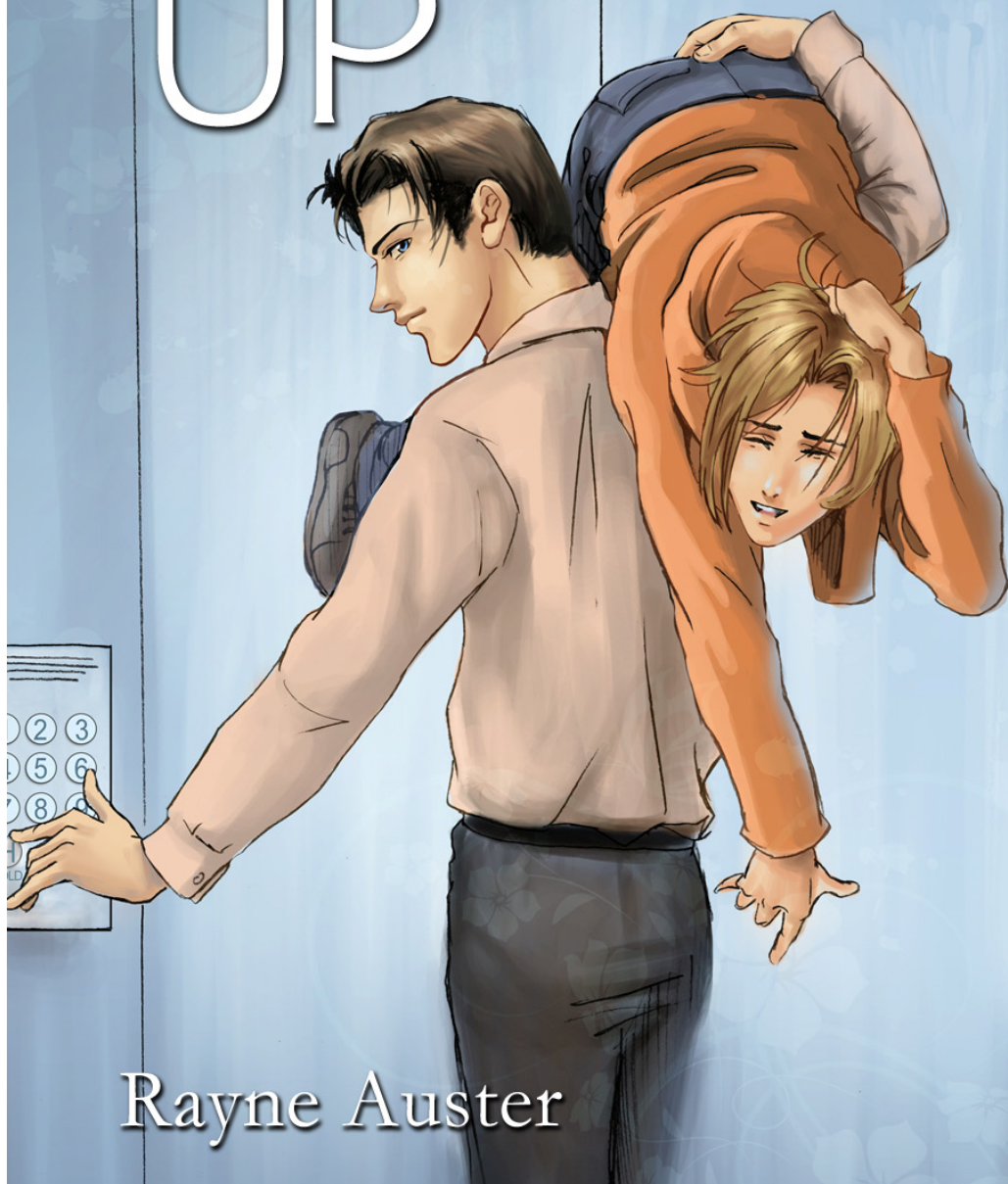


# Lift Me UP



Rayne Auster



## **Breaking and Entering**

EVER encountered the cliché tale where a couple finds one another while stuck in an elevator? You know the drill. Enter protagonist one, followed by protagonist two, followed by the elevator doors closing oh so slowly, almost as if the electronic devices themselves were lost within the sensuality of the moment to come. The elevator starts to move up and the audience holds its breath in anticipation waiting for the moment when, yes, you guessed it, the power cuts out and the elevator stalls.

This is where protagonist one turns to protagonist two and discovers, in a sudden moment of epiphany, that he or she is in love. This revelation is followed by hot monkey sex the likes of which is supposed to be both scandalous and sexy, appealing to the secret exhibitionist hidden deep within each and every one of us. After sharing a wild moment of passion, the couple then declares their everlasting love, whereupon the elevator comes back to life and it is assumed the couple lives happily ever after. Admit it. Most of you have heard it in some form or another, but I can promise you one thing: few, if any, have ever encountered quite it like I have.

It started off following the traditional formula: protagonist one entered the small silver cubicle followed by protagonist two and a giggle. Yes, a giggle, but I'm not going

there. The silver doors slid closed at their usual pace, but for some reason, it didn't feel that way. Every moment seemed to be drawn out, fraught with tension and anticipation. After clicking closed, the elevator began its graceful ascent to my apartment floor, and yes, you guessed it, partway there it ground to a halt. No, it wasn't a power failure. I could have dealt with another power failure. He stopped it, by hitting the emergency stop button. You know, the one that stops the elevator in place should something unexpected go wrong? Ok, I admit it, that is even more cliché than a power failure, but it is what happened next that I'm truly trying to draw your attention to.

Lips crashed down to claim lips and fingers buried themselves in strands of silken hair. Heated pants filled space with warm breath, interspersed with gasps and moans of pleasure escaping moist, swollen mouths. He thrust deep, burying himself into slick, tight heat, and pounded flesh till a cry of pleasure rent the silence asunder. The elevator whirled to life and continued its upward journey. The last few moments within that confined space were spent in shell-shocked silence until a soft ping signaled the end, silver doors sliding open with a soft whirr.

He grabbed her hand, stepped out and sauntered away, glancing back at me one last time as he turned the corner, greatly enjoying my distress. I never felt more broken and invisible than I did on that day. Kayden, my best friend, had just taunted me by having elevator sex with some drunk slut while I was forced to stand and watch the remaining strands of our friendship shatter away into a million pieces, each too small to grasp, yet sharper than the one that came before.

Barely conscious of that which surrounded me I let him walk away without so much as a protest leaving my lips. Not a very manly reaction, I know, but let's blame it on my having to live through the soul-scarring experience of watching straight sex. The moment I gathered enough sense to move, I, too, stepped out onto the landing of *my* apartment floor, for, if truth be told, Kayden doesn't even live in this apartment block, let alone this floor.

I took my key out of my pocket and headed to my apartment door, only to stare blankly at the handle before me. For some reason, the sheer concept of placing the small key into the lock and turning it was completely beyond me at the time. So much for having a high IQ. Defeated by the evils of mechanics, I sank to the floor and buried my face in my hands, no longer seeing anything at all. That is the moment disaster chose to strike.

I was pulled out of my self-pity with a vengeance. The sounds of shattering china preceded the sharp flare of pain that traveled up my leg, drawing a sharp cry from me. Glancing up, I met a pair of the bluest eyes I have ever seen; the clarity of the shade was so piercing it left me breathless. Unfortunately, the owner of these orbs was not amused, and the glare that I was on the receiving end of would have frozen my heart solid if not for the fact that it was already in shattered pieces around me. "What the hell are you doing sprawled across the floor? Are you drunk?" he demanded, derision apparent in every syllable.

I'd like to be able to tell you I replied with a suave comeback, effectively stemming his rage, whereby he then proceeded to ravage me senseless against the door of my

apartment, seeing as I'm so irresistible and all that, but life doesn't work that way, does it? Instead, being the relationship-challenged nerd that I am, I dropped my gaze and shook my head, stray strands of sandy brown hair falling into my rather plain, boring, hazel eyes.

"Hey." He knelt down before me, the derision in his voice strangely gone. "Are you sick? Do you need a doctor?"

When he reached out to touch me, I brushed his hand away and shook my head once more, doing my utmost to avoid looking back up into his eyes again. I feared that I would lose myself within them, thus spilling all the sordid details of my rather tragic evening to someone who was in essence a complete stranger to me. And all for a pair of pretty blue eyes. What does that say about the depth of my character? "I'm okay," I replied softly. "I'm just tired." And it was true. My encounter with Kayden had drained all the energy out of me with the efficiency of a sadistic vampire feeding on life-giving energy instead of blood.

"You sure?" he queried, and I could feel the intensity of the question in his gaze burning into me. Seems I didn't have to look into his eyes to feel their impact upon me. Not giving me a chance to reply he reached for me once more, and this time managed to grab the arm I attempted to use to brush his touch away with. "Here, let me help you up." And that was the end of that. He pulled me up with him, handling my weight as if it were nothing.

It should have been a dazzling moment, one in which I gracefully landed on my feet and nonchalantly thanked him for his assistance in a way that let him know I appreciated it, even though I didn't need it. Should have, could have, and

would have, however, impact nothing in the great scheme of things, and what really happened next is something I will never admit to, to anyone except him, that is. I whimpered—yes, like a little puppy in pain—and crumbled back down to the ground. If I hadn't been in so much pain at the time, I would have been humiliated beyond belief.

"That's it. You're obviously not 'okay,' as you so nicely put it." He swung me up into his arms, easy as can be. I guess my lanky five-foot-seven frame was no challenge for his rather robust six-foot-three or so. Feeling the sheer muscle pressed intimately against me, I wondered if perhaps he didn't make a living being an athlete. Athletics aside, he carried me to the apartment next door to my own, carefully sidestepping piles of boxes on his way to the bathroom. That is when I really did have an epiphany that evening. Sexy Blue Eyes was going to be my next door neighbor. Oh hell.

Placing me down on the toilet, he then proceeded to run his hands over every inch of my body, and I couldn't help but wish I could change his intentions. Every cell in my brain knew he was checking me for injuries, yet every cell in my body seemed to ignore that reality, sending trickles of pleasure through my body, heading straight to the last place I needed it—until he reached my ankle, that is. Sharp pain coursed through my body when he shifted it, killing every other thought except the desperate one to breathe from my one-track mind.

"It's swollen." He mused before standing and leaving me alone with my misery. I heard him shuffle a few boxes around and jumped in surprise when a door slammed open with a dull thud. "What's up with the broken dishes

scattered all over the hallway, Dylan?” A second male voice intruded upon my mind. “Taking a shot at being Greek?”

“Michael, great, you’re here. Do you have your kit with you? I have no idea where I packed my first aid supplies among all this mess, and I have someone in the bathroom that may require some medical attention.”

“You just got here and you’re already picking up strays?” Michael responded, peering into the bathroom as he did so. That is when I was faced with the second most gorgeous pair of eyes I had ever seen. Nothing beats clear, deep blue, at least not in my opinion. Michael’s eyes are deep emerald green, and at the time, they were sparkling like the gems they seemed to resemble. I got the impression Michael was laughing at Dylan for some reason or another. Thinking back to that moment, I sometimes wonder why I wasn’t overcome by a rush of jealousy. Considering the way my evening was going, that would have been a rather logical reaction, but it never occurred to me that Michael could be Dylan’s lover, not even for a moment. I guess there are some things you just know without being told.

Michael ran a glance over me from head to toe and paused when he saw the discoloration of the skin around my ankle. A soft whistle escaped his lips, and he glanced up at me once more. “How did you manage to get that winner of a bruise?” he questioned, shaking his head. “Wait right here. I’ll get my kit and then I’ll check it out.” World’s shortest conversation accomplished, he turned and ran out, not giving me time to react. Seemed to be a trend that night, but I guess that would be the rather literal definition of being swept away, now wouldn’t it? Not quite what I pictured the



experience to entail when I read all those romance books and yes, that is a secret I'll keep even from him. As far as he knows, I've never read a fiction novel in my life, and that's the way it's going to stay. Men simply don't read romance novels, or so I've been told.

Michael didn't leave me completely alone. The moment he slipped away, Dylan was back. He leaned against the doorframe, watching me as I sat, feeling much like a petulant child, upon the toilet seat in his bathroom. "The name's Dylan Kincaid," he introduced himself, in case I missed Michael's censure a moment earlier. "I'd offer you some water, but Michael will kill me if I do." He took a few steps into the bathroom and seated himself across from me, balancing far too gracefully than a man his size had a right to on the edge of the bathtub.

