



LIFE AFTER
LOVE BY THE NUMBERS SERIES
Math

S.L. DANIELSON

LIFE AFTER *Math*

*SEQUEL TO LOVE BY THE
NUMBERS*

S. L. DANIELSON

ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the South African Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated and is punishable by imprisonment and a fine."

Cover Artist: Reese Dante

Editor: Dawn Sievers

Life After Math © 2010 SL Danielson

ISBN # 9781920484040

Attention Readers: This book uses US English. Thank you.
All rights reserved.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission. All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental. The Licensed Art Material is being used for illustrative purposes only; any person depicted in the Licensed Art Material, is a model.

Attention Readers: This book uses US English. Thank you.

PUBLISHER

<http://www.silverpublishing.info>

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your purchase of this title. The authors and staff of Silver Publishing hope you enjoy this read and that we will have a long and happy association together.

Please remember that the only money authors make from writing comes from the sales of their books. If you like their work, spread the word and tell others about the books, but please refrain from sharing this book in any form. Authors depend on sales and sales only to support their families.

If you see "free shares" offered or cut-rate sales on pirate sites of this title, you can report the offending entry to copyright@silverpublishing.info

Thank you for not pirating our titles.

Lodewyk Deysel
Publisher
Silver Publishing
<http://www.silverpublishing.info>

DEDICATION:

Dedicated to math tutors everywhere.

TRADEMARKS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

iTunes: Apple Computer
Valium: Roche Holding AG

CHAPTER 1: FRESHMAN YEAR

"Let's see, you got one, two, three, four, five wrong. Not bad for college algebra!" Scott announced proudly.

Jared smirked. "I only do well because you help me. You got me through high school and that Mrs O'Reilly. Whatta hag she was!" the teens laughed in remembrance. They sat back on their bed in their tiny, shared dorm room.

"Dude, can this room be any smaller?" Jared commented. "We barely fit in this bed together and I can almost reach the desk just laying here." He stretched out his long, tan arm and brushed the handles of the drawers of the student-sized desk.

Scott shrugged his large shoulders. "Eh, it could be worse. At least this way we can tell right away if the other one's home. I kinda like it actually. Can't spend too much time away from you, I'd get withdrawal symptoms."

Jared leaned forward and kissed his lover. He intertwined his long fingers through the young man's thick strands of hair. The sterling silver commitment ring caught the sunlight and shone brightly. "I miss you, too. We used to spend almost every waking hour together."

"Yeah, we did, especially early on. I wanted to get to know who was behind that gorgeous blond, curly hair

and brown eyes... and that incredible body of yours."

Jared kissed him again. "Mmm, you're one to talk. Those blue eyes and that thick brown hair of yours had me from the moment we met."

"What a year that was. Who'd have thought looking at us that we'd end up together, going steady and at the same college?" Scott cupped Jared's pointy chin and kissed him again. "You liking college so far?"

"Eh, it's all right, I guess. It's amazing I even got in after turning down that baseball scholarship. My mom is paying in what she can, but it's tough on her. 'Course, my favorite part is that I get to be with my guy. I'm really glad to be away from my father. I miss my mom though," Jared lamented.

Scott held him close. "I miss my folks too. They said they're coming to visit next week. Never thought I'd be counting the days to see them," he said with a grin.

Jared smirked. "Me either. I miss 'em too. Your mom is such a freakin' awesome cook! She 'doesn't get to do that here, though, we'll just go out for dinner."

"True. Well, holiday break isn't too far off. We'll have Christmas together like we did last year."

"Only this time without the awkwardness?" Jared asked sarcastically.

"Very much so," Scott said in a reassuring tone. "We're in a very different place this year. You're my boyfriend! We need to focus on our future together now. I dream about it all the time, ya know. Getting married, raising adopted kids, and getting a big house together. We'll be together forever!"

Jared smiled at the other man. "Sounds good to me! I can't picture myself with anyone else but you."

Scott leaned in and kissed him. "Me either. I wondered if we could survive living together this first year, but it's going great!"

"Sure is." Jared licked his lips and looked at Scott seductively. "I've got an idea for a little bit of fun. Why don't we play strip algebra? Every problem I get right you lose an item and every one wrong I lose one? I already lost five, which more than uncovers me. You got them all right; I'd say we should both be buck naked right now."

Scott laughed. "You certainly know how to make math exciting now, don't ya?"

"Haven't I always?"

They kissed again, and began undressing each other. Scott pulled off Jared's tee shirt and covered the bare, tan chest with kisses. Jared unbuttoned his lover's shirt and whisked it from his body, revealing the slimmer 215-pound

Scott, down a total of 50 pounds from the 265 he was a year ago.

"Lookin' damn sexy, you are," Jared noted. He unzipped Scott's shorts and burrowed his hand inside. Scott moaned a bit and opened his legs so Jared could grip him more.

"You're the hottest guy in this school," Scott replied on another moan.

They kissed more and shed their shorts at the same time. Jared paused briefly and tossed their books to the side before returning to his mutually naked lover, waiting for him with open arms and legs.

"Come here... it's been too long," Scott requested. Jared lay down atop the brunet, their bodies pressed together tightly. The blond kissed his way down to Scott's crotch and slipped the dripping cock inside his mouth. Scott cried out a little bit. "Damn I missed that!"

Jared pursed his lips around the organ tighter and sucked his lover like a straw. He ran his hands around Scott's slimmer hips and over the swelling testicles. They both began to sweat and the moisture caused them to slide against each other as they moved.

Scott looked up and saw Jared's sterling silver commitment ring shimmering with the sunlight from the

window. They were on the third floor so no one could see what they were doing, luckily. He joined hands with his lover and ran his free hand through the blond locks positioned at his crotch. Jared moaned a bit and grabbed onto Scott's large legs. He pulled his head away for a moment to catch his breath. Scott looked into his lover's dark brown eyes and gave him the signal that it was very near the time. Jared nodded and stuck out his tongue and licked the entire length of the long, quivering cock. As soon as he finished, a white fountain of fluid spewed forth, hitting Jared squarely in the chest. Both young men smiled. Jared collapsed on Scott's body and rested his head on his shoulder.

"Awesome, baby! Just awesome!" They kissed sweetly for a moment, the shared fluid on their forms made them slide a bit. Scott rested his hands on Jared's muscular ass and held on. He loved just holding the man tight.

"Thank you! I'd love to get some more practice with you for sure," he mused.

Jared laughed and kissed his lover. "I'll be sure to rearrange my schedule so I'm off every night."

Scott rolled to his side so Jared could fall in beside him. They didn't even bother to cover themselves yet; they enjoyed laying naked together in full view. It was very

erotic to both of them. "My turn to make you come now."

Jared grinned and ran his hands over Scott's ass. "How about I come inside of you?"

Scott pouted and whined. "Oh. I was hopin' to suck you dry. I've been practicing."

"Practicing? On who?" Jared spouted.

"No one! I've just been getting extra-thick milkshakes to help build up the muscles of the mouth."

Jared ran his fingers over Scott's round, full lips. The same lips that had garnered his attention and called his name a hundred times. The same lips that kissed him, talked to him, and helped to make love to him. Scott's lips. "Suck me dry, baby."

They smiled at each other and changed positions once again. Jared laid flat on his back while Scott knelt before him. The brunet's long hair covered his actions as his face disappeared over Jared's crotch. Before too long, Jared reached behind him to grasp the pillows, then the headboard. "Babe... baby! Omigosh... you have been prac—" Jared gasped.

"Shhh, I can't talk with my mouth full," Scott warned him. He returned to his task and within moments Jared shot out his fluid onto Scott's chest.

Jared grabbed a nearby towel and shared it between

them. They were far from clean, but didn't care. Scott lay down on his side and held Jared to his chest. Kissing again, this time it was slow and sensual as they cupped each other's jaws and stroked them with their thumbs, relishing the closeness.

"I've really missed you," Scott said.

"I've missed you too," Jared replied. "Being roomies hasn't afforded us much opportunity to do this as much as I'd hoped. Well, we'll have to work on that."

Scott pulled Jared to him and hung on tight. "Yes, we will. I love you so much."

Smiling, Jared kissed Scott's chest. "I love you, too."

They lay together quietly while Jared used his free hand to caress Scott's hair, and Scott used his free arm to wrap around Jared's ass to hold him securely in place. He brushed his large fingers across the smooth skin, cupping it with his palm.

"You are, so handsome, Jar."

"So are you, Scotty." With one more glance at his own ring, Scott closed his eyes. They fell asleep within minutes.

Being roommates and lovers was a challenge for the two, but they were surviving well.

* * * *

The parents came to visit a week later. Scott's parents, Margaret and Martin Williams, both hugged the young men, as did Louise Adamson, Jared's mother.

"How are our wonderful sons doing?" Martin asked as he stood back from his six foot three son who met him at eye-level and whose husky build seemed to dwarf his lanky frame . Scott's mane of wavy locks also emphasized Martin's lack of hair.

"Just fine, Dad," Scott replied. "Classes here are tough, but so far so good."

"You two getting along alright?" Margaret asked. She grinned at them both with her perfect smile and tucked a strand of her unruly brown hair behind her ear. She felt tiny next to her son and husband and usually craned her neck to look up at them both.

The two eighteen year olds joined hands. "We're doing just fine. Living together hasn't been too much of a problem. The only issue so far has been time together," Jared said.

"Oh?" Louise asked. "Too much or too little?" A tall, thin blonde woman, her brown eyes were wide as she

looked up at her five foot eleven son from her vantage point on the bed.

"Too little, at least compared to what we used to have," Scott replied while he looked into Jared's eyes and winked at him.

"Who does all the cooking?" Margaret asked.

Scott glanced up at his mom and smiled. "Cooking? Uh, well. Mostly the cafeteria."

"Scott..." she began.

"I know, I know. But you guys are paying for the cafeteria! I figured I'd best eat there. I'm making healthy choices, don't worry."

Jared intervened. "I'm with him for meals at least half the time, Mrs W, don't worry. I see that he gets something healthy like I do."

"Good, glad to hear it. Don't want you to gain back all that weight you just lost, son," Martin interjected.

"Don't worry, Dad. I'm good. I'm active." Scott nudged Jared's arm and took his hand again.

All three parents just smiled. "You two are too perfect together," Louise commented. "I'm so glad you found each other."

"Me too, Mom. Me too," Jared replied.

* * * *

Christmastime rolled around and things were still going well between the two. It'd been six months since the couple had been officially dating and they went out to celebrate. Scott bought a bouquet of red roses and paired it with a gift card for MP3 music. He presented them to his boyfriend when he arrived to pick Scott up for their date.

"Hey, handsome! Damn, you look hot!" Jared commented as he rounded the corner from the front door. He smiled at the well-dressed young man in front of him and held out his arms wide in invitation.

Scott opened his arms as well and they embraced warmly, holding on for a long moment. They drew back reluctantly, and kissed a few times. Scott caught a glimpse of his parents in the background; Margaret was grinning widely. Martin tried to look away, but couldn't help but notice the interaction.

"Hey yourself, handsome. Love that color on you. Is it sage green?"

"That's the one. I always like the earthy tones. You look awesome as usual. Love that tie." He fingered the navy accessory which was dotted with golden triangles. It lay over Scott's stomach perfectly flat. The weight he'd lost

was very noticeable.

"Thanks! Had to get a new wardrobe with all that weight I lost. Mom picked this one out herself."

Jared looked back at Margaret. "Excellent eye, Mrs W."

Margaret practically giggled. "Thank you, Jared." She glanced at her watch. "Oh my! You two will miss your reservation if you don't get moving."

Scott's eyes widened and he turned his head quickly to face the refrigerator where the roses were. His thick, wavy hair whipped his face as his head turned. "Oh, shoot! Can't forget these."

He walked to the refrigerator, opened it, and carefully pulled out the heavy vase with the roses. The paper was still on them from the florist; he wanted them to be a surprise. "Jared, these are for you."

Jared's eyes almost sparkled as he looked upon the huge package. "Scotty... holy cow! What're these?"

"A token of my love for you. Open 'em."

Jared carefully pulled back the paper and a red rose head popped out into view, and then another followed by another. Within seconds the entire bouquet was visible. The roses were deep, blood red and accompanied by baby's breath and greenery. They were long-stemmed and soared a

foot higher than the vase itself.

"Scotty... they're gorgeous! Thank you!"

"Don't forget the card."

Jared plucked the small envelope from its holder and read the message quickly. Noticing the colorful plastic card behind it and flipped it in his hand. His brown eyes dripped happy tears. "A hundred dollar gift card for iTunes? Scotty, this is too much..."

Scott put his arms around his boyfriend's shoulders. "No amount could say how much you mean to me. Think of this as a small token of my love for you. Happy six months, Jared!"

Jared threw his arms around Scott and held on tight. "Thank you, baby! Thank you so much!"

They held on for a long moment and finally drew back and kissed softly. Martin cleared his throat. "Uh, boys... I hate to break in here..."

"We're going, Dad. I'm starving, are you?"

Jared nodded and dried off his face. "Let's hit it. See you later, Mr and Mrs W."

"Bye, boys! Have fun!"

They went back to the same Italian restaurant they'd dined at just before their first time together as a couple then went back to Scott's house afterwards.

"Damn, that was good lasagna. Don't tell my mom, but that was even better than hers!" Jared mused.

"I won't if you won't." Scott said with an air of amusement. He looked at the driveway and saw his parents' car was gone. "Well, looks like my folks' car is gone. We have the place to ourselves."

Jared smiled and ran his hand up Scott's thigh. "Thank goodness. I think I'm about to jump you right here! I need to give you your gift."

Scott smiled at him and took the tan hand. "We can do that later, after we have dessert."

Jared licked his lips. "I'm all up for that."

They hopped out of the car and walked inside and back to Scott's room. It was a perfect ending to their six-month anniversary meal.

* * * *

The following day Louise held a combination Christmas party/divorce soiree at her apartment. She'd invited only Margaret, Martin, and Scott. She cleared her throat and gathered their attention.

"My friends, I get to share the happy news that the twenty year siege of hell will finally end." She put her arm

around her son's shoulder and held him close. "My papers become final on February twenty-eighth next year. Douglas will be out of our lives forever!" Margaret, Martin and Scott all hugged her in congratulations. Jared kissed his mother's cheek.

"We're finally rid of that rat!"

"I wish I'd done it fifteen years ago, my precious son. At last, we are free."

Martin put his hand on her shoulder. "Was he always so terrible? How could you live with him all these years?"

Louise shook her head. "Not in the first couple of years. It wasn't until Jared was a child that things started heading south. I saw his true non-parenting skills. I knew then. That's when things began to get violent."

Scott looked over at Jared and took his hand. "That long, dude?"

"Yes. Over a decade I'd say. We just put up with it because we thought it was something we had to deal with."

"Not anymore. You're with me now, we'll look after you. Always."

Jared grinned at his lover. "I need to give you your present."

Scott winked at him. "You did, last night."

