



Passion's Victory



KC Kendrick's

PASSION'S VICTORY

...My pulse pounded loudly in my ears and my cock rose, anticipating something I knew wasn't a certainty. He'd come back, but for what? His warm lips found mine, seeking permission. I opened to him, inviting him to plunder at will. He did, thrusting his tongue into my mouth. I met him eagerly, hungrily. I wanted this, and more.

Jonas' strong fingers encircled my wrist and he lifted my arm above my head as his body pinned me, full length, against my front door. He pressed the hard ridge of his erection firmly to mine. I reached for him with my free hand, wanting to feel his length and girth, but he grabbed that wrist, too, and lifted it beside the other. I bucked against him, totally turned on by the aggression I sensed in him.

"Be still," he growled in my ear. He trailed kisses down my neck, even as his grip tightened. I struggled to break free of the vise grip he had on my wrists.

His pelvis ground against mine. I tilted my head and delved into the heat of his mouth. I moaned. He moaned. I wanted my hands free in the worst way. I needed to touch him, caress the sensitive, silky skin I knew sheathed his penis. I ached to feel his lips on my cock.

I threw my weight forward, desperate to force him to take a step back. It worked and I quickly spun him around and pinned him with my body. He grunted as he came in contact with the door and his lips bowed beneath mine. His strong

fingers released my hands, and I reached for him, gathering him to me. His muscled thigh slipped between mine and applied upward pressure on my balls. Instead of worrying about injury I pressed down, reveling in the tingling sensation...

ALSO BY KC KENDRICKS

Surrendered Victory

PASSION'S VICTORY

BY

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PASSION'S VICTORY
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To Lee Ann, who knows my many secrets and still loves me.

CHAPTER 1

It wasn't the quality of the coffee that suddenly had me taking my breaks in the company lunchroom, something I'd rarely done before. Not because I think I'm too good for it, or that being the junior owner of the company and part of the management team makes me unwelcome, but for the simple fact the coffee sucks. I think it's the water. Old building and old pipes equal nasty water; ergo, java that tastes suspiciously like organic fertilizer.

From the reaction of the assembled group when I mentioned the bottom line had improved enough for the company to get bottled water in the break room beginning as soon as my secretary could place the order, I wasn't the only

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one who disliked the taste of swamp water. Even the new guy had lifted his mug in a little salute and smiled. I'd smiled back.

The new guy—Jonas Chadwick. The real reason I endured the horrible coffee these days.

Tallish, maybe six-one or six-two without shoes, lean and athletic-looking, Jonas wore his years on his face with quiet dignity. Call those little lines at the corner of his cobalt eyes wrinkles, crow's feet, or whatever you like, they lent him maturity and testified to experiences I'd yet to have. Part of that experience is why Manning, Albright and Souther had hired him.

He had an impressive résumé and his freshman project with MAS showed the depth and scope of his talent. Richlands Casino took shape and form beneath his skilled hand.

Yes, I was...interested...in Jonas Chadwick. It remained to be seen if that interest was mutual. I watched covertly, hoped endlessly, and impatiently endured the lousy coffee.

"Hi, Micah!" A lovely, raven-haired beauty walked into the break room, got a cup of the swill, and sat down across from me.

"Hello, Sally. How's Carrie?"

"Still coughing. This might sound really horrible, but I'm glad I can escape that child and come to work. Being home all day wrecked my diet."

I laughed softly. I'd never have a family of my own, but I did understand how a sick eight-year-old might tax a parent's patience. As for Sally needing a diet, I thought not. A woman

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should look like a woman, being soft and curvy in the right places. Not that my taste ran to women. My taste ran to men like Jonas.

The sound of heeled boots clicking in the hall reached me. I already knew his step. The hair on my arms tingled as the very air crackled around me. A little frisson of excitement shivered through my insides as Jonas strolled into the room. He stood with his back to me as he poured a coffee. He'd finally hung up his suit in favor of the more casual attire we encouraged for normal workdays. His tight butt looked good in black denim.

He turned, and his gaze flicked from me to Sally and back to me before he took a seat at the adjacent table. Sally took her leave to go back to her desk, and I turned towards him.

"Good morning, Jonas. How's the casino this morning?"

"Morning." He shook his head. "The penthouse has a shaft problem. They want to move the elevators."

I had a shaft problem, too. I hoped no one stuck their head in the door and asked me to stand up.

"Did you mention you've moved the elevators twice already?"

He nodded. "I certainly did and told them this move would cost them a grand. They didn't blink and handed me a check. I turned it in to accounting this morning."

Really? I'd have him sit in on negotiations with my problem clients. I grinned at him. "Next time call me so I can take notes on how you did that."

"It's a gift."

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He finally grinned at me, blue eyes sparkling above a sensuously full mouth. I was smitten, and that was not good. I wasn't even sure he was gay. The vibe Jonas gave off wasn't the usual one, but I'd been told several times I didn't send out the usual signals, either. Maybe he wasn't sure about me.

I drained my cup and, as I finally had my penis back under control, rose to pour another round of toxic waste. Disgusted, I set my mug down and sighed. Impulse seized me. I turned, leaned on the counter, and met Jonas' curious gaze.

"I've had enough of this bilge water. I'm going down to the corner and get a real cup of coffee. Join me?"

He stared at me for the space of several long, breathless heartbeats and nodded. "You're the boss, so I guess you won't wonder where I am."

"We don't chain people to their desks, you know. If you need to run out, log it on the network's daily calendar and tell Sally as you walk by her. It's her job to keep track of us between nine and four."

Jonas rolled to his feet in a smooth, easy motion and stood beside me at the sink to wash out his mug. Standing this close to me I realized he had more bulk than I'd originally thought. Wearing a suit had given off a few false impressions and hidden his attributes. The man had a definite bump at the base of his zipper.

He hung his clean cup on a hook. "Ready?"

Why, yes, I was.

"Yep. C'mon." I moved past him, carefully avoiding any physical contact with him. I led him to the stairs, bypassing

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the elevator and reducing the risk of anyone who needed to talk shop bumping into us.

I waved breezily at Sally as we sauntered by the reception desk, telling her we'd be back in an hour. Jonas shot me a sidelong glance. I just grinned and mouthed, "I'm the boss" at him. The corner of his mouth twitched, then his shoulders moved with silent laughter.

We hit the street, side-by-side. Since Jonas was barely taller than my six-foot-one frame, my stride synced with his into an easy rhythm as we walked.

"How do you like our fair city since moving here?" I asked him to get the conversation flowing again. I burned to come right out and ask him if he were gay, but knew better than to do that. Jonas had a refined air about him, not the sort to respond favorably to such bluntness.

"It's warmer than Chicago, that's for sure. I'm used to freezing my ass off in January, not wearing T-shirts."

"I had the 'misfortune' to be in Chi-town in February a couple of years ago. I loved it!" I really had, too. "It snowed while I was there. Thirty years old and I made my first and only snowball."

He snorted. "Now, here I took you to be the sort to vacation at Telluride every year."

"You're psychic. I've been considering doing that." I opened the door to the coffee shop for him. He nodded in way of thanks as he walked through. "Coffee's on me, by the way."

Jonas flashed me a smile, eyes twinkling with honest amusement. I hoped I didn't make too big a fool of myself

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over this man, but concluded I likely would.

"I never thought otherwise, boss."

We stood shoulder to shoulder at the counter. I leaned a little closer than propriety might allow. Jonas seemed not to notice our thighs almost touched. *Damn*. The man was smooth, or straight and so sure of his sexuality it didn't bother him.

He ordered a large American, black. I sighed and, feeling preppy—or was it yuppie again these days?—ordered a large cappuccino with a shot of crème de menthe. Jonas settled in the booth across from me and shook his head. He pointed at my cup.

"Ah, to be young and not give a hoot about calories. That's what, eight hundred or so?" To his credit there wasn't any censure in his voice. No sadness, either. If he liked sweet drinks he bypassed them without regret.

That little glimmer of knowledge about the man was not the one I ached for.

"I wish, 'cause I'm not that young. It's more like a thousand calories, but I'm biking tonight so I'll burn them off." I hoped he'd ask more about my weekly bicycle ride so I could invite him to come along. I had a spare bike.

"I haven't been on a bike in years." Jonas sipped his coffee and looked out the window.

My heart skidded to a stop, then jerked back to life. A better chance would never present itself. I knew it. "Come along tonight then. I have a bike you can use."

His gaze flicked to mine, and he licked his lips,

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displaying the first bit of nervousness I'd seen in him. I backpedaled.

"There's a group of us," I explained as nonchalantly as I could. "We go out every week for a twenty-six mile ride. The girls stop at the halfway point and wait for the guys to come back through. No one will think anything if you don't do the whole distance your first time out. We've all done the short ride at one time or another."

His enigmatic gaze met mine. "Girls, huh? You wouldn't be trying to set me up with a sister or cousin or someone, would you?"

Damn. Jonas was sharp. How was I supposed to answer that without tipping my hand?

"As a matter of fact, I'm sure a few of the group will be very interested in you. But, since you're my new star employee, I'll protect you."

His look sharpened. A smile teased the corner of his mouth. "Well, in that case, I accept the invitation." He sipped his coffee.

I pressed my advantage, if I truly had the advantage. "Do you need bike shorts, too?" I couldn't wait to see him with gear on. Christ, I was giddy as a teenager. I needed to get a firm grip on my libido and remember I didn't know which team he batted for.

Jonas shook his head. "I have riding clothes, but thanks. When and where?"

I gave him the particulars and told him to be at my place by six o'clock, then drew a map for him on the back of a

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napkin. He tucked it neatly into his pocket and moved the conversation smoothly back to business. I sipped my coffee, enjoying the timbre of his voice and reveling in the occasional smile.

He drained the last liquid from his cup and suggested he get back to work. I reined in my disappointment and agreed, telling him to go ahead without me. I watched him leave without a backward glance in my direction. I finished my cappuccino in two big gulps and stared out the window at the traffic.

At thirty-four, I was too old to act like this. I knew better. So what if the guy made me tingle in all the right spots? He wasn't the first one, and he likely wouldn't be the last. I should content myself with having a face to go with the fantasy as I lay in the dark every night and ruined my eyesight while treading down the path to hell with my right hand leading the way.

I needed to go out more, that's what I really needed, but the gay club scene left me cold. There were plenty of hot guys to be found in the bars, but I wasn't comfortable with some stranger sucking my dick. I hoped to find some sort of stability. I refused to believe it impossible for two men—two gay men—to have that together.

I owned twenty-five percent of the family venture and getting involved with employees would hardly make my father and grandfather happy with me. They suspected my sexual orientation. We'd skirted the issue many times, but I'd always been careful not to do anything blatantly homosexual in their

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presence. Whether most gays agreed or not, I felt I owed my family that much for the love they gave me. Being considerate of their feelings never felt like “selling out” to me. I’m one of the lucky ones.

The afternoon loomed in front of me. I’d never be able to focus on the work properly. I sauntered back to the MAS building, leaned through the door of my father’s office, and told him I needed to go clear my head. He looked at me quizzically, obviously hoping I’d elaborate, but said nothing when I didn’t.

I slung my briefcase over my shoulder and told Sally I’d be gone for the remainder of the day. I backed my vintage 1969 Mustang Mach1 out of my parking space and eased the gearshift into drive. The old car eased forward with a sweet, throaty rumble. I shivered in the mid-afternoon heat.

Jonas’ assigned parking space sat empty. *Well, well.*

Did I dare hope he’d arrive at my place early?

CHAPTER 2

Admitting to myself that remaining at work would be pointless, since my ability to concentrate on my job would be nonexistent, led to another problem. Taking the afternoon off turned me into a clock-watcher, and an anxious one at that. Too bad I'd noticed Jonas' empty parking space. I got my gear ready for the bike ride and paced around my house like a caged Bengal tiger.

Did I feel stupid? Yes, I did. Every time I heard a car slow down as it passed in front of my house, I peeked out from behind the drapes. Every covert trip to the window led to disappointment. By four-thirty I'd turned surly—not a good way to be when one hopes to get laid.

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I hopped in the shower just to kill some time. It didn't make much sense because after twenty-six sweaty miles on a bike in eighty-degree heat I'd stink, but the hot water soothed my anxious mood. I'd no sooner stepped out of the bathroom and wrapped a towel around my waist, than the doorbell ring. It was Jonas.

I opened the door and invited him in. He looked me up. He looked me down. I hoped I passed his open appraisal in that quick inspection, because he certainly passed mine. I wanted to throw him down and have my way with him on the spot. My cock lengthened and swelled, and I hastily thought about plunging into ice water before my towel lifted. It helped, but not enough.

Drop-dead gorgeous, Jonas' turquoise pullover fit like a second skin across his wide shoulders and lit his cobalt-blue orbs to perfection. No bright colored bike shorts for him. No fancy swirls of pattern mingling with inspirational sports words. Just plain black that showed off his powerful thighs, tight ass, and lean stomach. Well-hidden beneath too much bike-short padding for my liking, the outline of his genitals lacked definition. It didn't matter. Jonas looked lean and mean, well able to light my fire, then quench it. *If only.*

Was he gay? I didn't get a flicker, and it didn't help my mood. I was too young to be losing my touch like this. I tightened my towel to show him I had a certain appreciation of his physique. He noticed and didn't bolt back out the door. Or laugh. Jonas Chadwick obviously took things in stride.

"You're an hour early," I muttered.

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He shook his head. "Would you believe I put my tracker on and forgot to change the settings to this time zone?" He held up his wrist displaying the fancy device a lot of bikers used to wirelessly track time, mileage and speed while on a ride.

