

Dark Roast Press Presents

Burnin' for You



FIRE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Jamie Lynn Miller

BURNIN' FOR YOU

Copyright © 2008 by Jamie Lynn Miller. All rights reserved.

Except for use in promotional review, the reproduction or use of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, by technologies now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher, Dark Roast Press, Calumet City IL, 60409.

The story is fictional. Names, places and any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Burnin' For You Cover Art © 2008 Jamie Lynn Miller

*For Storm Grant, who planted the seed and gave me the push. Thank you for all your help.
For John, who is always there for me with support and encouragement, I love you.*

Burnin'
for You

Lucas Taylor had one goal in mind tonight – to get blind drunk.

And by the looks of the rapidly emptying bottle in front of him, he was more than halfway there. He'd picked up an extra shift at work, thinking that keeping busy would take his mind off of what today was – this twisted “anniversary” – but it had only made things worse, being in that building, remembering him there.

So here he was at Casey's, his local gay-friendly bar, doing his best to dull the pain in his chest with alcohol, wanting nothing more than to just be numb and forget about this day, just wanting it to be over.

Lucas leaned his left shoulder against the wall at the far end of the bar, absently swirling the amber colored liquor in his shot glass as he looked around, his green eyes taking everything in. It was Saturday night, and the length of the bar was full, mostly with men, but a few women, too.

The Yankees were on the TV in the corner, winning by the sounds some of the patrons were making, but if it wasn't a Texas team playing, Lucas had no interest. The jukebox was blaring in the corner, music nearly drowned out by the conversations going on at the bar and at the tables scattered around.

Lucas caught sight of more than one set of couples, men sitting close together and laughing, a quick kiss, a hand on a thigh – and Lucas had to look away, chasing away the sudden lump in his throat with another shot.

He looked up when he saw movement out of the corner of his eye, to see Casey himself walking toward him from behind the bar. Casey had become a good friend in the five years since Lucas had moved to New York and found this place in his neighborhood, where he could relax and be himself. And Casey had been in the same line of work as Lucas, until he retired 10 years ago and opened up the bar, so it became an instant bond between the two of them.

Lucas tried to smile as the older, gray-haired man approached, but it fell flat, and he busied himself pouring another shot.

“Luke,” Casey said simply as he came to a stop in front of Lucas, setting down his glass of water.

Lucas nodded. “Hey, Case.”

The bartender put his hand on the half empty bottle. “You sure you don’t want me to call Tom?” he asked, concern in his voice. “I really don’t think you should be alone tonight.”

Lucas shook his head. “No. I’ll – I’ll be okay. Can I just crash in the back tonight?”

“You know you can,” Casey replied, waited a moment, then laid a hand on Lucas’s arm. “I’m sorry, Luke.”

Lucas swallowed deeply and fought against the sudden moisture in his eyes at his friend’s words. “I miss him,” he said, his words thick with sadness.

Casey nodded slowly. “I know. I do, too.” Then he raised his water glass. “To Ryan.”

Lucas raised his shot glass, hand shaking just slightly as he tried to find his voice. “To Ryan,” he echoed, then downed the shot, feeling the burn of alcohol down his throat turn into warmth inside him.

Casey started to say something, but the door to the bar opened and in spilled five very loud men, laughing and shoving at one another. Casey’s expression immediately turned annoyed and Lucas knew he was expecting trouble.

Lucas couldn't help but look over as well, his eyes taking in the group of twenty-something guys as they made their way over to an empty table, and you'd have to be blind not to notice that one of the men was nearly six inches taller than his friends. One of the others, a blond, smacked the taller man in the shoulder and Lucas could hear his laugh all the way across the bar.

Casey squeezed Lucas's arm, bringing his attention back to the bartender. "You need anything you let me know, okay?"

Lucas nodded. "Yeah, I will," he answered and Casey walked away to take care of the newcomers as Lucas turned back to his bottle.

He sighed as he poured another shot, letting the noise of the bar recede to a dull roar in his head. The alcohol was finally taking effect, his body feeling heavy, the painful thoughts and memories in his mind finally starting to fade.

He closed his eyes as he drank the next shot. He'd spent a lot of time last year with a bottle just like this. Many bottles, actually, until he'd beaten back the anger. But one thing he'd been unable to conquer was the loneliness. Their empty apartment, their empty bed, was a constant reminder of what he'd lost, what he'd had ripped away from him. It was just *his* apartment now, just *his* bed.

And trying to face that tonight was too much for him. So instead he sought solace in the bottom of another bottle.

The next shot of solace was lining up when a body stumbled into him, hitting his arm and spilling most of the liquor on the bar.

Pissed, Lucas turned – to come face to face with the tall man and his blond friend.

"God! I'm *so* sorry!" The tall man apologized immediately, then turned to his friend, giving him a shove. "Pete, you douche! Look what you made me do, you ass! Just go back to the table. I'll get the drinks."

The blond just laughed and shrugged, mumbling, "Sorry, man," to Lucas before walking back to the table.

The tall man shook his head and turned back to Lucas, who was reaching back behind the bar for some napkins.

“Oh, man, let me do that,” the tall guy said, his large hand brushing Lucas’s as he grabbed the napkins and started cleaning up the spill.

“It’s okay, really, I got it,” Lucas replied, but the other guy shook his head.

“Nope, my fault,” the guy responded. “Lemme buy you another shot, okay?”

Lucas couldn’t help but notice the other man’s accent, and felt a pang of homesickness on top of everything else.

“Texas boy, eh?” Lucas asked with a small smile.

The other man’s face lit up, smiling wide enough to show Lucas his dimples.

“Hell, yeah! San Antonio!” he answered, then stuck out his hand. “God, where are my manners? My momma would kill me. Name’s Evan.”

Lucas stuck out his hand as well and Evan enveloped it with his own, strong and warm, and Lucas felt a tingle at the contact.

“Lucas. From Richardson, near Dallas.”

Evan laughed, hazel eyes bright. “No way! I’ve got cousins who live right near there!”

Before Lucas could respond, Casey was there with a tray of drinks. “Here ya go, buddy,” he said to Evan, sliding the tray across the bar.

“Oh yeah, thanks.” Evan nodded at Casey, then looked back at Lucas, running a hand through his shaggy brown hair. “Umm, hey, are you – are you by yourself?”

Lucas hesitated, seeing the invitation in Evan’s eyes, but answered honestly. “Just me and the bottle.”

Evan smiled at his answer. “You wanna join me? I’m celebrating. Been up here for a couple months and finally landed me a job. I start on Monday.”

“Congratulations, and thanks for the offer, but I’m not good company tonight.”

Lucas saw the disappointment in Evan's eyes and wondered why he was mad at himself for putting it there when he didn't even know this guy.

The smile fell from Evan's face. "Oh...well, if you change your mind, just come over, okay? I'd like – never mind," he stammered. "Just – it was nice to meet you, Lucas."

Lucas nodded slowly. "Nice to meet you, too, Evan."

Evan held his gaze for just a bit too long, the invitation there once more in those hazel eyes, and Lucas felt...something. Something he hadn't felt in over a year when another pair of hazel eyes had looked at him like that.

* * * *

For the next hour, Lucas couldn't stop watching Evan in the mirror behind the bar. He didn't really look like Ryan – too tall, hair too long – but that smile, and those eyes...

And Lucas caught Evan watching him, too. After the third time their eyes met in the reflection, Evan stopped trying to disguise his interest, letting his eyes tell Lucas exactly what he wanted.

And now Lucas wanted it, too.

He shouldn't do this, he knew he shouldn't, but he was so goddamn lonely, it'd been so long now since he'd had anyone touch him... And with the amount of alcohol he had in his system now, everything was soft and slightly blurred around the edges, his higher brain functions too dull now to make him stop. To tell him this was a bad idea.

He looked at Evan again, at the desire in the younger man's eyes reflected in the mirror. Maybe he could help Lucas forget about this day, what it meant, or maybe Lucas could just pretend...

Decision made, Lucas downed one last shot, put enough money on the bar to cover what he'd drunk from the bottle and turned on the bar stool. He waited until Evan looked over at him before spreading his legs open a bit, his hand resting on his crotch, squeezing a little, his eyes making it clear he wanted this, too.

He saw Evan's eyes widen slightly with understanding before he gave Lucas a little nod.

Lucas stood up carefully from the bar stool, the world tilting just a bit before he regained his equilibrium and started making his way out of the bar, his heart starting to beat a bit faster with each step.

He heard Casey call out to him but he didn't stop, giving his friend a thumbs-up sign to let the bartender know not to worry about him right before the door closed behind him.

Lucas had no more than leaned against the brick wall of the bar when the door opened and out walked Evan, looking nervous but turned on at the same time.

Not wanting to give either of them time to think about what they were doing, Lucas cocked his head and asked, "You got someplace to go?" There was no way he was taking Evan back to his own apartment.

He watched Evan swallow and nod. "Yeah, just around the corner," he answered and Lucas pushed off the wall, following the taller man.

"...so Pete's a friend of mine from way back. He can be kind of a jerk, but he's a pretty good guy. He heard about some job openings here, convinced me to come up here, move in with him. Just got my own place last week, now that I'm gonna be starting a job. Can't live with Pete forever. Total slob. And..."

Evan's long strides carried them swiftly down the sidewalk, Lucas just slightly behind him, letting Evan's nervous chatter wash over him as he admired the other man's body.

Evan was wearing dark jeans that encased those long legs and ass perfectly. It was quite apparent that Evan liked to work out, his chest filling out the soft gray t-shirt he was wearing, showing off his biceps at the same time. He talked with his hands, and Lucas felt himself begin to harden inside his jeans at the thought of those long fingers wrapped around his dick.

His musings came to an end as Evan stopped talking and walking outside the non-descript door of a typical New York apartment building. He went into the foyer, inserted the key in the lock and opened the apartment door, flicking on a light as he went inside, Lucas once again following him, closing the door behind him.

"So – " Evan got out before Lucas had him pushed up against the wall, hands fisted in the younger man's shirt. Enough with the talking, his actions said, and Evan's eyes widened before going dark.

“Yeah, yeah,” Evan nodded, dipping his head, searching out Lucas’s mouth.

But Lucas dodged, turning his head. No kissing. He wasn’t letting this get that intimate. This was about sex, and release, that’s all.

He looked back and Evan tried again, and once more Lucas turned away. This time Evan got the message and went lower, kissing the side of Lucas’s neck instead, hands on Lucas’s waist, pulling him against the hard planes of his body.

Lucas was helpless to stop the shudder that ran through him at the sensations and he pressed closer to Evan, letting his eyes drift shut. Too long since anyone had touched him like this...

Evan continued to kiss along his neck, his large hands drifting down to cup Lucas’s ass, rocking his hips up slightly. Lucas groaned softly at the feel of Evan’s hard cock pushing against his through their jeans and he rocked his own hips in response.

Then they were both moving, hands pulling at shirts and zippers, stripping each other right there in Evan’s living room, Lucas was once again thankful for the alcohol haze he was in, preventing him from stopping this insanity and instead just letting him *feel*.

Feel Evan’s large, warm hands on his skin as more and more was exposed, making him shiver, feel Evan’s mouth kissing him wetly on his neck, his chest, his stomach as he dropped to his knees in front of Lucas.

Lucas was trying to keep his eyes closed, trying to pretend the hands on his body belonged to someone else, but the first touch of Evan’s tongue on his achingly hard cock had them flying open with a gasp.

“Oh, *fuck*,” he groaned, as he watched his cock slide into the wetness of Evan’s mouth, feeling the suction Evan was creating, hollowing his cheeks as he bobbed his head.

It felt good, so goddamn good, and Lucas tangled his fingers in Evan’s hair as the younger man continued to suck. Evan’s tongue swirled around the head of his cock, dipped into the slit, pressed against the bundle of nerves on the underside, dragging a moan out of Lucas. This guy was fucking *good*, and Lucas

didn't want him to stop, but he could already feel the first stirrings of his orgasm in his balls, and he didn't want this to be over with until he was buried inside the other man.

As if Evan could sense his thoughts, the younger man slowed, then pulled off, looking up at Lucas through half-lidded eyes, dark with lust, lips wet and pink.

