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Another Dream

TOP SHELF

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CHAPTER ONE

TGIF. Marty was worn out. It had been warmer than normal for an early November day in San Diego, and his boss, Chris, had acted more like an overseer than a foreman. Yeah, they were shorthanded, and yeah, they were behind schedule, but damn, Marty was only human. As he pulled into an empty parking spot at his apartment complex, he saw the man who had recently moved into the apartment directly across from his own coming down the stairs.

Introducing himself shortly after the man moved in, Marty had learned a few things about him. The man's name was Larry Travis. He was absolutely *painfully* shy. He was rather slender and maybe two inches shorter than Marty's five foot nine. Larry was not quite thirty years old, but Marty imagined he probably got carded regularly, because he could easily pass for a high-schooler. He must've had a pretty bad case of acne back when he was a teenager, because Marty could still see faint signs of the scars. He wore some pretty darned thick glasses, but had eyes the prettiest shade of blue Marty had ever seen hiding behind them, and a mop of gorgeous, honey gold hair.

He'd also noticed Larry stealing covert peeks at him whenever they'd met up in the parking lot or in the complex's fitness center. He figured that Larry had noticed the little rainbow decal he had in the rear window of his ever-faithful Valiant.

Marty made a point to always smile, wave, and toss out a 'how are ya, Larry' whenever he saw Larry and Larry was at least starting to blush a little less each time. It had to totally suck to be that shy.

It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon, and Marty didn't feel like spending the evening cruising for a hookup at Snayque's. Not that he'd mind going out dancing -- he adored dancing -- but he'd rather just come home alone tonight than with another mindless pretty boy who was just looking for a fun fuck for the night.

Was there a chance in hell that his timid neighbor could be persuaded to join him and his friends for an evening of dancing? If Marty showed up *with* someone, it would at least keep the guys out cruising for one-night stands from bothering him.

Marty waved and hollered, "How are ya, Larry?" He flashed Larry a big smile for good measure.

It was Marty, and damn, he had that leather tool belt hanging low on his hips. The man was beautiful.

Larry was worthless at small talk anyway, but his brain shorted out completely around Marty.

And Marty was just getting home from work, too -- all lovely with sweat. Marty's dark hair was mussed, and his T-shirt was grubby and clinging to his chest and arms, highlighting the well-formed muscles. It took all of Larry's concentration not to stare.

What could he say that would make himself seem interesting? "I'm fine, Marty. How are you today?" Fuck. Obviously he'd failed at the trying not to sound too dull effort. His face was heating up. Double fuck.

Usually that pretty much covered it, but for some reason that afternoon Marty continued, "Say, Larry, I was thinking. If you don't have any plans for this evening, would you like to join me and some friends? We're going out dancing at Snayque's."

Oh, God. Had he heard that right? Had Mr. Personality really just asked him to go out dancing?

Larry reached his car, and Marty stood there, just looking at him expectantly. Shit. He needed to say something. "Oh, um, thank you for thinking of me."

He paused, but Marty was still patiently waiting and gazing at him with an encouraging little smile. He didn't want Marty to think he was rejecting the thoughtful gesture out of hand. "Well... um... well, I can't dance."

There was no way Marty was asking him out on an actual *date*. He knew Marty was just being a friendly neighbor and inviting him to go along, but Marty looked truly let down. "Oh, well, if you'd like to try it again, I could help you out. I could lead you through some simple moves if you'd like to try it, rather than just dancing freestyle. I promise I won't try any complicated moves before you're ready for them."

Larry heard himself saying "okay" before he even realized he was answering Marty. Damn. Much as he'd love to spend an evening with Marty, there was no way he wouldn't totally embarrass himself trying to dance.

Marty smiled warmly. Wow, his smile was so beautiful. "That's terrific. Would it be okay to come by for you around a quarter to nine?"

"Um, sure." Brilliant, Larry. Way to knock his socks off.

But Marty didn't seem to mind that Larry appeared to be a complete doofus on top of being... well... rather less than attractive. He just looked Larry right in the eye, continued to smile, and said "Great. I'll see you then, Larry." Then he turned away and walked up the cement stairs to their floor.

Larry, on the other hand, was rooted to the spot, staring until Marty disappeared from sight. Jesus, what had he come outside for, anyway? Oh, yeah. He was going to run out to the grocery store for a few things. What things, though? Damn. He couldn't even think straight. No way could he drive straight, either, so he walked back up to his apartment so he wouldn't end up crumpled into a boneless heap in the parking lot.

Wow. The stunned expression on Larry's face when he'd asked Larry out was priceless. Marty liked the way he felt when Larry looked at him. He felt special. Hell, he hadn't felt this lighthearted since he was eighteen years old, back in Brownsville with his first love, Billy Atkinson.

Wow. Billy. He hadn't thought about Billy in years. God, he'd missed Billy so much when he'd first left home. Billy'd had a scholarship to Brownsville University. Marty had been scheduled to go there too, but he just couldn't stay in Brownsville after the blowup with Dad. There was no way his father would have paid for his school, and although his grades had been good, they hadn't been good enough for a scholarship. He couldn't ask Billy to give up that opportunity, and Billy hadn't volunteered. It had broken Marty's heart, but he'd been young and had bounced back.

He took a shower before anything else, because... well... yuck, he stank after work. Then he wandered into the kitchen and warmed up some leftover roast beef and gravy to make a hot sandwich. He sat down at his little table to eat and found himself thinking again.

Thinking about saying goodbye to Billy had him thinking about his family. He had some good friends here, but even after twenty years it was still hard not having family around during the holidays. His friends always included him, but he couldn't help thinking about the happy times at the big family gatherings his family used to have around the holidays. What were his sisters, Brenda, Betty, and Sally, up to? Did they ever think of him? His parents would be, what, in their seventies? Jesus. Were they even alive?

He'd loved Brenda's and Betty's little kids. He'd loved goofing around with them. Damn, he missed that too. Had Sally ever gotten married and had kids? Oh, God. Brenda's kids would be old enough to be married and have kids of their own, wouldn't they? He'd missed a lot.

Did they still live in Brownsville? Should he try to get in touch with them? Would they want to hear from him after all these years, or would they tell him to stay lost?

Shit. He didn't want to dwell on it anymore, so he cleaned up his dishes and grabbed his laptop so he could read an e-book he'd started earlier that week until it was time to fetch Larry. Ah, yes. Marty loved the hot, gay vampire in the novel he was reading. That vampire could suck Marty's blood -- or whatever he wanted, for that matter -- anytime he wanted. Marty sprawled across his overstuffed chair and opened up *Forever Mine* and read some more about Hektor and Rhys.

He was adrift in the story as Hektor was battling some rogue vampires when a knock at the door brought him back to reality. Shit, what time was it? Marty pitched his laptop onto the coffee table and sprinted to the door. He flung it open, and there stood Larry.

"Oh, shit, Larry. I'm so sorry. Come in, come in. Shit. I'm really, really sorry. I got engrossed in a book and lost track of time. Damn, what time is it anyway?" Marty looked at his watch. Fuck, it was nine o'clock. Larry was just standing there like he wasn't sure what to do, so Marty grabbed

hold of his arm and hauled him inside and shut the door. "I'm so sorry," Marty repeated once again.

"It's okay. I just wanted to make sure nothing was wrong. I don't want to interrupt you or anything."

Huh? Damn, Larry was insecure. "Oh hell, Larry, you aren't interrupting me. I was just killing time reading. I get all immersed in the story sometimes and lose track of the real world." Marty gave Larry a smile to bolster his confidence. "Hey, I'm just going to run down the hall and brush my teeth real quick, then we'll go, okay?"

"Um, sure. Okay."

Marty dashed down the hall to the bathroom and quickly used the toilet and brushed his teeth. Damn, he felt bad about being late. He finished up and walked back out to the living room. Larry was standing there looking nervous. He looked sweet in a pair of snug, faded, worn and torn blue jeans and a nice, loose-fitting tee. "Wow, Larry, you look fantastic," Marty told him.

Larry seemed surprised and embarrassed by the compliment, but managed a reply. "Thank you," he murmured, and then added, "So do you."

Marty flashed a big smile. "Thank you." He was actually similarly dressed in his best sexy worn jeans but with a rather tight tee. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes."

Marty led him out and locked up, and they walked down to his car. "Don't worry, I never drink and drive. It'll just be soft drinks for me tonight."

"Thank you."

Jesus, he assumed Larry would warm up once they got to know each other a little better, but in the meantime it looked like he'd just have to carry the conversation. They got in the car, and he drove in silence the short distance to Snayque's. "Here we are," he said, and flashed another smile Larry's way. Larry looked especially tense, bordering on panicky. Shit. "Are you okay, Larry?"

Larry took a deep breath, as if to calm himself. "Yeah, um... sorry. I'm just pretty nervous about this. Like I said, I've never been dancing."

Never? "Oh, don't worry about it, Larry," Marty reassured him. "I promise you, we won't do anything you aren't completely comfortable with, and I won't abandon you in there, either. We'll only do easy dances that I can lead you through, and not even that until you're ready for it, I promise." He reached out and gave Larry's hand a squeeze.

Larry seemed to relax a bit. "Thank you. I really appreciate your patience."

He gave Larry a smile and a wink. "You ready to go in?"

Larry nodded and returned the grin. Marty wasn't surprised when Larry had to show his ID to the bouncer at the door to get inside. They entered the building and were instantly surrounded by a steady dance beat and lights beaming around the large dance floor. He took hold of Larry's hand and looked around for Ray and Ronald. Movement at one of the tables across the way caught his eye, and he saw Ronald standing up, waving at them. He turned to Larry. "I see my friends over there." He led Larry around the perimeter toward their table. Marty smiled and waved at people he knew along the way.

"Marty, I was starting to think you were going to ditch us tonight," Ray chided him.

"Sorry about that. I got engrossed in my book and lost track of time."

Ronald laughed. "Did Hektor transform Rhys yet?"

"Hey, hey! Don't tell me what happens!" he scolded Ronald with a laugh. He turned to Larry with a smile. Larry looked somewhat taken aback by their conversation, but recovered quickly and managed to compose his features. "Larry, please meet my good friends, Ray and Ronald. Guys, this is my new neighbor, Larry Travis."

"Welcome, Larry," said Ray. "Are you from around here, or did you just move to town?"

"I grew up in the Midwest, but I've lived around here for a few years now. My recent move was just to a nicer place."

"Yeah? Good for you, Larry," said Ronald.

A waiter came by for their order. "Ginger ale for me, please." Marty turned to Larry. "What do you want, hon?"

Larry blinked and stuttered a bit with his reply. "Um -- a -- a beer please."

"Draft?" asked the waiter.

"Yes, please."

Ray and Ronald already had a couple of beers they were working on, so the waiter took off. A new song came on, and Ronald wiggled his eyebrows at Ray. Ray laughed. "Wanna dance, sweetheart?" he asked Ronald.

"You betcha, baby," Ronald replied, and off they went.

Marty grinned at Larry. "Are you enjoying the music?"

Larry smiled back. "Yes. Everyone seems to be having a good time here."

"Yeah, it's a fun place. Good music. They play a wide variety, and generally nice people too. Ray and Ronald are pretty much my best friends. They've been together forever. More than ten years."

"Really? I like to see that. They seem very nice."

Marty nodded. "Yeah, I like to see that too. And yes, they *are* very nice. Good people. They've done a lot for me over the years, and they truly deserve their happiness."

Larry just smiled back. He was a tongue-tied little thing, that was for sure. He was sweet, though, the way he blushed at the drop of a hat. Kinda cute, too, although not in the traditional sort of way. The little guy was starting to grow on Marty.

Marty liked the way he felt like a big, strong protector-type around Larry. Fuck, that was a rather dopey thing to admit, even just to himself, but it was true. He was a bit of a nurturer by nature, he supposed, but he didn't usually have much opportunity to bring out that side of himself, and he found he was enjoying it.

Shit, Larry, think of something to say. Shit, shit, shit. He gazed around the large room, hoping for inspiration. Fuck, he never had any trouble thinking of things for his story characters to say. Damn, what would Rhys say?

"Interesting décor... flashy," he blurted out. Fuck, Rhys wouldn't have said anything that lame. Hektor would've tossed him out on his ass long ago if he'd been that fucking pathetic.

But Marty smiled at Larry, and his smile reached his eyes, he wasn't being condescending. "Yeah, it *is* pretty flashy, isn't it? That crazy disco ball... it's wild."

The waiter returned with their drinks. Oh, thank God. They sat and sipped their beer and ginger ale while watching the dancers. Somehow the lack of conversation didn't seem awkward.

The song changed, and Marty's face lit up. "Hey, Larry. We could do a little push-pull single-step swing to this beat. It's a really, really simple step, and I can lead you through it. You won't have to improvise, and it's not at all complicated. What do you think, hon?"

Oh, God. Marty looked so eager. And again with the "hon." What did Marty mean by that? He must be one of those guys that used the word casually, 'cause there was surely no way it could be meant as an endearment.

The last thing in the world Larry wanted to do right then was disappoint this beautiful man who'd been so thoughtful to him. Fuck, he was petrified that he'd make a complete ass of himself out on the dance floor, but he could think of nothing to say except, "Okay."

Marty's smile broadened, and he put out his hand. Larry took it, and Marty led him out onto the fringes of the dance floor. The song did have a good steady beat. Maybe it wouldn't be too hard to follow. Thankfully, he found that he wasn't completely without rhythm, and after just a couple of awkward steps he was able to follow along smoothly as he grasped the tempo of the music. Marty was right, too. He didn't have to improvise anything. Just as the name of the dance implied, Marty pushed and pulled him through the steps.

He was amazed at the fact that not only was he not making a total fool out of himself out there, but he felt like he was actually doing okay. Certainly not doing anything that would draw negative attention to himself. Jesus, he was actually having fun, and couldn't help smiling up at Marty as he was pulled back in.

Marty's smile beamed back as Marty continued to effortlessly guide him through the dance. Jesus, Marty was looking at him so intently. It was as if Marty could see right into his head and know what he was thinking. Larry's cock twitched at the thought. Fuck, he sure hoped Marty *couldn't* read his thoughts, because they were anything but PG rated.

He imagined that beautiful mouth coming down onto his own. What would that be like? What was it that he'd had Rhys think the first time Hektor had kissed him? Something about 'waves of desire and longing coursing through him as he pressed his body against Hektor's solid length.' Larry's cock twitched again. Fuck, he was bordering on that right now with just Marty's hands holding his as Marty tossed him through the dance.

Thankfully the song ended, because he was having a hard time pulling his mind out of the gutter and was afraid he was going to spring a full damned boner out on the dance floor. Marty held his hand captive as they walked back to the table. Ray and Ronald had returned to the table as well, smiling like loons at each other.

Ray looked over at Larry. "Hey, Larry, how do you like Snayque's? How does it compare to the dance clubs where you used to live?"

Yeah, right. He'd never stepped foot in a dance club before that night. "It's nice. I'm having a good time. They do seem to have a wide variety of music here. I like that." He ignored Ray's other question, hoping Ray would forget about it so he wouldn't have to admit how pitiful he was.

"Yeah, they do," said Ronald. "There's something for everyone here."

"Well," replied Ray, "except maybe for cowboys. I don't think I've ever heard them play a country song."

Marty laughed. "Can you imagine *this* crowd two-stepping around the room?" Oh shit, that *would* be a sight. They all laughed at the visual.

Larry finished his beer and watched the crowd on the dance floor as they boogied to a solid disco

beat. He found himself smiling again as he watched. Their waiter came by again, and Marty ordered some chips and salsa and another round of drinks for them all.

Marty was glad that Larry's first dance had gone so well. He'd been a little worried about it since Larry'd been so nervous. Larry was clearly enjoying himself now, though. He'd wait for another good single-step beat, since it was simple and Larry had that down. He didn't think he'd try to get Larry to do any freestyle dancing this time around.

A slow dance, though. Oh yeah, that was something he definitely wanted to do with Larry. The look on Larry's face while they were dancing had been inscrutable. It had seemed to be alternating between desire and detachment, although Marty suspected the 'detachment' part of the look was probably Larry trying to conceal his thoughts from Marty. Marty was pretty sure that Larry had the hots for him -- the furtive glances Larry sent his way were not as subtle as Larry apparently thought. He kinda hoped so, anyway, and he certainly wanted to find out. A slow dance was always a good way to find that out.

Their chips and drinks arrived, so they busied themselves munching and drinking, watching the dancers move on the dance floor.

"Hello, Marty." He heard a campy voice behind him. Fuck. He turned to face the beautiful blond.

"Hello, Trevor." Marty smiled stiffly. "Are you having a good time tonight?"

"Not bad, lover," he replied. Fuck. "But you could make it a whole lot better. You lookin' for a hookup tonight?" Trevor ran an index finger down the side of Marty's face. Double fuck. Actually, Trevor was a damned good fuck and rather convenient too. He was never interested in anything more than a good lay for the night, and Marty had to admit that had often been appealing to him in the past.

"Sorry, Trev," Marty told him. "I'm not looking tonight."

"Well, damn." Trevor stared past Marty and settled his gaze on Larry. He gave Larry a slow and obvious once over, then turned back to Marty and quirked an eyebrow. "Well, if you change your mind, Marty, you know where to find me." Trevor turned on his heel and sashayed off toward another table.

Fuck. Marty turned around and looked at Larry. The poor guy had turned beet red and seemed miserable. Fuck! Marty put his hand on Larry's shoulder. "Larry, I'm really sorry about that. Trevor doesn't have a subtle bone in his body."

"There's nothing subtle about his bone, that's for sure," Ronald smirked. Ray elbowed him.

Marty cast him an irritated look. "You're not helping, Ronald."

"Sorry." Ronald looked a little sheepish.

Marty turned back to Larry. Fuck. Larry was so lacking in self-confidence anyway, he certainly didn't need to hear *that* shit, or have fucking dazzling Trevor eyeball him like he was some kind of cretin. "Larry, I'm so sorry. Please look at me? Please?"

Larry took a few deep breaths and swallowed, clearly trying to pull himself together and project a little poise. Finally, Larry peered back up, but Marty could see the apprehension in his eyes, magnified by his thick glasses. Marty didn't know what he could say to make that look go away.

So Marty moved his hand up from Larry's shoulder around to the nape of Larry's neck and then he put his mouth on Larry's and gave him a gentle little kiss. Marty broke it after about five seconds and brought his mouth around to Larry's ear. "I'm so very sorry, Larry. Please, please forgive me."

Marty could hear Larry's breath catch, and sat back to gaze again into Larry's eyes. The apprehension had been replaced by a mix of pleasure and surprise. Marty smiled. "Thank you."

Wow. Larry might not have pressed himself against his Hektor's solid length, but there had definitely been waves of desire and longing coursing through his body. And that had just been a five second, gentle kiss. Not even a kiss of passion. He only hoped it wasn't a kiss of pity.

He didn't know what to say. He had to say something, though. "It's okay, don't worry about it." But it wasn't okay. Not really. He felt like a stupid, repulsive caterpillar that had been caught trying to masquerade as a butterfly and had just gotten exposed to the world.

Marty looked a little confused by his comment. "It's *not* okay, Larry," he said. "And I *am* going to worry about it. Trevor can be a bitch sometimes." He sighed, then started again. "But to my regret, he's been a rather opportune bitch in the past. Again, I'm sorry."

Larry sensed, rather than saw, Ray and Ronald discreetly leave the table to give them some privacy. He wanted to make Marty feel better, but his mouth didn't seem to be cooperating with my head. "He's very beautiful, isn't he?"

"Beauty is only skin deep, though, Larry. It's what's on the inside that actually matters."

Did Marty not mind his old acne scars or his thick glasses? Marty *had* kissed him. Maybe Marty truly did care more about what was inside a person. But, shit, Larry was a mess there too. Was Larry just so caught up in always writing about impossibly gorgeous hunks that he'd forgotten that most people just didn't look like that, and perhaps everyday people really didn't put as much importance on it as he'd imagined that they did? Fuck, what would Rhys say?

"Thank you, Marty." Well, no, Rhys would have said something clever. Fuck.

Marty smiled at him again. "Thank *you*, Larry. Forgive me?"

"You haven't done anything to me that needs forgiving. I don't think I'll forgive Trevor, though, if you don't mind."

Marty laughed. "That's okay, you don't have to."

The song ended and another one started up. It had a beat similar to the one they had danced to earlier. He wanted this awkward discussion to end, so he asked Marty, "Is this a song we can do that push-pull dance to?"

Marty's smile widened. "It sure is!" He put his hand out for Larry to take, and they headed out to the dance floor.

It was perfect. Marty couldn't have orchestrated it better himself. Larry danced perfectly to the push-pull again, and the song that started up next was a good slow dance. He gave Larry's hands a squeeze. "Stay out for another?"

Larry seemed bewildered by the request, but nodded his head. Marty smiled encouragingly as he put his right hand on Larry's waist and took hold of Larry's right hand with his left. Larry placed his left hand on Marty's right shoulder, and Marty started to lead them around to the rhythm of the music.

Larry followed smoothly, once again. He really did have a good feel for the music, and once he had the self-confidence to do it, he would be a terrific freestyle dancer. The song turned sultry, and Marty moved his right hand around to the small of Larry's back and applied a little bit of pressure. Larry's eyes closed, then he bent his head down just a bit, and Marty detected a change in his breathing.

Oh, yeah. Fuck, yes. Larry was so fucking adorable like this, and Marty wanted him. Marty moved his right hand up a bit to pull Larry in against his chest.

Larry obeyed Marty's silent request, moving his left hand around Marty as his head came down against Marty's shoulder. Marty planted a little kiss on the side of his face.

Moving his right hand lower again to caress Larry's ass, Marty felt Larry let out a breath as Marty rubbed his groin against Larry's. Larry responded beautifully with a grind back of his own.

Marty's cock was filling quickly, and he could feel Larry's hardening against him as well. Larry's breath was coming quicker, and Marty landed another small kiss on the side of his face. Larry brought his head up and looked at Marty with such a stunned look in his beautiful, blue eyes. Marty brought his mouth down on Larry's for another soft kiss that ended with a nibble on the lips as the song came to an end.

Marty continued to hold Larry close as he looked down into those large, blue eyes and asked, "Come home with me?" *Please, please, please.*

Larry just nodded, but his eyes were filled with desire, mirroring Marty's own feelings. Marty smiled and squeezed his hand. "Let's go, hon."

Marty looked over at their table and saw that Ray and Ronald had returned. He caught Ronald's eye and gave him a wave to let him know they were leaving. Ronald saluted, and Marty turned to lead Larry out to his car.

Come home with me? Oh, God. Marty was asking Larry to have sex with him. Holy shit! What was he going to do? Now that was a stupid fucking question. He was going to have sex with the most wonderful man he'd ever met, that's what he was going to do. Hell, yes! When he'd woken up that morning, he'd never in his wildest dreams imagined the day would be ending like this. Wow. Just wow. Marty *wanted* him!

The drive back to the apartment complex was mostly a blur. Larry concentrated on not letting his cock get too out of hand, but repeated glances over at Marty were counterproductive to that goal. As they walked up the concrete stairs to their level, Larry's cock was rock solid and had taken over his thinking for him. He didn't seem to have a care in the world right then except for getting his rocks off -- with Marty -- soon.

Marty unlocked the door to his apartment and they entered. He closed and locked the door, then pulled Larry in for a kiss. Oh, it wasn't a gentle kiss this time, either. Jesus, fuck. Larry's arms wound around Marty's neck, and he found himself kissing Marty back with every ounce of strength he had. Marty's tongue found its way into his mouth and started a duel with Larry's. Larry was equal to the contest, and his tongue battled Marty's as their mouths and groins ground against each other.

Oh, fuck. Fuck no. But Larry couldn't stop it. He was past the point of no return. He groaned loudly into Marty's mouth as his cock pulsed and hot come spurted into his briefs. His strength was sapped out of him, and he felt Marty's arms tighten, holding him up as his body spasmed. How fucking embarrassing was that? Fuck, Rhys would never, *ever* shoot his load before Hektor even had a chance to yank his pants off. Marty had to think Larry was the most pathetic, useless waste of time he'd ever brought home.

Marty broke the kiss. "Fuck, yes. Do you know how hot that is? How good that makes me feel, knowing I sent you over the edge with just a kiss?"

Oh. Larry hadn't thought about it that way. That was a good idea, in fact. He'd have Hektor kiss Rhys into coming in his pants in the sequel to *Forever Mine* that he was working on.

"Come on, honey," Marty said, "let's get you cleaned up and both of us out of these clothes so we can start on round two. You're a youngster, hon, you'll recharge quickly."

Larry looked at him in amazement. "Hell yeah, baby, let's get moving on round two." Now *that* sounded a bit more like something Rhys would say. Clearly his cock was still running the show, because it didn't sound even remotely like anything *Larry* had ever said.

Marty's grin was wide as he grabbed Larry's hand and headed down the hallway toward the bathroom. Marty pulled Larry's shirt up and off over his head, and Larry kicked his shoes off and reached down to peel off his socks.

Hektor -- oops -- Marty had also removed his shirt and was working on his shoes and socks. What a sweetheart. They were in the bathroom to clean *Larry* up, but Marty seemed to know Larry would feel awkward getting all naked with Marty standing there still fully clothed. Larry unbuttoned his jeans, let them drop, and stepped out of them.

Yep, it was just his scrawny, pale self standing there in his soiled briefs in front of a tanned, muscular hunk of gorgeous man. Why wasn't that bothering him? Larry grinned. Because his cock, already back at half mast, was still in charge. He should let the little bastard run the show for him more often.

Marty smiled with a wicked glint in his eye as he slowly unbuttoned the fly of his jeans, let them drop to the floor, then stepped out of them and toward Larry. Marty's erection was solid against Larry's lower belly as he lowered his head for another kiss... slower this time.

Marty's tongue swept through Larry's mouth, and Larry pushed back with his own. Marty latched onto Larry's tongue and sucked on it. *Oh God*. That was so fucking good, and Larry heard himself moan. He thought it was himself moaning, anyway. His cock was fully up again when Marty broke the kiss.

"That's more like it." Marty hooked his thumbs at the waistband of his own underpants, hauled them down, and stepped out of them. God, he was beautiful. His cock was heavy and full, that lovely vein running along the underside was prominent. He had a fine crop of dark hair at the base of his cock and a spectacular line of it running up his tight, tanned abs and a smattering across his well-built chest.

Larry was staring, he knew he was, but he didn't give a rat's ass. Marty was every bit as beautiful as he'd imagined. He looked up at Marty's face again and saw Marty grinning at him. "You like what you see, hon?"

"Oh yeah. I like it a lot."

Chuckling, Marty yanked Larry's dirty briefs down to his ankles, and Larry stepped out of them. Marty stood back up and reached back for a wash cloth and wet it with some warm water, then turned back to Larry and kissed around on his face while washing him off.

Damn, that felt good. Warm and wet, the cloth was directed by a firm, strong hand. Marty spent more time than was strictly necessary cleaning Larry off.

When Marty was done, he tossed the wash cloth to the sink and led Larry to the bedroom. He pulled back the covers then turned back to Larry. He appeared hesitant, but then asked, "Larry, is it all right if we remove your glasses? I don't want to break them. Are you okay without them?"

Larry laughed. "Yeah, blind as a bat to anything further than a foot or so away, but otherwise okay. I don't need to see long distances for this."

Marty smiled and reached up for the glasses, carefully removed them, and placed them on the bedside table. At least, Larry assumed that was where he'd placed them. He sure as hell couldn't see them anymore. Then Marty was back in front of Larry's face, smiling at him and leaning down for a kiss. A passionate one, like the one at the front door. Larry wrapped both arms around Marty's neck and pressed against him, pushing into the kiss.

Larry felt free. Carefree and worry free. He felt safe with Marty.

Marty turned them around and backed him up to the bed. They climbed on and lay down, still kissing, arms wrapped around each other, bodies grinding and legs tangling. Marty rolled on top of him, pressing him down into the mattress as their tongues wrestled. Larry's legs splayed out and his hips instinctively thrust upward against Marty.

