



Unholy Matrimony

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CHAPTER ONE

Swirling colors and the strong bite of vodka.

Honking horns, screaming laughter, and the smell of fried food on the breeze.

Feet on the pavement, coins in the slots, cards and dice and noise, noise, noise.

Rustle of bed sheets, the pop of bubbly, and sighs, moans, whispers, cries.

Pleasure, so much, too much, falling forward, silken skin, soft raven hair, blue eyes, and fireworks.

Fucking fireworks in Sin City and the only sin is that it ends.

Morning, housekeeping!, and the beep of an alarm and get ready, the day's just begun and sin isn't only found in the dark places.

Ben knew he must have had one hell of a night, because when he woke, his head throbbed something awful. He sat up, rubbing at his forehead, scowling and muttering unholy curses under his breath.

He leaned forward and gazed around the room. It was a hotel room, a lavish and gaudy one in Las Vegas. There were tacky silk sheets pooled around his waist and an enormous mirror on the ceiling. He saw himself reflected in the mirror; he'd looked better. On the floor were remnants of clothing, wine bottles, and for some reason, crushed flower petals.

What the hell had he done?

"Jesus," Ben murmured, giving his forehead a good rub. He was hung over for sure. He hadn't felt so hung over since his freshman year of college during rush week. The sun poured in through the heavy suede curtains, and he squinted, swinging his legs to the edge of the bed in an attempt to stand.

He realized he was naked.

"What the fuck?" Ben froze, looking around the room. He was alone, wasn't he?

He stood carefully, feeling something sticky beneath his foot.

"Please, please, please," he muttered under his breath. He swore, his head throbbing. A used condom peeled off his foot and fell to the floor. "Shit, fuck, shit!"

He'd fucked someone the night before. He'd fucked someone other than his girlfriend, his beautiful, faithful, perfect girlfriend Genevieve, who was waiting for him at home in New York. He was a complete piece of shit.

He stumbled across the room, leaning against a heart-shaped hot tub and scowling at the expensive empty bottles of champagne floating in the water. He'd obviously been trying to impress whoever it had been, and as he stepped on another used condom, he'd apparently done a good job of it.

Ben sat down on the edge of the tub and put his head in his hands, groaning. How was he going to explain this one? How was he going to explain to Genevieve that his "business trip" to Las Vegas had turned out this way?

"I can't," Ben said "Won't." He frowned. "I should, though."

He glanced up at the ceiling and once again saw himself in the mirror. He certainly looked like he'd been fucking someone all night. His cheeks were flushed, his hair tousled.

He decided a shower was in order. A shower to wash away his sins.

As Ben stepped into the shower, he tried as hard as he could to remember anything about the night before. He closed the glass door and something crinkled beneath his foot – another condom wrapper, and near the shower drain he saw another used condom. "Jesus!"

And then he had something, a memory. A flash of black hair and wide, blue eyes.

He shook his head and turned on the faucet, the water stinging hot on his forehead and cheeks. With a grimace, he forced his head under the spray, punishing himself for his night of debauchery. It would take a lot more than a little hot water to cleanse him of his sins.

The weekend had been meant to relieve stress, a few days away from the hustle and bustle of New York City, from his father's demands and expectations and his girlfriend's constant scrutiny. A weekend away was exactly what Ben had needed.

At least that was what his best friend Lucas had said.

Las Vegas. Flashing neon lights. Gambling. Booze. Girls.

Ben's life had been too strait-laced, too serious. He'd needed a bit of shaking up and he'd needed it immediately.

Now he felt far too shaken.

He'd already felt awful lying to Genevieve about his "business trip" and then he'd gone and done something he'd never done before.

Cheated.

He was a cheater and a liar.

He ducked his head out of the hot water and felt like he was going to be sick. A flash of a long, lean form crawling toward him burst into his mind. The black hair was attached to the form, and piercing blue eyes stared him down.

Ben braced himself against the shower wall and blinked, water rolling off his nose. He remembered more. He remembered the person he'd fucked and fucked again. Ben had never seen anyone hotter. Tall, slender, bright, and sexy.

Ben groaned loudly. "Son of a bitch," he mumbled. He had to get out of the shower; it was like Chinese water torture. He dried himself off and threw on some clothes from the night before, scowling when he caught a whiff of cigarettes and the scent of musky perfume on his collar.

He checked his cell phone. One new text message, from Lucas. Dude, when you're up, come down for your free continental breakfast. It's fuckin amazing!

"Oh," Ben said dumbly. Free continental breakfast. His head felt awful, but his stomach was hungry. Free continental breakfast sounded amazing.

He threw one last look at the room and left, trying to calm himself as he went down to meet his friend for breakfast. In the elevator, he remembered pushing someone against the gold plated walls and kissing all down their neck and collarbone. Ben shivered, shaking the memory away.

Soon enough the elevator door dinged and opened to reveal the exquisite lobby area, the ceiling and floors painted in gold.

"Fuck."

Another memory hit: licking sweet gold dust down a slender, soft back all the way to an even sweeter ass. Ben's tongue hadn't stopped there. The sugared paint had glimmered between the cheeks, and he'd tasted it all.

He shook himself out of the memory, arousal and disgust dueling in his belly. The only thing he could think to do was to shove it all down with food. Ben crossed the lobby to the dining area, spotting Lucas across the room, who was already shoveling bacon and eggs into his mouth. Lucas looked bright and chipper, far better than Ben did. But Lucas had always been good at hiding his indiscretions. Ben was sure Lucas had taken at least one girl back to his hotel room the night before. And who could've blamed the ladies? Ben had to admit, his friend had the whole package.

Lucas was tall, blond, tan and handsome. A lady killer. Ben wasn't as classically handsome as his best friend, though he knew he wasn't completely hopeless. His girlfriend, Genevieve, had always told Ben that she was drawn in by his unique, delicate features and long, honey brown hair. Ben approached Lucas and groaned at the smell of greasy food.

"Whoa," Lucas said through his mouthful. "You look like shit."

"I am shit," Ben said, sitting beside his friend. He stole a waffle and began munching on the warm confection.

"So... I don't really need to ask how last night went, do I?" Lucas said. Ben groaned. "I told you no, but who was I to stop you?"

“You should’ve,” Ben said gruffly, wincing. The waffles tasted stale and cheap. “Now I have to go home and tell Gen that I...”

“... did nothing,” Lucas finished. “You know the saying, man. What happens in Vegas--”

“You sound like an announcer on one of those awful tourism shows on the Travel Channel.”

Lucas shrugged, still grinning. “How was it?”

Ben thought about all the used condoms and wrappers he’d tripped over earlier. “It was... It was... What’s the word...”

“Amazing?”

“I have no idea,” Ben hissed. “I don’t remember any of it!”

“Oh, shit. Nothing?” Lucas gaped.

“Nothing past... Well... I think we went to that show at the Tropicana, or whatever it was, didn’t we? What was that show called? Les Folies Bergere?” Ben scratched at his chest. “Or am I completely making this up?”

“No, man, we were there.” Lucas leaned forward, his sleeve dipping in maple syrup. “Fuck.”

“Yeah, I remember that,” Ben said. “You’re a pig, you know that? And then...”

Another flash, this one quick, but very clear in Ben’s mind. A young man dressed in torn, silver jeans, leaning across a glass bar surface, pressing his lips to Ben’s cheek, eyes bright blue. The memory was gone before Ben could really get a hold of it. There was no way that the man was the same person from the night before. No way.

“You got fucking trashed, never seen you so trashed. Must’ve been why you, you know,” Lucas said.

Ben felt sick again. “Oh, god, what did I do?” he asked, rubbing at his forehead.

Lucas snorted. “Are you kidding me?”

Ben shook his head, confused.

“I know, man, I never thought you had it in you, but damn, that pretty little thing you took home...” Lucas shoved another piece of bacon in his mouth. “God, I’d switch teams for a night to get a piece of that. Maybe there was more than alcohol in those drinks. I’ve heard stories about those Vegas bartenders.”

Ben felt like he was going to throw up. “Wait, what? Tell me I didn’t... “ Those piercing blue eyes, he couldn’t get them out of his head. Lucas smirked and poured himself a glass of orange juice. Ben winced at the memory that his friend’s action created: pouring champagne down a long, lean body.

“Okay, okay,” Ben said, shaking his head quickly. He cringed – that stung. “You saw me take someone home?”

“Fuck, man, I nearly had to hose you down,” Lucas laughed. “But you were talking to him the entire show. Didn’t even pay attention to the stage and the dancers. We had front row seats, man! Set me back a few hundred bones.”

Ben’s stomach turned. “Him? Really?”

“Yeah, the black-haired bartender,” Lucas said, nodding. “Black hair, pale skin, skinny... You were really gone for him. It was cute. And then he started dancing on the bar... You were lost.”

“Don’t be an asshole,” Ben groaned. “Stop fucking with me.”

Another memory exploded into his mind. He’d licked up someone’s belly, and then a chest. A flat, tight, masculine chest. And then there were those eyes again, staring down at him.

“Good grief,” Ben mumbled.

“It doesn’t make you gay or anything,” Lucas said jovially. “I’d fuck anything once. I mean, at least you have good taste, right?”

Ben slumped over in his seat and dropped his head down to the table. “I cheated on Gen.” He let his head thunk on the wood. “With a man.” He thunked his head onto the table again, and Lucas had to reach over and stop him.

“Jesus, man, cool it, it’s not a big deal,” Lucas said. “I mean, cheating on your girlfriend, ice queen or not, isn’t too swell, but the kid was...” Lucas pretended to swoon. “Who could resist?”

“I want to die,” Ben mumbled. He smashed his nose against the wood and tried to block out all memories of the night before. He must have been very, very drunk. No, trashed. He must have been trashed and out of his mind.

Ben was in no way homophobic. In fact, he’d grown up in a very progressive, liberal family with both a gay younger sister and a gay younger brother. Being gay was as natural as being straight in his household. He’d always felt a little left out that he was different from his siblings. They’d teased him for his heterosexual ways and never let him live it down the first time he’d brought a girl home.

But Ben wasn’t gay. He’d never even looked at a man twice in interest. What the fuck?

“Ugh, what the fuck?” he groaned. “How old was he even? Oh, god, he wasn’t jailbait or anything, was he?”

“Cool it, man,” Lucas said. “He was drinking with us. I think the club would be none too happy to have an underage worker drinking.”

“This can’t get any worse.”

“Well, you don’t have to worry about knocking up some chick,” Lucas said smoothly.

“It wouldn’t have mattered,” Ben said miserably into the table. “I used enough condoms. There are condoms everywhere. I think I saw a condom in the toilet.”

Lucas cringed.

“Yeah,” Ben rumbled.

“Ben, you listen to me,” Lucas said seriously. “You don’t say a word to Genevieve about any of this. We went on a business trip. We had meetings. We checked out the architecture, as promised to your old man. We played a game of golf. Nine holes, not eighteen. After that, we went to the sports bar, drank a few Bud Lites, and then retired to our hotel rooms at seven-thirty to watch the game on TV.”

“Who won the game?” Ben asked.

“Fuck if I know.”

“I can’t lie to Gen.”

“Because she’s such a sweet girl,” Lucas said sarcastically.

“Mm,” Ben grunted. He shut his eyes and a vision of the man from the night before came to him. Dazzling eyes, slender body, shiny hair, rosy cheeks. Legs for miles. His eyes glowed an even brighter blue against his pitch black hair. Ben even remembered how good he smelled. Almost like a girl, but not quite, just musky enough to keep it interesting. “I wonder what his name was.”

Lucas shrugged. “You gonna be okay?”

“I can’t lie to Genevieve,” Ben said again, looking up. His mind was racing as more and more memories came to him. He recalled fucking the guy up against the glass shower walls as the sweetest, prettiest sounds tumbled out from the bartender’s perfect mouth. Ben groaned, and his forehead met the tabletop for the third time that morning. He was going to have bruises to explain to his girlfriend by the time he got home.

“Ben, you absolutely can lie to her,” Lucas urged. “I gave you a cover story.”

“We don’t even know who won the game.”

“We’ll find out!”

Ben shook his head. “I gotta get out of here.”

“Listen, man, there’s no reason to be so freaked out,” Lucas said, grabbing at Ben’s arm as he stood.

“I cheated on my girlfriend,” Ben said softly. In all his twenty-five years on this planet, Ben had never so much as even thought about cheating on a significant other.

“You’ve been fucking a block of ice for the past two years, you’re bound to slip up sometime,” Lucas said under his breath.

Ben made a face. Lucas and Genevieve didn’t get along, never had, and it almost didn’t bother him anymore. Almost.

“I was going to propose to her,” Ben said. Lucas’ eyes widened. “Yeah, a month or so ago before she got all crazy about her new clothing line and jetted off to Paris.”

“Why the fuck didn’t you tell me?” Lucas asked. Ben sat back down, his face in his hands.

“I took her out to a nice restaurant, the night before she left,” Ben said. “I was wearing the same suit I wore last night, the same suit I fucked--”

Another fucking memory. The beautiful, black-haired man had bounced on Ben’s cock, riding as his long hair was tossed back by the movements of their hips.

‘More, more, more!’ the man had cried. He couldn’t get enough, and neither could Ben.

Ben swore and stood. “I didn’t ask her because she acted like she already knew that I was going to. Like she expected it. Like it... like it wasn’t special, just another step. So I didn’t.”

Lucas burst out laughing. “That bitch.” He paused. “I mean... That’s bitchy.”

Ben rolled his eyes. The most recent memory had jarred him, and he needed to get out of Vegas. “When do we fly back today?”

“Uh...” Lucas checked his watch. “Our plane’s in three hours.”

“Great,” Ben said. “I need a shower. Can I use yours?”

“Because yours reeks of infidelity?”

Ben made a face. “I swear, I can’t even take a step in my room without putting my foot in spilled champagne or a used condom or old room service food... And the fucking mirrors on the ceiling. So obnoxious.”

“More than I needed to know,” Lucas replied. “Yeah, sure.”

“Hey, did you... do anything last night?” Ben asked.

“Fuck you,” Lucas said right away. “I really did watch the game.”

“Bullshit.”

Lucas stared at Ben, frowning, and then slowly started to grin. “Well, you know.”

Ben shook his head. “We are bastards.”

As Lucas and Ben walked back to Lucas’ hotel room, Ben had his most vivid image yet. He shook as he remembered stroking the black-haired man’s face in front of a fountain and then leaning forward and kissing him softly on the lips.

Ben actually felt that one.

CHAPTER TWO

Ben got off the plane feeling worse than when he'd gotten on it. He was back in New York, the city that never sleeps, and what he really wanted was a nap.

Lucas had filled him in on the previous night, and Ben was more than a little shocked. They'd gone to the Tropicana, a famous Vegas showgirls club. Lucas shelled out a lot of money for front row seats, claiming it was worth it and that Ben owed him one later.

They started out watching the show, talking, having a good time. Their waitress was a busty blonde who seemed to only have eyes for Lucas, and Lucas seemed to feel the same way. Ben had gotten tired of being the third wheel, so he excused himself to the back of the club to sit at the bar for a bit.

Apparently, near the end of the show, Lucas left his waitress to find Ben, and found Ben. Ben was trashed out of his mind, sharing a bottle of Cristal with a dark-haired bartender. Before Lucas could even say a word, the bar staff, men and women alike, hopped up onto the bar and began dancing, mimicking the girls on stage. People were throwing tips while Ben was gazing up at his bartender with his tongue practically hanging out of his mouth.

The kid was wearing next to nothing, along with the rest of the staff, and he moved like a practiced dancer, kicking tips into Ben's lap playfully.

Once Lucas pushed through the crowd to sit next to his friend, he grabbed the bottle of champagne and nearly choked. An American Express credit card had been sitting beside Ben's wallet. "How are you gonna explain that charge?" Lucas hollered. "That's a company credit card!"

Ben shrugged, not taking his eyes off the beautiful specimen on the bar. "I'll tell them... sex."

Lucas snorted. "Our boss will understand. He is your dad, after all."

Ben's eyes sparkled, and he leaned forward, mouth watering. The man spread his legs wide open for Ben and licked over his lips once. Lucas said Ben looked like a lovesick puppy, gagging for it, and Ben claimed (allegedly) that he was deeply in love with the man.

Soon, the bartenders hopped off the surface and Ben sat in a stupor. The black-haired kid gave Ben a wink and disappeared into a back room.

"Snap out of it, man," Lucas said, waving a hand in front of Ben's face. "We have front row seats and the waitress is giving me free shots now."

"Mmm," Ben hummed, blinking dazedly. "Where'd he go?"

"Back to Cock Tease Land, I'm sure," Lucas said, and Ben laughed.

Not ten minutes later, the sleek little bartender came back, followed by the busty blonde who had been waiting on Lucas all evening. Lucas told Ben that at that point he had been more focused on their waitress' chest than the bartender, so he hadn't caught the man's name.

But he did remember that they'd all shared another bottle of Cristal and that the bartender had been more than charming. After a bit of bubbly, Lucas had been ready to take the waitress back to his hotel and Ben had been giggling like a school girl as the bartender batted his eyelashes and told bad jokes.

"I had my face buried between the waitress' tits," Lucas told Ben later on the plane. "But when I came up for air, I saw you leaving with that guy. You had your hand on his ass and everything."

And that was all Ben knew so far. Ben drove back from the airport, head full of fog and confusion. He'd refused to say a word the whole drive back. The more Ben was silent, the more memories flashed back to him, and he'd nearly pieced together actual scenes at that point. He dropped Lucas off and drove to his penthouse in Manhattan, ready to face the music.

When he parked his silver Jaguar for the valet to take, he hopped out and hurried up the steps of the grand apartment building.

"Hello, sir," greeted the enormous doorman, Bernard. "Have a nice business trip?"

Ben slowed his jog and adjusted his bag over his shoulder. "Why, what'd you hear?" he asked, paranoid.

Bernard frowned. "Sir?"

"I..." Ben shook his head. "It was... It was a good trip. I watched the game."

Bernard nodded. "Shame about the outcome."

"Yeah, who won?" Ben asked.

"Not my team," Bernard said dolefully.

Ben groaned. That didn't help at all. He was about to ask more when his cell phone chirped loudly in his pocket. He looked at it and saw that Genevieve was calling. "See you later, Bernard."

"Have a nice day..."

Ben ignored the call and slipped into the elevator, pressing the PH button. He tapped his foot impatiently, trying to ignore the memories charging through his mind: how he'd gazed down as the black-haired man sucked his dick, how he'd marveled when the man swallowed everything without even hesitating, how he'd flipped the bartender over and fucked him for the third time.

How many times had Ben done the poor kid? Though, if Ben remembered correctly (and sadly, he was beginning to) the bartender hadn't been complaining.

He'd been insatiable and hot and tight and...

The door opened to the penthouse floor and he stepped out, feeling dizzy.

Ben liked sex, of course he did, but he wasn't one for crazy sex fests or anything like that. He considered himself pretty vanilla and the most times he'd ever had sex in one night was twice, and that had been with Genevieve.

He needed to stop thinking about it. He had to either confess to Genevieve or forget it had ever happened. He decided to go with Lucas, even if his friend wasn't always the most reliable source of advice.

They'd played golf, had a few beers, and watched the game.

Well, maybe he'd leave out the part about the beers.

Ben was relieved to find out that Genevieve wasn't even home. She'd moved in with him after they'd been together only four months, and Ben was too much of a pushover to tell her no. And so, his bachelor pad had turned into a designer apartment with tiny furniture, what looked like rabbit food in the fridge, and numerous stress relief candles perched atop the surfaces of nearly every table and counter.

Genevieve was nothing if not pushy, and though Ben loved her, he could definitely understand why most of his friends didn't.

He flopped onto the spotless, uncomfortable, white chair and shut his eyes. A scene came into his head so clearly he could almost smell and taste it.

He remembered strolling down the boardwalk with the bartender, arm around the beautiful man's waist. He'd just bought them both hot dogs from some crappy little vender down the street. The black-haired beauty had broken away from Ben and skipped ahead to the miniature Statue of Liberty in the heart of Vegas.

"I've always wanted to see the real one," the bartender said sweetly, shivering a bit as he stood near it. Ben walked over to him and wrapped both arms around his slender body.

"I'll take you someday," Ben had told him. "I'll show you the whole fuckin' world."

Ben cringed. His memories of the night were shifting between scorching hot and unbearably corny. He slouched on the chair and tried to block out the new memories, but it was impossible.

He'd had the bartender in his arms, in front of the faux Statue of Liberty, and they'd been swaying, almost dancing.

"Oh, my god," Ben groaned. Could he have been any lamer?

The bartender had moved gently in his arms, pressing in closer and closer. "You're sweet," the man had said. "Even if you are a little drunk. Hell, I'll take sweet and drunk over pissy and sober like my boyfriend."

Ben sighed at the memory. So the man had cheated, too?

“How could anyone be mean to you?” Ben had asked, cupping the kid’s face.

“Easy,” the bartender had said. “I’m just a piece of ass. That’s what everyone thinks.”

Ben remembered the next part very clearly. He’d felt so bad for the kid, and while he’d felt a lot of others things for the bartender (lust, for example), that feeling stood out.

Ben hadn’t been able to help himself but to press his lips to the man’s in the most tender, gentle way possible. The shaky moan that had come from the man’s mouth still registered in Ben’s mind as one of the sweetest and most erotic sounds he’d ever heard.

With a smile, Ben fell asleep easily, feeling warm and lame.

“Wake up.”

Ben made a face, but didn’t open his eyes.

“Ben, wake up.”

He shifted and sighed, pulling a hard-as-a-rock throw pillow over his head.

“Ben... Ben! Wake up!”

Ben felt someone whack at his shoulder, and he cracked an eye open, looking up. His girlfriend was standing over him, a hand on her hip. She looked beautiful and annoyed, but mostly annoyed. Even in his groggy state, he could read her mood. She was dressed impeccably, as usual, with her makeup perfectly applied. She was pretty in an obvious way: long, blonde hair, slender form, and wide set, brown eyes. Her lips were tight, always slightly pinched.

“Well, you got home earlier than I thought you would,” was all she said.

Ben sat up, rubbing at the back of his neck. “Gen,” he said, smiling. He reached forward. “C’mere, I missed--”

“No! Don’t touch me, I’m wearing silk. It wrinkles so easily. I haven’t even really sat down all day, and this is vintage. If I ruin it, it’s over,” Genevieve said, taking a step back. “But I am happy to see you.”

“Oh,” Ben said dumbly. He understood; Genevieve was really weird about her clothes. Most of them cost more than an average person’s monthly rent. “Oh, yeah. I’m happy to see you, too. I missed you.”

Genevieve managed a smile. “Aw, that’s sweet. I’ve been so busy! I haven’t even had time to notice you were gone. Well, I noticed, of course.”

“Oh,” Ben said again, still feeling out of it. “Okay.”

She smiled at him and ruffled his hair, disturbing it from his low ponytail. “When are you going to cut this?” she asked, tugging at it. “It’s nearly to your shoulders now.”

“But I thought that was why you first noticed me,” Ben said. “Thought you liked it.”

“It’s not serious hair, Ben,” Genevieve replied. “It was cute when we were younger, but you’re trying to be a professional now. You want to be taken seriously, don’t you?”

Ben winced. He loved her, but there was no way he was cutting his hair. He’d had long hair since he was fifteen, an act of rebellion against his father and their ritzy, buttoned up lifestyle. They may have been a liberal family, but they still had maintained appearances. His father had a very certain image that he wanted his family to present, and that was clean, classy, and wealthy. Ben found that the rebellious act was still relevant today. He was as much under his father’s thumb now as he had been as a kid. He worked at his father’s architecture firm, he was living off his father’s money, and he’d even met Genevieve through one of his father’s business partners.

So, the long hair would stay. Take that, Daddy!

Ben cringed at the thought and then cringed some more as Genevieve tugged his ponytail harder. “You seem really out of it. What exactly did you do on this business trip?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Work,” Ben said. “Watched the game.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Genevieve remarked. “Sounds a lot like what you do when you’re here. Who won the game?”

Ben hesitated. “...my guys won.”

“Oh, really? I didn’t know your team was playing,” Genevieve said, frowning. “Then again, what do I know about sports?”

“Yeah, the hotel had this pay-per-view sports channel thing... so I watched an old game. A classic,” Ben said lamely.

Genevieve cooed and stroked Ben’s cheek. “You were really bored, huh?”

Ben thought about how in Vegas he’d lifted the bartender up, sat him on the bathroom sink, and fucked him senseless. “Yeah, really bored.”

“Well, you can’t count on that Lucas for any sort of fun,” Genevieve said, a bitter tone to her voice. “I can’t believe you’re even sort of friends with that guy.”

“He’s been my best friend since we were five,” Ben said.

She heaved a great sigh. “Whatever, baby.”

“Even if we weren’t best friends, I’d have to be cordial with him; he works with me, and for Dad,” Ben said. “He’s one hell of a designer, sort of like you.”

“Buildings and clothing are two very different things. Anyway, I’m not saying anything more,” she said, smiling and patting his head. “I just popped in from my lunch break, so...”

Ben grabbed at her hand to stop her from leaving. He’d missed her, of course he had. He loved her, no matter what Lucas said or how his body may have betrayed him in Sin City.

“Do you have to go?” He squeezed her hand, and she got a knowing look on her face.

“I’m not going to be late for a meeting because you want a quickie,” she said. He almost rolled his eyes – when was the last time they had spontaneous sex, anyway? Not that it mattered to Ben. He liked order, he liked planning things. Even sex.

“I didn’t mean that,” Ben said back, and she laughed.

“Maybe you should’ve, but no, I’m wearing silk,” she said. She bent low and kissed Ben on the forehead. “I’ll be back late; don’t wait up for me, okay?”

He nodded and let her pet him a bit. She gave him a small wave and fluttered out of the room in her heels. When he heard the door shut, he slumped down further. Genevieve and Ben were close, closer than he’d ever been with someone, and he loved her. He wanted to marry her at some point when things settled down.

Why had that all felt so awkward?

“You fucked some random guy,” Ben grumbled. “That’s why.”

He closed his eyes and shook his head. He was scum. He was lower than scum, he was an undeveloped life form that fed on higher beings. No, he didn’t deserve to feed on the higher beings. All he could do was sniff at other scumbags around him and hope for the best.

Why couldn’t he stop thinking about the bartender? The one who’d led him down this scumbag path? It wasn’t his fault; Ben couldn’t be upset with the pretty little thing.

He’d had some really hot, exciting sex, and it’d been ages, if ever, since he’d fucked like that.

He fell asleep with a trace of a smile on his face, despite his guilt and the ache in his back from the tiny designer chair. That was how most things in his life were; pretty, but painful.

The next couple of days were a blur for Ben. He hardly saw Genevieve, which suited him fine. He tried to get back into the swing of his life – his non-exciting, predictable, vanilla life.

It wasn’t working, not really. Every time he thought he was starting to forget, he’d remember something that either made him have to sit down or excuse himself to the men’s room to take care of some business.

He was relieved when Lucas invited him to lunch later that week.

“You still look like shit,” Lucas said, grinning across the table at Ben.

“I’d be offended, but I guess it’s becoming a look of mine,” Ben replied. “What are you so happy about?”

Lucas smiled wider. “Remember Laura?”

Ben stared blankly at Lucas. “Who?”

“The waitress from the club! You know, the one I fucked six ways from Sunday?” Lucas asked. “The same place you picked up that pretty boy barten--”

“Please, can we not talk about that?” Ben asked. He toyed with his fork and sighed. “I’ve been trying to forget about it.”

“Ah, haven’t been able to let that go yet, eh?” Lucas asked, smirking. Ben wanted to smack the smug little look right off Lucas’ face.

“Tell me about this girl,” Ben said. “You know, this is the first time that I haven’t been able to remember a name and you have. Let’s have some fun with this. Spill the whole thing, dirty details and all.”

“I slipped her my email,” Lucas said, waggling his eyebrows.

“So?”

“So?” Lucas laughed, leaning forward. “Cyber sex, my friend! God, all week long! And she has a webcam...”

“What the hell is the point of cyber sex if you’ve already, you know, actually done it with her?”

“Dude, you know... Don’t you and Genevieve like... have phone sex or whatever when you’re away from each other?” Lucas frowned.

Ben shook his head.

“Weird... Well, some of us get horny,” Lucas said. “Sort of like how I know you did the other night when you brought that guy home--”

“Shut up!”

Lucas leaned forward closer and lowered his voice. “She does the nastiest stuff for me on webcam...”

Ben stared at his friend. “For example?”

“She takes it all off and... she’s got these sex toys, Ben,” Lucas said, grinning deviantly. “She uses them for me.”

“Oh, god. That kind of thing is allowed on the internet?”

“You are such a doofus,” Lucas said. Just then, the waitress appeared with water, smiling down at the two men.

“Are you ready to order?” she asked.

“I suddenly don’t feel so hungry,” Ben said. Ben had actually gone the entire morning without thinking about their weekend in Vegas. Well, he’d had a few choice thoughts while licking his cereal spoon, but that was it.

“Are you okay?” Lucas asked.

“I’ll come back in a moment,” the waitress said, ducking out.

“I don’t know,” Ben said. “Do you think Gen is that bad?”

“Oh, god, I’m only fucking with you, man,” Lucas said. “You know we don’t get along, but it’s not like I think you should drop her for some little twink who mixes drinks in Vegas or something. It’s not even like you’re gay. It was a one time deal, right?”

Ben nodded. “I feel like I need to make this up to Gen. Only... without her knowing why.”

“Take her out,” Lucas said, shrugging. “It’ll make you feel less guilty, right?”

“I should take her out,” Ben said. “Yeah, we’ll go to that nice French place she loves... Good idea, man.”

