



# Man Down

STEPHANI HECHT

All Jessie Goodson wants to do is put the past behind him and focus on his dreams of becoming a paramedic. Broken and scarred in more ways than one, he yearns to prove to everyone who's ever doubted him that he can make something of himself. Determined to succeed, the last thing he wants is anything or anyone to distract him from his goal.

Randal Connors's job is to train new medics, it sure as hell isn't to mess around them. Especially a certain blond, who's not only way too young for him, but haunted by a secret past. But forbidden or not, Randal still finds himself becoming more attracted to Jessie with each passing day.

Then the explosive details of Jessie's secrets come out and Randal knows he can't turn his back on the man. But in helping Jessie, will Randal lose everything he has?

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

**Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.**

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Man Down

Copyright © 2010 Stephani Hecht

ISBN: 978-1-55487-541-2

Cover art by Angela Waters

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books

Look for us online at:

[www.eXtasybooks.com](http://www.eXtasybooks.com)

Man Down

By

Stephani Hecht

## *Dedication*

*To Jackie. You rock!*

## Chapter One

*Twenty-eight, Twenty-nine, Thirty. Pause.*

Jessie waited for the nurse to give two squeezes of the Ambo bag attached to the breathing tube before he repeated the grueling cycle of chest compressions. They had been working the full arrest for nearly a half hour and getting no results. The eighty-five year old woman was still lifeless, the cardiac monitor continued to display a flat line on the screen. Yet, Jessie and the hospital team continued to work.

His back, forearms, wrists and legs burned from exertion, his hands shook from pent-up adrenalin and his mind spun. As a paramedic student, this was his first time doing CPR, his first full-arrest, in a hospital setting. He'd been doing one of his many clinical rotations in the ER of St. Michael's when the patient had been brought in.

Before he could even get out a *What's going on?* Lucas, one of the nurses, had dragged him into the room and ordered Jessie to start compressions. Once it got underway, he'd gotten a heavy dose of

reality. Working a cardiac arrest was nothing like they showed in the movies or on TV. Instead, he found chaos. Everyone yelled at once, people bumped into each other, equipment was all over the floor, the ground was slippery from fluids and it seemed like one big giant cluster fuck.

The worst had to be the smells and the fact the poor patient had no privacy. The room had to be filled with at least a dozen people, yet her shirt was sliced in half and her chest fully exposed. Even though Jessie had never met the woman, he somehow felt she never would have thought she'd go out this way.

A bead of sweat dripped down his brow and he shrugged his shoulder up so he could wipe it on his dark blue scrub top. He could feel other droplets of perspiration trickling down his spine. While the main trauma room had seemed cool enough to start, thirty minutes of CPR had left him hot and puffing for breath.

Finally, when he just about decided to ask for someone to take over, the doctor running the code gave the clock one last glance before he sadly shook his head. "Let's call this one, gang."

Not wanting to get into trouble, Jessie continued compressions until Lucas nodded to indicate he could stop. Jessie stepped back, grimacing as all his muscles instantly tightened up. Yeah, he'd be spending a good portion of his

evening in a hot bath. At this rate, he'd be lucky if he could walk in the morning.

Everyone slowly trickled out until just Lucas and Jessie were left.

"You want to help me get her ready for her family to come in and say goodbye?" Lucas asked.

In the fifteen clinical rotations Jessie had worked in the ER, he and Lucas were already on their way to becoming good friends. With dark hair and mischievous blue eyes, Lucas had a snarky sense of humor that made him easy to like. Add the fact that he happened to be often overlooked in life because of his small build, the same way Jessie was, the two instantly bonded. So, while Jessie would have loved to go outside for a breather and regroup, he nodded and began to help Lucas disconnect her from the various pieces of medical equipment.

"I was going to Pandora's tonight. You want to join me?" Lucas asked, referring to the local gay club. How he could discuss something so mundane after losing a patient stunned Jessie, but then Lucas probably had gotten used to death and sickness. He'd been a nurse for five years.

"I would love to, but I have class after I get done here." Jessie pulled a sheet over the dead woman's chest, finally giving her the respect he thought she deserved. It just struck him as wrong that she continued to lay out on display, even if it



were just he and Lucas in the room now. Something on his face must have given away his thoughts because Lucas reached over and gave his arm a sympathetic squeeze.

"It gets easier. I promise."

"I'm fine." Jessie tried to smile. The last thing he wanted was to give the impression that he couldn't hack it as a paramedic. After a lifetime of falling short of others' expectations, he had a burning desire to finally be able to measure up.

"I puked after my first full arrest," Lucas confessed with a small wink.

Jessie gapped at him. Not because of the wink. He'd long grown accustomed to Lucas's flirting. The part about puking was a shocker though. Every time Jessie had worked with the nurse, he'd seemed to be so collective and efficient. It gave him a small measure of comfort to know things had been difficult for his friend, too.

After they finished cleaning up the patient and the trauma room, they went over to the smaller of the two nurse's stations to do their paperwork. While Lucas took a seat, Jessie remained standing.

"Oh, sweet mama, my day just got much better," Lucas breathed, a wicked grin spreading out over his lips as he looked at the ambulance bay doors.

Jessie followed his gaze and when he saw who Lucas was drooling over, he almost dropped his

pen. A paramedic, who Jessie had never met before, led a cot down the hallway. Hot, sexy and built, the man was every one of Jessie's wet dreams come to life. With dark hair and equally dark eyes, he had a build and a whole hard edge to him that instantly made Jessie's cock stand up and salute.

"Who is that?" Jessie asked as he continued to devour the man with his gaze. How come they'd never crossed paths before? Jessie had thought he'd met nearly every medic in the area and he'd have definitely remembered bumping into this guy before.

"Randal Connors," Lucas drew the name out slowly, like he was making love to every syllable. "I'd heard his company had transferred him back to Genesee County, but I didn't want to get my hopes up that it was true until I saw that fine ass for myself."

Even though he'd yet to see said ass, Jessie found himself nodding in agreement. Judging by the front of the god, he'd be willing to bet the backside would be just as good. He knew he was gapping like some lovesick teenager, but couldn't tear his gaze from the way Randal's dark blue cargo pants molded to his strong legs, or how the button up shirt stretched against his muscular chest oh so perfectly.

"Hey, Lucas," Randal greeted, once they were

within talking distance.

Jessie felt a bit like a goof as he realized he'd been so busy ogling Randal he'd never taken the time to look at the patient. He let out a little sigh as he realized it was Milly, one of St. Michael's frequent fliers. An overly thin woman with a ratty mane of brown hair and a nasty heroin habit, she usually had to come in for fluids and antibiotics at least once a month. At the moment, she was fast asleep, her mouth hanging open just enough to show the gap where her front teeth used to be.

"Hello, Randal. It's good to see you again. Why don't you put Milly in four?"

Randal nodded before he wheeled the cot into the small examining room. As Lucas watched him go, he couldn't help but feel a small twinge of disappointment that the paramedic hadn't glanced his way once.

\* \* \* \*

As he pushed the cot plush to the hospital bed, Randal had to resist the urge to look over his shoulder to see if the sexy hot thing had come in to the room. When he'd first seen the stranger standing next to Lucas, Randal had to fight to hide his immediate interest. It didn't help matters when the little puppy had practically devoured him with his gaze. It had taken all of Randal's self-

control not to return the heated look just so the stranger knew the attraction went both ways.

Which was crazy, since the kid was anything but Randal's usual type. He liked his men tall, built and dirty in a good way. The guy in the blue scrubs was anything but that. Small, thin, with short blond hair that was spiked slightly in the front and soft, wide blue eyes, he could be the poster child for innocence. So he should have never even gotten a second look from Randal. Try telling that to Randal's hard cock though, because it had given the man a second and then a third look and it liked what it saw.

Randal sighed as he tried to put the kid out of his mind. The last thing he needed or wanted was to start anything with anyone, especially someone who looked young enough to be in a pop band. Plus, the badge that said *Paramedic Student* hadn't gone unnoticed by Randal either. Since he'd just been asked to come to some of the classes and help with training, it would make things even more complicated and complications were things he did not have time or energy for.

"Are you going to lift me over to the bed or do I have to do it myself? Get your head out of your ass and get a move on. What exactly am I paying you for?" Milly grumbled, never opening her eyes.

It was on the tip of Randal's tongue to point out that she wasn't paying for anything since

whenever an ambulance picked her up, the first words out of her mouth were always, *I have no insurance, so don't even bother asking. Now get me to the damn hospital.* He held back because despite her faults, he did like Milly. She'd been around before he'd left Genesee County and he hadn't been at all surprised to see her still kicking when he'd transferred back. "You could get up and shag your own butt over there," he grunted, trying to hide his grin.

She finally cracked one lid, revealing a constricted pupil. "Really, what fun would that be? If I don't get a chance to get those hunky arms around me, I may have well just let your female partner wheel me in."

"Be good, Milly," he admonished, as Lucas and the cute blond came into the room.

"Again—what fun is that?" She slowly shook her head before her unfocused gaze drifted over to the newcomer. "Who are you?"

"My name's Jessie. Don't you remember that from all the other times you asked me?" A small grin played on the man's full lips.

"Of course I do, I just like watching the way your mouth moves when you say it," Milly declared with a wicked cackle. She gave Randal's chest a hard push. "Move back, I've decided I want Jessie to move me over to the bed. He's just so sweet and adorable, I want to put a leash on

that cute little ass and keep him as a pet.”

Jessie’s cheeks flushed with embarrassment while Lucas let out a muffled snort of laughter. Randal ducked his head so the kid wouldn’t see his grin. That didn’t mean he couldn’t goad Milly on a bit though. “Are you sure you want to do that? It’s a big responsibility adopting a paramedic student. You have to remember to feed them twice a day and walk them every night.”