"Want you," Evan drawled huskily. "Want you to fuck me."

Lucas's breath caught and he nodded, feeling his dick throb at Evan's words. "Bedroom?"

A few steps down the hall and then they were tumbling onto Evan's bed in the moonlight, Lucas on top of the taller man. The alcohol buzz made him feel pleasantly disconnected from himself as he began to explore Evan's long, hard body with his mouth and his hands.

Evan's skin was smooth and warm underneath his fingertips, and he licked across taut muscles, tongue flicking over first one nipple, then the other. The younger man bucked under him at the sensation, a groan slipping from his lips, as he tightened his hold on Lucas's hips.

Lucas groaned himself as Evan's hard cock slid against his and he reached down between their bodies. His hand wasn't quite big enough to wrap around both their erections, but he did his best and started jacking them both slowly.

He let his eyes slide closed, trying once again to picture a different body beneath him, a different cock pressed so tightly against his own. But every pleasurable sound Evan made pulled his eyes open and he found himself wanting to hear the younger man make more, in spite of himself.

So he stroked them faster, swiping his thumb over the leaking head of Evan's cock and was rewarded with a breathless, "Fuck, *yeah*," from him, as Evan tried to pump his hips.

"Feels so good, Lucas," Evan panted. "Want more...want you inside me...wanna come when you're in me..."

Lucas squeezed both their dicks hard at Evan's words, stilling his motions, staving off both their impending orgasms with twin groans.

"Do you have...?" Lucas trailed off.

Evan nodded, reaching over and slapping the top of his bedside table. Lucas shifted, letting go of their cocks to open up the drawer, withdrawing a small tube of lube and a condom.

He set the condom on the table, flicked open the lube with his thumb and coated several of his fingers before setting the tube next to the condom.

He moved off of Evan and the taller man raised up his legs, bending them at the knee, spreading them open wide. Lucas sucked in a breath at the sight of the handsome man laid out before him – Evan’s chest rising and falling with quick breaths, skin beginning to shine with a slight sheen of sweat, tongue flicking out to wet his lips, and his eyes – wide and nearly all pupil now, pinning him with a gaze filled with want and desire.

He’s beautiful.

Lucas froze there, suspended, as the unbidden thought penetrated his hazy mind, shocking him. It wasn’t supposed to be like this...

“Lucas...?”

Lucas blinked, coming back to himself at Evan’s voice.

“Lucas, *please*...” Evan raised his hips up, opening his legs wider, seeking Lucas’s touch.

And then Lucas was leaning over him, forcing his mind to go blank, pushing away the stray thought, letting his slick fingers caress Evan’s heavy balls before slipping lower, to tease at the other man’s entrance.

“Yeah, *yeah*,” Evan encouraged, and then Lucas watched as his mouth fell open, neck arching on the pillow as Lucas slowly slid his finger inside him.

Tight heat gripped Lucas’s finger as he started to stretch Evan, his cock throbbing at the thought of being surrounded by the same sensation.

Moments later Evan was asking for more and Lucas slid in a second finger, watching as Evan shifted restlessly on the bed, pushing down, trying to take more of Lucas’s fingers in.

Lucas pushed his fingers in all the way and Evan gasped. “Now! Ah, god, I’m ready...I’m ready...”

Lucas withdrew his fingers and reached for the condom, but Evan beat him to it.

“Let me,” Evan said, drawing Lucas up and between his spread legs, tearing open the foil packet.

He reached out and stroked Lucas, spreading the pre-come around the head of his cock and Lucas let his head fall back as Evan slowly rolled the latex down his erection and slicked him up with lube, making putting on a condom more sexy than it should ever be.

“Turn over?” he said when Evan was finished.

But Evan shook his head. “Want it like this. Wanna watch you...”

Lucas swallowed at Evan unknowingly making this more difficult for him, having to look at Evan’s face instead of his back. He felt things slipping out of control as it was, the alcohol no longer blurring things enough. But all he could do was nod, determined to keep his eyes closed this time and not think about Evan, but Ryan instead. He had to...

Then Lucas was moving, changing position between Evan’s legs, his cock pressed against Evan’s opening. His green eyes searched out hazel ones, saw Evan nod and smile and then he was pushing forward...

Lucas felt it the moment Evan’s body opened for him, the ring of muscle giving, just the head of his cock sliding inside. He couldn’t help the gasp as Evan’s body gripped him so tightly, then the younger man’s hands were on his forearms, squeezing.

“Keep going...ahh, don’t stop, don’t stop...” Evan was rambling, lifting his hips up, trying to get more of Lucas inside him.

So Lucas kept pushing, working himself inside with short thrusts, stretching Evan open wide until the other man’s balls were almost brushing the base of his cock.

He held himself perfectly still then, breathing harshly in tandem with Evan, giving the younger man time to adjust and himself time to will away the desire to come instantly. So long since he’d done this...

Then Evan was lifting up his legs, wrapping them around Lucas’s waist, the heel of one foot in the small of Lucas’s back, pushing, bringing Lucas inside him that final inch.

“God!” Evan threw back his head. “Lucas...Lucas...”

Taking that as his cue, Lucas bit his bottom lip as he withdrew nearly all the way out of Evan's body before pushing back in with one smooth stroke, again and again, setting up a rhythm. Evan met him stroke for stroke, lifting up his hips, clenching down with his internal muscles, dragging a deep groan from Lucas as he closed his eyes, trying to picture another face beneath him.

But it was like Evan was a mind reader, that he knew Lucas was trying to retreat into a fantasy, into memory, and he refused to let him, keeping Lucas grounded in the present with *him* instead by constantly talking to him. It was a litany of Lucas's name and *harder, more, faster*, anything to keep Lucas's eyes open and attention on him.

And it worked. God help him, but it worked, despite how much he fought it. There was just something about Evan's voice, and the look in his eyes... Lucas just let himself go, gave up the battle, let himself give in to the sensations coursing through his body, this intimacy he hadn't felt in over a year.

"Yeah...yeah," Evan smiled up at him when Lucas locked eyes with him and didn't look away. "God, you feel so good, Lucas...so fucking good... God, deeper...*please*..."

Lucas leaned down, changing the angle of his penetration, pushing in just a bit harder, a bit deeper – and hit that spot inside Evan. The younger man jerked underneath him, crying out sharply, clenching around Lucas's cock even harder, and Lucas was suddenly right there, at the precipice of release.

He gasped at the force at which his orgasm started to overtake him with the sudden tightening of his balls, the lightening coiling at the base of his spine, only moments away from climax.

"Evan," he ground out, speaking the younger man's name for the first time since meeting him in the bar. It should've felt strange to Lucas, saying this man's name during sex instead of another, but it came out as natural as breathing.

The younger man's eyes were blown wide and fucked out as he looked up at Lucas, his hairline wet with sweat now, and Lucas could tell by the expression on his face that Evan was close to his release as well.

"Yeah, yeah, that's it," Lucas encouraged him, snaking a hand between their bodies, wrapping his fingers around Evan's rock hard erection. "C'mon, Evan, c'mon..."

Evan yelled out as Lucas started stroking him, his back arching. “Yes! Oh fuck, oh fuck,” Evan rambled, “Gonna come, oh god, I’m gonna come...”

And then he was, his cock pulsing in Lucas’s grip as his orgasm washed over him, coating Lucas’s fingers and his own chest in thick, white ropes.

Above him, Lucas watched as Evan came apart, watched him shake, and Jesus *Christ*, the sounds he was making, combined with the feel of Evan’s body clamping down around him – Lucas was done.

He pushed in deep, once, twice, the guttural moan torn from his throat as he climaxed, coming inside Evan, long and hard, closing his eyes against the white spots filling his vision.

He sagged as the last of his release filled the condom, trembling a little with the aftershocks, feeling Evan’s body tremble around him. He was trying to get his breathing under control when he felt Evan’s hand cup the side of his face, his thumb rubbing gently. He opened his eyes to see the younger man smiling up at him with such tenderness that he felt his throat close up and he was unable to speak.

The last of Lucas’s strength was leaving him, his arms no longer able to hold him up and he felt himself start to tip to the side.

“Whoa, whoa,” he heard Evan say, then strong hands were on his upper arms, steadying him.

He blinked open heavy eyes as Evan asked, “You okay?”

Lucas nodded wordlessly, then slowly began to pull out of Evan’s body. As his softening cock slipped free, Evan made a quiet noise at the loss. Lucas removed the condom, tying it off, as the younger man reached down beside the bed and snagged a discarded shirt, using it to clean off his chest.

He pushed the small bedside trash can toward Lucas and he leaned over, tossing the used condom in, nearly toppling off the bed in the process. Too much booze and now sex – exhaustion swept over Lucas in waves. He caught himself on the edge of the bed just as Evan did as well.

“You sure you’re all right?”

Lucas could hear the concern in Evan’s voice and he turned his head to look at the other man. Now that the haze of sex and alcohol was beginning to disperse, the reality of what he’d just done – picked up a

stranger in a bar and fucked him – was beginning to set in. He needed to get out of here, now.

“ ‘m fine,” he replied slowly, his movements sluggish as he tried to swing his legs off the side of the bed. He’d no more than gotten to his feet, his head spinning a bit, when Evan caught his wrist.

“Wait,” the younger man said quietly. “Stay?”

Before Lucas could wrap his mind around the request, Evan continued.

“You’re wrecked. You shouldn’t be trying to get home like this. So stay...please? And just sleep.”

He looked down at the other man, and the combination of Evan’s expression, soft and open, his body warm and flushed in the aftermath of sex, his thumb rubbing gently on Lucas’s wrist, the bone-deep lethargy coursing through his body and the thought of going home alone to his cold and empty apartment had him speaking the word before he could stop himself.

“Okay.”

Evan’s smile was warm at his answer and he tugged on Lucas’s wrist. “C’mon,” he said, moving on the bed so that he could pull the covers back.

Lucas sank down gratefully onto the sheets, warm with their body heat, laid his head on the pillow and curled over onto his side. Deep down he knew staying here was a mistake, but the pull of sleep was too strong to fight common sense.

He felt the bed dip as Evan got off and walked out of the room, then he heard running water from down the hall. Just as he was about to drift off, Evan was back, his hand on Lucas’s shoulder.

“Here, take these,” Evan said softly as Lucas opened his eyes, to see several aspirin in one of Evan’s hands, a glass of water in the other.

Lucas could only stare in disbelief that this man would care about his hangover, when Lucas was essentially a stranger to him, someone he’d brought home for sex.

Lucas took the offered aspirin and water, swallowed them both down. “Thanks, I – “ he trailed off.

Evan shrugged, gave a half smile. “Just don’t want to see you hurting in the morning.” He took back the glass and Lucas laid his head back down, asleep before Evan returned to the bedroom.

* * * *

The nightmare came that night.

As Lucas expected it would, today of all days, but still, even if you know it's coming, there's little you can do to prepare yourself for it.

He was back in the building, fire everywhere. Red and yellow flames licking and burning. The walls, the ceiling. It wanted to burn them, too. Thick smoke and the heat – god, the heat. Getting hard to breathe, going to run out of air. Don't want to leave him, don't want to leave him. He's yelling at you, telling you to go. You don't have a choice, you know you have to. The explosion, moments later. Picking you up and slamming you down. He's gone...

Lucas woke with a gasp, his body jerking, a choked off "Ry-" escaping his lips as he sat up and looked around wildly, disoriented.

Then a warm hand was on his shoulder, Evan sitting up next to him. "Hey, hey, it's okay," he said gently, voice deep with sleep.

Lucas blinked and took a shaky breath, coming back to himself, remembering where he was. Evan was rubbing his arm, the motion soothing.

"Sorry," Lucas apologized, lying back down. "Didn't mean to wake you."

Evan shook his head. "Don't worry about it. Nightmare?"

Lucas nodded in response, staring at the ceiling.

"Wanna talk about it?" Evan asked, lying down as well, on his side facing Lucas.

Lucas turned his head, again surprised at Evan and his concern for him. "I lost someone," Lucas replied simply, quietly.

And again those hazel eyes seemed to already know, like Evan had somehow already figured it out.

"I'm sorry," Evan whispered, and moments later Lucas was asleep, Evan's hand resting over his heart.

