



## **Embers**

*A Torquere Press Single Shot by Tory Temple*

### ***One***

Chris Matthews didn't know why, after nearly two years, he still let Morgan piss him off so badly.

Most days, they got along. Small, petty arguments were either over by the time one of them left for work or forgotten somewhere along the way. There were a lot of petty arguments, but most of them were good-natured ones. Chris was used to them by now.

But then there were days when the small arguments exploded into big ones. It didn't happen often. Usually, Chris was able to diffuse the situation or ignore Morgan's bitching about one thing or another. But some days... well, some days Morgan was just impossible to ignore.

Today was one of those days.

"The fucking paper was in the fucking bushes again." Morgan stalked into the kitchen with the offending paper under his arm.

Chris took a bite of cereal and talked with his mouth full. "So call the delivery service. Again."

"I thought you did, last week."

"Well, yeah. Because you told me to. That's why I said 'again'." Chris shoveled in more of his cereal and eyed the clock. He had a bet with Tucker that he'd beat him to work for the third shift in a row. Of course, since Tucker was probably getting laid and that was why he was always late, it couldn't be considered much of a loss.

"I'm canceling this paper. I only read the Wall Street Journal anyway." Morgan glared at the newspaper and dropped it onto a chair.

Chris picked it up and eyed him. "Uh, no. I read this paper, and it runs good articles on the fire department. We're not canceling the paper."

That was met with something muttered under Morgan's breath about the fire department and then stony silence.

Chris raised a brow. "Excuse me? Are we back to the same old argument about firemen?"

"I didn't say *firemen*, I said fire *department*. Did you buy mango juice?"

He ignored the juice question. "For fuck's sake, Morgan. You work for the fire department." Morgan was one of the educators that worked with the department captains. He presented the coursework that was necessary for the firefighters to meet their forty-five hours of required classroom time per year.

"I know. So do you. In fact, isn't it time for you to be there?" Morgan glanced at his watch in a truly infuriating way.

Chris shoved back his chair and stood. "Sure. I'll just take the paper with me. It'll make room in the house for your pretentious Wall Street Whatever."

Morgan glanced up from the paperwork in front of him. "You're offended by my choice of reading material?"

"Sure, that's it." Chris shook his head in disbelief. "Why does it always come back to this? I'm not offended by most of the shit you say, but I thought we covered the fact that you bashing firefighters or the fire department isn't cool. You'd think after two years together, you'd try to be less of an asshole about it. You *live* with a fireman. You used to be one. You work with firemen. So when you can't shut your mouth about how above them you are, then I'm offended."

"I know, Mr. Matthews." Morgan's gray eyes were calm as he watched Chris grab his keys from the counter. "And you would think that after two years together, you'd try to be less sensitive."

"Less sensitive." Chris blinked. "That's how you think we should solve the problem? By me ignoring you when you're a dick?"

Morgan leaned back and took off his glasses. "Sure. I ignore you when you're being one."

Chris left his bowl on the table and the front door standing wide open when he left for work.

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His shift passed quickly and slowly by turns. They ran four calls during the day, two of which were false alarms, one was nothing more than an elderly woman who'd slipped and bumped her head in the grocery store, and one was a kitchen fire that was mostly out by the time they got there.

"She didn't know how to work the damn extinguisher." Tucker shook his head in disgust. "And she had real pretty pots and stuff in there that got all ruined. You know when they hang 'em from the rack and you know they're all shiny and pretty? They ain't pretty anymore." He laughed to himself, clearly amused, and swung back up into his seat on the engine.

*But you are*, Chris thought before he could help it, then rolled his eyes at himself. He'd gone after Tucker hard, once upon a time, but those feelings had long passed. There was no question that his paramedic partner was pretty, though, and sometimes Chris couldn't help wondering if life with Tucker was easier than life with Morgan. It had to be.

Life with anyone had to be easier than with Morgan.

He couldn't help checking his cell every hour for a missed call or a text message. Morgan had weird ways of apologizing without saying he was sorry. Chris had grown used to curt voicemail messages after the two of them had argued, asking what kind of pancakes he wanted or if Chris wanted to go see a movie on their day off. It wasn't as obvious as chocolates and flowers, but Chris never wanted that shit anyway.

There was no message. Not at noon when Chris checked the first time, and not at one or two or three o'clock. By four o'clock he was even more pissed off than he'd been when he'd left Morgan in the kitchen that morning.

"Man, come on. You gotta learn how to just let shit go. He ain't gonna change and neither are you, so how come you let it tie you in knots?" Tucker slouched on Chris's bunk and flipped through a stack of photographs Chris had recently taken. "These are pretty. I wanna go out to the desert soon."

"Thanks. Those are from the ride we took last week. And usually I do let shit go. I think that's the problem. How much shit do I just... let go? I never get to call him on anything? That's fucked." Chris slammed his locker closed, locking his cell phone inside so he wouldn't look at it.

Tucker snorted. "Didn't say don't call him on anything. Call him on all the shit you want, but then let it go. That'll confuse him." He looked up and grinned, flashing the dimples that had hooked Chris from the first day he and Tucker had met on the job.

Chris sighed. "I don't know, Tuck. Morgan's not like Chance." The tall, handsome department captain was Tucker's romantic partner and not Chris's favorite person, but living with Chance was probably easier than living with Morgan.

"No one's like Chance." Tucker laughed. "And believe me, things ain't all hearts and flowers 'round our house. But that's what I mean, see? Chance does shit that pisses me right the hell off, and you better believe that I let him know. But once I let him know and we yell it out for a while, I feel better. It might take a couple days, but things settle down and I get a blowjob for an apology. It's a good system."

Chris was pretty sure that Tucker did his share of apologizing as well. "Okay, Tuck," Chris said, ignoring the impulse to get his phone out of his locker. "I'll try letting it go."

"Uh-huh, give it a try. Those blue eyes you got goin' on are prolly hard for him to resist." Tucker grinned again. "Lemme know how it goes. Wanna get your ass kicked at Xbox?"

The soft chimes of the overhead alarm saved Chris from having to answer. He and Tucker both got up immediately and headed toward the station's garage that housed the engine and truck.

They dressed quickly and methodically in their heavy turnouts and swung up into their respective spots on the engine. Tucker whistled a tuneless melody to himself as their engineer started up and pulled out of the bay.

Chris watched the neighborhood pass by and envied Tucker's easy outlook on life.

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Some nights at work were quiet, some were interrupted by one or two calls, and then there were the nights that Chris didn't get more than an hour's sleep before the alarm went off again, summoning them to the engine.

When dawn finally broke, he and Tucker met the rest of their crew in the kitchen. Everyone looked haggard and grouchy as they poured generous cups of coffee and prayed for no more calls before their relief arrived in an hour.

Their wish miraculously came true, and when Chris' relief arrived to take his place, Chris grabbed his gear bag and left without even saying goodbye. He loved his job, but some days were just draining.

Morgan's car was absent from the driveway. Chris was glad; there was just no way he was in any shape to deal with their situation right then. Too tired.

He hadn't had breakfast or a shower, but Chris went straight to the bedroom and collapsed on the bed. He managed to kick off his tennis shoes before falling into an exhausted sleep.

The house was still quiet when he finally woke up at noon. Chris rolled to his back and blinked at the ceiling. He had no idea when Morgan would be home; his schedule varied from day to day depending on where he was teaching and how many classes needed to be done. He could be back in an hour, or not until evening.

Chris's hand drifted automatically to his cock, as it often did when he was alone in bed and had free time. He loved sex in all its forms, but there was something about jerking off that appealed to him a lot. The power over his own body, the self-control (or lack of it), the knowledge of what he liked best. He and Morgan had a varied and satisfying sex life, but sometimes rubbing himself off was what Chris liked best.

Especially when he was pissed at Morgan.

His jeans were still on, so Chris popped the button-fly and wriggled out of them while trying to reach for the lube in the nightstand drawer. He settled back down again and coated two fingers with the slick. One thing Chris had definitely learned to appreciate about Morgan was his preference for the higher-end brand of lubricant.

Chris ignored his cock for the moment and reached down between his legs. He circled his hole with wet fingers and felt himself clench involuntarily. His dick twitched on his belly and Chris teased himself that way for a while, just circling and rubbing. There was time to draw it out; no one was going to tell him what to do or to hurry up, so Chris savored the feeling.

He pushed in one finger, sliding it all the way to the third knuckle and stretching himself a little before adding a second one. With two fingers inside himself, Chris reached for his prostate and pressed lightly. He still hadn't come near his cock and it was starting to leak onto his belly.

When there was a small, sticky pool of fluid on his stomach, Chris finally withdrew his hand and took his prick in a gentle hold. A shudder coursed through him and his eyes fluttered closed as he touched himself with light fingers. His other hand fondled his balls and squeezed every now and again.

Chris did that for as long as he could stand before gripping himself more firmly and taking a nice, long stroke. His hips came up off the bed a little, and his legs spread even more. God, he really loved jerking off. He worked his other hand back down between his legs and circled his hole while he tugged hard on his cock. His stomach muscles clenched and Chris thought perhaps he wasn't going to last quite as long as he'd thought.

Two fingers went back inside his body and the hand on his prick sped up. There was a lick of flame right at the base of his spine, and Chris fed it with harder, faster strokes. One of his feet slid and slipped against the sheet, and the slick sounds of hand on flesh mixed with Chris' light panting.

Two strokes, then three, and Chris was coming with gritted teeth and a soft grunt. His come was warm and sticky as it flowed over his fingers and down between his legs. Chris knew it was getting on the sheets, probably mixed with the lube, but he'd strip the bed before Morgan got home. Right now, Chris just wanted to lie there limply.

