

Picture Perfect

Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane



Published by Dreamspinner Press 4760 Preston Road Suite 244-149 Frisco, TX 75034 http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Picture Perfect Copyright © 2009 by Bethany Brown and Ashlyn Kane

Cover Design by Mara McKennen

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the Publisher, except where permitted by law. To request permission and all other inquiries, contact Dreamspinner Press, 4760 Preston Road, Suite 244-149, Frisco, TX 75034 http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/

ISBN: 978-1-935192-64-0

Printed in the United States of America First Edition March, 2009

eBook edition available eBook ISBN: 978-1-935192-65-7 For Courtney and Kaitlynn. Without your encouragement, this may never have made it out of my head. Thank you for believing in me.

Chapter One

THE morning light managed to sneak around the partially closed windows to fall across the face of the man lying on the couch. He grunted in his sleep and turned his head so that he was facing the back of the couch instead of the window. The movement caused his short brown hair to stick up in even more unruly spikes than it normally did. Unable to completely wake him from his slumber, the patch of sunlight continued on its way, bringing light to the room. He was just about to slip back into deep sleep when something landed in the center of his back.

Cameron grunted as the weight hit him. The weight was then followed by the sensation of something licking his back.

"Get off of me, you stupid cat," he grumbled. Cam pulled his arms underneath him and pushed his upper body off of the couch. The cat hit the floor with a squeal. Cam gave a small snort of laughter. "That's what you get for jumping on me."

Cam sat up completely and rubbed sleep-heavy blue eyes. He ran a hand through his hair, doing nothing to tame the wild spikes that were sticking up all over his head. He scratched at the couch indent on his cheek with his left hand as his right hand fell to hang off the couch. Puddles, his cat, butted his hand and started to purr.

"Okay, I'll get up." Cam got to his feet with a groan and padded barefoot to the kitchen. He stumbled slightly as he stepped on one of the threads hanging from the cuff of his torn and faded jeans. Thankfully, he had managed to make it to the kitchen, so he was able to stop his fall on the center island.

Pushing away, Cam walked over to the fridge and yawned. He was just about to open it when he noticed the note stuck to it with an annoyingly bright daisy magnet.

You really shouldn't sleep on the couch, Cameron; it just isn't good for your back. You should throw out those jeans as well, or else people will think that you can't afford to buy nice clothes. Don't forget to pick up your niece at the airport and remember to tell her that I got her a summer job at the vet's. I bought you groceries so you and Emily will have something to eat for dinner. Have a good day, sweetie. Love, Mom.

Cam sighed and pulled the note off of the fridge. He was starting to regret that he had given his mother a key to the house. She was constantly coming in while he was either out or asleep. Cam looked down at Puddles as the purring cat wound around his feet.

"You know, if you were a dog, she wouldn't be able to get in the house without me noticing," he commented. The only response he got was a louder purr from Puddles and the feel of a lick to his ankle.

Cam laughed at the cat and opened the fridge. It was indeed filled with food. Possibly more food than he really needed. It wasn't like he didn't know how to go grocery shopping and he wasn't sure if Emily would like some of the stuff he could see sitting on his shelves. Hell, *he* didn't like some of the stuff sitting on his shelves. Pulling the orange juice from the fridge, he walked over to the cupboard to get a glass. As he was reaching for the glass, he noticed the time.

"Shit!"

He had twenty minutes before Emily's plane landed, which gave him just enough time to have a quick shower and change. Shoving the juice back into the fridge, Cam dashed out of the kitchen and headed for the stairs. He really should sleep in his bed instead of on the couch. His room had an alarm clock.

THIRTY minutes later, Cam ran into the arrivals area of the airport. There were still people milling about, so he wasn't that late. He hated

being late to pick up his niece. While he loved his sister, he didn't like the way that she treated her daughter.

His sister Amanda had gotten pregnant young. She'd always been a rebellious child, but when she found out she was going to become a mother, she had attempted to settle her ways. Diane, their mother, had accepted her daughter and her new granddaughter into her home with her usual charm and grace. After several years, Amanda had decided that she wanted to live and raise her daughter on her own, like she believed a mother should. That was when Diane and Cam started to notice the differences.

When Amanda and Emily had still been living at home, Emily had always been full of laughter. Since she and her mother had moved out, she had become more subdued. While she had always done well at school, her letters hardly ever mentioned friends or even class trips. She seemed to brighten while she was visiting and then lose that sparkle when she left again. Emily was spending the entire summer with Cam and he hoped that it would be a good one.

Scanning the crowd, Cam finally spotted his niece. She was talking to an elderly woman who was holding a map. Emily's sandy-colored hair was pulled away from her face by two butterfly clips, revealing her sparkling blue eyes. She was the image of her mother. She finished helping the woman find her way on the map and looked up and caught Cam's eye. A bright smile crossed her pretty face.

"Uncle Cam!" Emily launched herself into his arms with a delighted shriek.

Cam stumbled slightly as he caught her. "Damn, Sprite, I think sixteen is getting to be too old for you to do this."

"You're just not strong enough to catch me. Stopped going to the gym, did we?"

"Does this look like I stopped going to the gym?" Cam lifted the hem of his T-shirt to reveal a nicely defined set of abs.

"I stand corrected. You must just be getting old."

Cam slung one of her bags over his shoulder. "Or it could be because you aren't eight anymore. Do you have more bags?"

"Two more. We need to head to baggage claim." Emily looped her arm through Cam's free one and they started walking to baggage claim. "So, what do I have to look forward to this summer?"

"Your grandmother got you a summer job."

"What?!"

"Yep." Cam grinned at the shocked look on her face. "Hey, she got me my first summer job when I was sixteen and would have done the same for your mother, except she had just had you."

"So Mom got out of a summer job because she had me?"

"Yep, my big sister was a bad influence. I wanted to have a baby of my own so I didn't have to work."

"Hey, do you think that will work for me?"

"No, and don't even think about it. Your grandmother would kill you and then she would kill me while telling me that she always knew that you should have stayed with her instead of me."

"Well, we don't want that," Emily replied with a laugh. She stopped at the baggage carousel and started looking for her bags. Luckily, not only were they two of the first pieces, they were also actually together. Bags in hand, the two headed for the parking lot and Cam's truck.

"So, Sprite, where to?"

"Do I have to start my summer job today or do I at least get to wait until tomorrow?" Emily asked, climbing into the slightly battered pickup.

"I think you're clear for today. Although we should probably stop off and see when they need you."

"Where does Grandma have me working?"

"At the vet's."

"So I get to spend my days with Dr. Montgomery? That is not a bad way to spend the summer," Emily replied. She made a happy sound and licked her lips.

Cam shook his head at her actions, but privately, he agreed with her. Dr. Jeremy Montgomery had been fueling his fantasies for years. The local veterinarian had been two years ahead of him when they were in school. Cam still remembered when Jeremy had been assigned as his math tutor when he was in the ninth grade. That was when he had come to accept that he was gay and realized that he was in love with his math tutor. Nothing had really changed over the years.

"No drooling over your boss."

"Yeah, sure, whatever. Can we go to Maude's? I'm hungry."

"Sure thing." Cam put his truck in gear and headed into town. "They didn't feed you on the plane?"

"No, and I didn't get breakfast." Emily shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "Mom says that I need to lose weight."

Cam noticed how Emily seemed to shut down after that comment. He also noticed that she was looking pale and a bit too thin for his liking. Amanda had always been obsessed with her weight. It had been hard for their mother to make sure that Amanda ate enough when she was pregnant. Every time she gained even a pound Amanda immediately went on a diet. Unfortunately, it seemed as though she was starting to drag her daughter with her.

"You're beautiful, Em. You don't need to lose weight. In fact, I think we should head over to Maude's and let Betty spoil you," Cam announced. He got a slight blush and a small smile from Emily. For now, that would have to do. Everything would get better once they saw Betty.

Betty was the granddaughter of the original Maude and had taken over the diner with grace. She still used all of her grandmother's recipes and, when she made them, they tasted just as good as the originals, or so people said. Betty was in her sixties and not many who had known her grandmother were even around anymore.

Cam pulled the truck to a stop in the parking lot of Maude's. Turning the truck off, he looked over at Emily and grinned. It was common knowledge that Betty spoiled the people that she liked, and she absolutely adored Emily.

"Come on, Sprite. Let's get moving." Cam got out of the truck and headed for the door of the diner with Emily practically on his heels. She was obviously excited to go see Betty. Either that, or her mother had been starving her enough that all she wanted to do was eat. Cam really

hoped that the second thought wasn't the reason. He loved his niece and wanted her to be happy.

"Now, that can't be little Emily Walker, can it?" Betty called when she saw Emily. She came out from behind the counter and pulled Emily into a hug. "Darlin', look at you. You've gotten so big."

"I haven't changed that much, Betty," Emily remarked. She returned the hug with a slight blush.

"Nonsense. You've become quite the stunning young lady." Betty pulled away and gave her a beaming smile. "Now, you and your uncle sit down and I'll bring you some juice while you look over the menu."

Cam put a hand on Emily's shoulder and steered her into a booth. They had just gotten comfortable when Betty placed a pitcher of juice, two glasses, and two menus on the table. Cam smiled his thanks. Betty gave him a wink and patted his shoulder as she walked away. It seemed as though she had noticed the change in Emily as well. Cam poured them each a glass of orange juice while Emily gazed at her menu.

"It all looks so good."

"I'm having waffles."

"You always have waffles, Uncle Cam."

"I like waffles."

"You should try to broaden your horizons," Emily remarked slyly. She shot him a smirk that was more like her old self and continued to study the menu.

"I like waffles," Cam muttered. He gave his smirking niece a halfhearted glare over the top of his menu. He couldn't really be mad. He did always order waffles when they ate at Maude's. Betty made the best waffles that he had ever eaten.

Betty came and took their order. Cam got his waffles and Emily ordered eggs Benedict with a side of bacon.

"Uncle Cam?"

"Yeah, Sprite?"

"Are you still seeing Paul?"

Cam nearly choked on the orange juice that he was drinking. "What?"

"Are you still seeing Paul? You haven't mentioned him since I got here."

"No, I'm not seeing Paul anymore," Cam replied. He tried to ignore the memory of the hurtful words that Paul had shouted at him as he stormed out of the house and out of Cam's life.

"Good. He wasn't right for you," Emily stated. She smiled her thanks at Betty as their food was placed in front of them. "I didn't like the way that he talked to you."

Cam simply stared as Emily started to eat her food. He hadn't realized that his problems with Paul had been that obvious. Emily was only around in the summer and on holidays and she had noticed. Cam was just thankful that he had never asked Paul to move in with him. He didn't think he could have handled the breakup if Paul had been living with him.

They managed to have a nice breakfast. The conversation turned away from Cam's personal life to what it was that Emily wanted to do while she was in town. They succeeded in finishing all of the food that Betty gave them, including the extra plate of bacon that Betty had deposited on the table when she saw that Emily had polished off the first one. Emily ate most of the food herself, which made Cam wonder if his sister was feeding her daughter at all.

As Cam paid for their meal and took the pie that Betty shoved at him he noticed that Emily was starting to relax and her old smile was starting to surface. Holding the pie in one hand, Cam opened the door and let Emily precede him to the car. He could only hope that the smile stayed on her face.

DR. JEREMY MONTGOMERY stood and stretched his back with a wince. He had spent the past twenty minutes trying to pry a stuck thorn out of the paw of a puppy that wouldn't sit still. Eventually, the puppy's owner had been forced to hold the squirming animal. Jeremy had

managed to pull the thorn out while bent over at the waist to get at the puppy in the young man's arms.

"Thanks, Dr. M."

"You're welcome. Now be sure to keep Spot out of your mother's rosebushes from now on. Okay, Todd?"

"Sure, Dr. M."

"Head out to the desk and settle with Tammy."

"See you later, Dr. M." Todd smiled and placed Spot on the floor. The puppy bounded out of the room pulling on the leash, the thorn already forgotten.

Shaking his blond head in amusement, Jeremy followed Todd and Spot out of the exam room. Todd refused to call him Dr. Montgomery, and insisted on adding "Dr. M" to the end of every exchange. He was stretching his back and rubbing a hand over his shoulder when he heard Spot barking happily and Todd apologizing to someone. He was heading to the front to see what was going on when Melanie, his nurse, came from that direction.

"Mel, what's going on?"

"Todd is trying to flirt," she replied. Brown eyes dancing with merriment behind her glasses, she motioned for Jeremy to come closer to the door. Leaning next to her, Jeremy peered into the waiting room.

Spot was happily lapping up the attention that a pretty girl was giving him. When she looked up at the lightly blushing Todd, Jeremy recognized the face of Emily Walker. Glancing around the room, he spotted Cam standing at the desk talking to Tammy. Jeremy's breath caught as he looked at the younger man, just as it always did. He couldn't help himself. He found Cameron Walker absolutely breathtaking.

"What are they doing here?" Jeremy asked, hoping that the tremor wasn't in his voice.

"Getting Emily's schedule. She's working here for the summer to help out since Tammy is about ready to pop that baby out any time now." Melanie gave Jeremy a sly look. "I hear Cam isn't seeing Paul Stevens anymore." "Paul Stevens is an asshole," Jeremy growled. He gritted his teeth as his hands clenched into fists. Jeremy was not a fan of Paul.

"I'm not going to argue with you on that one," Melanie replied. "You know, you should come out and say hello to your new employee."

"Sometimes I hate you," Jeremy muttered darkly. Melanie simply laughed and headed into the waiting room. Taking a deep breath, Jeremy followed her.

Emily was still playing with Spot, but the blush on Todd's face had faded. It seemed as though Emily was returning his interest. When she spotted Jeremy, a bright smile crossed her face.

"Hi, Dr. Montgomery."

"It's nice to see you again, Emily." Jeremy smiled at her as she gave Spot one last pat and got to her feet. "He seems to like you."

"I like dogs. My mom won't let me have one. She says they take too much time." A hint of sadness that Jeremy had never seen before crossed her eyes. The expression was gone so quickly he almost thought that he had imagined it. "That doesn't matter now, since I'm sure that you'll have some dogs here that could use some attention."

"We take boarders, so there are always animals here to look after. I'm sure that you'll find that you fit right in."

"How about I take you to look at your schedule?" Melanie suggested. She gave Emily a bright smile then led her behind the door to the exam rooms. Jeremy watched them go with a slight smile then turned back to Cam. As he turned back, his sore back protested and he winced.

"Are you okay?" Cam asked. "You look like you hurt yourself."

"I'm fine."

"You're wincing."

"I may have pulled my back a bit while I was getting that thorn out of Spot's paw."

"You should take a hot shower when you get home," Cam suggested. "It should help to get the tension out of your muscles."

Jeremy was suddenly glad that he was wearing a lab coat. The mental image of Cam and showers sent all his blood rushing straight for

his groin. Jeremy couldn't help imagining what the 5'11" frame would look like naked and covered in water. He hoped that his thought didn't show in his eyes. He nervously tucked several strands of blond hair that had come loose from the braid hanging past his shoulders behind his ear.

"I'll have to do that," Jeremy responded. But I know that I'd like it more if you were in the shower with me.

"I'm ready to head out if you are, Uncle Cam," Emily announced, walking back into the room. She had several sheets of paper in her hands and a bright smile on her face.

Cam tossed an arm around her shoulders when she reached his side. "So, when's your first day?"

"Tomorrow."

"Well, I'll be sure to get you here on time."

"If you don't, I'll tell Grandma."

Jeremy laughed. "I don't think you want that, Cam. I've met your mother."

"You've got a point there. I'll have Emily here on time; don't you worry."

"I won't." Jeremy turned his attention away from blue eyes he wanted to drown in and smiled at Emily. "I look forward to having you here."

"Thanks, Dr. Montgomery. I'm looking forward to it as well. See you tomorrow." Emily waved as she left the clinic with her uncle.

Jeremy sighed as he watched them leave. He couldn't keep his eyes off of Cam's retreating form. His gaze kept darting to how nicely the snug denim hugged Cam's ass.

"When did you meet Mrs. Walker?" Melanie asked. She hadn't missed the looks her boss had been giving the other man.

"Fourteen years ago." Jeremy smiled at the confused expression on Melanie's face. "I used to tutor Cam in math."

"Wow, you've known Cam for a really long time, haven't you?"

"Not as well as I would like to," Jeremy muttered. He gave Melanie a dull smile and headed back to the exam rooms. He had more

patients to see. And if he spent most of his time picturing a pair of blue eyes, his patients wouldn't mention it.

Chapter Two

"COME on, Sprite. We gotta get moving!" Cam finished packing up the last of his equipment as he called out to Emily. Puddles was coiling around his feet, obviously not pleased with the fact that both of the people in the house were leaving for the day. Cam gave the cat a gentle push away from his feet. The last thing he wanted to do was step on his cat

"I know you don't want me to be late on my first day, but do you really need me to be this early?" Emily muttered coming into the room. She stopped when she got a good look at her uncle. "Wow."

Cam's normally unruly hair was in some semblance of order. He was wearing black dress pants and a blue dress shirt. The shirt, which his mother had purchased for him, made the color of his eyes practically glow. He also enjoyed the way it managed to outline the muscular build to his shoulders and chest. The black pants were his favorite and hugged his lower body like they were happy to be there and didn't want to leave. Cam loved how the material was comfortable and not too hot for summer wear.

"I look okay?" Cam asked. There was a small note of uncertainty in his voice and he hated it, but some of the things Paul had said to him still lingered in his mind.

"You look more than okay. Where are you going?"

"I'm taking pictures at a wedding today."

"You do weddings?"

"You didn't really think I made all of my money off of my gallery prints, did you?"

"Yeah."

"I'm not that popular. Plus, I really do like doing weddings." Cam reached out and tugged one of her braids. "Keeps me busy in the summers"

"I guess we both have summer jobs."

"I guess we do. Come on, Sprite. I gotta get you to work and make sure that I make it in time to keep the bride from freaking out," Cam announced. Emily grabbed the lunch she had packed out of the fridge and headed for the door. Cam had offered to make her a lunch, but she had made some mumbled comments about his cooking and said she wanted to do it herself. Cam hadn't pushed.

When Cam pulled in front of the animal clinic and let Emily out, he had to smother a sigh of disappointment. He had hoped that he would get a glimpse of Jeremy. Especially since Emily had decided that she would let him drive her to her first day, but after that she was riding her bike unless it was raining. Giving the clinic windows one final glance, Cam drove away with a sigh. It looked like he was going to have to face the bride without a glimpse of the man of his dreams. It didn't seem fair that she got to marry hers while he didn't even see his.

Cam quickly drove himself to the gardens just on the outskirts of town. They were beautiful at this time of year and most of the local weddings took place in them. The beauty of the flowers had the magic to make even the most homely of brides look stunning. Cam's own mother had gotten married in the gardens. How radiant his mother had looked in her wedding photos was what had prompted Cam to start photographing weddings.

As he grabbed his equipment out of the truck and started walking to the gazebo, he spotted the mother of the bride walking toward him. He managed to smother a groan and place a smile on his face.

"Where have you been? I told you to be here for eleven."

"It's only quarter to, Mrs. Watson. I'm right on time."

Mrs. Watson made a sound that was almost too dignified to be a snort. "Grace and the bridesmaids are waiting for you over by the fountain. Once you get some shots of them you can set up in the gazebo for the ceremony."

"Of course. I'll head right over." Cam smiled at Mrs. Watson then turned and headed to the area of the gardens where the fountain was. "Ungrateful bitch."

Mrs. Watson was the perfect example of the only thing he hated about weddings. Cam disliked overbearing mothers-of-the-bride. He liked calm mothers, but the ones who planned their daughters' weddings without consulting what the daughters wanted were the ones who drove him crazy. He was fairly certain that the only decision Grace had made about the wedding on her own was who the groom was. He was also certain that Mrs. Watson had made comments about that as well. Cam was starting to wonder how a woman like Mrs. Watson could have produced a daughter like Grace.

"I just can't believe she did that."

"Forget about it, Gracie. This is your wedding day. Don't let her ruin it."

"This a bad time?" Cam asked. He stepped under the awning that had been erected to keep the sun off of the bridal party. Five girls in pink and one in white turned to stare at him.

"Cameron, you're here," Grace remarked. She was a stunning vision in white, but her eyes looked worried. That wasn't the normal reaction for a bride on her wedding day.

"Of course I am. Your mother told me that I was late and I better get over here and take some pictures before I set up at the gazebo." Cam smiled at the women as he pulled his camera out of his bag.

"My mother tends to be a bit of a bitch."

"Really? I hadn't noticed." Cam sent a wicked grin in Grace's direction and was happy when he got a laugh in return. Whatever had been bothering her was starting to fade under the onslaught of Cam's attempts to make her smile.

Within fifteen minutes, Cam had Grace smiling and laughing, just like she should be on her wedding day. The only tears that he captured

on film were ones of the joy variety as her bridesmaids put the finishing touches on her outfit. She looked like a fairy-tale princess and her smile was bright enough to power an entire city.

Satisfied that Grace was going to be fine, Cam packed up his camera and headed toward the gazebo. About half of the guests had arrived, allowing Cam to have a good idea of where everyone would be. He needed to judge the crowd so that he would have a good line of sight for the procession. Finding the perfect spot, Cam went about setting up his camera equipment. He had just finished when Mrs. Watson sauntered back over

"Mr. Walker, if you would be so kind as to take a few shots of the ushers leading people to their seats? I believe that it always a nice thing for the happy couple to have some photos of the people who shared their special day with them." She gave him a very good imitation of a pleasant smile then walked back out into the crowd of relatives and friends.

Cam stared at her retreating form with shock on his face. Not only had she called him by his name, she hadn't once insulted him. Apparently having her friends and family within hearing distance made Mrs. Watson a tad more polite. Still marveling at her split personality, Cam picked up his camera and snapped a picture as she walked away. He needed to at least have a picture of the moment that the world spun out of control.

Chuckling to himself, Cam started to do as Mrs. Watson had asked. He was happily taking pictures of the ushers and guests when his lens captured a very familiar form. Cam panned the lens away from the striking green eyes to get a better look at the blond hair that was pulled tightly into a braid, causing a splash of gold to divide the black of the jacket. He had to pull the camera away from his face. There was no way in hell he was getting his first look at Jeremy in a tux through a camera.

Jeremy looked positively edible. The lines of the tux helped to outline the long lines of his body. The crisp cut of the suit accentuated the strong shoulders. Cam let his eyes wander from the top of Jeremy's blond hair to the tips of his black dress shoes and then back up to the top of the 6'3" man. Both times he lingered on the tempting swell of Jeremy's ass. Even with the jacket his ass was a sight. When he managed to pull his gaze away from the walking wet dream in front of him, Cam found green eyes gazing back at him.

Flushing brightly, Cam quickly pulled his eyes away from Jeremy. He pulled his camera back in front of his face to hide the fact that he was still looking. Through the lens he caught the smile that Jeremy sent in his direction. Cam almost dropped his camera. From the looks that Jeremy was sending his way, it almost seemed as if the other man was interested. Cam forced himself to look away from Jeremy and shoved the feelings to the back of his mind. The last thing he needed to do was get fired for jumping one of the groomsmen during the ceremony.

The wedding went perfectly. The bride was stunning. Her father handed her to her soon-to-be husband with tears in his eyes. Even her bitch of a mother seemed moved. Grace glowed as she said her vows to her tearful husband and smiled at him when he was almost too choked up to say his. The happy couple shared their first kiss as husband and wife among the cheers of the gathered guests. Cam captured every moment on film. After the bridal party marched down the aisle following the newly married couple, they moved further into the gardens for pictures.

Cam was busy setting up his tripod and ignoring slightly veiled insults from Mrs. Watson when a shadow fell across his field of vision. "Excuse me, you're in my light."

"Sorry." The shadow moved to one side. "I didn't know that you did weddings."

Cam looked up into Jeremy's green gaze. "Have to pay the bills somehow."

"Your gallery stuff doesn't pay the bills?"

"No." Cam frowned at the attractive man. "You know I sell my photos in galleries?"

Jeremy flashed a flirtatious smile. He was toying with the end of his braid with his left hand. "I know more about you than you think."

Cam swallowed nervously as Jeremy simply continued to smile at him. He was starting to feel a flush creep up his neck. "I need you to go and stand with the others so I can get the pictures taken."

"Sure thing," Jeremy remarked. He smiled and headed back to the others, tossing the braid back over his shoulder. As he left, he let his fingers trail across Cam's arm. Cam had to suppress the gasp that caused. Shaking off his sudden case of nerves, he turned to face the bridal party.

"Okay, everyone. Why don't you all get closer together?" Cam made motions for them to move closer. He snapped pictures while they moved as well as when they were in place. He'd found that he sometimes got better pictures when they didn't know that he was taking them. Cam preferred the natural look to photos that were posed.

The pictures went well. Cam managed to get a lot of the bride and groom even though all he really wanted was to keep his eyes on the blond groomsman. The little smiles that Jeremy kept sending his way were incredibly distracting. After about an hour, Cam was done.

"Okay, everyone. That's it. You're free to go," Cam stated. He smiled at the happy group and started to pack up his equipment. He was putting his camera away when another shadow fell over him. "You're standing in my light again."

"Are you going to the reception?" Jeremy asked.

Cam looked up at him. "Of course I am. Mrs. Watson wants to make sure that I get photos of everything. I'm amazed she didn't want me to follow Grace into the bathroom."

"Good."

"Pardon?"

"Not that she wanted you to follow Grace into the bathroom, but that you're going to the reception. Maybe I'll be able to steal you for a dance." Jeremy flashed his flirtatious smile once more then moved back over to the others.

Cam watched him go, feeling slightly stunned. The man he had been in love with since he was fourteen had been flirting with him. He wasn't sure if he was excited about the upcoming reception or terrified. The one thing he did know was that it was going to be an interesting time.

JEREMY watched as Cam moved around the reception hall, snapping pictures whenever he paused. It was fun to watch him work. Cam really seemed to put his heart into what he did. Jeremy smiled when he saw Cam lean down to answer a question from Grace's grandmother. He

liked the way that Cam was so open with people. He also liked the view of Cam's ass that he got as Cam bent over to talk to the elderly woman.

Jeremy was actually starting to enjoy the wedding. When his friend John had asked him to stand up in his wedding, he had had visions of a day full of boredom and fake smiles. Finding out that the wedding was on Emily's first day of work made him feel even more annoyed. He had thought that he would miss out on a chance to see Cam. When he spotted Cam taking pictures at the wedding, he'd almost dropped the wedding programs he had been holding. From that moment on the day had only gotten better.

Watching Cam was something that he had always enjoyed, but didn't get much of an opportunity to do. Jeremy liked to see him smiling. Cam hadn't been doing much smiling while he had been seeing Paul. The lack of that smile had increased Jeremy's dislike of Paul to the point where he wanted to throw things at the other man every time that he saw him.

"Hey, buddy!" John suddenly appeared at his elbow, swaying slightly. He had a champagne glass in one hand.

"Does your new wife know that you're drunk?"

"I've only had one glass!"

"We've always known that you were a cheap drunk," Jeremy remarked. He turned slightly and smiled at his friend. "Being married seems to suit you, Johnny. I don't think I've ever seen you look this happy."

"I'm married, Jer. Can you believe that?" There was a wide grin on John's face.

"I know. I was at the wedding, Johnny. Grace looked beautiful."

"She did. My Grace is a beautiful woman. God, Jer, I don't think I've ever been this happy before." The dopey smile that adorned John's face could have been from the booze, or from the sheer joy of being married. Jeremy couldn't really tell which one, but he liked to assume it was the second.

"I'm happy for you, Johnny," Jeremy stated. He smiled and pulled his newly married friend into a quick hug. "So, dinner and speeches are over. You gonna ask him to dance?" "What?"

John smiled at him. "I've seen you lookin', Jer. You've had your eyes on the photographer since the wedding started. Go and ask him for a dance."

"What would your new mother-in-law say? She seemed to have some very strong opinions about me."

"I don't care if she has a problem with you being gay. You are one of my oldest friends and I want you to have a good time at my wedding. Now, go and ask him to dance."

"John, I—"

"Dude, you've had a crush on him since high school. Just go ask him to dance." John smiled and clapped him on the shoulder then headed back to his wife.

Jeremy watched as John wrapped an arm around Grace's waist and pulled her onto the dance floor. Grace smiled as her new husband pulled her into the midst of the dancing wedding guests, accidentally pushing some of them out of the way. They looked incredibly happy together. Jeremy wanted that. He wanted to have someone in his life that made him that happy. Putting his glass down on the table, Jeremy headed over to where Cam was packing up his equipment.

Jeremy reached the photographer and placed a hand on his arm. He smiled when Cam turned to face him. "Dance with me."

"What?"

"Dance with me."

"Jeremy, I—"

"Please, Cameron. Just dance with me." Jeremy didn't try to hide the note of pleading in his voice.

"Okay," Cam replied. He put his camera on the table behind him then held his hand out to Jeremy. Jeremy smiled and took the offered hand. He could feel his stomach twist with nerves. He was starting to think the second piece of cake had been a bad idea. Pulling gently on Cam's arm, Jeremy propelled him onto the dance floor. Unlike John, Jeremy didn't try to get them close to the center. He just wanted to get them onto whatever open part of the dance floor was closest. Once there, he tugged Cam into his arms. His left hand tangled with the fingers of Cam's right and he pulled the entwined hands to rest against his chest. He wrapped his right arm around Cam's waist and pulled him close. Jeremy shivered as he felt the heat of Cam's hand on his back through the thin material of his shirt.

Jeremy looked into Cam's blue eyes as he began to move them in a soft sway to the music. He felt as though he was drowning in the blue orbs. When Cam gave him a soft smile and then rested his head on Jeremy's shoulder, Jeremy had to hold back a shout of triumph. He rested his cheek on the shorter man's hair as he pulled Cam closer. Jeremy sighed in satisfaction as they moved to the music.

"Jeremy?"

"Hmm?"

"You look really good in that tux."

"Thanks. You look pretty damn fine yourself. I don't think I've ever seen you all dressed up before."

"You've never seen me at a wedding before," Cam remarked. There was a teasing lilt to his voice, but Jeremy was having trouble concentrating on it. Every time that Cam talked, his lips brushed against Jeremy's throat, sending sparks of desire running through his body.

"I'm starting to think I should crash more weddings. Especially if it means that I get to dance with you." Jeremy moved the arm that was wrapped around Cam's waist and started to run his hand up and down Cam's back.

Cam pulled away enough to look at Jeremy. "Or you could just ask me on a date."

"Would you say yes?" Jeremy let go of Cam's hand so he could run his fingers through the brown hair.

"Why don't you ask me and find out?" Even in the dim lighting, Cam's blue eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Why Cameron, I do believe that you're flirting with me."

"I've been flirting with you since I was fourteen, Jeremy. This is just the first time that you've noticed." Cam wrapped both of his hands around Jeremy and gave him a devilish smile.

"Oh, I noticed. Trust me, I noticed." Jeremy ran a finger down Cam's cheek before he put his hand back in his hair. "I just wasn't ready to admit to it. By the time I was, I was away at school."

"And I was still here"

Jeremy chuckled. "You have no idea how much I looked forward to vacations."

Cam laughed and rested his head back against Jeremy's chest, keeping his arms around the trim waist. "Why did you never say anything?"

"There just never seemed to be the right time. You were always with someone, or if you weren't, I was. And then there was that thing with you and Paul Stevens."

Cam tensed at the mention of that name. "I don't want to talk about him."

"Baby, what did he do to you?"

"Please Jeremy, not now. I just want to enjoy this." There was a pleading note to Cam's voice.

"Anything you want." Jeremy pressed a kiss to the top of his head then ran his hands over Cam's back until the tension left. When he had Cam relaxed once again, Jeremy took his eyes off of the man in his arms. The dancing had thinned out slightly, so Jeremy was easily able to see the glare that Mrs. Watson was sending his way. She obviously had a problem with them dancing together, but since he was dancing with the wedding photographer she didn't have to worry about photos of them dancing ending up with the proofs.

"What's wrong?"

"Hmm?"

"You tensed up a bit. What's wrong?"

Jeremy gave a surprised laugh. He was stunned that Cam had noticed that something was wrong. "Nothing much. Mrs. Watson doesn't seem too happy with us dancing together."

"What?" Cam pulled his head off of Jeremy's chest and looked over at the mother of the bride. "Wow, she's really glaring at you. What did you do to her?"

"I didn't do anything. She's the one who cornered me and told me to make sure that my 'disgusting, deviant tendencies' didn't ruin her daughter's wedding. I think she was worried that I was going to proclaim my love for John and stop the wedding."

"That must have been what had Grace so upset when I got to the wedding. She must have heard her mother."

"You know, her reaction makes me want to act out."

"Is that why you wanted to dance with me?" There was a slight note of hurt in Cam's voice and he refused to look at Jeremy while he asked the question.

"No, baby. I wanted to dance with you because I wanted to ask you to my senior prom, but was too much of a chicken shit to do it. When I saw you at the wedding I thought that this would be my chance to get the dance I'd been dreaming about." Jeremy could actually feel the heat of Cam's blush against his skin. The younger man mumbled something against his chest. "Sorry, baby. I missed that."

"I said I would have said yes if you had asked me to the prom."

"So, will you say yes if I ask you out?"

"Why don't you ask me?"

"Still not going to tell me? You're very sneaky, baby." Jeremy had a fairly good idea of what Cam's answer would be, but he was enjoying the teasing almost as much as holding Cam in his arms.

"Sometimes." Cam sighed and pulled away as a faster song started. "I should get going."

"Need help with your stuff?"

"Sure," Cam replied. He walked off the dance floor and headed over to where he had left his equipment. Jeremy stayed just behind him

so he could watch Cam as he walked. He enjoyed the way that the dress pants hugged his ass.

When they reached the small pile of camera equipment, Cam picked up his camera. "Smile for me."

"What?"

"Smile for me. I want a picture of you."

"For the wedding proofs?"

"No, for me. Now smile, Dr. Montgomery," Cam instructed. He lifted the camera to his eye and waited. Jeremy smiled and was nearly blinded by the flash. He could hear Cam putting the camera away as he rubbed his eyes.

"That is one hell of a flash you've got on that camera."

"Sorry. Did it hurt your eyes?" Cam asked. He gently touched Jeremy's cheek with his fingertips.

Jeremy leaned into the light touch. "Not any more than expected. Come on; let's get you all packed up."

Jeremy smiled at Cam and picked up one of the bags. Cam grabbed the other one and the tripod and started for the door. Jeremy followed him out of the reception hall. As he turned to slip through the door, he caught sight of John giving him two thumbs up. Jeremy flipped him off with a laugh and left the hall. Once outside, his longer stride allowed him to easily catch up with Cam.

"You've got a lot of equipment."

"Have to if I want to make any money at this. People can be very particular about their wedding photos."

"Particular?"

Cam laughed. "It's a polite way to say bitchy."

Jeremy shook his head and placed the bag in the back of Cam's truck. Once he had his arms free, he leaned against the side of the truck and watched as Cam put everything in its place. When he was sure that Cam had put everything away, Jeremy reached out and pulled the smaller man into his arms. He felt Cam's hands settle on his waist.

Lowering his head, Jeremy caught the tempting lips in a kiss. As his tongue traced Cam's lips, Jeremy fisted his hands in the brown hair. When Cam opened to his questing tongue with a moan Jeremy pressed him into the side of the truck. He could feel Cam's hands grasping handfuls of his shirt. Jeremy angled their bodies so he had Cam trapped between him and the truck. He tilted Cam's head back and plundered his mouth.

Jeremy swallowed the moan that Cam issued as the kiss increased in intensity. Cam's fingers pulled the tie from his hair and then started to release the thick strands from the braid. Jeremy moaned as deft fingers massaged the area of his scalp that had become sore do to the tightness of the braid. He pulled his fingers out of Cam's hair and ran them down his sides. When he reached his waist, Jeremy pulled Cam's shirt out of his pants and ran his hands over smooth skin.

Cam broke away from Jeremy with a gasp. His eyes were dark with passion and Jeremy could feel his erection pressing against his own. Cam panted as he tried to pull much needed air into his lungs. Jeremy continued to run his hand over the skin of Cam's sides.

"Come home with me," Jeremy rasped. His voice was heavy with desire. A desire that was made even stronger by the simple fact that it was Cam in his arms.

"I can't," Cam whispered. His fingers continued to caress Jeremy's scalp.

"Why not?"

"I've got Emily waiting for me at home."

"Right. Spur of the moment is a bad idea." Jeremy let out a breath and rested his forehead against Cam's. "Have dinner with me?"

"When?"

"It's Saturday, right?"

Cam chuckled slightly. "Yes."

"Monday. I'll pick you up at six."

"Okay."

Jeremy pulled back slightly. "What was that?"

"Yes, I'll have dinner with you," Cam replied. He used his grip in Jeremy's hair to pull the taller man down and placed a soft kiss on Jeremy's lips. Jeremy thought that his insides were going to melt at the utter sweetness of that one kiss.

"Damn, baby. You keep doing that and I'm not going to be able to let you leave."

"I'll see you Monday at six," Cam stated. He gently pulled himself out of Jeremy's arms and got into his truck. Jeremy leaned into the open window and stole one last kiss.

"Monday at six, baby. I'll see you then."

"Night, Jeremy." Cam gave him a shy smile then drove off. Jeremy watched the truck drive off until it turned a corner and he could no longer see it.

Once Cam had driven out of view, Jeremy turned and headed back into the hall. He could still hear the sounds of the party. As he ran a hand through his now unbound hair, Jeremy could feel the smile start to form. He knew it was a dopey smile, but he didn't care. He had a date on Monday.

Chapter Three

CAM pulled the car into his driveway and just sat there. He kept replaying the events of the night over and over in his mind. He had danced with *Jeremy*. Jeremy had *kissed* him. He had a *date* on Monday.

"I have a date on Monday," Cam stated. He gave a soft laugh then got out of the car. Without Jeremy's help, it was a bit awkward to carry all of the equipment on his own in one trip. Cam managed to get everything into the house without dropping anything. He was pleasantly surprised by the outcome. He usually ended up dropping the tripod on his foot.

"Uncle Cam, do you need some help?"

"That would be great." Cam handed Emily one of the bags as she came over. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Now, where to?"

"Darkroom," Cam replied. He led the way through the house. They passed the kitchen and were almost at the enclosed porch when Cam stopped at a small door. He opened it to reveal a rather large room with no windows. When he flipped one of the two switches by the door, the entire room filled with a warm glow. The other switch controlled the red light used for developing.

"Wow, this place is pretty big for a darkroom," Emily commented. She entered the room and placed the bag where Cam indicated. He watched as she looked around the spacious room with its many tables.

There was even a cot in one corner. "Please tell me that you don't sleep in here"

"Sometimes. I've been known to get a tad caught up in my work. I try to stumble up to bed, but most of the time I end up on the couch."

"Where the cat ends up sleeping on your back."

"Exactly. Not really a good thing." Cam finished putting his equipment away then waved Emily out of the room. He turned off the lights and pulled the door closed behind them. The darkroom was the only room in the house that Puddles wasn't allowed access to. Cam didn't want his cat getting into any of the chemicals that he kept in there. He followed Emily into the kitchen, where she was sitting at the counter sipping a cup of tea. Cam grabbed a mug and poured himself one.

"So, are you going to tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"What happened at the wedding? You've had this dopey look on your face since you got out of the car."

"Have I really?"

"Yes." Emily put her cup down and rested her chin in her hands. "Now spill, Uncle Cam."

"What if I want to hear about your day?"

"That can wait."

Cam laughed. "The wedding was nice. I got some really good pictures."

"Not what I wanted to know." Emily laughed and punched him lightly on the arm. "I know Dr. Montgomery was at that wedding. Melanie told me."

"He asked me to dance," Cam replied. He could hear the dreamy tone in his voice, but he couldn't help it. He also didn't care that much.

"So you danced?"

"Yes, we danced." Cam bit his lip as he looked at Emily. "I have a date on Monday."

"What?" Emily gave an excited squeal and launched herself around the counter to give Cam an excited hug. "That's amazing! I'm so excited for you."

"Thanks. I'm really nervous about this, Em."

"Uncle Cam, why are you nervous? I know that you like Dr. Montgomery and he seems to be pretty fond of you."

Cam sighed. He didn't know what to tell her. How could he explain to his sixteen-year-old niece that he was nervous because his last boyfriend had completely destroyed his self-esteem? That he had hardly slept the past few months because he kept hearing over and over again the things that Paul had said to him? Cam hardly wanted to think of the things himself, let alone talk about them to someone else. He just hoped that his nerves wouldn't hurt his date with Jeremy.

"Uncle Cameron?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you okay? You're starting to look nervous. Did you not want Dr. Montgomery to ask you out?"

"No, I want to go out with Jeremy. Hell, I've been dreaming about going out with him since the day that I met him."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Just nerves, I guess." Cam laughed softly. "Guess I'm just putting too much pressure on myself."

"Well, I'm sure that your date will be fine. I'll call Grandma in the morning."

"Why are you going to call your grandmother?"

"Well, I need somewhere to sleep Monday night, now don't I?"

Cam sat and sputtered as Emily smiled and left the room. He couldn't believe that his niece had just said that to him. Shaking his head, Cam put both of the mugs into the dishwasher. He looked down as Puddles butted his legs.

"Hey there, princess. Did you miss me?" Cam crouched down and began to pet his cat. Puddles started to purr so loudly that she sounded

like a small engine. Cam laughed and picked her up. Cat in his arms, Cam headed up the stairs into his bedroom.

Cam dropped Puddles onto the bed then started to take off his clothes. He needed a shower. His shirt hit the floor near the hamper, but Cam didn't care enough to pick it back up. He could get it in the morning. Cam stopped in the bathroom attached to his room to look at his reflection

His hair was mussed from where Jeremy's hands had been. His lips were swollen from kissing. There was a dazed look in his blue eyes. No wonder Emily had been so determined to know what had happened. He looked like someone who had experienced one hell of a night. As he moved to turn on the water, Cam caught a glimpse of his back. The intricate scroll and knot work of the Celtic tattoo was visible over his shoulder. The tattoo covered the back of his shoulders then tapered down his spin to end just above the top of his ass. The tattoo hadn't been there the last time Jeremy had seen him with his shirt off. Of course, the last time Jeremy had seen him without a shirt on he had been sixteen and at a public pool. Cam stepped into the shower with a wicked smile. He hoped Jeremy liked tattoos.

Cam sighed softly as the warm water ran down his body. He couldn't believe how happy he felt. Grabbing his shampoo, Cam quickly lathered up his hair. Usually, after a wedding, he would take a shower and crash. Not this time. This time, he was too excited to sleep. Cam rushed through his normal shower routine, feeling the need to hurry, so he could share his excitement. There was one more person that he had to tell. Hopping out of the shower, Cam quickly dried off. He had a phone call to make.

RINGING. Something near his head was ringing.

Detective Patrick Hawkins shot his arm out from under the covers and slapped his alarm clock. The ringing didn't go away. Pulling the covers away from his head, he gave the clock a hard stare with annoyed, green eyes. It was nearly two. It was nearly two in the *morning* and his phone was ringing. He was going to kill whoever was on the other end of the line.

Patrick grabbed the phone with a growl. "What?"

"That's not a very polite way to answer the phone." The voice of Cameron Walker, his best friend, sounded much too cheerful for this time of the day.

