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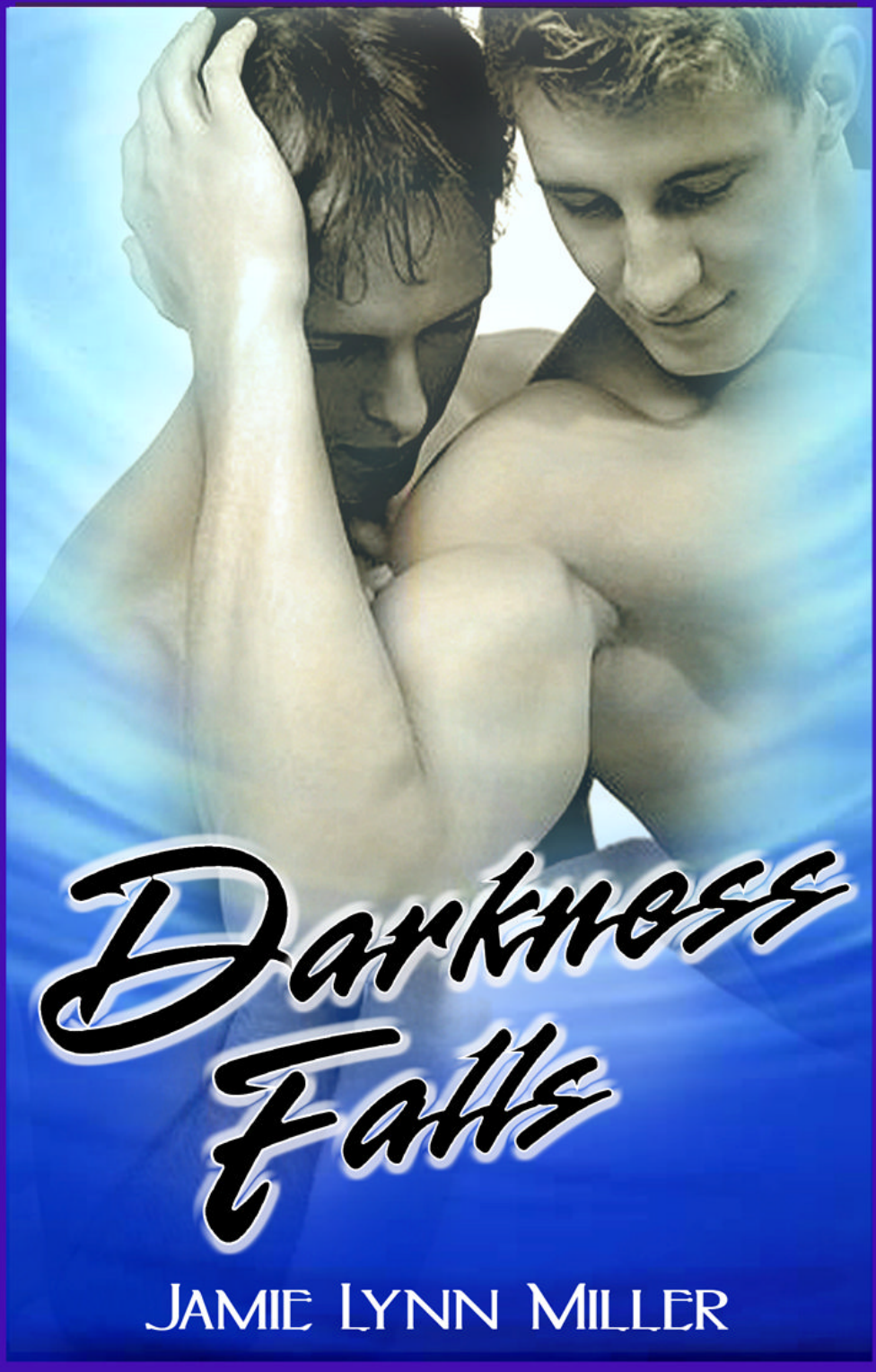

Darkness Falls

JAMIE LYNN MILLER

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Darkness Falls

By
Jamie Lynn Miller

It was a night shoot like dozens of others before it. It was a special effects shot like dozens of others before it as well.

But in a heartbeat, everything can change.

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Chapter 1

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The early October night was chilly here in greater New York, the air damp with the promise of rain as Matthew Tucker delivered his last lines of the night, then walked off camera, wanting nothing more than to get home and get some much needed sleep.

He groaned and settled his 6' 2" frame into his director's chair, emblazoned with his name and the name of the hit show he was currently co-starring on. *Dark Roads* was about two men who were modern day Robin Hoods.

Matthew raked his hand through his shaggy black hair, his dark brown eyes glancing back over to where his close friend and co-star, Daniel Westman, was getting ready to finish up the scene.
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He and Daniel, as characters Shane and Ben, were currently filming the second season of *Dark Roads*, and with the way the ratings looked right now, they'd be heading for a third season for sure.

Matthew smiled to himself at his luck. Not only had he landed the co-starring role on a hit show, but how fast and easily he and Daniel had clicked with one another. At 31 years old, having acted since age 19, Matthew had met a lot of actors. But he'd never formed any really strong friendships with any of them-- until he met Daniel.

The two of them couldn't be more opposite, from Matthew's dark hair and eyes to Daniel's blonde hair and blue eyes, from Matthew's outgoing personality to Daniel's more shy and reserved one.

But they say opposites attract, and he and Daniel were proof of that. They became fast friends during the filming of the pilot, and their bond had only grown stronger since. Even spending 12 hours a day on set didn't stop them from hanging out together during their limited free time, drinking beer and eating pizza, watching sports or playing video games.

Even 35 year-old Daniel, who had been in the business longer than Matthew, remarked how lucky they were, as their friendship off-screen only helped their characters' friendship on-screen, making the show even better.

Matthew watched as one of the prop guys handed Daniel a book of matches. His character Ben was in his pyromaniac bliss, getting ready to strike the match and toss it down into the large hole in the middle of the field where he was standing. Their characters had nearly been caught by the FBI in this episode, so they were disposing of their security company outfits and fake ID's by burning them.

First shot would be a close-up of Daniel as he struck the match, then made to flick it down onto the clothes and such. Next shot would be a close-up of the clothes burning, after the effects guys turned on the gas jets hidden underneath everything.

"Burn, baby, burn."

Matthew heard Daniel say Ben's line and watched as Daniel leaned over the hole and struck the match.

The explosion was intense, lighting up the night sky in a blinding ball of red and orange fire, debris shooting up into the air to rain back down upon the earth.

Matthew stared, uncomprehending, as his best friend was lifted up off his feet and thrown backwards, slamming back down onto the ground, landing on his side.

Matthew was moving before anyone else, sprinting across the grass, vaguely hearing yelling and shouting from the crew, but his entire focus was on Daniel, who was rolling back and forth, hands covering his face.

Over the pounding of his heart he could hear Daniel's cries of pain, and a chill raced down his spine at the sound. He covered the distance in long strides, dropping down heavily beside his friend, knees digging into the dirt.

"Daniel! Daniel!" He grasped Daniel's shoulders, stopping his movement, rolling him over onto his back.

"Fuck, Matt, it hurts!" Daniel gasped. His hands still covered his face, and Matthew could see small, bleeding cuts on the backs of Daniel's hands and forearms.

"Jesus, Danny," Matthew choked out, lightly grasping Daniel's wrists, feeling small tremors racing under his skin. "Put your hands down, Danny; let me see," he urged.

But Daniel twisted, turning his face away. "No! It burns!"

"Please, Danny, you've gotta let me see!" Matthew fought to quell his panic at his friend's pain, again turning Daniel onto his back.

This time Daniel let him move his hands away, and Matthew was relieved to see just a number of small cuts, like those on his arms, instead of a large wound like he had feared.

By this time the set had erupted into a flurry of activity and people were everywhere, yelling, advancing on Matthew and Daniel. Suddenly their director, James, was there beside them, a hand on Matthew's shoulder.

"Paramedics are on the way," he told Matthew, worry lacing his voice. "How is he?"

Matthew swallowed. “I’m not really sure,” he answered, then turned back to Daniel. “Danny, can you open your eyes? How bad are they hurting you?”

Daniel moved his eyelids in small movements, blinking, until his blue eyes were fully open. Matthew saw no blood and began to relax when Daniel started moving his head back and forth in jerky motions, eyes moving rapidly. One of his hands shot out, connecting with Matthew’s leg.

“Matt? Matt?”

The panic was back full force at the tremble in Daniel’s voice. He caught his friend’s hand. “I’m right here, Danny. What is it? What’s wrong?”

I can’t – “ Daniel’s breath caught-- “I can’t see…”

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The wait for the paramedics seemed interminable, when in reality it was maybe five minutes. But when your friend tells you he can no longer see, each minute seems like an hour as you try to keep him calm.

Then Matthew could only stand by, helpless, as he watched Daniel being loaded into the ambulance.
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"Come on," James said as they watched the truck drive away, red and white lights piercing the darkness. "Let's get you to the hospital."

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Matthew was pacing the waiting room in the ER like a caged animal when the creator of *Dark Roads*, Paul Swenson, arrived.

"Have you – ?" Paul started, and Matthew shook his head.

"The doctor's still with him."

Paul sat down heavily in one of the cracked plastic chairs. "James said he can't see?"

Matthew's jaw clenched, Daniel's scared voice echoing in his head, and he could only nod.

"Mr. Tucker?"

Matthew's head turned at the voice, seeing that it belonged to a 40-something man with close cropped dark hair in hospital scrubs and a white lab coat. His nametag read Dr. Ellison.

"You're here for Mr. Westman?" the man questioned as Matthew moved toward him.

"Yes," Matthew answered. "Please, how is he?"
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Dr. Ellison blew out a breath and crossed his arms over his chest. “Well, Mr. Westman has suffered corneal flash burns on both eyes, as a result of the explosion. At this point, he is still unable to see.”

“At this point?” Paul repeated. “So this isn’t permanent?”

“I have every hope that Mr. Westman’s eyesight will return,” Dr. Ellison answered. But before Matthew could take a relieved breath, the doctor continued. “I have to be honest with you, though. There is always a chance that the damage is too severe, being as close to the detonation as he was, and permanent blindness is a possibility.”

For a long moment, Matthew forgot how to breathe. No. No, he refused to believe…

“He’ll need to stay here overnight.” Dr. Ellison’s voice cut through his thoughts and he focused on what the older man was saying. “His eyes are bandaged and will need to remain that way for the next few days. He’s been given antibiotic eye drops to prevent any infection from particles of the debris that may have penetrated underneath the contact lenses he was wearing.”

“Is he in any pain?” Matthew questioned.

“He was,” Dr. Ellison acknowledged. “But we also gave him a drug to relax the muscles of the eyes to help with the healing process and to lessen the pain from the eye muscle spasms.”

“Can we see him?” Paul asked.

Dr. Ellison nodded. “Of course. He’s just been moved into a private room. Upstairs, number 223. He’s groggy from the pain medication and needs to rest, so please only stay for a few minutes.”

Matthew and Paul agreed and Dr. Ellison turned and walked away, back towards the exam rooms.

“C’mon, let’s go see him.” Paul placed his hand on Matthew’s arm.

But Matthew shook him off. “Not before you tell me what the HELL happened back there, Paul!” Matthew exploded. “Daniel could’ve been KILLED!”

Paul took a step back at Matthew’s thunderous expression. “I don’t know, Matthew; I really don’t. James is working with the fire department and the police. We’ll get to the bottom of this, I promise.”

“Damn straight you will.” And with that, Matthew turned on his heel and strode over to the elevators, angrily slapping the UP button.

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Matthew slowly pushed open the door to room 223 and stepped inside, Paul behind him. They moved around the curtain and Matthew swallowed hard at the sight.
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Daniel lay quietly in the hospital bed, his complexion paler than normal. Round white bandages covered both eyes, taped down with a strip of gauze, then wrapped across them and around Daniel's head. The cuts on his face and hands had been tended to and no longer oozed blood.

Matthew approached the bed and sat down in the chair next to it. He reached over and laid his hand on Daniel's arm. The older man stirred at the touch, turning his head toward Matthew.

"Hmmm.."

"Danny? Can you hear me?" Matthew asked softly.

"Matt? Iz zat you?" Daniel slurred.

"Yeah. Yeah, man, it's me."

"Hmmm…"

"Danny? Did the doctor talk to you? Tell you what's going on with your eyes?"

Daniel's head lolled back. " 'm tired…eyes hurt."

Realizing Daniel was too disorientated, under the influence of the pain medication, Matthew simply squeezed his friend's arm. "Just go to sleep, Danny. Everything's going to be okay."

Daniel sighed in response and his head tipped further away from Matthew.

Matthew looked toward where Paul was standing, silent, at the foot of the bed. He rose from the chair and motioned Paul to follow him out into the hall. They let the door close behind them as Matthew said, “I’m spending the night here with him.”

Paul shook his head. “The hospital’s not going to let you –“

Matthew advanced on the smaller man, using his height to his advantage. “Make it *happen*, Paul,” he growled. “You saw him. He’s completely out of it, and *blind*. If he wakes up he’ll be panicked and no one will be there.” He pressed a finger to Paul’s chest. “I’m *not* leaving him.”

“Okay, okay,” Paul conceded, holding up his hands. “I’ll go talk to someone.”

Matthew nodded, and as Paul walked off down the hall he pushed open the door to Daniel’s room again. He took his place in the chair once more and looked at his sleeping friend.

He took a shaky breath. “You’re gonna be fine,” he whispered. “Everything’s gonna be fine.”

He only hoped he wasn’t lying to his friend.

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Twenty minutes later the door opened and an orderly walked in, pushing a cot in front of him. A nurse was behind him with blankets and a pillow, and Paul was trailing behind. Matthew stood and crossed over to him.

"Thank you," he said softly, heartfelt.

