



**LOUISA
GOUGH**

CHANGING SPOTS

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He could feel the warmth radiating off of Jai as the other man leaned in close again. “So where is she coming from, then?”

Beau took a deep breath and tried to gather his thoughts. “She’s driving up from Anaheim. But you know how traffic is.”

“If the traffic is keeping her late, I think she’d understand if you stopped waiting down here.” Those fingers just barely brushed against his hand again. “Assuming she’s coming at all.”

Beau tilted his head. “You think my wife stood me up?”

“I don’t think a man looks that nervous waiting for his wife.”

Beau ducked his head to avoid Jai’s direct gaze. “You’ve got me there. I am married, but I’m not waiting for her.”

“Then what are you waiting for, Beau?”

“One of the predators you mentioned before.”

“He’s already found you...”

ALSO BY LOUISA GOUGH

The Alpha's Pet

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CHANGING SPOTS
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CHAPTER 1

Beau Southall nervously sipped from his rum and Coke, doing his best to disguise the fact that he was nervous at all. He tried to keep his attention on the bar, tried to play it cool, but every time he caught movement from the corner of his eye, he glanced over, wondering if this was it. Which was entirely pointless, because even if the man he was waiting for was sitting right next to him, Beau wouldn't have known. He forced himself to nurse his drink, knowing full well that he didn't want to get drunk or else the whole night would be a wash. Anna had gone to a lot of time and trouble to make it happen, and he didn't want to fuck it up by acting like a dweeb. So he sipped from his glass, letting the ice tap his teeth each time he brought the drink to his mouth.

At least he was standing on familiar ground. He and Anna used

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the Metro Hotel often. The bartender recognized him and always had his drink ready, but never showed any interest in just what Beau and his pretty wife did there once or twice a month. He had a room on the sixth floor, and the key felt heavy in his pocket. This was the first time in almost a year that Anna wasn't waiting for him upstairs, the other key tucked away in her purse. Beau didn't know who had the other key. He didn't even know if he'd find out before he left the bar and took the elevator up. He still wasn't sure how he felt about her absence. They did everything together. That was the deal. That had always been the deal. But she had told him that arrangement wouldn't work this time—since she didn't provide any other information, Beau's imagination had gone wild. Which had no doubt contributed to his nerves.

He took his cell out of his pocket and absently checked his email. He wasn't interested in any work emergencies or the latest gossip from his mother, but he did want to look busy. Like he wasn't waiting, even though he had no other reason to be in that bar. He wondered if anybody ever did anything except wait while they were in a hotel bar. Wait and kill time. He scanned through the messages and then tucked the phone back into his pocket. With nothing to keep his hands busy, he fidgeted with his napkin, pulling at the edges until he had a small pile of napkin scraps. *Okay, Beau, now you're being a dweeb.*

Most of the time, Beau felt like he was walking the fine line. Working as IT support at a call center didn't help his image. Neither did the glasses he had only recently replaced with contacts, nor the haircut that hadn't been updated since high school. But for the past several years his image hadn't mattered. He had Anna, after all.

“Fidgeting like that just begs for attention from all of the

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predators out there,” a deep voice with a faint accent to it rumbled behind him. It sounded amused. Startled, he jerked around to see another man standing there. He had golden-brown skin and shaggy black curls that fell almost to his shoulders. He looked East Indian, though the accent sounded closer to London.

Beau knew he was staring, but he didn't care. The man had to be stared at. Like a work of art. He was beautiful without being feminine. Had Anna chosen this man for him? If she did, she had a remarkable understanding of his preferences. Well, of course she did. What else would he expect from the person who knew him better than anybody?

“It's a nervous habit.” Beau brushed the pieces of napkin away. “I didn't know it'd make me look like prey.”

The man flashed his teeth in a brief grin. “It makes you look nervous, at the very least.” His eyes flicked briefly toward the man on Beau's left before making himself at home on the bar stool to the right. “And what do you have to be nervous about here?”

Beau almost blurted the truth, but remembered the rules of their little game and stopped himself in time. “Good question. That guy over in the corner...” Beau pointed to somebody sporting a black and white Disney T-shirt. “He looks pretty shady, don't you think?”

The stranger turned his head slightly to glance in that direction, keeping his body facing Beau before he turned back to him. “I think you're right.” His tongue darted out briefly, wetting his lips before he leaned in a bit. “I'm sure you intimidated him with your ability to shred paper, though.”

“Yeah, well, I figure if I'm ever cornered in a dark alley I can throw it in his face. Ever been to a New Year's Eve party? Confetti can be very disorienting.” Beau knew he was babbling, but his

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brain didn't seem interested in communicating with his mouth.

The stranger laughed, which could have been humiliating, but it had the warm touch of flirtation to it. Or, at least, it was what Beau thought flirtation might sound like coming from another man.

"I'll keep that in mind the next time I'm cornered in a dark alley." The other man paused a moment as though considering something carefully, then offered his hand. "Jai."

His skin was smooth and warm, his grip firm. Beau shook dozens of hands every day. Thousands of hands in his lifetime. But this one felt different. Like Jai was branding his skin somehow. "Beau. Nice to meet you. What's your poison?"

"Scotch, but I don't know if I want to sit here all night sipping it and anything that doesn't require sipping shouldn't be served at all." Jai smirked slightly, nodding to the rum and Coke. "That looks like a good start for the night, though."

Beau gestured at the bartender. "Two more, please. So, Jai, what brings you to the Metro? Business or pleasure?"

"Pleasure. You?"

"If everything goes well, the same."

As soon as the bartender finished with the two drinks, Jai set a ten down, leaning in toward him again. "Waiting for a woman?"

"Yeah. My wife."

One black brow rose in response to that and the other man couldn't quite hide his amused look. "Really? Never had one of those. Does it take a lot of waiting?"

Beau smiled and made a show of checking his watch. He sincerely hoped this was the man Anna had chosen for him, and not some random stranger, because he was really beginning to enjoy Jai's company. "Well, I have been sitting here for a few years. But you know how women are. They like to keep a guy

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waiting.”

Jai chuckled as he raised his glass to his lips, then took a sip before setting it down again. “That is one thing that men always have going for them, you know. They never make another man wait. Unless, I suppose, a wife is involved.”

“What about you? Are you waiting for anybody?”

“Yes, but no one specific.”

Beau felt a mild twinge of concern at that, but decided to ignore it. “That must be convenient for you.”

“Mm, I don’t know about that. I mean, I could find someone I’d be willing to wait for and maybe he isn’t available.”

“Honestly, I’d find it hard to believe that anything like that has ever happened to you.”

“Stranger things have happened.” Jai paused, then reached out, very lightly skimming his fingers over the back of Beau’s hand. “There are more comfortable places you could wait. It doesn’t look like your wife is coming any time soon.”

He suppressed a shiver at the contact, and his throat tightened. Just enough to make speaking a little more difficult than it should have been. “No, I should probably wait. She’d be pretty upset if she finally showed and I was gone.”

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"Then what are you waiting for, Beau?"

"One of the predators you mentioned before."

"He's already found you."

Beau's heart skipped a beat at the low words. His cock had already been half-erect, but now he was completely hard. It was something about the tone of his voice. It made Beau think of sticky, rich honey. "So what is the more comfortable place you had in mind?"

Jai slid a key out of his pocket, turning it over between his fingers. There was a weight to his gaze as though he knew exactly what effect he'd had on Beau. "I have a room here. I could always jump you in the men's room, but that might get us arrested."

Beau downed the rest of his drink, the rum going directly to his head. Or maybe that was only the sound of Jai's voice. "I think I'll choose a bed over getting arrested any day of the week."

The other man took one last sip of his drink, as though he had all the time in the world, then set the glass down and stepped away from the bar. He didn't turn back toward Beau or check to see if he was following. He simply strode across the bar and back into the hotel. At the elevator, he finally paused, hands loosely clasped behind his back as his eyes watched the numbers light up above the doors.

Beau took the opportunity to study Jai, his gaze sliding from his head to his toes and back up again. The jeans he wore fit snugly, outlining the curve of his ass, and giving Beau some small idea of how muscled his legs were. His shoulders were broad, and his white T-shirt pulled tight against his chest and flat stomach. His clothes were completely inconspicuous and plain, but they couldn't

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hide the fact that Jai looked powerful. In fact, he almost looked like he didn't belong in clothes at all. Beau found himself wondering exactly what Jai did when he wasn't helping married men live their deepest fantasies. Was he a model? He was certainly good-looking enough. Did he spend all of his time in the gym? Or were his muscles the result of an active lifestyle? Did he do manual labor for a living?

The elevator doors opened and Jai held out his hand, indicating Beau should enter first. When the doors swished shut, they were the only ones inside the small car, and Beau became even more aware of Jai's body. He itched to touch him, to run his hand over Jai's chest and shoulders, but something held him back. Some uncertainty at what he was doing there, at what he should be doing.

"Are you shy or just nervous?" Jai asked, breaking the silence.

The other man moved closer to him with a fluid grace, resting a hand against the wall on either side of Beau in the blink of an eye. He was trapped, held captive as Jai leaned in. The stranger didn't move to kiss him, though. Only coming in close to let his lips graze against Beau's ear as he spoke. "I hope you're just nervous, because I don't think I have the patience to coax you out of shyness." He bent his arms, bringing his body in closer until it brushed against the front of Beau's, making him gasp at the unmistakable feel of the other man's arousal. "Though it does make you more tempting."

"Nervous," Beau managed. He had been accused of a great many things, but never shyness. But it wasn't just nerves—though he had no idea if the experience would be anything like his fantasies. Jai overwhelmed him completely. The last person to fill his senses and send his mind spinning was Anna. "I don't think you'll have to coax."

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“Then I won’t.”

With that, Jai drew back from Beau’s ear just far enough to claim his mouth. Beau had thought about this many times before, but hadn’t been prepared for the jolt of hungry awareness triggered by feeling the other man’s stubble and the other flat, hard chest against his own. Jai’s lips were soft against his, but there was little softness in the kiss itself. At the first teasing flicker of the other man’s tongue, Beau parted his lips and welcomed the invasion.

Kissing Jai was nothing like kissing a woman. His brain was busy making all the comparisons, noting all the differences, but his body didn’t care. Not even a little bit. He wrapped an arm around Jai’s shoulders, holding him tightly as their tongues tangled together. The hard line of Jai’s body fit well against his, and he had to admit, it was nice to kiss somebody who was the same height. He dragged his other hand down Jai’s back to rest on his ass, which felt as good as Beau had expected it would. Beau was so caught up in the kiss, he didn’t hear the elevator ding to announce their floor. He would have been happy to stay in the elevator all night, riding it up and down the building while Jai plundered his mouth. But Jai pulled away, and a quick glance over the doors confirmed they were on the sixth floor.

Jai must have looked and found the room before meeting him in the bar, as he went directly to it. He unlocked the door, then held it open, gesturing Beau in first just as he had with the elevators. Beau heard the door click shut and lock behind him, before Jai’s arm slipped around him to rest his hand on his stomach, tugging him back slightly as the other man molded himself to his body. Jai’s other hand came up to start unbuttoning his shirt as his lips brushed light kisses up the back of his neck. When Jai got his shirt open enough, his hand slid inside, rubbing over his chest. His

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fingers slid over one nipple, making the skin contract and Beau inhale through his teeth, before Jai settled on teasing the small nub with tracing small circles.

“I’ve been thinking about how your lips would feel since I first saw you,” Jai purred against the side of his neck.

Beau moaned and tilted his head back, encouraging Jai to continue. He had no intention of remaining the passive partner and simply allowing Jai to do things to his body. He wanted to be active, to participate fully. He wanted to learn Jai’s body, and he wanted to know what his skin smelled like, what it tasted like. He wanted to know the texture of Jai’s body hair against his fingers and tongue. He wanted to feel the weight of Jai’s cock in his palm and against his tongue. But at that moment, he was more than happy to enjoy the warmth of Jai’s mouth on his neck, and the gentle pull of his fingers on his nipples.

He felt Jai pull his arms away briefly. The sound of fabric hitting the floor a moment later told him why. When Jai slid his arms around him again, the T-shirt was gone and he continued unbuttoning Beau’s shirt. His lips slid against the side of his throat again, with the brief tease of teeth and suction to draw the blood to the surface. Once he finished unbuttoning Beau’s shirt, his hands came up to tug it off his shoulders, and Beau helped shrug it off. Then, he could feel warm, bare skin against skin, though it was clear Jai was nowhere near stopping. Now his hands were moving down toward Beau’s jeans.

“But should I work off some of your nerves first?” Jai asked.

“Yes,” Beau breathed as Jai tugged his fly open. As soon as he felt the strong, sure fingers around his cock, his knees went weak. He had no choice but to grip Jai’s shoulder to keep his balance. His grip only tightened when Jai flexed his fingers, squeezing the

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sensitive flesh. His thumb swiped across the head of Beau's cock, wiping the pre-come away from the slit.

There was nothing hurried in Jai's touch. His fingers slid along Beau's cock at a steady pace, gripping him just a bit tighter each time his hand worked down toward those last few sensitive inches. Jai's other hand tugged his jeans and shorts down, so it could gain access to his ass. His hand massaged over it in time with the strokes, exploring, before moving on. The feel of those fingers suddenly teasing against his balls ripped a moan from low in Beau's chest. Jai cradled them in his palm, gently rolling his fingers over them.

Beau sought out Jai's mouth again, desperate to feel the pressure and texture of his lips. Jai immediately responded to the kiss, parting his lips to suck gently on Beau's tongue. His fingers never stopped moving, their careful dance sending sparks of electricity through his stomach and chest. Beau inhaled deeply, and caught the smell of sweat and pre-come and Jai's cologne. He palmed Jai's cock over his pants, sliding the heel of his hand along the other man's denim-clad length.

Jai groaned into the kiss as he pressed harder against Beau's body. His hips gave an involuntary little jerk forward into Beau's touch. Jai's hand worked along Beau's length faster, rolling his palm over his head at the end of each stroke. His fingers glided more easily as his palm spread the pre-come along his shaft. His other hand shifted slightly, still cradling Beau's balls but turning to let his middle finger press behind them, rubbing back and forth at the skin there.

Beau was so on edge he knew he would come if Jai kept that up. Of course, he had every reason to believe he'd be hard again within moments. His heart hammered in his ears, and his skin felt

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flushed and sensitive. Overly sensitive. He broke the kiss, but didn't pull his mouth away from Jai's skin. He skimmed the edge of his jaw, then moved to Jai's neck, using his teeth and lips and tongue. The more warm flesh he tasted, the more he wanted. He pressed his lips to Jai's pulse point and was gratified to realize that his heart raced just as fast as Beau's.

His ministrations were rewarded with another groan from Jai. The other man turned his head slightly, craning his neck to expose more of it to Beau's lips. Perhaps Jai was starting to grow impatient now, as the laziness of his earlier touches was entirely gone. His hand was working quickly, holding his cock in a firm grip as he squeezed gently and slid along Beau's length.

"Come for me." Jai's voice was quiet and breathless, but it was unquestionably an order.

As far as Beau knew, nobody had ever ordered him to come before. He didn't know if it was the sound of Jai's voice or the novelty of the words that triggered his orgasm. Or maybe it was the strong fingers, stroking and pulling, manipulating his flesh with nothing more than promises of what was to come. Whatever it was, it tore through him, lighting his nerves on fire until he burned with pleasure. His cock jerked and he moaned against Jai's taut skin, the sound muffled as string after string of come painted Jai's hand. Jai kept working his hand over him through the orgasm, giving him little encouraging squeezes as if trying to get every drop out of him that he had to give. Finally, it was too much and left him nearly painfully sensitive. His hand touched the back of Jai's, stilling it, and they both nearly collapsed against the nearest wall.

While he leaned there, through heavy-lidded eyes he saw Jai pop open the button on his jeans to give some slight relief to his straining cock. Watching the other man lick his come off of his

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fingers was nearly enough to revive Beau for a second round before he'd caught his breath. Jai's eyes were closed in pleasure as he worked over his hand, catching each sticky drop that had landed there. There was something almost catlike in those careful, savoring motions.

Beau watched until Jai's skin was completely clean, then cupped the back of his head and smashed their lips together. He tasted his own come on Jai's lips and tongue, and that only drove him to deepen the kiss. He ran his fingertips over Jai's smooth, tight skin, and was rewarded with a low moan.

* * *

A woman, who had gone unnoticed in the bar, watched the doors long after the two men had left together, her face impassive. She glanced down at the picture on her table, pushing it back and forth between her index fingers idly. The plan had been to approach him on neutral ground and to at least make an attempt to speak with him. She had followed him to the bar with just that in mind. The fact that he had zeroed in on the other man the moment he'd walked through the doors had complicated matters, though.

After a few moments she slipped the picture back inside of her purse and stood to cross the room to the bartender, a cloud of sweet scented perfume swirling around her.

"Excuse me, sir?" she called.

"Man, what's that you're wearing? You smell like a spice rack."

Her eyes flicked barely to the side, taking in the drunk to her right. He was dressed in a rumpled suit with his tie loosened. Staying at the hotel on business, she guessed, but the way he leered

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at her was hardly business-like.

Through her teeth she said, “It’s rude to sniff strangers.” Her eyes went back to the bartender, following him in annoyance as he seemed to stop at every other person except for her. She raised one hand to get his attention, but he didn’t seem to see it.

“I’m not sniffing, lady. This is, like...bad. I can taste whatever the hell you’re wearing.”

She took a deep breath, letting it out in what bordered on a hiss, then waved to the bartender a second time. Finally, he saw her and gave a nod of acknowledgment. Hopefully that meant he’d be along shortly.

“You smell almost like Christmas or something.”

Slowly, the woman turned her head to see the man nearly touching her as he leaned in to take a whiff. She took a step to the side, eyes narrowing.

“It’s cloves,” she said.

The bartender made his way over, tucking a tip into his pocket. “What can I help you with, miss?”

“The two men who left together earlier. Do you know anything about them?”

The man’s brows drew together in a knot as his eyes darted from the door they’d gone through and back to her. “Guy with the brown hair is a regular,” he said reluctantly. “Never seen the foreign guy, though.”

She opened her mouth to ask her next question when the drunken businessman blurted out, “Why the hell would you be wearing cloves?”

Her tongue ran over her upper teeth slowly, nostrils flaring slightly in annoyance. “It has anesthetic properties,” she bit out, before turning her attention back to the bartender. “All right. What

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does the regular do? That wasn't, I don't know, a drug deal or anything, was it?"

"Anesthetic? What, like you've got a sore knee?"

A low growl vibrated in her throat as her hands curled into fists. "It numbs the nose."

"Why'd you want to do that? You think we smell bad?"

The bartender glanced at the drunken man, then back to the woman as he shook his head. "No, definitely not. I don't get into the business of the customers, but as near as I can tell he and his wife just like to come down here and party every once in a while."

She gave a short nod. "Thank you." With that, she turned to leave.

Behind her, she could hear the businessman muttering to himself. "Man, how rude."

CHAPTER 2

“Tell me what else to do,” Beau said against Jai’s mouth. “What you want.”

He felt the brush of Jai’s tongue gently tracing his upper lip, tasting him again. “I want you to suck me off.”

Beau briefly considered mentioning that he had never done that before. He might not know how. He might not like it. But he pushed the thoughts away. Jai probably already knew he wasn’t the most experienced person. Besides, what did it matter if he did fuck it up? He’d probably never see Jai again after that night. There was no need to be self-conscious. He muttered an affirmative, teasing Jai’s mouth for long, sweet seconds before moving his lips down the column of Jai’s throat.

He left a trail of light kisses along the other man’s chest until

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he finally dropped to his knees. Jai's cock seemed much larger from that vantage point. Beau couldn't take his eyes off of it. His tongue darted out, the tip sliding across the top of his head.

That earned him a soft hiss in response, though it was such a light touch. Jai had to be on edge from lack of attention. It was encouraging, if he was going to continue being that sensitive. Jai's hand came down, fingers almost delicately tracing his cheek and the curve of his jaw as he watched.

Beau licked his skin again and again. By the fourth time, he forgot that he was ever nervous about the situation. His fantasy life had always been varied and intense, and he had a great imagination. He had gotten himself off more than once by imagining this very situation, but even those fantasies couldn't touch the reality. He loved the taste, the way pre-come mingled with the natural musk of Jai's skin. He loved the satiny, smooth texture. He loved the way Jai's cock jerked each time he dragged his tongue over the very tip. He couldn't believe he was on his knees for another man. Every time Jai moaned with pleasure, that sense of disbelief only increased. But he wanted more, and he knew Jai needed more. He looked up, watching Jai through his lashes as wrapped his lips around the head.

The other man's eyes closed and his head fell back against the wall. From his vantage point below, Beau could see the tension in Jai's jaw. Even without that, though, he could have known how the man was reacting. His hips leaned away from the wall as his fingers left Beau's cheek, curling around the base of his skull. Jai didn't pull him forward, simply held him. Impatience radiated off of Jai, but he was clearly still holding himself in check.

Beau lingered for a moment before sliding down Jai's thick shaft. It was heavy on his tongue and brushed against the roof of

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his mouth. He couldn't taste or smell anything except Jai, and he could barely hear his moans above the roaring in his ears. Jai's cock grew harder with each inch that disappeared into Beau's mouth. Beau was still an inch from the base of Jai's cock when he felt the tip touch the back of his throat. His muscles immediately tightened, and he automatically eased back, unable to accept the blunt head in his throat.

Jai made a soft sound bordering on a whimper as Beau drew back, then relaxed slightly with a sigh. "That's all right. Not too many men can do that." Beau felt the other man's fingers massaging the nape of his neck, as if encouraging him. "Just go slow and take what you can. I won't complain."

The low words revived his flagging courage, and he redoubled his efforts, determined to show Jai how much he enjoyed this and how much he appreciated Jai's patience. He sank down Jai's length until he felt the familiar pressure at the back of his throat and held him in place, swallowing repeatedly until he became accustomed to it. Beau eased back, dragging his tongue along the underside of the shaft until he reached the head. He swirled his tongue around the tip, and then took him in again. Jai continued to massage the back of his neck, his fingers coaxing and soothing at the same time. Beau closed his eyes and relaxed against the touch, the tension in his jaw and throat slowly disappearing, allowing him to take in a bit more with each stroke.

Each time his lips slid down Jai's cock and took him in that much farther, the other man moaned. What control he'd been relying on before was beginning to fray as his breath grew less steady.

"Oh, that's it, love." His voice was husky as he ran his fingers up from Beau's neck to bury in his hair.

