



Private Property

Copyright © 2009 by Audra Beagle and Chloe West

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680

Cover illustration copyright Alessia Brio

Used with permission

ISBN: 978-1-60370-786-2, 1-60370-786-7

Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: High Ball electronic edition / August 2009

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680

Dedication

To Hayley and Clare

## Prologue

### *Welcome Home*

Sam shut the mailbox with a little more force than he had intended and looked down at the letter in his hand. Not another one.

Maybe it was his frustration with writing, maybe it was because no one sent him anything in the mail, but the letter in his hand burned.

Sam jogged down the little gravel road to his newly purchased Victorian home. When he'd signed the rather large check for the secluded property in Newport, he thought it would be the perfect place to get his creative juices flowing again. New York City had become oppressive and stifling. He'd needed a change of scenery. The ocean, the cliffs, the fresh sea air. Newport was the perfect place to churn out another bland mystery novel that would sell like hotcakes.

It had, in fact, been over a year since he'd been able to write more than a paragraph of original fiction. Hell, Sam found that lately he couldn't even write letters. He had writer's block and even the perfect atmosphere wasn't going to help. Sam was doomed, and his publisher was going to eat him alive.

He couldn't be burned out at twenty-four. It seemed impossible, yet Sam felt it. Completely burned out.

Sam slammed the door behind him and stomped up the winding staircase to his office. It was on the third floor of the house, just below the attic, and the view was nothing if not inspiring. The big, stained glass window overlooked the cliffs down to the sea, and in the distance, a tall, white lighthouse flashed in the growing dusk.

It inspired Sam to throw himself into the sea.

He opened the drawer to his desk, sparing a passing glance at his untouched black typewriter, and shoved the letter in with the other three. The letters weren't addressed to him, so he hadn't read them. They were addressed to the previous owner of the house, a woman Sam hadn't met, as he'd purchased the house through a realtor.

He didn't know why he kept the letters. Maybe he'd send them to her someday? Maybe he was a masochist and liked being reminded of the fact that he was friendless and alone in this little town of Newport.

A loud rap on the door downstairs broke Sam out of his self loathing. Okay, so he wasn't entirely alone. His good friend Grant lived down the shore in a grand mansion with a private beach and dock. Sam's three story Victorian house, though weathered by the salty sea air, was no shack. However, it paled in comparison to Grant's less-than-humble abode.

They'd met through Sam's agent and had become fast friends. Grant specialized in narrating for audio books, and though it was not what he was known for (he was famous for his voice work in commercials), it was how he made the bulk of his income. Grant had recorded the

last three of Sam's best-selling mystery novels and somehow was more famous and well off than Sam.

And that had to be Grant at the door. Who else would be harassing him after dark?

Sam almost ignored the incessant pounding, but gave in and trudged down the stairs. He threw open the heavy, wooden door without even peeking out the window to check for crazy fans first. Maybe in New York he'd had a few middle-aged women hanging around his apartment, but here no one knew who he was, even if he had been on the New York Time's Best Seller list three years in a row.

He looked up and was about to make a scathing comment to his old friend when he realized it wasn't Grant standing on his doorstep at all.

## Chapter One

### *Someone Left a Cake Out in the Rain*

Sam opened the door to find a young man standing on his porch in the dark with a suitcase in one hand and a cake in the other. It was an odd sight, and Sam couldn't quite make out the man's features. He could only see dark hair glinting in the moonlight. The man fussed with himself as Sam peered out at him. Sam cleared his throat to get the stranger's attention.

"Can I help you?" Sam asked, frowning. Perhaps the young man's car had broken down some ways up the road.

"Oh." The young man looked up, dropping his suitcase on the wood with a thunk. "Yes. No. Well, yeah. Is... Can I talk to Audrey?"

A flicker of recognition at the name sparked in Sam's brain, but he shook his head. "No, it's only me here."

"So... she isn't home?"

Sam shook his head again. "I mean, I'm the only one who lives here. I don't know any Audrey."

The young man made a small noise of frustration, and Sam stared at him in the dark, confused. Sam reached inside and flipped the porch light on, and the man squinted into the light. An odd thought flashed through Sam's mind; the man looked both at home and displaced on the porch. Sam chalked up his observation as one of the many side effects of being a writer. He noticed every little detail of a situation, as if it was a scene in one of his novels, but he also read far too much into things. The stranger on his doorstep looked too wary and fidgety to be at home, but stood on the porch, gazing up at the peeled paint and touching the carved woodwork of the railing as if revisiting old memories.

Sam snapped himself out of his wandering thoughts and raised his eyebrows. The man had long, dark brown hair, bright brown eyes, and pale, delicate skin. If Sam hadn't taken such a close look at the man, he'd have sworn it was a woman, and a gorgeous woman, at that. A real knock-out, that was what this one was. It made Sam's stomach feel strange in a way he couldn't quite understand. But the stranger on his doorstep was definitely a man, Adam's apple and all. He was tall and slender and was dressed as stylishly as Sam had seen most people in New York City. The man certainly did not fit in with the local dress code, which normally consisted of conservative yuppie attire, usually cotton polo shirts and linen Bermuda shorts. Sam decided that the man wasn't from the area, no matter how fondly he was gazing at the house with big, sad eyes. He may have been impeccably dressed, but something about his face was worn and tired.

The man was the complete opposite of Sam. While Sam was more solidly built and boyish, the man on Sam's doorstep was lean and feminine, almost willowy. The man was pale and dark, an attractive contrast, where Sam was dark all over. Sam's olive toned skin complemented his short, wavy, brown hair and dark green eyes. True, more than a handful of women had called Sam handsome in his time, but Sam knew with one look that this person was the type to turn heads.

“If you’re sleeping with her, you can tell me,” the man said bluntly, pulling Sam from his thoughts.

“What?”

“Listen, it’s buggy out here and my legs are tired,” the man said. “Can I please come in?”

“I...” Sam stared down at the man’s suitcase and then at the rich chocolate cake in his hands. “Wait, Audrey Green? The Audrey Green who used to live here?”

The man’s eyes widened at this. “Used to live here? What do you mean used to live here?”

“I bought this house two months ago,” Sam said. “If you’re looking for Audrey, well, I haven’t even met her.”

The man shoved the cake at Sam. “Fuck!” He kicked at the suitcase and clenched his delicate hands together in a fist. “Fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck!”

“Um...”

The man took a deep breath and stared hard at Sam. “You never met her?”

“No, and I don’t think I should have to--”

“How can you buy a house from someone without meeting them?” the man asked sharply. “If she put you up to this, I’ll wring her neck!”

Sam took a step back. “I own this house.”

“How could she do this to me?” The man looked like he was about to cry, and Sam hadn’t felt this uncomfortable in ages.

“Listen, Mr...?”

“Adler, Will Adler,” the man said, suddenly sniffing. Large, fat tears began to roll down his face, and Sam’s mouth dropped open.

“Adler?”

“Yes, and you have to let me in,” the man said, wiping at his eyes.

It was Sam’s turn to widen his eyes. “Oh, no,” Sam said. “No, no, no. I don’t know you.” That was half a lie. “I can’t just let you--”

“What am I going to do? I took the ferry over,” Will snapped. “You need to let me in and I’ll explain everything and if we dig a hole in the back yard you’ll see that--”

Sam was at his breaking point. “I’m sorry, I can’t manage it,” Sam said. He didn’t feel sorry for the man. In fact, he suddenly felt contempt. Sam shouldn’t have to put up with this shit! This house was his, not Audrey’s, and so he shouldn’t have to house her wayward friends.

Even if this particular wayward friend had been trying to get a hold of her for say, three weeks by letter.

But that didn't matter.

Sam pushed the cake back into the young man's arms and slammed the door as fast as he could. He'd never closed a door in another person's face, and really, it felt empowering. Well, it did until the young man outside began sniffing again. Then Sam felt like he'd kicked a helpless puppy.

"Christ," Sam mumbled, leaning against the wall and rubbing at his forehead. He could feel one of his migraines coming on. "Jesus freaking Christ."

He could hear the young man, Will, pacing back and forth outside. Night had fallen by that time, and with a sigh, Sam flicked the porch light off, hoping that Will would get the message. Get out or be left in the dark. All sound from outside ceased for a few moments, and then the sniffing picked up again.

"Let me explain," Will said brokenly through the door. "Please, just -- let me in, I'll explain, and I brought this cake, and..."

Sam could handle the sniffing, but he could hear tears in Will's voice, and he couldn't stop himself from opening the door again. This time, he made sure to leave the screen door shut and locked tight so that there was a barrier between them. Sam should've known better than to open his door to a stranger in the dark. He had, after all, spent the last few years living in New York City, but there was something about Will.

Will blinked a few times, wiping a few stray tears off his cheek. "Just let me in," he said in a soft voice, pressing a hand against the screen. "I know where the spare key is hidden, anyway."

"Um." Sam began to reevaluate the situation. He took a step back, eyeing a steel poker leaning against the fireplace nearby. If he needed to, he could quickly leap over to it and protect himself.

But Will looked harmless. His eyes didn't look crazy. They looked defeated and miserable. And what harm could Will really do? Deadly assault by cake?

"What is it?" Sam asked quietly.

"I'm not into breaking and entering," Will said. "Just let me inside, you have to let me inside."

"I don't have to do anything."

"This house," Will said. "You have no idea what you're doing."

"Get off my property, or I'll have to call the police," Sam told him, bluffing. He was more annoyed now than afraid.



A little gasp escaped Will's mouth, and he looked down at the cake in his hands. "Your property? I can hardly imagine that. Audrey wouldn't..."

Sam had enough. He started to close the heavy door, and Will reached a hand out, touching the screen again. "Wait!"

"You have a five minutes to get off my property," Sam said. "Then I'm calling the police. All right? Good night."

Sam shut the door and locked it. He walked away, leaving the young man on his porch with that damn cake and suitcase. Sam grabbed the steel poker, just in case, and went upstairs.

\*\*\*

Hours later in his office, Sam didn't know what to do. He sat, feeling heavy and achy with fatigue, but he couldn't sleep. It was nearing two-thirty in the morning. Sam wasn't a night owl. He rarely saw these hours unless he had something good going with his writing, which was a nonexistent occurrence lately.

He leaned over his desk and peered out the front window, down to the wraparound driveway. He groaned softly.

The man was still there.

"Jesus," Sam murmured, sitting back in his chair and rubbing at his forehead. He still couldn't believe what had happened earlier. He stared out the window again; Will was in his driveway, sitting on a suitcase, cake in hand. He looked miserable but determined.

He can't intend on staying out there all night, Sam thought.

Will didn't look like he was planning on moving anytime soon, though.

Sam opened the small drawer in his desk and stared down at the little stack of letters inside. Each letter was addressed to Audrey Green in neat, curly penmanship. The sender was Will Adler.

"What have I gotten myself into?" Sam wondered aloud. He shut the drawer and focused his gaze on his typewriter. There was one sheet of paper in it, completely blank. "A letter," he mumbled. He put his fingers on the keys of his typewriter, and for the first time in a year, began to write.

\*\*\*

Sam awoke, startled, at the sound of the ferry horn booming from the harbor. Sam had thought the ferry horn was a charming addition to the Newport atmosphere when he first moved into the house, but the sound of the horn was louder than his alarm clock, and went off four hours earlier. Sam's face was pressed against a stack of papers on his desk. He must have fallen asleep.

Light spilled in across his desk, and he could also feel it warm on his back and neck. He'd chosen this room to be his office, not only for the view -- the shoreline behind him and the green, rolling fields before him -- but because it was the most well-lit room of the house. There were two windows, one at the front of the house, and one at the back. His desk faced the front, though when he first moved in, it had faced the ocean. But he had easily become distracted by the workings on the harbor, no matter how inspiring they may have been. So, he'd turned his desk to face the fields. The room had obviously been intended to be the master bedroom, but Sam, when inspired to write, would spend far more time in front of a typewriter than in a bed.

He rubbed at his eyes and then gaped down at the papers he'd been sleeping on. They were filled with words. Had he really written until he'd passed out?

"Oh my god," he said, a smile overtaking his face. "Oh my god!" He stood in glee and gazed out the window. The memories of the night before came back to him.

His driveway was empty.

Sam bounded down the stairs and threw open the door. On his front step was the chocolate cake.

Sam shook his head. What the hell was going on?

The ferry horn blared and the tide washed in.

## Chapter Two

*... And Eat It, Too*

Sam spent the whole day dozing on his couch in front of his old black and white TV. He was a stranger to technology, could never get the hang of it. He didn't own a cell phone, he couldn't even comprehend a DVD player, and he did all his writing on a heavy, black typewriter, so old he had to custom order new ink for it every few months.

He didn't mind the hassle, but the same couldn't be said for his editors, who had pleaded with him to switch to digital. Sam wasn't falling for that fad, just like he wasn't falling for the bullshit praise his editors sent his way. He knew that they knew his writing was useless swill, but as long as his garbage kept selling, they would keep kissing his ass.

He slept on his worn leather couch in the almost empty living room. He didn't have enough furniture to fill his new home. He could barely furnish his little apartment in New York. All he needed was a desk, his trusty typewriter, and a place to rest his head. Oh, and some inspiration, too.

The world had faded in and out to him all day as the news played on the small TV set. He was exhausted after the previous night; it already seemed so long ago, but as he dozed, the steel poker rested on his belly.

Will Adler may have seemed harmless, but Sam wasn't taking any chances. Each time the ferry horn blared, Sam jerked from his sleep and peered out the front window at the driveway, half expecting to see the young man camped out. Will had tears smudged down his face and dirt on his smart, black boots, elaborate cake in hand.

What was up with the cake? It still sat on Sam's porch.

"Major oil spill in Texas causes mayhem," the reporter on the TV droned. Sam's eyelids started to feel heavy again. He drifted to sleep, slipping into a quiet world where writer's block was a myth and cakes on doorsteps were delicious.

He woke with a start to incessant pounding on his front door. The steel poker fell to the floor with a clank as he sat up. "Ahh." He picked up the poker and walked carefully toward the door. As far as he knew, this Will guy could be crazy.

His first reaction was to peer out the window and look for a suitcase and a cake. He didn't see anything.

But then Sam moved the curtain farther aside and dropped the poker. Standing on the front step was Grant, looking as cocky as ever, trademark smirk planted firmly on his face. Grant had a right to be cocky, had a right to wear that smirk, because he had the right voice to get anything he wanted.

Sure, no one knew him by name, but the moment he opened his mouth and that deep rumbling voice came out, panties dropped. It also helped that he was a downright handsome man, classically so. He had broad, muscled shoulders, bright blue eyes, and short, golden

blond hair. He spent much of his time around a pool or on the beach, so he was tan and fresh faced.

Sam opened the door and scowled to see his friend holding the chocolate cake.

“Man, someone left a cake out in the rain,” Grant said with a wink. He handed the cake over and pushed into the house.

“Ha, ha,” Sam said.

“Seriously, it’s about to rain.”

Sam looked out the door, and the clouds were indeed dark and ominous. The sky threatened rain, and the cake threatened Sam.

“Let’s cut up that bad boy; I’m starved,” Grant said, heading off to the kitchen. Sam quickly locked the door and followed his friend through the living room to the kitchen. Once in the tiny kitchen, the two sat around a large, wooden dining table. It took up nearly all the space in the room, and while Sam had a fully functioning dining room, he preferred to eat in the kitchen. The dining room was the grandest area of the house, with dark wood floors and high ceilings adorned with carved woodwork. But the room was too dark for Sam’s taste, and he hated the formal atmosphere of the room. If he was going to dine alone, he preferred the coziness of the kitchen.

Sam looked across the table at his friend. “We’re not eating the cake,” he said firmly.

“The hell we’re not,” Grant said. His voice meant business.

“Don’t give me that horror movie voiceover bullshit,” Sam said, walking to the trash. “The cake goes. Some random guy left it on my doorstep.”

Grant chuckled, smirk still in place. The man never knew when to quit; Sam was pretty sure he’d never seen his friend without that smirk. “Sam, Sam, Sam, no one’s trying to poison you like in your little mystery novels. You don’t have fans, remember?”

Sam didn’t take it as a personal offense; this was what they did, insulted the living hell out of each other and then laughed it off. “It wasn’t a fan,” Sam said. “I’ll tell you the story, if you get away from the cake.”

Grant raised an eyebrow and sat back in his chair, waiting for Sam to seat himself again. “Let me guess, it was a dark and stormy night?”

Sam sighed. “It was last night.”

“Not so dark and stormy,” Grant boomed. He grinned lopsidedly at Sam. “What happened? Seriously. You look... not right.”

“This guy... this weird, weird guy... He pounded on my door last night, waving a cake around, and he had a suitcase. He wanted to be let in.”

Grant burst out laughing. “What?”

Sam shrugged. “And the weird thing, he kept throwing the name around of this lady. Audrey Green. I’ve been getting her mail. Grant, you’ve lived here for a long time. Did you know who used to live in this house?”

“Uh, sort of,” Grant said. “Big fuckin’ scandal took place in this house, that’s all I know.”

“Are you shitting me, man?”

“No. No, no. A couple lived here, I think. I travel so much, you know. I don’t really hang around town,” Grant said. “I don’t know everything that goes on around here.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah.”

Grant sighed dramatically. “All I know is the husband cheated on the wife, and the wife got rid of him.”

“What?” Sam felt ill. Was Grant being his usual, overly dramatic self, or had something sinister really happened in this house? “Got rid of?”

“Yep. Everyone in the town thought the husband was gay, too. One of those really gay guys. It was a big shock when they got married. We all knew it wouldn’t last.” Grant gave Sam a look. “I don’t know much about it, though. How it ended, you know? When this house went on the market, I thought of you, man. Thought you’d be able to concentrate and write more of those little books of yours.”

“Grant, are you implying that Audrey murdered her husband and now his ghost is taking the ferry over and haunting me with chocolate cake?” Sam asked, unnerved.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Grant said, putting his hands up. “You’re the writer. You filled in the blanks.”

“Ghosts can’t bake cakes,” Sam said. “And he was very... alive.”

Grant shrugged. “I was merely trying to inspire you. But really, I think they got a divorce and the guy moved to Connecticut.”

“How... inspiring,” Sam said flatly.

Grant smirked and pulled the cake over, opening the plastic covering. “Ghost or not, this looks delicious.”

“I really don’t think you should eat that,” Sam said. Grant was too busy fishing a fork out of the cupboard to answer. “Grant, a random stranger left that on my doorstep. Did I mention he sat outside my house the entire night?”

Grant sniffed at the cake and then scooped up a forkful, sticking his tongue out to taste the frosting. “Smells good, tastes fine.”

“Arsenic is odorless and tasteless, you know,” Sam said. Grant shoveled the cake in anyway, moaning in delight as he did so.

“This is amazing,” Grant said through his mouthful. “This is... orgasmic. Sam, you’ve got to try some, you haven’t been laid in months.”

“Years,” Sam corrected. “I haven’t been laid in years. Two years.”

Grant pushed the cake nearly into Sam’s lap. “You’re going to need the entire cake, then,” he said, licking his lips. “Seriously, that cake was...” He took another bite. “If it’s poison, I’ll die happy.”

Sam stared at the cake. It did look really good. It was a triple layer chocolate cake topped off with chocolate frosting. “You’re probably going to drop dead in a minute.”

“Come on. No one actually poisons cakes and leaves them on porches.”

“Yeah, they do.” Sam sighed and stared at the cake. It looked rich, chocolaty, creamy. He picked up a fork and dug into it. “Here goes nothing.”

He brought the forkful of cake to his lips, and as it entered his mouth, he closed his eyes and let the amazing wave of chocolate wash over him. It was, without a doubt, the best cake he’d ever tasted, poisoned or otherwise.

“Oh, my god,” Sam breathed, swallowing and opening his eyes. “That was...”

Sam trailed off as some movement caught the corner of his eye. He looked out the window into the backyard and gasped softly.

There he was. The man from last night. Will. In his backyard, holding a shovel and wandering around.

“Crud,” Sam said. He stood up, dropping the fork.

Grant, who was still shoveling cake into his mouth, managed to sputter out, “Did you just say ‘crud’? You’re turning into Agatha Christie.”

“Damnfuckshit. Are you happy? He’s back.” Sam walked to the window and glared out. Will was crouching by a tree, the shovel tall and rusty in his grip. “Why is he back? And what is he doing?”

Grant stood and followed the direction of Sam’s glare. “What the...”

“I’ll kill him,” Sam murmured.

“What the hell is she doing out there?” Grant leaned forward, squinting out the window. “You know there’s a girl in your backyard dragging a shovel around, right?”

“That’s not a girl,” Sam said through gritted teeth. “That’s him.”

“No way. That’s not a guy, that’s...”Grant blinked a few times. “That’s a guy? That’s the guy?”

“Yes,” Sam hissed. “Oh god, what is he doing?”

“Wait a minute, I just got a really great idea for your next novel,” Grant said in a low voice. “He poisons unsuspecting country folk, like yourself, and then buries the bodies in the backyard.”

Sam flipped Grant off.

Through the window, Sam could see Will smoothing a hand over the grass and smiling a little. Sam bristled; that was his grass. Sure, he didn’t mow it or water it or caress it like Will was currently doing, but he had paid for it. From his house to the cliff side, it was all Sam’s grass. And if there was one thing Sam couldn’t stand, it was people touching his grass. He said that out loud, and Grant did not look impressed. In the backyard, Will stood up and positioned the shovel in the ground.

Sam groaned and darted to the kitchen door, which led to the backyard. He pushed through the door and called out, “Hey! Hey, you!”

Grant followed close behind, pulling Sam back as Will’s eyes opened wide in surprise.

“You!” Sam yelled.

“Hello,” Will said, hiding the shovel behind his back. “Did you like the cake?”

Sam gaped at him. “Did I like the cake? Did I like the -- no! No, I didn’t like the cake, you-”

“It was delicious,” Grant said, barging in. “Where did you buy it?”

“I baked it,” Will said. He squinted his eyes at Grant. “Do I know you? Your voice sounds so familiar, I swear...”

Grant’s eyes lit up, and Sam huffed. “Huskies Dog Food,” Grant said dramatically, with a flourish of his arms. “The best for your dog.” He nodded. “Ring a bell?”

