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*With  
This  
Ring*

T.A. CHASE

*The end of the year is the start of a whole new beginning...*

*A Tabloid Star Story*

Josh Bauer and Ryan Kellar sweated through a turbulent start to their relationship. Now that they've embarked on a life together, filled with family friends—and each other—Ryan's suffering sweaty palms again. For an entirely different reason.

It's not the heat they generate every time they're alone together. It's not even the crush of people at Josh's jam-packed birthday party. It's the birthday present Ryan's carrying in his jeans pocket. The one that could make him the happiest man in the world, come New Year's Eve.

If Josh says "yes"...

Warning: Hot guy on guy sex. A happily married couple and a rocking New Year's Eve party guaranteed to keep you up all night.

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# With This Ring

*T.A. Chase*

# Dedication

To all my readers who fell in love with Josh and Ryan.

# Chapter One

Snow drifted across the bright blue sky, transforming the Vermont hills into a picture perfect winter wonderland postcard. Skiers dotted the slopes, racing down or riding up. Even with all the movement, there seemed a hushed expectancy to the air, like everyone was waiting for something special to happen.

Ryan Kellar snorted silently. The only one waiting was him as the hours crawled closer to midnight and one of the biggest moments in his life. New Year's Eve and his wedding.

"Ry, are you all right?"

He turned away from the windows in the dining room to find his parents eyeing him with mild concern. He smiled and nodded. "I'm fine, Mom."

"Not having second thoughts, are you?"

"If I didn't have second thoughts while planning the wedding, Dad, what makes you think I'd have them now?"

His dad shrugged. "Well, your marriage won't be legal in most of the country and the tabloids will go crazy once word gets out about this."

He and Josh had talked about the whole tabloid angle. After everything that had happened to them when they first met, avoiding any publicity should have been foremost in their minds. Yet neither Ryan nor Josh were willing to hide in a closet or act ashamed of loving each other.

"We're hoping no one will spill the beans about what's happening tonight. We only invited friends and family, plus Morgan is providing security. No one without an invitation gets in."

"Good thing we remembered to bring ours."

Ryan laughed as his mom's mouth dropped open. He recognized the voice. Garrett Johnson and CJ Lamont strolled into the room, hand-in-hand. Ryan tapped his mother's shoulder.

"It's not polite to stare." He nudged his dad. "Do you have a napkin for Mom to wipe the drool off her chin?"

She blushed and Garrett winked at her before kissing her cheek.

"Mrs. Kellar, I see where Ryan gets his good looks from."

The pleasure in his mother's eyes made Ryan swallow his snicker. CJ's fond expression told him that the man was used to Garrett's subtle flirting.

"All you actors can't stay away from the beautiful ones, can you?" Ryan's dad joked.

"No, sir. We can't." Garrett focused his gaze on CJ.

CJ blushed as well and Ryan's gut tensed. God, he hoped Josh would look at him forever like Garrett looked at CJ with such longing, love and desire in his eyes.

"Mom, Dad, this is Garrett Johnson and his partner, CJ Lamont." Ryan remembered his manners long enough to introduce his parents to his friends.

"Soon-to-be husband, actually." CJ held up his left hand, showing off a brushed yellow gold band.

"Awesome news!"

Ryan whooped when the pair nodded and Garrett revealed his matching band. He hugged them both tight and waved down a waiter.

"We need a bottle of champagne."

The waiter nodded before heading toward the bar.

"Celebrating already?"

Whirling, he spied Josh leaning in the doorway between the lobby and the dining room. He kept his gaze on his fiancé as Josh strolled through the room toward him. Josh slipped his arm around Ryan's waist and Ryan relaxed against him.

"Garrett. CJ. Glad you could make it," Josh greeted the men.

"Congratulations. We wouldn't have missed it for the world." CJ slapped Josh's back. "Maybe we'll pick up a few pointers for our wedding."

"Seriously?" Josh grinned. "That's great news. So you're going the wedding route as well, huh?"

Garrett laughed. "Yes, we are. Kasey and Gram are having a commitment ceremony, but we decided we wanted the whole shebang."

"Your brother and his partner are engaged too? It's an epidemic." Josh took the bottle from the waiter while Ryan passed out the glasses.

Josh extracted the cork with a soft pop and managed not to spill a drop of the bubbly liquid. Ryan admired the confident way his lover poured the champagne.

As the others laughed and toasted, Ryan thought back to the night he asked Josh to marry him.

## Chapter Two

### *Six Months Earlier*

The ice in Ryan's glass clashed together like castanets and people around him looked worried. Maybe they thought he was suffering from some kind of anxiety attack because of his shaking and the beads of sweat trickling down his face.

He set his drink down before he dropped it. Christ. His nerves were worse than when he had to speak at the Golden Globes. The way he acted, one would think he'd never done interviews or acted before.

Yeah, but none of those events were as important as what he was about to do. Nausea roiled his stomach. Whose idiot idea was this?

Oh right. It had been Bill's. He'd called his best friend a few weeks ago, in a panic over what to get Josh for his birthday and his ever-helpful friend suggested a ring, like Josh was a girl or something. Unfortunately, he couldn't get the idea out of his mind, especially after seeing a news segment on TV about states that allowed same sex marriage.

Ryan wiped his palms on his thighs, bumping the square lump in the pocket of his jeans. Josh's laughter rang out over the noise of the crowd at the club. It was now or never.

He pushed his way through the crowd toward the area where Josh held court with their friends. They'd come to the Lucky Seven to dance and hang out, celebrating Josh's birthday.

Josh Bauer, Ryan's boyfriend, stood, talking to Rachel, Josh's boss, as Ryan slipped up behind him and wrapped his arms around Josh's waist.

"Hey, Rachel, can I borrow Josh for a few minutes?" Ryan rested his chin on Josh's shoulder and flashed a shaky smile in Rachel's direction.

Her shrewd gaze studied him and he hoped his nervousness didn't show too badly. Ryan grimaced when Rachel winked at him. How could he get rave reviews for his acting if he couldn't even convince Rachel he was fine?

"You certainly may. Happy birthday, Josh." She kissed Josh's cheek and patted Ryan's hand before leaving.

"Ready to dance?" Josh turned in his arms and embraced him, large hands cupping Ryan's ass.

"Mmm..." He brought Josh's mouth down to his and kissed him.

He loved kissing Josh. Once his lover took over, Ryan held on, allowing Josh to plunder his mouth. He sucked on Josh's tongue and nibbled on his bottom lip. Josh lifted him up on his toes and he entwined his leg around Josh's thigh.

"Shit." Moaning, he dropped his head back to give Josh better access to his skin.

"I missed you," Josh murmured, scraping his teeth over Ryan's jugular. "I'm glad you got back in time for my birthday. It's the best present I ever got."

Birthday? Present? There was a reason he'd come over to get Josh, but his body overruled any other thought in his head.

"I want you. Please."

Begging Josh to fuck him was something Ryan had grown accustomed to doing.

"I love it when you beg."

Josh stepped back, grabbed his hand and dragged him across the club floor, ignoring the catcalls as their friends teased them.

They pushed through the door of Rachel's office, and he slammed back against it as Josh plastered his body tight to Ryan's.

"Rachel's going to get tired of us doing it in her office." He panted, arching his hips into Josh.

"She understands," Josh mumbled.

Ryan wasn't sure about that, but he pushed it out of his mind. Josh unbuttoned his shirt and shoved it out of the way, baring his chest to Josh's gaze. Ryan's head banged on the door as Josh pinched one of his nipples between his teeth while twisting the other nipple with his fingers.

"Damn."

"Get those pants off right now."

It didn't seem to matter that Ryan couldn't get his mind focused enough to move his hands. Josh took control, drawing a groan from Ryan. Soon naked flesh rubbed naked flesh. Sweat mingled with sweat and Ryan shivered as Josh's chest hair scratched over his sensitive skin.

His jeans fell to his ankles with a thud and Josh flipped him around. Ryan rested his cheek against the familiar wooden door. How many times in the last six months had he found himself in this position?

"What are you laughing at?" Josh whispered in his ear.

Stifling his chuckles, he shook his head. "Not important."

"I don't have any lube." Frustration ran in Josh's voice.

"Just do it, love." He canted his hips, offering his ass to Josh.

Ryan heard a slurp an instant before Josh pressed wet fingers inside his channel.

"Oh."

Relaxing, he pushed back, taking them in as far as he could. He loved that feeling, but in seconds, he wanted more.

“Josh, please. I’m ready.” He rocked back and forth, fucking himself on Josh’s fingers.

“Okay. Wait a second.”

“No,” he protested when Josh moved away.

Clothes rustled and a buckle jingled. They sighed as their bodies came together. The crown of Josh’s cock breached the stretched ring of Ryan’s ass.

Josh slipped one arm around Ryan’s chest and grasped Ryan’s cock with his other hand. Within seconds, they danced to a rhythm they loved. Give and take. Push and pull of sex. Each thrust in drove a soft cry from Ryan, and Josh’s grunts filled the air.

After months of making love, Ryan learned all the signs of Josh’s impending climax. The loss of grace as he reamed Ryan. How his fingers tightened around Ryan’s cock, demanding Ryan’s come as payment.

It was a price he willingly paid. He shouted as his pleasure burst and nerve endings fired. His come spilled over Josh’s hand, onto the door supporting them and the floor beneath them.

Josh slammed into him twice more before freezing. Ryan milked as much of the wet heat flooding his inner passage as he could from Josh. They slumped forward, their hearts racing in time with their breathing. Ryan didn’t know how many minutes they stood there before Josh straightened and eased out of him.

“Wow.”

“It’s been a while, honey.” Josh patted Ryan’s bare ass and pulled him away from the door. “Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

“Like I have any muscles to move,” he muttered as he snatched up his jeans enough to get out of the way of the door opening.

If they were going to continue fucking in Rachel’s office, they had to make sure to pack lube and towels in Josh’s backpack. Ryan’s hand brushed the square shape in his jeans pocket. Josh’s birthday present. He’d forgotten all about it the moment Josh kissed him.

“Here.” Josh came back and cleaned Ryan up with a wet towel. “We better straighten up and head back out before Tammy or Pete come looking for us.”

Ryan fastened his jeans and grabbed a hold of Josh’s wrist before his lover could leave again.

“Wait. I wanted to give you your present.”

