continued down, licking and nuzzling Grey's hips, the tiny hollow right next to each one. He buried his nose in Grey's pubes and breathed him in, fingers stroking Grey's thighs, encouraging them to part before he licked and loved on the heavy cock, not hard, but solid, proof Grey was at least enjoying his ministrations.

"Love..." Raine's cheek slid against his own, kissing the tip of Grey's cock.

He purred, slid his tongue along Raine's lips before sliding down to nuzzle Grey's balls. Raine's eyes watched him, still and focused, so dark. He smiled at Raine, leaned up again to kiss him hard before returning to the center of Grey's heat, where the musk was strongest, most heady.

Raine rested against Grey's thigh, lips on Grey's cock. He took each ball into his mouth, worshipping softly, carefully. Then on down along the hot, soft flesh beyond, searching for the wrinkled flesh that guarded Grey's hole.

"Oh..." The sound was almost too soft to hear.

He lapped at Grey's flesh, licked at that small hole, getting it wet, taking the flavor of pure Grey into himself. Here was one place where the twins were especially different, Grey tasting earthy and solid, while Raine was lighter.

Grey purred, rocking beneath him. He slid his fingers beneath Grey, holding the rounded ass cheeks as Grey rocked, encouraging the movements.

"I love you. I do..." Grey's thighs went tight, hard.

He whimpered, his hips starting to move, rubbing himself against the sheets as he began to fuck Grey with his tongue, pushing it into his lover over and over. Grey sobbed, moving faster, beginning to gasp, to twist. That sound traveled down his spine and lodged in his balls, made him work his tongue faster, stabbing it into Grey over and over again.

"Whit. Raine! Please..." Grey gasped, groaned.

He glanced up, confirming Raine's mouth was wrapped around Grey's cock and he slid his hand up to cup Grey's balls as he pushed his tongue deep. Grey shuddered, ass going tight around his tongue, Raine just groaning.

He whimpered, tongue softening, moving gently as his own hips snapped hard against the bed. Raine groaned, pushed against him, rubbing them together. He whimpered, humping hard against Raine and gasping as his cock sprayed, the pleasure like a bolt going through him.

Raine kissed him, hard enough to split his lip. He whimpered, but kissed back just as hard, needing Raine's passion. Raine was desperate against him, hard and forceful where he was normally yielding. Whit rolled onto his back, let Raine top him, hips grinding him into the mattress.

"Whit. Need you. Need. Now." Raine's energy was born from fear, from worry, but Whit would take it.

He spread his legs, coated his entrance and Raine's cock with his own seed and then guided Raine's cock in. A low moan left him as Raine spread him, the burn sharp, but bearable.

"Love. Love. So good..." Raine took him with strong, sure strokes, driving into him. "He's asleep. Already."

"We gave him what he needed Raine, now take what you need."

"You. Need to love you." Raine took another kiss, shaking with need.

"Right here," he murmured, putting one hand behind Raine's head, giving Raine a deep kiss. His other hand slid down and grabbed Raine's ass, encouraged each thrust.

Raine drove into him, pounding again and again, just panting into his mouth. "I love you..." Raine arched, bucking deep, pegging his gland.

Whit cried out, cock jerking, trying to fill again. "Raine! Love."

"Yes. Love. Whit..." Raine pushed even deeper, hips rocking faster, harder. "Soon."

He nodded. "Please, Raine. I want to feel you."

Raine's eyes rolled, heat filling him deep, heavy cock throbbing inside him.

"Yes. Yes."

He pulled Raine in close, taking his lover's mouth. Raine opened up, let him take a deep taste. He moaned into Raine's mouth and as the kiss came to an end, he lay back, panting, exhausted and sated.

Raine curled up against him, petting. "You want me to reheat supper? I'm starving."

He nuzzled against Raine's chest. "Yeah, I could eat."

"Love you." Raine stroked his hair. "So much."

He nodded, smiling up at Raine. "I know. I love you, too."

"Good. I... I didn't hurt you..."

He kissed Raine softly. "No, Raine. You didn't hurt me." He'd be feeling it still tomorrow, he was sure, but it had been necessary and good.

"Good. I needed." Raine cupped his cheek, thumb petting. "We're all home."

He nuzzled into the touch. "Yes. Yes."

They were home. All together. It was enough for now. It had to be.



## Chapter Seven

If Raine never had to listen to Grey throw up again, he'd be happy.

They were on their second round of chemo and Grey looked like someone who had been poisoned -- pale, bald, swollen. They hadn't seen a smile in over a week, Grey hadn't kept a meal down in two and a half days.

This was sheer hell.

He wandered aimlessly, trying to think of things to cook that might stay down, trying to think of something to entice Grey to eat, drink.

Whit was with Grey in the bathroom, cleaning him up, helping him with a shower.

God, they were just so helpless to do anything.

Raine heard the creak of the bed, Grey curling in without a word.

"How about some Sprite, Grey? Just something to wet your mouth?"

Grey nodded, eyes closed. "Yes. Please, Raine."

Oh. Yay.

Whit passed him on his way to the kitchen, gave him a sad smile and touched his arm briefly before continuing on to the garbage.

"I have some frozen grapes, too. Green ones." He brought the glass over, helped Grey sip.

"Later. I'm tired. I'll have some later, I promise."

"Okay." Raine helped Grey get settled, then turned on some low music before heading in to help Whit.

Whit gave him that same tired smile, closing the lid on the kitchen garbage. "Did he drink?"

"One sip." He frowned, squeezed Whit's hand. "Do you want to get out for a while? Go... on vacation or something?"

"I don't think Grey's up to that, Raine. Maybe after they're finished the chemo."

"I meant you, love. You look so sad..."

"Oh, I couldn't go without you and Grey!" Whit shook his head. "It's just hard. Seeing him hurting so badly."

Raine nodded. "How much longer can he do this?" How much longer could anyone do this?

"Until he's better," Whit said, voice rough.

"How can this make him better?"

"The chemo kills the bad cells as well as the good. And the good ones come back. The research I've done says there's a seventy percent chance of recovery in cases like Grey's. That's more than half, Raine. Way more than half."

"Only if he stays in remission for five years. What if he doesn't? What if it comes back?" He didn't want to fight with Whit. He *didn't*.

"He will and it won't. It can't." Whit shook his head. "He's going to get better. He's going to be fine."

Raine nodded, the 'but' sitting in his throat like a disease.

Whit gave him a quick, hard hug. "He is, Raine."

"I hope so. I need him." Whit didn't understand. Couldn't.

Whit nodded. "We both do. That's why he's going to get better. He has to."

Raine nodded, shaking. "He has to."

He needed to move, to walk, to run. "I'm going to work on the paperwork downstairs."

Whit looked at him. "Are you okay, Raine?"

"Yeah." He shook his head, his mouth able to lie, but not his heart.

"Oh, love." Whit stepped close, arms wrapping around his middle. "What can I do?"

"Nothing. Nothing. I'm fine." He was. He was being strong. He was being brave. He was...

Scared.

Terrified.

Completely lost.

He'd never missed Mamma and Nana so much.

"No, you're not," murmured Whit. "But you will be. We all will be." Whit buried his face in Raine's throat, breathing him in.

Raine held on. "I need him. He's the strong one. He always has been."

"He's not going anywhere, Raine. We won't let him." Whit turned his face up, looking up at Raine. "And you're stronger than you believe you know. A lot stronger."

"No. He is. I need him." He shook his head.

"Right now he needs you and you need to be strong for him. You can do it, Raine. You just need to have faith, to believe he's going to be okay."

"I *am* being strong. I *am*. I cook and clean up and work and don't just sit and cry. I am."

He was.

Really.

"I know. I know, Raine." Whit hugged him again. "I know."

"And he's so sick and things aren't right and I hate this."

"I know. It won't be forever though. Soon he'll be well. It'll all be behind us."

Raine nodded again, trying to hold onto Whit's hope. "I want to take him to the desert. Let the tribal elders pray for him."

Whit nodded. "After the chemo. We can't just stop his treatment halfway through."

"Okay. Okay, but then we take him home."

"As soon as the doctors have done everything they can."

Raine nodded. "I miss him. I miss us."

Whit blinked hard, eyes wet. "I know. Me, too."

He pushed into Whit's arms, needed to touch, to feel, to be okay for a minute, for a little while. Whit's face turned up, mouth open and meeting his, the kiss hard, almost frantic. They moaned, tongues sliding together, teeth clicking.

Whit's fingers slid through his hair, twisting, body pushing against him. One of Whit's legs wrapped around the back of his thighs, their cocks rubbing together. He grabbed Whit's ass, pulled hard, tugging them harder and harder together.

One hand wrapped in his shirt, Whit holding on, whimpering softly. "I want to go for a ride, Raine. Put on my leathers and feel the bike between my legs, feel you in front of me. Snug up against your ass."

"Oh, yes. I want to feel you, needy and hard, so hot. We could go late, go slow."

Whit nodded and rubbed harder. "Yeah. Tonight?"

"Yeah. Yeah. We'll drive until everything feels good again."

"Oh. Oh, yes. Please." Whit bit at his lower lip, heel digging into the top of his thigh.

"Yes. Love..." He pushed Whit into the counter, pushing harder, rocking quick.

"Yes. Good." Whit's hand slid between them, undoing their pants, pulling out their cocks so they rubbed together, heat on heat.

Oh. Hot. Hot. Raine grabbed Whit's shoulders, working them both together. Whit was breathless, kisses growing sloppy, body pushing so close.

"Love you. Need you." He growled, the sound not as low as Grey's would have been, but so needy.

Whit whimpered and bucked against him, heat splashing over his cock.

"Yes..." He ducked his head, thrusting and rocking, driving towards his orgasm.

"Love you," whispered Whit. "Love you so much."

"Oh." He jerked, bit Whit's shoulder as he came.

Whit moaned, hands holding on tight to him, leg still wrapped around his thighs.

"Thank you. Thank you." He closed his eyes, relaxed.

Whit just purred, lips sliding on his jaw. Raine closed his eyes, letting Whit make things quiet inside him, right. Whit seemed content to stay right there, wrapped up in him, their pricks nestled together, breathing each other's breath.

They could just stay right there for a minute. Right there until Grey needed them again.

## Chapter Eight

He dragged his ass down the stairs and into the shop, turning on the lights and settling at his desk. Christ, he had eighty million emails.

It was 2:30 in the morning, the street so quiet, so still, the summer on its very last legs.

And there he was, thirty pounds lighter, bald -- and not just on his head, but everywhere, and why didn't he expect that? -- and tired, bone tired.

The doctors kept making positive, encouraging sounds and he kept letting them poison him.

Grey spent about an hour working, then got up, headed out the front door towards the convenience store. He? Needed a soda and a candy bar.

There was a commotion behind him, the door from the stairway opening hard, slamming against the wall. "Grey! There he is. Raine, he's here, on the street." Whit came toward him, out of breath, pale. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. I want a soda and a candy bar. Go back to bed." He nodded, even almost smiled.

"You go back to bed, I'll get it for you. Raine almost had a heart attack when we couldn't find you."

"You can't just *leave*, Grey." Raine was shaking, eyes huge.

"I'm thirty seven years old, Raine. I can walk to the corner store."

"You should have let us know you were going out," murmured Whit, hands turning him, guiding him back to the door.

"I want a candy bar, Whit. You know where I'm going. Go back to bed." He was starting to get pissed off now. He wasn't *broken*. He had cancer.

"Just tell me which one and I'll get it for you. You can go back to bed with Raine. We don't all need to be up."

"I *know*." He shook his head, growled a little. "I'm not a child. I just want to walk down the street and get a fucking candy bar!"

Raine touched Whit's hand, "Come on, let the grouch go."

He glared at Raine. "What did you call me?"

"A grouch. A big grump. A bastard."

"Excuse the fuck out of me." How *dare* Raine bitch at him.

"We do. All the time. Just because you're sick doesn't mean you get to be evil forever."

"Raine..." murmured Whit, fingers twining with Raine's.

"No. It just means I get to be evil until I die and put you and Whit out of your misery." He bit the words out and headed down the street, toward the store.

"No, Grey. Please. Don't be mad, we just worry. Grey!" Whit's footsteps ran to catch up to him, a warm hand sliding along his arm and catching his. "We just worry about you."

He sighed, kept walking. "I know."

He did.

It didn't make it easier, but he knew.

Whit's fingers twined with his, feet half skipping every third or fourth step to keep up with his longer stride. "I know it's been hardest on you, but Raine's been hurting, too. Everything that happens to you, happens to both of you to one degree or another. Don't be mad at him."

"I'm not. I'm not mad. I just want a candy bar. I just want to be able to walk down the street."

Whit nodded. "I know. But we worry, because... what are you doing up this late anyway? You usually sleep all night, most of the day."