They kissed quickly. "Not *just* that. That was a gift to each other. I have another one for you. Come on into my room."

They disappeared around the corner of the apartment and into Jared's small bedroom. He knelt down and unearthed a package from under his bed. It was wrapped in metallic blue paper with a brilliant white bow on it. "For you, Scotty."

"Thank you! Well, let's see what this is." He methodically pulled back the tape and slid the box from the beautiful paper. Slipping off the top of the box, he picked up what was inside. "Oh, Jared! They're awesome!" It was a pair of swim trunks to match Jared's, in the same size as his. "I never thought I'd see the day where you and I would be the same size! Thank you, baby."

They kissed again. "You're welcome. Now we'll match at the pool. We'll look like twins."

They both laughed and Scott set the box aside and cupped his lover's face. "We need some mistletoe nearby, you're gonna get kissed big time."

Jared reached up to his dresser and held up a small plastic sprig he'd found at the discount store. "Will this do?"

Scott wet his lips. "Definitely."

* * * *

The rest of freshman year went without incident as the two did well in their courses. Scott continued to assist Jared with his college algebra course, sometimes utilizing the erotic method Jared had suggested earlier in the year. But this was not to last. Freshman apartments had to flip to the incoming class, leaving the two in separate units. Regretfully, they helped each other move and began the next chapter of their college life.

CHAPTER 2: SOPHOMORE YEAR

Scott had joined the tutor's club for math. Sitting down, he took in the room; it was him and perhaps six others. Then, a late arrival, a young Asian man, ran in and sat down next to him in the front row. Scott looked him over quickly. Short, perhaps five feet six inches, slim build, and jet black hair that fell to just below his jaw line. The man's facial features were delicate but housed a lovely pair of brown eyes. His smile... Scott couldn't tell yet. He was a very attractive young man, to be sure.

"I miss anything?" the man asked.

"No, not a thing. We're just getting started," Scott told him in a reassuring tone.

"Good. I'm Daniel Sato, by the way."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Scott Williams."

"Good to meet you too. You a math tutor too?"

"Yeah, algebra and trig. You?"

"Calculus usually. I think I met half my math class last year. I was the only one who understood it."

Scott laughed. "Same here. It was like that in high school too."

The class began and the two remained silent during the entire thing. Finally, after thirty-five minutes of

listening to the droning of the instructor, it was over. Scott stood up to leave; Daniel hurriedly gathered his books and followed.

"Scott, wait up a second."

"Oh, sorry about that. I've got another class. What's up?"

Daniel shifted his feet a bit and couldn't meet Scott's gaze. "I was wondering, well, if you weren't busy later, we could kinda talk math over coffee or something."

Scott smiled. For once he wasn't the shy one trying to make the moves. "I've got class and then I've got a date later on tonight. Maybe tomorrow?"

Daniel fell silent for a moment. "Oh. I didn't know that you were seeing someone. Sorry about that."

Scott felt a surge of sorrow run through his veins. "I'm sorry too. See this?" He held up his right hand. "It's a promise ring."

Daniel studied the silver band carefully. The touch of his small hands was so light it could barely be felt on Scott's skin. The young man was very cute, but Scott wouldn't dare jeopardize his relationship with Jared. "It's nice. How long have you been together?"

"Just over a year. We got promised last year, about two months after we started dating."

Daniel frowned. "Wow, that's kinda early, isn't it? You guys must be really sure about things."

Scott took a breath, but shifted the words in his mind. "We love each other. It's enough for now. I'm surprised you're not with someone."

Daniel smiled. At last Scott could see the small, white teeth that it was comprised of. All perfect. What a handsome young man he was! "Thank you for thinking so. I'm too shy."

"Ha, I don't buy that. I met you just today and you already asked me out. That's not shy."

Daniel shrugged. "I suppose not. I just thought we could still get together to discuss math. What's your major?"

"Engineering. Yours?"

"Same. At least we would have that to discuss."

"Very true. What year are you?"

"Sophomore, you?"

"Same," Scott answered. "Look, let's get together sometime. I'm still free tomorrow."

Daniel grinned. "Really?"

"Yes, really. Is seven okay?"

"That's a great time. I'll meet you at the coffee house."

Scott wrote it down. "All right, I'll see you then. Take care, Daniel."

"You too, Scott."

The two parted. Scott couldn't help but glance behind him and saw that Daniel was doing the same thing as well. They both turned their heads back quickly and walked to their destinations.

Later that evening, Jared knocked on Scott's door.

"Hey, baby!" Jared said in a lively tone.

"Hey to you, my handsome Jared. How are you?"

"Great! Better than great. I've decided on a major."

Scott shut the door and kissed him. "That's wonderful! What'd you choose?"

Jared kept his arms around Scott's neck and kissed him again. "Psychology. I figured I've been through a lot, I could be my own shrink."

Scott smiled and hugged him close. "That's great! I hope it works out for you. You're very smart, you can do it."

"Thank you my hot lover. Ready for our date?"

Scott flashed his keys for the door. "Let's go celebrate."

The two headed out for a nice dinner and then back to Scott's room for "dessert".

"Jared? You awake?" he whispered in the pitch blackness of the night.

"Hmm? Yeah, baby. What's up?"

Scott held his lover close and stroked his exposed arms softly. "That was wonderful. I've missed you. I have a feeling I'll miss you even more in the months to come."

Jared searched for Scott's face in the blackness and his hand finally came to rest on the puffy cheeks. "Why's that, hon?"

"My entire class schedule has shifted. I begin lab classes that'll kinda intrude on our evenings like this. I signed up to help tutor other students in math as well."

"Oh. I see," Jared replied coolly. "Will I get to see you at all anymore?"

Scott pulled him closer and kissed him. "I'll make the time. I'm yours and want to be with you as much as I can. I promise you."

Jared sighed. "As long as we keep seeing each other. I think things are going great as they are."

"So do I, but life interferes, especially now at

school. It won't be forever. Can you stick it out with me?"

Jared's eyes adjusted and he could finally see the large, pale face of the man he loved in the moonlight. He saw faint trails of tears from the corners of his blue eyes and wiped them away with his thumbs. "I'll do whatever it takes, my love. I promise you that." He leaned in and kissed the man softly.

Scott held him closer and pulled the sheet over their heads. The dim illumination highlighted their nude forms. Scott's eyes traveled up and down Jared's body, and his libido reacted to the sight. He reached his arms up and pulled the tan form of his lover to his pale one. "Make love to me again. I want to remember this night. Always."

Jared kissed him passionately and the two slid their bodies together again. Scott's hands skated down the soft skin and touched as much as he could. They made love once more and fell asleep, exhausted.

* * * *

A few days later, Scott knocked on Jared's door. He was greeted with a warm embrace and escorted inside. "Hi! Hey, I have someone I want you to meet."

Scott saw an imposing figure seated on the side

chair next to Jared's bed. He was at least six foot four, with blond hair and brown eyes. The stranger looked like a super-sized version of his lover. He stood up to greet him. "Hi. I'm Bret Davis. I'm in Jared's psych class. You must be Scott." He stuck out his huge tan hand to shake, which Scott met, only to feel his hand crumple under the man's crushing grip.

"Ow... nice grip there!"

Bret released his hand right away. "Oh, sorry about that! I didn't mean to hurt you. Did I?"

Scott stretched his fingers and cracked his knuckles. "No, you're good. Quite the handshake there." He looked back at his lover. "I'll have to introduce you to my new tutor partner."

Jared cocked a brow. "Who's that?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, remember I told you I was tutoring now? He's one of them too. Engineering major like me. Fellow geek. His name's Daniel."

"Ah. Is that where you were the other night?"

Scott nodded. "Yep. Two hours of talking about nothing but math. You'd have loved it."

Jared shuddered. "Holy crap. Don't you get enough math for one day?"

Scott laughed. "Nope. Love it almost as much as I

do other things." He put his arm around Jared's waist and kissed his cheek.

Bret cleared his throat. "Ah, young love. My girl and I are a lot like you two. Though, ya know, a guy and a girl..."

Jared stopped him. "We get it, we know. Scott and I have been together over a year."

"That's cool, you guys exclusive?"

Scott looked at him oddly. "Yeah, we're just us. Why?"

"That's totally cool. My girl and I broke up for a while, but we're back together now. You guys handling the stress alright?"

Jared nodded. "We're doing the best we can. It's a different universe here, that's for sure. But, we're good."

"Glad to hear that." Bret replied. "Hey, Jared, wanna join my study group? My cousin Taylor goes here too."

"Very cool. Good to have more heads working on this. What's he like?"

"He's older, in his thirties. He wanted to be a shrink and got really close, but then life happened and he had to back out. He's really super smart though and should totally be a shrink. Helps me out tons when I'm down in the

dumps."

"Sounds like a good group. Yeah, I'll go. When do they meet?"

Bret glanced at his watch. "Oh, in like two hours. How about we all catch whatever's at the cafeteria and then we'll go?"

Jared caught Scott's gaze. "All right with you, hon? Don't you have a lab tonight anyway?"

"Yeah, I sure do. Looks like we're both booked now."

"Just gotta make the most of it while you can, man," Bret offered.

Jared slipped his hand around Scott's. "Shall we? At least we can have dinner together."

Scott smiled at his lover and kissed him softly. "There is that. Come on, I'm hungry."

After dinner, Jared and Bret walked over to Bret's cousin's room. They knocked on the door and a voice bellowed in reply. "Enter."

The two students walked in and saw the man on the floor, writing notes furiously. Bret cleared his throat. "Taylor, I've got someone I want you to meet."

Shifting his feet nervously, Jared waited for the man to respond. In the meantime, he took in the sight before him. Bret's cousin had a medium build with shoulder length hair the color of a sunset.

The man finally turned to face them. His face was bearded and his bright green eyes were the perfect accent. He stood up and hugged his cousin briefly. "Well, what's your name?"

"I'm Jared Adamson. I'm in class with your cousin. Nice to meet you."

Their eyes locked for a moment, brown to green. Taylor held his hand for a moment. He was much gentler about it than Bret was. Taylor's pulse beat through his pasty white skin so strongly that Jared could actually feel it.

"Likewise. I'm Taylor Watson."

Bret broke the mysterious air between them. "Hey cuz! We're here for the study group."

Taylor laughed to himself. "Some group. Tonight it looks like just the two of you though. Have a seat anywhere you like. I'm not very formal."

Jared eyed the room. Bret took a seat on the chair stuffed back in the corner. Jared eyed the bed, but felt odd in taking the tutor's place of rest. Taylor noticed right away.

"You want my bed?"

"What? Oh, no... I—"

Taylor laughed. "Grab whatever place you want. Even the bed."

Jared smiled and relaxed a bit. He sat down on the long twin mattress and was surprised by its firmness. "Ah, now this is comfy."

Bret laughed and offered his cousin a seat by his side on the big chair. "Park it over here, Taylor. It's just the three of us."

"Very true." He grabbed some textbooks, and sat down next to his large cousin. "Shall we begin?"

They studied for about forty-five minutes before Bret excused himself to run down the hall. Jared looked the redhead over quickly, hoping not to be discovered.

Taylor smiled at him. "You like school so far?"

"Yeah, it's nice. I just wish I could see more of my lover."

"Your lover?"

Jared felt his face flush a bit. "Oh, yes sir. I'm with someone, a guy."

Taylor whacked his leg playfully. "Well, that's terrific! I'm happy for you two. Is it working out now that you're out of the confines of high school and into the close quarters and hard life of college?"

Jared nodded. "It's going good. Been an adjustment for sure. We used to hang out together all the time and could be alone a lot more. Not here. Not with the amount of homework and other things going on."

Taylor laughed. "I know what you mean. My first year was horrific at best. I had a roommate who was there all the time. I wondered how he passed anything. I couldn't even bring anyone over unless I met them at their place. It was rough. I had a lover at the time too."

"How'd you survive it?" Jared asked.

Bret walked back into the room and saw his cousin biting his lip. "Hey, what is it Taylor?"

The redhead waved his hand a bit and looked up at his kin. "I'm just telling Jared of what happened with Anthony."

"Ohhh." Bret looked over at Jared. "It wasn't pretty."

"Things were that bad right off?"

Taylor regained his composure and smiled to himself. "We didn't survive, Jared. Lots of arguments and bad timing on things. We'd met in high school, our senior year. We wanted to go to school together, live together, everything."

"How'd it work out in the end?"

Taylor wagged his head softly. "Uh, to be honest, it didn't. Look, everyone's different. My lover and I couldn't handle the constant stress and broke up in our junior year. Now, I'm not saying you two will also, but just know this isn't kid stuff anymore. You're adults now and living on your own. Just be careful with every decision you make."

Jared looked at his hand that housed the ring and kissed it. "I want us to be together forever. I know it won't be easy at all, but I think we've weathered a big storm already. We're ready for more as it comes."

Taylor smiled. "I hope you are."

After a lengthy pause, Jared met his green eyes. "Whatever happened to your lover?"

"Oh, he moved on with someone else. I still miss him a lot. We were promised and everything."

Scott glanced at his silver ring. "So are we, summer before last."

Taylor leaned forward and looked into Jared's eyes. "Look, I don't wanna scare you. I'm sure you'll make it."

Jared ran his hands through his hair. "Damn, I sure hope so. I love him so much and I want things to go great for us. I know we'll make it."

"I used to be so sure about my love too; but you just never know. Now that I'm older and wiser, I know it was

for the best."

Jared paused for a moment and took in Taylor's words. "Well, Scott and I are meant to be together. No one can tear us apart. Not ever. I'll still be with him when we're old and gray."

"I-I meant no offense." Taylor stammered. "Just be careful and make sure you cherish these years together. That's all I'm saying."

"I understand what you mean. Don't worry about it; you'll see, Scott and I can make it through anything."

Bret cleared his throat and caught the attention of the two men. "Guys, come on. Let's break up the serious crap here, huh? We're here to study. Come on, cuz, you're not getting any younger, isn't it almost your bedtime?"

Jared couldn't help but laugh and drew in a nervous breath. "Okay, that begs the question. Taylor, how old are you?"

The redhead looked him squarely in the eye. "Promise no old man cracks?"

"I promise."

"I'm thirty-five."

Jared snorted. "That's it? Damn, that's not old! You've still got red hair and you can sit on the floor still and everything."

Taylor smiled and looked the student up and down. "You look so much like my cousin. You're like his mini twin, except for the hair of course."

Jared played with his curls. "Yeah, my curly locks. I've even buzzed them once and they looked even weirder. I figure just keep 'em about this long and they're good."

"You have really nice hair, Jared. You're a good-looking young man." His eyes stayed trained on the attractive blond. Jared finally broke the stagnant stare.

"Thank you. Hey, as long as we're making promises. Quit calling me a young man and let's stick with Jared, all right?"

Taylor nodded. "Cool with me. All right, where were we?"

CHAPTER 3: SUMMERTIME

It was June of the year in between being sophomores and juniors. Jared and Scott had come home together.