Paul nodded and gave him a small smile. "I need to talk to you for a minute," he told Matthew. "Let them get you set up in here. C'mon."

Out in the hall, Paul sighed. "James called me a minute ago. The police and fire department's preliminary investigation is saying it was a gas explosion."

"Gas?" Matthew questioned. "From the –"

"Yeah," Paul confirmed. "Looks like there was a small leak in one of the pipes leading under the props. And when Daniel lit the match…"

"Son of a BITCH!" Matthew exploded. "How the hell does something like this happen, Paul?!"

Paul shook his head. "I don't know, Matthew, I really don't. It's obviously inexcusable and I'll find out what went wrong; I swear." He took a breath then continued. "In the meantime, I'll make sure Daniel has the best care, and of course the studio will be paying for everything…"

"You'd better believe they will," Matthew said forcefully, interrupting him, then pointed at Paul. "Heads had better roll over this, Paul."

Then he turned and left Paul standing in the hallway, wanting to get back to Daniel.

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Hours later Matthew was jolted from his fitful sleep by the sound of Daniel's arm hitting against the side rail on the bed.

"Wha-"

Daniel's groggy voice came to him as he untangled himself from the blankets, hurrying to get to his friend's side. In the dim light of the room Matthew could see Daniel's hands coming up to pull at the bandages.

"What's going on? What –"

Matthew quickly lowered the side rail, sat on the edge of the bed and reached out and took hold of Daniel's wrists. The older man jolted at the unexpected touch. "Who's – "

"Danny, it's me," Matthew spoke softly.
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"Matt? What's going on? Why can't I see?" Matthew could hear the touch of panic in his voice. He tried again to reach for the bandages, but Matthew gently brought his arms down, leaving his hands over Daniel's wrists.

"Do you remember anything about last night?" Matthew asked.

"Last…?" Daniel started, and when he paused Matthew knew it had all come back to him.

"How…how bad is it?" Daniel asked, voice flat. "My eyes?"

"You don't remember the doctor talking to you last night?"

Daniel shook his head, and Matthew said, "That's okay, you were pretty out of it after they gave you the pain meds."

"Just tell me, Matt. How bad is it?"

"You've got flash burns to both your eyes," Matthew started. "They gave you antibiotic eye drops and drops so that your eyes don't have muscle spasms while they're healing." Daniel remained silent, so Matthew continued. "You'll need to keep the bandages on for the next couple of days."

Matthew could see Daniel relax slightly. "That's not so bad, then, right? Few days like this and I'll be good as new," he finished with a small grin.

"Danny…" Matthew hesitated, trying to find the words. "The doctor is optimistic, yeah…"

Matthew could feel Daniel go still. "What aren't you telling me?"

Matthew fought past the tightening in his throat. "Because you were so close to the explosion, the damage might be more severe than the doctor thinks…"

"Are you saying I might be blind?" Daniel's voice was cold.

Matthew squeezed Daniel's wrists. "We don't know that. Don't you dare start thinking like that. You're going to be *fine*."

Daniel was silent for a long minute, and Matthew realized he was absently rubbing his thumb across the skin of Daniel's wrist.

"Do you know what happened?" Daniel asked abruptly. "What caused the explosion?"

Matthew sighed, realizing the topic of Daniel's eyesight was closed.

"Yeah. James said that there was a leak in one of the gas lines under the props." Matthew's anger was back at the situation and he raked a hand through his long hair. "Those assholes. You could've been *killed*."

Daniel reached out and knocked his hand against Matthew's leg. "Nah. Just goes to show how tough I am. Told Paul I didn't need my own stunt man."

Matthew couldn't help but smile, glad that Daniel could find humor in all of this.

"What time is it, anyway? How long have I been out?"

Matthew looked at his watch. "It's just after 2 a.m." he answered.

Daniel cocked his head. "2 a.m.? What the hell are you doing here?"

Matthew felt his face go hot, grateful that Daniel couldn't see. "I'm…spending the night."

Daniel's mouth opened a bit, closed. "Matt," he started, voice soft. "You didn't have to –"

"I know. I *wanted* to," Matthew replied. "I didn't want you waking up just like you did, confused, you can't see, and no one would be here."

Matthew saw Daniel swallow, then reach out and find Matthew's arm, wrapping his fingers around it. "Thanks," he replied, voice rough.

"Anytime, man," Matthew said quietly. "Do you think you can go back to sleep? Do you need anything? Eyes bothering you?"

Daniel paused just long enough before he said, “I’m fine,” that Matthew knew he was lying.

“C’mon man, stop with the tough guy act. Your eyes are bothering you, aren’t they?”

Daniel set his jaw and that was the only acknowledgment Matthew needed, stubborn idiot that his friend was. Matthew patted Daniel’s leg and rose from the bed.

“I’ll be back in a minute with the nurse.”

The nurse turned out to be Christiane, a happy, smiling woman in her early thirties with shoulder length dark hair and brown eyes. “Hello, Mr. Westman. I’m the night nurse, Christiane,” she started, but Daniel quickly cut her off.

“Christiane – that’s a beautiful name,” he said with a grin and she blushed, stammering a thank you. “And please, call me Daniel.”

Matthew finally had to chuckle at the exchange, rolling his eyes. “Dude, you’re not Ben,” he said, referring to Daniel’s character’s flirtatious ways on the show.

“Dude, she has a *needle* and I can’t *see*,” Daniel replied patiently, humor coloring his words. “Always pays to be nice to a woman with a sharp object.”

Christiane laughed. “A little flirting will go a long way,” she replied good naturedly. “In fact, I’ll even stick you in your arm instead of…somewhere else.”

Daniel's mouth dropped open, Matthew let loose with a laugh and Christiane took the opportunity to quickly stick Daniel with the needle.

"There you go. Didn't feel a thing, did you?" Christiane asked with a smile, then turned to leave. "Now you boys keep it down in here. No wild parties." She winked and walked out the door.

Matthew chuckled again and sat on the edge of the bed. "I'm proud of ya, Danny. You didn't even cry. Want a lollipop?"

Daniel's hand came up, found Matthew's shoulder, and pushed him off the bed. "Bitch."

Matthew smiled as he lay back down on the cot and closed his eyes. Everything was going to be just fine.

Chapter 2

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The next morning a different nurse came in to check on Daniel, and to tell him he would be released later that day.

Matthew told the older man he needed to run home and let his two dogs out before they tore the place down.

"Hey," Daniel called as Matthew went to walk past the bed. "Thanks again…for last night."

Matthew reached out and squeezed Daniel's shoulder. "I'll be back to spring you later."
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Matthew had no more than stepped outside the hospital doors when his phone started ringing. He fished it out of his pocket and checked the display: Tony Mitchell.

Tony was a fellow actor, also based here in New York. Both Matthew and Daniel had worked with Tony several times on different television shows and even a movie, and the three of them had become very close friends. Right now Tony was working on a show that filmed in the lot adjacent to *Dark Roads*, so they'd been able to spend some quality time with their friend over the past year.

Matthew flipped open the phone, but before he could even say hello, Tony was practically yelling in his ear.

"Jesus, Matt, it's all over the lot this morning! What the hell happened? Is Daniel all right?"

Matthew leaned against the brick wall of the building, out of everyone's way as he talked to Tony, explaining about the gas explosion and Daniel's condition. He finished with a shaky breath.

"I'm scared for him, Tony," he admitted. "If he can't – "

"Don't." Tony's voice was firm, cutting him off. "Don't you start thinking like that. Positive thoughts only, you hear me? Daniel doesn't need to hear any doubt in your voice or he'll start doubting, too."
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Matthew nodded, even though Tony couldn't see him. "Yeah. Yeah, you're right."

"Of course I am." Matthew could hear Tony smile. "Can I stop by the hospital and see him?"

"He's being released later today. I'll tell him you want to stop by and I'll call you later."

"Okay, sounds good. Tell him that I'm thinking about him."

"I will, Tony. I'll talk to you soon."

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Two hours later, having returned home to shower, shave, change into clean clothes and take care of the dogs, Matthew was back at the hospital, walking down the hallway to Daniel's room.

He saw both James and Paul standing outside Daniel's door as he turned the corner, talking to each other. Matthew interrupted their conversation as he approached, indicating the door to Daniel's room.

"Everything okay?"

James nodded. "The doctor's in talking with him."

"Have you found out anything more about the explosion?"
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James shook his head. “Not yet. The effects company is being grilled as to why the leak wasn’t detected. Obviously no one’s stepping up to take the blame.”

“Let me know what happens, okay?”

“Of course.”

Just then the door opened and the doctor indicated they could come in. By the stiff way Daniel was sitting up in bed and the set of his jaw, Matthew immediately knew the positive mood from last night and this morning was gone – replaced by worry and uncertainty now that the doctor had talked to him.

“Hey, Danny; it’s me,” Matthew greeted him. “James and Paul are here, too.”

James walked up to Daniel’s side and laid his hand on the younger man’s shoulder. “You holding up okay, kid? Everyone on the set’s thinking about you.”

Daniel gave a short nod. “I’m doin’ okay.”

And if you were anyone but Matthew, who knew Daniel better than anyone, you would’ve believed that.

"Daniel," Paul spoke up, "I can't tell you how sorry I am that this happened. There's no excuse for the carelessness that caused the explosion. Whatever you need – "

Dr. Ellison broke in. "I was just telling Mr. Westman that he can be discharged in about an hour. He'll need to come back the day after tomorrow to have the bandages removed. In the meantime he'll need care at home."

"The studio will arrange for a nurse – " Paul began, but Matthew sharply cut him off.

"No. I'll do it. I'll stay with Daniel."

The thought of some stranger taking care of his friend…no, that just wasn't going to happen.

"Matt, no." Daniel spoke up. "You don't have to do this."

It echoed their conversation from last night, and Matthew again repeated himself. "I know. I *want* to." He paused. "Or, I mean, if you'd rather have the nurse…"

"No," Daniel said quickly. "No, I'd rather have you stay with me."

Matthew turned back to Dr. Ellison and Paul. "Okay, it's settled then. What time does he need to be back here on Thursday to take the bandages off?"

"Have him back here at 11 a.m., please," Dr. Ellison answered. "I'll have his discharge papers ready in just a little while and then Mr. Westman is free to go."

"Thank you, Doctor." Paul shook his hand as Dr. Ellison left the room.

"Okay, we'll leave the two of you to get Daniel ready to go," James said. "We'll call and check up on you tomorrow, Danny. And if we hear anything more about the accident I'll be sure to let both of you know."

"Thanks, James," Daniel replied. James and Paul walked out the door.

Matthew turned back to Daniel. "How're you feeling? Eyes bothering you?"

"Not too much; just a dull ache-- much better than yesterday."

"Good." Matthew sat next to Daniel on the bed. "So…the doc talked to you this morning?"

Daniel nodded, fingers twisting the blanket.

"He told you that he expects you to be just fine, right?"

"Yep." Short, clipped.

"Danny…"

Daniel's voice was strong. "I'm sorry, Matt, but when you're told that there's a possibility that you might be permanently blind it weighs pretty heavy on you."

"And if that's all you keep thinking about it's going to crush you." Matthew's response was just as strong. "You're going to be *fine*, do you hear me?"

Daniel cracked a smile. "I'm blind, not deaf."

Matthew huffed out a laugh. "Alright, then. Now that that's settled, I'm gonna run home and pack some clothes and stuff, call Tony and see if he can take the dogs for the next couple of days, then drop them off. By the time I get back you should be all set to go." He stood up. "You need anything before I take off?"

Daniel shook his head. "Matt…you're really going above and beyond, here. Sleeping here last night, and now staying with me for the next few days…" He reached out a hand and Matthew caught it, felt Daniel squeeze it. "Thanks, man," he said softly, sincerely.

Matthew felt his stomach flutter at Daniel's words, and all he could do was squeeze his friend's hand in reply.

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On the drive home, Matthew called Tony, told him he'd be staying at Daniel's for the next two days and could he please watch the dogs for him?

"Sure, man," Tony agreed. "Bring your beasts over here. Oh, and don't forget their food! Last time they nearly ate me out of house and home."

Matthew laughed, said thanks, and Tony again asked about seeing Daniel.

"Let me get him home and get him settled and I'll see if he wants any visitors."

"How's he doing?"

Matthew sighed. "About as good as can be expected, really. He's worried, and I can't blame him. I'd be, too. But I'm trying to keep him positive."

"If anyone can, you can," Tony responded.

Matthew smiled. "Thanks for the vote of confidence. I'll call you later."

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Back at the hospital about an hour later, Matthew found Daniel sitting on the side of his bed and dressed in the clothes he was brought into the hospital wearing yesterday.
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"Hey, man, it's me," he greeted Daniel as he walked into the room, pushing a wheelchair. "Ready to go?"

Daniel held up the sheaf of papers in his hand. "I'm a free man."

"Good, 'cause I got your ride. Sorry it's not your usual sports car."

Daniel stood up from the bed. "I don't care. Just get me outta here."

A little maneuvering got the older man settled into the wheelchair and Matthew was soon pushing him out the front doors of the hospital. His truck was parked out front and he helped Daniel into the passenger seat before climbing into the driver's side and pulling out of the parking lot.

The ride to Daniel's rented house in Queens was quiet. Matthew unsure if Daniel was dozing or not, being unable to see his eyes. The older man wasn't speaking, and if he was resting, Matthew didn't want to disturb him, so he let him be.

He laid a hand on Daniel's arm when they pulled up to his house and Daniel stirred at the touch. "We're home, Danny."

Daniel nodded, opened the door, and slid out, waiting for Matthew to come around to his side and lead him up the driveway and front walk. It was easy for Matthew to tell by the tension in Daniel's body, radiating from the hand on his arm, that Daniel was already getting tired of being led around like a child.