"I don't know. I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep, so I went downstairs." They got to the store, went in, and Grey picked a few candy bars and a huge bottle of soda.

"You've got your appetite back, too," murmured Whit, smiling at him, the circles beneath his eyes dark in the stark fluorescents that lit the store.

"Until the next round starts, yeah." He put the pile on the corner. "You want anything?"

"Yeah, I'll have a mountain Dew." Whit smiled at him and put a much smaller bottle on the counter.

"Can you get one of those tea things for Raine?"

"Yeah, he'll like that. And some of those wretched sesame snacks he likes so much." Whit gave him a bit of a conspirator grin.

Grey found himself grinning back, nodding. "Yes. Get a bag of them."

Whit did and added a roll of mints. "For after. In case he wants to kiss us."

He laughed, loud and long, truly tickled.

Whit's smile was sweet, natural for the first time in a long time.

They paid the tab, after adding a temporary dragon tattoo for his bald head and Whit and Raine's arms, then headed home.

Whit's fingers twined with his again, looser this time, holding rather than clinging, his pace more leisurely, Whit keeping up easily.

"You can almost smell autumn coming this late at night." God, this felt good, just to wander.

Whit nodded. "There'll be rain soon, too. It's been so dry this summer."

"Has it? I feel like I missed it all."

"You have, pretty much. There will be other summers though, Grey."

Grey nodded. "Yeah and I might have well missed the dry one."

Whit chuckled softly. "A summer without Raine would be no fun, yeah?"

He snorted, the sound turning into another laugh.

God, it felt good.

Whit bumped their hips together, just grinning away, one of their bags swinging from his free hand.

"Love you." The sun was starting to lighten the sky, just barely, turning black to deep purple.

Whit nodded and smiled. "I know. I love you, too."

"Good."

Raine was still standing, watching them. "I heard you laugh."

He held out one bag. "I brought peace offerings."

Whit's fingers slid from his, their lover standing back a step to watch them together.

"Peace offerings?" Raine frowned. "I have real food."

Grey nodded. "I know. This? Is wicked snacky food."

Whit laughed softly. "Don't you remember how to play, Raine?"

Raine flushed dark, then took a deep breath. "You'll have to remind me."

Grey stepped close, fingers trailing through Raine's hair. "I can do that."

Raine gasped, lips parting. "Really?"

Whit moaned softly and whispered. "Inside."

Grey nodded, thumb brushing Raine's bottom lip. "Yes."

Whit's body pushed against him, pushing him toward Raine. "Inside. Upstairs. It's getting light."

"And I'm a vampire..." Grey winked, all of them laughing together.

They stumbled into the stairwell, their laughter echoing in the enclosed space.

"You should go for a walk more often." Raine led them up and up.

"I should." He nodded, in total agreement.

Whit held the door open for him and Raine, those sweet eyes so happy. They tumbled in together, things the closest to normal they'd been in forever. Raine looked up at him and he took a kiss, wrapping his arms around his twin.

Whit was watching, he could feel those eyes, like a caress. "So beautiful together."

He smiled against Raine's lips, something deep inside him healing at the joy in Raine's eyes.

It was Whit's fingers that started in on their clothing, unbuttoning their shirts and tugging them off, opening their pants. He moaned into Raine's lips, hands cupping his brother's head, tilting it back. He stepped out of his pants at Whit's bidding and then he and Raine were both naked, bodies pressed together as they kissed deeply. Raine's hands cupped his ass, tugged him close, those dark eyes wide, watching.

Whit's moan was heartfelt, sweet.

"Love you." He put all of himself into to words. He did love them both, more than life.



"Yes. Yes, Grey. Raine. Love you both, so much." Whit's fingers were warm, tugging them toward the leather couch.

It had been a long time since they'd sat there to make love.

"Our sodas will get cold." Raine's eyes danced, teasing.

"We have ice." He nipped at Raine's lips.

"Oh, ice. We could play!" Whit's laughter was soft and happy.

"Yes." He was awake for the first time in days, cock full and hard and needing. "My Raine."

Raine laughed, the sound beautiful. "Yours!"

"I want to watch you fuck," murmured Whit.

"Perv." Raine laughed again. "In me, Grey. Please. It's been so long."

Grey nodded, hand cupping Raine's ass and tugging him close.

"Your perv," murmured Whit. "Now the real question is do you want the ice now or with your drinks later?"

"Later. I just want to make love now." He might be too tired later.

"No kinky stuff, got it." Whit grinned and pushed them down onto the couch, pressed the lube into his fingers before sitting in the armchair. "I'm going to watch."

Grey handed Raine the tube. "Want you to ride me. I'll last longer."

Raine nodded, fingers moving to slick his cock, rub it firmly, up and down. Grey reached out, petting and stroking, tweaking the dark nipples, pinching them. Whit moaned softly, fingers fumbling to open his own shirt and pants.

Grey leaned back, legs sprawled, cock bobbing as he watched Raine slick those dark fingers, slide them deep in the hot body. "Beautiful."

"Stunning," murmured Whit, hands moving on his own body, breath becoming audible.

"He is." Grey nodded, groaning and stroking his own cock as Raine moved above him, so perfect.

"You both are." Whit's voice was husky, wanton.

"Want you." Raine straddled him, took him in deep with one slow, pure, delicious motions.

Whit cried out. "Oh, yes."

Grey's hands landed on Raine's hips, eyes fastened with his twin's. "I will do this forever."

"Promise me."

"I swear it. Seven minutes." Seven minutes he'd been alone in the world, waiting for his Raine.

"An eternity." Raine started to move, gasping for him.

"You are as one," murmured Whit, hand sliding on his cock.

Grey nodded. "My Raine."

He tugged Raine down for a kiss, the world spinning around him. Whit's gasps and moans spun with him, an added caress. He thrust up and up into Raine's body, their kiss going deep and wild.

Whit cried out, the scent of his come sharp and bright.

Yes. Yes, they needed. He needed. His Raine. Raine's cry pushed into his lips, seed splashing against his belly. His own orgasm was perfect, sweet, just necessary.

"Perfect," murmured Whit, words echoing his thoughts.

Raine rested down on him. "My Grey. Oh, I've waited so long..."

He stroked one hand down Raine's spine. "I know."

The couch dipped as Whit came to sit with them, fingers touching them equally, Whit as always fascinated with their skin.

"Love you." The words were whispered into Raine's lips, one hand stroking Whit's belly.

"Love you, Grey." Whit and Raine's response came together, their mouths pressing against his at the same time.

He smiled, tired again, but the tired this time natural, a sweet comfort.

Whit and Raine cuddled against him, blanketing him. "This is nice," said Whit, voice half-asleep.

"Mm-hmm." He nodded, home and happy. Settled. Staying.

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That late summer night had been the calm before the storm, the next round of chemotherapy leaving Grey decimated, unable to keep anything down, barely able to stumble to the bathroom.

Whit's days flowed one into the other, cleaning puke, washing Grey, laundering the sheets, and putting on a brave face for Raine.

He'd taken leave for September, but as it drew to the end of the month he called the principal and told her he wouldn't be back this year at all. Grey had six more weeks of chemo to suffer through and then, even if everything went well and it eradicated all the cancer, it would be months before he was his old self again.

Thanks to the school's progressive policy, one of the reasons he was teaching there, he was allowed the year's leave to care for his sick partner and he would have a job to return to the following September. A year without pay was going to decimate his savings, but there was no way he could do the job, even if Grey and Raine hadn't needed him to be there full time.

He'd sent off the paperwork just that morning. It was official.

Tired and cranky, he headed up to the roof garden and curled in Grey's chair, though Grey had not been up here in months. He fought the tears that threatened, he'd shed too many already, he refused to let his belief be anymore shaken. Lying his head on the back of his chair, he closed his eyes and rested awhile.

"Whit." Grey's voice was low, almost nonexistent from the stomach acid that burned his throat. Pale as a ghost, he made his way into the sunshine, easing down into the chair across from Whit.

"Grey!" Whit was shaky from dozing, blinking at Grey as if his lover really was the apparition he appeared. "I'm sorry. What did you need, love?"

"Nothing. I came to talk to you."

"Oh. Okay." He smiled and got up and moved to sit at Grey's feet, so his lover wouldn't have to strain to be heard. He stroked Grey's leg. "What about?"

"I think you and Raine should go on a vacation. Together. I'll pull enough from the fund for you to go. I want you to go, get away from all of this."

"And leave you alone?" Whit was horrified. He shook his head. "No. We can't do that. We won't."

"I'll be okay. You can go in two weeks. Go to the mountains or on a cruise. Have fun. We didn't celebrate your birthday right, anyway."

He shook his head. "No, no, together. We promised. All three of us."

"When I'm better. Now, you need to go. I'm making you both ill."

Panic filled him and he wrapped his arms around Grey's legs, clinging. "Why do you want us to go? What are you going to do while we're gone?"

"I'm going to sit and watch TV. Rest. Sleep." Grey reached out, stroked his hair. "Take Raine away from all this ugliness."

"He won't go." Whit was sure of that.

"Then you'll have to convince him."

"But I don't want to go either. We should be here helping you, Grey. I don't understand why you want us to leave you to suffer alone."

"Aren't you tired of being here?" Grey's eyes were so tired. "I know I am."

"You're sick. We will carry that with us no matter where we go, Grey." He shook his head. "I don't want to leave you -- I promised I wouldn't."

"But you can go, play." Grey cupped his jaw. "You need to play."

He nuzzled into the touch, tears pricking at his eyes. "Going without you would be like saying you were not going to get better."

Grey sighed, eyes closing. "Then let's all plan to go. Somewhere. Anywhere. Just for a weekend."

"Okay. If we plan it for next weekend, you should be at the end of a bad spell." At least that was the theory. The last weeks had all been bad.

Grey nodded. "I just want away for a while, for all of us."

"We can do that, Grey. I'll arrange it. A weekend at the Lake?"

He started to relax at the thought that they could go away together. Maybe the different environment would give Grey a boost.

"That's fine. I like the clean air, the sound of the trees."

"I'll take care of all the details. We can take my car."

He rubbed his cheek against Grey's leg. "Just a few more weeks left of the chemo, too."

"I'm sorry. I know this is all miserable." Grey's hand just kept petting.

"You didn't ask to get sick."

"No, I didn't, but you didn't ask for a sick lover."

"Then we're all sorry and none of it is fair." He looked up at Grey. "I just want our life back. I want this to not have happened." He knew it was childish, but he carried the pain of it in his belly always and Grey was right, he was tired, needed a break.

"Oh, God. Me, too." Grey grinned at him, winked. "Me, too."

He chuckled wryly. "I would guess so."

"I'm sorry about you missing this year's kids, Whit."

He nodded, tears pricking at his eyes again. "I am, too, but I wouldn't have been able to give them the attention they deserve. Taking the year off is for the best."

"If the chemo doesn't work, I'm not doing the bone marrow transplant." Grey's words were unexpected, firm.

His eyes flew up to Grey's. "But you've got a perfect match in Raine, that gives you a better chance than almost everyone."

"It's painful for Raine. It isn't a guarantee fix. It's expensive."

"You think it will be less painful for Raine to lose you?" The stone in his belly was growing in size again, like two fists now.

"I love you, Whit. I'm enough of a drain, now." Grey drew him up, held him.

He curled into Grey's chest, shaking his head. "Raine would be devastated without you. I would be, too." That was his biggest fear, that Grey would lose this battle and he would lose both the twins.

"We have to accept it's a possibility. That you'll have to be here for Raine, help him learn to be happy."

He shook his head. He couldn't deal with that now. He had to keep believing Grey was going to be fine, he had to keep saying Grey would be, even on the days he didn't believe. "I'll be here for him no matter what, Grey, but you promised not to leave. You're going to be fine. You *are*."

"I hope so." Grey stroked him, humming softly. "Tell me about the lake, about where we're going."

He accepted the questions as the distraction they were, closing his eyes and enjoying Grey's touch as he spoke softly about the cottages on the lake. He'd been considering renting one as a Christmas gift before all this had happened, so he could tell Grey about the swans and ducks that called the lake home, about the trees that were old and large, the forests old growth.

"Oh, it sounds perfect. Let's stay for three days." Grey sounded genuinely pleased, excited.

"I'll call them as soon as we go back downstairs." He smiled up at Grey, fingers tracing the sallow cheeks, the dark skin almost yellow.

"Good." Grey kissed his fingers, lips soft, dry.

He stroked Grey's lips, swallowing back his sorrow at the changes in the man. He would celebrate the fact that Grey was still with them instead.

"I love you." Grey watched him, eyes quiet, just drinking him in.

He nodded, smiled. "I love you, Grey. With my whole heart."

"When this is over, will you still love me?"

"Always, Grey. My heart belongs to you and Raine. Nothing will change that. Nothing." He believed it with all his heart, more than anything else, he knew it to be true.

