



A.
DREAMSPINNER
PRESS

Day Dream

THE PHONEBOOK

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I

GOD, Ryan hated business trips, he really did.

He used to like them—used to love them in fact. He'd felt so damned grown-up—business airfare, business-class, business credit card—hey, let's get the hell out of our hometown on the boss's dime, won't that be awesome?

But it wasn't any fun anymore—not when he had to leave Scotty at home.

Of course, Ryan's law firm didn't pay for *wives* to come on business trips, much less live-in gay lovers, so Ryan was pretty much shit out of luck. He had to admit that the joy of the business trip had seriously palled over the last two years, ever since he'd brought Scott Davidovitch home after a party and fallen head-over-heels for the love of his life.

Who was currently pissed as hell with Ryan, but that didn't mean Ryan was hanging up anyway.

“Jesus, Ryan, it's your fucking birthday tomorrow. You had to sign on for this business trip? I mean....” Scotty's voice lowered to a sulk. “You're turning *thirty*. Doesn't that just blow your mind? Don't you want a cake or a keg or a sex toy party or something?” Scotty was twenty-four. According to him, Ryan was ancient and venerable. Brat.

Ryan could picture his boyfriend, lying on their bed on his stomach, holding the phone to his ear. His beach-boy cut bangs would be wisping in his gray eyes and his legs—

probably wrapped in skinny jeans—would be crossed at the ankles and waving over his ass like a '50s schoolgirl getting ready to go to a sock hop. He'd be wearing pale yellow or blue, because he knew those colors looked stunning, and even, Ryan often thought, because they looked good with the décor in their bedroom. Scotty was wonderful, but wonderful didn't mean "not vain."

Abruptly Ryan wanted to be stuffing his sock up Scotty's hop, without any intervening miles between him and their Sacramento home.

"What I want, Scotty," Ryan said miserably, looking at his suitcase, "is for this deposition to be over so I can come home. I want to watch a movie, eat some pizza, and sleep with you. I want to not give a fuck about making partner before I'm thirty—'cause it ain't gonna happen, obviously—and I want to just be fucking home."

On the other end of the line, Scott gave a sigh, and Ryan pictured him rolling over onto his back. "Are you saying you didn't sign on for this trip?"

Ryan sighed. "It's complicated," he muttered. And it was. He'd started out signing up for them. He'd been the business trip king before he'd met Scotty. It was a good way to get noticed, he'd thought. He had a niche. He was indispensable, and his bosses would know it. And for the most part it had worked: he'd been an up-and-comer, and his position with the company had been golden.

And then the economy had stalled, and then hiring had stalled, and then people had started running around like headless chickens squawking, "Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck *my job!*" Ryan had simply held fast to his niche, anxious that he

and Scotty not suffer, not have to trade their really good apartment in for a crappy one, that Scotty, who had finally chosen a direction in which to take school, wouldn't have to quit school to work at Starbucks full time. Ryan was a good lawyer. He did a good job. He would keep his niche and he and Scotty could keep their lives; all he had to do was fly away two, three times a month and....

God, it sucked.

"I just...." He sighed and scrubbed his hand over his face. He'd never really talked to Scotty about this. Hadn't put it into words—didn't want to now, truth be known. But his cell phone was plugged in and he was done for the day and he was trapped in the hotel room alone. There was really nowhere to turn for comfort except to Scotty, and he couldn't do that unless he 'fessed up.

"I didn't want to lose the job, the money, Scott. We like where we are. I'm just afraid that if I start turning these trips down, I'll become first guy on the chopping block, you know?" He blew out a breath and sagged on the cheap hotel bed. The coverlet was glossy polyester purple paisley, and he dragged it off restlessly. One of the first things Scotty had gotten him, after they'd moved in together and these trips had become commonplace, had been a fuzzy blanket. The thick fleece kind—this one had a lion on it—and Ryan pulled that out of his luggage (it took up half the space) and threw it on the bed.

It was worth the extra space in the suitcase. That damned blanket felt like a little slice of home.

"Scotty?" The silence on the other end of the line had gone on a long time. "Scott? Do we still have reception?"

“I could quit school....” He sounded reluctant, and Ryan’s gut response was the right one.

“Oh *hell* no. Besides, I still have a job. There’s no reason for you to—”

“I mean, you know, if you asked and you lost your job—”

“Scotty—”

“No, man. I’m serious. This is bullshit. I fucking miss you. And it was one thing when I thought you wanted to be there, but you don’t, and now it just sucks. Tell them you don’t want to do this. Tell them you’ll do some other bullshit job that keeps you close to home.” Scott had always been the follower. He’d had no ambition when he and Ryan had met, and Ryan had been amused—and warmed—to find that his idea of ambition was a degree in philosophy and pop culture. It *was* a degree, and with Scotty’s quick, playful mind, Ryan had no doubts that he could find a way to turn a profit with it, but *forceful* and *dominant* only applied to Scotty when they were in the bedroom.

And then, it was rarely. In fact, his most dominant moment seemed to have been the time Ryan had gotten tangled up in his blue shirt, and Scotty had taken full advantage of it. Hearing Scotty getting all caveman and pissed off right now sort of reminded Ryan of that moment, and he lay down on his back and wriggled luxuriously on his blanket from home. His whole body started to tingle, just hearing Scott’s lightly timbered, beach-boy voice go all deep and hard like that.