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Beau gradually quickened his pace, sliding his fist along Jai's length at the same tempo as his mouth. He reached up with his other hand and cupped Jai's balls, squeezing them lightly. His own cock was beginning to throb, begging for attention. But he wasn't willing to release Jai. Not until he felt Jai's load hit the back of his mouth. He moaned at the thought and when Jai's fingers suddenly tightened in his hair, Beau knew that was the right thing to do. He moaned again, the sound vibrating along Jai's flesh.

With that, the tension broke and the control the other man had maintained was gone entirely. He could hear Jai hiss sharply between his teeth before the air escaped in a strangled groan. His hips gave small, involuntary movements, little thrusts and jerks against Beau's grip. The first jet of salty heat hit his tongue, making him moan. A shudder of desire ran through Beau as he sucked, swallowing around Jai's cock. The other man seemed to come endlessly, filling his mouth before Jai collapsed back against the wall, panting and trembling.

Beau couldn't take his mouth away from Jai's cock, even after he had swallowed down all the come. He licked and lapped at Jai's softening cock, collecting the last bits of liquid. Once he tasted nothing but clean skin, he shifted his attention, nuzzling Jai's balls.

He felt the hand in his hair sliding through it again, idly massaging his scalp. "What do you think about moving to the bed before draining me dry?"

Beau thought that was probably a good idea. His knees were already beginning to ache a little. He reached for Jai's hand and pulled himself to his feet. Jai immediately claimed his mouth with a hard, but brief kiss. Beau's lips were still tingling as Jai led him across the room to the large bed. Beau noted that it was definitely big enough for a third person, and barely had the time to file that

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away before Jai was pushing him to the mattress.

It was a welcome relief after kneeling on the floor and the weight of Jai's body on top of his only made it more so. The other man made short work of what remained of their clothing, before skimming his hands back up Beau's thighs. His head fell back against the mattress as one of those hands moved between his legs to cup his balls again, giving them a careful squeeze. A moment later his bared throat was attacked. Jai's lips danced across it like butterflies interspersed with the faint sting of teeth scraping every few kisses.

"I want you to fuck me," Beau blurted. That hadn't originally been a part of his fantasy. The thought of being fucked had always made him more than a little uncomfortable. But now with Jai's body pinning him down, he knew he wanted it. His body thrummed with that desire, and nothing else mattered.

Jai went still on top of him, just resting his cheek against his throat for a moment, before he raised his head to meet Beau's eyes. "Have you ever bottomed before?"

Beau swallowed and shook his head.

"All right." Jai's lips brushed his softly before he drew away to open up the drawer in the nightstand. That confirmed he had been to the room earlier, as there was already a bottle of lube and several condoms there. Jai set a condom aside and brought the bottle closer to them, offering a warm smile. "I'll go very slowly, then."

"I'd appreciate that."

Beau let Jai push his legs until his knees were bent and wide. He felt exposed, and felt a moment of uncertainty before Jai bent low. He felt hot breathe against his skin, and then Jai's hotter tongue lightly dancing over his hole. He tensed from his groin to

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his throat, and his moan sounded more like a whimper. That tongue flickered against him and drew wet circles on his skin, slowly spiraling inward. Jai pressed there against that entrance for a moment before pushing the muscle in just the slightest bit. There was a pause and the pressure lessened slightly, then he pushed forward again, making Beau moan again. He let out a shaky breath when Jai's tongue withdrew, shudders racing down his spine.

"Just relax."

While he was distracted, Jai must have opened the lube because the next thing Beau felt was a slick finger between his cheeks. It traced against his skin, mirroring the movements of Jai's tongue earlier. A light, teasing dance, slowly moving in to press against that tight ring of muscle. At the same time Jai's tongue was moving upward, tracing a line from his hole to his balls, before sucking one into his mouth.

The wet heat on his balls served as a sharp contrast to the cold finger sliding into his ass. He repeated Jai's words again and again. *Just relax. Just relax.* The slow glide of Jai's finger was unlike anything Beau had ever experienced before. At first, the pressure was uncomfortable, but as the friction between them built, so did the pleasure. Until he didn't have to remind himself to relax. That was when Jai added a second finger, slipping it inside of him as he increased the suction on Beau's sac.

Gentle vibrations ran threw his skin as the other man moaned around him. Rather than distracting him from what else Jai was doing, it only seemed to make him more aware. Those two fingers now inside of him thrust slowly as if testing him, pressing upward and curling slightly until Beau thought he might lose his mind from the pleasure. As if sensing that, Jai's fingers slowed, then stilled and drew back, to be replaced by three this time. There was

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the briefest of aches from their width, but it was quickly swallowed up by the wonderful sensation of being filled.

He began moving his hips, rocking them against Jai's hand. He wanted more, and the thought had no sooner entered his mind before he murmured the word. He knew Jai's cock would be quite a bit wider and longer than the three fingers. He knew he would stretch around it painfully at first. But it would be satisfying, too. In a way he had never even considered before. Jai continued thrusting his fingers in and out of his channel, driving Beau to greater heights until he was finally trembling with need.

"Please, please...Jai. I'm ready."

Jai's fingers pulled back and left him aching empty. He wasted little time pulling on the condom and spreading lube on his cock, though. One hand caught Beau behind his knee, pushing his leg up and tilting his hips invitingly. Before he could beg for more again, Jai had guided himself to press against Beau's stretched, slick hole. There was a faint burn as Jai slowly sank past that first tight ring of muscle. Beau pulled his other leg up, taking hold of them to make it easier for Jai to work every inch into him.

Beau focused on his breathing while Jai claimed him, inch by inch. He felt himself stretch around Jai's shaft, felt the pleasure flare into pain and then even out again. He couldn't take his attention from Jai's face, and he watched every moment of desire and satisfaction dance across his features. When he finally filled Beau completely, he thought he saw Jai's eyes flash golden. It was just for a moment, and Beau tried to tell himself that it was just a trick of the light. Beau gasped, and reached for Jai's arm, his fingers digging into his flesh. As Jai began to pull away, Beau moaned. The moan turned into a shout when Jai slammed forward again, sending a shock wave through his frame.

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“God, Beau, you feel amazing.” The words were practically growled out and Beau could almost swear he felt them crawl up his spine in shivers. Or maybe that was simply need.

Jai leaned over him, nuzzling just under his ear, his breath hot and teasing there. Beau felt hands gripping his hips, holding him up as Jai began thrusting in earnest. The sound of their thighs slapping together and their panting breath were the only sounds until Jai slammed his full length into him, rocking the bed against the wall behind them with a thump and forcing Beau’s spine into an arch. Their moans mingled for just a moment before he felt Jai’s teeth clamp down on the side of his throat. Holding him, claiming him. That faint edge of pain rippled through Beau and each thrust left him feeling raw and new as though he’d never experienced ecstasy before.

Beau was already certain he would want more of this. Need more. Once would not be enough for him. Brief worry flashed through him. What would Anna think when he told her that? But he decided to ignore that question. He would deal with it later. At that moment, he only had the energy, the focus, and the desire to think about Jai and the unbelievable things he was doing to Beau’s body. He wrapped his arms around Jai, trying to get a grip on the slick skin, marveling at the way his muscles moved and flexed. The teeth in his neck seemed to be sharper, or holding him with more pressure. The pain increased, but with it, the pleasure that was whipping through him.

The bed rocked with each stroke, Jai’s hand gripping the headboard. Beau’s thoughts were becoming more and more scattered from Jai’s onslaught. It was hard and fast and deep. The other man’s breath felt like steam against his throat, as if it should have left burns. Their bodies were pressed tight together, trapping

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his cock between their stomachs, tantalizing him with the faint friction from their movements.

Beau completely lost all sense of time. He had no idea how long he absorbed the pain and pleasure and vibrations of Jai's body crashing into his. All he knew was that the bliss became more intense, the friction against his cock more pronounced. Until he couldn't take it anymore. His back arched, every muscle pulling tight. His ass clenched tightly around Jai's thick cock, holding him deep inside as the world narrowed until they were the only two that existed. He shouted Jai's name as the orgasm ripped through him. He felt the streams of come land on his stomach, and then Jai was moving again, spreading the thick fluid across their torsos. Despite that, he didn't feel satisfied. He wouldn't until Jai reached his own climax.

At least he didn't have very long to wait. Jai's thrusts had changed, barely pulling out of him before slamming forward again. He wouldn't have thought it was possible to be taken faster than before, but he was wrong. One of Jai's arms slid under Beau's shoulders, pulling his upper body up a bit as he finally drew back from his throat and caught him in a punishing kiss. It left his lips feeling bruised and pleasantly swollen between Jai's mouth and his own teeth.

With a moan that verged on a feral growl, he felt Jai pound into him suddenly. His hips jerked against Beau as if he might push through their skin and meld them into one body. The other man clung to him and rocked as he came, his breath soft hisses and gasps.

It seemed like an eternity before Jai stopped moving. He lowered Beau back to the mattress, but didn't release him, or pull himself from Beau's body. As his breathing evened, Beau noticed

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the little patches of pain spread across his flesh. His lips were sensitive as his neck throbbed. He didn't think he would be able to sit normally for a few days. But he loved every bit of it. Each throb and low ache was a reminder of how Jai had taken him, and complemented the aftershocks of pleasure still radiating through him.

"How do you feel?" Jai's breath brushed against his ear. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, no. Not at all. I feel pretty great, actually."

"Good."

He felt the other man shift his weight, pushing himself up on one elbow. It was only to share a brief kiss, though, before he laid down again with a content, if exhausted, sigh.

"Where did Anna find you?"

Jai chuckled, a low, pleasant sound. "At her book club. We've discussed a few racy novels here and there and I suppose she heard enough out of me to confide about some of the...activities you two engage in."

"Her book club? God, and to think I actually complained about all the time she was spending with her book club. I'm going to have to apologize to her for that." He dragged his fingers down Jai's chest. He couldn't help himself. "Thank you for agreeing to be part of those activities. Really."

Jai shook his head slightly, negating that. "Thank you." His lips slid against Beau's throat, soothing the bite mark there. "I feel privileged for having met the both of you, and for this."

Beau was sure the privilege was his, but he wasn't going to argue the point. He just wanted to absorb the heat from Jai's body and rest. Tomorrow, he would show Anna exactly how grateful he was for this night, and for her. By the time he was finished, she

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wouldn't have a doubt in her mind of his love and appreciation.

* * *

The sunlight was warm and inviting in that way that only late Saturday morning light could be. Anna smiled a bit as she rolled over in bed. There was the briefest flash of confusion when her arm laid across Beau's side of the bed and found him gone. The confusion was driven away a moment later when she remembered what he'd been doing the night before. She bit her lip as she pictured it in her mind. Knowing her husband's fantasies, she'd been eyeing Jai for weeks. He was a beautiful man and she would have enjoyed inviting him over for dinner or conversation, but keeping quiet about him had been best. Beau had been given no hint as to what sort of man he'd be meeting in the bar last night.

Without any phone calls or Beau coming home early, she could guess it had been a success.

Once she had showered and dressed, Anna went downstairs to the kitchen to start making herself some coffee. There was no telling when Beau might be back, so she didn't bother starting breakfast for the both of them. As she leaned against the counter with her eyes closed, listening to the burbles and drips from the coffeemaker, her mind wandered to the hotel. Being there herself would have changed the fantasy a bit, so she'd had to torture herself by staying at home. Still, though, she wished she could have seen it. There was nothing else in the world she enjoyed more than Beau in the throes of passion.

She heard Beau's approach just a second before he wrapped his arm around her waist and kissed her neck. She sighed and relaxed against his familiar body, her skin already tingling beneath his

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mouth. “Good morning, pretty lady.”

“Mm, good morning.” Turning her head, she caught him in a brief kiss, then drew back to smile up at him. She could feel the wicked gleam in it. “Did you have a good night, honey?”

His smile matched hers. “It definitely didn’t suck. Do you want to hear all about it before or after I thank you?”

“Before, after, during. I’m open.” She turned against him to toy with the buttons on his shirt, admiring him. The lovebite on the side of his neck was hard to miss, as was the supremely satisfied look in his eyes. Had she told any of her girlfriends about her surprise for Beau, they likely would have thought her insane, but Beau’s fantasy had excited her nearly as much as it did him.

He slipped his hand beneath her shirt and cupped her breast, his thumb lightly running over her nipple. “I honestly didn’t expect anybody like Jai. I’m surprised you were able to keep him a secret for so long.”

Her eyes fluttered shut to lose herself in his touch as she leaned into his hand. “I thought you’d like him from the moment I saw him. I’ve been thinking about this one for a long, long time.” The first time Beau had admitted his fantasy about being with another man, it had sunk into her brain and stayed there, refusing to leave.

Beau caught her lips in a slow kiss, and she thought she could still taste Jai on his mouth. She could imagine the two of them together so easily, but she knew the images her imagination generated couldn’t touch the beauty of the real thing. He moved closer, pressing his erection to her hip. “I have an idea. Come to bed with me and I’ll show you exactly what we did.”

“How did I get so lucky?” She slipped an arm around his waist, just holding him close a moment and enjoying his warmth and the promise in it. It was a question she had asked herself many times

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since she first met Beau. He had never been classically handsome, but something about him always made her heart beat faster. From the moment she met him, she wanted him. Especially after it became clear that he didn't think he had a snowball's chance in hell with her. His good humor and charm won her over before he ever got up the courage to ask her out on their first date.

The eagerness to have him and hear about his night was too strong, though. The mental images and fantasies all night long had been the sweetest of torture, but now she was hungry for something a bit more real. Drawing back from him, she clasped his hand in hers to tug him back up to the bedroom with her.

They didn't get as far as the bedroom before Beau started tugging at her shirt. It was discarded in the hallway, and her bra was next, tossed aside before they entered the room. She turned around and finished the job of unbuttoning his shirt, and then she was wrapped up in his arms again, bare breasts pressed to his chest, her sensitive nipples aching from the contact.

"By the time we got up to the room, I was so hard for him, all it took was a handjob to get me off." As he spoke, he unzipped her jeans and pushed his fingers between her legs, rubbing her clit through her already damp underwear.

Her teeth dug into her bottom lip as she whimpered and felt the heat of arousal settling down low in her body, making it tight with need. One of her arms slipped around him to let her hand rub over his ass as the other hand teased him through his jeans. She'd always loved the feel of touching him through his clothes as his cock strained at the fabric.

"Even his hands would have felt different." She whispered the words as she kissed along the underside of his jaw. "I bet they felt rough like yours."

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“Yes, and they were much bigger, too.” His thumb flicked over her clit, intensifying the ache between her legs. “I loved to feel that...that strength wrapped around me. I was ready to give him anything he wanted from that alone.”

Another whimper was torn from her throat and she thought her knees might start to give out. The teasing, his words, and the things she pictured in her mind were simply all too delicious. “And what did you give him?” The question was breathless in anticipation as she tugged him back toward the bed with her.

He guided her to the mattress, and she sat down with a soft sigh of relief. Beau hooked his fingers around her waistband and pulled her pants and underwear down as he dropped to his knees. He cupped her ass with both hands, pulling her closer to the edge and lifting her slightly. “Two things, really. But the first thing I did was suck his cock.” He bent his head and caught her clit between his lips, teasing the engorged tip with his tongue. She gasped and squirmed, her hands going to the back of his head.

The thought of those same lips against her wrapped around the other man’s cock was nearly enough to get her off then and there. When she felt Beau suckle at her clit, she whimpered, her body shivering with tension. The gentle pull of his mouth and light flicks of his tongue had her fingers curling in his hair. As his mouth drew away from her, she started to protest before another pass of his tongue changed it to a moan.

“I...I bet you were amazing at it,” she breathed. “I’d love to see you like that, down on your knees with your lips wrapped around him.”

Beau slid two fingers into her wet pussy, curling the tips until he was touching her G-spot. She jerked at the shock of pleasure, her fingers tightening in his hair. “I sucked him until he shot his

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load down my throat,” he murmured, tonguing her flesh between each word. “And I swallowed every drop.”

As he started thrusting his fingers back and forth, rubbing against the inner walls of her channel, she couldn't think of anything else. If he continued speaking, she didn't hear it. All she could concentrate on was the feel of his hand and mouth and the images he'd put in her mind. Spending the night alone, working herself up with thoughts of Beau and Jai, had set her on edge enough. When his fingers massaged against her G-spot as his tongue found her swollen nub again, she went tumbling over.

Her body arched up off the bed as she cried out his name, her legs giving little involuntary kicks. Her fingers were curled tight enough in his hair that outside of bed she might have worried about pulling it, but all she could do at that moment was ride the waves of pleasure coursing through her.

Anna was so distracted by the last ebbing of her orgasm and the fingers still buried in her pussy that she didn't realize Beau had moved. Not until he hooked her legs over his shoulders and buried his tongue between her cheeks. She gasped as the hot tip danced across her clenched muscle, doing no more than teasing the opening.

“You let him fuck you?” Anna asked, not believing it even though she already knew the answer.

“I did,” Beau answered, his voice muffled. “And it wasn't his idea.”

That stunned her more than she would have expected it to. Of course, she had given him carte blanche to do whatever he wanted with Jai, but she hadn't thought it would go that far simply because it was such a new experience. She'd underestimated him. She almost felt bad that she had doubted it would happen, as though

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she didn't know him well enough. Her sweet husband who worked in IT and looked as good as he had the senior year of college was far more adventurous than she'd ever given him credit for.

Dwelling on her shock wasn't to last, though. That teasing probing from his tongue drove the thoughts right out of her mind. She whimpered as she sank her head back against the bed and just lost herself in him for a moment.

"Did you like it?" She hoped his answer would be yes. The thought of Beau under Jai, writhing in ecstasy and hungry for more made her shudder in arousal.

"I loved it. It was..." Beau pulled his fingers from inside of her and slid them against her ass, slicking the muscle with her juices. "God, Anna, I won't lie." He gently worked the tip of his forefinger into her passage. "It was amazing. Unbelievable."

She moaned softly, nodding a bit to him. "That's how I always feel with you."

There were so many things she'd done with him first, so many crazy things they'd explored together, that she could perfectly imagine what it must have felt like for him to try something that new. As she worked her hips to him to encourage his finger into her deeper, her mind kept returning to that beautiful image of Beau giving himself to the other man.

"Would you want to do it again?" She hadn't meant to ask it just yet, but the question came unbidden to her lips.

"Would I do it again with Jai? Absolutely, if I ever had the chance. I can't say I'd do that with anybody else, though." She felt his tongue sliding along her pussy lips before thrusting into her opening. She jerked her hips and arched her back off the bed, her walls clamping down around him. That was when he added a second finger, pushing it into her ass slowly. The pain seemed

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inconsequential as he continued to fuck her with his tongue, but she could feel her flesh stretching around him.

Picking her head up from the mattress again, she watched him through slitted eyes. One of her hands found its way into his hair to let her fingers tangle there and hold him. This time she thought about her words before speaking.

“What about with him and me?”

Beau lifted his head, his eyes wide, his mouth glistening. Despite his surprise, his fingers were still moving in her ass. “You want to have a threesome with Jai?”

Her eyes fluttered closed as she nodded slightly, her body rocking to him. They had always been open with one another, which was what had made their partnership so perfect. As new as the idea was, she knew he wouldn’t react badly. He might not be interested, but he wouldn’t be angry. She hoped he’d be interested, though. “I’ve thought about it for a long time. You and me and another man.”

“What have you thought about you and me and another man doing?” Beau asked.

“Watching the two of you together. Me sucking your cock while you suck his. Him fucking you while you’re fucking me. Things like that.”

He pushed both fingers in up to his third knuckle and paused. “What about Jai fucking you? Have you ever thought about that?”

“Yes.” The word was groaned out as she lifted her hips to him, silently begging for more. He pumped his wrist once more, then pulled his fingers free. “Don’t move.”

Anna watched with heavy eyes as Beau straightened and unzipped his pants. He managed to push them down to his ankles and grab the lubricant from the nightstand without tripping. He

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slicked his cock, sliding his tight fist up and down his length. Any other time, Anna would have been happy to simply watch him stroke himself, but her thighs were slick with her arousal and the heat that had filled her stomach hadn't faded at all after her orgasm.

When he stepped back to the bed, he lifted her legs to rest her ankles on his shoulders. She shivered as the head of his cock touched her ass, preparing to fill her. "I'd like that. I'd like to see the two of you together. Like to see his cock sliding into your little pussy."

Hearing that and imagining it, she'd never been happier that she'd started going to the book club. It had been an amazing stroke of luck to meet such a sexy and open-minded man there. There was still the matter of getting him to say yes, of course, but she had hope. After some of the stories Jai had shared, she didn't think he'd be disinterested.

"And what would you be doing?" Anna asked, reaching out to slide her hands appreciatively over her husband's chest.

"If Jai joins us, I plan to watch the two of you at least once. But mostly, I want to do this."

His hips moved forward, and he pushed past the initial resistance. She bit her lip to distract herself from the pain, and a part of her wanted to push him away to ease the pressure. But the rest of her knew it would be worth it. As soon as he was inside of her completely, it would be worth it. "I want to fuck your ass while he's inside of you, so I can feel you both at the same time."

The thought of being filled that completely was daunting. After having been together for six years, she and Beau had done many things together, but not that. Still, she'd be lying if she said the thought didn't excite her. She could almost imagine what it would

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feel like now to have another cock inside of her and involuntarily clenched in arousal, tearing a moan from Beau and a soft whimper from her.

Taking a few deep breaths, she relaxed and felt him work into her deeper. With her ankles over his shoulders like this she was nearly helpless under him, so could only squirm and wait for more from him. It only made it better.

“I want that, too.” The words came out in a hushed rush. “God, Beau.”

Beau pushed forward another inch and then another, and they were both beyond speaking. Anna couldn't do anything except remind herself to breathe as her body stretched and molded itself around Beau's cock. Sweat dotted his brow and cheeks, making his skin shine in the morning light. She couldn't keep her hands off of him. Her fingers collected the beads of sweat, smearing it across his cheeks and lips and down his neck to his chest. He moaned as he claimed the final inch of her passage, but she didn't make a sound. She couldn't. Her wind and her voice were caught in her throat as pleasure-pain blazed through her.

After an endless moment of just feeling that wonderful fullness of him buried inside of her, he started to draw back from her. The change in pressure let her gasp for breath just before he pushed into her again and the breath came out in a whimper. Then he was sawing into her, slow and careful and relentless. Anna couldn't help but hiss softly through her teeth at the edge of pain from it, but he'd get no complaint from her. That edge was absolutely intoxicating.