Lucas shrugged again.

“So, you and this Laura girl?” Ben quirked a smile, feeling better. “What’s going on with that?”

“Just fucking around. Long distance,” Lucas replied. “Nothing huge. You know me. Love ‘em and leave ‘em.”

“Sounds kind of huge; you never keep in touch with girls. I mean, you left her but you’re still talking to her,” Ben remarked. “Do you like her?”

“I like what she does on webcam with her blue vibrator,” Lucas said bluntly.

Ben could tell Lucas was trying to avoid something. “Oh, yeah?”

“She’s hot.”

Ben nodded. “You’re in love with her. You love her. You want to marry her and have kids and a mortgage with her.”

Lucas looked horrified. “Now I’m not hungry, fuck!”

Ben laughed. “Fine, fine. Just fucking around.”

“I believe you know what that’s like,” Lucas said pointedly.

Ben blanched. “Got your point. Let’s eat.”

The night was shaping up to be perfect. All the right calls had been made, the right strings pulled. Ben planned to wine and dine the hell out of his girlfriend and forget about his Vegas trip if it killed him.

He’d done quite well, he had to admit. That was, until they were halfway to Parapluie, Genevieve’s favorite French restaurant, and Ben realized he was wearing that suit.

It was the suit he’d almost proposed to Genevieve in, and the suit he’d fucked up and fucked in.

It was a smart, charcoal Armani number, his favorite. His mind was instantly back on Vegas while Genevieve chirped rapid fire last minute clothing orders into her cell phone. How romantic, and they weren’t even to the restaurant yet.

But things seemed to calm down a bit when they arrived and sat at a charming little table near a window overlooking the sparkling city lights. Genevieve looked lovely as ever as she put her cell phone down and picked up Ben’s hand.

“This is really sweet of you,” she said, smiling. “I feel like we never have time for each other anymore, but this proves that we can make it work. We can have it all.”

Ben smiled genuinely at her and caressed her hand. “I’m so sorry about me lately... I’ve been kind of out of it, but I swear I’m going to be better to you.”

Genevieve blinked. “Ben, you’re fine. We’re perfect. See, we can never see each other, ever, and still have nice times like this.”

“Oh... Yeah,” Ben said, his hand tensing around Genevieve’s fingers. “We’re good.”

“We should vacation together soon,” she said, smiling. “Let’s go to Paris. I need to go to Parisian fashion week soon, baby. You could come with me! I’ll show you Paris; you’ll love it.”

“I’ve been there. Spring break, with Lucas,” Ben said. “Fashion week? I don’t know. Sounds kind of... not my thing.”

“I’ll be there, and I’m your thing,” Genevieve replied, eyes wide and lips pouty. She really did look gorgeous in a black cocktail dress with her blonde hair tumbling over her shoulders. But why wasn’t she making his belly twist like she used to? “Think about it?”

“When is it?”

“Next week...”

Ben’s face fell. “Gen!”

“I know, I know,” Genevieve said briskly, opening up her menu. “What are you getting? The filet mignon here is to die.”

“I don’t know,” Ben mumbled, lowering his eyes to his own menu. Maybe a trip to Paris would do him some good, even if he’d spend the whole time surrounded by robotic fashion types. “Maybe I’ll go, sure.”

“Great!” Genevieve grinned. “I’m going to have the filet mignon for sure, but this time I am going to ask them to substitute the dressing with some sweetened vinegar.”

“You’re sweetened vinegar,” Ben teased.

Genevieve glanced up. “Sorry, what?”

“Nothing,” Ben mumbled.

Genevieve smiled, her phone beeping. She flipped it open and typed out a message, looking at Ben from over the phone. “Did you say something, sweetheart?”

Ben shook his head and stared down at the table.

They’d had a little too much to drink, which was becoming a bit of a habit lately for Ben, and they tripped through the door, lips attached.

Ben didn’t know what’d gotten into him, why he was suddenly so forward, so passionate. He kissed Genevieve hard on the lips, pushing her up against the door, his hormones racing. He hadn’t needed her so badly in... well, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d wanted her so much. It was like something crazy had happened between the restaurant and their apartment. His libido had gone from zero to sixty in five seconds.

Or five glasses of wine.

Ben wasn’t that much of a sexual person, if he really thought about it. He wasn’t driven by sex, and he rarely let it drive him. Of course sometimes...

He closed his eyes, and as he was about to push Genevieve against the arm of the couch and devour her with his mouth, he stopped. Another memory almost blinded him.

Ben remembered sinking low in a heart-shaped hot tub, circling his arms around his dark-haired bartender and kissing all down his neck. In the memory, he nudged the man’s thighs

open and found a hot hole with his finger. Ben hadn't really known what he'd been doing, but instinct had taken over and he'd pushed two fingers inside, curling them so tight that the beautiful bartender had fallen back in his arms and yelled, "Ben, oh, Ben!"

Ben opened his eyes and stared at Genevieve. She was there, right in front of him. She wasn't some hot memory that was haunting him from a night of debauchery, she was his actual girlfriend, and she was in his arms right now.

"Gen," he mumbled, his voice catching in his throat. She looked at him dazedly, her eyes heavy lidded. "Gen, baby..."

"Mmm," she moaned, letting her head drop back. Ben moved forward, blinking away his Vegas memories, and licked a fat stripe up her collarbone. She moaned again and leaned back, nearly knocking the end table over as Ben kissed her with a fiery passion. "Oh!"

Genevieve gasped as a pile of papers fell off the table, scattering to the floor. It triggered a strong flash of a memory in Ben. A flash of Vegas, and the man who had been haunting his memories ever since he'd left.

In this particular memory, the black-haired bartender leaned forward, kissing all down Ben's neck, and whispered, "Fuck me again?"

Ben recalled that he had nearly choked at the request, and his body had reacted positively. He'd pushed the kid against the wall and an assortment of soaps and shampoos had spilled to the floor with a clatter. The bartender had slammed against the tile and cried out.

"Shit," Ben had sworn, holding the young man's face. "Are you okay, Mason?"

Mason.

The bartender in Vegas, his name was Mason.

Mason.

Mason. Mason. Mason.

Genevieve kissed Ben's neck and arched against him, and the strongest, clearest memory yet flared behind his tightly closed lids. He let it play out in his mind, his thoughts undisturbed by Genevieve's touches.

"But I didn't bring my swimsuit," Mason said, laughing as he stood beside the lavish hot tub. Ben grinned and laughed in return, already tugging off his tie and suit jacket.

He bumped up against Mason, gently pressing the bartender against the wall beside the tub. "You don't need a suit," Ben said. He kissed up Mason's neck, groaning as the beautiful boy arched against him.

"I don't know," Mason said as he tangled his long fingers in Ben's locks. Ben usually hated when people messed with his hair, but the way Mason was holding on, pulling Ben close, only made Ben growl in appreciation.

“You don’t have to,” Ben said. He latched their lips together, and Mason kissed back with such passion and need that Ben took that as permission to start stripping the other man.

Mason didn’t tell Ben to stop. He let Ben tug off his heavy leather belt and then his soft, black cashmere turtleneck. Soon they both rid each other of their pants and they were pressed together in their boxers, cocks rubbing.

“Oh, my god,” Mason said, breathless. He wrapped his legs around Ben’s hips, purring. “Let’s get in that tub.”

And they did. Ben managed to get Mason in the cheesy, heart-shaped tub, naked and squirming in his lap. The water was scorching around them, and Ben, who had never felt either way about cock before, was suddenly very pleased to have Mason’s sliding across his belly.

“C’mere,” Ben murmured. “Closer, you’re too far away.”

Mason gave him a look. “I’m in your lap,” he sighed, moving closer still, nipping at Ben’s collarbone. “You’re so needy.”

“Mm,” Ben agreed. He slipped his fingers down Mason’s back and cupped the younger man’s ass. “Can I touch this here?”

“You’d better.” Mason gave a cockeyed smile and wriggled in Ben’s hold. “Oooh, yes, touch there...”

Before Ben knew it, he had three fingers in Mason, and Mason was moaning and clenching around him. It was moving fast, almost too fast because Ben was trying to savor it. Mason was the hottest thing he’d ever had against him, and in his drunken state, he knew that this was probably the only time he’d ever get to experience something so fine. .

“More, more.” Mason keened, riding Ben’s fingers, splashing water out of the tub and onto the floor. “Fuck me, please, please.”

Ben couldn’t say no, not when his fingers were squeezed so tight, not when hot lips pressed against his own, not when his cock was so hard it hurt. And Mason had condoms, lots of condoms.

So Ben let Mason and the alcohol take over, and when Mason sunk down onto his cock, the water still bubbling around them, Ben had never felt more intoxicated.

He shook himself out of the memory and tried to feel the same passion for Genevieve, who was rubbing against him in tantalizing ways. Sure, it was nice, but his memory of Mason was smoking hot and everything else seemed to pale in comparison.

But he’d never see Mason again, and he was committed to Genevieve.

“Oh, god,” Ben mumbled, snapping out of it. He gazed at his girlfriend as she moved her fingers to his belt buckle to make things more interesting. “Gen, stop!”

Genevieve looked up at him, eyes wide. “Stop?”

Ben froze. “Don’t move an inch,” he said. “Stay here. Stay. Okay?”

“What are you doing?” Genevieve asked, frowning.

“I... I’ll be right back,” Ben said. He stumbled away from her and disappeared through the living room and into his office. Leaning against his desk and swallowing gulps of air, he tried to calm the fire in his belly. He was overwhelmed, so overwhelmed with arousal for what wasn’t even there. For who wasn’t even there.

It had to stop; he had to fix things. Once and for all.

His eyes landed on a small, black velvet box that he’d hidden, tucked away behind a rubber tree plant beside his desk. He knelt down and grabbed the box, running his fingers over the soft surface.

He couldn’t stop the memories. Mason’s soft, velvet skin under his fingers. The way Mason’s ass had clenched around him as Ben petted the small of Mason’s back and cupped his little hips. The way Mason’s legs had wrapped around his waist, anchored as he rode Ben’s dick. The way his voice had also been velvet smooth, mewling compliments as they’d moved together.

Ben squeezed the box in his hand and stood up. It was time, they were due, it was right. He exited his office to find Genevieve sitting on the sofa just outside, tapping her foot nervously. She looked up as Ben entered the room. Her smile was uneasy and soft.

“What’s... up?” she asked. Ben had never seen her this way, this unsure, this vulnerable. It made his insides swirl, and he knelt in front of her. “Oh, my god,” she said. “Oh, my god...”

Ben nodded. “Genevieve...”

“No,” she murmured, stunned. “I mean, oh... I mean... What are you... What are you doing?”

“No?”

“No, not no...” Genevieve bit her lip. “I’ll shut up now.”

Ben laughed. “Yeah, you’d better,” he teased. He was nervous, so nervous, and he felt slightly ill. Was this right? It had to be. It all added up, it made sense. Ben liked making sense.

He stroked Genevieve’s hair and then pulled the tiny box out of his jacket pocket. She gasped, eyes sparkling, and trembled slightly.

“I love you, Genevieve Grace Rosen,” Ben said, blushing. “And I’m...I’m going to for the rest of my life. I want to make you happy and I want to be with you and... and...” He shoved the box forward, feeling awkward. “I mean, oops.” He opened the box and tried to smile.

“Oh, my god, Ben,” Genevieve breathed. “I never thought you’d actually... I mean... Oh, my god.”

“Will you,” Ben began, but his voice hitched in his throat. “Ugh. Ahem. Will you marry me?”

Genevieve looked like she might cry, which was strange, especially on her. Ben watched her carefully, nervously, his hand shaking as he prostrated the opened box to her. He tried to ignore the velvet, the way it reminded him of the swell of Mason’s ass.

“Yes,” she said, eyes widening. “Yes, Benjamin Bell, I’ll... I’ll marry you!”

She burst forward and threw her arms around his neck, kissing his head. “I love you,” she said.

It should have warmed Ben’s heart; he should’ve felt on top of the world, but for some reason he felt shaken. However, he knew he couldn’t let Genevieve know that. He lifted her head and kissed her.

Pulling her into his arms, he carried her up the stairs to their bedroom. His feet were heavy and his mind was somewhere else, but he knew that this was what someone did after they proposed marriage. He’d seen it in movies. Now they were supposed to be passionate, and he was supposed to feel complete. There was a hollow feeling inside of him, but he pushed it away. He kissed her back into the mattress of their bed. He removed her clothes and slipped the ring on her finger.

He then slipped inside her and hid his face in her neck, trying to figure out what was going on inside him. They moved together, and his hands smoothed down her back. She clenched tight around him, and he closed his eyes, trying and failing to get Mason out of his head.

When Ben woke up, he felt hung over, and he wasn’t sure why. The bed was empty. Genevieve had gone off to work hours earlier.

It was nearly ten in the morning, and he didn’t care if he was going to be late to work. Fuck, he already was late. By hours.

A nauseated feeling washed over him as he stood. He was engaged. Engaged to be married. To Genevieve. God, how was he going to break this to Lucas? Lucas wouldn’t be pissed, not for long anyway, but he’d still give Ben some guff.

Had proposing been the right thing? Ben was starting to wonder. He stumbled into the bathroom and stared at himself in the mirror. He looked like a complete wreck. There were dark circles under his eyes and his hair was everywhere.

“Nglock,” he managed, clearing his throat and leaning forward. God, were those wrinkles on his face? Was he an old man at the tender age of twenty-five? Upon closer inspection, he realized that they were lines from his pillow. “Fgulah...”

He padded into the bedroom, rubbing at his face, and nearly tripped over a pair of shoes when a loud rapping rang out from the downstairs.

“Ugh,” he groaned. He could only imagine it was Lucas, ready to scold him for missing the company meeting that morning. He leaned down and picked up his trousers from the previous evening. As he stepped into them, he felt all the emotion from the night before, and his head ached. He shook it off and headed down the stairs. The loud knocking continued, and he sighed, shoving his hand in his pocket as he crossed the living room. “I’m coming!” he called.

Inside his pocket, he felt something balled up, like a piece of paper, or maybe a receipt. He stopped in front of the door and pulled out the paper.

It was a receipt. He squinted down at it and his eyes widened.

“What the fuck...” There was another loud knock on the door. “Just a second!” he yelled.

In his hand was a receipt for The Cupid’s Bow, a Las Vegas walk-in wedding chapel. The charge was \$299, for the “Lover’s Package”. He gaped at the names at the bottom of the receipt: Benjamin Bell and Mason Hadley-Bell.

The knocking grew louder, more insistent, and Ben’s mouth hung open wide. “No fucking way,” he said, feeling dizzy. “No fucking way.” One more knock, and in the middle of Ben’s mental breakdown, he threw open the door, ready to strangle Lucas.

Except Lucas wasn’t standing in the doorway.

It was Mason, his lawfully wedded husband, dressed to kill in leather.

“Hey, stud,” Mason said. The bartender’s suitcases dropped to the floor, and so did Ben.

CHAPTER THREE

When Ben came to, he found himself propped against the wall, and there was a beautiful, black-haired man fanning him with a newspaper.

“Oh good, you’re not dead,” the man said, stopping his fanning. “I thought maybe... I don’t know. I killed you or something.”

Ben’s eyes widened. It was Mason, it was really Mason. He was in New York City, in Ben’s penthouse apartment. Wearing knee-high leather boots, sinfully tight jeans, an even tighter black top, and he had dark, smoky eyes.

“You,” was all Ben could manage to croak. He blinked and then looked down at his hands. He was still clutching the wedding receipt. He couldn’t seem to let go of it; his fingers were locked. “Ungh...”

“Are you okay?” Mason asked, leaning in close.

Ben still couldn’t speak. He only nodded and then started to shake his head. He wheezed once and waved his other hand in front of him, clearing his throat. “Hyock... Hehn... What are you... Why are... how did you... come when... Find me?”

Mason laughed softly and leaned back on his haunches, folding his arms across his chest. A sliver of skin was exposed; a pale hip and a bit of tummy, and Ben remembered licking that very spot.

“We’re hitched, why wouldn’t I come find you?” Mason asked. “Shit, you really are loaded, aren’t you?” Mason craned his neck to look around the penthouse, whistling as he did so.

“I... um... was I expecting you?” Ben asked. Mason made a face, and Ben sat up a little more. “Listen, I don’t even know you.”

“Yeah you do, in the biblical sense, at least,” Mason cracked. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Ben shook his head and then shook it again. “I only found out now about... what happened.” He held the receipt up to Mason. “And you-- you can’t be here! I have a life and a girlfriend and--”

“Ah, so you really are straight,” Mason said smoothly. “You didn’t fuck like you were straight.”

“What are you doing here?” Ben boomed, finally finding his voice. “How did you find my address? When did you get here? Who told you where to find me, what--”

“Stop yelling,” Mason whined. He covered his ears and pouted. “I didn’t do anything wrong. I didn’t stalk you.”

“Oh fuck, you stalked me?” Ben’s jaw dropped.

“I just said I didn’t! Jesus fucking Christ,” Mason snapped, standing. Ben gazed up at the man. He was taller than Ben remembered, decadently slender, and his legs were sky high. Mason put a hand on his hip and scowled. “It doesn’t even matter. You’re the one who proposed to me. I told you it was a bad idea, but--”

“Oh, no,” Ben moaned, head in his hands. “I... This... That was such a mistake, I don’t even... God, I do some dumb shit when I’m drunk. Is this even legal? When did they legalize gay marriage in Nevada?”

“Dumb shit?” Now Mason looked hurt. He crouched down again. “And what do you mean? Don’t you watch the news? They legalized it months ago, back in 2012. Besides, you wanted to marry me. I said it was a bad idea, that we didn’t even know each other, and all you said was, ‘Fuck, it’s better that way!’”

Ben felt ill and slid down the wall even further. He stared at the receipt. “I mean, is this even real? Who has a receipt for their wedding?”

“Almost everyone in Vegas,” Mason said. “Trust me, I’ve been best man at like five of those weddings.”

Ben groaned. “So... this is real, then?”

Mason nodded. “Yeah.”

“Fuck.” Ben looked at Mason then, really, really looked at him and shivered. Mason was prettier than Ben remembered, his legs were longer, his eyes were brighter, and his lips were redder. Mason in Technicolor-- it could fucking ruin a man. Ben grunted and forced himself to stand, Mason standing with him. Ben was shorter than Mason by a few inches, and he shook a little as the man looked down at him.

He was so pretty it was intimidating.

“You can’t be here,” Ben said, miserable. “You have to know this was a mistake, what we did, you coming here...”

Mason sighed and looked down at the floor, at his suitcases. “You’re taking it better than I thought you would,” he said. “Though I did think you’d remember, at least. Sure, I thought you’d call it off, but...”

“But what?”

Mason smiled, a brilliant, toothy grin, and stepped close to Ben, eyes sparkling. “I thought we could have some fun, regardless.” His fingers tickled down Ben’s arms and grabbed Ben’s hands. His smooth nails dug into Ben’s palms. “But now that I know you’re straight, with a girlfriend no less, I’m going to have to be hard on you, Benny.”

The way Mason looked at him made Ben’s heart jump up into his throat. “What -- “

“I have nowhere to go,” Mason said. He let go of Ben’s hands and took a step back. His eyes were no less intense, though. “I’m staying here.”

“What? You can’t -- “

“I take it you don’t want your little girlfriend to know you fucked and married some random guy, do you?” Mason asked.

“Are you blackmailing me?” Mason was one beautiful little bitch, Ben decided.

“Yes,” Mason said, not ashamed.

“I can get an annulment,” Ben said bluntly. “You can’t do this to me.”

“An annulment takes two people,” Mason said. “As does a divorce. And... I think I want to stay married to you, even though you do kind of treat me like shit.” He frowned. “I didn’t want to have to blackmail you, but because you’re straight and attached, it’s the only route. Like I said, I have nowhere else to go.”

“Didn’t you have some life back in Las Vegas?” Ben asked, paling.

“Not anymore,” Mason said. “Word gets around pretty fast, you know. My boyfriend wasn’t too happy that I fucked around on him. He kicked me out.”

“Don’t you have friends you can stay with?” Ben asked. “Anyone?”

Mason laughed and took a step forward, tugging lightly on Ben’s hair. “You’re my friend, aren’t you?”

Ben gulped. He was fucked, so very, very fucked. Ben wanted to toss Mason out on his ass, and at the same time he also wanted to fuck Mason’s ass. It was all very confusing. And if Genevieve found out...

“Your job...” Ben tried.

“Boyfriend owns the club,” Mason said. “No one’s going to hire me, he’s very... far reaching, if you catch my meaning. And there’s no way I’m going back to dancing, at least not in Las Vegas.”

“Dancing?” Ben felt faint again, and he put a hand against the wall. “You dance?”

Mason nodded. “I need to find a job, then I’ll be out of your life. Well, I’ll be out of your apartment,” he added.

“No,” Ben said firmly. “I can’t have you here. What the fuck am I going to tell my girlfriend? She lives with me, you know. And after you leave, what happens to our marriage?” He could barely say the word, it tasted bitter on his tongue.

“Well, it’s not my responsibility to figure out what you should tell your girlfriend. Maybe you shouldn’t have fucked me or asked me to marry you,” Mason said, a tart hint to his voice.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck... You can’t do this to me!” Ben said, his neck feeling hot.

“I don’t see why not,” Mason said. “What are you going to do about it? You kick me out, I’ll tell all.”

Ben rubbed at his eyes, groaning at the thought of giving in to Mason. “So, all you want is a place to stay until you find a job?” Mason nodded. “So, any job, and then you’re out of here? And you don’t tell anyone?”

“Yes, well, I don’t know. I don’t want just any stupid job. I’m a classically trained dancer, and this is New York City,” Mason said. “I want to audition to be a professional dancer on Broadway or something.”

Ben snorted. “I’m fucked! I’m fucked. Do you know how competitive New York is for dancing?”

“That’s the plan, anyway,” Mason said breezily.

“So,” Ben said, trying to hold onto his sanity. “You get a job as a Rockette and then we can annul this thing?”

Mason rolled his eyes. “I guess. Look, I’m not wild about this marriage thing either. I’m only nineteen--”

“What?” screeched Ben. “But you... but you’re a bartender! Don’t you have to be twenty-one to be a bartender?”

“I was fucking the club owner, of course he’d let me bartend. Whatever. I mean, you’re what, thirty?”

Ben was really starting to dislike this kid. “Twenty-five.”

“Oh,” Mason looked flushed, and it took Ben by surprise.

“Do I look thirty?” Ben asked. Mason cocked his head to the side and studied Ben.

“No,” he finally said. “The last time I saw you I wasn’t exactly sober, though I wasn’t nearly as trashed as you were. Do you remember anything?”

Now Ben was flushing.

“Oh,” Mason said, laughing. “I see what you remember. Sure you’re straight?”

Ben scowled at that. “Yes, and you’re hardly masculine, so...”

“Yeah, that’s what they all say,” Mason said. “I’ve gotta stop fucking straight guys, I guess.”

There was an uncomfortable beat of silence between them, and Ben realized the door was still wide open and Mason’s suitcases were out in the hallway.

“Are you really staying here?” Ben asked. “There’s nothing I can do to change your mind?”

Mason shook his head. “Nope.” Ben sighed and hauled the suitcases in before closing the door. “You know, I’ve always dreamed of coming to New York.”

“I know,” Ben said, setting down the suitcases. “I mean, I remember you telling me that. You were a lot nicer before, you know.”

“I wasn’t, you were just drunker,” Mason said. “I really didn’t want to have to come here and force you into this, I hope you know. I may be kind of a bitch, but I’m not that bad. I thought you’d at least be excited to get into my pants again.”

Ben scoffed. “You wanted to trade sex for a place to stay?”

“I was only with my last boyfriend for the job,” Mason said, shrugging. “Now, where am I staying?”

“Could I put you up in a nice hotel?” Ben asked. “You won’t have to pay for a thing.”

“You want to send me all alone into the big city?” Mason pouted, looking smaller, and Ben felt like an asshole immediately. Which was hilarious, given the circumstances. “You’d do that?”

Ben didn’t really know anything anymore. “I guess you’ll stay in the guest room.”

Mason smiled. “Oh, that sounds nice.”

“Sure.” Ben shoved his hands in his pockets, feeling awkward. He was standing with the nineteen year old boy he was married to. It didn’t get much weirder than that. “You’d have your own space at a hotel, you know.”

“I’d rather live in your space,” Mason said. And Ben’s belly swirled, because what an adorable answer that was. How could he argue with Mason? He didn’t exactly dislike the younger man. In other circumstances that didn’t involve being blackmailed, he’d have loved to be great friends with Mason.

“All right,” Ben said. “All right, fine, fine. The guest room is yours, but only until you find your little dancing job.”

“Oh, fine,” Mason huffed, but there was a trace of a smile on his face. Ben bent over to pick up one of Mason’s suitcases and his white leather shoulder bag. He caught a glimpse inside the bag and spotted half of a picture. It was a photo of Ben, grinning brilliantly, his face squished right up against what appeared to be Mason’s face. Ben stared at it, before Mason cleared his throat. “Ben?”

“Sorry,” Ben mumbled. He looked up, blinking. “Sorry, I’m... pretty overwhelmed.”

“I know, I’m sorry--” Mason started to say, when the front door swung open and Genevieve walked in.

“Benjamin, I didn’t think you’d still be home! I wanted to come see you before I went off to lunch with my old mentor,” Genevieve said, dropping her keys on the table. “I’ve been so happy all day, you...”

Genevieve saw Mason and stared, wide eyed. Ben felt like he might be sick.

“Who is this?” Genevieve asked, looking from Mason to Ben.

“Oh,” Ben said. He cleared his throat. “This is... this is... Mason.”

“Mason,” she said. “And Mason is?”

Ben could feel himself begin to sweat. He hated all the lying he’d done lately, he hated the pressure it’d put right behind his eyes. “Mason is my, um, he’s my--”

“Brother,” Mason said, smiling sweetly. “I’m Ben’s little brother.”

“Brother?” Genevieve’s eyes widened. “You have another brother and you didn’t tell me? I’ve only ever met Greg!”

Ben tried to look sheepish when he actually felt terrified. He gave Mason a quick glare and then laughed shakily. “I uh...”

“It’s my fault, really,” Mason interrupted. “I was always sort of the black sheep of the family, you see. I dropped out of school and ran off to Vegas, did some stuff I’m not proud of. But Ben here, he’s taking me in.”

“You are?” Genevieve asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am,” Ben said.

“I was disowned by the entire family,” Mason said, a bit too dramatically. “But Ben saw past that all, didn’t you?” Ben nodded, and Mason went on. “He’s given me another chance.” Mason wrapped an arm around Ben’s shoulder and squeezed. Mason smelled like cinnamon, and Ben wanted to shove his face into Mason’s neck and lick the smooth skin.

Not very brotherly.

“That’s very sweet of you,” Genevieve said, looking at the two. “You know, I do see the family resemblance now.”

“We have each other’s eyes,” Mason said, and that was the lie of the century. Ben’s eyes were dark brown, and Mason’s eyes were a bright blue.

“Are you wearing makeup?” Genevieve asked, leaning forward and squinting at Mason. “On your eyes, I mean.”

“Ah, yes, like I said, I was always the black sheep of the family,” Mason said, sighing theatrically.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Genevieve said, laughing. “Your brother Greg always has better nails than me. Maybe you fit in more than you think! Better than Benjamin here. I got the only straight one in the family, it seems. Lucky me.”

Mason shot her a look, and Ben gulped. “Lucky you. Don’t worry about me staying too long, though.”

“Yes, um, Mason is looking for work,” Ben said. “He’ll be staying with us until he can find a job. Is that all right?”

Genevieve sighed, looking between the two again. Mason pulled Ben closer, their cheeks smushing together, and Genevieve seemed to melt on the spot. “Of course it’s all right, Ben. I mean, Mason is family and this penthouse is huge. I wish you would have asked me first so we could have planned.”

“He sort of showed up unannounced,” Ben said, trying to push Mason back. But Mason stayed stuck to Ben’s side, sighing breathily against Ben’s neck and causing all sorts of trouble. The sort of trouble that might make itself known if Mason didn’t pull back very soon.

“I did,” Mason said. “But only because Ben made a promise to me,” he added, smirking.

“Do I want to know?” Genevieve asked.

“Nah,” Ben said, shrugging Mason off him. “It’s just something dumb from when we were kids.”

Genevieve’s eyes trailed down to Mason’s boots. “I think you’re wearing my footwear.”

Mason frowned. “Huh?”

“Gen’s a designer,” Ben explained. “She has her own label. She makes clothes.”

“I design clothing and footwear. I don’t make them. You make me sound so common, Benjamin,” Genevieve said, rolling her eyes and stepping up to Mason. “God, he doesn’t know anything, does he? And yes, you’re wearing last year’s suede, knee high boots. I designed them myself, for my label, La Brilliant Etoile.”

“Really?” Mason gaped. “These are my favorite boots! You designed these? Oh, my god! I wear them all the time, ever since I bought them in Hollywood last year when I was on vacation with my boyfriend. You’re an amazing designer, really. So classy. And these boots practically paid for themselves in tips alone.”

Genevieve grinned. “Oh, I can’t believe you’re related to my Benjamin. He has no taste whatsoever.”

“I know, Benny never had much taste in anything,” Mason said sweetly. “Clothes or women.”

Ben cleared his throat loudly. “All right, Mason, I’ll help you to your room.”

“Ben, wait a minute,” Genevieve said, smiling at Mason and not realizing he’d insulted her. “Have you told your brother the news?”

“What news?” Ben asked dumbly.

“The news, hello,” Genevieve said, holding up her hand, flashing the engagement ring.