“I’ll think about it,” Ryan said softly, thinking about Scotty’s body next to his instead. Scotty had long, lithe

muscles, and, in spite of the fact that they both worked out together, Ryan tended towards heavier, massy muscles in his chest and thighs. Ryan liked Scott's long-limbed, gentle definition. He found it sexy as hell.

"You will?" Scotty's caveman impersonation was brought up short by Ryan's ready compliance. "Really?"

Ryan had to laugh. "Well, yeah, Scotty. You're half of the dynamic duo, here. If you hate me being away as much as I hate being away from *you*, I figure you get a say. I don't want you quitting school, but if you think it's worth the risk of some of my income, I've got no excuses."

The silence on the other end of the line was impressed. "Damn. I thought we were going to fight or something."

Ryan had to laugh at that. They rarely fought. It wasn't because they didn't have any passion; mostly, it was because they tended to passionately agree. "Nope. No fight. We may fight over whether to buy Top Ramen or toilet paper later, but I'm so over the business trip right now. If I have to hear one more client lie about the extent of his personal injury—I mean, 'Yes, I've been affected by the asbestos, Mr. Connors. Last week I threw my dick out doing gymnastics with twins on a trapeze, and it's all the company's fault!' Jesus, I swear, Scotty, if nothing else, bailing off this gig will do a lot to improve my vision of mankind, that's for damned sure."

Scott was busy cracking up and Ryan just lay there and listened to the sound of his laughter for a minute. It really did make his day better, hearing that.

They talked desultorily for a while, then Ryan begged off to order room service and take a shower, and Scotty told him

to call back when he was clean, fed, and wearing nothing under his sleep pants.

“We’re not going to try for the phone sex again, are we?” Ryan whined. They’d tried it before and couldn’t seem to make it work. Ryan got self-conscious, Scotty got snarky, and between Ryan blushing and Scotty cracking jokes, there was no stroking, no thrusting, and definitely no coming between the hotel sheets. Thinking about it now, Ryan had to admit this state of affairs should probably have been a dealbreaker for the business trips from the get-go.

“Naw,” Scotty said with enough oomph to tell Ryan he was lying. But Ryan was starving and he *really* needed that shower and so he hung up, trusting that they’d have better things to say to each other than “Come on, baby, stroke that thing” when he got back on the phone.

They did. They talked for another hour. Finally, Ryan lay back against his pillows, clean, fed, and tired from holding the phone to his ear. He wasn’t quite ready for bed yet, but... well, this was usually the part of the evening when they watched television in blissful silence before retiring to bed. Even the best couples didn’t talk twenty-four/seven, and on a good night, they’d be fondling each other by now without any words needed.

“Scotty, it’s time to get off the phone,” Ryan said unhappily after a particularly long pause.

“Ryan, what did you use in the shower?” Scott asked unexpectedly, and Ryan shrugged.

“Hotel shit, why?”

“I thought so.... You know, I packed your home soap and shampoo for you this go-round.”

“Aw, jeez, I didn’t know that. Where is it?”

“The side pocket of your suitcase. You know, where you usually put your gym shoes.” The trip was not supposed to be long enough for Ryan to need to use the gym; it had been extended two days while he’d been en route.

Out of curiosity, Ryan rolled over to the suitcase on the floor and started rooting around. What he came up with was not what he’d been expecting.

“Awww, Jesus, Scotty... really?” He threw the items on the bed in good-humored exasperation.

“What?” Scott asked innocently. “I’m just trying to make you feel at home away from home!”

“Yeah, well, at home I usually top!” Of course, Ryan thought, looking in amazement at the eclectic bunch of sex toys and lube Scott had packed for him, this stuff didn’t have anything to do with topping, did it?

“Well, you don’t always,” Scott said arrogantly, “and it’s not like you haven’t used that shit before.”

Ryan sighed and lay down again, leaving the toys next to him. “Not all of it.” He picked up a package with a stretchy rubber thing inside that looked like it was designed to be a medieval torture device. “I don’t even know what this is supposed to be!”

“Then it’s probably the cock ring,” Scotty told him confidently. “You don’t usually need one. You sustain a fine and hard erection without it. I haven’t shown you those things because you tend to roger me just fine for hours. I want to be able to walk in the morning, you know?”

“Then why pack it now?”

Scott's laugh was low and dirty. "'Cause it turns me on to think of it on you. I'm a naturally selfish creature, baby. You're not getting any, I'm not getting any, and Ryan? I need to get me some."

"We've tried dirty talk before," Ryan said doubtfully, still embarrassed by the whole idea.

"We won't talk dirty. In fact, we won't even talk about sex at all. I just need to know you're doing something on the other end of the line while we're talking."

"Yeah? And what will you be doing?" As a lawyer, Ryan had a healthy skepticism.

Scotty made a breathy moan, and every hair on the back of Ryan's neck stood on end. He knew that sound.

"Already doing it, big guy. I, uh... I sort of have a kit just like that here, you know?"

Ryan found his groin tingling, growing warm and full. "Scotty," he asked suspiciously, "what are you wearing?"

"A butt plug and a cock ring. Why do you ask?"