I whistled. "Nice toy. I'm still wired."

By that I meant my little cyclometer connected my front tire to the device mounted on the handlebars by a small wire. I suffered from a curse passed on to me by frugal parents and couldn't throw out a gadget that still worked perfectly. The time had come to get nosey or expire from curiosity.

"You've got gear. What happened to your bike?"

"I left it in Seattle. It had a few years on it. I figured that if I got to Chicago and stayed, I'd get a better one. Maybe if I stay here, I'll get one. Having someone to ride with makes a difference in that, too."

If he stayed. He had a one-project contract with MAS—his choice, not ours. His gaze met mine. Clearly, we both had the same thought. Jonas didn't strike me as a rolling stone, but obviously he'd been one. I wondered what had made him decide to leave a senior architect position in Chicago and join MAS for a lesser title, and a little less money. I wished again I'd been present at both his interviews so I knew more about him. Maybe he figured the job bonus would make up the salary difference. Maybe titles didn't mean much. I had so many questions about the man, ones that as his employer I had to be careful asking.

"I'm not planning leaving anytime soon, boss." He grinned

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at me. "I'll be here at least three years to complete the casino."

"A lot can happen in three years, Jonas."

"I know. Why don't you go get dressed while I help myself to a bottle of your water?"

Too bad he didn't suggest helping himself to me. I fast approached the point where, gay or not, it would be obvious I was hot for him. I pointed to the kitchen and then ducked into my bedroom, leaving the door open in a blatant invitation.

Jonas noticed the open door, his gaze met mine as I let the towel fall to the floor displaying my half-hard state, but he didn't approach me. Instead, he opened his bottle of water and parked his very fine ass at my breakfast table and watched silently, his expression neutral, as I dressed.

Keeping a full erection at bay—somehow—I managed to get dressed as far as having only my socks to put on before joining him. He got me water while I laced my shoes. We had a lot of time before we had to load the bikes and meet the group, enough time for a few questions.

"Where's your family, Jonas, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I don't mind. My parents were in Seattle. They're gone now. I suppose that's the main reason I left. Nothing to keep me there, and I needed a change of scenery."

"Brothers? Sisters? Ex-wife?"

He snorted. "My siblings weren't pleased about my father's will. I'm sure they don't miss me." He lifted his bottle to me. "Being an only child, you won't ever know the joys of being treated equally," he informed me with a wry smile.

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Why would his siblings object to equality? The quick answer—Jonas was the black sheep of his family.

It was my turn to make rude noises. “Let me tell you something. Being an only child means that one’s parents see everything and they know you did it.”

Jonas grinned. “Hadn’t thought of it that way.” He drained the last few swallows from his bottle. “Why don’t we go check out your backup bike and get it ready?”

I agreed amicably, sorry he’d felt the need to change the subject, but glad to move on to something less inane. He followed me into the garage. I’d backed my pickup into the driveway and parked the Mach in the front yard so he’d spot the right house, which gave us a little room in the garage to make adjustments to the seat and handlebars. I pointed at the black bike, and he lifted it from the rack. He swung his leg over and settled on the seat, wiggling his butt, which made me shiver again. He nodded his approval.

“Nice seat.”

“It’s a little wider than standard, but it’s nice for longer rides since it gives extra support to your spine. I use it when we do our hundred-mile Saturdays. It won’t bruise your balls.”

Something flickered in those cobalt eyes. It passed so fast I didn’t have the chance to speculate, much less figure out what it was, but it wasn’t imagined. The honking of a car horn and arrival of a friend put an end to private conversation.

I introduced Jonas to Dixie, a near neighbor and one of the girls who rode with the group, then kept an ear on their conversation as I loaded our bikes on my truck. To my regret,

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he chatted up Dix like he planned to ask her out. I took his attentiveness to her as the answer to my question. He wasn't gay.

Well, I'd get over it. I had before. *Only...* For some reason, this time it stung more than usual. It hurt enough I wasn't ready to let go of it until I heard him say the word straight.

Dixie breezed out the driveway, hopped in her car, and laid down a long squeal of rubber as she pulled away. Jonas leaned on the side of the pickup and grinned at me.

"With her accent I'd never guess why her nickname is Dixie," he said, amused. I laughed in spite of my remorsefulness.

"I warned you several members of the group would be interested in you. Ready to go?"

"Ready as I'll ever be, and I hate to disappoint your Ms. Dixie, but I'm not ready to start dating again."

Again? I bit the bullet. "To heck with Dix. What about disappointing me?"

"Heck, I'll date Dixie, if that's what'll make you happy."

I knew he wasn't stupid, so that just confirmed for me the man was quick. And slippery.

"You might not care about your balls, but if you date our Dixie, you'll need to keep them secured," I warned him.

That look flashed across his face again, and this time I pegged it as sorrow. He glanced away. To pursue this conversation would do him a disservice. I knew that, even if I didn't know why.

"Climb aboard." I thumped the side of the truck twice in

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rapid succession and settled behind the steering wheel. Jonas climbed in and lawfully fastened his seatbelt. I noticed again how his size deceived. "It's about a twenty-minute drive to the beginning of our route."

He asked a few more details about the ride, and I filled him in. The men rode thirteen miles out of town, and then back. It took us about two hours, the speedsters, and occasionally me, less time than that. We generally had four to seven women who rode to a halfway point and stopped at a small park. Some weeks they lounged by the man-made lake; other weeks they turned around and went back without us. Sometimes, a couple of the guys would cut short their ride and go back with the girls. We enjoyed the loose arrangement with no requirements or restrictions and took care to keep it that way. Jonas nodded.

"So if I stop and wait for you to come back, it's not a problem?"

Only to my aching heart, but, like I said, I'd get over it. "Not at all. You probably shouldn't overdo your first time riding for a while. I need you at work tomorrow." I grinned at him.

"Heck, I need me at work tomorrow. I moved the elevator, as requested, but rerouting the mechanicals to keep to code is time-consuming."

I made a mental note to check in on him in the morning and offer the assistance of my meager talents. "Here we are," I told him as I turned into a parking lot.

We didn't waste any time before we mounted up and got underway. I stayed to Jonas' left and observed how he rode—

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and how he fielded the greetings from members of the group. I did my best to keep despair from getting the better of me.

We hit the five-mile mark and I thought he looked a little pale. He hadn't been in the southwest long, and I suspected the heat was affecting him. When the girls turned off into Becker Park, Jonas went with them. I turned on the speed and caught up with the front-runners, easily propelling them along. We picked up speed as we made the turn to head back to the park. I pedaled and worried about leaving Jonas with strangers, although why, I didn't know. He was a big boy.

Okay, I did know why I worried. What if he were attracted to any of them?

I might as well face the fact that I needed to ask him, point blank, if he were gay.

Jonas and the ladies had left the park and headed back. Depending on how much of a head start they had, he could be back at the pickup by now.

I cruised into the parking lot and found him sitting on the tailgate, relaxed and grinning. I coasted to a stop in front of him. His color was good, but his dark hair lay wet against his scalp.

"Hot?" I asked him cheerfully.

"I'm cooked," he responded just as cheerfully. "It's nice to know I can still keep up with the girls, at least."

I grinned at him. "It's nice to know they left you intact. Some of them are desperate for male companionship. Ready to go?"

He looked up at me. "Is there someplace we can grab a bite

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to eat?”

I hoped my surprise didn't show on my face. “Lots of places. There's even my place.”

For the space of three heartbeats he didn't respond, then he fixed me with that enigmatic blue gaze. God, I could get lost in his eyes.

The corner of his mouth twitched.

“Your place will be just fine.”

CHAPTER 3

I hid my pleased surprise as best I could under the circumstances. To anyone looking, those little twitches are painfully obvious in a pair of skintight bike shorts. Lucky for me, Jonas' attention focused on my face. I ignored my penis and loaded the bikes.

It was harder to ignore Jonas sitting in the grass doing a pretzel stretch to keep his back from getting tight. He groaned as he rolled to his feet. "I'm getting too old for this."

"Somehow I doubt that. You just need to get back into it." I banged the tailgate closed, and we climbed in the truck. I turned the key and a few moments later eased the pickup into the flow of traffic.

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Jonas appeared lost in thought as he stared out the passenger window. Halfway to our destination, he sighed audibly and fixed those incredible eyes on me.

“How old are you, if you don’t mind my asking?”

My heart stuttered, then beat quicker. That question went beyond professional curiosity, which could have been easily satisfied by a co-worker. No, I sensed his intent went deeper. By establishing range of our age difference, it would help him define life experiences.

“I’m still on the short side of thirty-four. You didn’t put your age on your resume, and I don’t remember your college dates.”

He nodded. “When you get past forty, employers tend to think you’ve gone brain-dead.”

I glanced over at him, our gazes sliding past each other’s as I kept most of my attention on the road ahead. He grinned. “Okay, boss, I’m forty-eight.”

My preferences ran toward older men, not because I had a father fixation or anything like that. Older guys are generally more secure...know themselves better. Their lives have a lot less drama. I’d placed him around forty-five and three years one way or the other hardly mattered.

I suddenly realized he’d not said my name, not even once, and I needed to hear him say it, but knew better than to push him. For anything.

Yet, he’d made the choice and accepted my invitation for a meal.

I backed the pickup into a parking spot along the street and

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we unloaded the bikes. Jonas tipped his head at the Mach 1.

"Nice," he said appreciatively.

I grinned. "You're a man of few words, aren't you?"

"Yep. I had one of those, too, back in my hay day. I managed to wreck it—twice."

"Oh, ouch. I bet that hurt." I laughed, but I winced, too. I'd be sick if I so much as scratched the paint on my little pony.

He snorted. "The last time really hurt 'cause it was my fault. The roads were icy, but I had to go out that night." He shook his head, obviously still disgusted with himself over the incident.

Jonas pushed his bike inside and lifted it back on its hooks with an easy show of strength. I stowed my bike along the wall. I rode it too much to bother with the storage rack. We hadn't made it through dinner, but I pitched him an offer.

"I ride most Saturdays, too, without the group, and you're more than welcome to join me, Jonas."

The devil sparked in his eyes and he grinned, showing even white teeth. "I should be over the food poisoning by then."

Feigning outrage, I put my hands on my hips and glared at him. "Fuck you, Chadwick. I was acquitted of those charges."

Jonas stared at me for a split second, then burst out laughing. Real laughter, too, not put on for the sake of his employer. He grinned at me. I would wait no longer.

I took the step, closing the gap between us to stand in front of him, so close our shoes touched. The smile faded from his face, replaced by a searching seriousness. I buried my fingers

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in his still-damp hair, toying with the wisps that curled on his collar. He swallowed, hard, but didn't pull away. I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his, stepping closer as I felt the surprise ripple through him. He took a quick, sharp breath, then his hands gripped my hips.

His touch spurred me on and sent my heart rate soaring. I hardened in a rush as jolts of arousal sizzled through my groin. I laved his lips with my tongue, stroking and licking, teasing him—enticing him—to join me in the dance. His mouth opened and his tongue slipped past mine. A startled awareness arced between us.

Heated desire licked mercilessly at my groin, torturing me with each burning caress. Sweat broke out on my back. I forgot to breathe as everything beyond his lips moving on mine ceased to be. A low moan rolled out of him, full of longing. I pulled him closer, wanting to feel his body against mine, needing to know if he was as hard as I was.

Jonas jerked away. I stared at him, dazed, the ghost of his mouth on mine lingering. I sobered quickly at his expression.

Fear. Longing. Panic. Arousal. Desperation. It was all there on his rugged face for me to see. I did the last thing I wanted to do and released him when I ached to hold him. My hands burned to reach for him as I forced them to hang limply at my sides.

"I'm sorry, Jonas," I said quietly, tendering a weak apology. I wasn't sorry in the least. I knew beyond any doubt he was gay—and he wanted me. One quick glance had confirmed just how much he wanted me. Somehow I managed

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to refrain from throwing my head back and letting loose a primal victory howl.

"I should go," he replied bleakly as he stepped farther away from me.

I couldn't let him walk away, not like this, not when so many things hung in the air between us.

"Please stay at least for a little while. Maybe we need to say a few things."

He shook his head. "Better that we not."

"No. Listen to me. This has nothing to do with your job, the company, or any of that. It's outside of that, private."

Relief washed over his rugged features. "That's good to know, but that's not why I have to leave. I'm not ready for this."

The words fell out of my mouth before I could stop them. "When will you be ready?"

Jonas looked away, outside the garage. His shoulders slumped tiredly. "Maybe never. Maybe the moment I get to my apartment and close the door on the world."

I held my hand out to him, palm up. "Then stay."

He hesitated for several long moments, so long it took every ounce of my willpower to remain silent and not push at him. Staying had to be his decision and his alone. I wondered at the inner battle he fought, for surely it was sizable, but I knew I couldn't help him until he asked. And he didn't ask. Jonas looked away, and I knew I'd lost, at least for tonight.

"I should go," he said, his voice low and strained. "I, um..." He took a quick, short breath. "I'll work from home

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tomorrow, if you don't mind."

I did mind, but not for any professional reason. Working from home at his discretion was part of his contract. I had to agree to it, and he knew that. I nodded.

"Okay. I'll post it on the network for you in the morning. I'm sorry, Jonas. I didn't intend to make you uncomfortable."

His chin lifted and the corner of his mouth twitched in the beginning of a smile. The light came back into his eyes and his expression became pure Jonas, the look that had drawn me to him in the first place.

"Yeah, well. Uncomfortable isn't quite the word, boss." He tipped an imaginary hat to me and walked away.

I couldn't help but notice the controlled balance of his stride as he crossed the yard to his vehicle, with the grace of a predator. Did he know he walked like that? Did he know men like me noticed that about him?