Bile rose quickly in Ben’s throat. “No! I didn’t, no, it’s – he doesn’t need to know, he’s had such a long, um, journey.”

“Don’t be stupid, Ben,” Genevieve said. She turned to Mason. “Last night, your big brother proposed to me. Isn’t that sweet?”

Mason’s smile looked broken, or maybe it was the way he was grinding his teeth. Ben didn’t know why, but now he felt like he’d cheated on Mason, which was crazy because he barely even knew the kid.

Genevieve giggled and pulled Ben into a cozy embrace. “That’s right, we’re getting married,” Ben said stiffly, trying to smile at Mason.

Mason’s smile hardened. “You move quick.”

“Oh, sweetie, we’ve been going out for two years,” Genevieve said, laughing a bit shrilly. She shoved Ben playfully. “You really haven’t told him much, have you?” Ben wanted to gag at the tone in her voice, sugary sweet and fake. She only adopted the tone around clients and other designers she loved to hate.

And now she was doing it around Ben’s brother. Or who she thought was Ben’s brother.

“Let me see that ring, sweetie,” Mason said, voice tightening. Genevieve grinned and held out her hand, displaying the rather impressive rock. Mason did a double take at it, and Genevieve looked pleased.

“Now let’s show you to the guest room,” she said, turning and heading up the stairs.

Mason whirled around and poked Ben in the chest. “You’re getting married?” he hissed, not paying Genevieve any mind. She was babbling about the guest room and neither man was listening.

“It’s none of your business. If you remember, I don’t even know you,” Ben retorted.

“It doesn’t matter, it’s tacky,” Mason said. “I thought you were better than that.”

“How can you think anything about me at all?” Ben shot back, this time louder.

“Sweetheart?” Genevieve called from the steps. “Are you two coming?”

“One moment,” Ben said, turning back to Mason. “Are you going to play nice or not?” he asked.

Mason frowned, stomping his foot. “She’s rather patronizing, you know,” was all he said.

“That doesn’t really affect you in any way, now does it?”

“It does. I’ll be living with you both,” Mason said.

“And whose fault is that?”

Mason rolled his eyes. “Don’t forget you shoved your dick in my ass and got me into this mess.”

Ben hissed back, “You didn’t seem to mind, from what I remember!”

“If you remembered more,” Mason said slowly, “you’d remember that you said you loved me.” Ben snorted. “You did. You said you wanted to show me the world.”

“I remember that part,” Ben said. “But even that drunk, I doubt I told you I loved you. It took me ten years to tell my own mother I love her. I don’t throw that word around. Now let’s go before she comes back down here, okay?”

Mason stayed rooted in place. “I don’t care if she comes back down here. Why are you marrying her?”

“What’s it to you?” Ben asked, slightly angry. “Besides, you were just gushing over her clothing designs. What do you have against her?”

Mason sighed. “Never mind... Maybe I should go to a hotel.”

“No, you’re staying here.”

“Oh, you do care,” Mason said dryly. “You’d better be nice to me, because if I don’t agree to this annulment, then you can’t marry her. And then she’ll know everything.” With that, he stomped ahead of Ben and went up the stairs.

Ben was left standing at the bottom of the staircase with Mason’s suitcase and shoulder bag. He curiously stole another look inside the bag, pulling out the photo he’d seen earlier. Sure enough, it was a picture of Mason and him. They were standing in front of the miniature Eiffel Tower, faces squished together, looking so happy. Ben couldn’t actually remember being that happy in a long time.

He shook his head and put the photo back in the bag. He figured he’d better get upstairs before Mason could say anything insane to Genevieve.

CHAPTER FOUR

Later that evening, Ben knocked on the door warily, and the door creaked open under the weight of his hands.

He looked into the room to find Mason in a very tiny pair of cotton shorts and a thin t-shirt. He had his hands on the large windowpane, supporting himself as he gracefully lifted his leg up past his head.

Ben coughed, and Mason fell out of his pose, turning and blushing. "Hey," Ben said. "You're still awake?"

Mason smoothed his hands down his body, and Ben tried to look away, but his eyes were glued to the small sliver of skin exposed at Mason's hip.

"I'm practicing," Mason said.

"Oh." Ben looked at the floor, back to Mason's hip, and then at the floor again.

"I told you I was classically trained in ballet," Mason said. "Did you think I was lying, or are you surprised that I'm that good?"

"I don't know," Ben muttered. He looked up again, and Mason caught his gaze. "Do you think you're good enough to get a job out here?"

"It's always been my dream to work on Broadway or be part of the ABC," Mason said. "If I can do it... I don't know. I haven't danced in over a year."

"I remember you dancing," Ben said, his face reddening. "On the bar."

"That wasn't dancing," Mason said quickly. "And I won't settle for it again."

"Great," Ben said. "So, how long do you think you'll be staying?"

Mason didn't respond, but crossed the room to Ben, hips swaying. He got too close for comfort and put delicate hands on Ben's shoulders. Ben wanted to ask what he was doing, wanted to push him back and run to Genevieve who was waiting in their bedroom, but once again he seemed to make the wrong decision.

Mason braced himself against Ben and lifted his leg up to Ben's hip. His leg curled and brushed the small of Ben's back. They were both breathing raggedly, and Ben felt a burning heat low in his belly. Mason let out a long breath and lifted his leg up above both their heads and then released, taking a step back.

"That..." Ben wiped at his forehead, feeling the sweat form there. "That wasn't an answer."

Mason laughed and sat down on the bed, his shorts riding further up his thighs. His skin was milky white and smooth, and Ben knew exactly how it tasted. "I think you answered the question about how long you'd let me stay," Mason said.

Ben raised an eyebrow, and Mason motioned to Ben's crotch. They both blushed; Ben was noticeably hard.

"Fuck."

"Sure you're straight?" Mason asked.

"Good night, Mason," Ben said, turning to leave. He stopped and looked over his shoulder. "Job hunting tomorrow. I cut out some auditions from the Times for you. They're on the kitchen table."

Mason smiled and began to stretch on the bed. "How sweet of you. Tell Jessica I said goodnight. I'm sure she'll be happy to see you," he added, winking.

Ben groaned, not bothering to correct Mason, and walked down the hall to his bedroom. He still couldn't believe it; Mason was there, in his house, doing stretches and other sinful things only a room away. He was also giving Ben record erections. Ben wondered if he should take care of it before going to his room.

"Ben? Ben?"

Ben snapped around and heard Genevieve's voice calling for him. He was trapped in limbo, standing in the hall between two rooms. In one room was his fiancée. In the other was the person he was married to. "Oh, my god," Ben mumbled. It was a fucking nightmare, and he didn't really want to be in either place.

Though he wouldn't have minded going back to the guest room and watching Mason stretch.

"Benjamin, are you coming to bed?" called Genevieve.

As Ben walked to his bedroom, he heard Mason snicker. Ben slipped into his room, blushing, and shut the door behind him.

"There you are," Genevieve said, smiling. She was in bed, wearing a black silk nighty. Ben raised an eyebrow. She hadn't dressed up for him in a long while. "I was wondering where you'd gone, but then I remembered you were probably catching up with your... Oh," she mumbled, eyes wide. She stared at Ben's groin area, her cheeks pink.

Ben was actually embarrassed. He was embarrassed about having an erection in front of his fiancée. "Uh... I missed you," he said lamely, hanging back by the door.

Genevieve smiled hesitantly and turned the bed down next to her. "Well... come here, then."

Ben did, and when he came, pressed up against his fiancée, he barely resisted moaning Mason's name.

“What do you mean you’re going to Paris tonight?” Ben asked, dropping his toast right into his coffee. It wasn’t even eight in the morning, and his impeccably dressed fiancée was almost out the door.

“I told you I was going,” she said. “And I know you wanted to come, but now with your brother here...”

Ben paled. Genevieve was going to Paris. Ben was going to be alone with Mason. Alone. With. Mason. He had conflicting emotions about the situation. With Genevieve gone he wouldn’t have to worry about letting any of his secrets slip.

He wouldn’t have to worry about Mason slipping up.

But being alone with Mason also meant...

“Being alone with Mason,” Ben muttered.

“Did you say something, sweetheart?” Genevieve asked, fluffing her hair and adjusting the seams of her stockings.

“I’ll miss you,” Ben said.

“Oh, that’s sweet,” Genevieve replied, smiling. “I’ll bring you some other time, when I’m not running around like a madwoman at fashion week.”

“Don’t max out the credit cards,” Ben warned. “Again.”

Genevieve laughed. “I’ll use your father’s credit cards. He never seems to mind.”

“Speaking of my father,” Ben said. “Um, if you talk to him, don’t mention anything about Mason being here. They didn’t part on the best of terms, and it would be bad if he knew the kid was back in town.”

“Oh, I promise,” Genevieve said.

They both heard a loud yawn and turned their heads to the staircase. Mason was walking down, scratching at his exposed belly. He was wearing loose pajama pants slung low on his hips, the tiniest t-shirt imaginable, and his hair was sticking out adorably. He smiled sleepily at the two and waved, wrinkling his nose.

“Do I smell cereal?” Mason said, shuffling into the kitchen.

Ben’s mouth dropped open. Mason’s pants were so low he could almost see everything.

“Good morning,” Mason added.

Genevieve gave Mason a tight smile. “Hey, hon.”

“Hi, dear,” Mason replied, sliding into a chair next to Ben.

“Sleep well?” Genevieve’s smile tightened more. It seemed Genevieve finally understood that Mason had been mocking her the night before. Ben had sworn to her that it was just the way Mason was. He hadn’t meant any harm (that she knew of, anyway), but apparently Genevieve was now offended. And the last time someone had offended her, she’d spilled wine all over their vintage Chanel. It didn’t help matters that it was a colleague of Ben’s at his company Christmas party.

“Oh, you know.”

“Mhm,” Genevieve said briskly. She turned to Ben and her smile warmed. “Well, I’ve got to get going. I probably won’t see you before I leave, you know how those transcontinental flights are.”

“But Gen,” Ben protested.

“Oh, are you leaving somewhere?” Mason asked.

“Yes, I’m going to Paris for fashion week,” Genevieve said.

“I’ll take good care of him for you,” Mason said. His voice was sickeningly sweet. “Don’t even worry.”

Genevieve gave a forced laugh. “I’m sure. I’ve got to go gather a few more things. I’ll be right back.”

Ben shot Mason a glare as his fiancée left the room. “Aren’t you a sweet kitten?” he grumbled.

“You know I am,” Mason replied. “And you’ll treat me like one to get what you want.”

Ben sighed. “You have no idea what I want.”

“Yeah, I do,” Mason said softly. “I know what you need, too. God, I heard you fucking your girlfriend last night. I’ll tell you one thing... I can do that better than she can. And you know it, too.”

Ben turned bright red. “Are you fucking with me?”

Mason smiled and got out of his chair, moving closer to Ben. He slid into Ben’s lap and caressed his shoulder once, sending shivers down Ben’s body.

“Come on, you remember,” Mason whispered. “Five times in one night. Those were my best fucks. It was a really good honeymoon.”

Ben’s stomach swirled in frustrated arousal. He loved having Mason in his lap, almost as much as he loved the thought of slapping the smirk right off Mason’s face. Instead, Ben gripped Mason’s hips and pulled the raven haired dancer forward, their bellies bumping.

“We could stay married and do that every night for the rest of your life,” Mason said lowly. “What do you think? It’s either that, or... ‘Ooh, Gen... Ohhh... Oh, I’m so close, Oh,

Mason...I mean, Gen!” He laughed wickedly as he thrust his hips forward and faked a rather noisy orgasm.

Ben blushed hotly, feeling himself harden. “Get off,” he hissed.

“I did! Last night, that was so hot, Benny,” Mason said. “I mean, it could’ve been. With me.”

Ben was about to reply when Genevieve swung back into the room and gasped. Mason was on Ben’s lap, straddling his waist.

“Um,” she said, looking at them. There was an awkward, uncomfortable feel to the room.

Ben glanced up, horrified. He looked from Genevieve to Mason, swallowing hard.

“What’s going on?” Genevieve asked in a high pitched squeak.

“We used to be really close,” Mason said smoothly, sliding out of Ben’s lap.

“Yeah, really, really close,” Ben added.

Genevieve smiled weakly. “That’s... nice. Well, I’m off. Will I be seeing you when I return, Mason?”

Mason grinned, plopping down in a seat and picking up a box of Cornflakes. “That depends,” Mason said. “I mean, Benny did say I could stay as long as it takes... didn’t you, Benny?”

“Uh. Yeah,” Ben said.

“Well,” she said, her smile faltering. “Good luck with your job hunt.” She gave Ben a dry kiss on the forehead and waved goodbye, her heels clacking all the way out the door.

Mason shoved his hand into the box of cereal, and Ben glared at him. “What?”

“Do you have to be such a bitch?” Ben asked.

“Yes,” Mason said, eating the cereal out of his hand. Ben sighed and shoved an empty bowl his way. “She hasn’t been very nice to me, you know. And why’s that? I’m just your brother. I dunno, maybe she has a thing against incest?”

Ben stared at Mason picking cornflakes out of the palm of his hand and fussing over each bite and decided that if Mason actually was his brother, he’d have committed incest years ago. Without regret. Send him to jail and have a nice day.

“Ugh,” was all Ben said. “You’re unbelievable.”

The floorboards creaked and both men looked up as Lucas stumbled into the kitchen, looking ruffled and pissed off. He was muttering to himself, glancing over his shoulder toward the front door. “What the fuck, all I said was ‘have a nice life’,” he muttered.

Ben was mildly relieved to see his best friend. “Lucas, what are you doing here?”

“I came to see you ‘cause you skipped work yesterday! Thought you died or something. Then I ran into the Ice Queen and she bitched at me and then purposely, I swear to fucking god, purposely stepped on my foot with those witch heels,” Lucas said angrily. “And...” He finally saw Mason sitting at the table. “Oh... my god.”

“Oh, I remember you,” Mason said pleasantly. “You fucked Laura. So you hate Ben’s fiancée, too?”

“Yeah, Laura, I...” Lucas’ eyes widened. “Your fuckin’ fiancée? Genevieve? Really?”

Ben held up his hands. “You guys don’t even know her!”

“You’re marrying that woman?”

“Only after he divorces me,” Mason snickered.

Lucas’ eyes got even wider. “Wait, what the fuck?”

“He’s lying,” Ben said quickly, standing.

“Then why is he here?” Lucas asked. He looked from Ben to Mason. Ben went red, and Mason shrugged.

“Yeah, why am I here, Benny?” Mason asked sweetly.

“Benny?” Lucas stared at Ben, and Ben didn’t say a word. “Someone tell me what the hell’s going on around here!”

Ben groaned. “First off.” He turned to Mason. “Stop calling me Benny. And secondly... yeah, we’re married.”

“Why the hell are you married?” Lucas asked, yelling now. “I mean, I know he’s fucking hot, but--”

“Thank you,” Mason said, smiling. He shoveled some more cereal into his mouth.

“He’s blackmailing me,” Ben said.

“I didn’t blackmail you into fucking my brains out, now did I?” Mason asked. “You did that without any sort of prompting on my part.”

“He’s got you there,” Lucas said.

“Whose side are you on, anyway?” Ben boomed.

“Mason’s, because he didn’t just stab my toes off with his obnoxious high heels,” Lucas replied. “Now, back up. You two are married? And you,” he said, nodding at Ben. “Engaged? What the fuck?”

“I have to sit down,” Ben moaned, and Mason stood up and guided Ben to his chair. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Benny.”

Ben heaved a sigh.

Lucas frowned. “Is this why... Is this why Laura asked me for your address, Ben? She told me she wanted to send you a bottle of Cristal in the mail as a thank you.” A smile started to spread across Lucas’ face. “But actually... But actually she wanted to know it so she could tell Mason his new address!”

Mason let out a giggle, and Lucas hooted, slapping the table, laughing. Ben stared at the two, shaking his head.

“You both are insane,” he said. “Fucking mad.”

“If he gives you trouble, any trouble at all, you call me,” Lucas said to Mason.

Mason nodded. “Thanks. I think I can handle him, though. And we’re about to spend a whole week alone together.”

Ben swore. “Don’t fucking remind me,” he said. He looked up at Lucas. “So, you don’t care that I’m being blackmailed, do you?”

“He’s blackmailing you for a good cause,” Lucas said. “He tells on you and Genevieve is out of the picture. You’re like a hero to me now, man,” he said to Mason.

Mason grinned and kicked his legs out, bumping Ben in the shin. Ben blushed, and Lucas smirked.

“You two are like an old married couple already,” Lucas joked.

Mason laughed and kicked Ben again. “Stop it,” Ben said.

Mason kicked him twice more, this time a little too close to his groin area. “Make me, big brother.”

Lucas raised an eyebrow, and Ben wanted to disappear. “Gen thinks we’re brothers.”

“God, this gets better and better,” Lucas said, grinning wide.

Mason lifted his leg and slid it on Ben’s lap, under the table. Ben glared back, but Mason smiled and wiggled his foot right on Ben’s groin.

“Hey--uhh,” Ben groaned, pushing himself back in the chair. “No more kicking or you’re grounded.”

“You can’t ground me!” Mason gasped.

Lucas rolled his eyes. “Well, I just swung by to see what was up. I didn’t expect to find that everything I ever knew was wrong. Are you coming into work, Ben? Your dad has been asking where you’ve been, said you don’t call him enough, and I’ve been trying to cover for you, but my Golden Boy status only goes so far.”

“Your dad?” Mason asked.

“We work at Ben’s father’s architecture firm,” Lucas said. “You should come meet him.”

“No,” Ben said firmly, standing. “Lucas, I will see you at work. Mason, you have some auditions to get ready for. Now I’ve got to take a shower, so if you guys will excuse me.”

Mason stayed quiet, looking small in his seat, and Lucas walked toward the front door.

“All right, see you later,” Lucas said vaguely. “Seriously, Mason, he gives you an ounce of trouble, let me know.”

“Bye,” Mason said, waving. When Lucas left, Ben let out a shaky sigh. “God, what’s wrong with you?”

“I’m going to shower,” Ben repeated. “And then I am going to work. I’m off at five. Don’t come back before then because I don’t have an extra key. If you go out, you stay out.”

“Fine,” Mason said.

“Okay.” Ben stared at him for another moment and then turned to head upstairs. He needed to shower, get dressed, and get on with his life. He couldn’t let this Mason thing trip him up. And the fact that he was going to have to spend a week alone with Mason? What did it even matter? Ben could control himself; he could harness his carnal needs.

He stepped into the shower, trying to ignore the raging hard-on he was sporting. Ben hadn’t felt so sexually charged in years. Mason was amazing for his libido, for better or worse. At least Ben was finding out that he was still a hot blooded male.

He stared into the stream of water and let it scald him a bit. He needed to wake up, to shake out of it. He needed to look forward and plan his life with Genevieve. He needed...

“Benny?”

“Fuck!” Ben cursed. He squinted through the opaque shower door and saw Mason’s outline standing in the bathroom. “What the fuck are you doing in here?”

“I need a shower, too, and I don’t know where to take one.”

“There’s a shower off the living room,” Ben barked.

“But there wasn’t any conditioner down there,” Mason whined.

Ben shoved his face under the spray and tried his best not to push open the shower door and strangle Mason. It would be a bad idea, especially considering the fact that he’d most likely

screw Mason instead of strangle him.

“My hair needs to be conditioned,” Mason continued. “Especially if I’m going on auditions. I can’t go with dull, dry hair, can I?”

“I don’t know,” Ben said.

“You don’t need conditioner with your ratty hair,” Mason said. “Give me yours.”

Ben realized that was probably the solution, and he even grabbed at the conditioner to hand it over to Mason, but Mason obviously had other ideas. He pulled open the glass shower door and stared at Ben.

Ben squeaked, dropping the conditioner and covering his groin. He was still half hard, and Mason smiled lecherously at him.

“You’ll have to do a better job than that,” Mason said, batting his eyelashes and staring at Ben’s groin area. Ben looked down and was mortified that despite his efforts his hard on was still clearly visible. “As much as I’d like to take you down a peg...” Mason’s eyes widened as Ben cock hardened further under his gaze. “I really can’t with that thing staring me down.”

Ben sputtered, getting a mouthful of water.

Mason leaned against the shower door, eyes dark. “Can I join you?”

Ben sputtered some more.

“I didn’t really come in here for conditioner, you know. My hair has natural luster.” Mason licked at his lips. “You may be an uptight, snobbish jerkoff with a frigid fiancée and really hideous furniture, but you have one hell of a nice cock.”

Ben could only sputter so much. He let go of his crotch and slammed the glass door shut. Mason laughed and pressed his fingers up against the glass.

“It’s okay to want me, Benny,” Mason said. “And I don’t even mind that you cheated on me with your fiancée.”

“Go away!” Ben managed, not really meaning it, but really wanting to mean it.

“I’m serious. Can I join you? I’m scared of your big penthouse,” Mason said. “It won’t even take long. Unless you make it take long. In which case, judging from your cock right now, even that won’t take very long.”

Ben groaned. “Get your ass out of here.”

Mason shuffled out of the bathroom without another word, and Ben breathed a sigh of relief.

And then, with just a few tugs and strokes on his dick, he came harder and quicker than he’d ever made himself before.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ben came home after a long day of work and sighed as he fit the key in his door. Being at work had been good for him. He'd needed to get away from home, from engagement and marriage and Mason. Ben had bullshitted in his office all morning and then gone out to lunch with Lucas, filling him in on the full story.

Well, he'd left out a few choice bits, such as Mason's side of things.

When he opened the door, he was greeted with the sound of his plasma TV and canned audience laughter. He walked into the living room and found Mason lounging on the spotless, white sofa with a massive bowl of ice cream. He was watching Oprah, surrounded by snacks.

"Hi," Mason said, not even looking up when Ben walked in. Ben gaped at the scene, but mostly at Mason's outfit. Mason was wearing sinfully tight jeans that were ripped in all the wrong (yet right) places and another tiny t-shirt and leather suspenders. His hair had been flat ironed straight, and he was wearing the most devastating makeup. His feet were bare, and he was curled up in the corner of the big couch, nearly disappearing between the cushions.

"Hi," Ben replied, too dumbfounded to say anything else. "You... You had auditions until six. It's five-thirty. Why are you here? How are you here?"

"Oh, I didn't go anywhere," Mason said. He leaned forward and set the bowl of ice cream on the coffee table. "It was raining out, and I don't have any money for a cab or the subway."

Ben breathed out, trying not to stare at the bare patch of skin visible right below Mason's ass check. "So you sat around all day."

"Yeah."

"You just... sat around and ate my food and watched TV all day."

"It was so good," Mason said, leaning on the arm of the couch.

"You can't... That's so lazy!"

Mason switched off the TV and turned to face Ben. "Listen, Benny. I've been working my ass off –literally-- for the past four years, trying to make it in this world. I barely ever get days off. I didn't have rich parents, or even nice parents to help me out with school or dance lessons or even something as simple as shelter and food. I knew you'd come home and bitch at me for sitting around all day, so, whatever. I wanted a day off."

Ben's mouth hung open, and he felt guilty. "I'm sorry," he said quietly.

"I'll go to auditions until midnight tomorrow, I swear."

"No, you... You don't have to," Ben said. He set his briefcase portfolio down and sighed.

“I want to,” Mason said. “I need to get back into it sometime.”

Ben nodded and sat at the other end of the sofa. This sofa was the only piece of furniture, barring his bed, that Genevieve hadn’t gotten rid of when she’d moved into the penthouse. All of his other furniture had been deemed too vulgar and was quickly replaced with uncomfortable designer pieces.

Ben had gotten the sofa from his mother as a graduation present before she passed away, and it was the most comfortable piece of furniture in the entire apartment. Ben sunk down into the cushions and looked over at Mason.

Mason stared down into his bowl of ice cream, for once not running his mouth.

“Why’d you stop dancing, anyway?” Ben asked.

Mason looked up in surprise. “There’s no real opportunities in Vegas for me. I’m not a showgirl and I didn’t want to strip... again.”

Ben nodded, a strange feeling in his chest. “There had to be something. Las Vegas is one of the entertainment capitals of the world.”

“Most casting directors only wanted to sleep with me,” Mason said. “Though I was in Celine Dion’s Vegas show ‘A New Day’ for four months.”

“What happened?”

Mason flushed bright red. “I, uh... I stepped on the train of one of her costumes and she had me fired.”

“Just for that?”

“I ripped the entire thing off, she was basically in her panties in front of a couple thousand people,” Mason said. “It was a disaster. And after that no one would hire me, fuck, even if I did sleep with them.”

A sudden wave of sympathy washed over Ben, and he scooted a little closer to Mason. “I’m sorry.”

Mason laughed. “Whatever. It’s nothing. I didn’t want to go back to stripping. I mean, it’s good money, but...” He frowned and picked at his jeans. “I don’t like feeling cheap.” Mason leaned forward a little, and Ben got a very good view of his ass. He scolded himself for looking and stared at the floor.

“That can’t feel very good,” Ben said.

“Anyway, I’ll be out tomorrow,” Mason said. “I need to start somewhere, see where I am.”

“Take your time, really,” Ben said. Mason’s eyes widened. “Well, not too much time. I do need to get married at some point. Well, you know. Again.”

Mason laughed and so did Ben. They both moved closer together.

“This couch is amazing. I napped on it for half the afternoon,” Mason said. He rested his head on the back of the couch and smiled at Ben.

“My mother bought it for me,” Ben said. “My bed, too. They were sort of a set.”

“You should trade beds with me then, the one in the guest room sucks,” Mason said. “I need to be well rested for my auditions, you know.”

Ben nodded. “Yeah, Genevieve bought the guest room bed... You could sleep on the couch out here tonight. I don’t mind.”

“Yeah, okay,” Mason said, snuggling deeper into the cushions. He looked so comfortable there, Ben wondered how long it’d been since Mason felt really comfortable, and then he wondered how Mason could have possibly felt comfortable in this penthouse.

It was sweet as hell, and Ben felt very sweet on Mason. He couldn’t deny it. He only had to resist, that was the tricky part.

“Well, I’m going to order a pizza for myself,” Ben announced.

Mason shrugged. “Okay.”

“Do you want pizza?”

“I’ll have a piece of yours, if you don’t mind.”

“Uh,” Ben said. “I sort of eat an entire pizza by myself, so I’ll order you one, too, if you want.”

Mason laughed. “Yeah, and I’ll be so fat for tomorrow’s auditions.”

“You could use some fat,” Ben said. “You’re so bony and you weigh like an ounce.” He remembered how feather light Mason had felt in his hands, and he blushed.

“Well... If you want to order me a pizza, I’d love it, thanks.” Mason grinned, disappearing even more between the cushions. “I mean, how does it work? What’s yours is mine now, half of it at least. Hey, half of this couch is mine.”

“Huh?”

“We’re married, idiot.”

“Oh, yeah,” Ben mumbled. “Yeah, that’s... Yeah.”

“Sorry,” Mason said quickly. “I won’t talk about it again.”

Ben shook his head. “Nah, it’s fine, it’s my fault.” He felt sad, and he didn’t quite understand why. “Well, I’m going to call for pizza.”

“Okay,” Mason said in a tiny voice. “Can I have pineapple?”

“Anything you want,” Ben said. He tried to shake himself out of his sudden sad mood, but it weighed on him. “Hey, pick out a movie from the DVD collection. All the good stuff is on the top shelf where Gen can’t reach.”

Ben could hear Mason giggling, even in the kitchen. He picked up the phone, but didn’t dial.

What the hell was going on inside his chest? His heart was beating so fast.

“Hey!” Mason called from the living room. Ben almost dropped the phone. “Anchovies, too?”

Ben laughed. “Okay,” he said. “Anchovies, too.”

Ben groaned, pulling the blankets up over his head. “Gen, turn the light off,” he murmured. “Too bright.”

“Benny?”

Ben jerked awake at the small voice. He rolled to his side and blinked his eyes open. Mason was standing in the doorway to Ben’s bedroom, hair mussed and hands wrapped around his bare torso. He wore a tiny pair of red, low cut boxer briefs.

“Mason? What’s wrong?”

“I can’t sleep downstairs,” Mason whispered.

Ben sighed, sitting up and rubbing at his tired eyes. “Why?”

“That clock, that huge fucking clock in the hallway is too loud. I can’t sleep.”

“The clock?”

“Yeah, it’s all ‘tick tock tick tock’ and I can’t even hear myself think,” Mason whined. “I think it must get louder at night because I slept on that couch all morning and didn’t even hear it. And I have an audition in five hours, Benny; I’m going to be so bad.”

“Okay. Okay,” Ben said, stretching his legs out. “I’ll turn off the clock.”

“Okay, but...” Mason folded his arms tighter, shivering. “There’s also your ice machine, it’s so noisy. And some ghosts.”

“Ghosts?”

“I’m cold,” Mason said in a tiny voice.

Ben looked around him. He couldn't send Mason back downstairs, he couldn't make Mason sleep on the guest room bed. The only thing that was left...

"Come here," Ben said, patting the empty side of the bed. "Come and sleep here. I'll go sleep in the guest room."

"That bed is really, really lumpy," Mason said.

"Then the couch..."

"Ghosts," Mason whispered.

"You want me to stay here?" Ben asked, yawning.

"I won't do anything," Mason said. "Besides, whenever I used to get scared when I was little, my brother let me sleep with him."

"I'm not your brother," Ben said. Mason made a whining sound and took a step forward. "But get in here."

Mason brightened and padded into the room, crawling into the empty space on the bed. He snuggled down immediately, sighing happily. "This is so comfy." Mason cuddled close to Ben, and Ben stilled, his body going rigid.

