

The book cover features a close-up photograph of a man and a woman. The woman, in the foreground, has her eyes closed and mouth slightly open, wearing a pinkish-purple open cardigan over a dark bra. The man, behind her, has his arms around her and is looking down at her. The background is dark and out of focus, showing parts of a car.

MISSY
WELSH

Love & Id

MY SUMMER
OF WES

My Summer of Wes

Table of Contents

My Summer of Wes

Missy Welsh

My Summer of Wes

Copyright © August 2010 by Missy Welsh

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

eISBN 978-1-60737-833-4

Editor: Raven McKnight

Cover Artist: P. L. Nunn

Printed in the United States of America

Published by

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 425960

San Francisco CA 94142-5960

www.loose-id.com

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

* * *

DISCLAIMER: Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.

Dedication

To my family for being so cool and supportive. To Kimber for helping me when I needed it.
With so much thanks to Raven for taking a chance on me.
This story is for every Mal everywhere.

Chapter One

The first week of summer I looked out from my parents' porch, over the perfectly clean rail to the manicured lawn, from the new sidewalk to the recently repaved street, and recognized that I lived in vanilla pudding. Everything was sterile, monitored, and scrubbed of personality. Vanilla.

Then the new neighbors moved in directly across the street, and I realized they were not vanilla-pudding kind of people.

I didn't think I was either—maybe—but my parents clung to their vanilla lives and hadn't stopped frowning since a bright red couch went into that house three days ago. They muttered with despair that the new neighbors would soon paint their house some obnoxious color or park an RV at the curb. Talk of a homeowners' association reared its head yet again.

And then the wind chimes went up. You'd have thought they were a car alarm going off every few minutes, the way my parents reacted.

I sighed now as the tinkling notes reached me. I liked the sound. It was soothing. I had started trying to anticipate which breeze would cause the little metal pipes to bump each other and send the music floating to me. I realized I was going to go crazy that summer, my summer between high school and college.

I had no friends to distract me, had never had a girlfriend, and couldn't stand my own family. The next three months would seriously test my sanity like no other break had. I wished again that I'd thought to sign up for the summer term or had at least won the argument to get a summer job. I was not, apparently, working-class. My first job would be after college, when "our kind of people" traditionally got their first jobs, and that was that.

But I'd discovered there was a guy about my age in the new neighbors' family. It was stupid. I knew that. It probably wouldn't work. Definitely wouldn't if I couldn't bring myself to get off the porch and talk to him. But maybe it could work. It wouldn't be like school, where the gossip would've turned any new kid against me before I had managed to say hi. He couldn't be influenced, because there was no one around to influence him.

I put my Kindle down, took my glasses off, and contemplated my clothes. Jeans and a T-shirt, no shoes—my rebellion for the day. Casual, nothing to make me stand out as the geek I was. Nothing to make me seem like what they all thought I was. What they'd yelled at me. Why I had no friends.

He came outside again, and I swallowed, trying to convince myself that this could work, simply because there was no reason it shouldn't. He wasn't familiar, so I doubted he was from around here. Hoped. I had no idea how far and wide I might be known. And though he looked a little like a jock, I had heard him laugh and watched him play with his two younger siblings.

He didn't seem like the bad kind of jock, so maybe he wouldn't hate me on sight.

He wore an old pair of cutoff sweatpants, tennis shoes, and no shirt—reason enough for my parents to dislike him right there. I envied his physique because, while I was lean, I didn't look like that. His muscles were clearly defined, and he had an easy grace about him. He might be into martial arts instead of sports. His hair was to his shoulders and styled so the wavy locks of blond and brown looked like a lion's mane around his face. My brown curls would make me look like Shirley Temple if I grew them out. And I didn't need to shave, while he looked so cool with his carefully trimmed stubble and aviator sunglasses.

I stood up when he went to his car, a bright yellow two-seater with a flat bed and historic plates that made me wonder if he'd restored it. Maybe with his dad? He reached in and brought out an iPod, then strapped it to his upper arm. Was he going running? I walked to the porch steps, wanting to catch him before he could get away again. Before I could lose my nerve.

That's when I heard them. I stopped cold on the first step, tensing and staring, though I hated that I did. They never came through here. It was a dead end...with an entrance to the new park. Shit. They'd probably be through here a lot now.

A shiver snaked down my spine. I wanted to keep walking, ignore them, go over and make a friend like they didn't matter. But I couldn't. Because they'd never let me get past them, never let me ignore them. And they'd use the names they loved to yell at me, ruining any chance I'd ever have of meeting him with a clean slate. If they were in the right mood, they'd even treat him to a show by beating me up yet again.

I walked back to my chair slowly, hoping they wouldn't notice me on my own porch. At least I had enough courage not to go inside and hide. My hands were shaking, though, and it was a little hard to breathe.

He was looking at me as I sat back down. I almost waved, but if I did, he might wave back, gaining their attention and passing it on to me. So I sat down and stayed there, hiding in the shadows of the porch.

"Hey, man," Collin Cross said to my neighbor. Collin smiled like a news anchor and had a mean right hook.

"Hey," my neighbor said back, draping his earbuds over his shoulder.

"You new here?" Alex Higgins asked. He was tall and dark, with a tendency to spit and get really red faced when he yelled obscenities.

"Yeah. Few days ago."

"You play ball?" Todd Casey asked, nodding to the hoop now attached to the garage. Shorter than the rest, Todd was still a bulldog. He had a loud bark to cover very little bite.

"Some," my neighbor said, frowning a little. And then he smiled brightly like something wonderful had just happened. "Hey, you know any good gay clubs around here?"

I gasped, and I think they did too. Had he lost his mind?

No one moved except for him. His smile suddenly looked frozen on his face, but his hands curled into fists at his sides. He was very still. Ready. Waiting for the signal to fight.

In the seconds before the others reacted, I wondered if I could get involved. There were four of them. He wouldn't be able to fight them all, something he seemed to expect, though I don't think he had when he'd asked that damning question. Could I go down there and, if nothing else, distract them enough for him to have a better chance of defeating a couple? I had gotten good at taking a punch.

Then Rick Lockhart, that big blond superjock, said the first thing he'd ever said to me back in ninth grade.

"What are you? Some kind of fag?"

My new neighbor actually took a step closer to Rick, who had him by at least six inches and twenty pounds.

"I'm the kind of fag who'd love to thrust his cock into your tight ass. You interested, honey?"

I held my breath but then let it out in a whoosh when Rick took a step back. I wished I could see Rick's face. He'd never backed down from me when I'd panicked and fought back those few times.

"Fuck you!" Rick yelled, then turned away. The side of his face that I could see was bright, blazing red.

"That's what I'm offering, baby," my neighbor called after Rick as the others followed. He held out his hands like he was showing them what he had.

They grumbled too low for me to hear what they were saying, but they walked away.

They actually walked away.

I looked back at him and discovered he was coming over. I closed my eyes and dropped my head. It would just figure that the first chance I had to make a friend in four long years would be with a gay guy. It was horrible to think it, but having a gay friend definitely wouldn't help my reputation or social standing. When I looked back up, he was standing in the flower bed, leaning on the porch railing, smiling at me.

"That was some crazy shit, huh?" he asked.

I said the first thing that popped into my head. "Why would you ask them that question?"

He shrugged and took off his sunglasses, dangling them from his fingertips. His eyes were green.

“One of them checked me out. Full head-to-toe once-over. With a grin. I didn’t realize he wasn’t out to his friends.” He sighed. “Or that they’d react like that.”

I felt a little dizzy and gripped the arms of my chair. “Which one?” Because, Jesus Christ, one of the guys who’d tortured me for four years about being something I wasn’t was actually gay himself?

He stared at me so long, I thought maybe he wasn’t going to answer me. Finally his lips curled just a little, and he shook his head.

“Nah. I’m not going to out him.”

I felt instant anger and pointed after them with an arm that shook. “Those assholes have tortured me since I was thirteen, and now you’re telling me one of them is gay, but you won’t say which one?”

He frowned. “Torturing you how?”

“That word they called you was spray painted onto my locker every day for six weeks in ninth. Someone wrote it on my backpack fifty-six times last year alone. And I can’t remember how many ti—” My voice cracked as tears burned my eyes. “How many times they beat the shit out of me in four goddamned years.”

I swallowed down the anger, fisting my hands to keep them from shaking as I looked away from him. I couldn’t take the shocked pity on his face. And I would not cry.

“God, man, I’m so sorry.”

“Save it,” I bit out, wiping my damn eyes. “It’s over now.”

And it was. I’d graduated high school ten days ago. I could let it go, move on. Christ, I hoped I could let it go and move on.

“They do anything else,” he said, his voice hard, “you let me know.”

I shook my head, staring at my knees. “Yeah, right. That’ll really help.”

“Hey, man, didn’t you see me out there? Not one punch thrown, but you know I won that shit.”

I snorted. “Yeah, okay.”

“We’ll stick together.”

I looked back at him, suddenly suspicious. “I’m not gay,” I said, clearly pronouncing each word.

He just stared at me for a few seconds, and I had the horrible feeling he wasn’t going to believe me. Why did no one ever believe me?

“Okay,” he finally said, shrugging again.

“I’m not.”

“Fine. It bother you that I am?”

I thought about that. It seemed socially suicidal for someone who'd been falsely accused of being gay to have anything to do with a gay guy. I hadn't realized I was suicidal until right then.

"No, it doesn't bother me." And then I said something really stupid. "But are you sure you are? You don't look it."

He grinned at me. "We don't all dress in drag, you know."

I felt myself blush but had to clarify, "I mean, you seem so—"

"Oh God, man," he said, shaking his head at me, "don't you dare say normal."

My blush intensified, and I kept my mouth shut.

"Believe me, I'm sure. I think women are great, but I don't want to sleep with them. There's nothing I like better than rubbing up against a nice, hard—"

"Okay." I held up a hand. "I believe you."

He laughed again. Then someone hollered, "Wesley," from across the street. He turned to look, and I saw a woman in the doorway of his house, waving a phone.

"Sorry, honey, but it's Grandma Belle," she said.

"All right," he answered. "Be right there." He turned back to me. "Gram Belle just got out of the hospital from a hip replacement." He grinned. "I'm her favorite." Then he took a few steps back, leaving footprints in the mulch. "Well, I'll see you around, then..." He raised his eyebrows.

"Malcolm," I said, realizing he wanted my name. "Mal."

He nodded. "See you, Mal."

"See you, Wesley."

He seemed happier for some reason, then turned to trot away. "Call me Wes," he said back to me.

"See you, Wes," I whispered as I watched him leave.

I sighed and wondered if I'd done it—made a friend. I hoped I had even as I wondered if it was a mistake. If nothing else, I supposed, one good thing had come from all this.

Now there was a colorful little sprinkle on the vanilla pudding of my life.

Chapter Two

Two days later, I sat again on the porch around eleven with my Kindle, reading more of the YA paranormal romance novel I couldn't get enough of. I'd read the series before, seen the movies, but I still couldn't put them down. The only reason I could read them out in the open now was because my parents had bought me the Kindle for graduation. No more book covers to embarrass me, and with the flip of a little switch, I could hide the screen in a second. It would've been wonderful while I'd been in study periods and lunch hours at school. Then I wouldn't have had to put covers on all my novels and pray no one tried to take them from me.

"Hey, Mal."

I jumped a little, and he chuckled at me from the flower bed.

"Hey, Wes." I cleared my throat and took off my reading glasses. "What's up?"

"You interested in cars at all?" He squinted at me like he doubted it but wanted to ask anyway.

He wore a pair of jeans that were smudged and torn from hours doing something filthy—under a car?—an equally destroyed T-shirt that might have always been gray, and a pair of cowboy boots that were scuffed and well worn.

In comparison, I looked like a friggin' choirboy in khaki slacks, navy polo, and loafers. Man, I'm such a geek.

"I don't know much about them, but I like your El Camino." I nodded at his yellow muscle car. I knew the name of it only because of an exhaustive Internet search of car photos. I'd heard it yesterday evening as he'd driven off. It had sounded thrilling.

He smiled. "I restore cars. Would you like to see my newest acquisition?"

I hesitated.

"She's in a garage outside LA, where I'm from. You're the only person I know in Palmdale, so how about you come have a look at her, smile and nod while I babble, and I'll get you a smoothie afterward?"

I laughed, both at his words and his pleading puppy-dog expression. He was difficult to resist. I bet this was something friends would do, so I agreed to go with him. If nothing else, I'd get to ride in that cool car for a while.

"You have, um," he said, looking me over as I stood, "something to wear that you wouldn't mind getting dirty? I'm not going to make you roll around on the shop floor or anything, but shit happens."

"Uh, yeah. I'll change."

“Cool.” He gripped the porch railing and jumped up and over it with all the grace of a cat. “What?” he asked as I stared at him.

“Nothing.” I made myself turn away because I was blushing. “I’ll be right back out.”

“I’ll wait here.” He walked around and sat on the top step, taking out his cell phone and flipping it open for the keyboard.

I scooped up my Kindle, turned it off, and went inside, all the while amazed by him. I wasn’t sure why. He was enviably agile and confident, so I guessed that was it. The way he’d handled himself with the guys the other day spoke of a lot of confidence. And experience. I wished, as I dug through the back of my closet, that he’d been at my school with me. Then, maybe, I’d have been able to learn something about making Rick and the rest walk away. At least it might’ve been less likely that Rick would’ve broken my nose twice last year.

I settled on a T-shirt that had a bleach stain across the front and an old pair of jeans that were a little big on me, sitting lower on my hips than normal. The only shoes I had that I didn’t care about were an old pair of tennis shoes. I dropped my glasses into my pocket, thinking I might need them if he wanted me to read anything on some car part or something. Looking at myself in my mirror, I thought I looked very clean but a little dilapidated. Everything was wrinkled, at least.

Back downstairs, I found him still sitting on that step, now surveying the neighborhood. He waved at Mr. Ellison as he stalked by, his cane smacking the sidewalk like gunshots. Mr. Ellison didn’t wave back, as usual, just kept walking and glaring. Wes shrugged at him.

I heard him get up as I locked the door. When I turned around, he was grinning at me again.

“Christ, you’re cute.” He shook his head at me.

I blushed. “This is the best I could do,” I told him, figuring he meant my clothes.

He put his arm around me, his big hand on the back of my neck, and guided me toward the stairs. “I’m going to have to get you dirty now. You know that, right? I’m seriously not going to be able to resist until you’re filthy.”

I laughed again, trotting with him across the street to his car. I didn’t even mind his touch, but it did cause a little lump in my throat as I realized no one had touched me in any way for a really long time. I hadn’t noticed until then that I’d missed that simple human contact.

We parted at the back of his car, heading around to our doors. I looked up as a movement caught my attention in the window of the house. His mom smiled at me and waved. She had his wavy blonde-brown hair, but darker eyes. I waved back and got in the passenger side just as Wes started the car, making it growl ferociously.

“I love this sound,” I told him.

He smiled at me, then popped it into reverse and eased down the drive. He drove like he moved, with unconscious grace and obvious skill. I felt like I was in one of those car movies where they raced around town causing all kinds of trouble. We weren't racing or causing trouble, but the sound of the car and the way people looked at us made me feel like we could, at any second, become criminals, leading the police on a three-state chase.

"I'm really loving this car." I smoothed my hand over the black leather seat.

He watched the traffic as we headed south. "It's the first car I restored. My dad helped, but it's been all me since then. It was little more than the frame when we bought it, but we could see the potential."

He went on about all they'd had to do to it, talking about parts and theories—cars had theories?—and designs. Smiling and nodding as he'd told me to, I understood only his passion for this, his love of his father, and, for whatever reason, his desire to draw me into this world. I couldn't have pointed out where washer fluid went or known where to find the dipstick to check the oil level—or what the level should be—let alone whether all the bits were there for an engine to be complete, but he seemed perfectly happy to tell me all about it. I liked listening to him. It was rare for me to find someone so excited about something that they wanted to share it with me. It was never, actually. This was a first.

About a half hour later, we pulled into the lot of a run-down garage in a part of east LA I'd never been in before. It looked shady, the neighborhood pretty questionable. I realized I was being a snob and focused on Wes because he knew what he was doing, calling out greetings to a few of the people hanging around. He knew their names, and they knew his. If he was comfortable, I should be.

Then someone called out something in Spanish to him that made his eyes cut toward me as he grinned a little.

"I took French," I said with a shrug.

He hollered something back to the guy, making him laugh and give Wes a thumbs-up.

"Was that about me?" I asked, following him into the garage.

"No." But his grin said he was lying.

I swallowed, hoping the guy hadn't been making fun of me. I knew I looked completely out of place and awkward. I stuffed my hands into my pockets, following Wes but not looking around. These guys felt like a different kind of bully. Still menacing because I was on the outside of their world trying to peek in. I felt the nerves start then.

"Hey," he said, putting his hand on the back of my neck again. "Hector was teasing me. Asking if you were mine."

I blushed. "What did you tell him?"

One side of his mouth quirked up higher than the other. "Only in my dreams."

My face flamed hotter. "Wes," I said, then had to clear my throat. "I, um..."

He chuckled and used his hand on my neck to get me walking deeper into the garage. "Don't sweat it, Mal. I'm a flirt. I can't help it. But I know where the line is. I might stand on it," he said, bumping his hip against mine, "but I won't cross it."

"Oh. Okay," I mumbled, guessing I could live with that.

"And here's my newest baby." His voice sounded like he really was going to introduce me to his child.

I wasn't sure what reaction he might've been expecting from me, so I just looked it over and tried to assemble the right response for the level of destruction in front of me.

I didn't know what the car was except that it was a Dodge. The front driver's side was smashed nearly back into the driver's seat. No tires, so it sat on the kind of lift they use to raise a car. A lot of it was rusty, but it had once been a slightly sparkling dark blue. The seats were missing in the back of it, allowing a clear view into the trunk.

"Must have been one hell of an accident," I said, still not sure if I should be really impressed by the car. Was it a classic something or other? Should I know it?

"Yeah," he said, leaning on me now. "But he walked away from it. That's the old steel frame for you. The other car was totaled."

This wasn't totaled?

"Looks like it needs a lot of work."

"She," he said. "Like most other man toys, we refer to them as female."

I looked at him and grinned, betting on why they were female and guessing he would've called it a he.

Wes leaned close and said in my ear, "I call him Ted."

He winked at me and walked away, over to something hidden under a sheet. "This," he said, "is my baby's heart."

He took the sheet off dramatically, revealing a shiny new engine. No idea what all it was, but it looked impressive sitting there with thick pipes and whatnot that made it look powerful.

"I bought it last month with some of the money from the last one I restored."

"Was it expensive?" I went over for a closer look and put my glasses on. The engine seemed designed to look like a piece of art.

When he didn't answer, I looked up over my glasses at him. He wore an odd little smile for just a few seconds before he wiped his hand down his face and cleared his throat with a breathy chuckle. I guessed I was being cute again in my ignorance.

"Not too bad," he said, "considering I got a hundred for the car."

"A hundred?" I asked, then realized, "One hundred thousand?"

"Think of them as collectables. People spend their lives looking for them or building them, holding on to them, fighting wills over them. The guy who had this one kept it in his garage for twenty-eight years just like this, hoping to fix her up someday."

Well, if that was the case... "Why'd he get rid of her?"

"He didn't, really. He owns forty percent of her, so when I sell her, he'll get that much of the price. He'll need the money more than the car now that he's the father of triplets."

"Oh, well, yeah. How much do you think you can get for this one?"

He shrugged. "Maybe eighty, eighty-five."

I did the math, realizing Wes would be a millionaire in no time, even with putting some of the money back into the next car. "Hell of a way to save for college," I said with envy. My parents were paying for me since I'd never been allowed to earn any money for myself. "Or are you not going?" I asked, realizing he had a career right here.

"Oh, I'm going. I want a business degree so I can get my own shop someday and know what I'm doing in the office too."

I nodded. "Good idea."

"What about you?" He hitched a hip on the passenger side of Ted's hood.

I shrugged. "College, but I don't know why. I mean, for what."

"What do you have a passion for?"

I stared at him because I didn't know. I might have been able to mumble about liking something, but not when I knew he knew what having a passion for something felt like. I couldn't bluff a guy who could tell I was bluffing.

"I don't know."

He smiled a little. "There has to be something you'd rather do than anything else."

"Like cars are for you?"

"Dude, I can work on a car and forget to eat, sleep, piss." He laughed. "Though all of those remind me I'm human eventually."

I didn't laugh with him, because I was trying to think of something I did that made me forget the world around me and that I was in it. I sighed, a little pained to realize that most everything I'd done in the past four years had been to escape reality. Reading took me away. Video games. The Internet. But I just used them to waste the hours between those I spent sleeping.

"Jesus," I mumbled, tucking my arms around my chest and squeezing my eyes shut. I'd wasted so much time, so much of my life, trying to escape being me because those assholes had made me hate myself before I'd even figured out who I really was.

I felt Wes's hands on my elbows, pulling me closer to him. I opened my eyes when he put an arm around my shoulders and kept me moving to the back of Ted, against the wall. Hiding me. I sniffed and realized with complete humiliation that I was crying.

"Shit," I muttered, wiping my cheeks as I faced the wall.

"It's okay," he said quietly, his hand rubbing circles on my back. "No one's looking."

"Sorry." I cleared my throat and swallowed back any further emotional outbursts. God, I'm such a girl.

"No, I'm sorry, Mal. It's hard to find a passion when you're fighting bullies all the time."

His hand went to the back of my neck again, and I found it oddly comforting as he massaged my tense muscles and just stood there beside me. I really had made a friend.

"But maybe now you can fix that. And I'd like to help."

"Thanks, Wes," I whispered.

He bumped me into his side and said nothing, but his smile was encouraging.

Chapter Three

We spent three hours wiggling around inside Ted. Apparently Wes had removed the backseats because he needed to strip the whole car down to the frame to take care of all the rust. He gave me odd jobs, correctly guessing I didn't know what I was doing and shouldn't be trusted with anything important. After a few hours, I looked up, moved forward, and suddenly found myself facedown through the backseat area and half into the trunk. My ears rang from the crashing sound of me on metal. I heard Wes chuckle as he gripped my hips and helped guide me back into the main body of the car.

"Oh shit! Did I break anything?"

"It's fine, Mal," he said, still laughing. Then his eyes lit on my chest, and he went still. "Oh. You're bleeding."

I looked up at Ted's ceiling instead of down at the cut, my mind already seeing an oozing, gaping wound. "I'm not good with blood," I told him, my voice sounding shaky to my own ears.

"Take your shirt off," he said. "Let me see."

I lifted my shirt up, and he helped me out of it when it touched the cut and I gasped.

"It's not bad, but don't look at it. Let's get out of here and clean it up."

I followed him out of Ted, walking with my eyes now focused on the back of his head so they didn't stray down to look at my chest. The last time I'd accidentally cut myself, I'd woken up on the floor with a knot on the back of my head. I didn't want to be the big girl who fainted in the body shop. I mean, I'd already cried, for Pete's sake. I needed to maintain some dignity.

"Sit." He pointed to a high stool in the little back room. I heard him running water at a sink, though I looked at the paint peeling from the ceiling. "Give me your shirt. It's still the cleanest thing around here."

His tone said he didn't understand how I'd managed not to be as filthy as him by now. I smiled as I handed over my shirt.

He finally came over to me and set a box in my hands. I held on to it.

"You've had a tetanus shot, right?"

"Yeah, for school, I think." I swallowed, watching his face as he looked at the cut. "Why?"

"Rusty car, my friend."

I flushed, his calling me his friend hitting me harder than worry over the cut. A friend. A cool, smart mechanic who actually liked hanging out with me. Who didn't tease me about my aversion to blood and who comforted me when I accidentally cried. Had I seriously hit the jackpot or what?

