



Pyke's Peak

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Chapter One

Pyke was fairly certain that nothing less than a dozen college kids could make the kind of mess he was witnessing. The kitchen counters and table were strewn with pizza boxes, random take-out containers, and a slew of empty pop and beer bottles, not to mention a cluster of little paper umbrellas stuck in what appeared to be leftover cheese cubes. The kitchen in Laurel's apartment was disgusting, a complete sty, the likes of which Pyke hadn't seen since he'd lived in a frat house.

"What the hell happened in here?" He looked for an empty spot on the counter so he could put his box of doughnuts down and kept the Saturday paper tightly in his hand, not willing to risk the sticky drink residue.

"Charming, as usual." Laurel shuffled right past him to the coffee maker and snarled at it when she realized it was empty. "The least you could do is start the coffee when you let yourself in at the crack of dawn."

"It's almost noon." Pyke grinned at her. "Did you have a good night?"

"A very long one." She held her terrycloth bathrobe closed with one hand and stared mournfully at the empty carafe. "Girls' night. There was tequila."

"And you didn't invite me over?" Pyke took the carafe from her hand and pointed her to the table. "Sit. I'll make coffee."

Laurel nodded and sank down onto a chair, then propped her head up with one hand, her hair falling in a tangled sheet in front of her face. "You're not a girl," she pointed out reasonably. "We sat and drank and bitched about men. You would've hated it."

"No drunken pillow fights while dressed only in your underwear?"

"That kind of thing only happens in your dreams."

Pyke put his newspaper and the doughnut box on a chair, then started the coffee brewing. As soon as he got the water going through the machine he started gathering up the garbage.

Laurel watched him but made no move to help. "You don't have to do that."

"No, I don't. But it'll put you in a good mood." He smiled at her and threw away some scary-looking chow mein. "Why don't you go shower and wake up?"

Laurel snorted at him but stood up. "You just don't want to look at me when I'm hung over and unglamorous."

"I always want to look at you," Pyke said with disarming honesty and his very best smile. "Take some aspirin, have a shower. Start Saturday all over again."

"You want something, don't you?" She looked at him suspiciously but she was moving toward the bathroom.

Pyke grinned at her and waved a pizza box in her general direction. "Always thinking so bad of me," he said with a mock pout. "Get in the shower. You'll feel tons better, I promise."

Laurel sighed and walked away, one hand up in surrender. "All right. Showering. Finding my happy place. Don't clean; I'll do it later."

As she vanished into the bathroom Pyke rolled his eyes. "Sure," he said out loud. "Like I'm going to sit here in this filth." He found a bigger garbage bag under the sink and started tossing everything that could go, then sorted out the bottles from the drinking glasses. When the recycling was out on the back step, he loaded the dishwasher and wiped down the counter.

After the kitchen looked reasonably clean Pyke poured himself a cup of coffee and grabbed a doughnut before he went to survey the living room. To his relief it looked like the ladies had managed to keep the damage mostly contained in the kitchen. He picked up a couple of cushions and tossed them back onto the couch, and took one more glass to the dishwasher.

He didn't see any extra ladies left on the floor behind the couch, or any stray underwear, so he contented himself with thinking about what he'd missed. In a perfect world, there would be a lot of stray, drunken women just lying around waiting for him to find.

The shower shut off with a clank of noisy pipes, signaling Laurel's return to the land of the sober and cleaned up. Pyke finished the coffee at the bottom of his mug and hauled himself off the couch to get her one of her own, then wandered down the hall to her bedroom.

He put Laurel's coffee on her dresser and was poking around at the makeup she'd left scattered there when she walked in, her hair in a towel and her bathrobe loosely tied at the waist.

"That's not really your color," she said, eyeing the pink lipstick in his hand.

"Not really yours, either." He put the lipstick down and held up another one, a brilliant red. "This one is."

"You just like a whore's mouth." She smiled at him and bent a bit, her hands on the towel as she squeezed excess water from her hair.

Pyke watched her, a low tingle of arousal warming his belly. He loved watching Laurel like this: fresh and clean and completely devoid of anything external to influence her beauty. He'd told her that once, and she'd laughed at him, accusing him of having the worst lines in history. Pyke couldn't help it if it was true.

She stood straight again and finished with the towel, her hair tumbled and damp around her face. "What?" She looked at him for a moment and then narrowed her eyes. "You've got that look."

"What look?"

"The look that means it's a good thing I'm already naked."

"Oh." Pyke's grin grew wide, and he added a wink. "That look."

"I just took a shower. I don't want another one." Laurel was smiling too, though, and she hung the towel over the bedroom door instead of throwing it at him.

"Are you still seeing whatsisface?" Pyke looked at the mirror over the dresser but didn't see a photo of the current whatsisface stuck in the frame.

"Brody? No." Laurel came over and stood next to him, running her fingers through her hair to untangle the ends. "Thus the girls' night and bitching."

Pyke nodded. "I had a gig," he offered. "And I'm playing again tonight. You should come."

She looked at him in the mirror. "Who else is going?" she asked. "I hate sitting there by myself."

"Shea. You should call him."

Laurel nodded and finished with her hair. "Okay, that could be fun. So. Are you going to leave the room to let me get dressed?" She turned from the mirror and faced him again, gesturing to the door expectantly.

"Nope." No way, not unless she kicked him out. Pyke would go in a heartbeat if she said she meant it, or even looked like she meant it, but he wasn't going to just go of his own accord. Not when he was getting hard just watching her detangle her hair.

Laurel blinked twice at him and then laughed. "All right." She smiled at Pyke, her mouth curling up on one side as she put a hand on her cocked hip. "What are you going to do, then?"

That sounded hopeful. Pyke beamed at her and peeled off his T-shirt.

She looked even more amused. "You're very sure of yourself. But leave the shirt off. That's okay."

"Okay?" He looked down at his chest and then curled his arms to show off his biceps. "Just okay?"

"Yeah," she said with a laugh. "Not bad." She glanced at the unmade bed and back at him, still smiling. "I'm going to assume that you didn't just show up here looking to get lucky, all right? You actually do have a real reason aside from your libido?"

"Uh, yeah." He nodded and hopped onto the bed, pausing only long enough to kick off his sneakers. "I do, actually. But I'm all distracted at the moment. God, you're pretty."

"Noted." She climbed onto the bed with him, one hand going right to his belly. "But it's kind of cheap to just get naked and go for it, don't you think?"

"I would never, ever, think you're cheap," Pyke assured her. He had no idea where that notion had come from. She'd never once hinted that she thought he was using her. "Laurel?"

Do I need to go have a talk with whatsisface?" He raised an eyebrow and pulled her closer to him.

"Nah, I took care of it." She sighed and moved into his arms, her bathrobe tugging and getting slightly tangled. "He's gone. It's just my wounded ego talking, I guess."

"Aw. I have the perfect cure for a wounded ego." He smiled at her and sniffed her hair, his arms looping around her so he could pet a little, his hand sliding down her back.

She giggled and scooted closer, her fingers curling around his hip, thumb tucked into one belt loop. "Is that what the kids are calling it these days?"

"I have no idea what they're calling it," he said with a grin. "I'm still just calling it fun."

"Fun is good." She lifted her face and kissed him, her mouth soft and welcoming. Just like always.

Pyke figured they were done talking for a while and followed her lead. He tugged her nice and close, kissing her with what he hoped was a certain amount of restraint. His prick would happily move things along as fast as possible, but that wasn't what Laurel needed, and it wasn't what Pyke wanted to give her. This time, anyway.

The kisses flowed, one into another, warm and comfortable as the sun spilled in on them from between the flutter of curtains. Laurel had her window open, and Pyke could hear birds outside, singing. There was a muted whoosh of traffic under the chirping, but it was easy to ignore.

Less easy to ignore was the quiet sound Laurel made when Pyke eventually eased his hand inside her robe to stroke lightly over the curve of her breast. The back of his fingers brushed the soft terry cloth but he barely felt it; the smoothness of her skin overwhelmed everything else. She made the soft, breathy sound again and pushed into his hand, her mouth smiling against his.

Pyke smiled back and deepened the kiss as he teased her nipple with the pads of his fingers. Laurel's tongue slid against his, her hand tightening on his hip, and her nipple drew up taut, inviting him to tug.

He knew what she liked, and he liked to prove it to her, to win the soft moans and the catch of her breath. He liked it even more when her hand flexed, fingers digging into his bicep, and she arched, pushing her breast into his hand.

"Stop teasing," she said against his mouth. "You want it, come and get it. Although, I should probably tell you that part of the festivities last night resulted in all my condoms getting trashed."

For a moment Pyke was torn between asking what they'd done to the rubbers and following her orders to get on with it. Then his body, apparently aware that there wasn't a choice to be made in such a situation, took over and his brain decided he really didn't care what had happened to them. "Don't need 'em." He kissed her harder and pushed her bathrobe away, sliding it off her shoulder as best he could.

"Oh, good. I was hoping you'd say that." She sounded breathless, which was pretty much what he was aiming for, and her fingers slid over his torso as he moved against her. She touched him without being coy, without teasing, and with a nudge of her knee against his, she made her point.

Pyke was a gentleman, at least with girls, and it really wouldn't do to put her off when they were both on the same page. He kissed her neck, his hands flat over her breasts and tummy, stroking and petting. She smelled amazing, like vanilla and springtime; true, that was most likely because of whatever she'd used in the shower, but Pyke didn't care.

It was only the roughness of his denim jeans that kept him from rubbing against her. His cock ached, but someone had once bitched him out rather thoroughly about how horrible denim felt against her pussy, so he didn't do that anymore, even if he did like knowing he'd had her juice on his jeans.

Instead, he let himself ache and lowered his mouth to her nipple so he could lick and suck, just until Laurel's hand carded through his hair. He'd been here before, he knew this, and when she tugged, he bit. Just a nip, a drag of his teeth that didn't quite let go.

"Yes," she said with a gasp, her hips lifting. "Pyke."

Pyke did it again, the hand that had been petting her belly moving down to smooth over her curls. Her legs, already parted to make room for him, shifted and slid on the bed. When he bit at her nipple again, bringing forth another gasp, he slid his fingers between her thighs and stroked into her heat.

Laurel moaned lushly and tugged at his hair again. "That's it," she whispered. "No need for condoms here. Nope. Nice hands. Such nice hands."

"I play guitar." He lifted his head, ignored her protest, and grinned. "It's not quite the same thing." But it was still a skill, he knew, and even when he was looking at her face and teasing her, he didn't stop moving. He had two fingers in her pussy, sliding slowly in and out while he used his thumb to brush over the wet folds around her clit. He could feel it, hard and swollen, but he wasn't ready to touch there yet. She wasn't where he wanted her.

Laurel didn't bother replying. She'd fallen back to the bed and was pulling his hair ineffectually, trying to get his head back to her breast. "Pyke, please," she said between one gasp and a half moan. Her hips lifted, trying to match the speed of his hand, and with a frustrated, tiny whimper she cupped her other breast herself and tugged her nipple, hard.

Pyke felt the way her body clamped down when she did it and his cock throbbed in response. "God, darlin'." With a whimper of his own he fingered her a little deeper and sucked at her tit just to feel it again.

"Come on," Laurel said, shoving at his shoulder.

"I love it when you get pushy." He left a sucking kiss on her breast and moved, just before she could dig in with her nails.

"I'll keep that in mind. Oh, God, there!"

Pyke grinned and moved his thumb again, rubbing just beside her clit, the fingers he had inside her pushing up a little. "Here?"

Laurel whimpered and lifted her hands to her still damp hair, digging through the dark curls. "Oh, yes."

Pyke gave in and shifted his weight so he could find friction on the bed. As soon as he rubbed, one long drag that made his balls tingle, he knew he couldn't do that again, not if he was going to take care of Laurel first. Wanting, needing, Pyke wriggled himself down the bed another few inches, kissing her belly on his way.

"Yes, yes, yes." Laurel was whispering, to him or to herself, and if it wasn't for the fact that she kept getting her foot stuck on her bathrobe and thus keeping herself exactly where she was, she would have pushed herself all the way up to the headboard.

Taking pity on her, or maybe just himself, Pyke brushed his thumb in a circle around her clit, his way made slick and hot by Laurel's need. She cried out and he did it again, then kissed her belly once more before he lowered his mouth and licked.

Her response was intense and immediate. It was also loud, which Pyke kind of liked. She called his name, one hand suddenly in his hair again, and her legs fell even more open. There was nothing at all shy about Laurel when she was close to coming. He loved every shudder, every gasp, every breathy moan he could get from her.

He licked, and she wiggled, her hips lifting rhythmically as her pulls at his hair got him where she wanted him. He alternated delicate licks with drawing the flat of his tongue over her again and again, moving with her with both his mouth and his fingers, letting her show him the pace she needed.

When her legs went stiff and she stopped moving entirely, Pyke moaned against her and rasped his tongue almost frantically over her clit, as tense as she was.

"Oh, God, Pyke." She was whispering, but to Pyke it was like there wasn't any sound at all other than her voice and the rush of his own blood in his veins.

All at once he could feel her throbbing, under his tongue and around his fingers in great, shuddering pulses. He groaned and stroked her through it with his fingers but only lapped at her once or twice, knowing that the sharpness of her moans meant that she was already too sensitive for more.

She was still breathing hard and making soft noises when he kissed his way back over her belly, up to her breast, then her neck until he could nuzzle into her hair. "Happy?"

"Mmmhmm." She smiled and snuggled in, then laughed as he took one of her hands and put it where he needed it. "Your turn?"

"My turn. I was a good boy. Polite, even."

"True enough." She kissed him, her tongue licking at his lips, which made his cock just throb, and pet him over his jeans. "You were a very good boy."

"Wonderful." He reached down and yanked his jeans open. "It's so nice to be appreciated."

"I appreciate you." She smiled again and winked at him as she curled her fingers around his cock. "I appreciate all the different parts of you."

"That particular part appreciates your appreciation." That particular part thought that Laurel had the softest, warmest, most wonderful hands ever.

"You talk too much." Laurel giggled at him, a sure sign that she was still floaty from her own orgasm, and looked down at her hand. "Cocks are funny things."

Pyke rolled his eyes and shoved his jeans off, being careful not to actually remove himself from Laurel's grasp. "They are not."

"Oh, they so are. You have a nice one, though." She twisted down the bed and put her head on his belly, one hand lightly stroking him. "It's bigger than some I've seen." She traced around the head with the tip of one finger. "And it's pretty."

"Thank you?" Pyke propped himself up on his elbows and watched her play with his dick, vaguely amused.

"Don't you think?"

"Well, 'pretty' isn't the first word that comes to mind, no."

"But you've got to admit it's an attractive cock."

"It's my very favorite one in the whole world," he assured her.

Laurel laughed and did him the favor of licking said cock, one broad sweep right up the side. "Even more than Shea's?"

"Of course." His hands made fists in her sheets. "Don't get me wrong, his is nice, but I'm pretty sure every man has only one favorite, and it's the one he's attached to."

Laurel gripped him a little tighter and jacked him slowly. "Shea's is longer, but yours is broader."

"Uh-huh." That was true. And Pyke was crushing her cotton sheets in his fist, if such a thing was possible. "And his curves a bit to the left."

"Does it?" She sounded surprised and turned her head to look up at him. "I never noticed."

"We got really drunk one night and took pictures to make sure."

Laurel looked vaguely disappointed. "I thought maybe you just noticed when you were giving each other blowjobs or something."

"Well, yeah. That, too."

Laurel beamed at him and licked him again. Pyke didn't bother trying to figure out what she was so happy about; he just wanted to come, and God damn, but Laurel could give good head when she was in the mood.

She took him in nice and deep and used her tongue a lot and, really, Pyke could have stayed there for a long, long time just getting a lovely Saturday blowjob. But then she looked up at him and sucked hard before letting him go. "I want to watch you go down on Shea sometime," she announced.

"Oh, fuck." Pyke reached and grabbed the base of his cock hard. "Don't say things like that without warning!" He looked down at her and tried to glare, but he didn't think he pulled it off very well.

She laughed and licked him again, right over his fingers. "You like the idea as much as I do. Do you think Shea will let it happen?"

Pyke shook his head, but only to clear it, not to say no. "I think he wouldn't be averse, approached properly."

"Properly?" Laurel sounded speculative as she pried Pyke's fingers away from his dick. "Like how?"

"Can we talk about this later? When I'm not quite so busy trying not to come?"

"Poor baby. A little turned on by the idea of me watching?"

Not just watching. Okay, watching was good. He'd like to do some watching of his own, too. "Oh, God." Images flashed through his mind as Laurel took him in again and started sucking him off, her head bobbing and turning. Her watching him and Shea. Him watching Shea with Laurel, both of them naked and moving on a couch or the bed.

The three of them, all together.

"God," he said with a moan. Laurel laughed around his cock, and the vibration raced to his balls. He could feel his orgasm as down deep as his toes, working its way through his whole body. His cock throbbed and his balls lifted, the fireworks going off. "Laurel. Yes."

She swallowed around him, her hand petting his hip and then his belly until he stopped shaking and finally lay still, staring at her ceiling and grinning like an idiot.

When he got his breath back, Laurel was still laughing, curled into his side and looking delighted with herself. "So, yes? You like that idea?"

Pyke hated to blush with embarrassment, but not quite as much as he hated going off like he was fifteen and it was his first time. "That was not fair, but you're on. If Shea agrees. Which he probably will." His heart was thundering, but his bones felt damn fine. There really was nothing wrong with being warm on a bed, newly laid, even if his jeans were still bunched up around one knee.

Laurel smiled and snuggled in. "Okay. I'll ask him. Maybe tonight while we're watching you play. Hey, what are you doing this afternoon? Want to go shopping with me?"

Oh, hell no. He loved Laurel a lot, but shopping and Laurel were not things that went well together. Luckily, he had other plans anyway and good ones. "Can't, darlin'. The actual real reason I came by was to tell you that I finally did something with the money."

Laurel sat up and looked at him intently. "You did?" She pulled her hair back and started finger combing it again. "It's about time. And I assume you mean more than just get a lawyer and an investment counselor? Honestly, Pyke. You've had that money just sitting there for far too long."

"Yes, ma'am." It was hard not to roll his eyes; he'd been doing it for weeks, though and thought maybe he should start resisting the urge.