He was half asleep, and the warmth radiating from Mason's body was dangerous.

"Benny," Mason said, poking Ben in the shoulder.

"Hmmm?"

"I actually never had a brother," Mason said. He turned and pressed right up against Ben's side. "But you've been pretty decent to me, so I wouldn't mind having you as one."

Ben was too tired to even pick that apart. He let Mason curl up close and before he knew it, he was out like a light.

When Ben woke up the next morning, he had an armful of Mason. He didn't mean to, and he was pretty sure if he'd been awake he wouldn't have let it happen. But he'd been asleep, and snuggling Mason, apparently.

Ben tensed his arms, and Mason sighed, nuzzling in closer. Ben could feel his bare, hot skin, and his hair smelled so sweet. Ben remembered being close with Mason like this in Vegas, just touching him, holding him sweetly until things got dirtier. In a weird way, Ben missed this closeness.

He rested his lips on top of Mason's head and closed his eyes, noting that they both had another forty-five minutes to sleep. Ben could fall asleep again and act like he'd never woken up and enjoy the fact that Mason was all over him.

He closed his eyes and tried to sleep, when a memory came back to him from the night in Vegas.

"Come on, I've got something to show you," Mason said, tugging Ben by the hand down the Las Vegas strip.

Ben grinned, holding his beer, and followed Mason. He couldn't let the man out of his sight, and why would he? Mason was the most attractive person he'd ever seen. "What is it?" Ben asked.

"I wanna show you... this," Mason said, pointing up. They were underneath a fake Eiffel Tower, and Mason gazed at it wistfully. "Isn't it corny?"

"No, it's cool." Ben wrapped his arms around Mason's waist and pulled him underneath the tower. "You know, I've been to the real one. It's way bigger than this, nowhere near as cozy."

"I don't want cozy, I want grand," Mason said, burying his face in Ben's neck.

"I want you," Ben replied.

Mason shivered. "Sure you do."

"I do, I..." Ben glanced toward the strip, at a glowing neon sign. "Mason..." He was getting an idea, an amazing idea. "Look over there."

Mason pulled his face from Ben's neck and looked down the strip. "The Cupid's Bow Chapel, yeah. That's one of those walk-in wedding chapels that Vegas is famous for."

"No shit." Ben stared at it, tugging Mason's hand. "Let's go do it."

"Do it?"

"I want to marry you," Ben said, grinning wide. "Let's do it. Fuckin' felt so right, you and me."

"Bad idea," Mason laughed. "You're not even from here, we don't know each other, you're straight, and even though you said you loved me, I don't believe you."

"It's the best idea I ever had."

"No," Mason said softly, kissing Ben's cheek. "Let's go get another hot dog."

"Marry me," Ben said loudly, sincerely. "And I'll give you a hot dog later."

Mason's eyes lit up. "But seriously, you don't even know me."

"That's why it's so good!" Ben exclaimed. "Come on, are you scared?"

"I'm not scared."

“Then come on.” Ben grinned, feeling happier than he had in ages. Mason smiled at him and reached into his shoulder bag, pulling out a camera.

“Okay, stud, but first,” Mason said, holding the camera out in front of them, “say cheese.”

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Ben sat up fast, cursing as the alarm sounded shrilly in his ear.

Mason groaned in his sleep. He reached up Ben’s body and whacked the older man in the face. Ben tried to grab at Mason’s swinging hands and the alarm kept beeping. Mason whacked him again, this time square in the nose.

“Ugh, why won’t you turn off?” Mason moaned in his sleep. He raised his arm to slug Ben again, and Ben caught Mason’s arm, lowering it to the mattress. Mason’s brow tensed, and he woke, eyes squinting open. Ben could hardly look at the younger man; he was tousled and flushed, more adorable than a sleepy kitten.

All of the anger and annoyance that Ben had for Mason was temporarily on hold. After Mason had curled into bed with him the night before, pouting and shivering, Ben’s heart had warmed to Mason. Hell, he’d even forgotten about the blackmailing for the time being. All he could think of was Mason and the Eiffel Tower. I’m fucked, Ben thought.

“Where am I?” Mason asked blearily.

Ben let go of his arm and shut off the alarm. “You’re in my bed,” he said, feeling stupid.

Mason shook his head a few times and then woke fully. “Oh, god, sorry, this bed is too comfy. Thought I was somewhere else.”

Ben nodded, shoving the alarm clock off the nightstand and lying back down. Even though Mason had seemed fully awake moments before, he was back down for the count. His breathing became heavy again, and Ben nudged him.

“Mmph, no, a little longer,” Mason murmured, curling into Ben. “Just a little longer.”

Mason looked so small burrowed in the sheets that Ben wished there was some way he could freeze time and let Mason sleep longer. But Ben couldn’t, and the best thing he could do for Mason was to force the young dancer out of bed.

“Mason, wake up,” Ben said, squeezing Mason’s arm.

“I’m awake!” Mason cracked an eye open. “Oh, it’s you.”

“Oh, it’s me?” Ben made a face. “I can’t be the worst you’ve woken up to.”

“Not by far.”

“You’ve got to get ready for your auditions. I’m gonna give you some cab money, all right?”

Mason sat up again, yawning. "Thank you. I can walk, though."

"No, you'll take a cab," Ben said firmly. "Now go make yourself beautiful or whatever it is you do."

"Aren't I perfect already?" Mason looked over his shoulder sleepily and almost knocked Ben out, he was so stunning. "Yeah, yeah, I know. I'm going."

Ben almost protested, but then Mason stood and started to walk away. He was wearing those tiny, red boxer-briefs, and they were nearly sliding off his body. Ben caught sight of a tattoo on Mason's lower back, a scattering of swirly letters, and he wondered how he'd missed that before.

Ben shook his head. Maybe he had time for a quick wank before he started the day.

When Ben came home that evening, after a trying day at work, he was more than a little surprised to see that Mason wasn't in the apartment. He'd thought that he'd find Mason curled up on the couch again, tub of ice cream in hand and Oprah blazing on the television.

He'd even decided that he wouldn't be mad, that he'd forgive Mason and order them Chinese food.

But the apartment was dead quiet and dark as Ben threw his keys on the kitchen table and took a seat. It felt a bit weird to be in the apartment alone, without Mason's annoying presence. It'd only been two days, but he'd already gotten used to this little inconvenience in his life, this little Mason.

He tugged at his tie and leaned back in his chair. His day had been long and his father had been quite hard on him. His father didn't approve of Ben missing work, especially missing important meetings.

Ben, on the other hand, thought it was a bit of a joke. He wasn't cut out for his father's business; he was no designer, no architect. He only had the job because he was his father's son and because Greg, Ben's older brother, had moved to Canada years prior to become an interior designer. His sister was out of the question and had run off to South Africa to work for the Peace Corps.

Ben was his father's last chance at placing a Bell as successor to his architect firm. It was a shame Ben didn't have an ounce of passion in him for the business. Ben was smart, but neither motivated nor cutthroat-- two things needed in his father's work.

If Ben was truthful with himself, he knew there were others worthier to follow his father. Lucas, for one.

Ben kicked his foot out, hitting a chair and hissing at the slight sting of pain. He could only hope that Lucas didn't resent him. Ben knew he'd be a poor head for the company. The job suited Lucas and his talents far more, but Ben had been born into this, and there was no way out.

Ben was doing everything right; he'd made all the right moves. He was marrying his girlfriend the successful, jet-setting fashion designer, he was following in his father's footsteps. Aside from the slight hiccup in Vegas, well, he would make any parent proud.

Why did he feel so discontent with life? Why was it that the Vegas thing was the most exciting thing to happen to him in... ever?

A soft knock sounded on the door, jarring Ben from his thoughts. How long had he been sitting there, introspecting? He glanced at the clock and coughed, realizing he'd been zoning out for an hour.

"Coming," he said, walking to the front door. He opened it and was greeted by Mason, and his heart skipped a beat. "Oh, you're back."

"Yeah," Mason said, stepping in, shaking his hair out. "I got caught in the rain. Perfect ending to a terrible day."

Ben watched Mason fuss, shaking his hair out, smoothing his jeans. He dropped his shoulder bag and sighed, checking his makeup in a mirror.

"Bad day?" Ben asked, frowning.

"Well, yeah," Mason said. "I blew all my auditions. I'm really behind, I guess. I haven't trained classically in over a year. God, I'm so stupid to think I could waltz into New York and get an amazing job as a dancer."

"No, you're really good," Ben said.

"You don't even know that."

"I believe in you." Ben loosened his necktie as he felt himself flush. He didn't even know where the words were coming from, but he couldn't stop. Having Mason home made Ben act like a fool in all the best ways. "I think you're great."

Mason smiled. "Thanks. But being great in bed won't get me where I want to be, not this time."

"I didn't mean that," Ben said quickly. "I meant--"

"What?" Mason laughed and Ben felt like an idiot. He didn't know if Mason was a good dancer or not. All he knew was that Mason could stretch his leg up over his head and was quite good at bouncing. Ben shoved that thought away and met Mason's gaze sheepishly. "Well, I am good," Mason said. "Or I was. So, I need to practice a bit more. A lot more. Fuck, I'm never going to catch up."

Mason stomped his feet in frustration and crossed into the living room, slouching down on the sofa with a sigh.

"Maybe I'll never get a job," Mason said, frowning. Ben stepped into the room, wringing his

hands together. “Don’t look so worried. If I can’t get a job in a few months, I’ll call it quits and move back to Vegas.”

“A few months?” Ben asked. A slight panic came over him. As much as he hated to admit that he enjoyed Mason’s company, he knew that he couldn’t keep the man forever. Genevieve would be home soon, and Mason had to go. “What if I want to get married by then?”

Mason looked up at Ben, half sunk into the cushions. He looked adorable, that was, until his eyes darkened and he began to look sultry again. “You’re in no rush,” Mason said.

“How do you know?”

“I can tell by the noises you make in bed,” Mason said, shrugging.

“What are you talking about?”

“Well.” Mason sat up a bit, propping his boot clad feet on the little table near the sofa. “With me you were all, ‘Yes! More! Oh! God! Fuck! Yessssssssssss!’”

Ben groaned, rubbing at his eyes.

“And with your little girlfriend, it was more... subdued.”

“I’ve heard your impression before,” Ben said. “I don’t need to hear it again.”

“‘Oh, Gen, you’re so... pretty’,” Mason mimicked.

“Fuck off,” Ben mumbled, feeling hot all over. “Fuck off, you don’t know anything about me.”

“You put on such an act for everyone,” Mason said, his tone even. “I bet no one knows anything about you. Not even your fiancée.”

Ben had nothing to say.

“Maybe you should think about that,” Mason said, standing up and starting to undo his belt.

“Maybe you should...” He unbuttoned his jeans and started to step out of his boots.

“Reevaluate your life.”

“What are you doing?”

“I know you can be passionate about things, because that’s all I knew about you when we first met,” Mason went on. He started to unbutton his tiny, black shirt. “‘Ooh, Mason, I want to show you the world. I love you, Mason, let’s get married! We don’t even know each other, it will be so good!’ God, Ben.” Mason was nearly half naked before him. “Maybe you should be an actor.”

“I wasn’t acting,” Ben said through gritted teeth.

“Yeah, you are. At least since I’ve come here,” Mason said. He stood in front of Ben in just his tiny, black boxers. “Whatever, I’m taking a shower. The city felt gross on me.”

Mason walked past Ben to the stairs. He stopped before taking a step up and wiggled out of his boxers, looking over his shoulder.

“Want to join me?” Mason asked.

Ben shook his head so fast he practically got a crick in his neck.

“That may be something you want to reevaluate, too,” Mason said. “Because I know I have a better ass than her.” Mason smiled and hopped up the stairs. Ben watched every step, but his eyes weren’t on Mason’s feet.

What the hell was wrong with him?

“I will not fuck him,” Ben mumbled to himself. “Again.”

CHAPTER SIX

Hours later, Ben found himself sitting on the couch, eating Chinese food alone. He hadn't heard from Mason in a while; last he knew, Mason was taking a shower and they'd been snappy with each other.

Ben tried not to let it bother him, the things Mason had said, but he couldn't help it. How was it that this nineteen-year-old kid from Vegas seemed to know Ben better than anyone else?

Ben stared at the TV, watching some action movie. He spooned some rice into his mouth and looked at the staircase. A light spilled down from the top, so he knew Mason was still up there. Ben got up and brought his bowl to the kitchen and decided to make Mason a bowl of teriyaki chicken and rice.

He prepared the dish and headed upstairs, seeing a light on in the guestroom. There was soft music coming from inside as well. He walked in and found Mason limbering up, stretching and posing at the window. He wore too-large pajama pants and another tiny t-shirt from his never ending collection. He looked as if he'd been crying.

"Mason?" Ben said softly.

Mason turned gracefully, his tear stained cheeks pink. "Oh, hi. Didn't see you. I'm trying to practice, do you mind?" He sniffed, rubbing at his eyes.

"Sure. I brought you something to eat, though," Ben replied awkwardly, holding the bowl up.

"Can't eat. Need to lose ten pounds."

"Mason, come on, what the fuck? That's sick."

"You said yourself how competitive the dancing is here." Mason stared at the ceiling, avoiding Ben's gaze. "What do you even know about it? I'm too fat, I'm too slow, I'm too old, I'm too... God, you know what? They could tell I'd been doing exotic dancing. They could tell and they don't want that, so I have to try to make it look like I've never stripped in my life."

"Mason," was all Ben said, frowning.

"They made me feel so worthless," Mason murmured, a tear sliding down his cheek. "I don't want to feel worthless anymore."

"Don't be stupid," Ben said. He set down the bowl of food at the bedside table and moved toward Mason. "You know you're not worthless."

"Just like you said I don't know you, you really don't know me," Mason said. Another tear rolled down his cheek, and he let it run over his lips. "I'm trashy, damn it."

Ben didn't think Mason was trashy, though maybe he should've. Mason wore the tiniest clothing, moved in the most provocative ways, and he had the dirtiest mouth. Somehow, even with all that, Ben didn't find him trashy. There was something about Mason, some spark of

innocence and warmth that changed it all.

“Dance for me,” Ben said, sitting down on the edge of the bed. The mattress didn’t yield to his body, and he winced. It really was a horrible bed.

“No way,” Mason said, wiping the rest of the tears down his face.

“Why?”

“You’ll laugh at me.”

Ben shook his head. “I swear, I won’t even look.”

Mason snorted. “You won’t look?”

“I..”

“You’re such a dork, Benny,” Mason said. Ben went to retort, but Mason slowly started moving to the beat of the music. “You can look, but don’t talk.” Ben was already staring at Mason’s hips, so he nodded dumbly. Mason’s moves were sexual, but began to turn more refined, more controlled.

The guest room was large enough for Mason to pull off a few moves, and he twirled on his toes, lifting his leg and arching his back. His baggy pants curved tight around his ass, and Ben swallowed.

He turned his back to Ben and stretched, his shirt riding up and exposing the tattoo on his lower back. Ben could read the text now. The swirly script spelled out Katarzyna.

“What does your tattoo mean?” Ben asked. “Who’s Katarzyna?” Mason stilled his movements and turned, pulling his shirt down. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry, but it was right there, and you said I could look.”

“But I also said you couldn’t talk,” Mason snapped. “Now shut up or get out.”

Ben closed his mouth, and Mason began to sway to the music again. It was obvious that he was getting lost in the beat. He leapt, there was just enough space to make a good show of it, and Ben knew Mason could dance now.

“Twelve years of ballet,” Mason said, stretching his leg up again. “Down the drain.”

Ben wanted to say something, but Mason looked at him hard and he closed his mouth again. He wasn’t supposed to talk. Right.

The music picked up the beat to something grittier, something dirtier, and Mason’s hips really began to work. His moves weren’t as graceful and pure as before. He began to grind his body down. Ben was reminded of how Mason had danced at the club, sexual and wild.

“This is what I’m really good at,” Mason said. His eyes locked with Ben’s, and he took two steps forward, licking at his lips. Ben’s eyes widened as Mason came closer. He kicked Ben’s

feet apart and grabbed hold of Ben's shoulders. Ben's mouth dried, and he squeaked as Mason knelt over his lap, legs straddling him. Mason tossed his hair back and ground down, ass against Ben's groin.

If Ben hadn't been hard before, he was now, immediately.

"Mason, you shouldn't--"

Mason clapped a hand over his mouth and ground down harder, rocking to the music. "This is how we dance," he said.

Ben shook his head, but his eyes widened and his hips thrust forward, thrust against Mason for relief. He found none, however. Mason's moves were too unmeasured, too sporadic, slow enough to keep Ben aroused but quick enough to never really satisfy. Mason's hips snapped forward, and he pressed his torso to Ben's, sliding his hands down Ben's arms and breathing hotly on Ben's neck.

"Mason - Mason!" Ben managed, red faced and harder than a rock. "Fuck, you're so... You're..."

"Sshh," Mason said, backing off a bit. "You said to dance for you. Now you don't want it?"

Ben didn't know what to say. Mason felt amazing on him, decadent and sexy and light. He gripped Mason's hips and tried to still the younger man, gazing up at his face silently. "Mason..."

"Benny?" Mason's movements slowed, more seductive, more precise. He ground easily against Ben's groin, trembling. Their eyes connected, and Ben saw it – vulnerability. There was that innocence Ben knew in Mason, the one bit of evidence that the world hadn't completely ruined him yet.

Ben gripped Mason's hips harder and picked him up, setting him down on the bed. Mason stared at Ben, eyes confused.

"I don't get you," Mason murmured. "Look at you, you want it so bad."

"Doesn't mean I should have it," Ben replied. "Doesn't mean you should have to give it to me."

"I want to."

"You're beautiful, so beautiful," Ben said. "And you're an amazing dancer – all types of dance."

"Thank you."

"But you're not for me, and I'm not for you," Ben said, stroking Mason's face. Mason pulled back sharply, frowning.

“You say the worst things.” The seductive look disappeared from Mason’s face in a flash and was replaced with hurt. “You say the worst fucking things.”

“You do the worst things.”

“At least I mean what I do,” Mason said, his cheeks red. “I’ve got to practice. Unless you want to help me, you should leave.”

Ben stood and took a few steps back. “I’m going to bed.”

“Good night.”

“Night, Mason,” Ben said softly. “Get some sleep and eat something.”

Mason didn’t answer, only stared at the floor.

Ben left. His arousal was gone, but the fire in his belly wouldn’t quit.

The next morning, Mason left before Ben woke for work. Ben hoped he was out at auditions and that he didn’t try to come back before the end of the work day. Mason didn’t have a key to the penthouse, and even if he charmed Bernard out front, it would be difficult to get the old man to let him in.

The kid needed a cell phone or something so Ben could check in on him. Ben nearly smacked himself at the thought, but during his lunch break he found himself in a T-Mobile store looking at phones. It’d make sense for Mason to have a way to contact him, at least until this whole thing was over.

He picked out a smart, silver Razr phone and had the extra line added to his cell plan. He spent the rest of his day thinking about how he’d explain the phone to Mason without looking like an obsessed freak. It didn’t stop him from adding his own cell phone number into the new phone’s address book.

Well, he’d bought it for a reason.

When Ben arrived home from work, Mason was still gone, and he left the door unlocked, a serious no-no in New York City. Another two hours passed before he heard a soft knock.

“It’s open,” Ben called. “Come on in.”

The door swung open, and Mason slipped inside, not even looking at Ben. Ben knew Mason was still pissed; he didn’t really blame Mason. He wasn’t sure if Mason had ever been rejected before, sexually. He must have been taking it hard.

“There are a couple of things for you on the counter,” Ben said. “I made you an extra key and um... I had an extra phone lying around. You should use it, you know, in case you need anything. City’s a big place, you need a cell phone.”

Mason hesitated by the counter, looking over the things. He still didn't acknowledge Ben.

"I ate some leftover Chinese," Ben went on. "You should have some, too."

Still not giving Ben the time of day, Mason took the phone and keys and disappeared up the stairs. Ben sighed and turned his attention back to the TV. So, Mason was definitely still pissed at him, but Ben had done the right thing. He couldn't fuck and mess around with Mason. He was a committed man.

To Genevieve, not Mason. The marriage to Mason meant nothing.

Ben must have fallen asleep on the couch, because he woke up with a shock hours later. His phone beeped with a new text message, and Ben rolled his eyes. The only people who ever texted him were spammers and Lucas.

Ben flipped open the phone and saw a text message from a brand new number. It was the same number he'd entered into his phonebook, hours earlier.

thank you.

He couldn't help smiling. He started to type out a Ur welcome but then decided against it. Instead, he leaned his head back against the couch and fell asleep again.

Ben didn't mind that Mason was gone when he woke. He also didn't mind that when he went upstairs to change for work he found his bed sheets turned down and his pillows strewn all over the bed. Ben had made the bed the morning before, and he wondered if Mason wanted Ben to know where he'd slept. Ben sat on the mattress and smiled as he pulled one of Mason's socks out from under the blanket. It was bright pink, so very Mason.

He thought, contrary to what Mason believed, that he was getting to know the man quite well. He was outlandish and forward, but also hardworking and shy at the same time. Ben thought, as he pulled on a clean suit and then set the pink sock back down on the bed, that Mason put up a front for most people.

Ben had seen the real Mason that night in Las Vegas, he was sure of it.

He wondered if Mason had seen the real Ben, too.

"Yes?" Ben asked, poking his head around the doorway. "You wanted to speak with me?"

"Come in, sit down, and close the door," a voice boomed from behind a sleek looking leather chair.

Ben sighed and did as he was told. He'd worry about being in trouble, but he'd faced this man with far worse consequences before. The chair turned and a pleasant-looking man in his

late fifties stared across the table at Ben. His face was lined with years of running a successful yet stressful business, but his eyes were kind and warm.

“You’ve been late to work three times this week,” he said.

“I know,” Ben said. “I’ve been a bit stressed lately.”

“It’s no excuse to come in late. Professionalism above everything else, Benjamin. Professionalism.”

“Dad, I -- “

“I told you to call me Gregory or Mr. Bell in the workplace,” his father said in a low voice. “Don’t make me look like a fool, Benjamin.”

Ben sighed. “Sorry, Gregory. I’m not trying to do anything. I honestly didn’t think being late a few times was a huge deal.”

“Benjamin, I’ve given you the finest schooling, the best training, all the encouragement I can offer. I’ve set it up so that when I am ready to hand the business over, I can give it to you, my son, with no hesitation or worry,” Gregory said seriously. “I know you’ll do a good job. I just need some sign that you want to.”

Ben stared at his father blankly.

Gregory let out a breath. “In time, you’ll see the benefits of taking over the business. You’re well off now; you’ll be well off in the future. Aren’t you enjoying being comfortable?”

“Yes.”

“Then please, think about what could and will be yours,” Gregory said.

Ben’s cell phone beeped and his fingers itched to check it. Now he could add Mason to the short list of people who texted him, and chances were, it was Mason.

“Now,” his father said, voice softening. “How is Genevieve?”

“She’s cool. Uh, good. Great.” Ben slipped his hand in his pocket and touched his phone. “We’re, ah... We’re doing pretty well.”

“Do you think she’s the one?”

Ben pulled his phone from his pocket. He hadn’t even told his father about the engagement, and he didn’t really mean to. “Oh, maybe, I’m not sure.” He was surprised by how much truth there was in the statement.

“Well, don’t let her get away,” Gregory said with a wink. “She’ll make a fine wife.”

Ben nodded and checked his phone surreptitiously. His stomach dropped when he read the text message from Mason.

sry 2 bothr u but im in the hospital

“Oh, shit,” Ben murmured.

“Benjamin?” His father looked at him, eyes cold.

Ben wasn’t listening to his father. He stared down at the text message again. “I need to go.”

“You came in late and now you’re leaving early?” Gregory didn’t look happy and Ben stood.

“I’m sorry, but it’s sort of an emergency,” Ben said. He quickly typed back to Mason, what happened? are you okay? what hospital?

“It can’t be so important that it--”

“Mason’s in the hospital,” Ben said, throwing his hands up in the air a little too dramatically. “I’ve gotta go, I’ve gotta--”

“Mason?”

“My broth-- I mean my hus-- um... a friend of mine,” Ben stuttered out. “He’s new to the city, staying with me while Gen is in Paris. I need to go, I’m sorry.”

His father called after him, but Ben was already out the door. Mason had texted him back with two words.

lenox hill

Ben already had his personal driver on the phone, giving directions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Mason Hadley?” the receptionist asked, typing away at her computer. “I don’t see anyone by that name.”

Ben shook his head. “Can you look again? He said this is where he was. I need to see him; he doesn’t have anyone else here.”

The receptionist, a gray-haired, old woman with far too much red lipstick on, looked up at him over her horn-rimmed glasses. “I’m sorry, sir, but I’ve already checked three times for you. Could he have come in with another name?”

“No, that wouldn’t make sense,” Ben said. Then he paled, itching at the collar of his shirt. “Mason Bell,” he muttered out.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Mason Bell,” Ben said. “B-E-L-L.”

The receptionist typed it in and nodded. “He’s in the emergency room, room 3B,” she said, exposing her lipstick teeth.

“Thank you,” Ben said, about to run off, but she cleared her throat.

“Are you family?” she asked.

“Yes,” Ben said quickly. “I’m uh, his brother. Benjamin Bell.”

She looked down at the computer screen. “It says here that a Benjamin Bell, his spouse, may only be allowed in to see him.”

Ben reddened. “Did I say brother? I meant husband. Um, yes.”

The receptionist glared. “Which is it?”

“I’m his spouse,” Ben said nervously. Somehow he’d felt more honest saying he was Mason’s brother. “It’s... we haven’t been married long. Can I see him?”

“Of course. Through those doors, room 3B.”

Ben felt shaky. This hospital ordeal was making the whole marriage thing a little too real. He walked down the hall, looking for the right room number. He paused outside of room 3B, fingers itching at his sides. This was the first marital duty he was performing and it made his belly feel heavy.

He walked into the room, bracing himself for the worst. Mason was lying on a hospital bed, his leg propped up in traction. He was reading a back issue of *Vogue*, and his face was streaked with dusty tears.

“Mason?” Ben asked.

“Benny!” Mason’s face crumbled as he saw Ben, and he set down the magazine. “You came.”

“Of course I did, with a text like that? Fuck, I was so worried,” Ben said. He sat on the edge of the bed and gently touched Mason’s leg. “What happened?”

Mason turned red. “It was... It was so bad. I was at an audition, and you know how it’s a little rainy out, right? Well... the stage was sort of wet. I went to do a leap, and I slipped and twisted the fuck out of my ankle.”

Ben frowned. “Ouch.”

“Yeah, it was humiliating. And it hurts so bad,” Mason said, sighing. “I won’t be able to dance for at least a week.”

Ben stared at Mason’s swollen ankle and knew that Mason’s pride was hurting far worse. He petted the ankle, and Mason almost purred at the contact.

“Shit, I’m never gonna make it here, who am I kidding?” Mason turned his head, his lips pouting. “I’m sorry.”

Ben gaped. “You’re sorry? What are you talking about?”

“I’m going to be useless for the next few days, which means no auditions,” Mason said. “This is going to set me back further than I thought, and as much as I’ve enjoyed pushing your buttons, I don’t really want to fuck up your life.”

“Mason, you’re not--”

“I am! Here you are, about to get married to someone you actually like, and I’m being selfish and trying to get the most I can out of you,” Mason said. His eyes were brimming with tears. “Ugh, you must think I’m such low class. I’m useless. And you’re wonderful, that’s all you’ve been to me. Letting me stay with you, I mean, I blackmailed you into it, but you’ve been such a gentleman.”

“You really don’t need to say all of this, it’s fine, I--”

Mason let out a small hiccup and kept talking. “It’s not. It’s not fine. You are a real prince, you know that? You got me a cell phone and everything, just to look out for me.” His voice rose in volume. “You could have fucked me ten times by now, but you haven’t.”

Ben winced.

“You are a good guy, Ben, a good guy.”

“Did they give you Vicodin?” Ben asked carefully.

“Yeah, so?” Mason started crying a little.

“Okay, Mason, why don’t you rest,” Ben said, coming a bit closer and patting Mason on the

hand.

Mason's eyes glazed over a little, and he nodded, mumbling something Ben couldn't quite make out. "And I mean it, too," Mason said audibly, closing his eyes. "I really, really do."

Ben, despite his better judgment, was about to ask what Mason meant, but the doctor came in. The man flashed Ben a smile and held out his hand.

"I'm Dr. Jean," he said, shaking Ben's hand. "You must be Mr. Bell's husband?"

Ben winced again, but nodded. "How, um, is he?"

"He's fine, just has a bit of a sprained ankle," Dr. Jean said. "He'll need a week of rest; he took quite a fall."

"Were the painkillers really necessary?" Ben asked.

"Oh yes, sprained ankles aren't too much trouble, but the pain can be quite severe. Hurts like a bitch," he added. "Worse than breaking it, really."

Ben let out a low whistle. "When can I take him home?"

"Oh, anytime you want to," Dr. Jean said. "He'll be happy to go home with you; he's been saying the nicest things about you. Nonstop. You must be one hell of a good guy."

Ben laughed. "That's the painkillers talking, I'm sure."

"No, he was raving about you before we got the painkillers in his system."

"Oh," Ben said quietly. "Well... is there any paperwork or anything to get him out of here?"

"Only a few signatures. You'll have to sign for him, since he's unable to. The spouse has the power to do that," Dr. Jean said. "I'll be right back. See, I'm just a resident, I can't actually discharge him myself."

When the doctor left, Ben turned to Mason and a warmth washed over him. Mason was dozing, sort of wincing in his sleep. Ben knew his foot must have really ached, and he had full license to be a whiny bitch for the next few days.