"It's almost two in the fucking morning. What do you want?"

"What if I just want to talk to my best friend?"

"Cam, I love you, you know I do, but, if you don't get to the point soon, I am going to get up, grab my gun, drive over to your house, and shoot you."

"Cranky. Did you not get laid last night?"

Patrick looked over his shoulder at the other man asleep in his bed. "Oh, I got laid. I got laid very well."

"Keith over?"

Patrick glared at the phone. "Do you have a camera hidden in my house that I don't know about?"

"If I had a camera hidden in your house, I wouldn't have to work weddings anymore. I could just sell the tapes to the horny gay men that you won't sleep with."

"There aren't that many of those." Patrick pushed himself into a sitting position and ran a hand down his chest. He winced slightly as his fingers brushed against the ring through his right nipple. Looking down, he spotted a prefect imprint of teeth on his chest around the nipple. He smiled as he ran his fingers over the warm skin of his bedmate's back. "How did you know Keith was here?"

"You're talking quietly, which means that there is someone with you, and you don't usually let one-night stands stay the night. Since you aren't dating anyone right now, that leaves Keith. Plus, you usually try to let him sleep since he works so hard at the hospital."

"You know, sometimes you know me so well it scares me."

"We've known each other since we were five."

"Good point." Patrick shifted so he was more comfortable, keeping his free hand running over Keith's back. "So, Shutterbug, what has you so worked up that you're calling me at two in the morning?"

"Jeremy asked me out!" The excitement in his voice sounded more like that of a teenage girl than a man of twenty-eight.

"Come again? I think the squealing burst my eardrum."

"Jeremy asked me out."

"Montgomery?"

"Yes."

"The vet?"

"Yes!" Cam's voice was starting to sound a tad annoyed.

"Well, it's about fucking time. You've only been dreaming of this since you found out he was your math tutor."

"I can barely believe that this is real."

Patrick smiled at the wistful tone in Cam's voice. He liked hearing the happiness that was there. It had been missing lately. "I'm happy for you, Shutterbug."

"Do you think it will work out?"

"If it doesn't, I will beat the shit out of him." Patrick stilled as Keith rolled over. Keith shifted closer, and Patrick moved his hand, so he was running his fingers through the soft, blond hair. Patrick smiled as Keith snuggled into his side.

"I don't want you to beat him up."

"Don't say that yet. At least wait until after you've had the date."

"Always so violent."

"You woke me up, Shutterbug. I'm not really feeling very pleasant right now."

"Well, I guess I can let you get back to sleep," Cam remarked. There was a teasing tone to his voice. Patrick could practically see the smug grin that Cam was most likely wearing.

"Get lost, Shutterbug. I need my beauty sleep." Patrick hung up the phone to the sound of Cam's warm laughter. Turning back to the other man in his bed, Patrick found a pair of sleepy, hazel eyes staring at him. "Sorry, Frisky. Didn't mean to wake you."

"That's okay." Patrick shifted Keith to one side and then slid back down into the bed, pulling Keith into his arms. Keith let out a sleepy sigh. "Who was on the phone?"

"Cam."

"Is he okay?"

Patrick ran his fingers along the arm that Keith had draped across his waist. "He's perfect. Jeremy finally asked him out."

"I'm guessing that's a good thing?" Keith shifted in Patrick's arms so his head was tucked under Patrick's chin.

"A very good thing. Cam's had a crush on Jeremy since we were in high school." Patrick felt Keith nod against his chest. He pressed a kiss to the messy hair. "Are you feeling any better?"

Keith had shown up on his doorstep in blood-coated scrubs with a vacant look in his eyes. Patrick had immediately dragged him inside and into the bathroom. While he got Keith stripped and into a bathtub full of hot water, the story had come spilling out. Keith was a nurse at the local hospital and had just been moved to the ER. A drunk driver had plowed into a soccer mom. Her seven-year-old daughter had died in the operating room. After he had Keith cleaned up, Patrick had used every trick he knew to exhaust Keith enough that he would be able to fall asleep.

"A bit. Coming here always makes me feel better. You know just how to take care of me."

Patrick smiled at the compliment. His cock took interest in the conversation when Keith flicked his pierced nipple with his tongue. "I have to say, I'm surprised that you came to see me instead of going to your boyfriend."

"He doesn't know how to take care of me. Plus, we broke up last week. He apparently just couldn't date someone who spent so much time obsessing about work."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I knew it wasn't working out." Keith rolled on top of him and grinned. "Round two?"

Patrick moaned and mashed his lips to Keith's in a demanding kiss. Their mouths crushed together with enough force that their teeth clicked. Patrick fisted one hand into Keith's hair, while the other slid down his back to grip the firm ass. He pulled away from the kiss and bit at the full lower lip. This action caused Keith to moan and writhe against him. Releasing his lip, Patrick moved his mouth down the column of Keith's throat. Keith tilted his head to one side to give him better access.

Keeping one hand on Keith's ass, Patrick bit his neck and thrust his hips up. He moaned as their erections slid against each other. Keith's mouth bit his ear, sending jolts of pleasure straight to his cock. When Keith's fingers tugged on his nipple ring, Patrick lost what little control he had left. With a burst of strength, Patrick flipped them over so he had the smaller man beneath him. At 5'8", Keith was a good six inches shorter than Patrick, which allowed Patrick to completely cover his body. Patrick thrust his tongue back into Keith's mouth as he stretched an arm out for lube and a condom. Grabbing the items, he dropped them onto the bed next to Keith. He didn't need them quite yet.

Patrick began kissing his way down Keith's body. He licked the indentation below Keith's throat where his collarbone dipped. From there, Patrick made his way to Keith's nipples. He pulled one into his mouth while his fingers toyed with the other. When he bit the tender nub caught in his teeth, Keith arched beneath him and grabbed his hair. Keith was whimpering beneath him as he turned his attention to the other nipple. The fingers in his hair were tugging almost painfully, but all it did was increase Patrick's arousal. He could feel the pre-come from Keith's cock against his stomach.

"Trick, please," Keith begged. "Just fuck me."

The sound of the nickname had Patrick groaning around the nipple still in his mouth. He pulled away and looked at the man beneath him. Keith was flushed and coated with a fine sheen of sweat. His hazel eyes were green with desire, and his cock looked hard enough to be painful. Patrick pressed a kiss to his lips and Keith's hands clung to his arms while the nurse whimpered. Licking the swollen lips, Patrick pulled back and grabbed the lube.

Needy whimpers erupted from Keith's throat as Patrick pulled the bottle into his line of sight. Patrick locked eyes with him as he poured lube over his fingers. He slipped one finger into the tight heat and Keith's entire body shuddered. The feel of Keith's channel trying to eat his finger pulled a moan from Patrick. He needed to be inside that ass. Thankfully, Keith was still loose from earlier, so he didn't have to take as much time preparing him. When Keith's ass was eagerly swallowing three fingers, Patrick quickly sheathed himself in a condom and ran the remaining lube over himself.

Guiding his erection to Keith's entrance, he grabbed the other man's legs. "How do you want this?"

"Hard and fast." Keith was panting and Patrick could feel his legs trembling in his hands.

"Done." Patrick lifted Keith's legs to his shoulders, turned his head to the side to kiss Keith's calf, and slid in with one thrust. Keith's moan echoed his own as he buried himself inside. Patrick grabbed both of Keith's hands, moved them over his head, and linked their fingers together. Bending the smaller man's legs, he leaned in for a kiss. When he felt Keith begin to shift underneath him, he pulled away from the kiss as he pulled himself out. He grinned into dazed eyes and snapped his hips forward.

From the way Keith went wild beneath him, Patrick knew he had nailed Keith's prostate. Keeping the angle, Patrick gave Keith what he wanted. His hips picked up the pace of a hard, fast fuck. Keith keened beneath him, and his head thrashed from side to side. Patrick grunted as Keith's fingers tightened around his. As Keith's hips began to meet his thrusts, Patrick increased his tempo. Keith's keen was turning into a consistent sound, a signal that he was close to orgasm, and Patrick hit his gland once more. Keith came with a howl. The contraction of his inner muscles ripped Patrick's orgasm from him. He came shouting Keith's name.

Patrick took a few moments to slow his breathing, then slowly pulled out of Keith. He could feel Keith's legs trembling as he released his hands to lower his legs back to the bed. Patrick tied off the condom, tossed it in the garbage, grabbed one of the discarded towels from the floor, and gently cleaned Keith off. Keith was still trembling slightly when he settled back against the bed. "You okay, Frisky?"

"Damn, Trick, that was just...," Keith paused, sucking in another breath. "Wow."

"Good wow?"

"Very good wow." Keith managed to bring his arms down from above his head and touch Patrick's cheek. "I'm tired now."

"Go to sleep, babe. I'll make sure you're up before I leave for work," Patrick remarked. Keith blinked sleepy eyes and nodded at him. Patrick pulled the covers back up and kissed Keith's forehead. Keith murmured, already half-asleep, and rolled himself into Patrick's arms. Pulling him close, Patrick hoped there would be no more late-night calls.

Chapter Four

FINISHING with his last patient before lunch, Jeremy headed into the waiting room. One of his assistants had already flipped the sign to closed, but he didn't see them anywhere. Frowning, he turned and headed into the kennels in the back. He could hear voices as he got closer. Stepping into the kennels, he found his missing staff.

The three girls were all playing with the animals. There were a mix of patients waiting to be picked up and pets being boarded while their owners were out of town. Melanie was playing with a small puppy, while Tammy had a cat in what her pregnancy had left of her lap. Emily was petting Hershey, a three-year-old chocolate lab who had been left at the clinic. Hershey's owner had gotten a new job out of the country and hadn't been able to take her. She had been at the clinic for two weeks and still wouldn't play with the others. The loss of her owner had hit her hard.

Emily sighed. "She always seems happy to see me, but then she sniffs me more and gets sad again. It's like she smells something on me that she likes, but it's not me."

"We can't always understand the way that dogs act," Jeremy remarked. He smiled as all three of them jumped slightly and turned to look at him. "I was wondering where my staff went."

"We're always back here when you can't find us, Doc," Tammy said. There was a smile on her face as she continued to stroke the purring feline.

Jeremy laughed. "True. So, Chinese for lunch for everyone?"

"You should make sure that you don't order too much food. Don't want to lose your appetite," Melanie remarked. She had a rather evil smile on her face.

"Excuse me?"

"Rumor has it you have a date tonight." Melanie's evil grin widened into a smirk as Jeremy sputtered. Emily was blushing and trying to hide her face behind Hershey.

"Somebody's been blabbing."

"Now don't you go and get mad at her, Doc. We pushed when we saw that stupid grin on your face and the way you kept looking at the clock. Emily was the only one who didn't look confused," Tammy said. She attempted to cross her arms over her rather pregnant belly, but ended up crossing them on top of it as she leveled a look at Jeremy. He actually felt the urge to squirm and he hadn't even done anything. Tammy already had the mom look down pat.

"I'm not mad."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything," Emily stated. She was nervously biting her lower lip.

"I'm not mad, Emily. These two could pry information out of a tree if they put their minds to it."

Emily's quick smile brightened her face. "So, where are you taking my uncle?"

"I'm not going to tell you."

"Why not?"

"If I tell you, you'll tell your uncle and I want it to be a surprise."

Emily sighed. "Fine; be all romantic and secretive."

"I plan on it. So, can I order lunch for us now?"

"Yes. Just make sure you order double for the pregnant eating machine," Melanie quipped. She picked up the puppy she had been playing with and put him back in his kennel, completely ignoring the glare that Tammy was sending her way.

Shaking his head at the antics of his staff, Jeremy headed into the reception area to call in the order. He told the woman on the phone to double the normal order, hoping that would be enough for Tammy. Once that was done, he turned to his small office. He was going through some of the files on his desk when the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Jeremy?" The voice on the other end of the phone was female and sounded annoyed.

Shit. Not today. "Hello, Mother. To what do I owe this pleasure?" Jeremy knew that his voice was coated in sarcasm, but he couldn't help it. His mother brought it out in him.

"I received a very upsetting call about you Jeremy." Alexandra Montgomery had a cultured voice that only ever seemed to be filled with annoyance and disdain. Things hadn't gone well between them when Jeremy had finally told her that he was gay and now they hardly spoke. Alexandra only called when she wanted to yell at him about something.

"Who would have called you about me, Mother? We don't exactly travel in the same circles." Jeremy was going over the past week in his head trying to figure out what he could have done that had been bad enough to prompt a call from his mother.

"Joyce Watson told me that you exhibited unsavory behavior at her daughter's wedding after she expressly requested you not too."

So, Grace's evil mother had ratted him out. *What a bitch*. "Unsavory behavior? It was a dance, Mother. One dance."

"With a man," Alexandra snapped. Jeremy could practically feel her fury over the phone. He was surprised that the phone wasn't melting from the angry heat in her voice.

"You know that I'm gay, Mother. I don't see why my dancing with another man has to be such an issue."

"You were in public!"

"I was at the wedding of one of my best friends; one who doesn't care that I'm gay. I don't understand how my actions have anything to do with you."

"How dare you embarrass me like that? Think of what people will say."

"Damn it, Mother, it was just a dance. It's not like we started having sex on the dance floor. I had no intention of embarrassing you. Believe it or not, I don't think about you when I'm dancing."

"Well, that was quite evident by the way you attempted to ruin your reputation."

"Most of the town knows that I'm gay. I doubt that my dancing with someone I intend to see more of will damage my reputation."

"I demand that you stop seeing this boy." Alexandra was using the tone that made every one of the many housekeepers that she had employed tremble in fear. It had never worked on her son before and wasn't about to start now.

"I'm turning thirty next week, Mother. I'm not a child. I can date whoever I damn well please!"

"You are an ungrateful child."

"And you're a cold-hearted bitch who can't even try to understand her son. I'm gay, Mother. That's not going to change. Why can't you just accept me for who I am?"

"What you are is an abomination. I curse the day that you slid from my womb."

Jeremy hung up the phone before she could say anything else. He had never heard that level of disgust in his mother's voice before. He had always thought that somewhere underneath her disapproval, she still loved him. Now he was starting to question himself. Jeremy sighed and ran a hand over his face. At least he didn't have to worry about spoiling his dinner. He wasn't hungry anymore.

Chapter Five

CAM stood in front of the mirror and frowned. He wasn't sure about the shirt he was wearing. Cam sighed, took the shirt off, and tossed it on the bed. Maybe the blue one. He picked the blue one off of the bed, put his arms through the sleeves, and started to button it. Once he had the shirt buttoned, he stared at his reflection once again. He was starting to wish that he hadn't already taken Emily to his mother's. He really wanted another opinion on his wardrobe. Calling Patrick and asking what color looked best on him would only result in laughter, which, while it would most likely make Patrick extremely happy, would not be helpful.

Cam growled in annoyance. Puddles looked up from where she had been napping on his pillow. She looked from him to the pile of clothes on the bed, then jumped onto the floor. She brushed against his legs as she left the room.

"Thanks, Puddles. I'm glad that you care," Cam muttered. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. The blue shirt would have to do. He did have to admit that it brought out the blue in his eyes. Cam left the top few buttons of the shirt undone, rolled up the sleeves, and headed down the stairs.

He was sitting on the chair by the door putting on his boots when the doorbell rang. Cam finished putting his boots on then stood. Looking at the closed door, he wiped his sweaty palms on the legs of his black jeans. "Now or never," Cam muttered. Taking a deep breath, Cam opened the door.

Jeremy was standing on the porch with a smile on his face. His thick, blond hair was hanging loose around his shoulders. He was wearing a forest green button-down shirt that stretched over the muscles in his chest. His legs were encased in a pair of dark blue jeans. Jeremy had finished off his outfit with a pair of hiking boots. He was also holding a bouquet of flowers.

"These are for you," Jeremy stated. He hand the bouquet to Cam.

"You bought me flowers?"

"Yes."

Cam raised slightly stunned eyes to Jeremy. "I don't think anyone has given me flowers before."

"Good. That makes them special."

"They would have been special anyway," Cam responded. "Come in while I find something to put them in."

Jeremy stepped into the house and pulled the door closed behind him, since Cam had his hands full. Cam glanced over his shoulder and saw that Jeremy was watching him walk to the kitchen. He turned away to hide the flush on his face. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so excited about a date. In fact, he wasn't sure if he had ever felt quite as excited as he was feeling.

"I like your house," Jeremy remarked. "It's much nicer than my apartment."

"You don't like your apartment?" Cam pulled one of the vases that his mother had left at the house out of a cupboard and started to fill it with water

"Not really. I've been thinking about getting a house. I just haven't had the time to look." Jeremy leaned his elbows on the counter. "You've never had anyone bring you flowers, but you have a vase?"

"Actually, I have four," Cam replied. He smiled at the confused expression on Jeremy's face. "My mother thinks that you should always be prepared. Apparently this includes vases."

Jeremy gave a bright laugh and Cam felt himself laughing as well. The non-threatening attitude that Jeremy had was doing wonders on his nerves. Cam was finally starting to calm down. Plus, he loved his flowers. No one he had dated had ever been so thoughtful.

Cam finished putting the flowers in the vase and turned with it in his arms to face Jeremy. "There; all done. What do you think?"

"Beautiful," Jeremy replied. Cam blushed when he realized that Jeremy wasn't looking at his attempt to arrange flowers, but was instead looking at him.

Not knowing what to say, Cam walked past him with the vase and into the living room. He walked straight to the table by the window and placed the vase on it. He moved things around slightly until he was sure that the flowers weren't going to fall.

"There. Now they'll get sunlight." Cam jumped slightly when strong arms wrapped around him from behind. A chin rested against his left shoulder.

"Do you really like them? I was worried that you would think they were stupid."

"I love the flowers, Jeremy. They're perfect." Cam ran his hands over the arms that were wrapped around his waist. He liked the strength in them. It made him feel safe and protected.

"I'm glad that you like them. I'll have to remember that you like flowers." Jeremy gave him a squeeze, then placed a soft kiss on his neck. "We should get going."

Cam reluctantly pulled out of Jeremy's arms. He turned to face the attractive vet standing in his living room. "So, where are we going?"

"If I didn't break down and tell Emily, I'm sure as hell not going to tell you. Sorry, sweetheart. You're just going to have to wait." Jeremy grinned at him and headed toward the door.

Cam enjoyed the view of Jeremy walking away from him. He was so intent on watching Jeremy's ass as he moved, he almost didn't see the gray blur that streaked across the room. "Jeremy, watch your feet!"

Jeremy bent down and scooped Puddles into his arms before she could attack his shoes. "What do we have here?"

"Sorry about that, Jeremy. She has a strange fascination with shoes."

"Of course she does; she's female." Jeremy scratched a spot behind Puddles' ears that had her purring in an instant. "She's friendly. What's her name?"

"Puddles."

Green eyes looked over the cat to give him an intrigued stare. "Puddles? I'm sure there's a story behind that."

"I got her when she was a kitten. I'd had her for about a day and still hadn't decided what I was going to call her. That was the day that one of the pipes under the sink burst. There was water everywhere. By the time I got everything settled, that little troublemaker was jumping back and forth in the puddles on the kitchen floor."

"Hence the name Puddles."

"Exactly." Cam took the cat from Jeremy's arms and placed her on the couch. "Sorry, cat. You don't get to come to dinner."

Puddles gave a rather insulted sounding meow and hopped off of the couch. Turning her back on the two men, she stalked into the kitchen. Her actions clearly stated that if they didn't want to play with her she had no need for them

"Well, we've been told." There was humor in Jeremy's voice.

"It seems that way."

"Well, no loss. She wasn't invited to dinner." Jeremy smiled and held out a hand. "Shall we?"

"Of course," Cam replied. He took the hand that Jeremy offered and let the older man pull him out the door. Cam briefly released his hold on Jeremy's hand in order to lock the door. Once that was done, he found his hand once again within Jeremy's hold. Jeremy smiled, tugged him to the car, and then opened the door for him.

"In you go."

"Did you really just open the door for me?"

"Get in the car, Cameron." Jeremy smiled and let go of Cam's hand. He leaned against the car, and smiled at Cam.

Cam shook his head, and got into the car. He had never had anyone hold the door open for him before. It seemed like his first date with Jeremy was going to be full of a lot of firsts. Cam nervously ran a hand through his hair as Jeremy climbed behind the wheel. Jeremy started the car and pulled onto the road.

"Am I dressed okay?"

"You look amazing and I'm still not telling you where we're going for dinner."

Cam laughed. "Saw through that, did you?"

"Just a bit."

"Why won't you tell me?"

"I told you. I want it to be a surprise. Just relax and let me take care of everything," Jeremy stated. He gave Cam a soft smile and turned his attention back to the road. Unfortunately, his words had the exact opposite effect on Cam.

Paul had used to say things like that to him. He'd say how Cam wouldn't have to worry, and he would take care of everything. Of course his taking care of everything meant doing things his way, and not caring at all about what Cam wanted. Paul had used to yell and call him names when things didn't go his way. The last time Paul had told him to relax, Paul had forgotten to untie him and he had spent an entire day tied to his bed.

"Cam? You okay, baby?"

"Sorry. I'm just a little nervous." Cam gave Jeremy a weak smile. His smile grew brighter as they pulled into the parking lot of his favorite Italian restaurant. "Is this where we're having dinner?"

"Only if you like Italian."

"I do. I love this place." Cam turned to face him. "What if I had said no?"

"I've made reservations at five other restaurants, but this one was my favorite."

"You made a total of six dinner reservations for our one date?" Jeremy flushed. "I wanted to get things right."

"First flowers and then my favorite restaurant. You are doing everything right." Cam reached out and laced his fingers through Jeremy's. He flushed again as Jeremy brought his hand to his lips for a kiss

"Come on. Let's go eat." Jeremy undid his seat belt and climbed out of the car. By the time Cam got his seat belt undone, Jeremy was already holding his door open for him.

Damn, that man moves fast. Cam accepted the hand that Jeremy held out to him and let the taller man pull him out of the car. Jeremy pulled a bit harder than Cam had expected and he ended up pressed against Jeremy's chest.

Cam looked into the green eyes above his and felt his breath catch. There was a look of tenderness in Jeremy's eyes that tugged at his heart. Cam slipped one of his hands into Jeremy's hair and pulled the man down to him. He pressed his lips against Jeremy's and sighed in pleasure when those lips opened to him. Cam let his tongue duel with Jeremy's for a moment before pulling back.

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet, baby. We haven't even had dinner." Jeremy smiled and pulled him away from the car, pushing the door shut once Cam was out of the way.

With their fingers laced together, they entered the restaurant. Jeremy walked over to the hostess.

"Welcome to The Evening Garden. How can I help you?"

"We have a reservation under Montgomery."

Her eyes dropped to the sheet on the podium. "For two?"

"Yes."

"Follow me please." The hostess gave them a pretty smile and started walking into the main body of the restaurant carrying two menus. Cam followed when Jeremy tugged on his fingers. He was still wrapping his mind around the fact that they were in his favorite restaurant. Paul had never been one to go out and he had hated Italian food.

"Here you are. Your server should be with you shortly." She put their menus on the table and left. Before he had a chance to sit down, Jeremy pulled out Cam's chair for him.

"You do realize that I'm not actually an invalid?" Cam asked. He looked up at Jeremy from his spot in the chair.

"I'm sorry." Jeremy sighed and flopped into his seat. "I get a bit carried away. I just like to take care of my dates."

Cam reached across the table to grasp his hand. "Hey, I kind of like the attention. Although, if you stand when I get up to go to the bathroom, I'm going to throw a dinner roll at your head."

Jeremy laughed. "I promise I won't stand when you have to go to the bathroom. And I'll try to be better about the other stuff. If I do anything that really gets on your nerves, just tell me and I'll stop. I don't want you mad at me."

"I don't think that's going to be a problem." Cam gave Jeremy's hand a squeeze then turned his attention to the menu.

Their server was a young woman named Katie whose opening flirt stopped the moment she noticed that they were still holding hands while they looked at the menu. She rattled off the specials with a smile that seemed genuine before she left to get their drinks. Cam watched her with a bit of confusion since he didn't remember ordering a drink, but his attention was easily caught by the menu. Katie returned carrying a bottle of red wine and two glasses.

"This is a bottle of what I believe to be the best wine we have. It's not the most expensive; it just tastes the best. First dates need a good bottle of wine." With that said, she placed the bottle on the table. "I'll just give the two of you a few more minutes to look over the menu."

"How did she know this was our first date?" Cam asked. He was starting to worry that their server was a psychic and was reading all of the naughty thoughts that he was having about Jeremy.

"I have no idea, baby. That was kind of spooky."

"Yeah, it was." Cam poured himself a glass of the wine. "Wow, she was right. This is a good wine."

After that, everything fell into place. Katie came back, took their dinner order, and brought them their food quickly. Cam's spinach and lobster ravioli was delicious and Jeremy's Mediterranean pasta smelled delightful. Katie periodically returned to see how they were doing and if they needed anything. For the first time ever, Cam felt like he actually had a waitress who cared whether or not they liked their dinner.

"That was amazing." Cam smiled at his dinner date. "I love the food here."

"So do I." Jeremy reached across the table and grasped Cam's hand again. "I'm having a very good time."

"Dessert," Katie announced. She placed an absolutely mouthwatering chocolate desert in front of them with two spoons next to it. "You boys enjoy."

"She brought us chocolate mousse."

"It looks really good." Jeremy glanced at Cam as he pulled his hand away. "You do like chocolate, don't you?"

"Yes, I like chocolate. I'm just starting to wonder if you planned this or if we really do have the most considerate waitress of all time." Cam frowned in the direction Katie had headed. "Either that, or she's some type of pod person."

Jeremy laughed. "It's the waitress. I may have made several reservations, but I didn't go quite this far. I wasn't sure where you wanted to eat." Jeremy smiled and turned his attention to the chocolate creation in front of him

Cam took a spoonful of the mousse and moaned as it hit his tongue. It was amazing. He blushed when he realized that his moan had captured Jeremy's full attention. It didn't help that he thought the only way to make the dessert any better would be to eat it off of Jeremy's chest. Deciding that being bold may be fun, Cam picked up the spoon again and slowly licked chocolate mousse off of it, staring into Jeremy's eyes the entire time.

"Baby, you keep that up and I'm going to lunge across this table at you," Jeremy stated. His green eyes seemed to be practically glowing with desire.

"No, you're not." Jeremy smiled. "But that's okay, 'cause I gotta tell you, I enjoyed the show."

Cam blushed again, but refused to take his eyes away from Jeremy's. Jeremy spooned out a helping of mousse then held the spoon out for Cam. With a wicked smile, Cam leaned forward and licked the mousse off of Jeremy's spoon. This time, Jeremy was the one who moaned. Cam smiled and licked his lips.

"Damn. I'm not sure if I want to hug the waitress for bringing this or if I want to strangle her."

"Why would you want to strangle her?"

"I'm not sure I can stand up anytime soon. At least not unless they lend me a menu to carry with me to the door." Jeremy shifted slightly in his seat. He used his spoon to give himself his first taste of the dessert. "Not bad."

"Not bad?"

"Well, I do know how I could make it taste better."

Cam arched a brow. "Really? How?"

"I could eat it off of you," Jeremy replied. He smiled as Cam nearly choked on the spoonful of mousse.

Cam stared at him for a moment. He was surprised that Jeremy's thoughts were so close to his own. Cam reached for the mousse and did another deliberate lick. He liked the way that Jeremy's eyes darkened with lust at the action. Cam still couldn't believe he was doing this on purpose. He was never this forward, especially on a first date. The fact that he was having dinner with Jeremy seemed to change everything. Cam couldn't remember the last time he had felt so comfortable on a date.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Jeremy asked. He continued to eat while he waited for his answer.

"Like what?"

"I'm not sure. You just had this really sweet look on your face for a minute there. What were you thinking about?"

"How happy I am that I'm having this date with you," Cam replied. He bit his lip shyly as he looked at Jeremy. To his surprise, Jeremy actually blushed and looked away momentarily.

"I'm glad that you're having a good time. I've spent a rather embarrassing amount of time planning this date." Jeremy finally looked back up, blush still in place. "I was hoping that one day I would work up the guts to ask you out."

"I'm glad you did." Cam finished with the mousse and leaned back in the chair. "So, do you have anything else planned?"

"Not really. I thought I'd leave that up to you." Jeremy put his spoon down with a smile. "I'm open to suggestions."

"Okay. Take me home."

Jeremy's eyes filled with confusion. "What? Why? I thought you said you were having a good time."

"I am, which is why I want you to take me home. The date can't really end the way I want it to in public." Cam smiled as he watched realization fill Jeremy's eyes, followed by an immediate spiking of lust. "Take me home, Jeremy."

"Check, please!"

Chapter Six

JEREMY'S hands were shaking slightly by the time he pulled into Cam's driveway. He was nervous. Going home with Cam had been in his fantasies for years and now it was going to happen. Jeremy couldn't believe how nervous he was. It wasn't like he had never had sex before. This was different. This was Cam. Nothing else had ever been this important.

"You coming in?" Cam asked. That hint of uncertainty was back in his voice again. Jeremy hated that sound. He didn't want Cam to ever feel unsure of himself around him.

"Only if you want me to." Jeremy turned off the car and turned to look at Cam. He smiled softly at the other man. Leaning across the distance between them, Jeremy placed a chaste kiss on Cam's lips. They still tasted faintly of the chocolate mousse that they had just eaten.

"I want you to come in," Cam responded. He smiled in the soft glow from the porch light.

Jeremy ran his thumb across Cam's lips. "Anything for you."

Jeremy pressed another quick kiss to Cam's lips then got out of the car. He quickly moved across the car and pulled Cam's door open for him. Cam was giving him an indulgent smile. Jeremy grabbed his hand and pulled him from the car. When he pulled Cam against his chest, he stole another kiss.

Jeremy licked along Cam's lips and pried the younger man's lips open. When Cam opened his mouth, Jeremy thrust his tongue inside and pulled Cam against his chest. Cam let out a small moan. Hearing that moan, Jeremy groaned and pressed him against the car. Cam let out a grunt when his back connected with the passenger-side mirror.

"Ouch."

"Maybe we should take this inside." Jeremy pulled away only far enough so he could lick a path down Cam's jaw.

"Inside is a good idea."

"You're the one with the key." Jeremy was happily nibbling on the skin behind Cam's ear.

"If you want me to let us into the house, you'll have to let me up. I can't unlock the door unless you stop doing that."

"Do you really want me to stop?"

"No, but we need to get inside." Cam put his hands on Jeremy's chest, but instead of pushing him away, Cam just ended up running his hands over the smooth planes.

"That is very distracting, baby." Jeremy leaned down and nipped Cam's neck.

"Okay; that's enough." Cam pulled his neck away from Jeremy's mouth. "You need to stop that. I don't want to have sex on the driveway."

"After you, baby." Jeremy swatted Cam on the ass as he walked past him to the front door. He grinned as Cam glared at him. Jeremy made sure that his car was locked and joined Cam at the door. He wrapped his arms around the trim waist and leaned his chin on Cam's shoulder. "Got the door open yet?"

"You are not helping."

Jeremy laughed and licked the patch of neck that was by his mouth. He grinned when Cam moaned and tilted his head to one side to allow Jeremy better access. Jeremy moved his mouth up and nibbled on Cam's ear.

"Still not helping, Jeremy."

"Sorry," Jeremy remarked. He let go of Cam and stepped away from his body. Cam managed to finally get the key in the lock and open the door. As the two of them walked in, Puddles came running right over. She wound herself around their ankles and started purring. "We seem to have company."

"I'm going to lock her in the kitchen." Cam scooped Puddles into his arms and walked into the kitchen.

Closing the door behind him, Jeremy took the opportunity to look around. He really hadn't gotten a chance to look before. Jeremy wandered into the living room. His eyes moved to the flowers sitting on the table. Walking over to them, he smiled. Jeremy was happy that Cam had liked the flowers. He had been a little nervous. Not many men liked it when another man bought them flowers.

"Cat's in the kitchen," Cam announced. He stopped next to Jeremy and looped an arm around his waist. "I love my flowers, Jeremy."

"I'm glad." Jeremy turned and pulled Cam into his arms. "So, where to now?"

"Follow me," Cam replied. He laced his fingers into Jeremy's and tugged him forward.

Giving Cam's hand a squeeze, Jeremy followed Cam through the house. He was starting to feel nervous again. Feeling the slight tremble in Cam's hand actually made him feel a bit better. It was comforting to know that he wasn't the only one who was nervous. As they walked up the stairs Jeremy took a nice long look at Cam's ass. Those jeans did wonders for his rear end.

When they got to the top of the stairs, Cam led them to the room at the end of the hall. He pushed open the door and pulled Jeremy in after him. As Cam turned on the lights, Jeremy got his first look at Cam's bedroom.

It was a large room with hardwood floors and a high ceiling. The cherry wood of the bedroom set was complimented nicely by the light oak of the floor. There were two doors in the room, but only one of them was open. In the open door, Jeremy could see a bathroom, so he assumed that the door on the other wall was a closet. There was a large window with a window seat in one wall. The scattered books on the window seat indicated that it was one of Cam's favorite spots. A king-sized bed was

next to the window seat. The bedspread and the drapes were in various shades of blue. What appeared to be a homemade quilt was draped on a trunk at the foot of the bed. The bed was covered in shirts.

"Cam, baby, did your closet puke on the bed?"

"Um, I wasn't sure what to wear." Cam pulled away from Jeremy and started to gather up the shirts on the bed. Instead of putting them away, he simply tossed them onto the window seat.

"You picked a nice one. You look amazing," Jeremy stated. He smiled when Cam blushed. "You blush a lot, baby. Doesn't anyone ever compliment you?"

"Not that often. It just means more coming from you." Cam stepped right up to Jeremy and stopped when they were only inches apart. Jeremy could feel the heat from his body.

Reaching out, Jeremy gently cupped Cam's cheek. He tilted the other man's face up and kissed him. When Cam moaned into the contact, Jeremy pulled him flush against his chest. He ran his hands down Cam's back and then back up, but underneath the shirt. He groaned as his hands encountered smooth, warm skin. Cam's hands clutched at his shirt.

Jeremy moved his hands away from the temptation of Cam's warm skin and managed to get his hands between them. He started to undo the buttons on Cam's shirt while he continued the kiss. When he had all of the buttons undone, Jeremy pushed the fabric down Cam's arms, running his hands along the warm skin that was revealed.

Jeremy stopped the kiss when Cam pushed him away. He stared down into lust-filled blue eyes. Jeremy gasped softly when Cam's hands began to unbutton his shirt. Every time the fabric parted, Cam would run his fingers across the skin exposed. By the time Cam had opened all of the buttons, Jeremy was trembling and gasping with every touch. When his shirt fell to the floor, he grabbed Cam and pulled him into a needy kiss.

They moved toward the bed as they kissed. Tongues dueling, both of them kicked off their shoes and managed to not fall over. Jeremy was quite impressed with that fact. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt such a strong need to be naked. None of his previous relationships had ever affected him this way.

When they bumped into the bed, Jeremy broke the kiss. He gave Cam a wicked smile and pushed him back onto the bed. Looking down at Cam, Jeremy smiled at the feast spread out before him. Jeremy crouched at Cam's feet and ran his hands down the denim encased legs. When he reached Cam's feet, he pulled the younger man's socks off. Jeremy slid his hands back up the denim, stopping when he ran out of fabric. He angled a look at Cam then began to kiss his way up Cam's chest.

Jeremy noted every reaction that Cam had. He liked the way that his entire stomach twitched when Jeremy nipped next to his navel. When Jeremy traced his ribs with his hands, Cam moaned. When he licked a path from his navel to his collarbone, Cam gasped and buried his hands in Jeremy's hair. Jeremy groaned when Cam tugged on his hair. He let Cam pull him up into a kiss.

While they kissed, Jeremy could feel Cam's hands on his back. When he moved down to Cam's neck and returned his attention to the mark he had started to leave earlier, Cam's fingers dug into his back. Jeremy grinned around the patch of skin he had between his lips and bit down. Cam nearly arched off of the bed. Jeremy had to press their lower bodies together to keep him from moving while he finished marking Cam's neck.

Jeremy pulled back to study his handiwork. There was a vivid red mark on the left side of Cam's neck. Jeremy smiled and ran his fingers over it. Cam gasped as Jeremy's fingers brushed the sensitive skin. Enjoying the sound that Cam made, Jeremy did it again. He was grinning foolishly when Cam suddenly moved. Jeremy found himself flat on his back with Cam on top of him. It was a nice place to be.

Cam leaned in for a kiss then began to move down Jeremy's body. Jeremy moaned as Cam's tongue traced a damp path across his collarbone. While his mouth was occupied with Jeremy's chest, Cam's hands were doing delicious things to his side. Jeremy had never before had a lover who traced all of his ribs in sequence. As Cam did wickedly wonderful things to his chest, Jeremy ran his hands over the strong back. When his fingers moved over Cam's shoulder and down his back, Jeremy thought he could feel a difference in the texture of the skin. He was about to push Cam over so he could get a look at his back, but was distracted by the feel of Cam's hands on the waist of his jeans.

Jeremy groaned as Cam slid his fingers underneath the waistband of his pants. The light, teasing touch of his fingers had Jeremy clutching at his back. When Cam slithered down his chest so his head was over the top of Jeremy's jeans, Jeremy buried his fingers in Cam's dark hair. He gasped when Cam popped the button on his jeans with his teeth.

"Damn, baby," Jeremy muttered. The only response he got was a wicked grin as Cam continued to unfasten his jeans with his teeth. Once he finished with the zipper, Cam slipped his hands underneath the waistband of Jeremy's pants and pulled. Jeremy lifted his hips and Cam was able to pull off his jeans and underwear in one smooth motion. Jeremy was suddenly naked in front of his new lover.

"So perfect," Cam murmured. Jeremy shivered as Cam's hands slowly moved up his thighs. Every touch of Cam's fingers set his body on fire. Sex had never felt like this before. Jeremy was drowning in sensation and he never wanted it to stop. When Cam stretched out on top of him he gasped at the feel of denim brushing against his already straining erection.

"Cameron." Jeremy slid his hands down the back of Cam's jeans as he was kissed to within an inch of his life. His hands slid over smooth skin, encountering nothing between the denim and Cam's delicious rear. The realization that Cam had gone to their dinner date without wearing any underwear sent a jolt of desire straight to Jeremy's already straining cock. He needed to have Cam naked. Now.

With a low growl, Jeremy flipped them over so Cam was on his back again. After delivering a very demanding kiss, he turned his attention to the last piece of clothing keeping him from fulfilling a fantasy he had had since high school. Jeremy slithered down Cam's body, kissing random body parts as he went. When he reached the top of Cam's jeans, Jeremy spent some time tracing the muscles in Cam's sixpack with his tongue while he undid the jeans. Cam was murmuring nonsense while his hands were fisting in Jeremy's hair. Jeremy had never thought that his scalp was an erogenous zone, but every tug on his hair went straight to his groin.

He finally got the jeans undone and out of his way. Jeremy wasn't sure where they ended up. He was fairly certain that he had tossed them over his shoulder, but his mind had emptied of thought the moment he had Cam naked. Jeremy felt his mouth water. He placed one arm across

Cam's hips, used his other to hold the base of his cock and dove right in. As his lips slid along the shaft Cam practically howled and his hips nearly bucked out of Jeremy's hold. Cam's grip on his hair increased and Jeremy found himself rubbing against the bed while he swirled his tongue around Cam's erection. He was just getting into a good rhythm when the tugs on his hair turned less than pleasant. Jeremy slowly pulled off of Cam and looked up at him.

Cam's face was flushed and he was panting. His eyes were glassy with desire. Jeremy could see sweat on his heaving chest. Cam's hand tightened in his hair and his arm started to pull up. Being faced with a decision of going with the motion or losing a chunk of his hair, Jeremy let Cam pull him up. Once he was within reach, Cam attacked his mouth. The kiss was messy, full of need, and had Jeremy nearing orgasm faster than a kiss ever had before.

"Jeremy."

Jeremy grunted against Cam's neck and continued to kiss and lick his throat.

"I want you in me."

That got Jeremy's attention. He stopped what he was doing and looked into Cam's eyes. The naked desire and longing he saw in the blue depths nearly did him in. He had to close his eyes to keep from losing it simply by seeing how much Cam wanted him.

"Lube?"

"Drawer." Cam pointed to the nightstand and tried to pull his hands from Jeremy's hair. His fingers were tangled quite well and the little tugs he caused while trying to get them out made Jeremy moan. Jeremy stretched out one long arm and opened the nightstand drawer. Shoving his hand inside, he managed to grasp both the bottle of lube and a condom. By the time he had the items on the bed, Cam had managed to get his hands out of his hair.

Jeremy opened the lube and coated one of his fingers. Looking into Cam's eyes, he slowly teased his way inside. He paused when Cam gasped softly. Jeremy placed gentle kisses on Cam's stomach and ran his other hand over Cam's hip until the younger man relaxed. Jeremy started to turn his finger as he slid it in further. When he slid his finger over Cam's prostate, Cam arched off the bed and his entire body flushed.

"So beautiful, baby. I could watch you all day."

"More," Cam panted. "Please Jeremy. More."

"Shh." Jeremy pressed another soothing kiss to the lover that was already starting to writhe underneath him. He had never had a lover that was as responsive as Cam. As he gently slid in a second finger along with the first, Jeremy licked one of Cam's nipples. That action caused Cam's hands to immediately take up residence in his hair once again. Jeremy continued to shower attention on Cam's nipples as his fingers stretched and teased him. When Cam started thrusting back against the three fingers that moved in and out rather easily, Jeremy lifted his head from his chest.

Cam moaned at the loss of contact.

"Baby, I need you to let go of my hair." Jeremy ran one hand over Cam's side in a soothing motion as he waited for Cam to let go of his hair. He needed to pull away to put on the condom and he couldn't do that with the death grip that Cam had on his hair.

Cam's fingers pulled out of his hair slowly. Cam was making small whimpering sounds as Jeremy continued to fuck him with his fingers. Jeremy loved every sound that Cam made. He could happily spend hours just listening to them. Jeremy pulled his fingers out and Cam made a panicked needy sound deep in his throat.

"Hush, baby. I'm not going anywhere," Jeremy stated. He quickly rolled on the condom and then coated himself with lube. Pressing himself just at the entrance, he looked into Cam's eyes. "Ready, baby?"

"Need you." Cam moaned. "Fuck me, Jeremy."

Jeremy lifted Cam's legs until they wrapped around his waist and then slid in with one long, slow thrust. Cam moaned in pleasure and arched his back as Jeremy buried himself inside his body. Jeremy had to stop as the tight heat surrounded him. A feeling of absolute perfection filled him. Looking into Cam's eyes, he started a series of long, slow thrusts. He wanted to make this last as long as possible.

As he thrust into him, Jeremy leaned forward and kissed Cam. Cam's hands slid up his back and dug into his shoulders. Jeremy angled his hips until he was hitting Cam's prostate with every stroke and was rewarded with a strangled cry. Cam started to emit small moans and

whimpers as he thrust back against Jeremy. Feeling himself start to close in on orgasm, Jeremy reached one hand in between their bodies and started to stroke Cam in time with his thrusts. Cam's small whimpers changed into chants of his name. When Cam came crying his name, Jeremy lost it. Orgasm hit him and he shouted out Cam's name. When his arms gave out, he managed not to fall completely on top of Cam.