"You're bullshitting me," Ryan said flatly, and Scott's low chuckle dared him to doubt it.

"You'll just have to trust me," Scotty said innocently. "And at the very least you can put the cock ring on and see what happens."

"Scotty...", Ryan protested, but at the same time, he was grappling with the package, and Scott could hear him swearing at it on the end of the line. "Okay," he muttered, still skeptical and looking at the stretchy rubber thing in his hand, "my pecker goes *where*?"

Scott walked him through it. He was cracking up through most of it, this was true, but he did walk Ryan through the process of where to put his cock, and then, surprisingly enough, where to put his testicles, and when he was done, Scott asked, “Well, how does it look?”

Ryan’s beginning erection had faded while he’d been opening up the package. He flexed his stomach (he was a little vain about his six-pack) to get a good look, mentally comparing his pale, occasionally freckled skin with his faraway lover’s. Scott was a hedonist at heart and took full advantage of the gym tanning bed. Even his pubic hair was bleached blond. By contrast, Ryan looked... well, ordinary.

“Small and wrinkled,” he muttered, embarrassed by the question.

Scott’s snort actually hurt his ear as it came through the little cell phone speaker. “I’ve seen it before, Ryan, up close and personal. It may be wrinkled right now, but it has never, ever, *ever* been small.”

Well, maybe not. But it certainly didn’t look particularly exciting now, sitting between Ryan’s legs in a nest of curly blond-brown hair. “So,” Ryan asked, “what now?”

“Is the plug greased?”

Ryan looked next to him. He’d laid the lube and the plug out on a towel once he realized what a pain in the cock getting the other thing out of the package would be. Sometimes, the key to successful sex in any form was not having to hunt for things when the moment was hot. (He and Scotty had figured this out once when they’d ended up using vegetable oil for lube. Besides being icky, unsanitary, hard to wash off, and really odd smelling, it had also been in the

kitchen when they'd started off in the bedroom—not the best sex they'd ever had, no.)

The plug was shaped like a large pink turnip with a pointy end, and, yes, it was running with silicone lube even as it sat on the white towel. It actually looked sort of obscene all by itself, didn't it?

“Plug grease is a ‘go’,” Ryan said dryly. “And now here I am, nekkid with my cock in a knot and a butt plug on standby, and you swear you're not going to try to talk dirty. Seriously?”

Scotty let out a low hum—again, Ryan knew that sound. He had an image of his lover, with his long, lithe body stretched out on their bed, his erection pointing skyward, and his legs spread to accommodate his own plug, and his nipples tingled. Experimentally, Ryan rubbed his palm over his chest and tweaked them, and he let out a breathy sigh when they got hard and pointy and...oh, so, sensitive.

He must have made a sound because Scotty asked, “What did you just do?”

“Uhm...” Ryan stammered, and the good feeling was gone. So was the slight swelling of his cock, and he sighed. “Not a goddamned thing. So, I'm just going to sit here like this? This is fun.”

“We could talk.”

“About what? I'm here with a thing on my cock because we ran out of conversation.”

Scott's sigh was no longer playful. “Please, Ryan... I went to a fair amount of trouble here....”

Ryan gave in, that quickly. Anything for Scotty. “I’m lying down on my blanket,” he said obediently, “in the dark. I just made a pass at my nipples. They were pretty tingly for a minute there, and then you tried to talk dirty and the whole thing went to hell. How about... I don’t know... can you sing?”

Scotty started to chuckle and the sound was pretty damned evil, and then he started to sing to the tune of “Let It Rock.” “I see you all/tied down, a big plug in your ass and your cock, erect, while your nipples get a pass/and I come to you, you don’t have a choice suck my cock, suck my cock, suck my cock...’.”

He might have made it through another verse, but Ryan was laughing too hard to hear the rest of it, and he stopped.

“Oh God...” Ryan chortled. “Jesus... Scotty... damn... way to kill a mood... ‘Let it rock, let it rock, let it rock!’” He sang the last part of the song right and then dissolved into giggles again, and Scott laughed with him. It was one of those giggle fits that kept going—one of them would start to talk and the other would start humming “Let It Rock” and then the whole sequence would start again, and for about five minutes there was nothing but the two of them, laughing with each other in the quiet of the night. Eventually, though, they were all giggled out and a comfortable silence buzzed on the cell phone in Ryan’s ear. His hand was wandering pleasantly along the tight skin of his stomach, and he started to rub it thoughtfully.

“So,” Scott murmured into the quiet, “dirty talk is out. Singing is out. You’ve heard about my day in excruciating detail.... What’s left?”

“You could read to me,” Ryan said facetiously. In the sober aftermath of their fit of the giggles, touching his own skin didn’t seem so awkward. He tried his nipples again and they buzzed and hardened, and so he tweaked them a little harder. They got that hard electric wire straight to his groin, and he had to suppress a gasp.

“Yeah, but if I read porn, you’ll get all weird again,” Scott muttered glumly. “What’s left? I’ve got your books here—weren’t you reading *The Kite Runner*?”

Ryan grimaced and continued to tweak his nipples. “Only if you want me to sob through my orgasm,” he said truthfully. Saddest goddamned book he’d ever read.