"It's a clean cut, at least, so that's good." He set my shirt down, but I didn't look at it, afraid there would be blood on it now. "This might sting."

It did. I bit my bottom lip, not wanting to add screaming to my list of girly quirks. Then I felt him blow on me, his breath making the sting stop. I blushed with embarrassment as my nipples hardened, waiting for him to make a crack about that, get close to that line again. Perfect opportunity to rub my nose in the fact that I was reacting in a somewhat sexual way to something he'd done to me. But Wes didn't say anything, stopped blowing on my skin, and reached for something else.

"You can look," he said, his voice a little gravelly now. "No blood, just a long red line."

"I'm good," I said, not wanting to risk it.

His green gaze snapped to mine as he grinned. Then I felt him smooth something cool across my chest, following the line of the cut.

"So, Mal, you do know I just got to second base with you, right?"

I laughed, blushing, of course.

"Don't worry," he said, his expression pure wicked. "I won't tell anybody you're so easy."

"Shut up, jerk." I chuckled.

He knocked my head sideways, then put things back into the box I still held.

"I think it would be better if we left it uncovered," he said, going back to doctor mode. "And I don't think we have a bandage big enough anyway."

I nodded, trusting his judgment.

"I'll rinse out your shirt, and you should be able to wear it in a while without it irritating the cut." He took the box and turned back to the sink.

"You just want me to walk around shirtless in front of you," I said. Two could play this game.

He made a breathy sound, his back to me as he stood at the sink. I could see him in the mirror, though, as he blushed a light pink high on his cheekbones.

Was he actually attracted to me? The idea caused a little flutter of panic inside me for a moment, but I pushed it down. So what if he was? I should be flattered, really. He was a great guy. He treated me better than most of the people I'd known. And he knew there was nowhere for this to go but friendship, so there was no threat of any kind. I decided I was flattered.

He turned back around—his blushes leaving faster than mine did—and leaned against the sink. "So now that you've broken my car and injured yourself, how about we go for that smoothie?"

I laughed, shaking my head. "I could use a smoothie, yeah."

"For your boo-boo," he said, making a pouty face.

"A boo-boo I should take a look at before we go." I stood and waved him away from the sink.

He moved, getting behind me. Then his arms came around in front of me and hugged me back against his chest. I shivered from his warm hands on my skin, the solidness of his chest against my back. I opened my mouth to say something, but I didn't know what.

"Don't want you going down," he said, a smile in his voice, "and doing any more damage."

"Ha-ha," I said, but it was probably a good idea. My mind was still imagining a giant slash that would let me see my beating heart. My stomach gave a little lurch as I looked into the mirror.

"Oh, okay." It wasn't bad, just like he'd said. A big scratch from just above my right nipple to just past my sternum. If there had been more, I would've looked like a cat went after me.

"Okay okay?" Wes asked, hugging me a little tighter. "Or okay, I think I need to sit down again?"

I looked at his reflection. He was genuinely concerned.

I patted the backs of his hands and turned around in his arms. "Okay okay. You were right; it's not bad."

He stared at me for a second, then cleared his throat and let me go before he turned away. "All right, then." He cleared his throat again. "Think you can put away our tools without skinning your knee or something while I rinse your shirt out?"

"Oh, funny," I said, heading back toward Ted as he turned on the water. I put everything away, carefully avoiding any of Ted's sharper-looking bits. Then Wes came back out, my shirt clutched in his hand.

"Come on, my little grease monkey. I'm hungry."

I rolled my eyes as I followed him outside. Just before we got into Wes's bright yellow El Camino—which he called Juan—the same guy from before called out in Spanish again.

Wes closed his eyes briefly and grinned, then cut his gaze toward me. "That was for you."

"What'd he say?" I glanced back at the guy.

"No means no."

I didn't understand for a second, then laughed as I realized the guy was implying Wes had refused my advances, scratching me to get away. Shaking my head, I just got in the car because I sincerely didn't care what that guy thought.

I had a friend.

Chapter Four

I felt a little awkward walking around without a shirt on in a trendy little shopping area not far from the garage. I'd never done so before, and I was acutely aware of being half-naked in public. My shirt was currently caught in a rolled-up window of the car, drying in the sun. Wes seemed perfectly comfortable sauntering around in his grubby garage clothes, so I tried to emulate him and not care either. But people stared.

I watched their eyes go to my chest first, and bet they were probably wondering who'd scratched me. Then they looked between Wes and me, no doubt trying to gauge how we knew each other. Some people didn't seem to care after that, but then I noticed a few girls openly assessing me. Two pointed and giggled, making me blush hotly. I sincerely hated that.

"You're causing quite a stir, Malcolm Small," Wes murmured as we walked into an ice-cream shop promising smoothies too.

"Yeah," I said, keeping my head down.

"Don't you want the girls checking you out?" he asked as we got in line at the counter.

"Checking me out?" I looked back and found them still watching, smiling and giggling, their heads close together as they whispered. "Oh," I said, starting to see what he meant.

He stared at me with disbelief. "Dude, you really need to learn what it looks like when someone's interested in you."

I shrugged.

He looped his arm around my shoulders and moved in close to whisper, "Okay, with girls, whispering and pointing isn't necessarily a good thing. But add in giggling and smiling, and you've got interest. All you have to do is be available to whichever one wins."

"Wins?" I asked, shivering with a sudden cold. I shifted closer to his warmth.

He cleared his throat, then continued, "They're very subtly deliberating on which one should have you. Many factors involved in that. Could take a while."

Hold on. "How do you know this stuff?"

He grinned. "Female cousins who liked to use me for recon."

"Recon?"

"They'd send me into a pack of guys to find out what I could about them and report back. Guys'll talk to other guys easier than they will to a girl, so in I went." His grin turned wicked. "Of course, my cousins eventually stopped using my services when I started keeping the best guys for myself."

I bet they hadn't appreciated that much. Those experiences, though, explained how Wes was so comfortable with just about anyone.

“Look over your shoulder at one of them,” Wes said, sounding serious. “Give her a once-over, smile very slightly, and then turn back around and tell this nice man what you want in your smoothie.”

“Which girl?” I asked, trying to remember what they looked like.

“How the hell should I know?” he asked, chuckling.

Right. I lost his arm and his warmth as he stepped up to tell the guy behind the counter that he wanted a cone of vanilla ice cream rolled in sprinkles instead of the smoothie he’d wanted all day. That shot my concentration all to hell because it brought back my thoughts from the day we met about how he was the sprinkle on my vanilla-pudding world. I laughed behind him, making him turn to smile at me quizzically. I just shook my head and looked over my shoulder as he’d instructed.

The bright red hair of one of the girls caught my attention, so I slid my glance from her head to her toes and back again. She blushed and seemed a little surprised. I smiled like I was supposed to, then I turned around again.

Wes had his cone and was licking sprinkles off—which made me chuckle again—and gazing behind me. “Oops,” he said. “You picked the wrong one.”

“Huh?” I resisted the urge to turn back.

“You looked at the redhead, right?” He glanced at me as I nodded. “Well, now her friend’s pissed and stomping away.”

“How was I supposed to know?”

The guy behind the counter was laughing silently, shaking his head. “It’s a crapshoot. How about some ice cream as a consolation prize?”

I shrugged, giving up on learning the intricacies of long-distance flirtation for the moment. “I’ll have a strawberry-passion fruit smoothie.”

“Living on the wild side,” Wes murmured, then took another long swipe of his sprinkles.

I laughed at him again, making him frown this time. I explained, blushing through it all, telling him how vanilla my world had been until Wes “The Sprinkle” Kinney had moved in across the street from me.

He thought that was hilarious, doubling over and everything. Even the guy behind the counter chuckled, probably already aware of Wes’s charm and colorful personality.

“You are so fucking adorable,” Wes said before kissing my forehead with cold lips.

A slightly uncomfortable awareness settled inside me. I shivered again and swallowed nervously. I had to look away from him, jumping slightly when the guy handed me my smoothie. What had that feeling been about? Trying to be subtle, I peeked at him and saw he was paying for both of us.

"I can get mine, Wes," I said, reaching for my wallet.

"My treat." He shoved his change into the tip jar. "I mean, I kidnapped you, forced you to do manual labor, lost you a date with a redhead. A free strawberry-passion fruit smoothie is definitely in order here."

I let him pay, happy he wanted to. Outside at a table, he sat on the back of the chair, his feet on the seat. I slouched in another one, the heat of the sun warming me up.

"It's been a great day," I said, taking a chance. "I'd be happy to repeat it. Except for the bloodletting." I glanced at my scratch.

"How about we let you heal up"—he bit into his ice cream—"and head back to the garage on Friday?"

"Sure." Though tomorrow would be horribly dull without him.

"I have a friend's birthday party in the city tonight," he went on. "I'm sure it'll last well into the early morning, so I'll be staying over and useless tomorrow."

"Sounds like a blast," I said because I didn't know what else to say. I'd never been to a party like that. The last birthday party I'd attended had involved a clown.

"Want to come with me?"

I almost said yes. I went so far as to open my mouth to say the word, but my breath wouldn't come out to let me. Today had worked my nerves over enough without adding a party with strangers, albeit strangers who knew Wes. I bet he'd probably stick with me to make sure I wasn't on my own for too long. I bet he'd probably introduce me to his friends and get me talking, making new friends for myself.

But I just couldn't do it.

He smiled a little bit and nodded at me. "It's okay, Mal. Maybe next time."

I nodded, ducking my head on the pretense of drinking more of my smoothie. I didn't know how he was so in tune with my thoughts, my feelings, but I was glad he was. It saved me from having to explain my paralysis.

We ate in silence for a while, watching shoppers and enjoying the sun. Wes finished his cone, patted his stomach with a satisfied sigh, then dropped into his chair. He leaned back, lacing his fingers on his chest and stretching his legs out, crossing his ankles near my feet. I looked at him as he stared at me.

"Have you ever dated?" he asked.

I blushed and shook my head, busying my mouth with my straw until I sucked up air.

He nodded. "Because of what they did?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Everyone believed them. Or if they didn't, no one wanted to contradict them after—" I cleared my throat as memories made me shiver. "After they saw what that got me."

“Beat up.”

I nodded, wiping a hand down my face. I suddenly felt exhausted.

He shook his head, then closed his eyes and leaned his head back.

I thought maybe that was the end of that, but then he sighed and started talking without looking back at me.

“I knew a guy in school who got bullied all the time. He wasn’t a friend, but I had a few classes with him. Phys ed was one of them. God, he was skinny as hell. And we had to wear uniforms, so they hung on him, making him look like a little kid. He couldn’t do hardly anything. Sucked at sports, couldn’t lift more than forty pounds, couldn’t do a pull-up to save his life.” He sighed again. “One day he asks me how I do it. How I’m out and nobody messes with me about it. So I tell him I wouldn’t let anyone intimidate me out of being myself. They don’t like it, that’s fine, but I’m not going to hide.”

He sat up, his face weary. He ran his fingers through his hair, looking at his boots.

“He came to school two days later with his granddad’s .45 and shot the one guy who always picked on him. Then he shot himself.”

“Jesus, Wes!” I suddenly wanted to comfort him. I reached for his hand and held it in mine. “Tell me you don’t blame yourself.”

“I don’t.” He held my hand tightly for a moment. “Not anymore. My dad went to his aunt, worried about me, and found out he’d left a note. He’d taken what I said and turned it crazy-side up. Talking about how he wasn’t going to let them get away with harassing him. A bunch of nonsense about setting an example.”

He stared at our hands for a while, and I didn’t move. I couldn’t imagine what that must have been like for him, but I was infinitely glad his family had been there for him. He’d talked to his dad about what he’d been going through, and I couldn’t imagine doing that.

My father didn’t like weakness or change or quitting. He’d ignored my bruises except to tell me to take care of them myself. My mother had taken me to the emergency room for the broken noses just to make sure they’d set well. I’d stopped talking to them or anyone else about what I’d suffered after the first few times, knowing it wouldn’t do any good. It had been the best school, and a transfer, though probably the only thing that would’ve saved me, had been out of the question the few times I’d managed to bring it up to either parent.

“You’re stronger than you think you are, Mal,” Wes whispered. “You survived when others couldn’t handle half what you did.”

I felt tears threaten as he reached over and cupped my cheek. His smile was a little sad. He ran his thumb over the skin of my temple, then cleared his throat and sat back. I realized I hadn’t objected to his touch in the slightest, which made me reconsider my reaction to his kiss earlier.

What is going on with me today?

"You ready to go?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yeah. Thanks, Wes."

"Sure," he said, standing and tossing his napkin into the trash. "We can do it again on Friday."

"For everything, Wes."

He smiled a little more brightly and looped his arm around my shoulders again as we walked back to his car. I didn't care what anyone might think of us. I wanted him to know I appreciated and trusted him. He deserved that for this amazing day.

Chapter Five

I was a little nervous as I walked across the street toward Wes's house. After everything we'd talked about on Wednesday, I couldn't help wondering if anything had changed between us. Would there be a weird vibe because he knew how truly fragile I was now? How similar I was to the guy he'd known? I mean, I hadn't gone crazy, but maybe there were different levels of it and I was still on "just a bit off his rocker." Definitely not requiring constant supervision and padded walls, but God only knew what awaited me in college.

No, not going there. College would be fine because I wasn't the socially disabled freak I'd thought I was. I had made a friend, almost by accident and a little reluctantly, but Wes had been serious about meeting up again today for another session with Ted. My ridiculous scratch was healing nicely, so I was all set for helping my new friend work on the car.

When he'd called me a while ago, he'd said he was finishing up a design concept that would give me a clearer picture of what Ted would look like when he was finished. I hoped he wasn't doing that because he'd seen how unimpressed I'd been with the destroyed version. I really liked working on that car with him, and though I didn't care what the end result would be, I didn't want him to know that.

I knocked on his front door and heard him call my name from somewhere inside.

"Yeah, it's me!"

"Door's open! Come on in!"

I went inside, noticing the red couch right away, the one that had set my parents off, and smiling at it.

"Wes, where are you?"

"Upstairs."

I went up the stairs, past a ton of framed photos going up the wall and all the way down the hall. I stopped a few times to watch Wes grow up, one shot at a time, always smiling or goofing off in the candid shots. The requisite class pictures showed his hair getting longer and longer, braces on and off, and only one pretty glum shot of him in a suit. I grinned.

Then there was a shot of him holding his baby brother and sister, twins, as newborns, one in the crook of each arm, and looking down at them with such love. Like they took his breath away.

"They felt like mine," he said above me.

I looked up at him, seeing that same smile on his face now as he looked at the photo. He wore sweatpants, and his T-shirt today was a grease-stained red one that seemed a size or so too small. He was really muscular.

"Do you want kids someday?" I asked, continuing up, only to stop and admire another photo, one of him holding the hands of toddler twins, walking away from the camera down a forested path. Why did that tug at my heart so much?

"Someday."

I wondered what that would mean for him. Adoption? A surrogate? Would he donate? I actually hoped so. The world needed more people like Wes Kinney.

He waved me up, and I followed him into his bedroom. It was sparse like mine. Nothing much on the walls and just a double bed, desk, dresser. Car magazines, along with clothes, littered a few surfaces, so he was a bit of a slob. I tried to care, since order and cleanliness were quirks of mine, but I was too caught up in being in Wes's domain, where he slept, dressed... Why did that make me feel like laughing?

"I was just finishing up." He gestured to the PC on his desk. "But then my computer decided to freak out again."

I eyed the CRT monitor and huge CPU tower. "How old is this thing?"

"Five, six years." He shrugged.

"What's it running on?"

He blinked at me.

"RAM? ROM?"

The right side of his mouth curled up, and he blinked again.

"Okay, then." I sat down at it and took a look around. "Wow, more memory might help, and it's pretty cheap, if you can find it."

"You one of those mobile computer-repair guys?" He sat on the end of his bed, leaning close.

"My parents won't let me work." I updated and then ran a malware-removal program I was glad to see he had. "Not while I was in school or now. And you know, now that I think about it, how were you working on your cars and going to school? You must have never—"

He grinned at me.

"What?" I asked, blushing. I sighed. "Am I being cute again?"

He chuckled. "You're always cute, Mal. But I'm smiling because it just occurred to me that you might think we're the same age."

"We're not?"

"Nope. I'm twenty-four."

I blinked this time. Six years older? "Seriously?"

He nodded, still looking so amused.

"Oh." Well, damn. "Why do you still live at home?"

He leaned forward on his knees, the grin fading. "I moved back last year because I couldn't stand my crappy apartment anymore."

I sighed with longing. "God, what I'd give for a crappy apartment."

"It wasn't so much the actual place as the neighbors. They didn't approve of my 'alternative lifestyle.'"

I snorted. "And you couldn't charm them into changing their minds?"

He huffed out a breath. "Unfortunately, no. The Hispanic community is not very accommodating." There was something in his eyes, a seriousness I hadn't yet seen. But then he sat back, grinning wickedly. "Which is a shame, since they have some really hot gay guys among their numbers."

"I'm guessing they didn't like you finding those guys."

"Or taking them home with me." He waggled his eyebrows at me.

I laughed, but then imagining Wes sneaking swarthy men into his apartment through the fire escape in the dead of night left me frowning. I didn't like imagining that.

"You know," he said, "you look like there's some Latin somewhere in you."

Distracted from trying to discover why the hell I didn't like the idea of him dating, I leaned close, whispering, "There is, but we don't talk about them."

He leaned close too. "Oh yeah?"

I nodded. "It seems my great-grandfather committed the unforgivable crime of falling in love with and marrying a little señorita while vacationing in Mexico City."

"Oh, the scandal." Wes pretended to faint back onto the bed with his hand to his forehead.

I rolled my eyes at him. "I was actually forbidden from learning Spanish in high school."

He groaned, no doubt at my father's idiotic paranoia over not being 100 percent vanilla.

"Did they—" I suddenly wondered but cut myself off from asking.

"Did who what?"

I stared at him for a moment, not sure I wanted to know if Wes had experienced any of the prejudice I had. He was so strong; I didn't know if I wanted to think of him as ever being scared. But maybe he had, and maybe he wanted to talk about it.

"Did they threaten you? Your neighbors?"

The mirth left his face as that seriousness returned. "Yeah, they did. It wasn't violent, but I think it might've gotten there if I hadn't left when I did." He ran his hand through his hair. "Mostly I hated the fear the guys I'd see would feel. There wasn't anything I could do to help them, save them. And I don't want to hide. I never have, and I never will. So watching them hide and having them beg me to do it too was just too much."

I nodded, understanding that. I couldn't imagine Wes trying to pretend he was anything but himself. I mean, he wasn't at all effeminate or flashy, but I very much doubted it was in

him to deny wanting what he wanted. I bet he might've tried for the sake of the guys he dated, but I also bet it hadn't lasted long. Unless he'd been in love.

"Have you ever been in love?" I whispered.

He looked me in the eyes and gave me this tiny little smile that made my heart pound.

"Yes, I think I...have been."

I nodded, clearing my throat and having to look away. Man, what had that reaction been about? He'd just smiled, for Pete's sake. Thinking about the man he'd loved and, I guessed, lost.

His computer saved me from any further queries as it dinged with the results of the test. I swiveled around and squeaked as I saw something I'd never seen before.

Looking over my shoulder, he said, "I'm guessing that high a number is bad."

"You think? Jeez, Wes, I wouldn't have thought a computer could still turn on with over two hundred instances of malware."

"Damn." He flopped back on his bed again. "I was really hoping not to have to buy a new one."

"It's not broken. Let's let the program finish, clean them up, and see what else we can do."

"You mean, you can fix it?" He sat up again to watch me.

"Look at me. I practically scream computer geek without saying a word."

He chuckled. "Yeah, that you do. And you know, that's actually a good career choice. Computer science, I think it's called. You could be the guy who makes the computers in the Pentagon secure and all that."

"Or on Air Force One." I laughed as the software finished with the malware. Then I went in to update his virus protection.

He fluffed my hair, making me duck away because it was so easy to send my curls into total frizz mode.

"Seriously, Mal, you might want to think about it. Computer science might be your passion. I mean, if nothing else, you just saved me a bunch of time and money."

"For crying out loud, Wes! You haven't updated your virus protection for over a thousand days!"

"I have to update it?"

I looked over at him. Yep, he honestly didn't know.

I leveled him with a glare. "Tell me you don't do any online banking on this thing."

"No, nothing like that," he said, his green eyes wide. "I do all my banking in the bank. Don't even have an ATM card."

"Well, that's good, at least."

I turned back, then opened the software and set it to update automatically, which it would do the next time he turned the computer on. Then I set it to update now, but of course it acted like I hadn't done a thing. He probably had a virus that was preventing any updates.

Shaking my head, I took out my key ring and popped my USB drive into his PC. It took a few minutes for the poor thing to recognize the new drive, but then I was able to access my own files.

"What're you doing?" he whispered near my ear.

I jumped a little. He was so close that he was practically resting his chin on my shoulder. It made me shiver. He smelled good.

I cleared my throat and managed to tell him about the potential virus and that I had work-arounds on my USB drive.

Grinning again, he said, "You just carry around one of those on your keys?"

"Yes, I do." I gestured up and down my torso. "Geek."

He chuckled, held the other side of my head, and planted a kiss on my cheek. I shivered again, glad he'd let go already so he didn't vibrate with it too. He settled onto his bed again to watch me, but when I refocused on the screen, I couldn't remember what I'd been about to do. Right, yes. Find the virus—probably more than one—and clean them up. Man, what was wrong with me?

"How do you feel about bowling?"

I shrugged, oddly used to his abrupt changes in topic even now. "You don't want me on a league, but I think it's fun." At least, I had when I was twelve.

"Let's go tomorrow. I discovered an alley last week that has entertainment on Saturday nights."

"Six viruses! And they're still coming. Jeez, Wes, I feel like I should wear gloves to touch this keyboard."

He looked confused. "Why?"

"You're not just infected—you have a full-blown infestation."

"Six—seven—is bad, huh?"

"One is bad, dumb-ass."

He chuckled. "Well, thank God you're here. Super Mal to the rescue!" He made a sound like a crowd cheering.

"You know when I'm done here," I said sternly, "that we're going to have a discussion about protection, right?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him stretch for something in his bedside table. Nine viruses!

A condom smacked into the monitor. I cracked up, turning around to toss it back at him. "Not that kind of protection."

He sat on the end of the bed again, inches away from me. "Shoot, because you could've had that one. It's cherry flavored. I hate that flavor."

I squinted at him, frowning as I tried to think of why taste mattered with a—

Oh. Right.

He chuckled me under the chin and winked at me. "When you're sucking cock, you don't really want to think of cough medicine." He gave me a small smile.

Immediately I remembered him licking sprinkles off that ice-cream cone, and I found myself looking at his mouth. What would that tongue feel like? He licked his lips, his tongue sliding slowly over the bottom one, and I wanted to touch that full pink lip too.

My stomach felt like it flipped over, making me swallow hard.

What. The. Hell?

He eyed me a little cautiously and hid the condom in his hand. "You have lunch yet?" When I shook my head, he said, "Then let's find a pizza place, okay?"

"Sure," I said, feeling relieved for a change of topic and scenery. "There's a great one just a few blocks from here. And since this scan could take a few hours on this machine, we've got the time." We'd be lucky if it was done by the time we got back, poor thing.

"Let's walk. I could use some air."

Yeah, me too. I got up as he did. "Do you still want to work on Ted today?"

He put his hand on the back of my neck and gave me another small smile. Both made me feel better. Grounded me.

"Definitely." He moved us to the door.

I think he might've meant for me to miss seeing him do it, but he tossed the cherry condom in the trash as he sent me through the door first. It was kind of nice that he made the effort not to fluster me again with that thing. I had enough on my mind.