Once in the front door, Matthew stood awkwardly for a moment, unsure of what to do. "Umm, do you want to be out here in the living room, or – "

"Actually," Daniel began, "I know all I've done is lie in bed since yesterday, but I'm kinda tired."

"Hey, no problem," Matthew replied. "You're healing. It's good that you want to rest." He gently took Daniel by his upper arm. "C'mon, let's get you upstairs."

They made their way slowly up the stairs and down the short hallway to Daniel's bedroom. The older man sat down on the bed with a tired sigh, then began pulling off his dirty, torn shirt.

"Oh hey, watch the bandages." Matthew moved and stretched the neck of the shirt wider so that it wouldn't snag the gauze as Daniel lifted it off his head. He took the garment from his friend with a frown.

"I'm afraid it's pretty trashed, Danny."

Daniel shrugged, bending over to untie his boots. "Toss it for me, will ya?"

"Sure, no – " Matthew stopped himself as he got a look at Daniel's bare back, the right side covered in a large, purple bruise where the older man had landed hard after the explosion.

"Jesus, Danny," Matthew reached out, fingers skimming along his friend's skin, trying to ignore the tingle it sent up his hand. "Does it hurt? Can I do anything?"

Daniel straightened up with a slight grimace. "It's not too bad, just kinda stiff."

"You've got a heating pad here, don't you? Want me to get it for you?"

"Yeah, that'd be great; thanks." Daniel stood up and began to unzip his pants.

Matthew swallowed and turned around abruptly. "Okay, umm, I'll get you some aspirin, too."

He left the room and located the heating pad in the linen closet, then got the aspirin and a glass of water from the bathroom before going back to Daniel's room. He stopped in the doorway, taking a minute to just look at his friend, stretched out on his stomach in just a pair of dark blue boxer shorts. He felt his stomach give a little flutter as he walked in and stopped beside the bed. He laid the heating pad down on the mattress, put the water on the bedside table and shook two aspirin out of the bottle.

"Here ya go, Danny."

Daniel raised himself up and Matthew put the aspirin in his open hand, waited until he popped the tablets in his mouth, then gave him the glass of water. Daniel finished the water and lay back down again, slipping his arms under his pillow, head turned to the side.

Matthew plugged in the heating pad, then laid it carefully over Daniel's bruised back. "Oh, I almost forgot. Tony's been calling. He wants to come over and see you."

Daniel picked his head up with a sharp, "No," prompting Matthew to lay his hand on his friend's back at the forceful reply. "I mean, I just don't want to see anyone right now, okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure." Matthew rubbed his thumb on Daniel's warm skin, feeling the tension there. "I'll call him and tell him not right now."

Daniel gave a little nod and put his head back down on the pillow.

"I'll let you get some sleep. Just yell if you need anything." Matthew stood, reluctantly removing his hand from Daniel's back, and left the room, looking back one more time at his friend.

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For the next little while Matthew busied himself around the house, bringing in his clothes and things from the truck and getting himself situated in the guest bedroom, right across the hall from Daniel's room. Smartest thing Daniel ever did, renting this house with two bedrooms. With the amount of time he and Daniel spent together here it was a blessing not to try and cram himself onto the too-short couch when he spent the night.

Daniel's living room was, as usual, a mess, not to mention the kitchen, so Matthew spent the better part of two hours cleaning up, and taking stock of what food Daniel had in the house. Satisfied
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there was enough around to make dinner, Matthew collapsed onto the couch and pulled out his cell phone.

"Tony? Hey, it's me. I asked Danny about you coming over, but…he's not really feeling up to visitors."

"Is he doing okay?"

"Yeah, he's upstairs resting right now." Matthew cast a glance at the stairs and lowered his voice. "I just don't think he wants anyone seeing him like this, you know?"

He heard Tony's frustrated sigh. "Pig-headed idiot."

Matthew cracked a smile. "No argument there."

Tony's voice went serious with his next words. "Hey Matt? I'm glad you're there for him."

"I care about him, Tony. Of course I'm here for him."

"Yeah, well…he cares about you, too. Just…hang in there with him, okay?"

Matthew blinked, suddenly struck with the feeling that Tony meant more than just referring to Daniel's injury with his words.

"Tony?"

Tony cleared his throat. "Hey, they're calling me back to set, I gotta run," he said quickly. "If you guys need anything, give me a call alright?"

"Um, yeah. Will do, man; thanks."

He hung up with Tony and tossed the phone on the coffee table, then leaned his head back against the couch cushions and closed his eyes.

He was awakened sometime later by a noise from upstairs, and as he opened his eyes he realized a few hours must have passed, as the living room was growing dark. He looked up the stairs and saw Daniel in the hallway, hand extended in front of him.

Matthew jumped up from the couch and made his way up the stairs. "Hey," he said as he reached his friend. "I told you to call me if you needed anything."

"Just…gotta pee," Daniel mumbled. "Didn't want to bother you."

"You're not a bother, Danny," Matthew softly reminded him. "Now c'mon before you burst."

"Oh, ha, ha," Daniel replied dryly as Matthew led him into the bathroom and stopped him in front of the toilet.

"I'll just…be outside," Matthew told him as he backed out of the room and closed the door.

Daniel was out a few minutes later and Matthew asked him if he wanted to go back to bed or if he felt like eating some dinner. The rumbling of Daniel's stomach was all the answer Matthew needed.

They headed back to Daniel's room where Matthew got out a clean t-shirt and sweatpants that Daniel put on before the men headed downstairs.

In the kitchen, Daniel sat in one of the chairs while Matthew whipped up a spaghetti dinner with garlic toast and two glasses of lemonade. He kept up a steady stream of conversation with Daniel, glad when the older man took part.

Dinner ready, Matthew set a plate in front of Daniel, then took a seat across from him.

"Okay, silverware's on your left, garlic toast is on your right and your lemonade is also to your left."

"Thanks, man," Daniel replied as he found his fork and dug into the spaghetti. "Wow, that's good," he remarked around a mouthful.

"Just call me Chef Boyardee," Matthew smiled, watching as Daniel carefully felt for his glass of lemonade and took a drink.

"God, that hospital food was awful," Daniel told him, swallowing around more noodles. "How they expect people to get better feeding them that crap is beyond me."

"Be thankful that you only had to be there for a day, then." Matthew took a drink of his own lemonade, then snapped his fingers as he remembered something. "Hey, your Blackhawks are playing the Leafs tonight. Bet we can catch the game on the radio."

"Yeah, that'd be cool," Daniel smiled, reaching once again for his lemonade. "The Hawks need a _ "

Too late, Matthew saw that Daniel had miscalculated his reach as Daniel's hand knocked into the glass, tipping it over and sending liquid spilling over the table and onto the floor.

"Shit!" Daniel swore. He stood abruptly, his chair scraping back and nearly toppling over. The napkin he'd been holding was thrown angrily onto the table. "Goddammit!"

Matthew jumped up, catching Daniel by his wrist. Daniel tried to pull away, but Matthew held fast. "Danny! Stop! It's okay, it was just an accident!"

Daniel's jaw was set tight, the muscles under Matthew's hand rigid. "I'm sorry," Daniel got out.

Matthew gave Daniel's wrist a gentle squeeze. "Nothing to apologize for. It was an accident. Now c'mon and sit back down, okay?"

Daniel nodded and Matthew let go of his wrist, watching as Daniel felt behind him for where the chair had moved to before sitting down.

It didn't take long for Matthew to clean up the spill, and when he was finished he found one of Daniel's empty sports bottles in the cabinet and filled it halfway with lemonade. He chastised himself for not thinking of this to begin with as he popped the top up.

He cast a worried glance over his shoulder at his friend, sitting still and quiet at the table, not eating. It had only been a day and this was already taking its toll on Daniel – this feeling of helplessness.

Matthew took a breath and went back over to the table, touching Daniel's hand. "Here you go. I put some more in your sports bottle."

"Don't really want anymore. Not hungry."

"You only had a few bites, Danny…"

"Matthew."

"Okay, okay," Matthew backed down with a sigh, sitting down to eat his dinner. But try as he might to get Daniel to talk to him, all he received were one or two word responses.

Matthew's appetite disappeared quickly as well, as he watched his friend withdraw into himself. He finally pushed away from the table and cleared the dishes, then led Daniel out into the living room. He flipped on the radio and found the hockey game, which was just getting started.

All Matthew could think was, "thank God for sports," when Daniel started to come out of his funk as the Hawks pulled ahead. Daniel started making comments, talking back to the radio as if the players could hear him, and by the time the game ended and the Hawks had won, there was an honest to God smile on Daniel's face. And an answering one on Matthew's.

It had gotten late and both men were yawning, so there was no protest from Daniel when Matthew suggested they pack it in for the night. And when they turned from the couch to go toward the stairs, this time it was Daniel who reached out and took Matthew's arm, instead of the other way around.

Once upstairs, they headed into the bathroom, which had a double sink, and they each took care of brushing their teeth at the same time. Finished, they walked down the hall to Daniel's room and the older man sank down onto the mattress, pulling off his t-shirt.

"Hey, Danny? Would you mind leaving your door open tonight? In case you need something so I can hear you?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Okay, umm, g'night, then."

"Wait. Matt?"

Daniel's low voice stopped Matthew and he turned and walked closer to the other man. "Yeah?"

"I'm – I'm sorry for being an ass tonight."

Matthew sat down beside his friend. "Danny…"

"This…isn't easy for me. I hate having to depend on people. And all you're trying to do is help me and I – "

"Danny, it's okay. You're angry that this happened to you and you have every right to be. It never should've happened."

"Still. I shouldn't take it out on you. I'm sorry." Daniel reached over and laid his hand on Matthew's thigh. "You're a good friend, Matt," he said quietly. "Thank you for doing all of this. For helping me."

All Matthew could focus on was the warmth of Daniel's palm as it soaked through his jeans, and the nearness of his friend's body. "I'm glad to do it, Danny," he replied softly.

And for just an instant, the air felt…charged, as they sat there side by side in the dark. Matthew felt Daniel lean toward him, his hand flexing on Matthew's leg before sliding away, breaking the moment.

Matthew cleared his throat, feeling his skin flush, and stood up. "Night, Danny," he whispered, and quickly left the room.

His dreams that night, not surprisingly, were filled with a handsome, blue-eyed man.

Chapter 3

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The next morning Matthew was making pancakes when he heard Daniel moving around upstairs. He went halfway up the stairs, quietly, to observe his friend. Daniel hadn't called down for help with anything, but he wanted to be there, just in case. He nodded, watching as Daniel walked out from the doorway of his room, his left arm extended out in front of him. He carefully made his way directly across the hall until his hand touched the doorjamb of Matthew's room. Daniel turned to the right, fingers trailing along the wall until he touched the doorjamb of the bathroom, then went inside, closing the door behind him.

"That's my boy." Matthew smiled as he went back down the stairs to the kitchen.
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Breakfast was ready when Daniel made his way slowly down the stairs and into the kitchen, taking a seat at the table.

"Morning," Matthew greeted him.

He was greeted in return by a grunt, customary Daniel morning-speak for "I haven't had my coffee yet", something Matthew had heard many times, picking Daniel up for an early morning call.

Matthew chuckled, setting down a mug in front of his friend, placing Daniel's hand on it. "It's hot; take it easy," he warned.

As he turned back to the stove, he heard an appreciative sigh from behind him. He chuckled as he flipped a pancake off the griddle and onto a plate.

"Mmmmm, that's good," he heard Daniel say.

Matthew scooped some scrambled eggs next to the pancakes, added two pieces of bacon, then set the plate in front of Daniel.

"How you can drink that stuff black is beyond me."

"'Cause that's how real men drink coffee, Francis. Not that half-caf mocha latte crap that you like."

Matthew laughed. “Shut up and eat your breakfast. Pancakes on the left, eggs on the right, bacon above the eggs.”

Daniel picked up his fork in a salute and dug in.

Two helpings each later, both men sat back with a satisfied sigh.

“First dinner last night and now breakfast this morning. If you’re not careful I’m gonna keep you here,” Daniel said with a smile, lifting up his mug to finish off his second cup.

Matthew felt his face warm. “Want any more coffee or do you feel like a human being again?”

“Actually, I feel like road kill,” Daniel admitted. “I haven’t had a chance to clean up since the morning all this happened. I need to get in the shower.”

Matthew had a horrible flash of Daniel stepping wrong, slipping, miscalculating something and falling in the shower.

Not wanting to make it seem that Daniel couldn’t handle showering, Matthew thought fast.

“Yeah, you do look like something the cat dragged in,” he teased. “But, umm, how ‘bout a bath instead? You’ll get your bandages wet from the shower spray and you need to keep them dry. And a good soak would help your back, too.”

Matthew waited as Daniel considered what Matthew had said, the older man's head cocked a bit to the side.

"Okay," Daniel agreed. "As long as you don't try and slip any frou-frou bubble bath stuff in there."

Matthew barked out a laugh. "You mean you've *got* that stuff here?"

"No, but I've seen it in *your* bathroom, Mr. Sensitive Skin," Daniel grinned. "Figured you'd brought it with you."

"Sensitive skin, eh? Says the man who has 4 different kinds of hand lotion and is never without his chapstick," Matthew smirked.

And before Daniel could come back with another smart-ass reply, Matthew was up and moving out of the kitchen, calling over his shoulder, "Gonna go start the water for your bath, princess!"

Back in the kitchen a short time later, Matthew was clearing the breakfast dishes when he noticed Daniel scratching at his face. He'd already been sporting his customary Ben-scruff the morning of the accident and hadn't shaved since, and it looked like the extra facial hair was bothering his friend.

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. "You want me to give you a shave?"

Daniel's hand dropped away from his face and Matthew was horrified that he'd maybe overstepped the bounds of friendship. Shaving another guy was kinda…personal. But Daniel nodded slowly and Matthew blew out a relieved breath.

"Yeah, man, I'd appreciate it," Daniel replied. "And I hope you know that you're the only person I'd trust putting a razor to my throat," he continued.