Beau reached between her legs and sought out her clit again. She almost protested, trying to tell him that she was too sensitive. But he silenced her with a flick of his thumb, and suddenly she

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reached a new level of pleasure. She grasped his arms, knowing she could do nothing except hang on for the ride. He never disrupted his rhythm, remaining slow and careful despite the growing inferno beneath her skin. Anna gave herself over to it completely, not trying to fight when she felt another orgasm gathering low in her stomach. As it overtook her, she broke her silence with a high pitched moan, almost a shout. Her muscles clamped around him, and she barely heard him ground out, "I'm about to lose it."

Shuddering and gasping, she could say nothing in response. Instead, she slid her hands down from his arms and around him, grasping his ass to pull him against her as she worked herself on his cock through her release. Her hips bucked slightly to his touch as she arched her body, trembling as she came.

"Please," she managed to groan. The only thing that could make the moment better would be feeling his hot seed inside of her.

He responded to her plea by quickening his tempo, unleashing himself to pound into her. What might have been pain before translated into pure ecstasy, and she felt herself plummeting over the edge yet again as he thrust into her the final time. She could feel the hot come pumping into her, could feel his pleasure with each twitch and shudder. She focused on his beloved face, watching bliss turn into satisfaction.

After endless moments the tension began to drain out of both of them and she collapsed back against the bed again. A few breathless pants later, Beau eased her legs back down and stretched out against her, an arm curled lovingly around her waist. She turned in toward him slightly and brushed one hand against his cheek, smiling at him before brushing a kiss against his lips.

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“Next week’s my turn to be treated. You get to set it up.”

“Besides Jai, is there anything in particular you want?”

She fell silent as she considered that, knowing that whatever she requested, he’d take it seriously. It was one of the things she loved about him so much. “A corruption game. You and Jai seducing me. Make it good.”

“Don’t I always make it good?”

“Always.” Her hand slid to his shoulder to draw him into a deep kiss. There was so much to say that went beyond words. She always found that kissing him like he was the last drop of water in a desert was a good start.

CHAPTER 3

“Now, considering this is an anthropology class”—Jai Bagri paused as a few of the students tittered—“can anyone tell me why we just spent the last hour discussing mass transportation?”

He looked out to see far too many blank faces looking back at him, which was as disappointing as ever. Worse than those were the ones who avoided his eyes. Instead, they stared off into space or down at their notes. He was sure more than a few were holding their cell phones on those notes and sending text messages. The ones who were staring past him were the ones that gave him hope. Their eyes were locked on the last slide he’d put up, which was a dramatic shot of the inside of a train car. It was color and clearly a modern photograph, though everyone was wearing period clothing from the nineteenth century. There were a number of men and

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women locked into conversation in the picture.

Finally, a hand shot up.

He pointed to her. “Sienna?”

“Genetic mixing,” she answered, then smiled a bit shyly as if uncertain of her own answer.

“Correct.” He graced her with a pleased flash of his teeth before going on. “All of these developments led to people moving in ways they never had before. Yes, there had always been a minority who went exploring and fathered children with the natives. Even ancient Egypt set up colonies. But this was the first time that the grand majority of people on the planet would have the opportunity to do something unheard of for the common man before—travel more than ten miles outside of his home village. From that comes a mingling of genetics that had never happened before. Isolated pockets where the same recessive genes are passed back and forth over and over again became more and more rare.”

He pressed the button to move on, switching over to the final slide. It was an animated map of the “out of Africa” hypothesis of human evolution, showing populations spreading out across the globe, signified by different colors for different periods of movement.

“A species that spanned the globe was capable of matings between nearly any population. The question then becomes, is that positive or not? While there is greater genetic variability, there is also the potential for minority populations to find themselves disappearing as they’re absorbed into the larger populations. Be prepared to answer that question next class. I also expect all of you to have read chapter seven.”

Even as he was speaking there was already the scrape of chairs as students were getting up to leave. There were seven students

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who were genuinely excited about anthropology instead of the majority who were undoubtedly apathetic about every class they took or had to take the class as part of the integrated studies program.

Once the class was empty, he leaned against the edge of the desk and pulled out the battered envelope he'd been carrying around for the entire day. Jai had been sure to make it difficult to find his home address, but his father had been more clever than he'd given him credit for. He'd mailed it to the university. Of course, his email address was available on the school's website, but his father had likely never touched a computer in his life.

He could imagine what the letter said without opening it. His father would want him to come home. His intended bride would be waiting for him. It was Jai's duty to continue the family line. The fact that his family's matchmaking had more to do with preserving the Pard than his own happiness was left unsaid.

As an anthropologist, he had found numerous references to therianthropic—part man and part beast—populations. In firsthand experience, the dwindling leopards were the only ones he was aware of still existing. Even before recessive genes had been understood, it was known in the Pard that the only way to guarantee the continuation of the line was to have both parents be shifters. The influence of western attitudes in choosing mates for oneself and looking outside of the group had hurt their numbers in ways no disaster ever had. His duty to his family and his people was to take a mate from within the Pard and ensure another generation would be born.

His hand tightened on the envelope and for a moment he considered tossing it away, unopened. The vibration of his phone in his pocket made him pause, though. He pulled it out and brought

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it up to his ear. “Hello?”

“Hi. Jai? This is Beau Southall.”

The sound of that voice was like being struck by lightning. He felt a slow throb in his cock, as if he needed a reminder of their night together. Turning his head slightly, he looked toward the doors to be sure no one else was coming in. It had been his last class of the day and the room wasn't scheduled for any further use for another thirty minutes. He had time for a private conversation.

“Beau. Hi. I hadn't expected this. What's going on?” He kept his voice carefully neutral and casual, as though the Southalls and their escapades hadn't been lurking in the back of his mind for days.

“I was wondering if you could meet for coffee or something today? I know this is short notice, but there's been a massive power failure here at work and we were all given the afternoon off.”

“I could do that, yes. I just finished my last class for the day.” He straightened up, shoving the letter into his bag before following it with his laptop and books. A thought occurred to him just before he asked where they should meet. “Does your wife know about this?” As much as he'd enjoyed his night with Beau, Anna had been his friend first, and he had no intentions to start any jealousies in their relationship.

Beau chuckled. “Technically, yes. Also, I really do mean coffee.”

This sounded intriguing. Rather than pester Beau with more questions, he decided it might be better to simply meet with him and find out what this was about. Half an hour later found him a few miles away stepping into Alley Cats, a small coffee shop tucked between a chiropractor and an antique store. Had he not laid

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eyes on Beau immediately he could have followed him by scent, as everything about the man was dangerously seared into his mind. He was quite obviously seated in a booth toward the back, though.

Jai slid into the booth, eyes involuntarily roaming over Beau. “It’s good to see you again.”

Beau answered with a ready smile. “It’s good to see you, too. How have you been?”

“Quite well actually, thank you. And yourself and Anna?” Curiosity was nearly killing him, but he managed not to start pestering Beau. Not yet.

“Great. Actually, I called you because I wanted to talk about Anna. Obviously, you know our arrangement about fantasies?” At Jai’s nod, Beau continued. “She told me that she would like me to arrange a threesome. With you.”

He felt his eyebrows raising nearly to his hairline, but he managed not to gape like an imbecile. Since leaving England and his family, he’d made it a point to not carry on any sort of intimate relationships. Casual sex was fine, though rarely as satisfying as his night with Beau, but anything more lasting than that was potentially dangerous. He had too many secrets to keep and the baggage of the burdens he’d left behind. One more night would be safe, though. At least he hoped it would be.

“All right.”

“Oh, good. I’d hoped it would be that easy.”

That made Jai chuckle in spite of his surprise. “Another Friday night at the hotel? What should I know?”

“I don’t know if I want to use the hotel, necessarily. My fantasy was to be seduced by a stranger. But she wants a corruption game. I thought the two of us could discuss it.”

“Corruption.” Jai rolled the word over in his mind, thinking of

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how that could play out. “There are a lot of ways to take that. Do the two of you usually enjoy role-playing?”

“The two of us usually enjoy everything. What have you got in mind?”

“If someone’s to be corrupted, it’s best if they start out innocent. Like a naive young housewife preparing dinner for her husband and his friend, only to discover they’re planning on sharing her.” He knew Anna was a journalist, not a housewife, and had a delightfully cynical mind, but short of bribing her to write a story he wasn’t sure how to corrupt that.

“Anna has a naive young anything would be worth it for the novelty factor alone.” He tilted his head and seemed to consider the situation. “You said that you had a class, right? Does that mean you’re a professor? What if Anna is the naive young student you ask to your office after class?”

“An assistant professor,” he agreed. “We could do that. How would we work you into it?”

Beau grinned. “I’ll be your TA.”

Jai couldn’t help but laugh. “You have a sick, evil mind. I love it.”

“It comes from working in IT. Sometimes my sick, evil mind is the only thing keeping me sane.”

“Obviously I can’t use my office at work, but...” He paused, thinking things over carefully. “There’s my office at home. That might be good since it’s not a place she’s already familiar with. That might make it easier for her to play the ‘game.’”

He could tell by the way Beau’s eyes widened that he wasn’t expecting Jai to suggest his own home. “I think that’d be great. Just so you know, Anna isn’t big into pain, but she loves submission and humiliation. So whatever plans you might want to

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make, just keep that in mind.”

“All right.” He nodded slowly. “Is there anything that’s off-limits?”

“The standard things. No golden showers or anything like that, obviously. She doesn’t like any sort of gags because they make her feel like she’s suffocating. That’s really all I can think of. My Anna loves to push boundaries and try new things.”

Jai didn’t bother to point that he had never urinated on anyone and had no intentions to start. It was a fine disclaimer to start with when discussing something of this nature. He considered mentioning his own limitations, but if Anna wasn’t into pain he doubted that blood or anything else particularly dangerous would come into play.

“Sounds good. Anything she particularly wants?” He paused, smirking slightly. “Or you, for that matter?”

“She wants both of us to fuck her at the same time. I think that’s the big one.” Beau reached for a napkin, and Jai wasn’t surprised when he started shredding it. “As for me? I just want you. It’s been really difficult to keep my hands to myself for this whole conversation.”

Jai’s smirk broadened into a grin as he leaned forward, resting his crossed arms on the table. “Likewise. It can be dangerous to feed desires like this, you know. I doubt this will keep you out of my head at all.”

“I’ve been in your head?”

“Yes. Can you blame me?”

“Considering that I’ve been thinking about you nonstop, no, not really.” Beau abandoned the napkin and moved his hand across the table, but didn’t get quite close enough to touch Jai. That hand was achingly tempting. Jai glanced down at it, before moving his

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own hand to lightly brush his fingers over Beau's knuckles. "I have a confession, though."

"Consider me your confessor then."

"When Anna started talking to me about how the two of you do these games, I was hoping at first she was bringing it up for, ah, her own benefit." While there were many things he had to keep to himself, it didn't strike him as ethically right to keep that to himself if the three of them would be spending the night together. He didn't think it would cause problems exactly, but hiding an attraction in a situation like that didn't sound particularly well-thought out.

"Is that why you agreed to do it? To improve your chances with her?"

"No. She showed me a picture of you." He flashed Beau a sheepish grin. "But that was my first thought when she started talking."

"I can tell you that the attraction is definitely mutual. I don't think she just wants a threesome in general. I think she wants one with you, specifically."

There was a brief tug of alarm at the back of his mind. He'd thought this would be safe because they were married, so there was little chance for anything deeper to form, but he'd be lying if he said he didn't find himself really liking the both of them. He pushed that thought aside, though. Things would be fine. They'd lose interest once their fantasies had been indulged and he'd be alone once more. Safely alone.

"So everything is all right with everyone, then." He hoped that was the case, at least. Beau didn't seem troubled that they were all attracted to one another.

"Everything is great. When you told me you had a confession, I

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was worried it'd be something really bad. Or some big, dark secret."

Jai offered a small smile and shrug. "No. I just think it's probably safest to be upfront about anything like that if we're all going to be naked together."

"Have you ever done anything like that before? Get naked with two or more other people at the same time?"

"Yes, but it was two men."

Beau's mouth fell open. "You know, that doesn't do anything to help the wood I'm sporting right now."

"So I probably shouldn't tell you any more details?" Jai grinned teasingly as he leaned forward again. "They were two friends from university, a couple. They'd invited me over for dinner when one of them, Jake, crawled into my lap and started kissing me while his boyfriend was in the kitchen. I had no idea that they'd planned it, so was terrified and so hard I almost came right then."

"Ah, so my proposition wasn't a first for you. Not that I'm surprised. Somebody like you probably gets more tail than he knows what to do with."

"Not as much as you think. I'm very particular about whom I'm with."

"Then I'm very, very glad I passed muster." Beau touched his knuckles, mimicking Jai's earlier gesture. "In fact, I'd like to show you how glad I am."

Hearing those words and thinking about what they might mean made him instantly hard. "Now? Is that allowed?"

Beau inclined his head. "I emailed Anna and told her we were meeting to discuss things. I also told her I didn't think I could be a gentleman about it. She told me we'd just have to make it up to

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her.”

That was all he needed to hear. “Where?”

“Considering that I can’t really walk in my current state…” He looked around the nearly empty coffee shop and then down the short corridor to the door with the restroom sign. “How about in there?”

Jai nodded slightly at that, then got to his feet. His own slacks were restrictive at the moment, so he had to hope no one noticed what all of this talk with Beau had done. He slid his hands into his pockets to mask it as best he could, before walking down to the bathroom and slipping inside. He trusted Beau to follow after a moment or two.

A moment or two turned into five minutes. Jai was finally forced to unzip his pants, just to relieve the pressure. He grabbed Beau as soon as the door opened, pulling him into the room completely and locking the door behind him. A second later their mouths were fused in a hard kiss. He could feel Beau’s hunger, feel the need with each sweep of his tongue, and it fed his own. Beau pushed his fingers into Jai’s open fly, fumbling and desperate.

With a groan, Jai pushed Beau back into the wall, pinning him there between it and his body. His own hand went to the front of Beau’s jeans to get them open, though he was somewhat more practiced at it. The younger man was almost painfully hard and his cock nearly sprang free from the shorts holding it back. He wrapped his fingers around it, giving a gentle squeeze and sweeping his thumb through the bead of pre-come collecting at Beau’s head.

He broke the kiss with a pant, brushing light kisses over Beau’s cheek and back to his ear, where he lightly scraped Beau’s earlobe

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between his teeth. “One of these times I want to taste you,” he whispered. “And I want you to come on my body and then lick it off.”

“Yes, yes.” Beau whispered, too, but Jai could still hear the wealth of passion behind the words. “Anything you want.”

If Beau was more experienced bottoming, he’d be tempted to fuck him then and there. Concern over hurting him without a proper warm-up or anything more than spit for lubricant stopped him. Instead, he nudged Beau’s hand out of the way and pushed his boxers down before wrapping his hand around both of their cocks, pressing them together as he stroked his hand along their length once, moaning into Beau’s ear.

“Oh, God.” Beau turned his head slightly and pressed a hot kiss to Jai’s neck while his arm snuck around Jai’s waist. He followed that up with another and another as Jai pumped his wrist again. “You feel so good. And you smell so good.”

Shuddering, he turned his face toward Beau, pressing a kiss to the other man’s temple. Under different circumstances, he might take his time and tease them both until they were breathless and wordless. It was too dangerous to take that long here. Once he found a good rhythm, he worked his hand over their cocks quickly, squeezing them gently as his hand neared the heads.

“Anyone could find us,” Jai whispered. “Can’t you just imagine someone needing to get in here and finding the door locked? Or the barrista figuring out we went in together? It’s dangerous. I think that’s what I like about it best.”

Beau made a soft sound of agreement and the hand on Jai’s back flexed into a fist. “I can’t wait to get your cock inside of me again. My mouth, my ass, I don’t care. I can’t stop thinking about it.”

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“We’ll make sure that happens on Friday,” Jai promised with a purr.

His other hand moved to roll his palm over their heads as he pumped his wrist, moaning softly. They were both leaking pre-come freely now and there was something deeply satisfying about having it mix from the both of them like that. Ducking down a bit lower, Jai caught a thin line of flesh on Beau’s throat between his teeth. Delicately, he worried it and sucked, teasing the skin with his tongue. His hips gave a small roll, thrusting his cock against Beau’s between his hands.

Beau almost immediately dropped his head back, baring his throat to Jai’s mouth. Jai wondered why Beau did that so easily. Mostly, he wondered if Beau would still do it if he fully understood what the act meant. His blood pumped just below the surface of his skin, reminding him how easy it would be to bite through the thin tissue, into his veins and muscle. He didn’t, though. He just contented himself with the taste of Beau’s sweat and the small, hungry moans that Jai could feel more than hear. Beau began moving his hips, thrusting against Jai’s hand and creating a maddening friction between their flesh.

Shifting against him, Jai moved his free hand to grasp Beau’s ass and pull him closer with each thrust. As he jerked them both off and felt the muscles tensing in Beau’s ass, he realized he wanted Beau to fuck him. It was an unusual desire, not one he gave into often, but he wanted it. At least once.

“Oh fuck.” Beau gasped. “Fuck, I’m close. Jai, please. So close.”

“I’m close, too. Come for me.” Jai panted, releasing his throat. Part of it was to speak, but also because he was afraid he might bite too hard if he had his teeth on Beau when he was in the throes

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of orgasm.

Jai wasn't sure that would work a second time. After all, Beau had been pretty on edge the first time, clearly wound up from their flirtation at the bar and the expectation of the night itself. But it did work, and almost immediately. Jai shuddered at the first splash of warm come on his cock, and he dragged his hand down Beau's shaft, coaxing his orgasm. Beau responded by jerking his hips sharply, and his body was still trembling when Jai felt the telltale tingle at the base of his spine. Beau chose that moment to sink his teeth into Jai's shoulder.

The sharp pain of that bite just as he came made him snarl harshly, jerking against Beau. It took self-control he didn't know he had not to make more noise, or bite Beau back. He thrust into his hand and against the other man's cock, hand pumping quickly and mixing the hot, sticky fluids. The mingled scents of their come made his head spin. It was the smell of sex. The smell of a mate.

"God, Beau," he exhaled.

"I know."

Jai knew they had to get themselves cleaned up and get out of there before anybody suspected anything, but he wasn't in a hurry to release his hold on Beau. Not until Beau gripped the hand still squeezing their cocks together. Jai didn't protest as Beau guided the sticky fingers to his mouth, but his softening cock twitched as Beau licked a string of come from his knuckle.

"You're going to kill me." He waited a moment longer, letting Beau suckle at two of his fingers, before drawing his hand back to catch him in a hungry, demanding kiss. His tongue forced its way past Beau's lips to explore and taste and lap up every hint of their come left. Already, his body was trying to work up to another round, and that simply wasn't possible. With great reluctance, he

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drew back.

Beau tucked himself back into his pants with a sigh. “At least that took a bit of the edge off.”

“Just a bit.” Jai pulled his slacks back into place and ensured there was nothing visible on his clothing, then drew a shaky hand through his hair. “So, Friday?”

“Yes. Is eight good?” At Jai’s nod, Beau continued, “Make sure you email Anna your address. I’m a little worried if you send it to me, I’ll be tempted to use it.”

That made him grin, but he nodded. “All right.” He was about to say goodbye and get out of there before they could find themselves in any further trouble, but then his mind was going back to what he’d thought of before. “How would you feel about fucking me?”

Beau blinked. “You want me to fuck you?”

“Yes. I’m growing rather fond of your cock.”

“How about I fuck you while you fuck Anna?”

He closed his eyes, imagining that for a moment, then nodded slightly. “I think I’d enjoy that quite a bit.”

“Me, too. Friday seems like an eternity from now.”

“It does.” He flashed Beau a smile, then brushed past him to get out of the bathroom. If he didn’t go home now, he was worried he might invite Beau there.

* * *

It wasn’t stalking if he didn’t know she existed. At least, that was how the woman justified things in her own mind. Since she had lost her opportunity in the bar, she hadn’t sought out any contact with Jai Bagri, nor had she done anything that could

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possibly interfere with his daily life. She was simply watching and learning, since everything she knew about the man was potentially wrong.

Just as she wouldn't perform surgery on an animal before she was sure of what the injuries were, she wouldn't make contact until she knew exactly who she was making contact with. That was what she told herself, at least. It made a fine excuse for her own fear and reluctance to face the man directly.

"Can I help you, miss?"

She pulled away from the office door, turning to face the older woman who was giving her a curious look.

"I was just looking for Dr. Bagri."

"Oh, he isn't here late on Monday or Wednesday." The woman paused, getting a confused look on her face. "Did he leave the office open? That's odd."

"Maybe it was his office mate," the woman suggested with a quick smile, glancing toward the name plate. "Professor Leavitt."

The second woman looked doubtful. "Maybe."

"Well, if he's not here, I'll just be going then."

"Who should I say was looking for him?"

The younger woman bit her tongue as she looked to the side, considering for a moment. "Just one of his students. It doesn't matter."

Before she could be pestered with any further questions, she started off down the hall. Wednesday sounded promising, then.

CHAPTER 4

It was Wednesday while she was writing that Anna received Jai's email. Beau had been tight-lipped about what Friday was bringing and she had played by the rules by not asking many questions. The instructions from Jai had shocked and amused her, however. More than willing to play the part, she'd gone out shopping to find an outfit that looked a bit more college appropriate than for a grown woman with a career.

While her daily life involved being a capable, dominating personality, she had always enjoyed fantasies involving giving up some power. She wasn't sure if Beau had ever harbored fantasies of dominating her, or anybody, but he was always game to give her what she wanted. Now her husband and Jai had tapped into something that managed to make her laugh and shiver in

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anticipation at the same time.

Friday night found her walking up the hallway in Jai's building, Beau by her side.

"You know, after all of this we're going to have to do something for him to show our appreciation," she murmured.

"I plan to show him my appreciation during all this."

Anna gave him a brief sidelong glance, smiling a bit. "You really like him."

"I do. Maybe it's just lust or the excitement of something new, but...it's easy to be around him. It's easy to trust him."

"It is."

That trust had been one of the overriding factors in why she'd approached Jai, aside from him simply being unspeakably sexy. She'd be lying if she said part of her hadn't worried about Beau's interest in being with another man. There had been a few concerns in the back of her head about him finding out he liked being with men more than with her. In the end, though, she knew he loved her and she loved him. Whatever else happened, they had that. She knew she could trust Jai not to hurt that love, even if he and Beau had their own separate connection.