Chapter Six

Wes's parents wanted to meet me.

When he'd called with the invitation, he'd said his parents were curious about me. I'd blushed, absurdly pleased as I wondered how much Wes talked about me with them. His dad wanted to know my opinion on Ted since Wes hadn't let him see the car yet, and his mom wanted to thank me for fixing Wes's computer and saving him money. Wes had said the twins would be there, but they kept themselves entertained most of the time so I shouldn't worry about them being a pain.

As I trotted across the street with a box of gourmet cupcakes—because you never went to a dinner party without bringing the hostess something—I realized I wasn't worried about any of the Kinneys. These were the people who had helped shape Wes into the man he was today, so they had to be pretty great. I mean, he'd told me once that when he had come out to his parents, neither of them had been anything but supportive. How many parents wouldn't freak right the hell out when their fifteen-year-old son told them he was gay? I knew that when I told mine, they'd either start screaming or keel over dead.

I stopped on the walk up to the Kinney's front porch.

When I told my parents? When? I rubbed a hand over my face. Man, these thoughts were just shooting out on autopilot now. No hesitation. Like I'd already accepted it. And after last night, well...

What did having a sex dream about Wes mean? Was it just because he was the first and only person to pay attention to me since puberty? He wasn't averse to touching me, but it was always pretty platonic. An arm around my shoulders or a hand on the back of my neck, both usually to get me moving. Sometimes for comfort. I didn't mind any of that. Welcomed it, really, because it did calm me down and make me feel more confident.

But after the way he'd made my heart trip inside me when I fixed his computer, and the insanity at the bowling alley... I mean, I actually got jealous of Wes talking and laughing with a guy! I'd tried to pretend to myself that it had been something—anything—else, but when combined with that dream, I had to wonder. What if this was more than reacting to someone who was nice to me? Could I actually be gay after all?

"Oh hell." I sighed and finished walking to their door.

Now I was nervous. I hadn't seen Wes for a few days because he'd driven over to Vegas to get parts for Ted. Well, I'd seen the fantasy Wes—in such a way that made me glad I did my own laundry, because I hadn't just woken up from a sex dream about Wes, rolled over, and gone back to sleep. No, I'd been so hard up, I'd had to finish. And God, had I finished!

So was it official, then? Was I really gay?

I'd tried dredging up memories of girls from high school, but they were always less than real. I remembered one who always wore a ponytail, the glittery-lipstick girl, the one who wore cowboy boots every Friday. Little stupid things that stuck with me. No sexy bodies or anything like that. It wasn't like they'd ever really figured in my fantasies, though. I usually watched myself when I jacked off, either looking down at my hand on my dick or standing in front of the mirror on the back of my bedroom door. I'd wanted someone to touch me. I'd wanted someone to want to touch me. Now, though, I could close my eyes and think about Wes.

I took a deep breath and rang their doorbell. Maybe tonight would be a good test for me. With this revelation foremost in my mind, maybe I would be able to see if it was just a weird trip my head was taking, or if I was really attracted to him.

Mrs. Kinney answered the door, a huge smile on her face. I stuck out my hand, but she hugged me instead, pulling me inside. Mr. Kinney did take my hand, then immediately asked me about Ted.

"He says it's going well, but that much damage..." He shook his head doubtfully.

"Honestly, it is going well. Wes is making great progress."

Wes got his smile from his dad.

The twins came screaming into the room, making both parents turn and try to find out what the problem was, but I was lost on watching Wes walk in.

He'd dressed up. It was odd seeing him in slacks and a polo just like me. He filled both out much better than I did, of course, and oh hell, there were those thoughts again. Wes looked good. Really good. I'd seen him half-naked in cutoffs, wearing ratty sweatpants and no shirt, or grubby garage clothes, so clean and pressed was new. And thoroughly distracting. I had to swallow and clear my throat, cutting my gaze away from him. Then he was right up in front of me and tapping on the box in my suddenly sweating hands.

"What's this?"

I looked at his face and nearly groaned. That damn smile. It was the sweet one that now made my heart flip-flop.

Oh yeah, it was all about Wes.

"Cupcakes," I said breathlessly.

His smile faltered a little as he stared into my eyes, like he sensed something was going on. Did he know? Could he tell? How did gaydar actually work?

His mom squealed with delight. "Cupcakes?" She looked at the box. "From Benjamin's? Mal, you absolute sweetheart!"

"Mom loves Benjamin's cupcakes," Wes said as she took the box from me. "I think it's half of why they moved up here."

"Oh hush," she said and practically skipped into the kitchen, the twins on her heels. I heard her deny both their requests to have one now as I stood alone in front of Wes.

With no idea what to do.

"You like baseball, Mal?" his dad asked me from the family room. The TV showed a game.

"I guess." I moved forward, acutely aware of Wes following me.

"We're Dodgers fans here." His dad settled into an old recliner that would've shocked my mother.

I made some interested sound and forced myself to sit down on the red couch. I stared at the screen as Wes sat down. Sprawled beside me, all confident male with his legs spread and his arm along the back. If I sat back, he'd have his arm around me.

Suddenly I very much wanted to sit back.

"Mal?" his mom asked.

I shot to my feet. "Yes?"

She grinned at me. "Wes didn't think you had any food allergies, but I wanted to make sure."

"No, no allergies."

"Okay, good. Food's on the table, then, boys." Over her shoulder as she walked toward the dining room, she said, "Give it up, Marshall. They're going to lose."

"Bite your tongue, Carol," he hollered back. Then to me, he said, "Okay, we're not all Dodgers fans."

"I'd rather bite yours," she called, making us all laugh. So that was where Wes got his talent for flirting.

Wes stood up beside me, so close, in fact, that I could feel the heat of him. Was that a new cologne? I spun away and followed his dad, taking a deep breath to try to steady my nerves. Suddenly I felt Wes's hand on the small of my back.

"You're doing great," he whispered near my ear, his hand rubbing.

I sighed, loving the contact and that he noticed I was nervous and offered reassurance. He really cared, damn it. He might be completely misinterpreting what was making me nuts right now, but he wanted me to be at ease here with his family.

"Thanks," I whispered back and took a seat beside him.

I knew I was probably awkward during dinner. Sitting there beside Wes, our fingers brushing as we passed plates and bowls of food, I kept blushing and looking away. His parents kept up a steady stream of conversation, but I bet I was making everyone uncomfortable. The harder I tried not to, the more I noticed it. I knew Wes was feeling it. He didn't say much after I sucked in a breath when he put my napkin back in my lap for me. He'd looked at me questioningly, offered up an apology, and my attempt to wave it off made me feel even more socially

retarded. I knew I was making a mess of things for sure when we reached for the salt at the same time and he snatched his hand back like he was afraid to touch me.

Then came little Katie's innocent comment as we dug into the cupcakes.

"You're boyfriend's cute, Wes." She grinned across the table at me as her twin, Carter, snickered beside her.

I blushed, but not because I felt any need to correct her. I liked the sound of that.

"He's not my boyfriend, Katie."

"He isn't?"

"No."

"How come?"

To his plate, Wes said, "I'm not his type."

She frowned at me, her cute little face all puckered up. "What's your type?"

It felt like the perfect opening, but this wasn't some Hallmark movie of the week.

"Let it go, Katie," their mom said.

"But he's smart and funny and cute, and he likes Wes's cars. Wes's other boyfriends never liked his cars as much as Mal does. Mal actually works on them with him!"

He'd never had someone work on his cars with him? I peeked at Wes and found him blushing as he drank his water with his eyes closed.

Mrs. Kinney smiled a tiny bit at me. I smiled a tiny bit back. I wasn't sure what I was saying, but she promptly distracted both kids by bringing up their upcoming trip to summer camp.

Neither Wes nor I said much after that, but I found myself wanting to reach over and squeeze his hand under the table. To let him know somehow that I was actually resigned to the fact I was gay. Resigned in a good way. That the pieces had finally fallen into place and here was Malcolm Small, whole and complete.

Nearly, anyway.

But I didn't move and didn't share, because Wes was turned in his seat just enough to give me his back while he talked to his dad about Ted.

His mom struck up a conversation with me about my college plans, and I tried to focus on her and pay attention, but I didn't think I was fooling her. She patted my hand at one point, giving me another smile, and I wanted to blurt it out to her. To just tell her I was gay and liked her son. But, really, I needed to tell him first.

When Grandma Belle called a few minutes later and the twins ran off to talk to her, I thanked his parents for dinner and said I should get going. They were glad to finally meet me, offered to have me over anytime, and I thought I was pretty coherent in my replies, but my eyes were on Wes. He looked kind of lost. Sad. Shoulders slumped, head bowed, hands fidgeting in his pockets. I didn't know what to do, so I said the only thing I could think of to let

him know everything was okay.

“So I’ll see you tomorrow, then, Wes?”

He looked up, his surprise clear before he beamed. “Yeah, of course.”

I nodded as I went out the door, saying final good-byes and thank-yous. He waved at me when I turned to look, the last person at the door, and I waved back.

I hoped I was ready for this as I walked back home and up to my room, uncontested and ignored for having fraternized with the enemy. If nothing else, I bet the Kinneys would welcome me wholeheartedly into their little clan without hesitation. I really hoped, though, that I’d get to wear the title Katie wanted to give me.

Wes’s boyfriend.

Chapter Seven

Mrs. Kinney let me in when I found myself on their doorstep the next afternoon. I had spent the morning psyching myself up for coming over and talking to Wes. Confessing to him.

“Hey, Mal.” She hugged me. “Here to see Wes?”

I nodded, realizing the house was very quiet for a Sunday. “Is he home?”

“Oh yeah. Upstairs in his room. The unnatural quiet is because Marshall has the twins off to buy stuff for summer camp.” She grinned a little maniacally at me. “I’m actually sitting down and reading a book.”

I chuckled with her before she shooed me up the stairs.

I found Wes lying on his bed, wearing that ratty pair of sweatpants and no shirt, bobbing his head to the radio, and flipping through the pages of a magazine. He didn’t see me, so I stood there in the doorway, partly in shadow, just watching him. And this time, when that weird feeling washed over me, I realized it was desire.

I wanted him. I might have admired his physique before, envied it, but now I realized I wanted to touch him. I imagined trailing my fingers over those washboard abs or combing them into his hair. How would he react? Would he smile? Sigh? Could I make him moan? What if I slid my hand under the waistband of his sweats and pushed them down to his thighs? If I found out how big his cock was and how hairy his balls were? Was his ass really as firm as it looked covered up?

Could I make him come?

“Hey, Mal,” he said, startling me as he stood up and grabbed a blue T-shirt. He put it on, fluffed his hair back up—which made me smile—and tossed the magazine across the room. “What’s up?”

Before I answered or moved at all, I suddenly wondered if he had gotten dressed because he thought I wouldn’t want to see him or because he didn’t want me to see him. A cold wave rolled through me. Was I attracted to him without his being attracted to me?

I realized the power he held over me, and my confidence in my mission evaporated.

Blushing, I tucked my arms around my chest and stared at the floor, at the tops of my sneakers. “Um, nothing much,” I mumbled.

We were silent for a while. An uncomfortable while. I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to tell him, but I knew now that I needed him to want me when I did. Was I not his type? Too much of a girl? He’d talked about Latino guys before, but I doubted he’d dated the emaciated, squirrely ones.

“Did I do something wrong, Mal? Upset you somehow?”

I looked up and found him standing there with his arms at his sides and his head cocked. His expression was concerned and confused.

“No, you didn’t do anything.”

“Was it what Katie said? That she assumed you’re gay? I know you hate that, but I didn’t—”

“No, that was fine.”

His mouth hung open for a moment, frozen in his aborted sentence. Then he frowned and said, “Fine?”

I took a deep breath and just said it. “I am gay, Wes. I just didn’t know until recently.”

He took a deep breath too, looking so relieved. “Yeah, I know.”

“What?” I croaked. “What do you mean, you know?”

He chuckled. “I mean, I’ve known since, like, ten seconds after meeting you.”

“But...but how? And why didn’t you say anything sooner?” God, I actually stomped my foot.

“After the way you reacted? After everything you’ve been through? No way. We come out when we come out, and you were pretty deep in the closet until, what? Like last week?”

“You knew when?” I cried, my voice cracking.

He stepped up to me, bringing me into his room to close the door behind me. “You always look people in the eye when they talk to you. It’s kind of unnerving at first, but then it’s really great because I always know I have your full attention.”

My blushing intensified. I hadn’t known I did that.

His voice went soft as he put his hands on my shoulders. “But then, last week, you kept looking somewhere else when I talked to you. That’s when I knew you were getting it.” He grinned. “And talk about unnerving.”

“Where did I look?” I whispered, betting I already knew.

He licked his lips. Yep.

“Hey,” he said, rubbing my arms. “This is a good thing, Mal. No more denial, no more hiding. You can be yourself now.”

I frowned. “I thought I was being myself.”

“Well, yes. This adds a new layer, then.”

I looked out his window and sighed. “I don’t really... I don’t really know what to do with this layer, Wes.”

“Come here.” He pulled me into his arms. He held me tight, those strong arms restricting but feeling so safe. I was completely wrapped in Wes, and it felt... God, safe was the only word for it. I felt safe. My shaking eased, and I was finally able to take a deep breath. It was a Wes-scented breath, though, and suddenly having him wrapped all around me, so warm and

strong... I bit my lip to keep from moaning because, Jesus God, I was getting hard now, and I still didn't know if he was just offering comfort to a friend in need or if I could tilt my head here on his shoulder and take a taste of his neck without upsetting him.

"It isn't like there's a time limit," he said, the heat of his breath washing down my jaw and neck. "You get to figure everything out on your own schedule. This here, Mal, is a great first step. You've trusted me with your secret, and I understand that and value your trust." He gave me a squeeze. "I'm on your side from here on out."

I tightened my arms around him, snuggling into the solidness of him. It was great to know he was my ally, to have this assurance and promise, but I couldn't help wanting more. I just wasn't so brave that I could ask him directly if he wanted me back, so I took another tactic.

"What should I do first, though? Find some guy who's willing to kiss me?"

Was it telling that the hand he had on my shoulder gripped there for a moment?

"I could—" He cleared his throat. "I could take you out to a club or something, if you want. See how a dance feels before you"—he sighed—"get physical."

He'd take me out, mentor me, but I don't think he actually wanted to. I bit my lip to keep from smiling.

"You know, I've never been kissed before. Will it be a turnoff to guys that I'm such a virgin?"

"Ah fuck." He stepped away to drop down onto his bed. Sitting there on the edge, he leaned on his elbows and held his forehead in one hand.

I laughed. It just bubbled up out of me because I was pretty damn sure Wes Kinney was trying to be all gentlemanly and not push me too fast. And that made me suddenly confident and brave like never before.

As he frowned at me, I sat down beside him. "The only guy I'm interested in kissing is you, Wes."

His smile slowly stretched his lovely lips. Shaking his head, he looped his arm behind my neck and pulled me close. "You little shit," he said, then used his other hand to tip my chin up and give me my first kiss.

My arms found their way around him again as his lips pressed to mine, lifted away, pressed again. It was a light, sweet kiss. He was so gentle, so patient. I felt tears burn my eyes as I opened my mouth, desperate for him to teach me how to kiss him.

And he did. Those soft lips showed me what to do by wonderful example. He cradled me in his arms as I did what he did back to him. He was gentle and slow, making me feel cherished even as I realized I was aching for him. His hair was silky, his skin warm, and the stubble on his cheeks did scratch. In a really nice way.

He held me so tight, and I never wanted to be anywhere else. He felt like what home should be—a warm, safe place where no one could hurt me. Then his tongue slid past my lips to stroke over mine, and I moaned from that delicious feeling. He moaned back, and my cock was hot and aching and confined. I wiggled, seeking relief, and he chuckled into my mouth.

“Oh!” I hollered as he sort of tackled me back on the bed. He came down on top of me, pressed to my chest, then used one knee to push mine apart and settled his hips on me so he straddled one of my thighs.

“You’re hard,” I whispered up into his devilishly grinning face. Of course, I immediately blushed because my dick liked that his was so nearby now.

“I am,” he growled. “And it’s all for you, Mal.”

“Oh man.”

He leaned close, humming in my ear, his breath washing over me, making me shiver. Then he rolled us over, and I sprawled in surprise on top of him. His hand slid down my back to press on my butt, fingers splayed, as he arched up into me. He did it again, moaning, rubbing against me, getting harder.

“I’ve dreamt of this.” He purred at me, looking so pleased. “Woken up aching for you, having to finish myself off quick because it hurts so much.” He pressed close and stayed there. “I’ve been waiting for you, Mal.”

Really? My chest ached a little at that.

“I’ve been fantasizing about you too.”

He gripped my ass and smiled at me while his other hand slid up my back beneath my shirt. I shivered for having his hot palm on my skin and didn’t really think, just pushed my hand between us and reached down until I had him in my hand. Cupping him, feeling the softness of his sweats at odds with the steel rod beneath them, I felt him groan like he was dying.

He rolled again, leaning on me, pressing me into the bed, and seeking my mouth for a new kind of kiss. Not so lazy, definitely not sweet—this kiss was sex. I moaned because it just felt so damn good as heat and need sizzled through me. I wrapped my arms around him again, holding on. I didn’t hesitate to let him have anything he wanted, so when he lifted his head with a growl and said, “Damn it, I can’t feel you through these pants.” I didn’t protest his moving back and undoing my khakis.

I lay there, panting a little, as he got on his knees and tugged my pants over my hips. My briefs stayed up, but they might as well have gone down, for all they concealed. There I bulged beneath baby blue cotton, and I felt myself blush as I wondered how I measured up.

“Oh, Malcolm.” He sighed, settling back down on top of me, his body curling around mine so he cradled rather than pressed against me. And I could feel him better now too as his cock’s pulse beat beside mine.

"You feel so good," I whispered as he kissed my neck, burying his hands under my shoulder blades. "You feel so right, Wes."

He rested his head on my shoulder. "I won't say I think we should take this slowly, even though I bet we probably should." He sighed again, his breath fanning my skin. "I honestly don't know what to do here, Mal. I want you. Very much. Right now. But I don't want to do anything that scares you away."

I gulped a little. "I don't know what to do either, but I trust you, Wes."

He lifted his head, smiling sweetly. "Yeah?"

I nodded, smiling too. I was scared, sure, but this wasn't a chance I wanted to miss. Being here with Wes was good. Right. I was scared only because I'd never done anything with someone before. I didn't want to suck—um, be terrible. It felt way too important.

"Tell me what to do?"

His grin went a little wicked. "Sure. Lie here. Breathe. Let me get you naked and spend a few hours doing really naughty things to you."

I laughed, but then... "Wait. Hours?"

His chuckle was wicked too. Then he leaned in and nipped at my bottom lip. And there went my thoughts about his tongue and those lips and my dick. "Yeah, okay."

"It's fine, Mal. We don't have to do anything. I was teasing you."

I frowned at him. "But you said you wanted to."

"Well, yeah. You're beautiful, and you've been driving me crazy, but—"

I thrust my hips up, rubbing hard into him because I realized this was him not wanting to pressure me. He gasped—I did too, actually. Then I said, "I want to too. I mean, also. Whatever you want, I want."

Now I watched his eyes searching my face. I smiled and relaxed, a little amazed that it really did feel just fine. Normal. Natural. Man, I was so gay. It's crazy what you can talk yourself out of when you're scared and into when you're not.

Finally he eased away from me, getting off the bed at the end of it. "You want to stop, you just say so. Any reason, anytime. Okay?"

I nodded as he took off my shoes and socks, then tugged my pants the rest of the way off. I helped, sitting up and taking off my shirt. He took off his, and I bit my lip with the knowledge that I could now touch those abs, nibble those pecs. And oh my God, he wanted to touch me too! My heart tripped over itself inside me. Then he tipped his chin toward my lap and said with one of those wicked grins, "Go on. Show me."

I chuckled, suddenly feeling a little shy but grasping the waist of my briefs anyway. I lay back, lifting my hips, wiggling free before untangling my legs and tossing my briefs at him. He caught them; then his eyes snapped down to where my dick stood up just for him.

“Dude, you need to change your name. You are not small.”

I blushed and lay back, all worries vanishing. Gym class hadn't been a safe time for me, but I'd thought I might be impressive. Then my heart kicked up when he put his hands on the waistband of his sweats and pushed them slowly down. Wow. There was a naked man in front of me, and I was going to start drooling.

“Oh damn, Wes. You're beautiful.”

He smiled at me, cocking his head to the side, letting me look at him. I'd known he was lean and toned, but seeing him naked and hard—for me, for me, for me!—was absolutely intoxicating. I mean, holy God, he was fucking awesome. He ran those big hands over his chest and stomach, still smiling down at me as I stared. Then he reached one hand down to cup himself, to slowly stroke from root to tip as he sighed, those beautiful eyes fluttering closed.

Mesmerized, I stared, wanting him. That was just it. I wanted to be the reason he sighed. To watch him stroke himself until he came. To hold him and kiss him. To stroke him myself.

“Wes,” I said, reaching for him.

He got back on the bed, and I pulled him down, wanting to kiss him. Skin to skin, he felt even more amazing than before. The heat of him was like a bonfire, his kiss slow but deep, his tongue dancing on mine as if he liked my taste and wanted more. Wanted more... I ran my hands down his back, my fingers tracing his spine, before I found his—oh, yes—very firm ass. Wes moaned as I gripped him in both hands and lifted my hips up, pressing into him again. Jesus.

He reached down and ran his hand over my thigh, then brought my leg up, asking me to hook it around him. I did, holding tight to him, loving how heavy he was and the way he pressed into me, our dicks side-by-side. The pleasure simmered through me. Then he shifted, his lips heading over my jaw to my throat, my shoulder.

“Wes, oh.” I gasped as his mouth settled on my left nipple. Oh damn, that was nice. I threaded a hand into his hair, messing it up, massaging his scalp, and looked at what he did to me.

I moaned, watching his perfect lips brush over me, that tongue lick and twirl. His thumb teased my other nipple, the different sensations making me ache, making it impossible to keep quiet. I bit my lip, trying to do the impossible, afraid of sounding like an idiot.

“Don't go quiet on me now. Let me hear you, Mal. I love it.”

He gave me a wicked smile before looking me in the eyes and licking a line down my stomach to my navel. Well, shit, that was sexy. Then he angled his head, and my cock got a rub from his cheek.

God, I think I just squealed.

Wes chuckled at me, sitting back on his knees and looking me over. Was it wrong not to give one shiny shit about the fact that I looked like a complete slut lying there on my back with my hands by my head, my legs spread around him, and my dick weeping for him already?

"I've never been with a guy who wasn't circumcised," he said, cocking his head at me and rubbing his hand over my thigh. "I've heard it makes you more sensitive since the head's always protected, though. Is that true?"

I fucking squealed again when he touched me lightly. I bit my lip to stop from making any such stupid sounds again.

"Well, look at that. Like a turtle coming out of its shell."

I laughed—mostly in agony—and looked down at my cock in his hand. I was fully erect, dark and long. He pumped his hand up, then down, moving my foreskin, pinching it over the head like I loved, and a deep moan rumbled out of me. It felt so much better when he did it than when I did.

He chuckled at me. "You're not going to last much longer."

Yeah, no. Shit, I was already gasping. I shook my head, panicking a little because I really did want to last, really did want to enjoy this for hours, not minutes. Or, God, seconds.

"I'm sorry."

He leaned over me and gave me a little kiss. "Don't worry, Mal," he said, smiling. "I'll take care of you. Just lie back, baby. Relax."

Baby. Goddamn, I liked that. I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, trying to find that nice, safe place. Then I felt something soft and wet slide around the head of my dick, making me gasp and jerk. His tongue!