They hung out at Scott's house a lot, reminding them of the days they spent together during high school.

"I miss those days a lot." Scott said while floating on an inflatable raft. "Things were a lot less busy. You were my only student. Now I've got four!"

Jared waded over and took his hand. "I know. I feel like I've hardly seen you this year, it sucks. You're always in class or tutoring or with Daniel. How is he, anyway?"

"He's good. Went home to Japan for the summer. He can only visit for three months, so the timing is perfect."

"You miss him?" Jared asked awkwardly.

Scott gave him a look. "He's just my friend, Jared. I miss him like I miss my cousins or something. Why?"

"Nothing, just curious. You two seem awful chummy when I've seen ya."

"Well no worse than you and Bret and his cousin. How'd the study group go? You got a B, didn't you?"

"Yeah! That was nice, to get a good set of grades for once. My mom was thrilled! I am too. They're both a

big help."

"Was it always just the three of you together?"

Jared scratched his head. "Mostly. Sometimes a couple of girls would join us. One of them was Bret's girl. The other one has a huge crush on Taylor."

Scott laughed. "Isn't she kinda barkin' up the wrong tree?"

"I guess it doesn't matter to her. She maybe thinks she can convert him or something I guess."

"Poor thing. That never works."

Jared nodded and laid his arms on Scott's legs. He laid his head down and sighed slowly. Kissing the hairy legs, he ran his wet hands over them. "I've missed you so much, Scott," he said quietly.

Scott saw rare tears in Jared's eyes. He hopped off the raft and held Jared in his arms. It'd been only a handful of times, but he felt Jared crying onto his shoulder. He held him tighter and steered them towards the steps to sit down. "Hey, shhhh. What's going on, baby? What's wrong?"

Jared finally looked up; his brown eyes sparkled with the tears that rolled from them. Scott kissed them away as best he could. "Like I said, I've missed you. I felt like I barely got to see you at all. I really preferred living together."

Scott kissed his hair. "I miss that too, but we've got the rest of our lives after this. Can you hang in there for two more years?"

Jared shook his head. "I gotta be honest. I dunno if I can or not, Scotty." Fresh tears spilled. "I need you with me, but it seems like we just keep finding new ways to be apart all the time. I couldn't wait for summertime to see you and hold you and just hang out with you again."

"I'm so sorry, but you could've guessed it'd get like that. College is hard. I've got the labs and the tutoring and another friend! That's huge for me!"

Jared scowled. "You don't have to tutor anyone except me and as for your other friend, I'm glad you have one, I really am..."

"But...?"

"But I'm jealous. I'm sure Daniel is a good guy, but I think he's got a major crush on you and you're blind to it. Don't you see it?"

Scott shook his head. "I guess I don't. Well, what about you and Bret and Taylor? I'm sure one of them has a thing for you and you don't know it."

"W-What? No one's said anything to me. Taylor's gay, but he's still hurting from his last guy..."

"Or he's holding back because he knows you're still

with me. We are still together, right?"

Jared cupped Scott's face and planted a long, warm kiss on his lips. "Of course we are! I just told you how much I've missed you and needed you. I still do. I just wish we had our own place here so we could hang out together alone."

"What about your mom's place? She works."

"True enough. Come on. Let's go back to my place and I can show you how much I missed you."

They headed over to Louise's apartment and hopped right into bed. Jared held Scott close and kissed him feverishly. "Dammit, baby. I missed you."

Scott smiled and kissed him back. "I missed you too. I'm sorry I couldn't tutor you nearly as much as I wanted to. Kinda loved that strip algebra idea you had. 'Course, we didn't get much work done then."

The two French-kissed and let their tongues mesh together in a wet, deep kiss. They hung on tight and breathed the other one in.

"Come in me, Scotty. Please? I've waited a long time for that and I think I'm ready now."

"Are you sure? I don't want to hurt you."

Jared kissed him sweetly and traced his fingers over Scott's chest hair. "I don't think you could ever hurt me."

"You're right. Do you have the stuff?"

"I'm glad you asked." Jared reached over and opened up his nightstand. Inside was a bottle of lube. "I bought this last week. I wanted to ask you again."

Scott sat up and kissed Jared again. "And I say yes to your request. I'd love it if you were inside me too."

"Really? You sure?"

"Yes, you're right. We've been apart too much. Let's make up for that time now, alright?"

Jared nodded. "Deal."

He shut the blinds and locked the door. "No surprises." Kicking off his sandals, he pulled off his sleeveless top, slipped off his swim trunks, and stood in front of Scott again.

Running his hands over the warm, nude body, Scott loved every second of it. He made sure to run his palms over the strong legs and firm buttocks. "Damn, you feel so incredible. That water always makes your skin softer."

Shushing him with kisses, Jared then pulled his tee off over his head. Scott kicked off his athletic shoes and shed his swim trunks as well. They felt a rush of cool breeze from the air conditioning and huddled together

tightly.

"Let's get into bed," Jared said. Scott nodded.

They pulled up the sheets and climbed into bed, cuddling up to one another and continued to kiss and touch. Scott brushed his fingers along Jared's collarbone and suckled his neck, leaving a large hickey. "Mmm, you taste extra sweet today."

"Must be the chlorine," Jared joked, smiling and holding Scott closer. His fingers tapped a dance down the man's spine until they reached the large, muscular halves of his ass. Jared cupped the derriere and shook it slightly; no movement. Scott had truly gotten into shape. "Damn, baby! Nice job on the ass!"

"I wanted to be fit like you are. You have the most amazing body..." his voice trailed off into the distance as the sheet tented and he sat up over his boyfriend's body. His eyes looked at every inch he could see, up and down over and over until Jared finally pulled Scott towards him.

"You're makin' me crazy with all that staring! Come here and lay one on me!"

Smiling, Scott scooted back a bit then leaned over and ran his hands over the supple skin beneath him. His lips were the next tourists; they started their tour at the chest then kissed their way down the rippled abdomen, with a

brief pit stop at the navel, to their final destination, Jared's crotch. Scott paused for a moment and ran his fingers over the awakening penis. His touch was so soft and familiar to Jared, it sprang to life immediately. Leaning forward, Scott kissed the tip softly and was thanked with a spritz of pre-cum.

Jared smiled. "That's my way of saying 'thank you'."

The young men laughed softly and embraced. Jared kissed Scott again and laid back, his arms above his head. "Scotty, I want you to go first."

Scott smiled. "I hope I know what I'm doing."

"You'll do just fine. You always do." The trust Jared had in him was overwhelming.

Scott prepared everything and held Jared's legs up high on his shoulders. Sweeping his hands over his lover's chest, he rested them on Jared's hips. He pushed himself inside slowly at first, but as their heat grew, he sank in deeper. Jared moaned aloud as the man he loved more than anything went inside him. He held onto Scott's arms tightly.

"Deeper, baby. Deeper," Jared requested. Scott kissed him in acknowledgement and pushed himself in even further. He felt his cock throb inside of his lover as the two reached critical mass. He held Jared's legs tightly as

the motion came to a sudden stop and the two tensed up together.

Jared's eyes grew large as he felt the moisture leave Scott and empty into him. They separated carefully and Scott helped to slowly lower Jared's legs. The blond sat up and opened his arms, taking Scott into them.

"That felt so good, baby!" Jared crooned.

Leaning back, Scott kissed his lover sweetly. "I'm glad we waited."

"Me too. It was worth every second. I feel so in sync with you now. I just wanna hold onto you forever."

Scott kissed him again and they embraced warmly. Jared's arms ran themselves up and down his lover's sweaty body, making him hotter.

"Scott... I want to be inside of you. Make you feel the incredible emotions you just made me feel."

"I want that too. I guess you'd have to be behind me, I'd break your legs."

"You're not that much bigger than me now. We're only what, 30 pounds apart now?"

"Something like that," Scott agreed.

"I'll be as gentle as you were."

Scott nodded. "I know you will. You're a terrific lover."

They kissed again and Jared smooched at Scott's neck and cheek and wrapped his arms around him again. "My Scotty."

"Always, I hope."

Scott lay down on the bed on his stomach. Jared lubed and stretched what needed it and kissed Scott's back. "I promise this won't hurt. I'd never hurt you."

"I know you wouldn't."

Jared slowly pushed himself inside of Scott, and the man moaned a bit. "You doing okay?"

"Uh huh... I'm good so far."

Jared continued and within a few moments he was inside the man he loved. The tempo picked up in pace, and a few moments after it began, they tensed again. Scott cried out a bit and reached for the pillow edges and clenched them. Jared caressed his back. "It's ok, baby. I'm almost done."

Scott felt the curious sensation of fluid entering him and the subsequent feeling of Jared's cock leaving his body. Jared caught his breath and backed away slowly. He reached over to the nightstand, picked up a towel and, after drying himself, he handed it to Scott.

"You'll need it, trust me. It'll drip right out if you flip over now," Jared advised.

"Thank you." Scott perched himself up on his side and Jared laid down beside him. They kissed again.

"How was it for you?" the blond asked. "Was it intense?"

"Holy shit, was it ever!"

Jared kissed him quickly. "Especially with someone you care about."

They kissed and played with each other's hair. Jared untangled Scott's wild mane and tucked it behind his ears. His fingers ran the length of the strands; they were past his shoulders now. "Growing your hair super long?" Jared asked.

"Nah, just long enough. This is about how long I want it. Need to trim it."

"If I grew my hair out that long, I'd look like a girl. All curly and stuff."

Scott made a face. "Are you saying I look like a girl?"

Jared's eyes grew wide. "No! No, that's not what I meant. Dammit, foot in mouth disease again. Sorry. That's not at all what I wanted to come out."

"That's all right. I know it's long and I probably do look like a girl; but if people would look past the hair, they'd see I'm very much a guy."

Jared fingered his chest and snaked around to his behind. "That you are, my love. No doubts about that."

They kissed again and held each other close. They finally stopped sweating and climbed under the covers and fell asleep.

* * * *

The summertime flew by and a week before they left for junior year, Margaret and Martin held a farewell party at their house for Jared. Louise was there too.

"You guys anxious to get back to school?" Martin asked.

"Somewhat," Jared answered. "I'm not looking forward to math classes, or English."

Scott looked over at him. "You know I can help you anytime."

Jared snorted. "Yeah, right. Are you and Daniel taking turns this time? Are you going to cut back on your tutoring load?"

Margaret made a face at her son. "Taking on too much again, son?"

"I didn't think I had. I think I will cut back a bit. We didn't get to see each other too much last semester. It was a

major drag."

Louise spoke up. "How about your group study sessions for your major, Jared? You can't miss out on those either."

"Ah, very true. Taylor would kill me," The blond replied. "I think, overall, we just have too much going on. I mean, I know we're together, but it's kinda hard to date when you're busy all the time."

Martin and Margaret shared a look. "It sure is. Try raising a child in there and it gets extra tough. We don't want you to burn out, son."

Louise nodded. "I second that one. I felt like a single parent with you. When you-know-who was home, it was like evading capture."

Scott stroked Jared's hair and took his hand. He couldn't ever forget the vision of his boyfriend with gauze and bandages on him from his father's attack. "I'll never forget that night. I won't burn out, Mom and Dad. I have way too much going for me."

Jared looked up at Scott and smiled. They hugged each other for a long moment. All three parents looked on and smiled.

"You two are such a great duo. I'd hate to see that go by the wayside," Louise commented. "It's never easy

when you're in college or in adult life, but you two seem to be faring pretty well."

"I think so." Scott agreed.

"Okay, who wanted hot dogs?" Martin asked as he walked over with a tray full of hamburgers and hot dogs. Everyone reached for their selection and the table fell quiet as the group devoured the savory summer fare.

After dinner, they all sat around the pool and took in the sights and smells of the season. The lightning bugs had just appeared, flashing their bright bodies in the fading light. The crickets were warming up for their symphony, and the stars had started to pop through the fabric of the dark velvet sky.

Scott and Jared walked over to one of the chaise lounges. Scott laid down first and then held his lover close to him. They stroked each other's skin softly as they chose different constellations for study.

"I think that's Leo, or Virgo?" Jared asked.

"I think that's Scorpio, actually. I could never keep these things straight."

Jared kissed him quickly. "I'm glad you're not straight. It'd sure complicate things," he mused.

Laughing, Scott kissed the blond sweetly. They hugged tightly on the chaise, soaking in each other's

company as much as possible before they'd be separated again when school began.

CHAPTER 4: JUNIOR YEAR

Scott moved back into his old room, something he appreciated. He liked the location of it, just down the hall from Jared's room. Daniel was one flight up and almost right above Scott.

Classes began and the happy couple looked over their schedules. Two days before classes began, Scott bit the bullet and went to tell Daniel he couldn't be a helper anymore.

"Daniel? You in?" Scott asked as he knocked on the doorway.

"Come in, Scott."

He walked inside to be greeted by a long hug. "I missed you a lot!"

Scott smiled and followed behind him. "I missed you too. Welcome home!"

Daniel handed him a large package, all wrapped in red paper.

"What's this?"

"It's just something from my homeland. Open it, see if you like it."

Scott sat down on the bed and ripped open the paper. He slowly revealed the bright black and white

garment underneath. He held it up to his chest. "It's gorgeous! What is it?"

"It's a man's kimono. It's like a robe. Made of one hundred percent silk. You like it?"

Scott smoothed the shimmering fabric lovingly. "Yes! Very much! Thank you, Daniel. That was very nice of you. I wish I had something for you." They hugged again.

"Don't worry about it; I wanted to get you something from a foreign land. You said you'd never been, right?"

"Very true. Haven't even been out of the country yet."

"Think of this as your intro to the Orient."

Scott slipped it on over his clothes. "It's so soft! Fits great too. Two years ago, there's no way it would've."

Daniel smoothed his hands over the fabric and over Scott's back. "Very nice, indeed. I hoped it'd fit you."

"It does. I'm sure it'll feel really nice out of the shower too. Ah! Jared's gonna love it."

Daniel scowled. "I meant for you to wear it, not him."

"Relax, all I meant was he'll love to see me in it. No way is he wearing it. It's all mine."

"Jared is a nice guy. He's a lucky man."

Scott grinned at his friend. "Yes, he is. I feel very fortunate to have him in my life. Hey, which reminds me of the other reason why I came over."

"Oh? It wasn't just to drop by and greet me after being gone all summer?"

"I missed ya! Don't worry. Hey, I've got some kinda bad news. I'm gonna have to drop out from the tutoring group."

Daniel frowned and let out a frustrated grunt. "Why? They need our help!"

Scott wagged his head. "I know they do and I'm still willing to do it sometimes, but not all the time! My relationship is starting to suffer from it. I need to be there with him more."

"So you're gonna slight your students just so you can get fucked more often? Damn, Scott. I never would've expected that from you."

"W-What? Expected what from me? Devotion? Loyalty? I love Jared and he should come first! I'm not Superman ya know! You're perfectly capable of doing this; it doesn't have to be all me!"

Daniel snorted and glared at him. "I figured it had to be him influencing you. You're not a jerk like this. Maybe

he isn't as nice as I thought he was."