Josh’s grin held satisfaction and a hint of lust. “I thought you already did, but give me a little while and I’ll be happy to get another one when we get home.”

“That’s a present you can have any day, any time.” He tugged Josh over to the couch and pushed him down on it.

Ryan’s hands trembled so badly, he had a hard time getting the box out of his pocket. When he finally had it in his hand, he dropped to his knees in front of Josh. Josh eyed him in confusion.

He cleared his throat and took a deep breath. “This is the hardest thing I’ve ever done. I had a pretty speech memorized, but nothing’s in my head anymore. I mean, you’re not a girl, so I don’t think you want to hear poetry or confessions of undying love.” He rubbed his forehead. “I’m supposed to be a suave leading man, yet I can’t tell you how I feel.”

Josh frowned. “What’s going on, Ryan? What’s so important that you’re all tied up in knots?”

“Josh Bauer, will you marry me? Tie the knot with me?” Ryan opened the box, holding it up for Josh to see.

The one dim lamp on Rachel’s desk reflected off a pair of etched platinum rings.

Josh’s mouth dropped open and shock claimed a spot in his eyes. “Ryan, are you serious?”

“I know it’s only been seven months since we met, but I know I love you and I want to spend the rest of my crazy life with you.” He held his breath.

He didn’t expect a lot of emotion from Josh. His big bad construction worker had grown up believing emotions were best tucked away, unacknowledged for the most part.

“Yes!”

Josh launched off the couch, knocking Ryan onto his back. The kiss they shared was filled with joy, promise and love. He set the ring box on the floor and framed Josh’s face with his hands. Their tears blended together and it was one of the happiest moments in Ryan’s life.

## Chapter Three

Sipping from his champagne glass, Josh glanced over at Ryan standing at the edge of the crowd with a silly grin on his face. He wandered over and bumped their hips together.

“Where’d you go?”

Ryan blinked like he was waking up from a dream and graced him with a quick peck on the cheek. “Just thinking about your birthday.”

The night Ryan proposed to him, Josh doubted he’d ever forget it. Once Josh accepted he was gay, he’d also come to grips with the fact that he’d never get married. He thought he was fine with that. He’d never even seen what was so special about marriage anyway.

It took falling in love with Ryan for him to understand why some of his straight friends spoke of it in such glowing terms. He’d said yes to Ryan without thinking about what came next.

“It was the perfect birthday,” he murmured.

CJ filled their glasses again and Garrett raised his to Josh and Ryan.

“A lot of words will be spoken tonight as you say your vows,” Garrett said in a serious tone. “The most important ones are the three words you say to each other every day as often as you can. I love you.”

“You must never forget to say them, no matter how angry you may get with each other or if one hurts the other,” CJ said, encircling Garrett’s waist with one arm while holding up his glass as well. “Love is a solid foundation upon which to build your new life together.”

“Love,” they all said together before draining their glasses.

“Now, CJ and I are going to our room to unpack. Then maybe we’ll go out and try the slopes.” Garrett set his glass down, hugged them both and headed out of the dining room.

“We’ll see you tonight.” CJ waved as he followed his lover out.

“Your father wants to take a nap and I want to check with the girls to see if they need any help.” Ryan’s mother kissed them. “We’ll catch up with you boys later.”

Ryan’s dad rolled his eyes a little at the mention of a nap, but he left without protesting.

Josh set their glasses on a table in the dining room and flagged down their waiter. After charging the champagne to their room, he took Ryan by the hand and led him out to the great room where a huge stone fireplace dominated the main lobby area with smaller, more private nooks spread around the edges.

He picked the one furthest away from people, more intimate and quiet. Josh drew Ryan down in the chair with him, arranging it so Ryan sat on his lap. It was a gay-friendly ski resort, but even if it wasn’t,

Josh wouldn't have cared. He had the right to show affection to the man he loved and no one had the right to say he couldn't.

Ryan rested his head on Josh's shoulder and they sat in silence for a few minutes, absorbing each other's warmth.

"Not having second thoughts, are you?"

Ryan chuckled. "My dad asked me the same question before you showed up."

"And your answer is?"

"The same as I told my dad. If I didn't have second thoughts in the six months leading up to this, I'm not going to change my mind today." Ryan nuzzled Josh's chin. "Though I will admit there were times when I wished we could elope to Vegas."

"Someday it might be possible for gay couples to do that." He pinched Ryan's ass. "What did you have to worry about with the planning? Erin and Rachel did it all for us."

"You're right. And I appreciate them involving my mom in the process."

"I think most women love weddings and everything that goes with them," Josh stated.

"All I can say is thank God for Rachel and Erin. We'd be getting married by a justice of the peace in Iowa if I was in charge of the nuptials."

Josh smiled. His lover would have asked Bill's advice and Ryan's best friend would have suggested something like that.

"Has Bill arrived yet?" Josh eased Ryan closer, breathing in the man's woodsy cologne. It was a scent that had come to represent home to Josh.

As crazy and annoying as Bill could be at times, Josh loved the way the man supported Ryan in everything. The love between Ryan and Bill was that of brothers and since the rest of Ryan's extended family declined to attend, Bill's presence was doubly important.

"He got in this morning, dumped his stuff and headed out to the slopes. Probably trying to pick up snow bunnies." Ryan placed his hand on Josh's chest where his heart was.

"I should have known. Let's hope he doesn't injure himself trying to impress the ladies."

Ryan didn't reply, but Josh had a feeling he was thinking about something. Leaning his head back on the top of the chair, he closed his eyes, allowing the peace and quiet ease him. The craziness of their party later on would drive any relaxation out of him.

"What do you think the papers will say when this gets out?"

Ryan's question was soft, but Josh heard the touch of worry in it. He re-adjusted their positions, getting Ryan to straddle his lap and face him. He cradled Ryan's face in his hands.

"Same as they always do when a celebrity gets married. Some will make a big deal of it. Some will make fun and others will ignore it. We've been in the tabloids before and somehow we fell in love despite

their intrusion.” He brushed his thumb over Ryan’s bottom lip. “Now that Sam’s your agent, he’ll help you figure out which ones to ignore and which ones to respond to.”

“And you’re not giving any interviews,” Ryan reminded him.

Not that he needed that pointed out to him. When Ryan and Josh first decided to try a serious relationship, Josh explained to the movie star that he would support Ryan’s career a hundred percent. He’d attend award shows and other events with him, but he wanted to stay out of the spotlight as much as possible.

Ryan accepted Josh’s request and tried to honor it as much as he could.

“We both know it’s better if I just keep my mouth shut.”

Their laughter mixed as Ryan leaned forward and brought their lips together. Josh opened to Ryan’s questing tongue. He shivered as Ryan sucked on his tongue. His cock started to stiffen and Ryan rocked against him once before backing away.

What did he do to deserve Ryan? There wasn’t anything special about him and Josh knew that. He worked as a bartender now that Ryan had convinced him to quit his other jobs. He still sent money every month to Erin and Pedro, but that didn’t make him a saint or anything.

Yet he held in his arms, and heart, one of the most gorgeous and talented men in the world. God must have been smiling down on him the night Ryan stepped foot in the Lucky Seven.

“Okay, no more of that, gentlemen.”

Rachel’s crisp British accent cut through their peaceful contemplation. Ryan scrambled off Josh’s lap and hugged her.

“No more of what?” Josh asked, climbing to his feet and kissing her cheek.

“All that staring into each other’s eyes along with all that sugary sweet nonsense. It’s enough to put people into a sugar coma.” The twinkle in her bright blue eyes balanced out the sarcasm in her voice. “You can do that when you say your vows.”

“Yes, ma’am,” they said in unison.

She hooked their arms with hers and they escorted her to the elevator.

“Sam has been looking for you, Ryan. He needs to go over the final version of the press release before he sends it out.”

Ryan looked skyward and exhaled heavily as they entered the elevator.

“Oh, I know. The trials and tribulations of being a movie star.” She patted him on the cheek. “Also, your mother said that your Great Aunt Edna is here. Seems none of you thought she’d show at an event like this, but the old lady surprised you all. She wants you to go and visit with her for a little while before the party.”

“And you said you wouldn’t have any other family here.” Josh was happy that some other relative came. Ryan’s other aunts and uncles refused to be a part of their wedding.

“Let’s see how happy I am after I talk to her. Which floor is her room on?” Ryan frowned, uneasiness shining in his eyes.

“I had the resort put her next to your parents.”

“Thanks.”

Ryan kissed Josh and stepped off the elevator. Turning, Josh looked at Rachel.

“Did you meet Great Aunt Edna?”

“Yes, I did, and your man has nothing to worry about. I was talking to the resort manager about the changes you and Ryan decided on when Edna checked in. She’s a feisty ninety years old and rather put out that no one thought she’d come to a gay wedding.” Rachel smiled. “All the other members of her family are pea-brained bigots who wouldn’t know true love if it bit them on the ass. Her words, not mine.”

Relief washed the tension in Josh’s shoulders away. “Now I can’t wait to meet her.”

“Oh, and she requested that I seat her at Garrett’s table because a meal is always better with good-looking men as dinner companions.”

He burst out laughing and Rachel joined him. They lurched into the hallway from the elevator. The honeymoon suite took up half of the top floor of the main building at the resort. He’d checked in yesterday morning and Ryan arrived late that night after wrapping a movie.

Swiping the key card, he waved Rachel in as he held open the door.

“Hey, Josh, wait.”

Erin raced down the hallway, shaking a piece of paper in his direction. “Was that Rachel with you?”

“Yeah.” He stepped back to let her in.

“Great. I need to talk to you both about seating.”

He groaned and Erin took a swipe at him as she went by. He motioned to the couch as he went to the mini bar where he pulled out three bottles of water. When he returned to the living area, Rachel and Erin were already seated, heads together as they talked about arrangements for the tables.

Josh bit back a smile. It was a good thing he and Ryan were relatively neat guys or there might be a bottle of lube on the coffee table from their early morning activities.

“What do you think?”

He glanced up to see the ladies staring at him with expectant expressions.

“About what?”

“Where were you? We asked if it would be okay to put Ryan’s great aunt at the table with Garrett and CJ.” Erin gave an exasperated sigh.

The red marring his cheeks informed Rachel about where his thoughts might have been.

“Josh was thinking about Ryan, I’m sure.” She winked at him.