"Why would he do that?" I inquired with a raised eyebrow. My lips quirked up, a trickle of amusement making its presence known despite the rather degrading situation I found myself in. You can't tell me that picturing Dylan—Mr. Six-Three, hot, sexy blue eyes, solid athletic build and insane strength—being ordered around by anyone isn't a funny thought. Okay, so maybe, if anyone could do it, Michael could. He has an overwhelming personality and knows how to get what he wants. He is a little taller than Dylan, but far more lean. Not quite as lanky as I am, but then again, only geeks, like me, get that privilege, and Michael is no geek. "Not into hospitality, is he?"

Dylan smiled at me. I didn't expect it, and the simple motion left me breathless, but we'll blame my shortness of breath on the pain coursing through me to keep my sense of

masculinity intact. “No. Apparently you’re not supposed to give an injured person anything in case an operation is required.”

I glanced down at the bubble that was pretending to be my ankle and chewed my bottom lip while my thoughts raced about like ping pong balls in my head. I didn’t want an operation. I’m allergic to anesthetic, and the thought of getting cut open without something to knock me out was not promising to say the least. Okay, I admit it, I was absolutely terrified, but I wasn’t about to admit it in front of a hot, sexy, Adonis of a man who I was hoping to hit on in the future. I’d already made a bad impression. No need to make it even worse by bursting into hysteria, right?

“So, I’ve introduced myself. Now it’s your turn.” Dylan abruptly changed the subject in a valiant attempt to distract me from thoughts of operations. Not very successfully, I might add, because the thought of even more pain simply refused to leave me, but you can’t blame a guy for trying.

I released my lip and licked at it, trying to rid it of the sting I’d inflicted upon it, and yes, I saw how Dylan’s eyes followed the path my tongue took, his own breath short. Unfortunately, he, unlike me, couldn’t blame it on injury and pain. That left me feeling all smug. “Avery.” I left it at that. What did my surname matter anyway? If everything worked out I fully intended to become Avery Kincaid, and if not? Well, it’s a lot more difficult to track someone down without a surname.

“Avery?” he repeated, and I could hear an undertone of disbelief in his voice. I don’t know why, but my name always gets a strange reaction. I blame that on the strange town fate

decided to dump me into. I mean, Avery is a perfectly normal name if you ignore what it sounds like. “You mean Avery as in—”

“Birdbrain.” I cut him short. I already knew where that sentence was going. Been there, done that, got the birdseed. “Yes, I’m a warm fuzzy home for our feathered friends, though if one pays careful attention to intonation, one will realize it is pronounced ‘a-ver-ree’ and not ‘a-vee-air-ree.’”

The chuckle that escaped his lips that night was warm, and for the life of me I couldn’t take offense at it, even though I was convinced he was laughing at me. “I was going to say Avery Brooks, but let’s go with your version.” He reached over and ruffled my hair. Yes, he actually had the audacity to do that, but then again, as I was to learn, Dylan doesn’t understand the concept of boundaries and propriety. Not that I minded all that much. My brain temporarily took a detour from Operation Lane straight to “Oh hell, what I wouldn’t do to get into his pants” Boulevard.

Licking my lips, I leaned forward to act on an impulse I shouldn’t have been having when Michael walked in and ruined it all. I know, no one is surprised by this development, but at the time, I was. “Alright, let’s take a look-see.” His voice cut into the inappropriate thoughts currently doing the can-can in my mind and pulled me back to the reality of where I was. To say I was not impressed is an understatement, but we will leave it there, because the expression on my face led to more rich laughter, every rumble sending delightful thrills through me.

Michael knelt down before me and lifted my ankle. I hissed, thus doing a rather efficient imitation of a snake. It’s

one step up from imitating a puppy, so I let the affront to my masculine pride slide. I had bigger things to worry about, after all. Blue bubbles being popped by operations while I had the pleasure of chewing a piece of leather, for instance.

Michael ran his hands over my ankle, resulting in more creative animal impersonations on my part. If I didn't know any better, I'd have been convinced he was trying to see how many different animals I am capable of impersonating. Let's pretend I did know better. "I'm sorry." He leaned back and opened the first aid kit he'd dragged in. It was considerably bigger than most and had pretty little red crosses all over it. "I'm afraid it's a break."

## **Vodka Now, Sanity Later**

TO THIS day, I don't think I'll forget the horror and disbelief that coursed through me with those last three innocent little words. I couldn't believe I'd managed to break my ankle, but the worst of it was, I'd done it sitting down. Okay, so I had a little help, but still, it didn't paint a pretty picture no matter how one looked at it. Michael pulled a couple of splints from that little magic bag of his like a wizard pulling rabbits out of hats. He then proceeded to bind my ankle well and solid. This was followed with me once more being swept off my feet, though I'm not sure it counts, as my feet weren't actually earthbound at the time.

Dylan carried me to a car and Michael slid into the driver's seat. Not all that romantic, but who was I to complain? Pulling out of the parking lot, he then proceeded to take me to the nearest hospital. I was in the back seat with Dylan there to support me. I got the impression he was meant to support my ankle physically or something, but the warmth of his body against mine was support of an altogether different kind. Strangely enough, his warm touch was distracting enough to keep my mind from borderline panic, so kudos to him for actually managing to accomplish what Michael ordered him to do.

Halfway to our final destination—yes, I did mean to

make the rather scary reference there—I leaned out of Dylan’s hold and tapped Michael on the shoulder. “There’s a liquor store just around the corner from the hospital. Mind if we take a slight detour to buy some vodka?”

Okay, so maybe that wasn’t the brightest way to phrase what I was trying to say, but I really didn’t expect the reaction I received. Dylan gaped at me like a fish out of water and Michael actually lost control of the car for a moment, drifting to the side before regaining control. “You’re joking, right?” Michael really tried to hide his incredulity beneath a calm façade, but I guess I’d shaken him up far too much for him to be all the successful.

“Do I look like I’m joking?” I retorted, deadpan. I know, I should have put him out of his misery and told him why I really wanted the alcohol, but I was having far too much fun drawing the moment of truth out.

“Are you insane?” Dylan finally found his voice. I was tempted to welcome him back into the land of the mammals but I didn’t think he’d appreciate the joke.

Raising my eyebrow, I gave him a look, or at least I like to think so, and then turned back to Michael, who was avidly trying to win a scowling contest. Michael shook his head, his knuckles white with tension as he gripped the steering wheel before him. “Don’t even bother arguing with him, Dylan. The answer is no, end of discussion.”

I laughed. Yes, I’m insane that way, but truth be told, I think it was colored more with hysteria than actual amusement. That is when I really let my bombshell rip. “Look, I have MH. My twin brother died while undergoing an operation to have his tonsils removed even though they

correctly diagnosed him and gave him Dantrolene. Now, I know there are other anesthetic agents that can be used, but the safest ones are local and they don't really work all that well on me, so you're either stopping for some vodka or volunteering to join me in my experience to come. If I have to chew on leather to bear the pain, then you're suffering with me. Your choice. Let me warn you though, you do not want to choose the latter. I make a very bad patient."

I was more than a touch pleased with my victory when Michael silently changed course and headed for the liquor store. Dylan was looking at me as if I'd suddenly grown two heads. We all remained silent while Michael parked. He stepped out, closed the door without so much as even looking at me, and headed straight in. The moment Michael was gone, Dylan pounced. No, not like that, though it would have been nice if the pouncing had been sexual instead. "What the hell is going on here?" he demanded, his tone gruff. "How did you manage to convince Michael to buy you vodka when I'm not even allowed to give you water because you'll probably need to be put under a knife?"

I winced at his phrasing. I can't say that was the most delicate way he could have said it, and the very thought of sharp silver objects upon my flesh while I sat by and watched was not comforting at all, but I didn't really have time to dwell on it. Dylan, he, well, how can I put this without sounding even more masochistic that I'm already sounding? What the hell, we all know I have a one-track mind. Dylan was magnificent when angry, the fire of passion burning in those clear eyes as he floored me with a calculating stare. If I hadn't been so aroused by it, I think I would have run in the opposite direction. A smart man

would have, but then again, we've already established that having a high IQ does not necessarily mean you're smart.

Pay attention, my students: The Art of Distraction—Lesson One. Leaning forward, I slid my fingers into the soft silky strands of his dark chocolate hair and laid claim to his mouth without even pausing to think about or consider the great theories of cause and consequence. His initial reaction was to tense, surprise momentarily keeping him in place, and then his lips parted, granting me entrance to the warm, slick cavern of his mouth. He tasted like vanilla, fresh and silky smooth, although that may just be my vanilla ice cream fetish rearing its head.

I flicked my tongue over his teeth and palate, lightly teasing, urging him on. Fortunately, he's fast on the uptake, and I quickly found myself completely overwhelmed as he took control of the kiss, aggressively thrusting his tongue into my mouth, giving me no quarter. He kissed just the way I liked it. I drowned in the sheer pleasure his possession of me granted, my senses lost to the solid press of his lips against mine, his tongue sweeping through every corner of my mouth. Soft breathy moans escaped the back of my throat and it was only when the pleasure was interrupted by sharp pain that my voice betrayed me in the worst way possible.

He flinched away, and I was too busy blinking back pretty stars to reassure him. Once I could see straight once more, I turned a heated glare onto the object of my displeasure. Mr. Bubblehead! Anything that can ruin my efforts to pucker up and deliver deserves a name.

Dylan pulled me from my introspection on the merits of



naming body parts by returning to what we were doing. Unfortunately for me, he returned to what we were doing before the kiss and not the kiss itself. “Okay, distraction tactic aside. Why is Michael, my stickler paramedic friend, willingly buying you vodka when it looks like you may need an operation to set a broken ankle? Won’t that interfere with the anesthetic?”

That was my first encounter with his tenacious nature. He was faced with a problem he did not understand and was adamant he would get a solution. It was a foregone conclusion that I would crumble under the pressure of his determination. “Not at all,” I retorted, a mischievous streak driving me to prolong the moment and consequently Dylan’s confusion. “It can’t interfere with something they will not be administering.”

“I hate to break it to you, Ay-very,”—the emphasis he put on my name was entirely deliberate and I most certainly didn’t miss it—“no, wait, actually I don’t mind breaking it to you. The moment I first laid eyes on you, you turned my entire evening upside down, so I guess it’s my turn to return the favor. You broke your ankle. They will need to set it and the likelihood of the process not requiring surgery is small. You plus likely surgery equals anesthetic.”

“MH plus anesthetic equals dead me,” I snapped back, not about to be outdone. I could play life mathematics with the best of them. I still can.

Either my tone or the speed with which I delivered my comeback gave him pause. I actually managed to count all the way to seventeen before he gathered himself enough to ask the question I should have answered before all of this

began, but why make things easy? “What is MH?”

“Malignant Hyperthermia.” If ever there were two words that were difficult for me to utter, those two were it. I don’t exactly have warm happy memories associated with them. The first time I heard them, my life changed forever. “It means I’m allergic to most anesthetics. There is medication that counters the allergy, but the chances of it working on me are slim when you take my genetic history into account. After all, it didn’t save Allen. So generally, doctors don’t want to take the risk. They use local anesthetic on me instead, as it doesn’t aggravate the MH, but for some reason, it doesn’t work all that well on me. Having my wisdom teeth removed was not fun, I can promise you. Hence my current solution to my problem: vodka. I’m a genius, aren’t I?”

“Not quite the way I’d word it, but yes, it’s not a bad idea.” I have to give him credit. He didn’t even blink when I threw all that information at him; he handled it calmly like a pro. Makes it hard to hate him, doesn’t it? “I’m sorry about your brother.” His words were soft and something within them pulled at me, bringing a thread of vulnerability to the fore.

I quickly brushed away the impulse to reminisce over things long dead and buried. “Don’t be. It was a long time ago. We were twelve at the time.”

His soft touch in my hair startled me, leaving me speechless. It wasn’t much of an accomplishment that evening, but generally, it is. I can be quite the chatterbox when given half the chance. “That doesn’t mean it doesn’t still hurt.” His soft words washed over me, and my brain turned to mush. I was so distracted I didn’t even notice

Michael's return. I guess you could say I was wrapped up in the moment.

THE rest of our journey was surprisingly uneventful. We actually managed to get to our destination, and I got just what I always wanted: a free ride in a wheelchair. Unfortunately for me, Michael and Dylan were both right. It was a break and I did require surgery of sorts to set it. I won't go into any more detail than that, but I can promise you the bottle of vodka that Michael bought was put to good use. They wanted to keep me longer for observation, but one bottle of vodka isn't enough to get me drunk or stupid enough to agree to that.