Larry's confidence in this moment knew no boundaries. He felt secure in Marty's arms. He felt like Marty's equal. He didn't feel insignificant. He felt aggressive.

Larry reached to the side and got a good grip on the sheet, then heaved them into a roll, landing himself on top, straddling Marty. Marty moaned and started sucking on his tongue again. Marty had one hand squeezing Larry's ass and the other on his upper back, pressing him down. Marty released his tongue, and Larry found himself flipped back to the bottom with Marty's face hovering directly over his, staring into his eyes.

"Larry?"

"Yeah?"

He smiled. "I want you, hon. Will you let me fuck you?"

Oh, Jesus. Marty wanted to *fuck* him. "Okay." *Shit, shit, shit.*

"How do you want it, honey?"

Huh? "Um, you pick."

He smiled. "Okay then, hands and knees all right with you?"

Marty's weight lifted off, and he heard the drawer of Marty's bedside table open. He assumed Marty was fetching lube and a condom. And he guessed that was his cue to... ah... get into

position. Oh, fuck. He rolled over and raised himself up onto his knees. He wanted this, he really did. But suddenly he was scared out of his wits and he could feel his cock wilting a bit. He closed his eyes and told himself that everything would be okay. Marty would take good care of him and it wouldn't hurt a bit.

It wasn't as if he didn't know *how* this worked. He fucking wrote about it all the time. But knowing was not quite the same as experiencing, and the unknown was frightening. He felt Marty behind him with one warm hand caressing his ass while the other moved up his back to massage his shoulder. He felt Marty pressing gentle kisses to his back, and he started to relax. Oh yeah, and his cock regained what it had lost... with a vengeance.

Would he actually come from being fucked in the ass? His characters generally did. Marty removed the hand he'd had on Larry's shoulder, and Larry heard the snap of a bottle of lube opening. Jesus. And then Larry felt Marty's cool, slicked fingers at his hole, and fuck, oh fuck, Marty penetrated him with one finger. Marty's other hand continued to caress his ass cheek, squeezing and massaging him. "Jesus, you're tight, honey. Has it been a while?"

That was putting it mildly. "Um, yeah... it's okay, though. I'm fine."

"Okay, hon. I'll take it slow for you. Make sure you're good and ready first."

Larry sighed. Good, because as tight as he felt around one finger, he couldn't imagine how he'd be able to handle Marty's cock. Fuck, that finger did feel good though, and he started to relax around it.

Marty moved the finger a bit, in and out and around to loosen the muscle at Larry's entrance. Marty's massaging hand lifted off from his ass, and he heard Marty snapping open the lube again. Then he felt more of the cool wetness at his hole as a second finger joined the first.

Oh God, he could feel the stretch. He groaned and sank to his elbows as his forehead pressed down on the sheet. Marty's fingers were moving, stretching him, and that warm hand was back again, caressing his ass, and up his side to his shoulder, to squeeze and massage.

Just when Larry was starting to feel relaxed and comfortable with Marty's fingers, they were gone. So was the warm hand from his shoulder. He heard the crackle of the condom wrapper as Marty tore it open, then a pause as Marty rolled it on. He felt Marty's hands on his hips, but Marty was hesitating. Shit. What?

"Hey, Larry?"

"Yeah?" Damn. Larry's voice caught in his throat.

"Um, actually, if you don't mind... ah... would it be all right with you if we were face to face instead of this position?"

Huh? Jesus. He'd thought Marty was backing out on doing him at all, but that wasn't the case.

Marty actually wanted a more intimate position. Wow.

"Oh. Okay." Larry rolled over and spread his legs apart. Then Marty was back over him, and he could see Marty's face smiling down. Larry found himself reaching up for Marty, his hand finding the side of Marty's face, caressing Marty's cheek and then moving around to clasp the side of Marty's head and pull Marty down for a kiss. It was a slow, tender kiss, starting with nibbles and progressing to tongues slow-dancing to a soundless, erotic melody.

Larry's other hand was at Marty's hip, gently stroking. Marty's body pressed down on his, and Marty's hips ground against him slowly and rhythmically. Marty moaned, and the resonance was so fucking heartfelt and passionate that Larry's cock leaped at the sound.

Oh Jesus, Larry didn't want to jump the gun again. He broke the kiss and heard himself pleading, babbling, his voice low and thick: "Marty, please, please, please. Oh, God. Now please, Marty. Please, now."

Marty moved back up quickly, hands on Larry's hips, bringing his legs up. Larry grabbed his legs behind the knees and pulled back.

Larry heard the snap of the lube cap once more, and could sense Marty stroking lube onto his condom-covered prick. Then Marty's hands were on Larry's ass and there was pressure at Larry's hole.

Oh God, oh God. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to relax. What would Rhys do? Shit, how would he know, Rhys was experienced by the time he'd met Hektor. Larry couldn't imagine Rhys ever acting like a fucking virgin anyway.

Larry could not stop the groan from escaping as he felt the head of Marty's cock breaching him, stretching him. The pressure increased, and, God, he felt so fucking full as Marty slid in.

He felt Marty's body lean back down over him, then Marty's lips were on his neck, nibbling, licking, and sucking. Fuck, that felt so damned good. Larry arched into it and wrapped his arms around Marty, holding on tightly. A hum of moaning surrounded them, and Larry was pretty sure he was at least contributing to the sounds.

Marty's lips moved up to Larry's and they kissed. Larry's cock ached so sweetly between them, and when he pressed his hips up, his cock rubbed along that exquisite hairline running down Marty's tight abs.

Marty groaned and pulled partially out, then thrust back in. Oh God, Marty'd found Larry's prostate. Marty withdrew again and started rhythmically driving into him, the angle perfectly aimed to graze Larry's gland with every thrust.

The sensations coursing through Larry's body were overpowering, and he had no conscious control over what he did or said. His legs and arms locked around Marty, and their mouths pressed together, the tongue battle a draw.

Larry felt a jolt of electrical heat course along his spine, and his body arched and jerked under Marty's weight. Hot come spurted between them, and he heard himself cry out, but the sound was muffled by Marty's mouth. He felt Marty's body stiffen over him, then Marty arched back and groaned loudly, and he felt Marty's cock throb hotly deep inside him.

Oh God, Larry was so fucking unaffectedly responsive. It was amazing. Marty felt like *he* was amazing for bringing such a strong reaction out of Larry.

Marty was boneless, resting atop Larry. He could feel Larry's hands on his back, petting him as Larry's legs fell weakly to the sides. Larry was breathing heavily, just as Marty was. He turned his head and landed a few kisses on the side of Larry's neck.

"God, Larry, you're amazing." Marty pulled out and tossed the condom, then he lay back down next to Larry.

Larry gave a little laugh. "There's nothing amazing about me, but *you* certainly are. Wow. You're perfect, Marty. Thank you so much for everything. Just -- thank you."

Marty lifted up and back over Larry. He wanted Larry to be able to look into his eyes when he said this. "Larry?"

"Yeah?"

"*You* were amazing. I absolutely love your open, unaffected, incredibly passionate responses. You make me feel like a king." Marty paused and then repeated himself with emphasis: "*You* make me feel like a king."

Marty watched as the sweetest smile spread across Larry's face. He couldn't resist leaning back down for another kiss. Tender, that time. Larry's arms came back around him and hugged him tight. Marty broke the kiss and looked back into Larry's beautiful, blue eyes.

"Larry?"

"Marty?" Larry was grinning widely.

Marty laughed. "Larry, I'd really like to keep seeing you. Not just the 'hi, neighbor' shit with maybe some sex thrown in, but... you know... date. I really had a great time tonight. Not just the sex, although that was great, too, but I mean everything. So, what to you think? Are you interested?"

Larry's grin faded, but his eyes widened in a look of surprise. He just nodded in reply.

Marty gave Larry a little kiss, and Larry hugged him tightly. He rolled to his back, dragging

Larry with him, and they just rested there a moment.

"Larry?"

Marty felt Larry nod against him, so he continued, "Will you sleep here with me tonight?"

"Yes." Marty barely heard him, but it was accompanied by a little squeeze.

Marty smiled. Damn, Larry made him feel so special.

"Hon, we should hop in the shower for a quick one."

"Oh, yeah... okay."

Marty rolled out of bed and got up. Larry started to follow him, but as Marty reached the door he realized Larry had stopped in the middle of the bedroom. Marty turned back to him. Larry was just standing there, looking unsure of himself, like he didn't know what to do. He looked back toward Marty's bedside table and took a step, then stopped again. He seemed distressed.

Oh fuck. Larry couldn't see where to go because Marty had put his glasses on the table.

"Damn, Larry, I'm sorry." Marty hurried back to Larry's side and put his hand on Larry's shoulder. "I'll get 'em. Stay here."

"I'm sorry." Larry's voice was miserable and small. Damn.

Marty picked up the glasses and brought them to Larry. Larry put them on and sighed with obvious relief.

Marty put his hands on Larry's shoulders so Larry would look right at him. "Larry, listen to me. You did absolutely nothing to be sorry for. *I'm* the one who was insensitive. *I'm* the one who should be, and is, sorry. Please don't apologize to me for the fact that you have poor eyesight."

Larry gave him a little smile. "Can I apologize for being an insecure idiot?"

Marty laughed. "You are not an idiot." He pulled Larry in for a hug. "But, damn, you are definitely the most insecure individual I've ever known." Marty rocked with him a bit and softly told him, "We'll work on that one."

CHAPTER TWO

Where was he? This wasn't his bed. Marty! That was right. He was in Marty's bed. Hell, yes. Marty had asked him to spend the night. Jesus, Marty had asked to actually *date* him. Did that make him Marty's boyfriend? Larry couldn't help smiling at the thought of that word. Boyfriend. And just as amazing, he wasn't a fucking pathetic twenty-nine-year-old virgin anymore.

Larry reached for the bedside table where he knew his glasses were. He found them and put them on. He looked around and saw his clothes folded neatly on top of Marty's dresser. Except for the skivvies -- they were in a plastic bag. Jesus. Larry put his clothes on and stuffed the icky bag into his back pocket, then headed into the bathroom.

Marty was so thoughtful. There was a brand-new toothbrush lying on the counter for him. He used it, and the toilet, then washed his hands before walking down the hall to the kitchen.

He must have made some noise as he approached, because Marty turned to him as he arrived at the kitchen doorway. "Good morning! And good timing, too. Hey, would you flip the bacon while I handle these pancakes?"

"Sure." Great, in fact. He was happy to have something to keep him occupied. He picked up the fork and started flipping. The sizzling strips were about ready to come off. Marty flipped a batch of pancakes, then turned to him and winked.

"Did you sleep well, Larry?"

Larry blinked. Marty was standing so close Larry could feel the heat radiating from the man's body. It was going to take all his concentration not to embarrass himself. "Yeah, it took me a moment to figure out where I was when I woke up, though. How about you? Did you sleep well?"

"Yep, I slept like a baby. You were still pretty out of it when I woke up, though, so I figured I'd just let you sleep in while I started some breakfast."

"Thanks." The bacon was done, so Larry removed it to some paper towels, and Marty put the pancakes on a couple of plates.

"Juice?" Marty asked.

"Yes, please." Larry focused on dividing the bacon up onto the two plates while Marty poured the orange juice, then they sat down at the table to eat.

"So, Larry," began Marty. "If we're going to date..." He paused there and raised his eyebrows,

grinning widely. Larry grinned back. "We should probably learn a bit more about each other."

"Okay."

Marty chuckled, Larry assumed at his verboseness. "I'll start," Marty told him. "As you've probably figured out, I work construction. Specifically, I'm a carpenter for Grover Construction."

"Yeah, the tool belt you wear was a clue." Not to mention hot. "Have you worked for Grover long?"

"I've been working there ever since I moved here from Brownsville, Kansas twenty years ago."

"You're from Brownsville? I'm from Richardson, about eighty miles east of there. I attended the university in Brownsville."

"Oh yeah? Small world. Ronald's from a little town in northern Oklahoma, about a hundred and fifty miles south of there. I know a guy here from Wichita, too. So, what did you major in?"

"Creative writing."

Marty raised his eyebrows. "Oh yeah? Is that what you do then, write? I figured you must work from home."

"Yeah."

"Do you have family still in Richardson?"

"Yes, just my mom and an older brother."

"Are you out to your family?"

"Yeah. I get preached at whenever I go home for a visit. Not so much my brother... he's okay... but my mom's always trying to get me to 'change my mind.'"

Marty grimaced. "Bummer."

"Yeah, I'd never hear the end of it if she knew what I did for a living now. She thinks I write obits. I used to. Write obits, that is, and moonlight at that convenience store at Tenth and Maple."

Marty put down his fork and quirked an eyebrow. "So, just what is it that you *do* write that your mom wouldn't approve of?"

Oops. He'd forgotten that he hadn't told Marty yet. He could feel his face heating up again. "Oh. Um, I write stories. Fiction. My pen name is just my name, backwards."

"Larry backwards? How would you pronounce that?" Marty's brow knit together.

"No," Larry laughed. "I mean reverse my first and last names, using my full name and not the nickname."

Marty's eyes widened and his jaw dropped. "Travis Lawrence? Holy shit! I love your books, Larry. Damn, you're the reason I was late last night."

Larry couldn't stop his grin. "Yeah, I figured that out when Ronald mentioned Hektor and Rhys when you told him why we were late." He was pretty proud of that story, and thrilled that Marty liked it.

"Were your obits as kinky as your books?"

Yeah, right. "Sadly, no. Pretty boring stuff, obits."

Marty crossed his arms, leaned back in his chair, and just looked rather contemplatively at Larry for a minute.

Larry chewed his lip and picked at his shirt sleeve under the scrutiny. Shit, what was Marty thinking about?

"You know," began Marty.

Shit. No, he didn't know. "What?"

"Well, I caught a glimpse of your hidden passion last night." Marty paused and winked. "But now that I have a better idea of the incredible depth of your fantasies, you just might want to be on your guard, because I *will* be working toward drawing your inner Rhys out."

That was *so* not a problem. Larry laughed. "Okay, *Hektor*, you have my leave to try."

"Sweet, I get to be Hektor." Marty laughed. "You know -- well, of course you know -- Hektor loves it when Rhys lets Hektor hunt him down."

Larry was pretty sure his blush was reaching his toes. Hell, yes, he knew it. Those scenes were hot, if he did say so himself. Jesus. Marty wanted to play games like that with him? Holy fuck, how would Rhys answer that?

Larry winked. "You know, Rhys absolutely loves Hektor's 'punishment' when he's finally caught."

Marty's jaw dropped. Oh damn, had he gone too far? No. That was a pretty wicked grin spreading on Marty's face.

"Well, Hektor does need to let his lover know who's boss."

They both burst out laughing. This was insane. Damn, Larry needed a new subject. "Well, anyway, you say you're from Brownsville? Is that where your family still lives too?"

Oh shit. *That* wiped the mirth off Marty's face. "Well, as far as I know."

"You're out of touch, then?"

"Yeah. It's been twenty years. I left when I was eighteen."

"Oh, man, that must have been hard."

"Yeah, it was kinda rough at first. I'll tell you about it." Marty paused and sighed. "I could use some unbiased advice, really. I've been thinking about them lately, trying to decide some things."

"Oh, okay."

"Well, it's like this," Marty began. "I came to the conclusion that I was definitely gay during my senior year in high school. During the summer after graduation, I made what turned out to be the huge mistake of coming out to my parents. My dad completely blew his stack. He said some truly awful things to me. My mom just stood there. She didn't defend me at all. She didn't say anything, but she looked at me like I was the biggest disappointment of her life. My dad... he didn't actually say the words, telling me to leave, but it was pretty implied."

How awful, to be all alone in the world, barely out of high school. How strong Marty must have been, emotionally, to be able to deal with that. To even survive, let alone become the happy and successful man he was now.

Marty continued. "I packed up my things that same day and took off. I emptied my bank account, said goodbye to my best friend, and started driving. I didn't really tell anyone where I was going, except Billy. I told him California, but I didn't even know what city I would end up in yet myself."

"Jesus, Marty. I can't imagine starting out on my own, with no family support, just barely out of high school. How long did it take you to get a job?"

"Actually, I was pretty lucky. I had a little experience helping put an addition on my sister and brother-in-law's home, and I ended up getting a job as an apprentice carpenter right away. My savings were enough to keep a cheap roof over my head and macaroni and cheese in my belly for a couple of weeks until my paychecks started coming in."

Larry pushed his plate away. "That must have been such a scary time for you."

"Yeah, it was."

"But you made it. You're happy and successful, and you did it all by yourself. You should be very proud of yourself."

Marty smiled. "Thanks, hon. Well, anyway, here's the thing I've been thinking about. I have three sisters. Two are older -- they were already married with kids when I left -- and one is a year younger. As far as I know, they didn't know anything about it. I don't know what they know about me now, and I guess I don't really know how they would feel about it. When I left, all I could think was that I couldn't face the same rejection from them as I'd just gotten from my parents. I just assumed they'd feel the same. In hindsight, I wonder if that's true. *Would* they have rejected me then? Would they now? Should I contact them, or consider the fact that they've never contacted me to be a sign?"

Larry leaned back in his chair and thought about it for a moment. Marty was actually asking *him* for advice, and he didn't want to fail Marty. He took a deep breath before replying. "I don't think you can assume that they haven't *tried* to contact you. You said yourself that, other than telling Billy 'California,' you didn't tell anyone where you were going. It's a big-assed country, Marty. And even if they learned from Billy that you were heading to California, well, it's still a big-assed state. And damn, your last name is Jones, for Christ's sake. That's not going to make it easy with all the privacy laws."

"You know, that's true. I would be very hard to track down. Shit, Larry, I don't even know if they still live in Brownsville, or if my parents are dead or alive. I don't think I want to contact *them* anyway. They made their opinions clear twenty years ago."

"What does your heart tell you to do, Marty? About your sisters?"

Marty shrugged. "I don't know."

Larry was surprised at how comfortable he felt this morning, talking freely with Marty, just saying what he thought, without feeling the need to overanalyze every comment first. "Sure you do. The fact that you're thinking so much about it tells me that you *want* to be their brother again. The question is, can you handle the rejection at this point if that's the way it ends up?"

Marty considered that for a moment. "Yeah, you're right. I do. And you know what? I think I could handle the rejection. I've lived the last twenty years assuming they would have rejected me, I suppose I could handle learning it for a fact. I guess contacting them and giving them the opportunity to reject me is the only way to find out if they would accept me."

Larry smiled. "What do you say we grab our computers and do a little research?"

Marty laughed. "There's no time like the present."

They were done eating, so they cleaned up the mess, then Larry excused himself to run over to his own apartment to change into some fresh clothes and grab his laptop.

Marty had known after last night that Larry had some hidden depths, but he never in a million

years would have pegged him as the author of *Forever Mine*, not to mention the dozens of Larry's other books he'd read in recent years. The more he learned about Larry, the more he liked the man.

He was really happy for the emotional support and advice Larry was giving him, too, as he tried to sort out his feelings about his family and decide what he should do about them. Larry's comments were helping him see the whole thing from a more positive perspective.

While Larry was home showering, he wrote out everything he knew about his family that might be helpful. He knew his sisters' full names and their addresses as of twenty years ago, and his parents' full names and his old home address and phone number. He couldn't remember his sisters' phone numbers.

He didn't want to contact his parents, but he did want to find out if they were still alive or not. Damn. No, he definitely didn't want to see them, but the idea that they might actually be dead still bothered him.

When Larry returned, Marty had Larry start looking for his sisters. Marty did a search for his parents, but after a few minutes he still hadn't had any luck. If they were alive, then either they'd moved and changed their phone number or were unlisted. They'd never seen a reason to be unlisted in the past, and Marty couldn't picture them ever moving from that house unless it was to a nursing home, so the outlook was grim.

"I'm not having any luck, Larry. Either they've moved or died. Damn."

"I'm sorry, Marty. I can check the social security death index later if you want me to, just so you can know one way or the other."

"Really? Yeah, I'd like to know. Any luck with my sisters?"

Larry nodded. "Yeah, I've found two of them, anyway. The two older ones, Brenda and Betty, are still married and are even still living in the same houses they were in when you left. I've got their phone numbers here. I can't find the younger one, Sally, though. But that's not surprising, since it's likely she's married and has a new name."

"But I can find her through Brenda and Betty... unless they hang up on me."

"I doubt they'll do that, Marty."

Yeah, Larry was probably right. He hoped Larry was right. It was hard to believe he was sitting there actually contemplating picking up the phone and calling his sisters. "What should I do about the girls? I should call, right? That would be better than just popping in one day and freaking them out."

Larry laughed. "Yeah, I'd recommend a phone call. They'll probably be freaked enough at that."

Fuck, was he ready to face this? Now? As in *right now*? Jesus. Marty took a deep breath. "I should get this over with, shouldn't I, before I talk myself out of it?"

"Like you said, there's no time like the present. Uh, do you want me to leave? Give you some privacy?"

"No!" Damn, he'd said that a little loud. "I mean, no. I think I'd really appreciate the moral support. Besides, I might need your shoulder if it doesn't go well." Marty smiled.

Larry gave him an encouraging smile in return. "I really think it *will* go well. I bet they'll be happy as hell to hear from you again."

Marty laughed. He really appreciated Larry's cheerleading. "I don't know about that. I picture them saying 'Who? Marty who?' Or maybe 'go crawl back under the rock you've been living under.'"

"Oh, God, am I rubbing off on you? Stop that crap, Marty. You're supposed to be 'Mr. Confident.' Come on, what would Hektor do here?"

Hektor? Marty laughed. He could have some fun with this. "He'd say, hand me my phone, please. I have a call to make."

Larry laughed. "That's more like it." He looked around. "I don't know where your phone is, though."

Marty stood up and slapped his front jeans pocket. "It's right here, *Rhys*. Don't make me ask you again." Marty wiggled his eyebrows for effect.

Larry's jaw dropped, but then an amused smile grew across his face. He got up and walked over to Marty. "I'm sorry, *Master Hektor*. I would be *very* happy to fetch your phone for you." He reached into Marty's front pocket and fumbled around, quite needlessly 'searching' for the phone. Oh, he was good. He'd found *something*, but it wasn't Marty's phone.

Marty grabbed Larry's wrist and withdrew Larry's hand from his pocket. He grinned as he pulled Larry around to face him, then he gave Larry a wink and said, "Drop your pants, hon."

Larry's eyes widened, but he moved his hands down to unfasten his jeans, never taking his eyes off of Marty's. After unzipping, he let them drop to the floor. His boxer briefs were starting to tent nicely. "Undies too, hon," Marty told him.

Larry's eyes were wide open, staring at Marty, but he moved fast, hooking his underwear and pulling them quickly down, before standing back up to face Marty. This was going to be fun.

Marty gave him a wicked grin, then dropped smoothly to his knees. He took hold of Larry's hip with one hand and grasped Larry's hard prick in the other. Then he brought his head down and sucked one of Larry's balls into his mouth.

Larry yelped and instantly his hands clutched at Marty's head. Hell yes! He loved Larry's reaction. Marty's cock leapt. He was already hard in anticipation. God, he loved giving head. His own cock started to ache.

He pumped a few times on Larry's cock and moved his mouth over to the other side of Larry's balls, sucking and licking. Larry was rocking his hips instinctively, back and forth. He was moaning and babbling shit Marty couldn't make out. God, his response was beautiful. What the hell would he do when Marty actually sucked on his dick?

Marty decided to find out. He moved his mouth up and started nipping and licking along the underside of Larry's cock. Larry's groans were fantastic, and his hands kneaded Marty's head, trying desperately to grab onto some hair, but it was too short. Marty's cock throbbed, and he started rubbing himself against Larry's leg.

Larry's head was thrown back, and he was rhythmically pumping his hips. Marty tightened his grip to steady Larry as he moved up to drag his tongue through Larry's slit and swirl around the head. Then he sucked Larry into his mouth, opened up and brought it all the way in. Larry's hips were fighting Marty's grip. Marty grasped Larry's other side to steady him and started sucking and bobbing up and down Larry's swollen prick.

Larry's moans expressed unadulterated ecstasy, and Marty was wrapped in them. His own cock was throbbing, and he moved one hand down to clutch Larry's leg and draw it forward so he could grind against it. He felt like a fucking dog rutting against Larry's leg, but he had no pride when it came to giving head. He fucking loved it.

Marty listened to Larry jabbering through his moans as Marty continued to service his cock: "Oh fuck, oh fuck, Jesus, oh God, Marty, ahhhhgg, oh please don't ever fucking stop."

Of course he wasn't going to fucking stop. Hell, he might just fucking come before Larry did, though. Jesus fuck, it was building. Oh fuck, yes. Marty's body started to stiffen up, and he thrust erratically against Larry's leg. His cock jerked and gooey heat spurted into his shorts. He groaned around Larry's cock, and it sent Larry over the edge. Marty sucked deeply and swallowed as waves of hot spunk burst into his mouth.

Larry's prick pulsed, and he moaned intensely, his legs shaking. Marty continued to suck and lick until Larry was completely spent and his body folded bonelessly over Marty.

Marty popped off, gave Larry a pat, and then helped him to his knees for a kiss. But Larry beat him to it. The instant he was down, his hands were at the sides of Marty's face and his tongue was invading Marty's mouth. Marty latched onto it and sucked hard. Larry rewarded Marty with beautiful sounds as his arms wrapped around Marty's neck. Marty pulled him in tightly and tendered out the kiss, nibbling at Larry's lips, then finally just holding him and rocking gently.

"Thank you, Larry," Marty whispered to him.

Larry's voice was hoarse as he replied: "Oh God, Marty, I can't believe you're thanking me. Jesus. Thank *you*!"

Marty laughed. "Okay, okay. But I do need to go change my pants even if you don't think you deserve a 'thank you.'"

Larry chuckled against him. "That is so hot, Marty."

Marty smiled and petted Larry's back. Then he leaned back and looked into Larry's eyes. "Thank you," he told Larry again.

Larry grinned back. "You're welcome, Marty."

That was so incredibly fucking amazing. Larry would never, absolutely ever, get over Marty actually coming in his pants like that. Wow. He was half in love with Marty and he'd only known the man as more than a passing acquaintance for less than twenty-four hours. He tried to rein in his feelings and persuade himself that it couldn't possibly be anything more than lust, because the whirling emotions in his mind were scaring the hell out of him.

Larry got back on his computer to work on finding Marty's parents while Marty changed his pants. When he came back in the room, Larry asked, "Can you tell me your parents' birth dates, Marty?"

Marty told him the dates. Shit. It was definitely them. "They're listed, Marty. I'm sorry."

Marty heaved a pretty big sigh. "When?"

"Both in the same month... back in ninety-eight... maybe an accident?"

"Hell if I know. Shit. Well, that's that, I guess. Fuck." He sighed again. "At least we've found Brenda and Betty."

"Yep... I'm sorry about your parents, Marty."

"Thanks. Shit. I know I wouldn't have seen them again anyway, but still, I didn't want them to be *dead*."

"I know." Shit, Larry didn't know what to say to comfort Marty. Marty looked fucking miserable about it. Probably felt guilty for not caring as much as he felt he should care, or for not knowing they'd been dead for ten years.

"Fuck," Marty said, then looked up at Larry before continuing, "Well, I don't want to sit here wallowing in these stupid negative feelings. Let's move on."

Larry gave him a little smile. "Okay. Are you ready to make your phone calls, or do you want to wait now?"

Marty didn't hesitate. "I want to get it over with." He pulled the phone out of his pocket and punched in one of the numbers Larry had written down. He looked over at Larry. "I'm trying Brenda first." After a moment he ended the call. "Voice mail. I don't want to leave a message. I'll try again later."

He punched in Betty's number, listened and waited. Same thing. He ended the call. "Shit, nobody's home."

"Sorry, Marty. I know you wanted to have this behind you."