On a whim, passing through the mall one day in early spring, Pyke had purchased a lotto ticket. He hadn't even picked his own numbers, just got an auto selection from the machine. Then, cleaning out his wallet weeks after that, he'd found out that he'd won the jackpot.

The eye-rolling was merely a side effect, he figured.

He found out that, along with knowing a lot of broke people, he also knew a demon in the shape of a beautiful woman. Laurel had been wildly protective of him, making sure he took all the right steps to get himself into a responsible and educated position about what to do with almost seven million dollars. But she still made him roll his eyes.

He gave her a grin instead. "I bought a house. You're going to love it."

She tilted her head at him. "A house? Well, that's good."

Pyke grinned and nodded. "It's amazing. It's completely assbackward and fucked up and ancient. The kitchen is on the second floor, there's five bedrooms, if you count the tower and the half wall thing in the attic, and four bathrooms and the front door opens into the dining room."

Laurel raised an eyebrow at him. "It sounds like a money pit and kind of horrible."

"It's fantastic; you're going to love it. It's got three floors and a glass room, and there's so much space! I can practice, and Shea can do his thing, and you can even have your own suite on the ground floor, if you don't mind that the tub is in a room with half a glass wall. We'll put up shutters or something."

"Pardon?" Laurel stared at him, her eyes wide.

"Oh, didn't I say? You and Shea are going to move in with me."

Chapter Two

Pyke had his back to the audience as he played, fingers flying along the neck of his guitar. Grinning, letting the music flow through him, he gave the amp a tweak and kept on going, totally rocking out. There were cheers and whistles from behind him, and Pyke knew that he'd have to make it up to Diesel, but he didn't care. The face and front man of the band really didn't like it when the people with more talent than his actually-not-bad vocals stole all the thunder.

Drea was slamming it on the drums and Pyke was feeding off her energy as they jammed. When they were on, they were on, and tonight they were on. Diesel'd had most of the first set to shine, but now the bar was getting noisy and Drea wanted to play; Pyke wasn't going to turn down the chance for a bit of improv. Who knew, maybe someone who really could make it work would be there, watching, and Drea could earn her big break. The girl needed to hook up with a band that was going places, not stick with Diesel.

Pyke himself didn't care if he ever made it past playing in bars and filling in at the recording studio for session musicians. He had nothing to prove, no need to be famous, and he didn't need the money. He had the girl, sometimes, and he had the guy, once in a while. He was pretty happy with things the way they were.

Assuming, of course, that the girl and the guy were going to move into the house and make it all perfect.

He'd seen Shea and Laurel come in, late enough that Pyke had begun to wonder if they were going to show. There hadn't been any time to even say hi, as Pyke was already on the stage and Diesel was nodding to the sound guy of the week, but at least they were there. Shea waved, Laurel blew him a kiss -- so apparently she'd decided he was kidding about the house -- and that was that.

Pyke had spent the set admiring them; he couldn't help it. He'd known Shea since they were twelve years old, and Shea could still make Pyke's knees wobble with a smile. He had pretty blue eyes, insanely long eyelashes, a chipped tooth, and even with all of that Shea was convinced he was nothing special to look at. Pyke had to admit that Shea could do with a little help picking out decent clothes, but aside from that he was pretty hot stuff. He was about the same height as Pyke, but where Pyke had leaned to a more retro, fifties greaser, rock star style, Shea was all clean cut college boy. A nice, fit college boy. With a boring wardrobe that Pyke liked to peel off him, because naked was better. Naked was something Pyke really shouldn't think about when he was playing.

Of course, checking out Laurel wasn't actually a better idea; more of the same, really. That girl knew how to dress, even if Shea didn't, and most of the people in the bar were appreciating her taste. Her skirt wasn't indecently short, but the top she'd picked was absolutely designed to gather and keep attention. She wasn't tiny, thank God, so even when she was dressed up to show off how feminine she was she still looked strong enough to hold her own. She had lush curves, all over; hips and breasts and a stellar ass; even her hair had gorgeous curves and waves. Pyke had to wonder how Shea could just sit there next to her and not be pawing at her.

It was a few songs before Pyke noticed just how very calm and relaxed Shea was, and how smug Laurel looked. Pyke gave Shea a thumbs up the next time their eyes met, and laughed when Shea turned red. He didn't know how hot he was, and he still got embarrassed if anyone knew he had sex. Pyke thought that was one of the more endearing things about him.

Song after song kept him busy until Drea finally decided that it was time to bring the whole evening up a notch. Pyke had to turn around to keep from watching Laurel and Shea; they were keeping him too distracted to match Drea's power. Now, there he was, fingers aching and heart pumping with the pure joy of making music.

Drea laid down a beat that even Pyke couldn't match and with a laugh he stepped back and pointed to her. "Give it up!" he said into the mic, grinning broadly. "Andrea Minckston!" He started applauding and Drea beamed at him, still pouring it out in a frenzy. The crowd was yelling and hooting and even Diesel looked impressed when she capped it all off with a crash of the cymbals and a last burst of staccato beats.

Pyke passed her a beer, and Diesel announced a break, though the applause was so loud Pyke figured no one heard him. He took off his guitar and put it on the stand, then leaned way over to kiss Drea's cheek. Ready for a drink and maybe a bit of love, Pyke hopped off the stage and went looking for his personal little table of groupies. He had to schmooze his way more or less politely past a few people, and remove one hand from a place it had no business being, but he got there.

At the table where Laurel and Shea were sitting there was a beer already there waiting for him. Pyke knew that Shea had probably ordered it for him ten minutes before, or it wouldn't have shown up until the break was over, given the press of bodies and low ratio of serving staff to customers.

"Thanks." Pyke fell into the chair next to him and kissed Shea's mouth, fast. "You're the best."

"So I hear." Shea grinned at him and drank from his own beer, his cheeks slightly pink. Public affection did that to him, even after years and years of Pyke being unrestrained. Pyke thought Shea should be used to it, but he'd settle for Shea allowing the touches and kissing, even if it did make him blush. "You sound good tonight."

Pyke shook his head. "Drea blew me away, as usual." He half-stood and leaned over to kiss Laurel. "Hey, pretty girl. Nice top."

"Shea helped me pick it out." She smiled and looked even more smug. "But the whore-red lipstick is just for you."

Pyke leered as she stood up. "Don't think I don't appreciate that, darlin'. Where are you going?"

"The ladies'." She rolled her eyes and looked at the mass of people between them and the hallway where the bathrooms were. "So, I'll see you back on stage. This is going to take a while. I bet there's a line."

Pyke nodded and shifted his chair a bit closer to Shea's so they could talk, despite the volume in the bar. "Are you two sticking around after?"

Laurel shook her head and gave him an apologetic look. "I don't think I can stay even until you finish, honey. Two or three in the morning is pushing it for me, after last night, and I have errands and all my weekend stuff to cram into tomorrow. Sorry."

"That's disappointing. You should plan your hangovers a little better, next time." Pyke grinned as she gave him a stiff finger. "She's just not tough like us," he added to Shea.

"She's tougher than me." Shea rolled his eyes at Pyke and looked even more apologetic than Laurel.

"No way!" Pyke frowned at him. "Shea, you're breaking my heart, man."

Laurel laughed as she walked away. "You'll heal. Probably overnight. See you, Pyke. Call me."

Pyke waved and then turned to face Shea. "And what's your excuse for abandoning me for the night?"

"Work." Shea shrugged at him and gave him a crooked smile. "I have to go into the office for a couple of hours tomorrow. Sorry."

"In the morning?"

"Well, at some point. I'd like to get it over with, yes." Shea's eyes narrowed. "Don't you dare try to convince me that one is the same as ten, again."

Pyke stared at him. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Last summer. We got toasted when we were camping, remember? You spent an hour trying to convince me that one in the afternoon was the same as ten in the morning, but with more sleep."

Pyke laughed and drank from his beer. "If I recall, it worked. You stayed up late with me and whatever it was you wanted to do at ten was done by mid-afternoon."

"True." Shea looked like it pained him to admit it. "But I'm not fried at the moment."

Pyke leaned over and, under the cover of the table, put his hand in Shea's lap. "Stay. Come home with me tonight. I'll make sure you wake up and get into the office by lunchtime, okay?"

Shea gave him an amused look through those amazing eyelashes. "Laurel already had her way with me. You think you can keep me awake?"

"I know I can keep you awake."

"I meant happily, as opposed to being an annoying tease. By the way, what was Laurel talking about? She said something about a house." He put his hand on Pyke's and -- to Pyke's great surprise -- pulled their hands higher instead of shoving Pyke away. He was blushing, but no more than usual.

"I bought a house. An amazing a house. A crazy-assed house that's going to break your brain. You're gonna have your own rooms, and probably two bathrooms. It's got a bunch. I already moved a lot of my stuff in, bought a lot of furniture from the old owners." He cupped Shea's balls and rubbed at the denim. "You're getting hard -- I could keep you awake and happy."

"My own rooms? Plural?" Shea sounded intrigued and like he wasn't at all interested in what Pyke was doing with his hands. "Interesting. When can I see this wonderful house that's only fit for an eccentric lucky bastard?"

"That's eccentric millionaire to you, mister." Pyke nuzzled Shea's jaw and pretended they weren't in plain view in a crowded bar. "Come home with me. I can show you the house on Monday."

"After I get off work?"

"After you get off."

"Laurel doesn't think you mean it. Do we have time to get to the bathroom?"

"No. And no."

Shea's hips lifted a bit, pushing his erection into Pyke's hand. "You're a tease."

"And you're playing with me." Pyke grinned and kissed Shea again. "You put my hand here and you know damn well I have to get back on that stage looking like I'm about to hump my guitar."

"You are about to hump your guitar." Shea gave him a long look and then laughed. "Okay, yeah. But my place, all right? You live in a dump, man, and I stand a much better chance getting out of my bed than yours."

"Awesome." Pyke gave him another pat on the cock and backed away to drink the last of his beer. "By the way, Laurel wants to watch us having sex."

"Cool."

They both turned around when a guy standing next to them choked on his beer, staring at them. Pyke gave him a long slow look up and down before rejecting him and turning back to Shea. "Yeah, made me embarrass myself when she said it."

"She told me." Shea beamed at him. "She totally doesn't believe you about the house, you know."

Pyke nodded and stood up as Diesel climbed back onto the stage. "I know. Wait, she doesn't believe I bought the weird house or that I want you two to move in?"

"The second. She's not crazy -- she knows you'd buy a house no one else wants." Shea's gaze was fixed on Pyke's midsection. "She doesn't believe you expect us to live with you."

Pyke grinned and adjusted his dick as Drea passed him. "You've got a feeling, don't you?" They didn't talk about it much, the feelings Shea sometimes got. "It's good?"

Shea nodded slowly. "It's good. I'm pretty sure. She's going to take some convincing."

"We can do that." Pyke hopped up onto the platform stage and reached for his guitar. "Oh, Laurel," he sang into the mic as Diesel talked to Mike, the bass player. "You're going to be late, darlin'."

People in the bar started looking around to see who he was singing to, and Shea laughed into his beer. Laurel was going to kill him, and they both knew it. Finally, just as Drea picked up her drumsticks and looked like she was ready to go, Laurel pushed through the crowd, looking frustrated but holding a fresh drink in one hand and a beer in the other.

"Aw, is that for me?" Pyke asked, still talking into the mic.

She nodded, and then shook her head. "Not if you're going to be like that, Pyke."

Pyke beamed at her and reached out a hand for the beer. "Ladies and gentlemen, my best friend. The lovely Laurel James. I bought her a house, and she brings me beer."

Laurel snorted as she passed him the beer and went back to sit with Shea. "Stop it with the house talk, doofus."

"She loves me," Pyke confided to the audience. Well, the part of the audience that was paying attention, anyway. "She's been my buddy since I was fifteen and she was assigned to carry my books at school when I broke my arm."

"Just play, damn it." Laurel sat down, her face flaming. "God."

Pyke grinned and looked at Drea. "You heard her, honey. Let's rock."

Chapter Three

"Come on. Is it stuck again?" Pyke pushed up against Shea and tried to see the lock.

"Back up." Shea laughed as he pushed Pyke away. "You're in my light. I can't see if it's stuck if I can't see."

"Always with the logic." Pyke backed up, but only far enough to let the yellow glow from the street light fall on the door. He stayed close enough to grope. "Is it in yet?"

"You're so weird." Shea wiggled the key and the lock snicked open. "There. Happy now?"

"Not yet." Pyke reached around and got his hand inside the front pocket of Shea's jeans. "Better."

Shea laughed again and opened the door. "I should've left a light on." The apartment was dark, and the glow of the clock on the stereo wasn't really enough to even highlight large shapes. "Be careful."

"I'm always careful." Pyke nuzzled the back of Shea's neck and held on tight. "Just get us to the bedroom without tripping over boots or pizza boxes, okay?"

"I'm pretty sure I can do that." For some reason Shea was whispering as they started to cross the room, sticking close to the wall.

"Are you whispering for a reason?" Pyke whispered as well, trying to walk and mold himself to Shea's back at the same time. "If it wasn't for the fact that we've got hard-ons, this is kinda like the time we slept in the tent in your backyard and tried to sneak in at three in the morning."

Shea snorted and Pyke could feel him laughing. "I was hard then, too."

Pyke stopped walking. "For real?"

"God, yes. I was, what? Sixteen? I was hard all the time."

"Huh." Pyke would have paused to think about that for a while, but Shea was dragging him into the bedroom. "For me?"

"Usually. And Mary Alice Johnston, remember her?"

"Yeah, she had great tits." Pyke stuck close as they crossed into the dark bedroom. "When was the first time you got hard for me?"

Shea grinned at him and turned on the bedroom lights, two lamps on either side of the bed. "Does your ego really need to hear about my lust for you? That you've been making me hard for decades?"

"Not decades!" Pyke, to his utter horror, felt his cheeks heat. "Be a couple more years before it's decades, at least."

"I was precocious." Shea peeled off his shirt and kicked his shoes off, wincing as they hit the wall with twin thuds that sounded loud in the very early morning stillness. "The neighbors are going to hate me."

Pyke ignored that. "Not precocious enough, since you didn't actually do anything for years. God, all that time wasted." Pyke stripped down as well, making sure his clothes wound up in roughly the same general area; practice had taught him that it was easier to find them in the morning if they weren't strewn all over the place. He was really looking forward to having his people in the same building all the time; he'd lose fewer shirts that way, maybe.

"It wasn't wasted." Shea shoved his jeans down and off, then his boxers. "I was merely gaining experience elsewhere. So I wouldn't be horrible at sex when I finally got where I wanted to be."

Pyke stared at him. "Practice with who?"

"Well, Mary Alice, for one." Shea rolled his eyes and got in bed, but he kicked the covers all the way down to the end. "Hurry up, Pyke. You talked me into an overnight, make with the sex."

"Pushy." Pyke finished getting undressed and crawled onto the bed, then right onto Shea. "I heard that, by the way. About getting to where you wanted to be."

Shea smiled up at him. "Laurel's pretty amazing."

"Bastard." Pyke laughed and wiggled around, rubbing his erection along Shea's and making them both gasp. "Say it."

"Say what?" Shea was laughing with him and moving too, partly humping and partly just laughing and rolling around on the bed. "Whisper sweet nothings to you, my dearest love?"

Pyke made retching sounds, which was just weird given how good it felt to be with Shea, all naked and hard and happy. "'Dearest love'? How about 'hot stud' or something like that?"

Shea opened his mouth and gasped as Pyke ground down on him. "Nice." His eyes glittered in the lamp light, and he added, "Dearest stud?"

"Oh, I like that one." Pyke kissed him wetly, and then they didn't talk for a while. Pyke had nothing against talking during sex -- he actually liked it -- but Shea's mouth tasted amazingly sweet from his last drink of soda, and his skin tasted salty. The combination of flavors and the way he and Shea found their groove together kept his mouth and breath too busy for words.

They rolled over on the bed more than once as their legs tangled and their hands groped and stroked. It was manhandling at its best, with Shea giving it back to him, thrust for thrust and kiss for sucking kiss. When Shea's hand pressed hard at the small of Pyke's back, keeping them tight together, it just got better.

"There," Pyke groaned, his hips rocking hard. He could feel his skin flush hot and then break out with goose pimples. "Come on, right there." His balls felt heavy and full, the heat of them starting to flow right through his body.

"Here?" Shea was on top of him, one leg thrown over Pyke's thigh, his cock pressed into Pyke's. "Dearest?"

Pyke started to laugh, his whole body lurching, and then it was better than good, better than the best, as he and Shea bucked and rode each other, racing to the end and measuring their pace in gasps and slaps of damp skin as they drove against hips and bellies.

They tumbled together, Shea a pulse or two ahead of Pyke's orgasm, and then they lay sticky and panting across of the head of the bed, still shaking and gasping out laughter in broken sounds.

"Dearest stud, eccentric, lucky millionaire bastard." Pyke grinned. "Could be worse."

"Could be better." Shea smiled at him and kissed his mouth again, softer and with a bit of a lingering, sleepy note. "Will be."

"Uh-huh." Pyke smiled and kissed him back, letting him go when Shea got up and went to the bathroom and then to the kitchen. Pyke found the tissues, promised himself a very long shower the next morning, and started putting the bed back together.

He smiled again when he realized he was humming to himself, content and ready to just be with Shea for a while.

Shea came back in with water and what looked like some kind of flat bread smeared with peanut butter. He got back into bed and passed Pyke the water, but kept the bread; Shea got the munchies after sex, but Pyke didn't. After years of messing around they both knew it and no longer even made mention of the fact that snacks followed orgasms, though some snacks were banned. Never again would anything tiny, sharp, or made with red dye be taken to bed, and Pyke disallowed most things with garlic, as well.

"What was the deal with Diesel, just before we left?" Shea asked around a mouthful of bread.

Pyke stretched and put the water on the nightstand. "He's pissed at me because I won't finance a CD straight up."

"Please." Shea rolled his eyes. "Why would you do that, as a personal favor? It's not like he wants to actually create a career or anything; he just wants to say he has a CD. There's other ways to make it happen than have you just pay for studio time and production. That's a lot of money to expect you to lay out."

"That's what I told him." Pyke shrugged. "So he said I wasn't part of the band spirit, and then Drea got in on it -- told him that a bunch of guys who played on weekends once in a while and only rehearsed when there was free beer wasn't a band with spirit, it was a hobby."