* * * *

The next time Lucas woke it was to something much more pleasant – the sensation of Evan kissing his way down Lucas’s neck, over to his shoulder, then down his back, slow and sensual.

Lucas had had every intention to get up and just leave this morning, but with the way Evan was making his body feel, now brushing a thumb over his nipple, and still craving the touch of someone, Lucas instead arched back against Evan’s hard body.

He felt Evan smile against his skin at his action. “You look so good,” he breathed into Lucas’s ear, making him shiver. “You feel so good...”

Evan’s fingers gently pinched Lucas’s nipple and Lucas jerked, the sensation shooting straight down to his cock. “Evan...” he moaned, feeling himself start to harden.

“Yeah, that’s it,” Evan murmured against his neck, giving Lucas’s nipple another squeeze before his hand started wandering – across his chest, down his abs to his stomach, to tease the fine hair below his navel, then back up again.

“Mmmm...” Lucas sighed at the touch, both soothing and turning him on at the same time, and he wanted more of it. He pressed back into Evan again, this time feeling the heat of Evan’s erection like a brand in the small of his back.

Evan sucked in a breath and rocked his hips and Lucas dropped his head back against Evan’s shoulder as the younger man’s questing fingers just brushed the tip of Lucas’s cock.

“More...” Lucas exhaled, then groaned deeply as Evan reached between his legs and cupped his heavy balls in his wide palm.

Lucas shifted, lifting up his top leg, bent at the knee, spreading himself open for Evan, and the other man took complete advantage of the new position. He fondled Lucas’s balls, rolling them, tugging gently, pulling another moan from Lucas.

“Like that, eh?” Evan smiled.

“God yeah...feels good...”

“How ‘bout this, then?” Evan asked, as his fingers slipped back behind Lucas’s balls, rubbing at the

skin there.

Another electric current shot its way through Lucas's body, his cock jerking as Evan stimulated him there.

"*Fuck*," Lucas swore; then Evan's long finger was moving even further back, sliding against Lucas's entrance.

"Can I?" Evan breathed, finger pushing gently against the puckered muscle.

Lucas's heartbeat quickened and he gave a shaky nod. "Y-Yeah. But...it's been a long time."

"It's okay, we'll take it slow," Evan replied, kissing along Lucas's neck again. "Now don't move..."

Evan rolled away from Lucas and he heard the bedside drawer opening and closing, then the younger man was back, slicking up his fingers. He moved toward the end of the bed and Lucas rolled onto his back and raised up both legs, bent at the knee. Evan settled himself between Lucas's spread legs, one hand on Lucas's knee, the other drifting between his legs.

Evan smiled at him just as he felt his finger, cool with gel, rubbing against his entrance. Lucas sucked in a breath and nodded at the younger man, and then he was pressing his head back into the pillow as Evan's finger breeched him.

It was uncomfortable just for a moment, his body remembering what this felt like, how *good* it felt, and he was relaxing as Evan started slowly sliding his finger in and out, stretching him.

"Jesus, Lucas, you're so tight. Am I hurting you?"

Lucas shook his head. "No, feels good. You can go faster, a little harder." Then he bit his lip as Evan complied. "Mmmm...yeah..." he sighed.

"God, you look so good like this," Evan murmured, bending over Lucas's upper body, supporting himself with a hand next to Lucas's shoulder. Then he dipped his head and licked Lucas's nipple.

Lucas couldn't help the small groan and he pressed down against Evan's finger as he tangled his hands in Evan's long hair. "Don't stop," he breathed.

And Evan didn't, licking and sucking on Lucas's nipple as he continued to stretch him open, driving Lucas higher and higher with the dual stimulation. And when Evan slid in a second finger, Lucas thought he'd fly apart.

His hips were moving restlessly on the bed, trying to get some kind of friction on his rock hard cock and bearing down on Evan's fingers, trying to get them deeper. And then they were, hitting that spot that had Lucas crying out sharply, neck arching on the pillow.

So Evan did it again, raising his head up from Lucas's chest as Lucas bucked beneath him, putting his mouth close to Lucas's ear.

"Want you to ride me, Lucas," he growled. "Wanna see you on top of me..."

"*Christ*," Lucas swore, his mind flooded with the mental image Evan's words had conjured up and he had to reach between their bodies to squeeze his cock hard to stop himself from coming right then and there.

Evan chuckled. "I take it you like the idea?"

"God, yeah," Lucas panted, practically shaking with the need to have Evan inside him. "I'm good, I'm ready..."

Evan smiled at him again and withdrew his fingers, leaving Lucas feeling empty and open. Evan moved back up the bed and sat with his back against the headboard next to Lucas, tearing open the condom packet. Lucas sat up and reached for the lube as Evan rolled the latex on himself, handing the tube to the younger man. Evan applied the lube liberally to his cock, then Lucas was straddling Evan's body, his own cock jutting out proudly, hard and aching for release.

Evan's hands settled on Lucas's ass, gently holding and spreading him open as Lucas reached behind himself to take Evan's cock in his hand, bringing it to press against his opening. He took a second to just rub the head against the puckered muscle, teasing himself and Evan, before pressing down.

Even with Evan's fingers having stretched him, the burn as the head of Evan's cock breeched his body caused Lucas to suck in a quick breath. But underneath the spike of pain was a feeling of fullness that Lucas loved, and he wanted all of Evan inside him.

Evan's cock was proportionate to his body – long and hard and thick, and Lucas worked himself down with short movements, hands braced on the headboard, bottom lip caught between his teeth as Evan filled him.

"Yeah, that's it...take it slow...god, you feel *amazing*," Evan rambled, still spreading Lucas open. "Almost there...just a little more...c'mon, take all of me in...wanna be all the way in you, Lucas..."

"Oh *god*," Lucas panted as Evan's cock slipped in the last inch. "So fucking big...feel so full...*god*..."

Lucas remained still for a moment, eyes closed, letting his body adjust, stretch around Evan's cock as the other man's hands shifted from his ass to grip his hips.

As the burn of penetration subsided, Lucas opened his eyes to see wide hazel ones looking back, feeling ripped bare by the intense gaze sweeping up and down his body. Then Evan locked eyes with him, voice pitched deep.

"C'mon, Lucas...ride me..."

And then Lucas was raising himself up on his knees, feeling Evan's cock slide out of his body until only the head remained inside, before sinking back down in one smooth motion.

Both men groaned and Evan's hands tightened on Lucas's hips as Lucas started a smooth, quick rhythm, raising himself up and down on Evan's cock, pushing down a little harder each time.

And this time Lucas didn't try and retreat into a fantasy, or memory. He locked eyes with Evan, staring at him with an expression so deep it felt like it was burning him, but he couldn't look away. He was right there, in the moment with Evan, realizing that the younger man was awakening something inside him he thought he'd never feel again.

The air was filled with quick, panting breaths as Lucas continued to ride Evan's cock, mindless words tumbling from both their mouths as they drove one another higher and higher. The head of Lucas's cock was angry red and wet with pre-come and he felt the beginnings of his orgasm start deep inside.

His rhythm started to falter and immediately Evan's strong arms were helping him lift himself up and down.

"You almost there, Lucas?" Evan breathed harshly. "You gonna come?"

Lucas nodded, biting his lip. "Close, 'm so close," he panted. "Just...a little more..."

And then he was crying out sharply as Evan bucked his hips, driving his cock in further than before, sliding against Lucas's prostate.

"Fuck, yeah, that's it," Evan exhaled, repeating the motion, and one of Lucas's hands slipped down from the headboard to clutch at Evan's shoulder.

"Evan...Evan," Lucas rambled, sparks racing up and down his spine as Evan's cock continued to stimulate his prostate as he pushed down against it.

"Feel so good...so tight...wanna feel you come, Lucas..."

And then Lucas was flying apart, Evan's hand wrapping itself around his cock, pulling once, twice – and Lucas was coming. His orgasm surged through him, his cock pulsing long and hard in Evan's grasp, painting the younger man's hand and chest with thick ropes of semen.

He called out Evan's name even as he came, eyes squeezed closed, head thrown back, feeling Evan's hips still pumping, quick, sharp thrusts of his cock inside him.

"Lucas! Oh god, *yeah*," Evan ground out, pushing Lucas down hard, holding him there as he came, too, eyes closing, mouth falling open.

Lucas couldn't stop the moan as he felt Evan's cock pulse deep within him, his own twitching at the stimulation, releasing a few more drops of semen. He sagged forward then, as Evan's climax subsided, pleasurable tiredness taking over his body, his other hand now resting on Evan's shoulder, too.

They remained that way for a long moment, calming their breathing, then Evan once again cupped the side of Lucas's face, his features soft, smiling up at Lucas.

And Lucas...

Smiled back.

“So...umm,” Evan started as they finished cleaning themselves up, “Would you like to stay for breakfast?”

Needing to be alone for a while, his thoughts and feelings a mess inside his head, Lucas shook his head in response. “Thanks, but, umm...I’ve got a lot of stuff I need to do today. I’d better get going,” he finished, reaching for his clothes that Evan must’ve folded and put on the bedside chair after he’d fallen asleep last night. And once again Lucas was struck by Evan’s thoughtfulness to a stranger.

Lucas quickly pulled on boxers and pants and his shirt, then stuffed his feet in his boots. Straightening up, he ran a hand through his messy, spiky hair, shifting awkwardly as he looked at Evan, still sitting naked on the bed, sheet bunched around his thighs.

Lucas swallowed, unsure of what to even say. It wasn’t like he made a habit of picking up men in a bar and having to deal with the morning after. Saving Lucas from any embarrassment, Evan spoke first, just as Lucas opened his mouth.

“Listen, I know this was just supposed to be sex, what we both wanted last night,” Evan began, speaking softly. “But I think there’s something more here now, between us, and I think you can feel it, too.” He paused, looking away from Lucas then back again. “I just – I want to see you again. I want to get to know you, Lucas.”

Lucas’s jaw clicked shut at Evan’s words and it took him a moment to find his voice. “Evan, I...” he began, the tone in his voice causing Evan to speak up again.

“I’m sorry,” Evan broke in, disappointment crossing his face. “I was reading too much into things...”

Lucas shook his head. “No, it’s not that. You weren’t wrong. Last night and this morning was...it was...” he trailed off, ducking his head, feeling his face flush and he heard Evan chuckle. Then he looked back up again, voice serious. “But...I don’t know if I’m ready for a relationship right now.”

Evan looked thoughtful. “That person you lost?”

Lucas nodded. “Yeah,” he replied quietly.

“Well...can I maybe give you my phone number, in case you change your mind?”

Lucas gave him a small smile. “Sure,” he answered, seeing the hope on Evan’s face as the younger man grabbed a piece of paper and a pen from the bedside table and scribbled quickly on it. Lucas reached out and took the paper, and with a small nod, turned and left Evan’s apartment, but not before looking back at the gorgeous man one last time.

* * * *

The late afternoon summer sun was streaming in through Lucas’s bedroom as he sat at his desk, books and papers spread out before him. He was supposed to be doing his homework, but his mind kept drifting to Evan, replaying the events of the previous night and this morning over and over in his head.

Thoughts and feelings tumbling inside his head, he turned to look at the photo sitting on the corner of his desk. He picked it up, rubbed his thumb over the face of the smiling man. Tom had been telling him it was time for him to move on, but up until this point he’d never felt ready for another relationship, like he’d be betraying Ryan.

His eyes shifted to the scrap of paper lying next to the phone. Maybe it was time to take a chance.

* * * *

Later that evening, sitting out on his balcony under the stars, Lucas took a deep breath and punched Evan’s number into his phone.

“Hello?”

Lucas swallowed. “Umm, hi. It’s Lucas.”

“Lucas!” He could practically see Evan’s smile over the phone. “Wow, I’m really glad you called.”

“Evan, listen...I want to get to know you, too, but...I don’t know where I want this to go,” Lucas told the younger man honestly.

“Hey, it’s okay. I understand,” Evan replied sincerely. “We can take things slow, as strange as that sounds now.”

They shared a laugh at that, and Lucas felt himself begin to relax. A few moments later they were talking about Texas and their families. Lucas learned that Evan also had a younger sister and older brother and soon they were telling stories about growing up, being the middle child.