“Oh, um...”

“He’s a voiceover actor,” Sam said. “You’ve probably heard him on TV. Now would you please get off my property?”

“I’m Grant Flynn,” Grant said, extending his hand. Will held out the shovel, face reddening.

“I’m Will.”

“And this is Sam, Sam Kostas,” Grant said. “He’s a writer.”

“You wouldn’t have heard of me,” Sam said. “Now, why are you skulking around my backyard with a shovel?”

“Your backyard?” Will asked, eyes flashing. “Yours?”

“Yes, my name is on the deed,” Sam said.

“My name is on the back of the door in the third floor bedroom,” Will replied evenly.

Sam was about to say something, but he paused.

“And my height,” Will went on. “And a few dates and symbols and...”

“Your height?” Sam asked.

Grant stepped over to Will and put a hand on his shoulder, but Will withdrew, scowling. “I think we all should go inside and figure this out,” Grant said in his most impressive voice. “Together.”

“Absolutely not,” Sam said immediately, just as Will said, “Finally.”

They glared at each other.

“Come on,” Grant said to Sam. “The kid makes a really good cake.”

Will threw his glare at Grant. “Excuse me? Kid?”

“Fine,” Sam said. “But we stay in the kitchen and... And if you do anything, I’m calling the cops,” he added, looking at Will.

Once again, Sam was on the receiving end of Will’s glare. “Unbelievable.”

\*\*\*

“It’s my house,” Will said, sitting at the kitchen table and glowering at Sam and Grant. “I know you own it now, you paid for it, but...”

“No ‘but’,” Sam replied. “How could it be any more mine than that?”

“I lost my first tooth right over there,” Will said. He pointed toward the kitchen sink. “I baked my first cake in this kitchen. I lost my virginity upstairs.”

Grant snickered.

“I grew up here,” Will said, his voice soft.

“I knew it,” Sam said. “From the moment you stepped on my porch, I could tell you’ve been here before.”

“You don’t look like a local,” Grant said.

“I just so happens I have taste,” Will replied.



Grant smirked. "Oh. I just thought you were gay."

Will gritted his teeth. "I don't see how that's any of your business."

"That's a shame."

"Listen," Will said with a sigh, "All my life, this house is all I've ever known, and I loved it. Then I loved her, and she moved in, and then everything fell apart."

Sam sighed, staring ahead at the cake between them. He looked up at Will and tried to ignore the strange feeling in his belly. It'd been there since the night before, when he first saw Will on his doorstep. "Well, whoever sold it to me obviously didn't want it."

"Obviously," Will repeated, anger flashing in his eyes again. "It's my house. My property."

Sam shook his head. "I bought it."

"No, it's mine. I lost all this in the divorce," Will said. His pale cheeks flushed red. "I lost everything in the divorce. She sold it to you, I know, but it wasn't fair. She knew I had the money to buy it back from her, and she still wanted to hurt me even more."

"At least think it over," Grant said to Sam.

Sam's face reddened to an almost maroon shade. "I can't write anywhere but here," he said firmly. "And Grant, you're the one who showed me the place! I'm not selling it, end of conversation."

"But--" Will began.

"No," Sam said. "And I think you should leave, Mr. Adler. Now."

"Oh, come on," Grant said lightly.

"Out!"

Will squeaked and moved away from Sam. "This isn't the end," Will warned. "I'm not going to take no for an answer."

"No is the only answer, I can guarantee you that," Sam said. "Now, you better go catch your ferry, because if you camp out on my driveway again, I'm calling the police."

Will smiled, a beautiful, toothy, open mouth grin, and for a moment Sam felt his heart pick up its pace at the sight of it. Will truly was an attractive creature, from his long, shiny brown hair, to his slender legs. But Sam wasn't going to let something like his overeager libido get in the way of his decision making processes.

Sam was a serious guy; he always went with his head, never his heart, which may or may not have explained his lack of action over the past two years.

"I'm not taking the ferry," Will said, backing up to the screen door. "I'm staying at a bed and

breakfast down the street. This is my town and my people. I will be back.”

“And I will call the police,” Sam said simply.

“Do what you like,” Will said. “But you haven’t seen the last of me.”

With one last brilliant smile, this one chock full of venom, Will exited the house through the back door, stopping to grab his shovel before he walked down the long driveway.

Sam’s stomach turned anxiously. “I think there was poison in that cake after all,” he said, holding his sides.

“No,” Grant said, shaking his head. “He was just that hot.”

“Same difference, Grant,” Sam said. “Smile full of poison. Besides, you know I don’t do guys. That’s more up your alley.”

“Yeah, you don’t do anyone.” Grant laughed and pushed the cake toward Sam. “Have your cake and eat it, too, Sam, my friend,” he added with a smirk.

Sam stared down at the cake, and it mocked him.

## Chapter Three

### *All's Fair... In Cake and War*

Sam leaned back in his desk chair and let out a long, exhausted breath. He'd spent the entire night writing again. He wasn't even entirely sure what he'd been writing. He'd had flashes of lighthouses, of unopened letters, of waves crashing against cliffs and shovels leaning against old trees.

His writing felt like a dream sequence, not entirely making sense to him. He'd never felt more inspired. It was like his fingers couldn't stop typing; his mind took over and told a story.

And the cake. The cake had been there, too.

Sam took one last bite of the succulent chocolate cake and realized that he'd eaten the whole thing by himself. He set his fork down on the desk and picked up a few cake crumbs with his fingers, licking them with a groan.

"Damn," he murmured, rubbing a hand over his middle and stretching. What a night it had been. He glanced up at the windows and saw that it was nearing dawn. The old lighthouse, which sat atop a jetty some ways into the ocean, had stopped its searching beams, and the sun had started to rise.

He stood up and gave a disparaging look at the empty cake platter. It had been a damn good cake, Sam had to admit. He may have hated Will, but the hate spoke nothing of how he felt about the cake Will had produced.

Sam shook his head and stumbled closer to the ocean side window. He looked out at the expanses of green grass that faded into beachy sand and then descended into a rocky cliff. It was a beautiful property for sure.

He turned and walked to the opposite window. Then he noticed that sitting in a field beside his driveway was Will. He was in a lawn chair, and he had sunglasses on that covered almost half his face. He held a magazine loosely in his hands, and his head was back, his feet crossed. Beside him sat a leather shoulder bag, a glass of lemonade, and that damn shovel.

"Unbelievable," Sam muttered. How long had the young man been there? Sam had clearly warned him that if he pulled that stunt again, the police would be called. "I'll kill him."

Sam pulled on his shoes and a sweatshirt and clomped down the stairs. The sun had almost completely risen, everything was bright. He staggered out the front door and marched down his porch steps, across the lawn, and over the driveway.

"Are you an idiot?" Sam yelled angrily as he approached Will.

Will flinched and sat up in his chair. He peered over his sunglasses and yawned. "Oh, hey. It's you again."

"Me again? I live here!" Sam said, frustrated. "Get off my property!"

"I'm not on your property." Will smiled. "Or my property."

"I told you I'd call the police if I found you out here again," Sam warned.

"You know, I saw the light on upstairs all night," Will said, eerily calm. "Up in my old bedroom. What were you doing into the wee hours of the morning?"

Sam furrowed his brows. "Why do you care?"

"I want to know what's going on in my bedroom."

"Your bedroom..." Sam trailed off, shaking his head. "That's my office. I was writing. I'm a writer."

"I know," Will said, rolling his eyes.

"Get out."

"No."

"I'll call the police," Sam warned again.

"Empty threat. Besides, don't I inspire you?" Will asked, lowering his sunglasses and smirking.

Sam held his tongue. True, he hadn't felt like writing a word until Will had shown up, but that meant nothing. Sam obviously needed to feel some emotion to get his creativity flowing, and Will had just happened to piss him off enough to get Sam writing again.

It had nothing to do with Will.

"I'm going back into my house," Sam said slowly. "And I am calling the police to escort you off my property."

"Do whatever you need to do." Will flashed another smile and pulled his sunglasses back on, sliding down in the chair and sighing. "I'll be relaxing out here on Mrs. Hastings's property."

Sam turned, poised to march straight to the house and make his call. "Mrs. Who?"

"Oh, that's right, you're one of those hermit writer types. You probably don't know your neighbors," Will said in a bored tone. He gestured behind himself across the large field of wheat to a tiny farm house in the distance. Sam could hardly call whoever lived there a neighbor; the house looked like a dot. "Mrs. Hastings lives there, all alone, poor dear, since her husband passed in '98. She's a close friend of the family. She's invited me over for the day. So, I am technically on her property. If you want, you can go down to city hall and check the property lines, but this side of the driveway is all Mrs. Hastings's."

Sam crossed his arms, his brow furrowing deeply. "You're going to sit here all day and that's it?"

Will smiled. "Perfect day for lounging."

"You're going to sit there all day and watch my house," Sam said again.

"It's a nice view," was Will's response. "I've got a perfect look up into your office. Did you enjoy the cake?"

That had Sam fuming. "I have no food in the house," he said quickly.

"It's all right to hate me and love my cake," Will said with a shrug. "Though, if you'd have been nice to me from the start, you'd know I can be just as sweet."

"I don't care about... about... your cake!" Sam bellowed. "Ugh! You are something else, I'll tell you that."

"Thank you," Will said.

"That wasn't a compliment."

"Oh, you simply don't realize yet that it was," Will said. "I'll bring you another cake and maybe you'll change your mind. Maybe this time... pineapple upside-down cake. Do you like pineapple, Mr. Kostas?"

Sam was so angry he didn't know which way to turn. He glowered at Will for a few moments and then turned on his heel to go back inside.

"Tell the police chief I said 'hi'," Will called after him. "His daughter was my best friend in high school!"

"Go to hell," Sam mumbled, crossing the driveway and climbing up the steps to disappear into the house. Relations to the police chief be damned -- what Will was doing was wrong, and Sam was going to put a stop to it. He marched through the foyer and straight to the kitchen where his old rotary phone was. He picked it up and let out a long, frustrated breath.

Turning around to look out the window at Will again, Sam saw that Will was no longer alone. He had the company of an elderly lady who was holding a tray of lemonade and looking quite cheerful with bright eyes and rosy cheeks.

"Where the hell did she come from?" Sam mumbled. There was at least two hundred yards between Sam's house and the old lady's, who was obviously Mrs. Hastings. "She must have been some kind of a track star." He stared out the window again.

Will had his sunglasses pushed up on his forehead, and he beamed at her, accepting some more lemonade. Sam walked to the window and opened it slightly, leaning in to get a listen.

"... not surprised you've never seen him," Will was saying loudly. "He's so incredibly reclusive -- is that the word? Oh, he's a writer, Mrs. H., you know how those writer types can be."

The elderly woman, presumably Mrs. Hastings, nodded, looking at Sam's house with a concerned expression.

"He's so rude," Will went on. "Smells a little, too. That's why they never come out, you know. Their lifestyle is... ech."

Sam's fists clenched in anger as Will glanced at the window he was standing at. Their eyes connected, and Sam could tell by Will's expression that he knew Sam could hear everything. The smirk on Will's face made that very obvious.

"Well, dear, you're welcome to visit with me as long as you like," Mrs. Hastings told Will, patting his hair lovingly. She stepped to the side, and Sam almost laughed when he saw a pair of worn running shoes on her feet. "It's a shame that your family doesn't own the house anymore. You know I wasn't too fond of the last owner, either."

Will heaved a loud sigh. "I hate to see this house deteriorate, with all the memories... Do you see what he's let happen to the lawn? Disgusting."

"Well, you did say his hygiene wasn't that good," Mrs. Hastings replied, frowning.

"I wish he'd reconsider my offer," Will said. "It's been a tough year for me..."

"You poor darling," Mrs. Hastings cooed. "He has to be a really unfeeling person not to understand your situation. How about I make you some cookies?"

"You're sweet. You always were my inspiration when it came to the kitchen," Will said, still gazing out at the house. "Look at the flowers, Mrs. H, ruined. They need watering every other day." Will pointed across the driveway to the house. There were withered flowers nestled all around the edge of the house and porch. Dying flowers lined the gravel driveway. For a moment, Sam felt a little ashamed for not looking after them, but he was no gardener. He was a writer.

"Your mother always had the most beautiful flowers," Mrs. Hastings said. "I have it in my right mind to go over there and give that boy a talking to."

Sam paled a little where he stood. Old people had always freaked him out just a little, especially people as old as Mrs. Hastings. She looked about eighty, and the flowery, dust-speckled apron she wore was no less intimidating. Sam clearly remembered visiting his grandmother in the nursing home when he was five. He'd wandered off and found himself surrounded by a roomful of gray-haired, wrinkly-faced, cheek pinching grannies who all had thought Sam was their grandson. The fight that had ensued over the confused boy was nothing short of horrifying. They'd scarred him for life and given him a severe aversion to all things antique.

Well, besides his typewriter. That thing was ancient.

"And you know, he said he'd call the police on me," Sam heard Will say, pulling him out of his reverie.

"He'll do no such thing," Mrs. Hastings said. "He throws his garbage down by the street

without a bin, that's a waste hazard. If he brings the police over here, they'll get a piece of my mind, I tell you what."

Sam gulped and put the phone down.

He was trapped again. "God damn it," Sam hissed angrily, squeezing his fists into a ball. It became clear that Will was in this for keeps, and Sam couldn't possibly get any writing done. Not with Will sitting there, leering at him all day.

"Are you sure you're okay out here?" Mrs. Hastings asked Will.

"Oh, yeah. I'm fine, thank you," Will said sweetly. "It's so peaceful out here, you know? I'm going to have a nice, relaxing day."

"Who's running the shop back in Mystic?"

"Joseph," Will said. "He can't bake worth a damn, but at least the shop will be organized while I'm gone. We hired a couple of kids for the summer to work there; they'll manage without me."

"No one can bake like you can," Mrs. Hastings said fondly, ruffling Will's hair again. "Abner always loved your pastries. It's such a shame you had to move away. Newport hasn't been the same without you."

"Well, I told you about the new bakery, right? We're going to open a second branch of Das Essen right here in downtown Newport," Will said proudly. "And I'll be moving back here to manage it. Hopefully back into my house."

Mrs. Hastings smiled wide. "Oh, that is good news."

"Bullshit," Sam mumbled. He stared at Will venomously. Every sweet word that left the young man's lips made Sam scowl harder, and as he took a few steps back from the window, he knew exactly what he had to do.

\*\*\*

Sam shoved the door to the shed open and grinned triumphantly. In the corner, rusted and full of cobwebs, sat an old, red lawn mower. He dragged it out of the shed and pushed it down the wraparound driveway to the front of the house, the machine creaking and squeaking the entire way. He stood directly across from Will, only the driveway between them.

Will, now alone with a fresh glass of lemonade and a plate of cookies, looked up from his magazines to watch Sam.

"What the hell are you doing with that?" Will called.

Sam smiled as sweetly as he knew how. "I thought I'd do some lawn work."

"That lawn mower hasn't worked since I was eighteen," Will said. "Good luck."

Sam's smile didn't fade as he pulled the cord to the mower and the machine roared to life. "Seems to be working fine!" Sam yelled over the noise.

"It's not going to cut evenly!" Will yelled back.

Sam chuckled. He didn't care about the lawn, not one little bit. It didn't matter if the lawn mower worked or not. He only wanted to make as much noise as he could for as long as humanly possible. Sam rolled the mower near the edge of the driveway and sat it there.

The mower was about ten feet from Will, and it roared so loud the ice cubes in Will's glass were shaking.

"What the hell!" Will hollered. Sam winked and slipped a pair of foam plugs in his ears. "That's fucking loud!"

"What?!" Sam cried over the blasting noise of the mower. "I can't hear you!"

"I said that's... ugh!" Will stood, as if he might cross the driveway onto Sam's property, but then stopped himself.

Sam shook his head. "I wouldn't do that if I were you!"

Will stomped his foot and put his hands over his ears. All he had to do was cross the driveway and turn off the mower, but Sam knew he wouldn't. He'd be crossing battle lines with no ammunition.

"I'm gonna go take a nap! I'll be back in a few hours to check on this." Sam turned and walked back to the house victoriously. There was no way Will could sit there and take that noise, no way. Even with earplugs in, Sam felt a migraine coming on, and Will seemed like a very delicate creature. This lesson would be well learned.

As Sam opened the screen door to the house the roaring stopped abruptly. Had Will crossed the threshold onto his property and turned off the mower?

Sam whipped around to find Will back in his lawn chair, grinning.

"Must have run out of gas," Sam heard Will say. Will leaned back and sunned himself. "Just your luck."

Sam stared blankly at the dead lawn mower. He pulled his earplugs out and frowned. "Great."

Will lay in his chair, turning his neck to the side an inch, allowing for some more sun on his pale skin.

"Fine," Sam mumbled, going down the stairs and skirting along the edge of the house, looking for something. "Noise isn't the only way to get rid of an asshole. Ah ha..."



Sam stumbled upon an old hose, and he picked it up with a grin. He turned the spigot and a staggering stream of water jerked out of the nozzle, splashing the side of the house with much force. Sam chuckled in delight, feeling slightly crazed having not slept in over twenty-four hours, and hoisted the hose over his shoulder to the front of the house.

He waved at Will, who still hadn't budged, and started whipping the hose around. "Gonna water some of the flowers," Sam explained. "Shame that they've been let go."

"Shut up," Will said lazily.

Sam crept closer to Will, covering half of the nozzle with his thumb so that the cold water streamed out more powerfully. He held the hose up and sprayed it dangerously close to where Will was settled. Will watched, clearly amused.

"I know you're not going to spray me on Mrs. Hastings's property," Will said, flipping a page casually in his magazine. "Besides, as much as you may want to appear badass, with your little crime novels and what not, I know for a fact that you--"

Sam sprayed Will's glass of lemonade, tipping it over. Will jumped and hid behind his magazine.

"How dare you!" Will screeched. "There aren't any flowers in this field!"

"I disagree," Sam said, eyes flashing. Will lowered his magazine and cringed. "You're quite the lovely little flower, aren't you?" He took a step forward onto the gravel driveway.

Will huffed. "Don't come any closer."

"I won't trespass on Mrs. Hastings's property," Sam said. "And you know what, you're right, there aren't any flowers in this field. But weeds have a right to live, too, don't they?" Sam held up the hose.

"You wouldn't!"

And just like that, Sam pressed his thumb down and sent a thick stream of water straight into Will's face. Sam didn't realize that part of the hose was hanging down near Will's feet, and it would have been all too easy for Will to reach down and grab it.

Which was exactly what Will did.

He tugged the hose out of Sam's hands, swearing so loud Sam's ears rang. "You rotten, rotten human being!" Will yelled, and directed the water first in Sam's surprised face, and then all down his long body. "Take that!"

"Ahh!" Sam cried, sputtering and stumbling backwards. The water was freezing cold, and he started shivering right away. "Asshole!"

Will laughed, on his feet, wielding the hose like a pro. He positioned his thumb over the nozzle so that the stream hit Sam intensely. It knocked Sam back a few steps. Sam retreated

back into his yard, running up the stairs and into the house. He slammed the door shut behind him.

He leaned against the door, panting and cursing. Will had won. He'd won, and now Sam was shivering, wet, and exhausted.

Sam looked out the window again. Will had gone back to reclining on his lawn chair, looking at his magazines with his sunglasses on. Sam shook his head. He was out of ideas. He couldn't annoy Will away. Calling the police seemed pointless, because everybody seemed to adore Will.

Sam slid down the wall and sat on the floor, pulling his knees to his chest and sighing. If he'd known that signing the deed to the house would come with all of this, he would never have set foot in Newport. He hated Will. He wanted to wring Will's neck and slap the sweet smile right off his face.

Sam stood up and looked out the window again. Will was on a cell phone now, chatting away. The hose had been tossed back onto Sam's property.

"Asshole," Sam said. He glared out the window and turned to go take a rest on the couch. A nap was in order. He had to regroup.

This meant war.

## Chapter Four

### *Wilhelm and Samuel*

When Sam woke up on the couch, disoriented and sore, it was completely dark in the living room. His mouth tasted like a sock, and his back was killing him.

“Will,” he hissed, pulling himself up. He’d given up earlier, and Will had won. The man was probably tucked in all warm and cozy at his bed and breakfast, gloating over the victory. Sam stumbled to the door, wiping at his face.

He should probably haul the lawn mower and the hose back into the shed. A glance at the clock told him it was nearly midnight. He yawned and kicked the front door open, in no mood for niceties.

What met his gaze as he stepped out onto the porch made his fists clench. Will was camped out at the edge of the field, a fire blazing and a tent set up. He was roasting marshmallows, looking quite pleased with himself. Sam almost found himself smiling at the scene. It was rather quaint, actually, though the sky was a bit overcast, blocking the stars from view. However, fireflies blinked in and out, creating little galaxies of light all across the yard.

“You have got to be kidding me!” Sam yelled.

Will looked up. “Oh, you again.”

“Me again...” Sam let out a sigh and folded his arms, counting to ten in his head. He didn’t want to blow up at Will. That got them nowhere, and the last time he’d yelled at Will, he’d ended up with wet pants.

The pants were still a little damp, and Sam was trying to calm himself down. The scent of burning marshmallow filtered into his nostrils, and Will looked sweeter than ever, sitting in the little lawn chair with a kebab stick of gooey fluff.

“You should give up,” Sam said, grinding his teeth. The way Will was looking at him was infuriating. “I think we both know how this will end.”

Will put on a pout, curling up in his chair and pulling a blanket around his shoulders. “Your name’s Sam, right?”

“Yes.”

“Short for...”

“Samuel,” Sam mumbled, his voice easily carrying through the yard to where Will sat.

“Nice.” Will smiled, tucking his feet under himself. “My dad’s name was Klaus.”

“So?”

“So...” Will shrugged. “He built that porch you’re standing on with his bare hands. The porch used to be a deep red, but my mother thought it looked tacky, so they white-washed the entire house. Are your pants still wet?”

Sam narrowed his eyes. “Little bit.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Will clarified. “You don’t know how badly I want this.”

“You,” Sam said stiffly, “don’t know how badly I don’t want you to have this.”

“Well, then we’re going to continue to have a problem,” Will said. “I’ve got all the time in the world, and Mrs. Hastings said I can camp out as long as I like.”