"Oh sweet God!"

I felt him kiss me, his lips sliding down, his tongue pressing up. My heart was going to explode, but I might die from not being able to breathe first. It was amazing! I looked down my body, unable to resist finally seeing someone else touch me, and gasped at the sight of him licking my cock. All sides, base to crown, that wet tongue slid over me. And then he looked me in the eyes and took me into his mouth. I cried out, thoughts stopping completely for a moment as sensation took over. Dark, wet, burning pleasure.

I lay back, trembling, and heard myself making little uh, uh, uh noises as he bobbed his head, sucking his way along my cock. It was wet and warm and oh so good. I spread my legs wider, wanting him to have access to whatever he wanted to touch. He shifted, and as I watched again, one hand stroked my shaft while his mouth sucked. His other hand fondled my balls.

"Oh fuck." I moaned, tilting my hips with his strokes.

"You look so hot right now, baby," he murmured, licking the head of my cock before pulling the foreskin up and over and stroking hard.

I arched off the bed, crying out mindlessly from that sharp pleasure, and realized a second later that he was distracting me. Some of those fingers formerly fondling my balls were now petting over my hole. The dry scrape of them rubbing was like when I'd touched myself there, but better. Better because it was someone else doing the touching, the exploring. Better because it was Wes. Because he wanted me.

"Wes." I gasped, spreading my legs even more against the bed.

He paused in sucking on me, and I looked down to see him putting his middle finger all the way into his mouth. Wetting it. But his gaze was questioning as he drew that glistening finger out of his mouth. Panting, I nodded. Yes—oh God—I wanted his finger inside me.

He gave me a grin, swallowed my cock, and pushed that finger slowly but insistently into me.

"Oh God," I cried, tangling one hand in his hair and gripping. "Ah! Oh! Oh God."

It didn't hurt so much as burn, but damn, that felt nice. Nice in a very naughty way. Very. Because there was a guy between my legs, sucking on my cock, with his finger working in and out of my ass, and I was undulating beneath his attentions, fucking myself into his mouth and onto his finger. Loving it.

"Good." I panted. "Oh God, good. Wes..."

He hummed or moaned or said something—I couldn't tell with his mouth full of cock—but suddenly the feeling changed. The pressure increased a thousandfold, and I looked down again in amazed, near-delirious wonder.

Wes Kinney had every last inch of me in his mouth. The head of my dick had to be in his throat.

"Oh fuck!" Then my first real orgasm slammed into me, making me howl and shake as I realized that he was staying down there, licking and sucking, swallowing. "Wes!"

He drew out every last drop and sensation as I moaned and slowly relaxed back against his bed. Melted. Boneless. I knew what being undone felt like now, oh yes. I felt him licking and looked down to watch him. Christ, he was bathing my dick with his perfect tongue. It felt heavenly, all soft and gentle. Loving. Then he pulled his finger out of me—oh my God!—and kissed my stomach. Smiling, he moved back over me.

I grinned back, running my hands up his sides, suddenly thrilled all over again. "What do you want me to do for you?"

He shook his head. "What do you want to do, Mal?"

I pulled him down on top of me, wanting his weight and his heat, and sighed when his hard dick pressed into my stomach. He reached down for a moment, adjusting us so our dicks

were side-by-side, and damn if mine didn't start filling all over again. I arched up, rubbing, feeling the slick softness of his leaking dick against my own.

"Oh shit, that's good," he murmured, rubbing with me.

"Yes." I gasped because the friction was delicious.

We kissed for days, tongues and lips devouring, slow but getting rushed as need built inside me all over again. I knew he felt the same way from how he clutched me close, one of his big hands on my ass and the other holding him up, muscles straining as he rubbed against me. I moaned into him, my fingers biting into his back and squeezing a firm butt cheek, wave after wave of pleasure crashing through me.

God, it felt so good to do this while holding on to him! It was desperate and basic and so unbelievably wonderful to feel him wanting me, hear him loving this too. How he made me feel was fantastic, but knowing how I made him feel was even better.

"Wes." I panted, looking into his flushed face, feeling my orgasm tightening my balls and tingling down my spine.

"Come, Mal." He growled, his face so fierce. "Lemme feel it."

I cried out, pressing into him and holding tight as heat burst between us, mine and his. Holy shit, that was amazing! We'd come at the same time. Together. I buried my face in his neck as he squeezed me to him, both of us trembling and gasping and sweaty. God, even the scent of us was thrilling!

He kissed my shoulder and sighed. "You were so worth the wait."

I hummed with happiness, hugging him and smiling as the seconds ticked by and a lovely feeling of... What? Was this how love felt? Could I be in love with Wes? Could it happen this fast?

"Better get up," he said, untangling our arms and legs. "Before we fall asleep and end up glued together."

I chuckled, looking down at the squishy mess covering me and seeing it as the evidence of change. I'd just jumped off a fucking cliff, Wes holding my hand the whole way down. Here I was, a gay guy with the proof of it all over me. I laughed again.

"Don't move." He headed into his bathroom.

I put my hands behind my head, still feeling that inner glow as I listened to him run water and splash around. Then the water stopped, and I watched him walk back to me. He took great care cleaning me up, the washcloth warm and damp and wonderful. I sighed, closing my eyes.

I opened them again when he stopped touching me, and found him looking down at me with a little smile on his face. "Go get rid of that," I said, nodding at the washcloth. "Then come lie here with me for a while."

He smiled brighter, then went back into the bathroom to rinse out the washcloth and hang it up. I watched him wash his hands, dry them, and walk back to me. He really had such a beautiful body. Still, he was like a sculpture, thought-out and perfect. Moving, he was thrilling, all those lean muscles bunching and flexing. I could look at him for days.

He settled in beside me, and I curled into him. Cocooned in Wes. God, it felt so good.

"Thank you," I whispered. "I've never felt so amazing."

"I wanted you in my life from the beginning, Mal. Any way I could have you." He snuggled me closer. "Even if it meant just as friends."

I couldn't help snorting. "Thank God that's not the case."

He chuckled and gave me a squeeze. "Amen, my friend."

Chapter Eight

For the first morning in my life, I woke up smiling. I just felt so good. Like I'd finally learned what good really meant. And the guy in the mirror kept grinning at me, knowing my secret and thrilled by it right along with me.

I hadn't wanted to leave Wes yesterday, but a terse call from my mother expecting me home for dinner had woken us up and gotten me moving. The last thing I'd wanted was to get into it with either parent over the inappropriate amount of time I was spending with "the new people." I certainly hadn't wanted one of them coming over there to drag me home either. I'd gotten a bunch of kisses from Wes as he walked me to the door, though. And a squeeze to my ass as he shuffled me out.

Mrs. Kinney had smiled and winked at me. I blushed scarlet, of course, because I'd completely forgotten she was even home!

"I'll come get you tomorrow," Wes had said, smiling and stroking my flaming cheekbone. "We'll work on Ted and spend the day together again."

I'd nodded, nibbled my bottom lip, totally unable to think of something to say since all I'd really wanted to say was, Can we have lots more sex too? But, God, not in front of his mother!

I chuckled to myself now as I finished taming my curly hair, but then the doorbell sounded, and I flung myself out of my bathroom, across the hall, and down the stairs, practically panting and with my heart pounding. If this was anyone other than Wes, I was going to look like an overeager idiot. Well, actually, I might look like that anyway.

It was him, and—oh man—how had I not caught on sooner? Just look at him! Tall, broad shoulders, lean muscles, that friggin' tight T-shirt showing off sculpted pecs and a flat stomach, jeans riding low enough that I could see the top of that fascinating muscle that pointed to his groin. Oh. My. God. I got hard so fast, I felt a little dizzy.

"Anyone else home?" he asked, stepping in, crowding me back.

I shook my head, the blood filling my cock leaving my brain empty.

He grabbed me up and devoured me.

Wow. Just... Damn. And wow.

So this was what it felt like to have someone want me.

I clung to him, holding on to those shoulders and that neck as he kissed me like he was trying to crawl inside me. God. What would it feel like to have him inside me? To have all this strength and maleness wrapped around me, the most masculine part of him thrust deep, possessing me? I moaned into his mouth, his tongue curling with mine, and hauled our hips together, grinding into him.

He lifted his head and sucked in a lungful of air. "Jesus, baby." He panted, his hand holding me tight and still against him.

Oh. Shit. Maybe that was too much?

Then he grinned at me. "You keep that up, you'll have me coming in my jeans."

I grinned back, seriously loving that I got him just as worked up as he got me.

"Oh, you like that idea, huh?" He chuckled, wrapping his arms around my shoulders, a big hand holding the back of my head.

I held him around his waist, playing with the muscles of his back. "Yeah, I do."

He nipped at the tip of my nose, making me laugh. "I was going to whisk you away for something sticky and sweet at the cafe, but I'm thinking now I might prefer the cream-filled treat you've got in your jeans."

I shivered, pressing in tighter to him, trying to ease the increasing ache of my dick.

He dipped his head, running his lips over my jaw before nibbling on my neck. I was learning that he had a very talented mouth.

"Let me?" he whispered right into my ear.

Oh God, he was really asking to suck me off right here in my living room.

"One condition," I managed to say through the haze of desire.

He lifted his head, grinning at me. "Name it."

"I get to do you after."

He blinked. Then that grin grew bigger. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. I want to know what you taste like, what you feel like on my tongue."

His hand gripped my hair almost painfully for a moment as his eyes rolled closed and he bit his lip. Oh, hey. Did he like me talking dirty?

"Will the skin of your dick feel soft in my mouth? Is your precum sort of sweet like mine?"

I couldn't say anything else, because he descended on my mouth again, clutching me hard. He was a little rough, but I felt him shiver and smiled inside because it just felt so good to know he really did desire me.

Finally, when my lips felt all tingly, he lifted his head again. "I always knew I liked your mouth, Mal," he said with a crooked grin.

"I've changed my condition. Let me do you first."

He actually growled as he nodded.

I dropped to my knees. Wes sucked in a breath as I unbuttoned his fly. Jesus, the man didn't wear underwear. Twice now, I'd gotten to see him undress, and both times he'd been naked inside his pants. Knowing he was so accessible was just real damn sexy.

And then it was a little scary.

"It's okay," he whispered, threading his fingers into the hair at my temple.

"Um. What should I do? I mean—"

"Remember how it felt yesterday? What you saw me do?"

I snorted and grinned. "Man, do I ever. I remembered twice last night and again this morning."

While he chuckled, I caught the scent of him. He smelled like...clean, aroused man. I think he might've said something to me, but I was so totally focused on the flushed, hard cock in front of my face that I couldn't hear anything except my own heartbeat. I leaned in and kissed the head, licked it. Sound came back to me, and I heard him gasp, felt him shiver. I watched him watch me as he leaned against the door. Then I focused on his beautiful dick, his heavy balls, and every sound he made as I explored.

He felt like me, the skin soft as velvet wrapped around steel. Different, obviously, since he was circumcised, but I liked that. His veins were more prominent, rolling as I touched them, and the head was fatter. Different was good. He trimmed his hair down there, and his balls were completely bare. "Nice," I murmured, making a mental note to do the same. I stroked from base to halfway, heard his strangled sound, then leaned in and kissed the head again with soft, wet lips.

"Oh Jesus." He groaned, gripping the back of my head. He didn't pull me closer, but I moved in for more anyway.

I tried to think of what he must have done to me yesterday, wanting to imitate how good that had felt. I didn't want to be bad at this, though I was sure he'd forgive my inexperience. I ended up figuring the point was to create a warm, wet place that could grip him tight, slide over him, suck with a rhythm like a pulse. I closed my eyes, just focused on him, and it was pretty easy after that, especially having his sounds to guide me. Wes was definitely not quiet during sex.

He tried to say different things a few times, starting and stopping. Mostly things that sounded like amazement, contained my name, and praised God. Over and over. I loved it and would've smiled a lot if my mouth hadn't been so full of him. Finally I decided to find out how deep I could take him and earned a "holy Christ!" for my efforts as he bumped the back of my throat. That wasn't even difficult. I just relaxed and swallowed, holding my breath, and felt him tremble as I gripped his twitching butt in my hands.

"Mal." He gasped, tugging on my hair, and I realized he was trying to tell me he was about to come. I didn't pull away completely but did settle him more on my tongue as I sucked one more time. I'd loved the taste of him so far, and then suddenly I got a mouthful of taste sensations when ropes of thick liquid jetted onto my tongue as he cried out and his whole body shuddered. I sucked and swallowed, smiling to myself because I'd made this happen and be-

cause he tasted like he smelled: absolutely, 100 percent musky man.

My Wes was delicious.

And apparently that was all I needed to dive over the edge myself. I pulled back, pressed my forehead into his thigh, and came in my damn pants. I hadn't even touched myself, for Pete's sake.

"Damn, Mal." He groaned, smoothing both of his hands over my hair. "You are gifted, my friend."

Oh, that was nice. "Thank you." I lifted my head and smiled up at him. Then I kissed that intriguing spot where groin, belly, and hip met before resting my cheek there. Yay, me. I gave good head. And enjoyed doing it! I kind of actually wanted to suck him back into my mouth and start all over again.

"Mal," he asked with a chuckle, "did you come?"

I felt my face turn seven different shades of red. "Um. Yes."

He laughed and tipped my head back so he could bend down and kiss me. "Then I'll owe you one."

I stood up on wobbly legs, grimacing at the wet mess in my briefs that wilted my chance of being able to tell him I'd be ready in a minute or two for him to do whatever he wanted.

He gave me another kiss and said, "Go on and change while I lean here and get my head back on straight."

He did look wiped out. And totally gorgeous. I tucked him back into his jeans and buttoned them up for him. Then he was cupping my cheek, pulling me in for more kisses. Man, I liked his kisses. These soft ones were the killers too. The rough ones could get my blood boiling, but the gentleness in these made me think about love.

We sighed together, staring into each other's eyes. His smile was small and quiet as he stroked my cheek with his thumb.

"It's a shame cock sucking isn't a degree, because you—"

I howled with laughter and covered his mouth so he couldn't say any more.

Chapter Nine

We ate breakfast at his place, and then I was fine on the drive to the garage. It was when we got out and Wes held my hand that my nerves kicked in and I started shaking. I squeezed his fingers as we got to Ted, trying to glean some of that strength of his. Then I felt like a stupid child when he figured out I was cracking and pulled me into his arms.

“What’s wrong?”

“They’re looking,” I whispered, closing my eyes.

“Who?”

“Everyone.”

“Are you...? Do you not want people to know we’re together?”

God, I couldn’t do that to him. I couldn’t make him hide like his exes had.

“No, that’s not it. I mean, it is, but... Wes, I got beat up because people thought I was gay.” I gripped the back of his T-shirt and leaned into him. “What’ll they do when they know I am?”

He hugged me tightly. “Aw, Mal. I know—that is scary. Everybody has their opinions, and some share them out loud, but you’ll learn when it’s okay and when it isn’t. Here, though, it’s okay. Hector doesn’t care. And Ben—the guy who does the paint?—he’s gay too. We’re pretty sure that Leon’s gay or bi, but he’s not talking.”

I managed a small chuckle at that. “So we can do this and touch and stuff, and it’s okay? Nobody’ll get upset?”

Wes slid his hand up under my shirt, stroking slow circles into my skin. I felt myself relaxing. Even after such a short time, he knew me so well.

“Nobody’ll get upset. This is fine.” Then I heard the grin in his voice as he said, “Probably shouldn’t have sex inside Ted or something, though. Unless you like an audience.”

I snorted. “So not sharing you.”

“No?”

I looked up at him, frowning. “No.”

So apparently I was a little possessive.

He smiled. “Good.” He pressed his forehead to mine. “Me neither.”

“Good.”

He gave me a quick kiss, then rubbed my arms up and down. “So. What do you want to break on Ted today?”

“Oh shut up.” I socked him in the kidney before moving away.

He laughed, smacking at my butt and heading for his tools.

And just like that, I was fine.

Until an hour later when I had such a raging hard-on that I could barely stand up straight. Wes, damn him, was bent over inside where the engine should be, his shirt riding up his back and his ass on display. I found myself standing between him and Ben, doing my best not to share like I'd said I wouldn't. Hector the Heckler walked by once and snickered at me, probably knowing exactly what was wrong with me and why Ben was taking yet another smoke break. I ignored both of them, but that left concentrating on Wes being ass up over the damn car. What was he even doing in there?

Finally he stood back, some old part in his hand, and went off to tinker with it. I checked the position of flippin' Ben—back in the paint shop—then shuffled into the little room with the sink. I couldn't sit on the stool and couldn't stand up straight, so I leaned over on the table and took a series of really deep breaths.

Was this normal? I wanted him all the time now. Knowing he was nearby got me hot. Seeing him was... Yeah, that line of thinking wasn't helping. If it wasn't normal to be so nuts for him, then he'd say something. He was the one with all the relationship experience. He was the one who'd been in love once. If he didn't complain, then I sure as hell wouldn't.

The door opened behind me, popping me on the butt. I gave a squawk and turned to see Wes as he came in.

"You okay?" he asked, frowning at me.

I nodded. "Yeah. Just, um, breathing." And there I went, blushing brightly.

His expression was questioning, so I pointed at my crotch, feeling like a kid who couldn't control his hormones. Would he think I was a freak?

Wes chuckled with a naughty grin. Which absolutely didn't help my dick chill out. I was really developing a thing for his smiles.

"Want some help with that?" He actually leered at me.

Oh, man. "What'd you have in mind?"

He crowded me back against the sink, the look on his face making my heart speed up.

"How about we stroke each other off?"

I trembled. "Oh damn."

He grinned at me, dipping his head to nip at my bottom lip as he worked his hands up under my T-shirt.

"You want that, honey?" he asked, and his voice purred. "Want to feel my cock sliding on yours, all hot and hard and crying for you?"

"Shit, Wes, you keep talking like that, I might come just from your voice." I was already panting and could feel a damp spot in my briefs getting bigger. Damn it, not twice in one day!

His expression was pure wicked. "Maybe we'll try that some other time. For now, take off your shirt."

He wanted to try talking me into coming some time? Oh hell.

Wes stepped away as I ripped my shirt over my head. He locked the door and took off his shirt, stuffing part of it in his back pocket. I did the same, then nearly died as he walked back to me while working his jeans open. God, he was just so beautiful.

He stood close, his cock jutting out toward me, as hard as mine, and worked open my jeans for me. I was too busy holding on to the sink and trying to keep upright. All my blood was pounding through my dick already. Then Wes was pushing down my briefs, even bringing my balls out, before giving me a nice, slow stroke.

"Oh fuck." I moaned, reaching one hand out to grip his shoulder.

He chuckled at me, the sound a low rumble. "You cussing is just so wrong."

"Hey, I'm no angel." Clearly. Angels didn't do stuff like this.

He leaned in, cupping my cheek with his other hand, and said against my lips, "When I come all over you, you'll be a dirty little angel."

I shivered again and panted a noise of surprised pleasure when I looked down to find he had both our cocks in his big hand. Then he thrust his hips, making his dick slide against mine, heads bumping and shooting a jolt of heat through me. I groaned as he did it again.

"Hold us too, baby." He guided my hand from the sink to wrap around his fingers on the other side of us. "Move opposite me."

He thrust, and I did too, learning the movement and thrilling to the delicious sensation. Then his mouth took mine, the kiss deep, his tongue licking in, thrusting. I let go and just moved with him, battling his tongue with mine, discovering how to suck on it and make him moan while our hips pushed and pulled our cocks through our hands.

When the feelings got too big to keep kissing, we panted at each other, eyes open and staring. Beautiful. Wes was just beautiful. Those pale green eyes and long lashes, all that wild hair, his lips swollen and dark and wet from kissing me. He was close, his skin flushing and hot breath bursting on my face.

"Wes." I needed to tell him what I thought even as my orgasm chased down my spine. Anything else was lost on a cry as I curled into our hands and shot all over us both. And—oh damn—he was even more beautiful as he came, painting our hands and my stomach with milky heat a few seconds later.

We leaned against each other, gasping, our hands moving slowly as we came back down. God, this was going to be addictive. The need, the fire, and even the gentleness of him kissing my cheek and whispering, "Sweet Mal."

I smiled, leaning back enough to kiss him softly. "So much for no sex in the garage."

He chuckled. "I knew it was inevitable the moment I said it."

We cleaned up with paper towels. Then he led me back out to Ted. "Stand here, clean this"—he handed me that part he'd fished out—"and think pure and chaste thoughts."

I headed for the hose at the back of the area Ted occupied, because the thing he'd given me was gross and greasy. "Wes, even when you're not around, my thoughts aren't pure or chaste." Not anymore.

"I've created a monster. Wait!"

"What?" I asked, holding the hose.

"Do not run water on that." He waved me back to him. "You were standing in front of what you need to clean it with."

"Oh." He was grinning at me as I went back to the bench and, apparently, the toothbrush and spray can. "Yeah, yeah. I'm so friggin' cute."

He walked over and kissed my cheek. "Yeah, you are." Then he pinched my ass, making me jump.

"Ah hell," I whispered as my dick took interest again. Ignoring it as best I could, I concentrated on making the whatever-it-was sparkle for him.

Chapter Ten

Hours later, I came out of the ice-cream shop with another smoothie and stopped dead.

"Well, well, if it isn't Malcolm Small."

Fear slithered through me as Rick Lockhart gave me that psycho smile of his. I stepped back instinctively but bumped into the glass of the door, trapped.

Wait a minute. This wasn't school. He hadn't caught me alone in a stairwell or a corner of the locker room. I was out in public, and Wes was right over there, sitting at our table in the sun. He didn't see me, but he was there, and so were a dozen other people.

"Leave me alone." I made to step around him, but he slammed me back against the door.

"You don't talk to me like that, you little fa—"

"Shut up!" I shoved at him. "You don't talk to me like that! Not anymore!"

Then Rick reminded me of how much bigger he was by grabbing my throat with one hand and punching me in the gut with the other. My smoothie hit the ground as I lost my breath, and any sound I might've made was strangled before it could escape. He hit me in the ribs, the force of the blow knocking me free of his grip. I hit the ground on my hands and knees, gasping a breath to cry out in pain.

"Stupid little faggot." He snarled, reaching for me again.

I scrambled up, but my knees were screaming, and I couldn't move fast enough. He grabbed my shirt and swung me around, sending me headfirst into a picnic table. I put my hands out, trying to catch myself, but my head still collided with the corner. It sounded and felt horrible. I was instantly dizzy and sick to my stomach.

"You son of a bitch!"

That was Wes. Oh thank Christ.

My head throbbing, I turned over on the ground and saw them.

Wes was hauling Rick away from me by his shirt, both their faces contorted with rage. I knew Rick's face, had seen it like that a thousand times, but seeing Wes that way was awful. He was smiles and teasing, not snarls and curses. I had to make this stop.

"Wes." I stood, only to lose my balance.

"Sit down here, honey," a gray-haired woman said, catching my arm. "You're bleeding."

I was suddenly aware of warmth seeping down my face.

"Shit," I muttered, letting her ease me back down, my stomach roiling. "Can't do blood."

"I called the police," the smoothie guy said as he came out. "Should we stop them?"

"Doesn't look like he needs any help," some other guy said. "How is he?"

"Not too bad," the woman said, reaching for me with a tissue. "You know how head wounds are, though."

Oh God. Wounds. On my head. And when she pressed that tissue to me, it felt like she was pressing it against my brain.

"Wes!" I reached out for him as the ground under me tilted and the world went dark.

* * *

"No, you can treat him right where he is," I heard Wes say very close by.

Someone pressed on my head, and pain made me jerk and gasp.

"Mal? Baby, you awake?"