Shea slid down a bit in the bed, looking disgusted. "I bet that went over well. She's right, and he's a dick."

"Yeah, really. He didn't like that, so much. So me and Drea are back to work on Monday at the studio -- or whenever it is that I'm supposed to go in -- and Diesel is once more solo. Mike split as soon as Diesel asked me for money."

"Mike's smart."

"Mike's grateful. And a good guy." Once upon a time Pyke and Mike and a couple of other guys had shared an apartment on a year-long lease. When Pyke could move out on his own due to his good luck, he paid off the remainder of the rent on the apartment before he left as his goodbye gift. It was only a couple of months, but Mike had needed the break, and the others had appreciated it, too.

"He's all right." Shea shrugged and swallowed, apparently done with his snack. "Pass me the water?"

Pyke passed it over and asked, "Something happen with you and Mike, babe?"

"Nah." Shea avoided his glance as he drank. "He just said something, back when you won."

"Oh." Pyke waited until Shea was finished drinking. "What did he say?"

"It was before you even collected the check." Shea finally looked at him. "The night we all got together to party after you realized your numbers matched. It wasn't about you, or the money -- he's never been after your money. It was just stuff, is all."

Pyke laughed. "Dude. Everyone had something to say that night. People wanting money, people telling me what to do, who to talk to, what bank to use. Nothing meant anything, Shea, not then. I was accused of ditching people, for Christ's sake. Twelve hours after I found out, weeks before the actual money stuff got sorted out and put through, and I was already being accused of having a big head and getting stuck up. People just get weird."

"You were the one who was supposed to get weird. Not everyone we know." Shea smiled at him and reached for the light. "You're just you. With a weird house."

"I was weird enough already, is all." Pyke waited until Shea had turned the light off and said, "Love you, man."

"Love you, too. Weirdo."

Smiling, Pyke curled around Shea's back and settled down to sleep with his best friend. The only thing that would be better was having his other best friend there, too, but he was working on that.

Chapter Four

Pyke pulled his motorcycle up to the curb and cut the engine. He kept vibrating after the engine died, his whole body almost shaking with anticipation. It was like Christmas morning and he was getting a puppy. Hell, it was like Christmas morning and he was the puppy. He put the Harley on its stand and climbed off, looking down the street for Shea's car.

Aside from a kid on a skateboard, the street was empty; utterly still and devoid of people. Pyke couldn't hear anything at all, and all he could see was mature trees and groomed lawns, neat sidewalks on either side of the tidy asphalt. Well, until he looked at his property, anyway.

He didn't have a neat lawn and a deciduous tree or two. No, he had overgrown hedges that completely closed in his yard, stretching up about fifteen feet high. There was a wooden door with a huge iron lock set into the hedge, and above the door was a faded sign that read "Peak House." The door led to a walking path and from there to the front door, but Pyke figured it was a bit useless for guests since the hedge door was locked.

It was a corner property, and the hedges turned with the street. The driveway, off the side street and tucked into a break in the hedge, was also gated. The huge iron gate was inscribed with a massive and curly 'P's that Pyke rather liked, though he thought he'd probably leave the gates open and not locked up tight.

The Peak family seemed to have enjoyed their privacy.

Pyke set his helmet over his handle bar and concentrated on not vibrating. It didn't work, so he looked up and down the street again, his excitement peaking as he heard the low rumble of Shea's car and then watched it come around the corner. The blue and white Camaro Shea had been driving since high school wasn't pretty, it wasn't old enough to be cool, but it ran, and it was completely Shea.

It was not Laurel. She was more the "cute and little compact car" type, but she'd learned years ago that it was best not to diss Shea's baby. The car parked behind Pyke's bike and she hopped out even before Shea had undone his seatbelt. "He still doesn't have air in there," she said by way of explanation. She did look a little sticky, her skirt and blouse creased and her collar limp. Of course, she'd been at work all day, so it might not have been just the heat.

"I know. He really needs fans or something in there." Pyke laughed and collected a kiss, then nodded to Shea as he climbed out. "Hey, babe."

"Stud." Shea looked a lot cooler than Laurel, even though he was wearing trousers and a golf shirt; his office was a bit more slack about the dress code. Still, Pyke figured he had them both beat, what with the leather jacket he always wore when he was riding his bike. At least his jeans had holes in them for ventilation.

Shea came around the front of the car and leaned back on the hood as he looked way up at the top of the hedge. Laurel stared at the gate. Pyke tried not to vibrate quite so much.

"Street parking only?" Laurel asked, looking up and down the road, like she thought a few other cars would materialize. She sounded very much as if she was trying to find something to be complimentary about.

"No, no." Pyke pulled out his keys and started trying to find the right one. The house came with a lot of keys. "There's a driveway on the other side, but I really wanted you two to see the house from this angle first. Okay? Yeah."

Laurel looked at Shea, her eyebrows up. "I think he wants us to be impressed with his mansion," she whispered loudly.

"I'm impressed with the hedge already." Shea grinned and stood up. "Do you have any idea how old it must be to grow like this?"

Pyke nodded. "It was planted more than ninety years ago, and the original part of the house is over a hundred. There's been a few additions since then, though. Ready?" He rattled the keys dramatically and unlocked the door.

The door creaked loudly, and Pyke jumped back, laughing. "Man, that's a sound for Halloween. Remind me to buy oil."

"I hope the house doesn't match," Shea murmured.

"'Twas a dark and stormy night..." Laurel giggled and crowded close. "Honestly, Pyke. What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking I'd found my calling." Pyke stepped aside and pointed to his house. He had to bite his lip to keep himself from squealing like a twelve year old.

For a long moment, no one said anything. Pyke looked at Shea and then at Laurel, delighted with the stunned reaction; really, it was the best possible thing he could have imagined. They were staring at the house, mouths slightly open in shock. It was like they hadn't believed him when he said the house was crazy. He couldn't wait to show them the inside.

If they survived the shock of the exterior, that was.

They both spoke at once, still looking up at the house.

"Whoa."

"Oh, my God."

"It has... towers!" Shea sounded wonderstruck, almost as captivated as he'd been when Pyke first shown him the inside of the antique printing press that Pyke's grandfather had owned.

"And balconies!" Laurel pointed to the second floor. "God, look at all the windows."

Giddy with his success, Pyke still had to correct her. "One balcony. One veranda, one porch, one patio and one... Uh, deck. One of everything, but many, many bathrooms and two sets of

stairs, at least, and secret doors, and it's just so cool! I've got a whole file of notes from the Peak family about the weirdness and wonder within!"

"I think he might just wet himself." Shea barely glanced at him before heading off to the left. "What's it like around here? And why is the house that horrible shade of blue? It looks like my mom's couch threw up."

"Wait!" Pyke started after him, his grand plan of showing the two of them everything together already falling apart. It was too late, though; he reached Shea just in time to see Laurel heading off to the right and around the far corner of the house. "Oh, fine then. Jesus." He let Shea go and went back to the front path to wait for them, shaking his head.

It didn't take long for them to return, Shea coming back the way he had gone, and a couple of moments later Laurel followed him around the corner of the house. Pyke smiled when he saw Shea's grin and took in the growing excitement in Laurel's face.

"Okay," Laurel said as she came to them. "From what you had said, I was expecting an old wreck of a house ready to tumble down. This isn't so much an old, sprawling house as it is art."

Pyke nodded, unable to stop smiling. "I know; it's fantastic. Now do you see why I love it?"

"Well, from the outside at least. It's got character, I'll give it that." Laurel looked at Shea. "What do you think, honey?"

Pyke looked at Shea as well, though he was pretty sure by the smile on Shea's face that Shea thought all was well. "Still got that feeling?" Pyke actually hoped so, as it was probably Shea's instincts that would sway Laurel.

"It's cool." Shea stood there with his hands in his pockets and looked a bit calmer, a bit less overwhelmed. "How did you find this place?"

"Well, it's a long story." Pyke grinned, and waved a hand at the house. "I was at an auction, looking at chairs."

"As you do," Laurel said dryly.

"As I do," Pyke agreed. He knew it was a strange thing to collect, but at least it was useful. "Anyway, I was looking at this chair that had a secret compartment. I'd figured it out when this guy came over and pointed out a second one. I was a little annoyed because I hadn't had a chance to find it myself, but he seemed pretty nice. He said that the chair came from his family estate, and I might be interested in some other pieces in the lot."

"Just how long a story is this?" Shea asked.

"Do you have somewhere else to be?"

"Well, maybe you can tell us the rest inside."

Pyke looked up at the house in all of its glory. It was three stories tall, it had two towers, some of the additions stuck out at bizarre angles, and it was a particularly interesting shade of teal. "I think the story will get derailed as soon as I open the front door for you."

"I suspect we'll have time to hear the whole story as we're moving in." Shea smiled at Laurel and gestured toward the house with his chin. "Do you really love your place so much that you would turn down a chance to live in art?"

Laurel rolled her eyes. "I haven't even looked inside," she protested. "Besides, you both know that it's about much more than whether I like my apartment or not. The three of us living together..." She shook her head and let the sentence fade away. "Let's just go in and take a look."

Pyke held up his keys again. "Okay, but I'm finishing my story. Two sentences. The guy was selling everything that belonged in this house, and then the house was to go on the market. I didn't buy everything, but I did buy the dining room furniture, a couple of other cool chairs, and the house itself. Did I mention the secret rooms?"

"For God's sake, can we just go in?" Shea was starting to sound a little irritable.

"Okay, okay." Pyke walked up the three steps of the veranda and to the front door. "This doorbell doesn't work, by the way." He unlocked the big door and paused to bang the knocker twice. "But this does."

Laurel waited for him to let her by and asked, "Is this the door that we would be using?"

"No, I just wanted you to get the full first impression. Around the far side of the house, by the driveway, is the porch and the mud room. I'll show you." It would have to be in a few minutes, he thought as they filed into the house. Once again they were staring about them like they'd been dropped into another world. "This is the dining room."

"No shit. Just how many people can sit at that table?" Shea was pointing at the huge mahogany table even as he walked toward a brass pole extending down from the ceiling in one corner of the room.

"There's chairs for eighteen. The room goes the entire width of the house, so the table fits. Plus the china cabinets, sideboards, trolley, and whatever that other thing is called." Pyke smiled as Laurel went straight to the windows, one hand reaching out to touch the lace. "Do you like those curtains? I think the same ones are in what would be your sitting room."

Laurel looked around. "Okay, walking into the dining room from the front door is strange. But I like the room, and I love the wide staircase." She looked toward the left where a curving staircase rose to the second floor. It had a maple banister which was ornately carved with a variety of birds.

"Uh, Pyke?" Shea was at the opposite end of the room from the stairs, on a large square of parquet flooring. "Pole dancing in the dining room?"

"That's not for pole dancing, but you can if you want to -- I'd totally watch." God, he'd watch. Maybe even video tape it and put it on the internet. But then Shea, and probably Laurel, would be pissed. "Look up."

Laurel walked over as well and peered up. The three of them stood next to each other on the parquet floor and looked up at the hole in the ceiling above them. "It's a fireman's pole."

"In case there's a traffic jam on the stairs?" Shea raised one eyebrow. "Okay, I believe you. The house is weird. What's next?"

Pike grinned. "Check this out." He walked to the wall behind the dining room table and slid a panel aside. "It's a dumbwaiter."

Laurel and Shea exchanged another look. "I'll bite," Laurel finally said. "Why is there a dumbwaiter?"

"The kitchen is upstairs."

"That doesn't seem terribly convenient, does it, Laurel?"

Pike rolled his eyes. "That's why there's a dumbwaiter. And look!" He moved farther down the wall and opened a second panel. "There's two! I just don't have any idea where this one goes, is all, since there's no opening upstairs. Still, it's cool." He looked around the room, suddenly realizing that a dumbwaiter that went nowhere wasn't a very good selling point. "Laurel, do you want to see your rooms yet?"

He had a lot of his hopes riding on her reaction to the suite of three rooms. If she liked them, it would go a long way to convincing her to move in. If she didn't like them, it was all over before it had begun.

"Even if she's not ready, I am." Shea smiled and looked around the room. "You said they were on the first floor?"

"Uh-huh." Pyke took Laurel's hand. "Okay. This is the dining room, there's the dumbwaiter, you like the stairs." He pointed back toward the stairs to a wide wooden door with a window set into it. "That's the door to the real entrance; what the Peaks called a mud room but is really an enclosed porch. And this..." He turned her around and stood behind her, his hands on her shoulders. "This is one of the two ways into your suite."

"Oh, goody. Right next to the sex pole."

"Ignore the pole." Honestly. "Admire the French doors. Look at the beveled antique glass panes and the lace curtains. With a nice lock so you can keep us out."

"Hey." Shea sounded mildly disapproving, but whether it was about being one of "us" or if it was about being locked out, Pyke wasn't sure.

"All right," Laurel said, ignoring Shea and nodding her head at the doors. "Nice glass doors that will break, so the lock is purely for show."

"Well, from a burglar, I suppose. It would keep me out." He looked at Shea and asked in a very serious voice, "Do you promise to respect the lock, my lecherous friend?"

Shea raised his right hand. "I solemnly swear to respect the lock. Unless provoked or bribed by someone offering more beer, chocolate or pizza than Miss James."

"There, you're safe." Pyke kissed the top of Laurel's head. "Can we go in now?"

Laurel was trying not to laugh. "I don't trust either of you. Is it currently locked? If you're holding the key I'm going to lodge a protest."

Pyke smirked and let her go. "You can lodge whatever you want with me, pretty one. But no, it's not locked. There's no furniture in there, by the way; it's your space, so you get to do what you want. The first room is the sitting room, then the bedroom, then the bath. You've got the whole back of the house on this level."

Laurel nodded and took the few steps to the French doors, then opened them both, pulling them out. "Oh, nice!" She sounded approving, which was a good sign.

They went in and Pyke bit at his thumbnail as Laurel turned in a circle, standing in the middle of the room. "Well?"

"God, give me a minute." She stood still with her hands on her hips and looked at the fireplace. "Does that work?"

"I'm not actually sure." Pyke tried to remember. "I'll get it inspected, anyway. Do you really want to burn wood?" He knew exactly who'd wind up carrying and stacking said wood, if she did.

"It might be nice." Laurel turned in another slow circle, counting out electrical outlets. "Not bad. Not bad at all. And I do like the lace curtains, you're right." She smiled at him, her face starting to lose the tense expression that she had when she was wondering if he'd gotten himself in too deep. Again. "The bedroom is through the arch?"

"The bedroom is through the arch." Pyke nodded and followed her as she started walking, Shea right behind him. "You can paint, if you want, or put new paper up. Both of you, I mean. I don't know if you'll like any of the colors; it's all the Peaks'. I haven't done anything but move my stuff in."

Laurel stopped walking just inside the archway, so suddenly that Pyke almost bumped into her. "What the hell is that?" Her voice was low and calm, which was how Pyke knew she was being serious.

Damn, he'd hoped she wouldn't notice that until after she'd seen the glory of the bathroom. "Um," he said as casually as he could. "That's the other way in, darlin'. Just a door."

"It leads to the outside, Pyke. It looks like my parents' kitchen door, Pyke. It's got a screen door, Pyke." Laurel turned around and fixed him with a glare. "There is an exterior door leading to my bedroom."

Pyke's teeth worried at his lower lip. "There's a couple of ways to get around this. You can put your bed in the other room, maybe. Or we can block off the door from the outside, like with a huge planter outside the door so no one uses it."

"Or," Shea said slowly as he looked around the room, "you could get over yourself, Laurel, and stop being such a stick in the mud. Look at these ceilings. God, this place is awesome."

"Or that." Pyke nodded but didn't look at Laurel. It physically hurt him a little to criticize her, but Shea had a point. Maybe. Maybe she really did hate the house and the fact that she had an exterior entrance to her rooms was going to be the one thing that she couldn't get past. "Take a look at the bathroom, at least."

Laurel was staring at Shea, looking both shocked and embarrassed. Shea, of course, was being the good guy and pretending not to notice, his attention captivated by the height of the ceilings and the moldings.

"I... Yeah, I'll look at the bathroom." Subdued, Laurel went to the other door in the room and Pyke found himself holding his breath. "Pyke!"

Shea spun around, right into Pyke's shoulder. "What the fuck?" His eyes were wide and he reached out with one hand to grab at Pyke's arm.

Pyke was already moving, though, dragging Shea with him. This was it, the entire and final make-or-break quirk. The house had a whole slew of neat things yet, but this one was in her space, and if she hated it, she hated it. End of the line.

"It's perfect!" She clutched at his arm, the one Shea didn't already have in a death grip, and dug her fingers in. She was almost squealing in delight. "Shea! Look at it!" She pointed wildly, one hand waving back and forth as she bounced up and down on her toes. "A claw foot tub! And it's real! Cast iron to hold the heat and so deep. Oh, my God!"

Pyke blinked at her like a fish newly hauled ashore. "The tub?"

"It's perfect!" She let go of him and bent down to caress the tub, her hands loving and gentle on the white interior.

"But..." Pyke looked at Shea. "The wall?"

Shea shrugged one shoulder and looked around the room. "It's a big bathroom, Laurel. And look, the curve of the stairs goes right up to your ceiling and you've got wicked cook plaster from it."

"It has a beautiful tub and a shower attachment! I love it!"

"Laurel?" Pyke wondered if he was going to make his lip bleed, he was chewing it so much. "The wall? It's made of glass, darlin'. That doesn't... you know. Bother you? I mean, a door is one thing and we can put up a sign or block it off, but a wall of--"

"Can't see through it," Laurel said, barely glancing at the object of Pyke's concern. "Those're glass bricks, Pyke. They let in tons of light, but no one can see through them. And they're

strong as hell. This is perfect." Her voice had gone dreamy again and she kicked off her shoes.

"Oh, all right. I like this part just fine." Shea leaned back on the counter and grinned. "Taking a bath?"

"No, silly." She rolled her eyes, but she did climb into the tub, fully clothed. "Leave me." She waved her hands imperiously and then giggled as she settled in. "I need to start planning where to put my things." She leaned back and closed her eyes, apparently content to sit in her tub.

Pyke felt vaguely like he'd just gotten off the Tilt-A-Whirl at the midway. "So, you're going to move in?" he asked cautiously.