"Mason," Ben said softly, stroking Mason's hair. "Mason, wake up, it's time to go."

Mason's eyelids fluttered open. "What? Benny?"

"Yeah, it's Benny," Ben replied. "Want to go home?"

"No guest room bed."

"No guest room bed," Ben assured him. "You can sleep in my bed."

"With you," Mason mumbled.

“We’ll see,” Ben said, feeling his chest tighten. “Do you want me to get you anything? There’s a Starbucks downstairs or... I could cook you a real dinner when we get home.”

Mason nodded, his eyes slipping shut again. An older man wearing a white coat came into the room, holding a clipboard.

“Mr... Bell?” he said, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Ben said, standing up. He extended his hand to shake the older man’s. “How do you do?”

“Oh, fine. I’m Dr. Schwarz,” the doctor said, smiling. “Is this yours?” he added, gesturing to Mason.

Ben laughed. “Kind of. Is he going to live?”

“He sure will. I need to do a final exam and then you can bust him out of here. You can either stay or go. It’ll take about fifteen minutes,” Dr. Schwarz said.

“I think I’ll go,” Ben said. He may have been Mason’s spouse by a technicality, but he wanted to give Mason privacy. “Page me when he’s ready.”

The doctor nodded, and Ben walked out of the room, giving Mason one more look. His heart felt tight, funny in his chest. He caught the eye of the receptionist as he exited the room, and she motioned him over.

“Yes?” he asked.

“We’ll need to schedule your husband for a follow-up appointment,” she said, already typing away. “A week from today at noon?”

“That’s fine,” Ben said.

“And the bill?”

“What about it?” Ben asked.

She raised an eyebrow. “Shall I send the bill to the address on file? Park Avenue?”

Ben bit at his lip, nodding. “Yes, put it in my name, please.”

“Is he under your insurance?” she asked.

It was then that Ben really understood what being married meant, what it meant for someone as down and out as Mason. Just being attached to Ben in this way opened up a whole new world of possibilities.

“He’s not on my insurance... yet. I’ll accept the charges. Thank you,” Ben said. He took the appointment card from the receptionist and headed toward the cafeteria. He felt as if he was under water, and he stopped outside the hospital gift shop and stared blankly through the

window.

A big bouquet of wild flowers sat before him and he shook his head.

“Don’t be stupid,” Ben said. He’d never bought flowers for anyone in his life. Genevieve was allergic to pretty much any sort of plant life, so he’d never bothered. Besides, it wasn’t like Ben was the romantic type.

But if he was reevaluating his life...

“That’ll be four-fifty,” the gift shop cashier said when Ben brought the gaudy bouquet up to be purchased. Ben shelled out the money and took the bouquet in his hands, staring it down.

“A rose for a rose, even with all its thorns,” Ben murmured, feeling ultimately corny as he hurried back to Mason’s ER room. He smiled at the receptionist, no questions asked because it was now known what relation Ben was to Mason, and he went back into the room.

Mason was awake and his eyes lit up as he saw Ben, and his mouth dropped open when Ben presented the flowers to him.

“Ben, you idiot,” Mason said, cheeks pink. Doctor Schwarz was standing next to Mason, taking his pulse.

“I know, I know,” Ben said, resting the flowers on the hospital bed. “Lame as they come, that’s me.”

“Mason was just telling me about the lovely date you’re going to take him on this weekend,” Dr. Schwarz said, finishing up with Mason’s blood pressure. “A Broadway show and dinner at Tavern on the Green? Sounds like a real evening.”

Mason looked at Ben sheepishly, a trace of guilt on his face.

“Yeah, well, I’m that kind of guy,” Ben said, trying not to glare at Mason. What a little weasel. “It’s the least I can do, I guess. But we’ll only go if Mason’s ankle is feeling better.”

“Oh, it will,” Mason said quickly. “I’m sure.”

When everything was finished up, a nurse pushed Mason out of the hospital in a wheelchair and Ben helped him into his car. He slid in after, holding a pair of crutches and a prescription for a whole lot of Vicodin.

“You don’t have to,” Mason said quietly, nodding off as they drove back to the penthouse. “Take me out this weekend, I mean. I was being stupid. You know, presenting the lie. Making our marriage seem more believable.”

“Our marriage is real enough; you shouldn’t have to feel like you need to make things up,” Ben replied, staring straight ahead. “But if you want, I know the manager of Tavern on the Green and I can pull some strings to get tickets to see Cats or something.”

Mason stayed silent, and Ben waited a moment before glancing at him.

Mason was fast asleep in the seat next to him; head leaned against the cold window, clutching the bouquet of flowers.

Ben sighed and looked out his own window.

Ben knew that Mason's painkillers had worn off when he heard the younger man whine from the next room.

"What is it?" Ben asked, coming in to see Mason splayed out on the couch, leg propped up on a pillow.

Mason gave Ben a look and then gazed over at the vase of flowers they'd brought back from the hospital. "Flowers, really?" Mason asked, voice slightly sarcastic.

"I see you need more Vicodin," Ben said dryly. "You liked them in the hospital. Besides, I was only trying to make our marriage look more believable."

Mason laughed and touched the flowers with gentle hands. "At least they weren't roses."

"Anyway, what is it?"

Mason looked a little shy now. "I'm bored. Can't you sit with me for a bit?"

"Mason," Ben said. "We've been back for two hours and you're already bored? Watch TV or something."

"Nothing's on," Mason said. "And I thought maybe you'd still be nice to me since, you know, I'm mortally wounded."

Ben scoffed. "Will you be nice back?"

"I'm due for some more Vicodin, so yes," Mason said, smiling sweetly.

"Don't bite the hand that gives you your painkillers," Ben warned. "You can't even get to the bathroom by yourself."

Mason made a face. "And I want some apple juice, too."

"In a sippy cup?"

Mason whined again, and Ben rolled his eyes. He poured Mason a glass of juice and got a couple more Vicodin, and then came back and sat in the chair next to the couch. Mason whined again.

"What is it now?" Ben asked.

“Come sit with me,” Mason said. “I’m lonely.” He moved his other leg aside, leaving a little spot for Ben to sit. It looked cozy, settling on the couch with Mason. Ben thought that maybe it looked a little too cozy.

But against his better instincts, he nestled himself in and patted Mason’s thigh. “How are you doing?”

“It hurts,” Mason said theatrically. “It hurts so bad.”

“You’re a trooper,” Ben replied. “Look at you, you’re still alive. Most people would have died from a sprain. But you... you carry on.”

“Don’t be a dick to me,” Mason said, swatting Ben on the forearm. “You don’t even know what it felt like.”

“Yeah, I do! I played lacrosse in high school, I sprained all sorts of things,” Ben said. He handed Mason the pills and the glass of juice. “Lacrosse and rugby. Made a man out of me.”

Mason laughed. “Oh yeah? Maybe you should have played a little longer.”

Ben shot Mason a look and smacked him gently on the thigh.

“Abusing me won’t make you any more of a man,” Mason said. “Now, fetch me a cookie.”

“Fetch? Fetch you a cookie? Who said we even have cookies?”

“You can go fetch me some at the store,” Mason shot back.

“Oh, god, please take those Vicodin,” Ben said. “I like you better on drugs.”

Mason flipped Ben off, but took the pills anyway. “You know, you don’t really need to take care of me.”

“Those pills work fast,” Ben said. Mason flipped him off one more time.

“I mean it. I’ve got crutches, I can take care of myself. It felt nice to have someone running around for me,” Mason said. Ben felt bad again. It was a recently developed habit. Mason could appear quite thorny, even bitchy, but then he’d reveal a little more about himself and it made Ben want to do everything for him.

“Nah, don’t worry about it,” Ben said. “Take it as payment for your lovely company.”

“I’m not a prostitute,” Mason said, his voice rising a tad.

Ben almost laughed. “What? I’m not saying you are. I didn’t mean...” He shook his head.

“Ugh,” was all Mason said in response.

“Listen, this may come as a bit of a surprise to you, but I actually, sort of, kind of, maybe like you... a little bit,” Ben sputtered out. “In a friendly way, of course. Maybe we can be

friends?”

“No,” Mason said firmly. “I give you erections. I don’t want to be that kind of friends with you.”

Ben’s face heated up, and he shifted away from Mason. “You didn’t seem to care before.”

“I didn’t think you wanted to be friends,” Mason said. He closed his eyes and then blinked them open wearily. “Shit, this stuff is kicking in.”

“Before you get all loopy, listen to me, okay?” Mason nodded. “I may have been drunk when I met you, but I don’t fuck people just to... fuck. I must’ve liked you, hell, I remember liking you. We had a fun time, right? And I don’t mean only the sex.”

“I know,” Mason slurred back. “It was some good clean fun.”

“You were... you were really something,” Ben said. “I know I liked you right away.”

“It was the alcohol.”

“Stop cutting yourself down while I’m trying to say nice shit to you.” Ben made a face. “I sort of remember going around town with you, eating hot dogs on the strip, taking pictures under the Eiffel Tower. Felt really good and comfortable with you. Now everything feels awkward.”

Mason yawned. “You’re the first person who hasn’t wanted to fuck me,” he mumbled. “Well... you know. The first to resist. After Vegas, that is. What happens there, stays there.”

Ben reddened. “Too bad the best part of Vegas followed me home.”

“Mm.” Mason fell asleep then, buried between the couch cushions.

Ben watched him, feeling vulnerable and stupid. Why was he letting his guard down for this kid? He had a whole life planned. A fiancée, a steady job, a life. He didn’t need Mason making waves, causing uncertainty and turmoil in his already-figured-out life.

He was pulled from his thoughts when he heard a low rumbling; Mason’s stomach. The poor kid must be ravenous.

Ben stood and grabbed his car keys. He’d pop down to the corner store and pick Mason up some cookies and then get some take out. Maybe Thai, tonight.

Ben spared Mason one last glance and then left, so much on his mind.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hours later, Mason was awake and munching on cold Pad Thai while Ben channel surfed. They hadn't said much; they'd just been sitting together and eating their food.

"So," Mason said, adjusting himself on the sofa. "Do you think -- "

A loud ringing interrupted, and Ben looked at Mason apologetically, reaching for his phone. It was Genevieve calling.

"Sorry," Ben said. "I've gotta get this." He picked up the phone. "Gen, is everything okay? It's gotta be five in the morning over there."

"Oh, it's fine," Genevieve replied, sounding light and tipsy. "Listen, I have some news." She let out a high pitched giggle.

"Genevieve, are you drunk?" Ben asked, standing up and walking into the kitchen.

"No! No, no, well, I had a little wine. Oh, Ben, I've been up all night talking to these designers and feeling so inspired. Paris is... so lovely," Genevieve said. "I'm going to move here, you and me. Let's move here."

Ben laughed. "Genevieve..."

"The parties, the city, the fashion..." Genevieve giggled again. "I wish you were here with me."

Ben was about to say "me, too," but then he stopped himself. He glanced over his shoulder at Mason, and the guilt set in. "Genevieve Rosen, you should go to sleep. Don't get into anymore trouble."

"Oh, but I have good news," Genevieve said loudly. "I've been asked to apprentice under Jacques Chevalier. Isn't that fucking amazing? He's a genius! Have you seen his spring line? His leather work is to die. I'm going to need to stay here another week or so to work out the details, but... I'm so happy! This is all I've ever wanted. Seriously amazing."

"All you've ever wanted?" Ben asked. "Gen, I'm so proud of you."

"I'm going to accept it. I'm going to accept the apprenticeship," Genevieve said. "I don't care, this is for me. I'm doing this for me, Ben."

"That's great, honey," Ben replied.

"And it will only be a year," Genevieve continued. "I mean, since you're about to take over your father's company, there's no way you can move here just yet."

"Move?"

"Well, you know, to France."

“I thought you weren’t serious!” Ben said, eyes widening.

“You should come over here now,” Genevieve said. “Be with me for the next week. I’ll call your father and make him give you the time off. You can study the Parisian architecture. It’s fascinating, Ben.”

“Hold up. You’re seriously going to move there for a year?” Ben was flabbergasted.

“It’s still in negotiation, but really... how could I not?” Genevieve giggled yet again. At first it’d been slightly adorable; now it was slightly disturbing. “Come here! We’ll go to fabulous parties. There’s so many people I want you to meet. We need to get you socialized! You’re a heathen, darling, but we can clean you up!”

Ben looked at Mason again, and his heart felt strange. Would Genevieve actually move to Paris without him? That hadn’t been part of their plan. Sure, he’d always wanted her to get a leg up in the business, but he’d never imagined himself not being a part of it, or not even being a factor in her decision.

“I can’t,” he said softly. “I’m sorry, I can’t.”

“Ben, honey,” Genevieve said, her words sugary sweet. “You must. Paris is divine this time of year.”

Ben scratched behind his ear. “I’m sorry, but Mason’s here and--”

Genevieve made a displeased noise over the phone. “He can come, too, of course.”

“He twisted his ankle,” Ben said. “There’s no way. He can’t travel.”

“He twisted his ankle?” Genevieve asked, voice sharp. “Did he trip over his pole or something?”

“Gen, come on, that’s not fair,” Ben said.

“What’s not fair is me being here alone, practically on the other side of the world,” Genevieve said, her voice cracking with emotion. “We just got engaged, for Christ’s sake, I don’t want to be alone now. Besides, you don’t know how it looks.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have appearances to keep up,” she said.

“Gen, you’re the one who left.” Ben wasn’t sure what was going on, he’d never heard Genevieve like this before. She’d always jetted off to random countries without giving him another thought. “Baby, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t you baby me,” Genevieve said. “Jacques wanted to throw me an engagement party, you know. Everyone’s buzzing about it, but how can he, when you’re in New York?”

“Gen...”

“Well, anyway, I called to tell you I won’t be home when I originally thought I would be,” Genevieve said briskly. “So you’ll have more quality time to spend with Jason.”

“Mason,” Ben corrected.

“Whatever. Ben, I didn’t call to fight with you,” she said. “I just wanted to say I missed you, and--”

“And that’s why you’ve been in Paris for about four days and you haven’t called me until now?” Ben interrupted. “Will it be like this when you live there?”

“Well, you didn’t call me, either,” Genevieve said, ignoring Ben’s last question.

Ben sighed. “I’ve been so busy with work and Mason and--”

“Fucking Mason!” Genevieve snapped. “You know what? You should marry him instead, because it’s very clear where your priorities lie.”

“Gen, that’s sick, don’t say that.”

“Good night, Ben.”

Ben sighed again. “Good night, Gen, I lo -- ”

Click.

Ben stared at the phone. Whenever Genevieve would go on business trips, she’d rarely call, and when she would call, they’d normally exchange about five words before someone would whisk her away again on some fashion emergency.

Things had obviously changed, but why? Ben knew it was all the marriage stuff; he wasn’t stupid. But why did that have to change everything so much? One thing Ben had really loved about his relationship with Genevieve was that it’d always been so effortless. Sure, sometimes he wished Genevieve would be more passionate, but he wasn’t exactly complaining.

Ben liked going about his own business, he liked having his own space to think, to exist. The penthouse, though styled more to Genevieve’s taste than his own, was practically his. She paid for half of the rent each month, but Ben spent most of the time in the apartment without her.

He came to a very frightening realization, standing in his kitchen, the lights from the living room television reflecting off the wall; he wasn’t ready to be married.

But his heart clenched strangely and he shook his head, trying to stop the thoughts from coming.

Maybe he wasn’t ready to be married to Genevieve.

“Benny?” called Mason from the living room.

Ben swiveled around and stared at the beautiful boy. His beautiful spouse. His. That was his Mason on the couch, right there. Free for the taking, willing, sexy, and sweet.

So what stopped Ben from stepping forward and taking what was his?

He folded his arms and joined Mason, not looking at the younger man, but sitting down and staring at the television.

“Was that her?” Mason asked.

“Don’t,” Ben said. “Yes, it was her. Yes, she was a bitch. No, I don’t want to talk about it. Save the insults.”

“Wasn’t gonna say anything,” Mason replied softly. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Ben said. “I can’t really take it right now. Maybe in a little bit.”

“Jeez, I would never purposely be an asshole to you.”

Ben gave Mason a look.

“Well, you know. When it matters.” Mason fidgeted with the hem of his shirt. “You gonna be okay?”

“I’m fucking sick of all the expectations,” Ben said. He rubbed at his eyes. “Everyone’s on my back. I’m so tired. I want everyone to leave me alone and let me be for a while.”

Mason shifted, looking down at his lap. “God, I’m not helping by being here.”

“Maybe,” Ben said. “Or maybe you are. I don’t know. Does it matter? You’re here.”

“Do you want me to leave?” Mason asked. “Seriously, tell me.”

“I...” Ben shrugged. “You’ve sort of grown on me, like...”

“A tumor?”

Ben went to nod, but then furrowed his brows. “What?” Mason had a strange look on his face, like he held something back. Suddenly he was giggling like crazy, and Ben couldn’t help but join in a little, laughing along. “I’m going to ignore that.”

“No, you’re not, you’re laughing, too,” Mason said. “Ah, I knew you liked me. Now I feel better about blackmailing you and ruining your life.” Mason was all smiles, and Ben pinched his leg.

“I told you I liked you before, but I think you were high on Vicodin,” Ben said.

“I remember,” Mason said. “So... besides the whole drunken marriage, gay squatter thing,

why are you stressing so much?"

Ben didn't even know where to begin. "My dad," he began, anyway.

"The in-laws are always bitches."

Ben threw Mason a look.

"Sorry, no more marriage jokes," Mason mumbled.

"Anyway, my dad, he's my boss, right? He's this famous architect, and he's got a really successful business. He put me through the Yale School of Architecture, best education an architect could ever hope for. He gave me the best training, made all the best resources available to me, and I am... basically set to take over the business when Dad retires." Ben took a breath. "It's a good life, obviously," he said, gesturing to his surroundings. "I just don't really... care."

"You're gonna be the next big thing in the architect world," Mason commented.

"Oh, yeah," Ben said, rolling his eyes. "I can't even draw."

Mason snickered. "How'd you manage to get your degree then?"

"They wouldn't fail Gregory Bell's son, are you kidding? It'd be a disgrace. Meanwhile, I've got all this guilt because Lucas, my best friend, he's got this fucking knack for designing houses. He's like... amazing. And we're on the same level, business wise. But when I move up, without having worked for it, and he stays in the same spot... Damn, he's going to be pissed at me," Ben said. "He deserves to take over, not me."

"Can't you both do it?" Mason asked.

"Nah. Maybe. I don't know."

"Okay, you have Daddy Issues. What else?" Mason actually looked interested.

Ben smiled; it felt like someone was listening to him thoroughly for this first time in ages. "Oh, god, what else. Well, besides the obvious," he said, gesturing between him and Mason. "There's Genevieve."

"Oooh," Mason said, leaning forward in interest. "Here comes the good part."

"You are... obnoxious," Ben said. "Sort of cute, too."

"Save the flattery, give me the dirt."

Ben rolled his eyes. "I don't know if I'm ready to be married."

"You are sort of young," Mason said. "And I guess I've not been a very good warm up act, right?"

“This whole situation is sort of making my proposal all the more real,” Ben admitted. “I...” He felt the words coming out of his mouth before he could stop them. “I don’t know if I would have proposed to her if I hadn’t met you.”

Mason looked a bit confused. “What do you mean?”

“Um.” Ben rubbed at the back of his neck. “Maybe I jumped the gun a bit because of my feelings for you.” Now Mason looked completely confused. “I’ve never been with a guy before,” Ben said quickly, trying to glaze over what he really meant. “Maybe I wanted to prove I was straight or something, so I asked her to marry me.”

Mason leaned forward, all wide eyes, and smacked Ben hard in the shoulder. “That is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard!”

Ben rubbed his shoulder, cringing. “I don’t know how else to explain it.”

“So you signed yourself up for a lifetime of misery and punishment because you were a little gay for one night?” Mason asked. “Oh, Jesus fuck, Ben. That’s... absurd.”

“Don’t you think it sort of makes sense?”

“No,” Mason said flatly. “And don’t cheapen the whole situation by writing it off as that. It isn’t fair, not to you, not to me, and not to Jennifer.”

“Genevieve.”

”God, whatever, I’m not marrying her,” Mason grumbled.

“What did your parents think when you told them you were gay?” Ben asked suddenly.

Mason seemed to draw inward. “They didn’t care.”

“They didn’t?” Ben frowned. “Oh. Do they even know where you are now?”

Mason shrugged.

“How long since you’ve seen them?”

“I was fifteen? I don’t know.”

Ben nodded, knowing not to push it any further. “My mom died when I was in college.”

“I’m sorry.”

They were silent for a few moments, and Ben took a sip of his soda. “Want to know a secret?”

Mason glanced up. “How secret is this secret?”

“You’ll be the only one to know it.”

“Yeah, tell me.”

Ben sucked in a deep breath. “When I proposed to Gen, all I could think about was, um, being with you in that stupid heart shaped hot tub. I’m surprised I got the right words out to her.”

Mason laughed. “No shit.”

“Yeah,” Ben said. He felt stupid, and he couldn’t look at Mason.

“Do you want to know a secret?”

Ben’s head snapped up. “Yes.”

Mason bit at his lip. “I lied about why I came here,” he said. “I, uh...”

“What?” Ben’s hands began to sweat. “What is it?”

“You’re not going to like it,” Mason said.

“Hey, this whole situation is pretty insane. I don’t think anything could faze me right now.”

Mason nodded, still looking unsure. “Remember how Genevieve said she could see the family resemblance?”

“Yeah, but that’s ridiculous--”

“I’m actually your brother,” Mason said quickly. “I didn’t know how to tell you.”

Ben’s mouth hung open. “What?”

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry for not telling you sooner,” Mason said, his face reddening. “I didn’t find out until later, until I got a call from my mother. She found out about the wedding and when I told her your name...”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Ben asked, standing and staring down at Mason.

“You were adopted,” Mason said.

“No, I fucking wasn’t!” Ben shook. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

Mason put a hand to his mouth as if he might sob, but instead he began to laugh.

“Are you serious?” Ben asked.

“No,” Mason managed, laughing so hard that tears streamed down his face. “Oh, my god, you believed me? The look on your face...”

“That’s not funny,” Ben mumbled, blushing hotly. “I actually told you a real... whatever.”

Mason was still tittering. “All right, all right, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, you are just a teenager.”

“Dick,” Mason said, shoving Ben in the shoulder. “You obviously like it that way.”

Ben shook his head. “Everyone I’ve ever been with has actually been older than me. Genevieve is twenty-eight.”

Mason’s eyes widened. “Gross.”

“Oh, whatever, I bet you’ve fucked forty year olds,” Ben said, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, but those were guys. It was hot. Old women are... not really my type. I’m not really into the whole cougar thing. But I guess I have that reaction to any women, really, what with being gay and all,” Mason remarked. He stretched his leg out, frowning. “I wish I could get up and go somewhere.”

”Where would you go?”

“Somewhere.”

“Over the rainbow?”

Mason stuck out his tongue and flipped Ben off. “The bathroom, for one.”

Ben paused. “Do you need to go to the bathroom?”

“No, I want to look in the mirror,” Mason replied. “Yes, I need to go to the bathroom!”

“Okay,” Ben said. He grabbed Mason’s crutches and handed them over, watching, amused, as Mason tried to stand on his own. Mason’s pajama pants slipped lower down his hips, and Ben could clearly see his ass. The tattoo he’d been so interested in earlier was visible, and he wanted to mention it to Mason again, but he bit his tongue. He looked away and sighed – who was he kidding? He gazed at the swells of Mason’s ass and resisted the urge to palm it.

“Help,” Mason said, staggering on his crutches. “And I wanna use the upstairs bathroom.”

“Why make it difficult?”

“Because I want to lie down after,” Mason said, fussing with his crutches. “Help!”

Ben allowed Mason to struggle for a tad bit longer before taking the crutches, setting them down on the couch, and scooping Mason up in his arms.

“Bastard,” Mason said, wrapping his arms around Ben’s neck.

“That’s for lying to me,” Ben said. He adjusted his hold on Mason, his stomach twisting as his knuckles brushed Mason’s ass. Mason was hot and soft in his arms.

“You didn’t have to carry me,” Mason murmured as Ben began to ascend the stairs.

“Can you imagine trying to get up these with crutches?” Ben squeezed Mason tight, making him squeal.

“I guess not.” Mason sighed softly and pressed his face against Ben’s throat. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Ben carried him into the bathroom and helped him to stand up against the sink.

“Do you think you need anymore help?” Ben asked, hesitating to leave Mason alone. “Or do you need--”

“I can piss on my own,” Mason said with a toothy grin. “I think.”

Ben nodded and gave Mason his privacy, closing the door. He stood in the hall, a few feet away from the bathroom, folding his arms and staring at a piece of art on the wall. It was a tiny picture of an Asian garden setting. He didn’t even remember how it got there. It was all wrong for his taste, completely wrong. Genevieve had managed to redecorate the entire penthouse without Ben knowing. At first, it was just one thing here, another thing there. Genevieve had replaced Ben’s model airplane collection with a few fake, exotic plants. Next, she had replaced all of his authentic African clay plates (a gift from his sister) with tiny, square, ceramic dishes. The last thing to go was the furniture, but Ben had fought for the bed and the couch.

As he stood in the hallway, he wondered if she’d taken something else from him. His sense of self and his confidence in who he was. His identity.

The toilet flushed, and Mason stumbled out of the bathroom, holding onto the wall for dear life. “Help!”

Ben snickered, letting Mason fall into his arms and cling to his neck. He slid his arms easily around Mason’s tiny body and they walked toward the guest room.

“Oh,” Mason mumbled.

“What is it? – Oh.” Ben remembered saying Mason could sleep in his bed. Ben turned around and headed toward his bedroom. Mason sighed contentedly, arms wrapped firmly around Ben’s neck, clinging close and cozy.

When they entered the master bedroom, Mason fell forward onto the bed and groaned. Ben rushed over and helps him ease back. He carefully propped Mason’s foot up on a few tiny throw pillows and fluffed the pillows. It all felt so domestic, and Ben flushed dumbly at the thought.

“Damn,” Mason said, glaring at his foot. “I had no idea it would hurt this bad.”

Ben stood by the bed, arms folded. "Yeah... Well, are you all comfortable?"

"No."

"No?"

Mason patted the mattress beside him. "You're missing. Come over here."

Ben smiled lopsidedly and sat on the bed, leaning against the headboard next to Mason. For a few moments they were quiet; Mason stretched his legs, flexing his toes and wincing. Ben's eyes landed on Mason's exposed belly and hips, his naval peeking out and tempting Ben.

"Fuck, I don't know how I'm going to pay for this," Mason murmured.

"What do you mean?"

Mason scooted down a little and looked up at Ben. "The doctor's bill. There's a reason I haven't been to the doctor since I was sixteen."

"Seriously? You haven't been to see a doctor in three years?"

"I haven't been sick," Mason said. "Too bad, at least."

"Well, don't worry about it," Ben said softly. "It's not like I can't afford a little emergency room visit. You are my husband, after all. I mean, I could do a little paperwork and you could even be on my insurance, if you make a habit out of spraining things."

Mason's eyes brightened for a moment and then quickly darkened. "No, that isn't your responsibility, to pay for me. It's my own damn fault for spraining my ankle."

"It's not a big deal," Ben said.

Mason sat up on his elbows. "It is," he said. "No one's ever... fuck." He flopped onto his back. "Why are you being so good to me?"

"I... it's not even that. I'm just being a decent human being," Ben said.

"I guess I haven't met too many of those in my life," Mason said. "You've done enough for me as it is, and all I've been is an asshole to you. I'm using you, you know."

"I don't think you are."

Mason laughed dryly. "Are you stupid?"

"Nah. I think you kinda like me." Ben looked over at Mason to find him hiding under a pillow. "It's okay. I like you a little, too. I wouldn't be here right now if I didn't."

"I didn't plan on liking you," Mason said, words muffled by the pillow. "I liked you right away and then when my boyfriend kicked me out, I hated you."

Ben tugged on the pillow. "Mason..."

"You're so fucking sweet to me, and you shouldn't be. You got me a cell phone – and don't even lie, I know you got me a new one, I'm not stupid. You gave me a key to your penthouse – I could have stolen everything you own, you know," Mason said, voice muffled.

Ben said nothing, because Mason was kind of stealing something. Nothing huge, just his heart.

"And now you're paying for my hospital bills... Oh, my god," Mason whined, coming out from under the pillow and gasping for air. "Why? Why are you so..."

"It's nothing," Ben said calmly. "For better or for worse, till death do us part, blah blah blah."

Mason's eyes widened. "Are you high?"

"No! Why?"

"Because..." Mason sighed. "This is too much, I feel..." He sat up, staring at Ben. "What do you want from me? You have to want something."

Ben chuckled. That list was long. "Nothing," he said. "I don't want anything from you."

"Nothing."

Ben shook his head.

"I come all the way across the country to find you, and you want nothing from me?" Mason squinted at Ben. "Exactly how much of our night in Vegas do you remember?"

"When I woke up that morning, I basically stepped on five used condoms and tripped over two empty champagne bottles, and I had the headache of a lifetime. I don't remember that much, but..." Ben shrugged. "I remember enough."

"You remember the sex."

"Yeah, I remember the sex."

"What else?"

Ben looked down. "Nothing." And that was a lie, because Ben had been having pleasant little epiphanies for weeks of how he'd romanced Mason that night in Vegas.

"Some of the things you said to me," Mason said slowly. "You said you remembered telling me you'd show me the world."