I blinked and realized Wes was holding me against his chest, tipping my head back so he could see my face.

"You okay?" I asked him, feeling dazed.

He smiled, his hand now cupping my cheek. "Me? Yeah, honey, I'm fine. It's you we're worried about."

I nodded, glad he was fine, and noticed an older man, a paramedic, hovering and that we were in the back of an ambulance with the doors open, facing outside.

"Look over here, son," he said, shining a penlight in my eyes.

"I'm telling you," Wes said, his voice harsh, and I felt his grip on me tighten, "he fainted because he saw blood. He does that."

"Just to be on the safe side," the paramedic said patiently, "I recommend you go to the hospital so you know he doesn't have a concussion."

"My head does hurt," I muttered.

"Okay, Mal," Wes said, his voice softer. "We'll go to the hospital. But not in the ambulance."

"That's fine, son. Let me get the paperwork. How old are you?"

"He's eighteen."

Man, it was nice lying there against Wes, letting him take care of me. My head pounded, but it felt better when I leaned into Wes and closed my eyes. He was warm and solid and sure beneath my cheek. He smelled like sweat and spicy laundry detergent and Wes, and that was nice too.

"Hey." He jostled me. "Mal, baby, keep your eyes open for a while, okay? For me?"

I opened my eyes. He looked scared.

"I'm okay, Wes," I whispered and managed a smile. "Just fuzzy."

He grinned at me and tugged on a curl. "You're always fuzzy."

"That's frizzy," I said, and things were suddenly a little clearer. I grabbed a handful of Wes's shirt and looked around, my head throbbing as I scanned the area. "Where's Rick?"

"It's fine," Wes said softly, rubbing my arm. "I knocked him out, and he was arrested for assault."

I swung back to look at him, surprised. "You knocked him out?"

He chuckled self-consciously. "I think I'm lucky there were so many witnesses who saw what he did to you, or I'd be the one arrested."

I sat up enough to hug him, my words of thanks lodged in my throat as tears burned my eyes. He'd protected me. Just like he'd said he would. I'd doubted him that first day, hadn't wanted his help. Now I squeezed him tightly and saw that the arm he'd had behind me was actually resting on the floor of the ambulance, an ice pack over his knuckles.

"Thank you, Wes," I managed to whisper into his ear.

He shivered against me, his other arm tight around me. "I just wish I'd seen him earlier," he whispered back in a sad little voice.

I pulled away to look into his green eyes. "It could've been so much worse if you hadn't been here. Rick's broken my nose twice. Bruised ribs, broken fingers, dislocated—"

He tugged me back to him, both arms crushing me close. I felt him shiver again, and I knew he cared about me. Who would've thought I'd have a knight in shining armor? Sir Wesley.

"I'll never let anyone get to you again, Mal." I felt him swallow hard. "Because I love you."

I gasped. He loved me?

"Excuse me," someone said, making me turn around as Wes relaxed his arms. It was a cop, a young Hispanic guy with kind eyes. "Some of the witnesses are saying this was a hate crime."

"Yes," I said, going with it. "Rick called me a faggot before he hit me." I touched my forehead for emphasis and discovered a bandage.

"And who provoked the confrontation?"

"He did."

"Do you know him?"

"We went to high school together. This isn't the first time he's attacked me either."

"Did you report the other times?"

"No, my parents wouldn't let me."

He blinked at me like he couldn't imagine why, but held his tongue. "Are they taking you to the hospital?"

"No, we're going on our own."

He handed me a business card. "Have them fax over the medical report so we can add it to the file, and give me a call if you want to add anything else."

I nodded and thanked him, tucking the card into my pocket as I finally stood up. Wes kept his hands on me, offering support.

“Mal, they’re going to write up that you’re gay.”

“I don’t care.” I looked up into those concerned eyes. “Rick needs to be punished for trying to hurt me because of that. If my parents find out, so be it. I’m not going to be a victim anymore.”

His smile was so proud, it made me blush. Not just proud, I now knew. Wes Kinney loved me.

Chapter Eleven

Wes didn't mention the fact that he'd said he loved me and I hadn't said it back. He just kept my hand in his while we sat in the emergency room's waiting area. I hesitated to ask for more from him, both because I hadn't said it back and because we were in public. But I wanted to be closer, wanted him to hold me. So selfishly.

He got up and pulled me up too, and we walked over to a love seat, where he sat down and leaned back against the arm with one leg stretched along the cushions. "Come here, baby," he whispered and urged me close. If he felt it was okay, then it was okay. I got on the seat between his legs and curled up against him, facing the back so my injuries weren't pressed into him.

I felt his breath in my hair as he sighed and cuddled me, his hand stroking up and down my back.

"Don't fall asleep," he murmured.

I nodded, tucking my hand under his arm. God, he was so wonderfully warm and solid.

"Is he okay?" a woman asked quietly. "If he's feeling worse, I can let them know."

"Are you feeling worse, Mal?"

"No." Just needed to be babied for a while. I gave him a one-armed squeeze.

He kissed the top of my head. "We're both just feeling pretty shaken. We were in a fight."

"But you've, um, made up?"

"Oh no! We weren't fighting each other. This prejudiced asshole attacked him and then me."

"Oh, dear." She tsked. "When will people just get over it?"

"Here's hoping some time in jail will help that guy get over it real damn fast."

"Amen. You just let me know if either of you need anything."

"Thank you."

I peeked over my shoulder as I heard her talking to someone else. She was an older lady, round and smiling, wearing a smock of the hospital's colors and neon pink rubber shoes. A volunteer, maybe?

"See, Mal? Some people don't mind."

I nodded against him and closed my eyes, something much more important than finding an ally on my mind.

Did I love Wes? How would I know? Literally, how would I know? I had to assume my parents loved me. They never said the words, but they provided for me, and I hoped it was more than just out of an obligation to keep me alive. But what did love feel like?

When he'd said the words, I had gasped. In surprise, in delight, maybe even in amazement. There had been a little thrill of excitement or something similar that had shot through me. It had actually been very similar to when he touched me. Anytime he touched me. I'd known I was starved for physical contact ever since he'd first put his hand on the back of my neck. Every time since then, though, that little zing still happened. Was that part of loving him?

Could you really fall in love with the first person to ever really be affectionate toward you? Or was that lust or something? Maybe I was just infatuated, crushing on him because he was the first everything for me. It wasn't like I didn't want to love him. Who wouldn't want to have someone love them? Just... Ah fuck, I just didn't know.

I snuggled into him more, and he tightened his arms around me. He kissed my head, and I felt his breath on my scalp. Wes's affection for me was clear, and if he was confident enough to call what he felt love... Maybe that's what I felt back for him. I craved his touch now, needed his kiss, dreamed of his smile. And I wanted to take care of him too. I hadn't really gotten to since I was such a damn big baby, needing him to save me and soothe me all the time, but it was there. It was what made me work on Ted despite not knowing what the hell I was doing. I liked helping him achieve a goal. Not to mention watching him get all sweaty and filthy. I was maybe a little entertaining for him too.

I chuckled, and he asked, "What's got you giggling?"

That wasn't a giggle. "Thinking about working on Ted."

"You're not thinking about what happened?" He sounded surprised, so I sat back, concerned maybe he couldn't stop thinking about it.

"This isn't the first time. It's not even the worst time." I leaned against the back of the love seat and his thick thigh, resting a hand on his hip. "The only difference being that someone stopped him this time."

"Then what had you so quiet? Are you hurting? I can ask them for more painkillers."

I shook my head. "It's not that."

God, should I tell him? I wanted to. I didn't want to keep anything from him, and he was my friend.

"I was thinking about what you said."

"What I—Oh." His gaze searched my face. "You don't have to say it back, Mal."

I knew that was a lie. A lie to take the pressure off me, to slow down what might feel too fast for me. He knew I was dysfunctional, and he didn't want to push.

"Yes, I do. But when I do, I want to make sure it's the truth." I nodded. Yes, that was what I wanted. It was easy to like Wes, to want him. I was sure it was easy to love him too, but I wanted to really know it in my bones before I said the words.

He gave me one of those quiet little smiles and wound our fingers together on his stomach. "I can accept that."

"Malcolm Small?"

I turned to see a nurse with a clipboard scanning the room, so I held up my hand to get her attention and stood. Wes popped up right beside me, treating me like glass, but I liked it because I knew why he did it.

Chapter Twelve

“Do you think my parents will have to be involved?”

We were back at his place, getting undressed in his bathroom because we smelled of garage and sweat and hospital. I was concussion free, and the painkillers had worked well on my headache. The only thing making me twitch was the possibility of my parents finding out.

“You’re eighteen. Nothing will involve them ever again unless you want it to.”

“Oh.” Well, that was good. Since they’d never supported me in any other way when it came to bullies, I doubted they would this time. And there was the whole being gay thing I didn’t want them knowing. I doubted my injuries would be mentioned at the dinner table even to ask what had happened to me.

Wes reached in to start the water in his little shower, but when he turned back, he was trying to hide a frown.

“What’s wrong?”

He sighed, looping his arms around himself. “You have bruises.”

I turned to look in the mirror. Yeah, I did. The ones on my head and stomach weren’t nearly as bad as the finger-shaped ones on my throat. If Rick hadn’t let go... I swallowed and caught sight of Wes staring at them too. He looked so angry, but I could tell it was turned inward.

“You saved me, Wes. I’m standing here now because of you.”

He took a deep breath and let it out, wiping a hand down his face as he nodded.

I saw steam curling from the shower stall, so I stepped over to turn the water down. I got in first, giving him time to collect himself. I loved knowing he felt so passionately about my injuries, but needed him to understand that if I wasn’t freaking out, he didn’t need to either. And he definitely didn’t need to feel guilty.

Wetting my hair, careful of my forehead, I waited and smiled, wondering if he liked looking at me all naked and wet. Could I distract him from serious thoughts just by standing there? I smiled bigger when I heard the shower door click shut.

“I thought the front of you was beautiful, Mal,” he said, his voice deep and growly as he ran his hands down my body from shoulders to waist. “But the back of you is truly inspirational.”

Yep, I could distract him. Then he distracted me by smoothing his hands down and over my butt to give me a squeeze. I moaned, tilting my hips, pressing into his hands.

“Oh, Mal. If you keep doing that, I might have to—” He cut himself off with a groan.

“What, Wes?” I had to ask, needed to know. “Tell me what you want.”

He chuckled behind me like he thought he was tempting fate. Then I felt his thumbs spread my cheeks apart just before the long, hot length of his cock was wedged between them. He hummed his pleasure as I gasped mine, realizing what he wanted. I was sure it wasn't just this. No, Wes wanted inside me. Wanted that thick dick buried to the hilt in my virgin ass. Was I ready for that? A finger was one thing, but this...

"It's okay, Mal," he mumbled against my neck as he kissed me there, sliding his hands around to hug my chest. "I just want this. Just this."

He moved, his cock rubbing against my hole, making my cheeks clench because of the friction. God, that felt good. He moaned, clearly enjoying my instinctive reaction. It felt even better when he rubbed against me again and again.

"I like that." I felt his teeth against my neck, his tongue following. "Please, Wes," I said, knowing I'd have to ask before he'd do this with me. "Please come into me."

He stopped moving immediately, and I swear I felt his heart skip a beat against my back. Then he stepped away and moved around so he could see me.

"Are you sure?" he asked, real concern on his face. "We don't have to."

"But you want to." I turned toward him. "That's what you wanted to say. You wanted to say you might have to fuck me if I did that again. Well, it's okay if you do. I want you to." I even managed to smile when I said it.

He swallowed, seeming torn between his desire to have me and his desire not to go too fast. But everything felt fast now. After all my uncertainty, these last few days felt like life on fast-forward. Making up for lost time. I wouldn't want this from some guy I'd just met in a bar or something. It was different with Wes. I trusted him and told him all that as he stared at me.

He ran his hand over his hair, slicking it back, making me smile. I leaned against the tiles, knowing him well enough to know I would get what I wanted.

Then he sighed, and one corner of his mouth quirked up. "All right, we'll do this, but we're going to take it really slowly, Mal." He opened the door. "You wait right there," he said, stepping out.

I chuckled, turned so I faced the wall, and waited for him to return. I put my hands over my head and braced my feet apart. I probably looked a little slutty with my ass out like that, but I was hoping he'd like it. My heart pounded in my chest, but I was grinning.

He returned and was still long enough that I had to turn and look. His expression was very serious as he looked me over. Then he smiled and wagged a tube of lubricant at me.

"Right. Thank you."

"Oh no, Mal. Thank you," he said as I heard the tube spit out its contents. "I have literally been fantasizing about this since our first day working on Ted. Every time I turned around, your bouncy little ass was in my face. And those damn low-riding jeans kept giving me these

peeks at your crack that had me sweating and hard the whole time.”

I blushed. How many other times had I driven him crazy like that? Had he been hard when he'd taken care of my scratch?

“Okay,” he said, sounding like he was psyching himself up.

“Okay.” I grinned at him over my shoulder.

I felt him spread my cheeks again. Then he petted my opening with the tip of his slick finger. I clenched instinctively again, but not because I didn't want him going in. It just made me tremble with a sudden dark desire.

“I need you to relax,” he said, his voice definitely like a growl now. And I suddenly realized he'd spoken to me with that very same tone many times before. Times when I'd turned him on? It had been often.

“I can't come in unless you let me, honey.”

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly, relaxing against the tiles. He didn't pet again but pushed his finger inside. I bit my bottom lip and hummed in pleasure. I felt myself spread around him, adjust to the size of what wanted in. Like before, it felt odd but good, little flickers of sensation darting through me.

He stepped in close, his body along my side all warm and hard, while his finger moved in and out with a steady pace, getting deeper. His other hand wrapped around my cock, slowly pulling, adding to the pleasure. Then he pulled that finger out completely, and I felt him come back with two.

I gasped. Okay, that burned a little on the bad side.

“Easy, baby,” he said in my ear and started stroking my cock more firmly, faster. “That better?”

I moaned against the tiles, nodding, because while, yeah, there was pain, there was also pleasure. He spread those long fingers apart, stretching me, making me gasp again. He started easing his fingers in and out—oh my God, he's fucking me with his fingers!—and it was all so...conflicting. I wanted him in deeper but also to get out; it felt so good, but it also hurt.

Then he pushed deeper still, and I grunted some unintelligible phrase that meant holy fuck, what's that?

“Malcolm Small, meet your prostate.”

He rubbed, and a deep, animalistic noise escaped me. I could barely breathe for the pleasure suddenly screaming through me. His damn fingers left for a moment, I snarled, he chuckled, and then more slick fingers came back.

“Oh fuck.” I groaned. How many did he have in there? “Jesus,” I said, panting now, not able to say that I really, really needed him to find that spot again like right fucking now. “Please,” I said and heard that I whimpered.

“God, you make the best sounds,” he said and thrust those fingers deeper.

Oh, there! His fingers never stopped rubbing that amazing, hidden gem inside me as I thrust my dick into his fist and growled into the tiles. Each breath left me with a cry, my body shaking, tingling, seconds from orgasm, and then it happened, crashing through me, making me yell in amazed pleasure, coming in his hand, squeezing those still-twitching fingers deep in my ass.

“Holy hell.” I panted. “Oh my God, Wes.”

He chuckled like he couldn’t quite believe it either. “You are seriously amazing to watch. I can tell I’m going to spend a lot of time watching you come.”

I laughed weakly, feeling my legs shake.

He pulled free of me, and I whimpered with his leaving. Then he leaned against my back and asked in my ear, “Does Malcolm like his prostate?”

“God yes!”

He kissed my cheek, tucking his arms around me again. I sighed, loving his hold on me, and tipped my ass up to feel his cock again. Still hard, still hot.

I felt him smile before he said, “I don’t happen to have any condoms right now, or your ass would already be stretched around my dick.”

I shivered at that delicious image. “Can’t we do it without one?”

“I need to get tested again,” he said, kissing my shoulder.

“Was the last one, um, normal?” God, I should’ve done some research. Should’ve gone shopping for condoms and lube and whatever the hell else we might need.

“It was negative, yeah, but I should get another one done, since it’s been six months.” He licked behind my ear and wrapped his arms around my chest. His cock wedged between my cheeks, rubbing just enough to really feel it.

“Do you have some reason to think you’re not okay?” God, please say no. The last thing I could ever want was for Wes to be ill in any way.

He sighed, pressing his nose into my hair. “No. I was always safe.”

“Then why wait? I trust you.” I grinned over my shoulder at him. “Do you want me to beg? Please, Wes, please fuck me.”

He made a growling noise in the back of his throat. “Not in here. I want to see your face when we make—When we do this.”

Make love. Wes wanted to call it making love. I blushed as I followed him out of the shower, but it was from happiness. He was such a romantic. And that brought the romantic out in me. I supposed I’d already lost my virginity several times over, but this seemed more real. Actual sex, because there would be penetration. Which sounded like he was going to shoot me, so that was the wrong word. Wes would be inside me, joined to me, coming in me.

Oh wow. Got me a little shiver there.

I dried off, watching Wes move, and discovered I was a tiny bit tender back there. Not painful, just aware. Yes, I had an asshole, and someone had recently been in it. A snort slipped out when I suddenly laughed.

“Love your laugh,” Wes said, smiling at me.

“I have a feeling it’s not going to be the last time you hear it today.”

“No?”

I shook my head and did my best to dry my hair without turning it into an Afro. I had to go gentle on my ribs and stomach too, but at least Wes seemed to be ignoring the bruises now.

“So the prospect of anal sex amuses you, hmm?”

I avoided looking at myself in the mirror as my face flamed. “That really needs a better name.”

He chuckled, hanging up his towel. “What would you prefer?”

“Sex.”

“We’ve already had sex.” He wagged his eyebrows at me and hung up my towel too.

“Real sex sex.”

He laughed out loud at that, then threw an arm over my shoulders and hugged me close as we went into his bedroom. “You’re just too cute sometimes, Mal.”

“Everything else sounds like I’m about to get skewered.”

“Technically, you are.” He emphasized that by biting my earlobe.

My laugh sounded a little breathless. Skewered on Wes’s cock. Oh my.

We tumbled onto his bed, and laughter faded as what we were about to do hit us. I got a little nervous, and Wes got gentle, which made my nervousness disappear. I let him take control as he kissed me and maneuvered me similar to how I’d been our first time on this bed. I stretched my hands over my head, feeling decadent and a little slutty again. I drew my legs back, exposing myself, and smiled when he made that growly noise in his throat. He leaned close and sucked on my tongue as I groaned and heard the cap on the lube.

Here we go.

That long finger felt good this time, probing and slick. I watched him watching me, blushing even as I enjoyed his grin. When he added more lube and another finger, I groaned again because he found my prostate and gave it a nudge. I gripped my elbows over my head, needing to hold on to something, as my eyes closed and I just lay there feeling him.

I didn’t tense up anywhere when I felt the broad head of his cock. I did gasp, though, staring up at him, when he pushed inside, making me spread around that fat head and let him in. That sharp pain was back and then some. I bit back words that would’ve made him stop. I didn’t want him to stop. I wanted this. To be connected to my Wes, possessed by him as com-

pletely as he could have me.

"I know, baby," he whispered, stroking my cock so pain mingled with pleasure. "Just relax and know it'll pass."

I took deep breaths, trusting him. Then he changed the angle of his assault, and it felt impossibly good. Oh-my-God good. The pain faded, and I moaned.

"Yeah." He smiled. "That's it. That's better, huh?"

"Yes. Mmm. Yes."

Wes waited and went slowly, like before, giving me time to adjust, distracting me with slow strokes to my dick and kisses on my lips and chest. I felt him shaking with the effort to go so slowly and reached up to hold his shoulders.

"You okay?" he asked, so concerned.

I nodded, unable to speak, and squeezed his muscles.

"Mal," he said, holding still. "It's okay if you want"—he sucked in a deep breath—"want me to stop."

I groaned and managed to mumble, "Need you. Stay." I hugged him with my calves for emphasis.

He groaned too and pushed in deeper, slowly, and I wondered suddenly what his steel rod reaching my prostate would feel like. Would it feel the same? A moment later, I discovered it felt even better. I was so full, full of him, and then to have that thick dick rubbing against that magical nugget of pleasure inside me and sliding past it...

I gasped. "Sweet Jesus."

"Mal?"

I stared up at him, suddenly realizing—"You're all the way in."

His chuckle was a little strained. "Balls-deep, baby."

I laughed a little shakily at that ridiculous phrase. Then all thoughts fled my mind when he moved, withdrawing and returning in tiny bursts, seeming to work his way out more than he came back in.

"Don't leave!" I tightened my ass on his cock, trying to hold him inside me.

He cried out, digging his fingers into my thighs. "Jesus, Mal."

"Don't leave," I said, though I relaxed again.

"I'm not, honey. See?" And he thrust back inside in one long stroke.

I couldn't speak to tell him that—oh yeah, sweet God—I saw. Saw stars and bursts of rainbow-colored lights and wondered if I could die from pleasure. He did it again and again, thrusting, making the whole world fade away as my absolute focus centered on this moment, this feeling. Nothing mattered but Wes and the very deliciously perfect pleasure he gave me.

I think I might have yelled his name as I came, clenching him not of my own free will this time and being rewarded with the feeling of him coming with me. His shout of pleasure made me smile even as it made me partially deaf, and I swore I could feel the heat of him shoot out deep inside me.

We panted there, him leaning on me while I melted into the bed. He wrapped his arms around me, rolling us to our sides and sighing before kissing my cheek.

Suddenly I couldn't help laughing. Okay, giggling. It just struck me all of a sudden that Wes had his cock wedged deep in my ass. Inside me! And I'd begged him to do it! And I'd liked it!

"Hmm." Wes breathed in my ear. "When your lover starts giggling hysterically after real sex sex..."

"Don't worry," I managed, patting his head. "I'm fine. It's all just so crazy. I'm happy! I just had sex with a guy, my best friend ever, and I'm so fucking happy!"

His arms squeezed me tight, those green eyes seeming to twinkle. "I'm happy too, Mal, and man, do I love you."

I think my heart skipped a few beats, because it started pounding to catch back up. And I just knew.

"I love you too, Wes."

"Yeah?" he whispered, smiling at me.

"Yeah."

"Say it again."

I looked him right in the eyes. "I love you, Wes."

Oh, that smile... It was all mine.

Chapter Thirteen

Sitting down for dinner gave me a whole new definition of tender. The only way I could sit on those hardwood chairs was if I leaned forward just right. I didn't regret for a moment what had given me that lovely predicament, though. God no. Making love with Wes was the highlight of my entire damn life. I honestly couldn't wait to do it again.

And my parents completely ignored my bruised throat and cut forehead.

"You've been spending a lot of time across the street," my mother said, looking like an extra from some eighties office drama. Ruffled blouses were a staple of her wardrobe. Come to think of it, I couldn't recall seeing her in a blouse that didn't have a ruffle. Even on weekends.

"Yes," I said, intending to leave it at that but then going for broke. "Wes is my friend now."

My father made a disapproving noise opposite her. "They look like liberals."

"I don't—" A gasp cut off that train of thought as my cell phone vibrated in my pocket. And leaning forward the way I was made sure the vibration tickled all through my groin. Four fucking times.

"You don't what?"

I shrugged and shoved a big bite of meatloaf into my mouth.

"Malcolm," my mother chastised, "you're not an animal. Take smaller bites."

I had to swallow twice, but at least my father lost interest in conversation and went back to his Wall Street Journal.

My cell vibrated again, making me shiver. Making me hard. I risked parental wrath and snatched it out of my pocket to turn it to silent. I had two texts waiting. From Wes. I smiled.

"Malcolm," she warned.

"Just turning it off."

"Oh. Good."