Reaching out to Beau, she took his hand in hers to give it a brief squeeze. "And I love seeing you happy."

"I guess that explains why you spoil me like you do." He squeezed her fingers back. "I didn't know he was a professor until I called him. You and he probably have more in common than he and I do."

"We have some good debates," she agreed. "But there's more to life than academics. You guys obviously get along just fine."

"We're extremely compatible physically. That helps us get along. Though I'm not sure it really matters. He said something the

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other day...something about how it was dangerous to encourage these desires.”

That made her blink and she stopped walking. They were only feet away from Jai’s door now, so she lowered her voice as she pulled Beau slightly closer. While she was fine letting there be some mystery around what they were planning each week, that hardly applied to other matters. She wouldn’t have been a very good journalist if unanswered questions didn’t bother her.

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. He just mentioned it offhand. Then he said he couldn’t get me out of his head and the conversation took a turn.” He offered a lopsided grin. “I’m not as good with the follow-ups as you.”

“And yet somehow, I still manage to love you.” She flashed him an answering grin before leaning up to give him a quick, firm kiss.

Pulling back again, she steeled her nerves, which were delightfully on edge. The uncertainty over what the evening might entail had her as excited as anything else. Taking the last few steps, she knocked at Jai’s door.

Jai answered within seconds and he looked amazing. It had always been a bit difficult for Anna not to stare at him. Especially in the weeks following her membership to the group, when everything about him was still novel. Sometimes, she wondered how his actual students managed to get through his courses. The combination of his accent and his good looks would have driven her to distraction as a twenty-year-old. More so than it already did. He was dressed like he was on his way to the campus, with his hair slicked back and a cute pair of glasses resting on his nose. He had on a tie that brought out the gold flecks in his eyes—had Beau

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noticed those?—and he smelled of freshly applied aftershave.

Beau released her and extended his hand in greeting. Anna didn't know if he did that because it was polite or because he wanted an excuse to touch Jai.

“Beau, Anna. Good to see you again.” One corner of his mouth quirked up into a brief smile, as though he was thinking of something funny. Maybe he was just thinking about how every time they met these days it ended in sex. Beau had told her about the bathroom incident.

After the men shook hands, Jai offered his hand to Anna as well, then gestured them in.

“Both of you are well, I trust?”

“We're great,” Beau said. “And relieved that it's finally Friday.”

Anna's eyes widened as she entered the apartment. “Wow, you have a beautiful place.”

There had been a brief period of time in school when she'd considered staying in acadamia to teach at the college level, so had researched salaries. They'd been surprisingly low, but Jai's apartment didn't reflect that. Each piece of furniture had clearly been picked out with care and most of it was the same shade of rich, stained wood. In contrast to the deep reddish-brown of the wood, the throw cushions on the couch and two easy chairs were bright colors. Yellow, green, blue. It wasn't a combination she would have thought of, yet it oddly fit.

“Thank you,” said Jai.

She heard the door shut behind her and a moment later a hand was at the small of her back. She wasn't sure which man it was until she glanced over her shoulder to see Jai. He offered a small smile, gesturing to the couch. “Would you take a seat for a few

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moments? I need Beau in my office for a bit before we begin.”

There was a jolt of lust as if his hand was electrified and it went straight through her down to her clit. She bit her tongue, nodding slightly. Having to wait in the living room alone while the two of them were doing God-knows-what in the office might kill her, but she could handle the anticipation.

“Sure,” she finally said, before going to take a seat on the couch. She crossed her legs, the short skirt she’d chosen for the night exposing a long line of thigh before she smoothed it out.

Of the two of them, Anna had always been the more patient one. The one who didn’t mind waiting an extra ninety minutes at the doctor’s office. The one who was willing to drive ten miles out of her way to run a small errand. She had learned a long time ago not to try to play waiting games with Beau. He didn’t do well with being tied up and left on his own, for example. But at that moment, Anna didn’t feel like the patient one. It was all she could do to keep from tapping her toes. No wonder Beau was in the habit of shredding anything within reach. Right that moment, she would love to have a napkin to focus her nervous energy on.

No, that wasn’t quite right. She wasn’t nervous. She had nothing to be nervous about. But she was excited. There was already an ache deep within her, and the thought of the two men behind the closed door only made it worse. Or maybe the thought made it better.

Ten minutes later, Beau reemerged. “Ms. Spencer?” The use of her maiden name sent another thrill through her. “Professor Bagri is waiting for you.”

She stood, smoothing her skirt again as she did. Maybe that was her own form of fidgeting tonight, since she didn’t have any paper to shred. When she turned and caught sight of Beau she

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nearly whimpered. The top two buttons on his shirt were undone and his hair was slightly mussed. His erection was already temptingly prominent. The waiting, perhaps, had been harder on him than on her.

“Thank you.”

She followed almost meekly to the office door, stepping inside when Beau held it open for her. Jai’s office looked just as she’d imagined it. His bookcases were overflowing, with neat stacks of books and papers surrounding them like defensive walls. How the man managed to hoard neatly, she didn’t know. It had to be some sort of natural talent. The desk was entirely bare except for a laptop. She somewhat doubted it always looked like that. Jai sat behind the desk, his fingers steepled.

“Ms. Spencer, thank you for coming,” Jai said.

She had never heard that particular tone from Jai before, and suddenly she was nineteen again, unsure of herself, and more than a little awestruck by her professors. They had seemed larger than life to her at the time, with so much knowledge and the power to make or break her academic career. A look from them, or a few words said in the right tone, could make her feel like a child.

“Of course.” She perched on the edge of her seat, her skirt primly pulled over her knees. “How are you?”

“Fine, thank you. I’m sure you’re curious about why Mr. Southall and myself needed to see you today.” He leaned forward, resting his hands on the desk as he did so. “We’ve been watching your work and are very impressed. We think you might be a good fit for an exclusive club here on campus.”

She drew her brows together and started to open her mouth, before snapping it shut. That hadn’t been the direction she was expecting at all. Glancing toward Beau gave her no hint as to

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where they were going with this. Turning her eyes back toward Jai, she cocked her head slightly. “I’m flattered. What club is that?”

“One I think—we both think—you’ll be quite suited for,” Beau said. “But you need to prove you’re worthy enough to know its name.”

It was easy to stay in character when the two of them were leaving her this confused. She had no idea where they were taking things now and found herself looking from Beau to Jai, trying to decipher what the point was. If their intention had been to pique her interest, they’d succeeded.

“All right,” she said slowly. “And how do I prove myself worthy? Is there a test?”

“Of a sort.” Jai got up from behind the desk and circled around it. There was something in the way he moved that was reminiscent of watching a predator stalking its prey. In that office, in that moment, she *was* the prey. It sent an involuntary shiver through her. “Or maybe it’s more of an initiation.”

She opened her mouth to ask what sort of initiation, but Beau cut her off. “Get on your knees.”

“What?”

“On your knees,” Beau repeated. “Don’t just sit there and stare at me. I gave you an order.”

She slid out of the chair reluctantly, heart hammering in her chest. The carpet was thick and soft around her knees as if it had been chosen for just that purpose. Beau and Jai were taller than her, but down on the floor like this they towered above her. The thrill of giving up all power to the two of them had her soaking through her panties. Each beat of her heart throbbed between her thighs.

“What else?” she asked.

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Jai answered. “Don’t speak unless you’re told to.” She felt his hand closing around the short ponytail she’d pulled her hair into. A moment later there was a gentle tug as he used it as a handle, tipping her head back to force her to look up at him. Her eyes ran up his body, pausing at his straining cock inside his slacks before they met his face.

“There are better things to do with your mouth,” he went on.

“Wh-what?” Anna stammered, slipping more into character by the second. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Hey,” Beau said sharply, “he told you not to speak. If you can’t do what you’re told, you’re going to be punished.”

Her lips pursed together in a small frown, but she didn’t speak. She felt Jai’s hand release her ponytail, but didn’t move her head. Giving up control like this was always difficult for her, which was perhaps what excited her so much about it. She and Beau hadn’t explored anything in this direction when they were together senior year, but she could imagine that even as a college student she still would have been this soaking wet.

Once Jai drew his hand back, he started opening his fly. Her eyes widened, mouth opening to say something, but the sight of Beau out of the corner of her eye made her snap it shut again.

“Have you ever sucked two cocks at the same time?” Jai asked.

Breathless, she shook her head slightly.

She watched, completely enthralled as Jai pulled his cock from his pants. Beau had mentioned that it was quite impressive, and her own imagination had been actively engaged with it, but she still didn’t quite know what to expect. Her pussy clenched at the sight of it, and she did her best not to squirm in place. She was so captivated by Jai that she didn’t notice Beau moving until he curled his hand in her ponytail. She glanced over and saw his pants

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were undone, his cock already glistening with pre-come.

“I bet you she has. She looks like a little slut to me.”

Jai moved closer, holding his cock in his hand to guide it toward her lips. It was an inch away from her, thick and tempting. He was close enough she could smell the enticing musky male scent of him. Both of them so close, so hard, left her light-headed. She bit her tongue, aching with the need to lean forward and taste them both.

“Is that it? Are you a little slut?” Jai purred. “You can speak.”

“No, sir.”

Beau wrapped the ponytail around his hand and pulled her hair back with just enough force to make her scalp tingle. “Tell Professor Bagri you want to suck his cock.”

“I...I want to suck your cock,” Anna said around the tightness in her throat.

“Now ask him nicely if you can.”

She swallowed, shivering, then licked her lips. “May I please suck your cock, sir?”

“You may.”

She felt Jai’s cock slide against her lips, pre-come leaving a salty sheen against her bottom lip. Her lips automatically parted to welcome him in with a soft moan. The taste of him was slightly different from Beau, somehow more wild. Her tongue swept over his head, the tip lightly probing at the slit and eliciting a soft hiss from Jai that made her body tighten with need.

Beau’s hand never left her hair, and she realized quickly he intended to control her pace. He let her tongue lick Jai’s cock for a few seconds before pushing her head forward, forcing the first few inches of his length past her lips. That wild taste intensified, and she swallowed, already feeling the pressure at the back of her

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throat. Beau guided her farther, pushing her mouth down his cock until her nose was buried in Jai's thick hair. He held her there without speaking, and the drumming in her ears grew louder and louder as her need for air increased. Then he yanked her head back with enough force to pull her completely off Jai's cock, but not quite enough to hurt.

"Do you like his cock? Tell him."

"Yes." She gasped. Her tongue darted out over her bottom lip, still tasting the faint salty musk from Jai. "I love it. I want more."

Jai's hand slowly slid along his shaft, stroking himself almost teasingly. "What about Mr. Southall's cock? Do you want to taste it, too?"

She swallowed and nodded. "Yes, please."

Beau's palm flattened against the back of her skull, and he held her in place as he guided his cock to her lips. He dragged the tip across her mouth, smearing the pre-come on her skin and taunting her with the taste and smell.

"Open up wide, little girl."

She obediently dropped her jaw enough to accommodate his width and he immediately thrust into her mouth. Her nipples began to ache at the familiar taste and texture, and she desperately wished she could take off her shirt. Or at least play with one of the hard points. Her hand moved to her chest, but Jai caught her wrist in an iron grip.

"You move when we tell you to move, or you'll be cuffed," he warned. "In order to find out if you're right for the club, I need to ask a few questions. Don't worry about your mouth being full. Hold up one finger for yes and two for no. And don't lie to me. Have you ever sucked anybody's cock before today?"

She was wound so tightly she wasn't sure how much more of

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this she could take. Part of her was tempted to push her luck and end up in those threatened cuffs, but she was sure they'd just deny her longer if that happened. Jai still gripped the wrist of her right hand, so she stuck up one finger.

"Have you ever let anybody fuck you?"

Anna thought for a moment, uncertain. Was she supposed to answer as herself or as the innocent they were corrupting? She held up two fingers.

Jai's smile was warm and satisfying. Disarming. "Good. That's just what I wanted to hear."

He released her wrist and straightened. She felt the tip of his cock against the corner of her stretched lips, and then Beau was pulling away from her. She barely had a chance to catch her breath before Jai's cock invaded her mouth. Anna reached up to grip his hip, but then remembered Jai's order and balled her hands into fists at her side.

Beau's hand was still at the back of her head, controlling her movements. She was ready for it this time when he forced her mouth down Jai's length. She moaned softly as she willed her jaw to relax further, squeezing her eyes shut. There was pressure at the back of her throat as she was pushed to her limit, before Beau allowed her to draw back again. Not all the way, though. She swallowed around Jai's cock, trying to catch her breath through her nose. Her tongue slid along the underside of his shaft, tracing each vein and just underneath his head, eliciting a harsh groan. At that, he started to slide himself back and forth between her lips, fucking her mouth.

The thought of that and how badly she wanted Jai inside of her pussy made her whimper, squeezing her thighs together as she fought the urge to touch herself. Beau didn't give her an inch. She

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couldn't push back against his hand, and if he didn't want her to move, she couldn't. He held her in place as Jai continued to ravish her mouth. She sensed movement and caught a glimpse of Beau cupping Jai's balls. Her jaw began to ache and her scalp was sore, but she couldn't say anything or do anything about that. Instead of being annoyed at her own powerlessness, she embraced it, moaning for more, rubbing her thighs together to find any sort of relief.

"Come on her face," Beau encouraged.

She felt Jai pulling back and closed her eyes again in preparation. Beau's fingers curled around her ponytail again, guiding her head back just before she heard Jai's moan. A hot splash of come hit her cheek, then her lips. She opened her mouth, holding it open to accept the sticky fluid as jet after jet flowed from his cock. Her tongue darted out to catch some off of her upper lip as she moaned.

"Are you hungry for more, Ms. Spencer?" Jai asked breathlessly.

That voice sent shudders down her spine. "Yes, please."

She didn't need to be told to open her mouth for Beau. He knew she could swallow him down to the root, and he took advantage of that knowledge, filling her completely on the first thrust. He pumped into her throat, forcing her to swallow around his shaft. Anna knew it wouldn't take long. Beau had been on edge all day, his anticipation rising as the clock brought them closer to the designated time. He rocked his hips harder, using her mouth with no regard for her desires. She wiggled her hips, certain that if either one of them touched her, just for a moment, she would explode. She hoped Jai would pinch her nipple or reach between her legs, but he didn't.

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Anna expected to feel his hot come slide down her throat, but he pulled away from her at the last second, aiming his cock at her other cheek.

The first hot stream to hit her made her shudder, whimpering in agonized frustration. Her eyes narrowed to slits, hungrily watching Beau as he pumped his fist along his shaft, milking it. He hit her cheek again, then across her parted lips. She moaned as she licked at his come. To her immense satisfaction Beau pushed past her lips for the tail end of his orgasm, letting her suck him clean, which she did with enthusiasm.

“Get her undressed.”

“Yes, sir,” came Beau’s prompt reply. He gripped her by her arms and pulled her to her feet. “Why don’t you strip for us and show off that sexy body of yours. But don’t wipe your face. I like it the way it is.”

After that, she didn’t trust herself to speak because she might simply start begging and then they’d make her wait even longer. Instead, she brought her hands up to untie the ribbon at the back of her blouse holding it tight beneath her breasts. She pulled it up over her head and set it over the back of the chair, leaving her in her bra and skirt. Her fingers lightly slid over the silky cups of her bra before she removed it, but she managed to avoid the temptation of teasing herself. Just barely. Her shoes and socks went next, then she let her skirt fall in a pool around her ankles.

Left in her underwear damp with arousal, she leaned over as she hooked her fingers under the elastic and slowly slid them down her legs. She could almost feel her skin itching under the heat of Jai’s gaze as she pulled them off.

Jai held out his hand expectantly, and she had no choice but to pass the skimpy garment over to him. He flashed a grin at her

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before tucking it in his back pocket. Anna wondered if she would ever see them again. Something about the thought of Jai keeping them increased the temperature under her skin, and she was forced to look away from him. Like she really was the confused virgin.

Beau took her by the wrist and guided her to the desk. It wasn't completely cleared off, but there was still plenty of room for her to lie across the massive top. Beau forced her legs apart, exposing her completely to Jai. She wanted to reach between her legs and slide her fingers along her swollen lips. She caught Beau's attention and pleaded with him with her eyes, knowing he could get her off in seconds.

When his warm fingers did touch her, she jerked off the desk. Beau pulled her lips apart, revealing her swollen clit to Jai. "Look how much she wants it."

The weight of their eyes on her was nearly as good as being touched, but not quite. Already she could see the cocks on both men growing hard again, and she wondered if just being looked at by the both of them would be enough to get her off. She hoped that wasn't all they had planned, but she was deep enough into the game that it wouldn't have entirely surprised her, either.

"Is that right?" Jai asked as he pulled off his shirt. For a man who spent his days teaching, he was surprisingly muscular. Beautifully so. She could see why Beau had been driven to distraction with lust for the man.

She took a deep breath, a shiver of anticipation coursing through her. "Yes, sir."

* * *

Beau wanted to climb onto the desk and fuck his wife until the

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desperate look in her eye was replaced with satisfaction. Everything about her was driving him wild at that moment. Her hair was already a mess, sloppily coming out of the ponytail—Anna usually never let a strand fall out of place. The come drying on her face made his balls ache every time he looked at her. Her skin was flushed from her brow to her chest, and he wanted to lick the thin layer of perspiration from her throat. Her inner thighs were wet with her arousal, and her pussy was perfect, her lips full and glistening, her clit engorged. He wanted to lick her juices from her flesh and bury his tongue inside of her. He wanted to fuck her and kiss her and hear the sweet little sounds she made. But he was as much bound by the game as she was, and they had agreed on one thing before calling Anna into the office. Jai called the shots. Beau could have what Jai wanted to give him.

Jai was adding to his torment, increasing it exponentially. Beau hadn't forgotten what he looked like naked, but the sight of his body was better than any memory. His cock was hard again, and the thought of him thrusting into Anna's willing body left him with a very odd and difficult set of emotions and impulses. He knew it would be hot—the two hottest people he knew having sex couldn't be anything but exciting. But the bitter sting of jealousy hit him twice. Rather than distracting him from his arousal, it only sharpened it. The more jealous he felt, the harder his cock got. Beau didn't understand it, but he wasn't exactly complaining either.

Beau dragged his finger along her labia, then brought it up to his mouth and licked it like honey. "Are you going to fuck her now, sir?"

Anna's hands were gripping the edge of the desk, her body trembling with tension. She whimpered, but said nothing. Beau

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wondered if the silent begging in her eyes was as obvious to Jai as it was for him, or if he only recognized it because he knew her so well. It was hard to tell, as Jai looked unmoved by it. Somehow, he managed to simply stand there and appear as if he were making some idle decision and had no interest in its outcome. The cool control made Beau wish momentarily he were the one at Jai's mercy, bowing to his will. Another agonizing, silent moment passed, before Jai stepped out of his shoes, following them with his slacks and boxers. He stepped forward, bracing his hands on either side of Anna as he leaned over her, trapping her against the desk.

"Yes." The word was practically purred as Jai's lips curled into a smile. Taking his cock in his hand, he dragged it against her lips slowly, watching her face. "If she begs."

Anna looked as though she was on the verge of orgasm from that alone. Her breath was shallow and rapid, body just barely squirming as she fought to hold still. "Please, please, sir. Fuck me. I want it."

"I don't believe her," Beau said, even as the scent of her fresh arousal hit him. He didn't really like being that mean to Anna under normal circumstances. But these weren't normal circumstances, and prolonging her satisfaction made him suffer, too.

Jai never looked away from Anna's face. Despite what he was doing, he managed to keep his own expression perfectly controlled. "Mr. Southall doesn't believe you. You'll need to beg better than that."

Her eyes fluttered shut as she nearly pouted. "I'll do anything you want. I want anything you'll give me. Just please fuck me."

It took every single ounce of strength Beau possessed to not push Jai out of the way and give her what she wanted. He looked

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up to Jai and licked his dry lips. “Perhaps we should see if she’ll really do anything we want.”

“True, ‘anything’ covers a lot of ground. Do you want us to both fuck you at the same time?”

Anna’s breath was expelled in a shuddering explosion as she nodded quickly. “Yes, sir.”

“Then get on your stomach,” Jai said.

Beau stood back as Anna obediently turned to face the desk, exposing her shapely little ass. Jai handed him the bottle of lube, and he didn’t need to be told what to do with it. He ran his fingers up and down her cheeks, remembering the last time he had fucked her like that. When he had still been riding high from his night with Jai. When every word she said drove him crazy with lust. He bent and licked her hole until she moaned and lifted her hips, rising to meet his face. He replaced his tongue with his lubed fingers, working two in. She tried to resist that intrusion, but he put his hand on the small of her back and pushed her back to the desk.

After a moment, she settled down, relaxing under the invasion, though her breath was still coming unevenly. Jai slid a hand to rest it between her shoulders and hold her in place, as his other hand slid under her body to cup one of her breasts. A strangled, desperate moan came from her as her back arched slightly, pushing herself into that touch. Knowing her reactions and how sensitive Anna’s nipples were, Beau could guess that Jai was likely teasing one. From the sounds she was making and the tension in her body, she already seemed to be on the verge of orgasm.

Beau didn’t want her to come just yet. Not until they were both buried in her body, but he suspected as soon as Jai entered her, she would explode. Not that he would blame her. He was doing everything he could to push her closer to the edge. And so was Jai.

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He worked his fingers in and out of her slowly, careful not to hurt her. Her moans vibrated through her body, gaining volume as Jai continued to play with her nipple. His cock throbbed, and he just wanted to be inside of her once again. “Are you ready to be fucked now, Ms. Spencer?”

“Yes, please.” The words were whimpered, barely loud enough to be heard her body was so tense.

Jai’s hand left her breast, both hands moving to her arms to help pull her up as Beau slid his fingers free from her. She was unsteady on her feet, eyes glassy with lust, and leaned heavily against the support of Jai’s hands. The other man sat on the edge of the desk, then pulled her closer, into his lap. Beau and Jai had discussed precautions while they were in the office. All of them were clean and Anna was on the pill, so there was little need for condoms. Which made things simpler, but also added an unexpected thrill at knowing the other man would come inside of his wife.

Beau stood to the side, watching as Jai gripped his cock and slid it along her lips, wetting the head. Anna raised herself up and wrapped her legs around his waist, but he caught her hips, guiding her onto his shaft slowly. Beau could see her muscles tense as she tried to break from Jai’s grip, but he was much stronger. Her eyes widened as he finally entered her, and her mouth formed a perfect, soundless O.