He didn’t acknowledge that. “Sure. She’ll embarrass the hell out of CJ, but Garrett will love her.”

“Okay, then as far as we’re concerned, everything is taken care of. You and Ryan can enjoy yourselves without worrying about anything.”

He sat between his two favorite ladies and threw his arms around their shoulders, hugging them close.

“I’m not sure what Ryan and I would have done if you two hadn’t stepped in like you did. Thank you both.”

“You’re my big brother, and heck, you’re the closest thing to a brother Rachel has. We just wanted to make sure you had a perfect day. You’ve done so much for Pedro and me. I wanted to return the favor.” Erin hugged him hard.

Rachel squeezed his knee before standing. “I have to go. Maybe you should take a short nap. It’s going to be a late night for all of us.”

Erin bounced to her feet. “Good idea. I want to check on Pedro and Zorro. Chad took them out on the kiddie slopes and I want to make sure they’re okay. I’m thrilled the resort understood about Zorro.”

“So am I. There wasn’t any way I’d get married without you and Pedro, though I assume he’s going to bed before the actual ceremony.” Josh joined them and wandered with them toward the door.

“Yes. There’s a young lady who works here that Pedro seems to trust. She’ll look after him until Chad and I get in. But he won’t miss out on the fun part since you’re holding the reception first.” Erin hugged him again before she left.

“That was a brilliant idea, by the way,” Rachel commented. “Having the party first and then the ceremony, so you’re pronounced man and husband right at midnight. The perfect New Year’s Eve celebration.”

“Ryan’s a romantic at heart.” He blew her a kiss and shut the door.

Josh went back to the couch and flopped on it, staring up at the ceiling. Again, he thanked God for Rachel and Erin. If not for them, he and Ryan would still be floundering, trying to figure out how to get anything organized.

## Chapter Four

Josh picked up his phone from the center console of Ryan's Cadillac. He pressed number two on the speed dial while glancing at Rachel, who sat in the backseat.

"Josh, how far out are you?" Erin's voice burst over the line.

"About ten minutes. Just calling to give you warning." He smiled at the happiness he heard in his sister's words.

Once they found out that Erin's ex-husband was no longer a threat to them, his sister had blossomed. Of course, the attention of a certain bodyguard helped.

"Chad's here and Pedro's ready for the birthday cake already. Did you have a good time last night?"

He looked over at Ryan and smiled, resting his hand on Ryan's thigh.

"It was one of the best birthdays I've ever had."

Ryan flashed him a quick grin before looking back at the road.

"Rachel's with you, right?"

"Yes, I wouldn't leave my other favorite girl at home."

Especially with the news he had to share with them. He hoped they'd be happy for him.

"Great. I'll see you when you get here."

"Love you, sis."

"Back at you, bro."

Hanging up, he tossed the phone back in the console.

"Well, Erin's in a good mood," he commented, leaning back against the seat.

"Must be because her older brother's coming for a visit," Ryan teased.

"I'm not sure. It could be that or it could be the fact that Chad is visiting."

"Chad?" Rachel piped up from the backseat.

"He's one of the body guards Morgan and Vance sent up to keep an eye on her when we were worried about Geraldo."

"And you're okay with them dating?" Ryan pulled onto Erin's street.

"If Morgan and Vance trust him enough to ensure my sister's safety, that's good enough for me."

Chad had to be vetted before he went to work for the security company. Anything suspicious or bad in his background would have red-flagged him. Plus, Chad seemed to get along with Pedro and Josh trusted his nephew's intuition.

Ryan parked the car behind Chad's truck and Zorro stood, barking, on the front steps of the porch.

"Hush, Zorro," Josh called as he climbed out of the car.

They sat down to dinner soon after arriving. Pedro fidgeted, eyeing the frosted cake sitting on the counter. The adults didn't waste time with eating, not wanting to frustrate him anymore.

The plates were rinsed and stuck in the dishwasher. Erin placed the candles and lit them. Josh almost busted a gut laughing as the adults sang with Zorro howling as accompaniment. He managed to get the candles blown out without them melting all over. Erin cut the cake and tried to hand the first piece to Josh.

"Let Pedro have the first piece."

She wrinkled her nose and he hid his smile behind his hand as Pedro pounced on the dessert. It was a special treat for him to have that much sugar. Erin tried to keep him from eating too many bad things.

Once everyone devoured the cake, Josh asked for them to gather in the living room. Erin let Pedro go to his room and turn on the TV.

Josh tugged Ryan to his side and stood in front of the others. "We have some news to tell everyone."

Erin's eyes lit up and Josh figured his sister might have guessed what he wanted to tell them.

"Last night Ryan asked me to marry him and I said yes."

Screaming, Erin catapulted herself into Josh's arms. He caught her and whirled her around, smiling as she covered his face with kisses. He noticed Rachel hugging Ryan and Chad shaking Ryan's hand. When he set Erin aside, she raced to Ryan and enveloped him in a hug while Josh accepted congratulations from Chad and Rachel.

"Have you decided on a date yet," Erin asked after everyone settled down and were seated.

"No. Not sure where we want to go and do it at. There's only four states that allow them right now and I have to admit I never saw myself getting married in Iowa."

The rest agreed and he rested against Ryan.

"That leaves Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont." Rachel pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes, thinking. "Maybe you could do a destination wedding."

"Oh, how about Vermont on New Year's Eve? It would be so romantic and a great way to start your new life together." Erin almost clapped her hands in excitement.

"Not sure how to go about planning something like this." Ryan shook his head. "Heck, as guys, aren't we supposed to get the tux and make sure we get to the church on time?"

"Men." Rachel mock-punched Ryan in the arm. "Tell you what. Why don't Erin and I do the research and logistics? We'll get your input, plus you'll have to get us guest lists."

Josh met Ryan's gaze and his lover nodded.

"Sounds like a good idea to me."

"Yeah. I have to head out to some on-location shit for this movie. I'd hate to leave you to do all the work." Ryan frowned.

Josh knew he'd have to deal with Ryan being gone for months at a time, but he figured they could enjoy the time they were together.

"Great, then don't worry. We'll make sure everything is perfect, but you'll get final say over everything. We'll be like your wedding coordinators."

Rachel winked at Erin and Josh's sister's face lit up. What had they gotten themselves into?

But over the next six months, the ladies proved to be worth their weight in gold as wedding planners. They arranged everything while keeping him and Ryan in the loop. They also included Ryan's mother, which won over Ryan and his parents.

## Chapter Five

Ryan entered his room with a relieved sigh. Boy, he hadn't realized how much work Great Aunt Edna would be. She could talk, and did, for hours about her time in Vaudeville. All the marvelous men who courted her and the ones who taught her how to sing and dance. He felt bad about not having spent a lot of time with her while he was growing up, but he promised her that he and Josh would come and visit her in New York when he got a break between movies.

It never occurred to him that someone from her generation would be so open about homosexuality. Maybe it stemmed from her time in the entertainment business. Or it could simply have been that she understood love couldn't be defined by narrow parameters. Love came in all shapes and sizes, whether it was two men in love or a man and a woman, love was the same.

He strolled into the living area and grinned at the picture Josh made sprawled out on the couch. Wandering over to his soon-to-be husband, he knelt and pressed his lips to Josh's.

Ryan licked a line along the seam of Josh's mouth. With a soft exhale, Josh opened to him. He stroked and teased Josh's tongue, drawing a moan from him. Josh raised his hand and thrust his fingers into Ryan's hair, taking the kiss deeper. Within seconds, he covered Josh like a human blanket.

They kissed, bit and sucked while grinding their hips together. His erection rubbed over the hard length of Josh's cock. He grunted as Josh grabbed his ass and humped against him faster.

"Please."

Josh managed to flip them until Ryan lay underneath and there was more pressure for Ryan to rub against. His soft cries were swallowed by Josh. Tingling pressure built at the base of his spine and his balls drew tight to his body.

"Josh." He bit his lip as he came in his jeans.

With a shout, Josh shoved against him and jerked as he came a few seconds after Ryan. Ryan smoothed his hands down Josh's back as Josh collapsed on him, driving him into the cushions of the couch.

"I haven't come in my jeans since I was a teenager." Ryan grimaced at the sticky mess in his underwear.

"You're going to give me a swollen head if you keep talking about how horny I make you."

Standing, Josh popped the button on his own jeans before offering a hand to Ryan.

"Ugh!" Ryan tugged at his crotch. "Good thing we need to get dressed for the party."

They made their way to the bathroom, stripping as they went. Josh turned on the shower while Ryan pulled their tuxedos out of the closet.

“Guess it wasn’t a complete waste of money getting tailored tuxes for the Golden Globes. At least we didn’t have to rent any for tonight.”

He heard Josh’s snort from the bathroom and he smiled. They had argued for days about the tuxedos. Josh didn’t believe it was worth the cost to get them custom made, but Ryan had persevered, wearing his lover down by explaining about all the award ceremonies they would be attending from now on.

“The water’s ready,” Josh called, and Ryan joined him in the shower.

As much as he wanted to play some more, they didn’t have time. They washed quickly and dried off. While Josh shaved, Ryan dressed.

He was tying his bow tie when Josh came in from the bathroom. Pausing, Ryan admired Josh’s body. All that olive toned skin beautifully marked with tattoos. Wings, wolves and stars adorned Josh, highlighting well-defined muscles earned from hard work and gym time.

Josh didn’t move as Ryan walked toward him and reached out, holding his fingers inches away from the newest design on Josh’s chest. It had been a Christmas present for him. Gothic lettering spelled out his name over Josh’s heart.

“Are we ready for this?”

He didn’t protest as Josh embraced him. He entwined his arms around Josh’s body and soaked up his lover’s strength and warmth.

“I’ve never been more ready for anything in my life. I love you, Ryan Kellar, and whether we have a marriage license or not, I’d still consider you my husband.”

The kiss they exchanged this time was gentle and he could imagine them in their golden years, kissing and loving. He couldn’t wait to grow old with Josh.

A knock on their door broke them apart. He trailed his fingers over Josh’s shoulder as he headed out to answer it. “Get dressed. It’s probably my parents.”

Shutting the bedroom door behind him, he tugged on his cuffs to straighten them before going to get the door. He opened it to allow his parents in.