"Of course, honey. You did good." She opened her eyes and smiled up at him. "I'm sorry I'm a bitch."

"It's not like it's news or anything." He bent down and kissed her. "Come see the rest of the house."

"I will, I promise. Give me five minutes with my new tub."

Shea laughed and headed out of the bathroom. "Come on, stud. Show me where I get to put myself."

Pyke nodded and backed away from Laurel, still watching her. "Really?"

"Really. And I really am sorry. I don't like change." She smiled and shrugged awkwardly, given she was in an empty tub and her neck was a little scrunched. "I'll make it up to you."

"By moving your own bed and couches?" That would be cool. He'd had enough trouble getting his bed to the top floor, and he'd hired movers to do it for him.

"No, but I do promise you nice sex."

"That'll do." It was almost embarrassing how quickly he accepted the offer. Almost, but not quite.

"Go show Shea the house. I'll catch up. Do you have a tape measure here?"

"Upstairs, in the kitchen. I think I left it on the counter."

"Pyke!" Shea sounded impatient and far away, his voice muted by many walls.

Pyke waved at Laurel and took off at a jog. "Coming!"

He found Shea halfway up the stairs. "I took a look at the mud room thing -- I like the chair."

"That's the one with secret compartments," Pyke said proudly. "I thought it would be neat to sit on a mystery chair while you put on your boots."

"Of course you did." Shea grinned and went up the stairs, taking the time to admire the bird carvings and comment on the width of the stairs. "Not much trouble getting my stuff up here, huh?"

"Nope. For an old house, there's a lot of openness." Pyke led him into the kitchen. "See? Pretty much the same size as the dining room, and then just around the corner to the living room. Half bath off to the side. This center core is original, but Laurel's bathroom was added on, and most of the third floor. Your rooms were added on, too, in the nineteen thirties." He tried not to grin too much, for fear of looking like a psycho maniac. Or more of one. It was hard -- Shea's rooms were the single most quirky thing in the house and one of the main reasons he'd bought it on sight.

"Yeah?" Shea stopped poking around at the kitchen cabinets and looked at him. "That's cool. Are we going to put all our dishes together?"

God, dishes. Pyke forced himself to keep up with the conversation and not vibrate. "Want to go pick out china patterns?" he asked with a grin.

"Yes, dearest." Shea rolled his eyes at him. He followed the counter to the end of the room and then peered into the half bath that Pyke pointed out. "Cool. The living room is on top of Laurel's rooms?" He kept on walking, past the fire pole, and gave a low whistle. "You didn't mention you bought a new TV. Your stud status just shot through the roof."

Pyke smirked and admired his big screen TV. "I'm a millionaire, according to my accountant. New house, new TV. I think I'll skip buying cars, though -- I like my bike. Do you like the TV?"

"I think I want to have sex with it."

Pyke laughed and pointed to his battered couch and the arm chair he'd snagged from his parents when he moved out at twenty. "I'm hoping you'll put your couches in here so we can pitch those."

"You know it, or we're going shopping; those are hideous." Shea looked around the room again and nodded. "Okay, approved. The food is near, as is the bathroom. I can hang out in here. The stairway across from the bathroom goes up to your floor?"

"Yeah, I took the whole third floor. When Laurel makes it up here I'll show you both."

"Cool." Shea nodded again and wandered from the living room, back to the kitchen and then to the top of the sweeping staircase. "Okay, I give. And you look like you're going to pee again. Where are my rooms?"

Pyke jumped up and down in the kitchen, unable to contain himself any longer. "This is possibly the absolute coolest. You're going to freak." He went to the corner of the kitchen and opened a large door. "Walk-in pantry. Awesome for all our food storage needs, right?"

"Right." Shea raised both his eyebrows but he looked in. "I hope my closet is this big, actually."

"I know, right? It's huge." Pyke walked into the pantry, lined on all three sides with shelves, some of which even had food on them; he'd brought his cereal and rice with him. "See how the shelves on the back wall all have edges so nothing can fall off?"

Shea started to grin. "You're not serious?"

"I am!" Pyke showed him the latch and pushed the wall, which swung silently open. "Your bedroom. Come on!" He dashed through and pointed to the front of the room, where French doors opened onto the balcony Laurel had admired. "Look!"

Shea pinged around the room, clearly thrilled to tiny bits by his secret entrance and the added attraction of having a balcony. He said he liked the size of the room, too, but Pyke thought maybe Shea was just saying things by that point; it was just a slightly larger than normal sized space, maybe fifteen feet on a side, but Shea seemed happy.

"I'll put the bed right there, and I can see out to the balcony -- wait, do we have eastern exposure on this side? Never mind, it doesn't matter. This is so awesome!"

Pyke laughed and let himself be kissed. "Want to see the other room? And your bathroom?" He pointed to an unremarkable door on the back wall. "It's a walk through, but it's all yours."

Shea opened the bathroom door and looked in. "One sink, one flush, one standard tub and shower, one closet. Cool. Acceptable, for sure."

"Keep going." Pyke couldn't stop grinning. Hell, he was vibrating again.

Shea gave him a long look and crossed his arms over his chest. "Is this a good thing or a bad thing?"

"The secret door was good, right?"

"Yes." There was no way Shea could deny that.

"This is better."

Shea looked at him suspiciously. "What could be better than a hidden door to my bedroom?"

"You tell me."

Shea closed his eyes and frowned. "I'm trying to remember what the other side of the house looked like from the outside. There was that patio thing, but that's outside Laurel's door, by the driveway. No balconies."

"Right, no balconies. But it's the inside part that's cool!"

Shea opened his eyes and sighed dramatically. "I give up. Show me."

Pyke bounced. "Okay, just go through the door." The walk-through bathroom was pretty close to what he'd had in his dorm room, four guys in two bedrooms sharing a bathroom, but he figured Shea wouldn't mind, seeing as how it was all his and no one else would walk in on him. Well, aside from Pyke. Pyke liked helping Shea shower as much as he liked helping Laurel bathe.

Shea opened the door and paused before starting to go up the short flight of stairs. "Why is there another level?"

"Remember those ceilings you liked in Laurel's bathroom? And the main stairs? You're going over them."

"Cool." Shea got to the top of the five or six steps and paused. "Now what?"

"There's a light switch on the right, at the normal height."

"Guys?" Laurel's voice called out, sounding slightly panicked. "Where are you?"

"Oh, crap. Be right back!" Pyke turned and dashed through the bathroom, the empty space where Shea's bed would be, and then through to the kitchen.

Laurel blinked at him. "I thought that was a pantry. I like the living room, by the way."

"It is, and good, I'm glad." He grinned and held out a hand. "You get a fancy tub and an exterior door. Shea gets a secret entrance and--"

"Holy crap!" Shea's yell ran through the house all the way to the kitchen.

Laurel's eyes got even wider. "What's he got?"

"Let's go see, shall we?" Pyke almost dragged her through the pantry and into Shea's first room.

"Remind me not to put anything breakable on that wall. Door. Thing. Oh, nice balcony!"

"Come on, darlin'. Boy's pitching a fit up there."

"Up?"

"Laurel!" Pyke rolled his eyes at her and dragged her onward and then upward. "Got the girl!"

Shea was standing in the middle of his second room looking just like Laurel had when she saw the tub, right down to the squealing sounds. "I have a secret tower room!"

Pyke leaned on the wall by the door and smiled as Shea picked Laurel up off her feet and swung her around. "It's cool, huh?"

An octagon lined on five sides with bookshelves from floor to ceiling, the room had only one window, looking out over the driveway. The light was from lamps and a metal chandelier,

and the paneling was all old, dark wood. It was the closest thing Pyke had ever seen to a gentlemen's smoking room, and he'd just known that Shea would adore it.

"It's beyond cool!" Shea turned another circle and went to touch one set of shelves. "I'm going to spend hours sorting out my books and tapes. This is fantastic! I'll need a desk."

Laurel looked just as enchanted. "It's really too bad that you'll have to bring people through the kitchen and the secret door and then your bathroom," she said thoughtfully. "This room deserves to be shown off."

"Oh, right. I forgot about that part." Pyke figured he sounded particularly smug as they both rounded on him. "Secret panel, leads to the living room. Actually, it's a very short secret passage, with more stairs, and then the living room."

They both went immediately to the blank section of wall between bookcases that corresponded to where the living room would be and started feeling the edges, looking for a catch.

Pyke watched them mess around for almost ten minutes. He left them to it and went back to the kitchen, then to the living room with a bag of potato chips. He turned on the lovely new TV with the volume way down and sat himself in his horrible old furniture to listen to them thump and scrape at the far wall, grinning to himself the whole time.

Silence fell and just when Pyke was thinking he should probably go and see what they were doing -- actually damaging the door would be a problem -- the wall slid sideways and Shea stood there, grinning at him like a loon.

"Not a push this time," he said, sounding satisfied.

"Nope." Pyke stood up and grinned right back. "Later, you can find the way to open it from this side."

Shea walked over to him and kissed him, hard. He was smiling while he did it, so the kiss was more teeth than lips and tongue, but Pyke wasn't fussy.

"Oh, nice." Laurel laughed and tugged them apart, gently. "I'm going to like seeing a lot of that. But I want my kisses, too."

"Not a problem." Pyke reached for her and kissed her lightly, and then with a bit more emphasis. She opened her mouth to him and things were just getting interesting when Shea cleared his throat.

"Yes?" Pyke asked, mostly into Laurel's mouth.

"She said kisses. Plural. My turn, and then I totally want to see your room."

Laurel's hand slid up Pyke's spine. "That! Me, too." She kept a hold of Pyke but turned her head and kissed Shea. "Take us upstairs, Pyke."

That was hard to resist. Plus, he could probably talk them into kisses while they were up there.

"This way." He snagged Laurel's hand and then Shea's as well, which left no hands for the chips. "Shea?"

"Got 'em." Shea understood about snacks.

They had to let go in order to get up the stairs, but that was okay. This time Pyke led the way and stayed in front; there wasn't a lot of point in making a big deal about his space, since it kind of spoke for itself.

The entire third floor was really only three big spaces: the bathroom, which was a closed-off quarter of the floor above the living room, and the rest, plus the tower. A center column rose right up to the roof, eight feet on each side, and it was next to this that the stairway was constructed. Other than the center column and the walls blocking off the bathroom, the rest of the floor was wide open, with a step up to his bed in the tower.

"Well?" he said, crossing to one of the many chairs in what he'd deemed his sitting area. "What do you think?"

As he'd expected -- hoped -- all of their attention was taken up by the area his bed occupied. Any other time -- and every time in the future -- he would hope that they were eager to get to the bed so they could have a lot of fun. This time, though, was all about the setting.

"Dude." Shea dropped the chips on a table and walked to the bed, stepping up on the platform. "You can see... everything. God."

"Holy cow, can you imagine this at night?" Laurel crawled onto his bed and looked all the way around. "This is the glass tower, right? It has to be, never mind. I'm being stupid. Stunned."

"It's kind of what made me know this was the house for me," Pyke said, smiling. "How could I possibly resist a bedroom made up entirely of windows? It's the highest peak in the house, and I can see... everything."

Shea was looking down at the yard. "You're going to wake up with the sun, stud."

"I know. That's okay, though."

"You're going to see every bolt of lightning. Every rain storm. Every flake of snow, if we get any." Laurel sounded almost aroused by the idea. "God, even the ceiling is glass. This is incredible."

"It's peaked so the weather just comes right off, and the metal bits holding all the glass together are some kind of alloy. I don't understand exactly how it all works, but they told me that the glass is the same stuff they use on glass bottom boats and for glass floors. Safe and strong, and if there's a storm I'll be sure to invite you." Pyke joined them on the bed, taking the potato chips with him. "Both of you. Hey, at the same time, even. The bed is big enough."

"I think I need a bigger bed," they both said at the same time.

Pyke smirked. They both blushed. "Awesome."

"Look." Laurel lay on the bed and pointed down to the front yard. "You can see the gate from here."

"You can see my balcony from here."

Pyke nodded and listened to them talk for a while; he figured the house was worth every penny he'd spent, just for this. They loved it, they were as delighted by it as he was, and they were going to move in. Everything was going to be amazing.

Chapter Five

Shea didn't have any trouble breaking his lease. He said he was lucky, but Pyke had an idea that Shea just knew the best time to call his landlord, the best time to mention at the office that he was looking for someone to take his apartment, and the best time to look around, all wide eyed and pretty, and ask if anyone had a truck and a morning to spare.

Laurel didn't get feelings, didn't have a vibe to lean on to get things going her way. She had to do it the hard way: advertising for a person to sublet and hiring a moving company. She didn't seem to mind, though; she said that with the money she was going to save on rent she could splurge. It was all about getting into that tub.

For Pyke it was all about making sure they both got their belongings in and where they wanted them to be, and making that happen as smoothly as it could. It wasn't easy, when they suddenly had two tables for the kitchen, both of them perfectly good. That little crisis was solved by Laurel noticing that there was an alcove in the mud room that her table would fit into. Once the table was covered in baskets and had shoe racks under it, she seemed so happy that Shea and Pyke just smiled and nodded and went back to getting Shea's bed in his room.

It took more time than Pyke wanted to finally get them both into the house. They both moved slowly, over a few weeks. Pyke had imagined a weekend-long shuttling of belongings, ideally the weekend after he'd moved in, but it dragged on and on. Everyone was working their regular jobs, so it was more like one carload from each of them every evening, and then they were gone again.

By the time it looked like they were mostly in and all the large furniture items had been delivered, Pyke was almost beside himself. He wanted to sit in front of the TV and watch movies. He wanted to cook together, to talk about their day, to plan the gardens, to just hang out in their home.

Pyke wasn't particularly good at being patient.

"So." He leaned on the kitchen counter and watched Shea wander in and out of the pantry. "Are you staying here tonight?" He wasn't sure if he sounded hopeful or desperate.

"Not tonight, stud." Sounding distracted, Shea picked up a box labeled "Bathroom" and headed back into his room. "But I only have a few more boxes over there, my old bed and a change of clothes. I'd stay tonight, but I need to meet a guy tomorrow morning and the old place is a lot closer. Tomorrow night, though, I'm pretty sure. You'll be stuck with me, after that."

Pyke considered and decided one night wasn't enough to throw a tantrum over. "Cool." Then he headed downstairs, via the fireman's pole.

He loved that pole. It dropped him right in front of Laurel's door and none of that pesky walking around. Her French doors were open and he could hear music playing in her living room -- the room with the exterior door. She really, really hadn't wanted to sleep so close to the back door.

"Hey, pretty," he said, leaning into her bedroom. "Can I come in?"

"Hey, yeah!" She waved him in and he walked through her perfectly organized bedroom to the middle room. She was wearing jeans and a college sweatshirt, her hair up in a ponytail as she put the finishing touches on her living room. "What do you think?"

Pyke looked around and grinned. Her old apartment had felt good, like it was Laurel's space. It hadn't had as much personality, though, and to Pyke it seemed like the underlying air of "temporary" was gone. Laurel seemed determined to make her space in Peak House her own. "It looks good. Like you love it."

"I do." She tossed a pillow onto her couch and moved into his arms, hugging him close. "I really do, honey. Thank you."

Pyke smiled and held onto her, sniffing the clean scent of her hair. "It's my pleasure, trust me."

She looked up at him. "I mean it. Not just about the whole money side and letting me and Shea get away with just paying utilities and maintenance, but for pushing about the house in the first place. I'm sorry I was so awful about it. It's a wonderful house."

Pyke kissed the tip of her nose. "You don't like change, and I did kind of just tell you that you were moving. I get it."

"True," she agreed with a nod. "You did. But I love the house and I love you and I love Shea. This is going to be wonderful, so thank you."

"It is." Pyke's stomach did a couple of happy flips, and he hugged her a little harder before letting her go. "I like what you've done in here."

"I'm still trying to decide about the color." She took his hand and led him to the couch, then pulled him down. "I'll probably just live with it for a year or so before I know what I want to do."

He nodded and sat, putting his arms back around her as she wiggled her way onto his lap. "That makes sense. Remember when my parents moved just after we finished high school?"

Laurel laughed. "That's exactly why I'm waiting. God, your poor dad. How many times did your mom repaint the kitchen?"

"Three in the first two months, and she finally went back to the color it was when they moved in."

"I thought he was going to leave, I honestly did." Laurel shook her head and snuggled in. "None of that for me, no way. I'm not going to drive you both batshit over something like that."

Pyke smiled and kissed her. "You're a good one, darlin'."

"I'm moody and cranky, and you put up with me. I'm not going to push that away. Plus, you and Shea are pretty cute. What else could a girl want?"

"We're talented, too. Ever hear Shea play the spoons?"

"No, but I remember him hanging spoons from his nose when we were freshmen in college. That was the year I seriously thought about running away from you two."

Pyke snickered. "We were freshmen. Everyone wanted to run away from us." Hell, he'd wanted to, as well. College really hadn't been Pyke's thing. Playing in a series of bands and drinking a lot had been Pyke's thing. "Did I ever say thank you, by the way?"

She lifted her head and gave him a quizzical look. "For what?"

"You pulled me through that year, man. I would've quit school for sure if you hadn't helped me pass my finals. And that summer you made me take summer session with you -- I only went so I didn't have to get a job, but I learned more those three months than I had the whole year before. The next year was better."

Laurel smiled at him. "You just needed to grow up a bit, that's all. And look at you now!"

"Yeah, I picked the right numbers and took care of my next ten years. A lot of skill there." He grinned at her. "But I have a feeling that you and Shea are going to help me pick a direction, aren't you?"

"Yep. We've already been talking about it."

Pyke wasn't surprised at all. He didn't think for one minute that a stroke of luck meant he got to coast through life, and he knew himself well enough to know that he'd need some help to focus. He was just lucky enough to have amazing people in his life who would help him with that.

He kissed Laurel again before he could get all sappy and sentimental. "So, you're all moved in? Spending tonight and every other night here with me? It's getting lonely."

"Oh, sorry." She made a sad face and shrugged a shoulder. "Tomorrow night, hon. I've had tonight booked with Sophie for about two months -- it's her sister's birthday party and we're going to have many, many margaritas. I'll be at her place, but home tomorrow afternoon. Probably hung over, but home with you."

Pyke sighed. "Well, Shea's going to be home tomorrow, too. We should plan something -- dinner in the dining room at that huge table, just to say we did it."