“Jesus, Ryan, about the only choice I’ve got left is the phonebook.”

Ryan smiled and backed himself up on the hotel pillow—and spread his legs. His cock was actually starting to swell a little from the touch to his nipples, and he needed the room. “I don’t think anyone’s named ‘Fornication’, so that’s probably not such a good idea.”

“Mmmno,” Scotty affirmed, “but there’s a Fornier—that’s close.”

“Okay... so, that’s as dirty as the phonebook gets? C’mon, Scotty, you can make the produce department look like an adult toy store. What else you got?”

“Well, there’s always the obvious,” Scott replied, speculation in his voice. “We’ve got Dick Cox...”

Ryan sputtered. “Now that’s just mean.” His cock was starting to fill out nicely and the binding on it was starting to

ache in a pleasant sort of way. He pulled absently on the loose skin and felt it growing fuller under his fingers.

“Think he’s got brothers named Willy and Peter?”

“Only if you’re reading the porn section of the yellow pages.” Tentatively Ryan felt his balls underneath what he was thinking of as “the sling.” They were hard and round, and just the faintest brush of his fingers against them made his abdomen clench and his prick flex across his stomach. “Dear Penthouse Forum....”

“I knew a Peter Dix once,” Scott was saying. “He was a pretty nice guy, actually. And a great lay.”

Ryan grunted—partly because he’d pulled his hand up and pinched a nipple again and partly because hearing about Scotty and his past lovers always filled him with an uncomfortable mixture of jealousy and lust. “Think you can find a Richard Dix in there?”

There was a pause, and Ryan heard Scott swallow. “Nnnno...,” he said slowly into the phone, and Ryan wondered what he was doing during that pause. His cock absolutely ached with the thought. There was the sound of frantically rustling pages, and when Scott spoke again, his voice was definitely breathless. “I’ve got a Horatio Hitchcock, though. Get it? Horny Hitchcock?” Scotty giggled and panted in the same breath. “What do you think he hitches that thing to?”

“Probably someone named ‘Fuller’,” Ryan gasped. He had his cock in his hand and was squeezing the base. As he spoke, he squeezed and pulled up, until the tip was turgid and purple in the circle of his thumb and finger. It hurt deliciously, and he tormented it a little by taking some of the pre-come and rubbing it around the top. Sooo... good....

Scott made his own little grunt. “Hey... I could always change my name to that... how ’bout you?”

“No....” Ryan’s cock was so full he didn’t even want to try the plug. He didn’t know how Scotty did it. “I knew a guy named Flucker once. I could always Flucker you Ful....” He squeezed his cock and pulled up again and his back arched off the bed. “Flucker you Fuller...,” he finished, definitely panting.

“Gauuuughhh....” Scotty’s sound was all lust, and Ryan’s asshole clenched with it. He *loved* to hear Scott horny. “Not anymore,” Scott muttered. “I can’t *come* with that thing in right now....”

Ryan actually whimpered, because he had a clear visual of what Scott had just done. He could see Scott, on his hands and knees, pulling the plug out, waving his ass in the air, all shiny with lube and waiting for Ryan’s invasion. Ryan’s cock oozed some more pre-come, and he struggled to keep up with the conversation. His fist, slick with the pre-come, tormented the sensitive ridge of his cockhead and he had a little bit of inspiration—Scotty’s sweet mouth was always so good at working that... that... that... place right there.

“What I could really use is someone named Ridgeway,” he muttered, hoping Scott could follow that. His balls were straining at the constriction of the ring, and his vision was starting to go black.

“What you really need is someone named Fingering,” Scott panted back, and the thought of Scott’s talented fingers exploring Ryan’s bottom made him whimper. “But

what I really need is someone named Pounder, so you'd have to change your name too!"

"I think we'll both—" Auughhh... his ass was positively hungry for some stimulation, and Ryan looked at the plug with new eyes. But... but... his hand on his cock was just too... oh God... he brought his thumb to his mouth to taste his pre-come because it was decadent and he could and then he went back to stroking and squeezing and tormenting his aching body. "Both have to be happy with Mr. Stroker..."

"Hey, there's someone here named Mr. Pflug, Ry. You want to try him out?"

Ryan looked at the plug again and then looked at his hand on his swollen cock and then almost whined into the phone.

"What's wrong?" Scott asked, his voice thready.

"I think I need to get hands-free if we're ever going to do this again," Ryan said in frustration, and then he squeezed his cock and groaned. "Because right now, if you're Mr. Stroker, I wanna be Mister Bates... get it?"

"Since Mister Bates is all I'm getting, yeah, sure, I get it," Scott complained, but then he moaned again, and Ryan heard the grunting and the wiggling and the breathy gasp that accompanied putting the plug back in. "Changed my mind," Scott muttered. "Mister Bates can do that for a guy."

"Mister Bates is a naughty fucker," Ryan agreed, and then he made a sound into the phone that defied description. Dammit, he was *empty*. His entire body *craved*. And if Scotty couldn't be there, *something* had to fill that void.

“Yeah, well, so’s Mr. Pflug.” Scott’s voice was getting adamant, and Ryan’s hunger grew teeth.

“Scotty,” he protested, but his body wanted it, yearned for it in fact. He just wanted to hear... to know....