I'd spent the better part of my evening staring at awe-inspiring white walls in the hopes of discovering the meaning of existence while drowning my woes in a bottle of clear liquid, so I didn't actually expect anyone to still be around when I finally got out. Imagine my surprise when I realized I had an audience to witness just how low I had really fallen. As I waddled out, possibly moving like Donald Duck, I saw him, casually flicking through a magazine while he waited for me.

He sensed me as I approached, glancing up just as I moved to attempt Operation: Sneak Past Sexy Neighbor. It would have been a successful operation if not for the fact that it was sabotaged before it even began. I swear the doctor gave me the loudest pair of crutches he could find, and the moment I moved they clacked loudly against the ground. Dylan closed the magazine with a snap and tossed it down

onto the table, not looking away from me for an instant. “I was beginning to wonder if you’d given in and allowed them to check you in,” he commented as he approached me.

“Check me in?” I responded with an overly dramatic tilt of my head. “More like check me out.” So sue me, I’m a sucker for exaggerated reactions.

Another point for me. I was once again on the receiving end of his rich sense of humor as he chuckled at my comment. “You don’t stop, do you?”

“Now why would I want to do something like that?” I gave him the best innocent look I could muster, which wasn’t innocent at all as I couldn’t resist the urge to pointedly check him out. I did it to demonstrate my point, of course. Liking what I saw was just an added bonus. “Why are you still here?” I queried, tilting my head to the side in curiosity.

“I figured you would need a lift home, seeing as we drove you here and since we’re dating and all, I figured I would play the part of your loving other half. I dropped Michael off at home and came back, just for you.” The twist to his lips as he said that was practically sadistic and even though it was blatantly obvious that he was egging me on I couldn’t help but walk right into that one.

“We’re what?” I spluttered. I don’t even want to contemplate the expression on my face at the time, as I suspect it gave Dylan’s earlier fish impersonation a run for its money.

“You don’t remember? I’m hurt.” Dylan raised an eyebrow as he all too calmly uttered words that threw me

completely into turmoil. Seems he can play my game every bit as well as I can. “And after all the effort you went to, to ask me out. It was ever so romantic. I practically fell for you the moment I saw you. Sealed with a kiss and all. Can’t say that I’ve ever had someone approach me quite that way before, and seeing as you were so creative, in deference to your sheer determination I’ve decided to agree. Come now, love. Let’s go home.”

Okay, so my fish impersonation far surpassed his. I’m a bit of a perfectionist at times, but I don’t generally appreciate doing the wrong things well. Not that it matters. Dylan remained unfazed by my speechless incredulity. The silence didn’t bother him one bit, actually giving him time to pay me back in spades for my earlier action. He ran his gaze over my body, the movement deliberately aggressive and sensual. Every single nerve within me woke up, practically buzzing with tension.

He noticed my arousal, though I’m not about to give him points for that feat. The bulge in my pants wasn’t exactly easy to miss. His eyes lingered at my crotch, and my humiliation increased tenfold when my body reacted further, the sheer intensity of my physical reaction actually bordering on pain. I could have come just from the look in his eyes alone. Fortunately, just as I felt my control begin to slip his gaze moved, drifting all the way down to the cast that now encased my ankle.

“How’s the ankle?” The mundane question surprised me and it took me a moment to gather enough wits to answer it.

“Apparently it’s a clean break, so it was easy to set. I’m lucky. They didn’t need to put in any metal pieces to hold me

together and said I should be able to start using it again in about six weeks.” I waved my right crutch around as I spoke. It probably looked ridiculous, but I didn’t really care. I’m an expressive person and I like to use my hands when I speak. A measly little thing like said appendages being occupied with holding me up was certainly not going to stop me.

Predictably, I lost my balance and was about to fall when Dylan reached out to support me. The sweet scent of warm vanilla surrounded me, and the sheer erotic nature of it pulled a moan from the back of my throat.

Dylan completely misinterpreted the source of my distress. Not giving me time to back away from temptation, he lifted me into his arms once more. It could have been another romantic moment; however, due to the unexpected nature of his action, it didn’t quite work out as planned. Instead of landing safely in his arms I ended up awkwardly sliding down his body, desperately fighting to keep my broken ankle from hitting the floor.

You see, as he moved to lift me up, I instinctively raised my arm, the reaction an ingrained defensive maneuver I didn’t even know existed in my repertoire. Dylan ended up with a crutch in the face. Here is some more life mathematics for you: Face plus crutch equals pain. Sudden pain plus instinctive reaction to it equals Avery sprawled all over the floor for the second time in the span of less than twenty-four hours. Isn’t it amazing?

Dylan knelt down before me, the expression on his face filled with guilt and remorse. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to drop you. Are you okay?”

I would have retorted with some kind of smart

comeback or another if not for the fact that his tone had an undertone of self-deprecation in it. I didn't want him blaming himself for something that was essentially my fault. If I hadn't tried to knock him out with my evil crutch he actually would have succeeded, thus carrying my out of the hospital the same way he brought me in: bridal style. The possibilities were endless, but the moment was past.

## **Smooth Ride**

WE ACTUALLY did make it to his car that morning. Believe it or not, it only took a few minutes more. Not about to take the chance of a repeat encounter, Dylan grabbed a conveniently parked wheelchair, pulled me up, and promptly pushed me down into it, dropping the dreaded walking sticks into my lap without so much as a pause. That is the second distinctive characteristic I discovered he possesses; he is nothing if not efficient.

He actually winked at me and then stepped behind me before pushing the chair towards the door. Halfway there, I yelped. Not my best moment, I'll admit, but I had a valid excuse. Dylan thought it would be funny to increase his speed, heading towards the door at a semi-run. That is not, however, what pulled the sound from my throat. I'd like to think I'm more dignified than that. The increase in speed was just a prequel to what came next. Dylan tilted the wheelchair back, giving me the impression that we were going to add a concussion to my current list of injuries.

Too speechless to voice a protest, I merely gripped the armrests beside me until my knuckles were white as he chuckled directly into my ear. "Don't worry so much, love." His teasing tone went straight to my groin, his warm breath tickling an erotic spot just behind my ear. "I won't let you



fall. That's your job, remember?"

Now that comment got my back up. "It's not as if I actually planned to trip you," I hissed up at him, narrowing my eyes in an attempt to glare. Though valiant, the effort was for naught. I couldn't do "angry" very well with the scent of vanilla embracing me like a long-lost lover.

He shrugged, standing back upright to push the wheelchair, sedately this time. "Premeditated or not, the end result is the same. You made me drop and break my best set of china."

"Fair is foul and foul is fair," I retorted, a sudden Shakespearean moment taking hold of me. "You made me break an ankle. I'd say that makes us about even." I titled my head to the side, my gaze fixed upon his features. He really is spectacular. He has a strong jaw line, full lips, an aquiline nose, and distinctly masculine cheekbones. That and gorgeous silky chocolate brown hair just long enough to brush the collar of his shirt. Ironically, it is the exact same shade as Kayden's hair. Interpret that any way you wish.

"Point." I gaped at him. I really didn't expect him to give that victory to me, so I didn't know what to say in return. Fortunately, I didn't need to speak. Reaching around me, he calmly opened the passenger door of his charcoal colored Audi A4. It's a classy car, but I didn't really notice it till much later. I had a better view, after all. You see, being seated in a wheelchair had me at eye level with an interesting part of his anatomy. Lucky for him, I was too dazed to act on my impulse to engage in a rather sudden, really public display of affection.

My perfect view was ruined by my need to actually get

into the car. The moment he had the door open, Dylan lifted me out of the wheelchair and rather promptly deposited me into the passenger seat. Closing the door, he headed around the car and slid into the driver's seat with feline grace, pleasing me greatly. Me plus Dylan plus confined space minus everyone else in the world equals, say it with me, yum. Now, if only he wasn't actually occupied with driving said confined space....

I could think of a lot of better things he could be doing with those hands of his. Instead they grasped a cold, hard piece of plastic, turning it this way and that way, the movement graceful and practiced. I was torn from my contemplation of all the possibilities when he actually asked me a personal question. "So, where do you live?"

Much to his censure, I reacted by bursting out into laughter. It was both an amusing and ironic situation. Dylan didn't realize I was his neighbor, yet was going to a lot of effort to actually help me. It reminded me of the very first thing he said to me just after tripping over my feet. He must have thought I was some random drunk passed out in the hallway. I'd already disproved that assumption but I hadn't yet explained to him what I was doing there, so I'll forgive his oblivion. "Right where you found me," I responded lightly, waiting for his surprise.

Much to my pique, he merely raised an eyebrow and turned right, heading back towards our apartment building. His reaction was far too calm for my liking. I'd kind of hoped to surprise him with that little piece of information, and I was disappointed to realize it did not faze him in the least. "May I ask why you were sprawled on the ground in front of your apartment instead of within it?"

“You may ask whatever you wish,” I responded shortly, turning away from him. “Whether I choose to respond or not is another matter entirely.” His question brought things I really wasn’t ready to talk about to the fore and I decided not to answer it, at least not then.

“True.” He nodded in acceptance, completely ignoring how rude my response was. “Though I believe now would be a good time to give you a heads up. I fully intend to get the answer to that question some day. It is, after all, what I do for a living.”

I didn’t realize the impact of that statement and remained completely blind to what he was trying to tell me. Call it an undocumented feature in my one-track mind. His response actually appealed to the cat in me, drawing my curiosity out. “What do you do for a living?” I asked, actually turning back to face him.

He glanced at me, and I could see a smile playing across his lips. “Is this where I quote your response back to you?” His tone was lightly teasing yet still it managed to shame me. “I’m a lawyer.” And that, my dear audience, is when I should have run far, far away. Hindsight though, as they say, is always twenty-twenty, and if I were to be truthful, I’d have to say that I don’t regret not running.

“Really?” I ran my eyes over the white, figure-hugging polo neck and the tight denim that he was clothed in, this time raising my own eyebrow at him in question. “I never would have pegged you as having a stuffy day job like that. What happened to the suit? Is it temporarily out of order?”

“No more out of order than your apartment key, I wager.” His response was quick, sure and pointed. It wasn’t

exactly polite, but I have to admit, I deserved it.

“What can I say? I know I’m slight but didn’t quite realize I really am invisible. Maybe it would help if you actually watched where you walked.” I snapped back, suddenly angry, despite the fact that I didn’t appear to have a logical reason to be.

“You sure you don’t want to talk about what happened last night?” Dylan ignored my anger, thus effectively defusing it in the light of his concern. He turned to me, momentarily breaking the most fundamental law known to man: Watch where you are going.

“Why would I want to do that?” I looked away from him, leaned on my hand, and stared blankly out the window. The surliness in my tone was enough to betray the hurt I was trying to hide, and I didn’t need the expression in my eyes to betray me even further. I’m not usually one to dwell on the bad things in my life, and I hated myself for letting Kayden get to me like that.

“It helps... sometimes.” His tone was soft and he didn’t push the matter any further. I was grateful for it.

The rest of the trip was spent in silence, though I can’t say whether it was awkward or not. There was definitely tension in the air, but the reasons for it were as multifaceted as a cut diamond. There was just something about Dylan that drew me to him, and even awkward conversation followed by silence was not enough to deter me. I wanted him, and decided then and there that I would have him, even if I had to humiliate myself to get him.

“Thanks for the lift. I’ll be okay from here.” The moment he parked the car, I slid out. I didn’t know if he planned to

help me out or not, but wasn't really up to finding out. The long night and the alcohol were starting to get to me and I didn't want to face my inherent attraction to him. I feared I would do something stupid in that state and, as a result, push him away. Not a far stretch for me. So I figured a hasty retreat would be the safest course of action. Sometimes, after all, it's better to back off and regroup to ensure an efficient offense at a later stage. The only thing I wanted at the time was to escape his presence so I could think.

Unfortunately for me, his mental answering machine was on at the time and his conscious mind didn't get the message. I barely managed to take two steps and he was beside me, left arm supporting my right to ease my tired wobble towards the entrance. His touch was hot on my skin and my breath hitched as arousal coursed through me once more.

"Running away from me already?" His whispered breath tickled my ear, sending a shiver down my spine. He grinned and I realized he knew exactly what his warm breath trickling over my ear did to me. I should have seen the warning signs then, but I guess I was thinking with a very different head at the time.

"You could say that." My response was breathy, betraying me and the dirty thoughts in my mind. What can I say? I'm male and my mind practically lives in the gutter.

"Why?" He dropped his tone an octave or so, and I had to bite my lip to keep from whimpering at the sheer sensuality in it. "You're the one that kissed me."