“Mom, you look so beautiful. Maybe next year if I go to the Oscars, I’ll take you as my date.” He hugged his mom carefully, not wanting to mess up her hair or dress.

“Josh would probably pay for my dress, just so he could get out of going.” She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes.

“What’s wrong?” He swiped a finger under her eye and caught a tear.

“Don’t worry about her, Ry. She’s been like this since we started to get ready. Must be a mother thing.”

His dad looked quite handsome, and very different from his usual causal jeans and polo shirt outfit.

"You're looking quite dashing, Dad." He waved them toward the couch. "Would you like a drink before we head down? Josh is getting dressed. He'll be done in a minute or so."

"Nothing at the moment. We wanted to give you something."

He noticed the box his mother carried. She gestured for him to join them on the couch. Sitting down, he wondered what his parents could have gotten him.

"You didn't have to get us anything."

In fact, he and Josh had requested that if anyone wanted to give them something, they preferred donations to several Autism organizations that helped kids like Pedro.

"This isn't new, Ry. It actually was your grandfather's."

His mother held out the box to him. As he took it, he glanced at his dad. "Which grandfather?"

"It was my father's," his dad said.

Both sets of Ryan's grandparents had died when he was quite young, so he never got to know them. Neither of his parents ever really spoke about them to him as he was growing up.

"Why now?" He opened the box and a thin gold band winked up at him.

"This is yours. I know you and Josh have matching bands, but your grandfather always wanted you to have this. You were only three, yet he said it was important that it got passed on. Your grandmother worked three jobs to buy it for him and he never took it off until the day before he died."

He eased the fragile circle out of the satin pillow it rested on. Holding it up to the light, he saw the words engraved on the inside: Forever Be My Love.

"Thank you." Tears welled in his eyes and he felt silly for getting emotional over a piece of jewelry from a man he never knew.

"You keep it and give it to your son or daughter." His mom folded his fingers around the ring.

"Mom."

"I know you're gay and everything, but that doesn't mean you can't adopt if you want to. There are a lot of needy children out there who could use good parents. Being a gay couple doesn't mean you're evil people who are going to corrupt children." She puffed up, indignant that anyone might consider her son a terrible person.

He patted her hand. "I know that, Mom, but we're not ready to talk about children yet. I mean we're getting married tonight and it isn't accepted in most states or by most people yet. Maybe we'll try changing the world one baby step at a time."

"What are we taking baby steps for?" Josh stepped from the bedroom and Ryan almost swallowed his tongue.

Someone should make it illegal for Josh to wear a tux. The man filled the fabric out so well, he looked like a cover model. If Ryan wasn't careful, some starlet was going to try and steal Josh away. Good thing Josh wasn't attracted to women.

“Josh, you look wonderful.” Ryan’s mother approached Josh with her hands held out.

Josh clasped them in his and kissed her cheeks. “I swear people are going to think you’re Ryan’s sister, not his mother.”

“You’re such a charmer.” She swatted his arm. “I can see why Ry fell in love with you.”

While Josh and his mom chatted, Ryan turned to his dad.

“Do you think Grandpa would have disowned me like the rest of the family if he were alive?”

His dad seemed to think for a moment before shaking his head. “I’m not sure. My dad was stubborn. It took him a year to accept your mother into the family simply because she was Protestant. Aunt Edna wore him down on that, so he probably would have come around after a while.”

He thought about all his extended family and how none of them chose to come to the resort for his wedding.

“I used to think we were a pretty close family. Now I’m not so sure.” His disappointment showed up in his voice.

His father laid a hand on his knee. “Ryan, I know it hurts to have them turn their backs on you, but you know what. Your mother and I still love you. Your Aunt Edna does as well. Plus, you’re marrying a guy who thinks you hung the moon. Build your own family with him.”

Glancing over at Josh, he caught his lover’s gaze and he saw all the love Josh had for him in his face.

“You’re right, Dad. Thank you for being such a great father.”

They embraced and Ryan appreciated how hard his father tried to understand what was going on. He knew his parents didn’t completely understand what his being gay meant, but from the moment they met Josh, they’d welcomed him with open arms.

## Chapter Six

Ryan tapped his fingers on the steering wheel, and his muscles tensed each mile closer they got to his parents' house. Josh smoothed a hand down his thigh to his knee.

"Stop worrying. It'll be fine."

"How can you say that? The first time my parents hear about you is actually a picture of us kissing in an alleyway."

Nervousness caused his pulse to race. His parents had seemed very accepting when he broke the news about being gay. It was one thing to hear it over the phone, but to be confronted by your son's lover was something totally different.

"You need to calm down, honey, or you're going to make yourself sick. They know we're coming. It's not like we're showing up on their doorstep without warning them first."

Josh slid a hand around the nape of Ryan's neck and started massaging the knots out of it. Ryan dropped his head forward slightly, letting Josh soothe his sore muscles.

"I guess I'm just worried about what my dad's going to say when he meets you," he admitted. "My mom's been helping Rachel and Erin with the wedding plans and I know she's excited about it. It's the only wedding she's going to get since I don't have a sister. I'm pretty sure she never thought I'd be marrying another guy though."

"It's probably not first on the list of announcements parents expect from their sons," Josh winked. "Just try not to worry about things until you need to. I think your parents will surprise you."

He hoped so, and they were going to find out soon. He pulled their vehicle into the driveway and parked behind his mom's car. They hadn't even shut the doors yet before his mother raced down the steps and flung herself at him.

"Ryan, I'm so glad you were able to come visit." She peppered his face with kisses while he tried to dodge her.

"Mom, you'd think I've been away at war the way you're carrying on. I've only been gone seven months."

"You've never been gone that long before. Not even when you were away at college."

He got her calmed down in time to see his father approach Josh. His mouth went dry as he waited to see what would happen.

"You must be Josh." His father walked up to Josh.

“Yes, sir. Thank you for inviting me to your home, Mr. Kellar.”

Josh offered his hand and Ryan relaxed when his dad shook it. If his dad had any doubts about Josh, he wouldn't have shaken Josh's hand. To Ryan's father, a man's handshake was a sign of respect.

“Introduce me to your fiancé, Ryan.” His mom tucked her arm in his. “I've heard a lot about him from his sister and his friend.”

“I hope it was all good, Mrs. Kellar.” Josh's smile was gentle.

Ryan could see that Josh had made an effort not to look so bad-ass the first meeting with Ryan's parents. His lover wore a button-down dress shirt over a blue T-shirt and faded jeans. Instead of his usual motorcycle boots, Josh wore running shoes. As much as Ryan loved the clothes Josh wore while working at the club, he also adored Josh when he dressed like a preppy. Of course, he lusted after Josh no matter what the man wore or didn't wear.

“I'll let you know later after we've spent some time together. I do have to say that I enjoy talking to your sister very much. She's a wonderful girl and such a good mother.”

“Yes, Erin is a great mother. Pedro isn't an easy kid, but she does her best to make his life easier.”

Ryan watched his mother steal his boyfriend. Smooth move, Mom, he thought as he went to the back of the car and popped the trunk.

“Let me help you, son.”

“Thanks, Dad.” He handed a suitcase to his dad before grabbing their carry on.

“Did you have a good flight?”

They headed into the house. Pausing in the hallway, he shot his father a look.

“You and Josh can use the guest room. The bed's bigger in there.”

Surprise shot through him. “Um...thanks, Dad. I wasn't sure if you'd want us to share a room.”

“You're adults, Ry. I can't tell you how to live your life. I trust you to respect my house, but if your fiancé was a girl, there wouldn't be any doubt where you'd sleep.”

He followed his dad upstairs to where they left the bags in the guest room. His dad stopped him before they went down.

“Ryan, your mother and I are trying our best to make Josh feel welcome here. We might not get everything right, but we're trying.”

He couldn't help himself. He hugged his father hard.

“I haven't said it enough, but I appreciate all you've done for me in my life. It was difficult for you to send me to college money-wise. Then when I told you I wanted to go to Hollywood and try my hand at acting, I know you thought I was crazy, but you helped pack me up and sent me out there.” Tears welled in his eyes. “I hope you aren't ashamed of me.”

“Ashamed? Why would we be ashamed of you?” A puzzled frown marred his father's forehead.

Ryan ducked his head. “For getting my picture in the tabloids. I’m sure it was embarrassing for Mom to go to the grocery store and stuff like that. You don’t know how low class I felt seeing myself on the covers of those rags.”

“You’re a handsome young man and an up-and-coming actor. People are interested in you. Unfortunately, it means your private life isn’t as private as you would wish it to be. You and Josh will have to be careful the bigger your career gets.” His dad grinned. “It’ll be hard, but I think the two of you can make it.”

“Ryan, get down here and help me with dinner.”

“Just like old times, huh?” His dad slapped him on the back as they went back downstairs.

Ensnared on a bar stool at the island counter, Josh munched on chips and dip while Ryan helped his mom prepare dinner. As he moved around the kitchen, he’d brush up against Josh and tiny chills would chase over his skin at the contact. Would the day ever come when he didn’t get turned on by the mere presence of Josh? He hoped not.

Dinner consisted of good food and lots of laughter. Josh kept them in stitches with stories from both the club and the construction site. Ryan told anecdotes about being on set for *Luther is King* and some of the other funny tales that happen while making a movie.

The dishes were washed and put away. They retired to the living room with coffee and homemade cookies. As they settled, Ryan leaned into Josh while they sat on the couch. Josh grinned at him, reassuring him silently that everything was okay.

“Now, I sent Erin the guest list for the family, Ryan. I have to admit, though, I’m not sure any one will come.” His mother didn’t look happy.

His heart dropped. “Really?”

“Well, it is just your father’s side. There aren’t any aunts or uncles on my side anymore.” She touched his father’s arm.

“Right, and I’m afraid my siblings aren’t all that open-minded. I’ve already received several phone calls from them about gay marriage being wrong and all that rot.” Anger flashed in his father’s eyes. “I told them in no uncertain terms that you were my son and I wasn’t going to turn my back on you. That marriage has nothing to do with the sex of the people getting married, but everything to do with love.”

Josh took Ryan’s cup and set it on the coffee table before embracing him. He laid his head on Josh’s shoulder and sighed. It hurt to know that people he thought cared for him couldn’t see beyond one aspect of his personality to help him celebrate a special moment in his life.

“It’s all right, I guess,” he mumbled.