"I remember the first time we saw you. Raine knew you were ours."

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw two of you. And then you spoke and I was yours." He smiled, fingers running down to trace Grey's neck, his collarbones.

"I knew when I touched you at your little house. You are so fine."

He smiled up at Grey, the words warming him through. "I still wonder sometimes, how you can say that, having access to your own and Raine's skin. You are so exotic, even if there were only one of you that would be true."

"We are like each other. You? Fascinate me." Oh, he would have to remember this, remember to take them out of the sickness and somewhere different, somewhere they could just talk.

"Fascinating? Me?" He shook his head. They saw him through rose colored glasses, his twins.

"Yes. You..." Grey smiled, shrugged. "Raine has all the beautiful words. I just love you."

He beamed up at Grey. "Those are the most beautiful words of all, my Grey."

"We need to prune the roses." Grey kissed his nose, licked his lips.

"I could do that. If you told me exactly what to cut," he added with a laugh. Plants were not his forte.

"Later. Right now? I like this."

He nodded. "Yes, later. I like this, too." He smiled up, feeling at peace for the first time in days, perhaps weeks. "I've missed you," he whispered, barely giving voice to the thought.

"I miss me, too." Grey kissed his head, his temple.

Whit tilted his head back far enough their mouths met, the kiss soft, almost just a simple touching of their lips. Grey smiled, eyes warm and welcoming. His tongue traced Grey's lips, wetting them.

"Love you so." Grey rubbed their noses together.

"I love you," he murmured back, smiling and licking at the tip of Grey's nose.

He got a laugh, husky and low, rich. He purred, pushing closer into Grey's arms. He hadn't realized how much he'd missed this, how much he'd needed it until now.

"This feels nice. We should do it more often."

"Yes. Whenever you're feeling up to the climb and it isn't too cold." He wondered if Grey's health was ever again not going to be foremost in his mind.

Grey nodded. "We'll have to make a plan for when it is cold."

"You might be well by then," he murmured, daring to hope.

"I hope so. That would be lovely."

"It would be." He nuzzled Grey's neck, ignoring the hospital and antiseptic smell that hung over Grey all the time now.

Grey rested, relaxed underneath him.

His own eyes closed, this time he dozed off in Grey's arms, instead of just dreaming about doing so.



## Chapter Nine

In the end, Grey had still been too sick for them to go to the lake. There was barely any respite anymore between the bouts of chemo and Whit could see the way Grey's illness was devastating Raine as surely as if Raine were the one with the cancer.

Whit felt like he was slowly losing his mind. It was becoming harder and harder to be positive, to believe that this devastation was going to end any way but badly. Two days before Grey's appointment with the doctors to discuss whether or not the chemo had worked and what they should do next, Whit knew he needed to get away, he needed to think, to find a way to hope again.

He wrote a note for Grey and Raine, left it by the bed where Raine would be sure to see it. He told them not to worry, that he would be back before sundown, he just needed a few hours to sort things out in his head. His gaze lingered before he left, his lovers wrapped tightly around each other, one beginning where the other ended. And he knew. He knew if Grey was lost, then so was Raine.

Swallowing back his cry, he slipped out the door and got into his car, headed off to the big mall in the suburbs. He needed to be away from the streets and stores and neighborhood that were his haunts with Grey and Raine, the places that were infused with their spirits.

The Rockland Mall in Henrickson was the perfect spot. Enormous, impersonal and about as far away from those shops and streets where the three of them had roamed and lived and loved as he could get.

He needed to forget. To spend several hours just wandering, looking at all the chain stores. To not think. Here he was just another person in the crowd, no one stopped him to ask how Grey was, to look at him with pity in their eyes. He spent hours, just walking, roaming the long, winding corridors several times over. The place was huge and impersonal, full of people who didn't know him, who didn't care. The stores were all the same somehow, without personality, bland.

He eventually found himself in a surprising little alcove with a fountain full of coins and fake ducks. It was quiet there, a mother breastfeeding her child in one corner, and old lady with a walker half asleep on a bench in front of the fountain. It seemed so out of place in this mall, an oasis.

He found another bench tucked away in behind the fountain and he sat there, his eyes closed. He could feel the sun on his face from the skylight and he could hear the water tinkling in the fountain and he knew that now was the time to remember.

They were so beautiful, his twins. Identical, and yet... so different, almost opposites; Grey, silent and strong, quiet and deep, Raine noisy and quick, bubbly and vivacious. They complemented each other so well, they completed each other. They were earth and

sky, ground and storm, and for a long time he'd thought they let him in only because they wished it, that they didn't *need* him.

They did need him though, as surely as he needed them. The three of them made a beautiful world together.

He smiled, memories flooding him.

The sun was shining and they were having a picnic. Raine had prepared an amazing basket of fruits and sweet rolls, a little flask with coffee. He poured out a cup for them to share and passed it to Whit. "Grey chose this especially for us today."

"Yes, it's a new blend." Grey's eyes smiled at him, waiting for him to try the dark roast. Whit knew that meant Grey had spent hours at the coffee shop, trying this blend out and then that, adding a touch of a dark bean to a lighter flavor, testing and retesting, making it perfect.

Whit took a sip and the flavor exploded on his tongue, heated his belly. He took another mouthful, letting it roll on his tongue. Everything was like this with his twins, each small act made important, significant.

After the coffee, he was fed a berry from Grey's fingers, a slice of pineapple from Raine's lips. He could smell the grass, earthy and bright, a lovely undertone for the fruit. And he could smell Grey and Raine, they smelled like it did after a rainstorm, clean and earthy and good.

Whit breathed in deeply and his lips parted as he remembered kisses. Each one special, unique. Tongues and fingers and cocks pushing into his mouth. Those same tongues and fingers and cocks touching him, licking him, fucking him. So much love, so much loving. All the memories tumbled together, crashed over him.

How could he have forgotten the joy taken in each moment?

He had forgotten because there had been so little of it in the last months. There had been pain and worry, all their hopes pined on a cure that drained Grey of his vitality, that sucked the life out of all of them. They'd all been working so hard for tomorrow, a tomorrow that might never come, that might be lost to them.

It came to him so suddenly, like a call from the very earth and sky themselves as he sat in this little fake piece of nature. They needed to leave the hospital and the city behind. The toxins and the chemo and the modern medicine had all had their turn. It was time to find themselves again, time to live life again, to find their joy in each other again.

Whit got up and searched for the travel agency he'd passed once or twice while wandering the mall, finding it again as if his feet had been led there. He booked three tickets for the following week with an open return. They would go to the desert. They

would stay as long as they needed to in the place where the earth and the sky met, in the place that would cradle her children.

He would either bury his lovers, his heart and his soul in the desert where they had come from, or they would become whole again. Either way they would find joy in each other and each day for as long as they were given.

He was terrified.

But for the first time in months, he was rushing, eager to see his lovers, the hope in his heart filling him with the belief that the desert would give them what they needed, would give them each other again.

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He woke up slowly, stared into near-black eyes that seemed huge in the drawn face. He could himself reflected inside his twin, tanned skin gone pale, gray streaks in his hair. Losing. They were losing.

Grey reached out, stroked his hair once, fingers tangling in the mess as they tried to soothe it. "This has to stop." I have to go, Raine.

"Okay. Then it stops." You cannot go without me.

He saw Grey try to smile and he leaned in, kissed his heart and home, tongue wetting the dry lips. "Whit won't understand."

Raine shrugged. "He knows."

Whit wouldn't ask him to stay here alone. Never again. He would never be without his Grey again. He pulled the blankets closer around them, the autumn air chill in the apartment. The fire was out, the hospital bed that had been delivered two weeks ago sitting in front of the hearth. The nurses thought it would be easier for Grey to get in and out of.

Grey refused to even look at it. Refused to leave their bed.

Raine thought they should just throw it off the balcony.

"I'm sorry, brother."

Grey would not cry, so Raine did, slow tears leaking from him. "I know."

"Do you remember when we would sit together, tell each other stories about being men?" Raine nodded; he could see their old room, Grey's eyes like dark holes in the fading light.

It had been so quiet then, so still in the desert, and the stories felt like they could come true. "Tell me another story."

"I can't." He was out of stories. He didn't want to tell this one.

"Please, Raine." Grey's hand tilted his face, eyes so serious. "I need to know."

He had always given in to that need. He always would.

It was what he was made to do. Raine settled himself in the bed, drew Grey into his lap and cradled the poor bald head against his chest. Then he closed his eyes against the medicines and paraphernalia around them, going back into a time where there was nothing but his heartbeat, Grey's. "Once, when the moon was heavy and the sky was dark, a storm came, crashing upon the desert. The lightning slammed into the ground, turning the sand to glass, and the rains came.

"There was a young spirit warrior, curious about the storm and the people, and he crept too close to a little house filled with women. The lightning spilled from the sky and split him in two and his halves went tumbling down into the little house.

"Hidden in a thunderclap, a woman cried as her sons were born, two hearts, two minds, one soul. They were well loved, carried against their mother's heart, upon their father's shoulders. They grew together, running and dancing on the hot ground. They laughed together, loved. One brother gave the other the tomatoes from his sandwich; the other gave his pickles. One wrote. One drew. One talked. One sang."

"Badly." Grey chuckled, breath hot on his chest and he tweaked the exposed ear.

"Hush. I'm telling this story." Your voice was beautiful then. Your voice is beautiful now, because I can hear you.

"Yes, my Raine." One finger caught a tear from his cheek, Grey licking it away. "My story."

"They grew and grew. They left the desert together, went to the ocean and met so many people. Made so many mistakes." And it still hurt, that he had lost those weeks, that he would give anything to have them back. To take Grey's pain away.

"Both of them made mistakes, my Raine. And all of them are forgiven."

"All of them?"

Grey nodded. "Every one."

Oh. Oh, his Grey. "Then they left one ocean and moved to another and built a quiet life. A private life. One of them began to dream, over and over, that someone called to them.

"Finally, after searching, they walked into a bar one night and found him, sitting alone, waiting for them. They followed him home and loved him, kept him for their own."

"Our Whit."

"Yes, Grey. Our Whit." They rocked together, hurting together. "They created a family, a life, a home. There was love there, and peace unlike any other. There were flowers and light and color and happiness."

"One day, sickness came." He said the words, hearing them echo throughout the flat, heavy and harsh. All stories had their turning point.

Grey nodded against him again, hand petting his belly.

"The brothers fought together and their Whit fought as well. The love never faltered, even as their bodies did. One day, they looked at each other and knew it was time. The poison had to stop."

"So they curled together on the bed and held each other and spoke of their lives and their Whit and how to make it easier for the one left behind because they were one soul and could not be separated, even for this."

Raine waited for Grey's argument, but only got those fingers wrapped tight around his own, squeezing. Holding on.

"Then they rested together and laughed, watched the sun rise and set and knew that the beauty in the world would remain, long after they departed." Raine heard a soft sob across the room and saw Whit, standing there with wet eyes. "They shared wine and kisses; they told their Whit they were sorry. They gave him all they were, for as long as they were able."

Grey, eyes still closed, sighed, mumbling. "They told him... they told him they loved him."

"Oh, my Grey, he always knew that." Raine tried to smile, but it was more than he had. "He had to have always known that. Then, beloved, the skies opened and all the pain sank into the ground. The brothers of the storm reached up together and became one man, one warrior again, running through the skies, calling out to the universe about the brightness of the sun and chasing the lightning."

He couldn't see Whit anymore, couldn't see Grey through the tears, but he knew Grey was asleep now, trusting in him. In the story.

He held one hand out toward his lover, needing their center close.

Whit's hand slid along his, their fingers twisting together as Whit's warmth pressed against his side. Close, head resting on his shoulder, Whit sat with him for a long time, the salt of their tears mingling. There were no words between them, just warmth and love and holding.

At length, Whit's fingers slid over his cheeks, wiping the tears from his eyes, before dropping down to slide over Grey's poor head. "I have something," Whit said softly.

"What, love?" Oh, Grey smiled when Whit touched him, even sound asleep.

"I had a revelation today while I was wandering." Whit chuckled wryly. "I went to that new mall over in Henrickson. It's huge and shiny and ugly. But, it made me realise how much the chemo has taken away from us, and how far apart we've grown. I mean we're all still here, together, but how often have we just sat together and *\*been\** like we are now? It's been so long."

Whit nuzzled against him, hand moving to rest on Grey's shoulder as the soft words continued. "So I went and bought us tickets, Raine. For all three of us. To the desert. There's a small charter plane on reserve at the airport. It's time for you and Grey to take me home to the land of your birth. I was so sure it was the right course to take, and then I came home and-" Whit's breath hitched. "I heard the story and I knew I had made the right decision."

"But... can he travel? What will we do without the doctors?" He thought he'd made his peace. He knew that Grey was... But he was still scared, still frightened to let it go after so many weeks. "What if..."