He stayed there for a while, long enough for his eyes to become heavy again, but Chris knew if he fell back to sleep, he'd be up all night. With a tired sigh, he struggled to sit up and then swung his legs out of bed. His sweats were on the chair and he left his T-shirt on the floor while he tugged the sheets off the king-size mattress. Neither he nor Morgan was overly tall or bulky, but having room to stretch out in bed made all the difference.

A cool shower improved his mood and cleared his head.

The sheets went into the wash and bread went into the toaster oven. Chris ate a bowl of cereal while standing at the counter, ignoring the tiny drops of water that were dripping from the ends of his hair onto his bare shoulders. Time for a trim. He was off the next day too, so maybe then.

The rest of the day was spent tinkering on his bike. His black Superhawk was in just as good a shape as it'd been on the day he'd bought it. The chrome gleamed and the paint remained unscratched, although the leather on the seat was looking a bit worn. Chris just figured that was a testament to how much he rode her, and anyway, seats were easily replaceable.

He wanted to ride, but by the time Chris had finished puttering around, dusk was falling. Morgan was likely due home within the hour. What had Tucker's advice been? To just let shit go, right? Chris sighed and dragged the cover back over his bike. Okay. He'd try.

He had marinated tri-tip going on the grill when Chris heard the front door open. He checked the twice-baked potatoes in the oven and waited in the kitchen to see if Morgan would make an appearance.

"You're cooking?" Morgan's voice was curious behind him.

Chris nodded and closed the oven. He turned and leaned against the counter, studying his partner. Morgan was as neat and starched as he'd been when Chris had left the day before. Not a dark hair out of place. Chris had to restrain himself from reaching up to ruffle his fingers through the short, silver strands at Morgan's temples. "Yeah. Hungry?"

Morgan's nod was cautious. "Did you poison it?"

"Yes." Chris could feel the corner of his mouth turn up. "Yours has arsenic. You won't taste it."

"All right," Morgan said, and sat at the table. "Just so I know."

Their dinner was quiet but not uncomfortable. Morgan ate his full plate and glanced toward the counter for more, so Chris got up and gave him some. Morgan finished his seconds and leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "Thank you."

"Welcome. I made dessert."

Morgan arched a brow. "Why, Mr. Matthews. I haven't known you to be this domestic in months."

"It's just brownies. That marble kind you like, with ice cream." He began dishing it out, making sure to give Morgan the chewy center piece.

Morgan ate his dessert with no further comment. When he was finished, he rose from the table and began doing the dishes, a chore that Chris knew he didn't like.

"I can get those." Chris licked his spoon and brought over his empty bowl. "Or stack them and let them soak. I'll do them in the morning."

Morgan kept washing and didn't answer, so Chris shrugged and wandered out to their small living room. He turned on the television and began scrolling through his list of recorded shows, looking for the motorcycle race he'd missed while working the day before.

The sounds of dishes and silverware clinking stopped. The light in the kitchen went off, but Morgan didn't immediately appear. Chris thought for a minute that Morgan had gone to the bedroom to work and wondered if his whole peace offering of supper was a waste, but then Morgan came in, dressed in soft, paint-splattered jeans and an old T-shirt.

He sat next to Chris on the couch, close enough for their thighs to touch. Chris liked the warmth he could feel through the worn denim. "Did you watch this yet?" Chris indicated the race with the remote control.

"Just the beginning." Morgan settled against Chris, heavy and warm and smelling slightly of his favored aftershave.

Chris knew Morgan had waited to watch the end of the race with him. He accepted that for what it was and leaned back, watching the racers and wishing, not for the first time, that he could experience that speed and thrill just once.

Regular, every day riding wasn't the same as racing, although Chris loved it more than anything else on the planet. Slipping his helmet down, tugging on gloves, feeling his bike rumble like a giant cat between his legs. And there definitely were places where he put her to the speed test, but it still wasn't the same as watching the riders on television go two hundred miles an hour around the track.

The desert rides he took with Morgan were pretty good, though. Finding small, paved streets off the main freeway. Heading out to Rosie's for decent egg-salad sandwiches and more than decent blowjobs in the tiny diner's restroom. Coming back home together, sweaty and dusty, and having a cold beer on the back patio before taking a shower with each other.

Chris supposed that was a pretty cool way to spend a day.

The race lasted for another hour. Chris shut it off after it was finished -- irritated that his favorite rider had lost yet again -- and nudged Morgan. "Hey. You asleep?"

Morgan mumbled that he wasn't, but his heavy weight and soft breathing said otherwise. Chris grinned and tugged him up off the couch.

"Let's go. You go to bed earlier and earlier every week. Isn't that what old people do?" The jibe was gentle and teasing; most of their jokes revolved around their age difference.

"You can fuck off, Christopher." Morgan yawned and let Chris lead him to bed. "I'm up every day at six-thirty. Plus, I can't nap on the job like some lazy firemen I know." He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"Yeah, we're all lazy and fat. No wonder you don't like us." Chris steered him toward the bed and pushed Morgan down on the edge of it. Morgan lay back obediently and fumbled with his fly. The buttons slipped easily out of the stretched-out holes.

Chris knelt on the floor and pulled at the frayed hem of Morgan's jeans. They came off with just a tug and Chris smiled a bit when he noticed the lack of underwear. It wasn't Morgan's style to go without briefs except on the rare occasion when he was feeling lazy or tired.

"Nice," Chris commented, rising up to stretch out next to Morgan on the bed. He gave Morgan's soft cock a light caress with his fingertips and then reached for Morgan's T-shirt.

When Morgan was naked, he roused himself enough to crawl beneath the covers and reach out for Chris. Once Chris had gotten rid of his own clothes, he slipped under the sheet and joined Morgan in the warm space.

The bedside lamp gave off a low, warm light. Morgan's eyes held none of their icy gray quality. They softened to a smooth pewter color at times, the little black flecks fading away to blend in with the silver speckles. Chris loved that color the best.

"I want you," Morgan whispered. Completely unnecessary; his blunt prick nudging at Chris' hip said it for him, but Chris liked to hear the words anyway. Sometimes he also thought it might be nice to have "want" replaced by "need," but he'd learned over the months to read between Morgan's words.

"Want you," Chris whispered back, already reaching for their cocks. "How?"



"You pick." Morgan's eyes fluttered closed, hiding the gray.

The lube was where he'd left it on the nightstand. Chris took what he needed and coated both of their shafts liberally. Morgan didn't make a sound except for a small intake of breath.

"Like this?" Chris asked, although he'd already been given the rare permission to do whatever he wanted. Their cocks felt good together in his hand, the softness of the skin conflicting with the dual hardness.

"Like that." Morgan's eyes stayed closed and he rocked his hips a little, the only indication that he was impatient.

Chris stroked them together, using one hand to hold them while the other one slipped between Morgan's legs to rub and fondle his sac. A quiet gasp was Chris' reward. The man loved his balls played with almost as much as his dick. Morgan showed his appreciation by sliding a hand over Chris' waist and splaying strong fingers over his ass in order to pull them closer together.

It wasn't easy to get a good rhythm going with their bodies pressed up close, but Morgan didn't seem to care. He rubbed against Chris as much as he could, tiny furrow between his brows and his eyes squeezed shut.

Chris did the best he could. Both of them were leaking, so he used that for more lube and breathed in the scent of their sex. Strong and musky and unique to them together. His own come never smelled as good as it did when his and Morgan's mixed, and Chris had come to appreciate that as a powerful aphrodisiac.

"Chris." A soft breath of his name, nothing more, and then Morgan was shuddering and spilling hot fluid over Chris' hand. "Yes. Chris."

He would have waited and tried to ride it out, but the sharp scent rose up and hit Chris all at once. He ground down hard against Morgan's stomach and his own hand and then he was coming too, more powerful than any hand job he could ever give himself on his own. Chris trembled and buried his face in Morgan's neck.

When the mess had cooled and was in danger of becoming sticky, Chris lifted his head. "Don't tell me you're asleep again."

Morgan snuffled and moved closer into the circle of Chris' arms. He sighed and made no other sound.

"You do that on purpose," Chris chastised softly. "So I'm the one stuck cleaning up."

He didn't mind.

## *Two*

"But I left mine at Station Sixteen when I worked overtime two days ago."

"How is that my problem, Mr. Matthews? Go and get the damn thing. You're off today."  
Morgan's voice was harried and rushed over the phone. "I have a class starting in four minutes."

Chris glared at Morgan's laptop on the kitchen table. The guy had the fucking thing password-protected all of a sudden -- or maybe it had always been like that and Chris never noticed or cared -- and Morgan was refusing to give him the password.

"Station Sixteen is a thirty minute drive! Why do they even keep that station in Oceanside's district? It's all the way over on the south side. Seems to me like they should just go over to Carlsbad or something."

Morgan made a frustrated noise into the phone. "Christopher. It's not my fault you forgot your laptop at work. Mine has the next month's schedules and classes and rookie sheets all laid out on it and I haven't backed it up. One little accidental deletion and I've got six captains giving me shit for fucking up their crews' classes."

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Morgan! I won't screw up your precious schedules. I know how to use a fucking computer. All I want to do is check my email to see why the new helmet I ordered isn't here yet. The package delivery sucks." Chris poked at Morgan's laptop again but had no success, password-wise. "What's the password? 'Chris has a big dick'?"

"Close. Substitute 'is' for 'has' and you've got it. I have to go, I'll be home early." Morgan disconnected, and Chris would bet a large sum of money that he turned his phone off, too.