"I thought you wanted to do other things on that table."

"After dinner, and are you volunteering?"

Laurel laughed. "Maybe," she said with a wink. "We'll just have to wait and see how my hangover is."

"I'm going to tell Shea you said so." Pyke laughed and got up, dumping her gently onto the couch. "Oh, by the way, I had a sign made for that door. It's really nice; I think you'll like it."

"What does it say?"

"Nothing rude, stop looking at me like that." Pyke walked toward the door and laughed. "It says, 'Private Entrance, please use other door' and has an arrow pointing around the driveway. It's well done, too -- iron and painted tile, very classy. Better than a poster stuck on the inside of your screen door."

Laurel gave him a long look and one of her sweeter smiles. "Thank you, honey. I appreciate it."

"I wouldn't want you getting annoyed by band members ringing your bell." God, what a mess that would be after the fourth time. "Speaking of -- is the garage okay for you and Shea? I know it's detached, but is there enough room in there?"

"It's fine." She tilted her head at him, making her ponytail sway. "Why? And what on earth does the garage have to do with band -- oh. Practice space."

Pyke nodded. "But not the way you're thinking. You and Shea get the garage, I put my bike in that shed thing around back, and I'm having a soundproofed building built for practice. Nothing huge, smaller than the garage, even. But if you need work done to the garage, now would be a good time to tell me."

"It's fine, honey." She nodded at him and smiled. "Thanks. Again. Really, you're all kinds of awesome, you know?"

"Yeah." Pyke grinned and left, whistling to himself. One more night and his dreams would all be coming true.

The next night Pyke found himself downtown instead of at home with Shea and Laurel. No doubt they were curled up on the couch, or eating in the dining room, or making out, or something fun.

The first night, and he wasn't there.

He couldn't remember being in a more foul mood, ever. On the other hand, he was never more motivated to get through a recording session and he played his very, very best. If he could have gotten out of it, he would have. Sadly, it was one of those situations where he was called in to fill a spot due to someone else's tragedy and no matter how much he would prefer to be at home, he wasn't about to mess up everyone else's lives by being a jerk. This was his job; this was what he did and loved, so there he was.

One in the morning and still playing guitar.

They finally stopped at two, happy with the tracks and willing to let the rest go until the next night. Pyke turned down the offer of a drink and another offer for a quick blowjob, and went

out to his bike. It was pouring rain, which more or less capped everything off. With a sigh, his foul mood abruptly turning to self-pity, Pyke climbed on his Harley and headed home, grateful for the lack of traffic.

Wet, tired, still feeling pathetic, he was unsurprised to find the house dark. He left his boots and leather jacket in the mud room, then let himself into the house as quietly as he could. There were no lights at all on the first floor, other than the nightlight someone had plugged in at the bottom of the main staircase, and no sound of the TV on. He went up to the kitchen, glanced in the pantry and found just a pantry.

Trying not to sigh too loudly, Pyke went up the final flight of stairs and stripped off his wet clothes in the dark. He got dry boxers on and sprawled out on his bed to watch the rain make lines on his windows, the glow of the distant street lights picking out the shine of the water against the black sky. It was rather pretty and sad, not unlike his mood.

When his cell phone started ringing Pyke didn't even flinch. He wasn't exactly used to getting calls in the middle of the night, but it happened often enough that he merely reached for the phone and looked at the display. Drunk dialing he'd let go to voice mail.

It was Shea, though, and that was just weird.

"Hey, babe," Pyke said softly when he answered. "Where are you? Need a ride home?"

"No, I'm downstairs. In bed." Shea sounded a little amused. "We heard you come home. Did you get wet?"

"Yeah." Pyke looked out the window again. "It's really coming down."

"There was thunder earlier. Laurel came up around midnight, said she was creeped out down there by herself. Come on down and sleep with us."

Pyke wasn't about to turn that down. "I'll be right there." He didn't even wait for Shea to reply before he hung up and tossed his phone back on the bed, already walking to his stairs.

In the kitchen, the pantry was still a pantry, but Pyke didn't mind; he knew how to open the door, and the fact that they hadn't gotten up to do it just meant that they were all snuggled up together. He let himself in and smiled at the lumps in the bed; there wasn't enough light to see very well, but he could make out Shea in the middle of the bed, spooned around Laurel.

"Is she sleeping?" he asked in a whisper as he got in behind Shea and curled up into his back, fitting them together with easy comfort.

"No," Laurel whispered back. "She's not. She was waiting for you to get home."

"Aw." Pyke kissed Shea's neck than rolled almost on top of him to kiss Laurel. "Here now. You can sleep."

"Good." She was smiling; he could hear it in her voice.

Pyke smiled too and cuddled up. Shea smelled good, sleep-warm and clean; Laurel was there, Pyke rested one hand on her hip, his arm draped over Shea to reach. Then he closed his eyes and fell asleep to the sound of the rain on Shea's balcony doors.

He woke up to sunlight filling the room, his cock nestled into Shea's ass, and his hand on Laurel's breast, over her T-shirt.

Nice.

Pyke breathed deeply, his eyes still closed, and stretched just a little. His morning erection slid along Shea's ass, their boxers making the motion nice and smooth. Shea pushed back, which made everything nicer.

"Morning," Pyke said, his voice low and sleep-hazy.

"Mmm." Shea wasn't really one for waking up fast, but he did get a hand on Pyke's thigh, keeping him where he was.

Laurel stretched, too, arching and twisting, slipping away from his hand for a moment before coming back. "There's a dick drilling my back," she said, sounding amused.

"Blame Shea. It's his."

"Blame Pyke. His is trying to drill me."

Pyke snickered and rubbed a bit more. Under his hand, Laurel's nipple drew up to a tight peak. "She likes that, Shea," he said in a mock whisper.

"She only thinks she likes it. Wait until you start making that sound of yours. She'll run away."

"Hey." Pyke stopped rubbing, and Laurel giggled. "What sound?"

"I know that sound." Laurel turned over in Shea's arms and smiled at them both. "I make him make that sound, too, remember?"

"Ah, yes. We three are very generous with each other." Shea's ass shifted and instead of rubbing, Pyke was rubbed.

"I wouldn't mind if you two were generous with each other right about now." Laurel's smile grew wicked, and Shea gasped.

Intrigued, Pyke ducked under the comforter to see why. "Oh, nice." Her hand was working between them, inside Shea's boxers. "Take it out, darlin'. Let me see."

Shea laughed a little breathlessly. "Are you serious?"

Laurel pulled the front of Shea's boxers away and moved back. It was a stunning sight, Pyke thought: Shea's cock, held in Laurel's hand; Laurel's legs and skimpy black panties, a strip of belly under the hem of her T-shirt.

"I'm totally serious." Pyke tugged on Shea's hip and got him laying down flat. "Laurel, play with him for a minute."

"Not a problem." She started stroking Shea's cock as Pyke sat up to push the comforter to the floor. If Shea had any protest to make it died before the words came; his legs spread, Laurel kissed him, and that was that.

Pyke tugged Shea's boxers off, got rid of his own, and rolled over Shea's leg to settle between his thighs. "Okay, then." He had to clear his throat to get Laurel and Shea to stop kissing. "You want to see, pretty?"

"Uh-huh." She was breathing almost as fast as Shea, which was oddly amusing.

"Feed him to me."

Shea groaned and Laurel giggled, but it happened. Pyke opened his mouth and started licking his second favorite cock, and Laurel fed it to him. Giving head in the morning was always an okay thing, but it was a bit more intense with Laurel watching, with two hands smoothing through his hair.

Shea seemed more turned on, too, or perhaps just really ready to get some relief. He pushed into Pyke's mouth, going deep a lot sooner than normal, and he was hard, hard, hard.

Laurel moaned, and Pyke looked up to see Shea lifting her T-shirt and pinching one of her nipples. When Laurel moaned again Pyke did as well, his cock throbbing against the bed as he watched Shea tease her. Pyke's moan made Shea fuck a bit faster, and from there things got a little fuzzy.

Pyke's balls ached, and he sucked Shea harder, tasting him when he started to leak. Shea and Laurel kissed, tongues dancing, both of them making soft, sweet sounds that made Pyke want to taste Laurel as much as Shea. He thought about that and went down on Shea with added enthusiasm, groaning at the image in his mind. God, to taste Laurel on Shea's cock was suddenly the primary goal of his life.

"Jesus, Pyke." Shea gasped and humped into his mouth. "God, yes."

Laurel made a whimpery sound and pulled away, yanking her shirt off. "Yes," she echoed. "That's it, Pyke. He's almost there. God, you're beautiful."

Pyke palmed Shea's balls and took him in deep; when he swallowed around the head of Shea's cock, Shea arched and swore again.

"Oh. Oh, yes." Laurel was breathless, her legs moving restlessly on the bed as she watched. Shea had abandoned her breasts, probably because all of his attention was on his own dick, but she didn't seem to mind. She was cupping them, teasing the nipples by herself, her eyes wide. "Show me, Pyke. Please."

Pyke lifted up, dragging his mouth all the way up Shea's long rod, showing her every bit of it before he sucked Shea down again. He could feel the way Shea was swelling, and he could hear the obvious and sudden silence of Shea holding his breath.

Looking at Laurel, Pyke slid his fingers back behind Shea's balls and pushed up as he swallowed.

"Fuck!" Shea came in tight, rocking waves, his dick pulsing and his stomach so tight he curled up over Pyke's head. "Pyke!"

Pyke swallowed and licked, his hips pushing down into the bed as hard as he could to keep from rubbing off on the sheets. He wanted, and he wanted to be somewhere better than on cotton when he went.

Laurel was almost panting as she watched. "Yes, that's it. Now me. God." She shoved one hand into her panties and started gasping.

"Whoa." Shea rolled and grabbed her wrist gently. "We'll take care of you, baby, okay?" He licked her fingers and nodded to Pyke. "Come on, stud."

Pyke forced himself to breathe, though he couldn't speak. In a moment he had one of Shea's rubbers on his cock and was kissing Laurel's mouth. He was going to ask her if it was all right, but she had her legs wrapped around his waist so he figured it was okay.

Shea was holding her, spooning her again. Right there. Pyke kissed Shea, licking Laurel from his lips as he pushed into her pussy.

"Pyke," she whispered. "God, please. Oh, God."

She was hot and wet, the whole room smelling of her sex. He licked at Shea again and started to move, fucking her with long, even strokes right into the depths of her heat. He could feel her, already tense, ready to come for him, ready to flex and flutter around his prick.

"You're so beautiful," Shea whispered. "Both of you."

Pyke lowered his mouth to Laurel's breast and dragged his teeth over one high nipple. "I want to do you both at the same time."

"Oh, shit!" Laurel arched, her cunt going tight.

"I want to lick you both," Pyke said, fucking her through her orgasm. "I want to taste you both. I want to fuck you while Shea's inside me."

Shea's breath caught. "Jesus, you'll get me up again, stud."

Pyke grinned at him through gritted teeth. "I really, really want to come now."

Laurel's pussy was flexing rapidly around him as she came, her hands clutching at his arms. "Fuck me. Come in me."

It was a request he could fulfill. He pounded into her a few more times and started to shoot, relief and joy pouring through him as he went. For long moments there was only silence and intense pleasure; then there was kissing and basking, all three of them tumbled together on a bed in the sunshine.

Chapter Six

Shea developed a passion for drawing up plans of the house. The big file of information and all the notes that the Peak family had left with Pyke didn't include any actual plans of the house, and Shea told Pyke that the collected information was sorely incomplete. He was going to fix that.

It amused and delighted Pyke that all three of them were soon involved with the project. Shea and Laurel worked all day at the office, then the three of them would spread sheets of paper out in the dining room, grab measuring tapes and spend an hour or two painstakingly measuring the house, room by room. Each room was drafted onto a page, and then Shea would painstakingly add it to a huge sheet of paper he was drawing the complete house on. He swore that he'd do the exterior as well, as soon as he found a ladder long enough.

The explorations led immediately to the discovery that there were pockets of space in the house that they hadn't yet found access to; Shea was thrilled. Pyke was amused, for the most part, but it was Laurel who was becoming obsessed.

To Shea, the plans were about collecting details and completing a project. He wanted the plans for the sake of having plans, a scale map of the house. He thought it was fitting and interesting and something that simply should be done.

Laurel wanted the house's secrets. She wanted to know why a wall was too deep, why the center core of the house seemed to be an eight by eight tube that the house was built around, why there were gaps as large as four feet between walls, sealed off from them.

Pyke just wanted to watch them in their intensity and excitement. He thought maybe he should be just as wildly involved in the project because of the plans or the secrets, but mostly he liked watching the two of them in grubby clothes, trying to find a way into a wall that Laurel insisted might have a secret closet or cupboard. They looked really hot, and Pyke was a simple man.

They found the basement that way, through Laurel's dogged determination, early one evening. Pyke had cooked supper for them all, and after they'd cleaned the kitchen everyone changed into what they were calling their exploring clothes and met down in the dining room. There was beer, though not a lot, and Shea almost landed on Laurel when he zipped down the pole as she came out of her suite.

"That pole is going to drive me insane."

"You should see Pyke dance with it," Shea deadpanned, leaving her with her mouth half open as he headed for the table. "So, which room tonight, team?"

Pyke smirked and preened when Laurel looked him up and down, her gaze considering. "I'm sexy," he told her, shimmying a little.

"You're nuts," she shot back with a grin. "However, for my birthday, I want you and Shea pole dancing for me. I'll put dollar bills in your jock straps."

Pyke opened his mouth and froze when Shea's hand suddenly slapped over it, silencing him.

"Pyke," Shea said slowly and deliberately. "If you agree that you and I will pole dance for her birthday, I will have to pole dance. I do not want to pole dance. Understand?"

Pyke nodded and licked Shea's fingers.

"You're gross." Shea laughed and let him go, then wiped his fingers on Pyke's shirt. Laurel snickered and tried to look disapproving, but she was just as easily amused as they were sometimes.

"Okay." Pyke went to the table and looked at the state of their plans. "Looks like we're done with Laurel's. Done with the mud room and the front verandah, and with this side of the dining room. So, where do you want to go next? Up?"

Laurel was shaking her head, a measuring tape already in her hand. "I want to deal with that second dumbwaiter."

Shea and Pyke exchanged glances. Laurel had been pushing about the dumbwaiter since they'd worked their way to the dining room and it didn't look like she was going to let it go.

"Baby." Shea was using his "let's all be reasonable" tone of voice. "We don't know where it goes. Up or down, and frankly it's the down that worries me."

Pyke took one look at Laurel's face and knew they were done for. She was not to be swayed by reason or even pleading. Sure enough, twenty minutes later she was sitting in the dumbwaiter, a rope around her waist and a flashlight in her hand. She also had a very large can of bug spray, just in case.

"Okay. Here we go." She tugged on one of the ropes and the pulley system screamed. Pyke winced, Shea flinched, and Laurel grinned as she started -- very slowly -- to move.

Down.

"Huh. Figures." Shea sighed and looked around, his hands still gripping the rope so tightly his knuckles were white. "We can meet her down there, I guess. Or you can -- I'm going to hold on here until she's down. Where's the basement door?"

Pyke shrugged. "I didn't even know there was a basement, man."

"Lovely." Shea looked at Laurel, who was just about to vanish from sight. "Baby, come on back, okay? We need to find the door."

"Don't be silly. I'll find it when I'm down there. Although I'll wait here while you go get that lantern you take camping. You know, the bright one that the moths love."

Half an hour after that Pyke was telling Shea to get a grip on himself and stop babbling about how dangerous the whole thing was. "She's down. She's been down for ten minutes, she's just looking around. And how do we know this?"

Shea rolled his eyes and frowned. "Because she keeps coming back to talk to us. She should have taken her phone."

"You're just being over-protective, and you're projecting your discomfort with basements onto her. She's doing great." Pyke stared at him. "Unless you've got a vibe. Do you?" That would be bad. Shea's feelings were never wrong.

"No." Shea sighed and looked utterly annoyed. "I don't have a feeling. She's fine." He turned and yelled down the hole, "Find any stairs yet?"

"Yup." Laurel's voice came from behind them and they spun around so fast that Shea almost fell down the dumbwaiter hole. "And the door. I'm awesome."

"You are indeed." Pyke gripped Shea's arm and hauled him away from the hole, right to where Laurel had swung open a decorative panel on the side of the stairway casing. "Huh. I assumed the underside of the stairs was closed in because of your bathroom plumbing."

"That, too." Laurel shone her light around just inside the panel. "By the way, those pipes will probably need to be redone in a few years, honey."

"Wonderful." Pyke pushed his plumbing woes aside and followed her into the opening, Shea right behind them. "Can we measure this some other time?"

"Oh, yeah. This is about exploring." Shea sounded almost awed as they looked down stone steps. "God, no one close that panel, okay? Basements are creepy. Hey, there's a light switch."

It didn't work, but they found an empty lightbulb socket to try out when they had a bulb handy, and the flashlight and lantern were enough for a look around. The shadows were a little creepy, Pyke had to admit, but it was fascinating. He gave Shea's hand a squeeze and followed Laurel.

"Check out the walls," she said, starting down the steps. "Careful, the fourth one is a little uneven."

"Wow. Look at all the stonework." Shea ran his hand over the wall of the stairs as they went down. "And it's dry; that has to be good."

"This is so cool; you're going to love it." Laurel's flashlight bobbed around as she tried to get them to go faster. "Three things that I could see and I'm all... like this!" The light bobbed with a lot of energy and Pyke laughed.

"You're floofy like you were about the tub." He grinned and stuck close. She was bouncing and there wasn't much Pyke liked better than watching Laurel bounce. She had a lot to bounce and it was all nice to watch.

Shea smacked him on the arm and Pyke stopped walking. "What? She knows I think her tits are awesome."

"Staring is rude."

"God, you two." Laurel's eyes rolled but she seemed both pleased and amused. "Okay, surprise one -- we have a basement with two rooms!" She waved her arms like Vanna White did on Wheel of Fortune. "This is the wine cellar. No wine, though. No spiders, either, which kind of worries me. There should be spiders, don't you think?"

"I think I can live without them." Shea wasn't a fan of the spider.

"Dude, a wine cellar? No way." Pyke looked harder into the shadows and took the lamp to the wall, appreciating that the basement floor was clear of clutter. There wasn't even any old junk or wood lying around. "Oh, how cool is this? The whole wall is built-in racks for bottles and kegs! We need to start collecting wine, clearly."