Whit's fingers slid across his mouth, his lover shushing him softly. "The doctors have had their turn, Raine. And I, more than anyone, have pushed and pushed for that. But what have they given us? Grey is still sick, and the chemo and radiation have taken away so much of him from us. We huddle together, like frightened children and have forgotten how to *\*live\**. Even if it's only for a few days more, I need to be with my lovers. Really *\*be\** with them, love with them, live with them. With you and Grey."

Whit's lovely eyes filled with tears again. "If I can do nothing else, I want to give him the sun painting the desert with its colors one more time. I want to give *\*you\** that. And I want it for myself."

"Home." Grey moaned, eyes opening and closing, hands trembling violently against his skin. "Take me home. Please."

Raine sobbed once, nodding as he held those poor hands close. "Yes. Yes, my Grey. When can we leave?"

## Chapter Ten

Wow, it was hot. Like a huge, heavy wall of heat. Or like stepping into an oven.

That was Whit's first impression as they got off the little charter airplane in the middle of nowhere. The plane had taxied to the hanger at the end of the runway, the steel roof bleached by the sun, a little building with bright red siding announcing itself as "The Office."

They needed to check in there, see if their ride was waiting for them. One of Grey and Raine's cousins or uncles was supposed to be meeting them, bringing them home.

Whit could hardly believe they were here. They'd had less than a week to get everything ready: close the store and the gallery, shut up the loft. That had been hard. So many memories, so many good times, and as they cleared out the fridge and the cupboards, packed a single bag of clothing for the three of them, they knew that they might never be back. That thought, like the heavy scent of medicine and sickness, hung there between them all.

They'd burned the medicine. He and Raine had taken every pill out of every bottle and tossed it into the fire, and then they'd put on their shoes and stomped on the little plastic bottles until they were nothing more than plastic confetti. Harmless. Innocuous.

Just before they'd left, Raine had whispered to him and, together, they'd pushed and pulled and manhandled the hospital bed out onto the balcony, tossing it over the railing. It landed with a satisfying crash. The mattress had been gone by the time the taxi came fifteen minutes later to take them to the airport and the start of their long journey.

They were here now though, they'd made it. Tired, exhausted and ready to collapsed, but their journey was almost done.

Whit had their bag over one shoulder, his other one tucked beneath Grey's arm as he and Raine supported their lover's weak body between them.

Grey was smiling, though, face turned up toward the sun and drinking it in. Raine chuckled. "Poor Whit's going to melt. He's not used to this good weather."

"I love the high desert in the fall." Grey took a deep breath, looking almost happy.

"Boys! Boys! They have come home to us!" A loud booming voice filled the air, a huge heavy man moving across the tarmac with dozens of seemingly identical dark-haired men surrounding him.

"Uncle Albert!" Raine nodded as they were surrounded, dozens of hands lifting Grey and suitcases and moving them all.

It was incredible, the way everything seemed suddenly lighter, as if all these people now carried a part of the burden, a portion of the pain. It wasn't just physical either.

Whit couldn't help but wonder if they shouldn't have come sooner, but he shut down that part of his thoughts. No more regrets, no more wishing things were different. This was how they were and if he didn't pay attention, didn't live every second for what it was, he would have nothing when there were no more seconds to be had.

He found Raine's eyes with his own and smiled, allowed himself to be swept up with them.

There were so many people talking, touching, hugging, that it felt completely overwhelming, but good. They'd been so isolated, so trapped, their only contacts with people the doctors and nurses and Grey refused to talk with any of them. Suddenly they were surrounded with love.

Even if none of them knew the truth.

Raine had told them about him, that he was Grey's lover, Raine's friend. Many of them suspected the truth, but no one would say.

Still, when he was hurried into an old van with Grey and Raine, along with six family members, Whit felt accepted.

An older man sat close to Grey, long grey braids mussed, dark eyes searching Grey's face. "We're glad you're here. Missy and Thomas have cleaned up the old house, put furniture in. It's small, but it's clean, the stove and water work."

"It will be fine, Grampa." Grey tried to smile, almost made it.

"Your grandmother, she is cooking beans for you, bread." The thin, aged hand moved over Grey's bare head.

"Thank you, Grampa." Raine brought the hand down on Grey's head, the trembling fingers stroking the skin. "Pray for him."

Grey was so gaunt and sallow, but already Whit could see that being here had brought a bit of color to the thin cheeks. They would let the medicines and poisons leave Grey's body and all pray together that the cancer went with them, that Grey's battle had been won.

"Is that the house you and Raine grew up in?" Whit asked.

Raine nodded. "It was our parents, then Aunt Kissy's. She died, remember? About a year ago?"



"Eight months." A man closer to their age held his hand out to Whit. "I'm Jim. Frannie's boy. It's been empty for four months. My sister and her husband moved to Phoenix."

He nodded and shook Jim's hand. "I'm sorry for your loss." He could only pray that Jim wouldn't be offering the same sentiments to him in the near future.

"I'm looking forward to seeing it," he admitted. He'd heard so many stories of Grey and Raine growing up there, playing and laughing and fighting. He wanted to see the place that had given birth to his magnificent lovers.

"It's nothing big." Grey smiled as Jim reached out, squeezed his hand.

"It's big enough, Grey."

Raine nodded, looking at them all. "We'll be fine there. We'll all heal."

Yes. Healing. Whit liked the sound of that. Already, the heat and being home, being without the medicines was easing the tightness around Grey's eyes.

"It doesn't need to be big. I just want to see it."

He tried to look out the front of the van, but all he could see was dust and sand kicked up by the car ahead of them, filled with more relatives.

"Are we going there first?" As nice as it was to meet Grey and Raine's relatives, Grey needed to rest. It had been such a long trip to get here -- all three of them were tired.

Their grandfather nodded. "My Maria says she'll leave food and towels, but the talking can wait a day or two."

"Nana shouldn't fuss." Grey's words made them all laugh.

"Nana made you cinnamon bread and there are beans and a whole bag of oranges."

"Oh. Real oranges?" Grey's eyes lit up. He'd been begging them for 'real' oranges for months and none had been right.

Whit laughed, pure joy going through him at the brightness in Grey's eyes. "Maybe she should have left two bags," he teased. How long had it been since they'd teased each other?

"We'll go buy more. And a juicer. As many as you can eat, Grey." Raine nodded.

"I'll stop at the market. There's a man with a truck of fruit. I'll bring some tomorrow." Whit wasn't sure who spoke, but it didn't matter. They cared. They were family. They wanted to help.

He leaned back against the seat, feeling the heat of Grey's body at his side, hotter even than the air that surrounded them. It was the first time in a long time that Grey felt substantial, felt *\*real\** instead of like a ghost.

"Is it much further?" he asked, more curious than anxious to get there.

"About ten more minutes, give or take." Albert smiled at them in the rear view mirror. "There are still pups there. Katy's line."

Raine's eyes lit up. "Oh! Oh, really?"

Grey actually laughed, then the entire family joined in.

"Katy? Pups? You mean dogs?" God, it had been so long since he'd heard Grey laugh like that.

"The ugliest liver-colored pups you will ever see." Grey rolled his eyes.

"Katy was our dog when we were boys, Whit. She's legendary."

He laughed. "Legendary? Was that because of her or because of the two of you?"

"Her."

"Them."

The whole van started laughing again, Raine actually pinking.

"She was a good dog."

Oh, this was fun, hearing about his twins' as boys, seeing this other side of them. "Why do I think there's a but attached to that?"

Jim snorted. "Because she was trained to bark when we snuck out. So Raine would fill his pockets with bacon and lunchmeat and play decoy while we ran."

Grey was laughing so hard. "He always smelled like lunch."

"And Katy kept gnawing my pockets on the clothesline!"

Whit laughed and laughed, picturing a pint sized Raine with an ugly dog constantly trying to get her nose into his pockets.

It felt so good, so normal and right.

"Do the pups have the same habit?" he asked when the laughter'd died down, making it start up again.

"They all have learned to sniff pockets. One of them liked chewing gum, remember Jim?" Uncle Albert's voice was so deep, just ringing out.

Whit giggled -- he leaned against Grey and just let it all out. Laughter instead of tears. He was so glad they'd come.

"So how many dogs are we talking about?"

"Sometimes dozens. Right now there are two. One old boy and a puppy. She was the runt and the others have either found homes or been hit."

"Oh, that's too bad. And nobody ever wants the runt, do they?"

He sighed, trying not to let the thought of pups getting hit bring him down, trying to hold onto the laughter and hope of a few moments ago.

"Someone will."

"Maybe Raine can take it."

Grey snorted at his grandfather. "Raine doesn't need a puppy."

"No, he has you," teased Whit.

He knew his twins would have heard the unspoken "and me."

"He does." Grey squeezed Raine's hand, eyes falling closed again. "I'm tired."

He wasn't surprised, they'd been on the go forever and Grey had been more animated in the last half hour than he had in the last weeks put together.

"We'll be there soon and you can sleep," he promised.

Raine nodded. "Nana will have left tea and toast for you."

One tear escaped Grandfather, sliding down along one cheek as those dark eyes watched his grandsons. "Soon. Soon, you will rest."

Whit refused to hear how final that sounded. He still had hope.

And more importantly, today Grey had laughed. He would always have that.

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Things were basically like he remembered - small and simple, clean and bright. Home.

It even smelled like cumin.

Raine took Grey back to the big bedroom, supporting the skeletal body with his own. "Gran left you oranges. Did you smell them?"

Grey shook his head, bare head bowed. "Is the bed big enough for all of us?"

"Of course it is. It has to be." It was a king, covered with dozens of quilts, some new, some familiar as his own skin.

Whit came along with one of the bags they'd brought. "We've been invited back to your grandfather's for supper if we want. But he said otherwise, no one would come before tomorrow."

Whit put the bag down, looking around. "I can see you here as boys. Grey? How are you?"

"Tired. Good. Glad to be home." Grey settled into the bed with a satisfied sigh, a low groan.

Whit tugged Grey's shoes off and loosened the buttons on his shirt. "Do you want anything?"

"I... I'm thirsty. I think I'm hungry..." His poor Grey, he'd forgotten how to not be nauseated, how to be hungry.

"I'll go get a plate or two. The smell of the fresh bread is making me crazy."

Whit placed a kiss on the top of Grey's head and came over to give him a hug. "I'll be quick. I'm glad we're here."

"Oranges. Don't forget the oranges. I've got some teas that Grampa gave me. We'll try those tomorrow." He was done crying and dying. He wanted to live now, with his lovers.

"I'll bring the whole bag. We can feed each other. Lick the juices from our fingers..." Whit was right there with him, eager to fill every moment.

Whit gave him a soft kiss on the side of his mouth and slipped out quietly.

He settled on the bed, fingers curling around Grey's, fingertips stroking the heavy knuckles. "We're home."

"We are."

"This was the right thing to do, yes?" He needed to know that Grey believed in this.

"Yes, Raine. I needed this." Needed him. Needed home.

Whit was as good as his word, soon coming back with two plates full of food, the bag of oranges under his arm.

"You two look cozy. I can't remember the last time we shared a meal in bed."

"It's been too long." Grey smiled and held a hand out to Whit, beckoning him into the bed.

"It has. And just look at this bread." Whit had cut it thick and slathered it with butter. There was also a bowl of beans, another of stew, and a plate of fry bread, as well as the oranges.

Whit sat up cross-legged and tore a piece of bread into two.

Grey actually moaned and the sound was one of pleasure, not of sickness or pain. Raine almost sobbed, tears of pure joy in his eyes.

He saw that same joy reflected in Whit's eyes as the bread was pressed to Grey's lips. "I stole a bite downstairs. It tastes as good as it smells."

Grey opened, eating eagerly, licking the sweet butter off his lips. Raine leaned over, licked for himself, fingers stroking Grey's arm.

Whit made a soft sound, eyes soft as he watched them.

Another piece of bread was pressed to Grey's mouth, Whit's fingers lingering this time.

Grey didn't speak, just ate and nibbled, even going so far as to lick and suck Whit's fingers clean. "The orange. Please. I have craved them."

Whit nodded. "It's so good to see you eat."

One orange was handed to him, Whit picking up a second and digging into the skin, the scent bursting strong on the air.

He peeled off one section after another, feeding them to Grey's hungry lips, rejoicing at the happy little sounds, the low growling rumbles that his Grey offered them.

Whit leaned in and licked at his fingers, at Grey's lips, eyes closing as he hummed softly.

"Delicious," murmured Whit, offering first Grey, and then Raine a slice.

Grey slowly faded, eyes closing, even as the juice dried on his lips. Raine sat and watched, the color still wrong, but not *\*wrong\**.

Whit sighed and leaned against him, hand finding his to curl their fingers together.

"It's good to see him eat."