"Hey, I know what we can do." Marty got up and walked over to his CD collection and started pulling some out. Then he turned and flashed Larry a huge smile. "We're going to practice some more dance steps, so when we go back to Snayque's tonight you'll feel more comfortable about getting out there and dancing."

Snayque's was hopping. Marty saw that Ray and Ronald were out on the dance floor, so he led Larry over to the bar so they could place their order there and wait to see where the guys sat down.

Larry looked like he was pretty happy to be there. Larry turned to Marty and smiled. "Thank you for this afternoon, Marty. I feel so much more comfortable here tonight than I did last night."

Marty pulled him in for a reinforcing hug. "Good," he told Larry. "I had fun this afternoon teaching you." The song ended and he saw Ray and Ronald heading for a table on the opposite side of the dance floor.

"Come on," he told Larry. "Let's go sit down." They picked up their drinks and headed for the table. The guys spotted them and waved when they got close.

"Hey, Marty, Larry... How are you boys tonight?" Ray wanted to know.

Marty laughed. "Great. Are you guys behaving yourselves?"

Ronald looked scandalized. "Never!"

Ray laughed at him, then turned to Marty. "Say, Marty, Ronald made an interesting observation after you guys left last night."

"Oh God, do I want to know?"

"It's not bad!" Ray turned to Larry. "Actually it's about you, Larry. Did you know that if you

reverse your names, you become the author of some of our favorite naughty books?"

Larry blushed and looked at Marty. Marty gave him a smile, a wink, and a look that said 'come on, honey, you can tell them.'

Larry looked back at Ray. "Um, well, actually, that *is* me. I'm a writer."

It was the first time Marty'd ever seen either Ray or Ronald speechless. It was short-lived, though.

"No shit?" asked Ronald. "I just thought it was a coincidence, not that it really was you. Dude, that's awesome. Please tell me there'll be a sequel to *Forever Mine*."

Larry smiled. "It's almost ready to submit. I'm mostly just going through it, editing and adding or deleting a few things here and there."

"Does Rhys get to do Hektor in the sequel?"

Now *that* was a blush. How funny. Marty wondered if Larry was thinking of them. Hell, he hoped Larry wanted to do him sometime. Marty usually topped, but now and then he liked the bottom position.

Larry's reply to Ronald didn't give Marty any clues, though. "Um, I don't want to give anything away. Besides, it's not completely finished yet."

Ronald grinned and affected an exaggerated whine. "Oh, o-kay."

"That reminds me," Marty told them. "I still need to finish up the original." He looked over at Ronald. "And *don't* give anything else away!"

Ronald pantomimed locking his lips and throwing away the key, then turned to Ray and threw his arms around Ray's neck. Ray pulled him in for a kiss.

Marty turned to Larry, and Larry smiled. Marty asked, "Wanna dance, hon?"

Larry's sweet smile broadened, and he took Marty's hand. "Yeah, I do."

Marty pulled Larry out onto the dance floor. The song had a good beat with a sultry element running through it. He tugged Larry toward him so they were touching as they began moving together. He ran his hands down the sides of Larry's body, and Larry moved both hands smoothly up Marty's arms.

Larry kept his eyes on Marty, and Marty gave him a reassuring squeeze. Larry really *did* have good rhythm. Larry was such a sweet-tempered and lovable little guy. He brought out the best in Marty.

Marty had been in relationships before, but had never felt so drawn toward anyone else. If he had been twenty-five, he'd have been scared. But he wasn't, he was thirty-eight years old and he'd been looking for someone to make him feel like this for years.

Now that Marty'd found that someone, he sure as hell didn't want to lose his potential Mr. Right before getting to really know him. He loved the way Larry looked at him, like Larry felt it too.

The song ended and he took Larry's hand before heading back toward their table. They didn't make it, though. Not before Trevor intruded to once again try Marty's patience. Damn. The smile Trevor directed toward him was saccharine and seemed about as sincere as a politician's election day promises.

"Hello, Marty." He turned to Larry. "Hello, Marty's friend."

Jesus. It looked like he didn't have a choice but to introduce them. Marty sighed. "Trevor, this is my boyfriend, Larry. Larry, this is Trevor."

Trevor raised his eyebrows as a fleeting glimmer of distress flashed through his eyes. It was quickly replaced by Trevor's usual studied calm. "Boyfriend, is it? That was certainly fast."

What the hell? Marty softened his tone for his reply. "When it's right, it's right."

Trevor turned to Larry. "I've seen you somewhere before. Don't you work at that convenience mart over on Maple?"

"I used to. Not anymore, though."

"Huh." Trevor sighed, once again letting down his defenses as an air of sadness crossed his handsome features, then he tightened his jaw and blanked his features. He turned back to Marty again. "See you around, Marty."

"Bye, Trevor," Marty replied. Trevor turned and walked away. What was that all about? Why had Trevor looked hurt when Marty had introduced Larry as his boyfriend? Trevor had been a regular hookup, but nothing more than that. He'd certainly never gotten the impression that Trevor had wanted anything more from their relationship.

Marty and Larry finally made it back to their table. Ray and Ronald were out on the dance floor. Marty turned to Larry. "You did great out there dancing. Did it feel good to you?"

"Yeah." Larry's smile was huge. "I never thought I'd ever say these words, but I *love* dancing."

Marty leaned over and gave him a kiss. Just a few nibbles, before pulling back to smile into Larry's eyes. "I do too, hon. We'll have to do this often."

Dancing with Marty was almost as good as sex. Hell, it was practically foreplay with some of the dances, it was so fucking erotic. They'd been in a room full of people, but it was like the people didn't exist. Like there wasn't anybody there except him and Marty, moving together to the music.

He wasn't even going to let another encounter with Trevor dampen his spirits. It was obvious that Trevor wanted Marty, but for some inexplicable reason, Marty wanted *him* rather than that flawless man. *When it's right, it's right*, Marty had said. The words echoed through his mind.

He didn't know what Marty had planned for them, but he knew he was looking forward to it. Marty shut the apartment door behind them and leaned in to give Larry a soft kiss. "So, Larry," Marty asked him. "What would you like to do? You're calling the shots tonight."

Oh, hell no. *He* was calling the shots? Okay, he could do this. He'd been daydreaming about sucking Marty off ever since Marty had done him that morning, so he wanted to do that. But it was confession time. Fuck.

"Okay. Um, here's the thing. I want to give you a blow job, but... well... shit." He was fucking stammering. Shit. "Okay, the thing is I haven't done it before, and I want you to tell me if I'm not doing something I should be doing or if I do something that isn't good. Okay?"

Marty looked more than a little surprised. Damn. "Really? You're sure you want to do it, though? I don't want you to do it just because you think you *should*."

"Oh, yes, I *want* to. I've been dreaming about it all day long. I just really want it to be good for you."

"Okay, hon. Well, I doubt I'll need to tell you anything."

They walked back to the bedroom, and Marty pulled his shirt over his head and kicked off his shoes. As they were getting undressed, Marty seems to be troubled, lost in thought. Shit. What had he said? It was his inexperience. He shouldn't have told Marty about it. Fuck.

Soon they were down to their shorts. Marty sat down cross-legged in the middle of the bed and stared thoughtfully at Larry.

"Larry?"

"Fuck." Oh shit. He hadn't meant to say that out loud. "Um, I mean, I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"Whatever it is that I said to upset you. Shit. I shouldn't have said anything. I just thought it would be better for you to know that in case I'm no good than to think that there wasn't any good reason for me to be lousy at it."

"Come here, hon." He reached for Larry. Larry took off his glasses and placed them on the bedside table, then climbed over to Marty. Marty held Larry's hands as Larry sat down facing him. "Larry, I'm *glad* you told me. If I'd thought you had previous experience, and I did think so, I would likely have been less gentle than I will be now that I know you've not done this before. Thank you for telling me."

"Oh. Good. But, *something's* upset you, hasn't it?"

"Upset isn't the right word. I'm just thinking about something. Look, Larry... will you be perfectly honest with me?"

"I've never lied to you, Marty. I won't, I promise."

"I know, Larry, but maybe you've omitted some things?"

Oh, fuck.

"Larry, the thing is, usually if an otherwise experienced man has never given a blow job, it's because he doesn't *want* to do it. Which is fine, not everyone wants to do that. But you said that you do want to do it."

"I do want to."

"Okay, hon. My point is, though, when I was young and just gaining experience, we progressed from rubbing off and hand jobs, to blow jobs, then finally to penetrative sex. Of course, that's not necessarily a rule or anything that all kids go through, but I think it might be fairly typical, isn't it?"

Fuck. Larry couldn't look up. Marty knew how pathetic he was. "I don't know." He didn't say it very loud, but he knew Marty heard him.

"Larry? Honey, before last night, had you ever had any kind of sex before?"

Hell, he'd never even *kissed* anyone before. Damn it. He couldn't say it. But he'd promised Marty he'd tell the truth. Larry stared at the sheet between them and tried to steady his breathing and keep from choking up. "I'm sorry." It was barely audible. "I didn't want you to know how pathetic I am."

"Oh, honey." He squeezed Larry's hands. "There's nothing wrong with being inexperienced. Please don't apologize for *that*. But don't you understand why your lover should be told something like that? To make things better for you?"

Larry nodded, but couldn't bring himself to look back up.

Marty's hand was at the side of his face, thumb wiping a runaway tear into Larry's cheek. Marty leaned toward him, lifted his face, and kissed him gently, tenderly. Marty's mouth felt so damned

good against his, and his cock listened.

Larry responded, happy to move past the awkward moment. He deepened the kiss and came up onto his knees to push forward into Marty. Marty leaned back, pulling Larry along. Marty's arms came around Larry and held him tightly. His tongue pressed into Marty's mouth. Marty moaned, and he felt Marty's tongue pushing back alongside his own.

Larry's cock hardened as they slowly ground against each other and alternated between deep kisses and gentle nibbles. The underwear had to go, so he sat up and hooked into Marty's waistband and slid the fabric down over Marty's cock, then down Marty's legs. Larry quickly removed his own and tossed both pairs of underwear aside.

Larry settled in close between Marty's legs and just looked. God, his cock was beautiful. He was dark, swollen, and heavy, and it was Larry that had gotten him that way. Larry cupped Marty's balls in one hand and gently rolled them. Larry grasped Marty's prick in the other and gave it a few pumps. Marty moaned and spread his legs further.

"God, you're beautiful, Marty."

"And you're enchanting, honey." Marty's voice was husky.

Larry wanted to taste, suck, and feel Marty's prick in his mouth. He leaned in and took the head of Marty's cock into his mouth and swirled his tongue around, savoring the flavor. Larry kept one hand around Marty's cock and moved the other to Marty's hip. Larry gave Marty a pump and a squeeze, then loosened his grip to cradle Marty's shaft while his tongue lavished along the underside of its length.

Marty's ass cheeks clenched, and Larry knew Marty was resisting the urge to thrust his hips. Larry moved one hand up Marty's body and found a nipple. Larry nipped and sucked his way up Marty's cock and ran his tongue through the leaking slit. It tasted deliciously bitter, like the kiss they'd shared after he'd come in Marty's mouth that morning. Larry's cock ached just thinking about it.

Larry opened up and took Marty into his mouth. He sealed his lips and sucked. Marty groaned and arched back on the bed. Larry felt Marty's hands clenched in his hair. Larry teased Marty's nipple and started bobbing up and down the length of Marty's cock. Larry's hand moved down to Marty's balls to roll them, and then lower to put pressure behind them.

Larry moved a hand back to the base of Marty's cock and pumped him while sucking firmly at the head. He nipped again along the underside, then back up to drag his tongue across the head. Marty's balls were drawn up tight, and moans filled the air as Larry took the length of hard cock deep into his mouth. Again Larry sealed his lips and sucked hard.

"Oh fuck. I'm gonna come, honey. Oh, God."

His hips thrust upward, and Larry held on tight. There was no fucking way he was popping off

for this. He pulled back just a bit and sucked hard. Marty grunted and stiffened, and Larry felt the hot fluid pulsing into his mouth. He swallowed, and sucked some more, until Marty was drained. Finally Larry popped off and sat up, breathing hard and licking his lips.

Larry was so hard his cock ached, and he gave it a squeeze.

"No." Marty's voice was hoarse, but the word was still clear. Fuck, Larry needed to come. "The drawer, honey. Get the stuff out of the drawer. You're gonna fuck me."

Oh, Jesus. Fuck yes. Larry reached for the drawer and grabbed a condom and the bottle of lube. Marty rolled over and lifted up onto his knees. "I just came, honey, so there's no pressure. I'm pretty fucking relaxed, so just lube up, have fun, and go."

Larry was relieved that the pressure was off him to get Marty to come this way. He was also thankful to Marty for making sure he didn't have time to fret and be anxious about his first time topping.

Larry's hands were shaking as he tore the wrapper and rolled the condom down his hard length. He added lube to the rubber, then squeezed some onto his fingers and tossed the bottle aside. He added lube at Marty's entrance and pushed some in with a couple of fingers. Damn, Marty *was* relaxed.

"I'm ready, honey."

Fuck, yes. Larry lined up and pressed in carefully. He felt little resistance and entered smoothly. Oh fuck. He was balls deep, and Marty felt so damned hot and incredibly tight. It was fucking amazing. Marty moaned, and Larry echoed the sound with his own.

Larry was so close to coming. He pulled back and pumped back into Marty. He took hold of Marty's hips and picked up a rhythm, thrusting in and out. He could feel his orgasm building. That familiar burning heat flashed along his spine, and his body stiffened and jerked. Larry grunted, and he could feel his cock pulsing deep in Marty's ass, dumping his load of spunk into the condom. Marty squeezed around him, and God, it felt so fucking good.

Larry took a moment to catch his breath, then slowly pulled out and tossed the condom into the trash. Marty rolled back over and reached for him. Larry dropped into Marty's arms and was enveloped in a warm hug.

Larry kissed and nibbled along Marty's neck, up to his ear. "Thank you," he whispered.

He could feel Marty's smile against his cheek. "It was my pleasure, honey. Thank you."

Larry laughed and gave Marty a hug. Marty was so fucking perfect.

"You've done it all now, hon," Marty told him. "Well, there's plenty to explore regarding positions, but you've basically covered it all now. The burden of having that hanging over your

head is gone forever."

"Thank you," Larry told him again. "And I'm sorry I didn't trust you enough to tell you in the first place. I won't ever make that mistake again."

"It's okay, hon. It worked out all right."

"Yeah. Wanna shower before bed?"

Marty laughed. "Definitely."

CHAPTER THREE

Fuck. What the hell time was it? Marty rolled out of bed to grab his phone off the dresser. He glanced at the clock. Jesus Christ, who the hell was calling him at six o'clock on a fucking Sunday morning?

He flipped the phone open and answered. "Hello?" Jesus. That was pretty much a croak. He sounded like hell.

"Marty?" He heard his name in surround sound. Larry was sitting up, looking a little dazed, probably wondering what the hell he was doing, and the phone voice was likewise inquiring.

"Yeah?" he replied.

"What are you talking about?" This was from Larry.

He covered up the mouthpiece and answered. "It's the phone, hon. Go back to sleep." Larry fell back to the pillow and rolled over.

The voice on the phone was back. "Oh, damn. You were asleep. I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking about the time difference."

Time difference? Oh fuck... caller ID. Marty thought he recognized the voice now. "Brenda?"

He walked out to the living room so he wouldn't disturb Larry.

"Yes." She sounded a little choked up. "I'm so glad you called. We've been trying to find you."

"You have?"

"Of course we have. You're our brother. We love you and we miss you so much."

Marty choked up now too. He didn't know what to say to that so he simply told her, "Thank you. I miss you too."

"Where are you? Are you in California? We tracked down your old friend Billy Atkinson, and he said that's where you'd told him you were going."

"Yes. I'm a little north of San Diego." He gave her his address.

"Are you all right? What do you do?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm a carpenter. I got a job as an apprentice carpenter almost as soon as I got here, thanks to the work I'd done on Betty and Carl's house. I've been working for that same company for twenty years now."

"That's such a relief."

Really? A relief? Marty sat down. "Tell me about yourself, Brenda, and Betty, Sally and all the kids."

"Goodness, where do I start? Well, Sally got married, but she's divorced now. She has two kids, Brian and Katie. They're in junior high."

"Wow. It's hard to picture Sally with a couple of kids."

Brenda laughed. "It'll probably be even harder for you to picture my Helen with two of her own, then. She's married to a nice young man named Tom, and they have two kids, Abe and Sue."

"Holy cow. You're a grandma, Brenda!"

She laughed again. "I know. Let's see, Betty already had Alan when you left and was expecting Ben. She has a girl, Marcia, now, too. Alan's a senior at Brownsville University, Ben's a junior. Marcia is a senior at the high school."

"Wow."

"My Greg got married yesterday. That's why we weren't home when you called, or for most of the day. I didn't think to check the caller ID last night. I wish I had."

"Little Greg is married? Wow. Well, it's just as well you didn't call. I was out until midnight, which would have been two o'clock, your time."

"Goodness."

"So do Helen and Greg still live in Brownsville, too? And what about Mike, what's he doing?"

"Helen lives here in Brownsville. Mike's an engineer and he moved to Austin three years ago when he graduated. He's not married, but his partner, Wes, is just the sweetest young man. Greg and Marie are also settling in Austin. Greg got a business degree and there are just more opportunities in a bigger city than there are here, so he figured he'd apply in the city where his brother lives."

Holy shit. His nephew, Brenda's son, was gay? Did they know that Marty was gay too? Apparently it didn't matter. "That's nice. Wow. That's a lot of information to process."

"What about you, Marty, do you have a partner?" Well, that answered the 'did they know about him' question.

"Not exactly, but I'm hopeful it'll turn into that."

"Oh, I'm afraid I don't know all the terminology. Mike and Wes call themselves 'partners' now because they're in a committed relationship and they live together. So the man I heard when you answered the phone doesn't live there with you?"

She heard Larry? "Um, no. He lives across the hall from me."

"Oh, okay. Is he your boyfriend, then?"

Jesus. This wasn't fazing her a bit. "Yes, Larry's my boyfriend."

"Good for you. I'm glad you have someone."

She was *glad* he had a *boyfriend*? In his wildest dreams, he'd never expected the conversation to go that well. What did he say to that? "Thank you," he told her. It was simple and appropriate, but still somehow not nearly enough to convey his feelings.

"Marty, will you come home for a visit? We'd all love to see you. Maybe over Thanksgiving weekend?"

Oh, God. Yeah, he wanted that. He really did. He just didn't look forward to the awkward reunion scene. Fuck. There was no way to get back into the family without going through that first, though.

"Um... yeah... I'm sure I can get away. I'll see if I can get a little extra time off work around then." Thanksgiving was only two and a half weeks away, but Marty never asked for time off. Chris owed him.

"Really? That's terrific, Marty. We'd love to have you here for as long as you can stay, but please try to include the Friday or Saturday in your stay because those are the only two days Mike can be here and I want you to be able to see everybody while you're here. I know everyone wants to see you again."

"Sure, I'll be sure to do that. I'll see what I can arrange, and I'll let you know when I'll be there, okay?"

"Okay. Oh, will you bring Larry with you? You can, you know. We'd love to meet him too."

Take Larry? Would Larry do that for him? He'd sure love the emotional support, but what were Larry's plans for Thanksgiving? "I'll talk to him, Brenda. I don't know yet. Thank you for the offer."

He and Larry *did* get along well, so even if things didn't work out, and they were only just friends by then, Larry would nevertheless be a pleasant road trip companion. And hell, if they

were still together at that time -- and he absolutely hoped they would be -- it would be a great test of their relationship.

She told him that she'd call the rest of the family and fill them in, and then they said their goodbyes and hung up. Marty felt a little numb. It was over. There was no 'confrontation.' He was more than accepted, he was missed and wanted. He was also wide awake at just after six o'clock on a Sunday morning.

Marty walked slowly back to the bedroom, thinking about it all. He was a great-uncle. His sisters' kids, whom he had loved playing around with, were all grown up now. Marty had known that, of course, but they'd been seared in his memory at the ages they'd been when he'd last seen them.

Marty could tell by Larry's steady breathing that he'd fallen back asleep. Marty put his phone down on the dresser and slipped back in between the sheets. He molded himself to Larry's back and reached an arm around to hold Larry against his chest. He felt warm and comfortable. It just felt so right.

Larry started to move, slowly waking up and cuddling back into Marty. Marty rubbed himself against Larry's backside, and the warm friction revitalized his cock. Marty's hand traveled down to stroke Larry's morning wood.

Marty knew the moment Larry snapped awake because he groaned and his hand flashed downward to grasp over Marty's. Marty trailed a row of kisses along the side of Larry's face, and Larry turned in Marty's arms to face him. Their lips met for a leisurely, gentle kiss. Marty lifted up to move his body over Larry's, lined up their hips, and pressed down, grinding gently.

Larry moaned into Marty's mouth and pushed his hips upward, meeting Marty's grind. Larry's hands were everywhere on his back, alternately petting him and hugging him tightly. Larry deepened their kiss, and Marty met Larry's tongue with his own.

Larry reached a hand out to grasp the sheet and rolled them, landing on top of Marty. Larry straddled him and ground against Marty's cock. Their kiss deepened, never breaking as their passion built.

Marty grabbed hold of Larry's ass, mashing them together as Marty thrust up. Larry's movements intensified and became erratic as he approached his orgasm. Marty's cock was hot and throbbing.

Their kiss broke as Larry's body started to stiffen and jerk. Marty heard Larry grunt, and he moved his hands up to caress Larry's back as liquid heat erupted between them. Marty trailed kisses along Larry's face as Larry's breathing stabilized, and his body relaxed.

Larry reached between them and grasped Marty's still hard cock. His hand was slick with the spunk smeared between them. Larry gave Marty's aching prick a firm pump. Damn, that felt good.

Marty's entire body was tingling, and he groaned and arched into Larry. Larry ran a thumb through Marty's slit and gave him another pump.

"Fuck," gasped Marty. He began thrusting upward, fucking the tight fist that had become the center of his focus. Larry brought his mouth down on Marty's, latched on to Marty's tongue, and sucked hard. Marty's groan seemed never-ending. God, Larry's body felt so good. They fit together perfectly.

Marty's balls were drawn up tight, and he felt his orgasm ready to burst. He continued to thrust as his cock spasmed and he shot, spilling hot come over Larry's hand.

Larry eased the intensity of their kiss as Marty's cock softened in his hand. Larry rolled off to the side, but stayed snuggled up close. "That was nice, Marty. What a wonderful way to wake up."

Yeah, it was nice. Marty wasn't used to waking up with anyone either. He'd never asked hookups to stay the night, nor had he stayed over at their places. During his failed relationships, he'd occasionally done the overnight thing, but he'd never had a full-blown, live-in relationship.

But he was thinking about it now. Jesus, it was scary how soon he'd begun to have these thoughts about Larry. He was falling hard, he knew that, and he really wanted the relationship to work out. It was simply way too early to talk about such things, though, and he surprised himself even thinking about them.

Marty smiled back. "Thank you. I like sleeping with you. It's comfortable, you know?"

"Yeah, I didn't think I'd be able to sleep at all, when you asked me to stay the other night, but I ended up actually sleeping better than usual. It's strange."

Marty gave him a squeeze. "It *is* strange, isn't it? I'm glad you feel that way too."

"Marty?"

"Yeah, hon?"

"Thank you. I know... well... just thank you. For everything."

Marty gave his back a rub. "You're welcome, honey."

They lay there companionably for awhile before getting up to shower and eat breakfast, then spent a lazy day together just hanging out. Marty did laundry and finished up reading *Forever Mine*, and Larry worked on writing the sequel. They spent some time over at the fitness center and shared a simple dinner of sandwiches before somewhat reluctantly parting ways. It was time. Marty had to be on the jobsite by seven o'clock, so he got up pretty early on work days and went to bed pretty early on work nights.

CHAPTER FOUR

Larry didn't sleep for shit Sunday night. It had taken him a while to even get to sleep, and then he'd woken up several times throughout the night. He'd had a lot on his mind, trying to sort out his feelings about Marty, but it was more than that. He'd felt cold and alone without Marty there beside him. He'd tossed an extra blanket on the bed and that had helped a little.

Marty wanted to take a road trip with him over Thanksgiving, and Larry was going to introduce Marty to his mother and brother. He had no idea how that would go over, but he didn't even care because Marty would be there at his side. And Marty wanted to introduce Larry to *his* family. That was big. Would Marty have asked him to share this special trip if Marty didn't have some level of feelings for him? Not likely.

Larry spent most of the day working on his book. He wanted to finish it by the end of the week. He made a run to the grocery store in the early afternoon, and when he got home, he started some spaghetti sauce simmering on the stove.

Larry wondered about Marty. Had Marty slept okay, or had he missed having Larry next to him, too? A vision of Marty, shirtless, hefting two by fours, framing out a wall, invaded Larry's imagination. Damn, Marty had the sexiest body. He wasn't huge, but *damn*, he had the tightest muscles. Larry would cheerfully spend a couple hours just licking Marty's entire body from head to toe.

Fuck. That got Larry thinking about himself in comparison. He tried to picture himself objectively. He was a little on the short side of average, and he had a small frame. He did work out, so he had decent muscle tone, but nothing built up at all. Maybe 'scrawny' was a little too harsh. Slender? No, that sounded girly. He was gay, but he didn't want to be feminine. He settled on 'lean.'

He looked in the mirror and tried to see himself through Marty's eyes instead of his own unforgiving ones. He did rather like his golden blond hair. It was thick, a nice color, and he wore it a little long. His eyes would otherwise probably be his best feature if it wasn't for those damned glasses. He'd tried contacts, but just couldn't do them.

He wished he looked a little closer to his age, but it dawned on him that the rest of his face really wasn't as bad as he tended to picture himself. His self-image had been held hostage by his teenaged years for so long that it was a habit. The faded scars from his acne were discernible, but not so obvious that they completely defined his face. In fact, if he was looking at someone else, he wouldn't really think that much of it, so others probably didn't consider it to be a big deal on him either, did they?

Nothing else really stood out. He might not be particularly good looking, but he supposed, if he

tried to be unbiased, that he wasn't actually *unattractive*, either.

Around four o'clock, Larry heard a sound out on the landing. It was probably Marty. He got home around that time on work days. Twenty minutes later there was a knock at the door.

Larry opened the door and there Marty stood, looking a little tired, but wearing a big grin. Larry forgot his earlier inhibitions and launched himself into Marty's arms. Marty gave Larry a warm little kiss and hug before Larry pulled him inside.

"I missed you last night," he told Marty. "I had trouble sleeping without you." Jesus, had he really just announced that to Marty?

Marty let out a big breath. "Larry, I am so glad you said that."

"You are?" Larry shut the door and led Marty into his living room.

"Yes."

"Do you want to sleep together tonight?" Larry asked. God, he was feeling bold.

"I would flat-out love to," Marty replied. "But you should know, before you agree to this, that I get up at six in the morning, so I'm asleep by ten."

"Oh, well, that's okay. I'm tired anyway today since I didn't sleep well last night." Larry grinned. "So, sure... my work time is flexible, and I don't mind adjusting my sleep schedule to fit with yours."

"Really? That's nice of you, hon. Thank you. So, where do you want to sleep, then, here or there?"

Oh. Larry hadn't thought about that. His bed was only full sized, but neither of them was huge anyway. "Um, well, it doesn't really matter. Do you have a preference?"

"Nope, it's your choice."

"Okay then. Let's see how we sleep here this time. Do you just have cereal on weekday mornings? I have a few boxes of that, or bread for toast."

"Cereal is great. That's what I generally have during the week anyway. Thanks for offering." Marty reached out and touched Larry's face, then punctuated his thank you with a light kiss.

Larry's grin was reflexive. It was so wonderful having Marty in his life, making him feel special like that. "You're welcome. Oh, hey, would you like to share my dinner with me, too? I have spaghetti sauce simmering on the stove."