I was interrupted from doing so by yet another text. Man, I hoped he wasn't expecting an answer. I wasn't feeling that bold tonight. I tucked my now-silent cell back into my pocket and devoted myself with single-minded attention to my meal. My mother's cooking skills were always good, but I couldn't taste much of anything tonight.

"Everything was delicious, Mom."

She inclined her head at me. "You're excused."

I didn't waste a second. I raced upstairs to my bedroom, pulled out my phone, and found four texts from Wes.

Close my eyes and feel you here.

Sigh and wish you were, my friend.

Love you still and deeply.

Come to me again.

Poetry. Wes had written me poetry! I read the words over and over again, standing there in my bedroom, unaware of anything else and glad for that. Then I wrote back the only two words I could think of.

When? Where?

I lay back on my bed, cradling my phone to my chest and waiting for it to vibrate with his answer. I wanted to sprint back to his house but wouldn't. I didn't have it in me to deal with the parents' queries about what I was up to.

My cell vibrated, making me jump. I smiled, reading his replies as they arrived.

I want you under the trees, under the stars.

Laid bare before me, mine to take, to love.

Come to me in darkness, as we tick into tomorrow.

I want you under the trees, under the stars.

How did he do that? His texts were lyrical to me. I knew he wanted me to meet him in the park. I guessed his hint about ticking into tomorrow meant midnight, making me grumble with frustration for the hours in between. I hated the wait but knew it was for the best. My parents went to bed every night at eleven like they were in prison and the warden would lock them in and shut out the light. By midnight they'd surely be asleep enough to miss me sneaking out, despite the fact that I'd never sneaked out before.

* * *

The hours between leaving the dinner table and the house passed unbearably slowly. I did some journaling, something I hadn't done for a long time because there hadn't been much to say. Boy, was there a lot to say now. I did it on my laptop, so as not to leave a paper trail, and had started toying with the idea of creating a blog. Maybe I wasn't the only one dealing with these things. Maybe reading about me would help someone else avoid the bad stuff and find their own Wes.

I also did a search on gay sex and nearly had an aneurysm over the results. It was amazing what people were willing to post online. Educational, though.

At eleven fifty-eight, I dropped to the ground in the backyard and looked back up, wondering only then how I was going to get back inside later that night. Then I just smiled, not really caring how or even if. I had a date, and that trumped everything else for the moment. For the next few hours. I walked off, cutting through yards to reach the park entrance.

As I came within sight of the pond, I didn't care about anything except the man sitting on top of a stone picnic table. He wore no shirt and was leaning back on his hands, staring up at the sky. The light had been broken in this area, so only the half-moon illuminated the scene.

Bathed in silver, he looked even more beautiful.

And God, he was mine.

He turned to look when he heard me trot closer, eager now to touch him, kiss him. My heart beat hard in my chest as he smiled at me, sat up, and held out a hand. I got up on the table, first on my knees and then sitting on his thighs, before he gathered me in and kissed me. I didn't care if anyone else was nearby, if someone might see us. I just wanted to be with him in every way I could.

"You changed," he mumbled against my mouth.

I nodded as he trailed his hands over my back and down to my ass. I'd gotten a little ridiculous about what I'd wear to meet him, the idea that we were being sneaky late at night making me kind of crazy. I had finally settled on a black polo and slacks. It definitely wasn't for a rendezvous in the park, but I'd wanted to look good for him.

"I like it," he said. "I feel like I'm corrupting a very studious, very good boy."

I chuckled. "You are."

He smiled and lay back on the tabletop, taking me with him. "Should I have dressed up too?" he asked, stroking my hair.

I shook my head, then brushed my lips over his as I leaned against him. "You did. Bad boys always wear jeans and cowboy boots and no shirts. You're perfect."

He hummed and angled his head for a deep kiss, sliding his hand up under my shirt now, caressing my back as his tongue toyed with mine.

He might think I'd dressed up tonight, but he didn't yet know one key element was missing. I'd forgone wearing briefs, wanting to be accessible just in case he wanted me to be accessible. I knew the second he discovered this, though, when his fingers delved under my waistband and reached low. When he paused in kissing me and his whole body went still. When he moaned and reached even lower to palm one cheek and squeeze.

On his lips, I whispered, "Now who's the bad boy?"

Before he could answer, he went still for another reason, and I did too.

Voices!

I instantly wondered if he would want to hide. If I wanted to. Then he sat up and wrapped his arms around me tightly. Before I could register what he was doing, he'd carried me into the trees, and the dark shadows closed in around us. He let me stand, his eyes on where we'd been and mine on him. I smiled.

Wes Kinney could carry me.

"Looks like we aren't the only ones who like it out here," he whispered, turning me around and wrapping his arms around me. He rested his chin on my shoulder as I gazed back at the picnic table.

What I saw made me gasp. Todd Casey. With a guy. Holding hands.

“What the hell?”

“He’s the one who checked me out. The one you asked about the day we met and I wouldn’t tell you.”

Todd Casey was gay? As if to confirm my question, he undid his pants and pushed them down to his ankles as he leaned against the end of the table. His friend dropped to his knees in front of him. By the sound of him, Todd really liked getting sucked off.

I felt more than heard Wes chuckle. “Our own private porn show.” He slid his hands up and down my stomach.

“Todd Casey can’t be gay,” I suddenly—but quietly—insisted. “He hated me. He wasn’t as bad as Rick.” I absently touched the scab on my forehead. “But he definitely didn’t keep quiet about what he thought of me.”

“You want to leave?” Wes asked, his concern for me clear in his voice.

“Maybe he just likes getting head from anyone who’ll do it.”

Neither of them could’ve possibly heard me, but Todd’s friend popped up, forced Todd around to brace his arms against the tabletop, and it was very clear he was suddenly fucking Todd’s ass.

“Yeah, no, he’s definitely gay.” Wes laughed in my ear. “And he’s done this before.”

I watched Todd’s friend pound into him, amazed by the force. It looked like Todd’s feet might be hopping up off the ground with every thrust.

“Damn,” I whispered. “Look at him go.”

“That guy must have a dick like a pencil,” Wes mumbled, his lips on my neck.

“Huh? Why?”

I felt Wes shift so his hard dick was pressed to my ass. Even through the denim of his jeans and my own pants, I could feel his heat and size. “Can you imagine me doing that to you? Pounding into you like I was trying to reach your throat?”

I swallowed, but not out of fear that it would hurt. Well, not entirely. It would be amazing, though, to have Wes take me with such fierce passion.

“Little dick make big noise.” He chuckled at himself. “Better hide size that way.”

I laughed quietly. “Big dick make little noise. Better to not split partner in half that way.”

He rumbled against my back and kissed my cheek, my temple. They were still going at it, and I wondered if Todd’s friend’s dick wasn’t just narrow but short too. Todd seemed to be enjoying himself, but he wasn’t making nearly as much noise as I did when Wes’s dick rubbed my prostate. I felt a little sorry for Todd if his friend couldn’t do that for him.

But wait one goddamn minute. I stalked out from the trees. “Where the fuck do you get off treating me like that when you’re just as gay as I am?”

It kind of felt good to see Todd and the guy fucking him spring apart. Todd actually yelped and, while blushing hotly, reached behind himself to tug the condom out of his ass. I heard Wes laugh behind me, but while I thought that was pretty damn funny too, I wanted a damn answer.

"Tell me why, you son of a bitch! Why the hell did you hurt me for four fucking years if you're gay too?"

"Jesus, Malcolm," Todd said, looking nervous as he tugged his pants back up.

"Answer me!"

I felt Wes's hand on my shoulder and realized I was actually getting in Todd's face.

"Hey, back off," Todd's fuck buddy said.

"Does this guy know about your gay-bashing activities, Todd? Huh?"

"What's he talking about?" the guy asked.

"I was afraid! And I didn't think you were gay, Malcolm, not really. But if they thought you were, they'd never guess I was." Todd Casey, one of the meanest assholes I'd ever known, looked damn near ready to cry.

"And I haven't been around those guys since that day we met." This he said to Wes. "I don't want to be around them anymore."

"Unbelievable," his friend said and walked away.

"Paul?"

"Get out of here, Todd," I said, feeling suddenly exhausted. "Don't you ever even look at me again."

"I'm really so sorry, Malcolm." He kept looking after the guy as he left and then back at me.

I knew that was the best I'd ever get out of him. "Fine. I'll try to learn to forgive you."

Todd ran off as I turned to Wes.

"You okay?" he asked, cupping my cheek.

I nodded, then leaned in for him to hold me. He did, tightly. I pressed my closed eyes into his throat, feeling how fast his heart was beating. I sighed, just leaning there against him, and found myself trying to understand what it might have been like for Todd.

I couldn't really justify his logic of using me as a decoy, but I could understand fear as a powerful motivator. Brawny as Todd was, he still would've made just as easy a target as I did if our classmates knew or even suspected he was gay. It would've turned him into a weakling despite his muscles. Hell, jocks got teased for getting good grades. Todd never would've survived, and the teachers and parents would've freaked about him being in the locker room with his teammates.

“You really think you can forgive him?” Wes asked, stroking my back in that soothing way he’d perfected.

“I think I already might,” I admitted glumly.

He made me lift my head so he could kiss me sweetly. “Everything you’ve been through and you can still forgive the ones who hurt you.” He gave me a little smile. “You’re amazing, Mal.”

I cuddled back in for a little while longer.

Chapter Fourteen

Wes walked me home, neither of us in the mood to make use of the picnic table or any dark shadows after all that. When we stood under where I'd dropped to the ground in the backyard, he stared up to my window and back at me. He frowned hard, then yanked my arm, pulling me along behind him as he walked around to the front door.

"It's a good goddamn thing I didn't see you do that. You could've broken your fucking neck, Malcolm. Don't you ever do that again."

His rough concern made me smile, but his second look wiped that smile off my face and had me promising never to do it again so long as I lived.

"But, Wes, how am I going to get back in?"

"You didn't bring a key?"

I shook my head, feeling amazingly stupid. I blamed bad teen movies from the eighties.

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out his battered leather wallet. From it, he took out two odd-looking metal tools that seemed suited for a dentist's office. Then he squatted in front of the lock and inserted the tools. I watched in fascination as he twisted and turned them until something clicked.

Wes Kinney had just broken into my house.

I couldn't control the slightly hysterical laugh that erupted out of me as he stood and put his tools away.

"Get ahold of yourself before we go in."

His word choice stopped me cold. "We?"

"I'll leave before anyone wakes up. Promise."

"They'll hear us," I said, my heart pounding in growing panic.

"I'll take off my boots."

"How will that help you keep your mouth shut while we have sex?"

He laughed. "How about we just cuddle up together and fall asleep?"

Warm fuzzies settled inside me, calming the panic. "You want to sleep with me?" I whispered. Despite all we'd done, that seemed amazingly intimate.

He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me close. "I do. But most of all, I want to wake up holding you again."

I groaned and dropped my forehead onto his shoulder. "Wes, the more you talk like that, the less I want to sleep."

He kissed my neck and whispered in my ear, "Then we'll just have to find a way to keep my mouth busy so I can't make any noise."

I swallowed my moan as a million ideas flashed through my mind. Then I took his hand and led him inside the danger zone.

I had two more hysterical fits as we made our way up the staircase and toward my room. No idea why except that I was sneaking my boyfriend into the house while my parents slept just a few feet away. Both times, Wes hugged me close, his hand over my mouth, smiling down at me. Then, the second time, he pulled his hand away and replaced it with his mouth.

I whimpered, clinging to him, only dimly aware that we were in the hall outside my room. But that thought got stronger when he reached down, held my ass, and ground himself against me. Any second, he'd make some too-loud noise that would shock my parents awake.

I pulled back, tugging on him to follow me. Once we were finally in my room with the door firmly shut, neither of us spared a moment before we got undressed. Then I kissed him hard, suddenly greedy for his taste. I hooked my knee over his hip, rubbing against him, making him moan into my mouth. I knew we shouldn't tempt fate but he was irresistible.

I pushed him to his back on the bed, then leaned heavily on him, knowing he liked that, and felt the rumble of his quiet groan. At least he was trying to be quiet. What I wanted, though, was seriously going to test that.

I didn't work my way down his perfect body. I just got on my knees and went for his cock. Just sucked it right into my mouth without hesitation. He jerked and cried out, arching up, his hands on my head. I listened for parental sounds but heard nothing, so devoted my attention to his hot flesh. He spread his legs, letting me have anything I wanted, and I took everything.

I reenacted something I'd seen on the Internet earlier and pushed his legs up and back, baring him to me. I wasn't sure about this, but I made myself lean in and lick his hole. He jerked and sucked in a breath. "Oh fuck, yeah, baby." He groaned, and I knew he liked that. I licked again, swirling my tongue, getting some whimpering and cursing. Wow, he really liked it. I licked a few more times, then wiggled my tongue into him.

"Mal," he bit out. "Aw, God. Fuck."

I sat back enough to see his arms out to his sides, gripping the sheet beneath him in shaking fists. I smiled, then bent and took one of his balls into my mouth and sucked while I petted him with the tips of my fingers. He arched and squirmed, grunting.

When we'd made love, it hadn't occurred to me to question who would do what. I'd definitely liked where I'd been for it, but I did wonder if Wes would ever want to have me inside him. Was it more normal to have one guy take and the other give? Or was switching okay? I didn't want to ask and find out Wes didn't want me that way.

I licked him with the full length of my tongue over his hole again, and he grabbed the back of my head, pulling me to his cock. I chuckled with naughty delight, loving that I was torturing him so well, but knowing when to have mercy. His cock was so hard that I had to pull it back

from his stomach before I could take him into my mouth.

He writhed under me as I sucked, demanding he come for me. Then he made a strangled sound, arched up, and came, hot jets erupting in my mouth, on my tongue. I hummed from the heady taste of him as I swallowed it all down.

I swear Wes tasted like summer.

When he finally relaxed, petting the back of my neck, I lifted my head, still sucking until he popped free. He whined, looking completely wasted. Smiling, I moved up enough to lick the shining drops that had leaked out onto his belly while I'd tortured him. I continued up his body until I could lay my head on his chest and listen to his heart hammering inside. He wrapped his arms around me, still getting his breath back, so I waited, exceptionally pleased by what I'd done to him.

"You did well," I whispered.

"I did?" He chuckled weakly. "All I did was lie here and try not to die from that amazing mouth of yours."

I smiled. "I meant not making much noise."

He kissed my forehead. "And risk having that end prematurely? I don't think so." He hugged me. "Give me a minute to have the world stop spinning, and I'll be all over you. Then we'll see who keeps quiet best."

I bit my lip and tried not to squirm impatiently as my dick reminded me it was there and angry for being ignored for so long.

"Oh look," he said brightly. "A mirror."

I looked over at the full-length mirror attached to the back of my bedroom door and blushed.

"Why is that making you blush?"

Of course I blushed more.

"Does Malcolm have a mirror fantasy?" he whispered.

I shrugged. "Sort of."

"Tell."

I put my head back down on his chest so he couldn't see my face turn fuchsia. "I like to watch myself sometimes. See what I look like when I...you know."

"Play with little Mal?" he offered.

I chuckled. "Yeah, that."

"Show me."

I looked at him. Yeah, he was serious. And there went my blushing.

"Show me, Mal," he whispered, brushing his thumb over my lips.

I swallowed a little nervously but got out of bed as he sat up. God, he wanted to watch me jerk off? But then I thought about it and remembered how I'd wanted to watch him do that too when I'd seen him naked for the first time. So, okay, maybe this wasn't as crazy as it seemed.

I put a hand on the door, bracing my feet and leaning forward just a bit. I could see him sitting on my bed, braced on his knees, an eager expression on his face. I smiled at him, feeling less nervous and a lot more, well, naughty. Like I was doing something dirty. Then I cupped myself, heard his gasp, and realized I was putting on a show. So why not give the man what he wanted?

I did what I always did, practically ignoring him as I stroked myself slowly at first, as I teased myself harder. I spit into my palm and stroked faster, hips pumping. I watched my hand stroke that skin up and over the head, pinch and tease, making me sigh and moan. It was better when Wes did this to me, so much better, and I looked back at him in the mirror.

He stood up, walked closer. The expression on his face was one of captivated desire, like he couldn't have torn his gaze away from me for anything. I rubbed my fingers around the crown of my cock, slippery, sensitive, aching for him.

Then Wes ducked under my arm and knelt between me and the door, his wide eyes on my dick as I held still now, not sure what he had in mind. His hand came up, fingers resting on my wrist, so I let myself go.

"Use my mouth," he said.

I didn't understand until he leaned forward and closed his eyes, his mouth open, clearly wanting me in it. Groaning, I slid my fingers into his hair and gripped the back of his head. I fed my dick into his perfect mouth, his lips wrapping around me, the warm wetness of his tongue stroking me.

"Jesus," I whispered as I thrust tentatively. It felt so absolutely delicious, but I wanted more, harder. I couldn't hurt him, though, and didn't know what to do.

Seeming to sense my indecision, he took hold of my hips and made me rock back and forth as he kept his head still. Oh God, he really meant for me to use him. He wanted me to thrust into his mouth like I had into my own fist. He was just giving me a better place to come.

"My Wes." I did as he wanted, thrusting deep.

I stroked his hair, massaged his scalp, leaned over enough to run my hand along his neck and shoulder. I needed to touch him, feel him, give back. He seemed to want to touch me too, caressing my thighs, knees, calves. He grabbed my butt and squeezed, pressing my hole with the tip of his finger in time to my movements in and out of his beautiful mouth.

I clenched my jaw when he moaned around me, the vibration nearly undoing me. But not yet, not yet. This was just too fucking good to let it get away from me just yet. A little more. I realized with a cry that he was meeting my thrusts, leaning into them, and then he looked up

at me.

God, those eyes!

My orgasm ripped through me as I tried to keep quiet, sounding to my ears like I was dying. He sucked me dry, then took his time licking me clean, making my dick shine. I smiled at myself in the mirror, flushed and panting, before looking back down at Wes as he slowly pulled away from me, sucking until I popped free of his exceptional mouth.

“Oh, Wes,” I whispered, shaking as he stood up a second later, gathered me in, and kissed me. I tasted myself on his tongue and loved it because he loved it. Had I been irresistible?

He started walking forward, making me walk backward. Then he actually dipped and picked me up so he could lay me on the bed and come down on top of me. His mouth never left mine as I clung to him. Then he lifted his head and said to me with dark passion in his eyes and voice, “There is no more beautiful man than you in all the world.”

“I love you too, Wes.”

When I finally fell asleep, I was smiling.

Chapter Fifteen

I woke with a moan, something hot and wet wrapped around my dick as something hard and slick probed slowly into my ass.

“Wes?” I asked, blinking and looking down.

He growled, staring up at me with his mouth full of cock. Good God, it was so intense! Watching him suck me off and fuck me with his long finger made the pleasure of feeling him do all that even better. I spread my legs, lifting them up, giving him better access to my ass as he inserted a second finger and twisted them, scissored them apart.

“Oh shit.” I groaned, throwing my head back and bowing my spine. “Wes.”

Then he pulled away, fingers and mouth, and I whimpered in frustration.

“Turn over, baby,” he said, his voice rough.

I did. He pushed my legs up until I was splayed under him like a biology-class frog. He spread my cheeks apart and pushed against my resistance. It was easier this time to let him in, to savor the stretch instead of fighting it. We both groaned as he gained entrance and went deep.

“Oh God, that’s good,” I mumbled into my pillow before panting through an open mouth.

“Christ. So tight.”

I lifted my hips, pushing against him as he thrust deeply, and groaned because the move made my dick rub against the sheet at just the right angle. A shiver snaked down my spine, and Wes moaned behind me, his breath on the back of my neck.

“Gonna...” he mumbled. “Gonna come.”

“Yes! Hurry.”

Then he was thrusting harder, faster, making me rub against the bed as he filled me up so deeply that he hit my prostate every damn delicious time. I was crying out with every plunge, meeting his strokes and fisting the pillow, the sound of his pelvis slapping against my ass mixing with the whining noises I couldn’t stop making. I bit the pillow as he went even faster, the friction driving me insane before heat washed through me and I came with a yell. I think I might’ve yelled his name.

He pushed me into the bed with one hard stroke and came inside me with such a deep howl of male satisfaction that I shivered beneath him. Oh, he so owned me. I was his completely. Holy hell.

“Jesus, Mal.” He groaned, resting all his weight on me. And damn if that didn’t feel good too.

“Yeah.” I sighed, reaching back to smooth my hands down his hips to the tops of his thighs. He shivered.

“Sorry.” He pushed up, his cock leaving me. I missed it already.

“It’s fine. I like the feel of you on top of me.”

“Well, okay, then.” He lay back down.

I moaned as he squashed me into the mattress.

He chuckled and kissed my cheek before getting up again and helping me up. “You do your own laundry?” he asked, eyeing the wet spot in the center of the sheet.

“Oh yeah,” I said with a laugh. “Ever since I started jerking off to thoughts of you.”

He pulled me close for a deep kiss. I could taste a hint of me in his mouth and liked that a lot. Then I felt something wet trickle down my thigh. Not something—semen. Ew. Wow. When we’d done this before, I hadn’t gotten up until after he’d cleaned me up; he seemed to like doing that for me. This slithering spunk was a little gross but also gave me clear evidence that he wanted me. I clenched my cheeks, trying to stem the flow, and groaned because the movement made my ass ache. God, it almost felt like he was still in there! What would it be like to have him wake me up like this every morning?

Morning!

I tore my mouth from his and looked at the clock. It was 9:12.

“Wes! Oh my God.”

“Take it easy,” he said, rubbing my back. “I literally hid in the closet when I heard your parents moving around.”

I sighed and leaned into him, relief not coming as quickly as panic had.

“I thought for sure your mom would see the extra set of clothes on the floor when she looked in on you, though.”

I lifted my head to frown at him. “My mom checked on me?”

He nodded. “Good thing I remembered to throw the sheet over your naked ass too.”

“Yeah, um, good thing.”

My mother checked on me before she left for work. That was just about the most maternal thing I knew about her.

As I pondered that bit of information, I cleaned up and then stripped my bed and got a new set of sheets while Wes went to get the shower going. Leaving making the bed for later, I climbed in behind him, and we took turns washing all our dirty parts and chuckling at each other until the water started getting cold.

He got his jeans and boots on while I got dressed, my mind already on which neighbors might be home to see him leave here without having seen him arrive. I didn’t want to care, and I knew already that Wes didn’t want to hide. Would it be all right, though, to not make it obvious?

"So what's for breakfast?" he asked as we walked into the kitchen.

"Cereal or cereal bars."

He curled his lip up at me.

I smiled and shrugged. "They believe in healthy."

"Eggs are healthy. Whole-grain pancakes are healthy."

"You don't have to sell me on it. I'd love an omelet."

He grinned. "What my Mal wants, he gets." He jangled his keys at me. "Come on, hot stuff. Let's go out for breakfast."

He made a pit stop at his house for gray sweatpants that showed off his semihard state, black flip-flops on those lovely feet, and a black sleeveless T-shirt that let the world see how toned he was. I felt little and delicate standing next to him, but he loved me, so I must have been what he wanted right back. He didn't even make fun of my skinny legs.

It was while I was looking at him as he drove that I realized how opposite we were. My stupid little thought popped out of my mouth before it had fully formed in my head.

"Am I the girl?"

His laugh sounded like a honk. Then he looked at me, saw me blushing and nibbling my bottom lip nervously.

"Oh, Mal. Hey, no. It's not like that." He held my hand as he divided his attention between the road and me. "You're all man, honey. Just the way I want you."

I nodded, threading our fingers. So I was smaller and...not as strong as him. Didn't make me a girl. It wasn't like he ignored my dick or anything; that was for sure.