He once again left me speechless and it was only when he took a step forward, leading us both to the apartment

building, that I realized he was toying with me. I should have been incensed but couldn't find the heart to protest something a part of me was actually enjoying. Stepping into the apartment building he turned towards the elevators taking me along with him. That is when the true impact of what had happened with Kayden came crashing down onto me like a ton of bricks.

The mere sight of those silver electronic doors was enough to drown my heart in dread. I'd already had two negative experiences within that particular confined space and I didn't want to face a potential third. Logically I knew I was being ridiculous—after all, the chances of that were practically non-existent—but we've already established that reason and emotion are not necessarily linked. Besides, if you really think about it you will realize that the chances of two bad experiences in one elevator in the span of a single week are just as ridiculous. Despite the improbability, it still managed to happen to me. Let's call it Avery Karma.

That is how I came to the conclusion that that particular elevator was not for me. Digging my crutches into the ground, I stopped dead, halting our progress more than a little abruptly. Dylan stopped beside me, a puzzled frown upon his face. "I'll take the stairs." That was the only explanation I offered him before turning away from the dreaded cubicle toward the stairs beside it.

"What do you mean you'll take the stairs?" he demanded, grabbing hold of my arm to halt my retreat. He was both confused by my decision and determined to get to the bottom of it. I, however, was not about to cave in to his presence a second time and refused to give him the answer he was looking for.

“I mean that I,” I put emphasis on every word, anger and aggression slipping into my tone despite my efforts to remain calm, “am not getting in there.” I waved a crutch, using the motion to point to the elevator, nearly castrating the object of my desire in the process. Now that would be a tragedy beyond comprehension, so let’s be thankful he’s quick on his feet.

Dylan casually sidestepped the flying crutch and released my arm in the process. The motion was far more graceful than it had a right to be, but then again, I guess he’d used up his klutz quota the previous evening, when he stumbled over and broke my ankle. I guess he, like me, doesn’t do things by halves either.

I used the fact that he had to release me to my advantage and actually managed a few paces towards the stairs before his voice intruded upon my perfect retreat. “Are you claustrophobic?”

I really should have seen that one coming, especially taking Dylan’s logical mind into consideration, but the question came at me from nowhere. “Claustrophobic? Why would you think that?” I turned to face him, my mind, sadly, too groggy to make the connections required to understand his reasoning process at the time.

He raised an eyebrow at me in disbelief. “Well, you are trying to avoid a confined space so I don’t really see it as a far stretch, though now that I really think about it I realize it was a stupid assumption to make. You had no problem using the elevator on the way to the hospital and had no problem with my car, so what’s the real problem here?”

“I had other things on my mind,” I muttered darkly

under my breath. I didn't really know how to respond. It's true that they used the elevator to take me to the hospital last night, but I was far too distracted to truly register the implications. Despite that, I still didn't want to step into that elevator. Not with images of Kayden and that slut still freshly imprinted upon my mind.

Dylan continued to watch me in silence, my muttered response obviously not enough for him. Or maybe he didn't hear it, but I wasn't in the mood to be logical. Realizing that he was not going to let me go until I actually deemed to give him some kind of response, I took a deep breath and gathered what few wits my mind could still reach for in its exhausted and drained out state. "Look. I'm not claustrophobic and before you ask, I don't have a problem being in a confined space with you." Yes, I was proud of that one. I actually managed to realize that after claustrophobia; not wanting to be alone in a confined space with him would be the next logical conclusion he'd come to.

The intensity of the way he watched me sent more of those predictable shivers through my body and he allowed the silence between us to stretch for a moment more before speaking. "I don't bite unless you want me to, and I don't intend to seduce you right now. Surprising as it may sound, I actually like my partners to be awake for the occasion and you look like you're about to pass out cold where you stand."

His words and their implications quite literally pulled a moan from the back of my throat. All my blood rushed from my head into my groin. Oh, the possibilities were endless, and I was almost tempted to take him up on the offer hidden deep within his words. He wanted to fuck me as badly as I wanted to fuck him, and the very idea that he was even



considering seduction was enough to have me raring to go.

I had to fight really hard to resist the urge to throw myself into his arms and beg him to claim me. He'd just stated that he wasn't going to do it because I looked like death warmed over, and I doubt dramatic passion would have done anything to change his mind. He, damn him, is far too logical for that. "It really has nothing to do with you." My voice came out husky and I had to pause my explanation to clear my throat. "I just don't have good associations with that elevator." The look I gave the all-too-innocent silver doors should have shattered them apart but I'm not a superhero so I guess the sheer force of my stare was not enough to make up for the likes of laser vision. "I'm not getting into it and you can't make me."

He sighed and shook his head, and that is when I knew I'd won. "All right, Tweety Bird, we'll have it your way." And that is how I got my nickname. The end. Wait. Don't look at me like that. What did you think this story was all about? How I met the man of my dreams? You're joking, right? You didn't really think I would spill the sordid details of my practically non-existent love life to a bunch of strangers, did you? I work in IT, remember? I'm not supposed to have a love life. Oh wait, I didn't get that far. I guess there's no helping it, then... onward with my tale.

## **Wake Me Up Before You...**

I AWOKE to a stampede of elephants running through the hallway. Okay, so it was actually a firm knock on my door, but it sounded like a stampede to me at the time. Perhaps, the fact that I was lost in strange dreams where a certain someone was far too well endowed to be human had something to do with it. Or maybe it was the vodka, making me far too sensitive for my own good. Either way, it boils down to the same thing: far too much banging for my liking.

Rolling to the side, I moved to get out of bed only to catch myself mere moments before rather dramatically tumbling to the ground. Seems having an ankle in a cast hinders movement somewhat. Remembering that I actually need to stay off said ankle, I reached for the crutches propped up beside my bed and quite literally hauled my ass out of it.

Annoyed beyond belief, I then headed towards my apartment front door wearing nothing more than sweatpants. I wasn't expecting any guests and wasn't about to encourage anyone to actually stay longer than absolutely necessary by actually getting dressed. You could say I got up on the wrong side of the bed.

Pulling the door open, I was just about to growl a greeting, only the sight that met me left me unexpectedly

speechless. This is where I need to backtrack a little. After our heated elevator debate, Dylan actually conceded and let me take the stairs. He obviously wasn't impressed, but had at least decided against arguing with me. Yup, that's another point to me, though I get the feeling I was on the losing end even then. After twelve flights of stairs, I really was ready to fall asleep standing up. As a result, I didn't invite Dylan in and my attempts at getting into his pants were put on hold.

To make a long story short, he practically ordered me to go to bed, waited for me to slip into my apartment, and left, which is why the sight of him standing before me a few hours later was unexpected. I would have thought, being as logical as he came across to be, he'd at least have given me more than seven hours of sleep after the night I had.

"Lunch." He lifted the bag he carried with a grin and then proceeded to slip right past me, into my private domain, without so much as a by your leave. I was left to stare blankly into an empty hallway as if the very air before me could explain away my new neighbor's behavior.

Giving in to the inevitable, I closed the door and hobbled deeper back into my apartment in search of the invading hordes. I know one man doesn't usually qualify as a horde, but when that one man is Dylan... I think you get my drift. "Why are you here?" I questioned, sinking down beside him in the living room. I'm a minimalist when it comes to furniture and only have one couch. Reason? I have as much of a social life as I do a love life, which, with the recent exception of Dylan, is nada! I guess that's why Kayden's actions impacted me as much as they did. He was one of the few friends I actually had.

“I brought you lunch.” Dylan reached into the bag to pull out chopsticks.

“Why?” I questioned, blatantly looking a gift horse in the mouth.

“I figured you’d be hungry by now.” Dylan pulled out a box of Chinese and dropped it into my lap, not even pausing to look at me as he rummaged around in the bag. “Now stop interrogating me and eat.” Retrieving what was obviously his share, he dropped the bag and flipped a pair of chopsticks my way with a grin. “I didn’t know what you like, so I got you beef.” He explained, flipping his own box open.

I glanced down at the warm box in my lap and followed suit, popping it open to peer at the steaming noodles contained therein. A sudden impulse to tease him niggled at my senses and I couldn’t help but give in to the temptation. “And if I’m vegetarian?” I glanced back towards him from the corner of my eye, trying really hard not to be too obvious about it.

It was like watching a movie in slow motion. His hand froze in mid-motion, already halfway towards his mouth, beef and noodles dangling from his chopsticks. The slice of beef slipped out and fell back into his box and his arm followed thereafter, slowly dropping down. “Are you?” He stared at me, an expression of disbelief and awkward shock on his face.

“Nope.” Scooping up a large portion of noodles, I stuffed it into my mouth with a grin. “Just thought I’d see if you really are as anal as you seem to be. A good anal retentive person would have planned ahead and bought one of each, chicken, beef and vegetable, just in case.” I don’t know what

possessed me to be that blunt, but I enjoyed it. The expression on Dylan's face was priceless.

"Anal retentive?" Dylan speared his noodles with his chopsticks but didn't move to eat. "Why do you say that?" His tone was mild.

"You do like things just so. Everything needs to be ordered and structured and needs to make perfect sense in your world. Kind of like having life all wrapped up in a pretty little box." I scooped some more food into my mouth, savoring the rich flavor. It was the best Chinese take out I had ever eaten. Strange, isn't it? How food always tastes better when you have someone to share it with?

"Hmm." He hummed, seeming to lose himself in thought for a moment. Surprisingly, he actually considered my words. Twirling his chopsticks, he gathered some of his noodles and put them into his mouth. His lips wrapped ever so softly around the sticks and so my mind once again took a headlong dive into its favorite place of residence: the gutter. I was of the opinion there were better things those lips could be wrapped around, and almost choked on a stray noodle at the thought.

"While we're on the topic of anal retentive behavior...." He turned to face me dead on and I had to swallow back a moan as I watched the chopsticks slide out of his mouth. I swear, the manipulative bastard did it on purpose, deliberately drawing the motion out as he watched me with a speculative gleam in those gorgeous, predatory blue eyes of his. Someday, I'll get him back for that.

"I'd like to return to last night's conversation. We never got round to discussing what you do." He dropped his

chopsticks into his container with a grin. He then moved to, oh so casually, continue his torment of me. Placing the still-full food container onto my coffee table, he proceeded to clean imaginary sauce off his fingers with his tongue. It had to be imaginary; he hadn't eaten enough to have that much sauce on his skin.

Biting back the groan that surfaced at the sight, I turned away from him and cleared my throat. I tried really hard to focus on the question he'd asked me, instead of on how sexy it was when his pink tongue lapped at his smooth tan skin. "I'm a technical business analyst." How I managed to be coherent I'll never know, but I must say I'm rather proud of how smoothly I managed to answer his question.

"Technical business analyst?" He repeated my words back at me for the second time that day, making me wonder if perhaps it wasn't some kind of secret interrogation technique designed to wear someone down before the real questions began. "What exactly does a business analyst do?" He leaned in closer and I could sense the now all-too-familiar scent of warm vanilla. The move was entirely deliberate and successfully managed to unbalance me even further.

I licked suddenly dry lips and shifted in an attempt to hide the rather prominent tent in my pants. Let me take this moment to supply a random interesting little fact: most men only need about ten seconds in order to be fully aroused. Bet you didn't know that. I on the other hand, didn't even need those ten seconds that day. I guess Dylan has that effect on me. Clearing my throat again, I fought my mind, grappling with my thoughts in an attempt to maintain enough coherence to hide the effect Dylan's presence had on my

body. It was a lost cause, but I didn't know that then. "Well... uh... it's difficult to explain."

"Try." He breathed into my ear, sending a spike of pleasure through me. That's when I realized Dylan has a sadistic streak a mile wide. He had to know that was one of my erogenous zones. He was breathing into that ear far too often not to have noticed.

Swallowing past the sudden lump in my throat, I backtracked through our conversation, trying to pinpoint exactly what it was we were actually talking about. "I guess... that depends on where you work." I licked my lips once more, more than a touch out of my element now that he was so physically close to me. "I... uh... usually a technical BA writes functional specifications... um... documents that specify how a piece of software is going to be implemented in order to achieve a given goal defined by business."

"Usually?" I was given a moment of reprieve when Dylan leaned back, moving away from me. "That would mean that's not what you do. So how is your job different?"

Dylan may have many flaws, but lack of reasoning is not one of them. He immediately saw where I was going and, strangely enough, was genuinely curious. I shook my head in agreement, leaning forward to place my container of Chinese down beside his. I had long since forgotten about the contents thereof.