“You won’t last more than one night out here,” Sam said.

“Oh yeah? One summer I camped out for an entire month,” Will said. “I know I look a little... high maintenance.” Sam coughed. “But I can hack it out here as well as any man with half as much fashion sense.”

Sam crossed his arms and stared Will down. “I am not giving up my house, no matter how annoying you are.”

Will pulled his marshmallow away from the flames and blew on it a little. He arched his eyebrow at Sam and very slowly slid the warm, mushy substance into his mouth, humming in delight as he pulled the stick out from between his lips. A little piece of sugary fluff stuck to his upper lip.

Sam almost stomped his foot; this was bad, really bad. He put on a brave front even as he felt a weird stirring in his belly. He didn’t know what to say, and luckily, as Will sat there molesting another marshmallow, the sky answered for him.

Thunder rolled in the distance, and Sam’s hopes went up.

“Was it a very dry month when you camped out?” Sam asked.

“A little rain isn’t going to scare me away.”

Sam knew that Newport wasn’t expecting a little rain. They were expecting flood conditions. Despite his disdain for technology, a few days before he’d found himself camped out in front of his black and white television completely riveted and wrapped up in a Golden Girls marathon. A news broadcast had interrupted a very important episode of his show, one where Blanche and Dorothy were mistaken for lesbians, and the forecast wasn’t looking good. Sam’s lips curled up in pleasure so sadistic that Will dropped his stick to the ground. The thunder boomed again, and lightning darted across the sky in a jagged, electric streak.

The first wet raindrop landed on Will’s eyelid and slipped down his cheek like a tear.

“But a lot of rain will send you packing,” Sam said, folding his arms and taking a step back so that he was sheltered under the porch roof. “Having fun?”

Will closed one eye and gazed at the sky. The raindrops came down on his fire and made little tsss tsss sounds. Will's expression was no longer the sickeningly sweet one he often wore; now it was an expression of defeat.

"You planned this," Will said shakily.

"Yeah, I control the weather and all. I really am a bastard, huh?" Sam said sarcastically. He leaned against the house and let out a bark of laughter. Will fussed as the raindrops grew fatter and heavier. "Man, I could get pretty comfy up here."

Tsss tsss.

Will stood and cursed, his clothes dampening. His flat hair was starting to curl at the bottom, and the marshmallows turned soggy.

Soon it was a gentle downpour, and Will was putting on a great show of flailing around his little tent, kicking things and swearing loudly. Sam chuckled to himself, shaking his head. Maybe Will had soaked him before, but now the entire world was soaking Will and it felt so good to watch.

"Samuel!" Will managed, holding the blanket over his head. "Stop just fucking standing there!"

Sam laughed loudly, watching Will run around, trying to save his precious camp. The gentle downpour turned torrential, and soon Sam could barely see Will through the thick sheet of rain.

"Stop laughing!" Will yelled. "Stop, this isn't funny!"

A clap of thunder sounded, startling them both, but Sam kept laughing. "No, I think it's pretty damn hilarious."

Will frowned and moved to grab his shoulder bag, but he slipped on a mud ball and fell with a smack onto his ass. Sam doubled over with painful laughter as Will whined shrilly, fussing more than Sam knew was possible.

"Jackass!" Will called out. He tried to get up, but the mud was too slippery, and he flopped around like a fish in the muck. "Oh, my god, this is completely disgusting."

"Oh, do you need some help?" Sam asked. He stepped out from the porch, the rain soaking him.

"Yes!" Will squeaked, shoving his bag into the tent and trying to stand.

Sam didn't mind the rain now. He walked across the driveway, whistling as the rain pounded down, and picked up the hose.

"What are you doing?" Will yelled, turning to face Sam on his knees.

Sam smirked and twisted the hose on. The water burst forward right into Will's gobsmacked

face. It was more satisfying than writing twenty pages of New York Times Best Seller gold. Will sputtered and grabbed at Sam's legs.

Now, this part of the plan wasn't so well thought out.

Sam's feet slipped, and he tumbled forward, crushing Will back into the mud. The position was awkward, uncomfortable, slimy, and yet Sam felt a sort of satisfaction as he pressed Will's face into a pile of sludge.

But Will turned out to be more of a formidable foe than Sam had anticipated. Sam found himself on his back with Will hovering over him.

"This is all your fault!" Will yelled. "Why did you have to ruin my life?"

"Your life?" Sam tried shoving Will off, but Will only held him down tighter. "Let me go, you freakish baker!"

"Hermit!" Will yelled.

"Go bake a fuckin' cake!"

"Eat me!"

Sam thrashed around and finally threw Will off him. He stood, eyes stinging from the rain, and kicked out at Will's grabbing hands. "Let me go!"

Sam took a step to the left, but Will's arms caught him and he tripped, his ankle twisting as he fell. The pain laced through him instantly. Sam had felt this kind of pain before. He'd played soccer when he was in high school, and he'd twisted his ankle multiple times.

"Get off, off!" Sam managed, clutching at his ankle and groaning. Will continued digging his nails in, but Sam threw him a look so venomous that Will propelled himself away and frowned.

"What, what?" Will asked through the downpour. "What happened?"

"My ankle," Sam moaned. "Oh god, it hurts, it..."

"This is a trick," Will said warily, scooting back. "You're gonna... You're gonna pour mud down my throat or something."

Sam shook his head. He was almost blacking out, the pain was so great. "I'm serious, this is bad. I need to... Ouch!"

He tried to stand on his good leg, but the slippery mud made it difficult, and the only thing to hold onto was Will. Sam would have rather spilled to the ground and crawled away before he'd grab onto Will for support.

And yet, Will was reaching forward, a somewhat concerned look on his face. "Shit, let's get you inside."

“No!” Sam protested. “No, don’t step on my property!”

“Shut up,” Will said. “You’re being such a god damn baby, let me help you in.”

“No, it’s a trick,” Sam said desperately. The pain and the rain and the mud and the thought of Will getting what he wanted, all of it was making Sam feel nauseated. “Just... Leave me alone, I’ll go inside and you get the hell off my property and it’ll all be okay.”

“I’m not going anywhere, and you can’t walk by yourself,” Will said. The rain was beginning to pound down even harder, and Will pushed the long hair off his forehead and grabbed at Sam’s arm.

“I’ll crawl,” Sam said, his voice pathetic.

Will rolled his eyes and pulled Sam up. “Lean on me, dumbass, I’m not going to drop you.”

The pain was so intense that Sam listened. He stood up with a yelp of agony and wrapped his arms around Will’s waist. They moved through the mud slowly, Sam wincing in pain at every step.

“You men are so stupid,” Will mumbled as they got up on the driveway.

“What does that make you, a chick?” Sam asked.

“Shut up and work with me here.”

Sam sighed as Will dragged him over to the porch, complaining the whole way. “God, don’t put your hands there!”

“What?”

“You’re molesting me.”

“In your dreams,” Sam groaned, feeling childish, but he was in too much pain to care. “Okay, fine, we’re on the porch, just leave me here. And go. Or I’ll... I’ll call 911 and they’ll... They’ll arrest you.”

Will snorted. “Oh, no you don’t.”

Sam struggled away from Will’s grip and broke free, falling onto the hard wood floor of the porch. The front door was mere feet away. Sam could make it on his own.

“Okay, thanks,” Sam said, looking up at Will from the ground. “Now, uh... Go away. And go to hell.”

Will folded his arms. “Go inside, then.”

Sam made a face and tried to crawl across the threshold, but his ankle spasmed and he let out a wail of anguish. Next thing he knew, Will was hoisting him up and dragging him to the door.

“No,” Sam said weakly. “Don’t come in, don’t...”

“You big fucking baby,” Will murmured. He managed to get Sam inside and kicked the door shut behind them. Sam felt completely defeated. Will had won again, hadn’t he? He was inside the house, and Sam was helpless. “Jeez, you don’t really know how to decorate, do you?”

“Can you not be a huge bitch?” Sam requested. “This is sort of humiliating -- ouch!”

“There, there,” Will said sarcastically. “Let’s get you to the couch... God, you weigh a ton.”

Will managed to drag Sam to the couch, and Sam collapsed on the cushions, cringing and twisting his ankle even more. Will immediately rushed to the end of the couch and put Sam’s foot up on a throw pillow. Sam didn’t even know that he owned throw pillows.

“Are you okay?” Will asked. “I can’t believe I actually care.”

He sat down on the couch, right next to Sam, and put his chin in his hand. Sam blinked some rain out of his eyes and blearily gazed at Will. The man was fussing again, always fussing. Will had mud all over his face and in his hair. The mud was making the hair stick to his face, and as Will brushed a few strands out of his eyes, he glanced at Sam, and their gazes connected.

Sam couldn’t help but admire how sweet Will looked at that moment, and it didn’t infuriate him. It must have been the pain. He was delirious, and only in that delirious world could he ever think Will was sweet.

“Pain,” Sam groaned out, looking away from Will and grimacing. “Ouch.”

“You’re such an asshole,” was the last thing Sam heard before slipping into a light sleep.

\*\*\*

When Sam woke that next morning he thought he was still dreaming. The most delicious smells reached his nose, and the sounds of pots and pans clanking around reminded him of mornings at his family home in Minnesota.

Sam had grown up in a country home just like this, and his mother was always up and about in the wee hours of the morning, preparing breakfast for his large family. Sam was the youngest of six children, and it had always been a fight to get his fair share of breakfast in the morning, despite the banquet his mother usually prepared.

Now, Sam only had to fight the ants for his food. He hadn’t seen his family in a few years, and the sounds drifting through his sleepy haze made his heart ache with nostalgia.

He realized he wasn’t dreaming when his ankle began to throb in time with his heartbeat and when the constant, high pitched chattering of a certain unwanted guest met his ears.

“Why would anyone put eggs in the vegetable crisper? What the hell has he done with the cupboards? Is that shellacked? For the love of... Who unhooks a garbage disposal?”



“I’m going to kill him,” Sam groaned, staring up at the ceiling.

He tried to sit up, but the pain in his ankle only allowed him to lie there, helpless and unmoving. He was trapped, again. Looking over the back of the sofa, he could see clear into the kitchen, and watched Will fuss around, knocking into things and disappearing behind the island counter a few times. Sam’s stomach rumbled; the scent coming from the kitchen was making his mouth water. He hadn’t eaten anything more complicated than instant soup, TV dinners, and an entire chocolate cake in weeks.

Will popped up from behind the counter and saw that Sam was awake, and he rolled his eyes. “Finally,” Will murmured. He threw down an oven mitt and walked into the living room, over to Sam’s couch. “I thought maybe you died.”

“Unluckily for you,” Sam said, making a face, “I’m still very much alive and owning this house. And I didn’t shellac anything.”

Will frowned, his eyes narrowing into a glare. “Fine. Well, I’m making hotcakes, eggs, and toast, and there’s fresh fruit. I don’t know what you like to eat.”

“Fresh fruit?” Sam raised his eyebrows. “I have fresh fruit?”

“No, Mrs. Hastings from next door has fresh fruit.”

“What time is it?”

Will made a face. “Early. Doctor Parker will be over in about a half hour to look at your ankle.”

“Doctor Parker?” Sam managed to sit up a bit, confused. “Who?”

“The local doctor. Jesus Christ,” Will said with a frustrated sigh. “By the way, now I know you really enjoyed that cake I brought you.”

Sam glared at Will. “You don’t know anything.”

“Yeah, I do. Your kitchen is full of food. Eggs, bread, stuff to make pizza, meat, frozen veggies...” Will smirked. “And you told me you had no food.”

“Go to hell,” Sam mumbled, turning red.

“Already there,” Will said with a cheerful smile. “White or wheat?”

“What?”

“Toast. White or wheat?”

Sam sat up a little more, wincing as his ankle twisted a bit. “Listen, Will... That’s short for William?”

“Wilhelm,” Will said.

“German, isn’t that?”

“Yeah. What’s it to you, Samuel?”

“Okay, Wilhelm, listen up,” Sam said. “No matter how nice you are to me, no matter how many damn cakes you bake, hot or otherwise, I am not giving you this house. So, you can cut the nice act right now.”

Will glared. “You haven’t tried my hotcakes yet; you may change your mind.”

“I never change my mind. I’m pigheaded to a fault. I’m a mystery writer, for fuck’s sake. I have no soul!” Sam huffed. “Why are you even here?”

“I spent the night,” Will said.

Sam almost jumped off the couch to strangle Will. “Where?”

“Um. Here.”

“No, where did you sleep?” Sam demanded.

“Well, since you made my bedroom an office, I stayed in your room,” Will said sweetly. “Nice dinosaur sheets.”

“You little--”

“And when the rest of the mud dries, have fun!” Will exclaimed, and disappeared back into the kitchen, Sam cussing him out colorfully as he went.

Sam flopped down on the couch again, defeated. He couldn’t move, Will was in his house, Will had slept in (and probably gotten mud all over) his bed, and there was nothing Sam could do about it. Fuck.

And Will knew about the dinosaur sheets.

Double fuck.

“Oh, god,” Sam moaned, covering his face with his hands. “Why are you doing this to me? Why? What the hell did I do to deserve this?”

Sam was about to bemoan some more when the scent of breakfast intensified to the point where he had to stop himself from drooling. He was starved. Petty warfare really worked up an appetite. He lowered his hands and opened his eyes and saw Will sitting on the coffee table, a tray full of delicious, steaming breakfast foods in his hand.

“Do you always bitch at the people who serve you food? ‘Cause it makes sense if you do... You’re actually quite skinny for someone who sits on his ass all day, staring at a typewriter,” Will remarked. “Even I don’t want to serve you this food.”

“Shut up, I’m not skinny,” Sam said quietly. “And you’re one to talk. You’re skin and bones.”

“Aw.” Will sighed and looked around the room for a moment. “You ever been married? Your style needs a feminine touch.”

“And I bet you think you’re the one who should do it.”

“Oh god, shit, no,” Will said, making a face. “Don’t even joke about that.”

“Can you please leave now?” Sam asked weakly.

Will nodded. “Are you hungry, Samuel?”

As if in reply, Sam’s stomach growled again, this time loudly.

“Good.” Will set the tray of food down on the end of the coffee table, just out of Sam’s reach. Sam stared at it miserably.

“What am I supposed to do with that?” Sam asked.

Will shrugged. “It’s not my problem... So, I’m leaving. I don’t want Doctor Parker to see me here, you know, with you. People will talk.”

“You wish,” Sam grumbled.

Will let out a laugh. “Have a good day, Samuel.”

“Wait!” Sam whined. “The food!”

It smelled delicious, and Sam knew he couldn’t get it himself without a struggle. It was a bit too far away, and his ankle was inflamed even more today. Will folded his arms and pouted in mock sympathy.

“I hope you like my hotcakes,” was all he said, and then he disappeared.

Sam grabbed a pillow, held it to his face, and let out a frustrated scream.

## Chapter Five

### *Pineapple Upside-Down Cake*

Three hours later, Sam sat glumly in front of his typewriter, eying up his best friend with much disdain. The rain had finally turned into a delicate drizzle, and while the clouds had cleared, Sam felt like he had his own personal rain cloud following him everywhere. And the worst part was, he wasn't going anywhere. After a visit from Doctor Parker, Sam was ordered to stay off his feet and on the couch for at least another day. Luckily, Grant had stopped by, and now the two sat together in the living room.

"Grant, it doesn't help that he's hot. In fact, it's a hindrance. It makes him more of a bitch. It makes him a Mega Bitch. Because he's sitting there bitching at me, covered in mud, and still looking attractive. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

Grant smirked. Nothing new there. "So, you wouldn't mind if I take him out?" Grant asked.

Sam grimaced and pushed the typewriter away. "His hotcakes were delicious, too. It's so unfair."

"Wah, wah, wah," Grant said. "Poor Sam. The hottest thing in town is sleeping in your bed and force feeding you baked goods. Excuse me while I turn green with envy."

Sam sat up a little more. "The problem is, you think with your dick," he explained evenly.

"The problem is, you apparently don't have a dick," Grant replied. "The only muscle you have between your legs is another brain."

"That doesn't even make sense. Your brain isn't a muscle, it's an organ."

"You just proved my point." Grant's smirk softened. "Besides, that's not the point. Maybe you should get to know the guy, you know, walk a mile in his gay little boots."

"He doesn't seem that gay," Sam said.

Grant's eyes bugged out a smidge. "Did you hit your head, too, when you fell?"

"Just twisted the ankle," Sam said. "And Doctor Parker said it'd be a week before I can walk again without the crutches. What am I going to do?"

"I'll nurse you back to health; just don't expect any hotcakes from me," Grant said.

"How about lukewarm cakes?"

"Hah. No. And you should write. I hauled all your office shit down for you, and now you'll have all the time in the world to get that novel of yours done. How's it going, by the by?" Grant actually looked interested, and Sam cleared his throat, looking away.

"I keep getting little bursts of inspiration, and then I can't write at all. I don't know what's going on."

“Fascinating.” Grant smirked again.

Sam sighed. “Get out of here, all right? I’ll try to finish my novel that will do nothing for me, but will end up making you even richer when you make it into a book on tape.”

“You can’t stop the inevitable.”

“Go, go,” Sam said, smiling. “But come back soon because...”

“You can’t even get yourself to the bathroom?” Grant supplied.

Sam scowled. “Bye.”

Grant gave a little wave and was gone. Sam leaned his head back and yawned. It had already been an exhausting day, and what had he gotten out of it? A new pair of crutches, the best hotcakes he’d ever eaten in his life, and a little loss of dignity.

And now Sam was staring at his typewriter, uninspired, unmotivated, and cranky.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Sam’s eyes blinked open, blearily, and then widened.

“What the...”

Sitting next to the typewriter, directly in his eye line, was an enormous cake. And it wasn’t just any cake. It was a pineapple upside-down cake.

It smelled beyond amazing.

A loud jostling prompted him to tear his eyes away from the glorious, sugary confection, and he found Will, knees and hands covered in dirt, standing in his doorway. He was holding a small, tin box, his shovel leaning against the wall behind him. He was backlit by the sun, and from the looks of it, it was going to be a lovely day that Sam would be completely unable to enjoy.

“What... What the hell are you doing... here?” Sam asked. “I don’t... How... How? What’s wrong with you?”

Will blew some hair off his forehead. “Don’t flatter yourself, it’s not you I can’t stay away from.” He dusted off the tin box and smiled a little.

“You son of a bitch,” Sam said harshly, sitting up with a groan. “What the hell are you doing and how did you get in?”

“Your smirking friend Grant gave me a set of keys,” Will said.

“Why would... he ever do that?” Sam wondered out loud, but then as he gazed at Will, who looked adorable covered in dirt, he knew exactly why Grant would do something like that.

“Did you sleep with him?” Sam sputtered out.

Will’s face turned from a brilliant smile to a horrified wince. “Oh, god, no. No! No, no, no. He just offered me the house keys and I said yes. Jesus Christ. Your mind is filthy.”

“Your feet are filthy, and you’re tracking mud into the house,” Sam snapped.

“These floors have seen a lot worse. They’re solid oak, and they’ve survived in this world longer than you have. Besides, like you even give a shit. I’ve seen what you’ve done to the place. A little mud on your floors seems to be the least of your worries. When I took a shower this morning, the drain was--”

“When you showered this morning?” Sam gasped. “Here?”

“Samuel, calm down,” Will said, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t call me Samuel!”

“Sammy?”

“Worse,” Sam groaned.

“So, just Sam then?”

Sam nodded stiffly. “Or you could leave and never speak my name again.”

“Sorry, Just Sam, can’t do that,” Will said. Sam made a face. “In payment for the cake, I want you to listen to a story.”

“You are bizarre,” Sam said.

Will smiled and sat on the arm of the couch, just above Sam’s feet. He held up the little tin, and Sam raised an eyebrow.

“Dug some holes in my backyard, did you?”

Will nodded. “And I found what I was looking for. This,” he shook the tin, the contents inside rattling noisily, “is a time capsule. I buried it when I was ten with my best friend Joseph. He’s Mrs. Hastings’s grandson.”

Sam only nodded, Will looked too much like a ten-year-old boy with eyes full of wonder at that moment for Sam to ruin it all by cussing him out again.

“Anyway.” Will opened the tin, the top creaking as he did. His eyes lit up, and he pulled out a small stack of baseball cards. “Joseph’s favorite Paw Sox players. And...” He brushed off a small piece of folded paper. “My very first love letter. Her name was Lara and I hated her.”

“Pulled on her pigtails, did you?”

Will grinned. “Of course. What else do I have in here? Ah!” He took out a photo and showed

it to Sam. “That’s me, my mom Sandra, and my dad Klaus. See, the whole back of the house used to be a huge screen porch.”

Sam peered at the picture, his lips quirking up despite himself. Will was wearing a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles T-shirt underneath a stained cooking apron. The apron was covered in hot pink flowers. His parents stood behind him, grinning for the camera.

“You were one freakish little thing, weren’t you?” Sam asked, his voice gentle.

“Oh, yeah, I had the urge to bake even back then.”

“Still have that apron?” Sam glanced up, amused.

Will laughed. “Actually, I do... But it’s up in the attic. This attic.”

“Guess it’s my apron, then,” Sam replied.

“Asshole,” Will said pleasantly. He dug deeper into the box and held up a ratty piece of paper, worn with time. “Here’s a cake recipe from my Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Katerina. Actually, it’s the recipe for that chocolate cake I brought you on my first visit. Same cake. My mom said Great-Great-Great-Grandma Katerina used to make it for Great-Great-Great-Grandpa Johannes all the time. I like to pretend it was how they fell in love.”

“Great,” was all Sam said.

Will rolled his eyes. “Another thing.” He pulled a small collar out of the box, a little pink thing with a purple bell on it. It jingled in Will’s hand. “This was my cat’s collar... She died when I was eight. Kiki. She got hit by a truck in front of the house, and we buried her in the backyard. Had a funeral and everything. It was sad.”

He shook the collar a few times and the bell jingled.

“I’m sorry,” Sam said, feeling awkward. He didn’t know what to say to Will, and for the first time Sam didn’t have the urge to yell at him.