"Does it bother you when I say you're cute or pretty?" he asked, real concern in his voice and face as he pulled into the parking lot of a little café.

Did it? "No," I said, turning to face him more. "I like it. That you think so, I mean."

He unbuckled and scooted across the seat to kiss me. "You're beautiful to me, Mal, and you're everything I want because you're a man, not a substitute girl. Your cock makes my mouth water, baby."

I chuckled, stole a kiss, then shoved at him. "Ditto. Now get before we do something illegal."

Inside the café, I was happily surprised to be just fine while sitting across from him in a booth. People looked, but I could tell the ones who didn't care from the ones who did. And then there were the ones who did care but in a good way. Like the guy who grinned at me over his coffee mug and the woman who winked. Wes and I weren't obvious about it, but I was sure my love for him was there in my face like his was, and that was okay here.

We chatted about Ted for a while, eating our omelets. Then a cute kid with big brown eyes came to our table and gave us a flier. He said he was organizing a gay-straight alliance at his

high school and they were throwing a fund-raiser at the bowling alley the next week. Wes talked to him, glad he was making the effort, sounding proud. The kid—he couldn't have been more than fourteen—walked away smiling.

"Am I a late bloomer for figuring it out at eighteen?"

He shrugged. "Everybody's different. Ben, at the garage? He was twenty-six."

I did not want to talk about Ben with the roaming eyes. "What about you?"

"I was at summer camp when it clicked for me." He waggled his eyebrows at me.

I grinned. "Did you discover a new extracurricular activity?"

He laughed. "Boy, did I."

"What happened? I mean, if you want to tell me."

"I want to share everything with you, Mal." He reached for my hand. While the warm fuzzies of that skipped around inside me, he said, "All the beds were bunk beds, and that made each set into a team right off. Carl had the top bunk, and he would get up at least three times a night to go to the restroom in the next building. He was a shy kid, but friendly and competent. We got along, but we weren't best buddies or anything."

His grin was a little bittersweet. "I followed him one night, wanting to see what he was doing because I couldn't believe he had to pee so much. I found him standing in the shower area crying. I got him to talk to me, and he confessed to never having been away from home before. I hugged him because he was just so sad, missing his huge family and all his siblings. I think he had, like, eight brothers and sisters or something."

Of course Wes wouldn't be able to let someone feel alone.

"One thing led to another, and Carl kissed me."

"He kissed you?"

"Yep. And that was the other reason he cried so much. He was afraid I couldn't possibly feel the same way about him."

"Aw."

He chuckled. "I credit Carl with waking me up. That was my best summer camp ever."

"No one caught on?"

"We figured out pretty quickly that the free time we were all given in the afternoons to mess around in the woods could actually be spent messing around." He waggled his eyebrows again.

"Well, damn." I laughed. "Maybe all I needed was summer camp."

He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes, and it occurred to me that he didn't want to think of me with anyone else. I tangled up our fingers.

"You like being my first," I whispered.

“Yes.”

“You want me all to yourself.”

“Yes.”

I licked my lips, enjoying how his eyes followed my tongue. “I’m all yours, Wes.”

He looked very possessive and kissed the back of my hand. If anyone looked at us, I didn’t notice, because that look had my whole attention. We just stared at each other, and I wondered if he was getting as turned on as I was.

“A friend of mine,” he said, stroking my skin, “invited me over to his house in Malibu for the Fourth.”

I sighed. Damn. “I’ll miss you.”

“You won’t have to miss me if you come with me.”

I blinked, my heart already thumping. “Go with you?”

He leaned over the table on his elbows. “Take a vacation with me, Mal. Play in the ocean with me. Kiss me on the beach. Sleep with me every night, and wake up with me every morning.”

I shivered, imagining that, and leaned closer too. “Your friends won’t mind?”

His hand holding mine was as soothing as a hug, his thumb stroking my knuckles. “They’ll love you.”

“And we can be, you know, out around them?”

“Brian owns the house, and he’s been with Jean-Louis for the past two years.”

“Oh. Okay.”

He gave me a smoldering look. I hadn’t, until then, known you could have sex with just your eyes, but damn, that’s what it felt like.

“Say yes, Mal.”

“Yes.”

“Good boy.”

“Yeah, not so much right now.” I chuckled and squirmed in my seat. “Better take me home.”

He grinned, grabbed the check, and sauntered over to pay. I got up, realizing I’d follow this man just about anywhere for one of those smiles. He gave me a great one and took my hand as we walked out into the sun.

Chapter Sixteen

I knew what Wes had been thinking when he'd asked me to drive Juan, the El Camino, down to Malibu for our little holiday vacation. He wanted me to be busy with something important so my nerves wouldn't get the best of me. Because I was nervous.

It had to be normal, though. I mean, I was about to meet his closest friends, the ones who would be most critical of his relationships. I was on a first-name basis with all the guys at the garage, including Hector the Heckler, who refused to speak English to me and laughed like a donkey. I was holding my own with all of them, but this was different. Wes's friends would know all his past boyfriends and hold them up in comparison. To me.

And I was making him hide from my parents.

"There's a rest stop coming up here," he said. "Let's take a break."

I pulled in and parked, turning everything off as he got out and shut his door. Joining him on the sidewalk to stretch my legs while I waited for him, I realized he was standing there grinning at me.

"What?" I asked, grinning back.

He reached into his pocket, then tossed me something. I caught it neatly as he walked toward the building. In my hand was a small tube of lubricant. Hold on. Why had he given it to me? Oh my God. Did he want me to—Wait. Was he trotting into the restroom of this rest stop so we could have sex? With me, you know, on top?

"Oh wow," I whispered.

Did I want to do that?

Yes.

Man, no hesitation there. I loved having him inside me. Having him be the one in control, giving everything up to him. But what would it be like to control Wes for a while? To have him submit to me? Put himself in my care?

I wanted to find out.

When I looked back up, he was just disappearing inside the rest stop. I ran to catch up with him, my heart pounding. As I entered the building, he went into the restroom, already unbuttoning his jeans. The look he sent me was pure hunger. I nearly tripped over my own feet following after him. I walked a little slower after that, trying to calm down. Be cool. I chuckled at myself because that so wasn't going to happen.

The toilets were in actual concrete block rooms with full doors. I found him in the last one, farthest from the entrance, the door open to reveal him. His jeans were around his ankles, stretched taut as he stood with his legs spread, his mouthwatering ass tipped up and waiting for me. He had his arms over his head, fingers splayed against the wall. His eyes were

closed, face relaxed. Waiting.

I just stood there, breathing heavily. "God, you're hot. You're just... Fuck."

He opened his eyes and looked back at me. "Take me, Mal." His voice was that growly one I loved to hear, telling me he was as excited as I was.

I stepped into the little room and closed the door behind me, then slid the bolt to lock it.

"Take your shirt off," I told him, taking off my own. "I want to feel you."

He gripped his T-shirt at the back of his neck and wrenched it off, then held it back for me. I took it and hung it on the door's hook with my own. And now he looked even more delicious, standing there naked and shackled by his pants, waiting for me. I could see and hear his heavy breathing. I grinned and unzipped my khakis, then pushed my briefs down to free my dick and balls. I left my pants up, wanting more range of movement than having them at my ankles would allow.

Ready now—shaking with readiness—I got some lube on my finger and then spread his cheeks. His puckered hole let me in as he hummed, closing his eyes. He felt smooth and tight and soft. God, it felt like a really great place to stick my dick. When I twisted my finger around, he groaned, bowing his back. I bit my lip, remembering that feeling, the want of more and more and more. I pushed in another finger and went deeper, discovering the odd bump that was his prostate. He moaned like he was dying, tipping his ass up to me, his hands clawing at the wall. My God, he was hot like this.

"More," he said, his voice rough.

"Are you ready?" I asked, knowing only how it felt to be ready when receiving him.

He nodded, his forehead pressed to the wall as he breathed through his mouth.

So I took my fingers away to prep my dick to give him more. I heard him growl a little and almost laughed. It was kind of nice to know this tortured him as much as when he did it to me.

Slicking my cock, I hesitated for the first time. Man, I didn't want to screw this up somehow and hurt him. I had always been aware enough to know he maintained an amazing amount of control when he did this to me. Could I do the same? God, I had to.

"Please, Mal," he said, peeking back at me. "Just go slow, honey. I'll be fine."

I leaned in and kissed high on his shoulder since I couldn't reach his mouth. He closed his eyes and sighed, his total trust in me obvious now. I could do this.

I spread his cheeks and fit my dick to him. As I pushed, gaining entrance, I heard myself gasp as he moaned. Jesus, that felt good! Just the head of my dick inside him and it felt amazing. Tight—so tight—and deliciously hot. I pushed deeper, a little bit, reminding myself that this first part was about getting him used to me, seating myself inside him bit by bit. I stroked his cock, remembering that had been a glorious distraction our first few times together, and listened to the way he breathed. That told me everything. I took my cues from him for

when to wait and when to go deeper.

One last push and I was completely sheathed in Wes, my balls pressed up against his butt, zipper digging into his flesh. I slid my dry hand over the satiny skin of his pelvis and the tickling hairs on his trembling thigh. He made a sound I'd never heard him make, like a whimper, like desperation.

"Jesus," he said. "Good. So fucking good."

I smiled and scraped my fingernails back up his thigh, making him gasp for breath. Only when he shifted, pushing back into me, did I pull away just an inch or so. I held that for a few seconds, then eased back in as we groaned. God, that was lovely. I did it again, a little farther, remembering the first time he'd done this to me and how I'd thought he was leaving. Maybe he remembered too, because he suddenly squeezed.

"Oh." I jerked, my forehead hitting his back.

"Wait," he said as if through a clenched jaw.

Instantly concerned I'd done something wrong, I asked, "You okay?"

"Wait," he said again, his whole body tense.

And I realized he was trying not to come. Trying to hold on a little longer. I kissed his back, thrilled beyond words to know I'd nearly made my perpetually cool boyfriend lose control. To me. I could've laughed.

Hoping it would help, I wrapped my hand around the base of his dick and squeezed. He groaned and shivered, but soon he relaxed with a sigh, each muscle seeming to lengthen one by one. He peeked back at me.

"Nearly got me," he said with a grin.

"I noticed." Then, against his shoulder, I asked, "So how do you want it, lover?"

"Whatever you want, honey. I'm all yours."

So I took what I wanted, pulling out and thrusting back, letting his dick go in favor of holding on to his hips. I built the speed and force slowly, still watching and listening to him, desperate to know he was enjoying this even as I felt a growing wildness.

This was so very basic. Animalistic. I claimed him as mine with every thrust. You're mine! Mine! Mine! Did he feel this way when he fucked me? Because this was going to happen a lot more often now that I knew what I'd been missing. God, yes!

I raked the base of his neck with my teeth and felt myself growl. He shivered in my arms, panting, deliciously submissive as I thrust into him, pressing him against the wall. And suddenly I wanted him to come. Wanted to feel him fly apart and squeeze my dick, his body begging mine to come with him.

I reached around and grasped his cock again, found it hot and hard and throbbing. He cried out, thrusting with me now, meeting every stroke as I fisted his cock, pulling and

squeezing.

"Come for me, Wes," I said, my voice sounding deeper and harsher. "Come. Now!"

And damn if he didn't. Right then, like he obeyed me.

It was wicked perfection. He yelled and clamped down on me, my full length, as I pressed into him and felt his cock quake in my hand. I didn't have a chance of lasting through that and cried out, practically screamed. I filled him up as he trembled and groaned. Then it was just our harsh breathing and shivering muscles as I locked my knees and pressed in tight, wanting to stay where I was for just a little bit longer.

"My God, Mal," he whispered.

"Yeah," I answered, my brain not quite back up to speed yet.

"I wasn't sure you'd like this, but holy God, you do. You really do."

"Do you?" I asked, concerned that I'd screwed it up after all.

"Jesus, Mal, it's the first time I've ever come like this." He paused to breathe. "That was just so fucking primal."

I chuckled, liking that he'd felt that way too, even as I puffed up with pride for being the first to do him so well.

"I think you might've bit me." He sounded surprised.

"Sorry," I said, seeing the spot at the base of his neck and pressing my fingers to it.

"Don't apologize. Really. That was just about the best part. I drove Malcolm Small wild."

I blushed. "Yeah, you did."

I eased back, both of us sighing as we separated. I stared at his ass for a moment, watching my cum slide out of him. God, was it normal to feel so possessive of him while watching that? To know it was mine, that I'd done that to him, that he'd taken it eagerly, begged for it? It was a damn heady rush. I heard him chuckle and looked up, embarrassed at having been caught staring at my cum on his skin.

I cleaned us up, finding it oddly pleasurable to take care of him, to be gentle and considerate like he always was. After we got dressed again, I cleaned up the wall too, where he'd come all over it. He was blushing when I stood back up.

"Look at you," I murmured, bringing him close for a kiss. I'd missed kissing him while we were together. He was tall enough that he could wrap around me and take my mouth while he filled me up, but I couldn't reach him the same way. This kiss, though, spoke of his delight and surprise that me topping had been so good. I cuddled into him, holding tight, not ready to let go yet.

"Spoiled for life," he whispered.

"Hmm?"

"You've spoiled me for life." He cupped my cheek. "It's never been so good."

Loving warmth spread through me, and this kiss was sweeter, the kind that took time and made me feel cherished. Then he just hugged me, our arms wrapped around each other and holding tight.

"I love you, Wes."

"I love you too, baby." He leaned back and gave me another kiss before sighing. "Think you can drive a little longer? I'm completely worn out."

I squeezed him, still feeling triumphant. "Definitely."

He went to the door, but I turned back to flush away the evidence of us having been there. Then I followed him out, only to bump into the back of him as he stopped just outside the door. I looked around him and saw what had made him freeze.

Two big guys in black leather with sleek sunglasses and sweaty bandannas were between us and the exit. They looked like bikers. Huge, bear-sized bikers from hell. I reached for Wes's hand, wanting to hold on to him, afraid of how much they might have heard. But Wes shook me off and fisted his hands, his whole body tense for bad reasons now because—Jesus God—Wes thought he was going to have to fight to get us out of the restroom.

"Hey," one of them said to us, taking off his sunglasses, while the other flushed the urinal.

"Hey," Wes said, his tone cautious.

The other one glanced into the mirror over the sinks as he washed his hands. "Jesus Christ," he said, disgusted, and I flinched. "Quit scaring them, Charlie."

Huh?

The other guy, the one watching us—Charlie—made a sound that could've been a laugh or a cough and turned to use the sink too.

Wes didn't relax, but he did move forward. I followed him, then tucked myself under his arm when he wrapped it around my shoulders. His gaze never left Charlie as he maneuvered me in front of him and gave me a little shove toward the door.

"It's okay, honey," Charlie said, and his voice actually sounded jovial. "We're cool."

"Good to know," Wes answered but didn't sound relaxed.

I opened the door, looking back at the bikers, only to have Wes shuffle me out. He grabbed my hand and stalked to the exit of the building.

From still inside the restroom, I heard, "Fucking hell, Charlie. If you were staring at that kid's ass, I swear to God right now, I'm not fucking you for the rest of this fucking trip."

I laughed, but Wes didn't, tugging me along now to the car. "It's okay, Wes. They're gay too."

"Get in the car, Malcolm."

I didn't know what the problem might be at that point, but his tone said not to argue. He held out his hand over Juan's hood as he walked around to the driver's side, so I tossed him the keys. We peeled out before I'd gotten my door shut.

Snapping on my seat belt, I looked at him. "Tell me what's wrong, Wes. I don't understand."

His voice sounded a little better as he said, "I just want to put some distance between us."

"But why?"

"Because I didn't like the way that Charlie bastard was looking at you."

I swallowed. I'd been so focused on Wes, I hadn't noticed any looks.

"How was he looking at me?"

He glanced at me. "I just didn't like it, is all," he said, quieter now, easing off the gas so we dropped below eighty. He reached over and took my hand, squeezed my fingers.

I shivered. "You think he wanted to hurt me?"

He cleared his throat, and a blush stole over his cheeks. "That was jealousy, Mal. Me being jealous and possessive. Of you. I didn't like that he was looking at you like he'd like to make a play for you."

Smiling now, I unbuckled and scooted over to wrap my arms around his chest and lean on his shoulder. "I'm all yours, Wes. Don't doubt that for a second."

But I did grin because I loved how he wanted to keep me to himself. God, but I think I really wanted to be kept.

Chapter Seventeen

“Stay here,” Wes whispered in my ear before standing.

I looked up at him, nodding, then watched him walk into the house. Figuring he was going for the bathroom or something, I turned back to watching the waves crash as the sun dipped lower.

It was so beautiful here. Not only because of what I saw now or all the sights I’d seen that day, but also because of who I could be here. Just me. Someone I had, until now, only been able to be in secret, with Wes. Here, I didn’t have to consider what other people might think, because they didn’t care that I was in love with another man. Some of them were too, and those who weren’t loved us anyway.

Brawny sun god Brian Turner had gone to school with Wes, then set off for one of those backpacking trips through Europe. Six months later, he’d returned with lean and dark Jean-Louis Peltier. With their little humorous spats, they acted like a sitcom couple. I tried hard not to laugh when they did argue, because, though Brian didn’t speak much French and Jean-Louis only argued in French, Brian still seemed to know what he was saying and countered it correctly nearly every time. And I was amazed by the way they finished each other’s sentences and sometimes seemed to have complete, decisive conversations without saying a word.

Blonde, pixie-sized Pumpkin “Yes, It’s My Real Name” Saunders had sold Juan, the El Camino, to Wes and his dad when she’d inherited it from her father. She had needed the money for his medical bills after the cancer had finally won, and claimed Wes’s unwavering spirit had reminded her of her father’s. He had tried to give the car back to her after they’d restored it, but she had wanted him to keep it. She’d told me all that while cocooned in the arms of Alan, a brown-eyed and blushing mechanic who worked in the garage where Juan had been reborn.

Also staying with us was forever-grinning Roger Kwan, who was apparently unattached and loving that fact. He’d disappeared twice that day, only coming back to the house to shower and exclaim over the action he was getting all over town. He’d called the first guy Ten because he’d met him at ten o’clock and taken him in the restroom of a bar for the next ten minutes. The second guy had been Pedro. Wes had covered my innocent ears while Roger had detailed what they had done together. I hadn’t minded, since whatever it was had made Jean-Louis shiver with a look of disbelief on his face. I figured if it could freak out a Frenchman, I didn’t need to know about it.

A really buff guy sauntered through my line of sight. Then Roger came running, leap-frogging over me. I laughed at him as he chased after the guy, and heard the echo of the oth-

ers laughing too. I looked back in search of Wes, but he wasn't with them. I shook my head as I glanced at Roger and his latest conquest, then returned my gaze to the ocean. I instantly mellowed again.

Some of my calm was, of course, also because I didn't have to worry about my behavior getting back to my parents. Coming out now to anyone I had gone to high school with didn't concern me nearly as much as coming out to my parents did. Or coming out to anyone who might be able to take word back to them. I'd known for a while now that most people didn't like them. Many thought they were snobs, self-righteous and opinionated. Those same people would probably have jumped at the chance to rub in their faces the fact that their son was gay. That their son was, as they had said to anyone who stood still too long, one of those abominations trying to defile the sanctity of marriage for normal people.

I set my chin on my knees, hugging them to my chest, as a breeze made me shiver despite its warmth. They'd never understand. They'd never accept me. So why bother telling them? Yes, it hurt, not being able to, but doing it and living with their hatred afterward would hurt more. What if they tried to change me? Had one of those religious places kidnap me and lock me up for a series of sessions with someone who thought Satan was lodged inside me? I shivered again. My parents were just crazy enough to go that route.

So I'd fake it when necessary and avoid them the rest of the time. It wasn't like they would pop over to the university for an unexpected visit. An e-mailed itinerary of every moment of our day's activities would arrive long before either of them did. I would just be myself when they weren't around and make my life what I now knew I wanted it to be. Maybe a life with Wes? Should we maybe talk about living together? Or was that too much? Too soon? For me and for us. We would probably end up together a lot, and with my parents footing the bill and already expecting me to get a place of my own... I'll think about it, I guess.

My cell phone vibrated in my pocket, so I took it out and flipped it open to read the text from Wes.

Juan and I request the pleasure of your company.

I smiled and turned to look at Wes's car parked parallel to the beach beside the towering thicket of pinelike trees and palms. I could see Wes's knee bent up in the flat bed. I got up and walked over, my steps quick because I wanted to know what he'd been up to until then. Were we going to watch the stars come out, tucked together? Were we going to break an indecency law or two?

I found he'd stolen the pillows from the two couches and piled them up in the bed, lounging on them now like some kind of surfer sheik. He put his phone in his pocket before tucking that arm behind his head. His whole body, his expressive face, was one big invitation to climb aboard. God, I love this man.

I sat on the tailgate and brushed off my feet before crawling over the pillows and then Wes. On my hands and knees above him, I stared down into those sea-glass eyes. He cupped my cheek and leaned up for a brief kiss before pulling me down on top of him.

He sighed as I rested my head in the dip of his shoulder, his chest hairs tickling my chin, and I angled my body to tuck close to his all down his left side. With my leg thrown over his and my arm crossing his stomach, I was instantly content. The scents and sounds of the sea and of Wes made me hum with bliss. And I could see the water, the setting sun, and the way the orange glow kissed his face and hair.

He was always beautiful, but near the sea, he was a god.

"I love you, Wes," I whispered, staring at him as he looked out over the water.

He smiled and closed his eyes for a few seconds, like he was savoring my words. I smiled too and snuggled into him as the arm he'd had behind his head came down to wrap around me. His hand covered my shoulder, the heat of his palm on my skin heating other places too. He hugged me closer, no doubt feeling my dick come alive against his hip. But neither of us did anything more, and I assumed he was as enthralled by the setting sun and holding me close as I was by the sight and by him.

It was the perfect end to a perfect day. I'd had a lot of those this summer. Perfect days. They'd started with the day Wes made love to me for the first time and had gone through nearly every day I had spent with him on through to today. It was as if some higher power had decided I'd gone through enough and here was my reward. I wasn't so naive as to think there wouldn't be bad days ahead, but I had Wes, and surviving was so much easier with him around. Actually, living was getting so much easier, because I had someone who smiled when he saw me, was eager to talk to me, kissed me like he'd missed me since the last one.

I watched the sun set, the ocean looking for a moment like it had caught fire, before deep shades of blue and indigo moved in and the stars sparkled. I sighed. It was so peaceful.

"I never want to leave here," I whispered.

He scooted down until his face was level with mine as we lay on our sides. "Be a beach bum with me, then. We'll braid hair and sell beads and learn to surf."

I grinned, liking that crazy dream. "I'll train seagulls to steal picnic baskets so we never have to leave the sand."

He pulled me closer so he could kiss me. It was a lazy kiss, the kind where he didn't have anything else in mind but to caress and explore my mouth with lips, tongue, and teeth. I think I loved that kind of kiss the best because he gave all his attention to the act, unhurried and content. Of course, it started little fires inside me that smoldered with languid desire and made me squirm closer, trail my hands down his chest and back, adding fuel to the flames. I felt him smile against my lips before he lifted his head and moved to kiss my neck.

I hated to rush him, really did love him slow and steady like that, but I ached for him. His teeth scraped, his tongue soothed, and then his lips sucked just below my ear. Moaning, I gripped the muscles of his back and pressed myself into him, delighted to feel he was aching for me too.

“You know”—I gasped as he moved down to my chest—“there is one problem to never leaving the beach.”

“What’s that?” he asked before devoting himself to my left nipple.

My thoughts scattered, but I grabbed them back because I had a point to make.

“Much more than this... Mmm... It’s actually illegal.” I threaded my fingers through his silky hair.