"It is. He's going to get better." He needed to believe that.

"He is, Raine." Whit looked up at him, hope in the tired eyes.

Whit's fingers slid over his cheek. "He is."

"Promise?" He scooted over, pushing into Whit's arms.

Whit held on tight and nodded. "This is a good place. It feels right being here. He'll get better."

"It's good for you too, yes my Whit? You feel right here?" With us?

Whit nodded slowly. "I do, Raine. I haven't felt this right in a long time."

"He ate. He actually wanted the oranges." He would not cry.

He would *\*not\**.

Whit laughed softly, hugging him close again. "Yes. And I have never enjoyed watching him eat more."

A soft kiss was pressed to his lips. "It feels like he's coming back to us."

Raine nodded, eyes closing against the tears. Let it not be a lie. Please, god. Let it not be a lie.

\*\*\*

Whit woke, sandwiched between his twins, the two long, warm bodies feeling so good.

He stretched and wriggled and it was only as his eyes opened and he saw Grey's head and the unfamiliar room that he remembered.

Grey's face looked peaceful though, rather than pained, as if his sleep was restful and good.

The place smelled good, it felt good, too, as if he knew it because he knew Grey and Raine, as if it knew \*him\*.

The fanciful turn of his thoughts made him smile and he cuddled in, enjoying the quiet and the warmth of his lovers.

Grey's eyes fluttered open, the dark gaze looking right into him. "Good... morning?"

His smile deepened and he nodded. "Good morning, Grey."

He didn't ask how Grey was feeling, didn't go there yet -- he just wanted a moment where everything was normal and good, right.

Grey smiled and stretched, skin sliding against him. "I want a bath, Whit. A bath and pancakes with butter and syrup and orange juice."

He laughed softly, delight and happiness moving through him at Grey's words.

"A bath! Oh, I hope there's bubbles."

For too long it had been nothing but sponge baths and, when Grey was feeling especially good, very quick showers. To sit in a bath together and wallow in the water...

"Oh, that sounds good. Hot water, soap, soaking." Grey sounded blissful.

"You two go, I'll start pancakes. There's not room for three in the little tub." Raine didn't look devastated, though. He looked pleased.

Whit leaned back into him and raised his head for a quick good-morning kiss. "Thank you. We won't be too long." Though if Grey wanted to linger, he knew Raine wouldn't begrudge them for a single minute.

"Take your time. I'm in no hurry."

Grey grinned over. "Coffee?"

Raine shook his head. "No, my Grey. Tea. Hot tea with good honey and mint."

"Oh. Honey."

"And maybe an orange slice or two to fill our bellies until the pancakes are ready?"

Raine laughed as Grey's stomach growled. "Oranges it is. Spoiled lovers."

"We are. You're wonderful." He gave Raine another kiss and climbed out of bed. Taking

Grey's hands, he tugged. "Hot water, bubbles, tea and oranges with the promise of pancakes with butter and syrup to come. All your desires are catered to."

"You spoil me." Grey followed easily, so thin, so pale, but smiling. Eager.

"Spoiling you feels good."

He hadn't really paid too much attention to the tub the night before, but Raine was quite right -- there was no way all three of them would fit. Just the two of them were going to be very close quarters. Of course *that* wasn't a problem.

He got the bath started, and then poked around the cabinet, searching for something that might give them bubbles.

He found two bottles of bubble bath - peach and strawberry - and he laughed as Grey poured a liberal amount of both in, winking over at him.

"We'll smell like a pair of fruits all day," he teased, wrapping his arms around Grey's middle and giving his lover a hug.

"Well, it takes one to know one." Grey grinned, leaning into him and goosing his ass.

He jumped at the unexpectedness pinch, laughing at his own reaction, at Grey's playfulness.

"Yes. Now come on, lets get all fruity smelling."

It was easiest to let Grey climb in and then step in between Grey's legs and sink into the water himself.

Humming happily, he leaned against Grey's chest.

"Mmm. Perfect." Grey folded up a towel, rested it beneath that poor bald head. "God, I've taken a thousand baths in here. This room used to be yellow."

"Oh, that must have been cheerful looking." Not that the pale blue wasn't, but yellow would suit two little boys. "Did you and Raine share the bath as boys?"

"When we were little. We had these plastic boats - mine was red and Raine's was blue."

He could just picture them -- skinny boys with missing teeth, playing in the tub with their boats.

"It sounds like fun."



"It was. I like our big tub at home better. We all fit." Grey's hands rubbed the bubbles over him, stroking his skin.

He smiled and hummed, enjoying the lovely touches of Grey's fingers, loving that Grey felt up to them.

Grey murmured a little against his skin and Whit thought Grey dozed a bit before Raine came in with oranges and tea.

He smiled at Raine and nodded at the commode. "Put down the lid and sit with us for a bit?"

It felt so good, so *\*normal\** to be in the tub with Grey. Having Raine there as well just made it more so.

Raine sat, bare feet propped on the edge of the tub. "You should wake him up. The tea is hot."

He nodded. And Grey had missed so much time, sleeping all the time.

He turned his head to kiss Grey's collarbone, tongue licking the drops of water from it. "Raine's brought tea and oranges, Grey."

"Mmm. Oranges." Grey's eyes opened. "Was there honey?"

"Of course there was. Here, my Grey. Drink." Raine said the elders insisted that this tea would help Grey heal.

Whit prayed they were right. As positive as he was trying to be, as much as he was trying to live in the moments they had, he was not ready to lose Grey yet. Not at all. He wanted those moments to last a proper lifetime.

He peeled an orange, the juices running down his fingers. He offered a slice over to Grey.

Grey ate eagerly, licking and lapping the juice from his fingers. They needed more of these. Now.

He couldn't stop his moan, didn't want to. Grey's tongue felt amazing, hot and soft. If it had been a long time since Grey had had an appetite, it had been even longer since eating had been a sensual affair.

"I want another, please." Grey's eyes were dark, hungry, alive.

"Drink some tea, first, my Grey."

Whit nodded. If they had to bribe Grey every sip, they would.

"Is it yummy?" He took a sip of his, the honey sweetening it nicely, the flavor beneath a bit odd but not horrible.

Grey tried it and - instead of growling - actually hummed and took another drink. "It's good."

Raine beamed, managing not to bounce. "It smelled good."

"Drink it all up," Whit suggested. "I'll bet Raine would be happy to make you more."

"As much as you want. It was made for you." Raine split more oranges into sections, putting them on a little plate on the edge of the tub.

As soon as Grey had finished his tea, Whit began to feed him more oranges, fingers slipping between Grey's lips.

Grey relaxed under him, smiling like he was in Heaven. It was worth it - leaving their home, coming here - just for this moment right here.

He rubbed his cheek against Grey's chest, smiling himself as he reached out to take Raine's hand, the three of them connected and sharing the peace.

"I should make a real breakfast for us."

Grey grumbled. "In a little while. Then we can all help."

Whit nodded. Pancakes were yummy but took a lot of work, a lot of time, and it wasn't fair to leave one person alone in the kitchen cooking.

"It'll be fun." He grinned and squeezed Raine's fingers. "We can steal bites and it'll look like mice were eating the edges of the pancakes."

Grey laughed softly, nodded. "And we should have sausage. Is there sausage in the freezer?"

"Oh, I hope so. That sounds delicious. What about biscuits?" What all could they tempt their Grey into eating?

Raine chuckled. "Granny's biscuits are in a plastic bag on the counter. Biscuits, beans, the makings for cornbread."

"I want tuna salad and tomato for lunch, maybe. And ice cream. Do you think I can have ice cream?"

The chemo had made Grey terribly sensitive to hot and cold, stealing even the ease of ice chips from him.

"What flavor do you want?" Whit asked. If they didn't have it, he or Raine could go get some. Or he was sure one of the family would be happy to bring some over.

"Cherry."

Raine laughed, "Vanilla."

"No. Cherry."

"Cherry \*and\* vanilla," Whit suggested. "Oh! Have you got or does someone you know have an ice cream maker? Wouldn't that be fun? Making our own? Then we could make vanilla and add in cherries to some of it."

"They're cheap now. We'll go get one in Phoenix. We can make a bunch of little batches."

He laughed. "Oh, that's going to be fun! What other flavors would you like, Grey? We can have as many as we want if we're doing our own. I want chocolate. But only if you take turns feeding it to me."

"Pistachio and maybe banana."

Raine chuckled. "Prickly pear?"

Whit made a face. "How about strawberry?"

"Oh. Strawberry..." Grey's hands tightened around his waist.

He smiled and nodded. "We could buy extra strawberries for... other things."

Raine smiled. "We could. Dip them in chocolate or float them in a glass of champagne."

Grey rumbled softly at the longing in Raine's voice, that underlying sorrow.

Whit stroked the too thin belly, petting and offering comfort. "We can do all of those. And the ice cream. Something for every day."

"That sounds good. It all sounds good. More tea, Raine?"

"Yes, drink it up. Drink all you want."

He hid his grin against Grey's chest. Raine was going to drown Grey in that tea. "One more cup and then we should get out before the water turns to ice and we turn to prunes."

"We should. Family will start coming soon. They won't be able to stay away." Grey stretched beneath him. "Do you think my hair will start coming back?"

He reached up and stroked his fingers over the poor bald head. "It will. Soon it will be as long as Raine's again."

"You think so? Do you think it will be right again?" Grey blushed, looked down as Raine got up and wandered off. "I know it's vain..."

"You're a beautiful man, Grey. Of course you want it to be right again. I want it too. For now you'll have to live with it being... interesting."

"It's ugly. I know it is." Grey must be feeling better, to care about his looks.

Whit shook his head. "Not ugly. Different. Striking. You could never be ugly, Grey." He would always want his lovers, no matter how they changed.

"I hate it." Grey leaned in, kissed him once, so gently. "But I didn't have a choice."

He blinked hard, eyes wet. "It'll grow back," he told Grey fiercely. It *would*.

"Promise me."

"I promise."

Because either it would grow back or Grey didn't get better and then it wouldn't matter. But he was determined to see his promise kept. "I'm going to watch it come back and I'm going to rub my hands over your head when it's short short and laugh as your hair tickles my palms. And I'm going to see how you look with it at that awkward length where you can't braid it, but it's too long to be neat."

Grey watched him, trusting him, drinking in his words just like Grey had accepted Raine's for years.

"And I'll watch it as it becomes long again. I'll watch it as it moves around me, caressing me while you make love to me, while you're inside me and all around me. It will be wonderful, Grey."

His voice had grown husky, his hands wrapping around Grey's arms, holding onto his lover.

"You promise." Grey held him, hands trembling against him.

"With everything I am."

He slid his hands up over Grey's scalp and brought their lips together, pouring all of his love and his need for Grey to be better, to be whole, to be \*theirs\* again, into it.

Grey sobbed into the kiss, just once, then kissed him back, tongue sliding against his bottom lip, pushing into his mouth.

He opened to Grey, gave himself to his lover, offered everything he was and took everything Grey was in return.

It was almost perfect, only Raine's flavor missing.

"Come on, both of you and help me make..." A spoon clattered to the floor, Raine moaning. "He's not well enough to."

Whit broke the kiss and turned to Raine, holding out his hand. "It's just a kiss and it's missing you."

Raine groaned, coming right to them like he was drawn. "Yes, please. Please."

"Raine. Shut up and kiss me." Grey's growl made him laugh, so familiar. So \*right\*.

Whit watched them for a moment, as their lips met, the long noses sliding against one another, tongues pushing back and forth, in Raine's mouth and then in Grey's, then Raine's again. Then he cried out and and pushed into the kiss, their flavors mingling all together.

It felt so good. So good.

He'd live in this moment forever if he could.

Raine tasted like tears, Grey like smoke and honey and both of them together were perfect, heady, his own.

The kiss broke slowly, reluctantly, their foreheads resting together, their breath mingling.

"Love you," Whit whispered. "I love you both. Forever."

Grey and Raine nodded. Together. One.

His earth and sky. His.

He held on.

## Chapter Eleven

He walked in the dark, watching the sun rise over the mountains, watched the lizards scurry and the cactus light up every morning like it was his last one.

Of course, he didn't know.

So he didn't sleep. He walked.

It was funny, sort of, how he'd been the one to sleep and Raine the one to stay awake for hours and hours. Now, Raine would curl up with Whit and sleep through the night, until deep in the morning.

He just walked and ate oranges and talked with Grandpa and Gran and his family. If this was dying, it was good. Satisfying.

If it was living, he'd take that, too.

He felt Grandpa's presence next to him as the sky grew lighter, one strong hand moving to rest on his shoulder, to squeeze.

"Morning." His hair was coming back, the wind just moving the fuzz.

"It is. Another beautiful one -- the desert's happy her sons are home."

"It's good to be here." He missed the ocean, but it was a distant hurt, just a bruise.