“Put the phone down and play with your asshole,” Scott demanded urgently. It was like he could read Ryan’s mind.

“That’s not in the ph- ph—” oh jeez... “phonebook,” Ryan panted, but it appeared he was too far gone to worry about dirty talk now.

“Don’t care, just do it!” Scott ordered. Oh... God... Scott, ordering him to do something. He did it so rarely... and Ryan loved it. Loved hearing Scotty in charge. Loved hearing his lover make demands of him, loved filling those demands—or... (the thought made his vision go dark) being filled by those demands. “C’mon, Ryan,” Scotty commanded. “Want to picture you doing it. So... so sweet....”

Ryan did it because Scott ordered him to. In fact, he turned around and stuck his ass in the air for better access—and so he could keep his head near the phone. First he swiped his fingers in the lube still drizzling of the plug and then he... oh jeez... fingered the opening, hissing with the coldness of the lube. His cock flexed against his stomach, wet and sticky and harder than it had ever been, and Ryan started positively growling with want.

“Are you in yet?” Scott’s voice was tinny with the distance from the pillow to Ryan’s ear, but it was still his, and he was still there with Ryan as he delicately penetrated himself with a fingertip.

“Barely,” Ryan hissed, and Scott actually laughed... and then groaned. “You?”

“I’m all stretched and happy, ass-wise,” Scott moaned. “But I gotta tell you, if it’s not you inside me, baby, it’s just not as fun to come.”

“Mmm....” It was supposed to be a sympathetic sound, but Ryan had just slipped his finger all the way in and it came out more of a blissful moan.

“What are you doing?” Scott asked with an edge of urgency.

“My taxes,” Ryan teased, inserting another finger and stretching himself. His cock flexed against his stomach, and he groaned then, long and with great frustration. This was *not* fun to do by yourself when you were trying to talk on the phone. Ryan turned his head and rested his weight on his shoulder so he could use his other hand to stroke himself. His entire body was on fire, and he wanted Scotty there so bad to make it better. But Scotty wasn’t there—Ryan had to settle for answering his own wants, although that made him tingle and ache too.

“Well, buddy, take your taxes and stuff them up your ass for me, will you?” Scott chuckled, and Ryan shivered.

“It’ll be so... so....” Whimper. “I’ll be so *full*....”

“That’s the risk,” pant “of playing with Mister Bates... now *do it*, dammit. I want to hear you come!”

“Fucker,” Ryan muttered, but he had already grasped the plug and slid it back along the crease of his ass to his hole, which was already lubed and stretched and achy. The tip of the plug went in, and then Ryan groaned and pushed and whimpered and stretched and gasped and then buried his face into the pillow and screamed, “*Oh my God!*” and then it was in, and Ryan had collapsed to his side, his

mouth near the mouthpiece of the phone, his fist pumping frantically on his engorged cock.

“You fucking yourself, Ry?”

“Oh God... Scotty—” Ryan’s voice cracked. His body was *so high*. It felt *so good*, and his fist kept working, kept pumping, and from the phone next to him he heard Scott groaning too.

Then Scott all but screamed into the phone, his voice harsh and cracked and exultant. “*Coming, Ryan! Coming... ah, God... so... good!*”

And that was it. That was when Ryan’s eyeballs rolled back in his head and his vision went dark and his entire body exploded out his cock and he spasmed and shouted and came and came and came and came and came.

Their breathing was the only thing traveling over the phone lines for a few moments, and then Ryan carefully took the towel that the toys were sitting on and wiped off his hand before picking up the phone and holding it to his ear.

“Scotty?”

“Ry?”

“You gonna live?”

“Just came out my eyeballs, Ry. I’ll let you know when I can see again.”

“Me too,” Ryan muttered. Oh jeez, all he wanted now was to close his eyes and sleep, but....

“Don’t forget to take the stuff off and clean it, yeah?” Scotty asked distantly, and Ryan imagined him, removing

the ring, pulling out the plug, and wrapping it in a towel while Ryan did the same.

“Yeah,” Ryan muttered, starting the process. He wanted his phone to still work when he lay down to sleep. They talked in broken phrases for a few minutes as they cleaned themselves up, and finally, Ryan had repacked everything and put his sleep-pants back on and was lying back down on his blanket (it was a little sticky, but it was still home) and Scotty was talking in his ear.

It wasn’t enough.

“Scotty,” Ryan said quietly when it was clear the conversation was over and they couldn’t stay awake another second, “you know I love you more than anything, right?”

“I love you too, Ry.”

“Would you still love me if I got fired and we had to work side-by-side at Starbucks and move to a crappy apartment and I wasn’t such a grown-up anymore?”

“I’d love you as long as you were by my side, Ryan.”

Ryan closed his eyes in the dark and wished so fiercely to just be able to touch Scott’s hand or his cheek or to rub his back as they fell asleep. “I love you even though I’m not,” he murmured, and Scott blew a sleepy raspberry at him.

“Well, duh,” he muttered with rolled eyes, and Ryan rang off, still chuckling slightly in the dark emptiness of the hotel room.

II

SCOTT cleaned the apartment the next day in a deep-assed blue funk. He'd had such plans for Ryan's birthday. The freezer had an ice cream cake in Ryan's favorite flavor; he'd saved up his tips for a nice takeout dinner from their favorite restaurant; hell, he even had roses, with a plan to scatter petals all over the damned kitchen table.