A good hour later, still talking about Richardson and San Antonio, Evan’s call waiting went off. He clicked over and came back to Lucas a minute later – it was his momma, she always calls on Sunday and he’d better talk to her. Lucas laughed, understanding completely.

“So hey, can I call you tomorrow night?” Evan asked tentatively.

Lucas smiled into the phone. “Yeah, I’d like that. ‘Night, Evan.”

“Awesome. ‘Night, Lucas.”

As Lucas hung up the phone he felt something loosen inside his chest, like the door to his heart had opened once again.

* * * *

Monday morning dawned bright and hot and Lucas was trying to eat a piece of toast, stuff his books and civilian clothes into his bag and get dressed at the same time. He swallowed down the last of the bread, wiped a blob of grape jelly off one of his textbooks and turned to his closet to get dressed.

He smiled as he pulled out his black shoes, navy blue slacks and then his shirt – his navy blue polo with L.TAYLOR embroidered in white on the right breast, and the FDNY crest embroidered in white on the left breast, with STATION 127 in the middle of the crest.

He dressed quickly in his uniform, pausing to run a hand through his hair and check his collar in the mirror; then he was sweeping his duffle bag from his bed and heading out the door.

It was a five block walk from his apartment to the station house and Lucas covered the distance quickly. As he turned the corner onto King Boulevard, he couldn’t suppress another smile as he saw the red and white engine pulled halfway out of the bay, gleaming in the sunshine.

Being a fireman in New York these past five years was everything Lucas could've asked for. As corny as it sounded, he'd known since childhood he wanted to grow up to be a fireman, and he'd made his dream come true.

The job certainly wasn't without its risks, and Lucas knew that all too well, but the feeling he got when he pulled someone out of a burning building was something that touched him deep inside. The pay sucked, but when someone who they'd saved stopped by the station to thank them – that was worth more than money.

As he walked up to the station he greeted dark-haired, 32 year-old Kyle Everett, their engineer, and blond, 28 year-old Toby Sanders, who rode the ladder truck, with a smile and a wave as the two men polished the rig. They called out a hello as Lucas walked in the open door of Bay Three and into the apparatus room, past the back end of the engine. Daniel Hoffmann and Shawn Larson were there, mopping the floor, and they looked up as Lucas started to walk past them.

"Taylor!" Daniel called out. "Truck versus engine on the court at 1:30!"

Lucas laughed. There was a standing rivalry in the station – those who rode the engine and those who rode the ladder truck – and the basketball half-court in the rear of the station was their battlefield.

"You're goin' down, Danny-boy!" Lucas taunted the 30 year-old sandy-haired man.

"In your dreams, *Lukey!*" 25 year-old Shawn called back and Lucas gave the red-head a playful one-finger salute in response as he continued past the engine and the truck, parked in Bay Two.

Bay One held the station's ambulance, more commonly referred to as "the bus," and 31 year-old Alix Jones, their lone paramedic at the moment, was sitting in the back with the doors open, a clipboard in her hand. Alix's partner had transferred to another station a week ago and other medics from different shifts had been picking up overtime, riding with Alix until they got a new paramedic, which was supposed to be any day now.

"Yo, Alix!" Lucas greeted her, stopping to playfully smack at her clipboard.

Alix whacked him on the arm, then smiled. "Heya, Luke. How's things?"

“Not too bad, Alix. How ‘bout you?”

She shrugged. “Can’t complain. Oh, Tommy’s looking for you. He’s upstairs in the kitchen.”

“Great, thanks,” he answered, turning to go.

“Don’t forget to look at the duty roster,” she smirked, tucking a strand of dark hair behind her ear, and Lucas groaned. That could only mean one thing. He had latrine duty. Yep, it was definitely a Monday.

Station 127 was three stories tall – the apparatus room on the ground floor, the common room, the kitchen and the Captain’s office on the second floor, and the dorms, the locker rooms and bathrooms on the third floor. And the station was old enough to have an honest to god fire pole running from top to bottom. Which Lucas used as often as possible, his inner child getting a thrill each time he slid down.

Lucas made his way up the stairs to the second floor, catching sight of their boss, Captain Jeff Marshall, on the phone in his office as he stopped to look at the duty roster on the bulletin board. Yep, latrine duty. Great.

He strode into the kitchen next, spying his best friend, Tom Kent, standing in front of the refrigerator, making a list for their grocery run later that day. He stepped up behind his taller, dark haired friend and smacked a hand on his back.

“Hey man!” he greeted Tom with a smile.

Tom turned, blinking at Lucas’s sunny attitude. “Hey to you, too. What’s got you in such a good mood on a Monday?”

Lucas shrugged. “Just had a good weekend.”

Tom’s brow furrowed in confusion. “You did? I thought with Saturday being...” he trailed off.

“Actually, it turned out to be okay.”

“I’m glad, man. I was worried about you, wishing you’d have taken me and Susie up on our offer to spend the evening with us. Didn’t want you to be alone.”

“Thanks again for that, Tommy. I appreciated the offer. But...I ended up not being alone after all.”

Tom’s eyebrows rose at Lucas’s small smile. “Oh? Something you wanna tell me, buddy?” he grinned.

Lucas shook his head. “Not right now,” he replied, then paused. “Actually, there is something I wanna say. Switch duties with me today, Tommy?”

Tom crossed his arms in front of his chest, an amused expression on his face. “Gosh, let me guess – bathroom? Nuh-uh, sorry, Luke. I switched with you twice in the last five shifts.” He clapped Lucas on the shoulder. “There’s a mop upstairs with your name on it. Have fun!”

With a chuckle he turned back to the fridge as Lucas groaned theatrically and hung his head before leaving the kitchen to go upstairs.

* * * *

An hour later Lucas was back in the now-empty kitchen, taking a break after cleaning the showers and the sinks, rummaging in the fridge for a soda before heading back upstairs to mop the floors.

He’d only taken a few swallows of the cold drink when he heard a burst of loud laughter from several voices drift up from downstairs. When it happened again a moment later, Lucas’s curiosity got the better of him and he stepped into the hallway, grabbed the gold fire pole and slid down....

...and felt his world tilt so violently at what he saw downstairs he had to reach out and grab the pole to keep from falling.

There, standing among his entire crew, laughing and smiling, was Evan. Dressed in an FDNY blue paramedics uniform.

Lucas’s heart dropped into his stomach and settled there like a lead weight, his mind still trying to process what he was seeing, even as his chest clenched up. This couldn’t be happening. This couldn’t be happening...

He stood there, frozen, until Captain Marshall’s head turned just enough that he spied Lucas out of the corner of his eye and waved to him.

“Luke! Come over here and meet our new paramedic,” Jeff called out, and Lucas had no choice but to put one foot in front of the other, until he was face to face with the man he’d had sex with just yesterday.

He'd seen Evan's eyes widen the moment he caught sight of Lucas, clearly shocked to see him, then his face broke out in a huge smile and he stuck out his hand.

"Evan Singer. Nice to meet you."

Keeping up appearances, Lucas returned the handshake, mumbling, "Lucas Taylor."

"Luke, do me a favor and give Evan the tour, will you?" Jeff said. "I've got a mound of paperwork to get to."

"Haven't finished the bathroom yet, Cap," Lucas replied, trying to get out of the request.

"It's not going anywhere," Jeff smiled. "Go on, show him around." Then he turned to the rest of the crew and clapped his hands together. "Ok, people, back to work!"

The little group broke up, with handshakes and pats on the back to Evan as everyone went back to what they'd been doing, leaving Lucas and Evan alone. They simply stared at one another for several heartbeats before Lucas broke eye contact, mumbling, "C'mon," before walking further into the station.

In a flat, monotone voice, mind still whirling, Lucas showed Evan the apparatus room, pointing out various things and then took him into the equipment room, where he took a minute to look Evan up and down.

There was no denying that Evan looked incredible in his uniform. The navy blue pants and short-sleeved, button down shirt fit him perfectly, the overall effect making him look even taller, if that was possible. His silver EMS pins gleamed on his collar, and the patches on his sleeves, one the FDNY crest and the other the Paramedic's crest, stood out in stark relief against the blue fabric. As did the E. SINGER embroidered on the right breast.

Lucas shook his head slightly, bringing himself back from his thoughts, to see Evan staring at him with an amused expression on his face.

"Alix will have to get you your turnout gear," Lucas said gruffly, hooking a thumb to the right side of the equipment room. While the firemen wore black helmets and black turnout gear with yellow reflective tape, the paramedics wore blue gear with white reflective tape and red helmets.

“Okay, sure,” Evan replied, his amusement still showing and Lucas felt sick to his stomach as he turned and led the way upstairs.

“This is the common room,” he said, voice still flat, arm sweeping out in front of him to encompass the TV set, couches, foosball table and air hockey table.

“Nice,” Evan said, nodding his head. “Better than San Antonio, that’s for sure.”

“Kitchen’s that way.” Lucas indicated, pointing across the hall. “And that’s the Captain’s office. Duty roster and drill schedule is posted on the bulletin board next to his office.”

Evan nodded again and fell in behind Lucas as they went up to the third floor.

“Here’s the bathroom and locker room. Just pick any empty locker. And here’s the dorm.”

The two men walked inside the fairly large room that held twelve beds in an open-style dorm. The station was too old to have the modern, individual cubicles with curtains, just an open room with short half walls that separated every two beds.

Lucas led Evan over to an empty one, which of course, since the universe hated him, was right next to his own.

“This’ll be yours,” he told Evan, voice tight, wanting nothing more than to be away from this man, needing to be by himself.

Why? *Why* was this happening to him? Just when he thought he could start to move ahead with his life again, finally meeting someone he felt he could have a relationship with...and it all came crashing down with the appearance of a blue uniform. What had he done so fucking wrong in his life to deserve this torture not once, but twice now? It wasn’t fair. *It wasn’t fucking fair.*

Evan was smiling at him, shaking his head. “God, Lucas, I can’t believe this. We never even talked about our jobs.” He took a step toward Lucas, reaching out to touch him. “What are the chances – ”

Evan cut himself off, confusion evident on his face as Lucas took a step back, shaking his head.

“This weekend was a mistake,” Lucas stated, voice hard, masking his inner turmoil. “It was just sex and it’ll never happen again. There’s never going to be anything between us.”

His stomach twisting in knots at his lie, Lucas abruptly turned on his heel and left the room, but not before seeing the shock and hurt cross Evan's face.

* * * *

For the remainder of the morning and into the afternoon, Lucas made sure he wasn't by himself, not giving Evan an opportunity to confront him. He either stayed in the common room with a couple of the guys, his head buried in one of his textbooks, or busied himself with his station duties and even went on the grocery run with Tom. Luckily for him, Evan was kept occupied by Alix, going over the bus, procedures, etc. but whenever they were in the same room together, Lucas felt Evan's eyes burning into him.

They got a run in the early evening, right after dinner – traffic accident a few blocks away. Only the engine and ambulance got the call, so Jeff, Lucas, Tom and Kyle headed out, Kyle behind the wheel of the engine, following Alix and Evan in the ambulance.

There was some minor chaos at the scene – cops directing traffic around the two vehicles, one of which had run a red light, smashing in the left rear side of the other, curious onlookers on the sidewalks and the accident victims themselves.

Lucas was out of the rig almost before it stopped moving, assessing the situation. The blue Ford Mustang had hit the green Subaru Outback, smashing in the hood, the engine smoking. Lucas could see the car held only one passenger, a male driver, who was moving slightly.

The Subaru's left rear door and quarter panel were smashed, but the damage wasn't as severe as it was on the Mustang. Lucas could see the female driver and it also looked like there was someone in the backseat, a child perhaps.

"Kyle!" Jeff called, jumping down out of the rig. "Get the reel line and spray down that engine!"

"Right, Cap!" Kyle answered, pulling the hose down.

"Luke! Check the Mustang's driver!"

"Right, Cap!" Lucas replied, already heading for the blue car.

Alix and Evan had just hopped out of the ambulance, medic bags in hand, and Lucas saw the younger man shoot him a look at Captain Marshall's order, as Evan was starting to head that way himself.