"I do write specifications, but often I'm called on to do things that are not exactly part of my official job description. I test the system, help out with training and install manuals, and occasionally take over training itself. I guess that's what happens when you work for a small company." Seeing as the

scent of vanilla was no longer right beside me, I could actually reason well enough to give him a semi-decent explanation, and without a single pause, to boot. We will, of course, ignore the fact that my words actually came out in a jumbled rush, the various sentence constructs meshing to form one unintelligible paragraph.

Dylan was unfazed by my babbling. In fact, as usual, he was amused, and actually took the time to ruffle my hair for the second time in as many days. It felt like he was treating me like a child. “Sounds like you’re an all-around superstar to me.”

That comment was so ridiculous I actually had to roll my eyes, all whilst ignoring the tingle in my scalp his touch had left behind. “I do what I have to do. It pays the bills. What more could I ask for?” I retorted dryly, trying to ignore the disappointment tugging at my senses. The game of cat and mouse, or mayhap I should say cat and bird, we were playing, was really starting to wear me down, and I no longer had the energy to flirt in the hopes of actually getting laid for a change.

“Oh, I don’t know. Job satisfaction. Growth. You know, the usual boring things people look for when committing their life to any given vocation.” He leaned back against the arm of my sofa and stretched his legs out, drawing my attention to his lean build. All deliberate, mind you.

I licked my lips yet again, drawn right back into the game without noticing. I couldn’t help it. Even the knowledge that he was playing with me wasn’t enough to rid me of the temptation to do more than look at the sexy, nicely wrapped package before me. I moistened the flesh of my lips with



saliva and stared at him in complete silence. My mind no longer cared enough to try to keep track of a conversation that didn't seem to be getting me anywhere.

"So...." He broke the silence that was building between us, his dogmatic nature bringing him right back into forbidden territory. "What's with you and your elevator phobia?"

And that is how we got back to the question I really didn't want to answer. I knew, however, that Dylan was too persistent to drop that matter, and as such that left only one option open to me. Giving in to the urges that had been plaguing me since I first laid eyes upon the man, I crawled towards him, the proximity of the warm vanilla scent entirely my own doing this time. I leaned in and grabbed his face between my hands so I could press my lips down onto his and kissed him so hard I felt his teeth through his flesh.

His skin was warm and firm beneath my lips as I aggressively attacked it. Desperate to get into the moist heat of his mouth I bit into the tender flesh, trying to give him a wordless message. He, however, did not play along, and kept his lips closed. Instead, he wove his fingers into my hair and pulled, the motion tearing my lips away from his. He stared into my face, the clear calculative gleam in his eyes a sharp contrast to the guilt in my own. Did I mention Dylan thinks too much?

"Are you trying to distract me?" His voice was husky, and the very sound of it was a clear indication that he was not as immune to my tactics as he would like me to think. This is where we come to *The Art of Distraction—Lesson Two*.

With the promise of victory in my sight, I was not about to give up. I changed tactics and swung my leg over his, effectively straddling his lap. It was not the most graceful of movements, seeing as I was hindered by additional weight around my ankle, but I didn't care. Once in position, I thrust aggressively up, pushing my erection directly into his groin. Remember that little interesting ten-second fact I dropped a little while back? Seems there may be some validity to it. Dylan was every bit as hard as I was.

His breath escaped him with a hiss. He groaned and instinctively grabbed my hips (I think he intended to push me away, but it didn't quite work out like that). His hands held me in place and his eyes glazed over. Then he thrust up against me, rubbing his erection over mine. "Ay-very." I didn't take offense at the emphasis he put on my name this time. In fact, I found I quite liked the sound of it on his hoarse breath. "We should finish talking first."

"Time for talking is over." I twisted my hips out of his grasp and rubbed up against him, returning the jagged thrusts of his hips. Reaching into his hair, I grabbed his scalp and leaned in towards him. "It's time for action now." I allowed my breath to linger on his lips for but a moment before yet again claiming his lips in an aggressive kiss. I was, after all, tired of waiting for him to make a move.

I sucked his bottom lip into my mouth and was surprised when his lips parted, granting me the entrance I was seeking earlier. I slipped my tongue into the warm heat of his mouth and savored the taste of vanilla within. He let me explore his mouth, his tongue brushing against mine to encourage the embrace, and I took full advantage of it. I

thoroughly delved into every corner I could reach: his teeth with the crooked kink just to the right, his palate, the lining of his cheeks. I left no stone unturned, or more specifically, no nerve un-stroked, and the sheer sense of power that coursed through me was addictive.

All too soon, I felt the need to breathe. I reluctantly pulled back from the mind-boggling kiss and rested my forehead against his shoulder, a hungry whimper escaping my lips. I thrust up against him again and groaned, nearly unraveled by the rough texture of the jeans he wore. The single motion was not enough, so I repeated it, pushing harder with each thrust only to cry out when his hands upon my hips halted my motion once again.

“Pushy little bottom, aren’t you?” His breath was as heavy and ragged as mine was, and the warmth of it ruffled my hair. I never would have thought warm air drifting through my hair could be sensual, but it was. Everything about Dylan was sensual, and I couldn’t help but crave him.

I lifted myself up in an attempt to escape his hold on my hips once again and the motion brought me level with his ear. “Who says I’m a bottom?” I breathed directly into it, unable to resist the urge to steal his seduction tactic from him.

“I do.” With that said, he slid his hands down and palmed my ass cheeks. Checkmate. I win.

## **The Art of Distraction**

THAT was the sweetest victory I ever achieved. Dylan gave up fighting me and we both gave in to our desire. Seeing as my hips were once again free I thrust back up against him, all thoughts but one gone from my mind. It was no longer about distracting him. The only emotion that remained was my need to get what I wanted, and I wanted him buried deep within me. “Want you,” I panted into his ear, my ragged breath betraying just how true those words were.

Instead of replying, he actually put his mouth to better use. Leaning in, he captured my nipple and sucked on it, hard. The combination of heat and moisture pulled a cry of pleasure from my throat, and I thanked my cast for ruining my attempts to get out of bed enough to make me grumpy. As a result, I had no shirt on and the easy access to my skin was a sweet pleasure I had not foreseen when preparing to give my unexpected visitor a piece of my mind. Seems I decided to give him a piece of my ass instead.

He slid his hands up my body, over the elastic holding my sweats, and paused when he reached my naked skin. I dropped my forehead onto his shoulder and panted into the moment of silence that embraced us.

Dylan made his way up my body with his mouth, alternately nibbling and kissing the skin he found along the

way, and headed directly for that evil little spot just by my ear that has me melting at the slightest touch. “You sure about this?” His whispered breath sent shivers of pleasure through me, each and every one headed directly to my groin, building up my need for release. I was practically putty in his hands and he still had the audacity to ask that?

Reaching up, I buried my fingers into his hair and pulled his face towards me, pressing my lips against his right ear. “Hell, yeah,” I growled, all out of patience. Releasing some of his hair, I then dropped my left hand and aggressively pushed it down onto the bulge in his pants, the action entirely deliberate in its intent, this time unraveling him instead of me.

I could have danced around in glee when my action pulled a moan from his throat, his hips pushing up into my hand but that would have required that I get off him, and I wasn’t about to do that now that I had him exactly where I wanted him.

“Yesssss.” The word came out like a hiss and this time I wasn’t the one doing the animal impersonations. “Ay... Ay-very.” His hands scrabbled for mine, pushing and pulling at me all at once, almost as if he couldn’t decide if he wanted me to stop or to continue. “Do... do you...” *pant pant* “protection... lube?” I’d finally manage to reduce him to single words, his eloquence completely gone, and the realization was a rush of power like no other.

I gave in to the inevitable and slid off his lap. He followed me up and I used his grasp on my wayward hand to guide him towards my bedroom. Or at least that is what I intended to do. I had completely forgotten about Mr.

Bubblehead, and my knees turned to pain-filled jelly the moment he touched the ground.

Fortunately for me, Dylan is far more graceful and efficient than I am. Moving with me, he used my downward fall to yet again sweep me off my feet while I continued my brilliant rendition of a classic damsel in distress. It was becoming a habit with us.

Time seemed to stand still, each of us fighting to regain our composure in a bid to pretend nothing had gone wrong. Unfortunately for me, Dylan is quicker to recover than I am. “Slow down there, Tweety Bird. I know you’re eager, but surely we can spare a moment to get you to bed in one piece?” His voice was gruff, still filled with desire but far more composed than I could ever hope to be, even after a few moments of awkward silence in which to recover.

The light teasing in his tone brought a flush of embarrassment to my cheeks. The sheer indignity of the entire situation was a hard pill to swallow and I mentally cursed Mr. Bubblehead’s very existence. It should have been a perfect seduction yet there I was embarrassed yet again while my wet dream laughed at me, far too composed for my own liking.

“Come now, Tweety Bird, don’t sulk.” His laughter faded away when he noticed the expression on my face and he shifted me in his arms. He then took a moment to nuzzle my hair and turned towards my bedroom. Without another word, he confidently carried me to my own bedroom and placed me down onto my still-ruffled sheets. Not even pausing to give me time to process what was happening, he leaned down and captured my lips, this time taking control

of the kiss in order to return the exploration I had subjected him to in the living room. Just as I was about to lose myself completely to the slightly coarse texture of his tongue, he sat up to pull his blue polo neck off. The moment the shirt was off, he reached toward my bedside table and promptly gave me the best lesson in embarrassment I have ever been subjected to.

This is the part I don't exactly want to talk about, but for the sake of accuracy, I guess we will, unfortunately, be going there. You see, as Dylan reached toward my bedside table he tensed, for a moment dead still. That is when I realized I had forgotten something there. The moment he recovered enough to move, he turned to me and raised an eyebrow, damned amusement sparkling in his eyes. "You have a dildo?" He dangled the bright, neon-green piece of incriminating evidence before me.

I was absolutely mortified, but even when mortified I can pull a sarcastic comment or two out of my repertoire. "It's not exactly a cucumber, now is it?" I wasn't about to admit that it was the only source of action I'd received in a long time. Two years, in fact. I hadn't slept with anyone since I broke up with the only other person I ever let touch me. Tyler wasn't the most monogamous of guys, and I had the privilege of finding that out the day he told me he'd contracted AIDS. The next six months were the worst six months of my life, but we won't be going there. I'm clean and that chapter in my life is long since over.

It didn't occur to me to ask Dylan if he too was clean. He didn't strike me as the kind of guy that would mess around just for the hell of it, and even if he did, he'd already proven

he was far too logical to be stupid about it. Anal retentive and unprotected sex don't really go hand in hand, now do they? Besides, he intended to use protection.

"No, it isn't a cucumber," Dylan agreed, leaning in to nip at my bottom lip. "A cucumber wouldn't be half as fun." He trailed the hard plastic tip down my chest towards my belly, slowly circling it when he got there. The sight of a hand other than my own on the toy caused my ass to clench, my muscles eager to be stretched and filled, but he wasn't done teasing me yet. "But first things first...." He palmed my erection and nibbled on my lip again. "Condoms and lube."

"Top... drawer...." It was my turn to be reduced to single word responses, pants filled with want interrupting any effort at coherent speech.

His hum vibrated against my skin, testifying to just how close our bodies were, before he once more withdrew, tearing another whimper from my throat. "I'll be right back, Tweety Bird." He ran a soothing hand over my chest. As he brushed over my nipples I arched into his hand, my skin burning for more of that touch. I was so lost in the sensation of it that I barely even noticed when his other hand returned, both now drifting down to pull my sweatpants off. Mr. Bubblehead didn't even give him pause, and he soon had me completely naked.

The moment my sweatpants were off, he straddled me and thrust his still-clothed erection against mine. His hands left my skin and moved to unbutton his jeans. He drew the motion out, watching me with every movement he made, and I could have died a happy man, right there and then. He embodied every fantasy I had ever had.



The moment he unbuttoned and unzipped his pants, his penis sprang free, the tip already slick with moisture. That is the moment I chose to pounce. Sitting up, I grabbed hold of it and fisted it, thrusting my hand aggressively up and down the hard pulsing flesh.

Obviously not about to be outdone, he pushed me back down with a growl but left my hand where it was. He thrust his hips into my grasp and bit down on my shoulder, the pain of it causing me to arch into him once more. While I was still lost in the strange sense of pleasure that quickly followed the pain, he slid two slick fingers deep into me, effectively killing any hope of logical thought I may have had.

The invasion didn't hurt. My body drew his fingers in with ease and I pushed down onto them, seeking that elusive pleasure I knew was coming. He, however, had other plans. Reaching down, he held my hips in place and took control of the motion, rapidly twisting and scissoring his fingers. It was sheer ecstasy and torment, all rolled into one, because I wanted it and wanted more.