"Clearly. But that means... oh, right. You are rich." Shea laughed. "Join one of those wine clubs, man. I approve of this method of going broke."

Laurel snorted but said nothing about the money or the wine. "There's all kinds of neat little alcoves. I wonder if they were for organizing things or if they were just there."

Pyke shrugged and followed the wall to its next turn. "So, what's the other room?"

"You're going to love this. I'm not sure, exactly, but it's got a heavy door and a light bulb outside. Reminds me of a movie I saw where the mad scientist would turn on a switch for a light to warn his apprentice when he was doing something dangerous."

Shea snorted. "Or, you know. It could be a darkroom."

Pyke grinned and followed Laurel's light to the door in question. "I think I like the mad scientist thing better."

"For your house?" Shea snorted, sounding unimpressed. "Dude. Go with darkroom and we'll all sleep better. I don't want to lie there in bed or in my tower and think about secret labs in the basement and a hollow core to the house. I'm delicate."

Laurel and Pyke both turned to look at him, Laurel shining the light on his face until Shea winced and looked away. "Okay, so not so much delicate as possessing an overactive imagination."

"That." Pyke nodded and looked at the bulb outside the door. "Well, everything is dusty so the scientist has been quiet, anyway." He turned the doorknob and glanced at Laurel. "You wanna, darlin'? You found it."

She laughed and reached out, putting her hand on his. "Pull."

The door opened easily, not creaking at all like the gate had done, and all three of them peered inside.

"Kinda... black." Shea got the lantern and passed it to Pyke. "Go forth. Explore."

"Jesus, you really are delicate, aren't you? Don't worry, Laurel will save you." Pyke left Shea at the doorway and went inside, holding the lamp out in front of him. "Oh, how very disappointing. It's not a secret lab."

It was, in fact, a darkroom. There weren't any handy contact sheets on display to underline the point, but there were shallow basins, a shelf of chemicals likely long since rendered inert by time, and a series of string lines going from one wall to the next for hanging prints to dry.

"I bet we can make it into a lab!" Laurel grinned at him and started poking around, opening drawers and cabinets.

"That would require one of us to become a mad scientist," Shea pointed out. He came into the room and looked around. "It's a good sized space. We can probably use it for something, I guess. No natural light at all, though, which is kind of depressing."

"But handy for a darkroom. Makes it dark." Pyke paced off the floor and then remembered he had a measuring tape attached to his jeans' pocket. A moment later he said, "Okay, approximately eleven by fifteen. That's huge, man. You know what this means, right?"

Laurel and Shea both gave him blank looks.

"It means that to use the basement to its true potential, we need to become wine snobs and one of us needs to develop a passion for photography. Did you see what I did there? Develop?"

Laurel and Shea looked at each other and left the room without a word, taking the lamp with them.

"Oh, come on." Pyke followed, not really wanting to be left in the dark. "It wasn't that bad."

"It was terrible." Laurel was giggling, though, he could hear her trying to stop. "Okay, last thing. That hollow center is down here, too. Look." She pointed with the light again. "That wall of the darkroom is one side, plus a few feet. And then it goes all the way around. I can't find a way in."

Shea took the flashlight from her hand and left them, finally curious enough to get over his basement thing. "Huh. She's right. It's the same eight feet. If nothing else, it'll make the basement easy to plot when we get real lights down here and can measure. No way in that I can see, but it took me a while to figure out how to open my tower door from the living room. We'll figure it out."

"I just don't get why it's even there," Pyke said, not for the first time. "I mean, what if there's stuff walled up in there we don't want to see?"

Again, Shea and Laurel looked at each other, but this time they didn't walk away. Instead, Laurel whapped Pyke on the arm, hard. "You had to go there, didn't you? Jerk."

"What?" He rubbed his arm. "I didn't actually say anything about d--"

"Shut up!" Shea glared at him. "Don't even say it. Not down here. In fact, can we go upstairs now? I need a beer, and I'm annoyed enough that you're going to have to make up to me."

"Me, too." Laurel went to Shea and took his hand. "He can make us popcorn and serve us on the couch."

"I was thinking more of 'servicing' and not so much 'serve'."

Laurel looked at Pyke and nodded. "Okay, that, too. But no talking."

Pyke snickered. "I always talk."

"Then I'll stay cranky." She reclaimed the flashlight and led Shea to the stairs. "Come along, my darling. No more basement for you."

Shea, Pyke noticed, didn't hesitate to leave with her. Smiling to himself, Pyke looked around the basement, the lamp held high. "Neat."

Then he went to the stairs, eager to start making up for mentioning spooky stuff while in the basement. He was good at making popcorn. He was better at servicing.

Chapter Seven

Pyke and Shea were in the living room playing Guitar Hero on the Xbox and fighting about whether or not Pyke had an unfair advantage.

"If I had an advantage, I'd be winning," Pyke pointed out, reaching for his beer. "God, this sucks. You suck. In fact, I've decided you have to suck me, just to make up for this."

"You wish." Shea beamed at him and grabbed the nearest beer bottle, which happened to be Pyke's, so he plucked it right out of Pyke's hand. "I think you should suck me, right after we're done here."

"Do boys always have the same fight over and over?" Laurel stood in the doorway, her hands on her hips. "Seriously, it's kind of cute the way you both just know you're going to have some kind of sex, but the fighting over who's doing what is... well, amusing, actually."

Pyke stole his beer back and toasted her. "It all comes down to position, darlin'. Neither of us is going to turn down a lay. You look nice; are you going out?"

She nodded and turned a circle. "What do you think? Nice? Too much? Not enough?" Her hair was in a very loose upswept tumble of curls and she had on a clingy knit top of some kind, the color a dark rust that went well with her pale slacks. Boots that were almost the same color as her top completed the outfit and made her at least three inches taller.

The boots did amazing things for her ass, too.

"That would depend on where you're going and what you're going to be doing," Shea said reasonably. He had abandoned the game to admire her, and Pyke allowed him to re-steal the beer. "If, for example, you're going to see your Great-Aunt Mary, it's far too much, put on a cardigan sweater and button it up."

"But if you're going out for cocktails with the girls, it's perfect. And feel free to wear that around the house as much as you want," Pyke put in.

She smiled and twirled again, then shook her ass at them, laughing. "Out with Ashley. See you later, my darlings. Don't have sex in the living room, in case we come back. Only I get to watch, okay?"

"You can stay and watch," Shea called as she left. "We don't mind."

"Some other time!" She laughed again and they could hear her going down the stairs.

"Who's Ashley?" Pyke asked as he reclaimed his beer again. "Do we know her?"

"Not that I can remember. Wanna play some more or get to the blowjobs?"

It wasn't a tough choice to make.

At eleven that night he and Shea were still on the couch, though they'd turned off the game and were immersed in a CSI marathon on TV. They were sitting at opposite ends of the couch, their legs tangled together, and a line of empty beer bottles stretched from Pyke to Shea, neatly resting against the couch.

"Should we move?" Pyke asked as he heard Laurel come in, talking. She'd brought Ashley home, apparently, but had used the main door and not her own entrance.

Shea merely grunted and pointed at the TV. "Shh."

"Okay, then." Pyke decided that being polite and standing to greet Laurel's friend was possibly beyond them, anyway, given the number of bottles. If Shea wanted to stay on the couch, he'd stay with Shea. He listened to boot heels on the stairs and the low murmur of voices while he tried to follow the plot of the show; it sounded like Laurel was talking about the dining room as she came through the kitchen.

"Heads up," he murmured, nudging Shea with his foot.

"Uh-huh." Shea sighed and struggled to sit up. "Whoa. Drunk."

"Me too, babe. Me too." Whoops. He looked at the door and blinked. "Hey, Laurel." Wow, he really was drunk. It looked like Ashley, poor thing, was a dude. He tried really, really hard not to say that out loud.

"Hey, guys." Laurel snorted at them. "Ash, this is Pyke. On the other end of the couch is Shea. They seem to have had a quiet night in."

Shea waved, looking as bleary as Pyke felt. "Just about to go to bed, though. Nice to meet you, Ash. Did you two have a nice night?"

Ashley smiled and nodded to each of them. "We did thank you. Heard a new band -- the lead guitar wasn't anywhere near your league, though, Pyke. I've seen you play a couple of times; I'm a fan."

Pyke blinked and stared. Ashley sounded like a dude, too. "Thank you," he managed to say, trying to puzzle it all out. "Who did you hear tonight?"

"Minx," Laurel said. "First on the stage, so the crowd was light. Do you need help getting upstairs to bed, honey?"

"No, I'm good. If I don't make it I'll just pile in with Shea. Less stairs."

Ashley glanced at Laurel and nodded knowingly. Knowing of what, Pyke had no clue.

"Okay, then." Laurel came over and kissed his forehead, then Shea's. "We're going down to my place. See you in the morning."

"Night, Laurel," Shea said. "Night, Ash."

They all said goodnights until it got confusing and then Laurel pulled Ashley from the room. Carefully, Pyke turned his head to peer at Shea and whispered, "Dude. That was a dude, right?"

"Uh-huh." Shea nodded slowly.

"Laurel's dating?"

Shea nodded again, looking glum. "Looks like."

"Well. Fuck."

Laurel was indeed dating. She talked about Ashley over breakfast, she mentioned him when she was trying to make weekend plans, and she told Shea all about how Ashley liked Pyke's playing. She told them both he was a CPA and that he liked books.

Pyke and Shea smiled and let her. In private, they made faces at each other and tried to come up with all his flaws. Sadly, they didn't have any evidence of his flaws, other than his complete acceptance of the idea that Shea and Pyke were a happy gay couple who happened to be friends with Laurel. The fact that it was kind-of-sort-of-if-you-squint true didn't help.

"I don't suppose we can tell him that we sleep with her, too?" Up in Pyke's room, Pyke was sitting on one of his favorite chairs for playing guitar, plucking at strings. Shea was sitting on the floor, leaning back against another chair and pretending to read a book about tarot cards.

"We sleep with her as well as he does, or we sleep with her as well as each other?" Shea didn't look up as he turned a page.

"As well or as good?" If Shea could be pedantic, so could Pyke.

"Now you're just being silly." So much for pedantic. "Besides, we haven't been able to get near her since he showed up."

"True." Pyke sighed and nodded. "I suppose we could be really good friends to her and turn up the gay, not give him any reason to wonder about her and us."

"Please. His name is more gay than we are." Shea rarely got that bitchy and it made Pyke smile. "Besides, why should we be more gay than we are so she can date someone else? I should start wearing that bi-pride pin, if I can find it. I'm just not that good a friend, Pyke."

Pyke sighed and looked around his room. He'd had such huge hopes and dreams, and he'd honestly thought things were going well. Shea was certainly on board, understood what was happening. But Laurel... "She doesn't get it, huh?"

Shea put down his book and stretched his legs out. "No. But you know what? I think it's a matter of her not realizing that's it's even possible, not a matter of her heart."

Pyke picked out another cord. "What do you mean?"

"I mean she's in love with you. She's in love with me. I can feel it. I feel it as much as I feel you loving me, Pyke. I don't think she knows what it is, though. She's fully aware that she loves us both and that we're all super close -- closer than any other friends. And she's cool with the physical stuff. She hasn't put it all together yet. Society tells her she's allowed one man, one person to be with. I honestly don't think it's even occurred to her that it can be the three of us, always."

Pyke leaned over and put the guitar back on its stand. "It's occurred to you, though?" He leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. "You can see it and you don't think I'm insane for wanting that?"

"I don't think you're insane. Your house is insane." Shea smiled and moved to him, crawling across the bit of floor until they were face to face. "I moved in here because I love you. Because I'm in love with you and have been for years. The house is cool, man. But you and Laurel are my heart."

Pyke nodded slowly and whispered, "Love you, too. It's okay that I love her?"

"I'd think less of you if you didn't. She's ours, man. She just doesn't know it, yet."

Pyke felt himself smile. "You have a feeling?"

"I always have a feeling. This one says be patient. It also says 'take me to bed, Pyke.' I think you should listen to that one."

Pyke's smile grew a bit as warmth blossomed in his stomach. It had nothing to do with arousal -- or more accurately, very little -- but it had everything to do with Shea and how much Pyke felt for him. "I will always listen to that feeling." He unfolded himself from the chair and offered Shea his hand. "Now. Always."

Shea took the hand and pulled himself up until they were chest to chest. "Always. I'm going to hold you to that."

"And I'm going to hold you to me." Pyke kissed him gently, then again. The third time their mouths met Pyke pushed his hand into Shea's hair and licked at his mouth, wanting in.

As easy as anything, Shea let him in and started walking them across the room to Pyke's bed. "Careful of the step up," he whispered between kisses. "I don't want to let you go."

"Don't let go." Not ever. Pyke let Shea lay him out on the bed and welcomed the weight of Shea lying on top of him as they kissed. They weren't still for long. The sun from all of Pyke's windows made the sleeping room hot, even in the late afternoon, and in a few moments they began to strip each other.

It was a task Pyke loved, especially when the goal was making love -- even more than fucking. The urgency was a slow burn, a decadent melody as opposed to the heavy push of a bass line, and with every button he slipped through its hole, with every tooth of a zipper loosened, he found new territory to savor.

Shea's mood was about the same, and without speaking about it they took turns. Shea's shirt removed, a long, languid pause while Pyke kissed and licked and loved his way over muscle and skin and nipples. Then Pyke's T-shirt was peeled away and he was made breathless by Shea's tongue and lips, the loving returned to him.

"Shea." He dragged Shea back up his body and kissed him hard, his hands mapping and caressing Shea's shoulders and back. "I love the way you look on my bed." White sheets, sunlight, and Shea, all-American boy. It was heady, like a fine wine. He dropped one hand to Shea's jeans and massaged the long line of his cock. "God, you feel good."

Shea pushed into his hand, his shoulders pushing back into the bed. "You make me feel good," he said with a grin. "Keep doing that. No, wait. Kiss me more."

"I can do both. I have many, many talents." Pyke kissed him and rubbed him, his hand making its way down to Shea's balls and then between his legs to press along the seam of his jeans.

"Yes," Shea hissed. "There. I want you there, Pyke."

Pyke nodded and kissed him once more, then rolled away. The bed was big; it took them a moment to get their jeans off, and then a longer moment to make out a while before Pyke finally made it to the table where he stashed his supplies. "Here? Are you sure?"

Shea looked at him, one eyebrow raised in a question. "Am I sure I want you inside me? Yes. Are we in our home? Yes. I don't see any--"

"We're surrounded by windows."

Shea blinked. "Let them look," he finally said. "This is our home. Make love to me, Pyke. Besides, chances are they can't see anything, given the angle and the light."

That was good enough for Pyke. He got Shea in the middle of his bed and kissed his mouth, his jaw, his chest. Cradled between Shea's legs, Pyke could see the world around them, could feel only the warmth from the sun and the heat of Shea's need.

He took Shea's cock into his mouth and sucked gently while he opened Shea. Fingers used to playing as many guitars as he had time for were gentle, taking time and care until Shea's body not only accepted him but demanded more. Until Shea demanded more, with his fists clutching at sheets, his hips rising and falling, his voice singing out and asking for Pyke's love.

"Always with you," Pyke whispered as he lined up. The condom was slippery with lube but Shea was ready, willing; he welcomed Pyke in and kept him there, legs curling around Pyke's hips.

"Love you," Shea said. His back arched and his neck bowed, and Pyke could only wonder at the beautiful gift he'd been given. All his life, Shea had been there, one third of the whole. There was still hope that the epitome of what they wanted would be achieved -- but the love that Shea offered was entirely unique and precious.

Pyke moved in him, almost divorced from the physical sensation, he was so lost in the momentary crush of feeling. But then Shea moved, his ass gliding down Pyke's cock and he looked up at Pyke's face and moaned, and physical reality swept over him.

"Oh, God." Pyke's eyes closed as his entire attention was shattered and fractured, torn away from his emotions and scattered from his cock to his balls to his feet to the way Shea smelled and tasted and right to how very, very good this felt.

"Yes," Shea whispered. "That's it." He moved, and Pyke looked, saw Shea lift his legs and catch them behind the knees. "Now, please."

Gasping, almost grunting, Pyke knelt up and watched as his dick vanished into Shea's ass. Again and again he thrust and pulled out, twice all the way out to rub the head of his cock over Shea's hole. Shea whimpered when he did that and begged to be fucked, effectively stopping Pyke from doing it again; if Shea was going to beg, Pyke was going to come too soon. There wasn't anything hotter than Shea pleading with him. the begging meant Pyke couldn't do it any more than that or he'd come too soon.

"Touch me," Shea asked, his eyes closed tight and his legs spread almost too wide. "Pyke!"

That time he did grunt, there was no way it wasn't a grunt, dirtier than a groan and way beyond any moan of pleasure. Pyke thrust deep and ground his hips against Shea's balls as he jacked Shea's cock. "Come on, give it up, babe."

Shea gave it up, in a long arc and with a viselike grip around Pyke's cock. He gave it up with a yell and a spasm, and he pulled Pyke's climax from his balls without warning.

Pyke came so hard the sunlight faded and the sound of Shea's breath in his ear was like the sound of the shore through a sea shell. He couldn't open his eyes when he was done, and he certainly couldn't move. Cleaning up was a far distant notion.

"I love you, Pyke," Shea whispered. "So much."

"I love you, too." He nodded and tried to kiss Shea's skin, but he wasn't sure if he managed it.

"I have a feeling. It'll work out. I feel it."

"Okay." It was that simple, right then. There was a lot of love to go around. It would be okay. Shea said so.

Chapter Eight

Laurel and Ashley continued to date once a week or so for a while, and Pyke found reasons to be practicing in his room or out of the house when Ashley came by. It wasn't that he was outright trying to be rude; he just didn't see the point in making himself watch Laurel's courting.

He was small enough to take comfort in the fact that they didn't see each other every day, or even every other day. It couldn't be terribly serious if they only had one date a week. He did wind up spending one evening on the stone patio by Laurel's door with them, though, an impromptu party of six or seven people and repeated requests for him to come out and sing and play had swayed him.

He thought it would be a lot easier to dislike Ashley if Ash was at all unlikable. Unfortunately, Laurel's string of icky boyfriends had broken and he seemed to genuinely treat her well with no ulterior motive -- aside from the given motive of eventually getting to sleep with her, and Pyke couldn't really hold that against the guy.