Scott took his arm sharply. "Now you listen to me! Jared is the love of my life and is the best thing to ever happen in mine! I'll do anything to make him happy and keep our relationship going strong."

"Including dumping all of the real people who need you in order to pass their classes? Is he worth that much to you? Or is he that insecure and impatient he can't wait it out with you?"

Scott let go of his arm and recoiled a bit. "Damn. I guess I never thought of it that way before."

Daniel motioned for them to sit down together on the bed. "Look, Scott. I like you, you're a top-notch student, great friend, and a wonderful boyfriend I'm sure, not to mention that you're a great son to your father. You wouldn't just dump people if you didn't have a good reason to."

"Very true. I'm not dumping everyone, just a couple of slots to open things up a bit."

"Is Jared in any study groups?"

"Yeah, he has a group that meets a couple days a week, why?"

"Has he made any friends in it?"

Scott shrugged. "I think so. Why?"

Daniel pushed his hand through his raven hair. "I

think he should cut back too, then."

"But..."

"Scott, if he's not willing to give a little, neither should you. It's only fair."

The two fell silent for a moment. Scott bowed his head and gripped his hair. "Dammit. This whole situation has gotten out of hand. If I don't help out I'm a jerk and jeopardizing people's grades, but if I do, then I'm endangering my relationship."

"It's up to you. Which future do you want to face?"

Scott stood up and removed the kimono. "One where I can win on both sides. There's gotta be a way to work this out where everyone benefits!" He folded the kimono over his arm and walked towards the door. "Thank you for the gift again. I'll let you know what I decide about the tutoring."

Daniel nodded. "I hope you find a balance, my friend."

"So do I," he said in a low, serious tone. He turned the knob and walked out the door, wondering what his next move should be.

Back at Jared's dorm room, he was still unpacking

items when Scott knocked on his door.

"Come in."

"Hey, baby." They kissed quickly.

"Hey, handsome. Come on in. What the heck is that?" Jared asked, seeing the kimono.

"Oh, uh, it was a gift from Daniel. Now, before you get all bent out of shape, I told him I'd never been there. He got it for me just as a surprise."

Jared bristled a bit. "That's how these things start. Haven't you ever watched a bad movie romance? It's always just a little this or that and pretty soon the two are all over each other."

Scott scowled. "Sorry I even brought it up. Look, we need to talk."

"Oh yeah? About what?"

"Us and school."

Jared sighed and continued his task. "I thought we'd already decided. You were going to cut back on your tutoring so you'd have more free time with me. Has that changed now? Oh wait, shit. I bet Daniel talked you out of it, didn't he?"

Scott looked away. Jared finally stopped what he was doing and walked over to his lover and cupped his face. "Scotty... you've gotta stop doing this."

"Doing what? What the hell am I even doing anymore? I don't get to decide who I'm going to help?" His lower lip quivered a bit and a few tears spilled out.

Jared held him close. "Shhh, Scott. You told me you didn't have the time to help much anymore, didn't you say that?"

Scott nodded and sniffed a bit. "I guess so."

"Don't you want to spend more time with me again?"

"Of course I do, but this isn't about you or us. This is about helping students pass their classes. Think of where you'd be if Mrs O'Reilly hadn't made us work together!"

Jared went over the words in his mind. "*Made* us work together? She may have ordered it, but it was up to me if it worked out at all. I could've been a very difficult student."

"Not if you wanted to play baseball again to save a beating from your father." Both men fell silent and sat on the bed together. "Jared, I love you more than anything, but I'm needed by other people too. It's not forever! We have the rest of our lives together, plus weekends and holidays and everything else. Remember what our parents said?"

Jared nodded. "I remember. It's tough, very tough. I suppose it's our first taste of the real world as adults. Too

busy for anything."

"Pretty much." He took Jared's hand and kissed it.

"Look, I want to keep seeing you, do you want to also?"

Jared kissed him softly and smoothed his hand over Scott's pale face. "Of course I do! I want to be around you always."

"Then please, let me do what I'm best at. Let me help them pass their math classes the way I helped you."

Jared pulled his hand away. "What if I need help too? Do you just pencil me in?"

Scott cleared his face and nodded. He retrieved the hand and held it tight. "If need be. I'll make you my special time student; the only one who gets tutored naked." They grinned and kissed a couple of times.

"Hope Daniel understands I need you too."

"He does. Look, for the first time in my life I've got a lover and a friend! That's huge to me!"

"I hope he knows you're just friends."

"He does."

Jared fingered the kimono. "Really? A silk kimono as a friendly gift?"

Scott smoothed the fabric himself. "That's how I perceive it."

"I hope you're right, baby. I really do."

* * * *

It'd been six weeks into the new semester. Jared adjusted his schedule to be a bit busier so he wouldn't pine for Scott as much. They still got together though, in the quiet hours of the middle of the night.

Scott tapped at the window on Jared's door. "It's me."

Jared quietly opened the door and let his lover in. They embraced immediately. "Damn, baby. I've missed you this week."

"Just this week?" Scott mused.

"Very funny. This is gonna be a long year. I need a shot of Scotty."

They two kissed passionately and headed right for bed. They slept there until 7 am, when Jared's alarm went off. Time to go right back to their insane schedules.

"I'll see you tonight?" Jared asked while pulling on his jeans.

"All of me," Scott answered with a smile.

They kissed a few more times while Jared sat in his lover's lap. "Until later then, my love," Jared said in a whisper.

"Later," Scott finished with one final kiss.

* * * *

Christmastime arrived before either man noticed. Thankfully, they went home for break. Margaret and Martin made sure their son was fed and sleeping, while Louise did the same for hers. During her working hours, the two would hang out at the apartment all day together, alone.

"I miss these times. Simpler days where we didn't have a hundred people needing us every second."

Scott traced his fingers around Jared's naked chest and kissed it. "I know what you mean. I need to get more organized."

Jared sniffed Scott's thick hair. "Or give it up."

Scott sighed. "Please don't start with me on that. You know I have an obligation."

"I know you do. I just wish we could be in high school again. Hey, answer me this, are you going to keep doing this after we graduate?"

"Do what?" Scott asked with a raised brow.

"Tutor people on the side or something. I can't deal with this forever."

Scott took Jared's hands and kissed them. "I promise you. Once we're out of school, you are my main focus. I will have a job, but so will you. We'll make time for each other nights and weekends. We'll have way more time then."

Jared's brown eyes shimmered with tears which he tried to blink back. "Promise?"

Snaking his arms around his lover's body, Scott held him close. "I promise you. I want only one man, and that's you. Understood?"

Nodding, Jared cuddled further into Scott. "Yes."

They kissed a few times and held each other close. Scott nuzzled Jared's small, tan neck and moved further south with every kiss. Jared moaned a bit and held his lover's head steady while he was treated to a very intense oral session.

"Ahhh! Baby! Keep getting those thick milkshakes, they're amazing!"

Scott licked his lover's dick and took it firmly in his hand to finish off its trembling. A lovely white fountain of fluid spewed forth, and Scott slathered it onto both of them. The stickiness of it held them together while they kissed.

"I love you. Always and forever, Jared Adamson."

"I adore you forever, Scott Williams. My love."

CHAPTER 5: JUNIOR YEAR, ACT II

The cold winter weather of January was the opening scene for the student's return to classes.

They helped each other unpack their laundry and went for a combination trip to the bookstore and cafeteria.

Jared looked around at the students. "I'm surprised your buddy hasn't shown up to greet you yet. Give you another present."

Scott pursed his lips and sighed. "Jared, how many times do I have to tell you that it didn't mean anything! It was a gift from a foreign land, I kinda requested it."

"Really? And he just happened to know your exact size by what, hugging you? Or did he measure you when you were asleep?"

"Enough. Please?"

Jared grunted. "Fine. Too bad I'm the only one who sees the crush he has on you. Sure didn't see mine."

Scott scowled. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? You told me you hung around me all the time to escape your father."

"That wasn't the only reason. I hoped the whole time you were gay. You were kinda elusive."

"I know, and I'm sorry. I thought you were straight!"

You had girls hanging all over you, and why the hell would you even pick me?"

"I had a crush on you within a month. I just couldn't tell you. That's what I think is happening with Daniel. It's been over a year with him, you really think he wants to just be buddies with you?"

Scott shook his head. "I dunno. He's a nice guy. He'd liven up anyone's life. I already have my wild boy."

Jared couldn't help but smile at the compliment. "I'm your wild boy? I think you've been a little wild yourself sometimes."

The two covertly winked at each other and squeezed each other's knees under the table.

"I just want to be able to see you more. You know how I feel about this," Jared explained.

"I know, I know. We're closing in on completing this insanity. Then we can get out of here, get our own place together, and settle into suburbia. Maybe get a dog, too."

Jared leaned in further. "Get married too?"

Scott licked his lips. "Of course! None of this is without that happening first. I want to be married and live the rest of my days with you."

"Almost wish we were official right now, engaged

and all."

"Why?"

"Maybe then some people would know you're off the market."

Scott groaned a bit. "I've been off the market ever since I met you. Please, let the insecurities rest, okay? Hey... you've got your study group too, remember? I have to share you with Bret and this Taylor fellow. We're good, we'll survive. Just give it a chance, all right?"

Jared let out a hot breath. "I hope you're right. I really can't deal with this too much longer. I need you. I didn't think I'd ever need anyone, but you, I do."

"I need you too. Stick with me; we're almost done. Alright?"

"Okay."

* * * *

Scott's tutoring schedule resumed. He and Daniel spent long hours helping the college algebra students, especially the freshman class.

Some sessions went long into the evening, upsetting Jared greatly. This time, he'd come by Scott's room and sat down in the hallway. He sent a text message reminding him

of their date. A few minutes later he got a reply.

*Sorry, baby. Can't do it tonight.
Have a student who's freaking out over his
algebra. I'll make it up to you, I promise.
Thank you, honey! Love you!*

Jared slapped the phone shut and threw it across the hall. He fought the hot tears that wanted to spill from his eyes but finally surrendered to them. *Dammit, Scotty! You're so fucking taken with this tutoring bit that you're ignoring me now? They mean more to you than I do? Nice fucking gesture!* He stood up, retrieved his phone, and ran back to his room.

* * * *

Finally, a month after the semester began, Jared waited in Scott's dorm room until he finally got home, at 11 pm.

"Well, at last! I'm sorry, what was your name again? Skyler? Simon? Oh, that's right, Scott!"

Scott shot him a suspicious look, but kissed him anyway. "Uh, yeah. It's me. What the hell's going on with you?"

Jared crossed his arms tightly. "I guess you'd know

if you'd bother to call me anymore. I try to at least text you."

"Baby, I'm sorry about that..." Scott attempted to hug the blond, but Jared recoiled. "Are you kidding me? I don't get to at least hug you?"

"This is killing me, Scotty!" Fat tears burned down his flushed cheeks. "I miss you so much; I don't know what to do! I stay with that study group until I can't stand it anymore. All I want to do when I come home is get into bed with you and sleep! At least to see your handsome face again!"

Scott tried to calm him. "Shhh, baby. I'm sorry!"

"That's all I hear from you, is that word. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Well guess what? It's not enough for me anymore. I feel I need an appointment just to see you!"

"I told you this is how it'd be! You said you'd stick with me!"

"I'm trying my damndest, but holy shit, this is hard! I told you I need you! You know how hard that is for a guy to even say?"

Scott bowed his head in defeat and sat down on his bed. He broke into tears himself and drew his legs to his face and rested his chin on his knees. "What can I do?"

"Just make some time for me again? Please? Or else

I fear our relationship might be in jeopardy."

"No!" Scott juttet his hand out and grabbed Jared's hand quickly. "I won't lose you!"

"I won't lose you either, but something's gotta give, okay?"

"I know. I know." Scott dried off his face and pulled back the bedding. "You're here now. Please, let's just get some sleep together? At least cuddle through the night?"

Jared cleared his face and saw the offer was genuine. He stripped off his clothes and got under the sheets. Scott did the same and the two embraced tightly.

"Never lose you... never," Jared whispered into Scott's ear as they drifted off to sleep.

* * * *

The following day, Jared went to his study group early. Bret wasn't there yet, but Taylor was.

"Morning, kiddo. How are ya?"

Jared opened his mouth to speak, but all that came was a squeak. He tossed his books onto the bed and ran into Taylor's arms.

"Hey... shhh. What is it? What's going on? Have a seat." He grabbed some tissues and handed them to the

blond.

"Everything just totally sucks! I can't deal with this anymore!"

Taylor cocked his head and sat down next to his friend. "You mean Scott doing all that tutoring and not having any time for you?"

Jared sniffed and nodded. "This isn't quite what I thought college would be like. I mean, I know he's a damn good tutor, he helped me graduate! But now..."

"Now you're jealous of the students getting his attention instead of you having it?"

"Yes. That's it exactly!"

Taylor put his hand on Jared's shoulders. "Damn. I hoped this wouldn't happen with you too. My ex and I, we spent so much time apart we figured, what the hell? Spend all of it apart. I was never really the same after that."

Jared shot him an appalled look. "Don't tell me that! I couldn't get by without that man in my life! He saved me!"

Taylor rubbed his thick beard. "Really, Jared? How did he save you?"

"I already told you. He tutored me and helped me graduate. Then the whole family thing... I couldn't tell anyone else but him. We were strangers when we met; but

formed a bond very quickly."

"Do you mind a second opinion?"

"About what?"

"Well think about it. Anyone competent could've been your tutor and as far as your family life, did he stop you from getting hit? Did he take you out of that environment?"

"First of all, he was the best student in the class as far as algebra went. I couldn't have had a better tutor! We hung out at his house all the time. It was kinda my idea, but he let it happen. Not a lot of people would've loved me hanging around every single day. We grew closer every day and I could finally tell him the truth about what my father did to me and my mom."

Taylor let out an exasperated breath. "All right, but did he ever directly stop an attack? Did he stand between you and your father when one of these episodes occurred?"

Jared's eyes darted around for an answer. "What? No! What the hell was he supposed to do? Step in front of my father when he was about to belt me? Get real, Taylor!"

"So you're telling me he had no opportunities to get you away from that monster at all?"

Fresh tears spilled down the blond's tan face. "Dammit. Yes, there was an occasion, but I insisted! My

father was already drinking and we both knew it. He begged me to stay, but I knew I had to go. So I got in the car with him. Later that night, my mom drove me over there, after I'd been beaten up."

"So he could've stopped it by holding you back that night? If he'd really wanted you to stay, he could've stopped you from going."

Jared's mouth gaped open and he let out a hot breath. "What're you saying? He wanted me to get hurt? That's absurd! Scott loves me! He fucking begged me not to get into the car that night, but I insisted! I told my father that night that I was in love with another guy. He beat me to a pulp! My mom took me to the hospital and then over to Scott's house. He carried me from the car to his bedroom and nursed me back to health while his mom went to deal with the police! He was so wonderful and caring. I told him the next morning that I loved him and he said he loved me back! He's my helper, not a hurter! We're just facing a time crunch right now because his tutoring gets in the way."