Will shook his head. “You didn’t know her. Oh, yeah, wait. One more thing.” Will fished a small switchblade out of the box and held it up. “Oooh.”

“Nice?” Sam frowned.

“Oh, yeah.” Will laughed. He flipped the blade open, and the switchblade turned out to be a simple hair comb. Will ran it through his fine hair once and smiled, eyes shining. “Won it at a fair.”

“I bet you carried it around in your back pocket and tried to freak people out with it,” Sam said.

“Nah. Well. Maybe a little.”

They shared a smile. Sam was about to ask more about Will's family when he realized something.

He and Will were getting along. Quite nicely. Sam had to put a stop to it.

"Well, that's sweet and all," Sam said. "And I think it's really cute. Your cat collars, your love letters, your lethal hair weapons... But just because I think it's cute doesn't mean you get the house back."

That was apparently the perfect mood ruiner.

Will's eyes darkened, and he stood, hands shaking around the tin. "You don't appreciate this house."

"I don't have to appreciate it to own it," Sam said.

"Just because you own something, doesn't mean it's yours. This house is my heart. And I have the money, so take it and buy another home to destroy!" Will shook the tin at Sam angrily.

Sam yawned and said, "Any other place I could find had neighbors on either side. I need seclusion to write."

Will slammed the house keys down on the table, and Sam actually jumped. Will looked scarily intense. "Enjoy being alone," Will gritted out. "Grant thinks I'm looking after you, good luck getting to a phone." He paused. "You know, you're the most heartless person I've ever met, Samuel Kostas."

And with that, Will stormed out of the house. Sam was left with a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach, an old shovel, and a pineapple upside-down cake.

He poked his finger into the cake and brought it to his mouth. Nope, not as sweet as Will had just been with his little tin and memories.

"Ugh."

And a handful of the gooey cake didn't change matters, either.

\*\*\*

After a very long morning of trying to write, an even longer afternoon of failing to write, and a short evening of swearing off writing forever, Sam was at the end of his rope. And what was worse, he had eaten the entire damn pineapple upside-down cake.

The entire thing.

And it was delicious.



There was a knock on his door around eight o'clock, a characteristic pounding that could have only been Grant. Sam groaned and shoved his typewriter off his lap. "It's open," he growled. "Open, open, open! Oh, god, stop knocking!"

The door creaked open, and Grant appeared in the living room doorway and smirked at the scene: Sam, laid out on the couch, his typewriter sideways on the cushions, and an empty cake platter.

"Look at you," Grant said in a greeting. "God, you look... just awful."

"Screw you," Sam mumbled, folding his arms. "I've had a terrible day."

Grant softened his smirk and sat down in an armchair across from Sam. "I'm sorry, bud. Wanna talk about it?"

Sam didn't want to talk about it; he wanted to scream about it. "I don't know."

"Well, good, I don't want to hear about it."

"Can you be nice to me for a few minutes?" Sam asked grumpily. "I seriously had the worst day."

Grant shrugged a shoulder and leaned back in his chair. "What're Will's keys doing on that table?"

"Don't ask."

"Ah, I see." Grant smirked again. "I gave those keys to Will for a reason, you know."

"To ruin my life? You're some friend."

"To improve your life," Grant said.

"I don't get how," Sam said through gritted teeth.

"You and Will."

"Are you kidding me? Seriously, I can't tell if you mean that or not because you're always fucking smirking," Sam said hotly.

Grant's eyes narrowed at this, and he stood. "Fine, you obviously don't know a good thing when it's staring you right in the face. And I may always be smirking, but at least I'm not an inconsiderate douchebag who likes to kick people when they're down."

"You're on his side?" Sam asked, eyes widening. "He's not going to sleep with you, you can cut the act."

"Unbelievable," Grant said. "Good luck with your novel. Seems like you got a lot done lying around in your pile of self loathing."

Sam flipped Grant off, and Grant stormed out of the house.

It was their first real fight, and Sam felt like more of a jackass than he'd felt in a long time. Or maybe that was indigestion.

He'd eaten an entire cake.

\*\*\*

It wasn't indigestion. Or really, it wasn't only indigestion. Around nine o'clock, Sam actually started feeling bad.

And something that amazed him even more was that he wasn't feeling bad for himself. He felt awful about some of the things he'd said to Will. Sure, he still didn't think Will had a right to barge into his house and demand the keys, but Sam shouldn't have been so harsh.

Will was recovering from a tremendous blow. He'd lost his wife and his childhood all in one fell swoop.

If Sam thought about it too hard he actually felt like he might cry. And it'd been longer since he'd cried than it'd been since he'd gotten laid.

What was happening to him? Was he going soft? No, he still hated Will. Sam hated him with a passion, but Sam hated a lot of things. He hated his publisher and most of his nonexistent fans, but that didn't mean they didn't pay his bills and keep him comfortable. Hate could be a good thing at times.

Sam had to detach himself from the situation. He had to separate his tiny, glowing ember of emotion from what the actual predicament was. Sam had to fight for his land, just like his founding fathers, and damn it if he wasn't going to fight!

"Damn right," Sam mumbled, perking up a bit. That helped -- detachment. Detachment was good. Very good. He rolled to the side and tugged his typewriter onto his lap again. He'd have another go at writing, and he'd produce something more than fantastic. It would hit the Best Seller's list, and Sam would have sex with a handful of fine looking ladies with very eager libidos.

And Will would be forgotten. Will and his crazy delicious cakes that reminded Sam of home and everything and everyone he'd left behind to become famous in New York City. It hadn't been worth it, to leave his home in Minnesota for the big city. And now where was he? He was in Newport, Rhode Island with writer's block, and at the moment, all he had was a full belly and a hell of a lot of frustration.

Sam cracked his knuckles and fed a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter. The trick was to not care. He'd spent his life not caring, and the words had flowed out of him and brought him great success.

He typed, The cake remained on the front porch for most of the night until...

Sam stopped typing. “Crud,” he mumbled. “Cake.”

He couldn’t write. His mind was focused on one thing and one thing alone. With a sigh, he moved his typewriter off his lap and folded his arms, staring at his twisted ankle. Will had placed a few throw pillows at the end of the couch where Sam’s ankle rested, so that his foot could be elevated properly. It was sweet, it was thoughtful.

It made Sam’s blood boil.

Sam glanced over the coffee table. It was covered with cake crumbs, papers, envelopes, and unopened mail. He frowned and peered at the mail.

There were the four letters meant for Audrey Green beside his typewriter.

“Why would Grant bring these down?” Sam thought aloud. “Mutiny.” He picked up the letters and organized them in a stack from oldest to newest. The handwriting, now that he knew Will better, fit his arch enemy perfectly.

Flowy, loopy, beautiful, and evil to the very core. Will’s “Is” and “As” looked particularly sinister.

Without thinking, Sam tore the first envelope open. Inside was one sheet of white parchment. He unfolded it, glaring down at the swirly handwriting. In small doses, Will’s cursive was almost charming, but in letter format it was obscene.

He held up the letter and squinted.

Audrey,

I know you owe me nothing, but you can’t do this. I saw the For Sale sign last week out in the front yard. Tell me this is a joke. You said you wouldn’t sell the house to me, and you know what it means to me and what it meant to my family.

I understand that you’re still angry, but if you sell this house I will have nothing left of my family.

Please, pick up the phone next time I call and let’s talk about this. I can come into town whenever you like and we can work this out. I have the money for the house, please don’t sell it to some stranger.

It’s all I have, Audrey.

Sincerely,  
Will

Sam lowered the letter, frowning. He wondered what had happened between Will and Audrey. Was what Grant had said true? Did Will really cheat on her? It must have been pretty bad, if Audrey felt the need to sell Will’s house from under him.

Some stranger. That was what Sam was, some stranger, and he was squatting in Will’s life.

He put the letter down and picked up the next. The post date was marked a week later than the first. The handwriting seemed a little sloppier, more rushed, more emotional. Sam tore the letter open and read through it.

This letter was more personal. Will wrote about the memories Audrey had taken from him by not giving the house back. He wrote about hammocks in the backyard, lemonade stands, first kisses and deaths of grandfathers. Will wrote about the first time he'd gotten drunk, hidden away in his bedroom closet while a babysitter dozed in front of the television downstairs. He wrote about his mother's wedding ring.

I would take it all back, if I could, Will wrote. If I hadn't hurt you in this way... Audrey, I know you have a caring heart. You opened it to me once, and I took advantage of your trust. We didn't belong together, like I thought we did, but you didn't deserve what I did to you. If you can't give me the house, then at least give me the ring back. When my parents died all those years ago, my mother wanted that ring to always stay in the family. Please.

Sam felt like he was spying on a conversation. A very private conversation.

He couldn't stop himself from opening the next letter, some strange emotion whirling around in his stomach. Sam had never really felt this way before. He didn't even know how he felt. Was he regretting the way he'd treated Will?

"No way," Sam said firmly. "No way in hell am I siding with Will. He cheated on his wife; he deserved what he got." Sam had never cheated on anyone in his life. Then again, he'd never had a real relationship.

Sam looked down at the next letter and read.

Audrey,

I refuse to be punished for this any longer! We both know our marriage was over long before it happened. It doesn't make it right, it doesn't make it fair, but we weren't even sleeping in the same bed at that point.

I was lonely, scared, and confused, and you exploited that! You took the only things in the world that still mattered to me; my mother's ring and my home. Don't tell me that you lost her ring, because I don't buy it.

That ring is over one hundred years old, it's a family heirloom, and I want it back. My Great-Great-Great-Grandfather Johannes gave it to my Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Katerina when they were married. If you won't let me buy the house from you, at least do this one thing for me. You've never accepted my apologies, you've never even tried to understand where I'm coming from. You ended our marriage years before I even looked at a man, you know that.

I will forever regret the decision I made that night, but if you do this to me, you will kill me. My parents died years before I met you, but I swear if you had seen them, if you had met them, you would understand.

-Will

“Another man,” Sam mumbled.

Sam started to put the pieces together. Will had cheated on Audrey with another man? Sam’s stomach started to ache. He had no right to be reading these letters; he had no right to know this much about Will.

The ferry horn blared in the distance, and Sam jumped, dropping the letter guiltily. He looked around the empty room. There was only one letter left, and his fingers were itching to tear the envelope open. It was the most recent letter, the one that had arrived the day Will had shown up on his front porch, cake in hand.

Sam wasted no time in opening the fourth and final letter. He unfolded the paper inside and read.

Audrey,

This is ridiculous. You’ve been ignoring my calls and my letters. I’ve asked some old friends from town to check in on you and they say you’ve disappeared. They also say there’s a different car in your driveway now. It’s not my business, but what is going on?

Ignore my letters and phone calls all you want. I’m coming to Newport on Friday, and I will be coming to the house. I expect you to give my ring back. I know you have it.

You’ve taken everything from me. Please give this little piece of me back.

Will.

Friday. That was the day Sam had met Will, and everything had changed.

## Chapter Six

### *If You Can't Beat 'Em...*

Sam put his head in his hands and groaned. He didn't know what to think anymore.

And now he was alone in this house with no strength to write and no one to talk to. His best friend had abandoned him, and he'd driven Will away.

I am a truly low creature, Sam decided.

And a glutton, he thought, looking at the empty cake plate.

He was going to die alone, bedridden and fat in Rhode Island. Could it get any worse?

Thunder boomed, and the lights flickered out.

Sam decided there was no god.

\*\*\*

It had been a long week, the longest of Sam's life. The power was out for days due to the massive thunderstorms, and without any company or television, Sam was faced with even more introspection than usual.

By the end of the week he was sick to death of the inside of his own head. He'd come to the conclusion that he was selfish and self-involved, yet a snappy dresser.

Some truths stung more than others.

But now Doctor Parker had deemed him fit to walk after one last checkup, and though Sam felt loathsome and sluggish, he was ready to get back on his feet again. He grabbed hold of his typewriter and stumbled up the stairs.

He'd had the same typewriter since college. It'd been a present from his parents, an encouragement for Sam to chase his dreams.

Sam had chased his dreams all the way to the bank.

But now, as he trudged into his office with the typewriter, he realized he hadn't been following his dreams all these years after all. He'd been following the money. All of his novels had been swill: shit, mindless moneymakers. Sure, thousands of people bought his books, but those people weren't his fans. They were fans of mindless entertainment, and that was what Sam gave them, It'd always been his dream to win a Pulitzer Prize, hadn't it?

What had he become?

He was a liar and a fake.

And Will had been right, entirely right. He was heartless.

There was only one thing to do. Sam opened the window behind his desk, the sun shining into the room, painting his legs in vibrant, warm hues. He turned to the typewriter, a dramatic expression on his face. Lifting the machine, he took a step toward the window, determined to chuck the blasted thing out into the driveway where it would smash into a million different pieces.

But as he walked, the floorboard creaked beneath him and shifted.

“What the hell?”

He set the typewriter back down, and with much effort, hunched low to the floor. The wood was splintered, and he pulled the plank from the floor, exposing an empty space beneath. Something glittered back at him in the afternoon light.

He reached down, eyes wide, and touched something cool. As he picked it up, holding it in the light. He couldn’t contain a gasp. It was a ring.

It had a white gold band, and at the top, two emeralds surrounded a princess cut diamond.

“It isn’t...”

Inside the band was engraved, To Katerina with love -- 1902.

“Holy shit!” Sam cried out. “It is!”

It was just like a movie. Sam held the ring up close to his face and squinted at it. It was the ring, Katerina’s ring, Will’s ring.

“Will...” Sam trailed off. He groaned. He’d spent the whole last week beating himself up, swearing to be a better person, to do something good with his life rather than just sit on the sidelines and glare at all the players.

But holding the ring, knowing what he had to do, he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t anywhere near ready.

“Good grief,” Sam mumbled, pocketing the ring and folding his arms. He stared out the window at the lighthouse. Will’s old bedroom -- no, Sam’s office had a beautiful view. He gave a sigh and turned around, kicking at the loose floorboard.

Why was this happening to him? Why was everything falling into place like this?

With resolve, he walked across the room and opened the door, just quickly catching Will Adler 1991 carved into the wood. Will was everywhere, he was literally everywhere. On the door, in his digestive system, in his pocket. Sam couldn’t escape the man.

“If you can’t beat ‘em...”

The ferry blared its horn loudly in the distance, and Sam limped out of the room in a hurry, one thing and one thing only on his mind.

He had to find Will.

\*\*\*

Robert Jones, the manager of the downtown bed and breakfast, aptly named “Bed and Breakfast,” was absolutely no help to Sam.

“But he said he was staying here,” Sam said, his ankle throbbing from hoofing it all around town. He looked around the small lobby of the quaint bed and breakfast and sighed. He lived about ten minutes out of town and regretted not taking his car. He’d thought the walk would give him some time to build up his nerve, but instead it had given blisters some time to build up on his feet. “He said he was here all week.”

“Well, it’s the end of the week, isn’t it, son?” Robert said, brushing at his crisp, black vest. “Besides, we don’t release information about any of our patrons, Mr....?”

“Shit, you’re right,” Sam swore. Robert looked down his nose at Sam and sniffed. “I mean... I’m Samuel -- no, Sam, Sam Kostas. Can you at least tell me when he was last here?”

“Oh, yes, the hermit,” Robert said, taking a step back, his nose scrunching up as if he smelled something putrid.

Sam rolled his eyes. “Will wouldn’t just pack up and head home... No...” He scratched at his chin. “That little bastard wouldn’t give up that easily. I mean, when he camped out on Mrs. Hastings’s property, he...”

Robert yawned.

“That’s it!” Sam crowed. “Thank you, Mr. Jones, you’ve been very unhelpful.” He slapped Robert on the shoulder.

Robert pulled away and then discreetly sanitized the counter with a bottle of cleaner and a flick of his wrist. Everyone knew those writer types were chock full of germs and had no soul, and that sort of stuff was catching.

Sam saluted Robert and exited the building, limping the entire way.

\*\*\*

“For the last time, Mr. Kostas,” Mrs. Hastings said bitterly, peering out the door of her farmhouse. “Willy isn’t here, he never was in the past few days, and he’s not comin’ back! Now kindly remove yourself from my property!”



Sam stared ahead at the woman and heaved a great sigh. She crossed her arms, and Sam was pretty sure she wouldn't back down. She had the look of someone weathered not only with age, but with honest, hard work and clean living. Sam wanted to hate her, but her cheery garden and rosy cheeks made it impossible. Even his fear of the elderly couldn't stop him from warming up a little to the woman. There was something to be said for a person who would offer you milk and cookies, while at the same time shaking a cane at you and demanding you get off their property. "Look, lady--"

Mrs. Hastings huffed.

"Mrs. Hastings," Sam said. "Well, where is he?"

"I can't say I know, now can I?"

Sam made a face, slipping his hand into his pocket and touching the ring. "I can pay you."

Mrs. Hastings gasped. "You will do no such thing!"

"Please, just tell me where Will is," Sam begged. "I've got to give him a ring, I--"

Mrs. Hastings's eyes widened.

"Oh, no, no, not like that!" Sam groaned. "See, I kicked him off my property after he made me breakfast in the morning, he made a mess of my bed and--"

Mrs. Hastings was pale white.

Sam sighed. "I give up."

"You show me this ring," Mrs. Hastings said firmly. "Or I'll whack you a good one." She lifted her cane menacingly.

Sam felt ridiculous, but he pulled the ring out of his pocket and held it up for Mrs. Hastings to see.

"Well, heavens to Betsy!" she cried. "Now that's a horse of a different color, ain't it?"

"Um." Sam tried to smile. "It sure, um, is."

"Little Willy's back in Mystic, ought to be working right now. It's the Das Essen bakery on Lindbergh Street. Not avenue, street," she said. "You got that?"

Sam's eyes lit up. "Got it."

"Repeat it back to me," she said. Sam made a face. "Lindbergh...?"

"Street, not avenue," Sam said dumbly.

"Okay," Mrs. Hastings said, her voice taking on a fond tone. "Now you go, and you find him."

“All right.”

“Be good to him, you hear?” she said sternly.

“Yeah,” Sam said, nodding and walking backwards away from her. For an old person, she really wasn’t that bad, he’d decided. Though she did have quite the mouth on her. “You got it.” He turned on his heel and walked away, shaking his head.

“Willy’s been through so much!” Mrs. Hastings called after Sam. “So much, you hear me? After his parents were in that accident and left him all alone, he had no one! Seventeen years old, all alone in that house!”

Sam slowed his walk, groaning. “Are you kidding me?” he muttered.

“Had to fend for himself!” Mrs. Hastings bellowed. “Not a scrap of family in the world! Sides me, of course, but I ain’t flesh and blood!”

Sam turned around. “I know,” he said testily. “I’ll be nice to him, okay?”

She nodded sweetly. “Pleasant trip.”

Sam, feeling miserable, walked across the field to his house and got into his car. He had to be quick if he was going to catch the next ferry.

\*\*\*

After wandering down the street for a good ten minutes in Mystic, Sam looked up with a great sigh and swore loudly. The street sign above him read “Lindbergh Avenue”.

“Sam, you idiot,” he muttered under his breath. “Street, not avenue.”

One should always listen to their elders.

At the end of Lindbergh Street sat Das Essen, the darlinest-looking bakery that Sam had ever seen. Just the fact that Sam thought it was darling made him feel angry and confused and, if he dared to admit it, fluttery.

He pulled the ring out of his pocket and crossed the cobble-stoned street. Lindbergh Street was lined in little shops, each one more quaint than the last. The town actually reminded Sam a bit of Newport, and he could see why if Will couldn’t stay in Newport, he’d moved to Mystic.

Inside, Das Essen bustled with people, all sorts of people. Customers eating, customers ordering, bakers making pies and cookies, and one very gruff looking man, standing behind the counter. The shop looked deceptively small from the outside, but inside it was quite roomy. Sam noticed that the floors were solid oak, and he could see Will’s inspiration from the old house in Newport. Sam approached the counter laden with pastries, holding the ring behind his back in a sweaty fist.

“Hi,” Sam said to the surly looking man standing behind the register.

The man looked up and nodded once, curtly. He was short, squat, and had a patch of thin, blond hair atop his head. His eyes, though, they meant business.

“Uh...” Sam shifted on his feet. “Maybe you can help me.”

He received another curt nod. Sam glanced at his nametag. It read Joseph.

So, this was Joseph, Will’s childhood friend.

“Ah, so, I’m looking for someone,” Sam said. “Is Will around?”

“Yes.”

“Is he available?”

“No.”

Sam frowned. “Is he here?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.” Sam leaned against the counter, turning the ring over and over in his nervous fingers. Why was he nervous? “Well, could you get him, maybe? I’ve got something important to tell him.”

“No.”

“Come on, man,” Sam said. “Help me out.”

Joseph sighed shortly and turned around, disappearing into a back room. Sam drummed his fingers on the glass counter for a moment, staring down at a familiar chocolate cake, and then Joseph reappeared.

“Did you get him?” Sam asked.

Joseph shrugged a shoulder.

Sam frowned again, turning and glancing around the shop. On the walls were old movie posters, all in German, and the tables and chairs all looked antique. No two chairs were alike.

The place felt like Will.

Sam let out a breath and turned around again, just in time to see Will coming out of the back room. He wore a green apron, and his hair was pulled back into a soft ponytail. His cheeks were smudged with flour, and his nose was flushed pink.

Sam’s heart tightened.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Will asked. He narrowed his eyes and came over to Sam as he dusted his hands off on his apron.

“I... I...” Sam swallowed. “I... I have something really... I came to give, I came for something... You’ll like it!”

Will stopped in his tracks, eyes widening. “You came to tell me you’re selling me my house back?”

“What?” Sam said, clouding over. “No! Jesus, no! Never!”

Will’s expression turned sour, and he took a few steps forward, stopping in front of Sam and slapping him smartly across the cheek. The patrons of the shop gasped as Sam cried out and stumbled backwards, dropping the ring on the floor. The whole thing felt like cheap community theater.

“Oh Jesus, Will! What’d you do that for?” Sam yelled angrily, crouching down and searching around for the little ring. It was right near Will’s smart looking black shoes. Leave it to Will to choose style over comfort. Sam scooped it up awkwardly.

“Get up,” Will said, staring down at him. “And get out of here.”