Marty laughed. "I was hoping you'd ask. It smells terrific. Thank you."

Marty loved Larry's sauce. It was thick and hearty and very meaty, with a wonderful blend of herbs. He used some funky shaped pasta, too... long like spaghetti, but thicker than standard spaghetti and spiraled.

The meal was delicious. Larry had even made a little salad to go with it. He put more effort into making appetizing meals than Marty ever did. Marty helped him clean up the kitchen afterward, then they settled in the living room.

Marty could see that Larry had a good eye for decorating. Marty just had a basic mish-mash of stuff that he'd purchased over the years without really considering too much how it all went together. Not that he couldn't tell that his couch didn't really coordinate all that well with the chair, but rather that he hadn't bought them at the same time and hadn't cared enough to make sure that they did.

Larry obviously cared. It was a masculine room, not frilly or pretty, and not particularly expensive looking, either, but nice and well coordinated. Even the pieces that didn't appear to be part of a set matched up well. Marty liked it. It made him wish he'd put a little more effort into his own furnishing decisions.

Marty turned to Larry and caught him looking back like he was trying to decide whether or not to say or do something. Larry blushed when he saw that Marty was looking back at him. Marty smiled to himself, guessing that Larry was having some naughty thoughts, then gave Larry a wicked little grin to help him out.

Larry laughed and grinned back, lifting his eyebrows. "Play time, hon?" Marty asked.

"Let's have some fun," Larry replied. Marty liked the sound of that. And he liked how comfortable Larry seemed to be with him already.

Marty made a false start at Larry to get things started. Larry laughed and dashed around the chair. The chase was on. Marty pursued him around the easy chair a couple of times before Larry ran into the dining area.

Marty growled as he followed Larry around the table. Apparently his growl wasn't particularly scary, though, because it caused Larry to burst out laughing. But at least that allowed Marty the opportunity to snatch Larry around the waist and lift him up.

Larry feigned a struggle, thumping Marty with his hands as Marty hauled him to the bedroom. Marty dumped him on the bed and dropped down on top, going in for a tickle attack.

"Oh God, no, no, no," Larry begged. Damn, he was ticklish. Larry couldn't seem to stop laughing.

"Tell me why I should stop," Marty teased, but he eased up a bit.

"I'll make it worth your while," Larry gasped.

Marty stopped. "Oh, yeah?"

Larry panted for a moment then gave him a wicked grin. "Oh, yeah."

"Want me to put your glasses on the table, hon?"

"Oh. Yeah -- thanks." Larry took them off and handed them to Marty. Marty placed them on the bedside table before pulling off his shirt. He turned back to Larry and pulled off Larry's shirt too. They each kicked off their shoes then Marty reached for him and started a kiss.

There was nothing gentle about this kiss. It was all tongues and grinding mouths as Larry's arms wound around Marty's neck. Marty lowered Larry onto his back and moved over him, then broke the kiss and moved down to Larry's neck to suck up a mark. Larry groaned and arched upward.

"Oh God, Marty." It was just a whisper, but Marty heard him. Marty moved back up to reclaim Larry's mouth, softly this time, then alternated between exploring Larry's mouth and nibbling his lips. Larry pushed his hips up to rub against Marty. Marty was hard and could feel the bulge in Larry's jeans, indicating his arousal.

Larry bucked them to the side to roll them, but midway through the turn Marty realized that they'd run out of bed. It was too late to stop the momentum, and as they dropped over the edge, all he could think was that at least he was on the bottom.

"Oof." Marty landed on his back and the breath was knocked out of him.

Larry landed on top, putting his hands out to help break the fall and take some of his weight. Larry gasped, and they lay there for a moment to catch their breaths.

Marty pulled Larry into his arms, then gave a little laugh. "Oops. You okay, hon?"

"I think so," Larry replied, but let out a little hiss. "Shit. My arm hurts, but I'm sure it'll be fine."

Damn. "Hon, I'm going to sit up and we'll take a look at it, okay?"

"Okay."

Marty spread his legs out so Larry's knees were on the ground between Marty's legs, then slowly pushed up to a sitting position. Larry leaned back up to a kneeling position and sat back on his feet, then immediately grabbed his left wrist with his right hand.

"Ouch. Fuck!" Larry gasped. "Damn, that hurts."

"Do you think it's broken?"

"I'm not sure. I've never had a broken bone before." The pain was evident in Larry's furrowed brow. Damn. How could he tell if it was broken or not?

"Can you move your wrist at all?"

Larry concentrated for a moment. "Fuck. I don't think so. Fuck." He looked a little pale.

Damn. "Hon, I'm going to help you get up to sit on the bed, then I'm going to fetch a bag of ice. I think that's the first thing we should do, okay?"

"Okay."

Marty helped Larry to his feet and sat him on the edge of the bed. Marty picked up Larry's glasses and placed them on his face before leaving the room so Larry wouldn't be sitting there in a blur.

Marty ran down to the kitchen and rifled through drawers looking for baggies. He found them and filled one with ice, then hammered it with a meat masher. After it was crushed, he transferred it to a fresh baggie and zipped it closed and then rushed back to the bedroom to put it on Larry's wrist.

Shit. Larry's lower left arm didn't look like it was lined up properly. He wasn't a doctor, of course, but he'd bet that it was broken. "Honey, do you have anything here that we can use for a sling? Maybe a sheet you don't use, or a towel?"

"Um, yes. There's an old sheet in the linen closet in the hallway. It's the white one."

Marty trotted out to the hallway and found the sheet. He brought it back to the bedroom and showed it to Larry. Larry confirmed it was the one, so Marty tore off a pretty large square, then folded it in half diagonally. They settled Larry's arm into it, and he tied it around the back of Larry's neck.

Marty carefully placed the ice bag back on Larry's lower forearm, then fetched Larry's shoes and put them on his feet. "Hon, I'll just carry your shirt, but do you have a lightweight jacket I can put around your shoulders?"

"Yes, in the closet near the entryway." Figuring they could get that on the way out, Marty put his own shoes and shirt on first.

Marty helped Larry to his feet and made sure Larry had his wallet and insurance cards in his pocket.

"I feel like such a klutz, Marty. Damn. Talk about the ultimate mood killer."

Marty had to laugh. "No shit. I wilted faster than if I'd walked in on my old granny dropping her drawers. I'm really sorry about this, Larry. I'll be more careful in the future."

"It was hardly your fault. I was the one rolling us. It's *my* fault."

"I don't think we need to assign blame, hon. It was just an accident. We'll both be more aware of our surroundings in the future."

"Kay."

Gently leading Larry out to the entryway, Marty found the jacket in the closet, then helped Larry slip it on his good arm. Marty rested the other side of the jacket over Larry's left shoulder and snapped a few of the closures to hold it on.

"Larry, do you have to go to any particular ER for your insurance or can we just head for the nearest one?"

"Nearest is fine."

Marty locked Larry's door and they walked down to his Valiant. They were actually pretty close to a hospital, so it was just a five minute drive.

"Does it still hurt much, hon?"

"The ice is really helping. As long as I don't move it, I'm okay."

"Good." Damn, Marty felt bad about this. He knew he hadn't really done anything wrong, nor had Larry, but still. He hated to see Larry in pain.

They didn't have any trouble finding a parking space and soon were in the ER waiting room. It didn't look busy. A few people were sitting around, but Marty couldn't tell if they were waiting to be seen or if they were waiting for someone who was already back there.

Larry checked in, and they only had to wait about five minutes before he was called into triage. Larry had to do that without Marty, apparently, so Marty sat down and waited. The room was cold, and the magazines were worthless specialty magazines Marty had no interest in. Shit. The people-watching wasn't even any good. Besides Marty, there were two women and an older man, and they were just sitting there staring into space.

It seemed like half an hour had gone by, but Marty's watch confirmed it had been less than fifteen minutes when he was called back to join Larry in an examination room. Larry was wearing one of those flattering hospital gowns, but still had his jeans on, so at least his butt was covered. Larry was sitting at the end of an exam table, and looked up and smiled when Marty was shown into the room.

"The resident could already tell it was broken just by feeling it," Larry told him. "I'm waiting to

be brought back for an X-ray, though, before they do anything else to it."

"Yeah? I hope it'll be a simple one for you and that you won't need any surgery to set it."

"Me too," he replied, then lowered his voice. "Damn, Marty, it was embarrassing having to explain how I broke it. They really question you hard about injuries if they don't think you're giving the complete answer. I guess they need to make sure there's nothing criminal or abusive going on."

Marty had to laugh... poor guy. "I wish I could've seen your face for that. You have the most adorable blush."

Larry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, well, I think the blush helped convince him I wasn't being roughed up."

"Jesus, I hope nobody thinks that." Marty looked Larry straight in the eye. "*You* know I would never hurt you, right?"

"I do know that, Marty. You don't have a mean bone in your body. I have no worries." Larry's smile was crooked.

Marty gave him a quick little kiss. "Thank you, hon."

They didn't have to wait long before a tech came by to take Larry for an X-ray. Marty stared at the glass jars of cotton balls and cotton swabs and at the equipment standing in the corner of the room for monitoring patients' vital signs. Larry was gone for about twenty minutes this time.

They waited together again for just a couple of minutes after his return from X-ray, and then Larry's nurse bustled in, carrying supplies to start an IV. "Hello, Mr. Travis." she smiled at Larry. "I'm back."

She turned to Marty and smiled. "Hi there, I'm Alice."

"Marty Jones. Pleased to meet you, although I guess I wish we weren't here."

She laughed. She had no trouble getting Larry's IV started on the first attempt, and then she got out a syringe to inject something into one of the little offshoot lines at the end of the main IV line, near his hand.

"The IV's just standard fluids, and Dr. Garson, the orthopedic doc on his way in to take care of your arm, wanted me to give you this narcotic," she told Larry. "It'll kick in shortly and will help take the edge off the pain for you."

"It's not too bad, really, at least not when I'm still."

She smiled. "You'll want this anyway, though, for when he comes in here to set the bone."

"Oh. Damn."

"It's not too far off. It won't be that bad. Don't worry. It'll be up to the doc, and whether he's able to get it set well, but I doubt you'll end up needing any surgery."

Larry didn't look convinced. Damn, Marty wished it was him instead of Larry. It would be nice once surgery was completely ruled out as a possibility.

"If you say so," Larry told her.

They sat around waiting for the doctor to come and set Larry's arm. Larry got groggy as the painkiller started to kick in. Finally the nurse came back in, along with the doctor. Damn, he looked young. Marty would have been surprised if he was even as old as Larry. He looked at them and introduced himself.

"Hello there. I'm Dr. Garson." He nodded at Larry and shook Marty's hand.

"Marty Jones," he replied.

Dr. Garson moved to the sink and washed his hands, then turned his attention to Larry. "Mr. Travis? How are you feeling now?"

"Oh, I'm pretty good." Larry gave the doctor a lopsided smile. Damn, he was stoned.

Apparently that was what the doctor wanted to see. He and the nurse were pretty damned efficient, because one moment Marty thought the doctor was just feeling out Larry's arm, and the next he had it snapped into place. Marty didn't think Larry even knew it had happened.

Larry was wheeled back for another X-ray so they could make sure the bones were lined up how they wanted them before applying the cast. Marty entertained himself watching the nurse set up the tray of stuff for applying the cast.

Doctor Garson was off doing who knew what -- probably chatting up a cute nurse -- while Marty waited. It didn't take long for Nurse Alice to get her stuff set up, so Marty was soon back to just staring around the room.

He looked at his watch. It was almost nine. Nuts. Marty imagined the doctor would be writing Larry a prescription for pain meds to use for a few days, and he was pretty sure Larry would be looped for the rest of the night and might not remember any of the instructions they'd be given. Marty wanted to call off work in the morning, at least for a couple of hours, to get Larry's prescription filled and make sure Larry was alert and able to take care of himself before being left alone.

He knew he couldn't use his cell phone in the hospital, but there was a phone in the room. He followed the instructions for getting an outside line and called Chris, his foreman, to say that he'd

be late tomorrow. Marty had always been the absolute definition of dependable and hard working, so Chris didn't have any trouble at all approving the request, although he did sound curious... especially since he had just granted Marty's Thanksgiving vacation request that morning.

Marty hardly ever took time off. No doubt he'd be fielding questions from the guys tomorrow.

Larry was wheeled back in, and Marty helped the tech get him situated on the exam table. Almost as soon as he was settled, Alice and Dr. Garson were back. Alice took up her position at the tray, and Dr. Garson looked over at Marty.

"The X-rays looked good. Mr. Jones, would you stand over here, please? If you don't mind, I'd like to have you hold Mr. Travis' arm in position for me."

"Sure," Marty replied. He scurried around the exam table to stand where the doctor indicated.

Dr. Garson carefully lifted Larry's forearm and hand and positioned them just as he wanted. The doctor showed Marty where to place his hands. Marty did as he was told and looked down at Larry. Larry was oblivious.

Alice handed Dr. Garson a soft-looking bandage roll, and the doctor wound it around and around Larry's arm, covering him from a little below the elbow down onto his hand. Meanwhile, Alice had another roll of something soaking in a pan of water, which she handed off when the doctor was done with the cottony stuff.

Apparently this was the plaster, and Dr. Garson applied it in much the same fashion, wrapping it around and around, smoothing it as he went. Another roll was applied, then the entire thing was smoothed down to contour to Larry's arm, and it was done.

Alice helped Marty sit Larry back up. Larry looked at Marty and slurred, "Are we going home now, baby?"

"Soon, hon," he told Larry.

Then he addressed the doctor. "That's some pretty strong stuff you gave him."

Dr. Garson chuckled. "Not really," he said. "He's a bit of a lightweight."

Marty laughed. No shit. He was totally stoned.

Dr. Garson handed Marty Larry's prescription and a sheet of aftercare instructions, then gave him a serious look. "I don't have to caution you, do I, about being more careful in the future?"

Shit. Fuck no. "Um, no, sir, it won't happen again."

"What? What won't happen again?" Damn, Larry sounded pretty concerned -- panicked even --

in a drugged out kind of way. Jesus, what did he *think* wouldn't happen again?

Marty tried to reassure him with a grin. "We won't be careless so you won't break your arm, or anything else, again. That's all, hon."

Larry blew out a considerable sigh of relief. "Oh. Well, okay then. *That's* okay." He said this while yanking down the collar of his gown and scratching at the mark Marty had sucked up on his neck just a few hours ago.

Jesus, even Marty blushed at that. Dr. Garson sorta snorted as he covered a laugh, then excused himself since he was done with them anyway. Marty tossed out a 'thank you' as he darted off.

Alice wore a huge grin as she removed Larry's IV, then helped Marty get him dressed. She put a real sling on Larry while Marty reviewed the paperwork, then Marty went to get his car while Alice wheeled Larry out to the exit. She helped Marty settle him into his seat, and Marty thanked her for all her help.

Jesus. What a night. The ride home was quiet. Larry just looked out the window with a cheesy little grin on his face. Marty had to wonder what the hell was going through his doped up mind.

Marty helped him up the stairs and into his apartment, hung up his jacket and walked him down the hall to the bedroom. He emptied their pockets onto the dresser, then led Larry into the bathroom. Marty helped him brush his teeth and pee, and then led him back to the bedroom to sit on the side of the bed.

"Honey, I'm going to take this sling off now so we can get you undressed, okay?"

"Kay."

Marty removed the sling and carefully slipped Larry's casted arm through his shirt sleeve, then pulled the shirt off over his head. Marty pulled off Larry's shoes and socks, then unfastened his jeans.

"Honey, I need you to stand up again so we can get your pants off." Larry did as he was asked, and Marty slipped his jeans and underwear down to his ankles.

"Okay, hon, sit back down now," he told Larry. Larry did, and Marty collected the dirty clothes and put them in the hamper Larry had next to his dresser.

Marty pulled back the sheets and settled Larry gently back on a pillow to sleep. He leaned down to give Larry a quick little kiss, but Larry grabbed his arm to hold him there a minute. Marty drew out the kiss and lost himself in the soft smacking sounds that seemed loud in the silent room. When Larry's grip loosened, Marty closed with a few last nibbles and pulled back to smile at Larry.

Larry looked him in the eye and said, "I love you, Marty." He was wearing that goofy, drugged

grin again, but Marty knew there had to be a grain of truth to the comment. The drugs wouldn't make him say something he didn't feel, but they would loosen him up to say what was *really* on his mind.

"I love you too, Larry." Marty smiled back into Larry's happy, oblivious, eyes, and at that moment he kind of felt like he really did, at least on some level. But he doubted if Larry would remember any of this in the morning.

"Pinky swear?" he asked Marty.

Marty had to chuckle at that. "Yeah, hon, pinky swear."

Larry closed his eyes, still grinning, and Marty put his glasses on the bedside table and got himself ready for bed too.

CHAPTER FIVE

Larry's arm was achy. He groaned and opened his eyes. He had a cast on his arm, and he started to remember the events of the previous night.

Shit. He'd rolled them off the bed and broken his arm. Marty had taken him to the emergency room, he remembered, but everything was just a little fuzzy after that. He reached for his glasses on the bedside table and, thankfully, they were there. There was a note folded into them, so he put his glasses on and read it. It was from Marty. Marty'd gone to pick up Larry's prescription and would be back shortly. The note told him not to 'do a damned thing' until Marty got back.

Larry laughed to himself. He really needed to pee, so he ignored that instruction and went into the bathroom. He used the toilet then brushed his teeth. It was definitely tricky getting the toothpaste squeezed onto the toothbrush one-handed. Damn. Typing on his laptop wasn't going to be fun, either.

Larry combed his hair then walked back into the bedroom. He saw a blue sling folded on his dresser and an instruction sheet from the hospital. He looked it over. Shit. It would be five or six weeks before he got the cast off. The sheet gave him a list of things to do and not to do and signs of bad reactions to watch out for.

A cold pack was on the to-do list, for a few days anyway. Larry remembered that he had some soft gel cold packs in the freezer, so he walked down to the kitchen, got one out, and held it on his wrist. Damn, too bad he hadn't thought of that when poor Marty was smashing ice for him last night.

Larry was standing there leaning against the kitchen counter when he heard Marty return. Shit, he was bare-assed naked and wished he'd thought to put something on.

"Hey, hon. How are you feeling this morning?" Marty asked as he walked into the kitchen. He put a couple of bags on the counter and gave Larry a little kiss.

"I'm fine. My arm's a little achy, but not too bad. Last night's a little fuzzy."

Marty laughed. "Yeah, I imagine so. You got pretty loopy on the painkiller they gave you at the hospital."

The fact that he was standing there buck naked didn't seem to faze Marty at all. Hell, why should it? They'd certainly seen each other naked before. Hell, they'd had their dicks in each other's asses, so there was really no reason for him to be self-conscious about something as inane as standing there nude.

What was Marty still doing there, though? Shouldn't he be at work? It was a Tuesday and well past the time he was usually gone. "Marty, you don't have to stay home with me. I'm okay now. I don't want you to miss work for me."

Marty smiled. "I know, hon. I called Chris -- that's my foreman -- last night. I told him I'd be a few hours late this morning. I just wanted to get your prescription filled for you and make sure you were oriented this morning, since you were so out of it last night."

"Oh, thank you."

"I hope you don't mind. I had to go through your wallet to find your prescription card before going to the pharmacy this morning."

Larry leaned back against the counter. "Oh, no, I don't mind. Thank you. I appreciate it."

"Did you find the hospital's instruction sheet on the dresser?"

"Yes."

"Okay, good. Um, I got your painkillers here, and some long plastic bags that are made for covering your cast when you bathe. I also picked you up a sandwich to put in the fridge for your lunch later so you don't have to fix anything."

Wow. "Thank you, Marty. Damn, that's thoughtful. Thank you."

"It's no big deal, hon." Marty shrugged and waved a hand at the pharmacy bag. "You're only supposed to take these painkillers for a few days, then you should be okay to switch to over-the-counter stuff. I think you should try the minimum dosage first since you reacted so strongly to the stuff in the hospital. Oh, and no driving on this stuff. If you need anything, wait until I get home, or you can call my cell."

"Okay, Dad," Larry teased him.

Marty laughed. "Okay, okay. I'll back off."

Larry gave him a hug. Damn, Marty was being so thoughtful. "Thank you, Marty. I really appreciate you taking the time off this morning to make sure I'm set up okay."

Marty hugged him back and gave him a little kiss. "You're welcome, hon. Are you okay now? Do you need anything else before I leave?"

"No, I'm fine now."

"Okay, hon. Oh, don't fix dinner, either. I'll take care of that when I get home."

Larry rolled his eyes. "Okay, I won't." He'd let Marty baby him a bit for a day or two. Marty

seemed to feel good doing it, and he knew he'd be doing the same thing to Marty if the situation was reversed.

Marty gave him another kiss goodbye, and then he left. Larry heard him go into his own apartment, probably to fetch his tool belt. Marty was sexy as fuck with that thing on, and Larry caught himself once again fantasizing about blowing Marty with his jeans barely down and that tool belt hanging there, adding the scent of worn leather to the musk of Marty's body.

Damn. He shook his head to clear the image and emptied out the bags Marty had brought in. He put the sandwich in the refrigerator, then pulled the plastic arm bags and his pill bottle out of the pharmacy bag. Larry saw that he could take one or two pills every six hours, as needed. He'd follow Marty's advice and try to get by with only one. He should probably wait until after his shower to take the first one, too, at least until he knew how he'd react to the things.

He took one of the arm wrappers and walked over to lock the front door before heading down the hall to take a shower.

It was a little awkward doing everything one handed, but at least he was right-handed and it was his left arm that was injured. He survived the shower, and then managed to pull on his clothes and settle his arm in the sling. That felt better. He got another ice pack out of the freezer and laid it on his arm. He found the one he'd had on it earlier and put it back in the freezer for later.

Damn, it was long past the time he'd wanted to take a pill. He clumsily poured a bowl of cereal, then popped off the lid to his pills and shook one out. He poured a glass of milk and took his pill, then sat down to eat his cereal.

After eating and cleaning up his breakfast, Larry settled down in the living room with his laptop. Fortunately, he'd finished the actual writing phase of his story and was just going to be reading through it and reworking bits here and there this week, then giving it a final proofreading. That wouldn't be *too* bad with one hand, he hoped.

Between the ice and the pill, the ache in his arm slowly receded to the background and he was able to engross himself in his work. The day passed uneventfully. He took breaks from his computer to make the bed and do some loads of laundry -- general puttering around the house, getting-this-and-that-done kind of stuff. He loved the sandwich Marty had picked up for his lunch. It was a roast beef sandwich with smoked cheddar cheese, red onions, tomatoes and lettuce, and it was delicious.

He changed out the ice pack throughout the day and took another pill mid-afternoon. He stuck to the minimum dosage since it was doing well enough and he didn't feel like he was having any ill effects from it.

Around four o'clock, Larry heard Marty getting home across the landing. Marty went into his own apartment. Probably to shower; damn, that was almost a shame. Jesus, Larry spent way too much time on his Marty-the-tool-belt-wearing-sweaty-carpenter fantasy. One of these days he'd have to do something to make that come true.

Larry was ready when Marty knocked on the door at twenty after. Larry's heart tugged when Marty's face actually lit up when he opened the door.

"Damn, honey. You look like you made it through the day just fine."

Marty was all fresh and clean and woodsy smelling. Larry's cock gave a little twitch when he smelled Marty. It might not be 'the fantasy,' but Marty lit his fire anyway. Larry gave Marty a smile.

"Yeah, it's just a broken arm," Larry told him. "It's a little inconvenient, is all."

"No pain?"

"Well, it's under control anyway. I keep rotating fresh cold packs on it, and the pain pill is helping too. I'm just taking one, and it seems to be good enough. Maybe I'll do two at bedtime, though."

"Yeah? Good. Well, listen, hon, I've got some chicken in the crock pot over at my place. Are you ready to come over and hang with me while I throw together some side dishes to have with it?"

"Sure. Do you mind if I bring my laptop?"

"Nope, bring whatever you want, hon."

Larry put his keys in his pocket, then picked up the laptop. They walked over to Marty's. The chicken smelled delicious.

"Feel free to put some music on if you want," Marty told him. So he browsed through Marty's collection and put Simon and Garfunkel's greatest hits CD in the player.

Larry settled in on the couch to get back to his editing, but took a good look around first. Marty's decorating was pretty haphazard, but his apartment was always clean and tidy.

He noticed that Marty's television was rather small, but that he had a lot of books and a nice sound system. Hanging out together wouldn't ever be a problem for them. He'd really enjoyed spending the day with Marty on Sunday. They had similar interests, each enjoying quiet pursuits, like listening to music while sitting next to each other on the couch, simply reading.

Marty was relieved that Larry was doing so well. He'd worried about Larry quite a bit throughout the day. He'd almost called to check up on Larry, but he'd gotten the feeling that Larry thought he was being a touch parental that morning, so he'd opted not to.

Marty had been busy as hell all day anyway. Chris had wanted the framing on the fifth floor

finished today. They'd all worked like dogs and managed to get it done. They'd been too busy for the guys to quiz him on his tardiness that morning or his Thanksgiving vacation plans. They were a good bunch of guys, all married with families except for Marty. They all knew he was gay, but it was a non-issue. They didn't ever bring it up and neither did he.

Dinner likely wouldn't be up to Larry's usual standards. Marty wasn't much of a cook. He'd never learned how to make things from scratch. He could've invested in a cookbook, but had just never cared enough to do it just for himself. He relied heavily on packaged foods, canned goods, and frozen stuff. He could toss meat into a crock pot just fine, but the rest was generally from a box or can.

He de-boned the chicken to make things easier for Larry and added some warmed up barbeque sauce from a jar. He dumped a large can of baked beans into a small baking pan and put it in the oven to heat up, and opened a can of green beans and emptied it into a small saucepan to warm up on the stove top. He also popped open a can of biscuits and had them ready to put in the oven to bake.

None of that would take long, so he got the little table set for two and poured them a couple of iced teas. He put the biscuits into the oven, set the timer, and joined Larry in the living room to wait.

"Ten minutes, hon," he told Larry.

Larry smiled. "Thank you so much, Marty. I hate for you to go to all this trouble after working all day. Now that we know I'm doing okay, I can fix us dinner tomorrow if you'd like."

Oh, man, in Marty's dreams he came home to a lovely meal that he didn't have to fix for himself, but he didn't want to put Larry out, either. "You work too, Larry. I don't want to be unfair."

"I know, but it's not physically tiring work. I'm working at home, so it's easy to do, and I like to get up and take breaks away from my computer. I don't mind doing that, since I usually put in some time working in the evenings and weekends, too. Besides, I really like to cook."

"You do? You actually *like* doing it?"

"Yeah, I guess I'm pretty domestic in general. You don't like cooking?"

"God, no, it's just something that needs to be done -- a chore."

Larry laughed. "Well, that settles it. I'll be in charge of dinners."

Oh, Marty could definitely go along with that plan. But Larry shouldn't be responsible for paying for the meals. He agreed on the condition that they split the cost of Larry's groceries.

The oven timer went off, so Marty served dinner up and they ate. To his credit, Larry ate everything and didn't make any critical comments about Marty's lack of culinary skills. He even

thanked Marty very prettily for the meal and apparently knew better than to push Marty to let him help with the cleanup.

They discussed sleeping arrangements and decided to sleep at Larry's so he'd be left behind at his own place when Marty left for work early in the morning. Marty made sure he had his phone, wallet, and keys, and then grabbed some clothes and his tool belt so he wouldn't have to stop back by his place in the morning.

Larry gaped with the oddest look on his face for a moment before shaking his head and composing his features. "Ready?" Larry asked.

"All set, hon," Marty replied.

Marty locked up and followed Larry across to his place. Marty put his tool belt on the floor by the door, and they walked into the living room. Larry put some folk music in the CD player and picked up his laptop.

"Mind if I peruse your book shelf?" Marty asked.

Larry's smile was genuine. "Not at all, Marty. Please help yourself."