Alix pulled on the sleeve of Evan's turnout coat. "C'mon, Evan. Luke's got it covered."

Evan nodded, still looking at Lucas, then turned his attention to the damaged car and its occupants.

Lucas crouched down next to the open window of the Mustang. The male driver, about 22 years old, was sitting with his head back against the seat, looking stunned, with a small trickle of blood coming from his nose from the airbag impact.

"Sir? Are you injured?" Lucas asked, hearing Alix's voice telling Jeff the door was jammed and Jeff telling Tom to get the pry bar.

"I – I don't think so," the man replied. "Well, my neck hurts some..."

"Okay, I want you to sit right there and not move around," Lucas told the man, then stood up.

"Alix!" he yelled. "I need a C-Collar!"

"Gotcha!" she called back, bending down to her medic bag to retrieve the collar, then jogging over to Lucas.

"Thanks," Lucas said. "How's yours over there?"

"Mom buckled her daughter into her booster seat, then didn't bother to put her own seatbelt on." Alix shook her head. "She's a bit banged up, small scalp laceration. Daughter's fine, just scared. Yours?"

"Bloody nose, possible whiplash."

"Okay, get him in the collar and I'll be back over in a minute to check him out," Alix replied then turned around. "Cap! We'll need the backboard over here!"

Jeff nodded, then called for Tom to get it out of the back of the ambulance.

Lucas got the collar on the driver of the Mustang, then stepped back when Alix returned.

"Can you walk Mom over to the bus, Luke? Gonna take her in and get that scalp laceration stitched up."

"Sure thing, Alix," Lucas answered as she and Tom prepared to get the driver of the Mustang out and

As Lucas walked over to the Subaru, he saw Evan standing on the opposite side, a crying little girl in his arms, rubbing her back soothingly.

“It’s okay, Alli,” Evan was saying to the little girl. “You’re all right, don’t cry. Your mom’s right here. You’ll see her in a minute. Shhh...”

And with a few more hiccupping breaths, little Alli did indeed start to calm down, laying her head on Evan’s shoulder.

“Yeah, that’s it,” Evan smiled, rocking back and forth, looking up from the little girl, right at Lucas.

And as Lucas watched Evan interact so smoothly with the little girl, he felt his heart clench at the knowledge that he could never have a relationship with this kind, compassionate man and he had to turn away from Evan’s gaze.

“Ma’am? Can you stand up and come with me?” Lucas asked the mother. “We’re going to take you to the hospital to get that stitched up for you.”

She stood, holding on to Lucas’s arm, and he could feel her hand shaking. “My daughter. Where’s Alli?” she asked, a scared tremor in her voice.

“She’s fine, ma’am. She’s right here,” Lucas assured her. “She’s in good hands,” he finished softly, locking eyes with Evan. “She’s in good hands...”

* * * *

Evan and Alix got another run much later that night, possible heart attack, and it was just after 11 pm when Lucas heard the bay door open, on his way to the bathroom to brush his teeth before climbing into bed.

Toby had just finished up at the sinks, leaving Lucas alone in the bathroom. He was wiping his mouth with a paper towel when he heard the door swing open. He looked up into the mirror – and saw Evan. And from the look in the young medic’s eyes and the set of his jaw, Lucas knew they were headed for the confrontation he’d been dreading.

“We need to talk,” Evan said firmly, walking toward Lucas.

Lucas turned from the sinks to face Evan. “No. We don’t,” he replied, just as strongly.

“You owe me an explanation, dammit,” Evan countered, and Lucas could sense the hurt under his words.

Hardening himself, he flung his reply at the young man. “I was *drunk*. It was nothing but a mistake, sleeping with you. End of story.”

Evan shook his head. “No. No, I’m not buying that. You never would’ve called me on Sunday if that was true.”

Knowing he was caught, Lucas floundered for a moment before finding his voice, softer this time. “Evan...nothing more can happen between us. So just let it go. *Please*.”

“I don’t understand. Why are you acting like this?” Evan asked plaintively, taking another step toward Lucas, reaching out to touch him. “What’s going – ”

The door to the bathroom opened at that moment and Tom walked in, dressed in only his boxers, a towel over his shoulder. Evan immediately dropped his hand and took a step back from Lucas, as they both averted their gaze from one another. It was obvious from the look on Tom’s face that he knew he’d just interrupted something, but before he could speak, Evan was brushing past him, out of the bathroom.

Lucas sighed and turned back to the sink, bracing his arms on it and hanging his head. Tom walked up beside him a moment later.

“Want to tell me what that was all about?” Tom asked.

“Nothing,” Lucas muttered.

“Certainly didn’t look like nothing. Something going on with you two?” Tom pressed gently. “You haven’t even known him for 24 hours yet and you’ve pretty much been avoiding him since he got here. Something about him just rubbing you the wrong way?”

Lucas hesitated for a minute, then decided to confide in his friend. He blew out a long breath then straightened up, turning to face Tom.

“Actually...we’ve known each other longer than 24 hours,” he confessed.

Tom blinked. "You...what?"

"Remember when I said I wasn't alone on Saturday?"

Tom nodded. "Yeah..." Then his eyes widened. "You don't mean...? You were with *Evan*? How...I mean – "

Lucas glanced away from his friend. "I picked him up at Casey's."

"*You picked him up?* You mean you...?"

"Yes, Tom, we fucked each other," Lucas confirmed bluntly.

"What were you *thinking*?" Tom hissed. "Sleeping with some guy you don't even know? You're lucky he wasn't some psycho and killed you!"

"God dammit, Tom! I was lonely! I was hurting and I was lonely. I miss Ryan so fucking much..." Lucas swallowed deeply. "And with Saturday the anniversary of his death...I just wasn't thinking straight, okay? I'd had too much to drink and he was interested and I just wanted to pretend..."

Tom sighed and reached out and squeezed Lucas's shoulder. "So I take it from what I saw in here things didn't go so well that night?"

Lucas gave a rueful chuckle. "Actually, it was just the opposite. I even spent the night. He gave me his number and I called him yesterday."

"Hang on, I don't understand. Why are you avoiding him like the plague, then?"

"Because the one thing we neglected to talk about was our *jobs*!" Lucas pushed angrily away from the sink, his back to Tom. "I told him today there can't be anything between us."

Tom was silent for a long minute, then asked softly, "Do you like him? You must if you called him."

Lucas whirled around. "It doesn't matter if I like him or not. He's a *paramedic*."

"Ah, Luke...don't do this to yourself. Ryan was a fireman – "

"We're ALL firemen, Tom! The medics are in just as much danger as we are. Half the time they're rushing in right behind us into some burning, collapsing building to pull someone out. Or they're pulling up on a gang-banger bleeding in the street while bullets are still flying," Lucas finished, pulling in a deep breath.

“Do you think Ryan would’ve wanted this for you?” Tom asked gently. “For you to be alone and unhappy? Or do you think he would want you to move on? Not to forget him, but just to find someone that makes you happy again.”

Lucas stared at Tom, throat working against the emotions threatening to smother him. Finally, he shook his head, his voice rough.

“I already lost someone I loved to this job. I won’t go through that again. I *can’t*.”

Then he was pushing past Tom, out of the bathroom, swiping angrily at his moisture filled eyes.

He leaned against the wall next to the doorway leading into the dorm, taking a minute to get himself back under control before heading in, knowing what he’d find. And sure enough, Evan was lying there in his bed on his side, facing Lucas’s bed, wide awake, his expression hurt and angry and confused.

Lucas looked away from him without a word, climbing into bed, facing away from Evan, but he still felt the young man’s eyes boring into his back until he finally fell into an uneasy sleep hours later.

* * * *

Lucas’s next shift was two days later, following Station 127’s “24-hour-on / 48-hour-off” shift schedule. He’d thought being away from Evan for those two days would help, that he could get a handle on his feelings for the other man and push them away, bury them deep and get on with his life.

But his efforts were in vain, with Evan invading his thoughts more than once throughout those two days, at night especially as he lay in his bed, helpless to stop the dreams that replayed last Saturday and Sunday.

So instead of walking into the station for his next shift with a clear head, able to look Evan in the eye, confident in his decision to end things between them before they really had a chance to get started, he instead did his best to once again avoid the young medic.

It was just after lunch, and Lucas had retreated to the common room with almost everyone else, settling himself into one of the chairs, textbook in hand, studying. Daniel and Tom started up a rousing game of foosball while Jeff and Evan turned on the TV and flipped through various sections of the newspaper.

“Hey, Luke, how’re your classes goin’?” Jeff asked a few minutes later.

“Kinda tough, Cap,” Lucas admitted. “Got a test tomorrow.”

“You should let Evan quiz you,” Jeff suggested, and both Lucas and Evan’s heads shot up.

Jeff looked over at Evan. “Luke’s studying to be a paramedic,” he explained.

Evan’s eyes widened and he turned to Lucas. “You’ve got your EMT certification?”

“Yep. Got it last year,” Lucas answered.

“So that’s why you were helping out at the accident the other day,” Evan said and Lucas nodded in response.

“Why don’t you two go use my office? It’s quieter in there,” Jeff told them.

“I’m good, Cap, really,” Lucas said quickly. “And besides, Alix has been helping me out.”

“She’s down inventorying the supplies in the bus,” Jeff replied. “Now go on and get in there with Evan.”

Lucas’s jaw muscle twitched, knowing there was nothing else he could say, no good reason he could give why he didn’t want to be alone with Evan. So all he could do was nod. “Sure, Cap,” he finally said, standing, as Evan did the same.

“Do you need to do any practicals?” Evan asked.

“Yeah, ET tube.”

“Ok, I’ll get my bag and you get the dummy.”

They were both back upstairs a few minutes later, walking into Jeff’s office, shutting the door behind them. Immediately a strained, awkward silence descended upon the room as they sat down at the small table.

“So…” Evan started after a few long moments passed. “Why do you want to be a paramedic?”

Lucas shrugged. “Same reason as you, I guess. Being a fireman is great and I love it; I just want to do more. Help people more, you know? I got a taste of it doing my ride-a-longs for my EMT certification and I know that it’s what I really wanna do.”

Evan nodded, smiling. “It really is an amazing feeling, isn’t it? Knowing you’re helping to save someone’s life.”

Lucas couldn’t help but return the smile. “Yeah. Scary, though, too.”

Evan sobered. “Yeah, sometimes you can’t save everyone.”

“You’ve lost someone?”

“A few,” Evan replied. “It never gets any easier.”

Silence reigned for a beat until Lucas spoke again. “You, uh...you were really good with that little girl last shift. The car accident.”

Evan chuckled. “Thanks. Some say it’s because I’m not that far removed in age myself.” Lucas smiled as Evan continued. “So...we’d better get to work before we get another run, eh?”

“Yeah, good idea,” Lucas replied, sliding his textbook across the table. “The test is on chapters five and six.”

Evan quizzed Lucas for the next twenty minutes with Lucas feeling more and more relaxed around Evan, but at the same time his heart ached because he could never have more with him than the tentative friendship he felt they were just starting to form.

Evan shut the textbook and leaned back in the chair. “Great job, man. You really know this stuff.”

Lucas gave him a small smile at the praise. “Thanks. And umm, thanks for taking the time to do this with me.”

“No problem. Ready to do the practical?”

“Yeah, sure,” Lucas replied, retrieving the dummy and laying it on the table as Evan opened up his medic bag and pulled out the ET tube.

Lucas positioned himself at the head of the dummy, looking straight down into its face and Evan handed him the required equipment.

“Now show me your mad intubation skills,” Evan smirked, and Lucas shook his head, then turned serious, looking back down at the dummy, bending over slightly.

Evan shifted, standing half next to and half behind Lucas, looking over his shoulder to observe Lucas’s technique. Lucas could feel Evan’s soft breath next to his face and it immediately unnerved him, having Evan this close to him.

Distracted by Evan’s close presence, Lucas wasn’t able to do the procedure correctly and Evan stopped him.

“No, like this,” Evan started to explain, voice low in Lucas’s ear. He raised his large hands up, sliding them slowly down Lucas’s forearms, stopping at the wrist, and Lucas couldn’t stop the shiver at Evan’s actions, his body starting to react to the younger man.