Taylor sighed. "Sorry, Jared. I don't mean to put Scott down—"

"Then don't! He loves me and I him! We're gonna get through this just fine and get out of here and buy a house and get married and even get a dog!"

"Sounds like a wonderful dream. I truly hope it's what you want."

"It is!"

Jared bolted from the room and ran back to his own room and called his mother.

"Mom? It's me."

"Hey, sweetie! You don't sound too good, what's going on?"

"Mom... things are just really screwed up right now... Scotty and I are fighting, and one of my study mates is making me question absolutely everything! I don't know what to even think anymore!" He sat on his bed and put his head in his free hand. Tears rained down his cheeks and he reached for a napkin to attempt to dry his face.

"Shhh, calm down, sweetie. You and Scott will survive. I know you will! Look at how he helped you the night your father beat you up and I took you over there. Remember?"

"How could I ever forget, Mom? That was the night before I told Scott I loved him for the first time. Taylor kinda made me rethink that whole night, though... he said that Scott should've insisted I come inside if he really

wanted to help; that he was at fault somehow!"

"Now you listen to me, Jared David Adamson," she replied sternly. "There was nothing in the world that could've stopped your father from doing what he did. If Scott would've held you back, you and I both know that your father would've knocked down the door to get to you. Scott did all he could! He loves you so much, don't doubt his love."

"I love him too... more than anything."

"Honey, remember how you tell me all the time about how you'll get married and get a house and a dog and everything you ever wanted with the man you love?"

Jared sniffed a few times and finally formed a smile across his lips. "Yeah, I remember. I've got the whole thing plotted out in my mind. I just wish things were different right now."

"Well, they're gonna be hard right now. You're in college and pursuing your dreams! Let Scott do his work, baby. You focus on yours too. You have the rest of your lives to love him and be together. All right? Don't give up or doubt his love for you."

"You're right, Mom. Damn, I'm such an idiot for listening to someone who doesn't understand. He's kinda bitter anyway, probably not the best person to talk to."

"Agreed. Feeling better?"

"Much. Thanks, mom. Love you!"

"Love you too, Jared. Give Scott a kiss for me."

"I will. Later, Mom."

Later that night, Scott came over to Jared's dorm room.

"Jar?"

"Come on in."

The two hugged tightly for almost a minute.

"I missed you, especially this morning," Jared admitted.

"Why especially this morning?"

"I talked to Taylor. He told me the story of him and his ex and how they broke up. He said it was a lot like us!"

Scott sat down. "What're you saying, Jared?"

"No, no, nothing like that! Hell no! I want us to stay together forever! Are you kidding me? After everything we've been through?"

"Some might say that is a case for a breakup. Too much drama, too much hardship," Scott said matter-of-factly.

Jared took his lover's hands. "Well, I don't want it to

be like that with us. Yes, we had trials and hardships, and we're hardly done yet. But we'll survive!"

"Did you talk to your mom?"

"Yeah, why?"

Scott laughed. "It sounds like something she'd say. That woman stayed twenty years in an abusive marriage. She put up with stuff not a lot of people would've! Both of you were hurt all the time, yet she stayed there."

Jared looked squarely at him. "What're you saying?"

"I'm saying that she stayed in something that harmed both of you constantly, and did not leave. She could've left!"

"No she couldn't have! He'd have killed us! We know that for a fact. He threatened my mom on many occasions. She'd take the beating for me sometimes! My mom is my true hero!"

Scott steadied the blond and pulled him down to sit in his lap. "Listen, your mom is a wonderful, resilient woman. She'd have to be. You took it too, and you were brave for telling him that night that you were gay and loved another man."

"I had to tell him the truth. I've been honest with you from minute one. I hate that you're tutoring these students and are away from me too much. I hate that the

only times we get together for are for a quick fuck and then it's back to work. I don't like this!"

Scott looked at him seriously. "I'm sorry. I can't quit. We decided to wait!"

Jared glanced up at the calendar and saw the following week was spring break. "Scotty, I love you more than anything on this planet. When we're on break next week, can we please go out and have fun like we used to? Like a date?"

"Of course we can! The pressure's off for a short while, but honey, it'll come right back once it's over. I cannot escape it."

"Or Daniel, either."

"Daniel? Quit making him an issue! He might have a crush on me, but I've made no advances towards him at all!"

"Then return that damn kimono! You shouldn't have accepted it in the first place."

"Return it? Are you kidding? That'd be a huge insult to him and his culture..."

"Fine! Keep the damn thing. He wanted you to have something from the Far East, go right ahead and keep it. I'll tell you right now, though, he won't steal you away from me by lavishing you with gifts... I might not have much at

all, but this heart beats only for you!"

Scott cupped his lover's face. "Stealing me away? That could never happen! Jared, I love you and only you! Can we get past this?"

Jared shrugged. "I dunno... I, I've gotta get some sleep. You can stay if you want, but please, let's just not talk about this anymore. Give it a rest for the night?"

Scott got up, paced the room for a moment, and looked back at the blond. He was enticed by the bed, the hour, and his lust, but finally his logic won out. "I'll see you in the morning, Jared. Good night." With that, he walked out the door and shut it.

CHAPTER 6 SPRING BREAK

Spring break had finally arrived. The men hadn't spoken in three days, but did text each other. Scott sat with his parents the first night home and had a long discussion with them.

"So, what's going on, son?" Martin began.

"It's Jared. More, it's me and Jared and, of course, Daniel and Taylor."

Margaret frowned. "What do they have to do with your relationship?"

Scott sighed. "I accepted a kimono that Daniel brought back from Japan last summer. Ever since then it's been a bone of contention between Jared and I."

Martin raised a brow. "You're fighting over a garment? Isn't that more than just a bit petty?"

"That's not the only thing. It's more what I said before. We don't get to see each other anymore. We don't date, we don't go out, don't eat together. If we do get together, it's just for the proverbial roll in the hay, but that's all."

Margaret looked at her son and took his hand. "Honey, if this is too much for you, you need to cut back somewhere. It's obvious this is affecting your relationship.

You need to make a choice."

Scott whisked his hand away and stood up. "Between tutoring and my boyfriend? My confidant and best friend? I can't do it Mom. I just can't."

Martin motioned him back to the table. "It really all comes down to whether you want things to work out. What sacrifices are you two willing to make?"

Scott sat down again and put his face in his hands. His breathing was fast and heavy. He couldn't even force the tears from his eyes, he was so confused and befuddled. He reached for his cup of water, but ended up dropping it and spilling it. His mother hopped up right away to get a towel.

Martin walked over to him. "Scott? You all right, son? Scott?"

The young man shook visibly and finally laid his head down on the table. "I can't... I can't give him up. Not ever. Still, my students! What can I do?"

Margaret rubbed his back. "Shh, honey. Go talk to the dean, or even the chancellor of the school. There has to be a way out of this that maybe you haven't thought of."

Lifting his head, Scott looked back at his mother. "I pray you're right. I truly do."

Scott stood up and hugged both of his parents for a

long moment. He flipped out his cell phone and dialed Jared. "Hey, hon."

"Hey, baby," Jared answered.

"How are you?"

"Good, you?"

"Better. Just had a talk with my parents. They're such wise people. They gave me a couple of options."

"Such as?"

Scott sighed. "Such as speaking to the dean or even someone higher up to see if they can get my hours reduced. It's affecting more than just you and me."

"Then you need to contact them as soon as we get back."

"I will, I will. Hey, how about you and I go out to a nice, quiet park and soak up some springtime together? What do you say?"

Jared's smile could be heard over the phone. "I say that sounds terrific! Where and when?"

"Don't worry about that. Just dress for the weather and I'll pick you up at eleven tomorrow."

"Sounds nice. Heading off to bed?"

"Yeah. It'll be hard to be there alone."

"Tell me about it. At least we still had that sometimes. Oh well, we'll be good, I know it. See you at

eleven tomorrow."

"Good night, hon. Love you. I'm sorry for all of this..."

"Shh, hey. I know you are. I am too. It's been very stressful lately; we'll get through it though. I know we will. I love you very much, Scott."

"I love you too, Jared. Good night."

"Night."

* * * *

The following day they went off to the park. It was only a few miles out of town, but it seemed like a faraway land. The drive itself was a trek on a ribbon of black roadway that took them deeper and deeper into a forest of greenery. They pulled into the parking lot for the area and gathered up their picnic basket. The couple hiked for a mile before deciding on a spot to lay out their blanket and enjoy their lunch of grilled chicken and coleslaw. They chose a spot near a placid lake that was acre upon acre of nothing but the purest, bluest water they'd ever seen. Jared sat up and took Scott's hand.

"You always find the most perfect spots for us to visit. When did you find this one?"

Scott grinned and kissed his boyfriend's hand. "Just out driving around one day. I saw a sign for this area and just had to explore it."

"Well it's gorgeous here. The perfect spot for two lovebirds to get together and clear their heads. I'm really sorry for everything I said to upset you."

"I'm sorry too. I think we can make up for that today."

Jared leaned in and kissed Scott softly. "I think so. It's gorgeous out here. Perfect spot to have sex in the openness of nature."

Scott smiled and rubbed Jared's arm. "Maybe so. We're not alone out here though. Just remember that."

"Oh I will. That just means we'll have to find a more secluded spot," he mused. Scott rolled his eyes and smiled at the man.

"I love you."

"Love you more." They kissed again and sat back on the blanket together. They studied cloud formations that floated by in the clearest blue sky they'd seen in a while.

Jared took Scott's hand. "Your eyes match that sky. You have your father's eyes."

"They're my favorite part of my appearance, besides my hair. I hated my body for so long it kept me from a lot

of things. Then I met you and it made me want to better myself."

"Now look at you. All fit and muscular. Very sexy." Jared kissed him and snuck his fingers under Scott's shirt. "Very very sexy," he whispered. His hand slipped beneath the cloth and flicked open the buttons, exposing the pale, hairy chest. Jared swung his leg over and straddled the man. Scott held him close.

"Is there anyone else in sight?" Scott asked nervously.

Jared looked around and saw no one. "Not a soul. Just you and me and this perfect setting."

Scott smiled and snaked his hand up Jared's shirt, opening it up. Their bare chests met in a warm embrace as Jared lay down on his lover's body to feel his warmth.

"I can feel your heart pounding."

"Excitement. You always do that to me, Jar."

They smiled at each other and kissed again. Jared put his arms above Scott's head and lay atop him, never ceasing his barrage of kisses. "I want you..."

"I want you too... quickly, let's get behind that grove of trees," Scott suggested.

They gathered up the blanket and ran behind the trees. Scott unbuttoned his jeans on the way, as did Jared.

As soon as the blanket was spread, the two stripped bare. They embraced tightly as Jared ran his hands all over Scott's body. Scott did the same to Jared; trying to touch every exposed inch of the man that he could. Their kisses become louder and deeper as the moans of their passion came to bear.

"My Scotty..." Jared breathed in a heavy, lustful tone. He sank to his knees and enveloped the large cock into his mouth, barely giving Scott time to adjust.

"Ahh...baby!" Scott settled into being suckled and ran his fingers through Jared's golden ringlets. Finally, after only a few moments, he emptied his load onto the tan chest in front of him. "My turn."

"Better hurry."

Scott took Jared's cock into his mouth and pretended it was the thickest milkshake he's ever encountered. Jared shook as sweat dripped down his naked body. "Ohmyg... Scotty..." Not a moment later, he shot out his white fluid at a very high speed.

They laid back and caught their breath. They used the corners of the blanket to wipe themselves off. Jared curled up next to Scott and held him close. "That was amazing."

Scott smoothed Jared's butt and smiled. "You're

amazing." He kissed the man again and laid there with him. They put their shirts over their midsections and settled back to study the clouds once more. An hour later, they left.

* * * *

Spring break ended soon enough and the students were back in the grind of things. Scott went to speak with dean about his hours of tutoring. They reviewed his grades and saw there had been a drop recently. They approved his request for reduction.

Later that afternoon, Scott got a visitor.

"Who is it?"

It was Daniel. "Hey. It's me."

"Daniel? Come on in."

The slight Asian man walked inside and opened his arms for a hug, which Scott gave to him.

"How are you?"

"Not too good, actually. I just came from the dean's office."

Scott raised a brow. "Oh? What for?"

"He just told me that one of the tutors pulled back on their hours."

"Oh. Uh, yeah. That would be me."

Daniel stomped his foot and clenched his fists. "Dammit! You did it anyway! Worse, you did it for him! A guy who doesn't deserve you!"

Scott scowled at him. "Now just wait a second here. He wasn't the only reason. My grades were starting to slip! If I drop those, goodbye scholarships! Not everything I do is for him, ya know."

Daniel crossed his arms tightly. "I'm not convinced of that at all. You two are too close."

"We're practically engaged! What do you want? Distance? No, forget it. I've lost too much precious time with him already. I'm not going to lose him."

"And now that my hours are increased, what's your concern for my grades? My time?"

Scott covered his mouth and gasped. "Shit, they didn't pile it all on you, did they?"

"Most of it. I can't do this by myself! I told you that!"

"Dan—"

"No. You know what? We just need to find another tutor. Someone better than you and who isn't in a needy relationship and quits just to appease his lover!" He stormed out of the room.

"Wait! Daniel!"

But it was too late. The student had run off down the hallway.

Scott had one saving grace; Jared's reaction.

"Jared?"

"Come on in!"

"Hey, hon."

"Hey."

They kissed a few times.

"How are you?" Jared asked.

"I'm good, actually. I've got some news. They cut back my hours!"

Jared grinned from ear to ear. "Really? That's wonderful! Wait, how much did they cut back?"

"Five hours worth, so I'm off an hour earlier every night!"

"Hey, every bit helps, huh? Now you can spend an extra hour studying something else. Engineering or physics or—"

"Anatomy," Scott interjected. They kissed passionately.

"Definitely that," Jared said in a lustful tone. He ran his fingers down Scott's shirt, flicking the buttons open. He

slipped his hands inside and pressed his palms firmly to the pale, smooth skin inside.

Scott promptly wrapped his arms around Jared's waist and pulled him closer. He quickly unbuttoned the man's jeans and fished his hand inside. He was surprised when he felt nothing impeding his exploration at all.

"You're not w—"

"Nope. I wanted to save more time. Every second with you is precious."

They smiled at each other and kissed again. Scott's shirt slipped down to his waist, revealing his furry chest. Jared wasted no time in kissing every follicle he could find. They lay back on the bed together. Jared shed his own shirt, since it was a pull-on. Scott held him closer and pushed his lover's jeans down slowly. Tantalizingly slowly, so he could watch the naked skin make its appearance. Once shed, Scott breathed heavily and immediately put his hands on the exposed ass.

"So damn hot!"

"Yes you are," Jared said.

They laughed at the same time and Jared assisted Scott with pushing off his jeans. Finally, they were on the sheets, nude, kissing, and alone. They wanted to take full advantage.