He drove off slowly, no squeal of the tires, no indication he had reason to hurry. I watched until his car disappeared behind the trees and bushes of my neighbor's landscaping, then resigned myself to another lonely night.

My bike and gear needed to be cleaned, and my vehicles should be parked properly for the evening. I looked around the garage and said to hell with it. Everything was fine where it sat, even the Mach. I wanted a shower, and I needed a drink. Several drinks, in fact.

Anxious for the cleansing heat of the shower, I peeled off my sweaty riding gear, left everything laying where it fell and stepped under the hot spray. The water pelted me in the face,

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then I turned to give my neck the same treatment. Had I blown it entirely with him? I simply didn't know, but what I did know was that answer would be many long days in coming.

The heat of the shower slowly worked its magic on me. My muscles relaxed and the tension in my neck eased. I squirted a generous measure of shower gel into my palm and lathered up. Unbidden, unwelcome, the image of Jonas' hands spreading soapsuds over my chest rose up behind my closed eyelids. My cock jumped and swelled. The tension swept back into me, returning with renewed vigor and purpose. I had no desire to deny the impulse.

The taste of his lips remained in my memory, as did the feel of his lean fingers gripping my hips. I soaped my hands and reached down to grasp my erection, pleasuring myself. Keyed up from the encounter with Jonas, my imagination worked overtime supplying the fantasy of his hand on my cock. It didn't take long.

My balls drew up. I spread my feet and braced myself against the tiled wall. My groin tightened and my orgasm began and quickly peaked. My hand stilled. I lay my head back against the wall and waited for my heart to stop racing.

It hadn't helped much. Nothing would until I shared myself with Jonas. Fool that I was, I'd gotten in over my head. Enough of this swimming in self-pity and remorse and jerking off in the shower like a twelve-year-old. I gave my genitals another quick wash and turned off the shower. I'd go out for that drink.

A couple of my fellow bikers generally went to a local

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club after riding. I could go there and at least have semi-intelligent conversation while we all got snookered.

Not planning on trolling, I dressed in khakis and a navy polo. Well, maybe I was trolling to be noticed just a bit. All my life people told me that navy brought up the color in my pale blue-gray eyes. One should look one's best if one planned on drinking too much.

People were kinder in their criticisms if you looked good while behaving like an ass.

I spotted two familiar cars as I drove the Mach 1 into the club's parking lot. I paid the five-buck cover charge without wincing like I normally did and went inside to find my buddies. As expected, they were at the bar enjoying themselves. One of them spotted me and waved. I waved back and maneuvered my way across the dance floor to them.

Gay dance clubs are not my scene. I came here infrequently enough that the newbies hit on me half a dozen times before I made it across the room. It's not that I wasn't flattered—I was—but I hated feeling like a piece of fresh meat.

The guys opened up a place for me at the bar and as I slipped in between two of them, found myself besieged with questions about Jonas. I finally held my hand up to silence them.

"I don't know much about him outside of he knows his stuff at work," I said firmly. I looped my arm over the most persistent interviewer's shoulder and gave him a squeeze. "That doesn't mean I wouldn't like to know more, okay? Now

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give it rest, and keep your hands off my employee. He's got work to do."

They whined and pouted, all but Jerry, who would fuck anything that walked probably—we all speculated and he didn't deny—even sheep. He grinned at me as if I'd thrown down a gauntlet. I ignored him.

Halfway through my second beer, I lost interest in alcohol and drowning my sorrow in copious amounts of fermented barley and hops. I said my goodbyes for the evening and paid a quick visit to the men's room before driving home the back way, even though I'd not had all that much to drink. It took longer, but I hated the idea of walking into my empty house.

I parked the Mach at the end of the driveway, crossed the yard, and went up the front porch steps two at a time.

Panic slammed into me.

Ready to fight and defend myself, I whirled around. The man sitting in the shadows at the end of my porch rose slowly. My heart lurched, my vision hazed on the wave of relief that swept through me and left my knees weak as it passed. Somehow I sucked air back into my lungs.

"You startled the hell outta me!"

Jonas held out his right hand to me, greeting me with the offer of an apology in a handshake. I clasped it, wishing I could see his face more clearly.

His fingers closed around mine as he backed me against the door.

CHAPTER 4

My pulse pounded loudly in my ears and my cock rose, anticipating something I knew wasn't a certainty. He'd come back, but for what? His warm lips found mine, seeking permission. I opened to him, inviting him to plunder at will. He did, thrusting his tongue into my mouth. I met him eagerly, hungrily. I wanted this, and more.

Jonas' strong fingers encircled my wrist and he lifted my arm above my head as his body pinned me, full length, against my front door. He pressed the hard ridge of his erection firmly to mine. I reached for him with my free hand, wanting to feel his length and girth, but he grabbed that wrist, too, and lifted it beside the other. I bucked against him, totally turned on by the

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aggression I sensed in him.

“Be still,” he growled in my ear. He trailed kisses down my neck, even as his grip tightened. I struggled to break free of the vise grip he had on my wrists.

His pelvis ground against mine. I tilted my head and delved into the heat of his mouth. I moaned. He moaned. I wanted my hands free in the worst way. I needed to touch him, caress the sensitive, silky skin I knew sheathed his penis. I ached to feel his lips on my cock.

I threw my weight forward, desperate to force him to take a step back. It worked and I quickly spun him around and pinned him with my body. He grunted as he came in contact with the door and his lips bowed beneath mine. His strong fingers released my hands, and I reached for him, gathering him to me. His muscled thigh slipped between mine and applied upward pressure on my balls. Instead of worrying about injury I pressed down, reveling in the tingling sensation.

“Jonas,” I murmured against his smiling lips. “Talk to...” His tongue flicked to mine, cutting off my request for a moment of conversation.

Any of my neighbors watching were getting quite a sideshow. I shoved my hand in my pocket, fumbling for my keys. They fell from my shaking fingers to the porch decking. Jonas pushed me back, breaking physical contact. I longed to see his eyes, to get some idea of what he thought, what he felt.

“Bend over and pick them up,” he said cheerfully as he rubbed my nipple.

I stared at him and tried to catch my breath. “Not in front

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of you, Chadwick. I know all about men like you.”

“Do you?” Something rough and dark in his voice gave me pause. What demon did he battle?

“I know enough.” I pushed him back against the side of the house, not with some little force. “Why did you come back?”

“I don’t know. Maybe to satisfy my curiosity.”

“Bullshit.” I fisted my hands in his shirt and gave him a shake. “We take this inside, make it private, or we’re done here.”

Jonas stared at me for the longest twenty seconds of my life, then he nodded. I released him and he bent over, snagged my keys, and dropped them into my outstretched palm. I unlocked the door and invited the devil into my home for the second time in one day.

“I need a drink. Do you want one, Jonas?” I needed to haul him into my bedroom and have my way with him, that’s what I needed. My insides quivered. I shivered despite the warm evening.

But I knew, to my sorrow, that quickie sex now would be a mistake, and I bet he knew it, too.

“I’ll take a brandy, if you have it.”

“I hope you’ll settle for bourbon.”

I poured us each a generous shot and handed him one. He nodded and tossed it back like a pro. I followed suit, and we set our empties down on the counter in unison. Jonas reached for me again. I lifted my chin and stared him down. His hand dropped to his side.

I wanted him. God, how I wanted him. I ached with it. His

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gaze met mine before flicking down to the bulge in my pants and back up.

"Looks nice."

"It's a sock," I told him cheerily, in the same tone that he'd used to tell me to bend over.

"Hmm. Well, that's the risk we run, isn't it?"

I snorted. "Ya think?" I went to check his package, and he moved away.

"Shy?" I hardly thought shyness to be a problem for him given his examination of my tonsils with his tongue.

"Let's just say I'm cautious."

I waved my hand in the direction of the sofa, inviting him to sit and talk. I hoped he'd end up staying if we both received the reassurances we seemed to need. He nodded and sat in the middle. I didn't mind being maneuvered to sit next to him in the least. I landed beside him. He shifted until the length of his thigh rested against mine. *The little shit.*

Lord, he tempted me, and he knew it. I draped my arm along the back of the couch. He laid his hand on my knee, and I burned beneath his touch. I edged closer to him and brushed a kiss to his dewy temple. Jonas turned and kissed me again.

I struggled not to get lost in him again, not to push him down beneath me. I won the battle, barely. His head dropped to my shoulder and he sighed tiredly. Whatever battle he fought, it seemed more complicated than mine.

Mine was simple. Fuck him now or fuck him later, as long as I fucked him.

"You want to tell me about it?" I asked him. "Or do you

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want to just go fuck my brains out and I'll see you in morning?"

"Do I get option three?"

"What's that? First you talk, then we fuck?"

"I knew you were a smart young man." He sighed again and relaxed a bit more. "I'm not exactly into causal sex."

Did he think that a revelation to anyone in the room? Sex with him would be intense, always. I'd understood that the moment he pinned me on the porch. I knew what he meant, though, and understood that, too.

"You're not into anything causal. You're about the most uptight stud I've ever run across."

That made him chuckle. "Stud, is it? Maybe twenty years ago, but a lot has happened since then."

That was the cue to ask him about some of his lesser demons, those things he deemed necessary for me to know now, before we put our hands on each other, while I still had time to walk away. I asked the question and waited for his answer.

"So, what happened to make you cautious and never casual?"

"I was in a long-term relationship in Seattle," he said quietly. "Drove my family crazy that I had a 'friend.' We were together over ten years. He died. Heart attack. I moved to Chicago."

I gave him a little squeeze. I'd never had a relationship that had lasted more than a few months. Fortunately, most of those had ended mutually and amicably. Losing a lover, having him

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wrenched away must have devastated him. It would anyone. Maybe someday I'd ask him about that man, but for now I hadn't earned the right to know his grief so I didn't pursue it.

"Did moving to Chicago help?"

He snorted and rolled his eyes.

"It got me away from heretical siblings, so in that respect, yes, it helped."

There was more. Unspoken words hung in the air. Did I push him for more or let him get to it in his own time? He remained silent, and I could not. The icy finger of the age we live in burned a cold path down my spine.

"Are you HIV positive?"

He turned to me, his features sharpened by surprise. "That's certainly a legitimate question, and no, I'm not. That's not the problem." He cocked his head. "Are you?"

"No, I'm not." I was glad to have that difficult hurdle out of the way. I hoped I never had to face a prospective lover telling me he was positive because I didn't know how I'd react. I touched his bristly cheek. "What's the problem, Jonas?"

He took a deep breath and answered my question. "I have...had ...testicular cancer. I'm done with treatments, but not in the clear yet."

Shit.

Okay. Not good news, but in the overall scheme of things, not the worst thing he could have told me.

"Obviously, you weren't incapacitated by it," I said dryly while my brain sorted through possibilities. One thing I knew

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for certain. He went to bed every night with fear as a bedmate and he always would.

Even if the doctors gave him a clean bill of health, the fear it could reoccur elsewhere in his body would never leave him. Did that make him less desirable as a lover?

Not to me. Now how did I convince him of that?

Jonas shook his head and the light sparked in his eyes again. "Thank God for that." He squeezed my knee and his look turned serious again. "If you think my health issue is a problem, then I need to save us both some grief and go home."

I didn't want him to leave, and now I didn't think it a good idea to push him for sex tonight, either. I wondered if anyone had been with him while he dealt with doctors, surgery and follow-up treatments and I didn't know how to ask him that. I'd been blessed with good health, and none of my friends had faced serious illness. His confiding in me threw me off balance.

Human being to human being I wanted to be open to him leaning on me if that's what he needed right now. It didn't make either of us weak.

"I don't want you to go home, Jonas." I stood and held out my hand to him. "It's early. We'll be more comfortable in the den. C'mon."

He took my hand, his fingers lacing through mine as if we'd made that connection hundreds of times. I led him to a spare bedroom I'd converted into a small television room with a sectional sofa. The unit lined the walls, and my buddies and I spent a lot of Sundays sprawled comfortably watching sports

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and talking trash. Jonas chuckled as he looked around.

“Could you get a bigger TV in here?” he asked, light sarcasm lending an amused lilt to his voice.

“Nope, not and still have any floor space. I tried.” The flat screen television did fill up a lot of space on the wall. I flopped into my favorite corner, patted the seat beside me and draped my arm along the back of the couch. He settled into the crook of my arm like he’d been doing it for years. I doubted he’d been passive in the relationship he’d spoken of—in any relationship—and it confirmed my suspicion he’d carried his burden alone.

“Jonas, do you have a good doctor here?”

“Is that you or my employer asking?”

I winced. For a moment I’d forgotten he worked for my company. “Both of me. Your employer can help you find one if you need one.”

“Thanks for the offer, but I went where the doctors in Chicago sent me here. They seem competent enough to continue the follow-up stuff.” He sat up a little straighter and looked at me. I licked my lips, hoping to encourage him to kiss me. He smiled, leaned in, and stopped. His breath tickled my moist lips.

“You’re a nice fellow, but way too eager to be kissed,” he teased. His lips brushed mine. Only death could have torn my gaze from his, would have forced my eyelids to close.

It wasn’t his smiling mouth or glowing eyes that held my attention, stole my breath and sent my heart soaring. His hand slid up my thigh, applying pressure against my tense muscles.

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My cock strained to break free of constricting fabric. My balls tingled and drew up.

With his lips teasing mine, Jonas inched down my zipper.

CHAPTER 5

Every cell in my body screamed with the need to do something. Lay back and let him do as he willed. Push him over, take him on the spot. Be still. Run. Anything but freeze. I wanted it all right now.