The two saving notes in the song were that Laurel was not involving Ashley in her love affair with the house, and she had not yet, in fact, taken Ashley to her bed. Pyke knew this because she'd told him over lunch one day. "There's nothing wrong with him," she said, looking over the top of her glass at Pyke. "But I don't want to rush sleeping with him. Don't know why, to tell you the truth, but he's not pushing, and I'm not encouraging."

That was a pretty good day.

Laurel always came home after dates, and she never spent the night out. She also didn't spend any more nights in Shea's bed, or Pyke's, but Shea was quick to remind Pyke that she hadn't really done that before Ashley came along. Laurel really did like her own space; that had been the motivation behind offering her a suite of rooms well apart from the rest of the living space, after all.

"Now, you," Shea said with a grin, "you like to bed hop."

"I do not. I just like company." Pyke sniffed. "You can come to my room, you know. That big glass room is pretty cool at night."

"The stars keep me awake."

"I can come up with much better ways of keeping you awake, babe." Pyke grinned and made a grab for Shea's jeans.

"That's the problem." Shea went to him, laughing. "Some of us have regular working hours, you know. I need to be up a lot earlier to get to the office than you do to get to the studio or a gig."

Pyke had to admit that Shea was right. "Okay, so how about we go to bed before midnight? I'll sing you to sleep, and then you can wake me up before you go?"

Shea kissed him, and Pyke chose to take that as a yes. He also chose to take that as a sign that they should find somewhere other than the kitchen to be right then and started steering them toward the pantry.

Before he could get them that far, however, the dumbwaiter came rattling up to the kitchen from the dining room, pausing when it was between floors. They'd discovered that the shaft made an excellent intercom system and the dumbwaiter itself was as good as a ringing phone to get attention.

"Guys?" Laurel's voice came.

"Hey, pretty." Pyke refused to stop speaking to her affectionately, even if he was being good about keeping his hands to himself. "What's up?"

"I think you better come down here." She sounded calm, but they'd known her since she was fifteen. They knew calm, and they knew the calm that came from "I am trying really hard not to shriek" so they moved fast.

She may not have deep love for the fire pole, but she had known them since she was fifteen, so she was already facing them when they landed. "Basement. I found it."

Pyke nodded. "You found the basement. We know."

She shook her head, and he suddenly noticed all the dust she was wearing on her T-shirt and jeans and the smudge on her cheek. "Not the basement. In the basement. It. I found it."

"Found what?" Shea asked cautiously. "This doesn't have anything to do with the lab, does it?"

"Darkroom," Pyke said automatically. "Not a lab."

"Whatever."

Laurel was nodding, her braids all fuzzy as hair escaped them. "In the lab--"

"See?"

"--the door to the middle. I found it. Come on!" She turned and headed to the open panel leading to the basement.

Pyke followed, mostly because Shea was pushing him. "What were you doing down there?"

"She's always down there," Shea told him as they went down the now lit up stairs. "When you're at practice or whatever. She got all the lights working, even."

"No one tells me these things. God." Pyke got to the bottom of the stairs and looked around at the basement. "Huh. It doesn't look any different than it did in the dark."

"Which is why you don't see me down here, duh." Shea followed Laurel around the corner. "Come on, if she's making me go into the lab--"

"Darkroom."

"--you have to come, too."

Pyke rolled his eyes and followed. She'd lit up the darkroom too, mostly through the creative use of extension cords and spotlights, one of which was stuck through a hole in the wall.

"Oh, man."

Laurel bounced, and for once, Pyke was too distracted to watch. "I know! It was really, really hard, too. I mean, I knew it had to be on this wall, and last week I was sure I'd found the seam in the shelving that was the edge of the door, but I couldn't get it open."

Pyke eyed the crowbar that Shea picked up and then set back down. "Did you break the house?"

She snorted. "I wouldn't break the house, you know that. I adore the house. I just needed to see if it was really the door or not, so I lifted the edge of the wainscoting. I mean, really. Wainscoting in a darkroom? It was like a sign saying 'Secret door here.'"

Shea knelt down and stuck his head in the hole. "Oh, wow. What the hell is it?"

"Beats me. Actually, no. I have a theory. But it might involve breaking the house, so we'll have to see."

"No breaking the house." Pyke knelt down beside Shea and patted him on the bum. "Room for two?"

"Not standing room, no." Shea backed out, and shook his head. "It's filthy in there. Also, cobwebs."

"I think the spiders just took over," Laurel said. "What do you think?"

"Wait!" Pyke raised a hand and eyebrow at the same time. "Lemme see before you two start talking about it. You'll ruin the surprise."

"Then stick your head in there and see." Laurel actually tapped her foot on the floor.

Pyke did as he was told. The light was the same hooded kind of thing he'd seen in garages and workshops all over the place and it was easy to turn around so he could see the room.

But it wasn't a room, at least not one he'd expected. The space was smaller than the eight by eight it measured outside of course, but it shot way up. Four floors, he assumed, since he couldn't see the top. All he could see was a square with all kinds of ledges and boxes sticking out of the walls, along with crossbeams and braces, up as far as the light would shine. Everything was dusty, covered in cobwebs, and there wasn't any point to climbing in there since he wouldn't be able to stand without banging his head on the first of the ledge-box-like things.

"Okay," he said slowly as he backed out. "Do I have the same smudge on my cheek that Laurel does?"

Shea peered at him and shook his head, then turned to Laurel. "I think you're right. I don't think it'll break the house, however."

"I can't wrap my head around where to test, though. We can't really get in there to mark where from the inside."

Pyke sat on the floor and watched them talk it out, not really following along. As far as he could tell, the center column of the house was a structural element designed for support and to encase secret nooks and cupboards. Those should be easy enough to find. He let them debate ideas for a minute -- starting with Shea suggesting laser pointers, for no reason Pyke could fathom -- and then started looking at the door Laurel had found.

Laurel and Shea had worked their way around to sonar when Pyke sat back on his heels. "Darlin', this isn't a door. It's just a wall. You did a fantastic job getting this section out, though."

Laurel stopped in mid-sentence and looked at him for a long moment. "You had to see that, didn't you?"

Pyke grinned. "I knew it. I knew you knew! You took apart a wall because you were so curious."

She blushed and nodded. "I couldn't sleep last night. It was driving me crazy. But I do know I can put it back, I swear. I can fix it."

Pyke stood up, laughing. "It's okay. I'm not mad." He held out his arms and drew her into a tight hug. "You did good, pretty. Now we know, and you didn't damage anything. You're kind of awesome." He kissed her forehead and pulled back. "You're also really dirty and kind of sweaty."

Shea snickered as Laurel tried to look offended. It was true, though.

Pyke took another look in the room and nodded. "Okay. First step is to put this wall back. Then we're going up to my room to find my hidden cupboards."

"Your room?" Shea asked.

"Well, aside from the basement it's the only floor where we can get to every wall of the center column without major battles. It just makes sense."

"But what are we going to do when we get there? We can't see that far up," Laurel pointed out. "We can't just take down sections of wall, even if I did manage it in here."

Pyke smiled at her. "Darlin'. Hollow sounds a hell of a lot different than solid, even to my band-weary ears."

It wasn't just any group of friends who could rebuild a wall, grab a beer, and troop up to a third floor sporting a glass tower and then start banging on the interior walls until they found a secret compartment. Pyke thought they needed a team name.

"We are not getting matching T-shirts." Laurel was adamant about that as she tapped her way along one wall, right at the three foot mark.

Shea was on another wall, using his beer bottle to bang at random spots. Pyke didn't think his heart was in the hunt. "I think we could use a secret handshake, though. Something as complicated as the house."

Pyke laughed and put his ear to the wall, listening hard as he tapped. Another inch and he did it again. "You know, I really should call Mr. Peak. I bet he knows all this stuff."

"Don't you dare!" Laurel sounded shocked. "This is our house now and I've worked too hard to have you spoil my fun."

Pyke smiled at her, and Shea laughed softly. "Now you did it, Laurel. You made him all sappy. And after all that fussing you did when he moved in."

Laurel looked momentarily chagrined. "I apologized for that," she said, giving the wall another knock. "Besides, it wasn't the house; it was how we were informed we were moving."

"Can't argue with that," Pyke admitted. "I apologize."

"I accept." Laurel grinned at him and hit the wall again. "Whoa. Did you hear that?"

Shea was already moving. "It's been papered over."

"Of course it has." Pyke rushed over too and marked the wall with a marker. "Okay, darlin'. Find the edges and we'll see what we can do."

It took her a few minutes to mark off the hollow spot. Pyke and Shea used the time to sit and drink beer while they watched, and when she showed them the rectangle they nodded. "Okay. What do you suggest, oh Dismantler of Walls?"

She frowned at them. "Peel the paper and find the opening?"

"That would make the most sense. Or we can bash it in."

Shea didn't even look at him, just whapped him. Hard. "Break the door and anything that might possibly be inside. Bright."

Laurel nodded. "You said no breaking the house. I'll peel it off, nice and neat. Might take me a few days."

Pyke rubbed at his arm. "Okay. Feel free, anytime. Well, unless I'm asleep. That might not be so cool."

She snorted. "You sleep with Shea."

"Shea might come up here, you never know. I promised to sing him to sleep."

She gave him a funny look and then smiled. "That'd be nice."

He barely stopped himself from telling her he'd sing to her, too.

Chapter Nine

"Okay, I'm here." Shea crawled into bed with him and practically melded to Pyke's back. "Pyke?"

"God." Pyke blinked into the darkness and forced himself to focus his eyes. "Babe? What time is it? What's wrong?"

"I can't sleep." Shea was pushed up close enough that Pyke could feel his heart hammering away. "I had a dream."

"Oh." Pyke rolled over and gathered him up, pausing only long enough to stack a few of the pillows up. He got Shea's head resting on his chest and looked around. "What about? Do you want to talk about it?" The sky was full of stars, but the moon was nowhere to be seen.

"Not really," Shea whispered. "I don't even remember it. Just water and something slimy. Probably just your run of the mill 'I shouldn't have eaten that before bed' nightmare."

Pyke nodded and rubbed Shea's arm with one hand, then played with his hair with the other. "I know those ones. I'm glad you came up -- it's always easier to let them go when someone is there to hold you."

Nodding, Shea slid his arms around Pyke's torso. "You said you'd make the stars be quiet."

"You're taking that to heart." Pyke smiled softly. "It's kind of like a story, sleeping up here in the sky. It's right out of fairy tale."

"You slaying dragons and things like that, being the knight. Laurel is the fair maid."

Pyke shook his head. "You're the knight. Hardworking and steady. I'm the wastrel, the spoiled prince. But yes, Laurel is the fair maid."

Shea laughed and then yawned. "Prince Charming."

"Not hardly." Pyke snorted rudely. "Go to sleep, my knight in shining armor. Tomorrow is another work day."

"Mmmkay. Quiet the stars with a song, my prince."

Pyke smiled and stroked his hair again, then softly began to sing. "Puff the magic dragon..."

Pyke let himself into the house and went up to bed, going as quietly as he could. It was another late night, and a Sunday as well. Shea and Laurel both needed to be up for their jobs in a matter of only a few hours. The least he could do was tippy-toe up to his room and not trip over the new trim to go around his secret panel.

He'd thought about hanging a painting over it, but as it wasn't a safe he decided he'd not bother making a huge secret about the fact the compartment was there. After all, Shea and Laurel knew, and no one else would ever be up there. He did his entertaining out in the band room or down in the living room. So, he found some nice antique wood trim and Laurel promised to make it look nice after they hung new paper.

He thought maybe he'd paint, though. Wallpaper was a pain in the ass.

Still thinking about paint versus wallpaper, Pyke undressed in the dark and then turned to his bed. "Jesus Christ."

"Sorry," Shea said. He was sitting up, outlined in the moonlight. "I thought you heard me moving around. Are you okay?"

"God. I will be. Maybe. You're lucky I didn't have a heart attack." Pyke was only half kidding. His heart was pounding wildly when he got into bed and held out his arms for Shea. "What are you doing awake, babe? And up here. Are the stars keeping you awake?"

Shea smiled and curled into him. "They were pretty quiet tonight. The moon got chatty, though."

"Say anything good?"

"Nah, just taunting me about my vibes." Shea sighed and turned his head on the pillow to look up at the sky. "You know that patient feeling? It told me to push a bit, this afternoon. I was in my tower, doodling out ideas for work and I just... wanted to go see Laurel. See how she's doing."

Pyke listened hard and held Shea close. "Uh-huh."

"She was in her bedroom, but she had the glass doors open so I knocked, right? She was over by the window, in that ugly chair you gave her, reading a book."

"It's not ugly; it's a vintage lounge from the thirties. And it's pink."

"It's horrible, but she loves it. Anyway, she was reading some romance novel and eating an apple, and when I knocked she looked up. She was crying."

Pyke frowned. "Crying? Over a romance novel?"

"That's what I asked her. Well, first I went and scooped her up and told her she wasn't being silly. I told her I had a feeling about her, and she at least took me seriously. So we sat and she ate her apple, and I waited."

"Okay." Pyke nodded and tried to be encouraging. "She told you why she was crying?"

"Well, she couldn't, is the thing. She says she's confused and mad at herself. She told me that her life is perfect and she has no reason at all to be sad -- her boyfriend is nice, she lives with her two best friends -- that's us, by the way -- and she loves her home. Work is good, everything is good. But she's sad and lonely and really confused."

Pyke looked out the window and thought about that, one hand absently rubbing at Shea's back. Laurel shouldn't be unhappy, above all else. Even if she was dating Ashley, Pyke didn't want her to be sad, and certainly not lonely. He knew Shea didn't, either. "What did you tell her?"

"I told her that maybe she needed to break out of her routine. Take a trip, see her girlfriends more." He sighed. "I even told her that maybe she should see Ashley more often. And I told her that we love her and will do anything to make her feel better."

"It's what I would have said." Pyke sighed, too. "Then what?" God, he should have been there. It wasn't fair to Shea, having to be the shoulder all the time, the one with the feelings. Sometimes the vibes weren't so rockin' good.

"Well, she said she wished she could blame hormones, but she couldn't. And she said the book was trash, completely unrealistic. Apparently the heroine picked the wrong guy; he was too smooth, too perfect, too respectable. According to her, she should have stuck with the funny one, the one who'd helped her through the hardest parts of her life. At which point I kinda suggested that the best friend didn't always get the girl in real life, either."

Pyke closed his eyes. "Oh, babe."

"Yeah. She got real quiet and cried more. I held her and let her use me as a tissue and then I told her that I love her. That you love her. And that we'll always, always be here."

Pyke nodded and curled around Shea a little tighter. "All true. Thank you."

Shea didn't say anything for a few minutes, but Pyke could feel him tremble, once. When he spoke again his voice was calm and clear -- but he'd had to swallow a couple of times to get there. "In the end, she asked if she could have a dinner party next Friday for her girlfriends. I said of course, and then she said a real dinner party -- in the dining room, three or four courses, use the dumbwaiter and all the good dishes. I said sure."

"I'm not cooking that much food, babe. We'll cater it. I'll help serve, though."

Shea laughed softly. "That's what she said you'd say. So that's what we're going to do. She's having a party, you and I will work it, and she'll maybe cheer up." His voice dropped low. "Maybe she'll do some thinking. Maybe she'll come back to us."

Pyke rubbed Shea's back and nodded. "Maybe. I hope so. What did the moon tell you?"

"The moon said it's time to sleep and what will be, will be."

"That's good advice. But I'm glad I have you here with me while I try to follow it."

Shea nodded again. "I love you, too."

Chapter Ten

Pyke had always known in his heart that the very worst thing about being without ready cash was trying to eat on a budget.

Thankfully, that was no longer an issue. Catering was totally the way to go when throwing a bash.

"Did you taste this?" he asked Shea, dragging him to the counter. "Look at this! It's amazing!"

"Dude. We're supposed to get this stuff onto the trolley, not dine." Shea ate the morsel Pyke held out, though, and licked his fingers. "You look sexy. I like the waiter look."

Pyke grinned and then snorted. "You like most of my looks. I like that about you. Also, I like you wearing a white shirt. Just sayin'."

"We're totally hot studs." Shea grinned at him, somehow still managing to blush. "But should we be eating their food?"

Pyke rolled his eyes and spoke as if educating a small child. "We take ours, we put the rest in the serving dishes, we make it all nice. There's six women down there and I bought dinner for twelve people. Trust me, we won't run out. Did you get the wine up from the basement?"

"Not yet." Shea went to the dumbwaiter and rolled the empty cart onto it. "I'll do it now. Make sure you get me some of that pasta." He started the dumbwaiter down with the cart and then headed to the stairs. "We can save the pole until they're seated, I figure."

Laughing, Pyke nodded. He hummed while he worked, transferring the first course into the serving dishes and making sure everything looked nice. One of the great things about not having a real job was that he'd had all day to get the dining room perfect for Laurel. He'd arranged an area for the ladies to have pre-dinner drinks in comfort, he'd set the table and put out the centerpieces, and he'd even managed to take out one of the leaves of the table by himself, so the party wasn't overwhelmed by the furniture.

Now he turned to making sure each and every dish looked lovely and was warming properly on the set-up the caterers had left. Hot water, closed lids, and he had two courses ready to go. From the dumbwaiter vent he could hear talking and laughter as Laurel's friends had a short tour of the lower level, and he could hear the second dumbwaiter rattling as Shea brought up a load of wine.

"God, I love being rich," he said to himself as he stole a deviled egg. A moment later he crossed the room to help bring up the wine and get it all opened to breathe, the wine coolers ready for the bottles that needed chilling.

As dinner parties went, it was all that Pyke had expected. The ladies were giggly, but impressed by the house, and a couple were completely fascinated by the dumbwaiter. Pyke sent the wine cart back down for Shea to take charge of, then pulled the second serving cart up.

It took him a few minutes to load it up with the food and make sure that everything he and Shea would need was on it, and then once more he put it in the dumbwaiter. He stopped twice to make sure the brakes were on the wheels while he waited for Shea to come back. The last thing he wanted was for the salad to tumble off the cart when they were lowering the dumbwaiter.