Cam shifted slightly and Jeremy slid out of him. They both moaned. "Jeremy?"

"Hmm?"

"Can you lift up for a minute? You're on my leg."

"Sorry, baby." Jeremy rolled off of Cam's leg and got off of the bed.

"You didn't have to get up."

"You just stay right there." Jeremy leaned down and placed a kiss on his lips. He turned away from the bed and walked into the bathroom. After taking care of the condom, he ran a washcloth under warm water and walked back into the bedroom. "I love that you have an attached bathroom."

"It does come in handy," Cam agreed. He gave Jeremy a sleepy smile when he wiped him down with the washcloth. Jeremy gave his nose a playful nip then took the washcloth back to the bathroom and left it in the sink.

When he got back, Cam had turned off all the lights except for the bedside lamp and was getting ready to climb into bed. That was when Jeremy noticed the tattoo. He quietly stepped up behind Cam and ran his fingers over one of the twisting designs. Cam shuddered slightly at his touch and Jeremy wondered what it would be like to bathe the entire thing with his tongue. His dick attempted to show some interest at that thought, but he was too tired.

"Do you like it?"

"It looks amazing. When did you get it done?"

"You can do whatever you want to it tomorrow. Right now I just need to sleep."

"Did I tire you out, baby?" Jeremy asked. He crawled into bed next to Cam and pulled the other man into his arms. They shifted around until they got comfortable.

"Good food, amazing sex. Yes, you tired me out. Now go to sleep." Cam turned off the bedside lamp then burrowed into Jeremy's arms. Jeremy pressed a kiss to the top of his head and cuddled him closer. With Cam in his arms, Jeremy fell asleep feeling happy for the first time in a very long time.

Chapter Seven

THE smell of bacon was what woke Cam from a peaceful sleep. For a moment, he wondered who was cooking in his kitchen. Then the events of the night before came rushing back. Jeremy. He'd had sex with Jeremy. He'd had fucking amazing sex with Jeremy. And now Jeremy was making him breakfast. Cam smiled happily and cuddled into the body behind him.

Wait a minute. Body behind him? Cam was starting to get a bad feeling.

The arm around his waist tightened as the smell of cooking food woke Jeremy. "Who's making breakfast?"

"Oh, this can't be good," Cam muttered.

"Sweetie, I'm making you breakfast." Diane breezed into the room without knocking.

"Mom!"

"I decided that we should eat as a family."

"Mom!"

"Emily is downstairs with Kennedy and I really don't understand why my granddaughter didn't want to come here for breakfast this morning. Have you done something to—" Diane Walker trailed off as she noticed that her son wasn't alone in his bed. "Oh my."

"Mom, do you think you could just go downstairs? Please?"

"Oh Cameron, honey. I'm so sorry." Turning a vivid shade of red, Diane rushed from the room, pulling the door closed behind her.

Cam groaned and covered his face with his hands. "Just kill me now. I should get a dog. A dog would at least bark when she came into the house. Useless cat."

Jeremy's arms tightened around him and he felt a kiss pressed to the back of his neck. "It's not that bad, baby."

"How can you say that? My mother just walked in on us in bed together."

"We could have been having sex when she came in."

Cam froze as that image filled his mind. "You're right; that would have been worse." Cam let out an annoyed groan. "This is not how I planned this morning."

"How did you plan it?" Jeremy asked. He pulled away just long enough to move them around so he was on his back with Cam draped across his chest.

"Well, we would wake up together slowly and kiss. And then we would take our time with each other until we came panting each other's names. This would be followed by a shower and then I would make you breakfast."

"Mmm, I like that idea." Jeremy pulled Cam into a kiss. Cam moaned as his tongue dueled with Jeremy's. It was everything a morning-after kiss should be: long, slow, and filled with possibilities. He pulled away when he felt Jeremy's hands on his ass.

"We can't have that morning." Cam could hear the disappointment in his voice.

"Why not?"

"Because my mother is in the kitchen with my niece and one of my best friends."

"Good point." Jeremy sighed. "I guess I'll just have to settle for a family breakfast with my boyfriend and his mom."

"Are you sure you don't want to..." Cam pulled away and looked into Jeremy's eyes. "Did you just call me your boyfriend?"

"Heard that, huh?"

"Am I really your boyfriend?"

Jeremy pushed a lock of hair out of Cam's blue eyes. "Boyfriend, lover, life partner, guy who you sleep with. Sweetheart, I don't care what word we use as long as it means that you're mine."

"I'm yours, Jeremy," Cam whispered. "You can call me anything that you want."

Jeremy smiled. "I was getting used to baby, but I'm starting to like sweetheart. Maybe I'll just use both."

"I'd like that, Bright Eyes." Cam smiled in satisfaction as the eyes in question spiked with lust at the new nickname.

"Not a good idea, sweetheart. Your mother is in the kitchen. We need to go down there."

"You're right." Cam got out of the bed with a sigh. "I'll head down now and you can have a shower. By the time we get done with breakfast, you'll have to leave for work."

"Okay. Do you have a T-shirt I can borrow? I can wear the jeans to work, but not the dress shirt."

"Second drawer in the dresser. There should be one in there that will fit you." Cam grabbed his jeans off of the floor and pulled them on. Looking for a shirt, he ended up grabbing Jeremy's green shirt from the night before. He pulled it on with a small sigh. It smelled like Jeremy.

"Now, that just isn't fair," Jeremy remarked. He slid his arms around Cam's waist and kissed the back of his neck. "I'm going to have to sit through breakfast with your mother while you wear my clothes. Not fair."

"Hey, it was the first shirt that I found." Cam smiled and pulled away from Jeremy. He rolled the sleeves up and turned to face his lover. That was not a good idea. The minute he turned around he was faced with a gloriously naked Jeremy. "And you say I'm not being fair?"

Jeremy lips curved into a wicked smile. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You're standing there looking all naked and edible and I have to go downstairs and get grilled by my mother and my friend."

"Your mom said Kennedy. So that would be Kennedy Marcus, right? Skinny blonde who used to hang out with you and Patrick Hawkins in high school?"

Cam's mouth dropped open in shock. "You remember the names of my best friends?"

"I remember everything that has to do with you, sweetheart." Jeremy leaned into him and Cam opened to the gentle kiss. "You better go down there before your mother comes back up here."

"My mother won't come back, but if I take much longer Kennedy might."

"See, a good reason for you to go downstairs." Jeremy pressed one more kiss to Cam's lips. "I won't be long."

"I'll hold you to that," Cam stated. He took his hands off of Jeremy's arms and let the other man walk into the bathroom. When he heard the water start in the shower, Cam left the room, making sure to pull the door closed behind him.

Standing outside his bedroom door with his head resting against it, Cam took a deep, calming breath. So what if his mother had walked in on him and Jeremy in bed together? Jeremy was right. It wasn't as if they had been having sex when she walked in. Cam could face his mother. He didn't need to hide at the top of the stairs and hope that she left. Unfortunately, that was exactly what he was doing.

Deciding that he needed to suck it up and act like an adult, Cam pushed away from the door and headed down the stairs. The farther away from Jeremy he got, the more nervous he became. All he really wanted to do was run back upstairs and get into the shower with Jeremy. And possibly never come out. When he got to the kitchen door he froze.

"What are you doing with my flowers?" Cam demanded. There was an angry tone to his voice. Diane had the flowers at the counter and was just putting the last one back in a vase.

"I changed the vase. The last one didn't match. I also cut the stems. You need to cut the stems, dear. What kind of a gay man are you if you don't know that?"

"No one had ever given me flowers before." Cam picked the vase up and carried it back into the other room. He placed them back on the table where they had been when he and Jeremy had returned from dinner. Cam turned the vase slightly, trying to find the best angle for the bouquet.

"Uncle Cam?"

Cam turned to see Emily nervously chewing on her lower lip. "What's up?"

"I'm sorry. I tried to talk her out of this, but she wouldn't listen. She got the idea in her head that we needed to have a family breakfast. We ran into Kennedy on our way here and Grandma told her to come with us. I'm really sorry."

"It's not your fault." Cam pulled her into a quick hug. "Come on. Time to face the music."

Cam pushed Emily into the kitchen ahead of him to give himself some more time to get his bearings. He was still riding the high from his date and the knowledge that Jeremy was showering in his bathroom. The unexpected arrival of his mother had thrown him for a loop. The first thing he saw when he got into the kitchen was Kennedy. He'd been so preoccupied with the flowers that he hadn't noticed her earlier.

Kennedy was everything that his sister had wanted to be: tall, willowy, blonde, and absolutely gorgeous. It was rather strange since in high school she had been gawky and awkward. Time tended to change things. Kennedy was a hairdresser now. The blonde hair that his sister had envied was full of streaks of blue, pink, green, and purple. Kennedy's violet eyes were not contacts; they were in fact naturally violet in color. Her nose was pierced and she had five silver hoops in each ear. Kennedy had taken the classic beauty that everyone had seen in her and changed it into something else. She was most definitely her own person.

"So, you fucked the animal doc." She was also blunt as hell.

"Kennedy Marcus! We do not talk like that in front of children," Diane snapped.

"Sorry." Kennedy didn't sound sorry at all, but Diane accepted the apology with a nod of her head. Handing control of the cooking over to Emily, who loved to cook, Diane fixed her gaze on her son. Cam fidgeted nervously and tugged on the bottom of Jeremy's shirt.

"Cameron, I'm sorry about this morning. I didn't expect you to have company."

"I thought Emily told you that I had a date?"

"She did."

"Then why did you think that I wouldn't have company?"

"Oh come on, Cam," Kennedy interjected. "The last two dates you went on ended with you at my place eating ice cream."

Cam sighed and ran a hand over his face. Kennedy was right. He had ended up at her place after his past few dates. Since she never asked the hard questions, it was easier to run to her than to Patrick. Patrick had always been able to read him easier than Kennedy. Kennedy just thought that all of his dates had ended badly. What she didn't know was that he had run away every time one of his dates tried to touch him.

Everything that had happened with Paul had made him terrified to let anyone touch him. The only reason he could think of that things had gone so well with Jeremy was because it was Jeremy. Cam knew in his heart that Jeremy would never hurt him.

"If I had known that you were going out with Jeremy last night I wouldn't have come over this morning." Diane had her arms crossed over her chest and was giving him an indulgent look.

"If I'd known you'd had a date, I still would have showed up," Kennedy remarked. She grinned when Cam threw a napkin at her. "Hey, I'm out of food and hungry."

"Buy groceries."

"You did at least use protection, didn't you?"

"Mom!" Cam stared at his mother in shock. He couldn't believe she had just asked him that. He could feel his face turning red. Kennedy was laughing so hard that she was starting to fall off of the stool she was sitting on. Emily had her back to them since she was still cooking, but her shoulders were shaking with suppressed laughter.

"You are my son, Cameron. I need to make sure that you're taking care of yourself. I don't want you going around and having sex if you aren't using protection." Diane had a stern look on her face. Her hair was starting to gray at the temples, but the only lines on her face were laugh

lines. She always had a smile ready. Diane Walker liked to look on the bright side of life.

"If it makes you feel better, Mrs. Walker, I can guarantee you that we used protection," Jeremy commented. He was standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Please, someone just kill me now," Cam moaned. He jumped when Kennedy leaned over and punched him in the arm. "Ow. What was that for?"

"Stop being a smartass."

"Bitch."

"Asshole."

"Children, that is enough! Sometimes I wonder if the two of you ever passed the age of twelve," Diane muttered. "Good morning, Jeremy. Would you like some eggs and bacon?"

"I would love some," Jeremy replied. Cam watched him walk over to the counter with what he knew was a dopey smile on his face. He couldn't help it. Seeing Jeremy standing there in one of his T-shirts was doing things to him. All he wanted to do was push Jeremy down and have his way with him on the floor.

Cam jumped as Kennedy hit him again. "What was that for?"

"Stop looking at him like that. You're a grown man, not a puppy. You make me want to gag."

"Nice to see you too, Kennedy," Jeremy stated. Cam felt lips brush his neck as Jeremy sat next to him. "I like what you've done to your hair."

"Thanks," Kennedy responded. When she didn't make a comment about Jeremy remembering her name, Cam pulled his attention away from the warm body next to him to look at her. She had a distracted look on her face. Cam grinned when he saw that she was looking at Jeremy's hair. Her fingers actually started to move like she wanted to get her hands in it.

"Kennedy, you're staring at Jeremy's hair."

"Look at it. It's gorgeous. I'd love to get my hands in it."

"I guess I could use a haircut," Jeremy responded. He reached up to tug at one of the damp, blond tangles.

"No!" Cam paused when he realized that he wasn't the only one who had shouted. Everyone in the room was looking at Jeremy with varying degrees of horror on their faces at the thought of him cutting his hair.

"I guess that means you like my hair?" If the look Jeremy was giving him was anything to go by, the only answer that mattered to Jeremy was Cam's.

"I like your hair just the way that it is." Cam slid a hand into the hair in question and gave a little tug. Memories of the night before flooded his mind. He liked being able to tangle his hands in Jeremy's hair. Cam pulled Jeremy closer and pressed a soft kiss to his lips.

"Food's ready," Emily announced. Cam broke away from Jeremy and looked in front of him. Emily had placed heaping plates of bacon, scrambled eggs, hash browns, breakfast sausage, and toast on the counter. The women had apparently been there for a while before the smell of food woke Cam and Jeremy.

"Great. I'm starving."

"Why aren't you eating with Seth?" Cam asked. Seth was Kennedy's boyfriend, at least when they were speaking to each other. They fought a lot and Cam didn't think that he treated her right. Since Kennedy had had the same thoughts about him and Paul, he was starting to worry that he might be right. The last thing he wanted was for Kennedy to be experiencing the same type of relationship that he had been in.

"We aren't seeing each other anymore."

"You broke up?" Diane asked. She placed a comforting hand on Kennedy's shoulder. "I'm sorry, dear."

"Don't be. I should have tossed his ass out a long time ago." Kennedy swallowed a mouthful of eggs. "The bastard was cheating on me."

"What an ass," Jeremy muttered. They all turned to look at him. "What? She's pretty. She was pretty in high school. She is obviously too good for this guy."

"Thanks, Jeremy. I wasn't even sure that you remembered me from high school." Kennedy tucked a strand of green hair behind her ear. "The weird thing is that he left all of his stuff in the apartment, but he cleaned out the fridge and freezer. He took all of the food."

"We should burn his stuff," Emily commented. She swallowed her bacon nervously when she realized that she had everyone's attention. "I saw it in a movie once"

"You know, that's a pretty good idea." Kennedy had a thoughtful look on her face as she ate. Cam shook his head and turned his attention to his food

As his mother drew Jeremy into a conversation, Cam realized that it wasn't going as bad as he had expected. In fact, it seemed that after her initial shock had worn off, Diane was determined to include Jeremy in the conversation. She was doing everything in her power to make him comfortable. She had never done that for Paul. Cam was starting to come to the conclusion that his mother had a better sense of people than he did. Diane had always told him that she didn't trust Paul, but he didn't want to believe her. Even when things got bad, he didn't want to believe that she was right about Paul. This time, he wanted her to be right about Jeremy and he was pretty sure that she was.

"Hey, you okay, baby? You seem lost in thought." Jeremy's concerned green eyes were staring straight into his.

Cam ran a hand down the smooth cheek. "I'm good, Bright Eyes."

"Just thought that I'd check." He leaned closer and whispered in Cam's ear. "We didn't get a chance to talk about last night. I was afraid that you were regretting it."

"No, I could never do that." Forgetting that his mother and teenaged niece were in the room, Cam pulled Jeremy into a heated kiss. He wanted to take the worry out of Jeremy's eyes.

Cam licked his way across Jeremy's lips and forced them to open for him. When he gained access to Jeremy's mouth, he delved right in. Cam could taste the bacon that Jeremy had just finished eating. He licked under Jeremy's tongue then ran his tongue across Jeremy's teeth. When Jeremy's tongue twined around his he moaned and clutched at the fabric of the T-shirt that Jeremy had borrowed.

Diane cleared her throat loudly. "Boys, there is an impressionable teenager at the table."

"Hey, what about me?" Kennedy protested.

"You are enjoying it too much."

"Not as much as they are," she responded.

Cam pulled away reluctantly. All he really wanted to do was climb onto Jeremy's lap and continue the kiss. Or maybe see if Jeremy would fuck him over the kitchen counter. Yeah, that sounded like a good idea. Much better than eating breakfast with his mother.

"Sweetheart, if you don't stop looking at me like that I'm going to embarrass myself." Jeremy's voice was a husky growl and he was shifting uncomfortably on his stool. Cam dropped his gaze and smiled when he noticed the bulge in Jeremy's jeans.

"Sorry."

"No you're not, but that's okay." Jeremy gave him a quick peck and then turned back to his food.

The rest of breakfast seemed to go by in a flash for Cam. Jeremy answered all of the questions he was asked and even asked some of his own. They all seemed to get along well. Jeremy had inserted himself into Cam's life and Cam loved it. He loved seeing Jeremy in his kitchen. He loved seeing Jeremy make his mother smile and his niece laugh. He loved the way that Jeremy was able to pull Kennedy out of her shell and start to get over her bad breakup. Cam just loved everything about Jeremy. Before he knew what was happening, he was walking Jeremy to the door so he and Emily wouldn't be late.

"This was amazing, Cam. I can't remember the last time I had a breakfast that I enjoyed this much."

"I'm glad." Cam wrapped his arms around Jeremy's neck. "I liked having you here for breakfast."

"I liked waking up with you in my arms." Jeremy tilted his head down and kissed him. Cam threaded his fingers through the soft, golden hair and tugged. Jeremy gasped and pulled away. His eyes were dark with lust. "I swear to God, sweetheart, you are the only person who can get me this turned on just by tugging on my hair." "You close for an hour around lunch, right?"

"Yeah, we close at one. Why?"

"I'll pick you up."

"Pick me up for what?"

"Lunch. We'll go to Maude's."

"It's a date." Jeremy smiled brightly and stole one more kiss. After sliding a hand down Cam's neck, Jeremy dashed out to his car where Emily was waiting. Cam watched as they got in the car and drove off. Once the car was out of sight, he headed back to the kitchen. Kennedy was helping his mother clean the dishes. Puddles, who had been oddly absent while they were eating, rubbed against his ankles. Cam reached down and gave her a scratch behind her ears.

"So, put out on the first date, huh?"

"Kennedy! My mother is standing right next to you!"

"Cameron, I've known about your feelings for Jeremy for years. Even your father, God rest his soul, knew that you felt something. He was always going on about how you shouldn't look that happy before you had to get tutored in math." Diane wiped her hands on a dish towel and smiled at him. "You look at Jeremy the way your father used to look at me."

Cam's father had died in a car crash when he was seventeen. He'd been driving home from work when he'd been hit by a transport truck. The truck had blown a tire and spun out of control. According to the paramedics his father had died instantly. He hadn't had time to feel any pain.

Cam walked over to his mother and wrapped her in a hug. "I love you, Mom."

"I love you too, darling. Now, go have a shower and get dressed. We are taking Kennedy grocery shopping and then you have a lunch date." Diane smiled and pushed him toward the door.

As he left the kitchen, he saw Kennedy move over to the sink to help his mother clean up. Cam smiled and shook his head. He'd always felt like Kennedy was more of a sister to him than Amanda. Amanda had never seemed to appreciate the things that Diane did for them, but

Kennedy lapped it up and did everything she could to help out. As he climbed the stairs to his room, Cam realized he didn't care if Jeremy ever met Amanda. In his mind, his boyfriend had just had breakfast with his family. And his family had loved him.

PATRICK ducked out of the station and bypassed the officers outside smoking. A wave of longing hit him when he walked through the smoke. He'd quit smoking three years ago, but he occasionally still wanted one. Patrick headed into the parking lot, leaned against his car, and pulled out his cell phone. He dialed Cam's home number, and frowned when the answering machine picked up. Disconnecting, he tried Cam's cell.

"Hello?"

"Where are you?"

"Grocery shopping with Mom and Kennedy. Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

"I am at work. I'm outside." Patrick squinted up at the bright, summer sun. "What are you doing grocery shopping?"

"Seth and Kennedy broke up."

"Okay."

"When he left, Seth took all of the food."

"What a little freak."

"Yeah. So, why did you call?"

"Can't I just call my best friend?" Patrick gave the phone his best teasing grin. Teasing Cam was easier in person, but over the years Patrick had become quite good at doing it over the phone.

"No, and wipe that damn smirk off of your face."

"How do you know that I'm smirking?"

"That tone has a smirk that goes with it. What do you want?"

"I just want to know how your date went, Shutterbug."

"It was amazing. He took me to my favorite restaurant."

72 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

Patrick frowned. "That was it? Dinner?"

"Dinner and sex," Cam replied. "Really good sex."

Patrick laughed, causing several of the officers outside to turn and look at him. "Since when did you start putting out on the first date? That's more my speed."

"Since it was Jeremy." The wistful tone in Cam's voice made Patrick roll his eyes. "Jeremy is amazing."

"If you start gushing, I'm going to hang up."

"Spoilsport."

"Slut."

"Whore."

"I'll talk to you later, Shutterbug."

"Bye."

Patrick slipped his phone back into his pocket. So, his Shutterbug was getting laid. Good for him. Smiling to himself, Patrick headed back to work. He had bad guys to catch.

Chapter Eight

JEREMY spent most of the morning with his head in the clouds. He treated all of his patients with the care they deserved, but he just couldn't get the smile off of his face. The fact that he could smell Cam on the shirt that he was wearing didn't help his concentration. A few of the pet owners had commented on it. Jeremy had let it slide most of the time, just smiling at them, but a few he told that he'd had a date the night before. As the people he told were elderly women, his announcement was met with some giggling, and remarks that it was good for a man his age to get out. One outspoken woman had even exclaimed "It's about damn time!" All in all, Jeremy was having a perfect day.

Putting some papers away in his office, Jeremy glanced at the clock. It was almost one. Feeling the smile that had never really left his face all morning widen, Jeremy practically skipped out of his office. Cam would be there soon. He stepped into the waiting room to see Tammy sitting behind the desk.

"Tammy, what are you still doing here? I thought you were going to go home early?" he asked. Tammy had been feeling off all morning and with her so close to her due date Jeremy wanted her to go home and rest. He wasn't going to keep a pregnant woman in his office when she didn't feel good, even if she was one of the best assistants he had ever had.

"I'm going. I just thought that I'd wait and let Cam in before I leave. I know that you like to check on the animals before lunch and I didn't want you to worry about him not being able to get in."

"Thanks, Tammy."

"You're welcome. Now head on back there so you can go to lunch," Tammy ordered. Jeremy smiled his thanks once more then headed into the kennels. He was so excited that he was practically walking on air.

Everything was as expected when he got to the back. Emily and Melanie were checking on all of the animals, making sure that they all had food and water. Since she was so well-behaved, they let Hershey roam free in the back when someone was back there to make sure that nothing happened to her. The last thing they wanted was to have a table fall on the sweet dog. Jeremy knelt to pet her and was treated to the same attention that Emily usually got. For a moment the dog looked excited and then she became sad once more. It was incredibly confusing.

"Everything going okay? No complications?"

"Everything is fine, Doc. You don't have to worry. You can go and have fun on your lunch date. I think Emily and I can take care of the animals while you're gone for an hour," Melanie teased. She looked up from where she had been sorting dog food into dishes and flashed Jeremy a smile that said she knew he had wicked thoughts in his mind. Jeremy actually felt himself blushing.

"Hello? Anyone back here?" Cam called. He came walking into the kennels and Jeremy forgot to breathe.

Cam was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, nothing to get excited about, but it was the vivid bite mark visible on his neck that had Jeremy fighting for air. Seeing the evidence of their passion from the night before on Cam's pale neck made Jeremy want to march right over and give him a matching one on the other side of his neck. The fire he saw in Cam's eyes caused blood to rush south. Jeremy could feel himself start to harden beneath his jeans. He was saved further embarrassment by the actions of someone else.

The moment that Cam had walked into the kennel, Hershey had walked over and sniffed him, like she did to everybody. However, this

time was different. Her tail started to wag and she sat back to paw at Cam's pant leg.

"Well, hello there. Aren't you a pretty girl," Cam remarked. He knelt down to pet her and she started to lick his cheek. Cam laughed and continued to play with her. "She's so friendly. She's not sick, is she?"

Jeremy smiled at the concern in his lover's voice. "No, she's not sick. She's just here until she finds a new home."

"Why does she need a new home?" Cam glanced up briefly to look at Jeremy before he turned his attention back to the seemingly lovesick dog that had managed to crawl into his lap.

"Her last owner moved and couldn't take her. We've been trying to find someone to take her for the last few weeks, but she hasn't responded to anyone. At least not until you showed up."

"Gee, Doc. Looks like you might have some competition," Melanie teased

"No one wants to hear your opinions," Jeremy remarked. Melanie simply laughed and stuck her tongue out at him.

Jeremy knelt next to Cam on the floor. Not being able to resist any longer, he leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips. When he pulled away, a tongue licked his face. Jeremy laughed and scratched the head of the dog who had just kissed him. She seemed almost blissfully happy.

"She really needs a new home?"

"Yeah. She can't stay here forever."

"Can I take her?"

Jeremy pulled away slightly to get a better look at his lover. "You really want to?"

"I've got a house and a huge yard. Plus, I've always wanted a dog." Cam smiled and rubbed Hershey's belly when she flopped over on the floor in front of him. "Is she okay with cats? I don't want her to eat Puddles"

Jeremy laughed. "She's fine with cats. You have nothing to worry about. Although, I'm pretty sure that Puddles can handle herself."

"Good." Cam gave Hershey one more scratch then got to his feet. "I'll fill out whatever paperwork you need me to when we get back from lunch. What's her name?"

"Hershey."

"Well, Hershey, I'll see you in an hour." Cam scratched her head then held his hand out for Jeremy. Jeremy reached out and laced their fingers together. He tugged his lover's hand and pulled them out of the kennel.

They walked out of the back holding hands. When they reached the waiting room, Tammy was gone and had locked the door when she left. Jeremy let go of Cam just long enough to open the door. Grasping his hand once again, he pulled Cam out of the clinic and onto the sidewalk. Jeremy made sure that the "out to lunch" sign was in place and locked the door. Once satisfied that everything would be fine while he was gone, he turned and gave Cam a smile.

"So, whose car are we taking?"

"Maude's isn't that far from here. I thought we could walk."

"I'd like that." Jeremy bumped his shoulder against Cam's and started to walk down the sidewalk toward the diner.

It was one of those beautiful summer days. The sun was bright in a cloudless sky. There was enough of a breeze that the day wasn't too hot to walk outside. There were many people out enjoying a chance to be in the sun. As they walked they saw people in suits eating on benches in front of their office buildings. It was one of those days that everyone wanted to be outside. They reached Maude's and stepped inside.

"Well, this is a surprise. I don't usually see you boys in here at this time of the day," Betty remarked. She smiled and motioned them to a booth.

Pushing Cam in front of him, Jeremy slid into one side of the booth. "It's always nice to see you, Betty."

"I like it when you boys are here." Betty focused her eyes on Cam. "Cameron honey, you are hardly ever here for lunch. I don't know what to bring you."

"How about a club house sandwich with fries and coleslaw?"

"Coming right up." She turned her sharp eyes back to Jeremy. "The usual for you, Jeremy?"

"Yes please, Betty."

"Well all right. I'll be back with your food in a bit." Betty smiled at them and headed to the counter. Once she was out of sight, Jeremy leaned his chin on his hand and gazed at Cam. He let the heat he felt in Cam's presence fill his eyes.

"What are you looking at?"

"The rather vivid love bite on your neck." Jeremy smiled as a pretty flush colored Cam's cheeks. "You know, I find you unbearably sexy when you blush."

"Really?" The uncertainty was back in Cam's voice and he was biting his lower lip. The nervousness that Jeremy could see in his lover's eyes broke his heart. He hated seeing Cam so unsure of himself.

"Baby, what did he do to you?" Jeremy reached across the table and put a hand on Cam's cheek. He knew for a fact that Cam's shy behavior didn't start until after he had been seeing Paul.

Cam lifted his own hand and placed it over Jeremy's. "I don't like to talk about it."

"Have you ever talked about it at all? To anyone?" Jeremy dropped his hand from Cam's cheek, but kept their hands linked together. From the haunted look in Cam's eyes, Jeremy could tell that Cam would need support if he was ever going to talk about it.

"No," Cam admitted. He sighed and ran his free hand over his face. "This isn't exactly something that I feel comfortable talking about at all, let alone in a diner."

"Here you go, boys," Betty announced. She placed their food along with two large glasses of lemonade on the table in front of them. "You boys eat up. I want these plates empty. If you empty them, I'll bring you pie."

"Thanks, Betty. I think we'll give that a try. You know how much we all love your pie," Jeremy replied. Betty laughed and gave his cheek a pat. She headed over to the other customers with her customary good humor and smile in place. Jeremy turned his attention back to Cam and

noticed that the other man had started to eat while he was distracted. Giving the hand that he still held a squeeze; Jeremy released it and let Cam eat.

Jeremy turned his attention to the food in front of him. As always, he felt like salivating at the sight of the ham and Swiss sandwich in front of him. He loved Betty's food and the ham and Swiss was his favorite. They ate in silence for a few minutes, both enjoying the delicious food. Jeremy slid his foot across the space between them and tapped Cam's calf. Startled, Cam looked up. Jeremy smiled and did it again.

"What are you doing?"

"Saying hi."

"With your foot?"

"I was chewing," Jeremy replied. He took another bite of his sandwich and slid his foot up Cam's calf once more. When he hit the back of his knee, Cam's jerked slightly.

"That is not fair."

Jeremy swallowed. "I have no idea what you mean."

"You're playing with my leg while I'm trying to eat. You're going to make me choke on my food."

"Do you want me to stop?" Jeremy stopped moving his foot, but left it resting behind Cam's knee.

"No." Cam's answer brought with it another one of those blushes that Jeremy loved to see.

"Then eat your lunch, sweetheart. If we finish our lunch, Betty said that she would bring us pie." Jeremy smiled and started eating his food again. As he ate, he continued to run his foot up and down Cam's legs. His actions helped lessen the tension that Jeremy's question about Paul had caused. Cam started smiling around the bites of food that he was eating. When Jeremy felt Cam's foot on his leg, he almost choked on the bite of sandwich he had just taken. He grabbed his lemonade to help wash it down his throat while Cam grinned at him.

"See, it is distracting while you are trying to eat."

"You can distract me any time you want to, sweetheart. Trust me, I don't mind." Jeremy pushed his empty plate to the middle of the table. He reached across the table and stole a fry from Cam's plate.

"Hey, that was mine!"

"I ate all of mine."

"Well, that's just too bad for you." Cam pulled his plate farther away from Jeremy's long arms. He gave Jeremy a glare. Well, at least he tried to. There was too much amusement in his eyes for it to work.

Jeremy leaned back and watched as Cam finished his lunch. He'd noticed on their date the night before that he really enjoyed watching Cam eat. Cam picked up the last fry from his plate and held it out to Jeremy. Jeremy grasped his wrist and leaned forward. He slowly took the fry with his mouth, making sure that his lips brushed Cam's fingers. Cam inhaled sharply as Jeremy licked his fingers. Jeremy pulled away with the fry in his mouth feeling very pleased with himself. He liked putting that dazed look in Cam's baby blues.

"Well, I see you boys finished off your food. I'll take these plates away and bring you some pie. Blueberry okay? I know that you like the key lime, Jeremy, but we're all out." Betty collected their plates and left them alone once more.

"Key lime?"

"It's my favorite," Jeremy replied. He sipped his lemonade then reached out to grab Cam's hand once more.

"I'll have to remember that."

Jeremy arched an inquisitive brow. "Why?"

"Well, someone has a birthday next Saturday."

"You remember when my birthday is?"

"Of course I do," Cam replied. He raised Jeremy's hands to his lips and pressed a kiss to the back. "It's a big one this year. You're turning thirty."

"Yes, I am. Not sure how I feel about turning thirty."

"I'm okay with it."

"I'm glad one of us is," Jeremy replied. When Cam pressed another kiss to his hand, he twisted his fingers so he could run them over the smooth cheek. Jeremy smiled softly and ran his thumb across Cam's lips. "I like this."

"You like what?"

"Us eating together. I could get used to spending my lunches with you."

"So could I." Ignoring everyone else in the restaurant, Cam pulled Jeremy's thumb into his mouth and gave it a quick bite.

"Save it for later, boys," Betty remarked with a smile. "The only thing anyone should be eating in my diner is my amazing food. You want to start nibbling on each other, you're going to make people jealous. I cannot offer a Jeremy sandwich on my menu."

Both Cam and Jeremy turned bright red as Betty dropped off their pie and left. To cover their embarrassment, they both started to eat the pie. Jeremy moaned as the fresh taste of blueberries exploded over his tongue. Betty's pies always tasted so good. As the last crumb of pie disappeared from their plates, Betty appeared with their bill. Cam grabbed it before Jeremy had a chance to look at it.

"What are you doing?"

"You paid for dinner last night, Bright Eyes. Let me pay for lunch." Cam stood and walked over to where Betty was standing at the register. Jeremy watched from the booth as Cam chatted with Betty and paid their bill. He saw Betty ask him a question, which Cam answered with a glance at Jeremy, a blush, and a nod. Jeremy felt warmth in his chest. It seemed as though Cam had just admitted that they were on a date.

Cam came back to the table and held his hand out with a warm smile. "Ready to go?"

"No more pie?"

"No more pie; the pie is all gone. Come on, you. Let's get you back to work." Cam grasped Jeremy's hand and pulled him to his feet. Jeremy let the tug on his hand pull him much farther into Cam's personal space than Cam had been expecting. Jeremy smiled down into the blue eyes as their chests pressed together. Cam's eyes were starting to darken.

"Sure you want to leave?"

"Jeremy, this is one of my favorite places to eat. Please do not make me molest you in Maude's."

"Sorry." Jeremy pulled away, but ran his fingers down Cam's chest.

"No you're not." Cam grinned at him. "Come on, Bright Eyes. Let's get moving."

Jeremy laced his fingers through Cam's and allowed the smaller man to pull him out of the diner. It was still a beautiful day outside, but most of the people that they had seen earlier were missing. Jeremy guessed that they had probably gone back to work. He enjoyed walking hand in hand with Cam. Cam's hand felt as if it belonged in his. Jeremy's happy floating feeling from earlier in the day was back.

"Cam?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you sure that you want to take Hershey? Getting a dog is a big decision, for you and the dog. She already seems to really like you and I don't want her to end up hurt again."

"I'm sure. Hershey is literally the dog I've always wanted. I'm planning on taking her home after I drop you off."

Jeremy turned and pulled Cam into his arms. "How about you take me home instead?"

"Tempting," Cam replied, looping his arms around Jeremy's waist. "I just don't think that Hershey will be able to do your job for you."

"Hmm. Very true." Jeremy dipped his head and pressed his lips to Cam's. When Cam let out a soft moan, Jeremy pressed his tongue into the willing mouth. He ran one hand up and down Cam's back as they kissed. He loved the feel of Cam in his arms. They broke apart only when the need to breathe became overwhelming.

"Damn, Jeremy. The things you do to me."

"Good things?"

"Very. Come on; time to get you to work and I want to go home and play with my new dog." Cam laced his fingers through Jeremy's once again and pulled him the rest of the way to the clinic.

Hands linked together, Jeremy let the feeling of rightness settle over him. Even though he was still concerned about whatever it was that Cam was refusing to tell him, he was deliriously happy. Jeremy knew that eventually Cam would tell him why he was nervous all of the time. He just had to wait. There was nothing Cam could say that would make him change his mind. Jeremy wasn't going anywhere.

Chapter Nine

CAM pulled his truck to a smooth stop in the driveway. Hershey was sitting quietly on the passenger seat. The massive amount of stuff he had purchased for her was in the bed of the pickup. Cam turned to his right and scratched her ears. He laughed as she wagged her tail and licked his check.

"Well, we're here. Ready to see your new home?" Not expecting to get an answer from a dog, Cam was surprised when she gave a bark and wagged her tail. Laughing, Cam got out of the truck and held the door open until Hershey jumped down.

Cam had been surprised at how well-trained she was. She responded to an amazing array of verbal commands, and when she was outside without a leash, she didn't stray far from Cam's side. Hershey stayed right by his leg as she surveyed the area around her new home. Cam had just closed the cab door when he heard her give a soft bark. He looked up to see Kennedy sitting on his front steps.

"What is that?"

"A dog. I thought you'd passed the first grade, D."

"No one likes a smartass, jackass." Kennedy got off of the steps and walked over to the pair. She knelt in front of Hershey and held out her hand to the dog's nose. Hershey sniffed her and gave a small wag of her tail. Kennedy scratched her ears and the small wag got bigger. "What's her name?"

"Hershey."

"I like her. Where did you get her?"

"Jeremy had her at the clinic. Her owner moved and couldn't take her so Jeremy was keeping her there until he found a home for her."

"And that home is your home?"

"Problem?"

"No. I just want to be here when Diane sees her for the first time," Kennedy replied. There was a wicked twinkle in her eyes. Every time she got that look, they got in some type of trouble. The last time they had ended up handcuffed to a police car. Patrick had not been happy. The handcuffs had been his.

"Stop giving me that look."

"What look?"

"That shit-eating look you give me when you want me to do something that I know will get us in a whole shitload of trouble." Cam gave her a small glare. "You're as bad as Patrick."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Bullshit." Cam snapped his fingers and Hershey followed him as he headed to the back of the truck to get his stuff. "All I want to do is go inside and get to know my new dog."

"I promise I'm not up to anything, Cameron," Kennedy announced. Cam turned to see her nervously pulling on a strand of blue hair. "I just don't really want to go home to my empty apartment. I don't want to be alone right now."

Cam sighed. "Fine. Give me a hand with this stuff."

"Holy fucking shit, Cam. What did you do? Buy out the entire pet store?"

"Shut up and help me," Cam snapped. He grabbed some stuff and started walking to the house. Hershey stayed at his side and Kennedy was right behind him. He unlocked the door and they put the first load of stuff inside. With the two of them, it only took two trips. Maybe Kennedy had a point about the amount of stuff he had bought.

Puddles appeared while they were putting Hershey's stuff away. She walked over to the dog and looked up. Hershey crouched until she was level with the cat. Puddles eyed her for a moment and then licked the dog's nose. It seemed as though the cat had given her seal of approval.

Once they had put everything away, Cam grabbed two beers out of the fridge and flopped onto the couch with Kennedy. "So, what's on your mind?"

"Hmm?"

"Why are you here, D?"

"I already told you. I don't want to be alone."

"That's part of it. Are you going to tell me the rest?"

"Are you okay?" she asked. Kennedy put her beer on the coffee table and shifted so she was facing Cam. Her eyes were serious.

"What?"

"I want to know if you're okay. I'm asking right now because I waited too long last time. By the time I asked then, you were very much not okay."

Cam felt the beginnings of panic in his chest. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"No, you probably don't, especially considering you never told me about it. I watched you pull in on yourself for months and you always said that you were fine. This time I want the truth. You aren't the type to jump into bed on the first date, Cameron. Now tell me. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Jeremy wouldn't hurt me."

"That's what you said when I asked about Paul."

"Don't you dare compare Jeremy to Paul!" Cam slammed his beer onto the table. "Jeremy is nothing like Paul."

"How would I know? You never talk about Paul."

"You know Jeremy, Kennedy. Hell, the two of you were never close, but when I said that one of my best friends was here he remembered your name and that you were the skinny blonde girl from

high school that hung out with me and Patrick. Paul couldn't even remember your name. He kept calling you Kim."

"Cameron, you need to talk about this."

"Why? I finally feel normal again. Why do you need to bring this up?" Cam got off of the couch and started to pace in front of the table. He picked up his beer and continued to drink.

"You need to talk about it or it will just get in the way of your new relationship."

"Where is this coming from?" Cam turned and faced Kennedy. Anger and pain were visible in his eyes as he looked at his best friend. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"I just want you to be happy."

"So you bring all of this back up? That's supposed to make me happy? I spent seven months after Paul left without being able to let anyone touch me, including you, my mother, and Patrick. I mean, God, I wouldn't let Patrick touch me! Patrick! Now that I can finally let someone touch me without fear you want me to talk about all the shit that happened to me?"

Kennedy jumped to her feet as well. "It's when you say things like this that makes me worried. I don't want you to end up in the same type of relationship that hurt you so badly."

"Did you know that Paul wouldn't touch me in public? Jeremy danced with me at his friend's wedding. He made *six* reservations last night because he wanted to make sure that he took me to a restaurant that I liked. Jeremy cares about me."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because he doesn't hurt me when we have sex!" The minute the words were out of his mouth, Cam clapped a hand to his mouth. Unfortunately, the hand he slapped over his mouth was the one that had been holding the beer. The bottle shattered on the floor.

Kennedy moved toward him. "Cam...."

"Don't touch me!" Cam backed away from her until his back hit the wall.

"Cam, why didn't you say anything?"

"Because I don't like thinking about it! I just want to pretend that none of it ever happened, but I can't do that when you keep bringing it up. Why couldn't you handle this more like Jeremy? He knows that there is something wrong, but he's willing to wait for me to be ready to tell him. Or even the way that Patrick handled it. Hell, I never told him, but he probably know everything, and he's never pushed me to say anything."

```
"Cam, I—"
"Just get out."
"But—"
```

"Just get out!" Cam could hear his voice cracking. He didn't want to cry in front of Kennedy. All he wanted was to be alone.

"I'm going to call you later," Kennedy stated. Making sure not to get any closer to Cam, she left the room. Once Cam heard the front door close, he slid down the wall. He curled his arms around his knees as the tears started to fall. He felt a nudge to his cheek and looked up.

Hershey was sitting next to him. She moved closer and licked his cheek. Cam managed to give her a weak smile before he put an arm around her. Hershey settled against his side and Cam rested his head back on his knees. With his new dog pressed against his side giving him whatever comfort that she could, Cam closed his eyes and let the tears he had been holding in fall.

JEREMY was sitting on his couch watching TV. The rest of his afternoon had gone by without any problems. After his lunch with Cam he had ended up walking on air again. He liked the way that Cam made him feel and he was really starting to enjoy having the younger man in his life. Jeremy knew that Cam had some things in his past that he needed to get over, but Jeremy was willing to wait until he was ready to tell him. Rushing things tended to make them worse.

Jeremy was laughing at the movie he was watching when the phone rang. He reached over and picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

```
"Jeremy?"
```

"Baby, what's wrong?" Jeremy had heard the hesitant, hurt note to Cam's voice and he immediately became concerned.

"Nothing. I just.... I just needed to hear your voice."

"Do you need me to come over? I can be there in fifteen minutes."

"No, I'm fine. I don't need you to..." There were hushed voices as Cam trailed off. What sounded like a scuffle came over the line.

"Dr. Montgomery?"

"Emily? What's going on?"

"He's lying. He looks like crap and I don't think he's eaten anything since he went to lunch with you."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"Thank you."

"I'm on my way," Jeremy replied. He hung up the phone and got to his feet. Jeremy quickly ran into his room and tossed some clothes into an overnight bag. While he didn't mind wearing clothes that smelled like Cam when he was at work, Jeremy decided that he should probably have his own clothes, if only to help his concentration. Smelling Cam all day caused him to daydream more than usual.