Chris glared at the phone and threw the cordless down on the table. He slammed down the lid of Morgan's computer, heedless of the delicate nature of the machine, and went to find his keys. After that argument, he needed a drive or a ride.

Ride won out over drive, so Chris' truck remained in the driveway as he pulled out on his motorcycle. Hopefully the trip to Station Sixteen and back would clear his head and remind him that Morgan didn't *mean* to sound like Chris couldn't handle using Morgan's laptop without fucking something up. It had just come out that way accidentally.

Sure. Chris couldn't contain an eye roll.

He pulled up to the fire station's driveway and punched in the access code to the gate. It rolled open and he drove around to the garage bay where the engines sat, gleaming and proud in the late-morning sunlight.

A few guys lifted their hands in greeting as he made his way through the station house to the small office space in the back. His laptop was there where he'd left it, so Chris gathered it up, mouse and all, and packed it carefully into his backpack.

He stopped in the kitchen on his way out and began chatting with the crew for a while, enjoying the company and the fresh banana bread one of the neighbors had baked for the station. There was talk of the new academy that had just graduated, along with the chiefs that were retiring and the guys who were up to take their places.

Chatting and snacking turned into chatting and lunch, and then the engine got a call for a medical aid that Chris decided to ride along for. It turned out to be a stroke victim, so by the time they got back to the station, it was nearing three o'clock. He meant to leave after that, but it turned out that Sixteen's crew had gotten a Wii. Since Chris' own station only had an Xbox that was a few years old, naturally he needed to try the thing out.

When Julian, the crew's captain, asked Chris if he was staying for dinner, Chris checked his watch in surprise.

"Oh, shit. Five o'clock? Nah, I gotta go." He scrambled up out of the recliner where he'd been watching Adam play a crappy game of Guitar Hero.

Morgan's car was already in the driveway when Chris got home, which made him blink. Morgan never made it home before six, and it was usually closer to seven.

He shouldered his backpack and headed in through the garage door after covering his bike. "Hey," he called, earlier irritation forgotten. The ride and the company had done him good.

Morgan sat at the kitchen table, paperwork surrounding him. He didn't glance up when Chris entered the kitchen. "What time is it?"

"Um." Chris looked over at the microwave. "Quarter to six. You're home early."

"I said I'd be." Morgan did look up then, familiar eyebrow arched.

"You did?" Chris couldn't remember.

"On the phone. When you were begging me for my password instead of just getting your ass over to Sixteen's for your own laptop."

"Oh." Chris paused, thinking. "I guess I was too annoyed to hear that part." He offered a benign smile and poured himself a glass of juice. "What the hell was that all about, anyway? I've used your laptop before."

Morgan gave an irritated sigh. "I told you. I had documents and spreadsheets all over it that I hadn't saved or backed up. One wrong move and ten hours worth of work would be gone."

Chris drained his glass and wished there'd been whiskey in it. "You could have just told me what to save and I'd have done it for you."

"I wasn't sure exactly what was on the desktop. Look, it's not a big deal. I'll let you use it next time, all right?" Morgan bowed his head again and went back to work.

Chris looked at the back of Morgan's head. There were a few more silver strands than there'd been six months ago. "Sure, Morgan," he said quietly. "Whatever."

Usually, Morgan ignored what he deemed "passive-aggressive conversation," This time, however, he turned in his chair and pinned Chris with a look. "You're mad because I wouldn't let you use my computer? Seriously?"

"No." Chris remained quiet, turning his juice glass over and over in his hands. "I don't care about your computer. I care that you treated me like I was a kid who might make a stupid mistake. I mean, come on, Morgan. Like I don't know how to save a fucking document on a laptop?"

"Christopher." Now Morgan was using his "try and see reason" voice, which Chris hated. "I never said any of those things. I know you know how to use a laptop. I know you could have saved it for me. I just wasn't sure what was on there, like I said. I'm finished explaining myself." He turned back to his work.

What was it Tucker had said? Try letting things go? Okay, Chris would try. He didn't know what good it would do, but he'd give it a chance.

"Okay," Chris said quietly, turning to the fridge again to see if they had any ingredients for dinner. "You're right. It's fine."

He could tell Morgan lifted his head and turned to look at Chris by the soft sound of clothing rustling, but Chris kept his eyes trained on the contents of the refrigerator.

"What do you mean, it's fine?"

"We still have leftover lamb chops in the freezer," Chris mused. "I can make them with mashed potatoes, if you want. And I mean it's fine. Why argue? You told me you were finished, so it's finished. Lamb chops?"

There was a marked silence in which Chris very pointedly did not turn around. "Sure," Morgan answered after a few beats. "Lamb chops. And can you put dill in the mashed potatoes again?"

"You got it." Chris pulled the food from the fridge and freezer and went about preparing their dinner as if they'd never bickered at all. "Give me half an hour."

"Okay," Morgan said, and if Chris detected a note of confusion in Morgan's tone, it was probably just his imagination.

Thirty-two minutes later, Chris produced a platter of four broiled lamb chops and a bowl of dill and sour cream mashed potatoes. All those recipes his mom kept sending him were paying off. Chris made a note to tell her thanks as he watched Morgan dig into his supper appreciatively.

And speaking of his mom... "My mom called this morning. She asked again when we were coming up for a visit." Chris' parents owned an almond orchard in central California, where he'd grown up. His mother was forever complaining that she and Chris' father didn't see enough of him and Morgan.

"We were just there a couple of weeks ago." It didn't come out as a protest, more like a stating of facts. Chris knew Morgan liked his mom and got along well with Chris' dad.

"No. It was at the beginning of last month. She wants to make you a cherry pie and my dad says he'll take you skeet shooting."

Morgan snorted and helped himself to more mashed potatoes. "These are good. And I don't shoot. This isn't a great time, though. The new academy just graduated, which means I've got rookie hours coming out my ears and frantic captains who need classes scheduled for them." He paused to swallow the last of the wine Chris had poured. "But... you could go on your own, if you want to."

Chris blinked. "Without you?" He thought about the last few visits he'd made up north and realized that ever since he and Morgan had moved in together, he hadn't gone to visit his parents by himself. There was no reason to, since his mom and dad were aware of his lifestyle and had welcomed Morgan into their family immediately. "Um. I could, I guess. Maybe next week for a couple of days."

"Sure. Bring me back that pie." Morgan smiled and shoved his plate away. "God, no more dinners like that for a while, okay? I'm due for my cholesterol test next month." Even as Morgan said it, he licked potatoes from his thumb and Chris chuckled.

"Sure, you got it. Chicken and brown rice tomorrow."

"Perfect." Morgan leaned over to kiss his thanks and any distance Chris had felt between them, real or imagined, evaporated.

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Chris had a four-day break beginning Wednesday that would be the perfect time to go see his parents, so he called his mom.

"What?" his mother said, amid other unidentifiable background noise. "You're not bringing Morgan? Did you break up?"

"No, Mom. God." Chris shook his head. Maribel Matthews tended toward the dramatic at times, which was why Chris was often grateful for the calm, level-headedness of his father. "We're fine, he's just busy. What the hell is all that noise?" It sounded to Chris like there was construction work going on right in his mother's kitchen.

"Canning party!" Maribel yelled cheerfully. "I grew cucumbers this year, so Nancy and Jean from the church came to show me how to make pickles! Your father will be happy. Well, once the kitchen gets back to normal. What days are you coming?"

"Thought I'd come up Wednesday and leave Friday."

There was a lot of banging and female laughter and Maribel was momentarily distracted. Chris tapped the fingers of his left hand against his thigh and waited.

"What was that, honey? Tuesday? No, Tuesday's no good, your father and I are due at the boating exhibition that day. Make it Wednesday to Saturday."

He didn't bother to correct her, and he didn't ask what the boating exhibition was. His parents were forever getting involved in community happenings. "Okay, sure. I'll be there Wednesday. Bye, Mom." Chris hung up on another round of noise and laughter.

That left his Monday open, and by begging prettily and sucking Morgan off, Chris was able to convince him to move some classes around and go for a bike ride.

Chris expected they'd go their usual desert route and possibly hit Rosie's for lunch, but Morgan shook his head when Chris suggested it.

"Up Pacific Coast Highway," Morgan said, sleek black helmet in his hands. "Maybe up past Malibu. I want to ride by the ocean."

It was an eighty-mile ride that would take them nearly two hours by car, but only just over an hour or so on their bikes. Chris shrugged. "Sure. PCH it is. Can we stop for tacos?"

Morgan confirmed that with an eye roll. Chris grinned at him and tugged his helmet on.

There was less traffic than they'd anticipated, so they rolled into the beachside city of Malibu in time to catch the breakfast menu at one of Chris' favorite ocean view restaurants. He wolfed down a Denver omelet and stole bites of Morgan's French toast until the other man threatened to stab Chris with his fork.

"We're having tacos for dinner," Chris announced, when their plates were cleared and only their half-full orange juice glasses remained. "You said."

"First of all, I don't know how you think about food right after stuffing yourself. Second of all, I didn't say anything like that, I said we could stop for tacos and you chose breakfast instead." Morgan wiped his mouth and used the edge of his knife to draw a pattern on the plastic tablecloth.

Chris just smiled and sat back in his chair, stomach full of omelet. The ocean smelled saltier than usual this morning, or maybe that was just because he was on a different beach. His beach at

home never seemed to have that tang in the air, but it was pretty. Chris had gotten some good pictures on his beach.

The thought of pictures reminded him of his camera, so he dug the small digital out of his jacket pocket. The little camera wasn't as good as the Pentax he had at home, but there wasn't usually room to bring the bigger one along on rides. Chris had gotten some decent shots with his smaller one, though. He took a picture of Morgan to test the lighting.