For a guy who'd thought that his entire adulthood would be one long stretch of self-involvement and hedonism, he'd gone out of his way to be thoughtful and attentive, and Ryan wasn't going to be able to make it.

And since he'd told Scott *why* he wasn't going to make it, Scott couldn't even hold it against him.

Damn the guy. He was sober, responsible, and ambitious and loved Scott to distraction. About all Scott could do for him was make sure the apartment was immaculate and be ready for a foot rub when he got home.

He had just about finished the vacuuming and was contemplating doing the rose-petal thing over the blue and yellow plaid tablecloth for the hell of it, because the smell might make him feel better, when his phone rang.

"Hey, Scotty, what're you doing?" Ryan asked jovially, and Scotty smiled. He was calling early. Maybe he had a break.

“I’m vacuuming topless in high heels and a garter belt,” Scott retorted. Well. He was vacuuming at least.

Ryan sucked in a breath, sounding positively turned on. “Really?”

“Well, part of it,” Scott confessed, and Ryan’s low laugh charmed him. Ryan could be all of those solid, dependable things that Scott needed in his life. He could also be whimsical, starry-eyed, and—as he had been the night before—perfectly willing to be led into sexual bliss by Scott himself. Scott used to think that sex was the one thing he did right in his life. Now he knew that it was sex with *Ryan* that was his calling.

“Hey,” Ryan said, sounding a little anxious. “Do me a favor, would you?”

“Yeah, sure. You know—anything, it’s your birthday, you absentee bastard.”

“Nice. I ordered something delivered to you for my birthday.”

“Aren’t I supposed to be the one getting you the present?” Scott asked, annoyed. Now he didn’t even have *that* to do.

“No, you’re the one who’s supposed to open the door *immediately*. You don’t want this thing standing in the hallway for too long, okay?”

Scott rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, what? Did you get yourself flowers?”

“No,” Ryan said patiently, “because you got them for me. I know you did. You even know I like them, because I’m a pathetic girl about shit like that. Now I gotta go. That thing’ll

be there in about an hour. *Please*, Scotty—for me? Would you answer the door on the first ring?”

Scott sighed. He'd been planning to go out and get groceries, but Ryan rarely asked him to overtax his blossoming responsibility, so this was probably important.

Glumly he finished cleaning the house, finally deciding to sacrifice a couple of roses to the kitchen table, just to make Ryan feel bad when he saw them the next day. If some of the petals were ripped in half instead of taken off the stem, hey, he couldn't be gracious about everything, now could he?

He'd actually started dinner—a basic pasta, but he was proud of it—when the doorbell rang, and he rushed from the kitchen to the front room, wiping his hands on a towel as he went. He flung open the door in something of a huff, and—

There was Ryan, standing in their hallway in the March chill, wearing nothing but a big red bow around his privates.

His pale skin was puckered with goose pimples, and he was standing next to his suitcases, dancing from stockinged foot to stockinged foot, and Scotty wasted precious nanojoules of his body heat staring at his lover with his mouth open.

Ryan smiled crookedly, his all-American boy features attaining an unbelievable beauty. “Happy birthday to me,” he said hopefully, and Scott practically jumped him in the hall.

“You're here you're here you're here... omigod, you're here!” Ryan was shivering in his arms and damned near trying to burrow under his clothes, but his mouth was warm and needy, and Scotty just stormed into the kiss, so damned glad to see him he could hardly think.

Ryan pulled back way too soon, but since he said, “Ooohh, God, Scotty, you’re so warm. Can we go inside?” Scott couldn’t get mad.

“Jesus!” Scott half-pulled, half-pushed him into the living room, closing the door behind them with his bare foot.

“Ss-suitcases,” Ryan chattered, and Scott said, “Shit! Go get under the blankets. I’ll be right there!” as he opened the door again to bring in the luggage. Neatly folded on the top of Ryan’s laptop backpack were the jeans, sweatshirt, and boxers that Ryan had probably worn on the plane, and Scott looked at them, absurdly touched.

Ryan—who had blushed so badly the first time they’d met that his ears had turned red. Ryan—who could barely talk dirty during phone sex. *His* Ryan, who had always been so sober and responsible and in charge. It was a grand romantic gesture, and Scotty had always been a sucker for those.

Until he’d moved in with Ryan, he’d never really been the recipient, that’s all.

He brought the luggage in and shoved it next to the door without giving a shit about the freshly cleaned apartment and then ran and turned off dinner. *Then* he practically ran into the bedroom, pulling his shirt over his head as he went.

“You’re getting naked too?” Ryan asked, puzzled. He’d been trying to remove the bow as he lay down in bed and had gotten hopelessly tangled.

Scott laughed and undid his jeans, hopping to push them down his legs. “Wasn’t that part of the plan?”

Ryan pulled at a knot placed right over his groin with obviously chilled fingers, then looked up, and grinned, pleased. “You know, I really didn’t think beyond undressing in the hallway and hoping nobody else showed up! Both of us naked is good, though. I’m down with that.”