He lifted his head to look me in the eyes as he pushed me to my back and knelt between my legs. The position brought to mind our first time again. My heart fluttered in my chest.

“Well, then,” he said, his voice that growly one already, “we’ll just have to avoid any exposure.”

“Exposure?” I asked, eyeing the direction of the house and the trees that blocked us from the view of anyone farther up the hill.

He leaned over me, unzipping my shorts. “All your naughty bits will have to stay covered up.”

Seemed a little anticlimactic to me. Then he settled back between my legs, stretched out so his feet draped over the tailgate and my thighs were under each of his arms. He dipped his head and exhaled slowly, his hot breath washing over my dick through the cotton of my briefs.

“Oh, okay.” I grunted, gripping the nearest pillows.

Yeah, that was a very stimulating sensation. And it got even better when he pressed his open mouth to me and did it again, this time with his tongue pressing down, firm and warm. I gasped, thanking God that I’d worn underwear. There were, apparently, great pleasures to be had both when I didn’t and when I did.

“Oh God.” I moaned when he managed to get one of my balls into the dark heat of his mouth. He turned his head to treat the other one too, moving his hands lazily back and forth on either side of my waist, petting me as he gave me a new appreciation for a thin layer of cotton. Having his mouth on me without it was a beautiful experience, to be sure, but this was just the right amount of torture to get me hard and desperate to come in a wickedly thrilling way.

He rubbed his cheek on me like a cat, marking me. Then I felt him pull the waist of my briefs down and suck my dick into his mouth. So much for keeping covered up flew through my mind a nanosecond before I groaned and tried to arch up. He held me down with his arms over my thighs and his hands flat on my stomach as he bobbed his head slowly, his lips wet

and tight around me. I shivered and reached down to warn him, but I didn't need to, because he was already sucking, anticipating the explosion. When it crashed through me like the waves beside us, I cried out and gripped him with my knees, feeling him hum as he swallowed it all down.

"Oh, Wes." I sighed, my heart slamming in my chest as he ran his tongue around the head of my dick and sent little spasms of pleasure tripping through me for just a little longer. He knew me so well.

I stared up at the stars, watching a distant plane move slowly above us, as he replaced my briefs and planted a lingering kiss on me. Then he zipped my shorts, covering me up completely again. When he loomed over me, I could only think one thing.

"I want you under the trees, under the stars," I said, quoting his text to me from when he wanted to meet me in the park that first time. "Laid bare before me, mine to take, to love. Come to me in darkness, as we tick into tomorrow. I want you under the trees, under the stars."

His smile was more beautiful than anything I'd seen in my whole life. "I finally got what I wanted," he whispered.

"Me too," I whispered back, pulling him down for a kiss. "What else do you want, my friend?" I murmured against his lips.

His crinkled-up green eyes were all I could see. He settled his strong body on top of mine, resting himself fully, not sparing me an ounce of his weight. His dick was like a steel rod between us. I groaned, loving both the way he pinned me down and the promise of that dick in my hands, mouth, body.

He kissed me, that pure-sex kiss, and rubbed against me slowly. Then he lifted his head and the rest of him up and away before he stood and hopped over the tailgate. How he moved so agilely while that hard, I didn't know. He held a hand up for me, a rogue's grin on his face, his cock's rigidity obvious behind his khakis.

"Right," I said, getting up and stumbling forward to stand beside him. "Inside, so we don't get arrested."

"Walk in front of me," he said, lacing our fingers together so I could curl mine into his palm.

I looked to the deck, just seeing Pumpkin and Alan still tucked together on the chaise. "They'll still see you."

He chuckled, following me. "I don't care who sees me. I just want to watch your ass while you walk."

I laughed, glancing back and finding he was, indeed, watching intently. So I picked up my pace, tugging him along, eager to undress so he could see as much of me as he wanted for the rest of the night.

Chapter Eighteen

On the Fourth, it seemed like every house near the beach was set up on the sand with a game of some kind and a table of drinks or snacks. Brian and Jean-Louis had put down a Twister mat, and Roger was trying to entice every muscle-bound jock who sauntered by to come play with him. Wes and I sat in the sand by Pumpkin and Alan, laughing at Roger's attempts, watching the sun set again.

Wes had refused to let me get a beer or even a fruity little wine cooler. But I'd discovered I could kiss him after he took a drink of his beer and taste it by running my tongue all over the inside of his mouth. He hadn't caught on yet, but I knew he was enjoying my attentions from the hard bulge against my lower back as I sat tucked against him.

Wes took another gulp of his beer. I waited for him to swallow, then turned and pulled him down for another kiss. As I slid my tongue over his and the roof of his mouth, he moaned into me. I licked around a little more, then pulled back, enjoying the taste of beer and him, and gave his lips a peck.

"You little shit." He grinned. "I just figured out what you're doing."

"What?" I tried for innocence, failing since I blushed.

"You're drinking through me." He laughed, and so did Pumpkin and Alan. "You kiss me like a nympho after every drink I take."

"Do not," I muttered, blushing hotter. A nympho? Good grief.

He nuzzled my neck, biting me softly. "Kiss me like that again, and I might have to take you inside before the fireworks." He rubbed his cock into my back, as if I needed help understanding what he meant.

I nibbled my bottom lip. Tempting as that suggestion was, I wanted my first Fourth of July party complete with fireworks just a little bit more. He took another drink, staring me in the eyes, and laughed at me when I didn't kiss him this time. But he did pull me tight to him and rest one arm across my chest.

I was lost in the warmth and scent of smoke, ocean, and Wes for a while, just listening to the conversations around me and watching the sun finally set as people had fun all over the beach. I was suddenly aware that I was comfortable. Not nervous at all. Was Wes still the reason? Would I always need him near to feel like this in a crowd?

Now was a good time to find out. If I freaked, I could always run back to him.

I sat up, making him look at me. "I'm going to get a drink."

He grinned. "Something—"

"Yeah, yeah." I stood. "I'll be a good boy."

"Part of why I love you." He winked at me before returning to his car talk with Alan.

Oh yeah, that kind of thing helped. Practically bouncing, I headed up the beach to the table slowly sinking into the sand from the weight of the different drinks piled on it. I looked for something nonalcoholic, but there weren't any obvious two-liter bottles in sight.

"If you find a Bud Light, send up a flare."

I smiled and looked at the girl standing beside me. She smiled back, teeth dazzling white and blue eyes bright. She made me think of that blonde actress who played ditzes in those spoof movies but who was actually smart in real life. Her little summer dress was pale yellow with tiny pink flowers. She was cute.

"Same thing if you see a Coke," I said.

She held up a finger and ducked under the table. When she came back up, she handed a sixteen-ounce bottle to me.

"Hey, thanks." I took it from her. "Shoot, it's warm."

We both looked back at the overburdened table—no ice in sight.

"Yeah," she said with a little laugh, "good luck with that."

I suddenly realized I felt perfectly fine. God, this was actually easy!

"I'm Tanya." She gave me her hand.

"Mal." She had soft skin and pink fingernail polish. Her thumb rubbed the back of my hand before she let go.

"Do you live around here?" she asked, her face open and curious.

I shook my head. "Just here for the Fourth, but I'll be going to UCLA in the fall." That seemed like something relevant to share.

"Yeah?" Her face lit up. "Me too! I'm finally a sophomore."

"Freshman. Did you have trouble with your credits or something?" I hoped that wasn't a stupid question, but couldn't think of a reason for her saying "finally" like that.

She rolled her eyes. "I thought it was in the bag at the end of spring. But then I discovered I wasn't doing so well in this horrible trig class." She shrugged.

"Oops." Hadn't she kept track of her progress?

"Yeah, but that's what summer sessions are for." She winked at me.

I chuckled obligingly. "Well, at least you sound like you know what you're doing. I haven't even seen the campus yet."

She stepped closer. "It's a great school. You'll find your groove and love it. And hey," she said with a grin as she touched my upper arm, "now you've already got a friend on campus."

Oh my God! Was she flirting with me?

"Do you know what you're going to study?" she asked, standing close enough that I could smell her vanilla perfume.

I blinked at her, trying to wrap my head around the fact that a girl was actually flirting with me. “Computer science,” I said, just to keep this going. I was with Wes. I knew that, wanted that, but this... Well, this was really interesting. And a little confusing.

“Oh, I know a few people in that field. You don’t look like a computer geek, though.” She winked at me again, definitely flirty.

I actually looked down at myself. A red T-shirt with the white stripes and stars of a flag hugged my chest a little tighter than I was used to, but Wes had said it looked good when he bought it for me that morning. Cargo shorts that somehow managed to make my legs look a little less skinny. Bare feet. Yeah, I guess I wasn’t geeked out at the moment. When I looked back up, she giggled at me and touched my arm again.

“Are you here with anyone, Mal?”

I nodded, but I didn’t want to tell her who I was there with. It wasn’t like I was going to do anything with her, would probably never see her again, but I kind of wanted to keep the possibility of hooking up with her alive. Wait. God, what was I doing? Wasn’t I gay now? Couldn’t she tell?

“Of course you are.” She smiled. “High school sweetheart?”

“No, we met earlier this summer.” Of course I was? Like someone like me couldn’t possibly be single? I felt like I was in a different dimension.

“Oooh, summer lovin’,” she sang with a little wiggle-and-giggle thing. I smiled at her, trying to figure out if I liked that, if this was turning me on.

Then she picked up a marker someone had left on the table. She scrawled her name and a phone number on a square red napkin and handed it to me with another flirty grin.

“In case your summer fling fizzles on campus.” She winked again. Okay, those were kind of annoying.

“Um, thanks,” I said, taking the napkin. And what exactly are you going to do with it, Malcolm?

She suddenly leaned in and kissed my cheek. “See you around, Mal,” she said in my ear before walking away, swinging her little hips so her dress swished around her thighs. I watched her long enough to see her look back over her shoulder. Then I looked down at the napkin.

Man, that was all just so...surreal. A pretty girl had given me her phone number. I wasn’t really attracted to her, but then, I hadn’t been immediately attracted to Wes when I met him either. Was that normal, or should I be panting after her already? But I loved Wes! Why did I care that—Because it was a first. I’d never had anyone pay attention to me, and now I had a great guy in love with me and a cute girl offering to see me again sometime.

Part of me did want to call her, find out where that could go. If it could go anywhere at all. Would a real date with her make me want her? What did that mean when I still wanted Wes? Because I did want Wes. I did love him.

I set the Coke down and turned around to see him curled up and resting his chin on his knees. He was staring out at the water, but something made me think he'd only just looked there. He seemed tense, stressed. Had he watched her flirting with me? Was he jealous? Disappointed? I suddenly wanted to bury the napkin in the sand, but I didn't want to chance having her see that. I wasn't that cruel. I wouldn't be calling her, though. I tucked it into the pocket on my thigh and walked back to Wes.

For some reason, chancing her seeing me cuddle back up with him didn't bother me at all. When I stood beside him, though, he didn't open up to let me.

"Can I sit with you again?" I asked the top of his head.

He looked up at me, clearly surprised. His gaze flicked to the table—confirming he had watched—but then he pushed his legs out and rested his hands on his thighs. It wasn't exactly an invitation, but at least he wasn't all closed up anymore.

I sat down between his knees and scooted back until I could lean against his chest. I sighed, relaxing, letting him support me. When he didn't make a move to touch me at all, I reached for both his hands and pulled his arms around me. I wiggled against him and made a happy sound, determined that he'd see I was where I wanted to be.

Finally his arms tightened around me, and he nuzzled into my neck to drop a kiss and sigh against my skin. I smiled, tilting my head to let him in, and rested my hands on his thighs to tickle my palms with the hairs there. He gave me another kiss, and then both of us jumped when a huge red, white, and blue explosion lit up the sky over the water.

Someone started singing the anthem, then everyone was, and it filled me with patriotism as I held the long fingers of the man I loved and watched my first Fourth of July party fireworks display.

Chapter Nineteen

Lying in bed with Wes in the morning, just cuddled up and lazy, was one of my most favorite things in the world now. We talked and laughed, kissed, and sometimes made plans. So it felt perfectly natural to broach a subject I'd been mulling over, despite the bit of distance he was still maintaining from last night.

"Since we're going to the same school in a few weeks," I said, toying with his hair, "what do you think about maybe living together?"

He blinked at me and looked...uncomfortable.

I blushed, my heart thudding hard. "Oh. Um, that's a bad idea, then?"

He rolled onto his back and stared up at the ceiling, sighing.

Shit. I closed my eyes, not wanting to see when he said he loved me but not that much.

"When I was your age, I was all over the place. Meeting new people, dating all kinds of guys. Then I met—" He cut himself off, and I opened my eyes to see him shaking his head like he didn't want to go there. "Things started to change a couple years ago. I stopped wanting to just have fun."

He closed his eyes and turned his head toward me. When he looked at me, I got the feeling he was expecting something painful to happen.

"I want to be in a long-term, committed relationship, Mal."

I frowned because, damn him, he was expecting me to say that wasn't what I wanted. I wondered who it was he'd met and what he'd done to Wes.

He huffed a breath and looked away, rubbing his eyes. "I know. I shouldn't expect that from someone your age—"

"Asshole."

He flinched and looked at me again, his eyes wide.

"I'm eighteen, so I couldn't possibly know what I want? Well, what if I do know?"

I didn't. Not entirely. I knew I wanted him, but other than that I didn't have a fucking clue what I wanted. I wasn't going to lie there and let him assume I'd run for the hills because he'd said he wanted a commitment, though. Yes, sweet holy hell, Wes Kinney was saying he wanted me and nobody but me. That right there was reason enough to pass out. Maybe commitment was what I wanted too.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, love me and live with me and all that stuff." I cleared my throat and relaxed because I sounded angry. I tried again, softer this time. "Really, Wes, I may not have known a lot of love in my life, but I know what I feel for you, and I don't want to lose that."

“What about that girl?”

I didn’t see any point in hiding what I’d done. It seemed stupid and selfish now, though. “I threw her number in the trash last night.”

“Yeah, but first you took it.”

Yeah, I’d set us up for this but good.

“You’re beautiful, Mal,” he said in a sad voice that made the statement anything but a compliment. “People are going to flirt with you. Come on to you.”

“I just wasn’t sure what to do. I didn’t want to be mean.”

His green eyes searched my face like he was trying to see into my thoughts, so I gave him some of them.

“I was curious, Wes. Amazed. A girl was flirting with me! Actively flirting, not like those girls at the ice-cream shop that day. She came over and started it all, and I just kind of went with it. It was interesting and kind of surreal.” I covered the side of his face with my palm, feeling the prickle of his stubble. “But I’m where I want to be right now. This is what I want, Wes.”

“You want to be with a guy.”

Was that the problem? I frowned again.

“It’s a little late to change my mind, Wes.”

“No, it isn’t. Maybe you’re bi. If you’re with a girl, you wouldn’t have to hide from your parents or worry about bullies or—”

“Stop!” I got on top of him, holding his arms down beside his head. “Listen to me, Wes. You are what I want. I’m not...settling. I love you!”

He looked hard at me again, so I stared back. I didn’t know what else to say. That this amazing man didn’t have the confidence to believe I’d choose him over someone—everyone—else just didn’t make sense. Couldn’t he see how wonderful he was?

Maybe the time for words was over. I kissed him, all tongue and lips and delving deep inside him. He made a small sound that seemed a little sad and a lot needy as his hands slid over my back and those strong arms held tight. Poor Wes.

I gentled my kiss, wanting to show him I loved him, not just that I desired him. The difference between want and need, I guessed. Maybe too it was important right then to show him that I didn’t hesitate to love the fact that he was very definitely male.

He sighed as I started kissing my way down his body. I gripped his biceps, feeling their strength, and nuzzled into the hair on his chest. Smiling up at him watching me, I made sure to lick and rub my face on him so he’d know I was happy with his maleness there. He gave me a small grunt and a little grin.

I devoted myself to his nipples, flicking them with the tip of my tongue to get them all pointy before I sucked them bright red. He was humming by then, so I nipped to get a groan. I

did love his sounds.

I wiggled down farther, pressed my chest against his erection, and sucked at his abs. I think he tensed them up so I could properly appreciate every ridge and valley with tongue and lips. I'd never done it before, but I managed to suck up a mark just south of his navel, where his skin was soft and smooth. It felt like I'd signed my name.

He was biting his bottom lip when I looked up at him, hunger all over that handsome face.

I chuckled when his cock poked my chin. I didn't have any scratchy stubble to torment him with, but it sounded like my baby-smooth cheek did the trick anyway. I rubbed and licked, hoping he'd see this for the happiness it was. His dick was just about the best toy I could ever have to play with. There wasn't a single thing I didn't love about it. The soft skin on my tongue, the salty taste—suck, suck—that musky male scent trapped in the hairs at its base—tug, nibble—and the way it made my mouth open wide to take it all the way in—swallow.

“Ugh, Mal!”

I pushed up on my hands, bobbing my head, only to discover that he could thrust up and do it himself. I stayed put, sucking as he pulled back, and let him fuck my mouth. See, Wes, see? Look what I let you do to me. Wouldn't if I didn't love you.

I held still and tried hard not to follow him when he pressed up into me and came. I did manage to gentle my sucking and relax a bit as I swallowed every spurt he gave me. When he groaned, I lifted off and crawled close on my knees. I grasped my dick, then pulled just three times before I was coming all over him, painting him with stripes of white. I was weirdly proud that one of them hit his chin as he watched me.

I kind of collapsed over him, catching myself on one hand. I took a deep breath, savoring the scent of sex, and slid my hand through the mess I'd made. Looking him right in those shining and hugely dilated green eyes, I swirled a bit of cum into the plum mark I'd made on him.

“My Wes,” I said, hearing the rasping depth of my voice and enjoying the shiver that shot through him.

He nodded at me, still sucking in deep lungfuls of air. Well, yay. I think he might get it now. Good boy. I chuckled at myself and flopped down onto my side next to him.

He turned and kissed my forehead. “I do want to.”

“Hmm?”

“Live with you at school. We can get an apartment.”

I smiled, feeling the heat of happiness blossom inside me.

“An apartment would be great. My parents are paying for everything for me, and they said that was an option.”

He didn't need to say it. I could see it in his eyes.

"I haven't told them anything about us, and I'm not going to. But only they won't know. I want to be out with you everywhere else in every other situation."

He smiled his sweet smile. "I can live with that. And if you ever want to tell them, I'll be right there with you, if you want."

"Thank you," I said, though I doubted that would happen anytime soon.

He rolled onto his side, apparently fine with being sticky. I could hear the excitement in his voice as he said, "It's going to be so amazing, Mal. So free. We'll meet new people, have fun, and spend every night together."

"Like being here."

He nodded and gave me a little kiss before he made an amused sound. "And study really hard," he said as though remembering the purpose of the whole thing.

"Every now and then."

Chapter Twenty

I took one last look around my bedroom even though I knew there was nothing left to pack. Wes and I had a new apartment within walking distance of campus, and he'd taken care of all the furnishings by getting his stuff out of storage. He had some really nice things, and our apartment was beautiful and right near a little park. Both made me wonder just how much his restoration business was earning him, since we seemed to be about to start living outside my means. I grinned to myself, though, thinking of how we'd already made grunting, sweaty use of most of the horizontal surfaces—and a few of the vertical ones too.

So, yeah, this was it. I had the last of my clothes and bathroom stuff in my new messenger bag, along with my laptop and all its accessories. Just one last scowl from the parents and I would be outta there, meeting Wes across the street and then driving down to the city.

"I don't understand," my father said as I came down the stairs, "why you feel the need for a roommate."

"We're friends," I said again. "And it'll be nice to have someone I can rely on in a new place." I didn't even have to fake the calm I felt knowing Wes would be with me for all this. Sometimes it felt overwhelming, but then he was there, and everything was fine again. I was still convinced that meant something.

"All right," he said and handed me a check. "That should cover everything for the rest of this month and next."

"Thanks, Dad." I didn't bother looking at the sum, just tucked the check into the flap of my bag. My father expressed his feelings monetarily, so I was sure there would be enough for my half of the rent, groceries, other bills, and still more for anything I'd need for school. I tried to take comfort in that.

He gave me his hand, we shook, and then he walked into the den and closed the door.

"Well," my mother said, looking uncomfortable as usual. "You got everything from the wash?"

"Yes."

"Your phone charger?"

"Yes."

She nodded and took a step closer. Was she going to hug me? But then she just patted my shoulder and walked away. "Call if you need more money," she said over her shoulder.

I supposed that was her way of saying she loved me, so I said, "Okay, I will," because I guess I loved her too.

And that was that. I walked out the door and across the street, taking off my bag to leave it in the front seat of Juan before going into the Kinney house. I was, apparently, family now and

had been told to stop knocking before I came in. I loved that.

I found Wes in the kitchen, his mother wrapped around him.

"Mom," he said patiently down to the top of her head. "I'm not going off to war."

"Oh shut up. You're still my baby. Give me a minute."

Wes smiled at me, the look saying he had no choice but to indulge his mom's farewell to her baby. I blew him a kiss and went back into the living room.

His little sister met me beside the red couch.

"So now you're Wes's boyfriend?" Katie asked, her face screwed up with confusion.

"Yes, now I am," I answered, squatting down to her level. "I didn't know I liked boys before," I told her, trying to figure out how to explain to a kid and then wondering if I even needed to.

"Oh. I didn't either until Jared Webb kissed me after phys ed last year." She looked at me solemnly. "Carter likes girls, but he's going through a phase, Mom says."

Huh? "A phase?"

"Yeah. He's a hair puller."

I laughed. "He should stop doing that soon."

"That's what Mom said. I'm hopeful."

I laughed again. Then Carter hollered for her to hurry up or he was going to delete her character off the video game. She ran off, threatening to delete his if he wasn't nice.

"She's almost as adorable as you are," Wes said behind me.

Before I could comment, Mrs. Kinney stalked over, her arms open. "Don't think you're getting out of here without hugging me too, Malcolm."

"Wouldn't dream of trying," I said, letting her nearly crush me.

"You take good care of him," she whispered by my ear.

"Definitely," I whispered back, smiling at Wes.

Then Mr. Kinney was there too, and more hugs were required from Wes and me. Even Katie and Carter came over, the latter reluctant to be all mushy with anyone, so of course Mrs. Kinney latched on to him.

This was how family said good-bye. With hugs and a few tears and well wishes. With requirements of calling when we got there and to make sure to lock the doors before we went to bed. Not one handshake or awkward stare.

"Phew," Wes said when we made it to the driveway, the Kinneys gathered on the porch to see us off.

I turned back to wave one more time as I opened Juan's passenger door. Waves and smiles from each one of them. I didn't bother to look back at my own house.

Wes started Juan, making him growl, as I slipped in and cradled my bag between my feet. The sound of this car still got to me, and I smiled over at Wes as he backed us down the drive.

“What did you call this place once?” he asked, stopping at the corner. “Vanilla something?”

I chuckled. “Yeah, my vanilla-pudding world.”

“You know I’m not the only sprinkle now, right?” He grinned and winked.

I laughed and leaned over to kiss him. “Sure, but you were the first and will always be the best sprinkle I’ve ever known.”

He took hold of my chin and kissed me more deeply for a moment. “Love you too,” he said with that sweet smile.

I sat back with a sigh, loving him and actually feeling better about whatever would come next, simply because I had Wes.

Missy Welsh

Missy lives in Akron, Ohio, near the university and has an evil day job that, thankfully, leaves her plenty of time to write her little heart out. She discovered M/M in 2009 and finished writing her first story in January of 2010. It was accepted by Loose Id Publishing in May 2010, and Missy states she's still flying high from that. She's currently working on a bunch of other stories because her muse will not be silenced.

Find out more about Missy at <http://missywelsh.com>.