Jessie shot Randal a look of disbelief. “Is that supposed to be helpful?”

“No,” Randal replied bluntly.

When Jessie’s lips parted in shock, Randal had to fight back a groan as he imagined how nice it would be to give Jessie something to fill that mouth with. He slapped those thoughts back and instead focused on waiting for Jessie’s reaction to his curt answer.

Jessie seemed to quickly recover, his glance slowly trailing up Randal’s body before settling on his face. “I don’t want to be Milly’s pet.”

The unmistakable desire stamped in the younger man’s eyes nearly screamed, *I wouldn’t mind being your puppy though*. Randal curled his gloved fingers tightly around the rail of his cot as a fresh wave of desire slammed into his body.

Fuck, Jessie had no idea how dangerous a game he was starting. He shot Jessie a stern look of warning, only to be shocked to see the man’s lips

curl up into a sly smile. Almost as if he'd just been served with a challenge he relished beating.

"Hello!" Milly waved a scab-covered arm. "I need moved, remember?"

"How about we do it together?" Jessie cocked his head to the side as a mischievous glint came to his eyes.

Randal's cock twitched like it was announcing it liked the sound of that suggestion. He let out a low growl of frustration and grabbed one end of the sheet under Milly. When Jessie leaned over to grab the other side, Randal couldn't help but breathe in the brat's sweet scent.

*Lemon and sugar? Who the hell smells like that?* Damn, it was nice though. It made Randal want to nibble the guy, just to see if he tasted just as sweet. They moved Milly over and Randal quickly stepped away from Jessie so he could compose himself.

"Did you let yourself get dehydrated again?" Jessie gently chastised Milly as he started to take her vitals.

Randal pulled the cot back as he continued to listen in on the conversation.

"Maybe I'm just looking for an excuse to come in and see you," Milly cooed, showing off several black teeth.

"Ah, Milly, we both know I'd never be able to keep up with you and you'd just end up breaking

my heart." Jessie grinned, suddenly looking even younger.

"But the fun we'd have until I did." Milly gave that cackle of hers again, ending it with a deep hacking cough that had Jessie frowning.

"How long have you had this?"

"A few days now. I didn't have enough money for a room, so I slept outside in the park and it rained."

Randal noticed that while Lucas carefully made observations in the patient chart, he never interrupted the casual banter going on between Jessie and the patient. A true testament to how much the nurse trusted Jessie's skills, even though he was just a student. Randal made a note to himself to find out what paramedics Jessie had done his ride times with, to ask what they thought of the kid.

He scowled to himself. What should it matter to him what others thought about the blond-haired punk? No complications meant forgetting all about Jessie, not fishing around for more information. He nodded a goodbye to Lucas before he left the room. As he pushed the cot back out to his rig, he told himself he needed to get Jessie and his cute little ass off his mind. Since he had no plans to do anything about his desires, there was no sense in lingering on them.

As he shoved the cot into the back of the rig, he



sighed in relief when he saw his partner already sitting in the passenger seat. When he'd gotten back to Genesee County, he'd been happy to find out he'd be working with Val. An older woman, who was nearly as wide as she was tall, she had a great personality and happened to be a damn good medic. Years ago, she'd been one of the first ones to take Randal under her wing, when he'd first started out.

"Did you get Milly settled in?" Val asked as she pulled her shoulder length brown hair back into a scrunchie.

"Yeah, Lucas was taking care of her when I left." He put his seatbelt on before he asked, "Have you had any of the paramedic students doing ride times with you?" *Wow, I managed to hold out for all of five minutes. Give me the gold star for not being able to forget about blond-haired distractions.*

All paramedic students had to log in so many hours in certain clinical situations, one of which happened to be riding along with working paramedics. Most students usually got comfortable and worked with the same rig. So it wasn't a far stretch to assume that Val would have had the same student riding with her.

"Yeah, some girl named, Lisa. Why?"

He shrugged. "I just met a student in the ER and it got me to wondering."

A knowing smile came over her face. "His name wouldn't happen to be Jessie, would it?"

"It may have been," Randal hedged. Damn, he'd forgotten how astute Val could be. He'd also failed to remember how nosy she could be, too.

"He's been riding mainly with Matt and James. From what I hear, they're pretty impressed with his skills." Val let out a snort of disgust. "He should tutor Lisa. She doesn't have a clue. Just the other day, she freaked out when a patient had a seizure in the back of the rig. I don't know how she made it this far in the program without flunking out."

Great, Randal couldn't wait until he had to deal with her while they were on a difficult scene. He still shuddered whenever he recalled the one time he had a student puke all over the rig when they had to transport a hemorrhaging accident victim. "He was working with Lucas in the ER today."

"That's not surprising. He and Lucas are really close."

"How close?" Randal asked sharply, cringing when Val chuckled. There was no way she wasn't going to latch onto that comment. If he wasn't careful, she'd be trying to set him and Jessie up. eHarmony and Cupid had nothing on Val when it came to the raging desire to play matchmaker.

"I'm not for sure. I don't think they're a couple, if that's what you're asking."

"I'm not," Randal denied.

"Good to know," she replied, the expression on her face telling him she didn't buy it for a second.

"Because he's not my type."

"No, he's not. He actually has morals and a personality."

Randal decided to ignore the insult. "Even if he was, I still wouldn't approach him. He's way too young."

"You're right. He probably still drinks juice boxes and watches cartoons. I wouldn't be surprised to find out he wore superhero jammies to bed." Val gave an overenthusiastic nod to match her snarky tone.

"Thanks for the sarcasm. Why did I ever let myself believe I actually missed you?"

"You're just pissed because I know all about your secret crush."

"Just drop it," Randal growled as he started to back the rig up.

"Oh, I'll drop it, but I don't think you'll be able to."

"Why's that?"

"Didn't you mention something about helping out with the paramedic class?"

He groaned as he realized where this was going. Not only would he have to deal with seeing Jessie again, but it would be happening in a matter of hours. "Shit! Fuck! Damn!"

Val snickered. "That's one way of putting it. Personally, I'm thinking of calling and volunteering to help out in the class, too. Something tells me this is one show I won't want to miss."

## *Chapter Two*

Randal purposely got to the class early so he could take a place in the far corner of the room and watch the students coming in. Not that he was stalking Jessie or anything. Nor did he give a rat's ass who the guy hung out with or if he had a special someone in the class. He just wanted to get a good look at the students he'd be teaching.

Even as he told himself that lie, he could almost hear Val's smirking laugh in his head.

The room where they held the medic classes took up nearly the entire second story of one of the older buildings on the hospital campus. Several long tables occupied the front of the room, while the back was left open so students could practice scenarios and get some hands-on training with the various rescue equipment.

Randal sat on the edge of one of the tables as he watched the students start to trickle in. It was the usual blend, younger college-aged kids, mixed in with older professional types. He recognized a

few cops and firefighters in the bunch and nodded hello to them as they took their seats. It was common for emergency personal to cross over and work in different areas of the field, plus, in Genesee County, a lot of the police officers did double duty as paramedics.

When Jessie finally came in, Randal's heart skipped a beat. Even though only a few hours had passed since they'd last seen each other, Jessie had changed out of his scrubs. He now wore a pair of baggy jeans, red t-shirt and a blue hoodie. The outfit made him look all the more desirable as Randal fantasized about slowly peeling back all those layers of clothing so he could get to the man inside.

A thin blonde female was plastered to his side, like she was his conjoined twin. Her hand placed possessively on Jessie's arm, she leaned heavily on him. Using her free hand, she flipped her long hair as she laughed overly loud at something he said. Jessie, for his part, didn't seem as interested in her. He gently pried her hand away from his arm before he took his seat. Now that they were closer, Randal could hear their conversation.

"I got you a pressie," she preened as she handed Jessie a box of candy.

Randal noticed it was *Lemonheads* and suddenly recalled the way Jessie had smelled like lemons and sugar earlier. It made him wonder how often

the chick handed out candy to Jessie. By the way she continued to drool over Jessie, Randal wouldn't put it past her to whip out a jar of chocolate body paint and offer that and herself up next.

"Hey, how did you know this was my favorite?" Jessie grinned at her as he took the treat.

She rolled her eyes, but continued to give the same flirtatious smile. "Because you eat those things every class. I'm beginning to think they're your only source of nourishment."

Instead of taking a chair, she hopped onto the table, kitty-corner to Jessie. After letting out an annoying squeal of laughter, she leaned forward and wrapped her arms around the back of his chair. Then she put her hands on his chest, her fingers splayed out like she wanted to touch as much of him as possible. It reminded Randal of a baby spider monkey hitching a ride with its mama. The only thing missing was for her to wrap her legs around his waist. He guessed *subtle* wasn't a word in her vocabulary.

An unwanted surge of jealousy went through him as he watched the girl paw up Jessie. Especially since he couldn't help but wonder how Jessie's chest would feel under *his* fingers. Then Jessie shifted forward some, easing away from her grip and Randal smiled. While Jessie hadn't gone so far as to verbally tell her to back up, the

message had still been delivered.

"Goddamn, is Lisa trying to come on to Jessie or get a piggy back ride," another medic named Matt drawled as he came over to stand by Randal.

Randal smiled at the tall, good looking man. With blond hair and a movie star build, he was the ladies man of their ambulance company. A fact he wasn't shy about bragging about. Randal still liked the guy though, and was pleased they'd be teaching together.

"You should have seen it earlier when she gave him candy." Randal shook his head as he watched Jessie inch even further forward in his chair, his ass barely holding onto the edge of the seat. A couple more inches and the kid would be in danger of falling flat on his face. Knowing Lisa though, she'd volunteer to kiss it better.