"Hey, come on." Morgan frowned at the camera lens. He avoided pictures of himself if Chris would let him.

"No, you come on. Please?" Chris made his eyes big and pleading, one of the few rare tricks that Morgan fell for.

"Do I have to smile?"

Chris laughed. "No. Just look out at the ocean and brood, like usual."

That was easy enough for Morgan to comply with, even though he gave Chris a rude gesture first. Chris snapped a few passable shots before a cloud passed over the sun and ruined the cool shadows he was trying to capture.

Another refill of coffee and orange juice sent them both to the restroom before they left. Chris was somewhat hoping for a quick blowjob in one of the stalls, but aside from getting in a fast grope by the sinks, there was no time. Too many people kept shuffling in and out of the bathroom and Morgan finally growled low in his throat.

"At home, where I can do it right." Morgan's eyes flashed silver and Chris felt need coil low in his belly.

"Let's go."

Chris really did think they were going to make it all the way home without stopping; at least, that was his plan, because it was awfully uncomfortable to ride with an erection pressing at the tight leather of his motorcycle pants. Not that he hadn't done it before, on plenty of occasions when riding with Morgan, but it was still painful.

Thirty miles from Oceanside, Morgan veered off the road. Pacific Coast Highway was riddled with tiny side streets that either led directly to the ocean or through expensive neighborhoods that looked out over the water. Chris was alarmed at Morgan's unexpected move and followed immediately, hoping there wasn't something wrong with his bike.

The neighborhood was tiny, exclusive, and quiet. The million-dollar homes that lined the street had spectacular views of the Pacific, but Chris was only concerned about Morgan. His bike looked fine from here, but Chris knew there were plenty of things that could go wrong for a rider that other people couldn't see.

Morgan finally stopped on a tiny cul-de-sac street that only had four homes and was shaded by towering palms. None of the houses faced the little copse of trees and bushes where Morgan parked his bike. Chris parked too and turned his bike off, getting his helmet off his head almost before the sound of the engine had died away.

"What's wrong?" Chris asked, ready to crouch down and examine Morgan's motorcycle. "Did you hit a rock? What?"

Morgan stayed where he was, straddling his seat, both legs splayed out to keep his balance even though the kickstand was down. "I have an emergency," he said solemnly.

"I know, otherwise you wouldn't have stopped!" Chris dropped to one knee and looked for a flat tire or slipped clutch.

"It's not down there. Up here, Mr. Matthews."

Chris squinted up at Morgan, wondering if he'd gotten a crack in his windshield or something minor. "Where?"

When Morgan patted his own crotch, it took a moment for Chris to understand what he meant. Realization finally dawned a moment later and Chris rose to his feet with a slow smile.

"You're kidding me." Chris slid a leg over Morgan's seat and sat on the bike so they were facing each other. "You don't like sex in public." He reached out a hand and squeezed the bulge in front of him. Apparently Chris hadn't been the only one trying to ride with a hard-on.

"I like sex with you. And this isn't exactly public." Morgan glanced around and Chris noted that he was right; they were effectively hidden from the quiet street and all the houses. "It's at least another half an hour before we get home and I can get your ass in the house. I can't wait that long. You did that... that *thing* with your eyes at the restaurant."

Chris chuckled and squeezed Morgan's cock again over the leather. "What thing?" he asked innocently, widening his eyes in an exact illustration of what he knew Morgan meant.

"Christopher." Low growl. "Suck me off and I promise you can fuck me when we get home."

He'd be crazy to turn down that offer, so Chris grinned and pushed at Morgan's chest. "Lean back. I don't have a lot of room to work, here."

Morgan leaned back and grabbed onto the handles at the rear of his seat, the ones meant for carrying a second rider. The movement thrust his crotch up and Chris was able to unzip Morgan with no trouble. The man's cock sprang from its confined space, hard and pink with infused blood.



"Poor baby," Chris murmured before bending at the waist to suckle Morgan gently. "Trying to ride home with this." Chris ignored the fact that he'd been trying to do the same thing, but with the promise of Morgan's ass available for him when he got home, Chris figured he could make it another thirty miles.

He hoped so, anyway, because the taste of Morgan on his tongue was going straight to Chris' dick. The head of Morgan's prick was soft and velvety and warm in Chris' mouth, and the sounds of appreciation that Morgan was making only served to make Chris harder in his leathers. Better get this over quick, Chris thought, otherwise he'd be getting come all over the inside of his expensive pants.

Chris kept his mouth open and wet and loose as he sucked on Morgan's cock. By the way Morgan was already thrusting his hips up, Chris figured he wouldn't have to worry about it taking too long. There were little clear drops of fluid that Chris could taste and he swallowed them greedily, looking for more.

"Now is not the time to tease, Mr. Matthews," Morgan gritted out. His knuckles were white on the seat handles.

"I think it's a great time for it." Chris smiled against Morgan's dick and took another gentle lick. "But lucky for you, I want to get off too. That means we're doing this fast so we can go home."

A soft groan was Morgan's only response, so Chris took that as an "okay, I'm all yours," He drew Morgan in again and went down farther than before, far enough to feel coarse hair brush against his nose. The position didn't allow Chris to get at Morgan's balls, so he stayed where he was and swirled his tongue, then fastened his lips around Morgan's cock and began sucking in earnest.

"Like that," Morgan panted above him. "Keep going."

Chris hadn't intended to stop, but the encouragement was nice to hear anyway. He sucked more tightly, ignoring his own twitching cock, and swallowed a couple of times. Morgan's prick swelled harder in Chris' mouth. Almost there. Chris knew Morgan well enough to be able to count seconds before the man came. Chris had about nine seconds left to make this the best hurry-up-we're-outside blowjob ever.

He hummed very softly around Morgan's dick and received more of Morgan's flavor in return. Five seconds. One more good, hard pull with his mouth and Chris felt the pulse right before he tasted the sugary bitterness of Morgan's come and heard him bite back a cry.

Two swallows and a good tongue-bath later, Chris tucked Morgan back inside his leathers and sat up. He used a thumb to wipe at the corner of his own mouth and offered Morgan a wink. "See? Fast. Can we go now?"

Morgan slouched in the seat of his bike, his entire posture exuding relaxation. "Sure," he grinned. "A nice, leisurely ride the rest of the way would be great."

"Don't even think about it," Chris warned, trying to adjust his erection so it wouldn't pinch while he rode. "You promised."

"I didn't promise we'd get home fast. I promised you could fuck me when we got there. Eventually." Morgan put his helmet back on and slid his face shield down, but not before Chris caught the twinkle in his eye.

Sometimes games were fun.

### *Three*

Chris left Morgan on Wednesday morning when the sun was just beginning to peek into their bedroom window. "I'll be back Saturday. Probably early." He kissed Morgan's head, the only part of him that was visible above the bedclothes.

Morgan yawned and stretched and for a minute Chris was tempted to crawl back in bed with him. "Saturday? I thought you were there until Sunday."

"I have to work on Sunday. I'll be back by afternoon on Saturday. Hey, maybe we can get dinner, okay?"

"Um." Morgan yawned again and scrubbed at his face. "I might have to teach. I'm waiting on Station Four's captain to get back to me."

"Oh. Then I'll call you when I'm on my home and see where you are. Are you going to sit up and kiss me goodbye the right way?"

Morgan snaked out a hand and grabbed the front of Chris' T-shirt. He yanked hard and Chris toppled over on top of him. "Oof, God. I didn't know you had your backpack on, too." Morgan shifted under Chris' weight but made no move to push Chris off. "Be safe, please." He nuzzled at Chris gently and brushed his hand across Chris' cheek.

"Yes, sir," Chris whispered, and kissed Morgan.

"Watch it, Mr. Matthews." Morgan kissed him back before shoving Chris away. "Go. I don't want to think about you driving in rush hour traffic with the insane business crowd."

Chris bent and kissed Morgan once more. "I'll call you."

"Call my cell," Morgan mumbled, nearly asleep again.

"You never answer it."

"If you call, I will."

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Chris did manage to escape the worst of the freeway rush hour drivers, only hitting a bit of traffic just outside of Los Angeles. The rest of his ride up the central coast was scenic and easy, if you didn't count the lady who was too busy turning around to scream at her children instead of watching how she was drifting into Chris' lane. The only reason he refrained from giving her the finger was the blonde, ringletted little girl watching him from her car seat.

Visiting his parents in March meant the almond orchards were in full bloom. The trees spread their low branches out to touch each other and everything was tufted with white, including the

thick green carpet of grass that lay like velvet beneath the trees. Chris turned off onto the private road that led straight through the orchard.

He passed the acre of land that grew wild mustard seed and then his childhood house came into view over the top of hill. Chris smiled to himself, the scent of almonds and almond blossoms rich in his nose. He glanced around as he pulled up the driveway and regretted that Morgan hadn't come with him. Morgan had never come during the spring; only in late summer when the trees were stripped bare of nuts. Springtime was Chris' favorite.

Maribel Matthews sat on the top step of the porch, a bowl of snap peas in her lap. "Chrissy," she smiled, presenting her cheek for Chris to kiss. "There are warm sugared almonds in the oven for you."

"That's a girl's name," Chris replied with a grin, as he always did. "You wished I was a girl." It was a familiar back-and-forth between them.

"I did no such thing, I was thrilled to have a son." Maribel shook a finger at him and her eyes twinkled. "I didn't know at the time I couldn't have more children."

"Ha," Chris laughed. "So later you wished I was a girl. That's okay, Mom." He bent and kissed her again, reaching a hand into the bowl and stealing a pea pod.