“No, it’s not.” His mom stiffened. “We’ve supported them when their children did far worse things than fall in love. Yet they dare to preach to us and tell us that our son is going to hell. You’re not a murderer or a druggie. It isn’t right and I think we’re better off not having them there.”

He sank deeper into Josh's arms, letting his lover's strength soothe him inside. "You and Bill will be there. That's all the family I need."

"Don't forget. Garrett and CJ have RSVP'ed and they are more your friends than mine. Mostly because you talk to them far more than I do," Josh pointed out. "And you know, my family is yours. Erin considers you another brother. Pedro loves you as much as I do."

True. The best type of family was the one he created from friends because they chose to care for him.

"Heavens yes, Bill will be there. He wouldn't miss a chance to harass you at the reception. I assume he's your best man." Ryan's dad chuckled.

"Yes. He complained about having to rent a tux and the cost of flying to Vermont, but after I explained that it was all his fault and he had only himself to blame, he changed his tune."

"His fault? How so?" Josh looked at him with interested eyes.

"A couple of weeks before your birthday, I called him in a panic because I couldn't think of anything to get you. He suggested a ring and I joked about you not being a girl and not interested in jewelry. A few days later, I was watching TV and saw a news piece on same sex marriage. The next thing I know I had the rings and plans to ask you to marry me."

"Another thing I have to thank the man for. He really is a great friend." Josh nudged him slightly.

He blushed when he realized what the other thing Josh was talking about. If it wasn't for Bill, they would never have hooked up in the first place.

"He's done a lot of stuff to answer to over the years. Good and bad. I can't wait to hear his speech at the reception." He smiled fondly at the thought of his best friend.

"About your reception."

Obviously his mother had been waiting for an opening. The rest of the night was spent discussing the reception and ceremony. His father deserted them when colors for the table arrangements entered into the conversation. Josh retreated soon after, leaving Ryan and his mother to bond over wedding plans.

It was one of the nicest times he'd ever spent with his mother.

## Chapter Seven

The cocktail hour was in full swing when Josh and Ryan arrived at the ballroom they'd rented for the reception. Erin greeted them with hugs. His sister looked gorgeous in a black strapless dress and her hair up. Josh knew the glow of happiness making her skin shine came from two sources. His wedding and the good-looking man who never left her side.

When Chad came to shake his hand, he gave him a hard one-armed hug. "Thank you for taking care of my sister, Chad."

The look Chad sent in Erin's direction made Josh think there might be another wedding to plan sooner rather than later.

"She's a wonderful woman. You did a good job raising her."

"I have a feeling she did most of that on her own."

With their mother out of the picture at an early age, he and Erin had learned to rely on each other, but there were times when Josh felt he'd let his sister down. Especially concerning her marriage to Geraldo.

Chad shrugged. "Maybe, but you set an honorable example to follow and you took care of her when she needed you."

Pedro raced up and hugged Josh's leg hard. Crouching down, he studied his nephew. Excitement and happiness gleamed in Pedro's dark eyes. The crowd and noise didn't seem to be bothering him so far. Zorro bumped his elbow with his nose. Looking over at the dog, he burst out laughing. Someone, most likely his sister, put a garland of white roses around the pit bull's neck. Zorro ducked his head like he was embarrassed to be seen like that.

"Are you having a good time?" he asked Pedro while patting Zorro's broad head.

His nephew nodded his head vigorously, almost falling over with the effort.

"Good. Make sure you don't get into trouble. There will be cake later."

Pedro's eyes lit up at the mention of the dessert. Josh straightened as his nephew and dog disappeared back into the crowd. Chad laughed.

"You've created a monster now. He'll bug Erin every second, wanting to know if it's time for cake yet or not."

"As long as he's not getting upset or having a meltdown, I think we're doing okay. I was afraid the crowd would overwhelm him, but he seems to be handling it well."

“Having Zorro with him helps.” Chad spotted someone across the room. “Morgan and Vance just arrived. I’m going to head over to say hi.”

“Let them know I’ll catch up with them later.” Josh acknowledged Morgan’s salute.

Ryan waved at him from the side of a petite white-haired lady draped in diamonds and a hot pink feather boa. The infamous Great Aunt Edna must have arrived. Josh hurried over, anticipation surging in his stomach. Something told him that she would be a marvelous support for Ryan, not just at the wedding, but in the rest of his life as well.

“Aunt Edna, this is my partner, Josh Bauer. Josh, this is my great aunt.” Ryan introduced them.

He took the elegant hand offered him in his and bent, kissing the paper-thin skin gently. An expensive perfume wafted over his nose and he was sure Erin or Rachel could tell him the name of it, but whatever it was fit the older lady perfectly.

“It’s wonderful to finally meet you, Ms. Kellar. I must say the women in Ryan’s family are some of the most beautiful I have ever seen. That’s saying something considering I live in Hollywood.”

“Quite the flatterer.” Edna fluttered her eyelashes at him and smiled, her faded blue eyes cool like she was gauging his worthiness for Ryan.

“I call them like I see them, ma’am.” He tucked her hand in the crook of his elbow. “Would you like a drink?”

“I never turn down a drink from a good-looking man.” She flapped the end of her boa at Ryan. “You can go mingle with your guests, Nephew. Your beau will take care of me, I’m sure.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

They shared fond smiles over Edna’s head and Josh escorted her to the bar. The bartender’s eyebrows shot up when they arrived.

“What would you like, Ms. Kellar?”

“Call me Edna. I’d like a Jameson on the rocks, please. And, young man, I’d like more whiskey than rocks.” She winked at the bartender, who laughed and nodded.

Resting an elbow on the bar, Josh ordered a beer. They got their drinks and Edna held hers up.

“To the man who won my nephew’s heart. May you treat it as the precious gift it is.”

He clinked his bottle to her glass and said in as serious a tone as he could, “I will cherish it every minute of my life.”

“I knew you were a smart man, Josh.” She turned to survey the room.

Her movements were graceful and she carried herself like a dancer. She had a kind of timeless beauty and he imagined there must have been hundreds of men who fell in love with her when she was younger.

“May I ask a personal question?”

She looked at him from the corner of her eye and nodded. “Certainly, Josh. I have no secrets from family.”

“Why did you never marry? I’m sure you could have had your choice of men, but you never picked one.”

Sighing, she waved the bartender over to fill up her glass. “I did pick one.”

The sadness in her sigh warned Josh there wasn’t a happy ending to her story. He caressed her arm.

“You don’t have to tell me. I was being nosy and it’s definitely none of my business.”

“Let’s go for a stroll.” She picked up her glass and slid her arm through his when he offered it.

Josh picked up his beer and wandered with Edna around the edges of the room. Maybe it was the look on her face or the way she carried herself, but no one interrupted them. They found a private alcove and she sat, primly tucking her dress around her legs and arranging the boa around her shoulders.

“I had gone over to England before the second world war. I met Frank at one of the clubs the soldiers frequented. We started dating, as best as anyone could back then. The Nazis were taking over Europe and we all knew that Britain would be entering the war soon. He wanted me to marry him before he got shipped over to the continent.”

“Why didn’t you?” He sat next to her.

“Arrogance in a way. I was young and believed, even with the war looming, we had all the time in the world. I didn’t want to be tied down, though I loved him with my whole heart. I told him we would talk about marriage again when he returned.” Wisdom filled her soft laugh. “I should have known it wouldn’t work out that way.”

“What happened?” Josh had already figured out that Frank hadn’t made it back.

“He died at the Battle of the Bulge and I lost my chance at love.”

He tugged the handkerchief Ryan had tucked in his pocket out and handed it to Edna. She dabbed the tears from her cheeks.

“I’m sure there have been many more offers since then, Edna. Why didn’t you accept any of them?”

She twisted the cotton square with her hands. “Maybe part of me didn’t believe I deserved to be happy when Frank died, protecting his country. He loved me so much and I know I hurt him when I didn’t say yes. The other thing is I never felt the way about any of those other men like I did Frank. I’ve had lovers by the dozen since then, but I couldn’t give any of them my heart.”

Josh let the silence reign for a few minutes while he thought about Edna’s past and losing her chance at love. He angled his body to look at her.

“That’s why you came tonight.”

Edna waved to someone in the crowd and Josh turned to see who it was. Ryan stood next to his parents, but his gaze was on them. Josh didn’t stop to think before he blew a kiss in his lover’s direction. Ryan’s face lit up with such love that Josh caught his breath at the beauty of it.

“Yes, that’s why I came tonight. Being gay isn’t looked down on quite as harshly as it was in my heyday, but you still have your battles to fight. Supporting Ryan at his wedding is my way of making up for

the fact that I didn't take a chance on love when I should have." Edna met his gaze with her own, determination firming her lips. "You are grasping love and holding tight to it. No one has the right to tell you you're wrong."

Leaning down, he brushed a kiss over Edna's cheek. "You are a strong woman, Edna. I know Ryan is honored that you came. Hopefully, you can grow closer now. With all your Vaudeville experience, I know you can help him with his career."

She patted his cheek. "I'll do what I can."

Erin caught his eye and mimed eating. He stood, held out a hand to help Edna to her feet.

"It looks like dinner is ready to be served. May I escort you to your table?"

"Did that blonde lady put me at the same table as Garrett Johnson?"

"Yes, she did." He swallowed his chuckle.

"Marvelous. When Cynthia mentioned he would be here, I knew I wanted to sit with him. He's a nice piece of eye candy." Edna practically wrung her hands together in glee.

Josh couldn't keep his laughter from bursting out that time. The oddness of this dignified lady saying something like "eye candy" struck him as hilarious. "Oh, you and Garrett are going to have such fun teasing CJ."

Everyone made their way to the dining room where the tables were set and the wait staff stood ready to serve the meal. Josh nodded toward Edna when he saw Ryan looking for him. Ryan smiled and took a seat next to Bill at the head table which included Bill's date, Erin, Chad and Pedro. Ryan's parents sat with Rachel and Josh's friends from the Lucky Seven.

Both Garrett and CJ stood when Josh and Edna approached them.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce you to Ms. Edna Kellar. She's Ryan's great aunt and specifically requested to be seated at your table."

"We're honored, Ms. Kellar, and again, I'm forced to say that the Kellar women are some of the most attractive ladies I've ever met." Garrett bowed over Edna's hand, earning an actual giggle from the lady.