Doing a quick once-over to make sure that he had everything he needed, Jeremy grabbed his keys and dashed out of the house. He jumped into his car and raced to Cam's house. He made the drive faster than legally possible, but he really didn't care. All he cared about was getting to Cam. He hadn't liked the sound of Emily's voice when she had taken the phone from Cam. Jeremy parked behind Cam's truck and hopped out of the car. He had just reached the door when Emily pulled it open.

"I'm glad you're here."

"How is he?" Jeremy walked in the door that Emily held open for him and slipped off his shoes.

"He got off of the floor."

"He was on the floor?"

"Yeah"

"Do you know what upset him?"

"No. He won't talk about it," Emily replied. She was biting her lip in the same nervous gesture that Cam had. "He's starting to worry me. I made him some dinner and left it in the kitchen. It's just some different salads and cold cuts, nothing heavy, and it'll keep."

"I'll see if I can get him to eat it."

"I put it in the fridge."

"I'll take care of him," Jeremy stated. He gave her hand a soft squeeze then stepped into the living room.

Cam was curled up in one corner of the couch. He was wearing the same clothes he had been earlier, but he looked decidedly rumpled. His hair was sticking up in odd angles. When he looked up at Jeremy, his eyes were all red and puffy.

"Oh, sweetheart." Jeremy sat next to him on the couch and pulled Cam into his arms. Cam tensed for a moment before he relaxed into Jeremy's arms. Jeremy ran his hand over Cam's back. "Are you okay?"

"Not really."

"Can you tell me about it?"

"I got in a fight with Kennedy."

"Can you tell me what the fight was about?"

"About the stuff I don't want to talk about."

"Still not ready to talk about it?" Jeremy shifted slightly and brought Cam more completely into his arms. He tucked the brown head under his chin.

"No. I didn't want to talk about it with Kennedy either, but she just kept pushing." Cam was starting to sniffle once more. He fisted his hands in the material of Jeremy's shirt and pulled himself farther into Jeremy's embrace.

Jeremy ran his hands over Cam's back and pressed soft kisses to his hair. He kept up the soothing gesture as he felt the wet heat of tears hit his chest. Jeremy murmured words of comfort into the ears of the man in his arms. After a few moments, the tension in Cam's body left. He sighed and relaxed his grip on Jeremy's shirt.

"Are you feeling better, baby?"

"A bit."

"Do you want something to eat? Emily left you some dinner in the fridge."

"I'm not really hungry. What did she leave me?"

"Salads and cold cuts."

"That should keep until tomorrow. What I really want to do is to have a shower and go to bed."

"Then let's go." Jeremy let go of Cam and prepared to stand. Cam didn't move away from his chest. "Baby, you okay?"

"I'm not really up for anything else." Cam clutched at his shirt and Jeremy could feel him biting his lip against his chest.

"Oh, baby," Jeremy murmured. He pressed a gentle kiss to the top of his head. "I didn't come here for sex. I came here because I was worried about you. If all you want to do is have a shower and go to bed then that's what we'll do."

"Really?"

"Really. Now get up. It's time for you to go and have a nice, hot shower." Jeremy slid his hands down to Cam's waist and gave him a gentle push. When Cam climbed to his feet, Jeremy smiled up at him. Jeremy stood and laced his fingers with Cam's. Cam leaned against his side for a moment.

"Is everything okay in here?" Emily asked. She was standing in the doorway and looking at them. Not only did she bite her lip when she was nervous like her uncle, she actually bit it in the same spot. It seemed to be a family trait.

"Yeah, everything is okay," Jeremy replied. "Your uncle and I are going to go to bed. He's had a long day."

"Emily."

"Yes, Uncle Cam?"

"Thank you for taking the phone away from me and telling Jeremy to come here. This was exactly what I needed."

A bright smile crossed Emily's face. "You're welcome. I'll let you two get ready for bed. I'll try not to make too much noise."

"Big plans for the evening?"

"I've got some new recipes that I want to try. Goodnight." Emily gave them a wave and headed back into the kitchen.

"Recipes?" Jeremy pulled him close and wrapped an arm around his waist.

"Emily likes to cook. Ready to go?"

"After you, sweetheart." Cam tugged on their laced fingers and headed to the stairs. When they got to the bedroom he paused and gave Jeremy another one of his nervous looks.

Jeremy pulled the hand he was holding to his lips and pressed a kiss there. "Go have your shower, baby. I'm just going to get ready for bed."

"Make yourself at home."

"I will." Jeremy leaned down and placed a gentle kiss to Cam's lips. He ran his thumb down Cam's cheek and managed to coax a smile from Cam's lips.

Jeremy watched as Cam pulled some clothes out of a drawer and headed into the bathroom. When he heard the shower turn on, Jeremy sat on the bed with a sigh. He wasn't sure if he wanted to kill Kennedy, or thank her. He knew that Cam needed to talk about what had him so scared, which is why he wanted to thank Kennedy. Seeing the pain that had taken over Cam's blue eyes made him want to strangle her. He was starting to think that he should call Patrick. He had a feeling that the detective knew more than anyone thought he did.

Jeremy got off of the bed and grabbed his bag. Thankfully he had remembered to bring it with him when he and Cam had gone upstairs. He pulled out a pair of flannel pajama bottoms and changed into them while Cam was showering. Jeremy put his bag by the foot of the bed, turned down the covers, and turned off all of the lights except the lamp by the bed. He crawled onto the bed and rested against the pillows. He sighed happily. Cam's bed was very comfortable.

The lights in the bathroom shut off and Cam stepped into the room. He was wearing a pair of pajama bottoms and a T-shirt. Cam ran a hand through his damp hair and glanced around the room. His eyes took in everything that Jeremy had done to get the room ready. When his eyes landed on Jeremy, he smiled.

"There's that smile that I like."

"You sure that you don't mind?"

"Just get in here so we can go to sleep," Jeremy commanded. He held the covers back for his lover. Cam turned off the bedside lamp as he crawled into the bed. Jeremy pulled the covers up and wrapped his arms around Cam. When he had his lover safely tucked in his arms, he pressed a soft kiss to the back of his head. "Go to sleep, baby."

"Thank you for this, Jeremy."

"It's not a problem, baby. I like going to sleep with you in my arms."

"Goodnight, Jeremy."

"Goodnight, sweetheart." Jeremy pressed another kiss to his neck and settled into the bed. Within moments, Cam had drifted to sleep. Jeremy pulled him closer and breathed in his scent. He was just starting to settle into the comfort that preceded sleep when he heard a noise.

Jeremy looked at the foot of the bed and saw that Hershey was standing on the trunk that sat there, looking at him. He patted the covers and the dog crawled onto the king-sized bed and settled herself on the other side of Cam. Jeremy reached over his lover and scratched her ear. Hershey wagged her tail softly then settled in to sleep. Finally able to settle himself, Jeremy drifted to sleep vowing to do anything in his power to make Cam happy.

Chapter Ten

JEREMY drove to Cam's feeling slightly depressed. It was his birthday. He was thirty. It was depressing. Cam had said that he was going to take him out for a birthday lunch, but that he had something he wanted to show him before they left. Jeremy was under orders to go straight to the backyard when he got to the house. Knowing the way that Cam had been spoiling Hershey, what he wanted to show Jeremy was most likely something else he had purchased for the dog. That dog was getting treated better than some people treated their children.

Jeremy pulled into the driveway and parked his car. For some bizarre reason, he liked seeing his car parked behind Cam's truck. He got the same feeling when he saw Cam's truck parked next to his car in the parking lot at his apartment building. Jeremy shook his head at his own odd thought and climbed out of his car. He was fairly certain that if he told Cam about his weird vehicle thoughts his lover would think he was crazy.

Jeremy walked around to the gate at the side of the house. He pulled it open and stepped into Cam's backyard. "Cam, are you out here?"

"Back here, Jeremy!" Cam called. Jeremy latched the gate behind him before moving farther into the yard. He didn't want to leave the gate open in case Hershey was in the yard. Jeremy rounded the corner into the main part of the yard and froze in shock.

"SURPRISE!"

All of his friends were standing in the yard. There were balloons, streamers, and a banner proclaiming "Happy Birthday, Jeremy" in large, neon-green letters. The large yard held several picnic tables and one long table set up by the grill. Everyone was clapping at his arrival. Cam stepped away from the crowd and moved over to Jeremy. Jeremy simply watched him come over.

"Jeremy? You okay, Bright Eyes?"

"What is this?"

"It's a surprise party. Happy birthday." Cam bit his lip. "Don't you like it?"

"I love it." Jeremy pulled Cam into his arms and kissed him. "Thank you."

"Come on; time to enjoy your party." Cam laced their fingers together and pulled him over to the guests.

Jeremy spent the next several hours being wished a happy birthday by all of his friends that were in the city. Tammy was there with her husband Karl, and Pamela, the new baby. Jeremy hadn't had a chance to go and see them at the hospital, so it was a special treat to see her. He even got a chance to hold the baby, which was a tad scary. He'd never held a baby before. Holding an infant was a lot different from holding a squirming animal. Jeremy had been afraid that he would drop her.

Finally managing to free himself from the various guests, not that he minded that they were there, Jeremy made his way to the table full of food. He couldn't believe the sheer amount of food that was sitting on the table. All of his favorite foods were there. Jeremy was starting to realize the reason behind some of the odd food-based questions that Cam had been asking him. What he still couldn't figure out was how Cam had known who to invite.

"See anything you like?"

Jeremy smiled as strong arms slid around his waist. "There is you."

"You can't see me. I'm behind you."

Jeremy turned in Cam's arms and smiled into the laughing blue eyes. "Now I can. Baby, how did you pull this off? All of my friends are here. You haven't even officially met some of these people yet."

"I had Melanie photocopy your address book."

"Remind me to make her life a living hell for the next week."

"Why? Don't you like your party?"

"I love my party."

"Then why do you want to torment Melanie?"

"It's my right as her boss. She shouldn't go through her boss's personal belongings," Jeremy stated. He gave Cam a triumphant smile. He was pretty pleased with his logic.

"That would sound better if you didn't make her address all of your Christmas cards every year."

Jeremy's eyes widened in astonishment. "How the hell do you know that?"

"Melanie."

"Good point." Jeremy pulled Cam close and tucked the shorter man's head under his chin. "This is amazing, baby. It really is."

"Glad you like it. Now get yourself some food. I'm going to go check on everybody else." Cam pulled out of his arms and gave him a kiss. After giving Jeremy's hand a squeeze, he headed back into the crowd.

Turning back to the food, Jeremy grabbed a plate. His mouth was watering at the choices available to him. He didn't know where to start. Jeremy just started piling things onto the plate that he was holding. He'd managed to fill half of the plate when he felt a hand come to rest on his elbow.

"Having trouble picking out what you want to eat?" Diane asked. She was looking at the pile of food on his plate with a smile on her face.

"It all just looks so good." Jeremy turned so he was facing her. "Do you know who made all of this food?"

"I did some of the cooking, but Emily did the bulk of it."

"Emily?"

"She loves to cook." Diane shook her head with a smile. "I have no idea where that girl gets her cooking talent. My daughter can barely make toast."

"How is Amanda? I don't think I've seen her around here lately."

A dark look came over Diane's face. "My daughter doesn't visit often. Or at all. She's a bit of a spoiled brat, actually."

"I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry about. This is not why I came over here in the first place. I want you to come with me."

"But my food."

"Bring it with you." Diane laughed as she turned and headed for the house. "Boys and food. After raising Cameron and Patrick, I should know better than to try and take a boy away from food."

"Um, I'm not a boy. I'm thirty."

Diane shot him an amused glance over her shoulder. "You're still a boy."

Jeremy laughed as he followed Diane into Cam's house. He was munching on the food that he had piled on his plate while he walked. The food was good. Very good. He was going to have to talk to Emily about her cooking skills. Maybe he could get her to make lunches for him. It would save him money on takeout and the stuff on his plate tasted better than most of the food he had delivered to him at the clinic.

Diane pulled him into the living room. Taking his arm, she gently lowered him onto the couch. "You just sit right here."

"Mrs. Walker, what's going on?"

"Jeremy, dear, how many times do I have to ask you to call me Diane?"

"Sorry. I keep forgetting." Jeremy gave her a sheepish smile. He leaned forward and put his plate of food on the coffee table. Since Hershey was outside, he didn't have to worry about her running in and taking food off of the plate. "So, what is it that you wanted to see me about?"

"I have something for you." She picked a box up off of the chair and handed it to him. "Happy birthday."

Jeremy took the box in surprise. He hadn't expected a birthday present from Diane. He'd barely expected to get one from Cam. Jeremy's hands shook as he undid the ribbon that held the box closed. He lifted the lid and pulled away the tissue paper inside to reveal a beautiful quilt done in varying shades of blue, green, and brown with gray accents. Jeremy's fingers trembled as he touched the material. "Diane, this is beautiful"

"That pattern is one that my grandmother taught me. I gave one to both Amanda and Cameron on their first birthdays and I also made one for Emily. I know this isn't your first birthday, but it is your first birthday as one of our family. Happy birthday, Jeremy." Diane leaned over and kissed his cheek. Giving him a pat, she walked out of the room.

Jeremy watched her leave then turned his attention back to the quilt. He had never been given something that had been made for him before. He could feel the burn of tears in his eyes. Running his fingers over the soft fabric of the quilt, he raised his free hands and wiped his eyes. Hearing footsteps, he looked up to see Cam stepping into the room.

"Hey, Bright Eyes." Cam had only made it a few steps into the room when the phone rang. He turned and headed into the kitchen, where the closest phone was.

Since Cam was no longer in the room, Jeremy turned his attention to his present again. He put both hands in the box and grasped the quilt. It was thick and soft. He couldn't wait to put it on his bed. Although July would probably be a bad time to put a quilt on the bed. Of course he could always turn up the air-conditioning.

"Well, that was odd." Cam came in and sat next to him on the couch.

"What was?"

"There was no one on the phone. Well, no, that's not true. Someone breathed at me for a second then hung up." Cam snuggled up next to him. "So, what are you doing in here when your party is going on outside?"

"Your mom gave me a present."

"Really? What did you get?"

"This." Jeremy handed him the box. Once Cam was holding it, Jeremy slid an arm around his shoulder, and pulled him close.

"Wow, she gave you one of the family quilts. Must mean that she likes you."

"Hope so," Jeremy replied. He took the box back from Cam and pressed a kiss to his cheek. "Come on; there's a party going on outside. I don't want to miss any more of the food."

Cam laughed as he got off of the couch. "You and food. I'll have to tell Emily how much you liked it."

Laughing together, the two of them left the living room and headed back to the party. Things were in full swing. Everyone was laughing and having a good time. Jeremy had another two plates of food. He was thinking about getting a fourth when he felt a small tug on his arm. He looked down to see Emily standing there.

"Were you going back for more food?"

"I was thinking about it. Why?"

"I have something for you," Emily stated. She handed him what she was holding in her hands. "I heard this was your favorite."

Jeremy looked down and saw that he was now holding a pie in his hand. A key lime pie. A key lime pie with a lit candle in the middle of it.

"Happy birthday, Jeremy." Emily handed him a fork and turned and walked away, ponytail bobbing with her movement.

"What have you got there?" Cam rested his head against Jeremy's shoulder and slid an arm around his waist.

"Back off, sweetheart. This is mine." Jeremy kissed his cheek, blew out the candle, and carried his pie and the fork to the porch. He settled on one of the steps and started to eat. Jeremy moaned as the first bite of the pie hit his tongue. It was amazing. Emily was an amazing cook.

"You know, if you eat that entire pie it's just going to go straight to your ass," a voice commented behind him.

Jeremy turned around and he felt a smile cross his face. Standing on the porch behind him was Ben Jacobs. He was tall with brown hair, brown eyes, and a friendly smile. He was also Jeremy's best friend. At thirty-two, he was two years older than Jeremy, but they had been in the same year in high school due to the two years of elementary school Ben had missed due to meningitis.

"Ben!" Jeremy put his pie down and jumped up to give him a hug. "What are you doing here?"

"I heard there was a party in honor of my best friend turning thirty. Where else would I be?" Ben pointed at the steps and then sat down. Jeremy settled beside him and picked up the pie again. Ben bumped shoulders with him and stole some filling from the pie.

"Hey, my pie!"

"Damn, this is good pie. Who made this?"

"Emily." Jeremy pointed her fork in her direction.

"She's Amanda's kid, right?"

"Yeah."

"So, where's Cam? I haven't seen him in years."

"Over there."

"Damn, he filled out. He any good in the sack?"

"Ben!" Jeremy turned and smacked his best friend on the arm hard enough to make the other man wince. "Since when do you care about sex with men?"

"I don't. I just want to make sure that the guy you're seeing is doing right by you." Ben hit him back. "I ask you this question about every guy you date."

"Well, Cam isn't every guy I date. He's Cam."

Ben put a gentle hand on his arm. "Jer, I just worry about you. I just want to make sure that he's living up to your expectations. Although, now that I've seen this party, I'm starting to think that I might not have to worry."

"You don't. He's amazing." Jeremy gave him a sly look. "And so is the sex."

"Okay, too much information." Ben laughed and stole some more filling out of Jeremy's pie while he looked around the yard. "So, does he know?"

"Know what?"

"That you've never had a birthday party before."

"No, he doesn't know that," Jeremy whispered. He thought back to all of his birthdays. His parents had never made much of deal about birthdays. In fact, they tended to ignore them. This was the first time that he had celebrated his birthday. It gave him a happy feeling inside that his first birthday celebration was with Cam.

"So, how is your birthday going?"

"It's great. Cam's mom made me a quilt."

"Wow, you got one of Diane Walker's quilts? She makes a bundle off of those things."

"So how long are you going to be in town for?"

"Actually, I'm moving back."

"Really?" Jeremy gave him a disbelieving look. "You're not shitting me, are you? 'Cause that would be pretty damn mean on my birthday."

"No, I'm not shitting you. My stuff is in my car. It's parked out front if you don't believe me."

"Okay, I'll bite. So, why are you moving back home?"

"I'm the new head chef at The Evening Garden."

"Ben, that's amazing. Hey, you better not mess up the menu at my favorite restaurant."

"Don't trust my cooking?" Ben punched Jeremy in the arm. "Asshole."

"I don't know. It's been a while since you cooked me anything."

"Fine. How about I come over tomorrow and cook you and Cam dinner?"

"Sounds good to me, but you'll have to make enough for Emily too. She's staying here for the summer."

"Fine. Dinner for four."

"Four?"

"You don't honestly believe that I'm going to make you food and not make enough for myself."

"You just wanted to invite yourself over for dinner."

"I'm making dinner. That doesn't really count as inviting myself over for dinner. If I wanted to invite myself over for dinner that would mean that you would have to cook for me."

"So I guess you're never inviting yourself over for dinner then."

"Hell no. I've tasted your cooking."

"Hey, I've gotten better."

"Really?"

"Yes. I have to cook for myself. I had to learn how to cook without poisoning myself. I don't really like having to get my stomach pumped."

"You had to get your stomach pumped?"

"You're the one who told me how bad my cooking was. I'm just telling you that you were right," Jeremy replied. When he saw that Ben was reaching for his fork, he pulled the pie farther away. Ben laughed and held up his hands in surrender. The two of them were laughing happily when a shadow fell over them. They looked up to see Cam standing in front of them.

"Emily sent me to see if you liked the pie."

"I love the pie. You can tell her that the pie is amazing." Jeremy put the pie on the steps on the side farthest away from Ben and got to his feet. He slid an arm around Cam's waist and turned them so they were facing Ben. "Cam, do you remember Ben?"

"Yes, I remember Ben." Cam pulled away from Jeremy so he could shake Ben's hand. "I'm glad that you made it."

"So am I. Turned out that it was perfect timing. I'm moving back."

"Really?"

"Yeah. They gave me head chef at The Evening Garden."

"Jeremy and I had our first date there."

"Technically, that wasn't your first date," Ben stated. He had a rather teasing look on his face.

"I'm sorry?"

"Ben, don't you dare tell him about that." Jeremy could feel the heat of his face turning red. He moved behind Cam and put his face on Cam's shoulder. "Don't listen to him, sweetheart. All he does is lie. You can't believe a single word that comes out of him mouth. Ever."

"I think I want to hear this"

"No you don't."

"Jeremy, I think Cameron can make his own decisions." Ben flashed Cam a truly devious smile. "So, do you want to hear the story?"

"Damn right I do."

"So, if you want to get technical, your official first date was right before your grade-nine math final."

"I'm not sure I'm with you."

"Jeremy always did every one of your sessions at the school, except that one. He did that one at my house. While my parents were out of town. And he made me make the muffins that you had."

Cam turned his head to look at Jeremy. "That was supposed to be a date? I was wondering why we didn't have it at the school. And why you looked so nice when I got there."

"It would have been a date if Jeremy had had the balls to do something about it. He was too much of a chicken shit to do anything. I was pretty pissed that I went to all that trouble and he didn't even try to kiss you."

"I was pretty upset that he didn't try to kiss me too."

"Hey, it's my birthday. Why is everyone picking on me?"

"Because it's fun," Cam stated. He pressed a kiss to Jeremy's cheek.

"And because it's easy." Ben got to his feet and clapped Jeremy on the shoulder. "Happy birthday, buddy. I'm gonna go get me some food."

Cam turned in Jeremy's arms until he was facing Jeremy. "So, you tried to take me on a date?"

"I can't believe that he told you that. I'm going to kill him later."

"You weren't going to tell me?"

"No. It's embarrassing."

"I think it's sweet." Cam pulled him down into a kiss. "I like that you wanted me back in high school."

Jeremy smiled and wrapped both arms around his lover's waist. He ran his tongue along Cam's throat then dipped his head in for a kiss. Jeremy slanted his mouth across Cam's and forced the shorter man's mouth open. He slid his tongue inside and twined it around Cam's. He pulled away when the party guests started cheering.

"We should get back to your party."

"We should." Jeremy placed one last kiss to Cam's lips. "Did I tell you that I love my party?"

"Several times. So, how much of that pie have you eaten?"

"About half." Jeremy grinned at the amused look on his lover's face.

"Do you want me to hide the rest of it in the fridge so that no one else eats it?"

"I would love that," Jeremy stated. He smiled at Cam as he walked over to the porch and scooped up his pie. He saw Cam shake his head fondly as he walked into the house.

Jeremy headed over to the rest of his guests. For his first birthday party, there was a surprisingly large number of people. Of course, that most likely had something to do with the fact that he was turning thirty and wasn't a child. He still couldn't believe that Cam had managed to call all of his friends and plan a surprise party without him knowing. Especially considering how much time he had been spending at Cam's lately.

104 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

Jeremy was starting to realize that Cam didn't like to be alone. On the nights when he was too tired from work to head over to Cam's his lover would either call or show up. Most often he called and then showed up. Having spent most of his life as a solitary creature, Jeremy had worried that it would bother him to have someone near him almost all of the time. Instead, he was starting to find out that he loved it. When Cam was around, everything felt better.

Immersing himself in the conversation of the people around him, Jeremy decided to enjoy his party until the last guest left. He allowed Ben to sling an arm around his neck and pull him into a conversation with Melanie and Emily. Jeremy was having the time of his life. He loved his party and was starting to form some ideas of how to thank Cam once everyone had left. They were ideas that would be much better off without guests.

Chapter Eleven

CAM was putting dishes into the dishwasher while the last of the guests were saying goodbye to Jeremy. Hershey was sitting by his feet, content to just be near him now that all the strangers were gone. While she was a friendly dog, she did prefer to be near him or Jeremy. Cam had just closed the dishwasher when he felt a gentle touch to his back. He turned to see his mother standing behind him.

"You did a wonderful job with this party, darling," Diane stated. She placed a kiss on his cheek as she put a rather large platter into his sink. "I found this outside."

"Thanks, Mom, for everything."

"Darling, all I did was bring in a platter."

"I meant the quilt. Jeremy loves it."

"Darling, he's part of the family now. He deserves to have a quilt." Diane patted his cheek. "Goodnight, darling. Emily and I are leaving now."

Diane turned and left the kitchen. Cam could hear her talking to Jeremy by the front door. With a sigh, he started to wash the dishes that wouldn't fit in the dishwasher. He hated washing dishes by hand. He always found more dirt on them after he finished cleaning them. Feeling something by his feet, he looked down to see that Puddles was washing Hershey's head. Hershey was just lying there, content to let the cat lick her.

Cam heard the front door close and lock. "Is everyone gone?"

"Yes, the last stragglers just left." Jeremy wrapped his arms around Cam's waist and rested his chin on his shoulder. "What are you doing?"

"I'm cleaning up."

"Can you stop?"

"Why?"

"Because it's my birthday and I want to take you upstairs and fuck you into the mattress."

Cam groaned and dropped the platter he was holding back into the sink. He let his body fall back so it was resting completely against Jeremy's. He felt Jeremy's arms tighten around his waist. Cam rotated his hips, pressing his ass against the erection he could feel staring behind Jeremy's jeans.

"Damn, baby. The things that you do to me."

Cam purred in pleasure as he felt teeth dig into his neck. "You can keep doing that forever and I won't complain."

"I may take you up on that." Jeremy turned Cam around in his arms and pulled him into a heated kiss. He slid his hands up under the back of Cam's shirt. "You going to stop cleaning up and come to bed with me?"

"I will if you let go of me." Cam gasped as Jeremy's fingers dug into his back while Jeremy bent down and bit his neck once more. "Okay, one more bite and I'm not going to be able to move."

"I love that you like it when I bite you."

"Jeremy, when you bite me, I have trouble thinking." Cam tugged Jeremy closer and pulled him into a heated kiss. He ran his tongue over Jeremy's lips and forced them open. Under the taste of key lime pie was the pure taste of Jeremy. It was a taste that Cam was starting to get addicted to. He dug his fingers into Jeremy's back and did some biting of his own. He nibbled on Jeremy's lips until the other man pulled away from him.

"We need to get moving."

"Why?"

"Because if we don't, I'm gonna fuck you right here in the kitchen."

Cam buried his hands in Jeremy's hair and held his face close. "I'm down with that."

Cam gasped as Jeremy immediately attacked his mouth with a hungry kiss. He opened to the onslaught of his lover's tongue. Wrapping several strands of blond hair around his fingers, Cam did something he knew would get him a reaction. He pulled. A deep moan slid from Jeremy's mouth into his. Strong arms clamped around his waist and pulled him closer. Cam moaned when he felt Jeremy's hands slide down the back of his jeans.

"Do you have lube in the kitchen?" After pulling his mouth away long enough to ask the question, Jeremy moved to Cam's neck.

Cam moaned as his lover licked and bit at his neck. "In the everything drawer."

Jeremy pulled back far enough that he was able to give Cam a rather surprised look. "You actually have lube in the kitchen?"

"And condoms." Cam had to quickly pull his hands from Jeremy's hair as the other man suddenly pulled away from him. He wondered why Jeremy was walking in the opposite direction of the everything drawer until he saw him bend over to scoop up the cat. Jeremy walked over to the door and tossed her into the other room. Hershey left on her own, but not without pausing to give Cam's hand a lick.

Cam stood where Jeremy had left him as he watched his lover go to the proper drawer. After a few moments of shifting items, Jeremy turned with a condom and a tube of lube in his hand. Cam watched as Jeremy stalked toward him. The way Jeremy moved was like sin on legs. Just watching Jeremy walk got him hard enough that he could feel the zipper of his jeans pressing against his erection.

Cam didn't move when Jeremy approached him. He stayed where he was and found himself swept into strong arms and forced backward until he was slammed into the kitchen wall. All of the breath went out of him in a long moan as Jeremy's body crushed him to the wall. Cam slid his hands up Jeremy's back under the shirt he was wearing. He moaned as his hands encountered warm skin. When Jeremy's mouth moved back

to the mark he had been leaving on Cam's neck, Cam cried out and dug his fingers into Jeremy's back. He was gripping so hard that he was sure that he was leaving bruises on his lover's skin. He didn't care. His fingers dug in deeper as Jeremy increased the suction on his neck.

Jeremy's hands slid down his chest, popping the buttons on his shirt as they went. Cam moaned when Jeremy lowered his head and began to lick one of his nipples. He removed his fingers from Jeremy's back and dug into the blond hair. Cam gasped and arched against the talented mouth. He was so focused on the sensation of Jeremy's tongue on his skin that he barely noticed that Jeremy's hands were still moving. The sudden feel of air against the bare skin of his erection caused him to gasp and open his eyes, which had fallen shut.

"Jeremy."

"I hope you've been working out, sweetheart," Jeremy stated. He started to slide Cam's jeans and briefs down his legs.

"Why?" Cam lifted his feet and kicked the garments out of his way.

"Because we aren't moving." With that said, Jeremy dove back in for a bruising kiss, the weight of his body holding Cam against the wall. Cam moaned into his mouth and gripped the hem of Jeremy's shirt. When he realized that Jeremy wasn't going to move his arms long enough to let Cam get his shirt off, Cam abandoned his attempts and turned his attention to Jeremy's jeans. When he popped the button and released the zipper, his hand encountered nothing except hot, bare skin. Jeremy wasn't wearing anything under his jeans.

Gasping at the sudden pressure of a finger at his entrance, Cam parted his legs, giving Jeremy more room to work with. The sensations that Jeremy was causing were making it increasingly difficult for Cam to concentrate. When a finger brushed across his prostate, Cam broke away from the kiss and howled. With the pleasure making him dizzy with sensation, he barely noticed when Jeremy added a second finger. Cam was clutching at the back of Jeremy's shirt to keep from collapsing into a puddle of pleasured goo.

"You ready for this, baby?"

"God Jeremy, do it." Cam panted and pushed down against the fingers inside of him. "Fuck me."

"You asked for it," Jeremy replied. Cam moaned as the fingers left him. He wanted to chase after them, but with Jeremy pinning him to the wall, there wasn't very far that he could go.

Feeling Jeremy's hands behind his knees, Cam let the hands guide him. He wrapped his legs around Jeremy's waist and held on tight. After some shifting, Cam felt the head of Jeremy's cock brush against his entrance. He let out a low groan as gravity and his own weight helped to slide him onto Jeremy. When Jeremy was fully inside of him, Cam actually whimpered. Jeremy had never been this deep before. It felt *so* good.

"You okay?"

Cam snapped his eyes up to Jeremy's and nodded. It was all he could do. He was fairly certain that if he opened his mouth all that would come out would be whimpers. As he tightened his legs, he felt fabric brush against him. The fact that Jeremy still had on all of his clothes made his head spin. It was surprisingly erotic. Bunching his abs, Cam started to lift himself off of the cock that was lodged inside of him. As he allowed gravity to pull him back down, they both groaned.

When Jeremy started to thrust, all Cam could do was hold on. The slow slide and thrust managed to hit his prostate every time. Cam's legs were starting to burn from holding himself against Jeremy's waist; his abs were burning from the thrusting he was doing; he was pretty certain that his back was getting rubbed to shit against the wall; but he didn't care. It felt too damn good for him to care about anything except the pleasure. They were pressed so closely together that every time that they moved, Cam's erection was rubbed between them. The added friction from the fabric of Jeremy's shirt was sending him to the brink rather quickly.

Cam looped his arms so they were under Jeremy's and he had his hand gripping the top of his shoulders. He used his new leverage to pull himself almost completely off of Jeremy and then dropped back down heavily. A vocal cry of pleasure was torn from his throat. Cam did it again. It felt like Jeremy was so deep he would never be able to come out again. Cam was enjoying that feeling. If he could keep Jeremy in him forever, he would.

Cam's breathing began to come in harsh pants as Jeremy increased his pace. When Jeremy pulled him away from the wall to drag him into a deep kiss, Cam latched onto him like a vice. After nearly kissing Cam into unconsciousness, Jeremy slammed him back into the wall. That last bit of force did it for Cam. He screamed in release as he came all over Jeremy's shirt. After a few more thrusts, Cam felt Jeremy's release inside of him. When Jeremy bit the still tender mark on his neck, Cam actually shuddered.

Jeremy pressed him into the wall as he tried to get his breathing back under control. Cam felt him pressing gentle licks and kisses to his neck. Cam was trembling and gasping for air. Little aftershocks of pleasure kept running through his body. He felt like all of his nerve endings were on fire. As his breathing slowed to normal, Cam felt the protest start in his thighs.

"Jeremy, Bright Eyes, I need you to let me down."

"Sorry, sweetheart. Hang on." Jeremy got a good grip on Cam's thighs and pulled out gently. They both groaned at the loss of contact. Once he was no longer inside of him, Cam felt Jeremy's hands slowly lower his legs to the ground. Cam was surprised that he actually dropped a bit once Jeremy let him go. Jeremy had apparently hiked him fairly high up the wall.

Cam shivered and burrowed closer to Jeremy. "My legs are cold."

"Sorry, baby. Why don't we go upstairs and get you into bed?"

"Sounds good to me." Cam tried to pull away from the wall, but his legs started to give out on him. Only Jeremy's arms kept him from falling.

"God, baby. Did I hurt you?"

"No, you didn't come even close to hurting me. Apparently I need to go to the gym more often if we're going to keep doing that. My legs are a little shaky."

"Well, I think I can help with that." Jeremy bent slightly and lifted Cam into his arms. Cam gave a rather unmanly yelp as he was lifted into the air. His arms tightened around Jeremy's neck. Jeremy got his balance and started to walk to the stairs.

"Jeremy, what are you doing?"

"I'm carrying you up the stairs, baby. I'm the one who wore you out, so I'm going to carry you to the bedroom."

"Okay, but if you drop me, you don't get to play with me anymore." Cam snuggled into the embrace and rested his head on Jeremy's shoulder. "Plus, your present is upstairs."

"Didn't I just get my present?"

Cam swatted the back of Jeremy's head. "Smartass. I got you an actual present."

"Then I guess I'll have to hurry," Jeremy responded. He quickened his pace slightly, but kept a firm grip on Cam. Cam simply enjoyed being carried in his lover's arms.

When they got to the bedroom, Cam found himself being carried into the attached bathroom instead of being deposited on the bed, like he had assumed. Placing Cam gently on the closed toilet, Jeremy started to fill the tub with water. He then turned back to Cam and pulled the opened shirt that he was still wearing off of him. Cam sighed happily as Jeremy gave him a kiss. He really enjoyed it when Jeremy took care of him. When Jeremy pulled away, Cam found himself staring into a pair of happy, green eyes.

Cam lifted his hand and pressed it to Jeremy's cheek. "Bright Eyes, what are you doing?"

"I'm running us a bath; what does it look like?" Jeremy pulled off his own clothing as the water continued to fill. Cam bit his lip in amusement at the mess that covered Jeremy's shirt. He hoped that it wasn't one that Jeremy particularly liked, since he doubted that the stains would come out of it. Cam sat back and enjoyed watching as Jeremy's smooth skin was bared for his view. He enjoyed looking at Jeremy when he was naked. Cam was of the opinion that his lover was the most attractive man alive.

"Have I told you that you're amazing?" Cam asked. He pulled Jeremy to him and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips, licking the salt taste of sweat from the skin around his lover's mouth.

"Tub's full," Jeremy commented, completely ignoring the question. He reached over and turned off the water. He stuck his hand into the water to make sure of the temperature before turning his attention back

to Cam. Cam sighed happily as Jeremy pulled him to his feet. When Jeremy felt that he was still trembling, he put his arm around his waist. "Get in the tub, sweetheart."

"You'll have to help me, Bright Eyes. I'm still a little shaky."

"Anything for you," Jeremy replied. He helped Cam settle into the large tub. Once Cam was safely in the tub, Jeremy climbed in with him. Cam smiled happily when Jeremy pulled him into his arms. Cam sighed in contentment and relaxed against Jeremy's chest. The feeling of Jeremy wrapping his arms around him and kissing the top of his head had Cam humming in bliss. He loved the feeling he got when his lover surrounded him with his larger frame. It was something he never wanted to lose.

"This is nice."

"Yeah, it is." Jeremy gave him a squeeze. "Can I wash your hair?" "Okay."

"Sit up." Jeremy gently pushed Cam forward until he was sitting up.

Cam heard the hand sprayer turn on and then he felt the water in his hair. Jeremy had his head tilted back, so none of the water got into Cam's eyes. It only took a few moments for the water to soak into his hair. Once his hair was completely wet, Jeremy grabbed the bottle of shampoo and began to wash it. Cam moaned as deft fingers began to massage the shampoo into his hair. While he didn't like having his hair pulled as much as Jeremy did, he did like what Jeremy was doing to him right now. Cam actually let out what could only be considered a purr as Jeremy kept up his ministrations.

Jeremy chuckled softly. "Like that?"

"God, that feels amazing. I don't know if anyone I've been with has ever washed my hair before. If someone did, it obviously wasn't very memorable"

"I like taking care of you." Jeremy continued what he was doing, pulling moans and whimpers from Cam as he did so. Cam was in heaven. The feeling of Jeremy's hands in his hair, which he assumed was supposed to be soothing, was not having quite that effect. While it was very soothing, it was also incredibly arousing. Cam could feel himself

starting to get hard again. After a moment, Jeremy tilted his head and used the sprayer to wash the soap out of his hair. Jeremy managed to get all of the shampoo rinsed out of Cam's hair without getting any of the soapy water in his eyes. His hands were gentle against Cam's cheeks as he positioned his head. Once the sprayer was turned off and put away, Cam was pulled back against Jeremy's chest. He felt gentle fingers push the damp hair away from his neck. When Cam felt lips begin to nibble and bite at his neck, he moaned and clutched at whatever part of Jeremy he could reach.

"Jeremy," Cam moaned. He pulled away, turned around, and pressed himself against Jeremy. He straddled his lover's lap and kissed him with all of the passion that he could feel building. Cam felt Jeremy's hands slide across his wet skin, with one staying on his back while the other wound its way into his clean hair. The mouth beneath him opened and Cam twined his tongue around his lover's. He could still taste the tart tang of lime, but it was starting to fade under a taste that was pure Jeremy. In what Cam assumed was an attempt to arch into the contact, Jeremy slid his body up. Unfortunately, this caused him to slip and end up under the water. Cam frantically pulled him back to the surface. "Jeremy, are you all right?"

Jeremy looked at him from behind a mass of wet, blond hair. "Maybe we should move to the bed."

"Good idea." Cam climbed out of the tub and held out a hand to Jeremy. The taller man accepted the hand up. Once out of the tub, Jeremy grabbed a towel and began to dry off Cam. Within moments, Cam was moaning and trying to get more contact with Jeremy. When Jeremy dropped the towel, Cam attempted to throw himself into his lover's arms. Jeremy stopped him gently and quickly dried himself off. When Jeremy finished drying his own body, Cam pounced. He wanted his hands on that skin. Jeremy stumbled slightly, but managed to keep his feet.

As Cam backed him toward the bed, he managed to not only lock their lips together in a passionate kiss, but also towel most of the water out of Jeremy's hair. When Cam felt Jeremy hit the edge of the bed, he dropped the towel he had been using to the floor. Jeremy cupped Cam's face in his hands and Cam found himself drawn into a tender kiss. When Jeremy finally let him up for air, he spun them around and pushed Cam onto the bed.

"This is what I call a perfect birthday," Jeremy murmured. His eyes traveled over Cam's form and Cam felt himself blush. No one had ever looked at him the way that Jeremy did. When Jeremy looked at him he felt special and wanted.

Cam moaned in ecstasy as Jeremy lowered his strong body on top of him. He felt fingers run down the side of his neck. The finger lingered over the still-tender bite on his neck. When Jeremy pressed his fingers against it, Cam cried out and felt himself harden more. He rather enjoyed how much Jeremy not only liked giving him marks, but looking at them as well.

"Hey, Bright Eyes?"

"Hmm?"

"Stop staring at the mark and give me another one." Cam grinned then pulled Jeremy to him for a heated kiss. Jeremy groaned and pressed himself against Cam as they kissed. Cam's arms slid around his back to pull him even closer. He loved the feel of Jeremy covering him. Having a larger body blanket him during sex was an incredible turn-on for Cam. He could feel his erection starting to push against Jeremy's stomach.

When Jeremy's mouth latched on to the other side of his neck, Cam moaned in ecstasy. Teeth clamped onto his flesh and Cam dug his fingers into Jeremy's shoulders with a force he was fairly certain would bruise. Even the small pain from lying on his slightly bruised back was lost in the pleasure of having Jeremy's teeth on his skin. Jeremy continued to torment that one spot until Cam was whimpering in incoherent need. When his neck was abandoned for his nipples, Cam thought he would go insane. He and Jeremy had just had an amazing bout of sex in the kitchen. He should not be this hard this quickly.

Cam moaned and writhed beneath Jeremy's administration. It was all he could do to hold back his orgasm. The feel of Jeremy's hands and lips all over his chest was driving him to the brink. He didn't know if he wanted it to stop or to keep going forever. Cam couldn't decide which sensation he liked most at the moment: the feel of Jeremy's mouth or the devastatingly gentle hands that were stroking his sides. Jeremy's hands slipped down between his legs and Cam cried out.

"Cam?"

"More, please more." Cam was embarrassed to feel tears of need leaking out of his eyes. After what had happened in the kitchen he couldn't believe what he was feeling. He felt like he was drowning in need.

"Hush, baby. Try to calm down."

"Please, Jeremy. Please, I need you." Cam was pawing at Jeremy, trying to get in contact with more skin. He needed to feel Jeremy surrounding him. Cam managed to pull one hand away long enough to grab the lube and a condom off of the night table. He tossed both items at Jeremy. When he felt a slick finger enter his opening, he cried out in relief.

"This what you want?"

"Please," Cam moaned. His head began to rock from side to side as Jeremy prepared him. Cam couldn't believe the way he was acting. It felt like it had been ages since he had had Jeremy inside of him. He couldn't understand where the frantic need to feel him once again came from. When two fingers brushed across his prostate, Cam screamed and nearly came off of the bed. Cam was so lost in sensation that when he felt the fingers leave him he cried out in loss. Jeremy pressed a gentle kiss to his lips and then Cam felt the head of Jeremy's cock press against his entrance. Cam's eyes locked with Jeremy's as Jeremy slid inside with one thrust.

Cam gasped as Jeremy began to move. He felt like his body was on fire. Every thrust brushed against his prostate and Cam began thrusting down to meet them. He wrapped his legs around Jeremy's waist to pull him in deeper, ignoring the protest of his thigh muscles. He could see sweat dripping down Jeremy's face. Cam reached up and pulled Jeremy into a hard kiss. The kiss lasted until Jeremy wrapped a hand around Cam's aching erection. The moment he felt Jeremy's hand, Cam screamed in pleasure.

When the pace increased, Cam thrust up to match it. He wanted more. Hands gripped his hips with bruising force and all Cam could do was thrash on the bed in pleasure. The hand moving over his erection was pulling him closer and closer to orgasm. When Jeremy nailed his prostate with a well-placed thrust and squeezed his cock at the same

time, Cam came with a wail. His body arched as the intense pleasure washed over him. Cam could feel Jeremy still thrusting into him, but it was almost as if it was far away. When Jeremy finally found release a few strokes later, the swelling of his erection caused Cam to whimper. Cam was panting and shaking from the force of his orgasm. He was wondering what was wrong with his vision until he realized his eyes had fallen closed.

Cam felt Jeremy pull out of him gently. Still dazed, Cam whimpered at the loss. Jeremy made soothing sounds and then Cam felt the damp towel from the floor wiping the semen off of his chest and stomach. He blinked at the ceiling as Jeremy got up from the bed and disposed of the condom and the dirty towel. When he felt the bed shift with Jeremy's weight as he crawled back in, he turned his head toward his lover. As gentle fingers stroked his hair, he tried to focus his dazed eyes.