"How are you feeling this morning?"

"Good. Stronger. Still tired. I worry. I worry that life is seeping away from me."

"That's because you're waiting to see what will happen instead of fighting." Grandpa turned him, eyes that he saw in the mirror every morning looking into him. "Come to the sweat lodge today. Let the people fight with you. We must begin the Night Way. We'll make war against the demon that walks your bones."

"I..." He wasn't sure. "We should speak to Raine. Whit."

He wasn't sure anymore.

It was odd.

"Your brother and your lover want you to fight for your life, of course. We will all give you our strength. With so many the cancer cannot win." Grandpa sounded so sure.

"And if it is my time? Can we fight that?"

"If it is your time it doesn't matter what we do, Grey. But what if the spirits are testing us? What if they want to see if you are willing to fight with everything and everyone you have to keep your life? You must show them that you *want* to live, Grey. Not that you are waiting to see what happens to your life."

"I want to live, ba-ba. What will Raine do without me?"

"Let's not find out."

Grandpa's hand squeezed his shoulder, the sun bright behind him, the long braid steel-grey and shining in the light.

"Shall I tell the others? Prepare the sweat lodge? Let them know you are going on the Ye'i bichai?"

"I want to be an old man here in the desert. I want to live." He nodded, heart pounding.

"When the sun is setting in the sky, leave your brother and your lover and come to the sweat lodge. It is time for the Night Way."

"Yes." Warm arms enveloped him, held him, helped him. He was so tired.

So fucking tired.

"It's good you came home, Grey. You need your family to help."

Grandpa turned him and together they headed back to the house, to where Raine and Whit slept. They sat together at the table, not speaking, just sitting together, the wind blowing the scents of the desert in.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, Whit coming down, yawning. "Oh. Grandpa. Hi."

Whit's hands slid over his shoulders, and a soft kiss dropped on his head.

"Good morning, Whit." Grandpa stood, smiled. "Ready yourself, Grey."

"I will. I'll be there. We'll fight." There would be no food for him today, nothing but that endless tea.

Whit smiled and nodded at Grandpa and then, once the door had closed, leaned down to kiss him. "What does he mean about readying yourself?"

He smiled against the kiss. "There's going to be a Ye'i bichai. Starting tonight. To get rid of the cancer."

Whit's whole body went tight. "A Ye'i bichai? Like with fasting and chanting and being up all night sweating?"

"Basically. It is the Night Way. It takes eight days." He wasn't going to argue the point.

Whit sat down hard on the chair next to his. "Are you sure you're up to it, Grey?" Whit's eyes were wide and worried.

"No, but I need to try." He took Whit's hand and squeezed. "I need to fight."

"What if it kills you? You're only just coming back from the chemo." Whit's free hand slid over his head.

"Then it kills me." He nestled into the touch. "I'm tired, Whit. So tired and I can't sleep."

Whit made a soft sound in the back of his throat. "Oh, Grey."

Standing, Whit held him close, his head on Whit's chest. He could feel each thump of Whit's heart. Grey leaned, eyes closing with something between relief and exhaustion. Whit's hands held him tight, fingers curling around his arms, as Whit rocked him slowly.

"What do you think Raine will say?"

"What does he think Raine will say about what?" His Raine padded in, eyes shadowed.

"Grandpa wants Grey to do a Ye'i bi... a Night Way."

Raine nodded. "He spoke to me yesterday."

"You knew about this already? Aren't you worried about what it could do to Grey? He's so weak. Eight whole days, Raine. Fasting and not sleeping and stuff."

"This will heal him." Raine believed completely, wholly, always had.

What sat back down on his chair rather abruptly. He looked a little stunned, scared. "I... don't know what to say." Whit's eyes met his. "I love you."

"I love you." He smiled, held one hand out. "If I'm meant to die here, I will, but I don't want to. I'm not ready to die, Whit."

For the first time in months, he meant that.

Whit's hand wrapped around his, held on tight. "I'm not ready for you to die yet, either, Grey. I need you." Whit looked past him up at Raine. "I need you *both*."



He heard Raine's soft sound, then Raine was encouraging him to stand. "You look tired. Whit, he needs us. He needs to sleep."

He shook his head. No sleeping. He didn't want to miss anything.

Whit was nodding too though, standing, still holding his hand. "You're going to be up for days, and without any food -- you need to rest before that, sleep -- recharge."

"I can't."

"You must." I won't lose you, my Grey. Come now.

"I can't." I will not leave you, brother. Lover. Life.

Whit bit his lower lip, chewing on it a moment, and then he nodded. "Let's bring a mattress down and put it on the porch. Even if you can't sleep, at least you can rest, and still be in the middle of things, still see the desert, the sky."

Raine beamed at Whit and he couldn't say no, couldn't refuse his family anything. "That's too much work, isn't it?"

"Oh, Grey, we'd move the earth and sky for you if we could." Whit hugged him tight, clinging for a moment. "Nothing is too much work if it makes you happy."

"Come on. The sofa is close. Ready. You can stretch out." Raine got him moving, walking.

"Do you want an orange?" Whit asked. "And there's some of that homemade bread left from yesterday. The one with the raisins and the nuts. Oh, I forgot you can't eat, can you? Um... water?"

"Tea, Whit love. He needs Granny's tea." Raine stroked his forehead, lips soft and dry.

"Okay. I can do that. I'm getting good at making that." Whit made a face and gave him a wink.

"It's good." It was. He liked it. Drank a ton of it.

"If you say so." Whit smiled and slid a hand along his arm. "I'll brew a big pot of it."

Raine got him settled on the sofa, wrapping around him with a soft sound. "You will live."

"Will I?"

"You have to."

Raine's lips mapped his face, closed his eyes for him.

He supposed Raine was right.

He had to.

\*\*\*

After the first night, he was tired and sick, hot and cold and missing his lovers. The chanting was everywhere, the sickness on his skin, seeping out in his sweat, and he fought the urge to just get up, leave. Go home and not lose these days.

The sand was everywhere, the smoke making the world hazy and wrong and... This was a mistake. He knew it was. It was time to go.

His grandfather's hand landed on him, strong and sure. "Stay."

Stay.

After the third day, the vomiting started, violent heaving that left him filthy and weak as a kitten. He railed against the world – against the spirits and the doctors and the gods and his own weakness that had let the cancer in, let it eat at him. He could hear ba-ba's voice, wrapping around him, pushing through him.

Digging into his blood.

Tearing from him.

Raine. Raine, love.

\*\*\*

He could hear his Grey. He could.

Five days.

Five days and he couldn't breathe, couldn't sleep, couldn't stop itching.

Raine paced up and down the hallways, scratching and worrying, snarling and fretting at Whit in turns. He refused to eat, refused to rest.

Please, let it work.

Please.

He needed. Grey was his. His heartbeat. His life.

Whit finally stopped him by standing in the path he was wearing out on the old rug in the front room, refusing to get out of his way.

"Raine. Please. You need to eat."

"I can't." He shook, so many days. His Grey.

"You have to." Whit's hands wrapped around his, holding on tight. "He *\*needs\** you to be strong, Raine."

"I can't. I miss him. I *\*miss\** him, Whit." He could feel it. Hurting him.

Whit went suddenly pale. "Is he... he isn't, is he? You'd know, right?"

"I would. I would know. Grey wouldn't leave me here alone."

Whit took a deep breath, color slowly returning to his cheeks. "Come sit with me. Share an orange. He'd like that, if you ate oranges while we waited."

"He loves those oranges." He followed Whit's lead, feeling lost.

Whit sat him down on the couch, reaching out to snag two oranges from the ceramic bowl on the coffee table.

One was pressed into his hand, Whit's fingers wrapping his around it. Then Whit began to peel the second one. "I've eaten so many of these since he went to the ritual. The smell makes it feel like he's here." Whit gave him a wry smile. "I've even been tempted to make your gran's tea."

"Ew." Raine winked, nails digging into the flesh. "That stuff smells like old bedsheets."

Whit's laughter was startled. "It *\*does\**."

He ate one piece of orange, the juice burning his throat. He wanted things right again.

He wanted to love again.

Whit's fingers moved over his, pulling off another section and guiding it up to his mouth.

"Three more days. It's more than half over."

"I miss him. I miss us. I miss *\*me\**." He hated this. Hated the cancer.

Whit nodded, blinking hard, eyes swimming. "I know. Oh, God, Raine, I know."

Suddenly Whit's arms wrapped around him, the hug tight, hard.

He pushed into those arms, face lifted for a kiss. Please. Please, Whit.

Whit's mouth met his, desperation and fear in the kiss, giving it an edge.

Yes. Please. Raine sobbed, needing to feel, to be loved and touched and whole.

Whit's tongue pushed into his mouth, Whit leaning against him. They went back onto the couch together, the orange crushing between them, filling the air with the sharp scent.

It was like Grey was there, somehow, between them. With them. Like his spirit was there.

Whit's fingers tugged open his shirt, slid on his skin, as a needy whimper filled his mouth.

He nodded, not even hard yet, but needing to know. To believe. "Whit."

"Love you. Love you and Grey. Need you." Whit's fingers were trembling, sliding over his chest, from one nipple to the other, down over his belly.

"Please. Please, love. Make me real."

Whit nodded, mouth hard against his own, teeth grazing his lower lip.

His shirt was opened the rest of the way and pushed off his chest, Whit's fingers still trembling as they undid the button on his pants, pulled down the zipper.

He arched up, giving Whit all he was, all he had.

Whit met his need, pressing back into him, rubbing them together, mouth sliding away to wrap around his nipple.

"I love you." He'd missed this. Missed so much in worrying for Grey that he and Whit hadn't touched. Hadn't loved.

A shudder moved through Whit, the lovely fingers between them again, opening Whit's pants and then pulling their cocks together.

"Oh. Oh, Raine. \*Raine\*."

"Yes. Yes, my Whit." He met Whit's eyes, fingers framing his face. "Won't leave you alone."

"Oh..." Whit swallowed and then they were kissing again, Whit pulling on their cocks.

He put all he was into the kiss, all his love and need, his fear and desire and passion.

Whit took it all, and demanded more, like a man starving. They were both so hungry for love, for each other, for Grey.

"Love!" He was hard. He needed. He ached. "Please!"

"Yes. Oh, Raine. It's been so long." Faster and faster, Whit stroked them together, skin sliding silky and hot.

He nodded, panting against Whit's lips, holding on. "I won't leave you here. I promise."

He felt Whit's smile against his lips, saw it in the familiar eyes. "That means Grey won't either. He'd never leave you, us."

Whit's words were breathless, his body moving, undulating over Raine.

"No. He can't. We need him."

He laughed, suddenly happy.

Whit's eyes lit up at his laughter and his lover jerked hard against him, hand squeezing their pricks tightly together, tight enough that he could feel Whit's cock pulse just before his belly was covered in come.

His own body responded, seed pouring from him, joining Whit's, keeping them together.

Whit stilled on him, panting, eyes holding his. "Love."

"Yeah. Love." He nodded, easy in his skin.

Whit's hand cupped his cheek, a soft smile brightening the tired features. Then Whit rested against him, head on his shoulder.

"We can rest. He's with family." He closed his eyes, holding tight. So sleepy.

He was so sleepy.

"So are we," whispered Whit.

Yes.

Yes, so were they.

\*\*\*

He'd lost the days.

The nights.

Whit.

Raine.

Breath.

Fear.

Pain.

Sickness.

Anything.

All things.

Grey lost himself and in that moment, the smoke cleared, the sun pouring through and lighting the world.

\*\*\*

Eight days.

They had been without Grey for eight days.

He'd been scared, hopeful, worried. Raine had cried and screamed, snapped and snarled, and railed against the cancer, had clung to him and pushed him away, but always had believed this was Grey's last, best hope.

He paced the kitchen, checking the clear broth he and Raine had made for Grey's return, making sure it was still hot, still ready.

The fresh bread sat on the counter, knife and butter next to it, the table set, ready. As was the mattress on the porch in case Grey was too weak to sit at the table to eat.

"He should be back soon," he said to Raine. Again.

Raine nodded. "He should. He's fine. He'll be fine."

There was the beginning of pure panic in those eyes.

He tried not to let that scare him – he knew they had a connection, if Raine was panicking... it meant he was missing Grey after eight days. He refused to let himself believe it was for any other reason.

He went over and took Raine's hands. He would find the strength to keep them going the last moments. "He's going to need us to be strong for him when he gets here, Raine. He's been through so much in the last eight days." Eight days, eight weeks, eight months. They had done so many terrible things to Grey's body to try get rid of the cancer.

"You can do it. We can do it together."

"I can. You can." Raine nodded. "Did we get oranges?"

Whit nodded. "We did. And there's ice cream in the freezer. The broth and bread are all ready."

All they needed now was Grey.