The man had *a lot* of books. Two tall book cases full of a wide variety of books. Marty selected a biography of Abraham Lincoln and settled into a corner of the couch to read, while Larry slowly scrolled through his document, pausing to make changes here and there as he went.

But Larry also kept stealing covert glances over at Marty's tool belt. When Marty once again noticed Larry just staring into space in that general direction, he decided he just had to ask.

"Larry? Do you want to use one of my tools? Do you need something fixed? I'd be happy to take care of it for you."

Larry snapped back to attention. "Oh, no, um, sorry. No, I don't need anything fixed."

Jesus, Larry was blushing something fierce. A grin grew slowly across Marty's face as realization dawned on him. Larry had a little fantasy floating through his head, and it involved that tool belt, and, hopefully, *Marty* wearing it.

Larry looked at Marty inquiringly as Marty put his book aside, got up, and sauntered over to the door. He turned back toward Larry. Yeah, he'd guessed right.

Larry's mouth fell open, and his eyes widened as he expelled a long breath. His look was an odd combination of incredulity and longing. God, that was hot.

Marty started springing a boner just looking at Larry all but drooling for him. Marty reached down, picked up the belt, and buckled it on, riding low on his hips. Then he pulled his T-shirt up over his head and tossed it aside for good measure. Larry stood up and couldn't seem to take

those big blue eyes off the tool belt.

Marty made a point of adjusting himself, then took his time walking back over to Larry. Marty stopped when he was two feet away. He wanted to see what Larry would do.

Larry brought his eyes up to Marty's, and he barely heard it: "Oh, fuck." It was more of an exhale than a whisper. Larry dropped straight down to his knees, and his good hand started working on the button at the top of Marty's jeans. Marty decided to help Larry out there and reached down to unbutton and unzip himself.

Larry gave Marty's jeans a yank, but didn't pull them down very far. He did the same with Marty's boxer briefs. Marty was already sporting a pretty good hard on, and he spread his legs apart a bit to make it easier for Larry to access. Marty reckoned that a small amount of dominance play would probably factor in nicely to a strong construction worker fantasy, so Marty wrapped his hands into Larry's silky hair and pulled Larry forward.

Larry trembled as he exhaled the breath he'd been holding and reached up with his good hand to guide the head of Marty's cock between his waiting lips. He breathed in deeply as his lips moved down Marty's shaft until his nose was buried in soft, dark curls.

Larry moaned, and the vibrations on his cock pulled a groan out of Marty. He tightened his grip in Larry's hair and gently guided Larry's head up and down the length of his cock.

Larry had a tight grip on Marty's thigh with his right hand. His lips were sealed tightly around Marty's cock, and the suction hollowed out his cheeks each time Marty pulled outward. Larry's hand traveled up, and Marty felt him get a grip on the handle of the hammer hanging down from the tool belt.

Fuck, Larry's mouth was hot and wet and just asking to be fucked. Marty groaned and gathered all the restraint he could muster as he started to slowly pump his hips. Larry moaned, but didn't falter.

Fuck yes, Larry was a natural. His tongue lapped the underside of Marty's shaft.

Marty heard slurping sounds and felt the wetness dripping as he thrust faster into Larry's beautiful mouth. Marty's eyes closed. He both heard and felt Larry's groan as Larry's body tensed and shook.

Larry was coming in his pants again. Hell yes. Marty's entire body was electrified, and the sensations were overwhelming, racing through Marty's balls to his cock. His hands tightened in Larry's hair.

Marty heard himself grunt, "Take it." His cock spasmed, and he shot a load of hot spunk straight to the back of Larry's throat. Larry swallowed and sucked, then swallowed some more. Marty's hands relaxed so Larry could pull back. Larry was breathing heavily as he lapped and licked Marty's softening prick, cleaning it. Then Larry popped off and nuzzled a moment at the base of

Marty's cock before leaning back to look up.

Marty dropped to his knees. His hands were still tangled in Larry's hair, and he pulled Larry to him for a long, hard kiss. Their tongues did battle, and Marty could taste his come in Larry's mouth.

Larry brought his good arm around Marty and held on tightly. Marty brought one hand down to grip Larry's ass and pulled him in for a little afterglow grind. Marty broke the kiss in favor of nibbles down Larry's throat, pausing to suck on Larry's Adam's apple, drawing out a groan. Marty moved around to nibble and suck on the side of Larry's neck, just behind his ear.

Larry moaned softly, and Marty heard his whisper, "That was so amazing, Marty."

Marty chuckled. "Now that I know about your little fetish, we'll make use of my tool belt more often."

CHAPTER SIX

Larry was pretty excited. He'd never been to the San Diego Zoo before. Upon learning that fact, Marty'd arranged a visit for the very next weekend. It was a simple activity he could enjoy even with his arm in a cast. Ray and Ronald went with them too. Larry wasn't sure who was more excited, himself or Ronald.

Marty, Ray and Ronald had all been before, of course, but hey, it was an awesome zoo, so they were all looking forward to an entertaining day browsing the exhibits in the fresh autumn air. They paired up as they walked past the flamingo lagoon toward the ape exhibit, with Marty walking alongside Ray, and Larry walking with non-stop chattering Ronald.

"I love flamingos," Ronald was saying. "Aren't they beautiful? And they're so expressive and unreserved. You've *got* to love their color. It's so bold and bright. Did you know they eat shrimp and algae?"

Was that rhetorical or did he want Larry to answer? "Um, no. I didn't know that." Larry decided he'd get in a reply while there was a rare opening in Ronald's monologue.

"Yep. They do. Gotta admire the shrimp choice, but algae? Yuck, what's up with that? I have no idea what's up with the standing on one leg thing. Weird."

Ronald paused again, so Larry snuck in another reply. "I don't know either. It *is* odd looking, isn't it?"

"Yep. Oh, hey, Larry, how's your arm doing? It's not bothering you at all walking around the zoo?"

"Oh, no. I'm done with the prescription pain meds now. I'm just taking some over the counter stuff to drive what's left of the ache away. I'll be quitting that soon too."

"That's good. I broke my arm once when I was younger. I hardly remember it anymore, since I was only four. Mostly I remember that it was itchy and I couldn't wait to get the cast off."

Larry nodded. "Yeah. That's true enough. It's just awkward mostly. Hard to type, though."

"How awful, considering you're a writer. How are you working around that?"

"Well, the timing isn't bad. Last week I was just finishing up making minor changes and a few little additions before submitting a story. Now I'm going to outline a few plot ideas I have. I figure that's still being productive, and it's easier to do one handed. I'm going to have to move on to typing one handed, though, before this thing comes off."

"Great idea, working on outlines for now. Oh, there are the apes up ahead! What do you think of baboons, Larry? I think they're pretty darned funny looking beasts, myself. Gibbons are cute, though. Don't baboon faces look like dogs to you? That's so funny. Do you know what likes to eat baboons? Leopards do, that's what."

It was hard for a person not to warm up and be comfortable in Ronald's cheerful company, and Larry was no exception. He found himself talking pretty freely to the man. "They do have dog faces, don't they? I never thought of it that way before, but you're right. Do you know how long they live, Ronald?"

"It depends. In the wild, where leopards and such are eating them, it's about thirty years. In a zoo, I think it's more like forty or forty-five years. Did you know that a gibbon is an ape? I think they look more like monkeys to me, but technically they're apes, not monkeys."

"How do you know so much about this stuff, Ronald? You're like a walking encyclopedia!"

Ronald laughed. "Nah, I don't know *that* much about it. It's just an interesting subject. I like to watch the nature shows on TV, and it's a subject I enjoy reading about too. I guess I have a pretty good memory."

Larry smiled and tried to think of something else to say, but he wasn't quick enough.

"You know, Larry," continued Ronald, still in full tour guide mode, "there are a lot more than just monkeys in the monkey trails. There are pygmy hippos, warty pigs, bearded pigs, and other animals. Oh my God, Larry, if you think baboons are funny looking, just *wait* until you see these bearded pigs. Ray, aren't they about the ugliest thing you've ever seen?"

Ray laughed. "They do rank up there, sweetheart."

Larry was enjoying Ronald's running commentary on the exhibits. Ronald was knowledgeable and had some funny observations and opinions. They slowly meandered through the monkey trails, checking out the various species to be found there. They spotted baboons, mandrills with their colorful snouts, guenons, the dreaded ugly bearded pigs, as well as the warty pigs.

Marty was happy to see that Larry was having a great time hanging out with Ronald. If a person could get past the obvious difference between them of Ronald's bubbly, extroverted personality compared to Larry's shy, introverted one, then it became apparent that they really had a lot in common and they seemed to be taking to each other. Larry didn't seem to have any strong friendships, at least not locally, and people really needed the support system friends provided.

After a refreshing stop at the Treehouse Café for lunch, they were reenergized and ready to proceed to the next exhibits. They once again settled into mixed pairs, with Ronald walking ahead with Larry, leaving Ray and Marty to follow behind them.

Ray spoke quietly to Marty. "So, Marty, tell me about you and Larry. You seem so happy. I'm not sure how much of it to attribute to your family situation and how much to Larry. How serious is this?"

Marty had been wondering when Ray would ask him about Larry. As best friends, they'd been sharing everything with one another for as long as Marty could remember. Ray had seen Marty through most of Marty's former failed relationships, and Marty had seen Ray through *his*, prior to meeting and falling in love with Ronald.

Marty answered carefully. "I would say it's pretty serious. I've never felt like this before, Ray. I'm falling hard. Hell, I think I've already fallen."

Ray digested that for a moment before continuing. "Ronald and I could tell that the first weekend when you introduced us -- that you were rather taken with each other, even then. It seems to be happening so fast..."

"Yeah, but I've thought a lot about it. It's hard to put a finger on why you fall for a particular person and not someone else." Marty paused and grinned at Ray. "I seem to recall being pretty concerned about *you* when you were all starry-eyed after a single date with Ronald."

"Okay, I'll give you that." Ray chuckled. "Larry... well... he's incredibly shy, isn't he? But he does seem to be warming up now. I guess it's hard not to warm up, with Ronald concentrating all his efforts on him."

Marty laughed. "Ronald's in top form today. But yes, Larry's extremely shy. We'd been just saying 'hi' to one another for a month, and he blushed at *that*, for goodness sake. But he does warm up once he gets to know you... *very* nicely, I might add."

Ray laughed. "Well, that's an important part of any successful relationship."

"It is, and we've got no worries in that department. He's intense, but completely unaffected. We're a perfect match."

"That's good. As shy as he is, I wouldn't have thought that he'd have had that much experience before you."

Marty paused, and sighed. "Ray, I'm telling you this in the strictest of confidence, because you're my best friend and I trust you with it."

"Jesus, Marty, what is it?"

"He had *no* experience, Ray. He was a virgin, but he didn't even tell me beforehand. I figured it out later from something he'd said. I'm just glad I went as easy on him as I did that first time."

"Christ. Why wouldn't he have wanted to tell you? It only makes sense, to make *sure* you go

easy on him."

"He didn't want me to think less of him for his lack of experience. He's twenty-nine, so he thought I would think that was pathetic."

"Damn, Marty, it kind of is."

Marty frowned. "He's pretty insecure, but *not* pathetic," he cautioned Ray. "I've seen progress in just this one week. I can see that he's consciously working on being more forward."

"Sorry, Marty, I didn't mean anything by it. I *like* Larry. He's good for you."

Marty smiled. "He *is* good for me. You can't imagine how good he makes me feel about myself. He brings out the best in me, and I actually like helping him to grow, especially since he's trying so hard, and I feel like he's doing it for me as well as for himself."

"Oh, yeah, you've fallen for him all right. I'm just glad that it's so obvious he's fallen for you too. Your heart is in good hands, I think."

"And his is safe with me."

"I know. You wouldn't hurt your worst enemy's feelings if you could help it. I've gotta wonder now, though... I'm having a very hard time imagining that a *virgin* wrote those smokin' hot books. He's got one hell of an imagination."

Marty grinned. "And a tool belt fetish to go with it."

Ray laughed. "You're the right man to take care of *that*!"

"It's a blast. We role play Hektor and Rhys, too. I've never had so much fun. I never got into anything like that with anyone else. Let's just say that Larry had *tons* of experience in his mind."

"I can see why you've fallen for him now. He does seem like a very nice guy."

They arrived at the elephant enclosure and rejoined Larry and Ronald. Ronald was pointing at an elephant that was taking a drink. "See how it's sucking the water into its trunk there?" Ronald asked. "She's not actually drinking through her trunk, though; she's just storing it in there. Watch what she does."

They watched as the elephant then lifted the tip of her trunk out of the water and put the tip in her mouth and proceeded to squirt the water into her mouth.

"Cool," said Larry. "I've heard that they use their trunk like we use our arms and hands; that they can even pick up a single blade of grass with it."

"That's right," Ronald replied. "I'm sure you know that African elephants have bigger ears than

the Asian ones, right?"

"Yeah, I did know that."

"Well, did you know that Asian elephants have more toenails than African elephants?"

"Really? No, I didn't know that."

They wandered around the elephant mesa for a while, watching the elephants roam around, then proceeded down to Bear Canyon, stopping to look at some birds and meerkats along the way. They took their time viewing the lions and bears as they slowly meandered back up out of that trail loop, then made their way to the exit.

They were worn out when they finally made it back to Ronald's car. They fell into their seats and let out a collective sigh of relief.

"I'm bushed," announced Ronald.

Ray laughed. "I think that makes four of us, sweetheart."

"I hate to tell you this, Marty," said Larry, "because I know you love my cooking, but I'm too worn out to cook tonight. Do you mind if we just make some sandwiches or something?"

"Honey, of course I don't mind. I hope you don't ever feel *obligated* to cook when you don't feel like it. Besides, we had a huge lunch today, so sandwiches are more than enough. I'll make 'em too, hon."

Larry just smiled. Damn, the poor guy did look beat. So did Ray and Ronald, for that matter.

"Great idea," said Ronald. "How about we stop at a sub place on the way home so we don't even have to make the damned things ourselves?"

"I like it," said Ray.

"Works for me," added Marty.

"Ditto," agreed Larry.

"I had a great time today," Larry said as he picked up the last of his turkey sub. "That Ronald is a really nice guy."

"Yes, he is. I was really happy for Ray when they got together."

"So you knew Ray from work and were friends with him before he even met Ronald?"

"Yes, Ray and I are close to the same age, but I'd been there about six years before he started working there as an estimator. I recognized him from Snayque's when I saw him in the office, so we struck up a conversation the next time we were both out dancing."

"Did you guys try dating each other when you first met?"

Marty laughed. "Yeah, we weren't a good match for that, but did get along great outside of bed, so we became friends. Over the years, we've become best friends."

Larry just smiled. He'd had a couple of good friends in high school -- well, he'd thought they were friends. But when it became known that he was gay, they'd ditched him so fast it was scary. Larry really liked Ronald as a friend. Ronald had seemed sincerely interested in Larry's thoughts and was so open and easygoing, not to mention funny.

Marty stood up and collected their sandwich wrappers. "Would you like some more iced tea, hon?"

"No, thanks. What's left here is enough." Larry finished it off and followed Marty into the kitchen with his empty glass. Marty took it from him and added it to the collection in the dishwasher.

They were staying at Marty's apartment that night. It made sense to stay at Larry's on work nights, but they stayed at Marty's on Friday and Saturday nights, since Marty didn't have to leave for work early the next the morning.

Larry looked at his watch and sighed. Damn, only seven o'clock and he was exhausted. He'd gotten used to going to bed and getting up earlier to get in sync with Marty's schedule, but not *that* early. Marty didn't seem nearly as wiped out as he did. Probably since Marty was used to performing physical labor all day long and Larry led a far more sedentary lifestyle, outside of his workouts.

His sigh didn't go unnoticed. "Hey, Larry, how about we take a shower, then you can hit the sack early tonight? There's no need for you to force yourself to stay awake, hon."

"You wouldn't mind, Marty?"

"Nah. Did you bring one of your arm bags over, to cover your cast in the shower?"

"Yes. It's in the bedroom with my clothes."

They walked down to the bedroom and stripped for the shower. Marty helped Larry get the bag secured with a tight seal over his arm, then they went into the bathroom. They brushed their teeth first, then Marty started the water running and got it nice and steamy.

They got in, and Larry got wet under the water first. They traded, and Marty poured some

shampoo into Larry's hand and grabbed the bar of soap for himself. Larry lathered up his hair with the woodsy scented shampoo while Marty soaped up and rinsed off under the spray.

They switched places again, and Larry rinsed out his hair before soaping up and doing a final rinse. He let Marty back under the spray to rinse out the shampoo. When they were done, Marty leaned over for a slippery kiss before shutting off the water.

Larry stepped out and handed Marty a towel before grabbing one for himself. Drying off was another one of those things that were awkward to do one-handed, and when Marty was done drying himself, he took Larry's towel to help Larry finish.

"Lift your arms up, hon," Marty told him with a wink.

Fun. He was tired, but never too tired to play around with Marty. Larry smiled and raised his arms over his head.

Larry'd already dried off the plastic bag, so Marty removed the bag from Larry's arm, then held the towel in both hands as he slowly massaged his way down the length of Larry's right arm. When Marty reached Larry's shoulder, he transferred one of his hands to Larry's left side, and then moved his hands forward to dry Larry's pits, then to the front to dry Larry's chest.

Larry closed his eyes and dropped his head back as Marty circled the towel around his nipples. The rough texture abraded the tips, and his nipples tightened and peaked. Marty always knew how to push his buttons. His heart pounded in his chest.

Marty moved around behind him and massaged and dried his back, then nibbled at his ear and whispered, "You can put your arms down now."

Larry brought his arms back down to his sides, and Marty began massaging his scalp and drying his hair. Marty moved gentle hands in slow circles and carefully dried sections of his hair. Damn, that felt good. So simple and yet so erotic. When Marty moved both hands down to cup Larry's buttocks, Larry moved his legs apart and dropped his head forward. His breath quickened at the firm touch.

Marty leaned in and trailed kisses along Larry's neck while kneading Larry's cheeks through the towel. Marty slipped the edge of his towel-covered hand down the crack of Larry's ass then moved his hands around to dry Larry's hips. Marty rubbed his way down one leg at a time and had Larry lift each foot so he could dry the sole and between the toes.

When Marty returned to the front, Larry opened his eyes, watching as Marty carefully cupped his balls in one towel-covered hand and wrapped the other carefully around his semi-erect prick, drying them gently. Larry could see that Marty's erection was perking up also. Marty wore a grin when he looked up, and Larry smiled back.

Larry wiggled his eyebrows. "Wanna move this into the bedroom, baby?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

Marty moved his body over Larry's, and Larry's good hand came up around his neck to pull him down for a gentle kiss. Marty settled in between Larry's legs, taking his weight on his arms, and carefully lined up their cocks.

Marty enjoyed the closeness he felt with Larry, enjoyed simply kissing and petting. Their pace was leisurely, and they took their time, softly exploring each other's mouths as Marty rubbed their swollen pricks alongside one another. With casual hookups, it had been more about cutting to the chase: sucking, fucking, getting off. The intimacy of drawn-out foreplay or afterglow cuddling had been absent, and Marty hadn't even known what he'd been missing.

As their heart rates increased, so did their pace. Marty heard Larry moan as Larry began pumping his hips to increase the friction. Larry's casted arm was flung out to the side, and his good hand traveled down Marty's back, settling on one hip.

Marty shifted his weight to one side and moved a hand up to tweak one of Larry's erect nipples. Larry groaned into his mouth and writhed beneath him, grinding upward into Marty's pelvis.

Marty's balls had drawn up, and he was leaking. He met Larry's grind with matching strength as they built toward their climax.

Their kiss broke, and Larry started babbling. "Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck..."

Marty gave Larry's nipple a pinch and slight twist, and Larry cried out. Marty felt Larry's cock pulse as hot come spilled between them. Larry's body jerked for a few moments before falling back, and then Marty felt Larry's hand squeeze in between them and take a firm grip on Marty's hard length.

"Oh yeah, hon... fuck yes... tight." Marty spoke mindlessly as he pumped through Larry's fist. He sped up, moving erratically as burning heat ripped through his balls and his come shot out onto Larry's hand. His thrusts slowed as he emptied until finally he collapsed bonelessly alongside Larry.

They simply lay there quietly as their breathing slowed. Then Marty lifted back up to smile at Larry. "I think we wasted a shower, hon."

Larry laughed. "Oh, yeah. Major icky all over me."

"You got the worst of it. Come on, hon... I'll get you cleaned up again." Marty took hold of Larry's sticky hand and led him back to the bathroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Larry had to admit, Marty's Plymouth Valiant -- 'old faithful,' as Marty called it -- was a pretty sweet ride. Larry'd had to convince Marty to let him take turns driving, even though he only had one hand available. Damned cast. At least his arm didn't hurt or ache at all any more. It was just inconvenient.

They were only taking two days each way for traveling, so they were on the road for a couple of pretty long eleven or twelve hour days. But it had been pleasant and relaxing so far. Marty was great company. Part of the time, whichever one of them was the passenger read aloud to the driver; part of the time they just quietly listened to the radio; and part of the time they talked.

They stayed in Albuquerque the first night and Wichita the second night. There was a hotel in Brownsville where they'd stay tonight after they left Richardson.

Richardson. Jesus, Larry was a little nervous. He hoped his mom would hold her tongue and realize, finally, that her crusade to get him to go straight was hopeless. Larry was thankful, at least, that his brother's family was hosting the gathering. Rick had always been okay with Larry, and they'd be on Rick's home turf, so maybe that would help keep his mom at bay. When Larry had told Rick he was bringing his boyfriend, Rick had seemed a little surprised, since Larry had never mentioned anyone before, but pleased.

It was cold and blustery in Richardson. Leaves were still blowing around, but the trees were pretty much bare. Larry couldn't say that he missed the Midwest weather. He was thoroughly spoiled by the Southern California sun now.

Larry looked over at Marty. He seemed lost in thought. "What are you thinking about?" Larry asked him.

Marty laughed. "Hell, you'd think I'd be thinking about meeting your family since we're almost there, but no, I was thinking about last night."

Larry had to laugh. He should try that trick when he was nervous about something. Don't dwell on it; just think about sex with Marty instead! "Yeah, last night was hot," he replied.

Fuck, it was always hot with Marty. Sometimes Larry wondered if Marty could read his mind. Marty always knew what buttons to push, and always reacted well to moves Larry made on him, too. It was hard to believe, now, how anxious he'd been the first time Marty had fucked him. He was always trying to get Marty to jump him now. He'd done Marty again, too, but usually Marty was on top, and he liked it that way.

As they pulled up to Larry's brother's ranch style house, Larry saw that there were three cars already parked in the drive. One he recognized as Rick and Karen's car, another he knew was his mom's car, and the other belonged to Karen's folks. Rick had told him they'd be there, along with Karen's younger sister, Emily.

"Looks like we're the last ones here," Larry commented.

"Yep. We're not late, though, are we? It's eleven o'clock, and you said you were told 'around noon.'"

"No, we're good."

As they climbed out of the car, the front door flew open and Randy, Rick's ten-year-old son, came flying out. "Uncle Larry!" he yelled.

"That's Randy," he told Marty, then turned to the kid. "Hey, punk, how've you been?"

"I'm fine." Randy turned to Marty. "Hi."

Marty grinned. "Hi there, Randy, I'm Marty, a good friend of your Uncle Larry's."

Randy gave Marty a tentative smile. "Yeah, Dad said you were comin'." He turned back to Larry again. "Come on! Everyone's here now."

Larry glanced over at Marty as they followed Randy in. Marty winked at him. Jesus. Didn't the man even know *how* to be nervous? They stepped inside and took off their jackets. Randy looked over at Marty, and with a ten-year-old's total lack of concern for appropriateness blurted out: "Dang, you have big muscles."

Marty just laughed. "That's because I'm a construction worker. It goes with the job."

"Really? Can you build things? Maybe you could help Dad and Grandpa finish that swing set. They can't figure it out."

"I'm a carpenter; I'm great at building things. Lead on, Randy," Marty told him. They put their jackets back on and headed toward the back. Good, a project they could help with sure beat sitting around trying to think of things he could contribute to the conversation.

They got waylaid in the kitchen. Karen was there, along with her mother, Vivian, her sister, Emily, and Larry's mom working on Thanksgiving dinner. Larry made the introductions and gave Mom a hug. She was pleasant and asked Marty about himself. When Marty told them he was a carpenter, Karen was ecstatic.

"Oh, thank goodness. We bought this elaborate wooden swing and climbing thing at the end-of-season sales, and Rick's been trying to get it put together for days. He'd hoped to have it completed before today, but, well, building stuff is not his thing at all. Dad's trying to help him now, but it's the blind leading the blind out there."

Marty laughed. "I'm happy to help," he told her.

Mom had to be a mom and cautioned Larry, "Now, Larry, don't you do anything out there to hurt

yourself with your arm in that cast."

"Don't worry, Mom," he told her. "I won't." Hell, he was glad to have a valid reason not to have to prove his complete incompetence as even a carpenter's lowly assistant.

Randy led them outside. Mark and Linda, Rick's other two kids, aged seven and four, were running around chasing each other. Rick and Karen's dad, Frank, were discussing how to attach the next piece. They looked up as Larry and Marty approached. Rick smiled and gave Larry a hug. Larry introduced them to Marty.

"Pleased to meet you, Marty," Rick told him. "Sorry about this mess out here."

"I'd be happy to help out. I'm a carpenter," Marty told them. "This kit looks like a piece of cake."

"Oh, thank goodness," Rick replied. "You wouldn't mind? I hate to put you to work on your vacation."

"Nah, I don't mind. This looks like fun. What are you working on now?"

Frank spoke up, "We can't decide how to attach this part here. It just doesn't look like the directions indicate."

Marty looked it all over. "Well," he said, "that's because you've got this section over here put together wrong."

"Shit." They were in unison.

Marty laughed. "It's not too big a deal, actually. We'll have this all finished inside of a couple of hours."

"What can I do to help?" Larry asked them.

Rick and Frank looked dubious. Larry was worse than Rick at this stuff, even when he didn't have his arm in a cast. But Marty spoke up, "You could sort out that mess of fasteners. That would help."

"Fasteners?"

Marty had an amused glint in his eye. "Yeah, the nuts and bolts and screws. Sort them out by type and size."

"Oh, sure, okay." Jesus. He'd just exposed himself as being utterly and completely ignorant in Marty's world of tools and such. Fuck.

Larry sat down and started sorting through the jumble of little metal pieces as Marty took control and started issuing instructions to Rick and Frank. Marty showed them which parts to

disassemble on the faulty platform as he started putting together another section.

It wasn't much more than an hour later and the kids were standing around them excitedly as Marty tightened the last bolt attaching a slide to one of the platforms and Rick hung the last swing. They stepped back to admire the finished product, and the kids jumped up and down, cheering.

Marty looked over at Rick with a smile. "Told you, piece of cake." Damn, Marty was a stud. The only thing that would have been better than a couple hours of watching Marty work would have been warm, jacketless weather, so he could watch Marty's muscles flex while working, and of course, the tool belt.

Rick laughed. "It seemed like it, once you arrived to take charge. I can't thank you enough, Marty."

"The kids' faces are thanks enough."

"Yeah, they've been hounding me about it since we brought it home."

The sliding door to the kitchen opened, and the ladies stepped out. The women ooh'd and aah'd and generally admired the finished product, but then put a damper on the kids' excitement by telling them it was time to come in to eat. Their disappointment was short lived, though, because hell, it was Thanksgiving dinner, and they knew they could run right back out again afterward anyway.

Everyone headed for the door and the waiting feast. Marty waited behind for Larry and leaned down to whisper in his ear as they walked toward the house. "You know, for a man with an unnatural fascination with tool belts, you sure don't know much about what's in 'em."

Larry didn't want to know how bright the shade of red that his face had turned was. He smiled coyly at Marty, though. "Perhaps you'd care to teach me sometime?"