Singularly disconcerting was the fact I couldn't get my hands on his zipper. The way we listed to port, I couldn't reach that far.

"No fair," I said against his lips, trying again to work my hand between our bodies.

"I know," he replied, laughter in his soft voice. He levered his way up until I lay pinned beneath him. My hand slipped down the front of his jeans and closed around his cock.

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Generous, was my first thought, and envy at his size my second. Not that I was lacking at a healthy eight inches or anything, but Jonas was every bit of nine with a bit more girth, and uncut, whereas I was. I was jealous.

“Like that?” he purred in my ear. “Want that?”

My heart skidded to a stop, then clamored back to life at a rapid pace. Did I want that? It had been years since I’d allowed a lover to fuck me. I pulled his lips back to mine, thrusting my tongue into the heat of his mouth. The tantalizing massage stopped. His quick fingers unbuckled my belt and unsnapped my pants. I held my breath waiting for him to free my erection from my underwear. He didn’t do it. The man meant to torture me, no doubt about it.

His hands rose to touch my face, his lips never leaving mine. I worked my hand free and unfastened his jeans, sliding them off his hips. I grasped his flank and squeezed. He grunted.

“Nice cock, Jonas, but not enough ass to push it.” I pulled him to me, sinking my fingers into his muscled buttocks until he growled and pumped against me. I hooked the elastic of his briefs with two fingers and tugged them down. His erection dropped into my waiting hand, and I wrapped my fingers around him and squeezed. Jonas drew in a sharp breath, the air hissing through his teeth.

“Be careful, man. There are no words to describe what radiation does to one’s genitals or how nervous it makes a fellow about being handled.”

Damn. I hadn’t thought of that and now that I did, I could

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only imagine how unpleasant it must have been. I eased my grip, but didn't release him. Jonas flexed his hips, rolling the velvet skin of his shaft over the hard inner core.

"Don't freak on me, okay? Just don't squeeze too hard either," he said, his smoky gaze meeting mine. He pumped his hips again, and I saw the pleasure flicker in his eyes.

"I guess you'll just have to tell me when I'm too rough."

A smile twitched at the corner of his mouth. "I'll do that—when we make love."

He couldn't possibly mean... I wrapped my legs around the back of his knees. It was the best I could with my pants only half off.

"What do you mean 'when we make love'?"

"I mean maybe tonight isn't the night. I mean I'm pretty tired from the ride, and we have to get up in the morning." His forehead dropped to mine. He moved in my hand again, a lazy rolling of his hips, then sighed.

He was serious and I didn't like it much. The time had come for me to do something I rarely did—pull rank.

"Your boss just gave you the day off tomorrow. Call it a mental health day."

Jonas tensed. "That's a bad precedent to set."

I agreed, but I wanted him badly. I also experienced the urge to take care of him, whether he liked it or not.

"An extra day of rest will do you good." It would do me a world of good, too. I'd not had two full days off in a row in long time, much less three. I released his dick and ran my fingers through his soft dark hair. "We can sleep until noon,

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then hop in the Mach and get out of the city tomorrow afternoon.”

His heart beat strongly in his chest. I could feel my own syncing to his rhythm. Sure he wouldn't agree to my proposal, I prepared to tell him not to worry about any of it, that we had time. Jonas suddenly relaxed, a long sigh on his lips.

He rose up and looked down at me. For the first time I glimpsed the full extent of the turmoil inside him and knew it went far deeper than spending the night wrecking my sheets.

“Okay, on one condition. We ride out to the casino site and do a walk over.”

I didn't have a problem with that and told him so. Combining business with pleasure wouldn't give rise to any suspicions at the office. I needed to zip off an email to Sally for her to get in the morning. She'd post our absence and destination on the network calendar, and we'd be set for the day.

Now could we make it through the night?

“So, am I staying?” A smile teased his lips. “Because if I am, you're going to have to feed me.”

“Christ! You didn't eat?”

He grinned. “You sound like a scolding queen, and I know you're not.”

“I'll feed you...later.” I fisted my fingers in his hair and pulled his mouth back down to mine.

Jonas kissed me breathless, and I let him. A new burst of arousal skittered along my nerve endings. Fresh sweat broke out on my back and chest. I needed to get him into the

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bedroom where we could maneuver. He shifted his weight, ending the kiss.

"I haven't done this since before the surgery. Don't be surprised when you go for my balls and find something a little unexpected."

The tone of his voice, the slight strain, spoke with an eloquence his off-hand words belied. Man-to-man I understood more than he gave me credit for. Were our situations reversed, I'd feel maimed, less a man somehow. It wasn't a thing of logic, which said one tiny testicle is a small price to pay for a healthy life. Logic had little to do with feeling sexually attractive.

Toss his sexual orientation into the mix of logic versus the testosterone high of maleness and you ended up with a minefield of emotions that would give any guy an ulcer, or worse.

I'd been curious and took his statement as tacit permission to satisfy that curiosity. With a great deal of caution I slipped my hand between our bodies. The sac contained only one testis. Either his surgeon had advised against a prosthetic replacement or his vanity didn't need a matched pair. It wasn't something I would ask yet, although I hoped he'd tell me. I kissed him.

"So why haven't you have sex since the surgery?"

"You are the curious sort, aren't you?" He rolled off me and pulled me up to sit beside him, then stripped out of his shirt and kicked off his shoes.

A thatch of dark hair graced the center of his chest,

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thinning as it spread across his pecs and down his belly. He lacked the bold line of hair that led downward to the genitals having, instead, an even smattering of fur that thickened again as it reached his thighs.

“Very curious.” I stood and held my hand out to him. He took it for a moment, allowing me to pull him to his feet. Jonas made a grab for his pants, pulling them back up to his waist.

“Wouldn’t do for one of us to trip on the way to your bed, would it?” he asked cheerfully.

My khakis were sliding down. I grabbed them and grinned before backing my way toward the bedroom. He followed, stalking me with a smile on his face, and I warmed to him all over again.

I didn’t bother turning on a lamp. Enough light came in from the streetlights and my too-close-for-comfort neighbors for our purposes. I flipped the covers back on the bed and turned to him. Jonas stood in a shadow, unmoving. I kicked off my shoes and undressed for him.

Striptease wasn’t my thing any more than gay nightclubs. I slipped out of my shirt without any exaggerated movements and draped it over the chair. Perched on the edge of the bed, I pulled off my slacks. They, too, I hung over the back of the chair. I debated leaving my boxers on a bit longer, but he waited, still in the shadow, to see all of me again. I hooked my thumbs under the elastic waistband.

“Wait,” Jonas said, his voice soft. He moved from the shadow to stand in front of me. His hands covered mine as he

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eased my underwear off my hips and let them fall to the carpet. My erection hung heavily between us. I leaned closer, aching to feel his hands on my cock again.

His hands came to rest on my shoulders. Somehow I kept from moaning with frustration. He knew the effect his teasing me like that had, too. The knowledge sparkled wickedly in his eyes. He ran his thumb over my lips.

"I almost jumped you this afternoon, before the bike ride. You looked so tempting, so hot, with that bulge under your towel. I sat at your table and watched you dress with the biggest hard-on I'd had in a long time." Jonas shook his head. "I knew this would happen, sooner or later."

I tugged on a few of the crisp, curly hairs under my fingertips, just hard enough to tease him. "The first time I saw you, so cool and collected in your suit and tie, I wondered if you were straight. I really wasn't sure. You don't come across as gay."

Jonas bent his head, his lips brushing my neck. The light touch excited and teased as it stole my breath. "I wondered about you, too. I asked about you, discreetly, of course. The prevailing opinion is that you're gay. No one remembers seeing you with a woman."

"And what did you think, before the prevailing opinion poll came back?" I bent my head to his chest, laving his nipple with my tongue until it puckered into a hard nub.

"Hmmm. I thought you were, but I wasn't ready to make an ass out of myself asking you just yet. Then the moment I saw you sitting in the break room with Sally, I knew you

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were.”

I knew what he meant. Sally possessed an inner sparkle that guys turned the charm on for. Happily married, she let guys know they didn't stand a chance with her, but it made no difference. She drew men, moth to a flame, and he'd seen she didn't light that fire in me.

My hands went to his belt, undoing the buckle. He'd not zipped up between the sofa and the bedroom. His jeans dropped and I eased his briefs down, freeing his cock.

We still had a lot left to say, reassurances that needed to be given. I'd say the words later, be it tonight or tomorrow. Jonas didn't need to worry that what happened between us had any bearing on his job. It didn't.

Tonight we simply wanted each other. If one of us woke disappointed...well, everyone took that risk with a new lover. I didn't think it would happen, but if he walked, for any reason, I'd still consider him a friend.

Right now I didn't have the time to devote to the spoken word. I had conversation of a different nature in mind.

Besides, it's not polite to speak with a guy's dick in your mouth.

CHAPTER 6

I dropped to my knees in front of Jonas and took his cock in my mouth. His size challenged me, but I refused to let it deter me from pleasuring him. Breathing deeply, I absorbed his musky scent, the uniqueness of male animal and individual man that identified Jonas. His scent imprinted on my brain. I could find him in the darkest room now. I knew it.

He moaned as I sucked him in, the vibration traveling up my hands to settle in the vicinity of my heart. It disturbed me he'd been without the comfort of a lover to see him through hard times.

His flanks trembled under my hands as I held his ass, teasing the crevice between his buttocks with one finger. I

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swirled my tongue around the rim of his penis and he pulled away.

"I'd better lie down before I fall down. That could prove embarrassing, you know."

"For you or for me?" I swung to my feet and stepped toward him, forcing him to move backward until his knees made contact with the bed. Jonas held his arms out to his sides and fell onto the mattress. I didn't waste time, but simply pounced on him, straddling his hips.

His hand closed around my rigid cock, his long fingers encircling me mid-shaft. Slowly he rolled the outer skin back toward the base, then his grip tightened as he changed direction. I closed my eyes and moaned in delight as he kept up the tease.

I lay back and enjoyed the hand job, but I still wanted more. I needed more. The pent-up tensions of the last three weeks begged for release. I eased off him and we maneuvered for position on the bed, finally coming to rest in the center, arms around each other, as I found his lips.

Our tongues danced, testing each other, tasting. I felt the ebb and flow of his arousal in his thighs, his hands. I heard it in the tempo of his breathing and the sudden quickening of his heartbeat. He would tense, or I would, as a caress excited, and it echoed in the other, our shared passion rising.

The hard length of his cock lay against mine, both pressed firmly between our bellies as we dug our fingers into each other's muscles, wanting to be closer. Somebody had leaked and the sharp tang of semen drifted up to me. I wanted to take

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him, sink into him and feel the heat of his body fist around my flesh, but sudden worry over the physicality of the act stayed me.

“Jonas.” I nibbled along the curve of his ear.

“Hmm?” He started humping my thigh as his fingers tweaked my nipples.

“Top or bottom?”

“Yes,” he said, sighing into my mouth.

Damn the man. He wanted to leave it up to me.

“Your surgery. Will it...” I’d tread onto unfamiliar ground, unsure of how to phrase my concerns, but afraid of his answer either way.

He stopped moving and looked at me, the glint of mischief still apparent in his eyes. “How do you think I would know?”

Jonas rose up, an easy, controlled move that showed his strength, and flipped me onto my back before I realized his game. He spoke against my lips, his voice low, a little hoarse, and all seriousness.

“I think we cross that bridge another night.”

The wisdom of that wasn’t lost on me, but I wanted him and would have pushed him had he not rolled completely away from me. The loss of physical contact with him cooled my headlong rush to stupidity. In that moment I realized the tenuous nature of his being here with me. I sat up and held my hand out to him.

“Okay. Another night, but I won’t pretend I don’t want to fuck you.”

He stood looking at me with that spooky stillness he

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possessed. "I'm sorry if I've disappointed you. It's not my intention to do so."

"I understand. Now get your ass back in the bed."

"Are you always this bossy?"

"Sometimes I'm worse. Are you always this jumpy?"

"Nope." He sighed and sat down on the bed. "This is like riding a horse, right? You get thrown, you get back on."

"You wanna ride, okay, but no spurs, cowboy."

"Oh, Lord." Jonas fell sideways, head on the pillow. I stretched out beside him again, draping my leg over his thighs to keep him from getting away again.

"I'm serious, Jonas. It's been a while since I bottomed, but I've got lots of lube."

He shook his head. "Let's slow down."

Even as he said the words, his hand fondled me again. Relief that he didn't want to stop swept me. I didn't mind fellatio being the main event tonight. I took his mouth, surprised at the force with which he met me, the sudden urgency I sensed in him.

I slipped out of his arms and kissed my way down his body, noticing the soft, fine texture of his skin. Gooseflesh rose in the wake of my tongue as it left a wet trail growing ever closer to the part of his anatomy that drew me like a magnet.

His impressive cock lay against the paler skin of his belly and reached almost to his belly button. He wasn't as heavily veined as I, with the glans rosy above a well-defined rim. The foreskin had pulled back nicely, his erect size filling it out.

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Rarely had I had the pleasure of viewing such an endowment.

Grasping the base of his shaft, I went down over him, deep throat. He moaned softly as his hand fisted in the sheet. His hips quickly turned restless, rising and falling as I sucked him. Jonas shifted, curling around and bringing one hand down on my bare ass with stinging force. I pinched his thigh, hard, to warn him not to start something we'd have to finish.

He laughed, sort of, chuckling and gasping at once as I dragged my teeth carefully over the rim of his dick. I teased the flat mushroom of his glans with my tongue while sucking in to draw air over him. Jonas smacked my ass again, but with less force.