Beau looked down, watching as Jai’s cock disappeared into his wife. Anna shuddered as her body fit around him, but she still didn’t make a sound. Not until Jai lifted her hips and then brought her back down hard, impaling her on his shaft. That wrenched a cry from her as her body arched backward, shaking and gasping. Her heavy-lidded eyes met Beau’s for a moment as he watched the

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release of her long denied orgasm wash across her face. Anna's eyes closed again and she moaned as Jai thrust into her several more times, making her shudder. Then he could see Jai's hands tighten their grip on her hips once more to hold her against him, keeping her immobile. She whined in frustration, biting her bottom lip.

Beau poured more of the lube over his cock and positioned himself behind her. He would have much preferred to do this on a bed, but maybe next time. Not that any of them had mentioned a next time, but Beau had high hopes. Beau found her hole with the tip of his cock and immediately met resistance. Undeterred, he pushed past the slick muscle until his cock broke through. Everything inside of him shouted at him to slam it home, but he couldn't do that to her. One hand rested on the top of Jai's and the other gripped the edge of the desk as he slowly worked his shaft into her passage.

"Oh God," Anna gasped. Her eyes still closed, she leaned back against Beau, resting her head on his chest. Her lips were parted, breasts shaking slightly with her still heavy breath.

As he finally sank that last inch into her passage, his eyes met Jai's. One of the other man's hands left Anna's hip, moving to tangle itself in Beau's hair and haul him in for a sudden, punishing kiss. His lips felt swollen and sensitive under Jai's as their tongues tangled against one another and fought for dominance. A slight roll of Jai's hips, barely sliding his cock in and out Anna, teased against Beau's cock through her internal walls. Feeling both of them at the same time was exactly how he imagined it and nothing like he expected. He could really feel Jai's cock, feel how hard he was, even feel him throbbing. It was almost like their little tryst in the bathroom, except Anna's soft flesh was the hand that held them

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together.

The kiss almost distracted him from all of that, though. They hadn't even touched while preparing for Anna, and he had been aching to feel Jai's mouth again. Jai moved his hips again, and Beau matched him, wondering how long he could withstand the exquisite heat of Anna's ass and the maddening pressure of Jai's cock. He could feel Anna start to move between them, rocking back and forth between each man, riding their cocks. Her head turned, moving to work her lips over the side of his neck as she whimpered. Her arms moved between their bodies, no doubt stroking her deprived flesh. Jai made no move to stop her this time.

Instead, Jai started to thrust deeper and harder. He pulled almost completely out of Anna before pulling her back down onto him. Beau moaned breathlessly into the kiss, reaching out blindly to dig his fingers into Jai's arm. He felt everything. Every inch of Jai's journey, every twitch. Anna's moans vibrated against Beau's throat as she writhed between them.

Beau dragged his hand up the side of her body, smoothing his palm over her skin until he reached her breast. He cupped it, his thumb lightly moving over her hard nipple. Otherwise, he didn't move, letting Anna and Jai control everything. His cock remained buried inside of her, but he didn't need any additional friction. Not with Jai's hard thrusts. He felt the sharp sting of Anna's teeth and knew that was just another request, another sign of her desperation. Beau took pity on her, rolling her nipple between his thumb and forefinger, pinching it with just the right amount of pressure.

She cried out, arching and squirming. One of her hands flew back to hold him at the back of his neck, just below where Jai's was buried in his hair. There was something very satisfying about having the both of them cling to him. He could feel the pace of

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Jai's hips increasing, the other man's breath picking up until he broke the kiss with a gasp. Each thrust dragged up and down Beau's length through Anna's body, making her clench and shudder and rock back on his cock. A moment later he felt Jai's lips on the other side of his neck, unconsciously mimicking the first soft kisses from Anna followed by a teasing bite.

Warmth flooded Beau's system at the light pain. As far as he could tell, he'd never had a biting fetish before. But when he felt Jai's teeth, everything went haywire. Was it just a natural reaction to Jai? Could he drive anybody crazy with a well-placed bite? Beau had actually had a dream about Jai fucking him hard from behind, roughly biting the back of his neck. When he woke, he hadn't wanted to bother Anna with his hard-on, and he jerked himself off with thoughts of Jai penetrating him with cock and teeth, marking him. In the cold light of day, he had shoved the fantasies to the back of his mind, but now they were back.

Beau reached for Anna's other nipple, manipulating it in the same way. Anna moaned in encouragement, her body tightening again. He began rocking his hips, but was careful to keep each stroke shallow. He didn't want to pull free from her, he just wanted to increase the friction. Even Jai moaned at the extra motion, responding by moving even faster. Anna arched back, and then she shuddered and her muscles begin to constrict around him once again. As he felt the tension in her body increase, she started to move more frantically. Her hand let go of the back of Beau's neck and both of her arms snaked around Jai, drawing him tighter against her. She darted forward to nuzzle into the side of Jai's throat, doing something that made the other man shudder and groan.

Jai was pounding into her quickly now, hard enough to make

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the three of them rock in time to his rhythm. Each thrust seemed to draw Anna tighter and tighter around Beau's cock, until he could barely move inside of her. Finally, the tension snapped. Anna's cries were muffled by Jai's throat as she writhed and rocked breathlessly, her body clenching spasmodically around their cocks. The scent of her arousal was hot in the air and Beau could imagine Jai's thighs were wet with it as she rode the both of them through her orgasm.

As if a chain reaction had been set off, Jai's breath hitched before coming out in a low growl. A moment later Beau felt his teeth digging into his throat, breaking through the skin ever so slightly as Jai's hips bucked against Anna's and he flooded her.

Beau couldn't stop himself from following them. Not with Anna's flesh clenched around him and Jai's teeth in his throat. Not with the knowledge that Jai was coming inside his wife. Not with the sounds of their pleasure filling the room and the musky, delicious smell of sex drenching the air. Every sense was being assaulted, and while this night was supposed to be about Anna's fantasy, it was still pushing every one of Beau's buttons. Beau thrust forward, burying himself as deeply as possible before erupting. The hot come coated his skin and her walls, and he took advantage of the added slick, pumping his hips to milk the orgasm for as long as he could.

After several breathless moments the three of them were left panting and spent, covered in a fine sheen of sweat. Jai drew back slowly from the both of them, hissing softly through his teeth. There was a perfect set of Anna's teeth left on the side of his neck, apparently what had made him react so suddenly earlier. Anna leaned forward a bit and laid her hands on the desk to help support herself.

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One of Jai's hands came up, stroking along Anna's back slowly. He started at the base of her skull and followed her spine all the way down to her ass before starting at the top again. His eyes were open just barely, watching Beau with a look of pure satisfaction.

Beau trailed kisses along her shoulder and neck until his mouth was at her ear. "Did you like that, Mrs. Southall?"

Anna moaned and nodded. He wouldn't be surprised if she wasn't up to speaking for awhile. He looked over her head to address Jai. "Do you mind if we use your shower before we—"

"Why don't you stay?" Jai paused, a brief flash of embarrassment crossing his face. "You'd be welcome to, I mean. My bed is big enough and I'm not the type to toss people out after something like this."

Beau sighed with relief. "I was hoping you'd say that. But I didn't want to be presumptuous."

Jai flashed him a quick grin. "And you can still use my shower, too."

CHAPTER 5

The bed was hardly uncomfortable under the worst of circumstances. When Jai had left home to go to America for school, he'd still had the benefit of his family's money and he'd bought himself everything he could want in his new life. It was only after his father realized he had no intentions of returning that he'd cut Jai off. It had been the Bagri wealth that had bought the bed and it had rarely been anything but perfect.

The next morning, it somehow managed to surpass that.

Jai opened his eyes to the early morning light. Neither of his lovers from the previous night were awake yet, which was just as well. He could admire them sleeping next to him, tangled up together in the blissful unawareness of dreams. One of Beau's arms was outstretched, wrapped almost possessively around Jai's

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own waist. As he looked at the two of them, he felt his heart clench painfully in his chest. There was something too right about that and the way their scents mingled with his own. It was a concept he hadn't entertained as a possibility in his own life for a very long time, but instinct recognized it regardless. Mates. His own. He could still see the mark on Beau's throat where he'd bitten him. One canine had cut through his skin, claiming him in a way that would have been undeniable back home. Yet neither of them would know. Neither would know the aching loneliness that they had eased.

But only for a short time, he reminded himself. This was a game for them. It wasn't something they wanted as a part of their lives on a regular basis.

Reaching across the two of them, Jai stroked one finger along Anna's cheek as he rested his own cheek against the top of Beau's head. He'd worried this could lead to disaster and feelings of attachment. Still, he could regret nothing.

She woke first, her lovely green eyes fluttering open. "Morning," she whispered with a smile.

"Good morning," he answered, finding his lips curling into an answering smile. "You slept well, I trust?"

She nodded slightly and shifted a bit before stretching, groaning under her breath. She immediately curled up against Beau's side again. He could imagine she had to be a bit sore after everything they'd put her through last night. He didn't think he'd ever seen a more satisfied woman by the end of it, though. "And you?"

"Very well."

His thoughts kept tumbling over themselves, unsure of where to go. His morning with Beau in the hotel had been all right

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enough. He'd known he wanted another night with the man, but had been resigned to it only happening once. After their meeting in the coffee shop and now this, things were a bit more confused. He wanted them both too much.

Anna carefully extracted herself from Beau's embrace. "He's kind of a bear in the morning. Do you want to make some breakfast?"

"Excellent idea." He gingerly removed Beau's arm from around his waist, slid out of the bed and pulled on a pair of shorts, then turned to offer Anna a T-shirt. "I have it on good authority it's dangerous to cook breakfast naked. Oddly, lunch is safe."

"Unless you're cooking BLTs, I suppose," Anna said, pulling the shirt on. It covered her to her thighs, but somehow she still seemed as naked as ever. Before leaving the room, she bent and kissed Beau's cheek. He smiled a little in his sleep, but didn't stir.

"Mm, true. I wouldn't recommend that."

In his kitchen, Jai started a kettle heating for tea, then went hunting through the cupboards. "I hope you're not both addicted to coffee. If I have any here, it's probably over a year old."

"No, we've been known to survive the odd morning without our coffee fix." She opened the fridge and surveyed its contents. "You can always tell when a man lives alone."

"How?"

"There's no food in this fridge. Fortunately for you, I've worked with less before."

"I'm very fortunate indeed." He couldn't help but grin as he leaned back against his counter, arms crossed, watching her rooting through his fridge. "I did buy some fresh tomatoes just the other night."

"Those are not a breakfast food."

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“Can of baked beans?”

She shot him a look over her shoulder and he shrugged. It was a perfectly acceptable breakfast to him, but Americans did have different ideas about what was appropriate for breakfast.

“I had a roommate from England when I was in college. One morning she insisted on cooking a proper fry up. She was horrified when I tried to flavor the beans with liquid smoke and brown sugar. Apparently, that’s just not done where she comes from.”

“No, it isn’t, but I’ve developed a bit of a taste for it over the years. I haven’t been back home in almost twelve years now.”

“Why not? That seems to be a long time to stay away from home.”

“My father’s very conservative and had very definite ideas about how I should live my life. An arranged marriage, staying close to the family, that sort of thing. I came here to study anthropology of the American Southwest and realized there was no good reason for me to go home again. He got angry with me over it a few years back and cut me off, so then I went and did my best to keep him from ever being able to find me again. Petty, I suppose. He just found me again not too long ago.”

When Jai realized he’d been rambling about his history, he cleared his throat. “Sorry. A bit more than you asked for.”

Anna turned away from the fridge to touch his arm. “I can’t say that I know exactly what you’re going through, but I think I have some idea. My parents had their own ideas about what I should do with my life. None of it included attending college in California, marrying somebody outside of the church, or putting my career ahead of having a family.” She offered a crooked grin. “And that’s just the stuff they know about.”

“Your parents don’t approve of Beau?” That was a rather

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dumbfounding thought, considering how devoted the man was. They'd been together for years but they still seemed like teenagers in love in so many ways. Of course, then again, his parents wouldn't have approved of Beau either. The thought made him smirk slightly.

"I'm sure they'd love him if he were Mormon." Anna shrugged. "But he's not. And he refuses to be converted. So...we're not welcome."

"I'm sorry. I'd apparently be welcome home right now if I just married the woman my family picked for me."

She tilted her head. "Why don't you?"

He reached out to her, curling a strand of her hair around his finger thoughtfully. "I guess because it isn't the life I want. I like it here. I like the friends I have here. I get lonely sometimes, but it's my life. Not my family's."

"Yeah, I don't think you would be very happy living by somebody else's rules." She turned back to the fridge and began sorting through it. "Beau's that way, too."

"I can see that about him. He's, ah, not the type to color inside the lines."

She started pulling things out of the fridge to set on the counter. There was most of a carton of eggs and a block of cheese he was gratified to see hadn't gone moldy. She'd managed to find a bunch of green onions that were only slightly limp as well.

"He's not. I think a part of him really chafes at having a nice little house and a nice conventional job. But at the same time, he'd do anything for somebody he loved." Anna looked up, wiping the hair from her face. "Do you like omelets?"

He nodded to her question with a small smile. "That doesn't surprise me. I don't think I've ever seen a man more devoted to his

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wife.”

“He likes you, you know.”

Jai inclined his head slightly, unable to deny it. “I thought so. I’m fond of him, too.”

“Fond of him as a person? Or do you just want to fuck his brains out? Not that I blame you about the latter. It’s why I started seeing him.”

That made him laugh softly and he could feel his cheeks warming a bit at her bluntness. “As a person. I’d consider him a friend, but I think it might be dangerous for the two of us to hang out together.”

“Because you do want to fuck his brains out?” Anna asked abruptly. He couldn’t tell if she was joking or not, so decided to answer honestly.

“Um. Yes.” He cleared his throat as he turned away to busy himself with his tea. “Do you want any tea?”

“I do. Beau doesn’t like it, though.” He heard her cracking eggs into a bowl, and then the rapid sound of her whipping them with a fork. She didn’t ask him where anything was, but she still managed to find the items she was looking for. Jai wasn’t surprised. From the first time he met her, he knew she was the sort of person who could take over any room. “If he mentions he wants to see you again, what should I tell him?”

“I’d be open to it, but that really comes down to the two of you.”

He felt like a stupid young schoolboy again, which was an unusual feeling for him. If there was the chance to see Beau again, he’d take it, even knowing it would be painful to torment himself with what he couldn’t have. It wasn’t just Beau, either. The physical connection with Beau was unlike anything he’d ever had

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before, but Anna was something else entirely. The two of them were everything he'd ever wanted without realizing it.

Yet they'd said nothing about it being anything other than sex. He couldn't bring himself to suggest anything so foolishly emotional.

"I wouldn't want to detract from what the two of you already have," he added.

"I don't think you could detract from what we have. The two of us have already been through a lot. I'm always going to be...secure with him. Whether you want to spend an occasional night with him or both of us."

He nudged a cup of tea over to her on the counter before turning to the fridge to pull out some milk for his own cup. Once he'd poured a dollop into his tea, he paused, staring down at the liquid. "I'm...fond of the both of you, you know."

"I'm fond of you, too. I don't suppose you have any fresh herbs?"

"I think I have some basil in the fridge door. Let me check." It took only a moment to find it and as he was handing it to her he heard the sound of a knock at his door. Rarely having visitors, particularly on Saturday morning, it was almost startling. "I'll go get that."

On his way to the door he considered pausing to pull on more clothing, but decided against it. Anyone who was banging at his door on a weekend morning would simply have to deal with the fact that he was in his boxers. A look through the peephole told him nothing, only showing the top of a small woman's head. Or possibly a tall child. When he opened the door, he saw it was a young woman of about Anna and Beau's age. She looked familiar, like a member of the Pard, but the spicy scent of her perfume made

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it impossible to tell by scent alone.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m Madhuri,” she said, as though that explained something. Her accent was completely American, so he tried to think of anyone he might know by that name in the country, but kept failing. Whatever she was there for, she looked almost painfully anxious.

“I’m sorry?”

“You didn’t read your father’s letter, did you?” The anxious look was steadily being replaced with embarrassment and she started blinking rapidly. “He thought you’d be more agreeable to someone in this country.”

Realization of who was standing in front of him hit him like a punch to the gut. “Oh no.”

“Jai?” Anna stepped into the room, but paused when she saw Madhuri and tried to pull the hem of her T-shirt down. “Oh, sorry. Were you expecting company?”

Madhuri’s jaw fell open when she caught sight of Anna, then quickly averted her eyes. “Obviously this was a bad time. And maybe just a bad idea in general.”

Even if he’d had no intention of humoring his family’s matchmaking, he still felt bad for the poor woman to be put into this situation. Jai winced as he rubbed the back of his neck, then turned back toward Anna.

“I believe this is the young woman my family was trying to set me up with.” He shot Madhuri a questioning look, raising one eyebrow. “Is that correct?”

“Yeah. My options are fairly limited, so I was hoping this might work.” Madhuri glanced up at him, lips pursed in a frown. “Clearly not. How do you do this with people you can’t be honest

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with?”

“Did I hear three voices out here?” Beau asked, stepping into the room and zipping his jeans. Of the three of them, he was the most dressed, but he was also the most damning. Madhuri would recognize the bold purple bite mark on Beau’s neck. “Oh, who’s this?”

“I think it’s Jai’s fiancée,” Anna said under her breath.

“Fiancée? Jai never mentioned a fiancée.” He looked at Jai, brow furrowed. “You never mentioned a fiancée.”

“I don’t have a fiancée,” Jai said forcefully, before turning back toward Madhuri. He was ready to apologize for that, since she’d clearly been misled about how interested he was in an arranged marriage. She was gaping at Beau, however.

“Are you insane?” she hissed at him.

“Hey,” Beau protested. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Maybe we should leave these two,” Anna suggested. “It sounds like they have a lot to talk about.”

“No, I want to know what’s insane about me.”

“He claimed you,” Madhuri said, then looked back up at Jai again. “You should not be doing this.”

“It’s my life.”

“And everyone else’s lives if it goes bad.”

“Claimed me? What the fuck does that even mean?”

Anna tugged on Beau’s arm. “Come on. I’m making some breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Then come help me find my clothes.” Anna finally succeeded in pulling her husband from the room, but Jai could still hear his protests down the hallway.

“He doesn’t even know what it means.” Madhuri hurled the

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words like an accusation. “Does it mean so little to you?”

He could feel the beginning of a headache forming from all of this and her heavy perfume. He pressed the palm of one hand against his forehead and closed his eyes as he grimaced. “If you really want to discuss this, get inside. This shouldn’t be in the hall.”

Jai heard the door shut and when he opened his eyes she was standing in front of it, arms crossed as she stared up at him. “You claimed a human who doesn’t even know what it means. How many of them do you do that with? Hell, how many at a time?”

“It isn’t like that. I care about them. Both of them.”

“So much that they have no idea what you’re doing.” Her eyes slid down from his face briefly, to his neck, before she rolled them. “And you even let one of them leave their mark on you. Don’t you have any respect for this at all?”

“That’s not a claim, that’s a hickey. There’s a difference,” Jai pointed out. “And there was no reason to bring it up. I never would have had to tell them if it wasn’t for you making a big deal of it.”

“Then tell them Indians are deeply offended by hickeys if you want to keep them in the dark,” she countered with another roll of her eyes. “There’re so few of us left and you’re the only available man of the Pard who isn’t related to me. You’ll have to forgive me for being irritated that my only chance to have children has been blown for the sake of orgies.”

Jai felt a brief pang of guilt at that. He wanted to say it wasn’t his problem, but it was. A little bit. It certainly wasn’t her fault she found herself in this situation. “Your chance hasn’t been blown. Stop jumping to conclusions.”

“So you’re only casually biting and sleeping with groups of humans?”

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“Yes. Not that it’s any of your business at all, but they’re married and what we’re doing is the definition of casual.” The words were meant to reassure her, but he felt a twinge in his chest. No matter how much he protested, she did have the right idea.

That seemed to mollify her somewhat. She uncrossed her arms, tucking her hair back behind her ears. “I’m sorry. I’d been told you might be reluctant about the match, but I wasn’t prepared to find you half naked with multiple people. I guess I could have sent you an email or something instead of this.”

“That might have been a better idea.” He took a step back from her, leaning against the back of the couch. “Or you could have come wearing less perfume. God, that’s strong.”

She shot him a mildly offended look. “I have a sensitive nose. It keeps me from smelling meat.”

Meat. He could guess what she meant, because he’d heard others in the Pard use the same term for humans. Which explained why she apparently didn’t even entertain the idea of pairing up with a human, he thought.

“I’m amazed you can smell anything at all. Look, I need to sort everything out with Beau and Anna. Why don’t we meet this afternoon? We can talk about...everything.”

“Fine. My cell phone number is in the letter your father sent you.” She opened up the door and let herself out without another word.

Even without the heavy perfume in the air any longer, he didn’t find his headache diminishing. The thought of having to talk to Beau and Anna about whatever the hell had just happened and then meeting with Madhuri again later in the day just drew every last bit of energy out of him. It didn’t matter that he’d only woken up an hour earlier. He was already exhausted. At his bedroom door, he

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rapped lightly on the door frame with a knuckle. “Are you decent?”

“Come on in,” Anna said.

Jai opened the door to see Beau sitting on the foot of the bed, pulling on his shoes. Anna stood in front of his vanity, combing her fingers through her hair, her face slightly pinched. She looked annoyed—Beau looked upset. Maybe even angry. He felt his last hope for a nice morning flutter away.

“What the hell is going on?” Beau asked without preamble.

He took a deep breath. Likely the best way to deal with this—perhaps even the only way—was to be as honest as he could. “My family wanted to arrange a marriage for me. It’s still fairly common. I didn’t have an interest in it, but apparently I should have read my mail, as they went ahead and picked a woman out for me. That would have been the angry woman who just showed up.”

“What did she mean by claiming?” Beau self-consciously rubbed the mark on his throat. “I don’t know a lot about Indian culture, but I don’t remember ever hearing that before.”

Jai mentally swore. Madhuri had casually suggested he could explain it away, but he knew he couldn’t. One of the reasons he’d avoided overly intimate relationships over the years was because he hated lying. He wasn’t very good at it, either. “No, it’s not a common aspect of Indian culture, just distinct to our particular tribal group.” The fact that the tribal group was nothing but shape-shifters didn’t have to be mentioned. “You lay a claim on your mate with a visible bite mark.”