Just as he was about to brush against my prostate, he pulled his fingers out, leaving me empty. Frustration and disappointment coursed through me as I was once again denied. Unable to bear it any more I lifted my hands, clenched them, and slammed them back down onto the bed, an aggressive snarl escaping my lips. I would not be denied. Not after all the teasing.

I moved, fully intending to return the mark he left upon my shoulder, only I didn't quite get that far. The moment I moved to bite him, he slid my dildo into me, and the sudden invasion of that cold, hard object floored me. I dropped back

down onto my bed with a cry and arched up once more, the angle of penetration an entirely new experience now that it wasn't my own hand doing the thrusting.

In another blow to my masculine pride, it only took him a few moments to have me begging for more. His strokes were firm and sure and every thrust of the dildo deep into me hit my prostate dead on. The hard plastic filled me over and over again, quickly heated by both the friction and my skin, and all too soon I felt the beginning of the end. My balls began to tingle and I could feel my orgasm rising, only to find out he still wasn't done with me.

"Not yet, my little bird," he whispered, his hot breath once more tickling my ear. "Not like this." He withdrew the dildo, and my balls pulsed in protest. I wanted to cry at the loss, but at the same time, I wanted more, just like he did. My body was hot and wet, slick with sweat, cum, and lube, and I wanted to be claimed in the most intimate way possible.

He tore open a condom, sheathing himself in it before reaching for the lube, pouring a generous amount into his hand. Tossing the lube to the side, he hastily spread the slick substance over the condom with a deep-throated groan, the very sound of it tinged with lust and hunger.

The moment he was done, he grabbed hold of my legs and pushed them towards my head, exposing me fully for penetration. My asshole fluttered in anticipation, and I reached up to part myself open even further, pulling my ass cheeks as far apart as I could while folded over almost double upon my own bed. Another growl escaped his throat and then he thrust deep into me, every bit as aggressive as

when he'd used the dildo.

I cried out and dropped my hands. I clenched the sheets as pain once again flared through me with a vengeance. Although I was stretched and ready, he was bigger than I anticipated, and the sudden penetration caused my muscles to burn and clamp, waves of tension coursing throughout my body.

“Relax, Tweety.” His strange nickname for me drained some of the tension from my body. “I’ll take care of you.” He licked the sensitive part beneath my ear, successfully distracting me from the pain of suddenly being filled by an object considerably bigger than I was used to, and gently rocked his hips into me.

His motions eased the pain and my body began to open up, adjusting to his girth. Feeling me relax he slowly increased the speed and depth of his thrusts, and the friction the movement caused turned the pain into pleasure. The moment he found and brushed over my prostate again, I completely forgot my discomfort and thrust up to meet his motion.

That seemed to be what he was waiting for. The moment I echoed his motion he relaxed and let himself go, thrusting hard, deep into my body. Finding an awkward rhythm, I met and countered his every move and savored the way my body stretched and burned to accommodate his every aggressive invasion, filling me over and over again.

I’d like to say it was a long, erotic experience, but I was too close and it had been too long for that to be a reasonable expectation. My imminent orgasm rose with the speed of a tsunami and I came with a sharp cry of release, twisting my

body on the sheets as pleasure took hold of me. He continued to slide deep into me, and the tension caused by my orgasm increased the friction once more, the burn a sweet addition, grounding me in the sea of pleasure I was drowning in. He followed me not too long thereafter, and I could feel every pulse of his release as he filled the latex condom in my body.

And that is why I usually describe my first sexual experience with him using only two words: Mind-blowing!

## **Truth Laid Bare**

AS WE lay there in the aftermath of mind-blowing sex, Dylan started thinking. Apparently his mind was not as blown away as mine. Over thinking is one of his vices, but that doesn't bother me one bit. Not then and not now. When you aim to snag someone, you have to be willing to accept both the good and the bad. "You know. I never bothered to ask if you're seeing anyone."

He went to a lot of effort to sound casual, but I could see that he really wanted a response to the question lingering not-so-innocently behind that statement. It is, after all, kind of hard to hide the tension in your body when you are naked and pressed intimately close to the person you are trying to hide said tension from, but I guess we can give him a point for effort.

I raised my head to meet his eyes and silently contemplated him for a moment. Several possible responses raced through my mind, including snarky comebacks, lies, and honesty, all bundled up and fighting for victory. I went with the honest response, ignoring my masculine pride and choosing to bare myself to him. This is where I ignore all smart comebacks about me having already bared myself to him. I'm talking about emotionally, not physically. "No. I'm not seeing anyone. To be honest, you're the first person I've

had sex with in two years.” It was the best decision I ever made.

“Two years?” He raised both eyebrows in disbelief and glanced at my drawer, the action rather pointed. “Then I guess that dildo must have seen a lot of action, for you to have that many condoms conveniently lying around.”

I should have seen that one coming. I walked right into it with eyes wide open and only have myself to blame for the discomfort that followed. Seeing as I had willingly stepped into that minefield of my own accord, I decided to grin and bear it like a man. Okay, so my grin was more of a grimace, but I tried. “Kayden left them here.”

“Who’s Kayden?” And so he stepped onto the first mine buried in the field of social ineptness I’d taken years to cultivate.

“A....” I hesitated, my mind racing to define something that no longer had a definition to me. I was unsure how I should proceed. With all the recent conflict in my life, I didn’t know what Kayden was to me anymore, but at least I knew what he had once been. “friend of mine, I guess.”

The moment I finished speaking, I knew Dylan hadn’t missed my hesitation, and if there was one thing I already knew I could be certain about, it was the fact that that hesitation was going to bite me in the ass in the form of a question I wasn’t really ready to answer, probably sooner rather than later. Dylan plus a mystery equals dogmatic persistence.

“Why did your....” His pause echoed mine, the slight change in intonation a clear indication that he realized there

was more to the story than I was telling him, “friend bring a box of condoms to your apartment?”

“He... uh... he was convinced I wasn’t getting laid enough and was on a mission to get me some action. Unfortunately, it didn’t exactly work out as planned.”

“Why is that?” Another mine blew up in my face in the form of a seemingly harmless question, but then again I should have already realized that none of Dylan’s questions are harmless. There is always more than idle curiosity behind them. His mind is razor-sharp and he’s quick on his figurative feet. I guess that’s why he’s a lawyer.

“We had a falling out.” I kept my response short and abrupt. My emotions were still rubbed raw by the events that led to the end of my friendship with Kayden, and I wasn’t really in the mood to reminisce over things I couldn’t change.

Dylan either didn’t see or completely ignored my reluctance and proceeded to step further into the field of doom stretched between us. With his usual maddening persistence, he casually asked his next question, strangely making a connection I never would have dreamt he could possibly make using the meager information I had supplied. “Does this have something to do with your elevator phobia?”

I spluttered, flailed about, and generally made a complete fool of myself, yet still I was stupid enough to try going down the denial route. “No, it has nothing to do with Kayden!” My response was forced and aggressive and my tone alone was enough to give me away. Assuming, of course, he was stupid enough to have missed the tension coursing all throughout my body, but seeing as he was still very much pressed up against me at the time, I very much

doubt that.

He quickly proved how futile my protest was, strangely seeming to enjoy my discomfort. Leaning in closer, he nipped my ear before whispering into it, as he was wont to do: “He who doth protest too much, Tweety Bird....” The action sent the usual thread of lust right through me, emphasizing just how powerless I was against him. Perhaps I’d already lost myself to him even then.

I gave in to defeat, too tired and sated to fight back with smart comebacks that held little to no meaning in the end. “Yes, I suppose you could say that.” The admission grated on my pride, taunting me with my own weakness, but I chose to ignore it. The worst was still to come and I took a deep, wavering breath in order to brace myself for it.

“What happened?” I saw the query coming even before he voiced it, and part of me rebelled against it, but strangely enough, something about his tone actually made me want to tell him. I was tired of facing my disillusion alone, and I guess a part of me was just a touch bitter. But first things first. I needed my space. Being pressed intimately against delectable flesh was not exactly helping me think with the head on my shoulders instead of the one lower down.

I sat up and leaned against a knee, taking a deep breath to steady myself before launching straight into my sordid excuse of a tale. “Ever read a kinky elevator sex scene?” It wasn’t the smartest opening line, but I couldn’t resist using the shock tactic so conveniently at my disposal.

“What?” Satisfaction coursed through me at Dylan’s outcry, the knowledge that I actually had him well and truly off balance, tickling me pink. Considering all my efforts



before, it was quite an achievement, so I had good reason to be proud. Even more so when he made an assumption so way off base it was actually funny. “You had sex with him in an elevator? Wait, in *our* apartment elevator?”

Jealousy really does strange things to one’s ability to reason. Considering that I’d just told him not all that long ago that he was the first in two years, that wasn’t a conclusion he should have jumped to—but it didn’t matter. That was the first sign I received that Dylan might actually want more from this than sex.

“No, I did not have sex with him in the elevator,” I replied with a light chuckle, far too pleased and smug even to pretend I was taking offense. “Though you are jumping ahead here. Alright, I’ll assume you know exactly what I’m referring to. So how do these kinky sex scenes usually start?” I was having far too much fun to make this conversation easy on him.

Dylan actually blinked in confusion and gaped at me in silence for a long moment before responding. I suspect his ever-logical mind was trying really hard to make sense of the information he was receiving, and failure to do so was leaving him stumped. I wonder what the error code in his brain is? Something tells me it is not the proverbial ID10T error so prevalent and well known in the IT field.

“Well?” I prompted when no response was forthcoming.

He raised an eyebrow, the silent question apparent, but decided he would play along with me for now. “A couple enters an elevator. The elevator begins to move and then stops for some reason, usually either a power failure, a fault in the elevator itself, or the emergency stop button. All very

cliché and neatly wrapped up.”

“Yup.” I nodded in agreement, actually grinning at him. It should have been a painful tale to recount, but something about telling it to Dylan and playing around with him as I did so actually made it fun. I completely forgot how hurt I was by it all and lost myself in the enjoyment of playing with Dylan’s assumptions. “That’s exactly how it happened, and the reason for the stop was a power failure.”

I could see the skepticism and confusion written all over his face, but foraged on nonetheless. I fully intended to get to the point... eventually. “Kayden and I were the only people in the elevator at the time.” I glanced away, something within me suddenly scared of Dylan’s potential reaction, even though logically I knew I had no reason to fear the same kind of rejection Kayden had dished out. “The lights went out and it was dark and I figured it would be the perfect opportunity to tell him the only secret I hadn’t yet found the courage to share. You see, we were best friends. We shared everything. So I thought perhaps it was time for me to tell him I’m gay.”

I fell into silence and waited for the penny to drop. “I assume he didn’t take it very well.” Ping. Bull’s eye.

“Depends on how you look at it, I guess.” I stared blankly ahead, completely lost in memories I should’ve let go. Yet, something within them really bothered me. Kayden’s betrayal made a hidden part of me question the core of my very identity. It was not something I was about to admit, but it was there nonetheless. “There was no physical or verbal violence. He didn’t yell, and he didn’t hit me. I guess that was part of the problem. He ignored me completely, and we spent the next hour and a half in dead silence. Once the

power was restored and we got out, he walked right past me, even bumped into me without even turning to look at me.”

“Is that what had you so upset last night?”

His question drew my attention back to him and I shook my head. “Nope.” I lilted my tone as I spoke in an effort to keep my response blasé. I failed, but we won’t go into that. “Last night there really was sex in that elevator. Kayden pressed the emergency stop button and I got the privilege to have front row seats to sex in the city in a whole new light. No, wait. It wasn’t front row seats. It was a private viewing. Either way, I got to see Kayden screw some random whore in front of me.”

Even as I spoke, I could see Dylan’s shock and disbelief. I guess he didn’t see that one coming, but I don’t blame him. It’s not exactly something you see every day, after all. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope,” I retorted, tongue in cheek. It really wasn’t a topic I wanted to dwell on, after all. “Why would I crack jokes about such a great show?”

“Avery.”

“Dylan.” I could hear the soft reproach in his tone but ignored it completely, copying his tone in response. In my opinion, the topic was done. End of story.

I guess he realized I wasn’t going to let him win, because he didn’t push me any further. Instead, he sighed, reaching out to ruffle my hair. “If it makes you feel any better, I wanted you from the moment I lay eyes on you.”