"Come on over here," he coaxed, moving. I knew his intent and shifted to give him access to me. His fingers closed around my shaft.

"Nice dick," he purred, then blew. His breath tickled my damp skin and I shivered and released him, momentarily.

"Are you going to torture me?" I flicked my tongue across the tip of his cock, tasting a salty-sour drop of semen that had appeared there. My world spun as the heat of his mouth enveloped me.

I forgot to think, or breathe, as he took me, his mouth and hand moving over my cock in unison. As I had done to him, so he did to me. I gathered my wits and licked his length, tip to base. His actions echoed mine. My pulse pounded with anticipation as ran my finger down the crevice between his buttocks. He didn't disappoint me, teasing me in exactly that way.

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Up we went, glorious lick by glorious lick, climbing higher as the give and take of pleasure wrapped us together, bound us in passion. My breathing grew strained as I fought the tide, not wanting to let it sweep me away without him. I rapidly lost the battle for control.

Jonas moaned, deep in his chest. I knew the sound, that of a man on the verge of falling into darkness. He jerked as I swirled my tongue around the rim of his glans, his fingers gripping my ass cheek with bruising force. The sound came again, deeper this time, as he shuddered against me in the throes of his orgasm.

Heat flared in my groin. My penis throbbed deliciously, anxious for the moment, the indescribable victory of release. My balls drew up and I could no more stop my climax than I could fly to the moon, hazing out as I came in his mouth, still moving on him out of instinct. Jonas stroked my cock, driving me higher, until I fell blissfully to where he waited. Stars whirled in my vision as I came harder than I ever had in my life.

I snapped back to awareness as he released my turgid penis, groaning. The taste of him filled my mouth, the musk of his maleness and the clean tang of his sweat in every breath I took.

How many times had I done this? Certainly more than I could remember or would admit to. Maybe those faceless fucks had all been to prepare me to recognize someone special like Jonas when he came along. Bracing myself on my elbow, I looked at him.

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He lay still, eyes closed, with his head on my thigh, breathing deeply and evenly. His dark locks were wet with his sweat. What did he think about there in his self-imposed darkness? Did he think of the former lover he'd lost? Did he dare to hope for something of permanence with me?

I'd sought such a relationship before. Several before, actually, and regardless of those outcomes, I believed it possible if the right two men connected. I knew a lot of gay men were notoriously bad at keeping long-term lovers, but I had a firmer foundation than most. I didn't fear censure from my family, only a few cautionary words before they accepted any partner I finally took home to meet them.

I flexed my thigh muscle, curious if Jonas were even awake. I poked him gently and a smile bowed the corner of his mouth.

"Are you trying to get me to move, boss?"

Boss. Would the man ever call me Micah? Hearing my name on his lips suddenly became the most important thing in my life. The ferocity of the need stunned me. Yet, he had to say it without any coaxing on my part or it wouldn't be the same.

Since when had I regressed to sixteen? Maybe it didn't matter. Making my way back to thirty-four did. I ran my hand along the back of his thigh, then squeezed his ass cheek.

"I wanted to be sure you were breathing, that's all. Would you like a beer?"

He rolled away from me and stretched, a contented groan rumbling in his chest. "I'll pass on the beer, but thanks."

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“Oh, that’s right. You didn’t bother to eat.” I smacked his bare butt. He grunted.

“I guess the restaurants have closed by now.”

I glanced at the clock. “Midnight. If you want a burger, we can make the local fast-food drive-thru, but you could take your chances and let me fix you a bowl of cereal.”

He made another rude noise. “You don’t have steak?”

“I’ll grill for you this weekend. What’s it gonna be?”

He rolled up onto his hands and knees before pushing me down flat on the mattress. He looked down at me, his face silvered by a white beam that slipped into the room between the drapes. His fingertips grazed my eyebrows, my cheeks, my lips.

Jonas smiled at me, the light reflecting in his eyes and sparkling like stars.

“I think I’d like another helping of you.” His lips brushed mine in the barest whisper of a kiss. “Micah.”

CHAPTER 7

My body tightened at his words. My cock twitched. He'd finally said my name, a whisper on his lips, and my whole world shifted on its axis. I inhaled, sucking in air only with great difficulty. If Jonas really wanted me, he could have me.

His face softened as his gaze turned curious. "What is it?"

I shook my head. "I'm about to get all mushy and I don't think either of us would like it."

"Ah. Please don't." He kissed me again, his lips easy on mine. I tasted the desire he held carefully in check, and more.

Gratitude, fatigue, and God help both of us, hope. I trailed my fingers along his side, down across his ribs, hip and thigh.

"Are you trying to get more than a bowl of cereal out of

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me?”

“You’re a smart one, Micah.”

I snorted and patted his hip. “C’mon. I’m hungry, too. We’ll refuel and then take it from there.”

Jonas brushed my cheek with his knuckles. “First things first.”

His mouth claimed mine, his lips hot against mine. I opened to him, eager to taste his desire and give my own back to him. Our tongues collided, seeking supremacy before easing into a more playful dance as he gentled the kiss, luring us back from a headlong rush to hasty moves. Yes, he knew this game as well as I, perhaps better. That notion excited me more.

Instead of moving away, he lowered his body onto mine, full length, and slipped his arms under my shoulders. It struck me again the deceptive nature of that lean body—he couldn’t be called a lightweight. Good muscle mass equated to good health.

I caught myself, stopped that train of thought cold. Is this what happened when someone you knew battled cancer, even if it were in the past? Did fear of the disease taking that person away from you seize your mind at odd moments? How did a person overcome the worry? Could a person put the fear of recurrence in a box and lock it away?

“Micah, what’s going on?”

I grabbed his ass and squeezed both cheeks. “Move if you want food.”

He didn’t. Jonas remained still, watching me. Maybe he

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could read minds, or maybe, more likely, my face gave me away.

“Would you rather I leave?” he asked quietly. I heard the expectation of my answer in his voice and his grudging acceptance of my choice. Only he was wrong.

“No. I do not want you to leave.” I wrapped my legs around his thighs.

His eyes lit with mischief, and a touch of relief. “If you want to play, boy, you’ve got to feed me.”

“Okay! Okay! Get off me.” I gripped him tighter. He planted a big, wet, sloppy kiss on me. I released him and he rolled away, relieved he hadn’t pursued questioning me. I suspected he knew, intuitively.

“Got an extra robe or should I wander about your house naked?”

“Naked certainly works for me, but probably not any of my neighbors who happen to be awake and looking in through my kitchen windows. I never remember to close the blinds on the French doors.” I got to my feet and tossed him my robe, then pulled on a pair of cut-off shorts.

Once in the kitchen I decided I’d like a bite to eat, too. I motioned for him to sit at the table and drew water for tea in a small saucepan as I didn’t have, or want, a real kettle.

“How ’bout an egg sandwich?”

“Sure. Anything I can do, or should I just stay out of your way?”

I tapped my nose with my index finger and grinned at him. He didn’t sit, but paced restlessly on the other side of the room

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as I scrambled the eggs and eased them into a hot skillet.

“Black tea or green ?” I asked him as the water boiled. He took two mugs off their respective hooks and slid them across the counter to me.

“Black.”

I plopped a tea bag in each mug and poured the hot water over them. Maybe not the most perfect way to brew tea, but it was after midnight and the tea purist patrol surely had to be asleep. Jonas took the mugs and carried them to the table. I followed with our egg sandwiches.

Something was definitely wrong with him. He fidgeted nervously on his chair and seemed withdrawn. I sat opposite him and covered his clammy palm with mine.

“Spill it. What’s wrong?”

He shook his head. “Don’t mind me. I get a little wired from time to time.”

“Can I help?” I leaned closer to him. “Will more sex help?”

Jonas cocked an eyebrow at me. “Ah, youth. Sex doesn’t cure everything.”

“Like hell.” I squeezed his hand. “Just tell me what has you wired, other than first-time sex after major surgery with a new partner.”

“That’s enough all in itself, don’t you think?” He worked his hand free and played with his teabag. I pulled the teabag from my cup, squeezed, and set it aside with his. “And the surgery itself wasn’t too overwhelming, just...painful.”

My balls drew up in sympathy, and my knees came

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together. The tension broke in him, and he laughed wickedly.

"That's about right, too, Micah." He sipped his tea.

I picked up my sandwich and devoured it under his amused gaze while he finished about half of his.

What could I say? I'd worked up an appetite. Jonas pushed the remains of his snack away, met my gaze without blinking, and took a deep breath. "Look, don't freak on me, but I need a pain pill."

"So, go take one." How I kept my cool, I'll never know. Had what we done caused him pain? If we had more than a sex-filled weekend together, some aspects of his situation were going to be difficult to adjust to. Never could I say he hadn't warned me.

"It's from the bike ride."

Relief mixed with concern and I focused on not showing either. "With all that padding and my fancy gel seat?"

He feigned indignation. "You looked at my padding? You perv!"

I crossed my heart and smirked at him. "I swear I'll never do it again."

"Liar. Listen to me. I take that pill and I might fall asleep on you."

"On me? Like, in the middle of things?"

He rolled his eyes as he slid the chair back from the table. "Aren't we the joker?"

I watched silently as he found his jeans and delved into a pocket. He pulled out a small packet and laid half a pill on the table. "I go easy on this stuff. I won't take a whole one if I

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don't have to." He leaned forward in his chair. "It's just I'm not ready for the night to be over."

Neither was I. My cock, already on alert, rose eagerly. I wanted him again, needed to go one step farther than a mutual blowjob, although if that were all he was ready for, it would more than suffice. Whatever he wanted, as long as we held each other again. Jonas popped the pill into his mouth and washed it down with a swig of his tea. He then finished off his sandwich and looked expectantly at me.

"So what's your story, boss? Why are you still unattached? A great-looking guy like you should have them stacked four deep on the porch."

"Flatterer. I used to have them lined up like that, then I turned thirty. For some reason, cruising lost its appeal. I want some stability in my life." I wanted him in my life, but telling him so tonight could have dire consequences. He'd think me desperate, which I was not, except when it came to him.

He covered my hand with his. "Stability is like the mist. You think you see it, think it's all around you, then it's gone." Jonas shook his head sadly. "I'm too old for you, Micah."

"I think I should be the one to decide that, unless what you're really saying is I'm too young for you."

Jonas squeezed my hand. "Who wouldn't want a handsome young man like you at his side?"

I met his gaze with honesty. "Maybe you. Let me tell you what I think." I turned my hand over beneath his and wrapped my fingers around it. "I think you're scared, and you think there's no point in pursuing a relationship. You're wrong,

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Jonas.”

A muscle in his jaw worked. “Am I? Only time will tell.”

“It’s my time to spend as I like. Don’t forget that. Right now I want to spend some of it in bed. With you.”

He almost smiled at me. I had a lot more I wanted to say to him, things that he surely already knew but needed to hear. Like no one’s future is guaranteed, and we all need to seize each opportunity for happiness that comes our way. I didn’t plan on passing up happiness tonight and tomorrow for fear of what might happen next year. I stood and pulled him up and into my arms. His lips found mine in a feverish haste.

I held him tightly, wanting to banish his fears and feeling helpless in the knowledge I couldn’t. His hand slipped between us to press against my swollen cock. I set all thinking beyond the feel of his hands and the taste of his lips aside. I reached through the gap in his robe and wrapped my fingers around his shaft. His penis pulsed in my hand, filling, as his passion rose to mine.

Relinquishing his mouth didn’t come easy. I trailed kisses down his neck as I played with his erection.

“Bed?”

He nodded in agreement and released me, his hand finding mine, squeezing. Such a small gesture to speak so loudly. I smiled and tipped my head in the direction of the bedroom.

“Go on in so I can turn off the lights.”

Wordlessly, he went ahead of me, turning on the reading lamp on my nightstand. I flipped off the kitchen and hallway lights and followed him.

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Lust bubbled in my belly as I watched him sprawl out in the middle of the bed. I marveled again at the rosy darkness of his erection against the paleness of his skin. I left my shorts where they dropped and knelt on the bed. He looked up at me, his eyes burning above his flushed cheeks. I ran my hands over his pelted thighs. My groin ached with my decision, wanting him. My penis jutted forward, rock hard, evidence of my desire for him.

“Fuck me, Jonas.”

His features tightened. Those blue eyes, already preternaturally bright, seemed to glow eerily in the low lighting. He swallowed, hard. “Are you sure? How long has it been for you?”

“I’m sure, and a while. Years, in fact. It doesn’t change the fact that between us, it’s give and take. With you, it’s negotiable.”

Jonas took a short, quick breath. “Agreed.”

I knew what he meant. We were alike in our preferences, he and I. With shaking hands I reached for him. Jonas welcomed me in. With his hands and his lips he soothed fears I hadn’t known I had.

CHAPTER 8

Lying still in his arms provided but a brief respite, a few seconds before the impact of allowing him to take me sank in. Was I truly ready for such intimacy with him? Perhaps not. It had always seemed to me, with my own particular set of preferences, male-to-male, that some used the act as a form of domination. I had never cared for the feelings those who did evoked in me. Nor had I cared for a partner that sought only to be dominated by me.

Jonas brought the opportunity for something else, something my being ached for. Being with him wiped away all the disappointments I'd had in former lovers. Not that I laid my unhappiness at the door of those partners, because I didn't.

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Most were fine fellows. They just were not what I wanted. I wanted someone who looked at me as an equal, and demanded the same from me. He spoke, his voice low and rough in my ear.

“You can change your mind, you know.” His fingertips wickedly teased the crease of my ass. The breath left my lungs on the surge of pure lust that ripped through me.