Marty laughed. "Oh, it would be my pleasure, hon." Damn, he was hot.

It had been a very pleasant visit so far. Larry's brother and his brother's father-in-law had been fun to work with while they put the kids' play set together. They didn't have much of a clue between them, but were able and very willing to follow instructions.

Larry had been willing, but there wasn't too much he could do with the broken arm after organizing the fastener mess for Marty. He'd held a few things in place with his good arm, but otherwise played around with the kids. They'd had some fun decorating his cast with magic markers too.

Thanksgiving dinner was outstanding. In the past, Marty'd spent it with Ray and Ronald and

some other good friends. As much as he'd appreciated that, it was just really nice to spend these holidays with actual family. It didn't even matter that it wasn't *his* family. It was Larry's family, but he thought of himself and Larry now as a solid couple, so they felt like family to him too.

Larry had said that his mother tended to preach at him whenever he was home, trying to convert him back to being straight. She hadn't tried that today. Having Larry show up with an actual boyfriend might have finally made it real for her. She seemed a little subdued, but not at all unpleasant.

Rick and Karen were very friendly and personable, and Rick's in-laws were also quite nice. The kids were a hoot. They ran back outside to play as soon as dinner was over. Marty offered to help with the cleanup, but the women wouldn't hear of it and shooed the men into the living room to watch the football games on TV.

Frank handled the remote like an old pro, flipping between games for them. They cheered for their favorite teams, bitched about the bad calls, and generally had a good time. The ladies joined them in the living room, but set up a card table off to the side to play spades. Larry joined them when Emily left the table to go play around with the kids.

Marty figured Larry wanted to spend some time with his mother. He was happy for Larry that Larry had her. Damn. That got him thinking about his own parents. They'd been dead now for ten years. He hated that the last words they'd ever spoken to each other were so spiteful and cruel. Had they ever regretted the harsh position they'd taken against him? Should he have contacted them after a couple of years just to test the waters?

It was way too fucking late to be regretting that now. He was glad he'd gotten back in touch with his sisters, though. He was actually looking forward to the reunion tomorrow, awkward moments or no. He didn't even care about that anymore, he just wanted to see them all again.

"So, Marty," said Rick, "This is the first time Larry's ever brought anyone home with him, or even mentioned a boyfriend to us before. You must be pretty special to him."

Marty raised his eyebrows, slightly surprised at the turn of the conversation. "Oh, I don't know about that. He's the only one that can tell you what he sees in me, but I can tell you that I think *he's* pretty special."

Rick's in-laws had gone home after a round of games that had followed the football viewing, and the kids had gone off to play in their rooms. Karen had kept the conversation light, but apparently Rick had a few concerns regarding his brother's happiness. "What is it that attracted you to Larry?" Rick wanted to know.

A look at Larry's face told Marty that he hadn't been expecting this line of questioning either. The color had drained from his cheeks and alarm brightened his eyes. Marty smiled reassuringly in Larry's direction.

No worries, he wanted to tell Larry, he could handle this. He looked Larry in the eye as he spoke. "Well, he's genuine. No games, just Larry. He's also genuinely sweet, and we just plain enjoy each other's company. The more we learn about each other, the more we find we have in common, and the things that are different aren't clashes, but good balances."

Karen was a romantic at heart, Marty could see. She smiled and said, "That's so sweet."

"What about you, Larry?" his mom wanted to know. "Why Marty?"

Yeah, Larry, why me? Marty wanted to hear this too. Larry took a deep breath and swallowed before replying. "Well, he's the kindest, most considerate, friendly, caring, courageous, and amusing person I've ever met. And I agree with what Marty said about how much we have in common, and that the differences are good. Life is so much more fun with Marty, and I just plain feel so comfortable with him."

Wow, was he really all that? He liked that Larry thought so. Marty grinned and winked, and Larry gave him a sweet smile. That probably convinced Larry's family they were both sincere about each other as much as the words did, since Rick returned the conversation to more relaxed topics.

They laughed about Rick's two days of fruitless efforts trying to put the kids' play set together. Karen told them about the kids' activities. Esther talked about her job at the library, then asked Larry to explain how he'd broken his arm. Uh-oh.

But apparently Larry was prepared for this line of questioning, and he'd worked out a far-less-embarrassing-than-the-truth story. He told them that he'd tripped walking down the hall with a load of clean laundry in his hands, fallen, broken his fall by putting out his left hand, but landed too awkwardly or heavily on it and the bone fractured. Not bad; simple but plausible.

He was a good storyteller, once he'd had a chance to think about it. Hell, the ER doctor might even have bought it if Larry hadn't been caught off guard by the questioning and been forced to confess the embarrassing truth.

Before they knew it, it was eight o'clock and time to take their leave. They shared a big round of hugs, and the kids came down to say goodbye, too. They ended up promising to visit again at Christmastime.

Larry was rather quiet once they got settled in the car. Marty gave him a smile and asked, "Did you enjoy the day, hon?"

"Yes," he was quick to answer, "I really did. Mom was different this time. I think she's finally accepted things as they are with me."

"I noticed that," Marty told him. "Your brother and Karen are very nice. I liked them."

He smiled. "Yeah, he's always been on my side about it all. He's always been pretty protective of me, too. I hope you didn't mind his questioning you about us too much."

"Nah, no big deal," Marty told him. "Hey, you came up with a good arm story."

Larry laughed. "Well, I *knew* I didn't want to 'fess up the truth to my family, so I worked up a little fib."

"I'm looking forward to tomorrow. I wonder if I'd even recognize my sisters if I ran into them on the street after all this time. I think I've probably changed quite a bit too. I was a pretty skinny kid, but twenty years of construction work has changed that. My hair was pretty long back then too."

"Really? Maybe I can get them to break out some old photos," Larry teased.

"Yeah, I doubt you'll even have to ask. I imagine we'll be spending quite a bit of time traveling down memory lane." Marty laughed. "Damn. The kids were all so little and now they're grown up. Helen even has kids of her own now. I *know* I wouldn't recognize any of them unless they grew up to look a lot like one of their parents."

Larry turned quiet again, like something was on his mind. Eventually he spit it out. "I'm a little nervous about meeting your family." He gave a little laugh. "What a shock, huh?"

Marty'd figured that was probably it. "You don't have to worry, hon. They'll all be nice, I'm sure, but if anything comes up I'll be right there to help you out."

"Thanks, Marty." He was quiet for a moment and then continued, "Sometimes I wonder why you put up with me. I'm so useless."

Jesus. Put up with? Marty loved every minute he spent with Larry. Hell, he loved Larry. Should he tell Larry that? They'd said the words when Larry had been sedated and loopy, before he'd really felt sure about his feelings. He felt more confident about it now, but would it scare Larry if he said it now, after barely three weeks together? "Larry, you are *never* useless. Introverted, yes... useless, no. I like you despite your quirks. Hell, I don't know; maybe even because of them. You like me despite my imperfections, don't you?" He decided to go with 'like' for the time being.

Larry's eyes looked large and somewhat troubled as he peered at Marty through his thick glasses. "You're perfect, Marty. And yes, of course I like you. A lot."

What could he say to make that look go away? "Oh, honey, I'm so far from perfect. Jesus. I have no sense of style, I hate to cook and I'm lousy at it. I think I'm a pretty boring stick in the mud sometimes too," he told Larry. "But I'm outgoing, and I've discovered that I enjoy looking out for you and helping you to grow. The thing is, our imperfections are good fits for each other."

"Thank you. I meant everything I said about you back there. You're all those things to me. Thank

you for caring about me."

"You're welcome, hon. Thanks for caring about me, too. I've been looking for you for twenty years, you know? I'm so glad we found each other."

Larry smiled, but still looked a little like something was on his mind. Damn.

When they arrived in Brownsville, Marty was shocked at how built up it had become. He'd thought about how the people would have changed, but somehow he'd just expected Brownsville to stay exactly the same. He had no trouble finding the hotel, though. They pulled into the hotel parking lot, then grabbed their bags out of the trunk and went inside to check in.

As they walked in, a couple of guys were leaving the counter to head for the elevators. As Marty checked in, he noticed that Larry looked over at the guys a few times. They got their room assignment and key cards and walked over to the elevators themselves.

"I think I know one of those guys who checked in before us," Larry told him.

"Oh, yeah, do you remember him from school? How come you didn't say something to him?"

"He was three years behind me at BU, and we were both members of the GLBT organization, but I wasn't very active. I only attended a few of the meetings, and none of the events, so I'm sure he won't remember me. Especially after seven and a half years."

"You remember him," Marty pointed out. "Anyway, even if he doesn't remember you, I'm sure he'd be happy to say 'hi.'"

The elevator doors opened and they stepped in. "You're right. I really should make more of a conscious effort to be forward. I just always imagine unpleasant reactions. I assumed that he'd scoff at me for pestering him, which is stupid, I know."

"I can't say that never happens, but the vast majority of the time people are happy to be recognized or acknowledged. Don't let the few bad experiences that might happen now and then keep you from doing what you'd like to do, hon. Take that guy, for instance. Was he a nice guy back in school, or do you have a valid reason to expect he might be rude if you speak to him?"

"He was very nice. I don't have any logical reason for thinking that way; it's just reflexive with me."

"Well, here's an exercise for you. If we happen to come across them again while we're staying here, you'll approach him and introduce yourself."

"Shit. Yeah, you're right. There's no reason not to, and it would be good for me." Larry laughed. "I can't help hoping we don't run into them, though."

Marty smiled and shook his head. They'd arrived at their room and let themselves in. He locked

the door behind them and looked around. It was a nice room, spacious and clean. They had a king-sized bed and a little sitting area, which was nice, since they'd be staying there for three nights. They unpacked their suitcases and got ready for bed.

Larry placed his glasses on the bedside table as he slipped between the sheets. "Do we need to be there at any particular time tomorrow?"

Marty pulled Larry in and gave him a quick kiss. "Not really. It was just settled that we'd be there sometime mid- to late morning, just no later than noon."

Larry placed his good hand at the side of Marty's face and kissed Marty softly. Marty responded with his own gentle kisses. Larry loved it when they lingered, simply kissing. It was so peaceful and comforting just lying there with their arms and legs tangled together, listening to the muted sounds their lips made as they kissed.

This was not to say that Larry was disappointed when the kissing eventually progressed to more intense activities. As their arousal grew, so did the strength of their kisses. When Marty broke the kiss, it was to roll Larry to his back and move unhurriedly down his body, nibbling and sucking along the way.

Larry's breathing grew ragged, and he groaned when Marty stopped to nip at his nipple. Jesus, it sent a jolt straight to his prick. His good hand moved to Marty's head, kneading, and his casted arm was flung over his own head. His body arched when Marty moved across his chest to tongue his other nipple before continuing downward.

Marty lingered in the area below Larry's navel, along the light line of hair growing there, and then across to sensitive areas at the sides of Larry's hips, where he remained to suck up a mark on Larry's skin.

Larry moaned. Marty had yet to touch his cock, but he ached in anticipation of what he knew was coming.

By the time Marty's tongue finally lapped along the throbbing length of Larry's cock, it was leaking, and when Marty ran his tongue through the slit, Larry groaned. Marty's hands grasped Larry's hips as he nibbled his way down to tongue Larry's balls.

The sensations coursing through Larry's body were overpowering, and his body writhed. His legs moved involuntarily; spread apart, intermittently bending and straightening.

Marty moved to straddle one of his legs, and Larry could feel the heat of Marty's cock, full and hard pressing against his leg. God, that was so fucking hot, the way Marty got off sucking him.

Marty moved his mouth back up to Larry's cock, and Larry couldn't stop himself from babbling. Larry's body arched under Marty. "Fuck, fuck... Marty, please... Oh, God, Marty... Aaaaahhh...

fuck, fuck, fuck."

Marty's hot, wet mouth was surrounding his aching prick, and the suction sent him out of his mind. He groaned loudly, and his hips bucked in Marty's hands. Marty's cock was hot against his leg, rubbing against him as he moved rhythmically, picking up speed. Larry felt the heat of come spurting on his leg as Marty's cock jerked against him. When Marty groaned around his cock, the vibrations overpowered him, and he came with a cry as Marty sucked and swallowed. His cock continued to twitch as Marty licked him clean.

Once Larry was drained, Marty kissed his way back up to Larry's mouth. They rolled to their sides and found themselves back where they'd started. Jumbled -- albeit sticky -- limbs and gentle kisses, lulling them to sleep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The sun was already fairly bright through the curtains when Marty woke up. He felt refreshed but grungy, covered in dried spunk. He glanced at the alarm clock on the bedside table and saw that it was only eight-thirty. The free breakfast buffet down in the lounge ran until ten o'clock, so they still had plenty of time to make that.

Marty rolled carefully out of bed, not wanting to disturb Larry, and made his way to the bathroom to shower. When he emerged, all fresh and squeaky clean, he saw that Larry was up and standing at the dresser, picking out clothes for the day.

"Good morning, hon," Marty greeted him.

Larry looked up and smiled. "Good morning. Ready for your big day?"

Marty laughed. "I am. I really am. Originally I was a little apprehensive about the awkwardness of a big reunion scene, but now I don't care. I can't wait to see them again."

"I really admire that about you, Marty. How easily you deal with difficult or potentially awkward situations. I'd be a total mess right now if I was in your shoes. And, you know what? You're so good at just walking in and being completely comfortable with people -- even total strangers -- I doubt that there'll even be any awkwardness in the reunion."

Marty cocked his head to the side and smiled. "Thanks, hon. You know, you're doing well yourself about staying relaxed in situations that would have freaked you just a few weeks ago. Like right now. You're meeting my family in just a few hours and you seem pretty calm."

Larry laughed. "That's because I know you'll be right there beside me. Everything's easier to handle when I'm standing next to you."

Marty leaned over and gave Larry a kiss. Larry grinned broadly in reply and Marty gave him a wink. "Shower up, honey. I'm hungry."

Larry laughed, but scampered off to the bathroom to get ready for the day. He didn't take long, and soon they were in the elevator riding down to the lounge. Marty took Larry's hand in his.

"You want to just go straight on over to Brenda's right after we eat, hon?" Marty asked.

"Sure. No reason to just kill time until noon. I know you can't wait."

When they walked into the lounge, the first thing Marty saw was the man Larry had recognized the previous night. He gave Larry's hand a squeeze and looked down to see if Larry'd noticed

too. Larry was biting his lip, but looked up at Marty and spoke softly. "Okay, I'll do it. Damn."

Marty gave his hand another squeeze and let him go.

Shit. Larry knew in his heart that the worst case scenario outcome here would only be that the man wouldn't recognize him and would just politely blow him off, but still... damn... a cold approach was his least favorite thing to do. He took a deep breath and walked over to the tall, good-looking blond man standing in front of one of the waffle makers. The man glanced over at Larry when he approached and gave him a little smile. Larry gathered up his courage and spoke.

"Hello."

"Hi there. How are you?"

"Oh, fine, thanks. Um... I believe we've met before. Didn't you attend Brownsville University?"

The man's smile broadened. "Yes, that's right. I thought you looked a little familiar, but I couldn't quite place it. You attended Brownsville, too?"

Jesus, what a relief. The man even remembered him. "Yes. I was three years ahead of you. You're name is Wes, right? Wes Shaw?"

"Yes, that's exactly right. I remember you now. Your first name is Larry, but I can't remember your last name."

"Oh, it's Travis."

"That's right. I recognize it now that you mention it. Say, Larry, would you like to join me and my partner at our table? That'll give us a chance to catch up. He was a year behind me at Brownsville, so you had already graduated when he was a freshman."

"Oh... um... wow, thanks." Larry glanced over at Marty, who was waiting for some toast to pop up. "Well, I'm not here alone. My boyfriend's with me."

"Oh, yeah? Terrific. You're both welcome to join us if you'd like." Wes was smiling at him. Larry could see in his eyes that he was sincere.

"Thank you. Okay, we'll join you. I'll just go tell him about it. Thanks."

"Okay, Larry. Our table's right over there in that corner." He cocked his head toward a table where the man Larry'd seen with Wes last night was already sitting.

"Okay. Thanks." Larry smiled then walked back over to Marty.

Marty raised his eyebrows when Larry reached his side. "How'd it go, hon?"

"Promise you won't say 'I told you so'?"

Marty laughed. "Promise."

"It went so well we're invited to join him and his partner at their table."

Marty's eyes widened. "Wow, Larry, that's more than I expected. Damn, you smooth talker, you. Should I be jealous?"

Larry laughed. "Of course not."

He grabbed an empty plate and quickly filled it from the ready-to-eat selections: some pancakes, sausage and bacon. Then he poured himself some juice.

"Ready?" Marty asked. His smile was encouraging.

"Yep. You?"

"All set."

Larry glanced over at the table and saw the two men sitting there already. The dark-haired man was nodding at Wes. Larry and Marty walked over to join them. The men stood up as Larry and Marty approached.

Wes nodded and smiled. "Larry."

Larry smiled at the couple as they put their trays down, and then spoke. "Wes, this is my boyfriend, Marty Jones ..." Larry was going to continue, but when Wes' jaw dropped and his partner gasped, it startled him into stopping.

Wes' partner spoke, "Oh, my God, Uncle Marty?"

Uncle Marty? Larry looked over and saw Marty smiling at the man. "Little Mikey?" Marty pulled the man in for a hug and ruffled his hair. "Damn, kiddo, you're all grown up!"

Mike laughed. "Well, yeah. Twenty years' worth. I remember now, you always used to call me 'kiddo' and muss up my hair."

"Yeah, it just came back to me when I recognized who you were."

"Well, I'm only four years younger than your boyfriend, so you don't need to call me 'kiddo' anymore." Mike chuckled.

"I think once you've changed someone's dirty diaper, you're entitled to call them 'kiddo' for the

rest of their life. I'm pretty sure that's a rule, isn't it, Wes?"

Wes smiled. "You have *my* permission."

They all laughed and sat down around the table.

Mike turned to Larry. "Larry, Wes was saying that you went to Brownsville with him? You were three years ahead of him, is that right?"

"Yes."

Mike pulled a face at Wes, then turned back to Larry and smiled. "You should be particularly flattered that, after being in school together for only one year, he remembered *you* seven years later, but I went to school with him for three years and he didn't know who I was when we met up four years later."

"Really?" That was unfathomable to Larry. Mike was damned good looking. Hell, he looked a bit like a younger, thinner, paler Marty.

Wes laughed and looked at Marty and Larry. "What Mike neglected to point out is that he was hiding in the back of a closet throughout college, so he just wasn't on my radar screen to be noticed in the first place."

Marty raised an eyebrow at Mike. "You didn't come out at school?"

"No, I was living at home while attending, and Dad had me worried. Turns out it was needlessly, but nonetheless..."

"Well," said Marty, "with my wonderful twenty-twenty hindsight, I can say that it might have been better if I'd demonstrated a little more restraint in that regard. So you waited until you were out of school to tell them?"

Wes laughed. "I'll say he did."

Mike rolled his eyes. "Well, actually, I moved to Austin so I could be out in my life without having to tell the family about it at all. I only finally just came out to them this past summer."

Marty laughed. "Damn, kiddo." He turned to Larry. "When did you tell your family, hon?"

"Well, my brother figured me out when I was in high school. He said I shouldn't keep it a secret from Mom and that he would always back me up about it, so he pretty much made me tell her. She's never been thrilled about it, but, well, nothing like your folks, Marty."

"Yeah. I wasn't really expecting that much venom. I don't know what I did expect, but it wasn't that."

"I was pretty lucky," said Wes. "I came out early, in high school, and never had any issues with the family about it at all."

Mike turned to Marty. "Mom and the aunts are all beside themselves with happiness about finding you. Well, I guess you found them. Mom says Aunt Sally cried when she found out you'd been back in contact with Mom and were coming to visit."

"She did? Damn. We were closest in age so we were pretty tight. I shouldn't have left her without saying anything. I just wasn't thinking straight. I couldn't face her. I was afraid she'd react the same way as our parents."

"Nah, she wouldn't have. She already knew. She'd walked in on you and some Billy kid making out in the rec room during your senior year, but never told a soul until this past summer. That's the first time everyone else learned that you were gay. I guess Grandma and Grandpa never said anything."

"Oops," Marty grimaced. "She walked in on us? She never even told *me* about it."

"So Larry," said Wes, "what happened to your arm?"

"Oh, um..." Larry blushed. Damn, the question took him by surprise this time. "...well, I fell on it."

Wes' eyebrows knitted together in a questioning look. "Oh, yeah?"

Larry glanced at Marty, then back to Wes. "Yeah, pretty much."

"Huh."

Marty laughed. "Damn, hon, and you did so well when your mother asked."

"Shit. I was ready for her."

Marty grinned at Wes. "It's innocent enough, just rather embarrassing since it involves rolling off the bed, and, well, not being alone at the time. The story he told his mom is that he tripped as he was walking down the hall while carrying a stack of clean laundry, and landed badly on his hand. The landed-badly-on-his-hand-while-falling part is true, so it actually sounded rather plausible."

Wes chuckled. "Yeah, that would be plausible. You have to be able to tell it with a straight face, though."

"I know. I can when I'm expecting the question. You caught me by surprise."

Marty asked, "What time were you guys planning to go over to the Evans' house? We were planning to just drive on over right after we finished eating."

Mike answered. "Same here. You want to just follow us over there, Uncle Marty?"

"Sure, kiddo."

Mike rolled his eyes. "What is it that you used to call Helen?"

Marty smiled. "Princess Popsicle."

Mike laughed, "That's right, I remember now. I hope you plan on calling her that, since I'm apparently going to be 'kiddo' for the rest of my life."

This time Marty laughed. "Well, I'll try it at least once, but if she complains, I don't have the diaper rule to hold over her head. I was a few years younger when she was a baby and never got to babysit during her diaper years. Plus, it's just not as catchy as 'kiddo,' you know?"

Wes asked, "What did you call Greg?"

"Bucko. It's catchy and the diaper rule applies. I'm sure he was too young to remember it, though."

Wes laughed, "I like it."

Marty turned to Larry. "Are you all done eating, hon? I'll take your tray for you."

"Yes, thanks, Marty."

Marty got up and cleared away their dirty dishes.

"Well, Larry," said Wes, "we got sidetracked and never did get caught up like we had intended when I invited you to sit with us."

Larry smiled. That was nice of Wes. "Well, I guess we've got all day."

"Yep," replied Mike. He kicked Wes under the table. "Hey, I'm glad we'll get to be there to see Mom and the aunts' faces when Uncle Marty arrives."

"You are so sentimental, honey," Wes teased him.

"I know, but you love me anyway."

"Not anyway... because."

Damn. That was so sweet. Larry wanted that. Wanted to feel free to tell Marty that he loved him. He did love Marty, with all his heart. He knew that now, but couldn't just say it. Not now. The door to that conversation had been cracked open when they were driving from Richardson to Brownsville, and Marty had made a point of telling Larry that he *liked* him. Liked.

Fuck.

Larry liked, loved, admired -- hell, you name it, he felt it -- Marty so much, and it kind of hurt to hear Marty say that *he* merely *liked* Larry. They hadn't been together that long, though. Was it too early to hope for Marty's love? Would Marty ever love him? And what had Marty meant when he'd said that he'd been looking for Larry for twenty years?

Mike gave Wes another nudge under the table and stood up to clear his and Wes' plates away. "Ready to go, guys?" he asked.

Wes and Larry stood up as Mike walked away with the dirty dishes. Marty rejoined them, and when Mike returned they all headed out to the parking lot.

"Do you remember where the house is, Uncle Marty?" asked Mike.

"Pretty much. Brownsville's changed so much in twenty years, though, it would be easy to take a wrong turn."

"Yeah, I guess it has. It's just been so gradual for me that I don't think about it. Just follow us. Unless you'd like to ride together. We don't have any plans today other than spending the day there with you anyway."

Marty raised an eyebrow at Larry. "That okay with you, hon? We're not planning anything else either, are we?"

"Sure, that's fine."

Marty turned back to Mike. "Yeah, let's just all ride together. I'll drive, if you don't mind. I left in that car twenty years ago, and I think it's fitting to return in it today."

"Seriously? You're driving the same car?"

"Yep," Marty laughed. "And it was twenty years old *then*. But she's reliable."

"Lead on, Uncle Marty."

Marty noticed a man raking leaves in the front yard as they approached the house. Was that George, Brenda's husband? The man looked up when they pulled into the drive. His hair was a bit thinner, but, yep, that was George.

"You remember Dad, Uncle Marty?" asked Mike.

"Yeah, I recognize him."

They all got out of the car, and George walked over to them.

"Hey, Dad, look what we found at the hotel!" Mike said.

George laughed. "So I see." He pulled Marty in for a hug. "How are you, sport?"

Marty laughed. "Good. You?"

"Fine, fine."

Marty turned to Larry and took his hand. "Larry, this is my brother-in-law, George. George, my boyfriend Larry."

"Welcome, Larry," said George.

"Thank you. It's nice to meet you."

The front door flew open, and they all looked up. It was Brenda, hurrying down the drive to greet him. Marty would have recognized her anywhere. She was older, certainly, with gray streaking her light brown hair, but it was still her. He smiled and held out his arms for her, then swung her around when she flew into them.

When he put her back down he said, "Damn, Bren... you haven't changed a bit."

"Nonsense," she laughed. "I'm a grandma... times two!"

"Well, you're the youngest-looking grandma I've ever seen."

"Thank you, Marty. And look at you! You're practically a body builder."

Marty laughed. "Nah, not even close. This is mostly just from my work."

She turned to Larry. "Hello, you must be Larry. I'm Brenda. It's so nice to meet you."

"Thank you. It's nice to meet you too." Larry smiled.

"Oh dear, look at your arm. What happened to you?"

Uh, oh. "Oh... um... well..." he stammered.

Wes came to his rescue. He winked at Larry and told her, "We already ferreted it out of him. He's embarrassed to admit to tripping over his own two feet. He landed wrong when he tripped carrying a load of folded laundry down the hall."

Larry blushed. "I'm not usually such a klutz," he told her. "It's the first time I've ever broken a

bone."

"I'm the klutz," Marty told them. "I'd had two broken bones and three trips for stitches before I left home. I've been a bit more careful since then."

George clapped his hands together. "Let's go inside," he announced.

"Yes," added Brenda. "Everyone else should be here soon."

Marty took Larry's hand again and gave it a squeeze, hoping it would help relax him a bit. Larry looked up and smiled, squeezing back. Clearly he was trying. It didn't come naturally to him -- being comfortable in new situations, in a group of strangers -- but Marty could see that he was making a determined effort not to just close up.

Marty looked around when they entered the house. "This has certainly changed a lot since the last time I saw it," he commented. The furnishings were all fairly new looking, with a neutral theme.

"I should hope so, in twenty years," Brenda said. "It's been redone a couple times since then, but this furniture here is only a year old. What I really need to do now is convert the kids' bedrooms into guest rooms. They're still set up with the old twin beds they used growing up. That's no good now that everyone is part of a couple. I'm glad the Shaws had one guest room for Greg and Marie, since they're just starting out and money is tight for them."

"Yeah," said Wes. "The room I used to share with my brother is now a guest room, but the third bedroom is still occupied by my younger sister, Anne."

"Greg is married to one of your sisters, is that right, Wes?" Larry asked.

"Yes, that's right," Wes replied.

"Marty," said George, "that looks like the same car you were driving when you left. Is it really the same one?"

"The only car I've ever owned."

"That car is older than you are."

Marty laughed. "Yeah, but I know her inside and out. I can do the work on it myself, but I couldn't with a new car."

A couple of cars pulled up outside. They looked out the window as a crowd emerged from them. Brenda filled them in. "Marty, Larry... that's Betty and Carl with Alan, Ben, and Marcia in the first car, and Sally with Brian and Katie in the second one."

"Yeah, I recognized Betty, Carl, and Sally. But Alan was only one and none of the others were

even born when I left." Betty and Carl he had easily recognized. Betty's dark blonde hair looked like a different shade, probably dyed, but it wasn't enough to disguise her. Sally had been seventeen when he left, so twenty years of changes made a bigger difference, but he still knew it was her. He'd recognize that mop of unruly, dark curls anywhere.