“Will, I--”

“Now,” Will interrupted. Joseph cracked his knuckles threateningly behind Will.

“Listen,” Sam said, trying to get the words out, but failing. For being a New York Times best selling author, Sam was at a loss for words. Instead, he got on his knees and thrust the ring toward Will.

Will’s brows furrowed in confusion for a moment before his eyes widened so large they looked like saucers.

“Oh my god,” Will said, reaching out. The entire shop was silent as Will’s fingertips brushed over the stones on the ring. And then Will jerked forward and his lips were all over Sam’s.

It was a harsh, closed mouth sort of kiss, Will’s hands covering Sam’s, the ring between them. For two long seconds their lips were crushed together, but then something even more shocking happened.

Sam opened his mouth, and they really kissed. Their tongues met, and it was all wet, hot, sizzling. It was the first kiss Sam’d had in two years, and it was better than Better Than Sex cake.

In that moment the only thing Sam could feel, hear, see was Will.

Well, that was until the thunderous sound of applause and cheering became so obnoxiously loud that the two broke apart. They stared at each other with flushed cheeks.

“Congratulations, Willy!” someone yelled from across the shop. That sentiment was echoed

by half a dozen other patrons.

“Oh my god,” Will said, grabbing the ring and shoving Sam away. “No, no, no!”

“Ew,” Sam said. “No, it isn’t like that -- I didn’t! No, Christ, no!”

Will looked around, clenching the ring in his fist. “I’m not marrying that idiot!”

The crowd hushed, and Sam felt like the biggest loser in the world.

And did he just kiss Will?

“Go back to what you all were doing, ha, ha,” Will said, his cheeks bright red. He glared and gestured for Sam to follow him into the back room. “Come on.”

“Oh, no,” Sam said. “No way. I am not going anywhere with you.”

“Just follow me,” Will hissed quietly.

Sam braced himself and walked into the back room after Will, and Will shut the door behind them. They were in a small supply room, filled with sacks of flour, spices, decadent toppings and countless recipe boxes. Will pulled a chair out from a desk jammed in the corner and offered it to Sam.

“Sit,” he said.

Sam glanced at the chair and then at Will. “Why?”

“Because we need to talk.”

Sam eyed the chair, chewing at his lips. They were still full and wet with the kiss, and he could taste a sweet lip gloss that Will must have been wearing. Lip gloss, of all things.

Sam sat.

“So,” Will said, folding his arms. The ring was looped on his pinky finger, sparkling.

“So...”

“I can’t believe you...”

“I’m sorry! And to be fair, you kissed me first,” Sam said quickly.

Will flushed bright red and looked down. “No, I meant, I can’t believe you found the ring. I... How did you even know?”

Sam cleared his throat. Shit, he didn’t want to admit to reading the letters. That would be creepy, that would be invasion of privacy! He thought quick on his feet.

“Uh, you told me before, you know, um, with the time capsule, that your Great-Great-Great

Grandma Katerina wrote that recipe. And then when I found the ring, I put two and two together. I'm a mystery writer," Sam finished awkwardly. "Yeah."

Will's eyes shone over with obvious emotion, and he looked like he might be about to cry. "Thank you," he said, voice cracking. He held his hand to his chest and let out a long breath. "Thank you so much."

"It's nothing," Sam said. He stared past Will at the wall. Sam couldn't look at Will that way, not when he was full of flour and his eyes were about to brim over with tears. It made Sam feel inspired, but not to write.

"Where did you find it?" Will asked. "Audrey said she lost it..."

"It was under a floorboard, in your old room, I mean, my office. I don't think it could have accidentally fallen in there."

"That bitch," Will said. "I knew it." He shook his head and wiped at his eyes, looking up at Sam. "What made you run all the way over here to give this to me? Isn't your foot still mangled?"

That was going to be harder to explain away.

"I, uh, um, yeah," Sam said.

Will grinned. "Oh."

"Yeah, oh."

They stared past each other awkwardly for a few moments, and then Sam cleared his throat.

"So, nice shop," he said, his voice cracking. "I like the wooden floors."

Will blushed. "It's, you know, it's my shop. My home away from home."

"Well, it smells good. Looks good." Sam tasted Will's lip gloss again. It tasted good, too.

"Thank you."

"You've got, um, crap on your cheeks," Sam said. "Flour, or whatever."

Will smiled, holding his hand up to his face. "I look like such a mess."

"No, you look good." Sam frowned. What was he doing? Flirting? With Will?

Yes, he was, and he had to put a stop to it, no matter how sweet Will's lips may have been, and god, they were sweet.

"Doesn't mean anything, though," Sam said quickly. "You know, me coming out here. It means nothing. I just wanted to get that ring out of my house. So, uh, guess you're all moved out now, huh?"

Will's mouth dropped open slightly. "Are you kidding me?"

"What, you didn't think I was all sweet on you, did you?" Sam asked. "Because, yeah, you kissed me."

"I did not!" Will sputtered, throwing his hands up.

"I have better things to do than sit in a supply closet with you," Sam said, standing up clumsily, the chair falling over. "I wanted to check out the, uh... gambling. How's the gambling in Mystic?"

Will glowered at Sam. "You are the single most awful person on this earth."

"Coming from you, I'll take that as a compliment," Sam said, feeling once more in his element. He may have been an awful person, but he was an awful person who had done a good deed, and now that the good deed was done, so was he. Now he could go back to being a self-centered jackass and feel absolutely no guilt about it.

"Well, get the hell out of my shop then," Will said tiredly. His voice lacked the usual venom it carried when he and Sam were sparring. Sam tried to think of something mean to say in return, but couldn't. Will not only sounded tired, but he looked tired, and he still held that damn ring to his chest.

"So, we're done here, then?" Sam looked around at the sacks and spices and crates. "Feeling a little claustrophobic."

"Yeah, see you."

Sam was about to leave, he had every intention of walking away from Will, but something kept his feet cemented to that damn supply closet floor. He glanced at Will, whose eyes had gone a bit red and weepy looking. Sam sighed.

"When?" he asked.

Will looked up. "What do you care? I won't harass you anymore, I swear. You won't see me anywhere near the god damn house. It's yours." He closed his fingers around the ring and looked down again. "Congratulations, Mr. Kostas."

"You're not even going to fight me for it? It's what we do!"

Will shrugged. "Not much more I can do. Thanks for the ring."

"So..." Sam shifted his weight from his bad ankle to the other. They couldn't just say goodbye, not like this. Not after all they'd been through. "I'll... see you."

"Yeah, bye."

Sam turned to walk out again, but then he faced Will once more. Will was rubbing at his eyes.

“You left your shovel in my yard,” Sam blurted out.

“It’s a cheap shovel, keep it,” Will said.

“But I uh... you see...” Sam trailed off. “I have this thing about shovels. You’ll have to come get it.”

Will looked dubious. “You have a thing with shovels?”

“Yeah, and it gets pretty bad this time of year,” Sam said. He couldn’t stop the idiocy from forcing its way up his throat and out of his mouth. “I get this rash and--”

“Okay,” Will said. “I’ll be in town preparing the new bakery for its grand opening next weekend; I’ll pick it up then.”

“Good, because I don’t want any of your shit in my house.”

Will didn’t take the bait. “Goodbye, Sam.”

“Because, it’s mine. Not yours. And so forth.”

Will stood up abruptly and glared at Sam. “I get it. I fucking get it. It’s yours. Not mine, and it never will be again. I’ll never be able to sleep in my old room again or make cakes in the kitchen. I’ll never be able to sit out back by the old oak tree, watch the harbor, and get eaten alive by mosquitoes. I get it. Now, will you please just leave?” Will turned his head and covered his mouth.

Was he crying? Sam didn’t deal well with crying. Sam didn’t deal well with most things, and apparently he now couldn’t even handle shovels. The heartless monster in him roared; maybe he did have some heart.

“You can...” Sam knew he would regret this. “Stay the week at the house.”

Will glanced up and lowered his hand. “What’d you say?”

“Nothing.”

“You said something, something about the house, something about staying.” Will furrowed his eyebrows and took a step forward. “Something.”

Sam sighed. “Look, I think I pissed off the manager of the bed and breakfast when I was trying to find you--”

“Trying to find me?” Will asked slowly.

Sam turned red. “The point is, you probably shouldn’t stay there. And Mrs. Hastings probably thinks we’re on our honeymoon by now, so you can’t stay there.”

Will gaped at Sam. “What did you do?”



“So,” Sam said, ignoring Will, “I guess what I am saying is, you can stay at my place for the week. It’s big enough, we’ll be out of each other’s faces. I write all day in my office, you can bake your cakes in the kitchen if you want, go out back and get mauled to death by mosquitoes. I don’t care. You can have one last week with the house, okay?”

Will’s eyebrows knitted together, and his mouth fell open. Sam didn’t know if it was a good thing or a bad thing. He also wasn’t sure what he wanted Will’s answer to be. If Will said yes, Sam would be crushed.

But if Will said no, Sam would be crushed.

“I’ll think about it,” Will said casually.

“You’ll... think about it.”

Will nodded. “I can’t stand you. You can’t stand me. I brought a shovel into your life. Living with you for a week would probably be really bad.”

“Well, you can always camp out in that field of yours.”

“Jackass.”

“There you go,” Sam said. “That’s the Wilhelm I’ve come to know and loathe. Let me know your answer soon.” He turned and pulled open the door. Before he could walk out, Will stopped him.

“Yes,” Will said. “I thought about it and yes. Let me get my things, and we’ll take the ferry over together.”

“I didn’t mean tonight,” Sam groaned.

“Now or never,” Will said. “If you do this for me I’ll be out of your hair forever. Scout’s honor.”

Sam laughed. “Aren’t you a little gay for the scouts?”

“I’m not gay,” Will said, eyes narrowing. “What made you think I was... Ugh, never mind.”

Sam raised his eyebrows, and Will smacked him on the shoulder. The heartless beast remained caged, and the two left the shop together with little to no violence.

## Chapter Seven

### *Crumbs in the Bed*

“Here you go,” Sam said, opening up the door to the guestroom. The room was by no means small, but not nearly as big as Sam’s office. It was upstairs, with the rest of the bedrooms, and it, too, had a view of the harbor. Sam thought, really, that he was being an excellent host. “You can stay in here.”

Will made a face. “No.”

“Why not?”

“This is the room I shared with Audrey,” Will said. “We didn’t use the room you’re using as a bedroom now because it was my parents’ and that would be weird, and I wanted to keep my bedroom the way it was. So we used this room, and I don’t much like it anymore.”

“Then where am I going to put you?” Sam asked.

“My room, I want my room,” Will said. “We’ll move the bed.”

“No,” Sam said flatly. “Absolutely and completely not.”

“If you don’t help me move the bed, then I’ll just do it myself,” Will said, folding his arms. “Mr. Dinosaur Sheets.”

Sam sighed. “You can’t sleep in there. That’s where I work; it’s the only place I can write. I haven’t written a word in over a year, and then when I sat in that room, it happened for me. I wrote myself stupid. You gotta understand that. What if I wanted to sleep in the kitchen?”

“If that’s where you had your heart set on sleeping, then sure.”

“You’re bullshitting me,” Sam said. “By the way, are you going to be making any cakes this week?”

Will raised his arm as if he was going to slap Sam again, and Sam winced, but then Will dropped his arm with a sigh and leaned against the wall.

“I think I’ll just go to the bed and breakfast... This isn’t going to work,” Will said softly. “You were stupid to offer it, and I was even stupider for accepting.”

“Hey now,” Sam said, frowning. He felt panicked for a moment, at the thought of Will leaving. He stood in front of the door, as if that would stop Will, and shrugged. “It’s already late, you may as well stay the night. You can sleep in my bed again, since you seemed to enjoy it so much last time... I’ll probably just be writing all night.”

It was true. Sam’s fingers were itching to write. He felt so inspired, he couldn’t wait to get to his typewriter.

“No,” Will said. “I can’t sleep in Mom and Dad’s old room again. Makes me too sad. Plus, you know, dinosaur sheets.”

“I changed them!”

“Jesus, I’ll stay, okay? We’ll figure something out,” Will said, smirking a bit. “I’ll take the couch.”

“No, that’s weird,” Sam replied stubbornly. “You sure you can’t sleep in this room?”

“I’d rather sleep outside.”

Sam made a whining sound. He couldn’t let Will have his office. The office was all Sam had. It was the only place he could feel any self worth.

But then he glanced at Will. Will had his arms folded and he was staring at the floor. He looked exhausted and he still had some of that damn flour on his jaw.

“Christ,” Sam mumbled. “We’ll move the god damn bed, but you can only sleep in there. No hanging out when I’m trying to work, and if I want to write all night you better deal with it. And you better not snore.”

“I don’t snore,” Will said, grinning. He flounced into the room to the bed, and Sam sighed, following after him. Will was getting his way. Again.

But it’d only be for a week and then everything would go back to normal. Normal, normal, normal.

\*\*\*

Will was curled up in his bed with a book, munching on a small blueberry tart. Sam tried not to watch, he tried to focus on his writing.

He’d been at it for hours, but that had been before Will came into the room. Will, with his fuzzy slippers and his little pajamas and his delicious baked goods. He hadn’t even offered one to Sam, only slipped under the covers and stuck his nose in a book.

Each little crunching nibble on the tart was driving Sam up the wall. He kept pressing the wrong keys and spilling his correction fluid. Will was one large pain in the ass.

“Can you keep it down over there?” Sam finally asked.

Will looked up from his book and took a large bite of his tart. “Am I not turning my pages quietly enough for you?”

“No, and you’re breathing,” Sam said.

“Oh, I’ll try and stop, then,” Will said, rolling his eyes. He took another bite of the tart, and the ring on his finger glinted prettily in the light.

“I have a thing about crumbs, too,” Sam said. “I hate them. You’re going to get crumbs in your bed.”

“It’s my bed, so it won’t concern you,” Will replied.

“But I’ll know they’re there,” Sam said. “You see, this is what I was talking about, you can’t be in here. I need to work, and you’re all... in your pajamas with the adorable bunnies on them and your... crumbs and... the shovel is still in the foyer.”

“Are you getting hives?” Will asked, a lopsided smile forming on his face. “You know, Sam, you are one strange guy. I mean, people call me eccentric, but I think you might actually be mental. Really, really mental.”

“I hate crumbs,” was all Sam said, staring at his typewriter.

“Well, as long as you don’t break out in hives, I think we’re going to be okay,” Will remarked, polishing off the last of his tart.

Sam wrinkled his nose. “Did you just make those or what?”

“Yep.”

“Are there more?”

“Samuel, if you wanted a tart, you should have just asked,” Will said, wiggling his slippers.

Sam gazed at Will. Bunny pajamas. “Yes, please, I’d like a tart.”

Will stuck his nose back in his book. “They’re down in the kitchen.”

Sam heaved a sigh. “Well, I only wanted it if you went to go get it for me.”

“I’m not your maid,” Will replied haughtily. He pulled the book closer to his face and squinted. “You know, after knowing you and then reading your writing, I... am flabbergasted.”

Sam froze. “What? What are you... Are you reading one of my books? Where did you get that? What... What are you reading?”

“Calm down, I picked it up at a used bookshop in Mystic, on sale.”

“Used...”

“I’m reading *A Murder in Memphis*. You know, the one with the ditzy heroine and the clumsy detective,” Will said. “I can’t believe you wrote this. It reads like a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure, except without the adventure... And it’s not like I really had a choice, either. It’s so damn boring here. You don’t even have cable, and there was some *Golden Girls* marathon on.”

Sam glared at Will. “Are you insulting my book?”

“Yes.”

“Oh...” Sam trailed off. He couldn’t believe Will was curled up in bed, in Sam’s office, wearing bunny pajamas and critiquing one of his books. And on top of all that, Will had blueberry tart in the corners of his mouth.

Sam wasn’t going to survive the week.

“Weird,” Will said, closing the book.

“What’s weird?”

“Mm... You, me, us. This.” Will let out a yawn and stretched out under the covers. He laid his head on the pillows and pulled the blankets up to his chin. “Goodnight.”

Before Sam could say another word, Will had closed his eyes and rolled over to face the wall. Sam stared at Will’s mess of brown hair and at the small bunny that was peeking at him from the shoulder of Will’s pajama top.

What was even going on anymore? Sam sure as hell didn’t know.

“Will,” Sam said. Will grunted in response. “That was the first book I ever wrote, so...”

“Are you saying the rest get better?” Will asked, voice muffled by the blankets.

“Um. No, actually,” Sam admitted. “They’re all crap. Except this one I’m writing now, this one is good, I think. It’s not really a mystery so much as a story about the human condition. And it’s not dumbed down for the type of audience the bestseller’s list caters to. This is real writing, actual writing. I don’t think I’ve ever allowed myself to write so freely, and you know what? I think it has something to do with this house. I don’t know what it is about the place, but it’s... I guess I’m saying I can tell why it means so much to you. Maybe I haven’t lived here as long as you, but I can feel an attachment growing. And that’s weird for me. You know what I mean?”

Will snored in response.

“I don’t snore’, my ass,” Sam grumbled. He stared at the little bunny on Will’s shoulder and sighed.

There was something about the house, indeed, and he was beginning to think his entire career depended on it.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Will and Sam sat together at the kitchen table. It was a beautiful morning, and they were eating beautiful waffles.

“Listen, my publisher’s coming over tonight for dinner,” Sam said, wringing his hands in a cloth napkin. “So, could you maybe...”

“Make myself scarce?” Will asked, digging into his waffles.

“Um, no,” Sam said. “Could you make a cake? Maybe that chocolate thing?”

“I have work all day,” Will said. “I can’t run around all day catering to your whims. Besides, I have a friend coming in from the city, and my afternoon is going to be pretty busy.”

Sam made a face and poked at his waffle. “You snored all night, you know,” he grouched.

Will reddened. “I’ll make a strawberry shortcake,” he said. “And that’s that. Now shut up and eat those waffles before I do.”

Sam smiled and cocked his head a little triumphantly. His mouth was practically watering already. Strawberry shortcake sounded amazing.

“So, I’ll be home late,” Will said.

“No problem,” Sam replied. He dug into his waffles and stopped mid-chew, realizing how they were acting with each other. Telling their schedules and plans for the day and...

“It doesn’t matter, anyway,” Sam added. “I’ll just be writing, I won’t even notice if you’re there or not.”

“You noticed my snoring all night,” Will said slyly. “And you look like shit. When do you ever sleep?”

“I sleep,” Sam said defensively.

Will rolled his eyes and stood up. He was wearing a smart little jacket and pinstriped trousers, leather boots, and his hair was flat and smooth. Sam could even detect a hint of gloss on Will’s bottom lip, and he could remember the taste.

He had to shake himself out of it.

“Have a good day, dear,” Will said, breezing past Sam and planting a kiss on the top of his head.

“Hey!” Sam protested, grabbing at his hair, feeling himself blush. “Jeez, bye.”

And Will was gone. Sam slumped in his seat, staring at the amazing waffles.

He’d miss them when they were gone, too.

\*\*\*

Later that day, Sam sat nervously across the living room from his publisher, Michael Ziegler, fidgeting his hands together. Michael had been over for about an hour, and he and Sam had been catching up. They hadn’t really talked about anything important yet, and Sam was avoiding it.

“So, what have you been working on?” Michael asked, smoothing down the pant leg of his ridiculously expensive suit.

Sam cringed. Finally it had caught up to him. “Well, there is this one thing.”

“Sam, it has to be more than just a thing. You’re on a deadline, remember? We want your next book to hit the shelves by Christmas, and then we want you on the Best Seller list by spring,” Michael said.

“Damn,” Sam muttered. “No pressure, though.”

“Lots of pressure. Do you know how many menopausal housewives write in to our publishing house every day, demanding a good mystery book? Sam, we’re talking thousands. They all want to know what the next mystery will be. They live for this stuff! Sure, they don’t want you specifically, Sam, but they want you in general. And as long as someone wants what you do in general, then hell, you’re successful. It’s all about flying under the radar, my friend. And your cover artist?” Michael let out a low whistle. “He’s anxious for an idea so he can start working on a mockup. What have you been doing?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“Tell me,” Michael said. “Come on, Kostas. We need you to churn out some more easy-to-read crap that everyone will go nuts for. Did you know that Dreamworks is optioning your second book for a movie?”

Sam frowned. “Easy-to-read crap, that’s... That’s real nice.”

“I don’t have to be nice, Sam, I just have to make money,” Michael said evenly. “And you’ve been my meal ticket for years.”

Sam stared at his publisher. Michael was usually harsh, but today he just seemed downright cranky. “Man, I’m working on it. But I don’t think my next book will really appeal to those dried up housewife types.”

“Well, whip it out and show it to me, bro,” Michael said. “I’ll decide if it’s crap enough for me or not.”

“Did you just call me... never mind.” Sam stood and motioned for Michael to follow him. “Come up to my office and you can skim the first few chapters.”

Michael followed, and Sam felt somewhat sick. A lot was riding on Michael’s visit today, much more than Sam had allowed himself to admit. If Michael didn’t like what he was working on, his career would be over.

One failed book and the publisher would drop him. Sam wasn’t marketable, he wasn’t a celebrity where even if his book crashed and burned the public would buy the next book just because of who he was. He was no J. K. Rowling or Stephen King. One mistake and he’d be through. Finished.

All of his fans were fickle, all worthless. That was why Sam never heard from them, and that was precisely the way he liked it.

Now, as he handed his manuscript over to Michael, he felt differently. He wanted a book that would bring in praise, not just big bucks. He wanted to write a book that would be remembered.

Sam watched Michael's eyebrows furrow as he read. Already, Sam's heart was sinking.

"What is this about?" Michael finally asked after a few more minutes of leafing through the papers. "What's the hook, the mystery?"

"It's more subtle than that," Sam said. "The character's feelings are a mystery in themselves. You know?"

"Oh shit, you've gone and turned into a real writer on me," Michael said, putting his head in his hands. "This is good, too good."

"What are you saying?" Sam asked. "My writing's too good?"

"This isn't the sort of stuff we publish," Michael said. "We need a mystery, and I've given you all the time I can. If you haven't started something we can publish, then it's over."

"You won't publish it because it doesn't suck?" Sam asked, voice rising. "Are you kidding me?"