Maribel looked over Chris' shoulder. "So Morgan really didn't come with you? I thought he would change his mind." She sounded disappointed, and Chris chuckled. Morgan had charmed his mother immediately upon their first meeting.

"Sorry. He had to work. He sent you something, though." Chris shrugged off his backpack and unzipped a side pocket. He pulled out a small square piece of fabric and handed it to his mother.

She unfolded it and her eyes lit up. "A new pot holder! Oh, for goodness sake. I told him the one he burned last time was an old one!" Maribel smiled at the cherries that decorated the pot holder.

Chris shrugged. The last time they'd visited, Maribel had asked Morgan to take a casserole from the oven. Morgan had accidentally touched the pot holder to the oven rack and burned a brown hole in the middle of it. "Dunno, Mom. He's kind of weird." In truth, Chris had thought it was a sweet gesture.

"Christopher. He is not. He's a perfect gentleman." Maribel rose, holding her bowl. "Let's go, your father is fiddling with his model trains. He wants you to go up to the guest bedroom and look at them."

He wondered what his mother would say if Chris told her exactly what Morgan "perfect gentleman" Daniels had done to her son last night in bed, but discarded that idea. "Sure, Mom." He took the bowl of peas from her and followed his mother inside. "Did Dad set up the whole model railroad thing like he wanted to?"

"I am not talking about your father's railroad. He came to bed at midnight last night. Midnight! Because of the railroad!" Maribel snatched the bowl from Chris and put it on the table, then hung her new pot holder on the oven. She sat down and began shelling peas again. "Midnight!"

"Okay, okay," Chris laughed. Clearly, it was a bone of contention between them. "Nothing much changes around here. I'll go say hi to Dad." He dropped his gloves on the kitchen table before heading for the stairs.

"Lunch in an hour!" she called after him.

Chris paused to drop his jacket and backpack in his old room before searching for his father. He found John Matthews in the spare bedroom down the hall, looking thoughtfully at a table that contained a perfect model railroad.

"Cool, Dad."

John turned with a smile and open arms. "Chris."

Chris hugged his father and then stood looking at the railroad. "So you went with the town theme instead of the coal mine, huh?"

"I'm doing both," his father answered with glee. "The town is just about done. I only need a fire station." He pointed to the empty spot at the corner of the table.

"Aw, jeeze. That should have been your first building, Dad." Chris grinned and poked at one of the fake pine trees.

"It's special." John couldn't contain his wide beam. "I'm having it custom-made. They're painting your station number on it. Station Nineteen, right across the top."

Chris blinked. "Dad. That's... hey, awesome. Seriously." There had always been the unspoken expectation that he would take over the almond orchard one day, but Chris had known from the time that he'd gone on his third-grade field trip to the fire station that he wanted to be a fireman. From that moment on, his parents had never been anything but supportive of his career choice, and his father delighted in telling friends and neighbors about his son who was a firefighter.

"Well. I can't just put *any* station in my town." John adjusted one of the tiny stop signs at an intersection. "Where's Morgan?"

"I know Mom told you he wasn't coming with me," Chris sighed. "God. There used to be a time without Morgan, you know." Although truthfully, it was getting harder for Chris to remember the time before Morgan. He sort of liked it that way.

Chris' father nodded. "Yes. I vaguely remember." He winked at Chris. "Then take fancy pictures with your fancy camera of my railroad and show it to him, okay?"

"Sure, Dad." He'd brought his good camera along to get some shots of the orchard in full flower. Pictures of his dad's railroad would make John happy, and Morgan would doubtlessly be interested.

They spent another half hour looking at the railroad and discussing how John would set up the new one with the coal mine until Maribel called them to lunch. Chris sat down to his mother's homemade macaroni and cheese and fresh cherry pie. "Nice, Mom. Did you wrap--"

She held up the plastic container of food before putting it in the freezer. "There should be enough for two meals. Share it with Morgan."

"He's going on about his cholesterol again." Chris shoveled in mac and cheese, feeling fortunate that his latest department fitness test had showed his bloodwork all in the normal range.

"He needs to start that medicine." John began eating his lunch with vigor. "There are pills he said he can take."

Chris and Morgan had had the argument about medication plenty of times. Chris wanted him to start the pills; Morgan wanted to hold off as long as possible. By now they were at an impasse over it. "Yeah, I know, Dad." He gave a half-hearted shrug and continued wolfing down his lunch. Nothing on earth compared to his mom's cooking.

After they were finished, Maribel waved them out of the kitchen, so Chris grabbed his camera and went out to the orchards with John to check the bee hives that helped to pollinate the almond blossoms. It was nice to spend time with his father. Chris noted the extra gray in John's hair and made a mental note to increase his visits.

The afternoon passed quickly enough. Chris and John strolled back up the house together and John disappeared once more into the spare bedroom to fiddle with his trains. Chris used the time to shower and take a short nap until Maribel called them both down to supper.

He waited through his parents' evening television shows while picking idly at one of the ever-present bowls of almonds. Chris managed to derail a minor argument regarding which VCR tapes were blank and which had Maribel's soap opera on them, but his parents both offered him confused looks when Chris tried to explain the merits of a digital recording system.

"The box records things? How do you get the tapes out?" His mother frowned at her embroidery.

"There aren't any tapes," Chris said patiently, for the third time. "You hook up the box to the TV and you just use the remote to scroll through the list of stuff that you tell it to record."

"So I can't watch my tapes?" John looked puzzled. "That doesn't sound like a very good deal to me."

Chris sighed. It was always amazing to him how his parents could own and cultivate prosperous acres of almond orchards, but the mysteries of DVR were too much for them to handle. "Just stick with your VCR, Dad." Chris grinned and popped some more almonds into his mouth.

When it neared nine o'clock, John and Maribel kissed Chris good night and went up the stairs to bed. Chris knew they'd be awake well before the sun, as they were every day. His father would be checking the almond trees, and Maribel would be busy in her garden, floppy hat on to protect her from the morning sun. All frustration with their technology issues aside, Chris was comforted by the fact that his parents' routine never changed.

He turned the sound down on the television and waited half an hour before pulling his cell phone from his pocket. The house was still and silent, and Chris knew his parents wouldn't hear anything from their bedroom on the second floor.

Morgan answered after two rings and Chris could hear the TV in the background. "Well, look who's not dead in a ditch."

Chris laughed softly. "I told you I'd call you."

"I expected it to be when you got there, not ten hours later. How was the ride?"

They spoke quietly for a while about not much of anything; how the ride up had been, how Chris' parents were, how the orchards were faring. Morgan relayed some information about upcoming classes he was going to teach and whether or not they'd both be able to go on the fire department's annual street bike ride together.

The phone line grew quiet after a time. "So," Chris said in a low voice. "It's kind of weird being here without you."

Morgan surprised him by not coming back with a sarcastic quip. "It's weird here, too. When's the last time we didn't spend the night together?"

"The last shift I worked," Chris chuckled. "We spend a lot of nights apart." That wasn't saying Chris liked it; it was just the nature of the job.

"No, you know what I mean." Morgan shifted position. Chris could hear him moving over the phone. "The last time one of us went away without the other."

Chris moved too, stretching out along the couch and resting his head on one of the arms. "Shoot, I have no idea. We go camping together, riding together... aside from work, we're always together. No wonder it feels weird."

"I have no one to suck my dick before bed."

"Your fault." Chris chuckled and rested one arm behind his head. "Told you to come with me. 'No, I have to work,' you said. And now you're bitching about the lack of blowjobs."

"Clearly, I didn't think this through." Morgan was smiling, Chris could hear it.

"Clearly. What do you do when I'm at work, and you want head? I know you can't reach it yourself."

Morgan snorted. "Not with my mouth. I have to resort to my own hand. See all the trouble you put me through?"

"I know you jack off plenty without me. And what about before I came along, huh?" Chris shifted again, his cock beginning to wake up with all the mentions of blowjobs and hand jobs.

"Oh, well. Before you came along, Mr. Matthews, I had men beating down my door. I made them line up and take numbers. I had very strict qualifications, too. No firemen."

"Too bad. Firemen are good in bed. Are you jerking off?" Chris slid a hand inside his own shorts and rested it alongside his hardening prick.

There was the sound of movement and what sounded to Chris like a zipper being undone. "I'm thinking about it. Talk me through it."

"You like phone sex," Chris reminded him with a laugh, curling his fingers around his dick and waiting. His skin was warm under his palm.

"You're right." Morgan's voice was raspy and Chris heard him draw in a small breath, signifying that Morgan had started to stroke himself. "I especially like it with you. Now talk me through it."

Chris groaned a little. "Okay, okay. Take your jeans all the way off so they're not in the way."

"Hold on." Morgan put the phone down for a moment and then returned. "Jeans off. Yours better be off, too."

In fact, Chris was trying to wiggle out of his shorts with one hand. He managed to get them down past his hips and kicked them to the floor. "They're off. Get the lube from under the couch cushion and use a lot of it."

"I already did." Chris could hear Morgan slicking himself up. "Lick your hand; use that for lube. You're teasing the head with just your fingers, aren't you?"

It was either kind of cool or kind of freaky that Morgan knew exactly what Chris was doing without being able to see him. Chris rubbed his thumb over the slit in his prick and felt a bit of fluid slide around. "Yeah," he whispered. "And you're playing with your balls." Morgan wasn't the only one who'd watched. Chris loved to see Morgan jerking off in the shower in the mornings.



"You're right." Morgan made a soft sound into the phone that traveled straight to Chris' leaking cock. "I'm playing with them and squeezing a little, just like you do to me right before I'm about to come. How do you always know?"