"So maybe I remember some other things," Ben said. Mason made a sour face and pressed his cheek up against Ben's leg. He breathed out, and Ben could feel the hot breath. He reached down without thought and stroked Mason's long, soft, black hair. Mason almost purred at the contact.

“I’m a little starved for affection,” Mason mumbled, nuzzling against Ben’s leg. “Affection is what I do best, you know.”

“I thought dirty dancing was what you did best,” Ben said. Mason grunted and bit at Ben’s leg. “Ouch!”

“I don’t want to blackmail you anymore.” Mason shoved his face up against Ben’s leg to hide.

“It’s okay, I kind of like it,” Ben said.

Mason pushed his lips forward and kissed Ben’s leg. “Yeah?” he asked.

Ben stroked Mason’s hair again, his fingers tingling, his belly flipping. “Yeah.”

Mason lifted his head and then sat up, dragging himself across the bed closer to Ben. “Fuck,” he hissed, his foot catching in the blankets.

“Hey, careful,” Ben said. Mason dragged himself closer, still hissing in pain. “What are you doing?”

Mason’s face looked determined. He knelt between Ben’s legs and his eyes flashed. “I want to thank you.”

“I don’t--”

“I may not be able to stand, but I can kneel,” Mason said, licking at his lips. His hands moved up Ben’s leg, tickling up the seam of Ben’s jeans and pressing down hard over Ben’s crotch. Ben hadn’t realized he was aroused until he felt Mason’s fingers on him, and he moaned loudly, his hips moving up into the touches.

“Mason, no,” he moaned.

“Yes,” Mason murmured, making quick work of Ben’s belt. He unbuckled it and tugged, pulling Ben’s hips forward, a completely deviant expression on his face. “Yes, yes, yes.”

Ben shook his head, but the relief he felt was so good. “Mason, no, seriously – Ooh, seriously,” he hissed.

“Shut up,” Mason said, looking up with fire in his eyes. “Shut up, this is all I have to pay you back with.”

Ben frowned and put a hand on Mason’s forehead. “Then stop. I don’t want it.” His words betrayed his body, and his hips bucked forward as Mason’s fingertips slid inside his pants. “Mason, stop, I don’t want it to be – ohh... -- be like this.”

“I want to do this. I’ve thought about sucking your perfect cock every single fucking day since Vegas,” Mason said, looking down and unbuttoning Ben’s pants. “I sort of... have a hunger for it.”

“Mason, stop...” Ben’s limbs turned to jelly. Mason tugged Ben’s pants down his hips, ignoring the halfhearted protests. Ben resisted as best he could, he resisted even as he gave in. It’s so fucked up, he thought, as Mason yanked at his boxers.

Mason pulled the boxers down to Ben’s knees and then stared at the exposed flesh. “Oh,” he breathed. “Oh, oh. Nice.”

Ben blinked, looking up at Mason dazedly. “Nice?”

“Your dick,” Mason clarified. “Nice. Can I?”

“Would you care if I said no?” Ben managed before Mason bent down and licked at the tip. “Oh, shit, shit!”

“Mmm...” Mason licked a long strip down Ben’s cock. “You smell so good... Like I remember, I think about it all the time, Benny.”

“Oh, my god,” Ben moaned. He slipped his fingers through Mason’s silky hair, meaning to push him back, to stop his movements, but Ben only ended up guiding Mason’s head as he licked.

“That’s right,” Mason said, voice deep and rough. “Show me how you like it.”

“Oh fuck, I like anything, anything,” Ben panted out. His fingers curled deep into the hair he was caressing, and Mason licked across the head of his cock in appreciation. Ben yelped at the feeling, and his legs jerked, knocking Mason off him, his fingers losing their grip.

“Jesus,” Mason laughed. “Trying to kill me?”

“No,” Ben breathed. “I’m the one in danger, here. Shit.”

“It’s your damn pants,” Mason said. “Take them off so I can get closer.”

“They’re all yours,” Ben said weakly. “Just... fuck... cut them off if you have to.”

Mason smiled and, with effort, tugged Ben’s pants and boxers down and off. He threw them on the floor and crawled toward Ben again. A powerful flashback from their night in Vegas bombarded Ben; Mason crawling on the bed toward him with the very same seductive look in those eyes... dark and fiery.

Ben could hardly handle the memory, and he forced himself to look back up at Mason. Mason moved between Ben’s legs, and Ben thrust his hips forward. He spread his thighs, allowing Mason to come closer. “Suck it,” he pleaded quietly. “I swear, you have to.”

“I don’t have to do anything,” Mason replied, petting Ben’s cock with nimble, slender fingers. “I want,” he said, “to do this.” He leaned down and swallowed Ben’s cock into his mouth, sucking hard enough to make Ben howl out and squeeze Mason between those thighs.

Mason gripped Ben’s legs and steadily kept sucking, his head bobbing up and down, the most delicious, moist sounds coming from his mouth. Ben felt hot and wet and so scandalized as

Mason devoured his cock. He loved it. How could he have been such an idiot and resisted this?

“Oh, yes,” he moaned, unable to stop himself from thrusting up and fucking Mason’s sweet mouth. Mason took it easily, sucking Ben down and then, Mason pulled off Ben’s dick to latch his mouth around the head and suckle at the tip. Ben’s thighs tensed, and he cupped Mason’s cheek, shivering.

“Fuck, you’re turning me on,” Mason said as he kissed down the shaft. “Tell me what to do, I wanna do it for you.”

Ben squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to come just from looking at Mason near his dick. “Please... suck it, please,” he said, desperation in his voice. He stroked Mason’s face and nudged his dick against those sweet lips. “Show me how good you are, remind me.”

Mason sucked in the tip again and let Ben guide his mouth down until he’d swallowed it whole. Mason moaned deeply around his mouthful, hands squeezing Ben’s thighs and raking up Ben’s belly.

“Remember this?” Mason murmured, popping off Ben’s cock and grinning. “Remember, come on.”

“Yes -- god,” Ben sighed, squeezing his eyes shut tight as he let the pleasure wash over him. “God, yes, I remember your mouth. I...”

“Remember...” Mason wrapped his hand around the base of Ben’s dick and squeezed. He pressed his lips to the tip and kissed all down the length, only to pause by Ben’s tight balls. “Remember this?” He licked at Ben’s balls and then sucked them into his mouth, pressing his tongue against them, sucking them, playing his tongue around them. Ben nearly lost it; he arched off the bed and groaned loudly.

“Yes, yes! Yes,” Ben moaned. “God, fuck, yes, you’re so fucking good, you’re so fucking good.”

Mason smiled around Ben’s balls and then went back to sucking his cock, his hot, aching cock that was almost about ready to spill over into Mason’s mouth.

“Remember fucking me?” Mason whispered.

And that did it. Ben screamed out and thrust one last time, coming in jagged movements in Mason’s mouth. Mason took it all hungrily, staring Ben in the eye as he swallowed hard and licked up the rest.

“Oh shit,” Ben groaned, stroking Mason’s face over and over again. “Jesus... that was...”

Mason leaned into the touch and then rolled off Ben, smiling contentedly. “Good?”

Ben tried to catch his breath back, tried to move and do something, anything for Mason, but he couldn’t. His chest rose and fell at a quick pace, and he began to sweat all over in the afterglow. His cock ached in a delicious, spent way, and his belly warmed pleasantly.

“Ye--yeah,” he stuttered out. “Even better than I remembered.”

Mason laughed, and when Ben finally pulled it together and turned to him, he found Mason cuddled up, his wrapped ankle safely placed on a pillow.

“Is your ankle okay?”

Mason nodded.

“Was that... um, okay for you?” Ben asked. Mason licked his lips and nodded again.

“Because you didn’t have to do it, and I--”

Mason rested a gentle hand against Ben’s mouth. “Shh. Bedtime.” Mason’s eyes drooped in an adorable manner, and Ben caressed his face again, something that was bound to make Mason purr.

“You’re... really, um, pretty,” Ben said awkwardly.

Mason’s eyes closed and his mouth curved into a half smile. “You’re just saying that because I swallowed.”

Ben laughed and reached over Mason, turning off the bedside lamp. “Yeah, you’re right. You’re actually hideous.” He pulled the blanket up over them and tucked Mason in. “Can I do anything for you?”

“Nope,” Mason whispered. “Nothing but a good, hard fucking is going to solve my problem right now.”

“I can’t--”

“I know, stupid,” Mason said with a laugh. “Let’s sleep, okay?”

Ben nodded in the dark and slipped under the covers. “I’m going to have good dreams tonight,” he said.

Mason curled a bit closer and nipped at Ben’s shoulder. “Night, stud.”

Ben wrapped his arm around Mason and decided that it felt good. Brother, husband, whatever, he liked Mason.

No doubt about that.

CHAPTER NINE

The next morning, Ben woke up unbearably warm. Mason was pressed up so close to him that there was hardly a centimeter between them. Ben glanced down, taking in the sight. It was a fine one, for sure, and even though he was stifling hot, he was also deliriously happy.

Because he'd realized something; he'd realized that he was really into Mason and that was okay because Mason was with him and there was nothing either of them could do about it.

Why couldn't he enjoy it a little?

He yawned and stretched, stroking a hand down Mason's back and loving the little mewling sounds Mason made. Feeling bold, he kissed Mason's forehead, and his bedmate's eyelids fluttered open.

"Huh?" Mason blinked a few times, slowly looking up. "Oh. Oh, mmm." And Mason nuzzled back down, nestling right under Ben's armpit.

"Hey, hey," Ben murmured, pulling Mason's hair gently. "I've got to get up and go to work."

"No," Mason mumbled. "Stay."

Ben wanted to, he really wanted to, but his father would kill him if he was even one second late to work. "Mason, you make it really hard."

Mason snickered.

"To go anywhere!" Ben blushed. "Well, you know. That too."

"Stay and take care of me," Mason whined softly. "I'm pathetic."

"You really are." Ben shook his head, swinging away from Mason's heat with great effort.

"Hey, you text me today if you need anything. I'm serious, anything."

"Sex?" Mason cracked an eye open.

Ben cringed. "Ugh..."

"Come back soon," Mason murmured, curling up and shutting his eyes again.

Ben stared for a few moments and then, with even greater effort, turned to go take a shower, get dressed, and go to work.

He'd never found it so difficult to leave someone before. What was up with that?

Ben checked his phone for the hundredth time that day. No messages. He grabbed his jacket and headed toward the elevator.

“Hey man, wait up!” Lucas called, jogging after him. They stepped into the elevator together, and Lucas grinned. “Where the hell have you been?”

“Busy... with stuff,” Ben said, checking his phone again. Still no messages.

“Oh yeah?” Lucas asked, his grin widening. “Would that stuff involve Mason?”

Ben’s neck heated up, and Lucas laughed. “He sprained his ankle. I had to, uh, take care of him,” Ben said.

Lucas raised an eyebrow and then clapped Ben on the back so hard that he nearly fell forward into the doors. “Laura said Mason seemed happier. Good on you, man.”

The door dinged open, and Ben tried to rush out, but Lucas stopped him. He hit the button to close the door and then sent them back up to the top floor again. “Nah ah,” Lucas said, wagging his finger. “Spill it all.”

“You spill it all,” Ben said back, rather childishly. “How the hell does Laura know what’s going on? And what’s going on with you and Laura?”

“Don’t change the subject,” Lucas said.

“Fuck,” Ben moaned. “There’s nothing to spill. I’m... watching out for the kid.”

“And where are you planning on going now?”

Ben tugged at the collar of his shirt. “Home.”

“To check on him?”

“Maybe.”

Lucas smacked him on the back again.

“He can barely move on his own!” Ben said in defense. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s everything,” Lucas said back in a sing song voice. The door dinged open, and Lucas stepped out. “See you later, loverboy.”

Ben flipped him off as the door closed.

“Oh... great,” he moaned, and then jumped about a foot as his phone vibrated strongly in his pocket. He opened it quickly, smiling to see that it was a message from Mason. His smile, however, didn’t last long.

thank u for all uve done 4me. rlly. i wont forget it - m

“Why does that sound like a goodbye?” Ben said aloud. The elevator stopped at the fifth floor, and Ben had to force himself to not swear up a storm as a bunch of businessmen slowly walked in. More and more suits piled into the cramped quarters, and Ben looked down at the

message on his phone, frowning. The door was about to close when someone stopped it, calling down the hallway as more men made their way toward the elevator.

Ben tapped his foot impatiently. What did that message mean? Did something happen? Did Mason leave?

“Fuck this!” Ben yelled, shoving a portly business man aside. He briefly recognized the man as the vice president of his father’s company. He didn’t care. He nearly tripped as he forced his way out of the elevator, people yelling after him.

He hopped out and tore down the hall to the stairwell.

Ben burst through his front door, out of breath. He’d run up fifteen flights of stairs, not patient enough to wait for the elevator to come to him. He dropped his keys and briefcase to the floor and tugged off his necktie, discarding it over a chair.

“Mason?” he called out into the dim apartment. “Mason, are you okay? Where are you? Mas...”

Ben’s eyes landed on the counter and sitting on that counter were two things.

Mason’s key and Mason’s cell phone.

Ben stared at the items, bewildered. “What...?” He picked up the phone and flipped it open. There were five unread text messages, all from his own phone. “Shit.”

He set down the phone and rushed into the living room. “Mason? Where the fuck are you?” He let out a strangled noise of frustration and ran up the stairs to his room. “Mason?”

All that greeted him was an unmade bed, his pants from the night before in a heap on the floor, and one of Mason’s damn pink socks in the sheets. He backed up and crossed the hall to the guest room. His eyes lit up; Mason’s shoulder bag was sitting on the ground, but his suitcase was gone.

“Fuck, fuck,” Ben groaned, crouching down in front of the white leather shoulder bag. “Fuck, Mason.”

The brilliant photo of Mason and him stuck out of the bag, and Ben pulled it out, frowning. They looked so vibrant and happy, grinning like idiots moments before Ben had pulled them both down the strip and into The Cupid’s Bow Chapel to seal them together matrimonially.

The memory came back to him so clearly it nearly bowled him over.

“My... My, uh, well,” Mason said as Ben all but dragged him toward the chapel. “Someone won’t be too happy about me getting married tonight.”

“So what? This feels so right,” Ben replied, feeling so warm in the cool Las Vegas air. “So fucking right and you look beautiful tonight.”

“Do you have anyone back home?” Mason asked, gripping Ben’s hand tighter.

Ben paused and then shook his head. “It doesn’t even matter, I don’t care...Do you? Have anyone?”

Mason grinned. “I guess I don’t care, either,” he said softly, skipping ahead to pull Ben into a deep, scorching kiss.

Ben stared at the photo, shaking from the memory. Had he lost Mason? Where could he have gone?

“Laura,” he said, perking up. He ran back down the stairs to Mason’s phone, flipping through the electronic phonebook quickly.

There were only two names in there: Ben and Laura.

“Was he texting her?” Ben wondered aloud. He knew he should feel bad for going through Mason’s things, but Mason’d left the phone here for Ben to find, so he couldn’t be hiding that much.

Ben clicked past his own messages to Mason and found one from Laura. He opened it.

see you soon, m - L

Ben frowned. Laura was all the way in Vegas, how would Mason see her soon unless he planned on going back there?

He found another text. yea but hes not that bad of a guy.. he misses u. give him a chance m, we all miss u here 2. -L

“Who’s ‘not that bad of a guy’?” Ben murmured. There was only one other message from Laura -- he found out where u’re at. idk how -L

Ben closed the phone, angrier than he’d been in a while. How could Mason just up and leave? Especially after the previous night, after all Ben had done for him? Ben had made reservations at the restaurant Mason had wanted to go to, he’d even pulled some strings and gotten front row tickets to see The Producers on Broadway.

“God, I am such an idiot,” Ben groaned. “He was using me. God. Stupid, stupid, stupid.” Ben stared down at the cell phone. “Don’t do it,” he said. “Don’t do it, it’ll look desperate and you’re not a desperate man.”

But he was already hitting send on the phone. He was already calling Laura.

“Mason honey?” answered a warm, feminine voice.

“No, not Mason honey,” Ben said.

“Oh.” There was a beat of silence. “Ben?”

“Bingo.”

There was more silence, and then a feigned, awkward giggle. “Oh, Ben, how are you?”

“Fucking great. Do you know where Mason is?” Ben asked.

“Isn’t he with you?” Laura’s voice sounded high pitched and phony. Ben rolled his eyes. “Last I heard from Mason, he was having a wonderful time with you!”

“Cut the act, I’m not falling for it,” Ben snapped. He was angry at Laura because he knew she was hiding something. “What were those text messages about?”

“You were looking through Mason’s phone?”

Ben cringed. “Um...”

Laura tsked.

“It’s none of your business,” Ben said. “Where is he? I have a right to know, I’m...his spouse.”

“That may be,” Laura replied. “But he asked me to not... I mean... I can’t say. I promised Mason I wouldn’t tell you.”

Ben took a deep breath. She obviously thought it was all a game, that none of it mattered, and she was only keeping a friend’s little secret. “I need to know where he is,” he said quietly, calmly. “And if you don’t tell me, I swear I will find out some other way.”

“Listen, he’s gone already,” Laura said. “There’s no point in--”

“You listen,” Ben interrupted, his teeth grinding. “I... I’m worried about him! I care about him, and, I uh, I like him. I can’t let him... fuck.”

Laura sighed over the phone. “He’s back with his ex, Armande,” she said quickly. “I don’t know where they are right now, Hell, they could be on a plane back to Vegas, so there’s no stopping him.”

“What?” Ben boomed, eyes widening.

“Don’t tell him I told you,” she said. “My shift is about to start, darling, so I’ve gotta go. You’re real sweet, though, just like Mason said.”

“Mason said--”

“Bye bye, now.”

The phone clicked off, and Ben groaned. He stared at the phone, squeezing it, resisting the urge to redial and scream at the poor waitress. He felt useless, trapped, frustrated and lonelier than he’d been in ages.

He set the phone down and leaned against the counter, gritting his teeth. What could he do? There was really nothing. Mason was gone; he'd been swept off his feet again by someone who actually showed he cared, and that was that.

Ben didn't know what to do.

"Fuck, man," Ben said, downing the last sip of his beer. He'd already had three of them, and he was reaching for his fourth. "I fuckin'... I fuckin' did good things for that kid."

Lucas, Ben's current drinking buddy, nodded. "I'm sorry Laura gave you the shoulder, dude. I'll talk to her, see if I can find anything out." He shook his drink at Ben, some of it spilling and splattering onto the couch.

"Don't bother, it's over," Ben said morosely.

"Well, you and Laura ought to get along, anyway," Lucas said. Ben looked over at his friend and grunted. Lucas had barely touched his own beer, and what Ben needed right then was a drunk, excitable Lucas. Not a sober, sense talking Lucas.

"Eh, I'll never see that waitress again, what does it matter?" Ben said.

Lucas set his own bottle down and stared at it. "I like her."

Ben snorted. "That internet bullshit is gonna get old. You're gonna want some real ass, man."

Lucas continued staring at his beer.

"Come on, man, what's happened to you? At least tell me some raunchy sex stories to try and cheer me up," Ben said, slapping Lucas on the back.

Lucas shifted in his seat and turned his gaze on Ben. "Are you ever going to grow up?" he asked, sharply. "You had Mason, fucking had him, and you were too much of a jerk to realize it. You let him go, you're never going to find love like that again and--"

"I don't love him!" Ben bellowed. The alcohol settled in his belly, and he was about ready for a fight. He glared at his friend, though some of the anger was lost when he saw how blue Lucas looked. "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." Lucas stood and brushed off his pants. "Enjoy your pity party, Benjamin, because like Mason, I'm not going to wait around for you to come to your senses." He turned, as Ben gaped after him, trying to find words.

"I don't love him!" was all Ben can think of to yell after his friend. Lucas didn't turn back, and when he slammed the door the sound echoed through the penthouse, all the way up to the high ceilings and the empty hollow places of Ben's heart.

Ben set down his beer and put his head in his hands.

“I don’t love him,” Ben said. He stared up at the clock, ticking loudly, and swore. “I don’t! Shut up!”

Ben’s pity party was almost never ending, it seemed, and he’d stopped drinking hours ago. It was going on two in the morning, and he’d been staring at the Discovery Channel since midnight. He had no idea what he’d been watching, nothing made sense to him. All he could think about was Mason.

“Oh,” Ben murmured, staring at the television harder. It was a special about fishing. He watched as group of deep sea fishermen caught a ton of fish and then let them go. That was what Mason was, Ben thought.

Mason, the one that got away.

“Christ,” Ben groaned. He shut off the television and flopped back on the couch. He couldn’t be this broken up about it. Mason was just a one night stand that, tragically, followed Ben all the way home. Ben refused to give that loss any more mourning than it deserved. He stood up and shoved the empty beer cans into the waste basket, shaking his head. Genevieve would want him to keep the place clean.

He made a face, his head hurting even more than it already did. He needed to get some rest, otherwise the impending hangover was going to be twice as bad. Standing on wobbly legs, he made his way up the stairs, leaning against the railing as he moved. He felt like he was going to be sick already, and he almost crawled to the bathroom, he was hunched over so low.

The last thing he remembered, before emptying the contents of his stomach into the bowl was handing Mason a hot dog, kissing Mason’s knuckles and murmuring, sweetly, “I love you.”

How fucking romantic.

Ben flushed the toilet and puked again.

Ben was on the floor. He was lying flat on the floor and there was an awful pounding coming from beyond his immediate senses. He smacked his lips a few times and made an awful face. Had he swallow a sock or something?

The pounding only grew louder, and he wondered if it was coming from his head, or if it was really happening and there actually was someone knocking on his door downstairs. He craned his neck and squinted at the alarm clock near his bed. It was almost eleven in the morning.

More pounding.

“All right!” Ben howled, clapping his hand over his eyes and staggering to his feet. He hadn’t been even slightly hung over in a while, not counting Vegas. He knew his alcohol tolerance was low, but this was ridiculous. “Fuck, all right, coming!”

He made it downstairs, slamming into the walls like a ping pong ball, and when he reached the kitchen counter, he cursed loudly. “Lucas, I know it’s you!” Ben hollered. “Keep your pants on, man. Jesus.”

When Ben ripped the door open, he was met with the very last person in the world he’d been expecting to see standing there.

“Hi,” Mason said meekly, leaning on his crutches.

Ben gaped at Mason, much like he had the first time the younger man had shown up at his door. This time he didn’t collapse to the floor, but barely.

“We’ve got to stop meeting like this,” Mason said, smiling softly.

“What are you doing here?” Ben asked. He rubbed at his face and groaned. “Are you back?”

Mason shook his head and looked down. “I needed to--”

“Rip my fucking heart out?” Ben asked loudly. He blushed even before he finished speaking.

Mason looked taken aback. “What?”

“Did you come back to give me some more and then take it back?” Ben didn’t care anymore, he was on a roll and he had things to say. “Because I don’t think you really gave me enough, I mean, I’m still alive. Maybe you should kill me now. Here, I will get you a steak knife.”

“Benny--”

“And don’t do your fucking adorable things and be your sweet fucking self,” Ben went on, feeling angrier and angrier the more he spoke. “Do you know what you did? Uprooted my whole life, made me fucking propose to a woman that I hardly even know, even after living with her for over a year? Do you know how you turned my life upside down, all because you’re...”

Mason stood there without saying a word, cheeks pink, eyes on the ground. His nose was red from the cold and really, Ben wanted to reach forward and kiss him.

But he couldn’t, because as besotted as he was with Mason, he was also pissed.

“You meant something to me,” Ben said brokenly. “You convinced me to take you in, and care about you, and then when you left, I worried. How could you do that to me?”

Mason leaned to the side, gripping his crutch and frowning. He dared to look up at Ben, right in the eyes, and his own eyes were wet. “I... came back to get something,” he murmured.

For a moment, for one single moment, Ben’s heart lifted.

“I left my shoulder bag here,” Mason said, looking to the floor again. “And it’s got my wallet and shit in it.”

Ben felt a mixture of confusion and anger. He gaped at Mason. “Your wallet... and your picture of us?”

Mason shrugged a shoulder. “That, too,” he replied. “Hey, listen, I’m really sorry I came here and messed up your life. I really didn’t mean to. Well... of course I meant to, but I didn’t want it to get this bad.”

“This bad?” Ben felt his chest tighten. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“We can get the annulment,” Mason said quickly. “I promise. I’m sorry I was a dick about it. Send me the papers and I’ll sign them.”

“No,” Ben said. He didn’t know why he said the word, but it came out of his mouth easily and he didn’t regret it. “Listen, I really--”

A loud crash sounded from outside.

It was the sound of his heart breaking, Ben thought. And as punishment for such a pathetic thought, a very tall, very large man in shades stepped up behind Mason and wrapped an arm around his waist.

“Knocked over your garbage,” the man said with a grin. “That shit was asking for it.”

“I told you not to come up here,” Mason said. He tensed in the man’s hold.

Ben immediately bristled as the man squeezed Mason harder. “Who is this?” Ben asked.

The man lowered his shades and flashed Ben a shit eating grin. “Ah! So this is the guy?” he said to Mason. “Yo, man, two days ago I was gonna bash your head in, for real! But then little Mase over here told me how nice you was to him and all that gay shit and I thought, nah, I’ll let him live.”

“Armande!” Mason hissed, face flushing. “Behave.”

So this was Armande? This thug was the guy Mason left Ben for? This clown?

Ben’s head throbbed, and he took a step forward. “You,” he said lowly.

“Cool it, tough guy,” Armande said, squeezing Mason so hard he nearly dropped his crutches. “I ain’t got no beef with you now. I got the girl, and you looked after her, right? We’re cool.”

Ben was going to rip this man’s lungs out.

“Can we just get my bag?” Mason asked. Ben had never seen Mason look so small, and the young man wouldn’t meet his eyes.

But Ben looked at him and stared so intensely that he wasn't paying attention to Armande anymore. Which was quite a feat, considering Armande's lumbering presence.

"Mason," Ben said.

"Punk, you know where his purse is?" Armande said. "Don't play like you don't know. I bought him that Prada. You know what that's worth?"

Mason looked miserable in Armande's hold, but Ben knew better. This Armande, this thug, was the guy for Mason. This muscular, long haired, tattooed, designer suit wearing chump with a gold hoop in his ear was Mason's knight in shining armor. This was the man who was going to ride off into the sunset with his Mason. Ben was merely a supporting player in this whole story, it seemed.

It hurt. What hurt even more was how wrong Ben knew this man was for Mason.

"I'll get the purse. Uh, the bag," Ben managed to croak. He turned around and shuffled toward the staircase, feeling lower than dirt.

"I'll go with him," he heard Mason say.

"Nah, baby, you're staying with Papi this time," rasped Armande.

Ben rolled his eyes. As much as it hurt, as much as he felt like a lesser man, he simply could not help feeling like Armande was a fucking caveman in comparison.

"Baby, not so tight, you're hurting me," Mason mumbled, and suddenly Ben saw red. He stopped where he stood and turned. Suddenly, he was sick of being a supporting player in his own life.

"Let go of him," Ben said. A feeling washed over him, one that was one part bravery and one part stupidity.

Armande laughed. "What do you know about him, huh? Just 'cause you fucked him, doesn't mean you know him. He likes it rough."

Ben almost growled. He felt territorial and eager to fight. Not to mention scared out of his wits.

"You're jealous that you don't got what I have," Armande said. "He's mine, you hear?"

"Shut up," Mason said. He pulled away from Armande and leaned on his crutches. "No one owns me, so both of you back off. This is ridiculous."

"You wanna fight or something?" Armande asked Ben, cracking his knuckles. "I'd hate to break all of your pretty things."

"The only thing you're going to break is my marriage," Ben said. "But you already know that."

Armande furrowed his brows. “Your what?”

“Ben, shut up,” Mason said, eyes widening. “Just--”

“Don’t play stupid,” Ben shouted. “I fucking married him, you know I did! Sure, we were drunk and we didn’t know what we were doing, but we made a commitment. We--”

“You what?” Armande roared. He turned to Mason, his eyes black with fury. “You married this punk? You told me you just fucked!” He turned back to Ben, eyes even darker. “I’m gonna fuckin’ break your face, kid.”

Mason put a delicate hand on Armande’s arm, only to have it shaken off. Armande took a menacing step forward, and Ben swore the room shook. “You really fuckin’ married my Mason?”

“Yeah,” Ben said shakily. A burst of courage flowed through him. “Yeah, I did. I did what you’ll never do. You don’t have the balls to, asshole!”

“Ben!” squeaked Mason.

“I should’ve killed you before,” Armande growled. His hands turned to fists, and the tension in the room snapped like a string. Ben knew he was about to get pummeled, and he was ready to face it. Maybe this wasn’t a fairy tale after all. Maybe it was a Greek tragedy.

“Don’t even joke about that shit,” Mason said. “No one’s killing anyone here.”

“Don’t talk,” Armande said. “You lied to me. I’ll deal with you later.”

That was all it took for Ben. He was going to jump forward into his own demise with arms wide open. At least he’d go down in history as a hero.

“Oh no you won’t,” Ben grumbled. He took a confident step forward and decked Armande right in the jaw. He put all of his strength into the blow, his knuckles stinging with pain, and yet, Armande barely reacted. He only growled, and Ben knew he was fucked. Really, really fucked.

But wasn’t he already?

Mason tried to hold Armande back, telling him to stop, but Armande didn’t. Ben couldn’t blame him; he must have had some sort of reputation to uphold. And he must have wanted to win the girl, too. Maybe even as much as Ben did.

So, Ben wasn’t very surprised when he found himself on the floor, his nose bleeding profusely and an enormous weight on his chest. Armande sat on him, enormous fists raised for round two.