Daniel said the words lightly, but Matthew could also hear the underlying seriousness in what he said, and it warmed him.

"Same here, man." Matthew grinned, put the last plate in the dishwasher and clapped his hands. "Okay, let's go make you look all pretty."

Daniel's reply was showing Matthew his middle finger as he stood up from the table and made his way out of the kitchen.

A quick stop in Daniel's room to get him fresh clothes and then the two men were walking into the bathroom, closing the door behind them. The bath was nearly halfway full by now, warm steam beginning to fill the air.

As Daniel took off his t-shirt, Matthew retrieved his friend's razor and shaving cream from the medicine cabinet, then a washcloth and hand towel.

"So, ummm, how do you want to do this?" Daniel asked.

Matthew glanced around the room. "Here, why don't I sit on the counter between the sinks and you can stand in front of me?"

Daniel nodded his agreement and Matthew hopped up on the counter. He reached out and took his friend by his wrist, pulling him closer, guiding him to stand between Matthew's widespread legs.

Matthew took a second, and a breath, as his heart jumped a bit, having Daniel so close, naked from the waist up. He closed his legs, until they were just barely brushing Daniel's, and he felt as if that drew Daniel even closer to him. Matthew swallowed, reluctant to release Daniel's wrist, the skin of it so warm under his fingers.

"Hey, everything okay?"

Daniel's quiet question broke Matthew out of the moment and he blinked, letting go of his friend's arm.

"Umm, yeah, sorry," Matthew stammered, and he turned his upper body toward the sink on his right, twisting on the taps. He adjusted the temperature just this side of too hot and soaked the washcloth, before handing it to Daniel.

Daniel wet down his face and neck with the cloth as Matthew first pulled up the stopper in the sink, then flipped open the cap on the shaving cream.

Face thoroughly damp, Daniel handed the washcloth back to Matthew, who laid it next to him on the counter, then turned off the taps on the sink. He squirted a small amount of shaving cream onto the fingers of his right hand, set the can down and rubbed the cream onto his left hand as well.

Reaching out, he slowly smoothed the cream onto Daniel's face – under his cheekbones, above his upper lip, across and back on the sides of his face, over and under his chin, then a short way down his neck. He felt Daniel release a small sigh and saw his shoulders relax.

The water running in the bathtub was the only sound in the room as Matthew picked up the razor and began carefully shaving his friend. A slow swipe down, a rinse in the sink…repeat…repeat…repeat. It was sensual, almost hypnotic, as more and more of Daniel's skin was revealed with each pass of the razor.

Matthew felt Daniel's hand touch his leg, slide up, until his palm was resting high up on his thigh. Matthew breathed in at the touch, breathed in the warm steam enveloping them, felt his legs close a fraction more.

One last pass with the razor and Matthew was finished, Daniel's skin pink and smooth once more. Eyes never leaving Daniel's face, Matthew set the razor down on the counter. There was a spot of shaving cream on Daniel's left cheekbone and Matthew reached up, palm resting against the side of his friend's face, fingers curling around behind Daniel's ear, his thumb sliding over Daniel's cheek, clearing the shaving cream away.

Time seemed to freeze, catching the two men in the moment as Matthew felt his chest tighten, his heart pound, and he couldn't breathe, felt lightheaded.

And this.

This feeling.

This is why he left his three-year relationship with his boyfriend Colin nearly four months ago. When he no longer got this feeling being around *him*, but around his best friend instead.

When he realized he was falling in love with Daniel.

His thumb caressed Daniel's cheek again and Matthew desperately wished that he could see Daniel's eyes, to see what he was feeling. God, was he alone in this madness? He needed to know…

Matthew felt Daniel sway towards him, his waist pressing against Matthew's groin, his fingers flexing on Matthew's thigh, and Matthew's throat went dry.

Daniel's voice was barely a whisper. "Matt?"

Matthew dropped his hand like Daniel's skin was burning him, feeling his face flush deeply. Jesus, what the hell was he *doing*? He cleared his throat, trying to find his voice.

"We're, uh, all done," he stammered.

Daniel stood there, silent, not moving for a long heartbeat before finally backing away from Matthew, turning towards the bathtub. Without hesitation, Daniel pulled down both his sweatpants and boxers, and Matthew felt his breath catch once again.

He knew he should look away, that it was wrong, that it was taking advantage of Daniel, but God help him, he couldn't. How long had he wanted to see Daniel like this, standing naked before him? He'd imagined what Daniel would look like in his dreams, moving against him, under him, over him, naked skin pressed tight to Matthew's own. His cock sliding against Matthew's.

And now, now when he can finally drink his fill of the beautiful man before him it has to happen like this, when Daniel is hurt and depending on him. Matthew never wanted it to happen like this.

He shook himself out of the thought and moved toward Daniel as he climbed into the tub, making sure his friend didn't fall. Daniel submerged himself up to his chin and smiled as he laid his head back against the tub.

"Damn, that feels great," he sighed.

"Do you want me to wash your hair?" Matthew asked as he turned off the taps. "Then you can soak for a while."

"Yeah, man; that'd be good."

"Okay, lift up your head and I'll unwind the gauze."

Daniel did as asked and Matthew carefully removed the white bandage from around Daniel's head, setting it on the sink, where he retrieved a drinking cup from beside the toothbrush holder.

Matthew perched himself on the ledge of the bathtub and filled up the cup. "Lean your head back a bit," he told Daniel.

He cupped his hand above Daniel's eyes, making sure to keep the eye patches dry, and poured the water over his friend's hair. One more cupful and Matthew set the cup aside and picked up the shampoo. He squirted a small amount into his hand then started working it into Daniel's hair.

His long fingers slid through the fine strands, his motions slowing, becoming more massaging than just washing. He heard Daniel sigh again, felt his friend relax, shoulders dipping. From his spot on the side of the tub, Matthew could easily see Daniel's lean body beneath the still water. His legs were spread, and Matthew could see his cock nestled in dark hair at his groin. Matthew wondered what it would feel like in his hand, his mouth…

He felt his own cock stir inside his pants, and guilt crashed down upon him again. He had to get out of here, away from Daniel; it was wrong, what he was doing, and he couldn't seem to stop.

Matthew abruptly stopped washing Daniel's hair, and quickly rinsed the soap out, his motions quick and jerky. He could tell Daniel sensed the sudden change, but before he could say anything, Matthew was speaking rapidly, moving away from the bathtub.

"Okay, um, the soap's on your left and I put your towel on the floor. Just reach down and you'll find it. Your clothes are on the sink. And if, if you need anything just yell, okay?" he finished, and fled the bathroom, Daniel's confused, "Matt?" following after him.

He didn't stop moving until he was down the stairs and through the kitchen, leaning up against the back door, his forehead pressed to the cool glass. He closed his eyes as images of Daniel's naked body flashed through his head and he reached down, cupping himself through his pants, felt himself half hard. He stroked himself once and a small moan escaped his lips.

But then he was pounding his fist against the door, furious with himself. His friend was *hurt*, and here he was, like a fucking peeping tom, leering at Daniel's naked body because his friend couldn't see him.

Matthew turned and slid down the door, coming to rest on the floor, head hanging between his shoulders. What the fuck was wrong with him?

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By the time Daniel walked down the stairs and made his way over to the couch about a half hour later, Matthew had gotten himself under control.

"Feel better?" he asked as Daniel sat down next to him, smelling soap-clean, his hair sticking up in spikes as it dried.
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"Much," Daniel answered, handing Matthew the gauze wrap. "You were right, soaking in the tub did help my back."

"Good – " Matthew started, but was interrupted by the ringing of the phone.

"Get it for me, will you?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah, sure," Matthew replied, crossing to the other side of the living room, where the phone was.

"Hello? Oh, hey, Paul. Yeah, he's right here; hang on."

Matthew put the phone in Daniel's hand and sat back down on the couch, picking up the newspaper he'd been reading.

"Hey, Paul, what's up? Yeah? Good. Mmm-hmmm, yeah, okay. Yeah, I'll think about it. Pretty good, thanks." Matthew saw Daniel turn towards him and as he looked back, Daniel smiled. "Matthew's taking good care of me."

Matthew grinned, his stomach doing that little flip again, as Daniel finished up his phone call with Paul.

"So Paul told me that the two guys who were working the pyrotechnics that night have been fired," Daniel said as Matthew rewrapped the bandage around his head. "Also told me that the studio is suing the effects company and that they think I should file my own civil suit."

"I think that's a good idea, Danny. It was their negligence that caused this. None of it was your fault."

Daniel nodded. "Yeah, I told him I'd think about it." He sat back against the couch. "So what are you up to?"

"Just reading the paper," Matthew replied.

"Oh yeah? Read some to me," Daniel said, slouching down further into the cushions, leaning his head back, folding his hands across his stomach.

"Sure, man. Let me guess; sports first?"

Daniel just laughed and Matthew started reading, happy to do this for his friend.

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After reading nearly the entire newspaper to Daniel, with each of them giving opinions on various articles, they settled into easy conversation.
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They talked more than they had in the two years they'd known each other, about everything under the sun - from their Hollywood lives to their personal lives. Each had the other laughing as they shared stories from their childhood and the crazy things they did, from Matthew the drama club geek to Daniel the debate team captain. Sports came next, each ribbing the other about the Bulls and the Lakers and how *their* team was the best. They talked about their parents and their siblings and how getting into acting was the best thing that had ever happened to them.

They talked and laughed, stopped to eat, then started all over again. And by the time night fell, Matthew felt more connected to Daniel than he ever had.

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The next morning after breakfast the phone rang and it was Tony, calling for Daniel. For a moment Matthew thought that Daniel was going to say he didn't want to talk to Tony, but then held out his hand for the phone.

Wanting to give his friend some privacy, Matthew went up to his guest room and flipped the channels on the small television until he heard Daniel say goodbye to Tony, then he went back downstairs.

He picked up the paper from the coffee table and flipped it open as he sat down next to Daniel on the couch.

"Want me to read the sports section?"
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"Hmmm? Oh, yeah, sure," Daniel answered, sounding distracted.

Sure enough, soon Daniel's end of the conversation about the news trailed off until Matthew asked him a question and he didn't even respond.

Matthew closed and folded the paper, setting it aside. He turned on the couch, facing his friend, concern etched across his features.

"Danny? What's wrong? You haven't heard anything I've said."

Silence for a long moment until Daniel shrugged. "It's nothing. Just…thanks again for staying with me, doing all of this."

"Hey, I told you, no problem. Besides," he smiled, knocking his hand against Daniel's shoulder. "It gave me the chance to return the favor."

"Return…?" Daniel was confused at first, then blew out an exasperated breath. "C'mon, man, that was totally different."

Matthew shook his head, serious now. "No, it wasn't. I was a mess after breaking up with Colin. You stayed at my apartment with me for three days."

What Daniel didn't know was that he was a mess because he'd given up the safety and security of a long-term relationship with Colin for the slimmest chance of a relationship with Daniel. Matthew felt there was…something between them. And he was gambling his happiness on it. But here it was, almost four months later, and he'd been too scared to go forward with whatever this thing was. If he was wrong, and Daniel was just being his natural charming self and Matthew was looking too deeply into it…he'd lose his best friend.

So instead of telling Daniel the complete truth as to why he broke up with Colin, he'd simply said that he was interested in someone else.

Daniel's voice was soft when he spoke. "You haven't told me anything about that other person. Have you made any progress?"

Matthew swallowed. "Um, no. Maybe. I don't…I don't know," he answered haltingly, and Daniel simply nodded his head slowly.

Nervous of where this conversation might be heading, Matthew changed the subject back. "This isn't about me. What's bothering you, Danny?"

"What time is it, Matt?"

Matthew blinked at the question, then looked at the clock above the fireplace. "It's 9:45," he answered and everything suddenly clicked into place. Daniel's appointment at the hospital was at 11am.

"You listen to me, Danny," Matthew told him, voice strong. "You're going to be fine. You're going to open your eyes and see my ugly face."

Matthew watched as Daniel tried to smile, but instead his jaw tightened and he swallowed. His mouth opened, but nothing came out. He tried again, voice so quiet that Matthew nearly missed it.

"I'm scared."

Matthew's throat closed up at his friend's admission, and when he saw Daniel make an abortive move with his hand, he didn't hesitate to reach over and take it.

Chapter 4

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Paul arrived at the hospital just as Dr. Ellison walked into the waiting room to collect Daniel.

"Ready, Mr. Westman?"

Daniel blew out a breath and tried to smile. "As I'll ever be. Let's do this."

Dr. Ellison turned and addressed Paul and Matthew. "Gentlemen, you can wait here for Mr. Westman."

"No, wait," Daniel said. "I'd like them to be there, too."
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"Are you sure, Danny?" Matthew questioned.

"Yeah, I'm sure," Daniel replied, then reached out a hand for Matthew's arm.

Dr. Ellison nodded. "Follow me, then."

The men walked down the hallway to a fairly large exam room, where another doctor and a nurse were waiting inside. Matthew guided Daniel over to the exam table and the older man raised himself up on to it, his legs hanging over the side.

"Mr. Westman, Doctor Lewis is here as well. He's an ophthalmologist that will be examining your eyes after we remove the bandages," Dr. Ellison explained.

Daniel nodded. "Okay, sure."

Dr. Ellison nodded to the nurse and she moved to the single window in the room, closing the blinds, while Dr. Lewis turned off all but one of the overhead lights, toward the rear of the room. While this was going on, Matthew noticed Daniel rhythmically clenching and unclenching his hands around the edge of the exam table, a tell tale sign of his nervousness.

"Alright then," Dr. Ellison began, stepping up next to Daniel, reaching for the gauze wrapped around Daniel's head. "I want you to keep your eyes closed as I remove the bandages." A minute later the eye patches had been taken off, and Dr. Ellison stepped back a bit.