"She has it bad for him." Matt looked shocked that someone other than him could be the object of someone's crush.

"He doesn't return her feelings." It was more of a statement rather than a question, since Jessie's ass-scoot retreat act had pretty much made that obvious.

"Jessie isn't into women," Matt said matter-of-fact, not even a tinge of judgment in his tone. His partner at work, James, was gay and in a committed relationship with one of the doctors at St. Michaels. From what Randal remembered,



Matt and James were really good friends and hung out all the time.

"Val told me he's been doing his ride times with you guys." Randal clenched his hands as he watched Lisa lean forward and run her fingers through Jessie's hair, messing it up.

"Yeah, he's going to make a damn fine medic, too. I already put a good word in for him so he has a job waiting at our company once he graduates next month."

It pleased Randal way more than it should to realize that he'd be seeing a lot more of Jessie in the future. He bit his bottom lip as he thought how Jessie would look in the back of the rig, spread out on the cot, a come-and-get-me look playing on his sensual features. Of course Jessie would have to pick that exact moment to notice him. He glanced over and Randal found himself caught up in that soft blue-eyed gaze. A tiny smile played over Jessie's lips as he slowly looked Randal over from head to boot. Hell, the brat even had the audacity to lick his lips, almost as if he were imaging how Randal tasted.

"Damn, he's all but fucking you with his eyes." Matt let out a low whistle.

Yes, Jessie was and damned if Randal could make himself look away. As his cock pressed against the fly of his jeans, he realized there was no way he could deny the attraction between the

two of them. When Jessie ran his tongue along his lips again, Randal mouthed, *be good*.

Jessie gave him a smirk before he mouthed back, *don't want to*.

Randal sucked in his breath at both Jessie's audacity and the pure sexuality of his disobedience. Someone needed to teach the punk some manners and Randal decided he'd be the perfect man for that job.

\* \* \* \*

A thrill went through Jessie as he stared at Randal and the obvious bulge in the man's pants. *He likes me. He really, really likes me*, his inner smartass chanted. Meanwhile, his mouth watered as he fantasized about how it would be to drop down to his knees and worship that hard cock teasing him.

"What are you gawking at?" Lisa demanded as she gave Jessie's hair a good tug.

He waved off his irritation long enough to come up with a good lie. Not that he cared about anyone knowing he was gay or anything. He just didn't feel like dealing with her drama at the moment. "I was noticing how Matt is checking you out."

Lisa immediately let her hands drop away as she straightened up. "Really?"

"Yeah, he hasn't been able to look away from

you since he came in." Jessie made a silent vow to buy Matt a beer later on to make up for all the trouble he was about to send the man's way. His fib had the desired affect though, since Lisa got off the table and took a chair on the other side of him instead of hanging on his back.

"You think he's into me?" she asked as she batted her eyelashes.

"I think he's really interested in you." Okay, now he owed Matt *two* beers. Because once Lisa set her sights onto somebody, she was more tenacious than a heat-seeking missile. After this conversation, the poor paramedic wasn't going to know a moment of peace.

"He is really cute and he's so tall, too." She flicked a dismissive glance over Jessie's small frame.

Ouch! Did she have to bring height into it? It hadn't seemed to bother her five seconds ago when she was trying to stick her tongue in his ear.

She wiggled her fingers at Matt.

The paramedic gave a confused smile before he returned the gesture. Then a knowing look passed over his face and he glared at Jessie. *Busted!* Jessie bit his bottom lip as he gave a sheepish shrug. Luckily, the instructor chose that moment to come in and he was saved when everyone directed their attention to the front of the class.

Given that they were doing all hands-on

activities today, the lecture went on for only a few minutes before they were split up into different groups. Since the main goal was to get them ready for their state licensing test, there were a lot of stations, so it took nearly two hours before Jessie got to Randal.

As he popped a small handful of candy into his mouth, he tried hard not to let his nerves show. God, he couldn't remember the last time he wanted someone as bad as he did Randal. The tall dark-haired paramedic had a sensuality about him that made Jessie both excited and nervous.

He thought about the way Randal had looked at him earlier. It hadn't taken a crystal ball or a call to his physic friends to figure out the man was attracted to him. It made Jessie wonder how far things could go between them if he allowed it. Even though he didn't want anything serious, it didn't mean they couldn't play around and have fun. Maybe he should flirt some more with Randal. It would be kind of fun to see how worked up he could get the man while they were in the middle of a roomful of people. Jessie approached the station.

Randal looked up, his face an unreadable mask of stone. "Are you eating something?"

Well, that hadn't gone like Jessie had hoped. Off balance, he just nodded.

"Get rid of it," Randal snapped.

Jessie quickly chewed, shivering a little at the sour bite in the candy. In the few seconds it took him to eat, he got a little bit of his attitude back. So, Randal wanted to play games, did he? Good for Jessie, he was very, very good at that sort of thing. He had all kinds of tricks up the sleeve of his hoodie and he wasn't shy about using them. Opening his mouth, he stuck out his tongue and made a big deal of showing off he'd obeyed. That finally got him a reaction, just the smallest flare of desire, passing over Randal's eyes, but enough to let Jessie know he'd just won the first round between them.

"Are you always this way?" Randal demanded, a tick developing in his jaw.

"Like what?" Jessie blinked innocently as he knelt down by the CPR dummy.

"Like a brat who's looking for trouble."

While the label *brat* made him bristle some, Jessie didn't allow it to show. Cocking his head to the side, he replied, "Yeah, that's pretty much how I usually am."

This time Randal's reaction was to tighten his grip on his clipboard, so hard the thin piece of wood actually creaked in protest.

The thing was, Jessie had no clue why it was so much fun pushing the guy's buttons. It's not like Jessie was free to pursue anything other than a casual fuck at this point in his life. He had certain

goals—get his paramedic license, get a decent job and finally, get all his shit together. A long-term relationship didn't figure into any of that.

So why was he going out of his way to flirt with Randal?

Thankfully, Randal started the scenario, so Jessie didn't have to deal with his conflicting emotions any longer. Instead, he found himself scrambling to keep ahead of the difficult medical situations Randal kept throwing out. They went from complicated, to complex, then downright outrageous. It didn't take him long to figure out Randal wanted Jessie to mess up and look like an idiot. Frustrated, Jessie almost flubbed up and killed his make believe patient before he managed to correct his error at the last possible second. *Focus! He's only doing this to get under your skin. Don't let him win. You're stronger than this.* Jessie knew it was probably half his fault for egging the guy on so much, but damn, Randal was riding him hard and not in a good way.

While Jessie had confidence in his knowledge and skills, a slow burn of anger still built up as Randal kept coming up with ridiculous mock situations. When Randal finally gave him a scenario that involved a female victim who'd been in a car accident, then burned when said car caught fire, *then* nearly drowned when that very same car rolled into a lake, Jessie finally had it. His

whole body ached from the CPR marathon earlier, he'd missed dinner because he'd been running late for class and he hadn't had a good night's sleep in over a week. To say his fuse was running short would have been an understatement.

Throwing down an oxygen mask, he muttered, "Don't forget to add the alien pregnancy and leprosy, too.

"Did you say something?" Randal demanded.

Even though Jessie wanted to tell him off in the worst way, he didn't dare for fear of getting into trouble. He hadn't fought this hard and long to let his dream slip from his fingers because he couldn't hold back his temper. Besides, he learned long ago that if he let his anger get the best of him, it never ended good.

"No, sir, I didn't say anything." Jessie lowered his gaze while the rage continued to bubble in his stomach.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, sir." God, how had he thought this jerk was actually good looking? Leave it to him to be attracted to the biggest asshole in Michigan. Maybe he should have siced Lisa on Randal instead of Matt. It seemed like they deserved each other. Keeping his face down, he tried not to squirm as he felt Randal's glare burning into the top of his head.

The man continued, "Good, then let's finish

this. Your patient's airway gets clogged with fluid. What do you do?"

Jessie picked up a suction catheter and held it to the dummie's parted rubber lips. "I use this to clear it out."

"Fine, but after a few seconds, that catheter gets clogged."

*Of course it does.* Jessie barely held back from rolling his eyes. "Okay," he replied, with a calmness he didn't feel. "I use sterile saline to clean it out."

"You don't have any because your dumb-as-shit partner left it in the rig. So, now what do you do?"

Worked up and frustrated, Jessie didn't even think about his next move, he just acted. Taking the catheter, he mimicked putting it in his own mouth. Randal didn't appear amused, even when Jessie started making loud sucking sounds. "There, all clean now." He smiled as he waited to see how Sir Stick Up His Ass reacted to that.

"That is absolutely disgusting." The corners of Randal's lips twitched.

"But, alas, it was necessary to save poor Annie here." Jessie gestured down to the dummy.

"Just so she can die two days later when her alien baby eats her from the inside out?" Randal cocked a brow.

Jessie choked on his response, realizing that



Randal had overheard his earlier smartass comment. Recovering, he said, "Actually, I think the leprosy will get her first."

"Damn, Annie never stood a chance." Randal sadly shook his head before he made a few more notes.

"So, did I pass?" Jessie nervously twiddled with the suction catheter.

"You know damn well you did. Matt was right when he said you knew your shit. Just be careful and don't get too overconfident when you get in the field or it may come back to bite you in the ass."

Jessie didn't know whether he should say thanks or get stung by the insult. He settled for shrugging as he gave what he hoped was an innocent look. "How do you know I don't like getting bit in the rear?"

Randal rolled his eyes. "Now I can see why everyone says you and Lucas are tight. He has no inner monologue either."