"I just know," Chris answered. He palmed the length of his dick and gave a good, stroking squeeze. "Oh, God. I think I'm closer than I thought." Listening to Morgan on the other end was a huge turn-on.

"Wait, wait." Morgan's words were soft but his breathing was loud. "Wait for me, I need a minute."

Chris paused with a heroic effort. "God, you're old," he half-groaned, half-laughed. His prick pulsed in his hand, but he didn't stroke. "Hurry up."

"Fuck you," Morgan replied. "I just don't pop my cork in thirty seconds like you young people do. Ooooooh Christ, that's good." He made another one of the little noises that Chris could practically feel.

"Morgan." Chris closed his eyes and forgot his promise to wait. His hand moved on its own, squeezing and stroking and pushing eager fingers into his slit. "Morgan, come on."

"Say it again."

"Come on," Chris said immediately. "Hurry up, I need to hear you, I want to come with you when you spill." He gasped and took a deep breath and continued, hand still playing over himself. "I want to hear that noise you make when you're on the edge, the one that always sets me off. Are you ready? God, please be ready, I can't hold off, I'm aching for it." He arched his neck on the arm of the couch, straining to hear Morgan.

"Chris, fuck," Morgan moaned into the phone. "You're-- oh God, yes!" There was a gasp and a grunt and Chris knew Morgan was coming, the white ribbons of spunk making little arcs over his fingers.

The mental picture, combined with that little noise that was fast becoming Chris' favorite, sent him over. He gritted his teeth and somehow didn't cry out, but only by sheer force of will. The heat in his spine and balls all rushed together to form an electric current that zoomed up his legs and then out. Warm fluid spilled down over his fingers and pooled on Chris' belly while he shuddered and then went still.

"Don't fall asleep like that on your parents' couch, Christopher." Morgan's voice was warm and rich with laughter. He was satisfied and smug, Chris could tell. "Clean yourself up."

"Yeah, yeah," Chris yawned. He sat up and stripped off his T-shirt, using that to swipe at the mess. "I should have called you from my bedroom."

"But then your parents would be right next door, and you wanted this, didn't you?" Oh yeah, definitely smug.

"What I wanted was for you to come up here with me. But you didn't, so I made do with mediocre phone sex." Chris grinned and sat up, reaching for his shorts. He found them in the dark and slipped them on, then got off the couch and headed for the stairs.

Morgan chuckled. "Remind me to write down the definition of 'mediocre' for you, Mr. Matthews. That wasn't it."

"I'll call you tomorrow." Chris smiled into the phone. He ascended the stairs as quietly as he could and slipped into his room.

"Call my cell, not the house. I don't know when I'll be home."

"Okay. Um... miss you."

There was a beat of silence. Then, "I miss you too, Chris."

Chris hung up and lay down on his bed. He held the phone in his hand until he dropped off to sleep.

## *Four*

Chris got through another full day at his parents' before deciding it was time to go home. His father's new train obsession, and his mother's insistence that Chris go to visit the neighbors -- all the neighbors -- with her were beginning to wear on him.

And besides, it wasn't shameful to admit he missed Morgan. Chris slept alone while he was at work; that didn't mean he had to do it at other times, too. It was time to go home.

"I thought you were here until Saturday," Maribel said, putting a second helping of turkey pot pie in front of him. "We invited the Lockharts over for brunch." She sounded hurt, and Chris felt guilty.

Not guilty enough to stay, however, especially when his father said, "You invited the Lockharts a month ago, before you knew Chris was coming home."

Maribel had the grace to blush, and Chris laughed. "Sorry, Mom. I, uh. Forgot about a shift at work." It was just a little fib. Better that than his mother's hurt feelings.

"I suppose," she sighed. "But you tell that man of yours that I won't accept another visit without him again."

Chris didn't know whether to laugh or be offended, so he contented himself with rolling his eyes and finishing his dinner.

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He didn't call Morgan to tell him he was coming home, so it wasn't a surprise to find an empty house. Morgan had said he was working, anyway. Chris thought for a moment about cooking a nice dinner, then realized that if Morgan didn't know Chris was there, chances were good that he'd just eat at whatever fire station was having classes today. Chris should probably save dinner for tomorrow night.

The laundry had to be done and Chris needed uniforms ironed for his next shift, so that took up the bulk of his Friday afternoon while he waited for Morgan. He put a little music on while he de-wrinkled his work clothes and took his time grooving to one of the indie bands he preferred.

His uniforms were too many in number for the closet Chris and Morgan shared, so the designated place for them was the closet in the guest room. The room also doubled as Morgan's office, since the two of them rarely had actual guests. It was very "Morgan" in there, Chris thought, with a large cherrywood desk and a twin bed made of solid oak.

Chris pushed open the door, hands full of hangers, and deposited his uniforms in the right place. He glanced over at Morgan's desk on his way out of the room and paused. Morgan's laptop was there, the lid open and screensaver in place. Morgan's battered briefcase, the one he refused to exchange for a new one because he claimed the one he owned was the perfect size, was on the

floor. Papers and class schedules were spread out over the desk, just like they were when Morgan was home and working.

The thing that was weird about it was the fact that Morgan's laptop and briefcase accompanied him to every station, every class. There had been days when Morgan had called the house from work, asking Chris for this paper or that computer disk that he'd forgotten to put in his briefcase before leaving. And once, when Chris had done a really good job of giving Morgan some spectacular head, Morgan had called an hour later, sheepishly requesting that Chris bring his forgotten briefcase to him.

It stood to reason that Morgan had forgotten one of these things when he'd left this morning and Chris wasn't home to get it for him. But both the computer and briefcase? It was next to impossible that Morgan had forgotten both, especially with the papers scattered everywhere.

Chris sat down in Morgan's chair and swiped his thumb across the laptop's touch pad. The screensaver vanished instantly and Morgan's email program popped up. That was unexpected; Chris had been ready to be blocked by Morgan's password.

He wasn't nosy by nature. Chris had never been one for gossip, despite it running rampant throughout the fire department. Firemen were notorious for being talkative and gossipy. Chris listened to the chatter if it was unavoidable, like at the dinner table during a shift, but he didn't seek it out and he never repeated what he heard.

That being said, Chris wondered later why his usually-present conscience was strangely silent as his eyes traveled over the monitor. He scanned the names and addresses in Morgan's inbox, recognizing several from the fire department. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Nothing, that was, except the last email that was sandwiched in between the read and the unread. Chris could see that Morgan hadn't read any mail since Thursday morning, the day after Chris had left. The very last email that Morgan had read had a time stamp of late Wednesday night, after their phone sex. The 'from' address read KRTurner.

Kyle Turner.

Chris sat very still and stared for a long time at the name. There was no subject line to give him a clue as to what the email might be about, but the name alone was enough for now.

Ten years ago, Kyle had been Morgan's... what? Partner? Boyfriend? Lover? Chris wasn't exactly sure, although he knew that Morgan and Kyle had had a relationship that went beyond just friends. Kyle was married to a woman -- at least, he used to be -- and he and Morgan had only seen each other several times a year, usually during brush fire season. Kyle had been a smokejumper, and Morgan had worked for the California Department of Forestry.

Then had come the accident; one that Morgan had only told Chris about one time and then refused to speak of again. The accident that had proved Kyle's utter recklessness and had gotten him covered in third-degree burns. The accident that should have killed him, from the way

Morgan described it. Kyle had been burned and disfigured and suffered the loss of a limb, forcing his parents to take him home to Ohio. Morgan's letters and phone calls had gone unanswered. It had split Kyle and Morgan up for good, cementing Morgan's dislike for firefighters and their daredevil natures.

As far as Chris knew, Morgan had never spoken to Kyle again. So why was there an email in Morgan's inbox?

Chris clicked over quickly to Morgan's "sent mail" folder and scanned the contents. A month's worth of sent mail rested there, but none with Kyle's address. That made Chris feel oddly better. At least Morgan, from what Chris could tell, hadn't initiated any type of contact.

He flipped back to the inbox and rested the cursor over the email. This was where the angel on his shoulder usually spoke up, but things were strangely silent.

Chris clicked. The email opened, revealing only one line on the otherwise blank page.

*I need you to come.*

Soundlessly, Chris got up from the desk and went out to the garage. He pulled down the ladder to the loft in the beams and climbed up, looking for the place he and Morgan stored their suitcases. Only Chris' suitcase remained in its place. Morgan's small rolling carry-on was missing.

Down the ladder and back into the house, then into the bathroom. No green toothbrush in the holder next to Chris' blue one.

He really didn't need more proof, but something prodded Chris to check the drawers in the bedroom anyway. T-shirts, briefs, and socks were missing. Chris sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at nothing for a long time.

When he finally moved, Chris didn't bother going back into the guest bedroom to shut down Morgan's computer and pretend he'd never been there. Morgan would figure out soon enough that Chris knew where he was. If he had the fucking balls to get pissed that Chris read his private email, well. Chris didn't really think Morgan stood on solid ground with that one.

He packed enough uniforms for two days and went to his station. There were always shifts to be had.

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His cell didn't ring until early the following morning. Chris knew the right thing to do was just turn it off and leave it in his locker, but the part of him that was a glutton for punishment made him carry his phone in his pocket instead. Or maybe it was just the part of him that wanted to hear what Morgan had to say, if anything.

"Yeah." Chris lay back on his bunk and studied the ceiling.

"Hey. What time are you getting home today?" Nothing in Morgan's tone indicated there was anything wrong, that he was anywhere but where he was supposed to be. And he obviously thought Chris was still at his parents'.