Michael didn't have to say a word for Sam to know the answer. His book option had been dropped. It was over. Michael was already trying to remove himself from the room.

"Listen, Sam, I--"

The door downstairs banged open, and a chirpy voice called out, "Sammy, I'm home!"

"One second," Sam said, excusing himself from the room. He looked down the stairs and there stood Will, holding a large strawberry shortcake in his hands.

"Am I too late?" Will asked. "God, my friend I told you about, stayed longer than usual. And let me tell you, what a bore he turned out to be. I swear, he's changed, the publishing industry has changed him. He reminds me a bit of you actually, a total asshole. And then I think he tried to grope me."

Michael appeared behind Sam's shoulder, a strange look on his face. He had obviously heard everything Will had said.

"Just my, um, roommate," Sam mumbled to Michael.

"And the cologne he was wearing was awful," Will said, dropping a bag on the floor. "We hung out in the new shop, and he seriously stunk the place up. I'm going to need to fumigate. God, that'll cost me. Why are all you writer people such sleazebags?"



“Wait a minute,” Michael said, coming up behind Sam. “Will?”

Will froze, staring up the staircase. “Mike?”

Sam looked at Will, and then at Michael, and then at Will again. “You know each other?”

“You know each other?” Will asked.

“He’s my publisher!”

“Not anymore,” Michael said, pushing past Sam and going down the stairs. “Will, babe, what are you doing here?” He frowned. “I knew this place was familiar.”

Will shrugged. “I’m just visiting, really. You’re his publisher? This is so weird.”

Sam was still standing at the top of the stairs, going over what Michael had said. Not anymore. Not anymore. Not anymore.

“Will,” Michael said. “You really meant those things? I thought we had a good time today, babe... We hadn’t seen each other in so long, you know?”

Will visibly tensed, his face tightening in discomfort. He set the cake down on the bench next to the door. “Sorry, Mike.”

“How do you know each other?” Sam blurted out, still frozen like a statue at the top of the stairs. Not anymore.

“We go back,” Will said dryly. “He’s the friend I was telling you about, who came to visit today.”

“I’m gonna take off,” Michael said. “I don’t really want to discuss this in front of a former client... Will, walk me out?”

Will gave Sam a distressed look. “Okay, come on, Mike.”

The two disappeared out the front door. Sam sank down on the top step, sitting with his knees together, shaking slightly. He’d just been dropped. He had no future. He’d never get a book published again. He was a failure.

“Fuck,” he mumbled.

He stared straight ahead and watched the dark outlines of Will and Michael through the front windows. Michael seemed to be getting pretty close to Will.

“I’ll kill him,” Sam said, and then threw a hand over his mouth. “Will, I meant I’ll kill Will because he’s...” His eyes landed on the shovel near the door. “He left that shovel in here. Great, I’m talking to myself now.”

The dark outlines of the two men got closer and closer together, and Sam’s teeth gritted harder and harder. But then there was a shout, and Will’s outline clearly backhanded

Michael's. The loud smacking sound made it all a little more obvious, too.

The door swung open, and Will stormed in, slamming it right in Michael's face.

"That jerk!" Will cried, rubbing his ass. He looked up at Sam. "Your publisher's a real piece of work."

"So's your best friend," Sam said, standing.

"He's not my best friend," Will said. "He's barely a friend. He's a mistake, that's what he is."

"Makes two of us."

Will groaned and climbed the steps to where Sam was sitting. He perched on the stair below Sam and leaned back, sighing.

"You know, I didn't take Michael for a fruit," Sam said after a few moments of silence. "And I've known him for years. All this time, he could've been staring at my ass."

Will turned around and gave Sam a look. "You're horrible."

"Sorry, I'm depressed."

"Well, I'm not like you. I'm not going to kick you when you're down."

Sam managed a smile, but it looked more like a wince. "So, what, is he like... totally crushing on you?"

"Shut up," Will said.

"I'm glad you smacked him," Sam replied. "Because if you hadn't, I would have. I would've hit him so hard."

Will cracked a smile. "For dropping your book or for putting his hand on my ass?"

Sam hesitated before begrudgingly mumbling, "Both."

They both sighed.

"So, I'm thinking," Will said. "I'm going to make a big dinner, we've got that cake, and I brought home a bottle of wine."

"Oh, that's nice," Sam said crankily. "And what am I supposed to do?"

"You're supposed to join me, dumbass."

"Oh." Sam's belly warmed a little, even though he still felt wrecked. "Yeah, I guess I could do that."

"If you want."

Oh, Sam wanted.

## Chapter Eight

### *Shortcomings*

Sam was overjoyed to learn from Will that there was a small wine cellar in his basement. "My great grandfather set this up," Will had explained, struggling to open the heavy, wooden door into the small room. Not that Sam was much for drinking alone, but he and Will had guzzled down the first bottle pretty quickly, so reinforcements were in order.

They both seemed to be drinking their sorrows away. Sam had lost his career, and Will had lost a house. It seemed only right that they get plastered on vintage '57 wine in Sam's office and Will's bedroom.

The bed was a little much, so they sat on the floor together, backs to the radiator and bottles between them. It was now late evening, and they sat in the near dark, enjoying the cool breeze coming in from the open window. Sam was getting used to the salty sea air, and he took a deep breath, tasting it on his tongue.

"This wine is older than you," Will said, his speech slurring somewhat as he threw back his cup. They were drinking from Styrofoam cups because Sam was really classy like that.

"It's older than you, too," Sam said. "You can't be older than me. How old are you?"

"Twenty-three. I'm looking old," Will bemoaned. "I'm surprised Michael even recognized me. I haven't seen him since... well... since."

"Since what?" Sam asked. "What happened with you two? I need to know for my memoirs."

"You don't need to know anything," Will said. He picked up the open bottle of wine and took a long gulp straight from it. "I don't want you to know, anyway. You'll think less of me."

"Not possible," Sam said. "My opinion of you is so low already that any sort of insight into your head," he stopped to poke Will in the face, "can only improve your situation."

"Oh, shut up," Will said. He took another sip and then huffed. "Fine, I slept with him."

"But he's not even hot," Sam blurted out. "I mean, if I were a guy, I mean, if I were a gay guy, I wouldn't tap that."

"I didn't tap that," Will said, making a face. "He tapped this."

Sam tried to drown himself in his cup of wine.

"Sorry."

"Sokay," Sam said.

"I... I cheated on Audrey with him," Will said softly. "I didn't even want to sleep with him, but he got me drunk and, well, here we are. He's the real reason my marriage ended and I lost

this house. The reason I'm sitting here right now sipping out of a Styrofoam cup with a man who's afraid of shovels and breadcrumbs."

"Death."

"What?"

"I'm also afraid of death," Sam whispered heavily.

"Oh."

"Doesn't it bother you? Death. I'm going to die because I'm old. Older than you. God. I'm going to die soon and I haven't been laid in two years," Sam groaned.

Will laughed. "Two years."

"Yeah, that's like... That's two years, man, Wilhelm," Sam said, raising his cup in a toast. "To two sexless years and probably two more."

"I haven't had sex in a long time, either," Will said. "And my situation isn't looking very good. I mean, I'm homeless."

"You're not homeless."

"Once I move out of Mystic, yeah. I'm homeless," Will moaned. "I'll turn tricks and bake them delicious cakes for extra money."

"Hey, you might be onto something."

Will shoved Sam hard, and Sam held his hands up, shaking his head.

"More wine," Will decided. He leaned over Sam's lap and grabbed at a new bottle, lingering just long enough to drive Sam a little crazy. Will smelled fresh, delicious, a bit like the cakes he made, but better.

Better Than Sex cake. Now Sam understood. One cup sexual tension, two tablespoons of Will, and a big dash of wine.

"Get off," Sam mumbled. "You're killing me."

"Hold on, Jesus," Will fussed. He finally sat up, holding a bottle of wine in each hand. "Here, take one."

"No, I'm good. I'm so good."

"Take," Will insisted, shoving the bottle into Sam's lap. Will leaned back, one side of his body squashed against Sam. "You know, I don't think I'm the marrying kind... I don't think it'll ever work out for me. And it sucks, because I really want to be settled, you know?"

"Ah."

“I don’t even care about the sex. Well, yeah I do. But mostly I just...” Will adjusted himself against Sam and took a long sip of wine. “No, the sex is really important. Samuel?”

Sam nodded dumbly. His head felt heavy and his groin felt hot. “Yuh.”

“How many people have you slept with?” Will asked.

“Oh, god,” Sam groaned. “Four.”

“All women?”

“As far as I know.”

Will nodded slightly. “I’ve only been with one woman.”

“And one douchebag.”

Will laughed. “And one douchebag.”

“And is that it?” Sam asked. “Two?”

Will nodded, eyes heavy lidded. “Yeah, and it was never really good sex, you know? Never like the shit you see in movies with all the passion and the whole, ripping each other’s clothes off because you can’t stand it anymore.” Will leaned against Sam even more and fanned himself. “I just need to be good and fucked, for real, just really, really fucked.” Sam squeezed his cup so hard it folded in on itself. “And it’s never going to happen. No one is ever going to touch me again.”

Sam rolled his eyes and set his dripping cup down. He took a single finger and poked Will in the eye. Will squealed. “There, I touched you. Happy?” Will scowled. “Anyway, that’s ridiculous, you’re an... okay sorta guy,” Sam said lamely. “Grant would fuck you, he’d so fuck you.”

“Yeah?” Will seemed a little too eager.

“But he’s a player,” Sam said. “You don’t want that.”

“I don’t?”

“No, you need someone who will, um, someone in your same sort of situation,” Sam said.

“Homeless and sex deprived?” Will said dryly. “Sounds like the kind of guy I’d like shoving appendages in me. My body is a temple, Samuel.”

“It is.”

“And when I finally have sex again, it’s not going to be with just anybody.” He shoved Sam in the arm. “It needs to be special. When Michael did me we were trashed, because when I get drunk, I get touchy feely. Or I used to.” He was half in Sam’s lap at this point. “Am I squashing you?”

“No,” Sam said.

“And when this guy finally does take me to bed, it’s gotta be for love,” Will added.

“Of course.”

“I want to be wined and dined,” Will explained.

“Mhm.”

“And you’d better not just shove it in there,” Will said.

“I won’t.”

They stopped and stared at each other.

“We have the wine,” Sam said.

Will leaned forward and their faces smashed together clumsily. They both groaned, and Will put his hands on Sam’s cheeks and zeroed in on his lips, giving Sam one of the sloppiest, wettest kisses of his life. Sam cursed loudly and pushed Will down, pinning him against the floor.

“Oh, Christ, your leg,” Will moaned, and Sam realized his knee was digging into Will’s groin. Sam drew back his knee and shut Will’s fussing up with another hard kiss, their lips sliding together.

Sam’s head felt heavy, and he could hardly hold himself up. He pulled back from Will and blinked slowly, pulling him into focus, and the look in Will’s eyes almost killed Sam. It was hungry, full of lust. He was Will’s prey, and Sam was loving every second of it.

“Wine,” Sam managed.

“Already so drunk,” Will groaned. “No more, no more.”

“No -- it’s... It’s on me!” Sam rolled them over and realized he’d knocked over one of the wine bottles and it was getting everywhere. All over his pants.

Will solved that problem by straddling Sam’s waist and making quick work of Sam’s belt buckle. Sam just watched Will, dazed. Will threw the belt behind him and started attacking the zipper of Sam’s pants.

“Will,” Sam stuttered out. “I don’t know--”

“Don’t talk,” Will said, putting his hand across Sam’s mouth. “Talking is bad. Really bad. Don’t say anything mean to me or I won’t let you fuck me.”

Sam’s eyes bugged out, and he grabbed at Will’s arms, struggling to tip Will over onto the floor. Will squealed and gave in, panting below Sam.

“I don’t know how to do this,” Sam said. Will blinked and arched up, rubbing his groin against Sam’s, and the talking stopped. Their mouths crashed together and their hands were everywhere. Sam ripped Will’s shirt up over his head and tugged his pants down roughly, not even bothering to undo the zipper.

Will squirmed and thrashed, rubbing against Sam until they were both shaking and moaning. They shoved their pants and boxers down to their knees, kissing all the while.

“Do it,” Will demanded. Their cocks brushed together, and Sam slumped forward, sinking between Will’s thighs.

“I... I...” Sam thrust forward, his dick bumping Will’s ass.

“Yes,” Will moaned.

“Oh fuck.”

“Inside me.”

Sam stopped for a moment and grabbed at his pants. He forced Will back on the floor; the other man was clutching at him, and Sam knew he had to do something first. He fumbled with his pants pockets and pulled out his wallet. He opened it and found just what he needed - a single condom.

He’d very determinedly placed the condom in his wallet before moving to Newport, hoping to get lucky not only with his writing, but with the ladies as well. He was pretty sure he was about to get very lucky, and though Will was no lady, he was prettier than any girl Sam had ever been with.

Sam ripped open the packet and rolled the condom down. He hunched over Will, and they rubbed some more, and Sam breathed out fiercely through his nostrils. He palmed Will’s ass and squeezed, pressing down there, feeling the hotness of Will’s hole even through the condom. It was like they were already fucking.

He spread Will open with his fingers and nudged just the head of his dick in. Will seized up, clawing at Sam’s back, and cried out as he came. His come smeared all across Sam’s stomach, and Sam pressed in an inch more before he lost it as well. He came in staggering bursts against the crease of Will’s ass, catching sight of Will’s little pink hole. He kept his eye on the prize as he fell backward, almost under the bed.

Will scrambled forward and pulled at Sam’s knees, his hair a crazy dark mess over his bare shoulders. “S-Sam. Oh, Sam. We...”

“Damn,” Sam groaned. “Did that really happen?” He tugged the condom off and threw it under the bed.

“Yeah,” Will breathed. He laughed, rubbing at his face. “That was so bad and so good. Oh god, you idiot.”

Sam knew to be slightly embarrassed; he had come in record time. But so had Will.

“No talking,” Sam said.

Will grabbed at Sam’s wrists and pulled him forward, pressing their lips together again. Sam was still coming down from his orgasm, and he hardly noticed being dragged up on Will’s bed, half naked. Will kicked off his boxers and kneeled over Sam, completely naked and flushed.

“Crumbs,” Sam mumbled, his eyelids heavy. “Crumbs in the bed, oh god...”

And that was the last thing Sam remembered that night.

\*\*\*

Sam cracked an eye open the next morning, feeling the sun beat down on him heavily. He felt sweaty and thick, waterlogged. He opened his other eye and looked around the room.

He was in his office, but all he could see were white blankets. He shifted a bit. He was in a bed.

Will’s bed.

And he was almost naked but for his boxers haphazardly pulled on and a sock hanging off his toe.

He heard a light sigh behind him, and he froze.

“God,” Sam whispered. His eyes landed on something. A crumb, nestled in the sheets. “Oh shit!”

“Mmm,” came a breathy voice behind him. Sam realized that someone was cuddled up to his back.

And that someone was Will. The same Will who had dug a hole in Sam’s backyard, hosed him down, and stalked him for an entire week straight.

Sam sat up quickly and let out a bone deep shudder. Will was curled up completely naked beside him, a small smile on his face. A warning flashed through Sam’s brain, but despite his common sense telling him to run and his entire body aching from his hangover, he didn’t move.

His dick was hard, so forget his brain. He stroked a soft hand down Will’s back and wondered what he’d gotten himself into.

Will’s smile warmed a bit, and he curled closer, letting out another sweet little sigh. His eyelids fluttered a few times, and then he looked up at Sam.

“Hi,” Will said, his voice thick with sleep.



Sam nodded, his hand tensing on Will's back. He relaxed his fingers and rested them on Will's waist. "Do you have to go to work soon?"

"Mm... What time is it?"

"I don't know. I just heard the ferry horn, so..."

Will closed his eyes and nestled himself under the blankets. "Soon. Work's soon."

Sam stared at Will and retracted his hand. He could see Will's pale, naked thigh poking out from under the covers, smooth and soft.

"What about you?" Will mumbled.

"I'll, um... I'm gonna go take a shower."

Will smiled again and curled in, kissing Sam's shoulder. Sam waited a moment before rolling out of the bed and backing away slowly. Will pulled Sam's pillow to his chest and snored softly, his hair curling against the sheets.

Sam shook his head and left the room. He walked down the hall, rubbing the back of his neck. His whole body ached and his head felt groggy. Memories of the previous night were flashing in his mind, making his dick harder. He'd had sex with Will. Well, he'd tried. And who knows what else they'd gotten up to.

Everything was so foggy.

"Shower," Sam murmured to himself. "And then writing. And then... Hell if I know."

One step at a time.

\*\*\*

When Sam came out of his room, fresh from a good shower (and an even better wank), he went to his office and saw that Will wasn't there. In fact, the bed was made and Sam's desk was tidied. Will had color coded his Post-It notes. Who would do something like that?

Sam made a face and went downstairs. Everything was quiet and still. There was no sign of anyone. Will must have gone to work.

And Sam couldn't help but feel a little disappointed.

"Damn," he said softly, rubbing at his forehead. His stomach rumbled, too, and he remembered some granola bars in the kitchen cabinet.

He walked into the kitchen and raised his eyebrows. On the table was a pot of fresh coffee, a lush blueberry muffin, and a bottle of aspirin. There was also a small note. Sam picked it up and glanced it over. I'll be back later than usual. Making pasta tonight. -- W

Sam felt deliriously domestic, and he grabbed at the muffin and bit into it as if it were an apple. It was, as he'd guessed, just as delicious as Will had been the night before.

Sam wasn't proud of his performance, he'd pretty much rubbed himself all over Will and then blown his load the moment they'd touched. Come to think of it, he hadn't even gotten all the way inside of Will.

"Oh my god."

He'd gotten inside of Will. His dick. Will's ass.

His dick in Will's ass.

"Oh... my god." He shoved the rest of the muffin into his mouth and leaned against the stove. How had it gotten that far? How had he somehow gotten Will to let him? Will was beautiful, soft, and kind.

Sure, Will had his own eccentricities, but it wasn't like he was a jobless, heartless freak like Sam. Sam didn't deserve Will. He didn't deserve to get his penis anywhere near Will.

"That hurts," he said, as he came to the realization. Will was too good for him. "That bastard, why would he let me sleep with him?"

Was shacking up with Sam a last ditch effort from Will to get the house? No, because that didn't gel with Sam's theory that Will was actually human. He scowled and stomped around the house a bit, trying to clear his head. His dick wasn't helping matters. It hadn't gotten any attention in ages and was now being more stubborn than Sam.

Every time he thought of Will's lips, Will's hands, and Will's perfect ass, Sam's dick stood at attention. This was definitely going to mess with Sam's busy schedule for the day. He'd planned on doing absolutely nothing until lunch. and then afterward, maybe napping. He no longer had a job; he didn't need to write anymore.

He could laze around all he wanted.

The thought made him ill.

"God damn it," he muttered, kicking at a stovepipe. "Shit, shit, shit." And his dick was hard, very hard. "Fuck!"

He shouted the last curse and sat down on his couch miserably. That sweet little note that Will had left was still clenched in his fist. Sweet little Will and his sweet little notes and his sweet little ass.

Sam couldn't stand it. He got up and stomped up the stairs and then stomped into his office. All the stomping was inspiring him to write, but what for?

For himself?

Sam sat down behind his desk and put a fresh piece of paper in the typewriter. Before starting, he gazed at the bed in the room, blushing again at how trigger happy he'd been. He didn't even come that fast when he'd fumbled around with his first girlfriend.

What was it about Will, anyway? Sam licked at his lips, the taste of blueberry still fresh. When he thought about the moment his dick had gotten inside Will, his stomach lurched pleasantly and he felt hot all over. He couldn't stop thinking about it.

He glanced at the clock. Will wouldn't be home again for seven more hours. Oh, but the sweet little note had said he'd be home later than usual that night. Fantastic.

Sam stared at his crotch. "We'll get through this," he mumbled. "God, I've become one of those guys who talk to their penis. Amazing. I'll kill Grant. This is his doing."

He gave a sigh and started typing.

\*\*\*

Sam had been giving into his basic instincts when there was a loud knock on the door. He felt caught and flustered.

He took his fingers off the keys of the typewriter and stood. It felt naughty and odd writing for himself, but it also felt so right. Sort of how being with Will made him feel.

He had to stop thinking about Will, otherwise he'd have another stiffy to deal with, and that could get a bit uncomfortable around company. He trotted down the stairs and opened the door.

"My man!" Grant boomed, storming into the house. He clapped Sam on the back and smirked, which he was wont to do.

"Whoa, what's got you so happy?" Sam asked. "I thought you were still pissed at me?"

"You know there's a shovel in your living room," Grant said.

Sam bristled. "It's Will's."

"So it's true!" Grant said, eyes glinting. "Get in his pants yet?"

"What are you talking about?" Sam asked. He paused. "And how did you know about his pants?"

Grant hooted. "It's all around town, Sam. Rumors about you and Will. He's staying here, right? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It isn't like that," Sam said quickly. "We were drunk. It's not like we like each other. It's not like the ring meant anything! It's not like I invited him over here so I could come awkwardly all over him!"

“Oh...” Grant’s smirk fell off and his eyes widened. “I didn’t... Man, I didn’t know something actually... happened. The ring?”

Sam turned red and kicked at the floor. “It meant nothing.”

“Sam.” Grant cocked his head to the side. “The ring?”

“There is no ring,” Sam said. “There’s nothing.”

Grant stared at Sam. “Right.”

Sam sighed. “Look. It was a mistake. Whatever you heard... big mistake. Catastrophic. Massive.”

“I think you like him,” Grant replied.

“Dude, I’m not gay,” Sam said, scowling.

“And Will isn’t exactly a manly man,” Grant said, eyes shining. “I see it happening. You two. He is too good for you, you know, but...”

Sam knew. “Well, I don’t like him. I hate him. That’s probably why things got so out of hand.”

“I hate a lot of people, Sam, and... I don’t invite them to stay at my house for a week.”

“Yeah, well, you’re an asshole.”

Grant laughed. “You really mean to tell me that you don’t like Will?”

Sam shook his head. Anything he’d been feeling earlier must have been his poor, neglected libido lashing out and making Sam feel gooey things. “I feel nothing, Grant. You should know that about me by now.”