"Okay," Shea said as he came into the kitchen from the stairs. "They all have wine and water, a few are still working on their cocktails, but they're seated at the table. By the way, nice touch with the place cards. Are you spending your days watching HGTV again?"

Pyke rolled his eyes. "No." Well, yes, but he wasn't going to admit it. He grabbed a hand towel, tossed it over his arm and went to the pole. "Ready?"

"Wait for me!" Shea dashed to him, and they zipped down the pole, to the delight of Laurel's friends.

"Show offs," Laurel said, but she was laughing along with the rest of them. "Very nice, though."

"That pole..." Nicole shook her head, still laughing. "I can't wait to tell Don about it. He'll be over with a case of beer, Pyke, just to bribe you into letting him pretend he's a fireman."

Pyke grinned and went to the dumbwaiter with Shea, where they began to lower the first course. "Send him around. I'm always open to bribes of beer."

"I'll keep that in mind." That was Tanya, one of Laurel's newest friends, and one that went through men like most women went through tissues.

Pyke winked at her. "You don't need to bribe me."

They all hooted with laughter and Laurel pointed to Shea. "You'll have to bribe him, Tanya. And he's a lot more expensive than Pyke."

Shea nodded but said nothing. The laughter kicked up a notch, and Pyke took a quick look at all the liquor he'd made available. Oh, well, they were all adults. It was a big house, too. Six ladies drinking Mai Tais and being served a catered meal were a lot easier to impress than the average bar crowd, he discovered.

He and Shea served the ladies, put the cart back on the lift, and headed up the stairs to get the main course ready to serve. Really, it was a pretty easy gig, and as soon as all the dishes were back upstairs and washed, he and Shea could flop in front of the TV and let the ladies do as they pleased. They'd all arrived in cabs, so he didn't even have to worry about charming car keys away from any of them.

"They're wound up," Shea remarked as they prepared the plates of pasta.

"Yeah. But guys would be too, if they had hot chicks serving them in a mansion. Private parties are always more... uh, what's the opposite of decorum?"

Shea laughed. "How many years have you spent waiting tables?"

"Enough to know to keep my ass away from they guests. Ladies grope."

Shea looked at him. "They do not."

"They totally do. Especially if they think you're unavailable. You're therefore safe -- and we know these girls, all of them. We fall neatly into the 'just kidding around' territory, babe. Trust me. Keep your butt away from them at all times. Unless, of course, you want to be felt up."

"You aren't serious."

Pyke gave him a long look and then dragged him over to the dumbwaiter shaft. "Listen."

"So then I told him that if he wanted to be all up in my business he was going to have to do something about that God damn cat of his. I mean, honest. I'm not fucking when a cat is staring at my ass, no matter how good the sex is."

"Oh, please. Honey. Be glad it's just a cat. Remember that guy last year? The one from Boston who was here for a few months? He had two dogs that would sit beside the bed and watch us. I'd prefer a person watching to dogs."

Pyke smirked at Shea. "See?"

"Ah, but that's just sex talk. Everyone does that." Shea didn't seem to be bothered. "It's not like they're talking about us."

"So, Laurel. They're finally together? It's been years, huh?"

Pyke raised an eyebrow, and Shea looked chagrined.

"They're happy," Laurel said. "They're awesome, really."

Shea smiled. "Aw."

"It's too bad all the cutest ones are gay," someone said with a sigh.

"They're not gay, they're bi." That was Francis; she'd known them for years, since she roomed with Laurel in college. "Pyke was a slut, back in the day."

Pyke's eyebrow went up, and Shea snickered. "Stop listening now."

"Ohh," Tanya said, drawing the word out for far longer than it needed to be. "Are they both bi? God, that would be fun."

Pyke stepped back, and Shea made a face. Neither of them moved far enough way to stop listening, though.

Various voices were raised in laughter, denials, cat calls and then speculation. Laurel didn't seem to be taking part, though her voice might have been buried.

"What? A girl can dream!" Tanya laughed, her voice carrying above the others. "Two hot men, that's a lot of fun. And ones that won't be scared about touching each other? Sign me up."

"In any event," Laurel's voice suddenly cut through the laughter, "those two are not up for grabs. Sorry, ladies."

A round of good natured pouting later and the subject seemed to be closed. The topic turned to gossip about someone's broken engagement, and Shea headed back to the pasta.

"That was... educational," he said as he got a plate ready. "And slightly disturbing."

Pyke nodded and then shook his head. "My point is made? Don't put your bum where they can get it. And we know them -- it's worse with strangers."

Shea laughed and nodded. "This is going to be a loud night, too, huh?"

"Oh, yes. The volume will go up with every drink. I suggest we grab a couple bottles of wine when we bring up the dishes from the first course."

"For us, or to keep them from getting too drunk?"

"For us, of course. Once the dishes are in the dishwasher, I'm getting sloppy in front of the TV with you."

"It's a plan."

The two of them got the main course served, brought up the first load of dishes, and got them washed before laying out the dessert. Shea had his bum patted once, but it was Sophie, who was very sweet and might even have done it by accident, so he told Pyke he didn't mind. He did, however, have a glass of wine while he cut the cheesecakes and got the dessert trays ready.

Pyke was just about to put the stack of dessert plates on the cart when the conversation below once more caught his attention. He and Shea had been making an effort to ignore it, especially when the ladies had worked their way back around to sex, but Ashley's name pulled him up short.

"Oh, I don't know." Laurel sounded weary, but not reluctant to talk about it. "He's really, really nice."

"Mmmhmm." More than one girl made a sound that sounded like far too much knowledge. "The kind to take home to mom?"

"Yeah, that kind. But then, I don't have anything against hard working, calm and respectful men. I've had my share of the others, you know?"

"But you're bored to tears." Tanya again. "How's the sex?"

Silence fell and even Shea stopped moving. Pyke knew he shouldn't be listening half as hard as he was, but he couldn't seem to help himself and Shea wasn't exactly pulling him away from the shaft.

"We. Well, we haven't."

The room exploded in a chorus of, "Oh, honey," and "Laurel, it's been ages!" and even one, "Can't he get it up?"

"Of course he can!" Laurel was laughing right along with them. "I just feel really bad, you know? He's nice, he's attractive, he's not pushy. But once in a while a girl kind of likes pushy. I don't feel... there's no passion."

Pyke backed away and looked at Shea. "Well."

"Well."

The two exchanged high fives and went back to preparing dessert. Ashley was as good as gone.

Chapter Eleven

Shea and Pyke didn't mention Ashley to Laurel or even to each other. They merely bided their time and made sure there was ice cream in the freezer. The after affects of the party lingered for more than a week; from the stray, drunken women Pyke found the next morning to the leftovers he had for lunch every day and the two cheesecakes still in the freezer.

Then there were the phone calls.

There were phone calls to thank Pyke for the food, to compliment the house, to apologize for the ass grabbing and to flirt. The compliments were easy to accept, the apologies were laughed off -- except Tanya, Pyke had great fun torturing her for her embarrassment -- and the flirting was returned. He had a reputation to maintain, after all.

Through it all, Laurel walked through the house looking distracted -- after the hangover went away -- and for the first time in weeks actually climbed into Pyke's lap to watch TV.

"What's up, darlin'?" he asked during a commercial break. Shea was there, too, his legs sprawled over Laurel's so the three of them were like a big pretzel.

"Just thinking about stuff." She snuggled in a bit more. "You two always make it easier."

"That's our job." Pyke nodded and let her think.

It was another half hour of TV before she said, "Do you guys like Ash?"

Pyke and Shea looked at each other. "We don't dislike Ashley," Pyke finally said. "But it's not what we feel that's important here, pretty. How do you feel?"

"I don't know," she whispered. "I only know that I feel better here with the two of you than I feel anywhere else."

Shea sighed and moved closer. "You know why that is. You just need to accept it and decide what to do about it, honey. We'll be here, no matter what. We're not going anywhere."

She looked at them both sadly and nodded. "I'm sorry I'm hurting you. I didn't mean to, and it's not something I want. I never, ever want to cause you pain."

Pyke kissed her cheek. "We know."

"I think I better go to bed. I have to think about stuff."

Pyke let her climb off him. "Like Shea said -- we'll be here. As long as you need to take, as long as you need us."

"I know. That's what makes me think I've been needing to have a think for a long time." She kissed them both, then, and left the room, leaving them to curl up together and wonder how long they'd be like that. Two instead of three.

It was a few days before Pyke finally snapped and realized he was tense and cranky and needed some stress taken care of. Luckily, Shea was home so Pyke invited him upstairs. Shea countered with his tower room, so Pyke brought his guitar downstairs and played his newest song through a couple of times while Shea sat and listened.

"What do you think?" Pyke finally asked, setting the guitar to the side and going to look out the window. "Hey, Laurel's home. Her car's in the drive."

"She drove up about ten minutes ago. And I think you're making yourself crazy. She broke up with Ash."

"I know. I saw the ice cream was gone. But she's not up here with us yet."

Shea tilted his head and gave Pyke the one look that Pyke didn't enjoy. It was like being examined by a particularly strict teacher who just knew he was the one who pulled the fire alarm and was completely prepared to find the proof and expel him. "Okay," Shea said finally. He stood up. "Let's go."

"Where?" Pyke wasn't exactly wary, but he wasn't sure he wanted to just follow blindly, either.

"I think that, when we were talking to Laurel, we forgot to give her key information, spelled out in a way she can't twist around with any insecurity. We need -- you need and I need -- to actually tell her that we're in love with her. Right now, before you write another song like that. Which, by the way, has an awesome melody but your lyrics are a bit too lovesick."

Pyke had a moment of confusion as his brain tried to reply to too many bits of information, and when he'd sorted out what was important, what was to be talked about later and what might have only been meant for distraction, Shea was already in the living room, his hidden door wide open.

So, of course, the thing he said was, "Are they really that bad?"

"God, yes." Shea laughed softly and went right to the fireman's pole. "Come on." He slid down, leaving Pyke no choice but to follow.

Pyke sighed and slipped down, then followed Shea to Laurel's door. "Well?"

"It's open." Shea sounded vaguely surprised. "Laurel?" He tapped at the frame and the door swung open a few more inches. "Oh, God."

Pyke shoved forward, wanting to know what had frozen Shea in place, his eyes wide.

Laurel lay on her bed, naked, her head turned toward them as the door finished swinging open. One hand was between her legs, the other had been pushing her hair out of her face. For a moment she looked like she was going to say something, but instead she merely moaned and went back to masturbating.

Pyke swallowed hard and took a step forward, his eyes hungry. "We love you. You should know that."

Shea moved with him. "He means we're in love with you."

Laurel nodded. "I know. I do." She fingered her pussy, the smell of sex filling the room and making the air close and hot around Pyke's body. "I do. I miss you."

Pyke swallowed hard, watching her. His cock was stiffening, filling his jeans. "Missed you, too, darlin'." He walked around to the end of the bed so he could see better. "God, you're wet."

She laughed brokenly and moved her hand. Her hips lifted, though, as if seeking sensation. "I was thinking about that time in Shea's bed. What you said." She turned her head to look at Shea. "Honey, you look..."

Pyke looked. Shea looked awestruck and aroused. "Come here, babe."

Woodenly, as if merely doing what he was told because he was told to do it, Shea moved to the end of the bed, too. "I feel like I'm seventeen again."

Pyke kissed him. Long and hard, and he got Shea's pants undone and his hand inside them. "You don't feel like a kid to me. Go kiss Laurel. Show her you missed her."

Shea was much more himself by the time he'd extracted himself from Pyke's arms. "Do you want that, Laurel? This?"

"Yes." She was watching them, her hands reaching out to them. "I do. I love you, and I've missed you so much. I'm sorry."

"Shh. Don't be sorry." Pyke stripped off his clothes and joined her on the bed, lying beside her and kissing her like he'd wanted to for weeks. She flowed against him, kissing him eagerly and, when the bed dipped, she pulled Shea into the kiss as well.

It wasn't quite licking her taste off Shea's cock, but it was close, and far more intense. Three way kissing was odd, but better than he'd ever imagined. The three of them made out, touching and petting, trading kisses and whispers until Laurel was gasping between them.

She was hot and wet inside, her breasts were swollen from nips and kisses and teeth being dragged over her nipples, and her hands were moving restlessly over the bed. "Please," she whispered against Pyke's mouth. "More."

He had his fingers in her cunt, stroking slowly. "Shea, be a dear? Laurel has needs."

Shea lifted his head from her breast and nodded. "So do you." He slithered down the bed and parted Laurel's legs, his breath warm on Pyke's hand. "Keep doing that, stud."

Pyke had no intention of stopping, and he watched Shea's head as he went down on Laurel, licking around and over her clit, his tongue sliding wetly over Pyke's fingers.

Laurel went wild, her hips lifting to meet Shea's face and Pyke's hand. "Yes, yes, yes," she gasped. "Oh, God. Shea. Please, there. Don't stop, don't ever, ever stop."

"I don't think he's going to stop, pretty." None of them were going to stop, not then and not for a long time to come. Pyke could feel her tensing, and he watched her eyes close tight. "Come on, darlin'. Let it happen."

Shea's tongue lapped around Pyke's fingers again and then scrubbed at Laurel's clit. Just as Laurel's muscles started to clamp down rhythmically, one of Shea's hands slid up the inside of Pyke's thigh to his balls.

"Oh!" Laurel cried out as she came, one hand on Shea's head to keep him there until she was ready to let him go, her legs trying to clamp around his head.

Pyke laughed and wouldn't let her, though. "That's it, good girl. Ease off, babe, she's gone to pieces for you." He slipped his fingers out of her pussy and into Shea's mouth. "God, that's hot."

Shea moaned and nodded, looking up at him. He sucked Pyke's fingers clean and then moved over, his mouth going to Pyke's balls.

"That's hot," Laurel said, still panting. "Really, really, hot."

Shea laughed and looked up at them. "So we're all agreed that watching each other get off is hot. Do we need to vote?"

"Nope." Pyke grinned back. "Just need to finish getting off. One of the nice things about girls is that she's not done just because she came."

Laurel snorted. "Don't get used to this, you. I do eventually need a nap and a soak in my tub, oh yes. But right now... I could go for a bit more of you." She kissed him and moved closer. "Like you said."

Pyke only wished he could remember what he'd said; he'd certainly thought a lot of things. "Okay. Yeah." He kissed her back and groaned as Shea licked his balls again and then took him for a fast suck. "Shea, don't stop."

Giggling, Laurel pulled back. "He's stopping."

Pyke moaned and fell back on the bed.

"It's for a good cause, relax." Shea laughed at him and leaned way over. "Laurel? In here?"

"Yeah, near the back. I wasn't that hopeful. No lube, though."

"You've got hand cream, and that'll have to do for now. The three of us are going shopping tomorrow, though."

Pyke gaped at him. "The three of us. Together. Including you."

"Love makes me do stuff." Shea shrugged, blushed, and rolled a rubber down onto Pyke's cock. "Sue me."

Pyke was about to say that he'd do no such thing, but Laurel threw a leg over his hips and rocked back. With Shea's expert help at holding Pyke's cock, she seated her self right down on him and they both gasped.

"Oh, fuck." Pyke held her hips and tried not to move. "Darlin'. Warn a guy."

"Okay." She took a breath and looked down at him, her hair a mess of curls framing her face. "I'm going to lift up now. And then I'm going to come back down."

Just behind her, Shea laughed softly. His hands slid around to cup her breasts and tweak her nipples. "Just a bit, lovelies. Then you're going to roll over for me."

Just a bit was all that Pyke needed. Laurel rocked on him, hot and tight, and he watched Shea play with her tits; every time Shea pinched, Laurel's pussy got tight around him and he had to dig his feet into the mattress. "Okay. Okay, God. I gotta move. A lot more."

Shea let her go and moved out of the way. "Flip over. I want Pyke's ass."

Laurel didn't even wait for Pyke, just got up and threw herself onto the mattress. "That! Now. Pyke, come on. That."

Pyke moved. He wasn't going to say no -- not to Laurel, not to Shea, not to the position. He was, however, going to tease Laurel a lot about her loss of ability to make complete sentences.

When he pushed back into her and stroked inside a couple of times, though, the teasing didn't seem important. When Shea's fingers, slick with cream, teased around his ass and finally pushed inside, it didn't even seem like a good idea. After all, he did live in a glass room. "Shea. Yes. More."

Laurel laughed, but it was strained, and he could feel her wiggling under him, her hips restlessly rocking. "Hurry, Shea."

Pyke moaned as Shea's fingers invaded him and Laurel moved far too much. "Fuck." He was whimpering. "Shea. Get in me, babe. She's fucking herself on my prick and I can't take a lot more of -- Yes! Thank you!"

Shea pushed into him, the blunt head of his cock opening Pyke up and stretching him wide to make room for the rest. Shea didn't say a word, just groaned softly as he slid in, going all the way, until Pyke could feel the curls of his pubic hair pressing up against him.

"Okay," Laurel whispered. "Now. Let's do this."

Pyke moaned and moved. He and Shea found a very shaky rhythm and lost it again almost immediately, but it didn't matter. Laurel was around him, still moving and moaning and kissing him, and Shea was filling his ass, slipping and sliding in on vanilla-scented sex. Pyke

flew, soared higher than he ever could even in his glass room, and cried out his love for them.

Shea slammed into him, forced him into Laurel and ground all three of them together. "I love you, too," he whispered, his cock throbbing. "Oh, God. I love you."

Laurel rocked and a hand went between them -- Shea's. He brought her off with a flick of his fingers and she cried out, yelling their names, and then Pyke's world burst into a million shades of musical notes as they all came together, one after another. It wasn't exactly harmony, but it was perfect.

"I love you," he whispered into Laurel's ear, feeling the weight of Shea on his back. "I've always loved you. And I'll love you forever."

She turned her head and kissed him, her eyes shining. "I know. I do. It took me too long to realize that it doesn't matter what the rest of the world wants for us. What we want is what we should do. Even if it's hard."

He kissed her back, softly, and nodded. "Shea?"

"Mmm."

"Thank you."

Shea shifted, slowly. Very slowly. He pulled out with a sigh and slid into place beside them. "I had a feeling."

Pyke smiled. "I had a feeling once. It told me to buy a lottery ticket."

"That worked out well for you."

"Not nearly as well as this." Smiling, content, Pyke kissed Shea and buried his face in Laurel's curls. He'd achieved the peak of his dreams and he couldn't possibly be happier.