Chris considered his answer carefully. Lying did not come naturally, and as far as Chris knew, he'd never lied to Morgan. But circumstances were a little different now.

"I'm thinking about staying another day. Probably be home tomorrow instead." Coming home tomorrow was probably true, in any case.

"Oh, really?" It was impossible to tell if the faint note of relief was real or imagined. "Okay. I, uh. I'll be home tomorrow evening, likely after you."

Chris rolled to his side and faced the small row of lockers. One was his, one was Andy's on B-shift, and one belonged to Tyson on C-shift. Chris' locker had three or four photos taped to it, taken of various places out in the desert. He stared at them now as he spoke to Morgan.

"Yeah, after me. Got it. Want anything in particular for dinner?" It was a stupid question; Chris already knew that dinner wasn't going to happen.

"I'll think about it. Maybe we'll go out. I'll see you tomorrow night, okay?" Morgan sounded subdued and quiet, or maybe that was just Chris' imagination again.

His cell phone was warm against his ear. "Sure, yeah. Tomorrow night. Later."

"Night, Chris. Miss you."

Chris hung up without replying.

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He did go home the next morning, only because no one on the incoming shift wanted to give up their hours. Chris spent twenty minutes on the department's computer, scanning shift schedules and hoping for available overtime somewhere. There was none to be had. Summer was on the way and people were working hard now so they could afford a few days off with their families when school got out.

Chris sighed and gave up at quarter past eight. He packed his gear bag and headed home, knowing the house would be empty for a few more hours.

He still hadn't decided on whether or not he should be there when Morgan got home.

It turned out to be a moot point, however, since Chris heard the garage door raise at three in the afternoon. He was trying to grab a quick nap and hadn't expected Morgan until late evening, but it seemed he'd caught an early flight back from wherever he'd gone.

*To see Kyle.*

Chris scowled and brushed the thought away. In all honesty, he didn't know that yet. But did he owe it to Morgan to find out? Right now, Chris pretty much thought that Morgan wasn't the one who was owed something.

He sat up in bed and tried to look like he hadn't been sleeping. The mussed bedclothes were probably a giveaway, but Chris didn't care. He fiddled with the edge of the sheet and waited.

Faint sounds from the hallway, then the kitchen indicated that Morgan had dropped his bag and gone to find a drink. Chris expected water or soda, but blinked when Morgan appeared in the bedroom doorway with a bottle of beer. He rarely drank alcohol before dinner.

They looked at each other silently. An undercurrent of something passed between them in that moment and Chris knew that no matter what else happened, Morgan wouldn't try and bullshit him. That was almost worse, knowing Chris was going to hear nothing but truth. Sometimes truth sucked.

"So you weren't at work," Chris said, putting it all out there immediately. What was the point of dancing around it?

Morgan took a long swallow of beer and leaned his head against the doorframe. "I wasn't at work." He was quiet. Lines around his eyes revealed a weariness that hadn't been there previously, or maybe Chris hadn't noticed. "Did you call me there?"

"No." Again, a bit of guilt surfaced at reading Morgan's private email, but then Chris remembered the instant nausea he'd felt at realizing where Morgan had gone. The guilt was easily squashed. "You left your laptop here. I checked it." He braced himself a little for the dressing-down he was sure to get, but none came.

"Oh. Yeah, I left in a hurry. Didn't take anything but my toothbrush and clean shirts." Morgan examined the rim of his bottle.

The lack of annoyance at Chris poking through Morgan's computer was alarming. Chris sat up a little straighter. "So, where were you?"

"Ohio. I went to Ohio."

Chris had known, but it was sickening to hear just the same. "To see him."

"To see Kyle, yes." Morgan nodded and kept his eyes on his beer.

"You knew you were going to go. That's why you didn't come to my parents' with me." Chris climbed out of bed shakily and pulled on a T-shirt. "You planned it all along."

"No. I didn't." Morgan raised his gaze and looked directly at Chris. "Christopher. Believe me, I didn't plan it. I knew there was a possibility of having to leave suddenly, but I didn't plan it to be while you were gone."

A shaft of afternoon sunlight sliced its way across the tops of Chris' bare feet. He felt the warmth on his skin as he tried to dissect the meaning of Morgan's words. "Wait. You knew you might just up and leave like that, but didn't warn me ahead of time? You knew you were going to fucking leave me?" Chris clenched his hands into fists to keep them from shaking.

"No!" Morgan's voice was sharp, cutting through the simmering tension. "I did not leave you. I'm not leaving you. Not like that."

"He emailed you. He's *been* emailing you, obviously, since you said you knew you might have to go. Kyle emailed and said he needed you and you went. All without telling me." The weight of betrayal was heavy, Chris realized. The amount of trust he'd put in Morgan had been more than he'd thought.

"It wasn't Kyle."

"Bullshit, it wasn't!" Chris grabbed a pillow from the bed and flung it toward the wall. It made a very unsatisfying soft landing and slid to the floor. "I saw, Morgan! I saw his fucking name, I read his fucking mail to you!" Chris was past the point of caring to debate whose moral wrong was worse.

"It wasn't from Kyle," Morgan said again. "It was from Monica."

Monica was Kyle's wife, last Chris had heard. That didn't make real sense. "Why?" God, he was so confused.

"Why what? Why did she contact me?"

Chris nodded and bit back the compulsion to urge Morgan to sit down before he fell over from exhaustion. "I guess, yeah. Why did either of them contact you?"

"He's dying. I needed to go."

The silence became screamingly oppressive. Chris stared across the bedroom at the man he loved, despite all of Morgan's hard work to rid Chris of that idea. "He's dying," Chris repeated carefully.

Morgan nodded once. "He should have died eight years ago, after the accident. But he hung in there, the stubborn bastard. He hung in there with no leg and covered in scar tissue, and now he's thirty-eight-years-old and he's going to die. Monica called me three weeks ago and let me know. She was the one who emailed and told me to come. She said Kyle asked her to."



Things clicked into place, although Chris didn't want them to. Morgan's more-argumentative-than-usual episodes. His reluctance to give Chris his laptop password. It made sense now, but making sense of it seemed to be just as confusing as anything else.

Chris swallowed. "You... you couldn't take me? You couldn't tell me?"

Morgan looked up, exhaustion and sorrow written into the lines of his mouth and eyes. But sorrow for what? For hurting Chris, or for his dying lover? "I didn't want to."

"Oh." Well, there was some more truth, whether Chris wanted to hear it or not. "I need to go."

"I understand." The defeat in Morgan's voice was evident, but Chris didn't waver.

"I don't." He grabbed his wallet and keys and left Morgan standing in the doorway of their bedroom.

## *Five*

He was able to sneak back to the house the next morning and load his bike up in the back of his truck, so Chris felt better about having both vehicles at his disposal. He had no idea where he was going to go or for how long he needed to stay away from the house, but his gear for work was in the cab of the truck and his bike would provide a soothing ride if he needed it.

The problem was, Chris didn't know what he needed, but a bike ride probably wasn't it.

Chris spent the first full day away from home at the library. He used the public computers to access information about the Sheep Creek fire, the one that had burned Kyle. A quick search of "Kyle Turner" revealed two or three old newspaper articles on the young smokejumper, but none of it was anything that Chris didn't already know.

One of the articles showed a picture of Kyle in uniform, about to board an aircraft. He held his helmet in one hand and the other hand was lifted to the camera. Chris leaned closer to the monitor, studying him. Kyle couldn't have been more than twenty-six in the picture, Chris guessed. Close-cut hair, white smile. The graininess of the black and white picture made it impossible to tell what color the man's eyes were.

Chris didn't bother closing the browser before he got up from his chair and left the library.

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He spent the night at the station and the next morning was his regular shift. Tucker was exceptionally cheerful, which pissed Chris off.

"God, can you shut up?" he finally snapped, when Tucker's soft whistling became too much to bear.

Tucker stopped refilling the med box and glanced up, eyebrow raised. "Scuse me?"

Chris could feel his cheeks heating. "Sorry," he mumbled, getting to his feet and leaving Tucker crouched over the box on the floor of the station's garage. "I just..." Chris shook his head. "Sorry." He turned and pulled open one of the doors that led from the garage into the station's small gym. Two other guys were already in there, so Chris just walked straight through to one of the dark classrooms. He sat at a table in the back corner and didn't bother with the lights.

It wasn't entirely unexpected when the door opened and Tucker slipped in. Chris knew he wasn't visible from the window in the hallway, so Tucker either just took a guess where Chris would be or he'd looked everywhere else.

Tucker slid into the seat next to him at the table and glanced around the dark room. "So," he said conversationally. "How's it goin'?"

It probably wasn't meant to be funny, but Chris snorted a laugh anyway and heard Tucker chuckle in response. "It's going fucking shitty," Chris answered. "And I'm in a crappy mood."

"Yup."

"Sorry."

"Don't care," Tucker shrugged. "I been in bad moods a lot. Usually 'cause something at home is fucked up."

"Something at home is fucked up."

"Uh-huh. But you don't gotta tell me what it is. I'll just hang here with you for a while, okay?"

The unexpected bit of kindness made Chris' chest tighten. "Yeah," he said quietly. "That'd be good, Tuck." He scooted forward and folded his arms on the desk, then lay his head down on them and sighed.

Tucker's chair scraped across the floor as he got near enough to lay a comforting hand on Chris' back.

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The day after that, Chris managed to snag an extra shift, but on the fourth day, he was faced with the terrifying possibility of having to go home. He was out of underwear, there was no cash in his wallet and his bank card was in his dresser drawer, and he was growing tired of avoiding everything anyway. Besides, he hadn't watered his plant in the kitchen and Morgan never remembered to do it. If Morgan was even there.