Grant squinted at Sam. “You’re sweet on the guy. I know you are.”

“I’m not!” Sam yelled. “I’m not in love with Will!”

“I didn’t say you were in love, man,” Grant said, smirking again. “But if that’s the case, you know, if you aren’t, um, involved with Will... You won’t mind if I ask him out?”

Sam flinched. “What?”

“Yeah, I think the two of us would hit it off.” Grant raised his eyebrows, staring Sam down. “So, you don’t mind?”

Sam felt like he was being tested. He cleared his throat. “Why would I mind?”

“Great.” Grant rubbed his hands together. “I’ll go down to his shop right now and ask him to dinner for tonight.”

“What? He’s working! You can’t just barge in there,” Sam said. “Besides, it’s not like I care or anything, but do you think you two are compatible?”

“What are you saying?”

“Maybe he’s not your type,” Sam said.

“Everyone’s my type,” Grant said. “Unless you think I’m not his?”

“No, I’m sure you two will...” Sam clenched his teeth together. “Hit it off famously.”

Grant grinned. “Well, then, I better go get the girl. Thanks, man.”

Sam could only nod and watch Grant disappear out the door.

It would never work between them. Will and Grant? That was even more ridiculous an idea than Will and Sam.

“Jackass,” Sam muttered, laughing a little, but his stomach was aching with something unfamiliar. Jealousy? Envy? Sam had written these emotions countless times, but he’d hardly experienced them for himself.

Sam frowned. “I’ll kill him.”

## Chapter Nine

### *Sweet Tarts and Old Farts*

Sam sat in an armchair downstairs, watching the front door intently. He'd been waiting there for over an hour, and it had started to get dark out. He felt like a worried father, waiting for his daughter to come home from her first date with the captain of the football team.

Except Will wasn't his daughter and... Well, Grant was no football hero.

He leaned forward and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was too old for this kind of stress. He was a bitter old man at the ripe age of twenty-four.

Soon, a car pulled into his driveway, and Sam tensed, his stomach plummeting to the floor. He stood up quickly and started making himself busy in the kitchen. No way was it going to look like he'd been watching the front door like a hawk when Will came strolling in. No way.

The headlights of the car in the driveway turned off, and a car door opened and shut. Sam started washing an already clean plate in the sink, his knuckles almost white.

The front door opened, and Sam's shoulders drew up. How was he going to react when he saw Will's beautifully flushed, happy face? What was Sam going to do?

"Sam?"

Sam turned around. It wasn't Will at all. It was Grant.

"What?" Sam asked, walking into the living room.

Grant sighed and entered the house. "Hey, I have to talk to you about something."

Something hot and sick rolled in Sam's stomach. What could he possibly have to say?

"Have a nice night?" Sam asked sharply.

Grant looked guilty, and Sam's stomach dropped. "That's what I want to talk to you about. Promise you won't be mad at me."

"Where's Will?"

"What?"

"It's ten at night, what did you do to him?" Sam yelled.

"Oh, so you do care?" Grant asked. "Since when? You don't give a shit about what Will does. Why should you care if I take him out, if I do him?"

"You did him?" Sam asked, voice quiet, face eerily calm.

"I didn't say--"

"I'm going to kill you!" Sam leapt onto Grant and slugged him hard across the face, right in the mouth. His hands wrapped around Grant's neck and commenced strangulation. He was out for suffocation. Slow, painful suffocation.

Luckily for Grant, Sam had the upper body strength of a ten-year-old girl, so he was easily shoved aside.

"You hit me!" Grant declared, his voice cracking. "You tried to strangle me! My voice! My livelihood!"

Sam panted, looking as if he was going to come at Grant again.

"Stop right there," Grant croaked, putting his hand out. He brought his hands beneath his breast and cleared his throat. "Mee, mee, mee, mee, mee," he hummed, exercising his voice. "La, la, la, la, la, la!"

"What the hell?"

"Huskies Dog Food," Grant boomed out.

Sam gaped at his former best friend, rubbing his sore knuckles. He'd really thrown a punch.

"Good, my voice is fine. I don't have to kill you now," Grant said. "Do you have any idea how much my vocal chords are insured for? More than you make in a year, I tell you what!"

"That isn't the fucking point!" Sam snapped. "Tell me you slept with him, tell me!"

"Why is it even your business?" Grant was smirking angrily, and it gave him a sinister flair. "Why should I have to tell you who I bag?"

Sam's nostrils flared. "Because... Because! He... God, and what, you're so great? You're a voice actor, Grant. Who the fuck are you? Why would anyone... What the hell do you have to offer? Stop smirking!"

"You little bastard," Grant said hotly. "Don't go there."

"Too late. Couldn't cut it as a real actor? Had to talk about dog food into a microphone instead? Christ, Grant, you're pathetic," Sam spat out. "You read my books for a living. It doesn't get any lower than that."

"That hurts me," Grant said softly. But that infernal smirk was still on his face, and Sam felt ready to blow another gasket.

"Then stop smirking for once and show some damn emotion!" Sam bellowed. "I'm so tired of the smugness, Grant. Who are you anymore?"

Grant dropped his head. "I used to be an actor," he said.

"What?"

“I said.” He looked up, smirk still in place. “I used to be an actor. I filmed the pilot for a well reviewed television show, it was set to take off. My career was about to get red hot... and then...”

“And then?”

“I worked my face too hard,” Grant whispered. “I was doing facial exercises one night, you know, trying to take a new spin on melancholy and... Then I suffered a minor stroke.”

“What?”

Grant nodded. “I suffered a minor stroke, paralyzing almost half of my face. And now I only have control over thirty percent of the muscles in my face. All I can do is smirk, man. It’s all I can do. And so, I am a voice actor.” Grant threw his hands up in frustration. “I can’t show emotions; no one takes my face seriously. All of my business and job deals take place over the phone. Right now, Sam, I’m... I’m upset right now. I’m torn up inside, and all I can do is smirk. This isn’t a life, Sam. I used to be someone.”

Sam stared at Grant. “That’s... That’s terrible. Why didn’t you tell me? All this time I just thought you were... an asshole.”

Grant’s eye glistened with a tear. “I know, I know. I can’t show my face anymore, not on the screen. I’m a failure, Sam. If it wasn’t for my powerful voice, I’d be... nothing.”

Sam held his arms up and gestured for Grant to come in for a hug. They embraced awkwardly for a few moments, patting each other on the back, when Sam remembered how angry he was.

“You fucked Will!” Sam shouted, shoving Grant away and glaring.

Grant flinched and then made a face that resembled a smirk. “Sam, are you kidding me?”

“You... You did, didn’t you? You took him out, he fell for your smirk -- sorry -- and then you nailed him,” Sam said, finally feeling crushed.

“You know what, Sam? I was coming here to apologize, but now I’m just going to leave. And you didn’t have to bring the smirk into it. Right now I’m falling apart.” His smirk hardened, and he turned to the door. “Goodbye.”

Sam watched him leave, anger, sadness, and confusion still coursing through him. It was the worst time in the world for the door to swing open again and reveal Will, smiling and flushed.

“Hey, what was Grant doing here?” Will asked.

“You!” Sam said. “You’ve ruined everything.”

Will’s eyes widened. “Sam, what do you mean?”



“You’ve destroyed my longest friendship!” he yelled. “You... slut!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Will asked.

“You slept with Grant,” Sam said. “I can’t believe you’d even agree to go on a date with him after last night. You used me, didn’t you? You thought you could fuck around with me and I’d be so desperate I’d fork over my keys and you could finally get what you want?”

Will stood there, gobsmacked, mouth wide open.

“News flash, you mean nothing to me. I was drunk! ”

Will’s eyes flashed at this, and he stepped forward, poking Sam hard in the chest with a long finger. “How dare you!”

“How dare you!” Sam said back childishly. “He was my best friend, Will!”

“I didn’t sleep with him,” Will said. His tone was icy, flat.

“Then where the hell were you? Why’d you come back so late?”

“I was working! I told you, in my note,” Will said. “What the hell’s gotten into you? Did you not take your medication today, you freak?”

“Don’t lie to me. Grant told me he asked you out and--”

“What? I hadn’t seen Grant in weeks until just outside the house right now!” Will yelled. “Jesus Christ. I was baking!” He grabbed at his shoulder bag and pulled out a small bag of tarts, shoving them at Sam. “I made these for you, you jerk.”

“Will...” Sam tried to grab at his arm.

“Don’t touch me, I don’t mean anything to you,” Will spat back. “I’m just a slut, right?”

“No, I mean... I don’t know, Grant said he took you out, and then it got so late--”

“Late? It’s not even ten-thirty! God, you’re like an old person!” Will stormed past Sam and climbed the stairs, fussing and cursing the whole way. Sam followed him into the office where all of Will’s belongings were, feeling incredibly confused. He stuffed the small bag of tarts in his pocket.

“Will, listen to me...”

“Why should I listen?” Will snapped. He’d pulled out his suitcase and started tossing his clothes in it. “You don’t listen to me. You don’t even know me.”

“What are you doing?” Sam demanded. “And what do you mean, I don’t know you? I know you!”

"I'm packing. I can't stay here. You're a complete maniac," Will said, grabbing a jacket and pulling it on. "You... I was so wrong to ever think... And then you thought last night was about me wanting the house? You're sick."

"Fuck the house!" Sam shouted. "I don't care about the house! I stopped caring about the house when I started caring about you!"

"And you just strung me along, so, what, you could sleep with me? You couldn't even do that right. You're pathetic, Sam," Will said, his voice shaking. "You really know nothing about me. How dare you assume anything?"

"I know you cried for hours in your bedroom closet when your grandfather died, when you were seven," Sam said quietly, trying to calm himself. "I know you tried to dig a hole to China in the backyard and ended up finding a buried treasure, just a box full of buttons, but you loved it anyway. I know that by the end of your marriage with Audrey, you weren't even sleeping in the same bed as her."

Will dropped the shoe he was holding and stared at Sam. "What?"

"The letters," Sam said, coming closer. "I read them."

"The letters?"

"All the letters you sent to Audrey, I got them," Sam said. "I didn't... I didn't mean to read them, but then I hurt my leg and Grant brought them down and I... Will, you're a beautiful person."

Tears spilled down Will's cheeks, and he put a hand to his mouth. "You," Will said. "You are the most manipulative person I have ever met. I don't want to ever see you again." Will slammed his suitcase shut and pushed past Sam out the door and to the stairs. Sam ran after him.

"Please, Will! Please!"

Will stopped halfway down the steps and turned, glaring up at Sam. "No. You've ruined this house for me. Keep it, it's yours now." He sniffed and wiped the tears from his cheeks. "I don't even care that you called me a slut, because you know I'm not. But you read those letters and you... you were inside me and I trusted you!"

"Don't leave, let me explain," Sam said, voice desperate.

"You've said enough, you've done enough," Will said. "I feel dirty, and I'm going to leave now."

Will gave Sam one last look and then was out the door. With a desperate sigh, Sam followed him to the porch and stopped at the top of the steps. "Will, don't do this."

Will held up a hand as he walked down the steps and then down the path to the road. The ferry horn blared as Sam watched Will walk away from him, suitcase in hand.

Sam had won the house, but he was all alone.

And he felt terrible.

## Chapter Ten

### *Mushy Shit*

Sam set the store-bought cake down on the table and lifted his fork. He took a mournful bite and swallowed.

It wasn't the same.

Nothing had been the same since Will left two days before. Sam threw down his fork.

Cake was never going to be the same again.

\*\*\*

Sam paced back and forth in front of his typewriter. It'd been two days without writing and two days without Will.

What did it mean?

\*\*\*

He walked by the shovel and scowled.

He walked by it again and swore.

He walked by it one more time and broke down like a little girl.

\*\*\*

Sam shook the crumbs out of the sheets and balled them up in his fists. He had to do something around the house or he would go crazy.

He walked down the steps into the laundry room and stared down into the washing machine. His hands clenched tight around the little bundle in his hands. He brought the sheets to his face and inhaled deeply.

"Oh my god, I've become a pervert," he groaned into the sheets. They smelled like Will and some crumbs got into his hair, but he didn't even mind. What were a few crumbs, anyway, in the long run?

"I need a new hobby," Sam decided. He shoved the sheets into the washing machine and cranked on the hot water.

\*\*\*

He moved the shovel from the foyer to the shed out back. That was where it belonged.

\*\*\*

Sam watered the flowers and waved to Mrs. Hastings. She smiled at him and brought over a glass of lemonade.

“The lawn is looking mighty nice there, Samuel,” she said. “Mighty nice.”

“Thank you,” Sam said. It was the first words he’d spoken to another human being in three days. “I’ve got a lot of free time now.”

“No writing?” she asked.

Sam shook his head. “I don’t know where my inspiration went,” he admitted.

She smiled, one of those wise little grins that should be noted. “I think I might know where you can find it again,” she said. She handed Sam a flyer and winked. “Bye now.”

Sam looked down at the flyer and let the hose run freezing cold water all over his feet. Will’s new bakery was opening the next evening. 5 p.m.. The public was welcome.

“Not me,” he mumbled. But he folded up the flyer and put it safely in his pocket, anyway.

\*\*\*

Sam moved the shovel from the shed out back to the kitchen. It was Will’s. It should be in the kitchen.

\*\*\*

Sam ignored Grant’s phone call for the seventh time that day. He let the machine get it.

“You have to come, man,” Grant’s voice rang out across the house. “He’ll forgive you. You’re meant for each other. God, you’ve got me sounding all gay. At least pick up the phone so I can apologize for playing that trick on you. I never asked Will out. I was just calling your bluff and... Damn it, Sam. Call me back.”

\*\*\*

Sam moved the shovel from the kitchen back to the foyer. It felt right.

\*\*\*

It was the day of the bakery opening, almost a week since Will had left, and the weather was absolutely beautiful. It was the perfect day for families to go into town to sample the splendors of European pastry, Will's specialty.

Sam was choosing to spend the day inside, lying on his couch and watching yet another Golden Girls marathon. Of course he knew what day it was. He knew exactly what was going on in town. He could picture it all so clearly.

Will would be dressed to the nines, sleek hair, just a dab of lip gloss, and a sassy little apron would be tied around his waist. Or maybe he'd have on one of those kinds that tied around the neck. Will was full of surprises.

Sam bitterly watched television, crossing his legs and settling deeper into the cushions. He glanced toward the foyer and could see the shovel handle poking out, mocking him.

"Shut up," Sam muttered, glaring at the shovel. "What do you know?"

The shovel sat solemnly.

"Yeah, I know." Sam made a face. "Oh, god. Not again."

He'd been catching himself not only talking to his crotch, but to the shovel, too. He was completely pathetic.

He stole a peek at his watch. It was four-thirty. Soon, Will's bakery would open.

Sam closed his eyes and tried to get himself to fall asleep.

But as soon as he closed his eyes, all he could see was Will.

He had it bad for Will. Really bad.

Sam put on some pants for the first time in two days and grabbed the shovel.

Sometimes to get what you want, you have to make a fool of yourself. In public. In front of the man you love. Regardless of rejection. Regardless of security throwing you out the back door into a pile of rotting pastry.

Because that was how Sam was visualizing it, as he got into his car and put his key in the ignition, the shovel strapped into the passenger seat.

Sam wasn't much for confidence.

"Hold on," he told the shovel. "This is only going to get creepier."

\*\*\*

The situation was a nightmare.

Sam was holding the shovel, standing right outside Das Essen, being eyed up strangely by random passersby. The shop looked different than the one in Mystic. It was more polished, but still had a lot of heart. It reminded Sam so much of Will: sleek on the outside, but sweet and warm on the inside. He could only imagine that inside the shop there was something delicious and sweet.

Oh, and there were probably some cakes in there, too.

“Okay,” he said, and opened the door.

When he got inside, he noticed the same oak floors that were in both the house by the harbor and the shop in Mystic. He stared down at the shiny floors and took a deep breath. The shop lights were dimmed, and Will stood at the front of the room with a microphone in hand. And damn, he looked good. An enthralled audience stared ahead at him.

“And so I want to thank you all for coming to the grand opening of Das Essen,” Will said. “It means so much to be able to open up my shop here, in my hometown. I’ve known all of you most of my life, and I know my parents would be so proud to see my dream realized. Thank you.”

Will put down the microphone and smiled radiantly at the crowd, and they all clapped for him. A few cheered, and Mrs. Hastings walked up to Will and handed him a dozen roses.

Sam had to make his move.

“Will!” he called out. He couldn’t be heard over the chatter and buzz of the people in the shop. Sam lowered the shovel and cleared his throat. He put two fingers between his lips and gave a loud, ear piercing whistle.

The shop went silent. Sam’s knees started to shake.

“Will,” he said, his voice wobbling. “Will Adler.”

Will turned around, and when he saw Sam, his eyes widened to the size of small pies. Every happy emotion that had been on his face before disappeared and he looked completely horrified.

“Will,” Sam said again, softer this time. “I came to...”

“What?” Will asked, putting his roses down on a table. “What did you come to the very important opening of my new shop to do, Samuel?”

Sam glanced around the shop. He saw Grant, Robert Jones, and Mrs. Hastings among the crowd. All eyes were on him.

Including Will’s. Will’s gaze was cold and level, directed only at Sam.

“I came to... to give you this,” Sam said dumbly, holding the dirty shovel up. Some dirt fell onto the clean, white floor, and a few people began to murmur to each other.

“I told you to keep that.”

“Yeah, well, I can’t really keep it,” Sam said, setting the shovel down. “In fact, I can’t really... do anything.”

Will’s face was red with embarrassment, and he gestured to the back room. “Can we talk in there?”

“No, I need to say what I need to say out here, in front of everyone,” Sam said confidently.

“Oh, god, I wish you wouldn’t,” Will groaned.

Sam glanced at a nearby table. There was a glass of water on the surface. “Can I have this?” he asked, already grabbing the glass. The woman at the table scoffed. “Thanks.” He took a long sip, and some of it trickled down his chin and onto his shirt. “Oh, crap.”

“Sam,” Grant hissed.

Sam ignored him. “Okay, what I need to say, what I need to say...”

“Say it, don’t spray it,” the lady at the table muttered.

“Oh,” Sam said, setting down the glass. “Ha. Ha. Will?”

“Just say whatever crazy thing you need to say to me,” Will said, his face turning red. “Get it over with so we can go on with the opening.”

“You can’t go on with it,” Sam started nervously. “You can’t without me. Or I can’t without you. What I’m trying to say is...” He felt like he was about to throw up. “I brought you your shovel.”

Will looked like he might kill Sam.

“I brought it because it reminded me of you,” Sam continued. “I mean, it was constantly hanging around the house, sorta like you used to do. Except, it was muddy and you are generally... quite clean.”

“Sam,” Will said lowly. “I think you should leave.”

“Not without you,” Sam said firmly. “I may be crap at words, which is ironic given my chosen field of um... well... I love you, you see.”

The crowd hushed, and Will’s eyebrow slowly rose up into his hairline.

“What did you say?” Will asked, voice trembling.

“You make delicious cakes and you can’t hold your liquor, but neither can I, and you drive me so crazy because you’re so fucking nice, and smart, and Will. Will, I love you,” Sam stuttered out.



Will put a hand to his mouth and trembled. "Prove it," he said through his fingers.

Sam walked up to where Will was standing and set the shovel up against the table. "I need to give you something back, something that's yours."

"I already said I don't want the shovel," Will said, eyes brimming over with tears. "Sam, if you..."

Sam shoved his hands into his pockets and pulled out a set of house keys. "Here," he said. "The house is yours."

Will paled, except for his cheeks, which were still bright pink. "Oh my god."

"I can't live in it. It's you, everything is you. My fucking -- sorry -- my office is you. The kitchen is you. The bedrooms are you, the backyard, the shed, the driveway, that field... Especially that ditch." Sam heaved a sigh. "The house belongs to you, Will."

Will shook his head. "N--no, it doesn't, you b--bought it, and I can't buy it back because I put all of my money into this shop and--"

"It's yours," Sam said, taking Will's hand and putting the keys gently in his palm. "All right? Yours."

"Oh." Will looked down at the keys and blinked out a tear.

"And I can't write anymore, not without you," Sam went on. "When you're around, I write so much. You inspire me, I... I haven't been able to write, and then you came along and I could. Then you disappeared and I couldn't again. See?"

Will sighed. "You have no idea if that's why--"

"Yes, I do," Sam insisted.

"Well, I can't take it. The house," Will said, giving the keys back to Sam. "I can't take it back. It's your house. You own it."

"But, see... You sort of own me," Sam said lamely. "And I'm useless without you."

"Take the dog gone blasted keys and kiss the idiot already!" a voice called from the back of the shop. Sam turned, and Will craned his neck to look.

It was Mrs. Hastings, and she was waving her cane at them.

"Quick now, I'm missing Jeopardy for this!"

Sam looked at Will, holding out the keys. "Please," he said. "Will?"

Will shook his head. "I can't live there," Will said softly. Sam's heart sank. "Without you."

Sam's head snapped up.

“Now kiss me and give me those damn keys,” Will murmured.

Sam could have let out a whoop of joy. Instead, he grabbed hold of Will’s hands and wrapped them around his own, the keys in their fists. Sam curled an arm around Will’s tiny waist and tugged him so close their chests bumped.

“I love you,” Sam said again. “Even if you get crumbs in the bed.”

“Sam, I love you, but...”

“Yes, Will?”

“Shut up.”

Their lips met, and Sam threaded his fingers through Will’s hair and kissed him senseless, dipping him backwards as Will’s foot popped up a bit. When they pulled apart, Will’s cheeks were flushed and his hair was mussed. Around them, people were murmuring and Grant was smirking fondly.

“So, you and me? In my house?” Will asked, beaming.

“Yeah, me and you. In my house,” Sam said, kissing Will’s neck.

Will laughed, rolling his eyes. “For real?”

“For real.”

“Are you sure?” Will asked.

“Wilhelm Adler, are you deaf and dumb?” Mrs. Hastings called from the back. “He already said yes! Now bring out the cake. We’re all here for some sugar, sugar.”

Sam winced. The moment was getting to be a bit too much for him, but he gazed at Will, feeling happier than he had in... well, ever.