Jessie had to give Randal that. Neither he nor Lucas could ever be accused of censoring their words. It had gotten Jessie in trouble more times than he could count in the past. "Yeah, Lucas and I are really good *friends*." Jessie frowned as he realized how much emphasis he'd put on that last word. Like it mattered to him that Randal realized he was available. He reminded himself once again

that now wasn't the time to start any kind of relationship unless it was the hot, sticky, physical, don't-bother-calling-me-in-the-morning type.

"Good, in this type of work, you need all the friends you can get. You can move on to the next station now. We're done here, kid." Randal looked back down at the clipboard.

Jessie forgot to breathe as he felt the twinge of the harsh dismissal. First the brat comment and now kid. Obviously, the older man just viewed Jessie as a young pest. Muttering thanks, he stood up and hurried on to the next station before he made an even bigger fool of himself.

## *Chapter Three*

“Lisa so fucking owes me for this one,” Jessie grumbled under his breath as he walked into the ambulance station. Why he’d let her talk him into switching ride times was still a mystery to him. Maybe because he felt a smidgen of guilt over the whole Matt-likes-you thing. Or maybe it was because he’d always been a sucker for a pouting female. Whatever the reason, here his ass was, getting ready to spend the next eight hours with an unsuspecting Randal.

An unsuspecting Randal who’d already made it perfectly clear he couldn’t stand Jessie.

As soon as he walked through the doors of the bay, he spotted Randal standing near a rig. Since Jessie had never liked to stew and fret over a bad situation, he went right over.

Randal must have heard him approaching because he glanced up.

“I’m your student today,” Jessie blurted awkwardly when Randal raised a brow

questioningly.

"I thought we were supposed to have Lisa?" Randal's expression revealed nothing.

Jessie didn't know if he was pissed or not. "We switched." Jessie hitched his backpack higher on his shoulder as he resisted the urge to nervously shuffle his feet.

"Oh, really? You care to tell me why?"

Jessie finally gave in and started to nervously shift around some. "She wanted to have a chance to work with James and Matt."

Randal grunted. "Let me guess, it was really Matt she was interested in getting to know better."

"Yeah." Jessie couldn't help but feel a tad guilty about her newest obsession since he'd been the one who lied and said Matt had been checking her out in the first place.

"So, you lost your little groupie. That must have been a disappointment," Randal drawled.

"Oh, I don't think Matt was that interested in me. I'm not his type at all," Jessie replied, deliberately misunderstanding.

Randal let out a heavy put-upon sigh. "Great, so now I get to listen to your mouth for a whole shift."

Jessie felt his own annoyance rise up. "I know I may be young and new, but I'm not some idiot, kid or brat. I'm top of the class and I'm good at this." He gestured to the rig so Randal would

know what he was talking about.

Randal just gave another one of those annoying smirks. "I'll be the judge of that."

Jessie vowed right then and there that he would prove himself to Randal if it was the last thing he did. "Just tell me how you like it best and I'll give it to you that way," he said, hoping that maybe his inappropriate wording would put Randal on the defensive for once. It did get Jessie a reaction, but not quite the one he'd been expecting.

Randal reached out and grabbed Jessie's arm, bringing him in close, so their bodies were pressed together. Jessie let out a gasp that soon turned to a groan of desire as he felt Randal's hard cock brushing against his stomach. As Randal's warm, spicy scent filled Jessie's senses, it took the self-control he could muster not to rub his cheek onto the man's strong chest.

"I don't get what kind of game you're playing," Randal all but growled. "One second you're coming on to me and in the next breath, you act skittish."

"I don't act skittish. Only cats and teenage girls do that."

"Really? What would you say if I dragged you into the back of the rig, bent you over the bench seat and fucked you senseless?"

Jessie's heart skipped a couple beats as that decadent image flashed in his sex-addled brain.

"Well, if you did things right, I'm sure *oh, baby* and *more, more, more* might be just a few things that I would yell."

The radio in the rig chose that moment to let out a loud squawk, interrupting whatever Randal might have said.

He let go of Jessie's arm and stepped back. A sense of loss went through Jessie, but for the life of him he couldn't figure out why. All he knew was for that brief second that Randal had been holding him, things had felt right. Even with the tension brewing between them.

\* \* \* \*

They had a busy shift, with no down time between calls. While Randal usually didn't complain about being swamped, he felt even more grateful than normal. It meant Jessie was working too hard to keep his mouth running.

Dispatch sent them on their fifth call. All the info they got was *Man Down*. Since that could mean anything from a drunk passed out on the street, to someone having a full arrest, they went lights and siren to the location.

As soon as they pulled up to the rundown ranch style home, Randal jumped out and went to the side door of the rig to get his trauma bag. Before he could grab it though, Jessie beat him to

it.

“Okay, I want you to run the scene. I’ll stand back and jump in only if see you need help,” he said. While he’d never give someone as flaky as Lisa that much power, after seeing Jessie in action all day, Randal knew the kid could more than handle it.

“Gotcha.” Jessie hefted the bag on his shoulder and started up the drive.

Val came around to walk by Randal.

“Wow, you really must be impressed with him if you’re letting him run the scene,” she said in a low voice so Jessie didn’t overhear.

“You’ve seen him today. He’s good. Just make sure you don’t let him hear us saying that though, the last thing he needs is another ego inflation.”

They rushed inside and found Jessie already in the living room, kneeling next to an elderly man who was dressed in an old bathrobe and ratty slippers. The man’s wife was practically hanging on Jessie’s back, all Lisa style, while she begged him to help her husband.

Knowing Jessie needed room to work, Randal gently pulled the woman away and started to get a history. At the same time, he kept an eye on Jessie, just in case he needed help. “Can you tell me what happened?” Randal asked, as he put a comforting hand on her arm. She had a bathrobe on, too, but hers was the long zip up kind and

dusky pink. It dawned on Randal that it was late in the afternoon and nowhere near time for them to be going to bed.

"He said he felt like his sugar was going low, then he passed out." The woman brought her hands to her mouth in worry. The nails on her fingers were brown and had crusted material all over them. Her hair didn't look any cleaner, the gray strands standing on end, leaving behind thin patches along her pink scalp.

"How long has he not been feeling well?"

"A few days now. I gave him a couple candy bars yesterday to make him feel better, but I guess it didn't work." When she opened her mouth to speak, he spotted gums where teeth should have been.

He started to tell Jessie to get a glucose reading, only to see the student already doing it. He also had all the stuff out to start an IV drip, plus a dose of glucose to push once he got the line in the man's vein.

That gave him enough confidence to leave Jessie under Val's direction and Randal led the woman into the kitchen. The tile floor felt sticky under his boots, which didn't surprise him since the carpet in the rest of the house had a natty, dirty look. A quick peek at the walls and sink, told him that roaches had taken up residence with the couple. How many was anyone's guess since piles



of garbage and clothing took up almost every inch of available floor space. No way they'd be getting the cot into the house.

Randal realized that they actually had two patients. While the woman wasn't unconscious and in need of immediate medical aid like her husband, it was painfully obvious she hadn't been taking care of herself either. "Why didn't you call us for help when your husband first got sick?" he asked, careful to make his tone gentle, so she knew he wasn't judging her.

She didn't answer him, instead put her filthy fingers back in her mouth. Letting out a sigh, he got the man's medical history from her, then went back into the living room.

Jessie already had the IV started and the man connected to the portable heart monitor. The patient's eyes were open as he mumbled something Randal couldn't understand, but at least the guy was conscious.

"We should get going," Jessie said as he started to shove stuff back into the trauma bag. "I haven't taken another reading yet, but the first one was too low to even register on the meter. I gave him the glucose though, so that should stabilize him until we get to the hospital."

While Jessie was giving off reassurances and using a calm tone, Randal realized it was all for the sake of the patient's wife. There was no

mistaking the underlying urgency in those blue eyes. Randal nodded and grabbed the patient's legs while Jessie took his arms. Between the two of them, they managed to navigate the maze of garbage and get the patient to the rig.

Val drove, while the patient's wife took the passenger seat. Randal radioed in the call to the hospital, the entire time watching as Jessie moved around the back of the ambulance. He'd taken off the black coat the student's were required to wear, showing off the white, long sleeved shirt he wore underneath.

Damn, he looked hot. While he may be small, it was obvious he still had more than enough muscles to make for a nice build. His lips were parted as he wrote something down, his brow slightly furrowed like he was deep in concentration. Randal's throat went dry as he wondered how soft Jessie's mouth would feel. How it would be to replace that serious expression with one of passion.

He got so caught up in his lustful thoughts that he didn't realize they were at the ER until Val pulled up into the bay. He quickly dismissed his fantasies as he helped Jessie disconnect the patient from the equipment.

They were greeted at the doors by Lucas and Dr. Calvin Dane. Jessie stepped aside to give Randal back control, but he shook his head. "Since

you did the treatment, you give the report."

Jessie blushed slightly before he shrugged and began to rattle off the treatment as they wheeled the cot into one of the bigger rooms. Calvin nodded, showing his approval before they transferred the patient over to the hospital bed.

"Good work. James was right about you. Way more impressive than the student he's stuck with today," Calvin said before he started to bark out orders to the hospital staff.

Jessie blushed as a guilty look went over his face. It made Randal wonder about Lisa and why she had such a sudden interest in Matt. Judging by Jessie's reaction, he had something to do with it.

"Thanks." Jessie hooked his thumb at the door. "I'm going to go help Val clean the rig." He left so fast, he almost left behind a vapor trail.

Calvin cocked a brow. "Was it something I said?"

"Before Lisa decided to go after Matt, she had a really big thing for Jessie."

Calvin muttered to Lucas and one of the other nurses before he pulled Randal to the side. "Doesn't she realize she'd be wasting her time with Jessie?"