Beau and Anna exchanged a look. “I’m not your mate, Jai.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, so that neither of them would see the flash of pain in his eyes. It had been more of a heat of the moment thing than a desire to claim him, but he had still wanted to

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claim him. The both of them, really. “No, you’re not. Which is why she was angry at me, for casually doing something that’s supposed to be very intimate.”

Beau stood. “I think we should probably go now.”

Anna nodded, but paused to touch Jai’s arm. “Call us when you get things worked out.” She leaned closer to whisper in his ear. “I hope you do.”

His only response was a small nod, as he didn’t know what he could say. Before he even heard the front door close, he was already longing for the both of them and for the leisurely morning he’d expected. After a few moments of standing alone in his bedroom and feeling lost, he stepped out to cross the hall into his office. There was apparently a letter he had to read.

* * *

“Why are you so angry?” Anna asked, once they were in the car.

“I’m not.”

“You are. He didn’t do anything to you.”

“Don’t try to be all reasonable with me right now. I’m not in the mood to be reasonable.”

“Okay, I can respect that. I just don’t get it.”

Beau looked at her with obvious disbelief. “You don’t get it? How could you not get it? He’s engaged, practically.”

“You’re married.”

“He knew about that from the beginning. I don’t want to get caught up in some weird family politics. And even you have to admit his family sounds weirder than most.”

“They do,” Anna conceded. “But that doesn’t mean you should

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turn your back on him. He's probably going to need a friend now more than ever."

"Did you not hear him say he claimed me? What the fuck does that even mean? Who has mates besides Australians? Regular people don't do that."

"Okay, that's weird. But you don't know what's going on. You didn't give him a chance to explain."

"What does it matter? This was just going to be a bit of fun, right? We never made any promises besides that."

"He likes you, and I'm pretty sure you like him."

Beau signaled and pulled into traffic. He knew Anna was right, but even her logic couldn't break through the tangle of emotions. Emotions he didn't want to name and didn't want to deal with. Emotions that weren't even appropriate for the situation. "What if he decides to marry her? How could I be his friend then?"

"Why can't you be his friend?"

"Because I don't want to be his friend, Anna."

"What do you want?" she asked softly.

He risked a glance at her, but she didn't look annoyed or jealous, just curious. "I don't know. I don't know. Maybe all of this was a bad idea."

Anna sighed. "Pretend I told you that you could hang out with Jai all you wanted, but couldn't have sex with him again. Would you still want to see him? As a person?"

"I...well, yeah. I mean, I like him, even if it'd be hard to keep my distance."

"I'm not going to tell you what to do, Beau. You're a grown man, and you're capable of making your own decisions. But if it were up to me, I do think you should at least give him support right now. I recognize that look in his eye. I've seen it in my own

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enough times.”

“What look is that?”

“He’s trapped. He thinks he can’t escape.” Anna took his hand, folding her fingers around his. “You helped me. Even when I didn’t want to let you.”

Beau’s lips thinned. He was still a little creeped out, but he knew Anna was probably right. If Jai didn’t want him around, then Beau would respect that. But it would be Jai’s decision. “I’ll call him this week. Okay?”

“Thank you.”

“But this is still really weird.”

“Life is weird sometimes, Beau. Nothing we can do about that.”

“No, I guess not.”

CHAPTER 6

Jai's father had helpfully given a rather detailed family tree on Madhuri, which made him feel uncomfortably like he was being offered a pedigreed dog. The woman had been right, though. If she wanted to marry a member of the Pard who wasn't a direct relative he was her only choice. That was most likely why she had looked so familiar at first glance, since she was related to everyone else. Her parents had moved to America while he was still a child, so he might have met her once before when she was a baby, but if he had he couldn't remember it.

There were still plenty of families who weren't Pard who practiced arranged marriages. He knew that, intellectually. He'd simply never felt as comfortable with it as others he knew did. He even had a friend at the university whose parents had found him a

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bride. His friend had been pleased that he wouldn't have to bother with all of that dating and hoping he'd be compatible with someone. Jai could see the benefit there, but it still didn't appeal.

His parents had found an educated, apparently intelligent, attractive and strong-willed woman. She might have been a good match for him, at least on paper. He had the uncomfortable feeling that in the flesh was going to be far different.

Being unsure of where Madhuri was staying, he chose to meet her at a cafe not far from his apartment. He sat at the table, drumming his fingers idly while watching for her. When he finally caught sight of her, he stood to greet her.

"Hello, Madhuri."

"Jai." She gave a brief, tight smile. "You can call me Maddy. My friends do."

"All right, Maddy then."

Once they were both seated, she picked up the menu to glance at it, one hand toying with her hair and trying to get it to stay behind her ear. After a moment, he realized her clothing was different than it had been that morning. The overpowering scent of cloves was gone as well. She must have taken his comment on the smell to heart. He felt an odd pang of guilt over that and wondered if he'd hurt her feelings.

"If you invited me here thinking we'd sip coffee and talk like civilized people, you're wrong. I'm eating," she told him without glancing up.

That made him laugh softly. "I could go for a sandwich, too."

She gave him a short, approving nod, but didn't look up from the menu. "I'm sorry for upsetting your friends. I was shocked and I reacted badly."

"You apologized earlier."

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“I know, but it doesn’t really make me feel less guilty.”

“A little warning would have helped, but I can’t fault you for anything else. Like you said, you were shocked.”

They sat in mildly awkward silence until their orders were taken and she no longer had the menu to hide behind. She fiddled nervously with her hair for a moment before looking at him again.

“This isn’t how things are supposed to go. You’re supposed to agree with your family’s choice and then the wedding ceremony is so big and exciting and romantic that we don’t have time to sit around feeling weird,” she said.

“I know that’s how it’s supposed to go, but I didn’t ask my family to find me a wife. If they were doing what I asked it would be different. They’re just treating me like breeding stock.”

“There are less than two hundred of us left worldwide. If we don’t act like breeding stock, how much longer will we survive?”

“Did you ever wonder if we were meant to?”

“Since I don’t really believe in fate or anything like that, I guess it doesn’t matter what’s meant. Just what I want.” She fell silent for a moment, looking thoughtful. “So what is it that you want?”

It shouldn’t have been a hard question, particularly not when he was almost halfway through his thirties. He should have had the answer figured out by then, he felt, but was no closer to it than when he was a teenager. “I don’t know. Freedom, love, security, what everyone else wants.”

“Does freedom really go with the other two?”

His thoughts automatically went to Beau and Anna, which pained him. Still, they were clearly in love and yet gave one another freedom. There were rules around that freedom and they discussed everything, but their love wasn’t some tether around

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their necks. “I think it can. Have you ever been in love?”

She pursed her lips together, shaking her head. “I bit a boy’s lip until it bled once when I was in high school. I haven’t dated much.”

That made him frown slightly. There was one of those details he’d never believed could be accounted for in an arranged match, because who would want to brag about their child’s sexual escapades? It sounded as though she was extremely inexperienced, which didn’t mesh well with his own tendencies. He far preferred adventurous lovers who already knew what they enjoyed.

“You should really try a bit of dating before you think about getting married. It’s amazing what you can learn about yourself and what you want out of life.”

“I already know who I am, and exactly what I want. What is love in the big picture, Jai? It’s not as though you’ll never have it with me. You’ll love your children. We may learn to love each other. Some things are more important.”

He doubted that she’d say that if she’d done much dating. If she had, she’d know how surprising desires could be at times. How illogical. His thoughts started drifting to Beau, unbidden, before he pushed them aside again. “This isn’t the nineteenth century. There are other options aside from this.”

“Like what?”

“Like artificial insemination if the goal is really just to continue the Pard. Or finding yourself one of the...half-Pard men.” He hesitated to use the phrase “half-human” in public, since it would raise eyebrows. There was a great deal of leeway about what could be discussed in public, so long as people dismissed it as sounding like something associated with an ethnic group instead of the paranormal. “I’ve looked into the genealogy. It’s clearly a

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recessive trait. They're carriers, Maddy. You'd have a fifty percent chance of having one of us every time. It would cut out the inbreeding problem, too."

Maddy stiffened like she had been slapped. "Artificial insemination? Bringing a...a...a mongrel into the Pard? That isn't how it works, Jai. That's not how we do things. Have you been away so long that you've forgotten your own traditions? Your own culture?"

"Are you even listening to yourself?" he countered, lowering his voice. "What's the use of tradition if it only leads to stagnation? If the two of us marry and have ten children it won't do any good. You said it yourself this morning. There's no other available man in the Pard that you're not related to. Who would our children be with in the Pard?" He paused then, watching her face closely and hoping something might start to sink in.

"We would find a suitable match for them, as is our duty to them. And as our parents have done for us. Jai, listen to reason. Please. We both have too much to lose if you refuse this match."

She was only six years younger than him, but it seemed like a vast age difference from where he sat. She couldn't question tradition and see where it needed to bend. It was frustrating, but more than that it made him feel sympathy for her. These were things she'd been fed her entire life. It was her world. He'd been there once and in many ways still felt the pull to follow tradition out of duty and loyalty to his people.

"Who would be suitable matches for them? Cousins who are cousins three times over?"

Maddy frowned. "We are just talking in circles." She leaned forward and lowered her voice. "Are you concerned because that man really is your mate? I know there have been...understandings

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in other marriages.”

He opened his mouth to automatically deny that, but their server arrived with their food at that moment and he snapped his mouth shut. It gave him a chance to think before he responded. While he had no problems with the arrangements he'd made with Anna and Beau, that was different. They were both in love. Beau wasn't seeking out his true passion elsewhere. It hurt to think, but he doubted that for the two of them it was much more than the game. He didn't love Madhuri and doubted that he ever could love her. Being trapped in that sort of relationship out of duty would be bad enough. Seeing Beau on the side, knowing that Jai himself was just a diversion and that Beau had with Anna what Jai would never have at all would be hell.

“He doesn't feel the same way about me. It would be pointless.”

“So the mark wasn't a mistake?” Maddy pressed gently.

Lowering his eyes to his sandwich, he shook his head slightly. “No.”

“I see. Maybe that's the reason I can't get through to you. I can't compete with what your instincts are telling you, Jai. Maybe you should sort that out before we talk further.”

“You're right about that at least.” He let his breath out in a heavy sigh, his stomach twisting into knots. The sandwich might have been a mistake after all. “This was really poor timing.”

“Yes, I can see that. If you don't mind me asking, why him? Why a married man?”

“He was interested in exploring things with another man. His wife is my friend and she set us up.” He paused, running over what he'd just said in his mind before he laughed softly. “I guess I wasn't as opposed to someone arranging my love life as I thought.”

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“I once knew somebody...I was sure she was my mate. She was my best friend, and every instinct I had told me she belonged to me. It was overwhelming and frightening. Ultimately, I pushed her away. It hurt, but I knew it was for the best. She wasn't like us. She couldn't have understood what I needed from her or what I was feeling. I still miss her, but I know it worked out for the best.”

Their eyes met and Jai felt as though his heart was being squeezed in a fist. Was that what he had to look forward to? The old stories said that it was the animal that chose the mate and in the early days of the Pard, before they became civilized, the chosen mate was always the one a person stayed with. The chosen mate wasn't always the best choice for the Pard though, even if it might be the for the individual. The mate could be human, for instance. Often, they were. The anthropologist in him wondered if that instinct had more to do with ensuring the Pard didn't end up as inbred as it had become. They might have been more spread out if they hadn't long ago bowed to the custom of arranged marriage, but they might have been stronger for it.

“I'm not sure he wants to see me again, so that problem may already be solved.” He couldn't quite hide the bitterness in his voice.

“Find out for sure and get some closure. Maybe once you do, you'll be able to look at this situation reasonably.”

Jai nodded slightly. Obviously, in her mind looking at it reasonably meant agreeing with her, but she was right that he needed to know what was happening between himself and Beau before he could fairly discuss things with her.

“I'll do that. I'll give him a few days to cool off a bit so we can talk without anger.” Or at least less of it, he silently hoped.

Maddy opened her purse and pulled out a few bills. She left

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them on the table near her plate and stood. “I’ll be in town. Call me after you speak to him. And if I don’t hear from you soon, then I’ll be calling you.”

A heavy weight settled on him as he realized that no matter what happened at least one person was going to be hurt in this. More and more it looked like that one person would be him.

CHAPTER 7

Beau considered calling first, but he didn't want to give Jai the chance to shut him out or create a thousand excuses for why they couldn't meet. Beau knew they couldn't put off this meeting. The mark on his neck hadn't really faded, and Jai still featured prominently in all of his dreams. It had been eight days since Jai's fiancée showed up, since Beau had left Jai's home, since he had promised Anna he would speak to Jai again. For the first two days, he hadn't even known if he wanted to keep his promise. For the two days after that, he struggled with the fact that he didn't even know what to say to Jai. It was too complicated. His feelings for Anna and for Jai were starting to get all tangled up in weird, hopeless ways. He would never stop loving Anna, he couldn't stop thinking about Jai, and Jai was apparently engaged to marry a

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woman he barely knew. What could any of them do about that?

By the time Beau resolved to go to Jai's apartment, he still didn't know what he wanted to say. He hoped it would come to him by the time Jai invited him in. He hoped Jai actually wanted to invite him in. He hoped by the end of the night, his life would make sense again. That particular hope weighed heavily on him when he knocked on the door.

Moments passed without an answer. It felt like ages, though it was most likely only twenty seconds. When Jai did finally answer the door, he didn't look surprised at all.

"Do you want to come in?"

"Yeah, it'll probably be easier that way."

Jai gestured him in, then shut the door behind him. There was an air of exhaustion to the other man that hadn't been there before. His shoulders slumped a bit and there were faint shadows under his eyes.

"Do you want something to drink?" he asked.

Beau nodded, hoping the alcohol would make the whole situation easier. "Do you have any scotch?"

Neither of them spoke as Jai poured the drink. Even after he handed the tumbler to Beau, Beau wasn't sure what to say or where to begin. But they couldn't spend the entire afternoon staring at each other. Beau took a sip from the drink, and then another, and then a longer swallow. The warmth spread through his chest and stomach, quieting his nerves.

"How are you doing?" Beau finally asked.

"Do you want the honest answer or the polite one?"

"The honest answer."

Jai took a long drink from his own glass. "Shitty. Yourself?"

"I don't know. It's been a long week and I spent most of it

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thinking about you. Worrying about you, to be more exact.”

“Worrying? Why?”

“Because of Saturday. Because you looked...miserable. Because Anna’s worried about you, and I always trust her instincts.”

Jai nodded slowly, before crossing the living room to sink down onto the couch. “I didn’t ask for my family to set me up with someone. I’d guessed they might, but they were across the Atlantic. It didn’t seem like something I had to worry about. Had it been something I thought would actually affect anything, I would have said something.”

Beau nodded. “I believe you. I was just a little surprised.” And felt more than a little betrayed. Which was dumb, and he wasn’t going to mention that. “So are you officially engaged now?”

“No. The last time we saw one another we argued quite a bit. My disrespect for tradition offended her, I think. We’re going to speak again about it, though.”

Beau finished his drink. He wanted another, but he didn’t ask for one. He needed to keep his head clear and his thoughts straight. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I mean, do you want to be engaged?”

“Not to her, at least. I don’t know if I’m cut out for marriage, but if I’m going to be in any sort of relationship it has to be for something other than tradition.”

“I don’t want you to be engaged,” Beau admitted. “Which is selfish, I know. I’m a married man. I’ve already made my choice. I don’t even have the right to...to have any feelings about your private life.”

“I don’t mind you having feelings about my private life.” Jai’s voice was soft.

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“Even so, I don’t really understand your private life. I mean, the arranged marriage is a little out there, but different cultures and all that. But the other things...” Beau touched the mark on his neck. “Like this? What’s this, Jai?”

The other man’s eyes flashed in anger unexpectedly as he slammed his glass down on the end table. “I don’t know how I can explain it to you. It’s part of who I am and who my people are. It’s not Indian. It’s just Pard.”

“You can start by telling me what that even means. What’s a Pard?”

Before he answered, Jai went very quiet and still. The seconds ticked by and Beau could feel his impatience rising. Finally, Jai answered. “Our tribal group, basically. It used to be made up of dozens of clans, but there are only a few left now. The name comes from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘panther.’ We were warriors, once. Now we’re barely anything.”

Beau wanted to step closer to Jai. He hated the space between them. Hated the fact that it felt like it was getting wider. “Is there more to this that you aren’t telling me? I mean, you don’t have to, but...it feels like there’s more.”

“We’re not traditionally Hindu.”

Beau debated between two questions but finally settled on the one that really mattered. The one he really wanted answered. “What does...claiming mean for you? What does this mark mean?”

“It means I feel a deep connection with you. That I want you. That I want to do everything I can for you. Not necessarily the same as marriage and monogamy, just a bond, usually with a strong sexual element to it. Like I said, we’re not traditionally Hindu. Our spiritual life is much more...animalistic.”

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The explanation, the expression of Jai's actual feelings, should have sent him running. He was a married man, after all, and Jai clearly came from a much, much different culture. One that clearly had a different set of expectations and values that were incompatible with his own. But instead of frightening him, he felt a deep sense of recognition. Almost as if he could say *oh, that's right*.

"But you don't really know me," Beau tried, more for his sake than Jai's.

"Knowing is what you get from socializing with someone and talking. I know your wife. This isn't knowing. It's not words. It's just...understanding."

It made sense to Beau. It made a lot of sense. But at the same time, it felt like nothing was making sense. He still felt as though Jai was holding something back from him. Something crucial. "So, ideally, how would this work? What do you want?"

"You. I want to be able to touch you and care for you and be a part of your life. I don't want to come between you and your wife, that's something entirely separate. I care about her, too, and I'd gladly spend time with the both of you or just you. I can't do that if it's one-sided, though. I love casual sex, but I'm incapable of it with you. If it's me feeling this and you getting off, I'd rather have nothing." Jai fell silent for a moment, before shooting Beau a piercing look. "So now that you've stripped my heart naked, why don't you tell me what you think?"

"Anna asked me on Saturday what I would do if she said she didn't want me to sleep with you anymore. She asked if I'd be willing to be your friend when you need a friend. I said I would be. That's why I came over here." At Jai's darkening expression, Beau held up his hand. "She didn't say we just had to be friends or

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anything like that. My point is, I care about you. I want you in my life. Even if that meant watching you get married to somebody who very clearly disapproves of me.”

“Madhuri suggested I marry her and have you on the side.”

“That’s very practical of her. And I’m so confused right now, I can’t even decide if it’s a good suggestion or not.”

“I can’t do it.” Jai dragged a hand through his hair slowly. “I knew I couldn’t a long time ago, before I even knew she existed. I wasn’t cut out for it, but I didn’t know how to get out of it, either. I just felt...”

Beau couldn’t keep his distance anymore. He still didn’t know what they were going to do or how they were going to untangle the mess they were in, but he didn’t care. He wanted to be close to Jai. “Trapped?”

Jai’s dark eyes turned up to his as he nodded and stood, then reached his hand out toward him, offering it palm up. “Exactly.”

Beau took Jai’s hand and pulled him closer, until their bodies were flush. He immediately had a reaction to Jai’s proximity, but he squashed that impulse. This wasn’t about sex. “You’re not trapped. Whatever you need to do, whatever you want to do, I’ll be here to help you. Anna, too. Just tell me what you need.”

“A lot more of this?” One corner of Jai’s mouth curled up a bit in a wry smile as he reached out, sliding his fingers into Beau’s hair to cradle the back of his skull. “I need to tell Maddy it isn’t going to happen. It isn’t fair to her to keep her hoping for something I can’t give her.” He paused, taking a deep breath. “And then there’s something I need to tell you. Anna, too.”

Curiosity clawed at him, but pushing Jai wouldn’t do any good. “Do you want to wait and tell us together?”

“I probably should.”

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“I can call her and ask her to come over tonight. Or tomorrow.”

Jai drew his brows together as he looked thoughtful for a moment. “Tomorrow, I think.”

“Do you want me to come back tomorrow?” Beau asked carefully, unwilling to leave but reluctant to announce he was staying.

“I’d like it if you stayed, actually.”

“I can do that.” He kissed Jai briefly before stepping back. “Let me call Anna and let her know.”

* * *

The article Anna was writing on the new women’s health clinic was one of the most painful experiences of her life. Not because the subject matter was dull or because it was difficult finding all of the information she needed, but because the entire time she was thinking about what was happening with Beau and Jai. She’d hoped her husband would go to see him sooner, but he’d uncharacteristically dragged it out. She hoped he hadn’t waited too long and Jai had made decisions he’d regret.

Each word she typed was like pulling teeth, as all she really wanted to do was find out what was happening. When her cell rang with Beau’s ringtone, she gratefully picked it up.

“Hey, honey. What’s going on?” she asked.

“Well, we talked. I’m still trying to process everything, and he said there’s something else he wants to tell us tomorrow. I told him I’d stay with him tonight, though I think we literally will just be sleeping.”

“Oh.” She slipped off her glasses as she leaned back in her chair, letting that sink in. “Does that mean everything’s okay or

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what?”

“I...Anna, honey, I honestly don't know. You were right. He does feel trapped. He doesn't want to marry Madhuri. Partially because...well, because of me. He told me again that I'm his mate, but he explained that it meant he felt a deep connection with me, that it's some sort of bond.”

That still struck her as a very odd way of describing things. She'd done a bit of research on her own, but most cultures simply didn't use that term in English. It was for animals, not people. “Do you feel the same way?”

“I mostly feel confused right now. You know Jai, he's not interested in having me all to himself. He knows that would never happen. But if that's the case, then what can I even give him? What sort of relationship could we possibly have? I need to know how you feel about all this.”

It was a thought she'd been mulling over in the back of her mind for two weeks. If it became more than just “Fantasy Friday” as they sometimes jokingly called it, how would they deal with it? She didn't have a desire to embrace some sort of swinger's lifestyle. Jai was sexy and being with him and Beau had been exciting, but moving him into their bedroom regularly might be too much for her. Then again, that might not be necessary at all.

“Do you think you could have a boyfriend without it interfering with us?” she finally asked. “He has his life, we have ours. Sometimes the two of you are together, sometimes the three of us. Do you think that could work?”

“That's pretty much what he suggested as well. But it's...it's honestly a bit, well, scary. Sure it works in theory, but I don't want to risk hurting you. Risk hurting us. I like Jai a lot, I really do, but nobody is worth that risk to me.”

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“Oh, honey. You say things like that and I want to marry you a second time. No matter what happens, we still have us. If we just take it one step at a time, I think it’s okay. And if something doesn’t work, then we’ll stop doing it.”