"We've closed the blinds and dimmed the lights, but I still want you to open your eyes slowly. Things might be fuzzy at first as well," the doctor told Daniel. "Okay, whenever you're ready."

Matthew saw Daniel take a breath and Matthew felt himself tense. Please, God…

Daniel's eyelids fluttered, then opened bit by bit, with Daniel blinking repeatedly. Eyes finally fully open, Daniel turned his head from side to side…and Matthew immediately knew something was wrong when Daniel's eyes didn't track to anyone or anything in the room.

Matthew immediately took a step forward. "Danny – "

"I can't – I can't see anything…"

At Daniel's anguished words, Matthew felt his face drain of all it's color and his heart plummeted to his stomach. No. No, this can't be happening…

Suddenly everyone was talking - Paul asking Dr. Ellison questions, Dr. Lewis speaking to the nurse about taking Daniel upstairs - but Matthew was frozen, unable to move, his brain still trying to process that his friend was blind. But when everyone turned to speak to Daniel at once and Matthew saw his friend flinch at the verbal onslaught, he knew that Daniel was overwhelmed. Too much to take in; too many people talking--

"Shut up." Matthew's voice came out broken and too quiet for anyone to hear.

"Shut UP!"

The room fell instantly silent and everyone turned to look at Matthew, shocked at his outburst.

"Everyone just get out," he told them, tone brooking no argument. "Right now. Give him a minute." Then he walked over to the door and opened it. And without a word everyone filed out and he closed the door behind them.

Matthew took a shaky breath and went over to Daniel, sitting beside him on the exam table. For a moment neither man spoke, Matthew not knowing what to say to his friend whose life had just changed forever. So instead he simply put his arm around Daniel's shoulders, actions speaking louder than words.

Daniel turned his head toward Matthew, and Matthew felt his heart clench at the sight of his friend's beautiful blue eyes, dull now, sightless.

Daniel's voice was just above a whisper. "I don't know what to do."

Hot tears prickled behind Matthew's eyes and his throat tried to close up around his words. "I don't either. But I won't let you go through this alone."

In answer, Daniel pressed his body into Matthew's and Matthew tightened his grip around his friend's shoulders.

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Half an hour later, Matthew was with Daniel in Dr. Lewis's office, the ophthalmologist having just finished examining Daniel.

"With this type of flash burn injury, as opposed to a physical wound or a chemical burn, there is always a chance that your vision will return," the gray-haired doctor told Daniel. "But you have to be prepared that it may not, and you need to adapt to this change in your life." He took a sheaf of papers and pamphlets off of his desk and handed them to Matthew. "I've given Mr. Tucker information on organizations for the blind and the contact information for several good counselors."

Dr. Lewis stood, and Matthew took Daniel's elbow in his hand, encouraging Daniel to stand as well.

"If you experience any pain, or any change in your vision, contact me right away."

When Daniel said nothing, Matthew thanked the doctor and the two men left the office. Matthew spied Paul waiting for them out in the hallway, but when he started to approach, Matthew silently waved him off. He motioned that he would call him later, and Paul nodded.

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The ride back to Daniel's house was painfully silent. Matthew knew from experience that Daniel was never one to be pushed into talking about something he didn't want to, so he left his friend to his own thoughts, as hard as it was for him to do so.

Once inside the front door, Matthew was again unsure of what to do or say to Daniel. "Do you – " he started, but Daniel cut him off.

"I'd really just like to be alone," he said in a flat voice, starting to move away from Matthew.

Matthew reached out and touched Daniel's arm. "Danny, if you want to talk – "

Daniel took a step, and Matthew's arm fell down to his side. "Not now, Matt; okay?"

Matthew sighed softly. "Yeah. Okay."

He then watched with sad eyes as Daniel found the wall of the foyer with his fingers and walked toward the stairs, turning the corner and disappearing upstairs. A few moments later Matthew heard the door to Daniel's bedroom close.

Not knowing what to do with himself, mind still reeling from the day's events, Matthew wandered through the house and out the back door, sitting down heavily on one of the patio chairs. He stared unseeingly at the trees as the cool fall wind rustled the leaves.

He finally roused himself almost an hour later and fished his cell phone out of his pocket. Daniel might not feel like talking right now, but Matthew really needed to.

"Mom? It's me."

"Hi, sweetheart!"

"Mom…" Matthew's voice broke.

"Matthew? Honey, what's wrong?"

Matthew cleared his throat, but his voice was still ragged. "Mom, it's Daniel. There's been an accident."

"An accident? Matthew, is Daniel all right?"

"No, Mom. He's not…"

As Matthew explained to his mother what had happened, he felt tears threaten with every sentence but he refused to let them fall. He needed to be strong, to keep it together for Daniel, not fall apart.

"I don't know what to do, Mom," Matthew finished. "I feel so damn helpless."

His mother's voice was soft when she answered. "Honey, all you can do is what you've been doing – be his friend. You can't fix this, but you can be there for him, give him whatever support he needs. And a shoulder to cry on and an ear to listen."

Matthew nodded. "I wish there was more, but I can do that. I *want* to do it."

Matthew heard his mother's smile. "I know you can. You're a good person, Matthew. It's not going to be easy for Daniel. He's lucky to have a friend like you."

Matthew smiled. "I'm lucky to have him, too, Mom."

Chapter 5

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A short time later Matthew went back inside, drifted into the kitchen to make a late lunch. He had felt wrung out after talking with his mom, but he had needed to make one more phone call, to Tony.

Tony was just as uncomprehending as Matthew was, not wanting to believe that this was happening to their friend. Matthew told him he had no idea what was going to happen from here, but promised to come get his dogs as soon as he could. Tony told him the dogs were just fine, they could stay as long as Matthew needed them to, just to take care of Daniel.
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Which is exactly what Matthew planned to do. He fixed himself and Daniel sandwiches and put them on the kitchen table, then went upstairs and knocked on Daniel's door.

"Danny?"

No response.

"I made some sandwiches. Want to come down and eat?"

Silence.

Matthew rested his fingers against the wood. "Okay, I'll just…I'll leave it on the table for you if you change your mind."

Back in the kitchen, after only a few half hearted bites of his food, Matthew found his own appetite had fled, and tossed the rest in the garbage.

Listless, Matthew walked aimlessly around the living room, looking at the photos Daniel had on the walls and on the shelves of the bookcases. He'd been in Daniel's house countless times and seen the pictures, but never really *seen* them. Several were of Daniel and his parents, back in Chicago and here in New York, the few times they'd visited. Another was Daniel with his brother and sister, taken years ago at a beach, the siblings laughing and smiling in the sun. There was one with Daniel and Tony, taken at one of the network events, both men clearly having a fantastic time.

Something was missing, though, that rotated through Matthew's own bookshelves and on his walls - pictures of him and his boyfriends – on a picnic, at a ballgame. Taken down when the relationship ended to be replaced when he started dating again. But Matthew had never once seen a candid photo of Daniel with his arm around a pretty girl or a handsome guy who wasn't a close friend or cast mate.

Daniel was a private person, and while Matthew was closer to him than just about anyone else, Daniel kept his dating, and his sexuality, pretty much to himself. Although Matthew had seen Daniel leave two or three network events with both men and women, he'd never come right out and told Matthew he was bi.

But it was the fact that he'd seen Daniel chatting with men more than women when the two of them hit the bars for a couple of drinks, talking for just for a minute or two, before always coming back to Matthew, that made him think…made him hope that maybe…

With a soft sigh he turned his head and his eye fell on several pictures of himself and Daniel. Most were candid shots taken by Tony at one party or another, of the two of them goofing around with each other. But there was one taken by Paul at the party he threw when *Dark Roads* had been renewed for a second season. Matthew had thrown his arm around Daniel's shoulders and pulled him in close. Daniel had wrapped one arm around Matthew's waist while his other arm had come up, his hand landing right over Matthew's heart. They had been laughing, their eyes shining, happy beyond belief about the renewal, staring right at each other when Paul snapped the picture.

Matthew lifted the frame off of the shelf and stroked his thumb over Daniel's face. Would he ever see his friend smile like that again?

He stared at the photo for a long time, lost in his thoughts, before finally setting it back down and randomly picking a book to read. But the murder mystery couldn't hold his attention and he set it next to him on the couch after only a few dozen pages. He closed his eyes with a tired sigh and let his head fall back against the cushions.

The squeak of the stairs roused him, and he realized with a jolt that he had fallen asleep for almost three hours. He rubbed a hand over his face and through his hair, glancing over toward the staircase where Daniel was just stepping off the last stair.

"Matt?" he called quietly.

"Yeah, Danny. Over here on the couch," Matthew answered him.

Matthew watched as Daniel made his way over to the living room and found the couch, where he sat at the very end, pressed up against the armrest.

"Hungry?" Matthew asked him.

A shake of Daniel's head. "No. Just wanna…sit here for awhile." Again, his voice flat and empty.

Matthew frowned slightly. He'd hoped that Daniel would want to talk about all of this. "Okay, Danny."

Picking up the abandoned murder mystery, Matthew read for the next hour, not really comprehending what the book was about, just doing it because honestly, he didn't know what else to do.

Daniel sat still and quiet the entire time until Matthew saw his head start to tilt sideways, eyes falling closed. A few minutes later and Daniel's breath evened out in sleep.

Closing the book, Matthew stared openly at his friend. Pressed into the corner of the couch he looked small and utterly worn out. Not anything like the strong person he'd been just two days ago. Now only a shell of his friend remained, and Matthew's heart ached.

Starting to stand, intending to go in the kitchen and get a drink, Matthew jostled the book on his lap and it started to slide to the floor. Catching it, he turned to toss it onto the end table, then froze in mid-motion.

There on the table were Daniel's glasses.

Useless now to sightless eyes.

The book tumbled from his fingers as he reached out and picked them up, feeling something inside him…shatter. His chest seized and his throat closed up, the hot press of tears strong behind his

eyes. He swore he wouldn't do this, wouldn't break down, but it was too late, the emotions crashing down upon him with crushing force, unstoppable.

He couldn't let Daniel hear, couldn't let him see…

Oh, god…

Matthew jolted up off the couch, still holding the glasses, practically running through the house and out the back door. In his haste, his foot caught on the edge of the patio and he went down, falling hard, hearing the glasses snap in his clenched hand.

There, on his knees in the damp grass, the deep, heartrending sobs broke free. His entire body shook with the force of his anguish, as he cried for his friend who would never be the same again and how utterly unfair it was.

He opened his hand to see the broken glasses, broken like Daniel, and white-hot anger overtook his anguish. Anger at the two men who had only lost their jobs, while they had ripped away *everything* from Daniel with their carelessness.

With a deep, hoarse cry, Matthew raised up and threw the glasses as far as he could, before collapsing back down onto the grass, curling up on his side, crying until his throat was raw and his eyes swollen, crying until he had nothing left, crying until the evening grew dark around him.

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The morning light filtered through the curtains in the guest room, and Matthew rolled away from the sun with a groan. His head felt thick and heavy, his eyes still puffy and throat scratchy from last night.

He had lain outside in the grass until the moon came up, his body lethargic, his limbs heavy. It was only when the chill October night air started to make him shiver that he finally roused himself and went back inside the house.

Daniel was gone from the couch and Matthew checked his room, to find his friend sleeping. Matthew had gone inside and sat down on the edge of the bed, just looking at Daniel for long minutes, before barely touching his leg beneath the blanket, then retreating to his own room.

He'd tossed and turned most of the night and now he sat up, rubbing his face, then rolling his shoulders, trying to work out the stiffness.

The sound of breaking glass had Matthew up and out of bed in an instant, legs tangling in the blankets, nearly making him fall in his haste. He barreled down the stairs, turning the corner to the kitchen, stopping in the doorway.

Daniel was there, standing at the counter next to the sink, wearing just a pair of boxers. It looked like he was trying to pour himself a glass of orange juice, but when he'd taken the glass out of the cabinet he'd missed the edge of the counter when setting it down, and now it lay shattered on the kitchen floor.

"Shit!" Daniel swore, starting to take a step forward with his bare foot, straight into the broken glass.

"Danny, don't!" Matthew yelled, startling Daniel and thankfully stopping him from moving.

Matthew walked into the kitchen, skirting the broken glass with his own bare feet, coming to stop next to Daniel. He reached out and took Daniel's arm. "Here, walk over – "

"Back OFF!" Daniel lashed out, breaking out of Matthew's grasp, then pushed hard against Matthew's chest with both his hands. Matthew stumbled back, hitting the refrigerator, stunned.

Daniel's body was practically shaking, every muscle tense, hands balled into fists at his sides. His eyes were bright with unshed moisture, his jaw muscle jumping.

Daniel suddenly whirled, smashing his fists down onto the counter, and in the next moment his arms swept out, sending everything on the counter flying – onto the floor, into the sink, items breaking and spilling.

"I hate this! I hate this!" The cry was ripped from Daniel right before a sob tore free and his legs buckled.

Matthew jumped forward, hooking an arm around Daniel's waist, but his weight brought them both down. They landed in one of the only clean spots on the floor, with Daniel's back pressed against

Matthew's chest, leaning up against the sink. Daniel immediately struggled to get free, but Matthew moved his arm higher, a band across Daniel's chest, refusing to let him go.

"God, Danny, let it out," Matthew begged, tears coloring his voice. "Please…don't keep it in anymore."

Daniel froze for a heartbeat before he finally gave in, sagging back against Matthew, the floodgates opening on his repressed emotions, harsh sobs racking his body.

Matthew held on tight, the side of his face pressed against Daniel's, his own silent tears flowing freely.

Long moments later, Daniel's anguish began to subside, his body going practically limp in Matthew's embrace.

"We'll get through this, I promise," Matthew vowed fiercely.

Daniel quieted at Matthew's words, getting his breathing back under control. He turned his body slightly, facing more toward Matthew. "This is *my* life, Matt. There is no 'we'," he said on a sigh.