The truck pulled up, the dust billowing up and the men carried Grey up to the porch. Grey was pale and still, thin.

So still, that for a second that felt like a lifetime he thought that Grey was dead.

Then Grey blinked slowly and Whit's heart started beating again, a long gasp filling his lungs.

"Grey." Raine pushed out the door. "Bring him in. Into the bedroom. In. He needs food."

"Raine."

"Yes. Yes, Grey. Home. You're home."

Whit went fluttering over, touching Grey, touching Raine, getting in the way as the men tried to carry Grey up to the bedroom. "Welcome home. Oh, welcome home."

"Whit." Grey's hand was shaking as it reached for him.

"Right here." Oh, Grey looked horrible. Like he was on death's door. Of course he'd looked worse after one or two particularly bad chemo sessions.

He took Grey's hand, held it until they had Grey settled. "Are you hungry? Raine's got broth, homemade bread. Even oranges. Whatever you want."

He closed his mouth on the questions he really wanted to ask. Are you all right? Did it work?

"Yes. Hungry. Please." Those eyes met his and they looked happy. Happy.

A tremulous laugh bubbled up from him. "Raine!" he called out. "Raine -- he's hungry!"

"I heard! I'm grabbing the oranges!" Raine was laughing, happiness ringing through the house.

Whit flung his arms around Grey's shoulders and hugged him tightly, kissed him.

He hadn't heard Raine laugh like that in too long.

They settled Grey in the bed and then all the family melted away, Grey reaching for him. "I need a bath."

He cuddled in, arms going around Grey's waist. "You do," he agreed. He didn't care though, he wasn't going to let a little needing a bath keep him from Grey.

"Let's see how you feel after you eat -- if you're not up to a bath we can give you a sponge bath." He grinned. "I've always wanted to play nurse."

Grey laughed - laughed, thank god - and nodded. "I missed you. Eight days. I've not been away from him so long."

He nodded. He knew. Raine had told him. "It was worth it though, wasn't it?"

He could feel it, and it wasn't just wistful thinking, he could see it in Grey's eyes.

"It was hard, but I had to." Grey nodded, the defeat in those tired eyes gone.

"I was so scared." He could admit that now.

"So was I." Grey settled, eyes closing. "I could sleep for days."

He laughed -- oh there was their Grey, ready to sleep while Raine just went and went.

"Raine! Hurry, he wants to sleep and we need to feed him first!"

"I'm coming, Whit-love. Keep him awake. I need my kisses!"

"Oh, kisses! That sounds like the perfect way to keep you awake, doesn't it? I'll do all the work."



He leaned up to bring their mouths together, almost crying at the sweet feeling of Grey's lips against his.

Grey tasted horrible, but the heat against him? The pressure? Made it worth it.

He took one kiss after another before their lips slid apart. "I love you," he told Grey, feeling it pounding hard and true inside him.

"Love you." Grey's eyes fell shut, breath slowing.

"No you don't. Oranges. Bread. You need food." Raine was... Raine was awake. Awake.

It made him giddy, seeing Grey and Raine being so... Grey and Raine.

Oh, Grey looked exhausted, done in, and Raine's face was still drawn, the bags under his eyes heavy, but things that had been askew and wrong seemed have sort of... slipped back into place.

He nudged Grey with his elbow. "Better listen -- you know what he's like when it comes to feeding us."

"I do. I'm hungry." Grey smiled, mouth opening like a little bird's.

He sat back a little, grinning, watching as Raine popped a bite of bread into Grey's mouth.

Grey didn't eat much, but he ate eagerly, moaning over the oranges, smiling at the soup.

The tea was refused. "It smells bad."

Raine frowned, sniffed the vile stuff. "It smells like it always does."

"It smells bad."

Whit giggled and nodded. "It's always smelled bad."

"It didn't smell bad before, but I don't want it." Oh, stubborn Grey.

"Then I'll make you some Earl Grey."

Whit leaned against Grey and reached out to stroke Raine's arm. "He'll be asleep before it's made. How about some water? He can have the tea when he wakes up."

Raine started to argue, then smiled at him. "Always so practical, our Whit."

He nodded and tugged Raine close for a kiss. That was him, that was his place.

"And then we'll sleep all together."

Raine licked his lips. "He's already sleeping, love."

Sure enough, Grey was sound asleep, a smile on his face, fingers on both of them.

"Oh." He reached out and touched the beloved face, then touched Raine's. "He's going to be all right," he whispered.

"He is. Our Grey." Raine reached for him, tears sliding down the drawn face. "I've been so scared."

Whit knew that it could all turn on a dime, that this hope could be crushed tomorrow, but now it was theirs.

He nodded, meeting Raine's hug, his own tears of relief mingling together with Raine's. "I know, love. I know." Him, too.

They held on to each other, hands moving again and again to touch Grey, to include him even if he was asleep, in their quiet, tearful celebration.

"I want him back. I want to make love, all of us together."

Raine's words were a plea.

And it echoed his own wishes. "Soon," he said. "Once he's slept and eaten and slept some more."

"Do you think... do you think he'll be able to? That he'll be strong again?"

"I do, Raine. There's such a difference already. He'll be our Grey again soon. I believe it."

He did. And if there were the odd worry and doubt, he chose to ignore them. Because he needed to believe it.

## Chapter Twelve

Grey was sleeping.

Sleeping.

Raine sat at the end of the bed, tears sliding down his cheeks as he watched. Grey's hair was starting to grow in again, all silver now, the black completely gone. The cancer, the treatments, the pain, they'd etched themselves into his twin, made them so very different, separate in a way they had never been.

Still, Grey had beaten it, hadn't he? Grey had survived, was healing, was growing stronger.

There was no more reason to worry.

Still, he watched, didn't he?

Night after night, hour after hour.

Whit came in with a tray of food, stopping when he caught sight of Raine's tears. "Raine? What's the matter?"

"I... Nothing. Nothing. I was just watching him."

"Oh." Whit took a deep breath, and carefully put the tray down before coming over to wrap around him. "You had me scared for a moment."

"Sorry. Sorry, I just." He held his hands open, at a loss for word.

Whit rubbed his arms, soft kisses landing on his back. "He's getting better, Raine. He \*is\*. Every day."

"I know. I just. I want him back to the way he was. The way we were."

Whit's hands slid through his hair, pushed it off his face, fingers wiping away his tears. "His body needs time, Raine."

Sighing, Whit leaned. "I know you want him completely better right away. So do I. We need to be patient though. We have to give him time."

"I have been patient. I've been strong and patient and good and I'm \*tired\*!" His eyes went wide as his voice went strident and panicked, as the fury he hadn't even known he felt bubbled up.

Grey's eyes popped open, hands reaching for him. "Raine."

"No. No, don't. I. I. Please." He shook his head, mad at himself, at God, at Grey.

Whit kept touching him. "Raine? Love, what's \*wrong\*?"

Whit sounded confused, worried.

"I. I." His mouth opened and closed, just shaking with rage.

Grey sat up, eyes fastened onto his. "You can be angry. You can. You've been so strong."

"How do you know? You weren't paying attention!" He slapped his hand over his mouth. What was he saying?

"I did." Every second, my Raine. "I swear to you."

Oh. Grey. My Grey. "You were going to die."

"I didn't."

"Not yet."

Grey nodded. "Not yet."

"Nobody died. Nobody. We're all alive. We're all here. Raine... please. We're all here. Alive." Whit pleaded softly, fingers running over his skin.

"Whit. Let him be angry. It's safe." Grey's voice was sure, eyes never moving from his. "I was giving up. We left our home. We haven't made love."

Raine nodded, hands curled into fists. "You were sick. You were mean to me. You were going to leave me."

Whit whimpered softly, curled against his back, head on his shoulder, just holding on.

"I didn't." Grey reached out, held his face. "Raine." My love. My home. Mine.

"I hate you."

Grey shook his head. "No, you don't."

No. He didn't.

He couldn't.

Whit shook his head, too, pressing harder against him like Whit was trying to melt into him. "You love him. You love each other."

"We do." Grey actually smiled. Smiled. "You and Whit saved my life."

"Grandfather saved your life."

"No." Grey leaned in, staring into him. "I lived for you."

"For us, Raine. He stayed for us." Whit whispered the words, beginning to rock slowly against him.

"I've been so scared."

"I know."

Their fingers twined and he got lost in Grey's eyes, in the life there.

Whit kept rocking, murmuring. "It's going to be all right. It's going to be all right. I love you. Love you both."

"It's going to be what it is." Grey frowned, staring at him. "Do you still want me?"

"I love you." It's been so long. I don't know. I don't want to hurt you.

"That's not what I asked." Raine. Raine. I want to know. I need to know.

Whit still against him, he could feel their lover holding his breath, one hand still moving against his belly. "We'll go slow. We'll take our time. You're so beautiful together..."

"I. I don't want to hurt him."

"You won't." You can't.

"Grey..."

"Raine."

"Then I'll go first."

Whit's warmth left his back, their lover moving around to look into his eyes. "First my tongue and then my fingers and then my cock and then your cock and we won't hurt him, Raine. We'll love him and he'll love us."

He was caught, trapped between his need to agree and his need to protect. Grey, though, his Grey stretched back, offered himself to Whit.

Whit's fingers slid along his cheek, his lover's eyes holding his, so full of worry and need and love. Then Whit pressed their lips together, the kiss short, but deep.

"I love you," Whit told him, smiling softly.

Turning, sliding up, Whit lay on top of his Grey, kissing his twin full on the mouth, tongue parting Grey's lips.

Grey groaned, pale hands sliding over Whit's ass, tugging them close together.

Whit's whimper was muffled by Grey's mouth, the slender body rippling, moving against Grey. Whit's fingers slid through the short white hair, pushing it off Grey's face.

"Love. Whit. Prove to me I'm alive." Grey leaned into Whit's touch.

"To all of us," murmured Whit, tongue sliding on Grey's face, moving over the long nose and high cheek bones that was a mirror to Raine's own.

Whit slid his fingers along Grey's sides, moving them back up again and finding a nipple, teasing it.

"Love..." Grey moaned, head tossing and Raine found himself groaning, growling, needing to be a part of that, but caught in his stillness.

"You taste good," murmured Whit, lips and tongue continuing their journey, moving down along Grey's neck. "Raine, love. Come and taste."

"Please. Please, Raine. I need."

Raine's heart clenched. He'd never made his Grey beg. Never. He pushed into Grey's arms, lips sliding over Grey's skin.

Whit's cry was sweet, one of his lover's hands sliding over his back, fingers stroking him through the light shirt he wore.

Shifting slightly to the right, Whit gave him room to lick and taste and explore.

"Love you." It was his Grey - not medicine, not bitterness. His Grey.

Yes.

Please, yes.

Whit brought their lips together for a moment, sharing a soft kiss with him before giving one to Grey and then slowly making his way down along Grey's body, leaving one wet kiss after another on Grey's skin.

He went up, meeting Grey's eyes as their lips met, the kiss enough to stop his heart, stop time.

Every now and then one of Whit's hands would slide on him, pushing beneath his shirt to touch his skin, or grab his ass, making him a part of Whit's explorations.

Sweet, soft sounds were coming from Whit, a new one for each new patch of skin their lover explored.

Raine barely paid attention; he was caught in Grey's eyes. In the pleasure there. The happiness.

The life.

The love.

Whit suddenly cried out, tongue flicking across the tip of Grey's cock. "Oh, it's been too long." Moaning, Whit's lips wrapped around Grey's cock head, lips hollowing as he began to suck.

Grey's eyes went wide, lips forming a perfect 'o'. "Raine."

He nodded, almost laughing. "Yes. Yes, my Grey. It's good. It's good."

Whit hummed an agreement, head starting to bob enthusiastically.

Grey whimpered, shifted, pushed toward his arms, hips jerking restlessly. "Whit. Raine. I need."

Whit pulled off, grinning a little wildly up at Grey. "I can taste how much." Then Whit's head ducked, pushing between Grey's legs and doing as he'd promised, hands rolling Grey's ass up so Whit could rim him.

"Whit. Whit. Raine. I..." Grey's hands opened and closed, eyes rolling wildly and Raine almost panicked. Almost worried.

"Taste so good, Grey. Like \*you\*." Whit moaned, kept working Grey's ass, while his hands rolled Grey's balls.

Raine swooped down, mouth dropping over Grey's cock, greedy for the salt and bittersweet flavor that was more familiar than his own breath.

Between them, he and Whit had Grey writhing and calling out, long-fingered hands grabbing at their hair.

Grey came, flavor exploding in his mouth, hips jerking up, snapping into his lips.

"Oh. Oh, Grey, you're beautiful," murmured Whit, looking, watching as the pleasure moved through Grey.

Grey pinked, but Whit told the truth. Flushed and gasping, panting, silver hair on dark sheets - his Grey was stunning.