"This time I have to agree with my partner." CJ claimed Edna's hand after Garrett let it go.

"Oh my. Two gorgeous hunks and they're all mine." Edna waved Josh away. "You go and enjoy your dinner with Ryan, Josh. I'll be fine."

Josh did just that. He knew Garrett and CJ would take good care of Edna, so he could focus his attention on Ryan and their upcoming vows.

## Chapter Eight

Ryan leaned over when Josh took the chair next to him. "Did you have a good talk with Aunt Edna?"

"She's an interesting lady. We're going to have to keep in touch with her after the wedding. I think she'd be able to help you." Josh grinned.

A strange clinking sound filled the air and Ryan turned to find Bill hitting his wine glass with a fork. Narrowing his eyes, he glared at his friend.

"Come on. You've been to a wedding reception before. When the guests hit their glasses, the bride and groom have to kiss. Okay, technically you're not married yet and we have two grooms, but still the idea's the same." Bill's smile was pure evil.

"You're going to be doing this all night, aren't you?"

"You better believe it, buddy." Bill waved a hand at him and Josh. "Come on now. Pucker up."

Josh was laughing as they leaned toward each other. They took their time kissing, not caring that it held up the meal or that their friends were whistling at them. It was their night.

"All right. All right. That's enough for now. We would all like to eat before the dancing starts," Bill yelled.

Laughter erupted throughout the room and Ryan flopped back in his chair, laughing as loudly as the others. God, he never imagined that he would have this much fun at his wedding. Of course, he never thought he'd get married.

His best friend stood and gestured to the waiters. "Make sure everyone has some champagne. It's time for the toasts."

Light chatter filled the room while the waiters uncorked the bottles and distributed the champagne. Ryan looked at his friend.

"Are you going to embarrass me or Josh?"

Bill turned away from the busty brunette he'd brought as a date. When Ryan had asked who she was earlier, Bill explained that he met her out on the slopes and since she wasn't busy she agreed to come with him. Only Bill would bring a stranger to his best friend's wedding.

"Isn't that what the best man is supposed to?" Butter wouldn't melt in Bill's mouth.

"Just remember that my parents are here," he whispered urgently over the table.

"Don't worry. It'll be fine."

He rolled his eyes and Josh reached under the table to squeeze his knee.

“Relax, Ryan. Your parents know what Bill’s like.” Josh’s warm breath washed over his ear.

“I just don’t want him upsetting them or you,” he admitted.

“I’m a big boy. I can handle anything your friend dishes out.”

Their champagne glasses were filled and Bill stood, raising his in the air.

“Like everything else in his life, Ryan had to have a different kind of wedding. So here we are, having the reception first before he and Josh exchange vows.”

Everyone chuckled.

“None of us ever imagined that Josh and Ryan would be vanguards in a way by actually getting married instead of just having a commitment ceremony, but more power to them as far as I’m concerned.”

Their friends clapped.

“I’ve known Ryan for a long time and I consider him my best friend. Too many times I saw him walk away from relationships because of the inherent problems involved with being gay in our society. Yet from the first time I saw Ryan and Josh together, I knew that this was one relationship that Ryan had to fight for.”

Bill nodded at Josh.

“Josh, you will be the rock my friend can cling to when he needs support and strength. You will anchor Ryan while he spreads his wings and learns to fly.” After clearing his throat, Bill took a little sip of champagne. “Ryan, what can I say? You’ve been my best friend for years and no one deserves happiness more than you. I love you, man. Congratulations.”

Everyone drank and Josh wiped a tear off Ryan’s cheek with his napkin.

“Who would have thought Bill could be such an eloquent speaker?” Josh teased, flicking some drops of water from his glass at Bill.

“I was inspired, jackass.” Bill flipped Josh off.

“Classy, dude.” Ryan rolled his eyes.

“Uh-hum.” Erin cleared her throat.

They all turned to where she stood on the other side of Josh, her hand lying on his shoulder.

“I was honored when Josh asked me to stand up with him. It surprised me a little since Antonio has been Josh’s best friend since we were little.” She pointed to Antonio sitting a table away with his wife.

Antonio acknowledged everyone’s stares, but Ryan noticed the man looked a little green around the edges. It might have been caused by the kiss Ryan and Josh shared. Antonio never turned his back on Josh when he came out, yet he wasn’t comfortable with public displays of affections between Josh and Ryan. It had been Marcelia, Antonio’s wife, who told her husband that they were coming to Josh’s wedding. Ryan owed the lady a personal thank you because he knew it meant a lot to Josh to have the man there.

“When I asked him why he was asking me, he told me it was because for so many years, our family had just been the two of us. I was the only one he could trust with his deepest darkest secrets.”

Tears pooled in Erin's eyes and Chad handed her a handkerchief to dry them. She took it with a warm look in the man's direction.

"Then Pedro came along. I floundered, trying to learn how to deal with my son and how to make him comfortable in a world that doesn't always understand him. Josh struggled to keep the two of us safe from the poor decision in a husband I had made. Through it all, we leaned on each other, taking strength with the knowledge that our little family of three was stronger for the trials we went through."

Josh reached up and covered Erin's hand while grasping Ryan's hand with his free one. Ryan almost gasped at the strength in Josh's grip on his hand, but looking at the emotion in his lover's face, Ryan didn't say a word. Erin's speech hit Josh in the heart and Ryan understood the man was trying not to cry.

"But we persevered and settled into a routine. It worked for us, though we were both lonely for companionship of a different kind. Josh had his chances, but he wouldn't stop being my big brother long enough to allow those chances to grow."

Ryan felt her gaze rest on him and he met her eyes with an encouraging smile.

"One night, Josh met someone and their first kiss put into motion events that led us to this night. After all that trouble, I wouldn't have been surprised if Josh and Ryan had called their budding relationship quits, but both men are stronger than any of us give them credit for being. They held tight to each other, believing that love was more important than career or reputation."

Erin moved to stand between them, her hands on both their shoulders.

"Ryan is perfect for my big brother in so many ways. He makes Josh laugh and smile, something he hasn't done very often. He gets Josh to relax, which we all know is a major feat. He fits into our family without any sharp edges or doubts, opening his heart to Pedro and me as quickly as he did to Josh."

A drop of liquid rolled down Ryan's cheek and he swiped at it with his hand.

"Congratulations, Josh and Ryan. May your marriage make all your dreams come true and prove that love will last no matter who is in love."

Their guests took a drink of their champagne while Josh jumped to his feet, dragging Ryan with him. They wrapped Erin in a tight hug as she cried on their shoulders. After a few moments, they gained control again and stepped away from each other. Erin returned to her seat while Josh and Ryan remained standing.

Holding hands, they turned to face the rest of their guests. Ryan's mother sobbed quietly into a handkerchief while Ryan's dad encircled her shoulders with his arms. There were tears in numerous eyes and smiles on everyone's face.

"We want to thank you all for coming and making our wedding so very special. It means a lot that you gave up holiday time to come here. Of course, Vermont is a rather beautiful place to be on New Year's Eve." Josh waved his free hand toward the windows looking out of the snow-covered hills.

"In many ways, you are all our family, whether by blood or by choice. I guarantee that when both Josh and I admitted to ourselves we were gay, neither of us ever imagined getting married, but here we are,

and though we haven't said the words or made it official yet, I think, in our hearts, we've felt married for months now." He raised his glass, which had been refilled by the efficient waiting staff. "Thank you and enjoy yourselves."

The glasses were emptied again and Josh signaled the manager that the food could be served. A low hum started as people chatted at the tables as the dinner plates were delivered. Josh talked to Erin, Chad and Pedro while Ryan chatted with Bill and his date.

## Chapter Nine

After everyone ate their fill, Josh stood, knocking on his glass to get everyone's attention. Of course, that caused everyone to start hitting their own glasses and he ended up having to kiss Ryan. It wasn't a hardship by any means. He even slid his hand to the small of Ryan's back and dipped the man back to give a dramatic flair to the kiss.

Hooting and hollering, their guests encouraged it. By the time he let Ryan stand up, both of them were panting and Josh wished he could adjust himself. There seemed to be a decided lack of room in his pants all of a sudden.

"Now that you're done with that rather impressive display of making out, what did you want to say, Josh?" Bill smirked as Josh reached across the table to smack him upside the head.

"What I wanted to say, before I was so pleasantly interrupted, was it's time to cut the cake and after that, there will be dancing until twenty minutes before midnight. That's when the ceremony will start. Now, hopefully, everything will run as smoothly as it did last night at the rehearsal."

Pedro and Zorro led the way to where the wedding cake stood, in regal splendor. They'd chosen to go with a non-traditional cake and when their guests realized what it was, they all erupted into laughter. The two miniature grooms stood on top of a camera with a replica of *The Hollywood Enterprise* folded up next to it. A friend of Erin's at work made the cake for them.

"Oh my God, that's perfect." Rachel spoke up from where she stood between Morgan and Vance. "You two are evil."

"Hey, the tabloid brought us together in a way." Ryan picked up a cake knife before gesturing to Sam, his agent. "That's why the *Enterprise* will get exclusive pictures from the wedding and an interview from me about getting married."

Ryan had discussed the interview possibility with Josh and as long as Ryan and Sam were comfortable doing it, Josh didn't mind, though it had been understood that Josh wouldn't be participating in said interview.

He cut a small piece of cake and turned to Josh. His lover smiled and opened his mouth. With a wink, he shoved the cake into Josh's face. Josh grabbed another piece that Erin had cut and slipped a hand behind Ryan's head, holding him still to pay him back. After struggling a few seconds, Ryan froze.

"Stop it, you two. You're going to ruin your tuxes before you even get married." Erin pulled on Josh's arm.

Breaking away, Ryan laughed as Josh wiped a towel through the layer of frosting coating his face. He took the napkin Rachel handed him and cleaned the mess off himself. One of the waiters came by and took the cake away to cut up and serve.

“We still have two hours before the ceremony begins, maybe we should do some dancing.” He nodded toward the band, who had set up while they were eating dinner.

Whirling around, he searched out Josh and grabbed his hand, pulling him to the dance floor. Ryan slipped his arms around Josh’s shoulders, lying his head on Josh’s chest as the slow song started. They strolled around the empty floor. Josh hummed in his ear, hands cupping his ass and pulling him closer.