"What if I want there to be?" The words were out before he even knew he was going to say them. But dammit, it was time to stop hiding from this, from what he was feeling, from what he wanted.

Daniel shook his head. "Matt, you don't – " he started.

"I wanted to say this a long time ago." Matthew talked over him, the words coming out in a rush, tumbling over each other. "I'm sorry that it's just coming out now. I didn't – I didn't know what to do, what to say to you. But there's something here, right? Between us? You feel it too, don't you? Please, Danny, please tell me – "

The rest of Matthew's question was lost as Daniel's mouth found his own, almost missing it, but Matthew dipped his head, correcting Daniel's aim, and then…

Then they were kissing and Matthew was flying apart.

Daniel's lips were soft and warm against his, pressing gently, and he groaned quietly, mouth opening slightly. And Daniel's tongue was there, asking for entrance, which Matthew quickly gave. He felt Daniel gasp as their tongues slid against each other for the first time, tasting one another.

Then Daniel was twisting, moving, never breaking the kiss as he straddled Matthew's legs, settling himself in Matthew's lap.

"Yeah," Matthew breathed into the kiss as he wrapped his arms around Daniel, felt Daniel's fingers thread through his long hair.

Their mouths parted and came back together again and again, their actions growing in intensity, breaths coming faster, hands roaming over bare skin. Matthew's erection was a hard ridge inside his

boxers and he grasped Daniel's hips, instantly felt the other man grind down against him, Daniel's rigid cock sliding against his through the fabric of their underwear.

Matthew broke the kiss with a deep groan at the contact, leaning his head back against the sink.

"Matt?" Daniel panted, confused.

Matthew pressed his forehead against Daniel's. "Not here, not on the floor," he breathed.

Daniel nodded, smiling, and stood, and when Matthew was standing next to him, Daniel threaded his fingers with Matthew's and said, "Lead on."

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They were barely in the door of Daniel's room before they were back in each other's arms. Matthew claimed Daniel's mouth for another deep kiss, feeling Daniel's hands reach around and settle on his ass, pulling him tight against the older man.

Matthew bucked his hips up and felt Daniel laugh into the kiss. Matthew smiled against Daniel's lips and slid his hands down Daniel's back, fingers dipping under Daniel's waistband.

"Yeah, Matt, yeah…" Daniel encouraged him, raising his hands up to cup Matthew's face, kissing him again, and Matthew hooked his thumbs in the elastic and eased the boxers over Daniel's hips, letting the material fall to the floor.
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Daniel pulled back from the kiss. “My turn,” he said with a smirk, reaching for Matthew’s boxers, pushing them down.

Nothing between them now, they pressed together, their groins touching, their erections sliding against each other. Both men moaned almost simultaneously at the contact, and Matthew marveled at Daniel’s heat, all centered below his waist.

Daniel tipped his head back just as Matthew’s came down, his lips mouthing wetly at Daniel’s neck.

“God, Matt…you feel so good.” Daniel’s arms tightened around Matthew and Matthew again bucked his hips, drawing in a breath at the feel of his cock rubbing against Daniel’s, pressed between their bodies.

“Bed. Now,” Matthew said against Daniel’s skin, and began walking them slowly backwards, stopping when the back of his knees touched the mattress.

He sank slowly downward, kissing Daniel’s neck, chest and stomach as he went. He scooted up the bed, his back against the headboard, then reached out and grasped Daniel’s wrist, giving it a little tug.

“C’mere.”

Daniel went willingly, crawling onto the bed, feeling with his hands where Matthew was, how he was lying, before straddling Matthew's waist once more, just like downstairs.

As Matthew looked into Daniel's wide blue eyes his heart gave a painful twinge. It wasn't right, it wasn't fair that their first time together was something Daniel would never see. But there was something Matthew could do, something that would make them equal.

So Matthew let his brown eyes slide closed.

If Daniel couldn't see their first time together, then neither would he.

His senses were immediately assaulted as Daniel cupped Matthew's face again, drawing him in for another deep kiss, their tongues sliding against one another, velvet-silk. Matthew's hands roamed up and down Daniel's back, skimming across heated skin and muscles, letting his fingertips "show" him Daniel.

As the kiss grew, Matthew felt Daniel's hips start to move, pressing down, then up, bumping their erections together again and again.

Matthew pulled back from the kiss, breathless. "God, Danny…"

"No, don't stop…" came Daniel's plea, his hands sliding down to grasp the top of Matthew's shoulders, still moving his hips.

Eyes still closed, Matthew found Daniel's jaw line with his lips, where he kissed and licked his way down the smooth column of Daniel's neck, the other man's salty taste exploding across his tongue.

He tilted Daniel's upper body back a bit to get better access to his chest, where his mouth found Daniel's right nipple. Matthew could feel Daniel's moan as he swiped his tongue across the small nub.

Encouraged, Matthew licked and sucked, hearing Daniel's voice get rough with arousal as his hand cupped the back of Matthew's head, holding him against his nipple.

"Mmm, yeah, like that…harder…*god*…"

The words went straight to Matthew's cock, hard and aching, still sliding against Daniel's. He pulled the now hardened bud into his mouth and bit Daniel's nipple lightly.

Daniel gasped, the grip on Matthew's head faltering, and Matthew pulled back, raising Daniel's upper body back up. Daniel dropped his head, bumping against Matthew's, his hips grinding harder now, his voice thready when he spoke.

"Touch me, Matt, *please*…"

Squeezing his eyes to make them stay shut, to not look down and see Daniel's cock, was one of the hardest things Matthew had ever done. He could feel fine tremors running through Daniel's body, knew his own was vibrating with need, too, his blood thrumming through his veins. He was flushed, hot, could feel the light sheen of sweat on his body and Daniel's.

He turned his head, nose bumping Daniel's, tipped his chin down and captured Daniel's mouth as his hand reached between their bodies, into the incredible heat pooled there. He'd never been more thankful for his large hands and long fingers than he was at that moment, as he curled his palm around both of their straining cocks.

Both of their mouths opened, breathing each other's breath at this first, intimate touch. Daniel was like silk and steel in his palm, heavy with need and arousal.

Matthew tightened his grip and slid his hand upwards, pressing their cocks together, skin sliding against skin. Daniel whined deep in his throat and Matthew thought he would come apart at the sound.

"More," Daniel pleaded, his fingers digging into Matthew's shoulders.

Matthew splayed his other hand on Daniel's back, then started stroking their cocks with long, smooth motions.

"*Christ*, Danny…" Matthew moaned, his brain still trying to process the fact that he was here with Daniel like this, with his cock in his hand, stroking them both to orgasm. It still seemed so unreal.

In between hot, wet, sharp kisses their breaths came in short pants. Matthew's hand was moving faster now, driving their passion higher and higher. He turned his wrist slightly on the next upstroke, to drag his thumb over the head of Daniel's cock, pressing down on the slit. He felt the wetness of Daniel's precome just as the older man shook in his arms, a harsh, ragged groan escaping his lips.

"Make me come, Matt…*oh god*…please, make me come…"

Matthew shuddered at Daniel's voice, gritty and thick, felt his own climax just beyond his reach.

"Yeah, Danny, yeah," he breathed against Daniel's neck, gripping their cocks just a bit harder.

"Yes!" Daniel bucked his hips sharply. "Just – just like that…almost, I – "

"Let me feel you come, Danny…let go…"

And with a cry that was nearly a sob, Daniel came, his body shaking on top of Matthew's. It took every ounce of willpower Matthew possessed to keep his eyes closed when he felt Daniel's cock pulse in his hand and the first, hot splash of semen coat his fingers and his own cock.

He kept stroking, coaxing wave after wave of Daniel's orgasm from him, feeling his own collecting at the base of his spine, rushing up to meet him.

Then Daniel's hand was knocking his away, taking over, stroking, stroking, Daniel's husky voice telling him, "Now let me feel *you* come."

And that was it for Matthew. One, two more pulls on his painfully hard erection and he was coming, shouting Daniel's name, feeling his brain liquefy and shoot out through his cock in milky jets, over and over.

Matthew could no longer keep his eyes closed, it just wasn't possible any more, and he opened them to see Daniel, face flushed, hairline damp with sweat, looking at him with such tenderness that it made Matthew's heart lurch inside his chest.

His body still trembling with aftershocks, he crushed Daniel to him, feeling the other man hold on to him just as tightly.

"God, Matt…" Daniel's voice was worn out and breathy, his face buried in Matthew's neck.

Matthew put his mouth next to Daniel's ear. "I love you," he whispered, and felt Daniel smile against his skin.

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Lying under the blankets a short time later, Matthew was spooned around Daniel's body, their hands linked, resting over Daniel's heart.

"It was you, you know," Matthew started, voice low. "The person I was interested in. Why I broke it off with Colin."

Daniel nodded slowly. "I thought so, but I wasn't sure. I was hoping, but you never – you didn't say anything. And if I made the first move and I was wrong…"
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Matthew kissed the side of Daniel's head, his hair soft against his lips. "I know, I'm sorry," he apologized. "I was scared. What if you didn't – what if I was reading too much into things between us? I was so afraid of what could go wrong that it stopped me from doing anything." Matthew sighed. "And I'm sorry that it took something like this, the accident, for me to finally say something."

Daniel turned in Matthew's arms to face him. "It doesn't matter. But Matt, things aren't going to be easy for me. My life…" He took a breath. "What I'm trying to say is, what we just did, it doesn't have to mean anything. I'll understand if you change your mind right now and walk away. Because things are going to be hard."

Matthew grasped Daniel's shoulder. "Stop; just *stop*. I'm not walking away from anything or anyone. I'm exactly where I want to be. I love you, Danny. And I want to be here for you, with you. If that's what you want."

Daniel gave him a small smile. "I do. But if it ever gets to be too much for you – "

The rest of Daniel's words were lost to Matthew's kiss.

Chapter 6

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EIGHT WEEKS LATER

Matthew picked up the newspaper from the coffee table and his eyes caught the date - December 13th. Hard to believe that it had been two months since Daniel had lost his sight.

They were settling into their new life together here in Daniel's house. Matthew had moved in, with the dogs, a few days after he and Daniel had started their relationship.
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Daniel called his parents that same week, in what had to be the hardest conversation he'd ever had, telling them he was blind. They came to New York a few days later and stayed at the house for a week. Matthew still had six months left on his apartment lease, so he went back with the dogs, giving Daniel and his family time together. Daniel's mother wanted him to come back to Chicago with them, but Daniel told them no. He needed some time to figure out what he was going to do, but that he wouldn't be by himself. Matthew would be staying with him.

They had agreed to tell Daniel's parents that Matthew was living with him, but not about the true nature of their relationship, figuring that "I'm blind, I'm gay and my lover is my co-star" would just be too much, too fast, for them.

It wasn't long before word got out to the fan community about Daniel and piles upon piles of fan mail started pouring in. The studio forwarded everything to Daniel's house, and Matthew would sit with Daniel for hours every night, reading the letters to him, and writing down his responses, his thanks.

Reading became a big part of their lives, actually, with Matthew reading the newspaper and books to Daniel nearly everyday. Daniel said he loved to hear Matthew's voice, and Matthew, in return, also received the gift of Daniel voice – in song.

One day about four weeks ago, Daniel asked Matthew to find his guitar in the back of his closet. Matthew knew all about his friend's love of music, but a busy acting career didn't leave much time to indulge it. But now…now Daniel said that he didn't need eyes to play, or sing. And it brought Matthew such joy to see Daniel still being able to do something he loved.

At first Daniel had been hesitant, almost shy, even, to sing and play in front of Matthew. But Matthew had encouraged him, and soon Matthew was relaxing on the couch, eyes closed, as his lover's beautiful voice washed over him. Lately Matthew had been hinting that Daniel should create his own songs, that he would write down the lyrics and the notes, and Matthew had smiled when he heard Daniel strumming out a new tune last week.

Matthew himself was marching to a different drummer these days. *Dark Roads* had officially been canceled three weeks ago. Matthew knew something was going on when the network called a meeting with just Paul and himself. Daniel had not been invited.

And sure enough, the network had decided to re-cast Daniel's role and move forward with the show. It took Matthew less than a heartbeat to walk away and never look back.

That had turned into Matthew and Daniel's first real fight, when Matthew broke the news. Daniel didn't want him giving up a good career on a hit show, just because he wasn't able to work any longer. And Matthew had said that the connection they had as Shane and Ben was a one in a million thing; it could never happen again. And trying to fake it with another actor was unthinkable to him. No. He and Daniel were Shane and Ben. Period.

The "argument" had ended after that when Daniel took Matthew upstairs and showed Matthew just how much those words meant to him.

Scripts began rolling in for Matthew soon after *Dark Roads'* cancellation had been announced, so he wasn't concerned about his financial situation. Nor was Daniel concerned about his. He had

decided to go ahead with his own lawsuit against the effects company, and the settlement was going to be huge. Plus he would also be getting a share of the settlement from the studio's lawsuit.

So things were going well for them, as well as they could be in this difficult new life. They still butted heads every so often, however. Daniel was a strong person, stubborn, and it was hard for him to ask for help. But he was slowly becoming more accepting about things that he just couldn't do. And he was making great strides getting around the house – knowing exactly how many steps it was from the living room to the stairs, the stairs to the bathroom and his bedroom, and so on. He walked with more confidence every day, not relying on touching walls or Matthew leading him, and it made Matthew intensely proud of him.

Matthew was still concerned about Daniel, though. He had refused to leave the house these past two months, nor would he allow anyone to visit. It was becoming his cocoon, and Matthew was worried. He knew Daniel hated showing any kind of weakness and to show people he was blind wasn't something he wanted to do. Nor had he said he wanted to contact any of the organizations Dr. Lewis had given Matthew the paperwork on. Up to now Matthew had been patient with Daniel through all of this, thinking he just needed time to adjust. But this wasn't healthy. Daniel needed to fully accept his blindness in order to move forward with his life, as hard as it was going to be for him. Matthew knew he would meet resistance, but he was going to start pushing Daniel. He loved him too much to watch him become a lonely hermit in this house.