"You okay, baby?"

"I think my brain melted," Cam replied. He tried to kiss the fingers on his cheek, but he couldn't seem to make his head move. He settled for giving Jeremy a dazed, but pleased, smile. "Do you want to open your present now?"

"Sure. Where is it? I don't think you'll be moving anytime soon."

"Neither do I. I can't feel my spine." Cam gave a tired chuckle. "It's on the dresser."

Cam watched as Jeremy crawled off of the bed and walked over to the dresser. He had no idea where Jeremy found the energy to move. Of course, Jeremy wasn't the one who had been fucked into oblivion. Twice. And it could also be the fact that there was a present waiting for him. Presents turned everyone into the children they had been when they were younger. Jeremy came back with the wrapped parcel and settled next to Cam on the bed. Cam rested his hand on his lover's knee.

"What is it?"

"You have to open it, Bright Eyes. I'm not going to tell you," Cam replied with a laugh. He gave Jeremy's knee a playful swat. Jeremy smiled at him and began to open his gift. Cam nervously bit his lip as he watched Jeremy unwrap it. He was afraid that Jeremy would think it was

stupid. When all Jeremy did after he opened it was stare at it, Cam felt his stomach roll. *Oh, God. He doesn't like it.* "Do you like it?"

"You got me the complete works of James Herriot."

"Yes." Oh, God. This was a bad idea. He's a vet. He probably already has them.

"This is amazing. I lost almost all of mine when a pipe burst and flooded my apartment." Jeremy finally looked at him and Cam saw that his lover had tears in his eyes. "Thank you, Cameron."

"Happy birthday, Jeremy." Cam grabbed Jeremy's hand and pulled him down for a soft kiss. He shivered when he felt Jeremy's fingers brush across one of the marks on his neck.

"Was that because I touched the mark, or because you're cold?"

"A bit of both."

"Then we better get you in bed." Jeremy gently placed the box set of books on the night table then got off of the bed. He leaned over Cam and gently lifted his legs into the air. Cam hissed as his overtaxed thigh muscles protested the movement. Jeremy only held his legs up for the time it took to slide the covers down enough to tuck Cam under them.

Cam sighed in relief as his legs were put back down. Now that the endorphins were starting to wear off, he was starting to hurt. His abs and thighs were burning and he knew that sitting tomorrow was not going to be comfortable. He was also starting to lose any of the energy he may have had. When Jeremy pulled the covers over him, he gave his lover a sleepy smile. Jeremy turned off all of the lights and then climbed into the bed with him. Cam found himself tugged into strong arms and he sighed happily.

"Baby, are you sure that you're okay?"

"I'm a little sore, but it's a good sore. Although, I think I'm going to have to start running or something. My thighs are burning." Cam groaned slightly as he shifted to get more comfortable. The feeling of Jeremy's hands running over his skin was starting to relax him.

"I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me, Bright Eyes."

"You said that you were sore."

"And I am, but it's not a 'my boyfriend hurt me' sore; it's a 'damn did I ever just get laid really well' sore. There's a very big difference." Cam pressed soft kisses to the chest that his head was resting on. While he loved how concerned Jeremy was about hurting him, he didn't want his lover to think that he had. The entire evening had been nothing but pleasurable.

"Cameron?"

The hesitant tone in which Jeremy called his full name caused Cam to prop himself up on his arms so he could look into his lover's eyes. "Is something wrong?"

"No, everything is perfect. Thank you for the party." Jeremy gave him a very vulnerable look. "I've never had one before."

"You've never had a birthday party before?"

Jeremy shook his head.

"Aw, Bright Eyes." Cam leaned down and pressed a kiss to his lover's lips. When he pulled away, he noticed tears starting to leak from Jeremy's eyes. He wiped them away with his thumb. "As long as I'm around, you'll always have a birthday party."

"Thank you, Cam. This was the best birthday that I've ever had, and that has absolutely everything to do with you." Jeremy laced his fingers with Cam's and pulled him close. Cam rested his head on Jeremy's chest and gave their linked fingers a squeeze. He continued to press soft kisses to Jeremy's chest until he felt his lover drift to sleep. Once sure that Jeremy was sleeping peacefully, Cam allowed himself to drift off as well. He never noticed that Hershey hadn't come into the room.

HE stepped into his apartment, locking all four locks behind him. Moving to the windows, he made sure that they were all locked and that the blinds were closed. There was no such thing as being too careful. It was something he had learned over the years. Careful was good. That's why he only went over at night. He didn't want anyone to see him.

He couldn't believe that stupid dog hadn't left him alone. Every window he had looked in, the dog had been right behind it. When he attempted to move closer, the dog's lips had started to pull back into a growl. They stayed that way until he moved away from the windows. He could barely see anything through the window with that stupid dog following his every move. He couldn't see and he needed to know.

He hadn't seen the vet leave. His truck had still been in the driveway. What was he still doing there? The party had ended hours ago. He should have left with everyone else. Why hadn't he left? What was he doing to his Cameron? Didn't he know that Cameron belonged to him?

He stopped pacing his apartment and moved over to the photos. As always, the photos calmed him. They were all of Cameron. His Cameron was a beautiful man. He needed to be taken care of. The vet couldn't do that. Only he could. He would have to call in the morning. Call just to hear his beautiful Cameron's voice. When he heard his Cameron's voice, everything would be better. After that, he could figure out what to do about the vet and the dog.

Chapter Twelve

THE sound of the phone ringing pulled Jeremy from sleep. He slowly blinked his eyes open. Cam was lying next to him, doing absolutely nothing to answer the phone. That was when Jeremy realized that Cam was still sound asleep and the phone was on Jeremy's side of the bed. Attempting to rub sleep from his brain with the swipe of a hand over his face, Jeremy reached over and answered the phone.

"Hello?"

The sound of heavy breathing and a pained gasp came over the line.

"Hello?"

"No, no, no, no!" The connection was cut as the phone disconnected in his ear. Jeremy stared at the phone for a moment then put it back in the cradle. Jeremy debated telling Cam about the phone call, but concluded that it was most likely just a teenager pulling a prank. He could remember doing something along those lines when he had been in school. Pushing tangled blond hair out of his eyes, he turned his attention to the body in the bed next to him.

Cam had rolled away from him during the night and was now lying on his stomach. This position gave Jeremy the opportunity to do something that he had wanted to do for a while. With Cam asleep, Jeremy had the opportunity to look his fill at the tattoo that had been tempting him since that first time he saw it. He had yet to get the chance to give it as much attention as he wanted to. Every time that he got Cam naked, his mind was distracted by other things. Mostly he was distracted by the things he could do to Cam. Having a naked Cam in his arms was fun.

Jeremy crawled over to Cam's still-sleeping body and propped himself up so he could look his fill. His eyes traveled over the strong shoulders and came to rest on the Celtic tattoo. Jeremy started to run his fingers over the swirling designs. He was close enough to Cam that he noticed when his actions started to penetrate the haze of sleep. That was how he noticed the flinch when his fingers ran over one spot. Jeremy did it again and got the same result. Unfortunately, it was not a happy flinch.

Jeremy leaned closer and noticed that there was a slight discoloration of the skin underneath the tattoo. Abandoning his erotic exploration of Cam's back, Jeremy started to look for more discolorations. He did not like what he found. There were bruises all over Cam's back. Bruises that Jeremy knew hadn't been there before their round in the kitchen. He didn't like the fact that he had hurt Cam. The hickeys and bite marks were a different matter; those were given during the height of passion and he knew that Cam liked them. Jeremy didn't like seeing bruises on his lover's skin.

Leaning across the bed, Jeremy snapped on the lamp. He wanted to get a better look at the marks on Cam's back. With the tattoo covering most of the available skin on his back, it was hard to see the color of his skin. Jeremy practically had his face pressed against Cam's back when Cam finally woke.

"Um, what are you doing?"

"You have marks on your back."

"It's called a tattoo."

"I know that, dumbass."

"Then what are you talking about?"

"These," Jeremy replied. He lightly pressed on one of the bruises that he had located.

"Ow! What the hell was that?"

"You have bruises all over your back. Bruises that I caused."

Cam rolled over to look up at him. "Jeremy, I'm okay."

"I hurt you." Jeremy lowered himself so he was on top of Cam with his face buried in Cam's neck. He felt Cam's arms come up around him and start to stroke his back.

"You didn't hurt me."

"You have bruises"

"Fine, I'll fuck you next time and you can have the bruises. Would that make you happy?"

Those words washed over Jeremy and the erection that had dimmed when he noticed the bruises on his lover flared back to life. He groaned and shifted slightly, pressing his erection against Cam's leg. He felt the chest beneath him move as Cam chuckled. Jeremy left his face buried against Cam's neck. They hadn't tried that yet and Jeremy was actually aching to get Cam inside of him.

"I'd like that."

"That is starting to become rather obvious. Lie back." Cam pushed Jeremy off of him until he was on his back and then leaned over him. "I promise I won't hurt you."

"I trust you," Jeremy replied. He let the truth of that statement shine in his eyes and was rewarded by an awed look from Cam. He was about to say something else when Cam leaned forward and kissed him.

This kiss felt different from the frantic ones of the night before. It was slow and sweet. Jeremy let Cam gently pry his lips open. A fleeting thought about morning breath went through his mind, but was quickly squashed by the absolute tenderness of the kiss that Cam was giving him. The kiss filled every one of his senses. It was like Cam was trying to claim him with that kiss. Jeremy stopped trying to fight the kiss and gave himself over to Cam.

The moment he gave up control, Cam released his lips and moved down his throat. Jeremy gasped as teeth scraped along his neck. The momentary sting was soothed by the swipe of a tongue. Cam's body slid along his and Jeremy spread his thighs to make room for Cam between them. Sure, he had bottomed before, but he had never been this trusting with a partner. Cam was the only one who made him feel like he was something special that should be treated with care. It was a wonderful and scary feeling.

Jeremy moaned as Cam's hands ran slowly down his ribs. The touch was light and left his skin tingling. Jeremy arched up, pressing his chest against Cam's as his lover latched on to a piece of skin where his neck and shoulder met. When Cam bit down, Jeremy gasped and gripped his lover's shoulders. With Cam's teeth in his skin, Jeremy was starting to understand the younger man's love of being bitten. Jeremy's grip on Cam's shoulders tightened as his lover kept up the pressure on his neck. When he thought he would go crazy from the simple pleasure of Cam's mouth on his skin, Cam released his neck and moved lower.

Setting a pace that drove Jeremy crazy with its slowness, Cam moved across his chest. Jeremy gasped as one of his nipples was sucked between Cam's lips. The feeling of Cam's tongue twining around his nipple in the way that it usually twisted with his tongue had Jeremy's back arching off of the bed. Jeremy opened his lips and a moan spilled out. When the warm mouth left his nipple, he sighed in loss until it latched onto the previously neglected nipple. The actions being repeated on the other side of his chest had Jeremy clutching at Cam's back again.

The warm, wet mouth left his nipple and licked a path down his chest. Jeremy's eyes fell closed as he drowned in sensation. He loved the feeling of Cam's mouth on him. He never wanted it to end. Jeremy giggled slightly when he felt Cam's teeth nipping at his sides. He was very ticklish on his sides and Cam always seemed to find a way to make him laugh at some point during sex. It was one of the many things that Jeremy found endearing about the other man.

Jeremy gasped softly as gentle hands spread his thighs. He felt Cam's thumbs run over the skin where his thighs joined his torso. He jumped slightly when that soft touch was repeated with a tongue, but the breath he had sucked in came out a low groan. Cam was licking his skin like it was something he would die without tasting and Jeremy loved it. He shivered as Cam's tongue slipped down the inside of his thigh. When he felt Cam's hands slide under his ass, he had a good idea of what it was that Cam was planning on doing to him. That still didn't prepare him for the feeling.

When Cam lifted his hips off of the bed and exposed his entrance, Jeremy felt his muscles clench slightly. Then his lover's tongue lapped over the opening and he lost all ability to think. Cam's tongue dipped inside of him and Jeremy started to thrash around on the bed. Cam was

the first lover to ever do this to him and it surprised him how much he liked it. The feel of Cam's tongue mimicking what his cock was going to be doing soon had Jeremy so hard he was aching. Jeremy let go of the sheets he had been clutching and gripped Cam's hair. He needed something to hold onto. He wasn't sure if he wanted to use his grip to pull Cam closer or push him away. The sensations running through his body had him teetering on the edge of sanity.

"Cam, God, do something." Jeremy knew that his voice was coming out as a whine, but he didn't care. He needed Cam to do something.

"Do what?"

"Fuck me, damn it!" Jeremy whined and pulled at Cam's shoulders. "I need you in me!"

"And you think I'm pushy," Cam murmured. Before Jeremy could word a retort, two lube-coated fingers were thrust inside him. Even with the attention that Cam had been giving him with his tongue, the thrust of the fingers burned slightly. It was exactly what Jeremy wanted.

Jeremy howled as Cam twisted his fingers and brushed over his prostate. Pleasure shot through his entire body as Cam played him like an instrument. When he felt the wet heat of Cam's mouth engulf the head of his cock, he started to whimper incoherently. Jeremy knew that he was making a rather wanton display of himself, but at the moment it didn't matter. All that mattered was the simple fact that Cam was the one making him feel this way. That was when he realized it. That was the moment that Jeremy realized that he loved Cam. Loved him with everything that he was.

Jeremy opened his eyes and tilted his head so he could see Cam. His lover was treating his erection as if it was a favorite toy that had just been returned to him. Jeremy shuddered as the sensation of teeth gently scraping along his shaft vibrated through his body. The small sting was soothed by a wash of Cam's talented tongue. Jeremy's legs had been flung over Cam's shoulders, giving his lover more room to play. The sight of Cam swallowing his cock while his fingers were buried in Jeremy's ass was almost enough to send Jeremy over the edge. Jeremy let out a pained whimper and Cam looked up at him, letting his cock slip from between his lips.

"Something wrong?"

"Don't want to come until you're in me," Jeremy panted. His breath was coming in harsh gasps as he tried to hold back his impending orgasm. He groaned when he felt Cam add a third finger. Hardly waiting for his body to adjust, Jeremy thrust down onto Cam's fingers.

"Slow down, Bright Eyes. I don't want to hurt you." Cam turned his head and pressed gentle kisses to Jeremy's thigh. The feeling of the soft kisses on his leg gave Jeremy something else to focus on other than the fingers in his ass. He managed to pull himself away from the brink by concentrating on the soothing touch of Cam's lips on his leg. When that soothing feeling suddenly turned to suction followed by a swift bite, Jeremy gasped and arched his hips.

Incoherent with need, Jeremy heard the small whimpers that escaped his mouth, but he didn't care. His hands grabbed at whatever part of Cam he could reach. He needed to feel Cam's skin under his hands. His fingers encountered Cam's shoulders and he dug in. Jeremy had a feeling that he was adding more bruises to the ones he had already given Cam, but he couldn't bring himself to care. He just needed to have Cam closer to him.

Cam pulled away just long enough to get a condom rolled on then he lined himself up with Jeremy's loosened entrance. Jeremy locked his eyes onto Cam's blue ones as he felt Cam enter him for the first time. He moaned at the slight burn of penetration, but it wasn't enough to hurt him. He let his hands drop down Cam's back as Cam continued his slide into him. By the time Cam was fully inside him, Jeremy was shaking with the effort he was using to keep from moving.

Taking a deep breath, Jeremy locked eyes with Cam. His hands grabbed the firm butt and tugged. That was all the encouragement that Cam needed. Jeremy moaned in pleasure as Cam started to thrust. The strokes started out slow, with each one brushing along his prostate, but they didn't stay that way. Jeremy thrust back with an increasing frequency, wanting to make Cam move faster. He was pretty sure that if he opened his mouth all that would come out were whimpers, so asking Cam to go harder was out of the question. He just had to hope that Cam would be able to understand what he was asking with his body.

Jeremy threw back his head and howled as Cam got what he was asking. His thrusts increased in speed and force, causing Jeremy to be bent almost in half. Jeremy could feel a burn starting in his abs as he continued to move against Cam. When a wet, sloppy kiss landed on his lips, Jeremy forced his tongue into Cam's mouth as he pulled him closer with the grip he still had on his ass. One of Cam's hands came between them and grasped Jeremy's erection, causing him to break away from the kiss and let out a gasping wail.

Jeremy rocked back against the cock in his ass and thrust up into the fist over his erection. He was licking and biting at every piece of skin that Cam put near his mouth. He could feel Cam's teeth biting into his neck and knew that the mark would be visible unless he wore a scarf to work. He didn't care. He wanted Cam's teeth on his skin. He was starting to understand why Cam liked it so much.

When he felt his orgasm building, Jeremy pulled his mouth away from Cam's skin. He was starting to have trouble sucking in air. It was all starting to be too much. When Cam managed to nail his prostate at the same time that he gave Jeremy's cock a good tug, Jeremy lost control and came with a wail. He felt hot semen hit his chest. Jeremy blinked open his dazed eyes and stared into Cam's. Cam's thrusts sped up inside of him and Jeremy clamped down with his inner muscles. Cam stilled and came with a strangled moan that sounded like Jeremy's name.

Jeremy was finally starting to get his breathing under control when Cam pulled out of him. He moaned at the feeling of loss then moaned again for a completely different reason as Cam lowered his legs to the bed. His thighs hurt. And so did his abs. And so did some random spots on his body. Jeremy tilted his head and took a good look at his skin. There was either a hickey or a bite mark where every one of the sore spots was. He looked like someone had tried to eat him.

A warm washcloth wiped the semen from his chest and he looked up into soft, blue eyes. "You okay, Bright Eyes?"

"I'm more than okay." Jeremy reached out and pulled Cam into a kiss. He ran his thumb over Cam's lips when he pulled away. "Although, I am starting to understand why you want to start running."

[&]quot;Legs hurt?"

"Hell yes," Jeremy replied. He pulled Cam into his arms and settled against the pillows with a sigh. He ran his hand along Cam's back in a motion that was soothing to both of them. They were just starting to slip into a comfortable doze when Hershey appeared at the foot of the bed. She whined and pawed at the bed. "I think the dog wants out."

"Then maybe you should go and let her out."

"She's your dog, baby."

"But you're the one who wore me out."

"I'm also the one who just got fucked into next week." Jeremy turned his still-dazed eyes to his lover. "I honestly don't think I can move yet, sweetheart."

"Fine. I'll go let Hershey out," Cam replied. He pressed one more kiss to Jeremy's chest then pulled out of his arms. Jeremy watched as Cam pulled on the pajama pants that were sitting at the foot of the bed. He waved and headed out of the room, Hershey at his heels.

Jeremy stretched after Cam left. He was sore, but it was a good sore. It had been a while since the last time he had let someone take him. He was pleasantly surprised that Cam had seemed to instinctively know what it was that he needed. He was also waiting for his realization that he loved Cam to freak him out. It wasn't. Apparently, being in love agreed with him. Now all he had to do was find the right time to tell Cam.

Chapter Thirteen

JEREMY was sitting in the living room reading the paper with Hershey on the floor next to him when Emily came bounding into the house. Her hair was windblown, her cheeks were red, and she had the largest smile that Jeremy had ever seen on her face. She looked stunning.

Spotting him in the room, she kicked off her shoes, dashed over and deposited herself on the couch next to him. "Jeremy, you'll never believe it!"

"Believe what, Cupcake?" Jeremy asked. He wasn't sure when he had started using the nickname for the teenager, but it felt right coming from his lips. It may have started around the same time she started calling him Jeremy. It was as if one day they had suddenly decided that they were family.

"Todd asked me to dinner!" Emily was so excited that she was practically bouncing on the couch. Hershey took one look at all of the energy that she had and fled. Jeremy was starting to wish that he could do the same.

"What's with all the shrieking?" Cam asked, coming into the room. Jeremy looked up at him and felt a burst of love so strong he was sure he had to be glowing.

"Todd asked me to dinner!" Emily repeated. She launched herself off of the couch and into her uncle's arms with a squeal of delight. Cam wrapped his arms around her and shot Jeremy a confused look over her shoulder

"Todd keeps coming by the clinic to see her. We've all been waiting for him to ask her out," Jeremy replied. He smiled at the sight of his lover with an excited teenager practically jumping while giving him a hug.

"I've got to call Lara!" she exclaimed. Emily gave Cam one more squeeze then ran out of the room and headed for the stairs. They heard her run all the way up the stairs and then heard the slam of her door.

Jeremy reached out a hand and tugged on Cam's arm until his lover was sprawled across him. "She seems happy."

"She does. I'm glad. I wonder what her life is like with Amanda. She always seems so sad when she first gets here." Cam shifted around on the couch until he was comfortable. He ended up with his head tucked under Jeremy's chin and an arm around his waist. "I like this."

"Like what, baby?"

"Having you here. Being able to walk into my living room, see you sitting on my couch, and know that I can crawl on top of you like this and that you won't mind."

"Never mind having you near me, sweetheart. In fact, I would love nothing more than to have you fuck me right here on the couch," Jeremy stated. He was still sore from the morning, but he was more than willing to go another round. He treated patients standing up. He didn't need to be able to sit comfortably to go to work.

Cam smacked his chest. "Don't say things like that when I can't do anything about it."

"Why can't you do anything about it?"

"Your friend is the one coming over to make us dinner. It's your fault that I can't fuck you over this couch."

Jeremy sucked in a breath as he felt Cam's teeth on his neck. "Over the couch?"

"Mmm hmm." Cam continued to suck and bite at Jeremy's neck. Jeremy moaned softly and tilted his head to one side, allowing Cam better access. His fingers dug into Cam's back as the pleasure started to mount. He loved the way that Cam made him feel.

"Dude, come on. Give a guy a little warning," Ben remarked. He was standing at the end of the couch staring at them while holding several bags of groceries in his hands.

"If you had knocked, you wouldn't have walked in on things that you don't want to see," Jeremy stated. He felt Cam trying to get up, but he tightened his grip. He didn't want to let Cam out of his arms.

"Why would I knock? You knew that I was coming over." Ben shifted the bag that he was holding in his hand. "So, where's the kitchen?"

"Through those doors," Jeremy repeated. He waved a hand in the direction of the kitchen. Ben shook his head and snorted in amusement before he headed into the kitchen. Jeremy raised an eyebrow when he saw Ben walk back through the living room. "Are you going back outside?"

"I have to get the rest of the groceries."

"There's more?"

"I'm a chef, Jer. It's not like I'm going to make a pizza." Ben gave him an annoyed look and left the house.

"I think he's mad at you, Bright Eyes."

"He'll get over it."

"You sure?"

"Of course. All I have to do is tell him how much I like the food that he made us and then he won't be mad anymore. This is kind of normal for us," Jeremy replied. He and Ben had a very solid friendship. They hardly ever had a real argument and when they did, they made up rather quickly since they couldn't stand the thought of not speaking to each other.

Ben waved at them as he walked back into the kitchen with the rest of the things he had brought in from the car. They could hear thudding noises coming from the other room as Ben put the groceries away. Jeremy pulled Cam closer and placed a kiss on the top of his head.

"So, I take it we'll be seeing a lot more of him now that he's moving back to town?"

"Most likely." Jeremy shifted so that he was looking into Cam's blue eyes. "That's not going to be a problem, is it?"

"No, I like Ben. He's a nice guy." Cam pushed himself out of Jeremy's arms when he heard cursing coming from the kitchen. "I'd better go and see what the problem is."

"No, stay here in my arms. I don't want to let you go."

"I'm not going far," Cam replied. He leaned down and pressed a kiss to Jeremy's lips. "Trust me, I'd rather take you up on the offer to fuck on the couch, but I'd better go and make sure that your friend isn't destroying my kitchen."

Jeremy watched as Cam walked out of the room. He was enjoying watching the way that his lover moved. Jeremy was picturing him naked as he walked away. The mental images were doing nothing to calm the desire that he was feeling. He sat up and ran a hand through his hair. He needed to calm down. While he knew that Ben wouldn't be bothered by him and Cam being affectionate with each other, he was fairly certain that Ben wouldn't appreciate him taking Cam on the kitchen floor. Damn, the kitchen. How was Jeremy supposed to go into the kitchen without getting hard after what happened last night? This was going to be an interesting dinner.

Jeremy was just about to get up and go into the kitchen when a shadow fell over him. He looked up to see Kennedy standing over him. "Does no one knock anymore?"

"Happy birthday." Kennedy thrust a present into his hands. "Where's Cam?"

"Kitchen."

"Thanks." Kennedy nodded at him and then stalked into the kitchen. Jeremy watched her go in surprise before he turned his attention back to the present in his hands. He hadn't thought that Kennedy liked him enough to get him a gift for his birthday. Apparently she was just one more person who liked Jeremy more than his parents did.

Jeremy tilted the package and looked for a seam in the paper. He found one and pulled the paper off of the gift. What he unwrapped was a rather expensive set of oil paints. Jeremy stared in surprise. He had painted in high school and college, but he hadn't had much of a chance

to do it lately. Oil was the medium that he preferred. He had even painted the landscape that was on the wall in his office. Jeremy was surprised that Kennedy remembered that he painted oil landscapes. He'd had the feeling that she didn't really like him that much.

Jeremy put the paints down and got to his feet. He had managed about three steps to the kitchen when Kennedy came storming into the room with Cam and Ben right on her heels. Cam's shirt was undone and he was trying to get it back on as he walked. Jeremy gave him a confused look.

"How could you!" Kennedy snapped. She slapped him across the face.

Jeremy clutched his cheek as pain flared to life. "What the fuck was that for?"

"How dare you treat Cam like Paul did! How dare you hurt him!"

"I would never hurt Cam. I love him!" Jeremy shouted. He was still rubbing his sore cheek when he realized that he had just announced to the entire room that he loved Cam when he hadn't told Cam yet. Jeremy felt all of the color drain from his face.

"What did you say?" Cam asked softly. He moved around Kennedy's still-angry form and approached Jeremy.

Jeremy reached out and touched his cheek. "I love you."

"Jeremy, I love you too," Cam replied. Jeremy leaned down and rested his forehead against Cam's. He slid his arms around the trim waist and soaked up the feeling of having the man he loved in his arms. Cam loving him back was doing a fairly good job of wiping just about everything else from his mind, even the pain in his cheek. Kennedy hit pretty hard.

"I don't understand. If you love him so much then why is he covered in bruises? I hugged him and he flinched." Kennedy's voice wasn't as hostile as it had been earlier, but it was still confused.

"I didn't hurt him, Kennedy. I would never hurt him." Jeremy ran a hand over Cam's back in a gesture that was soothing to himself as well as Cam. "We got a little carried away in the kitchen. I didn't even realize that I had done that until this morning when we woke up."

"And then I spent a good ten minutes convincing him that he didn't hurt me," Cam replied. He turned in Jeremy's arms, pressing his back to Jeremy's chest. "He's not hurting me, D."

"Okay." Kennedy took a deep breath and looked Jeremy in the eyes. "I'm sorry, Jeremy. I just worry about him."

"I understand that. What was that you were saying about Paul?" Jeremy felt Cam tense in his arms and concluded that this was what he had been fighting with Kennedy about that he didn't want to tell Jeremy.

"Wait. Paul Stevens?" Ben interjected. "The guy who abuses the people that he dates?"

Jeremy felt Cam stiffen in his arms. Things immediately clicked into place. "Oh, sweetheart."

"It wasn't a good relationship," Cam murmured. He turned and buried his face in Jeremy's chest. Jeremy wrapped his arms around Cam and held him close.

"Hey, you look a hell of a lot better than the last guy I knew who dated Paul," Ben replied.

"Paul was scared of Kennedy."

"I can see why," Jeremy mumbled. He raised one hand to his face and rubbed at what he knew was a very red mark on his face. He was starting to worry that it might bruise.

"I'm sorry," Kennedy sighed. She was actually starting to blush in embarrassment.

"Hey, that's a pretty good thing from where I'm standing. My friend Eric spent a week in the hospital after he and Paul split and while they had been dating he was always covered in bruises." Ben slung an arm around Kennedy's shoulders. "Come on, Xena. Why don't you come and help me in the kitchen? I'm guessing that you're staying for dinner?"

"You cooking?"

"Of course. I'm a chef. Like I'd let either of those two losers cook for me." Ben pulled Kennedy with him as he went back into the kitchen.

"Is everything okay? I thought I heard yelling?" Emily was standing at the foot of the stairs with a concerned look on her face.

"Everything is fine, Cupcake. Why don't you go and see what Ben and Kennedy are doing in the kitchen?"

"Ben let Kennedy into my kitchen? He's not letting her cook, is he?" With a slightly panicked look on her face, Emily dashed into the kitchen. Jeremy chuckled as she went past.

Jeremy was about to follow her into the kitchen when he felt that Cam was trembling in his arms. Jeremy pulled him closer and pressed soft kisses to his hair. "Hush, baby. What's wrong?"

"Are you mad at me?"

"Mad at you for what?" Jeremy backed the few steps to the couch and pulled Cam down with him. He settled himself comfortably and pulled Cam against his chest. He ran his hand over Cam's back until he felt his lover's trembling stop.

"For what happened with Paul."

"Baby, it's not your fault that you were in a bad relationship. I could never be mad at you for that."

"Are you mad at me for not telling you?"

"No, I'm not. I understand how hard it must be for you to even think about what it was like when you were with Paul, let alone talk about it. I'm not mad at you for not telling me." Jeremy pressed a kiss to the top of his head. "You would have told me when you were ready."

"I would have." Cam sat up and looked at him. "How are you so sure?"

"Because I love you," Jeremy replied. He felt a smile cross his face. Now that he had said it out loud, he was finding that it was very easy to say again and again. He liked the way he felt when he saw the joy saying those words out loud produced in Cam's eyes.

"I love you too, Jeremy. So much."

Jeremy put his hand on Cam's chin and tilted his face up for a kiss. He gently licked the lips underneath his until they parted for him. Once he had Cam's mouth open, he sent his tongue inside, looking for its mate. When he found it, he twined his tongue around Cam's, pulling

gasps from the smaller man. Jeremy put his other hand in Cam's hair as he plundered the willing mouth. Cam's tongue danced to meet his, giving as good as he got.

Jeremy wrapped his arms around Cam and lowered him to the couch. He used his larger build to hold him there. Jeremy pulled back from the kiss and grinned down at his slightly dazed lover. Cam still hadn't gotten his shirt done up and Jeremy was planning on taking advantage of that. He licked a path down Cam's neck until he reached the first of the marks that he had left. Jeremy licked it and enjoyed the way that Cam shivered beneath him. When he bit the mark, Cam's hands flew to his hair and dug in, trying to pull him closer. Jeremy was more than happy to give Cam what he wanted. He continued to suck and bite at the marked skin. His actions were causing the mark to grow in size and Cam was moaning and writhing underneath him.

"Hey, Count Dracula, think you can let him off of the couch? There is an impressionable teenager in the house and we don't want to give her any ideas of what to do on her date tomorrow, now do we?" Ben commented. He was standing next to the coffee table with his arms crossed and a spatula in one hand. Looking past him, Jeremy could see Emily and Kennedy peeking in from the kitchen.

"Hey, move your ass, Ben. You're blocking the view."

"No one asked you, you shameless hussy."

"You know, Ben, you're only getting away with that because I wouldn't mind taking a bite out of that nice-looking ass of yours," Kennedy remarked.

"Cam, I think your friend just hit on me."

"Well, either that or she's hungry," Cam stated. "Hey, at least she hasn't groped you yet. Patrick would have."

"Bite me, jackass."

"Sorry, D. I don't swing that way."

"Plus, he's mine, so back off, blondie," Jeremy growled.

"Well, that's rather obvious due to the giant hickey that you left on his neck. What are you, some type of vampire? I think Ben was right to call you Count Dracula." With that said, Kennedy turned and headed back into the kitchen. Giggling softly, Emily followed her.

"Ben, is there a reason that you came out here?"

"I'm not making dinner so you and your boyfriend can stay out here and make out. Now, I know you can chop vegetables, so get your ass off Cam and come into the kitchen and help me," Ben instructed. He gave Jeremy an annoyed look then headed back into the kitchen. The faint sounds of him insulting Kennedy were enough to pique Jeremy's interest.

"I think Ben wants us in the kitchen," Cam remarked. His hands were still running over Jeremy's back in rather arousing circles.

"Then you best stop doing that, love, or else I'm not going anywhere."

"I like it when you call me that."

"I love you."

"I love you."

"Would the two of you stop being so damn mushy and get the fuck in here!" Even though Ben was still in the kitchen, they could hear the annoyance in his voice.

Jeremy crawled off of Cam and got to his feet. He reached down and pulled his rumpled lover up next to him. Placing a gentle kiss to Cam's lips, Jeremy pushed him away and did up the buttons on his shirt. When Cam was covered to his satisfaction, Jeremy grasped his hand and started to pull him to the kitchen. He knew that the following dinner was most likely going to be slightly awkward, but he didn't care. He had Cam at his side and that was all that mattered.

HOW could he? How could Cameron want that other man? There was nothing special about the vet. He was average. He was a loser. Cameron deserved someone better. Even the blonde hairdresser had thought so. He had seen when she had slapped the man who had dared to touch his Cameron.

He had known that going to Cameron's in the day was risky. He never usually took that risk, but he had needed to see. After hearing the vet's voice on Cameron's phone when he had called in the morning, he had lost it. He'd thrown the phone across his dark apartment so hard that it had shattered against the wall. The pieces were still there.

He stepped around the broken phone and moved to the pictures of his Cameron. They helped to calm him. They let him know what he was doing this for. Everything was for his Cameron. Everything that he did was designed to bring them closer. Cameron would be his. He just had to let Cameron know that he was the better choice. That he was the one who would make things better.

He'd never worried about the redheaded man. The one called Paul. Cameron had gotten rid of him all on his own. Of course, that hadn't saved Paul. He'd had to be punished because he had hurt his Cameron. No one hurt his Cameron. No one. Paul had learned that, but it had taken days. Days that had been filled with the sweet sounds of pain and crying. Paul had learned that to hurt his Cameron was a bad idea.

He ran his fingers over one of his many pictures. It was one of Cameron at the park with his camera. Cameron had a smile on his face that he only got when he was taking photos. It was a beautiful smile. The smile was like a gift to the world.

Gifts! That was it. He would buy his Cameron gifts to let him know how much he was wanted. How much he was loved. His gifts would show his Cameron that he was better off without the vet. The gifts would make the vet leave. And if they didn't, there were other ways. Just ask Paul. Of course, Paul couldn't really talk anymore, so what would be the point?

Chapter Fourteen

BEN stood in front of Diane's house nervously chewing on his lower lip. He wasn't sure how he was going to approach this. It wasn't like there was an instruction manual for what he was about to do. The only comfort he had was the knowledge that Diane Walker had never hit anyone before.

Sighing deeply, Ben walked up the porch steps and knocked on the door. Just when he thought that she might not be home after all, Diane pulled the door open. Confusion clouded her eyes for a moment, but they filled with pleased surprise when she recognized Ben.

"Ben! What a surprise. What are you doing here?"

"I was wondering if you have a minute so we could talk." Ben winced inwardly as his voice came out nervous and hesitant. He hated sounding weak.

"Of course. Please, come inside," Diane replied. She moved to one side and allowed Ben to enter her house. "It's been a while since you've been here, hasn't it?"

"Not since high school. I used to come with Jeremy sometimes when he was tutoring Cam. He felt weird coming here to tutor by himself."

"Well, with how things turned out for the two of them I can understand why," Diane said with a laugh. She waved Ben in to the living room. "Please, have a seat. Would you like something to drink?"

"No, thank you. I'm fine." Ben sighed as he sat down.

"Are you settling in well?"

"Yes, thank you. It's been a bit of a task getting the restaurant in order, but it was worth it. It's only been a week, but I'm really glad to be home."

"Well, it's good that you're happy. Now, are you going to talk to me about what it is that brought you here?"

"I'm just not sure where to start."

"Sometimes being direct is the best approach."

"I think I might be Emily's father."

Diane blinked at him. "Uh, that probably could have used some buildup."

"I'm sorry. I really didn't know how to bring it up." Ben ran a hand through his hair with an annoyed groan. "I'm not doing this very well."

"Now dear, I sincerely doubt that this was something that you've had to practice talking about."

Ben gave a weak laugh. "No, it's not."

"So, you think that my granddaughter might be your daughter. Would you tell me why?"

"I'm not sure how I can say this without making Amanda—"

"Sound like the little tart that she was? I love my daughter, Ben, but I'm not blind to the way that she used to act. In fact, even though she's a mother now I don't believe that she's changed much over the years." Diane reached over and gave his knee a gentle squeeze. "Feel up to finishing?"

"I spent so much time here. Jeremy has always been my best friend. And Amanda, Amanda was beautiful and she was my age. Most of the kids who were my age thought I was two years behind because I was stupid. They didn't care that I had been sick. Amanda seemed different. She never thought I was stupid, or mocked me in front of others."

"No, she wouldn't have. She at least had some manners. And you are a very bright young man. I always thought so."

"Thank you." Ben felt himself start to flush with embarrassment. "Amanda was the first girl that I was ever with. I knew that I wasn't her first, but I thought she liked me. When I found out that she hadn't stopped seeing the guy she had been dating, it hurt."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Mrs. Walker."

"Ben, how many times do I have to tell you to call me Diane?" She gave his arm an affectionate slap. "I do feel as though I have to apologize. It was my job to raise her and every now and then I feel as though I didn't do a very good job. When Amanda told us that she was pregnant, but didn't know who the father was, it was a very shocking reality check as to the type of person that my daughter was."

"I always wondered when Amanda got pregnant if I could be the father, but I never got the chance to ask her about it. She stopped talking to me at school after we had sex. It seemed like once she'd had me, I didn't matter anymore. She got back together with Gary and didn't give me a single thought. It hurt, even though I was pretty sure she was still seeing someone else behind Gary's back. I wanted it to be me."

"She always was a bit shallow." Diane sighed and her eyes suddenly seemed tired. "She never did tell us the names of the boys she'd been sleeping with. Why are you bringing this up now?"

"I've been spending some time with Emily and, my God, Diane, does that girl ever remind me of me when I was her age. She takes to cooking just like I do and she's such a sweet kid."

"So you want to know if she's yours? And if she is? What then?"

"I'd like to spend time with her. I know she comes here in the summer, but if she is mine, I'd like it if she could come and stay with me during school breaks and holidays. As much as I tried to get this place out of my system, this is home and I wouldn't want my daughter raised anywhere else."

Diane patted his hand once more. "You're a good boy, Ben. Your mother must be very proud of you. Let me talk to Emily."

"Thank you, Diane."

"I can see how important this is to you. I'll talk to Emily and then we can see about getting a DNA test. I can't say that having my granddaughter around more wouldn't be something that would make me happy."

Ben chuckled as he got to his feet. "You're a good woman, Diane."

"Thank you." Diane walked him out. "Oh, and Ben?"

"Yes?"

"It really would make me happy to have you as part of the family," she replied. Diane smiled at him once more and then walked back into the house.

Ben stood in front of the house staring. He realized that it was almost the exact spot he had been standing in earlier and made himself start moving. He climbed into his car feeling slightly numb. That had gone much better than he had thought it would. If everything went well, he was going to find out if he was a father.

Chapter Fifteen

CAM had just finished his latest wedding and was putting his equipment in the truck. He was securing his camera when he noticed the package sitting in the bed. The sight of the small package wrapped in yellow paper with daisies on it filled him with dread. It wasn't the only package he had received lately. In fact, it was the seventh.

When the first one had shown up, Cam hadn't really given it much thought. It had arrived shortly after a wedding, which had made Cam think that it was from someone he had seen that day. Occasionally someone at a wedding would get a slight crush on him and give him a small gift. It didn't happen often, but it happened enough that Cam hadn't given the package a second thought. When the fourth gift had shown up on his porch, he had started to get worried. Jeremy had convinced him to call the police. The police were convinced that someone was stalking him and he was under strict instructions to call them the moment that he got another gift.

Cam sighed and pulled out his cell phone, hitting the speed dial. At least the cop assigned to his case was Patrick. He wasn't sure how he would have felt explaining all of the gifts to a stranger. Thankfully, talking to Patrick made him feel at ease.

"Hawkins"

"Hey, Patrick. It's Cam."

"Hey. Something up?"

"I got another package." Cam could feel a sense of dread crawling up his spine. He really didn't like this.

"Damn, this freak has it bad. What do these people like about that skinny ass of yours?"

"Hey, I happen to have a nice ass and I only have one stalker."

"I know. I was talking about Jeremy." Patrick chuckled on his end of the phone. "Are you at the house?"

"No. That's why this one has me worried."

There was a sound of feet hitting the floor. "Where are you?"

"At the park. I just finished doing a wedding and I found the damn thing in the back of my truck. He's never left anything in my truck before, Patrick. They've always been on my porch. I don't like this."

"Neither do I. Don't touch anything. I'll be there in ten minutes." Patrick hung up without saying goodbye. That's how their conversations normally went. They were so close that they only said what was needed. Goodbyes tended to be long and Patrick liked getting straight to the point.

Cam slid his phone back into his pocket and leaned against his truck. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. This was starting to get to him. He'd finally found someone to be happy with and suddenly he had a stalker. Jeremy was spending more time at his house, which was nice, but he didn't like the reason behind it. Jeremy was worried and didn't want him to be alone. Cam wanted him there because he didn't want to be anywhere else. Hell, Cam wanted Jeremy to move in with him.

They had been dating for almost two months and it was the best relationship that Cam had ever had. It was the one he wanted to be permanent. Cam had been building up to asking Jeremy to move in with him since Jeremy's birthday. He knew that most people would think that it was too soon in the relationship, but he loved Jeremy and he knew that Jeremy loved him. He also knew how much Jeremy hated his apartment. Cam had been slowly working up his nerve when the first gift showed up. In the weeks since then, everything had fallen apart. Cam just wanted to be able to put the stalker behind them so he and Jeremy could get back to where they had been.

Cam looked up when he heard a car pull up next to him. When Detective Patrick Hawkins stepped out of the car, Cam felt his mouth water just a bit. While he was completely in love with Jeremy, he wasn't blind. Patrick was a very good-looking man. The fact that he had known him since he was five didn't change that, nor did the fact that they had slept together. Actually, it made the attraction a bit stronger. His lean frame hit 6'2". The brown hair that had been unruly in grade school was tamed neatly and stayed out of his bright, green eyes. Plus, the man filled out a suit.

"Hey, Cam."

"Patrick."

"Where is it?"

"I didn't touch it. It's still in the back of the truck. I almost tossed my camera bag on top of it." Cam stepped away from the truck as Patrick put on a pair of latex gloves. He reached into the bed of the truck and picked up the package.

"You'd think whoever was doing this would find better wrapping paper. You don't strike me as the daisy type."

"I'm not."

"Don't like flowers?"

"No, I like flowers. I just don't like yellow. Or ugly things."

Patrick laughed. "Then what are you still doing with Montgomery?"

"Hey, no insulting my boyfriend."

"Why not? You insulted the last one that I had."

"That was because he was creepy." Cam shook his head. "He kept looking at me. They were weird looks, made my skin crawl. Where did you even find him?"