Ryan eased back a few inches to look into Josh’s eyes. “Why does this feel so much different than every other dance we shared?”

“Because even though we haven’t said the actual words yet, we’re married and this is our first dance as a married couple.” Josh nuzzled his cheek.

Not caring who was watching, he brought Josh’s face to his and kissed him. Their mouths moved leisurely together, tasting and testing. Relearning each touch that made the other shiver or moan. Each taking in the breath of the other, sharing the very thing that helped them live. Ryan allowed Josh to take the kiss deeper. Giving up control was easy for him and Josh liked to be in charge.

He slipped one hand up under Josh’s jacket, stroking it up and down Josh’s back, caressing each bump on his lover’s spine. “I love it when you hold me like this.”

“I’ll hold you like this forever, Ryan.”

The music died away and they came to a halt. Someone started clapping and they looked around. All of their guests were gathered around the dance floor, watching them dance. All the ladies had tears in their eyes. Some of the men looked uncomfortable, but most were smiling.

“Everyone grab a partner and join the happy couple on the floor,” the lead singer said.

Garrett and CJ were the first pair to walk out. Soon the floor was crowded with people dancing and laughing. Ryan patted Josh on the ass before moving off to mingle with everyone.

Morgan and Vance were dancing next to Rachel and Pete. He kissed them all before moving on. He wanted to say hi to everyone who took time out of their holidays to support them.

He was leaning on the bar when Morgan and Vance joined him.

“What are you gentlemen drinking?” He waved the bartender over.

“I’ll have a scotch and water,” Morgan ordered.

“I’ll have a beer.” Vance laughed as Ryan grimaced.

Morgan shook his head. “The only taste Vance has is in men.”

“I say the same thing about Josh. But hey, as long as he stays with me, then he can drink beer all he wants.” Ryan sipped his whiskey while he watched Josh foxtrot Aunt Edna around the floor. “I didn’t know Josh could foxtrot.”

“What did he tell us?” Morgan glanced over at Vance.

“He learned to dance for Erin, so he could teach her. That way when she went to dances in high school, she wouldn’t be embarrassed because she didn’t know how to dance.” Vance nodded toward Erin and Chad as they danced past. “Until you, everything he did was for her and Pedro. It’s nice to see him doing things for himself.”

“I never got to thank you for helping out with security for tonight.”

Ryan gestured toward the discreet men in black suits wandering around the edges of the room, keeping an eye out to make sure no one got in who wasn’t invited.

“Least we could do. You’re a big star now, Ryan. Any thing you do makes the news and for some strange reason, people think your personal life is fair game.” Morgan ran his finger through the circle of water left by his glass.

Ryan grunted his agreement. Aunt Edna waltzed over to him and grabbed his hand, dragging him out on the floor as she winked at the other men. Grinning, he twirled her around. She was pretty spry for being ninety. Soon, she’d moved on to another partner while he caught his breath.

Josh came up behind him, encircled his waist, and tugged him close. Lying his hands over Josh’s on his stomach, Ryan let Josh support his weight while they rested and watched their friends party.

The preacher approached them and Ryan checked the clock on the wall. It was twenty-five minutes to midnight.

“Are you ready?”

Ryan turned in Josh’s arms to face him. “You ready to get married, Josh?”

“I was ready the day you asked me.”

## Chapter Ten

Josh got the bandleader's attention and the man stopped the music. Everyone turned to look at him and Ryan.

"We need to get this wedding started. Can everyone gather around?" He held out a hand to Erin.

Bill strolled up with his date on his arm. "Are we going to do this thing?"

"Yes, we are."

Ryan and Josh stood arm-in-arm before the preacher with Erin on Josh's side and Bill on Ryan's. Rev. Harold Rutherford greeted everyone with a bright grin.

"I have to admit that weddings are my second favorite ceremony to perform. My first is, of course, baptisms. There is such joy and hope at weddings where a couple is willing to join their lives together." Rev. Harold held open his arms to include everyone in the room. "I know that you who will be witnesses to this wedding will help them continue on the path of love and happiness by supporting them and reminding them why they love each other."

Ryan trembled and Josh slipped his arm around Ryan's waist, supporting him. He didn't know if it was nerves or just excitement that affected the man, but he had no doubt that Ryan would go through with it.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to witness the union of these two men." The reverend stopped and laughed. "It's odd to be saying that, but so refreshing at the same time."

Josh silently agreed with the man. How strange it felt to be standing, surrounded by friends and family, about to exchange vows with another man. It was something Josh never thought to see in his own lifetime, aside from never thinking he'd experience it for himself.

Ryan's laugh had just a touch of hysteria to it. Josh couldn't believe that the man who could be so calm and collected in front of a camera had sweaty palms about one little ceremony.

"Joshua Kenneth Bauer, do you take this man, Ryan Jonathan Kellar, for your lawful wedded husband, to live in the estate of holy matrimony? Will you love, honor, comfort and cherish him from this day forward, forsaking all others, keeping only unto him for as long as you both shall live?"

"I do."

Rev. Harold turned to Ryan and asked him the same question.

"I do."

"Turn and face each other, gentlemen. Josh, repeat after me."

Josh gripped Ryan's hands tight in his and smiled softly at his lover.

"I, Joshua Kenneth Bauer, take thee, Ryan Jonathan Kellar, to be my lawful wedded husband, my constant friend, my faithful partner, and my love for this day forward. In the presence of God, our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to be your faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, and in joy as well as sorrow. I promise to love you unconditionally, to support you in your goals, to honor and respect you, to laugh with you and cry with you, and to cherish you for as long as we both shall live."

Josh recited them in a strong voice, wanting everyone to hear.

"Wonderful. Now, it's your turn, Ryan."

Ryan's voice shook and cracked as he repeated the vows. Josh bit his lip, not wanting to cry. He'd shed enough tears that day. It was supposed to be a happy occasion.

"To cherish you..." Ryan paused, regrouped and finished, "...for as long as we both shall live."

"Do you have the rings?"

Bill handed Ryan Josh's ring and Erin slipped Ryan's off her finger to lie in Josh's palm. In turn, they set them on the Bible Rev. Harold held out to them. He blessed them. "May these rings be blessed so that they who give them and wear them may abide in peace and continue in peace until life's end."

"Josh, take Ryan's ring and place it on his finger while repeating after me. With this ring, I thee wed. Wear it as a symbol of our love and commitment."

Josh noted his trembling fingers as he did what the reverend ordered him. He slid the ring halfway down and focused on what the reverend was saying. He repeated them in a shaking voice. After finishing, he pushed the ring all the way on and lifted Ryan's hand to brush a kiss over the ring, sealing his vow.

"Wonderful. Now, Ryan, place Josh's ring on his finger and repeat after me."

When Ryan finished, he kissed Josh's ring and flipping over Josh's hand, he kissed his palm.

Rev. Harold glanced up, including the whole group again with a benevolent expression. "In so much as Joshua and Ryan have consented to life forever together in wedlock, and have witnessed the same before this company, have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and having declared the same by giving and receiving of rings, I pronounce them husband and husband. You may share a kiss."

They crushed their mouths together, hard enough to split Josh's bottom lip. Relief ripped through Josh. They had made it through a major problem at the beginning of their relationship, proving that as long as they communicated and didn't jump to conclusions, they could weather any kind of storm. The bigger and brighter Ryan's star burned, the more possibilities arose of trouble, but Josh planned on always listening to Ryan.

"All right. You're starting to turn blue, guys."

Bill's comment broke the spell and they eased apart, keeping a hold of each other's hands before turning to face their guests.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to present Mr. Josh Bauer-Kellar and Mr. Ryan Kellar.”

Everyone gasped and Ryan whirled to stare at him. He nodded, knowing what it meant to Ryan. They had discussed whether or not they would change their names. Nothing had been decided, so Josh thought he’d surprise Ryan with the hyphenated name. His career didn’t rely on name recognition like Ryan’s did. It had been no big deal.

“Three... Two... One.”

Screams and yells came from all areas of the resort as everyone counted down to midnight. Horns sounded and Josh grabbed Ryan in his arms, whirling him around as they kissed again, celebrating their marriage and the start of a new year.

“Ryan, I’m sorry to bother you, but I need you two and your witnesses to sign the license.” Sam tapped Ryan on the shoulder.

Rounding up Erin and Bill, they went to a corner of the room where Sam produced the license and everyone signed it. When the last signature was signed, the others disappeared, leaving Josh and Ryan standing alone.

“Why change your name?” Ryan pushed into his arms, putting his arms around Josh’s waist under his jacket.

He shrugged and cupped Ryan’s firm ass, drawing his husband as close as he could with the layers of clothes between them. “I just thought it was fitting. Like a symbolic blending of our lives. Plus you’re just getting started in Hollywood, and you can’t really be changing your name at this point.”

“Thank you,” Ryan whispered against his ear.

“You’re welcome.” He inched away to look into Ryan’s eyes. “I love you more than I think you realize, Ryan Kellar. I will do everything in my power to make this marriage work.”

“Loving you has opened so many doors for me that I never even knew were there.” Ryan’s intense focus on him made Josh feel like there was no one else in the room. “I will meet you more than halfway in this marriage to keep our love strong and growing deeper every day.”

The kiss they shared this time held promise, love, passion and comfort. There was no fierce urgency, though that would come. It was a kiss between two men who knew they were loved and in a relationship meant to last forever.

## About the Author

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Out of Bounds  
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Playing the Game

*One hot night, one freeze frame...and one shocking surprise.*

## Tabloid Star

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As a bartender at the Lucky Seven club, Josh Bauer could take a different guy home every night...if he wanted to. Working three jobs, however, makes it hard to connect with anyone. One man, though, is too much temptation to resist. A steamy encounter in a back alley leads to an explosive night of sex in Josh's bed—a bed he isn't surprised to find empty the next morning.

What does surprise him, though, is the front page of a tabloid. Apparently his one-night stand isn't as anonymous as he thought it was.

Ryan Kellar's career is taking off. Advance buzz about his movie says it's a blockbuster, and going home with the gorgeous bartender is the perfect way to celebrate. And he thought he'd gotten away clean—until the picture in the paper shocks him into reality. Was Josh really just playing...or playing him for a fool?

Trust isn't big on their list right now, but as their worlds fall apart, it's all they have. At least until they figure out who took the picture. And why...