“Why did it take you so long to jump me, then?” I retorted, suddenly feeling playful. I wanted to forget Kayden

so we could get rid of the tension talking about him had caused. He wasn't worth it. Not when I had the owner of gorgeous, sexy, blue eyes spread out all naked and glorious in my bed. Hmm, oh, the endless possibilities.

"I was trying to be a gentleman." Dylan raised an eyebrow, his facial features deadpan. Unfortunately for him, I could see the sparkle of amusement in his eyes, and it gave him completely away. He was playing along with me and oh, how I loved him for it. That should have been my second hint as to where all of this was headed, but stupid is as stupid does. I wasn't ready to see it then.

"They still have those?" I leaned in and poked his side, suddenly curious to see if he was perhaps ticklish. I wanted a physical advantage over him, seeing as he's so good at keeping me completely off-balance verbally. Alas, such was not to be. He didn't even flinch.

"Of course, but we are a rare breed, you see. So you should count yourself lucky to have met me," he retorted without pause, reaching over to poke me in return. And that is how we ended up rolling around on my bed again. You see, I, unlike him, am actually ticklish, and I had just inadvertently given myself away. Perhaps I should think things through before acting on random impulses that simply keep getting me into trouble when I'm around Dylan. Then again, maybe not. Somewhere in the middle of the tickle torture he inflicted upon me, the nature of the touches changed and he soon had me moaning instead of laughing and that is where we spent the rest of the day. Don't you just love weekends?

## **Honest Communication**

FOLLOWING the best weekend of my life, Dylan and I started to date. There was no formal confirmation of the fact that we were now a couple, but we both knew it. I worked from home, seeing as I couldn't drive with a busted ankle, and he came over every evening for dinner. He even brought food. We ate more Chinese food, pizza, lasagna, and various other takeout delicacies, though I must say the most amusing of the lot was the birdseed.

Yes, Dylan actually thought it would be funny if he brought me birdseed to eat. Luckily for me, it was sunflower seeds, and I happen to like those. You should have seen his face when I calmly started to crack the seeds open and eat them. Another point to me, but that's beside the point. What I am trying to get to is that we settled into a pattern of sorts, neither of us voicing what our relationship may possibly mean to us, and it was only when Michael invited us to dinner four weeks later that I realized how much damage lack of honest communication could actually cause.

It started innocently enough. Dylan picked me up and drove me to Michael's place. Being the gentleman he is, he opened the passenger door and helped me out the moment we arrived. Since I had already mastered the evil crutches of doom, he wasn't even in danger of being castrated by me. We

walked up to the front door and knocked, and that is when everything started to go wrong.

Michael opened the door, and attempted to slip out, a look of sheer desperation on his face. He only had time to mouth a single “Sorry!” before he was interrupted by another male voice. “Dylan! I missed you!” A slim, pretty man with long blond hair and aquamarine eyes slipped right past Michael and proceeded to glue himself to Dylan like a barnacle sucking up to a rock.

“I tried to call you.” Michael’s softly spoken explanation fell on deaf ears; my mind barely even registered it. My heart was too busy pounding a painful rhythm in my chest. The sight of Dylan wrapped up in the arms of another man hurt me more than I ever thought possible. Kayden’s betrayal was but a mere shadow in comparison, and I didn’t know how to deal with it. The fact that Dylan didn’t seem to be pulling out of the hold made it even worse, and I completely lost myself within a flood of misery that hit me from nowhere.

The next thing I realized I was inside, seated at the dinner table with Dylan beside me and Michael across from me. Jacey—yes, it turns out *his* name is Jacey—was seated across from Dylan, and something about him just didn’t sit right with me. “So, what have you been doing with yourself lately, Dylan?” His tone was silky smooth with just the right level of suggestive undertone hidden deep within it, and my fingers had the sudden urge to rip out his throat.

“Nothing really. More of the same I guess.” Dylan’s tone was neutral. He remained calm and swirled the wine Michael had poured for us around in his glass. The wine wasn’t Michael’s best idea at the time, considering the

circumstances, but we all have our faults.

“You moved rather suddenly. Couldn’t you have at least called me to tell me about it? I would’ve helped, you know.” Jacey actually had the audacity to pout. He really thought that pathetic downturn of his lips was sexy, and Dylan didn’t do anything to disillusion him. I, on the other hand, couldn’t stomach it, so I reached for my own glass of wine and downed it in one swig. The moment the liquid was gone, I reached for the wine bottle to pour a refill, and when Michael moved to stop me, gave him the mother of all glares that quickly forced him to reconsider.

“Something came up rather suddenly.” Dylan’s response was simple and noncommittal, but I was too lost in the sea of all-consuming jealousy to realize he was taking a rather distant approach to Jacey. Go figure.

“He didn’t need your help.” I chipped in, downing another glass of wine. Wine has a tendency to loosen my tongue even more than usual. A rebellious part of me wanted Jacey to know Dylan didn’t need him in any way, especially not in the way Jacey seemed to be heavily hinting at.

“You still could’ve called after you moved. I’ve been worried sick. You just vanished.” Jacey reprimanded Dylan with another pout. The fact that he completely ignored me and my attempt to stake my claim grated on my nerves. The urge to tear out his throat was replaced by the urge to claw out his eyes. I wanted him alive to feel the pain.

“I was busy.” Dylan used the most common excuse known to man when it comes to losing touch. The problem is, sometimes it’s not an excuse. Fate is a fickle mistress who likes to throw the occasional curve ball our way. How was I

to know which of the two Dylan wanted to express to Jacey?

“Too busy to call your boyfriend?” Jacey lapped the edge of the glass in his hand and, for the first time since laying eyes on Dylan, actually looked away from him to acknowledge me instead. “Was the sex not good enough? You certainly didn’t complain.” He watched me as he spoke, every word a blatant message to me that I was not too blind to miss. He was telling me I was an intruder and it hurt, especially when I realized it might be the truth. After all, Dylan hadn’t even mentioned Jacey to me, even after I told him about my love life, or perhaps I should say lack thereof.

I didn’t even have the heart to protest, so I drowned my hurt in yet another glass of wine, no longer looking up. I couldn’t face the overt sexual innuendos in every movement Jacey made when Dylan didn’t even move to put Jacey in his place.

“Jacey, you are—”

Dylan only managed to utter three words before Jacey interrupted him once more, his tone actually dripping pure sex. “The last time was sooo good. Remember the honey and the cream?” I really didn’t think it was possible to seduce someone with your voice alone; the very realization that it was seemed to emphasize my every inadequacy. I could never seduce someone like that. I was, after all, a geek, working in the IT field. It is a common belief that we are sexually deficient.

My sexual inadequacy aside, it was what Jacey said next that really hit me hard. “You licked me all over, from top to bottom. I can’t remember ever having such a good time. We really should try the chocolate sauce next. You



have a thing for chocolate, don't you? You always said you were game to experiment. If you like we can even include your little boy toy over here and have that threesome we were considering."

My mind raced ahead and suddenly I could see Jacey and Dylan, together, doing things I didn't want Dylan doing with him. I wanted him to do them with me instead. My heart clenched in on itself and my chest ached and that is when I officially had enough. I refused to be there, listening to Dylan's boyfriend go on about how good their sex life was when it seemed Dylan had betrayed me in the most basic of ways.

I stood, drawing Dylan's attention to me, and I was caught in his gaze, for a moment uncertain as to what I should do next. Then the pain in my heart spurred me into motion. Suddenly angry at him for playing with me the way he did, I reached over and grabbed the glass of wine he still held from his hand. I downed it in a single motion and slammed it onto the table before him, every line of my body daring him to do something about it. When I was met with only dead silence, I turned and walked out without another word. Ok, so maybe hobbled out would be a more accurate rendition, but let's stick with the more glamorous of the two.

I actually made it halfway down the street Michael lived on before Dylan came after me, his voice drifting through the chilly night air. "Avery! Wait!" There was desperation in the cry, but I ignored it. I really didn't want to talk to him, not when he'd hurt me more than I ever thought possible, teaching me the true meaning of shattering a heart into a million pieces.

I continued to hobble along and actually managed to progress ten crutch clicks forward before, inevitably, he caught up with me. I tried my best to ignore him, but he grabbed me by the shoulder to halt any further progress I may have attempted to make. The moment he had me in place, he walked around to stand before me. He wanted to confront me head-on, but I turned my face away. I didn't want him to see how much it was all affecting me. "Avery. It's not what you think."

He paused, giving me time to respond. I, however, completely ignored the opening he gave me to protest. Dylan wanted to *talk* and I didn't feel like playing along. It's a well-known fact that it's difficult to convince someone using logic when said someone isn't offering points that can be argued.

"Come on, Avery. Talk to me. I'm trying to tell you Jacey is not my boyfriend." And that is how I stepped right into Dylan's game. Though ignoring him was a good tactic when I first considered it, I had forgotten to take my nature into account. I talk too much for such a tactic to be a viable solution for me.

"Really?" I snapped, looking at him before I could think better of it. "Does that mean he's another of your boy toys? Like me? Are you collecting your own private little harem? Someone for every day of the week? Or every month? Does this make me Mr. November? Or is it Mr. Saturday, seeing as that's the day you seduced me?"

"Avery, stop it. You're being ridiculous. He's not my boy toy and neither are you, and if I recall correctly I was not the one doing the seducing when we first met." Even though my head knew he had a point, my heart didn't get the message. I

knew I was unjustly accusing him without even giving him the chance to explain the situation, but I couldn't get the image of Jacey and Dylan out of my head.

"So now you're going to blame me?" I lost what little cool I managed to pretend to have, and set all my raw emotion free. "You certainly weren't complaining!" The moment I said it I knew I had thrown the same argument Jacey had used, but I didn't really care. "If you were involved with someone else, you could have just let me know! And if it was only sex, you shouldn't have implied you wanted more by actually being jealous that I might have been involved with Kayden! I can't believe I was stupid enough to actually fall for you!"

As those last few words slipped past my lips, their meaning sank into my mind and killed my rant, right then and there. I had just revealed something I hadn't realized until that very moment. Somewhere along the line, despite the short time I had known him, I had fallen for Dylan. The very thought made me want to run and hide from the world and everything in it. You see, flirting I can do with the best of them; committing to an actual relationship is another ball game entirely.

"You what?" Dylan's careful intonation made it clear that he knew exactly what it was I'd said and was merely seeking confirmation with the question, confirmation I had no intention of giving him.

I wanted time to work my own way through this, yes, say it with me, epiphany of mine, before facing him and possible rejection once again. After all, we still hadn't resolved the issue of the twink that had invaded Michael's house to get to Dylan. "It doesn't matter. You have Jacey.

You don't need me." I turned and attempted to move forward once more, hoping to get past and away from him so I could nurse my wounded heart and my shocking revelation in peace. I fully intended to throw a pity party and the only one invited was me.

"You're not going anywhere." It was the sheer command in his voice and not his sudden grip on my arm that stopped me dead once more. "I'm not done with you yet. I will only say this once, Avery, so you'd better listen and listen good. Jacey is not my boyfriend or my boy toy. I don't do random sex and believe in being with only a single person at a time. Yes, I did sleep with Jacey and yes there was cream and honey involved at the time. I was drunk out of my mind, and it's a mistake I don't intend to repeat. Ever. It was over six months ago, and when I came to my senses the next morning I broke it off. Not that there was a relationship to break off, seeing as that *was* a one night stand, but I did my best to make it clear that I did not want to be sexually involved with him. Jacey, unfortunately, didn't get the message. That's why I moved. Seems I didn't move far enough, seeing as he's managed to track me down again, but I don't regret it. Not for one minute. I met you."

If ever I heard a corny line, the last one was it, but I couldn't find the energy or heart to actually make fun of it. Something about the situation and the manner in which he said it actually seemed to give it the meaning it once had, before Hollywood used it to death. "So... where does that leave us then?"

"I love you, Tweety Bird. Where do you think that leaves us?" And that, I guess, is how our relationship began.

If I had my way, this would be the last chapter to my tale. But Dylan wouldn't be pleased if he realized I didn't see it through to its natural end. After all, all things must come full circle to be truly complete, and so my story will end where it all began.

## **Therapy**

THREE weeks after surviving the infamous “Twink Attack,” as it is now known, I finally had my cast removed. When I say finally I mean it, because it was a week overdue. During one of my checkups, the doctor commented that the break wasn’t healing as well as he’d hoped and recommended that I wear the cast a little longer. It was not a happy day for me. I envisioned endless days of torment ahead and could almost hear Mr. Bubblehead laughing at me. When I found out that the cast could finally be taken off, I literally hugged the poor man in white. Even hearing that I would need to keep the crutches of doom around a little longer while I got used to walking again did not detract from my elation.