Randal grunted, thinking back to the way she'd come on to Jessie. "I'm guessing not."

"So, he's had to deal with her throwing herself at him? As if that kid doesn't have enough on his

plate." Calvin shook his head sadly.

Randal stilled. Something about the way Calvin put that made him think the doctor was talking about more than the usual stress paramedic students face. "What else is going on with him?"

Calvin got an oh-shit look on his face. "You mean he hasn't told you about his past?"

"No, but since you seem to know all the details, why don't you share?" Randal crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

"I can't betray his trust like that." Calvin didn't seem fazed by Randal's demanding attitude.

"Why, did you treat him or something?" Randal could understand keeping a patient's confidentially since paramedics were bound by the same rules.

"No, one night he went out to the bar with me, James, Matt and Lucas. Jessie had a few too many drinks and kind of blurted out his secret. Afterward, we all promised him we'd keep his confidence. The only reason I thought you already knew was because of the way you guys were looking at each other earlier."

"There's nothing going on between us," Randal denied, even as his gut clenched at the thought of Jessie being with anyone other than him.

"You could have fooled me. You were eyeing him up like he was your own personal property."

Randal clenched his jaws together. First Matt,

then Val and now, Calvin. Why was everyone trying to butt into his personal life? It's not like he'd been wearing a shirt that said, *Lonely guy, looking for a young, hot medic to train in all kinds of nasty ways*. "There's nothing going on between Jessie and me," he repeated forcibly. "He's only twenty-two. Crap, there's ten years between our ages."

"I'm older than James and that never got between us." Calvin waved his hand dismissively. "Just promise me if you do start something with him, you'll be patient. He sometimes has trouble handling certain issues in his life."

"Let me guess, these certain things have to do with that great big secret you refuse to share?"

"Sorry." Calvin gave him a pat on the shoulder before going back to the patient.

Knowing that Calvin would never budge when he made up his mind about something, Randal decided to let it drop for now. He did make a mental note to have a long talk with Jessie though. That chat would be happening soon, too. With a wave goodbye, Randal went out to the rig.

Jessie and Val were at the back, getting ready to shut the doors when a shout interrupted them. Jessie jumped, a look of pure terror on his face, before Matt tackled him around the waist and lifted him off his feet.

"You little troublemaker. I should throw you in

the Flint River with all the other trash,” Matt exclaimed before he made like he was going to body slam Jessie onto the pavement.

Randal moved forward to help, but stopped short when he heard Jessie laugh. “Why, did I do something wrong?”

Matt’s voice took on a high-pitched, girly tone. “Oh, Matt, you’re so cute and I know you like me because Jessie told me so. He said you couldn’t keep your eyes off me.”

“So, Lisa told on me?” Jessie smiled, not looking one bit contrite as Matt let him go.

“You know Lisa, the biggest tattletale in five counties.” Matt ruffled Jessie’s hair before bringing him in for a half-hug. Lowering his voice, Matt said, “Sorry, about surprising you from behind like that. I forgot.”

“It’s okay,” Jessie all but whispered back.

Randal could tell that Jessie was far from okay though. His entire body trembled so hard he looked in danger of falling over and all the color had drained from his face. He looked so scared, so lost, that it made Randal want to go over and wrap his arms around Jessie in a protective embrace.

For all the mystery surrounding Jessie and his past, the encounter did clue Randal into one thing. Someone had hurt Jessie in the past—bad. He’d be willing to bet it wasn’t just a one-time incident

either. The kind of fear Jessie displayed usually came from long-term abuse.

A protective rage surged through Randal at the thought of anyone harming Jessie. Even though they'd just met, the little brat has somehow managed to worm his way under Randal's skin and it looked like he was there to stay. Before he even realized what he was doing, he'd crossed the short distance between them and was brushing the back of his knuckles against Jessie's cheek.

Val and Matt both got shocked expressions on their faces, while Jessie sucked in a breath as he grew still.

Randal wondered what reaction he'd get from Jessie—flirty or skittish.

For the longest time, Jessie didn't move, almost as if he were afraid of breaking the spell. Then his eyes grew dark with desire as he turned his cheek into Randal's touch.

Randal smiled as he realized he'd be getting the flirty side of his man. "Are you okay?" Randal asked, even though Jessie didn't seem to be trembling anymore.

"Not to brag, but I've been told by more than one lover that I was better than okay. I think the words *fantastic* and *mind blowing* were tossed around."

Randal rolled his eyes. Leave it to Jessie to turn everything into a sexual innuendo. "Does that

mouth of yours ever stop?" Randal quickly put his hand over Jessie's lips. "Don't answer that one. I was just begging for trouble asking that question."



## *Chapter Four*

By the time they finished their shift and got back to base, the sun had set. Even though Jessie was sore, tired and starved, he still couldn't remember the last time he'd enjoyed himself more. Not only had he finally broken through Randal's tough guy exterior, but the man actually acted like he wanted to get a little more physical, something that Jessie could really get on board for.

As they got out of the rig, Val let out a long groan. "I'm getting too old for these long shifts."

"Why don't you go home?" Randal suggested. "I'm sure Jessie would be willing to help me finish cleaning things up."

Val's gaze narrowed as a knowing look came over her face. "I'm sure he'd just jump at the chance to help you out."

All kinds of smartass comebacks popped into Jessie's head, but for once, he kept his trap shut. Val was old enough to be his mother for cripes sake, so it just didn't seem right to talk dirty to

her. Instead, he jumped back into the rear of the ambulance and busied himself putting things up.

After a few minutes, Randal came back. He had an armful of medical supplies to replace what they'd used during their shift. As he dumped them on the cot, Jessie became aware that they were truly alone for the first time since they'd met. Given that it was late and the crews left in staggered shifts, the base was deserted.

"Did Val leave?" he asked, cringing when he noticed there was the faintest of tremors in his voice. He didn't understand why he was allowing himself to get so worked up over Randal. It wasn't as if he hadn't had his fair share of lovers in the past.

He couldn't help it though. Being this close to Randal, the alluring spicy scent of the man, all of it, was making him tremble with need. God, all he'd have to do is reach out and he'd be able to touch Randal's wide chest. Maybe he would even allow his hand to travel lower, past the tight abdomen, before coming to rest on the man's cock. It had always been a fantasy of his to get down and dirty in the back of an ambulance.

"Yeah, Val left." Randal turned to face him.

While Jessie could nearly stand upright, the low ceiling forced Randal to lower his head slightly, which put his face in the perfect kissing position. "So, does that mean we can have some fun?"

Jessie finally reached out and fingered the buttons on Randal's top.

"We shouldn't. Someone could come in any second."

True, while they did have privacy at the moment, another crew could come rolling in any second. Rigs broke down, equipment failed—all reasons for an unexpected return to base. That still didn't deter Jessie, if anything it made him hornier. "Then we better be quick about it."

Before Randal could argue any further, Jessie reached out, grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him down for a kiss. If Jessie had any worries about Randal pushing him away, they were diminished when the older man let out a groan of approval. He even wrapped one arm around Jessie's waist and brought him in closer.

Jessie thrust his tongue into Randal's mouth, desperate to finally get a taste. *Niiiiice...* He closed his eyes against the pure pleasure of Randal's taste—hot, wild and addicting. Randal added his own tongue to the mix as he took control of the kiss. Jessie decided not to be bossy and let it happen, parting his lips in a blatant plea for more.

Randal broke the kiss off before he dropped to his knees and looked up from under his lashes, those dark eyes blazing with passion as they asked for permission. Jessie couldn't help but grin at

how quick things were progressing. He loved a guy who could go from zero to a hundred in twenty seconds.

He used his cheek to nuzzle Jessie through the fabric of his pants, before finally undoing them. Jessie let out a low hiss of pleasure as he felt strong fingers wrap around his shaft.

"Who knew my puppy had such a big cock," Randal observed with that smirk of his.

This time, instead of annoying Jessie, it ignited the flames of his desire. "Are you going to sit there admiring it all day, or are you going to suck it?"

Randal answered him, by parting his lips and taking all of Jessie in.

"Fuck!" Jessie yelled as he braced one hand on the wall above the bench seat and the other on the cabinets.

The curse seemed to amuse Randal, making him laugh around Jessie's length. The sound caused vibrations of pleasure to shoot up his shaft. Jessie let out another curse word, this one a near whimper as he rolled his hips forward.

Randal didn't waste time, more devouring Jessie's dick than loving it. He even added his hands to the mix, reaching between Jessie's legs to squeeze his balls. Not that Jessie was complaining. It felt so damn good and the fact that it was the sexiest paramedic in creation who had his lips on him, made it all the better.

"Damn it. I'm not going to last long." Jessie moved one hand so he could fist Randal's hair. He started to thrust his cock in and out of Randal's mouth, savoring the image of his slick shaft sliding past the man's stretched lips.

A low moan rumbled in Randal's chest as he started to suck harder.

He gave Jessie's balls one last squeeze and that was enough to finally push him over the edge. Throwing his head back, Jessie let out a hoarse cry as he emptied himself into Randal's mouth.

Randal took in every drop, even going so far as to lick Jessie clean before he tucked his cock back into his pants.

Jessie zipped himself up as Randal stood. Sliding his hand down to Randal's hard cock, Jessie asked, "You want me to take care of that for you?"

Randal leaned forward and placed a heated kiss to Jessie's lips. "I'd love for you to, but let's do it at my house."

"Do you live close by?" Jessie gently bit Randal's bottom lip.

"Just five minutes away."

"Hmmm...you, a bed and plenty of time to really explore each other?" Jessie grinned. "Sounds good to me."