*Warning: Hot manlove, gratuitous licking of tattoos and dealing with stalking paparazzi.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Tabloid Star:*

Josh got there before Ry could land the punch he was swinging. "Hey, guys, can I get you something to drink?"

Bill's hazy blue eyes met his with a smirk. "Yeah, liquid courage might help my friend get lucky tonight."

Ignoring the sarcastic tone in Bill's voice, Josh made a point of checking Ry out. He admitted to himself he liked what he saw. Ry was tall with a lean muscular build, more like a runner than a weight lifter. The baseball cap Ry wore made it hard to tell what color his hair was and the sunglasses hid the color of his eyes, but his tight black jeans and dark blue T-shirt gave Josh a hint at Ry's body. Josh's cock twitched, interested even though Josh didn't tend to take customers home.

"Well, I don't know about needing any liquid courage. If your friend's looking for something, I'm sure he could find it quite easily here."

Josh winked at Ry and a surprised grin crossed the man's face. Shaking his head, Bill nudged Ry with his shoulder.

"See, I said you could have anyone you wanted in this club. Why not live a little and celebrate?" Bill picked up his beer and gestured into the crowd. "I'm going over to talk to that curvy redhead. I hope you brought cab fare, buddy, because we won't be leaving together."

Ry scowled, but mumbled, "Go get her, stud, and don't worry. I have money."

They watched Bill weave his way through the crush of people until he disappeared. Josh looked back at Ry to find the man studying him. Ry slid his sunglasses down and looked over them, tracing the length of Josh's body. Josh swore he felt heat from each part of his skin those dark brown eyes touched. The desire blazing in that glance told Josh Ry was looking for someone different than Bill was.

"You want something to drink?" His question came out husky and he swallowed, trying to wet his suddenly dry throat.

"Drink? Sure, I'll take a whiskey, neat."

Josh forced himself to walk away and grab a glass. He could feel Ry's gaze burning into his back as the man eyed his ass. Taking a bottle of the top-shelf whiskey, he filled a high ball glass and handed it to Ry, who slid his fingers along Josh's as he took the drink, shooting lust and blood to Josh's groin.

"Fuck," Josh whispered.

"Thanks." Ry's pink tongue peeked out, wetting his plump bottom lip and drawing Josh's attention to it.

Josh groaned and adjusted his cock, searching for room in his too-tight jeans. "What exactly are you looking for, honey? I'll be happy to accommodate you, but you have to be sure."

Ry checked him out again, his eyes lingering at the growing bulge at Josh's groin. Hesitation colored Ry's words when he leaned forward and whispered, "I think you know what I'm looking for."

He could tell Ry didn't pick up men often, or probably not at all by the way the man's gaze darted away from him the moment he uttered that statement.

"Pete, can you handle it for ten minutes while I take my break?" Josh didn't look away from Ry, shouting his question over his shoulder toward the other bartender.

"Sure, Josh. I've got it." The smile in Pete's voice told Josh his friend knew what was going on between him and Ry.

He moved from behind the bar, gestured for Ry to follow him and made his way through the crowd toward the back of the club. Josh hit the back exit door at almost a run, letting the metal door slam open as he yanked Ry through the doorway. As the door shut, he pinned the man to the brick wall and kissed him.

*Love can be found among the pieces of a broken heart.*

## Seeing You

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The night his brother, Simon, was killed in an accident, Dylan took on a double load of guilt. Guilt for walking away unscathed...and for secretly loving Simon's partner, Wade. Unable to bear the pain, Dylan left the Lazy G ranch to rebuild his life elsewhere.

A year later he reluctantly responds to his sister's plea to come home, where he finds the Lazy G falling apart. And so is Wade. Wade has stopped caring about the ranch, about everything that should matter most to him.

Though there's more ranch work than one man can possibly handle, Dylan throws himself into the task. Wondering how he's going to find the strength to pull Wade out of the fog of grief when his own is still as raw as a fresh wound. Wondering when Wade will finally see that his second chance for happiness is standing right in front of him.

*Warning: Contains explicit, emotionally charged m/m sex. Extra box of tissues required. You could use your sleeve, of course, but we don't recommend it.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Seeing You:*

I found the third sketch the next morning, rolled up, on my unmade bed after I came back from a morning dip in the pond. Probably the last of the season, 'cause the water had been *cold*. I stood there dripping on the wooden floor, shivering, and I contemplated it. I had a feeling...

Yeah, this one was of me. It wasn't a very graceful pose. I was half bent over, hauling up a wooden slat, my hands covered in work gloves and my hat shading my face from view. I sat down on the bed and looked at that drawing, and I finally got a clue.

*"I want you to see me, see that I'm sorry I left and I'm back to stay. I'll help you hold onto this place, I swear..."*

I studied the sketch another minute, and then I set it on the dresser until I could frame it and hang it up next to the other two on my wall.

I didn't hunt down Wade to say thank you this time. I realized he was telling me something, but I still didn't know how much he was saying.

I spent a week avoiding Wade. I was unsure of what he wanted, where he was going with this, so I did what I do best. I ran.

Every time I saw him coming, I went the other way, or tried to look busy, and if that didn't work, I hid. Not behavior to be proud of, really, but sometimes not knowing and hoping was better than finding out and being disappointed.

What a coward I was. I wondered if I'd find the yellow brick road somewhere on the ranch.

I didn't know if I was coming or going, and I was learning that running was still tiring even if it was partly figurative.

After an evening spent watching TV with Mack and Dwayne, ignoring Mack's mutterings—even when he called me Debbie D. for my “long face”—I said good night, my mind on what Wade was doing up at the house as I made my way to my bedroom.

Was he getting ready for bed? Or already in it? Was he running a hand down the smooth skin of his stomach, into the hair at his groin? Was he stroking the length of his prick, enjoying the feel of it slowly filling until he was hard and throbbing? Was he picturing someone as he pumped himself, the intense feelings curling through his body? Did he cry someone's name as his back arched and he shot his pleasure into his hand?

Realizing I was leaning against my bedroom door and rubbing myself through my jeans, I huffed a laugh and started stripping. I was naked and about to climb into bed when I noticed the drawing left next to my pillow. I wondered when he had managed to leave this one since it hadn't been here when I came back earlier, and I had been in the bunkhouse since dinner.

I picked it up, unfurled it, ignoring the clenching of my stomach muscles, and gaped. The sketch was of me coming out of the pond, running a hand through my hair as I tilted my face up to the sun. I was decently covered in cut-offs, and there was nothing indecent about what I was wearing or doing. But I wouldn't show this to Mack or Erin, and definitely not to any kids.

I looked...sexual. The lines of my body, the look on my face, I don't know, but something about the way Wade had sketched me was unmistakably erotic.

Was this how Wade saw me? Was he answering my questions? Asking his own? Was he waiting for me to make my own move? I felt more confused than ever, and abruptly I was sick of the game. Tomorrow I was going to ask Wade what he wanted from me.

It was no surprise that I dreamed about his hands on me.

The next morning I stumbled out of bed late after a night spent dreaming. I blinked sleep from my eyes and when my right foot slipped on something, I looked down blankly for a moment. I rubbed my eyes, not thinking it could be what I thought it was, but it was still there when I opened them again, so I leaned down and picked it up.

There was nothing subtle about this sketch. I was lying on a bed, back arched, head thrown back, eyes shut, as I pumped my cock. I looked at this drawing of me and I blushed. This wasn't memory, it was imagination.

I stood there, my morning wood becoming actual interest as I thought of Wade spending time fantasizing about me, thinking of me spread out on his bed putting on a show just for him. I dragged on my clothes from yesterday and was on my way out the door within a few minutes. At the last second, I turned around, rummaged through the drawer in my bedside table and stuck the lube and a condom in my back pocket.

Then I went to find Wade.

I found Wade mucking stalls, not surprised that most of the meaningful conversations in my life have taken place around horse shit.

"Where is everybody, Wade?" He obviously hadn't heard me come in because he jumped before turning to look at me.

"Mack and Dwayne ran to town. Billy, Joe and Tom are out working cattle." Wade put down the pitchfork he'd been using and stepped out of the stall toward me.

"Good. Got something this morning." No sense beating around the bush.

"That right?" Wade's smile spread slowly across his face. He looked like he had a naughty secret.

"Oh, yeah. Think maybe you'd like it." I walked up close to Wade until our chests brushed.

"Think so?" Wade slid his right hand up my arm to my neck in one smooth caress that made me shiver.

"Oh, *yeah*. I should pass it on." Then we were kissing, tongues thrusting and hands flying as we both tried to touch as much of the other's body as possible. It was desperate and needy and a little awkward at first as we learned the way our mouths fit together.

I heard myself moan as I finally learned the taste of Wade. He tasted like coffee, a little bitter, and something else. Something that I would bet was just all Wade, rich and dark and so very good.

Good in the way that climbing Mount Everest is good, or winning the Nobel Peace Prize good. There were no words for the feeling as he stroked my tongue with his and moved his hands down to cup my ass, bringing my hips up to rub our cocks together through denim. "So good."

"Yeah," he took the time to mutter as he sucked on my neck, and we attacked buttons and belt buckles.

"This isn't going to last." I thought I should warn him of that, and then he got his hand around my cock. Yeah, no way was this going to last longer than a few more strokes.

"Last long enough to be in me?" Probably not, but for that I'd damn sure try.

“Maybe. God, that feels so good.” He continued to pump my dick. “But not going to last long enough to fuck you if you keep doing that.” I wrapped my hand around his cock, loving the heft in my hand as it pulsed with life.

“Shit, we don’t have anything.” Wade groaned and kissed me again. “We should go up to the house.”

“Hell, no. We got everything we need.” I dug the condom and lube out of my pocket. “Turn around, hands against the wall.” I wondered what he’d think of that command.

He didn’t say anything, just turned around, put his hands on the wall until he was almost bent over, and looked over his shoulder at me and grinned. “You gonna show me how I like it now?”

“Sure am. Hope you want it rough and fast because anything else will have to wait ’til later.” I pushed his jeans all the way down to his ankles to help him widen his stance a little. Talk about down and dirty in the stables.

“Yeah, don’t hold back. Been too long.” And with that we both froze as we thought about why. Then he turned his head to look at me again, serious this time, and said, “Dylan. Now.”



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