Sure I could change my mind, just not the condition of my penis. That would require I stop all thought of our joining, mere moments away, and I couldn't. Never had I been so eager to be penetrated.

I shifted my weight and pinned him to the bed. He grinned up at me as I ground my pelvis to his, giving both of us a little thrill. Jonas wrapped his legs around me and rolled us over and I took my turn, grinning up at him before I rolled us back the other way.

“We'll break your bed,” he warned, laughing. I didn't care and told him so as we rolled again, kissing playfully.

I thrust my tongue into the heat of his mouth. The playful mood vanished like the mist he'd spoken of earlier. Need flowed out of him. I opened myself and took it in to mingle with my own. I reached out and opened the nightstand drawer. He whistled in appreciation and shimmied his way up across my body for a closer look.

“Magnum. XXL. Extra sensitive. Ribbed. Strawberry. Snuggers.” He looked at me, eyebrow cocked. “Strawberry?”

“It was a gift.” I grinned at him as I wrapped my hand around his shaft. “Use the Snuggers.”

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“Like hell,” he grumbled and grabbed a Magnum. “You could put this on me with your tongue, you know.”

“Like hell.” I matched his tone perfectly. He laughed and ripped open the packet with his teeth. My chest squeezed the air out of my lungs again. Jonas paused.

“Are you okay? You’re wheezing.”

“Would you hurry up!”

His left eyebrow rose. A new sort of gleam lit his blue eyes from within. The corner of his sensuous, kissable mouth quirked in what might have been a smile had the gaze locked with mine been different. A new game was afoot, one I hadn’t meant to begin, but must now endure.

Torture.

Oh, not the kind that hurt. That would be too easy, or too base. This torture would be very different. My cock throbbed with anticipation. He rose up on his knees, straddling my torso, and flipped the open packet onto my chest.

“Put that on me.”

I slipped the condom out and palmed it. “First things first.”

His erection stared me in the face, literally, and I knew of only one reasonable thing to do. Jonas moaned as I sucked him in, flattening my tongue on the smooth surface of his glans. I took him no deeper, just teased the tip until he pulled away. I reached for him.

I fit the condom over him. His hands covered mine as I slowly rolled the latex down over his dick to the base. Gently, he guided me to his sac. I fondled him, mindful of the extra sensitivity he dealt with, and teased behind it, tickling him.

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The sac drew up and he grinned.

“Normal reactions are good,” he said, moving away from the fingers. He bent over me and licked my cock, tip to base, and back up. “You’ve not done this in a while. You want to roll over?”

I shook my head and placed my foot against his shoulder. I wanted to see his face, to watch how taking me affected him, even as he watched me. I grabbed the tube of lube and handed it to him. He squirted a generous amount onto his palm and grasped my erection.

“I don’t need it there,” I told him, understanding him well enough now to know he liked to tease. He held the tube over me.

He grinned. “I know. You need this.” Cold gel landed on my balls making them draw up.

“You need spanked, Chadwick.”

The grin faded from his face. He swallowed, hard. I grabbed his free hand.

“What is it?” I thought I knew, but maybe he needed to say it.

“I need this, Micah.” He caressed the inside of my thigh with his knuckles and I quivered under his touch. He added a bit more lube to the dollop on his palm and began to spread it about.

I held my breath, forgetting to breathe, as his hands touched me intimately, gliding over me. The strange bedfellows of anticipation and trepidation danced around the fire in my belly like tiny demons. The man was hung. I feared

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being unable to relax enough to accommodate him—and I desperately wanted it to happen.

I watched his face, features sharpened with arousal, and silently urged him to hurry. My whole being stretched taut, aching for him to take me. His fingers stroked beneath my sac and the gentle, teasing caresses that had slowly turned my brain to mush became serious. He lifted my other leg to his shoulder.

In spite of my desire for him, I tensed as he moved his cock across me, once, then again and again. Carefully he pressed for entrance only to back away. He applied a bit more lube and tossed the tube on the bed.

My cock lifted, aching for his notice. Jonas saw. His gaze flicked from mine, to my penis, then back. I took a deep breath. With great care, he pushed into me. I released the breath and forced my muscles to relax. Jonas slipped inside me. I jerked, surprised at the sensation.

“Easy, Micah.” His hands glided along my thighs as he eased back on the pressure.

“It’s been a very long time,” I told him again, afraid to draw a deep breath to speak for fear of my concentration slipping and my climax beginning. “Like ten years, maybe.”

He nodded and pressed into me. My body gave way, accepting him. I cried out, but not in pain.

My flesh twitched and quivered around the invader in a joyous dance of sensation with every rapid beat of my heart. Each throb started at Jonas and ended at the tip of my penis. He withdrew a few inches and my world burst into flame.

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Heat flashed up my spine. I grasped my cock, stroked and came, hard.

“Jonas!” I bucked against him.

His arms held me, keeping me from harm, as he pumped into me. His moans of pleasure echoed mine, his rhythm faltered. His body pulsed strongly within mine as he climaxed. Even swept up in his own release, he maintained control and remained cognizant of our joining.

He stilled. His chin dropped to his chest.

“Oh, God, Micah. Too fast.” Ragged, his voice sounded tired. He was spent, in more ways than one. I pushed my heels against his shoulders.

Jonas took the hint and withdrew from me. He looked at the bathroom, cocking his head in that general direction. I nodded. He staggered slightly as he got to his feet. I would have wished for a moment to catch my breath, but concern for him put wings on my feet. I placed my hand in the middle of his back as he tended to the condom.

“Are you okay?”

His bright blue gaze connected with mine and my worries evaporated. “I’m better than I’ve been in a long time, but I won’t kid you. I’m beat.” He shook his head. “I’m getting old. My legs feel like jelly.”

I turned on the shower. “So do mine. We can hold each other up so we don’t drown. How’s that?”

“Good plan.”

I stepped inside and held my hand out to him. It was tight squeeze for two—it always had been when I entertained—but

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I liked my little house and its equally small bathroom. It was perfect for a single guy.

Which maybe I wasn't any longer. I hoped that might be the case, but who knew how Jonas felt?

He leaned against me, his chin on my shoulder. "Soap?"

I lathered a washcloth and handed it to him, aware of the dark smudges beneath his eyes. We washed each other's backs, but aside from that we tended to our own hygiene. We could play the next time we showered together.

Clean enough, I stepped from the shower and toweled off before getting him a towel from the linen closet. Jonas stood under the spray, letting it hit him in the face. I squeezed his arm.

"Take your time, but you've only got about five minutes longer until you lose hot water."

He didn't move, just mumbled at me through the water pelting him. "Okay."

I padded out to the kitchen, snagged two bottles of water and carried them to the bedroom. The sound of the shower ceased. I watched Jonas dry off through the crack of the bathroom door. Finished, he leaned on the vanity, head down. My heart sank.

Yes, he appeared tired, and now with the sex over for the night, he wasn't in any hurry to come back to my bed. I probably wouldn't get any answers to the myriad questions plaguing me about him. He straightened, hung up his towel over the shower rod, and came to the bed.

Jonas dropped on the pillows beside me and accepted a

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water bottle with murmured thanks. After a few swallows he recapped it and set it on the nightstand. I rolled to my side and watched him. He slipped his feet under the covers and rolled to face me.

“You’re burning up with questions, aren’t you?”

Why lie? I nodded. “And I have new ones every minute.”

“Turn off the light, Micah. I think I can stay awake a bit longer. I don’t want you to suffer through the night with a lot of misconceptions.”

Oh, he didn’t, did he? How would he know what misconceptions I might have?

“I was your age when I met Vincent. He was ten years older than me, and had already had the first heart attack. I worried about everything. So I won’t tell you not to worry about me.”

“Okay, smartass, stop reading my mind and I’ll stop worrying.”

“Liar. You’re worried right now.” His hand found mine and our fingers intertwined. “How are you doing? Anything hurt?”

I squeezed his hand. How did I feel?

“I’m fine. Better than fine.” I wiggled my eyebrows at him. “You’ve done that before, haven’t you?”

“Now who’s the smartass? And yes I have. A lot.”

I sensed him relaxing. Heck, I had relaxed quite a bit, too, even though I desired to hold him again. I wouldn’t deny it if he asked. I’d like nothing more than for us to go at it again, if my cock would cooperate after the evening it’d had so far.

PASSION'S VICTORY

“What made you come back tonight, Jonas?”

He didn't pretend to misunderstand. That wasn't his style. His forthrightness, among other things, turned me on for him.

“Your Mach 1.”

Of course, his warped sense of humor was damn sexy, too.

CHAPTER 9

Jonas sighed and inched his way closer. Our thighs rubbed and we shifted once again, settling even closer. His knee worked its way between mine. My leg rose to rest on his. He draped his arm over me. The gesture stopped short of protectiveness, but I sensed it was a conscious effort.

I wouldn't fault him for it. His lover hadn't enjoyed good health. The move to protect was probably a deeply ingrained habit. In a way, I liked it.

Usually I made that move. Being with Jonas would provide the opportunity to learn a few different things, to experience a fuller, richer relationship than any I'd had. Maybe.

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It might be difficult to keep my mouth closed and my attitude in check long enough to allow him to lead the way sometimes.

“Are you going to answer my question?”

His fingers toyed with the short hair on the back of my head. “Since Vincent died, I’ve been telling myself I needed time to grieve. Seeing you in a towel convinced me I’m ready to move on. I was a fool to go home, so I came back. Then you weren’t here.”

“Well, I needed what couldn’t be found where I went,” I confessed dryly. “For what it’s worth, I’m damn glad you came back.”

“Me, too. Fucking the boss might be stupid, though.”

“Screwing employees isn’t real smart, either. Sexual harassment and all that, but here we are. I’m willing to take the chance and run with it.”

Jonas chuckled softly. “Call it what you like. It’s been torture the past couple of weeks not knowing if I dared approach you.”

“Same with me. I vacillated hourly on my opinion of which team you batted for.”

Amusement lit his blue orbs. “So, have you ever had a woman?”

I’d known early in my life I was gay. I’d not even dated the fairer sex. I shook my head. “You?”

“A few.”

My curiosity grew by leaps and bounds. “You never married?”

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"Oh, no. No, no. I knew I was, shall we say, different, by the time I hit puberty. I dated so my family wouldn't suspect."

"Dated, okay. But you had sex."

He shrugged. "Inquiring minds need to know."

I snorted. "It wasn't your mind that led you there."

"No, it wasn't. But it was irrevocable proof to myself that I am homosexual."

Jonas stretched, his back arching until our bellies rubbed. He relaxed, drawing me closer and finding my lips with his to kiss me softly, lightly, before pulling away.

"Micah, I need to know how you really feel about my health issues. I may live forever, or I may be gone in a year."

How did I feel? It was a mystery even to me. I refused to say something trifling such as we could get run down by a truck on the morrow.

"It's my heart to risk, Jonas. All I can say is that I want to see where tonight leads us. The rest of it will be as it is."

I didn't know if that were the answer he'd hoped for or not, but it was the truth and all I had to offer. To my great relief, he seemed satisfied with that.

"Okay. I appreciate your honesty more than you'll ever know."

Another bit of hard truthfulness lurked between us. I guided his hand to it. He smirked, then grinned as his fingers wrapped around my shaft.

"I knew that was there." He moved his hand over me. I sighed blissfully.

"You knew and you made me ask you?"

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"I thought we were going to sleep." His hand worked me in a steady rhythm.

"You'd say that now?" I jerked as arousal jolted through me, settling deeper in my groin. Jonas' lips moved against mine, his breath teasing me.

"So, are you up for another round?" I asked as my hand sought—and found—his erection. "I'll take that as a yes."

His tongue swept across my lips. "You can call that a yes. We need another condom."

My body tightened in a way that had nothing to do with pleasure in spite of the state of my penis.

"Oh, no, we don't," I replied firmly. I didn't care if I disappointed or even insulted him. I thought once up the ass a night sufficient, no matter how good it felt. I knew my limitations.

"For on you, Micah."

A fit of shivering seized me, shook me, and left as abruptly as it had come. My penis twitched, straining toward him. Sweat broke out in my armpits. I needed to claim him as he had me, but regardless of the sudden surge of my body, I wasn't ready.

Jonas gathered me in his arms. I protested and pushed away from him.

"No. You said you'd not been a bottom since before your surgery, and I'm too tired to be careful."

A storm brewed in his eyes, but the stark, whispered words he spoke were clear of it. "I'm fine. I need you."

The desire that bubbled in my belly cooled. Our first night

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together and already I would disappoint and anger him in ways unexpected. I shook my head.

"I hear you, Jonas. I do. But not tonight. Let's get some sleep. We can spend most of the next three days in bed, you know."

My heart sank at his subtle withdrawal. Oh, he didn't physically move, no. His energy, his aura if you will, pulled away from me and left me coldly alone. I didn't imagine it. The cool, clipped voice that spoke out of the darkness confirmed my fears.

"I won't stand for you treating me like an invalid, Micah. And I won't tolerate anything less than equality between us."

"That's not what I'm doing. I tell you again, I'm not sure I can be careful tonight. That's all there is to it."

His breathing filled the room. The long, lean lines of his frame vibrated with tension under my hand as I ran my hand down his side.

"Maybe I should go home," he said quietly.

"Do you always run?" The words fell sharply out of my mouth before I could stop them. Christ, I'd done it now.

Jonas rolled from the bed, out of my hands, away from my touch. I quickly followed him, intent on making immediate and heartfelt apologies. I stood and reached for him. His palms smacked flatly against the center of my chest, knocking me backwards and off balance onto the bed. I sat on the edge of the mattress, shocked at the extent of his anger.

What old wounds had I re-opened with my too-quick words?