“You asshole, you know he’s smaller than you!” he heard Mason cry. In Ben’s state of half consciousness he could only see Mason. Perfect Mason. The very same Mason who attempted to shove Armande off of Ben’s bruised and battered body. The same Mason who failed to hold back Armande’s massive fists.

Oh yeah, Ben was getting hit again. His body was numb, the blows barely held a sting.

Mason yelled louder, and Ben's heart swelled. Mason was trying to save him, trying to get the girl. Ben almost laughed, but he spit out blood instead. He was the girl in the end.

Before he could take another blow to both his body and pride, he saw Mason raising his crutches from under his armpits and swinging them down on Armande's back. The larger man rolled off Ben, swearing. Armande reached out for Mason, as if to harm him, and Ben couldn't do a damn thing to stop the man. He was flat on his back and not moving anytime soon.

But fate seemed to intervene in the form of the building's doorman, Bernard.

"Enough, enough!" Bernard called out, keeping his calm, but managing to look more menacing than ten Armandes at the same time. He pulled Armande up with one arm and threw the large man out the door, immediately moving to Ben's side. "Sir, are you quite all right?"

Ben groaned and tried to sit up. His head ached, and blood dribbled down his face, but he was alive. "Uhh," he garbled out. "Get him out of here. Armande," he managed to add. "I'll be fine. It's only my nose."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bell," Bernard said lowly to Ben, and then he nodded at Mason. "And you, too, Mr. Bell. I'll escort him off the premises."

Mason's cheeks were red with tears, and Ben looked up dazedly, shaking his head. He heard a scuffle in the hallway, and the door to the penthouse slammed shut. Mason trembled, crouching down by Ben and holding his crutch close to his chest.

"Mason?" Ben managed, tasting blood.

"Shut up, shut up," Mason groaned. "That was so stupid, so fucking stupid of you!"

Ben frowned. He felt like he might pass out. Armande had really given him a good bruising. "Uh. Mason? Is that you? You're perfect, you know..."

Mason swore under his breath and shook his head. "I mean, you're... You're amazing, and all, to fight for me, but you're so stupid! I have to go back down there."

"No, no!" Ben croaked, propping himself up on his elbows. "Fuck, no!"

Mason nodded. "I have to go to him."

And then Ben watched Mason hobble out the door, out of his life again. All Ben could do was sigh and cringe as his limbs ache.

"Your shoulder bag," he muttered, giving up and dropping his head back to the floor. "You forgot your shoulder bag."

CHAPTER TEN

“Wake up, you idiot.”

Ben groaned.

“Come on, I can’t drag you up, I’m crippled.”

What was that noise? Ben’s eyes tried to open, but he was too tired.

“He didn’t hit you that hard, just split your lip, messed up your nose a bit. Ben.”

“Ergh.”

“Benny!”

Ben knew that voice. His eyes opened wearily, and his head throbbed. Having a hangover and being beaten about the head was not a good combination. “You’re back,” Ben croaked out. He sat up, staring at Mason. His heart ached more than his head. “You’re back!”

“Of course I’m back. Did you think I’d leave you when you’re so pathetic?” Mason managed to sit beside Ben on the floor and stroked down his face. “He got you good.”

“He was going to hurt you,” Ben said. Mason laughed and pressed his hand to Ben’s cheek.

“He’d never hurt me,” Mason said. “Physically, that is. But he’d hurt you to hurt me.”

Ben shook his head, reaching out and holding onto Mason’s shoulder to steady himself. “What?”

“He always hurts the ones I love most,” Mason murmured. “To get to me. Isn’t he an ass?”

“The ones you love?”

Mason nodded, his face reddening prettily. “Yeah.”

Ben managed to sit up and hunched over, feeling his face. Yes, his lip was split and his nose was bleeding. “Fuck that guy.”

“He isn’t going to come back; I made sure of it,” Mason said with resolve.

“How?”

Mason made a face. “He owed me like a thousand favors...”

“Oh.” Ben groaned again and held his head in his hands. “Wait, what do you mean?”

“Not now, Benny. We need to get you cleaned up.”

“No, I know hardly anything about you. And... I just got the shit beaten out of me by a lumbering Neanderthal. I think I deserve some explanation,” Ben said.

Mason took a deep breath and looked Ben square in the eyes. “I... I’m not good at talking about this kind of stuff. No one’s really ever asked me before.”

“I want to know.” Ben touched Mason’s arm. “I need to know.”

“I’ve been with Armande for not even a year,” Mason started. “He owns the club I worked at. The one you and me... He’s kind of a high roller. So, of course I jumped on that. I mean, after I pretty much shamed myself for dancing, I needed someone to take care of me. See, Ben, I can’t take care of myself. I’ve always been this way.”

“You seem to handle yourself pretty well,” Ben said, cringing. His nose really hurt.

“Yeah, I used to have only myself...” Mason trailed off. “I grew up right outside Vegas. My mom was a drunk, and my dad was never around. I barely graduated high school. If it wasn’t for my grandmother, that is.”

“Your grandmother?”

“You know the tattoo on my lower back? The one that says Katarzyna?”

Ben nodded.

“That’s my grandmother’s name,” Mason said. “She died right after I graduated high school. I lived with her for a while. Things were going good then. She paid for my dance classes because she knew how passionate I was about it. She wasn’t rich or anything, but she cared about me.” He wiped at his eyes. “She was a dancer, back in Russia. She danced for royalty, she was that skilled. I learned everything I know from her. Well, not everything,” he added, face flushed.

“She must have meant a lot to you,” Ben said. “I’m sorry you lost her.”

“After she died, I had to move back in with my mom. I was working to make our rent. Not good kind of work, either. I was no prostitute, Ben, but... not much better. I was disgusting. My family made me this way. My mother practically was my pimp.”

Ben didn’t know what to say. He could only squeeze Mason’s hand in a show of support. “I don’t care about your past. I swear.”

Mason laughed. “You’re one of few. After Armande took me in, I did a lot of favors for him. He was arrested on some drug charges, and I was his alibi. They put me on the stand, and I lied for him in exchange for what he could give me.”

“What the hell could he give you?”

“A job? Food? Shelter,” Mason said, wrinkling his nose. “Something he called love, but I’ve never thought that was what love was like before. I’m not weak, Ben, I’m strong, but after nineteen years of taking care of myself and everyone around me, I...”

“I’m not judging you,” Ben said softly. “I’ve been spoon fed everything all my life. I don’t know what it’s like to take care of anyone. Everything I’ve ever wanted was always given to me. I don’t even know what I want to do with my life. Hell, I’d be just as bad off as you if I didn’t have Daddy taking care of me. Trust me, that’s not what you want from life.”

“Sounds good to me,” Mason murmured.

Ben chuckled and shook his head. “I haven’t been the nicest of guys, have I?”

Mason squeezed Ben’s hand back. “You’ve been better to me than you should. Listen, I really like you. This isn’t some desperate ploy so I don’t have to be out on my own. You’re the first person to ever show me something that felt real, even though it was so unreal. In Vegas, I felt like I’d really found the person I was going to spend the rest of my life with.”

“I believe you,” Ben said quickly. “I don’t think you’re using me, as dumb as that sounds. So... Armande. What happened? How did you reconnect with him?”

“He called,” Mason said. “Thanks to Laura. I love her, but she’s sort of spineless. Then again, Armande is her boss. He told me he forgave me for fucking around on him and that his new boy toy didn’t suck dick half as well as I do.”

Ben felt his cheeks heat up. “That was enough for you to go back to him?”

Mason hung his head. “You let me get close to you, too close. I was fucking up your entire life. I didn’t want to leave you, fuck, that was the last thing I wanted. I thought it’d be better for you because of Genevieve. Because of everything! I don’t want to be the kind of person I was before. I don’t want to have to blackmail someone into loving me.”

Ben pulled Mason a little closer to him, and they both grunted in pain at the movement. “Genevieve is moving to France. Even if you weren’t in my life, I don’t think our relationship could have held up across an ocean. It could barely survive in the same city. What was I thinking? I thought that was love; I had no idea.”

Now Mason blushed. “Love?” he asked.

Ben nodded, and Mason’s face lit up. “Feels like I’m going to die, though.”

“You’re not going to,” Mason said, smiling. “Don’t make me a widower before I hit twenty.”

“Oh, yeah. That’s one way to get out of it.”

“I came back, didn’t I?”

“But why, really?” Ben asked, looking Mason square in the eye. “You were going to leave. Why’d you come back?”

“Probably because I, uh, care about you,” Mason said quietly. “Is that selfish of me?”

“Contrary to what you think, you didn’t ruin my life,” Ben said. Mason gave him a look. “Fine, maybe you ruined it just a little, but at least I was living. I haven’t felt this alive, and in pain, may I add, in years.”

Mason couldn’t help but laugh a little at that. “I can’t believe Armande wanted me back. He’s usually so stubborn, and now I’ve kicked him out the door. He must be humiliated.”

“Fuck what he wants,” Ben said, eyes darkening. “What about what I want?”

Mason smiled sadly and pushed Ben’s hair out of his face. “What do you want?”

“I want...” Ben closed his eyes and tried to breathe right. His nose was still bleeding the slightest bit, and he wished the moment could be more romantic. “I want you. All of you. I want to be married to you.”

Mason smiled, but then his smile tightened and disappeared. “What are you going to do about Jocelyn?”

“Genevieve?”

“Yeah, her.”

Ben wrinkled his nose and sighed. “I don’t know.”

“Because, I gotta say, as your spouse, I really don’t appreciate you having asked her to marry you,” Mason said. He punched Ben in the shoulder, and Ben winced and clutched the spot. “Sorry.”

“Well, forget about her,” Ben replied, rubbing at his shoulder. “As far as I’m concerned, that’s over.”

“Okay,” Mason agreed. His smile returned, and his face brightened. “So... we’re really gonna do this?”

Ben nodded, trying to stand, groaning all the way up. “Yeah. Hand me a crutch.”

“Why?”

“Just do it!”

Mason gave Ben a confused look, but handed over a crutch. Ben took it and used it to hoist himself up. He stopped on his knee and knelt in front of Mason. Mason’s mouth fell open.

“You idiot,” he murmured.

Ben ignored that. “Mason... um... uh...”

“Hadley,” Mason supplied.

“Mason Hadley,” Ben said quickly. “Will you do me the honor, of, um... staying married to me?”

Mason stared at Ben for a long second, but then propelled himself forward, wrapping his arms around Ben’s neck and crashing them both down to the floor. Ben groaned in pain, but still accepted Mason, holding him tight, burying his face in Mason’s neck if only to muffle the scream of pain.

Mason pulled back and kissed Ben square on the lips, nearly knocking the wind out of him.

“Let’s get your face washed off, okay?” Mason asked.

Ben squeezed Mason in his arms and mumbled an affirmative into the soft, black hair. He sighed heavily in pleasure. Maybe everything was going to be okay after all.

Well, besides the busted nose. That was going to take some time to heal. Ben’s heart, on the other hand, was mending quicker than he could’ve thought possible.

“Stop looking at me like that, it’s fine,” Ben said, adjusting himself on the bed.

“If you think this makes you a big man, it doesn’t,” Mason retorted. “If it’s broken you should see a doctor.”

Mason had helped Ben clean up and upon inspecting his nose (the inspection involving Mason gently touching the bridge and Ben crying like a little baby while slapping Mason’s hands away) decided Ben needed to go the emergency room.

“Ben, it’s going to heal all wonky, you’ll have a crooked nose,” Mason said. Ben crossed his arms and grunted. He was comfy in bed, and he didn’t want to go anywhere, especially when he’d been imagining spending the rest of the evening loving on Mason. He flushed now in embarrassment just thinking about it. He’d had plans other than an ER visit.

“I don’t care if it’s crooked,” Ben said lamely.

“I’m the one who has to look at you,” Mason snapped. Ben opens his mouth to fire off another lame line when something warm settled in his belly. They were arguing. In bed. In their own bed.

He had Mason. Forever. Or as long as Mason would put up with him.

He reached across the bed and pulled Mason close. “Ben... what are you--”

Ben silenced him with a kiss, a deep, hot kiss that made them both moan. Mason carefully got up on his knees and was about to straddle Ben’s lap when their mouths changed angles and their noses bumped together. Ben almost threw Mason off the bed as he squeaked in pain, his arms flailing out to cover his nose, tears welling in his eyes.

“That’s it!” Mason cried. “Out of this bed right now. We’re going to the hospital.”

“But Mason--”

“If you ever want to get laid again, you’ll follow me.” Mason grabbed a crutch and hobbled to the door. “Coming?”

“If I ever want to again, yes.” Ben stood, his shoulders slumping as he dragged his feet across the floor. “So, this is married life,” he muttered.

“Don’t think I didn’t hear that!”

Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.

“This was such a good idea,” Ben moaned. He ran his hands through Mason’s hair gently, groaning as he was sucked into that hot, wet mouth.

“I’m only doing this because the pain killers haven’t kicked in yet,” Mason reminded Ben. “You were a bad boy.”

Ben didn’t care if he was a bitch during the hospital visit, all he cared about was Mason sucking his cock and the wonderful cloud the painkillers put him on. His bandaged nose didn’t hurt anymore, hell, he couldn’t feel it at all.

But Mason licking all around his cock, he felt that.

“Mmm,” Ben hummed, slipping down further. He could get used to this, watching Mason devour his cock, feeling that tight heat surround him, running his fingers through the fine, black hair as Mason’s head moved back and forth, up and down.

He thought this would never get old, not even when they were both old and gray.

“Is it good?” Mason looked up with earnest eyes. He looked unsure for the first time ever. Ben passed a hand through Mason’s hair and nodded, dazed.

“It’s the... best, mmm,” Ben moaned, eyes heavy lidded and body feeling warm. Mason smiled and swallowed hard around Ben’s dick again, nearly all the way down his throat. Ben’s belly fired up with that good feeling he only got when Mason was around. “Oh... Mason, yes...”

Mason beamed, his lips almost pressed flush to the hilt, and kept working Ben’s cock. Ben brought his hands up to cover his face, it was so good, and then he hit his nose. “Ah, fuck!”

“Fuck?” Mason pulled back.

“Fuck!” Ben gestured to his cock with one hand, clutching his nose with the other.

“Ahhh, poor baby,” Mason laughed, and sucked him in again. Ben’s belly ached with arousal, and his balls tightened, he was going to come in record time, and he didn’t even have the

good sense to be embarrassed about it.

“Mason,” he moaned. “Yes. I-- I love you.”

Mason sucked extra hard, and Ben thrust up once, twice, and came down Mason’s throat. The orgasm left Ben useless; he slipped back against his pillows and moaned as Mason pulled off. His toes tingled, his body felt like was sinking into the mattress, and he thought that was only partly because of the pain killers. He’d never felt so blissed out before. The warm aching in his heart was definitely all Mason’s doing.

He let Mason snuggle up close to him and tug the covers up over their bodies. Mason reached over and turned off the bedside lamp. The darkness made Ben even sleepier; his eyes could barely stay open. He kissed the top of Mason’s head and sighed in satisfaction.

“Really?” Mason asked after a moment or two of silence.

“Hmm?”

Mason kissed Ben’s neck. “You love me?”

Ben held him closer, smiling like an idiot. “So much, you don’t even know.”

“But why?” Mason asked.

Ben’s smile turned into a full out grin, and he mumbled, “Because you make me happy,” before slipping into unconsciousness.

Ben stared at his cell phone as it buzzed with another new call. He had already unhooked the landline in the penthouse so the only way to reach him was to call his cell phone.

“Gonna answer that one?” Mason asked casually, limbering up on the floor in front of the couch. He was almost doing a full split, and Ben had been watching him, stupefied by how flexible Mason was.

“Yeah, no,” Ben said, throwing his phone on the coffee table. “I... don’t want to deal with that yet.”

Mason gave Ben a look and pulled his knees to his chest. “You’ve gotta talk to Josephine sometime.”

“It’s Genevieve,” Ben said without thinking. “I know. Trust me, I know.”

Mason hugged his knees tight. “You haven’t changed your mind, right?”

Ben cringed. “Oh... Mason. I’m so sorry, but... I have. I didn’t want to hurt you, you’re such a nice kid, and...I’m leaving for Paris tonight to go be with her. I’m trying to impress her, win her heart back again and warm it from its icy shroud.”

There was a beat of silence between them.

“That’s not even funny,” Mason deadpanned.

Ben shrugged. “You’re a tough customer.”

Mason smiled a little and stuck his tongue out at Ben. “Come on, when are you gonna kick her to the curb?”

“Kick her to the curb?”

“You know, set her on the street with next week’s garbage.”

Ben groaned. “She isn’t that bad.”

“I’ll dump her for you, if you want,” Mason said. He leaned forward and pressed his belly to the rug, his legs completely spread eagle.

The phone buzzed again, this time more insistent, somehow. Ben knew he couldn’t ignore her forever, but what would another few minutes hurt?

“How are you even doing that with your sprained ankle?” Ben asked.

“Oh,” Mason replied, flushed. “I forgot to tell you. My ankle feels fine now.”

“You forgot to tell me?”

“Maybe I was milking it a little bit,” Mason said, smiling.

“You made me go all the way across town to pick up your luggage from that ape and then haul it all the way back!” Ben said. “You said your ankle hurt too much to help.”

“Armande isn’t an ape,” Mason said. He stood and did a backbend, and Ben’s mouth began to water. “He’s just a little rough around the edges.”

“He tried to kill me,” Ben said testily, “when I went over there. Do you know that?”

Ben watched the way Mason’s body contorted, and he couldn’t find it in himself to be mad. Mason flipped onto his feet and stretched down to touch his toes, his ass about eye level with Ben.

“Wanna... wanna do that over here?” Ben asked. Mason shook his ass twice and straightened up.

“Oh, so now that my ankle is better you want me to show you what else I can do?” Mason walked to the couch and lifted his leg, resting it on the back, right beside Ben’s head.

“I know exactly what else you can do,” Ben said. “That, I remember very clearly.”

Mason leaned in closer. “That’s what they all say.”

Ben growled and pulled Mason on him, hands moving down his back and then, Ben pressed his fingers against Mason's ass, causing him to squeal. Suddenly Ben was running on pure need, and he needed Mason. He lifted Mason up, and the younger man rocked in his lap, grinding their already hard cocks together.

"God, yes," Mason gasped, eyes wide. "Yes, yes, this is what I remember, too. I haven't gotten laid in weeks. Please."

Ben leaned in and licked up Mason's neck, latching his lips onto the warm, soft skin and sucking hard. He wanted to mark Mason, even though they both knew Mason was already his. He wanted to physically see it. Mason made a fuss and pressed his hands against Ben's chest, laughing and snapping his hips forward.

"Benny," he moaned prettily.

And it was the best thing Ben'd ever heard, his name spilling wantonly from Mason's lips. Ben slipped his hands into Mason's pants and tugged them down, revealing soft, creamy skin, and he squeezed, making Mason squeak.

Ben threw Mason's pants to the side and gripped his hips, placing the younger man back in his lap. Mason's cock was hard and pink, shining with precome. Ben rubbed a thumb over the tip, drawing more, and then touched his hand to his lips to taste.

Mason sighed and fumbled with Ben's belt, almost ripping it open, his jaw flexing as his teeth ground in concentration. Ben leaned back and watched Mason make quick work of his pants, tugging them down until Ben, too, was exposed and their dicks slid together in quick, jagged movements.

"Oh, fuck, feels so good," Mason moaned, rubbing up against Ben. "Imagine how good it'll feel inside me."

"I have," Ben said, voice deep and rough. "It's all I've been thinking about since we met. Shit, I know how good it'll be."

Mason laughed a little and scraped his nails down Ben's chest, shoving his hands under the garment and pinching a nipple. Ben groaned at the treatment and cupped Mason's ass, guiding his movements. Ben's fingers slipped down to run across Mason's crease, touching briefly over the tiny hole he'd been fantasizing about for far too long.

"Jesus," Mason sighed out. "I'm going to come right now if you keep doing that."

Ben slapped Mason's ass, and his nipple was pinched extra hard in return. "I'm gonna fuck you," Ben said. "I'm going to fuck you in every room."

Mason rubbed faster against him, beginning to pant as their cocks got harder, wetter. "Going for a record, I see," Mason gasped out. "Fuck, put it in me, Benny."

Ben didn't need to be told twice. He pressed an eager finger inside Mason, and Mason cried out loudly, nearly shaking above him. Ben shook, too, he knew they'd both wanted this for

what felt like a long time. It'd been building up between them for a week, a little something they'd started in Las Vegas that had spanned across the country to this very penthouse.

Now they were writhing together as Ben added another finger. He dry fucked Mason, and Mason leaned his head back, gripping Ben's shoulders and mewling.

"How much do you want it?" Ben asked, because he needed to hear this. "How much?"

"Mmmgh," Mason groaned. "So, so fucking much, Benny, fuck me, please."

"Mason, slow down, I gotta get a condom," Ben said breathlessly. "Or... maybe five condoms."

"I don't care, we're married, I'm clean," Mason replied. "I trust you."

Ben swelled with pride and pulled Mason forward, their chests bumping. He thrust his cock between Mason's legs at first, grinding in there, feeling the heat between Mason's thighs. His cock nudged Mason's hole, and he squeezed those tiny hips. His knuckles locked, and he slid the tip of his dick across Mason's hole.

"Oh, fuck!" Mason whined, a brilliant smile on his face.

The moment was so blissful that neither of them heard the front door swing open. Neither heard the clicking of stilettos on tile, and neither noticed Genevieve standing in the archway to the living room.

"Oh, my god," Genevieve gasped, covering her mouth with a perfectly manicured hand. She took a step back and bumped into one of her massive ceramic vases.

Ben was the first to notice her presence, and he cursed loudly. Ben's first instinct should have been to throw Mason off him, but instead, he stupidly pulled Mason closer.

"Oh, Benny, so good, don't stop," Mason moaned, eyes shut.

The sounds of ceramic shattering on the hardwood floors snapped them both out of it, and Mason jerked off Ben, eyes wide open as Genevieve stood before them, face red and fists shaking.

"Of all the things I never expected you to do to me!" she bellowed.

Ben covered his groin area in fear of her stilettos. "Gen, I can explain I--"

"You cheated on me!" she shrieked. "With your brother!"

Mason was apparently shameless and let out the tiniest of giggles. Genevieve's eyes darkened, and she tore the engagement ring off her finger and chucked it at them. The ring hit Ben square on his bandaged nose, and he was too busy blubbing like a small child to hear her last remarks.

Another shattered vase and a litany of curses. “Fuck you!” she swore, her face red with anger. “Fuck both of you, you’re sick! This is sick!”

She gave them both one last disgusted look and stormed out of the penthouse, one of her stiletto heels cracking off on the way. With one last colorful tirade of curses, she disappeared out the door, slamming it behind her. Two pictures rattled on the wall and fell to the floor, glass shattering everywhere.

Ben stared at the engagement ring on the floor. Sure, it was over between them, but it had meant something at one point.

Something confusing, at least.

He sighed and tugged his pants back up, feeling modest. Mason sat beside him, shaking.

“I’m sorry about that,” Ben said softly. “I’m so sorry she--”

Mason burst out laughing, trembling and vibrating on the couch next to Ben, still pantless. He wrapped his arms around his torso and rolled on the cushions, nearly disappearing between the cracks, sobs escaping his throat from laughter.

Ben squinted at Mason, perplexed. “Ha, ha?”

“Oh, my fucking god,” Mason managed. “That... That... She thought we were... incest!” He doubled over again, holding his sides and giggling uncontrollably. “What it must have looked like to her! Holy shit, I wish I had a camera.”

Ben looked down at his crotch. Mood ruined, libido killed. Genevieve was always good for that. He buckled his belt and frowned, leaning forward and staring hard at the ring. It shone in the dull light, mocking him. “Fuck,” he mumbled.

“Oh, come on,” Mason said, still giggling. “Come on, bro.”

Ben shook his head. “Not funny.”

Mason poked Ben in the side. “Benny...”

“Mason, I’m really not in the mood,” Ben snapped. Mason’s eyes widened, and he stopped laughing. “I feel like a huge jerk now. I should have handled it, so she didn’t have to see that. I shouldn’t have... I should...”

Mason sat up and pulled a pillow over his lap, his hair falling in his face. “I’m sorry.”

“I just need a second,” Ben said. “It’s not that funny.”

“You’re right,” Mason agreed. He brushed a soft finger along Ben’s hairline and smiled, only to be pushed away.

“Seriously, I need a second,” Ben said testily.

Mason's face clouded over. "Fine," he said, standing up and grabbing his pants. "I'll leave you alone to brood about your fiancée."

"Mason, don't even start with that shit."

"No! It's fine," Mason replied briskly. He walked to the archway of the room, stepping over the broken pieces of ceramic and glass, pieces of Ben's shattered relationship. "I'll be up in my room."

"Mason..."

Mason turned and left the room. Ben was alone now with the engagement ring, an aching nose, and a heap of broken ceramic.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A couple of hours later, Ben sat in his home office, staring at a blank wall. The office in his penthouse was pristine, spotless, barely even used. It was filled with architecture blueprints, textbooks, and shiny, grey file cabinets. The room was all beige and white and black, sharp angles and a little too tidy for comfort.

He leaned back in his big, leather executive chair, drumming his fingers on the grand mahogany desk. He was really confused about Genevieve. There was relief that it was finally over; he was now a free man. Well, free to be married to Mason.

But he also couldn't shake the feeling that he was an inconsiderate asshole. Or that Genevieve just might have been telling the entire city of Manhattan that Ben practiced incest with his slutty younger brother.

Ben groaned and rubbed the bridge of his nose, because that hurt, too.

He wasn't sorry he'd broken up with her, but he was sorry that it happened the way it did. Also, if he was being completely honest with himself, he was more sexually frustrated than he'd ever been in his life.

He'd had Mason for an entire week and hadn't gotten the relief he needed. It was wasted time, especially now that they were together. Or at least, Ben thought they were. Sure, Mason had run half way across the country to fuck up Ben's life, but did that really mean Mason wanted to be with him?

Mason hadn't even told Ben that he loved him. Ben could've laughed at his own logic. God, he was so fucked, but not in the way he wanted to be.

He was deep in thought when the door clicked open and the main concern of his ponderings shuffled in. Mason was dressed in one of Ben's long, button down work shirts. And that was all he wore, besides a pair of bright yellow ankle socks. He held up a small plate, a mangled sandwich sitting atop it.

"Thought you might be hungry," Mason said, taking another step into the room. "I made peanut butter and jelly and even managed to fuck that up, so..."

A trace of a smile formed on Ben's face, and he gestured for Mason to come further into the room. "I'm sorry I was short with you earlier," Ben said. He took the plate from Mason and set it on his desk.

"Aren't you going to taste it?" Mason asked.

"Would that be wise?"

Mason shook his head. "I dropped it. Twice." Ben made a face, and Mason crouched down next to him, stroking his legs. "I'm the one who's sorry. You've been with her for a long time."

"Two years," Ben said. Mason stroked a hand farther up his thigh, and Ben let out a long

breath. Mason's fingers felt so good, so right.

"Shit, I've never been with someone for more than six months." Mason dipped his head and kissed Ben's knee. "I should have been more understanding. I mean, if you still have feelings for her--"

Ben jerked Mason up into his lap and hugged the younger man so tight that the words squeezed right out of Mason. "I love you."

Ben's heart picked up speed, and his belly warmed. "Really?"

Mason nodded and straddled Ben, kneeling up a little on the chair. His smooth, bare legs clenched tightly around Ben's hips. "Why do you think I really came here, anyway? I may have been down on my luck, but that wasn't why. My heart couldn't forget you, and I knew you had to have felt the same way, too."

"You were right," Ben said. They locked eyes and shared a chaste kiss. Mason stroked down Ben's face, gently caressing the little white strip across his nose.

"Does it still hurt?"

"Fuck, yeah. But it was worth it." Ben smoothed his hands down Mason's bare thighs, leaving goose bumps behind. "You look good in this."

Mason flushed and looked at Ben from under his eyelashes. "Do you mind?"

"If I drop out of the architect game, I'll have no use for them, so they're yours."

"Are you going to quit your job?" Mason asked. He shifted over Ben, his ass bumping down and creating heat between them. Ben pulled Mason back down to repeat the movement.

"I-- I don't know," Ben breathed. "And right now... fuck, it's the last thing on my mind."

A spark lit in Mason's eyes, and he ground down hard, his nails digging into Ben's shoulders. "What's on your mind, stud?"

"You," Ben gritted out. "Fucking you. Here. In that damn shirt."

Mason moaned and knelt up, slapping Ben's hands away as he tried to pull Ben back down. Mason popped open the button on Ben's pants and dragged down the zip.

"Then do it," he said, breathing into Ben's ear. He licked at the lobe and moaned again. "Right now. No distractions. I need it."

"You need it," Ben groaned.

"Hey, I've taken care of you twice already," Mason said, grinning deviantly. "This time it's about me."

Mason pulled Ben's cock out of his pants and started rubbing. Ben shifted in his chair, closing his eyes, relishing the feeling, because if previous experience had taught him anything, it was that being with Mason was a task that liked to be interrupted. "Fuck, now, quick."

"Oh, yeah," Mason whispered, a dirty smile playing on his face. "You are a stud, aren't you?"

Ben shook his head, moaning low, loving the feel of Mason's fingers on his balls. "Want to come, so bad."

"You and I have that in common," Mason said. He positioned himself in Ben's lap. "Do it, Benny, finger me."