"My sweet Jared..."

"My Scotty..."

They kissed so completely that their lips were enveloped by each other's mouths. They wrapped their limbs tightly around each other and indulged in the touching and holding of the other. Both moaned a bit, but the sound was quickly stifled by another long kiss.

Jared spit into his hand and lubed himself up. He hoisted Scott's legs up a bit and then slipped himself inside the man. Inch by inch, he came closer to the ultimate goal. Scott writhed a bit and cleared long, wavy hair out of his face. Sweat had built up on both bodies, making the current act that much easier. Jared pushed himself harder and thrust with all of his might. His abdomen rippled a bit with every push. He grunted and groaned, turning Scott on even more. His pale fingers played their way down Jared's sweat-laden, hair-free chest. Finally, his cock had reached its destination and both men cried out a bit as it hardened, delivered its load, and relaxed.

Scott held Jared close until the throbbing had stopped and the spent dick retreated. They both caught their breath finally and looked at each other.

"That was wonderful!" Scott remarked.

Jared took his hands. "Yes it was! I loved it. Now

we have five whole hours together every week! I love you."

"I love you too."

The blond laid his head down on his lover's chest and they fell asleep.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMER SURPRISE

Almost as soon as Scott hit the stoop at his parents' front door, he'd made the decision. He wanted to be with Jared forever and he wanted to become engaged.

He told his parents the news that night.

"Mom? Dad? I've made a decision."

"What's that, hon?" Margaret asked.

"I wanna ask Jared to marry me."

Martin and Margaret shared a concerned glance. Both took large sips of their drinks and finally spoke again.

"Son, you realize you still have an entire year left of school."

"I know, Dad. But things have been so good since my hours were cut and we understand things now. I want to strike while we're good."

Margaret cleared her throat. "Sweetie, don't you think you ought to let things cool off a bit more before you ask? There's still the whole Daniel issue and yes, school itself. Secondly, are you positive you want to devote your life to one person?"

Scott frowned. "How sure were you two when you got married?"

Martin grinned. "I knew right away I'd ask your

mother to marry me. It was just a matter of proper timing. Are you sure this is it?"

"I love him, Dad. I won't lose him."

"Asking someone to marry you isn't a foolproof way to keep them, hon," his mother added. "Sometimes it'll make them run away as far as possible."

"But I know Jared loves me too; we've discussed marriage and living together and jobs, everything!"

"Who's going to get a job right out of school first? Consider your majors. You're an engineering student, but psychology? That'll take years more, and we must wonder if he's willing to go the distance on it." Martin said.

Scott let out a breath. "Fine. If we talk more about the future around you guys, then maybe can I go look at rings?"

"Invite him and his mother over anytime. We'd love to see them and yes, it would help if you were clearer on the future," Margaret chimed in.

"Cool. Okay, how about a week from now? We'll throw another pool party and Jared and I can be on the grill," he smirked.

His parents grinned and rolled their eyes. "No one's getting grilled. We just want to know you'll have a good future together."

"I know, Dad. I know."

* * * *

That weekend, the young men were brought together and the parents asked them questions for over two hours. After some discussion, they decided they'd passed the test. Margaret and Scott went out the next day to look at engagement rings. Scott saw the one he wanted and they bought it. He stowed the box in his room, under some clothes in his dresser until just the right time.

The following weekend, Scott invited Jared out to dinner at their favorite Italian restaurant. The same one they'd dined at before their first time together, almost four years ago. Jared was in a crisp white shirt, with black pants and an olive green tie. Scott was one step below a suit, with black pants, a blue shirt, and a gray sport coat. His hair was just as lush and full as the night they'd first gotten together. Jared hadn't changed much either. They were a mere four years older, but so much wiser.

They arrived back at Scott's parents' house ninety minutes later. The Williamses had set out the flowers, cider, and left for the night. As soon as Jared saw, he nearly gasped!

"Scott! Those are gorgeous!" It was a bouquet of roses, all deep red, long-stemmed.

Scott plucked one from the bouquet and handed it to Jared. The blond sniffed it carefully and brushed its petals against his face.

"Such soft petals on this flower, and not a thorn in sight." He glanced up and down at the stem. His eyes saw the two tall glasses and a chilled bottle of apple cider. "Wow, cider, flowers, nice dinner, fancy clothes. What's going on, Scott?"

"I wanted to make things up to you, first and foremost. You put up with a lot of things that most mates wouldn't have. I know you and I haven't had it always so rosy, but after telling our parents our futures the other day, I feel a lot better about everything."

Jared looked up into his blue eyes with a loving stare from his brown ones. They embraced and kissed deeply. "I love my flowers, and the cider, and I love you most of all."

Scott smiled and walked them over to the bottle and opened it. He poured two half-full glasses for them. "A toast. To our love, and may it last not only this year, but for decades to come."

Jared drank the cider quickly, his curious look had

captured Scott's eye. "Just what're you planning, my dear?"

"I'll be right back." Scott ran down the hall and unearthed the black box from his dresser. He came back out a moment later. "Please, have a seat at the table."

Jared complied and sat down at the head of the table. Scott knelt in front of him. The motion itself made the blond gasp for air. "Scott! Holy cow! You're gonna—"

Scott took Jared's left hand in his. "I know we've had issues. Heck, what couple doesn't? But I know we can work through anything, as long as we're together and stay strong. Jared David Adamson, will you marry me?"

The black velvet box was presented and Jared opened it. It was a stunning half-carat solitaire, round-cut diamond with engraving underneath. "To my Jared, always."

Scott sat back on his haunches and awaited an answer. "Please say yes the first time. I don't want a repeat of the promise ring incident where I end up crying over your rejection."

Jared shook his head. He thought of the absurdity of his reasoning for saying 'no' to this beautiful man back then. There was only one clear answer in his mind right now. "I'll never hurt you like that again, Scotty." He looked into his lover's eyes, slipped the ring onto his finger, and

said his answer very clearly, "Yes. I'll marry you, Scotty!"

CHAPTER 8: SENIOR MOMENTS

The rest of the summertime had flown by for the newly engaged couple. As a surprise for their betrothal, Martin and Margaret took the couple and Louise on a vacation with them to Florida. They went to a beach resort for a week of sand, sun, and solitude.

Scott and Jared visited the gift shop at one of the hotels and looked at the merchandise.

"I've never seen so many sand items in my life," Jared remarked.

Scott laughed. "This is the beach, hon. Hey, how about I get a little surfboard or something?"

Jared shot him an amused look. "I've never seen you even try to surf. What about a beach ball? We lost that one you got for your birthday."

"Nah." Scott's eyes scanned the shelves. He saw a bucket of sand dollars and starfish. "Hey, how about these?"

"Those are good. Cheap, too. Just be careful with the sand dollars, they're delicate."

"I will be." He took three of them out of the bucket. Jared looked over.

"Three of them?"

Scott smiled at him. "Course. Three dollars. Seems appropriate, doesn't it? Besides, I owe someone."

Jared shot him a look. "You're gonna give one to Daniel, aren't you?"

Scott nodded. "Why not? It's a damn buck, Jared. Gimme a break. Come on, let's go. We gotta pack up and leave paradise."

Jared pursed his lips and nodded. "Yeah. Guess we gotta leave."

* * * *

Two weeks later, the tropical time seemed like it'd never happened. The two moved into new rooms, on the top level.

"Wow, my first senior apartment," Jared joked. "Hope I won't have another one 'til they put us in the gay old folk's home."

Scott laughed. "Hopefully not for a really long time. Do they actually have gay ones?"

Jared shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe somewhere. Right now we're young and engaged and finishing up school. What could be better?"

"Not much that I know of." They moved close and

kissed a few times. "All right. Back to work."

"Slave driver," Jared said with a pout.

* * * *

Both men started classes the next day. Scott had been somewhat antsy about seeing Daniel again. Still, there he was, in class with him. Quiet as a mouse. He walked over afterwards.

"Hey, Daniel. How are you?"

The Asian man looked up in surprise. "Oh. Hi, Scott. I'm good. I didn't get to see you too much last semester. Then I went home to Japan again."

"Wow. Do you go there every summer?"

"Yes. To see my family."

Scott nodded. "I understand that. Oh hey, speaking of that. I went on vacation with my family and bought you something. You said you'd never been to anywhere tropical, right?"

"Right."

Scott unearthed a carefully wrapped package from his backpack and handed it to his friend. "This is for you."

Daniel's eyes lit up and he smiled brightly. "Thank you, Scott! I don't know what to say."

"Open it, lemme know if you like it first."

"Of course I'll like it," Daniel whispered. He carefully opened the tissue paper and revealed one of the sand dollars that Scott had bought at the gift shop. "It's beautiful! Thank you so much, Scott."

"I know it's not nearly as much as a kimono was, but I thought this summed up a beach pretty well."

Daniel stroked the sand dollar with his thin fingers. "It's so coarse feeling. Almost like chalk. Thank you again, Scott."

"You're welcome."

"Um, does Jared know?"

"Know what?"

"That you bought me a present?"

Scott twisted his lip in thought. "Yeah, he knows. He's not thrilled about it, but he knows. He watched me buy them. Those were a buck apiece. I didn't think he'd be that petty."

Daniel shrugged. "I hope not, for your sake. He hated that I bought you that kimono."

"Water under the bridge," Scott said with a wave of his hand.

"Really? Has he forgotten?"

"Well, I dunno about forgotten, but things are really

good between him and I right now. We're engaged!"

Daniel nearly dropped the dollar. "W-What? When did this happen?"

"During summer break. I haven't had too much of a chance to tell anyone else yet."

"So. Gonna marry that guy, huh?"

"Yes."

Daniel practically glared at him. "Isn't he your first boyfriend?"

"Yes. So what?"

"So shouldn't you at least play the field a little bit before you consign your entire life to one man?"

Scott backed away a bit. "I don't want anyone else. I love him."

Daniel groaned. "Fine. It's your life. I gotta go. Tutoring takes up most of my time. Thanks for the gift." He turned on his heel and walked away quickly.

Scott tried to catch up, but couldn't. "Dammit, Daniel. Be happy for me."

Back at the dorms, Jared was waiting for his fiancé outside his room. They saw each other in the hallway and hugged.

"Hey, baby! Hey, what's wrong?" Jared asked. He smoothed his hands down Scott's arms.

"Nothing, just issues with someone."

"It's that Daniel, isn't it? Why do you even talk to him anymore?"

Scott rolled his eyes. "Never mind. Forget I mentioned it. Come on, let's get inside." He unlocked the door and the two walked inside.

Jared grasped his lover's arm and turned him around for a long, passionate kiss.

"Mmm. That was very nice," Scott replied. He wrapped his arms around his companion's smaller waist.

"You looked like you needed it."

Scott smoothed his hands over Jared's face. "I need you." He cupped the blond's angular face and kissed him soundly, starting at the lips and continuing until they were in bed together, making the woes of their day disappear. They fell asleep after.

Jared awoke first and stretched a bit. He walked over to the windows and pulled the shades down tight. He looked over at his fiancé, still fast asleep. The wavy brown locks were still shoulder-length, but strewn about on the

pillowcase. The pale, hairy chest rose and fell with each breath that he took. Jared walked over and watched the tremendous sight of his lover sleeping. He bent his naked knee up and carefully climbed back onto the bed and lay atop Scott.

"Huh... oh hi." Scott awoke and saw Jared atop him, his handsome face right in his. "What a beautiful sight to wake up to every day."

Jared smiled and kissed his lover. "I agree there. I'm gonna go throw on my jeans and get us some coffee. Be back soon, hon."

Scott yawned and stretched. He wrapped his arms around Jared's body and touched as much as he could. "Don't be too long. I need you to keep me warmed up."

Jared smiled and rubbed his body against Scott's. "I won't be long. I need energy to keep loving you all night."

"Mmm. Works for me. Hurry back."

Jared climbed down and pulled his jeans on over his naked body and stepped into his sandals. He snatched the thermos from Scott's desk. "Be right back, baby. Love you."

Scott rubbed his leg. "Love you too."

Jared left the room.

At the other end of the hallway, right outside Scott's corner room, Daniel snuck down the steps. He watched for any sign of Jared and was pleased there wasn't one. He placed a small package at Scott's door and ran off like a frightened rabbit.

Jared returned after several minutes with the thermos full of fresh java. He saw the package at the door and bent down to pick it up. "What the...?"

He opened up the door and walked back into the room and saw that Scott had fallen asleep again and was on his side. He quietly set down the thermos and meticulously opened up the tissue paper wrapping. It was the sand dollar that Scott had bought in Florida. There was a note attached. Jared flipped it open and scanned it.

Dear Scott,

I cannot accept this and I truly cannot accept you being engaged to someone like Jared. I am sorry, but my feelings for you are too strong to ignore anymore. Please do not visit for a while until I have time to think about someone else. I'll love you always.

Sincerely,

Daniel

Jared felt his stomach twinge a bit with anger and jealousy. He was angry that Scott gave him the gift in the first place and furious that his suspicions had been validated. He was right about the man having more than just a serious crush on his fiancé.

He held back his hurt as long as he could; downing two cups of coffee within minutes. Scott finally turned and his face lifted as he sniffed the air.

"Mmm, smells like coffee made by my special guy!"

"Which special guy do you mean? Me or Daniel?" Jared retorted, tears streaming down his face.

Scott threw off the covers and sat up. "What? What the hell does that mean?"

Jared held up the note and the sand dollar. "I knew this would happen if you gave him that damn gift! He's in love with you! He admits it in this note he left!"

Scott stood up and saw the note that had been attached to the sand dollar. He glared at Jared "You read something that was meant for my eyes only?"

"Yes I read it! I'm your fiancé! I should know

everything!"

Scott snarled and turned around. He pulled on his shorts and shirt. "You're starting to sound more than just a little possessive, Jar, and it's pissing me off! What did he say?"

Jared threw the note at him. "Here, read the damn note yourself!"

Scott picked it up and quickly read it. He covered his eyes and bit his lip. "Hon, I swear to you, I never led him on or anything..."

Jared scoffed. "Oh I'm sure. He obviously thinks that he's the ideal man for you, not me. It's funny how strangers can see things that others can't because they're too close to be objective." Tears ran down his face and he looked away for a moment.

Scott's eyes widened and he walked closer. "What the hell are you saying?"

Jared cleared his face and looked down at the engagement ring. "I'm saying this is all a farce! Look at us, the ultimate odd couple. We've always been opposite."

"But that's what so great about us! We triumphed over that stupid stigma. We work!"

Jared harrumphed. "Do we? Really? We get to see each other during the summer, but at school, forget it. It's a

once-in-a-while fuck and that's it! The rest of the time you're taken. Hell, I'm taken! Now we've got proof of your not-so-secret admirer. It's all adding up to something we can't ignore anymore."

Scott's breathing picked up as his nerves overtook him. "W-What're you saying?"