"At a club. A club that I have not been to since that boyfriend," Patrick replied with a laugh. He slowly pulled the paper off of the package, being careful not to rip it in case they were able to find prints. Pulling back the paper revealed a box of rather expensive chocolates. There was a note stuck to this one.

Why don't you love me? Why are you with him when I love you so much? I've done so much for you and you don't see me. I'll make you see. You'll see that I'm the only one for you. You'll see that we should be together.

"Pat?" Cam nervously chewed on his lip while Patrick read the letter a second time.

"This isn't good, Cam. I don't like this at all."

"And you think I do? Damn it, Patrick! All I want to do is go home and spend the day curled up in my lover's arms. I don't want any of this shit!" Cam was mortified to realize that there were tears in his eyes. He turned away from Patrick and angrily rubbed at his eyes.

"Hey, calm down." Patrick wrapped his arms around Cam and pulled him against his chest. "We'll find this guy. I'm not going to let anything happen to you. You're too important to me."

Cam and Patrick had been best friends for so long, and Patrick was closer to him than Kennedy ever could be. When Patrick had realized that he was gay, Cam had been the one that he turned to. Unlike Cam, Patrick didn't have an understanding family. He'd had no one to talk to. In fact, not only had Patrick's father thrown him out for being gay, he'd beaten him to a pulp and thrown him through a window. Patrick had gone from the hospital to the Walker home and hadn't left until college. Cam thought of him as family and he knew that Patrick felt the same.

"I know, Pat. I just don't know how much more of this I can take." Cam turned and rested his head against Patrick's shoulder. The security that he felt in Patrick's arms helped to calm him.

"If you need anything, you call me. Any time. You were always there for me; let me be there for you."

"You're always there for me. I know that."

"Not enough to tell me what Paul was doing to you." Patrick tilted Cam's head up and looked into his eyes. "I had to guess about that one and I didn't like it one bit. I was happy when you got rid of him."

"I didn't tell anyone. I mean, it's not like I'm someone who can't take care of himself. Hell, Pat, you're the one who taught me to fight. I don't know why I let him do that to me.'

"You'll tell me if Montgomery ever steps out of line?"

"Trust me; you don't have to worry about that. You just keep trying to find the freak that keeps leaving me these gifts," Cam instructed. He pulled out of Patrick's arms and wiped the remaining moisture from his eyes. Looking around, he noticed that most of the other cars were gone from the lot. "Look, now that you have the gift, can I go? I don't want to be late for the reception."

"Go ahead. I'll take this to the station and put it with the others." Patrick leaned down and gave Cam a swift kiss, licking across Cam's lips. "Tell Montgomery that I say hi."

"You can call him Jeremy."

"Not yet. I haven't decided if he's good enough for my boy yet." Patrick flashed him a cheeky grin and got in his car. Cam was left staring after him as he drove off. Sometimes he really wanted to hit the cocky smirk off of his face.

Cam finished securing his camera equipment and climbed into his truck. The reception was small and earlier than most of the weddings he had been doing lately, so it wouldn't be that late. And since the clinic wasn't open on Sundays, Cam would be able to spend some time with Jeremy when he got home. Home. That was a nice thought. All he had to do was find the right time to ask Jeremy to make it permanent.

PATRICK dropped into the chair behind his desk with a sigh. He hated taking things to the lab. The little brunette lab tech kept hitting on him and wouldn't take no for an answer. He had to keep finding new ways to turn her down. While Patrick didn't flaunt his sexuality at work, he didn't hide it either. He didn't understand how she could keep overlooking the fact that he was gay. Hell, most of the new recruits knew that he was gay shortly after they started. She had been there for two years and still didn't seem to catch on.

Patrick had just picked up the sandwich he had snagged on the way back to his desk when his cell phone rang. He groaned softly as he picked it up. "Hawkins."

"Patrick?" The voice on the other end of the phone sounded slightly panicked. "It's Jeremy."

Patrick leaned forward and dropped the sandwich as all four legs of his chair hit the floor once again. "What's wrong?"

"I need you to send some cops to the house and then go and get Cam."

"What happened?"

"The fucking stalker stabbed his dog."

"What?!" Patrick knew that he was shouting, but he didn't care. He glared at everyone who looked over at him until they looked away.

"Since Cam is at that wedding, Ben and I went for a run. When we got back, Hershey was lying in the doorway bleeding and there was a note taped to the door. I have no idea what the note said. I didn't even look. I'm in the car on the way to the clinic. I left Ben at the house."

"Okay. I'll send some people over to talk to him." Patrick waved some of his co-workers closer as he wrote what he needed them to do on a piece of paper. "Is the dog going to be okay?"

"She'd better be. I don't want to have to tell Cam that that bastard killed his dog." There was the sound of squealing tires, as if Jeremy had taken a corner too fast. "I need you to look after him for me, Patrick. He really loves his dog."

"Don't worry about it, Jeremy. I'll look out for him." Patrick hung up the phone and turned to the two men standing in front of his desk. "You guys get all that?"

"This freak stabbed a dog? What a bastard," Officer Trent Matthews commented. He and his partner Officer Cody Sharpe were the two that had come over to the desk when they had seen Patrick motioning for assistance.

"Exactly. I want the two of you to go to the house and talk to Ben Jacobs. He should still be at the house. Montgomery took the dog to the clinic."

"Walker is lucky that his boyfriend is a vet," Sharpe stated.

"He is. I'm going to go and pick him up from the wedding that he's at. I don't want him driving when he finds out what the asshole did to his dog." Patrick nodded at the other two officers then headed to his car. He heard his stomach growl as he got into his car. He hadn't had a chance to eat the sandwich he had picked up and he had left it on his desk. Maybe he could snag some food from the reception when he picked up Cam.

Patrick raced through the streets. He needed to get to the reception hall before Cam left. He didn't want his friend to go home and find cops at his house and his dog missing. Patrick pulled to a smooth stop in the parking lot of the reception hall. Thankfully, Cam's truck was still in the parking lot. Patrick put his car into park and got out. He was starting to feel a tad apprehensive. How did you tell your friend that the man stalking him had stabbed his dog?

Several already-drunk wedding guests gave him strange looks as he walked past them. Patrick simply nodded. They were drunk enough that he doubted they would realize he wasn't supposed to be at the wedding. Patrick slipped into the reception hall and scanned the crowd. He spotted Cam across the hall packing up his equipment. Taking a deep breath, Patrick walked across the room to his friend. "Cameron?"

Cam turned to look at him and the smile fell from his face. "Oh God, what happened?"

"Let's finish packing up your stuff and go outside."

"Patrick, what happened?" Cam's voice was starting to get a slightly panicked note to it. His hands were gripping his camera bag so hard that his knuckles were turning white. "Is it Jeremy?"

"Jeremy is fine. Just give me some of that stuff and we'll carry it to the car," Patrick replied. He grabbed two of Cam's bags in one hand and started for the door. He heard Cam's rapid footsteps as he hurried to catch up.

"Patrick, what is going on? You're scaring me," Cam stated. He managed to catch up the Patrick when they were outside.

The force of Cam's hand clamping onto his arm made Patrick stop walking. He turned with a sigh. "The stalker hit your house."

"What? Oh my God." Cam nearly dropped his camera in his shock. "Is everyone okay? Emily was going out today, but Jeremy should have been at the house."

"Everyone is fine."

"Then why are you here and why do you have that look on your face?"

"He stabbed your dog." Patrick groaned when he realized the tone he had used to say that. He had practically snapped at Cam. Patrick sighed and unlocked his car. "Just put your stuff in the car and we'll talk on the way."

"Okay," Cam replied. He tossed his stuff into the back of Patrick's unlocked car then got into the front seat. He pulled his seat belt on and waited

Patrick climbed into the car and pulled on his seat belt. He could feel Cam's eyes on him. With a deep sigh, he put his hands on the steering wheel and faced Cam. "Stop looking at me like that. Jeremy is fine"

"You said this crazy guy went to my house? He was at my house? Did he touch anything?"

"I don't know. I came straight here after Jeremy called me. I haven't been to the house yet. The cops are on their way there to talk to Ben. Jeremy said that he went jogging with Ben, and when they came back they found Hershey stabbed. I don't know any more than that." Patrick sat silently and watched the emotions play over Cam's face.

"Is Hershey all right?"

"I don't know, Shutterbug," Patrick stated. The nickname fell easily off of his tongue. Sometimes he used it more than Cam's actual name. He reached across the distance between them and grasped Cam's hand. He gave it a strong squeeze. "Jeremy took her to the clinic. Do you want me to drive you there or do you want me to take you home?"

"Um." Cam sighed and ran a hand over his face. "I really want to go to the clinic, but I'll just be in Jeremy's way. Take me home."

Patrick pulled on Cam's hand until he had the other man in his arms. He placed a gentle kiss on his friend's lips. "It'll be okay, Shutterbug. I'll get this guy."

"You will, will you?"

"I will. Come on; let's get you home." Patrick gently pushed Cam back into the passenger seat, then put the car in drive. He started the drive back to Cam's, going much slower than he had on the way to the reception hall. He was pretty sure that Cam didn't need the added stress of his usual style of driving on top of everything else he was going through.

When Patrick pulled up in front of the house, he saw that several patrol cars were still there. Motioning to Cam to stay in the car, he climbed out and headed over to where Matthews and Sharpe were standing, talking with several officers. They stopped talking as he approached.

"What's going on?"

"We were just waiting for you, Detective," Matthews responded. The look on his face was a mixture of apprehension and anger.

"Why, did something go wrong?"

"No, Jacobs told us everything that we needed to know and then some. He was pretty helpful for a guy who cooks for a living."

"Then what are you still doing here?" Patrick crossed his arms and gave them his best "I am not impressed" look.

"We thought you might want to see this," Sharpe replied. He handed Patrick two clear evidence bags. Patrick took it from him with a feeling of trepidation. He didn't want to look at what was in the bags.

One of the bags had a rather wicked-looking hunting knife inside of it. The end of the knife was covered in blood. Patrick was fairly certain that the blood belonged to Hershey. Knowing that the blood belonged to Cam's dog made him feel incredibly angry. He still couldn't believe that the bastard had stabbed a dog. The contents of the other bag made all of the blood rush from his face.

The bag held two pictures. One was a photo of Cam and Jeremy that had been taken at the town picnic last week. There was a large red x

across Jeremy's face. The other picture was of Paul. There was no x crossing out Paul's face. Of course, the Paul in the picture was dead, frosty, and stuffed in a freezer with his throat slit. The picture of Paul had writing on it.

Do you understand now? This is how much I love you. We will be together. We were meant to be together.

"You've got to be shitting me," Patrick announced.

"You know the person in the picture?" Matthews asked. He seemed to do more talking than his partner.

"It's Paul Stevens. He is, or was, Cam's ex." Patrick handed the bags back to the officers. "Shit."

"Do you need us for anything else, sir?"

"No, but I want someone watching this house. I don't want this happening again. Clear it with the captain." Patrick nodded at them then headed back to his car. He looked at Cam still sitting in the passenger seat and felt his stomach drop. There was no good way for him to tell his friend that his stalker had apparently already killed one person to get to him. Patrick opened the door and looked down at his friend.

"Pat, you've got that look on your face."

"What look would that be?"

"The one that you get when you have something bad to tell me but you don't want to tell me."

"Just grab your gear, Shutterbug. Let's get you inside where I can keep an eye on you."

"Why do you need to keep an eye on me?"

"Cameron, please just wait until we get inside," Patrick pleaded. He stepped out of the way, but kept holding the door open. Cam looked up at him with concern on his face, but did as he was asked.

The two of them gathered up all of Cam's equipment and headed for the house. Patrick spotted Ben standing in the front door waiting for them. He nodded to the other man and waved Cam in front of him. Patrick glanced around at the cops that were still in the yard then followed Cam up the steps.

"You didn't drive back here yourself, did you?" Ben asked. He stepped to one side to allow them into the house. Once they were both inside, he closed the door and locked it.

"No, Pat came and got me." Cam put his bag down with shaking hands. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. What about you? Did you see the picture?"

"What picture?"

"Shutterbug, why don't you and Jacobs have a seat while I go and put your stuff in the darkroom?"

"Okay," Cam stated. Patrick watched as Cam let Ben lead him to the couch. His lack of protest worried Patrick. Cam wasn't the type to let people lead him around. The stalker was obviously causing him more anxiety than he showed.

Patrick headed to the darkroom. Having helped Cam set the darkroom up in the first place, he knew where everything went. It didn't take him long to get all of the equipment properly stowed and the room locked. When he got back to the other room, Cam was sitting on the couch. Ben had taken one of the chairs, allowing himself a view of the doors into the room. Patrick was impressed. Most people didn't seat themselves so they could see all of the entrances to the room.

Sitting on the couch next to Cam, Patrick suddenly found himself with an armful of trembling photographer. He wrapped his arms around Cam and pulled him close. The other man practically crawled into his lap.

"Pat, what's going on?"

"The guy stalking you, he left some pictures on the door."

"What type of pictures?"

"One was of you and Jeremy from the picnic. The other was a picture of Paul."

"Paul? I haven't seen Paul in months."

"I know. It was a picture of him dead in a freezer."

"Oh my God," Cam muttered. He buried his face in Patrick's shoulder. "Why is he doing this to me?"

"I don't know, Shutterbug. I've stationed a couple of officers outside to watch the house. I'm not letting him get any closer."

Cam suddenly gripped a handful of Patrick's shirt. "Don't leave!"

"Hey, I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here until Jeremy comes back"

"Cam, why don't you go and get some rest? I'll fix you and Detective Hawkins something to eat," Ben suggested. He smiled at them from his seat in the chair.

"Okay," Cam replied. He reluctantly let go of Patrick and walked out of the room. Both Ben and Patrick watched as he took shaky steps up the stairs.

"You know, you can call me Patrick." He let his eyes travel over the other man. He liked what he saw.

"Well Patrick, feel free to call me Ben." Ben smiled at him. "Go and sit with him. He needs to be with a friend right now, and we just aren't that close yet."

"He's like family to me," Patrick stated. He felt a sudden need to explain to Ben that he wasn't hitting on Cam. He'd never felt the need to explain his relationship with Cam before, but he didn't know Ben. All he knew was that the other man was Jeremy's best friend and he didn't want Jeremy to think that he was putting the moves on Cam.

"I know. I'm not worried. He looks at Jeremy like he's the only thing in the world that matters to him. He looks at you like you're the one he can trust to protect him."

"I will"

"Go upstairs and sit with him. I'll make you a sandwich."

"Thanks. I'm starving." Patrick gave Ben a smile and headed up the stairs. He walked down the hall to Cam's bedroom and stepped inside. Cam was curled up on the covers in a T-shirt and pajama bottoms. Patrick was impressed at how quickly he had changed.

Patrick removed his shoes and took off his jacket, tossing it over a nearby chair. After taking off his tie and adding it to the pile, he undid the top three buttons of his shirt. Leaving his shoulder holster on, he walked across the room and crawled onto the bed next to Cam. Cam

rolled over so he was pressed against Patrick with an arm around his waist.

"Why is this happening to me, Pat?"

"I don't know, Shutterbug. I'm going to stay right here with you until your boy gets home. Okay?"

"Yeah." Cam snuggled closer and closed his eyes. Patrick could feel the wet heat of tears through the thin fabric of his dress shirt. He draped an arm over Cam and started to move his hand in soothing motions along the strong back. Leaning back against the headboard, Patrick settled in to wait for Jeremy. There was no way in hell he was leaving his friend alone until his lover came home.

HE angrily slammed the door of his apartment behind him. The blood on his hands caused his fingers to slip as he secured the locks. His hands were shaking. He had been so close. He had almost made it into the house

When Cameron hadn't responded to his gifts, he had started to wonder if he was even getting them. He had waited in the bushes after he left the fifth one. It had been one of his favorites. It was a CD full of romantic love songs. When he had seen *Patrick* drive up to the house and open the gift while Cameron had watched, he had almost lost it. Cameron had called the cops on him?

He had watched when he had left the following gifts. The same thing had happened. Patrick had come to open them. That was when he started to plan. He needed to get to the house and leave something that would let Cameron know that he was serious. He had followed Cameron to the wedding and left the gift in the back of the truck, and then he had headed to the house. He had stayed in his car and waited for the vet and his friend to leave. Once they had, he had headed up to the steps. He had been planning to leave his note and maybe look around the house for a bit. The stupid dog had spoiled his plan.

He'd left his note and opened the door to get a look at the house. That was when the dog had attacked him. He'd been about to step in the door when teeth had closed around his arm. He didn't even remember that he had the knife until he was sticking it into the dog. He had just managed to pull his bleeding arm away when the cat lunged at him. He hadn't even known that Cameron had a cat. The cat bit him right on top of the dog bite and started to hiss and yowl. He was forced to leave, holding his bleeding arm to his chest.

He stumbled through his apartment to his bathroom. He needed to clean up. Once in the bathroom, he pulled the bloody fabric away from his arm and looked at the wound. His arm looked shredded. Stupid dog. He hoped that he had killed the damn thing. If the vet couldn't save it, maybe it would make Cameron leave him. Then Cameron would be his.

He hissed as he started to clean the wound on his arm. As he cleaned the blood away, the revealed wound looked worse. He was going to have to wear long sleeves until the mark went away. He didn't want anybody to notice it and start asking questions. That was the last thing that he wanted. He hated questions.

When he finished cleaning and bandaging his arm, he headed to his wall of pictures. He just needed to look at his Cameron. Looking at his Cameron made everything better. He ran his finger down one of his favorites. It was a picture of the tattoo on his Cameron's back. He had stolen it from the tattoo parlor where Cameron had gotten the tattoo done. He loved to look at the strong back covered in swirling black lines and imagine what it would be like to run his tongue over it. He closed his eyes as a smile crossed his face. At least he had gotten the rest of his plan executed before the dog had attacked him.

Chapter Sixteen

JEREMY stepped into the house with a tired sigh. He was exhausted, but Hershey was going to be fine. That was all that mattered to him at the moment. That, and Cam's safety. The presence of the police car in front of the house made him feel better about Cam's safety. That, and he recognized Patrick's car sitting next to it. The knowledge that Patrick had stayed by Cam's side made Jeremy feel better about the entire situation.

"Jer, that you?" Ben walked over and took a good, long look at him. "You look like shit."

"Thanks; I feel like shit." Jeremy walked over and handed Ben the keys that were in his hand. "Thank you for letting me use your car."

"Don't worry about it. I wasn't going to make you wait with Hershey while I moved my car out of your way."

"Is Patrick still here?"

"He's upstairs with Cam. You gonna be okay?" Ben was giving him a concerned look.

"I'll be fine. You can head home. I know you've got that test tomorrow."

Ben laughed. "It's a DNA test, Jer. It's not like I have to study for it. They're just going to take some blood from me and Emily."

"You guys going to do anything after?"

"I think that we're going to have lunch with Diane."

"You cooking?"

"After they poke me full of holes and take my blood like a bunch of vampires? I don't think so. We'll go out." Ben leaned against the door and slipped his shoes on. "Try and get some rest."

"Yeah, I'll try. At least I don't have to work tomorrow. Plus, I had Melanie cancel all of the appointments for Monday while I was fixing up Hershey." Jeremy gave him a weak smile. "I'll see you later."

"Tell Cam I said goodnight." In an uncharacteristic move, Ben pulled Jeremy into a quick hug before he left the house. Jeremy watched him go, feeling slightly stunned. He must have looked worse than he thought if Ben had hugged him.

With a weary sigh, Jeremy locked the door behind him. If Patrick was leaving, he'd let him out and then lock up again, but knowing Patrick, he'd stay until morning. Cam did have an actual guest bedroom, not just the one that Emily slept in, so Patrick would have a bed to sleep in. Jeremy climbed the stairs and headed to the bedroom. He stopped just inside the door and looked.

Cam was lying on top of the covers, sound asleep. It seemed as though Patrick had tossed one of the extra quilts over him to keep him warm. Cam was pressed along Patrick's side with one arm flung over his waist. Jeremy felt a momentary flash of jealousy that Cam could sleep with another man next to him. That was when he felt eyes on him. He looked up and found himself caught in a dangerous green gaze. His eyes flicked to the side and he saw that Patrick's hand was on his sidearm.

"You planning on shooting me?" Jeremy was rather proud that his voice didn't shake when he asked the question. The last thing he wanted to do was let Patrick know that he made him nervous.

"I don't know. You planning on getting that look off your face?"

"What look?"

"That angry jealous look. You know that Cam loves you. That look shouldn't be there just because I was here to hold him while he cried as you were patching up his dog. I'm not the one that he's in love with."

Jeremy sighed and ran a hand over his face. "I'm sorry. It's been a long night."

"I thought as much." Patrick slowly pulled himself out from beneath Cam's arm. Cam murmured slightly, but didn't wake. Patrick pulled the quilt more securely around him then walked over to the door. He motioned for Jeremy to step into the hall.

"Is something wrong?"

"Why don't you tell me?"

"What?" Jeremy looked at Patrick in confusion. He wasn't sure what the other man was getting at.

"Look, I know you have a problem with me." Patrick held up a hand to stop the protest that Jeremy was forming. "It's okay. I get that with every guy that Cam dates."

"Every guy?"

"Every last one. Cam and I are close and it tends to make the guys he dates suspicious of him. Don't be. He loves you."

"I know he loves me."

"Then why are you still looking at me like you're not sure what to do with me?"

Jeremy sighed and ran a hand over his face. "I don't know. I've never been like this before. Cam just means so much to me and the two of you are so close."

"My parents threw me out when I told them I was gay."

"Yeah, my parents don't understand either. My mother is always calling and telling me that I'm a disgrace to her reputation."

"No, you don't quite get it. My father nearly beat me unconscious when I told him I was gay, then threw me through a window. My mother spat on me the last time she saw me in the grocery store. Cam and his parents took me in when I had no place to go. He and Diane are the only family that I have here. I'm not going anywhere, Jeremy, so you'll just have to get used to me being around." Patrick had his arms crossed over his chest in a defensive posture, but Jeremy could see the nervousness underneath. With a sudden clarity, Jeremy realized that Patrick was

worried he would leave Cam rather than get used to having Patrick around.

"Hell, if I can handle Kennedy hitting me, I can handle you."

Patrick's eyes narrowed. "Why did Kennedy hit you?"

"She saw some bruises on Cam and she thought that I had hit him."

"Did you?"

"No. I would never hurt Cam. We'd gotten a tad carried away the night before. I didn't even know that he had the bruises until the morning." Jeremy gave Patrick an amused smile. "Why, you going to hit me too?"

"No. If you were actually hitting Cam, I'd just shoot you."

"Tell me about the relationship that you have with Cam."

"No, that's a question you should ask Cam. It's not my place to tell." Patrick flashed him what he assumed was supposed to be a reassuring smile. It didn't work very well. "Did you lock the door?"

"Yes"

"Good. I'm going to get some sleep. Wake me up before either of you go anywhere." Patrick nodded at him and stepped into the spare room. He closed the door behind him.

Jeremy stared at the closed door feeling slightly stunned. He was pretty sure that was the longest conversation that he had ever had with the other man. Turning around, he headed back into the bedroom. He looked at the bed and felt a smile cross his face. Cam was still curled up in the middle of the bed. The arm that had been around Patrick was now clutching a pillow to his chest. Jeremy walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. He gently shook Cam's shoulder.

"Wake up, sweetheart." Jeremy pushed a lock of hair off of Cam's forehead.

"Jeremy?" Cam blinked tired, bloodshot eyes at him. "When did you get back?"

"I just got in. How are you feeling?" Jeremy moved up on the bed and took over the position that Patrick had been in. He smiled as Cam wrapped around him.

"I feel like shit." Cam cuddled closer. "Is Hershey going to be okay?"

"She's going to be just fine. I got her all stitched up and she's resting at the clinic. I canceled all the appointments for Monday, and Melanie is going to go in and check on her in the morning. We can go see her after you get some rest."

"She's really going to be okay?"

"Yes."

"Thank God." Cam slithered up and pressed a kiss to Jeremy's neck. He then settled down against his chest and sighed happily. "I'm glad that you're okay. Where's Patrick?"

"In the spare room. He wants us to make sure that we wake him up before either one of us leaves the house. He can be pretty intense."

"That's Pat." There was a note of admiration in Cam's voice.

"Cameron, can I ask you something?"

"You can ask me anything you want. You know that."

Jeremy took a deep breath. "What is your relationship with Patrick?"

Cam sighed and pulled away from Jeremy. He sat up and looked into Jeremy's eyes. "You like to ask the hard questions, don't you?"

"If you don't want to tell me—"

"No, that's not it. It's hard to explain."

"Just try."

"Patrick was the first person I told when I realized that I was gay." Cam chuckled slightly. "He didn't care. He said that he would still be my friend even if I liked guys as long as I didn't date Travis Beckett."

"Travis Beckett?"

"He was in our class. He was your typical example of the class bully, right down to being kind of fat and really mean. His family moved away before we started high school."

"How old were you when you realized that you were gay?"

"Thirteen."

"That can be hard on a kid."

"I had Pat and Kennedy. No one picked on me. It was like I came with my own bodyguards."

"So, you and Patrick are just friends? Like you and Kennedy are?"

"Not exactly."

"Baby, you're avoiding the question."

"I know. I'm just not sure how to say this. This isn't something that we've ever talked about."

Jeremy pulled him close and pressed a kiss to the top of his head. "Just tell me."

"Patrick was my first."

Jeremy felt his entire body tense in shock. That was not the answer that he had been expecting. "Your first what?" Jeremy wasn't sure he wanted Cam to say what he knew he was going to say.

"The first guy that I ever slept with. He ended up staying with us after his parents kicked him out. We got really close. There were some other gay guys that we hung out with and they always talked about how much the first time hurt. Pat and I were sure that it didn't have to, so we decided that there was no way that we were going to let someone hurt us just for sex. We decided that we would be each other's firsts. It worked out pretty well."

"So, your first time was good?"

"Yeah, it was. It was really good. I'm glad that I did it with someone that I trusted." Cam pulled away and looked into Jeremy's eyes. "Are you mad at me?"

"No, sweetheart. I'm not mad at you." Jeremy pulled him into a gentle kiss. "Actually, I'm kind of envious. My first time wasn't that great."

"I'm sorry."

"Hey, it wasn't your fault." Jeremy leaned back into the pillows behind him with a soft sigh. "Did you and Patrick ever date?"

"No, it's almost like we're too close for that. I love him to bits, he's family, but I'm not in love with him. We did occasionally have sex, though."

"Really?"

"Yeah, when we weren't seeing other people, we would sometimes sleep together. It was never serious. I know I can count on him when I need him. He's always been there for me."

"I'm glad that you have a friend like him." Jeremy threaded his hand through Cam's hair. "So, you just tell Kennedy that she's your best friend, don't you? Patrick is really your best friend, isn't he?"

"I refuse to answer that on the grounds that Kennedy would kick my ass," Cam answered with a laugh.

Jeremy chuckled and pulled Cam farther into his chest. He loved the feel of having Cam in his arms. It was what he thought about while he was at work all day. The thought of coming home to Cam was what got him through the day.

"So, you're okay with my relationship with Patrick?" There was a nervous tremor to Cam's voice.

"Yeah, I'm okay with it. I know that you aren't sleeping with him now that we're together because you're not that type of guy."

"Paul thought I was. I barely saw Patrick when I was with him. He made me stop doing movie Tuesdays."

"Movie Tuesdays? Baby, you've been spending Tuesdays here with me."

"I know"

Jeremy pushed Cam away from him so he could look into his lover's eyes. "Cameron, I don't mind if you spend time with Patrick. He's obviously important to you."

"You know, letting me go out with him will make him like you more."

"Baby, you never have to ask me to spend time with your friends. Just let me know when you're going to be out, so I know when you're busy, and not to make plans."

"I love you, Jeremy."

"I love you too, sweetheart. Now get off of me. I need to have a shower." Jeremy got off of the bed and walked into the bathroom to the sound of Cam's laughter. He loved that sound. From the way that Diane had lit up the first time she had heard Jeremy make Cam laugh, Jeremy gathered that laughing wasn't something that Cam had been doing much of lately.

As Jeremy stripped off his clothes and climbed into the shower, his mind went back over the conversation that he had just had with his lover. He thought he was finally getting an idea of why Patrick was so protective. The two men had a lot of history. Jeremy did have to admit that he was jealous. Not of the closeness, but of the sex. Patrick was a good-looking man and Jeremy had found himself wondering many times what it would be like to be with him. The thought of Patrick in bed with Cam was rather arousing. It was arousing enough that he was starting to get hard in the shower. He was just about to reach for his erection when he heard the shower door open behind him. He smiled when he felt arms around his waist.

"I was lonely."

"You were?"

"Uh-huh." Cam slithered around so he was pressed against Jeremy's chest. "I thought that I'd come and keep you company."

"Good," Jeremy replied. He bent down and pulled Cam into a heated kiss. When Cam opened to him with a moan, he thrust his tongue inside his lover's mouth. Jeremy ran the tip of his tongue over the roof of Cam's mouth. Cam shuddered in his arms.

Jeremy slid his hands down his lover's wet back. *Mmmm, wet skin.* When he reached Cam's ass, he grabbed a handful of the delectable cheeks and pulled him flush against his body. He could feel his lover's erection grinding into his. As he leaned down to deepen the kiss, his hair fell around them in damp tangles. Jeremy couldn't bring himself to care. All he cared about was the taste flooding his mouth. He loved the way that Cam tasted.

Needing air, Jeremy pulled himself away from Cam's tempting mouth. After sucking in some of the much-needed air, he licked a path down Cam's neck. His lover tasted like water and skin. When he reached the juncture where neck met shoulder, he sucked a patch of skin into his mouth. He smiled as his lover groaned and trembled against him. He bit down on the skin in his mouth and was rewarded with a vocal cry.

Jeremy slid his hand between their tightly pressed bodies and grasped both erections in his hand. His hand slid easily over their joined erections. Jeremy gasped as Cam bit his neck. He groaned into Cam's neck and started to pump faster. Jeremy trembled as Cam's fingers trailed down his spine and dipped between his cheeks. When he felt a finger press inside of him, he lost it. He came all over Cam with a harsh moan and bit into the creamy shoulder. He felt Cam release against him as he bit into his flesh.

"God, Jeremy."

"Mmm." Jeremy pulled away and licked at the mark that he had left on his lover's shoulder.

"You better not let go of me."

"Why not?"

"I don't think I can stand on my own," Cam replied with a small chuckle.

"Hold onto me. I'll clean us up." Jeremy grabbed the shampoo and started to efficiently clean his lover. He had them both cleaned and rinsed before the hot water ran out. Jeremy stepped out of the shower and pulled Cam into his arms, wrapping him in one of the fluffy bath towels. "I love you, sweetheart."

"I love you too, Bright Eyes."

"Let's get you into bed." Jeremy pressed a soft kiss to Cam's damp hair and gently pushed him toward the bedroom. When they got into the other room, he handed his lover the pajama pants he had been wearing earlier.

"You don't usually want me to put clothes on, lover."

"We have a guest. I know he's already seen you naked, but I want to keep you wrapped up until he leaves."

Cam laughed. "Well, in that case, you better put some clothes on as well. I don't want Patrick to see you naked. I want to keep you all to myself."

"I like the possessive side of you. Makes me feel all special."

"You are special."

"Thanks, baby." Jeremy placed a soft kiss to his lover's lips. He pulled the covers back on the bed and ushered Cam under them. Once Cam was settled, he quickly pulled on his own pajama pants, turned on the bedside lamp, then moved around the room, securing it for the night. He was just about to head back to the bed when he heard scratching at the door. Jeremy opened it and watched with amusement as Puddles stalked into the room.

Puddles bounded across the room and jumped onto the bed, curling up by Cam. Jeremy was impressed to see that she was on the opposite side from where he slept. He made sure the door was closed, then joined Cam in the bed. Cam turned off the lamp and curled into his arms. They shifted around for a few moments to get comfortable. Once they were settled, Cam let out a small sigh. Jeremy felt the tension creep back into his lover's body.

"Baby, are you okay?"

"You're sure that Hershey is going to be okay?"

"She's going to be just fine. She'll need to stay at the clinic for a few days, but then she can come home."

"This guy is starting to scare me, Jeremy. Pat said he left a picture of Paul dead in a freezer stuck to my door. I'm scared."

"I know, sweetheart. I know. We'll get through this together." Jeremy pressed a kiss to the top of Cam's head. He ran his hand over his lover's back in a soothing motion until he felt his breathing even out in slumber. With his lover safe in his arms, Jeremy let sleep pull him under. They could deal with everything else in the morning.

Chapter Seventeen

CAM was alone when he woke up. That would have worried him, except he could hear voices coming from downstairs and he could smell breakfast cooking. *Mmm, bacon.* Cam stretched, then rolled over. Jeremy's spot in the bed was still warm, indicating that he hadn't been out of bed for long. Cam breathed in Jeremy's scent from the sheets. He liked being able to smell Jeremy in his bed.

Cam rolled himself out of bed and headed to the bathroom. He emptied his bladder, then headed to the kitchen. He was still wearing the pajama pants that he had put on before bed, but he didn't put on a shirt. While he respected Jeremy's request the night before, he hated wearing a shirt first thing in the morning. He liked to put off getting dressed as long as possible. When he reached the kitchen, Cam stopped and just enjoyed the view in front of him

Jeremy had his hair braided away from his face. He'd pulled on a white T-shirt that stretched across his shoulders. He was frying bacon on the stove. He held out one of his hands and Patrick placed a cup of coffee in it. Patrick was sitting on the kitchen counter barefoot wearing nothing but a faded pair of jeans. There was a tribal tattoo twining around his right bicep. The Japanese symbols for health and strength were tattooed on his left pectoral muscle. The kitchen light glinted off of the silver hoop through his right nipple. An angel holding a banner with the name Marguerite on it was tattooed on the inside of his left forearm. Patrick turned slightly to say something to Jeremy and the edge of the tattoo on

the back of his neck became visible. Patrick had his badge number tattooed on the back of his neck.

"Damn, two hot men in my kitchen. I could get used to this." Cam walked over and stood in front of Patrick. "Get off of the counter. You're blocking the coffee."

"Aw, you can have mine, Shutterbug." Patrick held his mug out to Cam.

"Fuck off and get out of my way."

"Sure." Patrick slithered off of the counter in a way the made his ripped abs clench enticingly. He flashed Cam a grin as he walked around him to the table. "You sure are grumpy in the morning."

"Bite me." Cam poured himself a cup of coffee then moved over to Jeremy. He slid himself under the arm that wasn't stirring bacon and kissed his lover's cheek. "Good morning, Bright Eyes."

"You didn't tell me he was that fun to look at without clothes on."

"You never asked."

"He has his nipple pierced. I thought he was a detective, not a rock star."

"You do realize that I can hear you?" Patrick snapped. He was sitting at the table glaring at the two of them.

"Don't be so sensitive."

"Bite me, Montgomery."

Jeremy turned so he was fully facing his lover. "Is he where you get your biting thing from?"

"Actually, I think he gets it from me."

"Will the two of you stop talking about me like I'm not even in the room? One more comment about me and biting, and I'm going to bite somebody."

"Big words, but I think you're all talk," Jeremy taunted. He didn't even turn to face Patrick. He kept his eyes locked with Cam's, which allowed Cam to watch him when Patrick did as taunted.

Cam watched Patrick walk up behind Jeremy. He felt his friend's arm brush against his bare stomach as Patrick wrapped an arm around Jeremy from behind. The end of Jeremy's braid touched his shoulder as Patrick pushed it out of the way. Letting his mouth hover just above Jeremy's T-shirt, Patrick licked the spot before biting down. Cam watched Jeremy's eyes glaze over and he felt himself start to harden. He knew the wicked things that Patrick could do with his mouth. Cam wasn't sure how he did it, but when Patrick bit him, it made every nerve ending in his body come alive in pleasure. From the way Jeremy's cock was suddenly glad to be there, he was pretty sure that the bite was causing the same reaction in his lover.

"Oh God," Jeremy moaned. He closed his eyes and leaned forward against Cam. His movement pulled them both closer and allowed Patrick better access to his neck. Cam reached out and ran his finger where Patrick's lips met Jeremy's neck. Patrick pulled away just long enough to give his finger a nip.

"Patrick." Cam's words came out in a rather embarrassing breathy moan. All Patrick had done was bite his finger, but he was rock hard with his erection pressing against Jeremy's.

"If you want me to stop, I'll go jerk off in the shower while the two of you play down here," Patrick stated. He'd stopped biting Jeremy's neck, but Cam could feel his hand moving under Jeremy's shirt. Jeremy was starting to make small whimpering sounds.

"Jeremy, did you catch that? This is up to you." Cam cupped Jeremy's face in his hands and stared into his dazed eyes. "You with me, love?"

"Yeah, I'm here." Jeremy blinked until his eyes cleared then stared into Cam's. Reading the decision in his lover's eyes, Cam smiled.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Patrick's voice was starting to become strained with what Cam knew was partially suppressed desire.

"I want you to keep doing what you're doing. Don't you dare go anywhere," Jeremy replied. He turned enough to take Patrick's mouth into a demanding kiss. Watching them kiss, Cam whimpered and rubbed himself against Jeremy. He couldn't believe how much watching Jeremy kiss another man was turning him on. Of course, the fact that the man was Patrick may have had something to do with it.

When Jeremy finished with Patrick, Cam leaned across him and pulled his friend into a kiss. He nearly purred when he felt Patrick's tongue swipe across the roof of his mouth. Cam clutched Jeremy as he continued to eat at Patrick's mouth. He pulled back when air became necessary, nipping at Patrick's lower lip. Cam felt Patrick's hands settle on his waist as the detective rested his chin against Jeremy's shoulder. Patrick arched an eyebrow at him.

"This is your show, Jeremy. Tell us how you want us," Cam instructed.

Jeremy's lips twitched in an amused smile. "The two of you have done this before, haven't you?"

"Once or twice," Patrick answered. He licked the bite he had left on Jeremy's neck. "You haven't answered Cam's question."

"God, I want..." Jeremy shivered as Patrick started to lick his neck again. "I want you to fuck me."

"I like that idea." Patrick hooked his chin over Jeremy's shoulder and grinned at Cam. "How flexible are you feeling, Shutterbug?"

"Why?"

"Add in Jeremy's height and that counter is just about at the right level."

It took a moment for Cam to grasp what Patrick was saying, but when he did, a wave of lust almost knocked him off of his feet. He swayed in Jeremy's arms. "I like that idea."

"What idea?" Jeremy's voice was full of confusion.

Cam locked eyes with Jeremy. "You fucking me while Patrick fucks you."

Jeremy's eyes glazed. "We can do that?"

"Hell yeah. Lube still in the kitchen drawer?"

"Yup. Grab some condoms, too. I'll get us naked," Cam stated. He quickly slithered out of his pajama pants and started working on Jeremy's clothes. By the time Patrick returned with the lube and condoms, he had Jeremy naked. Patrick grinned and tossed his jeans out of the way.

Cam licked a path across Jeremy's chest, and stopped when he encountered a nipple. He ran his tongue repeatedly over the nipple until it was a hardened nub. When he could feel Jeremy shaking, he moved on to the next one. Reaching around Jeremy, Cam grasped Patrick's nipple ring in his hand and tugged. Patrick emitted a pleased whine and began to run his hands over Jeremy. Cam could feel Patrick's fingers lightly brushing his own skin as the other man caressed Jeremy. Cam ran his tongue up Jeremy's chest to his neck, on the opposite side of the bite that Patrick had left. After swirling his tongue around the area for a moment, he bit down.

His action caused Jeremy to start to writhe between them. Jeremy was thrusting his erection against Cam's and grinding his ass toward Patrick. The sounds he was making were those of a man lost in pleasure and Cam loved it. He loved making Jeremy incoherent with passion. As he was sliding a hand down Jeremy's ass, his fingers brushed Patrick's lube-coated ones. He pulled his mouth off of Jeremy and smiled at his friend.

"You better get moving."

"Jeremy, help me get on the counter," Cam instructed. He smiled as strong arms helped to lift him from the floor to the counter. Once up there, he shifted around until he was in the perfect position for Jeremy to take him. His cock was already leaking. They hadn't tried this position yet. Cam liked to try new things.

"Here's the lube, Goldilocks. Get Shutterbug ready while I play with you," Patrick instructed. Cam watched as Jeremy's eyes fluttered. He knew what caused that look. Patrick had put a finger inside of him.

Cam made needy sounds as he watched Jeremy spread lube on his fingers. He couldn't remember the last time he had been this impatient during sex. It felt like he had been hard forever. Cam firmed his grip on the counter as he felt a finger enter him. Jeremy was moving that finger slowly, causing Cam to whimper. He wanted Jeremy in him now.

"More, Jeremy." Cam's voice turned into a whine as Jeremy brushed against his prostate. His hips lifted off the counter and came down with a small thud. He was going to add to his "bruises caused by sex" collection. The thought made him thrust down against the finger that Jeremy had inside of him. Jeremy's actions weren't quite the same as they usually were. It took Cam a moment to realize that Jeremy was

mimicking what Patrick was doing to him. Since Patrick seemed to be having fun teasing Jeremy, Jeremy was teasing him. Cam growled in frustration. "Stop teasing. Want you in me."

"You're always so damn pushy, Shutterbug. Let the man have his fun," Patrick panted. The man in question let out a moan that indicated Patrick had found his prostate and was doing naughty things to it.

Jeremy thrust his fingers rather sharply into Cam as Patrick played him like an instrument. Cam gasped at the sensation and tossed his head back. His head connected with the cupboards with a solid thunk. He frowned in momentary annoyance that was quickly replaced with pleasure as Jeremy started to twist his fingers. Cam moaned and thrust down to meet him. When Jeremy leaned down and bit into his neck, Cam cried out and started to tremble. He was starting to have some trouble holding onto the counter. The tremors he could feel in Jeremy's body as he prepared him heightened his pleasure. He loved seeing his lover lose control in pleasure. Suddenly the delightful preparations stopped.

"What the fuck? Jeremy!"

"Patrick stopped." Jeremy's voice was full of strain. He seemed to be just as annoyed as Cam was.

"Get inside Cam first. I don't think we'll be able to pull this off if I get in you first," Patrick instructed. Cam started to nod enthusiastically. He was a fan of that idea

Cam actually moaned when he heard the sound of Jeremy opening the condom. By the time his lover had the condom on, Cam was panting with need. Cam moaned again as he felt the head of Jeremy's cock pressing against his entrance. Jeremy entered him slowly. The slow slide and stretch had Cam letting out a soft keening noise. When he was fully seated inside of Cam, Jeremy rested his arms against the edge of the counter.

Keeping one hand on the counter to support himself, Cam ran the other hand down Jeremy's face. He pressed a soft kiss to his lover's lips. He loved the feeling of having Jeremy inside of him. Cam could feel Jeremy's erection resting just against his prostate. He knew that the moment Jeremy started moving he was going to be catapulted close to the edge. It was the waiting that was going to drive him insane.

"Jeremy, lean forward a bit," Patrick instructed. Cam could feel it when Patrick started to work his way into Jeremy. Every time that Patrick slid in further, Jeremy would shift his hips, causing Cam to gasp. It had been a while since Cam had done this. He'd forgotten how good it felt.