Evan guided Lucas’s hands, moving the ET tube into the correct position, moving closer to Lucas, his legs now touching the backs of Lucas’s. “You’ve got to visualize the vocal cords,” Evan told Lucas, his voice another low rumble next to Lucas’s ear. “And then...insert it...just like that...” he finished in a rough whisper.

And then Lucas couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, when Evan dropped his hands to Lucas’s waist, squeezing slightly, bringing their bodies into closer contact. Lucas swallowed, knowing what Evan was doing, and he turned his head to tell him no.

“Why are you fighting this?” Evan whispered, warm breath on Lucas’s face an instant before Evan’s lips brushed Lucas’s own.

Deep down Lucas couldn’t deny that he wanted this, wanted Evan, until the remembered pain of losing Ryan flooded through him at the touch of Evan’s lips. And he pushed away, Evan stumbling backwards.

He practically ran from Jeff's office, throwing open the door, startling Tom, sitting on the couch, the only one left in the common room. He saw Tom's brow furrow, heard Evan calling his name, but he didn't stop, striding over to the fire pole and sliding down.

His breath hitching in his chest, Lucas walked out of the front of the station into the sunshine and in one fluid move, turned and slammed his fist into the bay door.

* * * *

Later the next night, Lucas was still nursing sore knuckles as he sat in his living room, beer in hand, watching the rain fall outside, thinking about everything and nothing, wishing it was more of the latter.

A knock at his door roused him from his musings and he set his beer aside, rising to answer it – and was startled to see Evan standing on the other side when he opened it.

“How did you know – ?”

“Tom told me where you lived. Can I come in?”

Lucas blew out a breath, hesitating, before reluctantly letting Evan inside.

“What do you want, Evan?” Lucas asked wearily, shutting the door.

Evan turned toward him, looking unsure, running a hand through his rain damp hair. “Who's Ryan?” he finally asked, quietly. “Tom said I needed to ask you about him. That it would explain things.”

Taken aback by the unexpected question, Lucas could only stare at Evan for a long moment. An internal decision made, that it was time Evan *did* know, so he'd stop pursuing him, Lucas walked past Evan and picked up a photograph from the end table.

He stared at Ryan's smiling face for a long time before walking over to the window, looking out at the rain, his back to Evan.

“Ryan and I – we loved each other,” Lucas started, still not looking at Evan, voice low. “We were together for almost three years. He worked at the station, on the engine with me. Things were great, they were perfect. He moved in with me here six months before – before it happened.” Lucas paused, taking a deep breath.

“We got a call for a warehouse fire this time last year,” Lucas continued. “Three alarm, close by the station; we were the first company there. Ryan and I were each on an inch and a half hose, Ryan in the lead. We were pretty deep inside the building when my air tank alarm went off. Someone had screwed up that afternoon and hadn’t checked them. The other companies hadn’t gotten there yet and I didn’t want to leave Ryan alone.” Again Lucas paused, swallowing past the lump in his throat and felt the first, silent tear slip free.

“But Ryan was yelling at me, that I wouldn’t be any good if I couldn’t breathe and to get out,” Lucas went on, his voice breaking. “I had just cleared the doors when the explosion tore the building apart. I felt the heat on my back before I was lifted up off my feet and thrown 20 feet. I tried to get back in the building, but the guys held me back.” Lucas’s throat worked convulsively. “Ryan was gone and there was nothing I could do,” he finished, pain and loss coloring every word.

He turned now to face Evan, not bothering to wipe away his tear tracks. “I can’t put myself through that again, Evan. What we do, it’s too fucking dangerous. I learned that the hard way, and I will NEVER go through that again. Losing Ryan, it damn near killed me. So please, just let this go,” he pleaded. “I won’t let myself fall for you. I *can* ’t.”

“Lucas – “ Evan took a step forward, his own eyes bright with moisture.

Lucas shook his head. “No. Please, Evan, just go. Please.”

The only sound in the apartment was the rain hitting the window as the two men regarded each other silently, hurt and pain radiating off of one, sympathy and compassion from the other, until Evan turned and wordlessly left Lucas alone in his apartment, holding Ryan’s photo to his chest.

* * * *

The morning of his next shift, Lucas cornered Tom in the locker room as his friend was putting on his uniform. Ignoring Kyle, who was at his own locker, Lucas walked straight up to Tom and jabbed a finger into his chest.

“You sent him over to my apartment? I should kick your ass,” Lucas snapped, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Kyle turn his head sharply, then wisely leave the room.

“Luke, I – “ Tom started, trying to explain.

“ – but I won’t,” Lucas finished.

“You...won’t?”

Lucas sat down heavily on the bench next to his friend. “No. I was handling this whole situation badly. It was time Evan knew.”

“So you guys talked?” Tom asked hopefully.

“Not really. He asked who Ryan was. I told him who he was and about what happened last year...and then I asked him to go.”

Tom sighed. “I was hoping he might be able to convince you to put the past behind you and give this thing a shot between the two of you.”

“I know you were,” Lucas answered, standing. “But it’s just not gonna happen, Tom.”

* * * *

The station alarm sounded at 5:12 am the next morning, jolting the crew from their sleep. As Lucas threw back the blankets on his bed the dispatcher’s voice came over the loudspeaker – four alarm structure fire at a factory across town, in Station 51’s jurisdiction. This was the biggest run they’d had in a week and Lucas could already feel the adrenaline start to pump through his body as he jammed his feet into his boots and pulled up his turnout pants, slipping the suspenders over his shoulders.

Evan was getting ready, too, standing at the side of his bunk, across from Lucas's. This was the closest proximity they'd been to one another since the start of shift yesterday morning. Evan had been keeping his distance from Lucas, though Lucas could tell it was hard for the young man to do so, and he tried to convince himself that he was grateful to Evan for respecting his wishes.

Lucas turned to make his way to the fire pole, but Evan caught his elbow.

"Hey. Be careful." Evan said earnestly, then moved past Lucas to the pole before Lucas could even respond.

* * * *

The fire lit up the early morning sky, shooting flames and smoke into the air as Station 127 approached the chaos, sirens blaring. Four full companies of firemen were pouring out of their vehicles, laying hose as the Fire Chief shouted instructions to each station captain over the walkie-talkie.

The factory night shift employees were streaming out of the burning building, covered in soot, coughing, rubbing at their eyes. Lucas watched as Evan and Alix immediately sprinted over to help them, along with the other paramedics at the scene.

"Kent! Taylor!" Jeff shouted. "Two inch and a half – north side! Go!"

"Right, Cap!" they chorused as they strapped on their air tanks and slipped their masks over their faces, seating their helmets tight on their heads. Then they were grabbing the requested hose off the rear of the engine as Kyle worked quickly to get the water flowing. They could see Daniel, Toby and Shawn getting the ladder truck in place, raising the snorkel to the level of the second floor of the factory.

Yards of hose trailing behind them, Lucas and Tom ran toward the north side of the building and in through the door next to the loading docks. The wall of heat slammed into them first, brilliant red-orange flames so bright they had to squint, devouring everything in its path.

Tom and Lucas turned their hoses on as flaming debris showered down around them, pallets of material bursting into flames, toppling over. Tom stood on Lucas's right, four or five steps ahead of him, spraying gallons upon gallons of water on the fire, trying desperately to beat it back, get it under control.

Lucas was sweating in his heavy turnout gear, breathing harshly inside his air mask, eyes sweeping everywhere at once, making sure the fire wasn't wrapping around behind them when he heard it – an ominous groaning noise from directly above him and Tom.

Looking up, Lucas felt his heart slam against his chest – the support beams were on fire. And as he looked he saw the one above them snap. There could be only moments before it crashed down upon them.

"TOM!" Lucas screamed, even though he knew it was practically useless, his voice not carrying from behind his mask and over the sound of the fire to the other man.

He tried to reach Tom, tried to take those five steps to push his friend out of danger, but he only managed to take two before the beam broke away, falling from the ceiling and slamming into them both.

Lucas cried out as the heavy wood struck him on his right shoulder, driving him to the concrete floor but not pinning him. He landed chest down on his hose, driving the breath from him for a moment before he was rolling away from the flaming beam.

"TOM!" Lucas screamed again, still on the floor, eyes searching wildly for his friend as the fire surged up around them.

What he saw terrified him – Tom, unmoving, lying face down, pinned fully underneath the beam that was still on fire.

"Tom!" Lucas's gloved hand immediately came up to slap his personal alarm that was clipped to the strap of his air tank, activating the device, sending a signal out to Kyle at the engine, letting him know that Lucas was in trouble.

Then, shoulder screaming in protest, Lucas lifted up his hose and turned it on the beam, and Tom, praying that Tom's turnout gear was still protecting him from the flames.

The last of the fire had just gone out from the beam when movement from his right caught Lucas's attention. It was Toby and four guys from Station 51, running full tilt into the building. Lucas snapped off his hose as they approached, dropping it to the floor, struggling to get to his knees, his left hand clutching his right arm and shoulder.

"Tom's pinned!" Lucas yelled as Toby reached his side, helping him stand.

Three of the guys from 51 immediately started lifting the heavy wood from Tom while the other picked up Lucas's discarded hose, turning it on, pushing the flames back.

Toby got Lucas to his feet then rushed over to pull Tom out once the beam was lifted up high enough.

"We need a backboard!" Lucas yelled to Toby, dropping back down to the floor to check on Tom's condition.

"I'm on it!" Toby shouted back, sprinting back out of the building.

Another of Station 51's men was able to get Tom's hose under control, which was still turned on, whipping around wildly on the floor, and turned it on the flames. A pallet of material exploded to their left and Lucas instinctively covered Tom's prone body with his own, protecting his injured friend as burning debris rained down.

Just over a minute later Toby returned with the backboard, and as Lucas watched, Tom was transferred to it, face down, because of the air tank on his back.

Throughout the process Tom remained unmoving, eyes closed, breathing shallowly, and Lucas desperately wanted his friend out of this fiery hell hole as quick as possible.

"Okay, let's move!" Toby yelled once Tom was secured to the backboard, and he and two of 51's men lifted the board and started moving out of the building, Lucas trailing behind, his right arm held tight against his body.

As they got closer to the door, Lucas could see Evan and Alix waiting just outside with a stretcher, their expressions tight and concerned.

The minute Lucas cleared the doorway he was throwing off his helmet, pulling off his air mask as Tom was loaded onto the gurney.

“Beam came down on both of us!” Lucas called to Evan and Alix as the two of them started quickly rolling the stretcher toward the ambulance. “Tom was pinned! He hasn’t moved or opened his eyes!”

Evan nodded. “Let’s get this gear off of him!” he ordered as they came to a stop in front of the bus, and Tom’s helmet, air mask and tank were carefully removed by Toby.

“Let’s roll him,” Alix said. “I’ve got his neck.”

Evan and Alix carefully rolled Tom from his side onto his back and the paramedics went into action, Toby and Lucas standing by helplessly. Alix started putting a C-Collar on Tom as Evan unbuckled Tom’s turnout coat and immediately put his stethoscope to Tom’s chest.

“Pupils are equal and reactive,” Alix called out, moving then to check Tom’s leg, which was lying at a strange angle. “Compound fracture of the left femur!”

Evan shook his head. “I’ve got decreased breath sounds on the right.”

“Dammit,” Lucas swore, knowing that was a sure sign of a broken rib that had punctured a lung.

Alix immediately fastened a blood pressure cuff on Tom’s arm. “BP’s falling!”

“Shit! Tension pneumo – he’s gonna go into respiratory failure if we don’t decompress.”

“Get him on the bus, right now,” Alix ordered, opening the ambulance doors, and Toby helped Evan get the stretcher inside, Evan remaining next to Tom.

“Get an IV going!” Alix told Evan as she closed the doors. “Luke? What’s wrong with your arm?”

“What?” Lucas tore his eyes away from the ambulance. “Nothing. Don’t worry about me. Take care of Tom.”

“Cut the crap and get in the bus. I don’t have time to argue with you,” Alix said sharply, moving toward the driver’s door.

“Go,” Toby told Lucas. “I’ll tell Cap what’s going on.”