Jared cupped his hands around his face. "I knew this would happen. I just knew it! We're apart a lot, you've got that friend of yours—"

"Hey!" Scott interjected. "I'm not the only one who's got a 'friend'. What about that Taylor guy? I've never even met him!"

"Taylor?" Jared huffed. "Get serious. He's just a study buddy. Bret is too."

Scott cocked his head and scowled at the blond. "How do I know that's the truth? How do you know what's lurking in their psyches? You don't! At least Daniel has the guts to tell me how he feels in a note addressed to *me*! As for your 'friends' I think things started going wrong the moment you hooked up with them. Don't pin this all on me or Daniel!"

The two stood back from each other. Scott snapped up the thermos and poured out some coffee and drank it down like a shot. He paced the room and looked at the

clock. 10:35 pm. "I think you'd better go." He sat down on the bed again.

Jared opened his mouth to reply, but the words wouldn't come. Looking up for a moment at the light over the center of the room, he shut his eyes. He reached for his shirt and tossed it over his head and stepped into his shoes. Glancing back at Scott, who had his face in his hands, he took another look at the ornate ring on his left finger and twisted it around. After one more glance at the sand dollar, he removed it from his finger just as Scott looked up.

"No... Jared! Please? Baby don't... what're you doing?"

"Scotty... I have to. Please don't try to stop me. I-I'm sorry, baby. I can't do this anymore. I feel like we've gotten so distant from each other and you don't see my pain at all. I can't agree to marry you right now. I'm sorry!" He put the ring on top of the dresser and started to walk out of the room when Scott stood up and grabbed his shoulders.

"You dirt bag! You said you wouldn't do this again! Why are you hurting me again? You swore!"

Jared looked at him dead on. "Don't act all fucking innocent! Why are you hurting me? We're hardly in an ideal situation anymore. We'll keep hurting each other with the unspoken truth. You've got someone else in love with

you! How can we get married with that over our heads?" The two fell silent and stood apart from each other. Jared took a deep breath and looked at the ring one last time. "It's a beautiful ring. I was proud to wear it, but I can't anymore. Goodbye, Scott." He turned and headed out the door, breaking into a run as soon as he got past the door frame.

Scott cried out for him. "Dammit, Jared! I won't ask you again! Do you hear me? I'll never ask you again! I don't give a shit what you do!" He ducked back inside the dorm room and shut the door. He threw himself on the bed and sobbed loudly.

Jared ran over to Taylor's room two floors down. He was surprised he could find the way through his tear-impaired vision. He knocked on the door rapidly. "Taylor? Taylor are you in?"

The door opened and as soon as the redhead appeared, Jared fell into his arms and sobbed.

"Jared! What is it? What happened?" He soothed the man's back and shut the door. "Shhh, holy cow, calm down a little. Tell me what happened."

"I-I broke my engagement with Scott!"

Taylor's eyes grew large. "What? Why?"

Jared sat down on the bed and drew his knees up to his face. "I found a note from his friend Daniel. It was meant for him, but I saw it first and read it. Ohmigod, Taylor! What've I done? I know someone else is in love with him besides me and I went crazy! Now I've hurt him so badly again! He yelled a message to me as I left too... something about he'll never ask me again!" Jared began to hyperventilate. Taylor grabbed a paper bag and opened it.

"Breathe into this... take it easy. Breathe... breathe."

Jared used the bag and his respiration slowed a bit. He lay down on the bed and put his fists in his hair. "Dammit, I'm so fucking stupid! I'm so jealous of anyone who even looks at my Scotty!"

Taylor sat down next to him. "Why is that?"

"I dunno. I wish to hell I knew. I just threw away the greatest guy ever!"

"Now hold on, it takes two in a relationship, Jared. He was never perfect, was he?"

"No one's perfect, but we had such a great relationship—"

"Really?" Taylor interrupted. "So great that you turned him down the first time he asked to go steady? So great that you go crazy because you can't spend every

moment together? Rife with jealousy over this friend of his with the crush? How healthy was your pairing with him after all?"

Jared opened his lips, but no words escaped. He bowed his head and shook it. Taylor put on his shoes and put his wallet in his pocket. "Come on, you need some fresh air." He took Jared's hand and pulled him off the bed.

"Wait, where are we going?"

"To get something to drink and eat. You've just expended a lot of energy. You look pale as a ghost! Come on."

"But..."

"No buts. Come on, you need to eat and get some fresh air. You look awful, bud."

Jared cleared his face and looked into his friend's eyes. "I guess so. I need to call my mom."

"Don't call her at this hour, come on. You can barely string sentences together. Call her in the morning when things settle down."

"I guess you're right. No need to put her into a tailspin when I can't even string a sentence together right now." He rubbed his arms. "What've I done? This is all my fault... Scotty! My Scotty..."

Taylor hugged him tight as the young man sobbed.

"Shhh, it'll be alright. It will. I promise you. Come on, you need to relax. Can you come with me? I'll take your mind off things."

Jared nodded. "I guess so, let's hit it."

CHAPTER 9: SENIOR CLUB

The two headed out to a local pub. Taylor ordered up two draft beers. Jared stared at the ginger-colored beverage and fingered the glass.

"You gonna drink or just stare at it all night?" Taylor inquired.

"My father is an alcoholic. How do I know I won't be?"

Taylor pushed the beer towards him. "I don't think it's genetic. Come on, either you calm down this way or you and I are going to the hospital for some sedatives."

Jared looked at the beer stein again and the mauve-colored raspberry ale inside. Its aroma was sweet, not overwhelming. He took a sip and tasted it. He cast a studious look. "Hmm."

"Well? You like it?"

The blond swished it around in his mouth and finally swallowed it. "I like the fruity aftertaste it has. Guess it couldn't hurt. My stomach feels like someone punched me."

"Here." Taylor reached into his jacket and pulled out some antacid tablets. "Take two of these. You'll feel fine again, trust me."

Jared removed two of the large tablets from their wrapping and popped them into his mouth. He chewed them down quickly and chased them with water. He looked down at the bar and caught a glimpse of his left hand; the now empty left hand. He reached for the beer and took a few more swigs.

"Feeling any better?"

"Not yet, no."

Taylor put his arm around his shoulder. "Come on, let's play pool or darts or something." They stepped away from the bar and walked over to the bristle dart boards. Taylor caught the waitress's attention. "Miss? Could we get some toasted ravioli over here please?"

She winked at him. "Sure thing. Twelve or twenty?"

"Twenty. I'm starving to death. Oh, also some darts for the board here?"

"Coming right up."

A few minutes later, she resurfaced with the ravioli and the darts.

"Thanks."

"I'm Lindsey. Let me know if you need anything else."

"Will do."

Jared eyed the ravioli and his stomach rumbled.

"Go ahead, try one. They're like regular ones on the inside, just crispy on the outside."

Jared picked one up and sank his perfect teeth into it. The texture was new, but he enjoyed the taste. He popped the rest of it into his mouth and smiled. "Mmm, those are good."

"Love 'em. I get them every time I come here."

"Do you come here a lot?"

"As often as I can. Reminds me of the old days when I was your age and went out drinking a lot and played darts till three in the morning or until they threw us out."

Jared sank his face onto his hand. "I wish things were back to normal. I mean, is it me? Am I being jealous and possessive? Am I the one with the problem, or is it him, or both of us?"

Taylor picked up the darts and shot off the first one. It sailed perfectly into the double 19. "Well, you two have been having issues for quite some time. Don't you think this was inevitable?"

"How so?"

"Well, do you think he asked you to marry him under duress or out of obligation?" He shot off the second dart. He watched it land softly in the 13 slot. "Shoot, missed."

"Maybe so. I think I might've overdone it a bit with the whole Daniel thing. Do you think I did?"

"What does your gut tell you?" He shot the last dart into the 14 spot. "Dammit. Oh well, need to practice." He looked back at his friend and smoothed his arm.

Jared sighed. "Right now, my gut tells me to eat. Other than that, it'll have to wait until I can think clearly about this. I'm so discombobulated right now it's unreal."

"Hop down. I'll teach you how to play cricket."

"Cricket? Isn't that a bug?"

Taylor laughed. "It's also a British pub game. Picked it up years ago. Do you wanna take your mind off things?"

Jared popped another ravioli into his mouth. "Very much so."

"Then come over here and I'll teach you how to play."

The blond stepped down from the stool, took a large swig of beer, and walked over to his friend. "Deal. What do I do?"

Taylor meticulously went over everything to know about throwing darts. They played two full games of cricket. Jared's beer glass kept getting replaced with fresh ones. Before either man realized it, it was 2 am.

Jared tripped over his own feet on the way back to the table. "Holy shit! You see what time it is? I gotta go to... somewhere in the morning. Oh yeah! Class!"

Taylor laughed aloud. "Why Jared, I think you finally got a little buzzed. How you feeling, kid?"

"I'm great, just great. My tummy is happy right now and my head is as foggy as... somewhere. I dunno." He smiled. "I really don't care! Ha!" He laughed.

Taylor put his hand on the blond's knee. "We should head back. Don't want you to be late tomorrow for whatever it is you have."

"I agree. We should go. I'll drive." He stepped down and nearly fell over. Taylor caught him.

"Uh, make that I'll drive. You're more than buzzed I'd say. Come on." He picked up the young man and walked him out. They stumbled over to the car and he practically fell inside.

"Mush, driver!" Jared directed.

Taylor smiled to himself and started the car and drove them back home.

* * * *

The following morning, Scott got up at 8 am. He'd

barely slept all night, and knocked over a sizeable pile of tissues on his way to the bathroom.

He picked up the ring that Jared had left behind and held it in his hand for a moment. He stared at the diamond and twisted it slightly in his fingers. The facets of the rock caught the new sunrise and reflected it back into his bloodshot eyes.

"Dammit, Jared. What the hell happened?" Wrapping the ring in a tissue, he put it away in the desk drawer. He ate a snack cake for breakfast and put on his shoes. Scott left the dorm room and locked the door. "I've gotta find you and get a better explanation."

He walked a few doors down to Jared's room and knocked lightly. "Jar? You awake?" He tried to peer into the window, but it was frosted glass that obscured everything. Scott unearthed the key he had to the room from his pocket and unlocked the door. He'd opened it only a few inches, but his forward stride stopped completely when he saw into the room.

Jared was in his bed, nude from the waist up, with Taylor in his arms, who was completely nude! They were cuddled together in a lover's embrace. Scott's mouth fell open and he couldn't form words. Tears burned down his face as he struggled to interpret the scene that lay before

him. He had to decide what to do. Wake them up and make a scene? Slam the door and let them know he'd been there? Leave a nasty note on the door? Scott's mind reeled from all the possible reactions and he felt dizzy. He shook his head and looked at the couple one last time. "Goodbye, Jared." He shut the door as quietly as possible and locked it again. He bolted down the hallway towards Daniel's room.

Scott knocked on Daniel's door. "Daniel? Are you awake? Please, I need to see you!" he pleaded.

The door opened and the Asian man stood before him, dressed in red sleep shorts. He saw his friend's tear-stained face and pulled him inside. "Scott! What is it? What happened?"

Without missing a beat, Scott cupped his friend's small face in his hands and planted a long, sweet kiss on his lips. Daniel was very surprised, but delighted with the action. He wrapped his small arms around Scott and tried to hold on.

Down the hall, Jared awoke and felt his stomach turn a bit. He felt dizzy and had to shut his eyes until the room stopped spinning. He pulled up the covers over himself, realizing then that he was nude. He looked over

and saw a man next to him. "Scotty? When'd you come in last night, baby?"

Taylor opened his eyes and turned to face his blond friend. "Jared, it's me, Taylor."

Jared's mouth gaped open and he covered himself. "What the hell? How'd you get in my room much less my bed? What're you doing in here?" He lifted the covers and got out of bed, and saw that Taylor wasn't dressed either. "What're you doing here naked and in my bed with me?"

Taylor sat up and reached for his friend. "Relax... okay? You were upset, so we went out. I taught you cricket, remember?"

"I-I think so. Wait a damn minute. I was drinking! I remember seeing glass after glass appear on that table. You got me drunk!"

"Jared—"

"No! You got me drunk, dammit! You took me home here and probably had your way with me! Holy shit!" He clamped his hand over his mouth and bolted to the bathroom.

Taylor waited a few minutes for him to return. "Feeling any better?"

Jared stumbled out from the doorway holding his head. "No. I feel horrible! I've betrayed Scott!"

"You two broke up last night! What betrayal?"

Jared shut his eyes and tried to remember everything. "I broke off our engagement because I was jealous of him and Daniel. Now I've cheated on him, or did I? What the hell happened last night?"

Taylor ran his fingers over his chest and rubbed the red hairs. "Jared, you were upset. I thought I'd offer a bit of comfort—"

Jared's eyes grew wide. "Comfort? You mean you and I? We slept together?"

Taylor swallowed hard. "Yes," he whispered.

Jared ran back to the bathroom and purged again. He surfaced again a few minutes later and saw Taylor waiting for him. "Get out!"

"But Jared—"

"I said get out! How dare you! You get me drunk when I'm upset and then you take advantage of me? You prick!"

Taylor stood up and redressed. "You didn't seem to mind it last night! You're a fuckin' tease!" He turned on his heel and left the room.

Jared collapsed on the bed and sobbed. "Scotty, holy shit, what've I done? What can I do? I gotta find him. I bet I know right where he is too." He tossed on some

clothes and ran from the room and down to Daniel's room.

Inside Daniel's room, Scott and the young man were mid-kiss when Jared pushed the door open and saw them. Scott pulled away.

"Jared! What're you doing here?"

"Watching you kiss this little troublemaker!" He loomed above Daniel, who hid in Scott's shadow.

Scott shot an icy warning glare at Jared. "You leave my friend alone! How dare you barge in here like this?!"

Jared brushed off the warning. "I knew you'd be in here too. Being comforted by your little friend?" He took a swipe at Daniel, but missed.

"At least I didn't fuck him like you did with Taylor!" Scott screamed back.

Jared fell silent and his face lost all of its usual rosy color. "What?"

Scott glared at the blond. "You slut! You and I have one fight and you end up in his arms! I saw you two in bed, naked and together! I was just down there a little while ago. You two were passed out cold! I could smell the smoke in the room; you got drunk didn't you? Didn't you? You went out and got wasted and ended up fucking with Taylor?"

Jared bowed his head for a moment and finally looked up into the angry blue eyes and nodded. "Yes... that's what happened," he whispered.

Scott shut his eyes to try to stop the barrage of tears that wanted to come forth. He backed away from the blond. "I knew it. I fuckin' knew this would happen. All you damn jocks are alike! You hurt me once before and I barely recovered from it. Now? Are you kidding? Get out of my life, Jared! Once and for all!"

"I didn't mean to sleep with him!" Jared protested. "I was drunk!"

"Does it matter?" Daniel interjected.

"You stay outta this, kimono boy!" Jared shouted.