Cam felt Jeremy bite into his neck as Patrick completed his entry. Whimpering at the added sting to his neck, Cam began to shift. Unfortunately, he was having trouble getting leverage with no way to anchor his legs. He couldn't wrap them around both Jeremy and Patrick. His legs weren't that long. Just when he was ready to howl in frustration, he felt another set of arms bracing his legs. Patrick had put his hands on the edge of the counter with his arms supporting Cam's legs. Cam caught Patrick's eyes over Jeremy's shoulder. He nodded and Patrick flashed him a wicked smile.

When Patrick pulled out and pushed back in, the force of his hips sent Jeremy moving forward. Cam moaned as Jeremy went deeper inside of him. Within moments, they had managed to fall into a rhythm. Cam could feel bruises forming on his ass, but he didn't care. With the added force of Patrick's thrusts, Jeremy was going deeper than he ever had before. He was brushing against Cam's prostate with every thrust and Cam was howling in pleasure.

Cam shuddered as he felt his passion rising. Patrick was the one controlling the speed and force of the thrusts. Cam had forgotten how strong he was. He could still feel Patrick's arms holding his legs up. The sweat on his skin was starting to make his legs slide against Patrick's arms. Cam could feel those arms trembling against him and knew that Patrick was close. When Patrick howled in completion, the force of his final thrust slammed Jeremy forward, causing him to nail Cam's prostate. Cam screamed as he came. He moaned as he felt Jeremy bite down on his shoulder as he came as well.

Cam panted as he attempted to get his breathing back to normal. "Okay, you need to let me up now."

"Hmm?" There was a dazed look in Jeremy's eyes. It seemed as though orgasm had melted his brain.

"You need to move. We're squishing Shutterbug." Patrick tickled the back of Cam's leg with his fingers then pulled out of Jeremy with a

groan. Cam's legs nearly hit the counter as the support of Patrick's arms moved away.

Cam groaned as Jeremy pulled out of him. He was starting to feel the pain of stretched muscles. Both Patrick and Jeremy moved away from him in order to dispose of the condoms. Cam got off of the counter with a groan. "What's that smell?"

"Shit! The bacon!" Jeremy dashed over to the stove. Cam watched in amusement as Jeremy pulled a frying pan full of black lumps off of the stove. "Damn it."

"You burned breakfast? But I was hungry." Cam grabbed a dish towel with a small pout and started to wipe off his stomach.

"This is all your fault. And that was the last of the bacon." Jeremy sighed and tossed the entire pan into the sink.

"Fine. The two of you stay here. I'll go get more bacon," Cam stated. He pulled on Patrick's discarded jeans, Jeremy's T-shirt, and then headed for the front door. He paused to kiss both Jeremy and Patrick on his way.

"Wait a minute. There's someone stalking you. Do you really think that you should be going out alone?" Jeremy crossed his hands over his naked chest and glared at his lover.

"I'll be fine."

Patrick spoke up. "Actually, from what was left on the door, I'd have to say that the stalker wants to hurt Jeremy. He's just leaving gifts for Cam. Plus, if he had been anywhere near the house again, the guys outside would have scared him off."

"See, I told you that I would be fine." Cam blew his lover a kiss and continued on his way to the door. "Okay, off to get bacon."

"You might want to get a new pan while you're at it, Shutterbug. This one is done for good!" Patrick called.

"Got it. You two clean up the mess while I'm gone. I'll be back with breakfast soon." Cam slid his feet into his shoes and grabbed his wallet. "Jeremy, I'm taking your car. My truck's still at the reception hall"

"Drive safe, sweetheart."

"Bye, love." Cam picked up Jeremy's keys and headed out of the door. He pulled it closed behind him and practically skipped to the car.

Cam was feeling good. Jeremy was going to take him to see Hershey after they ate. He'd just had an amazing round of sex in his kitchen with the two people who meant the most to him in the world. Cam waved at the patrol car in front of the house and climbed behind the wheel of Jeremy's car. He put the car in motion and headed down the street.

As he drove, Cam thought about what he would need at the grocery store. He knew that they were out of bacon and he agreed that he most likely needed a new frying pan. He was also thinking about getting some of those Danish things that Patrick liked. He had never thought that he would be able to have Patrick and Jeremy at the same time. He hadn't thought that would be something that Jeremy would be interested in. He was glad that he was wrong. The sex in the kitchen had been amazing. Cam was starting to form plans for the rest of the day.

Approaching the turn that he needed to take, Cam pressed on the brakes to slow down. Nothing happened. Starting to get concerned, Cam slammed his foot on the pedal. Nothing happened. The brakes weren't working. Cam turned the wheel frantically and the car spun out of control. He ended up heading into the ditch. The last thing Cam saw was a tree rapidly approaching the windshield.

Chapter Eighteen

JEREMY'S hands were shaking as he walked into the hospital. Only Patrick's strong presence at his back kept him from falling apart completely. He just kept replaying the phone call over and over in his head. All he had heard was the nurse telling him that Cam had been in a car accident and then he had dropped the phone. Patrick had had to pick it up to get the rest of the information.

Jeremy had been starting to wonder what had been taking Cam so long to get groceries. He knew that Cam would have ended up looking for more than just bacon and a frying pan, but that shouldn't have taken him long. When the phone had rung, his heart had nearly stopped. He had known that it would be about Cam and he had known that it wasn't going to be good.

The hospital was full of people. Jeremy wasn't sure how they were going to be able to get through the crowd; then Patrick pulled out his badge. It seemed to have almost magical powers. Patrick held it up and people simply moved out of their way. They made it to the desk without too many problems.

Jeremy stood to one side while Patrick talked to the nurse behind the desk. He had no problem letting Patrick do the talking. He was fairly certain that if he opened his mouth to ask a question he would just start screaming. Either that or he would start to cry. He didn't want to do either one in the middle of the hospital.

Feeling someone touch his back, Jeremy turned and found himself looking into Patrick's concerned eyes. He swallowed nervously. "Is something wrong?"

"Come on, she told me what floor they have him on. Diane is already here."

"How did she get here before us?"

"She was here for the blood test, remember? This is the day that Emily and Ben are getting tested." Patrick gently steered Jeremy over to the elevators. Jeremy didn't even try to protest. He just let Patrick lead him around.

"Patrick, I'm scared."

"I know, Goldilocks. So am I. Come on; let's get up there." Patrick gently pushed Jeremy into the now-open elevator. As they traveled in the elevator, Patrick's hand never left Jeremy's back. The solid touch helped to anchor him

When the doors opened, the first thing that Jeremy saw was the waiting room. Diane was sitting in one of the chairs with Kennedy on one side and Emily on the other. Ben was leaning against the wall by Emily. Jeremy realized that he must have made some type of noise when they all suddenly looked up. He hadn't even noticed that Patrick was still moving him forward until Diane got up and pulled him into a hug. He wrapped his arms around her and felt tears fill his eyes.

"How is he?" Jeremy asked. He could hear the choke of tears in his own voice.

Diane pulled away and wiped her eyes. "He's still with the doctors. They haven't told us anything yet."

"Why don't we just sit back down?" Patrick leaned around Jeremy and placed a kiss on Diane's cheek. "Hi, Mom."

"Hello, Patrick, dear." Diane patted his cheek and headed back to her chair. Jeremy and Patrick sat down in the chairs across from the girls and Ben joined them. Jeremy ended up with Ben on his left and Patrick on his right. Jeremy was surprised to find that he was taking more strength from Patrick than he was from Ben.

They spent several hours sitting in the waiting room. At one point Kennedy and Emily went to get them all coffee. They'd finished their drinks and were once again simply sitting in the waiting room when a doctor walked in. The woman looked tired, but happy. Hopefully that was a good sign.

"I'm Dr. Thomas. Are you here for Cameron Walker?"

"Yes. I'm his mother." Diane had stood and moved over so she was standing next to the other woman.

"I've got some good news for you. Your son is going to be just fine."

"Oh, thank God," Diane breathed. They all breathed a sigh of relief at her announcement. Jeremy felt Patrick's hand fist in his shirt at his back

"Now, he did sustain some injuries. He broke his left arm, his nose, and several ribs. The seat belt left a rather large bruise on his chest. The broken nose has given him bruises around both of his eyes along with numerous other small cuts and bruises. He has some abrasions on his hands and neck that were caused by the seat belt and the air bag. We're going to keep him for a few days just to make sure that he didn't sustain any internal injuries that we missed."

"Can I see him?"

"He's still heavily sedated. I can only let one of you back."

When Diane turned and looked at him while biting her lip, Jeremy smiled and squeezed her shoulder. "Go ahead. He's your son."

"Thank you," Diane replied. She wiped the tears from her eyes and followed the doctor down the hall.

They all waited for Diane to return. After she reported that Cam did indeed seem to be okay even though he was covered in bruises, they all split off to head home. Kennedy went with Diane and Emily. Emily had decided to stay with her grandmother and Kennedy was going to stay with them as well. Ben headed off to The Evening Garden. He had to get prepared for the dinner rush. Jeremy ended up back in a car with Patrick.

"Have they figured out what happened to cause the accident?"

"Not yet. They're going to call me in the morning." Patrick put the key in the ignition then turned to face Jeremy. "Where do you want me to take you?"

"Can you take me back to Cam's? I really don't want to go home to my empty apartment tonight."

"Not a problem, Goldilocks." Patrick put the car in gear and started the drive back to Cam's. His hands were tightly gripping the steering wheel.

"Patrick, are you okay?"

"This was too close. He's a photographer. That is not supposed to be a dangerous profession."

"Patrick?" Jeremy put a hand on the other man's arm. He could feel the tremors running through the lean frame.

"Jeremy, you need to move your hand. I'm incredibly close to having a bit of a panic attack and I would rather have it somewhere where other people wouldn't see me."

"Okay." Jeremy pulled his hand off of Patrick's arm and moved as far away from Patrick as the seat would allow. He understood what Patrick was going through. He'd had his own breakdown in the car earlier, but he was Cam's boyfriend, not a cop.

The drive back to Cam's went by in silence. It wasn't a tense silence like the drive to the hospital. The panic that they had both been feeling over the accident had been dispelled by the news from the doctor. The silence that was in the car now was closer to a peaceful silence, but there was still the undercurrent of Patrick's impending breakdown. Jeremy didn't even feel like turning on the radio. He didn't want to increase the tension he could see running through Patrick. By the time they pulled into Cam's driveway, Patrick's hands were starting to shake on the steering wheel. The keys rattled when he pulled them out of the ignition.

Jeremy got out of the car and walked up to the door. He could still see the lights on in the kitchen from when they had rushed out of the house. He stood by the front door and waited for Patrick to reach him. Jeremy twisted the end of his braid around his fingers while he waited. For some reason he was starting to become nervous. He wasn't quite

sure where the feeling was coming from. He'd never been nervous around Patrick before. He hadn't even been nervous when they had been having sex in the kitchen.

Patrick brushed past him and opened the door. Jeremy enjoyed the view for a moment then walked into the house after him. He closed and locked the door behind him. When that was done, he turned to see where Patrick had ended up. He spotted the other man standing in the doorway to the kitchen. Jeremy slipped off his shoes, put them on the mat next to Patrick's, walked over and stood behind him, not quite touching, but close enough for his presence to be felt.

"Everything was going so well this morning. He was just supposed to go and get bacon and then come right back."

"I know"

"I shouldn't have let him leave."

"Patrick, it's not your fault."

Patrick let out a rather hysteric-sounding laugh. "I should have gone with him. Or I should have had one of the officers drive him. I wasn't thinking."

"It wasn't your fault," Jeremy repeated. He moved that last step and pulled Patrick into his arms.

Jeremy simply stood still holding Patrick while the other man tensed in his arms. After a moment, Patrick shuddered and turned around. He buried his face against Jeremy's neck and Jeremy felt the wet heat of tears as Patrick's body began to shake. Jeremy ran comforting hands over his back as the normally tough detective cried in his arms. By the time Patrick's tears ceased, he had managed to get his hands underneath the T-shirt that Jeremy was wearing. Jeremy could feel the heat of his hands practically burning his skin.

Patrick pulled away and Jeremy found himself staring into a pair of watery green eyes. Jeremy moved one hand away from Patrick's back and wiped the tears from his cheeks. Once he had all of the tears washed away, Jeremy tapped Patrick on the nose with his thumb. Patrick wrinkled his nose and gave him a rather ineffective glare. Jeremy laughed and did it again. This time Patrick snapped at his finger. Jeremy grinned.

"Do it again and I really am going to bite it."

"I still say that you are all talk."

"Is that a dare?"

"Maybe."

"You asked for it," Patrick replied. He pulled one hand out from underneath Jeremy's T-shirt and grasped the hand that Jeremy had been poking him with.

Jeremy watched with interest as his hand was pulled to Patrick's mouth. The thumb that he had been tapping him with was moving closer to the tempting lips. Jeremy gasped as Patrick sucked his thumb into his mouth. He moaned softly and he felt Patrick's tongue swirl around his thumb. When he felt Patrick's teeth clamp down on the digit, Jeremy turned swiftly and pressed Patrick against the doorframe. He pulled his thumb out of Patrick's mouth and leaned in for a kiss.

When his lips pressed against Patrick's, it was like Patrick came alive beneath him. It was nothing like their earlier kiss. That kiss had been softer and full of amused passion. This one was harder. Jeremy moaned as Patrick kissed him with almost bruising force. Jeremy could feel the hand that Patrick still had underneath his shirt dig into his back. He was forced to pull away to suck in the air that his lungs were demanding.

"Patrick, let go."

"No. Please, Jeremy, I need this." There was raw need shining in Patrick's still damp eyes.

"Calm down, Patrick. I wasn't going to say no."

"You weren't?"

"No. I just don't want to have sex in a doorway." Jeremy gently brushed hair off of Patrick's face. "We both need this."

"I was a bit worried that you'd turn me down." Patrick sighed and rested his head against Jeremy's shoulder.

"Hey, we had a lot of fun in the kitchen and I know that Cam had plans for later. I had a few of my own." Jeremy ran his hands over the strong back in his arms. He pulled them away from the wall and started walking them to the stairs. He felt Patrick's arm settle around his waist.

"I may have had some plans of my own as well," Patrick replied with a laugh. He snuggled himself against Jeremy's side with a sigh.

"Did you? Plans that I might like?"

"I think so." Patrick stopped them and turned so he was once again in the circle of Jeremy's arms. "Take me to bed?"

"If you insist." Jeremy looked at the man in his arms and smiled. He pressed another kiss to the tempting lips. He pulled away and grasped Patrick's hand. Giving a small tug, he pulled the other man up the stairs.

Jeremy pulled him down the hall into the master bedroom. The bed was still unmade. He and Patrick had never made it out of the kitchen before they got the call that Cam was at the hospital. Jeremy stumbled slightly as his feet encountered the pajama bottoms he had tossed on the floor when he had changed. His stumble pulled Patrick flush against him.

Patrick's arms immediately went around him to keep him from falling. Jeremy turned to thank him, but his eyes were drawn to Patrick's lips. He leaned in and licked the tempting lips in front of him. When Patrick's mouth opened with a whimper, Jeremy pressed closer and dipped his tongue inside. He fisted his hands in the back of Patrick's shirt and pulled him closer. Jeremy released him when he felt himself starting to trip again. He heard Patrick's soft laugher as he pulled away.

"I think that I'm going to have to let go of you if I don't want to drop both of us on our asses."

"Okay," Patrick replied. He slowly pulled himself out of Jeremy's arms. When he was far enough away, Jeremy bent over and pulled the pants away from his feet. He jumped when he felt Patrick pinch his ass.

"Hey!" Jeremy yelped and jumped to one side. He glared at the other man. "What was that for?"

"Can't seem to keep my hands off of your ass."

"Punk." Jeremy grinned at him. He started to move forward then stopped as he noticed Patrick's clothes for the first time. "That's not the shirt that you were wearing yesterday."

"No, it's not."

"But you didn't go home at all."

"No, I didn't."

"Then how did you get clean clothes?"

"Cam lets me keep stuff in the spare room." Patrick grinned at him.

"You're spoiled."

"Maybe," Patrick answered. There was a teasing lilt to his voice. The teasing made it to his eyes as Jeremy walked toward him.

Jeremy grabbed the front of Patrick's shirt and pulled him into his arms. He attacked the other man's lips with an almost bruising intensity. He had been hard since they had started kissing in the kitchen doorway and it hadn't gone away. If anything, he had gotten harder as they had walked up the stairs. Jeremy released the piece of shirt he was holding and grabbed Patrick's ass with both hands. He massaged the firm cheeks as he walked him toward the bed. He stopped moving when he felt Patrick bump into the bed.

Pulling away, Jeremy took a moment to look at Patrick. His hair was sticking up in angles all over the place. The kissable lips were swollen and his green eyes, while still slightly red, were full of passion. Patrick looked like sex on legs all wrapped up in a suit. Jeremy wanted to unwrap him.

"How many shirts do you have here?"

"A few. Why?"

"You'll see," Jeremy replied. He put one hand on either side of Patrick's shirt and pulled. The buttons flew across the room as the shirt ripped open. Jeremy pushed the ruined shirt off of the strong shoulders and ran his hands down the smooth, muscled arms. Once he had the shirt out of his way, Jeremy started on the belt. He wanted Patrick naked. He hadn't had a chance to get a good look at him before. He wanted to see all of the muscle he had felt pressing against him. Jeremy pulled the belt free from the loops and started on the pants. He had the button opened when he felt hands on top of his.

"Hold on. Let's get some of your clothes off before you get all of mine"

"Okay." Jeremy let go of Patrick's pants and pulled his shirt off. He tossed it behind him and started on his pants. Jeremy quickly removed them and tossed them in the same direction as his shirt. That last move made him completely naked. In the rush to get to the hospital, he hadn't bothered to put on any underwear. Jeremy smiled and shoved Patrick onto the bed. Patrick landed with a small exclamation of surprise.

Dropping to his knees at the edge of the bed, Jeremy finished removing Patrick's pants. Oddly enough, Patrick had put on underwear. Jeremy slipped his hands under the edge of the navy blue boxer briefs and pulled down. Once he had the last piece of clothing out of the way, Jeremy slithered up Patrick's body. Grabbing Patrick's hips, Jeremy actually managed to toss him up onto the bed. He enjoyed the surprised look on the detective's face for a moment and then joined him on the bed.

Jeremy lowered himself on top of Patrick. He moaned at the skin contact. He pressed his mouth to Patrick's and found himself the sudden recipient of a rather aggressive kiss. Their lips clashed together with enough force that Jeremy tasted blood. He moaned into the kiss and thrust his tongue into Patrick's mouth. Patrick's fingers dug into his back, as one long leg wrapped around him, pulling him close. Patrick thrust his tongue into Jeremy's mouth, licking across the roof. Jeremy moaned into the kiss as he ground down to meet Patrick's moving hips. Things were going a lot faster than he had planned.

Continuing the kiss, Jeremy managed to free one hand from Patrick's body to rummage in the nightstand. He pulled out lube and a condom. Jeremy pulled away from the kiss and nibbled his way to Patrick's ear. "Roll over."

Patrick moaned and did as he was instructed. Jeremy smiled at the smooth expanse of skin that had been presented to him. He ran his tongue over the numbers tattooed on the back of Patrick's neck. He traced each number with his tongue, delighting in the shivers it produced in the body beneath him. Finishing with the tattoo, Jeremy licked his way down Patrick's spine. When he was just about at the small of Patrick's back, he encountered a scar. He gave it a brief look, noticing that it had a date tattooed underneath it. Jeremy gave that small tattoo the same attention he had given the larger one. Patrick was writhing beneath him, a constant stream of moans issuing from his throat. Jeremy pressed one last kiss to the smooth back beneath him, then pulled away. He smiled when Patrick moaned at the loss.

"Lift up," Jeremy instructed. He let his hands curl around Patrick's hips as he tugged, indicating what it was he wanted lifted. Jeremy felt his mouth water as the tempting ass lifted into the air, rocking slightly as Patrick got his knees beneath him.

Once Patrick stopped moving, Jeremy picked up the tube of lube and squirted some into the palm of his hand. He let it warm for a moment, then he coated a finger and reached for what was being offered to him. Sliding the first finger inside, he moaned at the tight heat surrounding his finger. He heard his moan echo from Patrick's mouth as he began to slowly move the finger. Patrick was tighter than he had expected.

Jeremy bit the enticing cheek as he inserted another finger. Liking the moan that the bite produced, Jeremy repeated the action. He bit and nipped at the round globe until he could see several passion marks visible on the gold-dusted skin. Jeremy pulled his head away from Patrick's ass and glanced up the line of his back. The tan was flawless and unbroken. Apparently the good detective liked to sunbathe in the nude. Jeremy nipped at his hip and returned his attention to preparing the other man. Deciding that the other cheek needed to be given the same treatment as its partner, Jeremy started to bite his way across it. When he had Patrick sufficiently prepared, both of the man's ass cheeks were covered in teeth marks.

Pulling his fingers out of Patrick's ass caused an annoyed whine to issue from the detective's throat. Jeremy smiled at the noise. He liked that he had reduced the normally verbal man to wordless sounds. Jeremy rolled a condom on and then slicked himself with lube. He hissed at the feeling of his hand on his throbbing erection. It was almost too much after the fun of preparing Patrick. Lining up with Patrick's loosened entrance, Jeremy slowly slid inside.

The tight heat of Patrick's body drew a low moan from his mouth. Jeremy settled his hands on Patrick's hips. His fingers gripped hard enough to bruise as he pulled out and slowly pushed back in. When Patrick thrust back against him with a needy whimper, Jeremy tightened his grip on his hips. He shifted slightly, forcing Patrick's legs further apart so he could get a better angle. Patrick's howl as he hit his prostate brought a smile to his face.

"Harder," Patrick demanded. That one word broke the small amount of control that Jeremy had left. With a ragged groan, Jeremy pulled out and slammed back in.

Patrick howled and thrust back against Jeremy. They quickly set up an almost punishing rhythm. Jeremy was gripping his hips so tightly that he was positive that he was leaving bruises on his skin. Unclenching his hands from around Patrick's hips, Jeremy draped himself over the detective's body, practically crushing Patrick into the bed. He laced his fingers through the other man's and continued to use hard, forceful strokes. Jeremy pressed his mouth just above the tattoo on the back of Patrick's neck and pulled a patch of skin between his lips, sucking a mark to life. Once satisfied that the mark would be there for a good while, Jeremy pulled back and returned his hands to Patrick's hips.

Tilting Patrick's hips up, Jeremy began a punishing rhythm that hit Patrick's prostate every time. Letting go of Patrick's hips with one hand, Jeremy reached around and grabbed the detective's erection. The keening noise that spilled from Patrick's lips wasn't a sound that Jeremy had thought the other man would produce. He began to stroke Patrick's cock in time with his thrusts. Patrick lifted up slightly underneath him and increased the force of his backward motion. Within moments, Jeremy felt wet heat dribble over his fist as Patrick screamed out in completion. The tightening of the ass around his erection pulled Jeremy along as well. Jeremy tossed his head back as he cried out in ecstasy.

Finally letting go of Patrick's hip, Jeremy pulled out slowly. He winced when Patrick hissed in what was obviously not pleasure. Jeremy couldn't remember the last time he had been that rough during sex. He slowly made his way to the bathroom to dispose of the condom and get a washcloth for Patrick. His body was protesting the force of his movements from earlier. Maybe Cam had a point about joining a gym.

Jeremy walked back to the bed. Patrick had at least collapsed onto his side, so Jeremy was able to clean him off without having to roll him over. Once he had Patrick cleaned off, he turned the bedside lamp on, put the washcloth in the bathroom, and then turned the bedroom lights off. He climbed into the bed next to Patrick and pulled the covers over both of them. When he leaned over Patrick to turn off the lamp, he noticed that Patrick was crying again.

"Oh God! I didn't hurt you, did I?" Jeremy rolled Patrick over so that the detective was on his back underneath him.

"No, you didn't hurt me." Patrick reached up a shaking hand and wiped the tears from his eyes. "I can't lose him, Jeremy. He's family."

Jeremy settled onto his back and pulled Patrick on top of him as the other man started to cry again. He ran his hands over the strong back in a soothing motion. He pressed gentle kisses to the sweat-dampened hair and murmured nonsense words into his ears. Jeremy could feel Patrick's hand digging into his side. He pulled the blankets up around Patrick's shoulder when he felt the other man start to calm. Jeremy kept up his soothing motions until Patrick's tears trailed off into sniffles.

"Better?"

"Yeah." Patrick wiped his eyes and snuggled himself more comfortably into Jeremy's embrace. "If you tell anyone about this I'll shoot you."

"You know, your big bad scary detective act doesn't work anymore now that I've seen you cry."

"Fuck you."

"Maybe later." Jeremy gave him a squeeze and pressed a kiss to the top of his head. "Just try to relax. You need to get some sleep."

"I know." Patrick sighed against his chest. "Cam will be fine."

"Yes, he will. So, what's the scar on your back? The one with the date on it?"

"Oh that. It's nothing. It's just the scar from where I got shot."

"You got shot!"

"It was nothing."

"Nothing! Patrick, there's a bullet scar over your spine!"

"It's fine. The doctors were wrong when they said that I wouldn't walk again. Everything is fine. Now go to sleep."

"What?"

"Damn it, Goldilocks, I can't sleep when my pillow is talking." Patrick gave a quick bite to the patch of skin beneath his mouth. "Sleep. You can lecture me later."

"Fine," Jeremy sighed. He pulled Patrick closer and closed his eyes. Jeremy stayed awake until he heard Patrick's breathing even out in sleep. He'd learned a lot about the other man in the past day.

Patrick had always seemed like the elusive man that everyone wanted. And from what he knew of Patrick's sexual exploits, those people got what they wanted. Getting to know the man behind the image was something that Jeremy had greatly enjoyed. Jeremy was happy to find that the man Patrick really was inside was someone that he respected. Finally letting sleep overcome him, Jeremy drifted off with the knowledge that Cam was safe in the hospital and Patrick was safe in his arms.

Chapter Nineteen

EMILY was staring at the cracks in the ceiling. They almost seemed to form a pattern. She was trying to decide what that pattern was when there was a soft knock on her door. She turned her head to face the door.

"Em?" Kennedy pushed the door open and stuck her head in. "Can I come in?"

"Sure," Emily replied. She sat up and wrapped her arms around her legs, making room for Kennedy on the bed.

Kennedy folded her long legs onto the bed and smiled at Emily. "How ya doin', Chickadee?"

"It's a little overwhelming." Emily pushed a lock of hair out of her eyes. "I mean, the day that I go for a test to find out who my father is, my uncle almost dies in a car crash."

"Yeah, it's been one hell of a day." Kennedy shifted around on the bed before facing Emily. "So, how do you feel about Ben being your dad?"

"Kind of excited. I mean, I've never had a dad before. Well, I had one, everyone has one, but I didn't have one." Emily sighed and ran a hand over her face. "Did that make sense?"

Kennedy smiled at her. "I got what you meant."

"I'd really like to have a dad and Ben is really nice. He took me to the restaurant and gave me a cooking lesson." "He is a nice guy," Kennedy agreed. There was a rather dreamy smile on her face and she seemed to be staring off into space.

"Kennedy, do you like Ben?"

"What?" The dreamy smile vanished under a rather large amount of panic. "What did you say?"

"Oh my God. You have a crush on Ben!"

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do."

"I don't!"

"You do!"

"I don't!"

"Kennedy, you're acting like a twelve-year-old. Just suck it up and admit that you like him. Grow some balls."

Kennedy's eyes nearly popped out of her head. "Did you just tell me to grow some balls?"

"Yes."

"You're sixteen! Sixteen-year-olds are not supposed to talk like that!"

"Do you know who my mother is?"

Kennedy's mouth snapped shut on whatever it was she was going to say. She nodded her head. "Okay; good point."

"So, do you like him?" Emily had dropped her knees to the bed and was leaning on them with an excited smile.

"Yes, I think. Maybe." Kennedy groaned and pulled at one of the blue strands in her hair. "I don't know. It's not like we've been on a date. We've hardly talked to each other."

"So do you think that you could like him?"

"Hey, I came in here to see if you were okay, not talk about whether or not I have a crush on Ben."

"You said the word crush." Emily giggled. She giggled harder when Kennedy glared at her.

"Would you knock it off! You're acting like a teenage girl!"

"I am a teenage girl. What's your excuse?" Emily crossed her arms and arched an expressive eyebrow. It was an expression she had seen on her uncle quite a few times.

"You know, sometimes I wonder why I talk to you."

"You love me."

"Brat." Kennedy reached out and ruffled Emily's hair. When Emily squealed and tried to pull away, Kennedy lunged forward and started to tickle her. Her actions turned into a full-blown tickle fight. By the time they were done, they were both lying across the bed panting.

"Kennedy?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think that my uncle is going to be okay?"

Kennedy rolled onto her side and ran a hand over Emily's hair. "Yes. I think that he's going to pull through."

"Kennedy?"

"Yeah?"

"I really want Ben to be my dad. If he's my dad, I can move here and live with him."

"If you want him to be your dad, I hope he is."

"Kennedy?"

"Yeah?"

"Stay with me?"

"Sure thing, Chickadee," Kennedy replied. She rolled onto her back.

Emily looked over at her uncle's friend and smiled. Kennedy was one of the only adults that she knew who would voluntarily spend time with her. She was pretty sure that it was because Kennedy was still a kid at heart. They always had a great time together. Before she had fully realized what it meant that her uncle as gay, she had hoped that Kennedy would be her aunt. When she realized that it would never happen, she was happy to have her as a friend.

Curling herself against Kennedy's side, Emily took a deep breath and forced herself to relax. She'd get her answers in the morning.

A sound pulled Patrick from his much-needed rest. It sounded suspiciously like the *Indiana Jones* theme. It was his cell phone. His cell phone that was still in the spare room. The spare room that was across the hall and not the room where he was actually sleeping. The ringing also wasn't stopping. He apparently hadn't turned his voicemail on. *Damn phone*.

Grumbling under his breath, Patrick started to pull himself out of Jeremy's arms. Sleeping with Jeremy was like sleeping with a barnacle. The man was all clinging hands, but it wasn't something that Patrick minded. He was all for clinging. It made sleeping warmer. Plus, he had a secret love of being held. Finally extracting himself from Jeremy's arms, Patrick dashed across the room. Thankfully, his phone was still sitting on the night table where he had left it. Patrick snatched it up with an almost angry gesture.

"If this is a booty call I just have to say that my booty has already been well-used tonight, so you'd better call someone else."

```
"Um, Detective Hawkins?"
```

Shit. "Yes?"

"It's Officer Matthews."

"Matthews, why are you calling me at three in the morning?"

"We just got the report on the car. The brake lines were cut."

"God damn fucking piece of shit!"

"Sir?"

"There's someone at the hospital watching Cam, right?"

"Yes."

"Good." Patrick sighed and ran a hand over his face. "Send a patrol car over to Walker's house again. That's where Montgomery is and since

it was his car that had the break lines cut, it's obviously him that this crazy is trying to kill."

"I'll see that it's done, sir."

"And Matthews"

"Yes?"

"Get some sleep." Patrick hung up the phone without waiting for a reply. Looking at the clock once again, he groaned. It was much too early for this. He turned the phone off and put it back on the night table. He didn't want the evil thing near him.

Patrick winced as he walked back across the hall. He hadn't noticed it in his mad rush to grab the phone, but he was sore. His ass throbbed every time that he moved. Sitting down wasn't going to be fun. When he got back into the bedroom, he carefully crawled back into the bed. He didn't want to wake up Jeremy. The last thing he needed to know was that Cam was in the hospital because he had driven Jeremy's car. Patrick knew that Jeremy would only blame himself and Patrick was blaming himself enough for the both of them.

"Did I hear your phone play the *Indiana Jones* theme?" Jeremy pulled Patrick back into his arms.

Patrick settled against his chest. "Yes."

"That's cute."

"I aim to please." Patrick nipped at the skin of Jeremy's chest.

"So, who was on the phone?"

"Officer Matthews."

"And what did Officer Matthews want?"

Patrick sighed and started to run his fingers over Jeremy's chest in an aimless pattern. "They found out why the car crashed."

"Why?"

"Someone cut your brake lines."

"What?" The force of Jeremy's exclamation nearly tossed Patrick off of his chest. When he heard Patrick protest the violent movement, he

settled back down, holding the detective close. "Sorry. Why would someone cut my brake lines?"

"My guess is that the stalker wants you out of the picture so he can have Cam all to himself." Patrick kissed his chest. "I made sure that someone was watching Cam at the hospital and I had them send a patrol car over. I'm not taking any more chances with you and Cam."

"This isn't your fault."

"If you can blame yourself, I can blame myself," Patrick muttered. He tucked his head beneath Jeremy's chin and sulked slightly. Jeremy was doing a fairly good job of getting rid of his guilt.

Jeremy's chest moved underneath him as the other man chuckled. "You're cute when you sulk."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment." Patrick slithered so he was completely on top of Jeremy and looking down at him. He smiled as he felt Jeremy start to harden beneath him. "So, you think I'm cute."

"Maybe a bit."

"You know what I think?" Patrick ran his hands over Jeremy's chest, tweaking both of his nipples. He smiled more when Jeremy arched beneath him.

"No, what do you think?"

Patrick leaned down and licked along Jeremy's jaw until he reached his ear. "I think I want to ride you."

"Oh God." Jeremy's breath came out in a low moan as Patrick licked around the edge of his ear. Smiling at the response, Patrick sucked the lobe into his mouth. He gave it a small nibble, enjoying the way that it made Jeremy's hands grasp his hips.

Patrick pulled his mouth off of Jeremy's neck and leaned across to the end table. He pulled out the lube and a condom and turned his attention back to Jeremy. He held both items up in front of him with what he knew was a wicked smile on his face.

"You wake up horny, don't you?" Jeremy asked. From the way that his hands were running over Patrick's body, he didn't seem to mind.

"I'm a wild man," Patrick purred. He leaned back down and ran his tongue down Jeremy's neck. As his tongue traced patterns across Jeremy's skin, he reached between their bodies and stroked Jeremy to full hardness. Once that was done, he rolled the condom onto the other man.

Pouring some lube onto his fingers, Patrick reached around and stuck them in himself. He groaned at the feeling of two fingers spearing into his sore ass. Their earlier coupling had been hard enough that he was still feeling it, but Patrick didn't care. As he prepared himself, he felt Jeremy's eyes on him. He looked into the lust-filled eyes and grinned. He liked the look on Jeremy's face.

When he pulled his fingers out of his ass to get some more lube, Jeremy's eyes followed the motion. "Like what you see?"

"That is fucking sexy."

"Glad you like it." Patrick gasped as he shoved three fingers into his ass. He managed to hit his prostate as he stretched himself, causing his eyes to flutter shut. When he felt hands toying with his nipples, he arched into the touch. Patrick felt another lubed finger slip inside of him and opened his eyes. Jeremy had slid in one of his fingers along with his. Patrick looked at the man below him and groaned.

Pulling his still slick hand out of his ass, Patrick spread the excess lube over Jeremy's erection. Once it was coated, he used both hands to brace himself on Jeremy's strong chest. "Guide me."

Patrick spread his legs as best he could while straddling Jeremy. Strong but gentle hands pulled his cheeks apart. Jeremy pulled him down until his entrance rested against the tip of Jeremy's cock. Patrick moaned as he felt the head start to press in. Knowing that it was going to burn a bit, but not really caring, Patrick slammed himself down until he was sitting on Jeremy's lap with the other man's cock buried deep inside of him

"Holy shit, Patrick," Jeremy gasped. The hands on Patrick's hips tightened as Jeremy struggled to get his breathing back under control.

Smiling at the man beneath him, Patrick started to move. He kept his first few movements slow. He was looking for the angle that would cause Jeremy's cock to brush over his prostate with every stroke. Patrick cried out and clutched at Jeremy's chest when he finally found it. He slid up slowly once more, just to make sure that he could keep the angle; then he shoved himself back down as hard as he could. Beneath him, Jeremy cried out in pleasure.

Patrick started a nearly brutal pace. Within moments, he had Jeremy meeting every single one of his thrusts. His hands moved to grip Jeremy's shoulders for better leverage. Patrick was emitting wordless cries at every brush over his prostate. He was so hard his pre-come was making a puddle on Jeremy's stomach. He just needed that last push to orgasm.

When Jeremy wrapped a hand around his leaking erection that was all it took. Patrick screamed Jeremy's name as he came all over the other man's chest. He felt Jeremy's cock swell inside of him as the other man found his own release. With a small moan, Patrick collapsed onto Jeremy's chest. He felt hands running over his back as he tried to get his breathing back under control. Once he felt more like himself, he pulled off of Jeremy with a slight wince and flopped onto the bed.

"Don't move," Jeremy instructed. Patrick grunted at him and closed his eyes. A moment later, he felt a warm, damp cloth wiping his seed from his chest. He murmured his thanks to Jeremy.

Patrick had started to drift by the time that Jeremy returned to the bed. When Jeremy had settled, Patrick rolled over and inserted himself back in Jeremy's arms, with his chin tucked under Jeremy's chin. He placed a kiss to the solid chest beneath his cheek.

"Feeling better?" Jeremy asked. His hands gave Patrick's hips a light squeeze.

"Some. Tired now." He yawned and settled himself more comfortably. "Sorry to wake you."

"Don't worry about it. Just get some more sleep. You need it more than I do."

"Hold me while I sleep?"

"Of course. Just get some rest, Patrick. We'll go and see Cam in the hospital tomorrow," Jeremy stated. He kissed the top of Patrick's head then started to run his hand over his back.

Patrick stayed in Jeremy's arms while the older man drifted off to sleep. When sleep claimed him, his fingers stopped their soothing motion. Despite how tired he was, Patrick wasn't sure if he could fall asleep. His head was so full that he barely had room for his own thoughts. Even with Jeremy's comforting words ringing in his head and the rather fun bout of sex, Patrick still felt like he had let his best friend down. Finally, his exhaustion caught up with him. With Jeremy's arms strong around him, Patrick allowed sleep to claim him.

HE stood off to one side as the male nurse he had charmed went to get the answers to his question. He needed to know if his plan had worked. The car accident had been on the news, but they wouldn't release the name of the driver. Thankfully, he had caught the nurse checking him out the moment he had stepped into the hospital. It had been surprisingly easy to get the young man to do what he wanted.

Mental images of Jeremy lying in a broken heap inside the car at the bottom of a ditch danced through his mind. The images filled him with so much pleasure that he was almost giddy. With Jeremy out of the way, Cameron would be his. He was so happy that he wanted to skip with glee. He had to bury his smile as Keith, the nurse, came back over to where he was standing. There was a smile on the nurse's face.

"I've got that information that you wanted, Timothy." Keith smiled more and stroked his arm.

"Well?" Timothy had to work hard to keep up his friendly façade. All he wanted to do was to pull his arm away from the man who dared to touch him

"The patient's name is Cameron Walker and he's going to be fine."

Timothy felt the world stop. Cameron was hurt? Cameron had been in the car? Why had Cameron been driving Jeremy's car? This wasn't what was supposed to have happened. Jeremy was supposed to be lying in the hospital bed, or better yet, the morgue.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Timothy shook himself out of his daze. "I'm fine. I'm just relieved that he's okay."

"That's good." Keith brushed hair back from his forehead in a way that Timothy assumed was supposed to be appealing. "So, my shift is over in an hour. Want to get a drink?"

Timothy gave Keith a good, long look. Keith would have been exactly his type before he met Cameron. Now all he wanted to do was plan. "Sorry. I'm busy tonight. Maybe another time?"

"I'd really like that." Keith reached out and grabbed Timothy's hand. He quickly scrawled his phone number on the back of it with his pen. "Call me."

"I will," Timothy replied. He gave Keith's hand a flirtatious squeeze and headed out of the hospital. Knowing that the other man was watching, he put an extra swing into his step. He knew he had a great ass and if he had actually been interested in dating Keith, he would have done the same thing. He didn't want Keith to think that he was hiding something, which he was.

Timothy practically stalked to his car once he left the hospital. His hands were shaking with the force of his anger. How dare Jeremy cause Cameron to be hospitalized? He would pay. Timothy would just have to take a more direct approach. He knew that Jeremy would want to see Cameron. He would just be there when he arrived. Everything was going to work out fine. Cameron would be his and Jeremy would be no more.

Chapter Twenty

CAM'S head felt fuzzy. He tilted it to one side and the pressure only increased. He moaned softly and squeezed his eyes even further shut. This was not what waking up was supposed to feel like. For some reason his entire body hurt. The pain seemed to be concentrated in his nose, chest, and left arm. His eyes snapped open as he finally remembered what had happened.

He had been in a car accident. He had crashed Jeremy's car. Blinking his still-bleary eyes, Cam looked down at his left arm. It was in a cast. At least that explained the pain. From the look of the rather ugly sheets, he was obviously in the hospital. Cam managed to turn his head to the right and spotted his mother dozing in a chair by his bed.

"Mom?" His voice came out a rather harsh croak.

Diane instantly jolted awake. "Cameron?"

"Hi." Cam gave his mother what he hoped was a smile. He was having trouble feeling his face through the pain.

"Hi, sweetie." Diane leaned against the edge of the bed and started to brush her hand through his hair. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I banged into a tree. What happened?"

"You hit a tree," Diane replied with a laugh. "And a ditch. We were all really worried about you."

"I'm sorry." Cam yawned and rubbed his eyes. "What time is it?"

"Late. You should go back to sleep. You need your rest."

"Have you seen Jeremy?"

"Patrick took him home. They'll both be here in the morning."

"Is he mad that I crashed his car?" Cam asked. He could feel a nervous tension take up residence in his stomach. He and Jeremy had never really fought and the thought that Jeremy might be mad at him made his blood run cold

"No, sweetie. He was worried about you. He is most definitely not mad at you. In fact, I think he may actually be mad at his car." Diane leaned forward and pressed a light kiss to her son's head. "You really should get some sleep."

"You're sure that Jeremy and Patrick are okay?"

"I'm sure. Get some rest, Cameron. They'll be here in the morning." Diane pressed another kiss to Cam's head. She smiled at him then left the room

Cam stared at the door for a while after she left. He could feel his eyes start to close. He was tired, but he wasn't sure if he could sleep without seeing Jeremy, or at least hearing his voice. Cam shifted in the small hospital bed and tried to grab the phone on the table by the bed. Unfortunately, the phone was on the side with the broken arm. With how heavy the cast seemed, Cam doubted that he would be able to lift his arm at all, let alone pick up and dial the phone. Sighing softly, Cam settled back into the pillows. He hated hospitals. Letting the exhaustion finally overcome him, Cam slipped into a drugged sleep.

PATRICK followed Jeremy as he walked down the hall. They were on their way to see Cam. Patrick had offered to stay at the house and let Jeremy have some alone time with Cam, but the vet had insisted that he come along. While he tried not to show it, Patrick was rather glad that Jeremy had. He needed to see Cam. He knew that seeing that his best friend was alive would help to get rid of the knot of tension that was in his stomach.

Walking down the halls of the hospital wasn't easy for Patrick. He kept remembering the last time that he had been a patient there. Getting shot wasn't fun. Getting shot in the back and having the bullet lodge in your spine was even less fun. Several different doctors had told Patrick that even though they got the bullet out, it was unlikely that he would ever walk again. After several days of wallowing in self-pity, Patrick had decided that the doctors were full of shit and he sure as hell would be walking again. In fact, if memory served, he had fucked one of the doubting doctors in the supply closet that he and Jeremy had just passed.