Lucas nodded and climbed into the passenger seat of the ambulance for the longest six minute ride he could ever remember. He could hear Evan on the radio to Angel of Mercy hospital, calling in Tom's condition, which was deteriorating. They needed to get a chest tube in him immediately.

Alix pulled into the ER bay at the hospital with a rush of lights and sirens where one of the ER doctors and a nurse were waiting. Evan and the doctor got the stretcher out of the ambulance and disappeared quickly inside the hospital and down a hallway.

"Hey," Alix said gently, placing a hand on Lucas's left arm. "Let's get you looked at, okay?"

But Lucas remained rooted to the spot, staring down the hallway where Tom had been taken.

"He's in good hands, Luke."

Lucas turned his head at his own words echoing back at him and Alix gave him a small smile.

"I need to call Susie," Lucas said slowly.

Alix nodded. "Okay, let's do that first," she answered and Lucas let himself be led toward the nurse's station, to a phone call he dreaded having to make.

* * * *

A short while later Lucas emerged from the exam room, his turnout coat over his left arm, his right arm in a sling. Nothing broken, the doctor had told him, just a wrenched shoulder and some deep muscle bruising. He'd be out of commission for a couple of days while everything healed.

As he stepped out Alix was walking past and she stopped when she saw him.

"How's Tom?" Lucas asked without preamble.

Alix sighed. "He's in surgery. His lung's pretty bad and his spleen may have been nicked by one of the broken ribs as well. He's got some internal bleeding. They're setting his leg, too. It'll be awhile before we know anything."

Lucas ran a hand over his face. "Dammit."

“I’m on my way to get coffee. Want some?”

“No. Thanks, Alix.”

“Okay. I’ll be back in a bit. Susie’s here,” she told him, before moving away.

Lucas turned his head and spotted Tom’s wife, Susie, sitting by herself in a chair down the hallway, just past the nurse’s station, where Evan was filling out his paperwork on the run. As Lucas got closer he could see that Susie was crying softly, wiping at her eyes.

He stopped walking when he got next to Evan, swallowing deeply as he looked at Susie. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Evan turn to him, then to also look at Susie, looking small and scared in the hard plastic chair, waiting anxiously for word on her husband. The two men regarded her silently for a moment before Lucas turned to Evan.

“*Now* do you understand?” Lucas asked, voice rough, imploring.

He went to Susie then, going down on his knees next to her chair and she wrapped her arms around Lucas’s neck, burying her face in his shoulder. He held her tight, as she had done for him a year ago, turning his head to look at Evan, his gaze steady and unwavering until Evan had to look away.

* * * *

Three hours later Lucas lowered himself down onto his sofa, emotionally and physically exhausted. He’d taken a shower as soon as he’d gotten home from the hospital, washing off the soot and grime from the fire, the hot water helping to ease the ache in his arm and shoulder.

He closed his eyes and blew out a long breath, willing himself to relax from the stress of the early morning hours. He’d stayed with Susie until both her parents and Tom’s had arrived, and word had come down about his friend’s condition.

Thankfully, Tom’s surgery went well. They’d stopped the internal bleeding and luckily his spleen had not been damaged after all. The chest tube that had been inserted was working to help repair Tom’s lung and

his broken leg had been set and cast. Tom would be in the hospital for awhile and have quite a recovery period ahead of him, but he *would* recover, and that was the most important thing.

A soft knock on his door roused Lucas from the doze he'd slipped into, and he pushed himself up wearily from the couch with the arm not in the sling and went to answer it. And immediately wished he hadn't when he saw Evan standing in the hallway as he opened the door.

For an instant Lucas thought about shutting the door; he was too exhausted to deal with the younger man right now, but one look at Evan, who looked as tired as he was, made him step back and let him inside.

Lucas remained silent as they walked into his living room, waiting for Evan to tell him why he was there.

"I need to know something," Evan said quietly.

"What is it?"

Evan took a breath. "If you can look me in the eye and tell me you don't feel anything for me, I'll turn around and leave right now and I'll never bother you again."

Lucas shook his head, angry, exasperated. "Did you *not* understand the point I was trying to make at the hospital? That was me, sitting in a chair like that last year, but my outcome was the complete opposite of Susie's. She gets to take Tom home in a few weeks. I got to go to a funeral instead." Lucas paused, drawing in a shaky breath. "They say it's hardest on those left behind. And it's true. I know that first hand now and I never want to go through it again. But more than that..." Lucas's voice softened. "I never want *you* to go through it."

Evan took a step toward Lucas, less than an arm's length away now. "Lucas, please...stop pushing me away, telling yourself it's what's best for me. I *know* what's best for me and it's standing right in front of me."

Evan's next words were soft and slow. "I'm falling in love with you."

Lucas shook his head sharply, trying to take a step back, but Evan caught his left arm. "Evan, don't. I can't – I can't do this..."

“Yes, you *can*. I know you’re scared. I know our lives are dangerous, but I can’t change that. It’s what we do. It’s who we are.”

Evan rubbed his thumb gently against the skin of Lucas’s arm. “I can’t even imagine what it would be like to lose someone I loved as much as you loved Ryan. But have you ever stopped to think that either of us could be killed simply crossing the street? You can’t let your fear hold you back from happiness. Life’s about risks and taking chances. Otherwise it’s not worth living. So take a chance, Lucas. Take a chance on us...”

Then Evan was closing the distance, tilting his head down, pressing his lips softly, hesitantly, against Lucas’s.

At that first touch, that first taste of Evan, the younger man’s words echoing in his head, Lucas gave up the battle; tired of fighting what he knew in his heart was right. He didn’t try and stop the soft sound of surrender he made as he closed his eyes, parting his lips under Evan’s, his body swaying toward the taller man.

One of Evan’s arms came around his waist, strong and sure, while his other hand rose up to cradle the back of Lucas’s head. And as Evan slipped his tongue inside Lucas’s mouth, releasing a quiet moan, Lucas was never gladder that he had denied Evan the kiss he’d wanted the night they first met. That was the wrong time, the wrong situation, and he’d been with Evan that night for the wrong reasons.

But now...*now* was the right time. When the kiss truly meant something important between them, a commitment, and it was all the more sweeter and beautiful because of it.

Lucas’s left hand went to the small of Evan’s back, slipping up underneath Evan’s t-shirt to press against his warm skin, as he tilted his head, deepening the kiss.

The kiss went on, slow and deep and so fucking perfect that Lucas just let himself drown in the sensations Evan was creating inside him. And with the soft noises Evan was making, he knew he was having the same effect on the other man as well.

The hand wrapped around Lucas’s waist eventually drifted down to cup his ass through the gray sweatpants he was wearing, pulling his body tighter against Evan’s, his right arm now trapped firmly

between them in the sling. And when the younger man started a slow grind of his groin against Lucas's, Lucas couldn't help groaning into the kiss, pushing his tongue against Evan's a bit harder.

They remained that way for long minutes, rocking against each other, feeling themselves harden as the kiss grew more intense, until Lucas could feel small tremors racing underneath Evan's skin.

When Evan pulled back from the kiss Lucas whined in the back of his throat. "Don't – don't stop..." he panted, opening his eyes to see Evan's glassy, desire-filled ones looking back at him, Evan's lips puffy and shiny.

"You taste so good," Evan moaned. "Don't wanna stop...but I'm shakin' so bad I'm gonna fall down."

Lucas smiled and hooked the fingers of his left hand in the waistband of Evan's jeans. "C'mon then," he said, tugging Evan forward as he walked backwards the few steps to his couch. He dropped down onto the cushions and expected Evan to sit next to him, but instead Evan went to his knees in front of him, running his large hands up Lucas's legs, spreading them apart, moving between them.

"Luke..." he breathed, leaning in to capture Lucas's mouth once more, and Lucas's expression went soft at Evan's first use of his nickname. How perfect it sounded falling from the younger man's lips.

Lucas let his eyes fall closed again, kissing Evan deeply, fingers tangled in Evan's long hair as Evan's hands slid further up his legs until his thumbs were rubbing the hard ridge of Lucas's cock.

"Wanna taste more of you," Evan murmured into the kiss, nipping at Lucas's bottom lip.

"God...yeah..." Lucas lifted his hips up slightly and Evan tugged down his boxers and sweatpants, slipping them off Lucas's feet, tossing them somewhere behind him.

Again Evan ran his hands up Lucas's legs, bare this time, licking and kissing his way up Lucas's left thigh.

"Mmm....yeah," Lucas encouraged him, his fingers threading through Evan's soft hair.

And then Evan was cupping Lucas's heavy balls, licking a wet stripe up the underside of Lucas's hard cock at the same time and Lucas dropped his head back against the couch at the dual sensations.

Then he was groaning deep in his throat, picking his head back up as Evan's hot, wet mouth slid down over his cock, sucking at the head, lapping at the moisture leaking from the tip.

Evan sank lower then, taking in Lucas's hard length until Lucas felt the head of his cock bump the back of Evan's throat. Evan swallowed then, pulling another moan from Lucas before bobbing his head up and down smoothly and quickly, hollowing his cheeks as he sucked Lucas off.

"Feels so fucking good..." Lucas panted as Evan set about pulling his orgasm out of him in record time.

Evan's hand began fondling Lucas's balls again and Lucas spread his legs wider, tilting his hips up.

"Just – just a little more," Lucas breathed, biting his lip as he felt his climax start deep inside. "God, almost there..."

He couldn't stop his hips pumping upward, and Evan let him, once, twice, and then Evan was humming around his cock as it slid in and out of his mouth, the vibrations the last push Lucas needed.

He came with a sharp cry of Evan's name, eyes squeezing shut as his cock pulsed down Evan's throat, over and over, feeling Evan swallow everything he had to give until he was spent, sagging back against the couch, breathing harshly.

Lucas felt his cock slip from between Evan's lips and then the younger man was rising up, licking at Lucas's bottom lip.

"You taste fucking amazing...you *sound* fucking amazing when you come. I – " Evan's breath stuttered and Lucas realized he was stroking himself through his jeans.

"Evan, wait, wait," Lucas breathed, tugging at Evan's arm, nipping back at Evan's lips. "Wanna taste you, too..."

Evan groaned, his eyes dark with arousal, plundering Lucas's mouth hard and fast before pulling back, hands fumbling with his zipper. Lucas leaned in to help, suddenly irritated at having his right arm incapacitated and impatiently pulled at the strap of his sling, getting it over his head and tossing the material away.

Evan opened his mouth to protest, but what came out was a moan instead as Lucas got his hand inside Evan's jeans and stroked him firmly through his boxers.

"C'mon, Evan, get 'em off...let me touch you..."

Jeans, boxers, shoes, socks and even the t-shirt were quickly discarded and then Evan was standing gloriously naked in front of Lucas, his stiff cock standing out from his body, the head red and wet with precome.

Lucas wasted no time sliding to the edge of the couch where he wrapped his left hand around Evan's cock, and slipped his mouth down over the head.

Evan's taste exploded across his tongue – salty, bitter and musky – and he tongued at the slit, drawing more of the clear fluid out to swallow down. He heard Evan suck in a breath and one of his large hands settled on Lucas's head, fingers sliding through the short strands of his hair, while the other gripped his left shoulder.

Lucas opened his mouth wider and took in as much of Evan's cock as he could, a heavy weight against his tongue, steel wrapped in silk. He started sucking, his hand stroking at the same time as he bobbed his head, bringing Evan ever closer to his orgasm.

"Oh god, Luke...not gonna last," Evan warned him with a groan. "So close already...god, your mouth...don't stop, don't stop," he rambled.

And Lucas didn't, pressing his tongue firmly against the bundle of nerves on the underside of Evan's cock, and the younger man jerked at the sensation, a burst of precome Lucas's only warning before Evan was coming.

"Luke!" Evan cried out, fingers tightening in Lucas's hair as he climaxed, hips shuddering.

Lucas swallowed down Evan's release, hot bursts that coated his tongue and throat, Evan's taste intoxicating.

He released Evan's cock as the younger man's orgasm subsided and Evan sagged forward, collapsing onto the couch next to Lucas, flushed and smiling gently.

Lucas smiled as well, then leaned in to kiss Evan, long and slow, bringing them both back down until they drew apart, resting their foreheads together.

“I’m falling in love with you, too,” Lucas whispered.