\* \* \* \*

Randal made the drive him in his truck, while Jessie followed in his car. Once he got here, Randal didn't waste any time. He jumped out and nearly ran up the steps of his porch. As Randal was opening his front door, he said a silent prayer that he'd taken the time to clean his small house that morning before he'd gone to work.

"This is a nice place," Jessie commented as he came up behind Randal and started nibbling on his neck.

"It was my parents'." Randal bit back a groan as Jessie's hands somehow found their way under his shirt and started to caress his stomach.

"I want you to fuck me so bad," Jessie panted, obviously deciding the topic of Randal's house was over.

"Inside," Randal gritted out as he realized they were still standing on the porch.

"Yes, you inside me. That's the plan."

Randal let out a small growl before he spun around, grabbed Jessie by the front of the shirt and dragged him into the house. Randal kicked the door shut before he pinned Jessie to the wall and shut him up with a kiss. Right then he wanted silence, unless of course Jessie started to do that cute whimpering thing again. Randal and his cock both liked that sound a whole hell of a lot.

Jessie's hands went immediately to Randal's

pants. Before things got any further, Randal broke off the kiss and stepped back. A brief look of confusion and hurt flashed over Jessie's face before he gave an uncertain shake of his head. "Is there something wrong?"

"Of course not," Randal cupped his cheek. "I just called and ordered a pizza and I didn't think the delivery guy would appreciate it if I answered the door naked."

This time there was no missing the look of confusion on Jessie's face. "When did you order pizza?"

"On the way here." Randal smiled at the younger man's reaction.

"But, I thought you brought me here to have fun."

"We'll be having plenty of fun, don't worry." Randal reached down and cupped Jessie's hard cock. "I just want to feed you first. We were so busy today we never got a chance to really stop and eat and you must be starved."

Jessie opened his mouth to say something, no doubt a smartass response or argument, but the doorbell interrupted him. After giving him one last, hard kiss, Randal pulled away so he could answer it.

After paying the pizza guy, Randal shut the door and gestured with his head to the back of the house. "Come on, kitchen's this way." He led the

way, leaving Jessie no choice but to follow.

"Your place is a lot cleaner than mine," Jessie observed as his gaze scanned the interior of the house.

"Not one for housework?" Randal teased as he set the box down, then grabbed some plates from the cupboard.

"No, and my cleaning lady just quit." Jessie sat down on one of the barstools that lined the counter.

*Cleaning lady?* Randal stole a glance at Jessie, trying to figure out if he was joking or not, but for once, the brat's face didn't reveal anything. If anything, Jessie seemed uneasy and nervous as he rubbed his palms on the legs of his black pants. Randal paused as an unsettling thought occurred to him. "Please, tell me you don't still live with your parents?"

"What?" Jessie blinked a few times as if confused before he shook his head. "No, I haven't lived with them for six years."

Now it was Randal's turn to be lost. "I thought you were twenty-two?"

"I am."

"So, you've been on your own since you were sixteen?"

"I never said that." Jessie gestured to the pizza box. "Are we going to eat?"

The question was clearly a distraction, but



Randal decided to let him get away with it for now. This was their first date, if you could call fast food and fast sex a date, so there really wasn't a rush to get each other's bios. It did make Randal more curious than ever about Jessie and this mysterious past everyone had alluded to though. "Sure, I got it with all the works on it. I hope you eat it that way." He dished out two pieces to Jessie.

"I can pick off what I don't like." Jessie took the plate, immediately diving in. Not that Randal blamed him, they hadn't eaten anything other than a candy bar since before work.

Randal snagged a couple of beers from the fridge before he grabbed his own plate and took a seat next to Jessie. He handed one of the bottles to Jessie. "I don't need to card you, do I?" he teased.

"Funny," Jessie snorted as he took the drink.

"Come on, you can't tell me you don't have waitresses asking for you ID all the time."

"Yeah, that's right after they give me a kiddie menu and a box of crayons," Jessie joked as he opened the beer.

Randal's cock twitched in anticipation as he watched Jessie's lips wrap around the bottle. He wondered how quick they could eat and get naked. Jessie didn't seem to notice the affect he was having on Randal, too caught up in his food.

"So, why do you want to be a paramedic?"

Randal asked, still fixated by those lips.

Jessie took a few more bites, seeming to really think the question out before he finally shrugged. "I like the adrenaline."

They ate for a few more minutes before Jessie turned the tables. "How about you?"

Randal looked down at his food. "Twelve years ago my parents and I were in a car accident. It was a head-on collision with a truck and they didn't make it. The only reason I survived was because I was in the back seat."

Jessie paused, his face growing pale. "Shit, Randal. I'm sorry."

Now it was Randal who shrugged. "I was busted up pretty bad and spent a ton of time in the hospital. A lot of people helped me out during that time and when I got back on my feet, I decided I wanted to pay it back somehow. This seemed like a good way." He fidgeted with his plate, surprised at himself for confessing all that. He'd never shared that information with anyone, not even Val. Somehow though, it seemed right to talk about it with Jessie. Jessie got up, twisted Randal's stool around, then moved in close so his smaller body was between Randal's thighs.

"I think it's a great way to give back," Jessie breathed against his lips. Letting his hand drop to Randal's cock, Jessie's lips curled up into a wicked grin. "Speaking of which, I think I need to pay

someone back for a fantastic blow job.”

Since Randal was sitting, he didn't have to dip his head down to kiss Jessie. He threaded his fingers through Jessie's silky hair and brought him in. As soon as their lips touched, Jessie opened up so Randal could slide his tongue in. While earlier, Jessie had tasted tart and sweet, like the candies he ate, now the tang of beer and pizza lingered in his mouth.

Not breaking off the kiss, Jessie let his hand drift down to Randal's zipper. Undoing it, he reached in and pulled out Randal's cock. "I've been dying to get my hands on this since the first time I saw you," he whispered against Randal's lips.

Randal sucked in a breath when Jessie swiped his thumb across the tip of his cock.

Bringing his hand up to his mouth, Jessie slowly sucked the pre-cum off his thumb. "Tell me you have condoms and lube here," he begged before he closed his eyes, almost as if he were savoring Randal's essence.

"You mean you don't carry everything you need with you?" Randal teased as he wondered how he could manage things so Jessie's fingers were wrapped around his cock again.

"I may have a potty mouth, but I'm not a whore." Jessie licked his thumb again with an impish shrug. "Well...not usually. Now, do you

have the stuff here or am I going to have to make a mad dash to the drugstore?"

Randal laughed. "It's in my bedroom."

"Now who's the slut?" Jessie grabbed Randal's hand and tugged. "Lead the way."

Randal couldn't get Jessie there quick enough. As soon as they entered the room, Jessie dropped to his knees and grabbed Randal's cock again. "You're so fucking big, I'm going to be feeling you in my ass for days after you screw me tonight."

The image of him filling Jessie's tight ass had Randal groaning as he thrust forward. Jessie took the hint, his tongue darting out to tease the head of Randal's dick. The move was slow, deliberate and an obvious tease. Deciding to teach the brat some manners, Randal grabbed a handful of his hair and tugged. "Stop playing around and suck me."

"Yes, whatever you need. Just tell me what you want and I'll give it to you," Jessie replied, for once his tone totally compliant. The sudden turnaround from his normal bratty ways, both shocked and aroused Randal at the same time. Who knew that underneath all that snark hid a little submissive waiting to be ordered around? Randal suddenly felt like he'd been given the best gift ever.

He parted his lips and took Randal's cock in. As the hot, moist sensation enveloped his shaft,

Randal groaned and gave Jessie's hair another good tug. The pain proved to be a turn-on for his little, eager puppy.

Jessie let out another one of those sweet whimpers as he started to fumble with the fly of his own pants.

Just as he was pulling his cock out, Randal barked, "No, you don't come until I tell you to."

Jessie immediately obeyed, his hand dropping. "I wasn't going to finish myself. I just needed to relieve the pressure some."

"I'll let you know when it's time to do that. Until then, leave your cock alone, it's mine and mine alone to pleasure." For a second, Randal wondered if he'd pushed things too far. He'd always had to have control in the bedroom and his past partners had never complained, but then they'd been nothing like Jessie. The kid had a wild independent streak and Randal didn't know how he'd react to someone trying to tamp it down.

"Yes, sir," Jessie replied, his voice dropping several levels.

Then Jessie looked up at him. The younger man's pupils were blown with passion, his lips swollen from all the activity and his blond hair messed up from Randal's tugging. The image was so raw, so visceral, so fucking sexy that Randal almost lost it and shot off all over Jessie. Only by grabbing the base of his own cock and squeezing,

did Randal manage to hold back.

While he wanted to command Jessie to start sucking him off again, Randal knew he wouldn't last much longer and when he came, he wanted it to be when he was buried inside Jessie. So he issued another order. "Take off all you clothes and get on the bed."

A brief flash of that snarky grin came over Jessie's face before he quickly obeyed. As he took stripped, Randal went into the bathroom to grab a couple condoms and a bottle of lubricant.

As he walked back into the room, he almost choked at the image of the naked Jessie, now splayed out on the black comforter. His impressive cock was hard, the tip slick with pre-cum, but he wasn't stroking it. "You're doing so well at obeying me," Randal praised before he tossed the supplies onto the bed.

"It's hard. I need to come," Jessie moaned as he rolled his hips up.

"You will, soon. It just won't be until I give you permission."

"Is this to punish me for making the alien pregnancy-leprosy remark in class?" Jessie bit his bottom lip as need etched his features.

"Grab the lube and get yourself ready to take me," Randal ordered. Once Jessie grabbed the bottle, then started to pour some on his fingers, Randal answered the earlier question, "It's for the

remarks you made in class, the little attitude you had at the hospital and the way you kept making fuck-me-eyes all day on the rig. It's time that someone taught you some manners."