As they approached the house, two more cars pulled up. George went to the door while Brenda updated Marty and Larry. "That's Helen and her husband, Tom, with their kids, Abe and Sue, in the blue car, and Greg and Marie in that white one."

"Got it," said Marty. He looked over at Larry and winked. "Nothing like getting it all over with at once, huh?"

"Yeah, no kidding."

Marty walked over to the door to greet his sisters and their families. Betty came in first, and Marty scooped her into a spinning hug, then Sally, who cried and was reluctant to let go. Then he shook Carl's hand and was reintroduced -- or introduced, as the case may be -- to the myriad nieces and nephews.

The crowd made its way into the living room, where between the furniture, some folding chairs, and the floor, everyone found a seat. Marty made a blanket introduction of Larry, and Katie immediately requested permission to add to the drawings on his cast. Larry smiled and gave his consent.

Marty told them about his job, and then they went around the room, with each person giving him an update on what was going on in their lives. God, he hoped there wouldn't be a quiz later, because damn, that was a lot on information coming at him.

He glanced down where Larry sat cross-legged on the floor. Abe and Sue had joined Katie, and all three were taking turns drawing on his cast. Larry seemed relaxed sitting there with the kids.

Larry glanced up at Marty from where he was sitting on the ground with the kids. Marty grinned at him, and it warmed his heart, knowing that in the middle of all of this Marty was still taking the time to think about *him*. He smiled back to let Marty know he was doing fine. He knew Marty worried about him, knew that he was uncomfortable in settings like this. The last thing he wanted was to add to any stress Marty might be feeling on the inside. No matter how cool and calm Marty appeared, this day had to be taking an emotional toll.

Larry listened with one ear to the monologues that were part of the get-Marty-up-to-date process. He was actually enjoying himself sitting with the children, watching them further decorate his already silly-looking cast with their colorful drawings. He wondered what the doctor would think about it when it was cut off.

Around twelve-thirty, a temporary halt was called to the conversation when Brenda announced it

was time for lunch. There was a buffet line consisting of a variety of casseroles out on the kitchen counter, with a stack of disposable plates, forks, and spoons at the top of the line. Everyone filled their plates. The lucky ones found a spot at the table, and the rest used either a tray table or their lap.

The food was delicious. Larry took a deep breath and approached Marty's sister with a tentative smile. "Brenda, this cheesy corn and pasta dish is wonderful. I was wondering if you'd be willing to share the recipe."

"Thank you, Larry. Absolutely. I have all my recipes right in here on this computer so I can print a copy out for you just that quick."

"That's wonderful," said Marie. "Can I get a copy too?"

"Me too, please," added Mike. "Is this a new recipe, Mom? I don't remember you making it before."

Brenda clicked on the keyboard of the PC on the corner desk. "Yes, it is. I got it from Sally a couple months ago."

The printer buzzed, and she passed out their copies.

"Thank you, Brenda." Larry smiled and folded the paper into his pocket.

After lunch the younger kids went off to play in another room and the adults resettled in the living room. Marty was leaning against a door jamb, chatting with Tom and Carl. He looked so utterly charming and kissable, Larry had to shift his gaze to where some of the women were chatting so he wouldn't embarrass himself.

Marty came into the room and sat down on the couch next to Larry. "Let me see your cast now, hon?" he asked. He chuckled when he saw the new additions to the colorful jumble. "It's a good thing you don't work in an office with that thing."

"What *do* you do for a living, Larry?" That was Helen. Fuck. And he'd been doing so well staying out of the limelight and avoiding potentially embarrassing questions since the how-did-you-break-your-arm close call.

He didn't know how Marty's family would feel about it if he told them he wrote gay erotic romance, but he didn't want to outright lie to her, either. "I'm a writer. I just work from home and make my submissions by email."

"Oh, it must be nice to be able to work from home."

"Yes, I like it better than going in to an office."

Marty joined in and reinforced the redirection effort. "Once upon a time I actually had the goal

of having a nice office job, but after so many years of working outside I think working in an office would drive me nuts now."

"Do you like your work, Uncle Marty?" Helen asked him. She was smiling pleasantly.

"I love it, Princess Popsicle." He winked at her, and she laughed.

"I was just thinking about that the other day -- how you used to have nicknames for all of us. I always loved being the Princess of Popsicles."

Marty laughed with her. "When you were younger you always had one dripping down your chin and covering the front of your dress. You grew past that stage, but the name stuck."

"I really missed you when you left, Uncle Marty. Mom never knew what to say when we used to ask about you. I could tell she was worried."

"Yes, I've come to regret taking such an extreme stand. I made a bad assumption -- that my sisters would share our parents' opinion of me -- and I couldn't face them at the time. Then the more time passed, the harder it became."

"What made you decide to call?"

"I started spending a bit of time thinking about y'all and then wondering... would they really have rejected me back then... would they now? I talked it over with Larry, and he asked me if I could handle it if they did reject me now, and I decided that I could, and that it would be worth it just to try... to know for sure one way or the other."

"We're all glad you did. It's great having you back." She said it brightly, with a smile that reflected in her eyes. Larry gave Marty's hand a squeeze, and Marty squeezed back.

"Thank you Helen, I appreciate that," he told her.

Marty was wiped out. It had been one hell of an emotionally exhausting day. Tomorrow would be easier without the nieces and nephews. He and Larry would go to Betty and Carl's house after lunch, where Brenda, George, and Sally would join them. A photo album review was promised. He was actually looking forward to that.

Cameras had been snapping all afternoon, and he'd passed out his email address so they could send him copies. He'd made an effort to spend some time with each person there to get to know them. Everyone had been nice and even quite friendly.

Marty thought Larry had survived pretty unruffled too. He'd made what Marty knew was a concerted effort to contribute to the conversations. He was probably as emotionally wiped out as Marty was.

Marty let out a lengthy sigh and spoke to the occupants of the car in general. "What a day."

"Oh, man, no kidding." Larry's tone echoed his words. He was bushed.

"Yeah," said Mike from the back seat. "Not so bad for us, I think. I'm sure it was exhausting for you two, though... and probably for Mom and the aunts."

"Exhausting only begins to cover it," Marty replied as they turned into the hotel parking lot. "I'm thoroughly worn out."

"It was certainly a pleasure meeting you today, Marty," said Wes, "and seeing you again, Larry."

"Thank you," they replied in unison. Marty laughed and then continued, "It was a pleasure meeting you, Wes... and seeing you again too, kiddo."

Mike laughed. "It was great getting to know you again, Uncle Marty."

"Are you two spending tomorrow with Wes' family?" Larry looked back and asked them.

"Yessiree. Then we fly back to Austin tomorrow evening. I start a noon to midnight shift on Sunday," Wes replied with a smile.

Marty pulled into a parking spot near the door, then they all got out of the car and walked into the building. As they rode the elevators to Mike and Wes' floor, Marty asked, "Will we see you guys over the Christmas holiday? I'm not sure exactly when we'll be here yet, but we've promised both of our families that we'll be here at some point."

"Same here," said Mike. "We'll find out soon which days Wes is off and let the family know when we'll be here."

"We'll try to make sure we include those days in our trip, then," Marty told them.

The elevator stopped, and the guys shared a round of hugs and goodbyes before Mike and Wes walked off and the doors once again closed on Marty and Larry. Marty looked down at Larry. Larry was looking back with a tentative looking grin on his face. Marty reached down and gave Larry a quick little peck, then stepped back to wink at him. The tentative grin broadened into a more cheery smile.

"Thank you, Marty. For helping me get through today, even though it should have been the other way around."

"You helped me too, Larry, just by being there with me. You know what?"

"What?"

"I'm convinced I wouldn't even be here today if it hadn't been for you. Talking to you about it all that first weekend we were together might be the only thing that finally prompted me to take that first step."

The elevator doors opened, and they stepped out onto their floor.

"Do you really think so, Marty? I really helped you that much?"

"Yes, hon. I really think so. I can't thank you enough for the advice and support you gave me to get me here today."

Larry was silent as Marty opened the door to their room. They entered, and Marty locked the door behind them.

"Wow," said Larry. He looked up at Marty. "I'm glad I was actually able to help *you*."

Marty pulled Larry into his arms and they just rocked for a moment. Then he chuckled. "Damn, hon," he said, "I'm so tired I could fall asleep standing here with you."

Larry's eyes twinkled when he looked back up. "Let's go to bed, baby."

CHAPTER NINE

Larry opened his eyes and blinked. The curtains were closed, but it looked to be a sunny day behind them. He could hear the shower running in the bathroom. He sat up, put on his glasses, and tried to will away his morning wood. He got up and walked into the bathroom to brush his teeth. "Good morning, Marty," he called into the shower.

Marty peeked around the shower curtain with a grin. "Good mornin', hon. You want to join me?" He wiggled his eyebrows and glanced down at Larry's erection. "I could take care of that for you."

Larry grinned. "Be right in. Gotta put a bag on my cast first." He took care of that quickly and stepped into the shower stall.

The water was hot and the stall was steamy... kinda like Marty. Marty lost no time pulling him in to a wet, warm embrace.

Marty's hands slid down to Larry's ass as Marty's lips sought Larry's. Larry pressed his hips against Marty's and brought his arms up to link around Marty's neck as he pushed his tongue into Marty's mouth.

Damn, Marty felt good against him. Marty's cock was hardening rapidly as it pressed against Larry's hip. Marty's tongue perused Larry's mouth as his hands pulled Larry in tightly.

Time stood still as the water rained down on them. They slid and rubbed their bodies together, erections grinding, tongues skimming each other. Larry's cock throbbed, and he could feel Marty's hands moving along his body. On his ass, his back, up to his head, and back again.

Larry sensed the acceleration in Marty's breathing. Larry moaned when Marty broke their kiss and his mouth latched onto Larry's neck. Larry brought a hand down to grasp Marty's cock. He grabbed hold and gave it a squeeze. Marty groaned, and his head fell back. Larry felt Marty's prick pulse and the splash of hot come.

Marty held tightly onto Larry as his cock emptied, and then took hold of Larry's length to bring Larry to completion. Larry moaned deeply and sought Marty's mouth with his own. Marty kissed him hard and pumped his aching prick mercilessly. Larry cried out and arched as his orgasm overtook him. He held himself tightly against Marty as his body shook.

He felt weak as he leaned against Marty. God, he loved Marty so much. He felt loved in return during tender moments like this when Marty held him gently, caressed him softly, and kissed him lightly. He lived for these moments.

They eventually ended, though. Not that the times in between these special moments weren't good. They were. Marty was incredibly sensitive to his feelings and especially considerate to him. He always felt much cared for, but it truly felt like unspoken love at moments like this.

Marty held Larry's face in his hands and gave Larry a last gentle kiss before stepping back to smile at him. "I'm finished washing up, honey. I'll get out now and dry off so you can wash up, okay?"

Larry smiled back. "I'll just be a minute."

Larry listened to the homey sounds on the other side of the shower curtain as he shampooed his hair. He thought about the future and wondered what it had in store for him and Marty.

They practically lived together now. One of them always spent the night at the other's apartment, and they shared their meals together. He loved cooking for Marty, and Marty truly appreciated the meals he prepared. He even fixed Marty the loveliest lunches to take to work. Marty said the guys had teased him a bit about the sudden upgrade in the quality of his lunches.

They'd been together just three weeks now, but Larry had felt the connection to Marty almost instantly. He wondered if it was too soon to ask what Marty thought about them actually combining households and truly moving in together. His own lease was new, but he had no idea when Marty's would be up.

The cost savings would be as welcome as the company. They did spend all of their free time together, and Marty seemed to enjoy his company as much as he enjoyed Marty's.

Should he bring up the subject? Did Marty ever hope to have an actual partnership, or did he want to stay single? Fuck, what if Marty was still single because he liked it that way and wasn't interested in ever living with *anybody*, let alone *him*. What would Rhys do in a situation like this?

Double fuck. Rhys would consider the fact that his own ultimate goal was to be in a partnership with a man he loved and who loved him back. He would bring up the subject of moving in someday to see if his boyfriend had similar goals, because the sooner he knew the truth, if it was bad, the less painful it would ultimately be.

Yeah, right.

Larry rinsed his hair and grabbed the bar of soap. He *would* bring up the subject of living together, but he'd wait at least until after this visit with Marty's family was over. No matter how Marty felt about moving in, Larry still loved him and always would, and didn't want to hang a cloud over his head during this reunion.

He did *not* want to address the subject of love yet, though. It was too soon, and Marty would have said it the other day if he felt it. If Marty showed interest in moving in together, that would be enough to indicate that he felt the potential for it, and that was good enough for now.

Larry rinsed and turned off the water. When he emerged from the bathroom he had the towel around his waist, and saw that Marty was standing at the window just gazing out at the stark November landscape.

Larry pulled his clothes out of the dresser. "Everything okay, Marty?"

Marty was looking thoughtful and introspective, but cleared his face and put on a smile when he turned to reply to Larry. "Yeah, hon. Everything's fine."

"Okay," he replied. But it didn't look okay. It looked like Marty had something on his mind that was bothering him. Should Larry push or let it go?

Rhys would give it one more shot, so Larry did too. "You sure, Marty? You look like something's on your mind. I'd be happy to help if I can."

"Nothing's wrong, hon. I'm just thinking about something. I've... well... shit. This is new territory for me, and I'm not sure how to proceed."

"Oh." Fuck. What had he done wrong? He sat down on the bed to get dressed, trying to remain calm. "Did I do something... say something that's bothering you?"

"Oh, God, no, hon. Shit. No... I'm... well... I was just thinking about us in general and where we're heading." Marty paused and took a deep breath before rushing on. "Larry, we practically live together, and it feels so right, and I was wondering how you would feel about actually living together."

Jesus, Marty was actually worried about *his* reaction to that question? He looked like he was holding his breath waiting for Larry to respond. "You're kidding." Larry blurted.

"Damn."

"Shit, that came out wrong. I can't believe you just said that because I was just thinking about the same thing in the shower. I... well... I was trying to decide when to bring up the subject myself. Yes, Marty, I want to live with you, and I'm so glad you said that."

The worry in Marty's eyes disappeared. "Really?"

"Yeah, really." Larry smiled with relief. Jesus, he couldn't believe *Marty* had just brought it up.

Marty grimaced. "My lease is up for renewal. I have to either renew it now or be out before the first of February. Are you ready for this to happen that soon?"

Larry stood back up and finished dressing as they spoke. "Absolutely. Like you said, Marty, it feels so right, and we do practically live together now, anyway, so we might as well realize the cost savings of truly living together."

Marty didn't say anything in reply and just walked over to Larry and hugged him. Larry wrapped his arms around Marty and pressed back. They just stood there in each other's arms, rocking for a minute, and then Marty pulled back and smiled down at Larry. "Thank you, hon," he said. Then he laughed and continued, "Now we can think about all the mind-numbing specifics of how we're going to combine our stuff into one apartment and talk about it on the drive home."

"Okay."

"We have five hours before we have to be at Betty's house, hon. What do you want to do?"

"It's your town. Do you want to visit your old haunts or some old friends?"

Billy. Marty did kind of want to see Billy. Just to say, 'Hey, how are ya... I'm fine.' Marty'd found out from Brenda that Billy still lived in Brownsville. He managed a used car lot in town and -- of all things -- was married. He'd seemed pretty gay back when Marty had known him, showing no interest in girls, but apparently he was bisexual.

"Well, actually, I wouldn't mind visiting my best friend from my high school days. I haven't seen or spoken to him in twenty years."

"Oh, yeah? That's a great idea."

"I got his phone number from Brenda yesterday. Um... I should tell you, though... we were more than just 'friends.' I want to be upfront with you about that."

Larry was quiet for a moment, chewing his lip. "Oh. Well, I guess that shouldn't bother me, right? It's been twenty years, like you said."

"Right. That's long over, honey. I just thought it would be nice to say hi, maybe get a little closure."

"Um, do you want me to stay here while you go see him?"

"Hell, no. I want you with me by my side, hon."

"Thank you." Larry spoke softly, but gave him a smile and seemed satisfied.

Marty called the number that Brenda had given him, hoping that it wasn't too early on a Saturday to do so. A woman answered within two rings, though, and sounded as if she'd been awake for a while. He asked for Billy and was told that he had just left for work about fifteen minutes earlier. Marty could hear a couple of kids talking in the background. He thanked her and hung up his phone.

"He's at work," he told Larry, "but according to Brenda, 'work' is managing a used car lot, so I think we could just drop by and surprise him."

Larry shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "I'm game."

Marty laughed. "Let's go down for some more free breakfast buffet, then go look at used cars."

Larry climbed out of the car and looked around. It was a pretty nice-looking lot. There were several salesmen out speaking with customers. Marty smiled and held out a hand. Larry gave Marty his good hand and felt Marty's comforting squeeze.

"Do you think he's inside, Marty?"

"Well, if he's one of these guys out here, I don't even recognize him," Marty replied. "Let's go in, hon."

They pushed open the door and found themselves in a large display room. There were numerous offices opening off the room, and Larry noticed Marty looking at the one that was labeled 'William Atkinson, General Manager.'

The door was ajar, and Larry could see through the window that there was a man in there sitting alone behind a desk, going through some papers. He was nice looking, but looked a little worn down. The years hadn't been as kind to this man as they had been to Marty. Marty was vital, lively, and vibrant. This man looked tired, but not just from a bad night's sleep. He had frown lines, while Marty had smile lines, and his face just seemed to sag.

Marty squeezed Larry's hand again, and they walked over to the door. Marty knocked on the door and peeked in with a grin on his face. Marty's friend looked up, but didn't appear to recognize him.

The man put on an artificial-looking smile and asked, "How can I help you?"

"Hey, Billy," said Marty. The man knitted his brow, trying to place Marty. "Think back twenty years."

The man looked over at Larry and noticed Marty still holding his hand. *That* helped him out. He looked back at Marty and recognition dawned on his face and his smile turned genuine. "Marty Jones. I'll be damned. Come on in."

Marty laughed. "Took you long enough. Have I changed that much?"

Billy's eyes shone as he replied. "You've changed enough. You look good though. Damn, it's been a long time. Come in and sit down!"

"Too long. I should have come back sooner." Marty told him. They stepped into the room and sat in the chairs opposite the desk. "Billy, I'd like you to meet my partner, Larry Travis. Larry, my old friend Billy Atkinson."

Partner? That was new... and nice to hear. Larry liked the sound of it.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Billy." Larry couldn't help smiling. 'Partner' kept bouncing around his brain, short-circuiting it.

"Nice to meet you too, Larry." Billy smiled at him and then turned back to Marty. "Your sisters looked me up this past summer. They were searching for you."

"Yeah, they told me. So, you're married now, I hear."

"Yes. Two kids. A couple of girls. They're ten and eight."

"Yeah? That's great, Billy. Good for you."

Billy's smile was kind of rueful. "Yeah. It's good. Well, I'm glad to have the kids, and Carrie's okay too." He sighed. "I've often wondered what my life would have been like if I'd been brave enough to go with you all those years ago."

"Different. That's all, Billy. Not necessarily better."

Billy smiled and leaned back in his chair. "You missed the twenty-year class reunion this past summer. There was quite a turnout. A number of people asked about you, wondered if I knew where you were."

"Oh, yeah? I'll have to go to the twenty-five. That would be fun."

"Here, you want to give me your contact information? I'll pass it on to Kristy Bradford. Remember her? She's been the reunion coordinator." He passed Marty some paper and a pen.

"Sure." He started writing, then looked up at Billy. "I'm moving within a couple of months. I'll just give you the new address."

A man peeked into the room. He was tall and solid with a receding hairline. "Sorry to interrupt, folks," he directed at Marty and Larry. He turned to Billy and handed over some papers. "Bill, I just need your approval on this sale."

"Sure, Mark." Billy took the papers, then turned back to Marty. "Marty, do you remember Mark Akers? He was a year behind us in high school. Mark, this is Marty Jones."

Marty turned and smiled at the man. "Yes, I remember you, Mark. Good to see you again."

Recognition dawned on the man's face. "Marty Jones. Wow. Hell, yeah, I remember you. You

disappeared off the face a month after graduation. All the kids were talking, wondering where you went. Even Bill didn't know." He laughed. "Damn, Marty, there were some crazy rumors flying around about you."

"Oh, yeah?"

Mark glanced over at Larry, then back to Marty. "Hell, maybe they were true." It wasn't quite a sneer on his face, but it was close. Prick. Larry hated the unfair judgments.

Billy interrupted. "Mark, I'll get this paperwork back to you in just a few." His tone was a dismissal. Mark took the hint and backed out of the room.

Billy turned to Marty. "Sorry about that. He's an ass. If he wasn't such a good salesman..."

"Don't worry about it. Trust me, my skin's gotten quite thick over the years."

"Shame it's had to. Damn. Listen, Marty... How long are you in town?"

"We're leaving early tomorrow morning. Spending today at Betty's. I don't really have more time to get together with you this trip, but maybe another time?"

Billy stood up. Clearly he was swamped with work. "Yeah. We need to plan a real get-together next time you're in town." He smiled. It was a genuine, heartfelt smile. "It was great seeing you. I've thought about you often over the years." He turned to Larry and put out his hand. "It was nice meeting you, Larry."

Larry shook his hand and smiled back. "It was nice to meet you too, Bill."

Marty apparently didn't think a handshake was going to cut it. He walked around the desk and gave his friend a hug and a pat on the back. "I'll be in town over Christmas. Let's plan something for then, yeah?"

"Yeah. Have a safe trip home."

"Bye, Billy," Marty smiled over at Larry, and they walked back out to the display room and headed for the exit.

Mark Akers was standing in front of another office speaking with a couple women. He looked over at them as they walked toward the exit and the expression on his face reeked of animosity.

If there was one thing that could take control of Larry's actions and prompt him to act without worry about the consequences, it was prejudicial behavior. Okay, so maybe that was two things, since he'd learned that his cock took over when he was aroused.

At any rate, he didn't just take Marty's hand to walk through the room; he put his arm around Marty's waist and pulled in right next to Marty as they walked.

Marty didn't miss a beat, putting his arm around Larry's shoulders and giving Larry a squeeze. When the exit door closed behind them they both burst out laughing. "Jesus, Larry," Marty exclaimed, "I can't believe you did that!"

"I hope you didn't mind."

"Oh, hell, no. That was fun. Mark always was an asshole."

They got in the car and pulled out of the lot. They spent the next hour just driving around Brownsville so Marty could see how it had all changed. Marty told Larry stories of his exploits at different landmarks around town. They drove to the university and got out to walk around the grounds.

"Do you ever regret not attending, Marty?" Larry asked.

"I was kind of resentful at first. But now? No. I really enjoy my work." He looked down at Larry. "And I'm really happy with where I'm at in my life right now. The choices I made back then are the reason I'm standing here right now with you, so I can never regret those choices."

Larry smiled. "You say the nicest things sometimes."

"Just saying what I feel, honey."

"You told your friend Billy that I was your 'partner.'"

"Yeah, that's how I think of you now. You don't mind if I use that word?"

"Hell, no. I like it. I like being your partner."

Marty just smiled, and they held hands as they walked back to the car.

CHAPTER TEN

Larry laughed as Marty tried to act serious, turning his arm this way and that. "It looks good as new," Marty declared. "How does it feel? Can you move your hand freely now?"

"Yes, everything moves just fine, Marty. It feels a little weak from lack of use, but it shouldn't take long before it's completely back to normal."

Marty's eyes twinkled. "This calls for a celebration. It's Friday night, and we haven't been dancing since you had that cast put on your arm. What do you say we go to Snayque's to honor the day of the removal of the damned itchy thing?"

"Hell yes! That's an awesome idea."

Marty laughed and shook his head.

"What's so funny about that?"

"I was just comparing your reply and the look on your face just now to your reaction the first time I asked you to come to Snayque's with me. You stammered and hemmed and hawed. You looked completely shocked."

Larry smiled. Jesus. He didn't even feel like the same person anymore. "I *was* shocked. I'd been fantasizing about you and that damned tool belt for a while, but I'd never dreamed you would ever ask me to go out dancing with you, or anything else for that matter. And I certainly would never have gotten up the nerve to ask you."

"Well, I'm glad you pulled together the nerve to at least agree to go."

Larry laughed. "Yeah, me too."

They arrived at Snayque's earlier than usual and in a taxi this time. It was a celebration night, and Marty wanted to have a few beers tonight too. Marty had called Ray and Ronald, and he expected them to join him and Larry later on.

The club was decked out with glittery Christmas decorations. Even the lights flashing onto the disco ball were red and green. The bartenders and waiters all wore little elf hats.

The place was crowded, but there were still a few empty tables, so they snagged one. A waiter came by, and they ordered a couple of beers and some snacks, then sat back to watch the

dancers.

Marty's only concession to the Christmas season was to wear a red T-shirt. Larry actually had a red, green, and white striped one with a picture of Rudolph on the front. But they were both tame compared to some of the get-ups out on the dance floor. There were some exceptionally glittery and sexily dressed Santa's helpers there tonight.

When their order arrived Marty proposed a toast. "To new arms and new beginnings." He grinned, and Larry smiled happily back.

"Arms and beginnings," Larry agreed. "I'm really looking forward to the move next month."

"Me too, hon."

And he was. He'd been very much relieved when Larry had so readily agreed to their moving in together. Even though they each essentially spent the evenings the same as they had before -- just relaxing and either reading, writing, browsing, or watching the news -- it would just seem lonely now if he was doing it by himself. It was cozy having Larry beside him on the couch, quietly working away.

And Larry's cooking. Damn. He couldn't say enough good things about that. And Larry enjoyed doing it! Marty always insisted on doing the clean up since Larry went to all the trouble of fixing the meals.

Marty also made a point of taking care of any small repairs he'd noticed -- sticky dresser drawers, a wobbly table leg. Larry really was totally helpless in that department.

"Ho, ho, ho!" It was Ronald.

"How's the arm, Larry?" Ray asked. They sat down and joined Marty and Larry at the table.

"Great. Just a little weak feeling, but that'll go away soon."

"Good."

"We've got a dual celebration going on tonight. The arm and the upcoming move," Marty informed them.

"That's right," said Ronald. "You're just a few weeks away from the big 'move in.' How exciting. Just let us know what we can do to help."

"I remember what it was like back when we moved in together;" added Ray, "so many emotions -- excitement, joy, and anticipation -- but also a touch of uncertainty and nervousness."

"I wasn't uncertain," claimed Ronald.

Ray rolled his eyes and looked at his partner with a grin. "Sweetheart, you were such a bundle of nerves." He looked over at Marty and Larry. "He was an absolute mess."

"I remember," said Marty. "It's true, Ronald. You were a wreck."

"Whatever. Aren't you guys anxious about it at all?"

Marty glanced over at Larry. He wanted to hear Larry's reply to this question.

"Not really," Larry told them. "I think because we live right across from each other and spend so much time together now, it's like we're living together already. It's more just a merging of the stuff that's in the future. The merging of ourselves already works."

Marty smiled. "It *does* work, doesn't it, hon?" Marty reached over and gave Larry a gentle kiss. When Marty pulled back, Larry's grin was lopsided and his eyes were bright. Larry always wore his heart right on his sleeve, and Marty could always tell how he was feeling.

"You guys are so sweet together. Seriously, it's heartwarming just to watch the two of you," said Ronald.

Marty laughed. They definitely were good together. He'd never felt much of a connection to anyone he'd hooked up with or dated in the past. But with Larry he felt complete.

He loved Larry, and he knew Larry loved him back. They still hadn't said the words, though, except for the one time Larry didn't remember. They both said it with actions every day, but Marty had decided that he would wait for Larry to say it first. And wait he did.

"As if you and Ray can talk," replied Marty. "You two are the most sentimental and lovesick couple I've ever met."

Their waiter chose that moment to return.