* * * *

Later, tangled naked together underneath the sheets of Lucas’s bed, the late morning sun peeking in through the blinds, Lucas spoke the words that had been lying heavily on his mind, a confession he felt he needed to make.

“I need to apologize,” he began, and Evan shifted, raising himself up to look at Lucas, confusion on his face.

“For what?”

“The night we met, at the bar...it was the one year anniversary of Ryan’s death.”

Evan’s eyes went soft and he ran his fingers through Lucas’s short hair. “Ah, Luke...”

“I was so lonely and you were there and you were interested...” Lucas said, the words tumbling out of him.

“Shhh...Luke...” Evan tried to quiet him, but Lucas needed to get this out.

“I missed Ryan so damn much and I wanted to use you as a substitute, to pretend...” He swallowed, reaching to rub his thumb across Evan’s cheekbone. “It was wrong. I never should’ve...used you like that, and I’m sorry.”

Evan shook his head slowly, a soft smile on his face as he turned and kissed Lucas’s palm. “It’s okay, Luke. You don’t have to apologize. I understand why you did it, and if the situation had been reversed I may have done the same thing. I don’t care what the circumstances were that brought us together. Just that they did. We’re here now...and that’s all that matters.”

And as Evan leaned in to capture his mouth for a long, sweet kiss, vanquishing his worry, Lucas had to agree.

THREE WEEKS LATER

The morning was clear and bright, not a cloud in the sky, the sun shining down on the crew of Station 127 as they brandished sponges and hoses and towels – washing and polishing the engine and the ambulance until the red metal gleamed.

Lucas, Kyle, Shawn and Daniel were washing the engine while Toby helped out Alix and Evan with the bus, easy laughter and taunts flowing between everyone, as the truck guys had handed the engine guys their asses during the basketball game a short while earlier. And why? --because the truck guys had drafted 6' 4" Evan Singer to their team. Lucas would've protested the advantage, but it gave him an opportunity to manhandle his lover as he guarded him during the game, so he wasn't complaining.

In fact, he wasn't complaining about life in general these days. Tom's recovery was going better than his doctor had hoped, and he should be back at work in another four weeks. Lucas had been by the house several times in the last three weeks to see his friend, and to tell him that he and Evan were together now. To say that Tom was happy at the news was an understatement.

Things were great between Evan and him, too. As with any new relationship, they couldn't get enough of one another, spending their days off together, whenever Lucas wasn't in class.

They started dating, as backward as that may have been, considering how their relationship started, but it was working for them and that's all that mattered. They went out to dinner, caught a Yankees game when the Rangers were in town, went to the movies and had a picnic in Central Park. They were even planning on taking vacation time together next month to visit San Antonio. But most of all, they talked. Some nights they didn't even leave the apartment, Lucas's head in Evan's lap on the couch – just talking, getting to really know one another. And being woken up to soft, lazy kisses, then making love to Evan, felt more amazing each and every time.

He hadn't laughed or smiled so often in a long time, and he was thankful every day that Evan had pushed past his defenses and hadn't given up on him. He would always care for Ryan and he'd never forget him, but Evan understood that, and Lucas hoped that Ryan was smiling down on him and his newfound happiness.

A wet sponge smacking into Lucas's back pulled him from his thoughts and he whirled around to see Evan laughing, a smile on his face, his dimples flashing.

"Oh, you think that's funny, do you?" Lucas called over, swinging around the reel line he'd been using on the engine's tires, intending to soak the young medic, but at the last second Evan dodged, pulling an unsuspecting Alix in front of him, and she caught the full force of the spray instead.

Sputtering indignantly as the rest of the guys laughed, Alix wasted no time in throwing her own sponge at Evan, catching him on the side of his head. This time it was Lucas's turn to laugh as the soap suds slid down Evan's face.

Before an all out water war could get started, the station alarm sounded; it was instantly all business with the crew. The sponges, buckets and towels were quickly stowed away inside the apparatus room as they all made their way to the equipment room to pull on their gear. They were joined by Jeff and Haley Bullock, who had transferred over from second shift to take Tom's place while he was recovering.

The dispatcher's voice came over the loudspeaker – two alarm structure fire at a manufacturing facility in Station 99's jurisdiction - they were requesting assistance.

They rolled up onto the scene and quickly assessed the situation, with Jeff on the walkie-talkie to 99's captain. Thick, black, acrid smoke was streaming out of the front of the two-story building where 99's men were pouring water in, though the flames were difficult to see.

Kyle immediately went to work hooking up the hydrant to the engine as Jeff called out orders to everyone else.

"Bullock! Grab an inch and a half and assist 99 on the west side!"

“Right, Cap!” Haley answered, quickly hooking the hose line over her shoulder and moving toward the building.

“Sanders! Larson! Get that ladder up to the roof!”

“On it, Cap!” Shawn called back and he and Toby started getting the ladder into position.

“Taylor! Hoffmann! Grab the chainsaw and the K-12 and get on the roof; we need to ventilate. 99 can’t see what they’re doing. Watch yourselves up there.”

“Got it, Cap!” Lucas replied, and he and Daniel pulled on their air masks then retrieved both saws from the compartment on the engine.

Moments later they were climbing up the ladder and onto the roof, treading carefully. They spaced themselves apart, then fired up the saws and went to work cutting holes to allow the smoke to escape. Then Station 99 could advance into the building with their hoses and clearer visibility.

Minutes later both Lucas and Daniel had their first holes cut open, and the thick smoke started pouring out as they moved to cut another two holes further in on the roof.

It happened without warning.

One second Lucas was using the chainsaw, and the next the roof under him gave way and he plummeted down into the building.

For a brief second Lucas couldn’t comprehend that he was falling, until his body slammed into the razor sharp edge of a large piece of machinery. He cried out as he felt the metal pierce through his turnout pants, slicing open his skin, and agonizing pain shot through his right leg.

He bounced off the machinery, which slowed his fall but didn’t stop it, next impacting a large stack of wooden pallets, the top two of which crushed under the combined weight of Lucas and his heavy air tank. The stack of pallets toppled over, bringing Lucas with it, tossing him the remainder of the way to the cement floor.

Lucas hit hard, landing awkwardly on his air tank, driving the breath from his lungs as the pallets tumbled down upon him. He struggled to catch his breath, suddenly realizing he was no longer breathing in clean oxygen, but the thick smoke instead. That could only mean that either his air hose had been pierced or he had lost the positive seal on his mask.

He struggled to move under the weight of the wooden pallets, but his limbs wouldn't cooperate, his right leg hurting so bad it must be broken, though he could feel wetness coating his thigh. His vision started to swim with the lack of clean air to breathe, and even with the heat of the fire around him he started to grow cold.

Above the cracking and snapping of the flames, Lucas could vaguely make out voices shouting and he tried to call out, let them know where he was, but he couldn't draw enough breath, feeling himself on the verge of unconsciousness.

Then the voices were there, right above him, and hands started pulling away pieces of the pallets and roof debris that were on top of him, uncovering him moments later, and he found himself looking up into the concerned faces of Shawn, Toby and Daniel from behind their air masks.

"Lucas!" Shawn yelled. "God, Luke, hang on. We're gonna get you outta here."

"Okay, let's lift him!" Toby called and Lucas felt two pairs of hands hook under his shoulders and legs and raise him up quickly but carefully, while another set of hands supported his neck.

He was on a backboard seconds later, lying on his side, being carried through the smoke and flames and out into the bright sunshine where he was placed on a stretcher.

Someone was yelling to get his gear off of him, his body feeling like a rag doll as his helmet, mask and tank were removed and he was rolled carefully onto his back. He struggled to draw a breath of the fresh air, his lungs burning from inhaling the hot, acrid smoke.

"Lucas!" Evan's face swam into view above his, and he blinked heavily, starting to feel disconnected from his body, that was growing steadily colder.

“Hang on, Luke,” Evan told him, slipping an oxygen mask over his face. “Breathe for me, c’mon...” he pleaded, snapping open Lucas’s turnout coat and placing his stethoscope to Lucas’s chest.

“Where the hell is all this blood coming from?” Alix called out, a tinge of panic in her voice. “Evan, help me get his boots and pants off!”

Evan moved out of Lucas’s field of vision and he felt his boots removed and his turnout pants tugged off.

“Shit! Evan!”

“Oh god dammit, it’s his femoral artery! Alix, get the pressure dressing, *now*! He’s bleeding out!”

Lucas heard all of this as if from a great distance, his vision going dark around the edges, and he felt himself start to drift. He was so tired...

“Stay with me, Luke, stay with me!” Evan’s scared voice reached his ears.

Lucas tried to reach for Evan, to say his name, but his battered body wouldn’t obey him, giving in to the darkness instead...

“We’re losing him!”

“NO!”

* * * *

Consciousness returned slowly and painfully to Lucas. Everything hurt – his head, his back, his chest, every muscle in his body – but mainly his right leg.

His eyes blinked open slowly, a bit at a time, and things gradually came into focus. After a moment of disorientation he realized he was lying on his back in a hospital bed, an IV in his left arm. He felt the oxygen cannula in his nose and took a slow, experimental deep breath, grateful to find he could do so again. Swallowing was still somewhat painful, though; his throat was raw from inhaling the hot smoke for too long a period of time. He was covered with a blanket from his waist down, but he could feel that his right thigh was swathed in thick bandages.

Thankful that he was still in one piece, he allowed himself a small smile and turned his head to the side – to find an empty chair.

No Evan.

It took a moment to register that his lover wasn't there, and when it did the smile slid from Lucas's face. He'd just naturally assumed that Evan would be there, waiting for him to wake up, and it hit him like a punch to the gut that he wasn't.

And his mind went instantly, immediately someplace it shouldn't have. A knee-jerk emotional reaction – Evan had now experienced it for himself, to nearly lose someone to the job -- and he couldn't handle it. He was running, like Lucas had. That bastard. He'd made Lucas take the chance, take the risk, for love. To open his heart again. Only for Evan to trample all over it. It was hard enough losing Ryan, but now Evan, too? How *dare* he?

Deep down he knew it was stupid and irrational to be thinking like this. There could be a million perfectly valid reasons why Evan wasn't here, but at the moment the logical part of his brain was being soundly beaten down by the stronger emotional part.

Hot, angry tears threatened at his train of thought, but before one could fall, the door to his room opened and Evan was struggling to get through the opening, with a teddy bear nearly as tall as he was. His eyes slid over to the bed and widened the moment he saw Lucas looking back.

"Luke!" A huge, relieved smile lit up Evan's face and he dropped the stuffed animal, hurrying over to the side of the bed where he grasped Lucas's hand. "God, you're awake!"

Lucas blinked furiously; with his emotions swinging so swiftly from one end of the spectrum to the other in the matter of a few minutes, he was having trouble trying to process the fact that Evan was actually standing next to his bed.

"You – you're here," Lucas whispered hoarsely, his voice like sandpaper.

Evan cocked his head, regarding Lucas quizzically. "Well, yeah. Where else would I be?" he asked with a smile.

When Lucas remained silent he could almost see the light bulb go on over Evan's head, that he knew what Lucas had assumed, and he sat down on the edge of the bed, running a hand through Lucas's hair.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't terrified that I was going to lose you right then and there," Evan confessed softly. "Shit, Luke, you *did* die. You flatlined in the bus before we got here." He placed his hand on Lucas's chest. "I had to – to..." He paused, inhaling raggedly, and Lucas covered his hand with his own.

Evan swallowed then captured Lucas with his warm, hazel eyes. "I'm not going anywhere, Luke. I love you and I'm not going anywhere."

"Love you, too," Lucas whispered. "I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions. When I opened my eyes and you weren't there – "

Evan shook his head. "Don't apologize. I know how that must've looked to you and I'm sorry I wasn't here when you woke up."

"I wouldn't have woken up at all if it wasn't for you. You saved my life."

Evan tapped a finger on Lucas's chest. "Don't make me do it again, you hear me? No more high-wire acts without a net or at least without someone there to catch you."

Lucas's tone was light, but his eyes were serious. "What about you? You want the job? Will you catch me?"

Evan's soft smile went straight to Lucas's heart as the younger man leaned in for a kiss.

"Always, Luke. Always."

THE END