Scott wagged his eyebrows and threw himself across the bed so he could help Ryan with the wide satin ribbon. “How about I’ll *go* down with that, if only you tell me what you’re doing here. Do I need to get you an application at Starbucks?”

Ryan had propped himself up on an elbow and was letting Scott work on the ribbon while Ryan ran tender fingers through his lover’s hair. “No. I might not make partner anytime this decade, but I’m not fired. I just called up my boss, told him I was missing my own birthday and that my boyfriend needed me home more often. He said to take the day off and that they could find someone else to split the business trips with me so I only have to take, like, one a month.”

Scott looked up at him, knowing his mouth was slightly parted, knowing his chin was wobbling a little, and knowing his eyes were soft and watery—and not caring. “Really?” he asked. He was so damned happy he almost couldn’t get the word out through a swollen throat.

Ryan was smiling back at him, and the hand that had been in his hair cupped his cheek instead. “Really really,” he said softly. “No more ‘Ryan the workaholic boyfriend’. Lots more ‘Ryan and Scotty do the weekend up right’. How’s that?”

Scott shook his head and looked away, working the red satin knot again with trembling fingers. It came undone in his hands and he pushed the fabric frantically away so he could wrap his arms around Ryan—all of him—bare and still a little chilly from his grand romantic gesture. Very carefully, he kissed Ryan’s vulnerable hip bone, which was the first thing he could find.

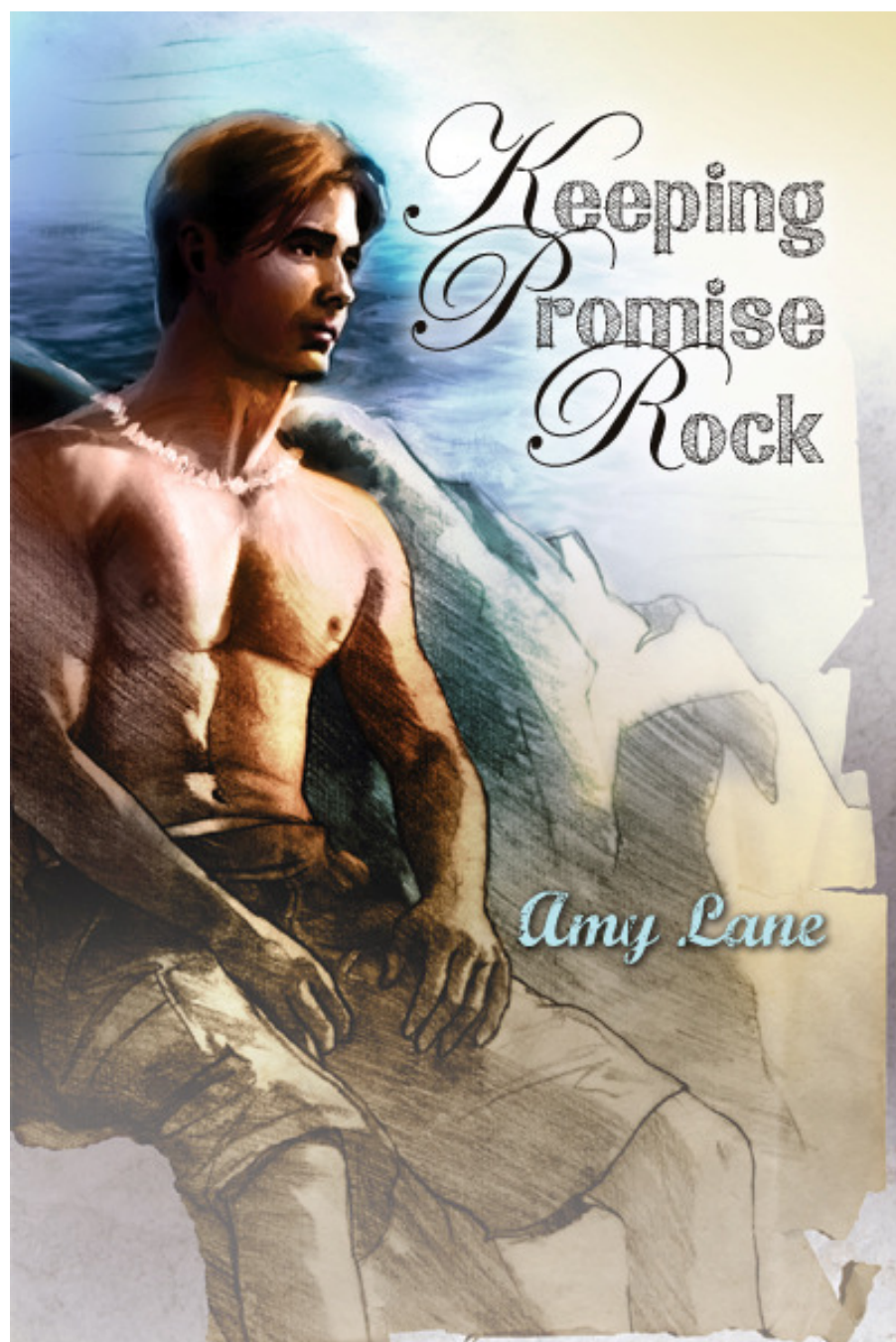
“That’s awesome,” he said, laying his cheek there and letting Ryan touch the curve of his ear reverently. He gazed up the length of Ryan’s body and smiled happily into those brown eyes. “You’re awesome. I would have eaten Top Ramen with you until we were old and gray, but we don’t have to do that because you’re awesome. Thanks, Ry.” He fought back the urge to get maudlin and managed a quirky grin. “So, what are we going to do with all of that free time?”