Yes, Daniel had been right; this wasn't going to be easy on either of them.

Matthew found himself getting angry often, at the injustice of it all, that so much had been ripped away from Daniel. He wanted Daniel to be able to see again so badly. The first time he had unconsciously said, “Hey, Danny, look at this,” Daniel had gone stock still for a split second and the familiar anger had torn through Matthew. He had stormed out of the house, wanting to hit something so fiercely that he had turned and smashed his fist into the side of the house, nearly breaking his hand.

He had fled to Tony’s house, knuckles throbbing, needing to talk to someone. Unlike Daniel, Matthew sought out the support of their friends, and Tony was always there for him.

After the incident with the wall, Matthew decided he needed a more productive output for his anger, a safer way to deal with his emotions when they became too much for him. So he turned the garage into a workout room. They had put Daniel’s car in storage a couple of weeks ago, so it was perfect. He put in a couple of machines, some free weights, a treadmill, and of course a heavy bag.

What started off as a way for Matthew to let off steam turned into a daily workout for both men when Daniel decided to join him. They had both used the gym at the studio regularly, and it felt good to start their workout routine again, together.

The crackle of the wood in the fireplace roused Matthew from his thoughts and he looked over to see his dogs, Shadow and Hunter, curled up in front of it, fast asleep.

The fireplace. Matthew couldn’t look at it anymore without getting hard. And yep, he felt his cock stir in his pants as he looked at the flames. He let his eyes slide closed as he remembered himself and Daniel on the floor in front of the hearth, naked, on a pile of blankets. After that first time on

Daniel's bed, they had turned into horny teenagers, unable to get enough of each other. For a week, they were naked more than they were clothed, each wanting nothing more than to touch and taste the other's body. They had gradually taken things further with one another, and the first time Matthew had taken Daniel into his mouth, Daniel's cock heavy against his tongue, Matthew came just from the sensation of Daniel climaxing in his mouth. And the first time Matthew's cock slipped between Daniel's lips, Matthew had lasted less than a minute before he was pulsing down Daniel's throat.

But the fireplace. It was there, on the blankets, that they had truly made love, when Daniel had slid inside Matthew's body for the first time. Matthew remembered the heat of the fire next to him and the heat of Daniel's body on top of him as Daniel's cock slipped inside him. It was…overwhelming. The feeling of being so intimately connected to Daniel took his breath away. And it was everything and more than he'd hoped for, making love with Daniel, feeling him push inside him again and again, driving them both toward a shattering orgasm.

Matthew shifted on the couch, reaching down to palm his cock as it grew heavy in his pants, accidentally jostling Daniel's feet, which were in his lap. He cast a worried glance at the older man, who was trying to sleep off a headache. Daniel had been suffering from them off and on lately, but he had brushed them off as nothing when Matthew asked if everything was okay. He quoted Matthew's own research back at him, telling him his other senses were making up for his loss of sight, and sometimes it just became overwhelming.

Daniel stirred, opening sightless eyes, blinking, turning his head in Matthew's direction. Matthew rubbed one of Daniel's sock clad feet. "Sorry; didn't mean to wake you."

Daniel ran a hand over his face. “Mmmm, that’s okay.”

“Feeling better?”

“Yeah; headache’s pretty much gone.” Daniel inhaled and blew out a long breath, stretching his arms, shirt riding up to expose the smooth skin of his stomach.

Matthew’s cock jumped at the sight and he squeezed it, his breath catching. Daniel cocked his head to the side at the sound, giving Matthew a slow smirk. He reached down and pushed his shirt up higher, lightly rubbing his stomach.

“So,” he smiled knowingly. “What’ve you been doing while I was sleeping?”

Matthew stroked himself as he watched Daniel’s fingers glide over his skin, dipping down to just under his waistband, deliberately teasing. “Just,” his voice caught, and Daniel’s smirk grew wider. “Just thinking,” he finished on a breath, still rubbing himself through his pants.

“Oh?” Daniel shifted, scooting his body down the couch a bit more, stretching his leg, pressing his foot into Matthew’s groin. He nudged Matthew’s hand away, pressing his foot full against Matthew’s erection, toes flexing, rubbing. “And just what were you thinking about, eh?” he asked with a smile as Matthew groaned at the delicious pressure against his cock.

Matthew turned slightly toward Daniel on the couch, his legs falling open wider. “You, and you know it,” he answered, as Daniel’s foot rubbed harder for a moment before Daniel was moving,

crawling toward Matthew. He felt for Matthew's leg, tugging it up onto the couch, leaving the other hanging off the side, foot on the floor. He slid his hand up the leg on the couch, to Matthew's waist, where he found the button on Matthew's pants and flicked it open, followed immediately by the zipper. He didn't even bother to pull down Matthew's pants, instead just reaching inside and taking Matthew out through the slit in his boxers.

"Oh god, Danny, yeah," Matthew groaned, cupping Daniel's head as the older man leaned down, mouth opening. And as his cock slid past Daniel's lips, that was the last coherent thought he had for a long time.

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They lay tangled together on the couch, sated and sleepy, Daniel on top of Matthew, both of their pants undone after Matthew had eagerly reciprocated Daniel's earlier blowjob.

Daniel's head was resting on Matthew's chest, Matthew absently running his fingers through Daniel's short hair. Daniel sighed and pressed closer, fingers flexing in Matthew's shirt.

Matthew bit his lip, knowing what he was about to say would probably end in disaster, but he was hoping to take advantage of Daniel's relaxed mood, maybe catch him off guard.

"Danny?"

"Hmmm?"
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"I'd like to make an appointment for you to see one of the counselors."

Daniel immediately tensed and Matthew tried to hide his disappointed sigh.

"Danny…I'm worried about you."

Matthew's lips compressed into a tight line of frustration when Daniel sat up and moved off of Matthew to sit on the other end of the couch, zipping up his pants.

"Don't be. I'm fine."

And there was that flat, unemotional tone of voice that Matthew hated.

"No. You're *not*," Matthew replied, gently but forcefully.

"Matthew."

Daniel's voice was a warning, but Matthew pressed on.

"I know you think your life is over, but it's *not*. You've got friends who care about you and a professional support group just waiting for you to take advantage of it." Matthew sat up, reached over and took Daniel's hand. "And I love you too much to sit here and watch you waste away inside this house," he finished softly.

Daniel pulled away from Matthew's hand, standing stiffly. "You really want to help me?"

"You know I do."

"Then back off and *drop it*," he snapped, turning sharply and leaving the room.

Matthew dropped back heavily against the cushions, eyes closing. "Damn it."

Chapter 7

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Two days later Matthew woke to the sensation of the blankets being pulled down off his body. Only wearing boxers, goosebumps rose on his bare skin as the cool air in the bedroom washed over him.

He grumbled under his breath, blinking open sleepy eyes. He found Daniel staring straight at him, propped up on his elbow, smiling, and Matthew stopped himself from what he was going to say. Daniel had done his best to avoid Matthew since their argument, barely speaking to him, so to have him smiling at him was a welcome sight. But something felt…strange.

Daniel turned his head, looking down Matthew's body, then back up again.
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"Those are the *fugliest* damn boxers I've ever seen," Daniel stated matter of factly.

"What?" Matthew took offense. "Are you nuts? Snoopy is –"

Realization slammed into Matthew and his mouth dropped open mid-sentence.

Daniel's smile grew wider as Matthew laid a hand on the side of his face. "Danny?" he breathed, voice shaky.

The older man nodded and Matthew let out a bark of laughter, pulling Daniel to him in a fierce embrace, rolling Daniel nearly on top of him. Daniel laughed, too, and soon both their bodies were shaking with it.

"God, Danny, oh god," Matthew finally got out. "How? What - ?"

"Things have been getting…lighter, for the past couple weeks," Daniel told him.

"Wait. Your headaches?" Matthew asked.

Daniel nodded. "Yeah."

"God, Danny, why didn't you say anything??"

"I was afraid to get your hopes up, and mine, in case it never got any better than seeing light gray instead of black. So I kept quiet. But then this morning, I opened my eyes…and there you were," Daniel finished with a grin.

"I just…I can't believe it." Matthew wrapped his arms tighter around Daniel, face against his neck, a single tear slipping free.

Daniel ran a hand through Matthew's shaggy hair and Matthew raised his head. His heart gave a lurch as he looked into Daniel's blue eyes, alive now and sparkling. Then his own eyes were sliding closed as Daniel captured his mouth for a long, deep kiss.

Breathless, they pulled back, and Matthew could feel Daniel's hardness pressing against his own.

"Let me look at you," Daniel breathed, and Matthew could only nod, his throat closing up at his words, words he thought he'd never hear.

Daniel slid off Matthew's body and for the next long while Matthew lay there, smiling, as Daniel explored every inch of his skin with his hands and mouth and eyes. His smile turned to soft moans when Daniel found one of his nipples and licked and sucked at the nub until Matthew started squirming underneath him.

Daniel gave the overstimulated nipple a last suck then, with a mischievous grin, moved downward, placing wet, open mouthed kisses down Matthew's chest to his stomach, tongue dipping in his navel, making Matthew shiver.

Then Daniel's hands were at the waistband of Matthew's boxers, fingers curling around the elastic.

"I've waited a long time to see all of you."

"Then just think of me as your Christmas present you get to open early," Matthew smiled.

"Well then, let me unwrap you," Daniel said, voice dropping, as he pulled Matthew's boxers down and off his legs.

Daniel sat back on his heels, simply staring at Matthew's body for long minutes, eyes sweeping up and down and back again, until he finally locked his gaze with Matthew.

"You're beautiful."

The two words were spoken with such tenderness that Matthew felt himself blush. "You're such a girl," he teased Daniel.

"Oh?" Daniel quirked an eyebrow at Matthew, then stood, and shimmied out of his boxers. He took his erection in his hand and started stroking slowly, giving Matthew a wicked grin. "Want me to show you exactly how much I'm *not* a girl?"

Matthew's mouth went dry at the sight of Daniel stroking himself. "Jesus, Danny," he exhaled, his legs spreading.

Daniel chuckled, smug. "I'll take that as a yes."

Then he was crawling slowly onto the bed, between Matthew's legs, looking like a sensual panther stalking its prey.

He ran his fingertips up Matthew's inner thighs, raising goosebumps, and Matthew shivered in anticipation. Daniel leaned down, his warm breath ghosting over Matthew's balls and cock. Matthew couldn't help the jerk of his hips upward, his cock seeking the wet warmth of Daniel's mouth. His cock bumped Daniel's chin, smearing precome, and the older man chuckled, dipping his head to mouth at Matthew's balls.

Matthew moaned at the sensation, head falling back onto the pillow. "Yeah," he sighed, legs falling open further.

Daniel's hand shifted, cupping Matthew's balls, rolling them in their sac, as Daniel's mouth moved higher, his other hand on Matthew's hip. His tongue licked a broad swipe straight up Matthew's erection and Matthew gasped as Daniel covered the head of his cock with his mouth.

Matthew raised his head again, one hand moving to cup the back of Daniel's head, fingers threading through the short strands. "Feels good, Danny…feels so good," he groaned as Daniel's tongue

swirled around the head of his cock, before he opened his mouth wider, taking in more of Matthew's erection.

Daniel's head started to bob up and down as he sucked, increasing the pressure on Matthew's cock. Matthew let go of Daniel's head, fingers twisting in the sheets as he brought his legs up, bending at the knees, spreading himself open as far as he could.

His breath came faster as Daniel sucked and he couldn't help but buck his hips. "Yeah, yeah," he panted. "More…"

Daniel pulled off his cock, looking up at Matthew, his lips shiny with moisture. "What do you want, Matt?" he asked, voice rough, his fingers leaving Matthew's balls to press against the skin behind them.

Matthew's hips bucked again. "Oh, fuck, Danny…"

"Tell me what you want…" A finger dipped even lower, pressed against the puckered muscle there.

"Inside!" Matthew gasped. "I want you inside me."

Daniel gave him a cocky smile. "See how easy that was?" He gave Matthew's cock another lick as Matthew reached out with his long arm, slapping his hand against the top of the bedside table, groping for the tube there.

"You're a bastard," Matthew laughed, tossing the lube at his lover.

Daniel chuckled and flipped the cap open, generously coating the fingers of his right hand, tossing the tube beside him on the bed. He bent over Matthew, his eyes again taking in Matthew's body.

"God, look at you," Daniel breathed, his eyes hungry, and Matthew knew he made quite a sight – breathing heavy, skin flushed, cock curving up from his belly, legs spread wide, eyes dark with arousal.

Then he was arching his back, mouth dropping open as Daniel slowly but steadily pushed a finger inside him.

"Yeah, open up for me, Matt…"

"God, feels good, Danny…"

Daniel worked his finger in and out faster as Matthew's body responded, then pushed a second in. Matthew groaned deeply at the increased pressure, then bit his lip as Daniel scissored his fingers, stretching him. A minute later he was bearing down on Daniel's fingers, trying to get them further inside.

"I'm ready," he panted. "Now, Danny, please…"

Daniel nodded and withdrew his fingers, dropping his head to quickly suck at the head of Matthew's cock before straightening up onto his knees. He again picked up the lube and coated his cock before leaning over Matthew, one hand still on his erection, the other braced next to Matthew's head.

Matthew tilted his hips, raising his legs to wrap around Daniel's lower back, feeling the blunt head of Daniel's cock press against his entrance. Then Daniel was pushing forward, and this…this was the moment Matthew loved the most, being penetrated, filled, stretched, with Daniel's cock. He let out a hoarse groan at the exquisite pressure, his eyes starting to slide shut.