Thinking of the past made him think of Julian, and his heart gave a familiar lurch. Julian would have believed him. Of course, Julian seeing him like that would have crushed him, which was why Patrick had never called to tell him. It had been three years and he still hadn't told Julian. Patrick wasn't sure what to say to him. How do you tell your ex that you were shot and nearly paralyzed, but you didn't call because you didn't want him to see you helpless in a hospital bed? Patrick shook off the thoughts and continued on his way.

Up ahead, Jeremy was talking with a male nurse that Patrick recognized at the nurse's station. There was a smile on his face. Patrick was happy to see that smile. Keith didn't smile nearly enough. Whatever it was Jeremy was telling him caused him to toss his head back and laugh. The bright sound echoed around the nurses' station, reminding Patrick of the good times from when he had been injured. Keith had been responsible for those good times. He had a rather interesting take on rehab, but it was one Patrick thoroughly enjoyed every chance he could. Having Keith in his bed was fun.

Smiling, Patrick walked over to the station. "Still charming the patients, Keith?"

"Patrick!" Keith leaned across the counter and kissed him on the lips. "What are you doing here?"

"I gave Jeremy a ride. We came to see Cam." Patrick leaned his arms on the counter. "What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in the ER?"

Jeremy was looking back and forth between the two of them. An understanding look suddenly crossed his face. "My God, Patrick, is there a gay man in this city that you haven't fucked?"

The words were said with affection and humor, but Keith turned a bright red. Patrick placed a comforting hand on Keith's, giving him a squeeze. When Keith returned the smile, Patrick felt a rush of heat. Maybe he could make use of that supply closet after he said hello to Cam. He let his fingers dance across the back of Keith's hand and was rewarded with a visible shudder.

"Patrick, are you going to answer my question?"

"No, Jeremy. I have not fucked every gay man in this city." Patrick turned his eyes to Jeremy. "Yet. But I have fucked most of the gay staff in this hospital."

"Slut."

"Thank you," Patrick replied. He gave Keith's hand one last squeeze then turned away from the nurses' station. As he moved away, he hooked an arm around Jeremy's elbow and pulled. "Come on, Goldilocks; let's go see your boy toy."

Patrick laughed as Jeremy stumbled while attempting to keep up. He liked the lighthearted side of his Goldilocks. He was happy that it was back. When Jeremy finally spun around and got his arm untangled, Patrick tossed his arm around his shoulder. They continued to laugh while they walked down the hall. They hadn't gotten very far when they heard a gasp from Keith.

Turning, Patrick froze when he saw a rather crazed-looking man holding a gun. The gun was pointed steadily at Jeremy. All of the hospital workers had backed away from him. Patrick could see one of them on the phone, hopefully calling the police. As angry, bloodshot eyes focused on them, Patrick slowly moved his hand toward his gun. When the dishevelled gunman moved slightly, Patrick spotted the scar on his cheek and knew who he was.

"Timmy?"

"Don't call me that! My name is Timothy!"

"Patrick, who is this guy?"

"We used to date." Patrick kept moving his hand toward his gun. Behind Timothy he could see hospital security. "Okay, Timothy, what are you doing here?"

"I came because he is supposed to be dead!" He kept the gun pointed at Jeremy. "He was supposed to be in the car. Not Cameron."

"Oh my God. You're the stalker," Jeremy murmured. He was staring at Timothy in shock.

"How dare you talk to me! This is all your fault!"

"Timothy, why don't you just calm down." Patrick put as much calm in his voice as he could. He didn't want Timothy to snap before he got to his gun.

"Calm down? You want me to calm down? Are you cracked?" Annoyance momentarily wiped the anger from his face. Timothy sneered at Patrick. "Why would I listen to you? I only dated you to get close to Cameron."

"What?"

"Oh come on, Patrick. Everyone knows that you and Cameron share men. You were my way in, but did it work? No. Instead, he ended up with an abusive partner and then a vet. A vet! He should be with me!" Timothy's angry eyes rounded on Jeremy. "This is all your fault!"

For Patrick, time seemed to slow. He saw Timothy squeeze the trigger and he knew that the bullet was headed straight for Jeremy. He couldn't let Jeremy die. Patrick did the only thing he could do. He shoved Jeremy to the right, pushing the other man through the door of a patient's open room. As the crack from the gun sounded in his ear, he felt a burning pain just below where his clavicle met his right shoulder. He pulled his gun as he hit the ground, getting off a shot that hit Timothy at center mass.

Pain shot through Patrick as he hit the ground. His right hand, which was still wrapped around his gun, had gone numb. In fact, his entire right arm had gone numb, except for his shoulder, which was radiating pain. The bullet to his spine hadn't hurt as much. Of course, it had been his *spine*. Nerve damage played hell with your pain receptors.

"Oh God! Patrick, are you okay?" Jeremy was trying to get out of the room that Patrick had shoved him into.

"I'm fine! It's just a flesh wound. Get your ass back in that room!" Patrick attempted to prop himself up on the doorframe. He gritted his teeth to keep from hissing in pain.

"What's going on? I thought I heard gunshots!" Cam's voice came from farther down the hall behind Patrick.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me! You're being stalked, so you think it's a good idea to get out of your hospital room when you hear gunshots!" A small hiss of pain escaped as he tried to turn his head and look at Cam.

"Oh my God! Patrick!"

"Cam, go back to your room," Keith instructed. His voice held the authority that it only ever held during a medical emergency. "Everything is going to be fine."

"Timothy?" Patrick groaned in pain as Keith pressed gauze to his wound to try and stop the bleeding.

"One of the doctors is looking at him. I don't think he's going to make it."

Looking over Keith's shoulder, Patrick spotted Officer Matthews. "Matthews!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Take Jeremy and Cam back to Cam's room. I want you to keep them there until things calm down."

"Yes, sir!" Officer Matthews grabbed Jeremy and started to haul him down the hall, despite his rather loud protests.

"Patrick." Keith turned his head until he was looking the other man in the eyes. "How are you doing?"

"I can't feel my arm." A small amount of panic was creeping into Patrick's mind. He didn't like the fact that he couldn't feel his arm.

"The bullet went clean through." Keith's voice was full of calming comfort, and his thumb gently brushed Patrick's neck.

"Damn. Why am I still conscious?"

"Most likely because you're a stubborn bastard. You're still holding your gun."

"Am I? I can't feel it."

204 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

"Patrick, I'm going to have to peel your fingers away from it. We can't chance your hand clenching and the gun going off."

"This is going to hurt, isn't it?"

"Most likely."

"Do it," Patrick instructed. He took a deep breath as Keith moved so he was leaning over his hand, but well away from the gun if it happened to go off.

Pain shot up Patrick's arm. He could feel his hand again, but all he could feel was pain. He actually whimpered as Keith slowly peeled his fingers from around his gun. He could hear, Keith murmuring soothing words, but they didn't help. It felt like his arm was on fire.

"Are you done yet?"

"Almost."

Another jolt of pain shot up Patrick's arm.

"There; done."

"Good. I'm going to pass out now." Patrick got one last glimpse of Keith's concerned face. Then the room turned black.

Chapter Twenty-One

BEN nervously tugged at the bottom of his shirt. He was standing in the waiting room in front of the hospital lab. He had received a phone call earlier telling him that the test results were in. Ben was about to find out if he was a father. He couldn't remember the last time he had been anywhere near this nervous. He wasn't sure what idea was making him the most nervous; if Emily was his daughter or if she wasn't. He was a chef and he hadn't been able to bring himself to eat breakfast. His stomach was in knots.

Ben heard a giggle and turned to face where the sound had come from. The nurse at the desk was giggling into her hand. She had the test result sitting in front of her, and had offered to give them to him, but he wanted to wait until Emily and Diane got there. Ben shot the nurse a glare and continued with his pacing. Pacing helped him work off nervous energy. Since he was always moving when he was cooking in the kitchen, he felt better when he was moving.

Hearing footsteps approach, Ben turned around and saw Emily and Diane heading toward him. Diane had her normal cool in place, but Emily looked just as nervous as he felt. Ben smiled at them as they walked over. He held out a hand to Emily, but instead of a handshake, he got a hug. Ben blinked in surprise, but wrapped his arms around her. When she pulled away, they were both smiling.

God, I hope she's mine. Ben smiled at Diane. "It's good to see you, Diane."

"Likewise. So, are they ready for us?"

"The smirking nurse has the test results."

Diane smiled softly. "I'll go and get them."

Ben watched her walk over to the desk then turned his attention back to the teenager at his side. "So, are you ready?"

"I think so." Emily looked up at him and bit her lip. "I'm a little nervous."

"Me, too. I don't think I've ever been this nervous about a test before." Ben ran a hand through his hair and gave her a rueful smile.

"Well, are the two of you ready for this?" Diane had opened the envelope and was holding the sheet with the results against her chest. Nothing about her expression gave any indication as to whether or not she had looked at the results.

"Emily?" Ben glanced at the girl who could be his daughter.

"I'm ready."

Diane looked down at the paper then looked back up at them. "Welcome to the family, Ben."

Emily squealed and Ben suddenly found himself with an armful of teenager. Ben laughed and pulled her closer. He wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her off of her feet as he spun her around in a circle. She laughed and tightened her hold on his neck. Ben finally lowered her back to the ground when he started to get dizzy. The last thing he wanted to do was fall down and drop his daughter.

Pulling away to hold her at arm's length, Ben took a moment to just drink in the sight of his daughter. He was a father. "So, you want to join your old man for lunch?"

"I'd like that, Dad." Emily beamed at him.

"Diane, would you like to join us as well?"

"Why, I would love to, Ben."

Ben smiled at the older woman and held out his arm. Diane smiled at him and looped her arm around his elbow. Ben held his other arm out to his daughter. With a large grin on her face, Emily copied her grandmother. The three of them started on their way down the hall. They were getting odd looks from the other people in the hospital, but Ben couldn't bring himself to care.

"Hey, Dad?"

"Yeah, sweetie?" Ben felt his grin widen as the endearment just slipped off his tongue. He liked the way that it sounded.

"After lunch, can we come back and visit Uncle Cam?"

"Sure thing. Do you want to make something for him?"

"That would be fun. Maybe some cookies."

"Chocolate chip is his favorite," Diane added.

"Well, I guess we're baking cookies," Ben remarked. He left the hospital with Diane and his daughter. His life was starting to look up.

CAM was toying with the edge of his cast. He and Jeremy were sitting on his hospital bed. It had taken some shifting, but they had managed to move around so Jeremy was behind Cam with Cam resting against his chest. They were waiting to hear about Patrick. Jeremy's hand was running up and down Cam's uninjured arm while he stared off into space. Every now and then, his arms would suddenly tighten around Cam. Cam wondered what he was thinking about when he did that.

"Jeremy?"

"Yeah, baby?"

"Do you think Patrick is going to be okay?" Cam tucked his head under Jeremy's chin and stopped toying with his cast so he could toy with Jeremy's shirt instead.

"I want to say yes, baby. I really do. But I just don't know. There was so much blood."

"I hate this."

"I know, baby." Jeremy pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

Cam cuddled into the comfort that he offered. He could feel the old fear from the first time Patrick had been shot resurfacing. He kept telling himself over and over again that it wasn't his spine this time, but it wasn't helping. Cam just kept seeing the blood leaking out of Patrick's shoulder as the man tried to prop himself against the door. He was more than happy that Patrick had pushed Jeremy out of the way, but he hated the thought of Patrick being hurt.

"Hey, baby?"

"Yeah?"

"You wanna pick up Hershey on the way home?"

"I'd like that," Cam replied. He bit his lip nervously. He wanted to ask Jeremy to move in with him, but he wasn't sure that this was the right time.

"Baby, is something bothering you?"

Fuck it. I'm gonna do it. Cam pulled back so that he was able to look into his lover's eyes. "Jeremy, would you move in with me?"

Jeremy's mouth dropped open and then snapped shut. Cam watched as the shock in his eyes was replaced by happiness and then love. He felt a smile cross his face as Jeremy beamed at him. When Jeremy pulled him into a hungry kiss, Cam moaned and melted against him. He raised his good hand up and threaded it in Jeremy's golden hair. When air became an issue, Cam pulled away from the kiss.

"Is that a yes?"

"Yes, of course yes. I love you, Cameron Walker. I would love to move in with you." Jeremy placed another kiss to his lips, then pulled him back into his arms. "Plus, I fucking hate my apartment."

Cam started to laugh. He laughed so hard he had to wipe tears from his eyes. "I try to be all serious and you make it about your hatred of your apartment."

"Just trying to lighten the mood," Jeremy replied. He kissed Cam once more. "I really do want to live with you. I love you so much, baby."

"I love you too." Cam ran his fingers down his lover's cheek with a smile. When Jeremy was near him, he felt like he could do anything.

"Cam, there's something I need to tell you."

"You can tell me anything."

"I had sex with Patrick."

Cam smiled at him. "I kind of guessed that."

"You're not angry?"

Cam placed his hand on Jeremy's cheek and forced him to look him in the eyes. "No, I'm not angry. When I left to go get more bacon, I had plans that would keep the three of us in bed all day. Were you worried because you had sex with him when I wasn't there?"

"A little"

"There was no need to be. Jeremy, I know you love me and I love you. I wouldn't have let you see how important Patrick is to me if I didn't trust you." Cam pressed a quick kiss to Jeremy's nose. "It takes a strong man to be comfortable enough in a relationship to allow a third to enter, even for a bit."

"So, we're not keeping Patrick?"

"I love him, but not in the way that I love you. He will always be a part of our lives, but he may not always be in our bed." Cam settled himself back against Jeremy's chest. "I think that he's trying to find someone that he can be with."

"And he thinks fucking every gay man in the city will accomplish this?"

"Patrick has some odd conceptions," Cam answered. He sighed and went back to toying with Jeremy's shirt. "I still hate waiting. My stomach is just as knotted as it was the last time that Patrick got shot."

"What happened?"

"It was a convenience store robbery. There was a pregnant girl in the store, and when the gunman went to shoot her, Patrick jumped in front of her and pushed her out of the way. The bullet lodged in his spine. God, was Justine ever angry."

"Who's Justine?"

"Justine O'Grady. She's Patrick's partner. She was on the other side of the store when the shot went off. She was so angry when he got himself hurt. She was also terrified that something would go wrong in surgery."

"They're close?"

"Very. Patrick is her son's godfather. She stayed in the hospital the entire time he was there. The doctors got the bullet out in surgery, but they said that he would never walk again. He proved them all wrong."

"He's strong, baby."

"I know." Cam sighed and closed his eyes. He could feel tears forming, but he didn't want to cry. He wanted to be strong for Patrick. Unfortunately, he was finding it hard to be strong for Patrick when he was using so much energy to heal his own injuries. Cam opened his eyes when he heard the door open. He looked over and saw Keith walking into the room.

Keith flashed them a tired smile. "Hey, guys."

"Keith, how is he?"

"He's going to be fine," Keith announced. "They patched him all up in surgery."

Cam felt all of the nervous tension leave him in a rush that made him dizzy. "Thank God."

"He'll have to go through rehab for his shoulder, but he'll be fine."

"What about the stalker?" Jeremy asked. Cam could still feel tension in the body pressed against his own.

"He didn't make it." Keith gave them a soft smile. "I just came to tell you about Patrick. I'll let you get some rest."

Once Keith was gone, Cam turned his attention back to Jeremy. "It's really over?"

"Yeah, baby. It's really over." Jeremy pulled him close and wrapped him in his arms.

Cam took one shuddering breath and then he started to cry. When Jeremy's arms tightened around him, Cam soaked up the support. Cam was finally able to let all of the fear he had been living with go. As he cried out all of his frustration and anger, Cam was happy in the knowledge that he was safe in his lover's arms. He was now sure that his future was going to be a happy one.

Chapter Twenty Two

JEREMY pulled Cam's truck to a stop in front of the house. Not just Cam's house anymore. It was theirs now. The thought filled Jeremy with so much happiness that he was surprised that he wasn't glowing. He put the car in park and then turned to look at his passenger.

"Well, girl, we're home," Jeremy stated. Hershey wagged her tail in happiness and licked his face. Jeremy laughed and scratched her ears. He climbed out of the truck and held the door open for Hershey. Jeremy watched closely as she hopped out of the cab of the truck. She seemed to be healing well from her injury.

Hearing the sounds of an approaching vehicle, Jeremy turned to look at the road. He smiled as Ben's truck pulled up. The beds of both Ben's truck and Cam's were filled with Jeremy's stuff. The moment that Cam had asked him to move in, he had started packing. He still couldn't believe that it had been only yesterday and he already had most of his stuff packed up.

"You know, I don't think it's fair that Cam doesn't have to help you move things," Ben remarked. He was leaning against his now parked car with his arms crossed.

"Ben, he has a broken arm. He can't carry things."

"Stop whining, Dad, or I won't let you have any of the cookies," Emily stated. She walked past both of them with a large tin in her hands.

Jeremy turned back to Ben with a large smile on his face. "Dad?"

"She's mine," Ben replied. The smile on his face was so large that Jeremy was surprised that it didn't crack his face in half.

"Congratulations! I'm so happy for you!" Jeremy pulled Ben into a bear hug.

Ben laughed and rested his head against Jeremy's shoulder. "Thanks. It's taking me some time to adjust to the fact that not only do I have a teenage daughter, but she's dating."

"So things are going good with Emily and Todd?"

"I think so. I'm not sure that I'm ready to ask." Ben laughed once more. "Although if he breaks her heart, I may have to kill him."

"That right there proves that you are more than ready to be a father." Jeremy gave Ben another squeeze.

"Hey, stop molesting my niece's father!" Cam called. He was standing in the doorway smiling at the two of them.

"I was just congratulating him." Jeremy let go of his best friend and headed up to his lover. Hershey had beaten him there and was calmly sitting at her master's feet. From the way that she kept looking up at Cam, Jeremy was pretty sure that she wouldn't be leaving his side until he got better. Jeremy pulled his lover into a quick kiss. "Hey, baby."

"Hey, yourself." Cam brushed a hand down his cheek. "Is that all of your stuff?"

"It's most of it. I still have some stuff left at the apartment, but this is all of the important stuff." Jeremy turned back to see Ben had started to carry his stuff into the house. "I should probably go and help him before he starts to bitch."

"It is your stuff."

"True." Jeremy smiled at Cam. "So, when we finish unpacking, do you want to go and see Patrick? He should be awake by then."

"I'd like that." Cam gave him a bright smile.

"Good. We'll do that." Jeremy pressed one more kiss to his lover's willing lips and then headed back to the two trucks. Leaning over the bed of Cam's truck, Jeremy grabbed the first box.

Two hours later, they finally had everything in the house and in the rooms they were supposed to be in. Jeremy had thankfully labeled everything when he had packed the stuff up. Since Cam really wasn't much help with the unpacking, he was in the kitchen with Emily. They were making lunch. When the last box had been put away, Ben and Jeremy collapsed on the couch.

"Dude, you have a lot of shit."

"Be glad I didn't make you move any of the furniture."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going to take Cam over to the apartment tomorrow and see if he wants me to bring any of the big stuff over." Jeremy tilted his head to one side to study his friend. "Do you and Emily want to come? If she's going to be staying with you, you might need some more furniture."

"I'm going to need more furniture period. I bought a house. It has a fully stocked gourmet kitchen, but the only other furniture is a bedroom set that I got from my grandmother. Actually, I think that Emily will like that set more than I do, so I'm going to need a new bed." Ben groaned and ran a hand over his face. "I hate shopping."

"You should take Diane with you. She has really good taste."

"That's a good idea," Ben replied. He smiled as Emily walked in with a plate full of sandwiches. "Thanks, sweetie."

"You're welcome." Emily sat on the loveseat and picked up one of the sandwiches.

"Cupcake, I thought Cam was in the kitchen with you?"

"He said that he was feeling tired, so I told him to go lie down."

"Oh. I'm going to take him a sandwich." Jeremy got up and grabbed one of the sandwiches, putting it on a napkin. He started to walk up the stairs, groaning as his body protested the movement. His muscles hadn't enjoyed moving day.

After making it up the stairs, Jeremy walked quietly down the hall to the bedroom. If Cam had fallen asleep, the last thing he wanted to do was to wake him. His injured lover needed his rest, especially if they were going to go back to the hospital to see Patrick. Jeremy stopped at

the bedroom door and looked inside. The sight that greeted him made him smile.

Cam was indeed asleep on the bed. It looked as if he had collapsed into slumber the moment that he had hit the mattress. What made Jeremy smile was the blanket that had been draped over him. It wasn't one of the blankets from the bed or one of the many quilts that were lying around the room. It was the blanket that was usually folded up on the chest at the foot of the bed where Hershey liked to sleep. It was Hershey's blanket.

The dog in question was curled up against Cam's good side on the bed. She must have pulled the blanket over him when he had fallen asleep. Jeremy shook his head and gave a slight laugh. Hershey was one of the smartest dogs he had ever seen.

Jeremy walked into the room and placed the napkin and sandwich on the end table. Cam would be able to spot it easily when he woke up. Jeremy reached over and smoothed a hand across Cam's hair. He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to his lover's head. Cam murmured, but didn't wake. Hershey, who had been watching him intently since he had entered the room, licked his hand and wagged her tail slightly. Jeremy gave her a scratch then left the room, pulling the door mostly closed behind him. He left it slightly ajar so Hershey could get out if she wanted to.

Jeremy made his way back downstairs. He was just about to sit down on the couch when someone knocked on the door. Jeremy sighed and looked at Ben.

"Hey, you live here. I'm not going to answer the door for you." Ben smiled at Jeremy and took a sip from the glass of lemonade he seemed to have gotten from the kitchen while Jeremy was upstairs.

Sighing once more, Jeremy headed to the front door and pulled it open. The sight that greeted him was one that he had never expected to see. Standing in front of him was a young man with short blond hair that was a shade darker than Jeremy's. The way that the top pieces of his hair seemed to wave hinted that his hair would be curly if it was longer. His eyes were a stunning blue-green type of hazel. One moment they seemed to be blue and the next they were green. He smiled nervously at Jeremy.

"Spencer?" Jeremy stared at his younger brother in shock. He hadn't seen him in years. Once Jeremy had announced that he was gay

and going to be a vet rather than a doctor, Spencer had become the golden boy of the Montgomery family. With Spencer being ten years younger than him, it was surprisingly easy for his mother to keep his brother away from him.

"Hey, big brother." Spencer gave him another nervous smile. "Surprised to see me?"

"Yes." Jeremy shook off his shock and motioned to the bench swing on the porch. "Please, sit down."

Jeremy took a moment to look at his brother as he moved over to the swing. Spencer had changed quite a bit from the gawky twelve-yearold that Jeremy remembered. It looked like the last eight years had been good to him.

Spencer smiled as Jeremy sat next to him. "This is a nice place."

"It's Cam's. I just moved in." Jeremy shifted so he was facing his brother. "I know this is going to sound rude, and I don't want it to, but what are you doing here?"

"I heard about the accident. I knew that you were dating Cam. I mean, Mother bitches about it enough. I wanted to come and see you at the hospital, but she wouldn't let me. She has her cronies over for bridge today, so I swiped the car and came out here."

"You sneaked out of the house to see me?"

"Your boyfriend just got in a car accident! Of course I wanted to see you!" Spencer sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "You're my brother, Jeremy. No matter what our mother says, you will always be my brother."

"You don't mind that I'm gay?"

"No. You being gay in no way changes how I feel about you, Jeremy. You're my big brother. Always will be."

Jeremy laughed. "You know, I'm really glad to hear that. I thought for sure that Mom would have turned you against me by now."

"Not going to happen."

"So, do you have some time?"

"I've got a while."

"Do you want to come in for a sandwich? Ben just helped me move all of my stuff in and we're eating now."

"I'd like that," Spencer replied. He smiled and got to his feet.

Once they were both standing, Jeremy pulled his brother into a hug. "I'm glad that you're here."

"So am I."

Pulling out of the hug, Jeremy smiled at his younger brother. He slid his arm around Spencer's shoulders and led him to the door. Pushing it open, Jeremy pushed Spencer inside. It was time to reintroduce his brother to his best friend. Hopefully, he would be able to introduce him to Cam as well. He just hoped that his lover woke up before Spencer had to leave.

HIS arm hurt. Actually, his arm throbbed. Most people would not be happy with this fact, but Patrick had learned that pain was a good thing. The pain meant that he could still feel his arm. Concentrating on his right arm, he slowly wiggled his fingers. It hurt like hell, but he could do it.

"You'd better not be trying to move that arm that the nice doctors have tied to your chest," an Irish-accented female voice remarked. Patrick opened his eyes to see his partner sitting in a chair by his bed.

Justine O'Grady was an attractive woman. Her long, red hair was in a braid that hung over her shoulder. Annoyed green eyes were focused on Patrick. She moved forward in the chair with a fighter's grace. A fair number of the men that they worked with had thought that as a woman, Justine wouldn't be able to fight. They were wrong. Justine had grown up in Dublin. She knew how to take care of herself. She raised a hand to brush his hair out of his eyes, causing her shirt sleeve to ride up. The exposed skin had a rose tattoo.

"You're back"

"I go home to Ireland to visit my mother for two weeks and you get your fool ass shot while I'm gone." Justine sat back in the chair and crossed her arms. She fixed him with an angry glare.

"I'm sorry?"

"You should be. I thought we had the discussion where you aren't supposed to jump into dangerous situations without me after you got shot in the spine?"

"I was at the hospital visiting Cam!"

Justine snorted. "Only you could get shot in a hospital."

"Thanks for that." Patrick glared at her. He had just woken up after having surgery and she was picking on him. He didn't think that was fair. She should at least have to wait a day.

"So, who shot you?"

"You don't know?"

"Matthews wouldn't tell me. Even though he can barely talk to me without stuttering in fear, he wouldn't tell me who shot you."

"The guy who was stalking Cam shot me."

"Cam was being stalked? Poor boy." Justine's eyes narrowed at him. "Why aren't you telling me this guy's name?"

"Timothy." Patrick looked over at Justine with a sigh. She was a good cop. This wouldn't be hard for her to figure out.

"Timothy? Wait. Not the nerdy, jittery Timmy that you were dating?"

"Yeah, that would be the one."

Justine started to laugh. "You got shot by some guy you fucked?"

"Yes"

"That is just sad," she remarked. Justine looked at him then gave up any attempt of trying to hold in her laughter. She laughed until tears came pouring from her eyes.

"It's not that funny."

"Yes, it is."

"I hate you, you know."

"No, you don't." Justine stopped laughing and smiled at him. "You love me. If you weren't gay and I wasn't happily married, you would have tried to jump me."

"Now I really hate you."

"Shut up. You know I love you." Justine leaned forward and ran a hand over his forehead. She smiled softly at him.

"I love you too, Sparky." Patrick smiled as lips brushed his forehead. "Where's my godson?"

"At home with his father. I wanted to check on you before I brought him over here. Had to make sure that you didn't look too scary."

"Do I pass?"

"I'll have Keegan bring Daniel over to visit you after lunch. How does that sound?"

"That sounds good." Patrick closed his eyes and yawned. "I'm tired."

"Well, you did have a busy time being operated on." Justine tweaked his nose. "You know how anaesthetic affects you."

"Promise to come back with my Danny-boy?"

"I promise." Justine stood and pressed a kiss to his head. "Get some rest, Bullet."

Patrick gave a weak smile at the nickname and watched as she walked out of his hospital room. His shoulder was throbbing, but it wasn't something that he couldn't handle. Patrick hated being doped up on painkillers. When his eyelids got too heavy to keep open, he let them fall closed. He could feel the pain retreating as he was sucked back down into oblivion.

CAM could feel a warm body sleeping next to him. A very furry, warm body. He slowly opened his eyes and found himself looking at the top of Hershey's head. He smiled. Cam could hardly believe how much he loved his dog. He'd only had her for a month and he couldn't imagine life without her there. Cam scratched her head with his uninjured hand.

"You are a good girl." Cam smiled when she rolled onto her side and licked his cheeks. He laughed and buried his head in her short fur.

"I like that sound," Jeremy commented. Cam looked up to see him leaning against the door. There was a wide smile on his face.

"And what sound would that be?"

"The sound of you laughing." Jeremy walked over to the bed and sat down on the edge. "When I got the phone call that you were in an accident, I was worried that I would never hear it again."

"I'm sorry that I scared you." Cam held out a hand as Jeremy climbed onto the bed. They ended up with Hershey in between them. Hershey gave Jeremy a lick before she settled back down. She seemed happy sandwiched between her two masters.

"Just don't do it again."

"I'll try not to."

"So, you will never guess who was here while you were sleeping."

"Who?"

"My brother."

Cam looked over Hershey and into his lover's smiling eyes. "Spencer was here?"

"Yep. He wanted to make sure that I was okay."

"You're not the one who was in the car accident."

"True. He also wanted to meet you, but he had to get the car back home before Mother noticed that he was gone."

Laughing, Cam poked him in the chest. "He borrowed you mother's car without asking? Sounds almost like you're a bad influence on him."

"I am not."

"Whatever."

Jeremy reached across and gave his bruised nose a gentle tap. "Anyway, I told him to come over for dinner next week."

"Are you cooking?"

"Since I don't want to poison my brother, I thought maybe I could bribe Emily into cooking for us."

"Sounds like a plan." Cam ran his fingers down Jeremy's cheek. "I love you."

"I love you too, baby." Jeremy attempted to lean in for a kiss, but Hershey was in the way. "I think our four-legged friend needs to go."

"Hershey." Cam waited until she looked at him. "Kitchen."

Hershey gave the dog version of a sigh then climbed to her feet. She made her way to the end of the bed and hopped down to the floor. She was moving slowly because of her injury, but it didn't seem as though there would be any lasting effects. Hershey gave them a look from the door, but she left the room. She even managed to pull the door partially closed with a paw once she was on the other side.

"You know, that is one smart dog you've got, baby."

"We've got," Cam corrected. He pulled Jeremy into his arms. "If you are going to be living here, that makes her your dog too."

"I can live with that." Jeremy propped himself up on his elbow and gazed down at Cam. "You're gorgeous."

Cam could see the love glowing in Jeremy's green eyes. "Even with the broken nose?"

"Even with the broken nose."

Cam laughed softly as Jeremy kissed his broken nose. He ran his hand over Jeremy's back, slipping it under his shirt so he could get at bare skin. He smiled happily when Jeremy moaned. "Make love to me?"

"Baby, you just got out of the hospital. I don't care what the doctors have you on; there is no way that us having sex will not hurt you."

"But I want you."

"And I always want you. I just don't want to hurt you." Jeremy settled himself and started to toy with his hair. "Baby, what's bothering you?"

"This is our first night officially living together. I want us to have sex." Cam pouted at Jeremy. He knew that his pout usually worked on his lover. Of course, breathing usually worked on Jeremy. He had Jeremy wrapped around his little finger and he knew it.

"Cam, baby, I love you. I love that we're living together. I want nothing more than to sink into you and enjoy our first official night together buried inside of you, but I won't hurt you."

"You won't hurt me."

"No, I won't hurt you on purpose. You are one giant bruise right now, baby. No matter what I do, it will hurt you."

"What if you just jack me off?" Cam suggested. What he really wanted was to have Jeremy inside of him, but he was willing to admit that his lover had a point. His ribs were starting to ache a bit and he was pretty sure that they wouldn't like it if he bent like he usually did during sex. He would settle for having his lover's hands on him.

"You'll have to promise not to move too much. I don't want you to hurt yourself."

"I promise. Just touch me." Cam knew his voice was coming out as a whine, but he couldn't help himself. Just being near Jeremy was making him harden in his pants. He wanted Jeremy badly. He was actually starting to tent the loose pants he was wearing.

A soft kiss was pressed to his forehead and then Jeremy moved away from him. When he felt himself gently pulled into a sitting position, he went willingly. Once he was sitting up, he raised his arms so Jeremy could help him remove his T-shirt. The twinge of pain from his ribs and broken arm made he realized that Jeremy had a point. Full-blown sex would probably hurt more than it would feel nice. Once the shirt was out of the way, Jeremy gently lowered him to the bed again.

Cam reached his uninjured hand behind Jeremy's head and started to undo his braid. Once he had the thick, golden strands freed from the confines of the braid, he buried his hand in the softness. Cam loved Jeremy's hair. He had never really liked longer hair on his lovers until Jeremy came along. He couldn't get enough of the feeling of all of that hair running over his hands. Getting a good grip, he pulled Jeremy down into a kiss.

The kiss started out soft and tender. Cam opened to his lover and moaned when he felt Jeremy's tongue dip inside. When Jeremy went to press forward harder, Cam gasped in pain. Apparently soft was a good idea for kisses when you had a broken nose. Cam sighed happily when

the kiss gentled once more. As they kissed, he tried to use his good hand to pull Jeremy's shirt off. One-handed clothes removal was not a skill that he had perfected. Cam pulled away from the kiss with a growl.

"Something wrong, baby?"

"Off." Cam tugged at the shirt in question. "I can't get it off with just one hand."

Jeremy laughed softly and pulled away. He pulled his T-shirt over his head and tossed it off of the bed. Cam licked his lips as all of that glorious skin came into view. He reached out and ran a hand over Jeremy's chest, smiling when his touch caused Jeremy to shiver. He wound his hand into Jeremy's hair once more and pulled his lover down for another kiss.

Cam let his tongue wind around Jeremy's in a long, languid kiss. He pulled Jeremy more firmly on top of him, not caring about the increase of pain along his ribs. He wanted to feel Jeremy's body over his. When he had Jeremy positioned over top of him, Cam looped one leg around his hips and pulled him closer, lining up their erections through their pants. He could almost feel the rough texture of Jeremy's jeans through the thin material of the pants he was wearing. Cam arched his hips and groaned at the friction.

He whimpered when Jeremy pulled away from him, but then he felt hands on his hips. Cam obediently lifted his hips so that Jeremy could pull his pants off. He watched as Jeremy stepped off of the bed and removed his own pants. Cam took a moment to look over his naked lover. Jeremy's hair was hanging in loose waves around his shoulders. There was a faint sheen of sweat covering his body and he was flushed with arousal. Cam thought he looked like a sex god come to life.

"Get your ass back on this bed, Bright Eyes." Cam held open his arms. When Jeremy crawled into them, Cam wrapped them around him. He heard Jeremy grunt when he accidentally thumped him with his cast. "Sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

Cam had opened his mouth to apologize once more, but was cut off by Jeremy's mouth. Cam moaned into the kiss. He buried his hand in Jeremy's hair once more and pulled him closer. He finally found the angle to tilt his head so the kiss could go deeper without pressing on his nose. He let one of his legs trail along Jeremy's while they kissed, causing their erections to rub together. Cam tossed his head back and gasped at the touch. He thrust his hips up, looking for more friction. A strong hand held his hips down.

"I thought I told you not to move."

"Then you'd better do something, Bright Eyes." Cam whimpered and moved against the hand holding him steady. He watched as Jeremy leaned over to grab the lube. His lover spread some in his hand then turned back and grasped both erections in his hand.

Cam's eyes fluttered closed at the sensation. He wanted to thrust into the grip on his erection, but he knew that Jeremy was right. He really should be taking it easy. Cam whimpered and tilted his head to one side, encouraging Jeremy to bite at his neck. Any marks that Jeremy left would most likely be hidden by all of the bruises from the accident. When teeth bit into his neck, Cam howled and tried to thrust. He was close.

Jeremy's strokes over their trapped erections sped up and Cam felt his orgasm building. He could hear whimpers and moans coming from his mouth. Just the feel of Jeremy's hands on his skin did more for him than sex with some of his previous lovers. When teeth bit into his neck once more in the same place where they had just left, Cam howled and came. He shuddered in Jeremy's arms as he felt his lover's seed join his on his stomach. He could feel Jeremy's panting breaths against his neck. What he wanted to do was to wrap himself around Jeremy as they drifted off to sleep, but he was too drained to move.

A small whimper of protest left his mouth as Jeremy crawled off of the bed. Cam followed his lover with his eyes as he walked into the bathroom to clean up. When he came back with a cloth to wipe up Cam, Cam reached out a hand to him. Understanding what he wanted, Jeremy leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips. Cam smiled into the soft touch. He licked Jeremy's lips as he pulled away. He smiled as Jeremy ran a thumb over his lips before he walked back into the bathroom.

Cam had started to drift by the time that Jeremy came back to the bed. He lifted his legs with Jeremy's help and his lover pulled the covers

224 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

over him. When Jeremy climbed into the bed, Cam moved until he was comfortable in his lover's arms.

```
"Hey, Bright Eyes?"
"Yeah, baby?"
"I love you."
"I love you, too."
```

"I'm glad that you moved in."

"Me, too." Jeremy kissed the top of his head. "Get some sleep, love."

Cam smiled as he felt the soft kiss against his head. He had Jeremy in his bed and he wasn't leaving. They lived together now. They would have many more nights together when he was able to move without pain. Nights that would be filled with pleasure. With that thought in his mind, Cam drifted to sleep in Jeremy's arms.

Epilogue

CAM leaned against the passenger side of the rental car that Jeremy had received while he waited for his insurance claim to be processed. Jeremy was helping a grumbling Patrick out of the car. Patrick wasn't happy about needing the help. Cam smiled when he heard a rather impressive insult.

"Hey, I don't have to help you. I could just take you back to the hospital," Jeremy snapped. "They weren't happy that you were leaving."

"It's been a week. I'll be fine," Patrick retorted. He stepped around to Cam's side of the car. "Your boyfriend is bugging me."

"He's just worried about you. I don't think that you should have left the hospital, either," Cam remarked. He let his gaze wander over his best friend. Patrick's arm was in a sling, limiting his movement, but he did look a bit better than he had the week before. There were lines of pain around his eyes. Cam knew that the other man hated to take any type of pain medication. He didn't like that Patrick was in pain.

"I'm fine. You and Goldilocks can stop worrying now." Patrick flashed him a smile and then walked through the door they were parked in front of.

Cam looked up at the sign above the door. The name *Keegan's* was proclaimed in tasteful neon. It wasn't that bright during the day, but Cam knew from experience that it was very bright at night. He felt Jeremy take his hand.

"How are you feeling today, baby?"

"I'm feeling pretty good, Bright Eyes. We should get in there before he does something stupid."

"I've never been to one of these places before."

"There's a first time for everything," Cam replied. He linked their fingers together and pulled Jeremy inside.

The front of the tattoo parlor was mostly empty. There was a young woman standing with one of the tattoo artists over by a wall with butterfly designs on it. Cam caught the tattoo artist's eye. When the man jerked his head to the back, Cam nodded and pulled Jeremy to the curtained-off area at the back. They passed through the curtain to see Patrick sitting on a tattoo chair with his shirt and bandages off. The dark stitches holding the wound closed were easily visible on the still-red and scabbed skin.

"Sure you want to do this now, lad? It's going to hurt." Keegan O'Grady's Irish-accented voice was full of nothing but concern. Patrick was not only his wife's partner, but also his favorite client.

"I can handle it. I already have those two fussing over me; I don't need you to do it too," Patrick grumbled. He glared at Keegan then lifted his glare to include Cam and Jeremy. Cam just smiled at his friend and moved closer.

"Okay. What was the date?"

"July thirtieth."

"Do you want me to put "in" on the front side and "out" on the back?"

"Yeah, and make sure to date both of them."

"You got it," Keegan replied. He turned the needle on and Jeremy went white next to Cam. When the needle touched Patrick's skin, he went even paler.

"Bright Eyes, are you okay?"

"I'm gonna go wait in the other room," Jeremy replied. He let go of Cam's hand and practically fled from the room.

"That boy of yours is jumpy."

"Guess I won't get him in your chair, Keegan."

"Don't worry about it. Between you and Pat here, I'm busy enough."

Cam chuckled and settled himself on the stool that was there for the people who came for moral support. This wait wouldn't be as long as most of the other tattoos that Patrick had received. Cam kept his eyes on Patrick while he got the new tattoo. He knew that it had to hurt, especially since the skin around the wound was still red and sore-looking, but Patrick barely flinched. He always had been good at hiding when he was in pain. In what seemed like a very short time, Keegan had finished both the front and the back. After wrapping up the tattoo, he helped Patrick put on his shirt and the sling.

"You know the drill"

"Yeah, I know."

"You might want to have someone help you put lotion on it until that bullet wound looks less angry."

"I'm sure I can find someone," Patrick replied. He shot Cam a leer.

"Cam, I don't know how you and Justine put up with this one."

"Well, I don't know about Justine, but I've had a lot of practice." Cam held his hand out to his friend. "Come on. Let's go and collect Jeremy."

When Patrick's hand wrapped around his, Cam pulled him into the other room. Jeremy was standing by the windows and looking outside. He didn't seem to be as pale as he had been in the other room. He turned and smiled when he saw them

"Chickened out on me, Goldilocks?"

"Shut up, Ink Blot."

"What?"

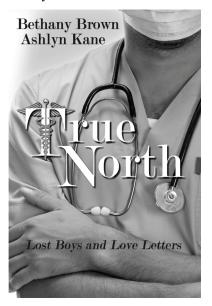
"That's your new nickname," Jeremy announced. He smiled and then walked out of the shop. Patrick sputtered and followed. Shaking his head at their antics, Cam waved to Keegan before he followed them out. He paused when he stepped outside.

228 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

Patrick and Jeremy were leaning against the car and arguing. It wasn't a serious argument; they both had smiles on their faces. Cam felt his heart swell and he chucked softly. He loved the two crazy men standing by the car. The two turned to him with smiles.

"Wanna go out for lunch, Shutterbug? After a week of hospital food, I'm dying to go to Maude's."

"Sounds like a plan." Cam held his hand out to Jeremy and linked their fingers together when his lover took his hand. "Let's walk. It's a nice day." Other Books in the Lost Boys & Love Letters Series...



Available from Dreamspinner Press <u>www.dreamspinnerpress.com</u>

230 | Bethany Brown & Ashlyn Kane

BETHANY BROWN is a 27 year old with a BA in English, Language and Literature, and a bit too much time on her hands. Hopefully, her new barista job will keep her occupied enough that her mind doesn't wander too far. Unfortunately, that most likely won't be possible. Her mind is too full of stories.

Having been interested in writing since her first trip to the Young Authors Conference in the fourth grade, Bethany finally gave in to the voices in her head and wrote them a story. Since all that accomplished was to make the voices louder, she's looking forward to continuing the *Lost Boys and Love Letters* Series with Ashlyn.

Bethany spends her free time reading, and watching TV and movies while pairing up her favorite male characters. She is always looking for something new to get Ashlyn hooked on. She also spends a great deal of time trying to convince Patrick, who lives in her head, that just because he won't leave doesn't mean he gets to be in all of the stories. Unfortunately, it's not working very well.

Bethany would like to take this opportunity to address the administrators who wouldn't let her into the Creative Writing Program at the University of Windsor. I have a writing career! Choke on that, suckers!

ASHLYN KANE is a 23-year-old supergeek who graduated cum laude from the University of Windsor with an honours degree in English Language and Literature. When she's not writing, she moonlights as an education student, and is somewhat baffled by the idea that someday someone will put her in charge of a group of children. She is addicted to classic rock, science fiction, and TV on DVD.

In the event that her professors go on strike, Ash can usually be found lounging around in Bethany's basement, making inappropriate sexual comments about any given male character on TV, especially if he's in the Air Force and has stupid hair.

She has a fiancé, a little brother and a bitchy cat.