Ryan’s grin was blinding. “I don’t know, baby. I guess if we get bored, we can always read the phonebook!”

AMY LANE teaches high school English, mothers four children, and writes the occasional book. When she's not begging students to sit-the-hell-down or taxiing kids to soccer/dance/karate—oh my! she can be found catching emergency naps, grocery shopping, or hiding in the bathroom, trying to read without interruption. She will never be found cooking, cleaning, or doing domestic chores, but she has been known to knit up an emergency hat/blanket/pair of socks for any occasion whatsoever or sometimes for no reason at all. She writes in the shower, while commuting, while her classes are doing bookwork, or while she's wandering the neighborhood at night pretending to exercise and has learned from necessity to type like the wind. She lives in a spider-infested and crumbling house in a shoddy suburb and counts on her beloved mate, Mack, to keep her tethered to reality—which he does while keeping her cell phone charged as a bonus. She's been married for twenty plus years and still believes in Twu Wuv, with a capital Twu and a capital Wuv, and she doesn't see any reason at all for that to change.

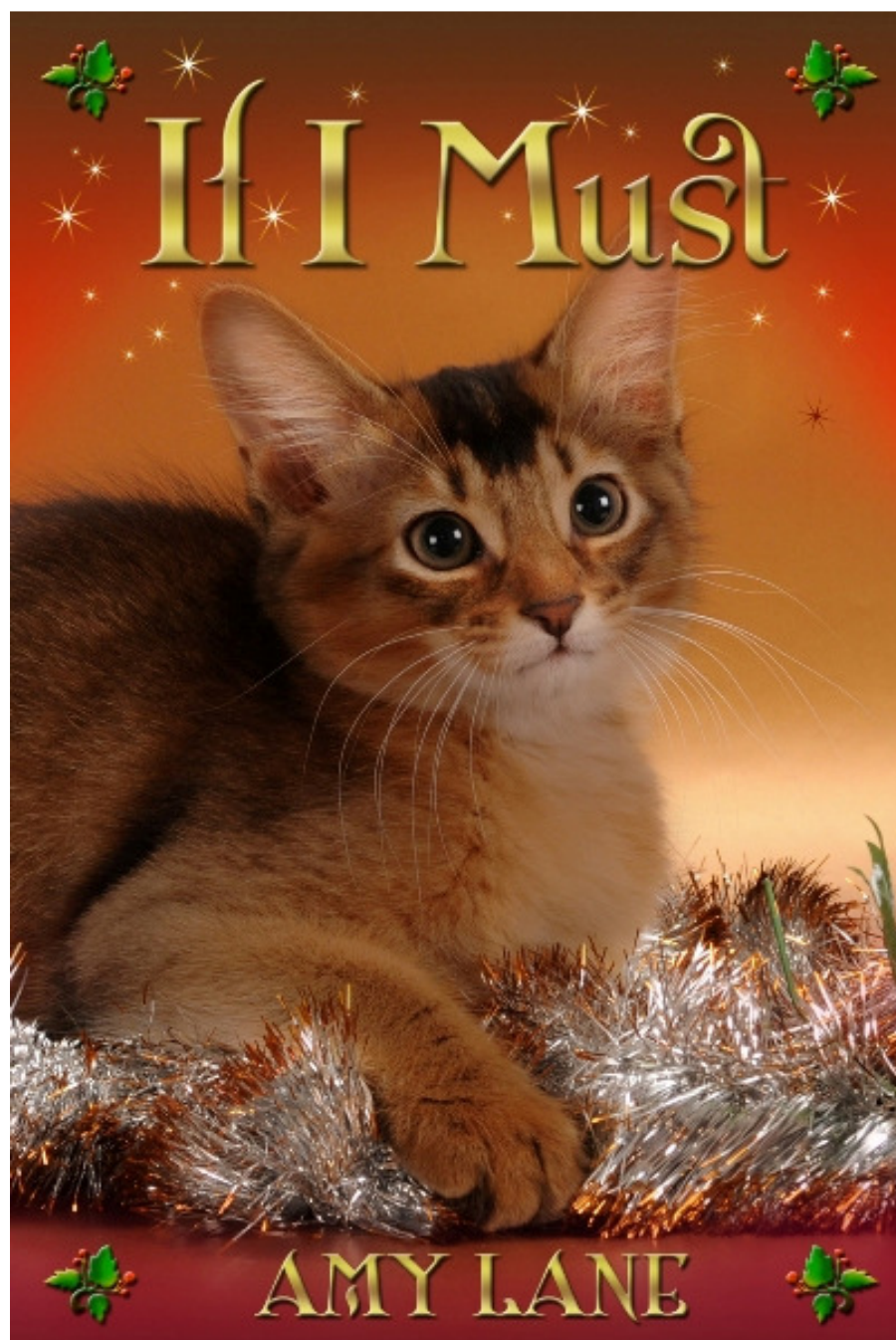
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