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"I'm sorry, Jonas. Truly sorry. I don't want you to leave angry."

He zipped his pants. "But you do want me to leave."

"Don't try and misconstrue my meaning. I don't want you to leave at all. But if you're hell-bent on doing so, I'd prefer we talk this out first. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, well, you be sorry. You don't know me, boss. I'm not a toy for some rich boy who likes to play games. Find someone else for that."

"What the fuck are you talking about? And stop calling me boss!" I stood again and held my hand out to him.

Jonas stared at my offered hand, the material side of my verbal apology, and my unspoken plea that he reconsider walking out before we really knew each other. My silent petition to give us a chance to become what I knew we could be.

The battle within him warred behind his frozen exterior. He moved not a muscle, nor did he sway. I'd never witnessed anyone stand so still. After what seemed an eternity, Jonas looked at me, his cobalt eyes dark with misery and indecision.

"If you walk away, Jonas, we both lose," I told him softly. "Whatever trigger I tripped, I'm sorry. That's all I can offer because I don't know your past, where you hurt."

He swallowed hard and took a deep breath. The proud shoulders lost their angry angles as his gaze flicked away, then back to mine.

"You don't need all the baggage I have, Micah. Find some younger man who hasn't made as many mistakes. Someone

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who can still believe in love.”

I let my hand fall to my side. “I’ve done that, several times, and they were just that—young. They didn’t recognize a mistake until it slapped them in the face and then it was too late.”

Jonas shook his head sadly. “You’re young, too, and a mistake is standing in front of you and you don’t see it. I don’t want you to go through with me what I went through with Vincent.”

“You loved him. To stay with him for so long and care for him says how much.”

His shoulders slumped. He moved past me and sat on the edge of the bed with a tired sigh.

“I didn’t love him at the end, Micah. What I felt when he died was relief. I was free of him, of his needs, his constant demands. His suffering. I wept, but it wasn’t with grief.” He looked at me, all barriers gone. “I did the best I could for him, but I can’t sit here and tell you in all honesty I’m sorry, for me or for him, that he died.”

I sat next to him, our thighs and shoulders touching. The way I had it figured, Jonas had given up the best part of his thirties and forties for his lover. They are the years most people think of as the last of their youth. Anger, resentment and guilt were powerful emotions, crippling if not dealt with.

Who did he confide in during those years? Were “their” friends really Vincent’s friends? It wasn’t uncommon for one party in a relationship to give up his own friends for a lover. I already knew, from his comments, Jonas’ siblings would not

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have offered him comfort. His hands lay fisted on his thighs. I picked up the near one and forced it open to interlace my fingers with his.

“You can’t make some decisions for another person, Jonas. I hear you. You’re scared the doctors didn’t get all the cancer. How could you not be? You’re guilty because you resent giving up the last certain healthy years of your own life to care for someone else. Welcome to the human race.”

He squeezed my hand and leaned against me. “Yeah, I’m scared. You’ve got that right. Guilty? That, too. But it eats me up inside to remember how madly I loved him in the beginning, and how all that vanished.”

“You can’t protect me or anyone else from the world.” I stood and faced him, resting my hands on his shoulders. “Take your pants off, Jonas. Get back in bed. I’ll go email Sally now, fix us another whiskey, and turn off the alarm. We’ll sleep late in the morning, then ride out to the casino site.”

Jonas nodded. He ran his hands up the back of my thighs and pulled me to him. His lips brushed my stomach, then he teased my belly button with the tip of his tongue. It tickled and I sucked in as far as I could. He glanced up at me, most of the shadows had gone from his eyes, but not all. Now, with both of us experiencing raw nerves, I didn’t want to push him further. He sighed and shook his head sadly.

“Bourbon. God, Micah. We need to stock your bar.”

CHAPTER 10

I lay in the dark, cocooned in the sheet and Jonas' body heat, and waited for the day to dawn. His steady breathing gave quiet testimony he did not sleep either, but remained withdrawn, an island on which I feared to tread. My sense of things whispered he'd told me things he wished he hadn't.

I didn't mind being his confessor. I would not judge him guilty on any count. He had lived those years as best he could, doing what he felt right in accordance with his own personal code of honor. Who was I to fault him?

Somewhere nearby, a bird chirped. Jonas stirred and slipped from the bed, padding softly on his way to another singular mission. I waited until he'd returned before rising in a

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like fashion. He waited for me when I reclaimed my spot, draping an arm over my chest and nibbling on my shoulder. There were rough bristles above his lip, not that I minded.

“Did you sleep at all, Micah?”

“I dozed once or twice. You?”

The sheets rustled as he levered up on his elbow. “About the same. Listen, I’m sorry. I had no right to lay my garbage at your feet.”

“Let it go for now,” I urged him. “We’ve got time to sort through where we’ve been in our lives to get to here, and where we’re gonna go now.”

“I hope you’re right.” He flopped down and stared at the ceiling.

Still dark, I couldn’t see his eyes. I didn’t have to.

His hand crept up my leg. It didn’t take a great brain to figure out where those long fingers were headed. I rolled towards him and began my own exploration. His penis lay at half-mast across his pelted thigh. I wrapped my thumb and index finger around him, just below the rim. He pulsed in my hand, and my own flesh echoed with a wicked throb. I flicked my wrist. His hips rocked up.

“Like that?”

His fingers closed around my shaft, squeezing ever so lightly, ever so skillfully. I sucked in a quick breath and rode the wave of pleasure that shimmered through me.

“You like that?” he asked, an amused lilt in his voice.

“Not one damn bit. Keep doing it, though, and I’ll see if that changes.”

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He snorted and rolled into my arms. His lips found mine, hot and seeking, yet unhurried.

We shifted closer, grunting and growling at each until we lay so perfectly near I managed to get thumb and index finger around both our erections. There wasn't room for me to do more than move my wrist, but it was enough. Jonas' strong arms held our bodies, pressed tightly together in the gray dawn. He laid claim to my mouth, his tongue moving in and out with the quickening pace of my wrist.

Sweat trickled down my chest to the sheets, already damp from Jonas' overheated body. The tension built between us, ebbing briefly before climbing higher. He tore his lips from mine, as a soft moan vibrated in his throat. Jonas made that sound again, and the delicious pressure in my groin broke free without warning as my orgasm seized me. I barely managed to warn him.

I think I called out to him. I know he called my name, a breathy groan as he shuddered against me. I flew, held prisoner by the pounding pleasure at the base of my spine and the absolute bliss radiating through my cock.

Jonas' arms loosened. He groaned again, or maybe laughed. Perhaps both, I wasn't sure. His hand closed around mine, stilling the movement of my wrist.

"Nice," he whispered in my ear. He relaxed so completely, went so utterly limp, that I opened my eyes to look at him.

His dark lashes lay against flushed cheeks. His breathing slowed.

Huh. Now he could sleep.

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It seemed like a good idea, actually. I closed my eyes. The last thing I heard was a soft snore coming from the adjoining pillow.

* * *

It should not have surprised me to find myself alone in the bed. Nonetheless, it did. I rolled over. His clothes were gone, too. Either he'd been very quiet, sneaky even, or I'd slept like the dead. It hardly mattered. Jonas had fled.

Damn the man.

Ten o'clock. I didn't want to go in to the office. How could I explain the change of plans without knowing if Jonas had spoken to anyone? I pulled on a pair of boxers and dragged my sorry ass to the kitchen. I wanted something cold and liquid before I tossed the sheets in the washer and cleaned up. I walked into the kitchen and found a note taped on my refrigerator.

Went home for clean clothes. Call me. J.

Some of the weight, not all, lifted off my chest. I grabbed a bottle of water and dropped onto a chair. Schoolboy-ish longing or not, I'd wanted to wake up with Jonas.

Call me, the note said. Call him—what? I could think of a few things to call him, and none of them were things I'd say in front of my mother. I gulped my water and hurried to tidy up.

Half an hour later I left the sheets spinning in the washer as I hopped in the Mach, and headed for the nearest coffee shop. Once fortified, but without any great improvement in mood, I drove straight to Jonas' place.

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Without calling him.

I should have called him. I knew it to be the right thing to do, but this little voice hissed at me he'd slunk home to a lover, one that allowed him to scratch the occasional itch. Just what I would do if that turned out to be the case... Well, I hadn't a clue.

Unfamiliar with the neighborhood he lived in, I drove past his place. I slammed on the brakes, jammed the shifter into reverse, hit the gas and popped the clutch. Three hundred horses spun the tires to an ear-splitting squeal. I sent a silent apology to the homeowners on the quiet residential street. Jonas would certainly know I'd arrived.

I parked the Mach 1 in front of the stylish, modern-ish, multi-level rambler and loped up the landscaped walkway. The door swung open. Jonas stepped out into the sunshine, quickly closing the door behind him. My heart sank before swelling angrily.

Damn. He did have someone inside.

Jonas leaned on the porch post, his sparkling eyes welcoming me above a wide white grin. Dressed in black jeans, black boots, and an old-fashioned black pocket tee, he really did take my breath away.

That grin on his face probably meant he wasn't angry I'd not called before showing up at his door. Maybe, just maybe, I needed to hear him out.

"I heard you coming," he said, laughing. "Everyone heard you."

I rolled my eyes. "Sorry about that."

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“C’mon in, but let me go first. I’ve got to grab the cat.”

Cat? He had a cat?

I hung back as he made a grab for something I couldn’t see. He stood, holding a little yellow kitten.

“That’s not a cat,” I told him dryly.

“He will be one day.”

Annoyance flashed through me, leaving as quickly as it had come. It was unreasonable, and impossible, for him to tell me everything about his life in a few short hours.

“You could’ve told me you had to come home to take care of the...” I looked at the wiggling mass of fuzzy fur with its toes spread wide to show off tiny, sharp claws. “Cat.”

I closed the door, watching as Jonas blew on the kitten’s face before setting the little beast on its feet. It scampered away. Jonas met my gaze. I smiled at him.

“So you’re already cheating on me with a pu—”

His hands rose to cover his ears. The mock horror on his face couldn’t hide his amusement. “Oh, don’t say it!”

We laughed together, stepping into each other’s embrace. The tension inside me eased as his arms encircled me, and I leaned on his strength. Or did he lean on mine? The lines between us blurred. I pulled his mouth to mine and kissed him.

That beautiful shared awareness surged through me, its warmth settling in my belly and spreading lower. I knew Jonas felt it, too, in the way his arms tightened around my ribs, and his thighs tensed against mine. I pulled away, needing answers.

Or at least needing to ask questions.

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“Jonas, are you always going to run when we get close?”

He leaned against my strength, and I offered it freely to him. I remained still, hopeful he'd give me some idea of what he thought. Jonas finally looked at me.

“I'm not running now.”

“That's your answer?”

His gaze searched my face. “I'm forty-eight, Micah, and maybe my best years are behind me. You're still young. You're healthy. What do you want with me? Why me?”

To say he moved me would be trite, but he did move me, and to unexpected depths. There would never be anything casual or shallow about my feelings for him.

In the same vein, pointing out that sometimes life required a leap of faith would also be too cliché. I wasn't going to suggest he consider the notion I'd fallen in love with him, not when he'd bolted on me twice. So where did our doubts and fears leave us? Were they insurmountable? I thought not.

Honesty, however insufficient for his unsure heart, was all I had to offer him.

“If I knew, Jonas, I'd tell you. I'd say the words, but I don't have them.”

“Me, neither. I never expected to...” Jonas looked away.

“What? Maybe love someone again?”

“Love is a big word to toss out, Micah,” he whispered. “We barely know each other.”

I would not allow him to back away again. Ready or not, I had to put a card on the table.

“Ever feel lightning strike?”

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A smile teased his sensuous mouth. His chin lifted. “Yeah. The first time I laid eyes on you.”

CHAPTER 11

I flushed hot at the warmth in his eyes. The sweeping heat gave way to a delightful shiver that tightened my groin in a flash. The sensation passed swiftly as my cock swelled. The gleam in Jonas' cobalt eyes waited to lead me astray.

As if I minded.

"You look hot in black, Chadwick."

"Flatterer. What's your point?"

"Like you don't fucking know," I growled at him.

He grinned broadly, showing off his even, white teeth.

"Oh, I know, boss." His hands came to rest on my shoulders.

"Where do we go from here?"

"Bed." The word popped out of my mouth before I'd

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formed the conscious thought. His eyebrow shot up.

Jonas must have liked the idea. His mouth came down on mine, hard and territorial. I opened to him, allowing him free rein and reveling in the sizzling jolts of arousal spiking through my body. I hardened, eager for him, wanting to take him and see what more was possible between us. I forgot to breathe as his hand snaked down the front of my jeans and closed around my throbbing shaft.

I thrust my tongue into the heat of his mouth and tasted mint, coffee, and the unique flavor of the man. A low rumble of encouragement vibrated deep in his chest as our dance gathered momentum. I teased him, scraping my teeth over his lower lip, sucking it. He responded with a few nibbles on mine. Jonas laved my lips with his tongue, then pulled away. I opened my eyes. His gaze led mine toward the ceiling.

“Should I walk up the stairs with your hand in my pants?” I quipped.

He shook his head, and giving my cock a quick squeeze, extricated his hand. “Go on up. I’ll be right there.”

I hated to release him, but knew the sooner I did, the sooner we’d be naked. He backed away and went to do whatever it was he thought so important he’d send me to his bed ahead of him.

He probably wanted to check on the kitten. I grinned as I took the stairs two at a time. I’d toss pussy innuendos at him until he fucked me into silence and see how he liked it. I did know him well enough to know his sense of humor would appreciate it. So would his dick.