Perhaps the moment called for a bit too much, perhaps moments like these were what made all of those annoying happy people Sam couldn’t stand so happy.

“Our house,” Sam said softly.

Will’s eyes flashed. He leaned forward and kissed Sam again.

“Seriously, some cake would be amazing right now,” Grant boomed from the crowd.

Will flipped Grant off over Sam’s shoulder, and they went back to kissing.

It was like coming home and all that other mushy shit. And as far as mushy shit went, Sam was becoming quite partial to Will’s.

His hands slid down and squeezed Will's ass. This was better than cake, this was better than writing, this was Will.

## Chapter Eleven

### *The Icing on the Cake*

Sam had never seen so much cake in one spot. And he'd never dished out so much cake to so many people so fast. They'd sold out the entire shop.

But he wasn't thinking about cake, he was thinking about something much sweeter, and he was ready to put his fork in it. He didn't want a repeat performance of the last time they'd attempted sex, but as they pulled into the driveway of their house, Will was already in his lap, hands everywhere. Sam was worried. Really worried.

He was worried about how hard he was, how he was sober but felt drunk on Will's kisses, and how Will was whimpering like a lost puppy in his ear.

"Stop," Sam groaned, pulling Will's hands from where they were attempting to dig into his trousers. "Will, stop!"

Will stilled in Sam's lap, pouting and leaning back against the steering wheel. "What?"

"I don't want--"

"Please don't tell me you can't be with me now," Will blurted out quickly. "After the whole shovel thing, and the embarrassing speech, and you groping me in front of half of the town."

Sam shook his head rapidly and stroked his hand up Will's chest. "I don't want to do this in the car," he said, blushing. "And I'm going to if you don't stop. I want to do this in our bed."

Will smirked a little. "All this talk about ours, we, us... Samuel, I'm impressed. I thought you'd be scared of commitment like every other man in the world."

"Just you wait," Sam replied. "I'll be scared shitless in a week."

Will groaned and punched Sam in the shoulder as he slid off Sam's lap. "Idiot," he said, eyes shining. "Let's go to bed, then."

They got out of Sam's car, and Sam walked Will into the house, his nerves almost getting the better of him. He was more nervous about having sex with Will than he had been when he sent his first book out to publishers.

When they got in to the house, stepping into the living room, Will looked around and gasped. "You... you cleaned. And... there's art on the walls. And... curtains?"

"Yeah, I found it all up in the attic," Sam said. "It was beginning to look like a lonely asshole lived here."

"Nice," Will remarked, giving Sam a tiny smile. "And--"

"Can we talk later?" Sam asked. Will raised an eyebrow, and Sam couldn't take it anymore. Will was looking as beautiful as he ever had, and Sam was harder than he could ever

remember being. Sam growled and grabbed hold of Will's arms, backing him up against the door.

"Yes," Will moaned. He latched onto Sam tight, breathing hotly all up Sam's neck. Their bodies pressed together, and Sam grinned as he felt just how excited Will was; his dick was digging into Sam's belly.

"God damn it, you're so..." Sam lifted Will up by the ass and crushed him against the door, rubbing himself between Will's long legs. Will squeaked and wrapped his legs around Sam's hips, rubbing back as best he could. "You're gorgeous," Sam gritted out. "And I want you more than a Pulitzer. Do you know how badly I want a Pulitzer?"

Will moaned, grabbing at Sam's shoulders. "What's a Pulitzer?"

"It's a..." Will started kissing up Sam's neck, bucking his hips forward. "Um." Will's hands smoothed down Sam's chest to his stomach. Will's hands slipped under the Sam's shirt. "An a-award. And..."

"Sounds impressive," Will whispered, flicking his tongue out against Sam's ear. "What do you want more... A Pulotzkisser or your dick inside me?"

Sam almost fell over, but instead he set Will down. He ignored Will's whines of protest, and started guiding him toward the staircase. Will stepped right in a potted plant and fussed over the dirt, and when Sam let out a laugh, he backed into the staircase railing and groaned out in pain.

"Up, up," Will hissed. "Oh god, soil in my boots!"

"It's fake, don't worry," Sam reassured him. "I kill plants, you know. Never remember to--"

"Shut up!" Will breathed.

Sam pulled Will up the stairs and smashed into the wall as they shared a hot kiss. A framed picture of a lighthouse that Sam had proudly hung earlier fell off the wall and slid down the stairs.

"We'll just... get that later," Sam said between Will's kisses. Will nodded and pushed Sam up the last few steps, and then they tumbled into Sam's office (Will's bedroom) and flicked on the light.

"Oh, my god," Will said, letting go of Sam and taking a few steps toward the bed.

The mattress was covered in dinosaur sheets. Fresh, clean dinosaur sheets.

"Have you been... sleeping in my bed?" Will asked, looking over his shoulder at Sam.

Sam blushed hard. "It's more convenient, you know, my office... The pillows smell like you, okay?"

"No crumbs?"

“Well, not anymore.”

Will grinned and reached forward, pushing Sam backwards onto the bed. Sam fell to the mattress, eyes watching Will the entire time.

“This time we do it right,” Will said. He stood in front of Sam and pulled his shirt off, ruffling out his shiny, dark hair. Sam reached forward and smoothed his hands down Will’s lean little body. Will moaned, and Sam rubbed his thumbs against Will’s tiny hips.

“I want you so bad,” Sam said. Will smiled and blew a piece of frizzy hair out of his eyes. “Stop being so accidentally adorable.”

Will laughed and turned around, sticking his ass out. Sam’s hands got grabbier and wrapped around Will’s thigh, pulling him backwards down to the bed.

“Sam!” Will squeaked, slipping into Sam’s lap. “I was going to strip for you.”

“This is better,” Sam mumbled into Will’s ear. He pulled his own shirt off so that his bare chest could touch Will’s bare back. Sam pressed up close to Will and thrust up against his ass.

“You’re so hard,” Will moaned out. “I don’t even remember what it looks like. I was so drunk before, but it feels big.”

“It’s huge,” Sam said. “Massive.”

“I’d better not turn around and destroy the illusion.”

“Hey,” Sam said, pinching Will’s waist. “Be sweet.”

“I always am,” Will replied, winking. He reached backwards, tugging at Sam’s belt. “Take it out.”

Sam swallowed hard and caught Will’s hand in his own. “No, you insulted it.”

Will rolled his eyes and ground back into Sam’s crotch. Sam groaned and pushed Will away, taking a deep breath. He wouldn’t come in his pants, he wouldn’t come in his pants.

“Come on,” Will whined. He struggled out of Sam’s grip and stood, his back to Sam. “Fine, I’m going ahead without you.” He unbuttoned his pants and pushed them to the ground, his boxers falling, too. He was naked.

Sam stared at Will’s perfect ass. He wouldn’t come in his pants, he wouldn’t come in his pants.

“Like it?” Will asked shyly, looking over his shoulder.

Sam swallowed again. Seeing Will’s ass, sober, was one of the best things that had ever happened to him. “Very much,” he choked out. He pressed a palm to Will’s ass and cupped it, causing Will to squirm a little.

Sam couldn't stop his fingers from trailing down Will's crease and pressing up against his hole. Will shuddered and turned quickly, his cock hard and red before Sam's eyes.

"You're not the only one excited," Will said, cheeks flushing. "You know, I came just as fast as you did last time... kind of embarrassing."

Sam ran a gentle hand down Will's hip to his thigh. "I had no idea what I was doing, I've never... you know... with a guy before."

"It felt good," Will said. "And if just a little felt good, I know a lot would feel even better." Will smiled sweetly and sunk to his knees on the floor, and Sam's heart clenched. "I want to see it up close."

Sam blinked. "Okay," he croaked out.

Will quickly undid Sam's pants, blushing the entire time, and then slipped his hand inside. Will cupped Sam through his boxers, and they both moaned.

"I want to..."

"Yes," Sam said. "Whatever. You can do whatever you want. Hell, if you want to fuck me, I'm fine with it."

"Really?" Will quirked an eyebrow.

Sam's face fell. "You called my bluff."

"Good, because I want you to fuck me," Will said. Will tugged on Sam's dick, his hand hot and tight around the aroused length.

"Oh, god."

Will pulled Sam's pants and boxers down and off. Now he and Will were equally naked and completely hard. Will leaned in close to Sam's cock, and he smiled, eyelids fluttering.

"It's really nice," Will murmured, gazing up at Sam. "It's... really, really nice."

"Thanks," Sam said, feeling smug. Coming from Will, he considered it the ultimate compliment. He had a really, really nice penis. That felt good.

"Mmm," Will hummed, licking his lips. "Can I... lick it?"

"I want you to so bad." Sam winced as Will wrapped long fingers around his cock. "Oh, yeah... So good..."

Will's eyes flashed, and he leaned forward, taking Sam's cock into his mouth. Sam cried out at the first bit of wet contact and grabbed a fistful of dinosaur sheets. Will was giving him a damn good sucking. Will pulled off far too quickly, and Sam whimpered.

"Why'd you stop?"

“I’ve never done this before,” Will said. He stroked Sam’s wet cock, a sly look on his face. “Do you like it?”

“What do you think?” Sam asked, thrusting his hips up.

“You haven’t gotten laid in ages, anything’s bound to feel good,” Will said. He flicked his tongue out against the head, and Sam shuddered. “You’re really, really wet, mmm.”

Sam groaned, and Will leaned in and sucked his dick again. This time Sam didn’t grab at dinosaurs. He grabbed at Will’s hair, and the silky strands felt fine in his fingers. Will glanced up and his eyes were dark. Sam thought Will looked rather good with a mouthful of his cock.

Sam admired Will from above, willing himself not to come buckets down Will’s throat. He thought it might be rude. He let go of Will’s hair and lay back, closing his eyes and enjoying the excellent head.

“Mmm,” Will murmured, his voice vibrating around Sam’s dick. “Wafuckmnow?”

Sam cracked an eye open and looked down again. “What?”

Will pulled off Sam’s dick with a pop and ran a hand over his lips. “I said, wanna fuck me now?”

“Uh...” Sam groaned and took a deep breath, his cock throbbing at Will’s words. He wanted to come in Will, deep inside him this time. “You’re too good, and you say the dirtiest things. And yes. I’d like to, um, fuck you now. If that’s okay.”

Will nodded, his eyes darkening. “You want to?”

“I may be an idiot,” Sam said. “But...” He gazed at Will and swallowed hard. “Okay, I have nothing witty to say. Yeah, Will, I want to fuck you.”

Will’s cheeks pinked, and he crawled onto the bed with Sam. For a moment they stared at each other.

Then Will brightened and got in Sam’s lap. He wiggled his bare ass down, grinding against Sam’s dick. “Oh my,” Will breathed as Sam’s dick brushed down across his hole.

Sam held Will close, rubbing up against Will and panting. “Should I put it in you?”

“Yes,” Will said. “But if I come right away, don’t laugh, and don’t come, or if you do, that’s fine, we can do it again. I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying here... in our house.”

“We can do it again?” Sam asked hopefully. Well, that was something else. Sam beamed at his crotch and slid his hands down Will’s sides, grinding into Will’s ass. “So...”

Will squirmed. “Yeah, um...”

“You’re the expert,” Sam said flatly. “What do I do?”



“I’ve done it once!”

“That’s way more that I have, and you saw what happened the last time I tried,” Sam said, shrugging. “Disaster struck.”

“It wasn’t a disaster,” Will huffed, getting off Sam’s lap and stalking away. He left the room, and Sam sat on the bed, frowning.

“What’d I say?” he asked softly to his crotch. His cock only tightened more, and he groaned. “Will? Will!”

Will appeared again, holding a small bottle. His cheeks were pink and his body was long, lean, and splendid. Sam perked up and opened his arms for him to come back.

“Well, okay, there’s, you know, you have to put something on yourself,” Will said.

Sam’s mouth dropped open, and he smacked his forehead. “Oh, my god, Will, I’m so sorry. I completely forgot. But I don’t have any condoms, not right now anyway. Well, I had one in my wallet, but as you may remember, we used that, and I--”

“Idiot!” Will groaned and sat on the bed. “No, I trust you.”

“I trust you, too, but... what do you mean?”

Will held up the small bottle and smiled a little.

“Oh...” Sam said. “Um, what?”

“Lotion,” Will said, reddening. “To make things... smoother.”

Sam nodded and took the bottle. “I want to put some in you,” he said. Will shivered, and Sam thought it must have been the right thing to say. He opened the bottle and covered his fingers. “Get in my lap.”

Will obeyed, which thrilled Sam right down to his toes. He loved how Will was actually doing what he said, it was more than a little hot.

“Please, touch me,” Will said, before bridging the gap between them by climbing into Sam’s lap and kissing him hotly. Sam gasped into the kiss and wrapped his arms around Will’s back, massaging the warm skin and trailing his fingers down to Will’s ass. Will tensed for a split second and then relaxed, licking at Sam’s lips.

He ran his slippery fingers down Will’s back and pressed them down Will’s crease. It was hot there and so soft. He’d never really thought about putting fingers inside someone this way before, he’d never been very adventurous with sex. In fact, most of his sexual encounters involved the missionary position with all the lights out.

This situation was much different. The lights were blazing and Will was squirming in his lap, waiting to be fingered.

Sam stroked down the crease of Will's ass and then pressed a finger against his hot little hole. There was a lot of give there, and Sam pressed inside, feeling and appreciating just how tight Will was. His cock twitched in anticipation, it was straining against Will's stomach. He slid his finger in a bit farther, and Will let out a low moan, nearly draping himself heavily over Sam's shoulders.

"Oh, oh," Will whined. "Oh."

"Yeah?"

"Oh." Will bit at his lip. "Yeah."

"Um, is this right?" Sam mumbled.

"Yes," Will breathed out. "Oh, yes, yes, yes..." He buried his face in between Sam's neck and shoulder and lapped at the skin there. "So good, Sam... You're a natural."

"We'll see," Sam said anxiously. He carefully added another finger and felt Will's muscles tighten around him considerably. Sam raised an eyebrow. Would his dick even fit in there? Of course it had one time (sort of), but would it again? Did alcohol loosen up more than just emotions?

"I know what you're thinking," Will said. "And -- oh, yeah... and yes, it will fit."

Sam laughed nervously and tugged his fingers up, touching deep inside Will. Will let out a yelp and tightened hard around Sam's fingers. Sam grinned triumphantly. He was doing something right.

"In deeper, just a little deeper, deeper," Will blathered. "D-deeper... Twist your fingers just a bit, no, no, not like-- yes, a bit like that!"

"When can I..." Sam bit his lip and curled his fingers in Will. "When can I get in there?"

Will was trembling in his lap. "S-soon, mmm, soon. One more finger, give me another, Samuel."

"Just Sam," Sam said as he managed to thrust three fingers in Will. Will cried out, hissing and digging his fingernails against Sam's back. Sam winced. "But you can call me that. It's sexy."

"Mmm," was all Will said, leaning his head back and grinding down on Sam's fingers. "Fuck me, fuck me, fuck me, I'm ready."

Sam blushed hotly. "Say it again."

"Fuck me, Samuel," Will said hotly.

That was it. Sam felt a rush in his belly as he pulled his fingers out of Will. He was ready to fuck Will, and he was going to do it good. "Where's that lotion?" Sam murmured.

Will grabbed it from the bed, and Sam took it, squeezing a generous amount into his hand.

“Let me,” Will whispered, thumbing the lotion off of Sam’s palm and slicking it down Sam’s dick. Sam gasped and shook at the contact. It was cold, but Will’s touch felt exquisite.

“Jesus,” Sam said. He bucked up into Will’s touch and batted Will’s hands away. “I need to get on you.”

“In me,” Will said huskily.

Sam twisted Will back onto the bed, towering over him, entire body shaking and sweating. “First things first,” Sam said. He gathered the remaining lotion from his hand and stroked wet fingers across Will’s hole.

“Oh my god,” Will sighed. “Are we really gonna?”

Sam held Will’s legs open and pushed forward, his dick slipping against Will’s ass. It felt amazing, but of course not as good as getting inside of Will would feel.

“Yes,” Sam said.

“What if we’re no good together?” Will breathed, holding tight to Sam’s biceps.

“Then we try again,” Sam gritted out. “But...” His cock pushed against Will’s hole. “I think...” The head eased in, and all of that tight heat opened and sucked Sam deep inside. “Ahh!”

Will arched his back and moaned, tearing the dinosaur sheets off the bed. “Oh!”

There was no chance that they wouldn’t be good together. Now, after all they’d been through, all the wars fought, cakes eaten, and treasures unearthed, they couldn’t help but be absolutely perfect for each other.

Like most things meant to be, they just fit together. Literally.

Sam’s dick pressed hard against Will’s spot, and with that first thrust, they were unstoppable. Will wound his legs around Sam’s waist, forcing Sam in deeper and deeper with each forward drive. Sam was lost, sinking into Will’s sweet body, his hands grabbing at any exposed flesh he could, his eyes rolling back in his head.

He hadn’t felt this alive in years, and he’d never had something so exciting at the end of his dick. Will was writhing beneath him, enjoying every minute of it, clinging and forcing Sam to do it harder, better.

The headboard began banging against the wall just as Will’s pleased whines turned into deep, throaty moans.

“That’s it,” Will said, meeting a particularly delicious thrust. “Fuck me.”

“Yes,” Sam managed through gritted teeth. “You are... you are... I never want to stop fucking

you.”

“Don’t. Give it to me. Let’s make a mess of these sheets.”

“They’re already horrible,” Sam groaned, “fucking horrible.”

Sam pushed into Will and held for a moment, watching the expression on Will’s face curl into something twisted, beautiful. A little, stuttered cry escaped his lips, and he opened his eyes, blinking at Sam and exhaling deeply. Sam pulled out again and then thrust back in, sending shivers all down his limbs and feeling his orgasm build up inside him.

Sam sank deep in, his hips pressing right against Will’s ass. He leaned forward and their chests slid together, and Will’s cock was trapped between them, hard and hot. Sam reached for it and stroked awkwardly, amazed that something could feel so good in his hand. He loved every inch of Will, he loved Will in metric centimeters even, and as he slid his fingers up to the tip of Will’s cock, he ached stupidly with love.

“Touch me, yes,” Will gasped. “God, so good, so good, oh, my god...”

Sam’s belly flared with heat, and his heart beat faster as he pumped Will’s cock in his hand. “Tell me what to do,” Sam said breathlessly. “Tell me.”

“Just do that -- mmm,” Will moaned. “Yes, I... Sam, kiss me, kiss me.”

“You’re beautiful,” Sam said before pressing his lips messily against Will’s. He kissed Will hard. Will squirmed under Sam and squeezed his muscles tight around Sam’s dick, and Sam almost couldn’t take it anymore.

Sam wanted to come in Will, deep inside him. He wanted to make Will his and never let go.

“Oh!” Will turned away from Sam’s kiss and clenched his eyes shut. He shook under Sam and squeezed his thighs together, pulling Sam closer and deeper than before. “Oh, oh, oh...”

And then Sam felt warm liquid against his belly. Will had come hard between them, and the noises he was making were sweeter than a German chocolate cake.

“Oh yes,” Will breathed, his body clenching tight around Sam’s dick. He cooed in Sam’s ear and raked his nails all down Sam’s back.

Sam’s chest swelled with pride and his dick swelled in Will’s ass. He was going to lose it in a second. He thrust in again, and Will mewled, petting at Sam’s hair and face.

“You’re so good,” Will said, voice full of affection. “Keep going, don’t stop.”

“I’m gonna come,” Sam groaned out. He thrust in harder.

“Come,” Will said. “Come on.”

“In your ass.”

Will clenched even harder around Sam. "Do it deep, do it real, real deep, Sam."

Sam tensed, all of the building feelings colliding together in his belly and his heart. His mouth started running on autopilot as he came. "I love you, I love you, you're so perfect and I love you. I love you. Please. God. I love you. The house is yours, only yours."

He emptied all he had to give into Will and slumped forward, squashing Will into the mattress, his cock still buried deep in that scorching heat.

"I love you, too," Will said, holding Sam to him. "You didn't just say that because you were coming, right?"

"Which part?" Sam asked, rising up off Will. His softening cock slipped out, and they both gasped. Come smeared onto Will's thigh and ass, and Sam stared down, his groin tightening again at the sight.

"The... part about the house," Will said, pinching Sam in the arm.

Sam laughed, pushing his finger into Will just to watch him squirm. "You know, it's still just my name on the deed," Sam said, curling his finger inside Will.

Will groaned and tossed his head back. "Bastard," he said, fondly. "Oh, yes, do that..."

Sam pushed two fingers in, he was really warming to the idea of getting inside Will again. "I suppose it'll take a ton of paper work to get your name on the lease."

"Stop talking about the house," Will moaned.

Sam pulled his fingers out and rubbed his newly hardening cock between Will's legs. "I mean, it's still mine... fuck." Will bit at his neck. "Damn, Will, it's not like we're hitched or something." He pressed his lips to Will's, swallowing Will's half amused noise of complaint. With a groan, Sam thrust inside Will's body for the second time that night.

As Will's body welcomed him inside, and his mouth was claimed by the sweetest lips he'd ever had, he felt Will grab hold of his hand. He squeezed back, but then pulled his mouth away when he felt something slide onto his finger.

He paused his movement and gaped down at Will.

On his left ring finger was Will's Great-Great-Great-Grandmother's ring.

"Marry me?" Will asked, eyes twinkling. His legs wrapped tight around Sam, not letting any space come between them.

"Will..." Will squeezed him, and he swore. "But then what would we have left to fight about?"

"I could think of a few things," Will said. "Your writing, for instance. And the shovel thing. We'll have to deal with the shovel thing sooner or later. So, what's it going to be? You gonna marry me or not?"

Sam stared at the ring on his hand. It was all wrong, but Will was all right, and he'd never thought of himself as the marrying kind. And really, as he opened his mouth to answer, he knew that everything was going to be okay.

"Yes, Will, you win. I'll marry you."

Will smiled, and so did Sam, because deep down, he knew one truth. Gay marriage wasn't legal in Rhode Island.

But Will didn't know that, and really, Sam was looking forward to that fight.

Their lips crashed together again, and as the headboard began to bang against the wall, a pleasing, steady rhythm, the ferry horn blared.

End