Whit kissed him, a finger pushing into Grey's body. "Will you fuck him, Raine? He's almost ready for you."

"Almost?" He leaned forward, nuzzling Grey's belly.

"Another finger... I want to..." Whit pushed a second finger in and twisted his hand, beaming as Grey jerked and cried out.

"Again, Whit. Do it again." He watched Grey with a fascination.

"Yes." Whit's fingers twisted, pushed, making Grey cry out again, then again.

"Look at him." Grey groaned, lips parted, entire body flushed with pleasure. Raine's cock jerked, bobbing as he shot without even a touch.

"Oh!" Whit leaned in over Grey and licked his come from his twin's body.

"You made me. So beautiful. So fine."

Grey nodded, the smile just beatific. "Whit. Whit, you."

Whit nodded, trembling as he settled between Grey's legs, prick dark and hard as it nudged at Grey's hole. "I love you, Grey."

"Love." Oh. Oh, look at his Grey. Look how beautiful.

Whit watched Grey's face as he pushed, cock slowly sinking into Grey's body. "Oh! Oh, God. Grey."

"So good. Feels so good. I feel you."

"Yes. Oh, Raine. He's *\*so\** tight." Whimpering, Whit began to move, taking Grey with deep, careful strokes.



"Is it good, my Grey? Is it fine, feeling him deep?" He leaned down, taking Grey's mouth, gasping as Grey kissed him back, took his lips.

"Oh, my loves. Beautiful. So beautiful." Whit began to move faster, breath gasping from him, fingers wrapping around Grey's hips.

Grey's hand wrapped around his head, holding him in the kiss. Demanding his response.

He could feel each one of Whit's thrusts in the way Grey's body moved, the way the air was pushed from his twin's mouth into his own.

Faster, and faster Whit moved, his soft sounds joining the slap of Grey and Whit's flesh in their quiet room.

Grey shivered, fingers opening and closing in his hair. He lifted his head, smiling down into Grey's eyes. "You're going to make him come, Whit."

"Good." Such pleasure and satisfaction in that one word. Whit laughed softly, the sound sweet. "I love you. I love you both."

"Both of you quit talking and let's make love, damnit." Grey's growl just made him smile.

This time Whit's laughter was breathless, and his movements increased, his thighs slapping against Grey's ass over and over again.

He reached down, fingers sliding over Grey's cock. "I need to see you, Grey. I need to believe."

Grey nodded, eyes rolling back in his head. Beautiful. Alive. Real.

"Oh, God! Yes!" Whit's hips started jerking, the smooth rhythms giving way beneath pure need.

His eyes filled with tears again as Grey came, heat sure and slick on his fingers.

Whit cried out, jerking one more time before freezing, a deep rose flushing over his body, his face.

Raine curled in close, cheek on Grey's shoulder, even as Whit leaned forward into Grey's arms.

There were tears in Whit's eyes, a smile on his lips.

Grey hummed, wriggled a moment and then started snoring, the sound familiar and right.

Whit giggled, one hand finding his, twining their fingers together.

"He's going to be okay." He couldn't stop grinning.

Whit nodded, rubbing their noses together and grinning back. "Yeah. He really is."

"Yeah." Raine could choose to believe or choose to worry. Believe was the far better option.

"Sleep with us, Raine. The three of us together."

"I'll try." He smiled, leaned to give Whit a kiss. "Grey sleeps for me."

Grey always had.

\*\*\*

Grey wandered through the house, munching and nibbling all the little odds and ends that Raine had left for them to eat.

Nuts. Pretzels. These little tortilla rollups.

They needed to go home.

He missed their life.

The family was wonderful, active and supportive and strong, but...

He needed his home back and this wasn't it.

Not anymore.

He found his twin and Whit, out on the porch. Whit was reading, leaning against Raine as they swung in the porch chair.

They both looked up as he came out, Whit just beaming at him and shifting to make room on the chair. "Grey! Come sit with us."

"I want to go home."

There was no sense beating around the bush, really.

Raine blinked over. "We are home."

"No. We're not. I want to go home."

Whit sat between them, a hand on each of their thighs. It felt good, normal. Almost right. Except that they weren't home.

"You mean back to the loft and the gallery and the antique store. Our lives."

"Yes." He wanted to go back to work. He wanted his camera.

Whit's hand squeezed his leg. "I'd like that. This place is beautiful, but I miss our home, my work."

"Yes. It's time."

Raine sighed. "But what if it's here that made you well?"

"Oh. Oh, Raine, no. It was us and Grey and Grandfather. Not the place." Whit shook his head and then turned to Grey, eyes worried. "Right?"

"No." Grey looked over at Raine. The doctors had said they had done what they could, that the numbers had improved as much as they would. They all knew that this wasn't the end of it. But it was the end for now. It was time to stop dying and go back and live for as many years as he could.

"So we can go back. Things can go back to normal." Whit squeezed his leg again and then leaned against Raine. "Don't you want that, too, Raine?"

"I. Yes." So scared. He'd done that, put that fear in Raine's eyes.

"We can't hide forever. I want Sunday brunch and our bathtub and your window."

"Your roof garden," Whit added. "Meals in front of the fire. Finger food in bed..."

Their lover's eyes shone brightly.

Grey nodded. "Our bed. My store. The rain."

Whit laughed. "Coffee from The Jungle Room, and sticky buns from Rosie's. Sitting in the dark at the movies." A sweet blush worked its way up Whit's face. "Trying not to get caught making out at The Dragon's Perch."

"Your kids. Lunch blowjobs." He couldn't stop smiling.

Whit nodded. "I have to let them know soon if I'm not going back -- my year's sabbatical is almost up."

Whit nudged Raine. "You're not playing -- what do you miss from home?"

"My kitchen. Shopping at Central Market for new things." Raine looked almost desperate for a moment. "Not lying and saying that you and Grey aren't mine to love."

"Oh, Raine..." Whit threw his arms around Raine, hugging him close and bringing their mouths together for a kiss. "I miss that, too -- miss not being \*us\*."

Grey nodded. "Make the reservations, Raine. We can go home."

Whit laughed happily, giving Raine another kiss and then turning to kiss him as well. "Home. With my twins. I like the sound of that."

"Yes. I need to go home." Grey looked over, met Raine's eyes. "I need to go home, my Raine. We need our lives back. I need to sit with you and drink wine from your lips."

He was tired of talking.

"It won't take us long to pack." Whit bounced in his seat, already making plans. "If we're home by the weekend we could have brunch out, informally let everyone know we're back, that you're well again."

"This weekend?" Raine looked shocked, a little scared. "But what..."

Grey's temper flared and he growled. "What? Don't you want to go back? Are you so caught up in me being sick that you can't bear it?"

Did Raine want him sick?

"No. No, that's no..."

"Then \*what\*?" Goddamnit, he was tired of this, tired of Raine fluttering and fussing.

Raine stood suddenly, the chair swaying. "Don't yell!"

"Don't be stupid!"

"I'm not stupid! You're an asshole!"

He stood up too, meeting Raine head-on. "I'm not dying just to give you something to have drama about."

The sound of the slap to his face hit him before the burn did.

Whit gasped loudly, but then all of a sudden started laughing softly. "Oh, now I truly know you're better."

They stared at each other, then they both started chuckling, their laughter getting louder, harder.

Whit stood with them, arms going around their waists, tugging them all together as they laughed and laughed.

Raine nodded, eyes just dancing. "Home. Home, home, home."

"Yes, home. The desert is beautiful, but we need to be home where we can be ourselves."

Whit leaned up and their mouths all met in a kiss as full of love and laughter as any they had shared.

Raine's fingers twined with his, just holding on tight.

It was good and right and almost perfect. Almost.

"Home," murmured Whit. "We're going home."

Yes. Home.

## Epilogue

Whit grinned at the kids as the bell went. "Don't forget your personal history projects are due on Monday!" he called out.

His smile widened at the collective groan that went up. He didn't blame them -- spring was here and it was promising to be a stellar weekend. He'd almost had the due date on the project be today. But then he would have been stuck grading over the weekend and now he had it free.

It was good to be the teacher.

He collected his things quickly, as eager as the kids to be off.

Grey and Raine were going to meet him halfway home at the Farmer's Market, and he all but trotted on his way there, eager to see them.

It felt like forever since they'd wandered together, even if it had in fact only been a couple of weeks.

With the bright sunlight shining, most of the stands at the market had drawn back their awnings, and Whit craned his neck, looking for his twins.

There they were - one head black as a crow's wing, one silver and shining like a beacon. He watched as Grey ate a bite of pear from Raine's fingers. No one would ever mistake them from one another again - Grey was still thin, the medicine and the pain aging him, marking him. Raine had grown stronger, supporting Grey whenever he stumbled.

They were beautiful.

His beautiful men.

He went slowly over to them, enjoying the way the sun shone in their hair and on their skin.

Grey saw him first, hand lifting in greeting. "Whit! Pears!"

Raine's laugh rang out. "And berries and the most amazing pistachios!"

He grinned at them, his smile wide enough it almost hurt. The love he felt for these two was overwhelming. And he wouldn't have it any other way.

He caught up to them, hands reaching to slide over Raine's arm, Grey's back. "I want a taste of everything."

"Of course." A bit of pear was rubbed over his lips, sweeter than Grey's fingers.

He moaned, tongue licking at his own lips, at Grey's fingers, before taking the bite in, crushing it with his teeth. "I don't know that I've ever had one so perfectly ripe."

"I bought five. I'm making a tart." Raine's smile warmed him through.

"Yum. Have you got whipping cream to go on top? What else looks good today?" He peeked into Raine's bag and stole one of the pistachios.

"There's some smoked salmon." One twin nodded, the other continued.

"Chocolate-covered coffee beans."

"Apples."

"Homemade strawberry jam."

"You haven't done the \*whole\* market yet, have you?" There was nothing like discovering new tastes and flavors with Grey and Raine.

They laughed, shook their head. "This was on the way here."

He giggled. Oh, he did love them.

"Let's get started then. I want to see if they have any of those big orange flower."

"Oh, those would be perfect on the dining room table." Raine's arm slipped into his.

He nodded, and they followed Grey up along one aisle, stopping at a stall with candied flower petals. "Oh, look! They're beautiful. How do you think they taste?"

"Pick some out. Try them." Grey smiled at the young girl behind the counter, charming her right off.

"Oh, lets try one of everything!"

He picked up a tray and started putting petals on it.

Raine followed right behind him, laughing and teasing, the heady scents of the flowers mingling with the soap and musk smell of his lovers.

Once Grey had paid for them, they stood off to the side and Whit laughed, feeling silly at eating flower petals and a bit nervous as well that they'd be awful. But Grey fed him a powdered sugar dusted red petal and it was delicious. Almost as good as licking the excess powder off Grey's fingers.

Grinning, he offered a purple one with a clear sugar glaze on it to Raine.

Raine's teeth clenched down on it, one of Raine's hands around his waist.

He could smell the sweetness of the sugar and the earthiness of the flower, Raine's own scent coloring it all. He leaned in, watching his lover's face as the delicate petal was eaten.

Raine's lips brushed his, the kiss barely there, feather-light. So sweet.

A shiver went through him, heat starting low in his belly and fanning out.

He swallowed, caught in Raine's eyes, in Raine's heat and scent and touch...

Grey's chuckle shattered the spell. "You are both wantons."

Raine smiled, nodded. "We are, but our lips are sweet."

Whit blushed softly, and met Grey's eyes, so dark beneath the fall of silver hair. "And we're \*your\* wantons with the sweet lips."

"You are." Grey reached out, fingers tracing his face. "We should find chocolate."

Raine nodded. "Raspberry syrup."

Whit laughed, winked. "Raspberry syrup isn't chocolate, Raine."

He skipped a few steps ahead, pretending a sudden interest in the vegetables one stand over to avoid any sudden goosing.

Raine's hair fell over his shoulder, one hand cupping his ass. "No, but I want to lick it off your skin, my Whit."

"Oh." He gasped softly, melting back into Raine's long body. "We'll get a big bottle of it."

Grey's hand appeared, the heavy copper bracelet that matched the one he and Raine wore catching the light. "Syrup and some fresh cream, yes?"

Raine nodded, took Grey's hand. "Yes, my Grey."

His hand slid over theirs caressing the warm skin. He brought their joined hands up to his mouth, placing soft kisses on their fingers. There was a time they wouldn't have been so overt in such a public place, but Grey's illness had taught Whit nothing if it had not taught him to not waste a second.



They stood together for a moment, just breathing together, loving each other.

Living together.

"I love you," he said softly, holding them both with his eyes.

"Yes." Grey nodded. "We know."

Raine laughed, squeezed his ass. "Let's go play, Whit."

"I can't think of anything I'd rather do right now."

With one arm through Grey's and the other through Raine's, he headed home.

It didn't get any better than this.

End