"Beer will not do for this occasion," declared Ronald. "We need fruity drinks."

Larry laughed. "What kind?"

"Oh, let's keep it simple." Ronald turned to the waiter. "A round of strawberry daiquiris, please."

Marty turned to Larry. "I think we've got time for a dance before that order comes back, honey. Do you want to?"

"Absolutely." Larry placed his hands on the sides of Marty's face and punctuated his reply with brief yet fiery kiss.

Marty loved how daring Larry was becoming with him and gave Larry's hand a squeeze as he led Larry out onto the dance floor. The song had a sensual beat to it, and Marty pulled Larry into his

arms so they would move against one another as they danced.

Marty trailed his hands up and down along Larry's back and sides. Eyes closed, Larry's hands moved up Marty's arms, gently pressing on his muscles, then up to his shoulders. When Larry's hands reached Marty's neck, Larry opened his eyes and reached up to press a gentle kiss to Marty's lips.

Damn, that felt good. Marty didn't want their night to end too early, however, so he resisted the very strong urge he was feeling to pull Larry's pelvis in to rub against his own. That didn't stop him from ramping up his efforts along Larry's ticklish sides, though. Larry squirmed, so Marty moved his hands back around to trail along Larry's back.

When the song ended, he took Larry's hand in his and they walked back to the table. Their timing was perfect as the celebration drinks had just arrived.

"Outstanding timing, my friends," declared Ray.

"Those look scrumptious, Ronald. Ordering strawberry daiquiris was a great idea," Larry said. Marty smiled to himself. He'd just as soon have a beer. He knew Ray would too. But they could go with the fruity drinks now and then if it made their lovers happy. He knew from past experience that Ronald loved 'em. Apparently Ronald had found a partner in crime in Larry.

Ronald saw that too. His eyes lit up and he scooted his chair a bit closer to Larry's. "Honey, we are going to have to stick together against these two, otherwise we'll never drink anything here except beer or ginger ale." Ronald scrunched up his nose to emphasize his point.

"Scandalous." Larry nodded. "But true. I've noticed the same thing."

Ray rolled his eyes. "There was nothing stopping you guys from drinking your frou-frou drinks, just 'cause we didn't order the same."

"Silly," Ronald scolded Ray. "It's just sad somehow drinking a frou-frou drink alone. I won't do it. But you're off the hook now. Larry and I can order them, and you two sticks-in-the-mud can have your boring drinks."

Marty laughed. "It's a deal."

Ray picked up his drink. "We need an appropriately lofty toast to go with these drinks."

"I've got it covered," said Ronald. He paused dramatically, then raised his glass to Marty and Larry. "To partnerships... a happy partnership is paradise. Seek it with love in your heart, but do not expect to travel this path without going through some rough country together." Ronald then turned to Ray. "And to my partner, he knows all there is to know about me but still loves me."

"To partners," replied Marty. They all clinked their glasses together.

They all took a drink, and then Ray gave Ronald a tender little kiss. "Nothing will ever change how I feel about you, sweetheart. I will *always* love you."

Marty noticed that Larry was wearing a rather crooked little smile and had a far away look on his face. But then his face sobered up and he looked almost sad. What the fuck was going through his mind?

Larry seemed to be quite happy most of the time. He was no good at hiding his feelings, so Marty knew Larry really was happy. Their day to day lives were fairly routine, but Larry seemed to like that too.

The sex... hell, the sex was outstanding. *Nobody* could fake responses like they elicited from each other. He had no doubts that Larry was satisfied sexually.

So what was going through his mind when he got that sad look? It never lasted long, but it was there.

That was a nice toast. True, too. Nobody was perfect, but love and mutual respect made it work anyway.

Ronald was a sweetie. Larry liked him and was happy for him. He and Ray were great together.

He hoped to have the same kind of relationship with Marty. He worked at it. He worked at improving himself and being less introverted. He wanted Marty to love him more than he'd ever wanted anything else in his life.

Ever since Marty had assigned him the task of approaching Wes that day in Brownsville, he'd been giving himself similar little tasks. And Marty had been right. He never encountered the kinds of reactions from people that his imagination had fabricated. He felt so comfortable around Marty he rarely even thought about what to say or do anymore, he just did it.

Larry sipped on his daiquiri and grinned at Marty, since Marty was looking back with a slight bit of concern marring those handsome features. Damn. What had he done now? He drank some more and smiled over at Ronald. Ronald smiled back and leaned into Ray.

Damn, that daiquiri was good. He slurped the rest of it down and smiled back over at Marty again. At least he didn't look concerned anymore, just thoughtful, and Marty smiled back.

"Everything okay, hon?" Marty asked him.

Well, hell yes, as far as he knew everything was okay, wasn't it? "Um, sure, baby. Everything's fine. Is everything okay with you? You look like something's bothering you."

Marty's smile was gentle. "Everything's wonderful, honey. Are you ready for another dance yet?"

Great idea. He needed to clear his head. He'd only had two drinks, but he could feel the effect of them just a bit. "Yeppers. Let's dance," he replied.

Marty took Larry's hand and led him to the middle of the floor as the music changed. The song had a good strong beat, and Larry felt pretty relaxed and free. He let himself go and just moved in time to the beat.

Marty was smiling at him and looking happy again. Larry stepped closer to Marty so their bodies touched as they moved to the music. Marty moved his hands along Larry's body, and Larry leaned in even closer, reaching up to hang onto Marty's shoulders.

Damn, Marty was so hot. Anytime those muscular arms went around Larry he felt weak in the knees. Leaning against that tight, solid chest made him weak in the knees. Hell, everything about Marty made him weak in the knees.

When they returned to the table, Ray and Ronald got up for the next dance. Larry glanced at Marty's full daiquiri and raised an eyebrow.

"Want me to take that off your hands, Marty?" he asked. "Would you rather order a beer or something else?"

Marty chuckled. "Have at, hon." Marty slid the glass over to him. Their waiter was walking by, so Marty flagged him down and ordered a beer instead. Larry took a long pull on the straw of his bonus daiquiri. Damn, he loved strawberries. And daiquiris. And Marty.

Larry looked out onto the dance floor and watched as Ray and Ronald moved together to the sultry music. Larry sighed and took another drink. Marty was looking out at the dance floor too, but then turned and reached over to take Larry's hand and give it a squeeze.

Larry gazed at Marty and finished up his drink. Damn, he was starting to feel more than just a little woozy. Maybe he shouldn't have had that third drink. Now he had to pee, too.

"Um, excuse me a minute. I need to use the restroom," he told Marty.

"Sure, hon," Marty's beer arrived as Larry stood up. Larry paused a moment to clear his head, then wove his way through the crowd toward the restroom door. Damn, it sure seemed like a much longer walk than it had appeared to be. When did the room get so big?

"Watch out, asshole." That was from a rather beefy looking man who turned around and sneered at Larry. Fuck. Larry had barely touched him.

"Sorry," Larry replied. He wasn't, though.

He moved on. Fuck, where had that stupid door disappeared to? He looked around, but he was shorter than most of the guys milling around, so it didn't do him much good.

"Whatcha lookin' for, dude?" Larry looked up. A tall, blond man was smiling at him. Thank goodness.

"Restroom." Larry told him.

The man's smile broadened. "You're pointing the wrong way." He cocked his head to the side. Fuck, how had he gotten so turned around? "Just keep your eye on that clock up there on the wall. It's just to the left of that."

Larry's sigh of relief was palpable. "Thank you very much."

The man's smile was warm and friendly. "I'm Quinn. Are you here alone?"

The question took a moment to register in Larry's foggy mind. Alone? Why did Quinn need to know that? "Um, I'm Larry." Larry looked around. Shit, he wasn't alone, but where *was* Marty? He couldn't remember how to get back to their table.

"Tell you what, Larry... I need to use the restroom too. How about I lead you over there?"

Now *that* was the best offer he'd had all night, 'cause damn, he *really* needed to pee. "Oh, thank you. That would be great."

Quinn smiled, took Larry's elbow and started walking toward the restroom. Somehow, it seemed like a much shorter trip just trailing along with Quinn than trying to get through everybody himself.

In no time at all they were at the restroom door. Quinn opened the door, and they went in. Another man was in there washing his hands. Larry approached the line of urinals and unzipped.

Relief washed over him as he emptied his full bladder. He finished up, refastened his jeans, and then walked over to the sinks to wash his hands. Quinn was already at the sinks finishing up. He smiled at Larry.

"I haven't seen you around, Larry. Are you new in town?" Quinn asked as he dried his hands.

"Oh, not really. I just got a cast off my arm and didn't come while I had that on. I'd only been here a couple of times before that." Damn, Quinn was certainly being friendly to him. What a nice guy. Did Marty know him? Larry gave him a warm smile.

"Yeah?" replied Quinn. "Hopefully I'll see you around more now."

Larry nodded and smiled, and thought about asking Quinn if he knew Marty, or Ray and Ronald, but didn't get the chance. Quinn moved close and placed one hand on the side of Larry's face and the other at his waist, around to his back. The next thing Larry knew, the man's mouth was on his.

Oh fuck. He was so fucking ignorant. How could he have so completely misread the situation? He felt like he was going to fall and grabbed the front of Quinn's shirt. Larry heard the restroom door open as he started to push against Quinn to break the kiss.

Quinn stood back to look at Larry. Curiosity reflected in his eyes.

Larry looked up and opened his mouth to explain when he heard a sharp intake of breath coming from the direction of the door. He turned to look and saw Trevor standing there. If looks could kill, Larry would have dropped like a stone to the cold, tile floor.

"Marty deserves *so* much better than *you*," Trevor choked out. Then he turned on his heel and fled from the room.

Larry stared after him and felt the blood drain from his face. What had he done? Had he just ruined everything? "Oh, fuck." It was barely a whisper.

Larry looked back at Quinn, but could think of nothing to say. All Larry could think of was what Marty would think when Trevor told him that Trevor'd seen Larry kissing some guy in the restroom.

Larry knew how *he'd* feel if he was told that Marty had just been kissing some other guy. He'd feel let down and sad and mad as hell. He didn't know what he'd think. He knew he'd be upset as fuck. Larry felt a tear roll down his cheek.

"Larry? Dude, I'm sorry man. I thought you were here alone. You looked interested"

"No. Fuck. I mean... I thought you were just being friendly. I never thought..."

"So let me get this straight. You've got a boyfriend named Marty sitting out there, and the fella that just walked in here is looking him up out there, as we speak, to rat you out. Is that it?"

Larry nodded. "He's going to hate me now." Larry felt the tears start to flow freely down his cheeks. His voice quivered as he spoke: "Fuck. I'm trying so fucking hard, and now he'll hate me."

"Is Marty reasonable or hot headed? If I come with you to explain, will that help or will he just punch me in the kisser?"

Hope flashed through Larry's mind. "You'd do that? Really? Marty is the nicest guy in the world. He would never punch you. Trevor's right. He really does deserve so much better than me, and I don't know why he picked me. I love him so much, and I don't want to ruin everything. I don't want him to hate me or not trust me. I don't want him to think I would kiss someone else on purpose." Fuck, he was babbling. He decided to shut up.

"O-kay. Um... well... I'll tell you what. Lead me to your boyfriend, and I'll tell him what

happened, okay?"

"Yes. Please. Thank you so much." Larry paused to sigh and scrub his face with his palms.

"Okay... come on."

Larry turned and walked to the door. He opened it and looked back at Quinn. Quinn was right behind him.

"Where's your table, Larry?"

"I can't see anything from here, but if we go to the bar I think I can see it from there."

Quinn took the lead and they moved quickly to the bar. Larry looked around and spotted their table. He looked up at Quinn. "Over there." He indicated the direction with a nod and started walking toward it.

Larry didn't see Trevor, but Marty was the picture of dejection, with his elbows on the table and his forehead leaning against his hands. Ronald looked concerned, and Ray stood up while talking to Marty. When Ray noticed Larry heading their way, he poked Ronald and they moved away from the table.

What the hell was going on? Marty couldn't imagine that Trevor would just out-and-out lie to him. But he was equally convinced that Larry would never do such a thing to him, either.

Larry was a little tipsy, and that did tend to loosen him up, but there was no way that Larry would make out with another man in the bathroom, no matter how much he drank.

Ray had volunteered to go look for Larry and see what was really going on. Fuck. What if Larry needed help? What would he do if Larry really *was* making out with some guy in the bathroom? He didn't know what to think. He didn't want to think.

Marty felt a hand on his back and knew it was Larry. "Marty?" he said. Fuck, his voice sounded small and scared. That meant Trevor hadn't just fabricated the whole thing. He sighed and looked up.

"Yeah." His voice caught a little, but he didn't really care. Larry should damned well know what this was doing to him.

Marty heard Larry take a deep breath. "Marty, it's not like it probably looked to Trevor."

Fuck!

"How's that?" he asked Larry. "Explain it to me then. What is it that looks like you are making out with some guy in the bathroom that isn't?"

Larry's jaw dropped. Shit, it looked like Larry had been crying too. What the fuck was going on here? Larry looked to the side at a man who was standing a few feet away from him. Marty looked up at him and quirked an eyebrow.

"Uh, Marty?" the man said. "Hey, my name's Quinn. I'm afraid there's been a misunderstanding and it's pretty much my fault. No need to blame Larry here."

Misunderstanding? "What happened?"

"Well, uh, Larry and I... we met up on the way to the restroom and were just having a friendly little chat. I was mistakenly under the impression that he was here alone and was interested. That was my misinterpretation. He was just being friendly and didn't realize I was making a move on him." Quinn paused for a moment. Marty's eyes narrowed a bit. Quinn continued. "Um... anyway, I kissed him... but Larry moved to push me off pretty much immediately. That Trevor fella's timing was particularly bad, and Larry here was mortified."

Marty glanced at Larry. Larry's lip quivered. Shit. Marty could definitely picture Larry not even remotely suspecting that the man was feeling him out. He could picture Larry smiling and making an effort to put himself forward. Larry had been making great strides in that area, but would not likely suspect that Quinn was taking a *romantic* interest in him.

Yeah, the story rang true. Larry was guilty of being naïve, but nothing more. Hell, Quinn wasn't really guilty of wrongdoing, either, and it had been very nice of him to come with Larry to explain himself. Most guys wouldn't have done that.

Larry still looked miserable and worried. Marty stood up and pulled Larry into his arms for a hug. "It's okay, honey. I believe that. It makes sense now. Don't worry."

Larry's arms wound tightly around Marty's neck, and Marty felt him shiver. "I was so afraid you'd hate me." Larry's voice quivered, and he hiccupped.

Marty rocked him side to side. "Never, honey. I could never hate you."

Marty glanced over at Quinn. He was chewing his lip and looked like he couldn't decide whether or not it was time to retreat. Marty smiled. "Thank you, Quinn. For coming with Larry to explain what happened. I appreciate it. I know Larry does, too."

Quinn looked relieved. "Thanks. Well, he was pretty upset. I didn't want to be responsible for busting up a relationship." Quinn gave a short laugh. "He promised me that you wouldn't punch me out."

"Nah. Not for an honest mistake. I'm sure your intentions would have been apparent to most guys, but Larry? Well, he wouldn't have seen that."

"If all is well here, then I'll just get back to cruisin'." Quinn cocked his head toward the dance

floor. Marty nodded, and Quinn wandered off.

Marty looked down into Larry's eyes. Larry looked back up with a tentative smile. Marty leaned down and gave him a gentle, reassuring kiss, then pulled him in tightly.

Marty heard Larry's soft moan and words, barely audible. "I love you so much."

Then Larry stiffened. Marty didn't think he'd meant for the words to be said aloud.

Marty responded quickly, before Larry had a chance to regret telling him. "I love you too, Larry." He spoke softly next to Larry's ear.

Larry's arms tightened around Marty's neck, but he didn't relax. "Really?" he whispered.

Marty pulled back and looked into Larry's eyes. "I pinky swear," Marty said with a grin.

That relaxed him. Larry gave a little smile, but looked bemused. "Pinky swear?"

"Yeah, hon. You made me pinky swear it the night you broke your arm."

His eyes were shining, and his voice broke. "I did?"

"Yeah, hon. I told you that night, and I'll say it again now... *I love you.*"

A tear broke loose and slowly slid down Larry's cheek. "I love you too, Marty."

Marty smiled. "Let's go home, love."

Larry just smiled.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TGIT. Was there such a thing? Tuesday was the last day of his work week before his and Larry's holiday trip, so TGIT worked for Marty. They had a flight to Kansas scheduled for pretty early in the morning tomorrow and would be returning on Saturday. They had booked a rental car to use, but Brenda had done the bedroom conversions she had talked about at Thanksgiving, so they would be staying at her house instead of at a hotel.

He and Larry had ended up having a wonderful weekend despite the inauspicious start with the restroom fiasco Friday night at Snayque's. They'd even been able to laugh about it, and the event had turned out to be a good thing in the end. He'd lost count of the number of times he and Larry had said 'I love you' to each other since then. It felt good.

Larry seemed to be floating around on cloud nine. He'd explained to Marty why he'd been reluctant to say 'I love you' earlier. Explained about the conversation on Thanksgiving when Marty had made a point of telling Larry why he 'liked' him so much. In hindsight, Marty realized that Larry had a point.

They'd had Ray and Ronald over on Saturday night for dinner and games. The guys had gotten a kick out of the explanation of the restroom story and were infinitely relieved for them that everything had worked out. Larry and Ronald were becoming fast friends. Ronald had a fun, bubbly, and friendly personality, and he seemed to enjoy taking Larry under his wing. Larry had become very comfortable with him.

Marty had already packed for the trip and had his luggage as well as his change of clothes for tonight and for traveling tomorrow over at Larry's place. So when he walked up the steps to their floor after work, he went straight to Larry's door instead of stopping at his own first.

Larry had given him a key since he stayed there most of the time and would be living there in a few weeks anyway, so he just let himself in.

"Hey, hon," Marty called out. "I'm home." Damn, something smelled good. Jesus, it smelled like fresh bread. Did Larry bake his own bread sometimes? There was another smell too. Something Italian?

Larry stuck his head out of the kitchen. "Hey, baby." He was smiling, but when he saw Marty standing there, his mouth went slack then he licked his lips. "Damn, Marty," he said. "You... uh... damn."

Marty laughed. What was it with Larry and his tool belt fixation? Not that Marty minded. Marty grinned. Larry's smile was back, and they came together in the dining area.

Oh, hell yes. Marty fresh from work, still wearing his leather tool belt. Damn. It was more than just the tool belt, though. It was the whole 'muscular man in well-fitting jeans with his T-shirt plastered against his torso after working all day' look. The tool belt and, hell, even the steel-toed work boots were just the icing on the cake. Okay, maybe the tool belt was a little more than just the icing.

Marty's arms came around Larry's waist, and his mouth came down hard on Larry's. Larry grabbed hold of Marty's shoulders and met Marty's forceful kiss eagerly.

Sex with Marty was always wonderful and never boring, but the occasional role playing added extra spice. Larry enjoyed it when they played at being Hektor and Rhys, but he really loved it when Marty took on the He-Man strong construction worker role. Marty's carpenter persona was more dominant and aggressive, and Larry absolutely loved it.

Larry could taste the tangy sweat of Marty's labors on the skin around Marty's mouth. Marty smelled good... hot... like Marty with the masculinity ramped up, and Larry melted against that hard chest as his senses approached overload levels.

Marty walked them over toward the table and pressed Larry against it as they kissed. Marty's hands moved around Larry's body, fondling, pressing, and squeezing his ass, his hips, and along his back. Larry pressed himself against Marty, and their hips ground together.

Larry could feel the solid ridge growing harder, larger in the crotch of Marty's jeans. He could feel the tools hanging down from Marty's tool belt swinging against his legs as they moved against each other. He could feel his own arousal growing, grinding against Marty.

Larry moved his hands down Marty's arms, and he savored the sensations that were stirred up by Marty's flexing muscles. Marty's arms tightened and then broke away, moving both hands down to the button of Larry's jeans.

Marty's fingers fumbled on the fastenings, and Larry brought his hands down to help. Larry swiftly unbuttoned and unzipped his own jeans, then moved his hands out of the way.

Larry could feel Marty's hands working on his own jeans. Marty broke their kiss and moved his mouth around to Larry's ear. Marty's voice growled at Larry's ear. "Turn around. Bend across the table."

Hell, yes... orders. Larry lost no time turning around and leaning across the top of the table. He sensed Marty moving swiftly to a side table in the living room and opening the little drawer. They'd stashed a supply of lube and condoms there. Marty picked out what was needed and turned to face Larry.

"Larry, I'm going to put your glasses on the counter here, okay?"

Oh, good idea. "Yeah. Thanks, baby."

Marty carefully removed Larry's glasses and placed them on the kitchen counter, then moved quickly back behind Larry. Larry felt his jeans and briefs being shoved down to his knees. He spread his legs apart as far as his pants would allow. Larry's cock was hard and aching to be touched, but Larry didn't touch himself. The anticipation, waiting for Marty to take care of him, would be better.

Larry felt Marty moving around behind him, then he felt cool fingers at his entrance as Marty shoved in some lube and stretched the muscle. "Is this what you wanted, Larry?" Marty spoke softly, but his voice was thick with passion. "Were you hoping for a hard fuck when you eyeballed me at the door?"

Hell yes. Anything. Fuck, Marty fresh from work bending him over for a hard fuck was a fantasy come true. Larry managed to gasp out a reply, but it wasn't particularly intelligible.

Marty chuckled. "I'm not sure what you just said, but I'll take that to be a 'yes.' Hopefully that's what you meant, because that's what you're going to get." He punctuated that comment with a sharp slap to Larry's ass.

Larry yelped. Jesus, that was new. Not bad, judging by how his cock leapt... just new.

Marty leaned against him, and Larry could feel the hard shaft pressed along his crack. He could also feel the handles of something or other hanging from the tool belt slapping against his thighs. Fuck, that was hot.

Marty stood back a moment, and Larry heard the crinkle of the condom wrapper being torn open. There was a pause, then Larry felt pressure at his hole and one of Marty's hands at his hip. Larry closed his eyes and made himself relax. Larry still found this part hard, but Marty was always slow and careful when entering him. Larry pressed back and felt Marty breach his muscle ring. Larry groaned at the slight burn, and Marty paused while Larry's body adjusted to him.

After a moment, Marty's hands moved up Larry's sides under his shirt until they reached his shoulders. Marty rubbed his muscles, massaging his neck and shoulders while pressing the rest of the way in.

Damn, Larry felt so full. Full and relaxed again with his cock hard and twitching in anticipation. His breath regulated, and Marty pulled back to thrust back in with a grunt. Balls, hips, and tools slapped against Larry's ass and thighs. Larry moaned.

Larry felt Marty's grip tighten on his shoulders as Marty leaned down across Larry's back. "You like that, don't you, Larry?" Marty asked as he pressed his hips forward. "You like a hard cock inside you. Do you imagine you're on a jobsite with me? That we've snuck off to an empty storage room? Or that I'm bending you over a table full of plans for a quick fuck before the project manager returns?"

Larry moaned again and couldn't find words to reply. Jesus, fuck. No, he hadn't thought of that, but damn... great idea.

Marty pumped a few times, then paused again. "Maybe you're a weasel of a building inspector, getting what he deserves. Or maybe this is what you like, and this is my bribe to get you to overlook a little code violation. That's it, isn't it, Larry? You'll overlook minor violations for a hard fuck bent over a barrel in a storage closet."

Larry's mind whirled as he lost himself in the fantasy. He knew he was babbling, but wasn't sure what he was saying. He felt Marty's hands pinching into his shoulders as Marty reared back and rammed into him. Marty began to steadily pump into him. Tools slapped against his thighs, and Marty's cock glanced along his gland. Larry was leaking, groaning, and completely adrift in the sensations flashing through his body.

Marty's hands released his shoulders and moved down to his hips. Larry could feel Marty's fingers biting into his flesh. Larry's head dropped down, his hands pressed against the hard surface of the table.

The sensory overload in Larry's mind was complete. He didn't realize he was coming until his body started shaking. Larry heard Marty groaning loudly as Marty's movements shuddered to a halt, then felt the hard shaft pulsing deep inside him.

Long moments passed as Larry gradually became aware of his surroundings. Marty had been leaning heavily across his back and raised back up to withdraw and dispose of the used condom. Larry heard Marty zip up behind him and reached down to pull his pants back up and re-zip himself.

Then Marty's arms were around him, rocking him against that solid body. "You okay, hon?" he asked.

Larry smiled. "I'm better than okay, baby. Way better than just okay."

Marty petted his back. "I love you, Larry."

"I love you too, Marty. Thank you. You make all of my fantasies come to life."

Marty chuckled. "It's my pleasure, hon. You can trust me on that."

Larry smiled and looked up at Marty. "Would you grab my glasses for me, please? I think there might be a mess on the table and carpet that I want to get before it stains."

Marty laughed. "Yeah, hon." He gave Larry a pat and fetched the glasses for him.

Marty got some paper towels and a wet sponge and took care of the cleanup while Larry

freshened up in the bathroom. Then Marty took his shower while Larry made the final dinner preparations.

As Marty stood under the hot spray, he thought about how much his life had changed in the past month and a half. How meaningful each day was, how happy he was, and how much he loved making Larry happy as well. He thought about commitment.

At Thanksgiving in Brownsville, Marty had spoken to his nephew and learned that he and his partner were planning a wedding ceremony in February, in Canada at Niagara Falls. He liked the sound of that too. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he wanted Larry to be his life partner. He didn't even want to imagine life without Larry in it anymore.

A wedding in the US still wouldn't mean anything on a federal level, but a true wedding ceremony would mean so much more to him than a simple 'domestic partnership' would. As Marty got dressed and walked down the hall for dinner, he resolved to discuss the issue with Larry.

When he reached the kitchen Marty discovered that Larry *had* made homemade bread, along with a small pan of lasagna and a small salad for their dinner.

"I figured I'd freeze the leftovers, since we'll be out of town for a few days," said Larry.

"Good idea, hon. That'll be easy to just thaw and warm up when we get back, won't it?"

"Exactly. I know I won't feel like cooking after spending the day traveling."

Marty poured their drinks while Larry dished up their food, then they sat down to eat. Larry's cooking, as always, was outstanding. Marty thought about how to bring up the sensitive subject matter he'd been pondering and wondered how Larry would receive it. When he looked across at Larry, he saw Larry looking back with concern in those eyes.

"Something on your mind, hon?" Marty asked him.

"Oh, um... well, not really. I was just thinking that *you* looked like you had something on your mind, and I was wondering about that."

Marty smiled. "Nothing bad, hon," Marty replied. "Big, but not bad."

"Did you want to talk about it, Marty?"

"Yeah, I do. Um, here's the thing. I was thinking about how we're moving in together and how we love each other. I can't imagine being without you now, Larry, and I was wondering how you would feel about formalizing our commitment."

Larry was silent for a moment, his face registering surprise, but definitely not distress. Marty's guess would be that it was a look of delight

When Larry found his voice, he simply asked for clarification. "What exactly do you want to do, Marty?"

Marty cleared his throat and looked carefully at Larry. "Well, I was thinking about a couple things. For one thing, I want to do what we can to legally protect ourselves as much as the law here allows. What do you think? Is it too soon for you to think about this?"

Larry shook his head. "I know how I feel about you, Marty, and it's strong. I love you with all my heart." Larry's smile was brilliant.

Marty smiled back and felt more confident as he continued. "And I think we should get married. I would like to marry you, Larry. I'd like to have an actual wedding ceremony. Would you do it? Would you marry me, Larry?"

Marty held his breath and waited for Larry to react. Larry just looked blank for a moment. "You... you want to *marry* me, Marty? Really?"

"Yes." Marty swallowed, then continued. "Will you, Larry? Will you marry me?"

Larry's tongue appeared to be tied. He just nodded and stared at Marty. Marty got up and walked around to Larry's side of the table. Larry stood up to meet him and threw himself into Marty's waiting arms.

The End