"No!"

Matthew's eyes snapped open at Daniel's sharp word. "What? What's wrong?"

Daniel shook his head. "Nothing. Just…don't close your eyes. Please. I want – I want to watch you, see your eyes…" he trailed off.

Matthew smiled softly, nodded in understanding. "C'mon then, Danny. Make love to me."

Daniel laughed. "Now who's the girl?" he teased back.

Matthew's response was lost to a sharp intake of breath as Daniel pushed again, and the head of his cock fully breached Matthew's body.

"Oh god, Matt…"

"Don't stop…keep going," Matthew panted.

And Daniel did, pushing steadily until only an inch of his cock remained outside of Matthew's body. Both men were breathing heavily, blue eyes locked with brown. Daniel's hand left his cock and he looked down, to where their bodies were joined, and he traced a finger around the muscle stretched so tight around his cock.

Matthew jerked at the sensation, releasing a moan, and Daniel kept rubbing. "God, you feel so good around me."

"Christ, Danny, want you in me all the time," Matthew ground out, clamping down his internal muscles around Daniel's cock.

This time it was Daniel who jerked at the pressure, and his hand came up, bracing it on the other side of Matthew's head as his hips moved backwards. He slid his cock nearly all the way out of Matthew before pressing back in.

"God, yes…" Matthew reached up to wrap his hands around Daniel's biceps. "Faster…c'mon, harder, Danny…"

That seemed to be all Daniel was waiting for, as he stroked in harder next time, picking up speed until their bodies were rocking together on the bed. Matthew tilted his hips up more, pressing his heel into Daniel's lower back.

"Deeper…*god*…go deeper, Danny…"

Daniel bit his lip and *pushed* and the last inch of his cock slammed inside Matthew. He cried out and saw stars as Daniel hit that hidden spot. His cock was rock hard, the head dark red, but getting no friction. Daniel hit his prostate again and Matthew reached for his cock. He was so close, could feel his orgasm building, just a few strokes and he'd come. But Daniel pushed his hand away before he could touch his erection.

"Danny, *please*," he practically begged. "I'm almost – "

Daniel shook his head. "It's gonna work like this," he told Matthew, voice low and ragged. "I'm gonna come in your ass…then you're gonna come in mine."

"Jesus *fuck*, Daniel," Matthew gasped, grabbing onto the base of his cock and squeezing roughly, nearly coming right then and there at Daniel's words.

Daniel chuckled deep in his throat and winked at Matthew before pushing Matthew's hand away from his cock again. In playful retaliation, Matthew again squeezed his internal muscles, wiping the smirk off Daniel's face, replacing it with an open mouthed moan. One more time and Daniel's rhythm faltered, his hips stuttering against Matthew's groin.

"You're almost there, aren't you?" Matthew asked in a gruff whisper, tightening his legs around Daniel's waist.

Daniel nodded, biting his lower lip, brow furrowed. “You’re always so tight…ahh, feels so damn good…”

Matthew could feel Daniel’s arms start to tremble, knew the other man was right there on the edge. “God, Danny, do it, c’mon…come for me…”

Matthew moved his hand to Daniel’s chest, where he captured Daniel’s nipple between his fingers and lightly pulled on the tender nub, twisting slightly.

“God, yes!”

The added stimulation pushed Daniel over the edge, and with a harsh cry of Matthew’s name, his climax swept through him. He shook against Matthew as his cock pulsed deep inside him, over and over. Matthew gasped at the sensation of Daniel’s wet heat filling him.

Matthew reached up to pull Daniel down for a kiss, feeling the aftershocks running through his body, but the older man had other ideas, and he slipped from Matthew’s body as the last pulse of his orgasm subsided.

Matthew barely had time to moan the loss and Daniel was reaching for the discarded tube of lube, pressing it into Matthew’s hand. Daniel was breathing hard, his eyes glassy and soft from his orgasm.

"Get me ready," he told Matthew. "I want you in me."

"God, *yeah*," Matthew replied eagerly, wiggling until he was sitting with his back pressed against the headboard and Daniel was straddling his waist.

Daniel rose up on his knees, holding onto the headboard on either side of Matthew's head as Matthew slicked his fingers and his cock. Then Matthew was reaching around Daniel and sliding in a finger, past the puckered muscle. Daniel was loose and relaxed from his climax and Matthew's finger slid in without too much resistance.

Matthew wrapped his other hand around Daniel, resting it on his lower back, then leaned forward slightly, to kiss and lick sloppy-wet at Daniel's chest as he fingered him open.

Just a few strokes and Daniel was pushing down on Matthew's finger, so he added a second. Daniel made a noise in his throat and stilled at the increased pressure.

"Shh, easy," Matthew whispered against Daniel's chest, and he felt the older man relax and press against Matthew's fingers a moment later.

"Yeah, there ya go," Matthew smiled, sliding his fingers in and out of Daniel's body, parting them slightly, stretching him.

"Enough," Daniel panted, looking down at Matthew. "I want you in me."

Matthew kissed Daniel's chest one more time then slowly slid his fingers out of him. He placed his hands on Daniel's hips, as Daniel reached behind himself, down between his legs and wrapped his hand around Matthew's cock, guiding it to his entrance.

Daniel sank down slowly, and Matthew's breathing stuttered as he felt the head of his cock push inside, the ring of muscle clamping down around it. He heard Daniel hiss out a breath.

"Oh, fuck, Danny…" Matthew panted, willing himself to hold still and not pull Daniel down on him or thrust up into him. This was only the second time Daniel had asked, *wanted*, to be penetrated; it was a special, rare moment and he needed to let Daniel take this at his own pace.

Daniel worked himself down onto Matthew's cock in slow, shuddering motions and Matthew thought he'd die from the way Daniel's body gripped his cock so tightly, wrapped in velvet heat.

Matthew looked up to see Daniel's eyes closed, teeth biting his lower lip. Matthew used his thumbs to caress the skin on Daniel's hips.

"Keep going, Danny…yeah, like that…almost there…I'm almost – almost all the way inside you…*god*…"

Then he was there, seated on Matthew's lap, Matthew's balls brushing his ass, Matthew's cock fully sheathed inside Daniel's body.

Daniel was breathing hard and Matthew reached up and cupped his face. “Yeah,” he smiled. “Yeah.”

Daniel smiled back, then dropped his forehead against Matthew’s with a small moan. “You’re so fucking big inside me.” Then he was kissing Matthew, hot and wet and deep. Their mouths slanted together again and again then Daniel was moving, pulling back from Matthew’s lips, rising up on his knees, sliding up Matthew’s cock.

Matthew gripped Daniel’s hips again while Daniel’s fingers curled around the headboard. Daniel rose up until just the head of Matthew’s cock remained inside him, then sank down again in one fluid move.

Fuck…” Daniel threw his head back, pulling in a huge breath.

“Christ, Danny…don’t stop…”

Daniel raised his head and locked eyes with Matthew, and the love and affection that shone out of Daniel’s eyes made Matthew’s stomach flip and his heart clench. He loved this man, he loved this man…

Never taking his eyes off of Matthew, Daniel rose up again, faster this time, then back down, drawing moans from both of them. Then he was riding Matthew’s cock in smooth motions, pressing down harder each time. Matthew’s fingers dug into the skin on Daniel’s hips, slipping on the sweat

slicked skin. Daniel would be wearing bruises by tonight, evidence of their lovemaking that would stay for days.

Matthew's hips could no longer stay still, and as Daniel sank down, Matthew pushed up. Daniel's whole body jerked and he gasped.

"Again! Oh, fuck, Matt…"

Matthew repeated the motion, pulling down on Daniel's hips, bucking up harder, pressing deep inside Daniel. He looked down as Daniel gasped again, and saw that his cock was nearly fully hard again. He'd barely lost his erection after coming inside Matthew.

"God, Danny…you're gonna come again, aren't you?"

Daniel's left hand slipped down off the headboard to grip at Matthew's shoulder. "Yeah...god…" he bit his lip. "I'm right, I'm right there…" His hand started to move off of Matthew's shoulder and Matthew knew he was going to stroke himself.

"No, don't touch yourself," Matthew said, stopping Daniel's movement. "You're gonna come just from this." Matthew bucked his hips up and Daniel hissed out another breath. "Both of us, like this," Matthew panted, feeling his cock swell, on the brink of his orgasm. "Together, c'mon…c'mon…"

And then Daniel keened low in his throat, his up and down movement faltering. Matthew held onto Daniel's hips, helping to lift him, needing just a few more strokes…

"Keep looking at me."

Matthew hadn't realized his eyes were sliding closed until Daniel spoke and he opened them at his words, looking into bright, shining eyes.

"Keep looking at me, Matt," Daniel panted. "I wanna see you fall apart."

And Matthew did. He crushed Daniel to him as he came, a hoarse, guttural cry of completion falling from his lips, shaking as his cock released deep, deep inside Daniel, filling him with his wet warmth.

Then Daniel was coming, holding on tightly to Matthew as his second orgasm tore through him, cock pulsing between their bodies, coating their stomachs and chests with his semen.

Daniel's voice was raw, sexed out, his lips on Matthew's ear. "Love you, love you…"

They held each other through the aftershocks running through their bodies, calming their breathing, slumped together, Daniel practically boneless on top of Matthew, Matthew still inside the older man. The smell of sex was heavy in the air – sweat and come and human male. Matthew reached up a large hand to gently cup the back of Daniel's head, where it lay on Matthew's shoulder, fingers sliding through the short, silky hair. Daniel sighed contentedly, placed a kiss on Matthew's neck, then raised his head.

He took Matthew's face between his hands, thumbs caressing Matthew's cheekbones, smiling gently, then lowered his face until their lips met. Their kisses were slow and languid, their lips warm against each other, and it was a long time before they found the energy to move from their embrace.

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The sun was high in the sky and the two men were still in bed, cleaned up now, limbs tangled together under the blankets. Daniel's head was resting on Matthew's shoulder, and Matthew's thumb was smoothing the skin on the side of Daniel's face, next to his eye.

"So everything's really all right?" Matthew asked. "You're seeing fine now?"

Daniel nodded. "Yeah, pretty much."

Matthew frowned. "What do you mean, 'pretty much'?"

"Things are just a little blurry still, that's all."

Matthew grinned and thumped his finger against Daniel's forehead. "That's 'cause you're not wearing your contacts, dork."

Daniel made to move, but Matthew tightened his arms around him.
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"Don't even think about it. You're not putting anything in your eyes until you go see Dr. Lewis tomorrow."

"Okay, okay," he agreed. Then he twisted his head to glance over Matthew's shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"Looking for my glasses, then," Daniel answered. "Have you seen 'em?"

Matthew felt his face go red and he chuckled weakly. "Um, Danny? About your glasses…"

EPILOGUE

Matthew drove his truck through the streets of New York City, heading toward Daniel's place. Correction. *Their* place, Matthew reminded himself with a smile. He glanced over to the passenger seat, where his *friendboyfriendlover* currently sat, also with a smile on his face, looking out the window.

Dr. Lewis had given Daniel the thumbs-up after his exam, more than pleased with his patient's healing ability that had finally returned his sight after eight long weeks. The ophthalmologist had sent Daniel on his way with a promise from the younger man to not wear his contacts for a week, until he came back for a follow-up exam.

So here they were, on their way back home with Daniel wearing his new glasses, courtesy of Matthew calling Daniel's optometrist the previous morning to order a new pair to replace the ones that Matthew had broken.

The small smile hadn't left Daniel's face since they walked out of the hospital, and Matthew could see the older man's eyes constantly sweeping back and forth, taking in the scenery as they drove. It had snowed again the night before, and the town was blanketed in a new layer of white that reflected the bright sun, high overhead.

Matthew pulled into their driveway a short time later and hopped out of the truck, eager to be back inside and out of the cold. He was also eager to call Paul with the good news that Daniel's sight had returned. It was his and Daniel's wish that *Dark Roads* could be put back into production now, and they both had a good feeling it would. He started for the front door, but stopped at Daniel's quiet, "Wait," and turned around to find Daniel standing at the edge of the driveway. The older man indicated with his head across the street.

"Walk with me?" Daniel asked.

Matthew looked across the road to the large park, filled with tall trees, gentle hills and a pond, now frozen. His mouth quirked up in a smile and he nodded, walking toward Daniel, and the two men crossed the street.

The snow crunched quietly beneath their boots as they walked through the park in the bright afternoon, not another person in sight. Their breath appeared before them in white puffs before disappearing into the crisp, clean air.

Matthew turned his head slightly to watch Daniel as once again the older man's eyes constantly flicked back and forth, taking in the snow-covered landscape. Matthew swallowed as his throat threatened to close up with sudden emotion. He couldn't imagine what it must be like for Daniel, living in darkness for so long, then gifted once again with sight. It was no wonder he just wanted to walk and look at the world around him.

Matthew slipped his gloved hand into Daniel's, squeezed, and was rewarded with a blinding smile and an answering squeeze. Daniel's nose and cheeks were red with the cold, his blue eyes bright and alive.

Matthew tugged on their hands and steered them toward a snow covered picnic table, where he brushed off the short end of the table and hopped up on it, feeling the dampness soak into his jeans, and not caring one bit. He maneuvered Daniel so he was turned around, standing between Matthew's legs. Daniel leaned back against Matthew's chest, and Matthew wrapped his arms around Daniel's stomach, Daniel's gloved hands resting atop Matthew's.

Daniel's voice was barely above a whisper when he spoke, rough with emotion. "I never thought I'd see any of this again. Never thought I'd see *you* again."

Matthew felt tears prick the backs of his eyes as he tightened his arms around Daniel, turning his head to press a kiss against Daniel's temple.

"Love you," Matthew breathed.

Then there were no more words, the two men content to let the quiet stillness of the beautiful winter afternoon wash over them, as they kept each other warm, looking out over the untouched snowy hills.

THE END