"God, okay," Ben gasped. He opened his eyes and stared down Mason's lean, lithe body. Blindly, he reached over onto his desk and found a small bottle of hand lotion. Genevieve had often complained about Ben's chapped hands and planted the tiny bottles around the apartment, and at that moment, Ben felt serious gratitude for his dry palms. He poured a drop of the lotion into his cupped hand and swept a wet finger across Mason's hole, pushing it in, curling and making the boy in his lap purr. Mason was all feline and sharp as Ben pressed a finger in him, and then another. "Feel good?"

"Feels so good. Mmm," Mason murmured. "Oh... Just move it up. Yes, there, right there."

Ben smiled, feeling a little cocky. He knew he had the hottest thing in all of Manhattan in his lap, possibly even the world. He pulled his fingers out, and their gazes connected.

"Gonna fuck you now."

Mason, eyes dark, licked down his palm and stroked Ben's dick once, squeezing and rolling his fingers down the shaft. Ben's stomach flipped, heating up; he had to get inside Mason. He quickly stroked lotion down his cock, hissing at the feeling against his sensitive flesh.

"Do it fast, come on," Mason said needily, his eyes wide with adoration. Ben leaned forward and kissed Mason before pushing the tip of his dick almost inside. "Ohh!"

"Yeah," Ben grunted, holding Mason firm and pressing deeper inside him. It was rough, but he could tell they both felt relief already. "Oh fuck, you're tight. Tighter than I remember."

Mason managed a laugh and twisted his hips, sliding down on Ben's cock. He cringed and then sighed. "You were so good..."

"Were?"

"Are, are!" Mason howled as Ben thrust without warning. "God, you are."

They moved together frantically on the chair. Mason mewled as Ben thrust up into his ass, holding Mason's hips and guiding him into each movement.

Mason sat back and let Ben fuck him however he liked. He arched his back and tightened

rhythmically around Ben's dick.

"F--fuck," Ben grunted. "Fuck!"

The chair creaked, and the leather was definitely going to chafe later, but Ben was already chasing his orgasm, so he didn't care if they fucked the entire apartment complex down. Mason began to squeak out obscenities, his hand between his legs, fisting his slender cock.

"Oh, my god," Mason groaned.

Ben shoved in extra hard, and Mason arched back so far that Ben needed to hold his hips up to keep him from toppling back onto the floor. One more thrust and Mason bucked as he came in hot jets all across Ben's shirt.

"Shit," Mason gasped, panting hard and rubbing Ben's chest. "Mmm, oh, god, so fucking good."

Ben nodded, but he still hadn't gotten his own yet. He gave Mason the tiniest break and then started thrusting again, this time in sloppy, unpracticed movements. He only wanted to come, he needed to. He'd been fucking without a finale for a week, and he was dying to come in Mason's ass, immediately if not sooner.

Mason bounced on Ben's cock, eyes wide, his hair everywhere. He looked radiant and so good, so amazingly hot. Ben dragged his hands down Mason's side and cursed as Mason expertly teased his cock, clenching, releasing, squeezing, loosening.

It was all too much and not enough and Ben was in the middle of it when he bucked forward, crying out and coming hard inside Mason. Mason drew in a sharp breath and looked at Ben expectantly, staring at him intensely.

"Did you?" Mason whispered. "Because I think I felt you..." He squirmed around a bit, smiling. "Oh, yeah, you did."

Ben let his mouth hang open. "Fuck, that..."

Mason leaned forward and kissed Ben softly, grinding slowly on the flesh still inside him, wincing as he moved. Ben's grip on Mason's hips loosened a bit, and he started rubbing all up and down Mason's back.

"Every day," Mason murmured. "We can do that every day."

Ben could only nod, dazed. "Why? Why do you... you know."

Mason cocked his head, pulling off Ben's dick. "What?"

"Why do you love me?"

"Because," Mason said simply, "you're rich and you'll take me around the world and you've got an attractive physique and--"

Ben put a hand over Mason's mouth and shook his head. "Come on."

Mason sighed. "'Cause I do. Is that good enough?"

"Yeah." Ben grinned, pinching Mason's side. "And you can go around the world, but you'll never find anything better than what's right here."

"That putrid sandwich?"

Ben laughed. "Yeah, that's what I meant."

"I know what you meant." Mason kissed Ben's throat, grinning. "Can I find it in the bedroom, too?"

Ben groaned, hardening already. "Yeah. And in the bathroom."

"How about the kitchen?"

"Up on the counter, sure," Ben said.

"Living room?"

Ben nodded and kissed Mason deeply, moving against him. "How about the bedroom right now?"

Mason bit at his lip and breathed right into Ben's ear. "If you promise there's actual lube in there. Fucked me a little raw, stud."

Ben's finger found Mason's hole, and he stroked across it. "I've got lube," he said.

Mason swore and scratched down Ben's chest. "Music to my ears."

"Oh, Benny."

Ten a.m. and Mason was flat on his back with Ben between his legs. Ben was still sore from the night before, and he bet that Mason was, too. They'd fucked not once more, but two more times.

Mason had been begging for it, tangled in the sheets and spreading his thighs for Ben. Ben hadn't been able to deny him – why would he? Ben wanted it just as bad, possibly more.

Now, Ben had Mason in front of him, splayed out and offered up. Ben dragged his hands all down Mason's body, his cock already nudging at Mason's hole.

"Not so fast," Mason said, yawning and smiling sleepily. "Put some lube on that thing."

Ben chuckled, reaching for the bottle. He felt like an eager little boy, barely able to contain his load. "Can't get anything past you."

“You like it rough,” Mason said, arching an eyebrow. “Noted.”

“Thought you did, too,” Ben replied. He gestured to the faint scratches on his shoulders. Indeed, Mason had been rough with Ben, needy and desperate, grabbing at his shoulders and digging in his nails. It had hurt, but not too badly, and Ben would have taken even more if it had meant Mason would beg for his cock longer.

Ben gazed down at Mason, pouring lube in his palm and lazily stroking his cock. “You look so good.”

“You look like a stud,” Mason replied, grinning. He blushed then, as Ben’s expression remained serious. “Thank you.”

Ben nodded and held Mason’s knees up on either side of him. He remembered how he’d had Mason on his side the night before, and he’d fucked Mason from behind. They’d moved together perfectly, matching each other’s rhythms and thrusts. Ben stroked behind Mason’s knee and pushed his hips forward, the very tip of his dick breaching Mason’s little body.

“Oh,” Mason murmured, blinking up at Ben. “God...”

Ben hissed in pleasure and sunk slowly into Mason’s ass. Mason was still as tight as ever, and Ben had to control himself, he wanted to take this one slow. He wanted to show Mason he could be gentle, that Mason was more than just a fuck to him.

“What are you doing?” Mason groaned out. Ben slowly thrust in and out of him, and Mason whined.

Ben locked their lips together and nudged his hips forward, hitting Mason’s spot dead on. Mason moaned into the kiss, and Ben hit it again and again and again. Mason started shaking and sweating beneath him, eyes squeezed shut and hands clutching at the sheets.

“Benny,” he breathed out.

“Do you like it slow?” Ben asked. Mason’s legs wrapped around Ben’s hips, and he brought Ben down on top of him so they were pressed together, chest to chest. “Yeah, that much, huh?”

“Don’t stop.”

Ben smiled, burying his face in the crook of Mason’s neck. He bet that Mason hadn’t been fucked slowly, maybe ever. Mason had seemed so confused as to why Ben wasn’t hammering into him, and while that was a nice feeling, Ben did promise to show Mason the world.

Mason’s breathing was hurried, impatient, gasping. Ben stroked down his side and whispered in his ear to calm down, to relax, to enjoy it.

Mason’s legs tightened around Ben’s waist, and he let out a tiny whimper. “Benny, you’re so good, this is...”

Ben nodded, lifting his head and kissing Mason as he fucked him slowly, steadily. He could feel his orgasm building inside him, boiling in the pit of his belly and heating up his whole body. Ben opened his mouth and latched on to Mason's neck, kissing down to Mason's collarbone and thrusting harder.

Mason let out a moan, a ragged, pretty moan, and trembled slightly under Ben. Mason felt hot, sweaty against him. Ben could taste the salt on Mason's skin, and he breathed in deep; the younger man smelled like cinnamon and sex.

"Oh, oh," Mason cried, tensing under Ben. "Oh..."

Ben stared down at Mason and sighed, feeling his own release coming.

Mason came without being touched, and Ben's ego was rather stroked. He'd never thought of himself as bad at sex, but he'd never gotten quite that reaction out of a partner before, either. Genevieve would usually moan a few times, go stiff, and then flop back limp as a fish until Ben would finish.

But Ben rocked Mason's world, and he knew Mason wasn't faking. Mason was as mad for Ben as Ben was for Mason, and they were compatible as anything in bed. Out of bed, too.

Ben thrust one last time and came with Mason's name on his lips. They basked in the afterglow for some time afterward, and Ben finally, finally felt at peace with everything. Nothing nagged at the back of his mind, nothing picked at him, pulled at him to do this or that. He was doing what he wanted with who he wanted.

It was time to live a little.

Just a little.

Ben flipped the last pancake as Mason came in through the door, dressed in his running gear. It was Monday morning, and the only work Ben planned on doing was in front of a skillet and all over Mason's body.

"Have a nice run?" Ben asked. Mason plopped down on a chair next to Ben and swore. "I see."

"My ankle is still a little fucked, and I'm so out of shape," Mason said. Ben smirked, about to speak. "Sex doesn't count as exercise, you freak. You make me sorer than eight hours at the gym, babe."

Ben snorted. "All right, all right."

"Hey," Mason said, perking up. "Your nose is barely swollen this morning. You even took the bandages off! It's just a little crooked."

"Thanks to the ape."

Mason laughed, rubbing at his ankle.

A large man in a navy blue jumpsuit edged between Mason and Ben, carrying a large mirror out the door. Mason and Ben didn't pay him any mind.

"My physical therapist said I should be back in shape in no time, though," Mason remarked. He came up behind Ben and kissed his neck. "And--"

"Larry! Come and help me with this dresser!" called a voice from upstairs. The same large man who'd had the mirror hurried back inside and disappeared up the staircase.

Mason shook his head. "And by the way, sex actually does sort of count as exercise. But not exclusively."

"Damn," Ben said. "No wonder I'm out of shape."

"You won't be for long," Mason replied, smirking. The two watched as a pair of movers carried a grand mahogany dresser out of the penthouse, and then a tall, skinny man walked in holding a clipboard.

"Said here," the skinny man mumbled, and then looked up at Ben. "Said here that the only pieces staying are the couch and the bed in the master bedroom. That right, sir?"

"And this skillet," Ben said, holding it up.

The skinny man nodded and walked away, making more notes.

"Does it hurt?" Mason whispered.

Ben touched his nose. "Nah, it's healing so fast."

"I meant your pride, stud," Mason said.

"Oh." Ben made a face and flipped the pancake. "Nah, that's healing fast, too."

Genevieve had demanded she get everything back that was hers, and so, that Monday morning, Ben found his swank penthouse apartment invaded by a moving company. Genevieve owned everything in the apartment, practically, except for the living room couch and the bed. Ben didn't care, though. He'd never liked all that stuff, anyway.

"What are we going to eat on?" Mason asked, sitting back down and pouting.

"I have a few creative solutions," Ben said. Mason threw a running shoe at him.

"You have a one track mind."

Ben shrugged and poured some more batter into the skillet. "You're the one who said we could do it every day for the rest of our lives."

"Baby," Mason said, smiling despite himself, "my ass is gonna need a break at some point."

“Not today, sugar,” said one of the gruff movers. “I need that chair, so move it, move it!”

Mason squeaked indignantly, but stood and allowed the man to take the chair. He backed up and bumped into another man, and he turned around and swore. “Jesus, watch it!”

The man raised his eyebrows. He looked a lot different than the movers; he wore a crisp suit and looked quite distinguished.

“Um,” the man said. “Is Benjamin here?”

Ben, who was crouched behind the counter, popped up and his eyes widened. “Dad? What are you doing here?”

Ben’s father, Gregory, appeared, and he cleared his throat. “Well, after a few days of your not showing up in the office, I decided to come see if you were all right. I didn’t know you were moving.” He ducked as a mural portrait swung by, and a mover grunted.

“No, I’m not moving,” Ben said, turning red. Mason stepped forward and looked between Ben and Gregory curiously. “I’m not moving at all, it’s, uh... It’s Gen’s stuff.”

“Genevieve?” Gregory frowned. “She’s moving?”

Ben nodded. “Yeah, she’s... We’re not... anymore.”

“Oh.” Ben’s father gazed around the emptying penthouse, frowning harder. “I had no idea.” He seemed speechless, completely out of his element. “Benjamin, what’s gotten into you?”

Ben put the skillet down and glanced at Mason, praying to some god that he’d stay quiet. “Um, nothing,” Ben said. “Nothing’s gotten into me, but... Well, as you can see, there’s been some changes around here.”

“I see that,” Gregory said. “I am... perplexed.”

“It was time to move on,” Ben said. He turned off the stove and flipped the last pancake onto the pile. “Do you want breakfast?”

“It’s noon, and you’re not even dressed.” Gregory shook his head, sighing loudly. “Benjamin--”

“Father, I have company,” Ben said, motioning to Mason. He hoped Mason’s presence would at least quell his father’s anger and disappointment for the time being.

The older man nodded at Mason. “I suppose we can speak another time when you don’t have company,” he said. “Tomorrow, during your lunch break perhaps?”

Ben was about to nod, about to agree to something he didn’t want, when he looked over at Mason, standing awkwardly by the door. Fuck, Mason was his husband, his partner, and his father didn’t even know.

His father knew nothing about him.

“I’m sorry, that won’t work,” Ben said resolutely. “I won’t be coming back tomorrow. Or ever.”

Mason’s eyes lit up a bit, and he smiled at Ben encouragingly.

“And why is that?” Gregory asked.

“Let’s face it, I’m no architect,” Ben said. He wrung his hands together and took a deep breath. “I’ve never been one, and as much as you want me to be, I’m not fit to take over the firm.”

“You sell yourself too short,” his father said. “You always have.”

“No,” Ben said. “I don’t want to do this. It’s not a matter of ability, though, come on. You know as well as I do that I was never the head of my class.”

His father looked momentarily stunned, and then his face hardened with disappointment. “Then what do you plan on doing?”

Ben opened his mouth and shut it again. He didn’t know. He didn’t think he should have to know right at that moment.

“I don’t know,” Ben said finally.

Gregory bristled. “You don’t know?”

“And for now, I don’t care.”

“I see,” Gregory said softly. “That’s really... That’s great, Ben.” But it was sarcasm, something his father had never been good at up until right then. “Just wonderful. In fact, it’s the best idea you’ve had in years. I think your mother would be proud.”

“Don’t,” Ben said testily, and Mason stared at the floor. “You have no idea what Mom would have thought. Dad, don’t say that, okay?”

His father folded his arms and shrugged a shoulder. “I guess we’ll never know.”

“Mom was always supportive of me, in whatever I wanted to do,” Ben said. He felt bold. He stole another glance at Mason. “In fact... she’d be really proud of me right now. I’m finally happy. I’m doing what I want. I’m with who I want.” Ben put a tentative arm around Mason’s shoulders and pulled him close.

As Gregory stared at Ben and Mason, two obnoxious movers who smelled of cigars rumbled by, carrying the guest room bed. Ben felt Mason tense in his hold, and he gave the younger man a reassuring squeeze.

“I broke up with Gen because I’m married now,” Ben said. He cleared his throat. “To Mason here.”

Gregory stared at them blankly.

"It's nice to finally meet you," Mason said, extending his hand. Ben was surprised when his father took the hand and shook it. He'd expected explosions, earthquakes, end of times kind of stuff, but his father remained stoic. "Your son is a wonderful man."

"When did you two get married?" Gregory asked.

"Two weeks ago, or so," Mason said. "In Vegas."

"I see."

Not a word was said as the movers picked up the table from the kitchen and removed the last of the things from the living room. Finally, Ben gathered his nerve back.

"I love him, so if you think that I'm--"

"I don't pretend to know the workings of your heart, and I would be a foolish man to try and come between something, anything, that even resembles love," his father said, tone quite serious. "Your mother would approve. She always said you weren't spontaneous enough." He turned as if to go, but then stopped. "And she did always say you'd be the last to come out of our children."

"I'm not gay," Ben said in defense.

Mason choked on a cough, and his father looked dubious. "He's gay, sir," Mason said. "I'll work on him and the whole coming out thing later."

Gregory blinked, doing a double take on Mason. "Right. Well, right."

Ben sighed.

"I'll take good care of him," Mason said, biting his lip. "I swear."

Gregory nodded curtly, turning back to Ben. "I expect you to have a life plan by next week," he said, watching as a twitchy, short mover walked by with a couple of chairs. "I don't care who you're with. I don't want you to waste your life."

"I'm not wasting anything!"

"You need direction," he went on. "And don't expect to come back to my company when you're jobless in a few months. You know how the economy is. I won't take you in again unless you're one hundred and ten percent committed to it. I already have someone in mind that I am going to put in your place."

Ben cringed. "Yeah. Yes, sir."

His father cast an expressionless look over Ben and Mason and walked to the front door. "Congratulations," he said. "You'll both have to come by some time."

“Thank you,” Mason said, waving awkwardly.

“Benjamin, can I have a word outside?” Gregory asked.

Ben nodded, and they walked just outside the door, closing it. Gregory was silent for a few moments, and then he put a hand on Ben’s shoulder.

“You know, I’m incredibly disappointed in you,” he said, frowning. “I can’t imagine why you’d throw away a whole career, all your education, your training, your experience.”

“I wasn’t happy.”

“You seem to be pretty cozy in there with that boy.”

“That’s recent,” Ben said, blushing. “Come on, Dad… level with me as my dad, not as Gregory, not as Mr. Bell, not as my boss. I’m not happy working for you. You let Greg and Lindsay do what they want. Why not me? I know I was never really ambitious about anything else, but still.”

Gregory’s cheeks flushed. “I guess I saw more of myself in you.” He sighed. “You really aren’t happy at the firm?”

“Miserable,” Ben replied instantly.

His father nodded. “I suppose you’ll be wanting to break the good news to Lucas, then.”

“Good news?”

“That he’s next in line to take over the firm,” Gregory said stiffly. “I’ve got no other choice.”

“He’s a really good choice,” Ben said. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

Gregory nodded and then turned to walk away. Ben watched him disappear into the elevator, and he sighed and headed back into the penthouse.

“Leave the bed!” Mason shrieked as Ben entered the living room. “Leave it, it’s Ben’s! Not Jacinda’s!”

The movers stared at Mason, confused. Ben waved a hand and rolled his eyes. “It’s Genevieve,” he said to Mason. “And yeah,” he added to the movers, “the bed stays. Dear god, the bed stays.”

The movers hauled the bed back upstairs, and Mason approached Ben carefully. “You okay?”

Ben nodded. “I think I just got my life back. Fuck.” He grinned. “I got my fucking life back!” He grabbed Mason around the waist and twirled the younger man gleefully. Mason wasn’t having any of it and tripped Ben up. They both fell to the floor, half sprawled on the Persian area rug.

“Gotta take this too, ladies,” one of the movers grunted out, beginning to roll up the rug.

Ben rolled Mason over onto the hardwood floor, nearly lying on top of him. “Hey, there.”

Mason snorted. “You are so gay.”

“What--”

“You tried twirling me like we were in some cheesy romantic comedy,” Mason said.

“What can I say? My life thus far has been quite the comedy, and now it’s finally got some romance in it,” Ben said, nuzzling down into Mason.

“Oh, god, stop, too much cheese, too much!” Mason batted him away, and the movers gawked at them like they were circus freaks.

Soon, Mason and Ben were left in an empty apartment. Well, empty except for a couch, a bed, and a closet full of useless, boring suits. And that office he had no use for anymore.

Ben and Mason leaned against each other on a wall, gazing up at the high cathedral ceilings. Their fingers twined, their conversation sparse.

“At least,” Mason said, “we have everything we really need in this apartment.”

“And you said I was cheesy,” Ben grumbled. “At least we still have each other, right?”

“Fuck no. They left that comfy couch, and the bed.” Mason smirked. “Oh, and you. You’re cute, too.”

Ben sighed, jabbing Mason in the ribs with an elbow. “Only one thing left to do...”

Ben accepted a large box of Chinese food from the delivery man and forked over some money. He carried the food into the living room and set it on the floor, next to Mason. He settled himself down beside Mason. Lucas and Laura sat across from them.

“So,” Lucas said, “I really do like what you’ve done to the place.”

“Oh, shut it,” Ben said. “We’ll be getting more furniture just as soon as Mason gets a hold of my credit card. Shouldn’t be long.”

“I’ve got him pretty whipped,” Mason said, smiling at his new and old friends. “But really, I’m in no rush to fill up the place. This sort of reminds me of my first apartment back in Vegas. No furniture, no food, just a few boxes and my leotard.”

“Gayest story ever,” Lucas said.

“Wrong!” Mason said, sipping on a beer. “Have you never read any Wilde? A Picture of Dorian Gray? Now that’s a gay story.”

“Wasn’t Oscar Wilde imprisoned for being homosexual?” Laura asked.

“The love that dare not speak its name,” Lucas drawled.

“You know, he died alone and poor in exile,” Laura said. “God, those were fucked up times. How do you guys feel about this kind of stuff?”

“Well, this is a mood killer,” Ben said. “Can we change the subject?”

“It’s a true story,” Laura said. Lucas shushed her with a playful hand, and she batted him away. Something gleamed on her finger, and Mason gasped.

“Laurie!” he said. “What’s on your finger?”

Laura blushed. “A ring?”

Now Lucas blushed, too. Ben turned to his friend, mouth open. “Lucas?”

“Okay, so I proposed to Laura, big fucking deal. You kids got married and I hardly blinked an eye,” Lucas said, exasperated.

“But you’re...” Ben trailed off. A player, a slut, a lady’s man. But seeing the look in Laura’s eyes and the way that Lucas had changed, Ben bit his tongue. “Congratulations, man. And welcome to the family,” he added, nodding to Laura.

“We’re like sisters now,” Mason said dryly to her, rolling his eyes and stretching his legs out. “Ooh, baby, I’m sore. Rub my back?”

Ben licked his lips. He couldn’t resist Mason stretching, but they had company. He took a deep breath and rubbed Mason’s back ever so slightly. “Um, there.”

“Come on, Ben, be a man,” Lucas said, sipping his beer.

“He is a man, trust me,” Mason said, and Ben groaned, blushing hard.

Lucas made a face. “Yeah, well, I knew that. High school gym class and all.”

Ben flipped his best friend off and then raised his beer. “So, I suppose tonight we’re celebrating more than your promotion in the firm.”

“Congratulations you two,” Mason said. They all raised their bottles.

“Here’s to... living life the way we want, achieving our dreams, and um, love. Yeah, love,” Ben said. They clinked their bottles together, and before Mason took a swallow of his beer, he gave Ben a wink.

“Oh, so very gay,” Lucas said. “Cheers!”

EPILOGUE

Mason filled up his water bottle in the sink and turned, bumping into Ben who had the classifieds spread out all over the kitchen counter.

The phone rang, and both men ignored it. “Genevieve?” Mason asked.

“Yup,” Ben replied, rifling through the papers. He circled a few ads with a red marker, and the answering machine clicked on. Hello, you have reached the Bell residence, Ben’s voice boomed. We’re not home right now, Mason’s voice said sweetly. But leave a message and we’ll get back to you. Ben’s voice added, Unless this is Lucas. Get back to work!

The answering machine beeped. “Benjamin Bell!” an angry, female voice screeched. It was Genevieve. Again.

Mason hummed and did a stretch. Ben yawned and continued searching through the papers.

“That man was not your brother! You’ve made a fool of me all around town!” Genevieve yelled. “Pick up the phone!”

Ben looked up from his papers and said to Mason over his shoulder, “You know, without Genevieve there, I bet Paris is really lovely this time of year.”

Mason smiled.

“At least pick up the phone and talk to me, Ben! I will not be the bad guy. I am classier than that little floozy you picked up in Vegas. And I...”

The machine beeped again, a robotic voice declaring, Message completed.

“Babe, we gotta go,” Mason said. Ben turned, and Mason caught Ben’s mouth with his own. They shared a long morning kiss, and when they parted, Ben had half of the classifieds for Mason. Mason picked them up and gawked. “I can’t make all of these auditions! You are so anal, Ben.”

Ben waggled his eyebrows.

“Ugh! I didn’t mean it like that,” Mason said, swatting at him with the papers. He turned to brace himself on the counter, stretching and raising up on his toes. “I can make four of these today.” He capped his water bottle and relaxed, folding the newspapers and slipping them into his shoulder bag. “Whatcha got for today?”

Ben held up his own classifieds section. “A whole lot of everything. Some publishing interview at ten, an advertising exec interview at noon, and then, for the hell of it, I’m going to the flower shop down the street and applying there as well. How does that sound?”

Mason leaned forward and tugged a long strand of Ben’s hair. “You do what you wanna do. For the record, I hope you become a flowerboy.”

Ben laughed. "Yeah, that's... that's cute."

Mason put his bag over his shoulder and tapped his foot impatiently. "Benny..."

"Yeah, I'm coming," Ben mumbled, gathering his papers and slipping his wallet into his pocket. "Give me a break, you wore me out last night... and this morning."

Mason flushed. Indeed they'd had quite the evening after Lucas and Laura had left. They'd fucked on the couch and then moved on to their only other piece of furniture, the bed. They ground together there until they came hard against each other, and that morning had been a repeat performance.

"Are we ready?" Ben asked, opening the front door.

Mason nodded. "Let's go."

The phone started ringing shrilly again, and that was their cue to leave. Ben found the calls easier to ignore now. After reading on page six of the New York Times about Genevieve's long time affair with the successful Parisian designer and her new mentor, Jacques Chevalier, Ben felt less guilty about his Vegas indiscretions. In fact, he felt quite good.

They rode the elevator down to the main lobby and greeted Bernard on the way. When they were out the door, Mason started to walk away from Ben.

"Where are you going?" Ben asked, tugging on Mason's shoulder bag.

Mason pointed down the street. "I've got to head down Fifth."

"I've gotta go down Park," Ben said.

It was a beautiful day out, full of promise. Mason looked down the road and shrugged. "I'll see you at home later? I've got a break around one. You want to meet for lunch?"

"Yeah," Ben agreed. "Let's meet at the apartment. I'll make you a sandwich. Anything you want." He'd never looked forward to going home like this, not ever. "Be good."

Mason kissed Ben and winked. "Later, stud."

Mason walked away, and Ben couldn't help noticing that Mason had an adorable shine to his skin that day, a slight dance in his step, and Ben had a good feeling that by the end of the day, Mason would have a job. He was that irresistible.

As for himself, Ben wasn't sure if he'd have a job by the end of the day. But he knew one thing for sure.

He'd have Mason.

He smiled as the town car pulled up beside the sidewalk and a meticulously dressed man stepped out and opened the door for Ben.

“Where to, sir?” the driver asked.

“Tiffany’s,” Ben said.

“Are congratulations in order, sir?” the driver asked.

Ben laughed. “Save your congratulations until after he sees the ring.”

Ben slid inside the car and a sudden memory flashed through his mind.

A priest looked down over a cheap podium at Ben and Mason and cleared his throat. “So, on this day... evening... um...” He checked his watch under his polyester robes. “Ahem. On this early morning at precisely two thirty three a.m., I now pronounce you husband and... husband. You may now kiss the... husband.”

Ben stared at Mason, smiling through his drunken haze, and reached forward and kissed Mason so hard he actually saw stars. Mason squeaked, wrapping his arms around Ben’s neck and kissing back with great passion.

A few couples in line to get married at The Cupid’s Bow Chapel started clapping, and when Ben pulled away, he swore to god he was in love. He didn’t care if he was drunk, he didn’t care if he’d only known Mason for a few hours. He knew this was it.

“Let’s go have a honeymoon,” he said to Mason, pulling out his hotel room key. “Only the best for you.”

Mason clung to Ben, laughing. “You say that now, but I know your type. You’re not gonna remember any of this in the morning, are you?”

“I’m totally sober,” Ben insisted, slurring his words and stumbling on his feet.

“If you forget about me, I’m going to come find you,” Mason said playfully. “I’ll hunt you down.”

“I’m not drunk,” Ben protested. “If I forget... If I forget, yeah, you come find me and I promise I won’t turn you away. I swear. I’ve got... My bed is so comfortable, you belong in it. I’ll make you pancakes! Anything you want. Like I said, I’ll show you the world.”

Mason grinned at Ben, shaking his head. “You’re nuts, you’re fucking nuts. I can’t believe we’re married.”

“Best fucking decision of my life. I love you. Let’s go fuck,” Ben said lowly, whisking Mason out of the chapel and down the Vegas strip, stopping only to buy some champagne and condoms.

Ben laughed to himself, looking out the window as the car pulled up to Tiffany’s. He’d been here before, but this time it was for love. This time it was for Mason.

He shook his head as the driver opened the car door. “Pick me up here at noon, please,” Ben said.

“Where to then?” the driver asked.

“Back to my apartment,” Ben said. “We’ll be picking someone else up and then straight on to JFK International Airport.”

“Oh, going on vacation, are you?”

“Honeymoon,” Ben said. “In Paris. The thing is, the guy doesn’t know yet.”

“Who would turn down Tiffany’s and a trip to Paris?” the driver asked.

“You don’t know my Mason,” Ben said with a smile. “Where he’s from, the Eiffel Tower isn’t all that special.”

“Ah...French?”

“Nope,” Ben said, laughing. “Vegas.”

“Well, you know what they say, sir,” the driver said with a wink. “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.”

Ben shook his head, and his heart warmed. “Not in my case.”

FIN