“You’re right.” Beau expelled a breath he had obviously been holding. “That’s why you’re the brains of this operation. Can you come by for breakfast tomorrow? I’m working the afternoon shift, so breakfast will probably be the best time for Jai to talk to us.”

“Sure. I’ll miss you tonight, though.” It wasn’t said out of any jealousy, just simple truth. She was used to sleeping next to him every night after all the years together. Not having him around every night would be the hardest part of any new arrangements. Maybe she could talk him into getting a dog in exchange for a boyfriend. The thought amused her.

“I’ll miss you, too. Call me if you need anything, okay? Even if it’s late enough to wake me up.”

“Okay. The same goes goes for you, you know? I know you have Jai there, but if you need to talk about it all I’ll have the phone next to the bed.”

“Yes, ma’am. I love you, sweetheart.”

That made her smile warmly. “I love you, too. Have a good night.”

CHAPTER 8

A week of sleepless nights finally ended. Even without sex, it was comforting to have Beau there in his bed. Had he offered, Jai wasn't entirely sure if he would have been up for it anyway. He was too anxious about what he was going to do in the morning. Sleep came easily enough, born of exhaustion and the simple satisfaction of having Beau there, but sex didn't go best with exhaustion and anxiety.

In the morning, however, Jai found himself driven to distraction by having Beau nearby. He shifted onto his side, resting a hand on the other man's stomach, idly stroking there.

"You should wake up," he murmured.

Beau groaned sleepily and turned toward Jai. "Rather sleep."

He couldn't resist any longer and leaned in to nuzzle under

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Beau's ear, breathing against his neck. "Your wife's coming over in about an hour."

"She knows I like my sleep. God, that feels good."

He grinned a bit and gently nibbled at Beau's earlobe before moving back to teasing his neck. The tip of his tongue lightly traced downward to his pulse. "Is it waking you up?"

"It's doing more than that," Beau said, shifting until his erection pressed against Jai's thigh. His hand moved down Jai's chest, pulling at the T-shirt until his skin was exposed to Beau's touch. "An hour, you said?"

Jai inhaled slowly, closing his eyes. One hand slid down Beau's body, moving behind him to grip his ass and tug him a bit closer. "Mmhhh. I was thinking showers might be in order."

"But that would require getting out of bed. And I want you to show me something."

"What?"

"What it means to be your mate. I mean, we've had two fantasies and a quick handjob in the bathroom, but never just you and me. You know?"

Some of that earlier anxiety came back as he considered that. In some ways, it would be easier to leave things as they were before he was completely honest with Beau and Anna. It could make it less painful to say goodbye, at the very least. To really be with him without any fantasies in the way would make it all too real and too agonizing if Beau rejected him. Still, he couldn't resist. If nothing else, he'd have a sweet memory to haunt the rest of his days.

"All right."

He drew Beau against him and brought their lips together. It was simply a soft brush at first, caressing Beau's mouth under his own, giving him gentle pecks and teasing little flicks of his tongue.

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The heat in it gradually grew, though. Not to the demanding hunger of their previous encounters, but to a steady need. His hands moved down to Beau's stomach, working the T-shirt upward to gain access to his skin.

Beau followed Jai's lead, not pressing for harder or faster caresses, but content to enjoy Jai's slow, thorough exploration of his mouth. Beau's hand seemed to be everywhere. He traced the muscles on Jai's arm, smoothed his palm over Jai's ribs, caressed the tender skin at the small of his back, and finally found his way back up to cup the side of Jai's face. Jai had Beau's shirt hiked up to his throat, but that wasn't anywhere near enough. He needed to feel Beau's body against his, skin to skin. He needed to feel the heat of his flesh, and the rougher texture of the hair on his chest and thighs.

They broke apart from the kiss at the same time, both of them reaching for their shirts without a word. As soon as they were tossed aside, they moved together again, kissing like they had never stopped. Beau moaned, and the soft sound went directly to Jai's groin. His cock twitched, and a surge of possessiveness overwhelmed him. Beau didn't belong to him, not entirely. But at that moment, in that bed, Beau was his. His lips trailed down from Beau's, moving over his throat. Each brush of them against Beau's skin was purposeful, learning each inch of his body. When he found a spot that made the other man's breath catch, he returned to it to tease with his teeth and tongue before moving on to the next place. Slowly, he worked his way down to Beau's collarbone, then to his chest. The tip of his tongue traced the lines of muscle through his skin, then in concentric circles, slowly spiraling to one nipple. He caught it between his teeth delicately, eyes rolling up to watch Beau's face.

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Beau's eyes were closed, his mouth slightly open, and he gasped every time Jai applied pressure to his sensitive flesh. His hand went to Jai's hair, his fingers flexing compulsively with each gentle bite. Jai moved his hand up Beau's body, his fingers searching for the other nipple, and he pinched it lightly. Jai gently rolled the hard flesh between the pads of his fingers, while he continued to use his tongue and teeth on the other. Beau tensed beneath him, his spine curving, until he finally broke his silence with a low whimper. Jai didn't stop until he felt Beau shift his body, his hips moving with just a hint of impatience. That's when Jai abandoned his nipples to continue his journey down Beau's body.

He'd given Beau a pair of sweatpants to sleep in, but now his fingers caught the waist on them to drag them down his thighs. For every inch lower his lips moved down Beau's chest, then stomach, the pants slid two inches. If this was the last time he had with Beau, he wanted to savor it, so forced himself not to hurry. His tongue dipped teasingly into the other man's navel, making him shiver slightly, before moving downward. He followed the trail of hair winding down his stomach to his cock, teasing the shaft with his breath as he finally got the pants off of Beau entirely.

His fingers wrapped around the other man's cock, though he didn't stroke him or guide him into his mouth. Not yet. Instead, he ducked down to trace Beau's balls with his tongue. Each brush of his tongue was almost impossibly soft and he could tell from the sounds Beau made and the small movements in his hips that he was growing impatient. Jai grinned a bit before resting his tongue against the center of his sac, then slowly dragged it upward to the underside of his shaft. His fingers moved so they wouldn't impede his tongue's journey all the way up to the head of Beau's cock.

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Beau already tasted of salty pre-come, and Jai's taste buds tingled from the contact. He dragged his tongue across the tip again and again, gathering the clear liquid as it leaked from Beau's slit. That, combined with the smooth texture of his skin and his natural scent, made Jai heady. He wanted Beau to completely overwhelm all of his senses. He wanted to sink into the smell and taste of him, into his heat.

"Jai...let me taste you, too. Please."

Unable to resist that, Jai drew back to slide out of his pajama bottoms, then moved up the bed, turning his body to give Beau access to it. He immediately felt the heat of Beau's breath against him, making him shudder. With a moan, he guided the other man's cock into his mouth. Shallowly at first, just suckling at his head and exploring with the tip of his tongue.

Beau wrapped his arm around Jai's thigh, holding him tightly as he mimicked Jai. His hot mouth closed around the tip, and Jai's balls instantly tightened. At that moment, he couldn't decide which he loved more—the taste of Beau's cock or the light pressure of his mouth. Jai let his tongue dance over the crown, tracing the ridge and then the vein on the underside. Beau did the same, his tongue gentle but intoxicating. He seemed happy to explore Jai's flesh, and when he found a spot that made Jai's cock jerk, Beau moaned in approval.

Jai drew him closer with an answering moan. One hand settled on Beau's ass, holding him there as he worked his lips along the other man's length. He slid him deeper into his mouth bit by bit before drawing back again. When he felt a similar tug from Beau's lips as the other man sucked, he couldn't resist any longer. His fingers kneading at Beau's ass, he swallowed his cock down to the base. His every sense was full of Beau and it left him almost dizzy

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before he drew back to breathe again. The brief taste of salt and the shuddering moan from Beau let him know the other man was enjoying it every bit as much as Jai was.

Beau palmed Jai's ass, pushing him forward until the tip of Jai's cock touched the back of his throat. He held Jai there for a beat, and then eased the pressure, allowing Jai to shift back. Beau never moved his head, just urged Jai's hips forward and back, until Jai didn't need to feel the weight and guidance of Beau's palm. He pumped his hips, fucking Beau's face while he moved his lips up and down Beau's shaft. Jai tried to move slowly. He tried to hold himself back, tried to make it last as long as he could. But every time Beau swallowed around the head of his cock, his good intentions were pushed farther away.

To try to regain a bit more control, he focused further on Beau. His lips glided along the other man's shaft as he took him completely into his mouth each time he moved forward, swallowing around him with soft groans. His tongue dragged up and down Beau's cock, stroking and pressing against every inch of his length. Jai's fingers on his ass kept tugging him close and pulling him into his mouth. He could feel his balls tightening as that familiar tension gathered in his body.

Beau's fingers moved on Jai's ass, sliding along the crack and then pushing between the cheeks. One fingertip traced his hole and Jai stiffened in response. He still wanted Beau to fuck him, and very much hoped that it would still be a possibility after that morning, but that didn't stop the flare of surprise or the rush of nerves. Beau didn't do anything except tease his clenched muscle, circling it until Jai began to relax and focus his attention on the weight and taste of Beau's cock. The suction around his own shaft increased, and so did the tingling at the base of his spine. He didn't

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want to come first, but Beau wasn't making it easy.

The movements of his hips into Beau's mouth were growing more erratic as he struggled with himself. He'd move quick and shallow for a moment, then deeper and slower. He clung to Beau's body as he groaned around his cock. Drawing back until just Beau's head was between his lips, he sucked at the sensitive flesh, rubbing the flat of his tongue back and forth against it, urging him closer to orgasm. When he couldn't take it any longer, he slid Beau's cock into his mouth down to the root as his own cock twitched. With a muffled moan, his hips rocked forward as he pumped jet after jet of come into Beau's waiting mouth.

Beau swallowed every bit of it greedily, keeping his lips tightly sealed around Jai's cock. He began pumping his hips, taking control of the rhythm, building the friction with faster and faster strokes. Jai let him have the control, moaning each time Beau's cock plunged into his mouth. He tightened his hold, silently begging for more, begging for Beau to let go and let him taste the thick come. When Beau stiffened, Jai braced himself for the flood of salty liquid, moaning when it finally hit the back of his tongue.

Pulling him closer, Jai swallowed down every inch Beau had, letting him come in the depths of his mouth as he drank each drop. After a long moment he drew back, letting his head rest against Beau's thigh as he caught his breath. One hand idly stroked along the other man's spine. The thought of never having this again pained him in ways he hadn't experienced before, but he knew keeping his secrets wouldn't help matters in the long run.

"We should probably get showered and dressed," Jai murmured before pressing a kiss to Beau's thigh.

"Yes, I agree. You get up first."

"If this is a trick so you can go back to sleep..." He trailed off

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with a teasing look. He slid out of bed, then stretched and arched his back.

“We could save time by showering together.”

“Only if we don’t start fooling around in there.”

“I really can’t make any promises. Do you want to shower first?”

“Assuming you’re not asleep when I get back.” He gave Beau a crooked smile before leaning over to give him a brief kiss.

When Jai tried to pull away, Beau caught him by the back of his head and deepened the kiss. His tongue and lips were still a bit salty, and Jai wanted to forget about the shower and simply spend the rest of the morning exploring Beau’s mouth.

“I won’t fall asleep,” Beau promised against his lips. “I’ll make breakfast.”

“Mm. I like this plan.”

Finally, he forced himself away from Beau to go take his shower. He didn’t linger, though part of him wanted to. Without the intoxication of Beau’s body, his nerves were coming back again. It was one thing to step outside of tradition and bind himself to a human. It was quite another to obliterate centuries of secrecy. He imagined others of the Pard who had mated with humans ended up being more honest than they were supposed to be, but knowing others had done it still didn’t make him feel entirely settled with what he was doing.

By the time he was clean and dressed, Beau was already gone from the bedroom. Jai followed his nose to find him in the kitchen.

“I hope you like French toast. It’s Anna’s favorite and I found bread, eggs, and milk.” He glanced at the clock and his eyes widened. “I better go make myself presentable. When the timer goes off, just take it out of the oven.”

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Beau hurried from the room before Jai could even respond. The kitchen already smelled delicious, and Beau had even put the kettle on to heat water for tea. Now they were down to mere minutes and Jai's appetite was gone. He couldn't even be sure he ever had an appetite. The nerves tightened his stomach and narrowed his focus until he couldn't think about anything except how he would tell them. He wasn't even distracted by the thought of Beau's wet, slick body in the shower—a thought that would have driven him mad any other time. Each second put him a little more on edge until a sharp rap on the door announced Anna's arrival. With his heart in his throat, he answered the door.

Anna greeted him with a warm smile. "Hey. Is that Beau's French toast I smell?"

Jai managed a tight smile in return, jaw clenched. "It is. He's in the shower right now."

He shut and locked the door behind her, taking a few deep breaths to try to steady himself. His mind kept going to all of the ways this could go wrong. All of the ways he could lose his mate and a dear friend in one fell swoop. It wasn't helping at all to focus on those thoughts, yet he couldn't seem to stop himself.

"Are you okay? You look...a bit green."

"My stomach's a bit upset this morning. I'll drink some tea and should be fine." He hoped, at least.

He went into the kitchen to prepare himself a cup, glancing at the timer as he did. Beau's French toast would be done soon. He still wasn't sure if he could eat any of it. Maybe it would be best to tell them before breakfast, he thought. It could end up being a huge waste of food, but at least he'd be less sick to his stomach.

"And how are you?" he asked.

"A bit tired this morning. I'm not used to having the bed to

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myself. I was thinking this afternoon, Beau and I will go pick out a dog.” Anna grinned. “A big one.”

That made him laugh softly and a bit of the tension eased. Just a bit, though. When the timer went off, he pulled out the French toast, then sat at the table to wait for Beau while he sipped his tea.

“Not a cat person, then?”

“Oh, I have nothing against cats. But I’ve wanted a dog for years and Beau always has excuses to put it off. I think it’s because his parents never let him have pets. He doesn’t know what to do around animals.”

“Ah.” He lapsed into silence, looking down at his tea for a moment. Elsewhere in the apartment he could hear the water in the shower being turned off. His moment of judgment was nearly at hand.

“What about you?” Anna asked, after a long beat of silence. “Do you like dogs?”

“I like dogs just fine. They don’t usually like me, though.” He flashed her a brief but genuine smile at that. “I never had any pets when I was growing up either.”

“I find that hard to believe. Dogs are usually a great judge of character. They should love you.”

“Why are we talking about dogs?” Beau asked, stepping out of the bedroom in nothing but his pants.

“Because we’re going to get one today.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, really.”

“Who said you could have a dog?” Beau asked as he approached her chair.

Anna stood to meet him. “Are you going to try to stop me?”

He grinned before leaning down to kiss her. It started as a brief

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touch but deepened into a long, slow caress. Jai could do nothing but watch as Anna wound her arms around Beau's neck and pulled him closer. When they finally broke apart, Beau grinned and said, "I wouldn't dare."

One last deep breath to prepare himself, then Jai drained the rest of his tea and stood. "If it's all right with the two of you, I think I should probably tell you what I, um, what I wanted to tell you." Oh, this was going to go well, he thought bitterly.

They broke apart and looked at him with expectant, curious eyes. For a moment, he considered announcing he was going to marry Madhuri after all and move back to London. Of course, he had no intention of actually doing that, but a clean break might be his best option. But then, if he did that, he would absolutely never see Beau again. At least this way, there was still a chance. No matter how small.

"We're listening," Beau said.

He opened his mouth to tell them, but found the words didn't want to come. After an uncomfortable pause, he tried again. "The Pard is made up of therianthropes."

Anna drew her brows together. "I'm sorry, was that English?"

"Therianthropes. Beast men. A combination of human and animal traits, which has been observed in the art of humanity since man first started making images of his world."

"Are you...are you saying you're a therianthrope?" Beau asked slowly.

Jai gave a small nod, lips pressed tightly together.

Anna had tilted her head to the side with a thoughtful look. He could almost see the gears of her mind working. "So this is some sort of spiritual thing. Your people, the Pard, feel that they have these animal sides or something?"

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“You could put it that way. We consider it a fact.”

“Well, that would explain the whole mating and claiming thing. But how is this different from what you told me last night?” Beau asked.

“It’s an...elaboration on it. In a way I’m as much a leopard as a man.” And in other ways he was neither, because the Pard straddled that space between. He swallowed around the lump in his throat before pushing on. “It’s not just a spiritual belief. There’s a physical element to it as well.”

“The biting thing? Is that the physical element you mean?”

Anna held up her hand. “Wait, are you saying you really are a leopard? You’re not saying that, are you?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

She stared at him hard for a moment before her features softened into something almost pitying. “Jai, that isn’t possible.”

“Why would you...I mean, why would anybody say something like that?” Beau demanded. “You sound crazy.”

This was going about as well as he’d expected. He frowned, dragging a hand through his hair. “I’m not. Can I show you something, to prove that?”

“Is it something that could hurt you or one of us if what you’re saying is wrong?” Anna asked carefully.

“No.”

“Show us,” Beau said, and Jai didn’t miss the way he pulled Anna closer to his side.

He tugged his T-shirt over his head, before sliding out of his pants and boxers. Out of the corner of his eye he could see mildly alarmed looks cross Beau and Anna’s faces as they watched what they surely thought was an act of insanity. When he raised his head to look at them both directly, Anna gasped. His eyes were always

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the first thing to go. He'd seen it in the mirror often enough to know what they looked like now. The iris turned pale gold and filled up the visible white of his eye. It darkened a bit to a rich, deep orange directly around his pupil, which looked small in comparison swimming in all the gold. It had been quite some time since he'd changed form and there was a wonderful sense of relief in it, even as he saw their reactions to the sight.

Pure power surged in his body as he transformed. As a child, it had always frightened him because he could feel himself disappear. His hands turned to paws, his skin turned to fur, and his face changed its shape. A newly formed tail brushed against the floor, and his sense of smell was magnified by one hundred. He could smell the fear coming from Anna. He could smell his own sweat and come on Beau's skin, despite his shower. He could hear their hearts thudding, and the woman upstairs moving around her kitchen, and the kids on the floor below playing some video game. Jai didn't move, though he longed to approach them. But he didn't want to send them running in terror. That wasn't how he wanted to remember them.

"Beau, I think we should go."

"What? Why?"

"Because this is...wait, don't get closer."

"Why not?"

"That's a leopard. You could be hurt."

"It's Jai, and he told me I'm his mate."

Anna's terror was enough to call to the predator in him, marking her as prey. Even like this he still retained enough sense of himself to resist that, though. Humans were not prey and this one especially wasn't to be touched. When Beau took a step forward, he could hear Anna's heart actually skip a beat before

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thundering on.

Beau moved closer until he was within touching distance and knelt down. Jai resisted the urge to move forward until he felt Beau's hand settle on top of his skull. Unable to fight it any longer, he pushed himself forward, leaning into Beau as he rubbed his head up his mate's arm. It was a touch of affection and one that left him smelling of Pard, as possessive of a gesture as leaving his mark on the man's throat.

"Beau," Anna exhaled shakily. She still hadn't moved, as if she were glued to the floor.

"It's fine," Beau murmured, his fingers lightly petting the back of Jai's head. "Come here."

"I don't want to. How can you be so calm about this?"

"Because this is clearly happening." Beau looked over his shoulder. "It's not a trick. You saw him transform. I get that you don't want to trust what appears to be a wild animal." He held out his hand. "But you trust me, right?"

She hesitated a moment longer, then finally took Beau's hand and moved in. Jai went very still to keep from frightening her any further. Somehow, he'd thought that Beau would be the one who'd respond badly, not Anna. He hadn't considered the fact that Anna had such an analytical mind. She dealt with the world in facts and possibilities. Seeing something that should have been impossible hadn't just frightened her. It had shaken the very foundations of her world.

"If I've gone insane, you'll visit me in the hospital regularly, won't you?" Anna asked, her voice soft and with a forced lightness to it.

Shaking, she reached out toward Jai. He held himself still, letting her approach at her own pace. She gasped when she finally

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touched him, her fingers moving through the short fur between his eyes. “He’s...soft.”

“Yeah, he is.”

“Beau this isn’t...I mean, this is something you see in movies. This doesn’t happen in real life.”

“Apparently it does.”

“Do you think he still understands us like this?”

Jai shifted his weight as he moved to head-butt Anna’s hand and make her meet his eyes. She stared back for a moment, startled, then looked at Beau again.

“How can you be so calm?” she asked.

“Because it’s Jai,” Beau said simply. “Look in his eyes. He’s there. I don’t understand any of this and a part of me is pretty...I don’t know, scared, I guess. But it’s a part of who he is.”

“Leopards don’t mate for life,” Anna said.

“What?”

“Why does he say that you’re his mate? They don’t mate for life.”

“Well, leopards probably aren’t homosexual, either. I’d guess it’s just a human construct to deal with those needs.”

She looked as though part of her wanted to argue more, but she bit it back. Cautiously, she stroked along Jai’s head, then back to his shoulder. He rumbled his approval and she gave a small smile.

“Okay. So your boyfriend is a cat and everything I know about reality is...questionable at best. I guess we can make this work.” She looked down at Jai for a moment, meeting his eyes. “Can you change back so we can talk more easily?”

Changing rapidly would leave him exhausted and starving. He hesitated a moment, trying to decide whether or not he’d have a chance for a nap before his first class of the day, then gave a small

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nod.

They both moved back while he shifted, the tail receding, forelegs becoming arms, his face rearranging itself to his human features. Once transformed, he didn't even try to move. He just laid on the floor, taking slow, careful breaths, and trying to build back his depleted energy. Beau knelt beside him and gently moved the hair from Jai's face.

"You look beat. Is it always like this?"

"Always takes a lot out of me. More if I shift back and forth in a short span of time."

After a moment, he found he had the energy to push himself into a sitting position and started slowly tugging his clothes back on. "I usually only shift when I can get out of the city and go hunting or something. That tends to help."

"How common is this?" Anna asked.

Jai leaned back against the cupboards as he sat on the floor, closing his eyes. "Almost every culture on the planet has some legend about therianthropes. The only ones I know of that still exist are the Pard. There's about a hundred and eighty of us left."

"Madhuri's one, too, isn't she?"

"Yes. The only way to guarantee your children will be Pard is to have them with another one of us. It's one of the reasons why arranged marriages are still so common in the Pard, even if they're becoming less common in Indian culture. I don't have much desire to be breeding stock for stagnating traditions, though."

"Have you ever had a normal relationship?" Anna asked.