Chris didn't want to admit to being afraid to go home.

So to home he went, his gear bag loaded down with dirty clothes. The house was quiet and still when he arrived and for a terrifying moment, Chris was afraid Morgan had packed up and left him.

*Like you did to him*, that annoying voice whispered. Chris told it to fuck off and dropped his laundry next to the washer. He'd do it later.

Each room of the house remained empty and silent as Chris searched for Morgan. There was nothing to indicate he'd gone. His Wall Street Journal was on the kitchen table and there were breakfast dishes in the sink. Chris stood in front of the bedroom closet and wondered what he'd find when he opened it. A blank space where Morgan's dress clothes and jeans had hung? An empty spot on the shelf where Morgan's pullover sweaters had been neatly folded?

Chris yanked on the door of the closet and it swung wide, revealing rows of clothes that hung exactly as he'd left them. His work uniforms and Morgan's slacks, Chris' sweatshirts and Morgan's ties. Everything was still there.

But... what was missing, then?

Chris nudged the door closed again and turned in a slow circle, taking in the contents of the bedroom. Nothing was out of place. But the fucking stillness of the house, like no one had been living there in Chris' absence, well. That was freaking him out.

"Morgan!" Chris called. He received no answer, unsurprisingly. Chris tried again. "Hey! Morgan!" He left the bedroom and began pushing open doors to the other rooms in the house, places he'd already looked or rooms he knew Morgan wasn't in. Guest bedroom, bathroom, small dining room, laundry room... the house remained empty and Chris grew even more frightened.

"Morgan!" he called out once more as he entered the kitchen, knowing that Morgan wasn't there but wanting to hear something other than the eerie quiet. "Mor-- oh!" Chris stopped short as the kitchen's back door opened and Morgan came in.

"What?" Morgan said, brow furrowed. He crossed the kitchen at once and laid a hand on Chris' arm. "Christopher. What's wrong? I could hear you shouting from outside."

"I... it's... you're here." Chris blinked at him, not caring if he sounded stupid. The immense wash of relief was dizzying.

Morgan frowned. "Well, yes. I live here."

"I just thought you might have gone somewhere else." Chris searched Morgan's face for something he couldn't explain to himself.

"Did you want me to?" Morgan's expression was impassive, but the small wrinkle remained between his brows.

Chris shook his head. "No. Don't leave me." The words came out in a rush and hung between them.

The quiet that filled their house made a slight change. Morgan tilted his head and studied Chris. "I don't want to leave you. I don't want you to make me."

"But you didn't tell me. You... you... you lied and hid shit and went to see him. You... you went to see him." An unfamiliar tightness was rising in Chris' chest and throat and for one horrified second, Chris felt his eyes burn. He blinked rapidly and forced away the sting.

Morgan took Chris' hand. "Come with me." He tugged a little and led Chris toward the back door of the kitchen. Chris went, not knowing what else to do amid the confusion.

Their tiny back porch led down two steps to an even tinier little patch of land in the far corner of the yard. Morgan had put up a small white plastic fence around the square of dirt. There were stakes in the soil, each one bearing the name of a flowering plant. "I planted," Morgan said unnecessarily, because Chris could see the rows of freshly-turned earth.

"Oh. Why?" Chris studied the stakes. Cornflower. Larkspur. Poppy.

"You said you wanted a garden. So I gave you a garden." Morgan turned and looked at the patch of dirt. "But you could probably dig those up and put other flowers in there if you wanted to. Or vegetables; maybe we could grow tomatoes or something."

It was true, Chris remembered. He'd said a while ago they should do something with the useless square of dirt in the yard, like make a garden. Morgan had snorted and turned back to his newspaper.

"You gave me a garden." Chris looked at it.

He didn't realize Morgan was still holding his hand until Morgan squeezed their fingers together. "Chris."

"Yeah?" He kept his eyes on the rich, brown dirt.

"I didn't want you associated with him at all. I didn't want to find any similarities between the two of you; I didn't want to have any part of you touch any part of him. I didn't tell you about it or take you with me because I needed to come back home and know that you were still just Chris. My Chris, the one who doesn't take risks like he did and isn't as fucking stupid as he was. I didn't want you anywhere near him so that I could come to you and know you were clean."

It was a long speech for Morgan and Chris knew it. If the man could say what needed to be said in two or three sentences, he would. An outpouring of more than that indicated it was something that Morgan felt strongly about.

"But you were alone," Chris said softly, staring at his garden. "You were alone, and I could have been there. I didn't ever have to lay eyes on him, but I could have been there where you needed me."

Morgan's voice was low. "You were exactly where I needed you. It was more comfort to know you were with your mom and dad than to worry about you seeing the mess of a man I thought I loved. You did what I needed you to do without even knowing it."

In earlier days of their relationship, Chris would have asked Morgan to define what he meant by "thought he loved". He would have analyzed whatever Morgan said and picked the semantics apart until Morgan's apology -- and that's what it was, Chris knew him well enough by now -- dissolved into yet another argument between them.

"Is he still alive?"

Morgan gave a short nod. "For now. He doesn't have long. Monica will call me."

"Will you go back?"

No answer was immediately forthcoming. Chris assumed that meant yes.

"You'll go with me, if I do." Morgan tightened his hand around Chris' again.

"I will." Chris nodded. "If you tell me when she calls."

"I will."

They turned to go back to the house together by unspoken agreement. Their hands remained linked all the way down the hall and into the bedroom, and when Morgan sat on the bed and pulled Chris down to him, Chris still didn't let go.

"This is what I want," Morgan whispered, tracing Chris' jaw with the pad of his finger. "You're what I want. My life is here with you. I don't love him; I don't want him."

"I know," Chris whispered back, because he did.

"Remember it."

Chris nodded and leaned into Morgan's touch, seeking more. Morgan complied by kissing him with a rough mouth, scraping his stubbled jaw alongside Chris'. "This is what I want," Chris repeated back to him. "You're what I want."

"I know."

"Remember it."

They didn't use words anymore. Their hands stayed joined except for the brief moment when they had to let go to get rid of shirts and shorts and jeans, but as soon as they were naked together, Chris felt Morgan's fingers searching for his own.

He found a vulnerable spot behind Morgan's ear and spent a long time there. The skin grew warm and wet as Chris scraped it with teeth and tongue, Morgan's soft sounds spurring Chris on. He made a hickey there; one that would get noticed. Chris didn't care. They rarely marked each other, but sometimes it was necessary.

Morgan writhed against Chris and his sounds grew louder, marked with a touch of urgency. It gave Chris a feel of heady power. He spent another moment at the tender spot just to hear the low, "Chris, please" and then Chris sucked in an unexpected breath when Morgan grasped his cock.

A long, firm stroke had Chris forgetting all about the spot behind Morgan's ear. "Yes," Chris gasped, head falling back and legs spreading. "Oh yeah, there."

Morgan jacked him for a while, long enough that Chris started making little whimpers and trying to thrust harder into Morgan's hand. His frustration level grew until he was nearly growling with it and Morgan chuckled.

"So impatient."

"I want the good stuff," Chris panted. "Sue me." He grabbed for Morgan and tried to find a thigh or hip to rub on.

"Okay, okay." Morgan grinned down at him and reached for the lube. "I'd be insane to turn that down."

Two slick fingers were in Chris' ass before he was prepared, but the tight burn and resulting stretch sent a zing of pleasure right to his cock. He arched off the bed and grabbed Morgan's wrist. "Now," he groaned. "Do it now."

"Hold on, let me just--"

"Nononono do it!" Chris shook his head in frustration. "Ready, I'm ready, no more prep!"

Morgan's fingers were gone in an instant and replaced with the blunt head of his cock. He didn't bother asking again, and Chris nearly sobbed in relief when Morgan pushed his way inside.

He could feel his own cock moving with each beat of his heart and resisted the urge to take his pulse that way. Instead, he reached for Morgan's hand and folded Morgan's fingers around his shaft.

There was a hot mouth sliding over Chris' skin as he clenched hard around the dick in his ass. Morgan groaned and licked at the goosebumps that rose on Chris' neck. He took a long, gliding stroke and nudged up against the sweet spot that made stars dance behind Chris' closed eyes.

Two more long thrusts, and then Morgan stopped moving altogether. Chris opened heavy eyes and looked up. "What's wrong?" His dick throbbed under Morgan's fingers.

"Nothing." Morgan reached up with the hand not around Chris' prick and smoothed Chris' hair off his forehead. "I just... want to feel."

Chris stayed as still as he could despite the nearly overwhelming desire to reach down and stroke himself off. He was close enough to tremble with the effort of not coming, but the sensation was electric and breathtaking. "Morgan," he begged, and then squeezed the muscles in his ass as hard as he could.

"No!" Morgan said, laughing, but it was too late. "Oh, you're a bastard." He surged forward and then froze again. There was an instant of suspended time, and then Chris felt Morgan tighten his fist. Chris had a moment to sink his nails into Morgan's bicep before he came, the white heat of it spilling over the hard fingers around Chris' cock. He managed to squeeze his ass again as Morgan jerked forward with a moan.

Morgan shuddered and clutched at Chris' hand as he came. Chris melded tightly to him, holding on.

\*\*\*

Chris found Morgan in the garden after dinner.

"If the poppies die too soon, we can do pansies instead." Morgan rubbed his chin thoughtfully and studied the dirt.

"Whatever's pretty. Let's see how it turns out first."

Morgan smiled and offered Chris a kiss. "You're easy to get along with."

"One of us has to be."

They kissed again, standing in the backyard next to Chris' garden.



Embers

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