"I'm sorry, I'll try better, sir." Jessie slid one finger in his tight hole.

When his other hand started to drift to his glistening cock, Randal made tsking sounds. "No touching."

"Sorry," Jessie panted, as he jerked his hand back.

Randal started to take off his clothes as he watched Jessie shove a second finger into his ass. His man was a thing of beauty, all sweaty, body flushed with passion as he worked himself. Once Randal had all his clothes off, he didn't get in bed right away, too caught up in watching Jessie.

It wasn't until Jessie added a third finger and little moans of pleasure started to pass through his lips that Randal moved in. Climbing onto the mattress, he grabbed the condom. Jessie scrambled to his knees and took the package from him.

"Please, let me put it on you," Jessie begged as he pressed a timid kiss to Randal's chest.

Once Randal nodded his consent, Jessie ripped the package open, his fingers trembled so much he almost dropped it a few times. Finally, he had the condom out. He gave Randal's chest another kiss before he slowly slid it on.

Randal closed his eyes and moaned as he felt Jessie's fingers slide up his cock. Then, when Jessie leaned forward and gave Randal's nipple a love bite, that shredded the last bit of restraint he had. "Get on your hands and knees," he said, softening the harsh tone by rubbing the back of his knuckles along Jessie's jaw.

Jessie gave him the sweetest of smiles before he obeyed. Once he was in position and Randal got a good look at the way Jessie's ass was titled up just right, Randal groaned in appreciation.

"Please, screw me. I can't wait any longer," Jessie said as he rested his head on his forearms.

While Randal wanted to take things slow and easy, Jessie's submission, the pose he was in, the way he moaned, all proved to be too overwhelming. Randal grabbed onto Jessie's hips with both hands and plunged into the man's tight ass in one hard thrust.

"Fuck, yes!" Jessie cried out as he fisted his hands into the comforter.

Randal smiled to himself. His puppy really did have a potty mouth on him.

"Let me come, Randal, I can't take it anymore," Jessie pleaded as he thrust back against him.

"Not, yet." Randal continued to pound into Jessie. He didn't think he'd be able to deny Jessie for long though, because Randal could feel himself reaching his peak. After a few more seconds, he



finally said, "Go ahead, come for me." Randal reached around Jessie and started to stroke his cock in time to his thrusts.

Jessie let out a sob of relief as he came, hot waves of semen hitting the comforter.

Once he knew Jessie was taken care of, Randal allowed his own pleasure to wash over him. He gave one last hard thrust before he moaned, his cock filling the condom.

Not wanting to crush Jessie, Randal rolled to his side so he could catch his breath and enjoy that special after-sex tingle. While he could have lain there all night, he knew he needed to get up, at least long enough to get cleaned up. So, after he'd taken a few moments to recoup, he made a quick trip to the bathroom. When he got out, he found that Jessie had gotten up and was nearly completely dressed. "Where are you going?" Randal demanded.

Jessie shot him an are-you-serious look. "Home."

"I'm not done with you yet. Get naked and back in bed." Randal crooked his finger at him.

Jessie paused as he slowly shook his head. "You don't have to be nice to me just because we had sex. In case you missed it, I enjoyed it, too."

Randal had to work hard to hide his shock. Did Jessie honestly think that he had just used him for a good time? Walking over to Jessie, Randal

cupped his chin and forced him to lock gazes. "This was just more than a quick fuck to me. I want to get to know you and I thought you felt the same way about me."

Jessie shook his head. "I don't think that's such a good idea"

"Why?"

"What if you don't like what you find out?"

Randal's gut clenched at the sincerity in Jessie's question. Damn, what had happened in his puppy's past to make him think so little of himself? Randal vowed then that if it took the rest of his life, he would prove to Jessie his worth. Placing a small kiss on the tip of Jessie's nose, Randal whispered, "I already know I'm going to like everything about you." Randal wrapped his arms around Jessie and brought him to his chest. Hell, who was he kidding? He more than liked Jessie, he was on the fast track to falling deeply in love with the man.

## Chapter Five

Randal stood in his usual corner of the classroom and stared across the room at Jessie. *Three weeks! Three weeks we've been together and there are times where I still feel I don't know him any better than the day we met.*

Sure, they'd made love plenty of times. Almost every night, in fact. Usually, Jessie would come to Randal's house and more nights than not, the kid didn't leave until the morning. In those times, Randal had told Jessie everything about himself. He talked about his childhood, his parents, the years he'd been working as a medic. In return, Jessie had continued to be as close-mouthed as ever about his past.

Since there was a guest lecturer in, they had some extra time before the hands-on portion began. The lights were just being dimmed for a Power Point presentation when Matt strolled in and came to stand next to Randal.

"Did I miss anything?" he asked before giving a

jaw-popping yawn.

“Nah, the lady from Social Services just gave her usual speech and now she’s showing the same pictures she uses every year,” Randal answered, not taking his gaze off Jessie. Something had seemed off about him since the class started. The usual carefree smile was gone as he continually nibbled on his bottom lip.

While Randal wanted to cross the room and ask Jessie what the problem was, he held back. The two had been trying to keep their relationship low key. Not that Randal was ashamed of the brat, but he didn’t want anyone to accuse Jessie of getting special treatment because he was sleeping with one of the instructor assistants.

Damn, it was hard though. With each passing moment, Jessie seemed to be getting worse. All the color had drained from his face and he had his clenched fists in his lap as he refused to look up at the presentation.

“God, I hate those things.” Matt flicked a glance up at the screen before he shuddered and looked away.

Not that Randal blamed him. Nobody in their right mind would enjoy staring at the photos of abuse victims.

Another picture flashed on the screen, this one of a male who’d been hit by a blunt object. Even though his face had been blacked out, all the livid

bruises and welts were still clearly visible.

"Fuck," Matt breathed, but he was looking at Jessie instead of the screen.

Randal glanced over just in time.

Jessie jumped from his chair so fast it tipped over. Muttering an apology, he didn't even take the time to pick it up before he ran from the room.

Randal felt all the blood drain from his face as he finally got the whole truth of what Jessie had been holding back. Self-loathing hit Randal as he realized he'd been an idiot for not catching on sooner. Sure, he'd had a small inkling that one day when Matt had scared Jessie at the rig, but after that Randal had been content to let things go. Now he realized he should have pushed harder, forced Jessie to tell everything.

There was no doubt in Randal's mind anymore that Jessie had been abused in the past and judging by his reaction to the photos, it had left behind plenty of emotional scars. Without a second thought, Randal abandoned his post and ran after Jessie. His guy was hurting right now and he needed to be there to comfort him.

\* \* \* \*

Jessie made it to the bathroom just in time to empty the contents of his stomach into the toilet. As soon as everything was up, he dropped all the

way to his knees and let out a strangled sob.

Fuck, he'd just lost it and made an ass out of himself in front of Randal. What's worse, after his spaz attack, there was no way Randal wouldn't be able to figure out what Jessie had been working so hard to hide from him.

A cool hand touched his forehead as Randal knelt behind him.

Jessie started at first, shocked that he was no longer alone. He'd been so caught up in vomiting, he hadn't heard Randal come in.

"I've got you, babe," Randal crooned as he rubbed lazy circles on Jessie's back.

"I gotta go. I can't take this. If I just leave, then I can forget. I can't take remembering," Jessie sentences were coming out in short bursts, the tone laced with hysteria.

"Jessie, you need to calm down."

"No, I need to leave." Jessie tried to push away from Randal, only to find the man's hold tightened on him. Panic made Jessie start to fight hard, harsh curse words, pushing past his lips. "You stupid shit, didn't you hear a damn word I said? Let me the fuck go."

Randal grabbed him on the shoulders and gave Jessie a hard shake. "Jessie! You will calm down, do you understand?"

Normally, Jessie would have bristled at such a hard command. Having survived that year in hell,

when his life had been dictated by others whims and twisted desires, he'd vowed long ago never to give up control again. But this wasn't just anybody ordering him around, it was Randal. After the past three weeks, Jessie had grown so used to bending to Randal's dominance in the bedroom that it came as second nature for him to obey now. Slowly the panic leaked from his body as he pushed the fear back. What came next, though was shame over his earlier behavior.

"I'm sorry. So sorry. I didn't mean—" Jessie cut himself off once he realized he was babbling again.

"You have nothing to apologize for." Randal helped him to his feet, then flushed the toilet. "Come on, let's wash your hands and face."

Randal led him to the sink, then turned on the water. Jessie's body started to shake so badly, that by the time Randal was done cleaning him up, his legs wouldn't support him anymore. He sank to the cold tiled floor and brought his knees up to his chest.

Randal got on the ground with him, then did something that shocked Jessie to his core. The older man reached out and pulled Jessie into his lap. Instead of fighting it, Jessie sank into the comfort, burying his face into Randal's chest.

The door opened and Jessie heard Matt ask, "Is he okay?"

"No, I'm going to take him home. Can you go back in the class and grab his bag. Just tell everyone that Jessie got sick and I'm driving him home."

"Sure." Matt paused.

Jessie felt a hand ruffling his hair.

"Kid, you need to tell Randal."

Jessie shook his head. How could Matt expect him to expose something that awful to a man as strong as Randal? If Randal knew some of the things Jessie had allowed to happen in the past, he'd never look at him the same way again.

"Trust him. He won't judge you, I promise." With those parting words, Matt left.

"Who hurt you, baby?" Randal asked softly.

Jessie refused to answer.

His voice got harder. "Tell me, now."