"Honey, please."

"What? I just want to know if he's ever been serious with anybody before."

Jai smiled faintly at the questioning. "I had a fairly serious

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boyfriend when I was a graduate student. He got a job offer on the other side of the country and I was happy where I was, so we went our separate ways. We tried being long distance, but it simply didn't work. I never told him what I was."

"Why did you tell us?" Anna asked.

"Because Beau is my mate and you're his wife. I couldn't be this deeply...tied to him without being honest."

"I guess I didn't realize just how deep that tie was," Anna said softly.

Beau looked up. "Is it a problem?"

"No." She shook her head, then paused for a moment, biting her lip. "It's just more serious than I thought it was. I thought things were still in a fairly casual stage."

"It's not the same as marriage or anything. It might grow into something more, but for right now it's just a deep bond," Jai explained.

"I think that we all have a lot to process right now," Beau said, folding Anna's hand in his and standing. "And you have to get ready for work, anyway. Maybe we should go now, and I'll call you later tonight."

Jai nodded slightly as he carefully pushed himself back up to his feet. He imagined he'd be eating the entire batch of French toast before passing out for another hour or two. At least it would help him mostly recover for his day.

"All right. I'll talk to you later, then."

"I will call you tonight." Beau grasped Jai by the back of his neck and pulled him into a soft kiss. He didn't release Anna's hand, and he didn't linger, but the contact was enough to soothe the last of Jai's nerves.

CHAPTER 9

In the soft glow of the candle, Beau thought he could actually see the leopard lurking in Jai's dark eyes. Ever since Jai had revealed his true nature, Beau found himself staring at the other man, looking for hints of the animal that lurked within. He still didn't understand what Jai was or how shifting into a leopard was even possible, but he could accept it. In fact, he was happy he knew. Jai seemed almost like a different person when they were together now. He was more open about his past when Beau asked questions, and he smiled more. Of course, this was only the second time he'd seen Jai since the big revelation, but he was still confident in his assessment.

It was a little strange to be sitting with another man in a very romantic restaurant. This was the sort of place he should take his

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wife on her birthday, not the sort of place he ever expected another man to take him to. On their first official date. But there he was, with his wife-approved boyfriend. Beau felt like he was being greedy. He never even deserved the amazing woman he married, and now he had an amazing man who wanted to spend time with him, who actually liked him. Beau knew just how blessed he was, and he also knew he could never take either of them for granted. His love for Anna hadn't dwindled since he'd met Jai. And his feelings for Jai...

Well, those were complicated. Beau hadn't worked them out, yet. But he loved the way it felt when Jai referred to him as his mate. He also loved it when Jai closed his mouth around the mark on his neck and made it dark again.

"Lost in thought?" Jai's voice held a trace of amusement.

"I'm sorry. Was I staring at you again?"

"Just a little. I think it's sort of cute. Anything in particular on your mind?"

"The usual. Surprise that this is my life now. Amazement that both you and Anna want me around. Then there's your basic lust and desire, but that's always on my mind when we're in the same room."

That made Jai chuckle softly before he reached across the table and lightly traced Beau's knuckles with one finger. "I guess you're just lucky then. I'm fairly amazed myself that you've taken everything in stride."

"I've always been pretty easy going. I think that's why I'm the only one at the call center who hasn't suffered at least one nervous breakdown."

"And Anna really is taking everything well? She isn't quietly going insane over my big reveal?"

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“She’s doing a lot of research. I think she’s trying to find everything ever written about therianthropes. Not that there’s a lot.” Beau shrugged. “But that’s Anna. The more information she has, the better she feels.”

Jai nodded. “I talked to Madhuri.”

“And?”

“She took it about as I expected her to. She was upset, but had too much pride to really show it.”

Beau sighed. “I feel bad for her. I think you did the right thing, but God, it must be really awful for her.”

“Yeah.” Jai’s eyes lowered for a moment. “I wish I could have done something for her, but she couldn’t question or break the traditions.”

Beau knew Jai would have done anything he could have if Madhuri would have let him. “Has she left LA now?”

“Yeah, she said she’d be in touch, since there aren’t many of us in the area, but that she needed some time to ‘lick her wounds,’ as she put it.”

“Makes sense.” He could see the vague regret lurking in Jai’s eyes and he twined their fingers together. His phone chose that moment to chirp in his pocket, and Beau checked it quickly, knowing it could only be from one person. “Anna wants us to go over to the house after dinner.”

“Any particular reason?” Jai drained the last of his wine before setting his glass down. “Nothing explicit. The text said, ‘I know you plan to go to Jai’s, but why don’t the two of you come over here instead?’” Beau grinned. “Maybe she’s got another little fantasy she wants to play out. Do you mind?”

Jai gave him an answering grin. “Not at all. I’d love that, actually.”

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“Excellent. You know, I don’t think I mentioned it, but Anna is going to Lake Powell with her family for a week next month. I couldn’t get that week off so I’m going to be all alone.”

“That sounds promising.” He paused, looking thoughtful, then leaned in. “Did you want dessert or should we head out?”

Beau wanted to lean across the table and catch Jai’s bottom lip between his teeth. Every time he looked at Jai, he found something new he either wanted to kiss or bite. “Let’s get the bill and get out of here.”

“Gladly.”

Jai waved over their waiter moments later for the bill. Once they’d paid, they wasted little time leaving the restaurant. It was a warm, clear night and just late enough that traffic was dying down.

“Did you pick out that dog after all?” Jai asked as he pulled out onto the road.

“Yes. Anna fell in love with a yellow lab. The dog is huge, but really docile and well-trained. His name is Buddy, which I think is an awful name for a dog.” Beau shrugged. “But Anna thinks it’s cute. I just hope she doesn’t decide she needs to rescue every dog at the pound.”

“Well, she has to have something to take up her extra time when you’re off with me. Unless you’re planning on setting her up with someone?” Jai raised an eyebrow slightly, glancing at Beau out of the corner of his eye.

“No. No, God, no.” Beau grimaced. “I guess that makes me a horrible hypocrite. But I know for a fact she could do better than me. I don’t want her to find that out.”

That made the other man laugh softly. “I don’t think she could find anyone else she loved as much.”

“Well, to be honest, if she did find somebody she wanted to

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spend time with, I wouldn't necessarily, you know, veto the idea. I would just have to meet him first to make sure he wasn't better than me."

"How very secure of you." There was a gently teasing note to Jai's voice.

"I know, I know. Before too long, I'll probably be just as possessive of you."

"I'm lazy. You don't have to worry about me straying. That would take too much effort."

"*Oh no, Beau, I would never want anybody but you,* would have probably made me feel better," Beau teased. "But I'll take what I can get."

Jai just grinned and said nothing. He did reach over to rest his hand on Beau's knee while he drove, rubbing lightly up and down his thigh.

"Oh, that's nice." Jai's knuckles brushed against his growing erection and Beau sighed. "That's very nice. Will it distract you too much if I return the favor?"

"Mm, no. Assuming you can keep from being too demanding," he said, grinning.

Beau really just wanted to unzip Jai's pants and go to town. It had been a long night of keeping his hands to himself, but they both had agreed on a proper date. And people on a proper date didn't sneak off to the bathroom or blatantly feel each other up under the table. But they weren't far from the house and if he could just keep himself under control for a bit longer, he would be rewarded. Except when he felt the proof that Jai was hard, too, he almost lost his resolve.

"Jai...I really want to fuck you tonight."

That statement earned him a soft sound of approval in

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response. Jai shifted slightly in his seat, his hand gripping the steering wheel a bit tighter.

When he spoke, there was a faint huskiness to his voice. “I’d like that.”

“Good. Then we’re both in for a nice night.”

They continued to rub and massage each other, silently working each other up. By the time they reached the house, Beau had no other thought but getting out of his pants. It never occurred to him that Anna would call them over just to talk. They were still trying to work out all of the rules, but Anna had made it clear that she wouldn’t infringe on his nights with Beau unless she was in the mood for both men. In return, he agreed they would go to her whenever she called, which was just a fact of Beau’s life and not really a stipulation.

The little house was dark when Jai parked the car. Beau hoped that meant Anna was already in bed. Buddy was barking in the backyard, but when Beau called his name, he immediately quieted. For all Beau’s minor bellyaching, Buddy was actually a pretty good dog. He unlocked the door and gestured for Jai to follow. Soft music wafted down the hall, and Beau grinned, pulling off his jacket to leave it forgotten on the back of a chair.

In the bedroom, Anna was already in bed as Beau had thought, though she wasn’t under the covers. She was stretched out on top of them, reading a book by lamplight in her negligee. She marked her place as she set aside the book, pushing herself up into a sitting position with a smile.

“I didn’t expect to see you two so soon. I hope you didn’t rush here on my account.”

Jai shook his head as he slid out of his own jacket, finding the hook on the back of the door to hang it on. “We skipped dessert.”

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Her eyes lowered slightly to take them both in and her smile took on a slightly wicked cast. "I guess you did."

Beau didn't waste any time getting undressed. He was with his two favorite people in the world. Clothing would just be a pain in the ass in about thirty seconds. Once stripped, he crawled onto the bed and plucked the book from Anna's hand. "You know I come running whenever you call."

That made Anna laugh softly as she slipped an arm around his waist. Drawing him closer, she caught him in a kiss that he gratefully sank into. Their lips stroked over each other in heated brushes as his tongue explored her mouth. He felt the weight on the bed as Jai kneeled on the mattress behind him, then leaned over him to start kissing his way down his spine, his lips treating each vertebra like a treasure.

"Wait," Anna gasped as she pulled back from the kiss. "Wait. Before things get too carried away I have something I wanted to say to Jai."

Beau felt the other man still at his back before he moved around him, laying on his side on the bed. His face showed cautious curiosity. "Yes?"

She took a deep breath, then smiled and reached out to touch Jai's cheek lightly. "Thank you for making Beau happy and thank you for trusting us." With that she leaned over to kiss him as well.

Beau tilted his head and watched the two of them kiss, noting the contrast in their skin and hair, and how large Jai's hand seemed when it cupped the side of her face. He ached to touch them both, but he didn't move for several seconds, too enraptured with the sight in front of him to want to disrupt them. He had always believed that complete monogamy was just the right and natural course of his life. It had never occurred to him that life could be

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better if they broke away from the traditional mold. A part of him still couldn't believe it, even as he watched Jai slide his hand down Anna's body to cup her breast through the lacy negligee.

Anna made a soft sound of pleasure as Jai's hand found her breast, wiggling slightly to press herself into his palm. The arm she'd left loosely around Beau's waist tightened and drew him in closer, until she reluctantly pulled back from Jai to nuzzle at Beau's cheek and cover it in soft, playful kisses.

"And now I think the two of you should kiss." She grinned.

Anna was barely finished speaking before their mouths were fused together. All of the frustration and desire that had built up over the course of dinner was released in that hard kiss. When Jai's tongue pushed at the corner of his mouth, Beau opened to him happily. He still loved the way Jai's mouth fit against his, loved the way Jai used his tongue and lips to coax greater pleasure. The fact that he could now kiss Jai nearly any time he wanted didn't diminish the pleasure, the novelty, at all.

Jai had already stripped himself before he'd joined them on the bed, so as he leaned into Beau he could feel nothing but firm, warm skin. His tongue danced with Beau's, one arm wrapping around his shoulders to haul him in closer. His other hand slid into his hair, fingers tangling in it. Absently, Beau realized he felt more hands than Jai possessed.

Anna hadn't stayed back to simply watch for long. One of her hands had slid down his body and was stroking his cock as she kissed along the side of his neck. Then, her mouth was gone from his neck. A moment later he felt the warm pull as she wrapped her lips around his head and he moaned hungrily into the kiss.

There wasn't anything in the world Beau liked more than feeling both Anna and Jai at the same time. While Jai sucked on

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his tongue, Anna swallowed his shaft, slowly gliding her lips down his length. He reached for Jai blindly, searching for his cock and closing his fingers around the hot length. His ass automatically clenched as he stroked Jai's length, his body already conditioned to want every inch of it deep inside of him.

Beau trailed kisses from Jai's mouth to his ear. "Tell Anna how much you want to fuck her," he murmured.

He could feel the shudder run through Jai's body at those words. He turned slightly, brushing his lips against Beau's cheek, then looked down toward Anna. His hand left Beau's hair to move down into hers, stroking through it. "I really want to be inside of you again."

She rolled her eyes up to look at the two of them before drawing back from Beau's cock. Her hand replaced her lips, stroking along his length. "And what's Beau going to be doing?" Her eyes flicked between the two of them as she used the tip of her tongue to lightly tease at his head, probing his slit.

"Jai is going to let me fuck him." Just saying the word sent a thrill through him. "Maybe you could help me get him ready?"

Pushing herself up into a sitting position, she nodded. A moment later he felt the hard press of her lips against his as she gave him a brief, firm kiss, then drew away to get the bottle of lube from the nightstand. She set it on the bed, then pulled her negligee up over her head and dropped it onto the floor. As she moved in close to Jai, she looked almost sinfully pleased with herself. She rested her hands against his chest and pushed.

"Now lay back."

Once Jai was on his back, she leaned down and kissed him as her hand reached to catch one of his legs behind the knee. When she tugged his leg upward, Jai automatically shifted to draw his

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legs up and expose himself to Beau.

While Beau settled on his stomach between Jai's legs, Anna straddled his torso and bent so she could reach his cock with her mouth. She gripped Jai's thighs, keeping his legs splayed while Beau gently pulled his cheeks apart to expose his hole. He ran his finger over the pucker lightly, giving Jai a chance to adjust to the contact while Anna bent her head and began licking at his inner thighs. Jai twitched and moaned at the combined assault, his tight muscles jumping at every brush of Beau's finger or flick of Anna's tongue. Beau waited as long as he could, but his patience wasn't great at the best of times. Without uttering a warning, he leaned forward to rim Jai's ass.

At that, Jai gave a long shudder and cried out with pleasure. Beau could feel the other man moving his hips toward him, wordlessly begging for more. His tongue lightly probed at the tight ring of muscle, each tiny movement making Jai moan. There was something so effortlessly dominant about the man that having him fully submit himself to the two of them filled Beau with the same sort of rare thrill he felt when Anna took on the submissive role. The unusualness of it alone gave it a special erotic power.

Anna moved her attention to Jai's balls, and Beau waited until she had pulled one between her lips before pushing his tongue deeper. The slightly earthy smell of Jai's skin made his whole body throb. He knew he would need to take it slow once he actually got inside Jai, but he didn't know how he was going to hold himself back. He could already tell that Jai's ass was going to be hot and tighter than anything else he had ever experienced. But he wanted to make it good for Jai, too. So good that he would beg Beau to fuck him again.

Beau continued to tongue-fuck him slowly, his temperature

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rising every time Jai moved his hips to meet him. Finally, when Jai choked out the simple request for more, Beau sat up and reached for the lube. He met Anna's eyes, and she abandoned Jai's sac in favor of his cock, wrapping her lips around his head as Beau slid a slick finger into Jai's channel.

He felt tight and hot around his finger, almost impossibly hot, but his body readily relaxed at the intrusion. Jai's hips gave a small roll into Beau's hand and up to Anna's mouth as he hissed in pleasure. He gripped her hips and pull her back as he buried his face between her thighs. The both of them moaned and she slid her lips farther down his shaft than before. Beau felt his own cock twitch at the thought of kissing the both of them and tasting the other.

"It's been a while, but you don't have to be that careful," Jai gasped out quietly against Anna's skin.

Encouraged by that, Beau added a second finger. He pumped his wrist, and Anna moved her head in time, picking up the pace as he moved faster. When Jai moaned, Beau slipped a third slick finger in. He reached beneath his body and stroked himself with his free hand, spreading the pre-come down his shaft. The blanket beneath him felt damp, too, and he couldn't remember the last time he had been so ready to fuck somebody. By the time Jai began rocking hard enough to fuck himself on Beau's fingers, he knew it was time. He gently pulled his hand free and reached for the lube again.

Anna slowed and stopped, guessing as to what Beau was going to do. Jai made a sound that bordered on a growl as he was suddenly deprived. Sitting up, he wrapped his arms around Anna, his hands cradling her breasts as his lips and teeth grazed lightly up the side of her neck.

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“I want to fuck you while he’s fucking me,” he breathed to her. Beau could see the shiver race through her as her eyes closed and she nodded slowly.

Under Jai’s guidance she lay back on the bed and he crawled on top of her. Seeing him from this perspective, Beau could imagine the predator beneath his skin perfectly. There was an almost inhuman grace to him and a power that went beyond musculature. He watched as the muscles in Jai’s ass flexed and he thrust forward into her, making her cry out as her body arched.

Beau slicked his shaft with the lube and positioned himself behind Jai. His heart was already racing and it seemed to be harder to breathe. His palms were sweaty, and his vision a little blurry. Everything inside of him called out for Jai. It wasn’t just sexual desire. It was deeper need, something at the most basic level. Maybe it was the same sort of need Jai felt for him. Maybe the bond he referred to was nothing more than hunger he felt all the way to his bones. He ran his hands down Jai’s back, taking a moment to enjoy the warmth, the smooth skin, the flex of his muscles each time he filled Anna. There was so much strength in his body, and Beau would be lying if he said it didn’t turn him on.

When Jai pulled back, Beau caught his hip and held him still. He could feel the tension in Jai’s body and heard the whimper of impatience from Anna, but he was intent on doing it right. He positioned his cock at Jai’s entrance, pushing until his head broke past the tight barrier. His grip tightened, and he pulled Jai back instead of thrusting forward.

Jai leaned into him readily, groaning as he was filled. He turned slightly, just enough to nuzzle underneath the curve of Beau’s jaw. “That’s perfect,” he breathed.

One of his hands moved back to hold onto Beau’s ass and keep

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him close as Jai pushed forward into Anna again. Beau could hear as she moaned her approval, her arms wrapping around the both of them. Just as he'd been able to feel Jai when they'd both been taking Anna, he could feel each flex and thrust as Jai moved inside of her. The muscles of his ass tensed and relaxed rhythmically around Beau's cock invitingly, making him want to bury himself fully in the other man's tight body.

Instead of setting his own rhythm, Beau followed Jai's body. He didn't want to lose that heat or the amazing grip around his cock, so he didn't try to pull out. He remained deep in Jai's passage, replacing friction with pressure. When Jai dropped forward to rest on the hand near Anna's head, Beau followed, draping across his back and kissing his neck. He even buried his nose in Jai's hair and inhaled, his throat tightening at the already familiar smell even as Jai flexed around him. His hand moved down Jai's arm and to Anna's shoulder, as though the boundaries between their bodies were being erased. When he touched Anna, he could almost feel her response echo through Jai's body. The smell of sex was a heady perfume, and Beau's skin was flushed and slick.

Each thrust and shift and roll of Jai's body translated into that delicious tension around his cock, so that he could almost imagine that while he was fucking Jai he was inside of Anna as well. His wife's hands slid over his back and shoulders and she leaned up to brush kisses against each man. Their shoulders, their necks, anything she could reach. As Jai began to move faster and harder, Beau felt the sting of Anna's nails in his shoulder as she moaned and rolled up to meet every thrust.

Beau lost himself in the sensations of bodies meeting bodies, of skin, of heat, of sharp pricks of pain in his flesh. He watched

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Anna's beautiful face change and contort as the bliss swept through her, pushing her closer and closer to her breaking point. Sometimes, when he tried to imagine a life without her, all he saw was darkness and drudgery, no life at all. He kissed Jai's neck again, licking the salty drops of sweat gathering at his nape before pressing his lips to the damp skin. He was beginning to think of Jai in the same way. He hadn't even been in Beau's life for a full month, but now he wondered how he had survived at all without knowing the other man. He was becoming as critical as Anna, but the thought didn't frighten him. If anything, he embraced it.

Before long, his body took over, seeking the most amount of pleasure possible. He began pumping his hips, each thrust driving Jai deep into Anna. She moaned and arched her back, her breath catching in her throat as they shifted into a faster rhythm. The pleasure shot up his spine and spread through him, hot and fast. He felt like it was stealing his oxygen, stealing his focus. His grip tightened on Jai because he needed something to ground him.

Even without touching Anna directly, he could tell when she came. The breathless cries from her were as familiar as his own voice and he could feel the new tension in Jai's body as he had to thrust harder against the tight grip of her body. He felt one of her legs tangling with his, pulling him tighter against Jai as she was lost in the throes of orgasm.

In turn, Jai clutched her to him as he leaned back into Beau. He managed to turn his head just enough to breathlessly scrape the mark on Beau's neck with his teeth.

"Come inside of me," he begged. "Please, Beau. I want to feel you."

The soft plea combined with the light pain on his neck was too much for Beau to withstand. He slammed into Jai's body, and as

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Jai clenched around him everything erupted. He closed his eyes and the light crystallized into star bursts, and bliss swept through him, hot and powerful. His cock jerked, shooting deep into Jai's ass. Every time Jai flexed his muscles, it felt like he was prolonging Beau's orgasm, stretching it for endless, exquisite seconds. He felt Anna's small hands fluttering over his skin, heard her breaths beneath Jai's gasps, and then another wave overtook him as Jai cried out with his own climax.

After countless moments of ecstasy, Beau became aware that the only sound in the room was the three of them panting for breath. Jai was supporting most of his weight on his forearms so as not to crush Anna beneath the two of them. Her eyes were closed, head turned to the side. Beau might have thought she was asleep except for the way her hand kept stroking along his arm

"Thank you," she began breathlessly, "for coming home."

Beau swallowed. There was no reason to thank him. He hadn't been joking when he told her he would come running any time she called. He eased away from Jai, who rolled away from Anna, creating space for Beau between their bodies. He settled there, feeling like everything was strange and comfortably familiar at the same time. His bed, his wife, his mate, all surrounding him. He kissed Anna gently on the mouth, then turned his head to mimic the gesture with Jai.

Jai cupped Beau's face and pulled him into a deeper kiss. Beau closed his eyes, relaxing into the sweet caress. When they finally pulled apart, Jai kissed his cheeks and brow. "I want to thank you, too."

"For what?" Beau asked.

"For bringing me home."

"It's where you belong."

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Beau relaxed into his pillow, his eyes and limbs heavy, feeling more content than he ever had before. He murmured a simple *love you*, knowing Anna would hear him, and hoping Jai would as well.

LOUISA GOUGH

Louisa Gough has been reading romances since she was a little girl, and finally decided it was time to write one of her own. When she isn't writing, she's traveling the world with her partner or watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with her cats.

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