Dylan and Michael were every bit as happy as I was. Okay, so they weren’t bouncing off the walls or anything, but they really were happy for me, and invited me out to a celebratory lunch. It was while we were getting ready to go out that things really got interesting.

“I just found out something interesting.” Dylan poked his head into his bedroom where I was busy digging through the closet looking for something to wear. He’d moved me in right after the fateful encounter with Mr. Honey and Cream, and we’d been living together ever since. It may seem rather sudden to have made such a commitment, but seriously,

think about it. We lived right next door to one another and more often than not spent our evenings together anyway. We certainly slept together. I didn't actually sell my apartment and all the furniture in it till much later, so technically it wasn't altogether official; I still had a safety net available at the time.

"Hmm?" I spared but a moment to hum in order to let him know I was listening, despite the fact that I was all but buried in my own clothes, searching for something suitable to wear now that I finally had two ankles again.

"Michael met someone." Now that actually did manage to garner my full attention. Michael, I'd found, has a tendency to "enjoy life," and yes, that can be interpreted as "avoids commitment like the plague." All this I know from Dylan. Michael prefers to keep conversations light, and tends to avoid more serious subject matters.

"Met someone as in actually likes someone enough to want something more than a drinking partner for an evening?" Even though Michael avoids commitment, he doesn't sleep around. He has to be really drunk to slip up like that, and that's only happened once since I met him. From what I can gather, he generally avoids interaction with anyone that is not a friend. I, being Dylan's partner, get the privilege of his company by proxy.

"Yup." Dylan grinned at me, and the sparkle in his eyes told me he was enjoying the telling far too much for his own good. Good thing Michael was not around to retaliate. "He actually asked me for advice. He wants to know what he should do to get the person's attention. I told him to live in the moment. If it's meant to be, an opportunity will make

itself known, and when it does, he should grab it with both hands. Who knows, he may even stumble upon love along the way.” The last was said to tease me, but I really didn’t mind. I can forgive Dylan pretty much anything these days.

“Wow. He likes someone enough to actually overcome his phobia of anything that may potentially resemble a relationship. So who is this person that managed to achieve the impossible?”

“I have no idea.” Dylan stepped up behind me to wrap his arms around my waist. “But since we’re on the topic of phobias, when are you getting over your phobia of getting into a certain elevator? I’m getting a little tired of taking the stairs, you know.”

“Who’s forcing you to take the stairs?” I pretended to focus on the clothes in my hands once more. I didn’t want Dylan to know how much his proximity was affecting me, the heat of his touch managing to warm my skin even though the shirt I wore. “You’re perfectly welcome to take the elevator while I take the stairs.”

“Then I’d be all alone and Tweety-Bird-less.” He actually breathed the response right into my ear, taking full advantage of my now rather well-known weakness.

“That’s a choice you have to make, now isn’t it?” I retorted, fighting the shiver that coursed down my spine. “And while we’re on the topic of Tweety Birds and names, who is Avery Brooks?” I jumped on the most random reference I could find in the hopes of changing the topic, suddenly remembering the nickname Dylan had branded me with way back when.



“You’re trying to distract me.” Dylan’s soft reprimand trickled into my ear as he slipped a hand beneath my shirt to splay it over the naked skin of my belly. “Tut tut, bad Tweety Bird.”

I arched into the heat of his touch, unable to resist. “You’re doing the same thing.” My response was breathy and short, thus proving that Dylan’s distraction tactic was far more efficient than mine.

“True.” My breath hitched when he sucked my earlobe into his mouth and nibbled on it, his saliva cooling my skin as it hit the air that surrounded us. “But I’m better at it than you are.” He slid his hand up towards my nipples in order to more effectively prove his point. “Avery Brooks is an actor. I know him because he acts in *Star Trek*.”

And that stopped everything short. “You’re a *Star Trek* fan?! You’re joking, right?” I turned to face him, forcing his hand to slide from my nipple and onto my back. “I can’t believe you’re a Trekkie! Please, say it isn’t sooooo.” I deliberately drew the last word out, using the dramatic overtones in my voice to tease him.

“Don’t tell me you’re a Warrie,” Dylan immediately reciprocated, picking up on my game just as I knew he would. Dylan can’t resist a debate. Here we have the Art of Distraction—Lesson Three: Find your opponent’s weak point and pounce right onto it with everything you have.

“But of course.” I tilted my head and pretended to preen, playing him with all I had. If truth be told, I’m neither a Trekkie nor a Warrie. I enjoy a good science fiction story but am not an avid obsessive fan of either *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*. Both series have their good points and their bad

points. However, the conflict between *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* fans is rather well known and I really couldn't resist the urge to play on it, seeing as Dylan was enough of a *Star Trek* fan to actually know obscure little things like the actual actors' names. "How can you not be a fan of Luke Skywalker and Yoda with all his wisdom?"

"Yoda is a fake. He doesn't even know how to create grammatically correct sentences and pretends to be all clever because he speaks all backwards." Dylan's avid protest brought me to tears, the intensity of the laughter it instigated actually physically painful. He was so lost in the argument that it actually took him a moment to realize I was screwing with him and another moment to react.

"Why Tweety Bird, are you making fun of me?" He slid his other hand beneath my clothes and leaned forward to drop a light kiss on the corner of my lips. "Are you sure you want to be doing that? You may want to reconsider." This was followed by another kiss, this one on the other side. "You see. When I get teased I am overcome by the sudden urge to retaliate and I think I know just the thing...." And that seemed to be what he was waiting for.

The moment he finished speaking he grabbed hold of me and tossed me over his shoulder. To this day, I still wonder how that was physically possible. I was so lost in the soft affectionate caresses he was dropping onto my skin that I didn't even see it coming. He then headed straight for the apartment door and, yes, you guessed it, the dreaded elevator.

"Hey, Dylan, wait! I'm not getting into that elevator." My protest fell on completely deaf ears. Okay, so maybe not so

much deaf as disobedient, because he did respond, even though it wasn't by putting me down.

"I know. I'm carrying you in. Not the same thing."

"Dylan, please. I'm sorry. I won't tease you about *Star Trek* anymore. I promise. Just put me down and step away from the lift." I tried to bargain with him using promises I knew I probably wouldn't keep, but he didn't even bother to respond. The elevator pinged, the sound loud in the silence that surrounded us. That is when it really hit me. He was going to take me in there whether I liked it or not, and nothing I said or did was going to make him change his mind. That certainly didn't stop me from trying, though. I happen to have a personal policy that demands I at least go down fighting.

The moment he stepped forward, I threw all my efforts into struggling in his grasp. Part of me hoped he would drop me so I could run away, while another part, the more sane part, hoped he wouldn't. That part of me realized that if he did let me go while I struggled, the chances of me landing safely were slim. I'd probably meet Mr. Bubblehead the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The moment the doors were closed, he complied with my request and carefully placed me down onto a horizontal, flat surface once more. He took great care to use his body to stabilize my progress as he slid me down, and by the time my feet hit a solid surface, I didn't really have the energy to stand up straight. The elevator began its descent, and as it started to move, Dylan moved along with it. That is when I realized what his true intent was. "Dylan, no!" My protest escaped my lips about a second too late, and I watched in horror as his finger connected with the emergency stop

button.

“And now, my dear little Tweety Bird, we will teach you that not all experiences in halted elevators are bad.”

His rough whisper sent lust right through me. I licked my lips, my mind racing for a smart comeback that should have contributed to fighting him off, but somewhere along the line between my brain and my lips, the message got all jumbled up and the error code in *my* brain got stuck on “How fast can I get into his pants?” It was good to know my one track mind was still functional.

The delay caused by the malfunction in my brain gave Dylan the time he needed to act on the promise in his words, and before I could even click OK to clear the error message in my head I found myself pressed up against the elevator wall, hot lips firmly locked upon mine. Leaving me little say in the matter, he slipped his tongue between my lips and plunged deep into my mouth, sweeping right through it without pause.

He succeeded in kissing me stupid, bit my bottom lip, and then moved to suck my earlobe. “We have to be quick.” His whisper trickled into my befuddled mind. The meaning of the actual individual words and the context in which they were being used only made partial sense to me, and I protested the interruption in what we were doing with a pleading whimper I will never again admit to. “I’m sure someone is already on their way to fix the problem.” He then traced my ear with his tongue and reached for my pants, fingers nimbly making short work of the fastenings that held the sudden erection he’d just given me in check.

My penis sprang free and he thrust my pants all the way

down, leaving me half-naked in what is, technically speaking, a public place. Fortunately for me, I was too far lost in lust to realize that. I actually helped him along by stepping out of my pants and underwear. “Now there’s a good Tweety,” he murmured, standing once more. Reaching into the pocket of his pants, he retrieved a condom and lube. The grin on his lips as he did so can only be described as positively wicked.

“Now on to the main event.” He grabbed my hand and squirted lube into it. He took only a moment to spread the lube over my fingers and then moved my hand to thrust my fingers into my ass. “Get yourself ready,” he purred into my ear.

I moaned and obeyed, the urge to thrust down onto the fingers now in my ass too much of a temptation to resist. I plunged my fingers as deep as I could get them and twisted them, spreading the cool slick substance around while Dylan prepared himself for me. He unbuttoned his pants and his erection sprang free, unrestrained. The fact that he’d gone commando told me he’d been preparing for this all along, but instead of bothering me, the realization only served to arouse me further.

The moment he had the condom on, he tugged my hand, pulling my slick fingers from my ass. He lifted the leg I’d just managed to get the cast off of, and my ass muscles quivered in anticipation of what was to come. Lining himself up, he thrust deep into my body. My muscles burned as they stretched to accommodate him. The brief foreplay had not been enough to stretch me sufficiently, but I didn’t care. I welcomed the slight sting, only just then realizing I missed

the slight undertone of aggression that had somehow slipped out of our relationship since our first desperate coupling session.

Not even giving my body time to adjust, he began to thrust in earnest, withdrawing only to plunge right back in again, his pace both rapid and desperate. I picked up my other leg and wrapped it around his waist, trusting him to support me, so I could draw him deeper into my body. I cried out when he hit my prostate, and that is where we both lost control completely. Our coupling was fast and all-consuming, and quickly lost all semblance of rhythm as we both moved in a desperate bid for release. My orgasm hit me suddenly and the intensity of it had me quivering for long moments thereafter. Dylan came just as the tremors in my body began to fade, and we both collapsed to the elevator floor, neither of us able to support the other. The next few moments were spent in the silence that usually follows great sex, and would have probably been followed by a mini-make-out session as well if not for the fact that the elevator chose that moment to move. Yes, it's cliché and everything, but what can I say?

Now we come to the not-so-glamorous part of kinky elevator sex stories that never really gets told. The sudden movement of the elevator spurred us into motion, and we quickly grappled our way back into our clothes. Dylan had an easier time of it than I did seeing as he hadn't actually undressed, whereas I had to somehow find a way to scurry back into both my underwear and my pants in the short time it would take the elevator to reach its destination. Suffice it to say, I didn't really stand a chance. The elevator doors opened while I was still in the process of buttoning my

pants, and I looked up to meet the eyes of none other than: Kayden! Did I forget to mention Kayden repairs elevators for a living?

To describe that as an awkward moment would be an understatement. I was mortified, and only later did it occur to me that it was actually a moment of sweet justice. It would appear that what goes around does, after all, come around, but at the time I wasn't reasoning that clearly. Dylan grabbed hold of my hand and we stumbled out the elevator in silence, my need to use crutches for a little while longer completely forgotten. It's amazing what embarrassment can accomplish, isn't it?

The moment we exited the elevator, I spotted Michael. He was headed right toward us, but instead of stopping when he came close, he continued to move, his attention not really upon us. "Sometimes we just have to live in the moment," Michael whispered as he stepped past me, bumping into Kayden's back. Kayden tripped and stumbled forward, into the elevator Dylan and I had just managed to vacate, and Michael stepped in behind him. The elevator doors slid oh so slowly closed, and a mere moment later the emergency stop light was once again illuminated. This apartment building really should do something about that lift....

Also by RAYNE AUSTER



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RAYNE AUSTER always had a passion for writing. However, growing up, she didn't have the patience to finish what she started. Most of her projects died before even seeing the light of day. While studying for a master's degree in computer science, she decided to post what she wrote online. That is when she discovered the joy of sharing the stories in her head. Unable to bear the thought of leaving her readers hanging, she finished her first piece of fiction. The satisfaction of actually completing a story quickly led to further inspiration, and she hasn't looked back since.

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