Jessie sighed as he squeezed his eyes shut. Matt had been right, he did need to tell Randal the truth. He, at least, owed him that much. "Have you ever heard of the Silver Ray Boot Camp?"

"Yeah, it was in the news a few years back for abuse." Randal sucked in a huge breath and his grip on Jessie tightened. "You were there, weren't you?"

Jessie nodded, but he didn't expound further. Right then, he couldn't have gotten any words past the lump in his throat, even if he'd wanted to. He kept his eyes closed, not wanting to see the



disgust in Randal's face.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Randal asked, his voice breaking a little.

"Because I've really gotten to like you and I didn't want to ruin things." Jessie buried his face deeper into Randal's chest. God, he didn't think he'd ever be able to survive if Randal pushed him away because of this. Jessie cursed himself for his stupidity. When he first met Randal, he'd warned himself not to get too close, not to let himself really care for the other man. Yet, his lame ass had done just that and now it was going to hurt so damn bad to lose him.

Matt came back in. "Here, I got his bag."

"Thanks," Randal said before he cupped Jessie's face and forced him to look up. "I'm taking you home, but you have to get up and walk out of here. I don't think you want everyone to see me carrying you."

"Okay." Jessie nodded and forced himself to his feet.

Randal put a hand in the small of Jessie's back and led him out to his truck.

"What about my car?" he asked as Randal opened the door for him.

"We'll get it tomorrow," Randal promised as he ushered Jessie into the passenger seat, then buckled him in.

Normally, Jessie would have balked at the

whole coddling thing, but right then, it felt too good to object. He couldn't remember the last time someone had given enough of a damn to worry over him.

The drive was short and neither one of them talked during it. It wasn't until they stopped that Jessie realized where they were. "You're taking me to your house?"

"Of course I am. You don't think I'd let you be alone when you're this upset, do you?" Randal turned off the truck and reached over to caress Jessie's cheek.

"Everyone else has," Jessie blurted before he could censor himself.

"I'm not everyone else. I hope you'll eventually realize that." Randal ran the pad of his thumb over Jessie's bottom lip.

Crap, Jessie wanted to believe that. So much so that it was an actual physical ache in his chest. But after being hurt so many times in the past, he just didn't dare to allow himself to hope.

"Let's get inside," Randal suggested.

Jessie nodded and followed him into the house. Once they got in, Randal didn't talk as he'd led Jessie to the couch. Only when Jessie was settled back into his lap and once again in Randal's warm embrace, did the questions start coming.

"Did your parents send you to Silver Ray?" Randal started rubbing his back again.

"Yeah, my dad caught me making out with my best friend, Robert, and all hell broke loose. They were really strict and thought I was a *degenerate*." Jessie's stomach still curdled at that word as he recalled all the times his parents had thrown it his way. "They got it into their heads that if they sent me to the boot camp, the instructors there could scare the gay out of me."

"I'm glad it didn't work." Randal gave the top of his head a kiss.

For some reason those words pleased Jessie and helped him to relax some. "Me, too."

"How old were you when they sent you away?"

Jessie sighed. "Fifteen. I was at the camp a year before the State found out about the abuse and shut the place down. After that, we were all supposed to go home, but my parents didn't want me anymore. So I went to live with my grandparents until they kicked me out when I was eighteen. I managed to support myself because I received a huge payout from a lawsuit settlement that some of us got from the former owners of the boot camp." Even after all these years, unwanted tears still welled up in Jessie's eyes as he thought about that last conversation he'd had with his father. He clung to Randal as the all-too-familiar fear of rejection plagued him. "I lied to myself," he confessed as one tear somehow managed to

escape his eye.

"When did you do that?" Randal gave his head another kiss.

"I told myself I couldn't get close to you because I didn't want any complications in my life. That I didn't have time for a relationship because of school and stuff. The truth is, I didn't want to grow attached to you because I can't stand to lose someone else who I care about."

Randal squeezed him so tight his ribs creaked. "Jessie, I'm not going anywhere."

"You can't promise that. Once you find out what they did to me in there. Some of the things I was forced to do..." Jessie trailed off because he so was not going there at that moment. "Let's just say, you'll get as disgusted by me and leave, just like the rest of them."

Randal pulled back so he could gaze down at Jessie. The tender emotions playing on his face had Jessie's heart racing. "There is nothing that can ever make me think less of you. I'm not going anywhere, ever. I promise."

Jessie nodded before he laid his head back on Randal's chest. While he wanted to believe that Randal meant what he said, deep down, he still couldn't help but worry that once Randal found out everything, he would find himself alone once again.

\* \* \* \*

Randal opened his eyes and winced as pain shot down his back. The last thing he remembered was he'd been holding Jessie and it had been late. They both must have fallen asleep on the couch somewhere during their talk and spent the entire night there. Not exactly the most comfortable place for two adult men to crash.

He sat up and let out a moan as his spine protested the movement. Casting a glance around, his heart sank as he realized he was alone. He sprang to his feet and raced around the house, calling out Jessie's name, but he was nowhere to be found. Randal's heart raced as he recalled how lost Jessie had seemed, how devoid of hope he'd seemed. Surely he wouldn't go off and do something reckless or stupid—right? Just as Randal's anger and worry started to build, he spotted something on the coffee table.

A worn paperback sat in the middle of the scratched wood table, placed with such careful deliberation, Randal knew Jessie had left it there for him to find. A piece of paper rested on top of it. He picked it up, then unfolded it, to find Jessie had left him a note.

*Randal,*

*I hope you don't mind, but I borrowed your extra car. I'm not trying to bail on you or anything, I just*

*didn't want to be around when you read this book. I know I should have told you everything that happened to me in person, but I'm not brave enough. I hope you understand. They published this book a couple of years ago and, while they changed my name to Jeff, it should let you know pretty much everything. If, after you've read it, you realize that you don't want to be with me, that's okay.*

*Jessie*

With his heart pounding painfully in his chest, Randal picked up the book. It was one of those true-crime novels that all bookstores carried. This one had bright red letters superimposed over a black and white photo of the boot camp, *Innocence Lost, The Silver Ray Scandal*.

The book looked beat to hell and Randal realized that Jessie probably carried the damn thing with him everywhere. Even though he wanted to burn the horrible thing, then tell Jessie none of it mattered, he knew he owed it to his guy to read it. Heart heavy, he opened it.

Three hours later, Randal stared out the front window as he waited for Jessie to return. Behind him, on the table, lay the wretched book. Even though it had been the hardest thing of his life, Randal had forced himself to read every heartbreaking detail. Now that it was done and over with, he just wanted to get rid of it, hold Jessie tight and start a new life with him.

Just when he was about to get in his truck and go out searching, Randal saw his old Cavalier pull up. Not willing to wait one more moment, he went on the porch to greet Jessie.

"Hey," Jessie said as he walked up. He nervously fiddled with the keys and it was obvious by his red-rimmed eyes that he'd done some crying. Well, that made two of them.

"I read it," Randal said as he waited for Jessie to walk up the steps. Once Jessie was close enough, he couldn't hold out anymore. Reaching out, Randal ran the back of his knuckles down Jessie's jaw.

Jessie eyes watered up. "I'm so sorry, Randal."

"You have nothing to be sorry for. You were just a kid."

Jessie shook his head. "I should have fought back harder or ran away. Instead, I just let it happen because I was a coward."

Randal didn't know if he should shake Jessie so he could get him to see sense, or just take the brat in his arms and hold him forever. Deciding on the latter, he tugged Jessie into hard embrace. "Do you honestly think that any of that was your fault?"

"That's what my dad told me. He said I brought it on myself because I'm gay."

Randal pulled back so he could lock gazes with Jessie. "In your deepest heart, do you really

believe that? If you had to treat a gay rape victim, would you say they deserved it?" Not that Randal thought so little of Jessie to believe he'd do that, he just needed Jessie to see how twisted his father's logic was.

Jessie shook his head. "Of course I would never say that."

"Then how can you continue to blame yourself? What those instructors and guards did to you was evil and I'm glad they're in prison. If they weren't, I'd probably go after them myself."

"So, does this mean you still like me?" Jessie nervously licked his lips.

Randal bent his head down and pressed a gentle kiss to Jessie's lips. "I'm not going anywhere. I do have a confession of my own to make though. I lied to myself, too."

"You did?" For the first time, that familiar grin of Jessie's came back. It was faint and wavering, but damn it, it was there and for that Randal felt relieved.

"Yeah, I told myself that there was no way a certain blond-haired brat would get under my skin."

"Oh, that was very bad of you." Jessie wrapped his arms around Randal's waist.

"I know because I went and fell in love with him."

Jessie stilled, the smile fading from his face.



"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying I love you. So much so, that once your class is finished next week, I want you to move in with me. I've grown to like waking up with you in my arms."

Jessie cocked his head to the side. "I thought you told Milly it was never a good idea to take in stray paramedic students."

Randal laughed, happy to see the old smartass coming back in Jessie. "Half the fun of rules is breaking them. Besides, you're not going to be a paramedic student much longer. So are you going to move in or not?"

Jessie smiled as he stood on tiptoe to kiss Randal. "Of course I will. I love you, too."

Randal pulled Jessie close to his chest, the smaller man fitting against him perfectly. "You'll never be alone again because this is where you belong." Randal closed his eyes and, for the first time in forever, felt truly and totally at peace. Sure, there were going to be some tough times ahead because Jessie still had a lot of demons to face, but Randal would be there for him every step of the way. Together they could beat anything.

### *About the Author*

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.

Stephani's email:

[archangelwriter@yahoo.com](mailto:archangelwriter@yahoo.com)

Stephani's website:

[www.stephanihecht.com](http://www.stephanihecht.com)

Stephani's MySpace:

<http://www.myspace.com/stephanihecht>