"Hey! Don't you dare yell at my friend!" Scott retorted. "We are very over, Jared. Forever. Don't even try to contact me anymore, do you understand? Never!" He ran out of the room and back down the hall to his own room and locked the door.

Jared and Daniel stared at each other.

"I think you'd better go," Daniel suggested in a diplomatic tone.

Jared shot him a look. "Oh shut up, you twerp! You were the one that started all of this in the first place with that damn note of yours! You and your gift to him and

fawning over him. He's mine!"

Daniel reared up and shot back with his own retort. "You weren't supposed to read it! It was meant for Scott! Now look what you've done to him. He's not yours anymore! You are bad news, I was right all along! Get out of my room, Jared, before I call the dean!"

Jared knew he could flatten the man if he wanted to, but Daniel spoke the truth. His relationship was over and there was nothing he could do to salvage it. He glanced down at his sterling silver commitment ring and pondered when and how he should return that as well. He backed away and left without another word.

Later that evening, Daniel visited Scott again and was let in. Scott's parents came by later and stayed with their son for a while. They didn't need to knock, the door was slightly open. Margaret burst into tears right away when she saw her son's face was beet red. It reminded her of when Jared had turned him down on his offer of going steady and he hid for three hours afterwards.

"Shhh, Scott. It's alright now, momma's here. I'm here, honey."

Scott left Daniel's shoulder for his mother's. Martin

gave the young Asian man a look. "We've got him now. Why don't you go get some sleep, it's really late."

Daniel looked into Martin's eyes. "I don't want to leave yet, sir. He's my friend and he's hurting. I want to help."

Margaret looked back at the two. "Daniel, you may stay if you want to. Actually, you can help us out. Can you go get some more water and some tissues or something?"

"Sure thing, Mrs Williams. I'll be right back."

Martin sat down on the bed and helped to soothe his son as well.

Scott managed a tiny smile. "I'm so glad you two are here. I emailed Dad with what happened."

Margaret kissed her son's forehead. "I know, sweetie. That's why we're here. I'm so sorry about Jared."

Martin mashed down his son's wild hair. "Come on, let's get you calmed down a bit." He presented a bottle of pills, Valium. "Think one will do it? The doctor upped the dosage."

"I think so. I need to calm down."

Daniel came back at that moment toting the water and towels. "Here we go. I'll empty out your trash too, it's overflowing!"

Margaret poured a small cup of water for him and

handed him the pill. "You need rest, sweetheart. You've been overdoing it for months. I'm surprised this didn't happen sooner."

"Tried to keep up with things. Jared, my students, Daniel, everyone!"

"It's too much for you, son. You needed to subtract something," Martin advised. "You're burned out and have far too much stress in your life. Time to really cut back."

"I know, dad. I know. Well, I'm certainly free of something big now, aren't I? Only the love of my life! I can't believe he did what he did!"

"I know. We were all surprised. Louise is giving him the third degree, I'm sure. As for you, you didn't do anything wrong. Calm down. Let the Valium kick in for you."

"I'm trying, mom."

Daniel came back again and sat on the side chair and watched the scene. "Can I do anything else for you?"

Scott shook his head. "No, I guess not, but you being here is a great help. I need to go get ready for bed. I'll be back."

He snatched the kimono and walked into the bathroom to change. The three waited for him to surface, which he did a few minutes later. Scott climbed into bed

wearing the kimono robe. Margaret touched it for a moment.

"That's such a beautiful garment, Daniel."

"Thank you. I knew he'd like it."

Scott shut his eyes and took some deep breaths.

"Mom? Dad?"

"We're here, bud," Martin answered.

"I think I'm just gonna get some sleep now. You guys don't have to stay."

"Are you sure, honey?"

"I'm better now. The Valium's gonna kick in a while. You guys have all been terrific. I'll be alright, I promise. Go on."

"All right, if you're sure. We're staying overnight in the hotel across the street. We'll text you the number, alright?" Martin said.

"Sounds good." He yawned and brushed off his face a bit. Margaret pushed his hair back and kissed his cheek. "We love you, sweetie. Sleep well. We'll be over in the morning, alright?"

"Okay, Mom. Good night. Love you guys."

"Love you too. Daniel, are you heading out too?"

"Uh, I'll wait until he's out. Make sure no one disturbs him."

"You're a good friend. Thank you," Martin said with a smile.

"Anytime, sir. Ma'am. Good night."

"Night, Daniel." She hugged him briefly and they walked out of the dorm together.

Scott fell asleep right away. Daniel slept in the chair next to the bed.

Jared called his mother and she came over.

"What's going on, honey?"

"Scott and I... we're finished. It's over."

"What?" She shrieked. "Why? What the hell happened?"

Jared broke into sobs. "It's all my fault, mom! I was jealous of that gift he got and of the other students who took his time and attention... I wanted it all for myself! Now I've broken us up! How stupid am I? What've I done?"

Louise held him tight and hushed him. "Shhh, baby. It's all right... calm down."

"No it's not all right! I got drunk and slept with Taylor!"

"You did what young man?!" she yelled. "How dare you!"

Jared backed away from her. "I didn't mean to! Honest, Mom!"

"Jared David... what the hell were you thinking? You know you have the propensity for alcoholism! Why did you do it?"

Jared sobbed louder and couldn't speak for several minutes. "I don't know... I don't know... dammit, Mom. I'm such a fuckup! That's all I am! Maybe Dad was right about me—"

Louise shook her head. "Now you listen to me, baby boy. You are my son and you are not a fuckup! You're a good man who has a lot of insecurities. I know you love Scott with all your heart... and you made some very wrong decisions. But you realize them at least! You need to make it up to Scott."

"How? He won't even talk to me!"

"Get his attention. Leave him a note... or an email or a text or however you guys communicate. Just let him know you're there!"

Jared dried his face and blew his nose. "I will, Mom. I will."

She kissed his head. "That's my boy. Your father was dead wrong, you're not any of those horrible things he called you over the years. You're a wonderful young man

who has a good heart! Scott saw it and I know you have it. I love you so much, honey!"

"I love you too, Mom. I'll let you know what happens."

"Please do."

"I will. Thanks, Mom."

"I'll be across the street at the hotel. Call me anytime, alright?"

"Will do." He dried off his face. He paced the halls all night. He wanted so badly to go talk to Scott, tell him it was a one-time thing, but he knew Daniel was in the room. He finally gave in to fatigue and fell asleep around 4 am.

The two did not speak for several days, but Jared left several messages for him spouting his want to apologize and start fresh. To combat all of his demons, Jared didn't even talk to Taylor at all or go to his study group. He told Bret what happened and avoided him as well just to make a clean break.

* * * *

Two weeks before graduation, Scott finally made a

decision. He walked over to Daniel's room and knocked on the door.

"Hey, Scott." They hugged briefly. "What's up?"

Scott picked up a paper bag next to him and handed it to Daniel. "Here. Please take this back. I can't accept it."

Daniel opened up the bag and saw the kimono inside. His lip quivered for a moment; he bit it to stop it. "But I bought that for you. It'll only fit you."

"I can't accept gifts from you. I shouldn't have in the first place. It's caused nothing but problems."

"But—"

"No. Please, just take it back. Save it for a man who can be yours alone. No more favors or gifts or anything. I made a mistake by giving you that sand dollar. You had the decency to return it at least. I really like the robe and wish I could keep it, but it wouldn't be right to. I need to clean out my soul a bit. I'm sorry if I led you on or gave you the wrong impression, Daniel. You're a good man, any guy would be lucky to have you."

Daniel's small, slanted eyes grew larger. "What're you saying?"

"I'm saying that when I graduate, that's it. I can't keep in contact with you."

"Because of him?"

"No, because of me. 'To thine own self be true'. I need to move on and start over on my own. Do you understand?"

Daniel shrugged. "Course. But it's not like I really even have a choice in the matter. It was nice knowing you, thanks for being my friend for a while."

"Thank you for being mine. Good luck, Daniel. You're a bright guy, you'll do great. I know you'll find the right man."

"Thank you." His eyes were glassy with unshed tears as he reached out for Scott. They hugged for a long moment before Scott pulled away.

"I gotta go. Take care of yourself."

"I will. You too!"

"Thank you." Scott left the room.

Daniel shut the door and retreated to bed, where he cried himself to sleep.

* * * *

Graduation day! At last! All parties were assembled. Louise caught sight of Mr and Mrs Williams as they walked with Scott. Ironically, their sons represented the start and finish of the class roster. Adams to Williams.

The two barely looked at each other as they both crossed the stage to accept their degrees. Jared had a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Scott a Bachelor of Science in Engineering.

As the lobby filled with graduates and family, the two scanned the room for each other. Someone else found Scott on his way back to his parents.

"Scott? I'm Taylor."

"So you're Taylor?" Scott scowled at him. "You prick! What the hell do you want?"

"I've gotta talk to you. In private."

Scott looked away. "We have nothing to say to each other."

"I've got something you'll want to hear. Just for a minute, please?"

Scott crossed his arms and stared at him. "Fine. Whatever. Where do you wanna talk?"

"Outside."

Scott shrugged. "Sure. Let's go."

They two walked outside and out to the woods behind the school. There was another person waiting by the trees. It was Jared.

Scott stopped in his tracks. "Whoa now, wait a second. What the hell's going on?"

Jared cleared his throat and smiled at his ex. "Hey, uh, it's good to see you again. We made it through school."

"Yes we did. Gawd, it's tough seeing you again, but good too, Jared. Hey you um, you look nice."

"Thanks! Wow. You look really great in your cap and gown. Nice honor cord. I knew you'd make it."

Scott smiled back. "Thanks. Hard fought these were. Had a tough time studying ever since, ya know..."

Taylor finally spoke up and stood between the two. "Guys, I owe you both a huge apology."

Jared tore his glance away from Scott for a moment. "What's going on, Taylor?"

"Jared, I have to confess something to you. I lied to you about what happened that night we went to the bar."

Scott harrumphed and scowled at the redhead. "Seemed pretty damn clear to me. You got him drunk and fucked my boyfriend!"

Taylor shook his head. "No, I didn't! That was the lie!"

Jared's eyes grew huge. "What? You let me believe that we did something this whole time that we really didn't? How could you do that to me? That's downright evil,

Taylor! Dammit! Were you that fuckin' hard up that you had to lie to me about us sleeping together? That's just twisted!"

Taylor grabbed at his red hair and tried to capture Jared's gaze again. "I did it because I was desperate... I wanted you and I knew Daniel wanted Scott! Dammit, from everything you told me it was over! I just wanted to take your mind off of him for ten fuckin' seconds. I just wanted to think that maybe, just maybe I had a shot with you."

Jared ran his hands over his face. "So you lied about us sleeping together because you wanted me?"

"Yes. I undressed you and put you in bed. I more did it in case you were sick, but you slept so soundly. I had to control myself so much. You're a hot one, Jared, but I did it. We didn't do anything. I swear on my life we didn't do anything."

Scott looked at Jared with a look of relief and held out his hand. "Jar—he lied! I hoped and prayed that it was all a ruse!"

"It was! We've been royally had, Scotty. Holy shit! All this time and you didn't tell us?"

Taylor bowed his head. "I wanted a chance with you, but I see even now that your devotion is unwavering. You love only Scott. Always have and always will. I never

had a prayer with you."

Jared looked over at his ex. "He's right about that. I never wanted any of this to happen. I promise you. Do you believe me?"

Scott nodded and walked towards the blond. They embraced for a long time and kissed. "Of course I do! I'm so sorry for how I acted... Jar, I love you so much."

"I love you more than anything, Scotty. And about being sorry... you're sorry? Holy crap, what I did was absolutely inexcusable. I never should've read that note. It was private."

Scott brushed his fingers over Jared's face. "But you were right. Daniel does care for me, but I told him it's just not possible. I even returned that robe."

Jared's eyes glistened and he smiled. "You did? Really?"

"Yes. I broke off my friendship with him too. He needs to move on for himself. He'll be hurt for a while, but he'll survive."

Taylor backed away from the scene, seeing he was clearly out. "I'm sorry for lying, guys. I really am."

Jared smiled at him lightly. "Hey, for whatever it's worth, you did help me that night. You taught me cricket. You also helped me pass some of my courses. You and

Bret. Thank you for that."

Taylor saw the two were very close and there was no room for him at all. He played with his hair and backed away. "There is that. Look, I'm gonna run. If anyone's looking for you I'll steer them out here alright?"

"Thanks, Taylor." Jared said as the man walked off. Scott's eyes didn't shift until he was sure the redhead was out of sight.

"Holy cow, now we might be able to put all this behind us!"

"It is behind us, Jared. I love only one man—you. Forever."

"There's just one thing though," Jared said with a tinge of sadness.

Scott stroked his lover's face gently. "What's that?"

"You swore you'd never ever ask me again if I said no. I didn't say no, but I did give the ring back. Technically we were broken up when all this shit happened."

Scott cast a studious look and held Jared closer. "That is true. I did say that and yes, we were broken up."

Jared wet his lips and looked up into his favorite blue eyes. "Scotty, did you mean it, what you yelled that night? That you'll never ask me to marry you again no matter what I did?"

Scott kissed Jared softly and grinned. "That's just it. I don't need to ask again. You said yes and I'm holding you to it like glue, Jared Adamson."

Jared's eyes grew wide and he formed a huge smile. "W-What? You still wanna marry me?"

Scott nodded. "With all my heart if you'll have me."

Jared threw his arms around the man and kissed him passionately. "You're damn right I will! Where is that ring? I wanna show it to my mom again."

"Funny you should ask." Scott reached up under his cloak and into his pants pocket and pulled out the tissue he'd put the ring in. He opened it and plucked out the bauble. "I did already ask, so I'll just confirm. Jared you are marrying me, right?"

"You'd better believe it!"

Scott slipped the ring onto the tan finger and they hugged enthusiastically. They looked over their shoulders and saw their parents heading their way. Jared ran over to his mom.

"We're engaged again! We're back together!"

"That's wonderful, honey! See, I knew things would work out."

Scott's parents cast the pair a delighted look. "Honey, that's wonderful!" Margaret chirped. "What

happened with that red-haired man?"

"That was Taylor. Mom, it was all a lie! He wanted Jared and Daniel wanted me... but neither one got us. We're good!"

"Jared, nothing happened that night?" Louise asked.

"Nope, not a thing. I got buzzed a bit and tried toasted ravioli, but other than that... nope."

Margaret let out a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness! I knew things would work out, I knew it!" She and Louise hugged each other. "You were right, Louise!"

"Come on boys, back to the hotel! We're celebrating!" Martin announced.

The happy duo joined hands and walked back with their parents to the parking lot and drove away.

Rumor was that the kimono was seen around campus again, on a tall, red-haired man. But it was only a rumor...

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Stephanie Danielson has been writing since she could hold a pen. Early works included a strong central character and evolved into entire villages. Alternative works began in her teens and she has never looked back once. She strives for real emotions, real characters, and to make a connection with the reader.

Email:

ladyauthorsld@gmail.com

Blog:

www.ladyauthorsld.blogspot.com