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This level of the house held only the master suite. Painted in shades of navy, maroon and brown, the Spartan bedroom held a king-size sleigh bed and matching furniture. I would have thought it in odd contrast to the rest of the airy, southwestern home had I not known he hailed from northern climes.

“Hold out your hand,” he instructed from behind me, standing so close his breath teased the back of my neck.

I did as requested, and he plopped a box of condoms and a tube of lubricant into my hand.

“I had to make a stop on the way home this morning.”

I placed the items on the nightstand before turning to him and fisting my hands in his T-shirt to pull him to me. “Good idea.”

“I thought so.” Jonas didn’t waste time kissing me. His busy hands unsnapped my jeans and had my zipper down in a second flat. “You look hot naked, Souther.”

Naked certainly appealed to me. I yanked his T-shirt over his head, which wasn’t easy with the man trying to divest me of my pants and my willingness to aid him. I managed to kick off my shoes and step out of the clothing pooling at my feet. Jonas went to his knees in front of me.

His mouth covered the head of my cock, blowing heated breath through the fabric of my briefs. My penis throbbed, anticipating more, but Jonas seemed in the mood to tease me unconscious.

I shivered in the wake of his hands slowly caressing their way up the back of my thighs. He blew on me again, applying

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pressure this time. His fingertips dug into my butt, holding me to his mouth. Moisture from his breath penetrated the cloth and gooseflesh rose once again on my back. I peeled out of my shirt, thrusting my hips forward as Jonas laughed wickedly. I dropped to the floor with him.

His arms came around me as I embraced him, toppling us over to the carpet. My lips found his, eager for the taste of him. He deepened the kiss to the promise of fulfillment. My heart rate soared, my pulse pounding in my ears until I thought surely Jonas could hear it, too. He hooked his fingers under the waistband of my underwear and shucked them off my hips. His fingers closed around my shaft. I sighed with appreciation of his slow, rhythmic caresses and the sudden jolt of desire that shot through my groin as he applied more pressure.

“I want you, Micah. Don’t back away today. I need to know. We both need to know what I can and can’t do anymore.”

I knew what he meant, and he was right. He did need to know, and so did I. He’d not yet shared the particulars of his illness and treatment, but it wasn’t difficult to guess the nature of his doubts and fears. For myself, I worried about causing him undue pain, and a bit more.

If he could no longer tolerate being penetrated, how would that affect his feelings about sex? Or mine? I rarely bottomed, but had he? He’d not really said. I stilled his hand.

“Jonas, tell me now. If this hurts you and you can’t continue, how are you going to feel?”

He shook his head and guided my hand to his dick.

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“Disappointed. I want that give and take with you. I don’t want to have it all this way, or that way. Desire, need. Complex stuff, you know?”

Yeah, I knew. Pleasing a lover took on myriad forms, as did accepting pleasure at the hands of another. I’d miss taking him, but would it matter to the point where it could end our relationship? Was I that shallow? I hoped not.

“One way or the other, we’ll figure it out. Now get your very fine ass out of those jeans and on the bed.”

He made a rude noise and rolled away from me. Jonas deftly pulled his boots off and wiggled out of his jeans. I eyeballed his erection, full and heavy, as he landed on all fours on the bed.

“You sure act old and dried-up, Chadwick, with your dick swinging like that.”

He straightened, rising on his knees to yank the covers down, all the while snickering at me. “I knew you were looking at it. Now come here. Playtime is over.”

That’s what he thought. I held the opinion it had just begun in earnest.

I pushed my side of the comforter down and knelt on the bed in front of Jonas. The memory of his mouth, warm and wet, gliding over my cock coiled in my belly like a live thing. I wrapped my arms around him and pulled him close, my lips close to his ear.

“Suck me.”

Jonas turned his head and claimed my mouth, his tongue teasing mine. His fingers dug into my ass with enough

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pressure to make me squirm. As his grip on my rear eased, the kiss deepened again. I found the push and pull of it heady. Down low I throbbed with every rapid beat of my heart. I fisted my fingers in his hair and kissed him back.

Back and forth we danced, shifting the lead seamlessly, as if we'd always done this and known the ebb and flow of the other forever. Breathless, I pulled away from him. Those blue eyes stared at me, glassy and unfocused. His palms came to rest on my chest. I guided his hand to my nipple. The corner of his mouth twitched as he squeezed the brown disc.

"Oh, jeez. When did I grow nips?" I leaned into his hand as he squeezed, delighted with the sparks that shot straight down a nerve to my penis.

Jonas' other hand slid down to my balls. "Don't ask questions. Just enjoy."

His long fingers closed around my shaft and went to work. The air left my lungs as I pulsed in his hand. Jonas met my gaze, then dipped his head. I watched, still as a stone, as he licked the length of my erection.

"Lie down, Micah."

It never occurred to me to protest as I stretched out on his bed, waiting, longing. I needed his mouth on me, wanted to feel his touch lift me before...

Jonas shifted with me, moved to cover my hips, his dark hair already damp as he took me, deep throat. I closed my eyes and time ceased to flow as my world condensed to nothing more than the heat of his mouth enveloping me, pleasuring me. I floated, wrapped in his spell.

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The bed shifted as he released my erection and lay on the pillows beside me. Though I ached for release, right now his pleasure was more important than mine. I wanted it to be good for him.

As much I feared hurting him, something worse than pain lurked in the shadows haunting me—disappointing him.

Vanquished by his eyes, full of desire for me, for all that was possible between us, those shadows would not rule me. I murmured his name and curled over him. Jonas slipped his fingers into my hair as I trailed my lips over his penis.

Hard, full, the size of his elegant tool challenged me, but already I knew its length and girth. Being uncut, his usually protected glans was extra sensitive to every touch now. I teased around the rim with my tongue. His hips lifted from the bed. I repeated the action and Jonas groaned. I grasped his shaft, rolling the soft skin over the steel core, and sucked him in, hand and mouth working in tandem.

Jonas lay tense under my ministrations, his breathing ragged. He moaned, softly at first, then louder, calling my name like a mantra. I tasted a drop of pre-cum and released him.

“Jonas.” I ran my hands over his pelted chest, dewed with sweat. “Tell me how you want me.” His muscled thighs quivered under my questing hands. He swallowed, hard, his throat constricting, then relaxing. His eyes opened.

“I want to see your face, Micah. I want to see how it moves you.”

Couldn't he already see it? I trembled with a need for him

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that went beyond sex. Maybe my face would show too much, but I couldn't deny him. I nodded and knelt between his knees.

He reached out a long arm and snagged a foil packet. He opened it and sheathed me in latex in a quick, practiced move, then he flipped the lube to me. I filled my lungs and squeezed out the cool gel into my palm to allow the lubricant to warm for a moment.

The mid-morning sun streamed brightly across the bed, falling across us as I carefully prepared him to accept me. I capped the tube and laid it within reach. Jonas watched, his intense gaze full of uncertainty and need, then he moved to give me access to his body.

Jonas tensed as the tip of my cock glided over him. I sensed the effort it took for him to relax. When he did, I pushed the head into him. He jumped, but his hands reached for me. I pushed slowly, and his body yielded, taking me completely. I hazed on the rush of arousal that sent me soaring towards orgasm.

"Micah. Now." The strain in his voice brought me back.

His face was taut with arousal, his chest and neck flushed dark. Panting, he gave me a lop-sided smile. I withdrew, then sank back into him, again and again. His eyelids fluttered, his unfocused gaze struggling to lock in on my face. Jonas dropped his right hand from my arm and grabbed himself. Dozens of tiny muscles danced around my flesh as I moved in him, stronger now.

"Jonas?"

"Stop and I'll beat..." He moaned as I drove into him.

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“You.”

I couldn't stop, not when I was coming. My groin tightened. My balls drew up. The familiar delicious heat swept through me as stimulated nerve endings reached the breaking point.

“Micah!” I heard him call my name. I would have tried to wait for him, but there was no need. He was ahead of me.

I felt the spasms of his climax, saw him shoot. I reached for the orgasm hovering in my system, let it take me down into him, let his hands guide me through it. Suddenly limp, I toppled to the bed beside him, spent. He rolled on his side, facing me.

“Jonas, are...”

His lips silenced mine.

CHAPTER 12

I floated in blissful darkness, knowing the moment would be fleeting. Jonas anchored me, his lips on mine. I tasted the echoes of our shared pleasure, of his release, and his relief. My immediate concerns about him evaporated like mist caught in sunlight. I sighed into his mouth. A low, satisfied groan rumbled in his chest as he stretched.

“Get your second wind, boy,” he purred in my ear. “I’ve got to teach you some self-control. You’re too quick.”

I opened my eyes and failed miserably to glare at his grinning face. “Me! It’s your fault.” I eased away from him and rolled off the bed. Knees pleasantly loose, I made my way to his spacious bathroom. Jonas followed me.

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Looking relaxed, and satisfied, he walked past me into the tiled, walk-in shower, and turned on the jets. I asked him if a shower was premature considering I had a few lessons to learn.

“Business, first. I really want to ride out to the casino site,” he replied seriously.

I snorted at him. “Your boss says it can wait, unless there’s a glitch you’ve not informed him of.”

Jonas shook his head. “Not a glitch. Just something I need to verify they’ve done correctly on the setbacks before they bulldoze too far ahead of themselves.”

That did make sense to me. Jonas stepped under the spray, lifting his face so the water beat on it. I didn’t need to ask him if he were all right. Any fool could see the answer, written in the little smile that refused to leave his lips, the loose, relaxed lines of his lean body, the breathy sigh of contentment as he planted his feet and leaned on the tiles.

“Are you getting wet, Micah?”

I leered at him. “After I finish looking at your naked ass.”

He tossed me a tube of shower gel. “Wash my back.”

No reply was required and I offered none as I squirted a generous amount of gel on a washrag and completed my assignment. Jonas turned and washed mine. We didn’t speak...we didn’t have to. The comfortable silence between us said more than words.

Toweling each other off afforded a bit of amusement that wasn’t entirely funny. After drying my backside, Jonas patted my balls dry, carefully rolling the hard testes inside the sac.

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“Are you going to inspect me every day?” I inquired, somehow keeping the annoyance I felt out of my voice. I understood his concern and his actions. I knew it to be the right thing to do, but I wouldn’t put up with it every time the man touched me.

Jonas shook his head. “No. Of course not. You’re going to check yourself, Micah, no arguments. It could be your life.”

“I hear ya. Now put your clothes on, Chadwick. It’s time for lunch, and I’ll buy.”

He pulled on his jeans, tucked the black tee in and zipped up. “Are you going to ask me?”

I knew what he meant. Was I going to ask if he were okay? Apparently he had something he wanted to say about the experience. I grasped his shoulder and met his gaze. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. Now, did you go off that quick just to get it over with for fear of hurting me?”

I shook my head. My chest tightened. The words came hard, squeezing by the lump in my throat with great difficulty.

“No, I didn’t. I never expected...” My voice cracked. I looked away.

How did I tell him that I’d fallen in love with him? We barely knew each other. Yeah, sure, the sex was one thing, but love was something else. Love was building a relationship, a life together. Love was his standing by a dying man regardless of the cost to himself. I’d not personally known the depth of that commitment. Did I have that strength of character? It wasn’t something a person knew for sure until the moment

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came upon them.

The memory of his face as I took him rose in my mind. Arousal, desire, trust. Complex things, he'd said, and I knew the truth of it as well as he. I'd felt the weight of his trust in my soul and had been humbled by the implications of it.

After all he'd been through, not just anyone would do to help him regain those feelings of sexual adequacy. He was a handsome man. Doubtless he'd had a lot of offers had he wanted—or needed—something casual. He'd opted for a man he knew. Someone, for God's sake, that he worked with and thought worth the associated risks of an office affair. He squeezed my shoulder.

"Never expected what? Micah?"

His gorgeous eyes, so brightly blue, watched me with unnerving intensity. I recognized the strange fire imprisoned in their depths and feared it was mirrored in my own eyes.

Hope.

I could say the words or let the moment pass, a moment that might never come again if I remained silent and allowed him to think I didn't want him. That I didn't love him. I finished the sentence he'd begun a lifetime ago.

"I never expected to find you."

He swallowed hard. I waited silently as he struggled to form the words. Finally, he managed to speak.

"You said, 'love someone again,' and I do." His rugged features softened. "It's not gratitude for a great fuck, or for friendship, or anything else." Jonas pulled me unresisting into his arms. When he spoke again, his voice deepened, grew

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ragged with emotion. “When I first saw you, Micah, it was like lightning striking me. I love you.”

I wrapped my arms around him and held him tightly and gave back to him the words he’d said to me. “Love’s a big word to toss about.”

“I know, but that’s what it is.”

“That’s what it is,” I agreed, then pulled away to look at him. “I love you. I don’t know what’s ahead, Jonas, and I don’t care. We’ll figure it out as we go, day by day.”

He nodded. “That we will.”

His lips on mine rendered whatever the future held for us unimportant. All that mattered, all that would ever matter, were the moments given to us to share. We would be together, joined by our hearts, and that would be our ultimate victory.

KC KENDRICKS

Multi-published in the arena of romance fiction, KC Kendrick is the pen name under which the author focuses on the interactions of men falling in love with men. Novels by KC Kendrick are adult in nature. Graphic without being vulgar, KC's stories are a celebration of love and hope for mature readers.

Writing more traditional romance under a different pseudonym, the author is an EPPIE Finalist and a CAPA nominee. With one contemporary best-selling title, and several other top-ten list titles, the author has established herself as a storyteller who delivers rich, satisfying romantic stories that feature strong themes of love, hope and redemption with positive, upbeat endings.

* * *

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